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Preface

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Guest Editors' Preface:

In March of 2007 the School of English Studies at the College of the Bahamas hosted the 26th Annual West Indian Literature Conference in Nassau, under the theme, "Horizons." A roundtable discussion was organized in order to introduce scholars to Bahamian writers and to give writers a space to discuss the challenges they face as well as the overarching preoccupations of their work. During the discussion, the issue of Bahamian literature's marginalization within the wider region was raised and debated at great length. On the heels of this exchange, Sandra Pouchet-Paquet of the University of Miami, proposed to all involved in the debate that we might begin to remedy the problem by dedicating an issue of *Anthurium* to Bahamian literature. Marjorie Brooks-Jones and I were charged with and accepted the task of guest editing this issue and several years later, here we are.

The Bahamas is a peculiar Caribbean nation. An archipelago of over 700 islands, just over 20 of which are inhabited, it is sandwiched by Florida in the north and Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic in the south. Independent from Britain since 1973, it, like many other nations in the Anglophone Caribbean, was led for a long time by a Moses figure, Lynden Pindling, a version of Barbados' Grantley Adams and Trinidad's Eric Williams, among others. The great struggle of the country was not so much for independence from the British as it was an internal one. The real struggle had taken place a decade earlier, between Pindling's reform-minded, black Progressive Liberal Party and a white oligarchy called the Bay Street Boys, whom historian Gordon K. Lewis described in his *Growth of the Modern West Indies* as exhibiting "a Dickensian mixture of American crass acquisitiveness and British snobbery" (331).

Today, the Bahamas remains a multi-racial society but one where the word "Bahamian" is curiously a codename for Black. The British legacy is much diminished, except in law and politics, and American-style consumerism and popular culture hold sway. New fault lines have emerged. Bahamian society has enjoyed economic prosperity since the Cuban Revolution made Nassau and Paradise Island the preferred locales for American tourism, casino gambling and glamorous Caribbean leisure. This prosperity has attracted immigrants in search of opportunity from around the world. The most uneasy relationship created by this pull has been between Haitian immigrants and Bahamians. Urbanization has also brought its share of predictable distress, as the country is experiencing unprecedented levels of crime against person and property. Drug trafficking fuels a gun culture and street justice. There is a growing consciousness of the economic marginalization of Bahamians, who feel that tourism and the foreign direct investment model of development have not benefited locals as much as would be desired. And disenchantment with party politics feeds a level of frustration that is palpable if one listens to the daily talk shows.

Bahamian writers offer crucial interventions in this context. Their discourses are a stark contrast to that of Bahamian musical and visual artists, whose work is diluted by the exigencies of the tourism marketplace. This collection offers the work of some of the country's more widely published poets, like Marion Bethel, Nicolette Bethel and Obediah Michael Smith, as well as new voices, like Sonia Farmer and Ward Minnis. Not surprisingly, the lion's share of the work here is poetry. It is safe to say that poetry is the favored mode of expression for Bahamian writers, for reasons I believe have much to do with oral culture. Our hope is that we shall see the

further growth of fiction in the years to come. We would like to thank Sandra Pouchet-Paquet and Patricia Saunders for the opportunity to bring this collection of Bahamian literature a wider reading audience. They have demonstrated yet again their great value to Caribbean literature and Caribbean studies. This edition provides a crucial step forward for the writers of the Bahamas.