

# New view of the Duke of Windsor is not just black and white

## Nassau Life

By RICHARD COULSON



**S**IR Orville Turnquest's recently published book, 'What Manner of Man is This?' is becoming a best-seller in The Bahamas - as well it should be.

The title refers to the Duke of Windsor, our Royal Governor from 1940 to 1945 when we were a dependent Crown Colony, and its special appeal arises from Sir Orville having also served in a later era, 1994 to 2001, as Governor General of the now sovereign Commonwealth of The Bahamas, both ruling from Government House on Mount Fitzwilliam.

The book should be must reading for all Bahamians, not just scholars of our history. It proceeds on two tracks.

The first outlines Sir Orville's impressive rise from humble beginnings at his 1929 birth in Grants Town to a brilliant legal career in partnership with Eugene Dupuch and his late wife, followed by election to a Progressive Liberal Party seat in the House of Assembly, Cabinet appointments and eventually to the non-political pinnacle as the respected impartial head of state for all Bahamians.

The foreword by his contemporary, Sir Sidney Poitier, emphasises the abject social conditions of their early years, when most black Bahamians were oppressed by the white minority from any chances of advancement, overcome by only a few whose strong parentage, sacrificing for the best education then available, gave them a start up the ladder to use their natural abilities and tenacity.

Any young Bahamians who may feel restricted under today's social structure should consider the far tougher obstacles that Sir Orville faced, and successfully conquered. They should be grateful that, at 87, he remained motivated to produce such an inspirational message.

The second track of his book, as indicated by its title, is a review of the Duke of Windsor's character and policies as Governor, and here Sir Orville's success is more problematical. When the Duke arrived in Nassau in August, 1940, with all the publicised fame, or infamy, of having abdicated the British throne, the 11-year-old Sir Orville was far too young to have any direct insight into the intense internal political battles within the Colony over the next

five years, often profoundly influenced by external pressures from London and Washington as the stresses of World War II impacted local life. Probably the most quoted portion of his book will be his blunt, unqualified conclusions that the Duke was weak, prejudiced, racist and disloyal - a pretty damning indictment.

The keynote of Sir Orville's book is struck by an eloquent speech delivered in 1942 to the Duke and his staff by Dr C R Walker, one of the few black Bahamians who had received a professional degree and a cultured education. He gave an impassioned account of the oppressed, poverty-stricken life which most Bahamians were compelled to live. He went further, suggesting that the Duke of Windsor, with his wide international training to be become King, had arrived in The Bahamas as a sort of Messiah to lead Bahamians out of the wilderness. His peroration directly to the Duke

asked him, in the words of John the Baptist to Jesus, "Art thou he who cometh?"

Sir Orville provides his own answer "A resounding no".

He is entirely correct. The Duke of Windsor clearly failed to wreak a total transformation of our dominant society, a task that even our Lord himself would have had trouble achieving in a five-year term.

But Sir Orville is on doubtful ground when he goes on to declare that the Duke, as Governor, "never pushed for much needed reforms whenever such measures were opposed by the Bay Street power base" and that "he failed to ... address the appalling political, social and economic conditions of the masses". His failure, we are told, arose from his racial aversions.

There is no doubt that the Duke, and even more strongly the Duchess, did not enjoy or seek out in their private lives the company of blacks, or "coloured people" as they were then called. It is on record in Philip Ziegler's authoritative biography 'King Edward VIII' that he disparaged the abilities of respected Bahamian blacks like musician Bert Cambridge and shop-owner Milo Butler (later knighted as our first native Governor General) to have any aptitude for political leadership, and blacks were unknown as invitees to social functions at Government House. This bias was,



SIR Orville Turnquest's son, Tommy, alongside 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.

of course, shared not only with virtually all members of the English aristocracy of that time, but also with the white working classes in England, the United States and The Bahamas itself.

But his personal racial antipathy was not reflected in his official policies. Michael Bloch's carefully researched 'The Duke of Windsor's War' (not cited in Sir Orville's bibliography) gives an almost monthly review of the Duke's term as Governor. Many pages are devoted to his wrangles with the all-white cabal of Bay Street Boys running the House of Assembly, led by the Hon A K Solomon, the implacably reactionary champion of the status quo, rigidly opposed to even modestly progressive measures. It was only with great difficulty that the Duke got his Executive Council ("Exco") to propose any projects that required the House to approve budgetary commitments, such as creating a Labour Bureau and an Out Island Development Fund to raise the level of worker employment.

Despite forceful backing of the liberal Colonial Office in London, the Duke was unable to get House approval of the secret ballot in Out Island elections. For this bitterly opposed change, his only recourse would have been to order the dissolution of the House, suspension of the Constitution and impose himself as an all powerful supremo. He may be called "weak" for not doing this, but it would have risked real political turmoil and instability, precisely when the United Kingdom and the US were in delicate negotiations to operate military air

bases here.

The Duke had to rush back from meeting President Roosevelt in Washington when Nassau exploded in the famous "Burma Road" riot in June, 1942, resulting from unequal pay to Bahamian labourers on "The Project" building Windsor Field. He was praised on all sides for taking the initiative to reverse previous policy by pushing through a modest increase in daily wages.

An even more significant benefit to impoverished Bahamians arose from his negotiating "The Contract", which by 1945 saw some 5,000 agricultural workers move from the destitute Out Islands to full employment in the southern US to replace war-time labour shortages. They were required to send a quarter of their pay back to their grateful families.

Exercising his right to choose appointive officials, the Duke managed to remove a furious Mr Solomon from Exco\*, continuing his stubborn resistance to change as the elected Leader of the House. Also, he established an influential new Board of "all talents" called the Economic Investigation Committee, developing new investment plans and including two men of mixed blood, Roland Symonette, later our first Prime Minister, and Etienne Dupuch, the feisty owner/editor of *The Tribune* (both subsequently knighted).

The Duke of Windsor's single greatest failing as Governor was his handling of the eventually unsolved murder of Sir Harry Oakes, in 1943, in a series of errors that had nothing to do with race but blighted the last

two years of his term. First, in the autocratic fashion of a former monarch, he tried (unsuccessfully) to embargo the hot news from leaving the Colony, then without waiting for advice from calmer heads, he transferred his Police Chief and imported a cop from the Miami Police Department to lead the criminal investigation, purely because this flatfoot had once fawned over him and the Duchess.

The charge of disloyalty made by Sir Orville lacks factual support. In pre-war years and up to 1940 the Duke clearly publicised his strong doubts about fighting Nazi Germany, as did many Britons and the iconic American flyer-hero Charles Lindbergh. He also made known his guarded respect for Hitler as a national leader. But once war was declared in September, 1939, the Duke sought every opportunity to serve the Crown. The vague claim that the Duke used "illegal financial dealings" to evade wartime currency controls of the pound sterling is not supported by any hard evidence provided by Sir Orville or by the many previous purveyors of this sensationalist myth. His "constant surveillance by the FBI" produced nothing.

Perhaps the clearest words on the Duke's Bahamian adventure were written by Etienne Dupuch in *The Tribune* as the Windsors departed in May, 1945. Mr Dupuch had objected to his original appointment and had often been hostile to his policies but, nevertheless, wrote (as quoted in Ziegler's biography) that the Duke "was generally trying to do his best for the islands and the people, es-

pecially for sections of the Colony that had long been neglected by the selfish political interests centred in Nassau ... he has always been strong, definite and unswerving in his purposes".

Mr Dupuch's first-hand observations over five years put a different light on Sir Orville's negative conclusions about the Windsor governorship. Despite presenting just one point of view, his book will remain a valuable contribution to our history. It is regrettable that the editors and researchers named in his acknowledgements did not correct three glaring factual errors obvious to a careful reader, but these should not detract from the sincerity of his message.

'What Manner of Man is This?' published by Grant's Town Press, is available at all major book stores in New Providence, Grand Bahama, Eleuthera and Abaco, hardcover \$35, paperback \$25.20. eBook on Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, iBooks and other eBook retailers worldwide.

• Historical note: The Duke replaced Mr Solomon on Exco by appointing Richard Coulson's father Sidney Farrington, a white Bahamian executive not linked to the lawyer/merchant group that dominated the House of Assembly.

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