Book Review: The Politics of Change: Jamaican Testament

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To Manley, the concept of a just society is predicated on "a single touchstone of right and wrong," but he shows reluctance to elaborate on the determinants of these relative qualities. Equality is identified as another pillar of the just society but mere words, cliches, and sometimes truisms are devoted to what equality is not, rather than to a positive and unequivocal definition of the word. Equality, to the author, does not presuppose that everybody possesses equal talents, interests or capabilities, nor does it presuppose that everybody ought to receive the same rewards for functions performed. In several pages, Manley admits that society cannot function effectively without differentials in rewards, but resorts to a compromising yet restrictive definition of equality: Access to a home and a job, to educational processes, to remedy under the law, and to leisure.

Manley is somewhat more specific—even if at times contradictory—as he examines the "setting for change." Here his political philosophy surfaces with clarity. Graphically describing Jamaica's colonial past, he identifies two main aspects of colonialism having negative effects on the growth pattern of the society: an irrelevant system of education and reliance on paternal government. He proposes attitudinal and economic reconstruction as the only edifice of the just and self-reliant society. But forces of conservatism and activism struggle for expression under the author's pen as he seeks to repudiate radicalism as a vehicle of change.

Though expressing great admiration for the one-party state of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Manley clings tenaciously to the continuance, if not entrenchment, of the two-party system inherited from the country's British colonial past. "Arguments about one-party states as against multi-party states," he writes, "begin with the supreme disadvantage of irrelevance in the Jamaican situation, because the one-party state is unthinkable to the Jamaican." p. 25. Though referring in the preface to his "activist involvement," if not commitment, the author makes clear on page 26 that he would not engineer the demise of the "Westminster model" constitution per se but would seek to accommodate it to the "psychological needs" of the people. The concepts of democracy—not those of totalitarianism—are the vehicles selected by Manley to attain the just society.

On page 27, Manley portrays himself as a progressive conservative who believes in change without chaos. He cautions activists and radicals when he emphasizes: "I repudiate the impatience for change with which we seek to undo and dismantle our present political strength and substitute for it some other system which would have to be artificially contrived to give effect to the purposes of impatience". Thus, Manley's activist involvement must be construed as a movement for change within the established system. This, therefore, is the politics of change or the Jamaican testament.

Acknowledging that discipline is essential to the attainment of social justice, the author again evaluates totalitarianism and democracy as to which could best foster national discipline, a concept imperatively essential to his thesis. But he laments that democracy could not be credited as a political method designed to enforce national discipline. Nevertheless, convinced that the goals of equality at the political level could best be realised through the democratic system, Manley argues that the challenge of the democratic method in a developing society is to see whether one can preserve the right to dissent, encourage the recognition of personal responsibility, and isolate the areas of collective action that demand national consensus. p. 28. This dichotomy of thought galvanizes his political and philosophical dilemma. Hamlet, would aptly ask: To be or not to be. . .

Be that as it may, as Manley examines the constraints of equality, pragmatism nurtured by experience but shaken by philosophical conflict so evident in all his pages, induced a key question on page 35. "If all do not have equal talents nor make contributions of equal complexity how then can they be of equal value?" The answer given—equal educational opportunities to create social mobility and foster changes in class attitudes—is inadequate.

Although the author persistently sees equality as an objective to be realised, he admits that the constraints of economic reality and natural selection may determine how far each child can go; resources may not permit the provision of secondary education for every child, and even fewer may be able to aspire to university education. Here the author shies away from answering such a key question raised by himself—apparently ignoring the fact that an unequivocal and clear answer to this question above all other considerations would be the raison d'etre for the publication of his book.

Be that as it may, Manley emphasises the importance of the mixing of all children at the primary school level as essential to the
evolution of an egalitarian society. In the
world of reality, experience has shown that
such things as a single educational
system—and working together within a
service organization such as the Army, the
National Youth Service or the Peace
Corps—do not in themselves foster
egalitarianism nor lead to the demise of
social stratification. These are legacies of a
reactionary capitalist system and will only
disappear with the system itself.

In a similar vein, the author reaffirms in
the second part of the book that although
his purpose was consideration of strategies
aimed at accomplishing changes necessary
for the transformation of the society, he is
not prepared to attempt a quantitative
analysis of what is required, neither would
he deal with growth rates nor gross
national production. Be that as it may,
quantification which the author sees as
the business of the technician, and quality
of life as the business of the philosopher,
are indeed not mutually exclusive. The
arguments and postulates of the
philosopher should be predicated on an
understanding and appreciation of
relevant facts, knowledge, and
information.

Though an analysis of the economic
problem would have been a plus for the
book, the author carefully avoids such an
exercise. Instead, he selects to identify
what he considers as major problems.
Among what he considers the eight basic
problems existing since 1945, Manley
identifies the export-import orientation of
the economy and trader mentality derived
from capitalist and colonial orientation as
the two main economic problems to be
solved. But he offers no practical solutions.
While he contends that an irrelevant
educational system was responsible for the
nation’s lack of basic skills to effect
necessary transformation of the economy,
he does not say what steps should be taken
to make the system relevant.

Proposals advanced by the author for the
economic transformation to create the just
society are indeed novel and seek little
support from established principles of
economics. The act of public ownership of
natural resources—particularly land,
beaches, utilities such as the banking
system, and the bauxite and the sugar
industries—do stimulate feelings of
nationalism but not economic
development. En passant, it should be
noted that the section on foreign policy,
seen by the author as an integral part of
economic development strategy, is of
significance since it is a statement of the
policy a Prime Minister intends to pursue.

Nevertheless, only time will fairly evaluate

Black Manhood:
The Building
Of Civilization
By the Black Man
Of the Nile
By Pham Goldman
Tarharka Publishing Company, Annapolis, Md.
242 pp. $14.95
Reviewed by John E. Fleming

The author of Black Manhood carefully
documents Black Africa’s role in the
growth and development of civilization, by
emphasizing those indices of African
genealogy and influence. He begins with
prehistoric Egypt and takes his narrative
through the 25th Dynasty by examining
the influence and dominance of Black
people’s culture along the Nile, from
Uganda to the Mediterranean.

Since Western civilization has its origins in
ancient Egypt, Western scholars, unable to
escape their own cultural and racial bias,
have found it necessary to dissolve Egypt’s
traditional and natural relationship with
Black Africa. Black Manhood is thus a
vital and significant contribution to
anthropology and history. The author
concludes: “Racial Chauvinism and
cultural innuendoes of a derogatory nature
almost invariably accompany the attempts
of one race of people to write the history
of another.” He points out why it was
necessary for the Western world to
“disprove” that Africans were significant,
if not crucial factors, in the development
of Egyptian civilization.

By using the works of renowned
anthropologists and Egyptologists, the
author traces the development of Egyptian
civilization and points out the role played
by Blacks. He effectively challenges the
assertions that Blacks played no role in

Egyptian history outside that of slaves,
captives and other persons of low caste
status. He discusses the absurdity of how
early Western scholars called Egyptians
white when it was clear that these Black
and brown men had the physiognomy of
Black people. Even an Italian scholar,
Giuseppe Sergi, was forced to ask the
question, “But if they are Black, how can
they be white?”

The pointedness of such questions not
withstanding, Goldman documents how
Egyptologists dismissed obvious Negroid
features as “deformities and
abnormalities.” The absurdity of such
clearing distortions is illustrated in the
irrationality of a German scholar,
Heinrich Brugsch-Bay, who suggested that
the Black Queen, Nefertari, ancestress of
the great 18th Dynasty, was portrayed as
Black in an art form because the work was
done after her death and the color black
represented the darkness of the grave.

Because of prejudice and ethnocentrism,
Western scholars refused to acknowledge
that Western culture, to a large degree,
originated in Africa. Further, prejudicial
attitudes against darker races prevented
Westerners from acknowledging the
contributions Africans made to medicine,
religion, astronomy, literature, agriculture,
architecture and engineering.

The author’s discussion of Egyptian
religion, especially the growth of
monotheism during the 18th Dynasty,
places in bold relief, the extent to which
Judeo-Christian beliefs are grounded in
Egyptian religion, whose origin Egyptians
themselves traced to the South. But such
revelations and acknowledgments would
have made it more difficult to distort Black
history and subsequently portray Black
people as less than human in order to deny
them human rights.

After reading Black Manhood, one would
be hard pressed to ignore the substantial
contribution of Blacks to world
civilization.

Black Manhood is well worth reading for
any student of Afro-American and African
history.

The reviewer is an assistant professor of history at
Howard University and a senior fellow at the Institute
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