



Jamaican Food: History, Biology, Culture

B. W. Higman

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The historical study of food and the anthropology of food are recent and growing fields of scholarly inquiry. Why people eat what they do and how they prepare it is an important means of studying a culture. It can reveal much about a culture's crop production, economy, eating rituals, preparation methods, festivals, foodways, history and environmental care, and degradation. This beautifully illustrated book by one of the Caribbean's pre-eminent historians, B.W. Higman, sheds new light on food and cultural practices in Jamaica from the time of the earliest Taino inhabitants through the introduction of different foodways by enslaved cultures, to creole adaptations to the fast-food phenomena of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The author examines the shift in Jamaican food practices over time, from the Tainos' use of bitter cassava to the Maroons' introduction of jerk pork, and the population's love affair with the fruits of the island such as paw paw, guava, star apple, and avocado pear. In this well-written and accessible study, the author traces how endemic animals, delicacies such as the turtle, ringtail pigeon, black land crab and mountain mullet, barely retained their popular status into the early twentieth century and are now almost completely forgotten, their populations dramatically depleted, often endangered. The two main sections of the book deal separately with plants and animals. Plants are grouped together according to the parts of them used as food: roots, stalks and leaves, fruits and seeds. Generally, all aspects of a particular plant have been discussed together and the plant as a whole has been located in its dominant use. Animals are treated in the same way, putting all of their uses in a single place but grouped into biological families.

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