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THE PEOPLE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Antonio Jarvis

There is really no such thing as typical American Virgin Islanders, for they are so complex and so variable that classification of the group is next to impossible. Yet since all of the people share certain general beliefs, cultural and recreational habits, superstitions, and economic practices, as well as bound by race and history into a loose whole, an attempt is sometimes made to speak of "the people of the Virgin Islands" with some degree of success.

When we except the French Villagers, who are white and live apart, and the Puerto Ricans, who are just coming in, we remain with a group of people of Negro descent, varying in color from Nordic white to Ashanti black. The women are well proportioned for the most part; many hard working ones are of graceful carriage and easy stride; the young people need only the proper gowns to surpass famed beauties in physical appearance. The men folk are frequently above middle height, clean limbed and strong, though not noted for endurance. They are good workers when their employers probe beneath the surface and try to understand their peculiar psychology. The children of this generation might have been taken from Harlem and set down in the tropics, and when they are set into Harlem life they have few adjustments to make.

It may be truthfully said of the Virgin Islanders that they are very imitative, adaptable, and self-possessed, in contrast with people of the larger leeward and winward islands. A St. Thomian or Crucian has the ability to lose himself in a London crowd, or in the San Francisco waterfront and become for the moment one of the people of that section. He will speak like a Cockney, or like a Connecticut Yankee upon occasion. Perhaps his background has made it easy for him to learn languages and he avails himself of

every opportunity to acquire some alien tongue, much to the wonderment of foreigners who are often astonished at meeting natives conversant with German, French, Spanish, Russian, Dutch and Danish.

On the whole the people of the Virgin Islands are kind-hearted and neighborly.

It is so easy to borrow money that no pawnshops exist in any town. People have not the slightest hesitation in sharing their very little with others, especially children, and it is the proud boast of the inhabitants of the Virgin Islands that no stranger can starve among them.

Unlike in Haiti, where pure Negroes feel themselves superior to the mixed people, everything lighter than black has an ascending value, and mere hue can substitute wealth, culture, and official position, so that social life among the colored people is one continued round of striving to get into inner circles even through not very commendable means. It is always assumed that a colored person from abroad belongs to a higher type of social plane than well-known colored people at home. This is truly the land of strangers.

Since the great exodus to North America within the last twenty-five years, there has grown a feeling that connection with the United States is equivalent to social improvement, and everyone boasts proudly of his relatives in Washington, Chicago or Brooklyn, and elsewhere. He does not know that too frequently those well-recommended family connections are overworked menials suffering under handicaps of race that the caste system of home can not equal. When these people return they carry their heads high and scorn the humbler ones who have been unable to make the great pilgrimage.

The people of the Virgin Islands are becoming Americanized to a certain degree, but this Americanization is superimposed upon the habit patterns of the past. It is a splendid veneer which looks like the real thing. Perhaps

the next generation will be entirely different from the people twenty years of age today, and it is conceivable that the American virtues will be developed to the extent of making these happy-go-lucky people hustling and industrious. Yet one wonders if it is really necessary to make the Virgin Islander over into something alien to the environment. It seems as though uprooting his beliefs, jarring him into the electrical age, substituting machinery for hand labor, and speeding up his mental processes, are not the very best things for his complete happiness. When he is made into something like a black Manhattanite, or a denizen of Birmingham he will lose all of his uniqueness and present another problem to the people of the United States.

Antonio Jarvis is Historian, Artist, Writer and Elementary School Principal in Charlotte Amalie, Virgin Islands.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

Alberta Wallen and Constance Staples

It is a stimulating experience to leave one's own community and travel to a totally different environment. Perhaps the greatest value to the educator is the gaining of a new perspective regarding universal professional problems. Many of us live in industrial centers where life in itself is so complicated any problem seems gigantic because of its implications for the total social structure. Due to the rather simple social life on these islands, educational problems can be brought into sharp focus for study and solution.

In the study of Educational Opportunities for Youth in the American Virgin Islands the students set up the following plan of action. The school personnel were to be interviewed to obtain information in regard to the number of children in the schools, the holding power of the high school, types and adequacy of buildings and materials,