

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

Introduction:

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

They are:

Jamaica

Guyana

Grenada

Jamaica

Michael Manley became Prime Minister of Jamaica in 1972. He reigned for two terms (1972-1980). He was defeated in the General elections of October 1980. His social reforms and expressed ideologies made the United States nervous.

1. He rejected the capitalist path to development and chose instead to adopt Democratic Socialism. The U.S. considered this very dangerous given the geographical fact that the island is only about 90 miles away from Florida.
2. He preached self-reliance and rejected a U.S. dominated economy. He insisted that Jamaicans should eat what they grew and import less American food items.
3. He openly admired Castro's social and economic programmes
4. He made several trips to Cuba and Castro also made a number of visits to Jamaica. During his reign Jamaica enjoyed diplomatic relationship with Cuba despite the Cold War that was declared by the great U.S.!
5. At various press conferences, Manley called for the lifting of the trade embargo that the U.S. placed on Cuba.
6. He believed in Third World Unity. He angered the U.S. with his famous "we are not for sale" speech at a public rally.
7. The U.S. was worried that their investments in Jamaica were threatened especially after Manley began a program of nationalization. The script was too familiar.

8. He sported a bush jacket and encouraged Jamaican men to do the same.

Reforms and Policies

1. Free secondary education. New schools were built including the Jose Marti Technical High School near Spanish Town. This was a gift from the Cuban government.
2. An adult literacy campaign was introduced
3. Improvement in medical care. Some (medical) students were given scholarship to study in Cuba and Russia. Cuban doctors were assigned to different health centres and hospitals.
4. New housing schemes and development for the poor and middle class.
5. Land Reform: lands were taken from foreign investors and leased to Jamaican small farmers at reduced rates. Their produce was collected by the AMC- Agricultural Marketing Corporation for sale at fair prices to both consumers and wholesalers.
6. Equal pay for women as well as two months maternity leave with pay.
7. Trade with Cuba flourished. For example condensed milk was bought from Cuba and sold to lower income Jamaicans at 50% of the cost of other condensed milk.

Reactions

The United States

1. Refused to grant Manley the U.S. \$100M line of credit that they had promised him
2. In 1976 the C.I.A. entered the island secretly to support the opposition party
3. Trade restrictions were applied to the island. Certain consumer goods were no longer available from the U.S. The supermarket shelves were empty. This strategy is better known as sabotage.
4. When Manley approached the U.S. dominated International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loans they insisted on harsh adjustment programs.
5. The propaganda of the American Yellow Press was at its best. They published various articles describing Jamaica as one of the most dangerous place on earth.

This had a negative impact on the tourist industry.

Jamaicans

- 1.** A number of the women supported the policies and programs of Manley especially the new labor and family laws.
- 2.** Lower class support was evident as the masses experienced an improvement in their standard of living. This was especially so during the first term before the negative reaction of America in particular and the international community in general to Manley's reforms.
- 3.** Those of the Black Pride movement supported Manley. His wife during his reign was a black woman who wore an Afro.
- 4.** The middle and upper class felt very threatened by the ideals of democratic socialism. They feared that their properties would be confiscated and given or sold to the poor at cheap rates. There were five flights a day to Miami and they were all full!
- 5.** There was a massive brain drain and flight of capital as the middle class and the rich took off!

The rest of the Caribbean

- 1.** They were totally afraid of U.S. reprisals. They decided to increase their economic ties with the U.S. they provided the shortfall in the goods and services that the U.S. would normally buy from Jamaica. That included the tourism market.
- 2.** They decided that they would have nothing to do with Cuba or Jamaica.
- 3.** A number of them cut off diplomatic relations with Jamaica or gave them the 'cold shoulder'.
- 4.** Barbados denied left wing politicians from Jamaica entry to their island