

ABSTRACT.

Cultural Nationalism its Development in
Jamaica, 1900 -1944.

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During the period 1900-1944 Jamaica experienced major political and social upheaval. This study is concerned with the role which a developing cultural nationalism played in determining these changes.

The period leading up to 1938 witnessed economic hardship, and deteriorating social conditions for the poor which made the riots of that year predictable. Although the rebellion when it did take place was fuelled by the protest of the lower classes, it was the middle class who seized the initiative and directed this protest into legitimate agitation for social and political change. The fact that the middle class assumed this leadership role is not surprising; it was a role for which they had groomed themselves in the previous decade. What is surprising, however, is that despite the fact that certain members of the middle class assumed a leadership role in the political life of this country

this was not the arena in which they had first made their appearance. This thesis will suggest that it was instead in the cultural arena that the middle class initially invested their energies, and it was because of their interest in culture that the concepts of nationalism developed its urgency. Nationalism was the ideology which became the vehicle for social change during the 'forties, and it was a concept open enough to encompass the political, economic and cultural concerns of a disgruntled middle class.

During the 1930's there was a heightened interest in the arts; music, dance theatre and fine arts, painting and sculpture were courted by certain members of the middle class who were stimulated by a need to discover an identity for themselves. This cultural growth came out of a middle class reluctance to engage themselves in political issues.

The colonial administration was tolerant of the growing activity compared with that of politics. In this, however, they were slightly misguided since the middle classes merely used cultural involvement to 'sharpen their teeth' and prepare for later involvement in politics. The colonial administration's choice of fostering the concerns of the middle class was,

however, not without benefit since the middle class true to their class position never prompted any revolutionary causes but were willing to settle for half-way house compromises with the colonial regime.

In suggesting this interpretation of the period this study will examine a number of factors and theories in order to validate the thesis that cultural nationalism, promoted in the 1930's was a determining factor in the development of a Jamaican nationalist ideology as opposed to being a mere outgrowth of a political nationalism.

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