

ABSTRACT

THE U.S.-JAMAICA RELATIONS: THE FARM WORK PROGRAMME, 1943-1962

Since 1943, a significant number of Jamaican contract workers have been recruited and 'exported' to the United States of America under the U.S. Farm Work Programme in order to work mainly on farms across that country. This arrangement, which was implemented at the height of the Second World War as part of the British-American war effort, has been allowed to continue operating for more than fifty years after the cessation of hostilities in 1945. Over the years, the Programme has been providing the American agricultural sector with a steady supply of foreign seasonal workers, on the one hand, and facilitating the temporary employment and migration of generations of unemployed/ underemployed Jamaican labourers, on the other. The perceived expediency of the Programme has contributed to the longevity of the Programme.

The present study seeks to evaluate thematically the historical significance of such a longstanding Programme primarily within the context of the Jamaican experience. Essentially, this work covers the first two decades of the Programme (1943-1962) from its inception during the Second World War to its final operations under the administration of the British colonial government. By analyzing information garnered from documents published and

declassified by the governments of Jamaica and the United States of America, as well as from articles appearing in contemporary newspaper, oral testimonies of 'veteran' farm workers and other primary and secondary sources, this study attempts to explore the importance of the Programme as an avenue for employment and other opportunities for thousands of Jamaican workers. Through the Programme, Jamaican workers have been able to export their labour power contractually for the economic benefit of their homeland, Jamaica and themselves.

This study provides a critical examination of the relations between the United States of America and its Caribbean neighbour, Jamaica. Traditionally, these relations have focussed primarily on trade. The Farm Work Programme has offered not only another opportunity for strengthening these relations and maintaining the links between the two countries but also in creating an outlet for trade in human resources in the post slavery period. The examination of such a Programme should offer valuable insights' into factors which contributed to the shaping of the fabric of post-colonial Jamaica.