
Citation: COMITAS, Lambros / Professor of Anthropology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. **ETHNOLOGY: WEST INDIES.**

HLAS Volume: 33

Essay: IN MARKED CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS YEARS the number of anthropological publications on the Caribbean region for the current review period has declined significantly. Moreover, there appears to be little change in the previously-noted paucity of publications which are based on recent, substantial field research in the West Indies. Given the increased awareness of the Caribbean among both academics and the general public in North America, the United Kingdom and Europe, this publication decline seems somewhat paradoxical. Lacking substantive information, one can only speculate as to the causes of this unexpected development. It could be argued, as I did in my last report, that Caribbean studies are undergoing a period of consolidation and transition. On the one hand, established scholars are publishing data generated in early field work or are utilizing the data for the formulation or refinement of methodology and theory. On the other hand, a new generation of anthropologists, now active in pre-doctoral or early post-doctoral field research, has yet to begin to publish. While this situation has not changed substantially over the past two years, other factors also appear to be currently and adversely influencing the publication picture. For one, economic retrenchment in the United States has reduced considerably grant and fellowship opportunities for field research, thereby inhibiting the flow of scholars to this and other regions. Financial pressures directly affecting publishing houses also are reducing publication opportunities for scholarly articles, books and monographs. Of possibly greater significance than economic structures is the growing difficulty of access to the West Indies by foreign scholars. The political problems and sensitivities of new nations such as Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and other internally self-governing units of the Commonwealth Caribbean; the tensions and turmoils of long established countries such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic; and the socio-political isolation of Cuba, all have led to new or much stricter visa regulations and controls. This may reflect an inclination towards acceptance of only "suitable" research problems and researchers. While not yet as critical as in other regions of the world, the general situation does not appear to be a temporary phase. We may anticipate that it will endure and become increasingly complex, affecting to a greater degree than is presently the case the quantity and nature of research publications by non-West Indian scholars. It is interesting to note the publication thrusts and themes reflected in this current compilation. In order of numerical importance, four distinctive, although sometimes overlapping, categories can be identified: 1) Readers, collections of essays by single authors, conference proceedings. For the first time in the history of systematic Caribbean studies, we have the almost simultaneous appearance of a relatively large number of publications in this category, generally edited or authored by established Caribbeanists. Included are the

works of Jean Benoist, Malcolm Cross, Richard Frucht, Stanford Gerber, Frances Henry, Michael Horowitz, Dell Hymes, Rex Nettleford, Richard Schaedel, George Eaton Simpson, Tad Szulc, and Norman Whitten and John Szwed. At least one other publication of this genre is in press and therefore not annotated here (a four-volume collection entitled *West Indian Perspectives* by this editor and David Lowenthal). 2) Publications concerned with current West Indian social questions and problems. Included here are articles and monographs focusing on political behavior, race issues, literacy, education, economic development, fertility, mental health, alcoholism, etc. 3) Descriptions and analyses dealing with the Afro-American theme. This set is concerned primarily with aspects of religious and cult behavior among Afro-West Indian groups, although also included are treatments of slave uprisings, general aspects of folk culture, as well as a review of the state of Afro-American research. 4) Ethnographic, social anthropological and ethnohistorical research on Amerindians and Bush Negroes in the Guianas. This is a small but uniformly good set of publications by English, Dutch and American scholars on various aspects of social organization, economic systems, art forms, and social change.