

Palmer, C. A. (2016). *Inward yearnings: Jamaica's journey to nationhood*. Kingston, Jamaica; Barbados; Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Press. 252pp, pbk, ISBN (print): 978-9-7664-0591-5. US\$40.

Could a native political elite's diminished sense of its cultural identity and evasion of its civilisational association with Africa during the fall of the British Empire in the Caribbean become the compelling force that shaped a colony's political destiny for the worse?

Nationalist Jamaican scholars have long declared for the affirmative on this matter as it relates to their country's experience with decolonisation. Their debunking claim – that far from being heroic anti-colonial leaders, Jamaica's culturally-alienated and Eurocentric political elite was complicit in delaying the island's passage to territorial statehood and were guilty of repressing alternative visions of Jamaican nationality – has long been at the centre of the Jamaican Fanonist critique of the brown and black middle class personalities that led the political movement to end colonial rule on the island.

History and scholarship have been kind to this interpretation of the cultural and political orientation of Jamaica's political leaders at a time of post-World War II anti-colonial upheaval. Recent studies on the politics of Jamaican decolonisation, including Deborah Thomas's *Modern Blackness*, Colin Clarke's *Race, class and the politics of decolonisation* and Colin A. Palmer's *Freedom's children* have added archival research sustaining the classical thesis elaborated in Trevor Munroe's *The politics of constitutional decolonisation* and Louis Lindsay's *The myth of independence: Middle class politics and non-mobilisation in Jamaica*. The latter two pieces were published in the 1970s during the resurgence of anti-colonial sentiments on the island and growth of nationalist scholarship, primarily emanating from the University of the West Indies.

Colin A. Palmer is a political historian of the modern Caribbean. This book complements his *Freedom's children* that analysed Jamaican political history between 1938 and 1944. He brings his prodigious scholarship and authoritative voice to bear on this new work concerning the cultural orientation of the native political elite between 1944 and 1962.

Far removed from the political fervour of the Jamaican 1970s and eschewing a Fanonist interpretation of political events, this book adds irrefutable evidence that Jamaica's political class abetted the persistence of colonialism in the crucial run-up to the island's political independence in 1962.

Palmer's careful documentation of the cultural politics of the 'nationalist' elite confirms earlier radical interpretations that the social class steering Jamaica's passage to political statehood and cultural selfhood displayed a startling Eurocentric cultural bias, poverty of leadership and a bewildering lack of vision. This much is clear from *Inward yearnings*, even though its main concern is with the making of Jamaican cultural identity and its political nationalism. As Palmer states, the book is about "the island's anguished discovery of Africa as it tried to discover and accept its racial self" as a country with a black majority (p. 3).

Over the course of eight chapters on the disputed quest for self-government, the Rastafarians' assertion of an exilic black nationality, political rivalries between the two main political parties, the doomed search for a pan-Caribbean identity and the collapse of the West Indies Federation, Palmer reveals a political elite's allegedly crippled cultural sensibilities in stunning detail. Eurocentric bias, unflinching empire loyalties, anti-black cultural scorn and

insular Jamaican nationalism defined those sentiments. Such attitudes, Palmer implies, repressed available alternative options within Jamaica and the Caribbean's protean political culture and historical traditions. They included Marxist activism, working class militancy for democracy and freedom, and unapologetic black consciousness movements.

Inward yearnings shows Jamaica's political elites rejecting these options and repressing dissidents who favoured them. Thus, political elites' lingering ties with Britain and the West trumped nationalist protests from below. Nowhere was this fawning Jamaican Eurocentrism more apparent, Palmer suggests, than in the embarrassing 1955 'Jamaica 300' tercentenary celebration put on by the Jamaican government of the day to commemorate the island's three-hundred-year ties to Britain.

Given such shocking evidence, observers might rightly ask: "With nationalists like these, who needs European colonisers?" Yet, this is the dreary conclusion from reading Palmer's study. In probing elite expressions of Jamaican nationality, Palmer has drawn an unflattering portrait of political leadership at a critical juncture in the island's history.

The two political leaders – Alexander Bustamante of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and Norman Manley of the People's National Party (PNP) – do not escape unscathed from Palmer's archival research and ensuing criticism. He finds Bustamante rejecting for long periods the PNP's call for Jamaican self-government, then later accepting it; Palmer also shows Bustamante denouncing British political rule, then warmly embracing it later. Political opportunism, not principle, typically defined Bustamante's position on critical issues and Palmer depicts him as a uniquely divisive figure who went from undermining unity within the anti-colonial movement in 1942 to upending the West Indian Federation in 1961.

Norman Manley did not fare much better. We see him in Parliament heaping cultural scorn on a black member of his party who dared challenge his leadership. After standing for self-government and the Federation, Manley delayed in seeking the former once in office and by 1961 had retreated to Bustamante's insular nationalism on the latter. After leading a socialist PNP for some 12 years, the PNP leader adopted Bustamante's anti-communism and his rejection of an African-centered nationalism for the island. Worse, in the final years of British rule, Palmer shows governments led by Jamaican leaders crushing Rastafarian protests, harassing communists, banning subversive literature and condoning the turn to a national security state.

In all this, *Inward yearnings* is notable not so much for disclosing these events: others had long commented on them. Rather, this work is valuable for its insights into the turbulence and uncertain racial sentiments afflicting the political elite's summoning of a Jamaican selfhood against stiff grassroots challengers who offered an alternative vision of Jamaican nationality tied to an African civilisation identity. This volume is a convincing review of the linkages between Jamaican state formation and the crafting of a peculiar form of Jamaican nationality defined by the evasion of a black racial selfhood. Notwithstanding its neglect of the Cold War and the impact of powerful external forces on these developments, *Inward yearnings* is a fascinating account of state formation and nationalism in Jamaica.

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