

A COLLEGE IN THE ISLANDS

By DAVID C. STEWART, *who is Secretary of the Joint Council on Educational Broadcasting and has been working on a study related to the activities of the College of the Virgin Islands.*

THE U.S. Virgin Islands—St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John—have a combined population of only 35,000, about 85 per cent Negro. When the U.S. purchased these islands from Denmark in 1917 for \$25,000,000 in gold, the most significant item on the American agenda was anti-submarine warfare. Thus, for some years, a succession of naval officers governed the islands. Since then civilian governorship has changed with the shifting tides of mainland politics (the governor serves at the pleasure of the President).

Until a few years ago, education in the Islands languished, as one governor after another appointed new Commissioners of Education. Under the Danes the literacy rate was 98 per cent; after nearly fifty years of American rule it has slipped to 87 per cent. On the U.S. mainland the public school drop-out rate is about 30 per cent; in the Virgin Islands it is more than 60 per cent. The tropical climate is fine but the cost of living is

relatively high and many public school teachers recruited on the mainland leave after only one year. The most talented Island high school graduates often continue their education on the mainland and many never return. Until recently there have not been many jobs for college graduates to return to. This drain on talent is experienced in most Caribbean islands, something that retards progress in nearly every phase of island life.

These and similar problems occupied the time of a special Governor's Conference on Higher Education in the Virgin Islands, called by Governor Ralph Paiewonsky in July 1961. About two dozen people were invited to St. Thomas to look over the situation and suggest what might be done. It is typical of the governor's own brand of pragmatism that this group of "education experts" included two well-known Washington lawyers closely associated with the Administration. One was Representative Edith Green of the House Education Committee, the other a knowledgeable foundation executive.

The conference recommended that the Islands establish a two-year college emphasizing a liberal arts education. But few of the conferees thought that it could be gotten under way in less than

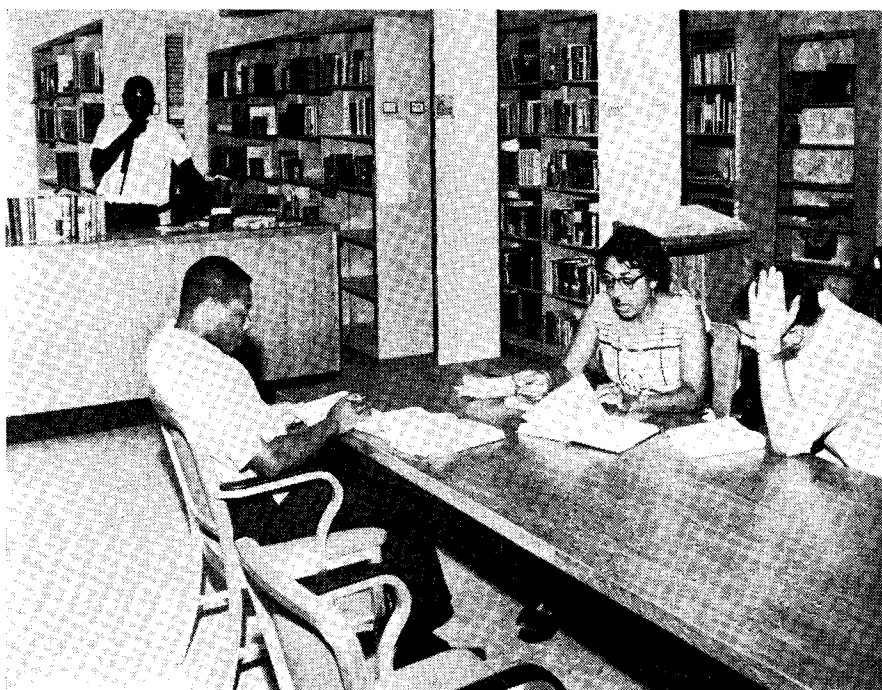
four years. The most venturesome thinking predicted that after one year of operation the College *might* have a combined full and part-time enrollment of seventy-five students.

Many of the residents of the Islands were equally pessimistic when the governor pledged in his 1961 inaugural address to establish a college. Some were plainly antagonistic. As one resident put it, "What do we need with colleges when we don't even have decent roads?" A number of taxpayers complained that it was senseless to establish a college before the Islands' Department of Education had raised the standards of the public schools to a bare minimum. The critics were saying, in effect, "Look, we're for better education, all right, but let's put first things first." Those whose views prevailed said, "There is a time for putting *second* things first." Paiewonsky, a wealthy rum merchant and native Virgin Islander, insisted that the establishment of a college was going to be the first order of business on his section of the New Frontier.

Two years (and an extraordinary amount of work and patience) later, Justice Arthur Goldberg formally opened the college to a class of more than 400, of which about forty-five were full-time students. Most of the students are Virgin Islanders, but there are some from the U.S. mainland, Canada, other Caribbean islands, South and Central America, and Africa. Current plans call for expansion from two to four years in nearly all college divisions beginning with teacher education.

The President of the college, Lawrence C. Wanlass, came to the Virgin Islands from Sacramento State College, where he was assistant to the president. Before this he was a professor of political science at Mount Holyoke. Typical of other members of the new administrative and teaching staff he is young (thirty-nine), harassed, and enthusiastic.

Sensitive to the local school problems and the fact that only a small percentage of students now graduate from the high schools, Wanlass nevertheless believes that the college will finally break an educationally unproductive chain of events. The college now represents a goal, a good reason for finishing high school. Besides, without local teacher education the schools will never reach the standards they seek. To those who say that the college is an unnecessary luxury



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at a time when some island roads are in bad repair, Wanlass replies that the roads will *always* be in disrepair—until a better-educated population understands the reasons for keeping them in shape.

Critics of the college often ask (rhetorically), "What do we want to educate these people for, anyway? I mean, as soon as these kids have a degree they'll leave the islands. What's the sense of that?" The president agrees that plenty of youngsters who receive a local college degree are apt to leave the island, but disagrees with those who think that the college is, therefore, hardly worth it. "Unfortunately," says Wanlass, "some of this criticism comes from college graduates who are really saying, 'I've got mine, why should I pay for yours?' The fact is that we don't know how many will leave after graduation. But those who remain will surely be more creative people. They will be better able to appreciate what exists here and work more imaginatively with the Islands' resources."

All the same, the college does seem conscious of its provincialism—one might say its insularity—and is trying to broaden its students' experiences. One effort is a "Washington and New York Seminar" in the spring, when the entire freshman class flies to the mainland and spends a week talking with "men and women prominent in American life." The tour also includes visits to galleries, museums, and theaters. When the four-year program is in full swing, island students will probably spend one of their college years on the mainland.

While the emphasis upon a broad liberal arts education is apparent in the curriculum for full-time students, evening and extension work is heavily island-oriented. Bookkeeping and accounting courses have been enormously popular. Jim Tillett, a successful Island designer, teaches a course in silk screening. In the heart of the burgeoning Caribbean tourist industry (more than 200 cruise ships sailed into St. Thomas's harbor last year), the college is giving appropriate attention to courses in tourist services, including hotel management.

Two years at the college (annual budget now about \$600,000, appropriated by the Island legislature) is a financial bargain even for U.S. mainland residents. A small faculty is experienced and creative if not "distinguished." The concentration is upon teaching, not research. The present ratio of faculty to full-time students is one to five. Annual tuition for Virgin Islanders is \$201, for others \$501. Room and board (all full-time students are expected to live on campus) is \$540 for the academic year.

The new college is aware of the presence of older Caribbean institutions like the University of Puerto Rico, Inter-

American University (also in Puerto Rico), and the University of the West Indies in Jamaica (which operates an enterprising extension service throughout the West Indies). In press releases the college makes self-conscious reference to itself as "the first non-sectarian, American-oriented, English-speaking college in the Caribbean area."

It is indeed the only American college in a geographical area beset by economic and political problems of every description: Cuba, Panama, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, not to mention the breakup of the West Indian Federation. Because of its strategic location and because of the goals it has set, the college seems destined to exert great influence throughout the Caribbean.

Wanlass and his board of trustees express a profound interest in serving the whole Caribbean area. A scholarship program for the Leeward and Windward Islands has just been established. The college has also created a Caribbean Affairs Institute to encourage area research. "The college," says Wanlass, "should play a key role in forming the kind of Caribbean society which will nurture a stable middle class. It should make something lasting possible. Unlike the supply of pure economic aid, our efforts should leave a lasting wake."

One of Governor Paiewonsky's strongest enthusiasms is the plan for an International Training Center operated by the college, training students from developing countries as well as American teachers who will be working in these countries. The college has already trained two groups of Peace Corps volunteers.

The arguments for and against establishing the college, the problems of launching and maintaining it, and its goals in an economically depressed area are not unlike the arguments, problems, and goals in many new nations all over the globe. What is learned about higher education in the Virgin Islands may prove to be of more practical value to developing countries—particularly African countries—than lessons learned from more "established" U.S. colleges and universities. Not long ago a vice president of a large mainland university put it this way: "We get dozens of leaders and specialists in African education, all eager to learn modern American ways. After a few months of observation they say, 'This is fine. You have marvelously complex and efficient colleges and universities. But what I have learned here has very little relevance to the problems I face in Africa.' I'm not saying that the Virgin Islands are exactly like Kenya or Tanganyika, but they are certainly more like these places than metropolitan USA."

An independent study has just been



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completed indicating the feasibility of establishing at the college a learning resources center that would provide instruction for leaders in the effective use of television, films, tape recorders, language laboratories, and other "new media" devices. One of the persons working on the study recently asked President Wanlass why it would not make good sense to put these new college activities and others on a ship or a converted Navy personnel barge. If you are an island-based college, deeply committed to educational extension work in the Caribbean, his argument ran, why not float one of your buildings—and take it on a scheduled tour of other Caribbean islands for six months of the year?

Putting second things first? Well, maybe. But by this time President Wanlass is used to the idea.

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—UNESCO.

Education in the Developing Nations

To the emerging nations of the world, the 1960s have come to be known as the Development Decade—a period during which they are laying the foundations for a long-range program of social, economic, and political growth that they hope will bring with it a better life for their teeming millions. At the heart of all the development programs is a massive effort to improve the quality and quantity of education, for the underdeveloped nations have learned by observation and experience that an educated citizenry is the key to achievement of their goals. The United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has played a leading role in helping the emerging nations to plan and launch their education programs. This and the accompanying article describe some of the progress and plans of the countries in Latin America and Africa.

1. Planning for Education in Latin America

By RENE MAHEU, the Director-General of UNESCO.

TODAY there is growing agreement among traditional economists that education is the cornerstone on which all development in the emerging countries must rest. It is clear, however, that only careful planning can make education a sound investment and thus open up new opportunities for progress through international assistance and cooperation. That is why UNESCO has actively encouraged the introduction of educational planning in individual countries in many parts of the world.

Among the many nations that are giving priority to the principle of educational planning, those in Latin America are moving most rapidly. Historically, this movement began at the Regional Conference of Ministers of Education, held in Lima, Peru, in 1956 under the auspices of UNESCO and the Organization of American States. Resolutions adopted at this meeting emphasized the importance of over-all educational plans and their administration and financing in order to cope with the serious educational problems of the region. Colombia, which introduced the resolutions, was the first to establish an educational

planning office capable of preparing systematic plans. Today, eight years after the conference, eighteen countries have created similar offices.

The reasons for this rapid development are many, but undoubtedly the following factors are among the most important:

- Growing awareness of the strong influence education has on economic development and of the close relationship between educational programs and plans for economic and social development.
- The expectation that long-term edu-