

ABSTRACT

This study of the second generation freeman in Jamaica 1907-1944 begins with ninety Jamaican individuals born round about 1900 and the events which have touched their lives up to 1944. The sample of respondents was drawn from a collection of one hundred villages spread throughout Jamaica and selected by the government of Jamaica in 1964 for special development. Generalisations ought therefore to be limited to the behaviour of persons living in those villages but in one key aspect--the race/colour distribution--this sample of ninety persons so closely resembles that of the total population of Jamaica at about the time of their birth, that generalisations to the whole society may be made with care.

All but two of these ninety persons were Afro-Jamaican. Born about seventy years after the grant of full freedom to the enslaved Afro-Jamaican population, these persons have been, because of this, seen in this study as the second generation of freemen. Their combined narratives form the base of this study and have been used to sketch the interaction between this generation of Afro-Jamaicans and their society. They have also been used as guides to the examination of archival sources. All ninety narratives as well as a range of other sources have been used to describe the Jamaican society of the early twentieth century. These data are presented in this study in such a way that they highlight the interaction between the freemen and the Jamaican society at recognised stages of psycho-social development. These are childhood, looking a living, making a living, joining a

social group and settling down.

One central fact emerges from this study. It is that 'shifting' has been a major factor in the life of the second generation of freemen. These shifts have been geographic as well as occupational and religious. As children they were shifted from one group of adults to another and from one geographic area to another. Between teenage and mid-adulthood they moved frequently from Jamaica to other countries and back in search of work and adventure. They also moved frequently within Jamaica. Shifting occurred even when the freemen in their later years had settled down to establish homes and family life. They now moved from their homes to other areas in Jamaica to make a living at such occupations as carpentry and higglering. Shifts were also from one Christian denomination to another.

This phenomenon which appears throughout the cycles and in several aspects of the life of the second generation of freemen was their way of coping with a society which, the study shows, offered them little social and economic space. Child-shifting appears to be, in addition, the outgrowth of notions popularly held among Afro-Jamaicans then that the child is the responsibility of the community and that each house needed and should house one. But this shifting, endemic to the freemen's coping system, also had the negative effect of inhibiting their creation of associations through which they could challenge the establishment and secure themselves more social and economic space.