

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 206 532

SO 013 550

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TITLE Mobility in the Virgin Islands: An Introduction to a Microstate Study.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Caribbean Studies Association Conference (6th, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, May 26-30, 1981).
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement: Developing Nations;
*Educational Background: Educational Mobility;
Ethnicity: Higher Education: *Human Capital;
*Occupational Mobility: Secondary Education: *Social Mobility: Socioeconomic Status: Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *Virgin Islands

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a survey undertaken in 1981 to investigate the influence of education on occupational realities and expectations of high school graduates in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The specific focus of the survey was on the effect of high school graduation on the young indigenous population's mobility expectations, pursuit of higher education, job aspirations, and job opportunities in the Virgin Islands and elsewhere. The hypothesis was that expanded educational facilities and access tend to increase expectations without providing occupational opportunities to satisfy those expectations. The sample consisted of all Virgin Islands high school seniors on St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John in May, 1981. Of the 961 questionnaires returned, 945 were valid. Initial analysis of the questionnaires indicated several patterns of mobility, including that students sent abroad (generally to the United States or Great Britain) probably would not return to serve the Virgin Islands as their occupational possibilities were greater elsewhere, students educated at schools and colleges in the Virgin Islands and the Caribbean in programs designed specifically to meet local needs were likely to seek and find work in the Virgin Islands, and people with a broad education often felt alienated from their peers. The conclusion is that the net effect of higher education is more a negative than a positive factor in the development of a microstate such as the Virgin Islands. Additional research is suggested to determine the roles played by ethnicity, socioeconomic status, education, and academic achievement in the outward mobility of students in the Virgin Islands. (DB)

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MOBILITY IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS: AN INTRODUCTION TO A MICROSTATE STUDY.

By

Donald H. Johnson, Jr.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Caribbean Studies Association Conference (6th, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, May 26-30, 1981).

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Mobility in the Virgin Islands: An Introduction to a Microstate Study.

A paper presented at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Caribbean Studies Association, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands on May 26-30, 1981.

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Education. It was ranked as the top priority of U.S. Virgin Islanders in a recently conducted survey by Lou Harris and Associates for the Melchior Sr. Foundation.¹ I would speculate that education may head the list of concerns for many, possibly all of these Caribbean Islands. Yet, what affect does the completion of secondary school or its' equivalent have on the young indigeneous population? What patterns of mobility do these native youth expect to follow? ~~What~~ jobs do they expect to find? Is it possible that expanded educational facilities and access only increases expectations without providing occupational opportunities to satisfy these expectations?

The role of education on mobility within the structure or out of it is unclear. It has been said "better job opportunities are for those with an education."² This may have a corollary: the realization that the opportunities one feels trained for may not exist in the Virgin Islands occupational opportunity structure. Thus, theoretically, some, possibly many Virgin Islands senior may wish to bypass the home occupational structure for the accessible American structure or another land of promise.

I have just recently conducted a survey that addresses these issues and concerns. It was administered to all Virgin Islands high school seniors on St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John. between the dates April 29 and May 6, 1981. I received 961 questionnaires of which 945 were valid. I have not had the chance to analyze the

survey as of yet. However, a preliminary glance at all of the questionnaires indicates that several patterns of mobility may emerge. I will briefly touch upon these. The finalized study will attempt to find out if the factors ethnicity, socio-economic status, education and academic achievement are determinants of perceived mobility in the Virgin Islands. In the broader sense, I will examine the implications of my findings for manpower development in the microstate.

Let me restate that during my brief time here today I wish to discuss what affects secondary schooling and the pursuit of higher education might have on the youth of these islands. Will they stay, or will they leave?

Since indigenous human resources and adequate native manpower are necessary, the study of education and mobility and its effects on the social stratification system is essential, otherwise it will be nearly impossible to develop indigenous human capital adequately.

Ideally, a balance may be struck between available manpower and occupational openings within the structure. Whenever a balance cannot be arrived at, or when people become mobile out of a given structure, due to emigration to another land, the broader system of social stratification may be affected. Available occupational positions unfilled by the indigenous population whether due to lack of skilled personnel, lack of human labor, or people unwilling to fill the vacancies for whatever reason creates a void that must be filled by outsiders able to perform the manpower needs. This new population

may bring an infusion of new or changing values which may result in social, political and economic change. The Virgin Islands have experienced a population explosion and shifts in the traditional social structure. This has affected the people.

Eli Ginzberg state that "the basic resource of any society is the quantity and the quality of the people who compose it."³ This is especially true for the inadequately researched group of "developing" nation-states that have been termed microstates. Microstates have been defined as

the small states with limited land area, limited population and limited resources, which are politically independent or internally self-governing, having the determination to be recognized as separate and distinct entities and the urge to move as far and as fast as possible into the category of "developed" countries⁴

In most cases these countries are the brunt of political scientist's jokes, the proverbial "banana republics," or those "forlorn dots on the map. . . as deGaulle dismissed them."⁵ Examples of such states include the islands of the eastern Caribbean. One Caribbean researcher states about those islands that "our human resources are the most important resources and the primary object of our concern."⁶

This concern for development⁶ of human resources has sometimes led leaders of these microstates to create programs that would ensure the brighter citizens of their countries could obtain a higher education. Usually this meant travel abroad. The assumption implicit in this blind faith in the affects of higher education is that the students will return to serve their homeland.

This does not appear to have been effective in the past; recent studies have indicated that it is probably not true today. Friday (1975)

in a study of smaller eastern Caribbean islands notes a "brain drain" from the smaller British islands to the larger ones, principally Jamaica and Trinidad as well as Great Britain and the United States. Wilson's study of Belize notes that the people may view higher education as a "ticket" out of the country. Martis conjectures some educated people of the Dutch Caribbean seek to go to the "land of promise," the Netherlands.⁷

The Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies recently made the statement that he felt third world countries and universities were becoming the training grounds of the industrialized world. There is some past evidence to back this up. Statistics have indicated that of the professional immigrants to the United States, 57% were from developing countries. 70% of these had come in on student visas with the stated intent to return to their homeland.⁸

Is the net effect of higher education a negative factor in the development of the microstate? It would appear so.

The Virgin Islands, the microstate under study, has an interesting twist. They have an indigeneous form of higher education that has as its mission to meet "the needs for higher education in the Virgin Islands and the Caribbean."⁹ The accredited institution offers the Associate and Bachelors degrees as well as three Masters degrees: Masters in Public Administration, Masters in Education and Masters in Business Administration. The college also conducts social and environmental studies through the research branch of the college: The Caribbean Research Institute. The college's development all has been done, and apparently done well, since the college's founding date of 1962. Harrigan states that one of the reasons for its founding

was to arrest the "brain drain."¹⁰

Yet, "little to no research has been conducted in this area of the world, especially regarding the affects of education, particularly higher education, on these countries."¹¹

This talk is beginning to sound like a study of the phenomenon, "brain drain." This is where the "better" or higher educated citizens leave the nation for "greener pastures."¹² Brain drain carries with it a negative connotation. From the vantage point of the individual country the term is appropriate. Yet, this same migration when viewed through the eyes of the individual immigrant may be positive. Blau and Duncan make a strong case for the fact that someone who is geographically mobile will probably be "upwardly mobile."

I propose that the term outward mobility be used for a person who has migrated from their native region or place of origin. Outward mobility does not connote positive or negative features. It does not differentiate, but identifies. Conceptually, it would augment the mobility literature and add a needed dimension for the analysis of occupational structures. The loss of indigeneous human resources in a given occupational structure could be clearly identified.

This neutral method of identification would particularly benefit developing countries, especially thosed identified as microstates. In these countries the human resource is the only indigeneous resource of any quantity. The concept of outward mobility gets to the root of their societal dilemma: a lost human resource.

From the historical perspective it appears that the conditions for education to be seen as a means for upward occupational

mobility did not exist. In fact, it appears a broad education had the negative consequence of alienating one from his peers. Noted Virgin Island historian J. Antonio Jarvis implied that those fortunate enough to go abroad and receive an education, upon returning, found little use for what they had and either "retrograded to the local level. . . or re-emigrated."¹³

If one uses higher education as a gauge for occupational upward mobility, it reiterates the trends we have noted. In the fourteen year period, 1925-1939, only 59 persons attended college.¹⁴ As late as 1962, the year C.V.I. got its start, only 135 loan and financial assistance applications were processed for study in the United States.¹⁵ The perceived need for higher education, apparently, did not exist for the majority of Islanders.

However, the Virgin Islands, in part due to the role of the College of the Virgin Islands, may be turning a corner. In the study I just completed, Virgin Islands youth self-reported that they have been accepted at over 320 different institutions of higher learning located in Great Britain, the West Indies, Puerto Rico, and the United States. The mere presence of the College may have the conscious raising or socializing affect of making students think about college as an alternative, yet this is only speculation.

I should also mention that my survey asked what types of jobs those people not going to college hoped to find. The majority, or so it appears from a brief glance at all of the research instruments, would prefer not to be associated with the tourist industry. Since the tourism industry is such a big part

of the Virgin Islands economy this may be disturbing and have a myriad of possible ramifications of a political, social and economic nature.

The youth who does not like the opportunities available in the Virgin Islands occupational structure may emigrate elsewhere. Some of the students, natives, commented on my survey that they felt they would be over-qualified to return to their homeland. This sample of answers is indicative of what appears to have already happened in the Virgin Islands. The Virgin Islander, in part due to outward mobility, finds himself a minority in his own land. The native suffers from what Blake terms as "rootlessness."¹⁶ Lewis characterizes the population as exaggerated individualism with little "community or social" commitment.¹⁷

This may be a harsh characterization. Nevertheless, solid data is needed on how the young people of the Virgin Islands perceive their opportunities of mobility within the Virgin Islands occupational structure. In addition, the part secondary and higher education plays in the routing people out of the Virgin Islands structured should be chronicled. Hopefully the study that I just completed will get at these questions.

While I realize that this is but one way to look at a complex problem, I hope to find out what part ethnicity, socio-economic status, education and academic achievement play in the outward mobility of students in the Virgin Islands. The group I questioned was a better educated than the norm group of students (the norm is completion of the ninth grade). An eyeballing of the questionnaire,

indicates that between 1/3 and 1/2 of the respondents answered that they would live in the United States if they could live anywhere in the world (QUESTION #46: If I could live anywhere I wanted to I would live on:). ^{About} ~~Less than~~ 1/3 of the respondents stated that they would prefer to be living on one of the three Virgin Islands. The major reason for moving to the United States was for better occupational opportunity. The main reason for staying was best summarized by one student who said, "this is my land, my home, my people." Many of those wishing to stay expressed the feeling that they felt they had something special to offer their land. However, among this sub-group that wished to remain in the Virgin Islands, an alarming number felt that they would not be living there when they were 30 years old but would be in the United States. Stated and implicit in this ^{response} ~~assumption~~ is the fact that many do not feel that the occupational opportunities will be available to them.

I will refrain from dealing with the implications of any of these responses but close this talk with the thought that it is possible that education and all of its good may indeed have negative ramifications unless careful planning is done taking into consideration the unique nature of the microstate.

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Acknowledgements:

Various amounts of financial support made this paper possible. I wish to acknowledge Grants from:

The University of Michigan's Rackham Graduate School
The University of Michigan School of Education
The University of Michigan Political Science Department
The Virgin Islands Department of Education

As well as generous grants-in-kind from the following community minded enterprises:

Coral Air, Incorporated
Delta Air Lines
Tourist Industries of St. Croix, Incorporated (doing
business as Budget Rent-A-Car)
Good Hope School, St. Croix
and Frederick Lutheran Church, St. Thomas

In addition, I wish to acknowledge the support and encouragement of the Caribbean Research Institute, educational leaders of V.I. secondary schools and the Virgin Islands Daily News.