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JOHN A. HOLM and ALISON WATT SHILLING
 Dictionary of Bahamian English
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It is hard to believe that less than twenty-five years ago the "ruling" concept of Caribbean English was that it was bad, brutish and broken – Caliban's idiolect, as it were. The ideal was to speak and write the Queen's English, towards which, as V.S. Naipaul's early novels illustrate, we struggled most creatively. But even our most creative efforts, the Caribbeanspeak as set down by our novelists, were for a long time looked on with scant enthusiasm by our teachers, who saw "The calypsonian" and *In the Castle of my Skin*, for example, as attempts to undermine all that they had been trying to inculcate via Fowler's *Modern English Usage* and the "classical" constructions of Macaulay and Maugham. And I can still remember the superciliousness among some of those who called themselves "linguisticians" (or something like that) at the appearance of Frank Collymore's *Notes for a Glossary of Words and*

Phrases of Barbadian Dialect in 1955.

Soon, however, the "problem" shifted from the fact of Caribbean English (or dialect) to its origin. And here again, in the light of all that has happened since, it is difficult to reconstruct a credible history, even though it is the standard history of colonial value systems and thought. With Collymore's *Glossary*, and with the professional, academic (and loving) *Jamaica Talk* by F. G. Cassidy which appeared in 1961, it was becoming pretty clear that persistent "errors" in Caribbean English were not the result of slow-wittedness and/or the inability to "cope", but (perhaps) derived from the presence, within the tongue's mind, of linguistic systems other than Queen Victoria's – like, say, Ashanti Twi or Yoruba, or even Kikongo. Like *nyam*, or *out it out*, or *one teeth*, or *a ants* or *eye-water*. Wasn't *nyam* heard throughout West Africa? And couldn't *eye-water* be a translation of the Igbo *ana-mmiri* or the Yoruba *omi oju* or the Twi *ani-suo*, in the same way that "carry go bring come", "hurry up back" and "de man-dem" made more and more sense as we got to know other African-based creole languages better? Yet at a Caribbean Linguistics Conference at Mona in 1963, some of the scholars present were still hotly denying the notion of an African provenance for Caribbean language-use in favour, believe it or not, of Celtic, Gaelic and even Serbo-Croat. In other words, not so long ago, we were anxious and willing, in the full face of our history and geography, to ascribe a context and matrix for our English which was not only unscientific, but uncomplimentary and insulting, both to ourselves and to the genius of the language itself.

Happily all that is behind us now and we have had, almost as if in compensation, a whole series of Caribbean Language studies, of which John Holm and Alison Watt Shilling's *Dictionary of Bahamian English* is an excellent example. It is, as Holm acknowledges, modelled on the first classic of its kind, F. G. Cassidy and Robert Le Page's *Dictionary of Jamaican English*; but it also reflects the continuing sophistication of creole language studies (employing the concept of cultural transference/transmission/interaction to create new forms in a new context) in that it employs not only a wider and more confident attribution of African presence than ever before, but is able to draw upon the resources represented by the *OED* plus a wide range of Atlantic, North American (including Gullah, Plantation, contemporary, slang and underworld), Caribbean (including Lucayan, Afro-Seminole, Bermudan, Haitian and Jamaican) and Central American forms, in addition, of course, to the catalysing action of Krio and Portuguese/creole, to create this 5,500 word entry work. Like the *DJE* before it, it is not only a definitive lexicon, but because of its concern with the social aspects of its study, makes an important contribution to creole culture studies as well.