Winward Road: Contributions to the Anthropology of St. Vincent

Thomas M. Fraser Jr.

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WINDWARD ROAD

Contributions to the Anthropology of Saint Vincent

edited by

Thomas M. Fraser, Jr.
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INTRODUCTION

The papers included in this volume represent the work of students of the University of Massachusetts field training course in cultural anthropology held during the summers of 1970 and 1971 on the island of St. Vincent in the West Indies. While it is obvious that an eight-week program such as these must primarily benefit the students involved, it was hoped that the research undertaken as part of the program might be of some value to individuals and groups concerned with finding answers to problems facing St. Vincent and other Caribbean nations. It is for this reason that the present volume has been prepared for distribution.

A further, less concrete, product of this program -- perhaps ultimately the most important -- was the development of mutual understanding and friendship between the students and the Vincentians among whom they were living. The following passage, quoted from the first summer's report on the program to the University of Massachusetts, illustrates the types of personal adjustment made by the students in the program:

The greatest impact on students -- even those who had previously travelled abroad -- was culture shock. They had not expected the feeling of complete isolation, loneliness, and the psychological difficulties of adapting to live completely on their own in another culture, albeit an English-speaking one. Equally impressive was the ability of all but one to come to grips with himself/herself and with the field situation, and to work out a series of satisfactory modes of adjustment and rapport. Copious tears of villagers and students on leaving the field testified to the success of this adjustment.

Most of the students in the program have commented that it was a tremendously valuable experience; that it proved to them not only that they could survive in a field situation, but that they could also establish meaningful personal relations with people of another culture, and carry on research as well.

Obviously these programs could not have met with the success they had -- nor would they have been possible at all -- without the warm hospitality of the Vincentian people, and without the friendly cooperation of the Government of St. Vincent at all levels. It is gratifying to me that a number of the students involved in these programs have desired to, and been able to, maintain and continue these relationships of hospitality, friendship and cooperation in subsequent visits to St. Vincent.

St. Vincent is a rugged volcanic island of some 133 square miles with a population of slightly under 100,000. Virtually all of this population is located along the narrow coastal strip ringing the mountainous center of the island. The heaviest concentration of population is
at the southern end of the island, centering on Kingstown, the capital, while north of Georgetown on the Windward side and Chateaubelair on the Leeward the land is rather sparsely settled by descendants of the original Carib inhabitants of St. Vincent. In common with other small West Indian islands, St. Vincent is not a prosperous country. Its economy is, in large part, geared to agricultural production -- chiefly bananas -- for export. Tourist facilities on a moderate scale exist and the government sees further development in this sector as a means of significant economic development. Until 1969 St. Vincent was politically dependent on the United Kingdom. Today, although still associated with Britain in matters of foreign policy and defense, the state is internally self-governing and is participating with other Commonwealth Caribbean nations in various schemes of regional integration.

The overwhelming majority of the population is of African ancestry, descendants of the plantation slaves freed by the Emancipation Act of 1834. According to the 1960 census, roughly 70 percent of the population is classified as Black, and another 22 percent as mixed. Four percent of the population is listed as East Indian, and a roughly equivalent proportion (listed in the census as mixed or White) is of Portuguese ancestry. These latter two groups represent the descendants of indentured workers introduced onto the plantations after emancipation of the slaves. Slightly over one percent of the island's population is identified as Carib, albeit heavily mixed, last remnants of St. Vincent's aboriginal inhabitants. The remaining two percent is composed of "Whites" including descendants of old planter families, several small enclaves of farmers and agricultural workers mostly descended from exiled Scottish and Irish prisoners, a small number of recently immigrated Near Easterners, and a few permanently resident expatriates.

The socioeconomic class structure of St. Vincent is fairly typical of that found in other Caribbean nations. The accompanying table summarizes its major features. The bulk of the population falls in the lower and lower middle categories, represented both in rural and town (urban) areas. The smaller upper middle and elite groups are indicated here as being exclusively urban. Although some individuals in these groups maintain rural residences, their orientation and their main occupational focus are in the capital city. Because West Indian societies, including St. Vincent, are presently in a state of transition, the elite category here is represented as several apices supported on the base of the social pyramid by means of different, and changing, sets of resources. The colonial elite, once supported by a monopoly of resources, has ceased to exist on St. Vincent; its economic and traditional social resources are retained by the "traditional elite." With the withdrawal of British control over internal affairs, a local elite -- largely distinct from the traditional elite -- emerged in the political sphere as the second apex of the social pyramid. More recently an "intellectual" apex has developed, challenging the other two and supported by a set of resources focused on anticolonialism, the localization (or perhaps regionalization) of the economy, and various interpretations of "Black Power."
### A MODEL OF ST. VINCENT CLASS STRUCTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Designation</th>
<th>Racial Composition</th>
<th>Occupational Characteristics</th>
<th>Maintenance Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ELITE: 0) Colonial</strong></td>
<td>Metropolitan White</td>
<td>Imperial Civil Service, Military, etc., Absentee Owners</td>
<td>Race, Economic (Land, Wealth) Political, Ideological (Social Values, Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1) Traditional</strong></td>
<td>Creole White Coloured</td>
<td>Planters, Owners of Large Businesses, Professionals, Bishop</td>
<td>Economic, Professional Service, Old Ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2) Political</strong></td>
<td>Coloured Black</td>
<td>Top Civil Service, Professionals, Politicians</td>
<td>Political (Votes, Patronage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3) Intellectual</strong></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Civil Service (not Political), Teachers, Professionals</td>
<td>New Ideology (Education, Unrest, Intellectualism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UPPER MIDDLE</strong></td>
<td>Coloured Black Portuguese East Indian (Syrian)</td>
<td>High Civil Service, Owners of Medium Businesses, Executives of Large Businesses, Bank Clerks, Senior Teachers, Clergy</td>
<td>Political Mobility, Patronage-Clientage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOWER MIDDLE</strong></td>
<td>Black Portuguese East Indian</td>
<td>Rural &amp; Urban Shops, Lower Civil Service, Clerks, Clergy, Rural &amp; Junior Teachers, Smallholders</td>
<td>Economic, Occupational Articulation, Patronage-Clientage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LOWER</strong></td>
<td>Black Portuguese East Indian Carib White</td>
<td>Rural &amp; Urban Labor Fishermen, Sharecrovers Tenants, Unemployed</td>
<td>Food, Cash Community vs. City Common Tradition, Cults</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Being concerned with rural areas, the studies in this volume are confined to aspects of the lower class and, in particular, the lower middle class. That this fails to sample the full dimensions of the social scale is obvious. But it does shed light on the ways of life typical of the great majority of the island's population -- a majority without whose long-run support the other elements of the society could not exist. The accompanying map indicates the location of the studies appearing in this report. All are on the Windward side of the island, extending from the Calliaqua area north to Georgetown. This Windward focus was initially established so as not to interfere with the studies of other social scientists who were working in Leeward areas in 1970. In 1971 the pattern was continued, in large part because of the contacts which had been established the previous year. While this localization of studies obviously fails to give a balanced picture of even rural Vincentian life, it does add depth to an understanding of this one area which in itself contains much diversity. A reading of all the studies in this volume -- a patchwork of communities and topics -- gives, I think, a fair feeling for the complexity and ways of life in this area.

In a number of the original papers, the authors employed fictitious names for the localities they studied in order to protect the anonymity of the residents. In preparing the papers for publication I have made the decision to use the real place names. For readers not familiar with St. Vincent it makes little difference whether or not a community is correctly identified. For Vincentians and others familiar with the island, correct identification is fairly easy however much the names are disguised. In regard to specific Vincentian individuals, however, every attempt has been made to make identification impossible in order to respect their privacy. In one or two instances where it seemed that an individual could be identified even after disguising his name, the entire reference to him has been deleted.

The papers cover a wide array of topics, from local botanical classification to tourism and education. Some authors approach their subjects in depth, some attempt to treat topics in greater breadth. Some of the papers appear to me to have been surprisingly successful in giving insights and understanding, others have been less successful. Of the topics covered, several are related to general areas of interest identified by a number of government officials. It is hoped that the results may have some value in official planning for the future of St. Vincent. Other topics were devised entirely by the student researcher. In all cases the students themselves, with my approval, designed the specific aspects of their topics, and developed their methods of study on the basis of their own interests and backgrounds.

Because anthropology is concerned with the many facets of man's culture and society, even these limited research reports contain information on a wide range of general problems. Thus it is possible to classify them in a number of different ways under a variety of general
labels. The grouping that is followed here seems to me to emphasize the major foci of the various papers and also to sort them on the basis of categories which can be useful for comparative purposes and, in some instances, for analysis involved in practical planning. Most of the studies can be placed in more than one category, and in the presentation of the papers in this volume will be included in the section with which they are most centrally concerned but will be cross-referenced in other appropriate sections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Papers Included</th>
<th>Other Relevant Papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Patterns</td>
<td>Ciski, Krasnow, Hourihan</td>
<td>Marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems in Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interracial Relations</td>
<td>Stone</td>
<td>Ciski, Katz,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mulcahy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three of these studies provided the basis for master's theses in anthropology: Ciski at the University of Massachusetts, Katz and Stone at Brown University; and another, in part, for a doctoral dissertation in education: Carlson at the University of Massachusetts. Three more provided preliminary data and contacts for further doctoral research in anthropology: Ciski, Hourihan and Morth at the University of Massachusetts.

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