Bermuda's "Land Losses" Inquiry: "Trading Places"

A submission to the Commission of Inquiry into Historic Losses of Land

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Introduction:

Let me begin by thanking the Commission for this opportunity to place my views before it. I do so out of a longstanding love and admiration for Bermuda.

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Few words shiver the spine of a modern democracy more than "expropriation." Even when dressed up in fancy legal garb as the exercise of "eminent domain," expropriation provokes the primal fear of the state or its proxies taking property "out of an owner's possession," as the dictionary has it. As such, the act of expropriation lies at the sensitive intersection in any society between individualism and collectivity. Almost invariably focused on land ownership, expropriation erodes the possessive individualism that lies at the heart of western culture – the right to acquire and possess material things. But expropriation also emanates from another fundamental impulse in western society – the urge to improve the collective well-being of its members. For example, the fifth amendment of the US constitution in fact enshrines the right of eminent domain as long as it is accompanied by "just compensation."

Dictionaries hint at the purported benevolent utility of expropriation: "to take for public use or in the public interest." By way of exemplifying such collective purpose, expropriation is often linked to the facilitation of public utilities, hospitals, roadways and national security. Public gain at private loss. Thus, the expropriation of property always hinges on a delicate dialectic between the legitimacy and rights of the private and of the public spheres. The test of any society in arbitrating this delicate balance lies in the transparency and equitability

of the transfer process. This evaluation is what lies at the heart of Bermuda's ongoing "losses of land" commission of inquiry, an inquiry into the manner and consequences of the exercise of eminent domain on the island over time.

Expropriation has found a role on every continent and developed society. Take Canada – my homeland – by way of example. Canada's emergence as a viable coast-to-coast nation over the last 150 years has frequently been expedited by strategic expropriation in aid of forced economic, military and infrastructure growth. Many would argue that the results have, on the whole, been positive. In the late 1950s, for instance, extensive stretches of the shoreline of the St. Lawrence River – Canada's major east-west axis of trade – were expropriated by the Canadian and American governments to facilitate a massive expansion of the river's navigational and hydroelectric capacity. The impact on small towns along the river was traumatic; they were submerged as the water level rose to permit higher dams and larger locks. Displaced townsfolk were compensated at market value for their land together with supplementary payments for "injurious affection." New towns were built at federal expense inland from the new waterway. Here lay the nub of the transaction: for existing farming use the lands had one valuation, but as the necessary precondition for a national megaproject their prospective value rose dramatically. Compensation tried to establish a balance between the two poles of value. Despite such due process, nostalgia for the "lost villages" of the St. Lawrence persists to this day. A way of life has been lost in the name of national progress. Nonetheless, the St. Lawrence Seaway is today an engine of national growth, generating $35 billion in annual business revenue and supporting 227,000 jobs on both sides of the river.

The relationship of expropriation and collective benefit is evident worldwide throughout modern history. The British canal system and the American railway network in the nineteenth century are two examples. In the twentieth century, many of North America's magnificent national parks reflect expropriation judiciously applied to collective need. So too are its occasional abuses. Think of the damage inflicted on the landscape of New York City and state by Robert Moses, whose headlong addiction to expropriation as a means of building motorways and forced urban renewal displaced many poor Americans from their

neighbourhoods in the Sixties and Seventies. For Moses, bulldozers took the place of due process and equitable negotiation.

Canada has, similarly, not always got it right when lifting property from its citizens. In the winter of 1941/2 in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the nation was gripped by a bout of virulent anti-Asian xenophobia. Panicked white Canadians assumed that their country was the next victim on Tokyo's master plan. Without due process and with only political expediency in mind, Ottawa gathered up 22,000 Japanese-Canadians (many of whom were in reality fully-fledged citizens) and deported them to internment camps in the continental interior. Their property – mainly fishing boats and market gardens – was confiscated without compensation. It took until 1988 for the federal government to issue an apology for this shameful abuse of a minority by the majority. Token payments were made to surviving victims and monies were dedicated to educational programs aimed at creating tolerance for cultural diversity. To their immense credit, Japanese-Canadians accepted this gesture of contrition and have renewed their faith in Canada, excelling in the arts and professions to this day. Over the last decade, Canada has been similarly engaged in a process of truth and reconciliation with its Aboriginal peoples, whose lands were treatied away in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Long History of Expropriation in Bermuda:

And what of Bermuda? The island's history is punctuated by expropriation that has generally served to fortify – at times quite literally – its growth and well-being. One should remember that Bermuda is an island bereft of traditionally sustaining natural resources. Its thin soil and rocky terrain defied early attempts, even with the exploitation of slave labour, to implant large-scale agriculture – silk, cotton, sugar and tobacco all failed to gain a lasting foothold. Instead, Bermuda has been left over time to rely precariously on its salubrious climate to attract visitors and on its strategic mid-Atlantic position to attract first the military and more recently exempt companies to nurture its well-being.

In the wake of the American Revolution, Britain came to regard Bermuda as its "Gibraltar of the West" and used expropriation to gird the colony with forts,

military barracks and roads designed to enhance its hemispheric prowess. In doing, the British military became steady island employers. Bermuda's map remains dotted with these militaristic initiatives -- Ireland Island, Prospect Barracks and Fort St. Catherine all echo this legacy. Much of this assemblage was made possible by means of expropriation backed by military fiat. Indeed, the deliberate selection and lay-out of the colony's new capital Hamilton in the 1780s was the product of a military governor, Henry Hamilton, who appointed commissioners to buy and design the town's square grid geography. It is important to note that these imposed changes to the Bermuda landscape and society affected *all* Bermudians regardless of race – the expropriation of land for roads and forts was blind to race and class. These mandated changes would leave an unforeseen legacy. Not only would they provide heritage sites for future tourism but when Bermuda's mid-Atlantic military utility began to fade, the island was prompted to convert its strategic mid-Atlantic position into an off-shore business enclave.

Similarly, Bermuda learned to leverage its Gulf Stream-favoured climate to its advantage early in the twentieth century as a pioneering tourist destination for wealthy North Americans. At heart of this endeavour was the forceful oversight of the Trade Development Board, an unelected coterie of merchants who groomed Bermuda meticulously into the "Isles of Rest," confident that success would line their pockets while at the same time promoting a general prosperity that would keep Bermuda from the economic dependency of the Caribbean plantation economies. What the Trade Development Board deemed good for the colony, the Colonial Assembly usually obliged.

The Implications of Growth in the Twentieth Century: Tucker's Town

The primacy of strategic location and inviting sunshine in Bermuda set the agenda of Bermuda's twentieth-century development. Other pursuits were pushed to the economic margin. While the once-lucrative trade in sweet onions slipped away from Bermuda, local agriculture persisted, albeit limited by the island's thin and easily exhausted soil and by the increasing imperialism of tourism over land values. Boat building and fishing also persisted, although the deep fall-off of the

island's continental shelf crimped the fishery. On a macro-economic policy plane, the long-term economic sustenance of the island rested on shifting the bulk of its employed field and sea-oriented society into the increasingly lucrative tourist and military support sectors of the economy.

Against this backdrop, the early twentieth century brought two new projects of national development to the fore in Bermuda: the creation of an exclusive enclave of residential tourism on a rocky spit of land called Tucker's Town in the east end and the construction of an end-to-end railway to unite the island. Each project prompted expropriation.

The genesis of the Tucker's Town project in the 1920s is, by now, well known: the combination of a long-established English steamship company ambitious to establish Bermuda as a high-end destination and a Trade Development Board eager to oblige this ambition together focused on a poor farming and fishing community that stood as an obstacle in the face of these commercial desires. Some context is, however, first needed to appreciate the dynamic of the times. Bermuda, together with the rest of the western world, had just emerged from a murderous world war and an equally devastating 'flu pandemic. The international economy had not as expected sprung into post-war prosperity and indeed teetered on the brink of a recession that would stretch into the mid-1920s. At the same time, other would-be tourist destinations – Florida and the Bahamas – were offering competition to the Isles of Rest. Capital was scarce in Bermuda, as was expertise in hotel management, advertising and the construction of luxury accommodation for those who wished to take up residence on the island on a more permanent basis than short-term tourism allowed. In short, a mood of anxiety troubled the island as the prospect of losing the momentum of its promising pre-war start to its tourism rose.

The ambition of developing Tucker's Town into an exclusive expatriate enclave of North American patricians offered an inviting antidote to this anxiety. The creation of a mid-Atlantic Tuxedo Park – the posh Gilded Age retreat for America's rich in the Hudson River valley -- would set the brand of Bermuda as the "go to" winter destination for wealthy North Americans, who, it was argued,

would soon be followed by legions of “trippers” eager to emulate their wealthier peers. The problem was that the Bermuda location deemed best suited to this ambition with its idyllic oceanic orientation was already occupied by community of Black farmers and fishers who had resided there since shortly after their emancipation from slavery. Their residence there was largely predicated on the fact that land on the Tucker’s Town peninsula had always been on the margins of Bermuda’s economy. In the early 1600s, Governor Daniel Tucker saw the point as vital to the seaward defence of the island, but the fortifications he placed there were soon superseded by stiffer defences on nearby islands. The soil was sparse and rocky. Early attempts to grow cotton there had failed. Only when the town spilled over into adjacent Paynter’s Vale did farming become viable to any profitable extent. For fishing and whaling, Tucker’s Town provided sheltered inlets, although its exposure to ocean storms often brought climatic punishment. Thus, the population remained small – perhaps 350 by the twentieth century. Nonetheless, there was a vibrant sense of community. A Methodist Chapel, for instance, anchored its religious life. But their hard-scrabble economic existence limited Tucker’s Towners’ access to education and tended to hive them off from interaction with the rest of the island.

Tucker’s Town was almost entirely a Black community. One exception was Goodwin Gosling, a merchant in the Bermuda liquor trade and a member of the so-called “Forty Thieves” clique of powerful merchants. In 1907, Gosling, a Paget resident, had built a cottage in Tucker’s Town – “The Clearing” – and began to assemble a parcel of about 100 acres of land out of the roughly 600 acres in Tucker’s Town. Gosling saw Tucker’s Town through a different lens than its long-time inhabitants. For him, its allure lay in its pink beaches, its ocean views and its potential for seclusion, not in its sustenance farming and fishing. His vision conformed to what we would today call a “gated community.” Affluent people would pay to be amongst their own. In this sense, he envisaged a community of residential tourists living in a bubble sustained by Bermuda’s sunny climate and oceanic orientation. It was a projection rooted primarily in wealthy class and social benchmarks, a status that was at the time in America almost the exclusive privilege of white Americans, and Bermudians whites for that matter. The fact

that that the inhabitants of Tucker's Town were poor Blacks underscored their unsuitability, in developers' minds, for adaptation to this blueprint for Bermuda's future. One can speculate that if Tucker's Town had been populated by Portuguese-Bermudian farmers or by a mixed racial society that the outcome would have resulted in the same urge to displace them from this would-be paradise by the sea. This not being the case, however, the Tucker's Town relocation took on an undeniable racial tinge from its outset. The whole point was to create a Disney-like enclave that capitalized on Bermuda's natural beauty, but not on its humanity.

Due Process in Tucker's Town?:

Gosling found a willing partner in his ambition in the Furness-Withy Steamship Company of England, the perfect partner to project the "Britishness" of the new Bermuda tourist product. The instrument of the partnership that emerged in 1919 was the Bermuda Development Company [BDC]. The goal of the BDC was to acquire an airtight pocket of about 300 acres of land on Tucker's Town point and another 200 or so acres in its Hamilton Parish hinterland. The BDC's possession of an initial one hundred of these acres was assured by the promise of buying out Gosling's own holding. In early 1920, the BDC therefore launched a drive to strike *voluntary* sale agreements with Tucker's Town residents. The tactic brought quick results. By February 1920, the BDC's lawyers, Watlington Conyers, reported that about three-quarters of the desired land had already been purchased, totalling about 300 acres. The sales were lock-stock-and-barrel agreements that included both land and homes on that land. We do not know what the average price paid for these acquisitions was, but a 1922 entry in the parish assessment book registers 275 acres to the BDC at an attributed cost of £75 an acre.

After the initial spate of sales, the pace slowed for several reasons. The BDC's land acquisition scheme began to attract public opinion (hardly the kind of opinion poll-driven exercise it is today, but nonetheless measurable in newspaper coverage and Assembly debates). A petition presented to the Assembly by a group of "freeholders of Tucker's Town" conveyed their unwillingness to part with land on which they had lived for years. They voiced their "natural love and

attachment for their lands" and claimed that "no monetary compensation" would budge them from their land. Other Bermudians – white – expressed their disquiet for different reasons. The BDC, in their mind, was a menacing monopoly that would bring foreign values and "alien" land owners to an island with a distinct culture and limited geography. *Royal Gazette* columnist Samuel Pepys Teucer (a pseudonym for its editor Arthur Purcell) likened the BDC project to a "Boozonian" paradise of cocktails and golf. More seriously, he portrayed Gosling, who would soon resign his post as Assistant Colonial Secretary to become the local director of the project, as "the hot air behind the dollar…running about at the beck and call of a soulless corporation." A more formidable obstacle for the BDC lay in the fact that a number of Tucker's Town landowners were refusing to sell. Perhaps the largest of these, with 74 acres, was farmer Bryan Talbot. Whether Talbot was holding out for reasons of his heritage and roots or because he hoped to up the sale price ante by procrastination is unclear. Eventually, he would ask £25, 000 for his land; the company countered with an offer of £6,500.

The BDC was now trapped by the logic of its plan: their enclave for wealthy residential tourists only made sense if the *entire* assemblage of land could be acquired. There can be no question that the BDC had the backing – transmitted by the well-placed Gosling in the local mercantile community – of the Trade Development Board and behind it the Colonial Government. As a large English company, Furness-Withy was also in many ways a proxy for Britain's stake in what it believed was in Bermuda's best interest. Thus, that familiar tool of policy implementation, expropriation, made its appearance in Tucker's Town.

In the summer of 1920, the BDC moved to gird itself with more authority in Bermuda. In July, it incorporated under Bermuda law and then a month later sought a further act to stiffen its power of land acquisition. The Bermuda Development Company Act, 1920 set out three procedures by which the company might realize the rest of its landholding ambition. To facilitate the provisions of the act, a three-person panel of paid commissioners was appointed to oversee its workings. Initially, they were empowered to convene a meeting at which the BDC could present a purchase offer to a hold-out landowner. If an acceptable price could be arrived at, the commission would sanction it as binding. If no accord was

found on price, the commission could then calculate a higher offer which was binding on the BDC and submit it to the landowner. If such an enhanced offer was refused, then the commission might invoke a third power of impanelling a jury of arbitration which would then hear out both parties and subsequently impose a final and indisputable selling price.

In the Assembly, there was some concern over the "compulsory" features of the act, but the general inclination was to push forward, especially since the BDC had signed contracts with architects, golf course designers and shipping companies. Over the next two years, the process of land accumulation laboriously moved forward, case by case. There were, for instance, problems with some Tucker's Town landowners whose title to land could not be confirmed. In 1923, the original act was amended to accommodate this anomaly. At the same time, Gosling tried to enhance the option of selling out by supplementing his original offers with land in Smith's and Devonshire, land clearly better suited to farming than the sparse soil of Tucker's Town. Eventually, however, the commission appointed arbitration juries to settle the few stubbornly outstanding cases where normal bargaining had failed. In early 1922, for instance, Bryan Talbot was awarded £8,200 for his land by an eight-man jury, even though Gosling had offered £10,000 plus six acres of land elsewhere. In a few cases, the process culminated in unhappy scenes of physical eviction after the jury's ruling. The notorious case of Diana Smith, who was evicted under police surveillance from her humble home on Tucker's Town Bay, has powerfully echoed into Bermuda oral history thereby providing a poignant capstone, for many, for the whole experience of Tucker's Town's uprooting. In a ditty she wrote as her own editorial on the experience, Smith wrote: "Godwin Gosling is a thief/And everyone knows it."

An Asymmetrical Negotiation?:

But was Gosling really a "thief"? Was the creation of the new Tucker's Town really an act of outright "theft" and an unregulated "land grab"? Like most historical questions, the answer must be nuanced by reference to the context and values of the time. Terms like "theft" and "land grab" are emotionally-loaded terms that deflect us from understanding that historical reality. Theft implies a complete lack

of consent and consultation. Such was not the case in Tucker's Town a century ago. The land was not simply "grabbed." There was due process and transparency. Legislation was obtained setting out graduated stages of property acquisition. The process of acquisition was transparent, the *Royal Gazette* providing frequent front-page coverage of the arbitration cases and even of the sad eviction of Diana Smith. Voices of opposition were reported and voiced in the Assembly. The commissioners showed some appreciation of the rights of the landowners, often visiting them in their homes to hear their side of the negotiation. And, thanks to the mandated procedure of the commission, final settlement prices for land did increase through negotiation.

Despite all of the above due process, the Tucker's Town land purchases and expropriations rested on a fundamental asymmetry between seller and buyer. On the one hand, Gosling and the BDC reflected the power of Bermuda's white-dominated colonial democracy and all the means at its disposal. Behind them stood a powerful and determined ally in the Furness-Withy steamship company, a company that opened Bermuda's gateway to outside capital and expertise. A property-defined franchise was the essence of Bermuda politics, an arena barely inhabited by Black Bermudians. The commissioners empowered to expedite the BDC's project were all white, as were those selected to serve on the arbitration juries. The BDC had retained a leading island legal firm to represent their interests. The residents of Tucker's Town, particularly the handful of hold-outs, were on the other hand, generally poorly educated and ill-prepared for the legalities and politics of dealing with the hard reality of island capitalism. Understandably, despite support from a few clerics and Assembly members, they also lacked leadership skills to guide them cohesively through the proposition they faced.

More "Lost Land": Trains and Planes:

The Tucker's Town upheaval was, however, hardly an unprecedented event in Bermuda history. Expropriation and policies of forced growth were familiar tools on the vulnerable mid-Atlantic island. This reality was made all the clearer in 1924, when another group of British capitalists arrived on the island, this time

with the ambition of an end-to-end railway. The story of the ultimately ill-fated Bermuda railway has often been told. But its building in the late 1920s brought a reprise of the confrontation between a determined company backed by an act of the Assembly and reluctant Bermuda landowners. Once again, the project won approval from the colonial government because of its appeal to "progress," both in terms of tourism and local mobility. The 22-mile railway was designed to hug the coast in an effort to minimize inland disruption. Even then, land had to be acquired. Some sold out willingly; others resisted. Some denounced the railway as an assault on a traditional way of life; others saw holding out as way of upping the ante. Communities along the line were vitally affected as, for instance, the railway cut local boat builders off from their shoreline yards. As construction neared completion, tensions rose – the viability of the project depended on the last spike being driven into place. Construction therefore culminated in a number of unpleasant evictions.

A similar pattern emerged around the construction of the Fort Bell/Kindley Field airfield in World War II and a cluster of US military bases scattered across the island. Here the state-sanctioned rationale was the necessity of providing a mid-Atlantic stopping-off place for Allied ships and aircraft in the struggle against Nazism, a pernicious ideology despised by all Bermudians. Few disputed the need to crush fascism and this offered Bermuda its opportunity to "do its bit." Indeed, Prime Minister Churchill told the Bermuda Assembly that the wartime bases were Bermuda's "contribution to a better world." While part of the airfield construction was made possible by dredging Castle Harbour, the rest relied on land expropriation in St. David's, particularly on Long Bird and Cooper's Island. Expropriation was the automatic response to the challenge. A commission oversaw the appropriations, settling valuations and adjudicating final prices. Many begrudged the process and resentment would fester well into the post-war period, but wartime imperatives took precedence.

In so many ways, the airport and railway land acquisitions resembled the traumatic events that overtook Tucker's Town in the 1920s, but with *one* exception: Tucker's Town was an almost entirely Black community. The coastal railway corridor and the runways that cut into St. David's devoured property that

cut across *all* racial and economic levels of Bermuda society. The forced exodus of the inhabitants of Tucker's Town was not, however, a reflection of racial predetermination, but instead reflected the existing demographic geography of the island and its touristic potential. Admittedly, the Tucker's Town community had come to inhabit this rocky outcrop of Bermuda because they had long occupied the lowest rung in Bermuda's socio-economic ladder and that is where the BDC found them.

Two Ways of Seeing It: "What If" and Trickle Down

Perhaps two theories, popular in some public policy circles, may help to further set Bermuda's expropriated lands to a more meaningful context.

Historians, having set out the past in traditional empirical fashion propelled by facts, sometimes like to play with the past by probing it in a *counterfactual* fashion – by asking "what if" of past events by projecting hypothetical variables into their future. What if, for instance, the Nazis had won the Battle of Britain? What if Nelson Mandela had died in prison on Robben Island and never returned to the mainland to again take up the fight against apartheid and ascend to South Africa's presidency? Where would America be today if JFK had not been assassinated? Such queries help us to set the actual outcomes of history in a more nuanced fashion.

What, therefore, would have been the fate of Tucker's Town and its inhabitants if the BDC had never set its ambitious eye on the touristic potential of their homeland? With all due respect and admiration of the vibrant community culture of that marginalized community, it is hard to imagine it ever assembling the capital, entrepreneurial connection and expertise to alter its hard scrabble way of life a century ago. What other opportunity might have altered the isolation of their community and its fortunes? Tourism, however, became the undisputed engine of Bermuda prosperity in the twentieth century and possibly its effects might eventually have been felt in far-flung Tucker's Town, but certainly not with same impact that Furness Withy did bring to it in the 1920s. What we do know is that the people of Tucker's Town left their homeland – some very unhappily – and were relocated to establish a new life nearer the centre of Bermuda's economy in

Smith's and Devonshire, where they came to enjoy more lucrative farming and access to the growing hospitality industry. Their ability to do so was enhanced by the financial settlements they received and, for some, new land they acquired in places down the road from their birthplace. In doing so, they also transported many of the elements of their original community – Marsden Church in Smith's today stands as a testament to the portability of life on the shores of Tucker's Bay. Bermuda's renowned Talbot Brothers began life singing hymns in Tucker's Town and went on to fame on stages across Bermuda and North America. (My old friend, the late Roy Talbot, once told me that his mother used money from her Tucker's town settlement to buy an organ for their new home near Newton's Bay in Smith's, an organ that accompanied nightly family sing-songs and the emergence of a singing group that ironically was soon paid to perform up in the new Tucker's Town homes.)

Similarly, what if the war had never produced an airport? Without an airport, Bermuda would never have emerged from war with a facility that put it on the doorstep of the post-war boom in commercial aviation and all that did to accelerate modern tourism. The Bermuda Railway did not perhaps leave such a constructive legacy, but one could note that its abandoned right of way has given Bermudians today a marvellous network of walking trails.

The fate of Tucker's Towners also invites us to contemplate another contemporary theory of economic development: trickle-down economics. Popular in 1980s America under Ronald Reagan, trickle-down economics argued that changes at the top of the economic pyramid – tax cuts for the rich, deregulation – would stimulate the economy to such an extent that benefits – full employment, wage growth – would percolate down to those working in factories and the service industries. It never worked out that way; the rich usually got richer and tucked away their windfall in property and safe investments. There was, however, some trickle-down effect for the lower reaches of the American economy. Bill Clinton inherited a booming economy that carried him through the 1990s. Somewhat the same can perhaps be said of Bermuda in the tourist-driven twentieth century. Yes, the likes of Goodwin Gosling and Stanley Spurling waxed prosperous by attaching themselves to the hotels, night clubs and import

businesses that thrived along Front Street and along the South Shore beaches, but at the same time many "ordinary" Black and white Bermudians found personal prosperity in the service industries that made Bermuda one of the world's premier carriage-trade tourist destinations. Today, Bermuda enjoys one of the highest per capita standards of living in the world – US $99,400 as of 2016 according to the World Bank. This economic momentum has propelled social and political change in Bermuda, the 1968 constitution allowing Bermuda to profoundly alter some of the power relations that underlay the treatment of Tucker's Town and other expropriations a century ago. Power is now trickling up in Bermuda. With such progressive momentum under way, hasty ahistorical judgements of the political ethos prevailing a century ago could obstruct the recent enrichment of the nature of Bermudian citizenship. Instead, Bermudians should continue to open up the scope of their citizenship and historical understanding through research, reporting, dialogue and the tolerance and togetherness that an honest history brings. Truth and reconciliation, as Canada is discovering, is preferable to retribution and division.

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October 5, 2020

A Personal Postscript:

In 1996, while researching my book *Another World: Bermuda and the Rise of Modern Tourism* (Macmillan, 1999), I received a call one day in the archives from a group called The Friends of the Bermuda College Library. Would I give a fund raising lecture in support of the library? With pleasure, I replied, and when asked for a topic I replied that I would talk about "Tucker's Town", simply because that is what I was working on at that moment. The topic intrigued me and I had been unable to find much on it beyond the archives files. Almost immediately after hanging up, a white local historian working at an adjacent table, hitherto unknown to me, came over and said to me "You can't talk about that." I was

astonished and, of course, now more than ever determined to address the topic. However, I now approached the event with some trepidation sensing that the topic was sensitive and perhaps a sore point in Bermuda history. Would anyone come?

On the evening of the talk, I headed for the big lecture hall at the College in an anxious mood. Would anybody come? On arrival, I was stunned to see a huge line-up creeping out of the building into the College quad. The organizers told me that the hall was full and that others were lined up outside wanting to get in. (I would subsequently redeliver the talk at Marsden Church a few days later.) That evening, we started late due to the overflow crowd. It was, in my mind, an extraordinary evening, not really so much for the lecture itself, but for the long, lively and sometimes heated question period and discussion that followed it as Black and white Bermudians engaged in a lively dialogue about something they had suppressed for years. This, I concluded, is what historians are supposed to do – bring the past to life and let it refresh people's citizenship.

The talk subsequently appeared as an article in *Bermuda* magazine under the title "Trading Places" and surfaced in my book and then reappeared in a book of essays put together by my wife, Sandy Campbell, and I titled *Short Bermudas*. The original magazine essay won an award at the regional journalism annual meeting in New York.

The Tucker's Town episode is a classic example of "suppressed memory." Societies, like individuals and families, will tend to supress experiences that trouble them or prompt uneasy questions about their past. Better to celebrate what they construe as positive rather than problematic. Hence, the story of Tucker's Town in the 1920s was seldom explored in the public sphere. White local historians occasionally tried to construct a rationale for the event by arguing that Tucker's Town was "sparsely populated" by "a degenerate lot" of people. Less racist interpretations linked the episode to priming the pump of Bermuda tourism. Otherwise the topic was allowed to slip out of the acknowledged record of Bermuda's past.

At the same time, Black Bermudians suppressed the memory by relegating it to family lore and an unpublished stream of community memory. I interviewed about ten Tucker's Town-born Bermudians as part of my research. Understandably, their command of the precise details of events then seventy years old was sketchy. I did, however, discover that the incident had remained in their family memory, albeit often in a rather mythological fashion. Many expressed nostalgia for a lost way of life but most did acknowledge that life had improved with the money and land that leaving Tucker's Town had brought. My sample was small but eloquent.

In the years since these events, the Tucker's Town relocation has finally surfaced in the Bermuda consciousness. This has been a healthy thing. I note, however, that it has often been an ill-informed discussion, tending to be based on a mythologized recollection of and hearsay about the past. For instance, the notion that the land was "stolen" is pervasive and overlooks the existence of some effort at due process. It seems to me , for instance, that talk of a "land grab" and "theft" surrounding this issue is predicated on a false extrapolation of what Tucker's Town land would be worth in the hands of its original inhabitants today when in fact it was the expropriation – whether rightly or wrongly -- which has given the land its stratospheric present value. Historians greatly value oral evidence, but also are ever cautious about the frailty of human memory. This is why contemporary documentation in archives is so precious as a source of analysis and a tonic for the drift of memory over time. Without careful reconstruction of the past, societies can find themselves in a dangerously divisive situation.

Let me conclude by commending your investigation and thanking you for hearing me out. My hope is that your deliberations will restore, contextualize and legitimize the long history of lost lands in Bermuda to a balanced, open and well-researched chapter of Bermuda's history, while at the same time avoiding turning it into a divisive issue in a society which I love and regard as one of the most successful bi-racial societies on earth.

Thank you.