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Postcolonial Roadways: A Visual Dossier

Clinton Hutton

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Postcolonial Roadways

A Visual Dossier

Curated by Clinton Hutton

Coral Gardens, 1963



Figure 1. A burned-out gas station at Coral Gardens.

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Figure 2. Onlookers at the Barnett Street Police Station, Montego Bay, where two members of the Rastafarian group in Coral Gardens were being held. Later, many innocent people were detained and mistreated there in acts of collective punishment of Rastas.



Figures 3–5. Victims of state suppression of Rastafari following the Carol Gardens incident. Left to right, the late Bongo Frank (who passed away in 2016), the late Empress Enid Steele (who passed away in 2015), and the late Bongo Iya (who passed away in 2014). Photographs by Clinton Hutton

Visit of H.I.M. Haile Selassie, 1966



Figure 6. A section of the massive crowds that turned out to welcome His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie, who arrived in Jamaica in April 1966.

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Figure 7. The largest gathering in the country's history, welcoming H.I.M. Haile Selassie to Jamaica.

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Figure 8. H.I.M. Haile Selassie presenting a gold medal to Prince Emanuel of the Ethiopia Africa Black International Congress, at Kings House, the seat of the Jamaican head of state.

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The Destruction of Back-a-Wall/Shanty Town, 1966



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Opposite page

Top

Figure 9. A section of Back-a-Wall, in West Kingston, in 1962. The destruction of poor people's homes began here in 1963.

Bottom left

Figure 10. The Jamaican government destroying Shanty Town, off Foreshore Road (renamed Marcus Garvey Drive), in 1966.

Bottom right

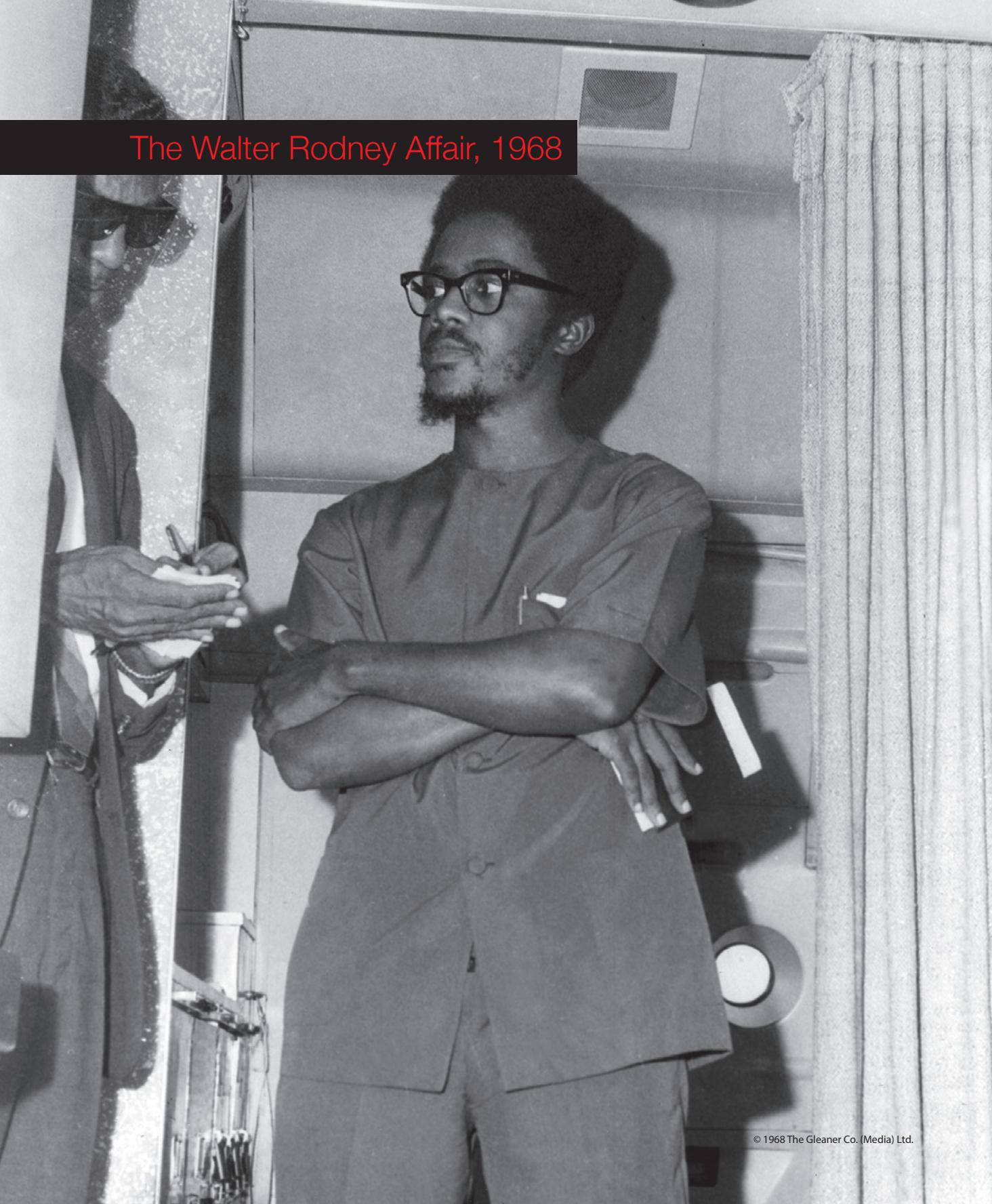
Figure 11. One of the two tractors used in the operation to destroy Shanty Town got stuck in the swamp.

Above

Figure 12. Members of one family escaping with their house.

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The Walter Rodney Affair, 1968





Opposite page

Figure 13. Dr. Walter Rodney at the Palisadoes International (Norman Manley International Airport) in October 1968, returning to Jamaica from a black writers conference in Canada. The government did not allow him to reenter the island.

Above

Figure 14. Demonstrators passing by the Supreme Court on King Street in support of Walter Rodney.

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Figure 15. The Police chasing University of the West Indies students who were demonstrating against the banning of Walter Rodney, October 1968.

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Figure 16. Youths demonstrating against the banning of Walter Rodney.

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Jamaica gained political independence from Britain in 1962, and the path to postcolonialism became immediately problematic. The political leaders of Jamaican independence ended the celebration of 1 August as Emancipation Day, the most important day that the country's majority African-descended population had been marking since the abolition of slavery. The government's logic was that the continued marking of emancipation was inconsistent with the philosophy, spirit, and practice of the new nation's motto—"Out of many, one people"—and its developmental path and goal. This in effect continued the marginalization of the philosophy, imagination, creativity, and agency of the majority in the affairs of nation building.

The new nation had to immediately begin to tackle the legacies of colonialism. On 11 April 1963, within eight months of independence, a violent episode in Coral Gardens near Montego Bay led to the deaths of eight people. Known as the Coral Gardens Incident, it was the result of a small group of Rastafarians rising up against a constant regime of state and elite persecution, and the response of the Jamaican government, which unleashed an assemblage of brutal collective punishments on Rastafarians and suspected Rastafarians across Jamaica.

Several years later, Emperor Haile Selassie visited Jamaica, 21–24 April 1966. This would have a significant ontological impact on Jamaican society, politics, and culture, as well as on the rise of Rastafari and reggae and of the best-known personality of both, Bob Marley.

By 12 July 1966, the bulldozing and torching of the West Kingston neighborhood Back-a-Wall that had begun in 1963 was completed, along with the destruction of Shanty Town. Back-a-Wall and Shanty Town were populated by the very poor, among them many Rastafarians, and thousands of people had been made homeless. The part of Back-a-Wall destroyed in 1963 was rebuilt as a housing complex named Tivoli Gardens, yet the Back-a-Wall residents who had been evicted were not allowed to live there. Tivoli residents, who were selected based on their party affiliation, were protected by a political paramilitary gang, Twenty-One-Strong, which became the Shower Posse. This model of housing solution became the basis of a garrison constituency that was to have a catastrophic impact on Jamaican politics and society, leading to the declaration in October 1966 of the first state of emergency in Kingston.

In October 1968, Jamaica saw its biggest mass protests since independence when the University of the West Indies lecturer Walter Rodney was declared persona non grata by the Jamaican government. Rodney, a Guyanese national who developed a close relationship with the Rastafarian community, had earned his first degree at UWI, Mona, in 1963 and returned to lecture at the university in early 1968. He went about teaching African history and discussing the social and political issues of development with working folks in Kingston and rural communities. The government feared that Rodney's Black Power message would harm the white-centered tourist industry, destabilize the country, and incite revolution, so when he left Jamaica to attend a conference in Canada, he was not allowed to reenter the country. Students at UWI marched in support of Rodney, and soon masses of people turned out on the streets of Kingston to protest the government ban. Riots erupted, in which buses, cars, and buildings were torched.