

The Life of Samuel Constantine Burke

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Samuel Constantine Burke, lawyer and politician, was one of the most prominent men in Jamaica during the second half of the nineteenth century.

In this thesis his life is traced from the early days of his English public school education in the 1850s, through to the last years when he became an elected member of the Legislative Council of Jamaica, during the 1890s. Throughout his life he had time enough to think about and express his opinions on some of the most important issues in post-emancipation Jamaican society.

Burke's positions in relation to many issues are examined: the Jamaican Constitution and the question of local participation in government, with particular reference to the abolition of the House of Assembly, in 1866, and the so-called Florence Affair, in 1881; education and its role in Jamaican society; indentured East Indian labour and the so-called labour problems in the second half of the nineteenth century; and the struggle between the Imperial authorities and locals to fill positions in the Jamaican civil service during the Crown Colony system of government.

This study suggests that the liberal values of Samuel Constantine Burke, which exhibited on the surface certain anti-colonial postures, were in their very nature a symptom of an unintended conservatism and individualism --- the early articulation of present day Jamaican middle class values.

The thesis follows a general narrative synthesis, unobtrusively punctuated by analytic interludes and is held together by a focus on the dominant theme of politics.