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# Circuits of Political Prophecy: Martin Luther King Jr., Peter Tosh, and the Black Radical Imaginary

**Carter Mathes**

Peace is the diploma you get in the cemetery.  
—Peter Tosh

I remember that during my childhood in Argentina, in the continuous performance cinemas there was an announcement saying, “The performance begins when you arrive.” Well, I think that “emancipation” is the opposite: it is a performance at which we always arrive late and which forces us to guess, painfully, at its mythical or impossible origins.  
—Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*

On 4 July 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta titled “The American Dream.” On a day marking US independence, in a year marked by sharpening critiques of American racial politics, King pointed out how the idea of US citizenship had fallen victim to what he termed the “schizophrenic personality” of the nation: “On the one hand we have proudly professed the great principles of democracy, but on the other hand we have sadly practiced the very opposite of those principles.”<sup>1</sup> King contrasted

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “The American Dream” (speech, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia, 4 July 1965). Transcript and audio available from the Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute at [mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc\\_the\\_american\\_dream/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_the_american_dream/) (accessed 26 March 2010).

this troubled relationship between American democracy and racial equality against his recent impressions of Jamaican racial pluralism:

The other day Mrs. King and I spent about ten days down in Jamaica. . . . Here you have people from many national backgrounds. . . . Do you know they all live there and they have a motto in Jamaica, “Out of many people, one people.” . . . One day, here in America, I hope that we will see this and we will become one big family of Americans. Not white Americans, not black Americans . . . but just Americans. One big family of Americans.<sup>2</sup>

Jamaica became a window into national racial harmony for King, allowing him to project his dream of racial equality in the United States through the perceived promise of Jamaican pluralism. King’s vision of post-independence racial politics reflected his belief in the progressive evolution of modern societies, his understanding that “if democracy is to live, segregation must die.”<sup>3</sup> A more complicated reality existed during this period of the black freedom movement in the United States, however, through the heightened radicalization and questioning of nonviolence by Malcolm X, members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and through the continued *de facto* segregation, poverty, and disillusionment rampant in poor black sections of northern and western cities. Indeed, the more permanent structural features of US racial subjection were becoming increasingly visible. It is important to understand King’s movement to and from Jamaica in the context of this historical juncture, for in spite of King’s view of Jamaican racial harmony, post-independence racial politics far more closely mirrored than superseded the tensions within the United States regarding racial identity and socioeconomic rights.

In these early years of Jamaica’s transition between independence from Great Britain in 1962, the rise in black consciousness during the late 1960s, and the experiments with democratic socialism in the 1970s, the political and racial terrain that King entered in 1965 represents an important precursor to the charged national struggles over racial and economic equality that intensified later in the decade and into the 1970s. As these undercurrents of containment mark discourses and events of freedom, independence, and citizenship moving between the United States and Jamaica, I examine the space between the “promise” imagined by King, the starkly different reality of contestation over race in the post-independence years in Jamaica, and the critical intervention of Peter Tosh’s political prophecy offered roughly a decade after King’s visit. I read the resonance of King’s intersection with Jamaican racial politics past his visit, into the 1970s, to consider how the prospect of Jamaica as a beacon for racial transformation becomes exhausted through the intensification of class, racial, and political warfare overtaking the nation by the mid-1970s. Examining this visible shift in Jamaican racial politics highlights the militant Rastafari dismissal of the Jamaican state projected by Peter Tosh at the One Love Peace Concert in 1978 as part of a subaltern line of critique that

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

firmly rejects any claims to social transformation being attainable through ideas of political development and racial respectability. The political and cultural resonance of King as an emissary of racial progress with a deepening black radical consciousness and Tosh as Rastafari intellectual using performance and song as modalities of the political fashioned outside of the frequencies of established political discourse upholds, challenges, and complicates the idea of racial progress as an achievement of liberal governance circulating between Jamaica and the United States.<sup>4</sup> Echoing the theoretical insights offered by Brent Edwards in his work on diaspora and black internationalism, this essay considers the convergence and space between King and Tosh as one in which dimensions of the black political prophetic imaginary are *articulated*, that is, framed through a “process of linking or connecting across gaps,” as they operate within and against the accepted avenues of liberal governance that largely guide this period of global racial transformation.<sup>5</sup> In bringing these two somewhat disparate figures together, then, I address the following question: how do ideas of black political identity travel between the supposed symbol of emerging racial democracy (the United States) and a nation that has just entered the hemispheric and global stage of modern postcolonial liberal democracy while remaining deeply ambivalent about the degree to which blackness defines national identity (Jamaica)?

I.

As Obika Gray documents in *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960–1972*, the immediate post-independence period witnessed a backlash against black consciousness taking hold within the political and economic landscape of the new nation. He quotes a 1963 letter published in the *Gleaner* to exemplify the way that US civil rights discourse was inverted and wielded as an indictment of black rule in Jamaica. The letter read:

All I can now say is, be careful all of you who are teaching race-hatred, lest the present situation in Alabama does not develop here in years to come but with the Chinese and white Jamaicans being victimized. . . . This whole concept now held by many Afro-Jamaicans that Jamaica is a Black Man’s country and Black Man Must Rule no matter what, makes a complete mockery of our motto.<sup>6</sup>

The motto the writer refers to is of course “Out of Many, One People,” and Gray profiles this writer’s view as a pillar in the ideology of “Jamaican exceptionalism,” a mindset and practice that upheld a color-blind meritocracy alongside the myth of cross-racial harmony as the basis

4 It is interesting to observe that the way King’s relationship to Jamaica has more recently been noted reflects a tone of longing for this past in which Jamaica was idealized by King as a model of racial advancement. See, for example, Henley Morgan, “If We Could See Ourselves as Others See Us,” *Jamaica Observer*, 17 May 2007; and Martin Henry, “King Loved Ja, Ja Loved King,” *Gleaner*, 25–31 January 2007, North American edition.

5 Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 11.

6 Letter to the editor, *Gleaner*, 8 October 1963; quoted in Obika Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960–1972* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 85 (ellipsis in original).

for Jamaican national identity, downplaying the complicated history of race and power that had brought the one-time colony to independence.<sup>7</sup> Gray's work on the relationship between race, nation, and political struggle during this period critically examines historical narratives of liberalism, freedom, nationalism, and racial formation within what Anthony Bogues recognizes as certain "complexities of the nature of the Jamaican state and both the colonial and Creole nationalist project of constructing a particular Afro-Jamaican subject."<sup>8</sup> This construction of national subjects in accordance with ideas of "new world" hemispheric modern political order, ideas that themselves were indelibly shaped by the context of early modern conquest and capitalism, point to an "internal paradox of liberal freedom," that, as theorized by David Scott, operates by underwriting political freedom through a silent partnering of it with the ruse of economic freedom, whereby "capitalist society required for its justification formal equality in rights yet inherently generated class differences in effective rights, powers, and possessions."<sup>9</sup> Scott suggests that the problem of Eurocentric liberal inheritance felt by formerly enslaved Africans was embedded in an idea of "political rationality" operating through "the shaping of conduct rather than the shaping of bodies."<sup>10</sup> Saidiya Hartman further illustrates this complexity of racial governance operating in the post-emancipation United States as a "vexed genealogy of freedom" that obscures "any absolute marker between slavery and its aftermath," a situation in which "emancipatory discourses of rights, liberty, and equality instigate, transmit, and effect forms of racial domination and liberal narratives of individuality idealize mechanisms of domination and discipline."<sup>11</sup> As these renderings of political philosophy stretch emerging ideas of race and nation beyond discrete national histories into a wider view of diaspora as an inherently political category of identification, this essay pursues the following questions: How do forms of political critique move across a diasporic terrain in which definitions of equality are shaped by particular calibrations of liberal political and economic forces often maintaining structures of hierarchy, division, and exploitation even through the granting of rights to black subjects? Furthermore, how might attending to sensory registers, such as the sonic, help uncover languages of political critique that reconfigure terms of liberation with an eye and ear toward a prophetic future? How do the sounds of such engagements travel, not only phonically but also as metaphysical forces and sentiments reflecting the contours of historical memory and consciousness?

In this sense 1965 was a notable year for King, as he began to forcefully articulate a new tenor of civil rights struggle through his opposition to the war in Vietnam. Over the course of that spring, King had issued several public statements advocating for a peacefully negotiated

7 Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica*, 85.

8 Anthony Bogues, "Politics, Nation, and Postcolony: Caribbean Reflections," *Small Axe*, no. 11 (March 2002): 2.

9 David Scott, "The Government of Freedom," in Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl, eds., *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 438.

10 *Ibid.*, 447.

11 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 115–16.

end to the conflict. Shortly before leaving for Jamaica, King pointed to US foreign policy in Southeast Asia as evidence of a “nation suffocating from material corruption,” and in the wake of his return from Jamaica, King insisted that, “it is necessary for me to continue to speak on [Vietnam],” even in the face of mounting criticism of his efforts to do so.<sup>12</sup> As James Cone has pointed out, 1965 also represented a diminishment in King’s hope in the viability of nonviolent resistance to colonial rule. In Cone’s words, initially “the place of the third world liberation movements in [King’s] thinking was to reinforce his liberal optimism regarding the certainty of the rise of a new world order of freedom and equality;” but his outlook on the demise of colonial power became darker by the mid-1960s as King recognized the structural dimensions of racism being sustained through American urban segregation, a “‘system of internal colonialism’ not unlike the exploitation of the Third World by European nations.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, King’s visit to Jamaica highlights an intersection of his growing radicalization and his desire to imagine racial equality occurring within modern structure and ideas of state governance. Indeed, Jamaica represented the possibility of balancing these desires, having achieved independence from British rule without the need for sustained anticolonial armed insurgency. This political and racial promise of nonviolence embodied in Jamaican independence is amplified through King’s movement between the United States and Jamaica as symbolic of a certain international trajectory of US civil rights black consciousness, while conversely it obscures the broader questioning of ideas of emancipation and social transformation articulated through more layered struggles over political agency and subjectivity within those same national lines.

King’s framing of race is clearly connected to a longer history of black intellectual exchange between Jamaica and the United States. These circuits of racial, cultural, and political identification operate and become marked through a tension between practices of black internationalism and formation of racial consciousness being shaped across the Americas. Indeed, King’s sermon echoes sentiments offered by the Jamaican leader Norman Manley shortly before independence, in April 1961, when he told an American audience that Jamaica was “made up of peoples drawn from all over the world, predominately Negro or of mixed blood, but also with large numbers of others. . . . Nowhere in the world has more progress been made in developing a non-racial society in which colour is not psychologically significant.”<sup>14</sup> Manley’s point relies upon an interpretation of *color* as a divider between black and white in an American sense of racial identity, rather than as an ephemeral category that marks the profound caste-like distinctions of *brownness* and *blackness* in a Jamaican context.

12 David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 428, 430.

13 James Cone, “Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World,” *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 458, 456. On King’s development of critiques of militarism and imperialism, see Thomas J. Noer, “Martin Luther King Jr. and the Cold War,” *Peace and Change* 22, no. 2 (1997): 111–31.

14 Norman Manley, quoted in Rex Nettleford, *Mirror, Mirror: Identity, Race, and Protest in Jamaica* (1970; Kingston: LMH Publishing, 1998), 23–24.

Winston James, reflecting on the earlier history of this hemispheric racial misrecognition between the United States and Jamaica, quotes W. E. B. Du Bois from the pages of the *Crisis* in 1915 where he claimed that Jamaica was “facing the world proudly with one great gift, the gift of racial peace, the utter overturning of the barbaric war of color, with a chance for men to lift themselves regardless of the complexion of their grandfathers. It is the most marvelous paradox of this paradoxical western world.”<sup>15</sup> James astutely focuses on the way that Du Bois’s light skin allows him to be seen within the emerging Jamaican color hierarchy as colored, or brown, rather than black, as he points to the fact that, “this is how the Jamaicans would have seen him, and this is how they would have treated him, and this was bound to have a bearing on how he perceived Jamaica.”<sup>16</sup> While James’s view of Du Bois’s reception in Jamaica reveals the permanence of a Jamaican race, color, and caste hierarchy, Du Bois’s positive assessment of the Jamaican color line also reflects his desire to read it within the humanism of his 1915 text *The Negro*, in which he argues that “a belief in humanity means a belief in colored men,” placing the hope for a future world in the “character of the Negro race,” that “strongest and gentlest of the races of men.”<sup>17</sup> Admittedly this is a particular stage in Du Bois’s political thought; yet it demands attention as relatively early evidence of a broader entanglement of black consciousness within the confines of Western liberal political philosophy. This paradox of democratic governance is described by David Scott as the “rationality of government”; the ideological and class alliances that underwrite the Jamaican political theater through a diffusion of power that eludes the more obvious imprint of the state by inscribing a range of racial and class sensibilities within “the mentalities and rationalities of the Jamaican arts of governing conduct.”<sup>18</sup> Scott, taking into account Michel Foucault’s later writings on governmentality alongside the diagnostic descriptions of post-independence Jamaican political culture offered by the political scientist Carl Stone, argues for the need to “map the *intelligibility* of forms and relations of Jamaican government,” to grasp them as “regimes of practice involved in the shaping, guiding, and regulation of conduct.”<sup>19</sup> Scott’s analysis suggests how citizens may help discipline and govern themselves through subscribing to sentiments that push refashioned political and racial identities into levels of order and conduct desired by the state and civil society.

The groundwork for such ideas of racial governance gained prominence in Jamaica as the early-twentieth-century color-class system fostered what Diane Austin-Brooks terms a *politics of moral order*, a religious terrain of subject formation in which ideas of Eurocentric cultural respectability are refashioned within a rubric of creolization that encompassed African conceptions of spirituality, death, and temporality, as well as ecstatic practices of Pentacostalism that

15 W. E. B. Du Bois, “An Amazing Island,” *Crisis*, June 1915, 80–81; quoted in Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth Century America* (London: Verso, 1988), 98.

16 James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 98.

17 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro* (New York: Henry Holt, 1915), 242.

18 David Scott, “Political Rationalities of the Jamaican Modern,” *Small Axe*, no. 14 (September 2003): 6, 22.

19 *Ibid.*, 19 (italics in original).

traveled to Jamaica from early black churches in the United States during the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> This internalization of a hegemonic morality points to the construction of social order as a spectral presence haunting Jamaican post-slavery and postcolonial history, stretching well beyond issues of skin color into the ordering of values and ideas of governance. These ideas unveil the complicated pathways defining Jamaican cultural and political life, as Austin-Broos frames this period of creolization beyond the idea of religion representing a straightforward hegemonic reinscription of European values, and rather as more of an improvisatory remixing of religious ontology and practice that reflects the convergence of African, European, and African American cosmologies within an emerging formation of Jamaican life. “These practices involve the positioning and repositioning of symbols brought to this domain by the powerful and the weak,” she states, so that “while Christianity always has been to some degree hegemonic, it also has been a genuine site of Jamaican cultural creativity.”<sup>21</sup> This sense of creolization presents a historical counter to the concept of *Creole multiracial nationalism*, an idea that had come to define the era of Jamaican independence by upholding middle-class respectability and the idea of a common cultural heritage as proof of the legitimacy of Jamaican independence within a global narrative of liberal progress, obscuring the realities of racial division while embracing folk cultural sensibilities as markers of the past from which modern Jamaicans had progressed.<sup>22</sup> This contestation between epistemology, belief, progress, and resistance is central not only to the structuring of the Jamaican racial state but also to underlying ideas of political progress throughout the African diaspora. In order to think carefully about these processes of transmission, inheritance, and transfiguration, I wish to focus attention on the elements of the sublime that inform certain practices and discourses of political meaning.

I am interested here in the convergence of phonic presentation, historical consciousness, and ideological positioning, as my view of the trajectory of thought and sentiment enabled by King and Tosh focuses on two interrelated factors: (1) how ideas of the political may be shaped or deformed through the aesthetic features of ideological discourse, and (2) how formations of black consciousness reflect the degree to which actors and publics are attuned to modes of political performance that simultaneously challenge and reinforce the boundaries of racial respectability. Determining what is or is not respectable within black public spheres is often measured in terms of how one’s sense of self and belonging may or may not be disrupted by differing projections of racial and political identity. These ideas become amplified due to a combination of the style in which they are presented and the way they may be heard as recognizable, rational forms of discourse. This point highlights the fact that class affiliations

20 Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 6–13.

21 *Ibid.*, 5.

22 For an astute analysis of the past, present, and future implications of Jamaican Creole multiracial nationalism, see Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

within racial categories are not completely defined by economics and color but more fundamentally perhaps by the allegiance one may have to a sense of order and belief in the feelings and sentiments engendered by the smooth operation of systems of governance.

These structures of feeling and meaning are maintained and often operate through relationships to the sensory. Aurality, as many theorists of sound and modernity argue, is both the most traditionally neglected of the senses in contrast to the “tyranny of the visual” yet also the most central to how we perceive and regulate aspects of space, time, and environment constantly inflecting individual and group consciousness. Michael Bull and Les Back point to practices of “deep listening” revealing the field of sensory relationships between art, politics, and the social:

Sound makes us re-think the meaning, nature, and significance of our social experience. Sound makes us re-think our relation to community. Sound makes us re-think our relational experiences, how we relate to others, ourselves and the spaces and places we inhabit. Sound makes us rethink our relationship to power.<sup>23</sup>

These relationships between sound and social experience are complicated by time, space, and geography, as explained by Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue, for “sound does not necessarily evoke an individual past experience; it can also connect one to a contemporary situation through an entirely different context, another place, another culture.”<sup>24</sup> Sound as felt historical experience travels with a nonlinearity through geographic spaces, historical moments, and formations of black memory. It helps uphold modes of social control, and gestures toward the possibility of their irruption. As Fred Moten reminds us, what sound may evoke can shake the stability of ontological meaning, allowing us to “accommodate a differentiation of the universal, of its ongoing reconstruction in sound as the differential mark.”<sup>25</sup> I continue with a perspective on the sonic appeals of both King and Tosh, as they circulate within discursive fields of historical progress and racial equality, highlighting the place of the sensory within contingencies of sovereign and disciplinary power.

## II.

Two weeks prior to King’s sermon in Atlanta, he delivered the commencement address at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. The speech initiated a series of public appearances and statements for King in Kingston during June 1965. In this movement between Atlanta and Kingston, King marks his optimism about a post-racial future through an understanding of the ways ideas of civil rights, decolonization, and historical change are

23 Michael Bull and Les Back, introduction to Michael Bull and Les Back, eds., *The Auditory Cultures Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 4.

24 Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue, introduction to Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue, eds., *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005), 23.

25 Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 201–2.

interwoven throughout the black world. King's movement and optimism are more complicated than a straightforward framing within a narrative of racial state formation and emancipation can disclose. By listening to King with a different attunement to social and political landscapes—one marked by a sense of continual and consistent disruption within and against more visible moments of achievement—it becomes clear that his presence both highlights and upsets narratives of racial progress being shaped in both nations.

After thanking the university and the Jamaican government for bringing him to “this wonderful country and this beautiful island,” and beginning his convocation address, King invokes the apocalyptic tone of Revelations with the words, “Behold! I make all things new and former things are passed away,” as a way of pointing to the new time in which colonialism and US segregation are meeting their ends. Drawing on the memory of his visit to Ghana in 1957 to witness the independence celebration, King underscores the fact that old world orders are being challenged and replaced by “the new order of freedom”: “Since that night . . . more than twenty-six new independent nations have come into being in Africa.”<sup>26</sup> King envisions historical change as apocalyptic redemption, frequently reinvoking the imperative from John in Revelations that attests to the massive sweeping away of history as an oppressive force that reimagines the future as productive rupture.<sup>27</sup> King explains this rupture as one in which the long history of US black captivity spanning slavery and what he terms “the old order of segregation which in reality was nothing but a new form of slavery covered up with certain niceties of complexity” is now languishing “on its death-bed” as black Americans begin to enter “the Promised Land of integration.”<sup>28</sup> As King outlines the shape of this “new age” he focuses on the global push toward racial equality within an “inter-related structure of reality” of a shrinking world. The double-sided nature of this new reality, what King refers to as “an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny,” is both liberating and constraining, as the sense of dawning freedom is tinged with the burden of responsibility, in King's words, to “be as productive, as resourceful, and as responsible as the people who have never known such years of oppression.”<sup>29</sup> This linear notion of progress suggests a stage for new subjectivities, but only to the degree that the stage itself is not fundamentally altered. The coverage of the event provided by Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner* situates King's valedictory address as a testimony to a spirit of uplift and inclusion, and in doing so points to King's signaling of an African American historical consciousness that becomes more translatable as the respectability of his sound increases:

He looked somewhat bemused and evidently had been rarely exposed to the Anglican order of service. In his Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and his father's

26 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., *Address at Valedictory Service, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, June 20, 1965* (Mona: University of the West Indies, West Indies Collection), 2.

27 On the issue of historical rupture, see especially Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); and Ato Sekyi-Out, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

28 King, *Address at Valedictory Service*, 2.

29 *Ibid.*, 5.

Ebenezer Church in Atlanta, Georgia, the services lean toward evangelical and “praise the lords” often punctuate the sermons.

But when he moved to the lectern to preach to this year’s graduating class there was magic in the air. . . .

Almost hidden behind the microphones, he ran easily through his acknowledgements in the slow southern drawl that education, culture, and practice have polished to a high oratorical gloss.

And when Dr. King, with never an extravagant movement of arm or head, with barely a perceptible increase in intensity, built to a great emotional climax, the congregation forgot momentarily that it was a religious service.<sup>30</sup>

His sound is not simply aural, because it is received and replayed through the prism of Jamaican middle-class cultural sensibilities; it exists and persists somewhere between what this distinct sector of Jamaican society imagines an African American civil rights icon to represent and the awkwardness of what the columnist refers to as a “murmur of appreciation roll[ing] across the hall, lasting a full two minutes,” after King’s concluding lines of “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty I’m free at last.”<sup>31</sup> The description of the applause is apt, since listening to its recorded presence verifies an unfamiliar silence as King’s words gain a familiar expressive, political force through his oft-repeated closing exhortations, absent any response to his call, and with an extremely brief yet clear moment of hesitation from the audience as he finishes his last word, before there seems to be certainty enough to applaud. Pushing these observations forward, I would like to consider the gentility of the sound of the murmur as a signal of the ongoing negotiation between acculturation and rupture defining the arc of the speech. At an earlier point in the address, King speaks to the breaking of “the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say ‘wait on time.’” Resisting this political containment animates his speech as he asserts that the possibility of a new age is predicated upon the rejection of “every doctrine of white supremacy,” and can only be achieved by expediently “bringing about a society of brotherhood and understanding” in the

30 “There Was Magic in the Air,” *Gleaner*, 21 June 1965. Comparing and contrasting the *Gleaner* account of King’s sound with that of Michael Ekwueme Thelwell, writing from the perspective of a Jamaican-born SNCC activist listening on television to King’s “I Have a Dream” speech at the March on Washington in August of 1963, provides a sense of how the political and aesthetic texture of King’s sound is heard in a different transnational perspective. See Michael Ekwueme Thelwell, “The August 28th March on Washington: The Castrated Giant” (1964), in *Duties, Pleasures, Conflicts: Essays in Struggle* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 57–73. In the 1986 postscript to the essay, Thelwell’s account begins by conveying the sense of disappointment felt among the SNCC activists once they realized how compromised the political tenor of the march had become. Thelwell then describes the experience of hearing King’s voice:

Then something unforgettable happened. Martin Luther King, Jr., began to talk. We greeted him with crude witticisms about “De Lawd.” Then that rich, resonant voice asserted itself and despite ourselves we became quiet. About half-way through as image built on stirring image, the voice took on a ringing authority and established its lyrical and rhythmic cadence that was strangely compelling and hypnotic. Somewhere in the artful repetitions of the “Let Freedom Ring” series, we began—despite our stubborn, intemperate hearts—to grunt punctuations to each pause. “Ahmen, Waal, Ahhuh.”

By the time the oration triumphantly swept into its closing movement—an expression of faith and moral and political possibility, delivered in the exquisite phrasing and timing of the black preacher’s art—we were transformed. We were on our feet, laughing, shouting, slapping palms, hugging, and not an eye was dry. What happened that afternoon in that tent was the most extraordinary, sudden, and total transformation of mood I have ever witnessed. (73)

31 “There Was Magic in the Air”; King, *Address at Valedictory Service*, 12.

face of hatred.<sup>32</sup> King's references the Jamaican national motto, "Out of Many, One People," as an example of how to meet these challenges of social equality facing the world, yet he fails to take into account the levels of racial antagonism and repression within the Jamaican state. This is a crucial gap that King hints at himself in an interview granted to the *Gleaner* shortly after arriving in Jamaica, when, according to the reporter, "Dr. King said he did not know enough of the details of Jamaica's racial climate to go into an extensive discussion, but his impression was that it was good."<sup>33</sup>

These gaps within black international mapping and reconfiguration are in part due to King's telling misreading of the political complexity and racial fissures in the emerging Jamaican nation-state, a political and racial blind spot that enables his hope in American racial equality to project a vision of postcolonial Jamaican democracy that elides the intensity of Jamaican racial and political struggle in this early post-independence context. In their volume *Small Garden, Bitter Weed*, George Beckford and Michael Witter provide a sense of this period:

Domestic policy was increasingly repressive. Progressive and radical political activists were harassed (passports seized), intimidated, jailed and deported. Progressive and socialist literature, culture and activities were banned. Rastafari bore the brunt of cultural repression from a regime whose consciousness must have been tormented by the challenge Rastafari represented to the oppressive social order. Thus the economic oppression of the masses was supported by the political and cultural repression of the State. The Youth, in particular, were brutalized by a regime and a social system, which was incapable of channeling their creative energies into productive activities, and instead regarded them as superfluous and a social and political nuisance.<sup>34</sup>

The social landscape was complicated at this point of early independence, as the nation had witnessed the upsurge of the "Youth" mentioned by Beckford and Witter, through the rise of *rudie*, or *rude boy* (*rude bwoy*), countercultural expression. This disengagement with the dominant social structure represented a point of identification within the cultural fabric of the Jamaican working and lower classes, a phenomenon extensively represented in the 1972 Perry Henzell film *The Harder They Come* and heard throughout transitions in Jamaican musical sound from ska, to rock steady, to early roots reggae forms. Garth White, in a seminal 1967 essay on the topic, offers a Fanonian analysis of rude bwoy culture as a lumpen response to the neocolonial hierarchies maintained by the Jamaican national bourgeoisie. For White, "Rude Bwoy is that person, native, who is totally disenchanted with the ruling system; who generally is descended from 'African' elements in the lower class and who is now armed." He goes on to suggest that rude bwoy anger and disavowal "is pointed not only against the settler and his descendants, but also to all that class of persons who occupy the middle rung in the society."<sup>35</sup> Obika Gray, writing several decades later, explains how rudies contained a fundamental set of

32 King, *Address at Valedictory Service*, 7, 10.

33 "Thinks Racial Climate Here Good," *Gleaner*, 21 June 1965, 1.

34 George Beckford and Michael Witter, *Small Garden, Bitter Weed: Struggle and Change in Jamaica* (London: Zed, 1982), 75.

35 Garth White, "Rudie, Oh Rudie!" *Caribbean Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1967): 39.

political and cultural tensions in which “such traits as political cynicism, aspirations for a better life . . . as well as the cultivation of a fearsome, violent personality . . . did not constitute either a coherent political ideology or a clear vision of an alternative society.”<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, the inchoate political consciousness and at times anarchic eruptions of violence of rude bwoy culture represented a clear separation from the Rastafari movement; on the other, as White points out, rude bwoys were very much defined through their relationship to sound, movement, and style, refuting a clear sense of disjuncture between these cultural formations. This point cannot be overstated, as ska served not simply as a “propagandistic music” or in “the role of commentator on the society” but also as a sensory accompaniment to the movements and practices of the rudie dance, “an extension of the principle that resulted in the slowing down of the tempo in ska music.”<sup>37</sup> The texture of this slowed down tempo and its political resonance can be heard in the following recounting from Ras Dizzy writing in the pages of the radical publication *Abeng* in 1969:

A night joint saloon was in its swing of music and fun as the Rudies go in and out of the dance. But if you had ever listened to Rudies’ Reggae tunes like “Just another girl” by Ken Boothe and “Sweet n’ Dandy” by Toots and his Maytals . . . then you could tell why the youths want to listen to them and watch the human emotions behind the effect.

The way they drink the beer, and then how they dance to the beat of the blues show that they are sophisticated human beings searching for freedom and recreational facilities free from fear of force.<sup>38</sup>

The sensory details in the descriptions offered by White and Dizzy underscore ideas of racial empowerment emerging through an attunement to registers of sound and time that upset established cultural values, ideas that are perhaps most strongly and lastingly felt through the lived history of Rastafari.

Although the roots of Rastafari can be traced to early-twentieth-century revivalist groups such as the Bedwardites, the diasporic syncretism of African and East Indian worldviews present on the island, Marcus Garvey’s Pan-African ideals, Jamaican trade union activism, and the 1930s countercultural prophetic figure Leonard Howell’s establishment of what would become the first Rastafari encampment at Pinnacle, the 1960s became the decade in which Rastafari’s visibility, viability, and status as abject threat were all placed in greater relief. The decade began with the release of the pivotal study *Report on the Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica*, undertaken by three University of the West Indies (UWI) professors, M. G. Smith, Roy Augier, and Rex Nettleford, largely as a response to the discourse of fear suffusing colonial Jamaican attitudes toward the movement. These fears were dramatically displayed from October 1959 through April 1960 as the Pan-Africanist leader of the Rastafari-inflected African Reform Church, Claudius Henry, his eventual wife, Edna Fisher, and Henry’s son, Reynold, were

36 Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica*, 75.

37 White, “Rudie, Oh Rudie!” 42.

38 Ras Dizzy, “Why Rudies Got to Be Ruder,” *Abeng*, 7 August 1969, n.p. (3).

arrested for planning two separate plots against British rule in the colony.<sup>39</sup> The report served as an important break in the downward drift of Jamaican attitudes toward Rastafari, suggesting that the movement was not actually oriented toward violence against the upper classes of Jamaican society but was instead focused on the politics of black redemption and repatriation to Africa. Largely written in consultation with one of the most esteemed Rastafari leaders at the time, Mortimer Planno, the UWI authors began a process of incorporating Planno within academic treatments of Rastafari, and backed the 1961 Rastafari Mission to Africa in which Planno and several Rastafari brethren visited the continent to investigate the possibilities for repatriation.<sup>40</sup> These positive developments were nonetheless offset to a degree by a marked resurgence in the perception of Rastafari as a threat to the emerging Jamaican nation-state, especially after 12 April 1963, when a dispute over the corporate usurpation of land evolved into a contestation between the defense forces of the independent Jamaican state and the Rastafari community in the area of Coral Gardens near Montego Bay. The “Holy Thursday Massacre” resulted in five deaths during the incident; the massive harassment, imprisonment, and abuse of a large segment of the local Rastafari community; and the subsequent hanging of three Rastas by the state.<sup>41</sup> The incident sharpened the sense of Rastafari as threat, and the remainder of the decade was marked by a much more visible tension between the creole elite, on one hand, and the Jamaican dispossessed, as well as academic and politically radical groups who were drawn to the movement, on the other. Such a consideration of Rastafari reveals the complexities of Jamaican cultural politics and the problematic relationship between race and respectability, as the political sensibilities and cultural orientation of the movement created friction against the fiction of creole racial pluralism through a commitment to radically reordering cultural, epistemological, and spiritual value in Jamaica. More than simply a rejection of Christianity, Rastafari offered an insurgent field of interpretations, reframing post-independence black identity, African diaspora consciousness, and historical knowledge outside of the frameworks of a colonial and postcolonial Jamaican state seen as complicit in the intellectually and politically stagnating Babylon system.

39 For more detailed information on the Henry activities, one should consult the contemporary critical reflections offered by Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Brian Meeks, *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000); Barry Chevannes, “Repairer of the Breach: Reverend Claudius Henry and Jamaican Society,” in Frances Henry, ed., *Ethnicity in the Americas* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976): 263–89; and Leonard E. Barrett Sr., *The Rastafarians* (Boston: Beacon, 1997).

40 See M. G. Smith, Roy Augier, and Rex Nettleford, *Report on the Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica* (1960; Mona: Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1988). For further context and reflection on the Report, see Nettleford, *Mirror, Mirror*.

41 Frank Jan van Dijk, *Jahmaica: Rastafari and Jamaican Society, 1930–1990* (New York: One Drop, 1993), 164–68. See also Prince Elijah Williams, *Book of Memory: A Rastafari Testimony*, ed. Michael Kuelker (St. Louis, MO: CaribSound, 2005). The firsthand account provided by Rastafari elder Prince Elijah Williams gives the following description of the police action against the community: “Now, the government of Jamaica, which was Busta-man-tief, he doesn’t use his discretion and tell the cops, Go look for the guys that committed this. Him put on his cowboy-self gun belts, white and rhinestone bwoi coming from Texas. When he come upon the commissioner of police, him seh, *kill every goddamn blasted one a-dem* that call themself Rasta. . . . Him seh, Harass them, beat them, charge them with vagrancy” (117; italics in original). Prince Elijah’s account in other sections of his narrative regarding Coral Gardens also makes the point, not acknowledged frequently enough, that the primary instigators of the conflict, referred to by media and dominant historical accounts as Rastafari, were perhaps simply dreadlocked Afro-Jamaicans perceived to be Rastafari, thus giving the Jamaican state reason to violently regulate the local Rastafari community.

The political and phenomenological context of Rastafari in which King's visit to Jamaica can be situated represents a convergence of race, nation, and resistance, set against ideas of political and cultural respectability that more sharply comes into focus on the day following King's valedictory speech, when he was given the key to the city of Kingston in a public ceremony at the National Stadium.<sup>42</sup> There are several themes to consider within King's speech of acceptance, as he immediately emphasizes how the cultural and political kinship he feels in Jamaica has strengthened his resolve to continue fighting. Offering the opening comment, "I have never felt more at home than I do here in Jamaica," King situates his transnational affiliation with Jamaica as a corrective to the "great deal of humiliation to my life and the life of the people with whom I work." These comments not only reflect King's obvious attempts to establish solidarity with his Jamaican audience but also suggest that his time in Jamaica offered some measure of freedom from the intense harassment he was currently being subjected to by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI. David Garrow, referring to wiretapped conversations of King's from earlier in 1965, points out that this period was marked by King's understanding that he was at risk: "[Elements of the FBI] are out to break me. . . . They are out to get me, harass me, break my spirit."<sup>43</sup> This context provides an important framework for listening to King's speech as he explains his belief in a politics of "maladjustment" that, while not moving him outside of the registers of acceptability marking the Jamaican state, does begin to challenge its calibration of racial consciousness and liberal political discourse:

I must honestly say to you that I never intend to adjust myself to segregation and racial discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to religious bigotry. I never intend to become adjusted to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give to the few. I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism, and the self-defeating effects of physical violence. . . .

Through such maladjustment we will be able to emerge from the deep and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man and to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.<sup>44</sup>

King's invocation of *maladjustment* responds to the subjection inscribed within practices of progress, development, and liberal governance, supplanting a more simplistic view of racial progress with the view that radical social transformation will only occur when those resisting oppression are willing to step outside of recognizable structures of containment—that is, ideas

42 Emperor Haile Selassie's visit to Jamaica in April 1966 presents another angle to my consideration of prophecy, black consciousness, and the politics of respectability that deserves more attention in a separate study. Selassie's visit resonates most strongly through the convergence of his importance as Messiah to many within the Rastafari movement, his status as a Pan-African resistance figure who turned back the Italian attempts to conquer Ethiopia, and his profile as a royal head of state invested in charting ideas of progressive national development. Untangling these ideological and symbolic aspects of Selassie's diasporic meaning, his visit to Jamaica, and his centrality to Rastafari is a separate yet related project I am in the process of developing.

43 Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 374. For more on the FBI COINTELPRO efforts against King, see Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960–1972* (New York: Free Press, 1989). For a broader view of the entirety of the US government's campaign against King, including research into possible involvement in his assassination, see William Pepper, *An Act of State: The Execution of Martin Luther King* (New York: Verso, 2003).

44 "King: I Feel Like a Human Being Here in Jamaica," *Gleaner*, 21 June 1965.

of the sociopolitical that quietly allow for the continuity and maintenance of repression within governmental and public spheres. While King's refusal to accommodate himself to these forms of dehumanization resonates with Rastafari critiques of Jamaican political rationality, his speech nonetheless maintains a level of commitment to messianic, Enlightenment-inflected conceptions of historical time through pointing to the prophet Amos, Thomas Jefferson, and Jesus Christ as historical models for his sense of maladjustment. This peculiar tonality of King's words vacillates between a longing for the disruption of political rationality and the sense of familiarity underlying these figures and the liberal narratives of equality and justice that they represent.

On the day following his speech in the National Stadium, King visited the grave of Marcus Garvey to lay a wreath and to speak to Garvey's historical legacy as "the first man of colour in the history of the United States to lead and develop a mass movement." He then points to the revolving nature of Garvey's legacy, telling the crowd of two thousand, "You gave Marcus Garvey to the United States . . . and he gave to the millions of Negroes in the United States a sense of personhood, a sense of manhood, a sense of somebodiness." The connection between King and Garvey is clearly evident through their similar deployments of racial struggle and Christian respectability, as King speaks to Garvey's "conviction that all God's children are significant . . . that God's black children are just as significant as his white children."<sup>45</sup> Despite King's attention to this shared narrative line with Garvey, the contrasting nature of Garvey's centrality to Rastafari consciousness also represents a rejection of Christian doctrine in its rearticulation of biblical scripture as an epistemological grounding for anticolonial black struggle in Jamaica and globally. In this sense, King's words should be heard within and against what Robert Hill terms the *countercultural black idiom* of Dread, as his representation as a respectable agent of change is idealized by the newly imagined nation yet obviates the deeper possibilities of his maladjustment's being put in dialogue with the subaltern black consciousness of Rastafari.<sup>46</sup>

This absence of convergence creates an ideological field with King's teleologically inflected ideas of racial progress positioned at one end and Peter Tosh's later challenge to these suppositions at the other. Bringing King and Tosh into some proximity illustrates how their voices and forces of expression point to the difficulty of diagnosing what Tosh repeatedly refers to as a *shitstem* without being reinscribed within it. I invoke Peter Tosh's linguistic/epistemological/aesthetic construction of the shitstem purposefully here, as it begins to illustrate the creaking and wringing of words into their fullness of political possibility through his attempt to project a kind of visceral, audible unpalatability, rubbing against the fibers of

45 "Garvey First to Give Negroes Sense of Dignity—King," *Gleaner*, 23 June 1965.

46 See Robert A. Hill, "From *New World* to *Abeng*: George Beckford and the Horn of Black Power in Jamaica, 1968–1970," *Small Axe*, no. 24 (October 2007): 1–2. Max Romeo attempts to address this gap in black historical memory in the opening lines of his 1977 song "Martin Luther King": "Everyone speaks of Marcus Garvey / No one remember Martin Luther King / They talk about Jose Marti / No one remember Martin Luther King / All over the world he travel spreading the word of Freedom / Taking other abuses working for Jah Jah Kingdom / They talk about Captain Morgan / No one remember Martin Luther King" (*Reconstruction*, 1978, ILPS 9503).

sentimental respectability so crucial to the texture of the emerging Jamaican state and oriented against forms of political rationality more broadly.<sup>47</sup> Such a movement between King and Tosh opens sonic and ideological space in order to briefly consider an overlapping yet differently attuned political stance and sense of political futurity that is offered by Peter Tosh. Tosh's analyses of Jamaican and global political culture, particularly his words delivered at the One Love Peace Concert in 1978, represent a different kind of graduation speech for the Jamaican populace—one that recenters an awareness of the long history of colonialism as a continuous project uninterrupted by independence and clearly manifested through the political violence, inequality, and presence of a militarized police-state marking the context of the 1970s. Most important, Tosh's perspective offers an analytical orientation that still lingers heavily in the historical and political atmosphere of the Jamaican present.

### III.

The critical point of transition between these historical moments—1968 and 1969, the years representing the height of Black Power in Jamaica—is an important and telling hinge that partially connects the visit of King to the performance of Tosh, as it is the point in which the early attempts to define a sense of Jamaican political black consciousness within the confines of neocolonialism are profoundly disrupted by the entrance of Black Power ideology as a viable structure of political expression in the Jamaican public sphere. This era is often marked by the 16 October 1968 “Rodney Riots,” an eruption of black consciousness among students at the University of the West Indies protesting the banning of the radical Guyanese historian Walter Rodney from returning to Jamaica to resume his teaching duties in the UWI history department after attending the Congress of Black Writers in Montreal. The government's decision to ban Rodney from Jamaica was met with intense resistance from a significant and vocal segment of university students, who first closed down the campus and ultimately joined with other protestors throughout Kingston, leading to a series of incidents pitting the Jamaican Defense Forces against the protestors. The political conflagration resulted in two deaths and extensive property damage throughout the city, but perhaps its deepest meaning was as a high point in the convergence of academic left intellectualism with black radicalism, pushing forward the sentiments regarding political identity in early post-independence Jamaica as primarily a matter to be determined through discourses of socialism and labor activism into a new space in which black consciousness was central to such ideas.<sup>48</sup> The heightened visibility of Black Power in Jamaica drastically altered the sociopolitical landscape of the nation, as intellectual activity was increasingly targeted by the government as subversive, Rastafari became seen as

47 My phrase *wringing of words* is taken from the title of Nathaniel Mackey's indispensable essay on the sonic and orthographic permutations of Kamau Brathwaite's poetry. See Nathaniel Mackey, “Wringing the Word,” in *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 40–58.

48 For more details on the Rodney Riots and the lasting historical implications of the conflict, see Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica*; and Bogues, “Black Power, Decolonization, and Caribbean Politics,” *boundary 2* 36, no. 1 (2009): 127–47.

a viable means of political expression for a broadening segment of society, and black radical activity outside of Jamaica was now viewed as threatening postcolonial governance. As a stage in the broader framework of Jamaican black consciousness, the ideological movement between disparate and intersecting figures such as King, Rodney, and (subsequently) Tosh complicates and enriches conceptualizations of transnational black radical thoughts moving across the Americas during this historical period.

Jamaica in the late 1970s had a much different cultural and political climate than during the late-1960s Black Power era, as can be grasped through the way that King's legacy is reinvented in 1977 through the visit of the US ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young. Given Young's role as a close advisor to King through most of the 1960s, and his centrality to the mainstream US civil rights movement, he had a very complicated presence as an emissary of President Jimmy Carter sent to "coax Jamaica back into the Western camp" by encouraging Prime Minister Michael Manley to reconsider the package of loans and economic arrangements being offered by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>49</sup> A look at the reporting of Young's visits to Jamaica during this period frames his advice to Manley that reconsidering the IMF package "was the safer path to take, rather than the more risky venture of self-reliance," alongside his claims to feeling transnational racial affiliation with Jamaica.<sup>50</sup> In a *New York Times* account of Young's trip to Jamaica in August of 1977, we can hear echoes of King's earlier thoughts upon visiting the new nation, as Young proclaims, "I always feel wonderful visiting Jamaica. . . . I consider myself Jamaican."<sup>51</sup> In the altered political economy of Jamaica defined much less by the promise of independence and instead dominated by an increasing sense of US neocolonialism, Young's attempt to deploy his blackness transnationally is read by the Worker's Liberation League in Jamaica as representing a "black face card." John Hearne, writing in a *Gleaner* column about Young's visit, takes issue with the Worker's Liberation League's analysis of Young as missing the larger point of Young's transnational movement, suggesting far more meaningful and ominous overtones for Jamaica: "He was plainly an American presence, doing his own thing inside our waters as a nuclear submarine. He was sleek, expensive, and displaced a lot more tonnage than you would imagine simply by looking at him, and he was loaded with more force than I care to think about."<sup>52</sup> The ominous quality of the times signified by Young's representation of US hemispheric and global power, and the dire economic choice that Manley was being presented with by Young, speaks to the new modes of extraction and subjection that were defining Jamaican political culture through the late 1970s transitions between social democratic

49 Anthony J. Payne, *Politics in Jamaica* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 72. See also Kari Levitt, *Reclaiming Development: Independent Thought and the Caribbean Community* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005). For more on the issue of CIA destabilization, see "The Destabilization Question," in Payne, *Politics in Jamaica*, 49–58, as well as references he cites.

50 Levitt, *Reclaiming Development*, 246.

51 Kathleen Teltsch, "Andrew Young Opens Jaunty Jamaican Visit," *New York Times*, 6 August 1977, 2.

52 John Hearne, "The Soft Voice, the Big Stick," *Gleaner*, 11 August 1977.

and neoliberal policies.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the particular dynamics of Young's diplomacy represent a manifestation of hemispheric neocolonialism that becomes a focal point within Peter Tosh's particular articulation of black radical thought.

Throughout the 1970s, US hemispheric power provided but one of the backdrops to the economic destabilization that contributed to armed conflict between the ruling People's National Party (PNP), and the opposition Jamaica Labor Party (JLP).<sup>54</sup> Obika Gray points out that Jamaican political culture during the decade reflected a mode of "predation politics" in which the state offered the gesture of constitutional democratic freedoms, while relegating power for the working and lower classes to the cultural rather than political spheres, "forc[ing] them to accept cultural forms of social power in exchange for their surrender of democratic citizenship rights."<sup>55</sup> This method of political performance and its broader manipulation of symbols of lower-class and Afro-Jamaican identity, Gray points out, is ultimately adopted by the "light-skinned middle class party leaders" Michael Manley and Edward Seaga, who "exhibited street-based moralities . . . copied the vernacular culture of the working and the unemployed lower class supporters and mimicked the 'nation language' of downtrodden groups."<sup>56</sup> These social conditions set the context for the One Love Peace Concert on 22 April 1978, and given the particular insights provided by Gray's perspective on the contours of the political sphere during the period, listening to Peter Tosh's sonic intervention into Jamaican political culture at the concert reveals the dissonance between Manley and Seaga's idealization of resistance among the Jamaican dispossessed, and the recognition of violent and nonviolent forms of governmental coercion that delimit the possibilities for political expression among the lower classes. In what follows, I focus on the meaning of Peter Tosh's intervention into and dismissal of the Jamaican political theater and broader formations of global and hemispheric capitalism as avenues of progress or transformation.

The concert was envisioned both as an event to commemorate the twelfth anniversary of Emperor Haile Selassie's visit to Jamaica and as an attempt to quell the explosions of political violence between the PNP and the JLP. The idea for the concert took shape when two jailed leaders of armed groups supporting the opposing parties, Claudie Massop (JLP) and Bucky Marshall (PNP), publicly committed to stopping the violence. Upon both of their releases by January 1978, they had translated this commitment into an organized effort to bring together

53 There is a wealth of writing on this moment in Jamaican political and economic ideological contestation. See especially Carl Stone, "Socialist to Capitalist Management," in *Class, State, and Democracy in Jamaica* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 150–83. Stone presents a thorough examination of Jamaica's inability to sustain "an alternate development path beyond traditional neocolonial policies" (151) even during the attempts of Michael Manley in the 1970s to institute socialist economic strategies within the emerging Jamaican state. Stone's analysis is particularly thorough in the way he situates the pushes and pulls in Jamaican political economy during this period within the broader global economic debates between free market, deregulatory, neoliberal economic development strategies and leftist attempts to expand state control and regulation of economic spheres. For more on these global contestations over economic ideology in the 1970s, see David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006).

54 On US hemispheric imperialism, see, for example, the prescient essay by Claudia Jones, "American Imperialism and the British West Indies," *Political Affairs* (April 1958): 9–18.

55 Obika Gray, "Predation Politics and the Political Impasse in Jamaica," *Small Axe*, no. 13 (March 2003): 81.

56 *Ibid.*, 78.

Jamaica's top musicians for a benefit on behalf of constituencies from both factions and, more important, to issue a call for peace in the face of looming internecine war. By 1978, Peter Tosh was in the early years of his solo career after leaving the Wailers in 1973 and releasing the albums *Legalize It* in 1976 and *Equal Rights* in 1977. Already a committed political activist,<sup>57</sup> Tosh, in launching a solo career, only emphasized this trajectory of his work, merging his militant lyrical output with the consummate musicianship of his new backing band, Word, Sound, and Power, which included Sly Dunbar on drums and Robbie Shakespeare on bass. Uncompromising in his intolerance of the Jamaican state's persecution of the poor and its subservience to US and European imperialism, Tosh was also committed to constantly heightening his international political critique of apartheid.<sup>58</sup> Clearly seen as a threat to the Jamaican state, he was beaten and harassed by the police.<sup>59</sup> The political context of the concert and the composition of the audience suggest one reason why Tosh used his set as a platform for political critique and education: "The gates had opened at two o' clock and by five the crowd numbered thirty two thousand. Ticket prices had been kept deliberately low so that even the poorest members of society would not be excluded."<sup>60</sup> One of the first proclamations that Tosh makes is a brief speech invoking the concept of *word, sound, power*—the Rastafari idea of the convergence of mental, sonic, and spiritual forces of transformation, truth, and resistance:

It's word, sound, and power that break down the barriers of oppression and drive away transgression and rule equality. Well right now you have a system or a shitstem, what a gwaan inna this country here for a long ages of time. Four hundred years and the same bucky massa business and black inferiority and brown superiority and white superiority rule this likkle black country here for a long time. Well I and I come with earthquake, lightning, and thunder to break down these barriers of oppression, drive away transgression and rule equality between humble black people.<sup>61</sup>

What cannot be heard in this scriptural rendering of Tosh's voice is its projection through the echo-effect of the microphone, as it layers his critique of a neocolonial present within

57 In 1968 Tosh was an active participant in the Rodney Riots and had been jailed for protesting the Ian Smith apartheid regime ruling Rhodesia. See Roger Steffens, "The Prophetic Perplexities of Peter Tosh," *The Ultimate Peter Tosh Experience* booklet, 9; Kevin O'Brien Chang and Wayne Chen, *Reggae Routes* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 100.

58 The fight against apartheid in South Africa was a crucial front for Tosh in the struggle against global white supremacy. One year prior to the One Love Peace Concert, Tosh had released the critically acclaimed album *Equal Rights*, which included the anti-apartheid anthem "Apartheid." We can also hear Tosh remind the audience at the peace concert of the fact that 1978 is anti-apartheid year. Tosh has this to say about the existential ties of memory and experience that bind him as a displaced African: "It was like I was born in South Africa. . . . In as much as I was taught that when you're white, you're perfectly right, when you're brown, you can stick around, but if you're black, stay in the back." *Stepping Razor Red X*, DVD, dir. Nicholas Campbell (1992; Video Service Canada, 2002). For more on Tosh's broader diasporic, black internationalist sensibility, hear and read the lyrics to his track "African" from *Equal Rights*.

59 The beatings Tosh suffered at the hands of the police are somewhat legendary. Several months after the One Love Peace Concert, Tosh was left for dead after a serious beating by eight to ten policemen left him with a fractured skull. In a later interview included in *Stepping Razor Red X*, Tosh contends that the beating was a result of his outspokenness at the concert.

60 Liner notes, Peter Tosh, *Talking Revolution: Live at the One Love Peace Concert 1978*, compact disc, Pressure Sounds 48, 2005.

61 Tosh, *Talking Revolution*. For more thoughts on the prophetic power of *word, sound, power*, and Rastafari ideas of truth and ideological engagement that emerge from this conceptualization, see Joseph Owens, *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica* (Kingston: Sangster, 1976), 178–82.

the reverberations of his apocalyptic tonality.<sup>62</sup> Forging connections between sound and resistance, Tosh challenges his listeners to aurally confront the deeper, lingering recesses of coloniality through an orientation toward *maladjustment*—to reintroduce King’s term—and the prophetic that remains indigestible to the Jamaican political elite. Reflecting on Tosh’s belief that the projection of certain words, such as the Jamaican epithet *bombo-claat*, could disrupt the smooth ordering of socioeconomic dispossession. Herbie Miller writes: “In Tosh’s world of reasoning, these words were so powerful that the enslavers under their colonial ‘shitstem’ banned them along with anything else they considered threatening to their control of power.”<sup>63</sup> Vincent Brown, in his study of the social and cultural meaning of death among enslaved Africans in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Jamaica, makes the point that song was an early weapon for the enslaved Africans, who often employed it as a mode of intimidation, irreverently singing and chanting lyrical testaments to the fragility of white life and the immanence of death in Jamaica, “offering a rejection of the symbolic order that facilitated social control in slave societies.”<sup>64</sup> Although not the central focus of Brown’s account, his framing of song allows for an appreciation of its ability to assert metaphysical and supernatural challenges to colonial ideas of order, and of its potential to resituate social and political meaning from an exclusively material realm, to alternate spaces of the haunted and the spiritual. Such a convergence of political imagination and sound arises in Tosh’s performance as his attention to the style, form, and projection of address becomes indispensable for conveying the ideological weight of his dismissal of both domestic and international regimes of order and subjection.

Tosh’s ability to underline his claims through a specific phonic appeal is in part facilitated through the sound of his band’s interweaving of roots reggae sound with distinct elements of African American blues and rock—exemplified particularly by Tosh’s and guitarist Al Anderson’s at times Hendrixian riffs, elongated solos, and use of the wa-wa. Tosh’s own instrumental sound of musical eclecticism, often heard in his rough-hewn scratch guitar licks, emphasizes his onstage persona of uncompromising, often harshly worded political critique. On this subject, Miller points out that Tosh is notable among reggae greats in his ability to push forward a deep roots sound, and is unparalleled in recognizing “the fine line between authenticity and commerciality” as a point from which transformative sound might emanate: “He believed he owned the authority to make things happen by the utterance of certain lyrical sound.”<sup>65</sup> As I have mentioned above, for Tosh, technologies of amplification and modulation are vital tools, allowing his voice to be heard during the One Love Peace Concert through his use of echo and reverb effects, emphasizing a haunting quality to his spoken words, and granting them a level of authority through lingering, resonating cuts of sound that persist beyond their

62 By *apocalyptic tonality* I am referring to Tosh’s investment in deliberately reworking biblical language and points of reference to refashion and redeploy Rastafari-inflected ideas of prophetic political judgment.

63 Herbie Miller, “Peter Tosh: The Mystic Man,” booklet in *The Ultimate Peter Tosh Experience*, 2 DVDs and 1 compact disc (Shanachie, 2009), 22.

64 Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 4.

65 Herbie Miller, interview by author, Kingston, Jamaica, 13 May 2009.

utterance. This utilization of a dub aesthetic<sup>66</sup> (not as a reflection of dub musical style per se but as a phenomenological orientation toward time and sound) becomes an equalizer of sorts that increases his stature as political commentator beyond the pale of the Jamaican political arena. Tosh, in a sense mapping the sentiments of fellow Jamaican sufferers, claims, “I am not a politician, but I suffer the consequences.”<sup>67</sup>

Speaking to the relative impotence of the Jamaican government and its tenuous nature in the face of much more powerful global forces, Tosh warns, “Well right now Jamaica been living under this colonial imperialistic situation for a long time. Seen? Where irrespective of what is going on now and what government in power, the government have to know that you have a whole lot of evil forces to fight who don’t like to see nothing progressive, so learn that. And the devil’s a dangerous guy.” In a scathing, lengthy diatribe locating the predatory qualities of Jamaican statecraft within a genealogy of piracy and colonialism. Tosh speaks to the police brutality and internecine political warfare of the present as interwoven with the logics of power established by Henry Morgan, Francis Drake, and Christopher Columbus: “Cause when a put dem in reading book and give us all observation that we must look up and live the life and principle of pirates, so the youth dem know fi fire dem guns like Henry Morgan same way.” Within a series of statements offered between songs, Tosh claims that there are limitations to the scope of the proceedings, as they hinge upon a notion of *peace* that is only aimed at satisfying the structures of power already in place by encouraging “black people to come together and forget the destructive element between I and I that segregate I and I,” rather than challenging the neocolonial and neoliberal foundations of Jamaican political economy. In this class hierarchy, upheld between the “upper miggie, miggie miggie, and lower miggie,” Tosh makes clear from where his perspective emerges: “I and I who is the poor and the underprivileged and the sufferer and the ghetto happen to be in the lower miggie class.” Tosh’s interwoven critiques of domestic governmentality and globalized economic neocolonialism reflect his position as sufferer and are clearly elaborated during the set when he addresses Prime Minister Michael Manley and opposition leader Edward Seaga. At one point, he elaborates upon his historical treatise on New World piracy, stating to the politicians and those assembled that pirates cannot be allowed to continue to “rob up the resources of the country, you know. Seen? Because that is what them been doing long, long, bloodbath of times.”<sup>68</sup> For Tosh, the devilry of piracy impacts the country most specifically in a lack of economic independence that has intense global and local implications. Refuting the dominant ideology of IMF-backed neoliberal globalization, he implores the audience to “learn” and grasp the fact that Jamaica could feed itself and could be freed of many shackles of imperialism by harnessing its natural

66 There is of course much more to contemplate regarding the sonic innovations and explorations of diasporic consciousness through the phenomenology of dub music. See, for example, Michael Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007); Dick Hebdige, *Cut and Mix: Culture, Identity, and Caribbean Music* (London: Methuen, 1987); and Phillip Maysles, “Dubbing the Nation,” *Small Axe*, no. 11 (March 2002): 91–111.

67 Tosh, *Talking Revolution*.

68 *Ibid.*

resources. In this way Tosh unravels another link in the chain of political meaning regarding the operations of Jamaican regimes of order and discipline, as he denounces the view of ganja as a commodity to be policed rather than a resource to be harnessed for the benefit of the national economy.<sup>69</sup> The presence of the plant as a sacramental herb within Rastafari practice is also central to Tosh's analysis of Jamaican political economy. His commitment to the legalization and freeing up of ganja as a natural resource, however, also represents a threshold of political inaudibility, a means through which the Jamaican political and cultural elite may dismiss Tosh as representing a perspective outside of rational political thought. This tension begins to be evidenced in the audio of the concert during one of Tosh's speeches, as he is addressing ganja as one of the island's most precious natural resources, and in the middle of a statement lashes out at audience members who seem to miss the gravity of his point, with the harshly intoned reminder, "This is not joke business you know," followed by an elaboration of his insight linking the Jamaican state's criminalization of ganja back to the legacy of piracy and economic dispossession as "just a shitstem they lay down to belittle the poor."<sup>70</sup>

In distinct ways, the languages of political affect invoked by Tosh remain unmapped within current genealogies of radical and prophetic black thought. There are registers he accesses and holds as central to political discourse that not only challenge but in many ways obviate a sense of the political through a privileging of rupture over recognizable redress. Carl Stone characterizes Tosh's music and distinctive sound as weapons that "mystify the white man, and blew his mind."<sup>71</sup> This transgressive orientation is emphasized by Tosh when, rather than attempting to get the leaders of the dueling political parties, Manley and Seaga, to join hands onstage as Bob Marley would do later in the show, Tosh rebukes them for upholding a legal system unfairly weighted against the most economically marginalized of the people and for their willingness to accept a hemispheric political order based upon the neoliberal economic hegemony of the United States and International Monetary Fund. In fact, as Herbie Miller points out, Marley's subsequent joining of Manley and Seaga might indeed have been an attempt to repair the breach created earlier by Tosh's critique of Jamaican political leadership and the lack of commitment to advancing the causes of those most in need.<sup>72</sup>

Much if not virtually all of Tosh's political orientation emanates from his engagement with Rastafari as both cosmology and lived practice. The space Rastafari occupies in Jamaican

69 Relatively little has been written on the intersection of ganja and post-independence Jamaican state formation. Horace Campbell has, however, collected several important facts and perspectives on the issue. See Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1987). On the topic of the use of anti-ganja laws as modes of social control in Jamaica, Campbell quotes Dr. Lambos Comitas: "Outlawing a popular custom is also a very convenient control device. The ganja legislation in Jamaica . . . can be used by the elite to control the lower classes with no loss in world opinion" (107). Furthermore, Campbell suggests the linkages between this form of social control in 1970s Jamaica and the drastic expansion of US antinarcotics enforcement efforts against Jamaican ganja farmers with the cooperation of the Manley government during the mid-1970s, an operation fittingly named (in terms of Tosh's points of analysis on the topic) Operation Buccaneer (112–15).

70 Ibid.

71 Carl Stone, quoted in *Stepping Razor Red X*.

72 Miller, interview. He went on to say, "What Bob did was what Martin Luther King would have done. What Peter did was what Malcolm X would have done. It was 'Message to the Grassroots' versus 'I Have a Dream.'"

society during the 1970s offers a socioeconomic window into the deepest levels of suffering and alienation. Tosh characterizes this fear and *downpression* of Rastafari as follows: “The government was totally against the Rastaman’s presence. The society had taught the people to hate, to ignore the Rastaman.”<sup>73</sup> As an Afro-diasporic remapping of Pan-African affiliation that critically resurrects blackness from abjection to a source of prophetic, global historical judgment, Rastafari practice proposes a fusion of spirituality and politics that resists the linearity of Christian dogma and centers itself on “a critique of the very foundations of capitalist/imperialist society and culture.” Building on the work of Anthony Bogues, we must view Tosh’s intervention here as one that offers a vision of “dread history” as a subaltern space of engagement with the political that “does not attempt to explain radical action from below solely in the terms of elite political and historical languages of the times.”<sup>74</sup> This level of the prophetic in Tosh is enigmatic, ethereal, and yet quite immediate. For Tosh, prophecy is not simply a linear continuation of the efforts of early Rastafari figures such as Leonard Howell, who clearly anticipate Tosh’s ability to step outside of respectable social norms through violent speech acts and a general disregard for decorum. Added to this rich historical tradition, Tosh forces a recognition of the otherworldly, mystical roots of Rastafari (often dismissed by more Judeo-Christian inflected orthodoxies of interpretation within the movement) by maintaining a focus on what Miller terms “the submerged cultural underpinnings to which [he] was privy,” an epistemological grounding “linking creolized African magic rituals and contemporary life issues,” and reflecting his “keen conviction that traditional spiritual knowledge assisted in the struggle for freedom.”<sup>75</sup>

King and Tosh, then, share a similar envisioning of what a political horizon might include, as they both understand the relative continuity of historical narratives that underwrite black subjection; yet their respective understandings of the routes through which circuits of political affinity might be conducted could not be more starkly different. The difference hinges on the places of redemptive logic in their political philosophies: King proposes a utopian goal emerging through the prospect of redress being achieved from within the structure of a liberal or neoliberal state, whereas Tosh’s idea of something like utopia might never be recognized teleologically as an achieved state but rather as a hermeneutic and experiential quest to realize what Rastafari have termed “the half that has never been told,”<sup>76</sup> a rethinking of history and resistance as both rupture and suture. To this end, a structure of feeling emerges that works from a desire to create, in the words of the Frankfurt School theorist Herbert Marcuse, the “political manifestations of a new sensibility [to] indicate the depth of the rebellion, of the rupture with the continuum of repression . . . to see, hear, feel new things in a new way . . . with the dissolution of ordinary and orderly perception.”<sup>77</sup> Drawing from Kant’s third *Critique*,

73 Peter Tosh, *Stepping Razor Red X*.

74 Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets*, 184.

75 Miller, “Peter Tosh,” 20–21.

76 Bob Marley and the Wailers, “Get Up, Stand Up,” *Burnin’*, 1973, ILPS9256.

77 Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 36–37.

Marcuse's outlook is deeply shaped by his belief that the imagination has been underwritten within a sensory-political order that delimits the realm of freedom: "The order and organization of class society, which have shaped the sensibility and the reason of man, have also shaped the freedom of the imagination."<sup>78</sup> This sense of the orderly and the possibility of its disruption is where I started and where I will conclude. It begins to mark a boundary for expressions of racial politics, and furthermore, the way that aesthetics become enfolded within collective imaginations of race and nation.

Troubling these constructions of the political imagination and articulations of black diasporic identities is never a completed task. By conceptualizing elements of black internationalism and radical thought across time and space, and through the gaps and points of resonance between the voices of King and Tosh, we can begin to see how certain aesthetic predispositions become enfolded within collective imaginations of race, nation, and political discourse. These boundaries marking the aesthetics of black radical politics are also marked by another force that unfortunately presents a line moving between King and Tosh: the erasure of individuals whose existence becomes intolerable to the maintenance of political order. This silencing, be it articulated through the physical violence of assassinations or through the delimitation of what constitutes viable and acceptable political discourse, restricts the possibilities for dynamic elements of the political imagination to envision possibilities for social and political transformation.<sup>79</sup>

I want to close, then, by suggesting that this search for an aesthetic of transnational black radical critique between the United States and Jamaica represents a particular tactic or strategy of political awareness and a prophetic tradition of black radical knowledge production. Such production does not rely on a formation of modern political culture that may invoke silence or death as the punishment for transgressing its boundaries. This challenge emerges out of expressive and political forces that both converge and compete in their efforts to capture the imaginations of black subjects who are forming racial and national identifications during moments of profound political change. By placing these issues within a transnational, or black international, framework, we can better see the convergences and gaps in diasporic political identities and can situate these spaces as both troubling and productive opportunities for translating terms of political discourse across national histories. My purpose, then, is not to simply state that Rastafari and Tosh present possibilities less hegemonic than King's ideology but rather to begin charting the difficulty in narrating the geographic, ideological, and historical aspects of racial politics within and outside of the confines of respectability undergirding emerging and evolving racial states in the Americas.

78 Ibid., 29.

79 For more details, theories, and speculation regarding the murders of King and Tosh, see Pepper, *An Act of State*, and the film *Stepping Razor Red X*.

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