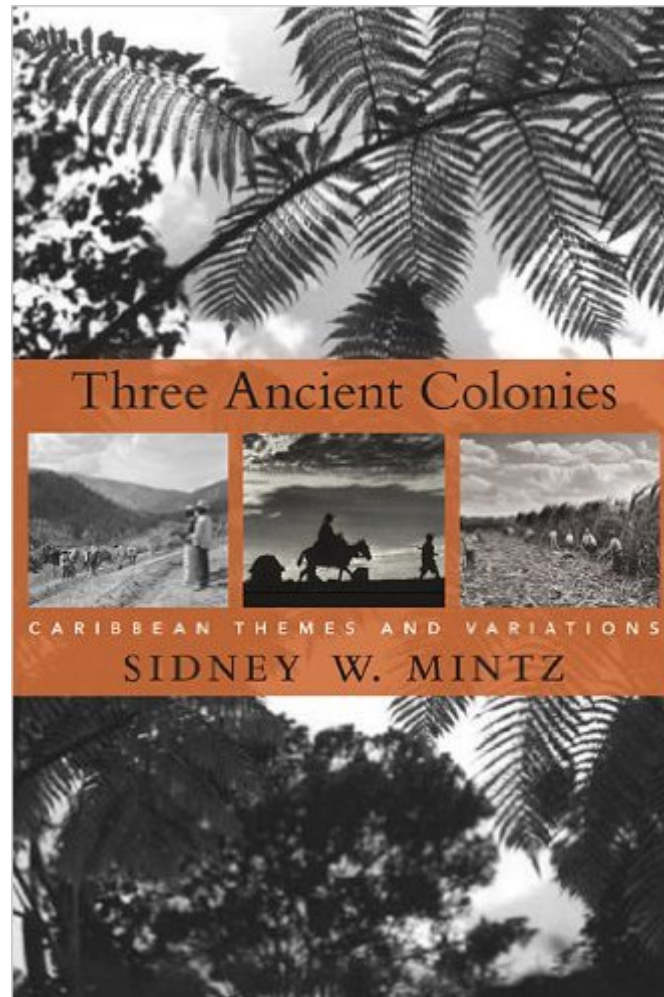


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Three Ancient Colonies: Caribbean Themes And Variations (The W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures)



Synopsis

As a young anthropologist, Sidney Mintz undertook fieldwork in Jamaica, Haiti, and Puerto Rico. Fifty years later, the eminent scholar of the Caribbean returns to those experiences to meditate on the societies and on the island people who befriended him. These reflections illuminate continuities and differences between these cultures, but even more they exemplify the power of people to reveal their own history. Mintz seeks to conjoin his knowledge of the history of Jamaica, Haiti, and Puerto Rico—a dynamic past born of a confluence of peoples of a sort that has happened only a few times in human history—with the ways that he heard people speak about themselves and their lives. Mintz argues that in Jamaica and Haiti, creolization represented a tremendous creative act by enslaved peoples: that creolization was not a passive mixing of cultures, but an effort to create new hybrid institutions and cultural meanings to replace those that had been demolished by enslavement. Globalization is not the new phenomenon we take it to be. This book is both a summation of Mintz's groundbreaking work in the region and a reminder of how anthropology allows people to explore the deep truths that history may leave unexamined.

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Customer Reviews

Sidney Mintz, who headed the anthropology department at Yale and helped found its counterpart at Johns Hopkins, is perhaps best known for his recent studies of food, notably *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Viking, 1985). His interest in sugar arose from field work in

the Caribbean, which he began in Puerto Rico in the late 1940s while still working on his Ph.D. at Columbia. He soon widened his experience to include Jamaica, Haiti, and other regions. The astonishing wealth to which the Caribbean colonies gave rise, Mintz writes, resulted from "the acquisitive energy of European masters and the cumulative forced labor of millions of workers, nearly all of them African," producing what he aptly calls "the first commercially marketed soft drugs ... tobacco, coffee, chocolate, and the sugar and molasses needed to sweeten them." Those drugs became instruments of power, used to remodel the class structure of Europe -- not least by supplying sweetened stimulants like sugared tea to fuel workers' punishing hours in mines, mills, and factories. What interests Mintz far more than the fruits of Caribbean labor is the extraordinary creativity with which the mostly West African slaves and their offspring, torn from their homes and cultures, the sources of their identity, assembled new societies and new identities in the New World. The destruction of their histories gave rise to new histories, each markedly different, intimate, and profound. Mintz is an impatient pragmatist when it comes to questions of how history and anthropology relate.

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