Today in History - May 3

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Today's Stories: Jamaica | A Couple of Kansans

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Jamaica

On **May 3**, 1494, Christopher Columbus sighted the island of Jamaica. Spanish colonists settled the island fifteen years later, and it fell into British hands in 1655. Although the Spanish introduced slavery to Jamaica, the British oversaw its development. By the end of the eighteenth century, Jamaica was one of the most valuable colonies in the world, its profitable plantation economy based on the production of sugar through the labor of African slaves.

View of Port Royal and Kingston Harbour in the Island of Jamaica. Popular Graphic Arts. Prints & Photographs Division

Wild Banana Plants, Jamaica, W.I., (c1907). Detroit Publishing Company. Prints & Photographs Division

Jamaica gained its independence from England in 1962 but remains a member of the British commonwealth. The U.S. has long been one of Jamaica's principal trading partners.

Learn More

- To learn more about Christopher Columbus and the consequences of European exploration of the Americas, see the online exhibition 1492: An Ongoing Voyage or search the loc.gov on Columbus.
- The African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship includes a map of West Africa During the Eighteenth Century. Many of the ports identified on the map are identified as being controlled by the English, Dutch, Danish, or French. The use of Latin, French, and Dutch place names on the map is another indication of the international interest in the African trade.
- Read the chapter about Jamaica in Islands of the Commonwealth Caribbean: a Regional Study, one of the texts included in the Country Studies digital collection.
- The Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789 make evident the fact that the Founding Fathers considered the Caribbean Islands, including Jamaica, strategically important to trade. See, for example, the debate of October 20, 1775. These journals are a part of A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875.
- For images of a Jamaican hotel and an estate, search on the term *Jamaica* in the Gottscho-Schleisner Collection. Note, however, that this search also retrieves images of *Jamaica Avenue* and *Jamaica, Long Island*. To refine such a search, use a more concise term, such as *Jamaica, British West Indies*.

A Couple of Kansans

Playwright William M. Inge was born in Independence, Kansas on **May 3**, 1913. Inge wrote several hit plays including *Come Back, Little Sheba*, *Bus Stop*, and *Picnic*, for which he won a Pulitzer Prize. His first play, *Farther Off From Heaven* (1947), was revised ten years later for Broadway as *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. Many of his plays were made into films and, in 1961, Inge won an Academy Award for his original screenplay *Splendor in the Grass*.

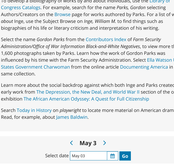
Portrait of William Inge. Carl Van Vechten, photographer, Sept. 8, 1954. Van Vechten Collection. Prints & Photographs Division

Gordon Parks., [ca. 1943]. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. Prints & Photographs Division

Photographer Gordon Parks was a contemporary of William Inge. He was born less than six months prior to Inge on November 30, 1912 in Kansas. He also pursued a career in the arts. Parks began taking photographs during the Great Depression and was earning his living as a self-taught fashion photographer by 1940. A fellowship allowed him to come to Washington, D.C., in 1942 and work for the Farm Security Administration. Working through the medium of photography, Parks went on to become one of America's finest social commentators. His autobiography, *A Choice of Weapons* (New York: Harper & Row), was published in 1966.

Washington, D.C. Government Charwoman. Ella Watson. Gordon Parks, photographer, Aug. 1942. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. Prints & Photographs Division

Washington, D.C. Corner Store Which Is Patronized by Mrs. Ella Watson, a Government Charwoman. Gordon Parks, photographer, Aug. 1942. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. Prints & Photographs Division



Washington, D.C. Mrs. Ella Watson, a Government Charwoman, Receiving Anonimous Poem Received Clara Smith.. Gordon Parks, photographer, Aug. 1942. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. Prints & Photographs Division

Washington, D.C. Adopted Daughter of Mrs. Ella Watson, a Government Charwoman. Gordon Parks, photographer, Aug. 1942. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives. Prints & Photographs Division

Learn More

- To develop a bibliography of works by and about individuals, use the Library of Congress Catalogs. For example, search for the name *Parks, Gordon* selecting Authors/Creators on the Place page for works authored by Parks. For a list of works about Inge, use the Subject Browse on Inge, William M. to find things such as biographies of his life or literary criticism and interpretation of his writing.
- Select the name *Gordon Parks* from the Contributors Index of *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives*, to view more than 1,600 photographs taken by Parks. Learn how the work of Gordon Parks was influenced by his time with the Farm Security Administration. Select Ella Watson (Visited States Government Charwoman from the online article Documenting America in the same collection.
- Learn more about the social backdrop against which both Inge and Parks created their early work from The Depression, the New Deal, and World War II section of the online exhibition The African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship.
- Search Today in History on jalogright to locate more material on American dramatists. Read, for example, about James Baldwin.

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