

U.S. Political Involvement in the British West Indies 1939-1985, Grenada

Introduction:

The United States became actively involved in the political affairs of three main Caribbean countries during this period.

They are:

Jamaica

Guyana

Grenada

Grenada

Eric Gairy became premier of Grenada in 1967. He was an eccentric ruler. He claimed to believe in U.F.O.s and made public speeches about this on international television. The Grenadian people were quite embarrassed by this.



Eric Gairy

His regime was corrupt. He wasted public funds on personal items while the one hospital on the island was poorly equipped and dilapidated. When the nurses went on strike to protest the horrible working conditions, they were tear-gassed at Gairy's orders. Twenty two of them were imprisoned and the 'ringleaders' were transferred to neighboring islands. Gairy owned 30 estates while the poor had very little land. There were 80 children in one class in the primary schools.

He used underhand means to keep himself in power. He was suspected of rigging the elections and using terrorists known as the Mongoose Gang to exterminate those who dared to oppose him. In 1973, he ordered the beating of six members of the opposition group, the New Jewel Movement. He treated Parliament as if it was his own personal property and instrument. He favoured those who supported him by granting them concessions and monopolies.

Gairy did not allow freedom of speech in Grenada. In 1975, he passed the Newspaper Act. The deposit required for a place in the newspaper rose from \$900.00 to \$20,000.00.

In March of 1979, Maurice Bishop, the leader of the opposition party: The New Jewel Movement seized power while Gairy was off the island. The new government was known as the People's Revolutionary government.

What changes did the People's Revolutionary Government bring to Grenada?

1. Free secondary education. This resulted in a significant decrease in the level of illiteracy.
2. Unemployment decreased from 30% to 15%.
3. There was a preventative medicine campaign.
4. More health clinics were built to take the strain off the island's hospital.
5. A housing scheme was established for the masses.
6. The international airport was constructed.

Why did the revolutionary government fail?

1. Some party members were very dishonest. They would attend to their private businesses and charge the bill to the government.
2. A number of the citizens were discontented with the pace of reforms. Several of the projects could not be sustained and others had to be cancelled because of lack of international funding.
3. The government of Grenada received very little support from the other Caribbean nations. The rest of the Caribbean was pro-American. Edward Seaga and the capitalist Jamaica Labour Party won the elections in 1980, one year after the Bishop revolution.



Edward Seaga

4. Grenada and the PRG were alienated in the international market. They had to depend on themselves and Cuba for economic survival. This was never going to be enough given the level of reconstruction work that they had to do.

5. There was division within the party. Members of Bishop's party felt that he was not radical enough.

On October 19, 1983, Bishop and some of his Cabinet ministers were brutally murdered in a coup led by some of his former friends. They were Communists called themselves the Revolutionary Military Council. On **October 25, 1983** the United States decided to invade Grenada. They called the move **Urgent Fury**.

Why did the United States invade Grenada?

1. They were concerned about the safety of several hundreds of United States citizens who were students at the St. George's Medical University in Grenada.

2. The October revolution in Grenada represented 'chronic wrongdoing' in her backyard. As the watchdog of the Western Hemisphere she was duty bound to protect the region. She applied the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.

3. As with Cuba, she was also concerned about the spread of **Communism** in her backyard. The United States, the champion of democracy could **NOT** tolerate Communism so close to her. She intervened to stop the extremists and radicals who got rid of Gairy from taking over the country.

How did the Caribbean react to the revolution?

1. Caribbean leaders from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States met in Barbados. The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Eugenia Charles of

Dominica. The leaders took the decision to join the United States armed forces that would invade Grenada.

2. Other Caribbean countries such as Jamaica sent a contingent to Grenada to help crush the revolution.

Effects of U.S. intervention in Grenada

1. Law and order was restored

2. Even though the bulk of the invasion force was withdrawn by December 1983, 800 soldiers stayed behind for one year to oversee the provisional government and the elections held in December (1984)

3. Communism and social ideologies ceased on the island. The New National Party led by Herbert Blaize was a democratic party that was in favor of American influence.

4. America used the opportunity to capture and deport 800 Cuban workers that were assigned to help in Grenada's development program.

5. The soldiers were involved in undesirable social activities such as gambling and prostitution.