The role of the coloured middle class in Nassau, Bahamas, 1890–1942

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In the Bahamas, just as happened in many nineteenth century West Indian societies, a coloured middle class emerged after emancipation. Even before the end of slavery in numerous Caribbean territories, but especially in Jamaica, there was a distinct group of free coloureds who lived mainly in the towns.[1] No detailed work has been done on this group in the Bahamas or of the immediate post-emancipation Bahamian society. However, it can be gleaned from newspapers and travelogues that by 1890, Nassau, the commercial and political capital of the Bahamas, located on New Providence Island had a small coloured middle class. This paper attempts to define the role of the Bahamian coloured middle class during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to describe how it changed over a period of time.

The intermediate coloured class in Nassau had the ambiguous position, in the strictly stratified society in Nassau,[2] between the white elite at the top, and the black labouring class at the bottom. It comprised freed coloureds who had emerged out of slavery, those who were products of European and African ancestry born in a free society and the upwardly mobile Liberated Africans. As in most West Indian colonies, miscegenation had ensured that 'the true African strain had suffered admixture'.[3] By the turn of the nineteenth century the coloured community of Nassau, at least, comprised 'a widely graduated scale of hue and appearance and a highly complex parentage.'[4] The coloureds were not an homogenous group, and as Etienne Dupuch noted, 'they ranged from black or off-black at the bottom, to 'light-brown' and 'high-yaller' and near white at the top.'[5]

Metropolitan and local whites who believed that Africans and their descendants were racially inferior imposed their opinions on the entire society, so that non-whites developed a self-hatred.[6] Proximity to the United States with its deteriorating race relations towards the end of the century and its rigid colour line[7] did not help matters. A person known to have negro blood was socially a Negro in America. In the Bahamas, however, as in the West Indies generally, many light-skinned coloureds

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because it was to their advantage, 'passed' for white and were accepted by the elite. Various writers, including Irish Magistrate Powles commented on the ambiguous colour line in Nassau:

> Although there is plenty of pure unspotted white blood scattered through the Bahamas, a good deal of that of the upper crust of Nassau society is decidedly mixed . . . Though the skins of most of them are fair enough to pass for pure white anywhere in Europe, their African blood would at once be detected by any southerner or West Indian.[8]

A person might not be pure white, but his associates would always be 'light' or lighter. Indeed, someone who was 'passing' would not 'associate with anyone a shade darker than themselves.'[9] A man who was admittedly coloured could not even talk to a lady of a 'so-called' white family.[10]

Nassau's society was segregated in almost every respect. Colour separated the races in housing, education, occupation and in social intercourse. Even certain mail boats, like *The Dart* which plied between Nassau and Harbour Island, had sections for whites only. No coloureds were allowed to enter *The Dart*'s cabin.[11] The racial situation was perhaps not as harsh as in the Southern States of America with its inflexible colour line, but on the other hand it did not conform to the West Indian norm. As Northcroft observed: 'It lacks the exclusiveness of the former and the equality of the latter.'[12]

At the same time, the role of the coloured middle class in the Bahamas did not differ dramatically from that in some West Indian colonies, especially Jamaica. As in that colony, the Bahamian middle class, rather than being a force that brought society together, acted more as a 'divisive element more apt to perpetuate than to eliminate colour prejudice.'[13] While those classified as coloured were generally ignored by the white elite class, they themselves looked down on the black labouring class.

Class lines were not as clearly demarcated in the widely scattered Out Island settlements where the majority of the population lived.[14] Out Islanders lived either in black, white or bi-racial communities. Those living in all-white settlements strictly separated themselves from blacks, being mostly endogamous. In bi-racial settlements whites segregated themselves socially and residentially from blacks.[15] Out Islanders were extremely poor in material terms, most living at the same economic and social level. Yet despite their poverty, intense racial feeling and deep-set prejudice kept the two races separate.[16]

Where considerable miscegenation had occurred in the Out Islands, for example in Eleuthera and Long Island, social stratification was based not on race alone, but also on social attitudes and associations. It

was easier in some Out Islands than in Nassau, for a 'bright' or light-skinned person with black ancestry to be considered white,[17] especially if he held a position such as a priest, teacher or commissioner in the settlement. Undoubtedly race difference rather than class difference was more important in Bahamian society. Because of the dearth of evidence regarding the Out Island society, this paper will concentrate mainly on the coloured middle class in Nassau.

Despite the acute racial feelings, coloureds in Nassau could gain some respectability even among the white community. This was most readily achieved by imitating whites as much as possible. Aspiring coloureds also attempted to obtain a good education, secure good jobs, own land, enter politics and attend the right churches.[18] Perhaps Peter J. Wilson's theory in *Crab Antics* for the black community of Providencia can be applied to the more elite of the Nassau coloureds. They not only had 'reputation', a characteristic held by the majority of the coloured population, but they also gained some 'respectability' which separated them from the rest of the black community.[19]

While attempting to acquire white values, the coloured middle class created social distance between itself and the black labouring class although some had relatives among that group and even attended the same churches and their children the same schools. Coloureds hired blacks as domestics, gardeners, and to do other menial tasks employing them usually for a life time. They trusted their children under the care of black maids and often loved their black retainers as part of the family.[20] The two classes with differing views on type of occupation, education, morality, marriage and religion, did not socialize. Often coloureds, among whom snobbery was rife, formed themselves into intimate cliques.[21]

Coloureds did not completely deny their African heritage, however. They enjoyed watching and even participated in the African-inspired 'Fire-Dance'. Their children often learned 'Ring Play' at school from their black class mates. Coloured children delighted in hearing 'old stories' from their black maids.[22] Although underprivileged blacks were the originators and main participants of the Junkanoo festival, coloureds and even some whites joined in the parade spontaneously.[23] Later in the 1930s, when the festival was seen as a tourist attraction by the white elite, the coloured middle class became more actively involved in it and it began to take on greater respectability.[24]

In economic terms, as was common in the British West Indies, the coloured middle class despised manual labour related to agriculture and the plantation. Unlike the Out Islands where agriculture and sponge fishing were the mainstays, Nassau's economy, like that of Bermuda, was essentially mercantile. New Providence's fine harbour and its proximity to the United States, had led to close economic ties between the two. The 'boom' and 'bust' characteristics of the Bahamas' economy influenced by outside events[25] especially in the United States, largely

benefitted Nassau and its white mercantile community. Finding it cheaper and more profitable to import foodstuffs from the United States, and to a lesser extent from Great Britain, than to subsidize the local economy, it benefitted from import duties which were levied on nearly every class of import including basic foodstuffs. Thus the bulk of the revenue of the Colony derived from indirect taxation which nominally boosted the economy.[26]

Not only did the white mercantile elite dominate the economy in the town, it also as Howard Johnson has demonstrated[27] through the Truck and Share Systems, controlled the large and 'impoverished labour force' in the Out Islands.[28] While there was hardly any circulation of cash in the Out Islands, in Nassau the operation of the import and export agencies and the large dry goods stores brought more money into circulation. The majority of the coloured middle class generally had no business experience and worked for wages or fees, as artisans, tradesmen and in the lower ranks of the civil service.[29]

By the turn of the century, however, numerous coloured men had accumulated some capital and were land owners and proprietors of their own businesses. They were active in the liquor trade, importing and retailing, and the restaurant and grocery businesses. William B. North, mulatto son of English merchant James A. North, for example, at the turn of the century, owned a liquor business on Balliou Hill Road and was also a retailer of groceries. He was also involved in the sponge industry as an outfitter.[30] A friend of his, Harry S. Black, owned and managed Black's Candy Kitchen on Bay Street. A large proportion of such men of moderate substance had some European ancestry, but this was not always the case.

An outstanding example of a darker coloured man who excelled in business was William P. Adderley, son of Joseph R. Adderley and grandson of Alliday Adderley of Yoruba descent. Born in Grant's Town, he followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, who by the 1860s through extensive agricultural enterprise had become a man of substance.[31] By the latter part of the nineteenth century, William Parliament had begun as a contractor, but moved on to become a grower, buyer and exporter of fruits and vegetables. By the turn of the century he was the proprietor of a grocery and dry goods shop called 'The Big Store' located at the southwestern corner of George and King Streets very near to Bay Street.[32]

Some coloureds, including mulatto C. O. Anderson[33] who was appointed Post Master General in 1913, succeeded in rising to high positions in the Civil Service mainly through obtaining a secondary education. This was rare, however. Most coloureds were deprived of a secondary education, which at the turn of the century and for the first quarter of the twentieth century was still largely private and the preserve of the upper class. The latter in general felt it undesirable to educate the children of working class blacks and coloureds. On the one

hand the elite thought them incapable of learning, on the other hand they feared that education might make them too 'uppity'. It therefore was disinclined to vote the necessary expenditure.[34] Since the Government did not provide secondary education, the majority of coloured children had only a primary education. Most remained outside of the private school system, which was very limited for coloureds.

A few coloured children from well respected and well-off families however, did manage to get a fairly good education either through the Boys Central School, the premier government elementary school which offered a sound basic education and produced a number of white and coloured teachers, or through private tuition.[35] Occasionally, coloured boys attended the Anglican Nassau Grammar School and the girls, St. Hilda's Anglican High School. The latter only allowed in very few coloured girls. May Anderson, the Postmaster's daughter, was the first coloured to attend in the early 1900s. Rowena Eldon, an orphan, was the second, her education being supported by the Aaron Dixon Fund.[36] The Anglican schools had a more liberal policy of admission for coloured children than Queen's College.

The latter's policy (although never specifically written) was known to the coloureds as that of a school which existed to educate the sons and daughters of the white Wesleyan and Presbyterian founders.[37] By the early 1900s, however, some coloured children, usually fair-skinned, but not always, from 'respectable' and well-to-do families, had gained admission into Queen's College. Rev. R. P. Dyer later observed that although the whites 'desire earnestly that their children be educated separately from the children of the other race,' that there 'have always been a certain number of coloured children in the school.'[38] If colour did not debar coloureds a secondary education, high fees usually did. Not many coloured families could afford to send their children to private schools.[39] The majority of coloured children therefore remained outside of the system. Those who did obtain a secondary education felt privileged to be 'accepted' by whites. Their opportunities were increased but their education served to create a greater cleavage between them and other coloured children.

The coloured middle class generally lacked a strong political tradition. Although coloured men sat in the House of Assembly at least since 1834,[40] and voiced independent opinions, there was never a significant enough number of them to form a coherent bloc against the white mercantile elite which dominated the House. Individuals, however, made their presence felt. For example, James C. Smith, a light-skinned coloured 'gentleman', held in high esteem by the community, while representing the Western District, worked tirelessly to upgrade conditions of the poor, black and oppressed. He established a newspaper *The Freeman* in 1887 which was critical of the many injustices of the day, including the Truck System and poor educational facilities.[41]

In 1889 six coloureds, four more than sat in the previous Assembly, were returned to the twenty-nine strong House.[42] However, it seemed that colour was not an issue. Governor Shea commented that the increased number of coloureds elected was of 'little significance as the question of race or colour was scarcely heard of . . .'[43] Moreover, the election of coloureds to the legislature was not seen as a threat to the white elite. Shea observed that the 'presence of the coloured men in the House of Assembly will not be the cause of any inconvenience.'[44]

White members, mainly merchants, still maintained a majority and directed policy to suit their own interests in informal as in legislative ways. As Hughes demonstrated, the white minority kept control of the legislature 'not through a restricted franchise' which was steadily widened,[45] but 'by means of corrupt elections.' It also maintained and increased its power by means of an outmoded constitutional system.[46] Magistrate Powles complained:

> This mockery of representation is the greatest farce in the world. The coloured people have the suffrage, subject to a small property qualification, but have no idea how to use it . . . The elections are by open voting, and bribery, corruption and intimidation are carried on in the most unblushing manner under the very noses of the officers presiding over the polling-booths. Nobody takes any notice, and as the coloured people have not yet learnt the art of political organization, they are powerless to defend themselves. The result is that the House of Assembly is little less than a family gathering of Nassau whites, nearly all of whom are related to each other, either by blood or marriage. Laws are passed simply for the benefit of the family, whilst the coloured people are ground down and oppressed in a manner that is a disgrace to the British flag.[47]

The role of the intermediary coloured middle class did not change dramatically during the early years of the twentieth century. Garveyism and World War I had little immediate impact on the social structure of Bahamian society. There was however, an increasing consciousness among coloureds of the racist policies of the day and also of the importance of educational attainment as a means of upward mobility.

Garvey's appeal was generally limited among the coloured middle class in the Caribbean and in the Bahamas. Undoubtedly some coloureds, especially those who participated in World War I, had heard of the Pan-African Movement. Much more research is needed to ascertain the influence of his thinking on the Bahamian coloured middle class. Although not much materialized from the Garvey movement in the Bahamas, his ideas were nevertheless known and important. For example, Reverend Richard Higgs, a Bahamian emigrant of twenty-three years in Florida, was violently assaulted by whites and forced to

return to Nassau for advocating social equality in a sermon that he preached in 'Coloured Town', Miami.[48]

It appears that a number of black and coloured Bahamians were ardent admirers of Garvey, and there might have been, as Tony Martin states, a United Improvement Association Branch established in the Bahamas.[49] The group of Garvey supporters, with A. F. Adderley as their lawyer, in the early 1920s proposed a Union Mercantile Association, independent of whites. Claiming that blacks were badly treated on scheduled boats, it planned to run a boat for them between Nassau and Miami.[50] The idea was obviously influenced by Garvey's Blackstar Steamship line with which Joshua Cockburn, a Bahamian ship captain, then living in New York, was associated.[51] It was also significant that a group of black Bahamians headed by Claudius R. Walker[52] founded the Bahamas Rejuvenation League in New York in 1921 in order to improve education for Bahamians. A member of the League was Frederick A. Toote, brother of T. A. Toote, who had emigrated to the United States where he obtained a college education. He was the energetic president of the Philadelphia division of the UNIA in the 1920s.[53]

World War I and Garveyism heightened the racial consciousness of the coloured middle class. The war acted as a catalyst in bringing together many Bahamians who ordinarily were separated by class and distance. Additionally, Bahamian soldiers also met West Indians, both white and black, some of whom were commissioned officers who thought that social and political changes were needed in the Caribbean.[54] Coloured Bahamians also experienced kindness from whites, especially in France, and formed friendships with European girls.[55] In the colour-conscious Bahamas this would have been impossible.

Perhaps the most lasting impression on black and coloured Bahamian soldiers was their exposure to the blatant discrimination encountered in the army. Although painfully aware of the prejudice which existed in the Bahamas, soldiers like Etienne Dupuch were nevertheless shocked and humiliated by the treatment they received. As loyal British soldiers fighting for 'King and Country' and for freedom, they constantly met signs stating 'Out of bounds to native troops'.[56] Dupuch, like hundreds of other coloured and black West Indians, returned home with a different outlook on the world. Dupuch admitted:

> I was a changed person when I returned to my island home at the age of 20 after seeing the peoples of Europe wallowing in a cesspit of human degradation. I was a very bitter man and swore that never again would I lift a finger, certainly not risk my life, in defence of King and Country, or of anything removed from my limited sphere of activities.[57]

With new knowledge and a broader outlook, Etienne Dupuch and other

coloureds and blacks took a greater interest in the affairs of the country. However, economic considerations, the struggle to make ends meet, and the power of the white elite tempered radicalism. No Cipriani, as in Trinidad emerged to take up the banner of the black labouring class. Neither were there post-war riots or unrest as in other territories in the West Indies.

Dupuch, himself, soon took over as editor of his family newspaper the *Tribune* which brought racial issues to the fore[58] but only to a limited clientele. Dupuch's criticism of the *status quo* had by necessity to be limited if he wished his paper to survive. Entering the House of Assembly in 1928, Dupuch's efforts to initiate major social and political changes were stymied by the lack of a strong united coloured faction. The introduction of the secret ballot and an end to discrimination, two issues which he strongly supported, would be a long time in coming.[59]

At the end of World War I, the colour situation had not changed appreciably since the 1890s. The slowly growing racial consciousness was helped by the continued emigration of Bahamians to the southern United States. Additionally, the arrival of several professional coloured and black West Indians in Nassau and the return of some black Bahamians who had been educated abroad, created some racial pride.

Since the mid nineteenth century, depressed conditions in the Bahamas had caused emigration of Bahamians, especially Out Islanders, to Florida and other parts of the United States. This trend continued in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.[60] Additionally, at the end of World War I about 3000 Bahamians were recruited as labourers at Charleston, South Carolina, to construct port and terminal facilities which would provide for the provisioning and maintenance of the American army into France.[61] As a Methodist Minister commented, Bahamian labourers were exposed to blatant discrimination, he further explained 'The colour question horrid and hateful enough in the Bahamas, is far worse in the Southern States . . .'[62] Bahamians who settled in Miami and Key West, were forced by discriminatory practices to establish churches of their own and were pushed into ghettos such as Coloured Town in Miami.[63] Many, who experienced the growing bigotry, intolerance and violence fanned by the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan after 1915, returned to the Bahamas with different attitudes towards colour.[64]

The coloured middle class gained self-respect with the arrival and settlement in Nassau of several coloured and black professional West Indians including physicians, C. H. Knight, William Pitt and a lawyer, Walter E. S. Callender. They were joined later by others including medical doctors, E. S. Worrell and Roland Cumberbatch. These immigrants swelled the ranks of the very small group of Bahamian coloured and black professionals, including two outstanding men, both lawyers, Thaddeus A. Toote[65] and Alfred E. Adderley.[66] Both were sons of successful merchants and politicians who had taken advantage of

the educational opportunities available to their sons both at home and abroad. Thaddeus A. Toote and A. F. Adderley, educated at the Inns of Court and at Cambridge University in England, soon became respected in their professions and as politicians by white and black alike. In addition to their educational attainments, their political power and professional expertise, their marriages to respectable coloured women[67] made them acceptable members of the coloured middle class.

As their reputations grew, the social distance between them and the black labouring class widened. Even within their own class they were held in awe, but did serve as models and an inspiration to aspiring coloureds and blacks. While gaining the respect of white professionals, it was unthinkable that there would be any social intercourse between the two races.

During the early years of the twentieth century the coloured middle class expanded accepting into its ranks black professionals, merchants, civil servants and successful artisans. No one at that time, neither black nor white, was wealthy. It was Prohibition rather than the First World War that made a difference to the social structure in the Bahamas. Before the 1920s, an entrenched mercantile elite had little real capital. Their colour more than their wealth separated them from non-whites. Bootlegging profits, augmented by those from the land boom, brought quick money into Nassau, creating a new monied class which was mostly white.[68]

Some coloureds and blacks in Nassau benefitted from Prohibition and expanded or established businesses on or near Bay Street. W. B. North's liquor business, had by the 1920s moved from Balliou Hill Road to the Market Range just off Bay Street. His relatives, by marriage, the D'Gregory brothers expanded and improved their meat business by installing refrigeration. W. P. Adderley's 'The Big Store' still flourished. Joseph Whitfield and Edward (Durham) Isaacs operated restaurants on the corners of Deveaux and Bay Streets and Bay and Market Streets respectively. Christopher C. Smith not only bought 'Johnson House' on the corner of Bay and Unions Streets, he also operated a large grocery business there in conjunction with the new Magnolia Apartments nearby.[69]

The coloured businessmen could not however compete with the *nouveau riche* white class which soon consolidated its wealth in large successful businesses and its power by seeking seats in the legislature. The new monied white class primarily benefitted from the growth of tourism and increased American investment which followed Prohibition.[70] By the mid-1930s, coloured and black businessmen, pitted against the powerful wealthy white establishments, were gradually being pushed off Bay Street. Those coloured businesses which managed to survive the Depression years underwent little expansion.

Coloureds and blacks, including an increasing number of migrants from the Out Islands, established businesses in the Over-the-Hill

district, the black section of Nassau, a trend that entrenched the socio-economic split.[71] As Colin Hughes asserted, *structural colour*, a concept described by M. G. Smith,[72] was most important in the Bahamas. Among the variables listed by Smith, 'wealth has had a pre-eminent place in the Bahamas.' Wealth attracted power and authority, and therefore in the Bahamas, racial differences were linked to economic relationships. Racial difference rather than class different '. . . determined the predominant features of social, economic, and political relationships.'[73]

Money 'whitened'. An illustrative case was Roland Symonette, a poor light-skinned coloured seaman from Current Settlement, Eleuthera. Having actively participated in bootlegging,[74] he rose to a position of wealth and power in the mid-1920s, consolidating his position in several legitimate enterprises, and by his election to the House of Assembly in 1925. Legend has it that when he was refused entry into the white elitist Royal Nassau Sailing Club, he established the Nassau Yacht Club which also was to discriminate against coloureds. In less than a generation he and his family were accepted by the white community.[75]

The white community by the 1930s included an emergent middle class comprising mainly Out Islanders from Harbour Island and Abaco. Often related or known to the white elite, because of their colour, they stood a better chance than the coloured middle class of finding employment as shop assistants and clerks in Bay Street establishments.[76] Rowena Eldon was one of the first and among the few coloureds to work in a clerical position for a Bay Street establishment.

With the advent of American investors such as Frank Munson, came the Jim Crow attitudes. Because of the growing importance of the tourist industry and the dependence on American investment, the white elite, who needed few lessons in racism, did little to stop the increasingly blatant discrimination against non-whites in public places and educational establishments. In Nassau it was understood that discrimination was practised in certain places such as hotels, cinemas, barber shops, some schools like Queen's College, the Royal Bank of Canada and J. P. Sands' shop. Girl Guide and Boy Scout troops were also segregated. In nearby Miami, Bahamians were nevertheless shocked to see actual signs indicating race on public facilities such as lavatory doors and water fountains. Residential segregation was also more blatant in the Southern United States.[77] As Nassau's reputation grew internationally during the 1930s, the influence and wealth of the white mercantile clique increased, while that of the coloured and black middle class relatively diminished.[78] The discriminatory policies which permeated the entire society pushed coloureds nearer to blacks, to what Hoetink called the Deep South variant.[79] Some coloureds however, discriminated against members of their own class if they were too dark. Black's Candy Kitchen, for example, catered to all races but only allowed the fair-skinned and whites in the sit-down back section of its

establishment. Blacks and darker coloureds were served in the front section.[80] Most coloureds and ambitious blacks increasingly looked towards education as a means of mobility.

Few coloureds and blacks by the mid-1920s had been exposed to higher education.[81] The establishment of the Government High School in 1925, brought about after some public pressure especially from enlightened coloured and black politicians such as T. A. Toote, A. F. Adderley and R. M. Bailey,[82] was therefore a major innovation. The school intended to accommodate the growing coloured middle class and the more upwardly mobile blacks, excluded by discriminatory policies from private secondary schools, soon became a prestigious black institution with very few whites attending. In less than two decades the school had created a coloured and black elite group which, excluded from the white establishments, increasingly turned to the professions, especially law. Other graduates of the Government High School were absorbed as teachers in the public school system and as clerks in the Civil Service.[83] It was significant that a coloured Government High graduate, Anatol Reeves (who later married Dr. Kenneth Rodgers, a member of the tightly-knit coloured middle class) along with Cecil Bethel, a Codrington College graduate, were appointed as Assistant Teachers at the Government High School in 1941.[84] Despite the heightened consciousness through exposure to secondary education and to outside influences, the coloured and black middle class failed to effect political or social change. The unification of a group of coloured and black politicians and a few enlightened whites over several issues including the secret ballot in March 1925, soon evaporated.[85]

Increased migration into Nassau in the 1920s and during the Depression years of impoverished Out Islanders, barred from the United States by stricter immigration laws,[86] put extra strains on the fragile infrastructure of the capital. The flocking of Out Islanders to Nassau also created new social problems including unemployment. However, despite the increasing poverty and restlessness among the migrant and black labouring population, the Bahamas did not experience the riots and strikes which reverberated throughout most of the British Caribbean. The unrest in the Bahamas was more isolated and not serious enough to cause alarm.[87] Whereas in Jamaica, coloured middle class leaders such as Norman Manley and Bustamante were becoming known as spokesmen for the black labouring class, no such coloured leaders emerged in the Bahamas. Neither did the coloured and black middle class leaders espouse the fledgling Trade Union movement[88] or form political parties – institutions so vital to the success of coloured West Indian leadership.

More vocal than the coloured and black middle class in its support of the underdog in the society was a group of enlightened whites or near whites including Henry M. Taylor, Cyril Stevenson, Jack Stanley Lowe

and Holly Brown, most of whom had Out Island roots. Lowe and Brown founded the *Herald* newspaper in May 1937 and it soon became more than Dupuch's *Tribune* the 'champion of the working man.'[89] Outspoken in its criticism of high public officials, the *Herald* particularly identified with the labouring class, something that the coloured and black middle class was reluctant to do.

Another critic of the Establishment was Milo B. Butler, a fiery black Out Islander with little education. By the late 1930s he had established a business, but was described as a merchant of 'small means and little standing.'[90] After losing his deposit and the seat for the West, which had been traditonally won by a black person, to Canadian millionaire Harry Oakes, Butler, with some support from the black labouring class, complained and announced his intention to lodge a protest against the glaring bribery which took place during the election.[91] He later organized a demonstration on Emancipation Day 1938 consisting of seven or eight hundred people who carried banners in support of the secret ballot. This political incident revealed the increasing unrest in a substantial section of New Providence's population. The coloured and black middle class failed to channel it into a national movement.

Four years later in June 1942 when the first mass uprising erupted over a wage dispute,[92] the coloured and black middle class did not attempt to use it to its political advantage although black anger was obviously directed against the white ruling elite. Stunned and appalled at the behaviour of the rioters, coloured and black leaders did little to articulate demands, other than pleading for wage increases. In fact they acted as mediators between the rioters and the Government.

While coloured and black leaders including Adderley, Dupuch, Walker, Cambridge and Butler realized the blatant injustices and hardships under which the labouring classes lived, they lacked the political will or machinery to effect change. They were willing to negotiate for a gradual peaceful solution. The coloured and black middle class could not condone violence or risk ruining its increasingly comfortable lifestyle. Class-wise, it still found it difficult to identify with the black labouring class. By the 1930s, the wives of the coloured elite including Ethel Adderley and Clarita Toote, having leisure time at their disposal, formed committees to help the poor and aid hurricane victims. Coloureds also headed and patronized several sporting clubs, including the Nassau Cricket Club and the Gym Tennis Club.[93] The social distance between the two classes was considerable. A. F. Adderley, for example, had become by the early 1940s a highly respected lawyer and politician, being admired by both blacks and whites in the society. Governor Murphy commenting in the mid-1940s believed that Adderley had 'reached that stage in the evolution of a gentleman of colour at which his own community ceased to regard him as truly representing their outlook.'[94] Etienne Dupuch observed much later that Adderley's:

> . . . approach to politics was conservative and while I believe he had a genuine desire to help in the advancement of black people, he knew that he was culturally head and shoulders above the great majority of them.[95]

A. F. Adderley, although of outstanding intellect and ability, typified the conservatism held by others of his class.

The expanded intermediary coloured and black middle class in 1942 was better educated and more aware of the injustices in the society but was politically impotent. Although it was excluded from white circles which controlled the economy, at the same time its members were not expected to participate in agriculatural and menial jobs. A few became professionals, while an increasing number of coloureds entered the teaching profession and lower ranks of the Civil Service. By the early 1940s, some coloureds and blacks were beginning to benefit financially from the growth of tourism and foreign investment.

Most coloureds suffered discrimination in a society deeply divided by colour and class. The definition of a coloured person in the Bahamas in the 1940s was still ambiguous, varying according to a person's family, wealth or its attitude. A wealthy person who had a 'tinture' of coloured blood would be accepted as white if he associated with the 'right' people.[96] Fair-skinned coloureds were accepted at some segregated restaurants and movie houses. The proximity to the caste-conscious Southern United States and the development of tourism exacerbated racist attitudes in the Bahamas. Exposure to so many whites tended to emphasize the already deeply-entrenched feelings of inferiority among the coloured and black middle class. The latter, which absorbed white values, tried to overcome its racial identity by imitating whites. A hierarchy was thus created within the non-white community where not only colour but physical attributes such as hair quality and facial structure mattered. The settlement in Nassau of white and near-white Out Islanders with their intransigent attitudes towards colour, also intensified racial divisions. Nassau's relatively large white population and its commercially based economy made for a social structure more resembling that of the Atlantic 'outpost' of Bermuda than that of the British West Indies.

While favouring change, the coloured and black middle class sought gradual, not revolutionary methods. Most coloured leaders, including Dupuch and Adderley, were conservative and by the 1940s had much affection for the British Empire. Despite the humiliating treatment it suffered because of the racist policies of the white elite, the coloured and black middle class lacked the political will to challenge the power of the white Bay Street clique. Later, in 1953, when the first political party was established, its conservatism hindered it from identifying with the party. History would show that the early success of the Progressive Liberal Party did not hinge on the luke-warm support of the coloured and black middle class.

Notes

1. Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 167–175. See also Mavis C. Campbell, *The Dynamics of Change in a Slave Society: A Sociopolitical History of the Free Coloureds of Jamaica, 1800–1865*, Rutherford, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976, and Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White. Race, Politics, and the Free Coloureds in Jamaica, 1792–1865*, Westport, Connecticut, 1981.
2. See Lloyd Braithwaite, 'Stratification in Trinidad', in *Slaves, Free Men, Citizens. West Indian Perspectives*, edited by Lambros Comitas and David Lowenthal, Garden City, New York, 1973, pp. 212–239. See also David Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies*, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 91–100.
3. G. J. H. Northcroft, *Sketches of Summerland. Giving Some Account of Nassau and The Bahama Islands*, Nassau, *The Nassau Guardian*, 1912, p. 62.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Etienne Dupuch, *The Tribune Story*, London, 1967, p. 37.
6. Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, London and Toronto, 1971, pp. 134–137.
7. Michael Banton, *Race Relations*, London, 1967, pp. 140 and 145.
8. L. D. Powles, *The Land of The Pink Pearl*, London, 1888, pp. 120–121.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 121.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 211. See also James H. Stark, *History of and Guide to the Bahamas*, Boston, 1891, p. 139.
12. Northcroft, *Sketches of Summerland*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
13. Sydney Olivier, *White Capital and Coloured Labour*, London, 1910, pp. 38–39. Cited in Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
14. Out Islands (now Family Islands) include all the islands of the Bahamas archipelago except New Providence on which the capital, Nassau is located.
15. D. Gail Saunders, 'The Social History of The Bahamas 1890–1953', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Waterloo, 1985, pp. 124–130 and 139.
16. *Ibid.*, 139.
17. Marc Tull, 'Colour Pride in Tarpum Bay. A Bahamian Community Reacts to Equality,' in *Anthropological Perspectives on Eleuthera Island 1973–1974*, College Center of the Finger Lakes, Corning, New York, 1974, p. 71.
18. Most of the coloured middle class belonged to the Anglican or Methodist churches which offered respectability and in some cases provided education for their children. See Saunders, 'Social History . . . ,' *op. cit.*, pp. 89–91.
19. Peter J. Wilson, *Crab Antics: The Social Anthropology of English Speaking Negro Societies of the Caribbean*, New Haven and London, 1973. In the study of Providencia which was all coloured, Peter Wilson argued that wealth, colour and respectability are the means by which social ranking is defined. Colour was very important, but respectability was more important. See pp. 95–98, 222–234.
20. Interview with E. Basil North, 1 January 1986.
21. Interview with Dr. Terry North, London, 5 August 1983.
22. Interview with E. Basil North, *op. cit.*
23. E. Clement Bethel, 'Music in The Bahamas. Its Roots, Development and Personality', M. A. Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1978, p. 217. The Junkanoo festival, which is celebrated twice every year on Boxing Day and New Year's day, can be traced back to the slavery period not only in The Bahamas but in several West Indian territories including Jamaica, Belize and St. Vincent. See Bethel, *Ibid.*, pp. 186–207.
24 *Ibid.*, pp. 234–235.
25. These included the coming of the Loyalists after the American Revolutionary war, and the blockade running era during the American Civil War. See Gordon Lewis, *The Growth of The Modern West Indies*, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 313..
27. See Howard Johnson, 'A Modified Form of Slavery': The Credit and Truck Systems in the Bahamas in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 26, No. 4, October 1986, pp. 729–753 and 'The Share System in the Bahamas in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Slavery and Abolition, A Journal of Comparative Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 21 September 1984, pp. 141–153.
28. 'The Share System in the Bahamas in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Ibid.*, p. 151.
29. D. Gail Saunders, 'The Social History of the Bahamas 1890–1953', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Waterloo, 1985, pp. 80–86.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–86.
31. Benson McDermott, A. F. Adderley 'Giant Strides Across the Bahamian Stage', *Bahamas Handbook and Businessman's Annual*, Nassau, 1980, p. 18.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 21. See also *Almanack*, 1901, Nassau Guardian, Advertisements at end of book.
33. Charles Osborn Anderson, born in Nassau in 1868, was educated at the Nassau Grammar School between 1881 and 1885. Rising through the ranks from Clerk in the Public Dispensary and Post Office to become the Examining Officer of Customs in 1906 and Auditor of Public Accounts in 1908, he was appointed Post Master General in 1913. *Bahamas Blue Books*, 1901–1902, 1913–1940.
34. Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870–1900*, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 77. See also Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, London and Toronto, 1971, p. 106.
35. See D. Gail Saunders, 'The Social History of the Bahamas 1890–1953', *op. cit.*, p. 80.
36. Interview with Rowena Eldon, Nassau, 8 December, 1983. Aaron Dixon, a Scotsman who had lived in the Bahamas, willed his property for the benefit of the poor and for the education of fatherless children. *Almanack 1894*, Nassau, Nassau Guardian, 1894, p. 26.
37. Gail Saunders, 'The Social History of the Bahamas 1890–1953', *op. cit.*, p. 81.
38. R. P. Dyer to the Methodist Missionary Society, London, February 1937. The Bahamas District WMMS papers, Box 715.
39. Board of Education Annual Report 1892, PRO/EDU/5–18, p. 2. cited Colbert Williams, *The Methodist Contribution to Education in The Bahamas*, Gloucester, 1982, p. 112.
40. Michael Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, London, Revised edition 1968, p. 128. See also Colin A. Hughes, *Race and Politics in the Bahamas*, University of Queensland Press, 1981, p. 10.
41. Powles, *Land of The Pink Pearl*, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–105. *The Freeman*, after the Government Administrator refused to recognize it, ceased publication just over two years after its establishment. *Blue Books*, 1889–1890.
42. All six coloured men elected to the House of Assembly in 1889 were involved in private businesses or in the Civil Service. Leon E. Dupuch, elected for the Eastern District was a printer; James C. Smith, representing the Western District, was the Post Master General; G. A. McGregor, also for the West was a Resident Justice; William C. Adderley a merchant was elected for the City and J. W. H. Deveaux, a farmer, was the Representative for Cat Island. *Blue Books*, 1887 and 1889. See also *Almanack* 1894, Nassau, Nassau Guardian, 1894, pp. 108–109.
43. Shea to Knutsford, 2 July, 1889, CO23/231/256–257.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 10. By the end of the nineteenth century the franchise required a freehold of £5 or a household tenancy of £2.8s.0d. in New Providence and £1.4s.0d. in the Out Islands.
46. The Bahamas, like Barbados and Bermuda, retained the outdated Old Representative System. See Saunders, 'The Social History of the Bahamas 1890–1953', *op. cit.*, pp. 40–41. See also Tracey L. Thompson, 'Constitutional Authority in The Bahama

Islands 1946–1947. The Governor and the Assembly,' *Journal of The Bahamas Historical Society*, Vol. 5, No. 1., 1983, p. 20.

47. Powles, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

48. Minute Paper. Colonial Secretary's Files. Confidential. No. 13. 13 July, 1921.

49. Tony Martin. *The Pan-African Connection. From Slavery to Garvey and Beyond*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1983, p. 59.

50. Minute Paper. Colonial Secretary's Files. Confidential. No. 21. 29 May, 1920. As far as can be ascertained the plan never materialized.

51. Robert A. Hill, (ed.) *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*. Vol. I, University of California Press, p. 515.

52. Claudius R. Walker was from Grant's Town. He studied medicine in the early 1920s at Howard University in Washington D.C. and at Meharry College in Nashville, Tennessee. He returned to Nassau in 1930.

53. Minute Paper. Colonial Secretary's Files. No. 145, 21 January, 1921. See also Robert Hill, (ed.) *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 371. See footnote 65 for information on T. A. Toote.

54. Etienne Dupuch, *A Salute to Friend and Foe*, Nassau, 1982, pp. 63–64, p. 68.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

56. Etienne Dupuch, *Tribune Story*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

57. Dupuch, *A Salute to Friend and Foe*, *op. cit.*, p. 100. An attitude he later changed.

58. Saunders, 'The Social History of The Bahamas 1890–1953', *op. cit.*, p. 212. See also the *Tribune*, 24 February, 1911.

59. The secret ballot was introduced in New Providence in 1939. It was not extended to the Out Islands until 1946. A Resolution against discrimination, sponsored by Etienne Dupuch, was passed in 1956.

60. Saunders, 'The Social History of The Bahamas 1890–1953', *op. cit.*, pp. 183–185.

61. Allardyce to Long, 24 August, 1918, CO23/283/163; *Ibid.*, 31 July 1918, CO23/283/124–126.

62. Eardley to Andrews, Nassau, 16 March 1917 Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Papers.

63. *Ibid.* Also see *Ibid.*, 19 February 1918, MMS.

64. Interview with Audrey V. Isaacs North, 20 June, 1984.

65. Thaddeus A. Toote was the son of Sankey Toote, a merchant, realtor and an outspoken member of the House of Assembly. Thaddeus A. Toote, born at Harbour Island, was educated at the Boys Central School (in Nassau), the Nassau Grammar School and Ellesmere College, Shropshire, England. He studied law at Lincoln's Inn, London and was called to the English Bar in June 1914. First elected to the House of Assembly in 1915 for Rum Cay and Watlings Island, he was re-elected in 1919. In 1918 he married Clarita C. North, daughter of B. North. *Tribune*, 24 November, 1924.

66. Alfred F. Adderley was the only son of W. P. Adderley, successful black merchant already mentioned. A. F. Adderley attended the Boys Central School and the Nassau Grammar School. He was sent to Denstone College in Staffordshire, England in 1908. Afterwards he attended St. Catherine's College Cambridge, where he obtained his B.A. and LL.B degrees in 1915. The first black Bahamian to attend an English University, he was called to the Middle Temple in 1919, and returned home to practice law. See Benson McDermott, 'A. F. Adderley. Giant Strides across the Bahamian Stage', *Bahamas Handbook and Businessman's Annual*, 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–24.

67. Clarita C. North, whom Toote married was the niece of W. B. North, well-off coloured merchant in Nassau. Ethel Lunn, was from a well known and respected coloured family in Nassau. Her brother Arthur was Nassau's best known tailor, another brother Tom was a watchmaker and a third Charles, was a jeweller. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

68. Gordon Lewis, *The Growth of The Modern West Indies*, *op. cit.*, p. 319

69. See Gail Saunders, 'The Social History of The Bahamas', *op. cit.*, pp.277–278.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 358–359.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 375.

72. M. G. Smith, *Framework for Caribbean Studies*, Mona, University of the West Indies, 1955, p. 65.
73. Colin Hughes, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
74. Grant to Churchill, 31 August, 1922, Conf. CO23/291/215 and Hughes to Geddes, 26 June 1922, CO23/292 Misc.
75. Gail Saunders, 'The Social History of The Bahamas', *op. cit.*, pp. 275–276.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 276–277.
77. Interview with Audrey V. Isaacs North, *op. cit.*
78. Gail Saunders, 'The Social History of The Bahamas', *op. cit.*, pp. 280–281; 288–289.
79. H. Hoetink, *The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations*, Oxford, 1967, pp. 46–47.
80. Interview with E. Basil North, 31 July 1984.
81. The few included Claudius R. Walker and Bertram Cambridge, also from Grant's Town. He studied the organ in New York from 1919 to 1922 returning home to lead an orchestra which played at private parties and later at night clubs. Included among the children of the traditional coloured middle class was Terry North, son of William Benjamin, who attended Ellesmere College in Shropshire and the University of London where he trained as a medical doctor. He returned only once to the Bahamas in 1929. See *Tribune*, 5 November 1930. Interview with E. Basil North, 31 July 1984 and interview with Dr. Terry North, 5 August 1983, London.
82. R. M. Bailey was born in Barbados on 28 October 1875. He attended Codrington College and studied the classics. He won a scholarship to study law, but social pressure prevented him from pursuing it. Migrating to Nassau in 1898, he married Rhoda Simons, and became a tailor. Although he never sat in the House of Assembly, he was active in urging the establishment of secondary education and the Government High School, and also encouraged C. C. Sweeting and S. C. McPherson to run for the House of Assembly. He was also a musician and took an active part in Sunday night concerts in Nassau. He died in 1960. Notes prepared by the family, September 1984.
83. Clifford to Shuckburg, 25 February 1933, CO23/477.
84. *Bahamas Civil Service List, 1944*, Nassau, Nassau Guardian, p. 23.
85. The group of coloureds and blacks included R. M. Bailey, T. A. Toote, A. F. Adderley, W. P. Adderley, L. W. Young, S. C. McPherson and Etienne Dupuch. Whites included C. C. Sweeting and W. C. B. Johnson. Collectively besides the secret ballot, they supported adequate public schooling, improvements of the Civil Service, better sanitation and the deepening of the harbour. *Tribune*, 24 January, 19 and 26 May 1923; 27 and 30 May 1925; see also *Nassau Guardian* 17 March 1925.
86. The Native Origins Act (1924), which lowered quotas from each country to 2 per cent of the nation's nationals in the United States in 1890, called for the possession of passports and literacy tests for Bahamians and other aliens. See Ray A. Billington, *American History After 1865*, New Jersey, 1979, p. 167 and *Tribune*, 21 June 1924.
87. The most serious incidents were the Inagua disturbances in 1937 and the Nassau By-election demonstrations in 1938. See Saunders, 'Social History . . . ', *op. cit.*, pp. 367–374.
88. *Ibid.*, pp. 365–366. The Trade Union Movement in the Bahamas was established in 1936 by Percy Christie, a white shoe merchant from a poor background who identified to some extent with the black labouring class. Within a year there was a membership of about 800 members, most of them unskilled labourers. In 1938, the Government appointed a Labour Bureau and a part time officer, John A. Hughes. Charles Rhodriquez, a black dry goods merchant, impatient with the Union's lack of progress, made a verbal attack on Christie, who resigned. Rhodriques took over the leadership.
89. Interview with Holly Brown, 10 September 1984.
90. Dundas to MacDonald, 11 July 1938, Conf., CO23/653.
91. *Ibid.*
92. See D. Gail Saunders, 'The 1942 Riot in Nassau, Bahamas. A Demand for

Change?', *The Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1985–6, pp. 117-46.

93. *Tribune*, 30 September, 1, 2 and 4 October 1935. See also *The Gym Tennis Club Souvenir Programme. Historical Day, 22 August 1981*. Nassau, 1981.

94. Personal Letter. Murphy to Hall, 28 November 1945, CO23/799/28.

95. Benson McDermott, 'A. F. Adderley', *op. cit.*, p. 41.

96. Denyer to Noble, 10 April 1947. Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera, WMMS.