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TOWN & GOWN

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"I am an admirer of the University. I respect the University. I welcome all students of the University and I want to see them making full use of the academic freedoms allowed. But they are using the words 'human rights' as a licence to do a lot of things and are causing the Government of suppressing freedom. I say categorically, however, there is no suppression of freedom in this country, but I will say there are some (at the University) who are abusing the freedom allowed them in this country..."

Hugh Shearer, mid-1968 speech in *Hugh Shearer: A Voice for the People*, p290

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The relationship between the UWI campus at Mona, and the adjacent city of Kingston, has involved both physical location, and ideas about the status of higher learning compared to day-to-day activities. This distinction between 'Gown' (referring to the historic practice of wearing academic gowns) and 'Town', is reflected in university histories around the world.

In 1948, when the then University College of the West Indies, popularly 'UC', was established at Mona, it was very much on the edge of the city. The growth of the city and changes in urban transportation greatly improved physical access. But the idea of the university as a self-contained space, where lecturers and students do their studies at a distance from reality, remains. This was even more so the case the 1960s, when the majority of students still lived in halls of residence on the campus for at least part of their university life. Additionally, the UWI was always conceived as an institution that prepares leadership and managerial elites for various sectors.

These perceptions remained even though the campus – then as now – drew significant numbers of staff and students from the city and interfaced with it in various ways. The Guild of Undergraduates and Students' Union facility have, at various times, attracted large numbers of young, non-UWI visitors.



Carnival parties and parades, especially 'Last Lap' drew hundreds and even thousands of young people from Kingston in the late 1960s



Intense 'reasonings' involved Rastafarian and other informal intellectuals and activists; and some involved students were, in turn, welcomed at activist locations and events off-campus

ISSUES OF THE 1960s?

"This was a period of anxiety for the West Indian Governments..."

"In Western Kingston... hunger, poverty and frustration were causing social unrest.

The Rastafarian movement and concern over increasing urban poverty had indicated growing social tensions. As domestic unrest intensified... governments grew more apprehensive. Castro and Khrushchev were already on their doorsteps. ... They had inherited a long tradition, at every level from the folk to the officials, of maintaining authority by repression and violence. The memory of Pinnacle and the Howells was still fresh in the minds of Jamaicans, many of whom regarded the social scientists at Mona and St Augustine as trouble-makers, forerunners of revolution, threats to property and privilege.

Some from the middle and upper classes were dismayed at the attraction the Rastafarian movement had for their sons and daughters. Many students, on the other hand, were deeply concerned at the indifference of the other generation to the misery around them; ... the continuing practice of discrimination and other relics of colonialism." (Sherlock & Nettleford, The UWI, 196-197)

Rupert Lewis, then a postgraduate student at the UWI, recalled the social and racial ferment resulting from the return of Marcus Garvey's body to Jamaica (in 1964) which created a large-scale mass interest in the relevance of Garvey's philosophy. And he recalled the importance of international events, especially the protest over US involvement in the Vietnam War and America's Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

STIRRING DEBATE

Such issues stirred debate and discussion among more aware students at Mona. Some recall concerns about the policies of the government, particularly related to the banning of any books related to socialism, communism, revolution or blackness in any form.

Carroll Marston Edwards (UWI 1967-1970): "...people paid attention to what was going in the world and had very strong opinions. So [at] the soda fountain there were amazing arguments...And ... everybody gathered there."



Image of book banning order



Angella Cunningham Heron (UWI 1966-1969): "Going to the Students Union was a regular activity for students across the board and you also have people from August Town coming up and talking will solve the world's problems, will solve Jamaica's problems, will solve Caribbean problems"



Jacqui Vernon Bertram (UWI 1965-1969): "...UWI at the time could've been paradise outside of the world and you wouldn't have had to bother with the world, but a group of us did bother; realize that this is wrong. .. When G. White did his musicology, ... songs like 'Everything Crash', 'Carry Go Bring Come', they weren't just songs that you sing and you dance to...It was really telling you if you were unaware... In our Ivory tower, that outside of this place, life is difficult and impossible for some Jamaicans. Through the groundings, through the association, [you] became aware of your responsibility for the less fortunate."



Arnold Bertram reflected on the anger of Rastafarians, especially radical Rastafarians like Ras Negus, whose camp was in Eastern Kingston: "Ras Negus and the others wished for freedom... The freedom to be African in Jamaica... How? Whatever government and police that is causing the suppression - move that thing! ...A police was free to catch you any minute, lock you up fi a spliff, trim off your locks - just sheg round you night and day. And that thing was hell man, it was

LIGHTING A FIRE

In response to these concerns, various networks, organisations and groups had been formed and publications established - some linked to political parties, some to political philosophies; a few had international connections. It was into this environment that Walter Rodney returned at the beginning of 1968; five years after leaving the UWI in 1963 with a 1st Class Honours degree in History.

"Walter arrived into a moment where agitation would get a response and (where) political education of the kind that he was into would definitely garner some response. People were hungry and eager for the kind of information Walter had. So it's like putting a light to incendiary material...."

- Rupert Lewis



Rodney's presence on the UWI Mona campus provided an incentive for increased engagement between gown and town at the level of students and some faculty; both on the campus and in various, mainly underprivileged, communities. Several students of the period recalled, in interviews, visiting Rastafarian camps and related events, some with Walter Rodney, for reasonings.

RAISING SECURITY CONCERNS



Rodney's activity attracted the underprivileged – but also the security forces. Jerry Small, an activist who had close friends on the Mona Campus and who introduced Walter Rodney to various Rastafarian communities, noted: *"The special branch had spies who would attend lectures and try to infiltrate the Black Power groups. These individuals would follow Black Power members in cars."*

When Rodney was finally banned by the government for subversive activities, in October 1968, Jamaican Prime Minister Hugh Shearer quoted from security reports:

"Rodney also openly declared his belief that as Jamaica was predominantly a black country, all brown-skinned mulatto people and their assets should be destroyed. He consistently told the groups with whom he associated that this could only be achieved by revolution and that no revolution had ever taken place without armed struggle and without bloodshed" He quoted Rodney as having told a meeting at the UWI: *"Revolution must come. We must be prepared to see it through. We must stop talking and indulging in academic exercises and act. Who will be the first to come Downtown and take up a machine gun?"*

And the Prime Minister quoted from a pamphlet, whose origins still provoke a range of speculative responses from activists of the time:

"Provoke the police. Don't argue with them. Insult them, ridicule them and then let them attack you and reveal the true nature of the system. Shut down the whole University. You know how to make a kerosene bomb, a Molotov. (1) a paper wick; (2) Bottle mix; (3) Oil. Don't read this, make one. Demonstrate. Fight for social justice. Burn...Burn...Burn."

But even the American intelligence agencies seemed to feel that the Jamaican government was over-reacting on Rodney, as US academic Michael O West showed in work with US National Archives files to analyse the Jamaican intelligence position on Rodney. These showed up Rodney's *"history of subversive action, agitation and organization of a Black Power movement, and the propagandization of Communism and violence"* but concluded that he posed *"no immediate threat to internal security...(though)...potentially dangerous since he might succeed in bringing together various disaffected elements in Jamaica."* (West, quoting an August 1968 assessment)



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In a pensive mood, Prime Minister Shearer strolls along the corridor towards his office. At right are the Minister of Home Affairs, Hon. Roy McNeil (with pipe) and the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, Mr. James Lloyd. Photo Credit The Gleaner

By September, files suggested 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 season."*

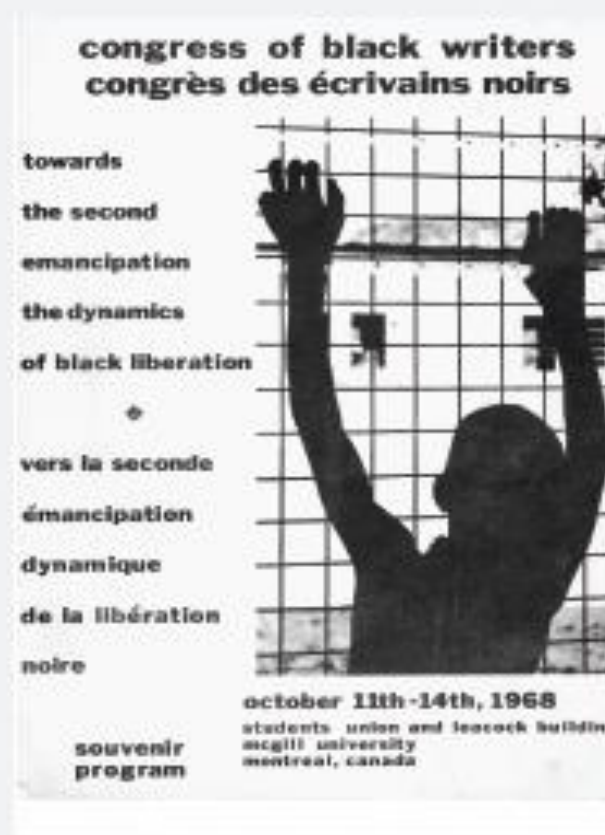
This seems to have been a tipping point for the government of Prime Minister Shearer. But even the American officials, who understood concerns over 'anti-establishment' elements, criticized Jamaica's intelligence services as partisan, overzealous, and prone to encourage the government in its highly unpopular harassment and suppression of any possible opposition.

PERSONA NON GRATA

Rodney travelled to a Black Writers Conference in Montreal, Canada, and returned to find himself unable to set foot in Jamaica because of a government ban. The UWI students' response was to demonstrate, against the banishment and the manner of the action; which left his pregnant wife and child stranded. Activists who had been close to Rodney, some of them students, also mobilised the 'African Doctor's friends across the city of Kingston, advising them of the plan to march.

The students' demonstration, hundreds of them in their signature red gowns, was therefore swollen and eventually overwhelmed by other protestors, and the march as a whole was eventually overwhelmed by looters and persons looking to vent their anger at the system that oppressed them.

Barbadian historian Prof Sir Woodville Marshall, then a lecturer recalled: *"...when the Rodney issue exploded, it then became plain that Rodney was agitating not really on the Campus but outside the campus... he was in associating himself in particular groups, protest groups and in fact he was helping to educate them along the line of protest action. Now, I am not sure that one can say that there is a direct connection between that activity that was going on outside and any activity among the students. But of course, because he ... was a good lecturer and because the extent to which militancy and protest action was becoming the norm among the students, once ... they heard what had happened to him, it didn't take much to stimulate the type of response which in fact happened. They weren't necessarily made into activists by ... direct contact with him but because they themselves, because a lot of them, they were already active in political areas..."*



Walter Rodney on the plane

DEMONSTRATION AND RIOT

The descent from demonstration to riot – stores looted, buses burned, three killed and many arrested – sent the students back to campus by every available route. There, many heard the Prime Minister, Hugh Shearer, castigate them and lay special blame on the non-Jamaican students – led by Guild President Ralph Gonsalves. And the security forces surrounded the university for a week to ensure that there would be no further marches.

The response of some students makes clear that they had different levels of appreciation of what Rodney's activities had been outside the campus and that activists, including some students, had mobilized wider community engagement with the march:

"Lies! And more lies and I couldn't understand why he would say these things when nutt'n ruh guh suh; cause I was really only protesting for my lecturer, but it became a revolution to take over the government and the students in their gowns, and the red gowns stand for communism. I mean, that was one of the major things you know. So I was really quite... shocked at the governments making these links."

The students were also distressed at the government's attack on their non-Jamaican colleagues:

"We had a lot of students from the other territories here at Mona. An amazing mix I think...The only reason why it became an issue was when the Rodney riots erupted and then government tried to pitch one group against the other: it was the wicked small Islanders, who were leading us Jamaicans astray."

(Carroll Marston Edwards)



Photo credit for all images used in collage : The Gleaner

AFTERMATH

The next week was spent within barricades. As students (especially non-Jamaicans) and the university staggered under a mountain of criticism from the government and various voices across society, the students, faculty and university officials also struggled internally to find common ground on which to respond to the criticisms and go forward together.

Vice-Chancellor, Philip Sherlock, under pressure from the government, took a hard line on students returning to classes:

Let me tell you bluntly – if our proposals are to stand any chance of sympathetic consideration by the Council of the University, you should return to classes without delay. This is the first prerequisite. I understand that some of you may wish to lay down conditions for this. I understand that one of these conditions is the withdrawal of the Police and Troops. This cannot be. It is the business of the government to govern. It can never be the business of any university to arrogate to itself the right to lay down conditions to any supporting government. To attempt this would be an insult to the Parliament and people of Jamaica.

The university was on the horns of a dilemma: it was a regional institution operating in national spaces and with the financial and other support of national governments of the former British West Indies. It was also a university committed to intellectual effort, where academics could freely pursue their research and teach their students, sometimes through questioning the status quo.

The Vice-Chancellor sought a middle ground:

"The University wishes to discuss with the Governments of the Caribbean the means by which the security of the contributing territories can be protected whilst ensuring the preservation of individual freedom and the growth of a healthy academic community."

The Public says

THIS WEEK a STAR reporter put the following question to members of the public:

"Who do you suppose should be blamed for the way in which the people demonstrated in the city on Wednesday over the refusal of the re-entry of Dr. Rodney to Jamaica?"

The following are the answers:



Mrs. E. McELMORY

"I think it is a deplorable affair because the Government and the people, and because of this, the people used the opportunity to create violence. Therefore I would not blame the at-



Mr. P. BAILEY
Custom Clerk

"I think the Government should be blamed, because if they did not bar Dr. Rodney from re-entering the country, there would never have been a demonstration."

The university slowly returned to some level of normalcy, though the next several years would be fractious ones. And Rupert Lewis argues that in the aftermath, *"the state violence...negated the fallout from the destruction: the cars and stuff that were damaged.... I think Shearer lost out in the medium and long term from the way the state handled it; not least of which Americans had a different assessment of the roots of 68. ... that Jamaica's inequality and socio-economic conditions led to the thing; it wasn't that you had these revolutionaries that were stimulating and doing stuff."*

Opposition Leader Norman Manley, though soon convinced that the government was right to ban Rodney, stood up for the UWI and for the students. In his Farewell Speech to the People's National Party (PNP) in November 1968, he appealed for Jamaicans to refrain from condemnation of the students and especially from a xenophobic response to the non-Jamaicans:



The Star newspaper VOX section on Walter Rodney

“*Do the students in Jamaica at the University not give us hope that they will serve a real purpose in our community when they show a live interest in matters that are of profound concern to democracy and to the acceptance of the principles of human rights?*”