

JAMAICA

196 B

- 0.33 When they freed the slaves in 1834
They left the great plantations
And took to the friendly mountains.
- The white plantation owners ~~XXXXX~~ owned the valleys,
But the high lands were Crown lands,
And the freedmen settled there undisturbed.
- They nursed a hurt the white man has never known,
Though he inflicted it.
- 0.57 The scar is not yet healed.
- 0.57 The ex-slaves sharpened the cutlasses
That had cut cane for the white man,
And, for the first time,
Began to work as their own masters,
Clearing the jungle that hid the fertile soil.
- Few stayed on the plantations -
The memory of centuries of slavery
Can not be eradicated
- 1.12 By changing a slave into a paid labourer.
- 1.42 The propertyless slaves became peasant farmers,
Digging and planting on difficult ground,
- 1.52 Coaxing the earth to yield its utmost.
- 1.52 They built their houses on the mountain slopes
Far from the valleys of slave-memory,
- 2.10 And developed their own communities.
- 2.32 After more than 300 years as a British Colony,
In now independent Jamaica
One child in 4 has no schooling at all.
Those children who do receive an education
Are schooled in an alien tradition
Irrelevant to their country
- 2.56 Or their way of life.



2.56

In a country where 75% of the people
Are of pure Negro origin,
The standards of the white Englishman dominate.
Where wealth and lightness of skin texture
Are the gauges of acceptability and respectability,
The poor black Jamaican peasant feels,
And is made to feel, hopelessly inferior.

But in the isolation of the hill villages,
The peasants could keep a self-respect,
Guarded and tended,
As they cared for their gardens.

The earth was fertile to their touch
And they themselves were fertile
And increased their kind.

The small farms produce food crops
For their own consumption.
If there is a narrow margin
Above what is needed by the family,
It is taken to town by the womenfolk
3.53 And sold in the local market.

In Jamaica, the woman is the keystone of the family.
70% of births are illegitimate:
The woman who bears the children
Also bears all responsibility for them,
Often providing home, food, clothing
Without the help of a man.

6.20 70% of Jamaica's farms are of 5 acres or less,
Employing only 13% of the farm land.
Estates of over 500 acres
Own 37% of farm land.
~~XXXXXX~~ And yet, on the large estates,
As much as 4/5 of the land can lie idle -
While the peasantry is starved of land,
And must use every inch of land
That is capable of bearing food.

6.53 But the earth is worn out that has borne so much.
Too intensive planting
And hard rains have eroded the soil.

In their mountain villages
The people too are worn out that have worked so much,
And borne too many children,
More than their land can support.
Out of a population of 1,600,000
Over 1,000,000 Jamaicans
Live directly off the land.

The traditional answer to overpopulation
In Jamaica has always been emigration.
In the 1880s, to Panama to build the Canal,
Later to Central and South America, Cuba, the United States,
Wherever there was the promise of work
They have gone, sold their labour, settled.
Most recently, to Britain:
In the 5 years before 1962
Nearly 10% of the population emigrated.
Now, the outlet to Britain is barred.
Where can they look now?

Only to their own country:
An island, 150 miles long, 50 wide.
An island, with limited resources.

7.45 The fertile soil has made Jamaica
An agricultural island.
In 1972, it was discovered that that soil
Contained bauxite, from which aluminium is made.
Since that time, Jamaica has proved to be
The world's richest source.

8.15 Now owning one-tenth of the island,
American and Canadian companies mine the bauxite.
Their investments total £60 million.
They employ 5,000 workers
Who receive the best wages in Jamaica.

8.28 The open-cast mining
Tears off the topsoil from the Jamaican countryside.
But the bauxite companies are obliged
To replace the topsoil, and replant,
And put to use both the land that has been worked
And the land not yet in use.
So the mining companies maintain beef and dairy herds,
9.03 And experiment with food crops

9.33 The bauxite is carried to the coast
And exported to Canada and the United States
In the form of ore.
Only one of the 4 foreign companies
Converts the ore into alumina
On the island itself.
A valuable source of industrial employment
Is thus lost to Jamaica's unemployed thousands.
The abuses of colonialism are continued

9.54 After independence.

9.54 Industries like bauxite
And the cement plant just outside Kingston
Are seen as the solution
To the island's immense unemployment problem,
Which lies around 18%.
Everything is done to attract industry:
Labour is cheap.
There are no monopoly laws,
No strict company legislation,
No minimum wage laws.
There are generous tax incentives for industry,
Provision of factory buildings,
Freedom from import duty for raw materials and machinery,
And the opportunity to take out profits in dollars.
With this freest of free enterprise,
The national income has doubled in 15 years,
And the rate of economic growth in the last 10 years
Has been the third highest in the world.

But because of all the concessions made
To ~~xxx~~ attract industry,
The only real advantage to the economy
Comes from the wages paid to the workers;
And, with the exception of bauxite and cement,
These wages are low -
Because the new industries depend on cheap labour.
And for all the emphasis on industry,
It still employs only 31,000.

10.58 The largest employer of labour
Is sugar.

12.18 The cutting of cane for the manufacture
Of sugar, rum and molasses
In the factories of the large estates
Is Jamaica's second industry

The margin of profit on sugar-cane is small,
And subject to wide fluctuations
On the world market;
For this reason, labour must be cheap and plentiful.

The work is only seasonal;
It is monotonous and arduous;
It is badly paid.
But for the workers in sugar
It means money, however little,
Where there would otherwise be none.

Cane has been cultivated on Jamaica for centuries;
At one time, the island was the world's most important source.
During the time when Jamaica
Was a colony of Britain
The profits went to the exploiting country.
And now, even after independence,
The Jamaican plantation-owners
Still do not take full advantage of their product.
Jamaica exports sugar,
And imports at high prices products
Such as marmelade and confectionery
Made almost entirely from Jamaican exports.
This perpetuation of the colonialist system
Deprives Jamaicans of employment opportunities
In the shape of industries based on sugar;
Keeps prices high;

14.00

And maintains Jamaica's dependence on Britain.

14.10

The sun shines for cane-cutter
And American tourist alike:
But in a different way.

14.29

Jamaica lies a few hours' flight f
From the United States;
Tourists who used to make for Havana
Now go to Montego Bay -
Which has all the comforts of Miami.

15.06

Tourists have contact with the sun and sea and beaches
But not the people of Jamaica.
Though it would not be true to say
That coloured people cannot go into the hotels.

Tourists in Jamaica are quarantined
From contact with common Jamaicans.

The beaches are not closed to the inhabitants:
But few can afford them.

In Jamaica there is no need for a colour bar
When the money bar is just as effective.

- 16.30 Kingston is the centre of business and government.
For those who work in business or professional jobs,
The pay is good - but for them only.
Those who cannot work, if they are crippled,
Can earn pennies as street entertainers.
The streets of Jamaica are filled with music.
- 17.59 Labour is plentiful, wages low.
Domestic servants, often with a 12 hour day,
Can make as little as 30/- a week.
Factory workers, chauffeurs, handyman, £2-£3.
To pay taxes, you must make over £6 per week:
- 18.24 Only one person in thirty pays taxes.
- 19.28 In the west of the city
There is a road that leads to a rubbish dump.
The refuse of Kingston is tipped here.
And it is here that the people
Who have come to Kingston looking for work
Find the only work and the only homes
Available to them.
Rejected by a society that has no place for them,
They build their homes out of the scraps of tin and timber
They find on the dump.
They find their food by scrabbling in the muck,
- Competing with buzzards.
There are no toilets, little fresh water.
But the children are often clean and cared-for.
- 21.04 One Jamaican answer to the country
That permits such degradation
Is to reject that country.
- 21.11 The Ras Tafari Movement
Which flourishes in the slums of Jamaica
Has as its goal
The return of ~~XXX~~ all black peoples
To the continent of Africa.
They profess themselves followers of Ras Tafari,

or Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia.
Jamaicans by birth, they take no part in Jamaican affairs;
They even refuse to vote.

- 22.31 As the dream of a return to an Africa
Where the black man is free
Gives something to look forward to in the future,
So the smoking of ~~XX~~(ganja) marijuana
Alleviates the present.
The Ras Tafari Movement is an escapist movement,
A recoil from the hopelessness of life.
To some Ras Tafari sects,
The smoking of marijuana is a religious act.
But under Jamaican law, it is a criminal offence,
And the punishment is prison,
- 23.19 Where the offenders really learn now to be criminals.
- 23.19 The psychology of the Ras Tafari brethren
Is ~~that~~^{that} of the unemployed.
In ~~the~~^{their} dream of a return to Africa
The brethren are unrealistic.
But the Emperor Haile Selassie,
Whom some of the Ras Tafarians regard as God,
All as King,
Has set aside 500 acres of very fertile and rich land
For the Black People of the West.
But only skilled people will be accepted
As immigrants to Ethiopia.
Therefore, the Ras Tafarians
Organize themselves to teach each other trades
To qualify as Ethiopian immigrants
- 24.05 And to earn enough money, to get there.
- 24.05 And since Amharic is the language
Of their God, King, and country of adoption,
- 24.19 They must learn that too.
- 24.23 Because of their long hair,
Nakedness, marijuana-smoking,
And the excesses of some of their brethren,
The majority of Jamaicans
Look upon the Ras Tafarians with suspicion and hatred.
But the Ras Tafarians are not dangerous:
They know too well
That in a white man's world
The black man cannot win.

27.29 . To mould a culture,
Where the black man's contribution
Is recognised as a worthy one.
To mould a culture, a new one,
Not a cheap copy of Britain, the colonialist land.
And in moulding a culture,
To mould, perhaps, a nation.
But how much time does Jamaica have?