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Synopsis

One of the first things any visitor to Barbados notices is Barbadian youths wearing baseball caps and T-shirts sporting the logos of North American teams; and these days, one is more likely to find an American sitcom on television than a Caribbean program. The Parish behind God's Back describes the social fabric and everyday life of one rural parish on the island, St. Lucy, including its many links to the outside world. It is a contemporary ethnography of the local that takes into account the enormous influence of global factors such as tourism, television, foreign travel, and return migrants. Written with students in mind, the book contains several unique features. Each chapter blends descriptions of Barbadian culture with comparisons to North America; throughout, the authors include tales of not only their own fieldwork experiences but those of their undergraduate students; and personal narratives are emphasized to engage interest in individuals. This highly readable and thought-provoking account should appeal to general readers with an interest in the Caribbean as well as to students of anthropology. George Gmelch is Professor and Chair, Department of Anthropology, Union College. Sharon Bohn Gmelch is Professor of Anthropology and Director of Women's Studies, Union College.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Excellent ethnography of the changes that have been occurring in Barbados since the arrival of Europeans and Africans. The Gmelches take students to the island for a semester every other year so they can learn how to do ethnographic research in cultural anthropology. They are placed in

Bajan homes and live there for ten weeks. The book is well informed by the students' perspectives. They help us all see what this island is like and what the life of the islanders has become in the light of tourism development on the island. The Gmelches write well and the book is easy to read and very informative. I have made the book a required text in one of my university, introductory anthropology courses.

The Gmelch's have, for many years, taken mostly white, middle-class, students from the USA to spend a college term living in rural St. Lucy Parish, Barbados. "The Parish Behind God's Back" presents a highly readable, appreciative, ethnographic account of contemporary village life gleaned from the Gmelch's own field work and that of their students. This book makes a very strong case for the value of study abroad schemes as it lets readers understand much about the process by which students gain insights into themselves and their own cultures while learning to live among strangers. This book is an enjoyable read and highly informative. I have adopted it as a mandatory reading for my university course "Peoples and Cultures of the Caribbean."

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