

# THE INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS CONFERENCE

*Julia G. Crane*

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

*THE INTER-VIRGIN ISLANDS CONFERENCE: A STUDY OF A MICROSTATE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION.* By NORWELL HARRIGAN. (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1980. \$8.25.)

Attempts at some form of "standing closer," federation, or formal cooperation between Caribbean islands have been set forth for more than a century. Today, as in 1873 when the governor of Barbados wrote the words, it is still true that "no one can dispute the advantages . . . of union between weak neighboring communities."

Although the Inter-Virgin Islands Conference, the organization founded to formalize and facilitate cooperation between the British Virgin Islands and the Virgin Islands of the United States, existed for only about fifteen years, it did demonstrate "the potential for cooperation across national boundaries at the subregional level." The conference was thus an experiment in institution building between two dependent territories, with the tacit understanding of their sovereign nation states.

Harrigan conceives of his book as an attempt to analyze the economic forces that "compelled non-sovereign territories to structure the Inter-Virgin Islands Conference as an international organization"; to describe the machinery and processes of the conference and examine its points of strength, its limitations, and the problems that attended its establishment and functioning; and to forecast the prospects for future cooperation along similar lines. He has performed a useful service in carefully delineating the goals and accomplishments of the conference—for there were definite accomplishments. His study provides insights into successes and failures along the way in the development of institutions by the conference and incidentally suggests a variety of ideas that could prove helpful to those planning future cooperative schemes for other Caribbean islands—or, indeed, for the Virgin Islands themselves, where many people believe some form of cooperation in aspects of governance to be "inevitable."

Harrigan clearly sets forth the "pillars" on which Inter-Virgin Islands cooperation was built and the specific contents of deliberations and agreements. It is abundantly clear that there were and are myriad

problems—from the ever-present ones concerned with trade and migration to those of less urgency—that are fruitful areas for cooperation between these two territories.

The Inter-Virgin Islands Conference was troubled from its inception. No specific staff existed, so conference work was shelved until the assigned tasks of government personnel had been completed. Budgetary provisions were always inadequate for the efforts at cooperation between these two dependent territories. Most importantly, the desire to serve individual interests was always a major divisive factor.

One cannot help but wonder, in view of events during the three years that have intervened since the writing of this book, if there may not be a new basis and a special need for a new organization similar to the Inter-Virgin Islands Conference. If, as seems possible, a new surge of growth and development occurs in the British Virgin Islands as a result of offshore oil company operations and a few lesser industrial developments, considerable change may result in the nature of trade, migration, and related issues between the two groups of islands.

This book assembles information that is useful to have in a single volume. It is the chief source of wonder to this reviewer, however, that the work does in fact constitute a book intended to be purchased as a separate publication. Despite its attractive presentation as a hard-cover book, it contains only sixty-five pages of text and twenty-three of appended material. Because it was published for the Caribbean Research Institute of the College of the Virgin Islands, the institute presumably views the volume as an intrinsic part of its published works. It would appear, however, that Norwell Harrigan's aim of wide dissemination of the information to Caribbean scholars and other relevant persons and governments might have been better served had it been published in a widely read journal.