

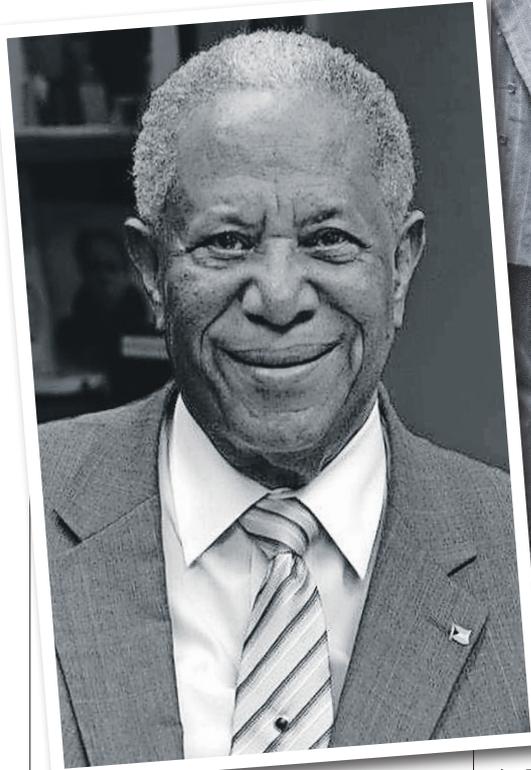
literary lives SIR ORVILLE TURNQUEST

What manner of man is this?

Sir Orville Turnquest's new biography of the Duke of Windsor is unique and a must-read for all Bahamians, Sir Christopher Ondaatje says

What is extraordinary about the biography 'What Manner of Man Is This?' is that it was written by a black Bahamian who was born in Grant's Town on July 19, 1929, who earned his way from "Over the Hill" - the poor section of Nassau - to become the fifth Governor General of an independent Bahamas where he served from January 3, 1994, until his retirement on November 13, 2001.

The author, therefore, is well qualified to write about the Duke of Windsor who, after only ten months as King of England, gave up his throne to

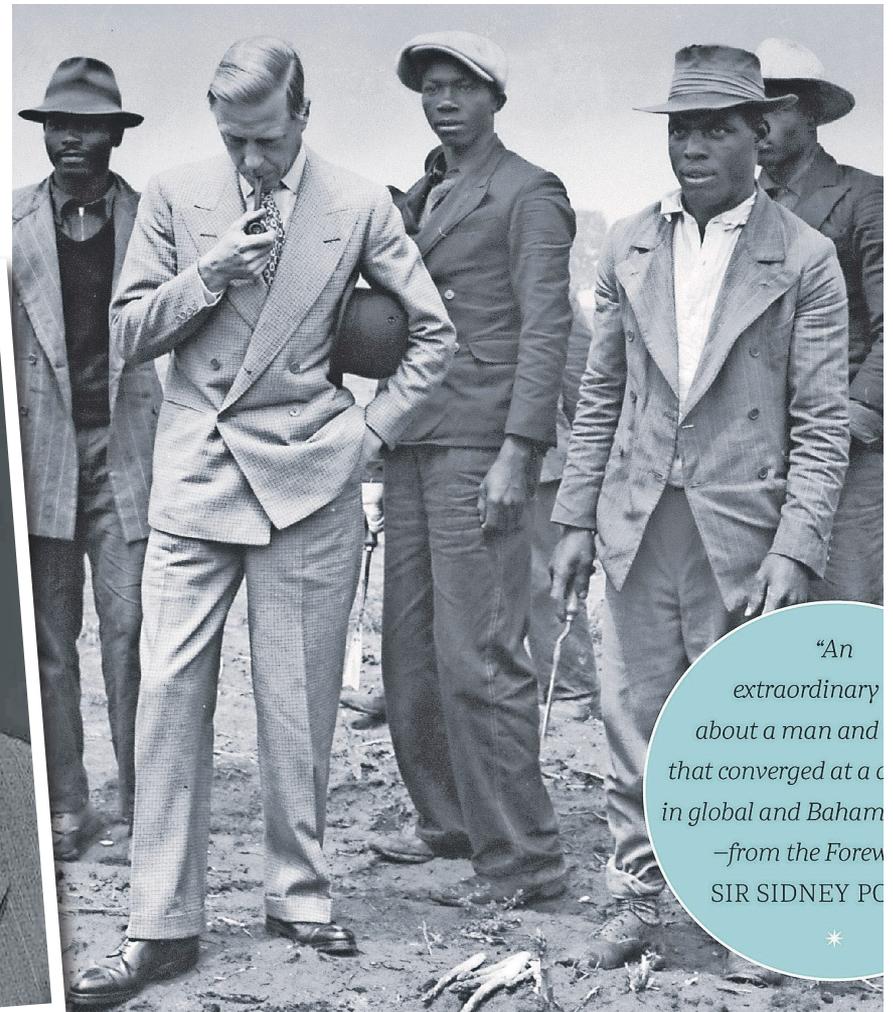


Former Governor General Sir Orville Turnquest

marry a twice-divorced commoner, and then reluctantly accepted a position as Governor of the Bahamas. This is a book that everyone in the Bahamas should read.

The Bahamas was then a colony, and for the Duke it meant banishment and a geographical position far away from European and German influence. After renouncing the throne as King Edward VIII of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions (the only other job he had ever had) on December 10, 1936, he assumed his new title Duke of Windsor and was free to marry his mistress, the American Mrs Wallis Simpson.

It may have been the love story of the age but it was also the scandal of the century. The Duke arrived in the Bahamas in August, 1940, and was sworn in as the 55th Governor, and the fact that such a famous man was posted



"An extraordinary book about a man and a woman that converged at a critical moment in global and Bahamian history."
—from the Foreword by SIR SIDNEY POPE

A detail of the cover of Sir Orville Turnquest's new biography of the Duke of Windsor reveals the sharply dressed, diffident Duke in stark contrast to the Bahamians around him.

"His personal attitude of superiority, together with his constant display of class prejudice and obvious ingrained bigotry against labourers and blacks, exposed his true nature as a racist."

to a small, remote island colony of the British Empire during such a dramatic period in world history led the United States and Britain to place a special focus on the Bahamas. Why Sir Orville Turnquest is so qualified to write about this man and this period is that he eventually became the 70th in the chain of succession to the important Governor's job.

While all of the other books about the Duke and Duchess of Windsor have sought to praise the couple's positive involvement in Bahamian life during the difficult years of World War II, without exception they have all been written by non-Bahamians, telling their stories from secondary sources. Sir Orville, on the other hand, has written

his biography from the point of view of a black Bahamian who was only 11 when the Duke of Windsor assumed his position. He was privy to a multitude of happenings during the Duke's five-year term as Governor.

Sir Orville also had the privilege of serving not only as a Bahamian Cabinet minister, and later as Governor General, but has interacted with members of the Royal Family at both Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. His book examines in detail the lives, the record, and the actions of the Duke and Duchess in their roles as Governor and First Lady during one of the most turbulent periods in Bahamas and world history. With the advantage of firsthand perspective Sir Orville credits the Duke as doing much to improve the economic base of the country - but he exposes areas of the Duke's governance that were abject failures.

He also exposes him as a racially biased individual who fell far short of implementing any social change, preferring to mix with the white oligarchic minority which comprised only 15 per cent of the Bahamian population, and to accept strictly enforced discriminatory practices.

In Sir Sidney Poitier's exceptional introduction to Sir Orville Turnquest's biography he says:

"What makes this book stand out from the many books about the Duke and Duchess of Windsor is that Sir Orville describes the hard life that the majority of black Bahamians experienced during those years - the racist culture, the lack of good education, the subsistence-level jobs if they were lucky enough to have one, the dire living conditions and the lack of full voting rights and adequate representation to address these very issues - he speaks knowledgeably and with the authenticity that only someone from that time and place can provide. When he takes the former King to task for doing little to nothing to address the racial disparity that existed at that time, he speaks passionately from the deep well of personal experience that only a young black boy from 'Over the Hill' can feel ... And when he analyses the few accomplishments and many failures of the Duke of Windsor's tenure in the office of Governor of the Bahamas he speaks authoritatively from the experience of someone who has hands-on knowledge of the manner of the office that both of these men held."

Banishment

'What Manner of Man Is This?' is an unvarnished account of a crucial stage

"The Duke is exposed as a racially biased individual who fell far short of implementing any social change, preferring to mix with the white oligarchic minority which comprised only 15 per cent of the Bahamian population, and to accept strictly enforced discriminatory practices."

of Bahamian history. One of its goals is to intertwine the unique history and geography of the islands with the history and legacy of one man. It succeeds in doing this, and sometimes makes startling revelations. Even before arriving to take up his post in 1940, the Duke wrote to his London solicitor George Allen describing his feelings about "taking up this wretched appointment" and saying that he viewed "the prospect of an indefinite period of exile on those islands with profound gloom and despondency". He further wrote to Winston Churchill saying that it "leaves no doubt in my mind but that my banishment to these islands was as good a war time expedience for a hopeless and insoluble situation as could be found".

All the arrangements for the official welcome of the new Governor included



The Duke and Duchess of Windsor in Bermuda in 1940, en route to the Bahamas where the Duke was to take up the post of Governor.



The Duke and Duchess were unhappy with the living conditions in Government House and undertook an expensive renovation. "Small, hideous, hardly any furniture - all unsatisfactory", the Duchess had written in a letter before arriving in the Bahamas

only white officials, their wives and prominent individuals in the white community. Nevertheless, at a ceremony at Clifford Park, the black community turned out in their thousands to welcome the new Royal Governor. They made it a festive occasion and the Duke then assiduously set about his task of governance and to preside over the regular meetings of the Executive Council. The Duchess started her own duties as First Lady - including the task of renovating Government House on Mount Fitzwilliam which the Duke and Duchess found to be completely unbecoming as their living quarters. "I have awful reports of the house - small, hideous, hardly any furniture - all unsatisfactory", the Duchess had written in a letter before arriving.

The Windsors therefore, letting

their feelings be known, moved out of Government House after only one week, and in one of his first meetings the Duke proposed that the building be renovated at some considerable expense while the Royal couple first moved into a palatial residence on Prospect Ridge owned by the British millionaire Frederick Sigrist, and later that summer to Westbourne - the country mansion owned by Sir Harry Oakes - until the refurbishments were completed. A new three-storey west wing was added to Government House with four guest suites to accommodate his personal staff. Expensive air-conditioning units were installed in each of the major rooms including the west wing. It was not a good beginning.

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Damning insight

The next year the Duke, in a confidential letter written on July 26, 1941, to the Right Honourable Walter Moyne - the Secretary of State for the Colonies - wrote that "the Membership of the Council I have inherited in the Bahamas leaves much to be desired". Nevertheless, on August 21, 1940, the Duke used his power to convince his Executive Council to make an interest-free war loan to Britain of £250,000 (equivalent to US\$1 million) from the colony's surplus funds. Hardly an arms-length transaction. He also wrote in the same letter "any suggestion of the appointment of a coloured member to Executive Council would not only be unwelcome but meet with the utmost hostility". This is a candid portrayal of the Duke of Windsor's assessment of the Bahamian local leadership of that period. A damning insight.

In Sir Orville's incisive and historical biography he describes the collapse of the Bahamian tourist industry in the months following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour in December, 1941, resulting in serious unemployment as a major problem. However the British and American governments had agreed to build a number of military bases in the West Indies, one being New Providence which developed two sites: Main Field (later named Oakes Field) and another Satellite Field near the western end of the island. Twenty-five hundred Bahamian labourers were hired and placed under the direction of two white Bahamians. Other Bahamians flocked to New Providence hoping to get higher paid work from these two foreign projects.

But this did not happen. Bahamian unskilled workers were being paid one-third of their American counterparts and the semi-skilled workers one-tenth of what the same-skilled American worker was making. The disquiet eventually erupted into dissatisfaction which escalated into the Burma Road Riot on June 1, 1942. The Duke of Windsor was at the time attending a meeting in New York and the acting governor Heape was unable to stop the police shooting into the crowd. One worker was killed, and others seriously wounded.

On arriving back in Nassau the Duke extended the existing curfew and the following morning met with black leaders who urged him to act quickly and to publicly rebuke oppression, inequality and poverty. To the Duke's credit



Sir Orville Turnquest's son, Tommy, watches over his father at a book signing at Logos bookstore, Harbour Bay Shopping Plaza. 'What Manner of Man Is This' has been breaking records for sales since its release on December 5.

he made an immediate and successful national broadcast urging calm, and followed it with a negotiated wage increase with a free midday meal. He also established a commission of inquiry to review the causes and the effects of the riots.

In 1942 the total population of the Bahamas was 70,000. In an enormously important meeting following the riot Dr C R Walker, together with a delegation of three members of the Bahamas Federation of Labour, in an audience with the Governor and his Executive Council, went a long way to abating the antipathy between white and black Bahamians, and to improve the disproportionate systems relating to suffrage, land ownership, job opportunities, fair wages and education. These were all serious Bahamian problems.

'The Contract'

In September, three months after the violent riot and a devastating Bay Street fire, the Duchess of Windsor wrote to her Aunt Bessie Merryman of Baltimore, Maryland, saying "The negroes here are busy complaining, now that the base is nearing completion and

some of them are being laid off". Her observations were correct. Unemployment was growing at an alarming rate because of the recent completion of the two airfields. The Duke therefore negotiated an agreement with Washington for the recruitment of up to 5,000 Bahamians to be employed as farm labourers in the United States.

It was probably one of the most outstanding achievements of his governorship.

The Bahamians needed jobs, and the United States needed labourers. The details of what became known as "The Contract" were read into the records of the Bahamian Parliament on March 31, 1943. In the end a total of 5,762 Bahamians were employed in the United States - one-twelfth of the entire population. And although the farm labour programme had a major economic impact on the Bahamas, increasing the economic worth of the vast majority of the population, it had a negative effect on the Out Islands, as many of the men remained in the United States or Nassau, leaving women and children behind.

Harry Oakes

During the early morning of Thursday, July 8, 1943, the bludgeoned and burned body of Sir Harry Oakes was discovered in Westbourne, his palatial house in Nassau, by his close friend Harold Christie. It was, at the time, the world's most celebrated murder and is still unsolved.

The Duke, ignoring local advice, arranged for the transfer of the Commissioner of Police in the Bahamas to Trinidad, and hired two Miami Police officers, Captain E W Melchen and Captain James O Barker, to come to Nassau and head the investigation. It was a ridiculously inept decision which led to the arrest and imprisonment of Count Alfred de Marigny, Oakes' son-in-law, who had secretly married his teenaged daughter, and with whom he was not on good terms.

De Marigny was charged with the murder and in a sensational trial which began on October 14, 1943, and ended the following month, was acquitted. De Marigny's acquittal was a severe embarrassment for the Governor, and the murder of Sir Harry will always

PHOTO: AARON DAVIS

Forgotten facts Paul C Aranha

be remembered as the single most infamous unsolved crime of the century. It marred the Windsor years in the Bahamas.

Dislike and disgust

In the final two chapters of his admirable book, Sir Orville has written on the legacy of the Duke of Windsor and his wife. Although the Duchess involved herself in the British Red Cross, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, volunteered for activities at a US military canteen and established two infant-welfare clinics in Nassau, she never liked the Bahamas or its people.

More than that, her correspondence to her favourite aunt, Mrs Bessie Merryman, provides an insight to her feelings of dislike and even disgust. "Naturally we loathe the job, but it was the only way out of a difficult situation - as we did not want to return to England except under our conditions."

The Duke, too, expressed equally negative sentiments about his appointment and tenure in the Bahamas, but nevertheless set about establishing positive roles for themselves in the hope of getting another appointment as an Ambassador to the United States, or even Governor General of Canada.

Despite his special qualifications and exceptional influence, Sir Orville states, "his personal attitude of superiority, together with his constant display of class prejudice and obvious ingrained bigotry against labourers and blacks, exposed his true nature as a racist".

Both he and the Duchess approached their job with a negative attitude and with loathing instead of a sense of purpose. The Duke was weak. He was not only prejudiced but disloyal. Some other writers have even described him as a traitor who had pro-Nazi leanings and who was involved in illegal financial and currency exchange dealings prohibited by wartime exchange control regulations.

At 12.45pm on April 29, 1945 - a Sunday - the Duke broadcast his formal farewell speech to the people of the Bahamas. That same day, the Duke and Duchess paid a farewell visit to the United States canteen where a large number of Royal Air Force men and canteen workers were present. They were presented with gifts. The following day there was a farewell gathering at the Infant Welfare Clinic, and that evening they hosted a farewell cocktail party on the terrace of Government House. Two days later, the Duke and Duchess left the Bahamas en route to the United States.

The Duke of Windsor was never again given another ambassadorial position.

'What Manner of Man is This, The Duke of Windsor's Years in The Bahamas', published by Grant's Town Press, is available at all major book stores in New Providence, Grand Bahama, Harbour Island and Abaco as well as the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas and The Linen Shop on Bay Street. Hardcover edition \$35, paperback for \$25.20, and the eBook on Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, eBooks and other eBook retailers worldwide.

NEXT WEEK: Philip Van Doren Stern, whose work inspired the Christmas classic film 'Its a Wonderful Life'

• *Sir Christopher Ondaatje is an adventurer and writer resident in the Bahamas. A Sri Lankan-born Canadian-Englishman, he is the author of several books, including "The Last Colonial".*

The novelty and glamour of early flying

Before I write any more about Bahamas Airways Ltd (BAL), I must correct a glaring error that my good friend, Orrie Sands, brought to my attention. The airline went out of business on October 9, 1970.

In 1936, the local press had firmly supported the need for a local airline and the Governor of the colony, Sir Bede Clifford, was one of the first to make use of Bahamas Airways' services. He was invited by Harry Oakes for an aerial cruise over the Exumas and Andros.

Flying was such a novelty - it was only 33 years after the Wright Brothers' first flight - that the press recorded each and every flight - not only of Bahamas Airways but of Pan American's Miami-Nassau-Miami flights too, giving names of passengers and pilot.

Long before airlines coined the expression 'frequent flyers', BAL established a regular clientele, led by the infamous Standard Oil heiress, Marion B Carstairs (1900-1993), owner of Whale Cay in the Berry Islands, and her less-flashy brother, Francis Francis (1906-1982), owner of neighbouring Bird Cay. The list grew to read like a "Who's Who" of Bahamian and international society.

On January 2, 1935, Col Cleveland C Lansing had bought White Bay Cay, an island in the Exuma Cays now known as Lansing Cay (Report on The Exumas, by W N Aranha, p286), and used Bahamas Airways to get to and fro. David McCullough, President of the Bath and Tennis Club, Palm Beach, flew to Nassau with his family (David and Kayros) to visit Harold Christie.

Other early passengers on BAL included (in alphabetical order) Norman Aranha,

William Aranha, Mr and Mrs John Archbold (heir to another Standard Oil fortune), Roy Arteaga, Lord Beaverbrook, Eugene Dupuch, Errol Flynn, Dr William Foulkes (father of Sir Arthur), Wallace Groves (bought Little Whale Cay in 1936 and, later, developed Freeport), Mr and Mrs Hensley, of London, Ontario, Canada, the Misses Barbara and Stephanie Hensley, Nassau's Dr A Hugh Johnson, Austin T Levy, the developer of Hatched Bay Plantations (who had been a passenger on Pan American's January 2, 1929, inaugural Miami-Nassau flight), Mr and Mrs Valentine Macy (he was another Standard Oil heir), John Maura (Bahamian, who became a World War II RAF pilot), John T McCutcheon (famous American cartoonist and owner of Treasure Island/Salt Cay), David Morrison (injured on a barge at Spanish Wells), Mrs Samuel Nickerson, Mrs J Pasche, artist Diana Pullinger, of London, Dr A Quackenbush, Mrs Stuart Radie, Robert Ripley (of 'Believe it or not'), Axel Wenner-Gren (Swedish industrialist, with a huge estate on Hog Island), Mrs D Fairchild Wheeler and numerous movie stars. The list goes on.

Eleven Governors of the Bahamas graced the cabins of the colony's first airline, Sir Bede Clifford being the first, followed by Sir Charles Dundas, the Duke of Windsor, Sir William Murphy, Sir George Sandford (who died in Nassau in 1950 and is buried in the Eastern Cemetery), Sir Robert Neville, the Earl of Ranfurly, Sir Raynor Arthur, Sir Robert Stapledon, Sir Ralph Grey and Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce.

Harold Christie had fathered aviation in the Bahamas, but his mind never wandered from selling land as the accompanying advertisements below show. In The Guardian of January 18, 1941, Harold Christie advertised BAL, five days after he placed an advert for the sale of a cottage at the Lyford Cay Club for £2,200, a far cry from the Lyford Cay Club and community that E P Taylor developed after 1959.

• islandairman@gmail.com

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