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Walter Rodney's Removal: Thirty-Three Years After

Eusi Kwayana

Thirty-three years after his violent and uninvestigated removal from this planet and from the company of his family, friends, students, and compatriots, his comrades and the world community that embraced him, Walter Rodney continues to make history. Apart from the fact that institutions of learning find his written works and ideas highly relevant in the twenty-first century, and necessary to the understanding of the Global human experience, The Walter Rodney Foundation inspired and created by his widow Dr Patricia Rodney, has been tireless in making sure that his contribution to social thought in a short life span of thirty-eight years is continually available to the new generations that seek a distant dialogue with human understanding.

The Walter Rodney Foundation's website has announced that last September Dr. Patricia, Chair and CEO accepted an invitation to the People's Republic of China and held conversations with Ms. Gao Mingxiu, Vice Director of the Global and Regional Issues Publications Center, and Dr. Li Anshan, the highly placed and erudite Chinese international academic, and discussed an existing agreement to translate *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* into Mandarin Chinese, and to publish it in China. Dr. Li who heads the School of Social Sciences of Peking University and has wide African and international experience is charged with the translation. More information appears on the popular website (www.walterrodneyfoundation.org). The site omits reference to Dr Patricia Rodney's well received presentation in Beijing. These notes make some historic connections touching the exciting project.

Rodney comes in the trail of a few eminent African with non-governmental status from the Western Hemisphere who have been warmly embraced by the Chinese at official, academic and popular levels. The celebrated Paul Robeson was a household name in China especially as he sang in Chinese and English the national song of China (Chi Lai!), introducing it with the explanation: "This is a song born in the struggle of the brave Chinese people. It begins, "Chi Lai! Arise you who refuse to be bond slaves, and ends 'Chen Jing'-March on".

Closer to the forthcoming publication of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* in the most populated country on earth, and Dr. Patricia Rodney's warm reception in Beijing, is the formal dinner held in Beijing on February 21, 1959 in honor of the venerable W.E.B. Du Bois, to celebrate with W.E.B. Du Bois, the scholars' scholar, peace and liberation warrior, brother of all the oppressed, acclaimed world figure and victim of U.S. oppression his 91st birthday. During that same day Du Bois addressed in a speech to a thousand students and faculty at the University of Peking, his last message directed to the peoples of China and Africa. The speech was reported in the *New York Times*.

Born in the United States of America and in Guyana respectively, a quarter of a century apart, Du Bois and Rodney were different persons of different generations. One came out of the struggle against Dr. Modibo Kadalie's "classical" colonialism. The younger man came out of the struggle of the beguiling, Cold War period after World War Two. Kagalie styles this "post-colonial imperialism". One endured to become a venerable veteran world figure and celebrity. The other, rising in stature and in works, had barely seen his 38th year when he was cut off. Yet because oppression and injustice persisted their missions coincided in many areas though varying in others, showing that indeed for the majority of the world's peoples, overcoming oppression and its effects

has not been as rapid as sometimes supposed.

They were both educators, teaching in institutions of higher learning and also in social movements; both were activists committed to a redistribution of political power in the world and to revolutionary social change, as well as actors in its painful and costly processes. Neither ever held office in the State nor aspired to governmental power. They both encountered State repression in their countries. They both at timely junctures produced path-breaking historic theses helping to break the silence and dispel ignorance of the history of Africa and how foreign penetration disrupted its overall development. They both sparked new interest in the continent of Africa, thus breaking the all-round isolation designed for Africa on account of the slave trade and the Berlin Conference. W.E.B. Du Bois published in 1946 *The World and Africa*. Walter Rodney published in 1972 *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Each in its time shook the conscience of the world, dispelling prevailing ignorance.

Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and Rodney's *Groundings with My Brothers* (1968) are works directed at different audiences, in the first place, but in the hearing of the world. The first was directed at the growing number of literate African Americans and the rest of concerned humanity. *Groundings* was directed at the growing number of literate and non-literate but intelligent Caribbean people and the rest of concerned humanity. Both served a high purpose, later or sooner articulated by Martin Carter, of revealing "the histories of men and the lives of the peoples" - a purpose, a necessary task the teaching historian, like the educated Griot of old cannot escape. Both works were revisionary and visionary. Both dealt with a people's psyche, and led on to sweeping reorientations of social thought and attitudes. There are other unintended parallels, but these will serve the present purpose.

One important difference comes to mind: Du Bois was impatient with Garvey. I suspect not for any trivial reason, but because he knew the pain it cost him to break through the barriers to deep knowledge of the community that bred him and knowledge of its complexities. He saw this rash newcomer taking things head-on with no opportunity for scholarly appreciation, like his, of the inner life. Rodney saw the virtues of Garvey, as curious enough to be self-educated, as not hesitant to undertake tasks presented on a world-wide scale and undertaking them with the sense of continuing the struggles of a Jamaican plantation society; as ready to take on empires and build independent self-governing communities based on self-made economy, as the ancients and the maroons had done.

They shared, at such a distance of time and location, strong views of the potential role of those who by gift or effort, or both, had achieved a certain elevation in relation to the generally deprived majority community. Du Bois wrote hopefully of the *Talented Tenth*. Rodney expressed this same hope in his own idiom suitable to the political economy of his environment. He called on middle class academics to realise that their future lay with the working people and their struggles.

Much more to the point, the spirit of the African-Asian Conference at Bandung (1955) seemed to be part of the intellectual concerns of the two scholar-activists in their separate missions to undo the effects of what Kadalie insists are two regimes of colonialism, the classical, and the "post-colonial" Imperialisms. During the celebration in his honor in Beijing in 1959, W.E.B. Du Bois, in the spirit of Bandung of 1955 declared the Chinese a colored people and appealed for their common political purpose to be embraced and pursued to the avoidance of European domination. Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* rested on the need for severance from the system designed and controlled by imperialism. If, as supposed by some, in Guyana Rodney had been pursuing some narrow African resurgence and was not concerned with the creation

of an empowering polity of African and Asian descendants with the indigenous people and other elements of the population, he would not have been martyred.

The part of Dr. Patricia Rodney, the Rodney family and the Walter Rodney Foundation members in reaching agreement for the translation of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* into Chinese and its imminent publication in China and the interest and support of the Chinese academic community to begin with are leaps into the future. This decision of the Chinese academy, 41 years after its publication by Bogle L'Overture must be at least new vindication of the author's scholarship and global vision.