Colin A. Palmer, *Inward Yearnings: Jamaica's Journey to Nationhood*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2016. vii + 262 pp. (Paper US\$ 40.00)

Inward Yearnings is an important link in the chain of contemporary Jamaican history, particularly the formative period of decolonization in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In compact manner, Colin Palmer retraces the well-trodden story from the 1938 labor riots, through the formation of the two dominant political parties (the People's National Party [PNP] and the Jamaica Labour Party [JLP]), traversing the gradual process of constitutional change toward full internal self-government via the detour of the ultimately failed experiment in Federation with the Eastern Caribbean islands and on to independence in 1962. This period has been explored by many; one could reasonably ask what new there is to be brought to this table.

Among the many noteworthy studies there is Ken Post's epic volume on the 1938 rebellion, *Arise Ye Starvelings* (1978), and the two-volume *Strike the Iron* (1981), which focuses on the political process in the following decade, both of which approach Jamaica through a certain mid-century English Marxist lens. Trevor Munroe's *The Politics of Constitutional Decolonization in Jamaica* (1972) examines the power dynamic between the British and the contending social forces in Jamaica that led to a particular conservative constitutional outcome with a modified Westminster document. And Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett's *The Story of the Jamaican People* (1998) covers much broader historical ground and uses race in ways not dissimilar to those adopted by Palmer.

What Palmer does effectively, however, is to focus on a set of specific questions that none of these texts address quite frontally: how is it that the majority of people in a country that had undergone over three centuries of British colonialism and over two centuries of slavery was able to construct a concept of the nation against this history of self-denial and denigration, and how did this give shape and direction to the movement for independence? In Palmer's words, "How did Jamaicans begin to define themselves as 'black'? And with what consequences in a society where a black skin was not a badge of honour?" (p. 3).

Palmer tries to answer these questions through eight chapters which take readers through the well-documented history of slavery and colonialism in order to develop the outlines of the resistance to them. There were the early twentieth-century movements like Bedwardism and Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) which played as significant a role in Jamaica as it did across the African Diaspora. He focuses, however (and correctly so), on the Rastafarians, a harried and initially tiny group that emerged after Haile Selassie's coronation in Ethiopia in 1930 and considered him to be

divine. The Rastas, with their back-to-Africa message and rejection of white aesthetics, most visibly captured in their fierce dreadlocks, were, he suggests, by no means the only source, but the sharp cutting edge of this resistance.

Inward Yearnings takes us through the twists and turns of the politics of this postwar period: the formation of the two parties and the emergence of its iconic leaders—the charismatic and incorrigibly opportunistic Alexander Bustamante and his cousin, the intellectual and phlegmatic Norman Manley. He suggests, compellingly, that in spite of both benefiting from the hierarchical color and class privilege of being “brown,” they nonetheless, and in contradictory fashions, played a role in the assertion of blackness as a positive value and its insertion into the concept of the nation. While the book captures the blighted attempt to federate with the Eastern Caribbean and advances a solid if conventional argument for its ultimate failure, this and the sketching of the outlines of a competing “West Indian” nationalism, are less convincing parts of the study.

At the heart of *Inward Yearnings* is the fundamental question of how, against the tide of countervailing notions of the superiority of Britain and whiteness, blackness came to be inserted as the central and most valuable component of the Jamaican genome. Here, however, is also the central weakness of Palmer’s effort. For having laid out the case for the importance of Rastafarianism, and by implication the people more generally in this movement, he returns too quickly to the safety of the traditional archives and documents of the political elites tracing the path they led as they maneuvered their way through the sharply competitive political process, leaving very little granular recognition and appreciation of what the ordinary people were thinking and doing. Palmer raises, and goes some distance in answering, important questions about the salience of race as a factor and determinant in Jamaica’s modern history, but doesn’t sufficiently till the soil to explore and perhaps understand the deeper popular beliefs, ideas, styles, and gestures that gave shape to this resistance. This dimension of that story is still a half that needs to be told.

Brian Meeks

Africana Studies, Brown University

brian_meeks@brown.edu