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# BELIZEAN STUDIES

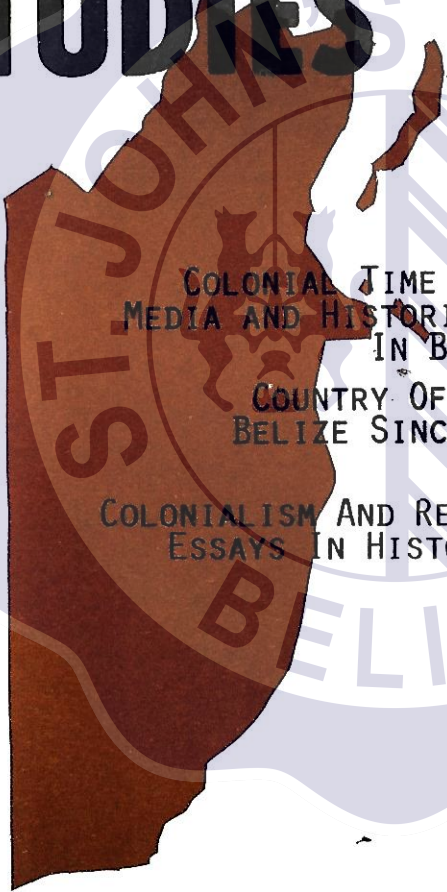
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COLONIAL TIME AND T.V. TIME:  
MEDIA AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS  
IN BELIZE

COUNTRY OF NO RETURN:  
BELIZE SINCE TELEVISION

COLONIALISM AND RESISTANCE IN BELIZE:  
ESSAYS IN HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

a journal of social research and thought





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Editor: Lita Hunter Krohn

Advisory Board: Mr. Leo Bradley  
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## EDITORIAL

The two articles appearing in this issue are concerned with television in Belize. It is said that we watch television for different reasons at different times. If we are watching too much T.V. what are the repercussions? The theories are numerous but in-depth studies few. What is extremely important is the quality of T.V. Is the price we pay a loss of identity, increased consumerism, imitation of the lifestyles and values of cultures alien to ours?

In Belize most programming is foreign. Will it lead to a shared loyalty to foreign institutions, peoples, personalities and preferences? Whose lifestyles are we copying, and if we are addicted to "Santa Barbara" and "Another World" is it prosperity, power and fame at any price?

"We deal in illusions, man. None of it is true. But you people sit there day after day. Night after night. All ages, colors, creeds. We're all you know. You're beginning to believe the illusions we're spinning here. You're beginning to think that the tube is reality and that your own lives are unreal. You do whatever the tube tells you. You dress like the tube. You eat like the tube. You raise your children like the tube. You even think like the tube. This is mass madness. You maniacs.

In God's name, you people are the real thing. We are the illusion..."

[Howard Beale, in the MGM movie Network]

In "Colonial Time and TV Time: Media and Historical Consciousness in Belize," Richard Wilk looks into a country (Belize) being shaken to its cultural base by an invasion that appears to be uncontrollable - television. Wilk investigates the concepts of time and distance and the changes they cause in Belizean consciousness. Wilk's main point establishes the differences between colonial time when for example, Mother Country England would rationalize exploitation, poverty and domination and submerge them in terms of backwardness, underdevelopment and primitivism. This was Mother Country interpreting for us. TV time, today, with direct feed from satellites, allows us into the world of information at the same quick pace as everyone else in the world.

John Lent in his study "Country of No Return: Belize Since Television," pursues the history of the uniqueness of the Belize situation in which television was chaotically introduced by private entrepreneurs pirating via satellite from both U.S. and Mexico, and that medium's development without a national television service.

One of the biggest challenges people face in society is how to channel their time and energy most constructively. Nations can be plagued with aimlessness and boredom. There is a serious need for each individual, as part of personal and spiritual maturity, to discover where he or she needs to go in life.

"Television plays a role in this development. It is an important form of communication for both entertainment and learning. We need therefore to take television seriously. There is a new twist to the old saying: 'We become what we watch.' Developing good television habits and becoming 'critical viewers' can be matters of life and health." [Growing with Media, by Regina Cameron and Charles Watt.]

Perhaps this issue of Belizean Studies will serve to stir up discussions on this new thing in town: T.V.

The Editor  
Lita Hunter Krohn

RICHARD WILK

## COLONIAL TIME AND T.V. TIME: MEDIA AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN BELIZE

Belize is a tiny country, with less population than the average rural American county. It rests uneasily on the Central American mainland, culturally a mixture of Latin and Caribbean, with a murky history and a future clouded by Guatemalan territorial claims. While Belize has avoided most of the political and military strife that has torn its Central American neighbors, and the threatened Guatemalan invasion has never come, the country has been shaken to its cultural fundament by another invasion that seems even less controllable than African killer bees. American television programming has become a central fact of Belizean culture. Even in rural areas the evening hours are captured by the Cosby Show, baseball, and regular network fare from TV movies to CNN news.

Many Belizeans and foreigners who treasure the relaxed pace of local life and the lively local culture are worried by foreign TV. They feel like they are watching the passing of a whole era of human affairs, a

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RICHARD WILK is an anthropologist and recently an assistant professor at New Mexico State University. He has done both archaeological and ethnographic research in Belize, working in both Orange Walk and Toledo Districts and living in Belize a total of five years. Presently he is a lecturer at the Anthropology Department of Indiana University.

culture of face to face contact, of folk-song and story-telling, and its replacement by a poor and cheap copy of what is worst in America. But why is it mostly the foreign-educated Belizean elite and the expatriate foreign residents who are most disturbed, while the average city worker or rural shop-owner seems delighted to watch network television? And what are the effects of sudden, almost unlimited media access on this previously isolated country? Just what kind of devastation have the networks unleashed on the third world?

Most critics of the American media in third world countries focus on the *content* of programs. In Saudi Arabia women's elbows are the source of corruption; elsewhere violence is decried, or consumerism, or lack of respect for the rights of Palestinians to a homeland. But in attacking the specifics of the message, these critics are missing the most important effects of TV, effects that occur even if all the elbows are covered and all the shoot-em-ups are banned. As McLuhan pointed out 20 years ago, the impact of television lies not in the messages carried over the channel, not in the content of the situation comedies and baseball games, but in the concepts of time and distance carried by the *immediacy* of the medium. The greatest effect of television on Belize is the change it causes in Belizean consciousness of their own culture and its relationship to those of rich and powerful countries like the United States. The most important change caused by television is the way it changes people's perceptions of time, distance, and culture. As this colonial model of the world changes under the impact of television, the basis of political rhetoric and political legitimacy is also changing.

## Colonial time

*Colonial time* is a system that emerged in what is now called the third world during centuries of western domination. As I use the term it means a way of thinking that merges time with distance and culture. The three are treated as aspects of the same phenomenon. Time, distance, and culture are almost interchangeable concepts in explaining and justifying the differences between the colony and the metropole. In *colonial time* the colony is described using metaphors that blend the

connotative meanings of time, distance and cultural development together. *Primitive, backward, and underdeveloped* are blends, while other words draw more directly on temporal, cultural, or spatial meanings (e.g. simple, uncultured, isolated, natural, savage, barbaric, degenerate, primordial, wild, rude, marginal, peripheral, uncivilized).

The ultimate effect of *colonial time* is to create and reproduce the concept of *tradition*, of a kind of culture that is rooted in a distant time and remote place. The colony is backward because it is dominated by unchanging tradition, *timeless*, isolated and pervasive. The flow of time in this context is the product of the colonial agents themselves, the administrators, officials, leaders, intelligentsia, and technocrats who collectively represent themselves as agents of 'progress' - a term opposed to 'tradition' that also merges time, distance and culture. Progress implies movement in time from the unchanging past to the dynamic future, in space from the isolated hinterland to the bustling city, and in culture from static tradition to fashionable modernity. In colonial culture, time is a blueprint for social and political change, it carries the burden of an entire cultural plan.

If *colonial time* is the heart of colonial cosmology, style and fashion are its outward concrete symbols. The gap in fashionable clothes, furnishing, housing styles, language, and customs between the colony and the metropole are seen by all participants in the colonial system as the concrete measure of the lag in colonial time between the traditional backwardness of the colony and the modernity of the metropole. The flow of consumer goods and intellectual goods between the metropole and the colony is a form of cultural timekeeping; the objects and ideas are clocks marking off *colonial time*. The units might be called 'years behind'.

In Belize in the 1950s the fashions seen on the street lagged several years behind those of New York (and many New York fashions never made to to Belize at all). In *colonial time* this put Belize many 'years behind' New York, at an equal age/distance/cultural footing as say, Tegucigapla, but still far 'ahead' of rural Belize or San Pedro Sula or a small Caribbean

island like Antigua. The irony of colonial time is that while it is premised on the promise of progress, there is really no catching up. The lag can become smaller or larger, but the clock is set in the metropole; ground zero is New York, or London, or Paris, and the colonies will always be in another time zone. The flow of fashion requires the colonies to keep running faster to catch up. They may be able to cut the distance in half each year, but like Zeno's rabbit, they will never reach their destination.

It is this very lag that makes it possible for the metropolitan consumer to savor the archaism of an African mask, an experience that emphasized the time gap even if the wood of the mask is still green. The educated African avoids such evidence of backwardness like the plague, and would rather decorate the house with cheap and unfashionable western goods.

While it may seem an elaborate form of bondage, *colonial time* serves the social and political interests of the colonial elites as well as the metropolitan powers. On the macroeconomic level the demand for metropolitan status goods like clothes, appliances, and even houses will always be assured; even when the colonials are starving, the answer is still progress, and progress is still measured by *colonial time*. On the level of politics, colonial time lends weight and authority to the ideas, policies, and goals of metropolitan politicians, allowing them to set the terms of debate even when their policies counter the interests of the colony or the colonial elite. On the global scale colonial time affirms the political dependency of undeveloped and developing on the developed, and keeps the colonial elite in a permanently subordinate position. They only pass on the message or the wealth - they never originate a thing.

On the local level, however, the counting of events and processes in colonial time is a potent tool for the colonial elite, for it makes them the timekeepers. Colonial time runs through narrow channels. The merging of distance, culture and time means the local elite, who can travel to the metropole and come back with new styles and fashions, are the conduit through which time flows and progress occurs. The metaphors of colonial



time allow this process of cultural flow and bridging of physical distance to be recast as 'progress'. The timeless stasis of tradition is broken only by 'change agents' who are in contact with the outside world. The local elite can be these agents, as long as they accept the premise that they are born and raised in a backward place. Without them, they can claim, the colony would never change.

## TV Time

Television does not necessarily change the colonial conception of time. Watching ten year old reruns of "I Dream of Genie" in a Mexico City hotel in 1978 did nothing but reinforce my feeling that Mexico was 'behind' the United States, in some way parallel but lagging. The kind of local TV fare offered in many third world countries - budget local programs interspersed among well-produced but outdated metropolitan productions - seems designed as an object lesson in colonial time. The viewer is hard pressed to tell whether the differences between their own experience and those depicted in "Father Knows Best" are the result of the passage of time, the distance between their country and the USA, or real cultural differences between themselves and Americans. The three distinctions are obscured and collapsed in each other. At the same time the news and current events are presented in local programs, the quality and content of which prove that the present in the ex-colony is years behind the present in the metropole.

When I lived in New Mexico, in the evening I sometimes switched back and forth between the news on a Mexican station in Ciudad Juarez, and the news on a network-affiliate station a few miles north in El Paso. The contrast was striking, even though Mexico's television productions are some of the best in the third world. I am sure that many residents of Juarez do the same thing in the evenings, and are struck by the contrast as well. After the news do they watch a faded and scratched ten-year-old American movie dubbed in Spanish on their own station, or do they turn to the Wheel of Fortune or the Cosby Show in English? The narrow political border between the two countries makes it clear that the distance expressed in colonial time is purely

metaphorical, though it remains a difficult journey.

In the old TV, the local broadcasting authorities, government regulators, and advertisers still stood between the viewing public and the metropolitan producers of entertainment and news. The manual trade of videotapes seemed to parallel the other colonial fashion trades. It looked like television might simply become another fashion item, another good on the endless conveyor belt from the metropole to the ex-colonies.

In 1978 when I first did fieldwork in southern Belize there were four or five video cassette recorders in Punta Gorda. The local Chinese restaurant had one hooked up to a 19-inch color TV behind the bar in the dining room. Their relatives in San Francisco would record two or three hours of network television each week and send it to them. The dining public, including Kekchi and Mopan Maya from remote villages, would sit for hours and watch everything from used-car commercials and Saturday morning cartoons to network newscasts from six months before. I have never felt so far from America.

But there is a new kind of TV Time appearing in places in the third world, a product of satellite technology. Today in Belize television operates by taking a direct feed from satellites. Often local announcements and commercials are inserted, though many American advertisements make it through. But for a good part of the day Belize television consumers are watching *real time* network broadcast television from the United States. The programs that have the greatest popularity seem to be, in decreasing order, sports, serial dramas (mostly situation comedies), and the news.

Most urban Belizeans watch rebroadcasts from WGN in Chicago. They have become avid Chicago Cubs fans, and in fifteen years have gone from being a soccer-cricket-bicycle-prizefight country to being a baseball-basketball-soccer-prizefight nation. When the Cubs made it into the play-offs in 1983 the country came to a standstill and shops closed during the games. One Belizean told me that the baseball-brainwashing of Belizean children had gone so far that he had heard them singing 'The Star Spangled Banner' before starting

their games! This pattern is not unique to Belize - all over the Americas where there is access to the satellites, people see direct, up-to-the-minute programming from the metropole, some of it in Spanish. Similar satellite networks are rapidly spreading in the eastern hemisphere.

Why does direct broadcast transmission make such a difference? Because the programs, especially the sports and news broadcasts, are so *immediate*. There is no lag. The Belizean family in their small house on the edge of Belize City is not only watching the same programs as all of urban America, but far more importantly, they are watching them at the same *time*. What the Belizeans are watching is happening *now*.

Satellite television has removed an essential element from the equation of colonial time. Distance between the metropole and the colony can no longer be reckoned in terms of time. The immediacy of contact makes it unalterably clear that only distance and culture set Belize apart from the United States, not time. TV time is now a single clock ticking away a single rhythm in every place it reaches, a continuous cycle of news, advertising, entertainment and special events. TV time is alarming and strange at first - it is the direct experience of a flow of events that was once far away, safely filtered, and dimly and indirectly perceived. Things seem to be moving more quickly, almost out of control.

### The Meaning of TV Time for Culture and Politics

And in some areas of culture, TV time is out of control. The conduits of power have been severely disrupted, because fashion is no longer channeled through the local elite; they have been circumvented because now information flows directly from television to the masses. Ten years ago when someone returned from a trip to New York or Miami they strutted their new clothes around for weeks, tried out their new words at parties, and displayed the latest bit of technology in their home. The consumption styles of the Belize Elite are now revealed as frauds - though they presume to sit on top of the local heap, they cannot come close to match-

ing what everyone can see on Miami Vice, in the advertisements, on the news. The local elite is no longer something to emulate, for it is no longer the main source of new things, the local agent and representative of the metropole.

In this light the laments about television that emanate from the Belizean elite acquire a new meaning. From right wing conservative businessmen to the radical intelligentsia, television is decried as the force that is crushing Belizean national consciousness. "We are going to lose our traditions." "Our national identity is disappearing." "We are becoming Americanized in every way." People who themselves have spent years at school in the United States acquiring the credentials of the elite, now come home and express shock at how 'little Belize' has been ruined by American television.

The Belizean elite has made a basic error, for like foreign visitors they have misconstrued the effect of TV time on the national consciousness. Today Belizeans perceive the reality of their nation much more clearly than ever before. Colonial time served the purpose of the metropole by making the distance between the colony and the metropole uncrossable. It clouded and obscured a crushing dominance. Colonial time rationalized exploitation, poverty, and domination by submerging them in the terms of backwardness, underdevelopment, and primitivism.

TV time has removed one of the ideological props of the colonial and post-colonial world order. Watching the Lakers play-off on a TV in Belize City, there is an immediacy of experience, an emotional involvement in the present on an equal basis with viewers in Los Angeles or New York. Your perception is not poorer, you are not seeing a game that happened last week, you are in the here and now. And when the game is over, both the stinks and the aromas of Belize City are in the here and now too, there is no escaping it. To steal Conrad's metaphor from Heart of Darkness, the journey upriver is no longer a journey back in time. It is just a trip upriver that takes some time. The lack of speed is a problem, not a metaphor, and it can be overcome by applying a bit of technology - an outboard motor. If things are different upriver it is not because of some

kind of time lag. We can't just sit back and expect that problems will be solved when the locals 'catch up'. Between Belize and the United States the time lag is gone, the distance is closing; what remains are cultural, economic, and political differences that require a new explanation, a new set of rationalizations.

The cultural effects of TV time lie mainly in their impact on existing local systems of control and power. The tragedy is not so much that local *culture* will disappear (there seems to be little objectively measurable increase in the 'Americanization' of local institutions, customs, or even language), though this is the pretense for local opposition to television. The lasting tragedy is instead that important kinds of power have now moved entirely out of the country and have been captured by the metropole. While colonial time left something for a local elite, TV time is established entirely in the metropolitan centers; as consumers of information and programming, the Belizeans have no power to affect what they see, except to turn it on and off. Including a certain proportion of local programming may blunt this effect, but the control of time cannot be regained. The rhythms of life now move in accord with the cycles of sport (baseball season, basketball season, hockey season, Superbowl Sunday), the cycles of weekly programming (Thursday night, LA Law), and the daily schedule (the kids stay home in the afternoon to see cartoons instead of going out to play). And for many the new rhythm of life includes periodic flights to Miami or Los Angeles, where they know what to expect, having seen it all on the tube.

While Belize has lost control of TV time, it may not end up such a bad bargain. Certainly a better understanding of cultural, spatial and temporal distance has resulted. Fashions and products from outside the country have lost some of their magic - they are no longer gifts from the future that carry the message of inevitability ("two years from now everyone will be wearing one"). Perhaps this is why local products are seeing something of a resurgence, with a highly visible 'buy Belizean' campaign sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. This is an enormous change in a country that has been exporting raw materials and importing everything else for 350 years. The local goods are no longer

'behind the times' - they may be inferior or superior, dear or a bargain, but they can now be assessed qualitatively without the extra baggage of being temporal symbols. They are not lagged versions, mimics of things out of date in the metropole (the despised aspect of colonial goods), but can now be presented as objects that exist in the present, the same present seen on TV. Advertisements for local products, churches, and politicians sandwiched in the two minute gaps between episodes of the Jeffersons have a powerful implicit message.

TV time is a key factor in understanding the process of making and expressing history in ex-colonies. Under colonial time, the present was history, dripping with inferences of archaism and tradition, 'rooted in the past'. TV time allows for explicit historical references, by separating the present from the past. To give an example, a box of Belizean matches is undesirable in colonial time because the object is archaic. The design of the box and the poor quality wooden sticks are the products of an outdated technology. This kind of artifact has been around for a long time, and it has long been replaced by better products in the metropolitan countries. Similarly, local foods are 'traditional', reflecting the inability to procure foreign foods, and a background in the backward 'bushy' parts of the country where people don't even know modern foods.

But TV time helps sever the temporal aspects of matches or food from their cultural baggage, from their relationship to the metropole. The box of matches can now become merely "old fashioned", the food can become merely "bush food" (or "roots" food, or Creole food). The objects can acquire historical and cultural referents that are truly in the present. Once they are in the present they can even achieve a positive connotation. Historical items can now represent the familiarity, security and continuity of the past, rather than the uncertainty and shame of being backward or retarded. Culturally significant practices and objects can now be symbols of identity and pride rather than badges of ignorance and isolation.

As a number of anthropologists have recently suggested, history is itself a cultural construction, and

western linear history is a particularly western product that grew along with the world system of colonial and mercantile expansion. This expansion turned the rest of the world into "peoples without history." How could they have a history, suspended permanently in the past? But TV time seems to have the power to unfreeze clocks, by extracting the present from the past and objectifying both. It allows time and events to be separated from each other and ordered into sequences that do not all lead inevitably in the same direction - toward the metropole. TV time frees the past from its colonial bondage and makes it fertile ground for political dispute in the present. A growing political awareness is the inevitable result.

I don't think it is a coincidence that history is an increasingly important topic of public interest and participation in Belize. The interpretation of events at the Battle of St. George's Cay in 1798 was an issue in the 1984 elections, the same elections affected by the television issue. As it happened, the champions of revisionist history lost, and the 'traditional' version of the story was reinstated. But of course it has a new meaning now, a meaning extracted from the web of colonial time.

#### NOTE:

This paper is written in a non-academic style - and I have not included any references or bibliography. The media is a new topic for me, and this paper is very much a work in progress, part of ongoing research that I plan to continue this year. Please read it as a series of thoughts and hypotheses, not as finished research or conclusions. I would like to acknowledge the formal and informal input of many Belizeans to this paper - people who have shown me that TV and all, Belize is still the best place in the world.

## COUNTRY OF NO RETURN: BELIZE SINCE TELEVISION

In the ever-occurring deliberations about possible effects of mass communications, certain countries surface as archetypal examples - almost as a "country of the moment." In the 1950s and 1960s, when radio (especially through forums) and television were believed to be development catalysts, India, American Samoa and one or two other territories were at center stage. In the 1970s, Brunei, with its gigantic and accelerated leap into color television, and Indonesia and India, with their PALAPA and S.I.T.E. satellites, became focal points, followed by the Middle East, with its overall rapid advancement in use of new information technology.

The "country of the moment" seems to be Belize. For various reasons, this multi-ethnic, independent nation, sandwiched between Mexico and Guatemala, has drawn the attention of outside communication scholars. The coun-

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DR. JOHN A. LENT, president of Third World Media Associates, has been a scholar of Third World mass communications for about 25 years. During that time he has concentrated on Asian and Caribbean countries. He has written or edited thirty books and monographs and has published over 240 journal articles throughout the world. Dr. Lent is a professor of communications at Temple University, where he won the distinguished research award in 1980. Address: Dr. John A. Lent, Third World Media Associates, 669 Ferne Blvd., Drexel Hill, PA., 19026, U.S.A.



try offers some interesting situations concerning mass communications. First, television was introduced chaotically by private entrepreneurs who pirated via satellite. Second, Belizeans are exposed to programs from stations in two different cultures, those of the United States and Mexico. Third, the medium's development began without a national television service in operation, and even today, without even one per cent local programming. Fourth, Belize was rather backward in mass communications before television, having one radio service and a handful of weekly newspapers.

#### PRESS AND RADIO

From the beginning, mass media in British Honduras (former name of Belize) were dependent upon outsiders. For example, in the 1820s, when settlers reacted in print to an ex-superintendent of the British settlement (who had called it the "most detestable spot on the face of the globe"), their protest, which became the first printed material, had to be sent to Jamaica to be set in type. By December 1825, the magistrates ordered that a "printing apparatus" be obtained, and the following March, The Honduras Almanack... appeared. Its printer, James Cruikshank, also brought out a weekly newspaper, The Honduras Gazette and Commercial Advertiser, on July 1, 1826. The first 38 issues were edited by the magistrates; for the next eight months, the printer edited the paper until "intemperance" (in his outspokenness) forced him to turn it over to the Legislative Assembly committee (Cave, 1974-75:3).

Cave (1974-75:8-11) found 18 other nineteenth century newspapers in British Honduras, including The Colonist, published in 1864 by the Colonist Office; The Central American Telegraph and The Times of Central America, both intended for regional audiences and both short-lived, and The Clarion, started in 1879 as a weekly and converted to a daily in 1935, its frequency at its demise in 1961. Most of the newspapers lasted a year or two. The chief reason for their brief stays related to the smallness of Belize City, whose population hovered between 4,000 and 9,000 throughout the century (Leslie, 1978).

Most newspapers contained mainly advertisements and

descriptions of social events among the colonialists, but the Colonial Guardian, published 1882-1913 by Frederick Gahne, had definite political views in its weekly editorials (Dobson, 1973:326).

In more recent times, a significant newspaper was The Belize Billboard, started in 1946, and used as an important organ of the labor movement and the opposition National Independence Party. Now Labor Minister Philip Goldson, who was Billboard managing editor in its early days, described how he ran into difficulties with the colonial government in 1951, when he wrote a story suggesting two ways to self government - through evolution or revolution. The British government, assuming he favored the latter, jailed him and News Editor Leigh Richardson for eight months on sedition charges. Goldson said that the dice were loaded against them by a jury hand-picked by the government. While in jail, Richardson wrote articles on toilet paper, which Goldson smuggled out to his brother who was editing the paper during his absence ("Personality of the Month," Belize Today, April 1987:10,16).

With the intensification of the drive towards independence, other outspoken newspapers incurred the wrath of the authorities or mobs. For example, The Sentinel in 1978 unleashed what one source called a "vicious and vulgar attack" upon various public and private figures. The governor was called the "asshole (later modified to "ass") of the month," after which he ordered the arrest of the editors. Rumors at the time had it that The Sentinel attack was done with the backing of the Belizean government which was upset with Britain's handling of the colony (Belizean Review, 1978). At the time of independence, Belize Times' plant was destroyed by fire, which the paper's present editor suspected was done by parties opposed to independence (Interview, Mai).

Belizean newspapers, for the most part, serve political purposes. The Belize Times, started in 1959, has been serving the People's United Party, and Beacon, Amandala and The Reporter, to varying degrees, support the ruling United Democratic Party. The leanings of The Voice, owned by two previous ministers in the PUP government, are not quite clear.

All (except The Voice) are weeklies, claiming circulations of 3,500 to 5,000 and distributed nationally. As in the case in other small territories of the Caribbean, they suffer problems of lack of staff[1], adequate equipment and supplies and advertising revenue. The Times editor voiced an objection heard of opposition newspapers elsewhere - that supplies, advertising and news and information, all tied to government, are denied (Interview, Mai).

Radio broadcasting started in 1937 with a 200-watt telecommunications transmitter modified for part time broadcasting use. One source said ZIK2 (the station's call signal) was not "even a station, just transmitting around Belize City"(Interview, York). A British grant almost 15 years later provided equipment and seconded personnel from the BBC, enabling the development of British Honduras Broadcasting (New Commonwealth, May 26, 1952:530, and January 19, 1953:88).

A number of things happened in the early 1960s to change the status of broadcasting. In 1961, after Hurricane Hattie destroyed much of the facility, new equipment was obtained, and by the following year, local staff had replaced most foreigners. In 1963, the station was removed from the Information Services and given autonomous status with its own chief broadcasting officer, and the following year, Radio Belize, as it was then known, became semi-commercial. In 1965, schools broadcasting began the the initiative of William Faux (Interview, Faux).

Describing radio in the mid-1970s, Faux said it was an AM-only service, broadcasting a large amount of imported programming from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily. He added that it was regulated by advisory council under the Ministry of Broadcasting, Information and Health, with no specific broadcasting laws. The council, made up of non-broadcasting professionals, had been set up in 1971 to advise on programs. The most popular programming in 1976, according to Faux, was Western pop music, with some reggae and calypso. Because of affordability of radio receivers and the availability of a number of signals (BBC, VOÅ, stations from Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras), nearly everyone listened to the medium. Faux said the problems at that time related

to the need for an emergency energy supply and staff training and expansion. Radio Belize had a huge personnel turnover because of the limited budget (Bze\$200,000)[2] allocated by government (Interview, Faux).

At the time of independence in 1981, more expansion occurred with the introduction of FM, and in some areas, stereo. The FM service was funded by the European Development Fund and British Development Aid Programme. Of the Bze\$2 million cost of FM, the Belizean government put up Bze\$300,000; UNESCO and Cable and Wireless also helped. Simultaneously, the service was made into a national system with two new 10-KW transmitters (World Broadcasting News, April 1982:15).

Today known as Radio One, the station and its sister, Friends FM, are the only radio service in the country.[3] Radio One and Friends FM follow the 'guidelines of the law of the country concerning broadcasting,' i.e., the "General Orders for the Public Service, Belize 1982."

Programme Organizer Ed York said the strengths of being government owned are that the station has more access to officials (especially since the 1984 change of government) and does not have to depend on commercial revenue alone for its survival. However, he thought the weaknesses were more prominent, among which were lack of latitude in working conditions and dependence upon government-issued funds. York said:

We can't make final decisions on our own for the public good. We have to get permission and this hurts us internally in hiring employees. It affects the speed in which to pass information because of the bureaucracy involved. Having to depend on government-issued funds, we are not able to execute to the maximum our projects. Total funding is by government. All our advertising money goes to the government treasury, which redistributes to us (Interview, York).

Because of competition from television and videocassette recorders, Radio One has changed its policy to reflect local culture. Seventy-five per cent of all shows are local. Of the music, which makes up 30 per

cent of all programming, at least 60 per cent must be Central American and Caribbean. Other local shows are specially prepared by cultural associations representing the Mayas, Kekchi or Garifuna, and presented in those languages. Thirty per cent of all radio programs in Belize are Spanish, while most of the rest are in English. An in-house drama club produces radio plays.

Additionally, three major newscasts of one hour total duration (two of which are bilingual) and four summaries of five minutes each are provided. Other shows are of social interest, featuring various youth- or government-oriented agencies; two one-hour phone-in programs are aired - one an open microphone, the other an "ask-your-doctor" format.

Radio's main problems have not changed much over the past decade. York claimed the biggest difficulty is lack of resources, such as enough modern equipment and properly-trained personnel (Interview, York).

## TELEVISION

### History

Obviously, radio and newspaper development was not very advanced in the mid-1970s when Belizeans, living near the borders, erected large antennas to pick up Mexican or Guatemalan television. At the time, Belize itself was considered too small to justify investment in a television service by an entrepreneur or the colonial government. However, with the worldwide popularization of videocassette recorders and satellite television, the circumstances also changed for tiny Belize. The first move towards television resulted after an American, Robert Landis, introduced commercial video to the country in 1978. He sold VCRs to ten Belizeans and supplied them with tapes by mail from Miami. Within a few months, Giovanni Smith, a Belizean flight engineer based in Miami, provided improved VCRs and a local system of tape rentals and the boom was on. By Christmas 1979, VCRs had become a popular present among the wealthy. The video business had become lucrative enough that Smith returned to Belize to operate his Nibble and Co., Efrain Aguilar became a competitor in the rental business and the rental price of cas-

ettes was lowered by nearly one half (Krohn, 1981:16). However, Nibble and Aguilar depended upon contacts in the United States to tape and air freight cassettes to them, which was a slow and costly venture.

On December 23, 1980, television entered its second phase when local entrepreneurs Emory King and Nestor Vasquez introduced the first commercial earth station to Belize.[4] Through their Tropical Vision, King and Vasquez taped television shows transmitted from the United States via satellite and made copies for rental to VCR owners.

Describing his experience, King said:

Vasquez and I decided that with an earth station, we could have television 24 hours a day and we could make money. We researched companies and bought a Harris earth station. In October 1980, I went to Texas, bought the station and we set it up. The business went very, very well. We rented tapes for Bze\$4 a night, and in ten months were making Bze\$10,000 gross income per month. There were enough VCRs to support all three companies very well (Interview, King).

Neither King nor his partner admit that what they were doing was piracy. King said he was "completely innocent" and believed satellite-fed television was a "good service of the United States to provide American views to the region." He added:

In 1980, I wrote a letter to every channel that was on the satellite we were using, such as WTBS, HBO, WGN, ESPN, Cinemax, Showtime, etc. I said, 'Look, we bought this earth station, and we are renting tapes to the public that we do of your shows. And we want to know what your royalty is.' I received two responses only, both saying they could not charge anything because of an international treaty, which the US is a signatory to, that allows each government to put up a satellite for its own domestic service, but which it cannot sell beyond its national borders (Interview, King).

Vasquez likened satellite reception to receiving a "foreign station on radio, getting it from our backyard" (Interview, Vasquez).

The third stage involved over-the-air broadcasting of television signals. Tropical Vision, within a month of establishing an earth station, applied for a license to telecast, but was repeatedly turned down, as was Nibble and Co. Yet, in the summer of 1981, Arthur Hoare erected a second earth station, established his Coordinated Electronics Ltd. and re-broadcast satellite programs live to 24 individuals who paid him US\$2,000 each for a special decoding antenna to receive the signal. Coordinated operated without a license, mandatory by the Belize Telecommunication Authority (BTA) Ordinance of 1972. A number of reasons were postulated on why Hoare was not stopped. First, he had friends in government who allowed the illegal activity; included among those was his wife, a top official in a PUP division (Interview, Vasquez). Other reasons were attributed to bureaucratic inefficiency, especially at that hectic period of Belizean independence; uncertainty of officials as to whether satellite transmission fell within Belizean broadcast law, and government apathy to a situation that initially only involved a small number of rich Belizeans (Krohn, 1981:19).

But, the limited audience changed when a local technician found a way to tune into Hoare's signals free of charge and thus complicated matters for the government. Vasquez said of the government's reaction to the large audience for over-the-air, illegal television:

Not wanting a head-on confrontation with the public that quickly grew used to the television Hoare started, the government closed its eyes to the illegal activity, which killed our cassette rentals. At the time, I said to King that we would broadcast too without a license. King refused, saying he was a friend of government, and sold his Tropical Vision shares to me. I knew the government could not close Tropical Vision because it would have to close Hoare as well. He was pro-government (Interview, Vasquez).

Vasquez brought in transmitters and converted his operation into Channel 7, and was followed by others. King said broadcasting stations "sprung up like mushrooms once they knew Hoare got away with it" (Interview, King). Despite the establishment of the Belize Broadcasting Authority (BBA) and a broadcasting act in 1983, on-the-air television and cable stations were set

up without government permission. Not until late 1986 did BBA license nine television stations (two each in Belize City and Orange Walk, and one each in Corozal, Punta Gorda, Belmopan, San Ignacio and Stann Creek) (Interview, Ewing).

The proliferation of television definitely placed Prime Minister George Price and his government in a delicate situation. Price was noted for not adopting Western paraphernalia of modernity without looking at dependency relationships that inevitably result. He feared that United States television, with its portrayal of first class lifestyles, posed a threat to his party's 30-year domination in Belize. However, his government also was concerned about the people monitoring television from Guatemala, considered an enemy that telecast propaganda to Belize. Thus, he favored one national television system, organized along public lines, that would not sap many national resources in an agriculture-based economy that was in some trouble, nor bring in as many outside programs as numerous stations would. He was hamstrung because the first illegal on-air television was owned by Hoare, whose wife was a leading politician in his party, and because television had become so popular that to rein it in was tantamount to political suicide (Lapper, 1984:16).

The opposition, United Democratic Party, supporting the United States and big business interests, exploited the situation, identifying with television entrepreneurs who favored multiple stations. In November 1982, a government bill to legalize just one station was soundly defeated in Parliament, when seven of twelve deputies defected to the opposition UDP for the vote (Barry, 1984:18).

Within two years, the situation in Belize changed considerably. The national elections of 1984 witnessed the first change of government in 30 years, bringing in Manuel Esquivel. As a result, the "small is beautiful" thinking of Price was abandoned in favor of a free market philosophy with the aim of attracting outside investment. Esquivel's right-of-center government is pro-Western in politics and very friendly with the United States.



Although legislation was enacted in 1983 to bring some order to cable and television, over three years lapsed before anything was done. King believed the government inaction from 1980 onwards was because no one had ever defied the authorities as blatantly as Hoare and others had. As a result, he said the government, dithered, wrung its hands and made admonitory statements, saying the public be advised that it is illegal to broadcast television shows like this. When the law was established in 1982-83, it was too late to do anything about the chaotic situation (Interview, King).

By 1987 the number of earth stations pirating United States television had reached at least 12. In a country with 166,000 people, with a per capita income of US\$977 and only one city a population over 10,000, at least nine licensed television stations and probably nine[5] cable companies function. Belize City, the largest with 50,000 people, has two television and four cable services; other towns with television - some with populations as low as 1,500, and none exceeding 7,000 - are Belmopan (the capital), San Ignacio, Orange Walk, San Pedro, Corozal, Dangriga and Punta Gorda. Placentia and Caye Caulker are expected to receive service as well. As King said, "we'll have more television here than in the whole of Britain" (Interview, King).

A recent estimate claimed 14,000 to 15,000 television receivers and 2,500 VCRs in Belize. Only the United States, Canada, Panama and Venezuela in the Western Hemisphere have more widespread use of VCRs than Belize, where there is one machine for every 14.8 people. Fifty per cent of all households and eighty per cent of all household electricity consumers have television sets. One television exists for every 10.8 Belizeans (Petch, 1987:12-13).

Television and cable companies survive in this cut-throat arena because they have no production costs and very little overhead. Vasquez said of his Channel 7:

I take from the satellite. I don't pay as they don't charge and don't scramble. If I had to, I'd pay on the rate of a small, poor country. There is not much complaint from the United States on copyright infringement. It doesn't mean much to them - a drop in

the bucket. I use network shows as the networks don't scramble and they have the best shows (Interview, Vasquez).

Cable companies charge customers an installation fee of about Bze\$150 to Bze\$250 and a monthly service rate of Bze\$20 to Bze\$30. Broadcasters sell advertising, in addition to other means of gaining revenue. Channel 7 charges Bze\$12 per 30-second spot, which Vasquez said was a low rate, that to be financially successful he would have to get all Belizeans "drunk and fat from drinking Beliken (a local beer which is one of his clients)" (Interview, Vasquez). Thus, hundreds of spots, some merely card announcements, are used daily. Monitoring Channel 7 for one 25-minute, prime-time period in May 1987, it was found that at least 16 commercials interrupted programming without any seeming interval schedule.[6]

Also, broadcasters canvas door to door for donations, while others sell their television program schedules for Bze\$5. One enterprising Corozal broadcaster numbers the guides and monthly has a lottery, offering a television set or case of liquor to the holder of the guide with the winning number (Interview, King).

### Governance

After much opposition and many amendments, the "Broadcasting and Television Act" was passed in July 1983. It included stipulations dealing with station licensing and operation. Stations seek licenses by applying to BBA, which, in turn, submits applications to the minister of communications, who has the final authority on the issuance of a license and its duration. The minister, in consultation with BBA, may regulate advertising, matters of religious, political or industrial controversy and the "ensuring of the preservation of due impartiality in programmes relating to such matters," and educational, cultural, sporting or scientific matters. Licensees must certify yearly that they are complying with the regulations. Violators of licensing requirements can be fined Bze\$5,000 or imprisoned for 12 months, or both ("Broadcasting and Television Act 1983").

When the broadcast authority finally licensed sta-

tions in 1986, it issued a mimeographed sheet on "Conditions of Licence," which gave more specific guidelines. Television stations are required to log all commercials, not use more than one fourth of their time for advertising and notify the BBA three days in advance ("or as soon as possible") when program changes are anticipated. Additionally, each station must present local news in conjunction with international, provide at least three education programs weekly and one per cent of all time for local shows (other than news and commercials). "R" rated shows can be shown after midnight and "X" rated are prohibited "on air." Cable operators are required to seek all permission from the competent authorities to use their facilities ("Conditions of Licence"). A second sheet, almost as an afterthought, specified that programs should be of high quality and not in violation of Belizean law or defamation, obscenity, privacy, respect for the rule of law, or due process of law. Nothing can be telecast that is detrimental to national defense, security, public safety, public order, public morality or public health, or discriminatory on the grounds of sex, race, place of origin, political opinion, color or creed.

The 1983 act created the Belize Broadcasting Authority, designed to advise the minister on licensing matters, maintain radio-TV services, supervise proper maintenance of equipment and monitor stations concerning license requirements. BBA can determine the hours of broadcast, conditions for the use of advertising and types of programs. Agnes Ewing, BBA secretary, said the board has been effective, especially in collecting the license fees of Bze\$4,000 for Belize City stations and Bze\$2,000 for other districts. She said board members planned to make stricter laws, including the licensing of cable operators (Interview, Ewing).

The seven-member board is appointed for renewable one-year terms by the minister of communications. One member is the permanent secretary to the minister responsible for broadcasting, while two represent the television industry.

Vasquez, one of the industry representatives, who also chairs Belize Telecommunication Authority (BTA), said BBA's job is to manage all national and interna-

tional broadcasting services in Belize, while the minister of communications, since March 1987, has been in charge of administering all types of frequency allocations (including broadcasting), and the BTA handles all domestic and international telephony. (Interview, Vasquez).

As of January 1988, BTA ceased to exist as Belize Telecommunications Ltd. (BTL), a private company whose shares initially are held by government, took over its duties. The BTL manager-designate for international services, Ernesto Torres, gave the thinking behind the changeover:

BTA now is a statutory board and as such it cannot be run as efficiently as BTL will be. As a statutory board, BTA was not free to act as a private group. The new company will work on a commercial basis in the hope its efficiency and revenue drawing capacity will be enhanced (Interview, Torres).

BTL will be heavily committed to the modernization of telecommunications services, including a US\$10 million program to establish digital exchanges throughout the country. Torres said digitalization should be advantageous to the economy as a whole, which is heavily dependent upon exports, and to individual businessmen (Interview, Torres).

### Programming

As already indicated, Belizean television stations use dishes to intercept satellite-relayed programs, mainly from the United States, and to retransmit them either over the air or via cable systems. As a result, local programming is nearly non-existent.

The stations present a five-minute, local "talking head" news show daily, supplied by the Curriculum Development Unit of the government. The unit was able to enter production after receiving a gift of Bze\$50,000 in equipment from the Japanese government (Interview, Krohn). One Belize City channel claims to air agriculture shows, government press conferences or national sporting events, but these are on very rare occasions.

The BBA requirement that one per cent of programming be locally produced has not been enforced; in fact, the government seems to be taking the same posture it did on illegal broadcasting - turning its head on the matter. In 1987, the deputy minister in charge of television actually said the one per cent figure was very high,

if one looks at the amount of hours we transmit during a twenty-four hour period. Unfortunately at the moment we have no production unit in the country which could produce particularly news items or programmes that could be aired countrywide (Belize Today, April 1987:13).

He added that the government planned to create a miniature television unit to produce national programs, but until then one could not expect local shows.

Conveniently, he ignored the existence of Belizean production units with supplies of shows. One such unit, Great Belize Productions, started in 1982 by Emory King when he sold his Tropical Vision shares, and by Stewart Krohn, has produced mainly promotional documentaries for tourist agencies and business investors. Educational films and commercials have been made, but the company relies for a large amount of revenue on feature film management, carried out for foreign producers shooting on location in Belize. Krohn said the "very strange system" of free television via satellite was "very stacked against local television production," adding:

When broadcasters get all their programming free from satellite, there is absolutely no incentive to do local programs. The situation will not change. We thought it would with the BBA one per cent ruling, but the government has gone on record that it will not enforce the rule (Interview, Krohn).

Krohn said that in August 1986, immediately after the rule was created, he wrote to all broadcasters, informing them that from the existing stock of Great Belize, there were enough programs to meet the one per cent ruling for three months. "If all 11 or 12 broadcasters paid the Bze\$950 for the package of 19 shows available (ranging from 20 minutes to one hour), we'd be in business," he said. But that did not happen and only one broadcaster responded "non-negatively." In a

May 1987 letter to the Minister of Home Affairs, Krohn reacted to the above-cited deputy minister's remarks, calling them "both false and detrimental to the development of a viable system of local programming," and claiming broadcasters had become accustomed to borrowing as they know the ministry will not enforce the law (Krohn letter to Curl Thompson, May 28, 1987).

Great Belize Productions continues to make programs with the hope that local broadcasters will eventually buy them. A magazine show, designed along the lines of "60 Minutes," was produced in 1987. Called "Belize All Over," each of the 18 segments during the 1987-88 season was divided into culture, profiles and socio-economic issues; a new show was scheduled for every two weeks. Expecting it to be a "money loser," Krohn said it was produced to "fight the stupidity of the ministry." Great Belize also makes four commercials monthly for television (Interview, Krohn).

Radio One, already involved in television production, plans to increase its output. According to York, the government's broadcasting department has purchased television equipment, and with permission of BBA, will produce shows. Plans have also proceeded for a separate government television station (Interview, York).

The major difficulty of television production in Belize, according to Krohn, is purchasing and maintaining equipment. In 1982 King and Krohn expanded GBP by turning it into a company and sold stock to six additional stockholders. About Bze\$150,000 went to buy additional equipment. Often, equipment must be sent to Miami for repairs, the process taking as long as a month. A duty of 57 per cent on television equipment, coupled with insufficient advertising revenue, have been debilitating to producers. In fact, Krohn did not believe the demographics of Belize allow for local programming; he thought the solution rests with regional efforts (Interview, Krohn). Regional programming, on the other hand, is difficult to mount because it requires outside funding, either from the United States, which under Reagan is more inclined to binational, rather than regional, agreements, or from supranational agencies.

## Impact

A number of impacts have been suggested regarding the onslaught of United States television in Belize. Most are based on anecdotal or impressionistic evidence, but, unlike in most countries, some are backed by scientific research.

Early on, warnings about television were sounded. For example, Krohn, in an article in Breakdown, a local magazine, predicted in 1979 that the programs would be United States re-runs and that some necessities of life would be given lower priorities as limited financial resources went into television receivers. Krohn thought the prime beneficiaries would be those with the motivation and resources to purchase time and produce their own shows, "those same wonderful folks who presently bring us Back to the Bible, Hour of Decision, and Showers of Blessing" (Krohn, 1979:11).

Lamenting the "far more important social costs," he foresaw what Belizeans now experience, virtually empty streets at night and a diminishment of social chatter. He wrote that Belize was,

a place where strangers greeted each other on the street; where children grew up spinning tops, flying kites and shooting marbles, not heroin, and that their parents could walk anywhere at any time without fear...[in Belize, these qualities] survive despite the rapid-fire onslaught of Bruce Lee, Doña Summer, Night Train Express and disco dancing contests. Television, however, might just be the straw that broke Belize's back (Krohn, 1979:13).

That the debate still flourishes is evidenced by a 1987 commencement address by the Belizean Roman Catholic bishop, who accused the "lifeless one-eyed monster situated in our living rooms" of "incredible manipulation" of minds. He hit upon an impact other Belizeans are concerned about:

In Belize, we are quickly losing our identity, self-respect and our capacity for self-determination. We are brainwashed to such an extent that we are beginning to think, speak, and act as though everything Belizean is no good (Belize Times, June 14, 1987:8).

No doubt Belizeans have absorbed parts of the United States way of life. American products, sports, fashions and slang have become popular. Football and baseball compete strongly with sports such as soccer or cricket that the British left behind. For example, Belize has a mania for the Chicago Cubs, whose baseball games are telecast by Channel 9. Bumper stickers with "WGN-Cubs" adorn automobiles, fans display "Belizeans Love Cubs" at games and Cubs players and coaches have gone to Belize to donate baseball equipment, operate clinics and start Little League.

Some Belizeans, Vasquez and King prominent among them, see the absorption of United States lifestyles via television as beneficial propaganda. Vasquez said showing the United States way of life fights communism (Interview, Vasquez), while King thought Americans would be "crazy to enforce anti-piracy laws." He added:

The United States is getting its point of view across to the Third World with Reagan and John Wayne on the television sets. In fact, Latin Americans are upset as hell about this, saying TV is creating desires for things we can't afford and selling us U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. Congress would be wise to provide taxpayer money to film companies as royalty to keep pushing this type of TV fare out to the world (Interview, King).

Specifically, United States television viewing has been associated with changes in Belizean politics and elections. King, claiming Belizean politicians are adopting United States views on foreign policy, quoted a "leftist" as saying the medium not only brainwashes the public, but also officials, who see "Reagan doing things on TV and they want to do them also" (Interview, King). Vasquez believed the 1984 elections went against the incumbent government because of television. According to him,

television broadcasting helped Belize tremendously. For years, the PUP government had a complete monopoly of the airwaves with Radio Belize dishing out government propaganda. Then people saw television and saw that it was okay to criticize the government. In the world news we gave them daily, they saw democratic systems working in other places. Then in 1984, both parties used television for campaigning.



Hoare and I did what we could for the parties we supported. Television drew the people away from Radio Belize; as more preferred TV, no one was listening to radio. A different mentality was at work and we changed the government for the first time in 30 years, peacefully, without one drop of blood shed. This is a big accomplishment (Interview, Vasquez).

Different views have also been expressed on the impact of television viewing upon consumer habits. In the only scientific study on the subject, Oliveira (1986) compared viewing and purchasing habits of Belizeans living in the Corozal district, who have available daily 18 hours of Mexican and 19 hours of United States television. Although he seemed hesitant in his conclusions, Oliveira said exposure to United States television was positively associated with United States product preference, and Mexican viewing with Central American product preference. He concluded that his findings "provide grounds for the view that U.S. programming encourages consumption of U.S. products, and at the same time discourages the use of Third World-made items" (Oliveira, 1986:142). In reporting his results elsewhere, Oliveira [sic] (1986:46-47) linked traditionalism with Mexican, but not United States, television viewing.

King said Belizean dress codes have changed because of television; for example, young people prefer jeans and at high school graduations, tuxedos and corsages, seen on United States television shows, are in vogue for the first time. However, King explained:

We have always been pro-American, but, for many years, American television has certainly reinforced this. Thousands upon thousands of Belizeans live the the U.S. and send back TVs, VCRs, shoes, etc. Eventually, local stores start importing them as the demand increases (Interview, King).

Agnes Ewing of the BBA agreed that Belizeans have changed their buying patterns because of television. She said:

You see something on television today, and within weeks, it is in the local stores and people buy it at four or five times its original price. TV is making people buy things they cannot afford. Belize has

fresh fruits and other local products but our markets are importing stuff we don't need and should not import (Interview, Ewing).

Others in the Caribbean have labeled purchasing via television the "1-800-Syndrome."

Vasquez did not agree that cultural and consumer values change mainly because of television. He contended that it is inevitable that seeing U.S. products will whet the public's appetite for them, but it would have happened without television because merchants work at promoting these goods. He said those who claim U.S. television has that impact are "anti-American" (Interview, Vasquez).

Roser et al (1986), attempting to correlate United States television viewing with emigration patterns, concluded that of 54 per cent of those willing to emigrate, 86 per cent chose the United States as a new location. They said United States entertainment programs did not seem to act as a pull for emigration, but,

While news media are not as strongly related to desire to emigrate as is interpersonal communication, those who watch U.S. news broadcasts are more likely to want to emigrate (Roser et al, 1986:23) [7].

Other changes in Belizean lifestyles are said to have occurred since television - lower achievements of school children, different eating and sleeping habits and more relaxed moral standards. A teacher member of BBA reported that students' grades have dropped in the past few years, and Ewing said:

Definitely there are fewer people on the streets at night. People used to go to the movies or out to chat, but when TV came in, they stayed home rather than risk being robbed on the street (Interview, Ewing).

A direct impact of television upon eating habits was related by King. Apparently when "Santa Barbara" was being shown by Channel 7, irate husbands complained to the station that they could not get their lunches as their wives were immersed in the soap opera. As a result, Channel 7 taped the show and aired it at 1:30

p.m. (Interview, King).

Shows featuring nudity and obscenity that appear on cable at all hours and on broadcast stations later at night, have been criticized as having unhealthy effects upon the audience. However, the BBA has not yet taken a firm stand on the issue.

Audience pull of television seriously hurt other media, such as radio and movie theaters. York stated that Radio One drastically altered its format and style because of VCR and television viewing:

VCRs had a lot of impact on radio listening, causing us to change our programming somewhat. We did it not just to compete with TV, but also to go on our own and get as much local input in programming as possible. When TV was a novelty - when VCRs brought in TV, our listening plummeted. It is surging upward now because of the 60 per cent Caribbean music and local program emphasis. Instead of ranting and raving about VCRs and television, we in radio changed our programming, realizing that TV was here to stay (Interview, York).

The few movie theaters in Belize have felt television's effects. Of four Belize City theaters, two have closed and one has been converted into a video palace with a 20-foot screen, on which satellite-gathered movies, sports and other fare are shown. Theaters have also folded in San Ignacio and Dangriga, while the Corozal cinema opens only on weekends.

Apparently, local newspaper sales have not changed. Times editor Amalia Mai attributed this to the nearly non-existent local fare on television. She said:

TV only has five minutes of government-represented news. So it does not affect readers who just see U.S. television. Belizeans will always want to read about Belize so they turn to newspapers. Radio is government propoganda repeated over and over every 24 hours (Interview, Mai).

#### CONCLUSION

Belize represents to a heightened degree a new nation that adopted television without first establishing a national policy concerning the medium. Actually,

not even basic guidelines were set. The result has been that television has sprouted everywhere in Belize, yet nowhere is there a service that can be called Belizean. Virtually all programming is imported - perhaps more appropriately, stolen via satellite - with possible consequences to politics, elections, lifestyles, leisure time and consumerism.

What started out as simply renting cassettes to a few wealthy Belizeans has been magnified to a complex, problem-riddled situation that befuddles the government and others involved with television. With viewers devoted to United States shows and broadcasters and cable operators accustomed to free programming, efforts to present local fare meet with lackadaisical attitudes. Governmental reforms are not expected to be very remedial. The momentum of television development may be such that to return to a stage where national betterment changes can be made is no longer possible.

## NOTES

1. For example, the Times has an editor, typist, compositor, lithographer and a manager.
2. Bze\$1 is equivalent to 50 cents US.
3. British Forces Radio broadcasts as an internal system, although there is a great spillover into Belize City.
4. Cable and Wireless previously used an earth station strictly for telephone transmissions.
5. Not licensed. Vasquez said there were nine cable companies; King listed three. Nine is more likely as Vasquez is still very active in the industry and thus a more reliable source.
6. Monitored by author.
7. Perhaps more useful results of their study were the data on media preferences. Of teen-agers (15 years old was the average age) in the sample, 96 per cent had been exposed to Belizean newspapers, 39 per cent to United States; 98 per cent to Belizean

radio, 7 per cent to U.S. and 10 per cent to other; 68 per cent to U.S. television, 10 per cent to Mexican, 13 per cent Guatemalan, 5 per cent Honduran. They also found that 95 per cent of the houses have radio receivers. Sixty per cent of the teen-agers preferred soul and disco music, 14 per cent reggae and calypso, 13 per cent rock and 10 per cent Country and Western (Roser et al, 1986).

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Mai, Amalia, editor, Belize Times, Belize City, Belize, May 29, 1987.

Torres, Ernesto, manager designate, international services, Belize Telecommunication Authority, Belize City, Belize, May 29, 1987.

Vasquez, Nestor C. A., chairman, BTA, owner of Tropical Vision and Channel 7, Belize City, Belize, May 28, 1987.

York, Ed, programme organizer, Radio One, Belize City, Belize, May 29, 1987.

JAMES S. MURPHY, S.J.

COLONIALISM AND RESISTANCE IN BELIZE: ESSAYS IN HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY

By Dr. O Nigel Bolland

Published by Cubola Productions, Benque Viejo del Carmen, Belize; Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), University of the West Indies, Jamaica; Society for the Promotion of Education and Research (SPEAR), Belize City, Belize.

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Nigel Bolland's Colonialism and Resistance in Belize: Essays in Historical Sociology is about two important realities from our past: slavery and colonialism. Early in his work, Dr. Bolland adopts dialectical theory, arguing that it constitutes the most useful framework for studying Caribbean social history. The methodological problems he alludes to are considerable; furthermore, reaching consensus on its use as an appropriate methodological tool is going to be difficult.

The important question introducing the book's second chapter is: what constitutes the beginnings of a genuine Belizean history? Or, where do we start? The Maya?

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FR. JAMES S. MURPHY, S.J. graduated from St. John's College in 1971 and entered the Jesuit order a year later. He studied at St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. from 1973 to 1978 and again in 1981-1983, completing an undergraduate degree in Philosophy and an M.A. in Political Science.

Between 1978 and 1981 Fr. Murphy served on the faculty of St. John's College, teaching Political Science in 6th Form and Religion and Social Studies in the high school. He left Belize in 1981 and completed his theological education for ordination to the priesthood at Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A. He rejoined the St. John's College 6th Form faculty for the 1988-89 school year.

British buccaneers? The Baymen? African slaves? The Garifuna? The Mestizo? Where, or when, does an authentic Belizean consciousness start, and with whom? Obviously answers to these kinds of questions have depended on who has done the writing of history.

Even if recent historical investigation has pointed to the apologetical nature of the writings of earlier historians, we are still left with the fact that many people in this country still hold to the notions of slaves' "devotion" and "zeal" for their masters, and of the "humanity," "egalitarianism," and "affection" of masters for slaves. The challenge remains to communicate, in a convincing and yet non-threatening manner, the essentially mythical nature of much of what was earlier handed to us as Belizean history.

Dr. Bolland points out that there have been two approaches to the study of slavery: one legal/cultural, the other economic. Eric Williams, who best articulated the latter, argued that "even the success of the abolitionist movement was more a result of changed economic conditions than of humanitarianism." (p. 79) Studies based on legal structures have tended to overlook what Dr. Bolland calls the "importance of informed customary behaviour," including the resistance of the slaves to their dehumanizing condition.

The book challenges the views that in the process of colonization, the British did not displace the indigenous Maya, and that those "few" Maya who were encountered by the British chose the "mild rule" of the British. It moves into a fascinating discussion of the incorporation of the alcalde system into the colonial administration, and then takes up the various forms of labour control that existed in Belize following the abolition of slavery in 1834 and the abolition of the apprenticeship system in 1838.

The argument here is that it is a mistake to see in these developments movement from bondage to freedom for the slaves. Rather they signaled a "transition from one system of domination to another, each involving distinct forms of labour control and patterns of labour resistance." (p. 256) As the legal status of the slaves changed in 1834, new forms of coercion evolved, prompt-



ing new forms of struggle for freedom. The need for control of labour and land by the landowners in Belize and elsewhere in the British West Indies was not, and could not, be changed by changes in law in 1834 or 1838. The author points out that "Such monopolistic control of land and labour was primarily a function of social and political factors..." (p. 257) reminding readers that "A century after the legal abolition of slavery a wave of labour unrest ushered in the modern era of class struggle in the Caribbean and the dialectics of labour control and resistance changed their form yet again." (p. 257) And so in Belize we had Antonio Soberanis and the Unemployed Brigade, and, in 1943, abolition of the penal sanctions of the 1883 Masters and Servants Ordinance. So much for freedom in 1834.

Colonialism and Resistance in Belize traces the struggle of the labour movement in Belize through the birth of the nationalist movement in the 1950s. Citing riots and other forms of protest, the implication is that constitutional and legal changes failed to produce genuine freedom for workers. It argues for important links between labour unrest in the 1930s and 1940s and the birth of the People's United Party, in the process playing down the role of the devaluation of the Belizean dollar in giving birth to modern Belizean politics.

Dr. Bolland applies to Belize the interesting contention of J. E. Greene, developed in his "Contemporary Politics in the English-Speaking Caribbean: Contradictions, Conflicts and Confusions," that the development of West Indian political parties resulted in the eventual absorption of labour unions by the emerging parties. The question here is: were the growing alliances between explicitly labour-focused movements and the emerging political parties primarily beneficial to the labour groups or to the emerging middle-class, political leaders? Dr. Bolland, in the case of Belize, opts for the latter. Interestingly, though, the book also points out that "Conditions of the working people everywhere were terrible - low wages, intermittent employment and spreading unemployment, atrocious housing, hunger and bad health, poor education or none at all, and an absence of the civil rights of suffrage and union organization," (p. 307) an agenda obviously

beyond the scope of an exclusively labour-focused movement to adequately address. It may well be the case that the leaders of the early nationalist movement utilized the organization of the labour movement to further the nationalist cause, but it may also be true that in doing so the political leaders believed they were furthering the interests of labour. Surely the expressed aims of the P.U.P. - better living and working conditions, industrial and agricultural development, universal adult suffrage and self-government - embodied working class interests.

Colonialism and Resistance in Belize ends by taking up several different issues in its final chapter. An important one concerns the relation between a colony's racial and ethnic groups as it moves into independence. One of three things may happen. The first, when one racial or ethnic group assumes power, in effect replacing the colonial power, he calls the "hegemonic mode of nationalism." The second option, called the "synthetic mode of nationalism," is characterized by the melting pot idea. That is, the post-independence rulers "seek legitimacy by articulating and promoting a synthetic national culture..." (p. 342) The slogans, "Out of Many, One People," in Jamaica, and "All o' we is one," in Trinidad & Tobago, express the idea.

The third option, pluralist nationalism, is the course Dr. Bolland somewhat tentatively predicts for Belize. This mode, he says, "legitimizes the co-existence and persistence of several racial and ethnic groups, and of 'hyphenated identities.' The pluralist mode is being institutionalized in Canada where there is a national commitment to bilingualism and a greater acceptance of the legitimacy of continuing ethnic identities than is the case in the United States." (p. 343) Adoption of either hegemonic or synthetic nationalism would be difficult in our case, pointing to the delicate and serious responsibility we all have in Belize to sustain our pluralist mode. This means not merely overcoming inherited racial and cultural prejudices, but nurturing all that is vibrant and beautiful in each.

It is interesting to note that while the dialectic - oppression/resistance - is maintained throughout the

book, the subject of the oppression, or at least the name given to the subject, changes. Whereas the concern in the early pages is powerfully and rightfully the slaves, by the middle pages it is working people or labouring class. And at the end it is all Belizeans whose attitudes and mind-sets reveal a lingering fear of freedom.

Without doubting the brutality experienced by black slaves in this country, there is a sense in which the experience of slavery enslaved all, just as today the legacy of the experiences of slavery and colonialism limits the freedom of us all. Thus, Colonialism and Resistance in Belize can conclude that Belize, and that's all of us, awaits national liberation.

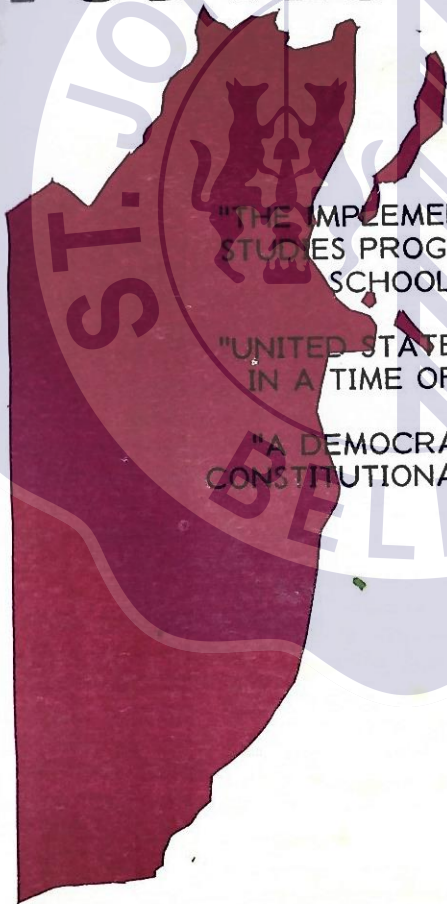
Powerful external forces exert pressure on us, from both the ideological right and the ideological left, and to the extent that we rely on either to legitimize our national aspirations and policies, we reveal our continuing fear of the freedom to take possession of our life and chart our own future as a nation. Taking possession of our life requires a willingness to honestly confront our past, in all its pleasant and unpleasant dimensions, in a process leading hopefully to a healthy and mature integration. Nigel Bolland's Colonialism and Resistance in Belize: Essays in Historical Sociology contributes to the process of collective integration. If this work sparks further open and honest dialogue and historical investigation of the many issues it raises, so much the better.

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"THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BELIZEAN  
STUDIES PROGRAMES IN SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS, 1964 - 1987"

"UNITED STATES - BELIZE RELATIONS  
IN A TIME OF TENSION: 1861 - 62"

"A DEMOCRACY TOO SOON: THE  
CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS 1923 - 25"





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## EDITORIAL

This issue of Belizean Studies presents a real assortment of research in fields as varied as education, history and constitutional development.

In "The Implementation of Belizean Studies Programmes in Secondary Schools, 1964-1987," Francis Humphreys traces the development of various approaches, and attempts to introduce a Belizean Studies programme into the Secondary School Curriculum. Humphreys points to factors such as the impact of government, various Belize-oriented publications, the decrease by Churches to open new schools and government, on the other hand, expanding in the building of secondary schools.

Having obtained our political independence in 1981, experimented with the two-party system in 1984, Belizeans must now come to grips with our identity. This study clearly indicates a pressing need to instill such programmes from the Ministry into schools so as to develop a deeper appreciation of things Belizean.

The "United States-Belize Relations in a Time of Tension: 1861-62" brings to light a little known incident about "when Belize and the United States may have been on the brink of armed conflict" some 130 years ago. What Richard Wilk has accomplished by having this article published is to make Belizean scholars aware of the documents which are available at the Archives Department in Belmopan. There are "Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Belize, 1847-1906," reports on schemes for mining gold to growing Agave in newspapers, gazettes and censuses. These accounts paint a livelier picture of what life must have been like in Belize City in bygone years.

Peter Ashdown is no stranger to Belize. His contribution, "A Democracy too Soon: The Constitutional Proposals 1923-25" is quite appropriate at this time in lieu of our recent experiments at the polls with democracy, the two-party system and constitutional amendments. The practice of democracy in early 20th century Belize was not as advanced as in other colonies, and the masses desired a "reestablishment of the elective principle in the constitution." Ashdown's paper provides insight and detail to the various moments in our constitutional development from the turn of the century to 1931, when a "Reconstruction Loan was made conditional on the Legislative Council voting the Administration 'reserve powers'."

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PETER ASHDOWN has done extensive research on Belize's history. His doctoral dissertation on modern Belizean history was done for the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.

FRANCIS HUMPHREYS has been lecturing in both Belizean and Caribbean history for at least 15 years. He taught at Pallotti High School for several years, and then went on to become Head of History at Stann Creek Ecumenical High School in Dangriga, Belize. Presently Mr. Humphreys teaches at St. John's College in Belize City. His research topics have included "The Battle of St. George's Caye: A New Analysis," an article published by Belizean Studies, and he has co-authored with Peter Ashdown Caribbean Revision History for CXC, a high school textbook published by Macmillan.

RICHARD WILK is an anthropologist and recently an assistant professor at New Mexico State University. He has done both archaeological and ethnographic research in Belize, working in both Orange Walk and Toledo Districts and living in Belize a total of five years. Presently he is in Belize on a Fulbright scholarship, researching consumer habits in Belize. Before coming to the country this year, Mr. Wilk was lecturing at the Anthropology department of Indiana University.

**"THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BELIZEANS STUDIES PROGRAMMES  
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS, 1964 - 1987"**

Since the attainment of self-government in 1964, and even more significantly after independence in 1981, nationalism has become a prominent feature of the Belizean experience. Belizean artists, poets, choreographers, sculptors, musicians and novelists have produced works richly expressive of the Belizean experience and ethnic complexity, while political independence remains the most obvious accomplishment of the earliest nationalist movement.

However, it is only in fairly recent times that Belizean Studies programmes, potentially powerful builders and preservers of this national outlook, are being implemented at the secondary level of the education system. This paper aims at identifying and evaluating the factors which affected the implementation of Belizean Studies programmes - or pure Belizean History - at the secondary level. Course content and administrative strategies that schools may employ to implement Belizean Studies courses will also be illustrated by reference to the programme of one rural secondary school.

In September of 1964 the UNESCO Educational Planning Mission to Belize urged that the small integrated educational system with limited resources must get "overall direction"



from the Ministry of Education.<sup>1</sup> The implementation of secondary level Belizean Studies programmes did not get "overall direction" from the Ministry of Education. From 1965 to 1969 one aim of Belize's educational system was "to diversify the curricula of secondary schools to meet more fully the varied needs, aptitudes and interests of the boys and girls who attend these schools."<sup>2</sup> The introduction of courses in national history, culture, geography, demography and government was not a part of that diversification strategy up to 1971<sup>3</sup>, and an increase in the sciences and vocational subjects, particularly at the Belize Technical College, was the only manifestation of changes in school curriculum. Up to 1970 the Ministry seemed satisfied that "all secondary schools, with the exception of the Junior Secondary Schools, prepared students for the General Certificate of Education Examinations."<sup>4</sup>

Despite a lack of direction from the Ministry, Muffles College in Orange Walk restructured its 1970-71 first year Social Studies programme to emphasize national history and environmental studies.<sup>5</sup> Further research may add flesh to this basic fact,<sup>6</sup> but it was the exception to the general rule that, for about a decade after the attainment of self-government, the Ministry provided minimal impetus to the implementation of secondary level courses in Belizean Studies.

By 1977 some of that impetus was exerted by Inez Sanchez, former Chief Education Officer. In a fervent address to teachers,<sup>7</sup> he condemned colonialism for having severed Belizeans from their historical and cultural heritage, thereby making them "cultural and mental slaves."<sup>8</sup> He asserted that "we need to teach national history from the Belizean point of view"<sup>9</sup> to find Belize's soul. Although these views were not statements of Ministry policy on secondary level Belizean Studies courses, they motivated the growing cadre of national secondary history teachers who could not "be encouraged by the soft-peddalling of nationalist policy in this field."<sup>10</sup> Those teachers were, and still are, the final instruments for the administration of Belizean Studies courses. Moreover, Sanchez remained a consistent advocate of the teaching of Belizean history at all levels of the educational system until his retirement earlier this year (1987).

Almost the same views as Sanchez's had been expressed in different terms three years earlier when the editors of

National Studies (now Belizean Studies) declared: "Belizean interest in our national history, archaeology and culture has been growing during the last few years. This has gone hand in hand with the growth of a national consciousness and is an excellent way to help establish our national identity."<sup>11</sup>

Two years after Sanchez's landmark address, former Curriculum Development Officer, Joseph Bennett, declared that "the decolonisation process must help to build pride in our country and what it holds for us. It must enable us to develop our own national philosophy of education...."<sup>12</sup> A national philosophy of education must include the principle that education should promote the forging of national unity and identity. The Belizean intelligentsia recognised the need for secondary courses in Belizean Studies to help forge a national identity and unity.<sup>13</sup>

However, recognition of the need should have been just the first step towards strong action to bring about widespread implementation of Belizean Studies programmes. Laudable though the pronouncements of Sanchez, Bennett and others may have been, in practice the very structure of the educational system tended to resist the implementation of secondary Belizean Studies programmes.

That resistance stemmed from the control factor in secondary schools. Up to 1976, the dual system of educational control by government and denominational authorities<sup>13</sup> may have contributed to the Ministry's reluctance to assume "overall direction" of the education system and the consequent slow implementation of secondary courses in Belizean Studies. In spite of rising Belizean nationalism during the decade after 1964, religious influence on education was manifested in the ideological (pro-west) outlook of Belize, the conservative outlook of politicians - a possible reason why, up to 1976, the Ministry "soft-pedalled" the implementation of Belizean Studies in secondary schools - emphasis of cultural and racial differences along denominational lines, and "multiple external orientation"<sup>14</sup> of the country rather than introspection.

Some of these manifestations encouraged the implementation of courses in Belizean Studies. The Ministry's consistent support for - and reliance on - the church-state system was a barrier to the clear definition and enforcement of ministerial policy on Belizean Studies courses. The religious and foreign orientation inherent in denominational secondary schools

resisted incorporation of Belizean Studies into the curricula so that, up to 1974, nationalist sentiment got scant expression in secondary education.<sup>15</sup> At that time 'Belizeanization' had only recently commenced in secondary schools, and "its pace was more likely to be dictated by religious considerations than the availability of qualified nationals...."<sup>16</sup>

Even the UNESCO Report of 1964 followed the earlier Easter and Dixon Reports<sup>17</sup> of the colonial era in criticising the church-state education system, which was the major barrier to any attempt at giving the Ministry "overall direction" of the education system. Though the Ministry could encourage and urge curriculum reform to make room for Belizean Studies, it could not dictate such policy. Impetus for curriculum reform came indirectly from the Ministry - by way of strong statements such as Sanchez's 1977 address, and the assistance given to Dobson for the production of A History of Belize - and other interested agencies or individuals, such as the short-lived Belize History Teachers Association.

The latter Association was formed by representatives from nine secondary schools on 22 October 1977, during the course of a meeting held at the Bliss Institute in response to a request by former Chief Education Officer, William Fonseca.<sup>18</sup> Two lectures on Belizean history were delivered by Leo Bradley and Dr. Peter Ashdown. John Maher, S.J., originated the idea of collecting past articles from Belizean Studies into one volume as a reference for Belizean Studies courses.<sup>19</sup> With unqualified support of the Association, Father Maher's idea became Readings in Belizean History, Volume I, which was used as a student text in at least one secondary school, Pallotti High School, up to 1980.<sup>\*\*</sup> Sanchez gave logistical support to the Association in terms of stationery and access to the Curriculum Development Unit for the mimeographing of Caribbean history theme papers prepared on behalf of the Association by some members.<sup>20</sup> In May, 1979, the Association ceased to function.

By that time, scholarly publications had stimulated even more interest in Belizean history by providing for the fruits of current research. In 1979, Father Richard Buhler, S.J., argued in Breakdown Magazine<sup>21</sup> that, over the years, many myths about national history had developed and passed into popular lore as fact. Some of these were deliberate attempts to use history as a means of controlling people, a situation that needed correction through accurate, modern scholarship

if history was to be a tool in national consciousness building. This was precisely that National Studies aimed to accomplish when it commenced in 1973 "to make available to the people of Belize...the facts of our history, culture and economic and social situation that are necessary to continue the process of building a national identity...."<sup>22</sup> National Studies became Belizean Studies in March, 1976, and until now has remained faithful to its original aim.

From 1973 to 1979 the Journal of Belizean Affairs likewise published several monographs on Belizean history, culture and economic and social life. Its demise, along with that of the BELCAST Journal of Belizean Affairs, was no small loss to Belizean Studies. This loss is somewhat mitigated by the relative glut of Belizean history texts that have appeared during the period in review.<sup>23</sup>

This increasing collection of printed information about all aspects of Belizean Studies prompts three observations: firstly, the flaws in Dobson's History,<sup>24</sup> the most widely used and only volume suitable for use as a student text in secondary schools, could be corrected by teacher reference to the wealth of information contained in the journals mentioned above and in the bibliography. Successful administration of Belizean Studies programmes depends heavily on the school's acquisition of all those references to create a functional research centre of the type already established at St. John's College.

Secondly, the vacuum created by the demise of the Journal of Belizean Affairs and its successor, the BELCAST Journal of Belizean Affairs needs to be filled with a comparable, if not superior, scholarly journal. The initiative to publish another research medium may come from tertiary institutions or from the Ministry, and must be a sustained effort to encourage more research and publication.

Thirdly, the Ministry's own efforts at publishing a junior history text, suitable for use in the lower forms of secondary schools, have fallen short of expectations. A History of Belize: New Nation in the Making<sup>25</sup> has stirred controversy and is in dire need of revision.

However, it is to the Ministry's credit that, since 1982, it considers "developing a strong programme in Belizean Studies aimed at fostering national consciousness, the appreciation of

our cultural heritage and an understanding of national concerns"<sup>26</sup> a prime objective of the Major Projects in the field of education. Coming in the wake of political independence and the negative impact of developments such as increased television broadcasting, migration to North America and illegal Central American refugees, this was a timely affirmation of Ministry attitude towards the one aspect of secondary education that could be programmed to counter those negative influences. In this light, the early statements of Sanchez and others are perhaps even more relevant now than when they were made, for the loss of Belizean culture and identity through a lack of institutionalised courses on the Belizean experience is a very real danger.

Fortunately, two recent developments are conducive to developing a strong programme in Belizean Studies. The churches<sup>27</sup> have been decreasing their initiative in opening new schools, while government, in cooperation with the lay community,<sup>28</sup> has become more active in advancing secondary education, exemplified by the establishment of community colleges in Corozal and Punta Gorda, Mopan High School, Escuela Secundaria Mexico, the Belmopan Comprehensive School, and the earlier junior secondary schools. These are all government funded and controlled, so there should be no religious or control barriers to the inclusion of Belizean Studies in their curricula. Further investigation, at present beyond the scope of this study, could determine if such courses are being administered. Stann Creek Ecumenical College is one rural secondary institution that has certainly implemented a Belizean Studies programme.

Formed in 1974 by the amalgamation of the former Stann Creek High School (Anglican) and Austin High School (Catholic), the Stann Creek Ecumenical College is managed by a chain of command extending downward from the Minister of Education through the Board of Governors, Principal, Vice-Principal and faculty.<sup>29</sup> Daily administration is executed by the Principal and office staff, and in practice there are no religious constraints on the implementation of Belizean Studies, although the three major religious denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Methodist) are represented on the Board of Governors. Administration has stopped short of adding a separate Belizean Studies course to the curriculum, and in some upper division classes history (which incorporates Belizean Studies) is optional. Thus from 1980 to 1987 a major objective of the History and Belizean Studies Department was

to examine the main trends and developments of Belizean history as an integral part of Caribbean history from the first to the senior year, while emphasising the uniqueness of the Belizean historical and cultural experience as an essential tool for the building of nationalism.<sup>30</sup>

For instance, a unit of work on the Maya included examination of Maya civilization in Belize - its level of development, a survey of the main archaeological sites coupled with a field trip to a site and a look at the main aspects of modern Maya culture.<sup>31</sup> Units on the Maya and the British Settlement in the Bay of Honduras up to 1798 were covered during the first and second years; slavery, emancipation, education, the Nationalist movement, the Anglo-Guatemala dispute and a special study of Garifuna and other ethnic groups were covered during the third and fourth years. Students acquired their basic text, A History of Belize, in first form and carried it through to fourth form.

The nucleus of an expandable resource centre for Belizean Studies has been established in the school's library. Teachers of history and Belizean Studies use their own industry and persistence to extract more texts, journals and teaching aids from administration, and administration is entirely responsible for the employment of suitably qualified and competent teachers. In essence, the institution has implemented a four-year programme integrated with history and utilizing a small resource centre.

The positive points to be drawn from this approach to Belizean Studies warrant further emphasis. It indicates a possible method of programming course content over the entire duration of high school, the need for adequate reference or research centres, as no single text is adequate for such courses, and the further need for competent and consistent classroom administration of the content. Efforts should also be made to carry out field trips to archaeological and other historical sites so that life is injected into the subject matter of Belizean Studies, and a deeper appreciation of things Belizean is cultivated in our children.

The negative elements likewise need attention. In their daily functions most secondary schools operate beyond the pale of the Ministry. They need only to fulfill certain basic requirements to become eligible for financial assistance from the Ministry. They then receive seventy percent of teachers'

salaries, which amounts to the greatest portion of their operational expenses. Yet it is extremely difficult for the Ministry to influence internal policies because of the dual system of control in most secondary schools already discussed.

While a core curriculum of academic subjects must be offered to students in preparation for external examinations (the 'holy grail' of the education system), each institution is essentially at liberty to include the teaching of a bare minimum of Belizean Studies, thereby paying 'lip service' to the discipline. Schools may omit Belizean Studies to make room for other domains considered more significant or desirable in the light of the institution's education philosophy, or they may develop a comprehensive four-year programme.

An undesirable ramification of this virtually unbridled liberty is "the lack of a binding curriculum in the lower forms of secondary schools, . . . a big constraint to ensuring at least good minimum standards for all secondary schools in the country. This is especially important given the variety of secondary schools and the differences between schools in the same category, and it explains the diversity of curricula which are used in individual schools . . . The system should have shared objectives for all secondary schools and provide an exposure to the same broad curriculum at least in the lower forms. . . ."32

Clearly, then, it is extremely essential that reform of the first and second year curricula of secondary schools to ensure exposure to the same broad Belizean Studies curriculum be effected, and the most powerful instrument of change is the Ministry. It must establish and enforce rules for the implementation of Belizean Studies at the secondary level. After all, the Ministry meets seventy percent of the financial demands of the piper, and in principle it should have the right to select some of the tunes appropriate to implement the Belizean philosophy of education.

The appropriateness - indeed, the necessity - of Belizean Studies has not been a debatable issue since self-government in 1964. The survival of Belize as the unified homeland of a polyglot society demands that such programmes be implemented in all secondary schools with the greatest expedition. The destruction of the shackles of vestigial colonial mentality, the strengthening of belief in self and the nation, the ultimate

burial of all complexes of cultural inferiority demand that Belizean Studies be implemented in all secondary schools with the least possible delay.

A nationalistic philosophy of education and the aim of developing a strong programme in Belizean Studies in secondary schools can quite easily be rendered rhetorical, and continue to breed anomalies and inconsistencies in the implementation of such programmes if the philosophy and aim are not translated into firm action to formulate and direct such courses. In this respect the UNESCO Report of 1964 is totally relevant now: the "overall direction" of our education system, and therefore of all the parts constituting that system, especially the implementation of secondary level Belizean Studies programmes, must come from the Ministry.

\*\* Editor's Note: Readings in Belizean History, Vol. 2 (Second Edition, edited by Lita Hunter Krohn) was published in May of 1987 and has been reprinted in 1989. Readings hopes to take the reader through a panorama of historical events in Belize by means of individual articles and research papers collected over the years - from the Maya to Independence.

## NOTES

1. Report of the UNESCO Educational Planning Mission to British Honduras (Belize), 1964. Paris, September, 1964. Henceforth, UNESCO Report.
2. Annual Reports of the Department of Education, 1965 to 1971. P. 1 of 1965-69 Report. Henceforth, Education Reports.
3. Education Reports, 1965-71.
4. Education Reports, 1969-70.
5. Education Reports, 1970-71. P. 15.
6. Muffles College records may provide information on course content, resource materials used, and evaluation methods. A thorough investigation of this topic would certainly require individual case studies of each institution now



offering courses in Belizean Studies.

7. I.E.Sanchez, "Belizean History - Its Role in a Cultural Revolution", in Belizean Studies, Volume 5, No. 5, September, 1977.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. C.H.Grant, The Making of Modern Belize. Cambridge University Press, 1976. P. 305.
11. National Studies, Volume 3, No. 3, May, 1974. Editorial "Toward a National History".
12. Joseph A. Bennett, "Goals, Priorities and the Decolonisation of Education in Belize", in Belizean Studies, Volume 7, No. 5, September, 1979.
13. Grant, P. 297-305.
14. Ibid., p. 304.  
Two significant aspects of that "external orientation" were:
  - i) Up to 1979 students were prepared for the General Certificate of Education examinations set by various British examination boards (Cambridge, London, Associated Examining Board for example). After 1979, the Caribbean Examinations Council started to replace the General Certificate of Education examinations with 'home-grown' Caribbean oriented exams. That process continues, since "A" level courses are still examined by the British Boards. Up to the present, success at external exams is the main criterion for determining the quality of each institution, the quality of students for job placement and for further education. Belizean Studies play no part in these critical value judgments.
  - ii) The Associate of Arts degree awarded by St. John's College and Belize Technical College Sixth Forms are modelled on U.S. colleges; so is their credit system of internal assessment of students' academic performance.
15. Ibid, p. 305.
16. Ibid.

17. Narda Dobson, A History of Belize, London, Longman, p. 321. J.C.Dixon concluded that "education was an appendage to the church".
18. Letter from William Fonseca, former Chief Education Officer, to principals of secondary schools, 14 October, 1977, in Records of the Belize Association of History Teachers, 1977-79.
19. Ibid, Minutes of formative meeting, 22 October, 1977.
20. Ibid. Those theme papers which were prepared included a comparative study of Movements Towards Independence in Belize, Jamaica and Cuba.
21. Richard Buhler, introduction to "In Search of History", in Brukdown: The Magazine of Belize, numbers 6 and 7 (combined issue), 1979.
22. National Studies, Volume 1, No. 1, January, 1973, Editorial.
23. The bibliography after these notes lists some of these recent publications useful as secondary level references.
24. Dobson's History has been the subject of much criticism for being basically a history of the British in Belize, and for being rather superficial on the modern period. In response, Dobson has stated:  
"I feel that a nation's history can only be satisfactorily presented by a national of that country. I therefore regard my own work as an interim measure which I hope may influence the people of Belize to become involved in their own history". (Narda Dobson, private correspondence to the editors of National Studies: recorded in Volume 2, No. 3, May, 1974 Editorial.)
25. Education Task Force, A History of Belize: New Nation in the Making. Belize City, Sunshine Books, 1983. This volume attempted to fulfill the obvious need for an elementary general text with a nationalistic outlook, but is flawed and objectionable on several counts, the most serious being its singular Marxist interpretation of the underlying cause of Belize's underdevelopment, thereby sacrificing clarity, structure, content and accuracy on the altar of ideology.

26. A Report on Major Projects in the Field of Education, 1982-86. Belmopan, Ministry of Education, 1986. P. 14.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Stann Creek Ecumenical College: Scheme of Management.
30. Stann Creek Ecumenical College, Department of History and Belizean Studies: Curriculum Guide, 1980-87. P. 1.
31. Ibid.
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**"UNITED STATES - BELIZE RELATIONS IN A TIME OF  
TENSION: 1861- 62"**

In these days when the diplomatic and cultural relations between the United States and Belize are so friendly and open, it is hard to imagine a time when things were quite the opposite. Belize and the United States have always been trading partners, and they have tended to share the same interests in the hemisphere. Unlike its relations with the neighboring republics of Central America, the United States has never had a strategic interest in Belizean territory, has never intervened directly (at least in a visible way) in Belizean internal affairs, and has certainly never invaded the country or landed troops to protect American interests.

Yet there was a time, about 130 years ago, when Belize and the United States may have been on the brink of armed conflict. Some important documents relating to this era are now available at the National Archives in Belmopan, and by way of making Belizeans more aware of this vital historical resource, I will below summarize and quote from some of the records that shed light on the events of that time.

The documents are microfilmed reels of the "Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Belize, 1847-1906." These are the letters and documents sent to the United States Secretary of State by U.S. Consuls and Commercial Representatives in Belize, reporting on events in the country, as well as the doings of

U.S. citizens in the area. They were collected and microfilmed by the U.S. National Archives in 1959, and copies were recently forwarded to the Belize National Archives. I was able to view and use these records with equipment in the archives through the courtesy and with the kind assistance of the staff there. I would like to encourage more Belizeans to take advantage of the wealth of information on the country available there.

The U.S. Consulate operated in Belize from early 1848 until 1853 when the consulate was shut down, opening again in 1861 under a Consul named George Raymond. The records from 1848 to 1853 deal mainly with the illegal activities of Belize City merchants, who were then sending large shipments of mahogany, logwood, indigo and cochineal to the United States without declaring their full value or weight, so they paid much less import duty in New Orleans than they should have (this was done through certification of false invoices). The U.S. Consul did not make himself popular in Belize by his efforts to expose this trade, especially when the U.S. Customs officials in New Orleans began to act on his information. Belize City merchants must have seen the consul as a spy in their midst, and they must have been much relieved when the consulate closed in 1853. Perhaps the most interesting record forwarded to Washington in this time was an 1850 issue (Vol. 1, No. 44, 11 November) of Belize's newspaper, "The Honduras Watchman." This contains a fascinating address by the Chief Justice to the Supreme Court in Belize, on the question of whether or not "Honduras" (not yet British Honduras) should be considered a colony or possession of the British Crown.

When the Consulate re-opened in November of 1861 under Raymond, the United States was engaged in the Civil War. Raymond was clearly sent to Belize in order to monitor the trade between Belize and the Confederate States of the south, then under a shipping blockade by the Union (northern) Navy. Northern strategy was to cut off the southern trade in cotton, and to keep munitions and articles of war from arriving from England and other neutral powers. While the English and their colonies were legally neutral in the American civil war, there was no question that the British government favored the confederacy. Confederate ships were welcome in many British ports, and when the United States protested this as a violation of neutrality, the hostility between the two countries escalated.

Once in Belize. George Raymond quickly became a very unpopular man. Since the records are written by Raymond himself, it is hard to tell if this was partly due to his personality and character, or totally a product of the situation he found himself in. All we can know for certain is that under Raymond's hand, relations between the British authorities in Belize and the U.S. Government came very close to open hostilities.

In Raymond's first despatch to Washington, on November 11, 1861, he states that

At this port, Belize, a sailing vessel named "Kate," commanded by Capt. Stevens, I am satisfied, is fitting out to carry munitions of war to the confederate states. She was formerly sailing under American colors, but will leave Belize under the British flag. I have used my best exertions to prevent her being supplied, but it is done clandestinely. A strong succession feeling [ie. pro-confederacy] exists among the people here. Their trade and commerce has been principally with the confederate states. It is now cut off by the United States blockade....

The next month he writes again to the American Secretary of State (William H. Seward):

From information authentically received and from what I see by observation, shipments are being made from this port in British Honduras to Yucatan, of munitions of war. These shipments are from Europe....Their destination from Yucatan is the confederate States, by way of Matamoros and Vera Cruz.

Raymond continued to send regular shipping reports, naming ships, their captains, and the merchants involved. The local authorities turned a deaf ear to his protests, arguing that it was perfectly legal to ship gunpowder to Mexico (indeed they have been selling a lot of munitions to the Santa Cruz Maya during the Caste War just a few years previously). And the diplomatic situation deteriorated rapidly. Raymond writes on February 4, 1862:

The government is fortifying "Fort George" opposite the town, believing that the United States government is about to make war upon the settlement.

He forwarded a copy of a printed speech from the Lt. Governor to the House of Assembly in Belize City, in which he proposed to ask London for funds to fortify Ft. George to resist "hostile powers," and also proposes to raise a volunteer military force for the defense of Belize. Evidently there was a degree of panic in Belize about the possibility that the United States would strike directly at those who were aiding and abetting its mortal enemy, even to the point of risking war with Great Britain. And a good deal of hostility was aimed at the agent of that now-hostile power in Belize - George Raymond.

This agent continued to send his damning reports of munitions traffic, and on May 6, 1862, he reported that the wily Belize merchants were buying cotton at a good price from confederate blockade runners, and were then turning around and selling that cotton, at considerable profit, no doubt, to merchants in the Union!

The schooner "Dianah", about the 20th of March last ran the blockade from Mobile, Alabama and landed in Campeche, containing one hundred (100) bales of cotton. The rebels who had charge of her transferred the cotton to the schooner "Cosina", and reached the port of Belize on the 29th of April. On the 3rd of May, Saturday, the cotton was sold at public auction to several persons of this place, [he later named Mathe, McNab Co. as the major purchaser of confederate cotton] and shipped by the Barque "Pallas" owned by John Jex of Belize and Josia Jex of the City of New York to the latter port.

In May of 1862, Raymond writes that the Lt. Governor and the Colonial Secretary, despite numerous requests and official communication from the U.S. government, have refused to accept his appointment as U.S. Consul in Belize. The Lt. Governor went so far as to print an announcement in the Government Gazette of May 17, 1862, that no-one had been recognized as the official U.S. Consul in Belize. Several increasingly testy notes between Raymond and Seymour show that the colonial authorities were stone-walling Raymond, arguing that they were unable to recognize Raymond because his paperwork was not in order, or they had not had confirmation from London. They did not have to accept Raymond's protest as long as they denied his official status.



Harassment of Raymond continued in other ways. Some residents questioned his right to fly the U.S. flag in front of his residence, and he wrote home melodramatically on June 5

British subjects have threatened to take down the American flag, now floating in front of my residence. I ask for protection of my country. I will never strike the flag unless ordered to, by my government.

We do not know how this was resolved, though it is sure that the U.S. Navy did not come to rescue Raymond's fragile dignity. But the British officials in Belize found other ways to torment him. Later in June a package of official papers arrived by ship addressed to the U.S. Consul. The Post Office in Belize City refused to hand them over to Raymond, since he was not officially recognized as the Consul by the colonial authorities. A furious protest finally freed the letters, along with a lofty note about how Mr. Raymond should in future have his mail addressed personally, without using his unrecognized title.

Raymond continued to send almost monthly reports of the arrival of confederate shipping, and the steadily increasing volume of contraband trade to and from the southern states. He gives the names of ships, their cargoes, their return cargoes, and the names of merchants who handle the trade and onward shipment of cotton to New York. It is not clear how much attention was being paid to these reports back in Washington, but apparently, other reports about Raymond were being listened to by his superiors. For the Secretary of State in Washington sent Raymond a letter on November 11, 1862, relieving him of his position because of unnamed "allegations" about his conduct, and because of complaints that he was overcharging for his official services as Consul. This despatch must have crossed Raymond's letter of resignation, dated November 14. His reasons for resigning were given as the "abuse" by the local authorities, but he shortly sent another letter defending himself against the other charges.

While Raymond continued to send despatches about shipping and contraband after his dismissal, perhaps in an effort to prove his patriotism and good faith, the stormy relationship between colonial authorities and the United States government began to quiet down as soon as he was dismissed. His replacement, Charles H. Leas, arrived on January 11, 1863 and was immediately welcomed by Lt. Governor Seymour at a re-

ception, and his credentials were accepted. Seymour had disparaging things to say about Raymond, as did other residents of Belize, all of which were forwarded to Washington by Leas. The new consul proved to be more diplomatic, and while he continued to send reports of illegal shipping and investigate the role of colonial officials in the trade with the confederacy (as well as the role of the Mexican government), relations between the U.S. and Belize never again reached the level of tension felt in 1862.

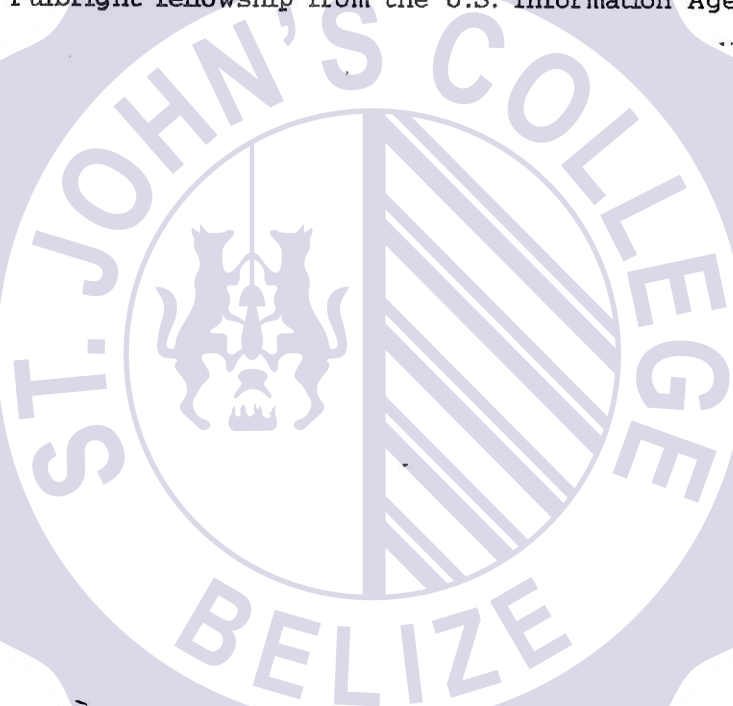
While this draws to a close the episode of open hostility, there are a number of interesting despatches by Leas that tell a bit more about the sudden change in attitude of the Belize authorities towards the U.S. representative. It seems that at this time the mahogany business was falling into a slump, while the prices of agricultural goods like cotton, corn, coffee and cocoa were sky-high partially because of the disruption in trade caused by the U.S. civil war. So the timber barons of Belize decided to turn to plantation farming, but did not have a ready supply of docile agricultural labor. So they hatched a scheme to import large numbers of freed black slaves from the United States, assuming that as soon as the Union won the war, they would want to deport as many ex-slaves as possible. They saw the new U.S. Consul as a potential ally in their plan to get official U.S. government backing. Leas gives details of this scheme, and of the way the local people pressured him to support them. In the meantime he did his own research, and wrote a confidential report to Washington with a penetrating analysis of social and economic conditions in the colony. He argued that the local merchants merely wanted to create competition on the labor market so they could drive the price of labor lower, and exploit both the local and imported black workers even more than they were already. Though he told the local merchants he would support their scheme, his private despatch to Washington condemned it in strong terms.

This brief account draws on a very small fraction of the documents now available in the National Archives on relations with the United States. Elsewhere in the reels of microfilm there are accounts of innumerable investment schemes by Americans interested in everything from mining gold to growing Agave in Belize. There are copies of newspapers, Gazettes, Censuses (including a complete copy of the census of 1861), tariff and duty regulations, shipping schedules, and brief accounts of social life in Belize City in a bygone era. These

archives are history in its raw form, and reading them gives a sense of immediacy and excitement that no history textbook can duplicate.

## NOTES

1. I would particularly like to thank Charles Gibson, Margaret Ventura and William Jones for their help. All the records mentioned in this paper are in reel 1 of the microfilm. Research was conducted with the support of a Fulbright fellowship from the U.S. Information Agency.



"A DEMOCRACY TOO SOON: THE CONSTITUTIONAL  
PROPOSALS 1923 - 25"

One witness to the Riot Commission of 1919 testified to his belief that the soldiers who had instigated the violence felt that "politically the Colony is very backward" and Bennett believed that "the rioting had a political aspect".<sup>1</sup> By 'political' he meant that the practice of democracy in Belize was not as well advanced as elsewhere in the colonial empire and there was a widespread desire among the populace for the re-establishment of the elective principle in the constitution.

That principle had last been exercised in Belize on a national scale in 1870 when, faced with the Icaiche threat, the Legislative Assembly had voted itself out of existence and handed over full legislative power to the governor and his officials.<sup>2</sup> 'Crown Colony' government had in fact only lasted twenty years, for in 1892 the nominated unofficial members of the Legislative Council had regained the substance of political power (without the attendant responsibility) after a constitutional crisis brought about by the maladministration of Sir Roger Goldsworthy and the Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Stevens v. McKinney*. The constitutional victory of 1892 had re-established the status quo ante and effectively returned political power in Belize to a clique of Scottish and Creole merchants, but it had been in the interests of that clique to maintain the fiction that Belize was still de facto a Crown Colony and in that misrepresentation it had been very successful: the populace at large, and to some extent the Colonial

Office (despite the best efforts of Governors Sweet-Escott and Swayne in 1905 and 1910 to disabuse it of the idea), held fast to the belief that in Belize legislative power and responsibility were firmly in the hands of His Majesty's representative.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, the post-1919 call for the re-establishment of the elective principle and the return of 'democracy' was eagerly taken up by all in Belize except those who understood and benefited from the status quo, and even they, initially at least, were prepared to countenance some change as long as it was largely cosmetic and did not seek to enfranchise the uneducated Creole labour force. Indeed it was A. R. Usher M.L.C. who was elected President of the newly formed British Honduras Taxpayer's Association (B.H.T.A.) in April 1921, and Frans Dragten (a prominent Guyanese lawyer) who had set up the British Honduras Electoral Reform Association in April 1919, who, in November 1921, had persuaded Sydney Cuthbert M.L.C. (the senior unofficial member and the major Scottish merchant) to present a resolution in Council requesting the return of the elective principle to the constitution.-

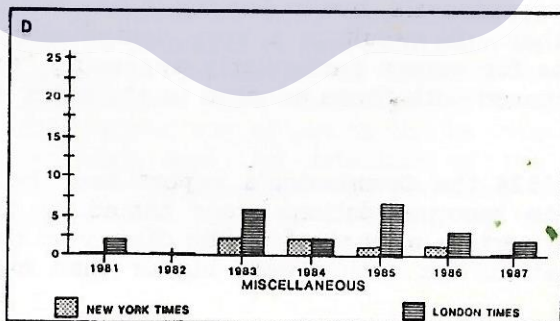
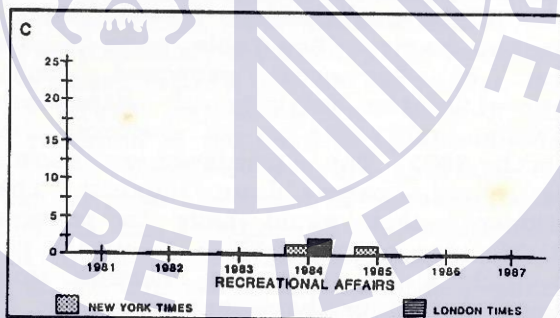
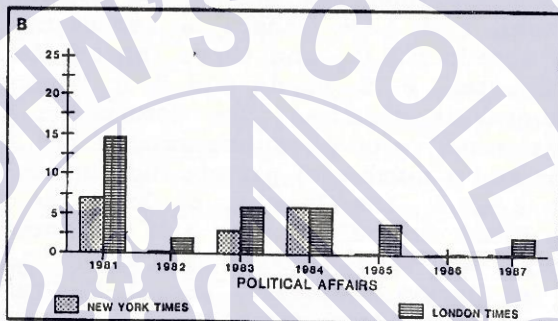
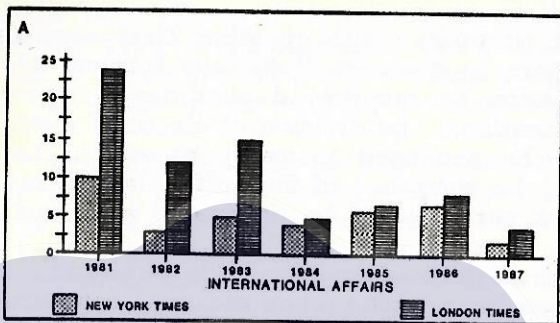
That resolution, although forwarded to the Colonial Office on 17 November 1921, did not receive a reply until January 1923, largely because the West Indian department was awaiting the constitutional recommendations of Major Wood, who was visiting the several British West Indian colonies during 1922. In fact the Under-Secretary's itinerary did not include Belize and, as his recommendations did not anywhere countenance the abolition of official majorities, they were of little consequence to the situation in the Colony. Apparently the Colonial Office was at first "inclined to think that the opportunity should be taken to make the grant of representative government conditional on the abolition of the unofficial majority"<sup>4</sup> but, in view of the "considerable sentimental value" attached by the people of the Colony "to the exceptional position under which the constitution rests on local law" and because of the Governor's assurances that the Council was not "obstructive", it was decided "it would be very undesirable to make the grant of the elective principle of representation an excuse for attempting to empower the Colony to legislate by Order in Council."<sup>5</sup> The Governor was therefore advised that the Secretary of State would not object to the re-introduction of the elective principle and the retention of the unofficial majority as long as the Governor was provided with powers "to put into effect measures which he and the Secretary of State consider essential to the well-being of the Colony when

public order or public faith or other first essentials of good government are in question."<sup>6</sup> He was further advised to set up a commission to recommend candidacy, voting and residency qualifications, the division of electoral districts and the duration of the proposed assembly based on the assumption that it would be composed of five officials and seven unofficials, of which three would be nominated and four elected.

In March 1923 the Governor made public the Secretary of State's proposals and set up the required commission, it being comprised of one member of the Executive Council (Sydney Cuthbert), two unofficial members of the Legislative Council (Sally Wolffsohn and A. R. Usher), a representative of the north (J. M. Rosado M.E.C.) and three representatives of the 'public' (F. Dragten, P. S. Woods and H. H. Vernon) with the Attorney General as chairman. The Commission sat through April and May and received submissions from several corporate bodies and a number of private individuals. The former included the B.H.T.A., the Chamber of Commerce (established in 1918), the Belize Friendly Society and the Ancient Order of the Foresters, and the latter, H. H. Cain, G. F. Bennett, E. A. Laing (a Clarion columnist) and G. E. Grabham M.L.C. (Usher's successor as local manager of the B.E.C.). On the non-controversial points the recommendations varied but on the vital issue of the qualifications for candidacy and voting they fell into two groups. (See Table, page 26.) Grabham and the Chamber of Commerce proposed high property qualifications while the majority of witnesses wanted a franchise which would take in as electors everyone with property worth \$800.<sup>7</sup> The Commissioners themselves, who reported in June, came down against the majority recommendations; voters would have to possess property valued at \$1,200, an income of \$720 or pay a rent of \$120, while those wishing to stand for election would require property worth \$3,500 or have an income of \$2,000.<sup>8</sup> The Governor in reporting the Commission's recommendations supported its proposals, but in London it was felt that "it was clear that they will result in a very limited electorate," the qualifications for voters particularly appearing "to be rather high -- compared with those adopted in the other West Indian colonies."<sup>9</sup>

In June 1924 the Commission's report and the draft bills based on its recommendations were tabled in the Council. There was a certain amount of public dismay at the fact that the qualifications for voting were higher than expected, but

FIG. 4 BELIZEAN ARTICLES BY CATEGORY, 1981-1987



far more of a furor was created by the unofficials when they came to realise the nature of the powers transferred to the executive by Clause 6. It would appear that they had not really fully grasped the Colonial Office's proviso of 1923 although, as the Clarion pointed out, it had been made clear enough at the time.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless the unofficials, now aware of the Imperial government's designs on their prerogatives, reacted bitterly, declaring that they were being treated as children and doubting "whether you will be able to get any self-respecting man to offer himself for election under those conditions."<sup>11</sup> They asked the Governor if the powers which would accrue to him included financial control, and on receiving an affirmative answer they protested that the Colony's traditional liberties were being undermined. Hutson was informed that Council had been misled and the unofficials supported this protest with a resolution demanding that Clause 6 be deleted from the constitutional bill.

The result of this confusion was that the Progressive Party and the B.H.T.A. passed resolutions in July in support of A. R. Usher's motion for the amendment of Clause 6 to remove financial control from the Governor while demanding, at the same time, a reduction in the high qualifications proposed.<sup>12</sup> The Colonial Office's attitude to the latter request was that it was purely an internal matter, but it was adamant in its insistence on retaining full reserve powers for "If the Colony wants unrepresentative Government we should insist on getting emergency powers of a more useful kind."<sup>13</sup> In February 1925 the Acting Governor, Douglas-Jones, informed the Council and the interested organisations that, while it was up to them to decide the level of qualifications required once the reserve powers were conceded, the Secretary of State refused any dilution of those powers and the government was presenting the bill with Clause 6 intact. Public discussion then ensued with the Progressive Party and the B.H.T.A., at public meetings in March, calling for the acceptance of the disputed clause and the lowering of qualifications for voting and membership. The audiences at these meetings, as the Independent observed, were composed of "the labour element in the town, and the ones to which (sic) it would be expected some privilege would be extended to empower them to send up a representative whereas as the proposal now stands hardly a dozen present would be eligible to (sic) electorship."<sup>14</sup> Similar meetings were also held in the district capitals in March and April where the same opinions were put forward.<sup>15</sup> Douglas-Jones reported that "In view of the terms of the resolutions



referred to above it was generally anticipated, I think, that the terms of the motion (the Unofficial members would move) would be favourable to the acceptance of Clause 6."<sup>16</sup>

On Monday 6 April 1925 in the Council Chamber A. R. Usher moved a motion rejecting Clause 6,, arguing that he was not satisfied that the people desired a change in the constitution which would "grab at the shadow and give away the substance." In this he was supported by every other unofficial. C. R. Beattie maintained that the increased taxation of late required continued financial control, while the Reverend Robert Cleghorn claimed that the press and public opinion were against change. The motion was carried unanimously.<sup>17</sup> In consequence Douglas-Jones indicated that he had no choice but to withdraw the bills.

The Unofficials' rejection of Clause 6 and of any immediate change came as a surprise to the Acting-Governor and a shock to the people. Douglas-Jones reported that "it transpired that at an informal meeting of the Unofficial Members held a day or two previously to the date of the meeting of the Council, they had unanimously agreed to reject it." The reasoning behind this rejection he attributed to "the fact that they might be forced by public opinion to accept what they regarded as too low qualifications." It appeared that "during what elsewhere would be termed the 'campaign' but which here cannot be possible so described, a certain section of the Creole element supported by some of the European residents commenced an agitation for lower qualifications for voters and members of the Council than is provided for in the draft bill." This appeared "to have frightened other sections of the community and I gather that pressure was brought to bear on unofficial members to reject the clause."<sup>18</sup> This analysis was given credence by Beattie's statement in the Chamber that the result of the public meeting of 5 March "was that qualifications should not be reduced to absurd limits." These would then be "difficult to resist" once the elective principle was conceded.<sup>19</sup> Douglas-Jones's conclusion was that it was not safe to say that no change was desired "but there is unfortunately no means of correctly gauging public opinion."<sup>20</sup>

If the executive was puzzled the people were furious. It had been confidently expected that the Council would bow to public opinion. The Clarion reported the decision as "A Serious Blunder," indicating that the unofficial members' arguments were facile, particularly those of Cleghorn who "has

left us amazed at his conclusion and not in the slightest convinced it is correct." It reminded the unofficials that the body of educated, articulate public opinion in the Colony was growing and asked them:

if they have forgotten that in the history of the Colony a Council consisting entirely of representatives of the merchant elite has been known which has pushed through measures to the detriment of the general community merely because it is in the interests of that merchant elite. May we point out that over and over again taxes have been levied by the increase of import duties which have fallen heavily on the poorer classes of the community whilst measures to increase the land tax, which would touch the pockets of the wealth landowners ... have been thrown out.<sup>21</sup>

In the Independent "Spotimar" demanded to know "By What Authority" had the unofficials carried a motion "in direct opposition to the will of the people." He deplored their resistance to constitutional change, noting that its only advantage was:

an opportunity, such as seldom given to the people, of placing ourselves on record to the Secretary of State or the Throne, against an unprecedented action that has been limited by the narrow dictates of self-interest and lack of courage to face on the broad field of discussion an inter-class dispute over franchise qualifications, or take a determined stand where that would be a necessity. (sic)<sup>22</sup>

The vote of the unofficial members should have been no surprise to anyone, given the Council's record. It would appear that Cuthbert's prefacing remarks to the resolution for change he had introduced in October 1921 had been forgotten. He had noted then that:

An impression appears to be abroad that if this Resolution is passed and accepted by the authorities at home, we shall once be granted universal suffrage, and that British Honduras will cease to be a Crown Colony. Of course this is not so. We must learn to creep before we can walk, and at first it is only to be expected that a certain number of the Unofficial

members of this Council will be elected, and that the qualifications for electors and elected will be fairly high.<sup>23</sup>

That the franchise requirements would necessarily be high and in consequence return the representatives of the group which already dominated the Council had earlier been explained by Dr. Cran. In his view there was "a certain class in the British Empire who, from inherent training and tradition, as it were, are peculiarly adaptable for the positions which they are placed in, and in the governing of their fellow subjects."<sup>24</sup>

H. H. Cain's interpretation of the results of this principle as practised in Belize was "the evil of class legislation," but the West India department, in its inherent acceptance of Cran's dictum, saw no reason to intervene. It had maintained from the outset that the franchise qualifications to be established was a purely internal matter<sup>26</sup> and, while it deprecated the qualifications recommended, it indicated that it still had little real understanding of the power relationships within the Colony. The attempt to obtain reserve powers for the Governor can be seen, not so much as a recognition of the political imbalance as it existed, but more as a safeguard for the future. Darnley's minute of 1923 that it was "just as well to take precautions against the possibility of the rise of an oligarchy of the kind existing in Barbados"<sup>27</sup> reflected the collective misunderstanding. It was not until 1933 that the West India department recognised that the real reason for the rejection of Clause 6 "was the fear of the Unofficial Members that the electoral and other qualifications would be reduced to a very low level and an uncontrolled flood of democracy let into British Honduras' political life."<sup>28</sup>

The failure of the Colonial Office to appreciate that the unofficials already constituted such a Barbadian-like oligarchy seemed not only to deny the arguments of Sweet-Escott and Swayne in 1905 and 1910 and the constitutional reaction of 1925, but also clearly indicated that the West India department had no real understanding of the nature of the constitutional change it had been forced to concede in 1892. Because Belize was not a particularly important colony, because the West India department was a training ground for Colonial Office recruits (and few stayed long enough to gain a sophisticated knowledge of the constitutional niceties in the multiplicity of Caribbean colonies), because the head of the West India

department in 1925 was not he of 1892 and because the arguments of Sweet-Ascott and Swayne in 1905 and 1910 had put no ice in the department, the consequences of the concession of the unofficial majority in 1892 were not fully comprehended in the very building where that concession had been ratified.

It was not until 1931 when the dubious activities of certain unofficial members of Council - who were engaged in running bootlegged whisky to the U.S.A. in defiance of the Volstead Act - threatened to damage Anglo-American relations that the Colonial Office civil servants began to regret the defeat of 1892 and the failure of 1925. Faced with Foreign Office protestations, the West India department of 1931 suddenly awoke to the force and validity of the arguments of Sweet-Escott and Swayne a generation earlier and recognised finally that the unofficial members were largely a "bunch of disloyal and jobbing traders"<sup>29</sup> who as "a gang of superior bootleggers"<sup>30</sup> used their majority in Council to protect their own selfish economic interests. But even then - despite the fact that the matter went as far as the British cabinet - no action was taken. It was decided that a threat to unilaterally abolish the unofficial majority (while constitutionally legal) would provoke an unjustifiable confrontation; it would be better therefore "to wait until an incident occurs."<sup>31</sup> That incident - the hurricane of 1931 and the necessary Hurricane Reconstruction Loan of 1932 - provided the Colonial Office with the excuse it needed to recover full legislative power for the governor. The Reconstruction Loan was made conditional on the Legislative Council voting the Administration 'reserve powers' for "public faith, public order or the first essentials of good Government."<sup>32</sup> Natural disaster had rectified the error of 1892 and implemented part of the constitutional proposals of 1923-25. Later governors were to use those powers to create the democracy which the unofficial members in 1925 had sought so stubbornly to resist.

## Notes and References

1. COL123/296, Report of the Commission, evidence of G.F. Bennett.
2. The Belize Town Board had been elected since 1911. For the end of the Legislative Assembly see N. Dobson, A History of Belize (London: Longman, 1973), p. 298 for one

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# BELIZEAN STUDIES

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JOHN COXON AND THE ROLE OF  
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OF THE YUCATÁN COLONIAL FRONTIER

THE POETRY OF COLONIALISM:  
19TH CENTURY DOGGEREL ABOUT  
BELIZE

THE VALDEZ PROPOSAL:  
A REBEL GENERAL'S PLAN FOR  
A GERMAN-GUATEMALAN INVASION  
OF BELIZE

a journal of social research and thought





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# EDITORIAL

Whether it was piracy and smuggling or logwood cutting and plotting invasions from Guatemala or just plain divide and rule philosophy, the history of Belize is unique and fascinating.

The first article in this issue of Belizean Studies is set during the early days of piracy and the settlement period. "John Coxen and the Role of Buccaneers in the Settlement of the Yucatan Colonial Frontier" focuses on a certain individual "frontier settler and pirate, founding father and social outcast..." From investigations done by Gilbert M. Joseph, our readers should get a lively and colorful picture of the life of these founding fathers in the Bay Settlement. Richard Wilk presents "The Poetry of Colonialism: 19th Century Doggerel About Belize." According to Wilk, "poems can tell us things about people's thoughts and feelings that we cannot find in other written forms of expression." The poems Wilk chooses show us the colony of Belize with all its class divisions, economic denominations and racial prejudices blatantly expressed in the written word.

The third piece of work, "The Valdez Proposal - A Rebel General's Plan for a German-Guatemalan Invasion of Belize," comes from Jaime Bisher, who was researching foreign espionage networks in Guatemala during the First World War and came across a forgotten document in Guatemala's National Archives. Basically, it is a 1918 proposal to the German Minister in Mexico from a prominent Guatemalan general in exile in which he proposes to create a "revolution" in Belize with help from German U-boats and Guatemalan troops.

The Editor  
Lita Hunter Krohn

# John Coxon and the Role of Buccaneers in the Settlement of the Yucatán Colonial Frontier

Gilbert M. Joseph

Frontier settler and pirate, founding father and social outcast—John Coxon was all of these.<sup>1</sup> His career reveals the dual social personality of the rugged Englishmen who first settled at Laguna de Términos on the Bay of Campeche near modern Ciudad del Carmen, as both buccaneers and cutters of what was then a valued commodity: logwood. Later they abandoned these wetlands on the western border of the Yucatán peninsula for more permanent eastern sites on the Gulf of Honduras near what is now Belize City, there to found the colony of British Honduras, which is today the semi-independent Colony of Belize.<sup>2</sup> Along with Coxon, such eminent pirates and rogues as Edward Teach ("Blackbeard"), Nicholas van Horn, William Benbow, Edward Low, John Williams ("Yankey"), and Bartholomew Sharp also made these young settlements their home for a time.<sup>3</sup> Yet John Coxon best exemplifies the frontiersman whose attachment to both the logging trade and the "ancient trade" of buccaneering created thorny problems for the colonial government. Further, unlike those other buccaneers, Coxon possessed an intuitive grasp of the aims under-

<sup>1</sup> John Coxon is almost as elusive for the modern historian as he was for the British and Spanish colonial officials who so unsuccessfully sought to pin him down in the late seventeenth century. The life story reconstructed here derives largely from a smattering of references scattered widely among several documentary collections. Coxon appears at frequent, though irregular intervals throughout the 1675-90 period in the *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series* (for a complete reference, see n. 8 below). His presence is similarly felt in volumes 24-27 and 40 of the *Bathway Papers* (n. 5), which deal with piracy in the late seventeenth century. His activities in the bay settlements may be glimpsed in volume 1 of Sir John A. Burdon's *Archives of British Honduras* (n. 30). Coxon's notoriety as a buccaneer has also drawn the attention of two Latin American historians. C. H. Haring discusses Coxon's transition from privateer to pirate in his standard work on buccaneers (n. 5). William F. Sharp examines the English filibustering expedition which Coxon led in search of the fabled cities of gold, in *Slavery on the Spanish Frontier* (n. 19). The most colorful (and often the most disapproving) treatments of the freewheeling society of Coxon's logging camps remain the contemporary travelers' accounts of William Dampier (n. 12), John Atkins (n. 42), and Nathaniel Uring (n. 39). The buccaneering aspect of the logging life is nowhere better described than in Dutchman Alexander O. Esquemeling's classic, firsthand account (n. 68). Esquemeling's principal source was Coxon's ally, the foremost buccaneer of his day, Henry Morgan.

<sup>2</sup> Two studies which give the buccaneer-loggers somewhat more than passing treatment are Arthur M. Wilson, "The Logwood Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Essays in the History of Modern Europe*, ed. Donald C. McKay (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936), pp. 1-15, and Alan K. Craig, "Logwood as a Factor in the Settlement of British Honduras," *Caribbean Studies* 9, no. 1 (April 1969), pp. 53-62.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 74-76 below.

## Editor's Note:

**BELIZE BECAME AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY ON SEPTEMBER 21st, 1981.**



lying the ambiguous policies of early British colonialism. He was able to anticipate changing needs and adapted himself accordingly to shifts in policy, thus successfully challenging and outmaneuvering a colonial government whose interests were frequently in conflict with his own. Through fat and lean times, Coxon refused to forswear buccaneering, and owing to a series of timely decisions, an occasional bold stroke, and not a little luck, he was never forced to do so. Much of his career at sea and on land was spent moving from one side of the law to the other. Coxon's commitment to buccaneering remained constant; it was the colonial government that wavered, now enlisting his talents, now condemning them, but always acting on expedience rather than principle.

Little is known of Coxon's early years, including his date of birth. He seems to have been born, no later than 1630, into an English seafaring family of humble origins and spent his early years apprenticing aboard English ships. Coxon crossed the Atlantic for the New World and by about 1665 was based in Jamaica. In addition to supporting a thriving sugar industry, the island served, after its capture from Spain in 1655, as a base for English buccaneers, who plundered the Spanish-American coasts for prizes laden with silver and other valuable *frutas de Indias*.<sup>4</sup> Young Coxon's lack of station and capital would have disqualified him from becoming a member of the new plantocracy. However, his apprenticeship as a seaman in England did earn him an important role in the extensive predatory operations then being waged from Port Royal. He began his career as a privateer in His Majesty's service in the mid-1660s, receiving regular commissions from the governor of Jamaica to seize Spanish ships on the Main.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to reflecting the aggressive confidence of the early English colonial expansion, such privateering or buccaneering provided a legitimate and gainful occupation for hundreds of English seamen who could not find a place in the burgeoning plantation economy, based as it was on monoculture, the large estate, and black slavery. In its first two decades, 1655–75, British Jamaica had been a haven of opportunity for the seamen, former servants, artisans, and small planters who had migrated from the mother country or from the eastern Caribbean islands, prepared to work hard and take considerable risks. The risks, both physical and financial, can scarcely be exaggerated. The island's first colonists were subjected to "a harsh winnowing process that separated out the great majority." Tropical diseases and famine decimated their ranks at a frightening rate. Of 12,000 Englishmen who came to Jamaica during the first six years, all but 3,470 quit or died. Many of Jamaica's earliest settlers turned to buccaneering for reasons of survival alone. Even before Coxon arrived in Port Royal in 1665, Jamaica's major port boasted a freebooting fleet of 1,500 men.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The origins of English buccaneering are discussed in Kenneth R. Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean: Trade and Plunder, 1530–1630* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup>Blathway Papers, 40 vols., Colonial Institute, Williamsburg, Virginia, vols. 21, 22, 24, 25, passim; C[harles] H. Haring, *The Buccaneers in the West Indies in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1910), pp. 220–21, 223.

<sup>6</sup>Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 165, 153.

For those newcomers who managed to survive and who were determined to improve their station by risking the little capital that they had, Jamaica held out real opportunity. During the first twenty years of colonization, the small planter was able, by dint of hard work and incredible sacrifice, to build himself up by stages to profitable large-scale sugar cultivation. Invariably, he would acquire a limited patent of land from the crown and invest everything in provision crops, indigo, or ginger. Tightening his belt and reinvesting most of his return, he would annually purchase a slave or two and put an extra acre into production. Finally, he would be in a position to command the necessary land, labor, and capital to convert his entire holdings into cane. Many of these modest pioneers who managed to ride out the hard times through luck or skill or strength went on to found the greatest fortunes in the British Caribbean.<sup>7</sup> In less than a generation, however, the picture had changed radically; only disappointment greeted those who had not previously gotten a foot in the door. By 1675, the concentration of land, wealth, and public office in fewer and fewer hands precluded the formation of a landed middle class. A radical social transformation had occurred: the number of white settlers had shrunk, the slave population had grown, and the gulf between large and small planters had widened. Whites of limited means arrived on the island to find their choices severely narrowed; beyond a limited need for urban and rural artisans, there was only the opportunity of indentured service on the plantation, a status not far above black slavery. Thus, as the social structure assumed this pattern of master and slave, buccaneering and a life at sea presented a real option to whites like Coxon, who formed the lower and middle ranks of colonial society.<sup>8</sup>

William Dampier's experience on the Bybrook plantation provides a dramatic illustration of the plight of white labor in Jamaica of the 1670s.<sup>9</sup> The son of a small tenant farmer in Somerset, England, Dampier apprenticed as a seaman but came to Jamaica in 1674 with high hopes of achieving wealth and status as a sugar planter. Arriving at Bybrook, Dampier received a rude jolt when he placed himself in the hands of a family contact, one William Whalley, a hard-working parvenu planter "who recognized only slaves and subordinates on the plantation he had most painfully built."<sup>10</sup> Like most seamen of his day, Dampier was scarcely able to read and write, and unsuited for work as an accountant. After living on the estate for a short period at Whalley's suffrance, Dampier was reduced to indentured labor, bound for a year in the plantation's mill. Tension mounted between the proprietor and his proud "boyler." Ultimately the two men came to blows, whereupon Dampier declared that he "could not be subject to any ones [h]umer"; he had "not cum heither to slave

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 165-68.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 170-71, 176; Great Britain, Public Record Office, *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series: America and the West Indies, 1574-1738* (hereafter cited as *CSPG*), 44 vols. (London: HMSO, 1860-1969), 1677-1680 (1896), p. 565.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Harry Bennett, "William Dampier, Buccaneer and Planter," *History Today* 14 (1964):469-77, and idem, "William Whalley, Planter of Seventeenth Century Jamaica," *Agricultural History* 40 (1966):113-23.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, "William Dampier," p. 474.

it.<sup>11</sup> Hankering again for the sea, Dampier ran off from the plantation to embark upon a far more illustrious career as a logger, freebooter, and transoceanic explorer.<sup>12</sup>

It is ironic that both Dampier and Coxon launched their careers as privateers just as buccaneering was being proscribed as a legitimate profession. By the late 1660s, the British government had decided that depredations against the Spanish were no longer necessary. Spain was increasingly unable to protect its markets, and the English had far more to fear militarily and economically from their other European rivals, the French and the Dutch. With the conquest of Jamaica, the English had confirmed their naval superiority over the Spanish in the Caribbean and had already begun to secure an increasing share of the Indies' riches through extensive smuggling networks. Moreover, the English still hoped that a regular pattern of trade between the two colonial systems might be arranged. Accordingly, the Madrid Treaties of 1667 and 1670, while signifying de facto English superiority over Spain, still conceded the Spaniards an important sop. Henceforth, "in order to eliminate sources of conflict between the nations, and establish peace" in America, all authorized depredations were to cease.<sup>13</sup> Buccaneering was now proscribed; royal commissions would be granted only for specific prizes in time of war. Unlicensed forms of naval plunder would be judged illegal and the offenders condemned as pirates.<sup>14</sup>

For Coxon, the new policy would have little immediate effect. To begin with, the line between buccaneering and privateering had never been carefully drawn. The only distinction between a buccaneer and a privateer was the license granted to the latter by his sovereign—that is, his royal letters of marque. Needless to say, all captains claimed such license. Many English captains, moreover, actually became pirates, for not only did they not bother to secure royal authorization, but they frequently plundered vessels of their own flag when other prizes were in short supply. Thus, while privateering might suddenly be phased out of English imperial strategy by edict, the confirmed buccaneer, though under increasing attack, would linger in the Caribbean for at least a century more.<sup>15</sup>

Coxon's future prospects as a buccaneer depended upon the strength of England's resolve in enforcing the new policy, and prior to 1682 the English were notoriously lax about policing Caribbean waters. From about 1677 to 1682, officially sanctioned looting actually experienced a brief revival in the West Indies, when the former buccaneer Sir Henry Morgan held sway in

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.

<sup>12</sup> William Dampier, *Voyages and Descriptions*, vol. 2, pt. 2: "Two Voyages to Campeachy," 2d ed. (London: J. Knapton, 1700).

<sup>13</sup> For the text of these treaties, see Frances G. Davenport and Charles O. Paullin, *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and Its Dependencies*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1917–37), 2:106, 194. The treaties confirmed English naval superiority by acknowledging England's "effective occupation" of Jamaica and several other colonies. Previously, Spain had regarded all of the Indies as its exclusive patrimony and had judged all colonizing ventures by other nations to be acts of trespass.

<sup>14</sup> Haring, pp. 200–201.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 271–72. See also the extensive references to pirate activity in the Blathway Papers, especially vols. 24, 25, and 40.

Jamaica.<sup>16</sup> Appearing in Port Royal shortly following Morgan's rise to power, Coxon proved to be a trusted privateer when His Majesty's government made it worth his while. From 1679 to 1681, Coxon became the leader of an armada made up of close to four hundred seamen and over half a dozen ships. Along with captains Sharp, Sawkins, and Cooke, Coxon carried out a series of commissions for the crown, enriching himself, the royal treasury, and Morgan in the process. The major expedition formed in the Gulf of Honduras in 1679. Several hundred corsairs elected Coxon their leader; then, "[spurred on by] the sacred hunger of Gold . . . to the undertaking of the most difficult Adventures," they vowed to repeat Morgan's plunder of Panama and the Spanish Main a decade earlier.<sup>17</sup> In 1680 they began their voyage south, sacking Santa Marta and Cartagena and making a shambles of Porto Bello.<sup>18</sup> Not content to work the coast and isthmus, Coxon and Sharp pushed their way up the Atrato River into the Colombian Chocó, in search of the legendary cities of gold. Each brought with him a large trunk to carry back the golden booty he expected to gather. Although their appetites had been whetted by local rumors, they never got beyond bartering a small number of gold trinkets with local Indian chiefs.<sup>19</sup>

As long as Morgan's clique ruled Jamaica, Coxon remained in the good graces of the government. Despite England's assurances to the Spaniards in 1670, colonial authorities did little to punish the leaders of the looting expedition. In 1680, although a royal warrant was actually issued for Coxon's arrest, influential friends at the governor's court and in the merchant community put up £2000 to preserve his freedom. Rather than returning to Jamaica in chains, Coxon received a hero's welcome when, in 1681, he sailed into Port Royal harbor flanked by eight other corsairs.<sup>20</sup> Coxon continued to grow in favor; he received a prestigious commission to track down the notorious French pirate ship, *La Trompeuse*, and in 1682 the governor of New Providence in the Bahamas charged him to take reprisals against Spanish raiders in the area.<sup>21</sup> Yet, Coxon knew that this period of grace would not long endure. By 1682, Morgan himself had been brought into line by the government and had begun to hound many of his former associates off the seas. Meanwhile, however, buccaneers and adventurers like Coxon were encountering economic opportunities of another sort. Almost simultaneously with the proscription of buccaneering, colonial officials and merchants on both sides of the Atlantic had

<sup>16</sup> Haring, pp. 222–29.

<sup>17</sup> Bartholomew Sharp, quoted in Christopher Lloyd, "Bartholomew Sharp, Buccaneer," *The Mariner's Mirror* 42, no. 4 (November 1956), p. 291.

<sup>18</sup> Haring, chap. 6, passim; Stephen L. Caiger, *British Honduras, Past and Present* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1951), p. 48; Cyril Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1972), p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> William F. Sharp, *Slavery on the Spanish Frontier: The Colombian Chocó, 1680–1810* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), pp. 30–32. British freebooters continued to plague the Chocó in later years. In 1702, however, the Spanish, aided by Indian allies, ambushed and massacred a force of one hundred fifty English adventurers and put an end to buccaneering in the area. It is plausible that Coxon took part in these later raids and not inconceivable that he was snuffed out in the 1702 massacre.

<sup>20</sup> *CSPC, 1677–1680*, pp. 563, 565; British Museum, Sloane MSS, vol. 2724, fol. 3; Haring, pp. 227–28.

<sup>21</sup> Haring, pp. 235, 237–38; *CSPC, 1681–1685* (1898), p. 284.

begun to herald the commercial uses and profitability of a wondrous new "drug," or dye ingredient, known as logwood.<sup>22</sup>

Today logwood is a term familiar only to the naturalist or to specialists in colonial history. Yet between two and three hundred years ago, logwood (or *palo de tinta*) was a common word in both England and Spain, certainly on the lips of political leaders, quite possibly on the mind of the man in the street.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, in 1739, the two countries would go to war over the substance, and historians view it as a controlling factor in the relations of these nations for well over a century. One historian of the Caribbean has even suggested that "with the exception of sugar, no single commodity has played a greater part in Caribbean history than logwood."<sup>24</sup> If this is true, it implies that the impact of logwood extended far beyond the economic sphere, for colonial trade figures clearly show that sugar was not the only commodity that overshadowed logwood, even in its heyday.<sup>25</sup> To be sure, the logwood traffic of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was a highly remunerative one and the English, Spanish—and to a lesser extent, the Dutch—in accordance with the best mercantilist theory of the day, sought to gain a hold on the trade. But logwood's brief flicker on the international stage was fraught with larger implications. Its rise and fall, over the course of a hundred-year period, happened to coincide with, and to articulate, the greater imperial issues of the age. Logwood became more than a sought-after commodity. It became the principal issue in the larger struggle between England and Spain, having political, diplomatic, and, as we shall see, social dimensions as well.

During the heyday of logwood, between 1650 and 1750, demand for the dye often outran supply, and prices soared as high as £100 sterling per ton. Between 1671 and 1684, over two hundred vessels entered the bay settlements of Campeche and Honduras, taking away through Jamaica close to six hundred tons per year. During a subsequent four and a half year period for which records are available, 1686–91, the trade through Jamaica almost doubled, one thousand tons of wood leaving the bays annually. We can only conjecture how much more wood went to New England and the European continent via the Yankee and Dutch traders then active in the bays.<sup>26</sup> (See table 1 for a rough

<sup>22</sup> *CSPC, 1714–1715* (1928), p. 59; Wilson, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> No doubt madrileño and Londoner alike discussed the much-publicized logwood dispute in the impassioned days leading up to the "War of Jenkins's Ear" in 1739.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur P. Newton, *The European Nations in the West Indies, 1493–1688* (London: A. & C. Black, 1933), p. 144.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the references to early eighteenth-century Jamaican trade and exports in *CSPC, 1702* (1912), pp. 67–69; *ibid.*, 1711–1712 (1925), pp. 206–7, 289. Sugar, rum, cotton, indigo, and ginger are usually placed ahead of logwood in the governors' reports and in export statistics. Jamaica's illicit trade in black slaves also overshadowed logwood in terms of profitability.

<sup>26</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The British in the Caribbean, 1624–1690* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 341–42. *CSPC* is sprinkled with references to Yankee and Dutch participation in the logwood trade. See, for example, *CSPC, 1681–1685*, pp. 143–44, 284 (New England traders) and *ibid.*, 1669–1674 (1889), pp. 415–16, 427–28 (Dutch merchants). See also Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623–1775* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 403, for additional figures on logwood export in the late seventeenth century.

TABLE 1  
Logwood Prices on the European Market from the Seventeenth  
Century Onward

Year	Price in Pounds Sterling	Source*
Prior to 1660 (Spanish Monopoly)	£90-£110	Dampier, <i>Voyages and Descriptions</i> , vol. 2, pt. 2, 2d ed., pp. 46-47
1670	£25-£50	CSPC, 1669-1674, p. 121
1717	£16	CSPC, 1717-1718, p. 45
1728	£9	Anon., <i>Some Observations on the Assiento Trade as it Has Been Exercised by the South-Sea Company</i> (London, 1738), p. 32
1749	£25	Burdon, <i>Archives of British Honduras</i> , 2:134
1756	£11	<i>Ibid.</i>
1768	£4	<i>Massachusetts Historical Society Collections</i> , 7th ser., vol. 20 (Boston, 1924), pp. 125, 129, 146, 186, 220, 134
1783	£8 10/-£10	Burdon, 1:13; Colonial Office Records, 123/2, 10 Feb. 1783
1825	£16	Gibbs, <i>British Honduras</i> , p. 124
1883	£5-£7	<i>Ibid.</i>

\*For full references to Dampier, CSPC, Burdon, Colonial Office Records, and Gibbs, see notes 12, 8, 30, 29, and 36, respectively.

indication of the prices paid in the European market for logwood from the seventeenth century onward.) The wood was held to be a vital component of England's proud young woollens industry, "soe essentially necessary in dying our manufactures that it would be of the last and worst consequence to be deprived thereof."<sup>27</sup> Indispensable for producing commercial shades of black, gray, purple, and violet, as well as especially bright hues of red, blue, and green, logwood was also thought to possess great powers as a medicament.<sup>28</sup> By

<sup>27</sup> Deposition of Richard Harris ("one of the most ancient traders to the West Indies") before the Board of Trade, 27 December 1714, CSPC, 1714-1715, p. 59. See also CSPC, 1733 (1939), p. 52. For a description of the wood's physical and chemical properties, see Arthur G. Perkin and Arthur E. Everest, *The Natural Organic Colouring Matters* (London: Longmans, Green, 1918), pp. 345, 363, 381-82, and Samuel J. Record and Clayton D. Mell, *Timbers of Tropical America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924), pp. 244-50. Today, synthetic dyes and a more sophisticated medical practice have rendered logwood virtually obsolete. It finds a place only where the use of a vegetable dye is called for: in the preparation of laboratory slides, in the makeup of certain inks, and in children's chemistry sets.

about 1640, large quantities of the best wood had been discovered in marshy stands throughout the Yucatán peninsula, most notably around the Bay of Campeche and the Gulf of Honduras. Since these areas were virtually unsettled and only nominally controlled by the Spaniards, it was not long before English seamen were visiting or settling in the swampy terrain—at first, with the blessing or tacit approval of the English government—there to cut the wood or else steal it from the warehouses and vessels of the Spanish.<sup>29</sup> While reliable data are impossible to obtain, it seems likely that by 1675, between two hundred and three hundred loggers had settled at the Laguna de Términos (known to the cutters as “Campeachy”), and at least that many at a variety of cutting sites on the Gulf of Honduras.<sup>30</sup>

Although the Spaniards had fallen to the nadir of their power and were caught in the worst financial depression of their history, they refused to abandon the illusion of sovereignty and decreed English settlement and cutting to be acts of trespass and piracy. While the Spanish seemed uninterested or unable to colonize the Yucatán marshlands, they refused to acquiesce in the pattern of surreptitious colonization which was being carried on by the English buccaneers. In order to limit the incursions, they began to hector the nascent settlements, by land and sea. Such attempts to dislodge the loggers by force proved as futile as earlier measures to expel them by decree. Harassment only added extra spice to the lives of men who ordinarily enjoyed flaunting the law.<sup>31</sup> Nor were English colonial officials intimidated by the Spanish measures taken against the loggers. As early as 1666, Jamaica's governor, Thomas Modyford, a close ally of both Morgan and Coxon, had said: “Every action gives new encouragement to attempt the Spaniard, finding them in all places very weak and very wealthy.”<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, English policy regarding the logwood trade and related settlements was ambiguous from the beginning. From 1670 to 1770, the British, wishing to maintain their rich Old World trade with Spain and to extend commercial relations with Spain's colonies in the New World, frequently censured the woodcutters as pirates. At the same time, England derived economic benefit from the logwood trade and political advantage from the buccaneers' attacks on Spanish ships and installations. The result was often a policy of drift in which one course of action was advocated in principle and another connived at in practice.<sup>33</sup> In the late seventeenth century, for example, Jamaica's governors were frequently put in the unfortunate position of having to plead for instructions regarding the mother country's attitude toward these new settlements. Modyford repeatedly argued for English guidance and sup-

<sup>29</sup> José Antonia Calderón Quijano, *Belize, 1663(?)–1821: Historia de los establecimientos británicos del Río Valis hasta la independencia de Hispanoamérica* (Seville: University of Seville, 1944), pp. 48–66; *CSPC, 1669–1674*, pp. 357–59; Great Britain, Colonial Office Records in the Public Record Office, General Series, 1/28, fol. 53; William Dampier, pp. 46–47, 53; Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands*, 2 vols. (London: Printed by B.M. for the author, 1707–25), 1:lxxxii–lxxxiii.

<sup>30</sup> Sir John Burdon, ed., *Archives of British Honduras*, 3 vols. (London: Sifton Praed, 1935), 1:8; James Jerome Parsons, *San Andrés and Providencia, English-Speaking Islands in the Western Caribbean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), p. 11; Caiger, *British Honduras*, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Craig, p. 57.

<sup>32</sup> *CSPC, 1661–1668* (1880), p. 359.

<sup>33</sup> Craig, pp. 57–58.

port of "these new sucking colonies [which] must have some help besides the native goodness of the soil."<sup>34</sup> His successor, Thomas Lynch, while far less partial to buccaneering interests, also found his superiors' apparent neglect infuriating. "For God's sake . . . give your commands about the Logwood," he wrote in desperation, pointing out that further drift might lead to war with Spain.<sup>35</sup>

It is not fully clear when Coxon first entered the bay settlements or began to participate in the logwood trade. He regarded himself a seaman by profession and more than likely remained actively at sea before buccaneering was proscribed in 1670. Moreover, like many buccaneers, he may have had little conception early on of the true value of the new commodity. During the 1640-70 period, many Spanish trading ships were taken, stripped of everything valuable—except the logwood cargo itself—and then burnt or set adrift.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the 1660s, as the fame of logwood spread, Coxon certainly could not have ignored the partnerships which were being formed on both sides of the Atlantic between English merchants and buccaneering crews for the purpose of acquiring the new "drug." In fact, it is likely that Coxon entered into such partnerships with some of the influential Jamaican merchants who were his friends.<sup>37</sup> The earliest record of Coxon actually cutting in the bays is a 1672 deposition, sworn by him before the governor of Jamaica, which speaks of his residence, during the preceding three years, in logging camps at Campeachy and on the Gulf of Honduras. We know that by 1675, Coxon was again at sea, this time commissioned by the French to capture Spanish ships on the Main, and that upon occasion, as in 1674 and again in 1679, he based himself in the bays. It is not farfetched, therefore, to assume that following his earlier stint as a cutter, he took logwood sloops as prizes or that like other buccaneers, he raided the few remaining Spanish logwood camps on the Gulf of Honduras.<sup>38</sup>

Coxon must have entertained serious thoughts of becoming a cutter on a more regular basis once England had made clear its intention to prosecute those who clung to buccaneering. The "bayman's" life was one of hard labor, but it was sweetened by monetary gain, prodigious drinking bouts, and cowed Indian women, thus recommending itself to men inclined to live on the fringes of the law.<sup>39</sup> Its greatest virtue, however, was that it did not estrange these

<sup>34</sup> *CSPC, 1669-1674*, p. 121.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 1:331; Archibald R. Gibbs, *British Honduras: An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Colony from Its Settlement in 1670* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1883), p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Povey to Thomas Povey, 25 April 1662, Balthway Papers, vol. 23.

<sup>38</sup> *CSPC, 1669-1674*, p. 427; *ibid.*, 1675-1676 (1893), p. 437; Haring, pp. 220, 223; E. O. Winzerling, *The Beginning of British Honduras, 1506-1765* (New York: North River Press, 1946), p. 68; Richard Pares, *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> The rigorous nature of the logging operation is described in detail by Dampier and in Nathaniel Uring, *A History of the Voyages and Travels of Captain Nathaniel Uring* (London: J. Peele, 1726). The only figures available—and for a later period when logwood had markedly declined—suggest that the logger was likely to make an average yearly profit of £50 for himself. While no windfall, this was a definite step up for most of the cutters (Long, 1:328). Dampier, pp. 53-54, estimated that some of the loggers spent as much as £40 on a single drinking bout when a merchant ship came into the bays.



~~buccaneers from the sea.~~ Logging became an indispensable sideline for the buccaneer forced to mark time on land. In this way, buccaneering began to merge with logwood cutting between 1670 and 1690. By the standards of the day, the rewards for capturing ~~Spanish ships and robbing them of rich cargoes,~~ coupled with a lucrative trade in logwood, were, no doubt, ideal for buccaneers like Coxon. ~~"Coin' to the Bays to cut logwood,"~~ soon became regarded by both British and Spanish colonial governors and naval officers as the buccaneer's most convenient ~~alibi.~~<sup>40</sup> Jamaica governor Thomas Modyford estimated in the early 1670s that as many as two thirds of the English freebooters in the Caribbean would enter the profitable logging trade, either at Campeachy, in the Gulf of Honduras, or elsewhere on the Spanish Main.<sup>41</sup>

Occasionally, such buccaneers became impatient, and, as English merchant John Atkins observed, "finding that little came by confining their Ways and Means to the Spaniards only, they fall at last on any Nation, the Transition being easy from a Buccaneer to a Pirate."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the logging settlements became breeding grounds and havens for some of the age's most notorious desperadoes. Edward Low began his career as a logwood loader in the Gulf of Honduras during the first decades of the eighteenth century. Resenting what he considered an unreasonable order from a merchant ship's captain, he discharged a musket at him and took to the high seas to begin his career as a pirate.<sup>43</sup> Years later, he appeared again in the Gulf of Honduras, this time to plunder a Spanish vessel. Upon learning that the ship's captain had dropped most of the valuable cargo overboard, Low went on a rampage, murdering most of the crew in cold blood, then lopping off the lips, ears, and nose of the captain, broiling them before the wretched man's eyes, and making him eat them prior to his execution.<sup>44</sup>

Edward Teach ("Blackbeard") regularly fled to the Gulf of Honduras, and sources indicate that on at least one occasion he took up logging.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, William Dampier lived as a logwood cutter and trader for a short time before drifting into full-time piratical pursuits and, ultimately, a more respectable life as an explorer.<sup>46</sup> Pirate captain William Benbow cut near Belize City for many years and made a tidy profit. Today a creek in Belize is named after him.<sup>47</sup> Nicholas van Horn, a Dutchman sailing with a French commission, made his headquarters at the Belize settlement and, after some months of woodcutting,

<sup>40</sup> The phrase and other references to explicit marauding activity in the bays appear with some frequency in the correspondence of the Blathwayt Papers. See, for example, Molesworth to Blathwayt, 2 November 1686, vol. 25; cf. Sloane MSS, vol. 2752, fol. 29. See also Haring, p. 226; Caiger, p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, p. 339.

<sup>42</sup> John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil, and the West Indies* (London: C. Ward and R. Chandler, 1735), p. 226.

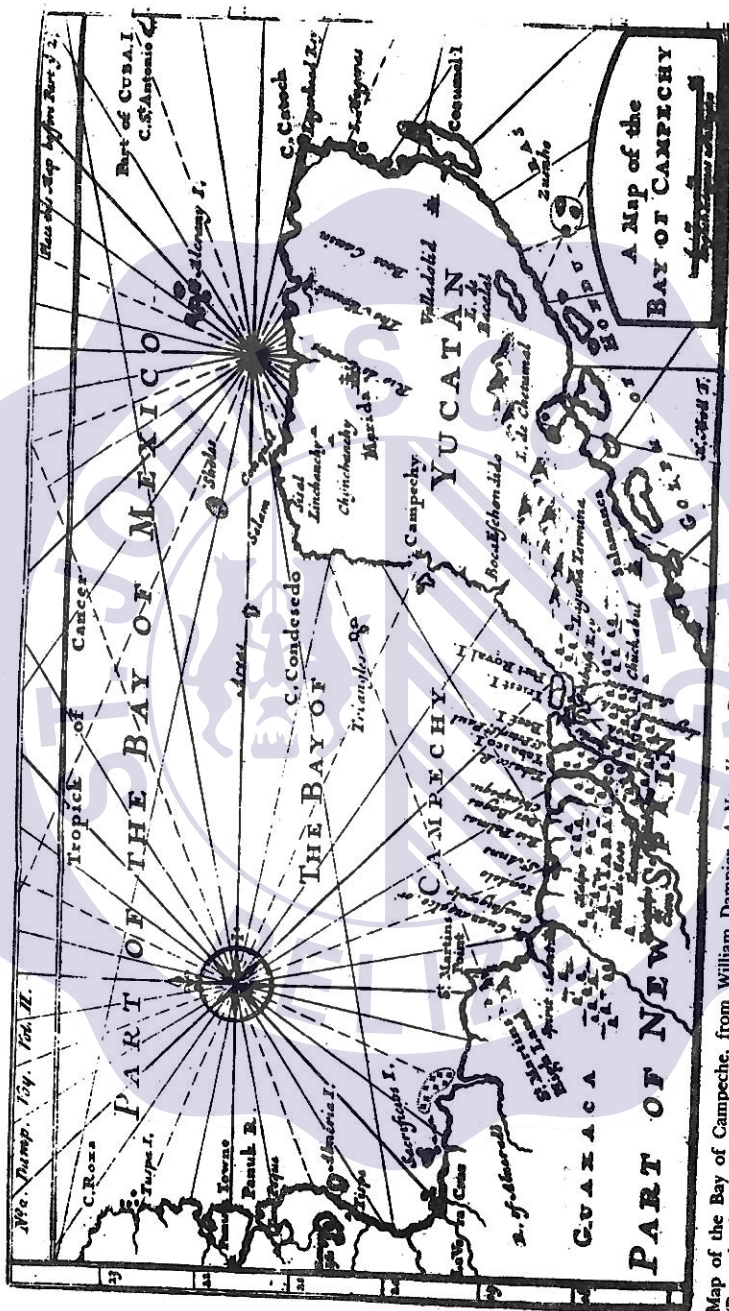
<sup>43</sup> Caiger, p. 64; Winzerling, pp. 77-78.

<sup>44</sup> *CSPC, 1724-1725* (1936), p. 72; Caiger, p. 65.

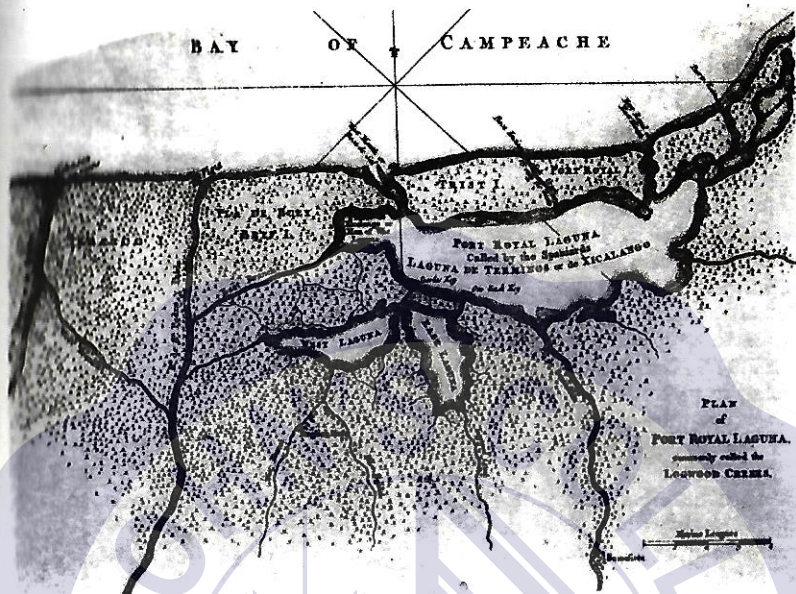
<sup>45</sup> Caiger, p. 64; Winzerling, pp. 76-77.

<sup>46</sup> Bennett, "William Dampier," p. 477.

<sup>47</sup> *The Honduras Almanack for the Year . . . 1830, Calculated to the Meridian of Belize* (Belize: "Published by authority of the Magistrates," 1830), p. 60; Gibbs, p. 28; Caiger, p. 232.



Map of the Bay of Campeche, from William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*, 1729. (Reproduction, courtesy of the William L. Clements Library.)



Plan of Laguna de Términos, from Thomas Jefferys, *A Description of the Spanish Islands*, 1762. (Reproduction, courtesy of the William L. Clements Library.)

led the sack of Campeche in 1685.<sup>48</sup> Captains Sawkins, Serles, Yankey, Bannister, Yallahs, and Sharp, all English privateers turned pirate, often collaborated on raids and rendezvoused in the Gulf of Honduras. The notorious Serles, one of Morgan's most trusted lieutenants, careened his vessel into the Bay of Campeche in 1672 and began to cut wood at Laguna de Términos. Shortly thereafter he was killed by one of his men. Sharp, Bannister, and Yankey were established loggers; yet it is owing to their plunder in and around the bay settlements that several offshore keys now bear their names.<sup>49</sup>

John Coxon's route to the bays, as well as his subsequent career there, can be documented in more graphic detail. His decision to take up the logging life on a more permanent basis in the 1680s again reveals his particular talent for adapting himself to recurring shifts in English colonial policy. With Morgan discredited and Thomas Lynch the new governor in Port Royal, it had become clear that England would no longer sanction buccaneering in the West Indies.

<sup>48</sup> *CSPC, 1681-1685*, pp. 457-58; *ibid.*, 1685-1688 (1899), p. 84; Molesworth to Blathwayt, 4 May 1686, *Blathwayt Papers*, vol. 25; Winzerling, p. 69; Haring, p. 201.

<sup>49</sup> Molesworth to Blathwayt, 3 February 1685 and 12 March 1687, *Blathwayt Papers*, vol. 25; duke of Albemarle to Blathwayt, 8 March 1688, *ibid.*, vol. 21; *CSPC, 1685-1688*, pp. 97, 241; *ibid.*, 1681-1685, pp. 457-58.

In 1682, Lynch ordered Coxon to bring back a boatload of loggers from the Gulf of Honduras. Coxon accepted the commission; we can only speculate whether these men he was called upon to apprehend had ever been his comrades. Before he reached the bays, however, Coxon discovered that a mutiny was afoot; his men were plotting to take his ship and go buccaneering. But as Governor Lynch recalled, in a letter to the home government, "Captain Coxon valiently resisted, killing one or two with his own hand, forcing eleven overboard, and bringing three here [Port Royal], who were then condemned."<sup>50</sup>

This decision to side with the English colonial authorities against men whom he undoubtedly regarded as his kindred spirits, must have been a difficult one for Coxon to make. Moreover, in making it, he must have reflected upon the ever narrowing possibilities for maneuver that now lay open to buccaneers like himself. Perhaps in this conflict lies the key to understanding why, late in 1682, when Lynch sent him to the bays again to apprehend loggers and pirates, Coxon acted differently.<sup>51</sup> For many months there was no word of him; then, late in 1683, Lynch was informed that Coxon had surfaced in the Gulf of Honduras—but as a pirate.<sup>52</sup> First he raided several Spanish warehouses in Yucatán; then he entered into a partnership with Bartholomew Sharp, whose former career as an English privateer paralleled his own. Before long, news of Coxon's depredations on English and Spanish ships alike filtered back to Lynch's successor as governor of Jamaica, Hender Molesworth, who was obliged to send several vessels in pursuit of Coxon.<sup>53</sup>

In turning pirate, Coxon had done little to distinguish himself from Blackbeard, Sharp, and many of the other noted buccaneers of his day who had begun their careers in the service of the crown. Yet Coxon was not content merely to remain a pirate. After another series of depredations on English and Spanish vessels, he was taken at sea early in 1686 and brought back to Jamaica. There he was condemned by a court of admiralty, only to escape and commence a more illustrious career as the leader of the Campeachy logwood cutters. Through a well-placed merchant friend, Coxon announced to Governor Molesworth that he was off to the bays and "nevermore would goe upon any buccaneering designe but get his bread by the sweat of his browe."<sup>54</sup> The governor was not entirely convinced and sent another force to retake Coxon.<sup>55</sup> By this time, however, Coxon had established a loyal following in logging circles, so that it was difficult to take him. In a frontier society that prized courage above most things, the resolute Coxon became a charismatic figure and exercised great sway over the Campeachy loggers. Informed of his immi-

<sup>50</sup> *CSPC, 1681-1685*, p. 320; Haring, p. 237.

<sup>51</sup> Lynch to Blathwayt, 18 December 1682, Blathwayt Papers, vol. 24. Coxon was one of five Jamaican captains and four hundred seamen that Lynch sent "after these cursed Pyrates."

<sup>52</sup> Lynch to Blathwayt, 11 November 1683, Blathwayt Papers, vol. 24; *CSPC, 1681-1685*, p. 535.

<sup>53</sup> Molesworth to Blathwayt, 2 November 1686 and 3 February 1688, Blathwayt Papers, vol. 25.

<sup>54</sup> Molesworth to Blathwayt, 2 November 1686, Blathwayt Papers, vol. 25; *CSPC, 1685-1688*, p. 143; Haring, p. 237.

<sup>55</sup> Molesworth wrote to Blathwayt: "I hear that Coxon is cutting logwood in the Gulf of Campeachy, and has written to his friends that he has given up privateering. . . . I shall none the less send the proclamation declaring him a pirate . . . by the first opportunity" (*CSPC, 1685-1688*, p. 274).

nent capture, Coxon rallied around him fifty trusted men and pushed his way miles farther up a creek where he and his men pitched camp. An incident soon occurred which put Coxon beyond reach of the authorities. Word was brought to the backwoods hideout that a Spanish *periagua* had raided the Campeachy works and taken one of the logwood sloops.<sup>56</sup> Returning down the creek and mobilizing another fifty men, Coxon pursued and ultimately retook the sloop, the *periagua* "flying at the sight of him."<sup>57</sup> Known for his dramatics, Coxon returned the sloop to its owner, then bound up his Spanish prisoners and placed them on board a ship, to be delivered personally, with his warmest regards, to his old nemesis, Governor Molesworth in Port Royal. Molesworth wisely returned the hostages to the Spanish governor of Yucatán and thereby avoided an incident. Dejectedly, he wrote to colonial secretary William Blathwayt: "After this Exploit, he [Coxon] strengthened his personal Guard with about 80 more, and having obliged the Logwood men in general by what he had done, the persons I employed for the seizing of him could neither find the opportunity nor the Assistance they required for the doeing of it, and Coxen soone after, with those men that he had gotten together, goes way in his Canoas for the River of Tabasco, with designe as was thought to rob some of the Indian Townes."<sup>58</sup>

Coxon's Indian raids produced slaves, concubines, and provisions, and suggest yet another reason for his popularity among the loggers.<sup>59</sup> Acknowledged *primus inter pares*, Coxon went on to build a prosperous, roughly egalitarian community based upon intensive woodcutting and looting. Supplies and necessary items which the Indian communities could not provide were obtained in raids on Spanish warehouses in Campeche and from attacks on coastal shipping. Ultimately, Coxon would accumulate significant wealth and prestige in what was fast becoming, much to England's diplomatic embarrassment, an incipient British colony. For, if British colonialism vacillated and its Spanish rival lacked the political and military clout—and often the resolve—to enforce its will, Coxon and his woodcutters were both impressively consistent and resolute. At the center of a diplomatic controversy and little understood by their own government, the loggers carried on their enterprise no matter what happened. Though they might occasionally appeal to England—by way of Jamaica—for help against the Spaniards, they steadfastly ignored any restrictions that colonial officials might try to impose upon them. The loggers were independent and doggedly stubborn, rugged individuals who chose to work knee-deep in a malarial swamp for their daily bread, rubbed elbows with alligators, and faced the loss of their homes with every new season, either by flood or forcible eviction.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> A *periagua* was a large flat-bottomed canoe for shallow watercourses.

<sup>57</sup> Molesworth to Blathwayt, 12 March 1687, Blathwayt Papers, vol. 25.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Molesworth to Blathwayt, 8 August 1687, Blathwayt Papers, vol. 25.

<sup>60</sup> Dampier, p. 91, whimsically relates how, during the wet season, life in the logging camps went on "three foot under water." Fascinated by the alligators of the Yucatán swamps, he provides several humorous (and perhaps apocryphal) anecdotes about loggers who literally stumbled into their jaws. One of these unfortunates was Dampier himself, although he emerged again more fright-

Always unpredictable, by 1688 Coxon had become reluctant to end his days in a community of social pariahs, and he expressed to several influential Jamaican friends his desire to return to Jamaica and take up his place in proper society. Repeatedly, he pressed Molesworth for a pardon, letting it be known that "if he cannot obtain it here [Jamaica] he must seeke Protection amongst the French."<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, Molesworth's successor, the duke of Albemarle—like Morgan, partial to the buccaneering faction—proffered a pardon, and in September 1688 Coxon returned to Port Royal to reclaim his citizenship.<sup>62</sup> Immediately, he entered into business arrangements with Jamaica merchants active in the thriving contraband trade with the Spanish colonies. Yet while he prospered financially, Coxon found it difficult to integrate himself into the respectable, sedentary island life. Nor was Jamaica's planter-merchant elite eager to accept him. Yearning for the life at sea, Coxon scoured the wharves and taverns, recruiting a crew of runaway servants and debtors, and slipped out of Port Royal. At this point, as he headed once more for the bays late in 1689, we lose clear sight of him.<sup>63</sup> According to one popular writer, who provides no documentation, Coxon spent the next decade at "Coxon-Hole" on the Gulf of Honduras, cutting wood, engaging in occasional acts of piracy, and trading with the Miskito Indians. More than likely, John Coxon ended his days beyond the pale of the law, a frontier patriarch settled among his admirers, either at Campeachy or on the Gulf of Honduras, still practicing his dual profession—occasionally a logger, more often a buccaneer.<sup>64</sup>

Coxon's life story is exemplary of the possibilities for conflict and accommodation which lay open to enterprising individuals and groups at the periphery of empire. Supremely self-confident, a brash adventurer risen from the underprivileged ranks of English society, Coxon was not content to hide himself in the folds of the English colonial system. Rather than eke out a humdrum existence at the margin, Coxon alternately collaborated and skir-

ened than harmed by the beast. Alligators were a part of the landscape of the logging camps and the loggers learned to live with them: "We do frequently meet them . . . and I have drank out of a Pond in the dry time, that hath been full of them, and the Water not deep enough to cover their Backs, and the Compass of the Pond so small I could get no Water, but by coming within two Yards of the Alligator Nose; They lying with their Heads towards mine as I was drinking, and looking on me all the while" (pp. 74–78, 82, 100).

<sup>61</sup> Lyman Musgrave to Blathwayt, 5 May 1690, Blathwayt Papers, vol. 27. Musgrave was a prominent Jamaican merchant.

<sup>62</sup> *CSPC, 1685–1688*, p. 597; Haring, p. 237.

<sup>63</sup> The death of the duke of Albemarle during the winter of 1688–89 may have been a major factor in Coxon's decision to take to the high seas in 1689. The duke's appointment had marked a return to the old freebooting spirit; now his death left the buccaneers without a powerful patron. Later in 1689, the Glorious Revolution marked a decisive turning point in the life of the Jamaica colony, signaling the final repudiation of the buccaneers and the triumph of their bitter rivals, the large sugar planters. Albemarle's successor, William Beeston, epitomized the return of rule to the big absentee planters. Dunn, pp. 160–63; Estelle Francis Ward, *Christopher Monck, Duke of Albemarle* (London: J. Murray, 1915), pp. 234–70.

<sup>64</sup> Winzerling, p. 70; Haring, p. 237; *CSPC, 1685–1688*, p. 597; cf. Lloyd, pp. 296–301.

mished with the English colonial authorities before setting out on his own, determined to improve his life's chances by fashioning his own social framework. In the process, he not only carved out his own niche but helped to create a more open, if far riskier, parallel society on the colonial frontier. It must be said that not everyone in this new society was a rogue or buccaneer. Many were honest men: merchants, veteran seamen, men who had failed in the occupations of colonial life and were looking for a means of gaining modest financial security. William Dampier, himself a logger and buccaneer in the late seventeenth century, viewed the logging settlement as "a Place where a Man, through hard work, might have gotten an Estate."<sup>65</sup> He pointed out that when privateering was suppressed, its practitioners were given a basic choice: "either go to Petit Guavas, where the Trade still continued, or into the Bay for logwood." And, he concluded, "the more Industrious sort of them came hither."<sup>66</sup> Yet it would still be well into the eighteenth century before the colonial establishment was powerful enough to drive all ideas of plunder from the minds of many loggers.

Beyond hard work and opportunity, Coxon's parallel society fostered a crude but democratic social organization that reflected its buccaneer origins. The rough discipline and egalitarian spirit which had been observed aboard ship were very conveniently transported to the settlements ashore, where the method of allotting shares in the profits of the business under the aegis of an elected logger would follow the model of distribution aboard ship. Dampier describes a "consort-ship" he entered into with other loggers, where oaths were taken and each individual's obligations and rewards were precisely mapped out in advance.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the primitive form of administration which came to characterize the bay settlements also harked back to the customs and usages of the buccaneers. A parallel can be drawn between the eighteenth-century public meeting in Belize and a seventeenth-century gathering of buccaneers on board ship, described here by Alexander Esquemeling:

On the ship, they first discuss where to go and get food supplies. . . . The captain is allowed no better fare than the meanest on board. If they notice he has better food, the men bring the dish from their own mess and exchange it for the captain's. . . . When the . . . ship is ready to sail, the buccaneers resolve by common vote where they shall cruise. They also draw up an agreement or *chasse partie*, in which is specified what the captain shall have for himself and for the use of his vessel [and what shall go to the remaining buccaneers].<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Dampier, pp. 54-55.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>68</sup> Alexander O. Esquemeling, *The Buccaneers of America (De Americaensche zee-roovers)*, trans. Alexis Brown (London: Folio Society, 1972; original Dutch version, 1678), pp. 58-59. Esquemeling's firsthand account of the buccaneers' "manner of living" (pp. 58-70) is undoubtedly the best we have. For a description of the early Belize public meeting, see O. Nigel Bolland, *The Formation of a Colonial Society: Belize, from Conquest to Crown Colony* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 36-40.

Thus, Dampier's judgment that "the Old [buccaneer] Standards so debauched the sober Men that came into the Bay . . . that they could never settle under any Civil Government," must be viewed in its proper perspective.<sup>69</sup> To be sure, Coxon and his mates stubbornly resisted the encroachment of "Civil Government," which implied social control by the English authorities. Yet in their own fashion the loggers agreed upon and abided by their own political code, which embodied a strong sense of fraternal loyalty and without which the frequent hardships of their profession would have been insupportable.<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps most basic to this frontier society—indeed to all new societies on the frontier—was its urge for adventure, its continual search for opportunity without restraint. Play, in the sense of adventure and peril, was a premier attraction of the logger's life. In fact, play was often an integral part of work. Revelry punctuated logwood operations and transactions with buyers; buccaneering raids and the abduction of Indian women all entered into the way the logger made his living. Houghing or hamstringing stampeding bullocks across the marshy plains might technically be called work, but for those who enjoyed it, it was the most savage sort of fun.<sup>71</sup> Obviously, for Coxon and many of the loggers, a safe, frugal existence would have been no life at all, regardless of the financial rewards involved. Peril and adventure were to be preferred, and they outweighed a fair number of inconveniences: Spaniards, hurricanes and floods, fierce insects, and disease.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, it was the Spaniards who made life most miserable for the Campeche loggers, and in 1680 and 1716, drove them from their settlement at Laguna de Términos, the last time for good. Most of them remained undaunted, however, and merely moved their operations across the peninsula to the Gulf of Honduras.<sup>73</sup> We can only wonder whether Coxon—who by 1716 would have been quite a venerable logger—lived to lead this migration to Belize.

The tenacity of the frontier society which Coxon and his peers carved out of the Yucatán swamps was in large part attributable to its openness: the bay settlements offered possibilities to those who could not or would not accommodate

<sup>69</sup> Dampier, pp. 53–54.

<sup>70</sup> David A. G. Waddell, *British Honduras: A Historical and Contemporary Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 49–51; Narda Dobson, *A History of Belize* (London: Longman Caribbean, 1973), pp. 105–17; Bolland, *Formation of a Colonial Society*, pp. 36–40.

<sup>71</sup> Any logger skillful with a "hocksing" or houghing pole could accumulate valuable hides and greatly increase his income. For other popular forms of recreation and such aquatic sports as gondola racing, which began to appear in the Gulf of Honduras during the first half of the eighteenth century, see George Henderson, *An Account of the British Settlement of Honduras*, 2d ed. (London: C. & R. Baldwin, 1811), p. 102.

<sup>72</sup> On flooding, see Dampier, p. 91. The names which the loggers gave the insect pests are instructive: "stinging flies," "galley nippers," and "bottle asses." Of the bite of the last, Uring, p. 358, wrote: "[it] poisons the blood and leaves a black speck as big as a large Pin's head, which in Two or Three Days grows rotten." Atkins, pp. 227–28, recalled that "these Vermin are an insufferable Plague and Impediment to Sleep." The "stinging flies" were such a nuisance that the captain of Atkins's ship elected to load his logwood at night when there were fewest about. Henderson, pp. 70–71, 85–90, discusses the fevers and tropical diseases that threatened the loggers.

<sup>73</sup> *CSPC, 1716–1717* (1930), pp. 201–2, 264–66, 293; *ibid.*, 1730 (1937), pp. 134–35. A few continued to come back to the Bay of Campeche and cut despite Spanish threats of slavery or death. In 1734 and on a number of other occasions later in the century, the Spanish drove the loggers out of their Belizé settlement, but each time they returned and rebuilt it.



themselves to the usual round of colonial life which they found to be oppressive or stifling. In providing this option throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the logwood camps gradually drew a more heterogeneous and respectable group of settlers. The Campeachy settlement probably did not have more than two hundred loggers prior to its demise in 1716.<sup>74</sup> By 1779, there were close to five hundred settlers in the Belize colony, as well as almost three thousand black and Indian slaves.<sup>75</sup> Joining discontented seamen like Coxon were individuals who had failed at, or grown tired of, more conventional occupations and were now looking to try their hand at something new. Later, as the settlements took on some degree of permanence, groups of reputable merchants paid regular visits and ultimately stayed. Meanwhile, groups of Maya and Miskito Indians were finding their way into the camps, lured by their kinfolk, often the loggers' mistresses, who had been relatively well treated by the English. Many of the Yucatecan Indians were fleeing from the onerous tribute and *repartimiento* obligations exacted by the Spanish, and accurately perceived—in the manner of many incoming whites—that the logging settlements on the frontier offered them some respite from the exploitive institutions of colonial life.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, even the formal slave regime which grew up in this frontier environment at the turn of the eighteenth century after Coxon's death seems to have been somewhat more tolerable than that which existed in plantation societies elsewhere in the New World. The importation of black slaves became necessary when European demand for mahogany, as well as logwood, increased, and with it the scope and complexity of the timber extraction process. Experiments with Indian labor failed, and although black slaves were an expensive commodity, several hundred were purchased for the Belize settlements during the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>77</sup> These blacks cut at the side of their masters in the swamps and forests. Work, however strenuous, was seasonal; and contemporary accounts suggest that the Belize slaves were better fed and clothed, and granted more free time than their counterparts on the sugar plantations in the West Indies.<sup>78</sup> By about 1770, however, the distinction be-

<sup>74</sup> Dampier, p. 53.

<sup>75</sup> Unsigned letter to Governor Dalling, 3 September 1779, Colonial Office Records, Jamaica Series, 137/75.

<sup>76</sup> Dampier, pp. 94–95; *Colección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista, y colonización de las posesiones españolas de América y Oceanía*, 42 vols. (Madrid: Academia de la Historia, 1864–85), 19:240; Parsons, pp. 11–12.

<sup>77</sup> Hamshere, p. 173.

<sup>78</sup> Of course, no attempt is made here to fuel the myth, propagated by Caiger and other imperial apologists, that slavery was a benign institution in Belize, administered with such compassion by the white settlers that its effects upon the slaves were minimal. Indeed, one hesitates to say "less oppressive," since slavery is, by definition, oppressive, and it is difficult to overemphasize that oppression. For revisionist, yet judicious assessments of Belizean slavery which point up its peculiar characteristics—owing to the organizational requirements of the logging industry—without sentimentalizing its impact, see Bolland, "Slavery in Belize," *Journal of Belizean Affairs* 6 (January 1978):3–36; C. H. Grant, *The Making of Modern Belize* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1976), p. 41–49; Norman Ashcraft, "The Early British Settlement in the Bay of Honduras," *Journal of Belizean Affairs* 2 (December 1973): 55–56; and Dobson, pp. 145–59. For the harsh plight of the West Indian plantation slave, see Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492–1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 183–200, and Bridenbaugh and Bridenbaugh, pt. 2: "Black Men's Plantations."

tween master and slave gradually came into sharper focus. Worsening conditions for slaves were tied to changes in the system of production. Mahogany now far surpassed logwood as the chief product of Belize, requiring ever greater amounts of capital, land, and labor. To keep pace with rising market demand, a more rigorous work regimen was imposed. Imported blacks were organized into larger work gangs and driven harder by their masters.<sup>79</sup>

As the intensification of the slave regime suggests, all frontiers pass away; the establishment of a viable settlement signals the vanishing of a frontier. So it was in the Gulf of Honduras as the first half of the eighteenth century drew to a close. Rude huts gave way to stylish cottages and even plantation manors.<sup>80</sup> Increasingly, Belize would develop a valuable entrepôt trade with the neighboring Indian tribes of the Miskito coast as well as with Spanish-speaking Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.<sup>81</sup> Whereas the logger had formerly taken his "wife" from the Indian villages and later from the black quarters, now he shipped her from home, and the marriage ceremony was an official one. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, John Coxon and his fellows had gone to Indian and black healers who offered magical cures.<sup>82</sup> By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the white man had become less superstitious and more racially conscious. If there was no doctor available, he tended to himself. The freewheeling society of the 1680s and 1690s was grinding to a halt in the 1730s and 1740s. Symbolically, in 1738 the free men of Belize elected a certain "Henry Sharpe, Esq.," one of their own, as their superintendent or liaison with the higher British authorities in Jamaica.<sup>83</sup> The days of simple, frontier rule were gone.

By the time the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, the old order had entirely vanished. The ethnic composition of Belize was now more diverse. To the local Indian population, already augmented by refugees from Spanish Yucatán, were added several hundred black Caribs, deported from Saint Vincent by the English colonial authorities in 1798. On the eve of slave emancipation in 1833, Britain's new colony was made up of about five hundred whites, an equal number of free blacks and "people of color," and several thousand black slaves.<sup>84</sup> *The Honduras Almanack*, the Belize colony's new, officially sanctioned publication, dedicated one of its first editions to a discussion of the "classes of society."<sup>85</sup> Slaves and Indians were spoken of in the most condescending terms, and free blacks were reminded that they were the children of slaves or ex-slaves themselves. All in all, Belize seemed intent upon erasing all memories of its wild youth. Late in the eighteenth century, a fine of half a

<sup>79</sup> Grant, p. 47; Bolland, "Slavery," pp. 9-10.

<sup>80</sup> Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies*, 5th ed., 5 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1966; first published 1818-19), 4:259-60, describes Belize at the turn of the century as a small but fashionable town of two hundred houses, "many of which are large, commodious, and elegantly furnished."

<sup>81</sup> Hamshere, p. 170.

<sup>82</sup> Dampier, p. 90.

<sup>83</sup> Gibbs, p. 35.

<sup>84</sup> Edwards, 4:259-66; Hamshere, p. 173.

<sup>85</sup> *Honduras Almanack*, pp. 6-36.

crowns was imposed for each episode of "profane cursing and swearing in disobedience to God's command."<sup>86</sup> In 1830, some seamen were sentenced to five days' imprisonment and a daily hour in the stocks for "bathing naked in the River as the Bishop of Jamaica and the Superintendent with their ladies were passing by."<sup>87</sup> To show that progress had been made, *The Almanack* reminded the colony that "a few years back . . . the sacred institution of marriage was not only neglected, but despised; concubinage, if not promiscuous intercourse, drunkenness, &c. were among the besetting sins of the land; and virtue and decency were but little known, and less thought of; but now a brighter prospect has opened."<sup>88</sup>

But had it? As the frontier had receded, the colony had advanced. In its wake, it brought privilege, exploitation, and deadening routine; in short, the same oppressive social evils that John Coxon and Belize's founding fathers had fled not so very long before. Buccaneers and outcasts from colonial society, these Englishmen sought in the marshlands of the Yucatán peninsula the opportunities they had increasingly been denied on land and at sea. John Coxon, the privateer who adapted and survived to become logwood cutter, slaver, and frontier patriarch, does more than typify these reluctant English colonists; he represents the archetype of the buccaneer who in fleeing colonial rule, unwittingly served to extend it.

<sup>86</sup> Hamshere, pp. 170-71.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>88</sup> *Honduras Almanack*, p. 22.

to

## THE POETRY OF COLONIALISM: 19TH CENTURY DOGGEREL ABOUT BELIZE

Poems are many things to many different people. They can be amusing, emotional, romantic, public or very private, abstract or descriptive. To an anthropologist like myself, however, poetry is important as a window into another culture and another time. Poems can tell us things about people's thoughts and feelings that we cannot find in other written forms of expression. They can even express ideas that the writer held, but was not consciously aware of at the time. Just as Homer has been a key, for generations of scholars, to the thought and emotions of the ancient Greeks, poems of other cultures have helped us to understand how people see themselves, each other, and the world.

The colonial culture of Belize City in the 19th century is today as distant from us as a foreign country. The colony's strict class divisions and hierarchy, their firm belief in the inherent superiority of people with light complexions (while those same superior people were thought incapable of physical labor in the local climate), the domination of politics and the economy by a small group of mahogany barons and merchants - all of this seemed so "natural" in Belize that it was hardly commented upon. People took these things for granted. The very things that made this culture so unique and peculiar to modern eyes went mostly unnoticed and unremarked in day-to-day life. So the literature of the time often tells us very little about the very things we most want to know about. What was it like to live in such a society? How did people rational-

ize their privileges or suffering? I find that the poems of the time can reveal more of this culture than they were originally meant to.

A variety of types of verses were popular in British Honduras in the 19th century. At the time poetry was much more widely written, read, and recited than now. A knowledge of verse was one of the marks of an educated gentleman - it distinguished those of a certain wealth, status and origin from the "common" and uneducated people. In this way poetry played its role in maintaining the class divisions of society; yet another means, like dress, manners and language, of telling an authentic bearer of European culture from a local imposter.

For "serious" artistic poetry, the colonials went to European sources (mostly English, but some German, Latin and Greek) of the most conservative sort. This reflected the colonial idea of the relationship between culture in Belize, and the "home" culture in Europe.<sup>1</sup> By elevating only European poetry to the status of "true art," the colonial elite showed their disdain for local culture (most of them would agree that there was no "local culture").

In the colonial mind, Belize was not a society on its own with its own language and culture, but was instead an enclave or island of the British culture surrounded by barbarism. The role of the colonial elite was to keep that island pure, unadulterated by local language, art or thought, especially since that local culture was the product of the lowest social class - the creole-speaking, John-Canoe dancing, Boom-and-Chime singing black working class of ex-slaves. The colonialists protected their version of England by denying that the 'customs' of the local people were culture or art at all.

But this created problems and ambiguities when the local elite did produce their own poetry about Belize. They were the local representatives of European culture, but it was obvious to all that they could never come close to equaling the sophisticated products of England's finest poets. Their own poems could not bear comparison with serious art, for real art must come from Europe. Yet those same poems had to be European, not local. There were two ways they could shield their own poetry from comparison with the 'real' culture of Europe. The first was to present it as a joke or parody, a mocking or comic imitation on a European model - not to be

taken seriously. The second way to make their poetry acceptable was to clothe it in religious or patriotic sentiments that were sacred; to question the poetry was to question an unquestionable sentiment. As long as the poem was religious, patriotic, or about royalty, it would be acceptable, no matter how twisted the verse or tortured the rhymes.

I want to focus on these locally-produced poems, written by the colonialists about the place they lived. They show us some interesting sides of the colonial mind. They are also, by and large, horrible poems that might still bring a smile of pain to the reader. I will not discuss private love poems, classical selections, or religious recitations, because these were rarely published in the newspapers I have consulted.

The first selection is from the Honduras Observer and Belize Gazette (volume 3, no. 4) of December 13, 1845.<sup>2</sup> This newspaper made a regular practice of printing humorous selections - usually straight from English and North American journals and newspapers - on the front page. Local news, on the second or third page, was clearly not as important as the latest joke from London. But the first contribution on the front page of this issue reads as follows:

#### THE HONDURAS LIGHT GUITAR

Written after seeing in the Nassau Guardian the Bahamian Parody on the Light Guitar

Oh I am of Honduras land,  
A land of wood and mud and sand;  
And where the servants have command,  
Of whom, in fear, the masters stand;  
While nightly gazing on a star,  
Then playing upon the light guitar.

Where when the Northern rainy breeze,  
A deluge pours upon Belize,  
Who says, he cannot if he please,  
In water stand up to his knees?  
While nightly gazing at his star,  
He plays upon his light guitar.

Where clouds pour out a flooding stream,  
The heated by sol's burning beam,  
The ground emits so dense a steam,  
Enough to make a stew of him,

Who boasts of gazing at a star,  
While playing on his light guitar.

Wherein abound insects and flies,  
The greatest pests beneath the skies;  
And in the grass the serpent lies,  
Whose deadly bit may paralyze  
The man, who gazes on a star,  
While playing on his light guitar.

Time fails to tell of other woes,  
Of bottle flies and mosquitoes;  
Of strikers, sand flies, and chigoes,  
That drink your blood and eat your toes,  
And fear you, not, nor see your star,  
Nor listen to your light guitar.

Our chronicler considereth,  
There may be reptiles, which he saith,  
Have poison'd lips and simoon<sup>3</sup> breath,  
Which scatter firebrands, arrows, death;  
If so how dim becomes our star,  
And sad and silent our guitar.

Within the jesting tone of this parody of a romantic poem, the author made two very real complaints about life in the colony. First that servants and workers did not show proper respect to their masters (remember this was less than 15 years after the abolition of slavery). Second, that the colony was physically a miserable place, with a bad climate and hostile pests. I would argue that this attitude towards the landscape was necessary to the European colonials and the local elite, for several reasons. It justified the fact that many of them planned to return to Europe as soon as they made enough money from exploiting the colony. They felt they could not stay for physical and health reasons. Seeing the place as a pestilential hell-hole makes it a lot easier to justify an exploitative attitude towards the country; taking wealth away without investing anything back in developing the place. If Belize was such a miserable spot, any European certainly deserved to get rich after a few years hard toil in a Belize City (or St. George's Cay) office, or on a rural estate surrounded by servants. And certainly those arrogant and demanding servants, who were said by the masters to be immune to insects and pests, themselves did not deserve any assistance!

But not all parody has to be quite so blatant. The following poem, which might be by the same author, uses irony in a much more subtle way. Instead of condemning the place outright, the poet uses overblown praise to get the same ultimate point across. In case the reader has missed the irony, the last verse brings the tone back to that of the previous poem. The source is the Honduras Observer and Belize Gazette (Vol. 4, no. 36, July 24, 1847).

### THE BANKS OF BELIZE - A PASTORAL BALLAD

While songsters their rivers to carol combine,  
Their Arnos and Barras, their Tweeds and their Dees,  
To the fair of Honduras, the pleasure be mine,  
To sing the most beautiful banks of Belize.

Hark the nymphs and the swains in dories are singing,  
While echo the music resounds thro' the tree;  
And the fishes around them are jumping and springing,  
Their joy to express in the crystal Belize.

Here young Alligators are playfully sporting,  
Here innocent Tigers and gentle Warees,  
All frisking like lambkins and wantonly courting,  
On the pastoral banks of sweet winding Belize.

No proud marble domes on these pastoral plains,  
Nor lofty pilasters the Traveler sees;  
But a charming simplicity everywhere reigns,  
In the wood-cutters huts on the Banks of Belize.

Let those who delight in fresh fish and fresh air,  
A gamboling go, to Honduras' fam'd keys,  
More delighted the bard, when attending the fair  
On the gay flow'ry banks of pellucid Belize.<sup>4</sup>

Ye Aldermen who on rich turtles would feast,  
Or wish to indulge on more rare Manatees,  
Leave the city a while, in perfection to taste,  
These delicate bits on the banks of Belize.

With Guanans and Monkeys your board shall be crown'd  
Ducks, Curacoos, Pigeons, and nice Hicatees,  
Wild turkies, Peccaries and Venison, abound  
To form your repast on the banks of Belize.



The songs of Mosquitoes will lull you to sleep,  
Songs sweet as the pastoral hum of the Bees;  
While Doctors and Sand-flies their vigil will keep,  
To suck your rich blood on the banks of Belize.

"The Banks of Belize" might well be modeled after a popular European poem of the time; certainly the author has made references in the first verse to the genre of romantic poems about European rivers. The poem achieves its humorous effect by juxtaposing the romantic words used to describe European scenery with the local scenery and fauna. The humor is two-edged, in that it also makes fun of the syrupy sentimentality of the romantic European poets. I detect something of a defensive tone; pointing out that even if Belize does not have the advantages of life in sophisticated Europe, it still has beautiful cays, fresh air, fresh fish, and a variety of game.

This two-edged humor captures the colonial dilemma in all its complex tragedy. The colonialist, even one born in Belize, was always stuck betwixt and between, not completely loyal to either the home country or the colony. They would curse the climate and the servants to each other, then defend the place to outsiders. Or they joked about the misery of doctor flies and sand flies with a European visitor, and later made fun of that same visitor (to another colonist) for being ignorant of the bush. A genuine love of Belize would always be hidden, as would a genuine hatred of the arrogant European power. Local music, art, and life could never live up to European expectations, but the life of Europe also seemed restrictive, staid, conservative and boring.

It is tempting to interpret the colonial attitude as a simple deceit. On the surface, dislike of the colony, while beneath there is a feeling of loyalty. On the surface a reverent love for the home country, while beneath there is growing hostility and estrangement. But I believe the fact of the matter was more complex and messy. The colonists were a diverse lot, including fresh arrivals and a Creole elite that had resided in Belize for generations. More importantly, in each individual, attitudes towards Belize were mixed together in such a way that the constant result was one of ambivalence. One could never be sure, could never feel completely one way or another.

Those ambivalent feelings come out well in the following selection. This appeared in the Belize Advertiser (Vol. 1, no.

22, December 22, 1888). I will give only an extract of a much longer work which deals with the conditions of burial in the colony. There was quite a bit of controversy, beginning in 1882, about the use of the vaults for above-ground burial at Charlotte's town cemetery instead of the older site at Yarborough, and this poem contrasts the new vaults with the ordinary form of burial.

THE YARBOROUGH FAIRY AND THE VAULTS  
(Of burial in Charlotte's town Cemetery)  
Presented with satiric introduction  
by Thomas Ingoldsby Jr., Honeymoon Cay

Oh, hither! Come hither hear the cat's call  
miaou-w- come hither to me!  
The cat fishes even mew in the sea!  
Hither, come hither, hear how they bawl,  
Flies, Animals, reptiles, birds, fishes and all  
Yelling like Blazed by night and by day  
Round my peaceful vaults and protective wall

As the fireflies dance in bight and in bay  
Humming mosquitoes, doctors and sandies  
Who tease and tickle your dames, dudes and dandies!  
And merrily, merrily whistle the gales  
And merrily carol sand pipers and quails  
(softly, softly-catch hold of the rubber-like tails  
Of those chattering monkeys up on my rails!)  
E'en the voice of the turtle is heard in this land  
Fat Aldermen's pet - blowing so bland  
As it floppingly flirts its fin for a hand  
(stewed in claret that fin is uncommonly grand)  
And landcrabs live in the curves of the sand  
See, shambling and scrambling, soldierlike band  
How they rattle and run beckoning huge claws  
As their eyes start out past their heads and their jaws  
....  
Bow wows and wee wees  
You'll hear in Belize  
But nothing to these?

The Zodiac sure is represented here.  
From tropic crab to Capricorn  
And hoarsely crows gay chanticler<sup>5</sup>  
By night, by day, by earliest morn  
Parrots, macaws,

John-Crows, Jack-daws,  
Birds with hooked beaks and incredible maws

Caw without cause  
Shriek without pause  
How the whole air thrills  
With millions of trills  
And the grasshopper shrills

Oh hither, come hither to me?  
Who would not lie,  
Shelv'd in the dry

(to be in the vaults is to be in the sky)  
Like mahomet's coffin hung upon high  
Over the heads of mourners who cry  
Dressed in dull raiments so shabby and sooty  
And free from the spairges of brimstone from Cloutie<sup>6</sup>

Safe from the fingers of frogs and wish willies,  
From the gambols of quashes, worms, armadillies,  
Snakes, locusts, rats, scorpions, roaches and lizzards,  
And all the kittle-kattle that trouble dead gizzards,

Even from the clip of  
Land crabs who nip off  
Noses and Toeses

Despite all this stirring,  
This racket and whirring,  
The chirping and buzzing  
The squeaking and fussing,  
You'll sleep like a top in peace and quiet  
After your life of care, worry and riot  
And be who his otium cum dig. takes at Yarborough<sup>7</sup>  
Calls this New Brighton - quite equal to Scarborough<sup>8</sup>

In the ambivalent mind of the 19th century colonialist, certain objects became emblems of what I have called the colonial dilemma. While art, music and religion were the emblematic representatives of European culture, in these poems it becomes clear that the unique local animals were emblematic of life in Belize. The polarities, the positives and negatives of the local fauna, have a wonderful equivalence to those of life in the colony in general.

On the negative side, the local flies make life miserable, the snakes can kill you, the wild animals make the bush a forbidding place. Yet the local person can learn to live with these pests, and develop a pride in knowing about them and surviving where a new arrival could not stand it.

On the positive side, many of these same exotic animals are delicacies. A plentiful supply of fresh meat was a sign of wealth in Europe, and game (especially turtle) was a privilege of the elite. The local colonist enjoyed everyday access to what any European would consider a rare luxury. And there is a certain grandeur, that even Victorians could appreciate, to the wildness of nature, even though the proper response to that grandeur was to go out and kill the animals for trophies or for table. Given their expressive richness, it is therefore no wonder that animals appear prominently in each of these poems.

To this point I have concentrated on pulling out the deeper meanings of these poems, ignoring the conscious intent of the authors. In the above poems, that intent was mostly to amuse, though the cemetery couplets enter into a current debate about the best way to dispose of the dead in the colony. On certain occasions, however, the colonial poets picked up the pen with a more serious goal in mind. I would like to end this piece with a specimen of this genre.

During 1888 and 1889 the colonial government brought up several proposals to grant land reserves to Garifuna (then called Caribs) and Indians.<sup>9</sup> Newspaper articles at the time show that the rural people, treated as squatters by the large landowners who owned most of the colony, were agitating for legal title to the parcels they lived on and farmed. The mahogany business was not booming, and many of the urban workers were unemployed and suffering. The Belize Advertiser published a series of furious editorials about the undeserving nature of the Caribs and Indians, arguing that they should be given no special treatment when it came to land.

In this context the following "patriotic" acrostic poem, also from the Belize Advertiser (Vol. 2, no. 1, July 27, 1889), celebrating the history of the colony, becomes more understandable. First the author asserts the essentially democratic nature of Belizean society (last line of verse 2). Then he appeals to the common interest of the elite and the worker, arguing that it is really in the best interest of all for the

restive "ruled" population to buckle down and follow orders. While this paternal advice may have reassured the elite of their right to rule, one wonders how the laboring population felt about these patriotic sentiments:

1

Beneath the sun that shined with tropic ray,  
Enshrouded by its groves of palmy trees  
Lies fair Belize beside its circling Bay,  
Inviting the trav'ler from its stormy seas  
Zephyrs of ocean blow across the strand  
Encircle round and cool the heated land.

2

Bought with the blood of English-speaking race,  
Rovers o'er the sea for commerce and for gold;  
Intrepid men who braved Spain to her face,  
Taking from her the power she could not hold.  
Industrious, dragged the logwood from the swamp,  
Smiting the tall Mahogany by river's bank,  
Holding the right to toil the highest of all rank.

3

How shall we keep the heritage they won,  
Or hand it, nobler, to succeeding line?  
Not by discord and strife will this be done,  
Dwindling our forces for our fight with time.  
Until we learn that unity is strength  
Rulers and ruled embraced in circle wide,  
And owning common interest, then at length  
Shall commerce grow and virtue shall abide.

-- SCOTUS

The ultimate answer to this use of patriotism to rally the poor and powerless behind the ruling class can be found in the following poem, the last in this collection. This is the only poem in the group that drops irony or humor, and addressed the harsh realities of the colony directly. By 1902, when this was published, the interests of the local educated Creole class and the powerful foreign economic and political interests had finally become so far apart that a sense of Belizean identity, one that did not have to hide behind humor, emerged.

In the cycles of boom and bust that characterized the fragile logging economy of the colony, the once-powerful local elite was losing its power to foreigners. At this point they found it useful to seek common identity with the downtrodden local laboring class (the "poor man" of the poem). I doubt that, after 200 years of having local Creoles as their bosses and oppressors, the poor working Belizeans suddenly embraced them as Belizean brothers and sisters when those Creoles fell on hard times. Still, this is a well-written piece of political agitation that would not be far out of place in a modern political campaign (from the Clarion, May 15, 1902).

#### MY COUNTRY

Once the home of the "Baymen" true,  
Now the nest of the favoured few;  
I speak my country, yes, of thee,  
Bleeding land of poverty.  
Land of many kicks and whacks,  
Of logwood and mahogany tax,  
Once the fairest in the world,  
But from that position hurled,  
By Officials come to dwell,  
Of them, how much could I tell!  
Want to make those sinners stare?  
Tell them that the Treasury's bare.  
Then together they will flock,  
Talk an hour round the clock,  
Pile on double the poor man's tax,  
Load it on their groaning backs.  
Naught to make your poor hearts glad,  
Life's a burden, gloomy, sad,  
Strangers come and take your bread;  
with good places they are fed,  
While Creoles may pine and groan,  
They get the meat, while you get the bone.  
"Sub umbra floreo" is all bosh,  
That's a motto that will not wash,  
We flourish? What a mockery, O ye Gods!  
They flourish, yes, by fearful odds;  
O, my country, this my toast,  
Some day, may those sinners roast.  
Yes my country of thee I speak.  
Yours 'til better times,  
G. Witty Kerr

## NOTES

1. Of course, the use of the term "home" culture for England was itself something of a subterfuge. Many of the upper crust of colonial society had never lived in England for any length of time, and would not have enjoyed an elevated status if they had lived there full time.
2. I would like to thank Charles Gibson, Chief Archivist, Margaret Ventura and William Jones at the National Archives in Belmopan for their kind help, and for bringing many old sources to my attention. They have made working in the archives a real pleasure, and are dedicated to bringing the history of Belize alive. I would also like to thank others for sharing their interest in Belizean history with me, for helping interpret some of the cemetery references, and for finding "My Country" in the Clarion and bringing it to my attention.
3. "Simoom" is an archaic word meaning a violent and dangerous wind, derived ultimately from an Arabic term for poison.
4. Here the irony is blatant. The waters of the Belize River are anything but transparent and glassy.
5. "Chanticler" is an archaic term for a rooster.
6. "Cloutie" is a Scottish word for the devil. "Spairges" apparently means splashes. This line may come from a poem by Robert Burns.
7. "Otium cum dig." appears to mean "rest with dignity," or perhaps "rest in peace."
8. These are two sea-side areas of Belize City close to the burial places. At the same time they may have been desirable places for residence.
9. See Nigel Bolland, "Alcaldes and Reservations: British Policy Towards the Maya in Late Nineteenth Century Belize," in Colonialism and Resistance in Belize, 1988, Cubola Productions, Belize.

## THE VALDEZ PROPOSAL: A REBEL GENERAL'S PLAN FOR A GERMAN-GUATEMALAN INVASION OF BELIZE

With healthy doses of good fortune, the secret proposal laying before the German Minister to Mexico might reshape the map of Central America. It might also relieve beleaguered German troops on the Western Front. In the desperate summer of 1918,, German Minister von Eckhardt had to consider any proposal that could possibly aid the Fatherland's faltering war effort.

The secret proposal called for a "revolution in the colony of Belice ..." created by rebel Guatemalan and Honduran forces backed up by German U-boats. After victory in Belize, the submarines could establish a base there to conveniently assault American ships in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. A popular revolt would spread from Guatemala and Honduras into Nicaragua and Costa Rica, installing new "revolutionary governments that would withdraw support from the Allied cause. This was the scenario outlined by the proposal's author, General Isidro Valdez.

Isidro Valdez, a native of Jalapa, Guatemala, graduated from the Guatemalan national military academy in 1893. He had served four years as an instructor at the academy when Guatemala was torn by a violent power struggle. The young officer cast his lot with anti-government rebels. In 1898 Valdez and his fellow revolutionists were driven out of Guatemala by government troops under General Lima. Guatemala fell under the iron hand of dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera and



Valdez was branded a traitor.

An exile at the mere age of twenty-three, Valdez dedicated himself to the overthrow of Estrada Cabrera. Yearning for his homeland and, even more so, imbued with ambitions and confidence amplified during his years among the military elite at the academy, Valdez took an active role in several attempts to depose the tyrant Estrada Cabrera. In exile in Mexico, Valdez associated with expatriates from other Central American nations and joined these fellow "liberals" in their insurgent intrigues. When the turmoil of civil war swept Mexico, Valdez and many other liberals took up arms with the Constitutionalists, luckily ending up on the winning side of Mexican President Carranza. Through his many years of persistent, aggressive opposition to Estrada Cabrera, Valdez gained a good many underground followers, particularly in his native Jalapa. Nevertheless, a failed attempt against the Guatemalan dictator in 1917 probably led him to seek foreign - European - assistance.

In Veracruz in July, 1918, General Valdez carefully composed his secret proposal to the German Minister in Mexico City. Apparently all modesty aside, Valdez bestowed upon himself the grandiose title of "Liberal Leader of the Revolutionaries of Central America." He cleverly began by stating the U.S. "...urges the Governments of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua to send large bodies of troops to the western front to oppose the offensive of the Prussian Armies ..." Valdez cited his own patriotism and expounded upon the superiority of Teutonic culture and the undeniably close ties between the German and Guatemalan peoples. The General reminded Minister von Eckhardt of Germany's commercial ties to Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

He lambasted Estrada Cabrera and the other Central American heads-of-state for "...declaring war on Germany..." and "...bending the knee before the Government of the White House." Valdez wrote, "Do they perhaps believe that the situation of Cuba, Santo Domingo and unfortunate Nicaragua which form feudal states under the Yankees does not deeply wound the dignity of our sovereignty which is due us as Central Americans?" Valdez raved on that the Central American dictators' "...permanence in power is due solely to the government of the United States" and that they were "...mere machines of Mr. [Woodrow] Wilson."

Then, Isidro Valdez says bluntly, "The first thing which we propose is to overthrow the government of Guatemala..., which has greater resources and more elements to contribute to the development of our cause against the other tyrannies of the Isthmus..."

Valdez' next step would be Honduras. "[When] our revolution is in the Departments of Peten [and] Alta Verapaz, we shall carry revolution to Honduras where the leaders [of revolt] are identified with us" (in the 1917 attempt on Guatemala, Valdez claims to have had 5,000 Salvadorans massed in Honduras, waiting to invade from the east). With the subsequent destruction of neighbouring governments (down to Costa Rica), "...the [Central American] union which is the desire of the Liberal Party" can be achieved. This union would pursue a "close entente" with Mexico, "...forming a block of nations which will check the tendencies of Yankee Imperialism." This block of nations could have been enough to rally South American governments into the formation of a powerful, anti-U.S. "Latin League." For the past few years American diplomats had winced at each rumour that this diabolical "Latin League" was in the making.

Belize was the pawn in Valdez' plan. He wrote:

"There will be a revolution in the colony of Belice which will declare itself independent from Great Britain and enter into an alliance with Germany, and in order that this revolution may be effective, it will be made with the assistance of German submarines. In order that independence may be obtained while the German submarines are in action, the revolutionary Governments of Guatemala and Honduras will furnish their contingents, with the necessary reserves."

Belize would be Valdez' offering to the Germans for installing him in Guatemala's Palacio Nacional. Valdez elaborated on this, saying, "With the revolution of Belice, the German government, with the help of Guatemala, can establish a naval base and install points of supply."

Undoubtedly, German Minister von Eckhardt gave Valdez' proposal some consideration. All the ingredients to give this wild scheme a chance seemed to be within grasp. An extensive, if corrupt, network of German spies, orchestrated by "businessman" Jorge Vogel in Guatemala City, extended into

the highest levels of Estrada Cabrera's government. The tentacles of Vogel's espionage service stretched even into Belize. A superb new class of German long-range submarine - the unterseekreuzer - could supposedly be provisioned for a ten-month cruise (about this time American military attaches in Argentina reported rumours of a covert German submarine base open for business around Tierra del Fuego). Regardless of political leanings, the many Germans in Guatemala could be counted on since Estrada Cabrera had confiscated their properties: Valdez promised to return it all when he took power.

In spite of Germany's obvious interest in Latin American intrigue, to allocate submarines to this far-flung, risky scheme could seem somewhat difficult in these hard-pressed months of the world war. Some submarine crews in Kiel had reportedly mutinied before sailing out of the harbor. And although Jorge Vogel's Central American espionage network worked efficiently enough, some of his agents pursued smuggling and other assorted vices harder than they did spying. The tainted reputation of Isidro Valdez was no plus for the operation either.

According to the files of Major Louis O'Donnell, U.S. Military Attache in Guatemala, Valdez had "...the reputation of being a drunkard and a Soldier of Fortune. It is said he will oppose any faction whatever if the reward is propitious financially." As if that were not bad enough, O'Donnell added, "He has been shot in the head [probably in Mexico], as a result of which some people claim he is mentally unsound." Regardless of von Eckhardt's decision on the matter, the Armistice on 11 November, 1918, not only ended the world war but shelved any idea of overt German participation in Valdez' plan.

About a year and a half later, on 8 April, 1920, President Estrada Cabrera's 22-year reign ground to a halt when the Guatemalan National Assembly declared him insane, an enraged mob looted his mansion and ran him into a prison cell. Long-time opponent General Valdez was appointed a member of the Constituente - a representative member of the constitutional committee from Jalapa.

Around Christmas that year, one of Major O'Donnell's Guatemalan informants passed him a copy of General Valdez' secret proposal. Major O'Donnell's superiors at the Military Intelligence Division in Washington, D.C. forwarded a translated

copy of the proposal to the U.S. State Department. Valdez' strong anti-American views and radical schemes aroused paranoia among State Department bureaucrats. Undersecretary of State W. L. Hurley pressed the U.S. Legation in Guatemala for more information on Valdez in January, 1921; Hurley wondered if Valdez "...may occupy a position of prominence there."

Major O'Donnell replied, "The present Government do [sic] not give him any consideration at all, and say that after he completes his duties in the 'Constituyente,' which will be very shortly, he will go back to Jalapa and become a 'nobody.' No one says anything good about him. However, he is the kind of a man who has very strong influence with the peon, and he would probably be able to muster to his banner a respectable command of men in Jalapa to fight for and with him, no matter what the principle involved was."

Despite the presence of German spy chief Jorge Vogel among the inner circles of Unionistas that deposed Estrada Cabrera, Isidro Valdez, die-hard foe of the deposed dictator for two decades, was rewarded with no prominent role in the new government. Surely the ambitious General felt short-changed by both the Unionistas and the Germans.

In June and July of 1921, the Unionistas returned all property confiscated during the war back to its' German owners.

Undaunted by nearly a quarter-century of setbacks, General Isidro Valdez led an armed revolt against Guatemala's new government in early August, 1921. Press releases report that it "...was immediately suppressed."

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