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Analysis: Rothschild Francis's Legacy Part 3 – Colonialism and Fear

This is the third of a four-part series on the legacy of Rothschild Francis in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Part 1 [1] and Part 2 [2], discussing Francis's involvement in the struggle for rights after transfer of the territory to the U.S. and the resulting legal battle, can be seen at the links below. The outcome, the author avers, is a totalitarian system of government in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Absence of People Power, Unity, and Leadership

The Virgin Islands totalitarian system uses political power as a system of management. Lord Acton summarized the negative influence of power in his statement "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Virgin Islanders experience the reality of absolute power daily. The corruption is no secret. The lyrics in the calypso "Think It Over," by Short Shirt of Antigua presents a clear picture of the effects of government corruption.

Although the song is extremely compelling, and many identify with the theme, there is little evidence that individuals are compelled to participate in actions that would change their circumstances. Similarly, many identify with Bob Marley's song "Get Up Stand Up," but don't get up or stand up for their rights.

Francis, a working-class man, was compelled to respond, not for his self-interest, but in the best interest of the society. Such duty to community was a powerful factor in the actions of General Budhoe, Queen Mary, and Queen Cosiah to name a few. Their lives were at risk but they were not subdued by fear.

The Arab Spring uprisings of the new millennium suggest that people around the world are standing up to reject totalitarianism in favor of democracy. In light of the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States and what has been called the Arab Spring, the Rothschild Francis revolution for democracy in the 1920s was groundbreaking. However, due to generations of colonial conditioning, the power of reason at that time was apparently not prevalent enough among the populace to stimulate the desire for a system of equality.

Democracy was advanced through the leadership of Francis with strategic outside assistance but not fulfilled by the people. In lieu of fighting for reform, complaining became a miniature freedom, a safe alternative action that became culturally acceptable to both the working and the ruling class.

Considering the absence of a people's revolution for government reform since 1878, the relapse into the acceptance of colonialism is a primary factor in the difficulty of enticing individuals to participate in an organized response to change the system. One notable ruling

against the colonial government system occurred in the early 1970s, when a U.S. Peace Corps worker on St. Croix initiated legal action that forced the U.S. Virgin Islands government to admit children of immigrant workers into the public education system.

In light of well-known governmental ills, the religious organizations' lack of leadership in resolving prevalent issues have been scrutinized. Those who read the Bible see different roles for the church. One point of view is that Jesus exemplified servant leadership and taught his disciples to be doers of the word. His doctrines produced protégés such as Jon Hus, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King Jr., other servant leaders, and social and religious reformers. Others embrace religion as an institution for sacraments and worship. That view comes down from the doctrines of the scribes and Pharisees, a view which, Jesus says, in Luke 11:42, neglects justice and the love for God.

In the Virgin Islands, the latter view has prevailed.

Although the segregation of groups in such a small community is an increasing challenge to organizing for political reform, it should be noted that worshippers in those same diverse groups stand upon cue when the priest, pastor or worship leaders raise their hands. Political reform would be easy if pastors could elevate their hands to raise the ethical conscience of the people. However, the people have to be ready to rise up.

According to the Scriptures, God parted the Red Sea on cue with Moses, and followed Israel in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. But the Israelites were still afraid to cross the Jordan to fight for their inheritance. In comparison, the Francis leadership excluded only asking God to part the Caribbean Sea. He knew the natives were not ready to fight for their inheritance.

The powers of resistance to change, saturnalia, and religion likely played a role in preventing the injustice from becoming intolerable enough to require immediate action. Resistance to change is natural, and stability helps people feel secure. The sense of security is also what challenges individuals to make changes when the change appears to have an uncomfortable level of insecurity or uncertainty.

The Rothschild Francis initiatives may have raised questions of insecurity and uncertainty in the minds of the skeptics and pessimists.

Saturnalia became a Roman tradition of a day of reversal of roles between the slaves and masters. It helped to release the stress of slavery, thereby decreasing the potential for revolts. The tradition of masquerade in the Virgin Islands was linked to the tradition of saturnalia. Historical documents indicate that holiday masquerades and other social events were popular in the 1920s. That era is recognized for producing the donkey masquerade song "Hold Him Joe."

Francis, also, engaged in music activities as a bandleader who held dances in his home. From a stress-level point of view he was exposed to indicators that the people were not agitated enough to prefer change over the status quo. Due to the lack of agitation, the change would have to come from other compelling forces. Therefore, Francis acquired support from outside the Virgin Islands.

The Virgin Islands Carnival festivals are successors to the saturnalia and masquerade. The carnival and festival masquerades enable participants to be the aristocrats and royals they really are. Perhaps escaping into the alternate reality works too well. With the ideology of wellbeing, some individuals may be able to disconnect from the societal adversities or overlook issues that are not personal threats. On the other hand, individuals and

organizations theoretically would find an urgent need to use their power and organizational skills to acquire government reform if the government were to ban carnival.

There is another religious explanation for the situational blindness of individuals who ignore societal dysfunctions. According to the philosopher Hegel, some religious doctrines enable individuals to retreat into an internal existence that minimizes the emotional dynamics of the harsh external realities. Some enslaved people endured the injustice of slavery, relying on their faith that they will have a just life in the Kingdom after the resurrection. That religious viewpoint could be a factor in the cultural philosophy of ignorance of political affairs and activities. The retreat into religion is similar to the retreat into Carnival.

Fear Implied

Perhaps due to conditioning over the years, even those of great financial and educational means in the community are relegated to fear of the colonial system. Rothschild Francis worked around the fear and demonstrated that the ideals of democracy can be achieved in the Virgin Islands. Hegel, a slavery-era philosopher, determined that slavery was possible because of two key elements – force and fear.

According to Hegel, the slave's fear of the fight to the death empowers the master to subdue and control him. Force characterizes power, including the fear that keep the body and mind enslaved. When the mind is enslaved, the person is enslaved.

Frederick Douglas, who literally fought for his freedom, notes the concept in his writing:

"I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason." Douglass wrote.

Douglass's statement also suggests the desire for freedom can become subdued. Apparently, the Virgin Islanders in Francis' day were as subdued by fear as the Israelites were in Moses' day. Francis made a valiant effort to overcome the phenomenon of fear and subjugation in his campaign for democracy and government reform. His campaign for democracy, justice, equality and reform against great odds of retribution was itself a display of fearlessness.

Cultivating thoughtlessness and annihilating "the power of reason" has been a successful strategy for maintaining the ruling class. Considering human nature, Douglass' comment about creating a "contented slave" would also apply today. Francis counteracted this strategy used by the ruling class by informing the masses through speeches and published articles. His thought-provoking communications stimulated reasoning.

However, it would be difficult to suggest or accept that the current oppressors are a class within your own ethnic group. Perhaps from his childhood school incidents of discrimination, Francis had an astute understanding of the societal power structure.

For the natives in general, the division of classes and the roles in the power structure would not be a cause for alarm or suspicion. It would seem more rational to associate oppression with European oppressors in the slave era. Today, a European ethnicity may still be viewed as a necessary element for imperialist ideologies and supremacists views, and to qualify a group as an oppressor. This was further reinforced as the society observed the ethnic distinction between the classes in the 1960s U.S. civil rights movement.

Rothschild Francis may have been one of the first to distinguish power and control as the marquee elements of oppression in relation to government structure and operations.

Today, almost 100 years after the transfer of the Virgin Islands to U.S. sovereignty, still display a general lack of knowledge of U.S. municipal government systems, intergovernmental relationships, and representation. The absence of civics courses in Virgin Islands schools over the years may be one among several factors that help annihilate the power of reason regarding representation. Over the years, the ruling class has not demonstrated that cultivating thought and the power of reasoning is a priority in education.

Further, the isolation of the islands limited exploration of alternative government models and exposure to progressive ideals. Under these circumstances, perhaps only a few Virgin Islanders can articulate how a typical municipal government like the one Francis proposed works.

In the governance there has been inadequate thought and reasoning about the operations of government. Proportionately, there has been opportunity for covert control, disenfranchisement, exploitation, injustice, and corruption.

As a result of the lack of information, the working class may not be aware of the critical need to secure a functioning democracy as identified by Rothschild Francis. Therefore, uniting for government reform and societal advancement has been categorized as an extremist ideology. In the 1920s, the communications contest between Rothschild Francis and his opponents was to establish their ideology as centrist and the opponent ideology as extremist. The governor's report and Judge Williams's articles sought to brand Francis as radical. From the neutral outside communities such as the ACLU, Herbert D. Brown's Efficiency Office, the U.S. Congress, the Department of Interior and Virgin Islanders abroad, the Francis ideology prevailed as the rational view on democracy.

As a result of the battles with Rothschild Francis, the ruling class views were recognized as extremist colonial views from the dark past in world history. Yet, under the influence of colonialism, the people were not determined to claim their rights already guaranteed by U.S. sovereignty. To date, from an operational perspective, the Virgin Islands operations are still dictated according to the limitations and sovereignty of the local ruling class.

The Hegelian theory articulates the effectiveness of fear as a factor for control of the enslaved. So, if a failure to act is caused by fear, Virgin Islanders have feared for too long, and have grown accustomed to the bondage of the colonial autocratic government. The fight for freedom starts with the fight against fear itself to overcome the fear of failure as well as the fear of success.

Fortunately, as the world advances and technology and globalization exposes the society to global ideals, a new opportunity for enlightenment arises. In such a case, there still exists a need to fight for what is good for the Virgin Islands; to demand government reform, and to acquire representation equal to that enjoyed by U.S. citizens on the mainland.

Oppressors never willingly relinquish control and power. In this case, Virgin Islanders have waited 96 years and have not taken possession of their homeland by having government for the people. Consequently, the indigenous people have been waiting to receive a social, economic, and political status of equality for generations, but continue to be deceived by the ruling class.

There will be no freedom without a fight. The options are few. Being peaceful and religious people, since 1878 Virgin Islanders have abstained from the fight and by default chosen fear over freedom. In the 1920s Rothschild Francis fought well and lived a fulfilled life of freedom in a society that is still enslaved to old world ideals.

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