The Population Problem on St. Vincent

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The Problem

In 1960 Geisert warned that the Caribbean was the only area in the Western hemisphere that was already overpopulated (1960:1). With a total land area of 86,000 square miles, the population was just over 13 million; at the same growth rate the population would be 27 million by 1975, 48 million by the year 2000. St. Vincent exemplifies the problem facing all of the Caribbean islands: an astonishing population growth rate with neither the land nor the resources to support it.

Three factors are important in assessing the significance of population problems: density of population, the rate of growth, and age distribution. In the United States in 1952, each person required two and one-half acres of arable land to maintain an average standard of living (Population Bulletin 1952:2); in St. Vincent, with only 30,000 acres under permanent cultivation and another 20,000 acres under marginal cultivation, the ratio is two-three persons per arable acre. This is a very poor ratio, especially considering the severely leached, unfertile nature of the soil. The rate of growth on St. Vincent approaches two percent per annum; on an island which already is incapable of supplying jobs or producing sufficient amounts of food for its citizens, this rate is disturbing. Lastly, the age distribution is weighted heavily in favor of non-productive, high-consuming school-age children. At the last census, almost 53% of the population was comprised of children under 14. Considering the accelerating growth rate, this age distribution is likely to remain unfavorable.

A severe problem facing St. Vincent is that it must not only raise levels of living but simultaneously provide for increasing numbers. As capital is limited, the population growth means that money must be diverted from investment into duplicating existing facilities; i.e., consumption, rather than investment, takes precedence (Coale 1958:20). The disproportionately large number of children do not produce anything; the resources they consume outweigh any surplus the existing labor force could produce. Other factors limit the potential development of industry even more severely: there are limited natural resources; the labor force is untrained; savings are inadequate for capital formation; and unsettled political conditions discourage foreign investment (Geisert 1960:6). In short, the prospects for industrial development in the near future seem bleak.

St. Vincent is no longer in the hands of colonial powers. In 1969 St. Vincent became an independent state in association with Great Britain. In effect, this means that locally elected Vincentian officials control internal affairs; external affairs are still under the control of Great Britain. Neither of the last two Vincentian governments has made any
clear statements about population and birth control; it is not a popular issue. At present, the government gives a small grant and tacit approval to the Planned Parenthood Association. Most of the money which supports the Association comes from outside sources; they have neither sufficient money nor personnel to cope with the entire population of St. Vincent. If any headway is to be made, the government must come out strongly in favor of birth control programs and must publicize this approval.

The remainder of this paper consists of a critical analysis of various explanations which have been offered to account for the present situation and, in the light of my own data, a discussion of possible solutions.

Historical Etiological Factors

Several factors have converged to produce the present unstable situation in St. Vincent. During the nineteenth century, St. Vincent maintained a one-crop economy, oriented towards the sugar industry. Plantation work called for a large population, and with extremely high death rates, high birth rates could be supported; customs and beliefs developed to support the high birth rates. By the turn of the century, the sugar industry had declined and the large population was transformed from an asset into a surplus. However, from 1900 until the Great Depression in 1929-35, large numbers of Vincentians were able to emigrate whenever labor shortages occurred; the large-scale fluctuations resulting from this emigration helped to disguise the emerging population difficulties. The Depression not only put an end to large emigration movements; it also forced many Vincentians already abroad to return home. Furthermore, at this time stringent restrictions were placed against admitting Blacks (particularly unskilled ones) into England, Canada, and the United States, the major outlets for Vincentians (Campers 1946).

While the birth rate in the twentieth century has continued at high levels, the mortality rate has sharply declined. Geisert has estimated that the mortality rate in 1960 was about half that in 1940. At the same time there has been a corresponding decrease in infant mortality as various diseases have been brought under control, although the infant mortality rate is still relatively high. Further contributing to the increased birth rate is the fact that gonorrhea, which once produced wide-spread sterility, is now largely under control.

It has frequently been assumed that falling death rates indicate an economic change from an agrarian society to a more market-oriented, independent, urbanized society. Urbanization, in turn, is thought to automatically produce lower birth rates. Coale (1958) has pointed out this is no longer necessarily the case. Through outside intervention the death rate can be dramatically lowered in an agrarian society with no accompanying industrialization. This certainly has been the case in St. Vincent. Moreover, the declining death rates and resulting increase in population make economic change and industrialization exceedingly difficult.
Patterns of Mating

Smith (1962) has stated that there are no uniform mating relations throughout the West Indies; however, certain patterns of mating reoccur with enough frequency for typologies to be delineated. Simey (1946: 82-3) has offered a typology of West Indian family unions: the Christian family, faithful concubinage, the companionate family, and the disintegrate family. Each of these types has constellations of behavior patterns appropriate to it. The Christian family is comprised of a legally married couple and their children, and is of a patriarchal order. Faithful concubinage is also of a patriarchal nature but the union has no legal status, although it has been stable for at least three years. The companionate family lives for pleasure or convenience for less than three years; the disintegrate family consists solely of the mother and her children, although men may occasionally visit. The role of the parents is differently defined in the different types of mating. Only in the Christian family and in faithful concubinage does the role of the father receive any elaboration.

Henriques (1949) has outlined a similar typology. He retains Simey's first two categories of Christian family and faithful concubinage, but changes the names of the second two to the keeper family and the maternal, or grandmother, family; his criteria for each of these types are similar to Simey's.²

The grandmother, or disintegrate, family, more popularly known as the matrifocal family, deserves a certain amount of attention as it represents the stereotype of the West Indian family. The matrifocal family, consisting of grandmother in the pivotal position, her daughter, and her daughter's children, is thought to result from idiosyncratic mating habits of the West Indian male. The male is thought to be, for a variety of etiological factors, irresponsible. This means, in concrete terms, that the male indiscriminately mates with a large number of women and that, if children result from these unions, he is likely at some point to abandon both the woman and the children. Actually, the women too have been accused of mating indiscriminately in a series of consensual unions with no thoughts of marriage. Typically, a woman will have her mother raise children resulting from temporary unions; she may or may not live in the same household.

Clarke, in a study of family life in Jamaica, has determined a type of mating pattern which escaped both Simey and Henriques; she calls this the visiting relation, or extra-residential mating. This pattern is the most common form of mating in Jamaica and is almost universal in the early stage of a union. According to Clarke, the various types of union are not exclusive; rather a pattern is followed in which a girl begins her mating in an extra-residential union while still living at home with her parents. After one or two children, the mother usually forms a consensual union, either with the father of her children or with another
man. The union can go in one of many directions; the couple may remain together indefinitely with no change of status, they may separate, or they may ultimately marry. I found this pattern to be very prevalent in Biabou, particularly among the poorer class.

The course each union takes depends on the particular individuals involved; however, even more significant in determining the outcome of the majority of unions is the particular kind of community organization present. Clarke has taken a look at three different kinds of Jamaican towns and demonstrated that the sum of local factors -- economic, demographic, and social -- weave intricate kinds of community ethos which exert an enormous amount of influence over local family patterns. The town of Biabou, with its mixture of economic classes, religious affiliations, and various levels of educational attainments, is predictably enough, represented by a mixture of marriages, consensual unions, and extra-residential matings.

Simey and Henriques delineate in some detail the nature of a West Indian marriage; it is, they advise, an economic and not a romantic institution (Simey 1946: 87, Henriques 1950:33). A woman, elevated to the position of wife, comes to expect concrete evidence of her new status: first a large, showy wedding, afterwards a maid, full economic support without having to work, paternal support, and a better home. It is obvious that marriage, far from being scorned by "promiscuous, irresponsible" West Indians, is held in such high esteem that the majority of the lower classes are unable to attain such a goal. Marriage inevitably occurs only when the individuals involved have both demonstrated their stability by a period of faithful concubinage and reached a certain economic status; invariably, the people who meet these conditions are middle-aged.

Clarke has also defined marriage as a condition of maturity and a particular status; it is not necessarily associated with parenthood and family (Clarke 1957); the presence or absence of children does not necessarily affect the chances for marriage; and, most important, there is no contradiction between marriage as an ideal for older age and early consensual unions.

Explanations of West Indian Mating Patterns

Several kinds of explanations have been offered to account for the kind of attitudes and behavior in the West Indies which have resulted in the present condition of overpopulation. Many authors, espousing the view that promiscuous and unstable patterns of mating result in overpopulation, have thought it beneficial to try to account for the development of these patterns.

Ericksen, Fox, and Freilich point to slavery in their etiologies of promiscuous modes of West Indian family life. According to these authors, several kinds of debilitating attitudes developed unchecked among the Blacks during their years in bondage. Because the Blacks
were forced to work against their will, they came to prefer leisure rather than income. There was no "Calvinistic thrift-work ethic" for them. The apathy engendered by this was further enhanced by the male's inability to protect his wife and children. Ill health, malnutrition and a high death rate were factors facing every slave; a kind of defensive fatalism developed which placed all responsibility and blame onto others. (Fox [1949: 64] suggests that this attitude is still present in the "tendency among them [West Indians] to expect improvements in their condition without exertion from themselves.")

Perhaps even more significant was the growing independence of the woman. She worked in the fields making her own way; unable to rely on the support of a man, she came not to expect it. Further weakening family life was the fact that children of slaves were never considered legitimate or illegitimate; they were simply property of the slaveowner. Such considerations, therefore, did not become significant to the Blacks.

Smith (1962) has pointed out that with Emancipation, missionaries successfully established marriage as a new form of mating. However, marriage did not replace the existing forms developed during the period of slavery; it merely became an acceptable alternative.

A second kind of explanation of West Indian mating patterns lies in the view that the West Indian Black is not subject to moral and religious restraints and therefore can indulge in promiscuous mating and irresponsible parenthood.

Negroes often show the type of conscience which is easily externalized and projected on to an institution like the church. The lower class Negroes do not seem to suffer the severe internal pressures of the middle class group, so widespread in white Protestantism. They seem able to an extraordinary degree to free themselves from guilt with the aid of a highly emotionalized religious service which, of course, is able to thunder against sin with all the lurid imagery of old-time revivalism. . . . Religious institutions, in this view, play exactly the opposite role from that usually ascribed to them in a Puritanical society; instead of stressing self-control and bringing pressure toward impulse renunciation, they aid the individual in increasing his daily satisfaction in life by the ceremonies which relieve his guilt (Dollard, quoted in Simey 1946:46).

This kind of explanation ignores the fact that West Indians are subject to moral and religious restraints which function within a local system of values; these values are not necessarily analogous to our own system of moral and religious restraints. Furthermore, this kind of explanation is more indicative of the value system of the theorist than it is of any explanation of overpopulation.
Henriques and Simey agree with the view that slavery was the major etiological factor in determining some forms of West Indian life; however, they think that continuing disorganization of the West Indian family is due to existing factors of economic and social depression. According to this theory, because jobs are scarce and pay little; because the Blacks are discriminated against and are unable to get adequate education or training; and because of the general poverty of the Caribbean islands which accentuates the factors mentioned, the West Indian male continues to exhibit a fatalistic attitude in which he "lives for now," for who knows what lies in store for the future. It is this kind of attitude which underlies the characteristic West Indian delight in the fete. The fete combines in one event all those things in which the West Indian can safely and happily indulge: rum, women, music, and talk; the fete is the essence of "living for now" (Freilich 1961).

All of the above theories have one thing in common: they are geared towards explaining the preponderance of consensual or extra-residential matings in the West Indies. Because this kind of promiscuity is thought to result in overpopulation, it is thought that the key to population control is to change attitudes (and/or economics) to enable more people to marry younger.

Let us remember that marriage is generally highly desired as a sign of improved economic class, status and respectability; it is not immorality that prevents its prevalence but lack of role-models and/or lack of money. With this in mind, the conclusions of Stycos and Back become particularly ironic. They discovered in their study of Jamaica that fertility in marriage is consistently higher than that in other unions. This is due to several factors: as marriage is respectable, children are more desirable in marriage than out of it. This is particularly true for such religious sects as Fundamentalists, who are quick to damn illegitimate children.

Marriage, in other words, is the "context for children." Married couples tend to have more money, better houses, an increased religious affiliation, and importantly, a decrease in venereal disease (Ibid., 283). All of these factors are likely to lead to increased fertility.

Not only do marriages have high fertility, but the average consensual union appears to have low fertility. 49% of the 3,264 unions interviewed by Stycos and Back had no live births (Ibid., 145). This is due primarily to the fact that there is an average of one-two years interm between unions, and even within unions, exposure to sexual intercourse is less frequent than in marriage due to the extra-residential nature of many of the unions. These facts are confirmed by the findings that married women in Jamaica age 35-40 have had 6.5 pregnancies, women in consensual unions have had 4.4 pregnancies, and women in visiting relationships have had 3.8 pregnancies. Lorimer (1954:56) has stated that by postponing marriage to 25 one reduces fertility by 25% over those with early marriages; this is borne out by the evidence that East Indians in St. Vincent, who marry early, have 5.07 children/union, while Negroes have only an average of 4.41/union. Obviously, earlier and more frequent marriage is not the answer to population control in the West Indies.
It is to psycho-social factors which we must turn in order to understand existing demographic facts. West Indians have been portrayed as wanting large families in order to prove the man's virility and the woman's femininity. However, in two separate studies (Hatt in Geisert 1960:39; Stycos and Back 1964:22) it was discovered the ideal family size is small. Stycos and Back found that 76% of Jamaican women want four or less children as compared with 87% of American women wanting four or less. The women I talked with, particularly those with several years of schooling, indicated a similar desire for relatively small families. If it is true that West Indian women want small families, why then is there such a large discrepancy between the ideal and what actually occurs?

Many factors can be seen to intervene between the fact that a girl wants a small family and ends up having a large one. Male-female sex ethos is certainly one of these. I was told again and again by the young men in Biabou that a boy became a man if someone was "making his baby." "They can no longer joke with me, I am now a man." In a place where little money exists and jobs are either nonexistent or distasteful, virility stands as one measure of status that cannot be denied. Making a girl pregnant can also be seen as evidence of the male image of superiority over women. One informant told me that if a girl annoyed him he would try to "settle his mind" by making her pregnant.

Corresponding to the male's attitude of virility is the woman's fear of being branded a "mule" because she is sterile. It is important to her to bear children, particularly if she is truly fond of her man. Frequently a girl tries to get pregnant solely to please her boyfriend, but as one informant said: "These boys who get girls in trouble can't afford the babies. They can't even take care of themselves. They desert the girls and the babies."

It is widely believed that the only true love in a man's life is his mother. "Every other relationship with a woman is based on lust and passion." Because it is thought that this is the inevitable nature of male-female relationships, men are seldom blamed for their behavior. It is more frequently the women who are held responsible for their pregnant state.

Economic factors also influence a woman's desire for children. Particularly if the prospects of having a husband to support her are dim, she will want a number of children as old-age insurance. Men also, though not as frequently, spoke of children as "insurance."

Perhaps the next most important influences on fertility are ideas of health, particularly the "due-number" theory (Stycos and Back 1964: 22). It is thought that God puts a certain number of children in a woman's stomach, and it is her duty to have them all. If she holds back all sorts of calamities may befall her, particularly insanity or sickness. When asked how all these babies would be fed the women replied: "God makes mouths; He will make bread." As a great many children are
brought up by their grandmothers, they are exposed to these ideas at a very impressionable age; later schooling is probably not of much influence in changing such impressions. Several boys told me that they had to engage in sexual intercourse because otherwise they might be led to do "sickly" things from frustration, for instance copulate with an animal or with another boy. They also insisted that it would be their girlfriends' fault if they were led to do such things, and they had informed their girls of this.

Let us take a closer look at the prevailing attitudes toward birth control and fertility among a particular group of West Indians -- Vincentians -- to see what light this throws upon the various solutions proposed for the West Indian population problem.

**Biabou**

Although I spent some time with employees of the St. Vincent Planned Parenthood Association discussing island-wide attitudes about birth control, the majority of my time was spent in one village on the Windward coast. Therefore, a short discussion of factors which may have influenced my sample seems in order. Biabou is well over 90% Black and in my discussion I shall restrict my data to Blacks. My fieldwork methods were determined by the short period of time in the field and the relatively large size of the village. I decided to concentrate upon a few informants. Interviews were intensive, but informal.

Biabou, a lovely village of approximately 1100 people (not including outskirts), borders on the Atlantic Ocean. Many of the houses and stores cluster in a small, relatively flat area near the beach. Mountains surround Biabou on three sides; it is in this steep mountain range that the men of Biabou raise their crops: primarily bananas, mangoes, yams, plantains, and coconuts.

While Biabou is only about 12 miles from Kingstown, the capital, the roads are not good and transportation is erratic unless one is rich enough to own a car; there are fewer than 12 cars in Biabou. Biabou in the past has therefore been fairly well insulated from events taking place in the city; however, the existence of radio and the ever-increasing commuting into the city mean that Biabou is subject to increasing exposure to external influences. Not all the people in Biabou are equally exposed. Many of the poorest families live high up the mountain sides. Electricity has not been extended to these areas. Furthermore, these people are the least likely to travel to Kingstown for business or other reasons. Their present isolation breeds more isolation.

The male population of Biabou represents a substantial occupational mixture: while the majority of men over 25 are employed in some kind of agricultural work, the remainder are divided between men who work in a business in the capital, Kingstown, or are semi-professionals in Biabou; men who are doing some kind of menial wage labor for the government (e.g., paving the roads); and those who are either temporarily or permanently
unemployed. Of the ten boys (approximately 15-20 years old) that I talked with, six were temporarily unemployed; two older men told me that these boys worked only to get enough money to stop working for a while.

Of the 11 women I interviewed, four were employed in semi-professional jobs, three ran general stores, and the remainder occupied their time with such nonproductive labor as washing, cooking, and taking care of children. There seems to be a pattern where the women with the greatest amount of education aim for high status jobs while those with little or no education have no career aspirations. This pattern is not as prevalent among the men, for high status jobs are difficult to get, regardless of amount of education: in this sphere, more opportunities exist for women.

Factors Influencing Attitudes about Fertility and Birth Control

Bianbou is represented by approximately nine different religious denominations. There seems to be no correlation between religious denomination and economic class and only a slight correlation between education and religious affiliation. More important for this study is the fact that attitudes to birth control, if influenced at all by religion, tend to be slightly negative.

The Fundamentalist sects generally are opposed to birth control, even in marriage, which they strongly advocate as the only proper alternative to "living in sin," i.e., consensual mating. People belonging to Fundamentalist sects are more likely to marry young for purely religious reasons whether they can really afford to or not. They are just as likely to avoid using birth control techniques.

Only one minister in Bianbou, of the Methodist church, has come out strongly in favor of birth control. At the time I was there, it was difficult to assess the influence this man was exerting. The two members of the Methodist church I talked with were using some form of birth control because of prior contact with the Planned Parenthood Association. It may be that there is a self-selecting factor at work where only those women with favorable attitudes to birth control go to hear the Methodist minister.

I interviewed the minister of the Anglican church, which is the largest denomination in Bianbou; he said he was sympathetic to birth control, but did not think the pulpit was the place to discuss such matters as the church had not made an official statement on the matter.

It seems unfortunate that the Anglican Church, with the largest constituency in St. Vincent, is not taking advantage of its opportunity to disseminate information about birth control. However, as has already been mentioned, many women of all religious denominations are guided in their actions by the "due-number" theory of fertility. It seems that the formal dictates of the church, while adhered to verbally, are ignored when it comes to actual behavior.
The people of Biabou are considered to be better educated and more intelligent than many on the island -- at least by the local residents. Until October, 1972 they had no high school but children could continue their education after sixth form in the high schools in Kingstown if they were accepted. However, several important considerations seem to negate the influence that education is supposed to have. The elementary school in Biabou is lacking in facilities, teachers, and curriculum. Children are literally packed into noisy, uncomfortable rooms; they are severely disciplined but to little avail. On the days that I visited the school, I was unable to hear the teacher above the din of the 1,000 children in the school. The teachers themselves are often little better educated than their pupils; many start teaching at 15 years of age. The curriculum, traditional British, seems grossly inappropriate in this tropical setting.

Although the school is free, some mothers will not send their children because they cannot afford shoes, or a pencil, or lunch for the child. On my walks up the mountain side, or "up the village" as it is more commonly known, I met two of these women. They told me that school was useless, a waste, and at any rate they needed their children at home. The principal of the school in Biabou suggested that these women have such a bad attitude because they are "poor and ignorant." There is little that can be done to force recalcitrant mothers to send their children to school. It is usually just these children who would benefit most from exposure to different life-styles than their parents.

On the outskirts of Biabou and in the mountains, or "up the village," live the poorest people. These people usually live in one-room wooden shacks with no electricity or running water; the cooking facilities and toilet are outside. These are the people who are accused by the more affluent residents of having promiscuous sexual relations and of over-populating the island. There is a certain amount of truth to these charges. The poor are victims of a vicious cycle; marriage is impossible economically; neither the men nor the women have employable skills and the men prefer to loaf rather than do tiresome, boring work on the roads. The mothers are ashamed, or too defiant, to send the children to school; so they continue in the only life-style they have ever known. The boy has no role-model for father; he grows up dependent solely on his mother or grandmother, and it is this relationship which remains all-important for life; even after a man has established consensual unions his love and first responsibility is his mother; not his woman, not his children.

The girl, in turn, is looking for a man to support her; one means of doing this is to have his baby. If the first man leaves, she looks for a second and has his baby -- and so the pattern goes. Although this pattern can occur among the rich, it is not so inevitable.

One factor which has been cited to explain the unimportance of the father role in family life is malnutrition. The Vincentian diet consists mostly of starchy foods; no one starves because most of these foods grow along the roadside and are easily stolen. However, they lack the necessary protein for a sufficiently balanced diet. Great emphasis has been
laid on the absence of family meals, due to the fact that the people, always in a state of protein hunger, are obsessed by the thought of food and eat when and where they can. This absence of family meals is, in turn, thought to denigrate the importance of family.

I found it difficult to assess the validity of this idea. However, it appears that malnutrition does have an effect on attitudes toward limiting family size. Malnutrition has been an important factor in producing the relatively large child mortality rate. In 1969, with a mortality total of 908 deaths on St. Vincent, 107 of these were children under five who died from malnutrition. Another 110 children died from gastroenteritis which may have resulted from malnutrition. The people of Biabou, sharing the island-wide diet, are likely to suffer from the effects of a certain amount of malnutrition. The resultant high child mortality rate leads to the desire to have many children, "just in case" several of them die.

Rural and urban attitudes to birth control are likely to differ; however, as I was unable to acquire any data on urban women, I shall not deal with this factor in this paper.

Attitudes toward Birth Control

Several psychological factors are responsible for the fact that prevailing attitudes to birth control among men and women differ. There is a definite tendency for women to be more favorable to birth control than men. One reason for this is the male's desire to have control over his woman. This attitude among the men seems to stem from an underlying current of hostility between the sexes. My research indicated the presence of male jealousy toward females, which appears to result from a variety of sources.

Most important among these is the male's lifelong dependence on his mother. In families where the father is absent, either temporarily or permanently, the mother provides love and food, but also is the sole source of discipline. A certain amount of resentment between mother and son is bound to occur. Furthermore, young boys growing up in their mother's household frequently have no male models to emulate; with no healthy father-role or husband-role model to emulate, the boy is usually unable to develop such a role for himself when he grows up.

Another factor contributing to male jealousy is that the men on St. Vincent are seldom able to provide for their families. Frequently, the only jobs available are agricultural jobs; but agricultural jobs smack of plantations and white supremacy, and younger Vincentians would prefer not to work at all than to take one of these demeaning jobs. Women, on the other hand, are almost always able to find some means of employment if they so desire; many women are therefore called upon to support their man.
While the facts indicate that Vincentian males are dependent upon women both emotionally and economically, this is not borne out in prevailing attitudes about the sexes. Men endeavor to maintain a psychological and physical superiority over women, and the women do not put up much resistance. One informant, a 16-year-old girl, confided to me that Vincentian girls were much smarter and more able than the boys. Yet when I asked if she thought it were true that men should be able to control the actions of their women, she agreed wholeheartedly.

One outcome of the male's desire to control his woman is his disapproval of contraceptives. Contraceptives are frequently associated with prostitution, so men often fear infidelity of their women if they are using a birth control device. A man may want to keep his woman from working so he will get her pregnant every year as a means of keeping her in the house. Another negative influence on a man's attitude towards birth control is the fact that the most widely known birth control device is the condom, which must be used by the male. I was told many times that men dislike the condom because it interferes with their freedom, and rather than use it, would prefer not to use anything.

Unless married, or in a stable consensual union, a man is not saddled with the responsibility of raising children; therefore, having children poses few problems for the male. Usually, in each union that he forms, a man desires the woman to have his baby, regardless of whether she has children from a previous union. Blake (quoted in Geisert 1960:40) found in 1955 that 85% of Caribbean women entered more than one consensual union, 51% more than two, and 27% more than three. With a proclivity, or at least the desire, to reproduce at least one child for each mate, the use of birth control in these unions often depends on whether or not the woman has a child from her current mate.

Stycos and Back (1964:22) discovered that a certain amount of inconsistency exists between the ideal family size, usually three-four children, and the conception of a large family, about 12 children; and an average family size, about eight children. This inconsistency in perception allows for a large margin of toleration of deviation from the ideal family size. In other words, although a woman might want three children, if she has eight she still considers her family size as average.

Quite obviously, the desire for small families, although encouraging, is not enough. Knowledge of birth control techniques must accompany the desire for controlling births. Geisert (1960:42) found that although knowledge of birth control is widespread, often no specific techniques are known. Stycos and Back also found that even a favorable attitude to birth control could be rendered irrelevant if specific techniques were not readily available. From my fieldwork, it was evident that although attitudes to birth control were more favorable after a woman had had a large number of children, there was not necessarily a corresponding increase in knowledge of birth control methods.
Knowledge of abortion does exist in Biabou. Two methods used are a homemade concoction of Clorox and other ingredients, which is then drunk; the other is to have someone jump on the pregnant girl's stomach. Needless to say, both of these methods are frightening; most girls would prefer not to resort to them. One informant mentioned that it is usually very poor illiterate girls with either no previous children, or alternatively with several children, who resort to these "bush" abortions.

One of the doctors on the island told me that abortions are illegal but they will be performed if a doctor recommends one. The same doctor mentioned that the abortion would cost nothing; yet three girls in Biabou told me that abortions performed by doctors were expensive and few girls could afford them. I was unable to determine which story was accurate.

Several employees of the St. Vincent Planned Parenthood Association discussed with me the problems they were having in disseminating information and birth control devices. Women are frequently reluctant to come to the clinic, particularly if their boyfriend disapproves. However, in 1970, the total number of users of some form of birth control was 3,244, a significant increase over the total in 1969, 2,418. The clinic personnel credit this increase to their policy of home visits, which they make in hopes that they will reach all the women who, for one reason or another, will not come to the clinic in Kingstown.

In the villages, a special effort is made to reach the young unmarried girls, as it is thought that they are the key to population control. This, as we have seen, is not necessarily the case. The clinic employs a wide variety of contraceptive devices; they charge a minimal amount for these supplies so that people will feel they are "worth something." However, if an individual cannot pay at all she is given free supplies. The clinic workers make follow-up visits to the homes to help with problems and answer further questions. They also distribute movies about birth control which are shown in the villages (much to the delight of village youths, who compose obscene calypso songs to accompany the movies).

The clinic staff does not usually run into open resistance. However, even with the home visits, they are not effectively reaching a wide audience. I was told that a lot of the women hide when the birth control worker comes around. Furthermore, even among those women who take some precautionary measures, there seems to be a lack of understanding about how the various techniques really work. Efforts at birth control are often too erratic for them to have any effect. I was told that some women were ashamed to admit that they did not understand the birth control procedure and would lie about understanding; they would take one pill and think that that was enough. This kind of behavior led to the rumor frequently circulated in Biabou that the pill makes one pregnant.

The problem therefore would seem to be not to get women to use birth control devices, but to get them to use them regularly. Positive knowledge and effective use of birth control devices would have the effect of removing many of the fears women have about these methods.
Conclusions

The outlook for the Vincentian population problem seems bleak. In order to effectively practice birth control, certain prerequisites are needed: the desire for a small family, knowledge of birth control, a favorable attitude to birth control, availability of birth control, and no, or few, contradictory factors (Stycos and Back 1964:35).

However, we have seen that the desire for a small family, which exists to some extent, is counteracted by many intervening variables. Knowledge of birth control techniques is often distorted, thereby affecting general attitudes toward birth control in a negative way. The Planned Parenthood Association has been unable to cope with these factors successfully, and they will probably remain unsuccessful until the government throws some support behind them.

The existing male-female sex ethos results in the desire, on the part of both sexes, to have babies. Education seems to have some effect on altering these traditional goals but this effect is limited, in part because few people receive enough education to enable them to improve their economic status and thereby acquire new goals, and in part because it is usually those people who produce the greatest number of children who receive no education at all.

Perhaps the only way in which Vincentian attitudes to birth control and fertility can be permanently changed would be through a major alteration and re-arrangement of the economy and education system. This prospect looks doubtful at present. Not enough flat land exists on St. Vincent to build a major airport; without access for jets and materials, major companies do not think it worthwhile to invest in industrialization in St. Vincent.

Likewise, the tourist industry is unlikely to develop as it has in other Caribbean islands without access to the major airlines. Furthermore, Vincentians are not altogether sure that they want St. Vincent to become a mecca for tourists.

Emigration is no longer the panacea it once was. Nearly every person under 25 that I talked to wanted to emigrate to the United States, Canada, or England. Not nearly enough visas will be granted to satisfy even a fraction of the number who want to go. The main effect of emigration is to drain the country of skilled workers. At any rate, because of the small numbers involved in emigration, and the resulting large number of child-bearing women left behind in St. Vincent, emigration has very little impact on actual birthrate.

The population problem is one which should take priority over other issues, for the increasing population accentuates all the other problems with which the government must deal. Vincentians may have inherited some of their problems from colonial powers; nevertheless, they are left with the problems. Their understandable reluctance to allow for extensive foreign intervention means that they must shoulder more responsibility in alleviating the population problems facing them.
NOTES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Birth Rate</th>
<th>Live Births</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>61,647</td>
<td>40/1000 (crude)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>79,948</td>
<td>42.2/1000 (crude)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>90,272</td>
<td>36.0/1000 (actual)</td>
<td>3,324</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>92,687</td>
<td>33.9 (actual)</td>
<td>3,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>94,451</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Growth Rate as of 1962: 2%/annum


Freilich (1961) has taken a different approach to family patterns in Trinidad. He makes no distinction between legal and common-law (consensual) marriage as they are "structurally and functionally the same." However, I found this distinction to be useful in my research on St. Vincent; therefore, I adhere to Simey's and Henriques' distinction. Furthermore, Freilich concluded that marriage among the people he studied is regarded as a temporary union; this is definitely not the case in St. Vincent.