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Social Sciences

Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writings from the Antilles
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"It is a Saturday night, Independence weekend, and there is not one church on this island that would welcome me and my kind publicly, speak our names openly, with respect, and honor us for who we are." In "Independence Day Letter," Helen Klonaris's contribution to *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles*, the author describes the social exile experienced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people in her native Bahamas. Klonaris writes eloquently about the internalized colonialism at the root of her country's pervasive homophobia; yet her outrage—and the deep hurt it belies—point beyond just a "niche" cause in some "other" place. Indeed, the Caribbean's notorious and often violent intolerance toward those who are, or are perceived to be, in some way queer is part of a far bigger issue.

As the selections in this anthology reveal, the negating force of the church and of mainstream Bahamian society to which Klonaris refers might equally be attributed to Black and GLBT communities within North America and Europe. In practical application, membership within these groups is often seen to be mutually exclusive and transgressions are met with sanction. *Our Caribbean* is an important book not only for acknowledging a minority within the minority, but because it bears a complex tension, bringing each voice out of isolation and into a larger discourse. Editor Thomas Glave has herein assembled a collection as genre-bending as its authors' identities, with poetry (by Faizal Deen from Guyana/Trinidad and Rane Arroyo from Puerto Rico/US, among others) interspersed between academic essays (by Timothy S. Chin from Jamaica and Ochy Curiel from the Dominican Republic), fiction (by Cubans Virgilio Piñero and Leonardo Padura Fuentes), and personal essay (by Audre Lorde from Granada/Barbados/US and Assotto Saint from Haiti), some excerpted from seminal texts and

some created specifically for this book. It is also noteworthy that with this publication Duke University Press makes headway against the long-established marginalization of topics generally dismissed as “too specialized” (read: irrelevant to) for serious (i.e. mainstream) academic consideration.

While solidarity can literally save lives, however, and institutional acceptance is often the first step toward greater gains, it is on the front lines, within the separate communities to which the authors at once belong and do not belong, that *Our Caribbean* holds the greatest potential for influence. Its very existence is a challenge to the usual defensiveness of identity politics. For this reason—and because we all stand to benefit from a more inclusive cultural mindset—this book represents a profound achievement.