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Paul d'Ambrosio

Washington University in St. Louis

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SENSING A FEAR OF DEMISE:
RESEARCHING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN
RELIGION AND COLONIALISM IN THE DYING DAYS
OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Paul d'Ambrosio

Mentor: Monique Bedasse

This historical research project looked into the relationship between the British Empire in its dying days and one of its colonies: Jamaica. The Caribbean island was ruled by the British for more than 300 years, only gaining independence in 1962. The project primarily focused on the middle of the twentieth century, and it paid extra attention to British perceptions of local religious and political movements that could have been seen as threats to British rule. Evidence consisted of documents originally written for public consumption, such as newspaper articles, as well as formerly private documents, such as declassified government archives. Over the course of the project, it was determined that large scale movements of any kind were viewed by the British as troublesome, but that the Rastafari Movement was given special attention by British intelligence services because of its fierce left-wing, anti-colonialist platform. Evidence was also found that U.S. intelligence was also concerned that Rastafari may cause Jamaica to become a Communist country. The British viewed the Jamaicans as inherently ignorant, and they were concerned that enough ignorant people could be “fooled” by Rastafari and become radical threats to British rule. This project found many connections between racism and paternalist colonial administrative practices, which the British used to justify cracking down on a movement that they were afraid could topple their power.