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A TUMULTUOUS UPHEAVAL AND TRANSFORMATION: THE IMPACT OF THE  
AMERICAN REVOLUTION ON THE BAHAMA ISLANDS

BY

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THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
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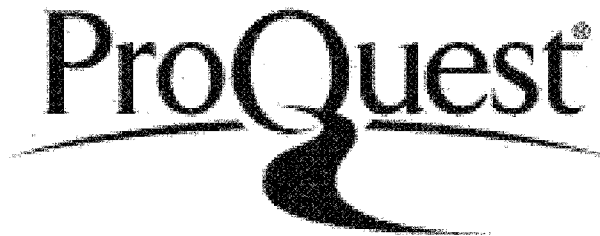


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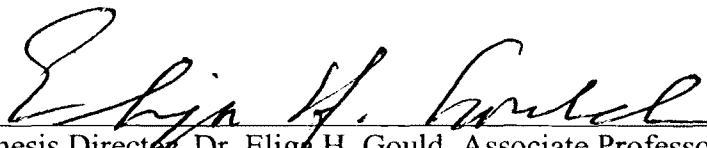
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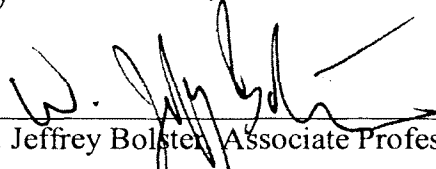


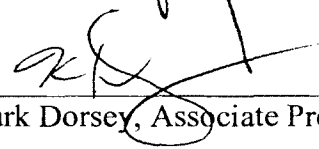
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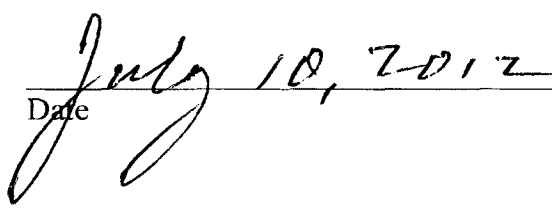
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This thesis has been examined and approved.

  
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Date

For my father, mother, brother, and all of my good friends who cheered me on through all  
the long hours of researching and writing.

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## ABSTRACT

### A TUMULTUOUS UPHEAVAL AND TRANSFORMATION: THE IMPACT OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION ON THE BAHAMA ISLANDS

by

Ross Michael Nedervelt

University of New Hampshire, September, 2012

The position of the Bahama Islands on the periphery Britain's "Blue-Water Empire," far removed from the American Revolution's pitched battles, did not allow the colony to escape unaffected. Rather, the American Revolution had a significant impact on the colony both during and after the conflict. The effects of the Continental Congress' military and commercial policies towards the islands resulted in a political breakdown not seen amongst the remaining loyal British colonies. Furthermore, the effects of the Revolution did not end with the conflict, rather they continued for decades afterwards as many displaced American Loyalists settled on the islands. The Loyalists immigration was a revolution in its own, transforming the colony from impoverished economic stasis to a booming frontier with the cotton and salt trades. Yet, the economic prosperity did not last, and the colony had sunk into economic stasis by the mid-1830s.

## INTRODUCTION

On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1776, the Bahama Islands were dramatically catapulted into the American Revolution. The American expedition to seize Nassau's stockpile of gunpowder and ammunition threw Governor Montfort Browne into a blundering tizzy, and resulted in public calls for his removal by the inhabitants. The dearth of trade brought about by the mainland conflict plunged the islands into widespread famine, and drove many Bahamians to obtain provisions by illicitly trading with the rebellious Americans. The combination of ire against Governor Browne's actions during the American invasion and his attempts to break the Bahamian-American trade would culminate in an "unprecedented" political battle for control of the colony. Governor Browne dismissed the General Assembly and the council to maintain authority; the council conspired to launch a coup d'état to remove Browne from power.<sup>1</sup>

The Bahamas continued to be affected in the decades following the Revolution, particularly as large numbers of Loyalist refugees and their slaves immigrated to the colony. Situated between the newly emerging United States and the British West Indies, the Bahamas became a Loyalist bulwark on the forefront of a newly reconfigured British Atlantic World. As the Loyalists took hold of the colony it blossomed economically, while strengthening its defenses and infrastructure, and was deeply altered culturally, as

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Craton, *A History of the Bahamas* (1962; reprint, Glasgow and London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1963), 149-160; Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One: From Aboriginal Times to the End of Slavery* (Athens, GA and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1999), 157-176.

the worldview of the Loyalist refugees overwhelmed that held by the “old conchs” who had long inhabited the archipelago. The sparks of the American Revolution set alight the flames of chaotic political power struggles and socio-cultural transformations, which significantly changed the islands over the course of almost sixty years.

The history of the Bahama Islands during this tumultuous era reveals how events occurring across the Atlantic world affected the periphery of Britain’s “Blue-Water Empire.” The situation of the Bahamas during the long eighteenth century was one marked by severe poverty and economic boom, economic stasis and socio-racial transformation, the production of raw materials and piracy-based entrepreneurialism, and transformative and chaotic revolutions. Bahamian settlers had limited contact with Great Britain: only a single merchant ship arrived in the archipelago each year for a majority of the eighteenth century. Such limited contact with the metropole made the Bahamas the epitome of neglect. Nevertheless, the islands were significantly impacted by the policies and actions of the United States and Great Britain.

Being so neglected and lacking important cash crops for much of the eighteenth century, the Bahamas were readily susceptible to influences originating elsewhere in the Atlantic World. Of particular consequence were the effects of three revolutions that transformed the British Atlantic World: the American Revolution, the Loyalist Revolution, and the Emancipation Revolution. The Continental Congress’ machinations to secure munitions to support the Revolution instigated a breakdown of the Bahamas’ traditional political order not seen in any of the other loyal colonies in the British Atlantic Empire. The breakdown of the Bahamian political system was accelerated by the disastrous state of New Providence Island’s defenses, which enabled the American forces

to successfully capture the island in 1776, as well as the illicit trade in provisions between the famished islanders and the American rebels. Loyalists from Georgia and South Carolina fled to the Bahamas seeking a climate similar to that of the Lower South, which would enable them to establish plantations and utilize slavery to cultivate cash crops. Consequently, the southern Loyalists proceeded to transform the colony's economy, material culture, social and racial demographics, and political environment. Then the emancipation of the slaves on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1834, brought an end to the plantation system established by the Loyalists, and ended the economic boom fostered by Loyalist settlers and cotton production.<sup>2</sup>

While the effects of these revolutions on the Bahamas have been addressed by scholars, historians have not fully realized the American Revolution's consequences for the island chain. Of the three revolutions to affect the Bahamas, the Loyalist Revolution has received the most discussion, particularly by Sandra Riley, who details the settlement of Loyalist refugees and their struggle to survive economically.<sup>3</sup> Gail Saunders, Whittington Bernard Johnson, and Howard Johnson have contributed immensely to understanding the effects of Bahamian slave culture and the abolition of slavery on the island economy and society.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the effects of the American Revolution and the

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<sup>2</sup> Sandra Riley, *Homeward Bound: A History of the Bahama Islands to 1850 with a Definitive Study of Abaco in the American Loyalist Plantation Period* (Miami: Island Research, 2000), 9-32, 47-61; Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996), 193-202.

<sup>3</sup> Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 124-134, 150-192, 193-202.

<sup>4</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 213-232, 258-296, 297-334, 358-391, 392-396; Gail Saunders, *Bahamian Loyalists and their Slaves* (London: MacMillan Caribbean, 1983); Gail Saunders, "Slavery and Cotton Culture in the Bahamas" in *Slavery without Sugar: Diversity in Caribbean Economy and Society since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Verene A. Shepherd (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002); Gail Saunders, *Bahamian Society after Emancipation* (1990: reprint, Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003); Gail Saunders, *Aspects of*

Continental Congress' foreign policy on the Bahamas have been given little attention by American and Bahamian scholars.<sup>5</sup> The American Revolution not only caused a dramatic political confrontation within the Bahamian government, but made manifest the effects that the conflict had on vulnerable peripheral colonies and served as a turning point for the colony's economic fortunes.

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*Bahamian History: Loyalists, Slavery and Emancipation, Junkanoo* (Nassau: The Bahamas: Department of Archives, Ministry of Education, 1991); Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude*, 1-32, 47-82; Whittington Bernard Johnson, *Race Relations in the Bahamas, 1784-1834: The Nonviolent Transformation from a Slave Society to a Free Society* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2000); Whittington Bernard Johnson, *Post-Emancipation Race Relations in the Bahamas* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006). For archeological contributions to understanding Bahamian slavery and slave culture, see: Laurie A Wilkie and Paul Farnsworth, *Sampling Many Pots: An Archeology of Memory and Tradition at a Bahamian Plantation* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Keith L. Tinker, *The Bahamas in American History: From Early European Contact to Bahamian Independence in 1973* (Lexington, KY: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 19-24; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 153-161; James A. Lewis. *The Final Campaign of the American Revolution: Rise and Fall of the Spanish Bahamas* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991); Eric Beerman, "The Last Battle of the American Revolution: Yorktown. No, the Bahamas!. (The Spanish-American Expedition to Nassau in 1782)," *The Americas* 45. no. 1 (July, 1988), 79-95; Paul Albury, *The Story of the Bahamas* (1975; reprint, London and Basingstoke, UK: MacMillan Publishers, 1984), 93-108.

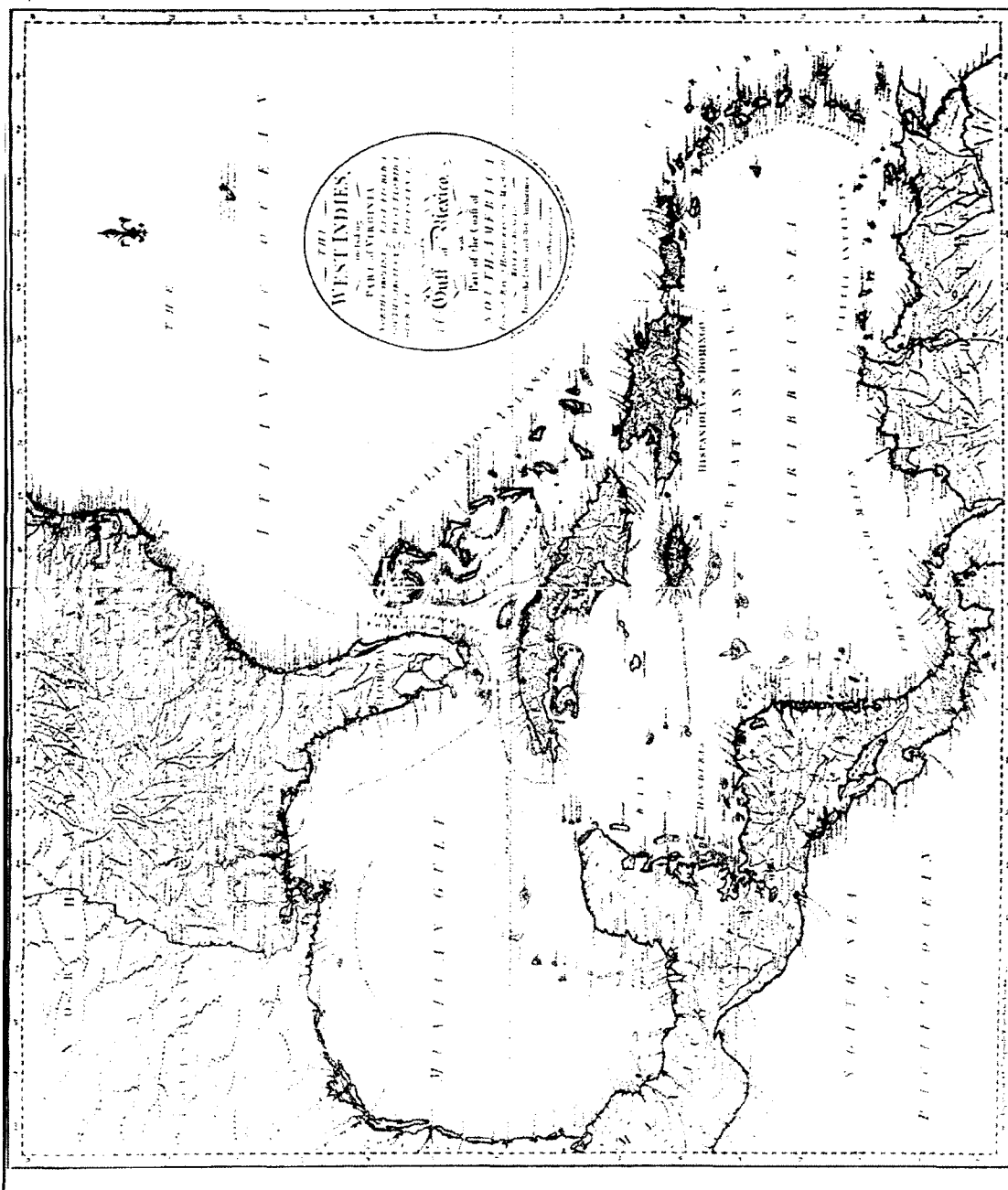


Figure 1: Map of the western Atlantic world with the Bahama Islands displayed in the center adjacent to the United States, Spanish Florida, and the Greater Antilles.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *The West Indies, including Part of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, East Florida, West Florida, Louisiana, and the Gulf of Mexico, Map* (London: John Cary Map and Printseller, 1783), from the Library of Congress.

## CHAPTER I

### JUST MAKING IT ON THE EDGE OF THE BLUE-WATER EMPIRE

In March 1773, the colony of the Bahama Islands stood in economic ruin. Its already meager trade had vanished in the escalating tensions and boycotts of the Imperial Crisis. The government found itself incapable of raising significant tax revenue to fund the salaries of several officials. This necessitated the General Assembly and Governor Thomas Shirley to submit a formal application to King George III humbly requesting an “Annual provision” from “His Royal Bounty” to pay the remaining officials’ salaries.<sup>1</sup> The economic crisis faced by the Bahama Islands during the Imperial Crisis developed out of the convergence of the colony’s natural and economic situations, and the political and economic upheavals caused by the colonial protests to the metropole’s new imperial tax schemes.

Bahamians’ memory of crisis and survival dictated solutions to serious problems faced by generations of islanders during the eighteenth century. For the settlers, sailors, and adventurers who colonized the Bahama Islands, the eighteenth century was an age of prosperity and bankruptcy, war and peace, legal trade and piracy. These difficulties shaped the actions of Bahamians as they attempted to survive and prosper on the edge of Britain’s vast Blue-Water Empire from the first English settlement in 1670 to the dawn of the American Revolution. The methods and solutions the islanders developed in order to

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<sup>1</sup> The Joint Address of the Council and Assembly of the Bahama Islands to Governor Shirley, C.O. 23/9/5.

survive formed a basic knowledge that they could revert to when threatened by a new, but parallel, danger. Periods of war, famine, economic depression, and trade stagnation saw many turn to the practices of piracy, privateering, and smuggling carried out by their forefathers.

Yet, the Imperial Crisis brought a whole new set of challenges as the colony found itself split between a number of fundamental problems that traditional Bahamian solutions could not easily address. The rising resentment to British influence and taxation in colonial America coupled with the influence of Country Whig philosophy regarding the colonial-metropole power theory, affected the colony's response to Whitehall's decision to make the Turks and Caicos Islands a protectorate of the Bahamas. This brought the wider concepts of taxation without representation and internal versus external taxation to the Bahamas. The dramatic decline in trade stemming from boycotts of British manufactured goods by mainland colonists depressed the Bahamian economy, raising fears that the colony would have to be abandoned and causing attempts to establish free ports to encourage trade to the colony—whether through honest practices or by smuggling.

Historical scholarship on the Bahamas' economic development during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has been divided between general, comprehensive analyses, and specialized discussions on a single aspect of the economy. Michael Craton and Gail Saunders have provided a comprehensive overview of how early settlers and adventurers attempted to survive and derive profit from the islands through small-scale farming, piracy and smuggling, salt raking, timber harvesting, "turtling," and wrecking.<sup>2</sup> Patrice Williams' in-depth scholarship on Bahamian trade and

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economics prior to the American Revolution has focused principally on the salt trade, and how this influenced the Bahamas' relationship with the Turks and Caicos Islands.<sup>3</sup> However, Craton, Saunders, and Williams offer only general information on the colonists' attempts to establish sugar, cotton, and coffee plantations for staple trade crops. Illicit actions taken by the Bahamians, particularly piracy, have been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion by David Cordingly and Colin Woodard.<sup>4</sup> These works focus principally on the actions and events of individual pirates and their crews, but they do not address the overarching socio-economic effects piracy had on the impoverished inhabitants of the Bahamians. Outside of this standard analysis, Virgil Henry Storr's scholarship interprets Bahamian piracy as a "way of doing business" and "piratical

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<sup>2</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 74-103, 115-176; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 47-76, 100-161.

<sup>3</sup> *The Salt Industry of the Bahamas* (Nassau, The Bahamas: Public Records Office, Archives Section, Ministry of Education and Culture, 1980); Patrice M. Williams, "The Politics of Salt: The Turks & Caicos Islands Issue 1764-1848" (M.Phil. thesis, University of the West Indies, 2002); Gwendolyn F. Fonseca-Elphick, "Salt Island: Grand Turk in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: A Thesis" (M.A. thesis, State University of New York College at Oneonta, 1997); Carlton Mills, *History of the Turks & Caicos Islands* (Oxford: MacMillan Education, 2008); Larry G. Bowman, "The Scarcity of Salt in Virginia during the American Revolution," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 77, no. 4 (October, 1969): 464-472; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*.

<sup>4</sup> Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750*, Latin American Realities (Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998); Daniel Defoe, *A General History of the Pyrates*, ed. Manuel Schonhorn (1972; reprint, Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999); Virgil Henry Storr, *Enterprising Slaves and Master Pirates: Understanding Economic Life in the Bahamas* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2004); David Cordingly, *Pirate Hunter of the Caribbean: The Adventurous Life of Captain Woodes Rogers* (New York: Random House, 2011); David Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life among the Pirates* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006); Colin Woodard, *The Republic of Pirates: Being the True and Surprising Story of the Caribbean Pirates and the Man Who Brought Them Down* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2007); George Woodbury, *The Great Days of Piracy in the West Indies* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1951); Violet Barbour, "Privateers and Pirates of the West Indies," *The American Historical Review* 16, no. 3 (April, 1911): 529-566.

enterprise,” because “no non-piratical enterprise” was as economically successful for the inhabitants.<sup>5</sup>

The economic and political situation that placed the Bahamas on the periphery of the British Empire during the Imperial Crisis has been addressed in several important ways. Gail Saunders and Michael Craton have framed the historical dialogue in terms of an economic struggle for survival as the Bahamas was isolated commercially by American protests against the Stamp and Townshend acts.<sup>6</sup> William McClellan, Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, and Donna Spindel have devoted little attention to the Bahamian experience during the Crisis. Rather they have focused principally on smuggling, and the wider effects of British tax policy and colonial protest in the major colonies of the British Caribbean and American mainland.<sup>7</sup> Yet, as Patrice Williams notes in “The Politics of Salt,” the consequences of British colonial tax policy and the Bahamian struggle for economic survival had important influence on the internal debate over the Bahamian-Turks colonial relationship.<sup>8</sup> By focusing on how the Imperial Crisis affected peripheral British colonies, such as the Bahama Islands, in terms of how it influenced political dialogue and economic crises, a more nuanced understanding of how

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<sup>5</sup> Storr, *Enterprising Slaves and Master Pirates*, 44, 51-52.

<sup>6</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 149-153; Craton and Saunders. *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 160-164.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, “The Stamp Act Crisis in the British Caribbean,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (April, 1994): 203-226; Donna J. Spindel, “The Stamp Act Crisis in the British West Indies,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (August, 1977): 203-221; William S. McClellan, *Smuggling in the American Colonies at the Outbreak of the Revolution, with Special Reference to the West Indies Trade* (New York: The Moffat, Yard and Company, 1912).

<sup>8</sup> Williams, “The Politics of Salt,” 57-72.

these colonies reacted to the effects of the American Revolution in the Atlantic World can be created.

Surviving physically and economically on the Bahama Islands depended primarily on the colony's environmental, geological, and geographical characteristics and issues. The position of the archipelago bordering the Strait of Florida and the Windward Passage made the islands an important station for colonial shipping between British North America and the West Indies, in addition to a critical military asset that could guard supply routes and launch raids against enemy vessels. This allowed piracy, smuggling, and wrecking to thrive, and brought commercial vessels to the colony. Yet, the Bahamas' poor soil hindered its ability to produce significant quantities of sugar cane, cotton, coffee beans, and other commercial cash crops. The archipelago was relegated to secondary status by the metropole, which idealized the wealth producing sugar colonies of Barbados and Jamaica. Bahamians managed to just make it in the British Atlantic World by harvesting timber and quality hardwoods, marketing native fruits and turtle meat, and raking salt.

The Bahama Islands' geological and environmental situation varied significantly from the principal sugar colonies constituting the Leeward and Windward Islands. Instead of mountainous islands with lush vegetation and rich soil deposits, the Bahamas were not much more than glorified sand bars. Many of the colony's islands towered no higher than 100 feet above sea level, but these were dwarfed by the other British West Indian islands—ranging from 1,120 feet (Barbados) to 7,402 feet (Jamaica) above the

ocean's surface.<sup>9</sup> The archipelago's predominately flat nature coupled with the "porosity of the rock," consisting mainly of limestone and coral sand covered by a meager layer of fertile soil or dispersed amongst the rocks in "banana holes," resulted in "absolutely no rivers or streams" flowing within the islands.<sup>10</sup> In some areas rocks, caves, and deep "potholes" marked the landscape, and freshwater lay near the surface above the "underlying salt water."<sup>11</sup> This made farming quite difficult, particularly for the large-scale plantation style of agriculture production akin to those used in Virginia, South Carolina, and Jamaica, because of the lack of deep fertile land that could hold freshwater and the serious risk of killing crops with brackish well-water.

These circumstances directed and limited the actions made by the Bahamians in their efforts to create a prosperous colonial economy, and sustain long-term colonial settlements. Early records of trade occurring during the early eighteenth century show that the inhabitants traded turtle meat and indigenous fruits with South Carolinian traders for victuals and supplies. New Providence Island's "natural produce" included sugar cane, cotton, "mahogany, cedar and pine" for "ship building," "lignum vitae, brown ebony and various dye woods," a variety of fruits, and pineapples that were the "best kind in America."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, only 800 of New Providence's approximately 51,100 acres

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<sup>9</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 11; Paulette Anne Bethel-Daly, "Uneven Development in the Bahamas: Past and Present" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1980), 39-40.

<sup>10</sup> George Burbank Shattuck and Benjamin LeRoy Miller, "Physiography and Geology of the Bahama Islands" in *The Bahama Islands*, ed. George Burbank Shattuck (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1905), 13; Governor Shirley's Answers to 19 Queries relating to His Majesty's Bahama Islands from the Right Honorable Earl of Dartmouth, C.O. 23/22/59-72.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Cordingly, *Pirate Hunter of the Caribbean*, 230: "Queries from the Board of Trade for the year 1728." C.O. 23/14/66.

were under cultivation.<sup>13</sup> This sustained a population, calculated by Governor George Phenney in 1722, of “427 whites and 233 blacks” on New Providence, as well as an additional 286 whites and 42 blacks spread across Eleuthera, Harbour Island, and Cat Island.<sup>14</sup>

Trade between Bahamians, Great Britain, and other British American colonies was limited during the early eighteenth century. During Governor Phenney’s administration, a “typical year” saw “only one ship” carrying goods arrive directly from Great Britain.<sup>15</sup> In 1728 and 1729, only “about 20 but very small” Bahamian vessels were engaged in trade.<sup>16</sup> The majority of these vessels sailed to South Carolina offering “Maddara [sic] and Mohoggony [sic] wood, turtle, lemons, oranges, [and] pine apples” in exchange for provisions, while others imported “rum and molasses” and other goods from Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua, Havana, and Hispaniola.<sup>17</sup> Yet, this meager trade contributed little to the overall wealth of the colony, generating approximately £104 10s. 3d. in revenue between 1728 and 1729.<sup>18</sup> Comparatively, the income of the Bahamas’ colonial government in a single year amounted to less than one-tenth of one percent of the £11,174 6s. 6d. incurred from the 2s. 6d. tax levied by Barbados during the same

<sup>13</sup> Cordingly, *Pirate Hunter of the Caribbean*, 230.

<sup>14</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 119-120.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>16</sup> “Mr. Fitzwilliam, Surveyor General of the Customs for the Southern Continent of America, to the Commissioners of the Customs. New Providence. 30<sup>th</sup> June. 1729” in *America and the West Indies, 1728-1729*, vol. 36 of *Calendar of State Papers: Colonial Series*, ed. Cecil Headlam (1937; reprint, Vaduz, Lichtenstein: Kraus Reprint, Ltd., 1964), 487-488. From this point forward the citation *Calendar of State Papers: Colonial Series* will be abbreviated as *CSP:CS*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 487-488; “List of ships entered and cleared at New Providence, 26<sup>th</sup> Dec., 1728 – 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1729” in *America and the West Indies, 1728-1729*, vol. 36 of *CSP:CS*, ed. Cecil Headlam, 363.

<sup>18</sup> “Treasurer’s account of public funds” in *America and the West Indies, 1728-1729*, vol. 36 of *CSP:CS*, ed. Cecil Headlam, 325.

period, and approximately one-and-one-third percent of Virginia's total revenue of £7,736 8s. 2¼d.<sup>19</sup>

While the colony and its inhabitants did not derive much wealth from direct trade, many benefited from vessels traversing Bahamian waters. The shifting sand bars, low-lying cays, rocky coral reefs, and treacherous Caribbean storms brought wealth to the inhabitants through the misfortunes of mariners from around the Atlantic. The loss or grounding of merchant and treasure ships on the Bahamian reefs provided inhabitants with lucrative careers in salvaging their cargos. Spanish ships were an especially favorite target of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Bahamians. They brought handsome sums to the destitute islanders that “could yield more returns than years of labor ashore.”<sup>20</sup> Bermudian Richard Richardson and a small company of men netted “a share of silver that weighed about 1400 pieces of eight” and “80 lb. a share” in cargo totaling approximately “£2,600” from the wreck of a Spanish vessel on Man Island during the summer of 1657.<sup>21</sup> While most wrecks did not yield similar riches, the prospect of improving one's financial and material well-being in the impoverished colony was enough to draw Bahamian wreckers to a sunken vessel like insects to a rotting corpse.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Treasure's account of the 2s. 6d. levy for year ending 30th Sept., 1729.” in *America and the West Indies, 1728-1729*, vol. 36 of CSP:CS, ed. Cecil Headlam, 347; “Account of H.M. Revenue of Virginia. 25th Oct. 1727 – 25th April, 1728.” in *America and the West Indies, 1728-1729*, vol. 36 of CSP:CS, ed. Cecil Headlam, 127.

<sup>20</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 86-87.

<sup>21</sup> W. Hubert Miller, “The Colonization of the Bahamas, 1647-1670.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (January, 1945): 41-42; Sir John H. Lefroy, *Memorials of the Discovery and Early Settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands, 1511-1687* (1879; reprint, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1932), 2:112-113; Riley, *Homeward Bound*. 32-33.

<sup>22</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 87; James M. Wright, “The Wrecking System of the Bahama Islands.” *Political Science Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (December, 1915): 618-644.

Attempts were made to establish cotton and tobacco plantations in the Bahamas stretching from the Carolina Lords Proprietors' rule that lasted from 1670 to 1706, all the way to the early days of the American Revolution. But, like many early English settlers of the Leeward and Windward Islands, they met limited results.<sup>23</sup> Tobacco and sugar were grown principally for "local consumption," with little-to-none being exported from the colony, and the fine cotton produced was not enough to develop an "export trade" of any significance.<sup>24</sup> Inhabitants' attempts to establish sugar plantations met with little success because of the "want of hands and money to erect works and buildings."<sup>25</sup>

The cultivation of agricultural lands on the islands was further complicated by the Lords Proprietors' rules regarding land tenure, which drastically limited the ability of the islanders to claim title to plots of land.<sup>26</sup> When Charles II granted the Bahama Islands to six of the eight Lords Proprietors of Carolina, the Proprietors were empowered to grant lands to the settlers, appoint governors to oversee the colony, and collect various forms of taxation.<sup>27</sup> During the rule of the Lords Proprietors they reserved "two-fifths of all land"

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<sup>23</sup> Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (1972; reprint, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 53-54, 61, 168-171; Angela Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America*, Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 23-24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>25</sup> "Mr. Fitzwilliam, Surveyor General of the Customs for the Southern Continent of America, to the Commissioners of the Customs. New Providence. 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1729" in *America and the West Indies, 1728-1729*, vol. 36 of *CSP:CS*, ed. Cecil Headlam, 488.

<sup>26</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 164-165; Governor Thomas Shirley to Lord Dartmouth, November 28, 1773, C.O. 23/22/57-58; Governor Shirley's Answers to 19 Queries relating to His Majesty's Bahama Islands from the Right Honorable Earl of Dartmouth. C.O. 23/22/59-72.

<sup>27</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 94-96; Paul Albury, *The Story of the Bahamas*, 49. The six Lords Proprietors appointed to oversee the Bahamas were: John Berkeley (1<sup>st</sup> Baron Berkeley of Stratton), Sir George Carteret, Sir John Colleton, Anthony

for themselves, and had the principal power to grant land to colonists—which were awarded in “less suitabl[e]...twelve-hundred-acre squares.”<sup>28</sup> The twelve-hundred-acre plots, consisting of sporadic banana holes and thin layers of fertile soil, could not provide enough nutrients to effectively cultivate cash crops. These land tenure policies continued after the Crown’s assumption of the colony’s governance in 1718, signaled by the installation of Captain Woodes Rogers as the colony’s first royal governor. Not until the large influx of persons and capital from the Loyalist exodus in the sunset years of the Revolution were the Bahamas Islands capable of producing anything above self-sufficient subsistence agriculture—an activity regarded by the islanders as a “necessary evil” for nearly a century-and-a-half.<sup>29</sup>

This differs dramatically from the sugar production in the British West Indies during the eighteenth century. In 1700, British West Indian sugar colonies of Barbados, Jamaica, and the Leeward Islands produced 12,170 tons, 4,474 tons, and 6,812 tons respectively.<sup>30</sup> Barbados led the way in sugar exports to Britain with approximately £316,000 in 1700, with Jamaican and Leeward Island exports amounting to £201,400 and £192,000.<sup>31</sup> Export estimations indicate that sugar products accounted for “93 percent of the total exports of Barbados, 99 percent for Antigua, 92 percent for St. Kitts, and 89 percent for Jamaica” well into 1770.<sup>32</sup> The colony of Granada expanded its sugar output,

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Ashley Cooper (1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury), William Craven (1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Craven), and Christopher Monck (2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Albemarle).

<sup>28</sup> Craton and Saunders. *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 95.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Dunn. *Sugar and Slaves*, 203.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>32</sup> O’Shaughnessy. *An Empire Divided*, 59.



and the value of its exports rose dramatically from £62,915 in 1763 to £859,981 in 1773, which made it the “second most valuable colony in the British Caribbean.”<sup>33</sup> Exports from Jamaica, the crown jewel of the British West Indies, rose significantly from 1,851,481 gallons of rum to 2,169,482 gallons and 1,359,621 hundredweight of sugar to 1,746,990 hundredweight between 1763 and 1775.<sup>34</sup> Overall, the value of sugar exported from the British West Indies to Britain “increased from £1,994,654 in 1763 to £2,666,052 sterling in 1773.”<sup>35</sup>

The islands’ secondary status within the Atlantic World meant the British government neglected to ensure its proper defense. They contributed little to the maintenance of fortifications on New Providence Island, and consequently Fort Nassau and Fort Montagu remained dilapidated throughout much of the eighteenth century. In 1721, Fort Nassau’s cannon carriages had rotted to the point where twenty-four had collapsed, in addition to three more that collapsed when their cannons were fired, leaving the cannons “lying uselessly on the ground.”<sup>36</sup> Despite its position guarding the Straits of Florida and the Windward Passage, the archipelago was inadequately garrisoned to repel French and Spanish attacks. Defending the colony fell on the shoulders of an independent company of British soldiers consisting of a force of “110 men including officers” in the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>36</sup> Cordingley, *Pirate Hunter of the Caribbean*, 230; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 162.

1720s, which dwindled to a mere “twenty-three men” following the French and Indian War and then to thirteen men in 1773—all of whom were stationed on New Providence.<sup>37</sup>

While Britain’s colonial administration did not view the archipelago in the same light as they did the sugar islands, the Bahamas did generate one product in high demand by the Empire: salt. During the early eighteenth century it was estimated that the salt raked on the Bahamas was sufficient enough to “furnish the new plantations and colonies on the north American coast.”<sup>38</sup> Exuma, Ragged Island, Long Island, Inagua, and the more remote Turks Island, were ideal locations for raking and shipping salt because of their low elevation, natural forming salt ponds, and their close proximity to the mainland and British trade routes. Consequently, the islands attracted seasonal Bermudian and Bahamian workers looking to earn income or barter the salt for trade goods and provisions with vessels from other British American colonies.

The exportation of salt from the Bahamas played an important role in commercial trade in the British Atlantic World. Salt became a particularly important resource for colonists in New England and the Canadian Maritimes, who utilized it to preserve fish and other meats for shipment to the British Isles and the West Indies.<sup>39</sup> Historian Michael Jarvis has noted that the New England colonies and Newfoundland “consumed more than half a million bushels a year” during the 1740s alone.<sup>40</sup> As a result of the need for salt as

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>38</sup> *The Salt Industry of the Bahamas*, 1, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *The Salt Industry in the Bahamas*, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Michael J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 197. Further scholarship conducted by Patrice M. Williams indicates that the salt trade to North America from the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos islands continued to grow and prosper throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Williams notes that between 1794 and 1805 Turks Island exported just over 357,106 bushels of

a commercial good, Bahamians increasingly engaged in a competitive collection and trade in the mineral with migrant Bermudians who raked salt on the Out Islands and Turks Island. A “conservative estimate” given by the Bermudian assembly in 1764 put the worth of the salt trade coming out of the Bahamas at “£20,000 sterling a year” and, based on prices for a bushel of salt in mainland America and the average carrying capacity of Bermudian vessels, the typical “sailor-raker” could earn approximately £15-£20 per voyage.<sup>41</sup>

The Bahama Islands also produced large amounts of wood for sale to Britain and the mainland colonies. Native Bahamian woods were highly valued for their use in manufacturing fine furniture, textile dyeing, and ship building. The harvesting of Bahamian logwoods and dyewoods formed the islands’ “first exports” of significance during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. British and American fine furniture manufacturers’ thirst for large quantities of mahogany caused it to supersede American walnut and oak as the material of choice by the 1730s, and consequentially further opened up the timber industry as an important aspect of Bahamian commerce.<sup>42</sup>

Inhabitants relied on the salt, timber, and wrecking industries during the first half of the eighteenth century during periods of economic prosperity. However, when times became tough or empires clashed, the inhabitants regularly resorted to piracy and

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salt on average per year to North America, accounting for seventy-eight percent of all salt produced and exported on the island. Between 1804 and 1806, the islands of New Providence, Exuma, and Crooked produced 583,051 bushels of salt. This traded for 1s. 3d. per bushel of salt for a net value of £36,440 13s. 9d. See: Williams, “The Politics of Salt”; Account of Exports from the Ports of Turks Island to British colonies and America in U.S. vessels, 1794-1805, C.O. 23/53/25-27; C.O. 23/51/31-34.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 197. Also see: Depositions of Saltus, Darrell, and Tatem, 1764, C.O. 37/19/244-249.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 219.

privateering, which served as their “definite model for economic success...ever since the 17<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>43</sup>

The lack of major interaction with the British government and military, particularly during the early-eighteenth century, and the geographical nature of the Bahama Islands enabled piracy and smuggling to flourish. The many uninhabited islands, inlets, and cays provided the perfect cover necessary to hide hostile ships and contraband goods. Furthermore, the absence of a strong British naval presence in Bahamian waters, as well as the crumbling state of Fort Nassau, allowed pirates to sail and shelter amongst the islands and ports uninhibited for years. As a result, from 1706 to 1718 the “golden age of piracy” saw the Bahamas become, as historian George Woodbury aptly put it, “the Pirate Republic of New Providence.”<sup>44</sup>

Despite their dangerous and illegitimate nature, piracy and smuggling brought needed income into the colony and facilitated a period of economic growth during the War of Jenkins’ Ear, King George’s War, and the French and Indian War. The prevalence of persistent “poverty, lack of resources, and the heartbreaking drudgery of alternative occupations” made the prospect of “instant or easy riches” quite alluring.<sup>45</sup> Wartime proved to be especially lucrative for Bahamians engaged in piracy and privateering, and in 1748 Governor John Tinker commented that “New Providence had ‘increased most surprisingly in strength and wealth.’”<sup>46</sup> During the War of Jenkins’ Ear prosperity flowed

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<sup>43</sup> Storr, *Enterprising Slaves and Master Pirates*, 44.

<sup>44</sup> George Woodbury, *The Great Days of Piracy in the West Indies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1951), 69.

<sup>45</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 114.

<sup>46</sup> Albury, *The Story of the Bahamas*, 86.

into the colony in the form of plunder and prizes, which fueled personal and public growth to the point “that some of the new homes and houses of business” were “called sumptuous in the Indies.”<sup>47</sup> However, the good times of pirating and plunder were about to come to an abrupt end following the French and Indian War, and would quickly be displaced by economic depression and bankruptcy which threatened the Bahamas’ very existence.

The Imperial Crisis following the French and Indian War created a politically and financially turbulent environment for the Bahama Islands, which saw the colony and its inhabitants take several different political and financial actions that straddled the growing rift between colonial British America and the metropole. The first major instance came in the growing internal debate over the role of the Turks and Caicos Islands within the greater Bahamian archipelago—which lasted until 1848 when the Turks and Caicos became an independent colony within the British Empire. This debate served as a microcosm for the larger imperial dispute between the American colonies and Parliament over the metropole’s ability to levy internal taxes on the colonists without direct representation. The second action saw the colony request a financial grant from the Crown in 1773 to pay its colonial officials and personnel, since tax revenues were so meager the Bahamian government found itself incapable of paying them. Further actions involved the attempt to establish Nassau and Turks Island as “free ports,” the inhabitants’ participation in illicit trading, and the protesting of tax policies implemented by the metropole.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 86.

In the wake of the French and Indian War, a triumphant and bankrupt Imperial Britain sought to effectively secure its American colonies while climbing out of its monstrous war debt. The French military operations during the war spurred the British government to increase its military presence throughout British North America and the West Indies, which largely remained in place following the conflict's end in February 1763. The French capture of Turks Island in June 1764 by Admiral d'Estaing, committed with the knowledge that France and Great Britain were now at peace, attempted to break the British control of the Windward Passage and shutdown the Jamaica trade. While Admiral d'Estaing's assault was vociferously condemned by both London and Paris, it exposed the need for a strong British military presence in America following the war. Chief administrative officials at Whitehall and on the frontbenches of Parliament endeavored to secure the borderlands of Indian Territory with regular troops, while fundamentally changing the transatlantic tax policy in order to pay down the debt and provide colonial security. This was a marked change from the previous century-and-a-half of colonial American policy of minimally intrusive oversight, to attempting to play an instrumental role in the American colonies. Yet, the taxation policies pushed by the administrations between 1764 and 1775 caused a detrimental shock to the British colonial system, and set the Empire on a course for international civil war.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 35-71; Williams, "The Politics of Salt," 59-60; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 160-161; Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Ian K. Steele, "Metropolitan Administration of the Colonies, 1696-1775" in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, Blackwell Companions to American History (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 8-13; Peter D. G. Thomas, "The Grenville Program, 1763-1765" in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, 118-122; Peter D. G. Thomas, "The Stamp Act Crisis and its Repercussions, including the Quartering Act Controversy" in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, 123-133; Robert J. Chaffin, "The Townshend Acts Crisis,

Parliament's taxation policies deeply affected the economic and political realities of British America. Lord Grenville's implementation of the Stamp Act in 1765 created an internal tax on British paper goods, legal documents, and nearly all means of written communication in the colonies.<sup>49</sup> This aroused protests and sympathies across the North American and Caribbean colonies because of the Act's universal application to all British colonies, and the direct taxation of British subjects without their due consent.<sup>50</sup> Arguments made against the implementation of the Stamp Act by the colonists targeted the method of "internal" taxation, which opponents claimed Parliament did not have the right to force on the colonies.<sup>51</sup> Only with direct representation in the House of Commons would direct internal taxation by the British government be justified. However, this was rebuffed with the assertion that all British colonists were "virtually" represented in Parliament.<sup>52</sup> The passage of the Townshend Duties in 1767 by the Chatham administration renewed the protests and heated political language of the Stamp Act Crisis, but the mainland colonists' protests expanded beyond effigy burnings and riots to incorporate widespread boycotts through the non-importation and non-consumption agreements.

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1767-1770" in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, 134-150; Edward Countryman, "Social Protest and the Revolutionary Movement, 1765-1776" in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, 184-194.

<sup>49</sup> "The Stamp Act" in *Colonies to Nation, 1763-1789: A Documentary History of the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene (London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975), 42-43.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Countryman, *The American Revolution: Revised Edition* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 41-43; O'Shaughnessy, "The Stamp Act Crisis in the British Caribbean," 203-226; Spindel, "The Stamp Act Crisis in the British West Indies," 203-221.

<sup>51</sup> "Examination of Benjamin Franklin in the House of Commons" in *Colonies to Nation, 1763-1789*, ed. Jack P. Greene, 72-78.

<sup>52</sup> "The American Position: Daniel Dulany, 'Considerations on the Property of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies...'" in *Colonies to Nation, 1763-1789*, ed. Jack P. Greene, 52-53.

The Stamp Act of 1765 caused a deep crisis in Britain's Atlantic Empire, and changed the way colonists understood political roles and relationships. The colonial and British philosophies surrounding colonial taxation and parliamentary representation did not just exist at the Atlantic World level, but played a significant role in relations between organized colonies and ambiguous territories within the Empire. Colonial reaction to the Stamp Act on the mainland produced hostile confrontations with royal officials and designated stamp collectors. In New York and Boston riotous mobs tore down collection offices, destroyed stamps, and threatened royal officials, while rioters in St. Kitts burned over £2,000 worth of stamps.<sup>53</sup>

However, the Bahamas avoided much of the chaos accompanying the mainland protests. The only individual designated to administer the Stamp Act was Governor Shirley, and the stamps allocated to the islands "comprised the second smallest shipments sent to any American colony." Reports from American captains travelling through the Bahamas in December 1765 expressed that "stamped papers were unavailable at New Providence," and that commerce continued "as usual." Furthermore, of all the West Indian colonies, the Bahamas was the only one to return all of its stamps intact to London.<sup>54</sup>

Although the use of the stamps does not appear to have occurred in the Bahamas, the colony might have seen some intimidation of stamp collectors to ensure that they were never distributed. One "unconfirmed report" that appeared in "one northern newspaper" detailed that a group of inhabitants from New Providence requested that the

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<sup>53</sup> Nash, *The Urban Crucible*, 184-194; Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 517.

<sup>54</sup> Spindel, "The Stamp Act Crisis in the British West Indies," 220, 220n69.



stamp distributor resign, but when he refused they “forced him into a coffin, nailed it shut, lowered it into the ground and covered it with 2 shovelfulls [sic] of dirt” causing him to resign. However, reports given by Governor Shirley indicate that “the Government remained in a perfect undisturbed State,” and there was no increase of British troops or ships in the Bahamas. While it does not appear that the Bahamas experienced the effects of the Stamp Act in as severe a manner as the mainland colonies, it significantly impacted the colony’s internal policies and ideological debates.<sup>55</sup>

A critical case study can be found in how the Bahamian colonial government and the Board of Trade conceptualized where the Turks and Caicos Islands existed within the British Empire, particularly in the debate over who held jurisdictional authority over the islands. The French capture of Turks Island gave the Bahamas an advantage over the Bermudians in their attempt to control the islands. Governor Shirley argued that the islands should be incorporated into the Bahamas in order to be more effectively defended by the Royal Navy, which could be comfortably stationed at Great Exuma—an “ideal base.”<sup>56</sup> This would tighten control over the Windward Passage against a possible French assault on “English cruisers” and merchant vessels, and further aggressive actions against British colonists.<sup>57</sup> The British colonial administration concurred with Governor Shirley, and determined that the Turks and Caicos Islands would be governed directly by the Bahamas. This gave the colonial Bahamian government full power to legislate for, tax, and regulate the inhabitants and commercial activities of Turks Island regardless of actual

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 220; *Massachusetts Gazette*, December 12, 1765; *New York Gazette*, December 2, 1765; *Massachusetts Gazette*, October 17, 1765; Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 517n1.

<sup>56</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 161.

<sup>57</sup> C.O. 23/16/16; Williams, “The Politics of Salt,” 60.

representation within the General Assembly.<sup>58</sup> The ability to tax and regulate a great proportion of the salt raking and trade occurring on Turks Island would bring much needed income into Bahamian coffers, while simultaneously attempting to drive off the interloping Bermudian salt rakers and traders operating on the island.<sup>59</sup>

However, the Bahamian General Assembly's Lower House took the moral high-ground. The Lower House's twenty-four members refused to legislate and approve taxes on the approximately twenty-five white male inhabitants despite Governor Shirley and Lord Hillsborough's arguments that the Turks Islanders were virtually represented—like the colonists living on Exuma and Cat Island who did not have elected representatives.<sup>60</sup> Siding with their fellow colonists on the mainland and in the West Indies protesting direct internal taxation, the assemblymen argued that they did not possess “any right to make Laws particularly for the government of Turks Island, as they have not any Representatives in this House.”<sup>61</sup> This argument is underscored by their assertion that representation in the colonial legislature was a rightful “Priviledge [sic]” the Turks Islanders had, because they were “in Number and consequence sufficient to be represented in any House of Assembly in America.”<sup>62</sup> As a result the Lower House could

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<sup>58</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 163; Letter from Governor Shirley to Lord Hillsborough, October 19, 1770, C.O. 23/8/102.

<sup>59</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 210.

<sup>60</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 134; Letter from the Lord Hillsborough to Governor Shirley, April 14, 1770, C.O. 23/8/67-68. The population of Turks Island was officially taken in 1773, which listed approximately 40 white inhabitants and 110 “reputed blacks.” The number cited represents the islanders who signed a petition to Governor Shirley in 1770 objecting to the Bahamians increasing control over the island and the salt raking industry. See: Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 180; Letter from the Turks Islanders to Governor Shirley, C.O. 23/8/126-127.

<sup>61</sup> C.O. 23/8/108r.

not in good conscience approve of imposing the colony's "Interiour Policy" on the Turks Islanders until they were permitted to do so by the Crown. Nevertheless, this still left open the colony's ability to enforce the Imperial laws and policies, since the Turks and Caicos Islands now fell under their preview according to the Board of Trade.<sup>63</sup>

While the mainland American colonies and West Indian sugar colonies experienced dramatic growth in importation and consumption of British manufactured goods going into the Imperial Crisis, trade to the Bahamas languished.<sup>64</sup> In a letter written in December 1768 by Governor Thomas Shirley to Lord Hillsborough, Shirley plainly states that "Alarms" were being raised by the inhabitants over the "languid State of Trade" that the islands depended on for "their very Existence."<sup>65</sup> As a result of the dreadful trade situation, a deeply troubled Shirley stressed that "many Families have, and still continue to remove from [the Bahamas] to the Continent and Neighboring Islands."<sup>66</sup> The regiment of British Regulars garrisoned on New Providence following the war had been dramatically depleted to merely "twenty-three men" from an original "Independent Company of One Hundred and fifty Men."<sup>67</sup> This put the ability to enforce colonial laws and "Civil Power" in the face of a "Riotous disposition" presented by the Bahamians'

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<sup>62</sup> C.O. 23/8/108r.

<sup>63</sup> Extracts from the Journals of the Lower House of Assembly, Wednesday, October 10, 1770, C.O. 23/8/116-117.

<sup>64</sup> T. H. Breen, "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present* 119 (May, 1988): 75-76, 77-78; R. W. Symonds, "The Export Trade of Furniture to Colonial America," *The Burlington Magazine of Connoisseurs* 77, no. 452 (November, 1940): 152-155, 158-160, 163; Carole Shammas, "Consumer Behavior in Colonial America," *Social Science History* 6, no. 1 (Winter, 1982): 67-86; T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Governor Thomas Shirley to Lord Hillsborough, December 9, 1768. C.O. 23/8/3.

<sup>66</sup> C.O. 23/8/3.

<sup>67</sup> C.O. 23/8/4.

“very bold [and] daring Spirit.”<sup>68</sup> The impoverished nature of the colonists, coupled with the lack of any staple crop produced in the archipelago and the threat of being unable to maintain domestic tranquility, caused the colony that had “been upon the decline ever since the Peace” to face the serious possibility of soon being “abandoned.”<sup>69</sup>

In an attempt to prevent the Bahama Islands from becoming a ghost colony, Governor Shirley floated the idea of “Opening the Port of New Providence” to foreign commerce. The establishment of New Providence Island as a British free port would entice Bahamians intending to permanently leave the colony to remain, while encouraging other colonists and settlers to “resort hither.” The advent of foreign ships meant greater commerce with other colonies in British America whose merchants and consumers sought legal means of obtaining various kinds of foreign manufactured goods and produce. For Shirley and the Bahamians, opening up the port would “make these Islands flourish and render them very usefull [sic] to the Mother Country.” Even “a few Years,” the governor estimated, would keep the colony afloat and effectively allow local cotton and coffee production to expand and develop into suitable cash crops.<sup>70</sup> Yet, while the establishment of New Providence as a free port did come to pass, the flow of legal British and colonial American commercial trade quickly dried up as the mainland colonists took aggressive action against British policy through numerous boycotts of imported manufactured goods and produce.

The various protests, boycotts, and non-consumption agreements against British goods by the mainland colonies saw Atlantic trade and colonial tax revenues decline in

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<sup>68</sup> C.O. 23/8/4.

<sup>69</sup> C.O. 23/8/3.

<sup>70</sup> C.O. 23/8/3.

the Bahamas. Colonial uproar against the implementation of the Townshend Duties had the strongest effect on the decline of transatlantic British commerce, which resulted in a dramatic drop in Britain's export trade to the thirteen colonies. Prior to the widespread implementation of boycotts in the thirteen colonies in 1768, British exports earned approximately £15,100,000 in 1768, but this had tumbled to £13,400,000 a year later for a "decline of only 38 per cent."<sup>71</sup> Through its various public and commercial taxes the Bahamas' Public Treasury only contained a "lordly total" of £144 7s. 7½d. in December 1768—a meager sum that would evaporate as the boycotts dragged on.<sup>72</sup>

In an attempt to stem the loss of trade, Bahamians and Turks Islanders changed their *modus operandi* from sanctioned trade with the British American mainland and the West Indian colonies to illicit trade with the Dutch, French, and Spanish West Indies. This was particularly true for the salt rakers on Turks Island, who unofficially established the island as a free port sometime between 1765 and 1767. The free port allowed victuals and timber from mainland British America to be exchanged for sugar products, wine, and slaves from the non-British West Indies.<sup>73</sup> Yet, many of these goods never reached the island's shore; rather, they were transferred from foreign vessels to British vessels and vice versa without going through the official importation procedures.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, according to Samuel Gambier's observations regarding the Turks Island smuggling operations, British vessels bound for the mainland colonies loaded with "foreign

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<sup>71</sup> Peter D. G. Thomas, *The Townshend Duties Crisis: The Second Phase of the American Revolution, 1767-1773* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 157.

<sup>72</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 150.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from Samuel Gambier to the Commissioner of the Customs, C.O. 23/8/124.

<sup>74</sup> State of Trade carried on at Turks Islands, C.O. 23/8/122.

Produce” and other “customable [and] prohibited commodities” often took on a “quantity of Salt, which they most likely reported [as their main cargo] on their return.”<sup>75</sup> This allowed smugglers to effectively disguise their cargoes, particularly in the case of foreign sugar, as salt in order to avoid paying import duties at British-American ports.

Bahamian officials also encouraged the establishment of Turks Island as a free port in an attempt to boost trade. Andrew Symmer, Governor Shirley’s personally appointed agent to the island, was very open in his advocacy for establishing Turks Island as a free port—especially since he was a chief participant in the ongoing illicit trade. Symmer permitted numerous vessels of “all nations” to freely come to the island “to sell or barter away their Cargoes for anything they could get in exchange.”<sup>76</sup> Since Turks Island was a British possession and not a free port established by the British Government the trade carried out there was in “open Violation of the grand Act of Navigation,” and an assumption of “the legislative power” with the act of “opening a free port.”<sup>77</sup> However, it was quite prosperous with over two hundred vessels from the principal port cities across colonial America conducting commerce at the island between 1768 and 1769.<sup>78</sup> Since the trade occurred off the books, the illicit free trade did not translate into increased revenues for the Bahamian colonial government—rather, the inhabitants and local officials pocketed the proceeds.

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<sup>75</sup> C.O. 23/8/124.

<sup>76</sup> C.O. 23/8/122.

<sup>77</sup> C.O. 23/8/122.

<sup>78</sup> A comprehensive list of port cities and colonies whose ships landed at Turks Island to trade includes the following: “Boston, New York, St. Kitts, Monti Christo, Hispaniola, New Providence, Dominica, Grenada, Santo Domingo, Jamaica, St. Eustatia, Bermuda, Cape Francois, St. Martin, Antigua, Curaçao, Cape Ann, Leith, Fort Dauphin, St. Thomas, and Barbados.” See: Williams, “The Politics of Salt,” 63.

The use of the Bahamas and Turks Island as conduits for smuggling illegal foreign goods to the mainland colonies increased tensions during the Imperial Crisis, but as the American non-importation and non-consumption movements took hold, smuggling through the Bahamas dried up. American smuggling of foreign products raised the ire of royal governors, tax collectors, and the West Indies lobby, which consequently fueled distrust of American colonists by officials in Whitehall and Parliament. The imposition of a 3*d.* per gallon tax on foreign molasses by the Sugar Act, designed to raise an estimated £78,000 per year, yielded “only £5,200 in 1764 and £4,090 in 1765.”<sup>79</sup> The failure to create revenue stemmed from “the continuance of widespread smuggling.”<sup>80</sup> The establishment of the non-importation and non-consumption agreements made by colonial American merchants and consumers briefly opened up the Bahamian and Turks routes to bring boycotted and foreign manufactured goods into the mainland colonies. This was quite clear to Bahamian officials who noted that the supply of illegal foreign manufactured goods would be “to the great prejudice of the Mother Country,” and would work in “upholding...the American merchants in their Resolution of Non-Importation.”<sup>81</sup> Yet, as the non-importation and non-consumption movements advanced, the mainland colonists cut themselves off from both legal and illegal imported goods, reasoning that “the importation of these articles would have sooner or later benefited...England.”<sup>82</sup>

Dwindling trade, meager colonial revenues, and the crumbling defensive infrastructure reached a crisis point in 1773. In a humble and flattering letter to King

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas. “The Stamp Act Crisis and its Repercussions, including the Quartering Act Controversy,” 131.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>81</sup> C.O. 23/8/122v.

<sup>82</sup> McClellan, *Smuggling in the American Colonies at the Outbreak of the Revolution*, 90.

George III, the General Assembly and Governor's Council laid out the economic realities the Bahamas faced on the eve of the American Revolution. The decline in trade caused the colony's revenue to be "almost annihilated," the "Treasury exhausted," and the government unable to pay the basic salaries of the officers and officials. Attempts to raise funds through the use of "heavy imposts" only resulted in reducing the inhabitants to a state of "Extreme poverty." Native woods that the colony's "Exports chiefly consist[ed]" had "become so scarce and the value so depreciated" the industry could not generate a serious profit. Governor Shirley estimated that the total value of the colony's exports to Britain "amounted to about £2450 Sterling" in 1771, and "to scarcely £1750 Sterling" in the following year. Even laying taxes on British goods and manufactures, as "in consequence of Orders from your Majesty's Ministers," was whole-heartedly rejected, since these goods along with provisions brought from neighboring colonies formed the entirety of the colony's imports.<sup>83</sup>

This put the General Assembly and Governor Shirley into a serious predicament. In an address to the governor, the assembly and council plainly stated that the colony's situation was so dire they had to seek financial assistance from the Crown. "We...pray," declared the gravely concerned officials, that the King "will out of His Royal Bounty order such an Annual provision for the Judges of the Courts, the Attorney General, and such other Civil Officers within this Government as...shall seem necessary."<sup>84</sup> In their letter the assembly and council included a detailed accounting of the salaries and perquisites of the judges, attorney general, provost marshal, and secretary that showed the

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<sup>83</sup> To the King's Most Excellent Majesty. C.O. 23/9/53-54; Governor Shirley's Answers to 19 Queries relating to His Majesty's Bahama Islands from the Right Honorable Earl of Dartmouth. C.O. 23/22/59-72.

<sup>84</sup> The Joint Address of the Council and Assembly of the Bahama Islands to Governor Shirley, C.O. 23/9/5.



colonial government owed approximately £87 10s. in salaries to its officials, as well as an additional £140 in perquisites for the fiscal year.<sup>85</sup>

The £227 10s. shortfall amounted to approximately eleven percent of the £2065 7s. 10¾d. in revenue raised for 1772, and an equal percentage of the £2033 18s. 10¾d. in expenditures for the same year.<sup>86</sup> Because of the limited intercolonial trade and the lack of a sufficient cash crop to generate revenue, the Bahamian government could not implement an emergency levy to raise revenue. The implementation of higher taxes on imports, exports, or the inhabitants seriously jeopardized losing what trade did manage to flow to the remote colony's islands. Consequently, seeking assistance from the Crown was the only course of action left.

However, the financial safety-net of the King's "Royal Bounty" was severely depleted, and unable to keep the Bahamian government from going bankrupt.<sup>87</sup> The fund available for the colonial economic assistance was "so low as to barely answer the present charges upon it," and fulfilling the request would leave the fund virtually empty.<sup>88</sup> Consequently, the Bahamian request for financial assistance was denied. All hope was lost. The "machinery of government" was on the verge of collapsing, with the courts having to "close down" and the government unable to "afford the £20 a month" to keep the skeleton force of "thirteen men" garrisoned at Forts Montagu and Nassau.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> A List of the principal Officers of the Government of the Bahama Islands and of the Salaries, which are established by the General Assembly there for their Support; together with an Account of Perquisites arising from their respective Offices, C.O. 23/9/7r.

<sup>86</sup> C.O. 23/22/69r.

<sup>87</sup> C.O. 23/9/5.

<sup>88</sup> Albury. *The Story of the Bahamas*. 89.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*. 88-89.

Forsaken by the King and abandoned by the mainland colonies, whose trade was the lifeblood of the islands, the Bahamas faced economic devastation and a coming revolution that would turn the colony on its head.

The Imperial Crisis raised serious problems with which the colony would have to grapple in order to survive in a rapidly changing Atlantic World. Issues about taxation raised internal discussion regarding the Bahamian colonial government's relationship to Turks Island in a manner analogous to the ongoing Imperial dialogue over parliamentary taxation in the American colonies. The economic crisis brought on by the evaporation of commercial trade with the mainland, and the islands' inability to expand agricultural lands and cultivate cash crops, exposed the dependent nature of the archipelago. The boycotts designed to protest the taxation schemes of Parliament inhibited the free flow of trade into the Bahamas, and threw the colony into bankruptcy. Earlier attempts to survive by increasing trade revenues via establishing free ports and smuggling operations were all for naught.

While economic hardship, illicit trading, and the dependency on commercial trade with the mainland colonies for income and provisions defined the Bahamas' past, they would also characterize much of its future during the American Revolution. Bahamians soon found themselves caught between warring factions of American rebels, who sought to obtain military supplies in exchange for desperately needed food while expanding their influence into the colony, and British loyalists attempting to hold the line and root out rebel sympathizers. Invasions and threats of invasions sent the fragile colony into chaos. Political battles between the governor and local colonial officials brought the archipelago

to the point of a gubernatorial dictatorship and a planned coup d'état by the council. During this chaotic time the islanders would find themselves facing a serious quandary: should they engage in trade with the rebel Americans to provide food for themselves and their families (and consequently be labeled traitors to the Crown), or remain loyal while watching their loved ones starve to death from famine?

## CHAPTER II

### CAUGHT BETWEEN REALITIES: THE REVOLUTION, THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS, AND POLITICAL TURMOIL IN THE BAHAMA ISLANDS

On March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1779, Governor Montfort Browne of the Bahama Islands took the “unprecedented” step of disbanding his council.<sup>1</sup> Browne’s action was designed to bring an end to the political battle being waged, both in Nassau and London, against Lieutenant Governor John Gambier’s “opposition junta,” which was endeavoring to remove him. The battle had raged for more than a year. Browne constantly bombarded both Gambier’s junta and the inhabitants with accusations of “illicit trading” with the American rebels, and of having secretly invited American forces ashore during the 1776 invasion of New Providence Island. Browne’s hostility towards the Bahamian people resulted in the Board of Trade removing him, and appointing John Maxwell as governor. The political tempest in this desolate, sandy archipelago speaks to more than just conflict between Montfort Browne and the Bahamians; it illustrates significant effects the American Revolution and the Continental Congress had on the peripheral colonies of the British Atlantic World.

The Bahama Islands were both geographically and economically isolated from much of the empire, yet the Revolution’s upheaval and the Continental Congress reached even there. Consequently, the population consisted of a mere 1,992 whites and 2,201 “reputed blacks” in 1773 settled across New Providence, Harbour Island and Spanish

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<sup>1</sup> Craton. *A History of the Bahamas*, 157.

Wells, Exuma, Eleuthera, Cat Island, and Turks Island. The 4,193 inhabitants made the Bahamas the smallest colony in British America, and the dearth of trade made it one of the poorest. Their isolated nature left them with inadequate and crumbling defenses, which made the Bahamas the only “loyal” colony to be successfully captured by the Americans. In a mere six years, the Bahama Islands experienced a fundamental political transformation. They went from a financially destitute colonial government, to a partisan political circus that blamed opponents for allowing the colony to be surrendered to the American rebels and possibly join the rebellion, and then to the “unprecedented” dismissal of the Governor’s Council and the formation of a military government.<sup>2</sup>

The Bahamian political conflict and breakdown were not merely the result of an internal conflict over differing opinions on how to govern the colony effectively during a time of Imperial crisis; rather, it was the unintentional consequences of the Continental Congress’ foreign trade policy and military actions. Confronted with the necessity of supplying the Continental Army with munitions to secure American Independence, and the desire to maintain an open trade policy with the impoverished colonies of Bahama and Bermuda to entice them to join the United States, the Congress attempted to do both. This “middle-of-the-road solution,” created out of necessity and benevolence, had dire political consequences for Bahamians. These consequences, in turn, came back to haunt

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<sup>2</sup> Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 463, 465, 514; Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 178-179; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 152-153; To the Kings most Excellent Majesty, C.O. 23/9/53-55; Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The Southern Plantations*, vol. II of *The British Empire Before the American Revolution: Provincial Characteristics and Sectional Tendencies in the Era Preceding the American Crisis* (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1936), 284-285; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 168, 180-181; Steven Sarson, *British America, 1500-1800: Creating Colonies, Imagining an Empire* (London and New York: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 87.

Congress. The formation of the opposition junta and Governor Browne's minor dictatorship eventually caused Congress to end the islands' trade privileges.

Britain's great Blue-Water Empire consisted of approximately thirty-three colonies stretching from Tobago to Quebec and West Florida to Bermuda. Historical discussion of political conflicts during the American Revolution has been monopolized by three great conflicts: the thirteen colonies against the Crown and Parliament, Patriots against Loyalists, and "Country" Whig philosophy against the corrupt "Court Party."<sup>3</sup> These three conflicts can be distilled into a single overarching category labeled "the thirteen colonies versus Great Britain." As interconnections through the Atlantic World appear more germane to explaining the "cause" and "effects" of the Revolution, discussion of political conflicts during the Revolution can be expanded to include internal political conflicts in the colonies beyond the American mainland.

The effects of the Revolution on Britain's Blue-Water Empire largely have focused on the negative impact it had on West Indian trade. As a result scholars have devoted little attention to the Revolution's impact on the political scenes of the West Indian colonies.<sup>4</sup> Andrew O'Shaughnessy's seminal work *An Empire Divided* has

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<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *The Fall of the British Empire: Origins of the War of American Independence* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); Don Cook, *The Long Fuse: How England Lost the American Colonies, 1760-1785* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995); Stanley Weintaub, *Iron Tears: America's Battle for Freedom, Britain's Quagmire, 1775-1783* (New York: Free Press, 2005); G. H. Guttridge, *English Whiggism and the American Revolution*, University of California Publications in History 28 (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942); John W. Derry, *English Politics and the American Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977); William Allen Benton, *Whig-Loyalism, An Aspect of Political Ideology in the American Revolutionary Era* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1969); Donald Barr Chidsey, *The Loyalists: The Story of Those Americans Who Fought Against Independence* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1973); Thomas B. Allen, *Tories: Fighting for the King in America's First Civil War* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2010); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

explained how the Imperial Crisis and the Revolution affected the principal West Indian sugar colonies politically; however, his focus centers on the reasons why the islands broke with their northern brethren and shunned the “mainland revolt.”<sup>5</sup> Historians Michael Jarvis and Wilfred Kerr have touched upon the political skirmishes within colonial Bermuda during the Revolution, which parallel a number of actions taken by the Bahamians and Governor Browne, but ultimately lack the significant events that the Bahamas experienced.<sup>6</sup> As Kerr shows, the Bermudan assembly voted on a number of controversial bills, ranging from blocking funds for maintaining the island’s forts to promoting “free trade” with the rebellious Americans, all of which ended with little more than a veto or an adjourned session.<sup>7</sup> Bermuda produced nothing comparable in severity to the formation of John Gambier’s “Juncto’ to oppose the Governor,” and Browne’s “unprecedented” dismissal of his council.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Bahamian political crisis offers scholars a unique case study on how the Congress’ external policies during the

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<sup>4</sup> Selwyn H. H. Carrington, *The British West Indies during the American Revolution*, Caribbean Series 8 (Dordrecht, The Netherlands and Providence, RI: Foris Publications, 1988); Richard Pares, “Boston to Barbados: The Economics of Interdependence” in *The American Revolution and the West Indies*, ed. Charles W. Toth (Port Washington, NY and London: Kennikat Press, 1975), 54-66; Curtis P. Nettels, “The Founding Fathers and the West Indies: The Economics of Revolution” in *The American Revolution and the West Indies*, ed. Charles W. Toth, 67-74; Lowell J. Ragatz, “The Sugar Colonies during the Revolution” in *The American Revolution and the West Indies*, ed. Charles W. Toth, 75-85; Burns, *History of the British West Indies*; James F. Shepherd, “British America and the Atlantic Economy” in *The Economy of Early America: The Revolutionary Period, 1763-1790*, ed. Ronald Hoffman, Perspectives on the American Revolution 6 (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1988), 3-44; John J. McCusker, “Growth, Stagnation, or Decline? The Economy of the British West Indies, 1763-1790” in *The Economy of Early America*, ed. Ronald Hoffman, 275-302.

<sup>5</sup> O’Shaughnessy. *An Empire Divided*, xiv.

<sup>6</sup> Wilfred Brenton Kerr. *Bermuda and the American Revolution: 1760-1783* (1936; reprint, Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1969), 73-80, 93, 95-97, 111-123; Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 396, 422, 429, 434, 438-439, 442. Also see: Addison E. Verrill, *Relations between Bermuda and the American Colonies during the Revolutionary War* (New Haven, CT: The Tuttle, Morehouse, & Taylor Press, 1907).

<sup>7</sup> Kerr. *Bermuda and the American Revolution*, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 157.

Revolution affected a remote colony, causing a hostile battle within the Bahamian government.

At the local level various groups of historians have assembled different portions of the Bahamian historical puzzle. Michael Craton and Gail Saunders have worked tirelessly to construct the story of the Bahamian people from pre-Columbian times to the present day, while Loyalist historians have established the transformative effects that the Loyalist influx had on the post-war archipelago.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the American Revolution and its effects on the islands have been observed chiefly from a British and Bahamian perspective. These standpoints have addressed the American involvement in terms of “loyalties divided,” and an “almost out of hand” situation stemming from the American invasions of Nassau in 1776 and 1778 that severely hampered the colony’s defensive capabilities.<sup>10</sup> Military histories centering on the naval invasion of Nassau in 1776 have left the Congress’ trade policy and its ramifications unexamined.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*; Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume Two: From the End of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century* (Athens, GA and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2000); Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*; Albury, *The Story of the Bahamas*; Riley, *Homeward Bound*; Peggs, *A Short History of the Bahamas*; William F. Keegan, *The People Who Discovered Columbus: The Prehistory of the Bahamas*, Florida Museum of Natural History: Ripley P. Bullen Series (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1992); Wilbur H. Siebert, “Loyalist Exodus to the West Indies: Legacy of Revolution” in *The American West Indies*, ed. Charles W. Toth (Port Washington, NY and London: Kenniket Press, 1975): 210-225; Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude*; Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), xiii-xvi, 94, 101-104, 115, 132, 150, 209, 215-246, 267, 271, 297, 305.

<sup>10</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 156-157; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 168-169; Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 98-103.

<sup>11</sup> The historical literature on this contradictory policy has not been directly addressed, but attention has been given to the two principle components individually. The American assault on Nassau to retrieve the larger stores of gunpowder has received the most scholarly attention, particularly in the chronicling of the history of the Continental Navy and biographies of Commodore Esek Hopkins. See: Edward Field, *Esek Hopkins, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Navy during the American Revolution, 1775 to 1778: Master Mariner, Politician, Brigadier General, Naval Officer and Philanthropist* (Providence, RI: The Preston and Rounds Company, 1898); Lucille E. Horgan, *Forged in War: The Continental Congress and the Origin of Military Supply and Acquisition Policy*, Contributions in Military Studies 219 (Westport, CT



The Continental Congress' military policy towards the Bahama Islands began to develop in the "munitions chess game" between rebellious colonists and British authorities, which strove to secure strategic local and regional stores of gunpowder, ammunition, and weapons from the enemy. The outcome would either neutralize the rebel uprisings by removing the rebels' ability to conduct an armed resistance, or provide military supplies to protect the protesting colonists until George III and his loyal opposition "reverse[d] the course" of the North administration.<sup>12</sup> As military action in the North American colonies dragged on, the need to acquire large stocks of gunpowder to advance the cause became more evident. When George Washington took command of the newly created Continental Army and the militia forces laying siege to Boston on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1775, the need for adequate gunpowder and ammunition overshadowed other concerns. In his numerous communiqués with Congress, Washington stressed that the troops surrounding Boston were "very poorly supplied" and there was "a great want of

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and London: Greenwood Press, 2002); Gardner Weld Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962); Robert Gardiner, *Navies and the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, Chatham Pictorial Histories (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996); William M. Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail: The American Navy during the Revolution* (New York: Scribner, 1976).

The trade aspect of the Continental Congress' foreign policy towards the Bahama and Bermuda Islands has received scant attention from historical scholars. What attention has been devoted to this issue has primarily focused on Bermuda. See: Kerr, *Bermuda and the American Revolution: 1760-1783*; Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*.

However, scholarship on the Bahama Islands during the American Revolution makes no mention of the Congress' commercial foreign policy towards the colony. The works of prominent Bahamian historians Michael Craton and Gail Saunders mainly discuss the prevalence of illicit trading between the American rebels and the islanders, but do not fully realize the role the Continental Congress played in allowing the Bahamian-American trading to continue.

<sup>12</sup> David L. Ammerman, "The crisis of Independence" in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. by Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, Blackwell Companions to American History (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 206. Further sources detailing the munitions chess game can be found in the following works: Larry Bowman, "The Virginia County Committees of Safety, 1774-1776," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 79, no. 3 (July, 1971): 334; Orlando W. Stephenson, "The Supply of Gunpowder in 1776," *The American Historical Review* 30, no. 2 (January, 1925): 271-281; Arthur Bernon Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord: The Beginning of the War of the American Revolution* (1959; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).

Powder.”<sup>13</sup> “We are so exceedingly destitute,” he exclaimed, that “our Artillery will be of little Use,” and the little supplies available “must be reserved for the small Arms...[with the] utmost Frugality.”<sup>14</sup> The quantity of powder at hand amounted to “no more than 9 Rounds a Man,” which would have had disastrous consequences on the battlefield.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the Congress found itself in a serious predicament. Incapable of supplying the Continental Army with the amount of powder necessary to successfully conduct a sustained, long-term military conflict, it became apparent that Congress would have to take drastic measures.

To satisfy the Army’s need Congress sought additional powder through importation, private manufacturers and backyard powder mills, and capture of enemy supplies. Importation and capturing British munitions were central to Congress’ developing foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> Importation was the principle means of acquiring military supplies for American forces, mainly from the French via the Dutch West Indian free ports, but seizure of British stores quickly proved to have serious repercussions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “George Washington to the Continental Congress, June 25, 1775,” *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series, Vol. 1: June – September 1775*, ed. W. W. Abbot and Philander D. Chase (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1985), 32; “George Washington to John Hancock, June 25, 1775,” *PGW: RWS, Vol. 1*, 35. The book *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series* is abbreviated as *PGW: RWS* after the first cited work, and for the rest of the thesis.

<sup>14</sup> “George Washington to John Hancock, July 10-11, 1775,” *PGW: RWS, Vol. 1*, 89. Prior to his arrival at Cambridge he had requested that a “Return” be made of the inventory, which listed “303½ [barrels] of Powder” in the store, but he discovered that there were only 36 barrels in the Massachusetts store. Combined with Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Connecticut stores this totaled 9,937 lbs., approximately 99½ barrels amounting to a sixty-seven percent shortfall.

<sup>15</sup> “George Washington to John Hancock, August 4, 1775,” *PGW: RWS, Vol. 1*, 227.

<sup>16</sup> Lucille E. Horgan, *Forged in War*, 1-27; Donald E. Reynolds, “Ammunition Supply in Revolutionary Virginia,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 73, no. 1 (January, 1965): 56-57, 59.

<sup>17</sup> J. Frankin Jameson, “St. Eustatius in the American Revolution” in *The American Revolution in the West Indies*, ed. Charles W. Toth, 86-100; Horgan, *Forged in War*, 7-11; Rayford W. Logan, “Saint Domingue:

The quest for military supplies for the resistance against British tyranny and the fate of the Bahama Islands converged on Wednesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1775. Congress received word of approximately 200 barrels of gunpowder locked away in the poorly maintained forts on New Providence Island. In all likelihood, the tip came from Downham Newton, an enigmatic trader from New Providence who sought provisions for his starving family and neighbors back home. On the same day the news of the arsenal arrived, a petition by Newton was laid before Congress asking them to authorize a supply of provisions to be sent to the islands in order to relieve the “distressed inhabitants.” The news was delegated to the Naval Committee with the instructions to “take measures for securing and bringing away” the munitions and, if successful, to have the powder brought to Philadelphia.<sup>18</sup>

The instructions issued to Commodore Esek Hopkins by Congress would bring the Continental Navy to the Bahamian shores, but not by a direct order. Directed to clear the Chesapeake and the Carolina coast of British warships, Hopkins was issued “special orders” by the Marine Committee and Congress. Though they contained no particular mention about the gunpowder at New Providence, Congress did allow for alternative actions to be taken provided that they were “most useful to the American cause” and distressed “the enemy by all means in your power.” However, Hopkins was not empowered by the Congress to bring the Bahamas into the Union through military force.

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Entrepôt for Revolutionaries” in *The American Revolution in the West Indies*, ed. Charles W. Toth, 101-111.

<sup>18</sup> Continental Congress, “November 29, 1775” in *Domestick Affairs*, vol. 1 of *The Secret Journals of the Acts and Proceedings of Congress, from the First Meeting thereof to the Dissolution of the Confederation, by the Adoption of the Constitution of the United States* (Boston: Thomas B. Wait, 1821), 35-36; Continental Congress, *September 21, 1775 – December 31, 1775*, vol. 3 of *Journal of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 389-390. All references using the *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* will be abbreviated JCC.

Nevertheless, the clause enabled Hopkins to take the fleet to New Providence in an attempt to obtain desperately needed munitions.<sup>19</sup>

How Hopkins became aware of the gunpowder stores on New Providence is not exactly certain, but two theories connect him with Congress' knowledge of the Bahamian gunpowder. The first posits that Hopkins was in Philadelphia on November 29<sup>th</sup>, which would have made him aware of the New Providence arsenal at the same time as the delegates. The second asserts that he learned about the stockpile through correspondence with his brother Stephen Hopkins, part of the Rhode Island delegation and a sitting member of the Naval Committee. Nonetheless, Hopkins apparently knew about the gunpowder stores well in advance of receiving his official instructions in early January 1776.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Continental Congress, *September 21, 1775 – December 31, 1775*, vol. 3 of *JCC*, 389-390.

<sup>20</sup> Alverda S. Beck, *The Letter Book of Esek Hopkins, Commander-in-Chief of the United States Navy, 1775-1777*, ed. Alverda S. Beck (Providence, RI: Press of E. L. Freeman Company, 1932), 10-12; "Waterton, April 15," *Essex Journal*, March 19, 1776, 2; Field, *Esek Hopkins, Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Navy during the American Revolution, 1775 to 1778*, 81-82, 94-97; John J. McCusker, "The American Invasion of Nassau in the Bahamas" in *Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic World*, ed. John J. McCusker, Routledge Studies in International Economic and Social History 1 (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 264.

Historical scholarship by Alverda S. Beck points to Hopkins having arrived in Philadelphia prior to November 29<sup>th</sup>, much earlier than Edward Field's "inconsistent" assertions that he arrived on January 14<sup>th</sup>. To substantiate this claim, Beck draws upon a "letter from Nathaniel Mumford, Thomas Greene, and Gideon Mumford to Governor Cooke" dated December 2<sup>nd</sup> in Philadelphia, which states that "Hopkins' son was inoculated [for Small Pox] last Wednesday [November 29], and are about the streets." Beck supposes that if Hopkins and his son travel together, then it can be safely asserted that they were in Philadelphia on November 29<sup>th</sup>. Hopkins official reason for being in Philadelphia at the time is murky, but based on letters and speculation by Beck he was probably there considering an unofficial offer to lead the newly formed Continental Navy. Yet, being in the city on November 29<sup>th</sup> put him in position to be informed of the arsenal at New Providence along with the delegates. However, John J. McCusker states in the essay "The American Invasion of Nassau in the Bahamas" that Commodore Hopkins most likely learned about the large quantity of gunpowder in Nassau from his brother Stephen Hopkins, a Rhode Island delegate in the Continental Congress, because he was part of the Naval Committee who received the report about the Bahamian stockpile. See: Alverda S. Beck, *The Letter Book of Esek Hopkins*, ed. Alverda S. Beck, 10-12; John J. McCusker, "The American Invasion of Nassau in the Bahamas" in *Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic World*, 264.

The rebelling Congress and the “loyal” Bahamas were on course for a dramatic confrontation. By the mere inclusion of this discretionary clause in Hopkins instructions, coupled with its gunpowder acquisition policies, Congress unwittingly put in motion a military action that would have a profoundly polarizing effect on the backwater Bahamas’ political environment. In a short span of four years the canvas-colored “storm clouds” of the Continental Navy that loomed on the blue horizon would give way to the devastating hurricane of internal political dispute.

Weighing anchor at Cape Henlopen, Delaware on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1776, Commodore Hopkins’s small squadron of six armed “made-over” schooners broke through the sea ice, which had delayed the journey from Philadelphia for nearly a month, and set out into the Atlantic. Encountering cold, blustery winter winds and an epidemic of small pox that swept through the fleet, Hopkins elected to sail south to the warm Bahamian waters “even before reaching the Chesapeake.” Sailing east into the Atlantic allowed Hopkins to avoid any possible confrontation with the “well-disciplined, experienced crew[s]” of Governor Dunmore’s squadron, which would have trapped the fleet in Chesapeake Bay and decimated them. Utilizing the “discretionary powers” in his instructions, Hopkins charted a course for the unsettled shores of the Abaco Islands on the northern fringe of the Bahamas archipelago to prepare for a major assault on New Providence. The mission had undergone a crucial change in objectives from reconnaissance and minor naval skirmishes, to a major attack on a British colony in order

to seize desperately needed “wartime stores” to resupply George Washington and the Continental Army.<sup>21</sup>

The Continental fleet reached the inhospitable, rocky shores of Hole-in-the-Wall, Abaco, on March 1<sup>st</sup>, proudly flying the standard of the “United Colonies” as they made their way along the coastline. The conflict between the King and his cantankerous New England subjects 1,250 miles away in Boston was no longer so distant; it had now arrived in the far-removed cays of the Bahamas. Commodore Hopkins impressed of “two local sailors” to guide his fleet through the treacherous, ever-shifting sand bars to New Providence. Whatever element of surprise Hopkins and his captains thought they had was lost even before their spyglasses displayed Abaco’s shores.<sup>22</sup>

A week before the fleet’s arrival, “Captain Andrew Law,” an “officer in His Majesty’s Land Service,” strode into the run down port of Nassau with news that a “fleet of eight small warships” was amassing off the snow-encrusted shores of Cape Delaware with “the intention of attacking New Providence.”<sup>23</sup> A second, more imperative alarm

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<sup>21</sup> Beck, *The Letter Book of Esek Hopkins*, 18-19; Robert B. Patton, *Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008), 92; Richard Buel, Jr., *In Irons: Britain’s Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1998), 84; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 154.

<sup>22</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 154; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 166-167.

<sup>23</sup> Copy of the Testimony of Captain Thomas Hodgson. December 30, 1779, C.O. 23/24/135; A Narrative of the Transactions & on the Invasion of the Island of New Providence by the Rebels in 1776, June 15, 1779, C.O. 23/9/112-113; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 153; Copy of A Narrative of the Transactions & on the Invasion of the Island of New Providence by the Rebels in 1776, June 15, 1779, C.O. 23/24/113-116.

The Colonial Office documents cited specifically make reference to a Captain Andrew “Law,” while Michael Craton and Sandra Riley refer to him as Captain Andrew “Shaw.” In analyzing the references in C.O. 23/9/112, C.O. 23/24/113, and C.O. 23/24/135, there is no evidence of a misspelling since all the references to “Captain Andrew Law” are consistent in spelling and appearance. The uppercase “L”s which appears in the words “Lieutenant,” “Land,” and “Leagues” in C.O. 23/9/112 and C.O. 23/24/113 are congruent with the capital letter in the Captain’s surname. It is difficult to pinpoint what primary source documents were utilized by Craton in his account of the Battle of Nassau that refers to a Captain “Shaw.”

came on the day the Americans appeared off Abaco. This time Captain George Dorsett came directly to Government House to deliver the news, having cut his whaling expedition short because “he thought it his Duty to return to Port” to deliver the “intelligence.”<sup>24</sup> Informing Governor Browne that based on the “Manœuvres of the...vessels” they were most certainly “bound [for] the Island of New Providence,” Captain Dorsett was dismissed by the governor who informed him that “he would Summon the Council” due to the “Undoubted Intelligence of the Enemy being so near us.”<sup>25</sup> Despite these serious warnings no precautionary actions were taken, and bedlam broke out on March 3<sup>rd</sup> when the small flotilla appeared during the early morning light. The Revolution, and the imperial turmoil that accompanied it, had arrived at New Providence’s sandy doorstep.

Panic quickly ensued, at least for the governor and the colonial assemblymen, as they tried to defend the island. Immediately informed of the Americans’ arrival by a “Pilot” who had spied the approaching fleet, Governor Browne was at a loss about what he should do. Having arrived from his home in Britain to assume the colony’s governorship only two years earlier, Browne had not expected to find himself facing a

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since his work contains neither footnotes nor endnotes, and only a barebones bibliography. Riley only cites two secondary source works in the endnote pertaining to the paragraph mentioning “Captain Andrew Shaw,” being Gardner Weld Allen’s *A Naval History of the American Revolution* and James H. Stark’s *Stark’s History and Guide to the Bahama Islands*, neither of which mention a “Captain Andrew Shaw.” Because of these factors the name “Andrew Law” listed in the Colonial Office documents will be used instead of the “Andrew Shaw” used in both Craton and Riley.

For citations relating to Riley’s research and cited works, see: Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 100, 242n15; Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution*, 95-97; James H. Stark, *Stark’s History and Guide to the Bahama Islands* (Boston: Photo-Electrotype Company, 1891), 71.

For historical research and images on eighteenth century cursive script, see: Laetitia Yeandle, “The Evolution of Handwriting in the English-Speaking Colonies of America,” *The American Archivist* 43, no. 3 (Summer, 1980): 308-309.

<sup>24</sup> Testimony of Captain George Dorsett, April 20, 1779, C.O. 23/9/120.

<sup>25</sup> C.O. 23/9/120.

hostile invasion by the American colonists. Standing at the window of Government House in his nightshirt, Browne bluntly asked the man: “what was to be done?” Due to Government House’s commanding view of the harbor below, Browne could most likely see the topmasts and sails of the American ships approaching beyond Hog Island from his own window. As fear set in, the governor ordered the militia to be summoned with three shots from a signal cannon. The proper militia summons was only two shots. Councilman Samuel Gambier, who was “so lame with the gout that he could not walk,” rushed as quickly as possible to Fort Montague only to find that two hours into the siege nothing had been done. Browne and the Council were seriously considering removing the gunpowder stores from the island; however, it was pointedly argued by the Council that removing the powder would only handicap the island’s virtually non-existent ability to repel an enemy attack.<sup>26</sup>

In their greatest hour of need the colony’s defenses were quickly discovered to be virtually useless. Fort Nassau’s cannons were readied and fired at the enemy fleet, which deterred the Americans from committing a frontal assault on Nassau. However, the force of the cannons’ recoil was too much for their wooden carriages, which had become rotten in the humid tropical climate, and were immediately torn off and rendered useless “on there [sic] first firing.” While the weather had taken its toll on the carriages, the island itself was consuming many of Fort Nassau’s additional cannons. The consistently drifting sands had submerged the cannons’ “axle trees” to the point that “12 or 15 men” were required just to move them into position. The sea had taken its toll on the Fort as well, having “washed away” and “weakened” one of the buttresses to the point where “five or

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<sup>26</sup> C.O. 23/9/112-113: A Plan and View of the Harbour and Town of Providence on board His Majesty’s ship *Escorte* by Capt. Foley. MPG 1/1066/7.



six” cannon percussions would have “inevitably brought it down.” While Fort Nassau’s condition was abominable; Fort Montagu’s was worse. At Fort Montagu there was neither a “Barrel of Powder, nor a length of Match” that was useable, and its guns were not “properly mounted” thus preventing them for being used to ward off the American invasion. The militia summoned to defend the island was in no shape to fight the invading American Marines. With only a defensive force of ninety men answering the call the militia was outnumbered approximately three to one, and of those who did report “several...had arms unfit for service” while others “were without Flints and Ammunition.” Faced with these realities, repelling the American force appeared to be an impossible task.<sup>27</sup>

Browne made a number of key miscalculations that would fuel the fires of his Bahamian political enemies several years later. The first was his decision to leave Fort Nassau stating that he was going to “go home” in order to “make himself a little decent,” an action that took him approximately “three hours,” and left no one in charge of the fort “to take Command or give the necessary Orders.” Thus, it fell upon the council members to take command, and they quickly surmised that Browne would not return to “defend His Majesty’s Forts” and “repel the Enemy.” Browne’s second decision was to withdraw the militia from Fort Montague to Fort Nassau, spiking the Fort’s cannons to ensure they

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<sup>27</sup> A Narrative of the Transactions & on the Invasion of the Island of New Providence by the Rebels in 1776. June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1779, C.O. 23/9/113; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 154-155; Sunday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1776. At a Council held this Day, C.O. 23/9/122r.

Fort Nassau lacked many of the proper supplies to maintain the cannons when in action, and required the militiamen manning the cannons to create makeshift equipment on the spot. The fort lacked “crows” (i.e. a crowbar) and “handspikes” for repositioning the cannons after they were fired. It also did not have any flint for firing, “wad[screws],” a “tub” for water to wet the sponge, nor “any stuff for wadding” to create an effective seal around the cannonball when it was fired. The militiamen had to “cut up blankets and old clothes” to use in place of the traditional sheepskin sponges that were unavailable, and then “nail [them] on the sponge-staves.” The cannon equipment that was at the fort at the time included: two “rammers,” two “sponge-staves,” one powder-horn, and two priming-wires. See: C.O. 23/9/113v.

could not be used by the Americans, without engaging the Marines who had made landfall nearby. The governor almost committed a third ill-advised decision when he pushed the council to allow him to have Fort Nassau's guns spiked after the powder stores were secretly ferried away to several awaiting ships bound for St. Augustine. However, the council overruled him fearing that this would only goad the Americans into setting fire to the town after they discovered the powder missing. Nevertheless Governor Browne surrendered the island, and in a fortnight the American invaders loaded their ships with the Forts' munitions and set sail for Rhode Island with Montfort Browne as their prisoner.<sup>28</sup>

The actions taken during the American invasion and occupation of New Providence formed the basis for several key arguments and accusations used during the political war between Montfort Browne and the inhabitants. Browne's abandonment of Fort Montagu to the Americans, his failure to engage the enemy in defense of Nassau, the loss of the colony's gunpowder and much of their stockpiled munitions, and his own capture were seen by Bahamian leaders as representative of incompetent leadership. However, the actions of the citizenry and principle inhabitants during the occupation provided Browne with a grave retort: the inhabitants willfully fraternized with the enemy. While Browne's retort may very well be true, outside of Browne's assertion there does

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<sup>28</sup> A Narrative of the Transactions & on the Invasion of the Island of New Providence by the Rebels in 1776, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1779, C.O. 23/9/113-114; Fort Nassau during March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1776, C.O. 23/9/126-129; Esek Hopkins, "Inventory of Stores &c. taken at Fort Nassau-March 3, 1776" in *The Correspondence of Esek Hopkins*, ed. Alverda S. Beck (Providence, RI: Roger Williams Press, 1933), 35.

A full list of the munitions and equipment taken from Fort Nassau includes the following: "71 Cannon from 9 to 32 Pounders;" 15 Mortars from 4 to 11 inches in diameter; 5,337 shells; 9,831 "round shott [sic];" 140 hand grenades; 816 "Fuzees [sic] or false Fires;" 99 Sponge-staves, Rammers, and Worms; 24 casks of gunpowder; and, a "Quantity of Match Rope not Weigh'd [sic]." An additional list of munitions taken from Fort Montagu consists of: 17 cannon from 9 to 36 Pounders; 1,240 "round shott [sic];" and, 121 shells. See: Esek Hopkins, "Inventory of Stores &c. taken at Fort Nassau-March 3, 1776" in *The Correspondence of Esek Hopkins*, 35; Field, *Esek Hopkins*, 115-116n2.

not appear to be any evidence demonstrating that the Bahamians explicitly engaged in a possible conspiracy to join the Union—mainly due to the lack of any supporting accounts from the inhabitants.<sup>29</sup> This claim would be a common element of Browne’s various letters to Lords Dartmouth and Germain during the transatlantic letter war he waged against the opposition junta. The fraternization between the occupying Americans and the inhabitants resulted in, as Michael Craton asserts, “over 200” of the Americans becoming “seriously ill on the voyage home” because of the amount of “captured...wine” they “caroused on.” These malicious charges ultimately had their roots in the policies and objectives of the Continental Congress, which, in combination with Congress’ trade policy, would send the political world of the hardscrabble colony into chaos.<sup>30</sup>

On the same day as the Congress learned about the cache of gunpowder in the Bahamas, they began to formulate a commercial trade policy towards the islands. Before the chamber a petition was presented by Downham Newton requesting permission to export “1,000 barrels of flour” to alleviate the “distressed inhabitants” of New Providence. In exchange, Newton offered the Congress “such a quantity of muskets as can be procured” from the sale of the cargo. This was a bold offer; most likely driven by a desire to aid his starving family and neighbors, Newton shunted aside his patriotism for

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<sup>29</sup> Primary source accounts of the American assault on New Providence in 1776 originate overwhelmingly from the Colonial Office papers covering the Bahama Islands. If Governor Browne’s assertion that high ranking members of the colonial legislature and Bahamian society did fraternize with occupying American forces, there is no supporting accounts. The letters and testimonies to the British Government that make up the collected documents from local officials denying Browne’s claims for two possible reasons: (1) Browne’s claims were genuinely false, and the colonists were defending themselves from slanderous accusations; or, (2) the accusations were in fact true, and the Bahamian officials and colonists lied in order to not incriminate themselves to British officials.

<sup>30</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 156. Also see: Burns, *The History of the British West Indies*, 519.

King and country and offered weapons in exchange for victuals for his fellow Bahamians. Congress accepted Newton's petition based on the recommendations of Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Allen, and John Jay, and subsequently granted him permission to export "such provisions of flour and pork" as he thought proper. The decision to permit Downham Newton to conduct trade with the distressed Bahamians would prove to be the first step in creating a benevolent trade policy towards the colony, and possibly making it the fourteenth state in order to limit contentious borderlands between the emerging United States and Great Britain.<sup>31</sup>

This reveals an important distinction about the nature of the Congress' external policy actions. The trade policy created a peaceful form of interaction between Congress and the Bahamians, one that contrasted sharply with the hostile invasion of New Providence. However, the policy was not one that could be characterized as altruistic. Congress had its own motives for allowing Bermuda and the Bahama Islands to be exempt from the embargo against the British Empire. As Lucille Horgan points out in *Forged in War*, the issuance of "embargo waivers" to specific colonies or to individuals (such as Downham Newton) permitted the United States to obtain arms easily through direct trade, and without risking their forces in aggressive military actions. The policy also attempted to use trade and provisions to win support from the Bahamians for the American cause, possibly leading the colony to join the rebellion against the British government.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Continental Congress, *September 21, 1775 – December 31, 1775*, vol. 3 of *JCC*, 369, 389-390.

<sup>32</sup> Horgan, *Forged in War*, 9-11.

The benevolent trade policy towards the Bahamians continued to form in the weeks and months following Commodore Hopkins successful assault on New Providence, particularly with respect to extending a kind hand to those who were adversely affected by the American invasion. An application for economic restitution from Congress was made by Charles Walker of New Providence, because his sloop *Endeavor* had been commandeered by Hopkins for the “use of the colonies,” along with its four ton cargo of “lignum vitæ” and “one hundred cedar posts.”<sup>33</sup> For an inhabitant of the most isolated and decentralized colony in the British Atlantic World the loss of one’s ship was devastating. In this far-flung world, one’s livelihood and survival depended on ships to gather food, collect raw materials (e.g. salt and timber) from neighboring islands, and bring those raw materials to markets throughout the Atlantic World.<sup>34</sup> In order to repay Walker for the trouble he had been caused, Congress ordered the ship to be “restored” to him along with “all her stores and materials,” and that he be paid a “sum of two thousand dollars” to defray “all losses, damages, premiums of insurance, and expences [sic]” he might have incurred.<sup>35</sup> However, if there was any money remaining, Walker was specifically encouraged to “invest the balance...in produce” to be exported and sold—most likely to Bahamas.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Continental Congress, *June 5, 1776 – October 8, 1776*, vol. 5 of *JCC*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 424-425.

<sup>34</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 49, 64, 111, 130, 186, 188, 189-211, 250-255; M. Joseph Sirgy, et al., “The Impact of Imports and Exports on a Country’s Quality of Life,” *Social Indicators Research* 83, no. 2 (September, 2007): 245-281.

<sup>35</sup> Continental Congress, *June 5, 1776 – October 8, 1776*, vol. 5 of *JCC*, 545-546.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 546.

The petitions brought before Congress by Henry Tucker's Bermudian delegation may have also helped in shaping its trade policy towards the impoverished Bahamas. The Bermudians and the Bahamians suffered terribly economically during the years prior to the start of the American Revolution. Bermuda in particular had been adversely affected by the Congress' trade embargo, which had been implemented incrementally against the entire British Empire between December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1774 and September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1775.<sup>37</sup> The non-importation and non-exportation agreements, which made up the key components of the embargo, effectively cut-off Bermuda and the Bahamas from their major sources of food and revenue. This threatened both colonies with famine and caused petitions to be submitted to Congress requesting relief from the "distress...[to] which they were exposed by the non-exportation agreement."<sup>38</sup> In the case of Bermuda, Congress perceived that the islanders were "friendly to the cause of America," and because of this the inhabitants

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<sup>37</sup> Timothy H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 325. The three stages of the full trade embargo consist of: the non-importation agreement (December 1, 1774), the non-consumption agreement (March 1, 1775), and the non-exportation agreement (September 1, 1775). These three agreements were put into effect in the hopes of using the combined might of the thirteen British North American colonies' theorized economic importance in the British Atlantic Commercial Empire against Parliament and the North administration. This ultimately did not have the desired effect on the metropole, and instead deeply hurt their fellow British American colonies economically—especially those who were significantly invested in producing, buying, selling, and transporting various staple crops (i.e. sugar) and manufactured goods throughout the British Atlantic World. As Andrew O'Shaughnessy observes in *An Empire Divided*, the non-importation and non-exportation agreements mobilized the West Indian colonies to protest the British actions on the mainland, since the agreements would have serious consequences to the islands in terms of: famine resulting from a halt in food importation, and economic recession resulting from the mainland colonists not purchasing sugar or sugar byproducts. An end to the importation of food staples caused a danger of unrest in the slave population, which was sustained by imports of salted fish from the New England colonies and guinea corn. As a result of the dwindling exportation of food stuffs from the America mainland, there was a rapid increase in slave deaths in the sugar colonies—which was being widely reported on by the London press in 1776. Between 1774 and 1776 there was a major increase in acts of slave resistance across the British West Indies; the principle rebellion being the "great Jamaican rebellion of 1776." The resulting famines and exponential rise in the threats of slave rebellions in the sugar colonies, caused West Indian support from the American cause to wane dramatically, and "virtually ceased by August 1776." See: O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, 137-154.

<sup>38</sup> Continental Congress, *September 21, 1775 – December 30, 1775*, vol. 3 of *JCC*, 362-363, 369, 389-390; Continental Congress, *June 5, 1776 – October 8, 1776*, vol. 5 of *JCC*, 417-418.

“ought to be supplied” with “so great a quantity...[of the] produce” of the assembled colonies.<sup>39</sup> Although the delegates requested an “annual allowance of salt” to be paid in exchange, the Bermudians were permitted to trade war materials for “produce to any amount.”<sup>40</sup> While the Bahamians did not receive any equivalent sustenance allowance from Congress, the Downham Newton case seems to provide a strong indication that acquiring munitions from patriots, or other American-sympathizers, outside the mainland colonies was a serious motive behind their actions. In essence what was emerging was a type of gunpowder-for-food program, but when Congress finally addressed its trade policy with Bermuda and the Bahamas in the summer of 1776, it was rather uncertain.

A fairly ambiguous trade policy emerged in July 1776. This policy came in the form of an “addendum exemption” to the full trade embargo Congress implemented on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1775. The addendum exemption sought to remedy the food shortages in Bermuda and the Bahamas caused by the non-importation and non-exportation agreements put in place almost eleven months earlier. The addendum exemption opened up much needed commercial trade to bring food and revenue to the islands, and assuaged the “distressed inhabitants.” Yet, there were no hard-line rules regarding what goods could or could not be exchanged; rather, the exemption merely placed a prohibition on the seizure of vessels and goods belonging to the Bermudians and Bahamians by

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<sup>39</sup> Continental Congress, *September 21, 1775 – December 30, 1775*, vol. 3 of *JCC*, 362-363. The Congress granted the Bermudians a yearly allowance consisting of: 72,000 bushels of corn, 2,000 barrels of bread or flour, 1,000 barrels of beef or pork, 2,100 barrels of peas or beans, and 300 “tierces” of rice. This allowance would be created out of contributions from New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina. On the same day that Congress granted the allowance (November 22, 1775) they approved Edward Stiles to send the “Brig Sea Nymph” under Captain Samuel Stobel to immediately transmit a cargo of victuals to Bermuda as part of the allowance. This consisted of: 4,000 bushels of corn, 300 barrels of flour, 100 barrels of bread, 20 barrels of pork, 8 barrels of beef, 15 barrels of apples, and 30 boxes of soap.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

American patriots. Bahamian vessels were now permitted to dock in patriot-held ports and offload their goods. This allowed merchants, captains, and principal members of the islands to send their ships to American ports, and return with illicit trade goods—an action prohibited by the British government.<sup>41</sup>

The policy attempted to expand the boundaries and influence of the United States into Bermuda and the Bahamas through open trade, instead of treating them as separate foreign territories. Unlike the idealistic and theoretical Model Treaty and the Treaty of Amity and Commerce with France, which contained specific trading principles and regulations on goods, the addendum exemption's lack of these items allowed for the new United States to commercially interact with Bermuda and the Bahamas as if they were part of a single entity. At its core the exemption was an attempt to draw the Bahamas and Bermuda into a closer relationship with the United States, and expand its authority into the neighboring peripheral colonies.<sup>42</sup>

American political figures worked to incorporate neighboring colonies into the United States through various negotiations with the British military and France. On two occasions during the war, Benjamin Franklin asserted the United States' claim to the Bahamas, as well as the Canadian colonies and Bermuda, as part of their territory. The first instance occurred in late September 1776, when Franklin proposed a sketch for peace to Lord William Howe, which requested that Britain cede control of “Quebec, St. John's, Nova Scotia, Bermuda, East and West Florida, and the Bahama islands” to the United States. By doing this a strict boundary line would be created between the United

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<sup>41</sup> Continental Congress, *June 5, 1776 – October 8, 1776*, vol. 5 of *JCC*, 579, 606.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 579; Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 54.



States and the British Empire, which was devoid of grey frontier zones that enables “occasions of misunderstanding” to arise over the “bad conduct of frontier inhabitants.” Almost six months later during a diplomatic mission to France, Franklin expressly stated to the French Foreign Minister Comte de Vergennes that a joint French and American force should be utilized to conquer all of Britain’s American colonies, and if successful the non-sugar producing colonies be put under the jurisdiction of the United States. As a result this would have made the Bahamas a part of an expanded United States, along with the Canadian provinces, Bermuda, and the Floridas.<sup>43</sup>

In this theoretical “new” world, the North American mainland, Bermuda, and the Bahama Islands would be the dominion of the United States, and the former British West Indian colonies would become part of a resurrected New France. The rationale behind why all the principal sugar colonies of the British West Indies were allocated to France, and Bermuda and the Bahamas were to be a part of the United States, was twofold. The first reason would be to provide significant financial motive for France to join the war on the side of the Americans. The second reason stems from the diminished support for the American cause in the sugar colonies by 1776, as argued by Andrew O’Shaughnessy, while support continued in Bermuda and the Bahamas well after July 1776. Michael Jarvis and Michael Craton both note that these islanders engaged in supporting the

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<sup>43</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 169-170; “Sketch of Propositions for a Peace 1776,” *March 21, 1775 through October 27, 1776*, vol. 22 of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. William B. Willcox (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 630-631; “The American Commissioners to Vergennes. 18 March 1777,” *October 27, 1776 through April 30, 1777*, vol. 23 of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. William B. Willcox (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 502-504.

American cause through trade or covert seizures of military supplies, as well as leaving the British controlled colonies to join the American cause on the mainland.<sup>44</sup>

Whatever the Congress' conception of how the Bahamas existed in relation to the newly established United States, the islands were directly affected by their trade policy decisions. The implementation of an embargo in 1775 against the whole British Empire consequently cut-off the meager trade that managed to sail into the archipelago. The embargo barred Bahamian ships from entering mainland ports to sell lumber, turtle meat, fruit, and salt in exchange for desperately needed provisions, thus causing a famine. Petitions were submitted requesting relief for the "distressed inhabitants." Congress' establishment of a benevolent trade policy through the addendum exemption, whether as a means of acquiring munitions for the war or enticing the colony to join the Union, brought the colony away from abyss of starvation created by the non-importation and non-exportation agreements. Yet, this policy would become an important factor in the political conflict between Governor Browne, the Council, and the islands' inhabitants.

The effects of Congress' ambivalent foreign policy towards the Bahamas set the stage for a political confrontation between the British-born Governor Browne, the Council and General Assembly, and the local islanders. The dispute would go beyond the traditional incessant bickering between governors and assemblies over the role of the "royal prerogative," and become an all out political war for control of the Bahamas.<sup>45</sup> It

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<sup>44</sup> The discussion on the division of the British New World between the United States and France after the conclusion of the War takes place on Thursday, July 18, 1776, beginning on page 576 in vol. 5 of *JCC* under the heading "Plan of Treaties." Also see: O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, 137-154; Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 383-385, 386-387, 389, 391, 396-407; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 156-157.

erupted shortly after Governor Browne's return to New Providence in December 1778, after he was traded for the rebel pretender Lord Sterling, and taking the reins from Assembly President John Brown—who served as the interim governor during Browne's absence. The internal conflict materialized from the rapid convergence of two principle issues: (1) negative characterizations of Browne's actions during the 1776 American invasion, and (2) the illicit trading between the inhabitants and the rebellious Americans.

The opening salvo came on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1779. In a scathing public declaration, Browne bitterly let loose two years of muzzled opinions and emotions. The "Conduct and Behavior" of the populace "Countenance[d] and Encourage[d] [sic]" the rebel invaders, and "manifest[ed] their designs in favor of the Rebels" while demonstrating an "uncommon degree of Indolence to me." The restored governor was clearly not holding back. He accused "Sundry Inhabitants" of disregarding "their Allegiance...to their Lawful Sovereign," and willfully ignored a royal proclamation and "positive Act of Parliament" by trading with the rebellious Americans "instigated" by their "View of Gain."<sup>46</sup>

Adding insult to injury Browne offered the Bahamians a "gracious" opportunity to escape from their situation. However, doing so would require the inhabitants to come forward and personally taken an "Oath of Allegiance" in front of Browne and the Council. This, in combination with the accusations, was deeply insulting to the inhabitants. Accepting the governor's offer would be nothing less than a tacit admission of guilt, and a confirmation that Browne's charges were in fact true, regardless of the fact

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<sup>45</sup> O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided*, 115-121, 185-196, 283; Jack P. Greene, "Ongoing Disputes over the Prerogative, 1763-1776" in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, 173-178.

<sup>46</sup> A Proclamation, January 4, 1779, C.O. 23/9/93.

that there was no appearance of an open debate on joining the American rebellion by the Bahamian government.<sup>47</sup>

In Browne's mind the actions of the inhabitants were tied directly with the American rebels. Browne argued that the Americans had been invited to New Providence by the colonists for "the purpose on which they came," and that a great "Quantity of Flower [sic] was sent by Congress" to entice the Bahamians into aiding them.<sup>48</sup> This was also the opinion held by Lord George Germain, who agreed with Browne's assessment that a secret alliance had been made between the rebels and the inhabitants, and that the Bahamas was moving towards joining with the breakaway American colonies.<sup>49</sup> The actions of the people and the council members during the raid were also subject to the governor's pell mell accusations.<sup>50</sup> Browne asserted that Commodore Hopkins and his officers were "countenanced" by the Council and other prominent members of the community, and "elegantly entertained" at the residences of "some of the Officers of [the] Government."<sup>51</sup> These were scandalous charges, which fell between libel and treason. Browne's claims would end the careers (and lives) of the council members if the

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<sup>47</sup> C.O. 23/9/93.

<sup>48</sup> Address by Governor Browne to the Council and the General Assembly, March 17, 1779, C.O. 23/24/125; Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 519.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Lord George Germain to Governor Browne, January 14, 1777, C.O. 23/23/116-118. During Brown's captivity and short participation in the British campaign in Rhode Island, Browne appears to have formulated the negative opinions and accusations that he would present in his proclamation. Lord Germain in a response to Browne stated that: "there can be little doubt from the whole behavior of the...Inhabitants of the Bahamas, that the Rebels were invited to undertake the Enterprise they formed against those Islands." Furthermore, Lord Germain asserted that the "refusal of the President [and] Council to deliver the Ordnance [and] Stores to Gen. Gage...was evidently in consequence of the Plan they had concerted with the Rebels for putting them into their hands." See: C.O. 23/23/116.

<sup>50</sup> Testimony of William Watherston, March 10, 1779, C.O. 23/24/127r; Testimony of John Grant, February 11, 1779, C.O. 23/24/128r.

<sup>51</sup> C.O. 23/24/125; Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 519.

Board of Trade and the Admiralty decided to take action. The Bahamians and the Council had to act before the Browne's accusations gained any more traction.

The inhabitants and the Council were not going to take Montfort Browne's accusations without issuing a response. In a lengthy letter to the Board of Trade, the Council outlined the "very gross Misrepresentations" made against their conduct and the "Inhabitants in general." The Council conjectured that the "grand Aim" of the oath was to shift the "Attention of His Majesty's Ministers from [Browne] to the Inhabitants," in a desperate effort to deflect attention away from his actions during the rebel assault. In attempting to divert attention onto the inhabitants the Council concluded that Browne was trying to prevent the Board of Trade from conducting a formal inquiry into the incident. This formal inquiry would have brought to light the governor's "incompetent" decisions during the American attack, and easily show "whom the Disgrace of that unfortunate Day" should fall upon.<sup>52</sup>

The General Assembly, in conjunction with the Council, drew attention to Governor Browne's blunders in their own letters and petitions delivered directly to him. In a "Remonstrance" delivered on March 12<sup>th</sup>, the assembly and council made a direct challenge to Browne regarding the events on the "unhappy day" of Hopkins' assault. The remonstrance asserted that the inhabitants had done their "duty," and followed the governor with "a determined Spirit" to engage the enemy. The council and assembly accused Browne of not thinking it "proper to...[lead] them on the attack;" rather, he "retreated" and "abandoned Fort Montague," and forced the men to leave their "Houses, Property and Families to the ravage of the Enemy." Their point was clear, Browne had no

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<sup>52</sup> Letter from the Council to the Lords of Trade. February 22, 1779, C.O. 23/9/90r.

one to blame but himself. The loss of Forts Montagu and Nassau, their munitions, and his own capture rested on his inept shoulders.<sup>53</sup>

The ripples of the Congress' desire to acquire munitions for the war effort and their discretionary clause in Commodore Hopkins instructions had become major political waves three years later. The events of the American invasion and occupation of Nassau had become a political weapon for control of the colony and the opinion of the Board of Trade across the Atlantic. The failures of Governor Browne in the heat of battle, regardless of the conditions of the colony's defenses and the wisdom of engaging a superior American force, had become a defensive argument of the council and inhabitants. This argument was designed to counter Browne's accusations by focusing on his ineptitude and poor decisions that caused the colony to fall in March 1776, and to lay the groundwork for his dismissal.

While both sides of the political conflict utilized the American invasion as an argument against the other, the ongoing trade between the islanders and the rebels became a more serious issue. The Continental Congress' benevolent trade policy enabled Bahamian ships to trade with the mainland unmolested by American naval and privateer vessels as if they were members of the Union, while authorizing American vessels to carry supplies to and from the islands.<sup>54</sup> The open trade enabled Bahamian fruit and salt to be sold in cities along the coast from Salem, Massachusetts down to Savannah, Georgia.<sup>55</sup> Congress' open trade prevented the islands from becoming economically

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<sup>53</sup> The Remonstrance of His Majesty's Council and the General Assembly, March 12, 1779, C.O. 23/24/145.

<sup>54</sup> Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 96, 98-99.

isolated, and partially alleviated the threat of widespread famine—while attempting to persuade the Bahamians to join with the Americans by strengthening relations through open trade. Nevertheless, the trade benefits provided by the policy via the addendum exemption were accompanied by serious wartime socio-political issues.<sup>56</sup>

The overarching issue faced by Bahamians, as well as other colonists living in peripheral colonies, pitted loyalty against survival. Should a man remain loyal to his King and ancestral mother-country, or should he engage in trade with his rebellious brethren in order to feed himself and his family? The Continental Congress' benevolent trade policy put the islanders in the very difficult position of having to answer this question. Trade allowed victuals and other goods to flow into the remote colony, while providing an avenue for inhabitants to sell raw materials to generate income that could help put food on the tables of starving families. On Harbour Island, the “best bread” available “‘even for the blessed Sacrament’ was ‘made of Tree Roots,’” where the inhabitants were just above “starving condition[s].”<sup>57</sup> However, by engaging in commercial trade with the rebellious Americans the inhabitants committed a serious violation of Britain’s wartime policy, which could possibly bring charges of aiding the enemy and treason against them.<sup>58</sup> For the old “conchs” that had long inhabited the Bahamas, experience from the

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<sup>55</sup> “Just Imported and to be Sold by Geo. Crowninshield,” *New England Chronicle*, May 18, 1775, 3; “Extract of a Letter from Captain Alexander M’Pherson,” *New York Gazette*, February 1, 1779, 3; *New Jersey Gazette*, December 10, 1777, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 96-99.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Governor Browne to Lord George Germain, May 10, 1777, C.O. 23/23/126r; Neil R. Stout, *The Royal Navy in America, 1760-1775: A Study of Enforcement of British Colonial Policy in the Era of the American Revolution* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1973), 13-24, 165-170; McClellan, *Smuggling in the American Colonies at the Outbreak of the Revolution*; George Louis Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1958), 72-85, 86-113, 114-131, 228-251; Jerry

Seven Years' War answered the Bahamians' conundrum: continue trading while professing loyalty to the Crown. This solution presented the inhabitants with the ability to maintain the veneer of being loyal British subjects, while simultaneously engaging in a necessary and "profitable contraband trade" that brought provisions and trade goods to the islands.<sup>59</sup>

The absence of a royal official in the colony allowed the Bahamian-American trade to occur. Prior to Browne's return the colony was managed by Lieutenant Governor John Gambier, a native colonist of New Providence, who granted the Nassauvian merchants various licenses to "carry on an open and free Intercourse" with the rebels.<sup>60</sup> The trade allowed the islanders to easily procure provisions to sustain themselves and their families, while exporting desired salt and timber collected from the wilderness of the Out Islands. "Gentlemen speculators" set up operations with New Providence planters in an attempt to cultivate indigo, in order to trade back to the mainland. The possible cultivation of Bahamian indigo for export received the attention of Congress, when

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W. Cooney, "'Doing Business in the Smuggling Way': Yankee Contraband in the Rio de la Plata" in *Commerce and Politics*, vol. 1 of *The Atlantic Staple Trade*, ed. Susan Socolow, An Expanding World 9 (Aldershot, UK and Brookfield, VT: Variorum, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1996), 302-308; Thomas M. Truxes, *Defying Empire: Trading with the Enemy in Colonial New York* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). Most of the legal act taken against the smugglers and illicit traders during the Eighteenth Century was in the form of seizure of the illegally imported goods, and the vessel which they were transported on. Imprisonment also did occur but long-term incarceration and executions were uncommon, mainly because the prosecutors, judges, and jury members in the colonies heavily favored the smugglers and an impartial trial was not possible—let alone a conviction.

<sup>59</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 159-160; Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 92; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 144-145. The extent of the illegal trade that occurred during the Seven Years' War was immense. According to Governor Thomas Shirley, there were "between 80 and 90 vessels" in continuous operation, which carried approximately 500 cargoes per year during the war. These illegal cargoes consisted of French goods from St. Dominigue, which were loaded onto various ships in the Spanish port of Monti Christi and then taken to the Bahamas.

<sup>60</sup> Extract of a Letter from Governor Browne to Lord George Germain, January 11, 1779, C.O. 23/9/138-139.



Edward Kennedy, an “inhabitant of [New] Providence,” brought “samples of green indigo” that were “a new manufacture” he had discovered and was hoping to sell.<sup>61</sup>

The illegal free intercourse carried on between the Bahamians and the rebel American merchants brazenly continued right in front of Governor Browne’s face. Upon his return Browne found not just an illicit trade being conducted by the inhabitants of the colony, but also blatant authorization and support for continuing the trade in the upper echelon of the government. “I find to my great mortification,” exclaimed an exasperated Browne in a letter to Lord Germain, that the illicit commerce was being “carried on [in] so glaring a manner” that the lieutenant governor “has repeatedly applyed [sic] to me...[to] continue a License,” which permitted the local merchants to “carry on an open and free Intercourse with the Rebels.” John Hunt, the colony’s “Collector,” was apparently no better than the lieutenant governor. In a second letter to Lord Germain, a determined Browne stated that he had “peremptorily refused” to “grant [the] Letters of Marque and Reprisals,” which Hunt had applied for in order to allow “five ships of his now loading...in Carolina” to be protected at another occasion.<sup>62</sup>

The inhabitants of Turks Island were particularly daring with their illicit trade practices. Upon returning to the island in 1778, agent Andrew Symmer found that the settlers had entered into a “secret Agreement” with the French governor of St. Dominigue, a blatant act of treason. The agreement with Britain’s longstanding foe, coupled with the “most open Rebellious manner” the settlers expressed towards Symmer,

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<sup>61</sup> Continental Congress. *October 3, 1777 – December 31, 1777*, vol. 9 of *JCC*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 1028-1029.

<sup>62</sup> C.O. 23/9/138r: Testimony of Thomas Smith, January 9, 1779, C.O. 23/24/133; Extract of a Letter from Governor Browne to Lord George Germain, January 15, 1779, C.O. 23/9/140r.

caused what few loyal inhabitants residing there to leave the island “to the mercy of the lawless Banditti.”<sup>63</sup>

The situation needed to be brought under control, and the inhabitants’ loyalty to the British government restored. One method of accomplishing this was through the use of “oaths of allegiance” to the Crown and laws of Parliament. This would theoretically establish who was a loyal subject of Britain, and who was a treasonous rebel. On the mainland British military officers and royal officials issued these oaths in exchange for pardons—or not being taken as enemy prisoners.<sup>64</sup> Montfort Browne was certainly no different. The governor’s proclamation offered one such oath in the hope that this would remedy some of the problems, while causing the inhabitants to admit their guilty activity during the invasion.<sup>65</sup> However, like many of their mainland brethren, the inhabitants could always lie and continue trading with the Americans for badly needed provisions. In order to put additional breaks on the Bahamians’ illegal free intercourse with the rebels, Browne refused to grant any of the requested “Letters of Marque and Reprisals” or licenses, intending to “put a check to this illicit Trade.”<sup>66</sup> Yet, these measures were not

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from Andrew Symmer to Lord George Germain, December 13, 1779, C.O. 23/10/86-87.

<sup>64</sup> Allen J. McCurry, “The North Government and the Outbreak of the American Revolution,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (February, 1971): 154; Robert F. Oaks, “Philadelphians in Exile: The Problem of Loyalty during the American Revolution,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 96, no. 3 (July, 1972):298-325; Joan R. Gunderson, “Independence, Citizenship, and the American Revolution,” *Signs* 13, no. 1 (Autumn, 1987): 62.

<sup>65</sup> C.O. 23/9/93.

<sup>66</sup> Extract of a Letter from Governor Browne to Lord George Germain, January 15, 1779, C.O. 23/9/140r; Protest by the Council Marked “B,” March 9, 1779, C.O. 23/24/121-122. On February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1779, a group of five ships landed their rich cargos on the Island. These ships were most likely ones employed by Robert Hunt, who had requested Governor Browne to grant five Letters of Marque for ships to trade for provisions on the mainland, and it was reported that he had five ships being loaded in Carolina.

entirely successful, and a number of heavily laden merchant vessels continued to land their cargos on New Providence.<sup>67</sup>

If the colony still could not be brought into line, a worst-case-scenario solution would have to be implemented. Proposed by Lord Germain, this required the use of a small military force to secure New Providence for Browne and reassert the rule of law—effectively stamping out the rebellious behavior through a demonstration of overwhelming force. The political figures occupying seats in the colonial government would be the main focus for Browne. By focusing on the actions of colonial officials with respect to illicit trading and the American invasion of Nassau, Browne could ascertain exactly who had been covertly aiding the rebels. Once identified, the individuals in question were to be brought before the Crown to be dismissed from His Majesty’s service, in addition to possibly being arrested and put on trial for treason.<sup>68</sup>

Further attempts to bring the colony under control began to take a dangerous and “unprecedented” turn. In an attempt to solidify his hold on the colony from the opposition junta, Browne began to systematically dismiss council members from their positions and install outsiders who were closely connected with him and not native to the colony. The reasons behind each dismissal varied. The discharge of Samuel Gambier from his duties as “Judge of the Court of Vice Admiralty, and Receiver General” was made, according to Browne, with “no fault to find” in the execution of Gambier’s duties. In contrast, the removal of Council President John Brown’s son from the “Office of Secretary” was a blatant act of retribution against President Brown. Montfort Browne’s rationale for Mr.

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<sup>67</sup> Copy G: Testimony of William Clarkson, Ensign, March 8, 1779, C.O. 23/24/153-154: Extract of a Letter from Governor Browne to Lord George Germain, January 15, 1779, C.O. 23/9/140r.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Lord George Germain to Governor Browne, January 14, 1777, C.O. 23/23/116-117.

Brown's removal was because "of the glaring Behaviour of his Father," who had been the acting "Commander in Chief" when the colony was surrendered to the Americans for a second time in January 1778. Browne also attempted to covertly replace highly regarded Chief Justice Thomas Atwood by granting him a leave of absence, and then two days later declaring the Chief Justice's seat to be "vacant." With the seat newly "vacant," Browne attempted to fill it with his own personal friend Robert Cummings in order to put him on the council, but the other members would not permit it. The governor also appointed "two Assistant Judges" to the court dealing with offenses committed at sea, which was made without the consent of the other justices and well outside the powers granted by his official royal commission. These actions were a dangerous "Usurpation of Powers," and only deepened the political chasm between Browne and the opposing junta in the council.<sup>69</sup>

The political climate in the colony deteriorated rapidly. The "Usurpation of Powers" committed by Governor Browne in his effort to disrupt the "infernal Schemes" of the "disaffected Juncto [sic]," culminated in his suspension of three council members and the "Dissolution of the General Assembly."<sup>70</sup> Allowing the General Assembly to continue to sit was rejected by Browne as being "in no wise [sic] for the Service of His Majesty."<sup>71</sup> Yet, his true motive for dissolving them probably came from their assault on his actions during the American invasion, which they had mentioned in the remonstrance

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<sup>69</sup> Letter from the Council to the Lords of Trade, February 22, 1779, C.O. 23/9/90-91; Letter from the Council to the Lords of Trade, March 31, 1779, C.O. 23/9/97; Letter from Governor Browne to Lord George Germain, June 29, 1779, C.O. 23/24/225-227.

<sup>70</sup> C.O. 23/9/90-91; C.O. 23/9/97; Petition from the Lieutenant Governor, His Majesty's Council, and the late General Assembly to the King, July 27, 1779, C.O. 23/24/239-242.

<sup>71</sup> Governor Browne's Response to the Remonstrance, March 15, 1779, C.O. 23/24/148r.

delivered three days before his decision.<sup>72</sup> The dismissal of John and Samuel Gambier, along with Robert Hunt, from the council was a part of an attempt to bring the colony's illicit trading under greater control. This resulted from their continued "Extensive and Lucrative Trade with the Rebels," which was enabled by the Continental Congress' trade policy towards the islands.<sup>73</sup> The removal of the three councilmen was also a shrewd maneuver to prevent John Gambier and the opposition junta from executing a coup against the governor. Veiled threats of a coup emerged after the junta discovered that Browne's original commission had disappeared during the 1776 invasion. If successful, the plot would have installed John Gambier as the acting governor until a replacement was appointed by Whitehall.<sup>74</sup>

Montfort Browne's actions against the council, General Assembly, and the inhabitants illustrate his desire to prevent the colony from joining with the Continental Congress in rebellion against Britain. Browne's previous experience with the American invasion in 1776, coupled with the continuous flow of illicit trade goods into the islands from the rebellious mainland, caused Browne to see an underlying conspiracy. The inhabitants engaged in trade with the Americans primarily out of a need for economic and physical survival. The Bahamians were not attempting to become a potential fourteenth state; rather, the benevolent trade policy opened an avenue that the inhabitants could use to achieve the end goal of personal survival. Nevertheless, Browne certainly thought a

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<sup>72</sup> C.O. 23/24/145.

<sup>73</sup> C.O. 23/24/147v; C.O. 23/24/225-227. Governor specifically mentions a portion of the Continental Congress' benevolent trade policy towards the islands in his response to the remonstrance delivered by the council and General Assembly.

<sup>74</sup> The Memorial of William Bradford and Andrew Symmer to Lord George Germain, May 8, 1780, C.O. 23/10/46-47.

Bahamian-American conspiracy existed. Because of the Bahamas' decentralized nature and the lack of a strong military presence on the islands Browne was forced to try to exert strength from a position of weakness, which resulted in his various actions that caused the colony to spiral out of control politically.

The political brawl and dismissal of the assembly during a time of imperial war put the colony in serious jeopardy. The governor refused to renew the Militia Act and supporting Revenue Acts until the assembly "properly investigated" the "very extraordinary Charges" that were "so false, so malignant, and so malicious[ly]" made against him. Without a renewed Militia Act there was no authority to form militia companies, and to ensure that they were "properly disciplined" in order to defend the colony. The dissolution of the assembly and expiration of the Revenue Acts prevented new revenue from coming into the colony's coffers. The resulting lack of funds barred much needed renovations to the dilapidated forts from occurring, in addition to replenishing the stocks of munitions lost during the American invasions. With "good Intelligence" that there was an impending "Invasion by the French," the inhabitants implored Browne to call a new assembly and renew the several Acts, because they were "incapable of exerting their natural strength" to oppose an invading enemy force. The multiple invasions by the Americans had taught them that much.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Governor Browne's Answer to the Memorial of the Inhabitants, April 27, 1779, C.O. 23/9/135; The Memorial of the Inhabitants of New Providence, April 23, 1779, C.O. 23/9/133. The intelligence the inhabitants referred to came from Henry Johnson, the late commander of the private warship *Deborah*, who had been taken captive by the frigate *Minerva* (a "Ship of War belonging to the French King") and carried to Cape François on the Island of Hispaniola. Johnson informed Chief Justice Thomas Atwood and Governor Browne that the French frigate was "fitting out [for] an Expedition against the Island of New Providence." According to Johnson the *Minerva* was just one vessel of a much larger fleet, which would transport "a thousand men" in different vessels. See: Testimony of Henry Johnson, April 7, 1779, C.O. 23/9/136. In an additional testimony, Captain John Young claimed that the French invasion force numbered 1,500 men supported by the "Guarde du Côte Brigantine." See: Testimony of John Young, April 19, 1779, C.O. 23/9/137.

While the threat of a French invasion worried the Bahamians at home, across the Atlantic in London officials saw the troubling political breakdown and the rise of Governor Browne's dictatorship as a severe problem. In London, the Board of Trade saw the political conflict as putting the colony in "an absolute State of Anarchy," and in need of laws for "the Revenue, the Militia, and other purposes" that were "essential" for its welfare. The numerous complaints filed against Browne by the council members and the assembly led the board to one conclusion: Montfort Browne had to be replaced.<sup>76</sup>

John Maxwell arrived at New Providence in March 1781 to replace Governor Browne. This brought an end to the bitter, divisive political struggle that had gripped the hardscrabble, far-flung colony for over a year. The Continental Congress' concerns over acquiring munitions had a dramatic, albeit unintended, effect on the Bahama Islands political environment. American plans to entice the Bahamas into joining with the Union as a potential "fourteenth state" were met with disappointment. The invasion caused both sides to make numerous attacks on the other's character, and blame their opposition for the downfall of the colony. The Bahamian-American trade brought desperately needed supplies to the islanders, but made them appear as part of the rebel uprising. In order to prevent the colony from joining the Continental Congress in the Revolution, Browne took action to bring the inhabitants back firmly under British colonial authority—however, it was at the cost of his position as governor. Ultimately the effect of Congress' policies would result in the dissolution of the General Assembly, the suspension of three

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<sup>76</sup> Board of Trade to the King, August 6, 1779, C.O. 23/24/177-181.

prominent members of the Governor's Council, a plotted coup, a short-lived dictatorship, and the replacement of the governor—a broad and unique array of chaotic political events.



## CHAPTER III

### THE LOYALIST REVOLUTION: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE POST- REVOLUTIONARY BAHAMAS

As the tide of the American Revolution turned against the British, colonists who remained loyal to the Crown began to flee patriot held territories. Loyalists branched out across the British Atlantic World. The overwhelming majority of Loyalist refugees escaped to the Canadian colonies, the “middle ground” of the Great Lakes basin, Bermuda and the Bahamas, the West Indies, and the British Isles. This began to solidify the soft boundaries between the newly formed United States and the British Empire.<sup>1</sup> Yet, much of the mainland territory remained nebulous in terms of both enforcement and loyalty until the “Civil War of 1812,” when the Great Lakes frontier was ravaged by devastating skirmishes that pitted neighbors against each other.<sup>2</sup>

The influx of loyal refugees had a profound impact on the social characteristics of these regions. Hardened Loyalists turned small settlements into bulwarks against the growing influence of the emerging United States, while borderland regions became dormant areas of contention that erupted into violent neighbor-against-neighbor conflict

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<sup>1</sup> Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 395, 416-425, 428-429, 435, 443, 451-452; Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 107-149; Charlene Johnson Kozy, “Tories Transplanted: The Caribbean Exile and Plantation Settlement of Southern Loyalists,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (Spring, 1991): 18-42; St. John Robinson, “Southern Loyalists in the Caribbean and Central America,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 93, no. 3-4 (July–October, 1992): 205-220; Maya Jasanoff, “The Other Side of Revolution: Loyalists in the British Empire,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (April, 2008): 205-232.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

during the second War of Independence. However, while the borderland territories on the American mainland remained ambiguous until the War of 1812, interspersed with American settlers and British colonists, the island colonies underwent quick, sharp social and economic alterations. Unlike the blurred identities of the North American mainland, the Bahama Islands did not suffer from divided loyalties. Rather the Loyalist influx overwhelmed and transformed the traditional dispositions of the islanders, which quickly turned the archipelago into a Loyalist stronghold at the end of the American Revolution and transformed the colony's economic, social, cultural, and racial characteristics in the decades afterwards.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional "old conchs" who had scratched out a living on the islands were overwhelmed by the incoming Loyalists and their slaves, who were accustomed to the plantation style agriculture of the Lower South. Scholarly estimates place the number of "Old White Household Heads" in 1788 at 430, and the new Loyalist household heads at 330. New settler families superseded original families on seven different island groups: New Providence, Exuma, Cat Island, Andros, Crooked and Acklin's Islands, and Caicos Island. The relocated Loyalists brought with them over 3,762 slaves, which were nearly double the existing slave population of 1,974 slaves. This transformed the socio-cultural,

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<sup>3</sup> Allen, *Tories*; Chidsey, *The Loyalists*; Keith Mason, "The American Loyalist Diaspora and the Reconfiguration of the British Atlantic World" in *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 239-259; Trevor Bernard, "Freedom, Migration, and the American Revolution" in *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf, 298-299; Thelma Peters, "The Loyalist Migration from East Florida to the Bahama Islands." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (October, 1961): 123-141; Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 147-245; Lewis, *The Final Campaign of the American Revolution*, 27, 59, 62-63, 82, 106-107, 124, 127-128, 131; Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 8, 12, 129, 192, 201-202; Thelma Peters, "The American Loyalists in the Bahama Islands: Who They Were." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (January, 1962): 226-240.

economic, and political nature of the Bahamas, bringing a die-hard imperial allegiance that had been refined by the fires of civil war on the mainland.<sup>4</sup>

The Loyalist exodus from the southern colonies during the second half of the American Revolution quickly ended the Bahamians' practice of charting their own course to ensure survival. While inhabitants had survived the French and Indian War and much of the American Revolution by conducting illicit trade with Britain's enemies in order to survive, Loyalist emigrants did not take kindly to the hypocritical actions of the Bahamians. In May 1782, the Bahama Islands were surrendered by Governor Maxwell to the Spanish when confronted with an overwhelming joint Spanish and American force of fifty-nine armed vessels and approximately 2,000 soldiers. What resulted was the subjugation of the loyal Bahamians and Loyalists settlers to "the insults and Calamities...[of] Despotic" Spain for over a year.<sup>5</sup> For the Loyalist refugees fleeing to the Bahamas, professing loyalty to King and country while continuing to trade with His Majesty's enemies and surrendering the colony to the Spanish during the closing years of the Revolution was intolerable.

The Loyalist transformation of the Bahama Islands has been the subject of numerous historical works.<sup>6</sup> Gail Saunders and Sandra Riley have contributed

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<sup>4</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 180.

<sup>5</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 158.

<sup>6</sup> Riley, *Homeward Bound*; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 162-186; Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*; Peters, "The Loyalist Migration from East Florida to the Bahama Islands," 123-141; Peters, "The American Loyalists in the Bahama Islands," 226-240; Wilbur Henry Siebert, *The Legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and the Bahamas: A Chapter out of the History of the American Loyalists* (1913; reprint, Boston: Gregg Press, 1972); Johnson, *Race Relations in the Bahamas, 1784-1834*; Saunders, *Bahamian Loyalists and their Slaves*; Thelma Peters, "The American Loyalists and the Plantation Period in the Bahama Islands" (Thesis, University of Florida, 1960), Christopher Estol Michael Curry, "Liberty Extended, Liberty Denied: The Black Loyalist Quest for Freedom in the Bahamas" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 2011); W. H. James, *Exuma: The Loyalist Years, 1783-1834* (Nassau, The Bahamas: Media

significantly to historical scholarship on how the Loyalist Diaspora completely transformed Bahamian society. Saunders focuses primarily on the long term social transformation caused by the influx of the slave and free black populations, who permanently settled many islands and towns, and consequently impacted the archipelago at a deeper level than the refugee white planters and merchants.<sup>7</sup> Riley conversely draws attention to the plight of the Loyalist refugees, how Andrew Deveaux's 227-man Loyalist militia managed to outmaneuver 600 Spanish troops to retake the islands in April 1783, and how the refugees strove to secure themselves financially through acquiring new lands to establish plantations and commercial businesses.

While the economic transformation of the Bahama Islands has been covered widely by the Bahamian and American scholars, the political, social, and international changes resulting from the Loyalists transformation are addressed differently. Yet, scholarly research in these areas is strongly connected to the economic growth and decline of cotton cultivation, slavery, and the plantation system. Saunders and Craton both focus on how the planter class that emerged from the cotton boom significantly influenced the Bahamian political sphere, particularly with regards to their push for infrastructural improvements, the battle for greater representation within the General Assembly, and their resistance to emancipation in the British Atlantic World. The international aspect of the Loyalists' influence has centered principally on the futile struggle to maintain slavery against the forces of emancipation. Scholarly focus on white

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Enterprises Ltd., 2011); Michael Craton, *Loyalists Mainly to Themselves: The Black "Loyalist" Diaspora to the Bahamas, 1782-c. 1820* (New York: Palgrave, St. Martin's, 2002); Astrid Melzner Whidden, "The Influences of the American Loyalists on Bahamian Architecture" (M.A. thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 1995); Saunders, *Aspects of Bahamian History*; Steve Dodge, *Carleton: Refugee Loyalist Settlement in Abaco, 1783-c. 1790* (Abaco, The Bahamas: Carleton Archeological Project, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 179, 182.

Loyalist immigrants and refugees looks at the short term cultural and material impact between the early 1780s and the early 1830s, and how it fell away after the Loyalist departure in the 1830s. However, scholars such as Gail Saunders who focus their attention on the African and Creole populations that arrived during the 1780s look at their lasting cultural contributions, since these groups remained on the islands long after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars have traditionally addressed the effects of the Loyalists on the Bahamas as being a “transformation.” It is more accurately imagined as a “Loyalist Revolution.” This revolution changed the nature of the colony from its pre-Revolution stasis to a loyal, booming frontier society, which lasted for half a century until the abolition of slavery on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1834.

Loyalist refugees had experienced the brutality of the rebels and Continental forces, who forced them from their homes, destroyed farmlands and businesses, confiscated personal property, and slaughtered friends and family members. These Loyalist refugees sought revenge against the American rebels and their sympathizers, while many of the Bahamians sought to capitalize on a steady stream of unescorted merchant vessels that could be easily captured and plundered. Consequently the Bahamian-American trade fostered by the Continental Congress’ benevolent trade policy could not be tolerated by Loyalists and British-Bahamian patriots.

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<sup>8</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 179-232, 258-391; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 162-216; Riley, *Homeward Bound*. ; Howard Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996); Saunders, *Aspects of Bahamian History*; Gail Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas, 1648-1838* (Nassau, The Bahamas: The Nassau Guardian, 1985), 149-169, 193-217.

While the Bahamians' economic interactions with the American rebels helped many islanders to survive the famines sweeping the archipelago, it also provided them with ample opportunities to take revenge on the open seas. The steady flow of American commercial ships traveling through Bahamian waters, combined with the archipelago's numerous hiding spaces, enabled Loyalists and Bahamians to launch privateering raids against the rebels. The increase of privateering enterprises against American, French, and Spanish shipping brought a wealth of prizes into the Bahamas that improved the situation of many islanders attempting to survive during the conflict.

The return of privateering as an entrepreneurial industry in the Bahamas aided in boosting the prosperity of the inhabitants during the poverty and famine conditions that the Imperial Crisis and American Revolution caused. Letters from Governor John Maxwell regarding Nassau's Vice Admiralty court list a total of "37 American vessels" that were "Captured and Libelled" by June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1780.<sup>9</sup> This number would be revised in April 1782 to include a staggering total of "127 rebel ships"—amounting to ninety vessels captured over the course of nearly two years.<sup>10</sup> Bahamian privateers targeted merchant vessels with "great execution," and dealt financial distress to "the Traders of Cuba, the Capes, and the Rebels."<sup>11</sup> The numbers of privateer vessels in operation in the Bahamas reached a point where Maxwell had to request that a frigate be stationed in the colony to "keep the Privateersmen in Order."<sup>12</sup> The number of American vessels, crews, and goods taken by Bahamian privateers was so great Maxwell was "unable to 'keep or Victual

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<sup>9</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*. 157-158.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Governor Maxwell to Lord Germain. August 31, 1780. C.O. 23/25/1.

<sup>12</sup> C.O. 23/25/1.

them,” and consequently had little choice but to return “them to the nearest American port and turn them loose.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet, the aggressive actions taken by the privateers were not about to be left unanswered. As Bahamian privateers increasingly prowled the shipping lanes they unintentionally overextended the colony’s hand as the British naval presence dwindled in the West Indies following Lord Cornwallis’ defeat at the Battle of Yorktown. The Continental Congress, fed up with the Bahamian privateers and the establishment of a “military government,” brought an end to its trading relationship with the Bahamians in 1779.<sup>14</sup> The ravaging of American and Spanish vessels goaded them into a combined military assault against the privateer nest of New Providence Island.

The departure of the Royal Navy left the colony exposed to attack from Spanish and American forces. Spanish forces under the direction of Bernardo de Gálvez had been slowly amassing in Cuba and St. Dominigue throughout 1781 in preparation for an attack on the heart of the Bahamas. By April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1782, the attack on New Providence was underway. Yet instead of a sole Spanish force being commanded by Gálvez, a joint Spanish-American force consisting of fifty-nine vessels, “twelve of which were American merchantmen” transformed into “armed privateers,” were lead by the Governor of Havana Juan de Cagigal and Commander Alexander Gillon of South Carolina.<sup>15</sup> The ground force under Governor Cagigal’s command consisted of approximately “2,000

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<sup>13</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 158

<sup>14</sup> Continental Congress, *January 1, 1779 – April 22, 1779*, vol. 13 of JCC, 388.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, *The Final Campaign of the American Revolution*, 21.

soldiers,” a crushing force nearly twelve times the size of the 170 British soldiers garrisoned on the island.<sup>16</sup>

Faced with an overwhelming Spanish and American force, Governor Maxwell’s decision to surrender the islands without firing a shot was a prudent short-term calculation. The preceding naval assaults against New Providence from the Continental Navy and the *Providence* impressed upon both the government and inhabitants the vulnerability of the Bahama Islands to hostile takeover—even with a small enemy force of one ship or a few hundred men. Surrounded on all sides by a superior naval force of 59 ships, the colonial capital faced certain annihilation if it attempted to resist.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, American ships were not the only targets of both the Loyalists and Bahamians’ wrath. Governor John Maxwell’s surrender of the islands on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1782 to the detested forces of Catholic Spain without a fight enraged many Loyalist refugees and Bahamian settlers. The residents of the archipelago found themselves under the rule of both Catholicism and an ally of the American rebels, who had driven them into exile and upset the political stability of the colony through invasions and illicit trading. For over a year the remaining colonists and Loyalists lived under “the insults and Calamities inseparable from Despotic power” of Don Antonio Claraco before the archipelago was retaken by Captain Andrew Deveaux on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1783.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to his surrendering of the colony to Catholic Spain, Governor Maxwell enraged the newly settled refugees by continuing to permit the Americans to sell

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 21; Burns, *History of the British West Indies*, 531.

<sup>17</sup> David Marley, *Wars of the Americas: A Chronology of Armed Conflict in the New World, 1492 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 346.

<sup>18</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 158.



provisions to the colony. Even after the conclusion of the Revolution, the Bahamas continued to experience severe food shortages. To alleviate the crisis Maxwell resorted to a traditional and sensible approach—at least to the old inhabitants—of opening Nassau as a free port, and allowing for the importation of “Indian corn” in American vessels.<sup>19</sup> Much to the bewilderment of the old inhabitants, the Loyalist refugees rioted in the summer of 1784, attempted to strike down the American colors, and proceeded to smuggle desperately needed provisions out of the colony.<sup>20</sup>

Threats of serious repercussions aimed at deterring further outlandish behavior from the Loyalists only goaded them further into opposing Governor Maxwell. While this brought an end to the riots, it was quickly replaced by “writing libels,” “disloyalty, licentiousness, and anarchy,” and the rise of the “Board of American Loyalists” in opposition to Maxwell.<sup>21</sup> Loyalist disfavor toward the governor began to escalate rapidly, and by September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1784 the board publically petitioned King George III to have Maxwell removed, arguing that he “had taken the government upon himself, oppressed the Loyalists, refused to seize American vessels,” and came to the Bahamas “only to make money.”<sup>22</sup> Hostilities came to a head during a meeting between the board and the governor on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, when the board “almost accused” Maxwell of “partiality and incompetence” to his face.<sup>23</sup> Fed up with the libelous cacophony from the Loyalist

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<sup>19</sup> Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 160-161.

<sup>20</sup> Governor Maxwell to Lord Sidney, May 17, 1784, C.O. 23/25/103-104.

<sup>21</sup> “Writing Libels,” C.O. 23/25/108-112; Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 161; Handbill, C.O. 23/26/96; James Hepburn, Handbill, July 26, 1784, C.O. 23/25/148.

<sup>22</sup> Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 162-163. Also see: Petition for Maxwell’s Removal, C.O. 23/26/170-171.

<sup>23</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 167.

inhabitants, and confronted with a serious lack of food and material aid from the metropole, Governor Maxwell resigned in February 1785 to retire to a life of quiet comfort in England.

The rapidly increasing Loyalist population on settled islands, the settlement of uninhabited islands, and the establishment of new towns challenged the existing distribution of representation within the colonial government. This strained political relations within the Bahamian political system as the Loyalists pushed for greater representation in the Lower House. The General Election of 1784 saw Exuma, Abaco, Andros, Long Island, and Cat Island represented for the first time with a combined delegation of eleven representatives—at least nine of whom were “virulent Loyalists.” Yet, the New Providence, Eleuthera, and Harbour Island delegations lost ten members, falling from twenty-four to fourteen, despite New Providence having a “total British population of 2,750 individuals” in 1782.<sup>24</sup> The newly elected minority Loyalist faction proceeded to challenge the legitimacy of the reigning “Old Guard” through allegations that the Provost Marshall, John Baker, had “arbitrarily declared six established settlers elected” for Nassau and western New Providence despite the Loyalist candidates receiving a majority of the votes.<sup>25</sup>

Tensions continued to escalate between the increasingly radical Loyalist faction and the Old Guard inhabitants and representatives. The assembly’s refusal to read several

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 168; Lewis, *The Final Campaign of the American Revolution*, 43. Even in 1788 the population of New Providence far exceeded that of any of the other islands, with 296 white household heads. Eleuthera, the second most populated island, had only reported 119 white household heads, and Harbour Island had roughly 94 household heads. Of the 760 white household heads, New Providence, Eleuthera, and Harbour Island accounted for approximately two-thirds of all white household heads in the Bahamas. See: Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 168.

petitions submitted by the Loyalists resulted in seven Loyalist members, led by James Hepburn, to withdraw from the Lower House. John Petty and Peter Dean, two of the seven absent representatives, published a scathing pamphlet in late April 1785 that “incensed those...in the House,” and caused the Speaker to order a copy to be “burnt publicly” in front of the Courthouse—in addition to censuring the printer John Wells.<sup>26</sup>

With tensions approaching a flashpoint, the situation was defused by detailed instructions from London advising Governor Powell to suspend James Hepburn, Robert Johnson, and John Wells from the assembly, and to resist calls for a new election. The Old Guard majority in the assembly took further measures against the “recalcitrant Loyalists.” The Lower House formally expelled Peter Dean, James Moss, and John Petty on September 26<sup>th</sup> for their roles in the petitions and protests, and proceeded to expel five more radical Loyalist members three days later. This successfully defused the situation, but the Loyalists continued to be a dominant political force of opposition afterwards.<sup>27</sup>

While the Loyalist immigration hardened the ideological boundary between the islands and the rebellious mainland during the latter half of the Revolution, the arrival of new settlers and slaves caused an economic revolution. This affected the colony in three crucial manners: (1) it enabled settlers to easily purchase land instead of having to be granted the land by either the Lords Proprietors or the governor, (2) it caused increased sums of capital to flow into the colony from new Loyalist immigrants, and (3) the new lands and capital led to the creation of a cotton staple crop economy.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 168-169.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 169.

The termination of the long established land ownership restrictions materialized from two important aspects of the Loyalist Diaspora. The first aspect consisted of the increase in demand for land to establish farms and plantations by Loyalist settlers. Beginning in the summer of 1783 the first organized mass migration of Loyalist refugees began, but instead of coming from the Carolinas and Georgia they originated from New York. From August to October 1783 “about fifteen hundred New Yorkers” made the journey to Abaco Island in several groups.<sup>28</sup> The first “pioneer group” of 250 settlers and 95 “ostensibly free” blacks set sail on August 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1783, and was followed by at least two larger groups totaling “941 settlers,” including “217 men, 118 women, 203 children...and 403 ‘servants,’” in September and October.<sup>29</sup>

Further sporadic waves of Loyalist refugees poured into the Bahamas from the Canadian Maritimes, particularly Nova Scotia, and Spanish-controlled East Florida. Of the 80,000 to 100,000 Loyalists who fled the new United States after 1783 approximately 4,000 to 7,300 people settled in the Bahamas between 1783 and 1789. These refugees had originally fled from New York, South Carolina, and Georgia to quickly and affordably settle under British governance by relocating to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and East Florida.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, a number of circumstances and international developments forced them to relocate to the Bahamas. The two principal reasons behind this Loyalist relocation were: Britain’s cession of East Florida to Spain in the Treaty of Paris of 1783, and the cold

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<sup>28</sup> Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, 220.

<sup>29</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 182-183.

<sup>30</sup> Peters, “The Loyalist Migration from East Florida to the Bahama Islands,” 131-132, 137-138; Wilbur H. Seibert, *Loyalists of East Florida, 1774-1785* (DeLand, FL: Florida State Historical Society, 1929), 150, 159; Peggs, *A Short History of the Bahamas*, 17; Kozy, “Tories Transplanted,” 25.

Canadian climate's inhospitality to plantation agriculture. The cession of the Floridas to Spain came as a shock to the British inhabitants and Loyalist refugees. Emotions of abandonment and betrayal gripped the East Florida inhabitants and refugees, many whom had "sacrificed Evry [sic] thing that is dear in life" and "freely bled" to now be deserted by King and country once again.<sup>31</sup> Many residents of East Florida did not believe the reports of the Florida cession and insisted on seeing the articles of the Treaty in print, while John Cruden petitioned Spanish King Charles III in October 1784 on behalf of the Loyalists settled between the St. Johns and St. Marys' Rivers to "allow them an 'internal government.'" <sup>32</sup>

Southern Loyalists found themselves faced with the possibility of having to settle in Canada, where the climate was an antithesis to their former homes in the Carolinas and Georgia, or the desolate Bahama Islands. The cold climate and rocky soil of the Canadian Maritimes made little sense to southern Loyalists, who regarded its climate as "not being calculated for Southern Constitutions, or for the employment of the Slaves." The sparsely inhabited Bahamas were on a similar latitude to the Lower South and were far better suited for the use of slavery than Canada. However, the soil was "far too poor to establish sugar plantations...or to cultivate rice and tobacco" that southern Loyalists were accustomed too. The Loyalists and East Floridians largely regarded the Bahamas as being nothing more than "barren Rock[s]," which were "not initially appealing to [the] Florida-based refugees." An investigative mission to the archipelago conducted by Dr. Lewis Johnston of St. Augustine during the summer of 1783 commented that the Out Islands

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<sup>31</sup> Peters, "The Loyalists Migration," 129; Joseph Byrne Lockey, *East Florida 1783-1785, a File of Documents Assembled and Many of them Translated* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1940), 301-302.

<sup>32</sup> Peters, "The Loyalists Migration," 129.

were only visited for “wrecking Turtling and cutting Timber.” While the barren, rocky soil gave little hope of establishing prosperous staple-crop-producing plantations akin to those in Tidewater Virginia, coastal South Carolina, Jamaica and Barbados, it did provide slave-owning, southern Loyalists with the opportunity to fulfill a principal objective—it was a “place where they could put their slaves to work” raking salt, harvesting native tropical fruits, and experimenting with cotton cultivation.<sup>33</sup>

The second important facet behind the Bahamian land reforms came with the inexpensive prices of newly available land acquired from the Lords Proprietors by the British Government. The low costs encouraged Loyalist refugees to settle on the Bahama Islands, while enabling Bahamians to expand and develop farms and plantations throughout the archipelago. Following the conclusion of the Revolution, the Crown bought out the three remaining Lords Proprietors’ claims on the remaining uncultivated Bahamian lands between 1784 and 1787 for a “total payment of twenty-six thousand pounds.”<sup>34</sup> The buyout enabled the British and Bahamian governments to sell land, conduct surveys, and maintain records of landownership on the islands, but it also gifted lands to both Bahamians and Loyalist settlers. For the Loyalist refugees, “who on account of their loyalty to his Majesty,” were awarded “forty acres of land...for every person, being master or mistress of a family” with an additional twenty acres for every “white and black man, woman, or child, of which such family shall consist,” but were exempted

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<sup>33</sup> Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, 220-221; Patrick Tonyn to Sir Guy Carleton, May 15, 1783, NYPL: Carleton Papers, Box 32, no. 7691; Dr. Lewis Johnson to unknown recipient, July 14, 1783. C.O. 5/560/928-933.

<sup>34</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 191. The three remaining Lords Proprietors consisted of: Sir John Snell Colleton, Lord William Craven (6<sup>th</sup> Baron Craven), and Lord Anthony Ashley-Cooper (5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury).

from paying quit rents for ten years.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Loyalist refugees were granted lands “free of all expence [sic] whatever” at “his Majesty’s Royal Will and Pleasure,” while long established Bahamians were subject to “an annual quit rent of two shillings per hundred acres.”<sup>36</sup>

The sale of the Crown’s newly acquired Bahamian lands significantly increased the amount of cultivated land. Calculations made by William Wylly, an ardent Loyalist and Solicitor General of the Bahamas, illustrate the dramatic growth of Bahamian landownership by the end of the 1780s. Wylly’s records show that by the conclusion of the American Revolution the total area of cultivated land was equal to 3,434 acres, but by 1788 the area had increased almost fivefold to 16,322 acres.<sup>37</sup> Wylly’s tabulations of Bahamian expansion illustrate an era of grand expansion that was taking place, yet modern scholarship indicates the extent of land purchases was in fact much greater amounting to at least “43,000 acres” in “114 patents” for an “average of 382 acres.”<sup>38</sup>

The growth in land sales following the post-Revolution land reforms spurred the development of plantation agriculture, which led to the expansion of the islands’ cotton trade. Loyalist refugees settling on the islands after 1783 began to establish cotton plantations along the “south and southeastern islands...[of] Exuma, Long Island, Crooked Island, and Acklins,” and by the end of 1785 the plantations produced “124 tons of

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<sup>35</sup> Proclamation of Lieutenant Governor Powell, *Bahama Gazette*, September 10, 1785.

<sup>36</sup> Proclamation of Lieutenant Governor Powell, *Bahama Gazette*, September 10, 1785; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 191.

<sup>37</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 191-192; William Wylly, *A Short Account of the Bahama Islands, Their Climate, Productions, &c. to which are added, some Strictures upon their relative and political Situation, the Defects of their present Government, &c. &c.* (London: n.p., 1789), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Arnold Talbot Bethell, *The Early Settlers of the Bahamas and Colonists of North America* (1937; reprint, Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 2008), 99-109; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 165.

cotton” on approximately 2,476 acres.<sup>39</sup> As demand for raw cotton increased dramatically with the rapid industrialization of British textile manufacturing, exports of cotton continued to increase steadily from 219 tons in 1787 to 442 tons in 1790, and finally peaked at approximately 602 tons in 1810.<sup>40</sup> Estimates of the average yield of cotton was roughly “112 pounds” per acre, with “exceptional plantations” harvesting up to “1,500 pounds...for each working slave.”<sup>41</sup>

The growth of cotton as a Bahamian cash crop was furthered by the development of the cotton gin. The creation of various versions of the cotton gin, principally Joseph Eve’s “inanimately powered, self-feeding roller gin” in 1788, enabled slaves and planters to remove the cotton seeds from the fiber more efficiently than if it had been done by hand.<sup>42</sup> This permitted vast quantities of cotton to be produced, cleaned, and sold for greater profits than before. Bahamian cotton planters quickly seized upon the new technology, and within a year “mastered the gin’s complexities.”<sup>43</sup> In an article in the *Bahamas Gazette*, “A Cotton Planter” analyzing “Eve’s wind gin” concluded that the gin yielded “250 lbs. per day” in cleaned cotton, and the saved equivalent of “eighteen

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<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude*, 13

<sup>40</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 192.

<sup>41</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 191.

<sup>42</sup> Angela Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 40-41. Joseph Eve was a resident of the Bahama Islands, who developed his cotton gin in 1788 at the age of nineteen. Eve’s “Cotton Machine” promised to inexpensively clean approximately “three hundred Pounds [of seed cotton] to a Hand per day (or one hundred pounds of fiber).” Inspired by Eli Whitney, Eve lobbied the Bahamian General Assembly for a patent on his cotton gin, but was denied. Eve eventually received a patent for his roller gin in 1803, however it was granted by the United States—not the Bahamas where it was originally developed. See: *Ibid.*, 40-43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



hundred days” worth of the slave’s labor.<sup>44</sup> The increased productivity of Eve’s gin allowed the slaves to better tend the cotton plants during the year, and enabled them to raise an additional “two tons of cotton” in good years.<sup>45</sup> While land reforms, an influx of new slaves and Loyalist capital, and the cotton gin made the Bahamas one of the largest cotton producing colonies in the British West Indies, the peak production of 602 tons paled in comparison to the 6,425,000 pounds being harvested annually in South Carolina by 1800.<sup>46</sup>

The cultivation of cotton provided Bahamian and Loyalist settlers with an increasingly in-demand staple crop that could be produced more easily than salt for a greater profit. The production of large quantities of salt necessary to produce significant annual profits required “large operations and more capital,” which put individual ownership of a salt raking enterprise financially out of reach for many planters and islanders. Typical salt raking operations were owned and managed by a collective corporation of local planters or individuals. This offered very little latitude for individual stakeholders to rake and trade salt, because of the Bahamian government’s increasing desire to exert its control over the industry. Yet, many Loyalist immigrants and planters entered into the salt raking industry as part of a corporation, or through creating small salt ponds adjacent to their cotton plantations. Early theoretical estimates in 1802 put Bahamian and Loyalist salt production at “three million bushels, or one hundred thousand tons” annually, worth an “estimated £250,000,” however in reality salt raking never

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 44; “A Cotton Planter.” *Bahamas Gazette*, March 18, 1794.

<sup>45</sup> Lakwete. *Inventing the Cotton Gin*, 44; “A Cotton Planter.” *Bahamas Gazette*, March 18, 1794.

<sup>46</sup> Rachel N. Klein. *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill, NC and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 247.

produced more than half of these optimistic calculations. Nevertheless, the salt trade did provided many planters with an additional source of income to their annual cotton income, and brought additional revenue into the islands.<sup>47</sup>

The development of Bahamian plantation agriculture did more than just produce a long desired staple crop; it signaled a break with the long pattern of economic stasis that characterized the colony's social and economical situation. During a four month expedition to New Providence in 1783, German botanist and physician Johann David Schoepf observed that the inhabitants continued to survive through traditional exports. Yet, he noted that cotton was "one of the best and surest rewards of the planter's toil," since it thrived in the rocky soil and hot, rain-limited island climate. The islanders Schoepf encountered on New Providence were mainly sailors and fisherman, with "real planters" being of "lesser consequence." Nassau consisted of a collection of houses "all lightly built and of simple construction" with walls made of "merely a plain covering of boards," and "one tolerably regular street....which runs next to the water."<sup>48</sup>

The clearing of uncultivated island wilderness to create cotton plantations and small farms also caused an increase in Bahamian logging and timber sales, and an explosive growth in salt raking. On the eve of the American Revolution logging competed with salt for the principal export of the colony, but the total revenues generated by these products only amounted to approximately £5,216 in 1774. However, by 1787 the value of Bahamian exports had increased over eleven-fold to £58,707, and the amount of

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<sup>47</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*. 197-198.

<sup>48</sup> Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784*, ed. and trans. Alfred J. Morrison (1911; reprint, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968), II:262-263, 268-284.

land under cultivation increased “twelve times” to approximately “thirty-five hundred acres” of which 8,000 acres were devoted to cotton production.<sup>49</sup>

The establishment of cotton plantations throughout the “cotton belt” between Cat Island and Acklin’s Island turned Bahamian and Loyalist farmers from debtors into colonial “cotton barons.” Exiled Georgian and South Carolinian planters settling in this region began to cultivate extra long staple, Sea Island Cotton. This would prove to be a shrewd decision, since the region’s climate was ideal for the cultivation of extra long staple cotton, and would “prove to be a bonanza for Loyalist planters.”<sup>50</sup> The financial impact of the cotton boom was illustrated by Oswald Eve, a pioneering settler of Cat Island, who noted in May 1784 that a planter brought into “debt and ruin” by the American Revolution relocated to Long Island with six slaves to grow cotton, and six years later had produced enough cotton “to establish a fortune of £5-6000.”<sup>51</sup>

The decade following the revolution was particularly kind to the Bahamas as they became more integrated into the reorganized British Atlantic economy. The emergence of cotton plantations, highly profitable cotton and hardwood exports, the establishment of Nassau as an economic free port in 1787 despite Loyalist opposition, and the influx of displaced Loyalists with “expanded needs and more refined tastes” precipitated an importation boom. While Bahamian imports were limited in number during the Imperial

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<sup>49</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 193-194; Johnson, *The Bahamas from Slavery to Servitude*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 196.

<sup>51</sup> May 29, 1784, C.O. 23/26/204-205.

Crisis, the post-Revolutionary era saw a “forty-fold increase” from roughly £3,400 to a staggering £136,359 in 1787.<sup>52</sup>

The explosion of commercial trade, agricultural development, and economic wealth that the Loyalist immigration brought to the Bahamas manifested itself initially in infrastructure improvements. The emerging Bahamian planter class pushed for the construction of public roads and the application of the philosophy, common in all plantation colonies, that landowners maintained responsibility for the upkeep of the roads adjacent to their property. Road construction spurred New Providence and the other principal islands to build major highways, with the Long Island highway reportedly being 100 miles long. Beginning with Lord Dunmore, who assumed the governorship in October 1787, there was a massive expansion of the colony’s public works projects that continued until the War of 1812. Major undertakings were made to increase the fortifications on New Providence, resulting in the construction of Fort Charlotte in 1789, Fort Fincastle in 1793, and a separate array of batteries on Hog Island and Potter’s Cay. Additionally, Lord Dunmore’s analysis of the conditions of the chambers, residences, and offices of the colonial government initiated the construction of a new “House of Assembly, Council Chamber, Courthouse and Gaol” between 1796 and 1812.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 192.

<sup>53</sup> Governor Maxwell to Shelburne, June 29, 1784, C.O. 23/25/243-276; Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 192, 194-195; Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 176-179, 185-186. The construction of Forts Charlotte and Fincastle were the most expensive construction projects undertaken between 1783 and 1812. These two fortifications would become the “lasting monuments” to “Dunmore’s Folly,” and were so massive “to the point of impregnability.” However, they never fired a shot in defense of the island during their active histories. Lord Dunmore spared no expense in improving the colonies defenses—to the point that he was actively bankrupting the colonial government, and depleting the War Office’s own funds. The construction of Fort Charlotte was originally estimated to cost an “economic £4,000” in 1787, but by 1789 Lord Dunmore had spent an incredible £7,636 that “exhausted the local resources.” Dunmore’s extensive building projects required an additional £17,846 from the War Office to finish Forts Charlotte and Fincastle, and a further £10,784 to complete

The immigration of loyalist planters and merchants from the American mainland and neighboring Bahamian islands to Nassau created a duality in the physical appearance of the colonial capital's residencies. The predominately "all-wood houses...of unpainted timber bleached gray" soon gave way to an increasing number of the "characteristic 'Loyalist' townhouse" consisting of a "stone shell encased...by elegant woodwork." A typical Loyalist townhouse produced an air of planter class refinement in the backwater colony, with amenities such as: wooden piazza galleries, central stone staircases with upper galleries, glass window panes, plastered walls, and pastel colored exteriors. The Loyalist influence on Bahamian architecture "lasted for at least a century" with a number of principal estates, such as "Greycliff, Jacaranda, and Cascadilla," being built during the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup>

The infrastructural improvements and exponential increase in trade and prosperity took the Bahamas from a ramshackle outpost of the British Atlantic World to a "civilized" colony in merely twenty years. Yet, as Michael Craton and Gail Saunders both observe, this economic transformation was temporary, and "faded with the knowledge that neither cotton nor any other plantation crop" would continuously provide for a "baronial lifestyle" in the same manner that tobacco and sugar did for Virginia, South Carolina, Jamaica, Barbados, Brazil, and Cuba.<sup>55</sup> The prospects for wealth and leisure created by the international cotton boom were rapidly evaporating with social upheaval, and calls for a socio-racial justice by emancipating the slaves throughout the

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additional barracks in 1794. This brought the total expenditures on fortifications up to an astronomical £32,266, which was approximately "eight times [over] the original estimate." See: Craton. *A History of the Bahamas*. 176-177.

<sup>54</sup> Craton and Saunders. *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*. 214.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-199.

British Empire. A third revolution would be the final blow to the wealth and colonial grandeur created by the Loyalist Revolution, and restore the Bahamas to much of its prior way of life.

The gradual decline of the Bahamian cotton trade began after 1810 when production peaked at 602 tons, and continued until the industry completely collapsed in 1838—four years following the end of slavery. The end of Bahamian prosperity resulted from a number of political and social events, which were fundamentally tied to cotton cultivation, the plantation system, and the global cotton trade. Beginning as early as 1788, the gradual depletion of minerals in the thin layers of fertile soil by years of cotton production resulted in increasingly smaller yields per year. The prosperity of the cotton plantation system in the Bahamas was also threatened by the emancipation movement, which exchanged slavery to apprenticeships and paid labor with its implementation in 1834. With the decline of cotton and the end of slavery, the archipelago gradually returned to its previous impoverished state.

Depletion of soil nutrients necessary for large-scale, yearly cotton production began early in the post-Revolutionary Bahamas. Bahamian planters and officials observed in 1788 that the “cotton production fell drastically” below what had been originally forecasted.<sup>56</sup> This was originally attributed to the onslaught of a cotton consuming “chenille bug,” a type of “caterpillar...variegated with beautiful colours and many legs” capable of destroying whole fields of cotton plants by consuming merely the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 196.

plant's leaves.<sup>57</sup> In 1794, the chenille bugs devoured roughly two-thirds of the Bahamian cotton crop, and four years later "almost demolished the crop" entirely.<sup>58</sup> However, as the years progressed it became evident that the "real and lasting reasons" for the crop's failure was due to the "inadequacy of Bahamian soil."<sup>59</sup>

Cotton soon faded into the economic backdrop, becoming a spoke in a diversified economy instead of the driving engine that it once was in the late eighteenth century. This left many planters in financial ruin, and forced many to abandon their plantations to either seek their fortunes elsewhere or immigrate to Britain. Yet, those who remained in the archipelago survived by turning to longstanding Bahamian industries. The salt raking industry continued to be a major source of income, exporting 4,870,253 bushels of salt from Turks Island to North American and the other British colonies between 1794 and 1805. As a result, the significant amount of salt being exported brought between £1,000 and £9,000 in annual tax revenue from 1802 to 1827.<sup>60</sup>

The rise of the emancipation movement in Britain threatened the "hard-won improvements" made by the Bahamas' planter and merchant classes, because it stood to eliminate the supply of cheap slave labor that Bahamian plantations and industries depended upon. The economy created by the Loyalist Revolution was threatened by a new imperial revolution. In order to maintain the wealth and social status generated by

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 196; Saunders, *Slavery in the Bahamas*, 44n44; Lewis A. Dodge, "The Cotton Caterpillar," *The American Naturalist* 7, no. 4 (April, 1873): 213-216.

<sup>58</sup> Saunders, "Slavery and Cotton Culture in the Bahamas," 130.

<sup>59</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 196.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, "The Politics of Salt," 161, 164; Submissions of John Lorimer, Naval Officer, 1805, C.O. 23/53/25-27.

the chattel labor system, the planters fought the oncoming emancipation movement “because they knew that it meant the destruction of most of what they stood for.”<sup>61</sup>

While much of the merchant and planter classes pushed to maintain slavery, the winds of abolition and black-male suffrage had been blowing in the colony since Lord Dunmore’s administration. Within two days of arriving in the Bahamas, Lord Dunmore issued a “proclamation relative to Negroes” offering a “general pardon to fugitive Blacks” who claimed they were “free Blacks from America,” who had been abducted by Loyalists settlers intending to sell them to the French on Hispaniola.<sup>62</sup> The decline of the cotton boom and Bahamian plantations, and the natural increase of the existing slave population, consequently made the importation of African slaves unnecessary.<sup>63</sup> In 1804 and 1807, the colonial government permitted free blacks to serve in the colonial militia and vote in elections.<sup>64</sup> The gradual liberalization of manumission laws and practices between 1800 and 1830 led to a “great increase” in the number of free blacks in the Bahamas, as well as a greater social acceptance of slaves purchasing their freedom instead of the master paying a “manumission fee of £90.”<sup>65</sup>

A series of slave acts and regulations passed by the General Assembly during the 1820s redefined the practice of slavery in the archipelago. These acts defined for the first time what a “master’s obligations to his slaves were,” specifying that every slave over ten

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<sup>61</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 187.

<sup>62</sup> Riley, *Homeward Bound*, 169.

<sup>63</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 217. The decline of cotton was occurring during the period of the British Parliament’s abolition of the African slave trade, which was “directly imposed” among the Crown colonies in 1805 and empire-wide in 1807.

<sup>64</sup> Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 197.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.



years old was to receive a “peck of ground corn” per week and two sets of clothes per year. Slaves were allotted a portion of land adjacent to their houses on which they could cultivate vegetables, and granted permission to freely trade dry goods; however, the colonial legislature expressly prohibited them from cultivating cotton, raising cattle, or raking salt unless permitted by their masters. By 1827, the colony criminalized the breaking up of slave families through sales and trading, and disallowed children under the age of fourteen from being separated from their parents. Further changes in the Bahamian slave laws in 1822, 1827, and 1829 allowed slaves to give testimony in court for all civil cases except those dealing with libel or slave ownership, provided they were Christian and deemed to be in good character.<sup>66</sup>

With the end of the Bahamian cotton boom and the exodus of many Loyalist families, the Bahamas was left in a situation that was both old and new. The diminishing wealth generated by the Loyalist Revolution’s economic transformation slowly returned the colony to the economic rhythm of prosperity and poverty, highlighted by a return to smuggling and piracy during periods of international crisis, typified by the pre-Revolutionary era.

The Loyalist influx instigated a revolution. The dramatic increase in population and demand for land to establish farms and plantations contributed to the implementation of much needed land reform, challenged the political environment, and hardened the boundaries of the reconfigured Atlantic world. The arrival of the Loyalist refugees transformed the backwater archipelago into a booming cotton colony, which brought in

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 196-197.

wealth and trade. The increase of settlers and slaves, coupled with the sale of lands held by the Lords Proprietors, expanded the number of towns and settled islands, and increased the representation of the Out Islands in the assembly.

Of the transformations that permanently affected the islands, the change in the racial composition of the colony was one of the most significant. The large influx of slaves and free blacks with the Loyalist Diaspora dramatically increased the black population from 2,201 in 1773 to over 10,002 by 1834.<sup>67</sup> Blacks remained in the Bahamas, even after the end of the cotton boom drove many white settlers to seek prosperity elsewhere. The introduction of black-male suffrage in 1807 and the land reforms enabled free blacks to own their own farmlands and vote in local elections. While the collapse of the Bahamian cotton trade dealt a major blow to the colony's economy, the growth of the salt trade made up for some of the lost revenue and created a strong export industry. However, it could not fully replace the wealth generated by the cotton boom, and the separation of the Turks and Caicos Islands from the Bahamas in 1848 dealt further damage the Bahamian economy. After experiencing over sixty years of transformative revolutions that shook the colony, the islands sank back into an economic struggle for survival.

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<sup>67</sup> Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Volume One*, 180, 289

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