

ABSTRACT

“BLOOD FOR BLOOD, FIRE FOR FIRE:” A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF POLITICAL TRIBALISM IN JAMAICA, 1938-1980.

Debbion Sharmarie Hyman

This study provides a detailed historical account of the development of political tribalism in Jamaica. It outlines as the critical juncture the period 1938-1944, asserting that at this epoch, there was the emergence of many of the principal elements of the system – politically-motivated violence, ‘demi-god’ appeal, ‘messianism’ and a ‘politicized collective identity.’ These principal elements would be fostered, nurtured, cultivated and entrenched in the political system and by 1980; its denouements would be clearly exhibited in the country’s bloodiest General Election.

The study draws primarily on archival materials such as Colonial Office Correspondences, cabinet submissions, trade union reports and newspaper materials covering the period 1938-1980.

Political tribalism in Jamaica undoubtedly developed out of a complex system that witnessed the fusion of a ‘politicized collective identity,’ ‘messianism,’ ‘demi-god’ appeal, the patron-client relationship, politically motivated violence and the explosion of politicized youth gangs that resulted in the entrenchment of a tribal political culture by 1980.

Keywords: Debbion Sharmarie Hyman; political tribalism, political violence, political history, political clientelism and patronage benefits.