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The Queen in the Cayman Islands: Symbolic power and colonial continuities

Grace Carrington
University College London
United Kingdom
g.carrington@ucl.ac.uk

Abstract: This article examines the symbolic role of Queen Elizabeth II in local politics in the Cayman Islands, exploring the ways the monarchy was invoked to bolster a sense of loyalty to Britain, to maintain the colonial status quo and to legitimise the power of local elites. After the death of the Queen in 2022, historians have been reflecting on her legacy in countries across the Commonwealth. In British Overseas Territories like the Cayman Islands, where she remained Queen for the entirety of her reign, her death was more visibly commemorated than in many independent, formerly colonised nations where her legacy appeared more complicated and controversial. Nonetheless, a closer look at the symbolic power of the Queen reveals how, in the Cayman Islands, the British monarchy functioned to symbolically reinforce the colonial order rooted in White supremacy during the mid-twentieth century. This helped to maintain the political dominance of powerful merchant families and to stifle attempts at alternative leadership. Thus, the Queen was a symbol of continuity in the Cayman Islands, in more ways than one, facilitating ongoing colonial and racial inequalities.

Keywords: Caribbean, Cayman Islands, decolonisation, monarchy, overseas territories, Queen Elizabeth II, race, United Kingdom

Introduction

In 1983, Queen Elizabeth II visited the Cayman Islands for the first time. It was a momentous day and the culmination of decades of lobbying by Caymanians and the British administration in Cayman to request a royal visit. Given their great "loyalty" to the Queen, Caymanians argued that the islands were more than deserving of a visit from the Queen (Jefferson, 1974, p. 11). According to Caymanian politician Jim Bodden (1976, p. 33), "no place in the world would you find subjects, not even in England, that … are as loyal as the average Caymanian". He argued that hosting the Queen would be "the most important thing that could ever be done for this territory" (Bodden, 1974, p. 25). When the long-anticipated royal visit finally arose, over five thousand people turned out to witness the spectacle, more than a quarter of the islands' population at that time (FCO, 1983, pp. 6-7; *Cayman Compass,* 2022). As the crowds highlighted, the Queen enjoyed immense popularity in the Cayman Islands. Indeed, loyalty to the monarchy was presented as an important part of Caymanian identity, particularly by the merchant elite, and was used to promote ties to Britain and to discourage efforts at greater self-determination.

On a regional level, 1983 can be seen as the end of formal decolonisation, with St Kitts and Nevis being the last country in the Caribbean to become independent. Throughout the previous decades, as other colonies in the region negotiated independence, Cayman resolutely refused significant constitutional change. Along with four other territories in the Caribbean – Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, and Turks and Caicos – the Cayman Islands retained their close ties with Britain and became an overseas territory with a degree of internal self-government. This article focuses on the mid-twentieth century, a period of time that was significant for the way that the Cayman Islands developed politically during decolonisation. In

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the first three decades of Queen Elizabeth's reign, the symbolic presence of the monarchy, in conjunction with the power of the merchant elite, was particularly significant for the constitutional development of Cayman, as well as its development as an offshore centre. For the first half of the twentieth century, a predominantly White group of merchants controlled the economy and political scene in the Cayman Islands. In the 1960s, these merchants used the Queen as a symbol of legitimacy and stability in their efforts to block alternative leadership. The monarchy also featured in campaigns to strengthen ties with Britain and split away from Jamaica to become a distinct crown colony in 1962. This article analyses how the British monarchy functioned to reinforce the colonial order rooted in White supremacy during the mid-twentieth century. This ensured the continued dominance of the established merchant families and stifled attempts to shift power away from the White minority. Indeed, in Cayman, the Queen served as a symbol of continuity and stability, facilitating ongoing colonial and racial inequalities. In later decades, Caymanian politics diversified somewhat, though certain merchant families remain powerful. Thus, this article mostly focuses on these crucial decades running up to the 1983 royal visit.

By the 1980s, as migration to Cayman increased through the success of the offshore industry, the demographics of the islands changed, and power gradually shifted somewhat away from the established merchant families (Bodden, 2010, p. 13). Furthermore, in terms of political developments, party politics, which was stifled in the early 1960s, did not return to Cayman until the twenty-first century (*ibid.*, p. 9). Therefore, this article reflects across the entirety of Queen Elizabeth II's reign, but focuses particularly on political developments in the mid-twentieth century at the time when the Caymanian merchant elite held disproportionate power in politics and society.

The article analyses the symbolic power of the monarchy, rather than direct involvement. However, it is worth noting that, although the monarch rarely directly intervenes, they do hold considerable constitutional power. The first constitution in the Cayman Islands was drawn up in 1959 and it established the Legislative Assembly, with members elected through universal suffrage for the first time (Cayman Islands Constitution, 1959). Although this allowed for a degree of legislative power in the Caymanian Assembly, under the control of the British Administrator, ultimate authority rested with the Governor of Jamaica, as the Queen's representative (Cayman Islands Constitution, 1959). When the Cayman Islands split away from Jamaica to become a direct crown colony of the UK in 1962, these powers were transferred to the Administrator in Cayman. Constitutional changes in 1972, 1993 and 2009 have gradually increased the level of internal self-government in Cayman, but local autonomy has remained more restricted than in some of the other overseas territories like Bermuda and the British Virgin Islands (Clegg, 2012, p. 423). Under the 2009 Cayman Islands Constitution, the monarch reserves "full power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Cayman Islands" (Cayman Islands Constitution, 2009). The Governor, appointed by the King or Queen, on the advice of the British Government, is the head of the government in Cayman and is "constitutionally answerable only to the Queen" (Dickson, 2020, pp. 196-7). Although this executive authority lies with the monarch, in reality, they are rarely drawn in to intervene directly. It should also be noted that the Caymanian Constitution is contained within an Order in Council, which is legally enacted by the British monarch (Hendry and Dickson, 2018).

Rather than examining direct political or constitutional interventions, this article explores the symbolic power of the British monarchy in the Cayman Islands. It follows Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic power', which addresses the forms of symbolic manipulation

that cultural producers and institutions use to influence social hierarchies and to maintain inequalities (Bourdieu, 1979, pp. 77-83). Bourdieu argued that symbolic power was used by the dominant in social hierarchies to uphold and reinforce those hierarchies and to encourage those who are dominated or oppressed not to challenge systemic inequality (*ibid.*). In the context of the Queen in the Cayman Islands, this article looks at how the monarchy holds a 'symbolic power' which helps to maintain colonial hierarchies. Language, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols relating to the British monarchy act to symbolically influence and reinforce colonial hierarchies in the Cayman Islands.

As a theoretical framework, this article employs three key concepts: Robinson's (1983) notion of racial capitalism; Harris' (1993) arguments relating to "Whiteness as property"; and scholarship exploring the British monarchy as a symbol of Whiteness within the British Empire. Firstly, in terms of racial capitalism, Robinson argued that capitalism developed in a way that "pursued essentially racial directions" (Robinson, 1983, p. 2). Through the transformation of European feudalism into capitalism, regional and cultural differences were transformed into "racial ones" (Robinson, 1983, p. 26). In the Caribbean, capitalism generated hierarchies rooted in racial oppression, with the system of enslavement underpinning societies. After the abolition of slavery, racial inequality remained embedded in societal structures. In the Cayman Islands, racial inequality was likewise apparent in institutions, governance, and social hierarchies. In the 1960s, as well as strengthening ties to Britain, the Cayman Islands developed as a centre for offshore finance. Racial capitalism is essential for understanding the development of Cayman as a tax haven and the supporting role of a White British monarch in creating a sense of financial stability to boost investor confidence.

Secondly, this article employs Harris' notion of "Whiteness as property" to explore how the perceived "Whiteness" of the British monarchy and the Caymanian merchants helped to boost the value of Cayman as a financial hub. Harris (1993, p. 1713) argues that Whiteness is valued "as treasured property in a society structured on racial caste". She furthermore contends that "White identity conferred tangible and economically valuable benefits", and therefore Whiteness was "jealously guarded" as a cherished possession (Harris, 1993, p. 1726). In the construction of Whiteness as property, being perceived as White becomes "a thing of significant value" (Harris, 1993, p. 1734). In the Cayman Islands, the perception of Whiteness, which the monarchy helped to reinforce, formed an important part of increasing Cayman's value as an offshore hub. Offshore financial centres in the Caribbean strove to associate themselves with Whiteness in order to increase their value and appeal in regional and global financial markets. For example, a *Time* article (1973, pp. 1-2) argued that investors were fleeing the Bahamas due to the "black nationalist government" and were instead turning to Cayman, which by contrast had an absence of "racial tension" and was therefore a safer place for White financiers. One British barrister involved in drafting the Cayman Trusts Law suggested that businesses moved to Cayman from the Bahamas simply because the new Bahamian Premier "was black", whereas Caymanian politicians and officials were mostly White (Freyer and Morriss, 2013, p. 1329). White investors viewed the stability of colonial, capitalist Caribbean societies and economies as rooted in and dependent on "Whiteness". Associating a territory with a White British monarch, and all the connotations of English heritage and colonialism, resulted in a perceived increase in value. For example, an advert in the *Financial Times* (1971, p. 29) written by the Administrator of the Cayman Islands emphasized the "stability of Government" and reinforced this with the assurance that "'God Save the Queen' is sung at the end of nearly all functions with volume and enthusiasm". The Queen as the "premier symbol of Whiteness" acted as a force of stability and reassurance for investors as Cayman expanded as an offshore financial centre (Andrews, 2022, p. xviii). Cayman became a valuable financial

hub because it had a White merchant oligarchy in charge, supported by British colonial rule and the British monarchy.

Thirdly, this article builds on scholarship exploring the ways British monarchs became symbolic of Whiteness during the British Empire. Throughout the centuries of the British Empire, the monarchy acted as the figurehead, as an idealised symbol of Whiteness (Clancy, 2021, pp. 215–6). Female monarchs presented themselves as the epitome of White womanhood, with Elizabeth I whitening her skin to highlight "her difference, her elevation, in whiteness" (Roberts, 2005, p. 39). Likewise, the image of a pale-skinned Queen Victoria was reproduced across the Empire to "make white rule of the non-white seem normative" (*ibid*., p. 32). In the Cayman Islands, the ubiquity of the image of Queen Elizabeth II in the twentieth century contributed to the normalisation of British control of the islands and of the racial inequalities in politics and society. Holly Randell-Moon (2017, p. 399) has highlighted the role the monarchy plays in "reaffirming the racialised and religious structures of settler state power" in Australia and New Zealand. When White settlers began colonising land, their efforts were legitimised through the legal backing of the British Crown. In the present day, the monarchy continues to symbolically uphold the legitimacy of settler occupation in Australasia (*ibid.*). Applying Randell-Moon's conception of monarchy to the Cayman Islands context reveals how the monarchy formed an "extension of the political and legal validation of settler colonialism" and functioned to legitimise British rule (Randell-Moon, 2017, p. 397). In the Cayman Islands, maintaining a White British head of state at the apex of political power reinforced the race and class hierarchies which underpinned colonial rule.

In analysing the symbolic power of the Queen in Cayman, this article firstly examines political developments in the 1960s and seeks to demonstrate how the British monarchy was used symbolically to bolster a sense of loyalty to Britain and to undermine pushes for self-government. The paper assesses the particular significance of the monarchy during Cayman's development as an offshore financial hub. Retaining a White head of state heightened Cayman's image as a respectable, safe, "White" centre for investment. Furthermore, the monarchy provided the symbolic foundation of the colonial system, and this symbolic power was used by both Caymanian politicians and British colonial officials to cement the existing system and discourage change. The local political elite employed the legitimising power of the monarchy to add respectability and authority to their political endeavours, as they sought to entrench their power. This article also explores how the monarchy functioned to reinforce the seeking of external validation and leadership from outside the Caribbean. For example, through the British honours system, the ultimate seal of approval and respectability could only be sought from overseas, rather than within the islands themselves. Likewise, in political disputes, the Queen was frequently petitioned to intervene, with the monarchy positioned as an apolitical, wise and righteous figure that would deliver justice. Finally, this article assesses the monarchy's symbolic role in land disputes. As land ownership had historically been granted by the Crown, the monarchy was perceived as the ultimate arbiter when it came to disputes over land. The Queen was often petitioned to mediate in issues relating to land, though in reality these matters were most often negotiated between the Governor and the Foreign Office. Throughout the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, the Cayman Islands opted to retain its ties to Britain. The popularity of the British monarchy in a place like the Cayman Islands is indicative of the colonial race and class hierarchies which continue to influence who has power and wealth.

Colonialism and monarchy in the Cayman Islands

Permanent settlement did not occur in the Cayman Islands until the eighteenth century, as English settlers, mostly farmers, logcutters and mariners, and enslaved people crossed over from Jamaica. In 1734, the first patent of land was bestowed by the Crown for a 3000-acre area in Grand Cayman (Hirst, 1910, p. 37). These early land grants were given to White planters and merchants from Jamaica looking to profit from the timber industry (Williams, 2010, p. 71). Like other colonies in the British Empire, White settler land ownership was legitimised and legalised through the power of royal grants. From 1863 onwards, the Cayman Islands became an official dependency of Jamaica, then a British colony (Cayman Laws, 1863). With the administration of the islands managed by and through Jamaica, Britain formed a more distant colonial presence for much of Cayman's history. Due to its isolation and topography, large plantations common in other Caribbean islands, were not established in Cayman. Attempts have been made to centre Caymanian history in seafaring traditions and to minimise the role of slavery. In reality, slavery was an essential part of both the agricultural and maritime industries, and it played a fundamental role in the creation of Caymanian society and culture (Williams, 2015, pp. 21–25). As Hilary Beckles has demonstrated, the British monarchy was inextricably linked to the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Beckles, 2013, pp. 37-55). From Queen Elizabeth I's support of slaving expeditions in the 1560s, to the Duke of Clarence (future King William IV)'s campaigning against the abolition of slavery in 1799, the British monarchy endorsed and profited from enslavement across the Caribbean (Newman, 2020). Although it is rarely discussed, this aspect of the monarchy's historical relationship with the Cayman Islands deserves acknowledgement.

The decades following the 1834 abolition of slavery were characterised by emigration, poverty, and isolation (Bodden, 2007, pp. 65-70). Most White Caymanians who had relied on the labour of enslaved people either experienced economic hardship or emigrated in search of prosperity elsewhere in the region. In this period, with a much larger poor, White population than elsewhere in the Caribbean, Caymanian society developed a somewhat greater degree of social integration. Rooted in colonial White supremacy, many Caribbean societies developed along highly stratified lines in terms of race and class, in what Premdas (1996, p. 6) has called a "colour-class system of stratification". In the Cayman Islands, there were somewhat less strict racial hierarchies and inequality, but society remained stratified by race. By the twentieth century, a White merchant oligarchy dominated both the political and economic arenas, giving them a huge influence over public opinion and political decision making (Hannerz, 1974, pp. 39–54). Some merchant families were descended from the White slave-owner class in Cayman, while others had arrived more recently from Jamaica. The merchants had established their power through controlling the shipping industry. This created a vertical societal structure, with most Caymanians dependent on these merchants for supplies and if they wished to travel. As one Caymanian politician put it, "all the ships was owned by white men" (Panton 1991, p. 3). One merchant family, the Merrens, ran the biggest trading company in Cayman and fixed "all retail prices" so that there was "no other merchant strong enough to stand against them" (Governor of Jamaica, 1955).

For the first half of the twentieth century, Cayman remained relatively isolated within the British empire, as a small dependency of Jamaica. Despite their isolation, Caymanians were encouraged to identify with Britishness, particularly English heritage, through schools, the church, public ceremonies, and imperial propaganda. As in nearby Jamaica, loyalty to the British monarchy was an essential part of this construction of Britishness (Rush, 2011, pp. 47–49). For example, Royal Navy visits were often timed to coincide with the Queen's birthday.

Parades and social events would be held to show the importance of the British empire and loyalty to the Queen (Bodden, 2007, pp. 30–33). Certainly, during the Second World War, notions of serving "your King and … your country" motivated many Caymanians to volunteer (Panton, 1940). Indeed, two-thirds of the adult male population signed up to fight (Spence, 2015, p. 55). These sentiments of Britishness and loyalty to the monarchy were particularly strong among the Caymanian merchant class, who saw themselves as a "settler extension of Britishness" (Hannerz, 1974, p. 115). They promoted ideas of Caymanian identity rooted in middle-class respectability and White British ancestry. Their respectability and legitimacy within society was reinforced through their prominent roles in local churches, often as preachers, through their positions as Justices of the Peace, and through their ownership of the few stores in the islands (Hannerz, 1974, pp. 42-53).

Becoming a crown colony

In the decades after the Second World War, when many colonies around the world were fighting for independence, the Cayman Islands instead strengthened ties to Britain and became a crown colony. The symbolic power of the Queen was a significant element in this decision. As Philip Murphy argues, in the British Empire the monarchy was an important tool used to forge imperial loyalty (Murphy, 2014, pp. 14–15). Caymanian merchants used this tool – the symbolic power of the monarchy – to encourage loyalty to Britain and take Cayman down a political route that served their own interests. This was evident in the political crisis as the West Indies Federation began to fracture. In 1957, Cayman reluctantly joined the Federation with an ambiguous status, as a dependency of Jamaica and without direct representation (Laws of the West Indies, 1957). As the Federation dissolved in 1962, the Cayman Islands split away from Jamaica to become its own British crown colony, in line with the wishes of the merchant class (Cayman Islands Constitution, 1962). The conservative Caymanian elite were wary of being a dependency of an independent, socialist Jamaica (Williams, 2014, pp. 41-2). They feared anything which might disrupt their political hegemony.

Despite the variety of options available to Cayman, the British Administrator only put forward two choices: internal self-government under an independent Jamaica or colony status with Britain (Martins, 1994, pp. 131–2). The merchants campaigned across the Cayman Islands to generate support for closer ties with Britain. The Queen and loyalty to the British monarchy were a crucial part of this affinity to Britain which the merchants promoted. Roy McTaggart, one of the leading merchants, used his influential position in society to obtain a petition signed by over three thousand Caymanians in favour of crown colony status under Britain (Williams, 2010, p. 243). He emphasised "British culture and civilization, pride in the empire and monarchy" in his campaign to encourage strengthening ties to Britain (Bodden, 2010, p. 106). Colonial Office accounts of the decision acknowledge the strong influence of the White merchants: "about one third of the population … was white and in a dominant position, especially commercially" (Thomas, 1961, p. 1). On the day of the assembly debate, members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) were presented with the two options. The pro-British stance of many of the merchants was encapsulated by one politician who told the House, "It should be the endeavour of the Caymanian people to see that the Union Jack should continue to cast its shadow on the ground from its flagpole in these Islands" (Martins, 1994, p. 134). This crucial decision was then determined by the visiting Governor of Jamaica "at the longest and loudest clap of hands" (McLoughlin, 1993, pp. 5-10). Essentially, McTaggart's anti-Jamaica, pro-British speech received a louder applause than the pro-Jamaica speech, and this is how Cayman's future was decided (McLaughlin. 1982, p. 28). Sybil McLaughlin, Clerk of the Assembly, acknowledged that basing such an important judgment on who clapped loudest

was "undemocratic" (McLoughlin, 1993, pp. 5-10). The power of the merchant elite at this critical juncture in Caymanian politics was the key reason why Cayman became a crown colony. Their use of the symbolic power of the monarchy to encourage loyalty to Britain is one of the important aspects in explaining how they engineered this move.

Not long after this vote, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and the Queen's consort, visited the Cayman Islands (*The Daily Gleaner*, 1962, p. 2). In his speech to the Duke, merchant Thomas William Farrington highlighted the recent decision to "remain part of Her Majesty's Commonwealth in perpetuity" (*ibid.*). Farrington emphasised Caymanians' "devotion and humble duty" to the Queen and insisted that "we look forward with enthusiasm to this cherished connection" (*ibid.*). His speech suggested the symbolic equivalence of the political decision to become a crown colony with loyalty to the Queen. Royal visits and the official events, speeches and rituals that surrounded them served to normalise the monarchy's position within the Caymanian state and to accentuate the importance of royal visitors.

At the same time as Cayman was negotiating its future position in relation to Jamaica, the West Indies Federation, and Britain, the advent of party politics brought new challenges to the merchants' power. Yet again, loyalty to the monarchy was promoted by the merchant elite as a way to reinforce their position and make the opposition appear less respectable. In 1961, a new political party was created in Cayman, advocating constitutional change. The National Democratic Party (NDP) supported internal self-government, with a view to eventual independence (NDP Manifesto, 1961, p. 1). Within a few months, membership had grown to over 1100 (Martins, 1994, p. 120). The leader of the NDP was Ormond Panton, a populist, pro-independence, anti-British "firebrand" who earned the nickname "Little Busta" – a nod to Alexander Bustamante, first prime minister of independent Jamaica – due to his reputation for championing the interests of the average Caymanian (Martins, 1994, pp. 120–1). Panton made use of international connections to develop the NDP by approaching Norman Manley, then Premier of Jamaica, for advice about party politics (Martins, 1994, pp. 119–20). On a visit to Jamaica in 1961, Panton even crossed paths with Eric Williams, the Premier of Trinidad and Tobago, who was also in Manley's office to discuss political party mobilisation (*ibid*.). The founding members of the NDP were from a range of backgrounds, including middle-class Black Caymanians from George Town, a few merchants from outside the capital, and some civil servants who kept their party membership secret. Initially, members met covertly due to the fear of repercussions from the merchant elite. Rumours spread of people losing their jobs as a result of their NDP membership (Martins, 1994, p. 122). Though some members of the NDP did not support greater autonomy, the party as a whole promoted internal self-government through the maintenance of ties to Jamaica, once the latter had become independent in 1962 (Kirkconnell, 2007, pp. 13-16). The NDP continued to support internal self-government even after the Jamaica link was off the table (NDP Manifesto, 1961, p. 1). This aspect of NDP policies, in particular, drew concerns from the merchant elite who feared that constitutional change might disrupt their power and influence.

In response to the creation of the NDP, prominent merchant politicians in Cayman founded the Christian Democratic Party (CDP). The party's sole purpose was to oppose the NDP. It emphasised its links with the Church and loyalty to the British monarchy to reinforce its legitimacy and respectability (CDP Manifesto, 1961, p. 1). CDP members placed "unswerving loyalty to her Majesty the Queen" at the heart of their manifesto and in their political speeches (*ibid*.). The CDP was also strongly against internal self-government and supported a closer constitutional relationship with Britain (*Tradewinds,* 1965, 28 October). The party was opposed to any change in taxation laws and claimed that any move towards greater

autonomy would force Caymanians to pay higher taxes (CDP Manifesto, 1961, p. 1). Other than opposing self-government, the CDP did not put forward any clear policies. In the absence of concrete policies, the party relied on the prominent position of its merchant politicians, reinforced with the emotional pull of patriotism through allegiance to the Queen.

Despite this manoeuvre by the merchant oligarchy and their CDP, the NDP gained a slim majority in the 1962 elections, winning seven out of 12 seats (Monthly Intelligence Report, 1962, pp. 1-2). Panton saw this as a great victory for more open politics and a shift towards internal self-government (Martins, 1994, pp. 129-30). Although personalities rather than policies dominated the election, NDP success demonstrated that some Caymanians had an appetite for political change that moved beyond the merchants' monopoly. However, the NDP's ability to build on their electoral success was hampered by the British Administrator, Jack Rose, who had an ongoing feud with Ormond Panton. Administrator Rose took the unprecedented step of nominating three of Panton's rivals to the Legislative Assembly. Convention dictated that the Administrator was expected to consult the leader of the majority party when making these nominations. When a similar incident occurred in Trinidad in 1956, the Secretary of State for the Colonies intervened and overruled the Governor following appeals from Trinidadian politicians (Bodden, 2010, 144-5). These nominations were a huge blow for Panton and his hopes to generate change in Caymanian politics. The repercussions of the Administrator's unconventional actions were felt when the Legislative Assembly met to elect two members to the Executive Council. Traditionally, nominated members would be expected to vote for the majority party, with the leader of this party being chosen for the Executive Council. However, the three nominated members voted for CDP candidates and, as a result, Ormond Panton was not elected to the Executive Council (Martins, 1994, p. 137). This ultimately spelled the end of Panton's political career: he resigned in protest and the NDP disintegrated as a political force at the following election.

It is striking that, in these two key moments of political change, the merchants used the powerful rhetoric of loyalty to the Queen to push their agenda and reinforce their legitimacy. Attempts at significant constitutional change in the following decades of the twentieth century, continued to be impeded by the efforts of the Caymanian establishment to maintain the status quo, with expressions of affinity to Britain and loyalty to the Queen often used in political messaging and discourse. For example, in 1972, Jim Bodden, a politician with populist leanings, suggested that he wished to push for further self-government in his election campaign (Bodden, 2010, p. 79). Once in power, however, Bodden backtracked on this promise, culminating in his 1976 pledge, along with other Members of the Legislative Assembly that they would not seek constitutional advance (*The Northwester,* 1976, Christmas, p. 6). In a clear pattern from earlier declarations against self-determination, the MLAs swore their "loyalty to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II" and stated that they would "remain a crown colony of the British Empire" (*ibid*.). The Queen again held symbolic importance in debates about constitutional change during the 1977 visit by the UN Committee on Decolonization, set up to encourage independence in the remaining territories attached to former empires. Some Caymanians reportedly sang *God Save the Queen* in response to the committee's probing questions regarding independence (Craton, 2003, p. 409). A group of Caymanians also sent a petition to the Queen regarding the UN visit, describing themselves as "Her loyal subjects in the Cayman Islands" and declaring opposition to any kind of constitutional change (Petition to Queen, 1977). When members of the Legislative Assembly presented to the UN committee, they argued that Caymanians wished to maintain their existing constitutional relationship with the UK, particularly given the "strong feeling of allegiance to England and to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II" (Bodden, 2007, pp. 116-123). Evidently, the monarchy held a symbolic

role in the decolonisation of the Cayman Islands and was used to discourage independence. The symbolic use of the monarchy by the Caymanian establishment to hamper efforts for political change and democratisation was clearly apparent, notably during political developments in the 1960s.

Monarchy and offshore finance

The symbolic power of the British monarchy as head of state in the Cayman Islands had particular significance for the development of offshore finance in the territory. It is no coincidence that, during the 1960s and 1970s, crucial moments of potential constitutional change overlapped with the early expansion of the offshore financial industry. Constitutional progress was held up as the antithesis of economic development, and Caymanians were encouraged to focus on the latter. The first major piece of legislation to nurture an offshore sector was introduced at the start of the 1960s. The establishment of offshore finance in Cayman involved the collaboration of three key groups: the British colonial administration; the Caymanian merchant oligarchy; and newly arrived White entrepreneurs. The British Administrator, Jack Rose, commissioned a law firm in Jamaica to draft a "Companies Law" which would allow businesses to register directly in the Cayman Islands. This 1960 Companies Law replaced Jamaican incorporation and encouraged foreign investment by permitting individuals and corporations to escape direct taxation (Freyer and Morriss, 2013, p. 1316.). The Law differentiated Cayman from other offshore centres like the Bahamas, as it allowed for a greater level of tax avoidance.

Wealthy White businessmen from the UK, North America, and other British colonies played a key role in the early days of offshore finance in Cayman. For example, William Walker, a White legal expert who was born in British Guiana, educated in Barbados, and studied law at Cambridge, encouraged the implementation of two key pieces of legislation in 1966: the Banks and Trust Companies Regulation Law and the Trusts Law (Freyer and Morriss, 2013, p. 1326). The involvement of these new arrivals was so extensive that one Bank of England official argued that Cayman was "literally raided by an expatriate tax council, who overnight persuaded them to enact trust legislation which goes beyond anything yet attempted elsewhere" (Ogle, 2017, p. 1445). The 1960 Companies Law and subsequent offshore legislation had a drastic impact on the growth of the Caymanian economy. Between 1966 and 1970, the economy grew by an average of 30 percent per year (Cayman Islands Annual Report, 1966 to 1970, p. 3). In 1970 alone, 500 new companies registered in the Cayman Islands (*ibid.*, p. 4) This considerable economic growth disproportionately benefitted the Caymanian merchants and the White "expatriate experts" who had engineered it (Bodden, 2007, pp. 160-70).

As Ogle (2020, p. 214) has demonstrated, Cayman's offshore financial industry developed in the context of the "liquidation and removal of European assets" from many decolonising countries. White business owners were fearful of "non-white rule" and "found themselves lured to some of the newly expanding tax havens still safely within the fold of the British empire" (*ibid.,* pp. 214-226). Retaining a White British monarch as head of state served to reassure White investors of the perceived stability and international respectability of Cayman as a financial centre. As Bodden (2007, p. 6-10) has argued, the fact that "all laws of the Cayman Islands must be assented to by the representative of the Crown" created an attractive environment for investment, boosting the perception of safety. As a British crown colony with the Queen as head of state, Cayman was therefore "still acceptable to the white world" (*ibid.,* pp. 177-185). The Queen was used by Caymanians when promoting the offshore sector

internationally, emphasising English heritage and a "long history of English financial and legal expertise" (Koram, 2022, p. 163). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Cayman positioned itself as a safe place for capital at a time of regional unrest. As a symbol of Whiteness and therefore stability, the Queen acted to increase the value of Cayman as an offshore tax haven. Caymanian politicians actively sought to attract White investors from former British colonies in Africa. For example, a White politician in the Executive Council declared that "any white Southern Rhodesians who wish to come here would be welcome" (Cayman Islands Annual Report, 1979, p. 7). It is clear that "racism has played and continues to play an important role in the development" of Cayman's financial sector (Bodden, 2007, pp. 175-184). The development of the offshore industry proved hugely successful, with Cayman now boasting the sixth largest banking centre in the world, in terms of assets (Clegg, 2018, p. 149).

The Queen had an even more direct relationship with offshore finance in the Cayman Islands than simply this symbolic role. Recent developments have exposed the British monarchy's use of Cayman's financial services. The Paradise Papers leaked in 2017 revealed that the Queen's private estate, the Duchy of Lancaster, held investments in Cayman (Clancy, 2021, pp. 1–2). This suggests that the monarchy directly benefitted financially from the system of offshore finance in British Overseas Territories.

Legitimisation of the colonial system

In the Cayman Islands, the monarchy provided the underpinning of the colonial system. As Norman Girvan argues, the monarchy was the "core symbol of colonial governance" in the Caribbean (Girvan, 2015, p. 96). Whenever criticism arose against the British Administrator or Governor, the role was defended on the basis that they were appointed by the Queen. For example, Caymanian politician Annie Bodden criticised comments made by another MLA by arguing "now that was an insult to Her Majesty the Queen to say such a thing about her representative" (Bodden, 1978, p. 12). It was demanded that Caymanians should respect the Administrator purely because they represented the Queen, and this was used to quiet any dissent towards decisions made by colonial officials. It should be noted that it was often members of the White political elite who expressed these sentiments, such as Thomas William Farrington after a 1970 protest march. He argued that Caymanians were "the most loyal in all Her Majesty's Commonwealth" and discouraged further unrest by suggesting that the Administrator "is Her Majesty's representative in these islands and as such he deserves respect" (Farrington, 1970). He repeated this sentiment at other moments of contention between Caymanians and the colonial administration, such as in a 1975 meeting of the Legislative Assembly when he argued that, as "Her Majesty's representative", Caymanians should "respect" the Administrator (Farrington, 1975, p. 4). This invoking of the Queen to discourage dissent contributed to the emphasis on law-abiding respectability within Caymanian society during the second half of the twentieth century. Protests were rare, and when they did occur, such as the 1970 Land March, the response from prominent figures like Farrington helped to discourage further unrest.

Colonial officials also participated in using the symbolic power of the Queen to encourage loyalty to Britain and to validate the existing constitutional set up. For example, in his 1969 address to the Legislative Assembly, Administrator Long told elected members that they had "a collective responsibility to Her Majesty the Queen and to all Caymanians" (Long, 1969, p. 1). Furthermore, he suggested that "local interests must be subordinate to national interests and this higher responsibility must always be your final concern" (Long, 1969, p. 2).

Thus, he implied that Caymanian interests and the interests of the British monarchy were one and the same.

Across the British Caribbean, colonialism was accompanied by a culture of Britishness that encouraged Caribbean peoples to identify with Britain, the Empire and the monarchy (Matthews, 2011; Rush, 2011, 1–15). The Cayman Islands were no different. Visits from members of the royal family were huge events, designed to generate enthusiasm and excitement from local people. These moments were highlighted and exaggerated in colonial reports. For example, a 1973 visit to the Cayman Islands by Prince (now King) Charles was apparently "the most pleasurable event" (Cayman Islands Annual Report, 1973, p. 3). In his report, the Administrator emphasised that the "people of the islands, being very loyal to the Crown, were happy to have this opportunity" (*ibid.*). This was part of the British administration's emphasis on loyalty to the Queen and Britain. Both Caymanian political leaders and British colonial officials readily evoked the symbolic power of the British monarchy in political discussions and debates.

The Queen and elite power in an island society

Apart from using the symbolic weight of the British monarchy to preserve colonial rule, local elites also sought to legitimise their own power. These endeavours often overlapped, as the merchants guarded their existing monopoly through maintaining the status quo. This was another key dynamic of the way that the monarchy functioned in Caymanian politics. As has been outlined, the use of the symbol of the Queen by the White merchant elite to support their political cause was evident during the founding of the CDP in 1961. The Queen was further utilised by Caymanian merchants to push for becoming their own crown colony in 1962. Both these political moves involved using the symbolic power of the monarchy to reinforce and entrench the power of the White merchant elite and to prevent changes to the colonial status quo.

A clear way in which the monarchy legitimised elite groups in the Caribbean is through the British honours system. The system involves the awarding of medals or titles in recognition of a particular achievement or service and retains imperial connotations, particularly through the ongoing use of the term "British Empire" (Clancy, 2021, pp. 48-9). A 2004 Public Administration Committee found the honours system to be "riddled with class prejudice and biased against ethnic minorities" (*ibid.*). In the Cayman Islands, the system served to reinforce race-class hierarchies and bolster the position of elites, since those with already prominent positions in politics or society were more likely to receive an award. For example, in 1966, certain prominent Caymanians were invited to meet the Queen when she stopped in Jamaica, with some receiving honours (*Tradewinds,* 1966, p. 1). This was perceived as a great privilege and boosted the reputation of those who were invited. Meeting the Queen or receiving an honour would involve newspaper coverage, was looked on favourably in Caymanian society and proximity to royalty would result in an elevated reputation. The invitees were predominantly White Caymanians from the merchant elite and Colonial Office briefs referred to them as "extremely loyal" (Williams, 24 January 1966, pp. 1-4). Thus, the Queen often functioned to legitimise those in power in the Cayman Islands. Merchants used the symbolic power of the monarchy to demand respect and to make their position in society appear natural. Royal visits, where those in an elevated position in society were offered the privileged opportunity to meet the Queen personally or were given British honours, served to embed hierarchies and reinforce the power of elites.

External authority and legitimacy

The power and prestige of the British monarchy also acted to encourage islanders to view legitimacy and authority as originating from outside the Caribbean. This undermined faith in local leadership, expertise and excellence. This phenomenon was apparent in the continued investment in, and reverence for, the British honours system in the Caribbean (Ghany, 2020, p. 73). Receiving a knighthood remains a "gold standard of Caribbean honour to which many persons aspire" (*ibid.*). As Ghany (2020, p. 75) argues:

> [in] many parts of the Commonwealth Caribbean there remains a deep connection to the British honours system [and] personal loyalty and devotion to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is a hallmark of many of its political and judicial elites.

This honours system created a dynamic whereby recognition and acknowledgement of one's achievements and respectability had to be sought from Britain, rather than this being provided endogenously, from within the Caribbean itself. People who received honours from the British monarchy were able to buy into a "formal social hierarchy" and feel part of an elite system (Harper, 2020, p. 4; Clancy, 2021, p. 49). The fact that only certain people were deemed worthy enough to meet the Queen and receive an honour imbued the "monarchy with a symbolic sense of value: it is so special it is accessible only to those important enough" (Clancy, 2021, p. 50).

The undermining of local leadership was evident in the numerous examples of people requesting the Queen's intervention in local issues. In several instances in Caymanian history, citizens sought to overrule local authority figures through appealing directly to the monarch. For example, Caymanians sent petitions to the Queen in 1970 and 1977 on the subject of constitutional change and local governance (*The Caymanian Weekly,* 1970, 23 April; Petition to Queen, 1977). In Cayman, and to some extent elsewhere too, this had the effect of undermining confidence in local leadership. Authority figures from outside the Caribbean, and particularly the monarchy, were presented by both Caymanians and British officials as more objective, more competent and more legitimate. For example, in a 1963 speech to the Legislative Assembly, Annie Bodden (1963, p. 22) argued that:

> There is not one local person ... competent, during the past ten years, to run the affairs of these Islands ... Caymanians should be proud to have [the Queen] to direct and lead them in the right way without oppression.

In the overseas territories, the Queen was portrayed as a reassuring, apolitical presence, above the petty squabbles of local politics. For example, a 1965 Caymanian newspaper editorial claimed, "in no other part of the Commonwealth do hearts beat with greater devotion and loyalty for [the Queen] who is above all party politics and who stands for the freedom we love and cherish" (*Tradewinds,* 1965, 17 June, p. 7).

Furthermore, the monarchy was presented as being the ultimate source of authority and democracy. In 1959, the Cayman Islands received a new constitution. This brought to an end the Justices and Vestry system of government which had formed a cornerstone of White merchant control in the islands. Yet it was the Queen who was credited with generously giving greater democracy to the islands. Member of the new Legislative Assembly, Lee A. Ebanks argued "we are trusted by the Queen that we are being given more rein" (McLoughlin, 1982, p. 18). Constitutional change in the form of a small degree of greater decision-making powers

was framed as generosity from the Queen, rather than being seen as a result of pressure from campaigning Caymanians.

Land, settler colonialism, and the monarchy

The British monarchy often became more politically significant in a local dispute when it centred on the issue of land. During the expansion of the British empire, royal grants of land facilitated the expropriation and settlement of colonial land. The first White British settlers would take with them the laws of England that were effective at the time of settlement (FCO, 1969, p. 2). Thus, for many colonies, English common law applied, which deemed that all lands in the realm originally belonged to the Sovereign, unless modified by new laws (*ibid*., p. 3). This meant that any unclaimed or public land in a colony would be considered Crown land by default. Through these laws, the monarchy provided and upheld the legitimacy and legal structure of White land ownership. The Queen was therefore often perceived as the final authority when it came to disputes over land. Moreover, the monarchy served to normalise British presence in the Cayman Islands and British control of land.

In Cayman, as in many other colonies, islanders sometimes resorted to petitioning the Queen during disagreements over land. The most significant instance of unrest over land rights occurred in 1970. By the late 1960s, the British colonial administration had become concerned about the lack of planning regulations in the face of increasing land speculation and development in the islands (FCO, 1969, p. 1). However, the Administrator's attempt to introduce new controls on the sale and development of land encountered strong opposition. These regulations disproportionately affected working-class Caymanians who would struggle to afford the new planning fees (Connolly, 2020, p. 211). On 20 April 1970, over 500 people marched through the capital demanding the repealing of the proposed "Land Development (Interim Control) Regulations" (Cayman Islands Annual Report, 1966 to 1970, p. 4). Bystanders joined the crowd, boosting the march and making it the most significant protest in Cayman in the twentieth century (Bodden, 2007, pp. 15-20). Several Members of the Legislative Assembly were involved, including Ira Walton and Annie Bodden (Walton, 1991, pp. 2-4). The demonstrators presented a petition to the Administrator which called for a new election, as well as the reconsidering of the land regulations. The petition was by no means radical, assuring the Administrator that protestors were "not trying in any manner to usurp power or to govern ourselves" (*The Caymanian Weekly,* 1970, 23 April). The marchers also signed a letter addressed to the Queen in which they demanded a new Administrator. They declared their pride in their "English heritage" and spoke as "loyal citizens of your empire" (*ibid*.). It is striking that the marchers referred enthusiastically to the "empire" in 1970 when many Caribbean countries had already become independent. They also stated their wish to continue the "tranquillity and freedom which was handed down from our forefathers" (*ibid*.). This is part of a narrative of Caymanian history which obscures enslavement.

Though demonstrators were generally united in their opposition to the new land development laws, their motives for protesting were varied. Placards highlighted a wide range of grievances, including calling for the repealing of land regulations and expressing a lack of faith in the government (Hannerz, 1974, p. 131). The monarchy was further evoked during subsequent meetings to discuss the land regulations. Political protest meetings ended with a rendition of *God Save the Queen*, which served to add respectability to the proceedings and to reassure the administration that protesters were not seeking to overhaul the existing political system (Hannerz, 1974, p. 143). MLA Jim Bodden cautioned against protests appearing to be

disorderly, arguing that Cayman needed to maintain the appearance of political stability so that foreign investors would not be put off (*ibid*, p. 146).

The 1970 Land March was initially seen as a success by those who had protested because certain regulations were repealed. However, the interim Land Development Law remained and, in the end, the planning laws were introduced with very little adjustment (Cayman Islands Annual Report, 1966-1970, p. 4). It is telling that the Queen was invoked during the dispute, seen as the higher authority and a voice of justice when it came to land grievances. The Queen formed a figure of stability and apolitical impartiality in any conflict. Dissatisfaction could then be aimed at the Administrator or local politicians without disrupting the entire colonial system.

Into the twenty-first century

By the early 1980s, overt demonstrations of loyalty and devotion to the Queen began to be less common from political leaders in many other Caribbean countries. Yet in the Cayman Islands, the Queen's popularity endured. In 1982, a special collection was issued to mark the 150th anniversary of the Caymanian Assembly. The Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Sybil McLaughlin, began the collection with the following message:

> In all this time, the Cayman Islands have always been loyal part of what was once the British Empire and is now the British Commonwealth, not because of any pressure from Great Britain but because the people here have always been deeply loyal to the British Crown and would not have it any other way (McLaughlin, 1982, p. 7).

The continuing power of patriotic rhetoric relating to the 'mother country' and the monarchy was evident in the Caymanian response to the onset of the 1982 Falklands War. A 'Mother Needs Your Help' campaign across the islands drummed up $1 million to donate to the UK war effort (Bodden, 2007, pp. 120-5). This article has focused on the decades following the Second World War, when the Caymanian merchants wielded a monopoly on politics and society in the islands. Their symbolic use of the monarchy had a particular impact on constitutional debates and local politics in the 1960s. After the breakdown of party politics through the disintegration of the NDP, the grip of the old established merchant families over the Legislative Assembly began to lessen somewhat (Hannerz, 1974, p. 112). The arrival of wealthy foreign businesspeople and investors to some extent diluted the control of old establishment families (Bodden, 2010, p. 13). Nonetheless, Bodden (2010, p. 9) argues that Caymanian politics remained mostly controlled by "established patrons and oligarchs until the general election in 2000".

This article began with a reference to the Queen's first visit to Cayman in 1983. Following this hugely popular one day visit, she returned in 1994. In his account of the tour, the Governor commented that enthusiasm was apparent among younger generations, as well as older Caymanians, with over three thousand people turning out to witness the Queen's arrival (Gore, 1994). In a speech during the visit, Caymanian Minister McKeeva Bush highlighted Cayman's "loyalty to and love for The Queen" which was "greeted by a rousing cheer from the 2000 people present" (*ibid.*). Writing at the start of the twenty-first century, Craton (2003, p. 409) argued that, for Caymanians "loyalty to the monarchy is central". He suggested that patriotism towards Britain "even grew in the last four decades of the twentieth century" (*ibid.*). Every year Caymanians hold ceremonies which emphasise the symbolic importance of the monarchy within the state and society, including the "formal opening of the Legislature and

the Supreme Court, the celebration of the Queen's Birthday… investitures at Government House, and Remembrance Day" (*ibid.*). Thus, some of the most important state and public events in Cayman continue to emphasise the position and significance of the British monarchy through these public spectacles.

In terms of elites, by the twenty-first century, a shift in power meant that wealthy retirees, professionals and blue-collar workers from the US, UK and Canada now "exert an inordinate level of influence over the Caymanian society by virtue of their investments and earning power" (Bodden, 2018, p. 144). Constitutionally, only gradual increases in local autonomy have been made and there appears little sign of interest in independence in the islands (Clegg, 2005, p. 128). Tensions with the UK have occasionally arisen, particularly over the constitutional powers that the Governor holds as the Queen's representative. Recent examples include the 2018 Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act, and the introduction of same-sex civil unions in 2020 (Clegg, Matheson and Mut Bosque, 2023, p. 9). The importance of Queen Elizabeth II for the Cayman Islands was particularly evident in the days after her death in 2022. Cayman held ten days of mourning and a series of official commemorative events. Tributes from school children and other Caymanians were collected by the government (Tributes, 2023). The Premier, Wayne Panton, in his official message declared "our loyalty to the British Crown was strongest and most heartfelt under her reign" (Tobutt, 2022). The ongoing veneration of the British monarchy in a place like the Cayman Islands is revealing of the race and class hierarchies which continue to influence who has power and wealth today.

Conclusion: Queen Elizabeth II and the Cayman Islands

During the era of decolonisation in the Cayman Islands, the monarchy played an important symbolic role in discouraging attempts at constitutional change. Patriotism, in the shape of "a strong feeling of allegiance to England and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II", was a powerful political device employed to promote ties to Britain (Bodden, 2007, pp. 119-124). Most significantly, in the 1960s, loyalty to the Queen was used to underpin the legitimacy of the merchant Christian Democratic Party in an effort to forestall the campaign for a more pluralist politics. As the royal family website (2023) claims, the Sovereign is intended to give "a sense of stability and continuity". In a highly unequal island society, "continuity" entailed the perpetuation of the Caymanian merchants' dominance in politics and the economy.

In the same period, as Cayman developed as an offshore financial centre, the Queen functioned as a figure of stability, boosting Cayman's appeal as a safe place for investment. The "pomp and pageantry of the colonial government, with its venerable yet quaint British customs", of which the monarchy was a central part, was used to promote Cayman to investors (Clegg, 2005, p. 129). Economic growth was encouraged at the expense of constitutional change, with continuing ties to Britain and the monarchy held up as fundamental to economic prosperity. At a global level, Cayman's success as a tax haven had considerable implications for the processes and impact of decolonisation elsewhere. The Cayman Islands acted as a space of colonial stability in the midst of decolonisation and movements for Black self-determination. As Vanessa Ogle (2020) has demonstrated, the creation of offshore financial centres in British Overseas Territories like Cayman, Bermuda and the British Virgin Islands, formed an important part of the political economy of decolonisation, allowing European assets to be moved to low tax jurisdictions as colonies became independent. The perceived Whiteness of the Cayman Islands, reinforced by retaining the British monarch as head of state, served to bolster Cayman's reputation as a financial hub. Within this framing, the lack of constitutional change, the economic success, and the "Whiteness" of Cayman was contrasted with the

independence, the perceived economic instability and the "Blackness" of other countries. Furthermore, greater autonomy, particularly for Black and mixed-race Caymanians, was implied to be a risk to stability and a threat to economic development. Therefore, the capitalist expansion of tax havens in British Overseas Territories developed along clearly racialised lines (Connolly, 2020, p. 212). It exploited existing race-class hierarchies in the Caribbean and undermined the efforts of Black leaders and political movements to effect transformative change to the colonial system.

Finally, the monarchy held particular significance when it came to the issue of land rights. Through centuries-old English laws, the Sovereign provided and upheld the legitimacy and legal structure of White land ownership, during the initial colonisation of a territory and into the twentieth century. The monarchy therefore functioned to normalise the British presence in Cayman and British control of land.

An exploration of the symbolic power of the Queen in the Cayman Islands has highlighted the extent to which the monarchy is associated with the notion of "stability". These discourses of stability also have wider implications for current trends in the region towards republicanism. Since Barbados' shift to republic status in 2021, the British monarch remains head of state in eight Caribbean countries. In many of these nations, campaigns are under way calling for the removal of lingering colonial legacies, including the abolishing of the monarchy. In debates about republicanism, the idea that a British monarch adds a sense of stability and offers an external source of impartiality in political disputes continues to resonate. The pervasive notion that a White British authority figure is needed to keep local political interests in check continues to hamper efforts to decolonise the region.

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