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***WALTER RODNEY AND BLACK POWER: JAMAICAN  
INTELLIGENCE AND US DIPLOMACY\****

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On October 15, 1968 the government of Jamaica barred Walter Rodney from returning to the island. A lecturer at the Jamaica (Mona) campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI), Rodney had been out of the country attending a black power conference in Canada. The Guyanese-born Rodney was no stranger to Jamaica: he had graduated from UWI in 1963, returning there as a member of the faculty at the beginning of 1968, after doing graduate studies in England and working briefly in Tanzania. Rodney's second stint in Jamaica lasted all of nine months, but it was a tumultuous and amazing nine months. It is a measure of the mark he made, within and without the university, that the decision to ban him sparked major disturbances, culminating in a rising in the capital city of Kingston.

Official US documents, until now untapped, shed new light on the "Rodney affair," as the event was soon dubbed. These novel sources reveal, in detail, the surveillance of Rodney and his activities by the Jamaican intelligence services, not just in the months before he was banned but also while he was a student at UWI. The US evidence also sheds light on the inner workings of the Jamaican government and why it acted against Rodney at the particular time that it did. Lastly, the documents offer a window onto US efforts to track black power in Jamaica (and elsewhere in

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the Caribbean) and, in coordination with local authorities, combat its influence.

The decision to ban Rodney was a triumph for the Jamaican intelligence services, which had been lobbying for his expulsion for months. Ultimately, the island's spymasters claim to have unearthed intelligence showing that Rodney had become a threat to the tourist industry, an allegation sure to gain attention at the highest political level. Actually, the Jamaican authorities expelled Rodney because they believed he presented a different kind of peril: he had become a focal point for the combination of the black power movement on the island. It also transpires that Rodney was a familiar figure to the guardians of Jamaican national security; he had been in their sights since his days as an undergraduate at UWI. His intelligence file, which the Jamaicans shared with the US embassy in Kingston, reveals cooperation between the Jamaican, Guyanese, and British intelligence apparatuses. The evidence further indicates that the Jamaican spymasters received information from sources "close" to undergraduate Rodney, and that they also may have had assets in London's Caribbean community, circles in which Rodney moved while a graduate student in that city. The new material considerably enhances our understanding of the Rodney affair, and so is quoted at length in this article.

The US government, as represented by its embassy in Kingston, took a keen interest in the Rodney affair as well as the black power phenomenon it so powerfully highlighted. The American authorities were then engaged in a full-scale repression of a black

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power insurgency at home,<sup>2</sup> and the Rodney affair brought into sharp relief the international character of the “menace.” Accordingly, US diplomats not only closely monitored black power activities in Jamaica and elsewhere in the Caribbean, but they also worked in concert with governments in the region to rein in black power movements and militants and to quarantine the ideological contagion.

The year of the Rodney affair, 1968, was a year of rebellion and revolutionary turmoil worldwide. Collectively, the events that made up the global rebellion of 1968 transcended the politico-military division between the capitalist West and the communist East as well as the socio-economic partition between the wealthy North and the impoverished South. The rebellion was unprecedented in its reach.<sup>3</sup> It also stood out for its spontaneity and lack of organizational coherence: It produced no coordinating body, such as the Communist International. Rather, the rebellion of 1968 was held together by a certain epistemic affinity, a

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<sup>2</sup> Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *The COINTELPRO Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret Wars Against Domestic Dissent* (Boston: South End Press, 1990); Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> The existing summaries of the rebellion of 1968 are unsatisfactory, some of them egregiously so, from the standpoint of black power and the struggles of oppressed peoples everywhere. See George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987); Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, editors, *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004).

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commonality of aim characterized by Rosie Douglas, noted Caribbean black power adherent, as “the rebellion of youth *everywhere against what is.*”<sup>4</sup> Douglas had a hand, albeit unwittingly, in the Rodney affair, or at least in the particular manner in which it began. The Jamaican government banned Rodney on his return to the island from attending the Congress of Black Writers in Montreal, an event Douglas was instrumental in organizing.

In a letter inviting Rodney to the congress, Douglas called attention to the “fantastic outburst of the peoples of the world”: guerilla warfare in Africa, Asia and Latin America; upheavals in China and India; and rebellion in North America and Europe, among other events. Douglas was struck by the novelty of it all, that is, the conjunction of events in such disparate places. “Never before in the history of mankind has human society been engulfed in such an all-embracing, tremendous crisis,” he waxed enthusiastic. “Peoples everywhere are rebelling.” Amidst the global political conflagration, Douglas and his coworkers posed the question: “Where then does the Black emancipation movement fit into this objective world situation? ... What must we do and how must we achieve our objectives as Black people in a changing objective world? This is the purpose of the Congress of Black Writers.”<sup>5</sup> The congress was a pioneering gathering of leading black power personalities from North America, the Caribbean and Europe. Here, perhaps for the first time, was a concrete

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<sup>4</sup> Atlanta University Center Archives (AUCA), Rodney Papers, Box 2, Rosie Douglas file: Douglas to Rodney, September 23, 1968 (emphasis in original).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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demonstration of the transnational dimensions of black power, a pan-African face of the rebellion of 1968.<sup>6</sup>

**Rodney as Campus Radical and the Spook on Campus**

Rodney came from a politically active family in Guyana, and he brought that spirit of activism with him to Jamaica when, in 1960, he arrived at UWI as an undergraduate.<sup>7</sup> According to the file compiled by Jamaican intelligence, Rodney, on arrival, “soon showed an interest in Campus Politics,” eventually becoming president of the debating society and editor of the student paper. Such activities did not unduly concern the Jamaican intelligence services, but their attitude to Rodney would soon change. As they became more interested in him, the Jamaican spymasters apparently contacted their Guyanese counterparts in search of background information. Rodney himself would later describe an activist vocation stretching back to his preteen years.<sup>8</sup> As of 1960,

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<sup>6</sup> On the congress, see Fanon Che Wilkins, “‘In the Belly of the Beast’: Black Power, Anti-Imperialism, and the African Liberation Solidarity Movement” (PhD Dissertation, New York University, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Rupert Charles Lewis, *Walter Rodney’s Intellectual and Political Thought* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Rodney described having his “first real introduction to the class question” at the age of eleven. Assigned the “humdrum task of distributing manifestos” for the equally youthful People’s Progressive Party, then a militant multiracial formation, Rodney remembered encountering certain people who would “chase you away or take it [the material he was distributing] contemptuously.” One householder even let the dog loose on him. See “Parties, Ideologies and

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however, Guyanese intelligence had nothing on him. He had not, in the locution of the craft, “come to security notice” before leaving home for UWI.<sup>9</sup>

In Jamaica, Rodney initially came to “security notice” in June 1961. Along with two other UWI students, he agreed to attend a meeting in Moscow, the invitation having come from the Prague-based International Union of Students (IUS). Jamaican intelligence thought it detected the beguiling power of Moscow gold behind the offer. If so, Rodney was not seduced, at least not on this occasion. Instead of going to Moscow, he toured the (presumably Anglophone) Caribbean with other students.<sup>10</sup>

Then, in January 1962, Rodney embarked on a Caribbean odyssey of an entirely different sort. Accompanied by two other UWI students (whether the same two who received the invitation to Moscow is uncertain), he went off to the University of Havana. Inevitably, he “again came to security notice,” Jamaican intelligence expressing no doubt as to who was behind the undertaking. “Enquiries made at this time show it was Rodney who conceived the idea of the Cuba visit, and reliable sources close to him described him as a person of extreme left wing inclinations and a great admirer of Castro and his Revolutionary

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Political Development: A Conversation With Walter Rodney,” *Black-World-Review*, 1, 2 (April-May 1976), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> US National Archives (USNA), RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Walter Anthony Rodney Background in Detail, August 1968, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

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Government.” The Jamaican spooks reckoned that Rodney’s contacts in Cuba extended to the highest level. “There is reason to believe,” they averred, “that whilst in Cuba Rodney and his companions were visited in the Hotel by Castro himself.” Whether or not that was so, the Cubans, quite literally, spared no propaganda on their guests: the trio returned to Jamaica laden with a “considerable amount of Communist literature and subversive publications of the IUS, including Che Guevara’s ‘Guerrilla Warfare.’” Customs officials, perhaps tipped off by the intelligence services, temporarily seized the trove. Undaunted by such highhandedness, Rodney, in a student newsletter, blasted the authorities for “panicking” and labeled the Cuban gifts “quite innocuous.”<sup>11</sup>

Rodney would soon find use for his “innocuous” propaganda. On returning from Cuba, his intelligence file complains, he banded with other students, “most notably Colin A. Moore, a Guyanese and Communist sympathizer,” to form the Students Democratic Party, “the aim of which was to spread Marxism throughout the West Indies.” Off campus, Rodney “made his first contact with the Rastafarians.” Back on campus, the tireless agitator threw in his lot with the working people: In May 1962, he “attempted to instigate a strike of the subordinate staff of the UWI.” Although having declined its June 1961 offer to attend a meeting in Moscow, Rodney apparently remained in contact with the International Union of Students. In August 1962, he attended an IUS congress

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

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in Leningrad, traveling by way of Havana. He was on the road again in November. This time round, however, the intelligence services could impugn neither his destination nor his sponsor. He traveled to various parts of the Anglophone Caribbean, the fruit of his “Student of the Year” prize, courtesy of BWIA, the Trinidad-based regional airline.<sup>12</sup>

The traveler rested his weary feet, if not his brain, in the first half of 1963. Between December 1962 and June 1963, Rodney’s intelligence file notes, “he seems to have been politically inactive, probably because he was preparing for his finals.” The spymasters conceded his intellectual prowess. He was, they recorded, “a diligent and intelligent student,” graduating with a first-class honors in history. Rodney may have been temporarily inactive, but he had hardly forsaken politics. On graduating, he promptly resumed his activism, becoming a “sympathizer” of the Young Socialist League, a left-wing formation within the opposition People’s National Party (PNP) and a group “whose objective was social revolution in Jamaica. It was non-violent.”<sup>13</sup> In October 1963, Rodney bade Jamaica farewell, leaving to pursue graduate studies at London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies. The Jamaican spooks, although perhaps relieved, had not heard the last of him.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3. The “Student of the Year” prizes were granted by the faculty on the basis of academic record, with some input from the Guild of Undergraduates, whose recommendations were based on extra-curricula activities.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

**The Calm Before the Storm: Rodney's Second Coming to Jamaica**

On arrival in the imperial center, Rodney's intelligence file indicates, he pursued his intellectual and political interests with equal fervor. "Whilst in England he stayed with his brother Edward Rodney," the Jamaican spymasters reported, and accompanied Edward "to what London sources [presumably British intelligence, or else contacts on the ground] termed 'meetings of various extremist groups.'" In particular, Rodney came to "notice" in 1965 on account of his "association with Richard Hart and other known West Indian Communists in London."<sup>14</sup>

Rodney obtained his PhD in 1966 and accepted a teaching post at the University of Dar es Salaam. In Tanzania, Jamaican intelligence asserts, he continued his political agitation, becoming "one of a group of left wing intellectuals who put forward a scheme for the radical reorganization" of the university curriculum on "Socialist Principles." At this point, the global black power movement was beginning to take shape; and Rodney, with characteristic alacrity, attached himself to it. "London," his intelligence file reads, "considers it probable that he met Stokely Carmichael ... whilst in Tanzania," although Carmichael's autobiography sheds no light on the matter.<sup>15</sup> Anyway, Rodney

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Carmichael did visit Tanzania in 1967, but he makes no mention of having met Rodney in his autobiography. Indeed, the book's sole reference to Rodney

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did not remain in Tanzania for very long. Toward the end of 1967, he left to take up a faculty appointment at UWI. On the way to Jamaica, he passed through London, where he is said to have contacted the Universal Coloured Peoples Association. To Jamaican intelligence, Rodney's activities over a period of seven years, from his days as a student on the island to his return as a UWI lecturer, demonstrated that he was a "convinced Communist with pro-Castro ideals, and latterly to have taken an interest in Black Power."<sup>16</sup>

The mixture of pro-Castro communism, so-called, and black power would soon prove combustible. Rodney, the spymasters bemoaned, "lost little time in interesting himself in Jamaican politics on his return to the island in January" of 1968. On February 13, he organized a meeting of "six 'reactionary fellows' (Rodney's words)."<sup>17</sup> It was a case of birds of a feather flocking together:

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is as sanitized as it is inaccurate. Carmichael notes his sadness on hearing that "another excellent brother, Walter Rodney, had been killed in an explosion in Guinea." Of course, Rodney was assassinated, not just "killed in an explosion," and not in Guinea but in Guyana. Rupert Lewis, Rodney's biographer, also has him in Tanzania around the same time as Carmichael, but Lewis too is mum on any rendezvous between the two. See Stokely Carmichael with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* (New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 637; Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought*, p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Walter Anthony Rodney Background in Detail, August 1968, pp. 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> There is likely an error here, perhaps of transcription, or perhaps because the reporting agent mistook "revolutionary" for "reactionary." Rodney would scarcely have organized a group of "reactionary" fellows--unless he was trying to spoof the intelligence services, which he likely knew were on his trail.

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“All present at this meeting have adverse security records.” Determined to organize for “the struggle ahead,” Rodney sought the advice of the “reactionary fellows” as to the best course of action. “Two organizations were suggested to him”: the opposition People’s National Party and the New World Group (NWG), “an organization of ‘armchair’ left wing intellectuals” that operated throughout the Anglophone Caribbean. Rodney, the intelligence services reported, was less than pleased with the counsel of the “reactionary fellows”: “He was not impressed by either” the PNP (despite having been a “sympathizer” of its Young Socialist League during his undergraduate days) or the NWG. “The former he felt (and rightly) would wish to have nothing to do with him, and the latter was too academic and not sufficiently in touch with the masses.” Rodney, as represented by the spooks, opted to bypass the existing political movements and go directly to the toilers. “He wished, he said, to meet the working people anywhere and everywhere in Jamaica. He expressed interest in the Rastafarians.”<sup>18</sup>

The Rastafarians, of course, were not new to Rodney. Already as an undergraduate, his intelligence file indicates, he had made contact with them, as previously noted. Yet, the spymasters reported, Rodney’s enthusiasm for the Rastafarians was not entirely requited. “Rodney has wooed the Rastafarians so far without success, and has expressed his disappointment and surprise

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<sup>18</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Walter Anthony Rodney Background in Detail, August 1968, p. 4.

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that they do not wish to support him. They listen to his views and give him the respect due to a man of learning, but seem unwilling to accept him as a leader. Nevertheless, he continues to cultivate them.”<sup>19</sup>

The spooks may be forgiven for arriving at such a conclusion. The only political culture they knew was one in which the relationship between the masses and educated men like Rodney was profoundly asymmetrical. Rodney’s approach was alien to them. Far from seeking to “lead” the Rastafarians, as the intelligence officials assumed, Rodney endeavored to engage them in a dialogue. It was a matter of “grounding” with his brothers. In a manifesto issued from Canada after his expulsion from Jamaica, a political testament that amounted to a counter-narrative to his intelligence file, Rodney offered an entirely different account of his engagement with the Jamaican masses, including the Rastafarians. “I sought them out where they lived, worked, worshipped, and had their recreation,” he explained. “In turn, they ‘checked’ me at work or at home, and together we ‘probed’ here and there, learning to recognise our common humanity. Naturally, they wanted to know what I stood for, what I ‘defended.’” Those sessions, to be sure, had their limitations; they were, by and large, androcentric affairs. After what he called “the alienation produced by the educational system,” however, such assemblies powerfully mediated Rodney political reorientation. “Some of my most profound experiences,” he confessed in his post-expulsion manifesto, “have been the sessions of reasoning or ‘grounding’

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

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with black brothers, squatting on an old car tire or a rusty five gallon can.”<sup>20</sup> In a line that would provide the title for a collection of his black power speeches and essays,<sup>21</sup> he continued: “It was this ‘grounding’ with my black brothers that the regime considered sinister and subversive.” Using a masculinist discourse that was by no means peculiar to him, but was generic to black power as a whole, he reflected on the broader meaning of an honorific alteration: “At some point, I ceased to be ‘Dr Rodney’ and was addressed as ‘Brother Rodney’ or better still ‘Brother Wally.’ That simple change meant that I was no longer a tool of the establishment, but was readmitted into the moral and cultural brotherhood of the Black Man.”<sup>22</sup>

The brotherhood in which Rodney presently found himself encompassed various segments of the lumpenproletariat, including youth gangs. “Recently,” his intelligence file asserts reprovably, “he has sought the support of the ‘Vikings’, a gang of violent robbers, thieves and bully-boys active in Kingston and at one time 50 strong.” Rodney, the spymasters editorialized, was not the first public personality to court this gang. It “has been used before to provide ‘strong arm’ boys to aspiring politicians and it is probably

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<sup>20</sup> Walter Rodney, “Jamaica Today, Bogle’s Reminder: A Statement from Brother Wally (Rodney) in Canada to all the Brothers in Jamaica,” p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Bogle-L’Ouverture Publications Ltd, 1969).

<sup>22</sup> Rodney, “Jamaica Today,” p. 4.

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this aspect of its proclivities which attracted Rodney's attention."<sup>23</sup> The analogy would have scandalized Rodney. A principled revolutionary, he swore in his post-expulsion manifesto: "I never gave anyone money or bought them drinks – that one must leave to the political gangsters of the two-party system."<sup>24</sup> Tagging Rodney as one such "political gangster," a figure well known to them, the intelligence officials noted that the Vikings, not unlike the Rastafarians, had spurned his overtures. "Once again," they gleefully pronounced, "he has been disappointed, for the Vikings, according to recent information, prefer to stick to straightforward crime, but here again Rodney is still cultivating them."<sup>25</sup> The spy men, at least, gave Rodney high marks for persistence.

Rodney, according to his intelligence file, took a special interest in three groups, including youth gangs like the Vikings and the Rastafarians. The third group to claim his attention was a heterodox religious movement led by the Rev. Claudius Henry. At one point, at least, Rastafarians were prominent among Henry's followers. Rodney, furthermore, reportedly was trying to arrange a meeting between Henry and the Vikings, although "so far without success."<sup>26</sup> Rodney would have noticed the commonalities between the groups, and the resulting potential for alliance building. Feared and loathed in equal measure by the dominant

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<sup>23</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Walter Anthony Rodney Background in Detail, August 1968, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Rodney, "Jamaica Today," p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Walter Anthony Rodney Background in Detail, August 1968, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

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classes, all three were perennial targets of state repression--the first, if not the last, offence being their anti-establishment credentials and black-affirming proclivities.

Jamaican intelligence, and the US embassy, took particular interest in Rodney's association with the Rev. Henry. To the Americans, Henry's "church has always had an appeal to the revivalist as well as the racist,"<sup>27</sup> the latter term repeatedly hurled with reckless abandon against representatives of the racially oppressed, largely by white envoys of an imperial state with such an abominable record of white supremacy at home and broad. Like so many other Rodney associates, Henry -- who assumed the ecclesiastical suffix, "R. B." (Repairer of the Breach) -- had what the spymasters termed an adverse security record. Henry's record, however, was exceptionally adverse. In 1960, he was convicted of treason for staging an armed rebellion, which resulted in the death of three of his followers and two British soldiers. Henry's son, who coordinated the rising, was hastily tried and executed, along with two African American comrades, all three of them former members of the US army. Like Jamaica's electoral politics, long dominated by two parties headed by a pair of cousins from the "brown" elite, the rebellion of 1960 doubled as a family affair. But, unlike the top political gangsters of the two-party system, to use Rodney's formulation, the Henrys enjoyed none of the perquisites of power and instead paid dearly for their activities.

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<sup>27</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 3079, file Jam: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, February 22, 1968.

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His son's life snuffed out by the hangman's noose, Henry was then sent to prison for ten years, while his wife received a three-year sentence.

Granted an early release in 1966, Henry reorganized his church, changed its name, and moved his base from town to country. The African Reform Church became the New Creation Peacemakers Tabernacle, its headquarters transferred from Kingston to the largely rural parish of Clarendon, where Henry went about repairing the breach and restoring the path among workers on the estates of a key-sugar producing region.<sup>28</sup> Into this new bottle, Henry poured old wine. His audience now consisting principally of rural proletarians, an unrepentant Henry, we read in Rodney's intelligence file, resumed his jeremiads "against the Jamaican government and claims that by 1972 he will overthrow it, by violence if necessary."<sup>29</sup>

Rodney, the spymasters noted, was introduced to Henry by Rupert Ahwee, "a Jamaican of Chinese extraction, ... a Communist sympathizer," and one of the six above-mentioned "reactionary fellows." Rodney and Henry apparently got on famously. The spooks lamented that while recent police action had "dampened his [Henry's] ardour," Rodney was still "encouraging him, with some

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Walter Anthony Rodney Background in Detail, August 1968, p. 5. For an overview of Henry, see A. Barrington Chevannes, "The Repairer of the Breach: Reverend Claudius Henry and Jamaican Society," in Frances Henry, editor, *Ethnicity in the Americas* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1976), pp. 263-289.

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success, to continue his activities and expand his organization.” The spymasters assumed, as they were wont to do, that the relationship necessarily was exploitative: the man of letters had attached himself to the unlettered Repairer of the Breach for self-interested reasons. Henry, the spooks surmised, “is probably being used by Rodney merely to provide a ready made following and it is unlikely that he has any use for Henry ... apart from his potential as a continuing source of annoyance to the Jamaican Government.”<sup>30</sup> The idea of the gangster model of political mobilization died hard.

Rodney’s extra-curricula activities during his 1968 Jamaica sojourn likely had a strategic purpose. His goal, it seems, was to forge a broad black power alliance, a formation that would include Rastafarians, urban youths (including gang members), and the likes of the Rev. Henry. Painting a picture of a man of boundless energy, Rodney’s intelligence file notes ruefully that he also “has interested himself in the formation of a Black Power Movement (BPM) in Jamaica and is attempting to set up branches in the UWI and in the city of Kingston.” On May 13, he organized an exploratory black power gathering at UWI, with some 300 persons in attendance. At this meeting, Rodney reportedly outlined four aims of black power: creating an awareness of blackness, mobilizing black people “to act in their own interests,” rejecting “white cultural imperialism,” and ensuring “the rule of blacks in

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<sup>30</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Walter Anthony Rodney Background in Detail, August 1968, pp. 4-5.

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black society.” He demanded “a complete break with the capitalist system,” and rejected the official Jamaican creed, “out of many, one people.” Jamaicans, the spy men had Rodney declaring, were “predominantly black and not a multiracial community. Therefore they should be governed only by black people.” These aims, Rodney is said to have concluded, “could be achieved only by revolution, adding that no revolution has ever taken place without a violent struggle.”<sup>31</sup>

A follow-up meeting three days later attracted 140 souls. “Among the speakers was one Dennis Chin, formerly a bookseller (African and Chinese publications) who said that he had been greatly inspired by Rodney’s speech on the 13th of May.” Chin, according to the intelligence report, reiterated Rodney’s “call for violent revolution, and advocated that UWI students should spread BP doctrines among High Schools and Colleges.” Chin’s own practice accorded with his preachment. At Rodney’s behest, he was reported to be busy organizing a black power group in Kingston.<sup>32</sup> Chin, like his mentor, apparently was a man of action.

As befitting a practicing pan-Africanist and internationalist, Rodney, his intelligence file asserts, “appears to be in touch with some BP elements in the U.S.A.” Actually, in a portent of what awaited Rodney, two black power adherents from the United States had been rounded up and ejected from Jamaica in the period leading up to October 1968. Unsurprisingly, the intelligence services “established” that the sable political tourists had arranged

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

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to meet Rodney, a rendezvous that was rudely cancelled by their unscheduled and unceremonious departure from the island.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, Rodney had other internationalist appointments, some of them quite predictable: "Very shortly after his return to Jamaica he was in touch with the Cuban Consul and has maintained his contact with him, having visited the Consulate on at least four occasions." Jamaican intelligence apparently had failed to penetrate the Cuban mission, the spymasters professing ignorance as to the purpose of Rodney's calls on the consul.<sup>34</sup>

In August 1968, the Jamaican intelligence services offered an assessment of Rodney's activities since his return to the island in January of that year. His political endeavors, they concluded, revealed "a history of subversive action, agitation and organization of a Black Power movement, and the propagandization of Communism and violence." Still, the spymasters reckoned, he posed "no immediate threat to internal security." His penchant for building alliances among the discontented, however, contained the seeds of future peril: "he is potentially dangerous since he might succeed in bringing together various disaffected elements in Jamaica."<sup>35</sup>

The Jamaican intelligence services, and the politicians they served, dreaded black power combination. They saw Rodney, appropriately so, as the key link in any such organizational chain.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 1, 7.

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An outstanding feature of black power in Jamaica was its diffusiveness.<sup>36</sup> No central organizational structure cohered the disparate black power and allied groups on the island. Jamaica, in this regard, differed from other societies in which black power gained relatively wide currency. In the United States, for instance, the Black Panther Party served as something of a national clearinghouse for black power, while the Black People's Convention and the National Joint Action Committee fulfilled similar functions in South Africa and Trinidad,<sup>37</sup> In Jamaica, to the contrary, the various components of black power – Rastafarians of various stripes, religious rebels as represented by the Rev. Henry and his group, urban youths, university students, and radical intellectuals – remained uncoordinated and

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<sup>36</sup> Norman Girvan, "After Rodney: The Politics of Student Protest in Jamaica," *New World Quarterly*, 4, 3 (1968), pp. 59-68.

<sup>37</sup> See, variously, Charles E. Jones, editor, *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998); Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, editors, *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Robert Fatton, Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Herman L. Bennett, "The Challenge to the Post-Colonial State: A Case Study of the February Revolution in Trinidad," in Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer, editors, *The Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 129-146; Brian Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Kingston: The Press of the University of the West Indies, 1996), pp. 9-36. For a larger overview of black power, see Locksley Edmondson, "The Internationalization of Black Power: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," *Mawazo*, 1, 4, (1968), pp. 16-30.

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unsynchronized on a national basis. Rodney, almost single-handedly, stood athwart the multiplicity of voices and activities. In 1968, at any rate, he personally supplied whatever coherence black power may have had on the island as a whole. More than anything else, Rodney symbolized the potential for black power combination. Little wonder the lawmen fretted he “might succeed in bringing together various disaffected elements in Jamaica.” He was, indeed, potentially dangerous to the society they were sworn to uphold, although not exactly in the way they imagined, or would soon claim.

**The Spooks Triumphant, being the Case for Rodney’s Expulsion**

In September 1968, a month after their initial assessment, the spymasters updated Rodney’s file. The potential threat about which they had previously spoken, the spooks now asserted, was beginning to be realized. The intelligence services had “for some time,” the addendum states, “recommended the deportation of Rodney because of his subversive activities,” which nefarious behavior continued unabated. He “has maintained his close association” with the Rev. Henry, providing him with a schedule of upcoming events at UWI and agreeing to speak at his churches throughout the island. Rodney, furthermore, also “has maintained close contact” with black power organizer Dennis Chin, whose efforts were being supported by various and sundry malcontents,

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such as the Young Socialist League and the Unemployed Workers Council.<sup>38</sup>

Since August, the spymasters went on, Rodney had expanded his circle. In particular, he “has been developing a close association with Robert Hill, a left wing extremist and friend of the Cuban Consul.” Hill had launched out on his own politically, and was “in the process of forming a revolutionary movement on Marxist/Leninist lines. He has said that Rodney is a valuable assistant to him and that his removal (i. e. by deportation) would be a serious blow to his movement.”<sup>39</sup> Hill, evidently, was responding to “thinly veiled” threats by the prime minister about “foreign” agitators, of whom Rodney was the most prominent.<sup>40</sup>

Hill, the intelligence addendum asserts, “has claimed that he and Rodney provide leadership and encouragement to various subversive groups in Jamaica.” Such joint ventures included “assisting the Dunkirk gang with subversive literature,” notably the Rastafarian-cum-black-power publications, *Black Man Speaks* and *Our Own*, and in attempting to “establish subversive groups at Cockburn Gardens and Duhaney Park,” two Kingston slums.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, Rodney and Hill are said to have developed new contacts in the parish of St. Ann, birthplace of Marcus Garvey,

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<sup>38</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Dr. Walter Anthony Rodney—Recent Activities, September 1968, pp. 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Dr. Walter Anthony Rodney—Recent Activities, September 1968, p. 3.

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later to become the subject of Hill's monumental scholarly labor.<sup>42</sup> Specifically, Rodney and Hill had been "in touch with a Dr. Ronald Duncan of Brown's Town."<sup>43</sup> Duncan is the leader of a semi-defunct subversive movement called the 'Freedom Movement', which in 1967 advocated violent revolution and some members of which were reported to be trained in the use of firearms." Recently, the intelligence services were "reliably" informed of attempts to revive the group, which had a "hard core of fifteen members who have considerable local influence."<sup>44</sup> It is unclear what role, if any, Rodney and Hill played in the reputed revival of the Freedom Movement, or whether they contacted its leader because it was being revived.

The most significant and alarming addition to Rodney's intelligence file between August and September 1968, however, was a claim that he had become a danger to the all-important tourism sector! The intelligence services "received information that Rodney had been in touch with Rastafarians in the Montego Bay area and was trying to incite them to attack the tourists in December which is the beginning of the peak of the tourist

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<sup>42</sup> Robert A. Hill (ed.), *The Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983- ).

<sup>43</sup> The individual in question was likely D. K. Duncan, then a dentist in Brown's Town. Rupert Lewis has Rodney "liming" or partying with Duncan, who, in the 1970s, became a government minister. See Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought*, p.120n21.

<sup>44</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Dr. Walter Anthony Rodney—Recent Activities, September 1968, p. 3.

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season.” As if to cast a patina of disinterested objectivity over their craft, the spymasters added, in the very next sentence: “it is problematic whether Rodney would have been successful” in such an undertaking.<sup>45</sup> Problematic indeed. Only a month previously, the same cast of characters had pronounced Rodney’s wooing of the Rastafarians a failure. Although disposed to accord Rodney “the respect due to a man of learning,” they had asserted, the dreads were “unwilling to accept him as a leader.” But the guardians of Jamaica’s security need not have worried about consistency; like intelligence handlers everywhere, their assertions faced no burden of proof. They just needed to work their will on their political superiors, or else satisfy the politicians’ desire. Any indication that the trade in white gold, and the whites who embodied the gold, were endangered would obviously be a serious matter of state. The mere hint that Rodney, in conjunction with the despised dreads, posed a threat to the tourist industry, then as now the holy grail of Jamaica’s political economy, was enough to jolt the politicians into action, despite the fact that the spymasters disingenuously discredited the reputed threat even while asserting its existence.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> The notion that Rastafarians posed a danger to tourism was not confined to Jamaica. In a kangaroo trial some years later, the authorities in Dominica condemned a dread to death allegedly for killing a tourist, a sentence they later commuted to life in prison. See Frank Jan Van Dijk, “Chanting Down Babylon Outernational: The Rise of Rastafari in Europe, the Caribbean, and the Pacific,” in Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane, editors, *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastarai Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), pp. 186-187.

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The US embassy, which often took a jaundiced view of the Jamaican government's activities, seemed unimpressed by the quality of the intelligence. Although sharply critical of the "impotent groups of agitators," including "black power and other racist, Marxist, [and] anti-establishment" elements with which Rodney was associated, American diplomats impeached the Jamaican intelligence services as overzealous and partisan. Using Rodney's case to make a larger point, the US legation reported to Washington that the island's spymasters were "prone to press the Government to take suppressive and harassing action," such as deportations, arrests, and police raids, "where the basis of arrest and conviction is uncertain or likely to be unpopular."<sup>47</sup> Actually, the relationship between the producers and consumers of intelligence may have been more complicated than this account suggests. The spymasters, although perhaps having their own agenda, also may have had a knack for supplying "intelligence" they thought, or knew, the politicians wanted.

**The Circle Broken: On the Expulsion and the Rising**

Buoyed by the damning report about his threat to tourism, the politicians now felt they had the political, if not exactly the legal, authority to deal with Rodney. The move was a preemptive strike against the coherence of black power in Jamaica, its purpose being to break the circle Rodney had taken the lead in seeking to forge. Accordingly, with the UWI vice-chancellor in attendance, the

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<sup>47</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Amembassy in Kingston to Department of State, November 15, 1968, pp. 1, 7.

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cabinet met on October 14 and subsequently declared Rodney *persona non grata*. The decision seems remarkably unhurried, since the information on which the cabinet acted had been available for at least two weeks, and perhaps much longer. The allegation, after all, was reputed to be of the utmost seriousness. “Never in the history of modern Jamaica,” the misnamed minister of legal affairs would later fulminate, “has there been [a] man who provided greater threat to [the] security of Jamaica than Rodney.”<sup>48</sup> If indeed ministers had credible intelligence that Rodney presented such an imminent danger, to the extent of inciting violent attacks on the country’s economic lifeline, then surely they would have moved against him more swiftly than they actually did, notions of tropical sluggishness notwithstanding. The hypothesis of “cooked” intelligence gains more credence when it is noted that the cabinet apparently acted without the benefit of the most up-to-date information: neither ministers nor vice-chancellor evidently knew that, even as they assembled to determine his fate, Rodney was out of the country attending the Congress of Black Writers in Montreal. True to form, Rodney’s intelligence update would report, “he had been making some inflammatory Black Power speeches” at the congress.<sup>49</sup>

The action against Rodney would turn out to be even more inflammatory. The authorities having discovered his whereabouts, he returned to Jamaica on October 15, the day after the cabinet

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<sup>48</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file Pol. 21: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, October 18, 1968.

<sup>49</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Dr. Walter Anthony Rodney—Recent Activities, September 1968, pp. 1-2.

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meeting, and was turned back without even being allowed to leave the aircraft. From his involuntary exile in Canada, whence Jamaican immigration had returned him, Rodney, his sharp pen ever at the ready, composed a stirring rebuttal. The Jamaican government, his post-expulsion manifesto opened up, had “a large percentage of Black Men, but as the brothers say, they are ‘white-hearted.’” Such “traitors to the Black Race,” the testament continued, “have no moral authority to lay accusations against me, a son of Africa.” Rodney was big on moral authority. He readily, and proudly, admitted to having grounded with dreads, youths, and religious rebels: “I did in fact speak at secondary schools and other educational institutions, in youth centres, on radio, in churches, in the public park in Race Course, in the country and in the town.” In these sessions, he raised the issue of turning the little world that is Jamaica upside down: “What was discussed obviously bothered the regime, because I did not hesitate to raise the question of revolutionary social change.” Most distressing of all to the island’s “white-hearted” rulers, the post-expulsion manifesto asserted, were the spatial settings in which the dialogues took place: “the little men who run Jamaica (locally) were even more frightened of the places where I found myself – in the gullies, backyards and rubbish dumps to which they have confined the black people, in the hope that the world would forget their existence.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Rodney, “Jamaica Today,” p. 4.

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The “black-hearted” people, within and without the university, remembered Rodney. The day he was banned, the UWI campus erupted; angry students quickly arranged for buses and trucks to take them to the offices of the prime minister and the ministry of home affairs to protest the following day. The vehicles failed to appear, and the students blamed the heavy hand of officialdom. Undaunted, the protestors took to their heels, only to be met by police officers wielding batons and firing teargas. The larger procession dispersed, the determined students made their way in small groups to the ministry of home affairs, where a delegation met the permanent secretary. Subsequently, the US embassy reported, the protestors were “herded” into a schoolyard across the street, where several individuals held forth.<sup>51</sup> The most conspicuous speaker, perhaps, was Rodney’s pregnant wife, Patricia Rodney, whose placard pointedly asked, “Where is my husband?”<sup>52</sup> Norman Girvan, a UWI faculty member described by US officials as having “a record of leftist associations” also addressed the assembly, as did Ralph Gonsalves, inaccurately identified by the Americans as a Trinidadian. A native of St. Vincent and a future prime minister of that country, Gonsalves headed UWI’s Guild of Undergraduates and was “known to have leftist tendencies.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Chronology of Events During October Disturbances, pp. 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Ralph Gonsalves, “The Rodney Affair and its Aftermath,” *Caribbean Quarterly*, 25, 3 (1979), p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Chronology of Events During October Disturbances, pp. 1-2.

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A rift soon developed between the two leftists, Girvan and Gonsalves, over the course of the protest. The professor accused the student leader of lacking political stamina and of being out of touch with his constituents.<sup>54</sup> It took him eleven years to do so, in writing, but Gonsalves eventually fired back, denying “an abdication of leadership” and defending his stewardship as “progressive, though by no means revolutionary.” Gonslaves also countered with charges of “adventurism” and leftist infantilism against Girvan.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, the exchanges involved no naming of names, only such oblique references as “student leadership” and “left wing members of the University staff.”

The fissures between Girvan and Gonsalves and their respective allies centered, in the first instance, if not in the last analysis, on how to respond to a sudden turn of events during the protest. Uninvited, a larger body of city dwellers joined the students. The appearance of the non-students split the UWI contingent. One group, apparently including Girvan, called for a march through West Kingston to bring out even more of the “dispossessed.” But where certain faculty and students saw an opportunity for an assertion of a UWI vanguard, or perhaps a prospect of following the mass line, some of their counterparts recoiled at the idea of “the move to West Kingston.” Gonsalves spoke for the latter. To him, the proposed march was “reckless,” even “potentially suicidal,” with the risk that students, especially those from the

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<sup>54</sup> Girvan, “After Rodney.”

<sup>55</sup> Gonslaves, “The Rodney Affair.”

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Eastern Caribbean, would find themselves between the devil and the salty Caribbean sea, facing the “combined strength of the security forces and the thugs.”<sup>56</sup> Confused, demoralized, the students broke ranks, did an about-face, and straggled back to campus in small groups. It was a less than glorious ending to an event that began as a virtual academic procession.

The UWI contingent may have withdrawn, but the protest had not ended. Indeed, the activities of the students would prove merely to be a dress rehearsal for those of the city dwellers. US diplomatic communications offer a striking contrast between the two groups of protestors. Yet the scene, incongruous though it may have seemed, reflected well the spectrum of the alliance Rodney was seeking to build. Respectable in protest, the students were smartly turned out in “red academic gowns and carrying [a] large assortment [of] homemade anti-government signs.”<sup>57</sup> Under provocation, they briefly abandoned decorum to engage in a “stone fight” with supporters of the pro-government Bustamante Industrial Trade Union as they passed its headquarters.<sup>58</sup> The city dwellers, presumably without placards and definitely less majestically attired, also were far less restrained. From all indications, the non-students were an amorphous group, including, no doubt, the just curious and the plain opportunistic—“unemployed youths and members of the lumpenproletariat,” one

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>57</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file Pol. 21: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, October 16, 1968.

<sup>58</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Chronology of Events During October Disturbances, p. 2.

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scholar has called them.<sup>59</sup> Yet it seems safe to assume, initially anyhow, that the core of the non-student protestors would have consisted of urban youths familiar with the person, or the legend, of the beloved “Brother Wally,” the fearless anti-Babylon chanter.<sup>60</sup>

The UWI radicals had proposed a march on West Kingston to swell the ranks of the demonstration with the dispossessed. But with the UWI contingent gone, the remaining protestors, many of them presumably from West Kingston and similar places, embarked on an even more radical course: they marched into the city center, the country’s commercial, financial and diplomatic hub. As they did so, whatever discipline they previously exhibited fell away, and relatively orderly formation gave way to rowdy discord. The demonstration morphed into the headless multitude, and a civil mutiny turned into a riotous assembly. Armed with stones, missiles they doubtless were more adept at deploying than the students, and Molotov cocktails fashioned from soda bottles and gasoline, roving bands of rioters scoured the business district. They singled out the holdings of international capital--prominent among them banking, insurance and oil concerns. Some rioters turned their wrath on the merchant class, everywhere a

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<sup>59</sup> Anthony Payne, “The Rodney Riots in Jamaica: The Background and Significance of the Events of October 1968,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 21, 2 (1983), p. 167.

<sup>60</sup> On Rodney’s impact in Jamaica, see Lewis, *Walter Rodney’s Intellectual and Political Thought*, pp. 85-123. For an overview of the rising, see Payne, “The Rodney Riots,” pp. 158-174.

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conspicuous symbol of oppression to the poor, breaking store windows and looting goods. Others burned the foreign-owned city buses, which, in addition to having a record of poor service, had recently increased fares. Still other rioters targeted automobiles driven and occupied by seemingly affluent individuals—vehicles that were “status symbols of what is considered the better life,” according to US officials.<sup>61</sup> The victims included “several [American] embassy officers,” whose automobiles were “extensively damaged” by rocks but who managed to escape with only “superficial personal injuries.”<sup>62</sup>

The crowd, although headless, was not purposeless. The moral economy of the rioting corresponded with the political economy of class, race and color on the island. The outstanding characteristic of that political economy, US diplomats noted, was a “fracturing of the population along racial and color lines, as well as on the basis of economic factors,” resulting in a situation in which “the browns and mulattos hold a highly disproportionate share of the economic and political power of Jamaica.”<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, the properties targeted by the rioters belonged largely to persons with white, brown and yellow skins. Similarly, the rioters directed their wrath against individuals described by the US embassy as “not only Caucasian, but also light-skinned Afro-Europeans, Jamaican

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<sup>61</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Chronology of Events During October Disturbances, pp. 2-3.

<sup>62</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file Pol. 21: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, October 16, 1968.

<sup>63</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Annex 2, pp. 1-2.

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Chinese, and Afro-Chinese and, in some instances against Jamaican Africans,” that is, dark-skinned blacks.<sup>64</sup> Class warfare, normally experienced by the poor in the form of structural violence, had been turbulently transferred to the streets. There, for a brief and violent moment, it assumed a form consistent with the color-inflected norms of the society, although those norms were not entirely determined by color, as evidenced by attacks on certain “Jamaican Africans.”

The rioters may have destroyed properties, roughed up individuals, and rattled the nerves of the island’s elite. At no point, however, did they threaten the authority of the state. Indeed, it seemed to Norman Girvan that the authorities had deliberately held back the police and allowed the rioting to ensue, in order to justify Rodney’s expulsion and discredit black power generally.<sup>65</sup> If so, the regime soon unleashed its repressive apparatuses. In retreat, the rioters momentarily found some unlikely allies. With the police in pursuit, some among the fleeing crowd took refuge in a fire station. The police, seeking to flush them out, fired teargas into the premises, gassing all the occupants, firemen as well as rioters. Infuriated, the firemen joined the melee, helping to stone the police. Worse still, the firemen spontaneously declared an industrial action, refusing to extinguish fires resulting from the riot. Before it was over, the army would be called in to back up the police. In the end, the rising claimed six lives, apparently all of

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<sup>64</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Amembassy in Kingston to Department of State, November 15, 1968, p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Girvan, “After Rodney,” p. 61.

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them participants in the demonstration turned riot, or individuals who had been caught up in it.<sup>66</sup> In suppressing the rising, as in deciding to expel Rodney, the Jamaican authorities apparently acted on their own, with little outside direction. The US embassy, for instance, restricted its role to cheerleading and to pointing out weaknesses in the coordination between the police and the military.

### **The Reaction to the Rising and the Rising of the Reaction**

US officials believed the rising to be “spontaneously generated.”<sup>67</sup> They found no evidence of involvement by “dissident or subversive organizations,” such as the Rastafarians, the Rev. Henry’s group, or the Nation of Islam,<sup>68</sup> which was part of the local black power dynamics, at least at the level of its surreptitiously distributed publications, which, along with the works of individuals like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, were officially banned.<sup>69</sup> Nor did the Americans find any “real connection between the Jamaicans who rioted and UWI students and teachers,” despite the presence at the university of a “core of

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<sup>66</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Chronology of Events During October Disturbances.

<sup>67</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Amembassy in Kingston to Department of State, November 15, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Annex 1-D.

<sup>69</sup> Lewis, *Walter Rodney’s Intellectual and Political Thought*, p. 98.

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radical intellectuals ... working to incite the Jamaican masses.”<sup>70</sup> US diplomats attributed the rising to the larger problems of Jamaican society, including a color-skewed class structure that limited upward social mobility for the masses and led to a high rate of emigration. Politically, the Americans noted, the system was just as impermeable: a deceptive superstructure with the trappings of parliamentary democracy – such as free expression, free elections and a two-party system – rested precariously on an “unstable base.”<sup>71</sup> In fact, US officials continued, the ruling party remained in power through “flagrant gerrymandering and manipulation of voter-registration procedures,” even as it imposed “strict limitation of parade permits for groups of dissidents” and arbitrarily denied passports to its critics. American diplomats also cited government attempts to “intimidate the Judiciary and the Clergy,” by which they did not mean such exponents of black liberationist theology as the Rev. Henry, but the mainline ministers who, in the wake of the Rodney affair, complained that Jamaica was descending into a “police state.” The government, furthermore, made a mockery of freedom of information by banning “subversive” literature and by using the official media, including the lone television station, for “self-serving

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<sup>70</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Amembassy in Kingston to Department of State, November 15, 1968, pp. 1-2.

<sup>71</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Annex 2, p. 1.

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propaganda.”<sup>72</sup> In fine, the US embassy’s assessment of Jamaican polity and society read like it had been copied from the scripts of Rodney and the other “agitators” the Americans joined the government in denouncing.

Unlike US officials, the Jamaican governing and ruling classes exhibited little penchant for reflection over the Rodney affair. The rising, they proclaimed in unison, was the handiwork of foreigners and their internal confederates. Politicians and commentators proceeded to denounce both groups with abandon, but the greater animus was reserved for the foreign agitators, most of whom came from elsewhere in the Caribbean; in other language, “small islanders,” a category from which denizens of Guyana, located on the South American mainland, apparently were not exempt. Institutionally, the xenophobia was directed at the entity that brought the bulk of the unwanted aliens to Jamaica: UWI.

The ruling Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), the repository of Jamaican know-nothingism, had never been fond of UWI. To the JLP leaders, the university was a relic of an era best forgotten. It was the most important, and conspicuous, survivor of the West Indies Federation, that brief experiment in Anglophone Caribbean political concord that the JLP had been so instrumental in aborting. Claiming that the federation drained Jamaica’s resources, requiring it to subsidize the “small islands,” the JLP demanded a popular vote on the issue in 1961, on the eve of independence. Raising the

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<sup>72</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, January 24, 1969; USNA, RG59, Box 3079, file Jam: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, November 22, 1968.

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slogan, “Jamaica yes, federation no,” JLP helmsman Alexander Bustamante and his ciphers barnstormed the country with their anti-unity message. A majority of those who voted in the referendum agreed that Jamaica should quit the federation and seek independence on its own. Concurrently, would-be philosopher-king Eric Williams, his initial zeal for Caribbean concord flagging, especially if it meant freedom of movement and free passage into Trinidad for denizens of Grenada, declared there could be no federation without Jamaica. Referring to the number of island groups that made up the federation, Williams, lately professor of history at the University of Woodford Square, among other institutions of higher learning, presently assumed the role of mathematician. One from ten, he famously deadpanned, leaves naught. Federation day was done.<sup>73</sup> Bustamante, reviled by the cognoscenti as a blustering dunce but revered by his more numerous devotees as the wily “Busta,” confounder of the wise as well as the fiscally transparent, would take the fall. Busta, it would be said, had busted the federation.<sup>74</sup> The University of the West Indies, however, survived. So, too, did Jamaican national

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<sup>73</sup> The allusion, of course, is to Williams’ famous speech entitled, “Massa Day Done.”

<sup>74</sup> Louis Lindsay, “Symbolic Politics: A Commentary on Self-Government and Jamaica’s Involvement in the Defunct W. I. Federation,” in Carl Stone and Aggrey Brown, editors, *Perspectives on Jamaica in the Seventies* (Kingston: Jamaica Publishing House, 1981), pp. 94-114.

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chauvinism. The other West Indians, true to the prickly and peppery regional temperament, responded in kind.<sup>75</sup>

In the wake of the rising, the JLP government returned to its nativist, know-nothing antecedents. The shrill calls to throw out the meddling foreigners and “Jamaicanize” UWI began at the very top of the political pyramid, spearheaded by Busta’s successor and a man described by Rodney as “the Dishonourable H. L. Shearer,

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<sup>75</sup> Comments like the one attributed to Barbadian Grantley Adams, prime minister of the federation, no less, were hardly calculated to advance Caribbean concord. The Jamaicans, he asserted, were largely an illiterate lot, while the Trinidadians had forsaken the work ethic, having given themselves over to calypso and partying. Only the Bajans, Sir Grantley informed a New York audience, possessed the intellect, industry and sobriety necessary to lead the federation! The pioneering black internationalist scholar St. Clair Drake, in a discourse on “differences in island national character” in the Caribbean, offered a materialist explanation, of sorts, for what he agreed was a Barbadian penchant for sternness and seriousness. Barbados, having had just a single colonizer, England, “has had no Spanish or French leavening to reinforce African gaiety as in most of the other islands.” Warming to the subject, Drake continued: “Intriguing questions arise as to why Trinidad has produced a number of distinguished Marxist intellectuals while Jamaica seems to be the seedbed of black nationalism and Barbados has produced policemen, doctors, businessmen and lawyers. Perhaps I may be permitted this over-simplification that seems a bit pejorative, for my father is a ‘Badian,’ and I am criticizing as a partial insider. My mother was from Virginia. I am therefore a Pan-African diaphora product.” See David Lowenthal, “The Social Background of the West Indies Federation,” in David Lowenthal, editor, *The West Indies Federation: Perspectives on a New Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 70; St. Clair Drake, “Diaspora Studies and Pan-Africanism,” in Joseph E. Harris, editor, *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982), p. 364.

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Prime Minister of Jamaica.”<sup>76</sup> Appearing in parliament to defend his government’s action, with the proceedings covered live on television and radio, then a rare event, Shearer set the tone for the official response to the rising and for the rise of the reaction. Rodney, he asserted, favored violent revolution to destroy “brown-skinned mulatto people.” As self-contradictory and misleading as his intelligence services, the prime minister gave out that Rodney defined black power as a “Castro revolution,” conveniently sidestepping the obvious fact that the Cuban leader, soon to be christened as one of the blackest men in the Caribbean by black power notable Stokely Carmichael, was phenotypically white. For good chauvinist effect, Shearer repeatedly stated that Rodney was not Jamaican. Nor, for that matter, were most of the students protesting his banning. The “small islanders,” furthermore, controlled the body that initiated the trouble, namely the Guild of Undergraduates, which, the prime minister claimed, apparently inaccurately, had just one Jamaican officer, the treasurer. Squaring the circle, Shearer linked the external agitators to the usual coterie of bad local actors and fifth columnists. Many of the demonstrators, he skulked, “identified themselves as Rastafarians,” prompting the US embassy, parsing his words, to note that he “carefully avoided saying they were Rastafarians.”<sup>77</sup> The distinction was likely lost on the prime minister’s targeted audience. Where Shearer led, his ministers and other underlings

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<sup>76</sup> Rodney, “Jamaica Today,” p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file Pol. 21: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, October 17, 1968; USNA, RG59, Box 3079, file Jam: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, November 22, 1968.

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followed, prominent among them the over-ambitious finance minister and future prime minister, the American-born turned Jamaican super-patriot Edward Seaga.

The virulence of the anti-foreign or, to be more precise, anti-Caribbean and anti-UWI diatribe alarmed US officials on the island. Recognizing the demagoguery for what it was, the Americans said as much, noting that the Jamaican authorities were “diverting public indignation to ‘foreign subversives’ at UWI,” and that they were “running scared.”<sup>78</sup> The Americans, who ought have known something of the matter, having recently emerged from one themselves, feared the baiting could escalate into a “full-fledged witch hunt.” US officials could find few, if any, voices of reason in the narrow circles of government officials and Jamaican elite in which they moved and had their being on the island. Collectively overcome by anxiety, the Jamaican grandees imagined multiple threats, foreign and domestic, which they conflated into a grander conspiracy emanating from a principal center.<sup>79</sup> The Americans would have diagnosed the syndrome immediately; in their language, this was a tropical strain of McCarthyism.<sup>80</sup> “Surprisingly,” the Americans marveled, “many Jamaicans who seem well balanced and objective on so many other issues see bogeyman at UWI.... The ‘menace’ of foreigners, communists,

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<sup>78</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Amembassy in Kingston to Department of State, November 15, 1968, pp. 3, 6.

<sup>79</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Annex 2, pp. 6-8

<sup>80</sup> Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998).

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criminals, hoodlums, Rastas, and even intellectuals are lumped together, making UWI a single convenient target.” Perhaps reflecting the dark mood of their local interlocutors, US diplomats raised the specter of revolution or counter-revolution. The crisis, they warned their superiors in Washington, was eroding the “slender thread of stability from which hangs the Damoclean sword of riot and revolution, or, perhaps, rightist reaction”<sup>81</sup>

If the official opposition also feared the rise of Thermidor, it was difficult to tell. In parliament, admittedly, speakers from the People’s National Party generally decried the jingoism emanating from the government benches. Fundamentally, however, the PNP had no disagreement with the regime. One PNP parliamentarian, according to the US summary, complained that the government had “made Rodney a martyr, increased his following, and stimulated [the] likelihood of external support for revolutionary movement in Jamaica.” PNP leader Norman Manley, for his part, “did not question wisdom that decision had to be taken, but did not like way it was done,” to use the economical formulation of the US embassy cable.<sup>82</sup> The government had ejected Rodney amid a cacophony of anti-foreign tirade. The PNP acclaimed the former while disclaiming the latter. The PNP’s slogan, if it had one, would have been “No Rodney, no xenophobia.” Effectively, the political gangsters had ganged up on Rodney.

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<sup>81</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file JAM – A: Internal Security Review: Annex 2, pp. 6-8.

<sup>82</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file Pol. 21: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, October 18, 1968.

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Outside of parliament, the PNP leadership was more circumspect, with Manley expressing qualified support for black power. Speaking before the party faithful, presumably an audience not entirely unsympathetic to the insurgency, Manley embraced black power insofar as it meant “acceptance of black identity, black future, and black duty.” At the same time, he “denounced violence and aspects of Black Power which emphasize racism” and exhibit “anti-white feelings.” But, like other traducers of the “racist aspects” of black power, the opposition leader failed to identify the objectionable features. Alternating between doublespeak and pigmentocracy, the multilingual Manley then offered a color-coded review of the Jamaican governing circle. Jamaicans, the US legation quoted him as saying, “must understand and must not ignore Black Power in a country where the Governor General is black, the Prime Minister is light brown, and he, the leader of the Opposition, is brown.”<sup>83</sup> At the level of the individual, Manley certainly had a keen appreciation for shades of color. His depiction of the distribution of power in Jamaica, however, was as rose-colored as it was skin-deep. And when it came to black power, the opposition leader was downright color-blind.

### **Jamaica Reprised: After Rodney and After Black Power**

In the aftermath of Rodney’s expulsion, US diplomats in Jamaica continued to closely monitor the local black power scene. It

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<sup>83</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2241, file Pol. 12: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, November 20, 1968.

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seemed to them that a Rodney coworker, Robert Hill, was attempting to fill the vacuum created by his comrade's unplanned departure. A "reporting officer" from the US embassy, consequently, was present at a meeting where Hill reported on the Montreal Congress of Black Writers, which he, like Rodney, attended, and on the continuing prospects of black power in Jamaica.<sup>84</sup> The hall was "packed with about 500 people, with only three or four nonblack faces in the audience (including one Chinese)." The crowd, which was "quite enthusiastic," ran the gamut from members of the middle class to Rastafarians. The US diplomat described the speaker, whom he believed to have been "effective," as a "lean, short, light-skinned mulatto with wispy brown beard and curly brown hair, about 25." This description formed the backdrop for the diplomat's distorted retort to Hill's comment that he was "a staunch follower" of Rodney. Resorting to a line oft-repeated by defamers of black power locally, the reporting officer opined: "it is curious how Hill, a very light-skinned mulatto, would fit into the scheme of things if the day arrives when Rodney's exhortation to kill mulattoes comes to pass."<sup>85</sup>

Prime Minister Shearer, archetypically scornful of truth, previously offered up the same diabolical fabrication in parliament. Hill, who presumably had spent more time with Rodney than either the prime

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<sup>84</sup> On the offerings of Hill and Rodney at the congress, see Wilkins, "'In The Belly of the Beast.'"

<sup>85</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 3079, file Jam: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, November 27, 1968.

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minister or US diplomats, without any attempt on his life, apparently did not share their wild delusions about black power's proposed final solution for people of visibly mixed African ancestry. Indeed, the Americans tarred Hill with the same feather they used to airbrush Rodney and other black power activists. In another post-Rodney assessment, this one resulting from an interview with the Rev. Henry, an encounter in which the US diplomat failed to identify himself as such, the Americans would describe how Hill, "who has attempted to replace Rodney, and other racists and black power advocates have also visited Henry."<sup>86</sup> Hill's report on the Montreal congress, according to the US diplomatic assessment, extolled Marcus Garvey and pan-Africanism, urged black combination across national boundaries, and proposed a "Black Heroes Day" in honor of the "martyred" Patrice Lumumba, to be celebrated on July 14, the birthday of the slain Congolese leader. Hill then turned from the global to the local: "A real crowd-pleaser, perhaps as part of his effort to fill Rodney's shoes, Hill lauded the Rastafarian poet Ras Dizzy, Mrs. Garvey, and other stars in the local Black Power galaxy." On the whole, the US official thought his "address was mild. He did not exhort the audience to any kind of violence." Perhaps he was being coy, the Americans surmised, his moderation, as they would have it, a result of undercover police presence, an issue to which Hill had referred.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2241, file Pol. 6: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, May 16, 1969.

<sup>87</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 3079, file Jam: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, November 27, 1968.

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The Jamaican government was not so bashful in its undertakings, although it should have been. As if to accept the “Dishonourable” (dis)honorific Rodney bestowed on him, Prime Minister Shearer had convinced the United Nations to designate 1968 the International Year of Human Rights! To complement the international commemoration and, inadvertently, complete the farce, Shearer’s government established its own human rights prize, with a stipend of £5,000 (US\$14,000). Seeking, evidently, to steal a black power heritage, the authorities named the prize after Marcus Garvey, in his own lifetime an object of derision for the likes of Shearer and the other “white-hearted” men in his cabinet. As the prize was open to persons of all nationalities, the US embassy suggested its government consider nominating such notables as Roy Wilkins, the NAACP leader routinely skewered by African American activists, most famously by the singer Gil Scott-Heron;<sup>88</sup> and Thurgood Marshall, the former NAACP lawyer and the first black to be appointed to the US Supreme Court.<sup>89</sup> The Jamaicans, however, chose another US citizen; in December 1968 they awarded the prize posthumously to Martin Luther King, Jr., who had been slain earlier in the year. Yet even as they were presenting the award to King’s widow, the Jamaican authorities were adding some final touches to the post-Rodney machinery of

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<sup>88</sup> “The revolution will not be televised.... There will be no slow motion or still life of Roy Wilkins strolling through Watts in a red, black and green liberation jumpsuit that he had been saving for just the proper occasion.” See Gil Scott-Heron, “The Revolution will not be Televised.”

<sup>89</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 3079, file Jam: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, July 8, 1967.

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repression: amending the immigration law to make it easier to deport “Commonwealth” citizens—meaning, concretely, citizens of other Caribbean countries.<sup>90</sup>

Politically and morally, the Jamaica Labour Party government never recovered from the Rodney affair. Accordingly, the opposition People’s National Party easily won the next election, in 1972. Not only was black power instrumental in laying the social foundations for the PNP victory, albeit inadvertently, but the PNP, on the hustings, very advertently courted some notable black power constituencies and brazenly appropriated their symbolic currency, with nary a hint of contrition for its complicity in the repression of black power, including Rodney’s expulsion. Most conspicuously, Michael Manley, the PNP leader for several years running, assumed the persona of a dread, his appearance on the campaign trail never complete without his cane, purportedly a gift of the Ethiopian emperor and Rastafarian deity Haile Selassie. A consummate showman with a glib tongue, Manley was in his element crisscrossing the island. Metaphorically chastising the wayward with his “rod of correction,” the PNP leader failed only to add that the emperor’s gift was an exact replica of the staff Moses used to smite the Red Sea, creating a corridor of land for the freed people to cross. Moses’ subsequent departure left the completion of the liberation project to his successor, Joshua, a moniker Manley had assumed, his audiences chanting, “Lick dem, Joshua, lick dem; lick dem wid di rod of correction,” mimicking a popular song. To Manley’s good electoral fortune, the

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<sup>90</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2242, file Pol. 21: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, January 16, 1969.

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Rastafarians had laid the groundwork for rounding out the exodus story, having previously labeled as “Pharaoh” his JLP opposite number, the hapless Prime Minister Shearer. Manley offered smoke in mirrors. Shearer, his campaign equally vacuous and devoid of substance, countered with monotony and dullness. When at curtain call the votes were counted, inevitably style had trumped boredom.<sup>91</sup> Manley, whose tomfoolery never fooled Rodney, may well have provided the prototype for Rodney’s Marxist extrapolation that events appearing against the huge canvass of Africa as tragedy reappear in the Caribbean as comedy.<sup>92</sup>

Manley’s belated dalliance with black power was both highly stylized and safely removed from the events of the previous decade. On receiving, dynastic-like, the mandate of the PNP leadership in 1969, the son, like the father he succeeded, tried to shine without the illuminating rays of black power. Soon after the coronation, some in the PNP suggested a rapprochement with the Rev. Henry, but Manley the younger rejected the suggestion. He preferred, the US embassy reported, “keeping Henry at arm’s length,” lest Shearer, whose parliament constituency included the

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<sup>91</sup> On Jamaican politics and the rise of Manley, see Carl Stone, *Class, Race and Political Behaviour in Urban Jamaica* (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1973); Carlene J. Edie, *Democracy by Default: Dependency and Clientalism in Jamaica* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991); Chevannes, “The Repairer of the Breach.”

<sup>92</sup> Karl Marx had said that historical events occur twice, first as tragedy and then as farce.

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area in which Henry's headquarters was located, use the issue against him.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, before assuming the PNP crown, US diplomats had heard complaints, presumably from his detractors in the party, that Manley was a facsimile of Shearer: "closely identified with the labor scene, and an occasional boozier and 'womanizer,'" with an eye for other men's wives. The two differed only in that, "unlike Shearer, who is rumored to be tainted by corruption by some critics, Manley is considered honest."<sup>94</sup>

His athletic frame settled neatly on the PNP throne, US officials came for an interview, an obligatory ritual for aspirants to higher office in those parts, those who would presume to rule by virtue of birthright not excluded. Manley, his interviewers reported, was "of continuing interest to the U. S. Government," not least because New York governor Nelson Rockefeller had expressed "special interest" in him. The Americans came away from the quizzing with a portrait of a man of moderation, personally and politically, an image somewhat at variance with their previous sketch. A jazz aficionado, the self-represented Manley "enjoys an occasional gin and tonic but does not over-indulge. He does not smoke. He is a careful dieter." Politically, he "describes himself as a strict anti-Communist. He states he is not a socialist ..., although he concedes he would rather that members of his Party not know that." As of his 1969 conference with US embassy officers, the future champion of "democratic socialism," by his own admission,

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<sup>93</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2241, file Pol. 6: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, May 16, 1969.

<sup>94</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2241, file Pol. 12: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, December 31, 1968.

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seemed to be something of a maverick Rockefeller Republican, which may explain the governor's "special interest" in him. A self-described "liberal democrat," Manley jubilated the Americans on how he "admires the United States, especially its technical and industrial program."<sup>95</sup>

Soon after becoming prime minister, Manley undertook another mandatory exercise, making the journey to the land of his admiration. On the sidelines of his official business in Washington, D. C., he addressed a popular forum. In the audience was Anthony Ferguson, a member of the Caribbean Unity Conference, based in Washington, and a disciple of C. L. R. James, then also a resident of that city, having returned to the United States after an involuntary, cold war-induced exile. At question time, Ferguson, who said he would "never forget the joy I felt when I read" *Groundings with My Brothers*, asked Manley about lifting the ban on Rodney. The prime minister, uncharacteristically tongue-tied, refused to entertain the inquiry. Undaunted, Ferguson cornered Manley at a reception following the speech. Shearer, not he, had banned Rodney, a suddenly loquacious Manley now protested, under the cover of a tête-à-tête. He had not, the prime minister went on, personally "investigated the circumstances surrounding the affair," and Rodney was free to apply for a visa to enter Jamaica. "Then and only then will your case be examined," Ferguson, in a letter to Rodney, who had returned to Dar es Salaam

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<sup>95</sup> USNA, RG59, Box 2241, file Pol. 12: Amembassy Kingston to Department of State, August 8, 1969.

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after being expelled from Jamaica, quoted Manley as saying. “He added, though, that he had heard the ban was necessary because of your inciting of the people to action against the government. This he could not and would not stand for, as if such was the case, he concluded, ‘you know I eh go let anybody, *particularly an outsider* come in and disrupt *my country*.’”<sup>96</sup> Shearer and the JLP, it seemed, had not exhausted Jamaican national chauvinism. In the heady days before Rodney’s expulsion, the Rev. Henry reportedly had predicted he would, by violent means if necessary, overthrow the government by 1972, the year he joined other erstwhile black power constituents in supporting Manley’s electoral victory. But Manley’s, or rather Joshua’s, vision of the promised land would not include Brother Wally, Henry’s erstwhile brethren—if the prime minister’s attitude to the idea of Rodney returning to Jamaica was any indication.

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<sup>96</sup> AUCA, Rodney Papers, Box 2, Anthony Ferguson file: Ferguson to Rodney, November 17, 1972 (emphasis in original).