

## **UNDERSTANDING OUR PAST IN THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE**

### **Afro-Caribbean schools in Costa Rica**

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#### **RESUMEN**

Este artículo es uno de una serie cuyo fin principal es desarrollar un retrato histórico de las escuelas para la gente de origen afro-caribeño en Costa Rica durante la primera mitad de los 1900s. El foco de los artículos está basado en una investigación de historia oral que giró alrededor de cuatro preguntas clave: 1) ¿Cómo eran las escuelas de la gente afro-caribeña durante 1934-48? 2) ¿Cómo empezaron? 3) ¿Cuál era el currículum que se enseñaba en esas escuelas y cómo se enseñaba? 4) ¿Qué sucedió con estas escuelas a través de los años? El sitio seleccionado para el estudio fue Limón, Costa Rica. Esta provincia ha sido el lugar de llegada y de residencia de la mayoría de los afro-caribeños de este país desde 1872.

La metodología cualitativa que se empleó permitió recoger evidencia para contestar las preguntas del estudio. Entre las técnicas para la recolección de datos están las entrevistas abiertas y a profundidad, entrevistas grabadas, transcripción verbatim de estas entrevistas, revisión de literatura relacionada al tema y estudio de varios documentos. Las entrevistas siguieron la metodología de la investigación de historia oral (i.e., con consentimiento y mutuo acuerdo pre-firmados por los participantes y la investigadora).

La información recogida reveló que las Escuelas de Inglés (como se conocían en Costa Rica) eran apoyadas por diferentes denominaciones religiosas, la compañía del ferrocarril, la compañía bananera United Fruit, y la Asociación Universal para el Mejoramiento del Negro. Este primer artículo de la serie habla brevemente del contexto socio-económico y político de las Escuelas de Inglés y el papel que desempeñaron estas entidades apoyando a las escuelas.

#### **ABSTRACT**

This article is one of a series which main goal is to develop an historical portrayal of schools for Afro-Caribbean people in Costa Rica during the first half of the 1900s. The focus of the articles is based on an oral history investigation that evolves around four

key questions: 1) What were the schools of the Afro-Caribbean people in Costa Rica like during the 1934-48? 2) How were they started? 3) What curriculum was taught in those schools? How was it taught? 4) What happened to those schools over time? The selected site for the study was Limón, Costa Rica. This city has been the place of arrival and dwelling of most of the country's Afro-Caribbean people since 1872.

The qualitative methods used provided evidence to answer the research questions. Among the techniques of data collection were open-ended interviews, recording of the interviews, verbatim transcriptions of those interviews, literature review, and various documents. The interviews followed the

guidelines of oral history inquiry (i.e., with consent and agreement forms pre-signed).

The data collected revealed that the English Schools (as they were known in Costa Rica) were supported by different church denominations, the railroad company, the United Fruit Company, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. A description of the general organization and the curriculum and instruction practiced permitted to find similarities between the English Schools and the primary schools designed for the British colonies, particularly Jamaica. This first article of the series talks briefly about the general context of the English Schools and the role that these entities played supporting the schools.

This study concentrates attention on the Afro-Caribbean schools established in Limón, Costa Rica. Limón, one of Costa Rica's seven provinces, had a large population of English-speaking Afro-Caribbean immigrants; consequently, it is the place where these Afro-Caribbean schools flourished. Most Afro-Caribbean immigrants came to Costa Rica looking for a way to make some money and return home to their respective Caribbean islands; they did not intend to settle permanently in this country.

The majority of Afro-Caribbean immigrants considered themselves Jamaicans, not Costa Ricans, and for this reason, they were more interested in the maintenance of their language and traditions than in any possible integration into the general culture of Costa Rica. The Costa Rican government also considered Afro-Caribbean immigrants foreigners whose stay in the country was only temporary; therefore, no commitment to these people was necessary. (Olien, 1970; Meléndez & Duncan, 1972; Palmer, 1986)

Because Afro-Caribbeans aimed to return to their place of origin, they established small private schools to provide education for their children. These schools were known as the English schools because classes were conducted in English. Various Protestant church denominations, the railroad company, the United Fruit Company, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), supported the English schools in one way or another. (Mattis, White, Gayle, personal communication, June, 1997) A few English schools were operated by individual teachers.

Blacks of African and West Indian origin entered Costa Rica in two main migrations: 1) during the colonial period, Spanish conquistadors brought African Blacks to help them exploit the gold mines they thought existed in Costa Rica; 2) West Indian Blacks, mainly from Jamaica, came to this country seeking for jobs in the railroad and in the banana industry. African Blacks in Costa Rica, experts say, blended with local groups; Jamaican

Blacks stayed in Costa Rica and were considered foreigners for a long time.

After the civil war, in 1948, President Figueres, established the Second Republic and extended national citizenship to Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Between 1954 and 1958, forty-seven public schools (950 percent increase over the number constructed between 1922 and 1951) were built in Limón and children were able to complete their elementary school education in Spanish. (Rout, 1976)

Geographic and social context of Afro-Caribbean schools

Limón, one of Costa Rica's seven provinces, is the place where these Afro-Caribbean schools flourished because of the high concentration of English-speaking Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Costa Rica is a small country in Central America, located between Nicaragua and Panama. Limón, one of Costa Rica's seven provinces, extends from the frontier with Nicaragua, north of Costa Rica, to the frontier with Panama on the south. The Caribbean sea borders the east of Limón and Limón shares borders with the provinces of Cartago, Heredia, and Puntarenas to the west. Limón has an extension of approximately 9,000 km<sup>2</sup> (3,516 square miles). It is one of the largest provinces of Costa Rica.

Limón has a variety of landscape. It ranges from high mountains such as Chirripó in the Talamanca Mountain Range to very low lands towards the coast. This diversity of scenery allows for climate differences. The population of the province is concentrated in the lowlands where the climate is warm. Furthermore, the banana plantations, the port activities and industry developed in these lowlands attract the majority of people.

According to the 1989 census, approximately 220,000 individuals lived in the province; one third of this population was Black<sup>1</sup> (Baker, 1996). Limón has a unique place among Costa Rican educational history. Its role as the point of arrival and principal dwelling place of Afro-Caribbeans gave rise to the establishment of English schools operated for and administered by Afro-Caribbeans. Thirty-three of these private English schools existed in Limón by 1927, and 1,500 students were enrolled, most of the students were English-speaking Afro-Caribbeans of Jamaican descent (Meléndez & Duncan, 1972). However, few Costa Ricans are aware of the existence of these schools and their tremendous contributions to Costa Rican education.

Like many other individuals who left their homes for the purpose of employment, these Afro-Caribbeans did not intend to settle permanently in Costa Rica. They considered themselves Jamaicans, not Costa Ricans and for this reason, the Afro-Caribbeans were more interested in the maintenance of their language and traditions than in any possible integration into the general culture of Costa Rica (Meléndez & Duncan, 1972). The Costa Rican government also considered the Afro-Caribbean immigrants foreigners whose stay in the country would be temporary; thus, the government did not compel children of Afro-Caribbean parents to attend public schools (Meléndez & Duncan, 1972; Olien, 1970; Palmer, 1986).

The English schools flourished during the first decades of the twentieth century because the government of Costa Rica did not intervene in the Afro-Caribbean people's affairs; and because these schools received support from different Protestant

church denominations, the United Fruit Company (UFCO), the railroad company (in Limón), and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The church support mainly consisted on the use of the parish hall to conduct classes. The UFCO and the railroad company provided jobs for alumni of the English schools and occasional building repairs (Sawyers-Royal, Mattis, H. Henry, personal communication, June, 1997). In addition, the UFCO granted money to some schools, especially those in rural areas of Limon, to pay for the teacher services and minor school supplies such as blackboards and chalk (Sawyers-Royal, personal communication, June, 1997). The UNIA establish some schools providing for all their needs, including the teacher (A. Henry, personal communication, June, 1997).

In order to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and to recognize the contributions made by Afro-Caribbeans to Costa Rican culture and education, it is important to discuss the educational history of the Afro-Caribbean people in this country. Little is known about Blacks<sup>2</sup> and their education before the 1940s in Costa Rica, and many people do not know why Blacks entered this country and what their life was like. Thus, further studies on the Black people in Costa Rica, their education and culture should be done and made available to Costa Ricans, in order to acknowledge the tremendous influence of the Afro-Caribbean in Costa Rican culture. It is imperative that Costa Rican Blacks take their place in the history of education in Costa Rica.

Despite the lack of official recognition of the Black presence, there have been Blacks in what is now Costa

Rica since the beginning of the Spanish colonies in the Americas. Meléndez (1972) says that there were thirty African slaves with Núñez de Balboa when he discovered the Pacific Ocean at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In 1883, there were 902 Jamaicans and by 1927 that number had risen to 17,245 (Jones, 1941, p. 42). In spite of the large numbers, until 1940 Blacks did not figure prominently in literature about Costa Rica (e.g., Biesanz, 1944; Flores, 1921; Kohkemper, 1954) or in studies conducted by the Costa Rican government. Two primary reasons caused this invisibility; first, the Afro-Caribbeans were considered foreigners and therefore did not form an integral part of Costa Rican society. Second, the majority of the national studies were done in the central plateau while Blacks were concentrated in the province of Limón, on Costa Rica's Caribbean coast (Jones, 1941).

### Migrations

Experts seem to conclude that Blacks entered Costa Rica in two main migrations: One from Africa and another from the West Indies, especially from Jamaica (e.g., Alleyne, 1988; Jones, 1941; Meléndez and Duncan, 1972; Olien, 1970; Purcell, 1992). These two migrations had their definite reason for occurring. African Blacks were brought by the Spanish conquistadors to help them exploit the gold mines they thought existed in Costa Rica, while Jamaican Blacks came to this country seeking jobs in the railroad first, and in the banana plantations later. These two waves were not the only migrations of Blacks to Costa

Rica. For instance, Palmer (1986) points out that Jamaican Blacks also came to the Talamanca (one of Limón's counties) coast, south of Puerto Limón. They fished and hunted the green turtle during its eggs-laying season (May to September). They came and left Costa Rica every year until William Smith (Old Smith), one of the fishermen who frequently came to Costa Rica, decided to settle here (in the Talamanca coast) with his family, in 1828. Old Smith was the founder of the first settlement in Cahuita (now a national park in Talamanca) (Palmer, 1986, p. 28).

The history of the second migration of African Blacks to Costa Rica is relevant in this paper because education, as shall be seen, was a very important aspect of life in Costa Rica for the Afro-Caribbean immigrants. A little information on the history of Jamaican Blacks is pertinent to understand the development of education among this group in Costa Rica.

### **Blacks from Jamaica**

Jamaica is an island of the West Indies, situated south of Cuba. It was a Spanish colony lost to the British crown in 1655. Jamaica's geographic location (close to Central and South America) made it an ideal place to shelter pirates and conduct illegal commerce. Its rich soil allowed the British masters to develop plantations, especially of sugar cane. The plantations required a great number of workers who were supplied by the slavery traders. In 1764, Jamaica experienced an economic crisis that turned the plantation activity to a cattle based economy. Natural tragedies also brought economic hardship to the island. Then, in the nineteenth century,

Blacks in Jamaica experienced important changes. (Alleyne, 1989; Black, 1958)

First, the slave trade was abolished in Great Britain in 1808. Then, slave emancipation in Jamaica was decreed in 1833. By 1860, the sugar plantations underwent a serious crisis that left many Jamaican Blacks unemployed. (Black, 1958) As a consequence, the first migrations outside the island took place. Many Jamaicans went to Panama to work on the railway. Second, new agricultural activities were taking place in Jamaica that also increased the number of migrations. In 1870, banana plantations were initiated in Jamaica to export the fruit to the United States. This new crop substituted for sugar cane with great success. Nevertheless, the banana plantation had a negative economic impact on Jamaican society because it required fewer workers than the sugar plantations. Therefore, a period of frequent migrations started. From 1881 to 1891, approximately 10,000 Jamaicans arrived in Central America, especially in Costa Rica. By 1921, almost 23,000 Jamaicans had migrated and the majority of them had settled in Costa Rica. (Meléndez, 1972)

Smaller groups of Afro-Caribbean people also arrived in Costa Rica and some settled permanently. As previously noted, these people came for reasons other than employment. They settled along the Caribbean coast of Talamanca, south of Puerto Limón (city of Limón). The first settlers were itinerant fishermen who later became farmers. They brought seeds from Jamaica and San Andrés (a Colombian island) to cultivate crops to feed their families. Seeds of some exotic trees and edible vegetables now found commonly in

Limón were brought by these immigrants. These exotic foods include jaquí [haki], also known as seso vegetal (vegetable 'brain'); bread fruit, nutmeg, and other trees not seen elsewhere in Costa Rica. (Palmer, 1986)

The West Indian immigrants also brought their customs, religion, language, and traditions. These traits were a mixture of traditions that they had kept from their ancestors in Africa and of British customs. (Alleyne, 1988; Meléndez & Duncan, 1972; Olien, 1970; Palmer, 1986; Purcell, 1992) In order for them to preserve their culture while living in Costa Rica, the Afro-Caribbeans established their own schools. Therefore, English schools were found as far as Cahuita, La Estrella Line, south of Limón, and as far as Siquirres and Guápiles, north of Limón. By 1927, 33 private schools operated in Limón, with 1500 students, most of them Negroes whose language was English (Meléndez & Duncan, 1972). In the areas of La Estrella Line, Guápiles, and the settlements between these two places, most immigrants came to work for the railroad or the banana industry.

### **The Railroad Project in Costa Rica**

Around 1852, approximately, the coffee producers located in the interior regions of Costa Rica realized that they had to find a better means of transportation for their produce (Casey, 1979). Formerly, coffee was transported by ox carts to Puntarenas, the main port on the Pacific coast, and from there, it was shipped to other parts of the world. However, this method was far from ideal.

Access to Puntarenas was a dirt trail that presented serious difficulties during the rainy season. Also, ox carts were a slow and unreliable means of transportation which presented risks for the safety of the produce. (Láscaris & Malavassi, 1985) Therefore, an access road to Limón, on the Atlantic coast, was the best hope for coffee producers (Casey, 1979). At the time, "the Atlantic Coast was not only undeveloped but also completely isolated from the central valley, without a road or even a mule path connecting it" (Chomsky, 1996, p. 18). The railroad project, consequently, took shape.

General Tomás Guardia, president of Costa Rica (1870-1882), devoted his administration to the construction of the railway on the Atlantic region. England financed the railway project and Henry Meiggs, from the United States, directed the construction. "The execution of the contract later fell into the hands of Minor C. Keith, Meiggs's nephew, who would later become one of the architects of the United Fruit Company and its man in Costa Rica" (Purcell, 1990, p. 25). Foreign laborers came to work on the railway because the project was labor intensive, and laborers from the highlands of the country could not be induced to work in the hot, humid lowlands. The project required a labor force accustomed to hard physical work in a tropical climate. Since the English had a major financial role, it seemed natural to recruit workers from their former colonial holdings. Therefore, Keith obtained permission from the government to introduce West Indian workers to the nation. In addition, workers also came from Italy and Asia (Alleyne, 1988; Meléndez & Duncan, 1972; Olien, 1970; Palmer, 1986; Purcell, 1992).

The first ship of West Indian workers, mainly from Jamaica, docked on December 20, 1872. It brought 123 men and three women to work on the railroad. (Meléndez & Duncan, 1972) The workers from the British West Indies had a basic level of education; the British government emphasized literacy on its colonies since 1865 (Meléndez & Duncan, 1972). This fact gave most West Indian workers a privileged position in the railroad company that workers from other backgrounds did not have. So much so that Koch (1975) wrote: "In addition to speaking English, blacks had significantly higher level of literacy than the immigrant Hispanics." [furthermore], "blacks in the 1920s averaged higher wages than Hispanics and occupied the more prestigious positions" (in Bourgois, 1989, p. 75).

Despite the advantages that the Jamaicans enjoyed in the workplace, they never intended to make Costa Rica their home. Most Jamaicans who came to Costa Rica to seek jobs in the railway planned to save money and return home. Duncan (1972) explains that the desire to return to Jamaica prevented Jamaicans from fully developing their traditions and establishing permanent settlements. Their houses, for example, were built as temporary structures and were almost never painted. However, subsequent events kept most Jamaicans in Costa Rica; many of whom never returned home (Alleyne, 1988; Meléndez & Duncan, 1972; Olien, 1970; Palmer, 1986; Purcell, 1992).

Some participants of this study remembered their relatives' desires to return to Jamaica. Sawyers-Royal commented on her parents' situation:

My parents came from Jamaica. They were always looking back home. My father came in 1899; my mother in 1900. They moved to Costa Rica because of the hard life there [in Jamaica]. This country [Costa Rica] was just opening and they thought to get some money; and they always said they were going back. But they never go back.

Another informant speaks of the immigrants' longing for their home country, but he sees this a direct result of the poor living conditions in Limón. Mattis argues:

How would they not want to go back, if they were living in an unhealthy region, a region where the government in office was not interested in opening schools in isolated areas, not even to open dispensaries for health matters... The only hospital was in the zone; it belonged to the foreigners, to the banana company. And its main interest was to take care of the big bosses. This was the case, indeed, that it [the hospital] was located in the American zone, close to where they [the bosses] lived. There was no other dispensary. Then, who is not going to want to emigrate? The thing is that some people are not analytical and say that they came with the idea of returning; but who would not go back... [under such conditions]?

Although neither the Costa Rican government nor the Jamaicans had planned on the workers establishing permanent residency, a series of financial

crises suffered by the railway project resulted in the enactment of governmental policies granting the workers title to land. These policies were intended to keep the workers happy despite the financial problems. Many Blacks took advantage of the land offered, but apparently the actual titles were never issued, at least no issued titles have been found. However, the fact that small old wooden houses organized in a linear sequence are still seen today along the railway demonstrates in part the enactment of this policy. The piece of land granted was about 1,722 m<sup>2</sup> (0.42 acres). (Meléndez & Duncan, 1972)

### **The role of the United Fruit Company**

The United Fruit Company (UFCO) was founded in 1899 in the consolidation of the Boston Fruit Company and other companies in the USA producing and marketing banana from the Caribbean islands, Central America, and Colombia. The principal founder was Minor C. Keith, the contractor who completed the railroad in Costa Rica. In 1884, he proposed a deal to the Costa Rican government in which he would fund the national debt and construct about 50 more miles of track. In return he received, for 99 years, full rights to these rail lines and 325,000 hectares (800,000 acres) of virgin land, tax exempt for 20 years. (Bourgeois, 1989; Casey, 1979; Chomsky, 1996).

Although the railroad construction started in 1872, in the 1880s the city of Limón still resembled a big swamp more than a flourishing city. However, by the 1900s with the help of the United Fruit

Company (UFCO), Limón had the most efficient sewage and tap water system; the UFCO also opened roads, and other businesses flourished along with the banana industry. Unfortunately, this growth and success was closely related to the banana industry; when the banana industry decayed, so did the city of Limón. (Casey, 1979) Bourgeois (1989), points out that “each time the company ceased production on infected or exhausted soils, it systematically destroyed the infrastructure it had constructed (railroads, bridges, telephone lines, etc.) in order to prevent competitors from being able to renew production on a smaller scale” (p. 8).

The Costa Rican government had little or no involvement in the region. They did not aid in the construction of infrastructure nor did they provide basic social services. The records at the local government of Limón show very little participation of the national government in Limón; the UFCO and the local government worked in harmony, so to speak. But the projects of infrastructure and social development did not follow an integral development of the city; rather, these projects were usually proposed by an individual at the local government or by the big company to satisfy their own interests. The hegemony of the UFCO on the territory was total; and it dominated all life in the region. (Municipalidad de Limón, 1992). Casey (1979) argues that “[d]ebe concedérsele a la industria bananera todo el crédito por la colonización y desarrollo de la provincia de Limón” (Full credit for the colonization and development of the province of Limón should be given to the banana industry) (p. 175).

The UFCO also had its influences in the education of the migrant residents of



Limón. Despite the fact that very little was found in the literature reviewed concerning this important aspect, Olien (1970) explains that while the United Fruit Company dominated the Caribbean lowlands,<sup>3</sup> Afro-Caribbean children had no problem attending private schools taught in English. Once the company left the area, education officials insisted that all children attend public schools which were taught in Spanish. "Informants still remember being dragged by school officials from under their beds, where they had been hidden by their parents, and forced to attend public schools" (p. 47).

Participants of this study gave the UFCO credit for the schooling they had received in the past, declaring that the UFCO helped in the establishment and survival of the English schools. A. Henry stated:

They [the UFCO] used to bring teachers from Jamaica and other English speaking countries to teach the children of Jamaican parenting that was brought here by the company [the UFCO] under certain contracts. So as to have them learn the language because the parents were to return back to their country. Wherever the company had plantation... the railroad... they had an English school. There were kids that come from the Lines [settlements along the railroad, close to banana plantations] also, but they call for transportation; they come by train; come in the morning and go back home to eat. The company provided the transportation. The company had almost everything under control. When you're well prepared in English you can get any

job of the company. That's why they brought the teachers so as to prepare you to do the work there, in the offices, in the commissaries, in the farms. They needed timekeepers and bookkeepers, people like those went to school so that they are well prepared to head for a job in those times."

In the same manner, Anglin (1981) writes: "One factor that helped parochial schools [English schools] survive was the fact that not only the railway but the banana companies did all their operations in English..." (p. 12). From these participants' perspective, the need for jobs in the UFCO was a major motivation for Afro-Caribbean immigrants to keep their children in the English schools. Mattis explains:

Thanks to them [well-known Jamaican teachers of the English schools], and to a series of other English teachers, the banana company found the number of employees that they needed in their commissaries, offices, and as foremen in their farms. The banana company managed their documentation in English, and English was used to communicate with the families from the American Zone [American families lived in a separate section of the settlement], because they did not speak Spanish and were not interested [in learning Spanish]. Bosses and foremen spoke English only.

Sawyers-Royal reflected that "the company thought that a school was important here and gave a grant to any teacher. In my father's school anybody

could attend because the company gave him a grant and he did it for the need. school.”

The banana industry had an economic crisis during the 1930s. This turning point was caused by diseases that attacked the crops, and by the labor strike in 1934. The UFCO negotiated another concession with the Costa Rican government, and in 1938 it moved to the Pacific. This period is characterized by the end of international migrations from the West Indies; in addition, many immigrants decided to return to their home countries and others migrated to Panama and the United States. The group of immigrants that remained in Costa Rica squatted on uncultivated lands and established themselves as subsistence farmers. When the economy improved, these farmers converted their subsistence plots into cash-earning enterprises, such as cacao or banana farms (Bourgeois, 1989).

### **Role of the church in Jamaica and Costa Rica**

Protestant churches exercised a great deal of influence in the lives of Costa Rican Blacks, much like it had been in Jamaica. Most of Jamaican Black immigrants were Protestants. They inherited the language and religion from their ancestors in the British colonies. Emancipation of the slaves in Jamaica (1833) had brought a great increase in the membership and influence of the missionary churches in Jamaica. (Black, 1958; Curtin, 1970; Purcell, 1990) The Baptists were the most energetic sect in the struggle for the rights of freedmen. With the help of the Baptist missionaries,

free villages on the island began to be established on a large scale. The first of these villages, started in 1835 by Rev. Phillippo, was Sligoville (in honor of the governor) situated in the hills behind Spanish Town. (Black, 1958; Curtin, 1970; Purcell, 1990) Following the establishment of Sligoville, more than 3,000 individuals were settled in Baptist villages in the western part of Jamaica alone (Curtin, 1970).

It is no surprise, then, that the Baptist church was the first one founded in Limón, in 1888 (Municipalidad de Limón, 1992). The churches were not only concerned with religious matters; they also established English schools in Limón. Minister Soby, a North American missionary was the founder of the Baptist church in Cahuita, Talamanca. Minister Soby brought the first teacher to Cahuita, in 1905. It was then that the English school in this part of Limón began its tradition. Teachers came and went and all of them taught in English; except Teacher Hilton who taught his students English and Spanish. Teacher Hilton arrived at Cahuita in 1914. (Palmer, 1986) The Methodist Church was the second Protestant church established in Limón (in 1894, according to Municipalidad de Limón, 1992). This church extended its services throughout Limón, and it is still there. The Methodists have a modern building in Limón and they operate a private bilingual school to which many middle class Afro-Costa Ricans and Costa Rican Hispanics currently send their children.

The Saint Mark's Anglican church was the third Protestant church founded in Limón (in 1896, Saint Mark's Church Memory, 1996). Like the Methodists, the Anglicans, later called Episcopalians, still

own property in Limón; and also operate a private bilingual school, the Saint Mark's School. This school enjoys prestige among middle class Afro-Costa Ricans and Costa Rican Hispanics.

In 1915, the Adventist Church settled in Limón (Municipalidad de Limón, 1992) and the Salvation Army Church probably arrived in Limón in the late 1930s. These churches also operated English schools during the 1940s and 1950s. (Anglin, Mattis, Henry. Personal communication, June, 1997) The Adventists have a modern bilingual school now and its school population is culturally diverse.

### **Relationship of Afro-Caribbean schools and the government**

Because Blacks in Costa Rica considered themselves Jamaicans and the state of Costa Rica considered them foreigners who at some point would return to their countries, neither of these parties, the Costa Rican government and Afro-Caribbeans, made a serious attempt, to include each other within their groups (1872-1948). The Jamaicans in Costa Rica, and the second-generation Afro-Caribbeans often felt that the culture of their country of origin was superior to that of their host country, Costa Rica. (Bourgeois, 1989, Meléndez & Duncan 1972; Olien 1970; Palmer 1970; Purcell, 1982) This fact was especially true for Jamaicans who based their claim to superiority on their British cultural heritage. Bryce-Laporte & Purcell (1982) described the situation:

Throughout the plantation period,

Jamaicans regarded themselves as British — culturally superior to Hispanics, superior even to the Americans. Their inclination, then, was to preserve their cultural superiority. When employers preferred them over Hispanics, mainly because they could communicate in English, this feeling of superiority was reinforced. In addition, they lived and worked as a group, apart from Hispanics, and sustained the rich folkways and mores of the rural Jamaica from whence they had come. (Cited in Lefever, 1992, p. 209)

Furthermore, many Afro-Caribbeans of the older generation living in Tortuguero (located fifty miles north of the city of Puerto Limón and thirty miles south of the Nicaraguan border) still consider themselves foreigners and have not become citizens of Costa Rica, even though they have been in the country for thirty or forty years. Afro-Caribbean people who came from Bluefields or the Corn Islands still think of themselves as Nicaraguans, and those who came from San Andrés still think of themselves as Colombians. (Lefever, 1992)

The large numbers of English-speaking Blacks who remained apart from Costa Rican society eventually created problems. For instance, the case of private schools in Limón presented a difficult situation for the government. Kepner (1936) wrote the following comment by Ricardo Fournier, at that time Secretary of Education in Costa Rica, concerning private schools:

Because of the language difficulty, the children of the English speaking Jamaican Negroes frequently go to

private schools, in which they often have to pay tuition. The private schools are really an acute problem for the public education system -it being hard to exercise supervision over them because of the language and because they do not follow government regulations. Some of the schools are in very small villages; thus the only way to force them to conform to governmental requirements would be to increase the number of inspectors. They tend to denationalize their areas. In them the government is unable to teach national ideas and the sentiments of Costa Rica. (Cited in Olien, 1970, pp.166-167)

Experts agree that the Jamaicans in Costa Rica sent their children to private schools because they preferred to maintain their culture, language and traditions until they returned home. As pointed out above, this situation slowed down or prevented entirely the process of social integration of Blacks to Costa Rican culture. (Alleyne, 1988; Meléndez & Duncan 1972; Olien 1970; Palmer 1970; Purcell, 1992) Olien (1970) explains that while the United Fruit Company dominated the Caribbean lowlands, children of Afro-Caribbean descent had no problem attending private schools taught in English. Once the company left the area, after the 1934 banana strike in Limón, the government education officials insisted that these children attended public schools which were taught in Spanish.

Part of the reason for the drastic change was that, since 1886, Mauro Fernández, president of Costa Rica (1885-1889) declared primary instruction

compulsory and gratuitous for all children from seven years of age to fourteen who resided in Costa Rica. The exceptions were children living more than two kilometers away from a school; they were not obligated to attend classes. In 1903, Limón had two public schools, and the evidence of the Ministry of Public Education reports that only the urban school district had regular school attendance, thus implying that children in the rural areas were not compelled to attend public schools. (Jinesta & Jinesta, 1921) As pointed out earlier, the United Fruit Company had complete hegemony in Limón and it dominated all life in the region. (Municipalidad de Limón, 1992). After 1934 without the United Fruit Company's protection, Afro-Caribbean children dwelling in the city of Limón and surrounding areas were forced to attend public schools. "Informants still remember being dragged by school officials from under their beds, where they had been hidden by their parents, and forced to attend public schools" (Olien, 1970, p. 47).

### **The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)**

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Blacks were organizing to gain rights and better treatment in the countries where they had been slaves. The UNIA in Limón was the most important organization of Afro-Caribbeans in Costa Rica, and its strength was such that the local division has been one of the longest surviving in the world; in fact, Limón's UNIA is one of a handful of UNIA's still in existence (Harpelle, 1993). Marcus Garvey<sup>4</sup>, the leader of the Universal Negro

Improvement Association, visited Limón on several occasions and encouraged the Afro-Caribbean community to fight for recognition and to preserve their cultural identity. The members of the UNIA paid nominal dues and needed to belong to the Negro race. (Harpelle, 1993) The association established a few English schools in Puerto Limón and in the settlements north of Puerto Limón (e.g., Cimarrones, Bataan, Saborío).

The purpose of this study was to narrate the story of the Afro-Caribbean schools in Costa Rica during the years 1934-1948. Some people of Afro-Caribbean descent speculate that there were English schools (as these schools were known) at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, there is no evidence in the literature of the existence of such schools in Costa Rica at that time; and the availability of human subjects to collect their oral histories is very limited. Nevertheless, the oral histories of other Afro-Caribbean descendants who attended those schools before 1948, there were major changes in Costa Rica and the English schools were affected almost to their extinction.

Despite the fact that many researchers acknowledge the education of Afro-Caribbeans in their studies, little has been said about the type of schools that these immigrants brought from the West Indies, particularly from Jamaica. Therefore, an historical study of what those schools were like, the kind of curriculum that was taught and how it was delivered, can make a contribution to the history of Costa Rican education. Such a study will add to the popular image of Costa Rica as one of the most literate countries in Latin America. Furthermore, this

investigation may help younger generations of Afro-Costa Ricans understand their schooling past.

## Notes

1. Historically, Blacks have helped to populate Limón. According to Casey (1979), in 1864 the population of Limón was estimated at 1200 people; by 1875 Limón had 3,074 inhabitants, and by 1892, there were 7,484 people. This increase in population supposes an increase caused by immigration. Meléndez (1972) adds that in 1927, there were 18,003 Blacks in Limón which represented 94.1% of the total of Blacks in Costa Rica; by 1950, a decrease of Black population recorded 13,749 Blacks living in Limón. Despite this decline, 91.8% of the Black population in Costa Rica lived in Limón by the 1950s.
2. In this study the researcher uses the terms Afro-Caribbeans, Blacks, and Negroes to refer to the Afro-Caribbean people in Costa Rica. *Negro* is the Spanish word used to refer to the ethnic group as well as to a person of dark skin. Blacks in Costa Rica prefer to be called *Negros* (Negroes) rather than *Morenos* because this latter word does not apply to their ethnic group. Afro-Caribbean or Afro-Costa Rican are relatively new terms that are beginning to be popular among Costa Rican writers. However, some young people of Afro-Caribbean origin prefer the term Blacks when using the English language.
3. The Caribbean lowlands of Costa Rica included the valleys irrigated by the largest rivers (and their affluents) of the Atlantic coast; from north to south of Puerto Limón, there were the Parímina River, the Reventazón River, the Matina River, the Estrella River, and the Sixaola River. The banana plantations were raised on those valleys and railroad tracks were built into the plantations to carry out the fruit. Consequently, workers and their families lived on settlements along the railroad or on the banana farms. Some of these settlements were (from north to south of Puerto Limón)

Guápiles, Guácimo, Germania, Cairo, Siquirres, Veintiocho Millas, Batán, Matina, Estrada, Zent, Beverly, Bananito, Valle de la Estrella, Cahuita. Many of the research participants mentioned some of these sites as their place of birth or English schooling. The settlers referred to the railroad villages to the north of Puerto Limón as: the Old Lines [Línea Vieja ] (e.g., Germania, Cairo), and to the south of Puerto Limón as La Estrella Line [Ramal La Estrella] (e.g., Beverly, Bananito, Cahuita). However, settlers of Puerto Limón referred to both of these railroad regions as "the Lines."

4. Marcus Garvey had begun the Universal Negro Improvement Association in his native Jamaica in 1914. His popularity was based on his appeal to race pride at a difficult time when Blacks had very little of which to be proud. Garvey exalted everything black and insisted that black stood for beauty and strength, not inferiority. He declared that Africans had a noble past and that Negroes should be proud of their ancestry. Also, he asserted that the only hope for African-Americans was to leave America and return to Africa to build a country of their own. (Franklin, 1974)

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