

**THE PECULIAR CLASS:**

**THE FORMATION, COLLAPSE, AND REFORMATION  
OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN ANTIGUA, WEST INDIES**

**1834-1940**

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## INTRODUCTION

“The middle classes in the West Indies ... constitute one of the most peculiar classes in the world, peculiar in the sense of the unusual historical development and the awkward and difficult situation they occupy in what constitutes the West Indian nation...” — C.L.R. James (1962: 130)

The small British West Indian island of Antigua, first colonized by Europeans in 1624, was important in the imperial scheme primarily for its production of sugar. Semi-refined brown sugar was produced on increasingly large plantations, owned by white men, using increasing numbers of African slaves as the labor force. By 1750, the population had reached roughly 35,000—32,000 slaves and 3,000 whites—and there it remained for the next 150 years. Emancipation in 1834 gave legal freedom to the slaves, but the sugar-producing regime continued: there was still a white planter class and a black labor force, a labor force that although it now worked for wages was nevertheless so constrained by planter control over the land and disciplined by punitive legislation that it spent the next one hundred years struggling to make that freedom a reality.

In addition to planters and laborers, in the slave period there was a middle stratum, a small but growing group legally defined as free colored and restricted by law and custom to a limited role in the economy and no role at all in formal political life. Those who write on the slave period in the British West Indies therefore describe these societies as being made up of three distinct segments: the usual image is a triangle cut laterally into three parts, each larger than the one above. Each segment is then described in terms of both color and social position: the small top segment is the white planter/merchant class, the larger middle segment is the “brown,” or “mulatto,” or “colored” free colored, and the bottom segment is the mass of black slaves. Each segment is considered a closed social and cultural unit, with virtually impermeable barriers between whites and all nonwhites and with very little upward (or downward) mobility even within the two segments that together constitute the nonwhite population.

This view of the free colored as the middle segment in a “color-class hierarchy” has formed the basis for an equally prevalent view of post-emancipation society: that it continued to be divided into the same three hierarchically ordered segments, each of which therefore had its origins, both biologically and socially, in the pyramidal structure of slave society—the white upper class in the white planter and merchant population, the “brown” middle class in the free colored population, and the black lower class in the slave population. Study after study either asserts directly, or simply assumes, that at emancipation in 1834 the free colored “became” the “brown middle class”—or “coloured middle class,” “middle coloured class,” or simply “coloured class”—and remained so well into the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> A particularly rigid interpretation of

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<sup>1</sup> This assumption, witting or not, is so long-standing and so prevalent that examples only hint at its extent. But for the automatic association of color and class, see Braithwaite 1953: 87; Curtin 1955: 155; R.T. Smith 1956: 195; Goveia 1965: 251; Hall 1971: 151; Patterson 1975: 318; Forsythe 1975: 23. For the assumption of continuity, see Broom 1954: 188; M.G. Smith 1965: chap. 7; Henriques 1968: 48; R.T. Smith 1970: 61; Stone 1972: 8; Forsythe 1975: 23; Post 1978: 102; Heuman 1981; M.G. Smith 1984: 42; Alexander 1984: 175-78; Saunders 1986; Brereton 1989.

social life and social relations in the slave period has thus been imported wholesale into the post-emancipation era. Further, it is an assumption that is not confined to scholarly discourse, but has been imported into basic texts and schoolbooks, and thus become embedded in the popular mind. The following, from a widely used history text, is representative: "The structure of society in the West Indies did not change radically in the nineteenth century.... the basic form of West Indian society, with the whites on top and the blacks at the bottom, remained unchanged" (Greenwood and Hamber 1981: 120).

By simply converting the free colored into a "brown middle class," scholars have taken the continuity from pre- to post-emancipation for granted, assuming a process that in fact must be proven. They have also muddied a number of analytic waters concerning the interrelationship of class and color. First, the repeated use of color terms to describe the three levels of society has seduced many observers into believing that color alone is the key to understanding West Indian social relations: even those who think that they are analyzing the interrelationship of color and class end up treating color as the determining characteristic. And second, by linking a color and a class, these scholars obscure the changing nature and membership of each class. Even if such a formulation works reasonably well for the white top and the black bottom—or does so as long as each remains conveniently in place—it does not work for the middle, certainly not in Antigua, and probably not anywhere.

It is this middle group, as it manifested itself over the century from emancipation until 1940, that is the focus of this study. At emancipation, the upper levels of the nonwhite population throughout the West Indies were converted, literally overnight, into a middle class. In Antigua, they did not become the owners of the plantations or the managers of the state apparatus, roles that remained the preserve of white men; nor did they become direct producers, a role filled by the former slaves. Rather they became the distributors and facilitators: as merchants, shopkeepers, and clerks, they imported and exported, bought and sold; as civil servants and lawyers, they facilitated the process of production, as well as of importing, exporting, buying, and selling; as artisans, they provided the materials that made this possible.

The time period covered stretches over one hundred years, from the early 1830s to the early 1940s—from emancipation in 1834 to the arrival of the American armed forces to build a base in 1940. These were two critical points in Antigua's history, points at which a major structural change led to a profound realignment of the social forces. In addition, these one hundred years encompassed a third critical point, one that has not generally been recognized as such: this was a structural crisis that took place in the 1890s, when growing economic problems, political paralysis, and social dissatisfaction finally came to a head and the kaleidoscope that is the social structure was again shaken, to resettle in a profoundly different pattern. It is this middle crisis that is central to an understanding of the development of the nonwhite middle class. It is analyzed in detail in Part 1.

Emancipation marked the beginning of a long struggle by the upper levels of the nonwhite population—what I call the nonwhite middle class—against the concerted efforts of the colonial authorities and local planter/merchant class to delimit its economic, political, and social roles. The white planters and merchants, with legal constraints on the mobility of the rest of the population removed, did everything they could to maintain it on the ground. Posed as distrust of the abilities and motives of the "natives"—a distrust, indeed fear, as insistent among remote

Colonial Office officials as among local European and Antiguan whites—the effort to find new ways to limit the size, economic role, and political mobilization of the nonwhite middle class is central to the dynamics of this period. The cultural component of colonial domination and local resistance centered on a struggle over issues of race and class—and, most crucially, of their relationship to each other.

It was a successful effort, and by the 1890s the nonwhite middle class was small in numbers and limited in economic and political power. At the same time, the Antiguan economy was in deep trouble. Sugar in general, and British West Indian sugar in particular, was facing increased competition from lower cost colonial producers and from European beet sugar, while the British government was no longer willing to provide tariff protection for its colonial imports. Growing conditions in Antigua were less than optimal, and when a worldwide depression forced sugar prices to new lows, the island became what one Colonial Office official called the “Cinderella of the West Indies.” The white planter class was facing economic ruin, while its political control was increasingly being contested by a restive nonwhite population and by a metropolitan government that had lost faith in that class’s ability to act in the best interests of the colony. Finally, after several years of economic stagnation and political paralysis, the planters, unable to contain the nonwhite insurgency and also keep the Colonial Office on their side, voted, in a desperate maneuver, to do away with their elected seats in the Legislative Council—and thus to deprive themselves of any role in opposition to the colonial power.

But this was a contradictory solution, because although it had the desired effect of delivering the final blow to the nonwhite middle class, it proved fatal for the local planter class as well. Once the colonial authorities were firmly in control, they were able to proceed rapidly with plans to open the Antiguan sugar industry to an outside investor, a British firm favored by the Colonial Office. The Antiguan producers, despite their fierce efforts to influence the terms of the investment, were quickly marginalized and then made subservient to outside capital.

With the nonwhite middle class of the nineteenth century fading away and the white population rapidly decreasing in numbers as well, opportunities then began to open up to a new group of nonwhite men and women. This class—which I call the “second,” or “new,” middle class—gradually, very gradually, began to establish itself over the next forty years. The “window of opportunity” for the second middle class narrowed with the rise of the trade union movement in the late 1930s, however, and closed abruptly with the arrival of the U.S. armed forces to build a base in 1940. Once again, the social structure was profoundly shaken; and once again, when the pieces settled, they formed a very different pattern.

### **The Peculiar Class**

Before turning to the study itself, it is necessary to say a few words about that slippery term *middle class*, and why it is possible to talk about *a* middle class, much less a *first* middle class and a *second* middle class, as I will in the text that follows.

Most societies have one or more groupings, segments, strata, or social classes that fall between the top and the bottom, the owners and the labor force, yet these middle classes are seldom studied and poorly understood. They are indeed, as C.L.R. James wrote, peculiar classes: they come in many varieties, are part of variable configurations, and have different

relationships to the class above and the class or classes below. Yet it is exactly this that makes understanding them crucial to understanding the entire societal dynamic. Anthropologists and historians frequently study resistance and struggle among the working class, but the middle class struggles too. The difference is that it struggles in two directions: against the restrictions placed by the class above on the one hand, and against the pressures from the class or classes below on the other. As one observer put it, "The middle class, like any other social group, does not exist ready-made in reality. It must be constituted through material and symbolic struggles waged simultaneously over class and between classes; it is a historically variable and reversible effect of these struggles" (Wacquant 1991: 57). Neither the boundaries of the middle class nor its membership can be assumed on some abstract theoretical basis. The middle class not only occupies contested terrain; it is *itself* contested terrain. And the success or failure of the contest determines a particular society's shape and trajectory.

Class as the term is used here refers to a real group of people, not to a logical possibility or abstract category. Classes are groups of people who behave in "class ways" (Thompson 1978: 147), who are tied together socially (including, most importantly, through marriage and kinship), have their own institutions, political parties, and even, in a general way, class *projects*—overarching goals that apply to most of the members. Each class emerges *in opposition* to other groups and classes, and defines itself in that process (Thompson 1978)—although I will argue in the Conclusion that the middle class in Antigua was also *chosen* and that opposition was therefore only part of the picture. But classes also have histories, and as we shall see below, historical knowledge—or the lack of it—is a crucial component of class and class struggle.

Despite its obvious shortcomings, W. Lloyd Warner's description of class in Yankee City, the American town that he and his colleagues studied in the early 1930s, is helpful for understanding how class worked in Antigua. Warner wrote that "If a man's education, occupation, wealth, income, family, intimate friends, clubs and fraternities, as well as his manners, speech, and general outward behavior, were known, it was not difficult for his fellow citizens to give a fairly exact estimate of his status" (Warner 1963: 38). In Antigua, as in Yankee City, each class is recognized as such by those inside and those outside—I will return to this below. And in both, economic factors are very much modified by other class attributes. Most important, history—described by class members in terms of family—is crucial: where a family comes from, geographically and socially, plays a central role in current class membership. Further, in situations where marriage is a family decision and is expected to be for life, marriage is a key defining factor: each class is highly intermarried and there is a clear sense of marrying "in" or "out," "up" or "down." Joseph Schumpeter's well-known image is particularly appropriate here: "The difference between the intercourse within a class and outside," he wrote, "is the same as the difference between swimming with and against the tide" (Schumpeter 1951: 141). It is precisely because the middle class is a social group, with its own institutions (social clubs, schools, sports clubs, churches) and marriage networks, and its very clear sense of itself, that I have been able to distinguish the two middle classes in Antigua. For, as I shall discuss in Part 2, the "first" middle class was institutionally and socially distinct from the "second" middle class, despite the fact that both filled a space that is structurally in the middle. In other words, the middle class can vary in content and role in different places, and in the same place at different times.

The use of the term *middle class* has been criticized for its imprecision, and it can certainly

obscure more than it reveals, but the alternatives are even less satisfactory. One is *petty bourgeoisie*, but the classical Marxist usage is both too narrow and too broad for the Antiguan circumstances: in Marxist terms, the petty bourgeoisie comprises those who make their living primarily through their own labor, owning their own means of production (tools) and other property (shops). Typically, they are self-employed small producers, trades people, artisans, or small merchants. This is too narrow because it does not include clerks and civil servants, doctors and lawyers, all of whom are forced into this class in racially divided small colonies. And it is too broad because the range of artisans, trades people, and small producers includes many who are socially not part of the middle class.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, although occupations are often used as a rough guide to membership in a class, this works better for advanced industrial societies than for the colonies of the third world. Indeed, models from advanced industrial societies do not work well in small impoverished colonies such as Antigua for two reasons: first, precisely because they are small, and second, because they were colonies that used racial divisions as a mode of control. The first means that the occupations that might, in larger societies, be considered bourgeois or upper class are, in small societies, petty bourgeois or middle class. The second means that people who hold the same occupation but are on opposite sides of the racial divide *cannot* be part of the same social class. To put it another way, in Antigua in this entire period there was no nonwhite upper class (or bourgeoisie). Even the larger nonwhite merchants cannot be considered to fit this role, which is reserved for the white planters and merchants. The nonwhites were too poor, too capital-shy; they were middle men, distributors, and servants of capital, directly or, as government bureaucrats, through the state. Thus the occupations held by the middle class ranged from lawyer to doctor, from merchant to shopkeeper, from clerk to teacher, from artisan to civil servant—occupations held by those who might, in larger and more racially homogeneous societies, be considered bourgeoisie, combined with those who might, in similar circumstances, be classified as petty bourgeoisie.

In an often quoted essay, Schumpeter wrote that “Each class resembles a hotel or omnibus, always full, but always of different people” (Schumpeter 1951: 165). As noted earlier, the literature on the West Indies has portrayed these societies as if each of the layers—top, middle, bottom; white, brown, black—were a separate bus, with a permanent content and shape and with little movement on or off. It is a central argument of what follows that the middle class “bus” in Antigua changed dramatically in the period from emancipation in 1834 to 1940. Further, not only did the riders change, but the bus itself changed—in size, in shape, and even in color. Such rapid change has a myriad of implications for class behavior and is masked by a descriptive terminology that reifies classes as structures and makes assumptions about the content of those structures.

The Antiguan nonwhite middle class of the early part of the twentieth century was a class

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<sup>2</sup> Ken Post, in one of the first books on the West Indies that deals with this class, distinguishes the “petty bourgeoisie proper” from the “white collar” office workers and professionals” who sell their labor power. This distinction, which Post made because he believes that the two groups have different ideological positions, as well as different origins, is not relevant for Antigua, where, possibly because of the small size of this class, neither is the case. It also seems to me that in these islands professionals—doctors and lawyers—were more like small businessmen than white collar office workers. On this see Post 1978: 79ff including notes.

that was clearly recognized as such, whose membership was widely agreed upon, by both those inside and outside. I had a clear sense of this after being on the island for only a few weeks, but this feeling was corroborated by an informal panel of four “experts,” all older nonwhites who had been adults in the 1930s but were not all from the middle class. They were asked (separately) to take a pack of cards, each with a family name, and arrange them in any way they wished in order to give me an idea of “how things were socially” in the early part of the century.<sup>3</sup> The names on the cards included surnames from nonwhite, white, Portuguese, and Lebanese families. The only help I gave was to suggest that they think in terms of groups and of a hierarchy or ranking—as I already knew Antiguan did—from top to bottom.

All the panel members put the whites in a group at the top and created a nonwhite middle class immediately below; all put the Portuguese and Lebanese off to the side, in separate piles, with the Portuguese ranked above the Lebanese—it must be remembered that the ranking was specifically for the early part of the century, not for the present. One white man was put apart from the rest of the whites. This was Major Hole, a white landowner, who was remembered as white (which he was), but was also remembered as alienated from the majority of the white planters because he was a vocal defender of the peasantry. Hole has become a famous—almost mythical—figure in Antigua, an eccentric defender of the common man whom the panelists felt would be badly served by being lumped with the planters and merchants; his role will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9. There was also almost unanimous agreement about membership in the nonwhite middle class, although some on the panel broke it into a core and “fringes,” while others wanted to consider it as a unit. The one surname about which there was disagreement—Harper—turned out, after further research, to be for a number of reasons a family that was understandably difficult for my panelists to classify (see Chapter 5).

The middle class that I am discussing was, as noted above, defined in part in opposition to the white planter–merchant–civil servant upper class. I have chosen the term *nonwhite* to describe this class, fully realizing that it is problematic. I have done so in order to avoid such imprecise and inaccurate terms as *brown* or *mulatto*, or such value-laden ones as *black*. I also did not want to use Afro-Caribbean, now favored by some scholars, because it obscures the European inheritance—genetic and cultural—of many members of this class. So I have chosen *nonwhite*, recognizing that in doing so I run the risk of being criticized for defining any group in the Caribbean in terms of the white population, as being *not white*. Further, I do not use the term for those nationality groupings such as the Portuguese and Lebanese, for even though they too are *not white* (or, as we shall see, not always white), they are socially separate from the *nonwhites* that I am writing about. They will instead be referred to by their national origin, as Portuguese and Lebanese.

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<sup>3</sup> There were originally six panelists, but two were dropped, one because she professed not to know a large number of people—which I knew to be totally untrue, and therefore assumed was because she was embarrassed by the prospect of ranking people—and the other because she refused to group people at all, although she was willing to talk about them individually. Her comments were astute, and were useful in the analysis, but in addition both refusals became interesting in terms of the discussion of the role of women in social life in Chapter 10: the women knew far better than the men the import of their decisions. The men had fewer hesitations, although they were unhappy about having to make a hierarchy, maintaining that differences were not due to class but to being part of different “social cliques,” with people in general being “much of a muchness”—again, a hesitation that made sense later in the research. None of the panelists wanted other people to learn how they had ranked these families. On being promised total anonymity, they became interested in the task and approached it as an intellectual challenge, a chance to look analytically at their own society.

### A Note on Sources and Methodology

As anthropologists have increasingly come to realize how much the past influences contemporary events, it has become increasingly common to write about history. The problems involved in this type of research are nevertheless sufficiently difficult that they need to be discussed in some detail, not only for the sake of future scholars but, more important, because the nature of the data shaped the final result—undoubtedly in ways that I do not recognize, as well as in ways I do.

The period from emancipation until the labor unrest of the late 1930s, and particularly the years after 1890, are something of a black hole in West Indian history, and this is particularly true for the smaller islands. There are some studies by economists, but historians have focused on the slave era or the labor unrest of the late 1930s. Not until very recently has the early post-emancipation period begun to come under scrutiny—often by the same scholars who studied slavery (i.e., Heuman 1992, Gaspar 1992, Berleant-Schiller 1992, Marshall 1991, and many of the contributors to McGlynn and Drescher 1992 and to Olwig 1994). Not surprisingly, therefore, the focus has remained on the labor force and particularly on the “peasantry.” For the Leewards, the only contemporary studies are Douglas Hall’s *Five of the Leewards, 1834-1870* (1971), written while Hall was resident tutor in Antigua; Paget Henry’s *Peripheral Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Antigua*, which pulls together some material on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but focuses on the 1950s and after; and Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s *Peasants and Capital: Dominica in the World Economy* (1988), which, although its focus is also the present, has interesting material on the nineteenth century as well. Finally, there is Gordon Lewis’s wonderful but idiosyncratic extended essay, *The Growth of the Modern West Indies*, which reveals new insights every time it is read, but unfortunately demands that the reader know as much as the author to get the full import of what he is saying—and few readers do.

There are, in addition, three valuable theses, two of which have not been published and so are not as well known as they should be. “The Fall of the Old Representative System in the Leeward and Windward Islands, 1854-1877” by Howard Aston Rogers (University of Southern California, 1970) contains valuable information on the system of government in the nineteenth century. I rely on it heavily in Chapter 2. In addition, “An Historical Analysis of the Development of the Union-Party System in the Commonwealth Caribbean, 1935-1968” by Patrick Lewis (University of Cincinnati, 1974), now Antigua and Barbuda’s ambassador to the United States but once a professor at Hampton Institute, contains equally valuable material on the pre-trade union period in the Leewards. Finally, Mindie Lazarus-Black’s recent (1990) thesis, “Illegitimate Acts and Illegal Encounters: The Development of Family Ideology and Structure in Antigua and Barbuda, West Indies,” is a fascinating discussion of that topic from colonization into the present (with a version published by Smithsonian Institution Press in 1994).

Because of the lack of a large body of analysis, I had to rely almost entirely on what can loosely be called primary or archival materials. But because of the partial nature of much of this, I found that I was using different types of documents for different periods and even for different topics. The first of these, which I used extensively in Parts 1 and 2, were the books written by visitors from overseas, most of which are well known and can be found in any large library. However, after the initial flurry of interest in the effects of emancipation, they decline precipitously both in number and in the amount of detail they include, and with the exception of Vere Langford Oliver’s three-volume *History of the Island of Antigua* (1894-1899)—which is

more a compendium of material and a genealogical study (of the white population) than a history as such—they become less and less useful. I also made extensive use of almanacs, wills, birth and death registers, jury, club, and school roll books, censuses, Leeward Island Blue Books, and reports to the Colonial Office from the local governor.

The entire study is built around information that I accumulated on individuals. First, in order to test assumptions of continuity between the pre- and post-emancipation periods, and from emancipation onward, I selected a sample of surnames—how they were chosen will be described in more detail in the introduction to Part 2—that I studied in detail. Using all the sources listed above, and with help from living informants, I built extensive genealogies for each surname and collected information on as many individuals as possible. And second, I collected information on hundreds of other people, not in the sample, both other members of the nonwhite middle class and planters, merchants, civil servants, doctors, and lawyers, white and nonwhite, Antiguan and British. Not having a computer at hand, I made a card for every individual and as I read through a document, or conducted an interview, I added any and every little piece of information gleaned from any and every source. Before long I had hundreds of cards with varying amounts of information on each. Aside from providing the basis for much of the discussion that follows, the information on these cards made my work with Antiguan informants more productive because it appeared to them that I “knew everybody”—even people they only dimly remembered themselves. Indeed, there were times when I felt I was living in the 1890s or 1920s rather than the 1980s, so familiar was I with the names and attributes of the people living then.

Working with archival materials in the West Indies, where the records have suffered the ravages, animate and inanimate, of time, is a frustrating task. The most serious problem is missing volumes—of birth, death, or marriage registers, for instance—or missing pages or parts of pages. In using the birth and death records, the fact that illegitimate children are not always recorded—especially in the middle period, when, as we shall see, their existence seems to have gone underground—makes for one kind of difficulty, while the fact that death and marriage records do not always distinguish legitimate from illegitimate children (and the practice in Antigua was to give the child the father’s surname) makes for another. In addition, there were problems particular to Antigua: In 1965, an archivist named E.C. Baker published an extensive survey of the materials available in the Leeward Islands, and it was on the basis of this that I had assured myself (and others) that Antigua was a good site for my project. When I arrived, however, I found that an earthquake in 1974 had severely damaged a number of major buildings, including the Court House, where court records, registers, jury and voter rolls, and an assortment of other court-related documents had been stored. Some of this material had then been removed: parts of it had been stacked in a series of small storage closets in the Administration Building at the bottom of High Street; the rest had been taken to the temporary High Court building at the top of High Street, where it had been unceremoniously dumped in a small, windowless room and left to fall prey to rats, roaches, and other voracious paper-eaters. The “archives” were therefore a four-foot-high tumbled heap of documents and fragments of documents, mixed together like leaves in a woodpile.

If I was to do the kind of research that I had planned, I felt I had no choice but to sort through and organize this material before I began. It took an enormous amount of time, and I would certainly advise anyone else to make sure—by inspection—that the records listed in

bibliographies exist, but the documents I uncovered proved worth the effort. The most important for my purposes were the handwritten jurors' rolls, which covered many, although not all, of the years between 1875 and 1936, plus some printed rolls for the years after 1936 and up to 1950. I was able to photograph the rolls for 1875 through 1905, 1911 (chosen because it was a census year), 1920, 1936, 1942, and 1944, and then use a process that prints rolls of film on paper (much like printing from a microfilm) in order to have paper copy to refer to. Unfortunately, I found no rolls for the years between 1920 and 1936, although they may have since appeared. I also uncovered a few voter registration lists, as well as one tantalizing packet of original returns from the 1844 census. The highlight of the whole dirty business, however, was finding copies of three emancipation proclamations—for the Free Coloured population, the Slave population, and the Portuguese population. Cecile Emmanuel Hill, then the registrar, immediately sent them up to Prime Minister V.C. Bird, and I believe they were later put on display in Antigua's first official archive, in the renovated Court House. Finally, I was able to salvage a fairly large but very incomplete collection of newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s, including the *Magnet* and the *Sun*. In addition, the newspaper collection at Colindale, in London, has an incomplete set of the *Star* for the 1930s. In the courthouse itself were incomplete sets of birth, death, and marriage records and assorted books of wills. Finally, some of the Antigua Syndicate Estates records were found stuck away in a couple of file cabinets at the old sugar factory; they were subsequently removed to the Ministry of Education for safekeeping.

As this description makes clear, there was no archive in Antigua at the time, nor any understanding of the need for one. But since then, under the leadership of Brigette Harris, an archive has been established, including this material and much else collected from around the island, and the staff has worked hard to raise the consciousness of all Antiguan about the need to preserve material from the past. A beautiful modern archive building has recently been completed: Antigua has indeed made enormous progress, in only fifteen years, from the heap of papers that I was faced with on my arrival in 1980.

As with so much West Indian history, the best preserved materials are at the Public Record Office at Kew Gardens in England, and for the period from 1890 onward I rely heavily on Colonial Office records, including both correspondence between the Leeward Island governors (or colonial secretaries) and the Colonial Office people and the internal "minutes" that preceded the drafting of each reply. The correspondence begins to be weeded out—presumably by space-conscious archivists—in about 1925, but until then provides the only available year-by-year view of Antiguan history. Partial in viewpoint and subject matter as it is, this correspondence nevertheless provides the backbone for much of the narrative that follows.

The Colonial Office records proved to be especially—and unexpectedly—important, however, for the insight that the minutes provided into what has been called the "Colonial Office mind" (Bertram 1930). These minutes provide a wealth of material that has for some reason been almost totally neglected by West Indian historians, and it is therefore necessary to say something about them.

Minutes were written by the Colonial Office staff to help the Secretary of State for Colonies draft his correspondence with the local governors and therefore accompanied virtually every piece of correspondence. There was an art to "minuting," and good minutes were not only well-organized and well-researched summaries of the situation (including its history), but were supposed to be "well written" as well: the tone of some of the minutes—contemptuous and

presumably considered witty—shows the extent to which the minute writers considered themselves among friends. Indeed, at times the art of minuting seems to have taken precedence over the art of governing. Each piece of correspondence was minuted by a series of people, and the minutes themselves decreased in length and detail as the minute writer increased in authority—until they finally reached either the Secretary of State for Colonies or someone under him who had the authority to make a decision on the final disposition of the matter at hand. As Sir George Fiddes, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Colonies from 1916 to 1926, has noted, the laboriousness of the system was mitigated by “common sense below, and the instinct of self-preservation above” (Fiddes 1926: 21)—in other words, the system rewarded caution, since there was always the fear that any inaccurate statement or error of judgment would be there to confront the writer at some later date. As Fiddes put it, with true British understatement, this must have had a “steadying effect” on all concerned (Fiddes 1926: 22). In any case, the minutes not only contain valuable summaries of discussions and decisions, but are extraordinarily revealing of Colonial Office attitudes and ways of thinking. (This particularly aspect of the minutes will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.)

I also made extensive use of Leeward Island Blue Books and Colonial Administrative Service Lists, particularly in the chapter on occupational mobility, where I adapted Harrison White’s concept of an opportunity, or vacancy, chain to chart the movement of individuals into occupational slots, as well as the changes in occupations over time (White 1970).<sup>4</sup> White’s work shifts the focus of the mobility study from the individual to the organization, and looks both at how different types or systems of organizations structure mobility differently and at how one individual’s movement can generate a series of subsequent moves. The Leeward Island Blue Books are annual volumes that include a list of every local civil service post, its salary and current occupant, and I used the volumes for the years 1895, 1900, 1905, 1910, 1915, 1919/20, 1925, 1930, 1935, and 1940 to construct a enormous chart that listed all the jobs and job-holders—from the top to the bottom—and then tracked both from 1890 to 1940. This, combined with the Colonial Administrative Service Lists, which include all appointments in the entire Colonial Service, made it possible to see not only what happened to individual job-holders but to see how the jobs themselves changed over time—how they increased or decreased in salary as they were revalued or devalued, how they were combined or split in two, and when and where in the hierarchy new jobs were added. Analyzing the entire local Colonial Service as a huge vacancy chain proved a useful entry point into understanding how the middle class gained access to it and how it changed when they did so.

The final source of archival material was in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. As far as I know, none of the documents in the National Archives that refer to Antigua have been used before, and there may be much more there. But the National Archives are difficult to work in, at least compared to the Public Record Office, and an exhaustive search would have needed more time than I had, so I confined myself to the years surrounding the establishment of the U.S. bases in the early 1940s.

Archival documents were a key source of information. But equally important were the oral interviews, which complemented, enhanced, and filled out the written documents. These

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<sup>4</sup> I thank Joan Vincent for putting me on to Harrison White in the first place. It should be noted that White deals with quite traditional organizations, in his case, church hierarchies.

interviews were conducted primarily in Antigua, but also in St. Kitts, Montserrat, Anguilla, Dominica, London, New York, and Toronto, where members of the families in my sample lived. I talked to some people many times, for many hours; others I talked to only once, but for an extended period; others only briefly. I concentrated on people in my sample families, but talked to many others as well.

Oral sources have obvious, and often stated, drawbacks as sources of "truth," but they are the only way that we can hear from groups whose voices seldom appear in written documents, one of the few ways to learn how people think about their past and about themselves, and an important source of information on attitudes and beliefs, as well as actions. Further, even though oral material may be the result of a self-selected presentation of self, material gained from oral sources can provide badly needed background information so that the archival research is both possible and comprehensible. For instance, while the archives provided me with lists of jurors, it was my informants who told me who these people were, what they did, who they married, and who their children were. I found no membership lists for the cricket clubs or lodges, but old photos buried in the backs of drawers or hanging on walls were invaluable for jogging memories. And while this information was often partial (and what people chose to relate was often carefully chosen), it nevertheless provided an entry: it could be cross-checked (in the archives and with other people); it could be used to trigger other memories, or other people's memories of the same event; and on and on.

The West Indian middle class is well known for its reticence in the face of questioning from strangers, and I would undoubtedly have faced many problems of access if I had been studying contemporary activities and behavior. But I was studying a *past* class, not a present one, and the few remaining members were older people, often widows and widowers, who not only had the time to spend with me but who did not on the whole see me, or my questions, as an intrusion. Only two refused to be interviewed, and the refusal itself proved illuminating: other people were pleased to tell me the family "secret" that they thought these people were trying to hide. It is significant, however, that these were both women: it is the women who are concerned with preserving the family's reputation, and who, as noted above, considered themselves the gatekeepers to the middle class.

While "faulty" memory is clearly one of the problematic aspects of using oral material, the way people remember things, particularly if certain memories or certain *ways* of remembering are repeated from person to person and are therefore not idiosyncratic, gives the researcher access to collective identities—or, more accurately, collective myths of identity. In fact, it is the very unreliability of oral sources about "major" things that make them interesting. Collective myths of identity work at many levels—family, village, island, class, ethnic group, and so on—and there are undoubtedly many such myths that it would be worth exploring, but the one of relevance to me was the myth the middle class had about its own origins. I will return to this in Part 2.

The chapters that follow are structured around the three critical periods in Antigua's history that were described above. After a prologue that introduces the reader to the geography and landscape of Antigua, Part 1, *Sugar and Empire*, focuses on the political economy of sugar, the planter class that controlled it as both developed from colonization until the late 1890s, and the fundamental problems of production and labor control in the nineteenth century. It ends with the economic and constitutional crisis of the mid-1890s, and the arrival of outside capital, which

changed the face of the sugar industry.

Part 2, *The Class Called Coloured*, turns to the nonwhite middle class and charts the emergence and decline of two middle classes, the first with roots in the free colored population and the second, which developed later, with other origins. Part 3, *Arrivance*, describes this second middle class in more detail: its education, its economic, political, and social role, and its relations with other classes, both those below and those above. It ends with the demise of this class, the result of internal and external forces: the rapid rise of a working-class-led trade union movement and the social upheaval caused by the arrival of the American armed forces.