



Caribbean Studies

ISSN: 0008-6533

iec.ics@upr.edu

Instituto de Estudios del Caribe

Puerto Rico

Plaza, Dwaine

Reseña de "A History of Education in the British Leeward Islands, 1838-1945" de Howard Fergus
Caribbean Studies, vol. 34, núm. 2, julio-diciembre, 2006, pp. 278-282

Instituto de Estudios del Caribe

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=39211853014>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

Howard Fergus. 2003. *A History of Education in the British Leeward Islands, 1838-1945*. Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press. xi + 236 pp. ISBN: 976-640-131-4.

One of the most important avenues for upward mobility among middle and lower class Blacks in post-emancipation Caribbean society was through education. Education was important because although it did not allow all Blacks to escape from the drudgery of field work, it did allow some to begin the process of providing a sense of hope for individuals and future generations to become upwardly mobile. The importance of education to Blacks is best underscored by the many reports of Black mothers sacrificing personal health and well-being to ensure that their children went to school for as long as possible (Gordon 1989:92). Despite the hope for education being the great equalizer to socially elevate their children from the drudgery of field work, mass public education in the Caribbean took a long time to emerge, because so little was invested by the colonial state for education.

The History of Education in the British Leeward Islands, 1838-1945 by Howard Fergus examines the social and economic forces that shaped and constrained the development of education in the Eastern Caribbean islands following emancipation to 1945. Using census records, government inspection and examination records, and social policy documents, Fergus offers a critique on British colonial education and highlights several noteworthy academic achievements in each territory despite financial and ideological problems of local governments.

The book is divided into seven well written chapters. Fergus brings to life the social and political developments taking place in the Eastern Caribbean which would eventually bring about elementary and secondary schools. During the period of slavery, the education provided for the slaves was essentially instruction in the Christian religion. Rudimentary education given to the slaves was resisted by plantation owners because they felt it would inject ideas into the population that were detrimental to

the plantation system. The observation has been made that “the planters regarded literacy as a sort of social dynamite” (Williams 1961:180).

Chapters one and two discuss the emergence of elementary schools from the post emancipation period to 1871. Fergus highlights the fact that schooling after emancipation was utilitarian but not in the sense of contributing to the economy except in a negative way. Elementary schooling received support if it fostered docility and contentment with one’s station in life. The lessons taught were essentially Christian teachings designed to keep oppressed people dormant in the absence of legitimized coercion. Another objective of elementary schooling was to keep the ex-slaves subservient, to civilize and improve them morally, to reduce criminal activity and to guarantee growth in church membership.

In chapter three, Fergus turns our attention to the teacher training institutions that were initiated by religious and charitable organizations in the Leeward Islands. Fergus criticizes the teacher training model in the Eastern Caribbean because it was based primarily on service training where skilled or already qualified teachers instructed young bright pupil teacher apprentices. Fergus notes that due to a lack of resources for teacher training, literary instruction ended up being a futile exercise characterized by “chalk talk,” “rote” or “sound without sense” teaching practices (Fergus 2003:55).

In chapter four Fergus focuses on the establishment of secondary schools in Antigua-Barbuda. He notes the inadequacy of secondary schooling to provide an education that was relevant for the society or the plantation economy. Antigua-Barbuda was unable to develop a system of mass education between 1838 and 1871 because there was not an adequate funding model. Financial support for education came from five major sources: religion-related philanthropy, imperial funding through what was known as the Negro Education Grant, the Lady Mico Charity, the local government and local philanthropy. The number of sources did not amount to enough money to fund a decent secondary school

system. As a result, secondary schooling in Antigua-Barbuda was characterized by poverty, the status of which did not change until 1871 when a federal Leeward Islands government was established. This new administrative structure did allow for some funds to be raised via limited tax revenue. An issue that arose was the relevance of the curriculum being taught. Students entering the secondary schooling system in Antigua received instruction in religious knowledge, English, Latin, French, Greek, mathematics, agricultural sciences, bookkeeping, drill, singing, target shooting, drawing and music. Undoubtedly these academic skills were preparing students (mainly boys) for the external Cambridge examinations, not for the practical needs of a plantation economy.

Chapter five examines the emergence of agricultural and technical schools in the Leeward Islands. Fergus notes that these schools were a little more practical in their orientation and skills taught to students. Students were taught handicrafts and domestic skills. The domestic economy did include agricultural production skills for both sexes. The training provided was not geared to produce persons with skills to utilize and manage farming systems as a means of a promotion up the social hierarchy. The purpose of these agricultural and technical schools was to keep Black laborers children in the fields.

Chapter six explores the development of adult education options in the Leeward Islands. Fergus notes that there was even less funding for adult education than there was for elementary and secondary education and the efforts to provide adult education were more fragmentary. Christian denominational leaders had as their objective the teaching of literacy skills using the bible to the adult ex-slaves. This had the effect of catechizing adults so that they would be easily indoctrinated into the Christian fold. Black adults who desired to read materials other than the bible found themselves largely out of luck because the public library at that time was restricted to only members who paid an annual due. Very few Blacks in the Caribbean had discretionary capital to buy a library membership.

In the final chapter, Fergus highlights the ideological shifts in education across the Leeward Islands which occurred only after a number of landmark Commission reports in the 1930s and 1940s. The Marriot-Mayhew commission appointed in 1931 was to consider education problems in the Eastern Caribbean. The commission recommended a six-year primary school program (from ages six to twelve) instead of a nine-year program as a more effective way of investing the miniscule sums available for the population. In a later committee, Hammond (in 1936) recommended a further organizational restructuring of the education system in order to reduce expenditure. The 1945 Moyne Commission report noted that the dilapidated buildings, the drab and uncongenial atmosphere and surroundings had little appeal for children and failed to stimulate interest and co-operation in the learning process. The Moyne Commission therefore recommended that the curriculum be overhauled and a new infrastructure be built so that the environment would be more conducive to learning.

The importance of the post-emancipation period (1838-1945) was that it established a tradition among Black Caribbean people for educational achievement as the most important weapon in their fight against barriers to upward mobility. Without education, a Black child was seen as defenseless against the power of the White minority. Hence, ensuring that one's progeny received a better education became an obsession amongst Caribbean parents (Lowenthal 1972:67). The post-emancipation period was also important because it forced Blacks to come to terms with the fact that "freedom" from formal slavery did not really mean equality with the Whites.

Having reviewed *The History of Education in the British Leeward Islands, 1838-1945*, I believe that it would be an excellent text book for courses taught at the undergraduate or graduate level in Caribbean social history. Undergraduate students in particular will find Fergus's writing style easy to comprehend and his extensive collection of statistics from the period will embellish their understanding of why education continues to play such an important

role in the evolution of mobility strategies for Black Caribbean families in the region and in the international diaspora.

Dwaine Plaza
 Department of Sociology
 Oregon State University
 dplaza@oregonstate.edu

References

- Gordon, Shirley. 1989. *A Century of West Indian Education. A Source Book*. London: Longman.
- Lowenthal, David. 1971. *West Indian Societies*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Eric. 1961. *Capitalism and Slavery*. New York: Russell and Russell.

Mary A. Renda. 2001. *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. xvii + 414 pps. ISBN: 0-8078-2628-6 (cloth), 0-8078-4938-3 (paper).

Since the early 1990s, there has been an important turn in American studies, U.S. history, and related fields to examinations of the cultural dimensions of U.S. imperialism. Such studies have shown how central questions of “culture” are to the histories of U.S. imperialism, and also how U.S. imperialism has been constitutive of American national culture and identity at “home.” They have presented compelling arguments and evidence for the historical inseparability of U.S. nation-building and empire-building, as, in the words of one scholar, “coterminous and mutually defining” projects (Kaplan 1993:17). Yet this salutary shift has been marked by a striking and perplexing oversight. While the first U.S. occupation of Haiti between 1915-1934 was one of the longest imperial interventions that the U.S. undertook in the early decades of the last century, one of the closest to its continental borders, as well as one of the most contested, this

By Howard A. Fergus. Read preview. A History of Education in the British Leeward Islands, 1838-1945. This book examines the social and economic forces that have shaped and constrained the development of education in the British Leeward Islands following emancipation. It offers a critique on British colonial education and highlights several noteworthy achievements despite financial and ideological problems. The dialectical nature of education in helping to shape as well as being shaped by the culture becomes evident. Excerpt. The name British Virgin Islands was applied in 1917 when the United States purchased some of the Virgin Islands from Denmark and called them the Virgin Islands of the United States. The Leeward Islands are all small by any definition. Fergus, Howard A. A History of Education in the British Leeward Islands, 1838-1945. Mona, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2003. Anthony P. Maingot. The Leeward Islands in the Caribbean form part of the Lesser Antilles, lying to the east of the Dominican republic. They include the Virgin Islands, St Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, Montserrat, and Guadeloupe. The largest of the islands, Guadeloupe, is a dpartement of France. J. A. Cannon. The Oxford Companion to British History JOHN CANNON. Cite this article Pick a style below, and copy the text for your bibliography. [Howard A Fergus] -- " Examines the social and economic forces that have shaped and constrained the development of education in the British Leeward islands following emancipation." -- Cover. Online version: Fergus, Howard A. History of education in the British Leeward Islands, 1838-1945. Kingston, Jamaica : University of the West Indies Press, 2003 (OCoLC)607038017. Document Type: Book. All Authors / Contributors: Howard A Fergus. Find more information about: Howard A Fergus. ISBN Contents: Introduction -- Elementary schools, 1838-1871 -- Elementary schools, 1871-1945 -- Teacher training -- Secondary schools, Agricultural and technical education -- Adult education -- Beyond 1945 : the sequel. Responsibility: Howard A. Fergus. Abstract