

ABSTRACT

The Role of Education in Barbados: Perspectives on Policy 1909-45

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By the late nineteenth century the Barbadian planter-merchant elite had constructed an educational system geared towards the preservation of their class power.

This study explains the manner in which this educational system was modified by the 1940s, making it appear more capable of offering elements of social justice. This was a response to pressures for change from both endogenous and exogenous forces which affected the evolution of educational policy between 1909 and 1945. The examination of educational ideas, administration and financing of education programmes, reveals a constant challenge to the ruling group's hegemonic imposition of its educational mission. The Colonial Office, parents, civil groups and political organisations within the colony articulated their own agenda for the development of popular education. Modifications resulting from this interaction included free primary education and, for secondary education, slightly expanded second grade facilities and provision for increased access through

scholarships. Organised education itself became an agency of change as such developments contributed to heightened aspirations for popular participation in the island's economic, social and political structure. Black middle class politicians in the House of Assembly envisaged a role for mass education in the process of building a new social order. Increasingly, the elitist approach to educational policy was perceived as a constraint to wider social reform. A signal development took place in 1943 with the appointment of a Director of Education. This supersession of the Education Board overcame some of the previous resistance to the overall superintendence of the system by a single professional head. This effected for educational development what had taken place earlier at a political level - it removed power from the hands of the planter-merchant elite thereby raising hopes for change in educational outlook. Nonetheless, the class-based nature of the society remained, and the new breed of politicians were themselves bound by the desire to pursue middle class advancement.