REVISITING THE ANTHROPOCENE ISLANDS:

Bahamian afterlives of extraction, saviorism, and repair

[Received May 27th 2026; accepted June 16th 2026 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.297]

Amelia Moore

Cornell University, Ithaca, USA <amm636@cornell.edu>

ABSTRACT: This article takes up the "inspirational islands" theme of this special issue as an an extended reflection on the question, "What is your relationship to The Bahamas?" This question inspired the author to revisit one of the seminal concepts of their work, "the Anthropocene Islands," and to consider how that framing of Bahamian life has evolved in the few years since their initial monograph on the subject was published. Referring to the author's positionality and familial legacies, personal and professional background, experiences as an environmental anthropologist of the Bahama islands, case examples, and the crucial scholarship that informs their thinking, past and present; the article explores what comes after critical diagnosis. The aim of the article is to allow this exploration of embodied (island) geographies to open a path towards repair for the scholars who do this work, the institutions and communities we do it for, and the biophysical afterlives our work may help imagine into being.

KEYWORDS: Bahamas, Anthropocene, savior ecologies, repair, biophysical afterlives, positionality

Introduction

> *Islands are rarely what they seem. I am acquainted with a small set of islands that have been visited by millions, and yet most visitors know very little about them. In this set of islands, the land and ocean are one continuous flow of energy. The substance of the land consists of exposed dunes and shallow banks formed by the precipitation of calcium carbonate from seawater. This limestone was excreted from the sea through the bodies of tiny sea creatures and shaped by chemical reactions repeating over millennia. Emerging on the western edge of the subtropical Atlantic Ocean, these islands are home to a host of life forms across the land and sea world: a kaleidoscope of reptiles, birds, insects, corals, fish, and shellfish that live in pine barrens, tropical coppice, mangrove marls, undersea reef colonies, sand flats, and beds of sea grasses. A shifting human populace of citizens, migrants, and international tourists also reside in this archipelago. These are the seven hundred islands of The Bahamas.* (Moore, 2019, p.1)

This is the opening paragraph to *Destination Anthropocene: Science and Tourism in the Bahamas*, published in August 2019. The book was the culmination of seventeen years of varied research experiences, initiated when I was a twenty-one year old undergraduate student and completed just prior to becoming a tenured university faculty member. The book's genre is multi-sited, longitudinal ethnography, and the subject is environmental field

research and sustainable tourism in The Bahamas, an independent archipelago in the Western mid-Atlantic stretching over 750 miles from just off the coast of the southeastern US state of Florida to the vicinity of northwestern Haiti (Figure 1). In it, I make the case for 'the Anthropocene islands' as a theoretical framework and contribution to contemporary Island Studies as part of a reconceptualisation of anthropology in the era of 'the Anthropocene idea.' Along the way, the book describes my evolution as a junior scholar forging a path at the convoluted intersection of the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities.

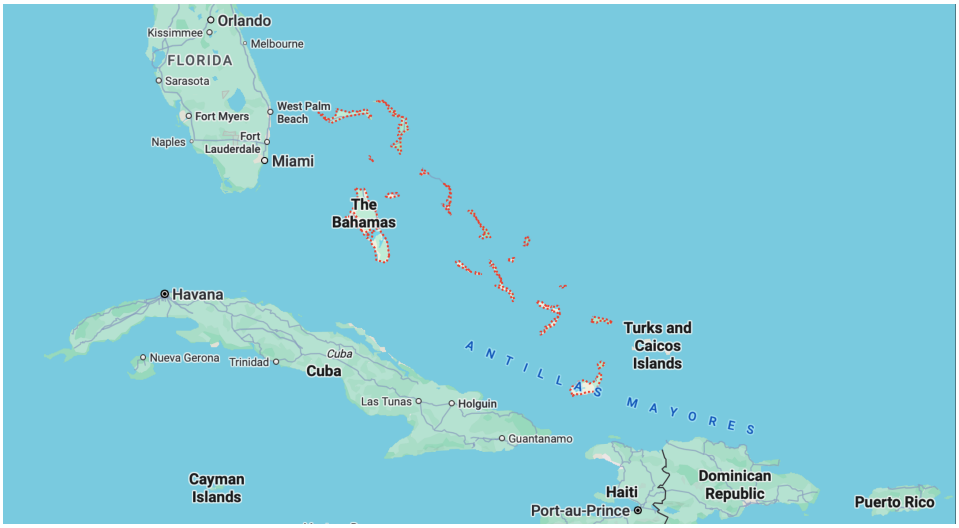


Figure 1 – The Bahamas (indicated in red) within the northern Caribbean (Google Maps, 2026).

I am proud to have completed the task of writing a monograph that attempts to hold so many threads together, yet I have been dissatisfied with the book since its publication. The text remains ill equipped to answer one of the most basic questions I am perpetually asked: 'what is your relationship to The Bahamas?' This is because the answer has always been a moving target, evolving with my understanding of the island nation along with my self-understanding as a subject of history and scholar formed within embodied geographies. I am grateful for the present opportunity posed by this special issue of *Shima* to use The Bahamas as my inspirational islands as a means to revisit some of the experiences and arguments that contributed to this work, and that now point me in other directions. In what follows, I reflect on my positionality as a biracial American woman, my ongoing professional arc as an environmental anthropologist of island life, and my evolving relationship to The Bahamas. My goal is not only to show how the personal is both professional and political[1], but also how the personal is enmeshed in biophysical and ecosystemic realities that deserve our professional attention. I want to use my experience in these exceptional islands to show how our attention can grow over time to inspire more reparative frameworks.

[1] For example, see blackpast.org (2012).

Beginnings[2]

I was born in the U.S. state of Washington in the early 1980s. My parents were a racially mixed couple who met in Seattle at a time when there was open social anxiety about racial miscegenation.[3] My mother has described herself as Black or African American, depending on the decade, because she was often asked, explicitly or implicitly, to explain herself. My father, a white, culturally protestant man, likely spent the majority of his life without having to identify as anything. They were both born into the Jim Crow south in the 1940s, they both weathered the civil unrest of the 1960s, and I believe they both thrived, in their own way, in the Pacific Northwest.

At the time of her birth, my mother's parents were English Professors at Tuskegee University, now referred to as a "historically Black university", in Alabama. Their careers were formed in the crucible of segregated American education. Their lives were framed by what was then called "the Negro problem" (Thompson 1933). It must have been liberating for my parents to move to Seattle as young professionals in the 1970s. Seattle was becoming a major cosmopolitan hub bolstered by specialised manufacturing. My father worked for the aerospace company, Boeing, and my mother worked for public television. Wealth was growing, the city and suburbs were growing, and skyscrapers were growing. The "Negro problem" must have seemed like a question for another place and time. My younger brother and I were subsequently raised in what was often mis-recognised as a post-racial bubble in the 1980s and 1990s (Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium, 2020). There was so much we didn't know.

As kids, we didn't know that our neighborhood was developed with a built-in racial covenant in the 1940s which dictated that no non-white people or Jews were allowed to own neighborhood property. The enduring legacy of this covenant was that my mother was the only Black person living there by the time I was old enough to notice. I had no idea that there was a multi-generational community of African Americans that had long called the Central District of Seattle home, struggling to survive through successive waves of gentrification (King & Shepard, 2020). This was a district I would later be bused into for high school, unwittingly participating in the race and class based segregation of elite public schooling (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). There were also surface level celebrations of what we called 'Native American culture' all over the region, including the name of the city of Seattle itself, but it was rarely mentioned that successive waves of white settlers looking for timber and other resources had pushed the original Indigenous inhabitants of the Northwest Coast onto reservations while deforesting, over-fishing, polluting, damming, dredging, filling in, and paving over the land to create the urban infrastructure I took for granted (Seattle Municipal Archives, 2025).

It may go without saying that I didn't know that the Boeing company, one of the largest producers of jet airplanes at the time, was contributing to the injection of many millions of tons of carbon into the atmosphere (which is ongoing despite mitigation, Hepher et al. 2021) or that its production plants were contaminating water, soil, and sediment in Washington and California, endangering public health (clean-up efforts are also ongoing, EPA 2019, Voisin, 2025). As an adolescent I worried about fitting in, but I didn't know enough to worry about what I was trying to fit in to.

[2] I have previously described a version of this positionally narrative in a blog post (Moore, 2020a).
[3] This anxiety that has come back in vogue in some American circles today.

I started describing my 'positionally' as part of my professional narrative a few years ago (for example, see Moore & Ota, 2025). I typically include it in public talks, but it is equally appropriate for this written reflection because none of us can claim objectivity as any kind of move to innocence in the scholarly work that we do (Tuck & Yang, 2012). I am aware that a youthful ignorance of my complete immersion in structural supremacy certainly isn't unique, but reflecting on my positionality helps me articulate a sense of complicity within a legacy of unfathomable injustice, and to comprehend how the categories by which I am able to identify, and through which I become socially identifiable, were shaped over generations. These reflections come with discomfort, a kind of embodied acknowledgment of the violence and inequity that has contributed to my existence. My biracial identity and the experiences of my Black ancestors do not absolve me from this complicity, nor do they automatically justify why I do the work that I do. However, I cannot deny that the choices my family members have made has influence over how I see the world and my place in it as simultaneously a social individual and component of a seething, indivisible yet inequitable collectivity. This knowledge drives my emerging sense of accountability. I now know that my relationship to the Bahama islands cannot be disentangled from my evolving understanding of self as a material embodiment of history. In fact, my relationship to these islands has greatly contributed to my personal and professional evolution.

Becoming with the Bahamas

I never set out to be an island scholar or an anthropologist. In fact, I pursued a degree in environmental biology as an undergraduate at Columbia University in the early 2000s. In the course of my wide ranging studies, I encountered the multifaceted dissonance between the natural sciences and the humanities. As I underwent a slow ethical awakening to the xenophobia, militarism, petrocapitalism, and fascism that manifested in the U.S. and New York city after September 11th, 2001, I was perplexed that we were not having real conversations about these topics in my classes on the atmospheric science of climate change or in field ornithology. It was made clear to me that researching these topics was not appropriate for a scientist— they were a distraction at best and indicative of a lack of seriousness at worst. However, when I took a course called 'Political Ecology,' taught by the environmental anthropologist Paige West, my sense of the possible exponentially expanded. I decided to minor in cultural anthropology to nurture my newfound love of critical theory.

In the summer of 2002, I was assigned to a summer research project in the settlement of Cherokee Sound on the island of Great Abaco in the Bahamian archipelago. I had no ties to the island or the country, but Dr. West was part of a multi-million dollar National Science Foundation Biocomplexity project conducting research in The Bahamas, co-led by anthropologist Kenneth Ward, and that project was looking for student field technicians. I joined a small team administering socioeconomic surveys to fisherfolk to gauge their perceptions of proposed marine protected area regulations. Even Dr. Broad - the only person on the team with long-term ties to the settlement at that time - would probably call this a form of 'helicopter science,' in which a group of foreigners from a colonising country dropped into a small island community in a 'post' colonial country for three weeks, collecting social data to inform research of limited direct relevance to the people we were surveying. At the time, I understood this to be the way conservation fieldwork was done. However, as a cultural anthropology minor, I was also tasked with reading the anthropology of The Bahamas. I concentrated primarily on folklore and postcolonial nationalism, and learning about Bahamian history and its role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a British colony. This was my introduction to a country struggling to be recognised, in the discipline of anthropology,

as a significant part of the wider Caribbean region. It was also my introduction to the Caribbean, a region struggling to be recognised as a geographical area of critical importance in the history of the world. I read Bahamian scholars like the historian Gail Saunders (Craton & Saunders 1999, 2000) and American anthropologists like Zora Neale Hurston (Hurston 2026), and I attempted ethnographic research in the small settlement to 'flesh out' what we were learning from our surveys about the local relationship to the changing marine environment. I completed my tasks to the satisfaction of my team members and supervisors, but I left Abaco with the sense that although we had collected enough information to fill out dozens of surveys that took ninety minutes to administer, I was only more keenly aware of how much I didn't know about what I was doing there.

The Bahamas stayed in the back of my mind as I navigated admission to graduate school. I managed to convince the anthropology department at the University of California Berkeley to take an environmental biology major who wanted to study the environmental politics of conservation. At that time, I knew my interest in the environment made me an outlier in a program that was heavily focused on medical anthropology and science studies, but I was able to connect anthropological arguments about the biomedical and biotechnical sciences to conservation biology and field ecology through courses with Paul Rabinow and Cori Hayden and by reading scholars like Kaushik Sunder Rajan (2006), Anna Tsing (2005), Donna Haraway (1997), Marilyn Strathern (1990), Hugh Raffles (2002), and Stefan Helmreich (2009). When I returned to The Bahamas in 2005, as a graduate student field technician working another summer surveying fishers for that same Biocomplexity project, only this time on the island of Eleuthera and the settlement of Tarpum Bay, I was able to reflect on the project itself as a phenomenon worth studying. I realised that the conservation scientists I worked for didn't just need anthropologists to study fisher perceptions of marine management— anthropologists needed to interrogate the very theory and practice of environmental research in a neocolonial, quasi-Caribbean archipelago. I was able to situate the work we were doing as the latest iteration in the evolution of colonial natural history (Subramaniam, 2014). I have been trying to convince natural scientists of the critical importance of that revelation ever since.

My student summer research turned into a decade long project to understand how the environmental sciences participate in reimagining biogeochemical and socioecological processes in the planetary context of increasing global environmental change and expanding transnational economies that some earth scientists were calling the Anthropocene[4]. In my work, the Bahama islands became more than a case study. I came to understand that these islands and waters have long been creative engines for the re-imagination and recreation of the planet itself. They are not a place where things happen - they are themselves the happening.[5] What was generated there in that early 21st century crucible of small island conservation and climate science, international tourism and finance, and legacies of British colonial rule was a form of the Anthropocene idea as an organising logic for living systems and island studies.

[4] The Anthropocene epoch designation has yet to overcome the hurdle of official recognition by the International Union of Geological Sciences, and was in fact rejected as a marker of planetary time in 2024, although members of the Anthropocene Working Group may appeal the decision and advocate for the designation of the Anthropocene as an "event" (Carrington, 2024).

[5] I often think of Antonio Benitez-Rojo's description of Caribbean islands as "machine machine machines" (Benitez-Rojo, 1992).

The Anthropocene Islands

The arguments and evidence for what I think of as an Anthropocene islands framework are presented throughout *Destination Anthropocene.* The chapters explore the theory and practice of Biocomplexity research, scientific field stations for international EuroAmerican researchers, early regional carbon offsetting schemes to perpetuate carbon intensive industries, invasive species regulation through consumption, and efforts to develop a market for aquatic cave diving. Analytically, I was able to think with the published work of key Bahamian scholars like Ian Strachan (2003), Nicolette Bethel (2007), Krista Thompson (2007), and Angelique Nixon (2017), who situate The Bahamas within colonial legacies that shape its racially inequitable Paradise imaginaries. These imaginaries enable international entities to develop beach resorts for visiting tourists and employ relatively cheap Bahamian labour, producing the illusion of economic stability while funneling wealth out of the country. I put these arguments in conversation with the events described in the book chapters and in dialogue with the anthropology of climate change and in arguments about biocapital and biopolitics I encountered in graduate school.

The idea of "the Anthropocene islands" emerged from this theoretical melange, indicating the way small islands had once again become key laboratories for research into planetary processes, this time for the study of anthropogenic climate change and socioecological vulnerability beyond evolutionary dynamics. This emergent ecological reality was being capitalised upon by EuroAmerican scientists and research institutions who designed and deployed hundreds of research projects to delineate the parameters of global change above and below the sea surface, in and around these readily accessible islands. It was also capitalised upon by burgeoning sustainable tourism markets which found new ways to market vulnerability as a niche destination asset to EuroAmerican tourists. The Anthropocene Islands became my term for the material/semiotic crucible of environmental science, international tourism, and global environmental change unevenly reshaping small island and Caribbean realities and relations.[6]

And yet, even as I finalised the book for publication, I was becoming aware of my own dissatisfaction with this approach. In part, such dissatisfaction with our own work can be a permanent condition as we try to describe life while everything is involved in the messy process of living it. But I was undergoing a sea change around this time, questioning my purpose as an academic. What did interrogating the Anthropocene idea mean for the scientists I shadowed, the fishers I interviewed, the government officials I obtained permissions from, the Bahamian colleagues who supported my work, or the tourists I encountered? Was it enough to practice Anthropocene anthropology, as I recommend in the book's conclusion, by considering the "disparate pieces that compose our time: the movements of people and creatures; the forms of logic and reason; the complex histories; and the narratives, practices, exclusions, collectives, conflicts, and synergies that come together to shape the landscapes we encounter in our work" (p. 139)? In other words, I was becoming more concerned about what comes after critical diagnosis. What should my relationship to The Bahamas become? What else am I responsible for?[7]

[6] It was also the theme of a special issue of *Shima* - 14(20) *(2020)* - entitled 'Islands and Aquapelagos In The Anthropocene.'

[7] This feeling involving the scholarly questioning of research morality and ethics has been recently described as the colonial discomfort that stems from attempting to write anything about the Global South as an American. Rather than conceal this discomfort, I rely on it to push me towards responsibility (Carpi 2026).

This book was finalised and sent to press during the first Trump presidential administration in the U.S. It was published just weeks before Hurricane Dorian hit the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama in The Bahamas, shattering ecosystems, infrastructures, and killing dozens of islanders, many of whom were undocumented Haitian nationals living in what have been called 'shanty towns' in flood prone areas that could not stand up to the storm. I was able to get on the ground with a small research team shortly thereafter, but our capacities as cultural anthropologists felt ineffectual amongst so many aid workers and the amplified xenophobic rhetoric that leveraged Haitian migrants as scapegoats for governmental incompetence (Louis, 2019). The global pandemic and the murder of George Floyd in the U.S. followed in 2020. I found that the tone of my book no longer aligned with the renewed acknowledgment of perpetual disparity that permeates our existence and has yet to dissipate. Inspired by this growing sense of compounding crisis stemming from events in The Bahamas and elsewhere, I have pursued theoretical engagements with critical work that I either wasn't aware of or wasn't available to me when I was writing the majority of *Destination Anthropocene*.

Island Afterlives

In her forward to *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, Angela Harris explains that "racial capitalism" is a term that "traces the historical role of white supremacy in the processes of dispossession, extraction, accumulation, and exploitation that are central to today's capitalism" (Harris, 2021, p. vii). These are the same economic and environmental processes that have simultaneously led to today's warming planet and ecocide, leading many scholars to argue that we cannot understand climate change and its effects as distinct from racial hierarchies and divisions of life and labour. Yet most political calls to respond to the ravages of climate change, such as recent calls made by the current Bahamian Prime Minister to the UN General Assembly demanding help for small islands states from UN member nations, refuse to acknowledge the racialised foundations of the environmental problems they want to solve, even in places that acknowledge social histories of racism (DWS News 2025).[8] Keston K. Perry and Leon Sealey-Huggins (2023) explain that, "such supposed ecologically redemptive acts create linear ideas of progress divided along longstanding historical divisions of labour, while deflecting from historical responsibility and calls for dismantling global structural inequalities".

These racialised structural inequities are increasingly understood as ecosystemic. Tianna Bruno (2023) theorises that anti-black logics and the structures that maintain Black precarity materialise in the present through the natural environment. She calls this, with due reference to Saidiya Hartman (2007) and Christina Sharpe (2016), the "biophysical afterlife of slavery" (Bruno 2023). She explores how this afterlife persists in many Black communities in the Americas who experienced enslavement, segregation, and exploitation coupled with the material reality of living with toxic air, soil, and water, all sedimented together in the same places and communities over generations. She writes that "precarity, devaluation, and the persistence of Black life" are "bound up in and with the biophysical environments in which Black people have worked, lived on, cultivated, and love" (2023, p. 1543).[9]

[8] The Prime Minister of The Bahamas in April 2026 was Phillip 'Brave' Davis.

[9] Bruno's work is one example of recent critical work on Black ecologies and geographies (for example see Hosbey, Lloréns, and Roane, 2022).

Building on this work, in an article on the biophysical afterlife of slavery in St. Croix, Ayana Flewellen describes the temporal relations and materialities of coral stones, building bricks made with coral limestone, in the everyday landscape of the island (Flewellen, 2025). These coral stones, once made by enslaved people for use in the infrastructures of enslavement, colonisation, and the extractive trades that upheld racial capitalism, have been disconnected from their origins and material histories in the present, removed from social memory. Yet they still manifest what she calls, "the palimpsestual spectre of colonialism imbued in common everyday objects" (2023, p.592).

These critical scholars give me the conceptual language with which to revisit the Anthropocene Islands with even more critical urgency. Racialised colonial histories have always been part of my conceptualisation of the crucible of possibility that manifests as the contemporary Bahamas, but this recent work shows how racialised hierarchies of being have been the primary engine of socioecological change. This perspective expands my theoretical conceptualisation from the possibilities generated by the Anthropocene idea to include grappling with the biophysical afterlives of what some scholars now think of as a racially stratified Plantationocene (Davis at al. 2019). This intellectual arc has helped me to better contextualise recent small island events, and to articulate a more accountable personal/professional purpose at the same time. I can now explicitly acknowledge what I think of as the entangled socioecological afterlives of past and present colonial extraction, of which racial capitalism and enslavement are constituent regional components, and which lead to the formation of what I have come to see as *savior ecologies* (described below). These processes continue to generate disparate future afterlives.

Bahamian Afterlives

In the last few years, I have turned more of my attention towards emergent ventures to restore coral reefs in the Caribbean. While no longer harvested by enslaved people for building materials, coral remains a valuable resource in the region, entangled within the structural logics of extraction. With the help of the marine sciences, coral beings are becoming increasingly engineered to enable spectacular blue futures: marine transformation, storm protection and risk financing, genetically assisted adaptation, rapid fragmentation and replication, novel entrepreneurial opportunities, and networking between institutions, enterprises, organisations, and communities (Coral Restoration Foundation, 2026; NOAA Fisheries, 2026; The Nature Conservancy 2026). In some sense, 'innovative' coral restoration research generates what I think of as future reefs of possibility designed to nurture profitable island ecologies within the biophysical afterlife of racial capitalism.

As of this moment, there are many actors working in coral science and restoration in The Bahamas. Due to its proximity to the US, accessible near-shore reef systems, and ecological precarity, The Bahamas has been a site for visiting coral reef scientists for decades. The country is now also becoming known for coral restoration science. For example, a Bahamas Coral Innovation Hub zoom presentation I attended in 2025 explained that reefs in The Bahamas are not in good shape (Hurtado, 2025). Hub scientists are responding with multiple strategies to enhance coral possibilities, such as experimenting with coral fragmentation, asexual reproduction, and budding techniques for branching corals, and with micro fragmentation for boulder corals. They are propagating thousands of corals across offshore and land-based nurseries in The Bahamas, Aruba and St. Lucia and experimenting with increasing genetic diversity using sexual reproduction techniques, honing their capacities to predict coral spawning. They are also testing the heat tolerance of coral larvae in the lab along with other

behaviours that may aid coral adaptability while monitoring how propagated corals survive life on the reef, testing different techniques using visual technologies.

Restoration science like this is increasingly put to profitable ends. There are two additional Bahamian examples I am following at this time: the first is Coral Vita, a for-profit venture on the island of Grand Bahama, founded by two American graduates of the Yale School of the Environment. Coral Vita develops laboratory techniques to grow coral fragments in onshore nurseries. These fragments become living products for sale in emerging coral restoration markets. The company's website says:

> *For good. For nature. For profit. We've created a new model of reef restoration — one that's built for impact and powered by revenue. Because mission-based business solutions can solve environmental problems better than NGO, academic, or government-led initiatives*. (Coral Vita, 2026a).

They also say, "We are the world's leading for-profit commercial reef restoration platform, growing resilient coral in months instead of decades to drive ecological regeneration, economic development, and community empowerment" (Coral Vita, 2026b). Coral Vita's clients include coastal developers, cargo and cruise shippers, resorts and eco-tourism operators, governments and marine park managers, corporations and foundations, and concerned citizens. They offer "damage repair and mitigation banking," stating:

> *coastal development happens. But it doesn't always happen the right way… Accidents happen too, such as ship groundings or anchor damage to reefs. In all of these cases, Coral Vita offers better solutions for responsible organizations and ecosystems.* (Coral Vita 2026c).

The tagline on every page of their website is: "Our jobs shouldn't exist. But we refuse to let coral reefs die on our watch" (Coral Vita, 2026b).

The second example comes from the MSC Foundation, an offshoot of a multinational cargo and cruise shipping company (Figure 2). In 2025, the MSC Foundation opened what they are calling a Marine Conservation Center on Ocean Cay, Bahamas, as "a base for biologists, scientists, students and island visitors[that] will offer educational opportunities for visitors on the… urgent need to protect coral reefs" (MSC Foundation, 2025). Ocean Cay is also home to their "Super Coral Reefs Program" which funds American research university scientists to "assist in coral's natural selection process by establishing certain hardy species and varieties, dubbed 'super coral', which are more resilient to severe environmental stresses" (MSC Foundation 2025). That same year, the MSC Foundation sponsored the Coral Pavilion at the UN Oceans Conference in Nice, France, where the CEO spoke about MSC's leadership in coral restoration and super coral science.

Ocean Cay was once an industrial aragonite sand mine. It was leased several years ago from the Bahamian government by MSC to be terraformed into an island cruise destination for vessels from Miami and New York. MSC now calls the island and its nearshore waters the Ocean Cay Marine Reserve, and the Marine Conservation Center is part of this private, all inclusive, tourism destination. Here, coral restoration provides sea life for cruise tourists to view while snorkeling. They advertise this as, "a former industrial site that we reclaimed and restored to its natural beauty (that) is now a unique private island destination that you can experience for yourself" (*Travel Weekly,* 2026).

In 2026, MSC announced the expansion of their private cruise island holdings in The Bahamas with the development of what they are calling "Sandy Cay", a tiny island adjacent to Ocean Cay. Touted as a "new luxury private island retreat set to debut in 2028" (Martin, 2026), this will be the second island that MSC will have been biophysically transformed, this time for cruise tourists who are willing to pay more for an even more exclusive, "high-end beach escape." MSC is expected to continue the "conservation legacy" of Ocean Cay with this new "mix of luxury and environmental positioning" (ibid, paragraph 13), providing "the combination of a large-scale marine reserve at Ocean Cay and a smaller, high-touch retreat at Sandy Cay."



Figure 2 - MSC cruise ship in Nassau harbour (Moore, 2026).

Coral restoration is not, of course, exclusive to the Caribbean region or The Bahamas. As a rapidly growing scientific and commercial field, it is a response to global coral degradation and death in tropical reefs (Braverman 2018). Coral restoration can be a form of localised experimentation in which scientists and amateur practitioners try to maintain submarine ecological communities to continue to sustain local socioecological relationships. However, small-scale projects are often overshadowed by far more expansive ventures in vision, practice, labour, expense, and ecological effect, pitched by companies like Coral Vita and MSC Cruises at grand scales of possibility. The designs of what I have elsewhere called an emerging corporate coral industry aim to materialise a new niche in the blue economy through engineered coral seascapes (Moore, 2018). The prevailing account undergirding all these large-scale endeavors is that preservationist management is inadequate by itself for planetary tropical coral survival because even protected reef areas are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Therefore, an interventionist approach, led by passionate scientists funded and branded by wealthy private interests, is said to be the world's last best hope for a planetary future inclusive of coral reefs in any meaningful capacity (Moore, 2021).

The Bahamas was a British colony for over three hundred years with a population comprised of enslaved and then segregated and indentured Africans and their descendants exploited by the ruling minority of Western European land and business owners and their descendants.

The agricultural plantation economies of other regional European colonies were never very successful in the Bahamian islands of ancient coral limestone, but marine trades and then foreign tourism extended the plantation system into new extractive areas. The advent of Black majority rule in 1967, and the end of outright British colonialism in 1973, did little to weaken the racialised system of segregated labour, wealth, and island space via foreign investment, coastal gentrification, and the territorial expansion of exclusive resorts (Strachan, 2003). The beach and the nearshore shallows of coral reef patches became tourism playgrounds and marine spatial products for consumerism on the most populous islands of New Providence and Grand Bahama.

In the same three hundred year time span, Bahamian coral relations went from objects of colonial natural history and necessary coastal subsistence for enslaved and free populations; to commercial extraction monopolised by industrial lobster fishing (crawfishing) primarily driven by the descendants of white Loyalists; to sites of recreational snorkeling and diving for foreign tourists alongside sites of EuroAmerican marine scientific research, conservation, and bioprospecting. Regional coral degradation greatly increased in the last century with reefs subjected to siltification, destructive fishing methods, dredging for ports and coastal development driven by foreign investment and fishing pressures, as well as white band disease in hard corals, pervasive stony coral tissue loss disease, and the last two years of massive regional coral bleaching events, the latest culminating in 2025 as part of what NOAA identified as the 4th Global Bleaching Event, driven by global warming (Coral Reef Watch, 2025). Restoration projects are attempts to rematerialise coral reefs in marine spaces where tropical coral are in decline or absent all together. However, what is re-made in these projects are not "innocent" reef ecologies: these are politically fraught reefs, all too often designed to uphold and extend the afterlives of racial capitalism that primarily benefit continued supremacist accumulation.

What the critical scholars I introduced above help me articulate is that as long as there has been Black precarity in the archipelago, originating with the arrival of enslaved Africans, there have been Black relationships with coral. As in St. Croix, enslaved Bahamians built plantation structures with coral stones and coral sand which still stand at the Clifton Plantation Heritage Park and in downtown Nassau on New Providence today (Figure 3). Reefs have always been places in the sea where fish and seafoods could be obtained to feed families when terrestrial foods were scarce and there was no money for imports. Black fishing communities could remain on distant outer islands on crown land after the collapse of agricultural plantations in part because they were anchored by island reef systems that enabled survival (Craton & Saunders 2000). Even as the next wave of tourism developments and marine protected areas threatened re-marginalised Black communities with dispossession, these precarious reef relations remained only to be attacked on the atmospheric front with rising sea temperatures. This history is mostly invisible to the corporate practitioners of reef conservation and restoration, yet the biophysical afterlives of racialised extraction are an inarguable part of the politics of coral relations in The Bahamas.

Scientific experimentation with both assisted adaptation and private partnerships is becoming the core of Bahamian coral restoration, participating in the generation of biophysical coral futures based on markets for extractive development. The prevalence of unexamined histories within these markets and the unwillingness to understand coral reefs as part of the afterlife of enslavement in the region has led to scientific innovation in the evolution of what I now think of as "savior ecologies", another biophysical manifestation of the afterlife of slavery, racial capitalism, and extraction. Savior ecologies are actively pursued by some scientists, coral conservationists, and philanthropists because they see coral

restoration funded by the wealthiest global actors as the only way forward. But such ecologies mask compounding inequities. Even when hiring local Bahamians descended from enslaved populations, who tend to be lower-level employees and technicians, and even when claiming to work with local 'communities,' international businesses are still designing coral restoration to extract value from locally spawned coral larva and fragments. To echo Flewellen (2020), restored coral reefs are becoming a new form of colonial palimpsest, enabling the continued privatisation of marine space and resources while providing cover for extractive industries responsible for coral degradation and Black precarity in the first place, and at a profitable price. As savior ecologies, these living reefs risk generating future afterlives that stabilise and sustain extractive relations in a process of repetitive re-materialisation.



Figure 3 - Clifton Heritage Park, New Providence, Bahamas (Moore, 2023).

What I was unable to state strongly enough in my 2019 book is that the environmental sciences, in this case the marine biological sciences, can be characterised by an inability to acknowledge how their fields perpetuate future biophysical afterlives of colonial violence. Today's reef restoration projects inherit this willful denial. Emergent savior ecologies based on coral restoration have been dehistoricised, depoliticised, deracialised, and selectively sanitised to enable the expansion and profitability of specific island enterprises.

If racialisation was the bedrock of the Bahamian colonial plantation system, and if it remains the bedrock of the subsequent tourism economy that relies on and reproduces Black precarity, then it is also the bedrock of the extractive industries investing in coral restoration products. The sciences that help provide innovative restoration products are complicit in the perpetuation of these legacies. My current fear is that restored reefs materialise these relations in ways that over-determine future biophysical afterlives that maintain racial capitalist economies of extraction in for-profit savior ecologies.

Conclusion: Towards Island Afterlives of Repair

I hope I have shown that the Bahama islands have been among the most formative mental and material geographies to inspire my intellectual and ethical awakening. Prior to my maturation as an anthropologist of The Bahamas, I experienced the relationship between structural and biophysical disparity as an abstraction, and I rarely considered the racial and colonial legacies inherited through my own and my familial experience in the U.S.. It is no coincidence that I had such an awakening in Caribbean islands, an aquapelagic region transformed by Western onto-epistemological and biophysical supremacy that has been perpetually reimagined by the descendants of Indigenous and enslaved populations in contradiction and resistance to that supremacy.

These realisations help me contextualise the question that I repeat internally, "what is my relationship to The Bahamas?" This question is generated by ongoing anxiety about my own complicit relationship to American imperialism, multiple forms of colonialism, and extractive economies that encompass research and education. I now choose to transform this anxiety into a reparative relationship that can help move beyond the diagnosis of socioecological problems stemming from the Anthropocene idea. My current goal is to participate in the development of evidence, arguments, and strategies concerning the future possibility of generating and living within afterlives of repair.

Just as the biophysical afterlives of extractivism have produced emerging savior ecologies along with toxic and dispossessive geographies, so too will proliferating savior ecologies produce their own afterlives. Islanders will be living with the environmental realities of exclusive tourist destinations, reef systems patchily restored via experimental and speculative ventures, and engineered super corals for generations to come. Social scientists and humanists must pay as much attention to these evolving biophysical worlds as the marine biologists paid by private enterprises for ecological monitoring. And yet, I posit that future reparative ecologies can also emerge from what we might think of as alternative biophysical projects.

Many contemporary scholars are working to define productive meanings of repair (Balfour, 2023; Barra, 2026; ICTJ, 2026;Thomas, 2024).[10] For my purposes here I will mention the work of Olufemi O. Taiwo (2025),[11] who takes what he calls a "constructivist view of reparations": a historically informed world making project to call a more just future into being. This view imagines reparative actions far beyond monetary compensation, actions that include an accounting for racial capitalism as it has manifested around the world beyond a singular

[10] There will be other opportunities to engage with a substantial review of this literature.
[11] I credit Jocelyn Poe for reminding me of Taiwo's book, *Reconsidering Reparations.*

attention to anti-blackness, and that maintain a central focus on addressing ongoing climate change as environmental racism.

Such inclusive forms of repair take many forms in The Bahamas. For example, there is already a Bahamas Reparations Committee that is participates in regional Caribbean organising for reparations from colonial enslavement (The Repair Campaign 2024). Bahamian citizens, especially young people, already organising for climate and environmental justice (Equality Bahamas 2024). In alignment with these ongoing efforts, I want to use my research capacity and scholarly voice to highlight locally generated community ecologies that precariously persist within and between the biophysical afterlives of extraction and saviorism (Moore, 2023). In the coming years, I hope to collaborate with regional colleagues to explore past and present small-scale, intimate relationships to island geographies maintained by and for islanders in non-proprietary aquapelagic reefs of possibility ranging from terrestrial food systems to offshore marine ecosystems. My research questions will center around the biophysical and biosocial afterlives that may yet be generated within ecologies that are intentionally nurtured to foster repair.

My Bahamian island inspired sense of accountability also extends towards the future afterlives we can foster within the academy. Rather than trying to fit ourselves and our students into programs that don't enable the capacity to act on our own complicity in supremacist systems, transdisciplinary environmental programs (a category which includes island studies) can reorganise around something that operates more like repair. I have been fortunate enough to become a professor of Environmental Justice, Law, and Policy, as well as an inaugural faculty fellow in the Center for Racial Justice and Equitable Futures, at Cornell University, where I can work directly towards more personally and professionally satisfying ends. This means that in addition to collaborating across Cornell and its affiliates to build up environmental justice praxis, I am able to focus on strategically dismantling disciplinary silos, designing ethical research projects and methods, developing transformative pedagogy, and devising reparative conceptual frameworks. This work will necessarily include student involvement within and in service to reparative initiatives.

Revisiting my relationship to The Bahama islands has instilled me with the certainty that I am neither impartial nor innocent and that I have a role to play in repair. Along with so many others, I am an embodiment of polarising ecologies and geographies, and I have been granted the capacity to try to prevent the perpetual extension of ongoing extractive afterlives. I hope that this understanding will guide me through the remainder of my career.

REFERENCES

Balfour, L. (2023). The politics of reparations for Black Americans. *Annual Review of Political Science 26*, 291-304.

Barra, M. P. (2026). *Good sediment: Black ecologies and the politics of restoration in coastal Louisiana*. University of Washington Press.

Benitez-Rojo, A. (1992). *The repeating island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern perspective.* Duke University Press.

Bethel, N. (2007). *Essays on life Vol. 1*. lulu.com.

BlackPast.org. (2012). *(1977) The Combahee River Collective Statement*. https://blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/

Braverman, I. (2018). *Coral whisperers: Scientists on the brink*. University of California Press.

Bruno, T. (2023). Ecological memory in the biophysical afterlife of slavery. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers 13*(7), 1543-1553.

Carpi, E. (2026). Where does the 'self-indigenization' syndrome come from? Critical reflections on 'research legitimacy' in contemporary academia. *Society for Cultural Anthropology*. https://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/series/where-does-the-self-indigenization-syndrome-come-from-critical-reflections-on-research-legitimacy-and-the-tokenism-of-contemporary-academia

Carrington, D. (2024, March 22). Geologists reject declaration of Anthropocene epoch. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/mar/22/geologists-reject-declaration-of-anthropocene-epoch

Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium. (2020). Segregated Seattle. *Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project*. https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/segregated.htm

Coral Reef Watch. (2025). Current global bleaching: Status update & data submission. NOAA. https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/satellite/research/coral_bleaching_report.php

Coral Restoration Foundation. (2026). Science and technology. https://coralrestoration.org/science-technology/

Coral Vita. (2026a). About. https://coralvita.co/about/

Coral Vita (2026b). Big coral: Big hope. https://coralvita.co/

Coral Vita. (2026c). Damage repair & mitigation banking. https://coralvita.co/grow-with-us/damage-repair-mitigation-banking/

Craton, M. & Saunders, G. (1999). *Islanders in the stream: A history of the Bahamian people Volume One: From Aboriginal times to the end of slavery*. University of Georgia Press.

Davis, J., Moulton, A., Van Sant, L. & Williams, B. (2019). Anthropocene, Capitalocene, … Plantationocene? A manifesto for ecological justice in an age of global crises. *Geography Compass 13* e12438

DWS News. (2025). Bahamas PM's powerful speech at UNGA 80: Climate, Palestine & Justice. YouTube.com

EPA. (2019). Hazardous waste cleanup: Boeing Plant 2, Tukwila, Washington. https://19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/hwcorrectiveactionsites/hazardous-waste-cleanup-boeing-plant-2-tukwila-washington.html

Equality Bahamas. (2024). Climate change & you: Your biggest concerns Part 1. https://equalitybahamas.com/events/climate-change-you-your-biggest-concerns-part-1/

Flewellen, A.O. (2025). The biophysical afterlife of slavery signaled through coral architectural stones at heritage sites on St. Croix. *American Antiquity 89(4)*: 591-607.

Glinton-Meicholas, P. (1993). *An Evening in Guanima.* BookBaby.

Haraway, D. J. (1997). *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse*. Routledge.

Harris, A. P. (2021). Forword: Racial capitalism and law." In Jenkins, D. & Leroy J. (Eds.) *Histories of racial capitalism* (pp. vii-xx). Columbia University Press.

Hartman, S. (2007). *Lose your mother: A journey along the Atlantic slave route*. Macmillan.

Helmreich, S. (2009). *Alien ocean: Anthropological voyages in microbial seas*. University of California Press.

Hepher, T., Lampert, A. & Johnson. E.M. (2021, July 28). Boeing jets emissions data highlights industry's green challenge. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/boeing-jets-contribute-1-mln-tonnes-co2-emissions-each-data-2021-07-26/

Hosbey, J., Lloréns, H. & Roane, J.T. (2022). Global Black ecologies. *Environment and Society 13*, 1-10.

Hurston, Z. N. (2026). Folktales from The Bahamas. (1930s). Grand Bahama Museum. https://www.grandbahamamuseum.org/exhibits/culture/folktale-collection

Hurtado, N. (2025). Webinar: The Bahamas Coral Innovation Hub. Perry Institute for Marine Science. https://www.perryinstitute.org/event/webinar-bahamas-coral-innovation-hub/

ICTJ. (2026). Reparations. https://www.ictj.org/reparations

King, A. & Shepard, K. (2020). Race matters: Understanding how the Central Area was gentrified. KOUW NPR Network. https://www.kuow.org/stories/race-matters-understanding-how-the-central-area-was-gentrified

Louis, B. M. (2019, December 3). Haitian migrants face deportation and stigma in hurricane-ravaged Bahamas. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/haitian-migrants-face-deportation-and-stigma-in-hurricane-ravaged-bahamas-127008

Martin, W.R. (2026, April 15). MSC's Sandy Cay signals new luxury era in The Bahamas. *The Traveler*.

Moore, A. (2018). Working together to restore the reef: Naturalizing corporate forms of coral, labor, and responsibility. *Cultural Anthropology Editor's Forum: Theorizing the Contemporary*. https://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/working-together-to-restore-the-reef-naturalizing-corporate-forms-of-coral-labor-and-responsibility

Moore, A. (2019). *Destination Anthropocene: Science and tourism in the Bahamas*, University of California Press.

Moore, A. (2020a). Many oceans to cross: Making Black women's lives matter in marine affairs. *Anthropocene Anthropology Blog*. https://amelia-moore.com/2020/09/28/many-oceans-to-cross-making-black-womens-lives-matter-in-marine-affairs/

Moore, A. (2020b). Islands and aquapelagos in the Anthropocene. *Shima 14*(2), 1-3.

Moore, A. (2021). We've never seen anything like it: Witnessing coral death and resurrection. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 11*(2). https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/716237

Moore, A. (2023). Black Atlantis. In Howe, C., Diamanti, J. & Moore, A. (Eds.) *Solarities: Elemental encounters and refractions* (pp. 287-299). Punctum Books.

Moore, A. & Ota, Y. (2025). Searching for positionality. Ocean Nexus Webinar. https://oceannexus.org/webinar/searching-for-positionality/

MSC Foundation. (2025). Super Coral Reefs Program. https://mscfoundation.org/what-we-do/programmes/super-coral-reefs-programme

Nixon, A. (2017). *Resisting Paradise: Tourism, diaspora, and sexuality in Caribbean culture.* University Press of Mississippi.

NOAA Fisheries. (2016). Restoring coral reefs. https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/restoring-coral-reefs

Orfield, G. & Eaton, S.E. (1996). *Dismantling desegregation: The quiet dismantling of* Brown v. Board of Education. The New Press.

Perry, K.K & Sealey-Huggins, L. (2023). Racial capitalism and climate justice: White redemptive power and the uneven geographies of eco-imperial crisis. *Geoforum* 145. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0016718523000982

Raffles, H. (2002). *In Amazonia: A natural history*. Princeton University Press.

Seattle Municipal Archives. 2026. Brief history of Seattle. https://www.seattle.gov/cityarchives/seattle-facts/brief-history-of-seattle

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press.

Strachan, I. (2003). *Paradise and plantation: Tourism and culture in the Anglophone Caribbean.* University of Virginia Press.

Strathern, M. (1990). *The gender of the gift: Problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia.* University of California Press.

Subramaniam, B. (2014). *Ghost stories for Darwin: The science of variation and the politics of diversity*. University of Illinois Press.

Sunder Rajan, K. (2006). *Biocapital: The constitution of postgenomic life*. Duke University Press.

Taiwo, O.O. (2025). *Reconsidering reparations: Why climate justice and constructive politics are needed in the wake of slavery and colonialism*. Haymarket Books.

The Nature Conservancy. (2026). Coral reefs. https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-insights/coral-reefs/

The Repair Campaign. (2024). Bahamas National Reparations Committee renews mandate with official relaunch. https://repaircampaign.org/uncategorized/bahamas-national-reparations-committee-renews-mandate-with-official-relaunch/

Thomas, D. A. (2024). Refusal (and repair). *Annual Review of Anthropology 53*, 93-109.

Thompson, C. H. 1933. Introduction: The problem of Negro Higher Education. *The Journal of Negro Education 2*(3), 257-271.

Thompson, K. A. (2007). *An eye For the Tropics: Tourism, photography, and framing the Caribbean picturesque.* Duke University Press.

Travel Weekly. (2026). Ocean Cay Marine Reserve. https://guides.northstartraveltracking.com/cruise-line-private-island-guide-2024/ocean-cay-msc-marine-reserve/index.html

Tsing, A. (2005). *Friction: An ethnography of global connection*. Princeton University Press.

Tuck, E. & Wayne Yang, K. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society 1*(1), 1-40.

Voisin, A. (2025). Boeing accused of discharge violations at Santa Susana Field Laboratory. California Water Boards. https://waterboards.ca.gov/press_room/press_releases/2025/pr20251202-boeing accused.html