



*Top Row, L. to R.: Carmichael, Johnson, Welsh, Rennals, Young, Reckford.
Bottom Row, L. to R.: Lea, Harris, Evans, Weller*

The West Indies Film Training School, 1950

TOWARDS the end of January two members of the Colonial Film Unit, Messrs. R. W. Harris and G. Evans, sailed for Jamaica to start the West Indies first film training school. Their journey marked another important stage in the Unit's plan to encourage film and film strip production in the colonial territories. The British possessions in the Caribbean, although they had benefited in the past from the Raw Stock scheme, were now to receive help in a more direct manner.

The first impressions on arrival at Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, were most auspicious. Everyone seemed only too glad to give all the help they could and the Unit was able to settle down in new surroundings with the minimum of trouble and inconvenience. The Unit received the full-hearted co-operation of Dr. Taylor, the Principal of the University College of the West Indies, and Mr. Sherlock, the Vice-Principal, and have nothing but praise for the way in which they helped to get the school started with the least possible delay.



*C.F.U. Course
in Still Photography*



*C.F.U. Course
in Motion Picture Photography*

Both instructors had had previous experience in West Africa, but faced this new venture as one demanding in many respects an entirely different outlook and approach. The Caribbean territories, partly owing to their comparative proximity to the United States and partly to their important geographical position in regard to world trade, are amongst the most cosmopolitan in the world. Both these factors have helped to create in the Caribbean a sophisticated society and one that is particularly suited to adapt itself to new ideas. Against this background, the project to train local personnel in film making could be expected to start with every prospect of real success.

All the students selected for the school, who come from Trinidad, Barbados and British Guiana as well as Jamaica, had had a good educational background although at the most the majority had only an amateur knowledge of photography. Two of them had spent a year or so in England studying visual aids in education as well as gaining a little experience in practical cinematography. The increased time will allow for more detailed study, for instance, in the writing and recording of commentaries, and it is intended to bring the still and cine work to a fairly high standard.

Broadly speaking, the course can be divided up into three stages. During the first three months the students will be given a thorough

grounding in the art of still photography. To give some idea of the subjects covered during this stage the following points may prove a useful guide. Theory is dealt with in some detail at first, but as soon as possible the students are given every opportunity to put theory into practice. After the first month their time is divided up between being outdoors with a camera and in working in the darkroom processing their results. More advanced work is then dealt with, because, when the bare technique of processing has been mastered, they are encouraged to develop their sense of pictorial composition, which in turn leads them to results of a higher standard. The use of filters and the art of treating prints to give the desired effects and of 'shading' and 'burning in' serve as useful forerunners to the more advanced stage of commercial photography. A high standard in this phase of the course is most essential if good quality reproductions are to be obtained for film strips.

Concurrently with this technical work, the students are given classes on film appreciation. This includes a review of the history, development, function and criticism of the film and a general sociological survey of its effect on society. During this early stage the students are trained to use their powers of observation, to widen their interests, to join in discussions and get practice in expressing themselves in public. This method has been found most productive, and the instructor on the creative side has been able to gain a good insight into the capabilities of each student. In addition to active discussion on subjects dealing directly with the film, each student has given a talk to the others on a subject on which he has particular knowledge.

The students are, at the time of writing, at this stage of their development and are ready to advance to the study of film and film-strip production with its corresponding work on the creative side of investigation, treatment and script-writing.

The comparative cheapness of film strip and, in some cases, its advantage over film as a teaching medium have given it a strong appeal to the authorities in the West Indies, where financial considerations are of the first importance. The students will approach film-strip production in all its stages by means of the motion picture film, since knowledge of the latter will serve as an excellent introduction to the problems of the former. Continuous practice, both on the technical and creative side, will be needed by them and it is estimated that three to four months will be required for this stage in the course.

At the end of this period they will be ready to launch forth, under the guidance of their instructors, on the treatment and shooting of simple film themes. This will demand the careful investigation and selection of the most suitable subjects. As far as possible, these will be graded according to their complexity and will in this way give the student the necessary experience and confidence that will enable him in the future to

tackle any subject that may come his way. Towards the end of the course it is hoped that the instructors will be able to visit all the students by turn in their own territories.

The end of the twelve months course is, in reality, for the students merely an introduction to the intricate and fascinating business of film making. To quote Mr. Churchill's famous phrase, it is 'the end of the beginning'. They have been shown the ground work but it will only be by constant practice and unremitting effort that they will become proficient and prove themselves able to make those films for which the West Indies stand in such urgent need.

Work in Progress

THE following is a list of films which have been received at the Unit's Headquarters with a brief indication of their progress up to the week ending 22nd July, 1950.

1. 35mm. Films

(a) NIGERIA:

Smallpox. Awaiting final commentary and recording.

CAMEROONS:

The assembly of the sequences of sixteen reels of the material from the Cameroons is now in hand.

(b) KENYA:

Group Farming. Awaiting viewing.

District Teams. Commentary finalized, awaiting titles.

Cattle Thieves. Two reels. Music and effects have been assembled and final commentary, commentator and date to be fixed.

NAIROBI: Selection of scenes and shape awaited.

CHARTER: Selection of scenes and shape awaited.

(c) UGANDA:

Challenge to Ignorance. A visual amendment and commentary to be finalized.

2. 16mm. Films

(a) NIGERIA:

Progress in Nigeria. Finalized and being dispatched.

Community Development. Awaiting Mr. Gibb for advice.

Sabon Sawan. Original matched. Awaiting titles.

Jos Resettlement. Hausa titles awaited from Labs.