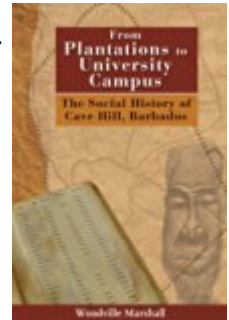


Woodville K. Marshall. *From Plantations to University Campus: The Social History of Cave Hill, Barbados.* Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2013. viii + 156 pp. \$24.00, paper, ISBN 978-976-640-321-8.



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Land is scarce in Barbados. It is a densely populated island, particularly in the south and the west. It has been that way since the arrival of the first English settlers in 1627. Woodville Marshall in his short book *From Plantations to University Campus: The Social History of Cave Hill, Barbados* offers a fascinating local history of the region of Barbados known as Cave Hill and the adjacent areas of Black Rock and Lazaretto along the leeward side of the island. These are the lands on which the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill sits today between the oldest English settlement in Holetown and the main city of Bridgetown. Marshall explores the space that became the university and the adjacent lands from the first settlement through to the modern day, and situates these lands and their inhabitants within the larger social history of the island. In his early history, he regularly refers to the lands that became the University of the West Indies campus as the “core space.” He sketches a history of this core space that, in part because of its proximity to urban centers, seems to have witnessed a

remarkable amount of dynamic change and turmoil. To construct his history, Marshall has clearly spent a significant amount of time carefully gathering and examining a wide range of local sources, including wills and deeds, newspaper evidence, and oral histories from elderly residents living in the community in the modern day. He has supporting evidence throughout and he is careful to not overly speculate when the evidence is lacking. In the appendix he includes government documents pertaining to the establishment of the university and a long list of the names of enslaved peoples in and around Cave Hill in 1834 with details about their sex, age, occupation, birthplace, and color. The text is supported by maps throughout.

Marshall’s chronological history of the development of these lands focuses on settlement patterns and land ownership and the social and economic activities within the core space over time. He is also attentive to the lived experience of people in that space and to the character of the communities that emerged there. He even delves into

stories about the eccentric “characters” (p. 99) who, according to oral accounts, lived in the area, such as a man who is said to have hired two taxis to go to the airport: one for him and one for his hat. Marshall makes a few key overall points about the core space, which he sums up clearly in a short conclusion. He convincingly demonstrates that Cave Hill and the land around it has never been consistently used for large-scale plantation production because the soil is “not generally hospitable to agricultural pursuits” (p. 87). Over the course of its history, he says, the Cave Hill area “was not essentially the home of plantations” (p. 124). The only large plantation in the area during slavery was Halletts and it “easily dwarfed all other landed properties” (p. 124). Halletts was formed from the consolidated lands of smaller freeholders in the late seventeenth century but it was not successful for a long period and over the course of the eighteenth century it became fragmented into smaller properties again. After slavery, the lands of Cave Hill became further fragmented, the population in the region became unusually mobile, and a higher than normal number of people migrated to other areas of the Caribbean. In the community which remained at Cave Hill, “mini-lots would increasingly become the defining feature of black landholding” (p. 125). Finally, creeping urbanization” (p. 125) changed the settlement patterns in the region once again. The establishment of the Cave Hill campus became “the central feature of a government-inspired urban development project” (p. 125) and it was built upon a space that was “not empty” (p. 125), which meant that many of the landholders were dispossessed of their property because on the land-scarce island of Barbados the government was able to justify and follow through on a policy of “compulsory acquisition” (p. 120) at prices that many landholders believed were below market value. Nevertheless, Marshall concludes by noting that most current residents of the adjacent community of Free Hill are pleased that the university was built

nearby because of increased economic opportunities.

The Cave Hill and Black Rock region that became the University of the West Indies campus is one of the most fascinating in Barbados because of its history. It was a hybrid of an urban and rural space that was marked by agricultural infertility, “land scarcity,” and a “floating population” (p. 66). It was the site of the Halletts plantation with all the violence and brutality that accompanied sugar slavery and the home of a lunatic asylum and a leper hospital which became the Barbados Department of Archives. It was struck harder than many places in the island by Asiatic cholera in 1854 and it was the site of particularly large and unruly riots and protests in 1876 during the Confederation Rebellion, when working-class Barbadians tried to force the elites on the island to form a confederation with the other Windward Islands, and again in 1895 during the “Depression Riots” in which rioters protested high unemployment and wage reductions.

This is not a book that will command a wide readership because it is so narrowly focused but it does deserve more attention. It makes no major historiographical contributions to wider literatures; it fills a very small historical niche. The publication of his book coincides with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the university. It is simply a short local history of a “core space” in Barbados that would become the University of the West Indies campus and at times the evidence limits the author to nothing more than dry iterations of land transactions. However, this is also a clearly and carefully written book, based on deep research and there is no doubt that this small area of land has an exceptionally fascinating story. Marshall does an excellent job of telling that story without straying too far from the often scarce surviving evidence.

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