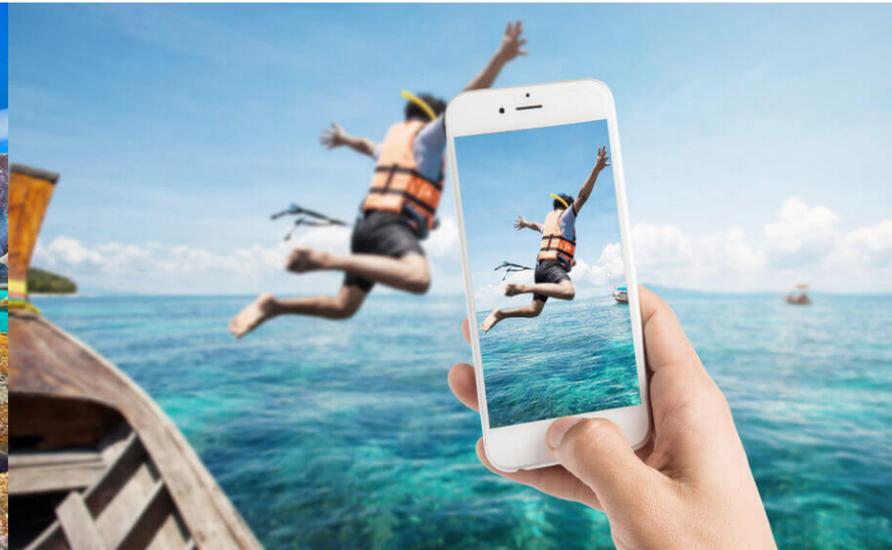
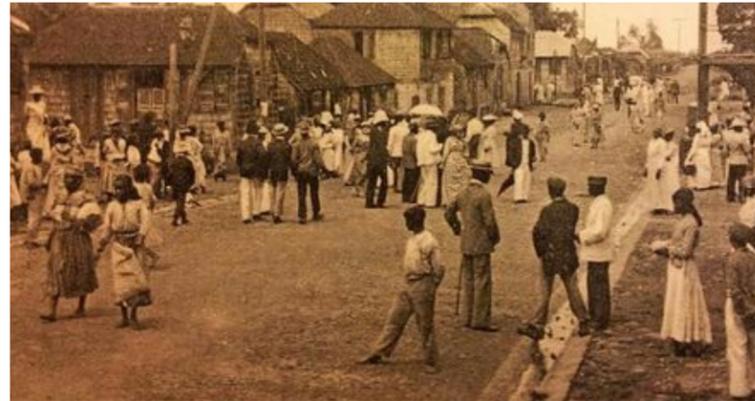


**TOURISM & THE INFLUENCE OF IMAGERY  
& SOCIAL MEDIA**  
FARRINGTON ASBERRY-LINDQUIST



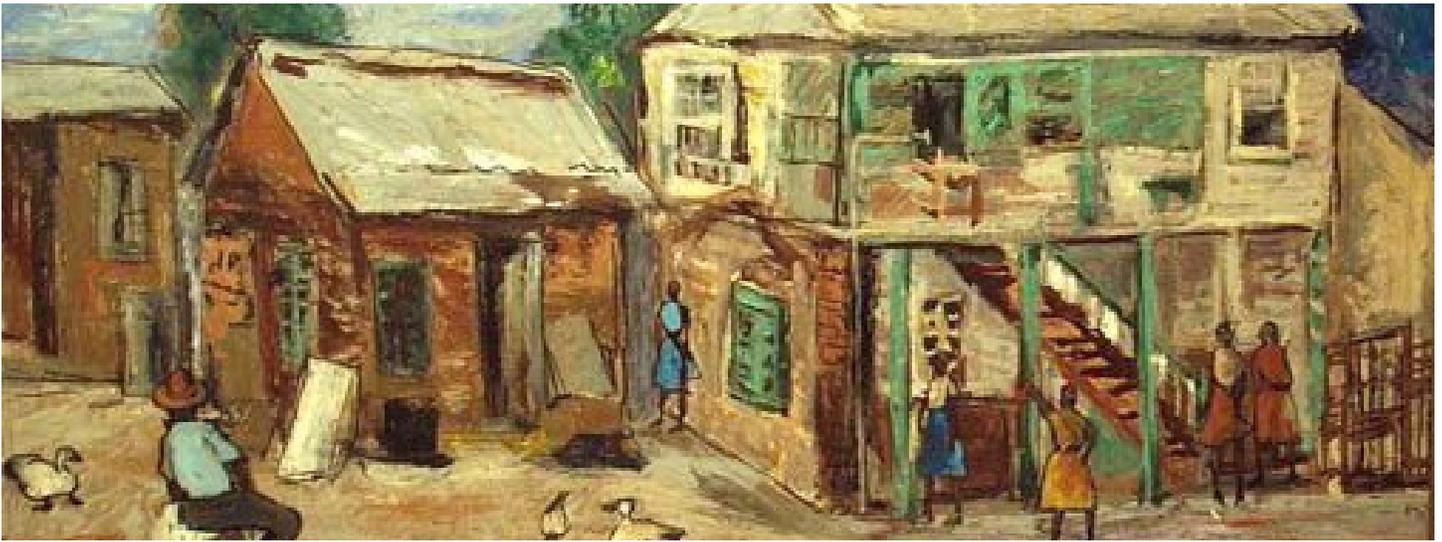


Figure 1: 'Old Settlement' by Ralph Campbell. Painting in the National Gallery of Jamaica Collection.

## INTRODUCTION

An estimated 32 million international tourists arrivals were recorded to Caribbean destinations in 2019. This was about a 4.4% increase from the 30.7 million international tourist arrivals recorded the previous year in 2018. As the tourism industry grows and more people travel, one can begin to wonder what is causing this rapid increase, specifically in the Caribbean region. This generation has become heavily dependent on technology as a source for information, shopping, news, activities, and other things made easily accessible by our devices. Technology and social media are powerful tools for marketing for this very reason. Marketing creates the desired image, while technology is the vessel to make it more successful. This has been a common theme in advertisements of the Caribbean and different travel packages associated with it like all-inclusive bundles. The reliance on our phones, tablets, and computers has led to a rapid increase in consuming products and services due to accessibility and well-marketed goods. In this case, an island advertised effectively will cause more people to want to visit and eventually promote it to others that will travel there as well. There are different methods to appeal to different audiences, but one that has proven effective for several groups of people is the utilization of social media platforms. This booklet will investigate the influence social media and imagery have on the development of the picturesque, tourist gaze, and built environment in the Caribbean and the tourism industry.

## FORMATION OF THE PICTURESQUE

The formation of the Caribbean picturesque dates back over five hundred years with colonial consumption and suppression of history playing a large role in developing its new image. European colonizers developed dangerous greed that led to high consumption of the beauties of the islands and stealing and overuse of resources which initiated the beginning of colonial consumption that has developed into tourism. The erasure and amnesia of history in Western modernity have proven to be an effective way to continue advertising a distorted EuroAmerican fantasy that

promotes the fabricated picturesque we are familiar with today.

European colonialists employed photography to falsely reframe the Caribbean. To bring more attention and draw more tourists to the islands, they chose to erase or not fully include many of the elements shown in more "authentic" imagery due to greed and the desire for economic gain. Without the use of imagery, the reimagined fantasy of the Caribbean would not have been as effective or influential. It is dangerous to depend on what you see or what is shown to you as a true depiction because oftentimes, this is not accurate, especially when most of what you see is what others want you to see. It is important to have reliable sources to establish your knowledge and opinions to be well-informed and lessen harmful effects on history and the preservation of authenticity.

## IMAGERY SHAPING NARRATIVES

When analyzing past imagery in the forms of paintings, photographs, and illustrations, there is a shift in the content which portrays more of the cultural aspects of the region like the people and practices. While it is difficult to identify what is authentic and what is not due to the manipulation of the region and its portrayal to the world, we can begin to see something that separates itself from the common focus on travel, resorts, and "paradise-like" visuals leading us to believe this could be a more accurate representation of the Caribbean outside of the umbrella of tourism. More historically recognized architectural styles are shown in these images because they do not focus on the tourist enclaves as present imagery does. However, there is a lot less architecture acknowledged in general due to the portrayal of the people, culture, and natural environment in these photographs.

Common themes in the present imagery of the Caribbean are high saturation and an emphasis on isolation towards a beach or resort area. This is the typical representation we see which has overthrown culture, distorts narratives and history, and questions authenticity. EuroAmerican fantasies and desires are often perpetuated in these images to encourage tourism and draw people in with a visual depiction of paradise. The architectural aspects in



Figure 2: Montego Bay, Jamaica

these photographs are usually cruise ships, resorts, or hotels and are not likely to include any existing homes or rural areas of the island. The use of staged photos and manipulation of certain elements, like directing lines and particular angles, help sell an idea of a tropical experience. As onlookers and consumers, we often blindly trust what we are shown, especially when we do not have prior knowledge of the topic being portrayed to support or refute its representation. We heavily rely on imagery to inform us about places we have never been, especially with the increased use of social media platforms with primary content in the form of photos and videos and influencers with large followings.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURIST GAZE

As stated in the book, *Key Concepts in Tourist Studies* by Melanie Smith, Nicola Macleod, and Margaret Hart Robertson, “The tourist gaze refers to the idea that tourists’ ways of seeing places and people and the selection of those sights is directed and organised by the tourism industry.” (Smith 175). The ways tourism has become industrialized and marketed have promoted behavior for tourists to follow. When traveling to a new place, there are those specific landmarks many people feel like they have to see to feel like they really visited that place. Every country has a specific package geared towards tourists that definitely influences their travel plans but also allows whoever is benefitting from tourism to control the flow of people and money.

While we all have been heavily influenced by media representation,

especially with the heightened use of social media, it does reach a point where we are no longer blindly believing in content but now fully accepting it and even aiding in creating content that continues its agenda. This shows how influential tourism media and marketing are but also demonstrates that tourists are not unaware of their travel intentions or impact on the built environment or each other.

As stated in *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance and Place* by Brian McLaren and D. Medina Lasansky, tourists are often dismissed as blind consumers, but we fail to acknowledge the awareness they have of their actions and their effect on the places they visit. Now, with the tourist gaze and hyper-consumption of tourism media such as photographs, videos, movies, packages, and more, it is clear that people have been conditioned to travel a certain way when visiting another country. Some examples of this include posing at the Leaning Tower of Pisa or riding gondolas through canals in Venice. This not only shows how influential the tourist gaze and tourism media are but also demonstrates that tourists are not unaware of their travel intentions or impact on the built environment. It is especially prevalent when they visit these places and are not the only ones carrying out this glorified task. An increase of tourists and self-generated imagery in addition to the growth of social media platforms on a global scale creates a cycle of creating and consuming that all contribute to preserving and perpetuating the tourism industry, tourist gaze, and formation of the picturesque.

As mentioned by Bianca Tulloch in her thesis *Reframing the Caribbean Picturesque*, “Current resort architecture in Jamaica fails to engage the local community and regional culture; depending largely on historically established perception of the landscape to attract tourists for economic development. I contend that architecture has the ability to enrich a cultural perception of island culture through cross-programming activities that cater to both types of island inhabitants. Redefining traditional spatial relationships between programs, landscape, society, culture, and nature can foster new interactions between island natives and tourists, resulting in a touristic consciousness, moulding the tourist into a visitor.” The imagery shaping the tourist gaze is heavily reliant on the resort and enclaved space culture. Islands have undergone changes to their coastal lines and reconstruction into their downtown areas due to the prioritization of tourists and tourist architecture like resorts, hotels, enclaves, and cruise ships. There is a major disconnect between the spaces shown in photographs, or other media forms, geared towards tourists and the actual built environment that consists of local areas and non-tourist destinations. It is important to reintegrate these regions and begin embracing neglected spaces in the same ways tourist spaces are celebrated digitally and architecturally.

### MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND INFLUENCE

One of the most effective forms of influence is through media. This includes social media, film, photography, brochures, or any other forms of mass communication and content production. Sometimes these are just blank images that begin to encourage travel to these “magical destinations,” or they will have text that



Figure 3: Caribbean Cruise.

draws you in like “last minute deals” and various travel packages. “All-Inclusive” is heavily marketed in tropical locations to promote a very isolated travel experience that most tourists prefer or think is the correct way to visit a place like the Caribbean.

Major travel destinations like Jamaica will yield a lot of imagery that portrays a paradise-like getaway in very calculated photographs. There is often high saturation and an overall awe factor that makes a viewer envision themselves in that place. Social media has been a prominent contributor in forming the picturesque and now pushing package deals to perpetuate a luxurious and exclusive experience. Tourist enclaves have become a popular experience to advertise. Isolation to the coast and congestion of main attractions to one space keeps tourists contained and also continue a sort of tourist bubble experience that transports them into the getaway they were promised. Marketing, media, and packages deliberately use photographs that appear like the resorts are the only aspects of the built environment which creates complete erasure and exclusion of the existing conditions on the rest of the island.

In *Tourism and Visual Culture* by Peter M. Burns, Cathy Palmer, and Jo-Anne M. Lester, they discuss the idea that we are all tourists. This applies to us when we travel, but also in the way we

interact with visual media and create our own. With everything becoming so highly commercialized and people buying into mass consumerism, there is a sense of entitlement attached to travel. Travel has become one of the top ways to set oneself apart from the rest, building on the argument in the book that we compare ourselves to others as a search for happiness. In addition to that, we now have access to so many social outlets and other internet aids where we can share these experiences and create an image of ourselves, wherever we are traveling to, and even transport others to that location through a simple photograph. This further proves that photography can shape any concept that one aims to create, whether at a small scale like an Instagram post or a travel advertisement to attract people to a specific area.

These notions seem to challenge the common phrase “a picture is worth a thousand words” by saying we use pictures to influence a person’s perceptions. While photography can have a negative impact by creating a false narrative or fantasy that becomes associated with a place or person, it can also be positive if it portrays the subject truthfully or is helpful in the image construction of a city to brand itself. In this generation especially, we have become so invested in social media and seeing other people’s lives online that we tend to believe whatever is being portrayed through a screen.

Tourism has been used as a tool to bring people to the region, and through those visits, tourists knowingly and unknowingly market



Figure 4: Airplane approaching St Maarten.



Figure 5: “Instagram-Worthy” Photo. Specific location unknown.

the location through photos, word of mouth, and other methods. Some have even become “ambassadors,” which I find to mean that they are essentially salespeople given the way they push this fantasy and profit off of it. In the world today, the collaboration between social media and celebrities or influencers has also been a driving force in the tourism industry. Particularly in the minds of young people who idolize many of these celebrities and influencers, their portrayal of travel destinations in the life they create online is usually perceived as true and shapes their followers’ opinions and knowledge of them.

The so-called “Instagram-worthy” moment directly relates to the tourist gaze and how many people will seek out these locations to get that particular photo or video. Social media and the fabricated representation of lives have influenced the way we view the world on and off the screen. In regards to the Caribbean, many people get their information about the region from social media, celebrities, influencers, and travel packages. Unfortunately, this creates a one-sided view of the Caribbean through a rose-colored lens and makes it difficult to identify the reality.

## CONCLUSION

Social media usage and influence are rapidly growing and impacting the way we interpret imagery and learn about the world. Although it has mostly proven to be negative in the way it has promoted false narratives of places, due to the fact we are living in a digital world, it is important to find ways to use social media positively. While it may not be possible to completely overshadow the existing perception of the Caribbean that depicts a paradise getaway with tropical drinks and clear ocean water, strategies can be implemented to encourage a new narrative that captures the entire reality of an island. Reintegration of the natural environment, built environment, and tourist enclaves would form more connections and cohesion and recreate a sense of identity that was previously lost. The new identity could then be displayed and honored in imagery and have global influence. Once we adjust the purpose of photographs to be selfless and honest, it would be possible to reimagine the Caribbean more authentically and capture moments that speak more to the culture and history of the islands.

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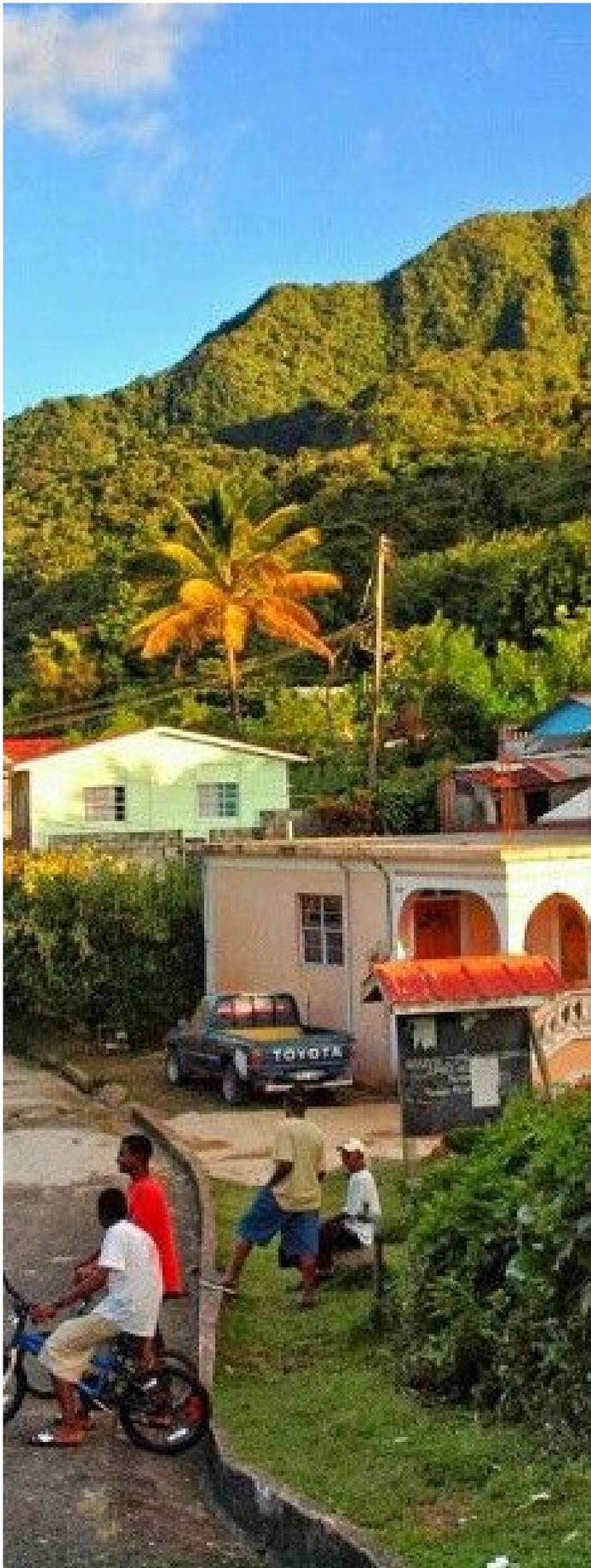


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