



Book Review

Globalizing the Caribbean: Political Economy, Social Change, and the Transnational Capitalist Class. **Jeb Sprague.** 2019. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. 332 pages, ISBN 978-1-4399-1654-4 Paperback (\$74.50)

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The Caribbean is the birthplace of modernity. It was the site where the ideals and contradictions of Enlightenment were bound together and acted out, and where capitalism was propelled through genocide, dispossession, and enslavement. Thus, while small in land space, these islands were gargantuan in historical and global political economic significance. Five hundred plus years later, the Caribbean remains a crucial node of rapid capital accumulation alongside intensive and expansive labor exploitation and economic marginalization. In *Globalizing the Caribbean: Political Economy, Social Change, and the Transnational Capitalist Class*, Jeb Sprague provides a powerful and detailed analysis of how the most recent epoch of capitalist globalization in the late twentieth into the twenty-first century is taking shape in the Caribbean.

Drawing on perspectives from the “global capitalism school,” specifically the theory of transnational processes, and critical studies in Caribbean and Latin American political economy, Sprague develops an explanation for the changing dynamics in the era of capitalist globalization in the Caribbean that centers the transnationalization of finance, production, and class relations. He defines transnationalization as processes that “while occurring across borders, takes place



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through functional integration. Functional integration refers to how amalgamations of different components (or agents) are constituted through their joint operations” (6).

Through four case studies - the Caribbean cruise ship business, migration and remittances, export processing zones, and mining - Sprague demonstrates the processes by which the Caribbean is being integrated into a transnational financial system and production networks, and the role of transnationally-oriented policy makers in the local state, US state, and supranational organizations in this shift. He highlights how this is all facilitated by the specter of US imperialism and interventionism in the region. More than describing the actors and mechanisms crucial to transnationalization in the region, he also shows how these processes have impacted Caribbean people. Specifically, he shows how the enrichment of the transnational capitalist class is predicated upon the intensification of structural marginalization and exclusion of an already and historically racialized and gendered Caribbean labor force. Sprague also attends to the various environmental impacts as the rise of transnationalism in mining and the cruise ship industry has had terrifying impacts for the region’s ecological and environmental well-being of a region that is also one of the most at risk with respect to climate change.

Even though Sprague largely focuses on the rise of the transnational capitalist class and the reproduction of exploitative class relations, the inclusion of race, gender, and imperial and colonial history into the analysis is a necessary task, as too many political economy approaches sidestep the salience of racial and gendered structures and hierarchies. Sprague’s turn to critical studies in Caribbean and Latin American political economy, which theorizes the relationship between capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, racism, and gendered relations of domination and exploitation is commendable. Following these works, Sprague maintains that historical capitalist expansion and contemporary transnationalism cannot be de-linked from racialization and gendered social processes, as former colonies in the Caribbean remain home to vast masses of darker-skinned women and men who are superexploited and deeply marginalized in the latest iteration of global capitalism. Still, it is surprising that some of the most preeminent scholars in the Black Radical Tradition were not included in the theorization of these relationships, most notably Cedric Robinson whose concept of ‘racial capitalism’ is particularly relevant for this analysis and Caribbean Black feminist radicals, particularly Claudia Jones whose analysis of capitalism highlights Black women’s ‘triple oppression,’ on the basis of class, race, and gender.

In addition, one is also left wondering how the racialized and gendered subaltern resists this onslaught of superexploitative relations. Sprague makes clear early on in the book that the Caribbean is home to “revolts against four centuries of slavery and colonialism and a fifth century of economic dependency” (2). And he does mention some instances of community mobilizations against transnational corporations, for example, local communities in the Dominican Republic that

have launched protests against harmful ecological impacts of mineral extraction. However, the variety of responses to transnational restructuring is underdeveloped in the text. Black radical scholarship asserts that anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-imperial resistance is central to the Caribbean experience and, as such, it is crucial to explore how the rise of the transnational capitalist class is not only linked to the degradation of racialized and gendered bodies but also how those bodies retain agency and exercise that agency in ways that undoubtedly shape the possibilities for transnational elites and policy-makers.

Well-written, engaging, and extraordinary in empirical detail and theoretical engagement, this book stands out as a crucial text documenting the contemporary changes sweeping across the Caribbean and situating these current dynamics as part of although distinct from the historical integration of the Caribbean into the world capitalist economy. Thus, this book is vital to those interested in the Caribbean and the global political economy, past and present.

References

- Robinson, Cedric. 2000 [1983]. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
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