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Natalie A. Zacek. *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands, 1670-1776.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 304 pp. $90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-19044-2.

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Conflict and Conformity in the Leeward Islands

Within the canon of British American history, the sugar islands have traditionally been thought of as an aberration, far outside the mainstream of Britain's settler societies in the New World. More often than not, the first historians of the West Indies discussed the dynamics of free society in static terms. It is still often assumed that the region was bereft of social traditions that may have (1) reflected English culture or (2) been the result of conscious settler efforts to start afresh by creating their own creole communities. It is often believed that it was the colonists' single-minded pursuit of riches, overwhelming desire to one day return to England, and degenerate behavior that conspired against the development of tropical Albions. This critical tradition of West Indian colonies goes back as far as the seventeenth century, but Natalie Zacek argues that most scholars have unknowingly repeated the late eighteenth-century anti-slavery view of white West Indian life. Caribbean settlers were portrayed by the abolitionists as hyper individualists, whose island societies were un-English and anathema to British sensibilities. Indeed most survey texts on colonial British America, in one way or another, repeat many of the themes laid out in late eighteenth-century abolitionist literature.

Zacek's masterfully written monograph on the Leeward Islands takes issue with the above mentioned traditional view of Caribbean society. This is not to say that she ignores the dominant role the slave system played in shaping life in Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis, and St. Kitts, but rather that Zacek wants us to learn more of how white society (before 1775) was not necessarily the cartoon portrayed by its abolitionist critics. As the title of this book underscores, Zacek approaches the Leeward Islands from the perspective of the *history of British colonization* rather than the history of slavery. In this way, it is aligned with the recent scholarship of Trevor Burnard, Jack Greene, B. W. Higman, Andrew O'Shaughnessy, and Simon Smith who have all sought to broaden our understanding of these non-mainland colonies within the context of a larger process of imperial cultural history. Zacek's work, perhaps more than any other, forcefully argues that before the American Revolution there was, at least in the Leewards, a collective effort by whites to (1) regulate their own behavior, (2) instill a common *English* identity, and (3) create a social and political culture based on creolized Anglican traditions.

Zacek puts forward a complex description of the social and cultural development of white society in the Leewards, underscoring that they were each "delicately calibrated" in order to secure the maintenance of power over the black super-majority, to contend with the consequences of periodic natural disasters, and to "manage" the ethnic diversity of the colonists. White unity was paramount to achieving these goals and the settlers adapted English traditions in order to accommodate an unusual diversity of free peoples. French Huguenots, English Quakers and Anglicans, Irish Catholics, and Scottish Presbyterians all had their own cultural traditions and, obviously, religious beliefs. These different groups not only coexisted, but intermarried, thanks to the paradoxically hierarchical yet plastic Anglican Church. The established church maintained order through its acceptance of social inequality, but could also, in the eighteenth century, tolerate a range of religious beliefs: the Latitudinarian Anglican position on matters of faith meant that a wide range of beliefs could be held, so long as they did not interfere with social order. Zacek, therefore, takes pains to show us, for example, how "orthodox" Quakers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century were perfectly unacceptable, while moderate and financially successful Friends of the eighteenth century were entirely respectable. In a similar way, rich Catholics–and even poor Catholics in the second half of the eighteenth century–were tolerated so long as they did not

pose a threat to the island's political stability. Thus, a major theme of this book is that harmony and "societal inclusion resulted from the combination and the *ability* of a group or individual to accommodate itself to certain norms and its *willingness* to do so" (p. 167). If only symbolically, the force of the Anglican Church, if not the Anglican faith, played a key role in re-enforcing a common English identity.

In addition to the symbolism of the established church, a common British identity was maintained in the Leeward Islands by the adoption, or replication, of British political traditions and ideology. Through a close study of the political history of the "federated" system of colonial government, Zacek shows us that there was a structure of government that was similar to other eighteenth-century colonial governments in the thirteen mainland colonies. While there may not have been grand government buildings erected in these tiny islands, the ruling elite had familiar conflicts with their governors. Most illustrative of this point is the preponderance of local expressions of the Anglo-American fetish for "[British] Liberty." This ideology, much like the symbol of the Anglican Church, helped create the glue that held together a settler society in the English Leeward Islands.

Zacek expertly reconstructs the complex dynamics of white society in the Leewards and reveals *how* settlers successfully organized their communities. Class, more than ethnicity, was critical to this process, so the many accounts describing social mobility are both fascinating to read and instructive. *Settler Society in the English Leeward Islands* details how social conflicts were resolved and how whites managed to keep their oppressive society stable, despite the surprising ethnic diversity in these tiny, but enormously profitable islands. This sophisticated yet clearly written book will inspire further research into the colonization process in other portions of the British Caribbean. Furthermore, the book goes far to insert the history of the West Indies into a larger discussion of empire and the settlement of colonial British America. This book will appeal to a wide audience of imperial, colonial, and Caribbean historians and encourage them to rethink their understanding of the West Indies during the first empire.

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