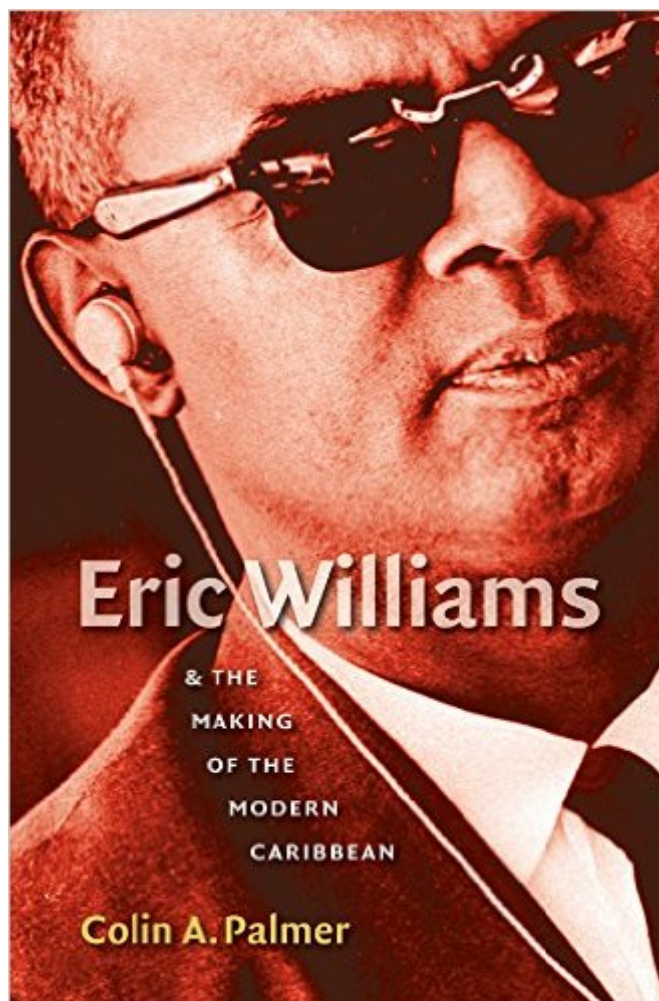


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Eric Williams And The Making Of The Modern Caribbean



Synopsis

Born in Trinidad, Eric Williams (1911-81) founded the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago's first modern political party in 1956, led the country to independence from the British culminating in 1962, and became the nation's first prime minister. Before entering politics, he was a professor at Howard University and wrote several books, including the classic *Capitalism and Slavery*. In the first scholarly biography of Williams, Colin Palmer provides insights into Williams's personality that illuminate his life as a scholar and politician and his tremendous influence on the historiography and politics of the Caribbean. Palmer focuses primarily on the fourteen-year period of struggles for independence in the Anglophone Caribbean. From 1956, when Williams became the chief minister of Trinidad and Tobago, to 1970, when the Black Power-inspired February Revolution brought his administration face to face with a younger generation intellectually indebted to his revolutionary thought, Williams was at the center of most of the conflicts and challenges that defined the region. He was most aggressive in advocating the creation of a West Indies federation to help the region assert itself in international political and economic arenas. Looking at the ideas of Williams as well as those of his Caribbean and African peers, Palmer demonstrates how the development of the modern Caribbean was inextricably intertwined with the evolution of a regional anticolonial consciousness.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The book is well written. It is balanced, and gives an insight into the deep love and commitment Dr.

Eric Williams had for the people of the Caribbean, and especially citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The book discloses in authentic detail, the struggle to reclaim Chaguramas from the United States of America, who had got it from the British in the second world war, ostensibly for defence of North America, South America, and the Caribbean. It is a treasure of history, showing the struggle of a former British colony reaching for its political and economic independence. The book is also well worth reading from a literary point of view.

Eric Williams was a complex and controversial giant who led a small Caribbean nation into independence. Professor Palmer attempts to understand him and his influence on the modern Caribbean by dissecting some of the major issues with which he dealt in the course of constructing his government. The result is a fascinating, well-researched study which should interest students of the Caribbean but also those interested in the problems of governance of small countries generally. He ends his book in 1970, though Williams continued as Prime Minister until his death in 1981; the years of plenty when high oil prices funded an economic boom are not covered, and would also make fascinating reading. However, while there is much more to say about Williams' tenure, what Palmer does cover can be taken on its own merits. Just one quibble: the author's arithmetic in the paragraph beginning at the bottom of page 228 doesn't add up, making his conclusions unintelligible; I trust this is the result of typographical error??

As Palmer says this is not a biography or a history of Trinidad. It is a good look at key moments in the long and influential political career of Eric Williams who for better or worse helped shaped the region. I would say that although there is not exactly bias towards the Williams, the book is very focused on his viewpoint and at times neglects the broader implications of world events. To be fair to Palmer he never claims the book is anything else. I felt it was a very accessible read, if sometimes simplistic. It makes a good text for anyone interested in politics outside of the US or in post-colonial nations in particular.

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