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Assassins of Conversation¹- 'Grassroots' publishing as an attack on the dialogue of the philistines

In the space of eight and a half months, as a lecturer, a young man of Guyanese/African heritage revolutionized the concept of “the intellectual” on the University of the West Indies Mona campus. Walter Rodney, the once quiet, unassuming scholar became more vocal, inspired by ‘grounding with his brothers’ in Trench Town, August Town, wherever there was a concrete seat and an eager audience. However more importantly, his ‘groundings’ with students outside of the lectures and tutorials had a profound impact on them. He transformed the space of UWI – some argue temporarily– from the bastion of the intelligencia to what a university truly should represent: a centre of dialectics and reasoning. In moving beyond the confines of the classroom to speak to his ‘brothers and sisters’, Rodney appears to operate contrary to his prescribed role in society based on the epistemological foundations of the middle class at the time. He taught on campus² at a time when there was a ‘moment’. Black Power was no longer a phrase, but an international movement and the students were a part of it. The philosophy and teachings of Marcus Garvey, among others, prohibited them from seeing the assassination of Dr. King as an attack on a man from Georgia; it was an attack on their race. The plight of Black people was no longer personal, it was political. Support for the struggle meant increased public awareness which was not always via a microphone. Writing became the movement’s mouth piece especially among students. This paper explores the impact of Rodney’s radical political ideology on student-based ‘grassroots’ publications prior to the 1968 riot, the increase in such publications after and also current publications of a similar nature and how they help(ed) to promote and engender a radically different kind of Caribbean political thought through consciousness regarding race, history and self.

¹ From Martin Carter’s ‘*For Walter Rodney*’(1980).

² UWI Mona Campus

