

## FINDING AIDS FOR STUDYING THE BRITISH CARIBBEAN

- HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF THE BRITISH CARIBBEAN*. By WILLIAM LUX. (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1975. Pp. 266. \$9.00.)
- HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF HONDURAS*. By HARVEY K. MEYER. (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1976. Pp. 413. \$15.00.)
- MASS MEDIA IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN: RECENT BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES*. By JOHN A. LENT. (Philadelphia, Penna.: Temple University School of Communications and Theatre, 1976. \$2.50.)

The English-speaking Caribbean and the Central American republic of Honduras are the subjects of these three recent compilations of historical, contemporary, and bibliographical data. While the bibliography by Lent is highly specialized, the works by Lux and Meyer (nos. 12 and 13, respectively, in the Latin American Historical Dictionary series edited by A. Curtis Wilgus) attempt a comprehensive survey of historical and contemporary facts and statistics. Works of this kind can meet a real need if the information is up to date and highly accurate; if the historical data are carefully selected, factually correct, and well organized; and if useful maps and a good, select bibliography are included.

Measured by these criteria, Lux's work is singularly deficient. Throughout the book, the author presents hopelessly outdated information as contemporary fact. Thus, the unsuspecting reader is told that "except in Barbados and the Leeward Islands, only one child in six goes to school in the West Indies" (pp. 20, 27), an entry calculated justifiably to infuriate any West Indian; he reads that the Jamaica Labour Party "has had a majority in the House of Assembly since 1944" (p. 143); and he is confidently informed that the *Labour Leader* is "a weekly newspaper that has been recently started" in Trinidad (p. 213) (it ceased publication in 1932). And so on. Much of the data that the author presents as contemporary are so grotesquely out of date—or simply inaccurate—that they will seriously mislead the reader, and the same is true of the historical "facts." The book is full of references that tell the reader nothing that he will likely need, or want, to know. Whatever one might expect to find under the entry "Negro" (p. 149), it is surprising to read: "The Negro rebellion in St. James (Jamaica) in 1831 caused damage to the extent of £666,977." There are a host of equally strange references, some indeed are quite incomprehensible: under "Minorities" (p. 109) we read, "In status, the Orientals, who are also subdivided, come between the White and the Negro in the West Indies. The Japanese were regarded as cultured people of the East until Pearl Harbour." Applied to the English-speaking Caribbean, this makes absolutely no sense. West Indians of Indian descent will note that Lux uses the term "coolie" apparently without any idea that it is an offensively racist term (pp. 18, 19); they may also be surprised at his definition of "Pandits" as "Indian men who wear national dress" (p. 110).

Even more embarrassing are the gross inaccuracies in the “historical” data, ranging from extraordinary misstatements to innumerable small errors. Barbadians will be more than surprised to learn that their state was “proclaimed a republic on November 30, 1966” (p. 25); Guyanese will be equally puzzled to read that “the Governor-General was replaced by a President of the republic” in 1961, or that under the pre-1928 constitution the governor, chief justice and attorney-general were “elected by colonial representatives” (pp. 93–94). What can we make of an entry that reads: “After the slave revolt in Jamaica in 1865” Crown Colony government was established “with a Governor assisted by his Cabinet and Prime Minister” (pp. 126, 134), or “[the British] took possession of Trinidad in 1783” and made the island “a Crown Colony from 1797 to 1950, when a semi-representative government was established” (pp. 191, 204)? Errors of this magnitude make a book of this kind worthless. Further, it does not contain a single map and its bibliography is useless. Well-informed readers are likely to feel insulted (or possibly amused) by this book, which reveals an extraordinary ignorance of the historical and contemporary development of the Commonwealth Caribbean; anyone seeking information on the region should conscientiously avoid it. It is productions of this type that make West Indians deeply—and too often, justifiably—suspicious of American “experts” whose works are foisted on them.

It is with considerable relief that we turn to Harvey K. Meyer’s work on Honduras. It is much longer than the Lux book (though the population of Honduras is just over half that of the English-speaking Caribbean), and its entries are far more detailed. Its organization avoids the repetitions of the Lux book, and, in general, the references are longer, fuller, and more specific as to dates, names, and places. For example, entries on Honduran writers include a brief biography and a list of major publications; in Lux, the formula is merely “a famous Trinidadian literary figure born in 1924.” There are long, detailed entries on the major historical events and personalities (e.g., Francisco Morazan, pp. 240–43), and he gives a very helpful summary of the political and constitutional structure of Honduras from 1522 to the present. Especially useful are the detailed historical and contemporary population statistics (pp. 281–83), and the information on the major archaeological sites and the work and publications of the leading archaeologists who have worked in Honduras. The book is enriched by eight maps and twenty-three illustrations (by the author) of Honduran historic artifacts, buildings, fruits and flowers, and much else. His useful bibliography is full and up to date—the majority of items being published since 1960—and includes a list of historical and modern map collections.

Meyer’s book is both informative and interesting; he has amply succeeded in his aim of pulling together “a great deal that is hard to find and widely scattered . . . also aimed at a *mood* of understanding . . . a *feel* to add form and perspective to mere facts.” This is a useful and illuminating historical dictionary because the author brings to it a scholarly knowledge of Honduran history and an intimate involvement with contemporary Honduras.

Lent’s bibliography on mass media in the Commonwealth Caribbean lists some 260 articles on the subject, culled mainly from *Caribbean Contact* (a regional

newspaper) and other newspapers and journals of the region. It is a useful piece of work, and will be a helpful guide to people concerned with the role and development of the media in the Caribbean, a field that is engaging increasing attention from the region's politicians, churchmen, and educators, as well as journalists. Lent's report, though strictly a specialist publication, will contribute usefully to bibliographical studies in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Historians and other social scientists engaged in research on the region are very much aware of the need for scholarly and critical bibliographies, for the literature is large, often inaccessible, and highly varied in quality.

A historical dictionary of the British Caribbean, published in 1975, might well be expected to contain a useful, up-to-date, select bibliography of historical and other relevant works; indeed, this seems an essential part of such a compilation. Unfortunately, the bibliography in Lux's *Dictionary*, reviewed above, is of the same quality as the rest of his book. Trinidad is heavily overrepresented, at the expense of all the other territories, because the author has included a large number of old, unimportant, or unobtainable titles on Trinidad that he has taken from a *Bibliography of Trinidad* compiled by an amateur historian around 1950. I do not exaggerate when I state that he has omitted virtually every important modern work on the English-speaking Caribbean. Pitman, Harlow, Higham, Mathieson, Ragatz, Newton, Cumpston, Pares, Wood, Goveia, Sheridan, Dunn, Brathwaite, Patterson, Handler, and many others are apparently unknown to Lux. While rigorously excluding all the serious and scholarly work on Caribbean history, he has listed innumerable titles on Trinidad that are quite useless (if obtainable at all) to the general reader, and only occasionally of interest to the scholar. This is a travesty of what a "select bibliography" of the British Caribbean should be.

Fortunately, historians of the Caribbean are developing serious bibliographical studies.<sup>1</sup> The pioneering work of E. V. Goveia<sup>2</sup> was an excellent critical study of historical writings on the English-speaking Caribbean, but, of course, it did not consider any modern works. Much earlier, Frank Cundall had written two useful bibliographies of Jamaica and the other islands,<sup>3</sup> now obviously very outdated. More recently Lambros Comitas has provided us with an ambitious bibliography covering the whole Caribbean and not confined to historical works.<sup>4</sup> But the literature on the Commonwealth Caribbean alone has grown so rapidly in recent years—especially since the establishment of the University of the West Indies and the journals associated with it—that we badly need a critical study of the historiography of the English-speaking Caribbean that would take its starting point from Goveia's study: the beginning of this century.<sup>5</sup>

A useful beginning in this direction has been made by W. K. Marshall in a recent article<sup>6</sup> that contains a good bibliography of historical writings on the Caribbean since 1940, including articles and unpublished papers as well as monographs. Marshall notes that the 1950s represented a watershed in Caribbean historiography, dividing the older "imperial" historians like Ragatz, Harlow, Higham, Pares, and others, who were essentially concerned with the political and economic relations between Britain (and the United States) and the West Indian colonies, from those more recent scholars, mainly but not exclusively West Indians, more interested in exploring the historical development of these

societies from the inside, from the perspective of the Caribbean peoples themselves. The establishment of departments of history and faculties of social sciences in the multicampus University of the West Indies, serving the whole Commonwealth Caribbean,<sup>7</sup> has been crucial in this process of decolonizing West Indian historiography; although this is not to deny the solid worth of the work done by historians like Ragatz or Pares. Since 1956 (the date of Goveia's study), historians of the Caribbean have been increasingly concerned to probe the inner dynamics of West Indian societies, economies, and politics; what the historian and poet Edward Brathwaite calls "the inner plantation." Indeed, it is Brathwaite who is currently engaged in preparing an ambitious bibliography of the English-speaking Caribbean, designed to pull together published works, articles, and unpublished theses and papers.<sup>8</sup> His overriding concern is with the historical, cultural, and social development of the Caribbean since the arrival of the Europeans and Africans, with the "ancestral heritage" and what it has meant to the formation of West Indian societies.

These are encouraging developments. The work is proceeding; the work of researching, analyzing, reinterpreting the past of an extraordinarily complex and historically rich region. In this work West Indian scholars welcome the participation of serious and sensitive colleagues from the metropolitan countries. The work of R. Sheridan, R. Dunn, J. S. Handler, D. Wood, M. Craton—to name only a few—underlines my point. A creative partnership between West Indian and metropolitan historians can only enrich the study of this fascinating region of the New World.

BRIDGET BRERETON

*University of the West Indies, Trinidad*

#### NOTES

1. Considerable work has already been done in identifying archival materials for the study of the Commonwealth Caribbean. The major surveys are: L. J. Ragatz, *A Guide for the Study of British Caribbean History, 1763–1834* (Washington, D.C., 1932; reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1970); M. Chandler, *Guide to Records in Barbados* (New York: International Publications Service, 1965); E. C. Baker, *Guide to Records in the Leeward Islands and Guide to Records in the Windward Islands* (New York: International Publications Service, 1965 and 1968); J. S. Handler, *A Guide to Source Materials for the Study of Barbados History, 1627–1834* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971); K. E. Ingram, *Manuscripts Relating to Commonwealth Caribbean Countries in U. S. and Canadian Repositories* (London, 1975).
2. *A Study on the Historiography of the British West Indies to the End of the 19th Century* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1978).
3. *Bibliographia Jamaicensis* (Kingston, 1902; reprinted New York: Burt Franklin Pub., 1971); *Bibliography of the West Indies (excluding Jamaica)* (Kingston, 1909; reprinted New York: Somerset Publications, 1971.)
4. *Caribbeana, 1900–1965: A Topical Bibliography* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968).
5. There is a good compilation for British Honduras (Belize): C. W. Minkel and R. H. Alderman, *A Bibliography of British Honduras, 1900–1970* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Latin American Studies Center, Research Report No. 7, 1970).
6. "A Review of Historical Writing on the Commonwealth Caribbean since c. 1940," *Social and Economic Studies* 24, no. 3 (Sept. 1975).
7. Excluding Guyana, served by the University of Guyana.
8. *Our Ancestral Heritage: A Bibliography of the English Speaking Caribbean* (Kingston, vol. 1, 1976; vol. 2 to follow).