

# Grenada diary: Roots of the invasion

by Bill Bigelow

Grenada: a little island with Swiss Family Robinson-like beauty, less than a third the population of Portland, a "naval fleet" of about ten fishing trawlers, its major contribution to the world economy—nutmeg.

"It's not safe," my travel agent warned. "I've read that the Cubans have taken over, and everyone carries guns." I did want to return from my vacation in one piece. After all, I had to be back in my classroom in September [1982]. But Grenada's accomplishments—especially in education—had become world famous; I wanted to see for myself.

My plane from Miami landed in Barbados. More warnings: Grenada is communist; Grenadians hate Americans; kids carry automatic rifles.

Waiting in line the next morning with other Americans, medical students, I sought assurances.

"Nothing to worry about," guaranteed my fellow passengers. "You don't bother them, they don't bother you."

And what about the revolution? "I wouldn't know," shrugged one student. "I go to class, I go to the beach, I go to town."

Our plane hugged the hilltops, made a sudden plunge, and we were down. "Welcome to Grenada—Isle of Spice." This was an airport? A typical Portland block is a longer "runway." But I was here. Now I could see for myself what all the fuss was about.

This "new" Grenada had been born March 13, 1979, when the New Jewel Movement overthrew then-Prime Minister Eric Gairy. The economy Gairy managed was in shambles; an estimated 49 percent of the population was unemployed. Held in contempt for his incompetent and unjust economic policies, Gairy was feared and hated for his "Mongoose Gang"—a vicious secret police force equipped by the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile.

The March revolution—the "Revo," as it was affectionately called in Grenada—ignited celebrations throughout the island. The New Jewel Movement promised a society fundamentally different from that of Gairy or the colonial order of some 300 years. But with virtually no industry, and national revenues dependent on fluctuations in the international price of nutmeg, bananas and cocoa, it wasn't going to be easy.

Though I didn't want to miss out on Grenada's spectacular beaches I was also there to see what Grenada had accomplished in the previous three years.

The economy had obviously turned around. A new agrarian reform law offered underutilized land to those forming co-operatives. While waiting in line in a St. George's restaurant, I met a member of the Good Hope Agri Co-op who invited me out to look around. As we walked through his land slurping mangoes and picking up fallen avocados he told me how he had formed the co-op with a number of his unemployed friends. The New Jewel government quickly offered encouragement by providing tools, seed, fertilizer and most importantly—land. Two of their members had been given scholarships to study farming methods. Other co-ops I visited were equally successful.

I also toured food processing plants which had been built to boost export earnings and provide still more jobs. According to outside aid agencies, in just three years unemployment had plummeted from about half the population to 14 percent. It sounded like something out of Ripley's Believe it or Not, but it was true.

As a teacher I was especially curious about education. In 1979, 45 percent of Grenadians couldn't read or write. A nationwide literacy campaign cut that to less than 10 percent. Between 1979 and 1982, university scholarships had shot from three up to 220. A new high school had been built—only the second with public money in 350 years.

I rented a car and drove around the island. Instead of advertising cigarettes and booze, billboards pushed education: "Each One Teach One," "Education Is Production Too," "If You Know, Teach; If You Don't, Learn."

As I spoke with Grenadians, the achievement mentioned even more than education was the construction



Agricultural workers in a militant mood in Gouyave. The Agricultural and General Workers Union and these workers won profit-sharing rights in 1981 (above).



"The manoeuvre is the Hardest Hard"—Carriacou Militia at the conclusion of National Manoeuvres of February, 1982.

(Photo: Free West Indian)

of the new international airport. Hotel managers, taxi drivers, nutmeg farmers and dockworkers all agreed it was a long overdue boost for the nagging tourist industry. While the Americans turned down Grenada's request for help in building the airport, the Cubans said, "Where do you want it?"—offering labor, expertise and equipment. Other international aid was also forthcoming.

President Reagan subsequently complained that Grenada had no use for such an airport, that the country didn't even have an air force. He claimed that it was a ruse for "Soviet-Cuban militarization" of the island. But if the airport was a communist plot it had the endorsement of all the capitalists on the island. The Chamber of Commerce, the Grenada Hotel Association and the Employers Federation all gave the project their enthusiastic blessings.

Impressive as the airport was, more significant to me was the new level of political involvement Grenada had achieved. People's democracy—that's the phrase I kept hearing. What it meant to the islanders was that now they were learning to participate in decisions they had never even considered as theirs to make.

In Zonal Council meetings held regularly throughout the country, neighborhood residents would meet to discuss everything from day-care centers to the national economic plan: how much to spend on imports, what crops to concentrate on, whether or not to use pesticides.

I met with Phyllis Coard, director of the National Women's Organization (NWO), and wife of Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard. In her musical West Indian accent, Ms. Coard spoke with an encyclopedic knowledge of Grenadian society. Traditionally unorganized and heavily discriminated against, women in the new Grenada had joined the NWO in droves. The goal of the organization was to empower women—to teach them to work together and to demand to be heard. That summer, Coard told me, the organization was in the midst of debating legalized abortion, whether to ban Depo Provera as birth control, and what to do about sexual harassment at work.

Grenada's political objective was summed up by Prime Minister Maurice Bishop: "To train the people to become the leaders." Another government official added, "We don't want to have only a 'representative democracy'—which means that once every five years for five seconds you go to the polls and mark your 'X.' We call that 'five-second democracy.'"

Certainly in four years the island had not become the new democratic utopia. It hadn't decided what pro-

cess would choose national leadership, no bill of rights had been developed. But more Grenadians were energetically and creatively involved in decisions affecting their lives than ever before.

Rather than supporting this embryonic democracy, the U.S. threatened it. During the Ocean Venture '81 naval maneuvers in August of 1981, the U.S. staged a mock invasion of Grenada on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico. Code named Amber and the Amberdines, the supposedly fictitious eastern Caribbean country of Amber was accused of being a pawn of Country Red to "export terrorism to a number of Caribbean countries." A Ranger battalion based in Ft. Lewis, Washington, was airlifted from California to Vieques. Paratroopers were landed in mountainous areas of the island and were backed by air attacks and the amphibious landing of a thousand marines.

Amber and the Amberdines—Grenada and the Grenadines; the operation was more than "purely coincidental," the Grenadian government charged at the time. Those maneuvers now cast considerable doubt on Reagan's claim that the recent invasion was a spontaneous move to restore order in Grenada. Planning for the invasion was in the works long ago. It's little wonder the Grenadians felt a need to stockpile arms to defend themselves.

On a steamy August night I began to understand why the U.S. chose to take such a hostile stance towards Grenada. I and hundreds of Grenadians crowded into the auditorium of a St. George's high school to watch performances from a number of Caribbean groups. Reggae musicians from St. Vincent, a political theatre troupe from Dominica, a calypso band from Barbados—each group closed its act with a short speech on how inspiring they found the changes in Grenada. With shouts and smiles they pledged to return to their islands and spread the word of the Grenadian "Revo."

For me, this West Indian cultural night symbolized the real "threat" posed by Grenada. It was not the supposed export of terrorism nor the alleged Soviet-Cuban menace that Reagan feared. Rather, it was Grenada's example to other impoverished Caribbean nations that worried the president—and also frightened the elites of those countries joining the invasion. What would become of American influence—not to mention American investment opportunities—if other countries united with Grenada in an effort to democratically restructure their economies in the interests of their own people? U.S. corporate control of markets and resources would inevitably be challenged. Caribbean nations might decide to embark on a more independent course in foreign policy, as had Grenada.

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## Street Beat

by Lanita Duke and Richard Brown

With the rubble cleared away from the troops' positions in Lebanon the **Street Beat** team asked, "In the aftermath of the bombing, should U.S. troops come home or launch some retaliatory action?"



**Walter Clute  
Security**

I think they should retaliate. I don't think it is right what they did. It is the same with Grenada. I'm glad the Marines went there.



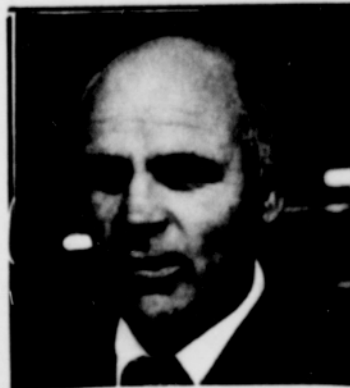
**Rev. A.R. Hopkins  
Pastor**

I think they should come on home and leave the problems of another country in their hands. They should settle their own problems.



**Mr. Portwood  
Housewife**

It's time to bring them home. It was tragic what happened but I still think they should just come home.



**Wally Hayden  
Wine Distributor**

I really think they ought to pull out. They are involved with other countries and their cultures. We don't know anything about them, therefore we should pull out.



**Bub Sherman  
Real Estate**

I don't think they should launch any retaliatory action, but I think they should stay for their own credibility. If you don't have your commitments taken care of in one area you won't have them taken care of in another area.



**Lu Neal  
Unemployed**

I really don't know, but I think they should have had better protection. They knew how it was over there. The truck should never have gotten that far.