

ABSTRACT

Since May 1957 the Bahamas Government has been trying to solve what has become known as 'The Haitian Problem': the problem of the continuing, and apparently increasing, illegal entry of Haitians into the Bahamas. Because of its illegal nature very little is known about the migration and this study is an attempt to present a comprehensive picture of the problem.

Because of the lack of data on the migration itself, together with the 'woeful dearth of statistics' and general information for both the Bahamas and Haiti, the search for what would normally be considered background data became a major part of the research. The results of this search are reflected in the fairly substantial sections of general data in Chapter 2: 'Haiti: Area of Origin', Chapter 4: 'The Bahamas: Area of Destination', together with Chapter 5 which tries to trace the history of the migration.

The core of the thesis focuses on the individual migrant. He is the main source of the data on the migration and this data was collected in the course of three surveys conducted during the summers of 1969, 1970 and 1971. This data is analysed and presented in Chapters 3 and 7. Chapter 3 is concerned with the migrant's way of life before he leaves Haiti. It is assumed that since the respondents had already migrated they possessed the characteristics which cause individuals to migrate, and data on the characteristics of the respondents is used to describe the Haitian who is likely to migrate. In addition, despite the fact that no research was carried on in Haiti, an attempt is made to indicate the changes which have taken place in Haiti, in the North-West, as a result of the migration.

Chapter 7 presents a case study of Haitians living in the Bahamas, in the Carmichael area of New Providence. The chapter not only analyses data on the migrant household and the individual, but also attempts to compare the Haitian migrant with the lower-income Bahamian, and to examine the interaction between the respondents and the receiving

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population. It is found that the Carmichael Haitian is isolated from the Bahamian population, and that interaction of the kind which would facilitate assimilation is limited. Moreover, it appears that such a degree of stability has been achieved by the Carmichael community that its members feel no need for such interaction. But the study also indicates that many Haitian children are being born in Carmichael, with legacies of primitive living conditions, a large degree of unemployment or under-employment, and exploitation by employers. In a decade or two these children will be claiming their rights as Bahamian citizens. It is time that the Bahamas Government begins to think about the future of these potential citizens and not condemn to personal destinies of isolation and relative deprivation.