THE Caribbean
A History of the Region and Its Peoples

Edited by STEPHAN PALMIÉ
and FRANCISCO A. SCARANO

The University of Chicago Press | Chicago and London
CONTENTS

General Maps x

Introduction: Caribbean Counterpoints 1

PART 1 THE CARIBBEAN STAGE
1 Geographies of Opportunity, Geographies of Constraint 45
   David Barker
2 Contemporary Caribbean Ecologies: The Weight of History 39
   Duncan McGregor
3 The Earliest Settlers 53
   L. Antonio Caret
4 Old World Precedents: Sugar and Slavery in the Mediterranean 59
   William D. Phillips Jr.

The Colonial Persuasion

Puerto Rico and the Dutch and French Antilles

After more than 400 years of imperial control under Spain and the United States, Puerto Rico is arguably the oldest colony in the world, while the Dutch and French Antilles have been under the same metropolitan powers since the 1630s. Colonialism does not mean a common history, however: unlike Puerto Rico and the French Antilles, for example, the Dutch Antilles did not experience the sugar plantation complex. Originally part of extensive territorial empires in the Western Hemisphere, the Dutch and French Antilles were reduced over time by warfare, revolution, and decolonization. Only for a few decades did these islands possess economic, strategic/military, or symbolic value to their metropolitan powers. Now they are in the midst of redefining their place within the constitutional systems of the United States, France, and the Netherlands.

This chapter discusses these three cases of Caribbean societies characterized by asymmetrical dependency relationships with their metropolitan powers. Aware of the difficulties experienced by
neighboring independent states, their populations are reluctant to sever ties with their metropoles. Neither independent nor wholly colonial, these territories strive for an alternative, non-sovereign political path with economic and social development that preserves their own cultural identities. In their relationships with their respective metropoles, they share certain commonalities: metropolitan citizenship; freedom of movement; common defense, market, and currency (with one exception); and metropolitan transfer payments and expenditures. These ties strengthen metropolitan-territorial links while weakening connections with other Caribbean territories.

Colonial Puerto Rico under the United States, 1898–1945

Although the United States offered to buy Puerto Rico from Spain in 1868, its real interest surfaced with the isthmian canal project later in the century. While trade between the island and the United States had been strong, no sizable American investments had found their way into its depressed agricultural export economy. But Puerto Rico's strategic location protected key access routes to the planned Panama Canal, and US forces invaded the island on July 25, 1898. By the Treaty of Paris—signed on December 10, 1898, and ratified on April 11, 1899—Spain ceded and the United States annexed Puerto Rico.

The political elites' favorable reception of US forces soured almost immediately with the establishment of a military government (1898–1900) and the enactment of the colonial Foraker Act in April 1900. Compared to the short-lived Autonomic Charter granted by Spain on November 25, 1897, the Foraker Act was found wanting; it established a civil government and the principles of the US–Puerto Rico relationship. Several of its provisions, which are still in operation today, were a federal court with proceedings in English, a customs union and the application of US coastwise shipping laws, the exemption of Puerto Rico from the application of US internal revenue laws, and a nonvoting “resident commissioner” in the US Congress. One important proviso also remains in full force today as part of the Federal Relations Act: the extension of all federal laws to Puerto Rico unless found to be locally inapplicable. No federal law has yet been deemed inapplicable.

Colonialism proved controversial in the republican United States. As a consequence of the Insular Cases brought before the US Supreme Court between 1901 and 1905, Puerto Rico was branded an "unincorporated territory"—that is, a possession that was not part of the United States, yet belonged to it and fell under the plenary powers of the US Congress and the executive.

Political forces in Puerto Rico responded much as they had under Spain. Some sought a wider form of self-government within the colonial status of the Foraker Act, while others favored assimilation through admission of Puerto Rico as a US state, or through independence under a US protectorate. Like Spain before it, the new colonial power repressed the pro-independence forces. One of the reasons for the imposition of US citizenship in the Jones Act of 1917 was to defuse a growing call for independence. In the 1920s, this pro-independence sector grew and became more militant under the Nationalist Party, headed by a Harvard-trained mulatto lawyer, Pedro Albizu Campos. During the economic crisis of the 1930s, political violence increased. It culminated in the assassination in 1936 of Francis Riggs, the American chief of police; the imprisonment of Albizu Campos as "intellectual author" of the crime; and the firing on peaceful Nationalist marchers by the insular police on March 21, 1937. This incident, known as the Ponce Massacre, left 17 Nationalists and two policemen dead.

During the 1930s two new US governmental actors entered onto the insular stage: the FBI and federal relief programs. Close surveillance by the FBI paired with repressive measures by the police against the Nationalists and pro-independence supporters became commonplace. The New Deal programs distributed food sur-
pluses and other direct aid, and launched emergency programs to reduce unemployment. World War II alleviated the economic crisis, and the island’s role in US regional and military strategy increased.

Diversity of the Dutch Antilles

The term “Netherlands Antilles” (hereafter NA) conceals significant differences between two sets of islands that had little contact until the 20th century. Inhabitants of the Windwards—St. Martin (shared with France), St. Eustatius, and Saba—speak English, while those in the Leewards—Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire—communicate mainly in Papiamento, a vernacular made up principally of Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French. Catholicism predominates in the Leewards, Protestant denominations in the Windwards. Up to the early 20th century, the colonies remained under the direct control of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, ruled by an appointed governor with strong executive powers. But political stagnation did not prevent economic and social change. By the 1920s Shell and Esso had established oil refineries in Curaçao and Aruba, respectively, taking advantage of their stability and security under the Netherlands, in contrast to nearby Venezuela. As World War II neared, the strategic value of the Dutch Leewards increased.

In 1936 new statutory regulations gave the Dutch Antilles a largely elected local council, with only 5% of the population enfranchised. The regulations catered to Aruba’s interest in autonomy by stating that local governments could be established free from direct control of the central administration in Curaçao, the largest and most populous island. Political parties began to be organized. But in spite of early calls by Curaçaoan lawyer Dr. Moises da Costa Gomez for extending the franchise, autonomy and representative parliamentary democracy were nowhere in sight on the eve of World War II.

Assimilation in the French Antilles

France’s policy oscillated for most of the 19th century between making the French Antilles—Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Bartholomew, and half of St. Martin—an integral (i.e., assimilated) part of France, or administering them separately as colonial possessions. Emancipation, declared for good in 1848, transformed slaves into citizens. By 1870 each island had elected one deputy to the National Assembly. Unlike to be elected, white planters refrained for the first time from participating. Between 1890 and 1923, black and mulatto Martinican and Guadeloupean deputies and senators introduced various bills in Parliament asking for the transformation of both islands into full-fledged but separate departments of France. French Antillean

backed their demand of “total Frenchness” by willingly enlisting in the French army in 1914 and 1939.

Consequently, it came as no surprise that on March 19, 1946, two Martinican deputies and members of the French Communist Party—the young, renowned poet and writer Aimé Césaire, founder of the négritude literary movement, and the labor leader Leopold Bissol—introduced the Law of Assimilation in the National Assembly, by which both islands became, as of January 1, 1948, two départements d'outre-mer (DOM), the equivalent of US states. Césaire—who also served as mayor of Fort-de-France, a position he held until his retirement in 2001—fully supported départementalisation. Assimilation, or decolonization through statehood within France, meant application to the DOM of social measures approved in the 1930s and in 1945, which the bekkés or white planters opposed, and the removal of the islands from the list of non-self-governing territories stipulated under article 75(e) of the United Nations Charter.

In the short run, the Constitution of the French Union, approved on October 26, 1946, failed to transform the empire into a commonwealth by creating various kinds of territories linked to the French Republic. In the end, only the French Antilles, Guiana, and St. Pierre and Miquelon in the Western Hemisphere remained part of France; several other territories attained independence, some by way of bloody wars (for example, Vietnam and Algeria). The constitution confirmed that the legal structure in the DOM was “the same as that of all metropolitan departments, other than for exceptions determined by law.” The law meant that every DOM had the same institutions as those in the metropole: a prefect (instead of a governor); a regional council elected by adult suffrage; representation in the Senate, Chamber of Deputies, and Economic and Social Council; the same legal codes and system of justice. But the conditional clause meant that exceptions to legislation could be made. All laws passed after 1946 would be automatically applicable to the DOM, unless otherwise specified, but earlier laws had to have been especially promulgated by the prefect to be applicable. Thus, legal disparities between the metropole and the DOM never disappeared. In Guadeloupe, serious social and political consequences erupted in at least two instances: first in 1967 due to the wider powers given to the prefect, and again in 2009 because of the high cost of gasoline and an unemployment rate of 22.7%.

The Netherlands Antilles under the Kingdom’s Charter

As with the French and US empires, World War II gave impetus to changes in the relationship between the Netherlands and its colonies. The German occupation forced the London-exiled Dutch government to govern the overseas territories
without the Dutch parliament’s assistance. In December 1942, Queen Wilhelmina said the future relationship of the kingdom would be directed “towards a commonwealth in which the Netherlands, Indonesia, Surinam, and Curacao would participate with “internal autonomy” and “full partnership.” No mention was made of self-determination as in the pronouncement aimed to keep Japanese-occupied Indonesia within the kingdom.

The call from political parties for autonomy in the Dutch Antilles and Surinam increased as soon as the war ended, as the Netherlands tried and failed to impede Indonesia’s independence. By 1947 the first change took place with the appointment by the governor of Curacao of da Costa Gomez as representative in the Dutch Ministry of Overseas Affairs. Also introduced were universal suffrage and a controversial executive council to function as a ministerial cabinet. From 1948 to 1954, two round table conferences were held to discuss the new constitutional order of the kingdom, with delegations from the NA and Surinam representing their own interests. A draft charter was approved in the Dutch House of Commons and the Antillean and Surinamese parliaments, and promulgated in December 1954.

The 61-article charter made the Netherlands, the NA, and Surinam equal and autonomous parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, a federal state bound to mutual assistance and to management of common affairs on an equal footing. The Netherlands handled exclusively the designated domains of citizenship, defense, and foreign relations. Among the kingdom’s affairs were the “observance of human rights and freedoms,” “the rule of law,” and “integrity of administration,” issues now falling under the contemporary term “good governance.” A central parliament and island councils, elected by universal suffrage and based on proportional representation, were set up in the NA. A minister plenipotentiary represented the NA in The Hague with the right to meet with the Council of Ministers when matters of their concern were under consideration. The charter also gave the NA specific prerogatives in international affairs. Thus, international agreements negotiated by the Netherlands would be nonbinding to territories that considered them detrimental; the metropole would be required to cooperate in international agreements that applied exclusively to the islands; and the NA would gain membership in international organizations. Two key provisions of the document placed military service under the jurisdiction of each territory and gave people of the Dutch territories freedom to move to and from the Netherlands, a right the Dutcheters themselves did not have.

In December 1955 the United Nations accepted the claim that the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname had attained a full measure of self-government by free association and removed them from the list of non-self-governing territories. For almost half a century, the charter operated as an agreeable compromise to all parties, leaving a range of areas (education, public health, social welfare, and economic development) in the hands of the autonomous parties, open to cooperation and assistance by the other partners, if so desired.

**Puerto Rico as Estado Libre Asociado**

Meanwhile, the US approach to Puerto Rico dramatically changed during World War II. With the building of army, naval, and air installations, the island became for the next half-century the center of US military operations in the Caribbean. Yet the new pro-independence Popular Democratic Party (PDP), led by Luis Muñoz Marín, a charismatic leader who had lived in the United States in his early years and maintained close relations with Democratic leaders, dominated the political panorama.

At first, colonial governor Rexford G. Tugwell and Muñoz Marín, as president of the Senate, implemented a progressive, government-supported development program. By 1948 a new program, known as Operation Bootstrap, began promoting industrialization with private (mostly US) capital. A symbol of economic and social success, it would soon be hailed as an example for other developing countries. For the next two decades, Muñoz Marín worked with the US Congress and president on the passage of the elective governor law (1948), the adoption by Puerto Rico of its own constitution (1950–52), the creation of commonwealth status (1952), the removal of Puerto Rico from the UN list of non-self-governing territories (1953), and the celebration of the first (1967) of three plebiscites on status preference.

During the war years, the political ferment of the island did not abate, particularly the demand by the independence forces for a plebiscite. Mindful of US opposition—particularly by the military establishment—to any real self-determination, Muñoz Marín pushed for a freezing of the status debate to focus on the dire economic and social situation of the island. With this platform, the PDP handily won the elections of 1944 and 1948, when Muñoz Marín became the first Puerto Rican elected governor. That year the legislature approved the Gag Law, a local version of the US Smith legislation of 1940, which punished with fines or incarceration any advocacy of “overthrowing, paralyzing, or destroying the insular government, or any political subdivision of this, by means of force of violence.” The law, enforced rigidly against the Nationalist Party, stifled public expression for independence until its repeal in 1958.

Public Law 600, the bill to permit Puerto Ricans to write their own constitution, was approved on July 3, 1950. It consisted of two parts. The first spelled out the procedure for drafting a constitution: the islanders would elect delegates to a constitutional convention that would approve or reject the finished document and then submit it to the US president and Congress for approval. The second part, known as the Federal Relations Act, compiled all the fiscal, economic, and political principles unilaterally enacted by the US Congress regarding the US–Puerto Rico relationship,
translated. Throughout the process, Muñoz Marín and congressional leaders differed in their interpretations of this event. For Muñoz Marín, the nature of the relationship with the United States changed because of the consent voted by the Puerto Rican people, even though he admitted to Congress that the official relationship remained unchanged. Congress, however, believed that Puerto Rico remained under the "territorial clause" of the Constitution, and it continued to exert plenary powers over the island. In the ensuing years, all PDP attempts to modify or enhance commonwealth status bumped against either a reluctant Congress or an uncooperative president; it could never synchronize both powers to attain its objectives. Meanwhile, large-scale migration to the mainland and the extension of new federal programs such as the minimum wage, food stamps, Medicare, and mortgage and rent programs further linked the island to the United States. The more the commonwealth remained the same, the more it became integrated into the United States.

Simultaneously, the PIP and other pro-independence groups promoted their case on the international scene (mainly in the UN). The PIP's electoral support dwindled, falling slowly and consistently from 19% in 1956 to 2% in the 2008 elections, losing for the third time their electoral franchise, with no leader of any stature in sight. The PPD's electoral support declined from majorities of over 60% in the Muñoz Marín era to around 45%. The statehood party has been the only movement steadily gaining support in the electoral field; its candidate won the governorship in 2008 with 53% of the vote.

Although diasporas to the metropoles also characterize the Dutch and French Antilles, only in Puerto Rico's case did stateside communities, led by Puerto Rican congressional representatives, demand participation in the island's decolonization process. And the numbers are significant: of 8 million Puerto Ricans in 2007, about 4.1 million resided in the mainland (2.7 million born there) and 3.9 million on the island. No study has been conducted of the emigrés' status preference. Meanwhile, immigration from the neighboring, independent Dominican Republic has further fueled the travails of independence.

These trends notwithstanding, plebiscites in 1993 and 1998 indicated a stalemate between the pro-commonwealth (45%) and pro-statehood (46%) forces. Pro-statehood forces will probably continue holding plebiscites until they gain a majority for a statehood petition, while simultaneously blocking, as in the past, any attempt by the PDP to enhance commonwealth status.

Moreover, Puerto Rico's symbolic and strategic value to the United States diminished with the 2008 economic crisis and the loss of federal tax incentives and exemptions. The closures of US military installations and of the naval range on the island of Vieques further distanced Puerto Rico more from its metropole. The prevalence of the Spanish language—the basis of a strong cultural nationalism—and the low percentage of bilinguals make statehood a difficult choice for the US.
Congress to support, apart from other considerations, such as the number of seats it would yield in the House of Representatives, which would diminish other states' congressional delegations.

Another growing factor is the control by Puerto Rican statehood supporters of the local field offices of the Justice Department, the federal courts, and, more recently, the FBI, which has always intervened strongly against independence, either with repressive measures or with counterintelligence actions against organizations and individuals. On September 23, 2005, the anniversary of the 1868 independence revolt, FBI operatives carried out the murder of Eliberto Ojeda Rios, a leader of the clandestine pro-independence group Los Macheteros. In the early 21st century, US attorneys in Puerto Rico have won numerous cases of corruption against pro-statehood politicians, but in March 2009 they failed to convict a former PPD governor in what was seen as a case of political persecution. As with the NA, “good governance” is an issue in the US–Puerto Rico relationship, especially given the large amounts of metropolitan transfers and the high incidence of drug-related crimes.

The Quest for Autonomy in the French Antilles

In the French Antilles, the first serious expressions of discontent with departmentalization came from Césaire, who broke with the French Communist Party in 1956 and formed the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais (PPM) in 1958. Césaire now advocated autonomy, meaning a large measure of self-government within the context of an ambiguous relationship with France. The first student movements sponsoring independence began at this time in France and later in each of the French Antilles. All were left-leaning and lacked popular backing. In 1967 a workers’ strike supported by the Groupe d’Organisation Nationale de la Guadeloupe (GONG) turned violent, and white French security forces killed more than 100 people. No official inquiry was ever called. During the 1970s and early 1980s bombing campaigns by the Alliance Révolutionnaire Caribéenne (ARC) were carried out in Guadeloupe and Martinique as well as in France, but violent political actions eventually fizzled and the ARC dissolved.

In the meantime, tourism and public administration became important in the economy, with the majority of the labor force employed in the service and public sectors. The traditional economy (sugar, bananas, and pineapples) declined, and most food began to be imported and sold at much higher prices than in France. Because of public and social transfers from France, both Guadeloupe and Martinique experienced significant economic growth, faster than most independent insular economies in the region and at times even faster than France. Yet unemployment stood at 25% in each island near the end of the 1970s, with most people depending on social allowances.

In 1982 the government of François Mitterrand introduced a decentralization law creating an elected regional council alongside the existing elected general council for each Caribbean department, effectively transferring decision-making power from the prefects to these bodies. As a result, unlike metropolitan France, where several departments combined into a region, each of the French Antilles became a region unto itself, with the new regional council becoming the most important local assembly. Decentralization also allowed the creation of agencies for local development, the opening up of local media outlets, and inclusion of the creole language in the educational curriculum. Césaire claimed that the new policies fulfilled his struggle for autonomy, started to work within the system, and called for a moratorium of status politics. In practical terms, for a time, any impulse toward independence or a significant change in status was quelled by Mitterrand’s decentralizing reforms.

Alfred Marie-Jeanne, founder and president of the Mouvement Indépendantiste Martiniquais (MIM), was reelected as head of the regional executive in 2004 and as a deputy to the French National Assembly in 2007. Yet independence sentiment in the French Antilles is marginal, and in 2003 Martinique (with 51% of the vote) and Guadeloupe (73%) each rejected in a referendum the option of becoming a "territorial collectivity" (collectivité territoriale), choosing instead to remain under article 73 with greater powers transferred to the islands. To the surprise of most political leaders—especially Lucette Michaux-Chevry, the charismatic president of Guadeloupe’s regional council—the electorate voted for the status quo. On the other hand, the residents of St. Martin and Saint-Bartholomew (with a mainly white population of descendants of the original French settlers and a high-priced tourism economy) voted overwhelmingly to become “overseas collectivities” (collectivités d’outre-mer, COM), severing in this way their administrative links with Guadeloupe. On February 7, 2007, Parliament passed a bill granting COM status to both islands. Guadeloupe and Martinique kept their separate place as DOM within the French political system, side by side with St. Martin and St. Bartholomew as COM.

As part of France, the DOM are legally part of the European Union (EU). This new constitutional arrangement served as the mechanism through which a significant amount of the EU’s structural funds have been allocated to the islands as less developed regions of the EU. But these large transfers of monies from France, and now increasingly from the EU, have fostered welfare-based dependency rather than development. And such interest in the French Antilles goes further than their symbolic value as the vestiges of global empire and a projection of French and EU power and culture in the Caribbean. The islands also represent an extensive, exclusive maritime economic zone and play a role in intercontinental air travel and telecommunications.

In January 2009, a violent general strike began in Guadeloupe and lasted 44 days.
People protested prices that were higher, and wages that were lower, than in the metropole, and unemployment rates of more than 20%. The strike pitted white French riot police against a coalition of 48 organizations—trade unions, environmental groups, and so forth—named Lyannaj Kont Pwofrtasyon (LKP), loosely translated as the Alliance against Profiteering. The LKP signed an agreement with the French government on 165 demands, including a US$250 increase in the monthly minimum wage.

As the labor turmoil spread to Martinique and other DOM, French President Nicholas Sarkozy launched an unprecedented consultation on the overseas territories, calling on the people of the DOM themselves and the diaspora in France to participate through the Internet. In Martinique a referendum was held in January 2010 “not about independence but about setting the right level of autonomy.” With a 55% turnout, 79.3% voted against the proposal for more autonomy, as the “no” campaign managed to confine a vote for more autonomy with a vote for independence. Apart from the traditional “divide and rule” policy, Sarkozy’s referendum offer to Martinique, which left out Guadeloupe (the LKP boycotted the consultation), indicates that each island generally moves to its own rhythm, with little or no coordination between political groups. No movement exists toward the integration of the islands and their 350,000 or so people into one political entity, although recently the diasporic associations have begun to represent the French Caribbean in general, not just individual islands. Amid labor turbulence, calls for further individual insular equality within the French economic system and for more local power based on each island’s identity are the order of the day in the French Caribbean.

**Fragmentation and Autonomy in the Dutch Antilles**

In the 1960s, labor troubles in Curaçao ushered a new era in the relationship between the Netherlands and its Caribbean territories. On May 30, 1969, a strike for higher wages against the Shell refinery turned into massive disturbances and looting in Willemstad by black workers and the unemployed, which led to the immediate deployment of the Dutch military, the eventual downfall of the Democratic Party administration, and the resignation of its long-time white leader, Dr. Ephraim Jonckheere. Since then, politics in Curaçao has been dominated by black leaders from two parties, the Worker’s Liberation Front (Frente Obrero de Liberación, or FOL), formed by labor leaders, and the New Antillean Movement (Movimiento de Antillas Nobo, or MAN), formed by socialist-oriented intellectuals.

The May 1969 riots had significant consequences on relations between the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean and among the islands themselves. First, Dutch policy, contrary to that of France and the United States, centered on the promotion of decolonization via independence. Suriname, in a convoluted process, followed through in 1975. To separate itself from the rest of the Netherlands Antilles, particularly the larger and more populous Curaçao, Aruba’s highly popular “Betic” Cross, of the Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo (MEP), reluctantly agreed to take that road by 1996. It was only a bluff, however, because as soon as Aruba attained status aparte in 1986 — meaning that it became an autonomous country in the kingdom on similar and equal terms as the NA — it made it clear that it had no interest in going through with the change. A 1993 protocol between the Netherlands and Aruba suspended the granting of full independence, which was originally scheduled for 1996. Aruba accepted several conditions guaranteeing “good governance” and abstained from restricting the admissions of Dutch citizens. Earlier, in 1990, a money-laundering situation linked with drug trafficking and offshore banking had led to the intervention of the Netherlands government in Aruba. Meanwhile, the economy prospered, based on a strong tourism sector, oilushman, offshore banking, and remittances. In 2000 the Netherlands and the United States exchanged diplomatic notes for a 10-year agreement giving access to the airports of Aruba and Curaçao for counternarcotics operations.

Dutch intervention in issues of “good governance” led to the action of the Curaçao-based Antillean government in 1992 to end the corrupt 40-year authoritarian rule of Claude Wathey on the Dutch side of St. Maarten. Metropolitan intervention in the form of monitoring and monies to Curaçao stopped the downturn of the tourist and offshore banking sectors and the financially troubled and environmental hazardous refinery leased to Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA). The Netherlands’ policy, termed “recolonization” by various critics, resulted in promoting “good governance” by curtailing the financial autonomy of the Dutch Caribbean islands and establishing new individual constitutional relationships with The Hague, furthering interisland fragmentation and separatism.

The 50-year experiment of the “Netherlands Antilles” failed. The islands wanted a different relationship with the Netherlands and among themselves. Between 2000 and 2005, referendums held in St. Maarten (70%) and Curaçao (68%) resulted in votes for status aparte; in Saba (59%) and Bonaire (86%), for closer ties with the Netherlands; and in St. Eustatius (76%), for remaining within the Netherlands Antilles. A May 2009 referendum in Curaçao turned the situation more fluid, as only 52% percent voted for that island to become, like Aruba, an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands and to have the Netherlands absorb a large portion of Curaçao’s US$2.7 billion debt in return for financial and judicial controls.

Thus, The Hague granted status aparte to Curaçao and St. Maarten with financial supervision and improvements in law enforcement, while Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba (together known as BES) were slated to become part of the Netherlands, with their island councils as local council, their governors as mayors, their
residents entitled to vote in Dutch and European elections, and the US dollar as their national currency, effective in January 2011. BES retained a “special municipality” status because, as Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende put it, “We are different; at home, we speak different languages. Whereas one person grew up among palm trees, the other among tulip fields.” The Netherlands agreed to preserve the islands’ culture, with Dutch, English, and Papiamentu being the accepted languages. By October 10, 2010, a new Kingdom of the Netherlands would be in place, including a more fragmented Dutch Caribbean with no common language or culture either within itself or with its main federation partner, the Netherlands. For the moment, the diaspora in the Netherlands—consisting of some 130,000 people (25% of them second-generation), mainly from Curacao—remained marginal to the status discussions.

Conclusion

In the early 21st century, Puerto Rico and the French and Dutch Antilles, although constitutionally diverse, are redefining their relationship with their metropoles, either for greater integration or for autonomy under “good governance” and sound economic administration with metropolitan supervision. Metropolitan citizenship, when allowing for cultural nationalism, is valued more than sovereignty. Voters do not favor the independence option, particularly in the French Antilles and Puerto Rico. The metropoles’ repression of independence movements in Puerto Rico and the French Antilles and the difficult economic situation of sovereign Caribbean nations make independence an unattractive, distant goal — especially in the case of the Dutch and French Antilles, where insularism makes integration a difficult prospect.

France and the Netherlands have been more active than the United States in ascertaining by direct negotiations and popular consultations their dependencies’ wishes and presenting their own alternatives for discussion. The results might not be crystal clear or definitive for any option, but for the moment autonomy and integration under a watchful and intervening metropole have the upper hand. In both the French and Dutch cases, intrasial fragmentation prevails, as the smallest islands leave their larger islands’ associations to integrate into the metropoles.

Puerto Rico is afflicted by a lack of consensus among insular political parties on substantive questions (which commonwealth: an enhanced version, or the present one?) and procedural issues (referendums or constitutional assemblies?). In the United States, an open, real discussion about whether to incorporate a Spanish-speaking, ethnically and culturally distinct nation as a state has not taken place, even though its increasingly English-speaking diaspora is more and more a part of the US mainstream.

For these non-sovereign Caribbean islands, economic growth has meant strengthening of the service (mainly tourist) and public sectors, to the detriment of manufacturing, traditional export crops, and food production for local consumption. All these islands rely for their main nourishment on imports from the metropoles, acutely so wherever urban sprawl and environmental degradation have claimed the limited lands that are suited for agriculture. The status options open to these societies are few. For the moment, autonomy seems to be the preferable political condition, for it allows the expression of cultural nationalism as a way to defuse an asymmetrical situation. Certainly, future change will also depend on political will and public opinion in the metropolitan states. The role played by the diasporas from these islands may increasingly be a key factor in any decision, final or otherwise.