

MAVIS CHRISTINE CAMPELL

The Dynamics of Change in a Slave Society. A Sociopolitical History of the Free Coloreds of Jamaica, 1800—1865

London: Associated University Press, 1976, 393 p.

Professor Campbell has written an excellent history of the first sixty-five years of the nineteenth century of Jamaica's free coloreds. It is thus neither a diplomatic nor a strictly political history of the Island nor an economic account during that period of time but deals with a subject which not only represents fascinating history but which so far has not been discussed in depth: a history of those parts of the population which were neither black nor white, the offspring of both, who were free but not admitted into a white dominated society. The book traces the development of these free coloreds through most of the nineteenth century in a society which like any other goes through the dynamics of change. It was gratifying for this hispanista and hispanizante reviewer that the author when discussing the stringent slave laws prevailing in Jamaica under British rule compared them with the more humane Spanish experience where the idea of protecting the right of the slave as a person was embodied in the Spanish *Siete Partidas* (p. 21).

The author gives us first the economic and political background of the period in Jamaica, stressing the implications of the American Revolution, the Haitian uprising and wars of independence, and finally the humanitarian and philanthropic movement in England (Wilberforce, Carlson). All of them, but especially the Haitian Revolution, weakened the position of the white plantocracy. An independent black state in the midst of a colonial Caribbean was a further blow to the system. Thus by the turn of the century forces were set loose which could not be controlled by the plantocracy and whose dynamics which so worried the whites were first noticed by the free coloreds. The author compares the status of the Jamaican mulatto with coloreds in other similar societies and stresses the important point that although "not unlike half-breeds in their attitudes and in their rejection by the whites", in contrast to these societies the Jamaican mulatto was "given a larger measure of political power" (p. 49).

In the following chapters Professor Campbell deals chronologically with the historic evolution and the major events which characterized the period as far as they relate to the coloreds, especially the removal of certain disabilities in the years 1813, 1823 and 1830. She stresses the point that many mulattos had slaves and were in general not supporters of the abolition of slavery (p. 150). It makes fascinating reading that "even mulatto slaves, especially those who were well treated, held similar views" (pp. 150—51). As the author points out, the mulattos felt it "extremely insulting to be lumped together with the pure blacks or 'negroes'" (p. 152).

A major figure among the coloreds was Edward Jordon (1800—1869), member of the Kingston Council and mayor of Kingston in the 1850s; he was also the founder of the *Watchman* — the mouthpiece of the Jamaican coloreds which was associated with the humanitarian movement in England. Jordon, as the leader of the coloreds could have done much more for the improvement of the non-white population but he chose a different course of action, and the author asserts that "the failure of the mulattos to shoulder their responsibilities has left a scar on the island as well as the West Indies to this day" (p. 178). Professor Campbell refers

to the famous saying of John Stuart Mill that “representative institutions are of little value and may be a mere instrument of tyranny or intrigue, when the generality of electors are not sufficiently interested in their government to give their vote, . . .” (p. 184) which was the situation which prevailed in Jamaica between 1838 and 1865, despite the abolition of slavery and several franchise acts precisely because the group which could have done more abstained from doing so. The mulattos preferred to side with the whites, although they were not fully admitted into the white society and the blacks resented this attitude by the coloreds. “Admittedly, the whites introduced racial prejudice into the island; but the mulattos perpetrated complexional discrimination with feverish vigor” (p. 193) and “It was unfortunate that the coloreds imitated the worst aspects of white norms, at the same time carefully avoiding anything that could connect them with the ‘Negro’ or ‘black’ or ‘African’ section of the island. This was to deny them the very political control of the island which they easily could have achieved” (p. 194). This basic racial attitude thus explains why the Assembly of 47 members never felt the full weight of the coloreds up to 1865 although this could have been achieved in view of their numbers. Actually Jordon and most of the other mulattos of the Assembly opposed most strenuously all proposals to introduce popular education, better medical services, an equitable system of land tenure (p. 212).

The author states correctly all along her study that the situation in Jamaica (as well as in other parts of the West Indies) would have been different had the mulattos sided with the black majority instead of playing the game with the whites in the pursuit of their own selfish interests. This was particularly true since despite the various franchise acts they were not especially liked by the whites who neutralized their leaders by giving them remunerative but innocuous positions.

For this reviewer the question then arises whether any different course of action was at all possible given the Zeitgeist when the entire world was dominated by the whites and especially by the British variety of it. Today’s situation is totally different and given the loss of power and face of the whites it would indeed be surprising if that same pattern of the last century would repeat itself. All in all, however, Professor Campbell has written a well documented book which represents an important and valuable contribution to West Indian history both from a historical viewpoint and as a background for contemporary events.

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The Making of Modern Belize. Politics, Society and British Colonialism in Central America.

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Belize (früher Britisch Honduras), letzte britische Kolonie auf dem südamerikanischen Festland, trat in den letzten Jahren immer nur dann ins Bewußtsein der bundesdeutschen Öffentlichkeit, wenn das im Süden und Westen angrenzende Nachbarland Guatemala wieder einmal drohte, es — wenn nötig mit Waffengewalt — zu annexieren, weil es Teil der früheren Capitanía General de Guatemala gewesen sei. Das vorliegende Buch ist ein Versuch, die internen sozialen und