

## Setting the Scene

*Linda Ainouche: How did your parents first meet?*

**Monty Howell:** I have no idea when, where, or how, my parents did first meet. I only know that both lived in Kingston from the mids-1930, during the British Colony's leadership, which already provides an assurance of encounter!

Yet my two parents came from Jamaica's western south coast and were originally from Anglican parishes.<sup>1</sup> My father was born on the 16th of June 1898 in a village named Red Lands in Clarendon parish and died on the 25th of February 1981 in Kingston. My mother, born Teneth Bent, was a cousin of my father, born on the 7th of March 1912 in Southfield, Saint Elizabeth parish, and was declared missing on the 7th of December 1943, in Saint Catherine parish.<sup>2</sup>

My father came back to Kingston on 18 November 1932 from the United States, where he had been expelled. The reason for his deportation is not entirely clear.

He lived in the USA after working as a seaman for the United States Army Transport (USAT) and then occupied activities recorded as an entrepreneur.

He left Jamaica in 1917 while World War I was raging, like thousands of his countrymen, because Jamaica was not providing a way for its youth to survive. He would have fled the country for a murky murder to which he would have been the only witness. He traveled four days on *Sixaola*, an American steam passenger ship from the USA to Jamaica. My mother was a seamstress before moving to Kingston in 1934 for studies, then worked as a secretary in the prominent tobacco factory run by the late B. & J.B Machado.<sup>3</sup> She was for a time engaged to one of the Machado's sons but fell in love with my father instead. The rest is history!

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1 Nelson, Louis P. 2005. Anglican Church Building and Local Context in Early Jamaica. *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*. 10. 63–65.

2 Saint Elizabeth is a parish in the southwest of Jamaica. Its capital is Black River. Saint Catherine Parish is part of the island southeast parishes, with Spanish town as the capital.

3 The B.B. Machado firm was established in 1875 in Kingston by the Cuban Machado family, who fled to Jamaica during the revolt of 1868–1878 for Independence from Spain to manufacture cigars and cigarettes. The firm was located at Winward and South Camp Roads in Kingston. Jamaica is still regarded as one of the top countries for producing cigars worldwide.

*What do you know about your parents' wedding?*

My grandparents on my mother's side were totally against their marriage. They belonged to a well-established family of landowners with Irish, Scottish, German, and Jewish roots. People like my grandparents wished to wed their children to partners with the fairest skin possible. In those days in Jamaica, marrying a very dark-skinned man like my father was not well accepted. Stigma tends to relegate my mother's family to the level of an outmoded *cliché* about social status. It looks that my mother's side parents were not prone to cope with such a matter like this. My mother was a beautiful fair-skinned woman, mixed with some Black blood drops. My grandparents eventually disowned my mother because she married a Black man heralding: "*If you marry him, we don't want anything to do with you.*" My parents got married on the 31st of January 1937 in Kingston. My father, who was thirty-eight, and my mother, who was twenty-six, lived at 37 Oliver Road in Kingston.

*Was skin complexion the only reason why your grandparents disowned your mother?*

Nothing else than she should not marry a Black man! It was straight out of color racism.

*Racial prejudice dehumanizes people by asserting that superficial shades of skin make some humans less human than others. Did your grandparents also, cast your father away for his dedication to Rastafari?*

People of dark color like my father had done to bear the brunt of this burden that racism was. Rastafari was not yet a powerful force that caused trouble for my grandparents in 1937. This was more of a problem for the colonial authorities.<sup>4</sup>

*Your charismatic, non-conventional, leader father is recognized as the Founding Father of the Rastafari movement. What is Rastafari for you?*

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4 The colonial authorities reigned in Jamaica starting in 1655. British took Sovereignty over Jamaica from Spanish domination, arrived with Christopher Columbus in 1494. Newman, Brooke. 2018. *A Dark Inheritance: Blood, Race, and Sex in Colonial Jamaica*. New Haven, CT. Yale University Press. 28–66.