Trinidad in the later 19th century was a divided society, consisting of rigidly stratified ethnic and national groupings. This study is concerned with the whites, the black masses, and the educated Negro middle class. The white upper class largely controlled the economy, especially the plantation sector (sugar and cocoa) and commerce. The economic structure was unfavourable to the peasant, and this was especially true with respect to the Crown Lands, taxation, and credit facilities. Political life in a 'pure' Crown Colony was dominated by the Unofficials. They nearly all came from the plantermerchant community, and they had considerable influence over local policy. Partly in reaction to this situation, many educated Trinidadians campaigned for elected members in the Legislative Council in 1884-8 and in 1892-5, but they failed to achieve their aims.

The white upper class, consisting of French and English
Creoles and resident Europeans, was an undoubted elite. Though there
were tensions and conflicts between them, they largely controlled the
economy, and they were the leaders of 'society'. In comparison, the
emerging Negro middle class was not a prosperous group. Its members
won their middle class status essentially through education, for the
main criterion for membership was command of European culture. At

the bottom of the economic scale, along with the Indians, were the Negro masses. Their living conditions were harsh, and they sought relief in their cultural world, a world which contained many African forms.

Trinidadians were divided by class, which pervaded the society, and by race. Whites held certain prejudicial views about Negroes, and historical factors also shaped the white view of the Negro. In the Trinidad of the later 19th century, therefore, race, colour, and class combined to create an immensely complex pattern of human relationships.