

THE SEARCH FOR COOPERATION

Report of an Exploratory Visit to the
University of the West Indies,
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Auspices of the Committee on Non-Western Studies
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INTRODUCTION

During the month of June, 1968, a generous grant from the Atlanta University Center's Committee on Non-Western Studies made it possible for me to visit the three campuses of the University of the West Indies, at Mona, Jamaica; St. Augustine, Trinidad; and Cave Hill, Barbados. My basic purpose was to explore the possibilities of developing various modes of communication and cooperation between the Atlanta University Center and the University of the West Indies.

Part of the background of the exploration was found in the quickening sense of black consciousness and the search for new levels of Afro-American identity which now pervade our Atlanta campuses--as well as many others like them. In the course of this heightened awareness of cultural roots, an increasing number of our students and faculty have begun to explore the West Indian experiences of black peoples. Some have only recently learned of the existence of the University of the West Indies and its own significant struggles to shape a new set of institutions and realities out of a colonized past. It seemed obvious to me that the students and faculties of these two University Centers shared too much in common to allow us to pass each other like ships in the night.

I. AREAS OF POSSIBLE COOPERATION

During the course of my visits, I sought to explore several specific possible areas of cooperation among the institutions involved.

They included:

1. Student exchanges during summers or regular school years
2. Faculty exchanges of varying types and durations
3. Visiting lectureships and Artists in Residence
4. Jointly sponsored research, institutes and conferences in areas of common concern.
5. Exchange and sharing of library facilities
6. Joint publishing ventures
7. Special Afro-American Consortium

Largely because of some very kind intermediaries and hosts, I was able to engage in significant conversations with some forty members of the faculty and staff of the three campuses, as well as to meet scores of students. (Besides, many contacts in the surrounding communities were developed, ranging from lectures by me to a fascinating visit with Mrs. Amy Jacques Garvey. However, these additional benefits will not be explored in this document.) Following is a brief, summary report on the visit, including a set of recommendations for further action.

II. THE THREE CAMPUSES: DISTINCTIVE CONCERNS

Certain distinctive elements developed from the conversations on each campus. I shall call attention to them briefly before summarizing the general conclusions.

A. Mona, Jamaica

On this segment of the trip I was fortunate to have as a companion Dr. Albert Manley, chairman of the Council of Presidents of the Atlanta University Center, and head of my own college, Spelman. He shared totally in my enthusiasm for the experience at Mona, and for the attractive prospects we foresaw in the larger relationships.

We were especially encouraged by our visit with Sir Philip Sherlock, Vice Chancellor of the University system. Sir Philip was most encouraging in his enthusiastic response. He felt that the sharing of facilities, the exchange of staff, joint research and even a special consortium of Afro-American Universities (using American in its hemispheric sense) might well grow out of our explorations. Sir Philip promised that upon receiving this report his first step would be to appoint two or more members of the faculty of the University of the West Indies to return our visit by coming to the Atlanta University Center. At that point, some specific joint proposals for cooperative work could be developed.

On the Mona campus our other contacts with faculty and students in History, Education, Economics, Religion and the Arts made it very clear that we have many common interests, problems and challenges,

and can probably be of great mutual assistance.

St. Augustine, Trinidad

The careful planning of Professors Andrew Comacho and Jesse Noel made the Trinidad visit a highly organized and most fruitful one. Here, visits with members of the University's Institute for Education revealed that the problems of developing meaningful, indigenous systems of education out of a colonialized past are problems which are shared by those concerned with education (and Education) at both University Centers. At St. Augustine, a center for Afro-Asian Studies has recently been established, and our growing supply of Africanists in Atlanta may be of some real help here. Also, some of the historians and social scientists in Trinidad are especially interested in studies in comparative slavery. One of them voiced a strong interest in doing research on phases of North American slavery, using our University Center as a base of operations. (Of course, there are several AU Center faculty persons who would be eager to study the patterns of Caribbean slavery from the base of the UWI.)

Cave Hill, Barbados

The youngest and smallest of the University campuses, Cave Hill, has a special attraction for scholars of the Afro-American experience. Its newly established Centre for Multi-Racial Studies holds many possibilities for significant research and offers facilities for some of the conferences which should develop out of continued explorations between the two University Centers.