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“Black Bahamas”

*Political Constructions of
Bahamian National Identity*

by

Maria A. Lee

Honors Thesis

in

Department of History

*in collaboration with
Department of Sociology and Anthropology*

*University of Richmond
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*Advisors: Drs. L. Carol Summers, Manuella Meyer,
Jan Hoffman French, Jennifer Nourse*

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Introduction

On Tuesday, 27 April 1965, in the House of Assembly an event known as “Black Tuesday” struck the capital city of Nassau, New Providence in The Bahamas.¹ A political furor arose in response to the failure of the ruling government to accurately determine voter distribution and boundaries.² In frustration, the leader of the opposition motioned towards the mace, shouting, “This is the symbol of authority, and authority in this island belongs to the people.” With a burgeoning crowd below, he then lifted the mace in front of the Speaker, and threw it down from the window of the House. “Yes, the people are outside,” he said to the Speaker and fellow members of the House, “and the mace belongs outside too!”³

This symbolic political gesture and other rhetorical devices will be examined to understand how The Bahamas became conceptually known as a “black” nation or “Black Bahamas”. Coined myself, a “Black Bahamas” is defined as a cultural framework that discounts citizenship as a definitive marker of Bahamian national identity. It fashions members of Bahamian society with darker skin pigmentation (who are in the majority of the population) as symbolically included in the popular imagination of an authentic Bahamian national identity.⁴ Moreover, it excludes non-black Bahamians of intermediate shades as not belonging to this imagined national community.⁵ The primary question addressed in this thesis will be how

¹ Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume Two: From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 340.

² Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 340.

³ *Nassau Tribune*, April 27, 1965, quoted in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 341.

⁴ Patricia Glington-Meicholas and Joylon Smith, *How To Be a True-True Bahamian: A Hilarious Look at Life in The Bahamas* (Nassau, Bahamas: Guanima Press, 2001), 110. I use Glington-Meicholas and Smith’s humorous understanding of “white” exclusions and “black” inclusions of Bahamian national identity. They claim, “If you desire to be a true-true Bahamian, being called ‘white’ is the kiss of death.”

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

political discourse and response to it played a role in the construction of this popular discourse and consciousness of Bahamian national identity.

Until the year 1967, control of economic, political, and social realms in The Bahamas remained in the hands of a light-skinned Bahamian mercantile oligarchy. This oligarchy was named “Bay Street”, for the street in the center of downtown Nassau from where they maintained their commercial and governmental domains. In the general election of January 10, 1967, however, government shifted to political leadership by individuals with darker skin tones, much like the majority of the population.⁶ Lynden Pindling, the main actor in the events of “Black Tuesday”, became leader of this new political order. It is argued here that Pindling and the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) from which he governed, were catalysts in the shift from the popular consciousness of The Bahamas into one of a “black” nation. Gaining Bahamian independence from Great Britain on July 10, 1973, the party continued in power for twenty-five years until August 1992. Thus, their political rhetoric and symbolism remained dominant for a generation of Bahamians from 1973 through 1992.

This thesis investigates what forms of black political discourse took hold in The Bahamas during the transformation of power in the mid-twentieth century and under the leadership of Pindling and the PLP. It examines the articulation of blackness as a form of political manipulation by the ruling government from 1967 to 1992 rather than as a means of elevation of the darker-colored majority in socioeconomic terms. As a student of both history and anthropology, I recognize the need to place such events in the language of cause and effect, as well as offer analyses of its construction through discursive practices. Using both fields of thought, however, I develop that the Pindling government’s discourse acted as a catalyst, or

⁶ *The Nassau Guardian*, January 10, 1967; *Nassau Tribune*, January 10, 1967. See section below on more detail of demographics of the Bahamian population.

agent of change in the way that average citizens came to think and talk about their national identity.

At its most pedagogic level, my thesis underscores the fluidity of racial conceptualizations, the ways in which both class and race are at the crux of socioeconomic division and hierarchies of power within Bahamian society, and how racialized *political* discourse has influenced a racialized *national* discourse that simplifies the complexities that exist in reality. Moreover, on a broader scale, my thesis offers an additional region to investigate the power of political symbolism to engender a sense of national identity. It also places historical foundations and present-day Bahamian formations of Black Nationalism and black power within the broader context of the Anglophone Caribbean, many African nations, and the United States of America.

Terminology and Demography of Race and Color

I attempt to deviate from racial categories of “white” and “black” as much as possible throughout my paper, given that I see race as a social construction rather than biological fact. Racial dichotomies limit the mixtures of shades of pigmentation within phenotypical skin color and oversimplify the existence of intermediate groups within Bahamian society. Nonetheless, I maintain that race, whiteness, and blackness hold important significance within the political and social consciousness of Bahamian society. I continue to use it with a frame of reference; however, I insert quotation marks surrounding the labels of “white” and “black” when necessary to expose their ambiguities. Moreover, I describe skin pigmentations of Bahamians in terms of their degree of darkness and lightness so that the reader may gather the nuances of racial constructions.⁷

⁷ Anton Allahaar, "'Race' and Class in the Making of Caribbean Political Culture," *Transforming Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (2001): 17. I follow the pattern of using quotation marks through Allahaar.

The demography of the Bahamian population in racial terms is also problematic. Although it is common for everyday Bahamians to put into percentages that 85 percent of the population is of African descent and 15 percent is “white”, these ratios do not adequately illustrate the more fluid categorizations of race, nor do they stipulate demographical accuracies.⁸ First of all, the geography of The Bahamas as an archipelago of approximately thirty inhabited islands across 5,500 square miles has resulted in the dispersal of Bahamian populations that have lived in relative isolation from each other.⁹ Each has separate relationships and varied demographics to the capital city of Nassau, New Providence and their inhabitants have different experiences and constructions of race. Secondly, there is no up-to-date statistical analysis of racial demography that exists, given that the last census that included racial categories was in 1953.¹⁰ Although this data was temporally and quantitatively skewed¹¹, it also posits questions as to why matters of race have been attached to political rhetoric when there are no structural policies in place to ensure a more equitable resource allocation to the communities that need it most – particularly the darker colored lower class majority.

Methodology

The primary research for this investigation involved a combination of archival and ethnographic components. In the summer of 2011, I engaged in archival research at the National Archives of The Bahamas that pointed me to structures of Bahamian society divided along both color and class lines. Specific sources included, but were not limited to, legal and

⁸ Nicolette Bethel, "Navigations: The Fluidity of National Identity in the Postcolonial Bahamas" (diss., University of Cambridge, 2000), [Online].

⁹ Bethel, "Navigations".

¹⁰ Bethel, "Navigations".

¹¹ Bethel, "Navigations". The categories solely included of “European”, “African”, and “Mulatto” (mixed race) at the time. One of the reasons why the 1953 census had its limitations was through the existence of ethnic immigrant groups such as Greeks, Chinese, and more recently, immigration of Haitians, Jamaicans, and Guyanese, and a large degree of emigration by Bahamian nationals. Its ratios of racial demographics are thus temporally and quantitatively skewed.

governmental records, and public records such as newspapers. I also collected numerous Colonial Office documents from the British National Archives at Kew in London, England to gather a more thorough timeline of events and to gain a sense of what were colonial ideologies of racial politics at the time of the PLP's emergence.

I also engaged in ethnographic and oral history interviews that tackled racial worldviews and personal experiences of “black” and non-black Bahamians in the island of New Providence. Such research included structured and unstructured interviews, surveys, and participant observation of political discourse for the purpose of triangulating the events of the late twentieth century into the experiences of individuals in the present. I gathered contacts and conducted interviews and casual conversation with over twenty-five Bahamians from ages eighteen to ninety-three years of age, and from a range of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds about their Bahamian identity.

Being a light-colored Bahamian individual myself, my personal background and identity posed as both useful and problematic to my investigation. Other than being more culturally attuned to Bahamian dialect and etiquette while conducting my ethnographic research, I was able to play ignorant in order to receive thorough oral histories from older, mainly darker-colored individuals about the hardships they experienced in the days prior to PLP emergence. Moreover, I was able to use my skin color to play off the stereotype that “all ‘white’ Bahamians are anti-PLP” to provide unspoken security in discussions with certain individuals who understood the impact of their racial rhetoric in a more negative light. In order to quell any suspicious of me being a “white Bahamian that just wants to tear apart the legacy of the PLP” or one who “just wishes for a return to Bay Street rule”, I used open-ended and general questions as much as possible. Questions included: “Can you tell me what ‘being Bahamian’ means to you?” or “What do you remember about independence (or other notable decades,

famous figures)?” I would then let them be the first to initiate a discussion about racial politics and use a series of snowballing questions thereafter. Out of privacy and compliance with the ethics of the American Anthropological Association and the Institutional Research Board of the University of Richmond, I have replaced most of my interviewee’s names with pseudonyms. This can be noted by the use of their fabricated names in quotation marks.

I write with disappointment that more of my initial ethnographic data did not make it into my final document; however, their rich and varied interpretations gave me valuable insight to continue my archival and secondary research. Their understandings of Bahamian national identity also helped to conceptualize my thesis in clearer terms. I found that many older light colored Bahamians were hesitant to talk about Pindling or the PLP period, but young Bahamians were eager to discuss what their thoughts and experiences. I found a number of contradictions in the rhetoric and the reality of the ways in which average darker-colored Bahamians live. Many are still just as disenfranchised as they were prior to the PLP. Thus, not much has changed, except the anti-white rhetoric and racialized blame game. My paper demonstrates ways in which the racialized rhetoric remains amidst continued social inequities in the political and economic realm.

Literature Review

I organized my search for secondary literature on this project on the basis of its regional and topical relevancy to social and political Bahamian history in the post-emancipation era of the mid-nineteenth century until the emergence of the PLP. I also gathered studies on political mobilization, race, class, and identity in The Bahamas and other parts of the Caribbean in both historical and anthropological contexts. Secondly, I organized my search on the basis of theoretical relevancy to the questions of Black Nationalism and consciousness, racial politics, and discourses on race, class, and national identity from other parts of the world. Thirdly, I

compiled anthropological literature on the impact of political rhetoric and metaphoric symbolism to invoke specific kinds of emotions and thought-processes among its citizens. This section highlights a small handful of key literature from each category.

My most used regional source from The Bahamas is Michael Craton and Gail Saunders's, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of The Bahamian People From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century* (2000). This narrative socio-historical source was paramount to the construction of the timeline to social, economic, and political aspects of Bahamian life throughout the time periods that I have researched. It is written by two of the most reputable and experienced scholars of Bahamian social history (whose independent works are also cited in this project) and has served as a backbone to my location of a breadth of primary sources and other relevant secondary literature. A criticism, which I take knowingly, is that of my over-reliance on this source. The lack of historical writing within the context of The Bahamas is one that has been difficult to compensate. I have, however, combined many primary and other secondary references when applicable to Craton and Saunders's findings in attempts to diversify the literature.

Colin Hughes's, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas* (1981) was another valuable source of historical context of The Bahamas, politics and social activity with regards to race and color. His narrative on the transition of "white" power and "black" power during the mid-twentieth century is supplemented primarily through the use of newspaper articles, many of which are no longer in good condition in The National Archives of The Bahamas. Thus, Hughes' work has provided my study with a timeline of events and further breadth of primary sources that I would otherwise have had difficulty locating. Furthermore, Hughes' insight on the social alliances of local colonial and Bay Street officials were also pivotal in the fashioning of my second chapter. Nonetheless, its narrative (as well as Craton and

Saunders's) is lacking in the depth of an extrapolation of the implications of political transformation of power on the sociocultural and socioeconomic elements of Bahamian society.

This is where my investigation comes in, to fill in the gaps of both time and analysis of how racial and political dynamics of this time period have impacted society in the present-day. Some notable Bahamian scholars including anthropologist Nicolette Bethel, literary authors Patricia Ginton-Meicholas and Ian Gregory Strachan have begun to tackle the unscathed territory of the complexities of Bahamian national identity, and the weavings of race, color, and class. Nonetheless, more can be done to identify the origins of the construction of Bahamian national identity and how the Bahamian nation can move forward. I intend for my thesis to be a step in this direction.

The incorporation of black power literature further aids in my goal of providing a more rigorous and contextual study of Pindling's political projects than has been done previously. A definition of black nationalism from Jeffrey Ogbar, and delineations between separatist and pluralist traditions within global black power movements from Ogbar, William VanDeburg and Bert Thomas have helped to provide a greater theoretical understanding of the origins and motivations of the use of blackness by the Pindling government. Lastly, the application of anthropological theory including those of notable scholars in the field, Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner, on the myriad of forms through which Pindling's projects have taken, has allowed my thesis to be interpreted through the lens of rhetorical symbolism. That is, it provides a means for me to discuss the myriad of political symbolism and rhetoric by the Pindling government as a means of "black" inclusion and "white" exclusion. Moreover, this allows me to use the language needed to explain a large part of my thesis: the political constructions of Bahamian national identity into that of a "black" exclusive belonging.

Organization of Chapters

In the first chapter, a narrative history of the post-emancipation period of the early nineteenth century until the rise of the PLP during the mid-twentieth century is examined as laying the historical foundations of color-coded classes and racial politics within Bahamian society. It recognizes the ways in which the Bay Street master class used legislative and economic stipulations, and property ownership to maintain their political and socioeconomic domination and marginalization of a darker colored majority. Yet it also exposes the growth of a middle class of intermediate shades throughout this time period that gained relative leverage through education and the franchise, making them socially distinct from the darker majority. A comparative analysis of the reform initiatives of the varied class backgrounds against Bay Street domination that began in the mid-twentieth century offers a more complicated understanding of power, privilege, and poverty within the historical foundations of Bahamian society. This chapter identifies that the existence of a middle class, from which the PLP emerged, clouded a racial dichotomy that oversimplified the power dynamics of color and class that were in existence.

In the second chapter, the ways in which race, color, and class had been understood by local colonial officials in the mid-1960s is investigated; as well as how they perceived the PLP prior to their electoral victory in 1967. Their perspective provides an opportunity to discuss the colonial non-racial interpretation of the region's challenges. The investigation also allows for a moment of introspection into the ways in which colonial ideology allowed for the mainstay of Bay Street rule for more than a century, and the ways in which an over-emphasis on class opposition is equally as problematic as ones of race and color. Furthermore, this chapter serves as a counter argument to the inverse reaction of racial interpretation within the PLP's political projects.

In the third chapter, the ways in which blackness was employed by the PLP government are examined as a means of consolidating an electorate of the darker colored popular classes. Prior to 1967 before its electoral victory, and in consecutive elections until 1992, the dominant ideas or motifs throughout their campaigns were those of the “white” minority as modern-day slaveholders and the heroic narrative of the PLP as the irrefutable emancipator of the “black” majority. Within the context of their political symbolism, this chapter debates the motivations of these motifs within the framework of various black power traditions, and also questions its consequences given highly publicized corruption and limited improvement in the quality of life of the darker colored majority. This chapter also inserts anthropological theory of political symbolism to investigate the power of the PLP government’s motifs to generate a social discourse and understanding of socioeconomic division in binary oppositions of “white” exploitation and “black” suffering. As the fulcrum of my thesis, I explore the ways in which these motifs have generated a national discourse in which “blacks” are symbolically included and “whites” are symbolically excluded from conceptualizations of Bahamian national identity. I demonstrate the limitations of their rhetoric and the ways in which a racialized “black” Bahamian national identity has been fruitless in providing real liberation of the nation’s darker-colored majority.

In the fourth and final chapter, sociocultural residues of racialized symbolic rhetoric and oppositional binaries of the political projects of the previous Pindling government are investigated through discourses of Bahamian national identity in the present-day. More specifically, features of the construction of a “black” orientation of Bahamian national identity, and the polarization of “white”, “light-skin” and non-black Bahamian others are explored. The chapter gives voice to what the framework continues to look like and feel like to Bahamians who do not fit the “black” stereotype, both in terms of skin color phenotype, dialect, and

behavior. It also examines the justifications of Bahamian national identity as being “black” in character and excluding non-black elements through evasive memory of “white” minority rule, resentment for continued economic power of such groups, and voluntary polarization of non-black Bahamians within the national community. I find such discourse to be problematic given that it continues to assume racial categories through a definitive class lens, and does little to pinpoint areas needing development in the economic structure of Bahamian society, particularly among the darker-colored popular classes. The discourse also prevents a more productive and inclusive national body for Bahamians of all shades. I wonder what forms of imaginations of Bahamian national identity would have taken place if another form of political rhetoric and transformation from Bay Street supervened.

Chapter One

Historical Foundations

Origins of Bay Street and the Rise of the Progressive Liberal Party

Chapter Objectives

From emancipation to the establishment of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), changes ensued that would allow for the growth of a middle class of darker to light colored Bahamians. Predominance of a lighter-colored Bay Street elite and a larger darker-colored majority remained from the nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. But an emergence of an affluent middle class of intermediate shades throughout this period served to complicate social dynamics within Bahamian society. This chapter seeks to understand the nature of socioeconomic power prior to the PLP as an interchange of class and color.

First, I explore the modes of power whereby the mercantile elite known as Bay Street grew in the decades following emancipation in the early nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century. Their authority left a legacy of political, economic, and social marginalization for relatively all African-descended Bahamians. Yet, I debate a simple delineation of “white” and “black” racial groups in respective hegemonic and marginalized realms. Through property ownership, the franchise, and educational opportunities, a middle class of intermediate shades also emerged. This exposes more complicated class-based and color-coded social dynamics moving into the twentieth century as the PLP emerged within The Bahamas.

Second, I examine the path to reform leading to the rise of the PLP in the latter half of the twentieth century. I seek to find difference in earlier initiatives such as mobilization of working class darker colored Bahamians (including a riot, and labor union strike) in contrast to the committee and political formations of middle class Bahamians of varying shades. Lastly, I

use this historical framework to discuss the emergence and ideologies of the PLP. Comprised of many members of an affluent, educated darker colored middle class, I debate that the primary issue of socioeconomic struggle to be conflated in blackness as inadequate. This conflation conceals the real issues of both color and class domination and marginalization at work after emancipation until the rise of the PLP.

Origins of Bay Street Political and Economic Domination in Post-Emancipation Era

The domination of Bay Street began in the era of post-emancipation. In 1808, the British crown abolished the transatlantic slave trade, allowing for one sixth of its then current slave population to receive formal freedom through manumission. By 1811, a system of apprenticeship was also instituted throughout the British colonies of the Caribbean whereby former slaves could be employed by their previous owners in hopes for a smoother transition from slave status to emancipation.¹ Finally on August 1, 1838, all forms of slavery and former slave apprentices were made fully free.² Nonetheless, there was little change in the relationship of former slave owners and slaves in the post-emancipation era in the British colony of The Bahamas or elsewhere in the British Caribbean.³ The structures of post-emancipation itself allowed for further entrenchment of the political and economic power of the master classes.

There is some scholarly debate among historians as to whether or not former colonizers and the British Colonial Office had shared ulterior motives of continuing the hegemony of

¹ July 14, 1834, CO 23/91, 289-91; Royal Gazette, June 27, 1834; Balfour to Spring Rice, September 13, 1834, CO 23/91, 380-81; Royal Gazette, August 6, 1834, quoted in Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People. From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century*, Vol. 2 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 3.

² Minutes of the Privy Council, November 28, 1838, CO 23/103, 171-71; Government Notice, November 1838, CO 23/103, 241; March 12, 1836, C.O 23/96, 244-74, quoted in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 3.

³ Colebrooke to Glenelg, August 8, 1835, CO 23/93, 44; Royal Gazette, August 1, 1835. in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in The Stream*, 13-14. Governor Colebrooke wrote that former slaves must “provide their own subsistence to their employers”. Moreover, Judge Robert Sandilands encouraged “negroes to work hard, be loyal, and grateful for their boon.” A large class of landless and dependent laborers derived from this structure.

“whites” in the colonies. Historian William Green, a specialist in British slave emancipation, outlined that the objectives of emancipation by the Colonial Office in London and local master classes had similar motives: “the colonies should continue to pursue plantation agriculture” and “political control of the colonies was safest if kept out of the hands of uneducated former slaves”.⁴ Yet, Bahamian historians Gail Saunders and Michael Craton wrote that certain legislative attempts to deny franchise to former slaves were vetoed by the Colonial Office under the institutional objectives of emancipation to provide equitable societies.⁵

Despite the Colonial Office’s more formal denunciation of discrimination and political hegemony of the Bay Street oligarchy, The Bahamas was one of the few colonies exempted from a conversion to Crown Colony rule following emancipation. Historian Deborah Weeks pointed to the larger resident population that existed in The Bahamas as quelling the fears of the Colonial Office, and by not requiring any upset or change to the hegemony that was so successfully established.⁶ This left the local mercantile oligarchy, famously labeled as “Bay Street” or the “Bay Street Boys”, to project a form of political control that reasserted restrictive and politically discriminative measures beyond emancipation and into the mid-twentieth century. In either side of the debate, the formal rejection of discriminatory practices towards a former slave population did little to shake the continued domination in The Bahamas and elsewhere in the British Caribbean.

⁴ Green, William A., *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 164, quoted in Deborah G. Weeks, *Movement of the People: The Relationship between Black Consciousness Movements, Race, and Class in the Caribbean*, Thesis, University of South Florida, 2008, 15

⁵ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in The Stream*, 3. A September 1838 circular was distributed among British West Indian governments by the Colonial Secretary for guidelines on how to approach new dynamics in a post-emancipation society.

⁶ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 105. According to Weeks, The Colonial Office did not require a conversion of the Bahamian colony into Crown Colony Rule due to the presence of a substantive “white” minority.

The Bay Street oligarchy was identified as “the most narrow-minded ruling class in the entire English-speaking Caribbean” according to historian Gordon Lewis.⁷ Through the same system of representative government practiced since 1729 during slavery, the “white” elite maintained political control.⁸ The nearly century-old franchise law of 1729 stated that only free males over the age of twenty-one, who owned property and had paid fifty point duties prior to the current year were able to vote.⁹ Yet after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the franchise law changed to also allow freed slaves the right to vote *only* if they were able to meet the property requirements. The language of race and color was not explicitly used; however, the obstacle of property ownership continued to limit the franchise through a color line. Despite the changed law requirements, members of the Bay Street elite maintained their political influence.

By 1834, however, there were four members of Assembly in The Bahamas who were identified as “Negroes”.¹⁰ Their ability to meet the property-owning and tax-paying requirements for the franchise demonstrated an early existence of a micro elite of “black” and “brown” Bahamians. That is, it demonstrated an elite subset of “black” Bahamians with a higher degree of social and economic status was distinct from the poorer “black” majority through class status and ownership of property. Nonetheless, such persons only represented a

⁷ Lewis, Gordon K., *The Growth of the Modern West Indies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968). 312, quoted in Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 105.

⁸ Whittington Bernard Johnson, *Post-Emancipation Race Relations in the Bahamas* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 16. There existed an appointed Governor, an advisory Council appointed by the Governor, and elected representatives of each district, and/or island (if not New Providence).

⁹ Colin A. Hughes, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981; Nassau: Media Publishing Ltd, 2010), 12. Citations refer to Media edition.); James Martin Wright and George Burbank Shattuck, *History of the Bahama Islands with a Special Study of the Abolition of Slavery in the Colony*. (Baltimore: Friedenwald, 1905), 521.

¹⁰ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 3; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 18. Craton and Saunders write the few non-white members of the House of Assembly was “drawn from the most respectable and conservative elements in their classes (if anything, promoting the interests of their own marginal micro-class”. Moreover, that they “never numbered more than a fifth of the members of the House of Assembly before the mid-twentieth century”.

microcosm of the otherwise poor, and thus politically inactive, black majority.¹¹ Predominantly “white” male property owners retained the majority of seats in the House of Assembly for yet another century. It was through franchise control that Bay Street prevented more “blacks” from also asserting political power.

Another critical mode of Bay Street rule fell along the vein of economic control. Imperial policy and local elites accepted liberal economic principles of laissez-faire whereby market forces were allowed to flow “naturally” through the concept of “free trade imperialism”.¹² As stated by historian Michael Craton, “It was chiefly through the control of the local economy that Bay Street sustained its hegemony.”¹³ Informal modes of bribery and patronage, exploitative wage labor through the import-export industry, and dependency on the master or elite class through the credit system, combined with the more obvious economic advantages through the monopoly of the most fertile and attractive lands.¹⁴ The dominance or capitalization of all enterprises and branches of trade, boatbuilding, and boat ownership further provided a means for the oligarchy to informally maintain its power.¹⁵ Although not explicitly

¹¹ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream* 17; Johnson W. B., *Post-emancipation Race Relations in the Bahamas*, 16; Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 12; Wright and Shattuck, “History of the Bahama Islands” p. 527. An account of the 1834 election by Wright and Shattuck: “The election in some of the Out Islands were nominal. In some of these only a few electors would assemble to vote and the poll was easily controlled. In closer settlements the poor inhabitants were dependent on the merchants for their necessaries and were generally indebted to the latter, who could control their votes”.

¹² Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 55. Michael Craton, “Bay Street, Black Power, and the Conchy Joes: Race and Class in the Colony and Commonwealth of the Bahamas, 1850-2000,” in *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, ed. Howard Johnson and Karl S. Watson (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998), 76.

¹³ Michael Craton, “Bay Street, Black Power”, 76.

¹⁴ *Bahamas Argus*, June 24, 1835; Nesbitt to Grey, September 7, 1847, C) 23/94; Black to Holland, March 15, 1867, CO 23/229 via Howard Johnson, “The Share System in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom* (Kingston: Ian Randle, and London: James Currey, 1991), 55-68. Circulation of cash was scarce in the import-export industry. Laborers grew dependent on merchants’ economic and social control through a credit system until the early 20th century when the opportunity for wage labor in New Providence increased. Free wage labor system worked in the favor and self-interest of land owners. Former slaves became sharecroppers to their previous owners or others, relying on merchant landlords for cash, clothing, seedlings, on biased credit terms. See also Craton and Saunders, 46. Johnson, *Post-Emancipation*, 36-37. Lewis, *The Growth of a Modern West Indies*, 312. Johnson, Howard, *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom*, 101, 115, 116. Weeks, *The Movement of the People*, 101.

¹⁵ Johnson, *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom*, 1-109. Johnson responds to Nigel Bolland’s deduction that elite “white” oligarchies across the British Caribbean intentionally created a monopoly to practice discrimination.

racial or discriminatory in nature, the Bahamian ruling class was still able to mold a stronger leverage of affluence and wealth, capitalizing on the financial weaknesses of the less-fortunate black majority.¹⁶

Although I will not account for Bay Street as “the most narrow-minded ruling class” in comparison to other British Caribbean colonies, I will defer to Green’s opinion. The ruling class of Bay Street was certainly narrow-minded to say the least. Their control of the political franchise and the economy laid the foundations of discrimination and historically rooted marginalization of lower classes and darker-colored members of Bahamian society.

Nonetheless, these modes of domination through control of the economy and franchise restrictions were never put forth in legislation in explicitly racial terms. In both the property voting requirements and laissez faire economic characteristics, there was no legal restriction on the basis of race and color. Nonetheless, their discriminatory practices were inextricably tied to racial oppression due to the difficulties of former slaves to gain economic independence from their former owners. One Bahamian historian, Whittington B. Johnson, made the naïve argument that because of the structural discrimination in place, the transition to emancipation and overall social relations in The Bahamas were “sanguine” in comparison to the American South.¹⁷ While the color prejudice of “white” Bahamian elites did not extend to physical violence against former slaves as it did in the American South, it would be a mistake to ignore the implicit marginalization of former slaves and non-elite Bahamians through the restrictive

Johnson claims that the dominance of trade and shortage of cash allowed for exploitation through informal forces of the economy.

¹⁶ Shaw-Lefevre to Glenelg, February 1, 1839 BSP (1839), 25, 107, Part 1, 36. Governor cites workers being “forced to work in servile conditions”; Bahamas Acts 53 Geo 11, c. 8 (1812), 308-14; 2 Geo IV, c. 16 (1821), 3338-43; 6 Will IV, c. 11 (1833), 54-60. Former slaves were subject to Vagrancy Acts whereby unemployment was not allowed, citing any person as an “idle vagabond”, “without visible means to support” or any means to “gainful employment”. This demonstrated the exploitative element of the master class, forcing former slaves into unfair working conditions because they were the only ones offered to them in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 19.

¹⁷ Johnson, W. B., *Post-Emancipation Race Relations in The Bahamas*, 12–13, 14–15, 111, 112, 120–21, 139–40.

franchise and economic mobility of the Bay Street elite.¹⁸ Although Bay Street's domination operated along the lines of class oppression, it also implicitly operated through color discrimination and oppression. Despite the absence of structural or legal racism, there was still no legislation in effect to protect the rights of "blacks" or former slaves within Bay Street's political and economic systems.¹⁹ Thus, although Bay Street operated with no explicit use of race or color, it was still implicitly rooted in color prejudice. The absence of intentional aid or inclusionary political and economic systems exposed Bay Street's indifference to the needs of the darker-colored majority.

Nonetheless, the darker-colored majority was not a monolithic group. Class distinctions introduced by the election of a micro-elite into the House of Assembly showed basic class differences; however, ethnic differences can also be illuminated. Between 1808 and 1838, approximately 6,500 Africans were released into The Bahamas following the closing of the transatlantic slave trade.²⁰ A significant number of liberated Africans used the apprenticeship system and vied for similar or the same jobs from the master class after the transition to emancipation. Thus, with the addition of more people into the pool of disenfranchised, darker populations within Bahamian society caused a greater strain on the availability of employment and labor.²¹ The added segment of liberated Africans brought an even greater demographic of darker-skinned population into the majority dominated by a lighter colored Bahamian elite.

¹⁸ Bridget Brereton, review of *Post-Emancipation Race Relations in the Bahamas*. By Whittington B. Johnson. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006., *The Journal of American History* 94, No. 2 (September 2007): 552. Johnson cites the non-existence of legally sanctioned segregation and violence, lynching, hate groups, extralegal harassment in his argument.

¹⁹ *The Nassau Guardian*, February 8, 1873; May 12, 1875, September 11, 1875; Johnson, *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom*, 1-109; O. Nigel Bolland, "Systems of Domination After Slavery: The Control of Land and Labor in the British West Indies After 1838," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (1981): 593-600.

²⁰ Rosanne Marion Adderley, "*New Negroes from Africa*": *Slave Trade Abolition and Free African Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 3; Gail Saunders, *Bahamian Society After Emancipation* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), 76; Johnson H., *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom*, 63.

²¹ Adderley, "*New Negroes From Africa*", 3. Saunders, *Bahamian Society After Emancipation*, 77. Johnson, H, *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom*, 59-61.

De-Facto Segregation: Spatialization of Power

An additional element of Bay Street domination could be evidenced by the physical realities of de-facto segregation. Although residential, educational, and religious aspects of social stratification grew along similar color lines of light-colored privilege and dark-colored marginalization, more was at work than racial difference. There still were prevalent distinctions of varying shades and acceptance of middle class “blacks”, “browns”, or “near-whites”, locally known as “Conchy Joes”.²² These class and color distinctions further complicate a narrative of Bahamian history that places the Bahamian people into a straitjacket of black and white racial dichotomy. As noted by Craton and Saunders, “All Bahamian nonwhites suffered from segregation in housing, education, work, and ordinary social intercourse, backed by a color-conscious legal system.” The presence of both non-white, and near white, but also lower class whites being subject to Bay Street domination highlight the importance of recognizing the layers of Bay Street rule. Moreover, this underlines how Bahamian society has historically been divided through race, but also shades of color and hierarchies of class.²³

The spatial layout of housing and commercial sites represented the pinnacle of de-facto segregation within the residential population of the island of New Providence. As described by Craton and Saunders, the population was “almost evenly divided between the dominant whites, ‘middle-class’ browns, a tenacious fringe of black laborers, mariners, domestics, and craftsmen”.²⁴ Elite “white” Bahamians and expatriates, and at times, wealthy light complexioned near white Bahamians, resided in low-density housing located on the northeastern and northwestern parts of the island.²⁵ Similarly, they maintained their

²² Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 32; 92.

²³ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 32; 92. “Poor whites separated from slave descendants, but also suffered social and economic deprivation.”

²⁴ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 92. They also refer to the middle classes as “high yellow” and “brown”.

²⁵ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 92.

commercial interests and monopoly on trade through ownership of shops, banks, and docks in the downtown Bay Street area.²⁶ Middle class “high yellows” and “browns” and other light-complexioned Bahamians also lived in relative privilege in areas close to the downtown area and main streets to the west and north of the island. On the other side of the spectrum, all-black settlements were primarily located outside the southern boundary, where living conditions were cramped and crowded. They were built upon swamps and mangroves, and their location was isolated from downtown areas of Bay Street and the center of commercial activity. Poor white “Conchy Joes” also lived nearby – often with discomfort by both parties.²⁷

De-facto segregation also continued in religious sectors. The domination of the Bay Street elite was shown through the centralized locations of their churches compared to those of other intermediate and lower class groups. For example, the congregation of the St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Kirk located in the center of town was exclusively “white” and the congregation of Wesley Methodist Chapel in the heart of Grant’s Town was exclusively “black”. Moreover, churches including Trinity Methodist Church and Ebenezer Methodist Chapel were set-up in such a way that allowed entrance to colored middle class and, at times, poorer “black” Bahamians.²⁸ Yet equality was not assured. Many interviewees throughout my research, for example, remembered how “blacks” and “coloreds” (mixed race) were only allowed to enter

²⁶ Johnson, *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom*, 17. This control of the land is the reason why Craton and Saunders describe the group that was formed “a white Bahamian agrocommercial oligarchy”. Fittingly, this group of elites came to be known as “Bay Street” or “The Bay Street Boys” - a term of identification connected to the power that they possessed through land and property ownership. Parallels can be made to the formation of similar white oligarchies within other colonies of the British West Indies after emancipation, including the white “Front Street” oligarchy of Bermuda and the white “plantocracy” of Barbados.

²⁷ L. D. Powles, *The Land of the Pink Pearl; Or, Recollections of Life in the Bahamas*, (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1888), 146-147. in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 84. Central locations of all-black, outlying settlements in New Providence included Grant’s Town, Bain Town, Fox Hill, Carmichael, Gambier, Adelaide.

²⁸ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 92.

through a certain back door, and sit in a designated area in pews separate from the “whites” who were present.²⁹ Separate cemeteries were also maintained.³⁰

With regards to education and access to social services, segregation and preferential treatment toward elite “whites” was also visible. Limited allocations of colonial funding were provided to the newly formed Bahamian Board of Education in 1935.³¹ Thus, there was a minimal level of schooling for former slaves’ children. Moreover, full control over educational policy was given to local government officials through an 1847 Education Act.³² Despite the official legislation of compulsory education for male and female children until twelve years of age through this Act, there were inadequate standards and methods of teaching that caused illiteracy to become rampant among the working class black majority.³³ Even with the existence of a number of private schools, most nonwhite individuals either could not afford the fee or were not allowed enrollment.³⁴ Secondary education fees were too high for the working class black majority, let alone higher education, which required enrollment overseas.³⁵ Educational discrimination persisted throughout the 19th and mid-20th centuries and was a significant reason for the continued rule of the Bay Street oligarchy.³⁶

²⁹ Teazel Bowe, interview by author, May 2011; M. Munroe, interview by author, June 2011, 2011; James Catalyn, interview by author, July 2011.

³⁰ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 103; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 133.

³¹ Circular of Colonial Secretary Lord Russell, March 1841, in Shirley C. Gordon, ed. *A Century of West Indian Education* (London: Longmans, 1963), 38.

³² Bahamas Act 10 Vic 1, c. 10

³³ Bahamas Act 10 Vic 1, c. 10. Law cited a “System of Popular Education and Training, [and] scholastic Establishment,” however this was not executed for most of the population. Craton, *History of the Bahamas, 200-201*. Historian Craton has explained that the lack of education for the majority “stalled” reform until the 1960s.

³⁴ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 103; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 133.

³⁵ Circular of Colonial Secretary Lord Russell, March 18, 41, in Shirley C. Gordon, ed. *A Century of West Indian Education* (London: Longmans, 1963), 38.

³⁶ Bahamas Government, *Report on the Census of 1891* (Nassau, 1892); Bahamas Government *Report on the Census of 1901* (Nassau, 1902). The percentage increase of literacy was only 2 per cent from 1891 and 1901. In 1901, 48.7 per cent of the population was recorded as “literate”, however there were marked differences between the categories of white, black, and colored. Moreover, the definition of literacy was a bare minimum. It did not infer post-primary education or ascribe to the qualifications needed for professional, clerical, or government employment in the colony.

CO 23/145, 213-14. Colonial officials responded to census reports with complacency, assumed a significant amount of the population were literate and sufficient money was being spent on education. In Saunders, *Bahamian Society After Emancipation*, 29.

Fluidity of Racial Binaries

Neither the “white” minority nor “black” majority were monolithic groups.³⁷ Both groups consisted of persons of varying levels of social class. Thus, more was at work than simply “white” power and race discrimination in the operation of the Bay Street rule. Even the generalization of Bay Street belonging to the “white” minority is subject to interpretation. While the Bay Street oligarchy was mostly comprised of fair-skinned or “lily-white”³⁸ individuals, some members were of mixed descent.³⁹ Such individuals were also elected members of the House of Assembly. Families of nearwhite backgrounds often achieved this relative degree of affluence and social mobility by the end of the 19th century through property ownership or education.⁴⁰ A micro-elite of “colored” or “mulatto” Bahamians of mixed European and African ancestry also began to achieve a relative degree of affluence and social mobility by the end of the 19th century through property ownership or education.⁴¹ Some were successful in small businesses (such as boatbuilding, carriage-riding, restaurants, shipment of goods to the out islanders, grocery and dry good establishments) that allowed them to live a middle class lifestyle through working the laissez faire system.

Moreover, other “white” or near-white “Conchy Joes” were similarly separated from Bay Street spheres of influence if occupying middle and lower rungs in society.⁴² Although nearwhites, poor “whites”, or “Conchy Joes” continued to reap benefits of property ownership that

³⁷ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 103.

³⁸ Gail Saunders, interview by author, June 2011. The skin color description of “lily white” implies the racial meaning ‘pure’ white, Caucasian, or of European descent.

³⁹ Saunders, *Bahamian Society After Emancipation*, 90. Some members of the Bay Street Boys could technically be considered “Conchy Joes”, but because of their superior class status, their mixed backgrounds were often overlooked.

⁴⁰ Charles Ives, *The Isles of Summer, Or, Nassau and the Bahamas* (New Haven, CT: Author, 1880), 292. Charles Ives, *Isles of Summer,; or Nassau and the Bahamas* (New Haven: Ives, 1880), 292. An American visitor to the island remarked on the ambiguity of Bahamian whites’ claims to white purity.

⁴¹ Johnson, W. B., *Post-Emancipation*, 58. Saunders, *Bahamian Society After Emancipation*, 1.

⁴² Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 102.

allowed a certain degree of affluence that was above the ever-more marginalized population of former slaves, many still lived in desolate conditions. The outer islands were especially known to house settlements of exclusively white Bahamians that were in deep poverty. Thus, there is a degree of consideration that must be given to demonstrate that power held by The Bay Street Boys did not imply total “white” power or ultimate privilege. Individuals of varying degrees of hue cut across race and class lines as elite and non-elite sectors of Bahamian society.

The first half of the twentieth century did little to change the domination of Bay Street or improve the living conditions of the majority of the darker-colored lower class population. In 1901, the majority “black” population was still in the lowest ranks of the social, economic, and political hierarchy.⁴³ While there was a considerable growing middle class of varying shades of color, upward mobility was rare.⁴⁴ A portrait taken of members of the House of Assembly in 1950 demonstrated not much had changed in the first half of the century, as only seven out of twenty-seven members of the House of Assembly were a visible mix of black and brown shades of skin color. (See Fig. 1)⁴⁵ The political hegemony, tied closely to the ownership of property, was still intact. For this reason, historian Deborah Weeks’ coined this period of slow change as “Waiting For The Bahamas to Reach”.

⁴³ Johnson, *Post-Emancipation Race Relations*, 50.

⁴⁴ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 102.

⁴⁵ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 305.



Figure 1: 1950 House of Assembly
 Courtesy of the National Archives of The Bahamas

Part of the reason for the slow change in Bahamian society was the continued barrier to education. Comparing the colony of The Bahamas to other colonies of Trinidad and Jamaica, Weeks reasons, “the educational system...lagged far behind the rest of the West Indies”.⁴⁶ At the start of the 1900s, a meager quantity of forty-four primary-level government schools provided compulsory education throughout the Bahamian archipelago.⁴⁷ Even by the late 1960s, as remembered by an elderly Bahamian, education in the peripheral “Out Islands” was limited to crammed, one-room schoolhouses.⁴⁸ In both the capital island of New Providence, and even more grossly in the peripheral Out Islands, hundreds of Bahamian schoolchildren continued to be illiterate, and received little to no form of schooling.⁴⁹ Still pendant on the limited Education Act of 1847, the Bahamian majority was without much education beyond classic literacy or primary education levels. For this reason, later generations of former slaves

⁴⁶ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 104.

⁴⁷ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 104. Olga Culmer Jenkins, *Bahamian Memories: Island Voices of The Twentieth Century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 180.

⁴⁸ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 104; Jenkins, *Bahamian Memories*, 180.

⁴⁹ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 104; Jenkins, *Bahamian Memories*, x.

continued to have little leverage to change their economic standing to leverage against the Bay Street mercantile elite.⁵⁰

A Growing Middle Class

The first half of the twentieth century did, however, provide an improvement in education that brought significant benefit to the Bahamian middle classes. In 1923, the establishment of the first public secondary school, Government High School, increased access and availability of educational advancement to many youthful members of darker-colored and intermediate shades of middle-class Bahamians. It also opened opportunities for further educational advancement in tertiary studies abroad.⁵¹ Many children of such middle class families, including Lynden O. Pindling, the future prime minister, attended Government High School and pursued higher education abroad after graduation.⁵² It was through these educational opportunities outside of the colony that many gained exposure to nationalistic sentiment, decolonization, and black power movement and became prominent leaders for reform by mid-century.⁵³ This did not change Bay Street's overwhelming domination of the lower class; darker-colored majority who still could not afford advanced schooling. Nonetheless, increased educational opportunities paved the way for a burgeoning darker-colored middle class who would begin to develop professional careers and hold more authoritative positions within Bahamian society.

Although the "black" middle class was slowly burgeoning in the first half of the century, the entrenchment of Bay Street grew deeper. The Bay Street elite expanded upon earlier forms

⁵⁰ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 107, 172. Bolland, Nigel O. *The Politics of Labor in the British Caribbean: The Social Origins of Authoritarianism*. 433.

⁵¹ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 105.

⁵² Judy Munroe, Interview by author, July 2011. Attended school with Pindling and other future Government ministers.

⁵³ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 105; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 107. Content of this black nationalism will be discussed in Ch. 3

of de facto segregation through the construction of a large stonewall known as “Collins Wall”.⁵⁴ Located on the borders of the eastern section of New Providence, it surrounded the heart of the city of Nassau, including the commercial center of Bay Street and the harbor for import and exporting goods. The wall originally served the function of bordering the large estate of a Bay Street merchant; however, it became a larger means by which Bay Street encapsulated itself within privileged physical spaces. Land within the estate was subdivided into plots for commercial buildings, residences, and the “all-white” private school of St. Andrew’s.⁵⁵ Moreover, its adjacent lands were homes to dense, over-crowded quarters of southern and western New Providence, predominately of the “black” lower class.⁵⁶ Thus, Collins Wall became physical evidence of the color and class divide under which Bahamian society operated.⁵⁷ It blocked direct entry into the commercial centers for the non-elite, and also lengthened the daily commute of many workers. Persons could only enter by using ladders, or by using extensive detours from their otherwise direct route to and from the city. The impenetrability of Collins Wall by outsiders to Bay Street spoke volumes to the open and blatant discriminatory system from which the oligarchy operated.

As an older Bahamian lawyer who resided in Nassau in the early twentieth century, Colin Hughes remembered the time of the Collins Wall as both inconvenient and dangerous for non-residents. “Men, women, and children clambered over the wall to go about their daily business. Inevitably, accidents occurred; one pregnant Negro woman miscarried after a fall, and a Negro boy broke a leg.”⁵⁸ Yet, neither matters of inconvenience nor danger were points of

⁵⁴ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 49

⁵⁵ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 49.

⁵⁶ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 49.

⁵⁷ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 49.

⁵⁸ *Nassau Guardian*, 3 May 1955 in Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 49. In May 1955, 350 residents formed a petition that the wall be opened. An editor of the *Nassau Guardian* cited “guarantees of privacy” for current and future land owners. He also made a mockery of those who attempt to break through it. “If there is an expectant mother, in this

contention or concern for the Bay Street oligarchy. Even in 1959, the Collins Wall remained a fixture within the confines of the city of Nassau. Discussions of opening up a single portion of the wall to “shorten long roundabout routes” and “scaling the high wall with ladders and other means” were described as a “hot controversy” in a November issue of the *Nassau Tribune*.⁵⁹ Being put to demolition in the mid-1960s only after the emergence of the PLP, the Collins Wall then became a testament to the enduring operation of Bay Street through self-seeking and obstinate means.⁶⁰

The first half of the twentieth century was also punctuated by the growth of the tourism industry and world events that allowed for economic prosperity for Bay Street, and relatively, to middle classes.⁶¹ Nonetheless, it continued to draw economic disparities between the upper class Bay Street elite and the darker colored lower classes to an even wider and more extreme level. The consolidation of American investment alone through the tourism industry provided increased employment opportunities and wage labor, and even spurred a massive emigration of Out Island men to benefit from employment opportunities. Moreover, during an era of bootlegging, the Bahamian economy skyrocketed as the colony became a primary source of smuggling alcohol to the United States during the Prohibition Era of the 1920s.⁶² With a

day and age, who displays such total disregard for her own health and that of the child she carries that she ‘jumps over’ a wall – well, a gate isn’t going to solve her problems.

⁵⁹ *Nassau Tribune*. Thursday, November 12, 1959. *Nassau Guardian*. Wednesday, November 11, 1959

⁶⁰ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 50.

⁶¹ Haddon-Smith to Harcourt, January 1, 1914, CO 23/273, 4-7; *The Nassau Tribune*, December 17, 1913, Colonial Annual Reports Bahamas, 1913-14, 20; Asa Pain, General Manager, Bahamas Timber Company to Haddon-Smith, and Bernard L. Wyatt to Commandant R. H. Crawford, December 21, 1913, CO 23/273, 8, 9; Saunders, “Social History”, 182. It was during this time that a water tower was constructed on New Providence, with piped sewerage only limited to the north of the ridge. Substandard city water still remained the only option for settlements to the south of the downtown area.

⁶² Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 17. Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 224. Roads were reported to be improved and the quantity of motor vehicles on the island multiplied. Colonial Annual Reports, Bahamas, 1916-1918, 13. Saunders, *Social History*, 183.

combination of the economic gains through the development of tourism and bootlegging alone, the population from 1921 and 1931 increased by 52.3 percent.⁶³

Economic prosperity of this time period also attracted the settlement of new immigrant groups. These included Greeks, Chinese, Lebanese, and Jews, but also expatriate American and British “whites”.⁶⁴ Over time, many immigrants (excluding the “white” expatriates) secured niches in industries such as the export of Bahamian sponges, local groceries, and restaurant and laundry businesses⁶⁵ Their descendants have since assimilated into Bahamian society and provide an even more complex composition to the population, with the addition of even more diversity of shade, and “racial” and ethnic backgrounds. As an added disparity, some immigrants even came to own businesses on the outskirts of Bay Street by 1930s.

Expatriate “whites” were automatically included into the Bay Street sphere of influence, and more ambiguous Greek and Chinese immigrants and their families also became socially “passable” to a certain degree among the white elite.⁶⁶ Their presence and legacy as immigrants, or much more to the growth of these immigrant groups throughout the twentieth century, demonstrate the racial and ethnic complexities involved in the mobilizations on socioeconomic improvement.

As a final extension to the economic power of the Bay Street elite, the colony became of strategic importance during World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor as it housed an antisubmarine and aircraft-staging base from 1942-1945 for Great Britain, the United States, and other Allied Powers.⁶⁷ The economic boom of this period was even more extensive than the

⁶³ Weeks, *Movement of the People*, 103; Jenkins, *Bahamian Memories*, 212.; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 224.

⁶⁴ Johnson, “Safeguarding Our Traders,” 135; *The Nassau Tribune*, July 25, 1925, September 1, 1926.

⁶⁵ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 258; 263

⁶⁶ Michael Craton, *Pindling: The Life and Times of Lynden Oscar Pindling, First Prime Minister of the Bahamas, 1930-2000* (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2002), 15; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 256-8; “Rich”, Interview by author, August 2011.

⁶⁷ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 275

first, bringing in money, improved air and sea transportation and media communications, and improved standards of living to the capital.⁶⁸ As expected, nearly all socioeconomic benefit derived was absorbed ultimately by the Bay Street oligarchy. Yet, the blatant exploitation would no longer go unnoticed. The growing foreign presence, and additional (but relative) benefits that were extended to new immigrants was the last straw for the growing Bahamian middle class. The combination of increased educational opportunity for middle class and bitterness over the ever-increasing domination of Bay Street laid the historical foundations of reform which began in earnest in the second half of the century.

⁶⁸ Crarton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 275

Rise of The PLP

Early Stirrings of Reform

The early stirrings of reform prior to the emergence of Pindling's Progressive Liberal Party laid important groundwork for what was to come. Events of the 1940s and early 1950s revealed distinct differences between the calls for reform from the lower class of "black" Bahamians and the formation of more equality-oriented committees stemming from the "black" middle class. The manifestation of the divide among Bahamian "blacks" in opposition to the Bay Street oligarchy through these varied reforms is crucial in understanding the problematic creation of "black" solidarity and an explicitly racial political platform through Pindling's leadership in the PLP (and later of the nation).

The first major sign that tolerance of Bay Street would no longer be accepted by the lower classes of Bahamian society came about in 1942, weeks after a decision had been made to convert New Providence into a staging base for the Allied Powers.⁶⁹ In order for this conversion to take place, the local airport required expansion. Since labor would be required for the construction, anticipation among local construction workers and unemployed members was high. Nonetheless, with a repeated scheme of exploitation, the Bahamian government had planned to limit local wages for unskilled labor as well as semi-skilled labor to only four shillings per day, compared to the twelve or more shillings per day for British and American foreign workers.⁷⁰ Furthermore, two members of the "white" elite were assigned to be

⁶⁹ Evidence of Bert Cambridge to Russell Commission, in Report of the Commission to Enquire into Disturbances in the Bahamas Which Took Place in June 1942 (Nassau: Guardian, 1942), 92; Gail Saunders, "The 1942 Riot in Nassau: A Demand for Change?" in *Bahamian Society After Emancipation* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1993), 1-47; Saunders, *Social History*, 420-23, quoted in Craton and Saunders 286-292.

⁷⁰ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 286; Timothy O. McCartney, "What Is the Relevance of Black Power to the Bahamas?," in *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*, comp. Orde Coombs (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974), 173. The 4 shillings/day rate was one which was established in 1936, prior to wartime inflation.

supervisors of the project instead of an experienced US navy general or a local nonwhite supervisor.⁷¹

Local workers objected. A number of darker-colored members of the House of Assembly quickly petitioned for minimum wage of eight shillings per day on their behalf; but they acted with delay, and work on the project was scheduled to begin before wage objects were addressed. Within minutes of the beginning of the workweek on June 1, 1942, local Bahamian workers left the construction site on strike and marched toward downtown Nassau with sticks and machetes, singing the now legendary lyrics: “Burma Road declare war on the Conchy Joe”. Before noon, most shops and business establishments on Bay Street had been looted, or at least had their windows or storefronts dismantled, and three fatalities and dozens of injuries among the rioters occurred.⁷²

The event, now known as the “Burma Road Riot”, has been interpreted as the first consolidated effort at defying absolute power and discriminatory practices of the Bay Street oligarchy.⁷³ It is interesting to note that only specific shops owned by the Bay Street elite and their darker-colored sympathizers were targeted, including targets not located on Bay Street that included the home of a “black” policeman and a black-owned shop in the southern district.⁷⁴ While this initial semi-planned initiative resulted in more structural damage and fatality than immediate progress or improvement in working conditions, it did spark a greater consciousness and public participation in social reform. It is interesting to note that this initial stirring of reform was not explicitly racial – i.e. desiring to oust all “whiteness” from leadership

⁷¹ “No Work today!” Evidence of John Hughes, Charles Rhodriguez, A.F. Adderley, and Bert Cambridge, Russell Commission, *Report*, 93, 145, 391-398; “Report of the Select Committee of the House of Assembly [to Enquire into the 1942 Riots],” Votes of the House of Assembly (Nassau: Guardian, 1942), 313, quoted in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 287-288.

⁷² Sir Alison Russell, H. McKinney, and H. Brown, Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into Disturbances in the Bahamas Which Took Place in June, 1942 (Nassau, 1942), p. 40, 58, quoted in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 287-288.

⁷³ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 287-288.

⁷⁴ Evidence of Aubrey Bethel, Reginald Erksine-Lindop, Stafford Sands, and Asa Pritchard in Russell Commission, Report, 28-53, 260-63, 350-58, 497-508, quoted in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 288.

in the colony. After all, members of the “brown” and “black” middle class establishments were also targeted as contributing to the marginalization of the lower class majority. It was not until later acts of reform through Pindling’s PLP that race, not class, became the primary issue.

On January 14, 1946, Reverend H. H. Brown’s inspirational sermon became further fuel for early stirrings of reform. He wrote:

“Instead of ‘government of the people, for the people,’ we have ‘exploitation of the many, for the privileged, by the few’. That a people has the kind of government that it deserves is almost axiomatic. A criticism of the local government is therefore a criticism of the entire population.”⁷⁵

Reverend Brown’s criticisms of the Bay Street regime exposed their fictional image of a democracy that represented the needs of the majority. He also warned the population that the 1942 Burma Road Riot would “seem pale and insignificant in comparison with its successor”, predicting that it would only be a matter of time that “ordinary citizens awoke to the responsibilities of democracy”.⁷⁶ As predicted, the decade following Reverend Brown’s premonition proved a time when Bahamians of all backgrounds became readily aware and prepared to bring principles of class struggle to the colony.

In December 1950, a group was formed under the name of the “Citizens’ Committee” to rally for greater political protection, education for the Bahamian majority, and to expose the obvious exploitation which stemmed from the structures of sociopolitical control of the Bay Street government.⁷⁷ As quoted by one of the committee’s founders, dentist Cleveland Eneas, the aims of the committee were to: “generally protect, improve, preserve and defend the

⁷⁵ Rev. H. H. Brown, sermon at Governor’s Harbor, Eleuthera, January 14, 1946; Brown to Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, January 29, 1946, quoted in Philip Cash, Shirley C. Gordon, and Gail Saunders, *Sources of Bahamian History* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1991), 291.

⁷⁶ Rev. H. H. Brown, sermon at Governor’s Harbor, Eleuthera, January 14, 1946.

⁷⁷ Craton, *Pindling*, 48.

economic, educational, and political rights of all Bahamians”.⁷⁸ Specifically, the new group campaigned for desegregation of Bay Street restaurants as well as the right to show films in local theatres that had been censored for being racially inflammatory for portraying mob violence and defiance to whites. They additionally published a bi-weekly paper, *The Voice*, and the occasional paper, *Citizen’s Torch* throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁷⁹

Nonetheless, this early attempt at reform had its limitations. Its aims, though commendable, were vague and had little effect in the long run. Its membership of middle class nonwhite Bahamians, including three members of the House of Assembly and other pioneer lawyers and intellectuals, could also be seen as a weakness.⁸⁰ Judging from its strongest rallying points of desegregation and censorship in social spheres such as dining and entertainment establishments, it is difficult to accept the seriousness of their aims to protect and fight for the rights of “all Bahamians”.⁸¹ That is, their most notable platforms related more to a criticism of the lack of social benefit for themselves, middle class black and browns, rather than to create more structural ways to combat socioeconomic exploitation of the overall majority. While it would be unfair to completely belittle these initial attempts to shake the Bay Street regime, it is still interesting to note the subtle difference of protest for increased benefit or acceptance of more blacks and browns into the elite community versus protest for genuine radical reform based on socioracial equality for the Bahamian majority. This subtle difference is key when studying how Bay Street’s political power became dismantled and whether or not real reform of society emerged.

⁷⁸ Constitution of the Citizens’ Committee, Dr. Cleveland Eneas Collection, Public Records Office, Nassau in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 307; Randol F. Fawkes, *The Faith That Moved the Mountain: A Memoir of a Life and the Times* (Nassau: Fawkes, 2003), 44-45; Citizens’ Torch 1 (June, September 1951)

⁷⁹ Fawkes, *The Faith That Moved the Mountains*, 44-45; Citizens’ Torch 1 (June, September 1951)

⁸⁰ Craton, *Pindling*, 48.

⁸¹ Constitution of the Citizens’ Committee, Dr. Cleveland Eneas Collection, Public Records Office, Nassau, quoted in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 307; Fawkes, *The Faith That Moved the Mountains*, 44-45; Citizens’ Torch 1 (June, September 1951)

Taking a more progressive stance, a financial institution named “The People’s Penny Savings Bank” was opened in November 1952 within the black Bahamian stronghold of Grant’s Town.⁸² Its purpose was to provide a designated haven for the less fortunate in the community to learn how to save and be financially independent, given that no “black” or nonwhite Bahamian was able to enter or work inside Bay Street banks before this period.⁸³ On opening day, nonwhite member of the House of Assembly Leon McKinney made remarks that the goals of this initiative were “not to boast of being a bank but rather a school of ‘thrift’ where any man, woman or child may take the first step towards self sufficiency by opening an account with an amount as small as a penny”.⁸⁴ Compared to the Citizens’ Committee, the initiatives of The People’s Penny Saving’s Bank were rooted in tangible assistance and protection from minority rule.

Moreover, opposition expressed through print media forums was also becoming stronger in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Two daily newspapers, *The Nassau Guardian* (founded in the late 1800s and early 1900s by members of the Bay Street elite) *The Nassau Tribune*, (founded by middle class “Conchy Joes”), and one weekly newspaper *The Nassau Herald* (founded by middle class individuals of darker shades) provided news and social commentary to Bahamian society. In the form of these two daily and one weekly newspapers, dialogue on reform became popular during the mid-twentieth century.⁸⁵ *The Nassau Guardian*, supported and owned by members of Bay Street, represented the most conservative and elite spectrum of society, whereas *The Nassau Tribune* and *The Nassau Herald* provided greater opportunity for

⁸² Fawkes, *The Faith That Moved the Mountains*, 50-56; Bahamian Review 13 (1971): 25; Saunders, *Social History*, 469 in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 304-205.

⁸³ Teazel Bowe, Interview by author, May 2011.

⁸⁴ Fawkes, *The Faith That Moved the Mountains*, 50-56; Bahamian Review 13 (13 (1971): 25 via Craton and Saunders, 305.

⁸⁵ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 40; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 307.

freedom of expression and disdain of the local regime.⁸⁶ *The Nassau Herald*, in particular, provided a forum for the nonwhite majority. Referring to *The Nassau Herald*, Hughes wrote, “In the eyes of white Bahamians, [it] was even more subversive of the natural and proper of society than was *The Nassau Tribune*”.⁸⁷ The role of *The Nassau Herald* in future communication to the nonwhite majority is a key component of my overall analysis. As Craton reflected on the surge of reform through print media, he wrote, “Dissent had always had a voice”, but I argue dissent in its organized form did not achieve widespread publication and readership until the later period of the late 1940s and 1950s.

The actions of the rioters in the 1942 Burma Road Riot, founders of the Citizens’ Committee and People’s Penny Saving Bank, and contributors to *The Nassau Tribune* and *The Nassau Herald* laid the groundwork for stronger political organization of the Progressive Liberal Party, founded in 1953. Yet these earlier stirrings of reform highlighted the lack of a “black” united front and lack of shared motivations for reform of Bay Street. While the 1942 riots and the formation of the People’s Penny Saving’s Bank served the purposes of alleviating discriminatory wage labor and bringing financial institutions to the disadvantaged majority, the founders of the Citizens’ Committee seemed more interested in securing rights for their specific class than overall reform of Bahamian society.

Emergence of the Progressive Liberal Party

The emergence of the Progressive Liberal Party in October 1953 did not begin as reform that was “black” or racial in tone. The founders of the PLP were actually three nearwhite “Conchy Joe” Bahamians, namely, Henry Taylor, William Cartwright, and Cyril Stevenson, whose leadership and involvement in the party became subsumed in 1955, a few

⁸⁶ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 31; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 307.

⁸⁷ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 31.

years into the party's emergence.⁸⁸ The following overview demonstrates how the party began as very multi-racial and inclusive in its inception, but changed with the incoming of many persons of the middle class "black" community.

When the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) was formed, it desired wider representation in the House of the Assembly, equitable education, employment opportunities, lower prices and low-cost housing.⁸⁹ Its first manifesto read:

The Progressive Liberal Party hopes to show that your big man and your little man, your black, brown and white man of all classes, creeds or religions in this country can combine and work together in supplying sound and successful political leadership which has been sadly lacking in The Bahamas. ⁹⁰

The PLP was the first political party to be formed in the colony, as the "Bay Street Boys" were simply that – a group of men who had mustered socioeconomic and political control, or rather, inherited it from their forefathers, and who ruled informally without party politics. Thus, the birth of the PLP was in fact a monumental change for the Bahamian society. In 1953, on the heels of earlier attempts at reform, the PLP marked the beginning of real political opposition to the inequalities that had structured it until this point. Throughout this section, I follow the Progressive Liberal Party's rise to power from its inception in 1953 until its electoral victory in January 1967.

⁸⁸ Craton Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 308, Craton, *Pindling*, 50. Founding members described ambiguously as both "white" or "near-white", or "colored" complexions, were involved in alternative news media including The Bahamian Review and The Nassau Herald as owners and chief-editors.

⁸⁹ Craton Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 308

⁹⁰ *Nassau Guardian*, 22 October 1953, published in full text as an advertisement in the *Nassau Guardian* of 26 October 1953. The platform also called for wider representation in the House of Assembly, the enfranchisement of women, support of equal employment opportunities, better education, lower prices, low-cost housing, improved social services. in Craton, *Pindling*, 51, See also Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 308.

The initial ideology of the founding leaders of the PLP was changed dramatically through internal dissent and new leadership.⁹¹ By May 1955, a new brand of PLP leadership emerged through a sector of young dark brown or “black” Bahamian lawyers returning from school abroad, notably Lynden Pindling as party leader, Randol Fawkes, as well as a local black Bahamian trade unionist, Charles Rhodriguez.⁹² One way of interpreting the motivations behind a changed leadership of the party derives from the historical divisions within “black” and “white” Bahamians of the middle class, as both had attempted to gain affluence amidst the Bay Street hegemony and were at odds with each other.⁹³ A former PLP minister, Paul Adderley, who was politically active during the time of this transition, however, provides the motivation as a matter of uncertainty over whether the founders could provide an equality-based reform in practice. At a presentation given to the public in 2011, Adderley also noted:

Black unity could not be achieved by the mulatto leadership of the PLP. They had given it life, but black and white unity it could not achieve. The white man refused to be changed.⁹⁴

In slightly different language, Craton and Saunders recognize the transition to new party leadership as demonstrating “reverse racism” and “deeply-bred distrust” between “coloreds” and “whites”.⁹⁵ Weeks, Craton, and Saunders all understand that the main reason for the division of the party leadership came from an ideological disagreement on the transformation of the party into a racialization of the party’s platform.⁹⁶ In either interpretation, a color divide

⁹¹ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 36-39; Doris L. Johnson, *The Quiet Revolution in The Bahamas* (Nassau: Family Islands Press, 1972), 29-42; Fawkes, *The Faith That Moved the Mountain*, 68-88; Henry Taylor, *My Political Memoirs* (Nassau, Bahamas: H. Taylor, 1987), 122-143; Saunders, *Social History*, 472-73.

⁹² Craton Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 308, Craton, Pindling, 50. Founding members described ambiguously as both “white” or “near-white”, or “colored” complexions, were involved in alternative news media including *The Bahamian Review* and *The Nassau Herald* as owners and chief-editors.

⁹³ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 308.

⁹⁴ Paul Adderley, *The Honorable Sir Lynden Pindling Memorial Lecture*, comp. The National Archives of The Bahamas, March 22, 2011, An Oral History Collection, The Dundas Centre for the Performing Arts, Nassau.

⁹⁵ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 309.

⁹⁶ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 309-310. Weeks, *The Movement of the People*, 109.

certainly occurred. The party's first chairman, Henry Taylor was gradually demoted as a figurehead until his resignation in 1963.⁹⁷

The undercurrents of internal dissent and the changes from white and "colored" leadership to "black" leadership continuously make scholars of Bahamian history and ordinary Bahamian citizens alike question whether or not the PLP then became a "black man's party", a party for the dark-colored majority. I argue with evidence through their political propaganda following this change in leadership that they did in fact create a "black Bahamas" or a notion of Bahamian identity that included "black" members of the Bahamian community and excluded non-black members in Bahamian society. The early transition to black leadership was one of the first signs of evidence of this construction.

By the mid-1950s, the PLP successfully petitioned the House of Commons for one-day elections, but the political organization was still young and there were other individual and group efforts to bring about reform that were unaffiliated with the PLP.⁹⁸

A grouping of political moderates of all shades assembled together as the Bahamas Democratic League and motioned resolutions of reform against the segregated Collins Wall and discrimination in public places.⁹⁹ The anti-discrimination resolution, led by nearwhite chief editor of the moderate *Nassau Tribune*, Etienne Dupuch, provided yet another scandalized exposure of the unjust Bay Street control. One account in particular, by Bert Cambridge revealed the double standard of entry into Bay Street hotels. He testified, "I have worked in hotels on this island and I know that common prostitutes are admitted to places in Bay Street

⁹⁷ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 309.

⁹⁸ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 54. May 1956. Before this time period, property owners were able to vote at multiple constituencies over the course of multiple days of voting. This was another means by which Bay Street was able to exercise political domination.

⁹⁹ Craton and Saunders 309. Moderates did not support the Bay Street regime or the PLP. Author and white Bahamian lawyer, Colin Hughes, helped to organize the BDL.

because they are white, and decent colored people are refused admission".¹⁰⁰ In typical fashion, the proposed resolution in the House of Assembly was 'handled' through a select committee who passed it in late February 1956. As a result, Nassau Hotels immediately provided public statements that their doors were open to all races.¹⁰¹ The contribution of the Bahamas Democratic League on the passing of an anti-discrimination act in the colony was still only an advancement of reform with limited success, as there was little to no legislation to ensure Bay Street adhered to their new law, or was penalized for discrimination that occurred.¹⁰²

Industrial action also pushed reform along. Emergence of labor movements through the form of the Bahamas Federation of Labor and the Bahamas Taxi Cab Union offered various tactics in the late 1950s to protest and bring about change in society. From 1950 to 1956, labor organizations increased from five to twelve, providing a tripling of membership in labor unions as a whole.¹⁰³ The Bahamas Taxi Cab Union, led by a young, lower class black Bahamian Clifford Darling, organized a physical blockade on November 1, 1957 to prevent traffic from flowing to and from the airport.¹⁰⁴ This initiative, rooted in protest of preferential treatment given to "white" taxi drivers, required all airlines to cancel flights for twenty-four hours until a truce was made.¹⁰⁵ The truce did not last long, however, as both the PLP and the Bahamas Federation of Labor joined in to organize an island-wide General Strike on January 13, 1958,

¹⁰⁰ Nassau Guardian, September 29, October 22, November 2, 1953, February 9, 1954, April 30, May 13, 1956, Nassau Tribune, January 3, 24, March 1, 20, 1956; Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 40-46; Etienne Jerome Dupuch, *Tribune Story* (London: Benn, 1967), 24, 139; Johnson, *Quiet Revolution*, 56; Taylor, *Political Memoirs*, 198-208.

¹⁰¹ *Nassau Tribune*, Thursday January 24, 1; Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 40-46; Dupuch, *Tribune Story*, 27, 139; Johnson, *Quiet Revolution*, 56; Taylor, *Political Memoirs*, 198-208.

¹⁰² Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 40-46; Dupuch, *Tribune Story*, 27, 139; Johnson, *Quiet Revolution*, 56; Taylor, *Political Memoirs*, 198-208.

¹⁰³ O. Nigel Bolland, *The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean: The Social Origins of Authoritarianism and Democracy in the Labour Movement* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001), 431-433. Saunders, *Bahamian Society After Emancipation*, 12, 152, 172. One three-hour strike by 100 employees for not receiving Christmas bonuses were carried out by the Electrical Department on the Public Works Department, for example. See in Monday, Nassau Tribune, February 20, 1956

¹⁰⁴ Clifford Darling, Interview by author, May 2011; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 310.

¹⁰⁵ *Nassau Tribune*, January 14, 1958; *Nassau Guardian*, January 14, 1958; Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 62-64 in Craton Saunders 310.

the morning of the opening of the House of Assembly.¹⁰⁶ Employees from the tourism, construction, airport, banking, electrical sectors, and even those unaffiliated with the labor unions, refused to work, and joined together in the downtown Rawson Square, below the House of Assembly. They continued to strike for sixteen days, causing international media to become aware of the situation and an investigation from Alan Lennox-Boyd, secretary of state for the colonies.¹⁰⁷ As a result of the events of the January 1958 General Strike, a Labor Department was instituted within the government of the colony to accept and process workers' grievances.

Both the Anti-Discrimination Resolution of 1956 and the General Strike of 1958 brought uncomfortable local and global exposure of Bay Street hegemony to greater heights.¹⁰⁸ They both resulted in legislative reform and served as stepping-stones for the PLP as they campaigned in the political sphere for upcoming elections. Motions from Etienne Dupuch and the Bahamas Democratic League were in dialogue with the same kinds of reform, but made clear their disapproval of the Progressive Liberal Party's black-centric leadership and racist mindset. Ties within the leadership of the PLP and the Bahamas Federation of Labor made it seem that their aims and ideologies were intricately interwoven. With PLP member Randol Fawkes serving as head of the Bahamas Federation of Labor and PLP leader Lynden Pindling serving as legal advisor, one would surmise that the advancement of labor movements was directly tied to the political agenda of the PLP. Yet, when Randal Fawkes resigned from the PLP to form his own Bahamas Labor Party, there was a notable divide between the two groups.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ *Nassau Tribune*, Monday, January 13, 1958; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 311.

¹⁰⁷ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 63-67; Johnson, *Quiet Revolution*, 36; Fawkes, *Faith That Moved the Mountain*, 123-25

¹⁰⁸ Craton, *Pindling*, 91. Alan Lennox Boyd, Secretary of State for the Colonies stayed in Nassau for one week in April 1958, meeting with leaders of the PLP, BDL, and the Bay Street Regime. This was not a routine visit, as a high-ranked official had never visited the colony before this period of reform attempts, industrialization, and party politics.

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 49-54; Johnson, *Quiet Revolution*, 33-34; Fawkes, *Faith That Moved the Mountain*, 82-88, Taylor, *Political Memoirs*, 219-24. In Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 312.

As a final push to combat the rise of the PLP and other reform-based initiatives, the outdated oligarchy converted into the United Bahamian Party in April 1958. A new era of party politics had thus begun.¹¹⁰ Leadership, self-interest in personal wealth, and former modes of power hardly changed through formal identification as a legitimate political unit. Nonetheless, their conversion into a political party symbolized a new era of party politics. The Bay Street oligarchy was vying for power in the same political playing field and on relatively equal terms after over a century and a half later of dominance.

Nonetheless even with advancing reform, corruption and control still dominated through Bay Street's relentless political and economic hegemony. The general elections of May 1956 and May 1962 were both electoral defeats for the Progressive Liberal Party.¹¹¹ During a by-election in February 1960, the PLP was able to double its representation in the House of Assembly with members of the micro middle class of black professionals, and a year later, was pivotal in the introduction of universal suffrage.¹¹² These successes in the political arena hinted that change was near, but not yet accessible, as the 1962 election demonstrated that the UBP had gained victory through winning the majority of seats in the House of Assembly despite the PLP having received the higher percentage of electoral votes.¹¹³

Leading to the general election of January 1967, the years of the 1960s became a game of tug-of-war between the ruling UBP and the growing oppositional force, the PLP. In early 1964, the UBP successfully achieved the rights of internal self-government for the colony, allowing for all activities of Government (apart from Foreign Relations, Defense, and Internal Security) to be under the responsibility of local Government Ministers.¹¹⁴ As a means of

¹¹⁰ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 311.

¹¹¹ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 309, 314. Despite growing support from the Bahamian majority

¹¹² Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 309, 314; Hughes, 94. The Collins Wall was also opened at two additional places. Universal suffrage allowed for all men and women over the age of 18 to vote.

¹¹³ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 101. UBP won through gerrymandering. UBP – 15. PLP – 2. Independent – 4 votes.

¹¹⁴ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 337. New constitution was promulgated on January 7, 1964.

garnering leverage against its growing opposition, the Bay Street oligarchy wielded the request for internal self-government as a strategic move. It allowed its political arm, the UBP fewer checks and balances from imperial powers on their stronghold of the colony. For this reason, Colin Hughes labeled this time period a “the years of white power” where “whites still dominated the colony”.¹¹⁵

In retort, the PLP began to appeal even more to darker-skinned, working class Bahamians who comprised the majority of the Bahamian population. They did this through modification of its members, and an increased revamping of campaign tactics and black power political rhetoric.¹¹⁶ It was no wonder that it was at this time that PLP cofounder Henry Taylor resigned, and other moderates who were lighter-skinned members of the middle class and nonwhites were similarly removed from the party either voluntarily or through loss in party elections.¹¹⁷

The PLP also began to embrace rhetoric and tactics of the black power movement prevalent in the Civil Rights Movement of the United States, and independence movements in countries of Africa and other parts of the Caribbean. Not only did the PLP embrace black power ideologies, but leading figures from the movement also embraced the PLP. Notable figures including Martin Luther King Jr., Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., and Norman Manley of Jamaica offered financial support, networking, and friendship to the PLP and its leader, Lynden Pindling.¹¹⁸ This careful molding of the political platform and image into one that nudged a “black” orientation along for legitimacy shows how intrinsic and

¹¹⁵ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 111. As attempts to secure power, the UBP increased its representation within the Executive Council and removed PLP supporters from public boards. Similarly, the judicial council remained all white. In a 20 November 1964 *Nassau Tribune* Editorial, it was commented that “They want to have all white judges so they can all sit down and work out how to put our people in prison.”

¹¹⁶ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 338.

¹¹⁷ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 338. Some former PLP members formed the National Democratic Party in response.

¹¹⁸ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 338; Craton, *Pindling*, 36. While studying in London, Lynden Pindling embraced black power doctrines through leading black West Indian and African activists and classmates within the British Commonwealth.

explicit race became for the future of the Bahamian nation during the latter half of the 20th century. Moreover, visits from prominent figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. brought legitimacy to Pindling. Many activities enjoyed by King and Pindling were photographed and posted in newspapers for mass consumption. In a particular image, King Jr. is photographed on a boat with a loose, informal posture and casually wearing a pair of swim trousers.¹¹⁹ These ideological, financial, and fraternal bonds with various influential black power theorists and activists helped to bolster the PLP's public image. Its political project surrounding black power was absolutely pivotal in the longevity of Pindling's regime.¹²⁰

The PLP pushed forward into more publicized and formal measures of protest and petitions on Tuesday, April 27, 1965, a day pronounced as "Black Tuesday". On this day, Pindling strategically moved towards the mace during a formal meeting of the House of Assembly shouting, "This is the symbol of authority, and authority in this island belongs to the people."¹²¹ Over frustration in the UBP government's failure to accurately determine voter distribution and boundaries that were representative and fair for more densely populated and lower class regions of the island, Pindling then lifted the mace in front of the Speaker, and threw it out of the window of the House, where a crowd of PLP supporters had been waiting.¹²²

Members of the PLP opposition also sent an official party delegation to the United Nations Committee on Colonialism later that year.¹²³ Led by Pindling, the PLP exposed the ultra-ownership and disproportionate wealth of UBP Government Ministers within the

¹¹⁹ "Dr. King On Visit", *Nassau Guardian*, Tuesday, April 20, 1965. Civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King and his wife were photographed during their visit to Nassau.

¹²⁰ Elaboration on the central function of black power political propaganda to the political projects of Pindling's government is the focus of Chapter 3.

¹²¹ *Nassau Tribune*, April 27, 1965; *Nassau Guardian*, April 27, 1967; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 341.

¹²² Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 340. The delegation met on August 23 and 24, 1965

¹²³ United Nations, Committee of Twenty-Four, Proceedings, 1965, A/600/aAdd7,86-11; Johnson, *Quiet Revolution*, Appendix A, 157-61.

majority of local industries and government contracts as well as the continued endorsement by the imperial government.¹²⁴ Although these initiatives did not bring about direct reform, they did bolster the PLP into a favorable position for the 1967 election.¹²⁵

Through a tumultuous series of events and reform initiatives, political government transformed in 1967 into one to the Progressive Liberal Party under the leadership of Lynden Pindling. It signified the downfall of the Bay Street mercantile oligarchy, and a much-needed stride in the removal of the systems of slavery-like discrimination that it had thrived upon. Nonetheless, the nuances of the historical foundations of class differentiation through racial discrimination in political, economic, and social realms until this momentous juncture must not be overlooked. As one anonymous “Colored Carpenter” insisted prior to an earlier election in 1962, the rise of the PLP would infer an elevation of middle to upper class “black” intellectuals who maintained and exceeded their self-interests over the larger “black” lower class majority:

Not colored people because the blind can't lead the blind. We are all poor and we have to go to the white man for jobs. We know that if we work for a colored man he can't pay us off, so don't let us look where we fall...So if the PLP gets the majority of seats in the House of Assembly, you know that only they and their families will be taken care of.¹²⁶

While Bahamian society needed a transformation from the inequities of Bay Street minority rule, it becomes dubious as to whether or not the middle class PLP members would respond to the real issues of both color and class domination and marginalization.

¹²⁴ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 341; United Nations Committee of Twenty-Four, Proceedings, 1965, A/600/aAdd 7, 86-111. The petition included evidence of the UBP Government Premier as “the biggest road-builder in the country”, the Minister of Maritime Affairs as “the biggest ship-owner in the country”, among others.

¹²⁵ Craton, *Pindling*, 133. Similarly to the 1962 election, the PLP won 51 per cent more votes than the UBP yet there was a disparity in the number of seats gained in the general election of 1967. A tie needed to be broken by two independents, who decided to side with the PLP.

¹²⁶ *Nassau Tribune*, November 25, 1962, quoted in Cash, *Sources of Bahamian History*, 291, and Hughes *Race and Politics*, 89. in Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 315



Figure 2: New PLP Government with Governor Ralph Grey in January 1967
 Courtesy of the National Archives of The Bahamas

Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the varied groupings of people beneath the crust of Bay Street power. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was an overwhelming economic, political, and social domination of former slaves through a dependent wage labor system, limitations to franchise, education, and commercial and residential living spaces. This domination carried on to the mid-twentieth century whereby the large majority of later generations continued to receive little education, work unskilled jobs for minimal wages, and experience even stronger de facto segregation.

Nonetheless, this chapter has also underscored how an interpretation of Bay Street rule as implied absolute “white” power over all “black” elements of Bahamian society has proven itself sorely mistaken. Class and race were very much embedded within the history of Bay Street rule. Many poor whites and middle class blacks crossed across such racial and class binaries. Small yet significant, the presence of middle classes of various shades of color from earlier decades of the post-emancipation era began to expose this simplistic binary to an even greater extent. Larger working class reforms such as the 1942 riot and 1958 General Strike

made strides in denouncing Bay Street power; however, their means of protest were short-lived and limited in terms of enacting real change. Their strides were outdone by more politically invested, middle-class initiatives through those involved in anti-discrimination reform, the Citizens' Committee, and finally, through the long-term goals of the Progressive Liberal Party.

While factors of color and race were intrinsically related to Bay Street's discrimination, an over-reliance of race in PLP ideology has had its implications in the ways in which class struggle has been misperceived. From a historical standpoint, the growing presence of a middle class "black" groupings affiliated with PLP exemplified how history could be repeating itself, in terms of maintenance of a similar class hierarchy that keep larger grassroots "black" lower classes in relatively immobile positions. I do not dispute that color was a primary discriminative means by which most nonwhite Bahamians suffered politically, economically, and socially throughout the post-emancipation era until the mid-twentieth century. I do, however, engage in a deeper study of the historical background of the PLP as a conglomerate of middle class intellectuals.

As much as Pindling and the PLP attempted to craft a unified "black" electorate in its first decade of becoming a Party, historical patterns prior to its 1967 victory refute this. Moreover, from an anthropological perspective, the political representation of blackness as a single entity of class struggle problematizes the ways in which color and race have been perceived. Most notably, the leadership of Pindling and the PLP in a construction of a unified "black" electorate prior to its 1967 victory and 1973 independence, has its implications in the way blackness is perceived and imagined in dominant ways within discursive forms, including the imagination of a "black" Bahamian national identity.

Chapter Two

“There is No Color Bar” Politics of Race Through The Eyes of The British

*So far we have been looking at Bahamian politics as a bilateral contest. [...] But it was also potentially a **triangular affair**, with the governor/Colonial Office being both an additional contestant and, in the last resort, **holding the ring and settling the rules for the other two**.¹*

Chapter Objectives

In confidential letters and intelligence reports on the political situation of The Bahamas written by British Governor to the colony of The Bahamas, Sir Ralph Grey and his staff between the years 1965-1966, one can gain insight into the politics of race as seen through the eyes of British officials. The following chapter explores the implications of class-based, non-racial language used by British colonial actors at the precipice of Pindling and the Progressive Liberal Party’s control of the government. I argue that it is through this prior language and non-racial interpretation of social inequalities, shared by colonial and local Bay Street authorities, that a backlash emerged in Pindling’s racial political projects. Furthermore, I debate that it is through this dialogic reaction that popular imaginations of a racial conceptualization of a Bahamian national identity as a “black” identity also came in to play.

The deterministic narratives of class (through Bay Street and British authorities) and race (through Pindling) were problematic given the dominance of both class and race factors within the historical foundations and power dynamics outlined in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, these debates led to the rejection of a class-based narrative to one that was explicitly rooted in color; laying the foundations of the overarching notion of a “Black Bahamas” projected by Pindling’s political projects.

¹ Colin A. Hughes, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981; Nassau: Media Publishing Ltd, 2010), 254. Citations refer to Media edition. Omitted section: [...bilateral contest in which white and Negro politicians sought to mobilize and deploy electoral support in their respective constituencies.]

Color-Coded Class Consciousness

The transition to internal self-government in The Bahamas in January 1964 allowed for the eclipse of direct colonial authority, but colonial officials were still significantly involved.² Through this transition, all domestic activities of Government within the colony came under the control of local government ministers: members of the United Bahamian Party (UBP) in the majority, and members of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) and newly formed National Democratic Party (NDP) in the minority.³ Nonetheless, British governor Ralph Grey and his staff remained in control of the ministries of Foreign Relations, Defense and Internal Security.⁴ In these roles, local colonial officials remained conscious of the growing emergence of Bahamian party politics, and more specifically, Pindling and the racial nature of his political projects.

Background notes in preparation for the Queen's visit in January 1966 sketched out the region's racial politics from the perspective of British colonial officials.⁵ Officially, the report stated, "there is no color bar" between the UBP and the PLP, only "a gap between 'the haves' and 'the have nots'".⁶ In parentheses, however, the author specified Bay Street's UBP, the party of "the haves" as "(mostly white, representing big business)". In contrast, he recognized "the other parties" as "the have nots" and again in parentheses that they were "(mainly colored)".⁷ By recognizing the ruling UBP as "the haves" of lucrative, power-wielding forces within the economic and commercial sectors of the colony the report drew an image of a strong, wealthy and stable unit, and exclusively that of the upper class elite of Bahamian society. Adding the

² Colin A. Hughes, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas*, 35. The Bahamas remained a British Crown Colony from 1717 to 1969; this implied that residential British governors oversaw activities of the colony and reported back to the Colonial Office in London, England.

³ [Governor?] to Colonial Office, "The Queen' Visit", Jan 1966, CO 1031/5152, C474134

⁴ Colin A. Hughes, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 35.

⁵ Comprising of the Colonial Secretary, Attorney-General, and Receiver-General

⁶ [Governor?] to Colonial Office, "The Queen' Visit", Jan 1966.

⁷ [Governor?] to Colonial Office, "The Queen' Visit", Jan 1966. Single quotation marks of 'the haves' and 'the have nots' were placed by me.

⁸ [Governor?] to Colonial Office, "The Queen' Visit", Jan 1966.

racial marker of “(mostly white)”, however, created an image of strength, economic and social opportunity towards the “white” upper-class elite. Correspondingly, recognizing the PLP as “the have-nots”, also created an image of weakness, poverty, and immobility towards a segment of Bahamian society that is “mostly colored” or “black”.

This interpretation begins to extrapolate how colonial officials attempted to sideline racial identity politics through matters of economics and class. By putting racial markers of a “(mostly white)” UBP and a “(mostly colored)” PLP in parentheses, the report placed race or color as secondary to the underlying issues of class divisions within party politics and social dynamics within The Bahamas at large. Nonetheless, the use of racial markers in parentheses demonstrated an acknowledgement that race and color was still a dominant means of dividing classes into “the haves” and “the have nots”. It is perplexing, then, why Governor Grey and his staff denied that color or race is an issue when they themselves spoke of the operation of both class and race in their narrative.

Colonial Partiality to Bay Street

I suspect part of the reason local British officials attempted to sidestep race as a dominant system of discrimination is because of their close alliance with Bay Street political rule. After all, it is under the broader colonial framework that the Bay Street oligarchy was able to thrive and maintain its hegemony in the post-emancipation era throughout the early nineteenth to mid-twentieth century.⁸ Just as resident British colonials were indirectly involved in the internal affairs of the 1960s, they were directly involved in the internal operation of government within the colony before this. There is no record of any objection to the blatant systems of discrimination through which Bay Street governed. The rhetoric of “there is no color bar”, then, signals a defense of Bay Street, and the nuances of the historical foundations of

⁸ See pages 17-18 of Chapter 1.

class differentiation through racial discrimination in political, economic, and social realms up to this point.

In the same letter, the staff of Governor Grey offered some criticisms of UBP administration that should have elicited a harsher response if it were not for such colonial alliance. Nonetheless, the more lenient response demonstrated their practice of complaisance. First, the letter spoke of the lack of “ministerial caliber” among the UBP.⁹ It mentioned that all Bahamian ministers of the UBP Government worked on a volunteer basis. They were unpaid, and thus continued to retain their business interests while holding public office.¹⁰ As UBP ministers comprised of the Bay Street mercantile elite, their primary income and hegemony derived from the success of their commercial establishments. The combined powers of holding public office plus owning major business interests led to exploitation of governmental authority to benefit personal investments. The history of the hegemony of Bay Street’s entrenchment has shown this to be true, and the UBP ministers exploited the Bahamian majority through dual political and economic power as in the past.

Nonetheless, operating on this alliance towards Bay Street, Governor Grey’s office dismissed any evidence of corruption as fallacy under the argument that the status quo has kept the colony in good standing. The letter surmised, “The objections are obvious but the system has been working reasonably well, and leading ministers are putting up a surprisingly good show.”¹¹ Details of how the governmental operation through UBP leadership was “working well” or exactly how ministers were “putting up a surprisingly good show” are not given; however, strong economic growth and development within the colony during the twentieth century was likely a factor in the governor’s positive report.

⁹ [Governor?] to Colonial Office, “The Queen’ Visit”, Jan 1966.

¹⁰ [Governor?] to Colonial Office, “The Queen’ Visit,” Jan 1966.

¹¹ [Governor?] to Colonial Office, “The Queen’ Visit”, Jan 1966.

At the time of Governor Grey's administration, the tourism industry was booming. The number of tourists traveling to the colony continued to increase from 32,108 to 822,317 during 1949 to 1966.¹² In prior decades of the 1940s and 1950s, local administration was relatively financially independent from the British Colonial Office in supporting its local budget and advancing local development.¹³ The economic boom through the tourist industry came about through the ingenuity of local administration and the Bay Street mercantile elite. It is worth noting, as Chapter 1 has shown, that the economic successes of the twentieth century occurred during a time of incredible poverty and disenfranchisement of the already marginalized Bahamian majority. The reported prosperity was not widespread, but rather limited to the specific Bay Street elite, relative to a Bahamian middle class of a gamut of skin colors and shades. The remarks from the colonial officials ultimately render them ignorant, or at least unable to discern major structures of inequalities that were at work.

The resident staff of Governor Grey and other colonial officials also administered their colonial alliance to the Bay Street oligarchy through their complaisance of conservatism. At the time of Grey's governorship, the British Labor Party held parliamentary power in London.¹⁴ Thus, conservatism within the colony should have been denounced given their goals to achieve equal representation for working classes on the home front. Nonetheless, such criticisms were ultimately deemed unimportant by Grey's staff.

In the letter, UBP ministers were reported as having "reluctance to see the full development of trade unionism and labor relations".¹⁵ The author admitted that the UBP administration was "in certain respects somewhat antiquated" moving forward into the twentieth century, but did not offer any further comments to suggest its disapproval. As cited

¹² Hughes, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas*, 39; 132.

¹³ Hughes, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas*, 39.

¹⁴ Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People. From The Ending of Slavery to The Twenty-First Century*, Vol. 2 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 305.

¹⁵ [Governor?] to Colonial Office. "The Queen' Visit", Jan 1966.

in Chapter 1, colonial officials introduced a law that made trade unionism legal through the rise of reform initiatives in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁶ Thus, the broader colonial framework allowed for the growth of trade unionism while the British Labor Party was in the majority at the time. Nonetheless, the local British colonial office did not write of the conservatism of the UBP government (or Bay Street elite) using alarming language. Turning a blind eye, the representative of Grey's staff wrote of the conservatism as a trivial shortcoming of the local government compared to its economic productivity. Its focus was on the colony's achievement of a "pre-eminent position" and a standard of living for working classes that was "higher than elsewhere" in the Caribbean. The author further wrote, "There are tensions below the surface, but given good will on all sides, there is no reason why the Islands should not continue to prosper".¹⁷

The conflicting positions of local British officials reeked of cooperation to Bay Street. Even when Bahamian labor movements and reform movements for improved representation of the working population paralleled those of the British Labor Party on the home front, local colonial officials continued to display lackadaisical criticism to the suspicious voluntary (unpaid) portfolios and conservatism of the UBP government.

Shared Goals of Discrimination: Colonial and Local Officials

The elements of race and color appear to be a more significant issue to local colonial officials than can be gleaned from their rhetoric. The operation of colonial partiality for the UBP Government who, in their words, was "mostly white" illuminates shared motivations of discrimination between the two groups. That is to say, just as Bay Street maintained its hegemony on the legal fiction that neither race nor color was a factor – or rather, that laissez

¹⁶ See page 42 of Chapter 1.

¹⁷ [Governor?] to Colonial Office. "The Queen' Visit", Jan 1966.

faire economy or franchise through property voting did not have underlying motivations to marginalize the “black” majority – they did. Similarly, just as local colonial officials conceptualized race and color as non-issues – they were.

The close alignment of Grey’s local administration to Bay Street was not new. Local colonial and governmental affiliations were rooted in the history of Bahamian societal developments and racial inequalities. Even as late as the 1940s, darker-colored Bahamians were forbidden to “cast a shadow” in Government House, home to the residing British governor and site of banquets and celebrations of British and Bay Street socialites alike.¹⁸ Moreover, political commentators and journalists saw the affiliations between resident British and local government officials as commonplace. Their close social relationships were so rudimentary that Bahamian political analyst, Colin Hughes posited British officials in the twentieth century as “socialites rather than socialists”, and identified that their “contacts were with Bay Street”.¹⁹ Another article in the oppositional *Nassau Herald* newspaper in February 1957 framed the British Colonial Office as “dancing to the tune set by Bay Street” and for “seeing Bahamian affairs only through the special eyeglasses provided by the country’s despotic leaders”.²⁰ Because of leniency and lackadaisical responses of Grey’s administration with the disenfranchising practices of UBP Government, I believe that these interpretations were on target. As stated by Hughes in the opening caption of this chapter, I believe the social dynamics were a triangular affair, with both colonial officials and the local oligarchy working together to maintain dominion, and discriminate non-elites in the process.

Both local colonial officials and the Bay Street elite negated the existence of a color bar and conceptualization of the social inequalities in order to continue their partnership and rule

¹⁸ [Governor?] to Colonial Office, “The Queen’ Visit”, Jan 1966

¹⁹ Hughes, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas*, 39. “Bay Street”, Location of downtown Nassau where UBP ministers and other members of the upper-class white elite held commercial establishments.

²⁰ “Despotic Leaders Unable To Face New Way of Life”, *The Nassau Herald*, 23 Feb 1957.

over the Bahamian majority. It did not matter if claims of such reform initiatives were relevant and paralleled the ideologies of the British Labor Government. Both colonial officials and the UBP appeared satisfied to exclude non-whites from their world of prosperity, even if only through their indifference to act otherwise.

Maintaining The Status Quo

The denial of a color divide by the local colonial office served the purpose of maintaining the status quo, which deemed “colored” segments of society as illegitimate sources of power. This became increasingly evident through the prolific comments of concern in monthly Intelligence and Security Reports by Governor Grey from December 1965 to July 1966 that exercised caution for the growing emergence of the PLP through Pindling’s leadership.

Colonial scrutiny of PLP-led public meetings was one way that British local officials exercised this caution. For example, in December 1965, one hundred persons were recorded as attending a public meeting compared to a growing audience of three hundred in March 1966.²¹ While the recording of numbers at a political meeting seems to be standard reporting data, the details served the dual purpose of gauging how active the Party was or was becoming, and also if they were gathering numbers of people sufficient to achieve electoral support that could overthrow the UBP. The Governor and his staff also recorded the names of individuals who spoke, and the content of their speeches in relation to their allegiance or opposition to the established authorities. The records specifically pinpointed the extent to which the messages of PLP spokesmen counteracted the Government and British officials. For example, in the December 1965 public meeting, it was mentioned “The speakers criticized government”, and in March 1966, “speeches were anti-Government, critical of the Governor and of the

²¹ Intelligence Report, December 1965; Intelligence Report, Mar 1966, CO 1031/5152, C474134.

Commissioner of Police.”²² Records also included plans for additional meetings. The running theme of scrutiny throughout the intelligence reports was how the purpose of the meetings and overall objectives were to include race and color discrimination in its opposition to local government. The PLP’s use of race diverged from the resident colonial officials’ own conceptualization, and their continued growth would jeopardize the status quo operative system of discrimination.

On a number of occasions, the PLP was reported in the media such as *The Bahamian Times* and by speakers at various public meetings as having the intention to “exploit issues”, “play the race issue throughout recent debates in the House”, and continue “exploitation of the racial theme”.²³ The use of the word “exploit” implied that the PLP was using race unfairly for its own benefit to win electoral support. The comment casted the PLP as a manipulative political party that was playing with race, trivializing it for its own political purposes versus communicating an issue that presented reality. On quick glance, one might assume that colonial interpretations support my overall thesis of Pindling’s use of race to deceive the broader “black” Bahamian public to create a unified electorate and ultimately a unified “black” national unit. I would argue against this hasty assumption given the evidences of colonial partiality to Bay Street, disregard for blatant signs of corruption within UBP Government, and ignorance of the interplay of historical color discrimination in the delineations of class differences. Despite similar ends, our means to achieve these ends are very different. My motivation for recognizing and understanding the roots of the political constructions on the basis of race differ quite dramatically from that of local colonial authorities.

The antagonism from local colonial officials stemmed from an absolute denial of racial causal factors, and a fear of an absolute understanding of the fate of the colony’s inequalities

²² Intelligence Report, December 1965; Intelligence Report, March 1966.

²³ Intelligence Report, February 1966; Intelligence Report, March 1966;. *The Bahamian Times*, the renamed version of The Nassau Herald newspaper media.

through race. While I already state that both arguments are over-deterministic, this dialogue was still prevalent. After all, Governor Grey and his officials denied a legal color bar, but local politicians saw one. In a letter enclosed with a June 1966 Intelligence Report, Governor Grey wrote:

The month was again quiet, but the PLP emphasis on racialism, which has now been taken up by the Bahamas Federation of Labor, is disturbing. The PLP no doubt see in racialism a means of getting sufficient cohesion among the voters of African descent, who are in the majority to bring about the overthrow of the present Government. It is a dangerous means.²⁴

The last line of the PLP's use of race as a 'dangerous means' implied fear held by the Governor that the Opposition could gain power within Government. The tone of impending danger of the PLP was rooted in fear of the possibility of destabilization of economic prosperity and loss of the political status quo of Bay Street rule through UBP administration.

The colonial residents' fear firmly rested in change of the status quo, decline of the economic successes within the colony, and overall positive report on governance through Bay Street elite. Yet, on a darker note, the fears of "racialist" ideologies by local colonial officials also rested upon a possibility of the "mostly white" administration to a "mostly colored" government administration. There is no explicit evidence to confirm officials' views on color or racial hierarchies; however, they certainly were concerned about a change in government in terms of color. In a handwritten note on the margins of another Intelligence Report, Grey wrote, "If racial propaganda is effective, with coloreds outnumbering whites 4:1, the next election could bring defeat to the UBP."²⁵ Thus, while the official rhetoric demonstrated a rejection of a color bar, Governor Grey himself continued to equate divisions in racial terms.

²⁴ Ralph Grey to Chief Registrar's Office, Bahamas Security and Intelligence Committee, No. 22. Personal, 15 July 1966, CO 1031/5152, C474134.

²⁵ Ralph Grey to Foreign Office. Date unknown. CO 1031/5152, C474134.

Through his delineation of the “coloreds” defeating the UBP, he framed the mobilization of a specific color group against a political party.

Colonial authorities hoped to protect a “mostly white” UBP from the growth of any non-white elements. Race and color mattered to local colonial authorities, and were the main reason why the conservatism and administrative shortcomings of the UBP administration were not seen as problematic. PLP ideology, objectives and political platform were also easily dismissed on this basis. Grey further wrote, “this continued propaganda [of the PLP]...could make a nasty incident out of some small happening which would otherwise be of no more than passing interest.”²⁶ The Governor too easily overlooked the propaganda of the PLP as stemming from the very real, and still operative systems of racial discriminations within the colony. His final comment that the PLP’s claims of racial discrimination would otherwise be “some small happening” or a “passing interest” further exposed the colonial practice of complacency from which the Bay Street oligarchy was able to operate.

On another occasion in June 1966, flippant remarks were made toward local trade unions for the similar intention of disregarding their grievances.²⁷ The Governor provided a narrative of attendance at a social function hosted by the Trade Union Congress. He claimed that one of the concluding speakers made remarks that “It was no longer good enough for the worker to live merely on fish and rice,” and that champagne was then served to all who were present to applaud the remarks and aims of trade union. Additionally, he described that toasts were made to the Queen (in her honor), and also to himself and his wife. Grey responded to this series of events, quite dismissively, particularly of the giving of champagne:

It is fair to say that torrential rain limited the number present to about fifty. Even so the use of champagne – though very kind – did not suggest a general condition of want.²⁸

²⁶ Grey to Foreign Office.

²⁷ Governor Ralph Grey to Colonial Office, Secret, Personal, 16 June 1966, CO 1031/5152, C474134.

²⁸ Grey to Colonial Office, 16 June 1966.

In his response, the Governor dismissed the socioeconomic grievances made by trade union representatives. He slipped this narrative in to suggest that the work of trade unions was contradicting their claim to support and provide for the working class. The example was quite tactful. He could have been noting that the seemingly extravagant purchase of champagne was feasible only because of the existence of a more affluent middle class group of “black” Bahamians. Thus, the Governor could have been aptly exposing class difference between the hosts of the function and the working class majority that they claimed to represent. Yet, in Grey’s anecdote, it seems as if elite “black” leaders were being mocked for their pretentious consumption of expensive champagne. Moreover, Grey’s objections were again working to undermine or delegitimize any claim that threatened the status quo of Bay Street rule by local colonial officials.

Summary

This chapter has outlined colonial patterns of complacency toward the Bay Street elite while showing evidence of their social ties to their administration. The fear of the growth of “racialism” through Pindling’s leadership, and mockery of pretentious consumption of expensive champagne by “coloreds” has also demonstrated further colonial partnership and alliance with Bay Street. Colonial officials also showed apt understanding of the correlation of class divisions by delineating them as “mostly white” versus “mostly colored”. Thus, when Governor Grey and his staff of local colonial officials asserted a lack of a formal “color bar,” it did not imply that the colony was not organized by race or characterized by less systematic racial categorization and discrimination. Rather, it was to offer its stamp of approval on its organization and allegiance to the Bay Street oligarchy that was still in existence. Political and labor platforms which revealed truths of racial discrimination, were deemed protests that

“would otherwise be a passing interest” in the colony. Local colonial authorities and Bay Street government knowingly participated in such systems of discrimination.

The confidential nature of the letters and intelligence reports written by local officials to the Colonial Office in London exposed deceitful politics of race yet denied that racial discrimination was an issue for current power holders. It wasn't an issue for either colonial or local Bay Street “white” elites. Pindling's political platforms, however, saw this as a central argument in their contestation for legitimacy. It was through such antagonism that Pindling's political platforms grew increasingly racial in content during his rise to power in the decade prior to 1967. Moreover, it was through this antagonism that a backlash of the political construction of a “Black Bahamas” came into existence, as Pindling's government engineered the newly independent nation from 1967 to 1992.

What goes around comes around, as the common adage goes. The backlash that ensued as a response to the politics of race is key to understanding the emergence of Pindling's political projects that followed. It responded to former ideologies that did not include color or race. It created a dialogue for a transformed government that recognized the political, economic, and social marginalization of a majority “black” population. In short, new political articulations of blackness were a reactive inverse of the colonial and Bay Street's conceptualizations that negated race and color as problematic issues in Bahamian society.²⁹ Such discussion is still reticent in today's Bahamian society and popular imagination of Bahamian national identity. Latter generations still wrestle to understand and debate the meanings of racial discriminations of the past and present and the ways in which race has been presented by the PLP as the key discriminatory force.³⁰

²⁹ This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

³⁰ This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

The realities are a combination of the two ideologies, whereby both class and race are at play. Thus, choosing one or the other fails to understand the complexities that exist both in terms of political power and social systems at work within the Bahamian community.

Chapter Three

“Remember Your Chains”¹

The Symbolic Power of Slavery in Political Rhetoric

“These are the Names! Remember Your Chains! Boycott! Join The PLP!”²

Chapter Objectives

The rhetoric of black power was at work in The Bahamas throughout the final half of the twentieth century; and its effects on the consciousness of a “Black Bahamas” are still being felt today. This chapter offers a historical overview of Pindling’s leadership as Premier and Prime Minister of The Bahamas from 1967 to 1992. It also examines the specific motifs of Bay Street as slave masters within the political projects of the Progressive Liberal Party to inform a collective identity of a “black” Bahamian identity. These motifs were instilled during the formative years before the Party became elected, in its early years of Pindling’s government, and later well-established years of the 1980s until the Party’s defeat in 1992.³ They included an assortment of motifs of overpowering whips and chains of the black Atlantic slave tradition, imagery of the master-slave relationship, and the Christian narrative of the story of Exodus, to provide a certain symbolic narrative of black suffering and black victimization within the present-day Bahamian society. Using familiar aspects of Bahamian legacies of slavery as well as the dominance of Christianity in The Bahamas, the Progressive Liberal Party was able to pull many Bahamians into a collective web and achieve political longevity.

After providing an historical overview of the leadership of the PLP Government, their long-running political motifs are assessed through the comparative lens of broader black power

¹ *Nassau Herald*, March 29, 1958, 2, 3.

² *Nassau Herald*, March 29, 1958, 2, 3.

³ Formative years refer to the roughly 1956-1967, shortly after Pindling became leader of the Party. Early years refer to post-1967 election and pre-drug scandal. Later years refer to the final years of Pindling’s government, after the Drug Commission of Inquiry of 1984 until the Party’s defeat of 1992.

traditions. I debate what kinds of black power rhetoric were at work when such motifs were being conceptualized in its original stage. Moreover, I look at how such slavery motifs were influenced by various traditions of the black power movement within the United States and broader Caribbean region.

Second, this chapter examines the symbolic power of Pindling's political rhetoric through the lens of anthropological theory. I examine the two-fold purpose of Pindling's articulation of symbolic framework of slavery to convince and persuade a collective "black" political and national framework, and isolate non-black and other intermediate groups from belonging to it.

Third, this chapter combines theoretical frameworks of black power ideology and political symbolism to incorporate a fuller study of the various forms of black power, and also the symbolic power by which motifs were used in Pindling's political projects throughout the second half of the twentieth century. With special inclusion of the ways in which Pindling's political delegates, supporters, and opponents reacted to the recurring motifs, I investigate the implications of Pindling's symbolic rhetoric on the popular consciousness of a "Black Bahamas".

As the fulcrum of my thesis, I establish specific ways in which black power and symbolic rhetoric within the political constructions of the Pindling Government contradict itself in practice. Moreover, I demonstrate how these contradictions have impacted the popular consciousness of being both a "black" Bahamian people and nation.

Pitfalls with Progress in Pindling Government: 1967-1992

The January 1967 election brought victory for the PLP.⁴ The PLP victory signified the first moment in Bahamian history where its Government was representative of the majority of the country's people. Furthermore, the 1967 victory represented a monumental and positive transformation of the historical and political hegemony of the Bay Street oligarchy. The lower class majority connected with and supported Pindling's leadership, and brought the party its political legitimacy in the election of 1967.⁵ The achievement of independence from Great Britain on July 10, 1973, however, was the strongest and most monumental achievement under the Pindling Government.⁶ The legacy of the Pindling Government in providing both the means to oust Bay Street rule in 1967 and achieve imperial rule in 1973 gave the political party much longevity. Thus, Pindling and his government were consistently reelected until their eventual defeat in 1992.⁷ At the time of his departure, Pindling had been the longest standing leader in the Western Hemisphere, surpassing all other nations except Fidel Castro of Cuba.⁸

Nonetheless, Pindling and the PLP achieved legitimacy and electoral support through racial means, pinning Bay Street men as slave masters to portray a simplistic racial dichotomy of political, economic, and social divides within Bahamian society. The extent to which blackness was used as a political tool to unite the majority at the polls and to portray whiteness as antithetical to political and national progress is undeniable. While Bay Street had dominated the majority of the population in the similar master-slave dichotomies, the issue of class and the rise of a dark-colored middle class throughout the twentieth century has been noted to expose

⁴ Colin A. Hughes, *Race and Politics in The Bahamas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981; Nassau: Media Publishing Ltd, 2010), 119-21. Citations refer to Media edition.

⁵ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 119-21, 216, 230-41.

⁶ Paul Albury, *The Story of The Bahamas* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1975), 23-84.

⁷ Nassau Tribune, July 10, 1973; Nassau Guardian, July 10, 1973; Bahamas Dateline 2 (June-August 1977), 7 (May-June 1982). General 1987 election, Bahamas Dateline 11 (June-July 1987); *Bahamas Index and Yearbook*, 1993, 131, 135.

⁸ Jayson Blair, "Sir Lynden Pindling, 70, Prime Minister Who Led Bahamas to Independence," *The New York Times*, August 27, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/27/world/sir-lynden-pindling-70-prime-minister-who-led-bahamas-to-independence.html>.

limitations or credibility to this argument. Given that many PLP members also derived from similar educated middle class “black” backgrounds made the symbolic rhetoric of a unified “black” electorate a fragile construction. My research shows that suspicions of class division were warranted, as Pindling’s government failed to lend full government machinery to improve the livelihood of the more disadvantaged, darker-colored lower class. Thus, the rhetoric was in certain respects, a scam.

The early years of Pindling’s governance were promising for the Bahamian majority; however, internal corruption and mismanagement of the treasury throughout the late 1970s and 1980s quickly undermined early advancements. Immediately following the 1967 election, budgetary adjustments allowed for a primary focus on education, followed by health services throughout the island (including milk and lunch programs), public works, and lastly, tourism.⁹ Government ministers were salaried so as to prevent conflicts of interest. Increased employment opportunities and desegregation in the social and economic spheres also benefited the historically marginalized “black” Bahamian community. Due in part to Pindling’s championship in early social and economic reform, the PLP received wide support and unprecedented margins in the polls.

Despite Pindling’s early championship for The Bahamas and the “black” majority, subsequent years of his governance were rife with economic and social ill that inhibited further progress and reform. By the time of independence, seventy-five per cent of the poorest and most densely populated settlements in Nassau still had inadequate infrastructure for running water, and eighty-five per cent of household incomes were spent on food and housing.¹⁰ The outer islands were also neglected and seldom visited by their political representatives, and infrastructure remained substandard. Crime increased to a horrific level, putting The Bahamas

⁹ Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People. From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century*, Vol. 2 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 350.

¹⁰ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 357.

on the map as having the highest crime rate per capita in the world, including major violent crime and burglary in 1979, and the development of highly organized youth gangs by the late 1980s.¹¹ Primary and secondary education, while being much more readily accessible to the majority, was of poor quality in government schools.¹² It is in these deficiencies that one begins to see the pitfalls of the political projects of the government. Herein also lies the speculation of the PLP's commitment to the "black" majority once Bay Street and colonial opponents were no longer political threats.

The economy plummeted in a few short years after Pindling came in to power. In 1970, for the first time ever, the government treasury experienced a shift from being in a state of surplus to a deficit of nearly \$12 million.¹³ By 1972, tourism numbers also declined, and eight of the largest hotels in Nassau suffered \$8 million in total losses. As is common for leaders with little experience in running a newly independent country, social and economic ideals initially set by the PLP Government were hardly realized or successfully implemented.

The most blatant pitfall of the Pindling Government came in 1984, when the Prime Minister was indicted for involvement in widespread drug trafficking throughout the islands of The Bahamas. An international commission of inquiry uncovered that the trafficking of cocaine and marijuana had soared since independence and reached dangerous levels after a decade had passed.¹⁴ Nearly all Out Islands of The Bahamas were found to be involved in some degree of trafficking, and PLP Government officials were, if only minimally, implicated for their inability to stop it.¹⁵ The evidence of the commission cited "widespread official corruption" within

¹¹ Bahamas Dateline 9 (April 30, 1984): 1-2; RBPF *Annual Report of the Year 1984* (Nassau: RBPH, 1985); Bahamas Dateline 9 (January 21, 1985): 3. Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 411.

¹² Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 411. Failure rate of 40.2%.

¹³ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 194. Hughes reported that by 1992, national debt was \$1 billion.

¹⁴ *Report of the Commission of Inquiry, Appointed to Inquire into the Illegal Use of the Bahamas for the Transshipment of Dangerous Drugs Destined for the United States*, November 1983-December 1984 (Nassau: Bahamas Government, 1984), 1-10.

¹⁵ Appendix II, List of Exhibits, ACP Lawrence Major's Reports, "Illegal Activities, Andros Island," January 17, 1977; "Illegal Activities Through the Bahamas," March 12, 1979, Appendix VIII, Persons arrested, drugs seized,

Pindling's cabinet and the Bahamian police. At least \$3.5 million could not be accounted for in the personal bank accounts of Pindling himself.¹⁶ Therefore, no official charges could be made against him. "We can still trace drug-related corruption right up to Pindling's door," one American intelligence official confessed in 1986, "but not through it."¹⁷ The alleged fraudulent use of government money and increased national debt, the exposure of internal corruption and undercover drug trafficking industry by the Commission of the Inquiry of the 1980s, and rise in social ills such as crime underlined major pitfalls of PLP reform under Pindling's leadership. It also heightened suspicions as to what forms allegiance did the Party hold for the betterment of the Bahamian majority.

The pitfalls of corruption and large acquirement of personal wealth by government ministers combined with a declining economy from 1967 to 1992 contradicted Pindling's political promises, public image, and political rhetoric. His legitimacy and political power provided more financial cushion for a rising group of middle class of darker-colored Bahamians who were affiliates of the regime.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the needs of building infrastructure and providing tangible support for the marginalized majority continued to fall asunder, suggesting a similar pattern of heedless Bay Street leadership of the recent past. Nonetheless, a large segment of the Bahamian population, most notably of grassroots sectors, found themselves attached to the symbolic power of the rhetoric of Pindling's Government. The following section reveals reasons for this continued political support.

and locations, January 1981-June 1984, *ibid.*, 86-97; Craton and Saunders, 382. "The 1984 Drug Commission found that Prime Minister Pindling had received...five times his official salary between 1977 and 1983, including a \$750,000 gift..., \$437,000...for nominal services, \$250,000 from an American benefactor, and \$181,00 from 'unidentified sources'...but it could not be proven that any of these monies were drug-related."

¹⁶*Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 23, 1982; NBC broadcast, November 5, 1983; "A Nation for Sale," *The Miami Herald Special Report* (articles dated September 23-October 10-1983, n.d. (1983); *Report of the Commission of Inquiry*, section 18, pp. 352-60.

¹⁷ Joel Brinkley, "Drugs and Graft Main Issue in Bahamas Vote," *The New York Times*, June 14, 1987, Corruption sec., <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/06/14/world/drugs-and-graft-main-issue-in-bahamas-vote.html?src=pm>.

¹⁸ Please note that I do not wish to generalize that all darker-colored upper to middle class Bahamians were affiliated of Pindling's regime or that all members of Pindling's cabinet were involved in the pitfalls of drug corruption and financial management; however, a large majority were.

Origins of a Bahamian Black Power Agenda

The discriminatory relationships imposed by generations of light-colored Bay Street elite rule made an inverse Bahamian black power agenda across class lines plausible by Pindling and his darker-colored supporters. As discussed in Chapter 1, Bay Street maintained its rule through political, economic, and social discrimination toward *all* non-white persons or near-white persons that were not a part of the mercantile elite. Moreover, parallels with “white” power holders in the epoch of slavery and emancipation until the mid-twentieth century are indisputable as non-whites continued to be discriminated against in the franchise and political arena until mid-twentieth century.¹⁹ Thus, Pindling’s articulation using metaphors of master-slave imagery within a political strategy of black power was highly conceivable. Predicated on the visible political discrimination of most non-whites prior to Pindling’s emergence, the rhetoric was set on fire.

Pindling was heavily influenced by the wider web of the black power movement throughout his implementation of Bahamian black power political rhetoric to the broader Bahamian public. The black power movement itself involves a number of traditions that Pindling pulled from. Having received financial support, friendship and camaraderie from leaders of varied traditions (including Martin Luther King Jr. of the United States Civil Rights Movement and Kwame Nkrumah of the Black Nationalist independence movement in Ghana) Pindling’s rhetoric must first be positioned and set apart from this framework or wider web of black power or Black Nationalism ideologies.

¹⁹ Nicolette Bethel, "Engendering The Bahamas: A Gendered Examination of Bahamian Nation Making, or National Identity and Gender in the Bahamian Context," *The International Journal of Bahamian Studies* 12, no. 0 (February 28, 2008). Bethel’s use of “political color” is deliberate. It does not provide a determinative analysis that the racial binary of “white” vs. “black” was operative in social settings, whereby intermediate groups are seen as socially distinct from other groups. Nonetheless, I would still take Bethel’s point a step further, to highlight that such intermediate groups were often economically distinct or advantaged. See rise of “black” middle class and middle class membership of the PLP in Chapter 1 for more explanation.

Various scholars have provided their take on the differences and similarities of various traditions within the ideology of black power.²⁰ One historian, Jeffrey Ogbar has provided a definition of Black Nationalism that is workable for study in the Bahamian context:

The most viable definition is one that includes group consciousness among black people and the belief that they, independent of whites, can achieve liberation by the creation and maintenance of black institutions to serve the best interests of black people. Territorial separatism and/or racial exclusivity are essential to this definition.²¹

The motivations behind Pindling's articulation of black disenfranchisement connect well with Ogbar's definition. Moreover, the timeframe of the mid-1950s when Pindling gained leadership of the Party was also the time of mass movements of resistance to white supremacy and the time of resurgence of black nationalist activity around the world. Being sponsored by Kwame Nkrumah from Ghana meant that Pindling was certainly aware of this growing form of black power ideology as he began his own political projects. In a 1970 editorial of *The Nassau Guardian*, for example, an anonymous writer criticized the PLP for "excessive quoting" of Nkrumah in its party meetings.²²

In a repeated political cartoon from *The Nassau Herald* in the 1958, for example, a headline read, "These Are The Names!!!...Remember Your Chains."²³ It then proceeded to list the names of constituency representatives of the United Bahamian Party and likened them to slave drivers. The illustration below the message further depicted the UBP as "forces of

²⁰ See Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins Univ.Press, 2005); William L. VanDeburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Bert J. Thomas, "Caribbean Black Power: From Slogan to Practical Politics,," *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 3 (March 01, 1992): 392-410, Sage Publications, Inc.

²¹ Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, 3.

²² *Nassau Guardian*, 7 November 1970.

²³, *Nassau Herald*, 29 March 29, 1958.

tyranny” that were enslaving “the Bahamian negro” brandishing a spiked mallet and large shackles.²⁴

The motif of a master-slave relationship within a framework of black nationalism served a dual purpose in Pindling’s projects by providing group consciousness and “black” solidarity to combat the Bay Street elite, and also serving to alienate non-blacks as enemies. Like in Ogbar’s definition, territorial separatism or racial “black” exclusivity was at the core of Pindling’s framework. For this reason, when Pindling gained leadership, he was instrumental in reconstructing the government and political rhetoric to serve the interests of the Bahamian “black” community. This exclusivity alienated non-black Bahamian elements from being considered a part of the cultural framework of national identity. Ultimately, it had its consequence in constructing a “Black Bahamas”.

Violent elements of the revolutionary Black Nationalist tradition or territorial separatist tradition were neither appropriate nor operative in Pindling’s political projects.²⁵ With the exception of the events of “Black Tuesday”²⁶, at no point in the emergence of Pindling as leader of the Party, transition to Government in 1967, or independence in 1973 was violence used to achieve Pindling’s aims. Moreover, physical violence or bloody conflict was never used, which compared to other Black Nationalist movements was quite a feat.²⁷

Non-violent black power movements followed a tradition of pluralism or integration.²⁸ Leaders of this tradition, including Martin Luther King Jr., practiced “community control” whereby local “black” constituencies would act as a support base for black empowerment and

²⁴ *The Nassau Herald*, November 30, 1959.

²⁵ William L. VanDeburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 112.

²⁶ *Nassau Tribune*, April 27, 1965; *The Nassau Herald*, April 27. One this day Pindling through the mace outside of House of Assembly in protest. See Introduction, 5.

²⁷ See Introduction, 5. The mace incident of Black Tuesday is discussed there in greater detail. Lack of violence is why Pindling’s rise to power has been coined a “Quiet Revolution” by Doris Johnson,

²⁸ Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, 112-113; William L. VanDeburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 112.

participation at state and national levels.²⁹ Unlike nationalist traditions that could be retaliatory and racially exclusive, pluralist forms of the black power movement worked to galvanize racial solidarity without self-determination or separation from “whites”. Sometimes, these movements were purely cultural movements, cultivating racial pride and strength, while others still hoped to improve economic, educational, and political institutions without alienating other groups in the process.³⁰

I would argue that Pindling’s black power rhetoric adapted to certain elements of both traditions. Although not violent, Pindling’s projects provided a cultural polarization within Bahamian society under a similar tradition of Black Nationalism. A notion of self-determination was at the core of Pindling’s political project, whereby similar language was used in slavery motifs about the need to emancipate or liberate the majority black Bahamian population from modern-day, slavery-like economic, political, and social inequality. At the same time, however, Pindling swayed to more pluralist traditions of bringing improvement to the disadvantaged majority on a national level through political forum. Officially, this political forum through the PLP’s founding platform of 1953, promised a multi-cultural framework.³¹ Even in the transitions to a noticeably dark-skinned portfolio of ministers and plethora of propaganda of motifs at the onset of Pindling’s leadership, the Party was described as a Party “for all Bahamians”.³² Thus, Pindling’s political project of black power operated on a tandem of official rhetoric of pluralism or integration while also displaying separatist and racially exclusionary propaganda by means of repeated and varied motifs of slavery.

The differences of bringing American black power traditions into The Bahamas, a darker-colored majority population, was also a dilemma within Pindling’s own political

²⁹ Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity*, 112.

³⁰ VanDeburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 113.

³¹ See pages 38-40 of Chapter 1.

³² *The Nassau Guardian*, October 23 1953, Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 36-39.

projects. Moreover, it was a dilemma for many rising black majority governments throughout the Caribbean that came into existence during the mid-twentieth century.³³ It was a dilemma due to the difference of demographics of darker colored people between the two regions, with American black power operating as a minority movement and Caribbean black power as the opposite. Historian Walter Rodney, considered the Father of Caribbean Black Power, identified three major components in the transference of American black power traditions into a Caribbean context: 1) a break with imperialism which has been historically “white racist”, 2) the assumption of power by the “black” masses in the islands, and 3) the cultural reconstruction of the society in the image of “the blacks”.³⁴ Much like my previous analysis of Pindling’s melding of both separatist and pluralist traditions of the black power movement, Rodney demonstrated a shared desire to emancipate and empower “blacks” throughout the Caribbean during this time period through similar means. He identified that this Caribbean black power was achieved through political legitimacy as well as a cultural reconstruction of nationhood centered on blackness. The combination of both traditions was what made Caribbean Black Power so much more powerful on the political and cultural trajectory of newly independent Caribbean nations.

Pindling’s black power political projects discretely conveyed separatist goals, “black” government, and political or public dominion over the society. Without claiming an official black power rhetoric or violent means, Pindling was able to exercise the symbolic power of its political propaganda and image of “black” power through an all-black government. This

³³ "Marcus Garvey," in *The Birth of Caribbean Civilization: A Century of Ideas about Culture and Identity, Nation and Society*, comp. O. Nigel. Bolland (Kingston Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 326.. Garvey promoted the notion that, “A Negro needs a nation of its own and must emancipate itself to be truly respected: build its own government, industry, progress, art, science, literature, culture.”

³⁴ "Walter Rodney," in *The Birth of Caribbean Civilization: A Century of Ideas about Culture and Identity, Nation and Society*, comp. O. Nigel. Bolland (Kingston Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 487. Rodney speaks as a scholar who self-identifies as black and has adopted a black power mindset, Rodney both embodies and defends its ideals.

effectively administered black power political objectives while having reasonable cultural impact on nation building of the budding independent nation of The Bahamas.

Political Symbolism in Bahamian Nation Building

Without physical violence attributable to separatist forms of black power, Pindling³⁵ used the symbolic power of political rhetoric to construct a culture of fear and resentment for the “white” minority as slave masters, undeserving of being included in the Bahamian nation. As discrimination deepened throughout the early 20th century, the PLP achieved political legitimacy in its electoral victory in January 1967 through racial means.³⁶ Moreover, the political rhetoric that accompanied Bahamian independence in July 1973 was also through similar means. According to Bahamian anthropologist Nicolette Bethel, the political rhetoric was “an overwhelmingly racist one,” and “‘binaristic’, dealing with whites and blacks and making little mention of intermediate groups”.³⁷ Pindling’s symbolic rhetoric of slavery in the years prior to independence and nation building in the decades following provide evidence of this.

In order to assess the range of motifs of Bay Street as slave masters that were used by Pindling to inform a collective “black” electorate and national community, I turn to theoretical studies of symbolic rhetoric from an anthropological perspective. The power of political rhetoric and the relationship between rhetoric and ritual in the process of power acquisition

³⁵ Pindling, leader of the Party will be used as representative of the Party and Government. Nonetheless, political constructions were not solely his design but also crafted by his political partners.

³⁶ Bethel, Nicolette. "Engendering The Bahamas: A Gendered Examination of Bahamian Nation Making, or National Identity and Gender in the Bahamian Context" *The International Journal of Bahamian Studies* [Online], Volume 12 Number 0 (28 February 2008).

³⁷ Bethel, Nicolette. "Engendering The Bahamas", [Online].

and legitimation in political campaigns have recently been adopted into anthropological thought.³⁸

In looking at Pindling's political rhetoric (in electoral campaigns) that was predicated on the symbolic power of slavery, there was a deliberate attempt to make the electorate see a racial binary. Using theoretical language from various anthropologists, Pindling's campaigns provided a "rhetorical and symbolic arena" whereby both voters and candidates were able to participate "ritually" in the complexities of the metaphoric symbolism of his political rhetoric.³⁹ These rhetorical events produced by Pindling could be seen as "cultural performances" or "plastic dramas" that amalgamated Bahamian history and social divisions into racial binaries.⁴⁰ Notions of rhetorical events such as "plastic dramas", Geertz noted, "synthesize of people's ethos and worldview".⁴¹ Thus, Pindling wanted society to absorb these racial binaries, metaphoric symbols of slavery motifs, and collective black struggle as truth.

Pindling's symbolic rhetoric served the ultimate goal of acquiring and maintaining political power and legitimacy. Victor Turner was the first to translate the study of symbolic rhetoric in relation to political action.⁴² Turner emphasized that symbolic rhetoric in politics stressed loyalty and obligation, and exposed conflict as the most fundamental and prominent aspects of society to a frightening degree.⁴³ This can certainly be seen within Pindling's political projects, as the rhetoric of slavery served to corner the Bahamian electorate into

³⁸ James R. McLeod, "The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics: Rhetoric, Ritual, and Power in the Era of Teledemocracy," *American Anthropologist* 101, No. 2 (1999): 360. Studies became prominent in mid-twentieth century.

³⁹ F. G. Bailey, *Stratagems and Spoils: A Social Anthropology of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), quoted in James R. McLeod, "Ritual and Rhetoric in Presidential Politics," *Central Issues in Anthropology*, 9th ser. (1991): 29-46.

⁴⁰ M. Singer, "The Cultural Pattern of Indian Civilization," *Far Eastern Quarterly*, 15th ser.: 23; Clifford Geertz, *Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali: An Essay in Cultural Analysis*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 3, both quoted respectively in McLeod, "The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics", 359.

⁴¹ Geertz, *Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali*), 3, quoted in McLeod, "The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics", 359.

⁴² Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 13-59, quoted in McLeod, "The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics", 359.

⁴³ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 35, quoted in McLeod, "The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics", 359.

taking sides, most poignantly stressing obligation from the majority “black” electorate to be loyal to the PLP. Continuing on, Turner emphasized that political rhetoric was “symbolic manipulation by design, playing on deeply held beliefs in the electorate”.⁴⁴ Thus, in many ways, the collective memories of Bay Street domination worked in the favor of Pindling’s political rhetoric. Although it was a political construction, its historical relevancy was able to resonate in the consciousness of much of the popular classes.

Nonetheless, later theorists have added even more tentacles to the understanding of the power of political and symbolic rhetoric. Beyond its relevancy and relationship to real conflict at work in Bahamian society, the political constructs have intensified such conflicts and made them even more authentic in the popular consciousness and legacies of a “Black Bahamas”. Theories by Kertzer underscore the deliberate construction of political rhetoric for mass consumption in societies at large, “created and orchestrated for quantitative effects”.⁴⁵ The construction, Kertzer continued, “follows certain culturally prescribed forms whose built-in logic makes the course of argument predictable.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, he explained that “makes the message uncontestable – framed in such a way as to be seen inherent to the way things are”.⁴⁷ The recurring motifs of slavery by Pindling served this purpose, exacting an imagination of black victimization and continued struggle, and white demonization and the continued need of their banishment from political and overall cultural realms of Bahamian society.

As a summative theoretical framework, the power of slavery in Pindling’s political rhetoric had two deliberate functions in the construction of a “Black Bahamas”: black solidarity and white alienation. The framework could finally be interpreted through a theoretical lens of the rhetorical symbolism of inclusion and exclusion: “to incorporate the in-group symbolically

⁴⁴ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 35, quoted in McLeod, “The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics”, 359.

⁴⁵ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 108, quoted in McLeod, “The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics”, 359.

⁴⁶ Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 108, quoted in McLeod, “The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics”, 359.

⁴⁷ Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, 108, quoted in McLeod, “The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics”, 359.

and exclude the out-group symbolically”.⁴⁸ Pindling’s symbolic construction of slavery was a means to provide *implicit* racial binaries and tensions as absolute, and to solidify fundamental aspects of black collectivity and white alienation within Bahamian society. Through the implicit acts of Pindling’s rhetorical symbolism of slavery grew the basis of Pindling’s political legitimation and conceptualization of the nation as a “Black Bahamas”.

Symbolic Power of Slavery in Political Rhetoric: 1957-1992

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Pindling’s political rhetoric and projects adhered to the symbolic power of slavery amidst widespread electoral support. His rhetoric resonated well – and with good reason – with many persons of African descent who experienced political disenfranchisement, and economic and social discrimination on the basis of their exclusion from the Bay Street “white” merchant oligarchy. Nonetheless, his political rhetoric drew a thin line between a call for black empowerment (following the pluralist tradition of black power) and more symbolic and implicit call for black autonomy and cultural ownership of the Bahamian nation (following the separatist tradition of black power).

Formative Years: Political Cartoons

In the formative years of Pindling’s political projects, violent visual imagery of master-slave relationships were repeatedly published as sketch drawing cartoons in local newspapers.⁴⁹ These cartoons allowed the PLP to vividly provide a picture of black marginalization by the elite minority that was easily digestible for literate and illiterate Bahamians alike. The epitaph, “Remember Your Chains!” from the chapter’s title and opening quote derive from one of these earlier cartoons, first published in a March 1958 edition of *The Nassau Herald*. (See Figure 3)

⁴⁸ G. Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations* (New York: Free Press, 1955), quoted in McLeod, “The Sociodrama of Presidential Politics”, 366.

⁴⁹ Hughes, *Race and Politics*, 245-255; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 307. *The Nassau Herald*, newspaper company that was often identified as the mouthpiece of the PLP, it had a readership of primary black, working class Bahamians.

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THESE ARE THE NAMES!!

NEW PROVIDENCE (City) Stafford L. Sands, Dr. R. W. Sawyer,	ABACO: John H. Bethell, Frank H. Christie, Leonard L. Thompson.	CAT ISLAND: H. G. Christie, Godfrey Kelly,	HARBOUR ISLAND J. N. Albury, A. R. Braynen, Foster Clarke,	ELEUTHERA: C. Trevor Kelly, George Baker, Asa H. Pritchard
LONG ISLAND: D. E. d'Albenas, P. D. Graham,	EXUMA: F. W. Brown, Robert H. Symonette,	INAGUA: Peter Bethell, NEW PROVIDENCE: R. T. Symonette,	SAN SALVADOR: Roy Solomon	GRAND BAHAMA: C. W. F. Bethell,

REMEMBER YOUR CHAINS

VICTORY OR ENSLAVEMENT

These are the Men who Failed To:

- PROVIDE UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE (The right for all men and women to vote)
- ABOLISH THE COMPANY AND PLURAL VOTE. The weapons they use to keep you enslaved.
- REMOVE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST NEGROES.
- DEVELOP THE OUT ISLANDS. (They talk about development, but instead they keep you in a state of poverty.)
- PROVIDE A COURT OF APPEAL. Every citizen in a Democratic State has the right of appeal.)

Boycott!! Remember Boycott!!

JOIN THE PLP

Figure 3: "Remember Your Chains,!" PLP Advertisement, *The Nassau Herald*, March 1958

This cartoon listed names of representatives of the United Bahamian Party, and using the command, "These are The Names! Remember Your Chains!" effectively equated the UBP Government as slave masters. Recalling Geertz' theory of symbolic rhetoric as "plastic dramas," this particular cartoon demonstrated how this master-slave imagery was seen as the quintessential means through which individuals should view their culture. Below this inscription and list of names was a cartoon illustration that depicted a large, burly, grotesque-

looking man raising a spiked mallet and large shackles toward a small, noticeably darker character. The smaller, powerless-looking man, labeled “the Bahamian negro”, made the cartoon explicitly racial and offered the conflict between masters and slaves as the fundamental division of Bahamians in its history at the time. Recalling Geertz’ theory of symbolic rhetoric as “plastic dramas,” this particular cartoon demonstrated how this master-slave imagery was seen as the quintessential means through which Bahamian individuals should view their culture, at a time of political and cultural transformation.

Another cartoon stating “Your Freedom Depends on How Tight Your Grip and Faith in the PLP” also predicated on the symbolic power of slavery. (See Figure 4)⁵⁰

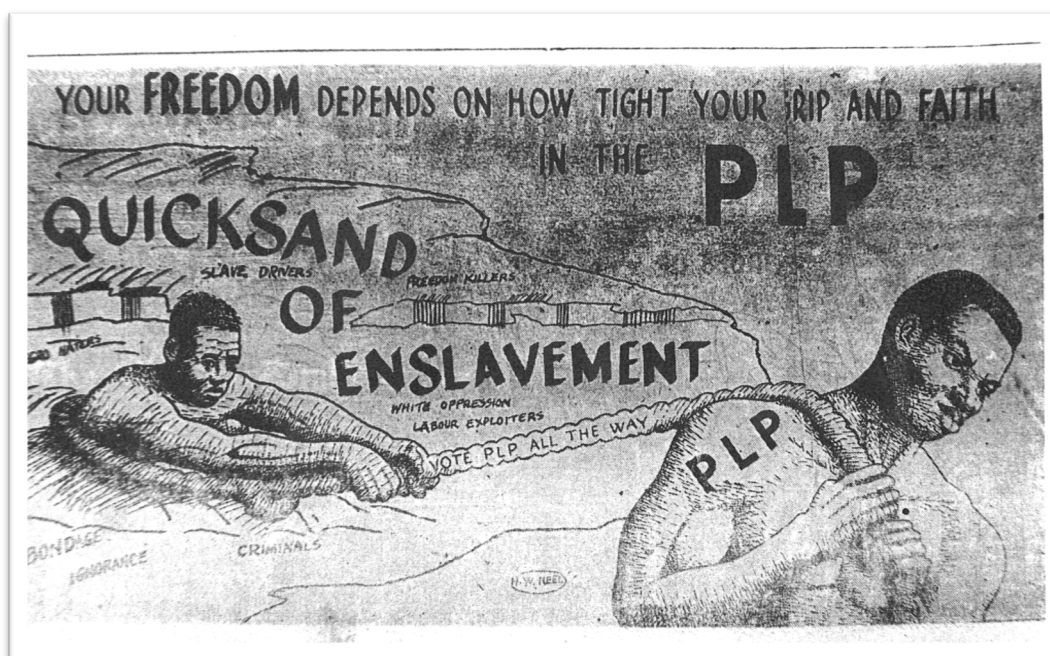


Figure 4: “Your Freedom Depends on How Tight Your Grip and Faith in the PLP”, Nassau Herald, September 1957, Courtesy of The National Archives of The Bahamas

Again, a dark-colored man was pictured as suffering through discriminatory systems of the “white” minority or Bay Street oligarchy in similar master-slave dialectic. Using symbolic imagery of “quicksand of enslavement”, the darker-colored man was pulled from forces of

⁵⁰ “Your Freedom Depends on How Tight Your Grip and Faith in the PLP,” *Nassau Herald*, 28 September 1957.

“white oppression”, “labor exploiters”, “freedom killers”, and “negro haters”, among others. The PLP was depicted as the heroic figure with the potential of metaphorically breaking the chains of tyranny and pulling the weak “Bahamian Negro” out of suffocating forces of racial oppression and economic exploitation at the hands of the white minority.

In a new era when opposition to the “white” Bay Street regime was being voiced, Pindling was able to capitalize on the Bahamian history of enslavement and present-day racial inequalities in a way that defined their political identity as liberators from white power, racism, and modern-day slavery. The metaphor itself linking the legacy and memory of slavery to the socioracial inequalities in the modern mid-twentieth century was an understandable one for many. Furthermore, the majority electorate proved to resonate with it through their consistent reelection of Pindling over the next twenty-five years. In both cartoons, there was an emphasis on the need for the Bahamian public’s active involvement in the pursuit of outdoing the evil deeds of Bay Street power. The first asked the readership to boycott the Bay Street regime, and in the other, to vote in support of the PLP. Just as the man was compelled to take initiative by grabbing one end of the rope, individuals experiencing racial and socioeconomic discrimination were encouraged to take initiative to combat forces of enslavement by voting the PLP into government. The deliberate political function of the symbolic rhetoric of slavery then becomes apparent for my analysis, as Pindling was attempting to bring symbolism into the consciousness of the popular electorate.

During this period of Pindling’s emergence and political rhetoric of slavery, there were many individuals who continued to apply such metaphorical language in their discourse of political and socioeconomic divisions in Bahamian society. In one instance, a resident of

Adelaide Village, located on the southern region of New Providence wrote, “But times have changed! Oh, how they have changed! I’ve got a little education...I have learned Freedom.”⁵¹

The author continued his letter by paraphrasing the mentality of Bay Street power holders refusing to educate “black bastards” because education would be considered dangerous to the maintenance of their slavery-like oligarchic rule.⁵² The final line of the author declaring that he has “learned Freedom” could be interpreted as an association with the slavery-themed language of freedom and liberation by Pindling’s political projects. Written in 1962, several years after Pindling’s political cartoons and other motifs of slavery came into existence, it would not be far-fetched to assume that the symbolism and metaphors of slavery became readily applied and expanded upon by the popular electorate through this political forum.

The Figure of Pindling as Black Moses and The Story of Exodus

The use of symbolic rhetoric of slavery by Pindling continued into the 1960s with the addition of the biblical narrative of Exodus. The narratives metaphorically linked the political plight and struggle of black freedom in The Bahamas to the biblical account in Exodus of the liberation of Israelites from the system of slavery by the Egyptian Pharaohs. Moreover, Pindling began being metaphorically characterized as the “Black Moses”, liberator of “black” Bahamians from the entrenchment of Bay Street slave masters.⁵³

In one of the final PLP conventions prior to the January 1967 election, the keynote address was given to religious leader Reverend Dr. H. W. Brown who “urged all delegates to Go Forward” and “likened the struggle for freedom in The Bahamas to the exodus of the Jews

⁵¹ “Letters from Adelaide Village No. 1: We Know Freedom Is Every Man’s Right”, *The Nassau Herald*, January 7, 1962.

⁵² “Letters from Adelaide Village”, *The Nassau Herald*, January 7, 1962.

⁵³ Ian G. Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 120; Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 96. Strachan notes that the figure of a Black Moses and the rhetoric of Exodus also appealed to the broader African-American black power and African/Caribbean black nationalist movements during the twentieth century. For example, movements led by Martin Luther King Jr, Malcom X, Haile Sealssie, and Marcus Garvey.

from slavery in Egypt".⁵⁴ Reverend Brown specifically pointed out parallels of the story of the emergence of PLP leadership to that of Moses, and the reluctance of some "black" Bahamians, to "travel the road to freedom" and "trust God" like the Israelites struggled to do.⁵⁵ Almost in denial of the irony, the election date announcement of January 10, 1967, correlated with the tenth day of the first month when God freed the Children of Israel, and Reverend Brown and the PLP joyously capitalized on this during their campaigning.⁵⁶

Even after the 1967 victory, the PLP Government continued to utilize the Exodus motif as a means to sustain its symbolism within the consciousness of the Bahamian black majority. As noted by Bahamian scholar Ian G. Strachan, all elections until their defeat in 1992 were carefully called on dates that could be numerically added up to ten.⁵⁷ Moreover, the language and personality cult of PLP Leader, L. O. Pindling as the Black Moses who was able to outdo the pharaohs of white Bay Street and bring forth the Promised Land of justice for and representation of the Bahamian "black" majority, was perhaps the most poignant means by which the PLP-Pindling government was able to remain in power.⁵⁸ Even today, his legacy as the Black Moses and the understanding of the PLP in this biblical language continues to be used in popular imaginations.⁵⁹

Pindling's symbolic rhetoric followed a similar train of thought in relation to the liberation of the "black" majority and banishment of the "white" elite power holders. Moreover, the rhetoric allowed Pindling an additional forum to mold familiar histories or narratives of slavery into the political construction of Pindling as the heroic figure for the "black" majority.

⁵⁴ *The Nassau Herald*, December 4, 1965.

⁵⁵ *The Nassau Herald*, December 4, 1965.

⁵⁶ Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation*, 122; Exodus 12: 1-3.

⁵⁷ Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation*, 122.

⁵⁸ Strachan, *Paradise and Plantation*, 121. Strachan identifies that the creation of the image of Pindling as the "Black Moses" was significantly helped by a narrative account by a PLP cabinet member that was widely read by the public and a standard text in Bahamian schools in the 1970s.

⁵⁹ *Tribute to Sir Lynden Oscar Pindling*, dir. The Vendetta Group, YouTube, January 9, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xP4ENCBUmBM&feature=player_embedded. Posted by "(Video) Tribute to Sir Lynden Oscar Pindling," *TheBahamasWeekly.com*, January 9, 2010.

As in the previous section, individuals have followed similar symbolic language of the Exodus narrative and Pindling as “Black Moses” in public discourse. Biblical narratives of redemption and liberation were easily identifiable and relevant among a primarily Judeo-Christian faith-based majority, and the metaphoric links to similar struggles in Bahamian society were not difficult.⁶⁰

In an article written by an anonymous author, “The Common Man”, in 1966, the currency of the Exodus narrative and political symbolisms of slavery were noted:

The mighty Pharaohs, like the power structures of today in The Bahamas and other parts, were determined to keep the Israelites in this condition. For the Egyptian to remain rich and powerful, the Israelites had to continue to be their slaves – working in their homes; working as builders; and working as laborers of all kinds. Egypt was maintaining her power on the backs of the Israelites, but whatever riches flowed into Egypt, very little of it found its way down to the Israelites... But, if we wish to break this spell, to go forward, and be free, for we shall be free, let us vote as we should, and wait no longer to do so than in the coming General Election! It is now that we should work to see that the Negroes are in the majority and are now capable of holding the majority of positions in this country.⁶¹

The framing of Pindling’s political action and unified “black” struggle in the symbolic language of Exodus, and more broadly, slavery, continued to engage a powerful form of political rhetoric and brought the classic themes of bondage and deliverance.⁶² The word Exodus literally means “the way out”.⁶³ With the climatic drowning of Pharaoh’s army at the hands of Moses and his staff stretched over the Red Sea, the Israelites escaped. There was a two-fold celebration of the escape and liberation for the enslaved Hebrews, and also for the eradication of Pharaoh’s tyranny.

⁶⁰ Strachan, *Paradise and Plantations*, 120; Callahan, *The Talking Book*, 96.

⁶¹ “My Country, Past and Present. My Children, We Shall Be Free!”, *The Bahamian Times*, July 23 1966.

⁶² David William Kling, *The Bible in History: How the Texts Have Shaped The Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 204.

⁶³ Callahan, *The Talking Book*, 96

The framing of Pindling's legacy within the personality cult of "Black Moses" resonated then and continues to resonate in the present day among popular classes of Bahamians.⁶⁴ The final consequence of this resonance is how the symbolic rhetoric identified the Bahamian nation as belonging to the liberated "black" majority. Through this rhetoric a popular understanding of the Bahamian nation emerged. This understanding has reasoned that the nation has become "black" in composition due to previous historical bondage and perceived deliverance through Pindling, and the monumental transition from "white" minority rule. With strong resonance and following from the majority of the population, and endorsement by government authorities, the cultural framework of a "black" Bahamian national identity and simplistic racial binaries within Bahamian was able to grow.

The Later Years: Television and Radio Broadcasts

Carrying on into the late 1970s and 1980s when the political party was well seated as the ruling government of The Bahamas, Pindling continued to use symbolic rhetoric of master-slave narratives of the black Atlantic slave tradition and the biblical narratives of Exodus in cyclic television and radio broadcasts during election seasons. Most notably, the content of such broadcasts included 1976 African-American television mini-series *Roots*, dramatizing the multi-generational legacies of slavery in the American South, and a 1956 movie *The Ten Commandments*, retelling the biblical narrative of Exodus.⁶⁵

Although such broadcasts entered the Bahamian scene at a time when the PLP Government had been using slavery metaphors for roughly two decades, dissemination

⁶⁴ Pindling's obituaries referred to him as the "Father of the Nation" and the "Black Moses". See for an example: Jayson Blair, "Sir Lynden Pindling, 70, Prime Minister Who Led Bahamas to Independence," *The New York Times*, August 27, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/27/world/sir-lynden-pindling-70-prime-minister-who-led-bahamas-to-independence.html>.

⁶⁵ *Roots* (1977), dir. William Blinn, David L. Wolper, Stan Margulies, M. Charles Cohen, Ernest Kinoy, James Lee, Marvin J. Chomsky, and Et. Al. (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007), DVD. The *Roots* television series premiered in 1977 and was an internationally acclaimed success. Adapted from book: Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976).

continued via mandatory showings for government school children in the late 1970s, repeated broadcasting on the sole state-owned television station, and airing of selective audio clips over the sole state-owned radio stations throughout election seasons in the 1980s. The purpose of maintaining political power and furthering longevity were identical to that used in the past; however, after twenty years of repetition, the symbolism and racial dichotomy had long since been recognized by the Bahamian electorate.

This symbolic construction of Bahamian societal conflict into racial binaries and a defined “black” Bahamian body continued to be problematic as it related to an oversimplification of the more nuanced shades of color, differentiations of color and class, and an uneasy transplant of an American racial dichotomy into a Bahamian context. Moreover, the evidence of internal corruption in the Pindling government and continued economic entrenchment of Bay Street began to be exposed in local and international media.⁶⁶ The media attention made a mockery of Pindling as a liberator of the black majority and his promise of bringing black empowerment and benefits to all Bahamians. Correspondingly, opposition to Pindling’s leadership and symbolic rhetoric of slavery grew to more pronounced levels with the exhaustive use of slavery in the 1970s and 1980s. The symbolic power of slavery as a form of political manipulation also began to be called into question by previous supporters of Pindling’s regime. I confer that this time period gives further evidence of the problems of the “Black Bahamas” framework and the extent to which there was a growing opposition to its ideology at the same time that it was being adopted into popular consciousness of many (often lower class) others.

The mini series *Roots* was adapted from the 1976 family history novel by Alex Haley who provided a multi-generational understanding of the brutality, oppression, and hypocrisy of

⁶⁶ See pages 68-69 of this chapter.

the American institution of slavery.⁶⁷ The narrative was captured through the eyes of Kunta Kinte, a young African man brought to the United States through the slave trade, other slaves he came in contact with, and his future daughter, grandson and great-grandchildren.⁶⁸ As a separate entity, the television series of *Roots* was a tremendous stepping-stone whereby non-black and African slave-descended populations within the global community were able to visualize and reflect on the most basic components of the institution of slavery; that is, the multi-generational loss of freedom and agency solely due to the “black” color of one’s skin. Yet as a tool for the state project of the PLP Government, *Roots* provided an additional public forum to promote more of the same: a powerful connection to the oppression of slavery among the Bahamian “black” majority, and solidarity against the “white” elites who had run the country prior to majority rule.

The oversimplification of Pindling’s articulation of blackness as a monolithic group, or rather, as a unified “black” Bahamian body that excluded “white” or non-black outsiders was even greater than before in the context of the dissemination of *Roots*. An example of the discomfort felt by an intermediary light brown-skinned Bahamian woman by the name of Ingrid when she disdainfully recalled, “When Pindling sent all the damn schoolchildren to the Dundas Theatre to watch *Roots*” as being the most powerful memory of cultural exclusion and separation from darker-colored Bahamians.⁶⁹ In her recollections of being bussed along with fellow classmates to watch consecutive episodes of *Roots* in the late 1970s, she felt disconnected from the rows of other children that were primarily black. Even though her skin exposes a degree of African ancestry, its lighter tone and her wispy or “soft” hair features point towards an additional mixing of European ancestry that brings ambiguity and a disconnect from a darker “black” Bahamian. The dilemma of Ingrid’s personal experiences reinforces that a unified

⁶⁷ Phillip P. Wander, "On The Meaning of "Roots"" *Journal of Communications*, 12th ser., 27, no. 4 (1977): 64.

⁶⁸ Wander, "On The Meaning of "Roots"", 64.

⁶⁹ “Ingrid”, Interview by author, June 2011. Emphasis placed by me.

“black” Bahamian identity constructed by the PLP government left segmented non-black and non-white Bahamians out of the mix.

Ingrid’s experiences also demonstrated the problematic nature of Pindling’s symbolic rhetoric through racial binaries of “black” and “white”. Transplanting *Roots*, an enactment of American-based slavery, within a Bahamian context of political rhetoric, overlooked fundamental differences between the demographics of each region. While the geographical regions share a basic history of the same institution of slavery, The Bahamas (and the Caribbean at-large) has fundamentally distinct understandings of race and color. The varied histories and more elaborate socioeconomic stratification of color that has emanated from the presence of a black majority versus a black minority was a crucial difference in the transplanting of *Roots* in a Bahamian context. Overriding these fundamental differences made the simplification of a unified “black” Bahamian body and the exclusionary “white” or non-black outsiders even greater than before.

The final media outlet used by Pindling to engage in a symbolic association of present-day inequalities in The Bahamas to the memories of slavery involved the replay of *Roots* and *The Ten Commandments*⁷⁰ on the airwaves of the government-owned radio and television stations during election seasons in the mid to late 1980s and early 1990s.⁷¹ The frequent play of specific sound bytes from these films over the radio airwaves during election times further exposed how common slavery motifs of master-slave relationships and biblical narratives of Exodus remained closely connected to the political craft of the PLP Government. These final media outlets also demonstrated how the Pindling Government continued to consolidate a unified “black” Bahamian national identity that was not operative in the realities of Bahamian

⁷⁰ *The Ten Commandments* (1956), dir. Cecil B. DeMille, Aenas MacKenzie, Charlton Heston, Yul Brynner, and Anne Baxter (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2006), DVD.

⁷¹ “Ingrid”, Interview by author, June 2011; “Ann”, Interview by author, August 2011; “Fredrick”, Interview by author, June 2011; “Samuel”, Interview by author, June 2011.

society. Moreover, through allegations of drug corruption and little tangible changes in the infrastructure or discriminatory practices of earlier years, the Pindling Government exuded unreliability and irresponsibility. The majority of the popular classes remained in positions of disadvantage. Thus, while doubts in the PLP government were mounting, Pindling's political projects continued, even taking on more virulent forms.

The state-owned and monopolized radio and television network, Zephyr Nassau Sunshine (ZNS) frequently aired advertisements for video cassette recordings of *Roots* and *The Ten Commandments* for sale at a local record store.⁷² The advertisements comprised of film sound bytes of Kunta Kinte being whipped with a cord of animal hide, and Moses exclaiming "Let my people go!" Even in 2011 when I was conducting my research, Bahamians and others who were living in The Bahamas during this time had vivid memories of the content of these advertisements due to its intense airplay and repetition.

One of these recollections came from a fair-skinned or "lily white" naturalized Bahamian woman who explained to me, "I recall hearing these commercials every morning when getting ready for work, in my car, and anytime – day and night – when my radio was on."⁷³ Not surprisingly, the interviewees with the most vivid recollections of the racially charged sound bytes came from light brown and fair skinned members of Bahamian society, who would have felt the most ostracized upon hearing and seeing them. Yet, in my opinion, what was more at stake in the dissemination of the advertisements was the unfair and simplistic racial dichotomy for "white" brutality and "black" suffering. It concealed much of the class-based warfare in operation through the PLP and Bay Street rule.

The specific selection of Kunta Kinte being whipped from *Roots* further protracted Pindling's key themes of black suffering and bondage as a symbol of discrimination, and

⁷² "Ann", Interview by author, August 2011. The family that owned the record store was also closely connected to the PLP, including one in the capacity of ZNS general manager who later served as the Minister of Health.

⁷³ "Ann", Interview by author, August 2011.

deliverance from the hands of Bay Street by Pindling's government. The repetitive sound of the whip on Kinte's bare body as he screamed in pain made this particular symbolic political rhetoric even more virulent than slavery motifs used in the past. With the power of radio and constant repetition throughout days and nights of election seasons, these sounds and symbolic rhetorical devices were deliberately created for mass consumption. Unlike other forms such as cartoon imagery, the audiovisual and audio broadcasts on the state-owned television and radio channels throughout the 1980s and early 1990s were nearly inescapable. Repeated at such an exhaustive rate, the symbolic rhetoric served to remind the Bahamian electorate of what the Pindling government wanted them to remember – that is, the primary issue of binary white repression and black oppression mentality. Harking on the dehumanization and imposed brutality that Kinte experienced as a slave, the potent rhetoric was a desperate plea by Pindling to keep slavery and its symbolism resonating in their consciousness.

The repeated commercial sequence also returned to the familiar heroic biblical narrative of Exodus and Pindling as the Black Moses, fighting to bring the disadvantaged majority into an improved way of living. The audio recording repeated the famous echo of Moses, "Let My People Go!" Conflating this biblical rhetoric with notions of black familiarity and solidarity between Pindling and the electorate, and shared resentment toward a certain kind of black suffering through the repeated echo of slave whippings supported the fundamental archetype of Pindling's political rhetoric.

Thoughtfully and purposefully, the violent and emotional scenes were chosen for their dramatic ability to resonate in the consciousness of the majority electorate. Furthermore, combining primary slavery motifs of master-slave narratives and the Exodus narrative into one mass media blitz implied a recycling of the overall virile and potent form of symbolic power of slavery in the final years of Pindling's rule. The media message worked to reinforce already

cemented metaphors of slavery and bondage, yet its virility waned with the growing suspicions of corruption within Pindling's government. In its aftermath, the virulent symbolism actually worked against the metaphors of Pindling and his Government as the political force to bring deliverance to the disadvantaged majority.

Aftermath of Slavery Motifs: Frustration Versus Die-Hard Loyalty

In the aftermath of Pindling's exhaustive use of slavery motifs throughout six successive general elections from January 1967 until August 1992, Bahamians were marked by either frustration or die-hard loyalty to the regime.⁷⁴ The existence of a tandem of both repulsion and wholehearted allegiance to Pindling's political projects demonstrated how its symbolic rhetoric did not hold true for all Bahamians. Nonetheless, I would argue that the political rhetoric and symbolism of slavery already reached the level of popular consciousness. On the basis of successive electoral victories over the span of a quarter of a century, the construction had resonated and been cemented into the worldview of many. Thus, frustration with the political rhetoric was not only evidence of the growing bankruptcy of its symbolic power, but also a frustration of the popular consciousness of those who were deceived by Pindling's framework.

In an article published by *The Nassau Tribune* in July 1992, a journalist reported on the voluminous phone calls to the newspaper company complaining of weekly broadcasts of "racially inflammatory programs" on the ZNS television station.⁷⁵ The journalist wrote about a certain caller, "she resented the fact that they thought she was so ignorant that they could 'try to hide their incompetence behind race'". Several other callers also complained about their

⁷⁴ Michael Craton, "Bay Street, Black Power, and the Conchy Joes : Race and Class in the Colony and Commonwealth of the Bahamas, 1850-2000," in *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, ed. Howard Johnson and Karl S. Watson (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998), 86.

⁷⁵ "Bahamas Resent Racial Movies," *Nassau Tribune*. July 23 1992, 4A.

resentment of being targeted as poorer, dark-skinned Bahamians. “You tell Pindling for me,” shouted one caller to the journalist, “I might be black, but I ain’ fool.” Another caller stated, “Yes, I am grass roots and I am poor, but I got my senses.” The journalist further summarized other callers’ reasons for the anger:

They were angry because they knew that they were being insulted; they felt that they were being treated like fools; they wanted to know what racial problems in the fifties and sixties had to do with unemployment, crime, missing money from the Treasury, and all the other problems that plague the Bahamas today.⁷⁶

The journalist went on to communicate his or her own opinion:

Pindling won once before on the race issue, and he may be trying to use it for another win during desperate times. [...] The truth of the matter is that they [the PLP] are a bunch of walking hypocrites and anyone who follows them is indeed a fool.⁷⁷

In all of the commentary involved in this article, including the statements by callers and the journalist him or herself, there was a common frustration with Pindling’s age-old symbolic rhetoric of slavery and continued use of racial conflict as the primary issue for contestation. Even for the callers whose backgrounds identified them as part of Pindling’s main support group of darker-colored, lower class, poor, or grassroots, had become disillusioned by the symbolic rhetoric, referring to it as unfair manipulation. By all parties, the common frustration derived from Pindling’s failure to engage in an accurate diagnosis of discriminatory frameworks that continued to disadvantage the majority of the darker colored lower classes and grassroots Bahamians.

In contrast, the symbolic rhetoric waged by Pindling still proved to hold resonance and powerful meaning to a large gamut of darker-colored, lower class Bahamians. Even today, long after Pindling’s eclipse from politics, the PLP’s most devoted supporters derive from older

⁷⁶ “Bahamas Resent Racial Movies,” *Nassau Tribune*. July 23 1992.

⁷⁷ “Bahamas Resent Racial Movies,” *Nassau Tribune*. July 23 1992,.

generations of Bahamians who lived through Bay Street's more blatant entrenchment and shared in celebration when Pindling assumed power in 1967. Despite the limited benefits or changes in socioeconomic dynamics, the physical transformation of the political sphere was sufficient for them to cling to Pindling's ideals, and appeal to the symbolic rhetoric of slavery that his political projects adhered to. A number of persons I came in contact with in my research reflected on this die-hard loyalty that many individuals in their grandparents' generation continue to have. The legacies of "The Bay Street Days", the heroic narrative of Pindling's emergence as leader, and the victorious transformation of The Bahamas eclipse any critique of his leadership or of his symbolic rhetoric as the emancipator of the darker-colored, popular classes of the "black" majority. "My Grammy will *always* be PLP," one friend of mine declared to me in a casual conversation one day, "just because she actually lived through it all, she will never change her vote".⁷⁸ Another said to me, "The 'old set' will *always* vote PLP. Nothing you can say or do will change their minds."⁷⁹ And lastly, a friend of mine whom I will call "Kenneth" further opened up to me about the reasons for a seemingly relentless core of PLP supporters in older Bahamian generations:

I live in Grant's Town, the place where former slaves actually lived and their generations still live. It's one of the poorest and most isolated settlements on the island. No other political party even tries to touch them. Because of slavery and Bay Street, they will always remain die-hard loyal followers of the PLP.⁸⁰

For a particular electorate that remains on the margins of socioeconomic class in The Bahamas, the initial transformation of government from that of a "white" minority" to one of Bahamians that looked like the majority of Bahamians was sufficient enough to feel empowered and loyal to Pindling's regime. Even without significant improvement to their livelihood, the notion of a

⁷⁸ "Corinne", Interview by author, May 2011.

⁷⁹ "LeShae", Interview by author, August 2011.

⁸⁰ "Kenneth", Interview by author, August 2011

“Black Bahamas”, that the nation belonged to the “black” majority, was sufficient enough to take hold of Pindling’s political rhetoric and its symbolic power of slavery.

Summary

The symbolic power of slavery in Pindling’s political rhetoric lasted throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Its symbolism was relevant enough to historical foundations of Bay Street entrenchment that it created a strong electorate contingent, which gave Pindling and the PLP political longevity from 1967 to 1992. Nonetheless, Pindling’s symbolism translated beyond political realms to understanding dynamics in the everyday lives and popular consciousness of the Bahamian majority. The meanings of being Bahamian have been delineated as a racial binary. “Black” Bahamians are symbolically incorporated into the national or cultural belonging to a Bahamian identity through Pindling’s political and collective rhetoric of black victimization and later black empowerment and vindication through Pindling’s electoral victories. Lighter-colored Bahamians, alternatively, are symbolically excluded through Pindling’s political rhetoric of white oppression, brutality, and relentless desire to exploit the darker-colored Bahamian majority for their own personal and business-related interests.

The symbolism has become complicated due to the presence of many intermediate groups that cut across racial and class lines both before and after Pindling’s emergence as leader of the PLP, rise to power in 1967, and national independence in 1973. Neither “white” nor “black” groups, which fit neatly in Pindling’s master-slave narratives, were as clear-cut as the symbolism intended for the Bahamian majority to believe. Many intermediate groups fell between the cracks, phenotypically and racially ambiguous to an exacting racial dichotomy. Moreover, the narrative was not an accurate historical interpretation of Bay Street entrenchment. For over one and a half centuries, both local and colonial officials of light

complexions sustained hegemony after slave emancipation that was much like the systems of discrimination in the previous slavery era in the colony. Nonetheless, a significant number of near-white Conchy Joes also struggled under the regime and, alternatively, some middle class darker Bahamians were able to achieve relatively high levels of education and financial security that separated them socioeconomically from the broader “black” majority as the colony moved closer to mid-twentieth century.⁸¹

The symbolism also has become complicated due to its deliberate function to manipulate an idealistic image of Pindling and the PLP. Through its political symbolism, the notion of Pindling as the central force to save or emancipate the Bahamian majority from longstanding discrimination and marginalization by the Bay Street elite has been mass consumed by Bahamians for nearly half a century. Even decades after Pindling departed from rule, the symbolic framework continues to have its resonance in the consciousness of many Bahamians. The symbolism ineptly glazed over the elite black power, wealth, and social privileges that became part and parcel of Pindling’s regime. The corruption of the drug trafficking trade, increase in national debt, and lack of capital improvements to the infrastructure of poorer black communities throughout the final decades of the twentieth century alluded to the more manipulative and deceptive elements at work in Pindling’s political projects. As much as the symbolism appealed to the plight of the black majority, the real actions of Pindling’s government did not prove to adhere to this image. Instead, the idealist image served the basic political function of attaining political power and legitimacy, with limited dedication to such groups after election times.

Lastly, Pindling’s symbolic framework became complicated in its implicit transference from political discourse into one of national discourse; or rather, the building of a “black”

⁸¹ See pages 28-29 in Chapter 1.

political entity that has translated into the building of “black” Bahamian national identity. Used as an emblem of what the Pindling government conceptualized as the fundamental conflicts in Bahamian society, the political symbolism has become even more powerful. The rhetoric of a unified blackness and shared black struggle grew as a part of national discourse. It operated at the simplified level of black inclusion and white exclusion in the new independent era of The Bahamas. Using Geertz and Turner’s theories of symbolic rhetoric as “plastic dramas” in the context of Pindling’s political and nationalist projects, what is noted is an artificial construction of binary racial oppositions that was not fully supported by the nation’s history or present-day socioeconomic and racial dynamic.

The projection of slavery-themed symbolic rhetoric by the Pindling Government was a deliberate “cultural performance” of what they wanted Bahamians to conceptualize as the sole marker of cultural and socioeconomic divisions in Bahamian society. While the symbolism has its basis in very real patterns of black oppression and inequality throughout the history of The Bahamas, the inverse reaction of black empowerment with white resentment and exclusion had its limitations. It had its limitations in providing a comprehensive image of what it means to be Bahamian, and the recognition that Pindling and the PLP were unable to fully transform the discriminatory class-based systems that brought about the construction in the first place.

Chapter Four

On Being Bahamian Today Popular Imaginations of a “Black” Bahamian National Identity

When describing oneself as a Bahamian, one either flashes one's skin color as a badge of identity, or else one defends oneself for not having that badge; for in the popular imagination, to be Bahamian is to be black.¹

Chapter Objectives

The popular belief “to be Bahamian is to be black”, as exposed by Bahamian anthropologist Nicolette Bethel in 2003, has persisted until the present-day. Through the words of Bahamians both young and old, and an amalgam of skin colors and shades that comprise the nation, this chapter gives voice to the challenges of non-black Bahamians who continue to struggle to ‘feel Bahamian’ or to culturally identify with being Bahamian. Putting into context the evasive memory of white oligarchic rule by Bay Street and continued economic advantage of many “white” or “light skin” or otherwise non-black Bahamian families in the present-day, the challenges for non-black Bahamians to orient themselves into an orbit of cultural inclusivity can be easily understood. It could even be argued that these challenges are deserved or even expected given the circumstances. Yet, studying the relative nature of this phenomenon provides a greater learning opportunity in place of declaring its reality as objective fact.

This chapter continues the work of my thesis on the political constructions of a “black” Bahamian national identity, yet does so in a more contemplative light. Using Benedict Anderson’s conceptualization of a nation as “an imagined political community”, I contend that

¹ Nicolette Bethel, "On Being Bahamian," *Blogworld: Nicolette Bethel's Blog* (web log), May 26, 2003, <http://nicobethel.net/blogworld/2003/05/on-being-bahamian/>.

many Bahamians have popularly imagined a Bahamian identity that is “black” in nature.² Through Anderson’s discussion of “institutions of power”, notably print capitalism that permits the conceptualization of a nation, I contend that mass production and long-term use of Pindling’s political projects allowed for fictive commonalities and shared narratives of blackness to take hold. Bahamian national identity is dependent on this consistent othering, whereby fictive commonalities of legacies of slavery are linked to contemporary “white” privilege by *all* African-descended Bahamians as a result of being deliberately promoted in Pindling’s era of rule.³ Nonetheless, the progression of a popular imagination of any national identity, including a “Black Bahamas”, requires conscious effort by both political and non-political actors to maintain its existence.⁴

Unlike prior chapters, the goal of this chapter is to explore features of the construction of a black orientation of Bahamian national identity rather than exhaust the evidence for the construction through the history of Bay Street and 1967 majority rule. With or without resolve of the origins factored in the construction of a “Black Bahamas”, the perception of Bahamian national identity as being black in character underscores many aspects of Bahamian society. It dictates discourse and dialogue, and often times it molds relationships among Bahamians of various backgrounds and shades. Whether it is through the evidence of history, present-day context, or by the political project of the Pindling government in the earlier years of nation building, this conceptualization has come to fruition. Using Evelyn Higginbotham’s theory of the metalanguage of race, blackness has become a euphemism to discuss other social and power

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6. Anderson goes on to describe the nation and its traditions as “invented”, and held together by “narratives” that identify a unique entity that is “inherently limited and sovereign. See other nationalist theorists also see nation-building as an invention or construction, quoted in Bethel, Nicolette. “Engendering The Bahamas: A Gendered Examination of Bahamian Nation Making, or National Identity and Gender in the Bahamian Context” *The International Journal of Bahamian Studies* [Online], Volume 12 Number 0 (28 February 2008).

⁴ Robert John Foster, *Nation Making: Emergent Identities in Postcolonial Melanesia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 5, quoted in Bethel, Nicolette. “Engendering The Bahamas”, [Online].

relations within the Bahamian national community.⁵ The notion that “race has constituted a discursive tool for both oppression and liberation” is duly embraced within the popular consciousness of a “black” national identity.⁶ Nonetheless, the means in which race has become a dominant discourse in understanding power differentials and claims of national belonging conceal the processes through which it was created. The symbolic power and black political rhetoric of Pindling’s government continues to have currency in the construction of a “black” Bahamian national identity.⁷

The following chapter shares experiences of what this black orientation, or popular imagination of a Bahamian national identity as a “black” identity continues to look, and feel like to Bahamians who do not fit the stereotype. These experiences will foster an investigation of the implications and complications of this singular “black” identity for a Bahamian people of diverse identities, backgrounds, and shades.

Meanings of a “Black Bahamas”: Cultural Identity Versus Citizenship

The central feature of the construction of a “Black Bahamas” is differentiation between a “black” Bahamian national identity versus a denial of legal Bahamian citizenship to non-black individuals. Following Anderson’s theories of an imagined community, many Bahamians have grouped themselves into a like-minded community or nation through the black race. There are automatic exclusions and inclusions of the larger Bahamian population due to this conceptualization. The process of othering, then, alludes to development of the popular notion

⁵ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 251; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980). Higginbotham uses Foucault’s concept of “technologies” which are “used to signify the elaboration and implementation of discourse (classificatory and evaluative) in order to maintain the survival and hegemony of one group over another.” In the case of Bahamian national identity, the technologies of race have allowed race to become a euphemism to discuss continued economic inequalities of Bahamian society.

⁶ Higginbotham, “Metalanguage of Race”, 252.

⁷ Higginbotham, “Metalanguage of Race”, 267, 268. “Race signified a cultural identity that defined and connect them as a people, even as a nation.” “power of race to mean nation. Race as the sign of perceived kinship ties. Crucible of the Middle Passage”

that Bahamian national identity has separated from the legal status of Bahamian citizenship to a more limited conception of the cultural tie of blackness. While citizenship incorporates persons who have been born in The Bahamas to a Bahamian parent(s), through naturalization, or application at the age of eighteen (if born in The Bahamas to non-Bahamian parents), the notion of Bahamian national identity is much less inclusive.⁸ It discounts legal markers of citizenship as deserving of the label of *being* Bahamian through ascribing to “black” cultural norms which include a shared African heritage, a shared dialect, and set of mannerisms, diet, method of rearing children, among others. Like in Anderson’s theories of imagined communities and intent of symbolic political rhetoric, fictive commonalities present themselves as metaphoric exclusion and inclusion of certain individuals. For this reason, challenges arise among the white, “light skin” or otherwise non-black Bahamian. For even though they have legal citizenship, they are often polarized from the black cultural orientation of Bahamian national identity.

Many of my interviewees elaborated on this distinction of Bahamian national identity apart from Bahamian citizenship, recognizing the paradox of citizenship for virtually all non-black Bahamians, yet they are not accepted into the cultural framework of being Bahamian. In the first instance, James, a brown-skinned professional reflected on the very obvious separation of the two classifications:

On a simple level, being Bahamian is being born in the Bahamas – that’s on a simple level. Identifying with being Bahamian means identifying with the culture of the Bahamas.. But we have this notion – it’s pretty explicit – that *black Bahamians are the real Bahamians*. And white Bahamians? Where you come from? Whitey! Foreigner!⁹

⁸ Nationality Act, No. 18 of 1973, *The Statute Law of the Bahamas, Revised Edition, 1987* (Nassau: Bahamas Government, 1987), Chap. 178, 2126-39.

⁹ “James”, Interview by author, May 2011.

James capitalized on the central point of the cultural distinctions of Bahamian identity being authentically “black” whereas any alternative form is seen as unauthentic. With good reason, Trevor, who could be described as a “bright skin” or “Conchy Joe” Bahamian, continues this cultural distinction: “Black is pure, real Bahamian, and white is sort of Bahamian.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, these are notions of a “Black Bahamas”.

Even cultural perception of the symbolism in the black color of the Bahamian national flag reflects this notion of a “Black Bahamas”. Despite the official symbolism of the black color to signify the “strength and vigor of a united people”, many use the lack of color as evidence to support this popular imagination of being Bahamian is to be black.¹¹ Black color represents the racial unity of the black people of the Bahamas. Humorously, but also poignantly touching on an important point, Lyall, a dark brown college student of economics, gave an interpretation that is widely shared among the Bahamian majority. In his dialogue he is referring to me, the interviewer:

Bahamian identity *is* the black identity. The black color is said to mean the unity of the people, but it really means the unity of the *black* people. So, you [are] probably in the ocean or something...¹²

Omar, also present for the conversation, reaffirmed Lyall’s explanation of the alternative or informal interpretation: “Don’t run from that fact. You are not represented on that flag.”¹³

Returning again to the separation of non-blacks from a cultural identification of being Bahamian, the popular interpretation of the symbolism of the Bahamian flag demonstrates how

¹⁰ “Trevor”, Interview by author, July 2011.

¹¹ *National Symbols*, The Bahamas National Archives, section goes here, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.bahamasnationalarchives.bs/National%20symbols/index.html#1>. From the report: “The Flag is distinctive in its color and design. The black equilateral triangle is superimposed on a horizontal background made up of two colors on three equal stripes – aquamarine, gold, and aquamarine. Black, a strong color represents the vigor and force of a united people; the triangle represents the enterprise and determination of the Bahamian people to develop and possess the rich resources of land and sea. The colors of the flag are symbolic of the land, sea, and sun.”

¹² “Lyall”, Interview by author, July 2011. When Lynden says “you”, he is referring to me, who would be identified as a “white” Bahamian. Similar remarks were made by: “Lashae” and “Tristan”, interviews by author, August 2011.

¹³ “Omar”, Interview by author, July 2011.

even national symbols, which officially serve as representations of all individuals with Bahamian citizenship, continue this paradox. Despite the formality of something as basic as a national flag, the common interpretations of its symbolism are taken to further discredit any non-black Bahamian from culturally belonging to a Bahamian national identity.

In The Corporate World

One of the environments I found best represented the cultural imagining of the singular “black” Bahamian national identity in the reflections of my interviewees was the workplace or corporate world. These small work environments offered a microcosmic look into the dynamics of majority “black” and minority “white” relationships on a daily basis – and a breadth of specific examples during my fieldwork. In particular, for twenty-one year old Michael, a Conchy Joe, the frequency that he must defend his, for lack of a better word, ‘Bahamian-ness’, to the persons he encounters at work attests to this truth of the notion of a “Black Bahamas” in the broader national framework.

Michael, a Bahamian national, is employed in the public sector. His job requires him to move to and from various departments and locations in the capital city of Nassau, New Providence throughout the day. The experiences of alienation cannot be mistaken. On a typical work day, Michael wears a uniform with a very large and prominent Bahamian flag embroidered on the upper left side shoulder. At first glance the majority of Bahamian employees of these offices automatically assume that he is employed by the United States. This phenomenon frustrates Michael:

After two years, people are still seeing me for the first time. One guy intentionally calls me ‘TSA’ [Transportation Security Administration]. It’s like the mentality that because I wear this style of uniform, I must be affiliated with US Customs. People continually ask,

“US Immigration?” No, Bahamian Immigration! It’s *here* [pointing to the flag on his uniform] and it’s here on my two IDs.¹⁴

Michael is employed by the Bahamian Government, and the national flag on his uniform overtly broadcasts his probable Bahamian nationality, but because of his lighter skin tone, he does not fit the mold of what the popular imagination to be Bahamian is. What is ironic about the continual rejection of Michael’s Bahamian identity by his darker-colored coworkers is that his skin tone is of a bright or bronze color, is reminiscent of a Conchy Joe, or “white” Bahamian of a darker hue. In other places like The United States, Michael’s skin color or racial identity would at least be questioned, and more easily lumped into the racial category of “black” due to his noticeable “mixed” coloring. In The Bahamas, Michael’s skin tone is still categorized as “white” or non-black. There are varying degrees of whiteness and darkness with different meanings and levels of cultural inclusivity within Bahamian constructions of racial identity. Through a process of lumping together all non-black elements in this Bahamian context, he is, therefore, initially not perceived as Bahamian.

Even in Michael’s main office, the conversations he has with a female co-worker continually cause him to defend his identity:

She’ll pull out a line, “What you eatin’ for lunch?” I tell her, “I was going by Imperial to get a conch snack.” And she would reply, “What you know about conch?” And I’ll go, “I consume more conch than anyone on this island.”, an exaggeration but still something to show her the ignorance of her question. Or sometimes during the day she’ll say, “White people don’t do stuff like that” or “You don’t know about that” or “You don’t do that”. Me and her are cool though, even though she racially abuses me all day.¹⁵

¹⁴ “Michael”, Interview by author, July 2011.

¹⁵ “Michael”, interview by author, July 2011. “Imperials” is popular restaurant for local Bahamians, located in the downtown area. It is frequented by (but not limited to) predominantly Bahamians of the working class due to its bargain prices.

Although the provoking personality of Michael's colleague and her manner of doubting or denying his knowledge of popular aspects of Bahamian culture due to his whiteness, the motivations of her questioning can find its framework in the mentality of a "Black Bahamas". The consumption of the mollusk, conch, and buying lunch at a popular local restaurant (Imperials) are classic Bahamian rituals. By her automatic deduction that he should not be taking part in such activities, she is similarly subscribing to this idea that he does not fit the culturally "black Bahamian" mold of persons who stereotypically do. The microcosm of events in Michael's workplace alludes to similar experiences of other white, light skin, or otherwise non-black Bahamians. In Michael's case, the cycle of questioning and defending of Bahamian-ness was set in a casual atmosphere with humorous dialogue. Although subtle and hardly malicious, her comments and those that Michael receives when in his uniform still produce feelings of cultural exclusion and polarization.

In trying to understand more about Michael's class parity with his coworker, I asked him to provide in a follow-up discussion following our interview:

She made a lil' less than me. She is a clerk in the [--] Department, and made about \$18,000 a year, I think she would be somewhere around lower middle class [category] – so just a little separation but not too much. I make a lil' over \$20,000 a year and I'd consider myself middle class.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the incursion of class difference between Michael and his co-worker demonstrates that lower class individuals who have little social interactions with non-black

¹⁶ "Michael", Email message to author, April 2011. I asked Michael direct questions about he and his co-worker's socioeconomic class standing and work experience within the department that they shared. Although I did not direct his answers, Michael would most likely not speak of class difference in such formal labels in his everyday discourse.

Bahamians are more inclined to purport the imagination or popular consciousness of a “Black Bahamas”.¹⁷

On The Streets

Another environment that I found conveys an imagining of a “Black Bahamas” is on the streets and other public places in the capital city of Nassau. Quite a number of my interviewees shared their experiences of being singled out in public places due to their non-black physical orientations. As a non-black Bahamian, I have also had similar experiences on numerous occasions. Perhaps targeted, harassing comments made to “white” or non-black Bahamians do not strongly support the overall “black” cultural orientation of Bahamian identity and polarization of non-blacks; yet, I would argue that they are not far from lending such support. In the experiences shared by my interviewees, they often use examples of being called out for the lighter colors of their skin as moments that make them more conscious of their non-blackness and sometimes uncomfortable in public places as a result. Therefore, although these street taunting’s have occurred as isolated incidents or from isolated groups of people on the street, the broader patterns of their occurrence in the public sphere lend quite well to a discussion of the modes in which a “Black Bahamas” is popularly imagined, expressed, and felt.

In one case, an individual by the name of “Malcolm” confessed, “I hate driving down the road with my windows down because of all of the comments that are screamed.”¹⁸ When I asked him if he could give any examples of these comments he mentioned the very common “white boy!” remark, which could be interpreted either as a joking remark or one that is more hostile or discriminatory. In the context of being yelled “white boy!” on a street by a stranger, though, I would argue it hostility – or, in the least – mockery of not being “black”. Sometimes

¹⁷ “Michael”, Email message to author, April 2011. Also, Michael’s coworker had approximately three more years of experience in the office than he did. Thus, she most used her seniority status to continue to ask the kinds of provocative questions that she did towards Michael.

¹⁸ “Malcolm”, Interview by author, May 2011.

Malcolm also receives comments like, “White boy! You think you’re better than everyone else, eh?” This comment further develops what persons on the street are thinking when they see someone who is not black. Ironically, Malcolm’s skin color is of an intermediary shade of “white” and black”.¹⁹ Like Michael, Malcolm is put into the polarizing category of “white”. A prejudgment is made that Malcolm, because of his light brown colored skin and the fact that he owns or drives a vehicle, is distrustful, and conniving in character.

These quick judgments reflect something greater as to what whiteness means, - in this case, greed, feigned superiority, or corruption -, and how it is quickly seen as suspect. Whiteness is in need of being made a mockery of in order to reassert that, at least culturally, blackness holds ultimate power and authenticity in the public spheres of Bahamian society.²⁰ In this context, Malcolm’s light brown skin is being protested for its superiority or higher economic class in the imaginations of lower class individuals on the streets. In this case, Malcolm’s family does belong to an upper middle class segment of Bahamians. Yet, light colored skin does not always infer wealth.

In another case, a much fairer-skinned “white” Bahamian named “Stefan”, gave examples of what he has had called out to him in public.²¹ One time a man shouted out, “You like that hey white boy?” as Stefan was exiting a liquor store with alcohol in hand. In our conversation Stefan was adamant to provide times he received these comments and responded back to defend himself and protest the derogatory remarks made toward him, or rather, his whiteness. In one instance, Stefan told me that he stopped walking, looked the person in the eye, replied, “Yes I do”, and went on his way. Unlike Malcolm, Stefan tends to express his frustrations when such taunting or bullying occurs through responding versus trying to block the sound or ignore it.

¹⁹ This again demonstrates the limitations of black and white racial labels within The Bahamas.

²⁰ See Higginbotham for a discussion of race as a “double-voiced discourse” or “global sign...that speaks about and lends meaning to a host of terms and expressions, to myriad aspects of life that would otherwise fall outside the referential domains of race”, such as class.

²¹ “Stefan”, Interview by author, June 2011.

Another occasion, when Stefan was walking towards the annual Junkanoo street parade with his mother, a “black” individual called out to his mother, “Where you think you goin’ lil’ ole’ white woman?”²² It was late evening and Stefan and his mother were walking through an isolated alleyway before arriving at a more central location in downtown Nassau. Stefan responded, “Bey, that’s my mummy ya know?” The interchange was tense to say the least, as a larger group of men appeared behind the first individual in a gang-like manner. On this occasion, Stefan and his mother quickly walked away, feeling a sense of insecurity and being unwilling to escalate the situation by entering into a dialogue with them. While the individuals involved in this incident seemed to be a group of delinquents using race to spark an argument or threat of violence, it draws parallels to other, more casual street calling that still intentionally demeans others through their whiteness. Stefan, despite being fair-skinned is not a member of the upper middle-class, nor does his family own large property attributable to families with his similar coloring that are descendants of Bay Street stalwarts.

In other dialogues, including some that I have experienced myself, “white” Bahamian females are called out at in public in a less threatening manner. Nonetheless, this form of catcalling reveals a similar pattern of attributing certain representations of higher class or sexual attractiveness to whiteness.²³ I have known some women to be called “Snowflake!” while driving in their cars, or: “Snow White” or “Aye, white girl! Look here!”. This kind of street-calling is more along the lines of gendered street harassment that includes verbal and non-verbal abuse whereby “black” Bahamian men are trying to elicit attention of a sexual nature.²⁴

Public places are also environments where other non-black Bahamian minorities, such as Chinese-Bahamians, feel the culture of exclusion and alienation. Cheyenne, for instance,

²² “Stefan”, Interview by author, June 2011.

²³ In my personal experiences, non-black females are more likely to receive more frequent and obscene catcalls than their darker counterparts.

²⁴ Even so, reasons why “white” Bahamian females are being called out for their whiteness reveals another complexity: that whiteness is still praised or celebrated as being more beautiful or attractive than blackness

shared her experiences of being a child of a dark-skinned “black” Bahamian mother, and a light-skinned Chinese-Bahamian father. Both of her parents were born in the capital city of Nassau and attended Bahamian schools, yet her father is often discredited as a foreigner or an illegal immigrant. The following extract provides her reflection on this aspect of her life:

One time when I was leaving the grocery store with my Dad and someone asked him, “Why don’t you go back to where you came from?” He just responded, “Yeah, okay, but it’s just around the corner!” He’s really good at brushing it off. To others he’ll say, “Guess what? I was born in PMH [a public hospital] just like you”.

It’s like being Bahamian has evolved around solely black Bahamians. Like the revolution of identity has been based on one, and the others being secondary. Both my parents are Bahamians, but one person’s claim to being Bahamian is discounted because of his ethnicity.²⁵

The exclusions of Cheyenne’s father in public spheres may be at first due to his Asian heritage, and the even less common understanding that non-European and non-African peoples are a part of the Bahamian nation, yet still it reflects the more basic elevation of blackness. For explicitly not being “black”, much like the other experiences shared prior, Bahamians are not welcome or considered Bahamian “enough”. Non-black Bahamians, then, are often the butt of jokes or verbally harassed on the streets due to the centrality of blackness ingrained in Bahamian culture – and the simultaneous disempowerment of whiteness in public forums in Bahamian society.

Throughout these examples of street calling within public spheres, class was understood and constructed racially. The territoriality serves as a means to protest the continued economic privileges of a white minority, whereby any “white”, “light skin” or non-black Bahamian is attributable to continued Bay Street economic privilege. Moreover, it serves

²⁵ “Cheyenne”, Interview by author, June 2011. PMH is an acronym for Princess Margaret Hospital, a public hospital in New Providence.

as a means by which such individuals are seen as suspect within the Bahamian community. Through the process of othering, the definitive marker of the “Black Bahamas” framework, such persons are antithetical to Bahamian national identity. Nonetheless, the discursive power of race operates to obscure more diverse systems of power.

Contradictions of Blackness

The “Black Bahamas” construct also creates fixed meanings of blackness and whiteness that closes off Bahamians who might not fit into the dichotomy. In this fixed image of blackness, even “black” Bahamians are polarized in society for not fitting into the cultural modes of what constitutes being a “black” Bahamian. As in the experiences shared by my interviewees Eddina and Evan, when one is not accepted as “black” enough by one’s peers for various reasons, a similar thought process occurs whereby they are separated from a perceived authentic Bahamian identity.

I interviewed Eddina and Evan together on their lunch hour at the health facility where they work. They both have had challenges in being stigmatized as “white”, or correspondingly, “not real Bahamian” despite sharing dark skin tones. In Evan’s experiences, not being “black enough” related specifically to his decision to attend university in Canada, and returning to his home country with a newfound desire to be involved in academic and professionally stimulating environments as opposed to getting involved in delinquent activities which he calls “ghetto”.

I get told that I’m not a real Bahamian all the time. I have to defend it all the time. My family has always criticized me because I want to better my education and want to learn. They make fun of how I’ve changed since I’ve gone to school. They call me “white boy” or that I don’t “act black” anymore. When it really when it comes down to it, though, I’m just not at all “ghetto” anymore. I could have easily gotten into that lifestyle if I didn’t have a desire to learn...²⁶

²⁶ “Evan”, Interview by author, June 2011.

For Eddina, not being “black” or Bahamian enough was perceived by her work colleagues, and pertained specifically to her manner of speaking.

I remember being at work one time and one of my co-workers asked me if I was Bahamian. So I told them “yes”, but you know in my head I was wondering, “Well why are you asking me that?” ...Then another co-worker standing nearby asked the other, “Well why did you ask her that?” So the first co-worker was like “Well, you know she have nice hair and she’s talk good.”²⁷

The primary feature of their anecdotes outline how this systematic rejection of whiteness within the popular constructs of Bahamian national identity operates even beyond skin color, to a careful regulation within the Bahamian “black” community itself. In Evan and Eddina’s experiences alone, both are either mocked or questioned about their Bahamian identity. In Evan’s case, this mockery is explicitly made through the teasing label of “white boy”. I would argue also, that because Eddina is singled out for speaking a form of standard English (with tinges of American and British influence) rather than a localized dialect, and soft hair (she has some Amerindian ancestry), she too, is being recognized as someone who has “white” features in the eyes of her coworkers.

Yet, no pun intended, there is a dark side to this way of thinking. Despite the inclusion and celebration of all elements “black” in Bahamian cultural and national identity, it seems there is little positive association, expectation, or pride in blackness as an entity. This turns the “Black Bahamas” framework on its head and exposes it for its contradictions. Furthermore, it questions the confidence of the majority of the Bahamian people in their nation. Returning to the examples given by dark-skinned Evan and Eddina, certain aspects of their lives caused them to be labeled as “white” or its synonymous label as not a culturally authentic or “real” Bahamian. Yet, these aspects of choosing education over delinquent behavior, having “nice” hair

²⁷ “Eddina”, Interview by author, June 2011.

over “bad” hair, or talking “good” over not talking “good”, have nothing to do with having “white” or phenotypically light skin and everything to do with a low expectation and imagination of what blackness is.²⁸ Furthermore, it reflects a mentality that the “black” nature of the Bahamian majority is naturally doomed for failure, and lacks pride in their appearance and capabilities.²⁹

Understanding this perceived low confidence in “black” Bahamians by “black” Bahamians themselves make the rationale for the polarization of “white”, “light skin” and classified “other” non-black Bahamians even more complex.³⁰ For some Bahamians, not all, it is almost as if common discourses which single out a person’s whiteness (either through their skin tones or behaviors) on the streets, in the workplace, or even within the nuclear family, *feigns* a sense of empowerment. That is, that the act of polarizing a non-black Bahamian boosts the confidence and esteem that would otherwise not be present. In other words, holding onto a “Black Bahamas” framework could be a means of expressing the insecurities of the Bahamian “black” majority, using the weapon of blackness in cultural and public realms, the only realm where they feel that they have control.

Part of the low self-esteem that many black Bahamians hold for themselves, and the contradictory “lighter is better” mentality that still exists in the same framework that exalts blackness in public spheres validly rests upon the continued economic dominance of “white”

²⁸ Higgonbotham, “Metalanguage of Race”, 255. Such constructions of race categories in moral categories of “good” and bad continue to exemplify race as a metalanguage. The author writes, “Race impregnates the simple meanings we take for granted. It makes hair “good” or “bad”, speech patterns “correct” or “incorrect”, discursive representation and construction of social relations.

²⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 11. This notion of an inferiority complex among black populations within postcolonial societies was popularized by French psychologist, F. Fanon, who claimed that it the direct result of economic subordination and the internalization or rather “epidermalization” of this inferiority as being directly related to one’s color of skin.

³⁰ In The Bahamas, the lack of self-esteem of “black” Bahamians. It is popularly known as the Black Crab Syndrome in The Bahamas whereby it is rooted in Bahamian culture that “black” persons prevent each other from succeeding in a similar way to which crabs climb on top of each other to prevent them from moving. Anthropologist Nicolette Bethel has also named it a “bottom of the ladder” syndrome. See Bethel’s for more detail: Nicolette Bethel, “On Race,” *Blogworld: Nicolette Bethel's Blog* (web log), May 26, 2003, <http://nicobethel.net/blogworld/2003/05/on-being-bahamian/>.

Bahamians and expatriate workers. Yet its weakness is in its perception that financial gains are limited to the stereotypical “white” Bahamian minority and that non-white Bahamians cannot reach the equal level of achievement because of their non-white color. While it is no coincidence that “white” groups in The Bahamas often make up the wealthiest segments of society, I would argue that there is less of a defined color bar, as many middle class black and brown families and other intermediate groups continue to cut across color and class lines. The distinctions of who are and who can be financially successful is not predicated on color or perceived racial markers. These dichotomies, what can or cannot be ascribed to an individual or group due to their “white” or “black” color run rampant in Bahamian society, and increase the complexities of a continued approbation of a “Black Bahamas” framework.

Voluntary Polarization

It would be unfair to leave the examination of this framework without pointing to ways in which non-black Bahamians continue to voluntarily remove themselves from the dark-skinned majority, therefore rejecting possibilities or alternatives of a more inclusive Bahamian community and national identity. I believe the difficulties I experienced in confirming particularly elderly non-black individuals as interviewees for my research feeds into a sub-culture of indifference that many – but not all – fair-skinned Bahamians embody. When I asked these individuals if they would be comfortable discussing their memories of the coming of Majority Rule and the Pindling era, I received many raised eyebrows, shakings of the head, and flat-out rejections on the basis that The Bahamas had been ‘ruined’ during this time period. Through this negative outlook of what The Bahamas has become through a change in leadership, whether it be because this leadership is “black” in nature or through other non-racial ways in which the Pindling Government failed to meet their expectations, there is a sense of resignation within these individuals as to their role in the future of the nation.

I have felt a sense that many “white” Bahamians have intentionally enclosed themselves within their own private spheres while growing up in Nassau. In this way, much of the de facto segregation of the earlier colonial and post-colonial eras within The Bahamas has remained, with the continuation of historically “white” residential, commercial, and social spheres. Many later generations of “white” Bahamian families have continued to reside and function in society in the similarly closeted fashion of their parents and grandparents, and surrounding neighbors and friends - a matter of social conditioning. I remember hearing my pastor give a sermon that asked the question, “How many of us will invite a “black” Bahamian into our homes, eat with them and share your lives with each other?”³¹ He was exposing the tendency for “white” Bahamians of today to work alongside “black” Bahamians in the public, corporate sphere and the rarity that these interactions create a more intimate level of relationship.

While I do not want to over-generalize that all “white” Bahamians practice this self-segregation, there is certainly enough evidence of this to warrant implications of their separation. Their tendency to separate offers another layer of reason as to why “white” Bahamians themselves do not have a sense of belonging to the Bahamian national entity. After all, many are not connected to the Bahamian majority in daily life beyond work or church obligations. This voluntary polarization could also serve to support how the “Black Bahamas” framework of thinking about who is culturally accepted as being a true Bahamian has come about. Some supporters of the Pindling Government who defend the “black” nature of their political party have blamed the lack of desire of non-blacks to be involved or associated with blacks.³² The argument for the reason why “white” Bahamians aren’t seen as having a

³¹ This sermon was given at a non-denominational church on the island of New Providence in the early 2000’s.

³² “Solomon Urges Whites To Enter PLP Kingdom”, *The Nassau Tribune*, April 28, 1989. “Someone said we ought to stop and include the white Bahamians,” Dr Eugene Newry told an all black audience. “That’s nonsense! Nonsense! Looking around the room, I see not a single Anglo-Bahamian.”, for an example of this.

legitimate claim to Bahamian identity is due to their own lack of desire to claim this identity and stop living separate lives from the Bahamian “black” majority.

Another potential reason why many elderly “white” Bahamians do not feel Bahamian today is because they do not orient themselves as having an independent national identity separate from the former British colonial identity that they once had and benefited from. Prior to 1973, all persons born in The Bahamas received British passports and were legally considered British.³³ Dr. Gail Saunders brought this insight to light when interviewed on the concept of the “Black Bahamas”.³⁴

Yet, there is an even bleaker side. Apart from the supposed ‘natural’ continuation of self-segregation in private spheres, or through a closer connection to a British identity than an independent Bahamian identity, there is another mode of understanding the voluntary polarization of fairer-skinned Bahamians. It lies in the ideological disconnect to the Pindling Government, and even the unprovoked or unjustified transition to a “black” majority government. Through these rationalizations there grows strong resentment to how The Bahamas has become a “Black Bahamas”, and demonstrates that there is still much ignorance to be relieved before a more inclusive imagining of the Bahamian people can be imagined.

In my discussions with a particularly elderly fair-skinned Bahamian couple, John and Josephine, they both shared an inability to understand how light-skinned Bahamians are continually stigmatized as evil or, in the least, alienated in comparison to darker-skinned Bahamians. Josephine in particular commented, “They keep drumming up the past as if they’re the only ones that were ever slaves. I mean, we have slavery all over the world.” Her critique baffled me, as my previous chapters have outlined the strong corollary of inequalities of the

³³ As a colony of Great Britain, local populations within The Bahamas were not independent citizens until it received independence on July 10, 1973.

³⁴ Gail Saunders, Interview by author, June 2011. She noted, “They did not see themselves as Bahamian. They saw themselves as British and felt safe under the British crown”.

black Atlantic slave tradition in The Bahamas that transferred into post-slavery eras up until the rise of the Pindling Government. Moreover, it is an unfair claim that the existence of other forms of slavery around the world makes slavery an acceptable system of domination. The triviality in which she described the use of slavery by darker Bahamians was distressing, and reflects again the dangerous set of beliefs that many members of Bahamian “white” community have with regards to denial of “black” Bahamians attempts to come to terms with their history of slavery, and continued disadvantage economically today.

A common feature of the “Black Bahamas” construct is the well-founded belief that “white” Bahamians do not acknowledge the wrongdoings of the Bay Street oligarchy of the nation’s early history. In the early 1990s a former Bay Street member, Sir Durward Knowles, made the first and only public apology to the Bahamian nation for the corruption and discrimination of the age-old Bay Street regime.³⁵ Nearing his 95th birthday, I had the opportunity to speak to Sir Durward about his apology, the backlash he received. “People were calling my house left, right, and center,” he said. “I had to retract my statement and only apologize on behalf of my family [instead of for all of Bay Street].” Ever since he made this statement and went on to create a non-profit organization, One Bahamas, that encourages and celebrates the diversity within The Bahamas, he feels he has been somewhat ostracized in the “white” community.³⁶ “Many of my old friends don’t talk to me anymore, but I have made so many new ones of all different colors because of it.”³⁷

The strained relationships that happened as a result of Sir Durward’s apology reveal some of the inner workings of the “white” Bahamian community. Agitation by his remarks envelops the widely shared denial, or lack of empathy for the unjust nature of the former Bay Street political and economic rule, and denies the continued economic advantage enjoyed by

³⁵ Durward Knowles, Interview by author, July 2011.

³⁶ Durward Knowles, July 2011.

³⁷ Durward Knowles, July 2011.

their descendants in the present-day. Although forms of economic power have expanded to include non-white members of society, there remains a deep-seated – and duly recognized – sense that corrupt minority power is still in existence today. By refusing to apologize or offer remorse over what went on during the long history of “white” minority oligarchic power, these individuals continue to polarize themselves and serve as evidence for the over-generalized, anti-white agenda of a “Black Bahamas” framework.

Summary

The pivotal function of a “Black Bahamas” framework is to polarize non-white members of Bahamian society and keep them from being seen as legitimate Bahamians. Yet as this chapter has shown, there are many features within this framework that involve introspection and participation from Bahamians of all backgrounds and colors that allow it to continue to be in operation today. While darker-skinned Bahamians often make antagonistic comments to their lighter-skinned counterparts on the streets, in the work place, or even at the nucleus of the family, there also is a strong fixation within social communities to invite or welcome this through their confinement in spheres with people that, for the most part, look like themselves.³⁸

The stain of Bay Street power still remains. It remains in the resentment from the darker majority, the arrogance of Bay Street’s children, and in the deep-seated belief in the attitudes of color hierarchy, or the concept of “lighter is better” that wreaks havoc in many Bahamians of all colors. All of these features block a more productive and unified Bahamian people, cognizant of the existence of the many colors that exist in our islands and not engaging in acts of polarization.

³⁸ Examples include rotary clubs, membership-only Nassau Yacht Club, country clubs, certain churches, and nightclubs, many of which were constructed and maintained by members of the Bay Street oligarchy in the early twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the crises of identity that many non-black Bahamians feel are calling out for a new way of imagining who does and does not belong. One young woman said to me, “I just don’t feel like this is my country.” And another, “Yes, I was born and raised on this island. Yes, I’m white. I’m no less Bahamian.” And another, “I’m just as Bahamian as they are.”

Below the superstructures that provide the groundwork for the operation of a “Black Bahamas” framework are those particularly younger Bahamians – like Michael, Malcolm, Cheyenne, Eddina or Evan – who have no affiliation or attachments to this way of thinking. We are left wondering why these views continue to be strong, if they can ever be alleviated. Moreover, we wonder if there are higher powers in the political realm that also contributed heavily in its construction.

Conclusion

I want to see the day when Bahamians of all shades dwell now and again on the tragedy of slavery – not to grow bitter or ashamed or self-righteous, but to keep it in memory as a cautionary tale of what must not be allowed to happen again.¹

The popular imagination of a blackness as intrinsic to Bahamian national identity would not have materialized to the extent that it has without the endurance of the political projects of the Pindling Government. The slavery-infused political constructions of the Government had a totalizing effect on the ways in which the broader Bahamian populace understood both race and class in solely racial terms. Such constructions were recognized as manipulative tools to conceal fallacies of the Pindling government including extensive internal corruption, mismanagement of funds, and limited resource allocation to improve the conditions of the poor. Additionally, they obscured the continued prevalence of an elite minority of light-skinned Bahamians along with a growing middle and upper class populace of Bahamians of all shades.

This study has elucidated the means by which race and blackness were articulated by the Pindling Government to create a defective image of “black” unity and vindication from the country’s past. Moreover, it has delved into the contributions of this defective political narrative in constructing a popular sense of black pride and vindication, and an imagination of Bahamian national identity with “black” insiders and “white” outsiders. The policies of the Pindling government did not change or solve pre-existing social divisions of race, color, and class. Instead, claiming race as primary in the political constructions of Pindling’s twenty-five year rule negated such intricate divisions of power as needing to be undone. Under a newly independent Bahamian nation, the totalizing effects of such ideologies of race were even further

¹ Patricia Glington-Meicholas, "Uncovering the Bahamian Self," *Yinna: Journal of the Bahamas Association for Cultural Studies (BACUS)* 1 (2000): 108.

problematized, as it failed to consider the possibilities of a unified national entity of Bahamians of all shades in the future.

Main Findings

The modes of power exercised by Bay Street in the post-emancipation era of nineteenth century laid the foundations for a consistently under-resourced Bahamian “black” majority still relevant today. Through evidence of Bay Street power in the franchise, privileged property ownership, residential spaces, and education, a superstructure of a racial system of discrimination was shown. Nonetheless, this superstructure also existed side-by-side with a growing middle class of Bahamians of darker and lighter shades who grew to enjoy certain privileges of the franchise and advanced education in the twentieth century. Such modes of power patterns a more nuanced socioeconomic composition of the Bahamian population that continues to be relevant today.

More prominently through the affluence of members of the Pindling Government and continued prominence of Bay Street in commercial sectors, the patterns of upper and middle class-based divisions within both “white” and “black” groupings of Bahamians proved to be similarly proportioned to previous eras in Bahamian history. The historical incursions of both class and race in the modern-day continue to bemoan the discursive constructions of Bahamian society and its restrictions of Bahamian national identity in purely racial terms.

Nonetheless, the non-racial ideologies of local and colonial elites provided a moment of introspection at the very obvious racial means through which Bay Street power operated on a larger scale. The denial of race as a problematic factor in the disadvantaged realities of most of the population not only demonstrated the rigidity and tenacity from which elite “white” power was maintained, but it also alluded to the continuation of similar contempt when political leadership transferred to Pindling and his PLP Government. Patterns of indifference and lack

of understanding for the political transformation to a more representative government remain in the present-day. They reason for self-segregation and isolation of certain upper middle class lighter-colored Bahamian families. Moreover, they contend as to why the construction of a “Black Bahamas” is met with resistance. The understanding that both class and race are intrinsically a part of the makeup of Bahamian society in this paper, however, demonstrates that neither should be overlooked. Doing so is detrimental to future progress for Bahamians of all shades and class backgrounds.

The articulations of blackness by the political projects of the Pindling Government from 1967-1992 provided a trajectory of social analysis that concealed class and race interplay. Through exhaustive motifs of chains and representations of the “white” minority as slave masters in various mass media forms, the Government was able to mold whiteness as the cause for Bahamian economic and socioeconomic disparities. While the symbolism has an understandable readability to diagnose the bigoted light-skinned Bay Street elite, the evidences of widespread drug corruption and mismanagement of government resources have slighted Pindling’s political rhetoric into one of deception. Rather than execute plans to bring improvement to the qualities of life for most of the underprivileged majority, this rhetoric served primarily as a political tool to bring Bahamian masses into the PLP’s collective web.

The symbolic power of Pindling’s rhetoric demonstrated how a shared “black” identity and suffering became absolute truth for much of the darker-colored poor. Despite the blatant corruption of Pindling’s regime, political power in the hands of the darker-colored government was substantial enough for Pindling’s six consecutive electoral victories throughout his twenty-five year rule. Blackness created fictive kinship ties, and the existence of the first “black” government assumed that Pindling’s government would have the best interests of the darker-colored majority at heart on the basis of a shared race. Nonetheless, the pitfalls of Pindling’s

government demonstrated fundamental elements of class difference and class interests within Bahamians of various shades at large.

The implications of Pindling's political projects on the popular imagination of a Bahamian national identity were also considered throughout this study. In my ethnographic research on how individuals understand and make sense of their personal Bahamian identity to the broader notions of what is culturally or popularly accepted as "being Bahamian", blackness was always used as a primary marker in the latter. In discursive forms within public spaces and work environments for instance, blackness was seen as a weapon and a feigned sense of empowerment against resent for non-black Bahamian others. In many respects, much of the discursive use of race was tied to underlying elements of class that were very much in dialogue with the use of race in the political agendas of old. Nonetheless, the degree of inequality is more or less the same as it had been in the past. I am often left wondering what kinds of expressions of Bahamian national identity and notions of racial and class-based power would have taken hold if it were not for the Progressive Liberal Party Government of 1967-1992. If a more representative government had taken hold, would the intricate power be exposed?

Areas for Future Study

My investigation is not without its shortcomings; however, it is my hope that future studies can be undertaken which account for these limitations. One of these areas includes the incorporation of the gender. Although hardly recognized, much of the contestations of power that I follow involve groupings of men, and women's involvements are rendered quite silent. It would be beneficial to include a sub-category of this nature to bring matters of the nation, discrimination (both acted upon and lived through), political reform, and popular consciousness of Bahamian national identity through this lens of gender.

Another possible area of study that should be engaged upon is that of the status of older and newer immigrant populations that have fashioned themselves as ethnic groupings beneath the racial binary of “white” and “black”. How is their degree of belonging or non-belonging within Bahamian society attributable (or not) to political constructions of the past? Moreover, how are light-skinned Greek and Chinese Bahamians considered “passable” within “white” Bahamian groupings, yet newer immigrants of darker-colored Haitian Bahamians are often received with antagonism? What are the limits to a cultural elevation of blackness through these additional analytical platforms?

Lastly, a more thorough analysis of the ways in which matters of class, race, and color are experienced in relation to other parts of The Bahamas would be incredibly useful. For brevity, Nassau, New Providence (the capital) was the main geographic focus of my study. Nonetheless, the peripheral islands of the Bahamian archipelago did not experience the same version of “white” power through the Bay Street archipelago, nor were they some of the mass consumers of Pindling’s political projects due to their isolated locations. Thus, in the very least, a discussion of Bahamian inflections of relationships of the center and the periphery could greatly enhance my discussion.

Significance of Study

At the core of this investigation is a call for real change within Bahamian society under socioeconomic and cultural terms. A transformation from the multivariate and discriminative systems of Bay Street was certainly needed. Nonetheless, change is still needed. The transformation of political leadership through Pindling did not effectively bring about real reform within the socioeconomic fabric of society and how class and race underpin much of the nation’s identity problems today.

Speaking to my fellow Bahamians, we must recognize our history. We must recognize it for its pains of slavery and wrongdoings of Bay Street, and the psychological scars that remain through resentment and polarization of non-blacks in cultural and national terms. We must also recognize our history of late, where some of both lighter and darker colored Bahamians have remained at the highest levels of economic prosperity. We must understand how class continues to underscore our society in a way that has been shafted by overly simplified racial rhetoric. And even in the ashes of our history, there exist Bahamians of many colors and shades, children of Bay Street, children of intermediate groups, and children of the disadvantaged and disenfranchised. The political rhetoric of old was perhaps a leading cause for the ways in which race is used to fundamentally oppose certain groups today, but it is we the people that maintain it. I do not have the magic remedy to purport utopic ideals of complete racial harmony and socioeconomic ideals for all. Nonetheless, I challenge our Bahamian society to reflect on our history. Become perplexed like I was at the beginning of my research. Leave thinking about the means from which we can move forward into the twenty-first century and depart from the framework of a “Black Bahamas”.

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