

## Protecting Heritage in the Caribbean

Siegel, P.E. and E. Righter. The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa 2011  
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*Protecting Heritage in the Caribbean is one of the latest publications in the Caribbean Archaeological and Ethnohistory Series published by the University of Alabama Press and edited by L. Antonio Curet. This is the first book of the series to deal specifically with Cultural Resource Management (CRM), addressing heritage preservation legislation and implementation across the Caribbean island region. The Caribbean presents a unique and complex situation where cultural heritage crossovers exist among numerous sovereign nations.*

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Peter E. Siegel and Elizabeth Righter together have extensive experience on both sides of the aisle (government agencies and independent CRM contractors) when it comes to dealing with heritage management in the Caribbean. Siegel is currently an associate professor of archaeology at Montclair State University, New Jersey, but he has knowledge and experience with the CRM world and has worked for many decades on Puerto Rico among other Caribbean islands. Righter is both a contract and research archaeologist, who was the Territorial Archaeologist within the State Historic Preservation Office for the U.S. Virgin Islands from 1983 to 1998. Siegel and Righter have gathered an illustrious list of contributors, each of whom are best able to explain the state of heritage preservation law and implementation on these various islands. At the outset, Siegel states the editors' goals in compiling this document. The overarching objective was to "assess how Caribbean nations address the challenges of protecting their cultural

heritages or patrimonies" (p. ix). Along the way, certain questions were asked of each country: (1) "Is there formal legislation that requires cultural patrimony to be considered prior to development projects?", (2) Does legislation apply only to government-funded project or to private ones as well?", (3) "Are there levels of legislation: local, regional, national?", and (4) "How well enforced are heritage preservation laws"? (p. ix). The primary objective was met by each contributing author, and each outlined formal legislation for their respective islands and addressed issues of enforcement for these laws. The individual questions regarding timing of surveys, funding of projects, and levels of legislation, although addressed in U.S. heritage law, are too specific to be relevant to the discussions within this book and these goals were not met. However, more interesting questions were brought to light along the way and the book is successful on

many fronts beyond these stated goals. As a resource of Caribbean legislation it is unparalleled. Nowhere else are so many pieces of legislation cited along with the relevant passages that apply to cultural resource protection. This type of information is typically hard to track down and often unknowable except by the people working on the front lines of heritage management and working directly with local governments. Because of this, at times the prose makes for difficult reading, but overall the information provided is accessible and not overly technical. That said, the audience for this book will necessarily be limited to archaeologists, cultural resource managers, preservationists, and perhaps government personnel—those who have a stake in the future of heritage management, heritage tourism, and the preservation of each nation's history.

This publication is timely. As Jay B. Havisser and R. Grant Gilmore III note in their chapter on the Netherland Antilles, the islands have “suffered a significant and irrevocable loss of its built and archaeological heritage. The citizens...feel the pain of this loss and are now attempting to mitigate it” (p. 140). There is the implication in many of the chapters that the islands are on the cusp of significant change, meaning this book may be outdated in a very short while. One example can be seen in Siegel's description of the dual legislation system in Puerto Rico (U.S. Federal law working in tandem with local commonwealth law) and the problems inherent in that organization. In the past year, the Puerto Rico commonwealth compliance agency system has undergone a fairly extensive restructuring.

This problem of trying to report on an ever-changing situation is most apparent in the discussion of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Two chapters are devoted to this set of islands: the first by Paul E. Lewis provides an overview, while the second by Richard Callaghan is entitled “Recent Efforts in Protecting Heri-

itage”. Callahan's chapter acts as a response to the previous St. Vincent discussion, which presents a pessimistic view of the prospects of heritage preservation on the island using the example of an international airport development and the impending destruction of multiple highly significant cultural resources. Because Callahan's contribution is an update, it contains the most recent (2010) legislation and describes successful mitigation efforts in regards to this airport project. As much of the book paints a very dire picture with mandates for protection lacking and little to no enforcement of what preservation laws do exist, it is a welcome idea that this book may soon be dated.

That said, there are some very progressive and smart ideas in this book that could positively change the current lackluster preservation environment for the Caribbean. The book culminates with an excellent chapter by William Keegan and Winston Phulgence, who are tasked with discussing islands with “underdeveloped” cultural heritage legislation, but along the way the authors propose innovative ways to deal with the current situation and give examples of how heritage protection has worked throughout the Caribbean in spite of little government support. They stress the need for community support and provide powerful examples of how to create that bond through creative educational projects. The authors also broach the subject of corruption in local governments, citing examples where public lands were sold to developers for personal gain. This theme of “politicized” (corrupt) decision making in regards to historic preservation is one of the main points made by Righter in her chapter on the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is disconcerting that in a place where U.S. law should carry some weight (U.S. is in the name of the country!), it is individual, politicized decisions that rule the day. The bottom line of Keegan and Phulgence's chapter

is that development projects must “contribute to the protection of the local environment and heritage” (p. 150), meaning developers must pay to develop, and whether that is through robust Environmental and Archaeological Impact Statements and/or through standardized development fees that support general heritage preservation, there can no longer be free rides, especially for foreign investment companies. A heritage tax or tourist tax is another option proposed by Siegel.

The individual chapters to this book provide a starting place to see where the governments of each country are in terms of cultural resource protection. The situations outlined in this compilation run the gamut from strong compliance (French West Indies under French law, as discussed by Benoît Bérard and Christian Stouvenot) to what appears to be no government oversight at all (St. Lucia as discussed by Milton Eric Branford). Esteban Prieto Vicioso, in his chapter on the Dominican Republic, provides concluding remarks that are applicable to most of the other islands discussed in this volume. Namely, that the primary factor in compromising cultural patrimony is a lack of enforcement of in-place legislation, and that accountability is spread out between too many separate agencies. Due to a lack of support, the mandates of preservation are not carried out. He rightly calls for “capable public institutions with honest technicians and professionals qualified to successfully manage the cultural patrimony” (p. 45).

Accountability spread out between separate agencies is a common problem highlighted in this volume. For Jamaica, Andrea Richard and Ainsley Henriques provide a thorough discussion of the various aspects of cultural heritage (e.g., archaeology, maritime resources, buildings, heritage tourism, museums, antiquities trade, education, site inventories), while pointing out that the lines of authority are often blurred between the agencies tasked

with the various aspects of heritage oversight. Siegel addresses this situation in his outline of Puerto Rico’s two-tiered system of legislation. Federal projects (on federal land, requiring federal permits, or funded by federal coffers) all fall under U.S. law in Puerto Rico, while all other projects are under the authority of the commonwealth law—in reality, the separation of authority is rarely clear. Here, Siegel uses the much contested prehistoric ceremonial site of PO-29 as an example of coordination of agencies, but this important site was anomalous and is not a typical example of how cultural resource management works (in particular Section 106 compliance). Ultimately, PO-29 underwent data recovery AND was preserved in place, which is a very unusual application of Section 106.

It is interesting that the same system that works fairly well in Puerto Rico, works not at all in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Elizabeth Righter describes how even with good local laws in place and the weight of the U.S. preservation system at play in the country, very little preservation work is carried out. There appears to be a lack of political will to implement the laws that are already in place. It is also possible the multifaceted U.S. system simply can’t work on a small island due to political manipulation.

Although mentioned rarely in this volume, heritage tourism is an integral part of the changes that are occurring across the Caribbean in regards to historic preservation. Reg Murphy points out that even though most Antiguans and Barbudans see the “relics of the colonial past as a painful episode of their history” (p. 74) and not anything to be protected, heritage tourism has been successful on Antigua and Barbuda. Tourism is the main economic activity on these islands and has become the rationale for preserving and protection heritage sites. Ironically, Murphy reports that the nation has no centralized man-

agement authority or national cultural resource regulations to enable historic preservation. The only real heritage protection on the island lies within the National Park lands, and nearly all the preservation work that has been carried out was done so by committed individuals within the local Historical and Archaeological Society with the aid of international grant funding. The final chapter of the book by Siegel lays out how he would like to see historic preservation carried out across the Caribbean and he basically uses the U.S. model, meaning systematic surveys would be conducted in areas slated for development to identify the presence or absence of heritage resources. Siegel stresses that “built into the permitting process for developers and government public-works agencies [should be] formal and systemic considerations of heritage resources....[not only] high-profile already-known monuments or archaeological sites, but also consideration of the potential for buried resources that we don’t know about” (p. 156) (emphasis the authors). To accomplish these goals, Siegel proposes that each nation provide education on the importance of the past, have legislation backed by enforcement (which would include regulatory agencies with trained staff), identify qualified consultants to do the work, and maintain curation facilities. The Caribbean is a multi-national entity with a shared cultural heritage and the concluding proposal of Siegel’s is to include heritage preservation as part of the mandate of a multi-regional organization such as the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). The OECS mandate already stresses environmental protection and could be modified to include cultural heritage protection. From a place of shared history, why not also share the responsibility

of a regulatory agency, appropriate curation facilities, lists of pre-qualified archaeological and architectural consultants, and increased oversight pressure. In the same vein, Esteban Prieto Vicioso (Dominican Republic) notes participation in the Organization of the Wider Caribbean on Monuments and Sites (CARI-MOS), which is a pan-Caribbean group that maintains site inventories, while Basil A. Reid and Vel Lewis in their chapter on Trinidad and Tobago describe the benefits of becoming signatories to the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) convention on the protection of the world’s cultural and natural heritage. Again, this type of outside accountability can only strengthen preservation practices within local governments.

This book is an excellent first step in understanding how the dual goals of promoting development and protecting national heritage can both be met through compromise, consultation, informed research, and by setting up systems of accountability. As stated in the U.S. National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (provided by Siegel in his chapter on Puerto Rico) “the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic heritage...[it] should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the...people” (p. 46). This sentiment is applicable to all nations. It is time to move from Caribbean heritage preservation being the work of a few committed individuals, which includes all of the contributors to this book, to being the mandate of this group of nations, connected by their shared heritage and need to protect it.

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**Edited by Peter E. Siegel and Elizabeth Righter**

**Pubdate: 2011 - 216 pages**

**Quality Paper: \$27.50 ISBN: 978-0-8173-5667-5 E Book: \$22.00 ISBN: 978-0-8173-8390-9**

**Series: Caribbean Archaeology and Ethnohistory Series - Series Editor: Antonio L. Curet**