

BOOK REVIEWS

BACCHUS, M. KAZIM. *Education for Economic, Social and Political Development in the British Caribbean Colonies from 1896 to 1945*. London, ON: The Althouse Press, The University of Western Ontario (2005). 322 pp. \$42.95 (Paper). (ISBN 0-920354-54-8).

The current-day campus of the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago began its life as the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture. In a nutshell, the thesis of M. Kazim Bacchus's book *Education for Economic, Social and Political Development in the British Caribbean Colonies from 1896 to 1945* recapitulates the early ontogeny of this pattern of development during the first half of the twentieth century. This is the third volume in a series – to be continued – giving an account of the “social, economic, and political forces that influenced the development of education in the ex-British Caribbean colonies” (p. i). As such, the book is of interest not only for those connected with education in the Caribbean, but for anyone involved with the study of the relationship of these factors in colonial and post-colonial societies.

The initial purposes of primary education for the non-elites – both the “respectable” and the destitute and vagrant – of the British Caribbean colonies emphasized agricultural training (gardening), later expanding into training in a range of “practical” subjects, including drawing and woodworking (for boys), and needlework and cookery (for girls). Efforts were made to encourage students to take up trade apprenticeships, but in most colonies these efforts remained underfunded and under-developed well into the 1930s. Other important subjects were hygiene, and, of course, civics. “With the growing threat to the legitimacy of the state, the authorities felt that greater emphasis should be placed on citizenship education to help re-establish the loyalty of the masses to their colonial rulers and the British monarchy” (p. 131). History teaching would lead to patriotism, particularly during times when the “mother country” was at war. Just as students were expected to adhere to the patriotic loyalty the Empire demanded, they were also to be trained in character. “The standards of behaviour held up as a model for

students were those of the respectable white English middle class – a yard stick the authorities often used to complain about the bad manners and noisy conduct of pupils” (p. 133).

Bacchus’s book is a well-organized and easily readable account of the “socioeconomic and political factors that influenced educational developments” (the title of Chapter One). He situates the educational systems of the British West Indian colonies clearly within the purview of the colonial authorities, and the demands of the British Empire. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which schooling – including students, teachers, training, infrastructure and supplies – was funded, to what kinds of children had what kinds of access to education, and to the development of the primary curriculum, the beginning development of the secondary curriculum, and links to vocational and higher education.

Throughout the British Caribbean the deteriorating economic conditions of the Great Depression, and widespread “labour unrest” and “social disturbances” in the colonies contributed to a rising challenge to the legitimacy of colonial rule that was to reach a climactic point during the independence movements of the 1960s. Moreover, despite the efforts of colonial rulers to educate their subjects for the good of the colonial economy, parents, unions, and the masses increasingly began to see education, particularly of a more academic nature, as the main pathway for occupational and class advancement. Even a primary school leaving certificate could open the way to a lower-level clerical job, and secondary schools were the opening to the ranks of the civil service.

Bacchus links these conflicting needs and goals with a good range of sources, including literary descriptions of school life. (More of these, we hope, will be included in the next volume of this series.) It must be noted, however, that the index is woefully inadequate, only partly rescued by the good organization of the chapters.

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MAGNUSON, ROGER P. *The Two Worlds of Quebec Education During the Traditional Era, 1760-1940*. London, ON: The Althouse Press, 2005. 267 pp. \$29.95. (ISBN 0-920354-57-2).

Roger Magnuson, who taught at McGill's Faculty of Education for thirty-five years, is a leading authority on the history of Quebec education, having published *A Brief History of Quebec Education* in 1980 and *Education in New France* in 1992. This latest book is the first account published in English of Quebec schooling during the British colonial period. Intended for the general reader, it is a companion volume to *Education in New France* and continues the narrative from 1760. In this compact study the author approaches what he terms the "traditional era" (1760-1940) from a comparative angle, contrasting the "two worlds" of French Catholic and English Protestant schooling. To the constant refrain of cultural dualism he conducts the reader through the themes and variations of the formative years of the education system by evoking the harmonies, dissonances and voices which composed the score of schooling in its early days. All the major themes are here: the legal establishment in the 1840s of the dual, denominational system which allowed for separate Catholic and Protestant public schools; the slow growth of elementary, secondary, technical and higher education; the co-existence of public and private schools; the special problems of rural schools and of the Irish, Italians and Jews in urban areas; the gender divide in schooling; and the training and employment of teachers. So, too, are the vignettes which bring the story to life: the nuns knitting woolen stockings for the chilly, kilted Scots soldiers; the kidnapping by the Abenakis of seven-year-old Esther Wheelwright, who was destined to become Mother Superior of the Quebec Ursulines in 1760; the solitary evening vigil kept by the young rural schoolmistress in northern Quebec, who waited anxiously for the arrival of her two eldest pupils, Marie and Jeannette, to keep her company during the long, dreaded hours of darkness; the secret diary-writing of sixteen-year-old Henriette Dessaulles, who confided to it the discomfort, pettiness, monotony and repression of convent life.

What emerges from all this is the complexity of the task of building a system in which the parties involved were so much at variance. Catholic and Protestant Churches, French and English speakers, conservative and progressive forces all staked their claim over schooling. A *modus vivendi* was found in the dual, denominational system which was established in the 1840s as "an insurance policy, the means by which each population could safeguard its cultural identity and existence." (p. 223). Yet Magnuson shows that the dual system was a distortion of the real intention of the legislators. The Common Schools Acts of the early 1840s were meant to create a common public school system open to all. The principle of dissent, which permitted Catholics and Protestants to set up schools of their own in areas where they were in the minority, was included to protect the educational rights

of the minority. The lawmakers failed to foresee its potential to undermine the common school ideal. Ironically, the laws which meant to bring the two sects together educationally in fact divided them, and the character of Quebec public schooling until 1997 was set in stone.

The historiography of Quebec education has tended to reflect the fact of ethnic division and to produce studies which reinforce an image of Catholic and Protestant being worlds apart. But this author, by crossing and re-crossing the intersections where Catholicism and Protestantism met, has revealed the goals and problems which Protestants and Catholics shared. Without minimizing the differences between the two, he has placed them in a common context: the building of an educational system acceptable to all Quebecers. This seamless, comprehensive approach is the book's great strength and sets it apart.

In writing a study of this fine quality and modest size, the author had tough decisions to make. Perhaps the hardest was how to set the parameters of the topic. Magnuson chose to end the text at 1940 on the grounds that the Second World War marked the beginning of the transition of French Canadian society from traditional to modern. It could be argued, though, that 1960 would have been a better choice because in so many ways the modern era began in that year with the election of the Liberal premier Jean Lesage and in that decade with the work of the Parent Commission and the deep reforms resulting from its recommendations. The creation of a government Ministry of Education, the rise of secularism, the new political nationalism: these were what brought the traditional era to an end.

Although the author claims that this is not a scholar's book, it stands as a solid piece of scholarship, buttressed by carefully-interpreted evidence and informed by many years of research. Its plain language and skilfully-crafted organization make the book accessible to anyone with an interest in Quebec history. This is a masterly survey of an education system in the making.

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