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NOTES

on

THE COLLOQUIUM OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN
HISTORIANS ON "POLITICAL IDEAS AND TENDENCIES
IN THE HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN" AND "CITIES
IN THE CARIBBEAN"

Prepared

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The VIIIth Colloquium of Caribbean Historians held in Fort-de-France, Martinique, from 4 - 9 April 1976, had two subject-matters to consider: political ideologies and cities in Caribbean history. Eight papers dealt with the first point while five covered the second one. A group of scholars working on towns in Puerto Rico had to cancel their participation at the last minute.

The level and interest of the communications varied extremely, when evaluated by a non-historian. But in view of the lack of study on Caribbean Social Development in a historical perspective, they pointed several facts of importance for the tasks of this Office. Furthermore, it was interesting to note the general orientation of the present generation of Historians from the English-speaking islands in contrast with the main preoccupations of older members of this profession in the same territories, or those of mainland Latin America. Finally, contacts with the members of the Caribbean Association of Historians had to be established, if this Office is to produce some analysis on the process of development in the sub-region.

As in most academic gatherings, it is difficult to discover some trends among the different papers presented at the conference. Instead of any global analysis, abstracts of the papers are given in the following paragraphs.

Dr. C. Goslinga: Willemstad, Dutch town in the Caribbean

The paper deals with the history of Willemstad founded in 1634 to meet the strategic preoccupations of the Dutch. The town evolved while Curacao was fulfilling the functions of a slave market, a naval base and a commercial emporium. Oil refineries and tourism added further elements to its characteristics. The paper centres on the physical aspects of the city, imprisoned in its ramparts and obliged

to resort to a special urban architecture with narrow streets and tall houses. These houses are characteristic of the Dutch colonial style.

Professor M. Deveze: The city of Cayenne, its history and its role in Guyane.

The paper summarizes the evolution of the city, with some emphasis on the demographic aspects. During the Ancien Régime, Cayenne had less population than its hinterland, due to its sanitary conditions and the economic structure of the territory. During the XIXth Century its population grew from 6,000 inhabitants to 10,000 in 1901, and remained stable until 1945. From 1946 to 1974, population growth became noteworthy, from 10,000 to 34,000 inhabitants. This increase is due partly to immigration. The town received 13,000 newcomers, of which 3,000 came from metropolitan France and 4,000 from the French Caribbean. Nowadays, there are 35,000 inhabitants in Cayenne against 56,000 in the whole department.

Wilma R. Bailey: Power Relations in Pre-emancipation Kingston

The paper describes the social stratification of Kingston, Jamaica, before emancipation. The three main social groups were: the European merchants, administrators, professionals and "lower order of white people" at the top; then the freed coloureds and the portuguese jews in the middle, and finally the slaves at the bottom. These three groups lacked a common social will, and social order was maintained through the use of force. Above all, the slaves posed special problems and their control became the main preoccupation of the Kingston Vestry.

Beryl M. Brown: The Development of Port Antonio 1723-1921

Port Antonio was created in 1723 in order to protect the maritime routes to Kingston and Port Royal, and to support the warfare against the maroons. Not much development took place during the first 70 years of its existence. But from 1791 to 1807, due to the crisis in neighbouring St. Domingue, sugar plantations were organized. Around the mid-XIXth century, these plantations entered into definite crisis, and from this date on the hinterland of the town became organized around a peasant

economy, producing bananas for exports. Such development boosted the commercial sector of the city. By 1900, nonetheless, the United Fruit Company intensified its monopolistic practices and brought both town and hinterland to ruin.

Sylvia W. De Groot: The Politics of the Maroons versus The Politics of the Government in Surinam

The author traces developments from 1650 to the XXth Century, and concludes with the following remarks:

1. A constant feature in their relationship has been a mutual, historically conditioned distrust;
2. the policy of the maroons has been fairly consistent and straightforward: its purpose was firstly to obtain their freedom and later their autonomy, to ward off any intrusion in their cultural set up and to protect their semi-isolation, while keeping open their access to the coast for supplies;
3. the colonist's policy has been wavering between isolationism and integration, depending upon economic and social changes in their society. In their plantation society manpower was of utmost importance, and policy versus the maroons was clearly influenced by the need for it. Self-interest under the guise of morality in no way ever deceived the maroons.

Jaap Van Soest: The Dutch Netherlands Antilles 1900-1950 - Political Retreat and Economic Expansion

The author summarizes as follows:

1. From 1895 to 1926, the Dutch Government kept its grip on Antillean economic and political affairs. By the establishment of a subsidiary of a big Dutch oil company the scope of Dutch interests became wider;
2. From 1926 to 1940, the Dutch Government kept its say in the political administration, although it became less conspicuous. But now the Hague stimulated Dutch business to explore the possibilities of the new Antillean prosperity.

3. After the war, the Dutch Government retired further politically, but it eagerly put itself again at the service of the economic expansion in the private sector. And together with private business the government assured itself of a firm grip upon the early development planning organizations.

And the author concludes with the question: Is there a consistent policy or mere coincidence behind the fact that political retreat of a metropolitan power is often compensated by its economic expansion in the same country?

G. Joseph Henri: Les Marxistes Jamaïcains au sein du Parti National Populaire (1938-1952)

The author traces the growth of Marxist ideology and organization before 1938, through the involvement of Richard Hart, W.A. Domingo, and the newspaper, Public Opinion. After 1938, the author seeks first of all to examine the accession of the marxists and their sympathisers to the highest decision-making positions in the Parti National Populaire and the union, and then to show within the context of the three following points, the compromises which they made with the right and the centre of the national party:

1. Their position in the party;
2. the question of "self-government";
3. the analysis which they made of the social classes on which they based their actions.

The author concludes that the attitude of the Jamaican marxists in this period (1938-1952), is a good example of difficulties met by Marxists when they tried to support nationalist movements in developing countries; in spite of other doctrinal adaptations it is difficult for them to accept the inter-class alliances implied in all nationalist movements.

J. Adelaide Merlande: The Introduction of Socialism in the French Antilles in the late XIXth and early XXth Centuries

The author chooses as a case-study the socialist current in Guadeloupe between 1890 and 1900. The study centres around the leader of the socialist group, Hegesippe Legitimus, and the newspaper, Le Peuple, and traces the ideological and political struggles of the period.

Cécile Celma: Political Life in Martinique from 1919 to 1939

The author undertakes her study against the background of three precise themes, the advance of leftist forces, the white creoles' and governor's roles, and assimilation. She traces the growth of the two major parties, the Socialist Party and the Radical-Republican Party, the intervention of the governors in elections, the alliances concluded by the white creoles with the political parties in order to preserve their economic interests, and the subsequent breakthrough of the Communist group with its working class alliances.

Eventually, the political forces are modified with the rising of leftist groups and the near disappearance of the "white creoles" from the political scene after 1943-44.

F.A. Baptiste: The Vichy Regime in Martinique June 1940 to June 1943: The Application of Police State Measures

The author traces the history of Martinique under the control of Admiral Robert, collaborationist with the war-time pro-German regime in France, the suspension of the normal political processes in Martinique, the re-organization of the police-security system, the detention of French-patriotic elements, and the involvement of the United States in the Robert regime in Martinique.

Yacou Alain: La Administración Colonial Española en la Isla de Cuba y los comienzos de las Revoluciones Francesa y Haitiana (1789-1795)

The author notes that the revolutionary upheavals in France and Haiti served to reinforce the Spanish repressive apparatus in Cuba and to cement the alliance between the colonial Administration and planter class.

Brinsley Samaroo: The Politics of Disharmony: The Debate relating to Political Union between the British West Indies and Canada 1884-1921

The author traces the initiatives for political unification between the British West Indies and Canada, indicating the major arguments advanced during the period for political union and postulating several reasons for the failure of attempts at such union.

Thomas Matthews: The Political Background to Industrialization
in Puerto Rico

The author deals with the turn towards industrialization in the mid-forties, and begins with the early years of American colonial rule, continues through the basic policy changes in America consequent on the world economic depression of the thirties, and eventually focuses on the arrival on the scene in 1940 of the Popular Democratic Party led by Muñoz Marin and the appointment of R. Tugwell as governor of Puerto Rico, both of which events ushered in the thrust towards industrialization in Puerto Rico.

