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In: *New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 60 (1986), no: 3/4, Leiden, 167-202

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BAHAMIAN LABOR MIGRATION, 1901–1963

INTRODUCTION

Migration in search of economic opportunity, along with small size, dependency, poverty, and the plantation legacy, has come to be recognized as a fundamental Caribbean reality (Segal 1985: 135). Indeed, the propensity to migrate is seen not only as an individual coping response to the chronic lack of opportunities at home, but also as a societal stabilizer since migration serves as a “safety valve” and provides for the infusion of much needed capital through remittances (Marshall 1982b: 465). The recent proliferation of Caribbean migration studies attests to this growing recognition (Stinner, de Albuquerque and Bryce-Laporte 1982; Brana-Shute 1983; Richardson 1983; Rubenstein 1983).

For all this effort, however, there is not a single published account of Bahamian labor migration (Collinwood 1981: 285).¹ Undoubtedly, much of this neglect is rooted in the persistent disinterest of West Indian scholars in the region’s Northern perimeter, whether by reason of geographic separation, cultural exclusion (Americanization), assumed historical differences, or Bahamian self-ostracism from the Caribbean Commonwealth community (Lewis 1968: 308ff). This omission is unfortunate because the Bahamas migration experience is rich in Caribbean commonalities – rural depopulation, recurrent migration and return, obligatory remittances, contractual recruitment of labor – yet manifestly distinct to warrant a special chapter. Most notably, since the tourist and international finance boom of the 1960’s the Bahamas have become a net importer of labor (Marshall 1982a: 9) and immigration, not emigration, has surfaced as the country’s most pressing

socio-economic issue largely under the guise of "Bahamianization" (Segal 1975: 107).

THE SETTING

The Bahama Islands form an archipelago that stretches some 760 miles, from the coast of Florida to near Cape Nicholas in Haiti.² The 29 islands and several hundred rocks and cays are scattered over 100,000 square miles of sea, and have a total land area of 5,400 square miles. Twenty-two of the 29 islands are inhabited, the largest being Andros (2,300 square miles) and the smallest Spanish Wells (.5 square miles). The islands are usually long, narrow and flat and composed mainly of calcareous sand, low ridges and lagoons and swamps.³ They have been ravaged periodically by hurricanes and because they are low-lying, damage to crops and settlements has been generally severe. Soils are thin and poor, and with the exception of parts of Eleuthera, Andros and Abaco, are incapable of supporting intense agriculture. Rainfall is often sparse, ranging from 25 inches a year in the Southern Bahama Islands to about 60 inches a year in the Northern Bahama Islands.

In the contemporary Caribbean, the Bahamas enjoy a level of affluence second only to Bermuda and other British dependent territories, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. The territory is destination for two million annual tourists who contribute nearly US \$3,000 in per capita income to each of the estimated (1980) inhabitants (Collinwood 1983: 500). Generous tax concessions and banking secrecy laws have made the islands the third largest off-shore international finance center (Ireland 1979: 55). In addition to a large petroleum refining and transshipment terminal on Grand Bahama, the Bahamas boasts the third largest "open registry" fleet in the world (Europa 1985: 1173). Between 1977 and 1983 total government expenditures increased markedly from \$US 163 million to \$US 383 million.⁴

The labor imperatives of this dramatic postwar expansion have transformed the Bahamas into a receiving society for expatriate (British, U.S. and Canadian) professionals and entrepreneurs and West Indian (primarily Haitian) construction and service workers. This pattern closely parallels the demographic reversal in the U.S. Virgin Islands intensified by the post-Castro 1960's tourism and construction boom (De Albuquerque & McElroy 1982). The contemporary Bahamas situation, however, is clearly discontinuous with the past. Akin to other British colonial dependencies, the post-emancipation economy

of the Bahamas was characterized by faltering monoculture and meager subsistence alleviated periodically by brittle export revivals and artificial wartime conditions. Against a backdrop of chronic depression, these short-lived economic upturns only reduced rather than reversed the long-standing outflow of wage labor.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines recurrent migration from the Bahamas from 1901 to 1963, the date of the territory's first restrictive Immigration Act (Segal 1975: 109) and shortly before the 1966 phaseout of formalized metropolitan (United States) recruitment of Bahamian labor. The analytical framework is taken from Mitchell (1978) who argues that migration patterns must be understood within the interacting contexts of both the "setting" and the "situation." The former focuses on the overall economic, political, and administrative structures which condition the migration experience, while the latter embraces the particular circumstance that surround actual or potential migrants. This framework contrasts with the migration models commonly found in the literature,⁵ but follows the livelihood adaptation approach in recent works (Carnegie 1982; Richardson 1983).

Given this approach, we have attempted to sketch the general economic history of the archipelago, discuss the fragility of the Bahamian resource base, examine the circumstances under which labor migration took place and the influences of colonial policy and regional labor demand on the movement of Bahamians. To do this, we have relied on a combination of demographic statistics and historical data contained in British colonial dispatches, Annual Reports of Resident Justices and Commissioners on the various islands, the Colonial Annual Reports, and a variety of other archival materials. While the focus of this paper is on temporary and recurrent migration, it is impossible to disentangle labor migration from "permanent" migration since (1) migration intentions often differ from the actual migration experience, and (2) aggregated migration data do not adequately capture the extent of temporary migration.

HISTORICAL BACKDROP

The original inhabitants of the Bahamas, the Lucayan Indians, were

wiped out within 30 years of Columbus' first landfall on the island of San Salvador by Spanish raiders seeking slaves for mine work in Cuba and Hispaniola. The islands became an English possession in 1629 and the island of Eleuthera was first settled in 1647 by a band of dissident protestants from Bermuda.

Other groups from both Bermuda and the Carolinas followed and established cotton and tobacco plantations. By 1670 there were 1,100 inhabitants with roughly 80 percent residing in New Providence. For most of the rest of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, because of lax colonial administration, repeated Spanish attacks on New Providence, and exhausted soil, buccaneering provided the most durable livelihood and Nassau came to be known as a pirates' haven. According to the 1741 census, nearly a century after colonization there were no permanent settlers in the out-islands (Craton 1962: 138).

The aftermath of the American revolution profoundly altered the demographic, social, and commercial structure of the Bahamas. Between 1783 and 1789, over 2000 loyalists plus their slaves migrated to the territory from ports in the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, and New York (Peters 1960; Brown 1976). This influx trebled the population and increased the proportion of slaves from one-half to three-fourths. Loyalist energies created the modern city of Nassau and were largely responsible for the ten-fold increase in merchandise trade between 1774 and 1787 (Craton 1962: 170). With generous Crown land grants, the refugees attempted to recreate American plantation life. For the first time expanded permanent settlement occurred in the out-islands. A few in the Northern Bahamas tier (Elbow Cay, Man of War Cay, Green Turtle Cay) became almost exclusively white. Between 1785 and 1787, even before the historic immigration was over, cotton acreage and output had nearly doubled. But by 1805 the cotton boom had passed because of pests, over-planting, and land-clearing methods which destroyed the little fertility Bahamian soils possessed (Shattuck 1905: 149). Many Loyalists remigrated while those remaining in the out-islands were forced to adopt the lifestyle of the earlier settlers ("conchs"), scratching the soil, fishing, privateering and wrecking.⁶

The nineteenth century witnessed the search for a more secure economic base, particularly in the out-islands⁷. Wrecking as an activity diminished as better charts of Bahamian waters became available and lighthouses were erected.⁸ The post-emancipation depression was interrupted by a series of unsuccessful export revivals. Between 1855-1857 a conch boom developed because cameo brooches were fashionable in France and Italy. Blockade-running during the early

years (1860–1863) of the American Civil War realized a remarkable twenty-fold increase in Bahamian trade, with Nassau never knowing a more frenzied interlude before or since (Craton 1962: 228–9). Failed attempts to market tomatoes and cigars because of quality and spoilage problems were followed by other export industries – pineapples, citrus, sisal – which flourished precariously but inevitably collapsed (Johnson 1972).⁹ Sponge fishing along the Great Bahamas Bank provided the most durable of these periodic export cycles from roughly 1870 until World War II. The industry peaked at the turn of the century but fell apart in the 1930's when a combination of devastating hurricanes and a blight destroyed the sponge beds.¹⁰

For the majority of Bahamians, the early twentieth century brought little opportunity at home; poverty was the norm (Albury 1975: 184). World War I provided some relief – construction work on naval installations in Charleston, South Carolina, and military service in the British, Canadian, and U.S. armed forces. With the cessation of hostilities, economic disaster was forestalled by the rum-running bonanza created by prohibition in the United States. Giant liquor houses mushroomed in Nassau, and government revenues based on liquor duties rose astronomically. Unfortunately, as with sponge fishing, this artificial economy “produced an ever deeper separation between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’” (Craton 1962: 267). The liquor business was exclusively controlled by the so-called “Bay Street Boys,” a few white Bahamian families in Nassau, many of them descendants of Loyalists (Johnson 1972; Brown 1976).

For the average Bahamian, particularly the black Bahamian, the 1930's and early 1940's were years of depression “enveloped in dense gloom” (Albury 1975: 190). Some of the out-islands reported cases of actual starvation (Craton 1962: 269). Scarce employment and bleak wages were exacerbated by the final collapse of the sponge industry (1938). The outbreak of World War II helped alleviate conditions. There was conscription into the U.S. and British forces and local employment was generated by the U.S. Navy and by development schemes undertaken by the Canadian multi-millionaire Sir Harry Oakes and Swedish industrialist Axel Wenner-Grenn (Albury 1975). These internationally known entrepreneurs had been recruited to the Bahamas by the Bay Street Boys to promote the territory as a tax and tourist haven. In 1943, the U.S. also made provision for the entry of up to 5,000 Bahamians as contract farm laborers on a rotating basis, to assist the war effort in food production (Colonial Annual Report 1946). The farm labor program provided seasonal employment for Bahamians over the next 23 years.

As the demand for agricultural labor in the U.S. declined in the postwar era, local employment was rapidly expanding in the booming tourist sector, fueled at first by a swarm of rich European refugees (Segal 1975).¹¹ For example, between 1949 and 1960 the number of visitors and the value of construction activity increased ten-fold (Hughes 1981: 32, 92). By the early 1960's, the Bahamian transition from labor exporter to importer was well underway as immigrant workers arrived from Haiti and Turks and Caicos to satisfy the demands of the burgeoning tourism and construction industries in New Providence and Grand Bahama (Freeport) and to service the lumber and agro-industries in Abaco and Andros and the salt industry in Inagua.

BAHAMIAN LABOR MIGRATION, 1901 – 1963

Volume

Between 1901 and 1963 the total population of the Bahamas more than doubled but 80 percent of this growth occurred after World War II and the subsequent tourism boom underway in the 1950's. Chronic emigration characterized the early period. According to census data in Table 1, the population grew only four percent between 1901 and 1911 but natural increase was 15 percent for the same period indicating a net loss of 11 percent or 6,116 residents through migration. Between 1911–1921, net out-migration approached 20 percent (11, 527) and exceeded natural increase causing an absolute decennial population decline. These migration figures approximate other impressionistic estimates. Albury (1975: 169) writes that “records are scant but perhaps ten to twelve thousand Bahamians emigrated during the first two decades of this century. One Bahamian in every five left home.” Craton (1962: 256) notes that in a roughly parallel period many islands lost 10 percent or more of their inhabitants to the U.S., with Inagua losing more than 30 percent of its population.

The positive net migration of 2,274 between 1921–1931 (see Table 1) resulted from: (1) the prohibition bonanza confined exclusively to New Providence and Grand Bahama; (2) return migration after the 1924 U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act which restricted entry of “negroes” from British West Indies to 200 per year (Reid 1939); and (3) immigration of mainly Jamaican and Cuban artesans to build vacation homes for Americans and to man a public works program funded with liquor duties (Johnson 1984).

TABLE 1. POPULATION CHANGES IN THE BAHAMAS BY ISLAND, 1901-1963

Island	1901	1911	1901 - 1911			1921	1911 - 1921			1931	1921 - 1931		
			A	B ¹	C		A	B ¹	C		A	B ¹	C
New Providence	12534	13554	1020	-662 ²	+1682	12975	-579	816	-1395	19756	6781	-835 ²	+7616
Grand Bahama	1780	1824	44	460	-416	1695	-129	350	-479	2241	546	228	+318
Abaco	3314	4463	1149	538	+611	3993	-470	442	-912	4233	240	318	-78
Acklin's Island	1565	1733	168	462	-294	1811	78	447	-369	1765	-46	172	-218
Andros	6347	7545	1198	1845	-647	6976	-569	1650	-2219	7071	95	1050	-955
Berry Islands	382	487	105	121	-16	328	-159	113	-272	222	-106	60	-166
Bimini, Cay Lobos													
Cay Sal	563	505	-58	77	-135	638	133	93	+40	756	118	98	+20
Cat Island ³	4658	5072	414	1124	-710	4273	-799	683	-1482	3959	-314	691	-1005
Crooked Island	1597	1541	-56	291	-347	1481	-60	362	-422	1329	-152	102	-254
Eleuthera Harbor													
Island, Spanish													
Wells	10499	8119	-2380	1326	-3706	7547	-572	1301	-1873	7527	-20	710	-730
Exuma And Cays	3086	3465	379	1033	-654	3730	265	633	-368	3774	44	730	-686
Inagua	1453	1343	-110	53	-163	937	-406	85	-491	667	-270	33	-303
Long Cay	499	376	-123	21	-144	166	-210	8	-218	144	-22	-15	-7
Long Island	3562	4159	597	1202	-605	4659	500	1262	-762	4515	-144	808	-952
Mayaguana	335	358	23	105	-82	432	74	105	-31	518	86	81	+5
Ragged Island	365	353	-12	104	-116	366	13	92	-79	424	58	105	-47
San Salvador ⁴ &													
Rum Cay	1196	1047	-149	225	-374	1024	-23	172	-195	927	-97	187	-284
Bahamas Total	53735	55944	2209	8325	-6116	53031	-2913	8614	-11527	59828	6797	4523	+2274

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TABLE I. POPULATION CHANGES IN THE BAHAMAS BY ISLAND, 1901-1963 (Cont'd.)

Island	1931 - 1943					1943 - 1953				1953 - 1963		
	1943	A	B ¹	C	1953	A	B ¹	C	1963	A	B ¹	C
New Providence	29391	9635	2843	+6792	46125	16739	13675	+3059	80907	34782	13009	+21773
Grand Bahama	2333	92	647	-555	4095	1762	458	1304	8230	4135	1557	+2578
Abaco	3461	-772	681	-1453	3407	-54	508	-562	6490	3083	994	+2089
Acklin's Island	1744	-21	486	-507	1273	-471	250	-721	1217	-56	272	-328
Andros	6718	-353	2291	-2644	7136	418	1400	-982	7461	325	2682	-2357
Berry Islands	403	181	71	+110	327	-76	55	-131	266	-61	37	-98
Bimini, Cay Lobos												
Cay Sal	725	-31	250	-281	1330	605	257	+348	1658	328	484	-156
Cat Island ³	3870	-89	1029	-1118	3201	-669	1312	-1981	3131	-70	691	-761
Crooked Island	1078	-251	168	-419	836	-242	97	-339	766	-70	80	-150
Eleuthera, Harbor												
Island, Spanish Wells	7864	337	1659	-1322	7596	-268	1008	-1276	9093	1497	2018	-521
Exuma and Cays	3784	10	1087	-1077	2919	-865	743	-1608	3440	521	685	-164
Inague	890	223	155	-68	999	109	167	-58	1240	241	425	-184
Long Cay	101	-43	-2	-41	80	-21	2	-23	22	-58	17	-75
Long Island	4564	49	1089	-1040	3755	-809	808	-1617	4176	421	983	-562
Mayaguana	591	73	159	-86	615	24	138	-114	707	92	247	-155
Ragged Island	417	-7	102	-109	320	-97	79	-176	371	51	144	-93
San Salvador ⁴ &												
Rum Cay	912	-15	184	-199	827	-85	79	-164	1045	218	288	-70
Bahamas Total	68846	9018	12899	-3881	84841	15995	21036	-5041	130220	45379	24613	+20766

Sources: 1. Colony Blue Books - Bahamas 1901-1940
 2. Commonwealth of the Bahamas - Statistical Abstract 1970
 3. Commonwealth of the Bahamas - Vital Statistics 1978

A- Intercensal Change
 B- Natural Increase
 C- Estimated Net Migration

Notes: 1. Adjusted for Census dates
 2. Higher deaths in New Providence because of deaths at hospital of ill persons from other islands
 3. Prior to 1926 Cat Island was called San Salvador
 4. Formerly Watlings Island

During the depressed 1931-1943 period between the end of prohibition and the beginning of the war, net migration again became negative. In addition to military conscription, the next major exodus of Bahamians occurred with the 1943 launching of the U.S. Farm Labor Program with provisions for recruiting up to 5,000 Bahamians seasonally. Estimated migration of 5,041 between 1943-1953 reflects this impact. The annual exodus of labor continued for over two decades but seasonal migration under the Program's auspices began to decline in 1955 and reached a low of 200 by 1966 (Albury 1975).

These decennial migration trends are broadly confirmed by the annual figures for 1920 through 1946 taken from the Colony Blue Books. Table 2 indicates heavy emigration before the enactment of the 1924 U.S. Immigration Act as well as some migration coinciding with the destruction of the sponge beds (1937-1938) and further heavy emigration with the start-up of the U.S. Farm Labor Program (1943). However, the fact that net migration was positive over most of the 1920-1946 period may suggest a pattern of migration and return especially during the 1921-1931 years when many Bahamians returned from Central America and were repatriated (after 1924) from Florida. This contention also seems plausible from the data in Table 6 since the nativity composition of the population did not appreciably change between 1901 and 1943. Another possibility is that "Immigrants" and "Emigrants" in Table 2 actually refer to arrivals and departures (Kuczynski 1953: 55), and include a relatively large proportion of winter visitors (see Colonial Annual Reports 1931, 1932).¹²

The Out-Islands

An enduring facet of Bahamian history is that the long series of ephemeral economic revivals woefully by-passed the out-islands. This is clear from Table 1. With the exception of Abaco, all these islands suffered absolute population declines between 1901 and 1953, and with only a few minor exceptions, experienced negative net migration for every census period between 1901 and 1963, indicating persistent emigration as well as a process of rural drift, primarily to New Providence, which had begun at least a century earlier (Hughes 1981: 12). In addition to resource scarcity, two internal forces largely responsible for this stark picture of peripheral depopulation were the policy neglect by the Nassau mercantile elite (Lewis 1968: 315) and the absence of a yeoman tradition (Hughes 1981: 14). Some specific if fragmentary details regarding the volume of migration from various islands and for

TABLE 2. NET MIGRATION,¹ BAHAMAS, 1920-1946

Year	Number of Immigrants			Number of Emigrants			Net Migration
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
1920			2964			5134	- 2170
1921	3224	1539	4763	3106	1847	4955	- 192
1922	4060	1997	6057	3503	2111	5614	+ 443
1923	3840	2037	5877	4906	3220	8126	- 2249
1924	3597	2275	5872	3218	2447	5665	+ 207
1925	3781	2359	6140	3120	2051	5171	+ 969
1926	2067	1121	3188	1410	768	2178	+1010
1927	4218	2758	6976	3484	2317	5801	+1175
1928	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1929	4970	3894	8864	5053	3809	8862	+ 2
1930	4350	3205	7555	4209	3103	7317	+ 238
1931	4063	3073	7136	3907	2996	6903	+ 233
1932	2770	2081	4851	2703	2011	4714	+ 137
1933	2945	2154	5099	3166	1752	4918	+ 181
1934	4156	5288	7684	4064	3514	7578	+ 106
1935	4693	4248	8941	4662	4112	8774	+ 167
1936	5818	5490	11308	5533	5384	10917	+ 391
1937	6912	6554	13466	7026	6921	13947	- 481
1938	5937	5440	11377	5966	5523	11489	- 112
1939	6304	6601	12905	6238	6458	12696	+ 209
1940	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	+ 296
1941	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	- 250
1942	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	+ 345
1943 ²	2378	1406	3784	4329	2093	6422	- 2638
1944	3779	2177	5956	2415	2176	4591	+1365
1945	1536	3001	8137	3501	2527	6028	+2109
1946	11315	8635	19950	7031	6452	13483	+6467

Sources: 1. Colony Blue Books, Bahamas 1920-1939, 1943-1946.

2. Kuczynski 1953: 55, 1940-1942.

Notes: ¹ We suspect "immigrants" and "emigrants" are more correctly arrivals and departures (see Kuczynski 1953: 55).

² Includes only the period from April 26 to December 31.

various years can be gleaned from colonial dispatches and consular reports and are sketched below.

Unfortunately, there is little information on the number of Bahamian laborers recruited to work in Panama and elsewhere in Central America. In 1908 314 contract workers returned from Mexico to Inagua (the main port of recruitment for the Southern Bahama Islands) after a year of service while over 500 remained in Mexico and

Central America (Annual Report of the Commissioner for the District of Inagua 1908). In 1912 "a large number of men" from Acklins and Crooked Island found work in Panama (Annual Report for Long Cay, Acklins, and Crooked Island 1912), but after 1916 when Florida had emerged as the preferred destination very few Bahamians were contracted for employment in Central America.

The sparse accounts available suggest the exodus north to Miami from Nassau until 1924, for farm labor and construction work, was similar in impact to the large-scale emigration of thousands of spongers to Key West in the early 1890's (Sharer 1955). The colonial governor complained at the turn of the century that there was "not one master carpenter, blacksmith, or mason in the colony" (Shattuck 1905: 600). Migration was particularly heavy in 1911 when 3,230 Bahamians migrated on schooners and a motor vessel making weekly runs to Miami, while only 1,964 returned. This outflow caused great "anxiety to the government and inconvenience to sponge outfitters and other employers of labor" (British Ambassador Bryce's letter, April 13, 1911). In 1918, between 2,500 and 3,000 men, primarily from the northern and central out-islands, were recruited to work on the U.S. Navy installations in Charleston, South Carolina. Most of these men came from Abaco, Andros, the Exumas, Eleuthera, Harbor Island, Spanish Wells, and Long Island. By 1919 the once famed Abaco sponging fleet was reduced to two vessels (Annual Report, Abaco, 1919), and by 1923 the situation in the out-islands had become so critical that the Colonial Annual Report of 1923-24 (No. 1202: 4) noted that nothing could be done to check the "gradual depopulation of these islands."

In the Southern Bahama Islands, employment was routinely provided by ships taking on stevedores expressly for the purpose of unloading and loading cargoes in Central American, South American and West Indian ports. In 1902, 143 steamers and 85 sailing vessels called in at Inagua and took on 2,880 workers, a total many times more than the number of able bodied men in Matthew Town (Albury 1975: 198). By 1912, an average of 160 stevedores were being employed monthly from Inagua, Long Cay, Crooked Island, Acklin's Island and Mayaguana. This number dwindled to about 60 men monthly after 1929, and by 1950 the recruitment of stevedores ceased.

The waves of labor recruited annually in the postwar U.S. Farm Labor Program were substantial averaging roughly 4,000 per year between 1947 and 1953 (Colonial Annual Report 1947, 1948, 1952, 1953). The exodus continued in the Southern Bahamas into the

1960's.¹³ By the time of the termination of the farm labor program in 1966 fewer than 200 laborers were involved (Albury 1975).

The effects of areal size and population density on the rate of out-migration/emigration from the out-islands during the first half of the twentieth century are summarized in Table 3. As expected, but contrary to much of the Caribbean literature (Roberts 1955; Segal 1975), population pressure was not a determinant of migration. In fact, the data indicate that New Providence with the highest density experienced the greatest net in-migration whereas sparsely inhabited islands like Andros suffered from extensive out-migration/emigration. This migratory pattern of an expanding center (Nassau) at the expense of a contracting periphery has been noted elsewhere (Brookfield 1980) and attests to the impoverishment of the out-islands and the traditional response to this deprivation.

Migrant Destinations

Figure 1 shows the various migrant destinations and streams for the period 1890-1966.

TABLE 3. AREAL SIZE, AND RANKINGS ON POPULATION DENSITY AND THE RATE OF NET MIGRATION FOR THE BAHAMAS, BY ISLAND, 1901-1963

Island	Area in Sq. Miles	Rank	Population Density ¹							
			1901	1911	1921	1931	1943	1953	1963	1901-1963
	Area	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank
New Providence	80	13	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Grand Bahama	530	4	15	16	15	15	15	12	9	14
Abaco	649	2	14	13	13	13	14	15	11	13
Acklin's Island	192	7	12	12	12	12	12	13	14	12
Andros	2300	1	17	14	16	16	16	16	15	16
Berry Islands	12	15	5	4	6	8	5	4	6	5
Bimini, Cay Lobos										
Cay Sal	11	16	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Cat Island ⁴	150	8	6	6	5	4	7	7	7	6
Crooked Island	84	12	9	9	10	10	9	9	12	10
Eleuthera, Harbor										
Island, Spanish										
Wells	200	6	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
Exuma and Cays	112	9	7	7	4	5	4	5	4	4
Inagua	599	3	13	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
Long Cay	9	17	2	3	9	9	10	11	16	9
Long Island	230	5	10	10	8	7	8	8	8	8
Mayaguana	110	10	16	14	14	14	13	14	13	15
Ragged Island	14	14	8	8	7	6	6	6	5	7
San Salvador ⁵										
and Rum Cay	90	11	11	11	11	11	11	10	10	11

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TABLE 3 CONTINUED

Rate of Net Migration²

1901-11 Rank ³	1911-21 Rank	1921-31 Rank	1931-43 Rank	1943-53 Rank	1953-63 Rank	1901-63 Rank
16	14	17	16	15	15	17
7	7	16	10	17	16	13
17	11	13	3	12	17	16
10	5	9	6	13	3	6
14	6	8	2	13	3	6
15	1	1	17	6	2	4
5	17	14	1	16	11	14
12	4	4	7	1	6	2
8	9	7	4	7	8	5
1	8	11	13	11	13	7
9	15	6	8	2	14	10
13	3	2	15	14	9	12
3	2	12	5	8	1	1
11	13	5	11	5	10	11
6	16	15	14	9	7	15
2	10	10	9	3	4	3
4	12	3	12	9	12	9

Sources: Table 3.05, Commonwealth of the Bahamas Statistical Abstract, 1980 Table 1.

- Notes: ¹ A Rank of 1 represents highest population density and 17 lowest.
- ² Computed from Table 1. Rankings are reported here instead of actual net migration rates, whose absolute values cannot be determined without error. However, the relative difference between rates for any intercensal period should remain the same.
- ³ A rank of 1 represents the highest rate of emigration/outmigration and 17 the lowest or in some cases the highest rate of immigration/in-migration.
- ⁴ Prior to 1926 Cat Island was called San Salvador.
- ⁵ Formerly Watlings Island.

Between 1895-1908, the primary destination for Bahamian labor migrants was Colón in Panama. Though quantitative estimates are lacking, most migrants were from the Southern Bahama Islands. When canal activity wound down, many Bahamians proceeded to Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala where they found work on United Fruit Company and Atlantic Fruit Company plantations. Some went as far north as Mexico. From 1900 to 1912, a fairly sizeable number of Southern Bahamians were recruited seasonally as cane cutters to work in San Pedro de Macorís, Puerto Plata and Sánchez in the Dominican Republic. The Law of 1912, designed to restrict "colored" immigration into the Dominican Republic, substantially curtailed this seasonal Bahamian migration (Colonial Office Dispatch, Bahamas No. 90, 1912).¹⁴

Figure 1. Labor Migration and Emigration from the Bahamas, 1890 to 1966

In 1909 a number of men from New Providence, Inagua, Crooked Island, Acklins Island and Long Cay were recruited to work at the Mexican port of Tampico and on the Cardenas/ Monterrey division of the National Railways of Mexico.

After 1908, Florida became the major destination of Bahamian migrant laborers. Migration from the Northern Bahama Islands (Abaco, Grand Bahama, Bimini, Berry Islands, New Providence and Eleuthera) was mainly to Miami, Key West and the Gulf Coast of Florida, while Southern Bahamians went primarily to Miami and up the East Coast of Florida. During this period (1908–1924) these migrants cast their stamp on Coconut Grove and Deerfield Beach.¹⁵ With the exception of migration to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1918, Florida continued to be the major destination of Bahamians even after the enactment of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924.¹⁶ By the 1930's migration to foreign destinations had dwindled, and it was only war-time employment and the creation of the 1943 U.S. Farm Labor

TABLE 4. SEX RATIO¹ BY ISLAND, FOR CENSUS YEARS 1901-1963

Island	Census Year	Sex Ratio						
		1901	1911	1921	1931	1943	1953	1963
New Providence		78.0	77.1	77.8	81.6	84.8	86.3	92.8
Grand Bahama		95.4	75.4	75.8	96.2	91.9	114.5	119.7
Abaco		89.8	100.2	91.9	98.9	96.2	94.6	119.3
Acklins Island		81.8	71.9	72.6	74.4	77.8	54.9	72.1
Andros		101.2	105.6	96.8	96.8	88.6	107.1	91.5
Berry Islands		122.1	134.1	82.2	74.8	94.7	127.1	146.3
Bimini, Cay Lobos and Cay Sal		93.5	87.0	130.3	113.6	104.4	112.1	101.0
Cat Island		81.4	70.1	70.8	84.1	84.1	72.1	80.9
Crooked Island		84.4	63.1	58.6	61.5	60.4	45.9	71.8
Eleuthers, Harbor Island and Spanish Wells		91.0	80.2	86.7	93.0	94.6	93.1	99.0
Exuma and Cays		80.2	68.3	75.1	80.0	88.5	65.3	87.8
Inagua		106.1	78.2	99.8	100.3	104.1	99.4	95.6
Long Cay		106.2	59.3	69.4	71.4	44.3	56.8	83.3
Long Island		82.5	73.7	72.1	115.4	93.0	81.8	95.2
Mayguana		92.5	70.5	66.8	111.2	85.8	85.2	80.8
Ragged Island		110.0	87.8	89.6	97.2	128.8	96.3	87.4
San Salvador and Rum Cay		79.0	70.2	75.9	76.6	77.4	89.7	81.4
Bahamas Total		87.0	80.6	81.4	87.1	87.5	86.5	95.1

Source: Table 3.04 Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Statistical Abstract 1980.

Note: ¹ Number of males per 100 females.

Program that alleviated the dismal local employment picture. Under the Farm Program, Bahamians were recruited to work cane fields and fruit groves in Florida and on farms all the way up the eastern seaboard to the Carolinas, Virginia, New Jersey, New York and on into Minnesota and Michigan (Greenberg 1978: 172). A few were employed in factories in New York, New Jersey and Michigan.

The Migrant Stream

The conventional age-sex selectivity of migration is largely confirmed by the various Bahamian migrations since 1900. Numerous data sources indicate male dominance of the migrant stream while reports and correspondence underscore that the men were mostly young.¹⁷ An examination of sex ratios by island in Table 4 suggests sharp declines in the male proportion of the population throughout most out-islands during the first two decades (1901–1921) of heavy out-migration/emigration. Falling trends are particularly strong for Acklins, Berry Islands, Cat and Crooked Islands, Long Cay, and Mayaguana. Over the next two decades (1921–1943), the ratios rise almost universally, reflecting substantial return migration resulting from U.S. immigration restrictions and the depression lull before wartime activity created new employment opportunities. Likewise, trends are reversed in most out-islands between 1943–1953 when migration under the U.S. Farm Labor Program was most intense.

Generally, male migrants were young. For example, the 1916 Annual Report for Cat Islands notes “that the majority of young men in the district continue to earn their living in Florida”. This same conclusion is echoed in the 1912, 1916, and 1918 Annual Reports for the District of Long Island and in the Colonial Annual Reports (1922–23 and 1923–24). Annual Reports from other islands are more qualified: “young men of the better classes all go away as soon as they are old enough there being no openings for them at home” (Eleuthera 1916); the “most energetic and ambitious islanders” leave (Abaco 1924). Only the 1912 Annual Report for Exuma notes a fairly sizeable number of middle-aged men in the migrant stream. Certainly the population distribution figures in Table 5 support the claim of numerous “middle-aged” migrants because of the particularly low and declining (as tracked per censal period) sex ratios for the 20–44 age groupings. These data parallel the trends of migration and return in Table 4 but also suggest a long-term tradition of livelihood mobility among most age segments of the work force.

TABLE 5. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION OF THE BAHAMAS BY AGE AND SEX FOR CENSUS YEARS 1911 - 1963

	1911		1921		1931		1943		1953		1963	
Age Group	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0-4	6.8	7.2	7.7	7.4	7.2	7.3	7.2	7.1	7.7	7.9	9.4	9.3
5-9	7.0	7.0	5.8	5.8	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.3	6.3	6.2	7.5	7.5
10-14	6.7	6.6	6.6	6.7	6.3	6.5	5.5	5.5	5.8	5.7	5.2	5.2
15-19	4.5	6.4	4.5	5.9	5.5	6.1	4.4	5.3	4.3	5.1	4.0	4.1
20-24	2.9	5.6	3.0	5.5	4.2	5.5	4.2	5.4	3.6	4.6	5.0	4.3
25-29	2.6	4.5	2.4	4.2	3.2	4.1	4.1	4.6	3.1	4.0	3.7	3.9
30-34	2.2	3.2	2.0	3.4	2.0	2.8	3.2	3.8	2.7	3.6	3.0	3.1
35-39	2.0	3.0	2.5	3.7	2.2	3.2	2.5	3.2	3.1	3.6		
40-44	2.0	2.6	2.1	2.7	1.8	2.2	1.9	2.6	2.6	3.1	4.7	5.1
45-54	3.4	4.1	3.6	4.5	3.6	4.2	2.9	4.1	3.3	4.3	3.8	4.1
55-64	2.2	2.5	2.6	3.0	2.4	2.7	2.4	2.8	1.9	2.6	1.9	2.3
65+	1.5	1.8	1.8	2.4	1.5	2.1	1.9	2.5	1.8	2.6	1.4	2.2
Not Stated	.8	.9	.2	.2	.7	.4	.2	.2	.3	.3	.2	.1
Total ¹	44.6	55.4	44.8	55.4	46.8	53.4	46.8	53.4	46.5	53.6	48.8	51.2

Sources: 1. Report of the Census of the Bahama Islands, 1911
 2. Report of the Census of the Bahama Islands, 1921
 3. Table 3.03, Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Statistical Abstract 1978

Note: ¹Totals for male and female do not add to exactly 100.0 because of rounding.

Reasons for Migration

The constellation of forces that comprise the setting and situation which conditioned the ebb and flow of Bahamian labor migration, included above all the dismal local employment picture repeatedly emphasized in historical records. The lack of opportunity was mainly due to the subsistence nature of the agricultural economy, the narrow resource base, and harsh climatic conditions. During the first half of this century, agriculture (supplemented by fishing), the "abiding natural occupation of the people" (Colonial Annual Report 1929: 17) provided a meager livelihood "owing to the uncompromising nature of the soil" and the difficulty in transporting crops to Nassau and other markets (Colonial Annual Report 1925: 8). Production was further reduced by poor farming practices.¹⁸ In lean years whole districts were denuded by emigration/out-migration.

The fragile and worn out agricultural base was severely taxed and often destroyed by hurricanes and droughts. In the aftermath of a particularly damaging hurricane, migration usually stepped up. The 1908 hurricane destroyed citrus trees, the sisal and cotton crops, and ground provisions as well, and prompted a wave of labor migration to Colon, especially from Long Cay, Acklins Island and Crooked Island. Hurricanes also periodically ravaged sponge fishing beds. By 1918–1919 this repeated damage and depletion from overfishing forced many men to foresake sponging for jobs in Florida and Charleston. In 1926 three hurricanes ravaged the Bahamas and destroyed the remaining sponge beds for Abaco fisherman, creating an exodus to Tarpon Springs Florida. The effects of the 1926 hurricanes were felt on practically every island – many lives were lost, whole settlements were washed away, thousands of buildings damaged or destroyed, livestock killed, and crops completely ruined (Colonial Annual Report 1926: 9). Thousands of people were left homeless and without food, and many flocked to Nassau hoping to find work there or passage to Florida where they could stay temporarily with relatives. The food shortage caused by the hurricanes of 1926 was accentuated by a severe drought in 1927 which destroyed all the new crops that had been planted in the Southern Bahama Islands, setting into motion another wave of labor migration (Colonial Annual Report 1927).

Most of the out-islands were dependent on a single industry the failure/closure of which further exacerbated unemployment and usually prompted a spate of migration. The shutting down of the Wilson City Lumber Works (1918) was a great blow to the people of

Abaco. Many had to migrate to Florida to find work or had to sign on for construction jobs in Charleston (Dodge 1983). The closing down of the salt industry in Inagua, because of competition from U.S. firms and a six-percent protective tariff, also resulted in migration to Central America and North America. Likewise, the fortunes of Matthew Town (Inagua) and Long Cay were closely intertwined with shipping line schedules and the demand for stevedores. When the ships no longer called to take on stevedores, men were forced to migrate to Nassau and Florida to find alternative employment.¹⁹

To these internal determinants of migration must be added a complement of significant external and institutional influences. United States and European investment in the circum-Caribbean had created a demand for labor, and Colonial policy and convenient shipping schedules facilitated the movement of workers from labor-surplus to labor-scarce areas. Labor contracts were negotiated and/or approved by the Government of the Bahamas, licenses granted recruiting agents, legislation enacted for the protection of migrants, provisions made for the remittances of savings, and ships retained to move these laborers back and forth. When the demand for labor declined and with protectionist sentiments and restrictive immigration laws abroad (U.S., the Dominican Republic, Central America, and Mexico), Bahamians were increasingly forced to find ways to subsist at home, despite the fact that the same local impoverishment that prompted earlier exoduses still persisted. In summary, it was the lack of job opportunities at home coupled with demand for labor abroad and a policy of active encouragement of labor migration that best explains Bahamian geographic mobility in this century.

Recruitment and Conditions of Service

The major mechanism of recruitment was the labor contract. However, such contracts were not carefully scrutinized by the Bahamas Government and the recruitment process was seldom closely monitored. A wealth of information points to the "unsatisfactory nature of the system under which coloured labourers" from the Southern Bahama Islands were engaged for service in Mexico and Panama (Colonial Office Dispatch No. 62, 1906). The Foreign Labourers Protection Act of 1904 provided Bahamian migrant laborers insufficient protection from unscrupulous employers. The British Colonial Office, therefore, called for further legislation to be patterned after Jamaican statutes which resulted in the enactment of the Bahamas Emigrant Labourers

Protection Act of 1907 (revised in 1909). This Act required that all labor contracts contain a description of the work, specify the period of contract, the normal daily working hours, the customary hours for meals, the rate of pay for overtime, and make provisions for free board, lodging, transportation and medical attention of workers, plus mandatory savings of the workers' wages and periodic remittances to his family.²⁰

While on the surface an enlightened piece of legislation, this Act still contained potential for abuse since it also required laborers to be diligent, honest, careful and attentive, to work overtime and on Sundays, and not to absent themselves from work without a reasonable excuse. If a laborer engaged in "wilful misconduct, intemperance or immorality," he was not entitled to receive his wages (Emigrant Laborers Protection Act of 1907). Though the legislation discouraged some foreign employers from engaging Bahamians, many contracts were successfully concluded. Various accounts indicate that the U.S. Government-supervised contract behind the Mason and Hanger Contracting Company and men resident in the Bahamas to build naval installations in Charleston (1918) was one of the best ever negotiated (Annual Report, Long Island 1918).

By far the best known and most closely monitored contract was the long-term Farm Labor Program between the United States Department of Labor and the Bahamas Government. A temporary labor office was set up in Nassau in 1943 to oversee the recruitment of agricultural workers (21–40 years of age) and to operate an accounting system that would keep track of compulsory deductions from workers' earnings for support of their dependents (Colonial Annual Report 1946).²¹ A Liaison Office was established in Orlando, Florida, to mediate disputes between Bahamian laborers and their employers and to monitor the conditions of the labor camps and insure that contract terms were carefully observed. A nine-month stint in the U.S. could typically include cutting cane and picking citrus in Florida, harvesting corn from Delaware to Minnesota, picking onions and peas in New York or Maine, and working tobacco in North Carolina (Greenberg 1978). Migrant biographies suggest such seasonal employment patterns were financially remunerative for the average Bahamian migrant as well as personally formative experiences (Greenberg 1978: 199).²²

Duration of Migration

Governed as it was by contract, most Bahamian labor migration was of

specified duration. Generally, Central American contracts involved commitments for one to three years while most U.S. programs were seasonal or annual. For example, the 1909 contract with the National Railways of Mexico required laborers for a period of one year to load and unload railway cars and steamers at the port of Tampico and to repair track on the Monterrey railway. On the other hand, when work on the Panama Canal was winding down, many Bahamians migrated elsewhere (Guatemala and Honduras) with or without contracts. Some were away in Central America for five years or more.

Migration to the U.S. was of much shorter duration, usually seasonal, and often recurrent. Migrants to Florida seldom absented themselves for more than a year. The general pattern was to leave for Florida in October and return the following May (Annual Report, Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera 1912; Annual Report, Long Island 1912). The end of the United States harvest season coincided with the demands for tending houses, crops and other family business in the Bahamas. The proximity of Florida made such commuting feasible. Migration to Charleston was also for a short duration. Most men who left in August-September, 1918, returned before Christmas or early in 1919. Under the U.S. Farm Labor Program most Bahamians were recruited annually for the duration of the harvest. In the case of Florida sugarcane, this was from November through March. However, unmarried migrants could retain employment up to two years:

Married men usually opted for a nine months stay, while single men, lacking the obligations toward a wife and children, could stay away from their families for upwards of two years. (Greenberg 1978: 173).

The Migrant Experience

Recorded migrant accounts paint a rather unfavorable picture of the working environment in Panama, Honduras and Mexico.²³ Many men returned in worse condition than when they had left. Some contracted venereal disease and tuberculosis, and others suffered from injuries sustained on the job (Annual Report for Inagua 1908). Despite the 1907 and 1909 Acts, the terms and conditions of contracts were seldom adhered to, and Bahamians occasionally returned home prematurely because of the poor treatment they had received.²⁴ Wages were arbitrarily taken in fines, overtime work not properly compensated, remittances to workers' families not made, and passages home routinely denied. The British Consul at Colón was too overburdened to investi-

gate all complaints and a fact-finding mission to the Canal Zone was undertaken in 1913 (Colonial Office Dispatch, Bahamas No. 25 1913). This resulted in a scheme to improve the protection and interest of British West Indians resident in Central America, yet by this time most Bahamians were migrating to the United States.

The Bahamian migrant experience in the United States was colored largely by race, with black migrants, primarily from the Southern Bahama Islands, complaining about the poor treatment they received, and whites from the Northern Bahamas praising conditions. In 1911 several incidences of alleged violence against black Bahamians in Miami were reported. Sir W. Grey Wilson, deputed to look into Bahamians' welfare in Florida, concluded that their "treatment was not altogether satisfactory" (Bryce 1911). Ensuing dispatches between the British Embassy in Washington, the British Consul General in New Orleans, the Colonial Office in London, and the Governor of the Bahamas, called for the appointment of a Vice Consul in Miami. After some investigation, it was concluded that there were no British subjects in Miami who were suitable for the post and that a Vice Consul "would have practically nothing to do but investigate complaints and grievances of colored Bahamians" (Bernays 1911). The suggestion was therefore made that the Governor of the Bahamas appoint one of his staff to visit Miami periodically.

Given the seemingly serious and chronic maltreatment of black Bahamian migrants, it is not surprising that the Assistant Resident Justice of Andros would write that "our young men prefer a seaman's life, which is a free one, to being a hired servant in a foreign land" (Annual Report, Nicoll's Town, Andros 1916). Likewise, the 1912 Annual Report for Arthur's Town, Cat Island, stated that "those who stay at home are far better off since many men return home crippled with rheumatism or otherwise broken down in health." By contrast, many men returned from Charleston looking very well and spoke highly of the treatment they had received as well as the "greenbacks" they were able to accumulate (Annual Report, Nicoll's Town, Andros 1918). But the Charleston contract was not universally acclaimed, and it is quite plausible that black migrants did not fare quite as well as their white counterparts. A number of men from Eleuthera and the Exumas died in Charleston, while the majority suffered from ill health. Many Eleutherans "returned home quite disgusted with the job, the conditions and treatment in Charleston not being what they had expected" (Annual Report, Rock Sound, Eleuthera 1918).

Details about migration experiences in later years, especially during

the 23-year postwar Farm Labor Program, are scant. On the one hand, it is clear Bahamians suffered the same well-documented abuses in Florida and elsewhere as other United States migrant farm laborers. On the other hand, although the contract explicitly rules out discrimination against Bahamians, anecdotal accounts suggest that aspects of the agreement were "ignored or not enforced" (Greenberg 1978: 202). Particularly in Florida during the "Jim Crow" era, Bahamian migrants commonly experienced racial epithets, slights by merchants, overwork from employers and occasionally black-stereotyping and concomitant police harassment and confrontations with local whites (Greenberg 1978). The same workers, however, generally conceded the overriding value of U.S. work and wages.

Remittances

Workers' remittances were substantial, sometimes irregular, but always important in the insular economy. Between 1900-1908, remittances from Panama and other Central American countries were the major income sources for many out-islands. In some cases money arrived sporadically, while in others it came up regularly on ships of the Hamburg-American Line. The local impact was often visible. The 1912 Annual Report for Long Cay, Acklins and Crooked Island notes "remittances from Colon have been larger this year and this is shown in the number of houses built and repaired in the district." This off-island income was supplemented in the Southern Bahama islands by additional earnings from stevedoring. In 1912, men recruited at Long Cay to work as stevedores earned a total of U.S. \$1400 a month. In Inagua, five ships from the Raporel Steamship Company trading with Haiti provided a payroll of £600 in June 1916, and one ship from the George D. Emery Company involved in loading timber in Central America had a payroll of £3,000. The 1929 payroll for stevedores recruited in Inagua amounted to U.S. \$32,174.

After 1908 remittances from the United States became significant. Money was regularly posted from Florida to out-island families with an average of U.S. \$40-\$50 per registered letter (Annual Report, The Bight, Cat Island 1913). In some areas "greenbacks" flowing in from Florida were considered the only "silver lining to a dark cloud" (Annual Report, Long Cay, Acklins and Crooked Island 1919). Accounts indicate the Charleston contract was particularly memorable for its local effects, since the wages paid were high and the men returned with good purses. Remittances continued to infuse the Bahamian economy

during the 1920s and 1930s although few Bahamians were able to find work abroad.

The inflow of United States dollars during the postwar U.S. Farm Labor Program spawned economic revivals particularly in the out-island communities most ravaged by the 1930s depression. Routine deductions from Bahamian workers' weekly pay checks ("25 cents of every dollar") were sent by the U.S. employers to the labor office in Nassau. From this main account an allowance was posted to the government offices on the island where the workers' dependents lived (Greenberg 1978: 174). In 1949, for example, remittances by an estimated 200 Cat Island workers in the United States amounted to nearly £3,000 (Annual Report, The Bight, Cat Island 1949). For the Bahamas as a whole, wage deductions for dependents in 1946 amounted to U.S. \$1,114,893. They declined in 1947 but rose to a high of U.S. \$1,417,340 in 1952 (Colonial Report 1952 and 1953). Total earnings of the approximately 4,500 Bahamians recruited to work in 1951 were about U.S. \$5 million. This total income from seasonal agricultural work in the U.S. exceeded the value of construction permits in the entire territory at roughly the same time (1949), and represented approximately 25 percent of total tourist spending (Bower 1963: 463).

Reasons for Return

Termination of labor contracts was the primary reason for the return of Bahamian migrants, although many Bahamians stayed on or remigrated elsewhere. All contracts entered into, especially after 1907, had a repatriation clause.

Labor conditions themselves also provided compelling reason for early return. When contracts were not honored by employers or did not live up to the expectations of Bahamian recruits, a mass exodus often resulted. Problems related to labor – unnecessary fines or other sanctions imposed on individual laborers – prompted some Bahamians to return home prematurely. Others were victims of prejudice and discrimination and returned home preferring to be free and poor than suffer such injustices.

Ill health was another major factor in the decision to return. Many Bahamians who worked in Central America, Mexico and the United States contracted malaria, typhoid fever, rheumatism, tuberculosis, venereal diseases, or suffered crippling job-related injuries, forcing some to return home invalid or otherwise broken down in health.

Homesickness/family reunification propelled a majority of Bahamians back to their home districts, as did familial and community obligations to clear fields, plant crops, tend fruit trees, and maintain homes and boats.

Sometimes immigration restrictions forced Bahamians to return home or prevented them from emigrating. The 1924 United States Immigration and Nationality Act dramatically stemmed the flow of Bahamians to Florida and resulted in the repatriation of a sizeable number of Bahamians working in Florida. As the Resident Justice for Long Cay, Acklins and Crooked Island noted in the 1924 Annual Report "now that Miami is closed people are returning home."

Impact of Migration on the Bahamas

Evaluating the impact of migration on the original sending society is a difficult exercise because interview data and historical accounts inevitably reflect individual biases regarding the benefits or costs of migration. To the individual Bahamian migrants and their families, the folklore suggests migration was an indispensable godsend. On the other hand, colonial officials and employers, especially in the out-islands, frequently decried migration's crippling effects on their communities. For example, the demographic impacts on some islands were dramatic. According to Table 1, between 1901-1921, the populations of Eleuthera, Inagua, and Long Cay fell 28, 36, and 67 percent respectively. During the U.S. Farm Labor wave (1943-1963), further declines were again recorded by Acklins (30 percent), Cat Island (19 percent), Crooked Island (29 percent), and Long Cay (78 percent).

Such drastic population declines, in combination with the chronic migration-induced sex-ratio imbalances (Table 4) – notably in New Providence, Acklins, Crooked Island, Cat Island, the Exumas, Long Cay, Long Island, San Salvador and Rum Cay – created severe local labor shortages. The common complaint was that "the best and most honest and energetic ... are emigrating to the Southern States" (Craton 1962: 255). Moreover, in the 1930s some towns were virtually deserted with residences and businesses untenanted and falling into decay (Albury 1975: 199). Surprisingly, migration had no visible effects on birth, death and marriage rates (see Table 6). This stability occurred primarily because Bahamian movements in this century have been largely recurrent labor migrations, generally of limited duration and often involving seasonal commuting. For the same reasons, persistent migration did not significantly alter the nativity composition of the

TABLE 6. CRUDE BIRTH, DEATH AND MARRIAGE¹ RATES IN THE BAHAMAS, 1901-1963

Year	Crude Birth	Crude Death	Crude Marriage	Year	Crude Birth	Crude Death	Crude Marriage	Year	Crude Birth	Crude Death	Crude Marriage
1901	39.6	23.8	11.9	1922	32.3	26.2	8.2	1943	38.4	17.1	13.7
1902	39.5	24.1	8.1	1923	31.8	27.9	9.7	1944	37.3	17.7	10.1
1903	38.7	21.6	7.8	1924	29.8	23.8	8.1	1945	32.3	20.5	6.8
1904	41.1	22.1	7.7	1925	28.0	23.5	8.2	1946	31.6	15.2	7.2
1905	40.3	21.4	7.9	1926	29.0	24.8	7.8	1947	NA	NA	NA
1906	40.4	22.8	8.6	1927	26.3	26.0	8.1	1948	34.6	15.0	9.4
1907	39.6	29.2	7.9	1928	NA	NA	NA	1949	35.4	15.1	8.9
1908	36.5	26.2	6.2	1929	30.6	19.6	8.4	1950	33.4	16.1	9.7
1909	39.0	21.1	7.3	1930	28.4	17.7	7.2	1951	NA	NA	NA
1910	38.2	26.1	7.5	1931	31.7	18.0	7.5	1952	34.2	13.1	NA
1911	34.0	21.7	7.1	1932	37.2	20.2	7.6	1953	37.6	12.2	7.7
1912	32.8	26.9	8.4	1933	29.9	18.7	6.8	1954	39.6	10.9	6.9
1913	34.5	25.9	9.1	1934	32.3	16.6	7.1	1955	31.3	10.2	7.2
1914	35.2	24.8	7.9	1935	34.6	16.6	8.5	1956	34.1	9.4	6.7
1915	44.2	20.6	6.7	1936	31.0	17.7	9.0	1957	30.8	7.9	7.0
1916	39.4	17.4	9.2	1937	34.0	15.8	9.4	1958	28.6	10.2	7.2
1917	39.3	20.8	7.6	1938	33.0	18.8	8.6	1959	28.6	9.0	8.0
1918	35.6	16.5	5.8	1939	32.4	17.6	8.8	1960	29.1	6.9	7.8
1919	37.3	18.7	6.6	1940	NA	NA	NA	1961	31.0	8.5	7.3
1920	36.2	22.7	6.6	1941	41.2	17.6	10.4	1962	27.7	6.5	6.6
1921	38.2	20.5	7.2	1942	NA	NA	NA	1963	NA	NA	NA

Sources: 1. Colony Blue Books - Bahamas

2. Bahamas - Vital Statistics Summaries and Reports, 1967, 1978

Note: ¹Based on revised population estimates

TABLE 7. POPULATION BY PLACE OF BIRTH, BAHAMAS, 1901-1963

Year	Total Population	Place of Birth											
		Bahamas		Other West Indies		USA and Canada		United Kingdom		Other Europe		All Other Countries	
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
1901	53,735	52196	97.1	628	1.2	386	.7	185	.3	22	—	328 ¹	.7
1911	55,944	54603	97.6	408	.7	511	.9	157	.3	30	.1	235	.4
1921	53,031	51980	98.0	249	.5	531	1.0	154	.3	47	.1	70	.1
1931	59,828	57560	96.2	590	1.0	1263	2.1	218	.4	131	.2	66	.1
1943	68,846	66168	96.1	903	1.3	1173	1.7	309	.4	145	.2	148	.2
1953	84,841	78896	93.0	1534	3.0	2091	2.5	793	1.0	201	.2	326	.3
1963	130,220	114438	87.9	8401 ²	6.4	4407	3.4	1752	1.3	603	.5	619 ³	.5

Source: 1901-1963 Censuses of the Bahama Islands

Notes: ¹ Of this number 308 were born in Africa² Of this number 4170 were born in Haiti and 2639 in the Turks and Caicos Islands³ Includes other commonwealth

population (see Table 7). This indirect demographic evidence that return was frequent and "permanent" migration was negligible contrasts the Bahamian pattern with migratory experiences elsewhere in the Caribbean.²⁵

There were myriad negative social spillovers associated with the recurrent exodus of able-bodied Bahamian males. A shortage of men meant that houses and boats fell into disrepair, fields went unplanted and untended, and women and children were forced to do the labor of men. Men leaving their families was seen to be the chief cause of immorality in the colony, while young people who returned from abroad, especially women, were observed to have changed for the worse (Annual Report, Author's Town, Cat Island 1916; Annual Report, Long Island 1931). Some migrants were also reported to have returned with various contagions which resulted in a marked increase in these diseases in hitherto relatively healthy island communities. The 1912 and 1916 Annual Reports for Arthur's Town, Cat Island, best summarize this negative view of Bahamian migration when they conclude that (1) "remittances do not make up for retrogression in the fields and other conditons that occur in the absence of men;" (2) "people do not improve physically, morally or financially while working abroad;" (3) "those who stay at home are far better off." In the same vein, many colonial authorities welcomed the 1924 United States Immigration and Naturalization Act, and the official position of the British Colonial office was that although the Act was likely to cause some personal hardship at first, the colony as a whole would benefit (Colonial Annual Report 1924: 4).

Yet this was a minority view. The vast majority of Bahamians and resident British officials on the out-islands saw migration as a great boon to their districts. Many communities prospered handsomely. Long Cay during its heyday (1900–1914) when it served as a port of call for the Hamburg-American Shipping Line, was called Fortune Island. Albury (1975: 199) similarly notes that the stevedoring center of Matthew Town, Inagua, was a magical place:

Its fine houses, broad streets, carriage traffic, and bustling commerce all combined to produce a throbbing, booming atmosphere. From there, workers departed to stevedore on ships of the Hamburg-American Line and Royal Netherlands Line, or to serve as contract laborers on the Panama Canal, Mexican Railway, and the mahogany industries of Central America. After their stint, they returned first to Inagua to throw a party, primed with 'Key' gin and barrelled beer, and then to drift back to their former lifestyles, a little richer and a little wiser.

The benefits attendant on labor migration attest to its durability as a livelihood strategy. Large number of houses were built and repaired with remittances. Migrant earnings were invested in new businesses. Men returned with new ideas, and occasionally with newly acquired skills and capital.²⁶ Migration also reduced unemployment at home (Annual Report, The Bight, Cat Island 1913). Returning migrants often came back politicized regarding their rights as workers and also with new attitudes towards black-white relationships. Such attitudinal changes were to fuel the growth of labor unions and the development of political consciousness among black Bahamians.

CONCLUSION

The Bahamas story illustrates many contours typical of other West Indian migrations. Above all, there was the conventional response to the familiar "push" conditions – poor soils, harsh weather, few industries – that constrained the majority of Bahamians from viable livelihood at home. The "pull" factors in the external environment included guaranteed employment, favourable wages, transportation, and contracts with provisions for income repatriation to support dependents left behind. Three somewhat distinct patterns were uncovered: the persistence of emigration from low-density out-island areas, the recurrent nature of migration, and its historical character in the contemporary context of an affluent, labor-short, immigrant society.

In the final analysis, however, to view Bahamian migration as solely a response to structural and historical conditions at home and abroad (the "setting") is to ignore the heroic dimensions of this migration and to reify the myriad reasons for the thousands of individual journeys (the "situation"). Certainly we must give Bahamians some credit in exercising control over their own livelihood mobility. While Rubenstein (1983: 304) argues that the "setting" takes precedence in the explanation of Caribbean migration, Richardson (1983: 176) clearly emphasizes the "situation":

long distance movements of West Indians from small islands are, from their standpoint, not so much manifestations of world-wide, macroeconomic shifts or disequilibria as they are ongoing livelihood adaptations to ensure survival on small, worn-out, and precarious resource bases.

The Bahamian story compels us again to examine both levels of analysis for understanding the richness of the migration experience.

NOTES

1. Otterbein (1966) in his study of family organization on Andros briefly touched upon migration of Andros Islanders. Dawn Marshall (1978) has addressed the issue of Haitian migration to the Bahamas and Boswell and Chibwa (1981) have examined internal migration between 1960-1970 – but Bahamian external migration remains an unexplored topic, with the exception of Greenberg's (1978) work on the Farm Labor Program.
2. This would, of course, suggest an intimate link with Florida and Haiti.
3. This section borrows heavily from the *Bahama Islands, 1980 Statistical Abstract*.
4. Data for 1977 from pg. 96 in *Yearbook of the Commonwealth 1984* (Foreign and Commonwealth Office); data for 1983 from Collinwood (1984), p. 615.
5. These include the two traditional narrow economic models which downplay non-market and institutional forces, i.e., the surplus labor theory (Lewis, 1954; Fei and Ranis, 1964) and Todaro's (1976) wage-differential model, as well as the more recent historical-structural model (Watson 1976; History Task Force 1979; Maldonado Denis 1980; Rubenstein 1983). This latter view emphasizes how external capitalist forces integrate preindustrial societies into the global capitalist economy through the migrant labor system, but it often reifies the migrant experience and obscures the impact of local conditions.
6. Wrecking was the practice of luring ships onto reefs and then salvaging the cargo when the ships broke up.
7. Craton (1962: 217) writes that at mid-century "...the out-islands were relics of a poverty ... almost primeval."
8. As late as 1858, there were 302 licensed wreckers including a crew of nearly 2,700 (Craton 1962: 239). This represented 25-30 percent of the total work force.
9. Pineapples, planted almost exclusively on Cat Island and Eleuthera, peaked in 1900 with exports of over 7 million dozen. The industry was plagued by weather, spoilage in transport, inefficient growing methods, U.S. duties, poor quality, and the practice of bulk shipping in preference to grading (Shattuck 1905: 176).
10. In 1901, one-third of the Bahamian work force (approximately 6,000 men) depended on sponging for their livelihood. At its peak (1919) the Bahama sponge industry supplied a quarter of the world's sponges (Hughes 1981: 12).
11. Tourism which had begun as early as the 1850's became the mainstay of the economy of New Providence (Nassau) by the 1920's, with a substantial number of North Americans of the "wealthiest classes" flocking to Nassau annually for their winter vacations (Colonial Annual Report, No. 1202, 1924: 4). This tradition of the Bahamas as a playground for wealthy winter vacationers continued until the end of the 1940's when attempts were made to explore the mass market and attract year round tourists.

12. This mis-classification may also explain why the net migration total for 1931-1943 is over 1,000 short of the 3,881 census figure reported in Table 1.
13. In 1947, 212 laborers were contracted from Long Cay, Acklins and Crooked Island. By 1950 this number had declined to 160 and by 1960 to 77.
14. The motives of the law were twofold: (1) to improve the race by attracting white and/or Spanish-speaking immigrants; and (2) hostility towards British, French, and Danish "negroes" who formed the bulk of the plantation laborers.
15. The earliest Bahamian community in Florida was established in Key West during the heyday of the sponge industry. By 1892, there were 8,000 Bahamians living in Key West, roughly a third of the town (Hughes 1981: 13). Many American black residents of Eastern Florida are descendants of Bahamians who migrated to Miami, Coconut Grove and Deerfield Beach.
16. White Bahamians were exempted from the provisions of this Act, while black Bahamians were permitted entry for purposes of family reunification and if they could pass an education test.
17. Otterbein (1966) in his study of Andros Islands noted that 42 percent of the adult males were away at any one point in time.
18. According to Craton (1962) and Shattuck (1905), the soil was so routinely overworked it lost 50 percent of its productivity in five years, and then was left fallow 15-20 years. There was little use of fertilizers and no system of crop rotation.
19. The Hamburg American Line abandoned Long Cay as a port of call in 1914. Between 1911 and 1931 Long Cay's population declined from 376 persons to 141 (see Table 1).
20. The average monthly wage in Panama in 1907 was 5 American gold dollars clear of deductions plus one pound sterling for the laborer's family.
21. According to Greenberg (1978: 174), this deduction amounted to 25 percent and included a travel allowance "in case the laborer did go broke and had no money to return home with."
22. In the 1940s, an industrious worker could earn up to \$20-25 per day harvesting corn or cane.
23. There are no accounts of the experiences of Bahamian laborers in the Dominican Republic except oblique references to hostility shown "British, French and Danish Negroes" (Colonial Office Dispatch, Bahamas No. 90, 1912).
24. The contract with the Panama Railroad Company was one such example, with many men deserting after the first month of service.

25. There is evidence in Segal (1975) that the age-sex selectivity of large-scale migration from Barbados and Puerto Rico markedly reduced birth rates in those countries. McElroy & De Albuquerque (1984) have shown that recent emigration from St. Kitts-Nevis has both reduced birth rates and raised death rates.

26. The 1919 Annual Report for the District of The Bight, Cat Island, notes that "one man returning from Florida brought a plough, seed planter, and a weeder."

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