

The U.S. and Naval Bases in the Caribbean

Introduction:

During World War 2 (1939-1945) Britain gave permission to the U.S. to lease land on which to erect bases to protect her precious canal from possible German attack. The lease was to be for 99 years. In return, Britain received 50 old destroyers (ships).

Six countries were selected;

1. Antigua
2. Bahamas
3. British Guiana
4. Jamaica
5. St. Lucia
6. Trinidad

Negative effects of U.S. Presence at the Bases

1. The Americans chose the best lands. In the case of Trinidad it took up a lovely beach named Chaguaramas which was then closed to the public!
2. The people felt that the lease was far too long. The War was not expected to last for 99 years. Why then did Britain agree to such a long lease? To make matters worst the local leaders were not consulted about the matter.
3. Caribbean people argue that there was really no need for this long lease since the 'possibility of a German attack ended when the war was over.
4. Chaguaramas became an issue when the Premier of Trinidad, Eric Williams wanted to use the area as the headquarters for the Federation.



Chaguaramas



Eric Williams

5. The soldiers practiced undesirable activities such as prostitution, gambling and drinking.
6. Racism and discrimination increased with their presence. The fact that they could afford to pay 'yankee dollars' that many persons craved for gave them an air and attitude of superiority.

Positive effects of U.S. Presence at the Bases

1. Sanitation and Health programs were sponsored by the U.S.
2. The bases were military bases so airstrips were constructed. Antigua later developed this airstrip into its national airport.
3. Highways and bridges were constructed while roads were paved.
4. The territories in particular and the region in general benefited from the added security of the military at the bases as long as the war lasted.
5. In 1941 under the land lease Act the Caribbean received \$15M of loans and much needed material for the economic development of the countries.

Economic Impact

1. During World War 2 the influence of the Americans on the economies of the British West Indies increased. The war had closed off many of the Caribbean's European markets. The Caribbean looked to the U.S. to sell much of its goods and in return they bought or imported goods from the U.S.

- 2.** During and after the war there was a severe food shortage. In 1942, the Anglo-American Commission introduced several measures to combat both the food shortage and unemployment that plagued the region. The Emergency Land-Water highway was created to overcome the inadequate food supplies from Britain.
- 3.** In 1950 the U.S. became interested in Jamaica's bauxite industry. Through ALCAN exploited both Jamaica's and Guyana's bauxite. In 1956 they invested heavily in Trinidad's oil industry.
- 4.** She used the opportunity to increase her investments in shipping, banking and insurance in the region.
- 5.** Through the Agency for International Development and the Caribbean Development Bank, bilateral and multilateral loans were offered to Caribbean countries such as Jamaica and Trinidad.
- 6.** The U.S. Peace Corps also aided in economic development. They assisted in key areas such as agricultural training and development.
- 7.** By 1962 U.S. dollars were pumped into the Tourism industry of the Caribbean. This was especially so after the rift with Fidel Castro and Cuba.