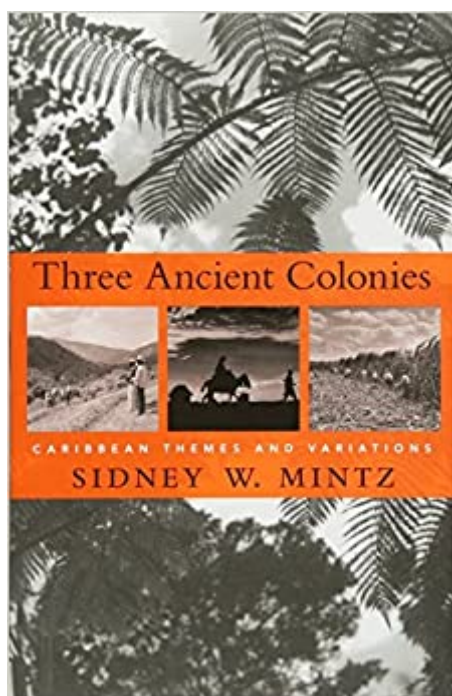


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# Three Ancient Colonies: Caribbean Themes And Variations (The W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures)



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this engaging, delightfully readable and provocative work, Sidney Mintz distills a lifetime of pioneering research to illuminate the making of three Caribbean plantation societies and of the creolized cultures that challenged the slave system from within. The work seamlessly brings

together history and anthropology, showcasing Mintz's impassioned and encyclopedic knowledge of the Caribbean. A must-read for all those interested in the history of slavery and the Atlantic world. (Laurent Dubois, Duke University) Drawing upon a lifetime of ethnographic fieldwork in the Caribbean region, Mintz arrives at bold conclusions about the societies and realities of our provocative, complex, and generally undervalued region. (Nicolette Bethel Caribbean Review of Books 2010-07-01) An engaging, accessible, and masterly work. (R. Berleant-Schiller Choice 2011-01-01)

Sidney W. Mintz was Research Professor and William L. Straus, Jr., Professor, Emeritus, in the Department of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University. He was the author of *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* and *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Power, and the Past*, among others.

Exactly what I wanted.

For those interested in Mintz life work and for those who are just beginning to understand caribbean history and relations.

I choose this rating because i recieved the package fast along with the book being in good condition!!!! worked out great

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. He insists that what anthropologists learn from their informants about their culture cannot be understood without appreciating the history that brought these individuals to where they are; nor can history be understood without seeing how it shapes individual lives. The first of the ancient colonies Mintz discusses is Jamaica, where domination by particularly brutal and implacable British plantation owners at first gave rise to an almost clandestine peasant economy, and after freedom finally came, to rural villages established by Christian missionaries with programs of their own. The modern consequences of this history are, as Mintz learned at first hand in the 1950s, the racial stratification of status and wealth and a sharp division between the roles of men and women. The Jamaican peasantry live "in the shadow of the national history." The history of Haiti, "the single most profitable colony in the history of the New World," was markedly different. Following the American and French revolutions, Haiti declared independence in 1804. The French did not accede until 1825, at an exorbitant price. The first revolution in history to end slavery, says Mintz, Haiti's was consequently the most terrifying: the United States did not recognize Haiti's independence until 1862. What followed was the collapse of the plantation system and the rise of a peasantry on whose backs "petty bureaucrats, coffee exporters, lawyers, military officers and merchants -- intermediaries of all sorts -- soon contrived to rest their collective weight." Much of what the elite skimmed was from a market economy run largely by women; nevertheless, as the first nation populated by emancipated slaves, power was largely undefined by race. Mintz's third and most ancient colony was the first he visited in person, Puerto Rico. Unlike Jamaica and Haiti, Puerto Rico did not have an important plantation economy until the U.S. introduced mechanized agriculture in the 20th century, when the southern coast became "an ocean of sugarcane" - and then only for a period measured in decades, not centuries, largely because in the beginning Spain's attention had been concentrated on its colonies in mainland Latin America. Thus, Mintz estimates, "the rise in the number of physically mixed people on the island must have been continuous." Historical differences gave rise to differences in gender relations, race relations, and issues of self and violence, a "pattern of fierce chaperonage, elopement, feigned rage, and rapid reconciliation" typical of marriages that "fitted neatly with a strikingly different pattern, one of homicide ... brought on either by insults real or fictive to masculine identity or by sexual jealousy." In his final and most fascinating chapter, "Creolization, Culture, and Social Institutions," Mintz shows how the enslaved responded to

terrible constraints by creating new social institutions within slavery, built from assorted memories of the different cultures from which they came. Creolization is not mere mixture, like paint in a pot, but a synthesis arising from what might seem incommensurates. But while Jamaica and Haiti gave rise to creolized cultures and creole languages, Mintz shows, Puerto Rico, although slavery existed there, never experienced a massive influx of slaves and was never creolized. Mintz persuasively demonstrates how human history intimately affects human response in cultural terms. Borrowing anthropologist Alfred Kroeber's argument that how culture comes to be is more distinctive of culture than what it is, Mintz says, "the process by which slaves dealt with the immediate postenslavement trauma they faced ... comes as close to understanding how culture comes to be than anything else in the human record I know of." *Three Ancient Colonies* is adapted from a series of lectures honoring W. E. B. Du Bois that Mintz delivered at Harvard in 2003, and begins with a deft biographical sketch of Du Bois and the role his acquaintance with the Caribbean played in his own view of the history of African Americans. He honors the memory of Du Bois and the men and women he came to know well in the rural communities of the Caribbean in this passionate, humorous, persuasively argued book.

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