



THE ALLIED EFFORT: WORLD WAR II AND PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE BRITISH WEST INDIES

Debbie McCollin, PhD*

** Department of History, Faculty of Humanities and Education
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, West Indies
debbie.mccollin@gmail.com*

Abstract

Despite the fact that the West Indies was only a peripheral theatre of World War II, the impact of this monumental conflict was keenly felt in these territories. Called upon to be a haven for men, a provider of staple goods and oil and a buffer for the soft underbelly of The United States, the region became a major target of German offensives. Accordingly, the pressures of war and the Nazi concentration on the Caribbean Sea at the peak of the war severely undermined the public health infrastructure of the British West Indies.

This paper specifically examines the efforts of the British and the Americans to address the escalation of public health issues in the British West Indies as a result of this conflict. Through the British Colonial Development and Welfare Act, the joint consultative committee, The Anglo-American Commission, the United States military and the philanthropic agency, The Rockefeller Foundation, the Allies spearheaded numerous efforts to stymie the rise of endemic diseases and outbreaks, maintain stable supplies of food and water and prepare for post-war infrastructural development. Such initiatives led to the propulsion of collaborative vertical disease campaigns, sanitation and water schemes and public health reconnaissance on a scale yet to be seen in the twentieth century in the region.

The paper explores their engagement with each other in relation to policy planning and implementation and the consequent turf wars, as well as the extent of their acceptance by and interaction with West Indians. The paper also argues that in certain cases their presence exacerbated health problems and certainly encouraged the promotion of neo-colonialist agendas.