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Resisting Hegemony: Black Entrepreneurship in Colonial Barbados, 1900-1966

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The paper discusses the issue of race and class hegemony that confronted the black entrepreneurs in Barbados during the period from 1900 to 1966. It examines how the black entrepreneurs made their mark on the business landscape and provides a reinterpretation of earlier positions on the "rise" of black entrepreneurs. It argues that the emergence of black businesses was not simply a case of "rise," but in several ways can be considered as resistance to the race and class hegemony of the planter-merchant class. That resistance, as in the case of the radical Workingmen's Association of the 1920s, was illustrated by explicit statements of intent to make inroads into sectors controlled by the upper classes. At times, as in the case of some enterprises, subtle statements or signs at the entrance of their businesses were indicative of the intent of the black entrepreneurs. In other cases, it involved a rejection of the assumptions held by the elite class about the place of the black workers in the society. That rejection led to the encroachment of black-owned businesses on sectors dominated by the planter-merchant class, without necessarily securing their displacement. As such, therefore, Barbadian black businesses were not completely daunted or obliterated by the pressures applied by the dominant planter-merchant class.

Introduction

In the first six decades of the twentieth century, the colony of Barbados boasted of several black merchants mainly operating from Roebuck Street, Bridgetown. Other black entrepreneurs, located at various points in the city, conducted business in an environment dominated by white

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merchants who generally sought to stifle this black progress. This paper identifies and examines the main black entrepreneurs who participated on the business landscape during the period from 1900 to 1966, when the island received independence from Britain. The paper has three main objectives. First, it discusses the issue of race and class hegemony, which influenced all aspects of social and economic life of the blacks in Barbados. Second, it raises the issue of black entrepreneurial resistance, explaining the utility of such a concept in the Barbados situation. Third, the paper examines the possible motives for black entry into business, their struggles to remain in business, and the meaning of their business expansion.

The central thesis is that the actions of those black entrepreneurs who were present in the business landscape between 1900 and 1966 can be regarded as resistance to race and class hegemony because of explicit and subtle statements that were made. In addition, the quest to pursue business was a rejection of the elite perspective on the place of the black man and woman in Barbadian society. That quest led to the establishment of enterprises that "encroached" on terrain not specifically prepared by black entrepreneurs.

Race and Class Hegemony

The history of Barbados has been remarkable for its long period of race and class hegemony. The country's economy has been dominated by a narrow planter-merchant class who controlled both the political and economic institutions for over 300 years. Such domination has not escaped the attention of sociologists, historians and political scientists. Sir Hilary Beckles, one of the Caribbean's leading scholars on slavery, has suggested that emancipation in 1838 did not break the power of the planter-merchant class, as blacks gained freedom without any reform to the political and economic infrastructure. Indeed, as Beckles tells us, the British government gave West Indian slaveholders £20 million in direct monetary compensation and an additional six years of apprenticed labour – equivalent to £17 million. In terms of the cash compensation, the Barbados, the planters' share was £1,714,561, a sum which some used in the post slavery period to further capitalize their estates and cement their dominance.[1] Beckles also opines that two additional events helped to maintain this planter-merchant domination. First, the local elite kept the instruments of political power with a narrow elective franchise based on property and income, which the freedmen had difficulty in reaching because of the low wage levels imposed on the workers for 100 years after emancipation in 1838. Second, the planter-merchant class tried its best to keep land out of the hands of the workers, as land was a key component used to achieve political and economic mobility within the system.[2]

Cecilia Karch also informs us that the domination was evident in the commercial sector in Bridgetown, where merchant houses, retail stores, banks, and insurance companies were mainly owned and controlled by this narrow merchant elite.[3] Barrow and Greene reinforce this point in their study of the small business sector in the twentieth century, where they argue that the domination was achieved by trading combinations, interlocking directorates and marriages.[4] Coleman argues that the removal of the planter-merchant class from political power in 1951 did not end this dominance, as class was able to influence black middle class politicians. Moreover, the achievement of independence in 1966 did not remove the economic base of the planter-merchant class, as the plantations and the commercial sector remained intact. Coleman notes that the structure of Barbados Chamber of Commerce, established in 1825, remained unchanged well into the 1950s. Noting that the Chamber served the "white community rather than the wider commercial interests," Coleman argues that it displayed "the cohesiveness of a privilege color-class in a highly color conscious society, concerned to protect its status and exclusiveness."

Coleman further suggests that in 1951 the council of the Chamber of Commerce "consisted of all white men with the exception of one coloured man who was in an executive position."[5]

There is no doubt that whites had firm control over elements of the business sector during the period from 1900 to 1966. The majority of the banks were foreign banks; most of the insurance companies were white-managed and owned; most of the commission agencies were white managed and owned; most of the sugar plantations and factories were white-owned and managed; the two foundries were white-owned and managed and the newspapers and the radio station were largely white-owned. Thus, whites controlled critical areas such as capital, insurance, food imports, sugar production and export, engineering and the media in a society where over 95 percent of the population was black.

Thus, the boards and the middle management staff were largely staffed by whites. Blacks who made up the majority of the population, were largely a working people, providing the labour necessary to produce sugar, molasses and rum, the colony's leading exports at the time. Moreover, the planter-merchant elite sought to entrench their positions through the consolidation of their organizations. For example, hegemony also achieved through the carefully orchestrated land policies developed by the planter-merchant elite, which, as Cecilia Karch suggests, prevented the break-up and large-scale subdivision of plantations. In this regard, the Chancery Court System was the mechanism used for many years to facilitate this continuation of sugar production in failing estates. When land was subdivided, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century, land prices were high enough to prevent large-scale ownership of plots, a situation that kept labourers on the tenantries where they worked for plantations and rented plantation land. Furthermore, the system of tenancy, combined with a policy to keep wages low at an average of 20 cents per day, made it difficult for the average labourer to purchase land and establish a business. That is why many labourers resorted to the vending of provisions and meat in the various markets in Bridgetown.

Hegemony was not only economic and political, but it was also racial and psychological. Thus, the resistance offered by black entrepreneurs is best understood, not necessarily when the imposing business structures are explained, but when ideological notions held by ruling class of blacks are analyzed. David Browne insists that ideas of racial inferiority were clearly expressed and segregation was practiced by individuals and institutions such as schools, recreational clubs, businesses and churches.[6]

For example, when Clennel Wickham, a black veteran of the First World War visited St. Cyprian's Church, one of the churches of the Anglican denomination, he experienced this racism. Wickham, dressed in military uniform, visited the church and sat in the front pew, normally reserved for whites. He was promptly told to move to the back pews where blacks were accommodated.[7] Military duties for the empire was not a qualification for admittance within this segregated space and illustrates the extent to which these notions were evident in the society, forming a restrictive wall for blacks.

Moreover, this view was also applied to business. It carved out the space for blacks as workers at the lower end of the spectrum in white-owned businesses. If blacks did set up enterprises, theirs would be small trading activities in the city's market space, vending fruits, vegetables and meat. Black entrepreneurs such as J.A. Tudor and Archibald Rollock, who started as workers, but transcended way beyond small vending, rejected this elite notion of the black as worker and small vendor.

In Barbadian society in the 1920s and 1930s, Whites expressed the view that as a working people, blacks were not supposed to aspire to similar material benefits as the upper and middle

classes. Their houses were supposed to be small, wooden huts with the minimum of furnishings. This position was clearly expressed by a local white merchant to journalist C.A. Greaves in 1937. Greaves told the Deane Commission, appointed to investigate the causes of the 1937 rebellion that the merchant insisted that:

> The prices of goods have not gone up. What has gone up is the standard of living. Forty-two years ago when I was engaged to my wife, I used to visit the coloured peoples' houses in St. James and certainly they had nice white wall houses. On Sunday morning, they would wash their feet clean, get in their donkey carts and go to church barefooted. Now they want boots, pine floors and some of them want to have the temerity to want carpets.[8]

This Gramscian view suggests that elite classes exert a measure of control by shaping personal convictions and values of the lower classes and getting them to accept those values. The establishment of enterprises by blacks ran counter to the view, as such businesses offered opportunities for them to achieve the material comforts they desired. They also used their savings to secure a secondary- and tertiary-level education for their children. This was significant in a society where most of the children received elementary schooling only, because of the requirement to pay fees at the grammar schools and failure of the government to build secondary schools.

Perhaps the clearest expression of the conservative view of the workers came in 1921 during a debate on education in the island's newspapers. David Bowne quotes one "arch conservative" who indicated clearly what should be the position of the workers: "We say, keep the masses in their place. Give them plenty of work and not too much money or leisure and no learning at all. Down with all theories of equal rights."[9] For the conservative in question, 'plenty of work' did not necessarily mean employment for 12 months a year, as the plantation system reduced its labour offering during the out-of-crop season. 'Plenty of work' meant long hours or heavy tasks for low wages. It is clear that the regime wanted to construct its domination through child labour in lieu of education. Thus, in the period under discussion, blacks were confronted with racial notions about what they should do and own, in addition to the economic and political structures, which generally excluded them from participation.

Reinterpretation of the 'Rise' of Black Entrepreneurs

One of the realities of Barbadian history in the colonial period since 1900 was that even though the planter-merchant class dominated the business landscape and employed measures to prevent significant black ownership in business, black entrepreneurs were still trying to carve their place on the business scene. In early writings on Barbadian business history, I saw this as simply the "rise" of black entrepreneurs, without discussing in detail the question of motive and ideology against the structures that they encountered. I saw them as private individuals who were making vigorous efforts to cement their position in economic spheres.[10] This was a serious oversight, as blacks were influenced by the ideological moorings of the 1920s and 1930s. The emergence of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) under the leadership of Marcus Garvey was a critical aspect of this ideological transfer. Garvey's association was international in scope and had several branches in Barbados, stimulating black consciousness and development. This consciousness was not only related to issues of the franchise and political exclusion, but the UNIA challenged blacks to create their own businesses. In the 1920s, the return of Panama

migrants and veterans of the First World War was an associated ideological spur. Having seen conditions abroad, particularly while working with members of the white community, black returnees were stimulated to demand better social and economic conditions. One way to advance this aim was to establish a business. Furthermore, in 1935, when Mussolini's Italy went to war against Ethiopia, blacks in Barbados and in other parts of the Caribbean were particularly incensed because Britain refused to halt Italy's assault on a black state. The invasion was well publicized in the *Barbados Advocate* newspaper and provided a context for blacks, under oppression in Barbados, to reject white notions of the black place in the society. Therefore, when blacks established businesses during the period, they were operating in a local environment where ideas of social betterment were freely aired and discussed.

That ideology influenced their business decisions to such an extent, that these actions can be reinterpreted as resistance to colonial hegemony. It is clear that not every act of the working classes can be classified as "resistance" to colonial hegemony. However, one must be mindful of explicit statements by black entrepreneurs regarding their entry and continuation in business. In some cases, a banner or a sign on the shop door might also point to the objectives of the entrepreneur. More important, the efforts of blacks to leave agricultural work, establish enterprises, and further expand them, must not be taken for granted. It represents a rejection of the assumptions held by the white planter-merchant elite about their place in society. This rejection can be interpreted as a measure of resistance to hegemony. Furthermore, resistance can also be applied to the actions of encroachment in areas traditionally preserved for the elite class such as the ownership of sugar plantations and commission houses. For example, Gary Lewis, in his discussion of race in Barbados in the first four decades of the twentieth century, opines that "whiteness was a unifying force around which (even lower income and poor) whites coalesced against black encroachment."[11]

The concept of black entrepreneurial resistance to hegemony should not be problematic because it has been shown that in the 100 years after emancipation in 1838, blacks sought to improve their social and economic circumstances using revolt, strike and migration. In essence, therefore, nineteenth and twentieth-century Barbadian workers were not docile nor acquiescent, simply accepting poverty-stricken conditions without endeavouring to break the cycle through resistance.[12] This being the case, it should not be difficult to accept the notion that black entrepreneurs were ideologically driven and saw their actions in business as oppositional, rather than supportive, of the established order.

Black entrepreneurs chose this option to improve their natural conditions, to create a better future for their children and to reduce, if not remove, the stronghold of the planter-merchant class in several sectors of the economy. In so doing, then, the paper offers a reinterpretation to the thesis long expressed for Barbados, particularly in the first 60 years of the twentieth century. Such initiatives in the twentieth century should not surprise us. Beckles has already shown that for the slavery period, enslaved blacks in Bridgetown openly challenged the legislation designed to curtail their vending activities in the eighteenth century. He insists that even though the slave codes prohibited enslaved blacks from buying and selling, enslaved vendors established an outdoor market in Bridgetown, which became known as the Butcher's market or the Shambles. What is significant is that they continued in the space between 1692 and 1817, when they were moved to another location in the city.[13] On a larger scale, Jerome Handler has shown that Joseph Rachell, a formerly enslaved black in Barbados, emerged as a powerful merchant who sometimes rescued white merchants from their creditors. There is also the example of Rachel Pringle-Polgreen, a free mulatto woman who owned a merchant house and a hotel. Although one cannot

be clear as to the motivating factors for the establishment of these enterprises, they represented significant acquisitions for those involved.[14] In addition, the research of Cecilia Karch has highlighted the case of London Bourne, a coloured businessman and substantial property owner in the nineteenth century who made "successful inroads" into the domain of the merchant class. Bourne became a merchant factor, competing with local whites and English-based merchant factors. Karch tells us that he owned three stores in Bridgetown and bought two plantations, Grazettes, (which he renamed Industry Hall) and Friendship. However, Bourne was viewed by the merchant class as an intruder and efforts were made to stop his advance. He had rented the upstairs section of his dwelling house to Commercial Hall, the forerunner to the Barbados Chamber of Commerce, but could not be a member of the Hall. Moreover, as Karch relates, during the 1850s the Speaker of the House of Assembly, Charles Packer, made a bid to take control of his estate for sums owed to him and no one came to Bourne's assistance. Bourne soon came up with the money and the estate was returned.[15] These business initiatives in a slave society did not overturn the established order, but showed what might be possible with hard work and business acumen.

Black Encroachment on the Business Landscape after 1900

The resistance of the underclasses was clearly demonstrated in the 1920s when the Workingmen's Association (WMA), an offshoot of Dr. Charles Duncan O'Neal's Democratic League, launched a plan to position itself in merchant activity. White merchants had, since 1917, banded themselves together in three conglomerates - Plantations Limited (1917), The Barbados Shipping and Trading (1920), and the Provision Dealers Association (1922), controlling the most critical aspects of the merchant activity. The WMA's response, according to David Browne, was to set up the Cooperative Supply Association in 1927 with the objective to supply groceries and drugs to the workers at lower prices. The Association established two groceries stores in Bridgetown and one in the parish of St. Lucy. One of the Bridgetown grocery stores was located at the corner of Reed Street and Baxter's Road. In 1927, a drug store was also set up in the city and a Loan and Friendly Society, which encouraged thrift and savings, was established.[16] To bypass the commission merchants, the WMA imported medicine from England, Germany, France, and the United States. A druggist, Carlton Browne, gave initial assistance in setting up the operations, while a Mr. Braithwaite was appointed druggist. The drug store also sold hardware articles such as oil lamps, earthenware, hair brooms, tobacco, cigarettes, boat polish, and galvanise buckets.[17] In establishing the enterprises, Dr. O'Neal noted that the "merchants and others have organized themselves in one solid mass, but the time is coming when you shall purchase all of these estates...."[18]

O'Neal also spoke of a larger plan to counter the policies of the plantation managers and owners who brought the workers' cane but did not pay the highest price. In 1927, at a WMA meeting at Belleplaine, St. Andrew, O'Neal told the gathering of 180 persons that he was "determined to form a company through which he hoped he soon will be able to build their own factories and mills to be able to grind their own canes."[19]

O'Neal's plan encompassed the creation of grocery stores, factories, estates and financial institutions. At the Belleplaine meeting, he informed his audience that they "had agreed to be in any sort of business to buy from a bag of yams to an estate." [20] Calling for the cooperation of men and women, he raised the idea of a lending society that could advance loans to workers which was to be repaid on a monthly basis. O'Neal also spoke about a dressmaking company,

purchasing imported cloth worth $1000 from United Kingdom and the United States, and employing girls to manufacture the dresses.[21]

Unfortunately, the grocery stores and drug store all collapsed within a short space of time, as leading members of the WMA experienced threats on their lives. Some who had joined the WMA were victimized by plantation managers, who refused to grind their canes. Moreover, the shops did not have a large customer base, perhaps because of the fear of victimization. Thus, they ran into debt and were forced to close. Other enterprises that O'Neal spoke of did not come to fruition.

However, it is clear that the workers had clear objectives in mind when they resisted the domination of the planter-merchant class. In attempting to set up their business initiatives, they were very explicit in their intent. Five clear reasons for these business initiatives can be deduced from the WMA meetings in 1927. First, the establishment of grocery stores and a drug store sought to offer better prices than what members of the Provision Dealers Ltd. were offering; this was an initiative that would have been favorable to the workers. Second, the leadership of the WMA rejected the notion of the blacks principally as labourers; rather, they espoused wealth creation for the benefit of themselves and their families. [22] It was a clear signal that workers envisaged a future where they would enter the business landscape for their benefit. Third, there is clear evidence that the workers were encouraged to invest their monies into the operations of WMA business concerns. At a Richmond Gap, St. Michael meeting, O'Neal spoke of shares in the business and produced forms for workers to sign on, with the 'lure' of 6 percent interest.[23] Fourth, in advocating the ownership of plantations and sugar mills, O'Neal wished for a better deal for the peasant farmers who cultivated sugar cane (sometimes producing three to four tons per year) but might not have received just value for their canes, as they were not present when the canes were weighed on the factory scales. One of the speakers at a Dean's Village meeting, Edgar Marshall, opined in more general terms of "controlling the sugar market" by way of a strong organization. Fifth, the WMA also envisaged blacks in management positions at their stores. Hence, the signage on the frontage read: "Owned by the workers managed by the workers for the benefit of the workers." This represents by far the most explicit statement of the workers of the 1920s to resist the hegemony of the ruling planter-merchant elite.

This business ideology, espoused by WMA leaders should not be surprising, as there was a close connection between the membership of the WMA and branches of Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. Garvey's organization boasted of several business enterprises such as the Black Star Line, a steamship operation, the Black Star steamship company, the Negro Factory Corporation and two newspapers, the *Negro World* and the *Watchman*.

Individual Black Entrepreneurs in the Retail Sector

In the 1920s, several black entrepreneurs, operating as sole proprietors, also attempted to carve their own sphere of influence in business. James A. Tudor, who became the leading provision merchant in Barbados in the 1940s, was stimulated by the racism he encountered in the second decade of the twentieth century. In a 1974 interview with social commentator, Elton Mottley, Tudor recalled a statement in 1911 by his white employer, John D. Taylor, which changed his ideological stance. Tudor relates:

> After serving him for many years, I took sick, came out and went back again to help him. And one day I hear he use remarks that he wouldn't help a blasted nigger. It was the first time that I knew that I belong to was blasted and that thing went to my soul. I left that dear white man with a beautiful family… But this old

> man forget himself and use that expression in the hearing of this poor naked nigger who was then been sleeping on crocus bag. I left him and went and lived with a black man called Alexander Lewis. I worked for Alexander and refused to work for him (John D. Taylor) anymore.[24]

Another statement by another leading Bridgetown businessman and chairman of the Barbados Mutual Life Assurance Society, E.T. Racker, further fired his passion for success. In 1914, when an English military vessel came to transport black recruits to Europe to serve in the war, Racker is alleged to have said "Sons of… not one of them will live to come back here." Tudor noted that the remark "changed every nerve cell" in his body because black Barbadians were on their way to defend whites and the plantation system, as blacks "had nothing to defend."[25]

One might argue that some of Tudor's close friends who openly opposed the policies of the planter-merchant class also influenced him. He became a close friend of the radical newspaper editor of the 1920s, Clennell Wilsden Wickham (editor of the *Weekly Herald)* who launched scathing attacks on members of the Assembly for their refusal to alleviate poverty and the distress of the workers. Wickham was also highly critical of the planter-merchant control of the Assembly via a restrictive franchise. Indeed, Tudor was so fond of Wickham that he frequently told one of his sons, James (later Sir James Tudor) that he should "always read what that young man Wickham writes in his paper and listen to him when he is talking!"[26]

Not only was James Tudor a close friend of Wickham, but he was also a close friend of Dr. Charles Duncan O'Neal, James A. Martineau and J.T.C. Ramsay. Sir James tells us that the group came together every Thursday afternoon in James Tudor's shop, and it was from these conversations that he heard words such as "merchant class," "plantocracy" and "reactionary".[27] There is no doubt that James Tudor rejected the notion that blacks were to be labourers. Born in 1892 and with little hope of self-improvement, he found himself picking cotton at Sterling plantation in the St. Philip parish at the age of twelve. Not satisfied with the low wages of six cents per week paid at the time, he moved to Bridgetown when he got employment as a porter, pushing handcarts through the city.[28] He also worked for provision merchants such as John D. Taylor, M.G. Bourne, J.C Mayers and Alexander Lewis where he managed to save $50 from the wages he received.

Fired by racial remarks and not content with what he considered menial jobs, he borrowed $100 from his mother-in-law (in addition to his savings) and opened a dry goods shop at Upper Roebuck Street, on the outskirts of the city in the 1920s. By 1937, he had established 28 shops throughout the island, and by 1952 he owned over 35 shops. One social commentator insists that by the late 1950s, Tudor was in the possession of 98 shops.[29]

It is clear that his business did not expand into a commission merchant house. He stocked his shops with goods supplied on credit by the commission merchants, a situation which made him vulnerable and eventually accounted for his demise. However, his expansion was an encroachment on white business territory in two ways. First, his capital accumulation was significant because it allowed him to diversify his enterprise into manufacturing and funeral services. Second, his employment of almost 100 persons as shopkeepers elevated many black working-class persons to the level of shop manager. Some of those such as Norman Howard, used this experience and wealth gained to establish supermarkets which are still operating today. The local commission merchants, from whom he credited goods, deemed his business expansion a threat and moved to close his operations down, forcing Tudor to sell much of his properties to repay loans immediately demanded.

His operation collapsed, but he was not alone in the establishment of such operations that represented the rejection of the elite notions that Blacks should be confined to inferior social and economic positions. Other provision merchants such as Stuart & Sampson, R.D.N. Maxwell, C.C. King and Wallingford Wilberforce Crichlow operated from Roebuck Street, also owned shops in rural Barbados and advanced themselves socially and economically in the planter-merchant dominated society.

Department Stores

The surge in economic activity among black entrepreneurs was also evident in the Bridgetown's department stores. Such stores, which represented considerable capital outlay for building, stock and wages, were not as ubiquitous as the provision stores. However, through being owned and managed by blacks, they effectively made encroachments on areas dominated by white-owned and managed stores such as Harrisons (1870), DaCosta's (1898) and Cave Shepherd (1906), to name a few. Two black entrepreneurs, N.E. Wilson and Archibald Rollock, made in-roads into this sector and competed for over 20 years with the established white merchants. Both of them started with small, one-door operations on Swan Street, then expanded and moved to locations that were more prestigious.

Newman E. Wilson, born in Grenada, came to Barbados in 1935 after a stint managing a store in Carriacou and established a store on Trafalgar Street a few yards away from Broad Street. Wilson's effort can be perceived as resistance in several ways. First, he rejected that a blacks from the Eastern Caribbean would not succeed in Barbados. As he was looking for a suitable location, one individual in Barbados warned him: "son, I don't know where you have made your money, but you are sure to lose it here." Second, when the white merchants tried to apply pressure on him by making it difficult to acquire goods to stock his Swan Street store, he met the manufacturer's representatives by night. They had shunned him for fear of victimization by established storeowners. Thirdly, Wilson by-passed the local merchants and ventured to the Far East, Europe, and the United States to supply his store with the best goods, at competitive prices. Persons of the upper class were attracted to his store and when challenged on their shopping habits, they would counter by saying that they were shopping for their house cleaners. The story is told of a city businessman, John Hutson, who walked into Wilson's store and found a product he could not obtain at the Broad Street stores. He later told Wilson that his store was a "Swan Street Store with the Broad Street goods at Swan Street prices."[30] Wilson, for marketing purposes, adopted this as his slogan. Fourth, Wilson moved out of his Swan Street location, known for small shops and low prices, into the more prestigious Trafalgar Square location, in close proximity to Broad Street, where he constructed a three-storey building. Finally, Wilson expanded his business to venture into new emerging operations such as manufacturing and hotel sector, and, in so doing, defied notions of "smallness" and made himself less vulnerable to market shocks.

Archibald Rollock also started in Swan Street, but unlike Wilson, established his three - storey store on lower Broad Street, the prized business area of the very wealthy merchants. By locating on Broad Street, he was challenging the assumptions held by the Bridgetown merchants that this street was the sole preserve of the white merchant elite. He went further by introducing the first escalator in Barbados in his Five and Ten Model Store, a technological innovation that brought droves of shoppers to this store to buy goods sourced from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

The resistance of black entrepreneurs is also evident in the drive to enter and stay in the commission merchant business, an area of activity long considered the domain of the leading white merchants houses such as DaCostas, Manning, and S.P. Musson. The commission merchants held pride of place in Barbados, for they were the importers and, in some cases, the exporters of commodities ranging from foodstuffs such as flour and rice to hardware items like lumber and cooking utensils. They sold to the provision merchants on credit, and in this way had considerable control of the distributive sector. From 1917, with the formation of Plantations Ltd, they consolidated their interests through the formation of another conglomerate Barbados Shipping and Trading in 1920.

Two black entrepreneurs, Lionel Richards and Lloyd Alleyne, made advances into this highly privileged sector. Lionel Richards worked as an office assistant at the commission business of John D. Taylor, before he moved to C.L Pitt & Co., another commission enterprise. Within the space of 10 years, he moved from office assistant to sales representative, company secretary, and then director in 1954, a rare achievement for any black man in Barbados. When Pitt retired in 1959, Richards - who had been in a favorable financial position - bought out most of the shares in the company, with Pitt retaining a small portion. In so doing, he had joined an elite band of 56 commission agents operating in Barbados in the 1950s and the only black entrepreneur in this sector.

He expanded the business into wholesale distribution and later diversified into the manufacturing sector, which was slowly gaining momentum, establishing West Indies Handbags Ltd., a joint venture with a manufacturer from the United Kingdom. When this venture folded because of the decline in the regional market, Richards and another Black entrepreneur, John Grace, established United Manufacturing, producing shoes; and another, Riga Ltd, manufacturing flags and souvenir items.[31] In establishing these operations, Richards rejected the notion that blacks should be relegated to working in other people's businesses. Moreover, by combining as commission merchant and manufacturer, he had also rejected notions of "smallness" generally ascribed to black entrepreneurs.

Alleyne was a carpenter by profession, but aspired to business when he started with a small three-door shop in Wellhouse, St. Philip. He then later expanded his operations to create a chain of shops and supermarkets. By 1980, he had amassed enough wealth to establishing Shamrock Trading Company, a commission merchant enterprise, in the business of importing and distributing. Though this comes a few years outside our period, it is still illustrative that Alleyne did not accept his place as an artisan; nor was he resigned to the position of shop owner, but aspired to move to the top of the ladder in the merchant business, which allowed him to cross over into planation ownership.

Pharmacy

William Maughan, a black pharmacist in the 1940s, established a pharmacy known as Nelson Pharmacy in Bridgetown. His quest to become a qualified druggist and his decision to leave 'safe' employment point to some form of resistance in establishing his own enterprise. Maughan was first employed at the St. Michael Alms House and the General Hospital before he embarked on a career as a pharmacist. He served as an apprentice druggist under John Gill, who had established a pharmacy in the city. After serving his apprenticeship, Maughan found employment at another pharmacy, Noel Roach and Sons, where he spent eight years. He could have remained as an employee at Noel Roach, but borrowed $5,000 from his employer to establish his pharmacy, effectively competing with about 20 other pharmacies in the country - most of them

white owned. His Nelson Pharmacy, located on Bridge Street, Bridgetown, drew its clientele from the dockworkers who operated from Carlisle Bay. When, however, a new port was built and opened in 1961, his enterprise declined and was wound up in the 1970s. [32]

Plantation Ownership

While Charles Duncan O'Neal envisaged the purchase of plantations in the 1920s, this did not become a reality for blacks on a cooperative basis for another 13 years. Ownership of a sugar plantation in Barbados had always been viewed as a source of wealth, power, and status, but it was also a position which was very difficult to achieve by blacks, either collectively or individually. Between October 1941 and December 1943, however, this became a reality for Barbadians, but not with Barbadian capital.

The Panama-based friendly society, Barbados Progressive Society, with membership of more than 6,000 in 1941 bought five sizeable plantations for $252,960. The total size of these five plantations was 1,274 acres. This investment, opines Woodville Marshall, “was an early and striking example of large-scale cooperative action undertaken by working class Barbadians.”[33] The society, formed in 1907 with branches in Colon and Panama City, comprised many Barbadians who migrated to Panama between 1904 and 1914. Marshall suggests that these branches were “reincarnated in 1926 and 1927, respectively, and that by 1939\1940, the society had invested its funds in agricultural land, a large bakery and 13 tenement houses in Colon.”[34] He further notes that its president, Percy George Seales along with John Randolph Scantlebury, member of the Committee of Management, made a business trip to Barbados in 1937. They made connections with Wallingford Wilberforce Crichlow, a black dry goods merchant of Roebuck Street, who was a significant landowner with 20 acres. He had some connections with G.C. Mahon, the plantation owner of Lion Castle.[35] Marshall informs us that the society felt marginalized and insecure in Panama and believed that an investment in Barbadian plantations represented "a positive insurance for their savings.”[36] This was a period of prosperity for Barbadian plantations, as sugar prices were reasonably good because of the British preference.

Marshall also suggests that another motive for the investment was social status points. He argues that this was perceived as “a highly significant attempt by blacks to scale those imposing barriers to elite social and economic activity...” [37] and that it brought great pride to those blacks who celebrated at Trents Great House as they were now owners of plantations and “sleeping in the house where white people used to live.” [38]

Although there was no stated motive to buy plantations as a way of challenging the dominance of the plantocracy, the action produced the same effect - plantation investments by blacks scaled the hitherto unattainable walls and created the potential for wealth, security and status.

The plantations ran into difficulties between 1941 and 1953 because of a lack of working capital, neglect, and poor management. However, the sale of Colleton (1962), Lascelles (1963) and Trents (1970) realized a considerable surplus. Colleton realized a surplus of $27,865.68; Lascelles was sold to DaCosta’s Ltd. for $216,000 and the surplus for Trents after sale was $122,134.00. Beneficiaries in Panama and Barbados received approximately US$140,000 between 1965 and 1979, with another $1.5 currently sitting in commercial banks in Barbados. [39] The excursions of black entrepreneurs into plantations did not end with the Panama Emigration Society. Researcher Trevor Rudder informs us that between 1945 and 1990, blacks owned 70 plantations, representing a total arable acreage of 11,472.[40] Whites owned 208 plantations, with arable acreage of 50,030. While much of this ownership occurred outside of our period, some of it also occurred prior to 1951. Including the Panama estates discussed above, blacks owned

(before 1951) 31 plantations, representing a total acreage of 7,161. Between 1951 and 1970, Mrs. Erma Rock, a black entrepreneur, with a base in omnibus transport, owned four plantations in St. Joseph, totalling 909 acres.

Table 1: Black Plantation Ownership in Barbados 1900 to 1951

PLANTATION	PARISH	SIZE IN 1937	OWNERSHIP
Adams Castle	Christ Church	287	E.E.Deane
Wotton	Christ Church	660	E.E.Deane
Canevale	Christ Church	111	Barbados Cooperative Bank
Maxwells	Christ Church	93	Barbados Cooperative Bank
Callenders	Christ Church	57	C.O. Edwards
Warners	Christ Church	118	L.E. Ward
Babbs	St. Lucy	82	A.S. Husbands
Bourborn	St. Lucy	192	Fairfield & Mt. Gay Co. Ltd.
Fairfield	St. Lucy	238	Fairfield & Mt. Gay Co. Ltd.
Bromefield	St. Lucy	410	Fairfield &Mt. Gay Co. Ltd.
Mt. Gay	St. Lucy	331	Fairfield & Mt. Gay Co. Ltd.
Checker Hall	St. Lucy	36	Mrs. R.C Skinner
Hannays	St. Philip	691 in 1929	Fairfield & Mt. Gay Co. Ltd.
Harrow	St. Philip	487	David S. Payne
Grazettes	St. Michael	161	Barbados Cooperative Bank
Malvern Lodge	St. Michael	20	W.W. Crichlow
Malvern & Eastmont	St. Joseph/St. John	391 combined	Charles Miller Austin
Mellowes	St. Joseph	246	C.W. Clarke
Frizers	St. Joseph	404	Barbados Cooperative Bank
Vaughans	St. Joseph	90	Barbados Cooperative Bank
Joes River	St. Joseph	554	Barbados Cooperative Bank
Baxters	St. Joseph	87	E.C. Brathwaite
Boscobel	St. Andrew	246	Mrs. R.C. Skinner
Morgan Lewis	St. Andrew	354	E.L. Bannister
Maynards	St. Peter	231	C.Edwards

Colleton	St. Peter	224	Panama Progressive Society
Mt. Prospect	St. Peter	203	Panama Progressive Society
Four Hills	St. Peter	307	Panama Progressive Society
Trents	St. James	343	Panama Progressive Society
Lascelles	St. James	197	Panama Progressive Society
Total acres		7,161	

Sources: Trevor Rudder, Barbados, interview with author, January 8, 2016 and *Advocate Yearbook and Who's Who with special industries section* (Bridgetown, 1951)

The case of Charles Miller Austin illustrates black encroachment in plantation ownership. Austin was a blacksmith who patented a wheel and made a fortune from his patent. At the turn of the twentieth century, he bought Marlvern and Eastmonte, two large plantations with a combined acreage of 391 acres, and became the first black man to purchase substantial properties among the St. John plantocracy, which was known for its exclusiveness. Miller-Austin also owned grocery shops in the parish of St. Joseph.

Some blacks such as Elliot Lisle Ward inherited plantations and a rum refinery from their white fathers. As the third largest single plantation owner in Barbados, he held directorship in key supporting organizations such as Plantations Ltd, the Barbados Sugar Producers Federation, and the Sugar Industry Agricultural Bank. As a leading rum refiner, he was also a director of the Industrial Development Corporation. Politically, he represented the parish of St. Lucy in the House of Assembly from 1934 to 1951.[41]

Others, however, such as Erma Rock, W.W. Crichlow and the black-run Barbados Cooperative Bank bought into estate ownership using their start-up businesses as a springboard for expansion and diversification. This black estate ownership came during the period of planter-merchant political and economic domination and not during the 1970s when planters sought ways to sell estates due to declining revenues.

Blacks in Manufacturing

Between 1900 and 1950, the black working people attempted to establish enterprises in light manufacturing, a sector that had been for many years discouraged by the planter-merchant class. While light industry was discouraged, the plantation owners encouraged foundries (Central Foundry Ltd and the Barbados Foundry), which would supply the factories and mills with spare parts in order to reduce the downtime of these enterprises. Planters also feared that new industries would drive persons away from the plantations, creating labour shortages or increased wages for agricultural work. On the other hand, the commission merchants discouraged manufacturing (except for biscuits and bread) because their main economic activity was importation from abroad for sale locally. This meant that items such as locally produced milk, flour, garments, and furniture would compete with these imports.

This recalcitrance elicited a stern rebuke from black politician Wynter Crawford, who served in the House of Assembly from 1940 to 1965. Crawford argued that the planter-merchant

dominated Assembly of the 1940s was not keen on investing or encouraging the manufacturing sector, and only did so after persistent arguments concerning food security during the war. Spurred by Crawford's agitation, the government established a plant manufacturing flour from cassava during the Second World War, but it closed at the conclusion of the conflict.

Black entrepreneurs, resisting the clear policy of the planter-merchant class, opened establishments making soft drinks, leather shoes, handbags, soap, furniture, and cement blocks. One of the earliest black entrepreneurs to enter the manufacturing area was the Grenadian-born James A. Martineau who, after establishing a drink manufacturing plant in Brazil, ventured to Barbados in 1920 and almost immediately set about to put his plant into operation. He ran his soft drink company for forty years, competing with imported products and was so successful, that his drinks, widely consumed by Barbadians, became known as "Martineau drinks." We do not know what motivated Martineau to enter the operation, but his political activism does indicate that he might have wanted to see significant change in the system of domination. It is clear that in the 1930s that Martineau was a leading figure in the formation of two key national institutions – the Barbados Labour Party and the Barbados Workers' Union. These organizations, which played a significant role in the island's development after 1941 (and still do today), were formed in Martineau's house on Bay Street, Bridgetown. As an entrepreneur, Martineau also contributed financially to the development of the Barbados Labour Party. It is clear that Martineau as an individual entrepreneur could not break the domination of the planter-merchant class. However, he could and did use his capital to sponsor a political party and a workers' union which opposed the policies of that class.

James A. Tudor followed Martineau into manufacturing when he established a small soft drink factory and a soap factory in 1929. He also established a tannery business, producing leather from local hides. This example was followed by James Roberts, who started a soap factory in 1944, producing brands such as "Swan" and Bomber.". Roberts' operation attempted to compete with imported soaps produced by Lever Brothers and Procter and Gamble, and he was bought out by a white businessman, Kenneth R. Hunte, who started his business career with the Bridgetown merchant term, S.P. Musson, Son and Company.[42]

When the government embarked on a wide-ranging economic diversification programme after 1950 that focused on manufacturing, black entrepreneurs (along with white entrepreneurs) invested in this sector. Valentine Wilkins established a shoe manufacturing plant in Spry Street, Bridgetown, producing leather shoes. While his business did not survive into the 1970s, L.G Hutchinson's ECAF Products Co. Ltd, did so for more than 50 years and is still in business today. It was established in 1955 at #29 Roebuck Street when L.G. Hutchinson and his wife, Sylvia Hutchinson, opted to leave a secured job with L.G. Williams Marketing in Trinidad. She left to partner with a friend, Edward Zephirin, who operated a bakery at the time. Hutchinson had recognized that Barbadian shopkeepers were retailing coffee wrapped in brown paper, a practice he considered unsatisfactory. [43] His business corrected this, and added other products such as black pepper, white pepper and cinnamon, packed in hygienically sealed bags.

Blacks in the Service Sector

The service sector comprising transport, banking, among others, played a secondary role to the sugar cane agriculture and the distributive sector in Barbados' colonial economy, but black inroads into this area demonstrate their quest to gravitate to business. Even though this was not an acknowledged area of dominance for the planter-merchant class, it nevertheless represented a

challenge to venture into these areas because of the capital outlay required in an environment where Blacks found difficulty in accessing loans.

Transportation was arguably the most attractive area within the service sector. White owned garages had always provided coach and taxi services, especially for visitors and the upper classes. However, with the cessation of the passenger train service in 1933, there was a demand for omnibus transport throughout the island. The white entrepreneur, George Eckstein, was the first to venture into this area when he established his General Bus Company in 1912. At least 10 Black entrepreneurs followed his lead and bought small buses or modified trucks for passenger accommodation. Having secured certain routes, they soon established a fleet of buses serving the transport needs of the populace. Mrs. Erma Rock, who established the Rocklyn Bus Company, ran the operation into the 1970s, using this as her base for ownership of four plantations, a limestone quarry that supplied construction material, and a canteen at Belleplaine in the parish of St. Andrew.

The hotel business was another area of black activity and the Maxwell family stands out in this regard. Livina Maxwell and her husband, William, who resided at Tent Bay, St. Joseph, were two enterprising black entrepreneurs. William was a small farmer who later bought the Atlantis Hotel, and Livina brought Fleetview Guest House. On William's retirement, his daughter, Enid Maxwell, an educator, operated the Atlantis Hotel. Unlike many other black enterprises that died with the founder, the Atlantis Hotel continued into the 1990s under Miss Maxwell's leadership.[44]

In the area of laundry services, the black entrepreneur John Beckles established a laundry in Chapel Lane, Bridgetown in 1910. He called his enterprise Barbados Dye and Laundry Works and operated with the slogan "he dyes to live, and the longer he lives the more he dyes and the more he dyes the longer he lives." Many of Beckles' newspaper advertisements depicted his business as the "Black Cat." In Barbadian folklore, the cat has nine lives and is not easily defeated. Beckles intended to make his business a permanent feature and it survived for over 50 years. More importantly, however, he channelled some of his wealth into poverty alleviation by establishing the Children's Goodwill League in 1935. The exploits of Beckles would be emulated by P.N. Browne, who, in 1913, established a jewellery enterprise on Swan Street, known as Browne and Co. Browne was a barrister-at-law and served in the legislature.[45]

The black cabinet maker, W.A. Griffith, also moved from joiner to retailer in a period of white entrepreneurial dominance, establishing a store in 1947 at #2 Swan Street under the name W.A. Griffith and Co. The Barbados Annual Review described him as a prominent cabinet member of Lucas Street who opened a Dry Goods and Hardware store that he ran for 50 years.[46]

In banking, Macdonald Symmonds, a black entrepreneur established the Barbados Cooperative Bank in 1938, with capital of $240,000. Known locally as the Penny Bank, it was a bank of the working people, with membership of over 20,000 persons. This was a partnership with another non-white man, David Stonewall Payne, owner of Harrow plantation. Blacks had established friendly societies and meeting turns, but never a bank, and Symmonds' effort obviously encroached on an area of commercial activity taken on by English and Canadian banks. Other banks operating at the time were Royal Bank, established in 1911 and Barclays Bank, which started operations in 1926 and the government-owned and managed Barbados Savings Bank, established in 1847. The bank owned six plantations – Canevale, Maxwells, Callenders, Frizers, Vaughans and Joes River. The Barbados Cooperative Bank continued until 1962, when it collapsed after David Stonewall Payne requested sums owed to him.[47]

Conclusion

The central argument of the paper has been that in the period when the planter-merchant class dominated society and economy, there was still black entrepreneurial advancement. This advancement was not simply the rise of a black entrepreneurial class, but in some way resistance to the ethos and ideology of the planter-merchant class. Blacks were making strides in every sector, particularly the prestigious plantation sector. Some sought a more secure footing via diversification. These small strides were never enough to gain pre-eminence in merchant or plantation activity, as low wages and unemployment continued to produce a class that can be described as a 'working people'.

Nevertheless, these efforts encroached on the preserve of the planter-merchant class and rejected certain assumptions of the place of the working people in society. Moreover, provision merchants such as James A. Tudor succeeded in establishing the grocery shop, particularly in rural areas. Many of these shops later expanded as supermarkets. At a personal level, the black businesspersons accumulated wealth that enabled their children to receive a secondary- and tertiary-level education, through which they entered the professions of law and medicine. Finally, the businesspersons of the post-independence period have drawn inspiration from the exploits of those men who dared to encroach on areas not laid out for their participation. Thus, the establishment of enterprises between 1900 and 1966 should be seen in the same light as enslaved blacks and workers who waged a political struggle against oppression in the nineteenth and the early 20th century.

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