

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the process by which Great Britain was replaced by the United States as the dominant external force in the lives of the people of Trinidad. The influence of both metropolitan powers was felt in all spheres but the emphasis in this study is on cultural history; the extent to which outside influences have been able to shape the thinking and behaviour of Trinidadians.

The growing importance of the United States in the region was accelerated by the Second World War which provided a showcase for American military and economic might while simultaneously revealing major cracks in the British imperial structure. World War II weakened Britain to the point where she was unable to devote enough resources to the welfare and development of the

empire to retain the loyalty of her subjects.

The loss of India in 1947 marked the beginning of a decolonisation process which proceeded apace in the postwar era and the United States, relishing the role of superpower, often moved into the vacuum created by British withdrawal. The Caribbean as a whole found itself drawn into the ambit of American hegemony and increased military and political influence simply facilitated more rapid infiltration of American culture.

Greater exposure to the American way of life was made easier as the Americans dominated the film industry and posed successful challenges to British dominance of the airwaves and the printed media. The presence of American troops on Trinidad soil proved to be a watershed as locals were able to observe the wealth and power of the Americans and make unfavourable comparisons with their British governors.

Americanization generated ambivalent feelings among Trinidadians who on one hand welcomed American wealth but on the other resented the substitution of one "mother country" by another. Attempts to involve Canada in the governing of West Indians were evidence of desperate and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to halt a process which has proven to be unstoppable.