



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

ROUNDTABLE ON COMMUNITY CHANGE

# RACIAL DYNAMICS IN BERMUDA IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

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## Authors & Acknowledgments

This paper is the result of collective learning by staff of the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change and advisors to our work on race in Bermuda. The authors are **Keith Lawrence** and **Raymond Codrington**. The messages have been developed with the valuable input of Anne Kubisch, Patricia Auspos, Jeff Conyers, Aideen Ratteray Pryse, Amanda Outerbridge, and Tamara Gathright-Fritz. The authors wish to thank them as well as the members of the Aspen-Bermuda Partnership on Racial Equity and participants in our Bermuda-based Racial Equity and Society Seminars for their insights and participation. The paper reflects a broad dialogue with many Bermudians who are too numerous to mention who patiently answered our questions and challenged our thinking. The staff of the Roundtable would especially like to acknowledge The Atlantic Philanthropies – Bermuda and Myra Virgil for the financial and intellectual support of this work.

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## Foreword: *Let's talk about race*

This paper is not the beginning of a conversation about race—nor is it the end. It is, quite simply, a snapshot in time.

Race in Bermuda has been an “issue”—unspoken and spoken—for as long as anyone can remember. It stirs all kinds of emotions—many not easy. While racial differences have sparked appalling behavior in the past, today it would be hard to find anyone of any race or ethnicity who does not cringe at the painful accounts of slavery, discrimination and related abuse.

But today we do still have issues around race. We need to talk about them openly and honestly—neither cringing nor blaming. Rather, we could use the knowledge that we've gained, the pain that we've felt, the discomfort that we've inflicted, the issues with which we still grapple and use it as a call to take action.

This is not about making people feel better; this is about making things better. It's about ensuring that racial inequity—where the playing field is grossly uneven simply because of one's race—is truly something of the past. Easy to say, but it's obviously not so easy to define the solution.

On the face of it, Bermuda has appeared more harmonious in its racial relations than many places—certainly when compared with the USA, whose causes we have at times thoughtlessly aligned with simply because of its physical proximity. But still, because an unresolved knot of an issue lurks in our community unaddressed, it emerges unbidden again and again, spiking the public agenda even when the issue up for debate has apparently nothing to do with race. Its discomfiting presence is never in doubt.

In 2008, The Atlantic Philanthropies launched an initiative to assist with untangling the complex network of feelings around race in Bermuda. Royal Commissions had taken place in the past, efforts had been made in some quarters to address inequities, and painful—sometimes angry, sometimes tearful—exchanges had taken place under “The Big Conversation” banner. Now it was time to try something different.

Enter the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, the leading think tank on race relations and a team that had already completed a body of work on systemic and structural consequences of race inequality. Atlantic was one of the few funders prepared to invest in examining those consequences. [It should be noted that funding remains limited for human rights and causes around inequality—and yet the cause of inequality

remains at the forefront of public debate, rearing its head regularly in our everyday dialogue.]

For three years, the Aspen team worked with 86 people on the Aspen Bermuda Racial Equity Project. The individuals were from a combination of socio-economic backgrounds, sectors, ethnicities and experiences. They had in common the potential to influence race relations in Bermuda in diverse segments of the community. They were interested in doing so, and cared enough to put the effort in.

For clarity, this document is not a report of that initiative, but the Aspen Bermuda Racial Equity Project was the genesis of this paper.

“Racial Dynamics in Bermuda in the 21st Century: Progress and Challenges” is a document designed to locate where we are in the racial dialogue. It is also a document that has been somewhat hampered in its efforts by the lack of hard data available. Data gathering has never been strong in Bermuda, as we have heard from many researchers on all aspects of Bermuda life. However, it’s clear that assembling more data about race is going to be needed if we are serious about addressing racial inequities. We need data on race in areas ranging from “stop and search” to home ownership. We also need comparative statistics on educational outcomes. Without this information it will be difficult-to-impossible to move the needle on creating equal outcomes for all Bermudians without regard to race, in an informed manner. We can’t keep relying on anecdotal information. While no one wants to deny the emotion around the topic, we need to address it with undeniable, unarguable facts. That way we will be empowered to launch the kind of mature movement that is needed.

Life is not fair—it never has been and may never be. Life continues to dole out inequalities in wealth, property ownership, business opportunity and education. But we don’t need to continue to make the kind of mistakes—often unintended, based on the false assumption that the path to success is the same for everyone now—that we continue to make about our racial situation in Bermuda.

This paper may be dated 2014 and some of the source material is even older, but we hope you will focus on the essence of the message. You may not agree with some of the things that are said in this paper, but it’s an opportunity for thoughtful reflection. This document provides a place from which broader conversations can emerge. It’s a point of reference, a resource. We’re grateful to all of the people who took part in the Aspen Bermuda Race Equity Project—and to Keith Lawrence and Raymond Codrington for providing us with a status report on race in Bermuda.

Much needs to be done to continue the patchwork of activity to level the playing field of racial equity. We should not rest until we can say, hand on heart, that every child born in Bermuda will receive the education, opportunity and community support they need to progress...whatever their race.

— Board of the Bermuda Community Foundation —

# Preface

For at least a decade now, civic leaders in Bermuda have attempted to draw attention to their nation's persistent racial socioeconomic disparities. Consistent tracking of racial disparities has not been a top priority here, so this has been a challenge. A number of surveys, studies, and statistical analyses over the last several decades have drawn some attention to these issues, but data on race remain quite limited and uneven. Nevertheless, those examinations have largely confirmed this broad concern: *Bermudians of all races do not share the same prospects for socio-economic success, even when they do share many non-racial characteristics in common.* Despite the data limitations, there appears to be enough historical and circumstantial evidence of linkages across race, opportunities and outcomes to justify a closer look at the significance of race in 21st Century Bermuda.

<sup>1</sup> *Bermuda Job Market Employment Brief.* Department of Statistics, Government of Bermuda. August 2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Bermuda Job Market Employment Brief.* August, 2011. Chart 3.4. [www.scribd.com/fullscreen/63578010?access\\_key=key-2kywdzvajg4bt49tzgwt&allow\\_share=true&escape=false&view\\_mode=scroll](http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/63578010?access_key=key-2kywdzvajg4bt49tzgwt&allow_share=true&escape=false&view_mode=scroll)

<sup>3</sup> Source: *Race in Bermuda: A Statistical Perspective.* Profiles of Bermuda. September, 2009

<sup>4</sup> *The 2010 Census of Population & Housing: Final Results,* p.24

<sup>5</sup> November, 2011 CURB presentation by Cordell W. Riley and Lynne Winfield to the Bermuda Human Resources Association; Elizabeth Roberts, "Arrest Rates Higher Than Ever," *The Royal Gazette,* July 23, 2010.

**Racial disparities in employment, educational access, and criminal justice are the areas where we see the widest disparities between Bermudians of different racial groups.** The racial patterning of each of these areas has its particular nuances, but the common outlines appear to be these:

*White Bermudians and non-Bermudians disproportionately earn higher incomes than black Bermudians, despite the latter's predominance in the labor force.*<sup>1</sup>

*The median earnings of skilled and professional non-Bermudian workers surpass those of similar black Bermudians in many job categories.*<sup>2</sup>

*Most white students attend privately funded schools and most black students attend public schools, and this racial sorting coincides with lower achievement levels among black students.*<sup>3</sup>

*White Bermudians are much more likely to be college-educated,<sup>4</sup> which gives them greater access to lucrative business sector jobs.*

*Black youth is at much greater risk of arrest, prosecution and incarceration than white peers.*<sup>5</sup>

Race relations initiatives such as The Big Conversation, government entities like the Commission for Unity & Racial Equality (CURE) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC), along with grassroots efforts such as Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda (CURB) have all worked hard to

promote substantive, good-faith public dialogue exploring these difficult issues. These courageous efforts generated open public debate about a subject that had previously tended to be discussed in hushed tones or behind closed doors. And perhaps not surprisingly, given the complexities of race and strong emotions that the topic can elicit, these public discussions have been sometimes painful and frustrating.

To deepen and better focus this conversation, the Atlantic Philanthropies enlisted the assistance of the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change in 2008. The Atlantic Philanthropies had already been a sponsor of the Roundtable's racial equity leadership development seminars in the US, and the foundation's Bermuda office believed that the Aspen model might also be valuable for civic leadership audiences in Bermuda.

The Aspen Roundtable has been working for almost 15 years with leaders grappling with the intersections of place, race and disadvantage in the US. Its guiding rationale is that the formative role of race in US history continues to influence the structure of opportunities in the present. The cornerstones of the Roundtable's work are a "structural racism" analytical framework that elevates the significance of racially inequitable opportunity structures as barriers to individual and community advancement, and a racial equity "theory of change" for guiding remedial practice. These Roundtable contributions helped the US social policy, human services and community building fields take race into account in ways that made clearer how ordinary citizens might act to transform institutions and systems that shape local opportunity.

**The concept of structural racism, which is explained later in this paper, holds true for all societies historically organized by race, although each one evolves its own racial ideology, institutional arrangements and everyday conventions, discourses, wisdoms and etiquettes.** So, the key to understanding the contemporary racial order in Bermuda is to recognize its distinctive institutional and cultural features here and to tease out how and where race may be driving or reinforcing inequities there.

This paper is informed by three years of close engagement by Aspen Roundtable staff with 86 Bermudian civic leaders, business professionals, youth organizers, nonprofit community-based practitioners, and public officers, who participated in Aspen Institute Leadership Seminars on Racial Equity and Society convened by the Roundtable on Community Change. The seminars were designed to provide participants with language, strategies, tools and an opportunity to develop a work plan for addressing race in their home environment. Between 2008 and 2011, Aspen Roundtable staff came regularly to Bermuda to meet organizational leaders, gather data, and observe everyday life here first-hand. This fruitful collaboration was only possible because of the commitment and generosity of our Bermudian partners, particularly the Atlantic Philanthropies.

**This paper is not a social science report.** Rather, it is a distillation and



analysis of the perspectives and impressions of a subset of Bermuda's civic leadership, gleaned through small group discussions and individual interviews. Inevitably, it also reflects the impressions and biases of authors whose main frame of reference is the US. Where these were available, some local statistics are offered for illustration. The document cites data as it is disaggregated in particular reports with attention to race, work status, and nationality. Quotes are actual comments or mild paraphrases shared during focus groups and seminar discussions over the course of the project, but these are kept anonymous to respect the sources.

This document has three parts besides this **Preface**.

The **Introduction** briefly traces the evolving significance and construction of race in Bermuda's social history, highlighting some important similarities and differences between Bermuda and its Caribbean and North America neighbors in this respect. It suggests that, as in other places with diverse populations and colonial histories, the meaning and significance of racial identity continue to evolve in contradictory ways in Bermuda. Growing racial tolerance and comfort with diversity in Bermudian society since the 1960s runs in parallel with the continuing stigmatization of (mostly young, male) black identity in many important daily contexts.

**Part I** offers an overview of Bermuda's demographic, political, economic and cultural landscape and some of the challenges associated with the intersection of race with salient features of that landscape. It focuses particularly on the dilemmas presented by the racial configuration of wealth, power and privilege, and by the need to expand opportunity while safeguarding Bermuda's special niche in the global economy.

**Part II** considers the practical implications of these observations about the significance of race for Bermuda's equity-minded leaders. It offers an aspirational vision for the society and suggests strategic priorities for a racially equitable, 21st Century Bermuda.

With the caveats mentioned above, this paper aspires only to offer Bermudians more food for thought about the state of race in their society. Hopefully, these reflections will complement ongoing local efforts to spark and sustain constructive dialogue on race, and effective action to address its old and new challenges.

## Introduction

# Race and its Construction in the Bermudian Historical Context

This paper looks critically at Bermuda's contemporary socioeconomic features primarily from the vantage point of race. **The purpose is not to single out this island nation for criticism or to discount its remarkable socioeconomic achievements. Rather, it responds to the interest of some Bermudians in a deeper examination of a topic that they believe strongly continues to be a problem area, yet also holds great potential for further progress.** Their yardstick for measuring such progress is racial equity, which is the complete disconnection of local opportunities and outcomes from racial identity—a situation that many black Bermudians, especially, believe to be far from the current societal reality.

**It goes without saying that no society can be truly assessed through any single lens.** Bermuda's unique characteristics as an international business hub, a high-end tourist destination, a British overseas territory, and a diverse society that blends North American, Caribbean and European influences, add many complexities to life here that call for a variety of analytical perspectives. Each vantage point, however, would describe and explain some features of Bermudian life better than others. Bermuda's racial disparities are quite evident and many have been visible here for generations. So it makes sense to explore these issues with a race-centered analysis, acknowledging the limitations inherent in that approach.

Bermuda's economic development strategies before the 2008 downturn clearly lifted living standards across the board. Political empowerment also paid some dividends for black Bermudians. However, few Bermudians would claim that these advances have brought about racial equity, and most might acknowledge that equity gains made in recent decades have been seriously undermined by the global recession. Public opinions diverge sharply, though, on the present day significance of race itself to the ways in which wealth and opportunity are distributed across this society. In this respect, Bermudians are no different from their nearest neighbors.

**Social scientists largely agree that race has no real biological basis.** But it has concrete social significance because many societies have historically accorded different degrees of power and privilege to members of different racial groups. "Race" refers to the labels assigned to people

based on observable physical traits like skin color, hair texture, and facial features. Since race is an invented concept that has been given meaning and significance by society, it is called a social construction. Social constructions are not facts or proven, but become accepted or seen as common sense because they are repeated, socially accepted and in turn become part of how we see the world, how we treat each other, and how we decide who gets access to what resources. Once begun, this process is ongoing. Thus “race-making” continues in different ways over the lifespan of a society unless it is deliberately interrupted.

**As a result, the “story” of race that becomes most pervasive influences the policies, practices and common sense beliefs that undergird, or “structure,” the political economy and culture.** Among these elements are typically “wisdoms” about the relative merits, tendencies and capacities of different identity groups. The term “structural racism” is often used as shorthand for the internalization of race in institutions and systems that appear to be guided only by rational and universal principles. **Structural racism** can be defined as

*a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to...allow privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time.*<sup>6</sup>

The core of the structural idea is that when race becomes embedded in this way, individual racial animus and conscious intent to discriminate become less significant because institutions and systems can generate inequities just following standard operating procedures.

Considering Bermuda’s racial history, concern about the scope and depth of structural racism today is entirely warranted. And looking back from the present to Bermuda’s early colonial period, structural racism appears to have generated two distinct phases of racial construction.

### **Slavery, Indentureship and the Initial Construction of Race through the 1970s**

The social construction of race began with Bermuda’s European settlement and colonization in the 17th Century, and continued up to the 1970s. Race-based slavery and indentureship were central institutions up to the early 19th Century, and Bermuda evolved a distinct racial hierarchy anchored in white privilege over that period. Later on, indentureship—the terms and conditions of which were not so far removed from those of slavery<sup>7</sup>—and post-slavery social sorting along crisscrossing lines of color, ethnicity and national origin, preserved many features of that hierarchy.

It should be noted that the first 300 years of race construction in Bermuda applied not only to Europeans and people of African descent, but also to Portuguese migrants from the Azores and the Cape Verde islands, who came to perform agricultural labor and occupy other lowly labor force niches. The early and subsequent construction of “Portuguese-ness” has

<sup>6</sup> Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. 2004, “Structural Racism and Community Building,” Keith Lawrence, Stacey Sutton, Anne Kubisch, Gretchen Susi and Karen Fulbright-Anderson, authors. Washington DC, The Aspen Institute.

<sup>7</sup> See *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Written by Herself* (1831), London: published by F. Westley and A. H. Davis.

been a much-debated topic, but it is clear that this identity was forged in contrast to the dominant white standard, and to the black African “other” at the opposite end of the spectrum. Portuguese immigrants experienced racial discrimination in the forms of restrictive quotas, occupational segregation, and exclusion from certain social clubs. But in contrast to blacks, their concentration and success in agriculture also led to their positive characterization as industrious.

This does not discount the ways in which Portuguese people have experienced discrimination in Bermuda’s past, and may still do. It only illustrates that in a racially ordered society, some groups may occupy a status somewhere “in between” blackness and whiteness. Ongoing debate as to whether the Portuguese label in Bermuda refers mainly to race, culture, or national ancestry, further illustrates this ambiguity. Black Bermudians, on the other hand, have not had the material or symbolic benefit of such racial ambiguity. Where it matters most, their representation as the racial “other” has been pretty fixed.

***Civil Rights, Class, Immigration and the Second Wave of Racial Construction***

A second phase in the social construction of race arguably began when civil rights activists boycotted segregated theatres and broke the color bar two generations ago, ending official white privilege and racial discrimination in Bermuda. The formal, legal architecture of racial hierarchy was dismantled in 1968 with the adoption of the Bermuda Constitution and by the end of the 1970s with universal suffrage. Since then, this nation has had black Premiers, first as members of the United Bermuda Party—a conservative, white-supported political party—and later as members of the black-associated Progressive Labour Party, and of the One Bermuda Alliance.

Globalization played an indirect but important role in shaping this ongoing “second wave” of racial construction. Black political empowerment was complemented by Bermuda’s accelerated economic growth in the 1990s as it became an appealing jurisdiction for thousands of international companies. This attractiveness to financial services corporations in the US and Europe also brought significant numbers of highly-skilled foreign workers, many of them people of color, to fill jobs in this growing sector. It also brought smaller numbers of unskilled migrants to provide low-wage services in this and the hospitality sector.

Like the Portuguese, foreign-born workers of color coming to Bermuda in recent times have also been “racialized.” With some groups this racialization has taken on positive connotations. For example, skilled workers from Asia and elsewhere, have largely have been able to reap the benefits of what some social scientists call “symbolic whiteness”<sup>8</sup> In other words, their highly-respected professional and technical skills have conferred many, if not all of the social advantages whites enjoy. On the other hand, low-skilled workers of color from places such as Jamaica, Sri Lanka and Malayasia who work in the hospitality sector, remain very much on the margins of Bermudian society and culture.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of this see Jim Sidanius and Felecia Pratto (2001), *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 16–17

The lines between race and class have become much less clear in this evolving second racial construction period. The fluidity of racial identity has also become more apparent in everyday Bermudian life. Economic growth prior to the current recession and black control of the public sector boosted and diversified Bermuda's elite and middle classes. At the same time, the increasing legitimization of cultural diversity and tolerance as social values in the post-civil rights period gave a sense that race no longer mattered so much in everyday affairs. As the class lines blur, Bermuda's racial order appears to be settling into a new equilibrium of mutual tolerance and suspicion. For the most part, this tension around race, nationality and work status has remained mostly beneath the surface. Intermittently, however, it bubbles up in racially-tinged political discourse, usually related to the size, role and efficacy of government, or to education, or to crime. The sometimes heated and unpleasant tones of these exchanges remind Bermudians that theirs is not yet the post-racial, color-blind society many want to imagine. Race still matters here even though its outlines are murkier and its linkages to socioeconomic outcomes are less clear cut than in the past.

### ***Implications for the Future***

Knowing that the pernicious social construction of race will not end spontaneously, some civic-minded Bermudians worry that racial inequities might not be receiving sufficient attention. To them, sufficient attention means pushing past anecdotal evidence and conventional wisdoms about why some individuals and racial groups succeed and others do not. It also means pointing out how racialization continues, and how in this contemporary period, institutional and cultural factors—past and present—still allow certain racial disparities and discontents to persist.

These leaders want to utilize a structural framework in which the concepts of race and racism are not reduced exclusively to individual behaviors and interpersonal relationships. Rather, race and racism are regarded by them as inseparable from how interconnected institutions and systems—global and domestic—work on a daily basis. Like other Bermudians, they know who still owns the lion's share of this nation's wealth, whose children remain most likely to attend private and public schools, who gets the most lucrative corporate jobs, and so on. So these leaders reject assertions that the racial patterning of these outcomes is merely coincidental and unintentional, simply because overt racism is now unfashionable.

Those who want to lead with race in social change discussions find it a hard sell because of Bermuda's standard of living and general tranquility. Despite the global recession, Bermuda still boasts a gross national income per capita that is close to double that of the US<sup>9</sup> The average Bermudian does much better than most individuals around the world. Unemployment hovers around eight percent,<sup>10</sup> and although this level is significant, the dramatic contrasts between wealth and poverty seen across the Americas and Caribbean are conspicuously absent here. Moreover, Bermuda's inequalities do not track with race as obviously as in places where encounters with destitute, homeless or mentally ill people of color are commonplace.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank:  
<http://data.worldbank.org/country/bermuda>

<sup>10</sup> *National Economic Report of Bermuda, 2012*. Government of Bermuda, Ministry of Finance, February, 2011.

In those places, it is also easier to see how globalization has compounded social problems marked by racial inequity<sup>11</sup>—the loss of working-class jobs, home ownership and wealth disparities, crime and punishment, upward mobility, and so on.

There are other reasons why deep racial introspection may seem unnecessary, futile and even counterproductive here. One is possibly a belief that it makes no sense to focus on race while “everyone is being hurt” by economic recession. Along with this concern about “unnecessary divisiveness” may be fear that delving into race could be too painful: it might (a) resurrect past grievances that just cannot be resolved and (b) unfairly criticize white Bermudians who do embrace equity values. It just seems more prudent to focus on “how far we have come” rather than “how far we still have to go”, and to trust what seems to be the progressive arc of Bermudian history.

“Excessive” racial introspection also seems unnecessary to those who believe that Bermuda’s race problem and its necessary “fixes” are pretty obvious. In Bermuda, as in the US, there are many who prefer to reduce race to a fixation on the problems of blacks, particularly those seemingly peculiar to young black males. Given their typical over-representation in unflattering educational, workforce, and criminal justice statistics, zeroing in on this demographic just seems like common sense. Indeed, there already appears to be something of a consensus in Bermuda in this regard around school and workforce policy reform. Important studies and reports such as the 2010 “Mincy Report,”<sup>12</sup> the 2008 “Commission for Unity and Racial Equality (CURE) Report,”<sup>13</sup> the 2007 “Hopkins Report,”<sup>14</sup> and the 2006 Bermuda Government “Life-Skills Report”<sup>15</sup> have all drawn a lot of attention to young black males.

There is no question that the situation of young black men deserves special attention. Nevertheless, interventions that concentrate on them alone are likely to be insufficient. Racial disparities are consequences of white privilege baked into the hardware and software of the political economy and culture. **Bermuda’s black youth ought to be viewed more as “canaries in the racial equity coal mine”—that is, as a group whose problems point to deeper society-wide imperfections.** Indeed, the circumstances of Bermuda’s black youth are telltale signs that the unhealthy social construction of race is continuing rather than fading away on its own.

If Bermudians find this plausible, it would be useful to reexamine the political economy and culture in a way that takes the racial past, its linkages to the present, and the ways in which global dynamics are deepening domestic racial inequities, more fully into account.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of this, see Andrew L. Barlow (2003) *Between Fear & Hope: Globalization and Race in the United States*, New York: Rowan & Littlefield.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald B. Mincy, Monique Jethwani-Keyser, and Eva Haldane (2010). *A Study of Employment, Earnings, and Educational Gaps between Young Black Bermudian Males and their Same-Age Peers*, Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well-Being, Columbia University School of Social Work.

<sup>13</sup> Hodgson, E. (2008), *The experience of racism in Bermuda and in its wider context*, Commission for Unity and Racial Equality (CURE), Ministry of Culture and Social Rehabilitation, Government of Bermuda. Hamilton: Government of Bermuda.

<sup>14</sup> Hopkins, D., Matthews, L., Matthews, P., Olajide, F., Smith, P., & Woods-Smith, R. (2007), *Review of Public Education in Bermuda: Commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Recreation*, Government of Bermuda, London: Institute of Education, University of London.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Statistics (2006), *Literacy in Bermuda: A study of adult literacy and life-skills in Bermuda*, Hamilton: Government of Bermuda.

# Part 1: The Big Picture

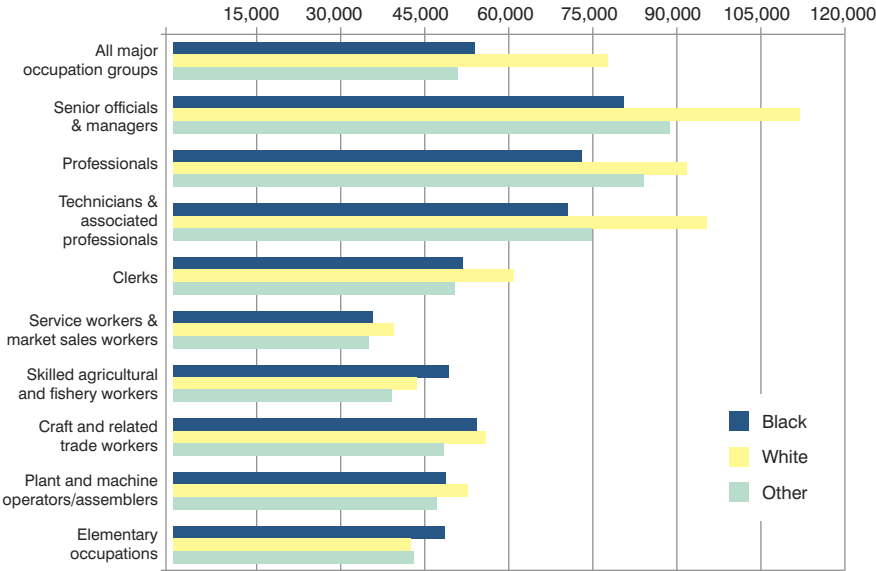
## Race, Power, Wealth and Opportunity in Bermuda Today

*“Whites are scared. Their biggest fear is fear of loss and having to give something up. Some whites have threatened that they may leave the island because of the black-led government and black majority.”*

**From a racial standpoint, one prominent feature of Bermuda’s political economy today seems to be black political rule and non-black economic dominance.** Although now governed by leaders who reflect its 54 percent black majority, Bermuda’s white (31 percent) and non-black<sup>16</sup> inhabitants (15 percent) dominate the economy. This is reflected in the skewed racial profiles of almost all major occupations, as Chart 1 shows.

<sup>16</sup> “Non-black” is used here as a shorthand for all other Bermudians who are neither identifiably white nor African-descended. See the Bermuda 2010 Housing and Population Census for all demographic statistics, [www.gov-subportal.com/images/Cabinet\\_Office/Dept\\_of\\_Statistics/Docs/Census/Census2010/Census%20Report%202010-Final%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.gov-subportal.com/images/Cabinet_Office/Dept_of_Statistics/Docs/Census/Census2010/Census%20Report%202010-Final%20(2).pdf)

<sup>17</sup> *Bermuda Job Market Employment Brief*, August, 2011, Table 3.3



*Chart 1: Filled Jobs by Median Gross Annual Income, Major Occupation Group & Race, for Establishments with Ten or more Employees, 2010<sup>17</sup>*

According to the 2010 Census of Housing and Population, about 65 percent of white workers held senior, managerial or professional positions compared to just 40 percent of black workers.<sup>18</sup>

Racial wealth data are largely unavailable here,<sup>19</sup> but income disparities, homeownership patterns and other signs suggest that **Bermuda has evolved a racial power and wealth asymmetry similar to societies where racial minorities initially ruled over racial majorities.** Civil rights partially flipped the political-economic script here as it did in many other places in the latter half of the 20th Century. “One-person, one-vote” enabled the racial majority to take control of government. More black Bermudians were able to own businesses and occupy leadership positions in companies as partners and CEOs, although still in relatively small numbers. Still, a majority of black Bermudians (58 percent) currently work in lower paying occupations—clerical, service, trades, and other blue-collar occupations—while only 34 percent of white Bermudians do.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, blacks may have been harder hit by the 2008 global downturn, although that may not come across in broad unemployment rates.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Disparities in Earnings and Bermudian Representation in the Labor Force***

Of the 40,000 individuals holding jobs in Bermuda, slightly more than one-half (53 percent) are black, about one-third (32 percent) are white, and a smaller fraction (15 percent) are of mixed and other races. This roughly mirrors the racial make-up of the island. But incomes track closely with race regardless of occupation. Blacks in most lower-paying occupations earn less, on average, than whites and other races working in those sectors.<sup>22 23</sup>

Looking across the economy, these features seem consistent: racial divergence in incomes, along with white Bermudians and non-Bermudians disproportionately earning higher incomes than blacks. Whites earn about 134 percent of the median wage; blacks earn about 93 percent, and other groups, 87 percent.<sup>24</sup> These disparities have been evident even in professional fields where blacks predominate. For instance, in 2007, more than 80 percent of the jobs in public administration were held by blacks<sup>25</sup> yet they did not have the lion’s share of higher-paying positions, and earned about \$10,000 less than whites on average.<sup>26</sup> Earnings disparities like these seemed to lead many black Bermudians to feel that the employment arena is not a meritocracy. One prominent black professional offered this observation:

*“Statistics about the workforce show that whites with no formal qualifications at all earn \$25,000 more than blacks with a college degree. Many people don’t accept this statistic as an indicator of racial inequality. Instead they claim that the whites might have had more experience or that the black person’s degree might be from an inferior institution. This is an example of why it is so hard to have good dialogue about race in Bermuda today.”*

<sup>18</sup> 2010 Census of Population and Housing: Final Results, p.30

<sup>19</sup> See “It’s Time to Quantify Our Wealth Gap Metric,” *The Royal Gazette*, December 1, 2012

<sup>20</sup> 2010 Census of Population and Housing: Final Results, p.30.

<sup>21</sup> See the *National Economic Report of Bermuda, 2010*. For a detailed job market analysis, see the August, 2011 Employment Brief, *The Bermuda Job Market*, published by the Government of Bermuda’s Department of Statistics.

<sup>22</sup> See *Bermuda Job Market Employment Brief*, Department of Statistics, Government of Bermuda, Chart 3.3, August, 2011, p.7

<sup>23</sup> *National Economic Report of Bermuda, 2007*, Table 13.

<sup>24</sup> August 2011 *Bermuda Job Market Employment Brief*.

<sup>25</sup> *National Economic Report of Bermuda, 2007*, p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32



Almost a third of all jobs in Bermuda are held by “non-Bermudians.” Officially, this population includes spouses of Bermudians, permanent resident certificate holders, and other guest workers. Most of these workers earn more than the median gross annual income,<sup>27</sup> again surpassing the earnings of black Bermudian workers in all job categories.<sup>28</sup> Non-Bermudians are more likely than black Bermudians to live in “well-to-do” households, and less likely to live in poverty.<sup>29</sup> This is largely attributable to the significant presence of expatriates and spouses of Bermudians in lucrative occupational areas.

**There are strong suspicions among black Bermudians that race still influences judgments about talent, qualifications, industriousness and other judgments about where different people “belong” in the private sector.** While the limited racial data make this assessment hard to confirm, it is hard to refute the view of many blacks that neither electoral empowerment nor a rising economic tide have brought truly equal opportunity here.

<sup>27</sup> \$57,915 in 2010

<sup>28</sup> *Bermuda Job Market Employment Brief*, August, 2011, Table 1

<sup>29</sup> Source: *Race in Bermuda: A Statistical Perspective*. Profiles of Bermuda, September, 2009

<sup>30</sup> The 2000 Bermuda Census defined poverty and near-poverty as incomes below \$35,000 and \$45,000, respectively.

<sup>31</sup> Includes households that are of other races, e.g., Portuguese, Asian, mixed, etc.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Economic position of households chart.

<sup>33</sup> The UN considers the inability to buy an essential “basket” of foods, clothing, housing, transportation, health-care, child care, and education “absolute poverty.” See *Low Income Thresholds: A Study in Bermuda Households in Need*, The Government of Bermuda Cabinet Office, Department of Statistics, March, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> See notes 12–14.

### **Poverty**

It is difficult to define and measure Bermudian poverty, but when the cost of living is considered, close to 30 percent of households here seem to live in or near that condition.<sup>30</sup> For black and white<sup>31</sup> households, the combined poverty and near-poverty rates are about 32 and 26 percent, respectively.<sup>32</sup> Approximately 50 percent of black female-headed households with children fall below the poverty line, and about 11 to 13 percent of households do not earn enough to purchase sufficient basic goods and services.<sup>33</sup>

### **Disparities in School Achievement**

Public education in Bermuda is a stark portrait in black and white. Schools here were desegregated in 1965, but today over 90 percent black students attend government-supported public schools, and 90 percent of white students attend privately-funded schools.

A succession of recent reports has drawn attention to the racial sorting in public and private schools and the lower achievement levels of black students. The well-publicized “Blueprint for Education” and “Hopkins Report”<sup>34</sup> noted that unlike private school students, most public school students did not acquire qualifications such as the International Baccalaureate Certificate and Advanced Level General Certificates of Education that prepare them for higher education because they were not available in these schools. These qualifications were not being made available to public school students and consequently, these students would have to complete an additional year of schooling in another institution to gain access to, for example, a university in the UK.

Bermuda’s public secondary schools are widely perceived to be below standard. Graduation rates for eligible public high school seniors, that is, low graduation rates in an inferior system hover around 50 percent which is comparable to the worst urban school districts in the US. Many parents

believe that the route to upward mobility starts with a private school education (approx. \$16,000/year), so half of all students attend private schools. There has been a 24 percent decline in public school enrollment and a 14 percent increase in private school enrollment since 2000.<sup>35</sup>

Private school connections are leveraged for jobs, business and home loans, and club memberships, so their racial profiles are important signals. The comparatively small number of black students in each grade suggests that only a few will have the entree to the opportunity networks of their peers later in life. Yet today’s de facto school segregation is not prominent on the nation’s education reform agenda.<sup>36</sup>

**Higher Education**

In the aggregate, significantly higher numbers of black Bermudians hold post-secondary qualifications. Almost 4,000 blacks hold college degrees and another 5,000 possess technical, vocational, or associational certificates; for white Bermudians, the totals are about 3,000 and 2,000 respectively.<sup>37</sup> But more than half of all white non-Bermudians hold at least a college degree, so when expatriate whites are taken into account, black Bermudian college graduates are significantly outnumbered by whites on the island.

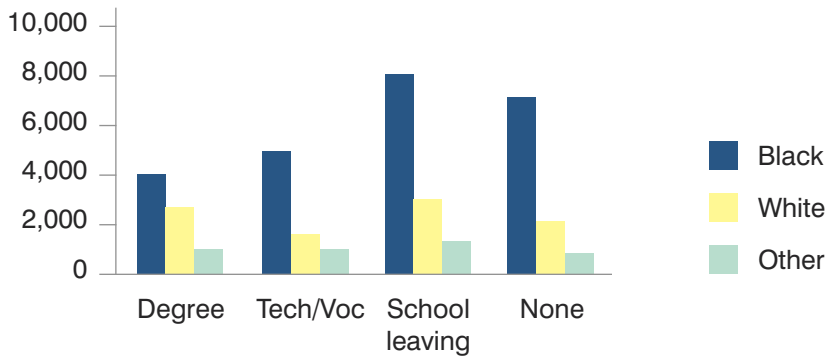


Chart 2: Bermudian-born population, by race, academic status 2010<sup>38</sup>

The large aggregate number of black college graduates obscures the fact that white Bermudians are much more likely (29 percent) than blacks (16 percent) to be college educated. Blacks are more likely (20 percent) to whites’ 16 percent) to have technical training of some kind. But this must be weighed against the reality that highly skilled non-Bermudians recruited to work here are college educated and well-paid. A college degree is critical for access to most good business sector jobs.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Note that there was a 21 percent increase in private middle school enrollment and a 35 percent increase in private senior school enrollment over the last decade.

<sup>36</sup> See *Roundtable: Education Bermuda*, by Duncan Hall, March 16, 2012 at [TheBermudian.com](http://TheBermudian.com). [www.thebermudian.com/people/760-roundtable-educating-bermuda](http://www.thebermudian.com/people/760-roundtable-educating-bermuda).

<sup>37</sup> *The 2010 Census of Population & Housing, Final Results*, p. 24

<sup>38</sup> “School Leaving” refers to a high-school certificate. Source: *The 2010 Census of Population & Housing: Final Results*. Department of Statistics, Government of Bermuda, December 2011, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> See *Bermuda Police Service Quarterly Crime Statistics* (Q4 2012 and Year End 2012) at [www.police.bm/content/crime-statistics](http://www.police.bm/content/crime-statistics)

<sup>40</sup> [Bernews.com](http://Bernews.com), July 21, 2011, [www.bernews.com/2011/07/police-stop-search-almost-6000-people/](http://www.bernews.com/2011/07/police-stop-search-almost-6000-people/).

<sup>41</sup> *Bermuda Police Service Quarterly Crime Statistics* (Q4 2012 and Year End 2012), p. 19

### **The Criminal Justice Picture**

Although on per capita murder rate, Bermuda ranks higher than New York and London, compared to most other countries, absolute levels of crime and punishment in Bermuda are unremarkable\*.<sup>39</sup> The prison population is around 400 and murders have rarely reached double-digits annually. But local perspective is what matters and anxiety about drugs and gun crime has grown significantly since the early 2000s. Bermuda was shocked by an upsurge in firearms offences in that decade, particularly when three murders were committed in December of 2009 alone.

<sup>42</sup> See "Arrest rates higher than ever," by Elizabeth Roberts, *The Royal Gazette*, July 23, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Highlighted by internationally renowned scholar Michelle Alexander at CURB Racial Justice conference in Bermuda, March 31, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> *Bermuda Police Service Quarterly Crime Statistics*, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> See "Falling Crime Rate Heartens Police Chief," by Jonathan Bell, *The Royal Gazette*, Jan. 31, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> It costs the Department of Corrections approximately \$85,000 annually to incarcerate each person currently in prison. The total 2011/12 Corrections budget was \$27.4 million, according to research done by the Coalition for the Protection of Children for the May, 2011 Afflare Films production, *Poverty in Paradise: The Price We Pay*.

<sup>47</sup> See [www.bermuda.org.uk/prison.htm](http://www.bermuda.org.uk/prison.htm)

<sup>48</sup> By one report, Bermuda's 2013 prison population of 417 ranked the nation 14th on a per capita incarceration scale: [www.bernews.com/2013/08/prison-population-rates-bermuda-ranks-14th/](http://www.bernews.com/2013/08/prison-population-rates-bermuda-ranks-14th/)

\* Bermuda's small population results in even one incident distorting percentage figures.

Gang activity and violence associated with drugs sparked vigorous law-and-order responses. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act of 2006 (PACE) legitimized community-focused policing methods and traffic and as a result drug enforcement activity had peaked by the end of the last decade. Numbers of primarily black males stopped and searched by police skyrocketed as they targeted areas with large numbers of black youth and high degrees of gang activity for surveillance.<sup>40</sup> Police Crime Statistics reported 17,429 stops-and-searches in 2011, a striking number in a society of just 68,000.<sup>41</sup> Black males under the age of 36 made up the overwhelming majority of those arrests.<sup>42</sup>

Black youth continue to be at greater risk not only of arrest, prosecution and incarceration, but also of confinement to the island of Bermuda itself. US immigration maintains a "Stop List" that permanently blocks individuals convicted of certain crimes from traveling to the US, and lower level black drug offenders caught up in the stop-and-search net are vastly over-represented.

**Since 2012, these law enforcement responses have drawn significant critical scrutiny and public outcry because of their uneven racial impacts,<sup>43</sup> and there has since been a dramatic turnaround in both police practices and crime.** There was a 44 percent drop in police stops and searches in 2013—to a level more than 500 percent lower than that of 2011.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, this coincided with a steady decline in rates of personal crime, property crime and crimes against the community. Anxiety about public safety remains significant, but Police Commissioner Michael DeSilva has claimed that his community partnerships and modified policing approaches have been largely vindicated.<sup>45</sup>

Despite these positive developments, criminal justice patterns and outcomes in Bermuda continue to be skewed racially. Roughly 98 per cent of prison inmates are black, which translates into an incarceration rate of approximately 148 out of every 10,000 black males.<sup>46</sup> When foreign prisoners are excluded, this level drops somewhat, but not enough to change Bermuda's statistical profile as one of the world's most punitive societies.<sup>47 48</sup>

Some observers connect this characteristic with failures in Bermuda's education and employment systems. Others prefer to point to popular culture and family dysfunction. But reasons aside, black Bermudians remain overinvolved with their criminal justice institutions.

**Cumulative Significance of Disparities in These Sectors**

Persistent racial disparities in employment, education and criminal justice should concern Bermudians for at least two related reasons. Outcomes in these areas can reinforce each other negatively, and they can feed into the human tendency to equate outward success and failure with inner worth. While Bermudians might readily see how educational inadequacies or the stigma of police arrest could diminish a young black individual’s future job prospects, they might miss the psychological impact of these outcomes on the society as a whole. These familiar outcomes may reinforce how race—particularly male blackness—continues to be subconsciously perceived, processed and valued. They can help to keep stereotypical images and perceptions of race alive even as Bermuda moves forward on race relations in other ways.

One reflection of this might be seen in the long-running local debate about the limited availability of technical training in Bermuda.<sup>49</sup> Some Bermudians view technical schools as the appropriate solution to the problems associated with black young people. This line of thinking assumes that black youth underperform in or drop out of traditional public schools because they are less talented or motivated academically, and so need more opportunities to learn skills related to working “with their hands.” As one commentator noted, the loss of technical schools “*has cost us 1,000 young males sitting on the walls...it’s ridiculous to think that all blacks should become doctors or bankers. Why can’t they be mechanics and plumbers?*”

Besides reinforcing the current norm of occupational segregation among white and black youth, there is more than an undercurrent of lower academic expectations for black youth in statements like these, making it hard to ignore suspicions about the depth of public commitments to comprehensive school reform. Moreover, the not-so-subtle message that black youth receive about their academic inferiority may itself be enough to lower their aspirations and performance in the classroom.<sup>50</sup>

Although more black Bermudians (28 percent) currently lack academic qualifications of any kind, the proportion of unqualified whites is almost as large (21 percent).<sup>51</sup> It appears that *all* Bermudians who might be more technically inclined need more technical training opportunities—be they scholarships to overseas schools or the re-establishment of local institutes. The unavailability of such opportunities prevents *all* Bermudians from fully developing technical talents. Similarly, the inadequacies of public schools deny all youth with academic potential, black and white, equal opportunities for upward mobility.

As already noted, the apparent devaluation of blacks’ intellectual capabilities seems to permeate the adult employment sector as well. Advocates of workforce equity legislation feel that black educational attainment and skill levels are systematically discounted particularly at the managerial levels of the business sector, and do not accept claims that Bermudians are simply unqualified for certain jobs. For support, they point to studies that

<sup>49</sup> The Bermuda College Act of 1974 resulted in the merger of the Bermuda Technical Institute, Bermuda Hotel and Catering College, and the Academic Sixth Form Centre.

<sup>50</sup> For more on the connection between school performance and social stereotypes see Steele C. M. and Aronson J., “Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1995.

<sup>51</sup> *The 2010 Census of Population & Housing: Final Results*, Department of Statistics, Government of Bermuda, December 2011, pp. 22–25

challenge the stereotype of Bermudian blacks as unqualified.<sup>52</sup>

**The larger point offered here is that racial education, employment and criminal justice disparities may be more relevant to the “second wave” construction of race in contemporary Bermuda than many realize.** A continued over-association of poorer school outcomes, lower job status, and higher prison rates with black identity can preserve old stereotypes even as diversity and tolerance gain greater traction. Chronic disparities, in other words, can help to “remake” race. So rather than disappearing—as Bermuda’s growing black middle-class might signal to many—the old racial order may be really evolving into something more complex. The obvious challenge for equity reformers is reducing substantive racial disparities in these critical sectors. Less obvious, but equally urgent, may be understanding and grappling with the collective, social psychological effects of those disparities.

### ***Civility, Conventional Wisdoms and Popular Culture***

The tensions created by black rule and continuing white privilege appear to foster resentments among black Bermudians and anxieties among concerned whites. There is no doubt that civic-minded Bermudians still perceive race to be an elephant—albeit a smaller one than before—in their nation’s living room. But cultural factors may be adding to difficulties in addressing race here in ways that might not be fully appreciated.

Bermudian life has developed a civility that centuries of small-island familiarity can breed. **How do individuals whose families might have enjoyed generations of privilege and those at whose expense they prospered talk honestly and deeply about race today?** How do you have this conversation without appearing divisive when almost everyone now consciously values color-blindness and diversity? Added to this is the difficulty of tempering strong convictions about personal responsibility—the notion that individuals can choose the paths they want in life—with awareness that the advantages and disadvantages of race can overwhelm individual merit.

The “other Bermuda” appears to find these dilemmas particularly frustrating after years of high profile race reports and initiatives.<sup>53</sup> The fragile black middle class do not really resent the society’s wealth dichotomy. But some of its members appear to be tired of the reluctance of too many better-off Bermudians, white and black, to acknowledge the limited upward mobility prospects of their deserving black countrymen. This comment by a black Bermudian suggests that the frustration is not aimed at white elites alone:

*“There is something about the psyche of the black person: when they get in power, they start to act white.”*

Besides these cultural challenges, there are those posed by conventional wisdoms that are also racially inflected. Bermuda’s special history, geography and economy contribute to an enviable standard of living and a sense, among many, that it is exceptional. It is likely that many who, in their

<sup>52</sup> Cordell Riley, a member of the CURB Advocacy Working Group, said testing for an internationally led 2003 OECD survey showed that blacks and whites in Bermuda were on a par in terms of literacy.

<sup>53</sup> Lord Pitt of Hampstead *et al.*, *Report of the High Commission into the 1977 Disturbances*, 1978; Dorothy K. Newman, *Bermuda’s Stride towards the Twenty-First Century*, Bermuda Statistical Department, Ministry of Finance, November 1994; Carol M. Swain & Associates, *A Common Destiny: Black, White and Portuguese in the Bermuda Workforce*, 1995; Bermuda Race Relations Initiative, *The Big Conversation: Final Report*, November 2007.

hearts, recognize that some fundamental changes may be needed may also think that “we’re already doing a lot of things right,” and that it might be foolhardy to delve too deeply into a contentious issue like race.

Overlapping notions of personal responsibility and meritocracy are also core values. With these values in mind, critics of race discourses generally cite examples of successful black individuals including politicians, business leaders and athletes, and point to the virtual disappearance of overt racism nowadays.<sup>54</sup>

However, they might consider that these individualistic values may not be as racially neutral as they may seem once historical inequities are factored in. Historically accumulated white privileges and non-white disadvantages locate Bermudians in opportunity spaces that are also defined, in varying degrees, by racial and ethnic identity. Thus a self-reliant, responsible white Bermudian may have advantages that a similar black Bermudian may not. **History has placed greater limits on the self-reliance payoff for blacks because of their long exclusion from opportunity networks connected to lucrative sectors.**

### **Social and Racial Exclusion**

Finally, **many Bermudians are deeply aware of social distances on their small island.** Sharing a living space of just twenty-one square miles, it is difficult to imagine how Bermudians’ daily lives could not overlap completely in most respects. Yet black, white, Portuguese-descended and immigrant groups manage to live very separate lives outside the artificial intimacies of the nine-to-five work schedule. As one Bermudian remarked: *“Two of the most segregated times in Bermuda are after work and on Sundays.”*

Where Bermudians live, socialize, worship and go to school, along with whom they most incarcerate, says a great deal about the true state of race relations in a place where almost no one who was born there is a stranger. Indeed, many blacks and whites on this island share the same last name.<sup>55</sup> While housing, recreational and educational patterns alone do not tell the entire story of “community” in Bermuda, it might still be instructive to look at these important areas a bit more closely.

Residential segregation by race is not as pronounced here as in the US or Caribbean. In many cases, Bermudians of all racial and ethnic backgrounds live in relatively close proximity to each other. However, it is hard not to notice that in places like Tucker’s Town, Fairylands, Shaw Park and Point Shares, race and class distinctions are carefully preserved. These residential areas, historically associated with wealth, boast some of the most exclusive and desirable locations in Bermuda.

The story some blacks tell is that it was difficult for them to buy property as recently as 20 years ago—that the banks were not lending mortgages to blacks,<sup>56</sup> and that they had to buy or borrow from their own families to do so. They also contend that although not officially sanctioned by law today, informal housing codes still maintain these areas as “small areas of

<sup>54</sup> Larry Burchall, “As Black Men We Must Take Responsibility For Our Actions,” *Bermuda Sun*, July 6, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Dill, Outerbridge, Trott, and Tucker.

<sup>56</sup> This is how black Bermudians characterize their inability to get bank mortgages in the past. Others may say that they could not satisfy the banks’ lending criteria.

exclusivity.” As a result, they say that they still feel uncomfortable just visiting these white neighborhoods.<sup>57</sup> These types of narratives reinforce the perception that social and residential boundaries opportunities are and have been historically closed to Black Bermudians.

Associational memberships, too, appear to mostly mirror class and race patterns. Race often defines the activities that people are involved in, and thus, where and with whom they mostly socialize. Many white Bermudians have never visited a black person’s house. Social and sports clubs’ memberships still appear racially skewed. National cultural celebrations such as Cup Match, the Non-Mariners Race Day and Bermuda Day do offer opportunities for broader social interaction, but these few festive occasions may be insufficient for promoting deeper social cohesion.

Such are the subtleties of racial sorting and exclusion that they may seem normal and go unnoticed by most. White Bermudians probably remain unaware of the lingering sense of exclusion that some of their black counterparts may still feel. Paradoxically, Bermuda’s enviable asset of racial civility may itself be something of a barrier to continuing progress on racial equity.

<sup>57</sup> The story of the displacement of black residents from Tucker’s Town is well documented. In addition, our own discussions revealed an aversion to visiting areas such as Point Shares on the part of some black Bermudians. One senior black business official who participated in one of this project’s seminars stated that he had never been invited to a white person’s house.

## Part 2: Getting it Right

# Challenges of Advancing Racial Equity in 21st Century Bermuda

**Bermuda does not seem to have far to travel to complete the job of achieving racial equity and inclusion.** It is possible to see a pathway there, although finishing the journey will not be easy because of structural barriers associated with race. In other words, even if more Bermudians of all colors joined the same churches and clubs, hung out together on weekends, gathered more often for public dialogue, or stopped hanging out “on the wall,” those behaviors alone would not necessarily change how certain roles, niches and cultural beliefs within the society connect with racial identity. Given what we know about Bermuda’s racial legacies, distinctive socio-cultural characteristics and disparities, what should Bermudians do differently to “move the needle” on race?

**There are no pat answers to this question, but one approach that seems plausible is cultivation of a broader base of civic leadership willing to give race the kind of attention it deserves.** This would be an expanded universe of people in Bermuda who recognize that the society’s longer-term cohesion and prosperity will depend as much on a better racial dynamic as on business growth. These leaders would have to be committed to a sustained social justice agenda that is comprehensive: one that acknowledges the interconnectivity of Bermuda’s opportunity sectors and systems, and the degree to which these determine the everyday life prospects of ordinary individuals. They would need to be intentional about breaking the historical connection between race and privilege on this island. Left alone, this connection will continue to legitimize many of the large and small decisions and the actions on so many levels that preserve racial disparities. It seems unlikely that without intentional work to promote a new sense of what *all* Bermudians share and are entitled to—progress toward racial equity may remain stalled.

Many thoughtful civic leaders here have already started down this road. They have already concluded that cross-racial trust-building through constructive dialogue must be an important starting point. Organizations such as Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda (CURB), the Diversity Institute of Bermuda (DIB), and the quangos, the Human Rights Commission and Commission for Unity and Racial Equality (CURE) led the way in finding a language about race that resonates broadly, and in initiating inclusive and



frank public dialogues about racial issues.\* **They understand that painful and provocative though these may be, the conversations need to happen, and that they should push beyond recitations of disparities and grievances to explore how race actually operates from day to day at multiple levels.** They also understand that equity-minded Bermudians need a clear vision of an alternative racial future to guide their actions.

### ***Getting the Way Race Operates Right***

Bringing the less visible dimensions of race to the fore is essential, but doing so in a manner that everyone can easily grasp is always a challenge. So leaders must find ways to help audiences understand race and racism as features of the background institutions, systems and transactions that structure everyday life. **Communicating effectively that racism means more than personal biases and intentional acts of discrimination is crucial** because this makes it possible for everyone to see that they are connected to social processes and outcomes that they may not necessarily favor or even perceive.

Few Bermudians today probably harbor racist beliefs or commit racist acts consciously. So it is neither practical nor constructive to dwell on accountability for injustices committed by distant ancestors. **But it is vital that white Bermudians acknowledge that they benefit today from a legacy of racial inequity.** In other words, everyone here needs to acknowledge that they are part of a system in which racial privilege has been preserved in many features of the socioeconomic and cultural fabric.

Shifting the popular common sense about race away from merely conscious individual biases and behaviors will be difficult because the logic that must replace this can seem contradictory. **Basically, Bermudians would have to recognize that it is entirely possible to have “racism without racists.”**<sup>58</sup> Friends and neighbors could consciously oppose racial injustices and inequities, and consciously support diversity, and still the former could thrive. The interplay of unconscious biases with a consensus around institutional arrangements that seem universal and fair can mask deep racial inequities. Conscious personal intent to oppress or exclude a particular group is no longer so necessary for sustaining structural racism. **Race could seem quite irrelevant in the course of daily life, as many Bermudians might attest. And yet it may still influence institutions, systems and cultural norms in ways that arbitrarily confer either privilege or disadvantage.**

<sup>58</sup> Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, 2003, *Racism without Racists: Color Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, Boulder, CO, Rowan and Littlefield.

\* Some of these organisations have reduced programme operations (CURB) or merged (CURE into HRC) and DIB into the Diversity Initiatives Fund held at the Bermuda Community Foundation.

One particular challenge that social justice leaders might face is **reconciling structural causes of inequity with seemingly compelling evidence of “self-sabotage” by young black men**, especially. The greater propensity of black males to join gangs, drop out of school, break traffic laws, and so on, seems to discredit all but the individually- and culturally-focused explanations and remedies that many Bermudians believe are simply common sense. To be credible to a national audience, social justice leaders need to explain plausibly where this common sense may be missing the mark as well as how a structural analysis helps put into context and

explain the root causes and related outcomes of these disparities.

Their responses can be grounded in what social scientists tell us about the reliance of race inequity systems on the unwitting “cooperation” of those most disadvantaged by them.<sup>59</sup> Rather than avoid or deny challenges that overemphasize personal responsibility, leaders must find ways to explain the poor choices that some people seem to make that do not, in any way, validate beliefs about inborn racial differences. Disparities in white and black contact with the criminal justice system, for instance, tell us nothing about the racial distribution of moral character, intelligence, propensity for crime or any other individual trait. All that these differences reflect is profound asymmetry in the *situations* or *contexts* that racial groups inhabit in societies like Bermuda in the first place. **If any group of people are disproportionately raised in dysfunctional households, surveilled by police, and channeled into inferior schools, their attitudes and behaviors will reflect the influences and options available to them.** Those who are not subject to such constraints are much more likely to avoid the life-long consequences of immaturity, family upheaval and other social hazards.

Racial equity proponents often struggle with this aspect of the structural conversation. As a result, discussions are easily reduced to the level of cultural deficits, parenting deficiencies, and individual pathologies. While these are not irrelevant, getting it right on race also means understanding and articulating how individuals in a racially structured society are shaped by those structures.

***Getting the Vision Right: New Connections for a Genuinely Color-blind Bermudian Future***

The debate about how broad-based social changes develop and become most effective continues, but some of their key features are well known. Each instance is a unique product of local historical context, civic agency and the timely mobilization of political and other resources by movement leaders. Successful social reforms also typically have a widely-shared guiding vision. Considering all this, race reformers in Bermuda might realistically assess their potential for making change on the scale they desire in light of the resources and capacities at their disposal. But just as importantly, they might need to present an image of progress that resonates broadly with potential allies in every important sector.

**They might consider promoting a collective vision that depicts a new Bermuda in which all citizens see that it is possible to reconcile bottom-line economic objectives with an unswerving commitment to racial equity.** Bermudians of good will may also yearn for a genuinely color-blind society. This can be part of the vision, provided everyone understands that “color-blindness” does not mean putting on blinders to race and avoidance of racial disparities. Nor does it mean accepting white norms in every consequential area of life as a natural default. The aspiration toward a color-blind society must be grounded in a desire for genuine inclusion, as well as the empathy and connectedness across communities

<sup>59</sup> See Sidanius, J, Pratto F., 2001.

that allow individuals to be judged on their merits in their everyday encounters with systems and institutions that shape opportunity.

To realize such aspirations in Bermuda, leaders may need to forge new connections on multiple levels:

- *around a new, more strategic framing of race and its significance here today*
- *across civic organizations that may view their missions too narrowly*
- *across public and private sector institutions that may not recognize their potential for collaboration around equity goals*
- *across old social and cultural divides that preserve racial hierarchy.*

### **Strategic Frame**

Wrestling meaningfully with Bermuda's racial outcome patterns requires a perspective spacious enough to account for the legacies of history, as well as for today's individual black successes and political empowerment. If civic leaders settle only for a narrower lens they will not be able to design strategies for ending chronic inequities that are socially caused. What may be worse, failure to address the corrosive effects of continuing racial inequities could undermine the substantive gains that some black Bermudians have already made.

But this is only part of the strategic frame around which leaders may need to build consensus. **The interactions of Bermuda's public secondary schools, job market and justice priorities seem to be particularly relevant to local disparities.** Other sectors obviously matter too, but it might be helpful to get broad agreement that these are a worthwhile collective starting point. These areas tend to be viewed separately by reformers, but such fragmented treatment can miss their shared dynamics and governance cultures. It might be better for reformers to adopt more of a "systems" outlook that recognizes cross-sector overlaps and feedback loops. Obviously, this is hard to do, but it may be necessary.

### **Civic Organizations**

It makes little sense for civic organizations committed to supporting fragile families and communities to continue working in relative isolation. **Racial inequities thrive on civic fragmentation.** If better connected, the collective voice and resources of civic organizations might make a significant difference in reframing policies and practices related to opportunity. But this coordination is unlikely to happen unless these organizations can see that they seek a common objective: a Bermuda that takes better care of its poor, vulnerable and less successful citizens.

### **Private Values, the Public Interest**

The conventional wisdom about social change in Bermuda holds that much hinges on the demonstration of a plausible connection between private sector interests and a broader public interest in racial equity. White and black Bermudians alike are quick to note that (a) business elites must be on board if there is to be any progress on race, and (b) business leaders

will not sign on to a racial equity agenda unless they see clearly how this could serve their bottom line.

**Private sector interests are vitally important to the viability of Bermuda's economy. While these cannot be held sacrosanct—given what we know about the historical role private property has played in sustaining white privilege—every effort must be made to reconcile those interests with the public's broader equity priorities.** Equity leaders can neither afford to ignore the private sector nor allow their priorities to take precedence over the public good. Indeed, demonstrating the dependence of business on social stability might be pivotal in getting more business leaders to sign on to a racial equity program. They know that their utter dependence on overseas business investors, social stability and attractiveness as a vacation destination require the preservation of a favorable national image. An atmosphere of festering black discontent over unchanging disparity gaps does not bode well for that image in the future.

Bridging the private/public divide is likely to be tough, **since there may be an implicit assumption that the upper echelons of international business need to be white spaces.** In other words, there could be the unspoken belief that, as evidence of professionalism, international business clients expect a corporate imagery and culture that fits their racial norms. None of this has anything to do with racism, business leaders might say, simply the realities of a highly competitive, customer-driven environment and insufficient numbers of qualified Bermudians who are disproportionately black. Of course, neither explanation is satisfactory. So, **business pragmatists must be able to see the hidden costs of having Bermuda's racial majority feel permanently shut out of the best jobs on offer here.**

Another important public/private divide to be acknowledged relates to who wields power in Bermuda, and how much they wield. At this juncture, white Bermudians and expats derive sufficient power from control of most of the island's businesses to effectively counter the power black Bermudians now derive from the ballot box. The underrepresentation of blacks in corporate leadership positions thus has hidden political consequences. These are the positions that provide entrée to networks that wield influence at the highest levels.

Black political rule does translate into considerable black empowerment, but if arrangements in the economic sphere effectively preserve white privilege, that empowerment loses a lot of material significance for black Bermudians.

Racial equity reformers may need to talk about the racial asymmetry in high-level influence because of the role that business interests play in governance. (Governance is the decision-making, negotiating and bargaining that determines policies and practices in every sector of society.) The distinctive patterns and priorities established in each area, and the levels of public resources allocated, always reflect the levels of engage-

ment (or non-participation) of influential public, business and civic actors. This engagement takes place in formal *and* informal settings, such as receptions, private social gatherings, and membership clubs. Access, then, is the special currency of governance. Memberships and connections that wealth brings provide a great deal of this currency to those who are not elected to public office or recognized as civic leaders.

Discussions about how business interests might address racial equity concerns could focus on the roles they play in education, employment and criminal justice governance. How do they help to shape public and institutional policies and practices in these crucial areas? Again, it might be useful to zero in on these sectors early on since they might be doing the most to continually preserve vestiges of the old race construct in Bermuda, even as the society moves forward in other ways.

### **Social and Cultural Connections**

Finally, prospects for a successful racial equity transformation may improve when Bermudians move to make connections with people beyond their familiar social and cultural circles which oftentimes means interacting with people of other races. These divides sustain racial exclusion and a psychology that still operates quietly to feed unconscious biases that connect racial identity with negative stereotypes in many minds. It seems very unlikely, for instance, that comprehensive school reform would not have been completed if Bermuda's white-dominated private schools graduated only 51 percent of students.

Racial exclusion deepens the dilemmas that talking honestly about race often poses on both sides. There are often real fears that excessive candor or poorly chosen words might put professional and personal relationships at risk. Many blacks fear being fired, refused a job or promotion for raising discrimination issues. They know too that legal remedies for such retaliatory actions can be very protracted, difficult to win, and costly—since it can cost a great deal to bring a case to court. Similarly, whites who recognize the barriers blacks face and share their desire for equity may shy away from cross-racial discussions for fear of being misunderstood, falling out of favor within their own circles, or both.\*

### **Close physical proximity has not been a racial panacea in Bermuda.**

As already noted, many well-meaning black and white Bermudians confess to never having visited a home in a racial community outside their own. For some, the reason is not having a sufficiently close friend of the other race. For others, it is simply the absence of an invitation or inclination to offer one themselves. The true social distances separating Bermuda's main racial identity groups are masked by a familiarity in which tourists appear to be the only strangers. But if this is true, and if indeed trust across racial groups is a prerequisite for dispelling myths about black Bermudians, this "social distance" issue may need prominence of the change agenda as well.

Wherever reformers may choose to begin, the structural changes they

\* In the US experience this tends to vary along generational lines. Generally speaking, younger people of all races tend to be less uncomfortable talking about race and other social identities. But older people in the workforce still typically avoid race conversations in mixed company.

want to initiate will likely take longer to bear fruit because of the need to build a reservoir of mutual trust across Bermuda's largest racial groups. Older black Bermudians may be publicly uncomplaining, but many carry psychological scars associated with family histories on this island. At the same time, whites who believe that they've worked hard for their success may harbor unease about the material implications of racial equity transformation—that is, the potential loss of some wealth and privilege. Layered onto this may be the ambivalence of younger black Bermudians who may feel race acutely in their daily encounters with employers and police, and who may lack their grandparents' and parents' sense of how far Bermuda has already come on race. Indeed, cross-racial and cross-generational trust-building may require the greatest investments of time and patience. Reviving the Big Conversation on race that started here in 2006 could be a good step in this direction.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Closing Thoughts***

As racial equity leaders in Bermuda take up this difficult challenge, they might keep Bermuda's distinctive political and cultural features in mind. Convictions about individualism and personal responsibility have strong appeal here. Compounding these beliefs are racial asymmetries in political and economic power, overt and subtle patterns of social exclusion that keep the racial order intact, and a strong consensus around the inviolability of business interests. Filtered through a racial equity prism, each feature raises important questions about the breadth and depth of public will to support a racial equity agenda. Yet there may not be a better time for bold, innovative action. Bermuda's special advantages as a nation and courageous civic voices for social justice position it well to eventually "get it right" on racial equity in the 21st Century.

<sup>60</sup> See "Continue the Big Conversation—social scientist," by Tim Smith in *The Royal Gazette*, July 5, 2011.

# Annex 1

## Racial Equity Seminar Participants

### JULY 2008

Sydney Gibbons

Cummings Zuill

Chae Powell

Aideen Ratteray Pryse

Cordell W. Riley

Carlton Simmons

### OCTOBER 2009

Najib Chentouf

Sara Clifford

Claudette Fleming

Jose A. Lora

Suzanne Mayall

Clare Mello

Venous Memari

Mark Nash

Ottiwell A. Simmons

Gavin Smith

Joseph Smith

William Trott

Gil Tucker

Tom Vesey

Myra Virgil

Paget Wharton

Keamon Woolaston

## Racial Equity Seminar Participants *Continued*

**JUNE 2010**

**Deborah Jackson**

**Wayne M. Caines**

**Lisa Lowery**

**Vicki Coelho**

**Shaun Morris**

**Jeffrey G. Conyers**

**Donna L. Pearman**

**William C. DeSilva, Jr.**

**Craig Simmons**

**Kelly Francis**

**Gerald Simons**

**Tamara Gathright Fritz**

**Rochelle Simons**

**Diane Gordon**

**Gil Tucker**

**Charles Gosling**

**Tom Vesey**

**Dwayne Hunt**

**Myra Virgil**



ANNEXES

**OCTOBER 2010**

**Jennifer Burland Adams**

**Melvyn Bassett**

**Charles Brown**

**Janita Burke**

**Kevin Comeau**

**Edith G. Conyers**

**Jeffery G. Conyers**

**Peter David Darling**

**Tim Darrell**

**Wayne Dill**

**Diane Gordon**

**Charles Gosling**

**Darnell Harvey**

**Deborah Jackson**

**Quinell Kumalae**

**Stanley Lee Chairman**

**Pamela Barit Nolan**

**Amanda Outerbridge**

**Aideen Ratteray Pryse**

**Ralph E. Richardson**

**Cordell W. Riley**

**Victor Ruberry**

**Doug Soares**

**Tom Vesey**

**Richard Winchell**

**Lynne Winfield**

## Annex 2

# The Aspen-Bermuda Partnership on Racial Equity

**WHAT IS IT?:** The Aspen-Bermuda Partnership on Racial Equity comprises a diverse group of Bermudians with a shared vision of a racially equitable, inclusive and integrated Bermuda. The Partnership's belief is that racial inequities weaken our civic infrastructure and undermine our economic promise.

**WHAT WILL IT DO?:** To extinguish structural racism in Bermuda the Partnership will work towards equity in employment, education and the criminal justice system, and anywhere else where an unequal access to power and leverage results in an uneven playing field and unequal outcomes. The Partnership will examine the causes of continuing racial inequity, with a view to identifying opportunities to develop and implement constructive solutions to race-related problems.

**HOW WILL IT DO IT?:** It is early days, but so far we have a number of working groups reviewing policy issues that enable racially biased outcomes, and thinking about strategies to address these disparities. The Partnership also aims to assist in enabling a healthy and well-informed public discussion about race in Bermuda.

**HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?:** We do not have a defined timetable. The quest for racial equity will be ongoing; it's a substantial task that requires shifts in behavior and mindset over time. It's also an essential task and the Partnership members are committed to it for the long haul.

**WHO EXACTLY IS INVOLVED?:** The group comprises the 65 alumni of the Aspen Institute's 2010 Seminars on Racial Equity and Society. The alumni are probably best described as a multi-racial cross-section of community leaders—individuals who through their work in the public, private and non-profit sectors have gained credibility and respect for their integrity and honesty. In order for this initiative to attract broad community support, the Partnership must engender trust.

**HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER RACE INITIATIVES?** We are trying to identify the root causes of racism, marginalization and discrimination by looking behind the disparities in our society to see what can most effectively be tackled. Specifically, there are three unusual features of this project.

1. The group is concerned about structural and systemic racial inequities, and takes a long-term view that aims to dismantle all the interacting causes of racial inequity.
2. We are linked with the Aspen Institute, a US think tank that takes an analytical and dispassionate approach to solving the problems of racial injustice.
3. The group is an unusual assortment of Bermudian society, all of whom advocate racial justice.

**Updated: October 25, 2011**

## Annex 3

# The Aspen-Bermuda Project Summary

On October 2009, June 2010, and October 2010 three groups of leaders from the non-profit sector, business community and government in Bermuda were brought together for a Racial Equity and Society Seminar.\*

The Aspen Institute convened the groups at the Aspen Meadows in Aspen, Colorado and Wye River Conference Center in Maryland.

Participants met to identify the causes of racial inequities in Bermuda and develop strategies for promoting greater racial equity in the country.

Through interactive dialogue, watching videos, and exercises, participants discussed several mechanisms through which racial inequities are reproduced. These include:

- Attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices that blacks and whites still have about each other
- Policies and practices in key sectors that affect opportunities in Bermudian life, especially education, employment and criminal justice
- Social segregation that operates in various Bermudian institutions, beginning with the schools and continuing in many social, religious, recreational, and civic institutions.

The Roundtable will work collaboratively with Bermudians to address disparities in Bermuda by identifying strategies and engaging individuals and organizations that have the capacity to sustain efforts around racial equity.

The goal of the project is to better understand what constitutes structural racism while developing ways to dismantle this to make progress on promoting racial equity in Bermuda.

\* In July 2008, two designates from Bermuda also joined a US-based leadership seminar on Racial Equality and Youth Development hosted by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, in Aspen, Colorado.



# THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

For more information on the Aspen – Bermuda  
Partnership on Racial Equity, contact the  
Bermuda Community Foundation at [info@bcf.bm](mailto:info@bcf.bm)



## BERMUDA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

