

The Groundings with My Brothers

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ISBN: 9780996095303

LCCN: 2014937406

Published in the UK 1969 by Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications
141 Coldershaw Road, London, W13 9 DU

Published in the USA by Research Associates School Time Publications
751 East 75th Street, Chicago, IL 60619

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carried out by white citizens, police and sheriffs against blacks.* Most incidents of rioting in recent years arose spontaneously out of self-defense and out of anger against brutality. When black Americans react to meet force with force this should surprise nobody, because even the most harmless animal will finally turn in desperation against its hunters. It is useful to know that this is the conclusion arrived at not only by Black Power leaders, but also by the official committee of the U.S. Senate which was appointed to investigate the racial situation.

Apart from local violent protest (riots), U.S. society faces the possibility of large-scale racial war. The book *Black Power*, written by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (and now banned by the 'White Power' Jamaican government) stresses that its aim was to present an opportunity to work out the racial question without resort to force, but if that opportunity was missed the society was moving towards destructive racial war. In such a war, black people would undoubtedly suffer because of their minority position, but as an organised group they could wreck untold damage on the whites. The white racists and warmongers cannot drop their bombs on black people *within the U.S.A.*, and whatever damage is done to property means damage to white property. We have nothing to lose for they are the capitalists. Black people could not hope to, nor do they want to, dominate the whites, but large sections of the black youth realise that they cannot shrink from fighting to demonstrate the hard way that a 10 per cent minority of 22 million cannot be treated as though they did not exist. Already the limited violence of the past few years has caused more notice to be taken of the legitimate social, economic, political and cultural demands of black people than has been the case for the previous 100 years. The goal is still a long way off, for it is not only in a crisis that the blacks must be considered. When decisions are taken in the normal day-to-day life of the U.S.A., the interests of the blacks must be taken into account *out of respect for their power* – power that can be used destructively if it is not allowed to express itself constructively. This is what Black Power means in the particular conditions of the U.S.A.

CHAPTER 3 BLACK POWER, ITS RELEVANCE TO THE WEST INDIES

About a fortnight ago I had the opportunity of speaking on Black Power to an audience on this campus. At that time, the consciousness among students as far as the racial question is concerned had been heightened by several incidents on the world scene – notably, the hangings in Rhodesia and the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King. Indeed, it has been heightened to such an extent that some individuals have started to organise a black power movement. My presence here attests to my full sympathy with their objectives.

The topic on this occasion is no longer just 'Black Power' but 'Black Power and You.' Black Power can be seen as a movement and an ideology springing from the reality of oppression of black peoples by whites within the imperialist world as a whole. Now we need to be specific in defining the West Indian scene and our own particular roles in the society. You and I have to decide whether we want to think black or to *remain* as a dirty version of white. (I shall indicate the full significance of this later.)

Recently there was a public statement in *Scope* where black power was referred to as 'black supremacy'. This may have been a genuine error or a deliberate falsification. Black Power is a call to black peoples to throw off white domination and resume the handling of their destinies. It means that blacks would enjoy power commensurate with their numbers in the world and in particular localities. Whenever an oppressed black shouts for equality he is called a racist. This was said of Marcus Garvey in his day. Imagine that! We are so inferior that if we demand equality of opportunity and power that is outrageously racist! Black people who speak up for their rights must be aware of this device of false accusations. It is intended to place you on the defensive and if possible embarrass you into silence. How can we be both oppressed and embarrassed? Is it that our major concern is not to hurt the feelings of the oppressor? Black people must now take the offensive – if it is anyone who should suffer embarrassment it is the whites. Did black people roast six million Jews? Who exterminated millions of indigenous inhabitants

*See S. Carmichael and C. Hamilton, *Black, the Politics of Liberation in America*.

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in the Americas and Australia? Who enslaved countless millions of Africans? The white capitalist cannibal has always fed on the world's black peoples. White capitalist imperialist society is profoundly and unmistakably racist.

The West Indies has always been a part of white capitalist society. We have been the most oppressed section because we were a slave society and the legacy of slavery still rests heavily upon the West Indian black man. I will briefly point to five highlights of our social development: (1) the development of racialism under slavery; (2) emancipation; (3) Indian indentured labour; (4) the year 1865 in Jamaica; (5) the year 1938 in the West Indies.

Slavery. As C. L. R. James, Eric Williams and other W.I. scholars have pointed out, slavery in the West Indies started as an economic phenomenon rather than a racial one. But it rapidly became racist as all white labour was withdrawn from the fields, leaving black to be identified with slave labour and white to be linked with property and domination. Out of this situation where blacks had an inferior status in practice, there grew social and scientific theories relating to the supposed inherent inferiority of the black man, who was considered as having been created to bring water and hew wood for the white man. This theory then served to rationalise white exploitation of blacks all over Africa and Asia. The West Indies and the American South share the dubious distinction of being the breeding ground for world racialism. Naturally, our own society provided the highest expressions of racialism. Even the blacks became convinced of their own inferiority, though fortunately we are capable of the most intense expressions when we recognise that we have been duped by the white men. Black Power recognises both the reality of black oppression and self-negation as well as the potential for revolt.

Emancipation. By the end of the 18th century, Britain had got most of what it wanted from black labour in the West Indies. Slavery and the slave trade made Britain strong and now stood in the way of new developments, so it was time to abandon those systems. The Slave Trade and Slavery were thus ended; but Britain had to consider how to squeeze what little remained in the territories and how to maintain the local whites in power. They therefore decided to give the planters £20 million compensation and to guarantee

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their black labour supplies for the next six years through a system called apprenticeship. In that period, white society consolidated its position to ensure that slave relations should persist in our society. The Rastafari brethren have always insisted that the black people were promised £20 million at emancipation. In reality, by any normal standards of justice, we black people should have got the £20 million compensation money. We were the ones who had been abused and wronged, hunted in Africa and brutalised on the plantations. In Europe, when serfdom was abolished, the serfs usually inherited the land as compensation and by right. In the West Indies, the exploiters were compensated because they could no longer exploit us in the same way as before. White property was of greater value than black humanity. It still is – white property is of greater value than black humanity in the British West Indies today, especially here in Jamaica.

Indian Indentured Labour. Britain and the white West Indians had to maintain the plantation system in order to keep white supreme. When Africans started leaving the plantations to set up as independent peasants they threatened the plantation structure and therefore Indians were imported under the indenture arrangements. That was possible because white power controlled most of the world and could move non-white peoples around as they wished. It was from British-controlled India that the indentured labour was obtained. It was the impact of British commercial, military and political policies that was destroying the life and culture of 19th century India and forcing people to flee to other parts of the world to earn bread. Look where Indians fled – to the West Indies! The West Indies is a place black people want to leave not to come to. One must therefore appreciate the pressure of white power on India which gave rise to migration to the West Indies. Indians were brought here solely in the interest of white society – at the expense of Africans already in the West Indies and often against their own best interests, for Indians perceived indentured labour to be a form of slavery and it was eventually terminated through the pressure of Indian opinion in the homeland. The West Indies has made a unique contribution to the history of suffering in the world, and Indians have provided part of that contribution since indentures were first introduced. This is another aspect of the historical situation which is still with us.

1865. In that year Britain found a way of perpetuating White Power in the West Indies after ruthlessly crushing the revolt of our black brothers led by Paul Bogle. The British Government took away the Constitution of Jamaica and placed the island under the complete control of the Colonial Office, a manoeuvre that was racially motivated. The Jamaican legislature was then largely in the hands of the local whites with a mulatto minority, but if the gradual changes continued the mulattoes would have taken control – and the blacks were next in line. Consequently, the British Government put a stop to the process of the gradual takeover of political power of blacks. When we look at the British Empire in the 19th century, we see a clear difference between white colonies and black colonies. In the white colonies like Canada and Australia the British were giving white people their freedom and self-rule. In the black colonies of the West Indies, Africa and Asia, the British were busy taking away the political freedom of the inhabitants. Actually, on the constitutional level, Britain had already displayed its racialism in the West Indies in the early 19th century when it refused to give mulattoes the power of Government in Trinidad, although they were the majority of free citizens. In 1865 in Jamaica, it was not the first nor the last time on which Britain made it clear that its white 'kith and kin' would be supported to hold dominion over blacks.

Slavery ended in various islands of the West Indies between 1834 and 1838. Exactly 100 years later (between 1934-38) the black people in the West Indies revolted against the hypocritical freedom of the society. The British were very surprised – they had long forgotten all about the blacks in the British West Indies and they sent a Royal Commission to find out what it was all about. The report of the conditions was so shocking that the British government did not release it until after the war, because they wanted black colonials to fight the white man's battles. By the time the war ended it was clear in the West Indies and throughout Asia and Africa that some concessions would have to be made to black peoples. In general, the problem as seen by white imperialists was to give enough power to certain groups in colonial society to keep the whole society from exploding and to maintain the essentials of the imperialist structure. In the British West Indies, they had to take into account the question of military strategy because we lie under the belly of the world's imperialist giant, the U.S.A. Besides, there was the new and vital

mineral bauxite, which had to be protected. The British solution was to pull out wherever possible and leave the imperial government in the hands of the U.S.A., while the local government was given to a white, brown and black petty-bourgeoisie who were culturally the creations of white capitalist society and who therefore support the white imperialist system because they gain personally and because they have been brainwashed into aiding the oppression of black people.

Black Power in the West Indies means three closely related things: (i) the break with imperialism which is historically white racist; (ii) the assumption of power by the black masses in the islands; and? (iii) the cultural reconstruction of the society in the image of the blacks.

I shall anticipate certain questions on who are the blacks in the West Indies since they are in fact questions which have been posed to me elsewhere. I maintain that it is the white world which has defined who are blacks – if you are not white then you are black. However, it is obvious that the West Indian situation is complicated by factors such as the variety of racial types and racial mixtures and by the process of class formation. We have, therefore, to note not simply what the white world says but also how individuals perceive each other. Nevertheless, we can talk of the mass of the West Indian population as being black – either African or Indian. There seems to have been some doubts on the last point, and some fear that black power is aimed against the Indian. This would be a flagrant denial of both the historical experience of the West Indies and the reality of the contemporary scene.

When the Indian was brought to the West Indies, he met the same racial contempt which whites applied to Africans. The Indian, too, was reduced to a single stereotype – the coolie or labourer. He too was a hewer of wood and a bringer of water. I spoke earlier of the revolt of the blacks in the West Indies in 1938. That revolt involved Africans in Jamaica, Africans and Indians in Trinidad and Guyana. The uprisings in Guyana were actually led by Indian sugar workers. Today, some Indians (like some Africans) have joined the white power structure in terms of economic activity and culture; but the underlying reality is that poverty resides among Africans and Indians in the West Indies and that power is denied them. Black

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Power in the West Indies, therefore, refers primarily to people who are recognisably African or Indian.

The Chinese, on the other hand, are a former labouring group who have now become bastions of white West Indian social structure. The Chinese of the People's Republic of China have long broken with and are fighting against white imperialism, but *our* Chinese have nothing to do with that movement. They are to be identified with Chiang-Kai-Shek and not Chairman Mao Tse-tung. They are to be put in the same bracket as the lackeys of capitalism and imperialism who are to be found in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Whatever the circumstances in which the Chinese came to the West Indies, they soon became (as a group) members of the exploiting class. They will have to either relinquish or be deprived of the function before they can be re-integrated into a West Indian society where the black man walks in dignity.

The same applies to the mulattoes, another group about whom I have been questioned. The West Indian brown man is characterised by ambiguity and ambivalence. He has in the past identified with the black masses when it suited his interests and at the present time some browns are in the forefront of the movement towards black consciousness; but the vast majority have fallen to the bribes of white imperialism, often outdoing the whites in their hatred and oppression of blacks. Garvey wrote of the Jamaican mulattoes - 'I was openly hated and persecuted by some of these coloured men of the island who did not want to be classified as Negroes but as white.' Naturally, conscious West Indian blacks like Garvey have in turn expressed their dislike for the browns, but there is nothing in the West Indian experience which suggests that browns are unacceptable when they choose to identify with blacks. The post-1938 developments in fact showed exactly the opposite. It seems to me, therefore, that it is not for the Black Power movement to determine the position of the browns, reds and so-called West Indian whites - the movement can only keep the door open and leave it to those groups to make their choice.

Black Power is not racially intolerant. It is the hope of the black man that he should have power over his own destinies. This is not incompatible with a multi-racial society where each individual counts equally. Because the moment that power is equitably

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distributed among several ethnic groups then the very relevance of making the distinction between groups will be lost. What we must object to is the current image of a multi-racial society living in harmony - that is a myth designed to justify the exploitation suffered by the blackest of our population, at the hands of the lighter-skinned groups. Let us look at the figures for the racial composition of the Jamaican population.

- Of our every 100 Jamaicans,
- 76.8% are visibly African
- 0.8% European
- 1.1% Indian
- 0.6% Chinese 91% have African blood
- 0.1% Syrian
- 14.6% Afro-European
- 5.4% other mixtures

This is a black society where Africans preponderate. Apart from the mulatto mixture all other groups are numerically insignificant and yet the society seeks to give them equal weight and indeed more weight than the Africans. If we went to Britain we could easily find non-white groups in the above proportions* - Africans and West Indians, Indians and Pakistanis, Turks, Arabs and other Easterners - but Britain is not called a multi-racial society. When we go to Britain we don't expect to take over all of the British real estate business, all their cinemas and most of their commerce as the European, Chinese and Syrian have done here. All we ask for there is some work and shelter, and we can't even get that. Black Power must proclaim that Jamaica is a black society - we should fly Garvey's Black Star banner and we will treat all other groups in the society on that understanding - they can have the *basic right of all individuals* but *no privileges to exploit Africans* as has been the pattern during slavery and ever since.

The present government knows that Jamaica is a black man's country. That is why Garvey has been made a national hero, for they are trying to deceive black people into thinking that the government is with them. The government of Jamaica recognises black power – it is afraid of the potential wrath of Jamaica's black and largely African population. It is that same fear which forced them to declare mourning when black men are murdered in Rhodesia, and when Martin Luther King was murdered in the U.S.A. But the black people don't need to be told that Garvey is a national hero – they know that. Nor do they need to be told to mourn when blacks are murdered by White Power, because they mourn everyday right here in Jamaica where white power keeps them ignorant, unemployed, ill-clothed and ill-fed. They will stop mourning when things change – and that means a revolution, for the first essential is to break the chains which bind us to white imperialists, and that is a very revolutionary step. Cuba is the only country in the West Indies and in this hemisphere which has broken with white power. That is why Stokely Carmichael can visit Cuba but he can't visit Trinidad or Jamaica. That is why Stokely can call Fidel 'one of the blackest men in the Americas' and that is why our leaders in contrast qualify as 'white'.

Here I'm not just playing with words – I'm extending the definition of Black Power by indicating the nature of its opposite, 'White Power,' and I'm providing a practical illustration of what black power means in one particular West Indian community where it had already occurred. White Power is the power of whites over blacks without any participation of the blacks. White Power rules the imperialist world as a whole. In Cuba, the black and mulattoes numbered 1,585,073 out of a population of 5,829,029 in 1953 – i.e. about one quarter of the population. Like Jamaica's black people today, they were the poorest and most depressed people on the island. Lighter-skinned Cubans held local power, while real power was in the hands of the U.S. imperialists. Black Cubans fought alongside white Cuban workers and peasants because they were all oppressed. Major Juan Almeida, one of the outstanding leaders of Cuba today, was one of the original guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra, and he is black. Black Cubans today enjoy political, economic and social rights and opportunities of exactly the same kind as white Cubans. They too bear arms in the Cuban Militia as an expression of their basic rights. In other words, White Power in Cuba is ended. The majority

of the white population naturally predominates numerically in most spheres of activity but they do not hold dominion over blacks without regard to the latter's interests. The blacks have achieved power commensurate with their own numbers by their heroic self-efforts during the days of slavery, in fighting against the Spanish and in fighting against imperialism. Having achieved their rights they can in fact afford to forget the category 'black' and think simply as Cuban citizens, as Socialist equals and as men. In Jamaica, where blacks are far greater in numbers and have no whites alongside them as oppressed workers and peasants, it will be the black people who alone can bear the brunt of revolutionary fighting.

Trotsky once wrote that Revolution is the carnival of the masses. When we have that carnival in the West Indies, are people like us here at the university going to join the bacchanal?

Let us have a look at our present position. Most of us who have studied at the U.W.I are discernibly black, and yet we are undeniably part of the white imperialist system. A few are actively pro-imperialist. They have no confidence in anything that is not white – they talk nonsense about black people being lazy – the same nonsense which was said about the Jamaican black man after emancipation, although he went to Panama and performed the giant task of building the Panama Canal – the same nonsense which is said about W.I. unemployed today, and yet they proceed to England to run the whole transport system. Most of us do not go to quite the same extremes in denigrating ourselves and our black brothers, but we say nothing against the system, and that means that we are acquiescing in the exploitation of our brethren. One of the ways that the situation has persisted especially in recent times is that it has given a few individuals like you and I a vision of personal progress measured in terms of front lawn and of the latest model of a huge American car. This has recruited us into their ranks and deprived the black masses of articulate leadership. That is why at the outset I stressed that our choice was to remain as part of the white system or to break with it. There is no alternative.

Black Power in the W.I. must aim at transforming the Black intelligentsia into the servants of the black masses. Black Power, within the university and without must aim at overcoming white cultural imperialism. Whites have dominated us both physically

and mentally. This fact is brought out in virtually any serious sociological study of the region – the brainwashing process has been so stupendous that it has convinced so many black men of their inferiority. I will simply draw a few illustrations to remind you of this fact which blacks like us at Mona prefer to forget.

The adult black in our West Indian society is fully conditioned to thinking white, because that is the training we are given from childhood. The little black girl plays with a white doll, identifying with it as she combs its flaxen hair. Asked to sketch the figure of a man or woman, the black schoolboy instinctively produces a white man or a white woman. This is not surprising, since until recently the illustrations in our text books were all figures of Europeans. The few changes which have taken place have barely scratched the surface of the problem. West Indians of every colour still aspire to European standards of dress and beauty. The language which is used by black people in describing ourselves shows how we despise our African appearance. 'Good hair' means European hair, 'good nose' means a straight nose, 'good complexion' means a light complexion. Everybody recognises how incongruous and ridiculous such terms are, but we continue to use them and to express our support of the assumption that white Europeans have the monopoly of beauty, and that black is the incarnation of ugliness. That is why black power advocates find it necessary to assert that BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL.

The most profound revelation of the sickness of our society on the question of race is our respect for all the white symbols of the Christian religion. God the Father is white, God the Son is white and presumably God the Holy Ghost is white also. The disciples and saints are white, all the Cherubim, Seraphim and angels are white – except Lucifer, of course, who was black, being the embodiment of evil. When one calls upon black people to reject these things, this is not an attack on the teachings of Christ or the ideals of Christianity. What we have to ask is 'Why should Christianity come to us all wrapped in white?' The white race constitute about 20 percent of the world's population, and yet non-white peoples are supposed to accept that all who inhabit the heavens are white. There are 650 million Chinese, so why shouldn't God and most of the angels be Chinese? The truth is that there is absolutely no reason why different racial groups should not provide themselves with their own religious

symbols. A picture of Christ could be red, white or black, depending upon the people who are involved. When Africans adopt the European concept that purity and goodness must be painted white and all that is evil and damned is to be painted black then we are flagrantly self-insulting.

Through the manipulation of this media of education and communication, white people have produced black people who administer the system and perpetuate the white values – 'white-hearted black men', as they are called by conscious elements. This is as true of the Indians as it is true of Africans in our West Indian society. Indeed, the basic explanation of the tragedy of African/Indian confrontation in Guyana and Trinidad is the fact that both groups are held captive by the European way of seeing things. When an African abuses an Indian he repeats all that the white men said about Indian indentured 'coolies'; and in turn the Indian has borrowed from the whites the stereotype of the 'lazy nigger' to apply to the African beside him. It is as though no black man can see another black man except by looking through a white person. It is time we started seeing through our own eyes. The road to black power here in the West Indies and everywhere else must begin with a reevaluation of ourselves as blacks and with a redefinition of the world from our own standpoint.

CHAPTER 6 THE GROUNDINGS WITH MY BROTHERS

The Government of Jamaica, which is Garvey's homeland, has seen it fit to ban me, a Guyanese, a black man, and an African. But this is not very surprising because through the composition of that Government, of its Prime Minister, the Head of State and several leading personalities, though that composition happens to be predominantly black, as the Brothers at home say, they are all white-hearted.

These men serve the interest of a foreign, white capitalist system and at home they uphold a social structure which ensures that the black man resides at the bottom of the social ladder. He is economically oppressed and culturally he has no opportunity to express himself. That is the situation from which we move.

There has recently, just tonight in fact, come to my attention a statement which is entitled 'Text of Statement' by the Honourable H. L. Shearer, Prime Minister of Jamaica, made in the House of Representatives of October 17, regarding the exclusion of Dr. Walter Rodney. I, up till now, have not got reasons for the ban imposed on me and probably I shall make some reference to this document as I go along.

But first, let me indicate this, that the Government of Jamaica, in so far as it has attempted to stifle the aspirations of the masses and in so far as it believed that my removal from the scene is going to aid in stifling the masses, are making a serious mistake. This act in itself will not delay their day of judgment. Indeed, these fellows know this, they know the present state of affairs cannot go on forever, and this is what creates the atmosphere of fear, this is what allows them to take such stupid and panic-stricken measures.

What I would like to indicate first and foremost for the benefit of some West Indians who still refuse to appreciate that our society is racist, I would like to give a slight historical analysis of the problem. West Indian society is a veritable laboratory of racialism. We virtually invented racialism. Because it was in the slave system on the slave plantation that the fantastic gap between master and slave

was translated into a feeling on the part of the white slave master that he had inherently to be superior to that black man who was slaving out in the fields. It was the white plantation owner who produced a number of pseudo-scientific and theological theories attesting to the inferiority of the black man. We were the society, it was in that part of the world that modern racialism was engendered, and it was developed and intensified since then, assuming certain subtleties, but nevertheless vicious forms based on colour and based on a hierarchy which presupposes that black is the lowest natural colour of things, and that white is at the top. That is the society from which we come and the particular society has added a new dimension to the bag of tricks which racialists have. That dimension is to try to confuse the people.

It goes like this. They claim that in our society we cannot talk about black and white because we have these gradations of shades. We have many peoples, we are told. Ninety-five percent of the Jamaican population is clearly black, the other 5 percent is divided into these shades, and we are told we have many peoples. It is a harmonious multi-racial society, we are told. It is an integrated society, we are told. It reminds me of Ted Jones' poem, 'Integrated Nigger,' and it is on this myth that exploitation is based and it is a subtle myth, an important myth, because it does in fact have a certain appeal. It talks about multi-racial and harmonious living which nobody on a theoretical level would oppose. That is what we are struggling for.

The lie is that harmony exists and the black people show it up to be a lie, sometimes quite spectacularly. This month, October, is Paul Bogle's month, that great black Jamaican patriot who marched and as he marched he said - "Remember your colour and cleave to the black." Marcus Garvey was also in the same category. Garvey's appeal was to all black men, whether they were in Jamaica or outside. And even when there were not great leaders present, the mass of the people have constantly been acting against this system. In our epoch the Rastafari have represented the leading force of this expression of the black consciousness. They have rejected this philistine white West Indian society. They have sought their cultural and spiritual roots in Ethiopia and Africa. So that whether there is a big flare up or not, there is always the constant activity of the black people who perceive that the system has nothing in it for them, except suppression and oppression.

Now the Government is terribly afraid of the question of colour. This is something I've learned from living in Jamaica for a period of time. They would much rather you talk about Communism, so that they could tell country people, 'He is a Communist, he wants to take your chickens,' and 'do those Jamaican peasants want you to take their goats? No man!' And they are very right too, so what they are afraid of is the question of colour. They are afraid of that tremendous historical experience of the degradation of the black man being brought to the fore. They do not want anybody to challenge their myth about 'Out of Many, One People' and a harmonious multi-racial society, and they show it in various ways. They will ban people from coming to the country like James Foreman and Stokely Carmichael. They will ban the literature of Malcolm X, Elijah Mohammed and Stokely Carmichael. The black Jamaican Government, in case you do not know it, have banned all publications by Stokely Carmichael, publications by Elijah Mohammed and all publications by Malcolm X. I hope Stokely does not go and write a book on Cookery or some such thing. It would be banned in Jamaica.

In my own case, to give you a small example, I went to the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation. I pre-recorded a program on Black Power and the white power system said that they are not using that program when they saw what came out of it. A small example but a token of things to come, no doubt. Because the system does not want you to open the issues, they do not want anybody to articulate those grievances which the masses are talking about all the time.

Now, what is my position? What is the position of all of us because we fall in the category of the black West Indian intellectual, a privilege in our society? Now what do we do with that privilege? The traditional pattern is that we join the Establishment, the black educated man in the West Indies is as much a part of the system of oppression as the bank managers and the plantation overseers.

The system will give you a nice house, a front lawn, a car, a reasonable bank balance. They will say, 'Sell your black soul.' That is the condition upon which you exist as a so-called intellectual in the society. Now how do we break out of this Babylonian Captivity. I suggest three ways. I suggest first that the intellectual, the academic, within his own discipline, has to attack those distortions which white imperialism, white cultural imperialism have produced in all

branches of scholarship. Now, in fact what I was attempting to do in the Congress of Black Writers earlier was to talk about that sort of thing and its relationship to African History. Of course, the white press of Canada did not see fit to talk about those points. I think I saw it only in the *McGill Daily*. They were more concerned with nice little juicy bits about violence. We will give them some tit-bits as we go along.

Now my second point is that the black intellectual has to move beyond his own discipline to challenge the social myth, which exists in the society as a whole. In other words, this myth about the multi-racial society. This is the sort of thing which we have a duty to perform to the black people from whom we came.

Thirdly, *the black intellectual, the black academic must attach himself to the activity of the black masses*. I shall not deal with point one on this occasion. I shall concentrate on points two and three. I shall try to exemplify my own role in the period while I was there in Jamaica.

I begin by stating first and foremost that the struggle was there long before I went and will continue long after I have left. I am simply trying to analyze that particular conjunction of forces as I saw them when I attempted to get in touch with the black people, to perform these functions: attacking the myth, the various myths rather, and getting in touch, working with the people. On the first level, as far as black power was concerned, the response of the population was automatic because this is what they are doing, this is what they are talking about. They can tell you and I about black power, but I'll indicate this later on. You can learn from them what black power really means. You do not have to teach them anything. You just have to say it and they add something to what you are saying.

So the mass response was there, and the Government response was also clearly there. They in their panic were quick to come out against this new specter, Black Power. Now, for my own part, I was prepared to make these statements in public and around me there gathered a nucleus and a movement was born calling itself the Black Power Movement. Unfortunately I have not brought the aims along with me, but you will find them highly respectable even in the terms of the system. We went outside the University and we talked to black

brothers and black sisters and this the society, this the system could not tolerate. Even more, let us talk about the activities. I lectured at the University, outside of the classroom that is. I had public lectures, I talked about black power and then I left there, I went from the campus. I was prepared to go anywhere that any group of black people were prepared to sit down to talk and listen. Because, that is black power, that is one of the elements, a sitting down together to reason, to 'ground' as the brothers say. We have to 'ground together.' There was all this furor about whites being present in the Black Writers Congress which most whites did not understand. They do not understand that our historical experience has been speaking to white people, whether it be begging white people, justifying ourselves against white people or even vilifying white people. Our whole context has been, 'that is the man to talk to.'

Now that new understanding is black brothers must talk to each other. That is a very simple understanding which any reasonable person outside of a particular 'in-group' would understand. That is why we talk about our 'family discussions.' Now when I went out, as I said, I would go to the radio if they wanted me, I would speak on television if they allowed me. I spoke at the Extra-Mural Centre. Now these are all highly respectable and I would go further down into West Kingston and I would speak wherever there was a possibility of our getting together. It might be in a sports club, it might be in a schoolroom, it might be in a church, it might be in a gully. (Those of you who come from Jamaica know those gully corners.) They are dark, dismal places with a black population who have had to seek refuge there. You will have to go there if you want to talk to them. I have spoken in what people call 'dungle,' rubbish dumps, for that is where people live in Jamaica. People live in rubbish dumps. That is where the Government puts people to live. Indeed, the Government does not even want them to live in rubbish dumps. I do not know where they want them to go because they bulldoze them off the rubbish dumps and send them God knows where. I have sat on a little oil drum, rusty and in the midst of garbage and some black brothers and I have grounded together. Now obviously, this, first of all, must have puzzled the Jamaican Government. I must be mad, surely, a man we are giving a job, we are giving status, what is he doing with these guys. Shearer calls them all manner of names there in this paper, you know: 'criminals and hooligans.' What is he doing with them? So they are

puzzled and then obviously after that suspicion, he must be up to something, as the paper will try to imply. But we spoke, we spoke about a lot of things and it was just the talking that was important, the meeting of black people. I was trying to contribute something. I was trying to contribute my experience in travelling, in reading, my analysis, and I was also gaining as I will indicate.

Now the Government of Jamaica and this statement; I cannot go into it. I have a lot of ambiguous reactions to it. At one level I want to tear it apart, but there are reasons why I do not want to tear it apart. The first is that all the charges made here are either irrelevant, frivolous or vague, and I cannot put forward any defense against such. You know, it is like that trick question: a man comes up and asks you, have you stopped beating your wife; he makes the assumption that you are beating your wife, and asks you, have you stopped. So it is that sort of nonsense, they throw out a little thing and then get you to grab the bait; and there is another reason why I would not defend myself against this. People like this man here, the so-called, the Dishonourable H. L. Shearer, Prime Minister of Jamaica, this traitor to the black race, has no moral authority to lay accusations against me. What I will give instead is not a defense, it is an explanation. It is an attempt to make an analysis of what was going on in the hope that this has some meaning for other people who are either within the struggle today or would like to join the struggle. For the educated black man, as I said, the principles are clear. There are three possibilities open to him and it seems to me that if he does not follow every single one of those three, and perhaps some more that he can think of, he is not fulfilling any function as far as our people are concerned, except the function of oppressing them. Let me refer to another statement which I made which the white press found very irritating – that all white people are enemies until proved otherwise, and this applies to black intellectuals, all of us are enemies to the people until we prove otherwise. It is not just a question of student riots.

The students have demonstrated which is good. They came out, they heard a University Lecturer was banned, they got no reason, which is the normal procedure of the Jamaican Government (it does not give reasons for things). They came out, they started to walk along the roads, the police started to tear gas them, they started to beat

them with batons and night sticks and something flared up, relatively small, but it is a great advance I tell you. There is no more bourgeois campus in the world than the University of the West Indies. Yes, was there, in my time this would not have happened: they might have demonstrated about bad food in the halls, or in solidarity with South Africans, you know, on quite harmless issues as far as the Jamaican Government was concerned. However, they moved, and that in itself is a good thing, but there was more to it than that. The black brother in Kingston, Jamaica moved against the Government of Jamaica. That is the point that must come home. Let us stop calling it student riots. What has happened in Jamaica is that the black people of the city of Kingston have seized upon this opportunity to begin their indictment against the Government of Jamaica.

Now, let us see what happened. As far as I can gather 50 buses were overturned and burnt. Fourteen major fires were started in different parts of the city; certain known enemies of the people were spat upon, dragged out of their cars and beaten, shop windows were wrecked. I gather that downtown Kingston looks as if Hurricane Flora has just passed through. Now let us get this abundantly clear – this did not happen as an isolated incident, that is part of a whole social malaise, that is revolutionary activity. It has only marginal significance as far as my ban is concerned. The significance is that the brothers see that I am a spokesman for their cause and the Jamaican Government is so brazen as to stop me from returning. That is the incident that triggered it off, but beneath that, there is a whole range of short-term and long-term considerations which we must take into mind. Take for instance the fact that those 50 buses were burned; that is not just coincidental for those who know Jamaican society. The J.O.S., which is the private company running transport in Kingston is one of the most notorious companies in Jamaica. There is a strike there every other day. It is notorious from the point of view of its relationships with the workers and just recently it decided to hike the fares as far as the people were concerned. Now, this is the poor people of Jamaica standing in the hot sun, waiting on the bus, having to pay increased fares and while they are struggling to find the 4d, for that is what the fares have gone up to, here is a whole set of guys flashing by in some cars longer than you can see out here in Montreal. You have to go to Jamaica to see long cars, you know. That little middle class there, they love to show off. The bigger the car the better.

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little petty city and they fill it up with American cars, and they jump around and they feel so pleased with themselves. And the black man is there and he has not got 4d for a bus fare. So when those 50 buses were burnt, it was that type of issue that was involved. The brothers who were in that struggle, unemployed, they have no housing, they have no education, they have no prospects in the society, save to go to what the Brothers call 'Must Pen' - May Pen Burial Cemetery. They call it 'Must Pen,' you must go there.

That is what has been going on in the society. So if we have to take a stand, we have to take a stand perhaps on the first issue, say the immoral, shameless conduct of the Jamaica Government in issuing this ban. But it is not the first and presumably will not be the last such action on their part. We also have to take a stand of solidarity behind those black brothers. We also have to recognise that three more martyrs have been added to the long list of black Martyrs in Jamaica in recent days. We have to find out their names. We will have to sing their praises.

This is not an issue which is isolated. In fact, as I speak here, I would like to feel perhaps that what I am saying in one form or another will reach the brothers and therefore it is a message both to you and to them. And above all, I would like to indicate my own gratification for that experience which I shared with them. Because I learnt. I got knowledge from them, real knowledge. You have to speak to Jamaican Rastas, and you have to listen to him, listen very carefully and then you will hear him tell you about the Word. And when you listen to him, and you can go back and read *Muntu*, an academic text, and read about *Nomo*, an African concept for Word, and you say, Goodness the Rastas know this, they knew this before Janheinz John. You have to listen to them and you hear them talk about Cosmic Power and it rings a bell. I say, but I have read this somewhere, this is Africa. You have to listen to their drums to get the Message of the Cosmic Power.

And when you get that, know you get humility, because look who you are learning from. The system says they have nothing, they are the illiterates, they are the dark people of Jamaica. Our conception of the whole world is that white is good and black is bad, so when you are talking about the man is dark, you mean he is stupid. He has a dark mind. So that is what the system says. But you learn humility

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after you get into contact with these brothers. And it is really great. I am giving here now a personal reaction because it is easy- I find it with my colleagues, my so-called peers, and white people, with black bourgeoisie. They frustrate me and I get annoyed. I find it difficult to conduct a discussion. I am more likely than not to tell them a few bad words after a while. And by and large, I do not think it is good for the personality, probably makes you contemptuous, haughty and so on, that you have seen and they have not seen. But with the black brothers you learn humility because they are teaching you. And you get confidence too, you get a confidence that comes from an awareness that our people are beautiful. Beauty is in the very existence of black people.

Now we have gone through historical experience which by all accounts we should have been wiped out. We have been subjected to genocidal practices. Millions raped from the West African continent, a system of slavery in the West Indies which was designed to kill people. The documents are there. White slavemasters used to conduct a discussion. They said, look we have some blacks, what to do with them? Is it better to let him grow old and work for us for an extended period of time, or should we let him work for a specified period of time, work him so hard and let him die, and buy a fresh slave? And the consensus of opinion was this, take a prime African black, work him to death in five years, and you make a profit. So the system aimed at killing us out!

Now not only have we survived as a people but the black brother in Kingston, Jamaica in particular, these are brothers who, up to now, are every day performing a miracle. It is a miracle how those fellows live. They live and they are physically fit, they have a vitality of mind, they have a tremendous sense of humor, they have depth. How do they do that in the midst of the existing conditions? And they create, they are always saying things. You know that some of the best painters and writers are coming out of the Rastafari environment. The black people in the West Indies have produced the culture that we have, whether it be steel band or folk music. Black bourgeoisie and white people in the West Indies have produced nothing! Black people who have suffered all these years create. That is amazing.

So these are things you learn when you are in contact with our people. And, therefore, it seems to me that there is something that we have to give. I tried to outline some of the things which I tried to give.

AFTERWORD

WALTER RODNEY'S GROUNDINGS - 45 YEARS ON

Dr. Verene A. Shepherd

This year marks the 45th anniversary of the publication Walter Rodney's *The Groundings with My Brothers* and the 4th anniversary of Rodney's expulsion from Jamaica after being declared *persona non grata* for his anti-colonial, pan-Africanist, black activist ideology and for articulating the causes of the "uncertified" black masses within a neo-colonial/pro-colonial state. Personally, I have always been outraged by Rodney's expulsion from Jamaica and ashamed that my country now has that reputation forever etched in historical records. I offered my own public apology to my Guyanese friends, even though I had nothing to do with that act, when I had the honour and pleasure of delivering the 6th Walter Rodney Memorial Lecture in Jamaica's Emancipation Park (following Rodney's example of public education in public spaces) on 25th November 2004.

I have often asked myself, how could this have happened so many years after Jamaica's political independence? How could this have happened in a country that gave birth to social activists Nanny, Marjorie Ann Reid, Sam Sharpe, Paul Bogle, Marcus Garvey and Bob Marley and has always harboured an uncompromising resentment against inequality and injustice? But then I remind myself that pan-Africanism has always been in the minority in the Caribbean; that the regime that did this to Walter Rodney was the regime that brutalised Rastafari in 1963; the regime that was hostile to pan-Africanism; the regime that Rodney described as "white-hearted black politicians" who "serve the interests of a foreign, white capitalist system [while] at home [they uphold a social structure which ensures that the Black man resides at the bottom of their social ladder;]" the regime that considered African history potentially subversive. Still, while many continue to try to make sense of this event, others view it as a watershed event in the social and political life of the black Caribbean. But what change did it engender?

Today, I scan Jamaican society and ask myself: Are Jamaica more African-centred now than in 1968? Do we live in a far more egalitarian and just society that has incorporated the masses to which Rodney reached out in 1968? Are our political leaders still "white