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# The Suppression of Leonard Howell in Late Colonial Jamaica, 1932-1954

D.A. Dunkley

Department of History & Archaeology  
University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston 7, Jamaica  
daive.dunkley@uwimona.edu.jm

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## Abstract

This article is about Leonard Percival Howell, the man who is widely regarded as the founder of the Rastafari movement, which started in Jamaica in 1932. The article focuses on the attempts to suppress Howell during the foundational phase of the Rastafari movement from 1932 to 1954. This was the period in which Howell began preaching the divinity of Haile Selassie I, who was crowned the emperor of Ethiopia in 1930. In 1937, Howell established the friendly organization known as the Ethiopian Salvation Society, and in 1940 started the first Rastafari community in the hills of the parish of St. Catherine, Jamaica. These and his other religio-political activities made Howell the target of one of the longest and most aggressive campaigns to suppress an anticolonial activist during the late colonial period in Jamaica. However, one of the main points of this article is that the attempts to suppress Howell, who was seen by the colonial government as seditious, implicated not just the colonial regime, but also a number of other opponents within the society. This article is an attempt to show that Howell's suppression was not exclusively a colonial endeavor, but a society-wide campaign to undermine his leadership in order to disband the Rastafari movement. Howell advocated an anticolonialism that was seen as too revolutionary by every participant in the campaign to suppress him and his movement, and particularly aggravating was the notion that a black monarch was the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and whose ascension signaled the start of black nationalism as a global liberation movement to end white rule over Africans and people of African descent.

## Keywords

Rastafarianism, colonialism, black nationalism, Ethiopia, millenarianism

## Introduction

In this article, I examine Leonard Percival Howell's foundational leadership of the Rastafari movement to show his contribution to black nationalism

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and by extension, his role in Jamaica's fight against colonialism.<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to focus on the attempts to suppress him by the colonial government, local press, traditional churches, labor leadership, and creole nationalism, as well as parts of the civilian population, including whites, coloreds, and blacks. The attempted suppression of Howell was an extensive campaign, which indicates the fear that Howell's message and activities might trigger the violent removal of British rule from colonial Jamaica. Howell and his lieutenant, Robert Hinds, spread the ideas of the Rastafari movement during its early phase, when it gained traction among the poorest group in the society, the peasantry. (Hinds, Joseph Hibbert, and Henry Archibald Dunkley later became leaders of their own groups.)<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, it wasn't the institutional opposition to Howell per se that catapulted him and the early Rastafari movement to the national stage; instead, antagonism toward Howell was couched in a resistance to his promotion of the divinity of Emperor Selassie I. Between 1932-1954, Howell preached the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia (who had been crowned in Addis Ababa in 1930), and established the first Rastafari community in Jamaica in the hills of St. Catherine's parish in 1940. In 1954, the police force of the partially creole nationalist government raided the Pinnacle encampment for the second time, hoping to end the popularity of Leonard Howell and the burgeoning Rastafari movement.

Howell's message was revolutionary. He advised the black people of colonial Jamaica that Emperor Selassie I was "the head over all man" and "the Supreme God"—advice or instructions that he repeated in his small book, *The Promised Key*, which was published in 1935 (Howell 1995:5). Howell delivered a message to African Jamaicans that was similar to the one that Marcus Garvey had enunciated after his own return to Jamaica in 1927. This was that Africans in every part of the global African diaspora should look east to Ethiopia for the crowning of a king who would lead them out of white domination. Garvey had abandoned this idea in 1937

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks are due to Dr. Jahlan Niaah and Dr. Rachel Moseley-Wood, of the University of the West Indies, Mona, for their help with this article, and also to the anonymous reviewers, who pointed out where other revisions were needed. I also wish to thank Monty Howell, Sister Hodesh, and the Howellites, who introduced me to vital archival materials and consented to have me interview them for this article.

<sup>2</sup> To the best of my knowledge, I am not related to the Rastafari patriarch Henry Archibald Dunkley.

after Selassie fled to London to escape the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, which started in May 1936. In a famous editorial, Garvey condemned the Ethiopian emperor as a “coward.”<sup>3</sup> However, Howell never lost his faith in the emperor, and continued to advocate the millenarian perspective of his ascension in 1930 as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and the beginning of black liberation in Jamaica and around the world.

In recent years, the scholarship on Howell has seen a great deal of growth. This is a welcome change in light of the years of neglect, seen from the start of Rastafari studies in the work of the American anthropologist, George E. Simpson, who had not even mentioned Howell in his groundbreaking article (Simpson 1955:167-70). In the famous *Report on the Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica*, published in 1960, Howell was presented to the public mainly as a criminal, and as someone who was quite likely insane (Smith, Augier & Nettleford 1960:6, 8, 9). Leonard E. Barrett’s and Joseph Owens’ studies in the 1960s and 1970s spread knowledge of the Rastafari movement. Howell was mentioned as one of the founders of the movement in these studies, but he was not examined in great detail, and the attempts to suppress him were not given the deserved attention. However, there is at present a great deal more on Howell in terms of scholarship. The change started with Robert Hill’s gripping article, which was published in 1981, or in the same year that Howell died (Hill 1981:30-71).<sup>4</sup> This was followed in the 1980s and 1990s by studies by Michael Hoenisch, Barry Chevannes, Frank Jan van Dijk, and William David Spencer, and in the first decade of this century by H el ene Lee and Charles Price.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Marcus Garvey, The Failure of Haile Selassie as Emperor, *Black Man*, March-April 1937.

<sup>4</sup> A shorter version of this seminal article was republished in *Jamaica Journal* (1983). The original article is now available as a short monograph, *Dread History: Leonard P. Howell and Millenarian Visions in the Early Rastafarian Religion* (2001).

<sup>5</sup> Hoenisch 1988:432-49; Chevannes 1994:121-24; Dijk 1995:67-101; Spencer 1998:361-89; Lee 2003; Price 2009:58-64. Chevannes mentions Howell throughout his study, but provides a brief biography of him in the pages to which I refer in the in-text citation. Lee’s book is a biography of Howell, and in fact the first full-length work on Howell. Price’s book, like Chevannes’ earlier work, also mentions Howell throughout, but without a biographical section like Chevannes provided. Nevertheless, Price goes into some amount of detail about Howell’s arrest and trial for sedition in 1934, which can be found in the pages that I refer to in the in-text citation.

My departure from this work is my focus on the attempts to suppress Howell, attempts which were largely unsuccessful, given both the worldwide success of Rastafarianism and Jamaican independence. Despite Lee's argument, Howell did not become wary or disheartened because of the attempts that were made to bring about his suppression (Lee 2003:218). After suffering for years on behalf of the Rastafari movement, it was no longer necessary for Howell to occupy the national spotlight. Other leaders were in place to carry on the work that Howell had started. Claudius Henry, for example, had established an encampment of his own in the hills of St. Andrew's parish in 1959, and the revisionist Dr. Vernon Carrington, also known as Prophet Gad, founded the 12 Tribes Mansion in 1968, which managed to gain adherents from among the brown-skinned or colored middle class of Jamaica.

After the 1954 police incursion at Pinnacle, Howell decided to play a secondary role, leaving the movement in the hands of the other leaders. They began to modify the early doctrine of Howell and to broaden the leadership provided by Hinds, Hibbert, Dunkley, and Altamont Reid. Meanwhile, reports in the *Daily Gleaner*, which had remained the most widely circulated newspaper in colonial Jamaica, showed that Howell continued to be harangued by the government and its police force, and by members of the civilian population after 1954.

There were reports that Howell was attacked more than once at Pinnacle due to his unwavering stance on the cultivation of marijuana in the community, and of course its use as a sacrament by members of the Rastafari movement.<sup>6</sup> The police returned to Pinnacle several times following the second raid in 1954 on ganja eradication expeditions, and to remove any remaining followers of Howell who were still residing in the community. These raids even took place during the postcolonial period of the 1970s under Michael Manley's government, which had embraced an Afrocentric policy in its promotion of Jamaica's cultural identity, one that drew from the philosophy of the Rastafari movement. In essence, Manley adopted the black nationalism of Rastafari as a way to gain widespread support from the island's black majority for his democratic socialist ideology (Birthwright 2011:264-70). Because of this, Howell could not have withdrawn himself

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<sup>6</sup> Gunmen Terrorize Rastas Demanding "the Weed". *Daily Gleaner*, 23 May 1979, p. 1.

fully from the spotlight as one of the founders of Rastafari, even if this was what he might have wanted to do.

I am also particularly concerned about Charles Price's *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica*, in which the author argues that Howell was thrust into the "national spotlight" by the "Government's attempts to quash the Rastafari" during the period of British colonial rule, and suggests that the publicity that Rastafari got from these attempts to suppress the movement was one of the "unintended consequences" of the campaign, or "by reporting on Howell and the Rastafari and by reprimanding Howell, the authorities' effort to disrupt the emergent Rastafari had the unanticipated consequence of amplifying their beliefs." In other words, the movement was able to undergo at least some of its growth within colonial Jamaica because measures were taken by the government to undermine and to end the leadership of foundational figures such as Howell (Price 2009:58, 60). This is an interesting thesis, but it is essentially untrue.

In fact, Howell was the one who made himself famous promoting the message of Rastafari and black nationalism, and the colonial regime, fearing popular independence and revolution, responded in one of the longest and most consistent campaigns against any opponent of colonialism in British Jamaica during the twentieth century. Howell remained the main target, even when it was his community of Pinnacle that was raided by the police, and his followers were sent to jail. He was already in the national spotlight when the campaign to suppress him began, and it was his popularity, and the potential that this had to grow even further, that threw his opposition into a state of frenzy. This rage and the eagerness to see him undermined continued unabated as Howell was in jail, and condemned to the lunatic asylum in Kingston. Even while locked away, his list of opponents grew, and calls were made by the groups from outside of the colonial government to take further and decisive action to bring about an effective end to Howell's activities and his influence.

Hoenisch (1988:433) suggested this view in his article, but his use of Foucault's framework to explain the attempts to suppress Howell as a colonial spectacle seems problematic because it suggests the anti-Howell campaign was an almost exclusively colonial undertaking, a perspective echoed by Van Dijk (1995:67). Howell's suppression, or the attempts made to suppress him, was not solely a colonial reaction. When the Dangerous Drugs Act was amended in 1948 to make marijuana illegal, for example, the government

at that moment was partially democratic (Haughton 2011:48). Power was shared between the colonizers and an elected House of Representatives. The latter was established under the Moyne Constitution of 1944, which had introduced Universal Adult Suffrage in that year, yet another major change in the direction of a democratic government, which was comprised of representatives of the general population.

### **Background, Leadership, and Context**

Howell is widely regarded as the first Rastafari leader, indicated for instance by H el ene Lee's *The First Rasta: Leonard Howell and the Rise of Rastafarianism*. Born in Red Hills, a district in the parish of Clarendon, Jamaica, on 16 June 1898, Howell was of African descent, and his dark complexion enhanced his leadership, but in the context of colonial Jamaica this also ensured that he would have to struggle to maintain this leadership position. The most prominent leaders by the end of the 1930s were the colored or brown-skinned creole nationalists, Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley, who were leaders of the labor movement. Howell became their adversary partly because he had put himself into the role of a leader of the poor and dispossessed majority of the island, and partly because of his dark-skinned complexion, which made him a more attractive option as a leader to the majority African population than his brown-skinned competitors at the head of the organized labor movement. It was clear that Howell shared the history of the black majority, namely the subjugation and dispossession under British slavery and British colonial rule. Creole nationalists rejected as too revolutionary Howell's black nationalism but they could not ignore him.

Howell's emergence in Clarendon took place at a time when many East Indians lived in parts of the parish. It is therefore no surprise that, as both Hill and Lee have pointed out, Howell made use of his exposure to Indian culture and the Hindi language. Evidence of this was seen in his decision to author *The Promised Key* under the pseudonym G.G. Maragh, which his followers later expanded to Ganganguru Maragh, and then contracted to Gong, names which Howell embraced and demonstrated the political influence of Indian culture (Hill 1983:24; Lee 2003:10, 17). Indians had arrived as indentured laborers, and were attracted to Howell by his opposition to colonialism; based on their experience in Jamaica, and through his

association with the Indians, he enhanced his anticolonial message. An estimated 37,000 Indians had arrived in Jamaica between 1843 and 1916, mostly to do the plantation work that the black population had done as slaves, and which many had abandoned after the emancipation of 1838. They were unwilling to accept the unfair wages, high rents for plantation housing, and the poor management practices of the planters. To make matters worse, most of these planters were also their former slaveholders (Scarano 1989:73; Shepherd 1996:245; Shepherd 2009:191).

Howell's use of Hindu 'visual' symbolism in the promotion of the Rastafari movement has received attention from scholars, and the most recent work on this has been done by the late art historian, Petrine Archer (Archer 2011:2). In addition, the ritual use of marijuana, and its association with Indians, which appear in the traditions of *sadhana* and *prasad*, has been examined in other studies (Mansingh & Mansingh 1985:96-115). By joining African and Indian traditions in his shaping of the Rastafari movement, Howell gave both groups representation and a sense of agency in colonial Jamaica. Together, they made Howell at least not objectionable to Indians, while his popularity among dark-skinned, African-identified Jamaicans grew. Unlike many of his black and brown followers, Howell was quite literate, not only writing *The Promised Key*, but starting a newspaper, *The People's Voice*, in the late 1930s, and as Chevannes has observed, Howell promoted himself as learned and well-read. Adopting a range of identities and titles including "scientist," medical doctor, philosopher, and prophet, Howell further intrigued his followers. Together, these identities enhanced his authority by giving his followers the impression that he was a man of many talents, therefore someone who was undoubtedly qualified to lead (Chevannes 1994:122, 124).

When he returned to Jamaica in 1932, Howell had been away since 1916, living as an immigrant like the Indians who came to Jamaica. He was only eighteen years old when he left the island. The story that Lee has told is that his father sent Howell away to protect him after the youngster witnessed the murder of Caroline Francis by Edward Rodney in the Red Hills area.<sup>7</sup> However, Monty Howell, the eldest of Leonard Howell's children,

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<sup>7</sup> The details about who was murdered, who did the murder, and the date are mine. See, Commutation of Capital Sentence, Reports in case of Edward Rodney for murder. Encloses copy Report of trial, notes, etc., Kings House, Jamaica, 14 December 1915, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) 57554, p. 80. See also Lee 2003:15.

has informed me that his father left Jamaica because both his parents, not only his father, felt that this was the best move after he had seen the murder.<sup>8</sup> This was a heinous act, and a condemnation of the colonial society of Jamaica, where law and order were supposed to prevail, and where young people, black, colored, white, or otherwise, should have been protected from such an event. Even for a mother, it was better to send her teenage son away than to have him live in this society. Howell's leaving was the beginning of his contempt for colonial Jamaica, which would only deepen and remain with him for life.

He later claimed that he ended up in Colón, Panama, which is quite possibly true, in light of the fact that this country, and particularly the sea port of Colón whose coast is on the Caribbean Sea, was the area that received around 31,041 Caribbean migrants, who went there in search of work as artisans and laborers, between 1904 and 1914 (O'Reggio 2006:41). The conditions in the area of Colón were harder than these migrants had expected. Many contracted diseases and many died, especially from malaria, yellow fever, pneumonia, and tuberculosis. Some were injured on the job, or died from job-related accidents, but because of wages which were as high as US \$2.00 per day if unskilled, and US \$5.00 if they were skilled workers, they continued to flock the area looking for work (James 1998:27). Howell said that he was among them but for 'only a short while' and survived the experience. He 'claimed' that he had "joined the Jamaican war contingent," and after which he was employed 'on an American merchant ship' owned by "the United Fruit Co." that was bound for "Canada" in 1918 (Hill 1983:28; Chang, O'Brien & Chen 1998:242). The documentation to prove all of this has not been found, but this was a fascinating story from which Howell's leadership benefitted. It gave his Rastafari followers the impression that he was a well-traveled individual, and that his exposure had given him much to teach them.

His arrival in New York's Harlem in 1924 is documented, which had opened a new chapter in his life that would also help to shape his ideas about his African identity. It was while in Harlem that he was in a position to interact closely with Garveyites, and where he joined Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). This period was intellectually

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<sup>8</sup> Author's interview with Monty Howell, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 11 June 2011.



stimulating for Howell. His arrival coincided with the Harlem Renaissance, the intellectual and cultural rebirth of African America, which had its heyday in the 1920s, shaped in part by the Garvey movement and by black novelists, poets, and musicians (Lee 2003:19-22; Martin 1986:174-75). Fellow Jamaicans Claude McKay and Marcus Garvey were also in Harlem at the time, and these outspoken figures espousing black nationalism may well have influenced Howell. It was during this eight-year period between his arrival in Harlem and return to Jamaica that Howell developed ideas about self-reliance within black communities. He became a construction worker, but then went into business and opened what Hill describes as a “tea room” “at 113 W. 136th Street in Harlem,” where he sold his Jamaican folk medicines (Hill 1983:30). Howell seems to have operated this tea room as a drugstore, where the medicines were sold as teas.<sup>9</sup>

Hill has also mentioned that Howell was influenced by books about black consciousness, which were published during the 1920s. One was published in New Jersey in the same year that Howell arrived in Harlem, the *Holy Piby*, or the *Black Man's Bible*, whose author was Shepherd Robert Athlyi Rogers, an Anguillan (Rogers 2000). Another that Hill mentions is *The Royal Parchment Scroll of Black Supremacy*, written by Rev. Fitz Balintine Pettersburgh, a Jamaican, and which was published in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1926 (Pettersburgh 2003). Howell integrated elements of these works into *The Promised Key*, but it is not fair to call this plagiarism, which Hill has done, and which other researchers have since then adopted (Hill 1983:27; Chang, O'Brien & Chen 1998:242). Howell simply made use of knowledge that his black audience might have known, and paid respect to the work of his predecessors by referring to “Black Supremacy,” which Pettersburgh had defined as “Our Triumph over white supremacy, Our SLAVE MASTER” (Howell 1995:4; Pettersburgh 2003:20). Howell had tried to ensure that his Rastafari followers saw the movement as not only a part of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, but also the legacy left by past freedom fighters, a struggle which had withstood the test of time, and which legitimized the Rastafari doctrine.

Hill's remarks about the Jamaican context into which Howell made his reappearance in 1932 are more useful. The island's black population had been preparing for a revolution, stoked by the black nationalism of

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<sup>9</sup> Author's interview with Sister Hodesh, Ensom City, St. Catherine, Jamaica, 30 July 2011.

Alexander Bedward and the Pan-Africanism of Garvey. Howell benefitted from the activism that was undertaken by both Bedward and Garvey. Bedward had started a branch of the Native Baptist Church in August Town, St. Andrew's parish, in the late nineteenth century, and his following by 1921 had grown to around 30,000 people (Satchell 2009:46-48). He was known for his anticolonial rhetoric, and was confined for the second time to the asylum in Kingston by the colonial government in 1921, and remained there until his death in 1930.<sup>10</sup> The colonial government would adopt the same strategy in its effort to suppress Howell. He, too, was committed to the Kingston asylum in 1938 and in 1960. The Howellites also claim that they believe their leader was sent to the asylum more than twice, but the documentation, again, has proven impossible to find.<sup>11</sup> Symbolically, Bedward's passing had occurred in the same year as the coronation event in Addis Ababa, which marked the ascension of the man whom the Rastafari saw as the messiah, fulfilling biblical prophecy that the son of God would return to save humankind. In other words, Bedward's death, which was a loss, was nonetheless marked by the emergence of a more powerful figure, who was a more compelling source of inspiration and hope for black people.

Garvey had also spoken of the crowning of an Ethiopian king as an event to be seen as a major sign of hope for blacks all over the world, inspiring the African majority of Jamaica to continue to believe in their eventual subversion of white supremacy. Garvey's return to Jamaica in 1927 was followed by the founding of his People's Political Party in 1929, which "had mass support," though the party did not win a seat in the island's elections of that year. However, this was only because its supporters were mainly poor black people, who did not qualify to vote. Undeterred, the branch of the UNIA in Kingston purchased Edelweiss Park at Cross Roads, near to the heart of the city, in 1929, and this "became a center for spiritual upliftment, self-improvement, political indoctrination, and purposeful recreation." Garvey also continued to promote Pan-Africanism through his writing, and his newspapers, the *Blackman* and *New Jamaican*, and his magazine, *Black Man*, kept black Jamaicans aware of issues concerning their liberation from white rule (Sherlock & Bennett 1993:308, 309). Upon his return, Howell was

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<sup>10</sup> The Bedward Episode. *The Gleaner*, 2 May 1921, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Author's interviews with Sister Hodesh, and with Alphanso Gallimore (born 1946), Gerald Lloyd Downer (born 1934), and Florence Stewart (born 1939), Tredegar Park, St. Catherine, Jamaica, 24 April 2011.

therefore able to benefit from preparations made by Garvey, as well as by Bedward.

### The Early Attacks on Howell

Anthony Bogues has established the link between the Rastafari and the radical African tradition, which had roots in Ethiopianism in the United States and the Back-to-Africa movement of the late nineteenth century, and both inspired by Ethiopia's defeat of Italy at Adowa in 1896 (Bogues 2003:154, 165; Gebrekidan 2005:39; Geiss 1974: 26-29). However, the suppression of Rastafari's leading figure began before he started preaching African radicalism, before his promotion of the subversive notion of the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. Howell's suppression began on the day after his return to Jamaica in 1932, when the island's biggest newspaper, the *Daily Gleaner*, published a notice of his arrival. This newspaper, to put the event into context, was established in 1834 by Jewish Jamaican brothers, Joshua and Jacob DeCordova (Cundall 1935:32, 63). Their father ran a coffee plantation in St. Catherine's parish, and in the same year as the abolition of slavery, his sons established the island's most widely read chronicle, which would in time provide daily accounts of the new society to be created in the aftermath of African freedom. The *Gleaner* was born at the moment that African freedom became a reality in British Jamaica. Writing later, John Bigelow would observe how greatly even coffee planters like the DeCordovas had suffered because of African freedom. Bigelow had reported in 1851 that the abolition of slavery had thrown 'out of cultivation over 200,000 acres' which were cultivated with coffee, and this meant in excess of 500 plantations "which, in 1832, required the labour of over 30,000 men"—enslaved people (Bigelow 1851:55). The DeCordovas remained at the helm of the *Gleaner* until long after Howell's return to Jamaica. Michael DeCordova was the last one to occupy the post of "managing director," which he demitted in 1948.<sup>12</sup>

Howell had returned on 17 November 1932 on a steamer, the *Sixaola*, which had sailed from New York to Kingston. The next day, the notice in the *Gleaner* claimed that Howell had been living in the United States

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<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Tortello, Printing in Jamaica. *A Jamaica Gleaner Feature*, 2 August 2004, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/pages/history/story0066.html> (accessed 17 December 2012).

illegally and was deported for overstaying his “time,” implying that he was a suspicious character and the colonial government should keep an eye on him.<sup>13</sup> At this point, his leadership of the Rastafari movement had not yet begun, but Howell was a good target for the *Gleaner* because he was a black man who possibly had broken the law in the United States, and was therefore expected to commit other crimes in Jamaica, his birthplace. The notice didn’t mention Garvey, though he returned under similar circumstances in 1927. In fact, none of the links that Howell had with the Garvey movement was mentioned, and perhaps this was due to the lack of information, but which for a newspaper, also meant the lack of interest. In any case, Howell, in due course, exposed the fact that he was the victim of stereotyping by the press, that the story in the *Gleaner* was a fabrication, that he was not deported because he was a degenerate or a career criminal. In almost no time, Howell became the founder of a religious movement, and one with strong social, political, and economic commitments. In fact, his leadership of the Rastafari movement would also be used by the press to embark upon a more aggressive campaign to suppress him, which began after his transformation into a leader of Jamaica’s black people. This same leadership role into which Howell had put himself was also responsible for the investigation that the police conducted into his past in 1936, an inquiry that uncovered that he had returned to Jamaica in exchange for his release from prison, but that he had been convicted of grand larceny, which had served as a way to undermine his career as a businessman, and had spent eighteen months in jail out of a sentence that was longer, based on the kind of charge that he had faced in court.<sup>14</sup> Where he was jailed was not revealed in the police report, but more than likely, he was imprisoned somewhere in or close to New York City, where he was living, running his tea room, and where he had embarked for Jamaica in November 1932. The point is also that by the time the Jamaican constabulary force came around to investigating Howell’s past, he was already in jail on the island for “sedition” along with his assistant, Robert Hinds.

This conviction came two years into Howell’s leadership of the Rastafari movement. In essence, what Howell did, which landed him in jail for

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<sup>13</sup> Sixaola in Yesterday from New York with Mails and Passengers. *Daily Gleaner*, 18 November 1932, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Acting Inspector General to Private Secretary, CSO, 18 July 1936, Pinnacle Papers (PP), Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, CSO, 5073/34.

two years at hard labor, and Hinds for one year, also at hard labor, was the crime of encouraging black people in Jamaica to pledge allegiance not to the colonial government or to imperial Britain, but to the Ethiopian emperor; and during this trial, it was reported to judge Chief Justice Robert William Lyall-Grant that Howell had been “abusing the King and the Queen, Queen Victoria, in fact everybody.”<sup>15</sup> Howell’s sentencing had taken place on 15 March 1934, and since he was the main target of the attempted suppression by the colonial government, its police, and its courts, he was given the harsher of the two sentences handed down by Lyall-Grant: two years, instead of the one year given to Hinds, who was a secondary target, seen as having been influenced by Leonard Howell.

The Howellites have insisted that their leader was not a thief. They acknowledge that he was charged for grand larceny, but insist that this was due to the fact that he was selling folk medicines from his tea room in Harlem without the required license. He was arrested, they claim, because of his subversion of the pharmaceutical establishment in the United States.<sup>16</sup> Although there does not appear to be any documentation to support the Howellites’ claim, we do have Hill’s discovery that Howell did, in fact, open a tea room in Harlem, and it was from here, his followers claimed, that he sold the folk medicines. We also know, based on Hill’s findings, that Howell did not overstay his time in the United States, which again negates the *Gleaner’s* claim that he was deported for this reason. Hill has stated that Howell had taken “out his first papers for citizenship in the United States in May 1924” (Hill 1983:30). In other words, Howell had started the process to regularize his immigration status in the United States in the very same year of his arrival in that country, and even though imprisonment would have put a stop to such an application, this becomes a consideration only if we accept that a prolonged period of seven or even six years in the 1920s was the time that it took for immigrants to gain citizenship in the United States, which was not the usual practice (Jiménez 2011:18-19). Immigration problems could not have been the reason for Howell’s return to Jamaica in 1932.

It was Howell’s street meetings which had sparked the reconnaissance by the colonial police force in Jamaica, in order to gather the information

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<sup>15</sup> Leonard Howell being Tried for Sedition in Saint Thomas. *Daily Gleaner*, 14 March 1934, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Author’s interview with Alphanso Gallimore (born 1946), Gerald Lloyd Downer (born 1934), and Florence Stewart (born 1939).

that was used in his conviction for sedition in 1934. Howell began holding these meetings in Kingston and St. Andrew between December 1932 and February 1933. Evidently, he realized that the police had him on their radar, and decided that he should change the locations of his meetings to the eastern parish of St. Thomas. He began holding these meetings in the parish capital of Morant Bay, but also in Port Morant, Seaforth, Trinity Ville, and Font Hill. Why he chose to relocate to St. Thomas is not difficult to explain; this was the parish in which the famous Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 had erupted. The leader of this rebellion was also a black preacher, Paul Bogle, a deacon of the Native Baptist Church, the same church that later came under the influence of Bedward, who had helped to create the context in which Howell could start his movement, shortly after returning to Jamaica. Bogle, like Howell, was a leading figure in a religious organization that had started in Jamaica among poor black people. Like Howell's Rastafari movement, the Native Baptist Church also used the Bible, but unlike Bogle, Howell saw the promised return of the messiah as fulfilled in the rise of the crowned prince of Ethiopia, Ras Tafari, as Emperor Haile Selassie I. Like Bogle, Howell adopted the idea that religion should be used for earthly liberation, a notion known as liberation theology, and which was based on a new translation of biblical hermeneutics, which located the purpose of religion in the experiences of the worshippers. For these Christians, religion was not for worship and fellowship alone; it was also and more importantly, the divinely approved engine of social, economic, and political growth; it was the will of God in action (Dick 2009:167-201).

The police and the colonial government were the ones to react to Howell's decision to relocate his meetings to St. Thomas. The police had followed him there to gather more information about his activities, and then brought him to court for sedition on the basis on this information. The trial, which was held in Morant Bay, the capital of the parish where Howell had been holding most of his meetings, showed that everything about this trial was about Howell—about his preaching, organizing, and leadership role in the Rastafari movement. The crime that he was charged with warranted a trial at the high court in the island's capital of Kingston, but the government sent Lyall-Grant to St. Thomas, where Howell had relocated, where most of his meetings were now being held. A trial in that parish sent a clear message that Howell was the government's target, and to dispose of the case effectively, Lyall-Grant was sent to preside over the trial. Not only was he the chief justice of Jamaica, he was also an experienced high court judge,

who had presided over the trials of other blacks who had committed acts against British rule—acts seen as sedition, or treason. The freedom fighters of Nyasaland, the British protectorate of Central Africa, were tried by Lyall-Grant following the 1915 rebellion that was led by Rev. John Chilembwe, who also founded the Providence Industrial Mission, a church that had been active in struggles against the British in Africa (McCracken 2012:127). Lyall-Grant served as “Judge of the High Court” in Nyasaland before coming to Jamaica (Shepperson & Price 1958:267, 381). The decision to use him at Howell’s trial was not difficult, and he made more than adequate use of the opportunity, registering the government’s disapproval of Howell’s activities by concluding the trial within a week. Swiftiness was part of the government’s plan of action, one carefully thought out in order to deflate Howell’s importance, and Lyall-Grant made sure to avoid a long trial, which might galvanize support for Howell. Another strategy was Lyall-Grant’s denouncement of Howell as a “fraud,” which the chief justice could do because of his own time in Africa, and which he also referred to while handing down the sentences for Howell and Hinds.<sup>17</sup>

Howell had started selling “postcards” for £1 each with the image of Selassie I as “passports” or as tickets into Ethiopia (Hill 1983:33; Murrell 1998:7). This act was used against him at the trial, allowing the chief justice to claim that Howell was a “fraud,” and it gave the colonial court another justification for Howell’s suppression, since there was no record of him ever being appointed as an emissary of the Ethiopian monarchy in Jamaica. And earlier during the trial, when the evidence was being heard, the reports collected by the police advised that Howell had been promoting himself to the point where he was seen as a prophet, a healer, and a redeemer of poor black people, information which was in a song that the police had heard Howell’s people singing at one of his meetings:

Leonard Howell seeks me and he finds me,  
 Fills my heart with glee;  
 That’s why I am happy all the day,  
 For I know what Leonard Howell is doing for my soul,  
 That’s why I am happy all the day.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Chief Justice Denounces Howell as a Fraud. *Daily Gleaner*, 17 March 1934, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Leonard Howell, on Trial says Ras Tafari is Messiah Returned to Earth. *Daily Gleaner*, 15 March 1934, p. 20.

### No Need for Serious Regard

The only outcome that the colonial government intended when Howell was put on trial for sedition was his suppression, but almost no mention was made in the charges brought against him of the Rastafari movement that he had started. The focus was on statements that he made in his speeches at his street meetings, which were said to have been seditious. Hinds accompanied him to prison, but only because he had participated in spreading Howell's message of disloyalty to the colonial government and imperial Britain. The unintended outcome of the trial was the revelation, based on the after the trial inquiries by the police in 1936, that Howell's followers had "lost confidence in him" as a result of his imprisonment, and that "a split in the Organization" had become apparent. The conclusion of the police was that the "Movement has lost very considerably in number and influence, and at the present need not be seriously regarded."<sup>19</sup> As far as the police and colonial government were concerned, the Rastafari movement was dying rather than gaining strength, due to Howell's incarceration back in 1934.

However, Howell's opponents outside of the government decided not to share the official view. Reporters at the *Gleaner*, for example, felt that Howell had done more than enough to create a viable "cult," meaning one of those "deviant social movements" whose beliefs and practices posed a threat to the social order, and the peace and safety of society (Stark & Bainbridge 1980:1377). An onslaught of articles in the *Gleaner* followed, alleging disturbances caused by the Rastafari people and sensationalizing the growing movement while deriding it as a cult. Even from behind the prison bars, the *Gleaner's* reporters concluded, Howell was still a menace to society, and his influence was growing. He was blamed for the "Harm Rastafari Advocates [were] doing in [the] East Parish," and the "St. Thomas Wars on the Ras Tafari Cult."<sup>20</sup>

Members of the public had also joined the calls for Howell's suppression from even before he was sentenced for sedition. They knew of no one else

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<sup>19</sup> Acting Inspector General to Private Secretary, CSO, 18 July 1936.

<sup>20</sup> The following is a sample of the headlines of the articles about the Rastafari that appeared in the *Gleaner* between 1934 and 1937: Deluded Creatures. *Daily Gleaner*, 9 July 1934, p. 12; Disturbances by Followers of the Rastafari Cult. *Daily Gleaner*, 20 July 1934, p. 6; Harm Rastafari Advocates are doing in Eastern Parish. *Daily Gleaner*, 23 May 1935, p. 1; St. Thomas Wars on the Ras Tafari Cult. *Daily Gleaner*, 18 January 1937, p. 28; and Dangerous Cults. *Daily Gleaner*, 19 January 1937, p. 9.



in the movement who could be blamed for its sudden appearance and its apparent growth. It was perceived by ordinary citizens such as Maud Wray, a woman from St. Thomas, that Howell was responsible for infecting other people in Jamaica with the strange ideas of his Rastafari cult, which happened because they had been listening to Howell's speeches. To express her dislike for Howell, Miss Wray had given two policemen, Constable Enos Gayle and Corporal Ebenezer Brooks, access to her "drawing room," so that they could overlook one of Howell's meetings in St. Thomas, and take careful notes of what he had been telling the people.<sup>21</sup> This evidence was presented at Howell's trial for sedition. The policemen also told the chief justice that they had attended Howell's meetings "in consequence of information" that they "received" from members of the public, whom they preferred not to name.<sup>22</sup> Most of the time, the members of the public who supplied the police with the information that led to Howell's arrest for sedition were not named or identified in any other way. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the majority of these informants were white, colored, or black people. Miss Wray was apparently the only name ever mentioned during the trial, and some of what was said about her suggests that she was a person of some means. She lived in a house with a drawing room, implying that she was at the very least from the lower middle class, but she could have been black, white, or colored, and at this late period, the latter could include even people who were partly of Indian or Chinese descent.

In addition to Miss Wray, another complainant who was identified, but not at Howell's trial, was an off-duty district constable from Seaforth, Robert Powers, who was almost surely not white and who, based on his occupation, belonged to the lower middle class. Powers was the self-appointed leader of a small gang comprised of his nephew and their friends, which in August 1934, had assaulted a woman, Delrosa Francis, who they had identified as a member of Howell's Rastafari following.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that Powers acted without any orders. He served summonses on Francis and her witnesses for disturbance of the peace, as well as for assaulting a

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<sup>21</sup> Leonard Howell, on Trial says Ras Tafari is Messiah Returned to Earth. *Daily Gleaner*, 15 March 1934, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Leonard Howell Being Tried for Sedition in Saint Thomas. *Daily Gleaner*, 14 March 1934, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Petitions of Daniel Price, Gertrude Nathan, Francella McNish, James Findley, and Delrosa Francis, Seaforth P.O., St. Thomas, 1 September 1934, PP, CSO 5073/34.

policeman, in the case of Francis. The resident magistrate who presided at the trial felt compelled to support the district constable, whose actions were potentially bad publicity for the constabulary, as well as the colonial government. The magistrate decided to postpone the trial from 8 August until 22 August, and then reconvened “downstairs” in the courthouse. In other words, the trial was disposed of quietly.<sup>24</sup> C.C. Woolley, the colonial secretary, was approached by Francis and her witnesses after they were sentenced to pay fines, or to serve time in the general penitentiary, which was not in the parish. Writing to Woolley, Francis and her witnesses cited their wish for “fair justice,” but Woolley’s response was that taking the matter to “the appeal Court” would prove futile.<sup>25</sup>

Two letters sent in 1936 delivered the same message that the public had reached its tipping point, and was ready to take matters into their own hands to permanently put to rest the problem of Leonard Howell, since the government seemed unable or unwilling to take further action. What was most upsetting to one of the writers of these letters, who chose to be anonymous, and who wrote to the colonial officials in London believing that the government of Jamaica was not able or willing to take a decisive stance against Howell, was that “The Ethiopian menace,” as the writer called Howell’s movement, had disturbed the peace and safety of the “White and high coloured folk” of Jamaica. This implied the writer’s ethnicity or cultural attachments, if not his or her race, and this writer added that the reason why whites and high coloreds were upset was that Howell had encouraged his people “not” to see themselves as “subjects of Great Britain,” which also implied that the writer felt attached to Britain, and was more than likely white or high colored himself or herself.<sup>26</sup>

The other letter writer, V.R. Cameron, had no reservations about stating his name for the record, even adding that he was a pastor from Font Hill,

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<sup>24</sup> Petitions of Daniel Price, Gertrude Nathan, Francella McNish, James Findley, and Delrosa Francis, Seaforth P.O., St. Thomas, 1 September 1934, PP, CSO 5073/34; Petitions of A.B. Gordon and Amelia Gordon, and Rachel Patterson, Seaforth P.O., St. Thomas, 3 September 1934, PP, CSO 5073/34.

<sup>25</sup> Acting Colonial Secretary to Delrosa Francis, Rachel Patterson, and Francella McNish, 14 September 1934, PP, CSO 5073/34; Acting Colonial Secretary to Daniel Price, Gertrude Nathan, Augustus Gordon, and James Findley, 14 September 1934, PP, CSO 5073/34.

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous letter, Kingston, Jamaica, to Sir John Maffey, London, 7 April 1936, PP, CSO 68512/30/36, pp. 1, 3.

St. Thomas, one of the areas in that parish where Howell had been active. Cameron addressed his letter to the governor, Edward Denham, and advised him of the injustices which Howell's followers in Font Hill had been facing, due to the actions of "a certain Baptist Minister who was once pastor of their[s]," but who "got against them and told the Leader of this group that he will use his influence to see that this group['s] movement is brought to nothing."<sup>27</sup> Denham sent the letter to Woolley for investigation, and the latter brought in Commissioner Wright to order an inquiry by the police, but it was Cameron who was investigated, not the claims that he had made in his letter, and based on these findings, Cameron was denounced as a troublemaker and an imposter, someone who was "not a recognized minister of any church."<sup>28</sup> The official response to Cameron from the colonial secretary's office told him 'that after inquiry the Government is not prepared to interfere in the matter.'<sup>29</sup> The government was able to use these findings not to take any more action against Howell, at least for the time being, and since Cameron, in his letter, had implied something that was worrying, that Howell was competing with preachers from the traditional churches for followers, and apparently, he was seeing success, which was now causing even a Baptist minister to become concerned. The Baptist Church had a long history of aiding blacks in Jamaica, and was very active in the struggles against slavery, which partly implied that Howell had enough charisma as a preacher to attract followers from even this Church, and partly because he had created a doctrine that was sufficiently powerful and enticing.

One of the stimulants for the complaints in these letters was *The Promised Key*, which was published in the year before the letters were sent, and had enough to further infuriate Howell's opponents, but also a sufficient amount of anticolonial and racial rhetoric that could make Howell's movement more attractive to Jamaica's poor black people. The book denounced the Roman Catholic "Pope" as "satan the devil," and as head of "a hypocritical religious system." These statements made Howell seem fearless, and perhaps among the most fearless of the warriors who had been fighting for

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<sup>27</sup> V.R. Cameron, Font Hill, Trinity Ville, P.O., to Sir Edward Denham, 19 May 1936, PP, CSO 5073/34, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> V.R. Cameron, Font Hill, Trinity Ville, P.O., to Sir Edward Denham, 19 May 1936, PP, CSO 5073/34, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Acting Colonial Secretary to Elder V.R. Cameron, 30 June 1936, PP, CSO 5073/34.

the rights of black people in Jamaica, which included Bogle, Bedward, and Garvey—leaders who were also themselves celebrated by the black majority. Howell was even bold enough to castigate the practitioners of the folk tradition known as Obeah, who were feared by most people. Howell warned that there would be “No admittance for obeah dogs” in the “Balm Yard,” Rastafari’s house of worship (Howell 1995:12, 13, 4). To his followers, Howell was not afraid to make enemies, not afraid to do what he thought was necessary to grow his movement. His opponents, on the other hand, became even more anxious about his leadership, and expressed more eagerness to suppress him.

### **The Police Raids in 1941 and 1954**

By the time that any leading figure in the labor movement of the 1930s began to voice objections to the Rastafari movement, Howell’s popularity among the peasantry had grown to such an extent that in 1940, he could establish the community of Pinnacle, which had 700 residents.<sup>30</sup> Howell had also reached the point where he felt enough confidence in the strength of his movement to take on the labor leadership, calling this a failure because it had not addressed the problem of race, which was obvious to him because of the fact that most of the island’s poor people were black, and because the most prominent labor leaders by the late 1930s were not black.<sup>31</sup> Alexander Bustamante, a brown-skinned, middle-class Jamaican, had become the most visible labor leader as a result of the 1938 labor protests. He formed a union in that same year, the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union, to which he gave his name, and appointed himself as its president-general. It was the strongest union in the island, and the one that Howell criticized at a meeting he held in Port Morant on 25 June 1939.<sup>32</sup> By 6 July of the same year, just twelve days later, Bustamante wrote a strong letter addressed to Woolley. In this letter, Bustamante called upon the colonial government to either imprison Howell again, or send him back to the lunatic asylum in order to silence him, and gave this as his justifications: “serious trouble is brewing at

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<sup>30</sup> The Ras Tafari Retreat to Mountain Fastness of St. Catherine. *Daily Gleaner*, 23 November 1940, page unknown.

<sup>31</sup> Acting Inspector General Sidley to the Colonial Secretary, 1939, PP, CSO 1130, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Acting Inspector General Sidley to the Colonial Secretary, 1939, PP, CSO 1130, p. 9.

Port Morant, in St. Thomas, owing to the mischievousness of a man whose name is Howell, Leader of this terrible thing that is called 'Rastafari'."<sup>33</sup>

Bustamante had benefitted from the invitation by A.G.S. Coombs to join his Jamaica Workers and Tradesmen Union in 1937. Hartley Neita has recorded how Bustamante had to be "persuaded" by Coombs, who was a "militant Garveyite," according to Arnold Bertram, to join the union (Neita 2005:29; Bertram 2006:Q4). However, in time, Bustamante also publicly turned his back on the ideology of black nationalism, which was embraced by earlier labor leaders, such as Coombs. Instead, Bustamante chose to pursue the improvement of the working class and the decolonization of Jamaica through the British parliamentary system, and adopted the leadership style of "charismatic authoritarianism," which made it impossible for him to view Leonard Howell as a fellow leader, or as someone who had a legitimate claim to be one of the leaders of any portion of the Jamaican population. For Bustamante, Howell was incapable of leadership because he did not subscribe to the established "order" or traditional leadership models, he had no regard for the "rules" or for "hierarchy," and he had no "technical qualifications" to justify having a place in leadership (Bolland 2001:517).

Almost the same position was taken by the press, which reported that Howell ruled his Pinnacle community like a tyrant, but what was almost never reported was that the community was under attack by intruders, or by other poor people who joined to steal from the residents, as well as from inhabitants of the surrounding communities.<sup>34</sup> Howell became more concerned about security only after these intruders were discovered. He would put them on trial like a judge, and ordered floggings and expulsions from the community. However, the message these actions sent to Howell's opponents only intensified their anxiousness to see him either jailed again, or confined to the asylum for another period. The measures Howell took were never mentioned as security procedures. Almost nothing was printed in the press, which stated that the Pinnacle community was itself under attack. Instead, Howell's methods were presented as evidence of extremism, and the kind that only an unstable mind would adopt, and further proof that

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<sup>33</sup> A. Bustamante, Duke Street, Kingston, Jamaica, to the Colonial Secretary, 6 July 1939, PP, CSO 1B/5/79/735.

<sup>34</sup> Van Dijk 1995:73; The Ras Tafari Retreat. *Daily Gleaner*, 23 November 1940, page unknown.

the Rastafari movement was lunacy. For example, one of the representatives of the press, R.A. Leevy, a writer for the leftist newspaper, *Public Opinion*—which had close ties to Norman Manley’s People’s National Party and National Workers’ Union, established in 1938 and 1943, respectively—wrote a lengthy four-part article that was published in the newspaper in 1943. These articles were based on an interview that Leevy did with Howell in 1939 or 1940 (Moyston 2011), and in the articles, Leevy wrote of telling Howell that “millions, including myself, are still disbelievers—firm, iron-clad disbelievers in Rastafarianism,” which was a statement of fact, but one that Leevy presented to suggest that Howell’s movement promoted an idea that many people, including Leevy, considered as insanity—the belief that Selassie I was the son of God.<sup>35</sup>

By the time that these articles were published, Howell had already started Pinnacle, which was labeled a “communist” experiment by a reporter for the *Gleaner*.<sup>36</sup> The Jamaica in which this reporter’s comment was published was far from an appreciative context for the communist ideology. Britain had just entered World War II in response to Germany’s 1939 invasion of Poland, a context that made communism appear as an even more alien and extreme ideology to Jamaicans, who were British subjects, and who lived in one of Britain’s most important colonies. While there might have been tolerance for Norman Manley’s Fabianism, because of the British origin of this ideology, communism, which was viewed as more extreme, was a completely different matter (Levi 1989:151; McBriar 1962). The mother country could not afford to fight a major war against Germany and Italy, and then Japan, while at the same time battle the “communist” movement for independence in its Jamaican colony. As for Leevy’s articles, these had also appeared in print after Howell’s Pinnacle community was raided by the police on 14 July 1941, and Howell had been sentenced to another two years at hard labor for assault. The articles that Leevy wrote represented an outrage against Howell and his encampment at Pinnacle, developments which continued to raise concerns in spite of the police raid and the sentencing of Howell, and along with 27 of his followers.

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<sup>35</sup> R.A. Leevy, Ras Tafarianism. *Public Opinion*, 13 March 1943, p. 3. The previous three parts were published on 13 February 1943, p. 3; 20 February 1943, p. 3; and 27 February 1943, p. 3. All four parts were given the same title.

<sup>36</sup> The Ras Tafari Retreat. *Daily Gleaner*, 23 November 1940, page unknown.

The build up to the raid started with Howell's announcement in 1939 of his "intention to build a tabernacle for the purpose of divine worship and for schooling members' children." The *Gleaner* had publicized the announcement in its 27 December edition, only days after Howell made the announcement.<sup>37</sup> In the month before the raid, another newspaper, the *Jamaica Times*, published a story linking the people at Pinnacle to the assaults and thefts reported in Spanish Town, capital of St. Catherine, the home parish of Pinnacle. It was obvious that this article was another fabrication. A man who was robbed of his bags of coal was interviewed by the reporter, and he had said that his assailant told him this: "Mi a no pinnacle man . . . Mi no know notin' bout them." The reporter, nonetheless, concluded that the assailant had "the qualifications of a Ras Tafarian," which meant that he looked unkempt.<sup>38</sup> It was well known that Howell promoted cleanliness among his people, and that he himself was almost never seen without his three-piece suit, and he kept his hair short, and had only a moustache. It was two days after this article in *The Jamaica Times* was published that the police raided Pinnacle for the first time.

The police contingent that went on this raid was comprised of 115 personnel, half of them armed, and their target was Howell. The police had used James Nelson, a man wanted for breaches of the firearms law, who was allegedly living at Pinnacle under Howell's protection, to justify the raid. Back in June of 1941, Nelson had written to the police in Spanish Town informing them that he could "be found at Pinnacle," where he was in possession of "ammunitions."<sup>39</sup> The address on this letter stated the post office in St. Thomas, which the police ignored. The fabrication became more obvious when Nelson was not found at Pinnacle on the day of the raid, or any time after that. Howell was not found at Pinnacle either, but was taken into custody eleven days later, when the police returned to the community during the night, and found him at home in bed. An even clearer piece of evidence that this was a fabricated campaign to suppress Howell by sending him to jail for another period was the way that the police gathered the witnesses, who gave the testimonies used to convict Howell and 27 of his

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<sup>37</sup> Port Morant notes (from our correspondent). *Daily Gleaner*, 27 December 1939, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Victims tell of Ras Tafarians' Reign of Terror in St. Catherine. *Jamaica Times*, 12 July 1941, page unknown.

<sup>39</sup> James Nelson to the Sergeant Major, Spanish Town Police Station, 14 June 1941, PP, CSO 5073/34 Copy.

people. It was during the raid, and after not finding Howell or Nelson, that the police sent for residents from the neighboring communities of Simon, Cross Pen, and Spanish Hole “to identify the assailants” who were convicted of assault.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the police were able to collect these testimonies used at the trial without any apparent resistance from the people living in the surrounding communities, which housed mostly peasants. Howell could not escape conviction on the basis of this evidence; he was well-known as the leader of Pinnacle.

Van Dijk has argued that the second police raid on Pinnacle, which took place on 22 May 1954, occurred during a period when there was hardly any “Rastafari agitation” (Van Dijk 1995:74). By this, he meant that there was little confrontation with the colonial authorities, or with any other group in the society for that matter. But was this really possible at any point during Howell’s leadership of the Rastafari movement? Pinnacle itself stood as a form of nonviolent agitation, that is, if we can appreciate that it was more than an encampment, but also a manifestation of Howell’s ideas regarding self-government and self-reliance for black people. Hoenisch has made this point clearer by referring to Pinnacle as a place where “a ‘microphysics’ of power was developed which organized the members of the commune under black control” (Hoenisch 1988:446). Pinnacle even survived the two additional years that Howell spent in prison after the raid in 1941, and its establishment close to Sligoville—the first free village, formed by ex-slaves in 1834—indicated that the community was Howell’s route to symbolic continuation of the fight for African freedom in colonial Jamaica. The self-reliance had itself served as one of the enticements for people who joined the community. Members received plots on which they built houses made of wood with thatched roofs, and on which they cultivated food crops for subsistence and sales. They also made household items, such as mats and brooms, and they burned coal for use in the community, and to sell in the markets in Spanish Town and downtown Kingston. Howell also started a bakery, which brought in cash. Pinnacle was similar to a Maroon village in that it was self-governed. There was a communal dining room, and a place where everyone went to worship.

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<sup>40</sup> Commissioner of Police Wright to the Colonial Secretary, 17 July 1944, PP, CSO 5073/34 Minutes, p. 5; Victims tell of Ras Tafarians’ Reign of Terror. *Jamaica Times*, 12 July 1941, page unknown.



If there was no agitation, no form of confrontation, then why would the newspaper, *Public Opinion*, publish Leevy's articles on the subjects of Howell and his movement in 1943? The interview for these articles was done from either 1939 or 1940. Constitutional change was also pending, and took place in the year following the publication of Leevy's articles. The island was at a critical juncture in its political history and in its nationalism, yet Howell and his people were still receiving attention in the press. Leevy's remarks in his articles that most people were still disbelievers in the divinity of Selassie I implied concern over the doctrine as much as disagreement with it. Furthermore, Howell was still in prison for assault when Leevy's articles were published, but he was still a subject of concern in the press. Why would the police also insist in the following year, after Howell was released from jail, that he should also be treated as a suspect in the death of his wife, Tyneth, née Bent, when no evidence implicating him in her death had been found? To say that this had nothing to do with agitation or an ongoing confrontation with the opponents of Howell's movement is to contradict available documentation. The attorney general, who was called in to investigate if Howell could be locked up again, this time for murder, did see the necessity for an investigation, but the conclusion that he reached, which he expressed with regret, was that he had "no alternative but to enter a nolle."<sup>41</sup>

Lee's perspective, which is similar to Van Dijk's, is also problematical. She states that the advice from the attorney general and the police, after Howell's release from prison in 1943, suggests that there was unwillingness on the part of officialdom to take any further action on the matter of Howell's suppression, at least until the second raid in 1954. Among her main reasons for this view are the 1938 labour protests and the constitutional change of 1944, both of which had occupied the attention of the government (Lee 2003:161). However, it is not likely that the government would have been less concerned about Howell in the midst of public unrest, or while facing political transformation. It was Howell who had started a movement that was also comprised of poor and suffering people. Also true is that the first raid on Pinnacle had taken place only three years after the labor protests, which indicates that there was still anxiety within government about Howell and his movement, to which the Parish Board of St. Catherine contributed greatly with its reports of unhygienic conditions at

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<sup>41</sup> Attorney General to the Colonial Secretary, 4 April 1944, PP, CSO 5073/34, Minutes, 18.

Pinnacle between November 1940 and January 1941, which had possibly caused the illness of some seventeen or eighteen people who had entered the Poor House in the parish, one of whom, according to a subsequent report, had died.<sup>42</sup> In March 1941, this same board even investigated if it was possible to undermine Howell by seizing the assets of his Ethiopian Salvation Society, a friendly society established in 1937, which the board believed had provided at least some of the funds Howell had used in the arrangement to purchase Pinnacle from the Chinese businessman, Albert Chang.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, there was a letter that Howell had sent to London in March 1939, addressed to the well-known Marxist, George Padmore, and which contained a small £5 donation to the International African Services Bureau, which had introduced Howell's name to the British government, and suggested that Howell was, from that year, thinking about expanding his movement beyond Jamaica, and possibly also thinking about linking the Rastafari to the Marxist ideology, to at least gain support from Marxist intellectuals, as well as from its other activists. The fact that this letter was intercepted was evidence of concern about Howell, not only Padmore, and the British government therefore sent a copy of the letter to the government of Jamaica for its further consideration.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, between the 1944 constitutional change and the second raid in 1954, the chief minister of Jamaica was one of Howell's archrivals, Alexander Bustamante. This second raid was delayed for more than a decade simply because the government of Jamaica needed a final solution for Howell, one that was permanent. The search for this final solution began from the moment that Howell was released from jail following his imprisonment after the 1941 raid, around the middle of 1943. Aiding the government was also the fact that World War II and its distractions had ended in 1945, and in just three years, the final solution was found in the form of the marijuana ban, introduced by an amendment to the Dangerous Drugs Act in 1948 (Haughton 2011:48). The House of Representatives,

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<sup>42</sup> Copy of Reports, MOH, PP, CSO 5073/34, pp. 1, 2; Sergeant W.J. Gyles to the Clerk, Parochial Board of St. Catherine, 28 March 1941, PP, CSO 5073/34 Copy 847.

<sup>43</sup> R.D.G. Lewars, Clerk, Parochial Board of St. Catherine, to the Assistant Director of Medical Services, 30 April 1941, PP, CSO 5073/34.

<sup>44</sup> L.P. Howell, President, Ethiopian Salvation Society, 76 King Street, Kingston, Jamaica, to George Padmore, 12A Westborne Grove, London W 2, England, 12 March 1939, PP, CSO 1B/5/79/735, C74U.

populated by the labor leadership, supported this amendment. It appears that everybody opposed to Howell supported this solution, and before the second raid, Howell said during a trial for marijuana possession at the Sutton Street Court in Kingston, where Justice C.D. Fritchett was presiding, that he had up to “five previous convictions” for marijuana possession. Fritchett was unsympathetic and sentenced Howell to twelve months in prison in 1951 for the possession of marijuana.<sup>45</sup>

Lee makes another problematic suggestion, which implies that the second raid was a more spectacular event than the first one, and to support this view she cites the massive deployment:

In all they numbered five supervisors, five detectives, 116 policemen, and a number of technical assistants. They had been thoroughly briefed and equipped with rifles, tear gas, riot batons, walkie-talkies, two car radios, and HF radio units, supported by a mobile water tank and canteen. (Lee 2003:190)

Lee adds the 110 guilty verdicts, which were handed down by the court for the possession of marijuana, and which the police had transported from Pinnacle to the courtroom as part of the spectacle (Lee 2003:191). There was indeed a spectacle, but this was neither the deployment for the raid nor the way that the trial was conducted. The deployment was the means to the real end, and so was the trial, and the real spectacle was that Howell was found guilty, but was then released upon appeal, but a total of 110 of his people found themselves in a less fortunate situation (Van Dijk 1995:74; Smith, Augier & Nettleford 1988:9). This was the way that the government which was now partly colonial and partly nationalist went about making sure that the final solution worked. The plan was to strip Howell of his influence by jailing his people, and even though he was released upon appeal, he was still the main target. His leadership was the main concern and the police personnel, the equipment that they brought with them, the marijuana that they seized and presented in the court, as well as the convictions of his people, were all part of making sure that Howell had no one left to lead. His movement had continued in spite of previous incarcerations, and even his confinement as a lunatic. Stripping him of the people he led, or at least a

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<sup>45</sup> Leonard Howell, Two Others Sent to Prison on Ganja Charge. *Daily Gleaner*, 2 March 1951, p. 4.

good proportion of this following, was now seen as the only way to ensure that he was taken out of the national spotlight.

## **Conclusion**

Leonard Howell was the most victimized of the early Rastafari leaders due to his advocacy of the movement's doctrine. As one of the most visible early leaders who preached the divinity of Haile Selassie I, Howell may well be described as the very first Rasta. But in becoming the first Rasta, he needed to acquire a following, and it was this work of building the movement, a task that he started within months of his return to Jamaica from the United States in 1932, that, in time, would also make him the main target of the effort to suppress the Rastafari movement. No one who opposed the movement in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s held this position without having some sense of the work of Leonard Howell, some understanding, however limited this might have been, of his advocacy of the Rastafari doctrine.

The first major triumph of the suppression campaign was the two years at hard labor that Howell received from the chief justice of Jamaica in the courthouse at Morant Bay in 1934, along with the one year at hard labor that was reserved for his lieutenant, Robert Hinds. The highest court official in the colony had been sent all the way from the island's capital of Kingston to preside over the trial of the man who was regarded as the leading figure of the Rastafari, the man who was seen as having started this new religious movement, which many Jamaicans thought of as strange, but which also promoted race consciousness and African solidarity, and overall a radical African-centered philosophy. Howell was the one who was seen as having taken the Rastafari virtually to the doorsteps of the executive and judiciary of the colonial government; and for this role he was eventually made to face conviction for one of the most serious offenses that a civilian could be charged with by their government, the charge of sedition. Howell was sent to jail on this occasion because he was said to have been preaching to people about not pledging allegiance to the colonial government, or to imperial Britain. This kind of advocacy was seen as not merely anticolonial rhetoric, but as the preparation for a revolution, and possibly one that would take place through violent means. And with this kind of implication, something urgent, something swift, and something effective had to be done to put a stop to Howell.

He was already in the national spotlight by the time that the press had really gotten off the ground with their campaign to have him permanently suppressed. Back in 1932, when the *Gleaner* had announced Howell's return to the island as a deportation for an immigration offense, this newspaper could not have possibly predicted that this same man would, in almost no time, also become one of the most discussed persons on its pages. Howell began his preaching in late 1932 or early 1933, but only after he had been featured in the *Gleaner* as a black Jamaican male expelled from the United States. The first story that was printed in the *Gleaner* was shown to be untrue based upon the discoveries made by the police in 1936, but the *Gleaner*, which was soon joined by other newspapers, such as *Public Opinion* and *The Jamaica Times*, subsequently invested far more energy and resources into keeping their readers abreast of almost everything that could prove to the point that Howell was a menace to society. Even in 1936, when the colonial government and its police force had concluded that the matter of Leonard Howell had been put to rest, that the organization that he led was dying, the campaign of the press was literally in full swing. Howell's incarceration for sedition had given comfort only to the government and the police. He had acquired other enemies, who had been waiting in the background for their chance to publicize their own anxieties and outrage, and to participate in any undertaking that could bring about his permanent suppression.

Ordinary civilians and organized labor played a vital role in punishing Howell. We know that white and colored people in Jamaica were very anxious about Howell, that they saw him as the potential leader of another Morant Bay Rebellion, and that they were eager to see the colonial government put an end to his activities. We also know that the Baptist Church was implicated in the anti-Howell campaign, which is somewhat shocking, considering the fact that this same church was active in the struggles against slavery in the early nineteenth century.

And as for organized labor, we know of the participation of Bustamante, who had turned away from black nationalism to embrace the less revolutionary creole nationalism that, in due course, became the means through which Jamaica was decolonized, and through which its independence was achieved in 1962. It was during Bustamante's term as chief minister of Jamaica that the second police raid took place on Howell's encampment at Pinnacle, which dealt the most serious blow to his movement. Participation

in Howell's suppression by the leftist side of creole nationalism was visible in the articles written by Leevy in *Public Opinion* in 1943, in which Howell was advised that most people saw his movement as strange, and would never take the Rastafari as a serious religious organization. Unlike Bustmante, who proposed sending Howell to either jail or the asylum, which implied that he was also fearful of Howell's influence and saw the latter as a contender for the leadership of at least the peasant population, Leevy felt that Howell's influence would never spread beyond a few hundred Jamaicans, and most certainly would never spread beyond Jamaica. This part of the anti-Howell campaign was based on the belief that his movement had nothing useful to offer black Jamaicans or black people from other parts of the world, but the Rastafari movement continued to grow. It survived Howell's death in New Kingston, Jamaica, on 25 February 1981, and is today a global movement.

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