

Mary N. Menezes, R.S.M.

BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS THE AMERINDIANS IN BRITISH GUIANA, 1803-1873

When first released, Menezes's work addressed a significant gap in the historiography of British Guiana, whose scholars had hitherto focused mostly on the history of the sugar industry, slavery and post-abolition immigration.

This work covers a period of seventy years of British rule commencing with the Dutch handover in 1803 and ending with the administrative reform of 1873 whereby the office of Superintendent of Rivers and Creeks, which had special prerogatives over the Amerindians, was abolished. After the government had absolved itself from any actual responsibility towards the Amerindians, it was only the different Christian denominations in the colony that remained in close contact with them and Menezes presents the reader with a balanced appraisal of the missionary endeavour as a whole. Instructing the indigenous people in literacy, numeracy and practical skills were certainly positive steps towards their integration into the colonial society, and yet the framework under which this instruction was carried out was highly problematic. She concludes with an overview of British policy towards the Amerindians and elicits one key principle which seems to have dominated all aspects of the British intervention in indigenous affairs – the principle of “expediency” that motivated the disparate, inconclusive and outright contradictory actions which the British adopted towards the native population of British Guiana. Thus, it can be concluded, there was no *one* British policy towards the Amerindians that characterised this period, instead, there was a multitude of policies, each reflecting the ethics and politics of its agent.

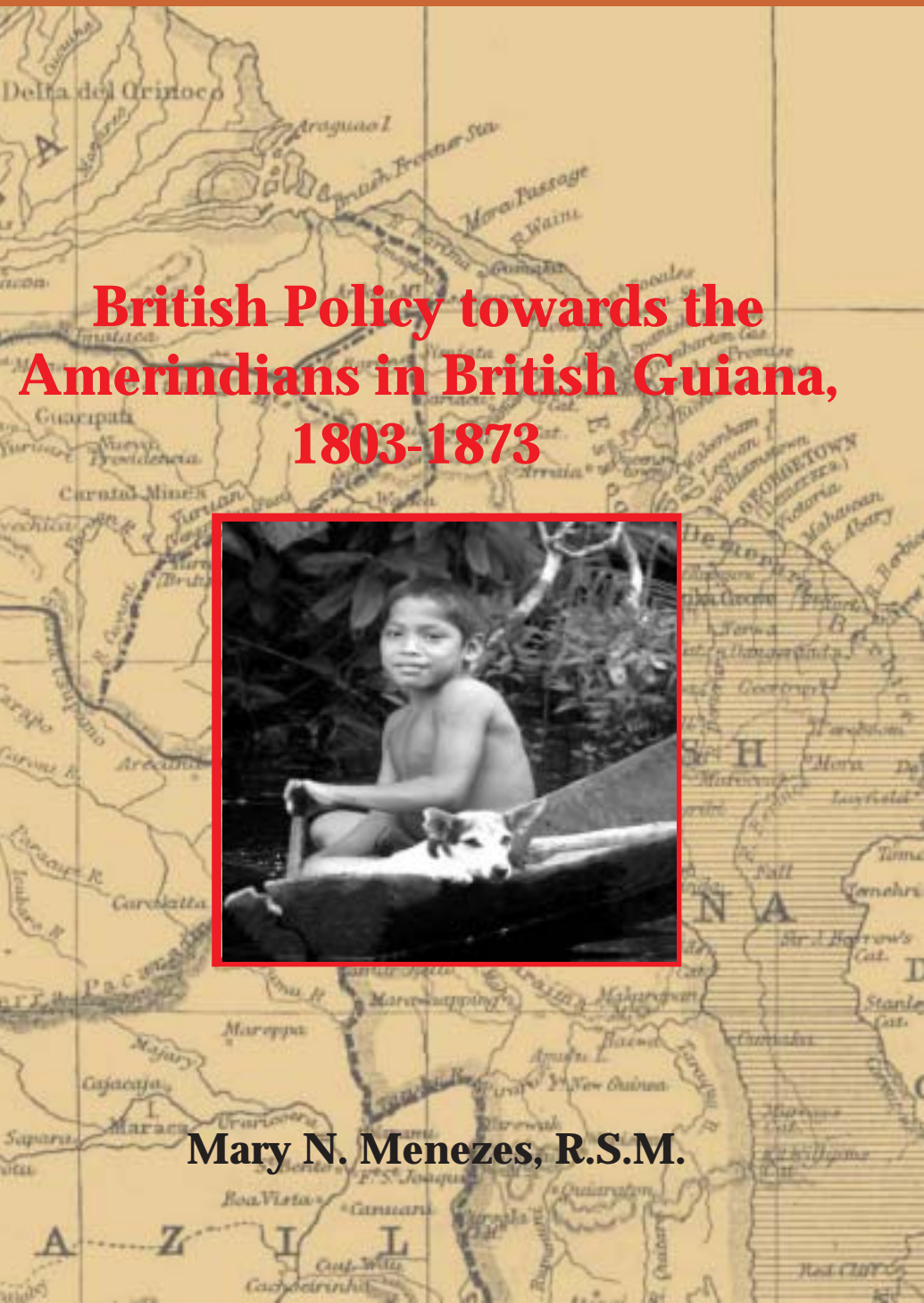
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