

L26B (CARIBBEAN LANGUAGE: SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND)
HANDOUT 1

What is the Caribbean?

NB: Please print and read this handout and take it to the lecture on Wednesday, 2 February 2005.

Questions:

- (1) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the definitions given below?
- (2) Can you formulate your own definition of the Caribbean? Write it down and we will consider it during the lecture.
- (3) Can we develop a 'linguistic' definition of the Caribbean? Try and put one together and we will look at how accurately you have been able to capture the reality.

DEFINITIONS

Oxford English Dictionary (1989):

Caribbean *a. and sb.* , applied to certain of the West Indian isles, and to the sea between them and the mainland.

The New Encyclopædia Britannica (1998):

Caribbean Sea, sub oceanic basin of the western Atlantic Ocean, situated north of the Equator in the Western Hemisphere and washing the north coast of South America and the eastern coasts Central America and part of Mexico. It covers an area of approximately 1,063,000 square miles (2,754,000 square km). [...]

To the south of the Caribbean Sea is bounded by the coasts of Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama; to the west by Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, and the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico; to the north by the Greater Antillean islands of Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico; and to the east by the Lesser Antillean chain, composed of the island arc that extends from the Virgin Islands in the northeast to Trinidad, off the Venezuelan coast, in the southeast.

International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (1968: 306):

The Caribbean area comprises the islands extending from Trinidad, Aruba, Margarita, and others off the coast of Venezuela in the south, to Jamaica, Cuba, Hispaniola (formerly, and in Spanish, Española , the western third being the Republic of Haiti and the rest the Dominican Republic). The main groupings are the four Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles (about forty inhabited islands), and Trinidad and Tobago. A few units

such as Colombia's San Andrés y Providencia and Honduras' Bay Islands, lying outside the 1,800-mile arc stretching from Cuba to Trinidad, are included, though the Bahamas are not.

