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The changing face of Nassau : the impact of tourism on Bahamian society in the 1920s and 1930s

Description of the development of the Bahamian tourist industry in the interbellum. Author analyses tourism's impact on the socioeconomic and political life of the colony, including race relations and its effect on white, coloured, and black entrepreneurs.

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THE CHANGING FACE OF NASSAU:
THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON BAHAMIAN SOCIETY
IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the twentieth century, fundamental change took place in the Caribbean. Many former colonies became independent and sought to develop their own political, economic, and cultural patterns. Despite this, the dependency on foreign investment remained. The tourist industry which developed in most Caribbean territories during this period was an “engine of growth,” and the key to development and modernization (Pattullo 1996:5-6).

As Polly Pattullo (1996:7-12) also demonstrated, the development of tourism while raising the standard of living for many in the region has also had a negative impact in some areas. The dependency on tourism and the change from elite tourism to mass tourism has had damaging effects on the economies, the socio-racial relations, the fragile infrastructure, cultural development, and the environment.

In the Bahamas as in Jamaica, Barbados, and Cuba, tourism on a small scale was developing as early as the nineteenth century. However, it was during the interwar years (1919-1939), that there was a tremendous growth in tourist travel internationally. North Americans travelled to Europe and within the United States especially to Florida and California which offered sunshine and warmth. Some ventured to the more “exotic” Caribbean and the Atlantic islands of Bermuda and New Providence (Nassau) in the Bahamas (Taylor 1973:1).

The Caribbean, as Paradise in European imagination, had come full circle – “from Paradise to wasteland and back again” (Strachan 1995:38). Frank Taylor (1993:4) states that by the early twentieth century, the Caribbean –

particularly Barbados, Jamaica, Cuba, the Bahamas (and Bermuda) – “began to be transformed into playgrounds” for itinerant Europeans and Americans in search of “health and enjoyment.” The once tropical plantations, thought to be unfit for whites, “were being touted as veritable gardens of Eden.”

The Bahamas was emerging as a “rich man’s paradise” from the mid-nineteenth century and tourism further expanded during the bonanza years of Prohibition in the United States (1919-33). Additionally, the decline in the traditional agricultural and sponge fishing industries and the possibility of quick money encouraged the colonial administrators and the House of Assembly to embrace the tourist business.

There is no detailed account of the tourist industry in the Bahamas. General historians (Albury 1975; Hughes 1981; Craton 1986) mention the industry briefly. Ian Strachan’s (1995) recent doctoral dissertation has proved useful as has, especially from a comparative perspective, Frank Taylor’s *To Hell with Paradise* (1993). Important sources, besides the traditional Colonial Office papers, include newspapers, travelogues, post-cards, touristic magazines, and oral history interviews.

This paper describes how Bahamian tourism developed in the 1920s and 1930s and analyzes the impact on the socio-economic and political life of the colony, including race relations and its effect on white, colored, and black entrepreneurs. It concludes by comparing Nassau then to contemporary times there, and in the wider Caribbean.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

As early as 1740, Nassau had gained a reputation as a winter and health resort for “invalids” and others from the United States and Canada seeking a change and warmer climate. However, up to the nineteenth century, tourism still existed on a very small scale and had limited impact on the economy. During the 1850s, the government began to actively promote tourism. It made contracts with the shipping companies and financed the building of the first hotel, the Royal Victoria (Albury 1975:221-22).

Tourism remained a small industry, yet at the end of the nineteenth century there was another concerted effort to promote tourism. Governor Haynes Smith, eager to attract visitors from Florida which was becoming a popular resort for American northerners, negotiated with Henry M. Flagler, a wealthy oil magnate, developer of South Florida and the owner of the East Coast Railway and a large number of hotels.¹ Flagler was instrumental in boosting the development of tourism. He bought the Royal Victoria

Hotel, agreed to build and maintain another hotel, the Colonial (opened in 1900), and to connect Nassau with his system of hotels and railways in Florida. This contract with Flagler and the very important Hotel and Steamship Act of 1898 gave the colony a winter passenger service between Nassau and Miami and a high standard of hotel accommodation (Albury 1975:225; Saunders 1985:35). These hotels provided "splendid" facilities for the wealthy visitor who wintered in Nassau. This type of visitor began the "season," which was to set a pattern for the tourist industry until the late 1940s (Albury 1975:225).

Much of the success of the tourist industry in the 1920s and 1930s was due to the upswing in the economy during Prohibition in the United States. Nassau, a transshipment port for smuggling liquor into the United States, benefitted greatly from rum-running profits. Revenues increased as a result of the dramatic rise in liquor exports (Craton 1986:250-55; Saunders 1985:241-51; Craton & Saunders, forthcoming).

Hotel facilities were expanded and improved. Guests were accommodated at the major hotels – the New Colonial, the Fort Montagu, completed in 1926, and the Royal Victoria. There were also smaller hotels such as the Prince George (after the mid-1930s), Lucerne, and Allen, with notorious reputations for housing rum-runners, and several boarding houses. Some private families accepted paying guests while others leased furnished houses for the winter.

The Colonial was destroyed by fire on March 31, 1922. The government and the Development Board, determined that there should be little or no adverse effect on tourism, contracted The Munson Steamship Line to quickly rebuild it. With a low interest government loan and imported West Indian and Cuban laborers, the company rebuilt it in six months. The hotel re-opened for the best season ever in February 1923. Aesthetically, the new structure was an eyesore. It was designed in the Spanish-American style, imported from South Florida, representing the first break with the traditional colonial Georgian architectural style (Saunders & Cartwright 1979:44).

Like most expatriate officials Governor Sir Bede Clifford (1932-1937) was at first skeptical about making tourism the mainstay of the Bahamian economy and attempted to improve agricultural production. However, he realized that tourism could quickly bolster the flagging economy and replace the revenue lost on exports boosted by Prohibition profits. As he recalled in his memoirs, he advised his Executive Council: "Well gentlemen, it amounts to this – if we can't take the liquor to the Americans we must bring the Americans to the liquor." The Governor saw it as "a choice between the tourist industry and bankruptcy" (Clifford 1964:194). In

other words, the liquor in Nassau attracted tourists "in waves and floods."

Clifford therefore enthusiastically embarked on a policy to encourage tourists. In 1932 he had negotiated a tighter contract with the Munson Company, which had hitherto rendered unsatisfactory service and had let the New Colonial Hotel fall into disrepair. Under the new contract the government would take over the hotel if service did not improve.

The government ensured that adequate and attractive facilities were available concentrating developments in the capital, mainly downtown Nassau. Sporting activities such as lawn tennis flourished by 1929. Frequent tournaments were held at the hotels or the Nassau Lawn Tennis Club. Golf links were built at Fort Charlotte and the Bahamas Country Club at Cable Beach. International golfers visited Nassau to participate in such tournaments as the British Colonial Open, which offered \$ 5000 in prizes in 1935. In that year Nassau established itself firmly on the southern golfing circuit.² Other activities were fishing, and duck and wild pigeon shooting. Big game fishing flourished at Bimini and Cat Cay, and like the mid-1930s Lyford Cay, through the efforts of Harold G. Christie, had also become known for the sport.³

Sea-bathing on the white coral sand beach at Hog Island was also a popular pastime.⁴ Funds were allocated to establish a "bathing beach" (for tourists only) on crown land opposite the New Colonial Hotel, while Fort Charlotte was restored and its grounds cleared for sight-seeing. Guides outfitted in costumes of the 1790 Aeneid period gave tours. A pamphlet, *Historic Forts of Nassau* written by Harcourt Malcolm, speaker of the Assembly and local historian, was sold there at one shilling. Profits from this sale and admission charge of two shillings were to be used for further restoration of historic monuments.⁵

Other tourist attractions included the white dominated horse racing and horse riding. Early in the decade an improved track for horse racing was built at the Montagu Park Race Course, also known as Hobby Horse Hall, located behind Cable Beach. The first races were held in January 1934, initiating a sport which was to become increasingly popular among ordinary Bahamians as well as well-heeled tourists.

In 1934, promoted mainly by Roland T. Symonette, Commodore of the Nassau Yacht Club (which he had founded in 1931), the Miami-Nassau Ocean Race and the Spring Championship Races of the International Star Class Yacht Racing Association were inaugurated in Nassau.

Another attraction was the Williamson Photosphere. John E. Williamson, the pioneer of undersea photography, supported by the government, in 1939 developed the unique Seafloor Post Office located in the Photo

sphere. Visitors bought specially produced stamps and observed the "wonders of the deep" in the clear Bahamian waters.⁶

Some of the foreign elite were lured by the exclusive Porcupine Club on Hog Island, the posh Bahamian Club on West Bay Street and others such as the Cat Cay and Bimini Rod and Gun Clubs. The Bahamian Club, which opened in 1920, was the first gambling facility in the Bahamas; its American owner, C.F. Reed, was granted permission to operate roulette tables. However, during the season, it was generally used by American and Canadian visitors to entertain their friends at dinner and supper. Many of the local elite were honorary members but they hardly ever patronized it.⁷

The infrastructure was greatly improved during the 1920s and 1930s from profits of the sale of alcohol. Wealth was expended mainly in financing sorely needed public works, communications, and making Nassau more attractive to tourists and investors. Water, telephone, and electricity supplies were improved and expanded. There was limited telephone service to the Out Islands but the wireless telegraph system was extended. A new electricity power plant and cold storage plant were installed in 1922.⁸ By the end of the 1920s there was a modern pipe-borne water supply and sewerage system. To facilitate shipping Nassau's harbor was dredged and deepened and a concrete wharf was constructed just north of Rawson Square. A warehouse and customs shed were also built to accommodate passengers. A new pier was constructed at Clifton, south-west New Providence, where ships could unload passengers and cargo during stormy weather which occasionally made Nassau harbor dangerously rough.

The once quiet streets were changing as the number of cars imported increased from six in 1918 to 297 in 1922. Thereafter, it continued to increase steadily. Ownership of a car became a status symbol and the Sunday drive the favorite pastime of the white and colored elite. This growth in the number of cars, complaints about speeding and reckless driving, and the rise in traffic accidents stimulated public criticism and the need for more traffic regulations.⁹

In order to cope with the increasing motor traffic in Nassau, the road system was extended and tarred by 1928. This was in contrast to the Out Islands which, with the exception of Eleuthera, had very few roads which were suitable for wheeled traffic. Some, such as the *Nassau Guardian's* editor, Mary Moseley, disliked the "oiled" streets and bemoaned the new process, expressing her fondness for "white" Bay Street.¹⁰

International communications were improved and by the end of the decade the Munson Line conducted a weekly winter passenger and freight service and a fortnightly summer service to and from New York. There were other services from Halifax, Canada, Bermuda, Jamaica, British

Honduras, and England via Bermuda. There were also frequent sailings from Miami to Nassau, but perhaps the most important development was the introduction of a daily air service by Pan American Airways. On January 2, 1929, a seaplane carrying twenty-four passengers began a regular winter service between Miami and Nassau (Moseley 1926:35; Hughes 1981:253). In the summer an eight-passenger aircraft serviced the island once or twice a week (Cash 1979:210). In addition a direct telephone link between Nassau, New York, and Canada was instituted, primarily to allow tourists and especially businessmen to keep in touch with their financial interests.

Nassau had gained a reputation not only as a tourist destination but also as a seasonal resort for the wealthy, some of whom made their homes there during the winter months. It was also during the 1930s that the Bahamas first became known internationally as a tax haven, attracting foreign investment, not only in the capital, but also on several of the Out Islands. Owing to its loose tax structure – there were no income, profits, capital gains, nor real estate taxes, many investors were drawn to Nassau to escape taxation in North America and Britain (Thompson 1979:30). By the mid-1930s Nassau was well established as a resort, owing to its unrivaled winter climate, yachting, “old-world atmosphere” and the government’s aggressive policy towards “selling” the Bahamas. The Development Board, financed by the government and chaired by R.H. Curry, the leading steam-ship agent with vested interest, spent thousands of pounds in advertisements to attract wealthy Americans and Canadians.

THE EFFECTS OF TOURISM

The vigorous measures adopted by the Development Board to improve transportation and communication between the United States and the Bahamas and to develop other amenities, brought increasing numbers of tourists to Nassau. Whereas 10,295 tourists had visited during the 1922-1923 season, over 25,000 stopped at Nassau between December 1934 and March 1935 and 57,394 in 1938.¹¹ Revenues were boosted and much wealth accrued mainly to the white Nassau mercantile elite and foreign investors.

Economically, there were benefits but because of the nature of the Bahamian (indeed the Caribbean) economy, tourism had only a limited impact. The orientation towards the export market and the domination of foreign ownership inhibited the development of linkages between all sectors of the domestic economy. This was particularly pertinent in the

Bahamas. There the service sectors, tourism, and financial services became the dominant activities with negligible development of secondary production and few linkages between any of the economic sectors (Higgins 1994:8). Additionally, the absence of direct taxation and dependence on import duties led to an underfinanced treasury in contrast to "tremendously wealthy private empires" (Lewis 1968:320).

The Bahamas benefitted from the Florida land boom in the 1920s and 1930s. American tourists, many of whom were investors, bought estates and cays, built homes, and laid out developments on Hog Island and New Providence. With land changing hands at an unprecedented rate, its value increased enormously especially on New Providence, although much land on the Out Islands was also leased or purchased. Bahamian realtors, led by Harold Christie, sold thousands of acres of land to foreigners. This was facilitated by local conditions such as poverty and shortage of money, local ignorance of the value of beach front properties, confused titles, and the inefficiency at the Surveyor General's Department and Registry (Saunders 1985:257; Craton & Saunders, forthcoming). The Colonial Administration's ambivalence towards such rapid development perhaps hampered some sales. Governor Cordeaux expressed his fear and almost paranoia of Americanization and his reluctance to sell or lease so much Crown Land:

I don't like the idea of parting, though its difficult to refuse genuine development schemes. Americans are buying every available inch of private land in New Providence and paying enormous prices for it – and there will soon be nothing British left except the flag!¹²

In the 1930s many palatial homes were built by expatriate residents. Among them were financier and banker Sir Herbert Holt and Lady Holt of Montreal, who began regularly visiting the Bahamas in 1935, financier Sir Frederick Williams-Taylor and his wife, also originally of Montreal but recently settled in London, British aeroplane manufacturer Frederick Sigrist¹³ from Berkshire, England, and Harry Oakes and his family who had several residences. They lavishly entertained each other and the local elite. In 1935 Nassau was described as "the social center of the south" where "the society set of Palm Beach and other Florida resorts mingled with the fashionable colony here in a gay whirl of parties" sometimes prompted by royal visitors (Saunders 1985:340).¹⁴

More modest land developments were also taking place to accommodate blacks and coloreds, some of whom had recently migrated from the Out Islands. The developers were mainly foreign¹⁵ with some outstanding local entrepreneurs like L. Walton Young who developed areas in

southern New Providence, like his foreign counterparts, away from the increasingly pristine tourist center of Nassau (Saunders 1985:259).

There was uneven development in the Bahamas. While Nassau experienced rapid development, the Out Islands, where the majority of people lived, were generally neglected. *Tribune* editor Etienne Dupuch commented in 1924, "we have almost bankrupted the Treasury to build a hotel, a golf course and provide a steamship line while the people of the Out Islands starve."¹⁶ This situation, aggravated by tightened US immigration restrictions after 1924 and a series of severe hurricanes in the late 1920s and early 1930s, accelerated migration of Out Islanders into Nassau. Between 1921 and 1931, New Providence's population increased by 6,781, or 52 percent. In 1921 less than a quarter of the total population lived in New Providence. Ten years later, the proportion had risen to a third.¹⁷

This migration to the capital created new socio-economic problems. Most of the newcomers were unskilled and therefore unable to find steady employment.¹⁸ The tourist industry brought in more money and should have created new jobs and training skills for Bahamian laborers, but did not because of management's discriminatory policy. The majority of people derived only a "small share of profit" from tourism as the hotels and foreign residents imported most of their staff.¹⁹

Etienne Dupuch argued that the New Colonial, far from creating jobs, gave rise to competition. After much protest from cab drivers and boatmen, the hotel-sponsored transportation for guests to the golf-course and the Hog Island Beach ceased and locals were hired. Bahamian bellboys were not employed until 1925.²⁰

Governor Charles Dundas tried to rectify this situation by opening the Dundas Civic Center, supplied by public subscription, to train blacks as cooks, waiters, and domestic servants. This way they would be qualified for the lowest paid jobs which were available to blacks and coloreds and at which they might be capable (Saunders 1985:340; Bethel & Bethel 1991:64). The Montagu Hotel hired graduates of the Center for the 1932-33 season to work as bartenders and Bahamian workers were supplied to wealthy whites homes as well. Managerial positions continued to be filled by foreigners. Bahamian laborers also suffered from the high cost of living in Nassau. Jobs became scarcer towards the end of the decade and wages were reduced but the cost of living remained high. Nassau was generally accepted as one of the most expensive places in the world. The combination of rich American tourists, prosperous bootleggers and real estate developers inflated the cost of living and made it difficult for British

officials and Wesleyan ministers to maintain a satisfactory standard of living in Nassau (Saunders 1985:269).²¹

House rents for foreign residents were three times as expensive as those in Trinidad. And it was much more for the majority of the laboring class and migrants. In 1938, unskilled laborers earned 2 to 4 shillings a day, while those with skills were paid between 4 and 20 shillings a day. Cooks and housemaids received 10-20 shillings a week for working about ten hours a day.²² A laborer spent about 4 shillings a week on rent and 9 pence a day for his food. Food prices were especially high because of the decline in agriculture and the dependency on imports. Native-grown fruits and vegetables were scarce and expensive. Governor Dundas complained that there were "not a few who now regard life as a cultivator beneath their dignity."²³

Laborers in the tourism industry suffered even more because of its seasonal nature. Many worked only three to four months of the year. Even in the winter when more job opportunities became available, wages remained dangerously low and the black population barely survived. This demoralizing situation, tightening discriminatory policies, and the transfer of other American values resulted in increased social problems such as vagrancy and crime.

In July 1935, when businessman and politician Roland Symonette was building the Prince George Hotel 300 to 400 men sought employment. A near riot broke out when they realized that most of them would not be hired. Later that year 800 unemployed men turned to Fort Charlotte for forty available jobs. Unable to find work, many unashamedly took to begging, loitering, arson, and theft. In the late summer of 1937, the Nassau and Montagu Theaters both of which practised segregation mysteriously burnt down. By July 1938, Governor Dundas admitted that there was "a Nassau mob of about 1000 persons" consisting of "young loafers, criminals and riff raff of that type."²⁴

In short, despite the growing optimism brought by the development of tourism, there were great social disparities within Bahamian society. The growing restlessness, present in the Caribbean generally during the 1930s, culminated in riots and strikes. The Nassau riot of 1942, unlike those in the rest of the Caribbean, did not result in any immediate change in social conditions for the masses.

Despite the great advances in the health and material conditions in down-town Nassau, sanitary and health conditions for the majority of the population remained dismal until the 1960s. Major improvements of potable water and sewerage excluded Grant's Town and Bain Town in the south, where the black majority resided. The House of Assembly, which at

first had rejected the request of the Governor that a sanitary expert from England be employed, reversed its decision only after a number of American visitors became ill with typhoid fever.²⁵

Sir Wilfred Beveridge, an eminent doctor and later one of the leaders of the Labour Party's great social reforms in Britain following World War II, praised Nassau's new water-works and sewerage system then under construction. However, he deplored their limited extension and revealed the extremely unhygienic conditions of the Eastern and Pond Districts, Grant's Town, and Bain Town. He was also shocked by the conditions in the hospital, the prevalence of tuberculosis, venereal diseases, and neonatal tetanus, and horrified by public indifference, ignorance, and poverty which led to substandard housing and overcrowding. These suburbs, not too far from central Nassau, suffered from congestion, flooding, uncollected garbage in which pigs, dogs, and fowls rooted, and also open privies polluting both wells and cooking areas (Beveridge 1927:48; Saunders 1985:262).

Up to 1951 conditions virtually did not change. S.E.V. Luke, of the Colonial Office wrote

Behind Nassau's picturesque old-world streets and the princely mansions along the East and West shores are slums as bad as any West Indian Colony, and far worse than anything Bermuda can show.

He added that "it is disgraceful that conditions should exist in so rich an island." Indeed over 71 percent of New Providence housing still had no running water in 1953.²⁶

Tourism and foreign investment especially affected the white elite Nassauvians, although the middle class also subtly became Americanized. Frank Taylor's (1973:216) comment on the Jamaican situation, "Along with the American tourist there had also come the American film, Hollywood values, and apparently Hollywood 'vulgarity'" was also true for the Bahamas. A letter writer to the *Tribune* in March 1930 complained about the loudness, drinking, and vulgar dancing by some staff of the New Colonial Hotel who were waiting to embark on the *Munargo*. The writer was shocked:

What an example for our girls to see stockingless painted half-drunken dissipated young men and women displaying to all around how far they have fallen into a state of utter depravity and disgrace.²⁷

Undoubtedly such behavior, films, and the radio, which became popular in Nassau during the thirties, had a profound effect on a section of the

population. Another letter to the *Tribune* at the time, although perhaps exaggerating, stated that Nassau, under the influence of American culture, was going mad. The writer said young people of Nassau were frivolous, "dancing, drinking and living a sporting life, in and out of season."²⁸

Besides keeping up with the most popular American dances, the white and colored elite were exposed to American foods and fashion. Preoccupation with materialism was growing and American imports also influenced dress codes. Styles became more casual and dresses were shortened from just above the ankle, usually to mid-calf length. Slacks were worn in the late thirties and make-up, although by no means universal, became more common. Men's styles also became less formal. Often, shirts with neckties were worn instead of the customary three piece dark tailored suit. As the search for the sun became a major force in the tourist industry bathing attire for both sexes became briefer (exposing the flesh) but was still modest.²⁹

Drinking by both men and women had become an acceptable custom and an integral part of Bahamian society during the 1930s. Liquor interests increased after Prohibition and it became more accessible and inexpensive. Tourism, which attracted "the fun-loving heavy drinking" visitors and made liquor so accessible, had a profound impact on Bahamian drinking habits and the growth of alcoholism. Prostitution, which was prevalent in Nassau since the early twentieth century, worsened as "dance halls" and the sale of liquor increased. Prostitutes also frequented the wharves (Dean-Patterson 1978:37).³⁰

Some persons at the time held reservations about the effects of the tourist industry. Alan Burns (1944:84), Colonial Secretary in the Bahamas during the mid- to late 1920s, expressed some scepticism.

It was a glorious playground, but a very expensive place. The tourists poured money into the colony, but the people, both white and coloured, gave a great deal of their character in exchange for it.

Prohibition and the development of the tourist industry had a profound effect on race and class relations. The white mercantile elite profited most from the tourist industry. This class traditionally included families such as the Malcolms, Duncombes, Adderleys, and Moseleys. However, during the bonanza years of the 1920s it was expanded to include the *nouveau riche* group headed by Roland T. Symonette, Frank and Harold Christie, and Walter K. Moore, all from poor backgrounds. Prohibition had brought quick money and provided the "financial foundation of their status as the social and political ruling class of the island" (Lewis 1968:311).

Money whitened. Roland Symonette, for example, a poor, light-skinned seaman from Current settlement, Eleuthera, actually participated in boot-legging and rose to a position of wealth and power in the mid-1920s. He, like the white mercantile elite generally, consolidated his position in legitimate enterprises and election to the House of Assembly. In less than a generation the white community accepted him and his family. Wealth attracted power and authority, and racial differences were linked to economic relationships. Now race became even more important in determining social status (Hughes 1981:22; Saunders 1987:448-65; Saunders 1994a:1-17 and 1994b:7).

The white mercantile elite controlled not only the strategic business enterprises but also the political machinery. The growing strength of *nouveau riche* politicians, united with the influential older elite, benefitting from corrupt election practices, made it increasingly difficult for coloreds and blacks to win seats. Politically the latter lost ground in the House of Assembly after 1935. Governor Dundas admitted in 1938, "the corrupt practices of electioneering in this colony are notorious and not disputed by anyone."³¹ The secret ballot was not introduced to the Out Islands and permanently adopted in New Providence until 1946.

The gap between rich and poor and white and black widened in Nassau. "The merchants of Bay Street ... saw to it that everything should be done to attract visitors who would spend money in their shops" (Burns 1949:84). As a result, they restricted not only non-white participation but also legislatively controlled the immigrant minorities of Lebanese, Jews, Chinese, and Greeks (Johnson 1991:125-48). Foreigners, wishing to invest in the mid to late 1930s, usually first approached lawyer A.K. Solomon, and after 1935, Stafford L. Sands, his brash and brilliant nephew. Harold G. Christie then provided suitable land and Roland T. Symonette, who was in the shipbuilding and construction business, helped to develop it. They also benefitted from their interests in other lucrative enterprises such as the grocery, wholesale, and liquor businesses. They, along with the Bethells, Kellys, and Roberts, controlled the socio-economic and political life of the colony (Saunders 1985:352-53).

Some Bahamians were critical of the ruling elite's concentration on tourists and money-making to the detriment of locals. An anonymous writer in protest against another road diversion wrote:

I can only come to the conclusion that we really need a thorough change among our so-called leaders today. They have sold Sunday for the almighty dollar; they have sold themselves for a mess of pottage and now they are trying to sell the last and only privilege that Bahamians have and

pride, our walks along the waterfront. I wonder sometimes they don't ask ourselves to lock up ourselves in our homes at certain hours of the day so that tourists can have the rights and privileges of the tourists for themselves (cited in Cash, Gordon & Saunders 1991:285).³²

A small white middle class including teachers, civil servants and shop assistants, which was emerging after Prohibition, emulated the white *nouveau riche*. Not many young and ambitious white Bahamians wished to pursue further education and qualify professionally, except in the legal field. Commercial prosperity lured them into shopkeeping and other commercial enterprises. While wealth created a division among the Nassau whites, their color and small numbers united them as a social group. Although they did not usually socialize, they assisted each other by finding positions or Civil Service jobs for white youngsters.

Colored and black businessmen on or near Bay Street, many of whom had also benefitted from Prohibition, pitted against wealthy white competition were pushed off of Bay Street in the 1930s. Those whose businesses survived the depression underwent little expansion. Some coloreds, such as the DeGregorys and a number of upwardly mobile blacks, many of them originally from the Out Islands, like Herbert and Eugene Heastie, Edgar Bain, and Ulrich Mortimer managed to keep their businesses going. Many established businesses over the hill (Saunders 1985:359).

The majority of coloreds and upwardly mobile blacks, barred from holding jobs on Bay Street, turned to education for salvation. Fortunate pupils attended the Government High School, the first public secondary school established in Nassau in 1925. Others were able to attend schools abroad, particularly in the United States, England, and the Angolophone Caribbean. Non-whites were increasingly employed in clerical level posts within the Civil Service and also as teachers (Saunders 1985:260, 279).

As in the Caribbean generally, the tourist industry made the racial situation worse. In the Bahamas, however, racial discrimination was more severe than in the other Caribbean colonies. The substantial white population (representing at least 10 percent of the population) and long historical ties with the southern United States led to antagonistic race relations. With the advent of Americans such as Frank Munson – who Dupuch described as a “visciously prejudiced man”³³ – came the Jim Crow attitudes. Discrimination was practised in public places and whites segregated themselves socially from blacks and coloreds, seeking to educate their children separately. The color bar at Queen's College was rigorously upheld until the 1950s. Similarly, whites segregated themselves in seating patterns in church and in some cases kept separate Sunday

schools and even insisted on being buried in separate graveyards (Cash, Gordon & Saunders 1991:50-51, 144, 278-79). In the mid-1930s, a Methodist Minister commented that in no other part of the West Indies the color situation was so sad and the racial bitterness so deep as in the Bahamas.³⁴

As Frank Taylor (1973:213) demonstrates, racism was "historically a built in feature of West Indian tradition of hospitality." The development of and growing dependency on tourism and American investment during the 1920s and 1930s hardened the already existing color line in the Bahamas. Like Jamaica and Barbados, the Bahamas suffered from discrimination in most tourist related facilities, "a mere reflection of practices current within the society as a whole." The flow of American visitors, money, and ideas in the 1920s and 1930s reinforced and extended racial segregation. American and British investors and land developers bought large tracts of land in the western area including Westward Villas and the Grove Estate, also known as Vista Marina. Sales of properties were aimed at wealthy Americans and the Nassau elite. Even if coloreds or blacks could afford to purchase lots, they were specifically banned by restrictive covenants (Saunders 1985:258).³⁵ Similar developments occurred east of the town and included Shirley Slope and Buen Retiro. Additionally, as in Jamaica the best beaches were reserved and, using public funds, were condoned off for the exclusive use of tourists (Taylor 1973:213-14; Saunders 1985:328).

The system of segregation was supported not only by the local elite but also by the Governor at the time. Etienne Dupuch (1967:76-77) wrote later that Sir Bede Clifford "felt that the tourist industry called for an 'all white' policy." Although he "succeeded in stemming the downward economic trend ... he did not realize the serious blow he had dealt to human relations in the colony."

Of course, the blatant discrimination did not go unnoticed. Three local black orchestra conductors, Bert Cambridge, Noel Maellet, and Leonard White, complained that local orchestras and bands were considered good enough for local functions, but not for elite gatherings.³⁶ The hotels and clubs hired American bands during the tourist season in Nassau. If colored and black musicians wished to hear a foreign orchestra, they had to seek special permission to enter the outside premises and listen at the windows.³⁷

Bootlegging, followed by the development of tourism, changed social values and widened the gap not only between races, but also classes. The new wealth created a cleavage not only between whites but also between non-whites. It exacerbated the already ingrained self-hatred and inferiority complex held by non-whites. As in the Caribbean generally, the divisive

element within the colored and black middle class tended to “perpetuate [rather] than to eliminate colour prejudice” (Olivier 1929:38-39; Lowenthal 1972:72).

Some colored businesses also practised discrimination. Black’s Candy Kitchen, for example, catered to all races but only whites or fair-skinned coloreds were allowed into its sit-down section (Saunders 1987:457). Some ambitious Nassau families, realizing the great advantages being offered to whites, gradually abandoned their colored and black acquaintances and “passed” for white. Association with whites and marriage to someone of European origin eventually led to acceptance by the white elite (Saunders 1985:358).³⁸

Tourism’s growth also stimulated the development and commercialization of local black entertainment and indigenous crafts. Catering to visitors and locals alike, the nightclubs, which became popular in the 1930s, also encouraged social drinking and prostitution. Two outstanding nightclubs, The Silver Slipper and The Zanzibar were built in Grant’s Town in the 1930s. The former was foreign owned, while the Zanzibar was co-owned by black entrepreneurs Milo Butler, Bert Gibson, Preston Moss, and Felix Johnson who catered to a varied clientele. Patrons attended in parties, usually fraternizing only with those at their own tables. The groups thus segregated their seating. Local black orchestras usually played at the clubs and “native” floorshows were performed to please the tourists (Saunders 1985:330-31).

Indigenous culture was also “packaged” for tourists. The Bahamian Goombay was popularized internationally by a member of the white elite, Charles Lofthouse. Black song writers and musicians, such as Alphonso “Blind Blake” Higgs and George Symonette, also gained limited local recognition. Other less well-known entertainers were Phillip Brice from Fox Hill, “Cowboy,” and “Shorty the Serenader” who sauntered down Bay Street singing and playing for American visitors, especially when cruise ships were in port (Burns 1949:84; Saunders 1985:333).

Additionally, tourists and winter residents, with stereotyped ideas about the “docility, ... manners, superstitious, idiosyncracies, and modes of thought” about the “natives” visited black settlements where they watched indigenous African-inspired dances and witnessed the “Holy Rollers” at their prayer meetings, “rolling more enthusiastically at the thought of the collection they would take up from the rich visitors.” Similarly young black boys dived for coins on the docks, much to the amusement of tourists (Malone & Roberts 1991:42; Dahl 1995:64-65).

Tourism also had a profound effect on the development of straw work, an ancient Bahamian craft. The straw market proper started in the mid-1930s, behind the Prince George's Wharf.

CONCLUSION

Downtown Nassau, in contrast to the black suburbs and Out Islands, changed significantly during the 1920s and 1930s. In order to please visitors, the infrastructure of the city was vastly improved and touristic and business facilities were constructed in the "quaint and bustling" Bay Street area. By the end of the 1930s, Nassau boasted several hotels, two modern theaters, and many posh shops selling a variety of European and American goods which especially appealed to the tourists.

The growth of tourism during this period boosted revenues and generated jobs and wage labor for the New Providence workers. However, the greater wealth was domiciled in Nassau and more specifically in the hands of a small mercantile elite which controlled the socio-economic and political life. The black majority lived in poverty in a society in which social problems such as crime and vagrancy were increasing.

Modern tourism in the Bahamas and in the Caribbean is built on the foundation of the earlier development, but is very different from that in the 1920s and 1930s. Whereas the tourist industry then was seasonal and catered to the happy few, today the Bahamas and the Caribbean cater to large numbers of tourists.

In 1994 of the 13.7 million Caribbean tourists about 3.5 million visited the Bahamas (Pattullo 1996:11). The change from elite tourism to mass tourism means that the Bahamas, a "mature" destination, struggles to compete with the rest of the Caribbean which has embraced tourism in the light of declining staple industries such as sugar, oil, and agriculture.

Factors which have radically changed Caribbean tourism since the 1920s and 1930s are the introduction of big hotel chains, large-scale gambling, and the cruise ship industry which is largely owned and controlled from outside the region. Expanding tremendously since the early 1980s, the cruise ship industry especially has outstripped land-based tourism. However, while cruise ships bring in enormous numbers of tourists, there are questionable benefits to the Caribbean and its people and its long term effect on the region's land-based tourism (Pattullo 1996:157-59).

As Pattullo further demonstrated, competition between hotels and cruise ships is real. While hotels provide jobs for locals, cruise ships which operate in the Caribbean are free to employ who they wish. Most cruise ships

are supplied by U.S. companies, not Caribbean ones. Moreover, cruise ships are polluting Caribbean waters and endangering the environment, and because they supply their passengers with most amenities it has been argued that little is left to spend in ports of call (Pattullo 1996:161-65).

Tourism has also had a profound impact on indigenous culture in the Caribbean – its lifestyle, food, music, dress, architecture, and celebrations. The people of the Caribbean have imitated Americans and their ways and have subtly been Americanized.

While Carnival in Trinidad has retained its own identity, it has changed over the years as it has been influenced by tourism. In the Bahamas, Junkanoo, a Christmas festival, which portrayed modest costumes of sack-ing, sponge, and newspaper in the 1920s and 1930s, now display elaborate costumes of cardboard, styrofoam, and colored crepe paper with groups hundreds-strong with drums, cowbells, and trumpets and large brass sections. Although tourists are almost entirely excluded from participating in Junkanoo, the spectator role of tourist, at least in the earlier years, has been “crucial to the survival of Junkanoo” (Wood 1995:487-92; Pattullo 1996:187).

Additionally, economic benefits from tourism indirectly assist sponsors in getting large groups into the parade. Tourism created a dependency syndrome which was damaging socially, culturally, and psychologically. Felix Bethel (1989:135) argues that “[i]t is clearly the case that as a result of tourism the Bahamas is chronically dependent” and not only economically. Such a state of dependency has had a pervasive effect on its population and economic growth (Demas 1976:56-59). Indeed Gordon Lewis (1968:321, 327) argued that “[t]his dependency on the wealthy United States tourist traffic, fundamentally parasitic, has incalculable consequences for the Bermudian-Bahamian [Caribbean] way of life. It has made of the ruling groups paranoid tourist-worshippers.” He further commented that life for the black majority was “a grim struggle for existence in a deceptively idyllic Eden.”

Lingering poverty and the inequities in Caribbean societies along with tourism have led to an increase in crime and drug-addiction. No real solutions have been found by Caribbean governments to combat these deep-rooted social problems. Some local tourists leaders, who believe that unabated crime will destroy the tourist industry, have responded by creating all-inclusive resorts which are cordoned off from the society and have tight security.

Changes introduced after the “Quiet Revolution” in 1967 with its emphasis on the improvement of education and social services raised the standard of living for the black majority and led to the upward mobility of

a large percentage of blacks. Despite this, the white mercantile elite has continued as the prominent beneficiaries of tourism, a "monoculture." Blacks in the Bahamas, as in the Caribbean generally, continue to occupy mainly servile positions in the tourism industry, catering mostly to a white clientele in an "intrinsically ... neo-plantation enterprise."³⁹

NOTES

1. Public Record Office (PRO), Colonial Office (CO) 23/246/57, Haynes Smith to Chamberlain, February 23, 1897.
2. *Nassau Magazine* 2(2) February 1935, pp. 12-13, 24.
3. *Tribune*, February 7, 1933; February 22 and March 5, 1937.
4. PRO, CO 23/291/340-345, Grant to Devonshire, October 28, 1922; Aspinall 1923:253-54.
5. PRO, CO 23/463, Clifford to Conliffe-Lister, December 30, 1932
6. *Nassau Magazine* 2(2) February 1940, pp. 8-9.
7. PRO, CO 23/289/311-312, Cordeaux to Churchill, December 23, 1921, Conf.
8. See *Nassau Guardian*, September 30, 1922; PRO, CO 23/405, CO 23/454, *Colonial Annual Reports Bahamas*, 1928, 1931. Encl.; *Tribune*, June 17, 1925. In 1928 in Nassau there were 1000 subscribers which increased to 1,150 by 1931. Eleuthera by that year had 65 miles of telephone lines; Cat Island 30 miles, Long Island 45, connecting the major settlements.
9. *Nassau Guardian*, February 3, 1923; December 29, 1926; *Tribune*, April 15 and September 23, 1923; July 17, 1926; January 11, 1927. New traffic rules were introduced early in 1927.
10. *Nassau Guardian*, August 20, 1921. See also PRO, CO 23/454, *Colonial Annual Reports Bahamas*, 1931, Encl.
11. *Tribune*, March 19, 1934; *Votes of the House of Assembly*, 21 November 1935-1 June, 1936, Appendix A, Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1936, p. 224; *Colonial Annual Report*, 1938, London: H.M.S.O., 1939, p. 18.
12. PRO, CO 23/296, Cordeaux to Darnley, August 8, 1925, private.
13. Sigrist was a founding member of the Hawker Aircraft Company which manufactured the Hurricane, the single-seater fighter plane designed by Sidney Camm, and utilized so successfully in World War II.
14. See also *Nassau Magazine* 2(4) April 1935, p. 22.
15. For example, Captain J.S. Engler of Miami, developer of Engler's Public Market in Miami, hoped to lure many Bahamian residents in Miami back to the Bahamas and subdivided "Nassau's Master Suburb" naming it Englerston.
16. *Tribune*, January 23, 1924.
17. *Report on the Census of the Bahama Islands*, taken April 26, 1931.

18. PRO, *Colonial Annual Reports Bahamas*, 1928
19. *Nassau Guardian*, February 3, 1923.
20. *Nassau Guardian*, February 21, 1925; *Tribune*, February 13, 1924.
21. PRO, CO 23/296, see Cordeaux to Amery, June 11, 1925, Conf.
22. *Colonial Annual Report*, 1938, p. 19.
23. PRO, CO 23/415, Dundas to Passfield, September 20, 1929.
24. PRO, CO 23/653, Dundas to Parkinson, July 11, 1938, Conf. See also *Tribune*, September 5, 27 and 30, 1937.
25. PRO, CO 23/347, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report, 1926-1927, Encl.
26. *Report on the Census of the Bahamas Islands*, December 6, 1953, Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1954.
27. *Tribune*, March 12, 1930.
28. *Tribune*, October 4, 1933.
29. *Tribune*, September 9, 1931; *Nassau Magazine* 3(3) February, 1936, 3(3) p. 15; Walvin 1995:16.
30. See also *Report of the Commission on Venereal Diseases*, Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1918, p. 23.
31. PRO, CO 23/653, Dundas to McDonald, July 11, 1938, conf.; Saunders 1985:232.
32. See also *Tribune*, January 6, 1938.
33. *Tribune*, December 16, 1983.
34. Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Letters, Johnson to Burns, April 8, 1936.
35. See for example, Registrar General's Department, Nassau Bahamas Conveyance, June 5, 1937 between Guy Robert Brooke Baxter and Vendor and the Baster Estate Ltd., clause 14: "no lot or any part thereof or any interest therein in the Vista Marina Subdivision of the GROVE Estate shall be sold, leased or otherwise conveyed to any person other than a full-blooded member of the Caucasian race."
36. *Tribune*, January 13, 1934.
37. Interview with Maxwell Thompson, January 17, 1984.
38. See also interview with Basil and Audrey North, August 10, 1984.
39. Hughes 1981:10; Bethel 1989:99-138; Barry, Wood & Preusch 1984:87; Taylor 1993:175.

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