

ABSTRACT

The History of Petroleum Exploration on Barbados 1865 to 1985

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Literally and figuratively forged in the shadow of the plantation, in spite of over a century of exploration, the history of the Barbadian petroleum industry remained untold. However, this research, which spans the period 1865 to 1985, reveals an industry which contributed much to the political and economic evolution of the island. Through the application of an analytical framework which incorporates plantation-themed theory in the analysis of exploration to 1950, and a nationalist framework to examine the industry from 1950 to 1985, this dissertation examined how each approach shaped the industry's progress. In applying quantitative and qualitative methods to measure the effects of each approach, a base was first provided to give causation to the conflict and stagnation within the industry prior to 1950. It is then argued that an increasingly powerful black political elite, wary of the imperial ideology which permeated the sector, sought control over the petroleum industry for its own nationalist ends.

A national consensus, facilitated by the passage of the Petroleum Act of 1950, resulted in Barbados, much to the chagrin of imperial authorities and the local planter class, becoming one of the first British colonies to nationalize its petroleum rights. Utilizing select tenets of nationalist thought taken from Gellner, Kolotilin, Malthus, and others, this dissertation interprets post-1950 growth within the Barbados petroleum industry as symptomatic of consensus and compromise. Similar to shifts in the global petroleum power dynamic which occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War, the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979 had a profound impact on the local petroleum industry. This dissertation reveals that in response, the state, seeking to build on gains made over the preceding decades, hastened the pace of its physical and institutional petroleum development. It reveals that in spite of production incomparable to its neighbors, the Barbados petroleum industry, faced with global petroleum and economic crises, had by 1985, become essential to the island's economic well-being.

Keywords: Barbados Petroleum; Buoc; Colonialism; Crude Oil; Manjak; Turners Hall; Petroleum Act 1950; Nationalization; Woodbourne oil field