

TRACING BLACK RADICAL THOUGHT: COLONIALISM, RACE, CLASS,  
WOMEN AND GENDER IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF C.L.R. JAMES &  
AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

RUNAKO KAMAU GREGG

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE  
STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT  
YORK UNIVERSITY  
TORONTO, ONTARIO  
APRIL, 2024

©Runako Gregg, 2024

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation aims to illuminate the contours of the Black radical tradition, namely its anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist principles, through an examination of the lives and works of C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire. There are four main goals here: (1) to introduce the trajectory and nuances of the Black radical tradition by way of the contributions of these two contemporaries, (2) to explore the varying expressions of these ideas through the span of several decades of the lives of James and Césaire, (3) to understand the portrayal of gender in some of their most important creative work, and (4) to think through the role that women played in their philosophical development and conception of revolutionary subjecthood.

To meet these objectives, I first interrogate the early life influences of the philosophers in the respective colonies they were born into, including their educational and familial backgrounds, then delve into their engagements with Marxism and left-wing thought more broadly, before considering how gender is presented in their creative writings, and finally how women factor in their emergence and projections of radicalism.

The method of comparative evaluation undertaken in this study lends itself to different pathways to apprehend some of James' and Césaire's most significant works. It thereby broaches ground for further research into these figures, while at the same time teasing out threads of the Black radical tradition that ultimately help to validate its utility as an analytical tool within the spectrum of humanist discourse. Moreover, the dissertation shows through the social and political thought of James and Césaire, two twentieth century thinkers from the Caribbean, lies a critical, internationalist, anti-oppressive framework aligned towards the betterment of humanity.

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to those who believe that the path towards freedom for all can only come through society's most oppressed.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to express deep gratitude to too many peers, mentors, friends, and family to name, for all your support. You know who you are, and ought to know that without your encouragement and belief in my goal to see this degree to the end, I would surely not have completed it.

My committee members should be named. Professor Emeritus Patrick D M Taylor and Associate Professor Gamal Abdel-Shehid. Your commitment to staying on over the course of several years to help and guide me through this dissertation project was truly humbling.

My supervisor. Professor Emerita Kamala Kempadoo. For showing so much care, concern, and understanding from day one, as I navigated SPTH and life – I thank you endlessly.

My mother and my siblings – you have been my biggest fans and I appreciate you so much for it.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                |         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Abstract.....                                                                                                  | ii      |
| Dedication.....                                                                                                | iii     |
| Acknowledgements.....                                                                                          | iv      |
| Table of Contents.....                                                                                         | v       |
| <br>Introduction: In Search of Black Radicalism.....                                                           | <br>1   |
| <br>Section One – Early Colonial Life, Marx, Marxists & Marxism: Locating Black Revolutionary Thought.....     | <br>13  |
| <br>Chapter 1 – Colonial Foundations: The Early Life of C.L.R. James.....                                      | <br>14  |
| <br>Chapter 2 – Assimilation, Social Mobility and The Black Struggle: The Formative Years of Aimé Césaire..... | <br>53  |
| <br>Chapter 3 – Class & Race: C.L.R. James’ Marxist Lens.....                                                  | <br>90  |
| <br>Chapter 4 – Building Negritude From The Left: Aimé Césaire’s Anti-Colonial Theory.....                     | <br>141 |
| <br>Section Two – Creative Works, Women & Gender: The Intellectual Development of a Radical.....               | <br>193 |
| <br>Chapter 5 – Foreshadowing Radicalism: C.L.R. James’ Creative Mind.....                                     | <br>194 |
| <br>Chapter 6 – Aimé Césaire: Poems, Plays, Gender & Revolution.....                                           | <br>226 |
| <br>Chapter 7 – The Role of Women in the Philosophic Rise of C.L.R. James.....                                 | <br>264 |
| <br>Chapter 8 – Willful Blindness: Aimé Césaire, the Nardals and Suzanne Césaire.....                          | <br>309 |
| <br>Conclusion – Reflections of a Revolutionary Journey.....                                                   | <br>348 |
| <br>Bibliography.....                                                                                          | <br>367 |

## **Introduction – In Search of Black Radicalism: C.L.R. James & Aimé Césaire**

Since the mid to late nineteenth century, a particular radical tradition in Western political and social theory has flourished, which is fundamentally beholden to critiques of capitalist production. Revolutionaries of this ilk are typically heavily influenced by the scholarly output of Karl Marx and argue that capitalist social relations reproduce inequalities among those subsumed by the totalizing tendency of this system, ultimately leading to rampant exploitation. Yet, the use of this lens alone has proven to be insufficient for many scholars who have recognized that other tools are required to articulate the specificities of the socio-historical realities of certain groups more aptly.

The Black radical tradition, as coined by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism*, can trace its origins, in historical and theoretical form, at least as far back as the early nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> As a strand of Black studies in general, it is intrinsically inter-disciplinary in nature, as writers that fall under its scope have found economical, sociological, historical, and various philosophical disciplines to be indispensable in theorizing the condition of people of African descent in the modern era. Moreover, in his foreword to the 2000 reprint of *Black Marxism*, Robin D. G. Kelley points out that Robinson's unearthing of this practice effectually "shifts the center of radical thought and revolution from Europe to the so-called 'periphery' – to the colonial territories, marginalized colored people of the metropolitan centers of capital, and those Frantz Fanon identified as 'the wretched of the earth'."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, Foreword to *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, by Cedric J. Robinson (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 10.

Heeding Robinson's suggestion that the Black radical tradition is an epistemological approach that fosters direction on key questions of the day affecting "the wretched of the earth." I embarked on a study of two of the most prominent figures to emerge from this mould in the twentieth century – C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire.

I have spent my entire adult life trying to understand the world around me, my place in it and how to transform the conditions of the racialized, colonized, working class, poor, and oppressed among us. Thus, revolutionary thought has long been of great interest to me. As I navigated these ideas in my younger years, I often found myself in Black activist spaces where there was a race-first slant, while the Leftist groups I was close to held class struggle at the forefront. It was a tension that I felt I was constantly mediating, even as I believed that the latter was the necessary route towards overturning the global capitalist order that sustained social and economic ills affecting so many, including people of African descent. However, I could identify weaknesses in both methods and recognized that it was not as simple as choosing one course of action over the other, especially as there was so much overlap and intersection among all the world's most subjugated people.

As I increasingly read more literature from the Black radical tradition, I realized that this debate was many decades old and could not be easily dispensed with, but rather required much rumination. James and Césaire were two of the most captivating thinkers traversing this discussion for me, even as they appeared to be on opposing sides. I started my doctoral research with only a superficial understanding of them, but the more I was exposed to their works, questions around race, class, gender, colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, and praxis were raised that led me to appreciate their value as revolutionaries.

This dissertation engages in a comparative study of James and Césaire to illuminate the development of their views on aspects of these subjects. By shedding light on some of their corresponding and divergent theoretical positions it both yields a firmer grasp on the nuances of their efforts and speaks to the validity of Black radical thought in projecting humanist ideals. Put another way, the dissertation adds to this oft-peripheralized branch of Black studies and aims to spark further interest into the fertile breadth of its contours.

As I have already intimated, the main impetus behind why I decided to juxtapose James and Césaire is because I believe that there is a deeper magnitude of richness that can be gleaned from Black radical thought through this framing. Furthermore, they can both be regarded as major contributors to the area despite their markedly different methodologies. Put crudely, James' revolutionary disposition centers on class analysis and is primarily articulated through political commentary, while Césaire's generally turns on race and his preferred tool is poetry. I also find it intriguing that they live and arrive at their most significant conclusions during virtually the same era, albeit under British and American dominion on the one hand and French colonialism on the other. Nevertheless, the discernable shades of the Black radical tradition itself are reflected within and between a plethora of their respective texts and organizing activities.

Additionally, although others who fall within the ambit of this paradigm could be analyzed in a similar manner, it would be difficult to find more than a few scholars with a formative grounding in the English-speaking Caribbean who have made the kind of impact in Black studies and beyond as James, and likewise Césaire, whose foundation was the French-speaking Caribbean. Indeed, the fact that these two intellectuals from separate tiny colonies in the Caribbean have had such a reach throughout the African diaspora – to the extent that their



publications are still considered requisite reading in the field – speaks to the kind of allure this project may evoke for students, researchers, and theorists, and the questions that it may raise.

### *Demarcating the Black radical tradition*

Before setting out the dissertation's parameters, I would like to provide a more robust definition of the Black radical tradition, or Black radical thought, to better explicate how C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire embody it. I find Anthony Bogues helpful here for this task.

In his book, *Caliban's Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James*, Bogues outlines four central themes that distinguish the Black radical tradition.<sup>3</sup> The first theme he identifies is the foregrounding of race/White racism and its characteristics in Western society. Bogues notes that this often entails an intersecting engagement which poses questions both about the nature of social and economic relations, as well as ontological queries. Hence, he remarks that combating the dehumanizing forces of White racism induces a process for people of African descent towards reclaiming their humanity through an object-to-subject struggle resulting in a (re)definition of the self. What's more, the complex totality of society and social life, in general, means that "each moment of struggle for this definition creates new forms, which then manifest themselves in new cultural representations and images, particularly in the public sphere," thereby offering a challenge and critique of dominant mainstream configurations.<sup>4</sup>

In the United States, this theme is exhibited in the jazz and blues music genres which emerged in the early twentieth century, and likewise calypso music during the same epoch in the Caribbean. Non-fiction books and poetry pieces are other mediums in the Black radical tradition where cultural contestation has taken place, whilst new constructive representations have been

---

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James* (Chicago, IL: Pluto Press, 1997). Bogues also delves deeper elsewhere in a later work see Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, 4.

formed. The renowned Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s was a movement driven by African Americans, though inspiring people across the African diaspora, which encapsulated this kind of cultural resistance/reclamation tactic across myriad art forms. Aimé Césaire's own "négritude" (negritude) efforts, beginning in the 1930s similarly speak directly to this aspect of Black radical thought. As an ideology, negritude was itself rooted in the principle that people of African descent needed to collectively rebuff cultural assimilation by engendering respect for their past, while at the same time conceptualizing and advancing notions of African distinctiveness. Its most salient feature, the restoration of self-pride among people of African descent, was undeniably apparent in Césaire's classic semi-autobiographical poetic treatise entitled, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*: "...I accept...I accept...completely, without reservation...my race that no brew of herbs and flowers could wash away."<sup>5</sup>

The second theme in the Black radical tradition that Bogues observes is a consequence of the first. Within a socio-historical setup that denigrates people of African descent, "the construction of a new historical framework which seeks to define the activities of blacks as significant and contributing to social progress is imperative."<sup>6</sup> This element of the Black radical tradition is probably most evident in the anti-colonial writings coming out of Africa and the African diaspora around the mid-twentieth century. W.E.B Dubois', *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, is one such monograph that reflects this stream.<sup>7</sup> In this piece of revisionist history, Dubois illuminates the realities of Black labourers in the Southern U.S. in the aftermath of the American Civil War. He challenges the view at the time that the enslaved and freed

---

<sup>5</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, in *The Original 1939 Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (bilingual edition), translated and edited A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 45.

<sup>6</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, with an introduction by David Levering Lewis (Toronto: Free Press, 1998).

people were docile non-agents of social change in the U.S., by highlighting their impacts, including how their labour was inextricably linked to social and economic development in the U.S.

C.L.R. James', *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, similarly utilizes a materialist framework in his own lauded history of the events that led to Haiti becoming the first independent nation in the colonized Americas.<sup>8</sup> James' reclamation of this history was a boon to the budding anti-colonial movement of the late 1930s and 1940s, as he was able to show the propensity of people of African descent to assert their freedom against insurmountable odds, and subsequently declare their independence even as their enslaved counterparts in the rest of the "New World" continued to languish at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, *The Black Jacobins* encouraged other anti-colonial writings which fit into this particular theme of the Black radical tradition, compelling socialists who employed Marxist political praxis to consider the inputs of people of African descent in the battle against capitalist logic.

Another theme that Bogue pinpoints as emblematic of the Black radical tradition is the connectedness of Africa and the African diaspora in Black liberation struggles. Bogue notes that "this connection to Africa was a fundamental feature of radical Caribbean political activity in both pre-slavery and post-slavery societies as well as the United States."<sup>9</sup> Commonly referred to as Pan-Africanism, this socio-political outlook initially amassed popular support in the early twentieth century via Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association, which had chapters across the African diaspora. Yet, even outside of the Garvey movement, Pan-Africanism had great utility for Black anti-colonial activists. Figures like James and Césaire,

---

<sup>8</sup> C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Bogue, *Caliban's Freedom*, 4

along with other scholars, novelists and political actors galvanized at conferences, such as the Pan-African Congress, where discussions were focused on the subjugation of people of African descent worldwide. To be sure, well-known socio-political agitators like Malcolm X of the United States, Walter Rodney of Guyana, and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana all avidly espoused a Pan-Africanist viewpoint.

Pan-Africanism certainly influenced the works of James and Césaire. In addition to *The Black Jacobins*, James published, *A History of Negro Revolt* in the following year, which was a compilation of six monographs analyzing social movements in Africa and the African diaspora, and tacitly linked these different contexts to a collective sense of liberation.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Césaire's trilogy of plays in the 1960s, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*<sup>11</sup>, *A Season in the Congo*<sup>12</sup> and *A Tempest*<sup>13</sup>, each explored the situation of Black people in the Caribbean, Africa and the U.S., whilst laying bare the complexities of decolonization in both the colonial and “post”-colonial eras. Moreover, an affinity for Pan-Africanism is arguably the most recognizable facet of the Black radical tradition, as writers inevitably engage in a conceptual and material connection to the African continent.

Lastly, the fourth theme that Bogues identifies as characteristic of the Black radical tradition is its humanist approach. He explains in *Caliban's Freedom* that this is evidenced in the “radical activities of the black populations in both Africa and the African diaspora” which have “challenged the intellectual basis of Western civilization, its notions of happiness, concepts of individualism and individuality and expanded notions of freedom and equality.”<sup>14</sup> Bogues

---

<sup>10</sup> C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, with an introduction by Robin Kelly (Chicago: C.H. Kerr, 1995). First published as *A History of Negro Revolt* (1938).

<sup>11</sup> Aimé Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe; A Play*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York, Grove Press 1970).

<sup>12</sup> Aimé Césaire, *A Season in the Congo; A Play*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Grove Press 1968).

<sup>13</sup> Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest; A Play*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, N.Y.: G. Borchardt 1986).

<sup>14</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, 5.

adds that “[t]hese issues have been raised in the arts and popular culture as well as in political theses and mass political activities.”<sup>15</sup>

Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* exemplifies this strand of the Black radical tradition.<sup>16</sup> In the book, he demonstrates that Euro-American colonialism is not only brutal, exploitative, and centred around the pursuit of capital and a notion of white supremacy, but it also exposes the hypocrisy of its perpetrators. Indeed, he reveals that in large part European philosophies and practices are unmistakably contradictory. Thus, for Césaire, the dehumanizing nature of colonialism cannot be regarded as an aberration in European epistemology or behaviour, but rather can be deemed as consistent with it. His critique leads him to a point of departure wherein Western thought proves insufficient for expressing *true* humanism.

James’ wide range of writings can also be said to be undergirded by humanist ideology. Certainly, his historical pieces, socio-political critiques, and cultural observations are based on a materialist perspective that revolves around human beings, labourers or otherwise, as agents of social change whom themselves push the bounds of Western civilization’s ideas about freedom. James, a self-identified Marxist, resolved that humanism in the sense of relative all-encompassing sovereignty could only manifest through an anti-capitalist posture. What’s more, this link between an anti-capitalist stance and humanism is unquestionably a common feature of the Black radical tradition.

#### *A thesis tracing Black radical thought*

With the delineation above in mind, several critiques can be undertaken to engage discourses that constitute theories germane to the Black radical tradition. For this dissertation, I have identified five subjects in the life and works of C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire that can be

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

marked out for comparability between them – colonialism, race, class, gender, and the sway of women on their philosophical growth. These often-overlapping categories have been distilled further into two distinct sections, which contains two chapters each on James and Césaire. This mapping is meant to crystallize the evolution and scope of their revolutionary thought by way of the themes under discussion. Moreover, through the course of this exercise, arguments are put forward that enable some depth of understanding of their ideas, such that their value to the Black radical tradition can be assessed. Nevertheless, I contend that the examination which follows points to the genesis and critical utility of Black radical thought as espoused by James and Césaire and opens space for more scrutiny of this discipline. The initiating question being asked and answered in due course here then is: What do the lives and works of James and Césaire tell us about this field and their contributions to it?

#### *Summarizing the sections*

#### **Early Colonial Life Marx, Marxists & Marxism: Locating Black Revolutionary Thought**

The first section of this dissertation is chronological and begins by exploring the early life of C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire in the years before they gained worldwide popularity and engaged in unequivocal, anti-colonial, revolutionary writing, and activism. These opening chapters survey some of their primary life influences, with a mind towards ascertaining which experiences may have played a role in the rebellious, innovative interventions they eventually had that fit them within the gamut of the Black radical tradition. Yet, they only deal cursorily with the theories or modes of analysis that James and Césaire would develop by the end of the 1930s and into the 1940s. In other words, the works which exhibit the ideas for which the men would become known are left practically untouched. Thus, the inquiry here presupposes the

notion that they only scarcely resemble the philosophers they would become in the years that follow.

The two remaining chapters demarcate the role that Marx, Marxism and Marxists played in both the writings and activity of C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire from about the early 1930s, to about the mid-1950s, which was in essence a period that began with both principally being concerned with anti-colonial politics while in the metropolitan countries of their respective birthplaces before gradually widening their scope in the 1940s. The latter first encountered Marxism during his sojourn in France, while the former delved into Marxism and the theories surrounding it almost immediately upon his arrival in England. Although many regard James as a devout Marxist, and Césaire an open critic of Marxism, these chapters demonstrate that such notions must be complicated if the insights of each scholar are to be truly understood. They both begin with a discussion on the impact of early exposure to Marxism in the metropole during the 1930s. The utility of these theories for each thinker in the 1940s and into the 1950s is then explored concerning the ongoing refinement of their mode of analysis during this period. Taken together, this examination shows the role the vicissitudes that each experienced with Marx, Marxism and Marxists, cemented their fidelity to the Black radical tradition at the dawn of the anti-colonial, decolonization, and independence movements in this epoch.

### **Creative Works, Women & Gender: The Intellectual Development of a Radical**

The first two chapters of the second section concentrate on the way gender constructions are treated within the creative writings of James and Césaire. Specifically, there is an assessment of how men and women, or masculinity and femininity, appear in their fictional texts, poems, and plays. In the case of James, most of this interrogation looks at publications from a time before he is beholden to political agitation since such pieces are effectively absent thereafter.

Contrastingly, Césaire's chapter on this theme illustrates that his creative compositions are attendant with his radical theorizations. Nonetheless, these chapters show how gender functions as a vehicle for both men to explore their revolutionary imaginings, even if it is not always intended to be deployed in this fashion. Moreover, the discussion here illustrates that their radical creative pieces are crucially formed by their conceptions of gender. Much can be gleaned from them if read through this lens, including the limitations in their outlook.

The final chapters evaluate the influence of women who were in Césaire's and James' philosophic and organizing circles, and concomitantly, how they regarded women broadly as the two honed their methodological approaches in resistance to capitalism, imperialism, racism, and colonialism. Each chapter touches upon how women are addressed in their resultant critiques of these hegemonic systems, either in speeches, articles, or other non-fictional writings. Further, some scrutiny of the works of the women who are closest to them when they are most active form an important part of this appraisal. In the end, these chapters show that while there are some fascinating fissures within largely patriarchal oeuvres, both James and Césaire struggled with the so-called "Woman Question," even as the women around them unequivocally helped to shape their respective revolutionary views. Put differently, degrees of sexism aside, this discussion demonstrates that their Black radical thought formation could not exist without the critical direction that the women in their lives provided. Thus, a notable shortcoming of the two thinkers is confronted here – the invisibilization and exclusion of women, especially Black women, in their opuses.

### **Reflections of a Revolutionary Journey**

The final section is a concluding piece to the dissertation that essentially summarizes the previous two sections, rather than introducing substantive new material. However, the



convergences and variances between James and Césaire is put directly into focus here to reaffirm the multi-layered nature of the Black radical tradition and the lessons that this study reveals about their philosophical track.

**SECTION ONE – EARLY COLONIAL LIFE, MARX, MARXISTS &  
MARXISM: LOCATING BLACK REVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT**

## **Chapter 1 – Colonial Foundations: The Early Life of C.L.R. James**

Several people were born in the colony of Trinidad that became known within the expanse of the Black radical tradition for their ground-breaking efforts in the twentieth century outside of the Caribbean region. Among them are Henry Sylvester Williams, Claudia Cumberbatch (Jones), Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Touré), George Padmore, and of course C.L.R. James. Williams was one of the founders of the Pan-African movement, Jones a pioneer in delivering an intersectional analysis of race and gender within a Marxist framework in the U.S. Communist Party and U.K. Leftist groups she was a part of, Touré an eminent leader of the Civil Rights and Black Power era in the United States, Padmore a servant of the Communist and Pan-African cause in the U.S. and the continents of Europe and Africa, while James made his mark mainly as a theorist and organizer in England and the United States and published a stirring account about the only successful revolution of enslaved people in the so-called “New World.” With a population that was under one million for most of the century, it is curious that this small island was the birthplace of such impressive figures. Even though almost all their activities did not take place in the colony, the phenomenon still raises questions about their rearing and life before migrating to Europe or the United States. This is especially pertinent in the case of C.L.R. James since he lived in Trinidad for over 30 years before departing for the first time.

This chapter examines C.L.R. James’ early life in Trinidad and postulates on the experiences that may have led him on the path towards becoming a Pan-African, anti-colonial revolutionary thinker shortly after leaving the colony in 1932. To start the analysis, a short background about the colony is provided for context. This is useful for providing an overview of the historical, economic, social, and political forces at work and how these elements would either

directly or indirectly envelop James' life. The discussion then turns to his familial relationships and educational exposures at the primary and secondary school levels. A look at his adult life follows, including his reading and writing activities. Specifically, meditations on colonialism, race and class within his associations are highlighted. Moreover, the prevailing argument here is that scrutiny of these events at home are required to explain C.L.R. James' penchant for radicalism when he goes abroad.

### **The British Colony of Trinidad in Context**

The island of Trinidad's first colonizing forebear was the Spanish who made first contact in 1498. The indigenous Lokonos (Arawaks) and Kalina (Caribs) made up most of the population at this time and were attacked and enslaved almost immediately upon contact, with many of them seized for labour in the Greater Antilles.<sup>17</sup> Once the colony was settled by the imperial power in 1592, the decimation of the indigenous people ensued due to disease, slave raids, the disruption of traditional subsistence practices and flight to the mainland. Even though their population dwindled to a fraction of what it was when the Spanish first landed in Trinidad, they frequently resisted their displacement and exploitation throughout the seventeenth century. However, typically, the insurrections of indigenous people in the colony were brutally repressed. For example, Bridget Brereton cites the "last Indian Rebellion in Trinidad" that took place in 1699, following an uprising by a group of indigenous people in a central-east town who murdered several Spanish functionaries in an act of resistance against Christianity and colonialism. The rebels were pursued by Spanish soldiers many miles east of the incident and ultimately, "some were killed and captured; others preferred suicide to enslavement, leaping off

---

<sup>17</sup> For more on why Spain colonialism focused on developing the Greater Antilles at the time, see David Watts, "Early Hispanic New World Agriculture, 1492-1509," in *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader*, eds. Hilary McD. Beckles and Verene A. Shepherd (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000).

a high cliff to their death in a final, mass protest.”<sup>18</sup> In the end, the Lokonos and Kalina of Trinidad were devastated by their encounter with the colonizing forces, as by the eighteenth century, there were only 2000 of them compared to 40,000 when the Spanish landed two centuries earlier.

Trinidad was seized by the English (British) in 1797, and by then, was largely settled by the French and their enslaved Africans. With respect to the administration of their colonies, the British typically opted for a system of self-governance in the West Indies at this time, which followed the British constitution, and featured a governor with an elected lower house and an appointed upper house forming a legislative assembly. However, the British government decided to impose a Crown Colony government in Trinidad, as there was concern about the power that the planter class had amassed in representative assemblies in other colonies; the abnormally high number of property-owning free people of colour living in Trinidad in particular; along with the fact that the French, Spanish and other Europeans together outnumbered the British.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, under the Crown Colony system, all essential administrative powers in Trinidad would be controlled by the British government, with its authority vested through the colony’s Governor. This form of government was introduced in most of the other British colonies in the West Indies by the end of the nineteenth century would basically remain in Trinidad until 1925.

---

<sup>18</sup> Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962* (Port of Spain: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1981), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Williams observes that the principal reason for the imposition of a Crown Colony government was to “deny the vote to people of colour who were otherwise qualified.” See Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (Great Britain: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1962/1964), 68, 72. “Free people of colour” at this historical moment refers to people of African ancestry, of varying degrees, who were either not White or not slaves. Bridget Brereton notes that in 1810 they made up at least 20 per cent of the population and had been an important element in the colony since the 1780s as significant land-owners. See Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962*, 63-69.

Relative to older colonies in the British West Indies like Jamaica and Barbados, Trinidad was vastly under-populated in the early nineteenth century, as the Spanish never settled in the colony in large numbers, while much of the population living in Trinidad up to when the British annexed the island at the end of the eighteenth century, came from colonies like Martinique, Grenada, St. Lucia, Guadeloupe, and Saint Domingue as a result of the Haitian Revolution.<sup>20</sup> Many of these migrants were planters who brought enslaved men and women with them, transforming Trinidad into a slave society for the first time. Still, much effort was made during these early decades to bring in more labourers to work on sugar, coffee, cocoa, and cotton estates. The push for workers during this period, particularly for expanding sugar plantations, was challenging because the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was outlawed in 1807, but inter-colonial trading of enslaved peoples helped to supplement the need for labour.<sup>21</sup>

By 1809, there were reportedly 739 plantations that employed 18,302 enslaved people in the colony.<sup>22</sup> A high proportion of planters were small or medium estate owners, as the enslaved lived in smaller units compared to the more mature British colonies. This did not mean though that that these Black bodies escaped the horrors of Atlantic slavery in Trinidad. For instance, the 1800 Slave Ordinance gave slave masters discretionary powers to inflict cruel corporal punishment for supposed insubordination with no serious attempts to restrict the methods used.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, as Carl Campbell notes, “The predominance of African-born slaves in a frontier

---

<sup>20</sup> See Bridget Brereton, “Enter the Africans and the French, 1783-97,” in *A History of Modern Trinidad*, 13-31. In an article examining the impact of the Haitian Revolution across the Americas, David Geggus notes that along with “North America,” Cuba and Jamaica, Trinidad was one of the places that Saint Domingue “refugee” planters specifically migrated with their slaves due to the uprising. See David Geggus, “The French and Haitian Revolutions, and Resistance to Slavery in the Americas: An Overview,” *Revue Française d’Histoire d’Outre-Mer* 76, nos. 282-283 (1989): 107-124, 112, footnote 20.

<sup>21</sup> See Eric Williams, “Trinidad as a Model British Slave Colony,” in *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, 65-85.

<sup>22</sup> According to Brereton, these figures were reported by Governor Hislop. Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, 47.

<sup>23</sup> Bridget Brereton, “The Historical Background to the Cultural Background of Violence in Trinidad,” *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, Issue 4 (The University of the West Indies Institute of Gender Studies, Feb. 2010): 3-4. <https://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/february2010/index.asp>.

colony where new estates had to be established by arduous land clearing contributed to a high rate of mortality,” while the general shortage of labour “tended in the direction of pressure of work on the declining slave population.”<sup>24</sup> The enslaved resisted their oppression throughout the 50-60 years that the institution was the focal point of the colony’s economic development, through marronage, poisonings, practicing their own religious rites and conspiring to rebel.

Although the British were able to attract planters with enslaved people to Trinidad, along with some Europeans and Chinese workers, they faced a crisis once the institution of slavery itself was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1834. A severe labour shortage ensued that left the colonialists in a remarkable conundrum, more so than neighbouring islands which had more extensive plantation systems that many formerly enslaved people were incentivised to continue to work on for several years. In Trinidad, after the four-year “apprentice” period concluded in 1838, the majority of the newly freed people either opted for unoccupied Crown lands to start small farms or went into the colony’s towns to live and work, joining enslaved people who had previously secured their freedom, along with Whites and free people of colour who were the majority in these spaces at the time.<sup>25</sup>

In order to make up for the labour demand, colonialists summoned workers from as far as Portugal, India and China, and even some from the continent of Africa.<sup>26</sup> These were in effect, indentured servants, as most arrived on fixed contracts that tied them to estates for several years under harsh conditions not radically different to the enslaved who worked these same fields before them. In fact, many who managed these workers carried the same attitude towards them

---

<sup>24</sup> Carl Campbell, “Trinidad’s Free Coloureds in Comparative Caribbean Perspectives,” in Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, 608.

<sup>25</sup> Brian W. Blouet, “Land Policies in Trinidad, 1838-50,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 9 (May 1977): 43-59., 43-44.

<sup>26</sup> Marianne Soares Ramesar, *Survivors of Another Crossing* (St. Augustine: University of the West Indies School School of Continuing Studies, 1994), 67.

as they did with the enslaved, including floggings and beatings at times, while there was often little support for indentured workers from the colonial administration. Many resisted, especially in the latter half of the century when their numbers grew exponentially, in the form of cultural practices, sabotage of crops and animals, and other labour actions.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, even though the abolition of slavery did not signal any real political change in the colony, Trinidad was changing rapidly with respect to the composition of its inhabitants, its economic situation; and gradually with respect to the nature of class stratification in the post-emancipation period.

By 1846, the British government had abandoned their policy of exclusive trading and protection of products from its colonies, including preferential sugar duties. Yet, even as the British Empire deserted their economic arrangements in favour of free trade relationships with other nations, they still maintained political control over their possessions in the West Indies. Thus, the British government still concerned itself with the demand for more workers to toil on sugar plantations in Trinidad. While most of the White population that came to Trinidad after 1840 consisted of a steady stream of workers from Britain who became civil servants and professionals, including those occupying managerial positions on sugar estates, the colony still recruited thousands of formerly enslaved people from the Eastern Caribbean and the African continent until 1861.<sup>28</sup> However, the vast majority of workers who migrated to Trinidad during the immediate post-emancipation period would come from India under indentureship arrangements, a practice that remained valid until 1917. The immigration of Indian people to Trinidad had a substantial impact on the colony, which was already quite cosmopolitan by

---

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion on the mechanics of control, apathy of colonial authorities and resistance from Indian indentured workers, see Kusha Haraksingh, "Control and Resistance Among Overseas Indian Workers: A Study of Labour on the Sugar Plantations of Trinidad 1875-1917," in *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present: A Student Reader*, eds. Hilary McD. Beckles and Verene A. Shepherd (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1996): 207-214.

<sup>28</sup> Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962*, 70, 96-100.



1870.<sup>29</sup> They migrated in especially large numbers between the 1850s and 1880s, and by 1891 the group already represented nearly one-third of the entire Trinidadian population.<sup>30</sup> The post-emancipation epoch in Trinidad had been contentious even before the arrival of Indian migrants, due to its eclectic mix of Christian denominations and people of European, African, Western Asian (Middle Eastern), and mixed ancestry. In a study of nineteenth century education policies directed towards so-called “East Indian” communities that finds exclusion was, in effect, more so promoted rather than integration, Vashti Singh also notes what the wider social implications were for this group in Trinidad and the hardship they faced:

The East Indians were not welcome in the new host society. Differences based on race, socio-economic status, cultural background, and social traits led to overt discrimination...In particular, the East Indians and Africans possessed distinctly separate identities and each group was conscious of itself as a unique entity of a different religion and culture. Mutual distrust, suspicion and dislike kept both races apart...On account of discrimination and non-acceptance, the East Indians were socially excluded from the rest of the society. This impact of social exclusion was reinforced by their residential segregation on the sugar estates. With a renewed commitment they sought to preserve their religious and cultural identity.<sup>31</sup>

Hence, while East Indians in Trinidad were vital to the prosperity and sustainability of the sugar plantations in the colony, they largely remained marginalized within mainstream colonial society at the end of the nineteenth century. Instead, social and political dynamics and tensions were between the European minority who controlled the island’s African majority. Together both groups were known as the “Creoles.” The term “Creole” can be seen as subsuming various identities at the end of the nineteenth century. This includes the diverse European community with British, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Irish comprising it, as well as the African community consisting of descendants of enslaved people from across the West

---

<sup>29</sup>See Lomarsh Roopnarine, *Indo-Caribbean Indenture: Resistance and Accommodation, 1838-1920* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> The 1891 census figures for Trinidad indicate that East Indians makeup 32.1% of the total population in Trinidad. See 1946 “British West Indies Census – Trinidad and Tobago.”

<sup>31</sup> Vashti Singh, “East Indian Education in Nineteenth-century Trinidad: Exclusion or Integration?,” in *The Legacy of Indian Indenture: Historical and Contemporary Aspects of Migration and Diaspora*, eds. Mauits S. Hassankhan, Lomarsh Roopnarine, Hans Ramsøedh (New York: Routledge, 2017), 139-161., 141.

Indies, along with “free coloureds,”<sup>32</sup> and a minority from Africa and the United States. In his seminal work, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*, Kamau Brathwaite defines Creoles as “the people, mainly from Britain and West Africa, who settled, lived, worked and were born in Jamaica, contributed to the formation of a society which developed, or was developing its own distinctive character or culture, which, in so far as it was neither purely British, nor West African, is called ‘creole’...” Although Brathwaite’s monograph is about Jamaica, his description is generally useful for the rest of the Caribbean, including Trinidad. He goes on to add further nuance to help conceptualize Creole society as “the result of a complex situation where a colonial polity reacts, as a whole, to external metropolitan pressures, and at the same time to internal adjustments made necessary by the juxtaposition of master and slave, élite and labourer, in a culturally heterogeneous relationship.”<sup>33</sup>

Certainly, Trinidad was far from simplistic during this period, as race, class, religion, ethnicity, and nationality collided in the ways Brathwaite insinuates in his outlining of Creole society. Rhoda Reddock describes the specific case of ethnicity and identity construction in Trinidad:

...immigrant groups are all assumed to be “pure” and to have had a prior existence in their host countries before settling in Trinidad and Tobago; nevertheless, local conditions in Trinidad and Tobago shaped their experiences thereafter and affected their ethnic classification and identity. What is also important is the fact that this construction took place within the context of European colonial and cultural dominance, which to a large extent shaped the process of ethnic definition. Thus, we have from very early the construction of the “Negro” or “Black” at the lower end of the social hierarchical continuum with the “European” or “White” at the other end. In between fit

---

<sup>32</sup> This term is usually used interchangeably with “people of colour” along with “coloured.” and sometimes “mixed.” Again, in general, this group of people are descendants of those who were once enslaved and either freed through certain agreements or managed to purchase their freedom. In this study, the terms describing this group may also be used interchangeably. Furthermore, borrowing Bridget Brereton’s framework for defining racial groups at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth is also helpful here. She describes “Coloured” as individuals “of mixed European and African descent, probably light-complexioned.” She continues that “A ‘black’ is understood to be a person of unmixed African descent, or predominantly of African descent, whose complexion is dark,” while “‘African’ is used only to describe persons born in Africa.” See Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Kamau Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005 [1971]), xxix, xxxi.

other ethnic groups, latecomers to the process as well as the results of racial “mixing” between groups at the opposite ends of the spectrum. Of course one’s position on the continuum depended on a number of interrelated factors including skin colour and phenotype (especially hair quality), economic status and educational attainment...<sup>34</sup>

Not surprisingly, the entrance of large numbers of Indian immigrants occasioned the creation of new ethnicities and new stereotypes. The new “East Indians” (to be distinguished from “West Indians”), were defined in opposition to their labouring predecessors both internally and externally as they sought also to define themselves. In contrast, “East Indians” were constructed as hard-working and thrifty, common characteristics of immigrants anywhere...<sup>35</sup>

To be sure, at the turn of the century, the cohesion of this assorted society was continually being tested, especially with the colony’s Black masses and Black middle-class vying for social, political, and economic mobilization, sometimes creating alliances between one another. These structural elements of colonial society were changing in vital ways at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The British Government’s free trade policy, along with European reliance on beet sugar – grown and produced in that continent – led to several crises in the sugar market, resulting in the virtual collapse of the West Indian sugar market in the mid-1890s.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the Trinidadian economy began to diversify, and cocoa became a main export before the end of the nineteenth century. However, oil was discovered in Trinidad in 1910, and by the 1920s, it was the colony’s primary export. These economic changes brought strength to Trinidad’s economy and enriched development throughout the colony, ultimately bringing its inhabitants closer together, as new settlements were created, and older towns expanded. Furthermore, stakes were higher as the Black and Coloured middle class competed for political power against the colony’s White merchant and planter-class

---

<sup>34</sup> Rhoda Reddock, “Contestations over Culture, Class, Gender and Identity in Trinidad and Tobago: ‘The Little Tradition’” in *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture*, eds. Verene Shepherd and Glen Richards (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002), 111-126., 115-116.

<sup>35</sup> Reddock, “Contestations over Culture, Class, Gender and Identity in Trinidad and Tobago, 116.

<sup>36</sup> Kelvin Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad 1917-1945* (Jamaica: The Press – University of the West Indies, 1994), 4.

minority, who still grappled with divisions between English Creoles and French Creoles.<sup>37</sup> The Black masses would also become more aware and resentful of their marginalization via the Crown Colony during this era, leading to the establishment of the Trinidad Workingmen's Association in 1897. This working-class group principally represented the urban Black population in the colony and led an unsuccessful strike in 1902, and many of its agitators and followers rioted in the legislative chamber in 1903, setting the chief administrative building ablaze while sixteen people were shot by the government.<sup>38</sup> All of these happenings are not even to make mention of the inclusion of the colony's sister isle of Tobago as a ward of Trinidad in 1899. It was under this backdrop that C.L.R. James would enter the world at the dawn of the twentieth century.

### **C.L.R. James (1901-1932)**

#### *Navigating family expectations, middle-class life, and a love for cricket*

Cyril Lionel Robert James was born in the town of Tunapuna, Trinidad, on January 4, 1901, the eldest of three children to Robert Alexander and Ida Elizabeth (Bessie) James. He had a relatively middle-class upbringing, as his father was a schoolmaster, and his mother was an educated woman who was well-read. James would later attribute his appetite for reading to his mother who essentially introduced him to books.<sup>39</sup> Yet, it was his father who tutored him and his siblings regularly from the age of eight in preparation for secondary school education that at the

---

<sup>37</sup> This clash also had cultural implications among these groups. Citing concepts developed by Ravindra Jain and inspired by Brathwaite, Reddock notes that the opposing forces of two processes "acculturation" and "interculturalization" in the colony: "The former he sees as a reactionary force based on the imitation and privileging of Euro-Creole norms and behaviour (the Afro-Saxon) which opposes the spontaneous indigenous and creative interculturalization which has been taking place continually since the nineteenth century." See Reddock, "Contestations over Culture, Class, Gender and Identity in Trinidad and Tobago," 116.

<sup>38</sup> Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> C.L.R. James recalls that his mother was constantly reading and that his life revolved around reading until he was nine. See Letter from C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, July 1944, Reprinted in *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*, eds. Paget Henry and Robert Buhle (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 19. Also see, C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 16.

time was restricted to either those who could afford the fees to attend or those who earned scholarships to cover their tuition costs.

The lower middle-class position that James was born into could be linked to his paternal and maternal grandfathers, both of whom he knew well. James' paternal grandfather was among the many immigrants that came to Trinidad during the immediate post-emancipation years and worked as a “pan-boiler on a sugar estate,” which was a position “usually held by white men.” James remarked that this was significant, as it meant his Barbadian-born grandfather had “raised himself above the mass of poverty, dirt, ignorance and vice...”<sup>40</sup> In his putative autobiography, *Beyond a Boundary*, he also recalls how his grandfather tried to openly flaunt the respectability that he believed he had attained through the coveted occupation:

My grand-father went to church every Sunday morning at eleven o'clock wearing in the broiling hot sun a frock-coat, striped trousers, and top-hat, with his walking stick in hand...respectability was not an ideal, it was an armour...the family fortunes declined and the children grew up in unending struggle not to sink below the level of the Sunday morning top-hat and frock-coat.<sup>41</sup>

James' paternal grandfather's fight to maintain his new socio-economic position in Trinidad resulted in his father's pursuits as a teacher. Not to be outdone, James' maternal grandfather, also migrating to Trinidad from Barbados in the latter half of the nineteenth century, “used to claim that he was the first coloured man to become an engine-driver on the Trinidad Government Railway.”<sup>42</sup> James was particularly fond of his maternal grandfather, “Josh,” whom he remembers was a favourite among the White men, “managers, engineers and other magnates of the sugar estates,” and that he possessed no “racial or national consciousness.”<sup>43</sup> James recites a story about Josh in *Beyond a Boundary* where the latter performed a “miracle” on a

---

<sup>40</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 7. James says here that his grandfather was “an emigrant from one of the smaller islands.” However, Selwyn Cudjoe says in a later publication that both of his grandfathers came to Trinidad from Barbados. See, Selwyn Cudjoe, “The Audacity of It All: C.L.R. James's Trinidadian Background” in Henry and Buhle, *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*, 40-41.

<sup>41</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 7-8.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 13

malfunctioning engine to the bewilderment of his White colleagues, and refused to tell them how he had fixed the machine. James claims that it was only years after he had heard the legendary story that Josh told him why he did not explain how he was able to resolve the issue: “They were white men with all their M.I.C.E. and R.I.C.E. and all their big degrees, and it was their business to fix it. I had to fix it for them. Why should I tell them?”<sup>44</sup> Certainly, James was impressed by Josh’s noteworthy skill and affirmation despite his humble beginnings in a society where White supremacy reigned.

Based on the interaction he had with both of his grandfathers – especially his maternal grandfather, with whom he appears to have spent the most time– it is likely that James would not have necessarily seen his skin colour as wretched or a barrier in colonial society during his childhood. He had at least two shining examples who, though not highly educated, seemed to disturb the dominant colonial colour/caste set up in the colony, setting a precedent for others on both sides of the family. Furthermore, both of his parents were committed to consolidating their class position via the educational success of their children. So, unlike many of the poor Black working-class in Trinidad at the start of the twentieth century, they saw social mobility as a tangible goal, and were prepared to – or could – make sacrifices to ensure that their children realized this.

With these dynamics in place, C.L.R. James was inexorably immersed in an environment that encouraged high educational attainment. The self-conscious James’ household was surrounded by books, with British literary classics and magazines continually purchased and in circulation. Indeed, the link between British literature outside of the classroom and the British-based model of education in the typically financially prohibitive secondary schools in Trinidad was recognized by James’ parents. Ultimately, the foundation they nurtured proved beneficial,

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 15

as James was admitted to the prestigious Queen's Royal College (QRC) in Trinidad, arguably the most prominent high school in the country, after earning a scholarship – then termed a College Exhibition award – to attend the school in the country's capital city of Port-of-Spain at the age of ten. He was the youngest child to ever win an exhibition and understandably considered a prodigy with a bright future ahead of him.<sup>45</sup>

In many ways, QRC resembled an English public school. Founded in 1859 as the Queen's Collegiate School (Queen's Royal College from 1870), QRC emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as one of two unparalleled all-boys academic institutions in the country – the other St. Mary's College or College of the Immaculate Conception (CIC) – where students were exposed to an English curriculum, took English examinations, all while being trained for the Cambridge examinations. The boys who attended either school were essentially being prepared for an opportunity to be selected for a scholarship, called an Island Scholarship, to attend university in England.<sup>46</sup> QRC's teachers or "masters" were educated at Oxford and Cambridge and were among the many educators that flocked to colonies like Trinidad under the guise of an ongoing civilizing mission in the aftermath of Atlantic slavery.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, as a whole, education within the British Empire provided an opportunity to indoctrinate pupils about Anglo-Saxon civilization as expressed through the classics, Christianity and cricket.<sup>48</sup> In this way, schools like QRC were instrumental during this period in reinforcing ideas about British superiority, both moral and otherwise, all while creating and consolidating a colonial elite.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Kent Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>46</sup> Campbell, *Colony & Nation*, 28.

<sup>47</sup> Aviston Downes, "Colonial Education, Cricket and Masculinity in the Caribbean, 1870-1920," in *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 22, no. 1 (2005): 3-21., 4.

<sup>48</sup> Keith A.P. Sandiford, "Imperialism, Colonial Education, and the Origins of West Indies Cricket." in *An Area of Conquest: Popular Democracy and West Indies Cricket Supremacy*, ed. Hilary McD. Beckles (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1994), 2. Also noted in *Ibid*.

<sup>49</sup> Downes, "Colonial Education, Cricket and Masculinity in the Caribbean, 1870-1920," 4.

From a very young age, James found himself captivated by the game of cricket, which was as much a part of his daily life at QRC as his scholastic studies. He spent hours playing, watching and reading about cricket, enamoured by the island's most prolific players; so much so that his performance at QRC suffered.<sup>50</sup> Although James' level of infatuation with cricket may have been exceptional, especially because he continued to play and write about the game in various ways after graduating from QRC, cricket nevertheless was a crucial component of the British Empire's efforts to indoctrinate colonial subjects through education during this late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century period.

Victorian morality was entwined with the public-school code in England, replicated at QRC and affirmed through cricket. Cricket's emphasis on discipline, sportsmanship, and etiquette, along with its distinctive costume surely made the public-school code more palatable for students. In *Beyond a Boundary*, James writes that the moral code he developed during this part of his life became "the moral framework of my existence" and "it has never left me." Concerning cricket, he explains: "I never cheated. I never appealed for a decision unless I thought the batsman was out. I never argued with the umpire. I never jeered at a defeated opponent. I never gave to a friend a vote or place which by any stretch of the imagination could be seen as belonging to an enemy or to a stranger..."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the value of propagating this measure of morality was indispensable for colonial authorities to tame a colonized population that was being continually dominated by far-flung oppressors. As he intimates above, James himself was unavoidably affected by this code of ethics and remained puritanical well into his

---

<sup>50</sup> Worcester, C.L.R. *James: A Political Biography*, 10

<sup>51</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 26.



adult years. He adds: “I failed to live up to it many times, but when I did I knew and that is what matters.”<sup>52</sup>

In addition to forming part of the civilizing mission of colonial authorities, cricket’s placement in elite schools like QRC also served to inculcate the budding elite of Trinidad with a particular sense of British-fashioned masculinity. As Aviston Downes explains, throughout the empire, from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards these schools were essential, “nurseries of hegemonic masculinity articulated in terms of political leadership, economic dominance, heterosexuality, headship of nuclear family and chivalric defence of property and empire.”<sup>53</sup> Success for the young men at these schools and other colonial institutions represented an affirmation of manhood or masculinity, tied to their sense of humanity, which they had largely been denied as enslaved people and then just as colonial subjects. Thus, in the early twentieth-century environment that C.L.R. James lived in cricket is “not a game in the West Indies – or not merely a game. It is the means whereby the colonial showed his human equivalence to the coloniser.”<sup>54</sup> Moreover, cricket along with other aspects of colonial life was effective in promulgating values and codes among the colonized, including cementing a particular construction of masculinity, especially those of the middle-class strata, which reduced the likelihood that they would challenge their condition. The contradictions of colonial society, evident in the notions of fairness, just play, sportsmanship, respect, dignity and the like, ultimately did not escape James. Nonetheless, he continued to uncritically consume these seemingly omnipresent ethics as easily as he picked up a cricket ball during his high school days.

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Downes, “Colonial Education, Cricket and Masculinity in the Caribbean, 1870-1920,” 5-6.

<sup>54</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography*, 11. Worcester takes this quote from William Carr, “West Indian Writing.” University Radio Service mimeo, Kingston, Jamaica, n.d.

James' exposure to middle-class values either through the expectations of his family, school life and academic training still could not completely isolate him from the realities of the world around him. So, while the avaricious reader indulged in high-brow weeklies like the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Spectator* and *Vanity Fair*, which mainly concentrated on politics and culture in Great Britain, he also purchased the *Negro World* regularly, even when it was banned after 1919.<sup>55</sup> The *Negro World* was the mouthpiece for the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), a Pan-African organization founded by Jamaican Marcus Garvey who at the time inspired thousands of people of African descent to establish chapters of the UNIA all over the world, including in Trinidad, with a strong emphasis on African pride. By reading the *Negro World*, James would have been aware of the growing Pan-African, anti-colonial movement and its serious challenge to the status quo, particularly the subjugation of people of African descent. Yet, there is no indication that James was either a proponent or part of any of the numerous UNIA chapters that would emerge in Trinidad by the 1920s.<sup>56</sup> He would later say in an interview that if he did not get a copy of the *Negro World*, "he would not die."<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, James seems to be somewhat indifferent to racial discrimination and class exploitation in his late teenage years and early twenties – a clear contrast to the politically astute and passionate commentator he would later become. For instance, in *Beyond a Boundary* he professes that he was left unscarred after being denied admission on racial grounds to the English regiment near the end of World War I, and adds that racial discrimination at QRC "never

---

<sup>55</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography*, 11-12. Also see Richard Small, "The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist," in *Urgent Tasks*, no. 12 (1981) and *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work*, ed. Paul Buhle (London: Allison & Busby, 1986), 16.

<sup>56</sup> According to Tony Martin's count, based on membership card details, by around 1926, there were at least 30 UNIA chapters in Trinidad. See Tony Martin, *Race First: the ideological and organizational struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Dover, Massachusetts: Majority Press, 1986), 373

<sup>57</sup> Small, "The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist," *Urgent Tasks*, no. 12, footnote 15.

troubled us.”<sup>58</sup> Concerning the former, James found himself rebuffed despite having met the preliminary qualifications when the interviewer he encountered at the Merchants Recruiting Office, “took one look at me, saw my dark-skin and, shaking his head vigorously, motioned me violently away.” James observed that he was being treated differently than the White men that came before the interviewer before his turn and that he was not “obviously inferior to any of them in anything.”<sup>59</sup> Despite the racist policy, James offered only meek protest, even as the cadet corps instructor expressed outrage when he told him about what happened. The incident is curious, as James would surely have noticed that the White boys he went to school with were typically the ones selected by the recruiting regiment for training and eventually sent away to Europe to partake in the massive bloodshed taking place on that continent. Furthermore, it is quite telling that James voluntarily pursued participation in a war taking place thousands of kilometres away as a British soldier to “see the world.”<sup>60</sup> Put differently, even with the availability of literature that would have raised questions about racism, colonialism and imperialism, the teenage James still had not developed a critical outlook on these matters.

Even within the world of recreational cricket, the teenage James could plainly see divisions along race and class lines with respect to certain clubs. Among the top cricket sides in the country at the time, there was one club that was deemed for the wealthy and made up of Whites along with a few “coloured” players from established “mulatto families” and another club mainly comprised of Whites who were Roman Catholics. A third club was made up entirely of policemen and a fourth exclusively featured Blacks whom James describes as “plebeians” with “no social status.” In deciding which first-class cricket club to play for after high school, James, now a highly touted bowler after success at the second-tier division, found

---

<sup>58</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 30.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

himself deciding between a club known to be mainly comprised of brown-skinned middle-class players called Maple, and a side which consisted predominantly of lower-middle-class Blacks called Shannon. Maple was more concerned with colour than class as “a doctor or lawyer with distinctly dark-skin could be blackballed, though light-skinned department-store clerks of uncertain income and still more uncertain lineage were admitted by a matter of course.”<sup>61</sup> By ultimately selecting this club, James recalls that when faced with the “fundamental divisions in the island” he had “gone to the right” thereby “delaying (his) political development for years.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the decision to play with Maple evidences a lack of interest in delving into notions of race solidarity or challenging class stratification at this juncture of his life.

It is important to note that although C.L.R. James may not have been challenging the status quo concerning colonial institutions, ideas, or artifices, he was no stranger to defiant behaviour as a youth. A case in point was his apathy for attaining academic pre-eminence while in high school. After being named a College Exhibition awardee to attend QRC, it was expected that James would continue to work assiduously to excel in all his classes towards the penultimate goal of being one of a selected few to receive an Island Scholarship to attend university, before enjoying repute as a professional in the colony. In *Beyond a Boundary*, James notes that the highest honour for a Black former Island Scholarship winner was to be nominated by the Governor of the colony as one of the few non-White members of the Legislative Council, though to a low post in the government. He remarks that the ideal course for a College Exhibition recipient was as follows: “exhibition, scholarship, profession, wealth, Legislative Council and the title of Honourable. When someone brought it off the local people were very proud of him.”<sup>63</sup> Yet, despite finishing second in an essay competition among all high school students in the

---

<sup>61</sup> All quotes in this paragraph to this point in James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 49-50.

<sup>62</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 53.

<sup>63</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 22.

country in just his second year of study at QRC, James did not develop the drive necessary to be at the top of his graduating class. He was more interested in cricket and reading works that fell outside the scope of his school curricula. When his father and others in his family tried to impress upon him the importance of staying focused on his studies it made little impact, as he continued to defy their wishes and even lied to them about how much time he was spending playing cricket. The threat of losing the College Exhibition award and all the pressure he was getting at home, including the threat of floggings from his father, did not deter him:

There were periods when my father and I lived normally. But then bad reports would come, the prohibitions would be re-imposed and I would plan to evade them. I was not a vicious boy. All I wanted was to play cricket and soccer, not merely to play but to live the life, and nothing could stop me. When all my tricks and plans and evasions failed I just went and played and said to hell with the consequences.<sup>64</sup>

What should be underscored here then is that while James did in many ways conform to the middle-class and gender ideals of the day, there was a rebellious spirit within him that could not easily be snuffed out. He thrived on his sense of independence in thought and action, and not even the weight of expectation from his family could alter that. This perhaps helps to explain why James could not be easily cajoled to act in certain ways by people or events happening around him during his youth.

### *Writing literature, and the search for colonial identity and sovereignty*

1919 was a turbulent year for industrial labour in both Trinidad and Tobago, which was largely sparked by low wages and the rising costs of products.<sup>65</sup> During the first few months of the year, Trinidad endured strikes by dock workers, railway workers; labourers from the Trinidad Asphalt Company; workers at the Electric and Telephone companies; and even city council employees. By early December of 1919, dock workers in Port of Spain engaged in a militant

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>65</sup> Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State*, 15

strike in the capital city when shipping companies refused to negotiate with them. Their fiery protests were soon joined by other unionists, leaving parts of Port of Spain shut down due to mass pickets and animated public meetings. The Black population in the city, particularly the poor working-class and unemployed, were also major supporters to this cause. Moreover, there appears to have been an element of racial animus, as “roving crowds adopted threatening gestures, abusive language and in some instances physically assaulted members of the White community.”<sup>66</sup> Within days of the radical actions the dock workers ended their strike after they won a 25 percent wage increase from their employers. Although the impetus for this strike and others which took place throughout the year was unmistakably the deteriorating economic situation in the country at the time, the authorities pointed to incitement and baiting on the part of the Garveyites and the *Negro World* as the cause for the unrest.<sup>67</sup> James himself believed the latter as he says that through a fellow cricketer that he “knew some of the men who were leading it and I am positive that they were Garveyites.” He adds: “All I did was to go and watch what was happening without taking any part.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, James was most certainly attuned to the labour strife taking place in Trinidad during the immediate post-World War I period, but again his reaction suggests he did not feel compelled to either participate or understand the dilemma any further.

It looks like James was merely a passive observer during this period of his life, as he would have witnessed both racial and class strife in various contexts. Instead, during the early 1920s, James remained devoted to playing and writing about cricket rather than engaging further in critical social or political thought. He worked as a teacher during this period and eventually

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>68</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography*, 14. Quoted from Alan Mackenzie interview with C.L.R. James, October 1975. See Alan J. McKenzie and C.L.R. James, “Radical Pan-Africanism in the 1930s: A Discussion with C.L.R. James,” *Radical History Review* 24 (Fall 1980): 68-75.

found himself employed at QRC where he simply taught the curriculum, regurgitating most of what he had been taught as a high school student. This curriculum was not only Eurocentric but also taught history in a way that sanitized the myriad cruelties the British committed in the establishment of their vast empire, whilst justifying imperial rule in colonies like Trinidad. Even as the seeds of anti-colonialism had begun to form across the British Empire James did not refrain from the curriculum. In *Beyond a Boundary*, regarding the curriculum, he notes: “I didn’t think it was any good, but I didn’t bother about it.”<sup>69</sup> In his later years, James was asked in an interview how he reconciled the material he was teaching during this period with the budding nationalist sentiment in colonies across the empire. He proclaims: “I wasn’t thinking about that. My job was teaching those books and that history as the British wrote it and that’s what I did.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, James’ outlook on the world around him to this point in his life was consistent with what one would expect from someone who was imbued with middle-class values as a child, as a student at QRC, and pre-occupied with all things related to cricket. Like the sport that he loved dearly, he played within the rules of colonial society without a mind to challenging authority or the rules themselves, as unfair as they may have seemed to the intellectuals and activists of the time. Despite his apparent passivity, the mere fact that James had unenthusiastically become a teacher and truly endeavoured to exclusively be a writer – much to the chagrin of his father and unlike his QRC classmates – exemplifies both his defiance and desire to be independent of a system that wanted to pigeon-hole him. Moreover, once James started to explore his interests more seriously in literature, a path towards developing an enlightened political consciousness began to open.

---

<sup>69</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 65.

<sup>70</sup> Farrukh Dhondy, *C.L.R. James: a life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001), 17-18.

In his early adult years, C.L.R. James zeal for reading continued to be matched only by his passion for cricket. In an interview with Paul Buhle in 1987, James explains what he was doing in his spare time during this period, aside from playing cricket:

Reading books, that's what I was doing. Literature and history. And I not only read as the ordinary West Indian read, but I went to the library and found all sorts of books on history and classical studies. Somebody had put all the books there...he put a classical list in there and then no one used to read them. I came and saw them and began to read and I read everything and I had a fantastic memory so that in time, before long, when anyone in Trinidad wanted to know something about literature, they came to me, James was the man.<sup>71</sup>

In *Beyond a Boundary* James admits that when he had completed his studies at QRC, he was not only educated, but his deep immersion in literature left him an educated “member of the British middle-class with literary gifts.”<sup>72</sup> In addition to *The Cricketer*, James’ fascination with British life and society was evident in his subscription to other periodicals like: “the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Times Educational Supplement*, the *Observer* the *Sunday Times*, the *Criterion*, the *London Mercury*, the *Musical Review*, the *Gramophone*, the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, the *Mercure de France*, for some time the *Nation* and the *New Republic*...”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, he inundated himself with works that gave him a solid conceptual grasp of British culture, and Western thought generally, which would have justly made him stand out as a reservoir of knowledge, especially when taken together with his studies on the history of the region. This would manifest more tangibly when an opportunity to delve further into the realm of literature specifically came about.

In 1919, James and several other literature aficionados founded a group called the Maverick club which would stimulate his interest in writing beyond his many journalistic pieces on cricket. He says that the group was “a circle of friends (most of them were white) with whom

---

<sup>71</sup> Paul Buhle, “The Making of a Literary Life,” in Henry and Buhle, *C.L.R. James’s Caribbean*, 58.

<sup>72</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 32.

<sup>73</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 64.



we exchanged ideas, books, records and manuscripts.”<sup>74</sup> They published lectures and essays on English literature and drama. The Maverick helped bring James acclaim among the literary circles in Trinidad at the time and ultimately nurtured his writing both in terms of breadth and skill. By the middle of the 1920s, he committed himself to writing on a daily basis on a wide range of topics but often focused on the genre of fiction. James’ attraction to Western literature helped him evolve past sports journalism and conceive of an opportunity to *see the world*, without having to enlist in the British regiment:

Never losing sight of my plan to go abroad and write, I studied assiduously the art of fiction: Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Tchekov, Flaubert, Maupassant and the Goncourt brothers, their writings, their diaries and their correspondence; Percy Lubbock and Edwin Muir; I balanced the virtues of Thackeray, Dickens and Fielding against the vices of Hemmingway, Faulkner and Lawrence. Intellectually I lived abroad, chiefly in England...In politics I took little interest.<sup>75</sup>

Although C.L.R. James’ mind may have been set intellectually toward England, and he was surely envisioning himself there physically, it would be hard to imagine the social and political movements taking place in Trinidad during the decade were not having some sort of impact on him. The strikes of 1919 that culminated with the dock workers’ strike in December of that year is one such example.<sup>76</sup> This wave of strikes merely set the stage for a decade that would see both labour and political organization in the colony develop like never before. Following the dock workers’ strike in Port of Spain there were strikes from other labourers in regions across the colony by the end of 1919 and into 1920. British troops were ultimately dispatched to Trinidad in 1920 to quell the unrest, while new laws were passed to repress the strikers, including arrests and deportations. The Sedition Ordinance (No. 10 of 1920) was a device which enabled the colonial government to suppress both the circulation and importation of Garveyite or socialist literature. Moreover, the push for radical change within the dynamics of

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid..

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>76</sup> For more on these events see Andrew Bukka Rennie, *History of the Working Class in Trinidad & Tobago in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1919-1956)* [Port of Spain: The Majority Press, 2011{1973}, 1-20.

labour in the colony was primarily led by the Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA), whom the government charged was responsible for the series of strikes in 1919 and 1920. The TWA reveled in left-wing and socialist ideas and naturally supported other groups who were pushing for constitutional reform in the early 1920s.<sup>77</sup>

Middle-class groups in Trinidad agitated for constitutional reform in the early 1920s since their political ambitions were constrained by the pure Crown Colony structure at the time. The Black urban working class also saw an opportunity for a more equitable society through political representation, particularly following labour defeats in 1920 and ongoing oppression by the colonial government. The TWA emerged as the sole representative of this latter group by 1921, but they joined forces with middle-class liberals to expand their influence in pushing for constitutional reform. The Colonial Office eventually accepted recommendations made by both an outside commission and the local Legislative Reform Committee in 1922 and in 1925 Trinidad held its first-ever national elections. However, the franchise was quite narrow as most working-class and lower-middle-class people did not qualify as candidates to run in the elections, while only six percent of the colony's total population even qualified to vote.<sup>78</sup> Voting men had to be over 21 years of age and voting women over the age of 30, though there were property and income restrictions.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the elections that took place in 1925 and thereafter brought the colonized masses closer to political power than ever before and inspired ideas of anti-colonial self-determination. Meanwhile, the working class in Trinidad could claim representation in the newly structured Legislative Council through the TWA president, Arthur Andrew Cipriani, a White Trinidad-born man of French ancestry, who continually articulated the grievances of the

---

<sup>77</sup> See Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State*, 14-68.

<sup>78</sup> Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962*, 166.

<sup>79</sup> This is noted by the government of Trinidad and Tobago in a 2016 commemoration of adult suffrage. See Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, 12 Republican Parliament: 3<sup>rd</sup> Session, "Commemorating 70 Years of Universal Adult Suffrage," <https://www.ttparliament.org/commemorating-70-years-of-universal-adult-suffrage/>.

colony's working-class groups – Black and Indian, urban, and rural – and pushed for legislative reforms through his Port-of-Spain seat in Council. Indeed, the TWA flourished throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s. By 1928, it had essentially evolved into a political party which had tens of thousands of members in branches all over Trinidad and Tobago, who would meet several times a year to decide on policy for the entire organization. The TWA even made inroads mobilizing Indians in Trinidad, thus obtaining support from influential Indo-Trinidadians who would help give the Black-dominated party a multi-racial tinge.<sup>80</sup>

The political and economic temperament in Trinidad during the 1920s in some ways mirrored what was taking place internationally in the aftermath of World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the impending worldwide economic crisis of the 1930s. Thus, both local and international events had reverberations throughout the colony. Culturally, a theme of looking inward for validation was afoot among the colonized masses, evident with the rise of calypso music by the end of the decade – specifically calypso tents – along with writing outputs and other forms of artistic expression. C.L.R. James' fidelity to Western literature was not necessarily apparent in his published writings during this period, as he too was moved by a colony and a region where the oppressed were increasingly seeking to define themselves and control their destiny.

Partnering with one of the country's renowned literary critics of the time, Alfred Mendes, James produced two issues of the journal *Trinidad* in 1929-1930. The magazine, co-edited by James and Mendes mainly featured short fiction and poetry by Trinidadians, likely connected in some way to the Maverick club. *Trinidad* was ground-breaking, as literature based in the West

---

<sup>80</sup> Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962*, 168.

Indies and written by West Indians was virtually non-existent before 1930.<sup>81</sup> With its two releases the magazine signalled the beginning of a tradition, undoubtedly spurred by the shifting dynamics in the region. Before the release of the first issue of *Trinidad*, James earned local fame among intellectuals after his short fictional story “La Divina Pastora” was published in 1927 and later selected for *The Best British Stories of 1928*.<sup>82</sup> The following year, James wrote a full-length novel, *Minty Alley*, which would not be published until 1936, while two other short stories would appear in *Trinidad*, “Turner’s Prosperity” and “Triumph.” These fictional works, like “La Divina Pastora,” depict working-class life in Trinidad as integral to the story being told with Trinidad’s slums or “barrack-yards” as its backdrop. Certainly, James’ residence in the Port of Spain suburb of Belmont and his social activities in the capital city would have connected him with many of the country’s working-class and working-poor quite regularly, notwithstanding his position of privilege. He comfortably walked the streets of Port of Spain, bought various records, listened to and talked about calypso and other local topics of the day and could discourse ad nauseum about cricket. Furthermore, the political awakening in Trinidad in the 1920s, crucially stimulated by the urban working class, especially those living in Port of Spain, was happening right before James’ eyes. Thus, his foray into the field of literature gave him an instrument to express what he had observed.

In addition to *Trinidad*, James and Mendes also contributed essays and short fiction pieces to another local journal called *The Beacon*, which was founded, published, and edited by Albert Gomes beginning in 1931. Gomes, like Mendes, was born in Trinidad to a family that had its roots in Portugal. While *Trinidad* focused on exhibiting the literary talents of the local

---

<sup>81</sup> This was mainly because there was not a culture of reading in the West Indies before this, which could be attributed to education and literacy development issues. See Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London, U.K.: Faber, 1970).

<sup>82</sup> C.L.R. James, “La Divina Pastora,” in *The C.L.R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw (New York: Wiley Blackwell Readers, 1992), 25-28. First published in *Best Short Stories*, ed. Edward J. O’Brien (London, 1928).

colonized population, thereby demonstrating their capacity to stand on equal footing with their counterparts from the metropole, *The Beacon* went a step further. Gomes not only saw it as a publication which would feature the varied literary writings of West Indians but also as a space to agitate readers around issues of race and political oppression via the tenets of colonialism.

Years later, Gomes would explain that the significance of *The Beacon* was that it:

...was more than just a literary magazine and mouthpiece of a clique. Indeed, it became the focus of a movement of enlightenment spearheaded by Trinidad's angry young men of the Thirties. It was the torpor, the smugness and hypocrisy of the Trinidad of the period of that provoked the response of which produced the magazine and the defiant bohemianism of the movement that was built around it.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, by joining Gomes, James and Mendes were invited to participate in a level of critique that previously would have either been confined to their meetings with other literary middle-class writers or not have taken place at all. Gomes even called for revolt in the pages of *The Beacon*: "Black man, bearded old son of a slave, your children are being slain by the dozens in America, in Africa, in the Indies...Bare your fangs as the white man does. Cast off your docility. You have to be savage like the white man to escape the white man's. But the white man won't spare your neck." Gomes continued with his strong words in this editorial, which appears in the journal's July 1931 edition: "You have to fight the white man's fury...But you musn't want to be a white black man, Black man...This is the curse of you and yours: the desire to adopt the White Man's customs...The curse of the Negro race is the Black Apologist."<sup>84</sup> It is clear with these words that Gomes was seeking to stir the budding anti-colonial sentiment of the time and the feeling of alienation that many Trinidadians likely felt for their White imperial masters. The magazine encouraged Black pride akin to Garveyism, and demonstrated solidarity across colonized populations, with an "India Section" which catered to the East Indian population in

---

<sup>83</sup> Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, ed., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 168. Excerpted from Albert Gomes, *Through a Maze of Colour* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Key Caribbean Publications Ltd., 1974).

<sup>84</sup> Albert Gomes, "Black Man," *The Beacon: A Monthly Review* 1, no. 4 (July 1931): 1-3.

Trinidad.<sup>85</sup> Yet, the pieces in *The Beacon* were not universal in their tone. Instead, conflicting ideas would surface within the pages of the magazine, as there was a deliberate attempt to capitalize on controversial matters.<sup>86</sup> There were divergent views on issues such as colonialism, the colonial government, the labour movement, and religion, as the magazine sold upwards of 5,000 copies throughout the Caribbean during its two years of publication.<sup>87</sup>

C.L.R. James ultimately landed within the spectrum of *The Beacon* contributors as a moderate. He still managed to enthusiastically discuss Western literature and exhibit his command of the genre without reservations, despite the fiercer rhetoric in the magazine from contributors that would have been loath to heap such praises upon the cultural productions of the colonizer.<sup>88</sup> However, James was featured in a debate on race, which added fodder to the controversial journal.

In the same issue of *The Beacon* which published the above-mentioned Albert Gomes article “Black Man,” a piece entitled “Race Admixture” by an English scientist stationed at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad named Dr. Sidney Harland was also included. In the article, Harland essentially expounded upon the notion of the inferiority of Blacks in relation to Whites when “scrutinized at the bar of reason.” He argued that although there is “no pure race in the world” as “all races show a vast mental and physical diversity,” including hereditarily acquired “genius” by some Blacks, on average, Blacks are intellectually

---

<sup>85</sup> This feature appears to have been part of the journal for five issues. See “India Section,” in *The Beacon* 2, nos. 1-5 (Privately published, 1932).

<sup>86</sup> Gomes admits that “although the editorial notes reflected more or less my own views, in all other sections contributors of most riotously conflicting views co-existed.” See Donnell and Lawson Welsh, *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, 170. Excerpted from Gomes, *Through a Maze of Colour*.

<sup>87</sup> Reinhard Sander, ed., *From Trinidad: An Anthology of West Indian Writing* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), 2.

<sup>88</sup> See C.L.R. James, “Books and Writers.” in *The Beacon* 1, no. 1 (March 1931): 22-24. C.L.R. James, “The Problem of Knowledge.” in *The Beacon* 1, no. 4 (July 1931): 30-32. This observation of James was essentially made by Kent Worcester when briefly commented on these articles. See Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography*, 17.

deficient as compared to Whites by “five to ten percent.”<sup>89</sup> James responded to Harland’s position and findings in the very next issue of *The Beacon* with an article aptly titled: “The Intelligence of the Negro: A Few Words for Dr. Harland.” In his article, James takes issue with the fact that Harland looks to be ignoring historical studies and other empirical evidence that disproves his conclusion about the intellectual abilities of people of African descent:

[T]he Doctor put forward his antiquated opinions with a confidence and self-sufficiency which betoken his total, his teetotal abstention from recent views on the subject... Let us suppose then that Dr. Harland, having lived in the West Indies a long time, had used his eyes and observed the relative intelligences of the people around him. Surely quite casual observation would be enough to tell him that in no field of human enterprise where the competition is open can the negro's intelligence be considered inferior. In the open professions, law and medicine, in the sphere of higher education, in the Civil Service, in politics, in journalism, the negro's record, especially when one considers his immense initial disadvantages, shows intelligence second to that of no other race... I do not make excessive claims for West Indian negroes. I know only too well the shortcomings of my own people. But in one thing they are not inferior. And that thing is intelligence. Let Dr. Harland leave his books for a while and sit up and take notice. Wherever the negro is given a chance, he establishes himself. And this from a people barely three generations away from the physical and moral degradation of slavery.<sup>90</sup>

James’ reply to Harland illustrates that although the former had spent several years enchanted by scholars of Western literature, he had no qualms about the intellectual capacities of people of African descent, notwithstanding their many “disadvantages.” Indeed, he was a living example of such prowess. Still, to bolster his argument in the article, he discussed the great achievements of Toussaint Louverture – leader of the only successful slave revolt during the period of Atlantic slavery – as well as several other revered Black men, to highlight the potential of people of African descent. Yet, despite the use of a notorious revolutionary figure, James himself still was not politically inclined; therefore, unlike Gomes's “Black Man” article, his critique on White supremacy was not tantamount to a call to action among those who had been denigrated by the people and institutions that Harland represented. Hence, in the same article

---

<sup>89</sup> Sidney C. Harland, “Race Admixture,” *The Beacon* 1, no. 4 (July 1931): 25-30.

<sup>90</sup> C.L.R. James, “The Intelligence of the Negro: A Few Words with Dr. Harland,” *The Beacon* 1, no. 5 (August 1931), 7.

where James refutes Harland's theories, he also distances himself from the rabble-rousing words of Gomes:

I am not touchous [sic] on the race question. If at times I feel some bitterness at the disabilities and disadvantages to which my being negro has subjected me it is soon washed away by remembering the few things in my life of which I am proud, I owe, apart from my family, chiefly to white men, almost all Englishmen and Americans, men some of them of international reputation, who have shown me kindness, appreciation, and in more than one case, spontaneous and genuine friendship...So that I am unlikely to see red on the race question, however much I am provoked to it by people who will not realise that the more they discriminate the less discriminating they show themselves. No, as I think over the Doctor's article I find that my chief reaction to it is not racial but educational.<sup>91</sup>

Cursorily, the quote above seems to speak precisely to what Gomes warned against in his editorial – the Black apologist. Gomes even appears to anticipate James, stating: “Throw away all that confidence in the White Man and his altruism.”<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, James could hardly be considered a Black apologist, as his outlook revealed his lived reality at the time. Many of the people that he associated with since he left QRC – whether on the cricket pitch with Maple or in literary groups like the Maverick, *Trinidad*, and *The Beacon* – were White men like Gomes, who along with Alfred Mendes and others, would both encourage and challenge him as a writer and a scholar. Furthermore, James simply was not committed to radical political thought at this juncture in his life. Gomes on the other hand gladly published pieces in *The Beacon* that were explicitly anti-government, anti-colonial and/or openly challenged the power and authority of the Catholic Church, which was a major political player in Trinidad at the time.<sup>93</sup>

By the early 1930s, what is rather clear is that C.L.R. James was demonstrably engaged in writing counter-narratives. Put differently, he was producing pieces that aimed to challenge dominant norms and center the experiences of those burdened by colonialism. This was evident

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>92</sup> Gomes, “Black Man,” 2.

<sup>93</sup> Gomes claims that the pressure from the Catholic Church made it very difficult for *The Beacon* to get funding through advertising. See Donnell and Lawson Welsh, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, 168. Excerpted from Gomes, *Through a Maze of Colour*.



in his “The Intelligence of the Negro” article, where in addition to Toussaint Louverture, he mentions esteemed thinkers and activists like James Weldon Johnson, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois to counter assumptions about the inferiority of people of African descent. James would also write about the illustrious career of a Black Trinidadian scholar named Michel Maxwell Philip in *The Beacon* whom he contends “was a man of varied intellectual power and breadth of culture which make him and such as he the fine flower of a civilized society.”<sup>94</sup> James’ fiction pieces also played a similar role, as “La Divina Pastora,” “Triumph,” “Turner’s Prosperity,” and the novel *Minty Alley*, were all unconventional for their focus on the peasant and working class in society. This is a similar track as John Jacob (J.J.) Thomas’s book-long response to British novelist James Anthony Froude’s *The English in the West Indies* in 1887 that had attacked the desire for self-rule in colonies like Trinidad and raised myriad stereotypes pointing to the inferiority of Black people in general. Thomas, a Black Trinidadian, rebutted with *Froudacity: West Indian Fables By James Anthony Froude Explained* in 1889, where he details the abuses of power taking place under the Crown Colony system of governance; argues that Black people have persevered despite the racism they have faced; and highlights their intelligence and growing accomplishments among other things.<sup>95</sup> There are obvious parallels, despite the fact that James does not publicly acknowledge reading Thomas and others who fell into this “vindication of the race” genre.<sup>96</sup> However, an argument can also be made that his writings and involvement with *The Beacon* were more connected to a sense of intellectual

---

<sup>94</sup> C.L.R. James, “Michel Maxwell Phillip: 1829-1886: Sometime Solicitor General of Trinidad: An Impression,” *The Beacon* 1, no. 6, (September 1931): 16-24., 22.

<sup>95</sup> J.J. Thomas, *Froudacity: West Indian Fables By James Anthony Froude Explained* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889).

<sup>96</sup> For a brief discussion on J.J. Thomas’ book, the “vindication of race genre” and C.L.R. James connection to Thomas decades later, see Bridget Brereton, Introduction to *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies; with the pamphlet The Case for West Indian Self-Government*, by C.L.R. James (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 7-8.

responsibility that would see him share his superior knowledge with lay people – a belief gleaned from British cultural critic Matthew Arnold – rather than a radical socio-political outlook.

Christian Hogsbjerg points to C.L.R. James' assertion that his Maverick literary circle was rooted in their belief in "the tenets of Matthew Arnold" to posit the idea that his early philosophical outlook was most influenced by Arnold's works.<sup>97</sup> For instance, the utility of culture was a central feature of Arnold's liberal humanist position. James espoused Arnold's principle that those who were virtuosos of culture should spread "sweetness and light and the best that has been thought and said in the world."<sup>98</sup> This was not a process of indoctrination for the harbingers of culture, but rather about equality for Arnold:

It does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgments and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, - nourished, and not bound by them. This is the social idea; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and the learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore of sweetness and light.<sup>99</sup>

Hogsbjerg, therefore, argues that the motivations for James and other writers from *The Beacon* were to a certain degree borrowed from what Arnold states above. In an article written as a reflection of the experience and maturity he gained as a writer in Trinidad in the 1930s, James himself recalls that with his literary circle, namely those involved in *Trinidad* and *The Beacon*, that "we spread sweetness and light, and we studied the best that there was in literature

---

<sup>97</sup> Christian Hogsbjerg, "'We Lived According to the Tenets of Matthew Arnold': Reflections on the 'Colonial Victorianism' of the Young C.L.R. James," *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 2 (2013): 201-223.

<sup>98</sup> This is a quote from James in James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 64.

<sup>99</sup> From P. J. Keating, ed., *Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose* (Middlesex, 1970), 225-26. Quoted in Hogsbjerg, "'We Lived According to the Tenets of Matthew Arnold'," 210.

in order to transmit it to the people - as we thought, the poor, backward West Indian people.”<sup>100</sup>

Applying Arnold’s theory, James’ fictional works could be deemed as being tied to the principle that men of culture do not “try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgments and watchwords.” This is why in these pieces his writing could be “characterized by an unsentimental concern for the working-class poor of Trinidad” and did not “resort to rhetorical flourishes in form or narrative technique,” comporting with a realist style of literature.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, James and others affiliated with *The Beacon* who wrote these “barrack-yard” stories from the framework of a writer who “made contact with the people,” perhaps did so intending to disseminate a different form of culture – albeit quite different from the middle-class ideals that they were accustomed to.<sup>102</sup>

James’ article on Michel Maxwell Philip may have been drawing from Arnold, as in that piece he accentuates the lawyer’s greatness by pointing to his “varied intellectual power and breadth of culture,” which included giving his daughters lessons in Italian after dinner. Philip’s value should not be lost because he “was not a man possessed by that passionate desire for the welfare of the poorer classes” the way the presumed champion of the working-class masses Captain Cipriani was believed to be. Rather, his command of rhetorical prose or cultural aptitude should be lauded, since “it takes all sorts to make a world and it takes all sorts to make a Government, a thing which extremists on both sides cannot realise. Conservatism unprodded hardens into tyranny, radicalism unchecked degenerates into chaos.”<sup>103</sup> Indeed, just as he would have characterized Philip, James too was in the middle of this political spectrum.

---

<sup>100</sup> C.L.R. James, “Discovering Literature in Trinidad: The Nineteen Thirties,” *Journal Commonwealth of Literature*, no. 7 (July 1969): 73-81., 73.

<sup>101</sup> Caryl Phillips, “C.L.R. James: Mariner, Renegade and Castaway.” in *A New World Order: Selected Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2001), 155. Quoted in Hogsbjerg, “‘We Lived According to the Tenets of Matthew Arnold’,” 217.

<sup>102</sup> For this observation see Sander, *From Trinidad*, 7-8.

<sup>103</sup> James, “Michel Maxwell Phillip,” 22.

Nevertheless, writers for *The Beacon* were undoubtedly indulging in anti-colonial nationalist ideas, and some radical posturing, even if James did not openly appear to. Fundamentally, the works in the journal aimed to display the literary faculty of Creole society, and with an underlying nationalist assumption, delved into the specificity of the Trinidad cultural landscape. This would explain why James used the Trinidadian vernacular in his fictional pieces, traversing working-class life along the way, instead of reproducing the kind of English/British proper dialogue typically imitated by West Indian writers of the time. However, James ultimately did not project a political agenda or analysis through his writing until 1932, when he left Trinidad for England. That year he published *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies*. Yet, James had essentially completed the pamphlet before he left Trinidad.

#### *Broaching anti-colonial thought and a methodology for political writing*

Like so many Trinidadians in the 1920s and early 1930s, C.L.R. James was captivated by Captain Andrew Arthur Cipriani and his ability to rouse the colony's working-class masses. James decided to write a political biography on Cipriani that would connect his rise to the increasing political maturity of the colonized. He, therefore, observes that with Cipriani at the head of the TWA, they were now "alive to politics as at no other time in the history of Trinidad."<sup>104</sup> However, *The Life of Captain Cipriani* certainly was not a conventional biography, as James merely used Cipriani's prominence as an entry point to talk about the political situation in the West Indies. Along with criticizing the White colonial elite in the West Indies and their sense of entitlement in colonies like Trinidad, James also mentioned the persistent tension between the Black and Coloured middle classes and their problematic disconnectedness from the

---

<sup>104</sup> C.L.R. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani: an account of British Government in the West Indies*, with the pamphlet, "Case for West Indian Self-Government." (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 86.

colonized masses in trying to construct a united nationalist vision. Still, James' main argument was that the cultural development of "those African slaves who were brought almost continually to the West Indies" was proof that "the Crown Colony system of government has no place." Even though it was once useful, it must now be considered "fraud because it is based on assumptions of superiority which have no foundation in fact." More to the point, James asserted that the colonized and the masses in the West Indies at the very least matched people in the metropole with respect to their cultural faculty:

Cut off from all contact with Africa for a century and a quarter, they present to-day the extraordinary spectacle of a people who in language and social customs, religion, education and outlook are essentially Western, and indeed, far more advanced in Western culture than many a European community.<sup>105</sup>

Thus, with the publication, James finally expressed an anti-colonial position and engaged in political critique. However, it is worth noting that James uses Western culture as the measuring stick upon which the readiness of the colonized for self-governance should be judged, and also argues that people of African descent in the Caribbean should not be confused with the "primitive peoples of Africa."<sup>106</sup> Anthony Bogues remarks that this view was common among intellectuals of the time and added that while James's view would eventually change "politically on the eve of his departure to London, he was still operating within the framework of Western thought with its racial hierarchy which posited Africans as non-historic people."<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, like the pamphlet's namesake, James was not calling for revolution, but rather that the colonized masses should have the opportunity to benefit from a European model of governance which would truly represent them. James' belief that the middle class in Trinidad – armed with the values and aspirations of Western culture – should be allowed to pursue self-governance, was a

---

<sup>105</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, 169.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>107</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, 24.

step further than the reformist Cipriani who never called for independence from Britain, but the former still received criticism from his colleagues at *The Beacon* who reviewed the publication.<sup>108</sup> In addition to questioning James' reverence for Cipriani, Albert Gomes, for example, chastised him for "his method of criticism" and for his failure to acknowledge what was needed in Trinidad was a "classless society, a communist society."<sup>109</sup> Another critic, Ralph Mentor, expressed disappointment that James targeted the Crown Colony system as if it were the source of racial prejudice in colonial society, rather than citing it as a "barbaric relic of slavery days," which essentially "has its roots in the slave trade" and "which thrives on ignorance and a vicious economic situation."<sup>110</sup> Nonetheless, James was neither ready nor equipped to make these incisive arguments at this juncture. After all, this was the first time he had ever really used political analysis to engage in anti-colonial discourse.

*The Life of Captain Cipriani* was a far cry from the revolutionary, anti-colonial, Pan-African writings that James would subsequently produce for decades after the publication of the pamphlet. At the same time, it seems that the criticisms of his peers played a role in the political direction James would take shortly after its release. Still, this piece should not be overlooked, at the very least, due to James' method of study. Specifically, James scrutinizes a compelling, "dominant personality" to examine a particular socio-political situation and said individual's role in "the making of history."<sup>111</sup> This would be a feature of James' analysis for years to come; likewise, James' interest in the colonial masses in the book – akin to his focus on this same

---

<sup>108</sup> In addition to stating that Cipriani was a "radical socialist," but "did not believe in the inevitability of class struggle and the eventual collapse of the capitalist order." Selwyn Ryan notes that "At no time did he come out for full independence from Britain. All demands for social and political reforms were made within the imperial framework." See Selwyn Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: a study of decolonization in a multi-racial society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 35, 43.

<sup>109</sup> Albert Gomes, "Editorial Commentaries" *The Beacon* 2, no. 5 (September 1932): 5-7., 7.

<sup>110</sup> Ralph Mentor, "A Study of Mr. James' Political Biography," *The Beacon* 2, no. 6 (October-November 1932): 15-17., 16.

<sup>111</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, 24.

group in his barrack-yard fiction in the late 1920s. Moreover, in general, the work was indicative that James, though not a radical, was engaged in some measure of anti-colonial thought before he left Trinidad in 1932. As Bogues argues, James came from a Black Caribbean intellectual tradition wherein its participants were prepared by a “self-affirming” experience in the Caribbean that was realized and radicalized outside of the region.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, *The Life of Captain Cipriani* is a text that engenders reflection for James on the function of the colonial political apparatus and the meaning of true sovereignty for those subjugated within this paradigm. The exercise was the finale in a series of events in Trinidad that planted the seeds of his political theory before parting the colony. In other words, his early life experiences including his home environment and education, followed by his early adulthood activities had vitally shaped the man he would become in Europe and the United States. James’ quick inclination towards political activism, Marxism, and other revolutionary ideas after about a year in England can only truly be understood once his influences in Trinidad are brought into the equation.

## Conclusion

It is not in dispute that C.L.R. James had no real penchant for revolutionary thought on the cusp of his sojourn to England. However, there are happenings from his early life in Trinidad that reasonably put him on a trajectory toward his evolution into an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, Pan-Africanist figure.

James’ primary socialization at home was rife with a focus on academic achievement, extensive reading, and a belief that race did not signify inferiority in any way. This experience fostered a disposition of both discipline and inquisitiveness that he would carry with him to one of the colony’s two most distinguished boys’ secondary schools and beyond, even as he became

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 26.

smitten by the game of cricket. There were contradictions at QRC and other spheres of colonial society that would become easier for James to grasp after he graduated, but his immersion in this middle-class setup still played a role in shaping him. To be sure, his years at the school imparted a “hegemonic masculinity” that probably also gave him the confidence to embark on the endeavours he boldly pursued later in life. At the same time, his adolescence reveals a rebelliousness that continues into adulthood when he began writing literature that pushed him to challenge societal norms.

Involvement in the Maverick club and the journals *Trinidad* and *The Beacon* tracks with what is known about James at this juncture, as they were part of a movement of creatives and writers who believed that they were no less talented than their equivalents in the metropole. These were ventures by people from Trinidad’s middle class, but the journals specially aligned themselves with designs of self-determination. This included efforts to validate the specificity of the island’s distinct cultural outputs, which differentiated them from the products imposed on them from afar. The challenge to the colonizer’s culture also occasioned a focus on working-class life in Trinidad, which James earnestly participated in, writing fictional pieces that reflected his interactions with the working-class and working-poor people around the capital city where he lived. Such an emphasis on the masses would characterize his work when he eventually transitions to producing political texts.

Moreover, James’ collaboration with *The Beacon* was important, as it encouraged him to consider the span of anti-colonialism, race consciousness and working-class mobilization, which dovetailed with his interest in creating counter-narratives through fiction. From this politicized exposure emerges “The Intelligence of the Negro,” “Michel Maxwell Phillip,” and *The Life of Captain Cipriani*. Although this dive into the world of non-fiction did not present any radical



discourse, there are still kernels of Jamesian thought here. The two articles demonstrate that he already has no problem critiquing White supremacist conceptions and exalting Black men's achievements to make his point. Further, his publication on Captain Cipriani employs the technique of using the story of a messianic leader in an uprising of colonized people as an opening to talk about a social, political, and economic situation primed for change. He would return to this later in the 1930s most famously with *The Black Jacobins*. What's more, *The Beacon* experience indicates that the hegemonic masculinity that he absorbed in his school days followed him into his social and political writing, as to the exclusion of women, he touts the intelligence of the Black men, profiles an accomplished Black man, and later the great leadership of a White man. This too would be a theme in his non-fiction publications in later years.

Certainly, the C.L.R. James who spent the first 30 years of his life in Trinidad did not project the kind of revolutionary consciousness that defined his career in England and the United States. Nevertheless, some connections can be drawn from experiences he had during this time in the colony that can be said to be instrumental in forming his philosophical proclivities for decades.

## Chapter 2 – Assimilation, Social Mobility, and the Black Struggle: The Formative Years of Aimé Césaire

Anthony Bogues' supposition that the twentieth century gave rise to a Caribbean intellectual tradition where individuals "steeped in the traditions of Western civilization" recognize its contradiction, and are prepared by their Caribbean experience to make theoretical contributions outside of the region, surely applies to Aimé Césaire as well.<sup>113</sup> Still, there is an interplay of factors that would have made all of them, including him, unique. Colonialism typically looked different depending on the imposing European power and could even have different dynamics in colonies ruled by the same metropole depending on their size, geography, population demographics, and crop production, among other things. Further, there are specificities about one's life in a respective colony that would affect the philosophical direction they take.

The following chapter looks at occurrences from the early life of Aimé Césaire to identify signposts that account for his emergence as a revolutionary thinker. As was the case with C.L.R. James, it begins with a relatively brief overview of the colony in which he was born, Martinique, to contextualize these experiences. The nuances of his familial relationships and the values imparted on him is then considered. Following this, in addition to probing political exposures in his childhood and adolescence, there is a discussion about his educational training. Finally, there is some analysis of influences in the years immediately after he arrives in France and before he begins his activism and publishing work. Above all, the argument being advanced here is that Césaire's radical leanings have connections to his upbringing in Martinique, even as the

---

<sup>113</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, 26.

opportunity to explore them only really materializes when he leaves the colony to confront the contradictions of assimilation.

### **The French Colony of Martinique in Context**

Like most of the Lesser Antilles, Martinique was mainly populated by Kalina during the period of first contact with European colonialists. Although French settlers were welcomed by these indigenous people of the island when they landed in 1635, relations between them quickly deteriorated when the former erected a fort.<sup>114</sup> The Kalina resisted the settlers' expansionist ambitions, assisted by Kalina from Guadeloupe, Dominica, and St. Vincent, and attacked the settlers, but were forced to retreat, as they were easily overpowered by the advanced artillery directed toward them from behind the fort.<sup>115</sup> The clash essentially led to a division of Martinique that would see the settlers occupy the leeward side of the island by 1637, while the Kalina were confined to the windward side. Peace remained between the two groups for more than a decade, but by the end of the 1640s, only about 400 Kalina remained on the island compared to a much larger settler population that was more than 5,000 by 1658.<sup>116</sup> The Kalina, along with Kalina from close by colonies, continued to fight against French encroachment, culminating in a war in the region between 1654-1659 that almost saw the former capture

---

<sup>114</sup> Phillip Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), Ebook, 134.

<sup>115</sup> Nellis M. Crouse, *French Pioneers in the French West Indies, 1624-1664* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 60-61.

<sup>116</sup> Boucher states in a discussion about 1648 marking a new phase in French-Island Carib relations that Martinique's governor Jacques Dyl du Parquet had "maintained peace with the approximately four hundred Caribs remaining on the island." In Batie's article examining the shift to mass sugar production in the English and French Caribbean in the early to mid-seventeenth century indicates that 5,303 Whites inhabited the island. See Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 146. Robert C. Batie, "Why Sugar? Economic Cycles and the Changing of Staples on the English and French Antilles, 1624-54," in Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, 219.

Martinique until Dutch ships intervened on behalf of the settlers.<sup>117</sup> However, by 1660, the Kalina population in Martinique was virtually non-existent.

Enslaved Africans were present in Martinique and sister islands like Guadeloupe, Dominica, and St. Lucia for much of the seventeenth century. In fact, the Kalina attack on the island's settlers in 1654 during the war was accompanied by an uprising of enslaved Africans.<sup>118</sup> In 1664, the ratio of people of mixed African and European descent and enslaved persons to Whites was two to one and increased to three to one by 1701, while the enslaved population itself stood at 21,000 in 1700.<sup>119</sup> However, the institution of slavery was not formalized in the French Caribbean until the passing of the *Code Noir* in 1685, which was initially intended to regulate the treatment of enslaved people on plantations and the illegal trade between West Africa and these colonies.

Through its plantation slave economy, Martinique became one of the top sugar-producing colonies between 1763 until the French Revolution in 1789.<sup>120</sup> The enslaved always resisted their abhorrent treatment even before the metropole became embroiled in the upheaval centered around "the rights of man," but Martinique's most noteworthy revolts came in the years after the

---

<sup>117</sup> Boucher's second chapter provides a helpful context on the tensions between the French settlers and the Island Caribs, demonstrating that the situation in the region from about the 1620s until the end of the war were quite dynamic, while contestations encompassed several islands. Therefore, Martinique cannot easily be examined in isolation. See Boucher, "Two: Real Politik Caribbean Style: Euro-Carib Relations during the European Invasion, 1623-1660, in *Cannibal Encounters*, 104-178.

<sup>118</sup> Although Craton notes that "Carib raids were almost invariably accompanied by slave uprisings—such as that in 1654 which ravaged Martinique," Boucher remarks that during this incident Du Parquet's compound was besieged by "Caribs from Martinique and Dominica aided by fugitive slaves (*marrons*)." It is possible that the confrontation featured both enslaved and *marrons*. However, neither author goes into any depth in discussing this aspect of the incident. See Michael Craton, "From Caribs to Black Caribs: The Amerindian Roots of Servile Resistance in the Caribbean," in *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History*, ed. Gary Okihiro (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 108. Boucher, *Cannibal Encounters*, 153.

<sup>119</sup> See Eric Williams, "Capitalism and Slavery," in Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, 455. Marietta Morrissey, "Women's Work, Family Formation, and Reproduction among Caribbean Slaves," in Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, 675.

<sup>120</sup> See Ibid. Morrissey also includes a chart that indicates Martinique was sixth among the top ten leading Caribbean islands in sugar exports between 1766-70.

event. To be sure, the French Revolution did have a major impact on the enslaved. As Bernard Moitt notes, the series of plots and attempted uprisings in August, September, and October 1789, “suggest that slaves were knowledgeable about political events in France, but more importantly, that they observed cracks in the political hegemony of the planter class at home which resulted in these events.”<sup>121</sup> These acts continued into the first half of the nineteenth century, such as the unsuccessful revolt of 1822, when the armed enslaved in the town of Carbet managed to kill two Whites and wound 5 before it was snuffed out and mass execution against the alleged culprits ensued.<sup>122</sup> The 1831 plot to burn down the cane fields in Saint-Pierre was also thwarted after a number of plantation fields and houses were set ablaze, only to be quickly extinguished and the rebels quelled by the superior force of the planters.<sup>123</sup> At the same time, less bellicose retaliation like strikes and poisonings were more common, and effectively helped to build momentum towards the abolition of slavery in all the French colonies in 1848.<sup>124</sup>

Akin to much of the Caribbean, Martinique’s early history as a colony featured the control and sway of multiple imperial powers – namely the British and the French – as various wars and struggles were waged on the European continent and abroad for centuries following its so-called discovery at the end of the fifteenth century. Nonetheless, the French essentially governed the island from the seventeenth century onwards and have not relinquished control since the British traded it back to them along with several other territories towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1814.

---

<sup>121</sup> Bernard Moitt, “Slave Resistance in Guadeloupe and Martinique, 1791-1848,” in Beckles and Shepherd, *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, 921.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 926.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 927

<sup>124</sup> See Ibid. John Savage, “‘Black Magic’ and White Terror: Slave Poisoning and Colonial Society in Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Martinique,” *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2007, George Mason University Press), 635-662.

Unlike British colonial policy, centralization and assimilation were at the heart of French rule in their various colonies at least until the middle of the nineteenth century. The French saw their colonies in the West Indies as an extension of France, thus there was an attempt to inundate inhabitants with French culture, values, and traditions towards ultimately incorporating the respective colony into its larger political structure.<sup>125</sup> For instance, laws and rights that applied to the citizens in France would technically be reflected equally in its colonies to those who could qualify as French citizens. Furthermore, the colonies were not seen as individual entities, so there was no colonial state apparatus that would have specific representation in France as there had been for Britain and its colonies during their imperial rule over distant territories. Hence, the concerns of French West Indian colonies like Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane were not addressed in the French parliament, unless they affected France, particularly after Saint-Domingue gained its independence and became Haiti in 1804.

In general, the French colonies in the West Indies were not expected to be self-sufficient or autonomous economically, but rather engaged in a bi-lateral arrangement wherein their economies exclusively served the needs of the metropole – specifically in the form of sugar and other tropical products – and the metropole would provide necessary resources for sustenance to the colonies. Similar to the economic arrangement that was present in the British West Indies, the metropole retained almost all the profits from the colonies including the high returns that its sugar-producing colonies, namely Martinique and Guadeloupe, generated. It was only after 1861 that this relationship, termed “L’exclusif” or “Pacte Coloniale,” was abolished, allowing for the colonies to trade and/or buy and sell goods with foreign countries. Moreover, other than wealthy White Creole landowners known as Békés, French colonial presence in these islands came in the

---

<sup>125</sup> See Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

form of fleeting residents, such as soldiers, traders, missionaries, and administrators who were vastly outnumbered by the enslaved African population.

In Martinique and the other colonies of the French West Indies, the colonial policy would change significantly in 1848 when a decree was passed that immediately transitioned the colony from rule by a governor sent from France to representation by three deputies from Martinique who would form part of the French National Assembly, the body that made the laws governing the colonies. More importantly, the revolution in France of 1848, or the arrival of the Second Republic, is what brought about the abolition of slavery in the country, freeing enslaved Africans in all their territories; making them French citizens; and giving them (men) the right to vote, which incidentally had also been granted to the masses of French men for the first time that year. Although universal male suffrage was suppressed and freedom restricted<sup>126</sup> just three years later under Napoleon III, it was restored in 1870 under France's Third Republic, and people of African ancestry in Martinique were finally able to access colonial representation in French assemblies, as well as free public primary school education by 1882.

Indentured labour, largely coming from India, was the primary strategy adopted by France to make up for the loss of enslaved labour in its Caribbean colonies, including Martinique. In fact, only five other colonies in the Caribbean were a more popular destination for these workers, as between 1854-1899, 25,404 people from India landed in the island.<sup>127</sup> However, this system proved to be an unreliable replacement for enslavement. High rates of mortality due to illness – surely exacerbated by brutal working conditions – meant that many

---

<sup>126</sup> After slavery, “vagrancy” was seen as a problem, so anti-vagrancy laws were instituted, which were meant to ensure that the workers were working regularly; while passbooks were issued to make it more difficult for them to leave the plantation and find work elsewhere. See Rosamunde Renard, “Labour Relations in Post-Slavery Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870,” *The Journal of Caribbean History* 26, no. 1 (January 1992): 37-61., 46, 47, 48.

<sup>127</sup> See Roopnarine, *Indo-Caribbean Indenture*, 122-125.

could not even fulfill their contracts. In addition, there was no meaningful population growth in this period, as Indian labourers in the French colonies generally saw deaths exceeding births by a ratio of 3:1, while in Martinique men outnumbered women at a rate that remained above 2:1 until 1880.<sup>128</sup> New migration to the French colonies was shut down by the mid 1880s, and by the end of 1894, following high levels of repatriation, there were just over 5,000 Indians in Martinique, which was much less than Guadeloupe who had far more arrivals from India during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>129</sup>

At the turn of the century, Martinique was in economic and social turmoil. From about 1884 until the beginning of the twentieth century, the colony's main export, sugar, experienced economic stagnation. As a result of lower prices, many bankruptcies occurred during this period leading to further concentration of the sugar plantations into the hands of a few powerful White Creole owners who absorbed independent sugar factories.<sup>130</sup> Spurred by the right to organize provisions extended to them from the metropole in 1884, workers in the colony reacted to the crisis by organizing themselves collectively to grapple with the lower wages and precarious employment opportunities they were forced to endure. For instance, agricultural workers organized the first general strike in Martinique in 1900, which resulted in the shooting deaths of 10 workers at a plantation owned by a Frenchman in the town of Le François.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, labour strife would be characteristic of life for many of the formerly enslaved masses in Martinique, and

---

<sup>128</sup> David Northrop, "Indentured Indians in the French Antilles (Les immigrants indiens engagés aux Antilles françaises)," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 87, no. 326-327 (1er semestre, 2000), 255.

<sup>129</sup> See Appendix in *Ibid.*, 270. Guadeloupe's Indian population is 15,161 in 1894, while Martinique's population is 5,077 and descends further to 4,665 by 1899. Northrop also notes that Martinique had higher rates of repatriation with a figure of 9,279 by the end of 1900 compared to 8,813 in Guadeloupe. See *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>130</sup> Christian Filostrat, *Negritude, Agonistes: Assimilation against Nationalism in the French-speaking Caribbean and Guyane* (New Jersey: Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers, 2008), 30.

<sup>131</sup> For more on the general strike and the internal and external factors surrounding it, see Christopher M. Church, "The Political Summation: Incendiarism, Civil Unrest, and Legislative Catastrophe at the Turn of the Century" in *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017): 147-190.



its sister isle Guadeloupe, for several decades into the twentieth century, or rather from the inception of the Third Republic (1870-1940) onwards:

Throughout this period, the former slaves, now "free" workers, lived under brutal exploitation. Although free, many remained tied to the plantations because they received hardly any money, being constantly indebted to the bosses who paid them in vouchers or tokens enabling them to buy supplies in shops belonging to the bosses or under their control. Some workers lived on the plantation in "negro cabins" belonging to the plantation owner. The former slave-drivers were transformed into managers or accountants who controlled workers' whole lives. This whole situation meant that there were enormous social and political pressures on the workers when there were strikes or elections.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, emancipation, citizenship, and universal male suffrage for the formerly enslaved in Martinique and Guadeloupe did not drastically improve their living conditions. In Martinique, the impact of a colony built entirely on slave labour and exclusively for the benefit of the metropole was still felt at the turn of the century. Even though slavery had been abolished decades earlier, the Martinican economy and labour force had not been diversified, which meant that the masses of formerly enslaved people of African descent had little options but to live and work in rural areas, often languishing on sugar plantations. This shaky economic structure in the colony affected other aspects of life among the colonized. For instance, there was a general lack of resources on the island, which meant that basic infrastructure and critical necessities such as doctors and hospitals were limited, leading to a series of epidemics up to the early 1900s.<sup>133</sup>

The tenuous economy was hampered further by natural disasters at the end of the nineteenth century that culminated in a volcanic eruption in 1902 at Mount Pelée which destroyed the town of St. Pierre, killing almost all its 30,000 residents and leaving four banks ruined. The Mount Pelée catastrophe was devastating, as, in addition to the thousands of people that perished, Martinique also lost a town that was for all intents and purposes, its commercial

---

<sup>132</sup> "Guadeloupe-Martinique: Behind 50 years of Departmental Status, the French Colonial State Still Maintains Its Grip." *The Spark*, May 5 1996, <http://the-spark.net/csart124.html>. Also see Rosamunde Renard, "Labour Relations in Post-Slavery Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870."

<sup>133</sup> McCoy, Shelby T. *The Negro In The French West Indies* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 173-174.

and cultural capital and known as the “Paris of the West Indies.”<sup>134</sup> In fact, it was from there the island’s main export of sugar and later rum was shipped, while the town’s inhabitants were easily higher numerically than the colony’s capital of Fort-de-France. St. Pierre was re-settled six years later, but its prominence was never restored.

What’s more, perhaps unsurprisingly, the post-emancipation period also witnessed continual animosity between the Blacks and Whites in Martinique. Although there were no noteworthy incidents of violence between Blacks and the minority elite White Creoles/Békés at the very start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as there had been during the immediate post-emancipation years – outside of the massacre of the above-mentioned agricultural strike in 1900 – the colonized masses were well aware of the massive disparity in wealth between the two groups. White Martinicans, along with a few mixed race or so-called “Mulatto”<sup>135</sup> elites, owned most of the arable land in the colony where the formerly enslaved toiled well into the twentieth century, despite being vastly outnumbered by the latter.<sup>136</sup> The upper class then were mainly plantation owners who largely controlled the financial and political affairs of the island, notwithstanding their relatively tiny population. The bigger middle-class grouping primarily consisted of White and a marked number of Mulatto merchants and their employees, who lived and worked in towns, while some owned small farms in the countryside. The peasant, working-poor and working-class stratum comprised most of Martinican society who were plantation workers,

---

<sup>134</sup> Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders, *Volcanoes in Human History: The Far-reaching Effects of Major Eruptions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 196.

<sup>135</sup> *Mulâtre* or Mulatto is similar to the term “coloured” or “people of colour” and “mixed” discussed earlier concerning Trinidad, which were used interchangeably in Martinique. However, in Martinique, like elsewhere in the French West Indies, the term is generally not considered pejorative and is one of several terms used from around the eighteenth century to describe people with different variations of African and/or European ancestry, typically linked to skin complexion. Mulatto was also used to describe the middle-class, as this group was the first “mixed” group to reach that class position in Martinique where colour or skin complexion was closely aligned with class position. Other terms used in Martinique are “*nègre* (black), *chabine* (mixed race, but light) and *câpre* (a mix of black and mulatto).” See Alan West Durán, ed., *African Caribbeans: A Reference Guide* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 132.

<sup>136</sup> Susan Frutkin has the breakdown of landownership in her monograph. See Susan Frutkin, *Aimé Césaire, Black Between Worlds* (Miami: University of Miami Center for Advanced International Studies, 1973), 8.

general labourers, household servants, washerwomen and others who also did menial jobs.<sup>137</sup>

This substantial mass of the labour force in the colony were almost all Black except some Mulattos and the abovementioned rapidly diminishing East Indian population.<sup>138</sup>

Certainly, the Black population in Martinique at this juncture felt that they were not being treated as equal French citizens as compared to the non-Black middle- and upper-class population on the island and throughout the empire. Unemployment, low wages, a lack of socio-economic mobility, competition with immigrant workers and political representation that seemed meaningless, in many ways reflected the outlook of the masses of Black people in the colony as compared to their White counterparts and to a somewhat lesser extent, the Mulatto segment of society. Indeed, it was under this socio-political backdrop that Aimé Césaire was born.

### **Aimé Césaire (1913-1935)**

#### *Learning educational excellence and social mobility in the Césaire household*

On June 13, 1913, Aimé Fernand David Césaire was born in Basse-Pointe, a small town on the northeast coast of Martinique. He was the second eldest of Elénore and Fernand Césaire's seven children. His father was a trained teacher who worked as a manager of a sugar plantation at the time of Aimé's birth, while his mother was a seamstress.<sup>139</sup> The Césaires were a family of modest means and probably did not experience the kind of poverty that so many Blacks endured at the turn of the century in Martinique – particularly those who had little choice but to live on plantations. Yet, in his seminal poem *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, which was autobiographical in most respects, Aimé Césaire reflects on his childhood as one of hardship:

---

<sup>137</sup> de Boer and Sanders, *Volcanoes in Human History*, 197.

<sup>138</sup> West Durán pegs this population at 3,764 by 1900. See West Durán, *African Caribbeans: A Reference Guide*, 133.

<sup>139</sup> Romuald Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire* (Paris: Perrin, 2010), 30.

At the end of the first light, another little house very bad-smelling in a very narrow street, a miniscule house which harbors in its guts of rotten wood dozens of rats and the turbulence of my six brothers and sisters, a cruel little house whose demands panic the ends of our months and my temperamental father gnawed by one persistent ache, I never knew which one, whom an unexpected sorcery could lull to melancholy tenderness or drive to towering flames of anger, and my mother whose legs pedal, pedal, day and night, for our tireless hunger, I am even awakened at night by these tireless legs pedaling by night and the bitter bite in the softer flesh of the night by a Singer that my mother pedals, pedals for our hunger and day and night.<sup>140</sup>

Although Césaire above recalls his early life as being enveloped by indigence and squalor, these descriptions were likely induced by his poetic style; the critique he had developed on colonialism by the time that *Notebook* was written, and the political objectives he may have had in writing the elongated poem. None of these factors were necessarily mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, irrespective of whether Césaire's early life was one of deep deprivation, what is clearer is his family's emphasis on education, particularly as a channel for the pursuit of social mobility.

From a very early age, Césaire and his siblings were part of an education regiment that included both their daily elementary schooling and supplementary classes at home led by their father, Fernand. The Césaire children received instruction from their father every morning from 6:00 am to 7:45 am in general subjects, arithmetic, and French. Along with making a deliberate effort to perfect their French to offset the effect of the widely spoken Martinican Creole around them, Fernand also “inculcated in them, by means of a highly disciplined regime, an admiration for the literary models of the traditional canon, such as Victor Hugo and Voltaire.”<sup>141</sup> Indeed, akin to C.L.R. James' father, the elder Césaire was obsessed with the success of his children in their studies, as he and his wife had grand ambitions for all their children. Case in point, Aimé Césaire was named after Aimé Barthou, a famous journalist who wrote in the *Journal de l'université des Annales* in Paris from 1907-1919 and under the publication's new name,

---

<sup>140</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 15.

<sup>141</sup> Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5.

*Conferencia*, at the end of World War I.<sup>142</sup> It is quite telling that Fernand had a subscription to the journal, which targeted middle-class folks and featured commentaries by top Parisian culturalists and intellectuals who wrote on diverse subjects about “art, literature, painting, poetry, theatre, in effect, everything that comprised the nature and epitome of French culture.”<sup>143</sup> Moreover, he knew that the dreams he had for his family could not be fulfilled without a French-centric paradigm of education.

It should be noted that unlike the British colonial context in a place like Trinidad, the opportunities for socio-economic mobility among the formerly enslaved and indentured in Martinique were severely limited outside of rural agricultural work in the early twentieth century.<sup>144</sup> Urbanized infrastructure was not as widely established in Martinique as it would have been during the same period in Trinidad. With so many people still working on sugar plantations in the French colony, it simply was not imperative to the metropole government that Martinique rapidly develop its industrial sectors, despite an economy that remained precarious due to the fidelity to the ever-declining profitability of sugar production. Therefore, occupations such as dock workers, railway workers, electricity and telephone company workers and positions associated with colonial administration – which were all crucial to the Trinidadian economy by the early twentieth century – were proportionately scant and certainly not as pivotal in Martinique. The Césaires were among a minority of rural Black Martinicans that were not confined to agricultural labour and essentially occupied middle-class status. They recognized

---

<sup>142</sup> Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire*, 36.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., translation is mine.

<sup>144</sup> In her short breakdown of the historical, social, political and economic situation of Martinique, Susan Frutkin asserts that as economic troubles of the island in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century can be traced back to the “pacte colonial,” which essentially established it as a monoculture economy. She explains: “Characteristically, Martinique’s function was to provide sugarcane and its by-products to France, while acting at the same time as an exclusive market, for French products, carried in French ships.” The economy “Inevitably...developed with absolute primacy of the agricultural sector, and more specifically, of one or two agricultural products.” Strikingly, she notes that “As late as 1960...sugarcane and its products still accounted for 97% of Martinique’s exports.” See Frutkin, *Aimé Césaire, Black Between Worlds*, 6.

that middle-class values like higher education would facilitate greater social mobility and they imparted these ideas to their children. Central to this would be the acquisition and mastery of the French language and active discouragement of Martinican Creole. James Arnold explains this notion in *Modernism and Negritude*:

Creole is the first language of all black Martinicans; but it has always been the servile language in the scheme of social, economic, and political power of obtaining in French-dominated societies in the Caribbean. To be exclusively a Creole speaker was to be a nigger. To eventually affirm blackness as a positive value, Martinicans of Césaire's generation had first to master the language of the colonial authority. Aimé Césaire did this through the schools, of course, but the function of language and culture in his home environment had special importance.<sup>145</sup>

To be sure, French culture was constitutive of virtually every social, political, and economic colonial apparatus in Martinique, thus Black Martinicans could not reasonably thrive within its socio-economic structure without critically shunning Creole culture. Fernand Césaire recognized this, imparting the idea to his children that if they were to make a good living for themselves in an urban setting there was little room for the kind of indulgences that the colonized in Trinidad could explore within that more diverse economic structure and much larger colony. More to the point, with opportunities undoubtedly scarce in Martinique, education was practically the only means for advancement into the middle class for Black people in the colony.

The weight placed on education in the Césaire household preceded Aimé Césaire's schoolmaster-trained father, as it was valued a great deal by both of his paternal grandparents. Césaire's father had merely followed in the footsteps of his father, Nicolas Louis Fernand, who is credited with being the first Martinican to attend a university, or *école normale* (St. Cloud) in France, after presumably being one of only one hundred fifty children in Martinique attending secondary school in 1880.<sup>146</sup> He returned to Martinique to become a teacher in his vibrant

---

<sup>145</sup> A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

hometown of St. Pierre before becoming a principal. Césaire's paternal grandmother, Eugénie Macni, on the other hand, is remembered fondly for teaching him and his siblings the basics of French, namely how to read, at a time when there was no pre-school available for them to attend in Basse-Pointe.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, it was Césaire's grandmother who was responsible for educating his father and his aunt after his grandfather passed away at just twenty-eight years of age.<sup>148</sup> Perhaps more noteworthy is the fact that many Martinican adults were still not literate in French at the time that Césaire was born, as education only became free in 1881 and compulsory the following year. This was a full fourteen years after Césaire's paternal grandparents were born in 1868, which was just twenty years after the abolition of slavery in the colony. Furthermore, it was believed that three in four children were uneducated in 1900, even with the obligation for children to attend school.<sup>149</sup> Thus, the respect and devotion that Aimé Césaire would develop for education were engendered in him by previous familial generations that had defied the odds and managed to become literate while most Black Martinicans would have found such an accomplishment rather elusive.

Césaire's grandmother's contribution to his educational development and her presence in the home had a profound effect on him as well as his siblings who recall a woman who was "visibly African in origin." She also had a considerable impact on the people around her, as many connected with her based on the moral authority she exercised, representing a kind of spiritual advisor to those who knew her.<sup>150</sup> It has been suggested that the mythic status of Césaire's paternal grandmother, known in the family as "Mama Nini," likely played a significant

---

<sup>147</sup> Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire*, 30.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>149</sup> Armand Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique, Tome 2 (De 1848 à 1939)* [Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996], 155.

<sup>150</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 2.

role in his descriptions and adulation of Africa in later work.<sup>151</sup> In addition, Césaire would himself later talk about a paternal lineage that extended to an African-born ancestor who had played a heroic role during an 1833 uprising in the town of Grand'Anse, which he claimed was part of "a tradition of political struggle for the freedom of blacks" in his family that "influenced me a great deal."<sup>152</sup> Yet, considering what was taking place in Martinique during his childhood and adolescent years, it seems likely that awareness of political struggle in a general sense would have been unavoidable for Césaire.

### *Worker's rights and political struggle*

As was mentioned earlier, the persistent economic troubles in Martinique in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century led to organized efforts by workers to protest against poor working conditions. Collective organizing and unified action had become commonplace from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, while socialism was a popular ideology among the working-class masses in the colony, as it had been in Trinidad during the same period. Workers may have been inspired by the Russian Revolution in 1917, and perhaps rhetoric from Communist and Marxist elements critical of World War I and France's participation in it. Indeed, newspapers, magazines, and literature of all types from France would have pervaded in Martinique to a much higher degree than local publications, and worker's rights were topical in the former at least since the right to organize laws were passed in 1884. Also, there would also have been Martinicans who, like Captain Cipriani in Trinidad, came back to Martinique after the war with a sense of indignation after being among 18,000 men conscripted by France to fight in a war for freedom against German forces, while decades-long oppression persisted in the French

---

<sup>151</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 6. Romuald Fonkoua notes that Césaire's sister actually believed that her Grandmother resembled people from a city in Senegal. See Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire*, 30-31.

<sup>152</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 2-3.



colony. Nevertheless, socialism as an ideology exposing the exploitation of workers by the capitalist class had gained traction in Martinique earlier than the 1920s due to local formations.

Martinique had a plethora of circles, associations and societies created in the immediate post-emancipation years. As they had during slavery, the formerly enslaved often formed these collectives to help one another. They would be sites where work, social life, and culture were shared and became more widespread from about 1880. Associations in St. Pierre included groups like *Le Progrès*, *Fraternité*, *L'Union Républicaine*, and *L'Union des Ouvriers de Saint-Pierre*.<sup>153</sup> There was even a Socialist party that emerged in the 1880s, which was led by Amédée Knight, a rich Mulatto engineer, who was elected Senator for Martinique in 1899 and re-elected in 1906. With Knight in the French Senate, pushing for reforms in education, employment and housing, Black Martinicans for the first time had a voice in the government.<sup>154</sup> Nonetheless, the Black masses in Martinique did not pay much attention to electoral politics during this period – and even somewhat further into the twentieth century – so conservative forces consistently prevailed, while Knight's Radical Socialist Party gravitated towards workers in urban spaces, typically neglecting the downtrodden working in the fields.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, associations or societies located in urban spaces that did not regularly dialogue and organize with the many workers on plantations and factories in rural areas would be confined to progressive ideas without any significant action. Moreover, ideology, organization, class consciousness, and collective action would only begin after the alliance of workers that took place during the

---

<sup>153</sup> Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique Tome 2*, 121.

<sup>154</sup> Ernest Zebrowski has a quote from Knight where he explicitly appears to identify with being Black. See Ernest Zebrowski, Jr., *The Last Days of St. Pierre: The Volcanic Disaster That Claimed Thirty Thousand Lives*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 35. Nicolas refers to him as a “coloured man.” See Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique Tome 2*, 148.

<sup>155</sup> It is believed that despite being enfranchised, Blacks in Martinique did not really participate in elections. See, Stephen H. Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy, 1870-1925* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1963)[1929], 504-505.

aforementioned strike of 1900. In effect, the general strike marked the beginning of the labour movement in Martinique.<sup>156</sup>

Following the 1900 strike, a new socialist party would emerge that appeared to be more committed to an all-encompassing working-class struggle. The growing socialist movement in France at the time appealed to Martinican workers who were discovering for themselves the utility of the ideology for worker organization. Joseph Lagrosillière, another Martinican-born Mulatto, who was trained and worked professionally as a lawyer, was instrumental in galvanizing the socialist movement in Martinique. He was co-founder of the *Groupe des Etudiants Socialiste des Antilles* (Antillean<sup>157</sup> Socialist Student Group) in the late 1890s and founded the *Fédération Socialiste de Martinique* soon after the general strike, which affiliated itself with the French Socialist Party in 1901, just as the Radical Socialist Party owed its namesake to a metropole base when it was created twenty years earlier. Also in 1901, in addition to denouncing the massacre of strikers which took place during the Le François ordeal through the Antillean Socialist Student Group, Lagrosillière began a publication called *Le Prolétaire*, the self-declared “Organ of the Workers Party.” At a meeting of hundreds of socialist gatherers in Saint-Pierre, Lagrosillière pushed for workers to organize themselves politically:

I want you to organize in order to seize the Town Halls, so that private industry can be brought under municipal control...to seize the Conseil General, so that you can give direct support to your own class institutions, in order to send your men to Parliament who will be your servants and no longer your masters...<sup>158</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> Commenting on the aftermath of the strike, Nicolas says “Encouraged by their struggles and their successes, realizing how much mass action could achieve, we see, in several corporations, workers creating unions, the day after the strike.” (translation mine) See Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique Tome 2*, 162.

<sup>157</sup> “Antilles” is synonymous with “(French) West Indies” or “(French) Caribbean” and these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter.

<sup>158</sup> Peter Morgan, *Fire Mountain: How One Man Survived The World's Worst Volcanic Disaster* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 55. This quotation was translated and taken from *Joseph Lagrosillière: Socialiste Coloniale* (Éditions Désormeaux, 1996), 275, according to Morgan’s notes on “Chapter Two: Death to the Whites!”

As the Socialist Workers Party's candidate for deputy in the constituency of North Martinique in the elections of 1902, Lagrosillière was outmatched in the preliminary round by the nominee for the Radical Party and an entrant from the plantocracy who was forced to call for more progressive policies in his campaigning to appease the increasing numbers of Black and Mulatto voters that were drawn to socialist values and challenge to the political status quo.<sup>159</sup> Lagrosillière would leave Martinique entirely for several years following the death of members of his family in Saint-Pierre due to the Mount Péle eruption, which occurred on the eve of the final election ballot between the top two candidates. Nevertheless, although the Martinican working class still appeared to be a bit apathetic towards elections, the labour movement continued to grow in his absence and socialist ideals continued to be espoused. Another general strike took place in 1905, followed by smaller strikes in 1906 and 1910.<sup>160</sup> Lagrosillière returned to Martinique in 1906 and was finally elected as a deputy in 1910,<sup>161</sup> was re-elected in 1914, and continued to play an active role in Martinican politics in the following decades. This was significant because Lagrosillière, like Knight, claimed to speak for the Black majority in Martinique, even as this group did not vote in proportion to their numerical advantage among the electorate in elections.

Fernand Césaire was a supporter of Joseph Lagrosillière, and as Romuald Fonkoua notes “like all middle-class French Antilleans who owed their status to public education and secular schooling,” the Césaires were themselves socialists.<sup>162</sup> It can be surmised then, that Aimé Césaire's recollections of his family's affiliation with the “political struggle for the freedom of Blacks” encompassed socialist ideas and workers' rights more specifically. Even with his

---

<sup>159</sup> Zebrowski Jr., *The Last Days of St. Pierre: The Volcanic Disaster That Claimed Thirty Thousand Lives*, 35, 45-46.

<sup>160</sup> Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique*, 179.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>162</sup> Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire*, my translation, 36.

middle-class aspirations and relative distance from agricultural work in rural fields, Fernand would have been attuned to the happenings of the labour movement and there was likely some chatter around the Césaire household that affirmed a pro-worker outlook. Furthermore, workers' struggles were ongoing during Aimé Césaire's childhood and teenage years. For example, there was yet another general strike in 1923 following the collapse of the sugar market in 1921-1922. These strikes were quite significant as "massive demonstrations were organized during the sugar harvest, and in some cases, cane fields were set ablaze at night, reviving past slave-revolt practices."<sup>163</sup> It is hard to imagine that strikes of this magnitude would not pique the interest of a socialist, nor be mentioned favourably in their home. Lagrosillière was continually being linked to these uprisings by his political opponents and was even imprisoned by local authorities after municipal elections for allegedly inciting violence through his support of a 1925 strike. Yet, throughout this period, Fernand Césaire remained a supporter of Lagrosillière.<sup>164</sup> Again, it is unlikely that Aimé Césaire could be insulated from his father's feelings towards Lagrosillière. The latter would have fit within the family's conception of embracing political actors who purport to fight for the liberation of Black Martinicans, regardless of his possible contradictions.<sup>165</sup>

### *Moving to the capital, elite education, and dreams of escape*

Despite the commotion of labour and politics in the 1920s, the young Césaire kept to his father's plan and the discipline that was instilled in him paid off, as the young voracious reader was offered a scholarship to attend secondary school (lycée) at the age of eleven in Fort-de-

---

<sup>163</sup> West Durán, *African Caribbeans: A Reference Guide*, 130.

<sup>164</sup> Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire*, 36.

<sup>165</sup> Lagrosillière is famously known for entering an alliance with Fernand Clerc, representing the Planter's party, which allowed him to become Counsel General. As Fonkoua notes, this did not deter the elder Césaire from supporting him. See *Ibid*.

France. The urban capital city was also home to the highly reputable Lycée Victor Schoelcher. The all-boys' school was named after the prominent French abolitionist Victor Schoelcher, who also donated 10,000 books to a library in Fort-de-France, similarly named in his honour, and built in 1893. Like QRC in Trinidad, the government-backed high school housed many of the colony's best students, some of whom would go on to complete their secondary studies in France, followed by post-secondary schooling at a university also in the metropole. Yet, the metropole relied on Lycée Schoelcher as its principal point for a system of recruitment in the West Indies that aimed to "attract the most promising young minds, form them in a proper Cartesian mould, and offer them careers as administrators in its overseas empire."<sup>166</sup>

Recognizing the significance of the scholarship opportunity to attend the high school, Aimé Césaire's parents moved the entire family to the capital city to facilitate his scholarly ambitions. Although all of Aimé Césaire's brothers ultimately attended Lycée Schoelcher, and his sisters went to local all-girls schools, he still stood out among all his siblings from an early age. He is remembered as being quieter and more reserved than his brothers and sisters, but his superior intellect was obvious. He was completely devoted to reading and immersed himself in his studies with much fervour, often spending many late nights with his books.<sup>167</sup> Césaire's parents knew that the attention they paid to Aimé, including uprooting the entire family to move from their hometown to Fort-de-France would be well worth it so that he could fully realize his potential and firmly elevate the family's middle-class status in Martinique.

Césaire's shy demeanour, along with his upbringing in Basse-Pointe did not make it easy for him to initially adjust to life in Fort-de-France and at Lycée Schoelcher. He was often by himself and felt somewhat lost in the privileged environment during his first years at the

---

<sup>166</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 6.

<sup>167</sup> Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire*, 35.

school.<sup>168</sup> Césaire would have interacted with more White people at Lycée Schoelcher and Fort-de-France than he would have in Basse-Pointe, but he recalls not having any animosity towards White students at the school, some of whom he had become friends with.<sup>169</sup> Also, at the age of twelve, he became friends with a student from Guyane named Léon-Gontran Damas who stayed at the school temporarily after his lycée was destroyed by a cyclone that hit that country. The two boys got close during the short time that Damas was in Martinique and would get an opportunity to build upon their relationship six years later in France. As well, Césaire enjoyed playing team sports, especially football, as he and Damas even organized opposing teams at the school. He was as enthralled with football as he was with reading but, unlike C.L.R. James, Césaire did not sacrifice his studies for his love of sport, so he had given up this passion before he was sixteen in order to meet the demands of his formal education regiment.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, outside of Damas, it appears that Césaire did not have encounters with other classmates that left an impression on him or encouraged him to be more sociable throughout these adolescent years.

Even though Césaire did not make too many friends at Lycée Schoelcher, he excelled at his studies, which mirrored curricula in France and were taught by respected teachers who received their training in the metropole. Césaire recalls being particularly interested in French and passionate about history while at the secondary school. Indeed, upon graduation from Lycée Schoelcher, he received prizes in French and history, along with Latin and English, while being named the best overall student. One former teacher remembers him as doing “everything well” and being “gentle,” “gracious,” and “so perfect that it seemed abnormal.”<sup>171</sup> Césaire held all his

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 7.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

teachers in high regard, yet he developed a special admiration for one teacher at the school who taught Geography.<sup>172</sup>

Eugène Revert was a well-known geographer in the French empire who further distinguished himself from other teachers at Césaire's high school by incorporating information indigenous to Martinique in his classes, as opposed to material germane to the metropole. He told his students about the volcanic nature of the island they inhabited and even took his class on field trips to explain the particularities and range of Martinican landscapes as they explored them first-hand.<sup>173</sup> Césaire was captivated by Revert, so much so that when the latter asked him what he wanted to do once he completed his high school studies he said: "Like you, Mister Professor."<sup>174</sup> Although Césaire did not become a geographer after graduation, he did continue to follow the research of his favourite teacher in subsequent years. His "countless evocations of the nature of Martinique" in future works are inextricably linked to the lessons he received from Revert at Lycée Schoelcher and the geographer's general impact on him.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, the respect was mutual as Revert had a high opinion of the teenaged student. He saw Césaire's intellectual potential and recommended him to the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris, certain that he would advance to the city's prestigious university Ecole Normale Supérieure.<sup>176</sup>

Once he received his *baccalauréat* (diploma), and on the strength of another coveted scholarship, Aimé Césaire was bound for France in 1931. Césaire was anxious to leave Martinique, which he believed was a "hell-hole," unquestionably inferior in many respects to

---

<sup>172</sup> In one interview, Césaire said he believed his teachers were "heroic." See Charles H. Rowell, "It is Through Poetry That One Copes With Solitude: An Interview with Aimé Césaire," *Callaloo*, no. 38 (Winter, 1989), with English translations, 49-67., 59.

<sup>173</sup> Vincent Clément, "Latitude and Longitude of the Past: Place, Negritude and French Caribbean Identity in Aimé Césaire's Poetry," *Caribbean Studies* 39, no. 1-2 (December/January, 2011), Institute of Caribbean Studies, Puerto Rico, 171-193, 175.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire*, 39.

France.<sup>177</sup> In an interview many years later, he recalls feeling “the urgent need to escape.” He adds: “I was suffocating in the small colonial society that was Martinique with its pettiness, its gossiping, its prejudices and its hierarchy of classes and races.”<sup>178</sup> Certainly, he did not expect to miss Fort-de-France or anything else that Martinique had to offer: “Whereas the thought of exile saddened most of my classmates, it brought joy to me: Paris, a promise of fulfilment; in fact, I was not at ease in the Antillean world.”<sup>179</sup> On the boat towards France, as the island disappeared in the horizon, the very thought of leaving Martinique brought him “sensual pleasure.”<sup>180</sup>

Césaire’s sentiments were almost the exact opposite of what he would express at the end of his sojourn in the metropole, revealed most poignantly in his autobiographically styled work, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Nonetheless, it was while living and studying in France that he would experience his political awakening. Whereas C.L.R. James was beginning to develop the mode of analysis and the social and political critique that would define his philosophical position shortly before he left Trinidad for England, there is no indication that Aimé Césaire possessed any commitment to radical or independent theoretical thought before he left Martinique. Although he was exposed to affirming ideas about Black liberation and working-class resistance to capitalist oppression, Césaire did not concretely engage with any of these theories. For all intents and purposes, French colonialism had created in Césaire a loyal subject that extolled the superiority of the metropole, while deriding the colony and all its

---

<sup>177</sup> Césaire uses the term *la merde* to describe how he felt about Martinique at the time. *Merde* could be interpreted as “hell” in English and is quite commonly translated to mean “shit.” I translated it as “hell-hole” because of the definite article “the” used before the word. For interview see Pierre Bois, “Aimé Césaire, un poète en colère,” interview with Aimé Césaire, *Le Figaro* (December 20, 1974).

<sup>178</sup> Gilles Anquetil, “Le Long Cri D’Aimé Césaire,” interview with Aimé Césaire, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 1528 (February 23, 1994), <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/documents/20080417.BIB1140/le-long-cri-d-039-aime-cesaire.html>, the translations are mine.

<sup>179</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 8. Arnold has translated Césaire here from a 1967 interview with M. a M. (Georges) Ngal, *Aimé Césaire: un homme à la recherche d’une patrie* (Dakar-Abidjan: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1975), 33.

<sup>180</sup> Bois, “Aimé Césaire, un poète en colère,” translation is mine.



potential. Yet, considering his rigid Franco-centric training, which inevitably impelled him to snub Martinican Creole culture; it would have been quite challenging for the eighteen-year-old to think inspiringly about the colony and the prospects of its inhabitants. This is not even to make mention of the limited employment opportunities and poor working conditions that the Black masses in the country continued to experience, whilst the labour situation became volatile again when Césaire departed in 1931 due to the Great Depression. Education was Aimé Césaire's passport to a world far grander than Martinique. He had "a thirst for knowledge" and his intention, once he arrived in France, was to study hard and "learn." lest he finds himself working back home working "the cane field."<sup>181</sup> Césaire learned a great deal in France – in ways he surely did not anticipate when he first left Martinique.

*Traversing assimilation, anti-colonialism, and Black subjectivity in the Latin Quarter*

Lycée Louis-le-Grand was a school for elite high school students from all over France and its empire, designed to help them prepare for examinations that would determine acceptance into the elite university, Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris. The preparatory school was quite demanding, but Césaire continued to exhibit unparalleled discipline and would eventually advance to ENS. The schools were in the *Quartier latin* (Latin Quarter), the fifth and sixth administrative districts in the city. The Latin Quarter was a lively area and home to many students. Indeed, it was in this environment, outside of his rigorous training and classes that Césaire would form relationships that would have an indelible impact on his intellectual creativity and thought.

Césaire's immersion in his school studies cannot be dismissed, as it would still play an indispensable role in his personal and intellectual development. He was assimilating to the

---

<sup>181</sup> Anquetil, "Le Long Cri D'Aimé Césaire," translation is mine.

European intellectual tradition at a much quicker rate than he was at Lycée Schoelcher during his initial years in Paris, circumscribed by a curriculum that anchored students' success on their fidelity to a deep understanding of French canons.<sup>182</sup> But this absorption of French culture was hardly passive and became more difficult to grapple with as his time in the metropole wore on, and feelings of alienation festered. Gregson Davis explains this process further for Césaire and other students that came from French colonies during the years immediately before the Second World War:

Students of color, in particular, sooner or later found themselves drawn, if only in self-defense, into a radically critical stance towards European civilization and its arrogant claims to superiority. Thus cultural assimilation ironically engendered, in proportion to its very thoroughness, a form of resistance on the part of its youthful recipients that can usefully be labeled counter-assimilationist. Since the stigmatization, or even erasure of non-Western cultural traditions was a common subtext of the promotion of the canon both inside and outside the confines of the lycée, many students of African origin sought vigorously to repossess a degraded identity – the more so because their skin color marked them off as “other” in a manner both irreducible and pronounced.<sup>183</sup>

The racial marginalization colonial students themselves experienced in Paris, especially as it manifested with respect to their living conditions in comparison to their local white counterparts, stirred indignation among many students of African descent in the 1930s, as well as critiques about their inclusion and exclusion as French citizens and denigration via their skin colour.<sup>184</sup> Students within the university community would get together to discuss and debate these matters, including Aimé Césaire who keenly took part in these discursive exchanges. So, while the Latin Quarter featured various members of the French intelligentsia that would help Césaire construct his ideas and worldview one way or the other, and corroborate what he was learning in school, his interactions with students of African descent from the French West Indies and the African continent were ultimately the greatest source of inspiration for the philosophical

---

<sup>182</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 7.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 154.

outlook he would develop before his time in France came to an end. It is through his relationship with these students that he would learn to challenge colonialism and the problematic centrality of assimilation processes that enveloped the lives of colonized people.

At Louis-le-Grand, Césaire reconnected with Léon-Gontran Damas, but it was his new friendship with Léopold Sédar Senghor, a fellow schoolmate a few years ahead of him from Senegal, that truly moved him. Describing their initial meeting after exchanging their names and the colonies they came from, Césaire recalls: “He introduced me to the school, and very quickly we become pals. We translate our Latin texts together; we build a world anew. He asks me about the West Indies. I literally drink from his lips whatever he can tell me about Africa.”<sup>185</sup> Besides the instant chemistry between the two, Césaire was left mesmerized by the embodiment of someone who actually came from Africa. In Martinique, as in the other colonies throughout the Caribbean, Africa and its inhabitants were not portrayed positively. In fact, part of the justification for colonizing the continent at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century was to bring “civilization” to the “primitive” cultures.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, for Césaire, Senghor nullified these assumptions precisely because he was able to transcend French assimilation and find his own authentic voice. Put differently, Senghor distinguished himself from his Antillean counterparts since he was already grounded in unadulterated Black subjecthood:

For Senghor there was no problem whatsoever, because, as a Senegalese-and in spite of his Greek and Latin culture-he had remained, I believe, a true Senegalese and, fundamentally, an African. Africa has always known that French colonialism was marginal and probably doomed from the start. But here was a man perfectly anchored in his identity, a Senegalese identity, an African one taking in all that the world could bring him, in a "Self" not assimilated but assimilating.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> Rowell, “It is Through Poetry That One Copes With Solitude,” 51.

<sup>186</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 7-8.

<sup>187</sup> Rowell, “It is Through Poetry That One Copes With Solitude,” 51.

Césaire's comments above show why, for someone experiencing a kind of identity crisis like he and other students were in the 1930s, Senghor would have been so fascinating. Senghor reminded Césaire of the contrasting cultural assimilation he experienced in Martinique and how disconnected he was to the place his ancestors came from just a century earlier. Moreover, the latter's own impressions about his grandmother's African aura, along with a belief that his paternal lineage began with a rebellious enslaved man born in Africa named Césaire, likely played a role in the way he was drawn to Senghor. The figure of Africa and its inextricable connection to Black identity and ontological reclamation that saturated Aimé Césaire's subsequent writings then cannot be separated from his relationship with Léopold Senghor. The two spent a lot of time together in the early 1930s when they were both at Louis-le-Grand, discussing books, and exchanging ideas about culture and colonialism, while Césaire would also share some early poems with Senghor.<sup>188</sup> In reality, this duo was a trio joined by Damas, and together they reflected very seriously on the state of Black people around the world. Still, other things were happening around Césaire and his friends in Paris that also played a role in ultimately shaping his outlook.

Mere days after Césaire arrived in Paris in September 1931, an exhibition was displayed which was primarily organized by the Communist Party called "La vérité aux colonies" (The Truth about the Colonies). It was a counter-exhibition to the government-endorsed "Exhibition coloniale Internationale de Paris" (International Colonial Exhibition of Paris), which featured representations of France's colonial possessions in the form of arts, crafts, and theatrical performances for six months. The "Truth about the Colonies" was an eight-month display which attempted to challenge the ruling government's view that colonialism was a fruitful exchange of cultures or "association" with the lands they claimed dominion over – as opposed to an

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

assimilation process – by depicting the abuses that were taking place. While there is no indication that Césaire attended the exhibition, there were many other activities taking place in Paris during Césaire’s first year in the metropole based on the same anti-colonial exercise. In fact, by the end of his next month in France, a new bilingual journal that Césaire would become familiar with called *La Revue du Monde Noir* (The Review of the Black World) released its first of six issues. The publication was fervently committed to Pan-Africanism and the cultural heterogeneity of people of African descent. It was created by a Martinican student named Paulette Nardal and a Haitian activist named Léo Sajous who were both living in France. They had been a part of another Paris-based journal called *La Dépêche Africaine* (The African Dispatch), which demarcated a notion of Black identity and placed great emphasis on facilitating connections among Black people around the world to create a united voice. This magazine, which published from 1928-1932, though critical of colonialism, directed much of its content on political reforms in the colonies and was not opposed to political French assimilation. Yet, although *La Dépêche Africaine* did not advocate cultural assimilation, their desire for political rights in Africa and the Antilles “unintentionally reproduced the colonial hierarchy that correlated political rights with cultural assimilation and elevated Antilleans over Africans.”<sup>189</sup>

Unlike its predecessor, *La Revue du Monde Noir* placed far greater emphasis on manifestations of unassimilated Black culture in French colonies as a way to critique the rationale of colonialism, while at the same time bringing together all people of African descent through their diversity. So, capturing the mood of many colonial students and other Black intellectuals living in France at the time, the journal structured itself around the question of

---

<sup>189</sup> Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 168-169.

“black cultural difference and transnational solidarity.”<sup>190</sup> Furthermore, *La Revue du Monde Noir* broached the notion of race consciousness and worldwide race solidarity similar to the way that the UNIA’s *Negro World* did. In their first issue, they declared that their aim was: “to create among *les Noirs* of the entire world, regardless of nationality, an intellectual and moral tie, which will permit them to better know each other, to love one another, to defend more effectively their collective interests and to glorify their race.”<sup>191</sup> *La Revue du Monde Noir*’s contributors, like *La Dépêche Africaine*’s, were members of the Black elite – students, journalists, poets, educators, future colonial administrators, etc. – who believed that this could be achieved by highlighting different elements of Black culture from around the world. Ironically, these writers had perfectly assimilated into French society and were able to exercise their privilege, evident in the very production and circulation of *La Revue du Monde Noir*, based on this reality. Nonetheless, by focusing on the plurality of Black culture, *La Revue du Monde Noir* intended to demonstrate that colonized people of African descent could culturally stand on equal footing with other peoples within the scope of modern society, despite their differences.<sup>192</sup> Thus, the pieces in the journal focused on African history and politics, Black poetry, and other arts, while copies of the publication reached the Caribbean, Africa, as well as the United States. One of the cultural products that were prominently featured in *La Revue du Monde Noir* and indelibly grabbed the attention of Aimé Césaire was pieces from Black people living in the United States who were part of the Harlem Renaissance movement.

The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement that had its roots in the New York City neighbourhood of Harlem, attracting many singers, musicians, poets, writers, and other

---

<sup>190</sup> “Our Aim.” *Revue du Monde Noir*, no. 1 (1932), 2, quoted and translated in Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 171.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., the emphasis/non-translation of “*les Noirs*” is Wilder’s.

<sup>192</sup> Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 173.

artists and activists. The movement gained momentum in the 1920s and continued into the mid-1930s, while its cultural output spread its influence throughout the country and around the world. The underlying basis of the rich material that came out during this period was the reinvention of Black identity inside and outside of the United States, with distinct cultural productions as its corollary. Its purpose was essentially race consciousness and Pan-African racial uplift, which would challenge pervading racist ideas about people of African descent. Moreover, by exhibiting the cultural idiosyncrasies of Black people in the United States, the artists and writers who comprised the Harlem Renaissance movement tried to assert the humanity of people of African descent by rebuffing Euro-American cultural assimilation and the pernicious racism that they constantly faced. One of its proponents, Jamaican-born Claude McKay, had his “To America” poem reprinted in *La Revue du Monde Noir*, where he referred to the U.S. as a “cultured hell” of “bitterness” and “hate,” which he valiantly had to resist.<sup>193</sup> Pieces like this would resonate with Césaire in the year that the journal was published, as he was contemplating the lived experience of people of African descent located within the purview of the French empire and the dialectical nature of cultural assimilation therein.

Although Césaire may have relished the opportunity to read the writings rooted in the Harlem Renaissance, he was certainly not the only Antillean or colonized African that gravitated toward these works. Damas and Senghor, along with other students and Black intellectuals in France, were well acquainted with the movement and had even translated some of the pieces from English to French, in addition to meeting some of these Black American artists when they spent time in the country. Césaire describes the impact of these figures of the Harlem Renaissance in an interview:

---

<sup>193</sup> *Revue du Monde Noir*, no. 1 (1931), 38, quoted and translated in *Ibid.*, 176.

In spite of our imperfect knowledge of English, we had read people like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, later Sterling Brown and other people of the Black Renaissance collected in Alain Locke's anthology [The New Negro]...They [the Black Americans] were the first to teach us the rudiments of what we called "Negritude." They were the first to say "Black is beautiful." This does not seem to be much, but it was tremendous. It was the beginning of a cultural revolution, a kind of revolution of values. It was in no way a refusal of the outside world, it was bringing things into focus. What for us became fundamental was – and that was new – a desperate quest for the Negro "Self."<sup>194</sup>

The quote above illustrates that the Harlem Renaissance truly moved Césaire and his colleagues, as they tried to construct a mode of analysis that would enable them to arrive at a newly empowered subject position for colonized people of African descent. The pieces in *La Revue du Monde Noir* and *La Dépêche Africaine* played a role in this journey, but the fact of the matter is that, again, the Latin Quarter was rife with students and intellectuals mulling over the contours of Black subjectivity, colonialism, and liberation. Césaire and his cohorts met regularly with Black elites from the colonies who regularly discussed these issues, and they even met with Harlem Renaissance writers like the above-mentioned McKay. They were not just concerned with questions around culture as resistance though. The growing hold of Communism in France and Europe at large, for instance, did not escape this predominantly French West Indian contingent. At least by the 1930s, many people of African descent had found socialist and communist rhetoric to be most useful in challenging the exploitative nature of colonialism, and the marginalization of Black people in general. There were some like Césaire, who thought that *La Revue du Monde Noir* was too superficial, and others who believed that more explicit anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist discussion needed to be articulated.<sup>195</sup> For this reason, a group of people that Césaire commonly interacted with, including Damas, subsequently created yet another journal, *Légitime défense* (Self-defence) in 1932.

---

<sup>194</sup> Charles H. Rowell, "It is Through Poetry That One Copes With Solitude," 51.

<sup>195</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 11. Arnold makes this claim based on the aforementioned 1967 interview with Nagal had with Césaire. See Nagal, *Aimé Césaire*.



*Légitime défense* released just one issue, which was structured like a manifesto. This could be attributed to the sway of the Communist Party in France and the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels. For the group, the *Communist Manifesto* made a direct link between colonialism and capitalist imperialism, utilizing “the manifesto as a subversive political tool” while also framing “the terms through which colonialism could be framed and understood.”<sup>196</sup> On the other hand, the country’s Communist Party was the only political group to openly denounce colonialism at the time, evident in their opposition to the months-long “L’Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris.” The signatories to the journal did not include Damas, despite his involvement in the group, but instead eight Martinican students who were living in Paris. They acknowledged their privilege as members of the Black elite from the French West Indies but declared that they were “traitors to [their] class” and directed the issue toward an audience that occupied the same class position.<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, the *Légitime défense* group identified themselves as Marxists who were critical of the “capitalist, Christian, bourgeois world” and “humanitarian hypocrisy.”<sup>198</sup> While the group pushed for a revolution that would embolden colonized people, specifically the working-class masses, overturning cultural values also landed within their critique. As Gary Wilder observes, they criticized literature and poetry from the Antilles that “neither engaged the everyday social injustice that confronted the masses nor expressed the writer’s deepest cultural values.”<sup>199</sup> In a *Légitime défense* article written by Etienne Léro called, “Misère d’un poésie” (Misery of poetry), the writer notes: “A foreigner would search in vain in this literature for an original and profound accent, for a sensual Black

---

<sup>196</sup> Lori Cole, “Légitime defense: From Communism and Surrealism to Caribbean Self-Definition,” *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 4, no. 1 (2010): 15-30., 18.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>198</sup> “*Légitime défense: Declaration*” (1932), in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. Michael Richardson, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski (New York: Verso, 1996), 41.

<sup>199</sup> Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 178.

imagination, for an echo of the hates and aspirations of an oppressed people.” Léro believed that authentic literature from the colonies did not exist because of the elite Black Antillean’s proximity and aspirations towards Whiteness and European culture:

The West Indian, stuffed until bursting with white morality, white culture, white education, white prejudices, flaunts in his booklets the bloated image of himself. For him, to be a good copy of the pale man takes the place of social reason as well as poetic reason. He is never decent enough, solemn enough for his own taste – “You act like a nigger.” He does not fail to become indignant if, in his presence, you yield to a natural exuberance. He does not want to “act like a nigger” in his verses either. It becomes a point of honor for a white to be able to read all of his book without guessing the color of his skin.<sup>200</sup>

Thus, in the article, Léro asserts that true West Indian literature could emerge if it reflected and proudly rooted itself in the cultural and racial differences of people of African descent who were from the region. This “new West Indian poetry” would only come about if the “Black proletariat” can free itself from a “parasite mulatto caste” and “some degenerate whites” to “draw on Creole” for its distinct expression.<sup>201</sup> In this way, *Légitime défense* still accentuated the value of culture like *La Revue du Monde Noir*, rejecting Eurocentric assimilation, but at the same time, they embarked on a political analysis that was vociferously anti-colonial and revolutionary. Moreover, the group’s outlook on culture was more indebted to a local movement called Surrealism than the Harlem Renaissance.

Surrealism was a cultural movement that emerged in France in the early 1920s and had gained a steady following by the early 1930s. Its founder André Breton defines Surrealism in his 1924 manifesto as “Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought... in the absence of all control

---

<sup>200</sup> Etienne Léro, “Misère d’un poésie,” in *Légitime défense* (Vaduz: Krause Reprints, 1970), 10, quoted in Dale Tomich, “The Dialectic of Colonialism and Culture: The Origins of the Negritude of Aimé Césaire,” *Review* 2, no. 3 (Winter, 1979): 351-385., 361.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation.”<sup>202</sup> As can be inferred here, Breton gives a nod to the psycho-analytical hypothesis of Sigmund Freud and the possibilities opened up by the sphere of dreams.<sup>203</sup> The *Légitime défense* group saw in this definition, grounded in the power and legitimacy of the dream, a tool for affirming the cultural productions of people of African descent, circumventing the constraints of the French assimilationist lens. It entailed a kind of introspective psychic experience that would enable the Black subject to freely delve into the depths of their psyche to produce or imagine something that was not over-determined by a particular convention, and yet remain valid. The journal declared that “Western Civilization” stultified such expression with its “abominable system of constraints and restrictions, the extermination of love and the confinement of the dream.”<sup>204</sup>

In reality, *Légitime défense*’s conception of cultural expression was not at odds with *La Revue du Monde Noir* and the Harlem Renaissance. However, the writers involved aligned themselves with the Surrealist movement in France at the time, stating this explicitly in the journal. They even shared a space with the founder and wrote in other surrealist publications. Indeed, the Surrealists were the only other organized group that joined the Communist Party in their denouncing of the Colonial Exhibition. The anti-colonial surrealists even partnered with the Communist Party to put on the earlier mentioned contrary exhibition called the “truth about the colonies,” where they highlighted the inherent violence of colonialism, along with explaining the link between capitalism and imperialism in perpetuating this Euro-centric form of domination, while presenting communism as a viable alternative. Nevertheless, Aimé Césaire said he did not fraternize with the group of his fellow countrymen in terms of the intellectual thought

---

<sup>202</sup> André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924), in *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.

<sup>203</sup> Breton explicitly credits the work of Freud in the Manifesto for helping formulate the theory of Surrealism. See *Ibid*, 10, 11.

<sup>204</sup> *Légitime défense*, 1-2, quoted in Dale Tomich, “The Dialectic of Colonialism and Culture,” 359.

surrounding *Légitime défense*. He claims that he reproached them because they were so bound to French Communists and French Surrealists that the specificity of Black subjectivity had been elided in their critique.<sup>205</sup> Still, Césaire ultimately identified with some of the same figures that the group highlighted in their singular issue of the journal, and quite tellingly, his writings in subsequent years replicated a similar vision.

To be sure, all the groups mentioned above had some impact on shaping the mode of analysis that Aimé Césaire would begin to adopt around 1934-1935, when he, Senghor and Damas headed *L'Étudiant Noir* and began publishing their works through this student journal. *La Revue du Monde*'s spotlight on the diversity of Black culture would move him, as well as *Légitime défense*'s militancy. Moreover, the experiences that Césaire had in France at large pushed him to adopt a radical position less than four years after leaving Martinique. It is too difficult to cite one event as *the* source for the praxis that he began to theorize in *L'Étudiant Noir* and would consolidate before he went back to the Caribbean. Rather, it was an amalgamation of all the people, events and ideas that enveloped his daily life in Paris. So, this anti-colonial philosophy that the trio developed with their peculiarities during the mid to late 1930s, which came to be known as negritude, contained elements of African essence; cultural dexterity; psychoanalysis; Black self-affirmation; and was not indifferent to Marxist or communist framing of the struggle for people of African descent. This was evident when Césaire first named the concept in 1935 with an article he wrote for issue number 3 of *L'Étudiant* entitled, "Conscience raciale et révolution sociale" (Racial Consciousness and Social Revolution).<sup>206</sup>

## Conclusion

---

<sup>205</sup> Aimé Césaire states this in an interview with René Depestre. See appendix to Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 85.

<sup>206</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Conscience raciale et révolution sociale," *L'étudiant noir: Journal mensuel de l'Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France* 3 (1935): 1–2. Print. Reprinted in Filostrate, *Negritude, Agonistes*, 123–26.

Ascertaining how much meaning to attribute to the events in the early life of Aimé Césaire concerning shaping the anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist philosopher he would become by the mid-1930s is a trying task. Although the activities surrounding him in the Latin Quarter when he arrives as a student present the most tangible connections, his experiences in Martinique up until early adulthood should not be discounted.

The Césaire household was a space where educational pursuits and transcendental achievements were strongly emphasized from Aimé's grandparents, down to his parents. They saw it as a chance for social mobility. So much so that when Aimé received a scholarship to attend the revered Lycée Victor Schoelcher secondary school, the family moved from their rural home in Basse-Point to Martinique's capital Fort-de-France. Along with the reification of middle-class values, a program of assimilation was also deeply instilled in him at home and in school, leading to his penchant for French, and likely his yearning to leave Martinique for France. These aspects of his background in the colony led him to the metropole where his depth of understanding of its culture as benign was disturbed by the encounters he had there. Yet, other elements of this period appear to have been a factor in his radical turn.

It has been noted that the fascination with Africa that Césaire would take up later in his writing may be linked to the integral role his grandmother played during his childhood. Further, he pointed to the fact that his family's placement in a lineage of social and political struggle in the colony greatly affected him, including the heroics of a forefather in an early 19th-century uprising in Martinique. It is reasonable to assume then that the socio-political movements on the island would have had reverberations for him, even if there is no record of him joining any organization or reading related literature at the time. Indeed, the family is believed to have been socialists and his father was a major supporter of a renowned labour leader and founder of the

Socialist Federation of Martinique Joseph Lagrosillière, who was elected as a deputy for Martinique in the French Assembly in 1910 to 1924 while collaborating with other leftists along the way. Lagrosillière's efforts on behalf of the island's Black working class would have been hard for the young Césaire to ignore, especially given his family's leanings, thus his attraction to ideas of the Left while living in the metropole is utterly rational.

The products of groups like *La Dépêche Africaine*, *La Revue du Monde Noir*, and *Légitime défense* are palpably closest to the views that Césaire projects when he starts publishing in the 1930s. Again, the Black internationalism of *La Dépêche Africaine*, the strength of varied cultural Blackness as an attack on assimilation by *La Revue du Monde Noir*, and the Marxist and anti-colonial threads of *Légitime défense* would all be incorporated in his works. They also introduced him to movements he would be enchanted by, such as the Harlem Renaissance and Surrealism, which influenced his poetry. Moreover, this is to say nothing about his friendships and collaborations with Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon-Gontran Damas. The aforementioned Paulette Nardal too, who will be taken up in much greater detail in a subsequent chapter, along with her sisters, had a marked influence on him as well.

In the end, it should be underscored that any study on the experiences of Aimé Césaire's early life that explains his revolutionary stance in later years must begin in Martinique. These events involve more extrapolation than his time in Paris, but they point to a phenomenon that he and C.L.R. James both share – being inescapably shaped by the environments into which they were born.

### **Chapter 3 – Class & Race: C.L.R. James’ Marxist Lens**

Even though there are some markers from the first 31 years of his life, one would still find it is rather astounding that C.L.R. James’ name could not be untangled from the field of Black radical thought a few decades later. Nevertheless, he was entrenched in anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, anti-racist, Marxist activity from about the mid-1930s, until a foray into nationalist politics in Trinidad and Tobago in the late 1950s. Marxism specifically was his foundation, as it helped him to elucidate power dynamics in the modern world that rendered people oppressor and oppressed within its social, political, and economic structures. Yet, James’ endeavour to attend to the plight of Black, colonized, working-class, and peasant populations led to the development of his own important insights to advance this struggle.

This chapter looks at the course of James’ progression in revolutionary theory when he lived in England and the United States during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. It begins with an examination of his first engagement with Marxism, including his initial studies of Karl Marx, the Russian Revolution and the key figures and ideas following the transformative event. His organizing efforts with groups on the Left are also probed, along with his first political publications. The discussion then shifts to his analysis of the “Negro Question” and the “Russia Question,” and the creation of his own grassroots leftist group. Finally, the tenets of his independent Marxist philosophy are set out by drawing its connections to Black self-determination. Moreover, this critique of James’ most active decades shows the centrality of Marx, Marxists, and Marxism to his station as a philosopher.

#### **Marxist, Anti-imperialist, and Anti-colonialist Learnings in England**

*Joining the British Labour Party and studying Marx in Nelson*

As noted in the preceding chapter, when C.L.R. James arrived in England in 1932, although he had a grasp of anti-colonial analysis, he was not invested in political writing. Since his days at QRC, James expressed a desire to become a renowned writer and he believed England could provide an avenue for such a career. For years James immersed himself in British culture and literature, so his departure to England to “write books” seemed inevitable.<sup>207</sup> The opportunity to live in the country was facilitated by friend and world-class professional cricketer Learie Constantine, who frequently visited James when the former made trips back to Trinidad. Indeed, it was through Constantine that James would quickly become acclimated to life in England, including the kind of social and political agitation that would reveal his inclinations.

Upon arrival in England, James lived with Constantine, his wife and their small child in Nelson, Lancashire. The two men were virtually inseparable during James’ stay in the town, as he helped Constantine write his first book, while Constantine supported the James’ professional writing aspirations and introduced him to various social circles in Nelson. Constantine was quite popular, even beyond his athletic prowess.<sup>208</sup> James recalls that there was much interest in the West Indies and West Indians at the time, and Constantine was often called upon to speak to different groups about these matters, before eventually imploring James to join him and speak on his behalf.<sup>209</sup> Private meetings were held at the Constantine household as well. It was there James would meet local trade unionists that the cricketer had befriended in Nelson, an industrial town which had a reputation of being ripe with worker militancy via its mill labourers.<sup>210</sup> Unlike the hardcore trade unionists in Trinidad that James mainly observed from a distance, he got close

---

<sup>207</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London, U.K.: Stanley Paul, 1976), 110.

<sup>208</sup> James talks about the various kinds of people that Constantine knew who he was inevitably introduced to. See *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>210</sup> Nelson was known as “Red Nelson” and “Little Moscow,” following a 1928 lockout “designed to break the power of the militant Nelson Weavers’ Association.” See Christian Hogsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 44-45.



to these politically active workers who challenged his ideas and his biography on Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani – the same way his former colleagues from *The Beacon* would when it was ultimately published.<sup>211</sup> The work was published in Nelson the same year he arrived, and weeks later three of its chapters would be published as a pamphlet entitled, *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*.<sup>212</sup> Many of them belonged to a radical affiliate of the British Labour Party called the Independent Labour Party that had deep roots in the town and would have a profound impact on his outlook during his relatively short stay in Nelson, as he heard stories about their intransigence and witnessed at least one major action. James remembers that before meeting the agitators, “my labour and socialist ideas had been got from books and were rather abstract,” so these “cynical working men were a revelation and brought me down to earth.”<sup>213</sup>

James was drawn to the political activism that these workers were engaged in and became a member of the British Labour Party (BLP) himself, while at the same time publicly speaking out against colonialism. Furthermore, the workers inspired James to develop a better understanding of the foundation of their politics. James had already begun a reading program in Nelson which, among other things, he hoped would help him write a biography of Toussaint Louverture. But, his interactions with the workers caused him to gravitate toward writings on political economy as well. He recalls that they initially presented him with German philosopher Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* and volumes of Russian-born revolutionary theorist Leon Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*. James then took it upon himself to read “relevant volumes of Stalin” and Vladimir Lenin before inexorably discovering the works of

---

<sup>211</sup> See James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*. Recall critiques from *The Beacon* writers noted in the Chapter 1: Gomes, “Editorial Commentaries,” 5-7 and Mentor, “A Study of Mr. James’ Political Biography,” 16.

<sup>212</sup> See James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*.

<sup>213</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 119.

Marx, including the classic Volume One of *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.<sup>214</sup>

In the first volume of *Capital*, James would have read a technical overview and critique of the inner workings of the capitalist system and gained a deeper comprehension of what more generally he understood, by way of his trade unionist associates, as the ongoing exploitation of the worker[s] (working class) by the employer[s] (capitalist class), enabled and mediated by various state apparatuses. The book presupposes a perpetual conflict between the classes, accentuated by the inherent contradictions of the capitalist social relations of production, which would precipitate the conditions for a revolution by the proletariat or working class. Indeed, there was arguably no single book that would help James more to assess the forces that he and his new comrades in BLP were up against in attending to the plight of the working class more than Marx's pain-staking analysis.

*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851) was likewise complementary for James, particularly as it appropriated one of Marx's core analytical devices – historical materialism – and revealed his view on the role of the individual in the course of history. Reflecting on this essay 17 years later in the preface to its second edition, Marx insists that the piece distinguished him from other celebrated scholars who had also written on Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (Napoléon III) and the successful 1851 coup in the aftermath of the events that initiated the Second French Empire, such as social theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, because of his unique methodology. So, while Proudhon's "historical construction of the coup d'état becomes a historical apologia for its hero" thereby falling "into the error of our so-called objective historians," Marx's account "on the contrary" endeavoured to "demonstrate how class struggle in

---

<sup>214</sup> David Widgery, "A Meeting with Comrade James," in *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work*, ed. Paul Buhle (London: Allison & Busby, 1986), 116 and *Urgent Tasks* 12.

France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part.”<sup>215</sup> Moreover, in the text itself Marx observed, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”<sup>216</sup> Marx's conception of materialism or historical materialism, and its embedded dialectical nature, would become tremendously useful for James in his writing by the end of the 1930s.

James' first real engagement with Marxist thought within his reading program at Nelson should be underscored though. Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* illuminated Marxism for James in critical ways, inspiring him to study the Russian Revolution in greater detail and thereafter the above-mentioned Marx classics and others. When he moved to London in 1933 and became an organizer with the BLP, James would be drawn closer to Trotsky's ideas.

Leon Trotsky was a prominent figure in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or Soviet Union, as he was the founder and commander of the Red Workers' and Peasants' Army (Red Army) following the 1917 Russian Revolution, and ultimately helped to secure a victory for the worker-led revolutionary government in the civil war against a mixture of pro-monarchist, pro-capitalist, and interventionist forces, among others that followed from 1917-1923. However, by 1929, Trotsky had been ostracised from the party, exiled from Russia, and then deported from the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, he attracted a sizable following while in exile, particularly for his critique of Stalin's policies, including his appeals to Left internationalism, which gained traction throughout Europe by the early 1930s. In Britain, socialist ideas had become commonplace in mainstream parliamentary politics by this period,

---

<sup>215</sup> Karl Marx, Preface (1869) to *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf>. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *La Révolution social démontrée par le coup d'état du 2 décembre* (Paris: Garnier, 1852).

<sup>216</sup> Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 5.

with the BLP essentially embodying a spectrum of radical political ideas, revolutionary and otherwise, all trying to influence party policy.<sup>217</sup> Around the time that James arrived in England, the above-mentioned current associated with the BLP, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), disaffiliated with the party and by 1934 its most revolutionary members established itself as the Marxist Group. As Anthony Bogues observes, “The political objectives of the Marxist group were to work for a united front with the ILP and win the mainstream of militant workers by a united front activity in support of Trotskyism and the banner of the Fourth International.”<sup>218</sup> James found himself in the Marxist Group, as Trotskyism largely appealed to him and others because of the implications of a radical internationalism via the Fourth International, which essentially strived to align the working class across borders to incite the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. What’s more, there was a genesis for this type of organizing that began with Karl Marx and continued with Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and then Leon Trotsky.

*The centrality of the Russian Revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat and world revolution, from Marx to Lenin, to Trotsky*

For many who considered themselves Marxists, socialists or communists, the Soviet Union was supposed to represent the kind of revolutionary break from capitalism that could potentially be replicated around the world. In the nineteenth century, Marx had written in *Capital* and other popular works such as *The Communist Manifesto*, co-written with Friedrich Engels, about the impending development within respective capitalist economies that would result in a proletariat revolution. In essence, as Marx wrote in the latter text, the contemporaneous bourgeois dictatorship would be overthrown and replaced by the proletariat

---

<sup>217</sup> See David Coates, *The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>218</sup> Bogues, *Caliban’s Freedom*, 30.

who would realize their capacity for revolutionary change once they became aware of the extent of their oppression and organized themselves as a class that puts their interests first.<sup>219</sup> Marx explains his postulation about this revolutionary class in *The Poverty of Philosophy* through a dialectical materialist lens:

An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society. For the oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself, it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side...Meanwhile the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution. Indeed, is it at all surprising that a society founded on the opposition of classes should culminate in brutal contradiction, the shock of body against body, as its final *denouement*?<sup>220</sup>

Yet, during his lifetime, Marx could point to only one brief instance when there had been “working class government, the product of the struggle against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour.”<sup>221</sup> This came in the form of the Paris Commune, which was a defiant municipal council elected by citizens of Paris that held power in the city for about two months during the late nineteenth-century French civil war (1870-1871) until their revolt was crushed by the national government. Marx was encouraged by the Commune but also realized there were lessons to be learned from its failure. Indeed, it was one of his disciples, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who would three decades later offer his own critique on the Commune while in the midst of leading his own revolutionary movement in Russia.<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>219</sup> See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* [E-book] (London: Verso, 2012).

<sup>220</sup> Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon* [1847] (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Poverty-Philosophy.pdf>, 80. Emphasis in original.

<sup>221</sup> Karl Marx, “The Third Address May 1871 [The Paris Commune]” in *The Civil War in France*. [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_Civil\\_War\\_in\\_France.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_Civil_War_in_France.pdf), 26.

<sup>222</sup> See Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Lessons of the Commune” [1908] in *Lenin Collected Works*, volume 13 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 475-478, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mar/23.htm>.

Vladimir Lenin was a devout Marxist committed to revolutionary change in Russia as a writer, theorist, and activist by the turn of the twentieth century. He saw the country of his birth, a largely agrarian peasant society, as a place ripe for the kind of socio-political revolution that Marx and Engels discussed in *The Communist Manifesto*. This was a break from classic Marxism, which grounded capitalist overthrow with the rise to action by the industrialized proletariat. Instead, Lenin believed that peasants – despite their relative backwardness to urban workers inseparably linked to economic development and the centres of political power – were no less revolutionary and should be captured by socialist organizing and ambition.<sup>223</sup> At the same time, distinguishing himself from Marx, he posited that an established vanguard party should help to engender class consciousness of the proletariat, rather than expect them to spontaneously see the contradictions in capitalist society and rebel.<sup>224</sup> From around 1900, Lenin belonged to the pro-worker, Marxist-based, Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) and led the faction within it that would eventually become its own party in 1912 – nine years after it split the RSDLP in two – called the Bolshevik Party. As the leader of the revolutionary party, officially known as the (All-)Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) or RCP by 1918, Lenin strongly believed that they had evolved into a vanguard party that could achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat that Marx and Engels put forward in *The Communist Manifesto*. Furthermore, for Lenin, with Russia as a major actor on the world stage at the time, the Russian Revolution itself was an international event which fundamentally transcended what the Paris

---

<sup>223</sup> See Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Socialism and the Peasantry” [1905] in *Lenin Collected Works*, volume 9, 307-315, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/oct/10.htm>.

<sup>224</sup> See Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Trade-Unionist Politics And Social-Democratic Policies,” section III of *What Is To Be Done?: Burning Questions of our Movement* [1902] in *Lenin Collected Works*, volume 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 347-530. Also “Trade-Unionist Politics And Social-Democratic Policies,” section III of *What Is To Be Done?*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iii.htm>.

Commune was able to accomplish in its short existence and would inspire other left-wing agitators to follow this socialist revolution.

In 1919, Lenin founded the Communist International (Comintern), also known as the Third International, an alliance of left-wing radicals and trade unions. This followed *The Communist Manifesto*'s call for workers of the world to unite, underscoring that it is imperative for those who were already working towards a communist future to be in solidarity with the proletariat in all nations as they became more conscious.<sup>225</sup> Marx had already led this kind of set-up through the International Workingmen's Association or First International (1864-1876), while the Second International came about soon after his death (1889-1916). For his part, Lenin vociferously proposed a socialist revolution, such as what had taken place in Russia, be replicated around the world in a united front that would actively resist bourgeois power, which was at the time ensconced in post-war social, political, and economic turmoil.<sup>226</sup> The Comintern was supposed to facilitate this revolt against capitalism. Lenin surmised that wars between economic powerhouses would continue in the absence of a countervailing force like the Comintern, as he postulated that imperialism – or external geo-political actions by Empires – was the highest stage of capitalism.<sup>227</sup>

Yet, Lenin's conviction about the RCP in particular resulted in certain decisions that made its ascendancy dubious in the years immediately following the 1917 revolution, as the party continually relied on abuses of power and undemocratic processes, ultimately betraying the masses it claimed to represent. The RCP had lost its way by the early 1920s as the state in

---

<sup>225</sup> The proclamation about worker's unity that ends the pamphlet states "WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!" See Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 85.

<sup>226</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution" a.k.a. "The April Theses" [1917], in *Lenin Collected Works*, volume 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 19-26, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm>.

<sup>227</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline* in *Ibid* volume 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), 667-766, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>.

Russia appeared to be increasingly authoritarian and capitalist in its formation.<sup>228</sup> This only seemed to worsen when Lenin died in 1924, and Joseph Stalin assumed power. Leon Trotsky, the most prominent and popular Bolshevik revolutionary, began actively challenging Stalin's leadership even before Lenin's death until he and his United Opposition comrades were ostracised in the late 1920s. Ideological differences were at the root of the intra-party conflict, and this would continue during Trotsky's exile, while the so-called communist world split between Trotskyism and Stalinism. In addition to his disagreement over the unaccountable bureaucratic structure that Stalin consolidated and controlled as head of the RCP – which was renamed the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) or ACP in 1925, following the formal unification of the Soviet Union – Trotsky also opposed the former's belief in "Socialism in One Country."<sup>229</sup> Hence, while Stalin believed that a failure of communist uprisings in Europe in the years following the Russian Revolution was an indication that the Soviet Union should focus on internal development, Trotsky remained committed to an internationalist perspective that encouraged the theory of "permanent revolution," which entailed the spread of a worker's revolution in countries all over the world until capitalism was effectively deposed.<sup>230</sup> In exile, Trotsky pushed for a united front that would support revolutionary activities in different countries, but at the same time resist Stalinism. He founded the International Left Opposition, which would be renamed the International Communist League (ICL) by 1933 that ultimately formed the basis of the Fourth International collective in 1938. Certainly, Trotsky's organizing

---

<sup>228</sup> For more on the Russian Revolution and the years immediately following, see Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution: 1917-1923*, Vols. 1-3 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985).

<sup>229</sup> Stalin explains his theory, and challenges Trotsky, through his reading of the deceased Lenin. See Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, "Concerning Questions of Leninism" (Moscow, 1926), <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1926/01/25.htm>.

<sup>230</sup> See Leon Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution* (Berlin: Left Opposition, 1930), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/pr-index.htm>.



efforts were not lost on the ILP, as his ideas inspired the creation of the Marxist group, of which C.L.R. James became a crucial member.

The ongoing split between Stalinism and Trotskyism was a concern for the relatively few ILP members that belonged to the revolutionary Marxist group. James and his comrades had to negotiate between the problematic figure Stalin had become by the early 1930s; the defence of the Soviet state itself; and of course, the implications for the practical application of Marxist and/or communist theory. James began writing and speaking about these matters soon after his recruitment into the Marxist group, adding his depth of theoretical understanding to their discussions as he ultimately emerged as one of the group's leaders, and a popular spokesperson among the ILP at large. Representing the radical views of the Marxist group, James caused a stir among the ILP both in meetings and through his writings in the party's magazine *New Leader*.<sup>231</sup> However, it was through the publication of his first political book in 1937, *World Revolution: 1917-1936*, that James would truly elevate his status among the political Left, nationally and internationally.<sup>232</sup>

With *World Revolution*, James offers a critique of the Soviet Union nearly twenty years after the start of the Russian Revolution and assesses the state and/or pitfalls of other revolutionary movements elsewhere in the world. In so doing, James exhibits his allegiance to Trotskyism, proclaiming in the book's preface: "How much the book owes to the writings of Trotsky, the text can only partially show."<sup>233</sup> Hence, in line with Trotsky's views, James railed against Stalinism and the Comintern's unwillingness to pay attention to or invest more in anti-

---

<sup>231</sup> Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, 31-32. Bogues includes a quote from ILP member B.L. Gupta who recalls that James' "attacks on Stalinism were absolutely devastating" in Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson, *Against the Stream* (London: Socialist Platform, 1986), 263.

<sup>232</sup> C.L.R. James, *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* [1937] (Connecticut: Hyperion, 1973).

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

capitalist movements happening outside of the Soviet Union. Like Trotsky, he observes that the Soviet Union prioritized its own national security, leading to a lack of support within the Comintern leadership for revolutionary crises in Germany, China and Spain. For James, the Soviet Union was now, in essence, a mainly counter-revolutionary force that betrayed socialist principles. Before delving into his case studies in the book, he roots his analysis in orthodox Marxism to buttress the underlying themes and thesis of the publication with a chapter simply entitled, “Marxism.” Under the header of “The Economic Impossibility of National Socialism” he notes:

For thousands of years educated men had solaced themselves with dreams of a Communist society, but the realistic conceptions of scientific Socialism could only arise when the international forces of production had made possible the abundance of commodities. For Marx and Engels, therefore, basing their whole structure on the economic interdependence of the modern world and the consequent political ties, the mere idea of a national Socialism would have been a pernicious absurdity, to be driven out of Socialist ideology with whips and scorpions back into its natural home, the camp of the radical petty-bourgeoisie. “Proletarians of all lands, unite” was no idealistic slogan, but the political expression of economic need. They would not have raised it otherwise.<sup>234</sup>

The quote above forms part of James’ and Trotsky’s argument that the notion of “Socialism in One Country” model adopted by Stalin and the ACP of the time betrayed Marxist thought. He would further point to Marx’s belief in the need for “permanent revolution,” which would address the “uneven development of capitalism in various countries,” which meant “inevitably the uneven development of the proletariat, and for this and other historical reasons a different correlation of class forces in each country.”<sup>235</sup> James ultimately proposes then that the Comintern must be redeemed with the creation, or sanctioning, of a new world revolutionary force that would condemn the Stalin-led Third International in favour of a Fourth International under Trotsky’s leadership.<sup>236</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 37.

While the Fourth International was an important topic for James to broach, much of his concern in the book is the Soviet Union, internally as well as externally. There are several instances throughout *World Revolution* where he describes the peril that the working class in the Soviet Union find themselves in under the massive undemocratic bureaucracy headed by Stalin. For example, after reflecting upon Stalin's economic plan in the aftermath of the "economic revolution in October, 1917," James concludes that "The Russian proletariat, after its Herculean efforts, seems to have exchanged one set of masters for another, while the very basis of the proletarian State is being undermined beneath its feet."<sup>237</sup> He adds in this final chapter that the "Workers' State is a spectacle which is a caricature of Socialism."<sup>238</sup> Indeed, James recognizes that the gains of the Russian Revolution needed to be protected, defended and/or put back on course. It is for this reason that he returned to the astuteness of Vladimir Lenin in the publication, thereby making an argument for the appropriate function of the vanguard party and/or democratic workers' councils (soviets), rather than what had become reality under the Stalin regime. Moreover, James' discussion on Lenin reveals the extent to which the latter's outlook was instructive in the development of the former's theoretical groundings in Marxism by this late 1930s period. He thought that Lenin set himself apart from others in the Bolshevik uprising for several reasons including his belief in "the creative capacity of the masses."<sup>239</sup> As Bogues observes, James' fascination with Lenin's ability to organize for and sustain revolutionary activity among ordinary people was not only an interrogation of the dichotomous interplay between intellectuals and the masses that he would return to in later work but also

---

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 123.

foretells his interest in the spontaneity of working-class organization, wherein he would “develop notions of how concrete revolutionary practice of the masses challenged capitalist hegemony.”<sup>240</sup>

*World Revolution* made some waves in the leftist community in Britain. Christian Hogsbjerg, building his piece around the idea of *World Revolution*’s 1937 publisher’s assertion that it was foremost “A Kind of Bible of Trotskyism,” cites one magazine reviewer who called James’ text, “a book that every socialist and every revolutionary should possess.” Another claimed that it was “unique of its kind” and “very badly needed.” Hogsbjerg ultimately states that it “filled an important vacuum in the literature of the non-Stalinist Left in Britain.” James even found himself “under surveillance as a threat to imperial security,” while the British government tried to censor its sale within the scope of the empire, including in India.<sup>241</sup> Nevertheless, James was involved in other political activity during the mid to late 1930s that distinguished him further from other rabble-rousers in the country and among other socialists of the time.

### *Becoming a militant Pan-Africanist*

Even as James’ life became enveloped by Marxist theory and labour activism during this mid to late 1930s period in London, he remained an outspoken critic of colonialism. His analysis had reached beyond the confines of the British West Indies, as he now was openly opposed to this form of rule by empires across the world. Colonialism in Africa had become a particular concern for him, and he soon realized that specific organizing efforts and actions would be required to address the predicament on that continent. Yet, it would be hard to discount the impact of James’ residency in London on his outlook. The city was a hub for migrants from the

---

<sup>240</sup> Bogues, *Caliban’s Freedom*, 37.

<sup>241</sup> Christian Hogsbjerg, “‘A Kind of Bible on Trotskyism’: Reflections on C.L.R. James’s *World Revolution*,” *CLR James Journal* 19, nos. 1-2, (Fall 2013 – 23<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary Issue): 243-275., 263.

colonies and many Black intellectuals often converged around issues that were taking place back home. Anti-colonialism in general was a growing sentiment within Britain's populous, diverse capital when James moved there. Kent Worcester described London in this interwar period as "an international crossroads of Pan-African thought and activism." He speculates why Black intellectuals in the city especially would have been propelled into political activity:

By the end of World War I, colonialism encompassed twenty percent of the globe's land mass and over ten percent of the world's population. The conquest of African and other Third World territories in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the major European powers constituted the most intensive period of imperial expansion in world history. Movements for political and socioeconomic self-determination, many of them led by intellectuals who resided in Europe's capitals at one time or another, emerged as a militant response to the Age of Imperialism.<sup>242</sup>

For Worcester, this context helps to explain how Blacks in Britain, and across the world, gravitated toward the crisis in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935. The conflict in Ethiopia began at the end of 1934 after Italy imposed itself on the former's territory by building a fort. This action was especially notable for Pan-Africanists due to Ethiopia's symbolic value as an African nation that had never been a European colony. Acts of aggression would continue in 1935 and gained worldwide attention as attempts for resolution at the League of Nations took place for several months until Italy invaded Ethiopia in October of that year. In his capacity as a member of the ILP, and chairman of one of their branches, James wrote several articles for the party's journal *New Leader*, speaking out against the Italian action and encouraging his colleagues to provide express, unequivocal support for the Ethiopians.<sup>243</sup> In an article that appeared in the journal the day after Italian troops invaded Ethiopia, James heaps scorn on the lacklustre efforts by the international community, including the League of Nations, to condemn Italy as little more than sanctions were being recommended to deal with the conflict. Instead, James calls on the

---

<sup>242</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, 30.

<sup>243</sup> See *Marxist Internet Archive*, "C.L.R. James Archive" for selected articles James wrote for *New Leader*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/index.htm>.

working class and peasant masses from around the world to organize themselves, independent of governments and world powers, and resist all imperialist actions:

Workers of Europe, peasants and workers of Africa and of India, sufferers from imperialism all over the world, all anxious to help the Ethiopian people, organise yourselves independently, and by your own sanctions, the use of your own power, assist the Ethiopian people. Their struggle is only now beginning.

*Let us fight against not only Italian imperialism, but the other robbers and oppressors, French and British imperialism. Do not let them drag you in. To come within the orbit of imperialist politics is to be debilitated by the stench, to be drowned in the morass of lies and hypocrisy.*<sup>244</sup>

In addition to writing for the *New Leader*, James also took his position to the ILP's annual conference in 1936 where he sought to pass a resolution that would embolden the party to take a principled stance against what was taking place in Ethiopia. The resolution reads in part:

It is necessary to support the anti-imperialist mass movements arising among 'coloured' peoples in all countries in connection with the Abyssinian crisis, and to create a firm alliance between the international working class movement and suppressed peoples.<sup>245</sup>

The resolution reveals that James believed that connections must be made between the labour struggle and the fight against colonialism and/or acts of imperialism while recognizing that it was people of colour who were the most significant agitators. Furthermore, he felt a sense of responsibility to advocate for Ethiopians, which went beyond his anti-colonial and anti-imperialist principles. In an article appearing in the *New Leader* that same year, he explains that in addition to resisting imperialism and the enemy that was "Italian Capitalism," race solidarity was also a factor in his willingness to join the Ethiopian army to fight against the European colonial power:

My hope was to get into the army. It would have given me an opportunity to make contact not only with the masses of Abyssinians and other Africans, but in the ranks with them I would have had the best possible opportunity of putting across the International Socialist case...I did not intend to spend the rest of my life in Abyssinia, but all things considered, I thought, and still think

---

<sup>244</sup> C.L.R. James, "Intervening in Abyssinia," *New Leader* (October 1935), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1935/new-leader.htm>. Emphasis in original.

<sup>245</sup> Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*, 183.

that two of three years there, given the fact that I am a Negro and am especially interested in the African revolution, was well worth the attempt.<sup>246</sup>

Although James never reached East Africa during the war to fight for the severely outmatched Ethiopian army, his words above illustrate that his Pan-African consciousness was quite explicit at this stage in his political life. Despite his integral involvement in the Marxist group and revolutionary socialist politics, the specificity of the cause of people of African descent was not lost on him. Thus, at the onset of the conflict in Ethiopia in 1935 he co-founded and was named the chair of the International African Friends of Abyssinia – later called International African Friends of Ethiopia. By 1937, with the war now over, the group split and the more radical members who remained reincarnated the organization's name once again, now calling it the International African Service Bureau (IASB).<sup>247</sup> Along with James, this relatively small group of seven included fellow countryman and Communist George Padmore, the first wife of Marcus Garvey, Amy Ashwood Garvey and the future first Prime Minister of independent Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta.<sup>248</sup> The IASB was resolutely anti-colonial and its membership was restricted to people of African descent, although they accepted “non-African” allies genuinely interested in “Africa and the cause of the Colonial peoples” in a “practical way”

---

<sup>246</sup> James claims that he was told he would have been better served to do work with the International Friends of Ethiopia. See his letter, “Fighting for the Abyssinian Emperor,” *New Leader* (June 5, 1936), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1935/new-leader.htm>.

<sup>247</sup> In his June 5 1936 letter, James claims that he left the International Friends of Ethiopia after the group decided to support sanctions and “possibly lead British workers to what Marxists knew from the start would be an imperialist war.” See *Ibid*.

<sup>248</sup> James, who called the group “the most striking West Indian creation between the wars” says that there were seven members on the committee of the IASB in “From Toussaint L’Ouverture to Fidel Castro,” an appendix which appears in James, *The Black Jacobins*, 398. One of these committee members, Ras Makonnen (publicity secretary) said that the wider membership of the IASB wasn’t “large,” “clear” or “highly organized” but “it came together in an informal way.” See Ras Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 122.

to join as associate members.<sup>249</sup> The aim of the group was initially explained in the first issue of their journal, *African Sentinel*:

Our aim objective is to serve as a medium of information between the Colonial and European public – the British in particular – as well as to create a connecting link between the Africans at home (in Africa) and the Africans abroad (in the West Indies, United States of America and other Western countries) by transmission of messages and information, news and views, from one to another, in the most accurate and concise forms. The fundamental cause for which we are out and which is to advocate and defend, as far as it may be possible, the cause of oppressed sections of humanity, and particularly of the great majority of Africans and peoples of African descent who are scattered all over the face of the globe.<sup>250</sup>

C.L.R. James' involvement in the IASB then is quite noteworthy, especially because there was likely no other Black organization operating out of Britain that was more militant than this anti-colonial formation. Moreover, while he was an active member of the ILP through the Marxist Group; writing for both the *New Leader* and the Marxist Group's *Fight* – which led to the group's expulsion from the ILP in 1936; and publishing *World Revolution*, a seminal text within the Left community; James was also blossoming as a leading figure among those connected to the International Pan-African movement. Pan-Africanism was on the verge of burgeoning in ways that it had not come close to since it was proposed as a philosophy by Trinidadian Henry Sylvester-Williams at the end of the nineteenth century, and James was at the centre of its development, along with his childhood friend George Padmore and their IASB colleagues. The activities of the Bureau were important to James, as he wrote for the group's journal, re-launched as the *International African Opinion* in 1938, and enthusiastically spoke about the causes that they were invested in, all while infusing his outlook on the class struggle. His first editorial for the magazine – which he deemed to be “a journal of action” rather than a

---

<sup>249</sup> “What is the International African Service Bureau?” advertisement appearing on the inside back page of one of the IASB's major publications: Eric Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean* (Manchester: IASB, 1942).

<sup>250</sup> “Our Policy” *African Sentinel* 1, no. 1 (October-November 1937), 1, quoted in Christian Hogsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 112.



“literary journal or giver of advice from the mountain-tops” – reveals his mindset to Pan-African anti-colonial activism and the IASB’s role:

We base ourselves upon the great masses of the people. The individual achievements of a few black men do not and cannot solve the problems of blacks. One of our most important tasks is to make clear to black intellectuals and other members of the middle class, that in the present state of world affairs there is no way out for them by seeking the crumbs from the tables of their imperialist masters. They must identify themselves with the struggles of the masses...We shall be merciless to those blacks who in pursuit of their own narrow interests so frequently betray the great masses of the Negroes, the large majority of them are working poor.<sup>251</sup>

Indeed, he recalls that while the group was supported by the ILP at the end of the 1930s, its function was largely as propagandists, so “whenever there was a meeting held by the Labour Party, or a conference organised by the Communist Party or some trade union group, or a meeting of liberals who were interested in the ‘Colonial Question’, we were always there.”<sup>252</sup> Although it would be Padmore that really carried the IASB and its correlative Pan-Africanist ideas and frameworks – which became quite popular among Black intellectuals and activists by the end of the 1940s – James’ commitment to Pan-Africanism at this juncture of his life should be underscored. Pan-Africanism entailed a commitment to the end of colonialism in all its forms, and for all his attachment to Marxism, he recognized that leftist groups in Britain, and seemingly internationally, either could not or would not steadfastly articulate an anti-colonial position. Nor would they explicitly acknowledge the role that White supremacy played in the plight of people of colour throughout the world. Although James did not publish anything at the time that inferred this sentiment, he was surely aware of it and felt conflicted because of the depth of his Marxist-based organizing. Padmore himself had left his role as an official in the Third International, precisely because he believed that the ACP and the Comintern abandoned support for anti-colonial resistance after the Soviet Union essentially aligned with Britain and

---

<sup>251</sup> C.L.R. James, “Editorial,” *International African Opinion* 1, no. 1 (July 1938): 2-3., quoted in Hogsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 120-121.

<sup>252</sup> C.L.R. James, “Black Intellectuals in Britain,” in *Colour, Culture and Consciousness*, ed. Bhikhu Pakekh (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), 16.

France in a geo-political row with Germany.<sup>253</sup> Moreover, the IASB's orientation suggests that James had begun to adopt the belief that colonized people, or people of African descent, should embark on political and social self-determination without necessarily waiting for support from the international Left.

We should recall that even when James lived in Trinidad and was more interested in literature as opposed to the political writing that many of his colleagues at *The Beacon* were drawn to, he resisted anti-Black racism quite directly. As noted in Chapter 1, James wrote a strident response in the journal to Dr. Sidney Harland's assertion that people of African descent were intellectually deficient when compared to their White counterparts, and in a subsequent piece, extolled the brilliance of Michel Maxwell Phillip.<sup>254</sup> It would seem that before James left Trinidad he considered highlighting people like Phillip, or more specifically their greatness, to combat racist assumptions about people of African descent. Indeed, James would leave the colony determined to write a biography on another exceptional person of African descent, the renowned leader of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint Louverture.

James' reasons for wanting to write about Louverture may have been two-fold, however. First, he likely wanted to show the ingenuity and supreme leadership ability of the Black man who was credited as being the most important figure in the Haitian Revolution. Second, his objective would have been to demonstrate how the resistance to enslavement and colonialism by the masses in Haiti led to the conquest of an oppressive status quo, and the establishment of an independent nation where people of African descent were governing themselves for over 125 years. This approach to biography writing was akin to the methodology he employed in his earlier-mentioned text about a Trinidadian who held a leadership position in the infantry of the

---

<sup>253</sup> See George Padmore, "An Open Letter to Earl Browder" *The Crisis* 42, no. 10 (October 1935): 302-315.

<sup>254</sup> James, "The Intelligence of the Negro" and James, "Michel Maxwell Phillip."

British Army stationed in the British West Indies (West India Regiment) during World War I – Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani – which again, he had essentially completed before he arrived in England.

In *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies*, subsequently published as a pamphlet entitled *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*, James examines the popular labour leader's life and objectives in connection to the increasing consciousness of the working-class in Trinidad following the war as a way to argue in favour of self-governance in the West Indies. He insisted that Cipriani's story was important to tell because by the early 1930s, according to James, of all the "many West Indians" who "have worked for the emancipation of the West Indies...none has worked like Captain Cipriani."<sup>255</sup> Although Cipriani was not ancestrally African or among the island's oppressed, he identified with the liberatory aspirations of Trinidad's colonial subjects, and most importantly for James, his leadership invigorated the anti-colonial movement in the colony, which had begun to spread in British colonies across the West Indies. Thus, C.L.R. James had not only adopted an anti-colonial stance several years before the origins of the IASB, but self-determination was the corollary to this position for him – even if his outlook was more liberal than the left-wing commentators of *The Beacon* who were often far more caustic in their rhetoric than he was. Nonetheless, James was unquestionably more radical by the late 1930s, which would become evident not only with his association with the IASB but also through the works he produced on Toussaint Louverture.

*On the path of Black self-determination and revolution through the Black Jacobins*

---

<sup>255</sup> James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, 60.

Even as James had plunged himself into the midst of anti-capitalist labour politics in England, he continued to pursue his goal of writing about Louverture and the Haitian Revolution. When he was not attending ILP meetings, speaking on behalf of the Marxist Group, or doing his paid journalist work as a cricket correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*, James spent a great deal of time researching the events surrounding the only successful slave rebellion during the period of Atlantic slavery and its famed leader.<sup>256</sup> His initial findings resulted in the script of a play that he wrote in 1934 entitled *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History*. By 1936, the play was featured at London's Westminster Theatre and marked the first time that a cast full of professional Black actors starred on this stage in a play written by a Black playwright.<sup>257</sup> Utilizing his background in Western literature and fondness of playwrights like Shakespeare, James constructed a piece that portrayed the Haitian Revolution as an inspiring drama about the struggle against slavery in the "New World," focusing on the tragedy and heroism of its protagonist, Toussaint Louverture. Two years later he made his mark in the academic world after finally publishing his comprehensive account of the Haitian Revolution with *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*.

In essence, *The Black Jacobins* represents the dovetailing of James' political beliefs and activity in this 1930s period. As with his observations on the Russian Revolution in *World Revolution*, James employed a materialist perspective to discuss the events surrounding the Haitian Revolution. He describes the role that the various classes of San Domingo/Saint Domingue played in the uprising, namely the connection between socio-economic conflicts in precipitating it, as well as the influence of similar dynamics taking place in France and that

---

<sup>256</sup> Hogsbjerg discusses James' research and six-month trip to France from 1933 to 1934, where he would meet negritude philosopher, poet, and politician Léon-Gontran Damas. See Hogsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 84-86.

<sup>257</sup> C.L.R. James, *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History; A Play in Three Acts*, ed. Christian Hogsbjerg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.

country's involvement in the colony, along with other imperial powers, during the years 1791 to 1804 that the text focuses on. Moreover, in what was becoming a trademark, James inserted Toussaint Louverture into the narrative akin to the way Vladimir Lenin was in *World Revolution* – to insist upon his genius and impeccable leadership abilities in mobilizing the unorganized masses into action against great odds, and ultimately towards victory.<sup>258</sup>

*The Black Jacobins* was more than just a Marxist retelling of the only successful rebellion led by the enslaved in a “New World” colony. Anti-colonialist thought, which again began to foment within James earlier in the decade when he was still living in Trinidad, along with the IASB's Pan-Africanist ideals he was presently immersed in, appears to be the eventual impetus behind the publication. For instance, at the conclusion of the text, James notes that he used the “black Haitian labourers” as “an example to study” for the contemporaneous anti-colonial struggle:

Despite the temporary reaction of Fascism, the prevailing standards of human liberty and equality are infinitely more advanced and more profound than those current in 1789. Judged relatively by those standards, the millions of blacks in Africa and the few of them who are educated are as much pariahs in that vast prison as the blacks and Mulattoes of San Domingo in the eighteen century. The Imperialists envisage an eternity of African exploitation...Imperialism vaunts its exploitation of the wealth of Africa for the benefit of civilization. In reality, from the very nature of its system of production for profit it strangles the real wealth of the continent – the creative capacity of the African people. The African faces a long and difficult road and he will need guidance. But he will tread fast because he will walk upright.<sup>259</sup>

Indeed, *The Black Jacobins* represented a shift in the penchant for anti-colonial activism specific to the British West Indies, albeit moderate, that James engaged in during the first half of the decade. He admitted twenty-five years after the book was published that he did have African independence in mind when he wrote it.<sup>260</sup> He believed that for West Indians, “*Before they could*

---

<sup>258</sup> James actually compares Louverture and Lenin and the circumstances they faced in the book. See James, *The Black Jacobins*, 282-286.

<sup>259</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 375-376, 377.

<sup>260</sup> MARHO – The Radical Historians Organization, “(Interview with) C.L.R. James,” in *Visions of History*, eds. Henry Ablelove and E.P. Thompson (Manchester University Press, 1983), 267.

*begin to see themselves as a free and independent people they had to clear from [their] minds the stigma that anything African was inherently inferior and degraded. The road to West Indian national identity lay through Africa.”*<sup>261</sup> This view reflects the fact that Pan-Africanism – what can be understood as the international linkages between people of African descent through the commonality of political struggle, social upliftment, and fight against oppression more generally – undoubtedly had a decisive impact on James in the latter part of the 1930s. Yet, it should be noted that the Pan-Africanist thrust of *The Black Jacobins* does not necessarily overshadow the Marxist theoretical underpinnings that he had become devoted to with the ILP and the Leon Trotsky-inspired Marxist Group. The C.L.R. James that subscribed to Trotsky’s notion of permanent revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and building global resistance to the forces of capitalism was not absent in the text, but rather he found a way to draw attention to these ideas by examining the Haitian Revolution. Moreover, the book was an assemblage of several concepts, purposely stitched together by James to construct a corrective, inspiring historical narrative.

*The Black Jacobins* unfolds the way one would expect from an author relying upon a Marxist framework to describe a social uprising, but James is also able to build upon ideas that come out of Marxist thought and propose new ones. For instance, the text makes an argument for permanent revolution, which again, was a concept first articulated by Marx that had been expounded by Trotsky since the first decade of the century. One of the tenets of Trotsky’s notion of permanent revolution was that a revolutionary proletariat class could arise without passing through two distinct revolutions – first a bourgeois and then a socialist revolution contingent upon capitalist development – contrary to the belief of many Marxists, including Joseph Stalin.

---

<sup>261</sup> C.L.R. James, “From Toussaint L’Ouverture to Fidel Castro,” in James, *The Black Jacobins*, 402. Emphasis in the original.

Rather, Trotsky believed that as was the case in revolutionary Russia, “uneven and combined capitalist development” in a “backward country,” or one not neatly passing through these stages, could vault the proletariat into state power.<sup>262</sup> For James, a similar situation evolved in Saint Domingue, where the enslaved in the colony ultimately became amenable to revolutionary thought as their struggle grew. Moreover, he proposes that they were dynamically impacted by the revolutionary rumblings taking place in France. James demonstrates in the book that there was a dialectical link between what was taking place in the colony and what transpired in France from 1789 to 1815. He notes, concerning the Saint Domingue rebels and their leader Toussaint Louverture:

Leader of a backward and ignorant mass, (Toussaint L’Ouverture) was yet the forefront of the great historical movement of his time. The blacks were taking part in the destruction of European feudalism begun by the French Revolution, and liberty and equality, the slogans of the revolution, meant far more to them than to any Frenchman. That is why in the hour of danger Toussaint, uninstructed as he was, could find the language and accent of Diderot, Rousseau, and Raynal, of Mirabeau, Robespierre and Danton. And in one respect he excelled them all. For even these masters of the spoken and written word, owing to the class complications of their society, too often had to pause, to hesitate, to qualify. Toussaint could defend the freedom of the blacks without reservation.<sup>263</sup>

This juxtaposition of the Blacks in Saint Domingue with the revolutionary instigators and theorists in France, or Jacobins, is the bedrock of James’ thesis. Furthermore, he shed light on the Trotskyist notion of permanent revolution by not only accentuating the unheralded ascendancy of the oppressed masses in the French colony through self-activity but also by demonstrating the symbiosis of the revolutionary moment between metropole and colony over the course of more than twenty-five years. In James’ view, the two could not be separated. For example, his narration shows their insurrection in the chapter “San Domingo Masses Begin” in 1791, two years after riots and protests in France led to the French National Assembly’s adoption

---

<sup>262</sup> See Leon Trotsky and Max Eastman trans., *The History of the Russian Revolution* Vols. 1-3, (Ann Arbor: University Michigan Press, 1957).

<sup>263</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 198.

of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen,” and immediately follows with the chapter, “And the Paris masses complete,” in which he infers that the Jacobins were so heavily influenced by what had transpired in the colony that the Assembly was compelled to abolish slavery throughout the French Republic in 1794 based on this same “Rights of Man and Citizen” human rights legislation. As Hogsbjerg stresses in his take on James’ trajectory in the text, the argument here then is that this political development was “not simply a manifestation of the new revolutionary ideals taking hold among the French people.” Rather, “it came about because of the realisation that it was in the material interests of both revolutionary struggles, one in the imperial metropolis and one in the colonial periphery, to forge unity against the clear and present danger of counter-revolution.” Thus, “In a fundamental sense, the destinies of the two revolutions were from now on explicitly bound together.”<sup>264</sup>

At the time that the book was released, Trotskyists like James emphasized the need for permanent revolution to sustain worldwide socialist revolution instead of the singular focus on the Soviet Union that had seemingly been accepted by many Marxists around the world. While *World Revolution* sees James critiquing the Stalin-led approach, *The Black Jacobins* turns to a historical example to make the case for permanent revolution. To be sure, just as Trotsky had done with his innovations to Marxist thought, *The Black Jacobins* added contours to Marxism, and Trotskyism, through its analysis of the Haitian Revolution which had long been etched into the margins of world history. Moreover, in addition to redeeming its historical significance, James’ transformation of the enslaved of the Haitian Revolution into a proletariat class was another salient aspect of the text.

---

<sup>264</sup> Christian Hogsbjerg, “CLR James and the Black Jacobins” in *International Socialism*, no. 126 (Spring, 2010), <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj2/2010/isj2-126/hogsbjerg.html>.



Within the Marxist conception of class society and capitalist development, enslaved people or peasants were distinct from the proletariat class. Yet, C.L.R. James argues that nonetheless, the enslaved of Saint Domingue “worked on the land, and, like revolutionary peasants everywhere, they aimed at the extermination of their oppressors,” while “working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plain,” ultimately making them “closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time, and the rising was, therefore, a thoroughly prepared and organised mass movement.”<sup>265</sup> This was yet another way that James used the monograph to push his ideological beliefs during the late 1930s. The revolutionary masses of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century Haiti were to be analogized with the modern working class, thereby inspiring the latter to push back against their exploiters with the belief that they too could liberate themselves from the shackles of capitalism and achieve some form of self-determination. Indeed, the Haitian Revolution was a model of success spurred on by the unlikelyst of heroes, which had a dramatic impact on the political landscape in France, as well as the global economic system as a whole. It was vitally important for James that his readers recognize that these brave revolutionary actors who stifled the efforts of imperial powers, sending reverberations throughout the world, were men and women of African descent. This account was an overt challenge to the conventional wisdom of the event and ontological assumptions about Black people both in the past and present. They were not vicious savages who exhibited their innate violent, unthinking predilections when they began their path towards eradicating slavery throughout Saint Domingue but instead were valorous fighters who went to war against sophisticated military regiments and managed to overcome this renowned might through great leadership and judicious tactical organizing. So, *The Black Jacobins* did not just bring promise to anti-colonialists, Pan-

---

<sup>265</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 85-86.

Africanists, Marxists, Trotskyists, or the working class around the world, but also to Black people who had experienced centuries of denigration and psychological torment. James' words undeniably aimed to empower people of African descent the world over:

At bottom the popular movement had acquired an immense self-confidence. The former slaves had defeated white colonists, Spaniards and British, and now they were free. They were aware of French politics, for it concerned them closely. Black men who had been slaves were deputies in the French Parliament, black men who had been slaves negotiated with the French and foreign governments. Black men who had been slaves filled the highest positions in the colony. There was Toussaint, the former slave, incredibly grand and powerful and incomparably the greatest man in San Domingo. There was no need to be ashamed of being a black. The revolution had awakened them, had given them the possibility of achievement, confidence and pride. That psychological weakness, that feeling of inferiority with which the imperialists poison colonial peoples everywhere, these were gone.<sup>266</sup>

Thus, *The Black Jacobins* not only insisted that historians, researchers, and theoreticians consider the function of slavery in the making of the modern world, but also illustrated the active role that people of African descent played in shaping it, at the very least, through a poignant event that essentially hastened the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the institution of slavery, first in the French empire and the British empire soon after. If the history of the modern world could not ignore the significance of the French Revolution, then neither could the Haitian Revolution be overlooked nor the people that made it. James would later argue that people of African descent from the Caribbean were quintessential modern people.<sup>267</sup>

It should be noted though that James's narrative was not a full romanticization of the events that led to enslaved peoples snatching their freedom and implausibly declaring independence from colonial overlords. In the same way that he was critical of what ensued out of the Russian Revolution, he similarly critiques the challenges of this revolt, including decisions by the revolutionary leadership in San Domingo that undermined their extraordinary feats at certain junctures. To be sure, for all the genius James bestowed on Louverture, he did not

---

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>267</sup> See C.L.R. James, "West Indian Intellectual," the introductory essay to a new edition of J.J. Thomas, *Froudacity* (London: New Beacon, 1969)[1889], 23-49.

conceal his flaws either. James pointed to Louverture's "despotism" and "ruthlessness."<sup>268</sup> The best example of this was perhaps Louverture's approach towards the rebuilding of the colony once he was in command of the island following several years of fighting, to prove that it could be as productive as it was under slavery. He imposed a draconian free labour regime, as many of the same Blacks that he had effectively freed were prevented from leaving plantations or buying property for subsistence farming. When these workers resisted Louverture repressed them and he even executed one of his generals – his nephew Moïse – for supporting the revolt, fearing that the latter "might supplant him."<sup>269</sup> This signalled the beginning of Louverture's demise as his authoritarian policies continued and he struggled to engender the same degree of support from the masses. Moreover, James evokes characters from the Russian Revolution to underscore that having Moïse shot was "a crime...almost as if Lenin had had Trotsky shot for taking the side of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie."<sup>270</sup> Louverture's disconnect from the workers is what ultimately distinguished him from Lenin for James and was at the root of his downfall. James states that "whereas Lenin kept the party and the masses thoroughly aware at every step, and explained carefully the exact position of the bourgeois servants of the Workers' State, Toussaint explained nothing, and allowed the masses to think that their old enemies were being favoured at their expense."<sup>271</sup> Instead, Louverture should have told the masses that he was preparing a fight for independence to preserve their liberty, the way another of his generals Jean-Jacques Dessalines had quite straightforwardly done at the time. James avers that the latter's approach "was and still is the way to speak to the masses, and it is no accident that Dessalines, and not Toussaint led the island to independence. Toussaint shut up within himself, immersed in

---

<sup>268</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 254.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

diplomacy, went his tortuous way, overconfident that he had only to speak and the masses would follow.”<sup>272</sup>

While Dessalines being more in touch with the masses and distrusting the French – also contrary to Louverture’s approach – helped him to propel his army to defeat the metropole enemies in the war for independence, James does not elide the heavy-handed tactics the former used during the period of conflict. Certainly, as was the case with his appraisal of the Russian situation, James did not see the leading figures as beyond reproach in this implausible triumph against colonialism and imperialism. Additionally, it was clear to him that “neither Dessalines’ army nor his ferocity won the victory. It was the people.” He adds, “far from being intimidated, the civil population met the terror with courage and firmness as frightened the terrorists.”<sup>273</sup> Indeed, both taking revolutionary organizers and presumed state officials to task and locating the success of insurgency in the valour and spontaneity of the oppressed would become defining features of James’ theorizing in the following decades.

In addition, the book was perhaps the first produced by an established Marxist that had considered Black people as predominantly comprising a revolutionary class. It was as if James was harking back to his clash with Dr. Harland about the intellectual capacities of people of African descent to now argue that they were just as revolutionary as their White counterparts. His message to Black folks seemingly trapped under the yoke of racism and colonialism in the 1930s was that they had a history of resisting and overcoming oppression on their own volition. In the same year that *The Black Jacobins* was released, James would make this point even more

---

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 240.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 361. James goes on here to discuss several incredible acts of bravery and defiance exhibited by the masses when they faced certain death. See Ibid., 361-362.

direct with a companion volume to the manuscript called *A History of Negro Revolt*.<sup>274</sup> The short publication highlighted instances of rebellion on the African continent, the Caribbean, and the United States of America. Although the pamphlet was not nearly as strong as the work James had done in *The Black Jacobins*, it nonetheless revealed James' awareness that the entirety of his political project could not be achieved through the Marxist organizing he was involved in at the time alone.

Despite James' concern with the plight of people of African descent and his activities with the IASB, his groundings and fidelity remained with Marxism, or more specifically Trotskyism. In other words, he believed that societal injustices and political economy at large could be best understood primarily through class analysis. Marxist paradigms then were the key to resisting hegemonic subjugation for the peasant, the working class and the colonized, including people of African descent. Yet, James was aware that there was a peculiarity about race in the global capitalist world. In *The Black Jacobins*, James proclaimed that the "race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental."<sup>275</sup> Thus, although he privileged class over race regarding critiques of political economy, there was still recognition that the latter could not be marginalized within the wider analysis.

## **The "Negro Question" and the "Russian Question": Refining Marxism in the United States**

### *Assessing the Negro Question*

---

<sup>274</sup> C.L.R. James, *A History of Negro Revolt* [1938] (London: Race Today Publications, 1985). Also, revised and re-issued as Robin Kelley, ed., *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Chicago: C.H. Kerr, 1995).

<sup>275</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 283.

C.L.R. James would get an opportunity to address the “racial factor” in anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist organizing at the end of the decade when he travelled to the United States. The Trotsky-affiliated Socialist Workers Party (SWP) there invited James to speak on and organize around the so-called “Negro Question.” It was Trotsky himself who proposed that the SWP recruit his disciple for a tour of the country to attend to this matter of the place or involvement of Black people’s struggles in the United States within the larger revolutionary workers’ movement. He expressed interest in this matter as early as 1919 when he writes an adopted manifesto at the Communist International’s founding congress, where he criticizes United States President Woodrow Wilson’s attitude towards people of African descent in the country, while also asserting that the proletariat revolution should include colonized peoples: “Wilson’s programs, at its best, is meant only to change the commercial label of colonial slavery...Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your liberation.”<sup>276</sup> At the Comintern’s congress the following year, Africans in the United States were more unswervingly construed as a nation and potential revolutionary force in Lenin’s thesis on “national and colonial questions,” as he proclaims that “communist parties must directly support the revolutionary movement among the dependent nations and those without equal rights (for example Ireland, the Negroes in America, and so forth), and in the colonies.”<sup>277</sup> What’s more, in addition to the 1920 congress making a precondition for membership to the Comintern based on the support of “every colonial liberation movement not merely in words, but in deeds” at the 1920 congress, Trotsky personally made a call to

---

<sup>276</sup> Leon Trotsky, “Manifesto of the Communist International to the proletariat of the entire world” (March 6, 1919), in *The Communist International: 1919-1943 Documents, Volume I 1919-1922*, selected and ed. Jane Degras, (London: F.Cass, 1971), 43, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/documents/volume1-1919-1922.pdf>.

<sup>277</sup> Leon Trotsky, “Theses on the National and Colonial Question Adopted by the Second Comintern Congress,” in *Ibid.*, 142.

Communists in the United States to rally “enlightened, young self-sacrificing Negroes” to incite the Black masses in the country.<sup>278</sup>

Even though Trotsky’s relationship with the Comintern was strained by the end of the 1920s, his opinion on engaging the African American working class did not change. For instance, he explains to his followers in the United States in a 1928 letter why it was important to reach out to the country’s Black workers the way the Communist Party had been during that decade: “We must find the road to the most deprived, the darkest strata of the proletariat, beginning with the Negro, whom capitalist society has converted into a pariah, and who must learn to see in us his revolutionary brothers. And it depends wholly upon our energy and devotion to the work.”<sup>279</sup> Indeed, the Communist Party had appealed to many people of African descent in the United States with their critiques of racism and the inequalities it created in the country’s social, political, and economic spaces. The United States Communist Party supported the notion of self-determination for Black people, namely the provision of land space in the Southern part of the country, thereby mechanically adapting the Bolshevik Party’s decision of allowing independence to perceived nations within the former Tsarist empire during the Russian Revolution. However, they rose to prominence at the time of the nationally polarizing Scottsboro trial in 1931, providing legal and financial assistance to the Black accused in the case and writing editorials condemning the racist treatment of the teenage boys in their attempts at a fair trial.<sup>280</sup> Further, the Communist Party recruited Black working-class people as the

---

<sup>278</sup> Leon Trotsky, “Conditions of Admission to the Communist International Approved by the Second Comintern Congress,” in *Ibid.*, 170. Also, Leon Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol 2 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), 355.

<sup>279</sup> Leon Trotsky, “A Letter to the American Trotskyists,” *The Militant* 2, no. 10 (June, 1929), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1929/03/letter-american.htm>. Excerpted quote appears in introduction of C.L.R. James and Scott McLemee, ed., *C.L.R. James on the ‘Negro Question’* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996), xviii.

<sup>280</sup> See Hugh T. Murray Jr., “Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign,” *Science and Society* 35, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 177-192.

depression wore on in the decade. From outside of the United States, Trotsky picked up on this tenor and continued to encourage his faction to pay attention to the distinct situation of the country's Black oppressed within the context of the class struggle:

It is then possible that the Negroes will become the most advanced section. We have a similar example in Russia. The Russians were the European [equivalent of the] Negroes. It is very possible that the Negroes, also through self-determination will proceed to the proletarian dictatorship in a couple of gigantic strides, ahead of the great bloc of white workers. They will then furnish the vanguard. I am absolutely sure that they will win any case fight better than the white workers.<sup>281</sup>

Trotsky refers to Black people in the United States as the pre-revolutionary Russian equivalent within Europe to suggest that although the latter were disenfranchised within the political, social, and economic landscape of the continent, their “backward” character quickly changed once they developed a posture of self-determination. He said this in 1933 and his sentiment had not changed several years later when he encouraged James to lead the way among Trotskyists in the United States around the Negro Question.

Given James' two recent publications and his work with the IASB, it seemed logical that he would have great interest in resolving the Negro Question when he moved to the United States by the end of 1938. Nevertheless, the situation for people of African descent in the country was unique – perhaps more distinct than anywhere else in the world – and certainly different than what he had experienced in Britain. James admitted when he arrived in the country, he “was not especially interested in the Negro work of the SWP.”<sup>282</sup> However, this attitude quickly changed after his interactions with the Black community in New York City, followed by a national lecture series over the course of several months at the end of 1938 into the

---

<sup>281</sup> Leon Trotsky, “The Negro Question in America,” in *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Merit Publishers, 1967), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1940/negro1.htm#prinkipo>. Excerpted quote also appears in James and McLemee, *C.L.R. James on the 'Negro Question'*, xix.

<sup>282</sup> C.L.R. James (“J.R. Johnson”) *Roots of the Party Crisis* (Socialist Workers Party, ca. March 1940, mimeographed). Excerpted quotations appear in James and McLemee, *C.L.R. James on the 'Negro Question'*, xviii.



Spring of 1939. James then travelled to Mexico in April of that year, leading a delegation to meet with Trotsky, and offered some observations for the SWP to consider in their organizing efforts.

Trotsky continued to contemplate the function of self-determination for people of African descent in the United States on the eve of his meeting with James. The latter on the other hand did not support the idea of that advocating for a separate (Black) nation within the country was a viable organizing strategy for the SWP to build around. In his “Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question” article written before the trip to Mexico, he responds to his mentor’s ruminations by proclaiming, among other things, that “the Negro, fortunately for Socialism, does not want self-determination.” For James, in addition to self-determination being “economically reactionary” for the “American Negroes,” the fact that they don’t want it themselves, aside from Communist Party “stooges” makes the pursuit “politically false.” He advises instead that the SWP’s aims could essentially be better achieved through “the creation of confidence among the Negroes that revolutionary socialism does honestly and sincerely mean to stand by its promises.”<sup>283</sup>

Moreover, James is not only suspicious of the notion that people of African descent in the United States having their own self-governing geographical space should be an organizing principle, but he also has a contemptuous attitude towards Black organizations in the country, including the widely followed Garvey Movement, and their ability to organize a “Negro movement” with radical ends.<sup>284</sup> Additionally, he contends that despite their support by Black Americans, these groups either have a bourgeois orientation or appeal only to race/colour rather than class. Although James recognizes that “The constant domination of whites, whether by the

---

<sup>283</sup> C.L.R. James, “Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question” and “Notes Following the Discussion,” *Socialist Workers Party Internal Bulletin*, no. 9 (June 1939), in James and McLemee, *C.L.R. James on the ‘Negro Question’*, 3-14, 14-16., 8.

<sup>284</sup> See *Ibid.*, 7, 13, 15.

bourgeoisie or in workers' movements, more and more irks the Negro," his faith in the preponderance of a revolutionary party is strong. He claims "Our great weapon at the present is Marxism which we illuminate every grave social and political problem of the day. The party's first task, therefore, is to do what no organization, white or Negro, can do completely unless it is based on the principles of Marxism, study the Negro question in relation to the national and international situation."<sup>285</sup> James thesis in the article is, in essence, instead of endorsing the call for self-determination, a revolutionary socialist organization, more specifically the SWP, should take the responsibility of helping these Black people establish an organization that would be favourable to socialism and ultimately incorporate their fight in the United States into the international workers struggle.<sup>286</sup>

James' words perhaps suggest that he did not see the value of self-determination for people of African descent in the country because he did not yet grasp that the specificities of their condition could not be understood by a commitment to anti-capitalist organizing or "principles of Marxism" alone. Put differently, his dismissiveness of the call for self-determination shows that he may not have had a deep enough appreciation of the function of race in the United States. Furthermore, it appears as if in his preparation for the meeting with Trotsky, he did not consider the great achievements of centuries of independent Black resistance, which did not rely on Marxist enlightenment in pursuit of freedom but were driven by their own ideas on how to improve their condition. So, while James states at the outset of "Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question" that "The Negro represents potentially the most revolutionary section of the population" and "he is today more militant than ever," he nevertheless purports

---

<sup>285</sup> James and McLemee, *C.L.R. James on the 'Negro Question'*, 9, 12

<sup>286</sup> James stresses that support for a "Negro mass movement must not be conditional upon whether it is socialist or not. It is the awakening and bringing into political activity of the large mass of Negroes which is the main consideration, and to this the party must give its frank, sincere and unwavering support." See *Ibid.*, 11.

that their liberation could only reasonably be obtained through the “militant leadership” of a vanguard organization upholding Marxist orthodoxy in its orientation – presumably the SWP – and not independent self-determination.<sup>287</sup>

It was commonplace for Marxists in the early twentieth century to subordinate the grievances of colonized peoples, including Black people in the United States, to the objectives of the White proletariat. James’ position is curious, however, especially since he had recently experienced the limits of Marxist organizing in England concerning the colonial aggression in Ethiopia, and the lack of support in general for anti-colonial activity in Africa and the West Indies. To be sure, the socialist movement sidelining the desire for independence and self-determination by colonized people on the African continent catapulted him into the realm of Pan-African critique and practice. Yet, James recognized that this was a different context, where the country’s Black population seemed to be pushing for their rights to be recognized as nationals, akin to what people of African descent would have been experiencing in England, France or even the French West Indies.

In James’ ensuing meeting with Trotsky, he elucidates his apprehensiveness around self-determination further noting that in contrast to marginalized groups elsewhere in the world – ostensibly like colonized peoples in Africa and the British West Indies – “The Negro desperately wants to be an American citizen.” He also did not see Black Americans as having their own “tradition of language, literature and history” such that it would sustain the conception of them as a separate nation.<sup>288</sup> In addition, James was concerned that pushing for an independent state in the southern United States could undermine the cross-racial gains that were already being made

---

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>288</sup> This quote is taken from an exchange between Trotsky and James in Mexico titled “Self-Determination for the American Negroes” [1939] in *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, ed. George Breitman, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1940/negro1.htm#sd>.

within certain working-class groupings. Hence, he muses that while the collaboration of White and Black workers in unions such as the Southern sharecroppers' union foretells that the former will likely "overcome their agelong prejudices," for the SWP to "propose that the Negro have this black state for himself is asking too much from the white workers..." In saying this, James reiterates to Trotsky that the strategy is even more misguided "especially when the Negro himself is not making the same demand."<sup>289</sup> He cites an example of a Black woman discriminated against and assaulted who tells her attacker that Marcus Garvey would stymie such injustices once "he is in power," to illustrate his view that Garvey's followers were not in favour of self-determination, but "were glad to follow a militant leadership" – which he already argued is what the "Negro movement" needed. The skeptical James, therefore, proposes "An investigation be made into these movements" to ascertain "how far there is any demand among Negroes for self-determination." Even though he recommends to Trotsky that "if some demand should arise among the Negroes for the right of self-determination we should support it," he added the SWP should "not go out of our way to raise this slogan and place necessary barrier between ourselves and socialism." He then surmises: "I consider the idea of separating as a step backward so far as a socialist society is concerned."<sup>290</sup>

For Anthony Bogues, James's position on self-determination illustrates that he had not "resolved the issue of nationality and Marxism" by the middle of 1939 and had "not yet broken with mainstream Marxist theory which viewed the social struggles of minorities as of episodic value."<sup>291</sup> Bogues adds further that "Although recognising that African-Americans were struggling to be 'American citizens', he did not consider this to be the struggles of a nationality. Nor did James see at the time that it was their exclusion from this process which could lay the

---

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Anthony Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, 86.

basis for a struggle for self-determination.”<sup>292</sup> Yet, this may be too simplified a deduction of why James believed support for the establishment of a territory within the United States for Black people that they would alone control was untenable. In addition to his aforementioned trepidations, it is likely that he simply saw the venture as impractical. Differing from the situation for people of African descent in the Caribbean or Africa, the United States was a settler colony where Black Americans were a minority population, vastly outnumbered by their White oppressors. What’s more, much of the Black population lived in the northern part of the country, many of whom had recently migrated there to get away from the interminable racism they faced in the South. Still, even if the entire Black population were on board with this form of self-determination that bestowed them their own self-governed space, the prospects of realizing an endeavour antithetical to the country’s deeply embedded racist colonialist logic were remote.

The specter for James of an alignment on self-determination and nationalism for Black people in the United States with the Garvey movement also cannot be understated. In a 1937 interview, regarding the UNIA, Garvey boasts: “We were the first fascists...We had disciplined men, women, and children training for the liberation of Africa. The black masses saw that in this extreme nationalism lay their only hope and they readily supported it. Mussolini copied fascism from me.”<sup>293</sup> Certainly, James saw the dangers in Garvey’s approach, pointing out that he preceded Adolf Hitler – a target of the Allies in the Second World War underway at the time for, among other things, his extreme nationalism – by more than ten years. Furthermore, in James’ view, the pro-capitalist Garvey was a “reactionary”:

He used fierce words but he was opposed to the labor movement and counseled subservience to bosses...He deliberately aimed at the poorest, most down-trodden and humiliated Negroes...Garvey was a race fanatic. His appeal was to black against white. He wanted purity of

---

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Colour Line* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 232.

race. A great part of his propaganda was based on past achievements of blacks, their present misery, their future greatness.<sup>294</sup>

James' appraisal has further credence when one considers Garvey's designs had associations with the infamous Ku Klux Klan (KKK) organization and other White supremacist outfits that brought violence upon Black people in the country.<sup>295</sup> Garvey even had a two-hour meeting in 1922 with the second-in-command of the KKK, Edward Young Clarke, where they seemed to share mutual support for racial separation.<sup>296</sup> Given all this, it is quite reasonable that James would have had great difficulty advocating for Black self-determination that, on its face, evoked Garvey's stance. Indeed, such notions of racial purity had already provided a justification for deleterious structures, embedded in U.S. capitalist society, like Jim Crow in the South, which brought interminable exploitation, terrorism, and death, to so many people of African descent in these states.

Another angle to consider, notwithstanding the fact that it appeared to parallel a policy of the rival Comintern, is that James' stance on self-determination had much to do with his belief that Trotsky and others in the SWP did not see the importance of building a Black socialist organization that would enhance the working-class struggle in the country by placing it at the forefront. The SWP had been accustomed to collaborating with other groups around specific actions and even creating front units that further propagated their message, but James was worried his associates were letting an opportunity pass by encouraging a kind of disconnected self-determination among "potentially the most revolutionary section of the population" to

---

<sup>294</sup> C.L.R. James, "Marcus Garvey (1940)" in James and McLemee, *C.L.R. James on the 'Negro Question'*, 114.

<sup>295</sup> See Paul Gilroy's brief discussion of this on in Gilroy, *Against Race*, 231-234.

<sup>296</sup> Garvey shares brief notes of the meeting in a telegram where he flatly states about Young, "He believes America to be a White man's country, and also states that the Negro should have a country of his own in Africa." Garvey was probably trying to be strategic, and saw the meeting as a success, but he had the ire of many Black publications and leaders. See Collin Grant's chapter "Behold the Demagogue or Misunderstood Messiah" for discussion on Garvey's association with KKK in *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 318-348.

remain at arm's-length. As set out in "Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question," he wanted substantial resources to be devoted to organizing them so that the SWP could help to engender an autonomous Black organization and support Black workers as much and as far as possible, who would align to lead the oppressed proletariat to overthrow the political, social, and economic landscape in the country. Trotsky did not disagree with James about the fruitfulness of such an investment, but he questioned whether the SWP had the capacity to do what James was proposing and suggested that the latter may be overlooking that "To fight for the possibility of realizing an independent state is a sight of great moral and political awakening. It would be a tremendous revolutionary step. This ascendancy would immediately have the best economic consequences."<sup>297</sup> Nevertheless, again, James was not convinced that the tactic was viable.

James continued his reflections on the Negro Question upon his return to the United States. In December 1939, he revisited a familiar analytical tool whilst writing generally on the revolutionary potential of people of African descent in SWP's journal, *New International*. In the essay, "Revolution and the Negro," James once again raises the Haitian and French revolutions to talk about the capacity of Black people to make and influence revolution at key historical moments, while also delving into their role in the American Civil War and present-day uprisings in Africa. Just as he had done in *Black Jacobins* and *History of Pan-African Revolt*, James strives to stress the role played by people of African descent as actors of historical and social change in modern Western civilization: "what we as Marxists have to see is the tremendous role played by Negroes in the transformation of Western civilisation from feudalism to capitalism." He continues: "It is only from this vantage-ground that we shall be able to appreciate (and prepare for) the still greater role they must of necessity play in the transition from capitalism to

---

<sup>297</sup> See "A Negro Organization" [1939] in George Breitman, *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1940/negro1.htm#sd>.

socialism.”<sup>298</sup> Finally, James prognosticates at the conclusion of the essay that “In Africa, in America, in the West Indies, on a national and international scale, the millions of Negroes will raise their heads, rise up from their knees, and write some of the most massive and brilliant chapters in the history of international socialism.”<sup>299</sup> Nevertheless, James’ vision for how the SWP should deal with the Negro Question at the end of 1939 indicates that he remained uncertain about independent Black organizing, as he like many Marxists of the time took a paternalistic view of Black struggle in the United States.

### *Breaking with Trotsky*

The 1940s, however, would see C.L.R. James open up to new ideas as he continued to survey varying aspects of socialist theory and practice toward finding concrete solutions. During this period, while internal squabbles of the SWP resulted in the creation of the related Workers’ Party (WP), he led a small faction called the Johnson-Forrest Tendency within the latter group that would foray into new territory of Marxist thought. The group’s name was based on the pseudonym he had given himself, “J.R. Johnson,” and its co-founder, Raya Dunayevskaya, whose alias was “Freddie Forrest.” As with most Trotskyists of the time, the Johnson-Forrest Tendency was stridently opposed to Joseph Stalin’s leadership of the Soviet Union’s Communist Party, along with its influence over the Comintern. Yet, James and Dunayevskaya distinguished themselves from others by expressing skepticism on the utility of a vanguard party as the main mechanism for the revolutionary proletariat’s political ascendancy. Their scrutiny of the Soviet Union, or rather the “Russia Question” – “the development of the Bolshevik Party, the Russian

---

<sup>298</sup> C.L.R. James, “Revolution and the Negro” *New International*, Volume V (December 1939) in *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939-1949*, eds. Scott McLemee and Paul LeBlanc (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 77.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.



Revolution and what had taken place in the Russian economy”<sup>300</sup> – and James’ revisiting of Lenin, enabled them to develop a theory which characterized this putative bastion of vanguard proletariat communist revolution as “state capitalism,” while at the same time emphasizing the need to support new forms of organizing workers’ resistance. So, even as Trotsky insisted that the Soviet Union was still a workers’ state, though corrupted by Stalin, James argues instead that this “bureaucratic mechanism in Russia confronts the individual worker with economic and political consequences [that are not] other than those of capitalism.”<sup>301</sup> For James and the Johnson-Forrest Tendency, the problem at this historical juncture with the “socialism in one country” model for socialists, communists, Marxists and other anti-capitalist revolutionaries is not necessarily Stalinism, but rather it is the bourgeois nature of the state – “rooted in the relations of production and the need to control workers” – that suppresses “the democracy of the modern masses” and ultimately “compels totalitarian savagery.”<sup>302</sup> Moreover, although state capitalism was a particular form, its function was not unique to the Soviet Union, as James asserts “the Stalinist bureaucracy is the American bureaucracy carried to its ultimate logical conclusion...The rulers of Russia perform the same functions as are performed by Ford, General Motors and their huge bureaucratic staffs.”<sup>303</sup> Thus, unlike many Leftists at the time, including people of African descent who were enchanted by the promise of the Communist Party, the Johnson-Forrest Tendency shrewdly exposed the realities of the Russian state.

---

<sup>300</sup> James notes Dunayevskaya expertise on the “Russia Question” in a lecture delivered in London. See C.L.R. James, “Perspectives and Proposals” (1963) in *Marxism For Our Times: C.L.R. James On Revolutionary Organization*, ed. Martin Glaberman (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999), 159.

<sup>301</sup> C.L.R. James (“J.R. Johnson”), “After Ten Years: On Trotsky’s The Revolution Betrayed” *New Internationalist* 12, no. 8 (October 1946), quoted in McLemee and Paul LeBlanc, *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism*, 7.

<sup>302</sup> C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, “Chapter II: The State and Revolution” in *The Invading Socialist Society* (Detroit: Bedwick Editions, 1947), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1947/invading/ch02.htm>.

<sup>303</sup> C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee Boggs, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* [E-Book] (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2013), 158, 167-168.

Aside from building tools for his ongoing critique of the Soviet Union, James invested considerably in refining his interpretations of Marx and presenting these nuanced views in close relation to the material conditions of the working class within the ever-evolving preponderance of capitalist society, specifically in the United States, in both his writing and organizing efforts. It appears that it was this activity which led him to avowedly abandon vanguardism as the primary force impelling the proletariat to pursue the revolutionary ends of a socialist or communist society. The Johnson-Forrest Tendency would first comprehensively articulate this new position in *The Invading Socialist Society* (1947), where the group argues based on their on-the-ground activity that the “self-mobilisation of the masses is the dominating social and political feature of our age.” Based on their observations they found, “The workers today are aware of the tremendous problems involved in the overthrow of bourgeois society. They seek philosophy of life, place, an organization, a social force which will not only be the direct expression of the proletarian class struggle, but direct force with which to rebuild society.”<sup>304</sup> Indeed, while the proletariat in Europe seemed to languish in the aftermath of war, Nazism and the Soviet Union’s misdirection through Stalinism, James and his comrades witnessed a heightened awareness among this same class as there was a tremendous upsurge in industrial production taking place in the United States that transformed them greatly. Even though the working class in the country did not really express themselves politically, or with the theoretical understanding that traditional Marxists believed was required to bring about revolutionary change, James nevertheless saw vital value in the self-mobilization of this stratum due to his own experiences with them during this period. To be sure, he spent more time than ever before alongside workers, including Black farmers, as they protested and organized actions, which ultimately convinced him of this

---

<sup>304</sup> James and Dunayevskaya, “Chapter I: World War II and Social Revolution” in *The Invading Socialist Society*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1947/invading/ch01.htm>.

centrality of self-activity among all groups in their resistance to oppression. For James, the impending struggle would teach the American proletariat about the basis of class warfare and the necessity of socialism. Certainly, although he had identified the staggering potency of self-activity in *The Black Jacobins*, he may not have reached the same assessment without his ample exchanges with African Americans.

*Returning to the Negro Question and asserting self-activity*

Throughout the decade, even as James was becoming a reputable Marxist thinker, now on another continent, he had also committed himself to addressing the Negro Question. In addition to the above-mentioned engagement with Black workers, James wrote regularly about matters on Black people in the United States, under his column called “The Negro Fight” which typically appeared in the WP’s weekly paper *Labour Action*. Although James managed to delve into anti-colonial incitement in some of his pieces and even recruited George Padmore to contribute to the publication, he was predominantly focused on what was happening around him in his Harlem, New York residence and other Black communities in the country.<sup>305</sup> His articles during this period discuss “novels, segregation, industrial relations, relations between the sexes, and whatever else happened to be news,” all while it was becoming increasingly evident to him that “Blacks were arriving at a new stage of self-awareness, and sooner or later would move in the direction of independent political action.”<sup>306</sup> At the same time, there was a bit of a debate in the WP about the Negro Question. Since 1939, James had advocated the creation of all-Black organizations, and as the 1940s wore on he appeared to be suggesting more and more that the WP did not need to be proximally close to this process. On the other hand, others in the party felt that this was contrary to their multi-racial organizing principles embodied in *Labour Action*’s

---

<sup>305</sup> Bogues, *Caliban’s Freedom*, 90.

<sup>306</sup> Worcester, *C.L.R. James*, 73.

slogan “black and white, unite and fight!”, and worried that without the guidance of a group like WP, rooted in class analysis, their revolutionary ambitions would be severely undermined. While at least by the mid-1940s, James saw that the discrimination that African Americans faced at the hands of European-Americans to be too deeply seated and their history too different for the two groups to seamlessly unite based on an identical fight, others in the WP were fretful that to do otherwise would encourage “racial separation” socially and politically. Although this debate in the party was never really resolved, by the end of the decade James incisively articulated where his musings had led him after ten years.<sup>307</sup> This would be poignantly conveyed when he released a dynamic essay that would definitively demarcate his position on the Negro Question after rejoining the SWP. Aptly titled, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Question in the United States,” James eschews the trepidation that had somewhat muddled his views on the Black struggle in the United States a decade earlier and essentially abandoned his ostensible Marxist dogmatism:

We can compare what we have to say that is new by comparing it to previous positions on the Negro question in the socialist movement. The proletariat, as we know, must lead the struggle of all the oppressed and all those who are persecuted by capitalism. But this has been interpreted in the past – and by some very good socialists too – in the following sense: the independent struggles of the Negro people have not got much more than an episodic value and, as a matter of fact, can constitute a great danger not only to the Negroes themselves, but to the organized labor movement. The real leadership of the Negro struggle must rest with in the hands of organized labor and of the Marxist party. Without that the Negro struggle is not only weak, but is likely to cause difficulties for the Negroes and dangers to organized labor. This, as I say, is the position held by many socialist in the past. Some great socialists in the United States have been associated with this attitude. We, on the other hand, say something entirely different.<sup>308</sup>

What is most striking about James’ words above, written for the purpose of shaping the SWP’s policy towards the Negro Question, is how much of a reversal it is of his earlier position on the matter when he wrote “Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question” and “Revolution and

---

<sup>307</sup> See Worcester’s discussion of the debate in *Ibid.*, 77-80.

<sup>308</sup> C.L.R. James, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA,” *Fourth International* 9, no. 8 (December 1948), in McLemee and Paul LeBlanc, *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism*, 179-180.

the Negro” less than ten years earlier. Whereas he previously approached the Negro Question with the notion that some form of vanguard leadership in the creation of Black organizations would reasonably come from a “Marxist party” like the SWP, by 1948, he had become critical of that view. Rather, James’ resolutions, which were laid out in the “Revolutionary Answer,” forcefully illustrate his shift in perspective:

We say, number one, that the Negro struggle, the independent Negro struggle, has a vitality and validity on its own; that it has deep historic roots in the past of America and in present struggles; it has an organic political perspective, along which it is traveling, to one degree or another, and everything shows that at the present time it is traveling with great speed and vigor. We say, number two, that this independent Negro movement is able to intervene with terrific force upon the general social and political life of the nation, despite the fact that it is waged under the banner of democratic rights, and is not led necessarily either by the organized labor movement or the Marxist party. We say, number three, and this is the most important, that it is able to exercise a powerful influence upon the revolutionary proletariat, that it has got a great contribution to make to the development of the proletariat in the United States, and that is in itself a constituent part of the struggle for socialism. In this way we challenge directly any attempt to subordinate or push to the rear the social and political significance of the independent Negro struggle for democratic rights. That is our position.<sup>309</sup>

To be sure, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Question in the United States” reveals James once again pushing the bounds of mainstream Marxism. The idea that revolutionary socialism could be achieved by a movement that was not being promoted by organized labour or a Marxist party was most certainly sacrilege for devout Marxists of this period. Indeed, it was more jarring than James of the late 1930s impressing the importance of recognizing the revolutionary potential of people of African descent – and success in the case of the Haitian Revolution – to argue for their inclusion in Marxist organizing. He now proclaimed that the Black struggle could make waves in the American social and political landscape with a “vitality and validity on its own.” Furthermore, considering the indispensable nature of this “constituent part of the struggle for socialism,” it was no longer acceptable to “subordinate or push to the rear” the independent Black movement. Yet, James did not think it was necessary for

---

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 180.

this movement to express a commitment to Marxism, because “The Negro people...the struggles they have carried on, their ideas...on the basis of their own experiences, approach the conclusions of Marxism.”<sup>310</sup> So, the self-activity of African Americans should be respected and endorsed, even if it appeared to be spontaneous. And, concerning the “bourgeois state,” he adds: “They may not formulate their belief in Marxist terms, but their experience drives them to reject this shibboleth of bourgeois democracy.”<sup>311</sup> Thus, although James’ new conclusion did not impel him to disavow his Marxist allegiances, his synthesis of the Black struggle and Marxism is what made his declaration so astute. He had developed an analysis of race, Marxism and revolution that essentially resolved his reservations about Black nationalism and self-determination in the United States while innovating Marxist thought and organizing tactics in a way that no one before him had articulated.

As his sojourn in the United States abruptly came to an end by the early 1950s, James had most certainly become a distinguished Marxist theorist whose shrewdness often separated him from other socialist agitators. Still, his long stopover in the country in many ways was a tumultuous time, as among other things he broke from Trotsky by 1940; he twice left the SWP, forming his own socialist organization; lived underground as an alien migrant and wrote under a pseudonym; was divorced from his first wife, married to another woman and divorced again; had a child; and finally, was imprisoned for several weeks in 1952 after being deemed an undesirable alien under the watchful eye of the Federal Bureau of Intelligence, eventually leading to his return to England in 1953 following his denial of United States citizenship. Going back to England did not mean that James would discard what he had learned in the United States. On the contrary, forged from a dialectical analysis of the proletariat formed through his study of Marx,

---

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 181.

his new analytical point of departure would serve him well for years to come in reading resistance movements across the world.

## **Conclusion**

C.L.R. James left Trinidad in 1932 before returning for the first time in 1958. Intellectually, he grew leaps and bounds during the intervening years, catalyzed by his devotion to ideas emanating from or inspired by Karl Marx. To be sure, his studies, collaborations and writings raged to such a degree that he made considerable contributions to Marxist thought, including the unique positionality of Black people and their revolutionary potential – both within conventional configurations of Marxism and outside of it.

The experiences that James had in England were categorically foundational in steering his revolutionary disposition, therefore most of the discussion in this chapter takes place here. He jumped into leftist spaces upon arrival, joining the BLP and soon thereafter the more radical ILP's Marxist group. In addition to meeting and organizing with workers, he also engaged in an intensive reading program that took him to the works of Karl Marx and those who worked from similar principles, including key figures involved in the Russian Revolution like Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky. After several years of study, his grasp on the working-class struggle worldwide and the situation in the Soviet Union was conveyed in *World Revolution*, where he signals a commitment to the Leninist brand of Marxism, and by extension, support for the exiled Trotsky. The book made waves among the non-Stalinist Left in the country, coming twenty years after the 1917 uprising in Russia.

James' activism in England was not exclusively confined to rows between Stalin and Trotsky, and how best to approach the working class internationally. His Pan-Africanist organizing was also important, as he co-founded a group with other people of African descent

from around the world that initially mobilized against the invasion of Ethiopia before it evolved into the IASB and protested colonialism in Africa generally. For his part, James' anti-colonialism was consistent regardless of what sphere he was operating in, from speeches and pieces for ILP's *New Leader* to the IASB's *International Opinion*. Indeed, he continually exhorted the Left to appreciate and prioritize the "Colonial Question" in their advocacy, particularly self-determination for people of African descent. Moreover, the combination of all his activity in the metropole seemed to culminate in the *Black Jacobins* in 1938.

*The Black Jacobins* is a ground-breaking text that most tellingly announces James' place in the province of Black radical thought. His compelling narrative on the Haitian Revolution exhibits his commitment to anti-colonialism, Black liberation, and Marxism all in the same text. For someone as grounded in Marxism as he was, his centering on the most oppressed in society – the enslaved or those regarded as inferior under their skin colour – sent a message to leftists about the revolutionary potential possessed by people of African descent. While Marxists of the day failed to concentrate on the fight against colonialism with the zeal that James and other Pan-Africanists believed it deserved, *The Black Jacobins* forced them to confront this perspective. Still the most oppressed – colonized, working-class or working-poor people of African descent – whether on the African continent or in the West Indies, were capable and suitably positioned through their self-activity, to spark the overthrow of the capitalist, imperialist order across borders, even in the absence of Marxist influence. To be sure, it was a lesson for Pan-Africanists too.

In the United States, James' evolution took another step, namely on the Russia Question and the Negro Question. He broke from Trotsky over their disagreement on whether the Soviet Union remained a workers' state under Stalin's regime. Contrary to Trotsky, James postulated



that the Russia-led alignment represented a phenomenon he termed “state capitalism.” He worked alongside Raya Dunayevskaya to build this argument and they co-founded the JFT, which cemented their break from Trotskyism, and as will be explained in more detail in a subsequent chapter, propelled them into elements of Marx’s opus that most leftists had not been familiar with. In addition to rebuffing the Communist Party’s “socialism in one country” model, the JFT’s examination of the working class in the United States led them to reject vanguardism as the main vehicle towards the realization of a socialist or communist society. Instead, following their on-the-ground observations, they proposed that workers themselves had their own awareness of the problems inherent in bourgeois society and would enable its overthrow and rebuild it as a socialist formation. For James, this hypothesis could be tested by looking at the Black movement in the United States.

Almost ten years after his first offerings on the Negro Question, James reached the “Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Question in the United States.” His response was inspired by the paradigm of self-activity that he reached alongside his JFT colleagues. Put differently, he insists that the fight against subjugation for Black people in the United States did not require a Marxist vanguard party or even an explicit indebtedness to Marxism. This went beyond stressing the revolutionary potential of people of African descent and making a case for their plight to be put at the forefront of leftist organizing, as he had done as an organizer in England and in *The Black Jacobins*. By the end of the 1940s, his position was that the self-activity of Black people in the United States had “a vitality and validity of its own” that would seek the displacement of the status quo. James was no longer bogged down by strict Marxist doctrine and affirmed his importance as a Black radical thinker even further.

## Chapter 4 – Building Negritude from the Left: Aimé Césaire’s Anti-Colonial Theory

When Aimé Césaire left Martinique for France in 1931, he was looking forward to experiencing first-hand the wealth of cultural and social opportunities that he was certain the metropole had to offer. Notwithstanding his family’s socialist orientation, there is nothing to indicate that Césaire had expressed any sort of radical social or political critique himself when he first took up residence in Paris, but his enthusiasm for the sojourn upon departure from the French West Indies suggests that he was ready to absorb all that the country had to offer. His affiliation with students, intellectuals, and various groups soon after his arrival implies, he did just that. Chapter 2 described some of these connections and briefly discussed the history or constitution of the groups themselves. Here, as was the case with the previous chapter on C.L.R. James, the focus is on the influence of Marxist-based entities on the early thought and development of Aimé Césaire in France during the 1930s and the role that Marxism plays in his activities while he was based in Martinique through the 1940s and into the 1950s.

The chapter begins with an overview of *Légitime défense* and the ways in which it shapes Césaire’s interactions with left-wing ideas. This is followed by an examination of activities and theories he is engaged with as a student that demonstrates that Marxism is continually within his orbit, even as he challenges its orthodoxy. The analysis then shifts to his commitments in Martinique, where he continues to combine anti-colonial and anti-capitalist critique and joins the French Communist Party. Finally, there is some discussion on the reasons for his break from the political party. In the main, the argument being advanced here is that even as he builds his philosophical position, Marxism, for all its shortcomings, remains a useful tool for Aimé Césaire.

### **Marx, Marxism, and Negritude in France**

### *Anti-colonial, Marxist learnings through *Légitime défense**

Journals like *La Dépêche Africaine*, and *La Revue du Monde Noir*, along with the figures and works coming out of the Harlem Renaissance were undoubtedly important in the development of Césaire's early anti-colonial ideas, but it appears that the short-lived Marxist-inspired *Légitime défense* had a noteworthy impact on him as well. Although in later years Césaire claimed that he took the latter to task over theoretical differences, the degree of proximity he had to the group in the early to mid-1930s – along with what he would produce in subsequent years – makes it hard to believe that he did not spend some time engaging with their approach to anti-colonial work. In fact, *Légitime défense* is generally regarded as the precursor to the negritude movement that Césaire, along with Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon-Gontran Damas would become known for spearheading.<sup>312</sup>

*Légitime défense* was a collaborative effort by eight Martinican students in France to release a review that would approach anti-colonialism with a more radical political position than their contemporaries. The result was one issue of the journal, released in June 1932, which in the words of Shireen Lewis, strived primarily to “expose and analyze...the problem of the liberation of colonized peoples and the problem of the elaboration of a literary aesthetic grounded in the particularities of the black experience.”<sup>313</sup> The above-mentioned publications were not so different cursorily in their aims, but what distinguished *Légitime défense* is that it was philosophically grounded in both Marxism-Leninism and Surrealism. What's more, they explicitly made the connection to these ideas in the journal.

---

<sup>312</sup> For the pioneering work which remains an authoritative and major source of information on Négritude, *Légitime Défense*, and their relationship with one another see Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974). This sentiment is shared by authors such as Shireen Lewis, *Race, Culture and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Négritude to Créolité* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006) and Franklin Rosemont and Robin D.G. Kelley, eds., *Black Brown and Beige: Surrealist writings from Africa and the Diaspora* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

<sup>313</sup> Lewis, *Race, Culture and Identity*, 1.

From the outset of the publication, the authors of the journal made it clear that they wanted to take on the struggle against colonialism in a dynamic, insurrectionary way. Beginning with their “Declaration,” they proclaim that they intend to “rise up against all those who don’t feel suffocated by the capitalist, Christian, bourgeois world, to which our protesting bodies reluctantly belong.” They cite their allegiance to the Communist International (Comintern)’s fight against these forces and believe “unreservedly in its triumph because we accept Marx’s dialectical materialism.”<sup>314</sup> The “Declaration,” or foreword, divulges that the *Légitime défense* group is equally committed to the liberatory opportunities they believe that surrealism affords them. Yet, what is most clear about this group of Martinicans is that they are unapologetically interested in anti-capitalist, anti-colonial revolution, even though their target audience is not the proletariat as is the case for Comintern. Instead, the issue aims to agitate young folks from the bourgeoisie in the French Caribbean whose “capacity for revolt we do not underestimate,” along with young people of African descent in general, because “they in particular suffer from the effects of capitalism (apart from Africa, witness Scottsboro) and that they seem to offer – in having a materially determined personality – a generally higher potential for revolt and joy.”<sup>315</sup> The group’s disavowal of their class and desire for upheaval becomes even clearer at the end of the foreword:

Born of the French bourgeoisie of color, one of the most pitiful things on the face of the earth, we declare – and we will not go back on this declaration – in the face of all administrative, governmental parliamentary, industrial, commercial corpses etc., that we intend, as traitors of this class, to take our betrayal as far as possible. We spit on everything they love, venerate, on everything that nourishes them or gives them joy.<sup>316</sup>

---

<sup>314</sup> Etienne Léro, Thélus Léro, René Ménil, Jules-Marcel Monnerot, Michel Pilotin, Maurice-Sabas Quitman, Auguste Thésée, and Pierre Yoyotte. “*Légitime défense*: Declaration” [1932], in Richardson and Fijalkowski, *Refusal of the Shadow*, 41.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>316</sup> This quote is Lewis’s excerpted translation of “*Légitime défense*: Declaration” in Lewis, *Race, Culture and Identity*, 2.

While appearing to eschew their socio-economic background, the *Légitime défense* writers nevertheless recognized the critical role that the children of the bourgeoisie of colour in the French West Indies could play in a radical anti-colonial movement by being leaders and utilizing resources at their disposal to promote ideas and activities that would empower the Black masses. Moreover, although *La Revue du Monde Noir* and other popular journals of the time focused on culture as their point of departure in conceptualizing resistance, *Légitime défense* instead began with political economy and Marxism-Leninism as their vehicle.

Taking into account both Trotsky and Lenin's position on colonialism at the forming of the Third International previously discussed, along with the efforts that the Comintern made globally to recruit people of African descent and give voice to their dilemma in the 1920s and 1930s, the appeal of Marxism-Leninism for *Légitime défense*, given their orientation, is explicable. Indeed, the Comintern actively supported newspapers, leagues, and committees during this period in France that expressed resistance to colonialism. A snippet of a thesis from their Sixth Congress in 1928 reveals this promise:

While organizing the revolution against imperialism under the banner of proletarian dictatorship in the so-called 'civilized States', the Communist International supports every movement against imperialist violence in the colonies, semi-colonies, and dependent countries (e.g. in Latin America); it carries on vigorous propaganda against every kind of chauvinism and imperialist ill-treatment of enslaved peoples and races, large and small (the attitude towards Negroes and workers of the 'yellow races', anti-semitism, etc.), and supports their struggle against the bourgeoisie of the oppressing nation.<sup>317</sup>

Yet even before Lenin and the Comintern, in Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels' groundbreaking 1848 work *The Communist Manifesto*, the two authors observe the link between colonialism and capitalism and encourage revolutionary change. This appraisal surely had some

---

<sup>317</sup> "Theses on the revolutionary movement in colonial and semi-colonial countries adopted by the sixth Comintern congress (excerpts)" [September 1928] in *The Communist International: 1919-1943 Documents, Volume II 1923-1928*, sel. and ed. Jane Degras, 521 <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/documents/volume2-1923-1928.pdf>.

influence on the Comintern and their concerns for people of the colonized world.<sup>318</sup> One should recall too that the Parti communiste français (French Communist Party), who were highly critical of colonialism in their party manifesto, was the main organizer of an exhibition entitled “La vérité aux colonies” (The Truth about the Colonies) in September 1931, purposely countering the ruling government’s “Exhibition coloniale Internationale de Paris” (International Colonial Exhibition of Paris). The latter tried to portray French colonialism as a mutually beneficial exchange of cultures or association with the lands and people effectively under the country’s imperial control. On the other hand, the French Communist Party’s (PCF) presentation attempted to depict the various abuses in colonies that were taking place as a result of French imperialism, including a tract called “Ne visitez pas L’Exposition coloniale” (Don’t Visit the Colonial Exposition) which “demanded that France immediately evacuate the colonies and arrest generals and civil servants responsible for massacres in Africa...”<sup>319</sup> Thus, the presence of an active political entity in France like the PCF that espoused Marxism in theory and action, inclusive of denouncing colonialism, likely further engendered the *Légitime défense* octet’s affinity for Marxism-Leninism. In fact, three of the group’s main figures – Etienne Léro, René Menil, and Jules Monnerot – were all believed to be members of the PCF at some point in the 1930s. This is in addition to other Communist-based groups in Paris that they were in contact with who advocated on behalf of people of African descent and received assistance from the PCF, such as Ligue Universelle pour la Défense de la Race Noire (Universal League for the

---

<sup>318</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* [E-book] (London: Verso, 2012), 42.

<sup>319</sup> Lewis, *Race, Culture and Identity*, 8.

Defence of the Black Race) and the Comité de la Défense de la Race Nègre (Committee for the Defence of the Negro Race).<sup>320</sup>

*Légitime défense* ultimately employs Marx's class analysis in their publication to describe the social actors in the French Caribbean and the socioeconomic conditions as a whole, all while pushing their revolutionary agenda. At the same time, as Lewis notes, their critique "expands the Marxist paradigm to include race and colour prejudice as elements which complicate the struggle for liberation by colonized black proletarians in the Caribbean."<sup>321</sup> Hence, the authors make it clear that the Black proletariat in the region, who comprise the majority of the population, do not only face oppression because of their class position but also because of their race and/or colour. Discrimination and exploitation are deployed by an elite White minority that retains most of the wealth and power while occupying the top of the class hierarchy, and a bourgeoisie of colour in the middle of the stratification that consists mainly of lighter-skinned Blacks in relation to the mostly darker-skinned proletariat. Again, it is the bourgeoisie of colour that *Légitime défense* blames for the plight of the Black proletariat, as they see the former as "traitors to their race because, instead of advancing the interests of black workers with whom they share a common history and physiognomy, they instead resort to the same discriminatory behaviour as the white Créoles."<sup>322</sup> Indeed, this measure of solidarity beyond the parameters of class to an appeal based on race, colour or history, though rooted in resistance to capitalist exploitation, is an innovation to Marxism that the journal's writers recognized as necessary for the theory to truly be helpful within the constructs of an anti-colonial initiative. Moreover, opening the question of race in this way demonstrates the kind of

---

<sup>320</sup> See J. Ayo Langley, "Pan-Africanism in Paris, 1924-36," *Journal of Modern African Studies* VII, no. 1 (April 1969): 69-94.

<sup>321</sup> Lewis, *Race, Culture and Identity*, 10.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

incisiveness that Aimé Césaire and his colleagues would also have to adopt as they tried to flesh out an anti-colonial programme in the years that immediately followed the *Légitime défense* publication.

The foregoing discussion of *Légitime défense* is important here, because of the marked effect the group likely had on Césaire. Several works have looked at *Légitime défense*'s connection to Césaire to explore the origins of negritude, or at least crucial early influences. To be sure, the call made in the journal for authentic literature with an “original and profound accent” and “sensual Black imagination,” with “an echo of the hates and aspirations of an oppressed people” is a message that he would eventually heed in his writings.<sup>323</sup> The use of surrealism in the negritude works of the 1930s and 1940s has also generated interest in *Légitime défense*'s project. Certainly, negritude writers fancied the range that surrealism provided for in the form of psychoanalysis, blurring the lines between dream and reality, all while pushing the bounds of the material world towards the emancipation of the (Black) subject. *Légitime défense*'s Marxist underpinnings also presage the influence of left-wing politics in the formation of negritude and are a source of inspiration for Césaire's radical development. Indeed, the great affect that Marx, Marxism, communism, and leftist political theory of this nature had on him during this period should not be understated.

Although Aimé Césaire did not make any literary contributions to *Légitime défense*, there is no reason to believe that he did not fraternize with his fellow Martinican nationals as they contrived the journal and continued to discuss its ideas in the months and years that followed its publication. As Senghor recalls: “When Jules Monnerot, Etienne Léro, and René Menil hurled the manifesto of *Légitime défense* at the West Indian bourgeoisie, Aimé Césaire, then a student

---

<sup>323</sup> Etienne Léro, “Misère d'un poésie,” in *Légitime défense* (Vaduz: Krause Reprints, 1970), 10, quoted and translated in Dale Tomich, “The Dialectic of Colonialism and Culture: The Origins of the Negritude of Aimé Césaire,” *Review* 2, no. 3 (Winter 1979): 351-385., 361.



at ‘khâgne’ at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, was the first to hear it and to listen to it.”<sup>324</sup> Césaire was not in France for a full year when the group released the issue in June 1932, but he was quickly absorbed in the world around him. Living in Paris’s Latin Quarter at this time entailed being surrounded by people of African descent – students, intellectuals, and artists – who were inexorably confronted with the predicament of White supremacy and colonialism in the places where they were born, even as they likewise endured discriminatory experiences in the city. Debates, lectures, discursive discussions, and an assortment of works that reflected their concerns and interest in conceptualizing ways to thwart pervading injustices against them, which were seemingly even more obvious from their standpoint in the metropole, abounded for the young Césaire. The assimilationist character of French colonialism largely disparaged and marginalized culture(s) indigenous to continental Africa, as well as forms emerging out of the West Indies. As a result, journals like *La Dépêche Africaine* and *La Revue du Monde Noir* that Césaire essentially pored over in his first year, focused first on validating African culture and/or the artistic endeavours of people of African descent, rather than political agitation. Even so, political solutions were being considered by the Black anti-colonialists in France, and for reasons illustrated above regarding *Légitime défense*’s leanings, Marx was being discussed, along with how Communism could facilitate political independence and end the stark economic exploitation taking place in the colonies. Without a doubt, as his anti-colonial consciousness was burgeoning, Césaire would very much be exposed to these ideas, including the usefulness of Marxism. In fact, he recalls that at the time he was “more of a communist or a ‘communist

---

<sup>324</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, ed., *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (Paris: PUF, 1948), 55. Excerpt of longer quote, translated in Tomich, “The Dialectic of Colonialism and Culture,” 365.

sympathizer’,” even though he did not become affiliated with any organization until nearly three years into his studies in Paris.<sup>325</sup>

By 1934, Césaire had officially joined a student group called L’Association des étudiants martiniquais (The Martinican Students’ Association) amid a controversy over Martinican students’ ability to secure scholarships for their studies in the metropole after the French government decided to restrict their availability.<sup>326</sup> Césaire became popular among the students, as he pushed for a more determined approach to the issues facing them.<sup>327</sup> The following year, after being elected president of the group, his idea of creating a new journal connected to the student group but inclusive of both continental Africans and West Indians of African descent was realized. This was crucial for him, as although there was a multitude of students and associations that delved into anti-colonial and anti-capitalist thought around this period, they were often divided along national or regional lines. Therefore, the journal, evolving from earlier incarnations to eventually be called *L’Étudiant Noir* (*The Black Student*), aimed to unite the diverse students of African descent living in Paris. Damas, who was the editorial secretary for the journal writes: “*L’Étudiant noir*, a corporate and combative newspaper, aimed to put an end to the tribalization and clan feeling that were strong in the Latin Quarter. One ceased to be a student from Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Africa, Madagascar, and became merely a Black student. Life in isolation was over.”<sup>328</sup>

---

<sup>325</sup> Césaire says this in an interview with Françoise Vergès. See Aimé Césaire and Françoise Vergès, *Resolutely Black: Conversations with Françoise Vergès*, trans. Matthew B. Smith (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 6. First published in French as Aimé Césaire and Françoise Vergès, *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai: Entretiens avec Françoise Vergès* (Albin Michel, 2005).

<sup>326</sup> For a brief discussion of this and the Martinican Students’ Association, see David Alliot and Aimé Césaire, “*Le communisme est à l’ordre du jour*”: Aimé Césaire et le P.C.F., de l’engagement à la rupture (1935-1957) [Paris: Pierre Guillaume de Roux, 2013], 25-27.

<sup>327</sup> Ngal, *Aimé Césaire*, 70.

<sup>328</sup> Léon-Gontran Damas, “Notre Génération” (unpublished manuscript), in Kesteloot and Kennedy, *Black Writers in French*, 83-84.

Yet, an appeal to Pan-Africanism was not the only way that Césaire and his *L'Étudiant Noir* colleagues looked to distinguish themselves from other journals when it debuted in March 1935. Even as they endorsed using some of the same tools to combat colonialism as their counterparts, they diverged in their yearning to invoke Africa in their works and how Black subjectivity should be interrogated in conjunction with particular philosophies. Césaire subsequently explains how he believed the vision for *L'Étudiant Noir* differed from his friends featured in *Légitime défense*:

There were two tendencies within our group. On the one hand, there were people on the left, Communists at that time, such as J. Monnerot, E. Léro, and René Ménil. They were Communists, and therefore we supported them. But very soon I had to reproach them – and perhaps I owe this to Senghor – for being French Communists. There was nothing to distinguish them from the French surrealists and the French Communists. In other words, their poems were colorless.<sup>329</sup>

Césaire's assertion that his *Légitime défense* comrades produced “colourless” poems was most certainly a pun regarding what he believed was the group's failure to really engage the particularities of Blackness in their works. He thought that for all their efforts, the group did not do enough to circumvent assimilation, as they emulated “the French surrealists and the French Communists” in the sense that they did not adequately consider “the Negro question.” So Césaire did not necessarily reject these philosophical approaches, instead he criticized Black Communists for “forgetting our Negro characteristics.” He continues: “they acted like Communists, which was alright, but they acted like abstract Communists. I maintained that the political question could not do away with our condition as Negroes. We are Negroes with a great number of historical particularities.”<sup>330</sup> Hence, for Césaire, one could not be seriously interested in emancipation for people of African descent by dealing with an ideology in abstraction: “We had to scuffle a bit against certain individuals who appealed to the authority of *Légitime défense*

---

<sup>329</sup> René Desparte and Aimé Césaire, “An interview with Aimé Césaire (1967),” trans. by Maro Riofrancos, in appendix to, Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 79-94., 84-85.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 85

and we accused them of being false revolutionaries, of making a revolution which does not engage the whole man. And we felt that being Black entails particular duties. It is not an abstract existence. Consequently, it was necessary to root this revolutionary ideal in negritude.”<sup>331</sup>

*Pushing race within communist revolutionary thought*

*L'Étudiant Noir* would give Césaire an opportunity to transcend where he believed *Légitime défense* fell short. An article which appeared in the third issue of *L'Étudiant Noir* shows how specifically he challenged his colleagues during the middle of this decade. Under the journal's "Les Idées" (Ideas) heading and "Nègries" (Negroes) sub-heading, Césaire's offering "Conscience raciale et révolution sociale" (Racial Consciousness and Social Revolution), articulates his critique of the "false revolutionaries" with a semblance of prose that he would become known for:

What revolution was ever made by a people innocent of curiosities? Whoever incited a toy against its owner? However, that is the trick that our black revolutionaries want to perform when they ask the Negro to revolt against the capitalism that oppresses him. What can we call a population of assimilated persons except a toy? Dostoevsky said it already, more or less: any race that believes it has nothing to say to the world is merely an "ethnic curiosity," and any individual is a toy if he believes that his people arrive empty-handed at the meeting place of receiving and giving.

"Take action!" they say to the Negro. But since acting is creating, and since creating is kneading and leavening your natural substance, our Negro at home will not take action if he is distracted from himself and if he lives apart from himself.<sup>332</sup>

---

<sup>331</sup> Excerpted quote appears, translated, in Tomich, "The Dialectic of Colonialism and Culture," 368. Tomich indicates that this quote is taken from Ngal, *Aimé Césaire*, 60. However, in my reading of the text, I could not locate this statement, nor another quote that Tomich cites from this text on 366 of his article. On the other hand, Kesteloot cites Ngal while excerpting the Tomich quote(s) in question in French, but does not give a specific page number, instead indicating that it is from the Ngal's interview in *Aimé Césaire*. See, Lilyan Kesteloot, *Histoire de la littérature négro-africaine* (Paris: Karthala, 2001), 96, footnote 3.

<sup>332</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Conscience raciale et révolution sociale" in *L'étudiant noir: Journal mensuel de l'Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France* 1, no. 3 (May-June 1935), 1. Reprinted in Filostrat, *Negritude, Agonistes, Assimilation*, 123-126. These two paragraphs appear, translated, in Christopher L. Miller, "The (Revised) Birth of Negritude: Communist Revolution and 'the Immanent Negro' in 1935," *Publications of Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)* 125, no. 3 (May 2010), 745.

In these opening paragraphs, Césaire wastes no time making clear his disapproval of putting *social revolution* ahead of particularized introspection of Blackness or *racial consciousness*. Further, he questions the likelihood of an uprising from an assimilated people without an identity of their own who do not appreciate the significance of having claims to a culture of their own or “creating” and “kneading and leavening your natural substance.” However, it should be noted that even as Césaire makes a case for cultural renewal before political agitation in the context of anti-colonial resistance, he employs Marxist thought. The article begins with an epitaph from *Les Chiens de Garde* (*The Watchdogs*), written by PCF ideologue Paul Nizan, which is an exposé on materialism according to Marx.<sup>333</sup> Thereafter, “Conscience raciale et revolution sociale” (“Conscience raciale”) sees Césaire engage with Marxism in multiple ways to underscore his main argument. For example, the notion of alienation or self-alienation because of material circumstances, which Marx first examines at length about the worker in capitalist society in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* is explored in the article:

A strange disorder, in effect, consumes us in the Antilles: a fear of ourselves, a capitulation of being to appearing, a weakness that makes an exploited people turn their back on their own nature, because a race of exploiters makes them ashamed, with the perfidious purpose of eradicating “self-consciousness of the exploited.”<sup>334</sup>

In this third paragraph of the article, a Marxist reading of Césaire’s words makes it apparent that he has replaced “class” with “race”; the proletariat with people of African descent, namely those living in the West Indies, “an exploited people”; while the capitalists are the “race of exploiters” in his analysis. Therefore, just as workers experience alienation within capitalist society, enabled by capitalists, Black people inevitably face self-alienation at the hands of White

---

<sup>333</sup> Paul Nizan, *Les Chiens de garde* (Paris: Les Editions Rieder, 1932).

<sup>334</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Conscience raciale,” 1. This paragraph appears, translated, in Raisa Raxer, “Black and White and Re(a)d All Over: L’Étudiant noir, Communism, and the Birth of Négritude,” *Research in African Literatures* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2013), 4.

people as a result of colonialism. Marx affirms that the “activity of the worker, is not his own, spontaneous activity. It belongs to another. It is the loss of his own self.”<sup>335</sup> In Césaire’s interpretation, this loss of self restricts the ability of the colonized to truly act, because one cannot take action “if he is distracted from himself and if he lives apart from himself.” Additionally, for Marx, the proletariat’s unawareness of the ways that their labour or mere existence is enveloped by alienation makes it less likely that they will recognize the breadth of their exploitation and seek to end it. At the same time, the capitalist class relies on ideology, and relatedly, engendering a consciousness among the proletariat that makes them acquiescent to maintaining the status quo, as it reflects their own.<sup>336</sup> This measure of control, through the normalization of ideology, ultimately disempowers the working class. What’s more, “material conditions create a ruling class that perpetuates the material conditions of oppression by creating immaterial cultural structures that also reflect their consciousness.”<sup>337</sup> Césaire sees the same bind and questions how then “action” is possible for “the Negro” under these circumstances – when the colonizer’s practice of assimilation, by design and in effect, is making the colonized “ashamed” of their “own nature” and essentially without their own consciousness. They are saturated by a culture that militates against their sense of self, thereby precluding their capacity to think, create and produce culturally for themselves, setting the groundwork for a paradox even when resistance to their material conditions becomes a strategy:

The white exploiters have given, to us, the other, the exploited blacks, a culture, but a white culture, a civilization, but white civilization, a morality, but a white morality, thus paralyzing us with invisible nets for the hypothetical case when we might liberate ourselves from the most appreciable material enslavement they have imposed on us. And they hatch their plot, patiently, untiringly, by diligent ruse until we die at the knowledge of ourselves.<sup>338</sup>

---

<sup>335</sup> Karl Marx, “Alienated Labor,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 62. Excerpted quote in Raxer, “Black and White and Re(a)d All Over,” 4.

<sup>336</sup> See section “Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas,” in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 2001), 64-66.

<sup>337</sup> Raxer, “Black and White and Re(a)d All Over,” 5.

<sup>338</sup> Césaire, “Conscience raciale,” 1. This paragraph appears, translated, in *Ibid.*

Even as Césaire borrows Marx's concepts of alienation and ideology to present the case of people of African descent, the passage above intimates that the latter's philosophy does not provide an adequate tactic to overturn their fortunes. Marx suggests that a change in the worker's material conditions will lead to something akin to self-consciousness and thus their freedom. This is a contradiction for Césaire, which does not account for the internalization of oppression that Black people have sustained. Instead, at least concerning the specificities of Césaire's revolutionary subject, the "revolutionary philosopher" should grapple with the immaterial before the material:

From this moment...if it is true that the work of the revolutionary dialectic is to destroy "all the falser perceptions lavished upon men," should we not denounce the soporific identifying culture and place beneath the prisons that white capitalism has built for us, each one of our racial values like so many liberating bombs? They have forgotten the principal, those who tell the Negro to revolt without first making him become conscious of himself, without first telling him that it is beautiful and good and legitimate to be a Negro.<sup>339</sup>

Hence, Césaire's concern is the (re)discovery of an authentic Black consciousness through an affirming cultural identity. Furthermore, as Raisa Raxer observes, it is for this reason that Nizan, who writes of "the self-consciousness of the exploited" in *Les Chiens du garde* is quoted in "Conscience raciale" rather than Marx who does not specifically address self-consciousness in his works. Case in point, "Nizan's conception of... 'the self-consciousness of the exploited' is a psychologized version of Marxist consciousness that looks a bit more like self-awareness or self-identity that is vaguer than the purely material self-consciousness of the proletariat revolution..."<sup>340</sup> Raxer adds: "This looser notion of self-consciousness is fundamental to the way Césaire adapts alienation and consciousness to race, to those aspects of identity that are not economically determined but still intertwined with the material conditions in which we

---

<sup>339</sup> Césaire, "Conscience raciale," 1. This paragraph appears, translated, in Raxer, "Black and White and Re(a)d All Over," 8.

<sup>340</sup> Raxer, "Black and White and Re(a)d All Over," 7.

live.” Although Nizan’s postulation deals with the problematic of the relationship between bourgeois philosophy and the self-consciousness, the parallels are unmistakable for Césaire in regards to “black consciousness in the dominant white cultural ideology.” Thus, she concludes: “When Césaire fights for self-consciousness by condemning the false white culture that has been imposed on blacks, he is retransmitting and color coding Nizan’s call for a Marxist culture war.”<sup>341</sup>

By incorporating race into Marxist thought in the article, Césaire has impelled Black communists and other revolutionaries to re-think their preoccupation with objective, economically based identities tied to material conditions in their call for revolt. Indeed, for Césaire, race for people of African descent is intricately connected to rather than subsumed by their categorization as an exploited group. The false consciousness that emanates from the “soporific identifying culture” therefore must be replaced: “we want to exploit our own values, to know our strengths through personal experience, to excavate our own racial domain, certain as we are to find in its depths the well-spring of universal humanity.” Put differently, Black cultural production will inevitably lead to the kind of self-discovery that will transcend insidious assumptions about non-White groups propagated through White supremacy, effectively re-constituting theories of humanism. He finally names his project or process which should accompany “the Revolution”:

Thus, therefore, before making the Revolution and in order to make the revolution – the real one – the deep destructive cut and not a surface disturbance, one condition is essential: break up the mechanical race identification, tear up superficial values, seize ourselves in the immediate Negro, plant our negritude like a beautiful tree so that it can bear its most authentic fruit.<sup>342</sup>

---

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 7, 8.

<sup>342</sup> Césaire, “Conscience raciale,” 1. This paragraph appears, translated, in Raxer, “Black and White and Re(a)d All Over,” 10.



Negritude is Césaire's solution for the colonized to develop a self-consciousness which rises above the disfigured, contaminated consciousness that for centuries has afflicted their psyches by way of a suffocating White culture. This undertaking in Raxer's words: "bursts forth from the... 'immediate Negro' of an unalienated, unalienable, affirming racial identity. It is a tree that must be tended in order to blossom into this thriving, authentic identity, one that will bear a multitude of fruit..."<sup>343</sup> To be sure, Césaire is already invested in developing his brand of negritude. For him, it is an exercise not just about affirming Black identity, which his Parisian contemporaries clearly championed as well, but more specifically a humanist venture that at once contemplated the subjectivity of people of African descent, Marxism, and revolution, amidst the realities of colonialism. The confluence of these ideas becomes clearer towards the end of the article when he proclaims that "for the Revolution we work on taking possession of ourselves" against the ascendancy of White culture and the "conquering imperialism." In fact, it is the prospect of revolution that drives Césaire's critique: "Yes, let us work at being Negro, in the certainty that it is to work for the Revolution, for he who has his own strength will be able to make Revolution, and he who is in his authentic nature has his own strength."<sup>344</sup> Again, Marxism is the language of resistance for many people of African descent at this time precisely because of its revolutionary promise. Césaire indulged the philosophy, but be that as it may, he saw its flaws specifically when it came to the colonized Black subject who was being incited to rise. They could not be vaulted into political action without first being vested in Black cultural renewal. Moreover, as Christopher Miller observes in his examination of the article: "Negritude is thus born not in categorical opposition to Marxism or the idea of a general communist revolution but rather as an engaged corrective to these ideas. Césaire is saying that blacks will be

---

<sup>343</sup> Raxer, "Black and White and Re(a)d All Over," 10.

<sup>344</sup> Césaire, "Conscience racial," 2. English translation of these excerpts appears in Miller, "The (Revised) Birth of Negritude," 747.

better, more authentic revolutionaries if they are in true communication with their blackness, with what he now calls negritude.”<sup>345</sup>

“Conscience raciale” is the second earliest available published work of Aimé Césaire, and needless to say, it is quite telling. It is an astute analysis from a twenty-two-year-old student who has undoubtedly spent a great deal of time scrutinizing the anti-colonial ideas replete in his surrounding environment of Black intellectuals, artists, and activists. Just as the *Légitime défense* writers did, he pushes Marxism on the question of race, but with far more vigour. Whereas the *Légitime défense* group attempted to add the dynamic of race/racism somewhat seamlessly to the political proletariat struggle, this approach is too superficial for Césaire. He is not prepared to accept that Marxism alone – or rather Marxism, socialism, communism, and surrealism – can speak to the conditions of oppressed people of African descent. In his view, the particularities of those who have a history of enslavement and continually suffer under colonialism and racism simply cannot be equated with the abstract, essentially White workers, exploited by the forces of capitalism that major Communist groups predominantly endeavour to incite. Above all, he does not believe that efforts at anti-colonial uprisings can be successful without the affirmation of Black identity and redemption of their consciousness, unadulterated as it were from the domineering thumb of White supremacy. Yet, Césaire is not rejecting Marxist theory. In fact, he employs certain elements of it to construct his thesis in the article. The way Césaire splices Marx’s concepts with Nizan’s illustrates that while he is critiquing Marx, he sees imperative value in these ideas. At the same time, he is encouraging the Marxists in his midst to depart from an orthodox reading of Marx for the sake of “the Revolution” like Nizan had with *Les Chiens du garde*.

---

<sup>345</sup> Miller, “The (Revised) Birth of Negritude,” 747.

Further evidence that Césaire is wrapped up and perhaps dedicated to Marxism during this period of his life is borne in the months after the publication of the article. In the latter part of 1935, he became a member of the Jeunesses communistes (Young Communists' League) at Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) around the time that he began his studies there. Césaire's involvement in the group was virtually unknown until after his death, and it does not appear that he ever mentioned it in interviews on the topic of his student years in France. In an interview, a former student who attended ENS at the same time as Césaire – though unaware if he was a part of the Young Communists at the school – recalls that he was labelled a “communist” by the student body, adding “at the time for us, this did not necessarily imply joining an organization, but rather an expression of ideas.”<sup>346</sup> Although it is likely that he was not an active member of the Young Communists' League at ENS, Romuald Fonkoua surmises that nonetheless, “his companionship with communist militants from the school suggests that he shared their ideas without reservation.”<sup>347</sup> Thus, Aimé Césaire's associations with communism, along with his readings of Marx, should not be overlooked with respect to the role it played in shaping his political and intellectual thought.

#### *Adopting leftist poetry, arts*

Overall, scholarship about Césaire's time in France during the 1930s has contemplated his bold introduction of negritude to the world, particularly through the widely read *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*), which he wrote between 1935 and 1937 before it was finally published by the Paris-based periodical *Volontés* in 1939. Most salient with respect to the style and method of writing in this elongated, semi-autobiographical

---

<sup>346</sup> Alliot and Césaire, “*Le communisme est à l'ordre du jour*,” 44. Alliot quotes from an interview with Dominique Desanti. All translations from this book are mine unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>347</sup> Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire*, 112-113.

anti-colonial poem is the function of surrealist philosophy in the work. The surrealist movement itself, which blossomed in France during the 1920s and into the 1930s, was closely aligned with communism and revolutionary activism. For instance, the Centrale Surréaliste (Bureau of Surrealist Research), also known as the Paris Surrealist Group (PSG), was tied to the PCF on several occasions throughout this period, including the “La vérité aux colonies” project discussed earlier. Some foundational members of the PSG joined the PCF, like André Breton who, again, is regarded as the founder of surrealism.<sup>348</sup> Surrealists generally embraced Marxist thought, while trying to find their place within politically radical groups in France at the time.<sup>349</sup> Indeed, there was an axiomatic tension between a philosophy whose point of departure was a materialist and objective base, and the immaterial and subjective principles that guided surrealism that made it difficult for surrealists to function within organizations like the PCF.<sup>350</sup> They mainly used visual arts and literature such as poetry as their medium to express ideas that often challenged Western values and other normative positions, including colonialism. In a book on the selected writings of Breton, Franklin Rosemont expounds on the philosophy of surrealism:

Surrealism, a unitary project of total revolution, is above all a method of knowledge and a way of life; it is lived far more than it is written, or written about, or drawn. Surrealism is the most exhilarating adventure of the mind, an unparalleled means of pursuing the fervent quest for freedom and true life beyond the veil of ideological appearances. Only the social revolution—the leap, in the celebrated expression of Marx and Engels, ‘from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom’—will enable the true life of poetry and mad love to cast aside, definitively, the fetters of degradation and dishonour and to flourish with unrestrained splendour.<sup>351</sup>

---

<sup>348</sup> See Donald LaCoss, “Introduction: Surrealism, and Romantic Anticapitalism,” in Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: surrealism, marxism, anarchism, situationism, utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), xiv-xv. LaCoss notes that their membership with the PCF, as well as the time they spent trying to work directly with the Third International, was short due to surrealism’s preference for anarchist cultural politics.

<sup>349</sup> See chapter, “The Revolution and the Intellectuals: *Pierre Naville’s Revolutionary Pessimism*” in Löwy, *Morning Star*, 43-64.

<sup>350</sup> See Robert Short, “The Politics of Surrealism, 1920–36\*,” in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, eds. Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, 18-36 [E-book] (London: Routledge, 2020): 18–36.

<sup>351</sup> Franklin Rosemont, ed., *André Breton: What is Surrealism? Selected Writings* (New York: Pathfinder, 1978), 21-22.

To be sure, the influence of this philosophical approach is evident at a basic level in “Conscience raciale,” and most certainly in *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (*Cahier*), albeit, as examined below, with Césaire’s exploration of Blackness forming its focus apart from any real discussion of the wider proletariat “social revolution.” Before writing these works, it is hard to imagine that Césaire would not have read or heard about Breton’s position in *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930) where he claims that revolt requires an alteration of the unconscious. Specifically, Breton underscores that although freedom from class domination is the goal of revolution, the internalization of subjugation itself necessitates a subjective, affirming transformation first: “(T)he end must be a total elimination of the claims of a class to which we belong in spite of ourselves and which we cannot help abolish outside of ourselves as long as we have not succeeded in abolishing them within ourselves.”<sup>352</sup> This idea is embodied in both of Césaire’s aforementioned publications – explicitly encouraged with respect to “Conscience raciale” and methodologically delved into in a sense to define negritude in *Cahier*. Moreover, one could rationally conclude that Césaire did not absorb surrealist writings without accepting the Marxist evocations therein. While his interests at the time were not primarily in political organizing and concrete mass resistance, his proximity to such trajectories is important to acknowledge.

The surrealists don’t appear to be the only group of innovative writers in search of freedom that influenced Aimé Césaire’s philosophical development in the 1930s who endorsed Marxism, communism, or socialism. As previously mentioned, Black American artists who lived in Paris during this period also had an indelible impact on the young Martinican. These writers belonged to the Harlem Renaissance movement which began in the United States in the

---

<sup>352</sup> See, André Breton “Second Manifesto of Surrealism” (1930), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 132.

1920s and focused on constructing a new empowering conception of people of African descent through the creation of visual art, literature and music that would combat denigrating stereotypes that characterized their existence in the country. Again, there were journals in Paris like *La Revue du Monde Noir* that served a similar function – and featured works from these artists within their own issues – but Césaire appears to have been especially drawn to the works from the English-speaking writers of the Harlem Renaissance and their endeavour to build a movement around the idea of a new Black identity. Indeed, it was a source of inspiration that would help him take up the particularities of Blackness that surrealism could not, as his theorizing of negritude was in its nascent stages. However, again, it should be noted that many of these writers were proponents of Marxism, socialism and communism who had their poems published in Left magazines, while some were even active members of the Communist Party in the United States.<sup>353</sup> Richard Wright, one of the most prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance had an open affiliation with the Communist Party and was one of the movement’s artists that Césaire read with great admiration. In fact, he translated Wright’s communist-tinged poem “I Have Seen Black Hands” in the May-June 1935 issue of *L’Étudiant Noir*. The final stanza of that poem revealed Wright’s political leanings:

I am black and I have seen black hands  
 Raised in fists of revolt, side by side with the white fists of white workers,  
 And some day and it is only this which sustains me  
 Some day there will be millions and millions of them,  
 On some red day in a burst of fists on a new horizon!<sup>354</sup>

The poem, first published in 1934 in the radical Left literary journal *The New Masses*, was written at a time when Wright had recently joined the Communist Party in the United States

---

<sup>353</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 27. Arnold makes this point, but for more on Harlem Renaissance writers having their pieces published in leftist magazines, see William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>354</sup> Richard Wright, “I have seen black hands,” in *The Richard Wright Reader*, eds. Ellen Wright and Michael Fabre (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 246. Aimé Césaire’s translation of the poem, called “Mains Noires,” appears under a section of *L’étudiant noir* called “Un Peu Poésie,” *L’étudiant noir* 1, no. 3 (May-June 1935), 6.

and met with other revolutionary artists that it supported. Césaire surely would have been aware of this context for the poem when he translated it, and his decision to include the piece in the same issue that he wrote “Conscience raciale” is indicative of his wrangling with Black particularity alongside what was seemingly the only avenue for anti-colonial, material liberation – socialist/communist revolution. Moreover, Césaire’s affection for the literature coming out of the Harlem Renaissance, and his encounters or proximity to those who visited Paris during his sojourn there, would have made him inescapably appreciative of Marx in his early theoretical and political development, even if he did not actively participate in any Marxist organizations. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to consider more closely how his project of negritude, most pronounced by the end of the decade, namely through his magnum opus, *Cahier*, is pliant with left-wing ideas because it strives for humanism above all.

*Expanding upon the edifice of Césairean negritude*

In *Cahier*, Césaire does not explicitly take on Marxist concepts or challenge its limits as he did in “Conscience raciale.” Rather, he turns his attention to the plea he makes in the article for the (re)discovery and affirmation of Black identity towards the fortification of a consciousness that strikes out against a White supremacist, colonialist and capitalist world that has desecrated the existence of people of African descent for centuries. In this way, his subject remains akin to Marx’s proletariat. Yet, it also projects universalism through the particularism of Blackness.

*Cahier* begins with descriptions of the pitiful social conditions and geography that suggests a oneness between the colonized and the land itself, presumably Martinique. It is an alienated place, “this inert town, this desolate throng under the sun, not connected to anything

that is expressed, asserted, released in broad daylight its own.”<sup>355</sup> Although not totally devoid of any joy, it is still a largely immiserated colonial space that has been denuded of any tools of resistance, “this town – flat...it crawls on its hands without the slightest desire to drill the sky with a stature of protest.”<sup>356</sup> There is shame and hopelessness in these opening stanzas. Still, there are many shifts in the poem’s narration, which for Gregson Davis are tantamount to the speaker donning identity masks in this “drama of self-exploration” that “the poet assumes and discards at the dictates of the plot.” He surmises that this is basically what negritude is – a phenomenon that “can be interpreted not as static datum or essence, but as a plastic concept in the process of construction.”<sup>357</sup> This is evident as the text progresses. In addition, there is an anthropomorphic shift that makes it more apparent that the narrator-protagonist is prodding his own being, yet deeply connected to the blighted land, its people, of whom he will speak valiantly:

...I would arrive sleek and young in this land of mine and I would say to this land whose loam is part of my flesh: “I have wandered for a long time and I am coming back to the deserted hideousness of your sores.”  
 I would come to this land of mine and I would say to it: “Embrace me without fear . . . And if all I can do is speak, it is for you I shall speak.”  
 And again I would say:  
 “My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth, my voice the freedom of those who break down in the prison holes of despair.”  
 And on the way I would say to myself:  
 “And above all, my body as well as my soul beware of assuming the sterile attitude of a spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of miseries is not a proscenium, a man screaming is not a dancing bear . . .”  
 And behold here I am come home!<sup>358</sup>

With this passage, Césaire heralds that the protagonist’s march of self-discovery is underway, concomitant with “this land whose loam is part of my flesh.” The goal is to bring

---

<sup>355</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, 5.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>357</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 27.

<sup>358</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, 17.



Martinique to the heights of another Caribbean colony that revolted against its diminished sense of self – “Haiti where negritude rose for the first time and stated that it believed in its humanity.”<sup>359</sup> For Gregson, this passage sets the emboldened speaker up as spokesperson for the oppressed. Still, this exercise of mask-wearing is a burrowing into Black subjectivity that implicates the narrator and those he speaks for, including the colonial processes that connect them. Thus, as his consciousness “leav(es) timid Europe which collects and proudly overrates itself” and he “summon(s) this beautiful egotism that ventures forth,” he is led to recall slavery in the Antilles: “My memory is encircled with blood. My memory has a belt of corpses!” The surrealist journey then finds him sitting with the stupor of his people and the stereotypes projected upon them that they have uncritically accepted and perhaps relished. He declares that he is swept up in a “sudden and beneficent inner revolution” that will allow him to “honour my repugnant ugliness.”<sup>360</sup> This ontological battle must face depravities of the past that cannot merely be elided for a transhistorical identity:

I refuse to pass off my puffiness for authentic glory.  
And I laugh at my former puerile fantasies.  
No, we’ve never been Amazons of the king of Dahomey, nor princes  
of Ghana with eight hundred camels, nor wise men in Timbuktu under  
Askia the Great, nor the architects of Djenné, nor Madhis, nor warriors.  
We don’t feel under our armpit the itch of those who in the old  
days carried a lance...

...And this land screamed for centuries that we are bestial brutes; that  
the human pulse stops at the gates of the barracoon; that we are walking  
compost hideously promising tender cane and silky cotton and they  
would brand us with red-hot irons and we would sleep in our excrement  
and they would sell us on the town square and an ell of English cloth and  
salted meat from Ireland cost less than we did, and this land was calm,  
tranquil, repeating that the spirit of the Lord was in its acts.<sup>361</sup>

---

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 23; 23, 25.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 27, 29.

Hence, finding the Black self for Césaire means rejecting essentialism and the “puerile fantasies” attached to it and coming to terms with the particularity of a history and subjecthood disconnected from any notion of a glorious African past. Instead, here is Martinique, the land where the colonized endured the inhumanity of enslavement and the colonizer insisted that “the spirit of the Lord was in its acts.” Furthermore, he posits that confronting this past also entails recognizing White supremacy’s negative construction of Blackness is powerful and cannot be easily overcome. This is exemplified by a pseudo real life scene in *Cahier* involving a man on a streetcar who is described as “hideous,” “grouchy,” “melancholy,” “slouched,” and “ugly.” Under the White gaze then, he is the embodiment of a “nigger” through and through. The protagonist distances himself from this man he observes in front of him, only to realize how such a posture is a betrayal of his emancipatory mission:

Me I turned, my eyes proclaiming that I had nothing in common with  
this monkey.  
He was comical and ugly,  
comical and ugly for sure.  
I displayed a big complicitous smile . . .  
My cowardice rediscovered!  
Hail to the three centuries that uphold my civil rights and my minimized  
blood.  
My heroism, what a farce!  
This town fits me to a t.  
And my soul is prostrate. Prostrate like this town in its refuse and mud.  
This town, my face of mud.<sup>362</sup>

To be sure, Césaire’s hero is not just taking history, the land, and his people to task on his road to negritude, but also his own unconscious. At this juncture, it is clear he is inseparable from who he is supposed to speak for. Gregson Davis elaborates on this:

All the prior reiterations of the island and its populace are now fully acknowledged to be aspects of the poet’s self. There is no glossing over, no convenient self-serving elisions of the embarrassing or unsightly. Above-all, the narrator-hero (“my heroism, what a farce!”) will be capable of achieving empathy with his race by uncompromising self-searching (“this town, my face of mud”). The ever-present temptation of all “assimilated” blacks to “identify with the

---

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 31.

oppressor is both faced and transcended. The means to that transcendence, we have come to learn in the course of the poem, is a fearless interior journey into one's subliminal consciousness.<sup>363</sup>

This turn in the text helps to setup the crescendo that begins several stanzas later when the protagonist points to pre-colonial African civilization as something he can draw pride from, even if generalized, as opposed to the specific kingdoms he refers to earlier in the poem. That is to say, those who “invented neither powder nor compass...could harness neither steam nor electricity...explored neither the seas nor the sky,” but also “those without whom the earth would not be the earth.”<sup>364</sup> Laying out this configuration is important as it announces that there is validity in culture outside the scope of European assimilation. Furthermore, this potential renewal of Black identity, as Césaire argued in “Conscience raciale,” is the result of the active process central to negritude:

...my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral

it takes root in the red flesh of the soil  
it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky  
it breaks through opaque prostration with its upright patience.<sup>365</sup>

Unlike a static structure like a “tower” or “cathedral,” this activity of self-discovery yields endless possibilities while rooting itself in elements of nature, or the earth – of “soil” and “sky” – thereby enabling transcendent assertiveness, or uprightness. The hero exclaims that the “White world” is “cracking,” unable to slow this reinvigoration of Blackness that he is locked into.<sup>366</sup> He continues the refrain that this impending emergence is for those who “never invented anything...never explored anything...never conquered anything” and beckons for the now “beautiful” land to “make me into a man of termination...of initiation...of mediation...of

---

<sup>363</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 46.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 37.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

germination...”<sup>367</sup> Indeed, Césaire appears to be exhibiting the influence that German ethnologist Leo Frobenius’ hypothesis that people of African descent were plant-like – appearing in a book translated in French in 1936 as *Histoire de la civilisation africaine* (History of African Civilization) – had on him.<sup>368</sup> At the same time, these passages should not be read in isolation, as the course of *Cahier* demonstrates that his decolonial project is about universalism, not particularism. This is underscored as negritude continues to transform the protagonist:

But in doing so, my heart, preserve me from all hatred  
do not make me into that man of hatred for whom I feel only hatred  
for sheltered as I am in this unique race  
you still know my catholic love  
you know that it is not from hatred of other races  
that I demand of myself to be a digger for this unique race  
that what I want  
is for universal hunger  
for universal thirst

to summon it free at last<sup>369</sup>

Therefore, as he continues to be a “digger for this unique race,” he does so on the basis of humanist universalism – not the “hatred of other races,” as a form of anti-racist racism, or the essentialization of race that some critics would accuse him of doing in *Cahier*. His appeals in the poem ultimately go beyond racial identification and speak to how the harms perpetrated against Black people have eviscerated their humanity. It is something he wants all to understand. So, even as the protagonist redeems himself, his land, and his people as the poem closes, finally standing strong and emboldened, accepting “without reservation” a sullied past interwoven into their identity, he makes the case that an inclusive universalist future is possible once the great crimes of the modern world, such as those affecting people of African descent, are attended to.

---

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>368</sup> Lilian Kesteloot notes “With what enthusiasm the young blacks read Frobenius! Césaire and Senghor confess their passion for this book, which from beginning to end showed the richness of African civilizations, an admiration recorded in many of their own writings.” See Kesteloot and Kennedy, *Black Writers in French*, 94-95. Gregson Davis states that Aimé Césaire in particular read and re-read the French translation of Frobenius’s original 1933 text “so frequently that you came to know whole sections of the text by heart.” See Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 9.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, though largely beyond the scope of this discussion, it should be noted that the reading of *Cahier* here underlines that while there are similarities, there are also divergences between Césaire's articulations of negritude and positions developed by the other two figures credited with founding the philosophy, especially Senghor. Although negritude for all three centres on the search for identity within an anti-racist, anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist framework, Senghor relies heavily upon racial essentialism for his point of departure. As illustrated above, while Césaire does venture into an exploration of Black identity, he does not subscribe to the belief that it is fixed, instead pointing to a fluidity and aggregation of experiences that people of African descent can draw upon as part of an internal liberation process. On the other hand, Senghor posits that there are innate cultural predilections that Africans possess, separate from Europeans, across time. For example, in the same year that *Cahier* was first published, Senghor wrote that "Negro is emotion as reason is Hellenic (Greek)."<sup>370</sup> Years later, he would expound on this concept, stating "European (White) reason is analytic; Negro reason is intuitive through participation."<sup>371</sup> He continues to distinguish between African and European rationality:

The European takes pleasure in recognizing the world through the reproduction of the object . . . the African from knowing it vitally through image and rhythm. With the European the chords of the senses lead to the heart and the head, with the African Negro to the heart and the belly.<sup>372</sup>

Even as it is well-intentioned, such biologically or culturally deterministic ideas can feed racist, colonialist, and imperialist policies that do not serve the masses of Black people.

Thinking through and validating pre-colonial African culture, including the ethnography that

---

<sup>370</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Ce que l'homme noir apporte (What the black man contributes)," in *L'homme de Couleur*, ed. Cardinal Verdier (Paris, Plon, 1939), 295.

<sup>371</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, "The spirit of civilization, or the laws of African negro culture," *Presence Africaine* nos. 8-9-10 (June-November 1956). The 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists (Paris/Sorbonne, September 19-22, 1956), 52

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

Frobenius and Senghor advance was a useful, if not inspirational exercise for Césaire, but it was a mere transitory return on his path towards revolutionary humanism.

To be sure, the foregoing examination of *Cahier* indicates that Césaire gravitated towards surrealism, and likewise Marxist theory, because of their humanist drive. Again, communists, socialists, and others beholden to Marxism raised colonialism as a focal point of their cause, and by extension the plight of Black people everywhere. This disposition provided a space for Césairean negritude to live, challenging the very notion of universalism within these leftist tendencies, which is to say nothing of liberalist logics.

### **Marxism and Anti-colonialism at Home and Abroad**

#### *Confronting tyranny in Martinique, entering politics with the Communist Party*

With the Second World War on the horizon in 1939, Aimé Césaire returned to Martinique along with his wife of two years, Suzanne, and their one-year-old child, Jacques, after completing his Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures (Diploma of Advanced Studies) at ENS with a thesis entitled, "The theme of the South in Black American literature" *Le Thème du Sud dans la poésie négro-américaine des Etats-Unis* (The Theme of the South in the Negro-American poetry of the United States).<sup>373</sup> Employed as a teacher at his alma mater, Lycée Schoelcher in the island's capital of Fort-de-France, and following the initial publication of *Cahier*, Césaire thrust himself into anti-colonial writing, co-founding the journal *Tropiques*. The journal was essentially a response to the rise of the French state, or Vichy regime, after the fall of the French Third Republic in 1940 when the country was invaded by Germany. Martinique was consequently governed by the Vichy regime for much of the Second World War period, while also enduring a kind of military occupation by the administration, along with the United States

---

<sup>373</sup> Apparently, a copy of this thesis has never been located and/or published anywhere. See Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 10-11.

navy, which corralled the French fleet when they entered the region. In an essay entitled “West Indians and Africans,” Frantz Fanon, a former student of Césaire’s, explains that the presence of thousands of French sailors, daily imposing their racist attitudes during their stay, had a jarring impact on the Black Martinican population: “The West Indian, in the presence of those men who despised him, began to have misgivings as to his values. The West Indian underwent his first metaphysical experience.”<sup>374</sup> After decades of an official policy of assimilation and civil rights that were technically passed on to them, which even allowed them to have Black representation in political positions on the island, they were forced to confront their status as colonial subjects in a very direct way during this ordeal. Thus, as James Arnold notes, “These conditions contributed to radicalizing Césaire and his friends, preparing them for a more anticolonialist posture at the end of the war.”<sup>375</sup>

*Tropiques* was ultimately a collaborative effort between Césaire and several other Martinican scholars, including his wife Suzanne – who had also been a writer for *L’Étudiant Noir* – and former *Légitime défense* member René Menil. Césaire served as editor of the publication which lasted from 1941 to 1945, despite the official policy of the Vichy regime to censor it. Robin Kelley observes that the writings in *Tropiques* uncover “the evolution of a sophisticated anticolonial stance as well as a vision of a postcolonial future.” He describes the journal’s theoretical underpinnings further in his book *Freedom Dreams*:

Theirs was a conception of freedom that drew on modernism and a deep appreciation for precolonial African modes of thought and practice; it drew on surrealism as the strategy of revolution of the mind and Marxism as revolution of the productive forces. It was an effort to carve out a position independent of all these forces, a kind of wedding of Negritude, Marxism, and surrealism...<sup>376</sup>

---

<sup>374</sup> Frantz Fanon, “West Indians and Africans,” in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 23.

<sup>375</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 12-13.

<sup>376</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 168-169.

*Tropiques* then illustrates the continual progression of Césaire’s intellectual thought. The themes, topics and aims of the journal were an amalgam of the ideas that he surveyed and wrote about in the ten years preceding its distribution. Although *Tropiques* is primarily deemed to be an ode to surrealism, or rather an innovation to the philosophy, it would not be enough to sustain Césaire’s ongoing clash with the Colonial Question in the French West Indies and his quest for revolutionary material change.<sup>377</sup> He gave some indication of this in his article “Panorama,” which appeared in February 1944, when he averred that “The Martinican Revolution will be made in the name of bread, of course; but also in the name of fresh air and poetry (which amounts to the same thing).”<sup>378</sup> By 1945, he entered the realm of representative politics and was elected mayor of Fort-de-France, as well as central Martinique’s deputy to the French National Assembly on the PCF ticket. His impact was almost immediate, as he cosponsored a bill the following year that transformed Martinique, along with other French territories, into départements d’outre-mer (overseas departments), formally integrating them into the French political structure and extending past and present laws to these former colonies.<sup>379</sup> Martinique’s status as a department was hardly the equivalent of the push for independent nation statehood that was building momentum at the time throughout the British Empire. However, Césaire believed that given the policy of assimilation in the colony and sheer desire by the Black masses to have the spirit of the French Revolution concretely bestowed upon them as had long been promised by republicans in the metropole, departmentalization was the most sound strategy to

---

<sup>377</sup> Kelley argues that Césaire and his colleagues “not only embraced surrealism,” but also “expanded it, enlarged its perspectives, and contributed enormously to theorizing the “domain of the Marvelous.” See *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>378</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Panorama” *Tropiques*, no. 1 (April 1941). The translation of this piece appears in Richardson and Fijalkowski, *Refusal of the Shadow*, 79-81., 81.

<sup>379</sup> For an overview of post-war Martinique, including the PCF activities and Césaire’s efforts as an elected statesman, see Armand Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique: De 1939 à 1971, Tome 3* [Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998].



pursue.<sup>380</sup> Nonetheless, for the discussion here, it is Césaire's foray into Marxist-based political organization that is perhaps most noteworthy at this juncture in his life. A decade earlier, he demanded that those who called for the involvement of people of African descent in proletariat struggle more seriously consider the particularities of race within that sphere. Now, he had officially consigned himself to it by becoming a member of the world's most prominent organization professing to be rooted in Marxism.

Césaire's reasons for joining the PCF and entering legislative politics were most certainly motivated by the situation on the ground in Martinique, rather than ideological comfort exclusively. He recalls that once he took office, he was alarmed that Fort-de-France was "devoid of essential equipment...the number of schools were insufficient," while the town of just 45,000 was "ravaged annually by typhoid fever because the water networks were dilapidated and in poor condition."<sup>381</sup> This was not only in the capital but "all of Martinique during the war and the regime of Vichy." Hence, as James Arnold observes, "The years immediately following the war were marked by a prolonged struggle...to ensure adequate primary school facilities, to improve the housing of the wretchedly poor, and to extend to the new Overseas Departments the social legislation that, in France proper, covered old-age pensions, health insurance (and) unemployment insurance."<sup>382</sup> Indeed, the desperation of the people that he had been elected to represent, and the general socio-economic concerns of the people of Martinique, had forced Aimé Césaire to confront the realities of class warfare like never before. Neither surrealism nor

---

<sup>380</sup> Drawing on Nicolas, Gary Wilder notes: "In response to critics of his support for the 1946 law, Césaire repeatedly explained that departmentalization corresponded to the longtime wishes of the Antillean people and enjoyed broad public support in the postwar period, especially among Communists, workers, and civil service employees. It was opposed only by a minority of right-wing white békés. Césaire and his colleagues seized a historic opportunity to pass a radical anticolonial law in a brief opening when Martinican and French politics were dominated by Communist legislators." See Gary Wilder, "Untimely Vision: Aime Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia," *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (Winter, 2009): 101-140., 107 at footnote 10.

<sup>381</sup> Alliot and Césaire, "*Le communisme est à l'ordre du jour*," 169-170.

<sup>382</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 173.

negritude on their own could attend to the everyday needs of the people of the island. Turning to Marxism and communism, or specifically, an alliance with the PCF, was perhaps an easy choice for Césaire given his ongoing proximity to these ideas. He explained why he joined the party in an official statement prepared for the PCF brochure in 1946:

I joined the Communist party because, in a world not yet cured of racism, where the fierce exploitation of colonial populations still persists, the Communist party embodies the will to work effectively for the coming and only social and political order we can accept – because it will be founded on the right of all men to dignity without regard to origin, religion or colour.<sup>383</sup>

Césaire's words echoed the sentiments of many people of African descent during the 1930s and 1940s, with respect to how they saw the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) – which would officially adopt the name Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) by 1952 – and its affiliated satellites like the PCF, along with the Comintern. In the realm of formal politics, the party was his best hope for addressing the condition of the colonized, especially the substantial proletariat majority that suffered on his home island. Yet, Césaire did not merely play a pedestrian role in the PCF when he joined but became an active and popular representative. He was invited to delegate meetings internationally and wrote poems and articles for the PCF. For instance, two of his articles appeared in *Les Lettres Françaises*, which was a literary magazine funded by the PCF and managed by party member, novelist, and poet Louis Aragon. The first sees Césaire offering commentary on international affairs while expressing concerns that the “warmongers” from capitalist countries remain a threat to the peaceful (communist) countries of the world, and states that peace between the two sides is necessary to avoid a Third World War.<sup>384</sup> The second article written for the publication was an analysis of a Hollywood film called *Santa Fe Trail*, which is a revisionist history of the American Civil War

---

<sup>383</sup> This quote is taken from pamphlet, “Why am I a Communist?” Originally published by the French Communist Party, in Aimé Césaire, *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 4.

<sup>384</sup> Alliot and Césaire, “*Le communisme est à l'ordre du jour*,” 189-190.

that attempts to “rehabilitate the values of the South” and present its wartime army in a positive light while portraying “supporters of democracy” and abolitionists as outlaws.<sup>385</sup> Césaire uses the 1940 film as an entry point to critique the current state of affairs in the United States with McCarthyism well underway in the country: “The America of 1949, called upon to be the America of Abraham Lincoln or the America of the Ku Klux Klan has chosen the America of the Ku Klux Klan.”<sup>386</sup> Given these views, along with his membership to the PCF, it is unsurprising that he was denied a transit visa by the United States government in October of that year.<sup>387</sup>

Césaire’s involvement with PCF activities in this late 1940s period did not mean that he had forgotten about the continual global impact of slavery and colonialism on people of African descent, but he was becoming increasingly comfortable putting class at the forefront of his discourse. Less than a year before he wrote the articles in *Les Lettres Françaises*, Césaire shared the podium with Gaston Monnerville – a member of the French Senate from French Guiana – and his long-time friend Léopold Sédar Senghor, before an audience at the historic Sorbonne, University of Paris, commemorating to the day the one-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of slavery. Although Césaire offered praise for the legendary abolitionist, legislator and Martinican representative Victor Schoelcher who wrote a decree abolishing slavery, he also used the speech as an opportunity to remark that slavery was consistent with France’s parliamentary republicanism, even though the current French government hoped the occasion would be a testament to their tradition of “tolerance and imperial benevolence.”<sup>388</sup> Césaire argued that republicanism consisted of two divergent strands – one that was radical and the other conservative. As Gary Wilder observes, “Rather than canonize the 1848 revolution as a victory

---

<sup>385</sup> This is how Alliot describes the film before reproducing an excerpt of Césaire’s article in *Ibid.*, 191

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 191-192.

<sup>387</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 175.

<sup>388</sup> Gary Wilder, “Race, Reason, Impasse: Césaire, Fanon, and the Legacy of Emancipation,” *Radical History Review*, issue 90 (Fall 2004):31-61., 31.

of enlightened republicanism over colonial backwardness, Césaire’s speech presented a revisionist history of emancipation to recuperate a radical current within the republican tradition—militant, urban, popular—that itself had fallen victim to the revolution.”<sup>389</sup> Hence, for Césaire, it was the “magnificent (working-class) people of Paris” that were the imperative actors in the campaign to end slavery, and not necessarily the procedural tradition of parliamentary republicanism. To help illustrate this point he cites an 1844 workers’ led petition to the Deputies of the French Assembly in which the former demanded that the latter abolish slavery “on the great principle of human brotherhood.”<sup>390</sup> Césaire further describes the character of the abstract Parisian worker in his speech:

He vegetates in the cellars and the attics described by Villerme, without fire, without meat, often without bread, but at the height of his misery, he finds even in this same suffering, enough grandeur, enough generosity to send an affectionate thought of solidarity with other people more oppressed than him: Thousands of negro slaves banished thousands of kilometres away from France in tiny islands.<sup>391</sup>

To be sure, Césaire’s admiration for and focus on the activity of the proletariat in the abolition of slavery reflected an outward unequivocal expression of Marxist analysis. Furthermore, like other Marxist writers, Césaire employed a historical materialist outlook to evoke the conditions of popular revolution. Yet, even as he conjures up the important historical moment with a corrective, he also makes connections to the present epoch, namely the shortcomings of emancipation. He reminds his audience that “Racism is here. It is not dead...The colonial problem confronts us, it is waiting to be resolved.”<sup>392</sup> With the ongoing marginalization of the formerly enslaved in the French West Indies in mind, Césaire portends at

---

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>390</sup> See “Section 4” in Aimé Césaire, *Victor Schoelcher et l’abolition de l’esclavage: suivi de trois discours* (“Victor Schoelcher and slavery (Lecture: Éditions La Capucin, 2004), 63-77., 68. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from this source are mine.

<sup>391</sup> Césaire refers to Louis-René Villermé, an economist who wrote on social issues including works on prisoners in the 1830s and on the everyday conditions of workers in Paris in the 1830s and 1840s. See Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid. 70.

the end of his discourse that “true emancipation is not that which is decreed, but which men conquer for themselves, it is not behind them but before them, and it is their responsibility to prepare it in common with the people of France in the luminous wake [*sillage*] of 1848.”<sup>393</sup> His melding of the not-so-distant past, present and future in this way is similar to one of C.L.R. James’ main objectives with the *Black Jacobins* – invoking a significant event where the French metropolitan proletariat expressed solidarity with the enslaved in the latter’s quest for emancipation – to inspire and support the contemporaneous anti-colonial efforts in the colonies. Likewise, Césaire’s historical materialist account candidly alludes to the inadequacy of abolition to free the formerly enslaved from the perpetual social ills of colonization. Two years later, in another speech of sorts, Aimé Césaire would produce his most explicit Marxist, anti-colonial piece to date, *Discours sur le colonialisme*.

### *The Colonial Question and anti-colonial Marxism*

Although Césaire may have hoped that the departmentalization of Martinique would propel the decolonization process forward in the island, or at least afford its inhabitants the same rights as the metropole, it was clear by the end of the 1940s that progress in this respect was nominal at best. French officials even tightened their grip on the island’s political affairs while maintaining their colonial attitudes with respect to policies concerning the Antilles and representatives like Césaire. The implementation of social legislation that was supposed to be extended to the departments following the passing of the 1946 law still had not been realized, effectively forestalling the measure of integration that Césaire expected departmentalization would bring.<sup>394</sup> As well, elsewhere around the world anti-colonial and independence efforts

---

<sup>393</sup> Ibid. 76. This quotation also appears in Wilder’s “Race, Reason, Impasse,” 32-33. The translation is his.

<sup>394</sup> Wilder, “Untimely Vision, 114. For France’s reluctance to implement social legislation in the overseas departments, see Bertrand François-Lubin, “Les méandres de la politique sociale outre-mer,” in 1946 – 1996:

were gaining serious momentum and developing into a legitimate movement. It was in this context, speaking from his position of repute as a famed poet, mayor of Fort-de-France and Central Martinique's deputy to the French Assembly as a member of the PCF that Césaire penned a speech, in the form of a book, on the colonial question in 1950. Like his address in Paris two years earlier, Césaire is primarily concerned with the Colonial Question in *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*) and uses a Marxist lens to open up space to talk about the matter further. Yet, his first non-fiction book did not repudiate other philosophical positions that he had adopted in previous years.

*Discourse on Colonialism* is indeed on the topic of colonialism, but rather than focus alone on the perils of the centuries-long institution, Césaire argues that the system is symptomatic of a depraved European/Western civilization. From the outset of the essay, he calls Europe "sick," "decadent" and "indefensible." However, Césaire's overtures mention that the current state of affairs is a result of "two centuries of bourgeois rule" which has made the West "incapable of solving the two major problems which its existence has given rise: the problem of the proletariat and the colonial problem."<sup>395</sup> In this way, the piece ultimately develops into a work that is simultaneously anti-colonial and Marxist, all while rebuking Western modernity. Césaire's anti-colonial indignation here is the corollary of his position on Western civilization, which he sees as being bound up with the bourgeoisie and their proliferation of capitalist society. True to his present Marxist positionality, he spends ample time heaping scorn on this ruling class, making it clear that they are responsible for the abhorrent acts that Europe or the West has or is engaged in. For instance, about the recent atrocities of the Adolf Hitler/Nazi-led holocaust during the Second World War, Césaire boldly states that the "very distinguished, very

---

*Cinquante ans de départementalisation outre-mer*, eds. Fred Constant and Justin Daniel (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 73 – 83.

<sup>395</sup> Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 31, 32.

humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century...has Hitler inside him.”<sup>396</sup>

Furthermore, through a series of quotations, he points out that even in the aftermath of the events of the holocaust, the French bourgeoisie, including notable theorists of law as well as politicians, were openly expressing ideas that aligned them with Nazi logic on nationalism and race.<sup>397</sup> The trajectory of this class cannot be changed, as it is “inevitable” that “the bourgeoisie is condemned to become every day more snarling, more openly ferocious, more shameless, more summarily barbarous...”<sup>398</sup> They cannot be counted on to progressively attend to the colonial problem or other wrongs of the world, since the bourgeoisie persistently “attempt to reduce the most human problems to comfortable, hollow notions.”<sup>399</sup> Thus, Césaire argues that “capitalist society, at its present stage, is incapable of establishing a concept of the rights of all men, just as it is has proved incapable of establishing a system of individual ethics.”<sup>400</sup>

Nonetheless, the book’s dual objective is probably best exemplified through Césaire’s appropriation of Marx’s theory to illuminate some constitutive elements and injustices of colonialism. To facilitate this critique, he first draws parallels between colonialism and capitalism quite openly, as when he responds to his question “what, fundamentally is colonization?”:

...the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies.<sup>401</sup>

By defining the origins of colonialism in the terms above – mirroring capitalism’s nascent stages or players and its inexorable growth towards imperialism – Césaire entices

---

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 33.

Marxists and others belonging to the political Left to think critically about colonialism through a lens that they were familiar with. In effect, capitalism and colonialism were inextricably linked, as the former was the cause of the latter; they did not emerge as distinct, independent, contemporaneous events. Yet, Césaire appears to implicitly analogize the two systems almost as separate entities to solicit a more palatable grasp of his monograph among its target audience. This methodology is again revealed when he expounds upon the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in a way that is synonymous with Marx's critique of the relationship between the class that owns the means of production and the labourer in capitalist society: "Between the colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses."<sup>402</sup> Césaire, therefore, adds that between the two antagonistic groups in the colonial setting there are only "relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production." Indeed, Césaire directly borrows from Marx when he describes this process as "proletarianization and mystification."<sup>403</sup> Mystification here alludes to Marx's notion of false consciousness. Just as false consciousness ultimately results in both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat adhering to ideologies deployed through myriad institutions by the bourgeois class for their benefit in capitalist society, so too is the perception of the world for the colonizer and colonized over-determined under colonialism. Césaire avows regarding colonialism that the dominant ideology or what Marx and Engels called "the ideas of the ruling class" in *German*

---

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 42, 44.



*Ideology*, it is fundamental that the colonizer is (racially) superior to the colonized.<sup>404</sup> In other words, it was continually justified because of the assumption that the history, culture, and nature of non-European people were inferior, while these purported civilizing missions of European empires ensued under the auspices of human progress. For Césaire, this racist logic was captured in the equation: “Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery.”<sup>405</sup>

Césaire broached Marx’s concept of false consciousness to raise a similar point in “Conscience raciale” and *Cahier*, albeit to discuss its subjective implications for the colonized, and likewise found it worthwhile to revisit the idea of alienation in *Discourse on Colonialism*. For Marx, under capitalism, money and commodities begin to stand in for human relations and human beings, objectifying them and robbing them of their human essence, thereby inducing alienation among the proletariat. This was no different for the colonized, prompting Césaire to declare another equation “colonization = thingification.”<sup>406</sup> He subsequently explains how his calculation led him to this conclusion:

*I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out...I am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life – from life, from the dance, from wisdom...I am talking about millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkies...I am talking about natural economies that have been disrupted – harmonious and viable economies adapted to the indigenous population – about crops destroyed, malnutrition permanently introduced, agricultural development oriented solely toward the benefit of metropolitan countries; about the looting of products, the looting of raw materials.*<sup>407</sup>

Again, as illustrated above, Césaire has a more expanded version of alienation than Marx’s concept, clearly reaching beyond its foundation in the exploited labourer. The colonized experience alienation in other crucial ways, such as through the expropriation of their land and

---

<sup>404</sup> See section Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas,” in *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur, 64-66.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 43.

what is produced therein, as well as from their “old societies” in general, and thus from their true sense of selves. Moreover, Césaire suggests that these “non-European civilizations” were something to behold: “They were communal societies, never societies of the few. They were societies that were not only ante-capitalist, as has been said, but also *anti-capitalist*. They were democratic societies, always. They were cooperative societies, fraternal societies. I make systematic defense of societies destroyed by imperialism.”<sup>408</sup> The inference that can be made here then is that colonized people face severe alienation, since not only have their societies been largely annihilated through colonialism, but they have had them exchanged with a situation that is its polar opposite. Yet, more can be gleaned from these comments. For instance, in addition to describing pre-colonial societies in a way that would appeal to communists and socialists, Césaire challenges the notion that the culture of the colonized was backwards, but rather a progressive representation of a society that revolutionaries in Europe were hopeful of, which had been materially “slowed down” and not helped by “European takeover.”<sup>409</sup>

Certainly, Aimé Césaire has several objectives in *Discourse on Colonialism*. Its underpinnings are anti-colonial and Marxist, but he innovatively wields these ideas to powerfully convey his position. Hence, while the author is expressly against colonialism because of the harm suffered by colonized people, the book further argues that colonialism is as natural an outgrowth of European modernity as Nazism, of which he believes there are undeniable parallels between the two. His incendiary critique posits that the view that Nazism was now being condemned because it was an affront to mankind was erroneous, especially since Hitler’s notion of the domination of one race over all others had been at least tacitly accepted and promoted for

---

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 46.

generations in Europe via colonialism.<sup>410</sup> Instead, Césaire declares that Nazism is treated differently than colonialism because “it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the ‘niggers’ of Africa.”<sup>411</sup> Indeed, he made a strong case for anti-colonialism with the tantalizing comparison, while also giving nuance and ultimately space to comprehend his concept of negritude, which was delivered poetically in *Cahier*. Put differently, since Europe is a “dying civilization” that has caused irreparable damage, room exists for other cultures and epistemologies to be taken up and its people validated, lest Europe squanders its “last *chance*” at moral redemption.<sup>412</sup> Still, it is Marx, Marxism, and working-class revolution that Césaire ultimately uses as his main conduit to delineate this path. Thus, his book concludes as follows:

Which comes down to saying that the salvation of Europe is not a matter of revolution in methods. It is a matter of the Revolution – the one which, until such time as there is a classless society, will substitute for the narrow tyranny of a dehumanized bourgeoisie the preponderance of the only class that still has a universal mission, because it suffers in its flesh from all the wrongs of history, from all the universal wrongs: the proletariat.<sup>413</sup>

This final paragraph of course cannot be detached from the poignant arguments that Césaire made throughout the lengthy essay. He advocates for proletariat revolution, and elsewhere in the text even suggests that for an example of the “new society that we must create with the help of all our brother slaves...we can look to the Soviet Union,” but this is conditional. Thus, Césaire expects that the proletarian revolution encompasses all oppressed peoples, regardless of race or nationality, which will dismantle the deleterious status quo of the West, particularly colonialism, thereby enabling colonized people to finally affirm their identities and achieve self-determination. Nevertheless, *Discourse on Colonialism* is a revision of certain

---

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 78. Emphasis in original.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

aspects of the theory of Marx and Marxist organizing, as Césaire manipulates these ideas to deconstruct and accentuate the colonial question within the parameters of communist revolution. Although elements of his poetic disposition, surrealist groundings and his theory of negritude are arguably all present in some way in this book, Césaire's fidelity to Marxism and communism stood out like never before. When the text was released through the PCF publishing house in 1950, he acknowledged the leader of the party, Maurice Thorez after the end of the piece.<sup>414</sup> That same year, on the occasion of Thorez's fiftieth birthday celebrations, Césaire wrote a poem called "Maurice Thorez Speaks," offering high praise of the PCF secretary general, which began: "The voice of Maurice Thorez/the antidote of the poisons of lies/the clear reason against the possessed...the thunderbird in the dull capitalist sky." He concluded the poem by affirming his pledge to communism writing: "COMMUNISM IS THE AGENDA OF THE DAY/communism is still the order of all days/blood of martyrs – pollen their light – Revolution their beautiful summer/and for all the bread and roses."<sup>415</sup> Césaire's celebrity within the PCF continued into the decade, as he was a committee member at the World Peace Council – an organization founded by the USSR Communist Party, purportedly to support peace campaigns around the world – where he denounced the arms race brought about by the "Cold War," citing capitalist countries as the agitators, and also condemned U.S. and Western imperialism as a threat to world security in a submitted report.<sup>416</sup> He even visited Moscow with a delegation of PCF members in 1953 upon the death of Joseph Stalin and wrote a vibrant account of what he saw during his seven days in the Soviet Union, presumably for his PCF-affiliated colleagues in La Fédération communiste de la Martinique (The Communist Federation of Martinique), which appeared in a

---

<sup>414</sup> Alliot and Césaire, "*Le communisme est à l'ordre du jour*," 184-185.

<sup>415</sup> This poem is reprinted in *Ibid.*, 165, 166.

<sup>416</sup> *Wikipoemes: Les poèmes de la littérature francophone*, "Pourquoi Je suis Communiste: Poésie/Poèmes d'Aimé Césaire." <http://www.wikipoemes.com/poemes/aimé-césaire/pourquoi-je-suis-communiste195196619.php>. Also see discussion in *Ibid.*, 150-154.

Russian journal<sup>417</sup>: “This is a great nation, proud that she is a guardian of...freedom, equality, world peace...these people know that, under any circumstances, the future belongs to them.” He contrasted what he observed with his own situation as a “son of one of the smallest nations on earth...suffering under the oppression of a colonial regime. But I have seen the Soviet Union...will triumph because it is linked to the great ideas of Lenin and Stalin.”<sup>418</sup> However, between 1955 and 1956, Aimé Césaire began to realize that the PCF would not be as valuable to him in his anti-colonial aspirations as he had imagined when joined ten years earlier.

### *Breaking with the PCF*

Césaire’s loyalty to the PCF never really appeared to wane during the first decade of his tenure with the party, but neither did his belief in the power and style of his poetry. The above-mentioned Louis Aragon was not a fan of Césaire’s work, or his association with Trotskyist André Breton, despite being a surrealist himself before the start of the Second World War. After the war, Aragon changed his position and by the mid-1950s he was given the authority to establish aesthetic norms for writers within the PCF and to ultimately coerce all the poets in the party to conform to a style that “proscribed free verse, pilloried formal individualism, and generally tied the traditional prosody of France to the interests of the revolutionary working class.”<sup>419</sup> The idea behind this was to make the poetry produced by the party more accessible to a wider audience. As Charles Dobzynski, the poet/editor of another PCF-supported journal at the

---

<sup>417</sup> Alliot discusses this trip to Moscow and the letter and also reproduces the letter in the book. See Alliot and Césaire, “*Le communisme est à l’ordre du jour*,” 193, 194.

<sup>418</sup> Aimé Césaire, “La voix de la Martinique” in *Il Litératournaïa gazéta* [Le Journal littéraire] no. 34 (March 19, 1953), p. 4. These quotes appear, translated, in Thomas Hale and Kora Véron, “Aimé Césaire’s Break from the Parti communiste français: Nouveaux élans, nouveaux défis,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2009): 47-62., 48.

<sup>419</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 180.

time recalls, “for a free spirit like Aimé Césaire, this idea was unacceptable.”<sup>420</sup> Indeed, in 1955, Césaire openly challenged the policy, taking the debate to an emerging cultural, political and literary pan-African magazine called *Présence Africaine: Revue Culturelle du Monde Noir* (*African Presence: Cultural Review of the Negro World*), where he would chastise another Black poet affiliated with the PCF named René Despestre who was from Haiti: “To hell with it Despestre to hell with it let Aragon talk.” In addition to encouraging Despestre to recall and exalt his African/Haitian heritage, Césaire dismissed the traditional prosody that Aragon called for as “the solemn wretchedness of an impoverished tune.”<sup>421</sup> Certainly, as James Arnold notes “the direction indicated by Aragon signified for Césaire the very cultural assimilationism that he had combated since the days of *Tropiques*.”<sup>422</sup>

The mere notion that the PCF would even suggest that his poetry should be constrained probably made Césaire reflect upon the activity of the party in general. While the party’s publishing houses appeared to be less supportive of his work, *Présence Africaine* was comprised of writers that shared his fervour for anti-colonialism and decolonization, and it actively highlighted his pieces. For example, the journal re-published *Discourse on Colonialism* in 1955 and *Cahier* the following year. For Césaire, decolonization remained firmly on his mind, evident in an article that appeared in *Présence Africaine* in 1956 entitled “Décolonisation pour les Antilles” (“Decolonization for the French West Indies”), along with an introduction for a book by Daniel Guérin released in the same year called *Les Antilles décolonisées* (*The Decolonized French West Indies*) where he lamented the fact that “ten years after” it was passed, the

---

<sup>420</sup> This is an excerpt from a quote that Alliot includes in his book from an interview he had with Charles Dobzynski in 2009. See Alliot and Césaire, “*Le communisme est à l’ordre du jour*,” 204.

<sup>421</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Réponse à Depestre poète haïtien (Eléments d’un art poétique)” in *Présence Africaine: Revue culturelle du monde noir*, (n.s.), no. 1-2 (April-July 1955), 114. These two quotations also appear, translated, in Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 181.

<sup>422</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 181.

departmentalization law had brought “disappointments” and “nausea” to the French West Indies.<sup>423</sup> On the other hand, by 1955, the PCF still had not developed an unequivocal position on colonialism, which would have been magnified for Césaire after that year’s Bandung Conference – a meeting of leaders of Asian and African countries who, among other things, declared a strictly anti-colonial policy, including condemning France’s colonial rule in Algeria. While Césaire delivered a speech for the Comité d’action des intellectuels contre poursuite de la guerre en Afrique du Nord (Action Committee of Intellectuals Against the Pursuit of War in North Africa) in January 1956, affirming his opposition to France’s policy in Algeria two months later, PCF deputies in the French Assembly supported the ruling government’s “special powers” decree that caused further atrocities in the colony.<sup>424</sup> Moreover, in the shadow of a speech by the new leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, disclosing many of the crimes that occurred during his predecessor’s nearly three decades of rule, the PCF was increasingly coming under pressure for their tacit support of these transgressions. Many intellectuals would break from the PCF, including Aimé Césaire, who officially resigned from the party on October 23, 1956.<sup>425</sup>

Césaire’s resignation came in the form of a letter he wrote directly to PCF Secretary General, Maurice Thorez. The main thread of the piece is that the PCF has compromised its principles and putative duties to such an extent that the author could no longer justify his affiliation. He began with the following words:

It would be easy for me to articulate, as much with respect to the French Communist Party as with respect to the Communist International as sponsored by the Soviet Union, a long list of grievances or disagreements...Lately, the harvest has been particularly bountiful: Khrushchev’s revelations concerning Stalin are enough to have plunged all those who have participated in communist activity, to whatever degree, into an abyss of shock, pain, and shame (or, at least, I

---

<sup>423</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Décolonisation pour les Antilles,” in *Présence Africaine: Revue culturelle du monde noir*, No. 7 (Octobre-Novembre 1955). Aimé Césaire, “Introduction,” in Daniel Guérin, *Les Antilles décolonisées* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956), 18. Translation is mine.

<sup>424</sup> Hale and Véron, “Aimé Césaire’s Break from the Parti communiste français,” 51.

<sup>425</sup> Hale and Véron note that many of the intellectuals who left the party did so following the invasion of Hungary by the Soviet Union, whereas Césaire’s resignation came the day before the invasion.

hope so)...The dead, the tortured, the executed — no, neither posthumous rehabilitations, nor national funerals, nor official speeches can overcome them. These are not the kind of ghosts that one can ward off with a mechanical phrase.<sup>426</sup>

The PCF was reluctant to denounce Stalin's policies and Césaire's moral outrage with the party was unyielding throughout the letter. He adds that in the aftermath of the revelations of these atrocities they showed "nothing but obstinacy in error; perseverance in lies; the absurd pretension of having never been wrong" and even "in the middle of the whirlwind, examines itself and claims to be satisfied."<sup>427</sup> Yet, predictably, less than halfway through the essay, Césaire turned to the issue of colonialism where he made a parenthetical reference to the above-mentioned PCF support of the French government: "I am alluding to the French Communist Party's vote on Algeria, by which it granted the Guy Mollet-Lacoste government full powers to carry out its North African policy — a circumstance that we have no guarantee will not be replicated in the future."<sup>428</sup> He had joined the PCF precisely because he believed that it was an opportunity for him to combine his Marxist leanings with anti-colonial ambition in pursuit of a revolutionary communist state order that would finally liberate people of African descent from a situation of relative disenfranchisement. After more than ten years as a member of the party, Césaire had indisputably not seen this vision realized:

Suffice it to say that we are convinced that our questions (or, if you prefer, the colonial question) cannot be treated as a part of a more important whole, a part over which others can negotiate or come to whatever compromise seems appropriate in light of a general situation, of which they alone have the right to take stock...In any case, it is clear that our struggle — the struggle of colonial peoples against colonialism, the struggle of peoples of color against racism — is more complex, or better yet, of a completely different nature than the fight of the French worker against French capitalism, and it cannot in any way be considered a part, a fragment, of that struggle.<sup>429</sup>

---

<sup>426</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez," trans. Chike Jeffers, *Social Text* 28, no.2 (Summer 2010): 145-152., 145.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid.



In essence, he came to the realization that under the present terms of the labour struggle, specifically here in the context of “French capitalism,” rooted in the emboldening of the predominantly White working class, a sincere anti-colonial agenda would not ever be pursued with any kind of urgency or priority. Non-White peoples continued to suffer mightily at the hands of French imperialism, and the PCF, like the Stalin-controlled Comintern, had proved insufficient for advancing the cause of colonized people. For Césaire, they could not attend to “the singularity of our problems, which cannot be reduced to any other problem” or the “singularity of our history, constructed out of terrible misfortunes that belong to no one else.”<sup>430</sup> Nonetheless, he makes it clear that “it is neither Marxism nor communism that I am renouncing,” but rather “what I want is that Marxism and communism be placed in the service of black peoples, and not black peoples in the service of Marxism and communism.”<sup>431</sup> In other words, Césaire is rejecting this form of Marxist organizing, which he believes not only subordinates the struggles of people of African descent and other colonized people but replicates the behaviour of the ruling class they purport to be opposed to:

This is not a desire to fight alone and a disdain for all alliances. It is a desire to distinguish between alliance and subordination, solidarity and resignation. It is exactly the latter of these pairs that threatens us in some of the glaring flaws we find in the members of the French Communist Party: their inveterate assimilationism; their unconscious chauvinism; their fairly simplistic faith, which they share with bourgeois Europeans, in the omnilateral superiority of the West; their belief that evolution as it took place in Europe is the only evolution possible, the only kind desirable, the kind the whole world must undergo...All these flaws lead to a literary tribe that, concerning everything and nothing, dogmatizes in the name of the party.<sup>432</sup>

Thus, the PCF does not represent the kind of wedding between anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism and anti-racism that attracted him to the party. Although Césaire still saw Marxism as central to his political project, if only for its revolutionary predilections, by the end of 1956 he endorses new forms of organizing that will place people of African descent at the centre of their

---

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 149.

fight. In short – in the same vein as what his Trinidadian counterpart proposed – organizations of their very own “made for them, made by them, and adapted to ends that they alone can determine,” that call for transnational “unity” among them.<sup>433</sup> Indeed, Césaire was now more than ever keen to explore the means through which he could apply negritude to a Marxist-based political apparatus, and would begin this process soon after his resignation with the founding of the Parti progressiste martiniquais (Martinican Progressive Party) towards the end of the decade.

## Conclusion

Aimé Césaire’s break from the PCF is one of the most well-known hallmarks of his career. Some have assumed that he signalled with this event a feeling that leftist ideas were an inadequate tool for dealing with the Black struggle and ran counter to his pronouncement of negritude. Nevertheless, a review of Césaire’s philosophic development unveils that Marxist engagement was a vital component of his activities from the early 1930s through to the late 1950s. Although he challenges conventions surrounding Marxism, its utility for him during this period is undeniable. In fact, his negritude is assembled by considering its core tenets.

Again, the journey toward revolutionary thought for Césaire begins with his connection to *Légitime défense*. Produced by his countrymen, this journal was explicit about using Marxist-Leninism as a guidepost towards anti-colonial revolution. They implored the privileged of the French West Indies to recognize the urgency of leading, promoting ideas, and engaging in activities that can uplift the working class and working poor among them. Still, despite their adoption of left-wing ideas, they stressed the importance of overlaying race and colour within class analysis to the point of building solidarity on that basis. Moreover, they encouraged their Antillean peers to find authenticity in their own literature, including sourcing a multi-faceted

---

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 148.

approach, not least of which included surrealism. This is a message that Césaire received, as some of his first publications could attest, though *Légitime défense*'s socio-political framework also appears to have influenced his outlook at a time when he says he was sympathetic to communist beliefs.

Césaire's study of Marx is palpable in "Conscience raciale," as he utilizes the latter's hypothesis about the worker and alienation, and the function of ideology in capitalist society to make persuasive points about Black subjectivity. At the same time, he argues that these paradigms are limited, as they cannot exclusively provide the tools needed to foment revolution for people of African descent. Instead, turning to racial self-consciousness, he postulates that cultural production for Black people which enables the sort of self-discovery that casts aside the toxicity of White supremacy on their psyche is the more appropriate course. This is the essence of what he calls negritude. However, Césaire's breakdown in "Conscience raciale" shows that he arrives at the theory by both taking up and critiquing Marxist understandings. Put another way, negritude is not incompatible with class war. What's more, he repeatedly demonstrates faithfulness to Marxism throughout the remainder of the decade, whether by association with "militant communists" at ENS, his association with and use of surrealism, and his fondness of the artists and works of the Harlem Renaissance.

Césairean negritude is substantiated further in *Cahier*. The poem clarifies that the decolonial method has a universalist purpose, despite its devotion to Black particularism. It does not stray away from Marxism, but rather takes its cue from "Conscience raciale" and accentuates that the obliteration of the humanity of people of African descent through slavery and colonialism must be grappled with and not allowed to fall by the wayside amid the drive for socialist revolution. Therefore, just as Marxists harp on the ways in which workers are

disconnected from themselves under capitalism, *Cahier* makes the point that the alignment of Blackness under assimilation and other prevailing colonial institutions and policies requires a reinvention of identity that, while eschewing racial essentialism, furnishes opportunities for people of African descent to access a positive sense of self. In the end, Césairean negritude paves the way for a more inclusive Western humanist universalism in conjunction with Marxism.

When Césaire returned to Martinique, leftist politics remained a mainstay for him as he continued tackling the Colonial Question. Indeed, he attached himself to France's largest communist institution at the time, the PCF, and became one of Martinique's deputies to the French National Assembly for both practical and ideological reasons. In his capacity as a member of the party, he continued to show overlaps between the worker's struggle, colonialism, and the fight for racial equality overall toward transformative change. This project was elevated via *Discourse on Colonialism* where he railed against Western modernity, including its offshoots of capitalism and colonialism. In effect, Césaire delineated the intertwined nature of the two systems to illustrate that socialists, communists or Marxists should be no less devoted to annihilating colonialism and its pernicious effects than they are to capitalist society. The point is made even stronger when he juxtaposed their tenets to elucidate similarities between the two – namely by expanding Marxist principles on alienation and false consciousness to make clear the function of colonialism for his audience. To be sure, *Discourse on Colonialism* reiterated Césairean thought as a modality that appeals to anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial sensibilities.

Finally, Césaire's decision to leave the PCF should be understood as a principled response, not only to their support for Stalin's dubious policies but to the party's inability to incorporate anti-colonial and anti-racist actions into its mandate. He was not renouncing

Marxism nor communism, but the orientation of the PCF and the Comintern that took Black and colonized people for granted, while reproducing hegemonic relations in the process. Indeed, it was an affirmation of his approach to politics, which would not allow for the Colonial Question to be elided in favour of a Euro-centric disposition that elevated class relations and minimized other societal harms. Thus, he recognized that colonized or oppressed people needed to abandon entities like the PCF and build organizations that would attend to their plight without reservation. Consistent with others that fall in line with the tradition of Black radicalism then, like C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire's allegiance to Marxism is vitally important. Without question, he found Marxian themes serviceable to his anti-colonial and anti-racist imaginings, even as he expanded them. These innovations, which also validate his philosophy of negritude, inevitably set him apart from many others on the Left and suggest that his contributions to revolutionary thought are worthy of study.

**SECTION TWO – CREATIVE WORKS, WOMEN & GENDER: THE  
INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF A RADICAL**

## Chapter 5 – Foreshadowing Radicalism: C.L.R. James’ Creative Mind

The perspicacity that C.L.R. James provides on bourgeois politics, race, (anti)colonialism, imperialism and revolution have resulted in significant contributions in the sphere of Black radical thought and beyond. At the same time, these offerings are not unassailable, as shortcomings do exist within James’ philosophical worldview. The topic of women and gender, for example, can be regarded as palpably under-analyzed and under-represented in his political writing. This omission may say much about the time and context that James was active, but it is also helpful in assessing the value of his various analyses given such limitations. On the other hand, Aaron Kamugisha argues that in thinking through his notion of the new society from the 1950s onwards, even as it is a “fragmentary topic that appears and disappears across his texts,” James calls for a “radical transformation of gender relations” and makes a “firm linkage of human freedom to the liberation of women.”<sup>434</sup> Although an assessment of James’ position on the “Woman Question” will be touched upon in a subsequent chapter, it is worth noting that this seeming interest in women and gender relations overall can be traced back to creative writings from the 1920s and 1930s, before James has a radical perspective. Still, there is a divergence between James’ political and creative outputs, as he delves into the topic more fervently in the latter than the former. Furthermore, these creative pieces even appear to be wound up in what was or what would become Jamesian thought a few years after they were published.

This chapter contextualizes and explores some of James’ short fiction publications, his only full-length novel, and his play centering on Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint

---

<sup>434</sup> Aaron Kamugisha, “The Hearts of Men?: Gender in the Late C.L.R. James,” *Small Axe* 15, no. 1 (March 2011): 76-94., 77. Kamugisha’s work here will be dealt with in greater depth in a subsequent chapter.

Louverture and the events surrounding the improbable liberation on the island of Hispaniola, as well as the book on the same topic. Specifically, in addition to themes of race, class, and colonialism, how women are included, excluded, or portrayed and how gender is constructed, deconstructed, or challenged within these texts are considered. The broader argument here is that representations of men and women in C.L.R. James' creative works signal critiques that ultimately translate into his overarching analytical outlook in his nonfictional writing. To be sure, the characters he sketches parallel individuals and views that he upheld during his course in the realm of radicalism.

### **Writing Fiction in Trinidad**

As previously mentioned, upon graduating from Queen's Royal College, in addition to pursuing his interests in cricket, C.L.R. James immersed himself in English literature as he geared towards a career as a writer. He co-founded the literary group Maverick in 1919 which initially was a group of friends who "exchanged ideas, books, records and manuscripts," but they eventually published lectures and articles on literature and drama.<sup>435</sup> By the middle of the 1920s, although James had made writing on a variety of topics a daily habit, he ultimately gravitated towards a particular genre, as he "assiduously studied the art of fiction."<sup>436</sup> His foundation was undoubtedly Eurocentric, but as the 1920s wore on a West Indian and Trinidad-specific national consciousness began to blossom among the populace that impelled him to expand his perspective. Thus, James and some of his peers endeavoured to write pieces that would both illustrate their literary skills, as well as the social and cultural nuances of Trinidad and Tobago, and the West Indies at large. Moreover, James's first mediations on women and gender took place within this space.

---

<sup>435</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 64.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.



Recall that in the 1920s, the political, economic, and social dynamics in the colony were shifting. There was labour unrest right at the start of the decade that gave rise to the powerful Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA), which would evolve into a political organization that galvanized the island's Black urban working class as they clamoured for social mobility, along with a greater share of industrial wealth, and resisted repressive laws. Politically, the Crown Colony structure that left the vast majority of people on the island unrepresented in government was being confronted as momentum built in favour of constitutional reform. Despite some inherent differences, alliances between the colony's working class and middle-class groups led to the dissolution of the Crown Colony model which essentially bestowed all governing power in the hands of a governor, accountable to only the Colonial Office in Britain.<sup>437</sup> With an increased Legislative Council of more elected officials who could challenge the governor, Trinidad and Tobago held its first-ever national elections in 1925. To be sure, significant global events such as the Russian Revolution and the First World War were having some impact on local political consciousness, with ideas around anti-colonialism and autonomy prompting an inward examination and appreciation of cultural outputs, particularly among some of the colony's intellectuals.

Hazel Carby contends that James' works in his early adulthood fit into a kind of intellectual rebirth that the colony was experiencing in the 1920s and 1930s, shaped by the Harlem Renaissance and the proletarian literature movement emerging out of the Soviet Union.

<sup>438</sup> In other words, the emphasis on cultural renewal by people of African descent in the context

---

<sup>437</sup> In contextualizing literary development at the time, Sander observes that the approach of the middle class in the colony towards the political state of affairs was "reformist and nationalist," while the working class "militant and socialist." See Reinhard Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening: West Indian Literature of the Nineteen-Thirties* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988), 8.

<sup>438</sup> See Hazel Carby, "Proletarian or Revolutionary Literature: C.L.R. James and the politics of the Trinidad Renaissance," *New Formations* no. 10 (Spring 1990).

of the United States that essentially characterized the Harlem Renaissance, along with writings by the Soviet Union's intelligentsia, inspired by everyday workers as part of their own cultural revolution around the same period, ultimately had a strong influence on what the intellectual community in Trinidad would produce. Furthermore, like the artists or writers who participated in these outside movements, this intellectual class in the British colony typically conceived of themselves as nationalists seeking to expound upon the distinct identity or culture of the oppressed masses on the island, as they increasingly advocated for self-determination. It is in this context that James began to mature as a writer with the field of fiction as his preferred genre.

### Short Stories

James wrote his first published piece in 1927, the aforementioned "La Divina Pastora," which earned him some recognition after it was selected for *The Best British Stories of 1928*.<sup>439</sup> Further, recall that by 1929, James and Alfred Mendes were co-editors of the *Trinidad* journal, which mainly consisted of short fiction and poetry by local writers with a goal of developing an indigenous literary tradition in the region and specifically in Trinidad. Mendes says that it was the First World War and the Russian Revolution that initially "drove us into writing about our islands."<sup>440</sup> Their work with *The Beacon* continued this so-called "Trinidad renaissance."<sup>441</sup> Although, as discussed earlier, *The Beacon* is much more political in its orientation than *Trinidad*, both shared a similar approach to the fictional compositions they endeavoured to publish. For instance, when the former organized a short story competition the editor and

---

<sup>439</sup> See James, "La Divina Pastora."

<sup>440</sup> Mendes is cited in Reinhard Sander, "Introduction: The Beacon and the Emergence of West Indian Literature," in *The Beacon: Volumes I-IV, 1931-1939*, with introductions by Reinhard Sander and Brinsley Samaroo (New York: Kraus, 1977), xix.

<sup>441</sup> This term is used to describe the explosion of literature in the colony in the 1930s. Norval Edwards argues that it can be linked to a genealogy of transitions in Caribbean fiction works in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. See Norval Edwards, "The Foundational Generation: From Beacon to Savacou," in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, eds. Michael Bucknor and Alison Donnell (New York: Routledge, 2011), 111-123.

founder of the magazine, Albert Gomes, felt compelled to express his dismay at what had been received up to the closing date:

We regret to write that few good stories have been received for this Competition...Several of the stories we have received read like advertisements for the enhancement of our tourist trade; others, like anecdotes from the Good Book and still more, like extracts from *True Story*... [T]he average Trinidad writer regards his fellow country-men as his inferiors, an uninteresting people who are not worth his while. He genuinely feels (and by this, of course, asserts his own feeling of inferiority) that with his people as characters his stories would be worth nothing. It is for this reason that he peoples them with creatures from other planets, American gangsters and English M.P.'s and revives familiar plots and characters from other *nth* rate periodicals... Why is the local writer so eager to attach mystery to cut and dried Trinidad?<sup>442</sup>

Indeed, most of the fictional pieces that would appear in *Trinidad* and *The Beacon* use Trinidad society as its background. James' "La Divina Pastora" provided a template for writers whose works were published in these journals. Written at a time when the cosmopolitan nature of Trinidad society would have been obvious to most that studied or spent time on the island, this short-fiction story tries to "capture the essence of the life of the descendants of members of the remnant Spanish community."<sup>443</sup> Helen Pyne-Timothy argues that James' objective is to "faithfully record cultural practices and beliefs of Trinidad society." Therefore, he highlights a ritual with origins in this particular group, namely "the belief in the miraculous power of La Divina Pastora, an indigenized version of the Virgin Mary which had become an important part of the folk-belief system in Trinidad."<sup>444</sup> On the other hand, the story also exemplifies a feature of a good portion of the works that *Trinidad* and *The Beacon* published, which "makes use of traditional short-story plot about a person who pursues one course of action relentlessly, only to discover that it has the opposite effect of what was intended, or this was unnecessary in the first

---

<sup>442</sup> Editorial, "Local Fiction," *The Beacon: A Monthly Review* 1, no. 10 (Jan.-Feb. 1932) [Privately published, 1931]: 1-2.

<sup>443</sup> Helen Pyne-Timothy, "Identity, Society and Meaning: A Study of the Early Studies of C.L.R. James," in *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*, eds. Selwyn Cudjoe and William Cain (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 51-60., 54.

<sup>444</sup> Pyne-Timothy, "Identity, Society and Meaning," 54.

place.”<sup>445</sup> For instance, “La Divina Pastora,” which James claims was told to him by his grandmother, centers around two woman characters – Anita Perez and her mother – who toil away on a cocoa plantation while hoping for upward social mobility, specifically through the younger’s marriage. He writes that Anita “had one earthly aim. She considered it her duty to get married as quickly as possible, first because in that retired spot it marked the sweet perfection of a woman’s existence, and secondly, because feminine youth and beauty if they exist, fade early in the hard work on the cocoa plantation.” He adds that “She had no thought of woman’s rights,” only that through marriage there is a chance that “this hard life in the cocoa would cease.”<sup>446</sup> In order to bring about a proposal from a wealthy farmer who regularly visited her, but had not expressed any romantic interest, Anita makes a pilgrimage to see a mystical saint and offers it “her only ornament,” a gold chain. Upon her return, she is courted by the farmer due to events seemingly unrelated to the sacrifice, and following an outing with him, she collapses at home just as the chain reappears.

James makes some noteworthy statements in his narration on Anita that are suggestive of a specific stance on women in colonial society who subscribe to certain cultural or religious practices in pursuit of a goal – or ideals that they think will make them happier. In essence, he decries the notion that women should blindly rely on either the mystical or their partnership with men, to improve their life circumstances, rather than belief in their independent activity. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that James and his colleagues have certain social, political, and cultural aims undergirding these stories above all else. For instance, in “Turner’s Prosperity,” which appeared in *Trinidad*’s first issue, James similarly follows the cautionary tale style, yet its subtle critique on middle-class idealism reveals another salient aspect of much of the

---

<sup>445</sup>Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening*, 49.

<sup>446</sup> C.L.R. James, “La Divina Pastora,” 25.

literature being published by the magazines that he is affiliated with at this time.<sup>447</sup> In this short-fiction James writes about a clerk, Turner, who finds himself in debt as he tries to sustain and aspire to a lifestyle that he cannot afford. Turner is presented with a reprieve by his manager, but instead of using it to work towards paying off his debts, he and his wife concoct a scheme to double the amount of money they owe and leverage the offer as a loan for other investments. However, they are unsuccessful as the offer is rescinded and the lesson of the story manifests when the manager indicates that he could have helped Turner if the debt was half the amount that he claimed. Thus, as Frank Rosengarten remarks, “Turner’s ‘prosperity’ turns out to be Turner’s downfall.”<sup>448</sup> On the other hand, it would be fair to also consider that James intended to emphasize the irony of venture capitalism, as well as who is actually able to benefit from the larger system of commerce in the colonial setting.<sup>449</sup> Certainly for many of Trinidad and Tobago’s inhabitants of non-European ancestry, like Turner, socio-economic mobility would have been a struggle. So, it is no accident then that while James portrays the desperation of the indebted protagonist, along with creditors of African and Indian descent seeking to recoup their small loan amounts from him, Turner’s employer – a White Scottish man – is the only person in his purview of middle-class reputation who has the capacity to both provide wages to him and loan him at least as much money as he owes to his creditors.

Although laying out the socio-economic dynamics on the island is central to the story, it is interesting that Turner’s wife is depicted as the mastermind behind the plan for the couple to enter the entrepreneurial class. So, like “La Divina Pastora,” James again evokes the messaging

---

<sup>447</sup> C.L.R. James, “Turner’s Prosperity,” in *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings* (London: Allison & Busby 1980), 9-13. First published in *Trinidad* no. 1 (December 1929).

<sup>448</sup> Frank Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary: C.L.R. James and the Struggle for a New Society* (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2008), 171.

<sup>449</sup> Aldon Lyndon Nielsen, *C.L.R. James: A Critical Introduction* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997), 21.

of a woman who engages in risky behaviour based on immaterial assumptions in search of a higher-class position. Turner's prosperity then, or downfall, is tied to his wife's desire to reach this status. Ultimately, Turner's wife, and Turner, suffer devastating consequences in their quest for bourgeois ambitions as propagated in colonial society that is inherently out of reach for them. Hence, this story sees James' again using a female character to critique the working-class pursuit of middle-class ethics.

*Writing barrack-yard literature, the open challenge to Victorian bourgeois idealism*

Barrack-yard literature is another genre of fiction that emerges from *Trinidad* and *The Beacon* that would become distinguishable for explicitly subverting middle-class sensibilities by focusing on the poor and working-class on the island, as well as normative ideas about gender. As was discussed in an earlier chapter, akin to Gomes' editorial above calling for a kind of narrative realism for the stories that *The Beacon* wished to publish, these stories were fictional pieces based in the barrack-yards or urban slums of Trinidad. C.L.R. James would be one of a handful of authors that authentically wrote within this genre.<sup>450</sup> Peter Ayers offers this description of this kind of writing:

Barrack-yard literature, as the name suggests, is rooted in a particular social, economic environment...The writers use the spiritual, moral, and sexual values they find in the yards as the basis of an explicit or implicit attack on the conventional values of bourgeois society. The most apparent characteristic of such literature is its use of the techniques of social realism to gain an impression of immediacy and involvement. Selected details of daily life are given without comment or censure, and the reader is compelled to accept the assumptions of the yard as his own. The writers use the yards to form a closed environment, in which the values and prejudices of the reader are shown to have no place.<sup>451</sup>

---

<sup>450</sup> Sander talks about this authenticity matter. See Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening*, 55.

<sup>451</sup> Peter Ayers as quoted in Sander, *From Trinidad*, 12-13.

Curiously, with the vulgarities of the barrack-yard as its foreground, fictional works like James' "Triumph" are driven by relations between men and women, with the writers laying "great stress on the independence and vitality of the women who lived in these yards."<sup>452</sup>

"Triumph" begins with a description of the squalid conditions in which the story is set and the inhabitants of "Port-of-Spain proper" who are the "porters, the prostitutes, carter-men, washerwomen and domestic servants of the city."<sup>453</sup> As part of this introduction, James also explains that historically, in addition to precarity, the barrack-yard is a place where cultural elements of Trinidad like carnival flourish, thereby distinguishing it and its people from the slums of England and the United States. The plot itself revolves around a prostitute, Mamitz, who is badly beaten by her lover and abandoned after being accused by him of infidelity. Following this incident, Mamitz is unable to get another man to "keep" her despite her "very obvious attractions" and is convinced by her friend Celestine that a curse has been put on her by their jealous neighbour Irene. Mamitz's luck begins to change when she partakes in a cleansing regime recommended to her by Celestine to escape the curse. The story essentially closes after Mamitz and Celestine successfully thwart Irene's attempt to facilitate the departure of Mamitz's main source of income, Nicolas, leading to even greater earnings for the two women.

As with "La Divina Pastora," "Triumph" also sees James alluding to the diversity of the Trinidad population, as he presents characters that are originally from Guyana, Barbados and St. Vincent and even mentions the presence of descendants of French aristocrats in the island. More strikingly, however, is that both short fictions resemble in the sense that "supernatural powers trigger the central conflict" – again illustrating how the paranormal crucially forms part of the folk-belief system in Trinidadian culture – while ultimately showing in the stories that "power

---

<sup>452</sup> Sander, *The Trinidad Awakening*, 9.

<sup>453</sup> C.L.R. James, "Triumph," in Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Reader*, 29-40., 29.

lies not with religious deities or obeah, but with women themselves.”<sup>454</sup> Indeed, in “Triumph,” it is Celestine’s sense of empowerment and encouraging words that motivate Mamitz to redeem herself and exert agency in her affairs. In the end, both women usurp the power dynamics inherent in prostitution by resolutely rejecting abuse and exploitation and wielding their independence. Further, Mamitz and Celestine defy societal norms about women at this historical juncture, as both the dominance of Victorian culture and religious values in the British colony typically made women subordinate to men. In this way, the Mamitz character is a sharp contrast to her opposite number, Anita, in “La Divina Pastora.” Helen Pyne-Timothy explains the latter in her article, “Identity, Society and Meaning: A Study of the Early Stories of C.L.R. James”:

James deals with the plight of the poor woman, who, within the frame of the narrow economic opportunity of the society and the mores inculcated by Roman Catholic religion, has no choice but to marry; but she has no control over her fate or condition, and she can only wait passively for the male agent to provide the opportunity for her to change her life. Emerging from James’s treatment stagnation and sterility in the lives of these women, Anita and her mother, and therefore by implication, in the life of this entire community...James implicitly criticizes the passivity of the woman and her dependence on religion and miracles rather than will for her fate.<sup>455</sup>

Although Pyne-Timothy may be anticipating James’ subsequent fictional works with her critique, it is rather clear that the tone and objective of “La Divina Pastora” and “Triumph” are different. Unlike the rural community in the former, the barrack-yard in the latter is far from sterile and women are not bound by monogamy for their fulfilment. Even as both Anita and Mamitz are dependent on men for their prosperity, Mamitz recognizes her value to the men that maintain her livelihood by ensuring that their engagements are mutually beneficial. Anita on the other hand expresses no volition and is unable to realize that her male suitor finds her alluring, notwithstanding her appeals to the supernatural. James remarks that Anita “had no thoughts of woman’s rights” and that for women like her, “marriage marked the sweet perfection of a

---

<sup>454</sup> Chris Johnson, “Sex and the Subversive Alien: The moral life of C.L.R. James,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14, nos. 1&2, (May 2011): 185-203., 190.

<sup>455</sup> Pyne-Timothy, “Identity, Society and Meaning,” 54-55.



woman's existence." His portrayal of the barrack-yard community in "Triumph" repudiates this idea decisively by illustrating that women's rights – their wants, needs and desires – can be asserted exclusively through their independence and non-monogamous existence.

Conversely, Carby has argued that C.L.R. James is not progressive on the "Woman Question" in this late 1920s period or the decade that followed.<sup>456</sup> For instance, in her view, barrack-yard fiction, like "Triumph," is an exercise in middle-class/intellectual voyeurism, with the narrator or protagonist looking in on the (female) working-class to juxtapose "their social and political passions" in relation to his own.<sup>457</sup> Further, Carby avers elsewhere that this kind of literature could be read as "sympathetic fictions of women's lives in Trinidad" and "representations of the way in which the sexuality of poor women commodified under colonial capitalism." Yet, the fact that James expends so much thought and space on sketching women characters as potential autonomous agents of change, particularly society's most disregarded, is notable.<sup>458</sup>

Around the time that "Triumph" was released, James began writing a longer barrack-yard story called *Minty Alley* where the same themes, and gender relations more generally, are explored with greater depth. Although the book would not be published until 1936, several years after he had left Trinidad for England, it is useful for gaining a greater understanding of James' approach to these matters as a fictional writer in the colony during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

### **Race, Class, and Gender in *Minty Alley***

---

<sup>456</sup> See Hazel Carby, "Body Lines and Color Lines" (Chapter 4) in *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 113-132.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>458</sup> Carby, "Proletarian or Revolutionary Literature," 106.

At a basic level, *Minty Alley* is a coming-of-age novel about a young man of African descent who belongs to Trinidad and Tobago's middle class, and despite his privilege, knows very little about life outside of the books he has read and what his education has told him about the world. The story begins with this central character, "Haynes," making the odd decision to move into a slum house following the death of his mother to save money. There, Haynes meets working-class counterparts who are as enchanted by him as he is by them. "Mrs. Rouse" is the landlord of No.2 Minty Alley, but lives there with Haynes and the other tenants, including her niece "Maisie"; her common-law husband "Benoit"; and "Miss Atwell," "Nurse Jackson," and "Philomen" among others. The main characters remarkably confide in Haynes as their emotions, perspectives and idiosyncrasies are revealed through these interactions.

James uses the lead character to explore a specific barrack-yard setting on Minty Alley, while the plot and characters develop with him as its narrative device. Inspired by his own experience of living in a barrack-yard in the late 1920s, James positions Haynes as a representative of the Black middle class who engages in a cultural, or rather, class exchange with the country's urban working class through his residence in the barrack-yard. Yet, the novel is more about illustrating the value of the latter group as opposed to the former. While the colony's middle class generally assumed that its working class is parochial and uninspiring, James instead reveals that there is much to be gained from them, as seen in Haynes' development in the book. Indeed, while the other main characters in the story appear to assume that Hayes' class position has bestowed upon him superior knowledge or acuity that they lack, James depicts Haynes as prosaic relative to his barrack-yard counterparts. Haynes is a titillated spectator of the drama, intrigue and passions that abound at No.2 Minty Alley, as he observes that the residents either cheat, lie, fight, argue or express themselves sexually in ways he was not exposed to before

moving to the barrack-yard. Moreover, while James accentuates the vibrancy of the working class in *Minty Alley* through the vantage point of Haynes, like “Triumph,” it is the author's particular construction of gender and its intersection with race and class in his portrayal of women that is the driving force behind the story.

As with his other fictional work, James depicts the diverse makeup of Trinidadian society in *Minty Alley* through the book's main characters, delving further into racial descriptors in this piece than the others before it. Early in the novel, Mrs. Rouse is described to the reader: “Her face was a smooth light-brown with a fine aquiline nose and well-cut firm lips. The strain of white ancestry responsible for the nose was not recent, for her hair was coarse and essentially negriod.”<sup>459</sup> Shortly thereafter Haynes meets Mrs. Rouse's daughter, Maisie, whom he notes though “not as light in colour as the aunt, she also was smooth-skinned and brown.”<sup>460</sup> However, the curiosity of racial phenotype as it correlates with class ultimately manifests when Haynes first sees Nurse Jackson's son, Sonny: “The boy, who at once obeyed orders was about eight years old, unhealthy looking but cute. It was his colour, however, which rather startled Mr. Haynes. He wondered at the presence of so fair skin among all those dark people.”<sup>461</sup> The narrator pushes this point further when Haynes has his first close interaction with Nurse Jackson and scrutinizes her appearance:

She was to all appearances white, but tell-tale finger-nails showed the coloured blood. She was somewhere in the thirties, late thirties, battered by life, but certainly of superior style and breeding to the others in the house. Not that Mrs. Rouse, for instance, was in any way vulgar. Not at all. But from the nurse's deportment and speech, Haynes felt instinctively that she had been reared in surroundings different to her present position. Or perhaps the nurse's training had helped to give a refined quality to her voice and manner. He noted again that extreme fairness of her complexion and her long, silky, almost golden hair. If she had had money she would have been able to take her place with the white aristocracy, ninety-nine per cent of whom had more coloured blood than she had. Benoit didn't seem the type of man to attract her. He was very

---

<sup>459</sup> C.L.R. James, *Minty Alley* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 26.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 29.

black, with no compensation of money, profession or personal charm to atone for the social and economic disadvantages of his black skin...

Life had left its mark upon her, in her weather-beaten body and hard style as much as in the fact that she, a professional woman with so fair skin, lived openly and without shame in the house of these lowly black folk.<sup>462</sup>

Through the description of Nurse Jackson and Benoit, James lays bare the entrenched correlation between colour, class, and gender in colonial society. The character Benoit recognizes the significance of seducing this “nice woman,” extolling her “Nice colour, straight hair”<sup>463</sup> and later telling Haynes that a “white woman is too sweet,” especially as he would benefit materially from her socio-economic status.<sup>464</sup> On the other hand, the presence of Nurse Jackson and her relationship with Benoit disrupts notions of racial stratification, while also generating more interest in this micro-chasm of the working class. The insertion of Philomen, a woman of Indian ancestry who works at No. 2 Minty Alley, has a similar effect.

During the 1920s and 1930s, it would not have been common for people of African descent and people of Indian descent to cohabitate in Trinidad. Indeed, the geographic divide that typically existed between the two groups alone – urban versus rural – along with how their differences were fomented by the colonial regime, often made them suspicious of one another.<sup>465</sup> James uses the character Philomen to address and defy this reality, even as he pushes his story forward and exhibits the varying complexities of the working class on the island. Philomen is the only identifiable person of Indian descent in Minty Alley but is regarded as a friend of Mrs. Rouse despite her clear role as a servant in the household. Yet, Maisie finds her presence deplorable. Upon learning of her niece’s attack on Philomen after Maisie discovered that

---

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 67. Here Benoit mentions that Nurse’s employer gave her “a big bottle of lotion, a bottle with a gold stopper and ten dollars as a present. Five was mine.”

<sup>465</sup> See, Kevin Yelvington, *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Post-emancipation Social and Cultural Life* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1999).

Philomen borrowed Mrs. Rouse's comb, Mrs. Rouse tells Haynes that Maisie "called Philomen so much coolie dog, so much lousy head, ask her what she know about comb and brush in the village where she from." In subsequently explaining herself to Haynes, Maisie avows: "All coolie head have lice. And she too nasty." James' narrator quickly rebuts this claim: "This was an out and out slander of Philomen, who, as is customary with Indians, bathed often, more often than anybody in the house, getting up at extraordinary early hours to do so before her work began."<sup>466</sup> Thus, James' treatment of Philomen falls within the scope of contesting the norms of colonial society, namely through female characters, even though she has a minor role in the book. At the same time, he finds himself reproducing stereotypes about the submissiveness of Indian women through this marginal character. Philomen is deprived of any agency in the story as she does not stand up to Maisie's reprehensible behaviour, while it is the narrator who in the end defends her from discriminatory categorization.

#### *Confronting gender norms in Minty Alley*

Although Haynes is the protagonist in this working-class tale, as with "Triumph," it is the women of *Minty Alley* that the story is built around. Aside from Haynes and Benoit, the men in the novel are akin to background props in comparison to their women counterparts. Without a doubt, James believes he can tell a gripping story without making men the focal point. Furthermore, he once again dislocates assumptions about gender roles by highlighting the agency of the women in the barrack-yard. These are women that run afoul of Victorian sensibility specifically due to their class position. Even as there remains an expectation that their men will or should be supporting them financially, they have been forced to live on the margins of society where they must find a way to independently sustain themselves. We learn that Miss Atwell,

---

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 114.

Mrs. Rouse and Nurse Jackson have all had their livelihoods compromised by the actions of men who were supposed to love and/or support them. For instance, when Haynes first meets Miss Atwell, the narrator describes her as being “in defensive confinement” after the man who had kept her “had not turned up for weeks,” while she consequently “owed rent, she owed for other things, and was in fear of seizure.”<sup>467</sup> Later it is revealed that Miss Atwell’s keeper is “so remiss in his visits and paying of rent that she had sought and obtained employment in a shirt factory, where she is working twelve hours a day...”<sup>468</sup> Despite her fair skin and laudable profession, Nurse Jackson appears to experience a similar sense of betrayal and lack of security as she is left to care for her son in the absence of the boy’s father – with her track record of abusing the child to boot; marries Benoit, then leaves him when he falls ill; and she is later convicted of theft. Mrs. Rouse on the other hand is abandoned by her husband (Mr. Rouse) and then Benoit; struggles with the upkeep of No. 2 Minty Alley; and can scarcely achieve her own sustenance through a fledging cake business.

In contrast to these women, however, is Maisie. Throughout *Minty Alley*, she clashes with Mrs. Rouse, while revealing herself to be the opposite of her passive aunt. Mrs. Rouse’s character traits are most conspicuous viz a vis her relationship with Benoit. Benoit is lazy, unfaithful and feels entitled to the things that Mrs. Rouse does for him. Mrs. Rouse on the other hand continually enables Benoit, making excuses for the unbalanced nature of their relationship including his infidelities: “He help me well and we made some money and we live a happy life. We had our little troubles, but the King and Queen have them, and he was always a man like a little frock. But all men are like that, and when you married a man and get to know him well

---

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 142.

there's plenty of things you must see and don't see."<sup>469</sup> Even when Benoit takes his selfishness to new heights by leaving Mrs. Rouse to marry Nurse Jackson, she remains devoted to him and looks towards the mystical: "three times a day the scent of incense and asafoetida burning in her bedroom poisoned the atmosphere. She was using all the science she knew to win back Benoit."<sup>470</sup> Indeed, she convinces herself that Nurse Jackson had used the power of obeah to lure Benoit away from her.

While there is a general sense of deep empathy for Mrs. Rouse from the women in the barrack-yard after Benoit's betrayal, Maisie does not share this sentiment. She sees Benoit for who he is and is almost incredulous at the notion that her aunt would be disappointed about his absence. After Miss Atwell tells Mrs. Rouse to "trust in God," Maisie retorts: "In God we trus', but in man we bus'. All you still talking about that worthless Benoit?"<sup>471</sup> Despite her young age, Maisie exhibits a degree of sagaciousness and independence that the other women in this story lack and she condemns them for it: "All old women, stupid when it come to a man, I notice that...Perhaps if she did handle the man differently from early all of this wouldn't have happened. Catch me crying after any man. I tell you!"<sup>472</sup>

Surely by design, Mrs. Rouse resembles the kind of submissiveness and fidelity to the supernatural that James is implicitly unsympathetic of in "La Divina Pastora" and "Triumph." It is hardly surprising then that her plight is such an integral component of the novel. Moreover, in her critique of the aunt and niece characters, Barbara Paul-Emile adds that Mrs. Rouse fits the archetype of a martyr as she "persists in giving to someone who uses her gifts to continue in destructive patterns...As Benoit becomes more irresponsible and selfish, Mrs. Rouse becomes

---

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 93.

more devoted, and giving.”<sup>473</sup> Contrarily, Maisie represents the warrior archetype, with her “courage, self-confidence, and a willingness to face the odds.”<sup>474</sup> This makes Maisie a magnetic character, principally since she shares these qualities with no one else in the book. Paul-Emile adds that “While particular figures in *Minty Alley* might draw empathy, it is Maisie who wins respect.” Furthermore, like Celestine and Mamitz in “Triumph,” James imbues Maisie with a certain vitality that both encourages this warrior spirit and challenges contemporaneous assumptions about working-class women. Perhaps more impressively though, it is through Maisie that normative gender constructions relating to both men and women are discursively confronted as evidenced in the dialogue above.

Just as James explores femininity through the women in *Minty Alley*, he undertakes a similar exercise with the novel’s men, namely its central character. At the beginning of the story, Haynes is not portrayed with traditional (Caribbean) masculine traits. For example, even though he moves on his own to the barrack-yard, he is still coddled by his mother’s house servant, Ella. The women in No.2 *Minty Alley* see him as “soft” and somewhat naïve.<sup>475</sup> Haynes sticks to himself unless called upon, which leads Benoit to question his heterosexuality: You are a funny fellow...What’s wrong? You sick?...You don’t go after girls?..<sup>476</sup> Unlike Haynes, Benoit feels empowered through his promiscuity and sense of control over the women around him. Indeed, Benoit embodies the kind of conventional masculinity that sees women as subservient beings to be dominated by men. Although Haynes has the respect of women around him due to his bookishness and approachable demeanour, as the story progresses, and Benoit positions himself as a mentor to the young, sexually inexperienced Haynes, there is a marked

---

<sup>473</sup> Barbara Paul-Emile, “Gender Dynamics in James’s *Minty Alley*,” in Cudjoe and Cain, *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*, 72-78, 74.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>475</sup> James, *Minty Alley*, 53.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.



shift in the latter's masculinity. Haynes' outlook on the attention that he receives from the women in the barrack-yard is far different than when he first arrived. He observes "how these women centred round a man." He then says to himself "It's good to be a man," and then "girded himself for the task of showing both Maisie and himself what a man he was."<sup>477</sup> Without question, Haynes' performance of masculinity is heavily influenced by Benoit and it shows in his sexual confidence: "'Hold her and kiss her,' Benoit had said. And now he felt that he could do what he liked with Maisie when he pleased."<sup>478</sup>

With Benoit no longer residing at Minty Alley, Haynes assumes the role of the head of the household with broadening responsibilities and authority over the women at No. 2 Minty Alley: "...he was the master of the house. Nothing was ever done without consulting him."<sup>479</sup> At one point, he even takes on a paternalistic role with Maisie and tries to admonish her for her decision-making. Maisie responds to him with "a smile – slow, amused almost derisive" and says: "What next, teacher?" Haynes reacts to this with a threat of violence: "You want smacking."<sup>480</sup> This is a far cry from the timid, confrontation-averse individual who first came to the barrack-yard months earlier and Maisie, unsurprisingly, immediately calls out his performance: "Ha... You are getting on, Mr. Hayes. When you first came here you couldn't say boo to a goose."<sup>481</sup> Nonetheless, Haynes' purported ascendancy into manhood ultimately becomes subdued by the end of the story. The woman with whom he shares romantic feelings and believes he has some control, Maisie, leaves him for potential opportunities in the United States. There is also very little Haynes can do or say when Mrs. Rouse must sell the house. Recognizing Haynes' lack of independence despite his ostensible transformation, Mrs. Rouse

---

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

first looks for a new lodging for him and then instructs him to contact Ella for assistance. To which Haynes simply replies: “Yes, I know.”<sup>482</sup>

James’ intervention in colonial constructions of gender is quite remarkable. He appears to be critical of celebrated notions of Caribbean masculinity and patriarchy in a way that indubitably would have been uncommon at the time. The toxicity of this masculinity is revealed through both Benoit and Haynes. Benoit who is perhaps the proto-typical Caribbean man is depicted as lazy, unemployed, and entirely reliant on the women in his life. James does little to complicate this image, as his goal appears to be to deconstruct it. Even though he is employed, educated and of a higher-class position than Benoit, Haynes is no better for conceiving of gender relations the way his mentor does, while the common denominator remains – a requisite dependence on the women around him. James likely has a larger mission in mind with Haynes though, as he shows through the character’s growth how valuable the insights and experiences of the working class in Trinidadian society can be to the middle class, and for a people as a whole that were trying to break the shackles of colonialism. Again, engendering a nationalist, unified, anti-colonial movement is what James and his colleagues at the *Trinidad* and the *Beacon* were striving for with their writings during this period. This was often done through opposing dominant ideas harnessed by a colonial elite and intelligentsia that did not recognize the value of the impoverished masses in the colony who defied established norms daily. James’ curiosity about those on the margins of Trinidadian society at this stage of his writing career is obvious. Nevertheless, what shines through in *Minty Alley*, as with James’ other fictional works is his insistence to, if only indirectly, impart vitality, independence, and defiance upon his women characters. While James would downplay his intentions with the novel in hindsight, and others have drawn parallels between him and the dynamic Maisie character, it is rather clear that James

---

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 243.

made some effort to create emboldened women characters.<sup>483</sup> Put differently, he has located rebelliousness not only within the Trinidadian lower classes but specifically the women among them, while resisting gender standards along the way.

Nevertheless, for Hazel Carby, *Minty Alley* is hardly ahead of its time. Rather, she believes that the book, like all his writings, whether on sport, fiction, history or politics, indicate that he is wedded to masculinist ideologies. Consequently, she asserts, “The class divisions of James’s fictional world are gendered: the masses are feminized; the point of view of the intellectual/middle class protagonist is masculine.”<sup>484</sup> Although Carby’s position here alludes to the plot in *Minty Alley*, she suggests that even in his other pieces, such as “La Divina Pastora” and “Triumph” where there is no middle-class protagonist, the working class is “overwhelmingly imagined through figures of women.” She explains this framing further through her critique of Haynes in *Minty Alley*:

[T]he bridge that enables Haynes to cross into the world of the working class and stop being a mere vicarious observer of their life is an act of sexual conquest. Sexual intimacy between the younger female character, Maisie, and Haynes is the means by which Haynes comes to “know” the intimate details of the yard; sexual familiarity with the female body and the body of the proletariat are representationally collapsed and fused... Simultaneously, this moment also acts as a marker of Haynes sexual maturity: becoming a man and gaining the knowledge he needs to represent the masses are likewise combined. Haynes “realized that whatever he said would carry weight with them, and with this realization came a sense of responsibility and increasing confidence.” From this point on, Haynes plays an essential rather than peripheral role in the lives of the occupants of the barrack yard; women become actively dependent upon him and increasingly subservient in servicing his domestic and sexual needs.<sup>485</sup>

---

<sup>483</sup> In a 1973 lecture before a Rutgers’ audience James says: “This is 1928. I haven’t the faintest idea of any political or social relations, I am just writing a story.” He adds that instead, it was only hindsight that he could describe *Minty Alley* as “the relation between the black middle-class and the black plebeian class.” Cited in and discussed in Nicole King, *C.L.R. James and Creolization: Circles of Influence* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 71. Rosengarten looks at Maisie’s desire to go abroad and the fact that she shares a birthday with James to suggest that the author – perhaps unconsciously – identified with Maisie. See Frank Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, p. 167-168.

<sup>484</sup> Carby, *Race Men*, 125.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126.

Indeed, Carby puts forward that James' barrack-yard fiction cannot be disentangled from the "autonomous, patriarchal masculinity" that enmesh his other works at the time.<sup>486</sup> This includes both his cricket journalism and his biography on *Captain Cipriani*, where he "sought to develop a theory of a direct, unmediated relation between the heroic male figure and the people...[an] ideal of the black male hero as one inspiring as well as expressing the social passions of the people..."<sup>487</sup> Thus, she posits that even as James and his fellow *Beacon* contributors wrote about the working-class, and about women, it is rooted in a patriarchal conceptualization of anti-colonial politics.<sup>488</sup> Correspondingly, she states that James was one of several male intellectuals of the 1930s who "created historical discourses of black manhood" of which the figure of Toussaint Louverture garnered particular attention.<sup>489</sup>

Although Carby's arguments about how C.L.R. James reproduced a masculinist outlook on social and political agitation is persuasive, it does not negate the fact that in some measure he wrote about women in two if not three of his fictional works in a way that intrinsically challenged gender binaries. Moreover, even as James' women characters may have been missing a middle-class intellectual man to help them transcend their oppressive condition, as Carby implies, he still exalts the most independent, rebellious, and shrewd among them above all else.

It is worth mentioning as well that James' interest in women who belied gender expectations appeared to follow into his personal life as well. This bares out in his choice of partner in marriage at the time that *Minty Alley* is being drafted, Juanita Samuel Young. Young was a skilled stenographer who worked as a secretary in a law firm when she married James in

---

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>488</sup> Carby calls the works of James and his colleagues in the 1920s "proletarian literature." See Carby, "Proletarian or Revolutionary Literature."

<sup>489</sup> Carby, *Race Men*, 113, 114.

1929. It would have been rare for a woman to attain the qualifications and hold this kind of job, and years later James himself later said that until the oil strikes in Trinidad and region-wide labour unrest in the 1930s when jobs opened for women, “there were only three roles permitted women in the Caribbean. One could marry, be a mistress, or be a prostitute.”<sup>490</sup> Yet, Young not only worked, but she also played an integral role in the production of his early work as she “proofread and typed the first publications to which he signed his name...”<sup>491</sup> While the marriage did not survive James’ sojourn to England and then the United States, the relationship suggests that life imitates art concerning his choice of companion at this juncture of his life.

### **Creative Writing About Real Women**

During his first year in England after emigrating from Trinidad, James’ fascination with women, who like his wife disturbed the Victorian order, eventually emerges in his journalism. Specifically, an essay that is published for the *Port of Spain Gazette* entitled, “The Women.” The article is one of a series of articles that James writes in 1932 based on his initial experiences in the new environment – from the places he saw, the people he met and their ways of life. “The Women” appeared in the *Port of Spain Gazette* one week after he wrote “The Men.” In “The Men,” James depicts some mundane interactions he has with “Englishmen” and draws conclusions on their comportment, including the way their outlook seems to be governed by class and status preoccupations. He is most animated on this topic when laying out examples of how “the average (White) man in London is eaten up with colour prejudice.” In what may be a foretelling of his romantic pursuits in the years to come, the three detailed examples James gives to make this point are of White men looking at him with scorn when it is apparent he has made a

---

<sup>490</sup> Constance Webb, *Not Without Love: Memoirs* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003), 202.

<sup>491</sup> Chris Johnson, “Sex and the Subversive Alien,” 192. Also, Rosengarten notes that Young “put her talent as a skilled stenographer at James’ disposal for several years...” Frank Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 20.

connection of some sort with a White woman.<sup>492</sup> This emphasis on racial bias as only manifesting when he is seen with a White woman seems implausible, and may be indicative of a masculinist position that regards women as something to be possessed by men, irrespective of their colour.

Unlike the previous week's installation for the newspaper, the piece on women that he encountered, again mainly in the country's capital city of London, unmistakably exhibits the pleasure James derived from these observations. For instance, he describes the fashion sense of certain "types" of women with great delight: "A good coat gives a finish and they are not in half so much trouble about the dresses as they would be if they lived in the tropics...The cap is red, dead red, matching her complexion. The scarf also maybe red and white. And the general effect is quite stunning."<sup>493</sup> However, early in the article, it is clear what impressed James: "That is what I admired in her chiefly, her independence, her ease, her total lack of restraint. They have a lot of freedom, these girls. They go where they like, when they like...The result is that the average young woman has got rid, for the most part, of her male complexes."<sup>494</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly though, the type of woman that James is most enthusiastic about is "the Bohemian":

Her main preoccupation is that men treat her, or at least most men should treat her, as an individual and not as a woman in the Victorian sense of the word. Some of them carry it to lengths. They will not allow you to carry a bag for them. Why should you carry it, is their point. You are you and I am me. You carry your bag and I will carry mine. If I have two you will help me with one. But then if you have two, I will help you with one just the same. No favours required from men, please. Some of them won't even allow themselves to be taken out. They will go but they will pay. You work for your money and I work for mine. And so on. I got to know a few girls of this type, or approaching it, and they were very good company, very good company indeed. Despite all their masculinity, they were still nonetheless women...<sup>495</sup>

---

<sup>492</sup> C.L.R. James "The Men," in *Letters from London: Seven essays by C.L.R. James*, ed. Nicholas Laughlin (Oxford: Signal Books, 2003), 83-87.

<sup>493</sup> C.L.R. James "The Women," in Nicholas Laughlin, *Letters from London*, 99.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

Even as James equates the attitudes of these women to masculinity, he recognizes that it is not merely an imitation of men, but rather a disposition that is not normally associated with their gender. He notes that their capacity for humour, conversation and bookishness is no less and transcended many men, including himself.<sup>496</sup> Scholarly engagements and clothing styles aside, some of the depictions in “The Women” recall ideals about women characters that he lauded in his fictional works. Two years later, he finished another piece that, through its creative writing form, gave him another chance to accentuate these rebellious traits, this time grounded in a real-life revolution.

#### *Scripting Toussaint Louverture and the men and women of the Haitian Revolution*

As was noted in Chapter 3, the first major work that C.L.R. James embarked on after crossing the Atlantic was a research project on the Haitian Revolution. Again, he was especially interested in Toussaint Louverture and had conceptualized writing a biography on him before migrating to England.<sup>497</sup> Further, to understand the context from which Toussaint would emerge, James spent many months studying the social and political events of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the former French colony of Saint Domingue (San Domingo). Recall too that his first attempt at conveying what he had gleaned from the historical examination came in the form of a theatrical composition. This harked back to his activities in the 1920s when he directed two compositions for the Maverick Club and dramatized working-class life in urban Trinidad through “Triumph” and *Minty Alley*.<sup>498</sup> Certainly, the 1936 London staging of *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History; A Play in Three Acts*, was an opportunity for James’ interpretation of a revolutionary moment, culminating in the creation of an

---

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>497</sup> James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 119.

<sup>498</sup> Kent Worcester explains in a footnote that James directed two plays for the Maverick club, while acting in one of them. See Worcester, *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography*, 248.

independent Black republic, to be projected on stage in the capital of the world's largest empire at a time when anti-colonial sentiment was gaining momentum among people of African descent around the world.<sup>499</sup> Moreover, given the creative liberties afforded to him through this aesthetic, it is useful to interrogate how James presents women in the piece and gender in general.

Three women appear in *Toussaint Louverture*: Madame Louverture, wife of Toussaint; Pauline (Bonaparte) Leclerc, sister of Napoleon and wife of General Charles Leclerc who had been sent by Napoleon to San Domingo to re-take control of the colony; and Suzanne, Pauline's servant. Of the three, all but Pauline Leclerc is of more than relatively minor importance. Madame Louverture receives the least amount of attention, as she makes just two brief appearances in the script, both of which appear to have been cut out of the actual performance. It is remarkable, given the centrality of the play's namesake that his wife would offer no commentary on the transformative events that he is at the forefront of. Instead, it is Suzanne, described as a "mulatta," who displays her allegiance with the island's anti-slavery revolution in a short dialogue. In a scene set in the colony at the end of 1802, upon the arrival of Toussaint, his troops and their accompanying band, Suzanne asks Pauline to be excused so that she may join the welcoming crowd. Pauline becomes incredulous when Suzanne mentions that the band is playing prominent songs of the French Revolution and announces that they also belong to the revolutionary masses:

PAULINE: (*Slightly hysterical*) The *Marseillaise*? That is the song of the Republic.

SUZANNE: But it is our song, too, Madame

PAULINE: Your song?

---

<sup>499</sup> It should be noted that James would revise this play some 30 years later for a theatre piece called *The Black Jacobins*. The latter play will be discussed in a later chapter.



SUZANNE: But yes, Madame. When we fought for freedom we sang those songs. The revolutionaries in France sang them and we sang them too. We made our own songs but always our soldiers march to the *Marseillaise*.

PAULINE: But that is impertinence. They have no right, the black savages.<sup>500</sup>

The exchange between the two women provides a snapshot of one of James' main aims in his take on the story of the San Domingo uprising – to highlight the similarities between the revolutionary forces in the metropole and the colony, particularly the astute recognition by the latter that the goals of the French Revolution aligned with their own. More remarkably, as Raj Chetty observes, Suzanne makes her claim “in intraracial solidarity across color, as a mulatta woman joining the gathering black crowds meeting the marching black army.”<sup>501</sup> Chetty continues:

Suzanne's 'we' links all those who have struggled for emancipation from slavery as both fighters and singers, including black and mulatta women... Suzanne, the mulatta servant, is the only one on stage in this scene who can hear the music of black revolution, a revolution romantically figured through the unity between a mulatta woman, black masses and mulatto leaders.<sup>502</sup>

Thus, aside from exhibiting the parallels between the San Domingo revolutionaries and their counterparts in France, Suzanne's brief appearance draws attention to the relative cohesion among all people of African descent in the colony, irrespective of their skin tone, with regard to their commitment to overthrow the status quo. Nonetheless, James' gendering of this salient aspect of the revolution does not resemble the depictions in his barrack-yard tales. Suzanne does not act or display any real measure of insubordination, apart from being a singer-cheerleader for the Black (male) soldiers who are fighting for the freedom of the racially subjugated.

---

<sup>500</sup> C.L.R. James, *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History; A Play in Three Acts* [1936], ed. Christian Hogsbjerg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 117-118.

<sup>501</sup> Raj Chetty, “Can a Mulatta Be a Black Jacobin? C.L.R. James, Feminism and the Place of Collaboration” in *Small Axe* 23, no. 3 (November 2019): 87-103., 93.

<sup>502</sup> Raj Chetty, “Race Fundamentalism: Caribbean Fundamentalism Theater and the Challenge to Black Diaspora” (PhD. diss., University of Washington, 2013), 78, 79.

It is only through the character of Pauline Leclerc, a representative of the colonizing force, that we see signs of the C.L.R. James that gravitated towards writing about women who flouted normative gender positions in his literary works. She is noted by one of the characters as "the sister who is more to (Bonaparte)" than Bonaparte's own wife, Josephine, and is inserted in a few tactical discussions with French generals both alongside her husband and independent of him.<sup>503</sup> Although she may not be critical to moving the plot forward, and does have fewer lines than the other major characters in *Toussaint Louverture*, James is still able to present her as a clever, outspoken person, with a degree of sexual independence that belies her class position.

This can be seen in the following exchange between Pauline and Pétion:

PAULINE General Pétion, thank heaven the war is over. I am going to give a grand ball to celebrate the peace. Now what will this ball be? It must be either a linen ball or a muslin ball.

SUZANNE Let us have another Creole ball, Madame.

PAULINE No, I have been wearing Creole for the past week. What do you think, General Pétion? It must be either linen or muslin. Now which shall it be? Suzanne, get me a fan.

(Suzanne goes out.)

PÉTION (Moving close to Pauline) It depends on the one you are wearing at the time.

PAULINE Flatterer! We shall have a muslin ball.

PÉTION Or better still, two balls, Madame. A muslin ball and then a linen ball.

PAULINE Pétion, you are marvellous. But which shall we have first? Ah, I know who will help us. General Delafosse, where is that young officer who danced so well last Saturday? You remember him? He has a mole on his right cheek.<sup>504</sup>

The inference here is that Pauline and Pétion have either flirted or had intimate contact in the past, and she has also now identified the "young officer" as someone she is attracted to. Yet,

---

<sup>503</sup> James, *Toussaint Louverture*, 96-97.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

Pauline is not lauded on a scale anywhere near that of Toussaint and the other Black revolutionaries, nor the fictitious women characters in the aforementioned pieces he had written about in Trinidad. Moreover, Chetty speculates that James had the White women he wrote about in “The Women” in mind with his portrayal of Pauline Leclerc:

James’s depiction of Pauline Leclerc suggests that he found a fruitful analogy between the freedom and independence of white women in 1930s London and Pauline’s freedom and independence, her sexual and political “license” as an aristocratic woman, 150 years earlier. Perhaps this helps to explain why the 1936 play devoted more stage time and dialogue to a white, French aristocratic woman aligned with counterrevolutionary military policy than to revolutionary black and mulatta Haitian women: James could both read about the independence of white women in Eurocentric archives of the French and Haitian Revolutions, and draw from the freedom and independence of white women with whom he consorted.<sup>505</sup>

Chetty’s assertion above raises some intriguing questions about James’ views on women and gender in his writings from the 1920s through to the late 1930s. While he may have been genuinely enamoured by the degree of freedom and defiance exhibited by the Black and Brown women of the barrack-yard, as well as the lower to upper-middle-class White women he encountered in England, James elides their significance in the context of revolutionary action. What’s more, the ostensible challenge to patriarchy in his barrack-yard literature does not exist in *Toussaint Louverture*. Rather, the focus is on the valiant leadership of the protagonist and the fearless determination of the other men fighting for Black emancipation through revolutionary action including, most notably, Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Nicosia Shakes states that while James centers the Haitian Revolution to assert the humanity of people of African descent, the Toussaint and Dessalines characters are used to project two ideals of Black humanity.<sup>506</sup> In making a larger argument about the two as not necessarily heroes, but icons, she adds: “Toussaint represents nobility, rationality and vulnerability, whilst Dessalines represents uncompromising resistance. Although Toussaint’s leadership is needed for the success of the Revolution,

---

<sup>505</sup> Raj Chetty, “Race Fundamentalism,” 76-77.

<sup>506</sup> Nicosia Shakes, “History and Drama in C.L.R. James’ *Toussaint Louverture*: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History,” *C.L.R. James Journal* 19, nos. 1 & 2, 23rd Anniversary Issue (Fall, 2013): 38-60., 42.

Dessalines emerges as ultimate victor and consolidator of Haitian independence from France.”<sup>507</sup>

These qualities are on display early in the play during an exchange between them:

**TOUSSAINT:** Brothers, we suffer. I know how we suffer. All is ready and we are not afraid to fight. But before we kill let us make a petition and go one day to the Colonial Assembly. We’ll tell them—

*(Out of the crowd leaps an almost naked figure. He clambers up to the platform and pushes his way to the front. The crowd hitherto quiet, is at once astir. The Negro is Dessalines, soon to be known as The Tiger, and afterwards first Emperor of Haiti.)*

**DESSALINES:** No petition—we have to fight! *(Stir in the crowd.)* Not tomorrow but today—now! *(Crowd responds.)* No more work, *(response from crowd)*, no more whip. *(There is almost a cheer.)* Black man eat bananas. Black man eat potatoes. White man eat bread. If white man want bread let white man work. *(There is a great laugh.)* If we kill the whites we are free. *(The drums are beating faster, as if quickened by Dessalines’ speech.)* I, Dessalines, will work no more. Liberty!<sup>508</sup>

Although the scene above helps to convey the personality of each character from the outset and the tension that will reoccur between them throughout the narrative – as well as their representation of variants of Black humanity – the depiction is contrived in a highly masculinized space. In fact, it is emblematic of *Toussaint Louverture*. Expressions of ingenuity, self-determination and dauntlessness are exclusively portrayed by Black men, as save for the “mulatta” Suzanne, Black women are scarcely even ornamental here. Patriarchy is simply an unadulterated norm. Furthermore, while it would have been apt, James neglects to use his creative license to create a Maisie-like character to reflect the myriad ways women would have been involved in the revolutionary uprising, thereby reifying gender archetypes.

## Conclusion

As a hallmark figure within the tradition of Black radical thought, C.L.R. James is predominantly studied for his social, political, economic, and cultural texts that fall within that orbit. To be sure, this is where his most important work lies, and he is best judged by these

---

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> James, *Toussaint Louverture*, 55.

contributions. However, an examination of his creative writing reveals that there are elements of James' analytical framework that largely pre-date his station as an eminent revolutionary critic. Perhaps most compellingly is what these pieces may say about his future work through the representation of women and the function of gender more broadly that is grappled within them.

In the short stories "La Divina Pastora" and "Turner's Prosperity," James portrays female characters who are ruined by their attempt at socio-economic advancement according to the entrenched standards of colonial society. Furthermore, Anita in the former and Turner's wife in the latter align their goal with or alongside a male romantic interest or partner to their detriment. This lesson is more explicit in "Triumph" where James' principal woman character is instead rewarded for independent activity not necessarily tied to Victorian ideals around femininity, marriage, or partnership with a man. Male characters play a relatively peripheral role in this story. Additionally, its barrack-yard setting is a space of high energy, excitement through dialogue, and indulgence in cultural practices and ethics that are generally frowned upon by the bourgeois class. Hence, James sheds a light on the self-determining attributes of working-poor and working-class communities that inspire anti-colonial thought and agency much in the same way his nonfiction works would in the decades that follow "Triumph"'s publication.

This trend continues in *Minty Alley* where he explores themes from his short fiction with more depth and nuance through several characters, though its purpose appears to be easier to trace. Thus, with the barrack-yard as his lens, he probes interpretations of race, colour, class, and gender that speak to dynamics at play in the wider colonial society to a greater extent than his previous offerings. Yet, as with "Triumph," it is the vibrancy of the working class that James underscores, while the progression of the story's protagonist is again inextricably linked to an environment where women are at the forefront. Further, even as Haynes' middle-class

background is disturbed, the person who has the greatest impact on him is a rebellious young woman who repeatedly exhibits behaviour throughout the narration that unapologetically shatters colonial norms about femininity. Indeed, Maisie projects a kind of indignation, boldness, and determination that James would draw into focus when he turned to the realm of real-life contexts.

The history of the Haitian Revolution is a magnification of the independent self-activity he extols in his fictional pieces, most patently in *Minty Alley* and “Triumph.” However, his play on this event, *Toussaint Louverture*, did not resemble them with respect to his depiction of women and gender construction at large. Although the two women with dialogue in the script show elements of the audacity James upheld elsewhere, they are not fundamental characters in his re-telling. He would have been limited by the historical record, but the exclusion of women from this creative work may be illustrative of a view that the role of women in the real transformative anti-colonial struggle was peripheral. On the other hand, in *Toussaint Louverture*, men alone are seen as the actors handling the affairs of an improbable march towards liberation for the enslaved masses and therefore best suited for scrutiny.

Taken together, James’ creative writing, especially as it relates to his constructions of women and gender therein, raises pertinent questions about his development as a theorist. Surveying this subject in his fictional work does indicate that it helps him, if even unconsciously, in the formation of a philosophical outlook that he would apply to varying socio-political and cultural contexts when he becomes engrossed in revolutionary activism. Specifically, conceptions of courage, defiance, militancy, and self-determination are infused into key women characters in these pieces – overturning norms of masculinity and femininity of the day – are later proffered by James in his political writing on anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, and liberation of the oppressed, towards a new society.

## Chapter 6 – Aimé Césaire: Poems, Plays, Gender & Revolution

In contrast to C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire is best known for his creative writing pieces. Césaire's focus within this field was on poetry and later plays. Through these mediums, he stirred matters of race, class, colonialism, nationalism, and revolution. Indeed, his reputation as a poet typically characterizes his connection to the Black radical tradition. However, Césaire is not usually seen to have taken a critical approach to gender and female representation in his poems and theatre productions. Nonetheless, as illustrated here, the lens of women and gender can still be used in these works to assess and gain a deeper understanding of his philosophical outlook.

The famed *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*) is the first site of critique, followed by the poems "Chevelure" and "Lost Body." There is then a discussion of his productions as a playwright, namely "Et les Chiens se taisaient (And the Dogs Were Silent)." *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (*The Tragedy of King Christophe*), and *Une Saison au Congo* (*A Season in the Congo*). Ultimately, this chapter argues that even though his submissions are often complex, gender in the main has an indispensable function in Aimé Césaire's creative works.

### Negritude and Gender in Cahier

As was reviewed in Chapter 4, *Cahier* contains several of the same themes as Aimé Césaire's *L'étudiant noir* publications, including exploitation, colonialism, Black identity, and self-determination, but adopts a different method than those articles. In particular, the text largely reads as a deeply personal narrative poem that borrows from the surrealist art form which he had developed a strong penchant for by the mid to late 1930s. Césaire uses long winding and

convoluted metaphors, combined with rhythmic linguistic devices and jarring imagery to describe his impressions of what a decolonial imaginative return to Martinique would signify for his narrator-protagonist after being away from home for several years. The poem can be broken down into three parts. Recall, in the first part of the composition, he depicts a downtrodden and desolate homeland that has been devastated by slavery and colonialism. The narrator then inserts himself and talks about leaving this place to come back as its liberator as he traverses both his moral and embodied identity. This is followed by a continued interrogation of Blackness or negritude more generally until the speaker concludes the piece with a declaration of self-conscious liberation through analysis and redefinition of the (Black) self – his negritude.<sup>509</sup> Moreover, although Césaire appears to engage gender in a relatively open and direct way in *Cahier*, with feminine and masculine principles as constitutive elements of his negritude installation, embodied women are not detectable in his liberation imagination.

The use of sexual imagery and gendered language in *Cahier* is primarily attached to his description of the Martinican landscape. Beverley Ormerod observes that in its “non-prophetic passages,” sexual vigour is abound in Césaire’s descriptions of the “plump breasts of the hills, the upright palm-trees, the rushing waterfalls, the wild sucking of the sea along the windward shores.”<sup>510</sup> Indeed, Césaire relies on phallic imagery, such as through his use of trees, to connote the resilience of people of African descent once inoculated with the essence of negritude. This becomes most evident where “prophesy and reality are blended” in the third part of the poem when he most outwardly affirms the concept, contrasting it with the dreary and sterile nature of European life.<sup>511</sup>

---

<sup>509</sup> Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 42.

<sup>510</sup> Beverley Ormerod, “Césaire’s ‘Cahier’: An Aesthetic of Commitment,” *Dalhousie French Studies*, no. 1 (1979): 61-74., 69.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.



Ormerod maintains then that in addition to “phallic vigour,” for Césaire, trees also represent “stability, perseverance” and “the embracing of life.”<sup>512</sup> Yet, gendered language does not just apply to trees, as the town or city, perhaps Fort-de-France, is presented “like a woman,” crawling “on its hands without the slightest desire to drill the sky with a stature of protest.”<sup>513</sup> Hedy Kalikoff concurs that nature and geography are sexualized and gendered in *Cahier* and hypothesizes further that the feminine and masculine also exist on two axes.<sup>514</sup> She draws on the notion of the city described in the poem to discuss the horizontal line as feminine: “At its lowest point, the female is the city, the impoverished hybrid of urban modernism and colonized squalor – flattened, sprawled, prostrated. In its antithesis, the female represents fertility. Both of these extremes are on a horizontal axis, whether positive or negative, whether they signify fertility or passivity.”<sup>515</sup> Kalikoff counterposes the city or earth with a particular reference to the sun, which is gendered male on the vertical axis and can also be positive or negative. She notes that early on the sun is portrayed as “cursed and venereal, a force on high, looking down on the colonized island.” This authoritative sun is “infected by an illness, a malady of the colonizer, apparently the result of a contagious coupling, and the implication is that ‘la terre’ or ‘la ville’ has been infected by a diseased phallus.” Thus, the phallic symbol is not inherently good, as it has left “the earth” or “the city” contaminated. Nonetheless, Kalikoff stresses that there are multiple shifts in representation where the sun is “refigured,” such as in the second part of *Cahier* where she observes the “female sex raised towards the phallic sun...and the sun now has the capacity not to infect but to fertilize, to turn golden that which is under its light.” After another turn towards a diseased representation, just before the poem’s third act, she adds that the

---

<sup>512</sup> Beverley Ormerod, “Césaire’s ‘Cahier’,” 72.

<sup>513</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, 13.

<sup>514</sup> Hedy Kalikoff, “Gender, Genre and Geography in Aime Césaire’s ‘Cahier D’un Retour au Pays Natal’,” *Callaloo* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 492-505.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 496. The subsequent five quotes can be found at this reference as well.

speaker calls on the sun to “affect a leap beyond self-disgust which had permeated the preceding section.” This leads to the “pinnacle of the sun as symbol” as it is transformed into “a black angel to help the subject ascend skyward, out of the depths of the colonized state.” These shifts, along with other contradictory and ambiguous portrayals of gender, underlined through geography, suggest that *Cahier*’s construction of negritude is complicated and perhaps cannot be reduced to a mere phallogocentric endeavour. In fact, Kalikoff cites the end of the poem where Césaire peculiarly says the sun “is not good enough for me” and pleads to the wind to bind him to the soil and to strangle him by its “lasso of stars,” to argue that “Despite the exuberant upward movement” in this final stanza, “bounding and strangulation” and not the phallus metaphor is used “to express reconciliation and liberation.”<sup>516</sup> She surmises that Césaire is quite cognizant of the text’s contortionism and postulates that he is engaged in a disruptive exercise and transformative project of redefinition:

Césaire’s poem with its eruptive, disruptive, denunciatory power aims to explode colonial discourse, the phallogocentric system on the other side of which lies a new map of the world, a different Imaginary. When the speaker of the poem associates himself with the masculine sun, he is filling in the role the colonizer had played...<sup>517</sup>

...The poem’s emphasis on vertical movement and insistence on masculinity should not, then, be read literally as the epic outpouring of a phallic leader, but rather as an attempt to subvert colonial discourse through reimagining the colonial Imaginary. The poem’s blatant sexual images and gendered landscapes prove to be unstable and disruptive, suggesting a reading of the poem’s masculinity that highlights its constructedness rather than its depiction of a natural process.<sup>518</sup>

The inference of this view is that colonial hetero-patriarchy is being challenged in the poem. To be sure, this tracks with the demystification of colonialism and Eurocentrism that is on display throughout *Cahier* by way of a number of poetic devices. Still, although the language and symbolism Césaire employs may point to divergent or even radical readings of gender,

---

<sup>516</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, 55, 57. Kalikoff, “Gender, Genre and Geography,” 501.

<sup>517</sup> Kalikoff, “Gender, Genre and Geography,” 502.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid, 503.

notwithstanding a geographical analysis, such readings are more difficult to validate when the narrator, under the auspices of negritude, makes a “virile prayer” to become the champion for his people:

grant me the courage of the martyr  
grant me the savage faith of the sorcerer  
grant me my hands the power to mold  
grant my soul the sword’s temper  
I won’t inch. Make my head into a figurehead  
and as for me, my heart, make me not into a father nor a brother  
nor a son, but into the father, the brother, the son  
nor a husband, but the lover of this unique people<sup>519</sup>

Therefore, even though negritude may demonstrate the constructedness of masculinity, the stanza above and the ones that immediately follow, which are also in the third part of the piece, suggests it is a deeply patriarchal process. He asks to be made a man of “initiation,” “mediation,” “germination” and “the executor of these lofty works,” before declaring that “the time has come to gird one’s loins like a brave man.”<sup>520</sup> Janice Horner Kaufman argues that by the protagonist then saying, “I demand of myself” to be the digger for this unique race,” within this presentation, it is the Black man who is “the inseminator and nurturer of his race, designating himself, and not woman, as the Creator.”<sup>521</sup> Césaire’s gendered depiction of manifest liberation here is narrowly structured and does not even contemplate women – his subject is “the father, the brother, the son” and not just the “husband,” but also “the lover of this unique people.” It would seem from this passage that for the young philosopher, the colonized individual or individuals who are to be transformed and emerge as liberators are men. To be fair, *Cahier* is a semi-autobiographical poem through which the author – especially at this juncture – seems to be expounding upon what negritude means for him, or the narrator-protagonist.

---

<sup>519</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, 47.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> Janice Horner Kaufman, “Maximin, Cixous, and Césaire: Créolization, Intertextuality, and Coiled Myth” (PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 1997), 109.

Nonetheless, there are other aspects of the composition which reveal that its phallogentric impulses go beyond a few stanzas.

It is worth noting that there is only one instance in *Cahier* where Césaire offers any meaningful characterization of an embodied woman. This is in the second part of the piece when he briefly describes his household and its members, namely his father and mother:

...my temperamental father gnawed by one persistent ache, I never knew which one, whom an unexpected sorcery could lull to melancholy tenderness or drive towering flames of anger, and my mother whose legs pedal, pedal, day and night, for our tireless hunger, I am even awakened at night by these tireless legs pedaling by night and the bitter bite in the soft flesh of the night by a Singer that my mother pedals, pedals for our hunger both day and night.<sup>522</sup>

In these few lines, which were touched upon in Chapter 4, Césaire conveys the anguish that his parents both endured as colonial subjects, and in the next stanza, his grandmother on “the bed of boards from which my race arose” sleeps on a bed “yearning for a mattress.”<sup>523</sup> His reminiscence is sharp and symbolic of the emotional, psychological, and physical debasement of Black humanity. The image of his mother, however, stands out, as she is configured as stoutly carrying the heaviest burden. Certainly, this shows that Césaire is cognizant that women are acutely affected by colonialism, perhaps disproportionately so. Yet, the way that *Cahier* unfolds, the reader is left to presume that their freedom cannot be achieved unless the poem’s hero, and by extension other men, find their identity, inclusive of a masculinity that makes it possible for them to stand up to become saviours of Black Antilleans. This is exemplified by the transformation of the figure near the end of the text referred to as the “good nigger.” He represents an “old negritude” that accepted White supremacy, and correspondingly, did not actively challenge their inferiorization. As the “old negritude progressively cadavers itself” the “good nigger” is sketched as past tense:

---

<sup>522</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, 15.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

No bones about it: he was a good nigger.  
The Whites say he was a good nigger, a really good nigger, massa's good  
ole darky.  
I say hurray!  
He was a good nigger indeed  
poverty had wounded his chest and back and they had stuffed into his  
poor brain that a fatality no one could trap weighed on him; that he had  
no control over his own destiny; that an evil Lord had for all eternity inscribed  
Thou Shall Not in his pelvic constitution; that he must be a good  
nigger; must honestly put up with being a good nigger; must sincerely  
believe in his worthlessness, without any perverse curiosity to verify the  
fatidic hieroglyphs.

He was a very good nigger

And it never occurred to him that he could hoe, dig, cut anything, anything  
else really than insipid cane.

He was a very good nigger.<sup>524</sup>

As is characteristic of surrealist technique, the narrator seamlessly conflates the wretched  
condition of Black people from the period of enslavement to the present, and back to the horrors  
of "slave ships," to make the point that new negritude was an ontological break leaving the  
"good nigger" behind:

Reeking of fried onions the nigger scum is on its feet discovers in its spilled blood the  
bitter taste of freedom

And the nigger scum is on its feet

the seated nigger scum  
unexpectedly standing  
standing in the hold  
standing in the cabins  
standing on the deck  
standing in the wind  
standing under the sun  
standing in the blood  
standing  
and  
free  
standing and no longer a poor creature in its maritime freedom and  
destitution gyrating in perfect drift<sup>525</sup>

---

<sup>524</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 53.

In these penultimate stanzas then, the narrator revisits the ships that carried the enslaved – where the “good nigger” first felt compelled to acquiesce to his defilement – and depicts him as finally emboldened. The portrayal of this figure insinuates that the leading Black radical subject is necessarily a man, or men.

In making a case that ableism and sexism are features of *Cahier*, Christian Flaugh points to a likeness between this “good nigger,” the protagonist’s father, and the Black man on the streetcar that was referenced in Chapter 4, to highlight Césaire’s specific concern with the psychological and physical disability of men in the poem.<sup>526</sup> For Flaugh, disability in the piece is something that especially affects the mind of the colonized male, which ultimately has consequences for his body. Overcoming both psychological and physical disabilities, or what Flaugh terms “psychocorporeal disabilities” is central to liberation for Césaire.<sup>527</sup> He cites these disabilities in aspects of the “good nigger,” the father – who is “temperamental,” could be either lulled to “melancholy tenderness,” or “drive towering flames of anger” – and the man from the streetcar who was described as “melancholy” and “slouched.” Based on the image of the narrator’s mother, who he believes is depicted as “only able-bodied and physically productive,” he postulates that there is an intentional dichotomy in *Cahier* between colonized men and women.<sup>528</sup> Hence, Flaugh stresses that while there is a demonstrated concern for “men’s minds as hosts of melancholia,” women on the other hand, are “not valued for their intellectual or psychological faculties, and are therefore only partially included in the humanizing call to stand in the decolonized (and eventually postcolonial) states of liberty and ability.”<sup>529</sup>

---

<sup>526</sup>Christian Flaugh, “Of Colonized Mind and Matter: The Dis/Abilities of Negritude in Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010): 291-308.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

Nevertheless, the text belies such a rigid determination. For instance, it is intriguing that in these three stanzas quoted above and the following one that closes the piece, Césaire no longer uses a distinguishable gendered framing. In fact, “nigger scum” is translated from the original French version of the poem as “la négraille,” which adopts the feminine pronoun “la.” This shift aligns with the geographical reconfiguration in the last stanza that Kalikoff calls attention to. It may be indicative of the *Cahier*’s trajectory towards new possibilities, not just for people covered by the particularity of Blackness, but as an entry point to contemplate a new universalism for all of humanity.

In the end, it is difficult to ignore *Cahier*’s hetero-patriarchal disposition. Even if the masculinist first-person narrative were to be excused, there are many instances in the text that illustrate the process of negritude as a phallogentric dynamic that relies on a heterosexual male-female binary. This is most obvious in the descriptions of the landscape but seems to be implied in the anthropomorphized passages as well. Thus, while the triumph of negritude in *Cahier*’s finale may point to a de-stabilization of gender norms and inspire radical humanist potential overall, it is not clear, particularly under the text’s surrealist prose, that Césaire believed women should be the vanguards of his anti-colonial formation.

### **From Poet to Playwright: Women, Gender, and Revolution**

Upon his return to Martinique, Césaire continued to commit himself to address notions of Black self-determination in the French Caribbean context. As noted elsewhere, the journal that he co-founded during the Second World War, *Tropiques*, was the main avenue for him to engage in this work, especially as he faced oppression existentially like never before through the Vichy occupation of the island in the years immediately after his homecoming. Furthermore, along with writing for *Tropiques* and becoming a politician by 1945, Césaire honed his craft as a poet

undergirded by revolutionary thought throughout the decade. At this juncture then, it may be useful to look at some of his pieces to deliberate on whether there is a shift in a writing style and themes that up to *Cahier* – and his socio-political articles from *L'étudiant noir* – could chiefly be deemed patriarchal.

To be sure, the abstract nature of Aimé Césaire's poetry can make definitive statements on themes such as his treatment of women quite challenging. For Horner Kaufman, one way of tracing sexism in Aimé Césaire's poetry is by analyzing his use of trees, which typically play a central role in these compositions. His masculinized use of trees in *Cahier* is an example of this. She argues that he first extends the tree metaphor to women in "Chevelure," a piece published in his 1948 collection of poems *Soleil cou coupé* (*Solar Throat Slashed*). In addition to the fluctuation of "hard male consonants" and "soft female ones" in the poem, thereby producing "two consonantic chains simulating the actual braiding together of a soft and hard body," the tree image in the last stanza also reveals itself to be masculinized and feminized:<sup>530</sup>

Innocent who ventures there  
forget to remember  
that the baobab is our tree  
that it badly waves arms so dwarfed  
that one would take it for an imbecilic giant  
and you  
sojourn of my insolence of my tombs of my twisters  
mane bundle of lianas stubborn hope of the shipwrecked  
sleep softly in the meticulous trunk of my embrace my woman  
my citadel<sup>531</sup>

---

<sup>530</sup> Horner Kaufman, "Maximin, Cixous, and Césaire," 111. Eshleman and Smith point to the ambiguity in some of Césaire's pieces. See, Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, "Introduction" in Eshleman and Clayton, *The Collected Poetry*, 19.

<sup>531</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Chevelure," in *The Complete Poetry of Aime Cesaire*, trans. A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017), 367, 369.



Horner Kaufman asserts that Leo Frobenius' theory of civilization informs Césaire's work, which explains why an examination of trees in his poems can be instructive.<sup>532</sup> Frobenius' *Histoire de la civilisation africaine* argues that humanity is driven by a vital force called "Paideuma," which manifests itself as two forms of civilization opposed to each other in nature. In this framework, Ethiopians, or people connected to plant life, were the closest ancestors to Black people, while White people are basically considered to be descendants of the Hamitic peoples who are linked to animal life. Hence, in the stanza above, Horner Kaufman observes that his application of "innocent" to both men and women in this piece suggests "the race of l'homme-plante living in harmony with the universe," while their coupling "promises the existence of a new race." Furthermore, while the "sleeping woman is more passive than the embracing man," the vertical tree image in the last line here is "both masculine and feminine." She continues with her interpretation of the significance of the plant-man's meticulous trunk being "deeply-rooted only by the side of his woman" at the poem's conclusion: "As preserver of his culture and spirituality, she symbolizes his African heritage. As his lover and carrier of his seed, she is his protection, his future, and his inspiration."<sup>533</sup>

This reading of "Chevelure" indicates that Césaire's outlook on the role of women is that they play an invaluable role in his negritude revolution and are side by side with men. At the same time, it could also be construed via the poem's final line, in spite of some blending of feminine and masculine, that the subject of this process is a man. So, while "my woman" is vital, her voice remains concealed in "the meticulous trunk of (his) embrace," while her role is consigned to supporter or symbol, rather than catalyst as he emerges. In this way, "Chevelure"

---

<sup>532</sup> Janice Horner Kaufman says that in addition to the "profound effect on the thought and works" on the negritude founders, she argues that Frobenius' "paideuma" can be found in several of Césaire's works. See Janice Horner Kaufman, "Tracing the Paideuma in Aimé Césaire's Poetry: From Solar Throat Slashed (Soleil Cou-Coupé) to Cadaster (Cadastre)," *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 77, no. 1/2, 85-104.

<sup>533</sup> Horner Kaufman, "Maximin, Cixous, and Césaire," 112.

resembles *Cahier*, as the deployment of its negritude narrative rests on the ubiquity of the feminine principle, even as conquest is contingent upon a patriarchal edifice.

Yet, Horner Kaufman remarks that, taken as a whole, there is still a “frequent absence of the (black) female body from Césaire’s works...”<sup>534</sup> She cites “Corps Perdu” (Lost Body) from his 1950 collection by the same name, where, in the final stanza, it appears that the body the poet refers to is male:

the wind alas I shall hear it still  
nigger nigger nigger from the depths of the timeless sky a little less loud than today  
but too loud nonetheless  
and this crazed howling of dogs and horses  
that it thrusts at our forever maroon heels  
but in my turn into the implacable air  
in my turn into the air  
I shall raise so violent a cry  
that I shall splatter the entire sky

and with my branches torn to shreds  
and with the insolent jet of my wounded and solemn shaft

I shall command the islands to exist<sup>535</sup>

“Lost Body” too has echoes of *Cahier*, as Césaire’s messianic voice is very much present along with the tree image as the body. This body, despite being chased by “crazed howling dogs and horses” and sustaining critical wounds to its “branches and shaft,” emerges defiant in anti-colonial glory as it “command(s) the islands to exist.” However, for Horner Kaufman, even as this plant-man is portrayed as hardy against the animal-man, the latter “representing the domineering white race (as) embodied by the vicious pursing dogs and horses,” Césaire is also “Appropriating the role of Creator from God, as well as from woman.” The rebellious action that climaxes as the piece concludes is not a shared ontological transformation that entreats both man and woman within the tree body as one may glean from “Chevelure.” What’s more, in her

---

<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>535</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Lost Body,” in Arnold and Eshleman, *The Complete Poetry of Aime Cesaire*, 499.

view, “The rage filled ejaculatory stream is the poet’s voice and his ink, as well as his sperm. It is above all the ascending energy of the black race, depicted in exclusively masculine terms.”<sup>536</sup>

The critique that Horner Kaufman provides on “Lost Body” insinuates that Césaire had not positively let go of sexist gender constructions by 1950. It also raises the question of whether he could conceptualize women as the subjects of ultimate sacrifice in impelling his vision of negritude instead of mere equal supporters of it with their counterparts. Yet, like *Cahier*, as well as “Chevelure,” the poem could be read differently if one considers the poet’s conjectural incarnation in the piece, including the way he expounds upon the body in the last stanza. This does not necessarily justify strong masculinist language or the exclusion of women, especially if it is habitual, but as an artist, Césaire should be given some room to express himself in a variety of ways, including inserting himself into the text. So, while this poem imagines a male-bodied protagonist as the saviour of Black people, it does not necessarily mean that, for Césaire, a female counterpart couldn’t play a similar role, or that the two couldn’t do it in unison as he may be alluding to in “Chevelure.” Indeed, the indispensability of women within his message of negritude in the previous two pieces examined above, militates against the view that women were not needed to bring about revolutionary change, even if the perspective is largely phallocentric. Additionally, it should be considered that his training and exposure to specific poetic forms would have come with inherent limitations and made it less likely that he would challenge patriarchal bias.

In the late 1950s and into the 1960s, Aimé Césaire delved into another art form through which to explore his philosophical ambitions and better connect with an audience not attuned to the avant-garde prose that led to his literary fame. Entering the arena of theatre, he scripted an old poem and wrote plays that all sought to dramatize his ideas and motivate anti-colonial

---

<sup>536</sup> Horner Kaufman, “Maximin, Cixous, and Césaire,” 110.

thought more generally. Some examination of these productions then may help provide another perspective on Césaire's contemplation of women and gender norms at large within his radical imagination.

### *And the Dogs Were Silent*

Among the pieces in Césaire's first collection of poetry in 1946 *Les armes miraculeuses* (*Miraculous Weapons*) is "Et les Chiens se taisaient" (And the Dogs Were Silent). First conceptualized as a story about the Haitian Revolution as early as 1941, it metamorphized into a poetic lyrical oratorio<sup>537</sup> about an enslaved man who is imprisoned for killing his master and ruminates on the tribulations of the slave trade and colonialism. Césaire then re-wrote the poem as a dramaturgy, eventually appearing in a 1956 issue of the journal *Présence Africaine*. The central character in "And the Dogs Were Silent" – surely inspired by the illustrious leader of the Haitian Revolution Toussaint Louverture – is "Le Rebelle" (The Rebel) who is assumed to be confined to a jail cell for the duration of the piece until death, even as he reflects on centuries of suffering endured by people of African descent. The Rebel has resigned himself to martyrdom to expose the colonizer or "blue-eyed architect" as the "builder of a pestilential world."<sup>538</sup> Indeed, the Rebel believes that his suicidal decision is a necessary sacrifice to take down a colonial system empowered by white supremacy. This refusal for "once and for all, to be a slave" intends to encourage the colonized to free themselves from the shackles of colonization and assimilation. These revolutionary viewpoints are expressed in a variety of ways throughout the play, including

---

<sup>537</sup> As noted in Eshleman and Smith, Césaire used the term "oratorio lyrique" to designate "Et les chiens se taisaient." See Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, "Introduction," in Aimé Césaire, *Aimé Césaire: Lyric and Dramatic Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), xiv, footnote 8.

<sup>538</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Et les chiens se taisaient (tragédie)/And The Dogs Were Silent (Tragedy)," in Arnold and Eshleman, *The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire*, 169.

during visits by two women characters that are close to him and opposed to his strategy: The Beloved and the Mother.

The Beloved tries to dissuade the Rebel by appealing to his love for her and the vitality that still exists around him. She remarks that while their environment may be enveloped by “threats to life” there likewise remain “promises of life”<sup>539</sup>. The Rebel does not buy into the idea that simply because there is life it means that it is promising. He points to the example of two hungry orphaned children in their midst. They should represent hope and belief in life, but instead, the “two skinny children holding hands at your door sill are crepuscular and barely alive.”<sup>540</sup> It is for them that he chose to die and rouse his people to commit themselves to overthrow the socio-historical status quo. The Beloved continually challenges the Rebel’s vision, before she repeatedly pleads for him to “embrace me,” perhaps believing that once he holds her, he may see the error of his outlook. She wants more than anything for him to see the world as worth living, namely with her, regardless of his pessimism about the status quo: “Embrace me. The world is young.” The Rebel quips: “O how fragile is the world.” She tries again: “Embrace me. The world is a flux of plumes and palms of spikenards of desires of cassia.” The Rebel is steadfast though and cuts down the sentiment with his principled stance “O the world is lusterless with rearing horses.”<sup>541</sup> The Rebel is not in the least bit swayed by the prospects of love with his romantic partner over liberation for Black people everywhere.

The visit to the Rebel by the Beloved is in turn followed by the Mother whom he is immediately suspicious of, certain that she has been sent to break his resistance. She tells her son he is headed down a perilous road or rather into a “desert,” void of anything save “the gibbet

---

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 177, 179.

of mutineers and black limbs in the fangs of the wind.”<sup>542</sup> On the other hand, he counters that “they have lied to you” and it is “a magnificent land, full of sun...of parrots...of fruit...of fresh water...of breadfruit trees...”<sup>543</sup> With more conviction than the Beloved, the Mother insists that the Rebel should atone for his actions by renouncing his “evil vengeance” and “lay down his arms.”<sup>544</sup> Yet, the more she pleads to his sense of humanity and “brotherhood,” the more defiant he becomes and even details the sequence of events leading up to and including the killing of his master.<sup>545</sup> The Rebel contends that he is not about to suffer an “evil and pernicious death...for having hated too much,” as the Mother tells him, but rather “a verdant and sumptuous death...for having loved too much.”<sup>546</sup> Her maternal love is inconsequential as when she says, “I had dreamed of a son who would close his mother’s eyes,” he snaps, “I chose to open onto another sun the eyes of my son.”<sup>547</sup> To be sure, the Rebel is resolute that he has made a choice that will result in a new world for future generations of people of African descent.

“And the Dogs Were Silent” is reminiscent of “Lost Body” and *Cahier* before it. Again, the putative hero has a masculine essence and is determined to decolonize his mind and by extension those of his people through radical thought and action. In addition to the Beloved and the Mother, there are other women speakers such as “Narratress,” “First Madwoman,” and “Second Madwoman,” but they more function as background voices in the surrealist world illuminated through the Rebel. Thus, like Césaire’s noted poetry pieces, the women that appear here are either trivial figures in revolutionary moments or are non-existent. Even though Horner Kaufman observes that “several female tree images link positively with rebellion and liberation”

---

<sup>542</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>545</sup> The Rebel describes the events leading up to this killing. See Ibid, 223, 225.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 223-225.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

in this piece, the actual women characters do not mirror such representation.<sup>548</sup> Yet, this is not to say that these characters, namely the Mother and the Beloved, do not play an imperative role in this story. As James Arnold points out, Césaire relies on stereotypical depictions of the Mother as “symbolic of a universal humanism” – divergent from the radical humanism being forged by the Rebel – and the Beloved as “symbolic of...biological necessity” or proliferation of life, as obstacles to overcome in the protagonist’s journey. Put differently, “The suffering male hero of Negritude must transcend these representations of feminine weakness in order to realize his salvatory maleness in the radiant future that beckons beyond his present sacrifice of self.”<sup>549</sup> Hence, even though Césaire employed a different platform to articulate his brand of negritude, “And the Dogs were Silent” could still be read as beholden to patriarchal assumptions.

### *The Tragedy of King Christophe*

It would be several years before Aimé Césaire would compose another play. He remained busy with his political ascendancy and absorbed in a rising tide of decolonial and independence movements across Africa and the Caribbean. By 1961 though, the same year revised versions of poems that comprised *Lost Body* and *Solar Throat Slashed* are combined and released in a new collection called *Cadastre*, he began drafting his first original play. *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (*The Tragedy of King Christophe*) would be published in its finality in 1963, then staged for the first time the following year in Austria and subsequently France in 1965.<sup>550</sup> Like “And the Dogs Were Silent,” the play is also inspired by the Haitian Revolution, which he had published a historical essay about in 1960 entitled “Toussaint Louverture: La

---

<sup>548</sup> Horner Kaufman, “Maximin, Cixous, and Césaire,” 113.

<sup>549</sup> A. James Arnold, “The Erotics of Colonialism in the Contemporary French West Indian Literary Culture,” *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 68, nos. 1 & 2 (1994): 5-22, 6.

<sup>550</sup> First published Aimé Césaire, *La tragédie du roi Christophe: théâtre* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1963). Christopher Prendergast provides the timeline for its staging in Christopher Prendergast, ed., *A History of Modern French Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 586.

révolution française et le problème colonial” (Toussaint Louverture: The French Revolution and the Colonial Problem). However, Césaire’s concern in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* is not revolution and not even so much a demarcation of negritude, but rather governance of the post-revolutionary nation-state. Set in the period following the Haitian Revolution, the story centers around a former slave and military general under Louverture, Henri Christophe, and his struggle to govern. Christophe came to power in Haiti after the assassination of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the first head of the independent country, and ultimately crowned himself King of North Haiti or Saint Domingue as it was then known from 1807-1820. The theatrical production traces Christophe’s impressive building projects, his continued comfort with authoritarianism, as well as a somewhat comedic calamity of miscues, let-downs, and betrayals that he endures as head of state before meeting his demise and finally committing suicide. In the end, the insinuation is that there are severe consequences for losing touch with the objective of completely overthrowing an oppressive system – or rather, the pursuit of negritude.

Although the protagonist is another super-male with lofty goals, *The Tragedy of King Christophe* presents a markedly different narrative than any of the poems he had written before it, including the preceding theatrical adaptation “And the Dogs Were Silent.” Nonetheless, the relative minimalization of women characters remain. The only woman character of note is Christophe’s wife, Madame Christophe, whose dialogue is conspicuously less than the men closest to him. However, like the Beloved and the Mother, Madame Christophe serves an important purpose in Césaire’s drama. She too is concerned with the choices that her husband is making and fervidly tries to get him to do otherwise as he becomes fixated on delusions of grandeur:

Take care! Take care, Christophe, of putting the roof of one hut on top of another it will be too little or too big! Christophe, don’t ask too much of people, or yourself. Besides, I am a mother, and sometimes when I see you spurring the fiery horse of your heart, my own heart falters, and I



say to myself: “Let’s hope we won’t measure the children’s misery by their father’s excess! Our children, Christophe, think of our children. My God! How will this end?”<sup>551</sup>

Here, Madame Christophe is warning against the pressure that Christophe is imposing on others so that his vision of Black prosperity in Haiti, corresponding with Western counterparts, can be realized at all costs. She also tries to appeal to his sensibilities as a husband and a father in her plea before him, even though he maintains that his forced labour edict is justified given the denigrating past of people of African descent, which demands that “I have to ask more of blacks than other people.”<sup>552</sup> Madame Christophe’s reproach of this twisted logic continues and themes of Césairean negritude are evoked when she exclaims that a king should be like “the great mombin tree” providing refuge for “cattle thirsting for shade.” Yet, this is not what Christophe’s reign looked like to his wife: “But you? You? Sometimes I wonder if you, taking everything into your hands/trying to manage everything, if you’re not the big fig tree that grabs hold of all the vegetation around it and stifles it.”<sup>553</sup> In effect then, she also admonishes him for improperly wielding masculinity, or patriarchal power, under the negritude rubric. Nonetheless, he fails to heed Madame Christophe’s advice, even as she has identified herself as “poor” and “simple” – consonant with the people he is exerting tyrannical power over.<sup>554</sup> Unlike the Rebel who hopes that others will follow the example of his revolutionary acts, Christophe essentially decides that his plans to construct a Citadel monument as a symbol of sovereignty and pride is best for his people and he coerces them to work harder and faster to build it. Indeed, Christophe’s insistence on this project that he sees as “Cancelling out the slave ship,” along with the construction of palatial buildings in North Haiti, and the grueling labour demands he imposes on his people everywhere, make him the opposite of a radical Césairean subject. In *Cahier*, he declared that

---

<sup>551</sup> Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 41.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*, 42

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

negritude did not flow from the mimicry of such Western ideals, especially as they were closely tied with colonization and capitalism. However, in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, the protagonist deems that his vision beckons toward Africa and is precisely what will redeem Haiti from its dehumanizing past, thereby ignoring his wife.

It should be noted too that aside from signalling the king's downfall and representing the masses, Madame Christophe is eventually aligned with Africa in the piece – or rather African culture and civilization – which is another central facet of negritude. For instance, when Christophe seeks to connect with Africa on his deathbed through a voodoo practice, she performs the creole song and chant in the ceremony. As Wichmann Bailey elucidates: “In this mystical twilight she is Mambo, the officiant, the hierophant, she who through her affinity for occult power, for dialogue with the god, for continued contact with the Mother, Afrique-Guinée, has the power to effect an infusion of the divine in her dying husband.”<sup>555</sup> Nonetheless, despite Wichmann Bailey's stance that throughout the invocations, “she is present here in a completely different role than we have heretofore seen her play,” it seems that Césaire is also accentuating the import of the character in the closing scenes.<sup>556</sup> Madame Christophe had already bluntly warned Christophe that he had gone perilously astray, namely by rebuffing the path of negritude mobilization attached to Haiti's most dispossessed that once led it to revolutionary nationhood. As he seeks redemption at the end of his life through a symbolic return to Africa, she acts as a kind of metaphor to set him in a more righteous orbit. What's more, in this same scene, the continent itself is gendered as a maternal figure. Just before Christophe passes, he calls out “Africa help me to go home, carry me like an aged child in your arms. Undress and wash me.”<sup>557</sup>

---

<sup>555</sup> Marianne Wichmann Bailey, *The Ritual Theatre of Aimé Césaire: Mythic Structures of the Dramatic Imagination* (Tubingen: Gunter Narr, 1992), 95-96.

<sup>556</sup> Wichmann Bailey, *The Ritual Theatre of Aimé Césaire*, 95.

<sup>557</sup> Césaire, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, 90.

Hence, even as *The Tragedy of King Christophe* is decidedly phallocentric, a woman character, as well as the feminine principle, are pivotal to its critique about the anti-hero's looming ruin and his belated negritude realization.

Setting aside Christophe's last words, like Césaire's poetry, the feminine elsewhere is also fundamental in the play's representation of geography. During a speech given immediately before he is executed, Metellus, the leader of a group of peasants and small farmers who decided to rebel against Christophe's despotic conduct, blatantly analogizes Haiti to a woman:

I've known flight and terror, fighting in the days when we took terror by the throat with Toussaint! Good fighting blood flowed in our veins. On the wild mountain trails, on the steep slopes/of the gorges/amid the barking of the guns/we saw Hope (the palms of her maiden hands glistened in the night of her skin like the gold in the hollows of the dark leaves of the caïmito tree)/we saw her/we (our pus dried by the red coral leaf) saw her dancing/with her incredible bare breasts/and her unfaltering blood (She was the Madwoman who harangued our timid blood/and wouldn't let it rot in ease and glut or pittance) Rich raucous blood it was and bitter manioc without bandage covered our wounds!  
Damnation!  
We were going to build a country/all of us together!  
Not just to stake out this island!  
A country open to all the islands!  
To black men everywhere. The blacks of the whole world.  
But then came politicians/cutting the house in two/laying hands on our mother/disfiguring her in the eyes of the world/making her into a crude pitiful puppet.<sup>558</sup>

Thus, this self-proclaimed former fighter in the San Domingo uprising, ordered killed by Christophe, laments the fact that the land which once mothered emancipation for its enslaved inhabitants and dared Western notions of universalism, has been usurped by the anti-hero and his political foe from South Haiti, Pétion, along with their supporters. They have sullied the legacy of the nation, dividing it between Blacks and Mulattoes, while together representing what he terms "Double tyranny," with Christophe as the "brute" and Pétion the "haughty skeptic."<sup>559</sup> To be sure, the orientation of Haiti set out in this discourse, as possessing generative qualities with the capacity to foment revolution, correlates with the construction of Martinique in *Cahier*.

---

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

Furthermore, through Metellus, Césaire avers that in spite of Christophe’s belief that he was bringing greatness to the land by embracing European ideals, it was rather a desecration, and of course, a betrayal of negritude.

There are other instances in *The Tragedy of King Christophe* that Césaire appears to link Christophe’s misguided understanding of negritude with mistreatment of the feminine principle. For example, in Scene Three of the First Act, soon after the protagonist’s coronation, he enters his ad hoc royal court and acknowledges the dress and pageantry among those gathered but notes the “depressing shortage of women.” He then says: “Bring in the ladies, assign them to their place in the ceremony.” At this point, according to the play’s stage directions, the women who enter the scene are “full bodied black women dressed fit to kill. They curtsy to Christophe, who taps some of them on their rear ends as they pass.”<sup>560</sup> The women are decorative pieces in the naming ritual the taking place, which he states endows everyone present with “titles of nobility,” even as they are adopting European-styled identities. Speaking to his audience, though directly addressing the “gentlemen,” Christophe stresses that by taking new names and titles “from the future” since “we can’t rescue them from the past” they are engaged in a reclamation of Africa.<sup>561</sup> Therefore, early in the play, the anti-hero’s certitude that Black humanity can be affirmed without attending to the past, and through Eurocentric constructs that reproduce oppression, in conjunction with his disrespect of women, is used to establish that his tendency is antithetical to Césairean negritude.

In a subsequent scene, embodied women are again demeaned in relation to Christophe’s questionable politics. Pressing ahead with his cruel economic strategy in which all peasants are forced to participate, including women and children, he bestows his agent and Minister of Public

---

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid., 25.

Morality, Hugonin, with the responsibility of enforcing a new forced marriage policy. Hugonin, picking up on Christophe's pronouncements about women, "Every woman ten stones a day. It won't kill them," and that marriage addresses the State's need for "a solid foundation" – presumably to encourage discipline and the reproduction of workers – carries out the order "immediately" as per the anti-hero's wishes. Although the peasants consist of men and women, as Hugonin shuttles random couples together and basically deems them married, he objectifies the latter while speaking to the former:

What do you say, boy? How's this little lady appeal to you? Not bad, eh? Too fat? Never mind that, fat women are the best...Going, going...she's yours!...You want the skinny one? Done...We've got something for every taste...You over there! You're built like Hercules in person...And look at the croup, the muscles on that young lady! I bet she could throw an elephant. Well, what are you waiting for...Help yourselves gentlemen. We've got a shoe for every foot. Your majesty, a woman like that is a blessing. She'll give us a whole work gang before she's through."<sup>562</sup>

Even though the words above are not Christophe's, they can be seen as an extension of Césaire's criticism of him. Put differently, this speech touts the dictator's austere programme, but also infers that he condones women being reduced to their bodies, including for their ostensive capacity to work, procreate, and to be possessed by men. This contradicts the track of Césairean negritude where the feminine is highly respected and practically sacred, even while it may be repeatedly subsumed under a patriarchal standard.

*The Tragedy of King Christophe* is certainly different than any of Césaire's writings before it. It is a piece based on momentous events and expressed through an actual historical figure, not a loose extrapolation of one or a script derived from his imagination. While the poet-turned-playwright undoubtedly had political objectives in bringing the story to the stage and there are creative liberties undertaken, his representations of gender appear to again help to define this project. Therefore, a gendering of the land as a woman is discernible; however here

---

<sup>562</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

he delves into this rendering to underscore the extent to which Christophe's headship is a misapprehension of negritude – a tenor throughout the play. Furthermore, the phallic objects that he deploys to rescue Haiti are not trees, the sun, or the sky, but rather designs that emulate emblems of Western hegemony, such as grand constructions, oligarchic governance, and the imposition of grievous working conditions. The Madame Christophe character is also serviceable for Césaire's lesson. Like his feminine essence elsewhere, she is associated with the land, and its disenfranchised Black masses, as well as an access point for true negritude. On the other hand, the protagonist's masculinist expression and failure to appropriately harness patriarchal power is implicitly chided throughout.

Nevertheless, like the creative works before it, embodied women are minimized in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*. As important as Madame Christophe may be for Césaire, she has relatively few lines, and by some measure is typecast like the Beloved as her concerns are couched in terms of the maternal or feminine. Meanwhile, the voices of other women in the play are silenced and many of those that do appear at the centre of the stage are disparaged. In a sense, Césaire would have been limited by the source material at his disposal, as women were predominantly invisibilized as agents of history in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, his appraisal of the events surrounding Christophe's reign had the latitude for more progressive treatment of women characters. Depicting a female rebel leader or other women who were as equally invested in the building of the post-colonial state would have been well within Césaire's scope for the story. Instead, the piece bares another instance where his mould of negritude is enveloped by phallocentrism.

*A Season in the Congo*

In 1966, Césaire published another play that was far more contemporaneous than his first original offering called *Une Saison au Congo* (*A Season in the Congo*). It was revised in 1967 and appeared on stage for the first time that year in Paris. The story is set in the late 1950s and early 1960s on the African continent, but there are obvious parallels with *The Tragedy of King Christophe*. The central character is another aspirational male political leader engaged in a convulsive struggle from colonialism to independence and post-colonialism until he meets his tragic demise. More to the point, the drama follows anti-colonialist Patrice Lumumba's rise and fall in a two-year period as the Belgian Congo colony transitioned to what would then be called the Republic of Congo, of which he would become the first Prime Minister. Apart from King Christophe, Lumumba is fashioned as closely connected to the desires of the colonized masses in the country. However, Césaire shows him encountering a number of obstacles from several factions as the plot progresses, ranging from ethnic strife, economic turmoil and omnipresent manipulation by the colonizer. Still, *A Season in the Congo* is not too preoccupied with Lumumba's personality, but rather uses him as the main lens to expose the socio-political circumstances of the colony as it tries to shake its colonial shackles and forge a national identity. There are several other characters in the script, including a few women, thus providing some opportunity to scrutinize their representations, notwithstanding their minor roles, along with the broader utility of gender in the piece.

Early in the play, one of the three women with whom Lumumba will in due course have a substantive dialogue makes an appearance. Mama Makosi, or the "Mighty Madame" as she is first referred to in the script, is seen gathered with a group of other Congolese Africans at a bar. When they learn that the leader of the party whom they all support, Lumumba, has been jailed by the Belgians after being accused of inciting anti-colonial riots, ideas are floated with respect to

how best to respond to the situation. One of the women in the group suggests a strike that would be accompanied by street demonstrations as a protest against his imprisonment. Mama Makosi immediately dismisses this proposed radical action. Instead, she convinces the group that a more effective approach would be to work and raise money for Lumumba's bail so that he can properly represent them. Her proposal is ostensibly similar to the caution exhibited by the women characters in Césaire's previous dramas. For Adaku Annan, this character's aversion to revolutionary strategies is a letdown. Annan points to a scene later in the play when Mama Makosi's brothel is surrounded by paratroopers trying to re-arrest Lumumba and she "rushes in with other women in a panic, probably more concerned with their own safety than that of Lumumba and his men."<sup>563</sup> Hence, although the audience is initially "prepared by the writer to expect a powerful woman who would contribute to the struggle and keep Congo on its feet, we are faced with an emotional individual who appears to shy away from action and rather enjoys the privilege of personal association of those in authority."<sup>564</sup>

If one is to read *A Season in the Congo*, akin to *The Tragedy of King Christophe* or "And the Dogs Were Silent," without taking into account the larger political project that Césaire is setting out, then Mama Makosi can perhaps be read as another cautionary female character imbued with traditional feminine traits. Yet, more context, particularly with respect to the interactions between her and Lumumba reveals further complexity. As an unmarried woman who runs a bar/brothel, the superficial observer would probably find the relatively close relationship between Mama Makosi and the protagonist to be curious. By Act II, Scene 1 her role is better understood during a scene that features a conversation between Lumumba and his political party colleague Mokutu – whose name is a bastardization of eventual real-life

---

<sup>563</sup> Adaku Tawaia Annan, "Revolution as Theatre: Revolutionary Aesthetics in the Works of Selected Black Playwrights" (PhD. diss., dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987), University of Virginia, 1997), 182.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.



Congolese dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. Mokutu opines that if Lumumba, now Prime Minister, continues to be seen in bars, the outside world will view Congolese as “sex-crazed apes” and their reputation would be further tarnished.<sup>565</sup> What’s more, when Mama Mokosi invites Lumumba to her bar for an event which will feature food, dancing – and surely sex workers – Mokutu advises against it, avowing that it is not fitting for him to attend such a gathering. She retorts that Lumumba will “always be the same Patrice for us.”<sup>566</sup> Her response indicates Lumumba’s relatability to Mama Mokosi and the alienated working-class and poor that regularly patronize these spaces. Lumumba recognizes that while the bars have their drawbacks, it is the colonial masters who have put a strain on the state of affairs in the Republic of Congo, not these places nor the people in them. Moreover, Mama Makosi and the energy within her establishment are “a faithful reflection of our Congo today” where there is “something fresh and new sprouting through the compost.”<sup>567</sup> Here Césaire seeks to underscore that Lumumba’s visits to these bars are more than just a vice. He gains insight through these interactions and draws closer to everyday people as the country is consumed in a process of defining its destiny as an independent nation. Congruous with Césairean negritude’s feminine, Mama Makosi represents both the people that he is invested in as well as their confidence in him and his ideals. For instance, her strategy to secure Lumumba’s release from jail is a signal of the message of hard work that he continually tried to impart to his followers. The reciprocity is pronounced later when Lumumba, now a fugitive, discloses his intention to use Mama Makosi’s bar as his headquarters. Although she is justifiably frightened when the paratroopers eventually arrive, she unhesitantly accedes to the request: “the house is yours, and the people will protect you.”<sup>568</sup>

---

<sup>565</sup> Césaire, *A Season in the Congo*, 43.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

Even after Lumumba's death, Mama Makosi continues to typify the many that followed him. At a rally where Mokutu declares Lumumba a national hero, some in the crowd express their appreciation by saying "Long live Mokutu!" Mama Makosi also in attendance, rejects the sentiment and encapsulates the defiance of the fallen leader: "I say what I want. Uhuru Lumumba."<sup>569</sup> Thus, the spirit of the great anti-colonialist lives on in people like Mama Makosi.

There is another female character in the play with an even smaller role that Césaire similarly uses to convey an underlying political point. After the army on Lumumba's orders suppresses an uprising by a militarized secessionist faction, ethnic tensions become inflamed, and he is blamed when soldiers massacre civilians of the Baluba tribe. Although he does not accept responsibility for the incident, remarking that it was the Belgian police that allowed for the ethnic conflict and carnage to reach the depths that it did, Lumumba seeks to escape amid this crisis and intriguingly finds himself at a bar with a "good-time" woman or "girl." named Hélène Jewel. In the only scene that she appears, they share an intimate dance. Karen Boucher observes that Lumumba's choice of Hélène is symbolic since she is from the Lulua tribe – the traditional enemies of the Baluba. Hence, "His dancing with a Lulua woman is a way of showing the world that he refuses to succumb to their criticisms and ahistorical interpretation of the events."<sup>570</sup> With uncertain days ahead for his country and his life in balance, Lumumba orates what the dance means to him and then implores her to continue: "We have danced the dance of my life! When I am gone, when I am spent...when the Congo is no more than a season seasoned with blood, be beautiful, still beautiful, keeping of the terrible days no more...No sadness, darling. Dance with me till dawn and give me heart to go to the end of the night."<sup>571</sup>

---

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>570</sup> Karen Boucher, *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba* (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2010), 146.

<sup>571</sup> Césaire, *A Season in the Congo*, 60.

Thus, Hélène's other task in the story is "to prepare Lumumba for his heroic martyrdom, to be a witness to his splendor and transcendent demise."<sup>572</sup> As with Mama Makosi, Hélène is used to help support and project the protagonist's grand objectives – irrespective of whether he may be facing death – rather than being an impediment.

On the other hand, the woman character with the most dialogue and closest proximity to Lumumba in *A Season in the Congo*, his wife Pauline, diverges from these two women. Her placement is akin to Madame Christophe. Although contrary to Christophe's reactionary politics Lumumba is following a bottom-up radical blueprint that upholds the desires of Congo's masses, Pauline, too, acts to foreshadow her husband's heartrending fall. She passionately pours doubt on the notion that he is faithfully supported by party colleagues and followers. He agrees that he has enemies but is adamant that "the people are for me" and they would be his "shield."<sup>573</sup> Lumumba continues: "I speak to them, they understand me, they follow me. We are in revolution, Pauline, and in a revolution, it is the people that count."<sup>574</sup> A cynical Pauline warns against this view: "The people, yes. But the people are weak and disarmed. They're credulous. And your enemies are sly and patient, and they've got the whole world behind them."<sup>575</sup> Indeed, despite his dismissals, Lumumba's wife could see that his prospects of success were insuperable, with lurking betrayals and crises mounting around him by this point in the play. At the same time, distinct from Madame Christophe, her corrective does not allow him to fulfil his duties to the masses he presides over in this post-colonial state. In one of the play's final scenes, she queries him about his feelings for her and his children: "I have never turned you aside from your duty, but Africa is not your wife...Do you want the people to see me with my head shaved,

---

<sup>572</sup> Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo*, 146.

<sup>573</sup> Césaire, *A Season in the Congo*, 65

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

following a funeral procession? And the children? Do you want them to be orphans?”<sup>576</sup> Hence, as Annan notes, she is resentful of her husband’s “neglect of his family to ‘over-involve’ himself with the country”<sup>577</sup> Further, while on the whole she is presented as “more intuitive than her husband and more concerned about his safety than Lumumba himself,” this intuition is “presented as a feminine trait, not a result of any political insight.”<sup>578</sup> Moreover, although Lumumba, Christophe and the Rebel are all different, Césaire’s scripting of Pauline displays a pattern of his protagonists being constrained by stereotypical feminine characteristics through their wives. In the end, for better or worse, they press on with their respective vision to assert heroic masculinity.

In addition, Césaire’s inclination to feminize the land and link it to a phallogentric ascension of negritude is also present in *A Season in the Congo*. The archetype is evident in an Independence Day ceremony speech by Lumumba:

We are the people who have been dispossessed, beaten, mutilated; the people for whom the conquerors treated as inferiors, in whose face they spat. A people of kitchen boys, house boys, laundry boys, in short, a people of boys, of yea-bwanas, and anyone who wanted to prove that a man is not necessarily a man could take us as an example.  
Sire, whatever suffering, whatever humiliation could be known, we have known it.  
But comrades, they were not able to dull our taste for life, and we resisted.  
We didn’t have much to fight with, but we fought, we fought for fifty years.  
And today we have won.  
Today our country is in the hands of its children.  
This sky, this river, these lands are ours...  
People of the Congo, this is a great day.  
It is when the nations of the world welcome Congo, our mother,  
and still more Congo our child,  
child of our sleepless nights, of our sufferings, of our struggles.<sup>579</sup>

It is quite clear that the anti-colonial struggle in this dialogue has been framed as most critically, if not exclusively, falling under the domain of the men of Congo. Albeit tacit, what is

---

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>577</sup> Tawaia Annan, “Revolution as Theatre,” 183.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>579</sup> Césaire, *A Season in the Congo*, 19.

conveyed here is that the once emasculated colonized men engaged in negritude, and as a result, have reclaimed their maleness and restored the dignity of the land, or their mother, which they draw nourishment from and are also meant to protect. Put another way, through the central character, Césaire transmits the achievement of nationhood itself as a patriarchal venture. Yet, the reference to the land as “our child” somewhat disturbs Césaire’s paradigm. Bouwer explains what this may signify: “Their masculinity rehabilitated through this gesture of wresting their country from the rapacious hands of the colonizers, they express their creative potency in terms of procreation and parenting. Birthing and mothering have been appropriated by men.”<sup>580</sup> This appropriation harks back to the gender warps Césaire engages in at particular junctures within the poems reviewed above. Similarly, it does not take away from the phallocentrism that pervades the overall narrative, especially at this moment when women are effectively erased from notions of nation formation.

Nevertheless, even as nation-building is masculinist, and Lumumba names the figurative child “Kongo, our king” thereby simultaneously rejecting King Leopold and the Belgians and evoking the ancient kingdom of Kongo, the newly independent nation itself is a woman, specifically a mother. In fact, the hero later refers to his wife as Pauline Congo. Thus, Césaire’s crafting of Pauline serves a dual purpose, as in addition to her conventional qualities, she is also an explicit projection of the Mother Africa trope upon which renewed Black humanity rests.<sup>581</sup> In the final dialogue between them where, as discussed above, she rebukes him for his interminable commitment to a cause and people she believes are destined to betray him, the

---

<sup>580</sup> Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo*, 145.

<sup>581</sup> Bouwer discusses this Mother Africa trope quoting Florence Stratton who says that it “functions both formally and thematically to valorize African culture. It also operates to refute colonial representations of Africa...a negative image of Africa as savage, [infertile], and treacherous is replaced by a positive one: an image of Africa as warm and sensuous, fruitful and nurturing.” Further, when projected onto African women as Césaire does, it offers “a mythic concept of supreme motherhood” and ignores “the limited status of the woman who is required to do her husband’s bidding in her day-to-day life.” See *Ibid.*, 136.

character rejects her husband's framing: "I haven't got the name of a country or a river, I've got the name of a woman: Pauline."<sup>582</sup> On the one hand, this reads as if she is asserting her independent personhood, demanding to be seen as more than a convenient symbol within the realm of his nationalist musings. Yet, given the context, Pauline instead comes across as a clichéd wife interested in her family above all, including her husband's safety, and doubtful that the radical future he envisions can come to fruition. In response, Lumumba indicates directly that he wants more from her:

It can't be helped. In my heart I've always called you Pauline Congo, and your double name has helped me doubly to control my weakness. And I'm prepared to defy the whole world if I know I can count on you. If I die, I leave the children a legacy of great struggle. And you will help them, guide them, arm them.<sup>583</sup>

These startling lines is the last contact he has with Pauline before he is killed. He tells his wife to take on the responsibility of leading their children on a path toward his resolute anti-colonial position. Notwithstanding her prescience regarding his colleagues, apart from being a caring partner, the audience has been given no indication that Pauline is invested in Lumumba's politics before this communication. What's more, in the real-life letter to Pauline of which dialogue is an extrapolation, Lumumba's request is passive and indirect.<sup>584</sup> Still, it is not likely that Césaire is suddenly trying to show that Pauline was political all along. Rather, by having her fade from the stage here right after those words are spoken, she is purposefully transmuted into a symbol. Pauline "Congo" is to now reflect her ascribed name. A mother figure to Lumumba's off-spring/followers that inspires and guides them and who they are also to revere,

---

<sup>582</sup> Césaire, *A Season in the Congo*, 86.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>584</sup> Bouwer quotes Lumumba actual words: "To my children whom I leave and whom perhaps I will see no more, I wish that they be told that the future of the Congo is beautiful and that it expects from them, as it expects from each Congolese, to accomplish the sacred task of reconstruction of our independence and our sovereignty." See Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo*, 148.

respect and protect. Further evidence of this comes in the final scene of the last act. Pauline delivers a monologue and at the end of it she imagines hearing and seeing her husband:

“Look! Hush! Hush! There he is!” A Sanza player enters and offers a few lines to no one in particular and starts a war chant that Pauline echoes: “Luma! Luma!” As the play concludes, her voice is the last one the audience hears while “the drums of vengeance answer their call well into the night.”<sup>585</sup>

The situating of Pauline here signifies the continuation of Lumumba’s legacy. Despite the turmoil of the day, his spirit lives on through her – Mother Africa (Congo). It is a metamorphosis expressly connected to the lead character that can be compared to Madame Christophe’s representation by the end of *The Tragedy of King Christophe*.

In the subsequent versions of the play, Pauline is silent in the final scene and the war cry is eliminated, as it is believed that Césaire did not want perceived attention placed on Lumumba’s personal life to detract from the political aim of the play.<sup>586</sup> Even as others have argued that Pauline’s presence in the original script took nothing away from this objective, the character’s minimalization persists across all versions of the play. Put differently, she has few lines and becomes most important in the first configuration of the piece when she has been converted into an emblem. By the end of this edition, she is no longer recognizable as the woman who groused about her husband’s political principles, including his allegiance to “the people.” Instead, she is an acolyte of Lumumba. Nonetheless, leaving aside her dis/appearance in the last scene, it could be argued that Pauline’s main function is merely to shore up the protagonist since her substance goes no further than being the spouse of Lumumba. Bouwer assesses the implications of this for the character and women in general who are similarly portrayed: “In being reduced to symbol, they are denied subjectivity and agency, indeed, any

---

<sup>585</sup> These final lines and stage directions are in the initial version of the script and have been translated by Bouwer. See Bouwer, *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo*, 147.

<sup>586</sup> See discussion on the significance of Pauline’s inclusion/exclusion in *Ibid.*, 147-148.

presence on the stage. They became figments of the (de)colonial imagination. Never do the women seem to be, and speak for, themselves.”<sup>587</sup>

Brouwer’s observation can be extended to the Mama Makosi and H       Jewel characters, as well as the other women in the play who say almost nothing. In essence, to a greater degree than Pauline before she is transfigured, these women, although captivating, have no independent thought, while their roles can best be understood as affirming Lumumba’s outlook. For Mama Makosi, this can be found in her representation of the hero’s oneness with the colonized masses, while H      ’s assignment is to amplify his unwavering nationalism. They do not stand alone or add anything to the plot aside from facilitating C      ’s mythologizing of Lumumba. The same can be said for the women that the protagonist encounters at the bar. These women are portrayed as being swooned by his charm and boast of superior virility. Even when he sings a song objectifying them after touting the libido-enhancing qualities of a beer he sells/drinks, he is met with wide applause making it clear that these women “serve to highlight Lumumba’s masculinity.”<sup>588</sup> More to the point, it is a masculinity that C       hopes to restore in alignment with his negritude ethos, even if it comes at the expense of women and their contributions to anti-colonialism, nationalism and political struggle as a whole.

*A Season in the Congo* allows for deeper insight into C      ’s grappling with gender within the theatrical arena, as he employs more female characters to engage with the male lead than in his prior two pieces. The Mama Makosi and H       Jewel characters, along with the women at the bar, are a novelty, as they do not in any way seek to dissuade the protagonist from his political vision. Instead, they endorse it without trepidation. These women are constructed more as sycophants than sovereign contributing intellectual interlocutors, and they ultimately aid

---

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>588</sup> See Brouwer’s discussion in Ibid., 141-142.



in the accentuation of Lumumba's masculinity. Mama Makosi is the only one out of this group who appears in multiple scenes with dialogue and an inkling of civic consciousness. She does not play a traditional gender role or the Mother Africa trope but is still reduced to a symbol that Césaire deploys to reinforce the hero's ideals. This is especially clear-cut as the piece winds-up and she utters "Uhuru Lumumba" while surrounded by devotees of Congo's duplicitous new leader. On the other hand, Pauline is practically a carbon copy of the Beloved and Madame Christophe in her role as a fretful romantic partner until she, somewhat like the latter, is converted into a signifier of the thrust of negritude and carrier of Lumumba's legacy. In the end, while there are some instances in the play where gender dichotomies are interrupted to a degree and women are saliently featured, Césaire's patriarchal anti-colonial nationalist assumptions still linger 30 years after his first publications.

## Conclusion

Aimé Césaire produced several powerful creative pieces over the course of his life that exemplify his propensity for revolutionary thought. Themes of anti-colonialism, self-determination and transformation unequivocally pervade as he wields his negritude framework. Yet, his positioning of gender also plays a vital role in the advancement of these ideas in certain texts.

The multifaceted *Cahier* is rich with examples of Césaire employing gender norms to crystalize a turbulent journey against the ills of colonialism toward self-determination and an expansion of Western universalism. Certainly, beyond a commitment to the use of gendered language, he also exhibits dexterity in his exploration of masculine and feminine assumptions in this long poem that is refreshingly disruptive. For instance, the geographic picture he paints is one of sexualized symbols within a gender binary setup that ascribes both positive and negative

attributes to each side. This at least hints at an awareness of the social construction that inheres men's and women's roles and expectations, as his gender dislocations on this plane can be traced to the apogee of the piece. Yet, embodied femaleness is marginalized in *Cahier* and eventually left out of the transformation of Césaire's radical subject and revolution broadly, while patriarchal logic is reified. The corollary then is that negritude is an action of which men must be at the forefront, while women are ancillary within the confines this fateful task.

The trend of maneuvering around gender norms is also evident in "Chevelure" and "Lost Body," namely through tree similes. Although the feminine, or women, appear to be encompassed in the manifestation of negritude in "Chevelure" standing alongside their opposite number, it is also plausible to see the transubstantiation here as Césaire inscribing his male liberator. Either way, this role does not materialize without the interplay of gender in the piece that culminates at its apex. On the other hand, the peak of "Lost Body" is not vague about who is to take up the mantle of revolutionary leadership in the Black struggle against colonialism. Indeed, the masculinist language that he deploys in this poem not only exemplifies the subject's formidable show of strength but in effect, invisibilizes the feminine as even their traditional role as Creator is seemingly appropriated as it is in *Cahier*.

Césaire's shift to playwrighting enables an assessment of how he treats gender through his depiction of visually personified figures. "And the Dogs Were Silent" is his first attempt in the field of theatre, but it unfolds much like his poems – with the male hero as the vessel for combat against the forces of Black subjugation. To be sure, the Rebel is valorously insistent in his mission to assert negritude, even as he concedes it will lead to his death. Gender norms are unquestionably reproduced in the play, as the two main female characters, the Beloved and the Mother are portrayed as more invested in romantic love and nurturing impulses respectively,

than self-determination at all costs. Furthermore, although these women have minor roles, Césaire uses them as symbolic pieces, whose ideas, tethered to their gender, must be vanquished so that liberation for all may be achieved.

*The Tragedy of King Christophe* has a different objective than the cited works before it, but the gender trappings are similar. The play takes place in Haiti where, recall, Césaire proclaimed in *Cahier* that “negritude rose for the first time and stated that it believed in its humanity.”<sup>589</sup> However, King Christophe engages in activities that undermine the goals of the Haitian revolution, even though he thinks his undertakings are in line with them. He is reminded of the error in his ways by his wife Madame Christophe who, through her objection to his decisions as head of state, her representation of the masses that King Christophe has alienated, and her assignment at the play’s culmination, comes to herald a legitimate articulation of negritude. At the same time, her dialogue is noticeably limited, especially given both her closeness to the protagonist and what she stands for. Further, like the women characters in “And the Dogs Were Silent,” she basically fits into age-old categorizations of women, as even her crucial lesson is uttered by way of this model. Moreover, Césaire again steepes into a gendering of the land with Haiti being reckoned as mother. Here, the tactic is additionally used to differentiate between a proper application of radical negritude and King Christophe’s reactionary version, which comprises of the derision of women and their bodies. Yet, outside of Madame Christophe, there are no other women characters with dialogue in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*.

Although the context is different, much of these same threads are present in *A Season in the Congo*. Set in an African colony wrestling with the tribulations of decolonization, the land here, Congo, is defined as both a woman and child at different points by the play’s central

---

<sup>589</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, 19.

character, Lumumba, and implicitly in need of protection by once emasculated men. A plain connection is also made between Congo, where negritude is essentially in the process of standing up – via its birthing and rehabilitation by men – and Lumumba’s wife whom he refers to as Pauline Congo. Nonetheless, prior to Césaire appropriating her for his mother Africa trope, Pauline’s dialogue with Lumumba parallels the putative feminine essence of the Beloved, the Mother, and Madame Christophe characters, concerning their engagement with the respective protagonist. What’s more, while there are other women characters in *A Season of the Congo* that go against these standard images, and buoy up the protagonist, their discourse is limited and they act as props to undergird him on a revolutionary pathway, rather than truly autonomous figures.

In the end, Aimé Césaire’s poems and plays demonstrate that he is not oblivious to the function of gender in his theory of anti-colonial struggle. On the contrary, it is constitutive of his philosophy of negritude, and by some measure, as compelling as it is complex therein. Still, as poignant as his outlook is on fighting back against the plight of people of African descent, these works unveil that such actions often entail replicating normative gender roles, thus not incorporating women as agents of change on the same level as their male counterparts.

## Chapter 7 – The Role of Women in the Philosophic Rise of C.L.R. James

It was put forward in Chapter 5 that elements of C.L.R. James' portrayal of women's roles and tacit critiques of gender in his fictional pieces seem to anticipate his evolution as a theorist. The discussion here turns to the subject of women and gender mainly outside the realm of his creative writing. Although there is some examination of how he treats these matters in his nonfiction works, it takes place within a broader exploration of the impact that women in James's life have on his development into the field of Black radicalism. This exercise seeks to demonstrate that even as he makes gripping submissions on revolutionary thought and action across the breadth of several fields or contexts, he is crucially aided by the women around him. Moreover, the point of departure relies on an underlying assumption that these texts do not engage female representation with the kind of vigilance that one might expect given the apparent import of women's rights issues, or women's roles, to his activities dating back to his abovementioned literary writing phase. In other words, even though James grows intellectually due to the alliances and partnerships he has with women, his political acumen on gender and the so-called "Woman Question" does not really come close to the extraordinary agency he embodies in some of the women in his creative texts.

Some of James' potential early influences in England are considered, and *The Black Jacobins* is revisited once again before the analysis shifts to his productivity in the United States where most of this chapter focuses. Indeed, in that country, he essentially cements the core of his philosophical outlook. James's relationships with women such as Constance Webb, Raya Dunayevskaya, Grace (Lee) Boggs, and Selma (Deitch) James are interrogated to illustrate their connections to the conclusions he reaches during his 15-year sojourn in the United States and beyond. Therefore, James' involvement with groups like the Socialist Workers Party, the

Johnson Forrest Tendency, and related newspaper publications *Internal Discussion Bulletin* and *Correspondence*, is examined, along with his progress on the so-called “Woman Question.”

Additionally, James’ penchant for presenting unorthodox women characters in his creative imaginary is reiterated – primarily through scrutiny of two figures in a revised version of his play *Toussaint Louverture* – even while drawing out his foible on the function of race in the fight for women’s liberation.

### **Juanita Samuel Young**

It should be noted that while there is a dearth of material available on the women whom C.L.R. James may have affiliated with during his early adult years in Trinidad, his marriage to Juanita Samuel Young should be highlighted for a second time. They were only married for three years before James left Trinidad for England, but she did play a primary role in the production of his work at the time. As stated in Chapter 5, Young was a skilled stenographer who “proofread and typed the first publications to which he signed his name” and “maintained his household” as he devoted himself to writing.<sup>590</sup> This suggests that apart from an intimate relationship through marriage, to some extent, she may have been an intellectual partner to James as well. As a secretary in a law firm at the time she married James, Young would have likely possessed a skill set that allowed for a high degree of meticulousness in the reviews of his texts and even debate the clarity of themes and ideas he was trying to put across. This process would surely have been useful as *Minty Alley* and *The Life of Captain Cipriani* were drafted during these years. Still, very little is known about her, aside from a few comments that James makes

---

<sup>590</sup> Johnson, “Sex and the Subversive Alien,” 192. Also, Rosengarten notes that Young “put her talent as a skilled stenographer at James’ disposal for several years...” See Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 20.

about her in his unfinished autobiography and a life-long friend who recalls that James took his marriage to Young for granted.<sup>591</sup>

### **Marxist Women and Amy Ashwood Garvey**

The women that James becomes close to are easier to track when he leaves Trinidad in 1932. Not long after James' foray into leftist spaces in England, he met several women who helped to facilitate his trajectory as a thinker and political activist. It is believed that Esther Ball was likely responsible for James joining the Independent Labour Party, while another woman, Margaret Johns, persuaded him to become a member of the Marxist Group.<sup>592</sup> As was previously discussed, his participation in these organizations led to his commitment to Marxism and thrust him into campaigns in support of the international workers' rights movement. From a theoretical standpoint, it meant an immersion into the lineage of capitalist critique from Marx to Lenin, to Trotsky. To be sure, the foundation of James' outlook on political economy began here. In addition, he befriended two other women, Nan MacLean Milton of Scotland and Nora Connolly O'Brien from neighbouring Ireland, who also played an important role in his early activism. Frank Rosengarten briefly describes his relationship with them in *Urbane*

#### *Revolutionary:*

Both women were simultaneously nationalists, republicans, and socialists who worked closely with C.L.R. in mobilizing European resistance to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. In late 1935 Nora Connolly O'Brien invited James to Ireland to speak on the invasion. Shortly thereafter, she began a correspondence with Trotsky at about the same time that James began writing to the exiled Russian revolutionary.<sup>593</sup>

Thus, MacLean Milton and Connolly O'Brien helped to provide a pathway towards the organizing efforts he was most impassioned about in the mid to late 1930s, as well as a

---

<sup>591</sup> See Selwyn R. Cudjoe, "'As Ever Darling, All My Love, Nello': The Love Letters of C.L.R. James," in Cudjoe and Cain, *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*, 215-216.

<sup>592</sup> Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 96.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

soundboard for anti-oppression or anti-colonial discourse. Yet, James likely worked more closely with another woman, Amy Ashwood Garvey, who was an original member, along with several other pan-Africanists based in London, of the International African Friends of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) that he founded in 1935. Ashwood Garvey remained even as the organization split up after the war in Ethiopia and changed its name to the International African Service Bureau in 1937, retaining its most radical members for the new formation.<sup>594</sup> Indeed, she would have already had nearly two decades of experience as an organizer with the widely popular internationalist United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). She was critical to the growth of that group alongside her husband Marcus Garvey as, among other things, she became secretary and one of the first directors of the Black Star Line Shipping Corporation, which was a steamship company that sought to foster trade among people of the African diaspora towards Black self-determination.<sup>595</sup> Rhoda Reddock notes that the UNIA had a dual-sex hierarchy that “provided space for women to acquire skills and experience in organizing, leadership and cooperation.”<sup>596</sup> Nonetheless, Ashwood Garvey was an illuminating figure in her own right, as she continued to make her mark in Jamaica, the United States and England long after she divorced in 1922.<sup>597</sup> During this period, she had a jazz club in Central London that became “a regular meeting place for activists, artists and students.”<sup>598</sup> James recalls that it was also a place where “the only good food in town was served” and featured Ashwood Garvey’s Trinidadian

---

<sup>594</sup> In a June 5, 1936 letter, James claims that he left the International Friends of Ethiopia after the group decided to support sanctions and “possibly lead British workers to what Marxists knew from the start would be an imperialist war.” See C.L.R. James, “Fighting for the Abyssinian Emperor,” *New Leader* (June 5, 1936), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1936/06/abyssinia.html>.

<sup>595</sup> Verene Shepherd discusses Ashwood Garvey’s involvement in the Black Star Line Shipping Corporation. See Verene Shepherd, *Women in Caribbean History: The British-colonised Territories* (Ian Randle Publishers, 1999), 181.

<sup>596</sup> Rhoda Reddock, “The first Mrs. Garvey: Pan-Africanism and feminism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century British colonial Caribbean,” *Feminist African* 19 (2014): 58-77., 72.

<sup>597</sup> For more on the life and achievements of Amy Ashwood Garvey see *Ibid.*, 58-77.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.



partner who, in addition to his musical talents, had long been an open supporter of women's rights.<sup>599</sup> Moreover, it is plausible that Ashwood Garvey's wealth of experience as an internationalist – which consisted not only of her attachment to building the UNIA, but also co-founded the Nigerian Progress Union when she first moved to England in 1924, and soon after this becoming an impresario in the United States – had a marked impact on James as he learned the tenets of grassroots organization and his viewpoint turned out to be increasingly globalized.

Certainly, although there is limited data on his interactions with them, the women that were present at the time of James' initial enchantment with Marxism, anti-colonialism and Pan-Africanism were reminiscent of the type of women that captivated him in his fiction stories like "Triumph" and *Minty Alley*. Ashwood Garvey could be described as independent, passionate, intelligent, and feminist. She embodied women's empowerment and made herself recognizable despite what Reddock terms "the patriarchal character of early pan-Africanist organisations."<sup>600</sup> Hence, one might speculate that as James delved into political writing, women and intrinsic critiques of gender would figure prominently in his analysis. Then again, aside from patriarchy often emanating from Pan-Africanist outfits, for most radicals of this era, further entrenchment with Marxist organizations inexorably meant an emphasis on class struggle that generally precluded meaningful assessments on gender in addition to blind spots on race. Nevertheless, James had an opportunity to infuse a project he had envisioned for several years with the knowledge and perspectives he had gained while living in England in the 1930s, including women connected to his most salient activities.

---

<sup>599</sup> Reddock quote of James appears in Delia Jarret-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson: 1905-1965* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998), 84. She also cites a 1929 article that appeared in the *Jamaican Gleaner* where Ashwood Garvey's partner, Trinidadian comedian Sam Manning, drew attention to issues affecting Black women and called on Black men to support them. See Reddock, "The first Mrs. Garvey," 68.

<sup>600</sup> Reddock, "The first Mrs. Garvey," 72.

## Women and Gender in *The Black Jacobins*

Before James left England for the United States at the end of the decade, all his wrangling with the information he gathered on the circumstances that led to Haitian statehood resulted in arguably his most popular text to date, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. As previously discussed, the 1938 publication is essentially a historical piece that examines the roots of the Haitian Revolution from a materialist perspective. Simply put, it represents an intersection of James' early Marxist thought and anti-colonial activism. However, like the play on the same subject matter before it, *Toussaint Louverture*, glaringly absent from the lengthy book is any consequential perusal on the role that women either in general or as individual actors played among the revolutionary masses during the movement to abolish slavery in San Domingo.

In the opening chapter of the book, after referring to the colony's escaped enslaved people or rather "Those whose boldness of spirit found slavery intolerable and refused to evade it by committing suicide by flying into the woods and mountains as free men – maroons." James adds "Women followed them. They reproduced themselves."<sup>601</sup> Contrary to his novel and short stories, as well as his encounters with Marxist women and Amy Ashwood Garvey, these women seem to be nothing more than an afterthought for James as he demarcates whose "boldness of spirit" should be emphasized in this gender binary. Faith Smith argues that the mere presence of women in this context only occurs to James when he needed to account for how these communities expanded through reproduction. As Smith puts it "Women rounded out a picture for him, providing the backdrop to the 'real' historical actors."<sup>602</sup> Subsequently "mulatto" women who had previously fought against the British are described as "assisting the men with a

---

<sup>601</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 20.

<sup>602</sup> Faith Smith, "Coming Home to the Real Thing: Gender and Intellectual Life in the Anglophone Caribbean" in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 93, no. 4 (Fall, 1994): 895-923., 898.

fearlessness and disregard that showed their revolutionary temper,” though they are not on the side of Toussaint and the San Domingo revolutionaries, and no further narrative about them is given.<sup>603</sup> Later, there is a passing reference of women “fighting side by side with the men” in a scene with Toussaint’s supposed successor and his wife, but again, there is no discussion on what this signifies or any other related discussion.<sup>604</sup> Finally, James provides an anecdote of a woman who “shamed” her husband when they are both brought forward for execution and proclaimed: “You do not know how sweet it is to die for liberty!” He adds, “refusing to allow herself to be hanged by the executioner, she took the rope and hanged herself,” while another woman told her daughters attending the execution with her “Be glad you will not be the mothers of slaves.”<sup>605</sup> While on this occasion James captures the rebelliousness of women ensnared in the dramatic events leading to the overturning of slavery in the colony, it is momentary, as this is the extent of the conversation. Indeed, throughout *The Black Jacobins*, he makes no meaningful effort to elaborate on the audacity of the society’s most beleaguered women the way one may have expected based on his creative writing.

The exclusion of “female agency as fact or issue” in *The Black Jacobins* as Cora Kaplan notes gives “free reign to the imaginative possibilities and limitations of pure masculinist heroism.”<sup>606</sup> To be sure, this is what James’ review of the incredible victory of the formerly enslaved over their colonial oppressors amounts to as men, by and large, are his only actors. Toussaint Louverture, through whose “individual leadership” James regards as “responsible for this unique achievement...almost entirely” gains the most attention among the self-liberated men

---

<sup>603</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 232.

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid.*, 346, 257. James explains that Dessalines called upon Toussaint’s nephew and anointed successor, Charles Belair, and his wife Sanite, to join him in a battle against the French. The implication is that the wife was invited to this meeting because “women were now fighting side by side against the men” (346).

<sup>605</sup> *Ibid.*, 361-362.

<sup>606</sup> Cora Kaplan, “Black Heroes/White Writers: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the Literary Imagination,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 46 (Autumn, 1998): 32-62, 55.

at the forefront of the revolutionary war, along with Jean-Jacques Dessaline's unapologetic disposition in the face of their oppressors.<sup>607</sup> James' configuration makes it inevitable that the link between intelligence, leadership, strength, courage and dominance would be indelibly linked with men and perceived positively in this historical moment. At the same time, James' construction of Toussaint also celebrates patriarchy in ways that conflict with his approach in *Minty Alley*. For example, Keguro Macharia observes "despite having numerous affairs with other women," James makes no comment on Toussaint's polygamy.<sup>608</sup> Distinct from Benoit and Haynes, James does not submit any implicit critique on the patriarchal virility of the book's namesake. Indeed, Toussaint's imperfections in this account have nothing to do with him exerting masculinist privilege over the women in his life. Macharia argues further that the telling of the protagonist's efforts when he retained political power to ensure that women and children were cared for, and earlier the safety of his former master's wife, shows the hero as a "noble patriarch" and "Implicitly James suggests that a large measure of Toussaint's greatness lies in his ability to embody and rehabilitate respectable, patriarchal intimate life."<sup>609</sup> Thus, as James tried to convey the greatness of the central character, he relied on normative ideas of gender, apart from what is presented in *Minty Alley*, which is published two years before *The Black Jacobins*.

It is not difficult to imagine why James would have refrained from critique at the junctures described above, as his primary purpose was to depict a brilliant, magnanimous, and impassioned former slave who accomplished the unlikeliest of feats in the modern world to date before his tragic downfall. Contrasting the portrayal in *Toussaint Louverture*, Toussaint's flaws,

---

<sup>607</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, ix.

<sup>608</sup> Keguro Macharia, *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 108.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid. For Macharia's references to Toussaint's noble patriarchy, see James, *The Black Jacobins*, 90, 254.

including his “despotism, his ruthlessness, his impenetrability”<sup>610</sup> are noted, but problematizing masculinity surely is not a consideration for James in writing *The Black Jacobins*, especially as his theorizations in the late 1930s are circumscribed by Marxist and anti-colonial tenets. Rather, he is more interested in analogizing the protagonist with historical European greats to both inspire and restore the humanity of people of African descent in their protracted fight against colonialism. Moreover, given the historical sources at his disposal and the patriarchal lens through which that information was recorded, it is very likely that James would have had little material to work from concerning women revolutionaries in San Domingo during the period under study. Nevertheless, James had enough information about what transpired to extrapolate if he truly wanted to disturb gender stereotypes. The women who fought alongside men are examples of the fodder he could have adopted for this purpose, as well as the women he cites who valiantly faced death.

So, as C.L.R. James plunged into political writing, he did not consider the role of sex or gender in any consequential way. Revolution was masculine and Black liberation itself was bound up in the successes and challenges of Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution. For Carby, amid the wave of anti-colonialism and agitation among people of African descent on the African continent and throughout the African diaspora, *The Black Jacobins* “seeks to re-write the history of black men in the formation of the modern world.”<sup>611</sup> Michelle Ann Stephens posits that in this modern world, where the nation (state) is so central, through the book, “the state is embodied metonymically in the figure of the black male sovereign, a black emperor able to represent the masses globally, and not just nationally, on the world stage of early-twentieth-

---

<sup>610</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 254.

<sup>611</sup> Carby, *Race Men*, 130.

century geopolitics.”<sup>612</sup> In addition, in the absence of any theorization on gender to this point in James’ writing career, Carby’s argument about his barrack-yard literature, noted in Chapter 5, rings true.<sup>613</sup> While James may have consciously constructed women characters that defied stereotypes in ways that many would have found to be shocking, even as he aims to illuminate the vitality of working-class life, he believed, pragmatically or otherwise, like Césaire, men or male leadership are the real agents of change. Examinations of gender in history or politics then are negligible. He says plainly in the preface to *The Black Jacobins* that “Great men make history, but only such history as it is possible for them to make. Their freedom of achievement is limited to the necessities of their environment.”<sup>614</sup> In this equation, women are inescapably hamstrung and left with little choice but to rely on men to liberate them. An honest reflection on the people in the English circles he frequented in the 1930s should not have led him to the binary he sets out in the book. Yet, it would take nearly two decades before James incorporates a suitable interrogation of patriarchy and women’s struggles among his various socio-political critiques. This was not before the women around him would play a vital role in refining his broader philosophical outlook during his most active political years.

## **Women, Revolutionary Politics, and Intimate Life**

### *Falling in love and reflecting on women’s rights*

As discussed previously, James was invited to the United States in 1938 by Leon Trotsky and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) to do a six-month lecture tour. Again, he was seen as a figure who could help them attend to the “race question” and advance a revolutionary program for the working class in the U.S. at the dawn of the Second World War, but ultimately remained

---

<sup>612</sup> Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 210.

<sup>613</sup> Carby, *Race Men*, 126.

<sup>614</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, x.

in the country for more than 15 years. Over this time, while he would indeed provide critical insights for Marxists on the race question and the particularities of anti-capitalist organizing in the U.S. context, his intellectual advancement as a whole, along with his eventual offerings on the “Woman Question,” cannot be easily separated from the women who he was closest with.

One of the first people that C.L.R. James befriends when he arrives in the U.S. is a woman named Constance Webb. Webb, a White woman, was a member of the SWP who would first meet James a few days after she saw him deliver a lecture in Los Angeles on “The Negro Question” in 1939, just before his visit with Trotsky in Mexico.<sup>615</sup> James was immediately enchanted by the twenty-one-year-old Webb, who in addition to being a Trotskyist, was also a budding actor, model, and writer.<sup>616</sup> Starting in 1939, he wrote several letters to her which give some insight into his ideas, views and reflections on a variety of issues connected to political organizing and toil. In 1944, two years before they were married, Webb turned to James at a time when she grappled with issues that had become the genesis of the women’s liberation movement, such as the concept of women’s autonomy. She was in love and engaged to be married to an accomplished actor who demanded that she end her pursuits since they would not be able to sustain a relationship if they are both actors.<sup>617</sup> James responded to Webb’s conflict with a letter to her while musing on the “modern woman”:

She is called a career woman. The name is stupid but nevertheless very revealing. A man is never a career man. That is his right and privilege. He can have his career and the finest fruit of his successful career is wife and children. But the woman is called career woman because her “career” in modern society demands that she be placed in a subordinate position or even renounce the normal life. The social dice are loaded against her. And the plain fact of the matter is the social dice are loaded, not only in the economic opportunities, *but in the minds of men*. The man cannot take it. I know my own sex reasonably well. And with the best will in the world a man, a good man, unconsciously demands that a woman submit to him. It is what he wants that matters

---

<sup>615</sup> Webb, *Not Without Love*, 71-73.

<sup>616</sup> See Caryl Phillips, “Obituary: Constance Webb – writer wife of CLR James,” *The Guardian*, April 15, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/apr/15/guardianobituaries.booksobituaries>.

<sup>617</sup> For discussion on the context for this particular correspondence between James and Webb, including a comment by the latter explaining it decades later, see Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 63-64.

in the end, not what she wants...Nevertheless the “career woman” can fight and given real ability, and luck, can *sometimes* win through.<sup>618</sup>

James’ response shows a respectable, progressive grasp on the issue of women’s freedom, which Webb herself found to be empowering. More to the point, it suggests that he is open to being pushed to critique normative ideas around the Woman Question through his correspondence with Webb, and likely others. Marxist disposition aside, he gives a forthright assessment of patriarchy that proves he understands that she carries “the burden of an oppressed sex” as he carries “the burden of an oppressed race.”<sup>619</sup> What’s more, in a prior letter to Webb, James demonstrates a strong desire to expound upon the notion of women’s liberation as he sketches out a play that centers around Harriet Tubman in the context of the American Civil War. One can presuppose that James has great admiration for Tubman as he indicates in the letter that he has already written a biography of her and considers her to be a revolutionary who believed that the abolition of slavery could only be achieved through “war.”<sup>620</sup> Yet, rather than the presumed heroine, for the most part, he talks about a White woman character, “a Southerner, who will make a rapid transformation from southern prejudice to an extreme revolutionary position.”<sup>621</sup> James adds that she is “very brilliant, well-educated, and of a passionate temperament (I do *not* mean sex).”<sup>622</sup> She becomes associated with the abolitionist movement, “takes up women’s rights, temperance reform, etc., all the revolutionary ideas of the time” and ultimately falls “madly” in love with an ex-slave.<sup>623</sup> Like the women that are main characters in James’ fictional stories, the Marxist women that he meets while living in London, and Amy

---

<sup>618</sup> C.L.R. James and Constance Webb, *Special Delivery: The Letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1948*, ed. Anna Grimshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 150.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, 82, 84.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.



Ashwood Garvey, she is bold and embodies a fighting spirit not typically assigned to women at any time. James shares an exchange between the woman and her romantic interest in the letter:

“Are you afraid?” Or words to that effect, she asks him.  
He laughs. He is not afraid of anything. But –.  
Then she speaks, curses all the prejudice. She’ll break it down. She will live her own life  
with the man she wants, etc., etc.

They kiss passionately. She says she’d love to kiss him “at the main corner in Charleston,  
Carolina, for everyone to see...”<sup>624</sup>

The story that James attempts to sketch out suggests that he again sees fiction as a way to shed light on the political ideals he is invested in. A story about a White woman abolitionist in the Civil War era who is distinctly more defiant than an ex-slave, although unusual, reflects possibilities that James hopes will rouse others. In particular, the character’s radical conversion that he claims to have seen “quite a few times in real life.”<sup>625</sup> On the other hand, the amusement he expresses in his description of her strikes a chord with the White women he talks about in “The Women” article, specifically “the Bohemian” exemplar, as well as the Pauline Leclerc character he presents in *Toussaint Louverture* – both of whom were talked about in Chapter 5. Recall, Pauline Leclerc’s role in this play based on the events of the Haitian Revolution was not elemental to the story. However, James imparts a level of directness and perceptiveness in her relatively short dialogue that would have been staggering for a woman of her background during that era. Again, Pauline Leclerc is a White woman of esteemed privilege tied to counter-revolutionary forces, yet, akin to the revolutionary White woman abolitionist in his draft play on Harriet Tubman, the character stands out within James’ narrative about Black liberation, even as its protagonist is a reputed Black historical figure. Put differently, one would think the intersection of race, class and gender inhered in a story about an improbable Black woman hero

---

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid.

would be more tantalizing for him to extol. It would seem then that James is either trying to appeal to Webb by sharing his profile of the White character, or that in the 1930s and into the 1940s, the intrepid women that James is most enthralled by, at least in his political creative works, are White women. Although, it is not unwarranted to propose that both may be true here, this move also raises questions about the value he imputes to Black women in radical struggle, particularly given his disinclination to lift them up in his pieces on the Haitian Revolution, a play where a known militant Black woman is the central character, or anywhere else.

Still, it is curious whether James actually believes in his imaginings of woman-centered narratives – Black or White – and women’s liberation as he has constructed it here, or elsewhere, in a real-world context. An excerpt from another subsequent letter to Webb suggests that it is something he is working through:

You have fought your way out. But you may get caught again. The solution, of course, is to find both the man who gives security (I am not speaking of money, though that counts). I am speaking of emotional security, which feels that here, with him, I am safe with all the love and protection and confidence that a woman needs, and at the same time, in the same person find that creative drive, that consciousness of living for something out of one’s self, which all human beings need so strongly they cannot do without it.<sup>626</sup>

James unambiguously sympathizes with women’s desire for self-determination, but his statement above could be read as both paternalistic and relying on patriarchal assumptions in conceptualizing their freedom, as he alludes that it is men who necessarily enable the process. So, by inference, while he may be fascinated with independent, resolute, militant women, his modern woman of the 1940s can only truly know freedom through a gender binary that requires a man to provide the support necessary to embolden her in the world. This is a contrast to the woman he described from the story in the earlier letter set in the context of the Civil War, and to an extent, the women he wrote about in his fictional pieces many years before. At the same time,

---

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., 111.

James' comment may alternatively be interpreted as advocating for a complementary relationship between men and women that allows them to access their shared needs "which all human beings need so strongly they cannot do without it." Additionally, one should again consider that James had his own romantic interest in Webb when he penned this letter and may have hoped to convince her that he could provide the "emotional security" that would truly make her feel free. Nevertheless, overall, what is more noteworthy is how James is pushed by Webb to ponder on the Woman Question amidst the many correspondences between them, even if the span of his attentiveness to this subject is hard to pin down at this juncture.

As the decade wore on the Woman Question was topical for James and other Marxists. For instance, there were the contradictions that surfaced in the mid-1940s in the U.S. when men returned to factories and other positions they dominated before the Second World War began, replacing women that worked these jobs during the war, only for women to then be encouraged to stay or enter the general labour force by the end of the decade. Moreover, for James, this period was pivotal, as he would work quite closely with women that made invaluable contributions to his views and intellectual development.

#### *Debating the Russian Question and breaking with Trotsky*

As discussed in Chapter 2, the SWP split into two camps in 1940 off the heels of the Soviet Union's decision to sign a Non-Aggression Pact with Germany during the war. Again, the SWP dissidents soon formed the Workers Party (WP) and were joined by C.L.R. James who – unlike WP comrades Max Shachtman's and James Burnham's assertion that the Soviet economy was representative of bureaucratic collectivism – began to postulate the idea of "state capitalism" as a way to describe the nature of the Soviet Union. Further, he was not alone in this outlook, as another Trotskyist who sided with the WP, Raya Dunayevskaya, also posited this

theory independent of James. Dunayevskaya would become one of the most important people James would meet in his life and the reason he decided to stay in the U.S. beyond his initial visit.<sup>627</sup>

Dunayevskaya, a White Jewish woman, was born Rae Spiegel in Ukraine before moving to the United States at the age of twelve in 1922. She became active in the American Leftist movement at a young age, and among other things, she supported the Black fight back in Chicago by writing for the *American Negro Congress* newspaper; was a member of the United States Communist Party youth organization; and essentially became a Trotskyist by the age of 18, leading to her expulsion from the American Communist Party by its Chicago members. As a follower of the United States-based section of the Trotskyist Left Opposition in the 1930s, she ultimately worked as Leon Trotsky's secretary for almost a year from August 1937 to May 1938. The 1930s would also see her adopt her mother's name, Raya Dunayevskaya.

Despite her close working relationship with Trotsky, by 1940, like Shachtman, Burnham and a few others who left the SWP to form the WP, she had denounced Trotsky's political and economic assessment of the Soviet Union at the onset of the Second World War. Yet, it is through an article which appeared in the *Internal Discussion Bulletin* of the WP in March 1941 that she clearly distinguished herself from her dissident colleagues. There, she explained her view that the true nature of the USSR is state capitalist rather than bureaucratic collectivist or state socialism:

The determining factor in analyzing the class nature of a society is not whether the means of production are the *private* property of the capitalist class or are state-owned, but whether the means of production are *capital*, that is, whether they are monopolized and alienated from the direct producers. The Soviet Government occupies in relation to the whole economic system the position which a capitalist occupies in relation to a single enterprise. Shachtman's designation of the class nature of the Soviet Union as "bureaucratic state socialism" is an irrational expression

---

<sup>627</sup> James says the Dunayevskaya played "the decisive role" in determining whether he would return to England or stay in the U.S. See James quoted in Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom*, 55.

behind which there exists the real economic relation of state-capitalist-exploiter to the propertyless exploited.<sup>628</sup>

In quoting the same passage above from Dunayevskaya's article, "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a Capitalist Society," Rosengarten notes that James did not articulate his view with the "precision and thoroughness that Dunayevskaya displayed," as she based her theory of state capitalism in general "on the study of primary Russian-language sources that James was unable to utilize."<sup>629</sup> In fact, her knowledge of the language allowed her to study industrialization in Russia from 1928-1941. The research entailed an analysis of the internal workings of the USSR economy, including production incentives, taxes, and the situation for its various workers through Russian statistical sources and economic documents she was able to obtain. Dunayevskaya also looked at the country's overall production and contrasted this to the world economy.<sup>630</sup> Her examination led her to conclude that the USSR, notwithstanding the absence of private ownership, functioned much more like a capitalist economy than the worker's state that Trotsky believes it is transitioning to or the form of socialism that Shachtman and others thought it had reached.

Dunayevskaya's acuity was something that James surely recognized upon reading the piece under the pseudonym "Freddie James" in contrast to his own highly theoretical and long-winded submission that is featured in the same issue of *Internal Discussion Bulletin* under the

---

<sup>628</sup> Raya Dunayevskaya ("Freddie James"), "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a Capitalist Society," *Internal Discussion Bulletin of the Workers Party* No.7 (March 1941). Also, in Raya Dunayevskaya, *News and Letters Pamphlet* (October 1992), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1941/ussr-capitalist.htm>.

<sup>629</sup> Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 67.

<sup>630</sup> Dunayevskaya wrote "An Analysis of Russian Economy" over the course of three months beginning in December 1942. She explains the methodology for the research that led to her pronouncement that the Soviet Union is a capitalist society in 1941 with the first article of the series. See Raya Dunayevskaya ("Freddie Forest"), "An Analysis of the Russian Economy: A – Overview," *The New Internationalist* VIII, no. 11 (December 1942): 327-332, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1942/russian-economy/ch01.htm>

alias “J.R. Johnson.”<sup>631</sup> The two quickly joined forces to lead what became known as the State Capitalist Tendency within the WP. They set up a study group within the WP to further develop their position on state capitalism but were most critically aided by another philosopher and political activist named Grace Lee. Lee, who received her Ph.D. in philosophy in 1940, joined the duo in 1941 – the same year she claimed to devote the rest of her life to being a “movement activist in the Black community.”<sup>632</sup> Born in 1915 to Chinese American immigrants in Providence, Rhode Island, the young postgraduate was highly valued to the group for her ability to read German and her studies of original Hegel texts. Lee recalls that it was not long before James had her “translating sections of *Das Kapital* and comparing the structure of capital with Hegel’s logic.”<sup>633</sup>

*Reaching new heights alongside Dunayevskaya, Lee and the Johnson-Forrest Tendency*

The three revolutionary theorists anchored the State Capitalist Tendency throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s in the various works of Karl Marx. Renamed the “Johnson-Forest Tendency” (JFT) after its two founders (Dunayevskaya now “Freddie Forest”) by the mid-1940s, the group continued to study the Russian Question, all while examining the state of the Left around the world; the working-class movement in the United States; and elucidating correctives on socialism through writings and lectures. In effect, the JFT distinguished themselves from other Left formations who purported to be Marxists. They encouraged a return to the texts of Vladimir Lenin and particularly Marx to develop a method that would guide revolutionaries past the lionization of the Soviet Union toward a true understanding of socialism.

---

<sup>631</sup> C.L.R. James (“J.R. Johnson”), “Stalinist Russia is a Fascist State: Towards a Clarification of the Discussion,” *Internal Discussion Bulletin of the Workers Party* No.7 (March 1941): 7-37, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/workersparty/wp-ib/n7-mar-1941-buletin-workers-party.pdf>.

<sup>632</sup> Grace Lee Boggs quoted in Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 69. Lee Boggs also discusses her stance on Black liberation in Grace Lee Boggs, “C.L.R. James: Organizing in the U.S.A., 1938-1953,” in Cudjoe and Cain, *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*, 165-170.

<sup>633</sup> Bogues, *Caliban’s Freedom*, 60.

C.L.R. James' work in the period where he led the JFT can be regarded as the defining moment of his philosophical maturity as well as his most involved years as an activist. It is during these years that James commits himself to an even more thorough understanding of Marxist economics, critiques Trotsky and finally crystalizes an approach to revolutionary politics – the notion of (spontaneous) self-activity – that would critically distinguish him from his radical contemporaries. Nevertheless, it must be underscored that it is unlikely that James would have achieved this level of development or been as productive as he was without Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee.

It is fair to say that at every stage of C.L.R. James' progression as a thinker, he benefited from being surrounded by like-minded individuals and collaborators who stimulated him in critical ways. This was the case with the Maverick group and *The Beacon* contributors in Trinidad, as well as his comrades from the Independent Labour Party (Marxist Group) and the International African Service Bureau in London. However, what appears to be different for James in the United States is the length of time he spends working with one organization and one individual who stood shoulder to shoulder with him on most of his political insights – Raya Dunayevskaya. In fact, in some respects, Dunayevskaya was ahead of James. As noted above, she was indisputably more informed about the inner workings of the Soviet Union than James and as such was able to deduce a more nuanced understanding of how it had become emblematic of state capitalism. Therefore, James' approach to the Russia Question and theory of state capitalism in the 1940s was inexorably linked to and stirred by her analysis, even as he penned the tendency's "Resolution on the Russia Question" as early as September 1941.<sup>634</sup> It was

---

<sup>634</sup> C.L.R. James ("J.R. Johnson"), "Resolution on the Russian Question," submitted to the National Convention of the Workers Party (September 19, 1941): 16-30, <http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/52.pdf>.

Dunayevskaya who continued to explain “The Nature of the Russian Economy”<sup>635</sup> in the years that immediately followed, and subsequently predicted that the alliance between the West and the Soviet Union during the Second World War was a signal that they were headed towards competition within the global capitalist and imperialist order.<sup>636</sup> With this in mind, it would be quite difficult to distinguish James’ critiques on political economy from hers.

Dunayevskaya also weighed into a topic that was supposed to be James’ specialty in the Trotskyist movement: The Negro Question. As the 1940s wore on and James moved away from his initial position that Black organizing in the United States required leadership from a Marxist party, Dunayevskaya was also drawing similar conclusions. In 1944, she argues that her Left comrades were flawed in not seeing the value of supporting the Black struggle in the United States, even as it may have appeared to be disconnected from the imperative of a class-conscious proletariat:

To free himself from his oppression, the Negroes will be compelled to struggle against capitalist society which cannot release him. His very oppression makes him potentially one of the bitterest enemies of the existing society, as is evident by his attitude toward the war. However, the unemployment inherent in the social crisis and the past history of the country make the proletariat most vulnerable on the very question of the assimilation of the Negro (within) its ranks... The proletariat must respond by reorganizing not only the validity but the inevitability of the mass Negro movements against Negro oppression and strive to lend this movement and harness its revolutionary potentialities for this struggle against capitalist society. This can only be done along the lines laid down in the Marxist thesis on the National Question.

---

<sup>635</sup> “The Nature of the Russian Economy” is the category given to a series of pieces that she writes in 1942 to 1943, including the aforementioned “An Analysis of Russian Economy,” which is a sub-category. The other sub-categories/articles deemed to be Part II of “The Nature of the Russian Economy” are Freddie Forest, “Politics and Economics” (November 1942), 60-121, and Freddie Forest, “Labour and Society” (August 1943): 87-101. It is not clear where these documents were initially published, but they are reproduced at the *Marxist Internet Archive* in the “Raya Dunayevskaya Collection,” <http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/102.pdf> and <http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/87.pdf>.

<sup>636</sup> Dunayevskaya made this assessment following a 1943 article that she translated from the Russian. Raya Dunayevskaya, trans., “The Teaching of Economics in the Soviet Union,” *The American Economic Review* 34, no. 3 (September 1944): 501-530. In a rejoinder to the original unsigned article that appeared in a prominent Russian journal, presumably written under the guise of state theoreticians, Dunayevskaya rubbishes their interpretation of Marxian economics (i.e. law of value and alienated labour) and declares the impending rivalry in the global capitalist order between the United States and the Soviet Union. See Raya Dunayevskaya, “A New Revision of Marxian Economics,” in *The American Economic Review* 34, no. 3 (September 1944): 531-537, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1944/revision.htm>.



As the social crisis develops and the proletariat becomes more and more conscious of its role as the regenerating force in American capitalist society, it will not only of necessity be compelled to shoulder the solution of the Negro Question. It cannot at the same time avoid unleashing the aspirations of the Negroes to free themselves from the special oppression to which they are subject.<sup>637</sup>

Dunayevskaya's insights above on the Negro Question would be reflected more and more in the writings and positions adopted by the JFT in the remainder of the decade. Given her proximity to Black organizing efforts, it is probable that she was just as informed about these matters as James. Still, her commitment to returning to Marx to build more clarity in revolutionary strategy would have had the most resounding impact on him. A case in point is *Notes on Dialectics*. Although James is the exclusive author, Dunayevskaya's translation from the Russian of Lenin's notes on Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* and *Science of Logic* moved him to write the manuscript and he would also have benefited from her technical direction.<sup>638</sup> To be sure, Dunayevskaya was a philosophical leader in her own right, and by the 1950s she had been credited with founding a new strand within Leftist theory and politics called Marxist-humanism.<sup>639</sup>

Grace Lee was a relative newcomer to Trotskyist circles when she joined the JFT and had not published to the level of the group's other two main members, but her support should not be overlooked. For example, Lee's English translation of three essays from Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* – which make it “unmistakably clear that Marx's overriding

---

<sup>637</sup> Raya Dunayevskaya (“Freddie Forest”), “Marxism and the Negro Problem – A Discussion Article” (June 18, 1944). There is no indication of where this article was first published, but it is reproduced at *Marxist Internet Archive* in the “Raya Dunayevskaya Collection,” <http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/259.pdf>.

<sup>638</sup> Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for a Change: An Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 59.

<sup>639</sup> Following the English translation of *Economic Manuscripts, 1844*, Dunayevskaya essentially posits that the human or humanity is not simply a corollary of Marx's economic theory, but rather is constitutive of his critique of capitalism and central to his resistance of it from his early writings onwards. The focus is on human agency and subjectivity instead of structuralist interpretations of social theory. This human dimension is required to conceptualize a new society. See Raya Dunayevskaya, “Marx's Humanism Today,” in Eric Fromm, ed., *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1965/marx-humanism.htm>.

concern was the human essence of workers, not property relations” – was the first ever translation to English of these texts when the JFT published them in 1947.<sup>640</sup> She also co-wrote *The American Worker*, a pamphlet that delved into the class struggle from the point of view of the worker. For her part, Lee expounded on Marx’s theory of alienation, which is developed in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Furthermore, Lee is credited as a collaborator on James’ *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, and also assisted James in producing *Notes on Dialectics* with her insights. Yet, she was more crucial to him than publication records show. As Frank Rosengarten notes: “She became James’s most assiduous intellectual partner in terms of day-to-day operations of the organization.”<sup>641</sup> At the same time, she also took on the “daily responsibilities of editing, translating and distributing materials produced by the JFT.”<sup>642</sup> Her letter writing, primarily regarding literary criticism and popular culture, was most useful for James during this period. While James acknowledges that Lee specifically helped him to “root a modern aesthetic in the movies”<sup>643</sup>, Rosengarten argues that the comparison James makes in his works on the relationship between literature and society beyond the 1940s, including his paralleling of classical authors and twentieth-century art, literature and cinema may owe more to Lee’s interventions than is generally recognized.<sup>644</sup>

Certainly, while the JFT took a collaborative approach to the works it produced, the ongoing dialogic engagement on theory with Dunayevskaya, and to a somewhat lesser degree Lee, helped James’ intellectual growth a great deal. A poignant example of this is exhibited in a correspondence between the three of them in a series of letters spanning two years from 1949 to

---

<sup>640</sup> Lee Boggs, *Living for a Change*, 58.

<sup>641</sup> Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 69.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> C.L.R. James quoted in Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 75.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

1951.<sup>645</sup> Driven by Dunayevskaya's translations of Lenin's *Philosophic Notebooks*, they analyzed, debated and clarified the topics covered in these writings and their implications, in an enlightening and respectful back and forth. Nonetheless, Lee recalls that such an intense process was not uncommon, even when all three of them lived in New York: "We would spend a morning or afternoon writing talking, and eating and then go home and write voluminous letters to one another extending or enlarging on what we had discussed, sending these around to other members of our tendency in barely legible carbon copies."<sup>646</sup> Evidently, this kind of activity pushed James to his cerebral limits as the time he spent in the United States ultimately proved to be the most productive period of his career. Moreover, along with ruminating on the philosophies of Marx, Lenin, Hegel and others, approaches to the Woman Question would also have been mulled over by the JFT trio.

## **The Woman Question**

### *Writing about middle-class women in American Civilization*

James first appears to delve into the Woman Question from a political standpoint in 1950 with his manuscript of *American Civilization*. The text is essentially a long essay that sees James exploring the virtues of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, mentioned in the United States declaration of Independence, through an examination of the country's history, society, and culture. In the section "Negroes, Women and the Intellectuals," James proclaims that with the right to vote, wide access to post-secondary education and gadgets that make life at home easier, among other things, "the American woman is undoubtedly the freest, the most advanced, with

---

<sup>645</sup> There are 35 letters in this correspondence, all of which are directed to either James, Dunayevskaya or Lee, under their pseudonyms, except for one letter addressed to William Gorman. See Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James and Grace Lee (Boggs), "Philosophic Correspondence, 1949-1951," at *Marxist Internet Archive* in the "Raya Dunayevskaya Collection," <http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/1595.pdf>.

<sup>646</sup> Lee Boggs, *Living for a Change*, 60.

the most opportunities for self-development in the world.”<sup>647</sup> Yet, he stated that this same group of middle-class – presumably White – women are “the most unhappy, the most torn, the most dissatisfied, the most antagonistic in their relations with men that it is possible to find in history or as far as can be gathered, in other parts of the world.”<sup>648</sup> For James, it is this very contradiction in their existence that made these women increasingly aware of their oppression despite the purported equal-footing with their male counterparts. Although he does not directly speak to the women’s movement of the day, he reasons that this recognition signifies the need for a new relationship between men and women. True gender parity, or “a genuinely equal relationship” between men and women, would require “a total reorganization of *all* kinds of labour relations in the world at large.”<sup>649</sup> Thus, even as James weighed into the Woman Question, true to the work of the JFT, he stressed the need for an overhaul of the economic system that disfigured relationships between people, including the inextricable link between men and women.

Nevertheless, given the depths of C.L.R. James’ working-class orientation at the time, it is perplexing that he again elides the most exploited women within the society that he is surveying and instead examines the travails of middle-class women. One would think that this was a perfect opening for the writer to interpose the radical potential of working-poor and working-class women in the United States or raise an intersectional race, gender and class critique as fellow Trinidadian Claudia Jones had done by the end of the 1940s. However, such a thesis is absent, and with it, again, any appraisal by James of Black women. Astonishingly, though he states that working-class women experience hardships that far outstrip their middle-class counterparts, he explains that the former “are less vocal, protest less. History has repeatedly

---

<sup>647</sup> C.L.R. James, *American Civilization*, eds. Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 212.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-213.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*, 216 (*italics in original*).

shown that this is not because they feel less but because they see no way out.”<sup>650</sup> Aaron Kamugisha notes, however, while employing this same quote that “This focus on middle-class women is necessary for James so he can show the distinctive gendered nature of women’s oppression in American capitalist society.”<sup>651</sup> So, the fact that subjugation follows women even when they are well-to-do is illuminated with this approach. On the other hand, Kamugisha suggests that it is difficult to take James to task on his analysis of *American Civilization* since it is an incomplete work that he did not subsequently revise as he intended.<sup>652</sup> What’s more, James’ viewpoint would develop later in the decade in large part due to his colleagues.

*Selma (Deitch) James, the lives of working-class women, and radical feminism*

As early as 1950, there is evidence that James’ gaze towards the middle class to articulate the Woman Question is unreservedly eschewed by the JFT. Again, Dunayevskaya and Lee would have played some part in ultimately stimulating James’ outlook. For instance, in 1950, among Dunayevskaya’s reports on the 1949-1950 strike by miners’ unions in West Virginia against major coal companies throughout that year was an article that extolled the militancy of women who refused to be cowed by mine owners. She reveals that women were not mere observers in this action, as even the miner’s wives pushed their husbands to abstain from working and encourage the general community to support the wildcat strike.<sup>653</sup> Dunayevskaya also wrote the following year about the status of women generally in the immediate post-war period, including the shifting dynamics within organizations like the WP and SWP that “old

---

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>651</sup> Kamugisha, “The Hearts of Men?,” 86.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> Raya Dunayevskaya (“Freddie Forest”), “The Miners’ Wives,” *Marxist Internet Archive* in the “Raya Dunayevskaya Collection” along with the other articles that comprise Dunayevskaya’s reporting on the strike, <https://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/1477.pdf>.

radicals” struggled to grapple with.<sup>654</sup> In addition to linking the battles of people of African descent in the country to women’s rights, she said that working-class women’s requisite employment during the war meant that they had been transformed and now “categorically refused to remain an appendage to men.”<sup>655</sup> Lee on the other hand, aside from her theoretical predilection, would have been shaped by her organizing efforts alongside mostly working-class Black women in a defence plant in the early 1940s.<sup>656</sup> Without a doubt, practically all of the JFT’s organizing efforts and stances were wedded to the working class throughout its existence. In fact, it was another member of the JFT, a White woman, who herself had worked in a factory that would be more directly able to educate James on the special oppression of women and the importance of supporting women-led resistance.

Selma Deitch was a factory worker in New York City, where she was born and raised when she joined the JFT in the mid-1940s at the age of 14. She grew up in a Jewish ghetto that intersected with a Black ghetto and both of her parents were immersed in working-class activism.<sup>657</sup> C.L.R. played a pivotal role in mentoring Selma and helping her reach her potential, but her ability to theorize the everyday life of working-class women made her stand out from other JFT members who fell under C.L.R.’s leadership. She opened a panel discussion for the

---

<sup>654</sup> Raya Dunayevskaya, “On Women in the Post-War World, and the Old Radicals,” 64-66. This is a draft of an unpublished essay. See *Marxist Humanist Initiative* under “Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya,” <http://www.marxisthumanistinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/On-Women-in-the-Post-War-World-and-the-Old-Radicals.pdf>. This piece appears to have been developed further in a section of a document entitled “Our Organization: American Roots and World Concepts” under the sub-category “The Women,” a draft of which was presented by Dunayevskaya at the first Convention of Correspondence Committees in July 1953, 33-39. See *Marxist Internet Archive* in the “Raya Dunayevskaya Collection,” <http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/2042.pdf>.

<sup>655</sup> Dunayevskaya, “On Women in the Post-War World, and the Old Radicals,” 65.

<sup>656</sup> Grace Lee actually worked at the plant towards the end of the Second World War, and it was a space where “radicals like her hoped to make contact with production workers.” The job allowed for her to be “part of a group that held Negro history study groups during coffee breaks.” See Stephen Ward, *In Love and Struggle: The Revolutionary Lives of James and Grace Lee Boggs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 104.

<sup>657</sup> Becky Gardiner, “A Life in writing: Selma James,” *The Guardian*, June 8, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jun/08/life-in-writing-selma-james>.

JFT on the Woman Question in 1951 at just 21 years of age. The following is an excerpt of that address:

We start from the position of women in the home for that is where the majority of women are, that is where the problem of women begins and that is the place to which all working women must return daily.

Capitalism has socialized production. It has brought thousands of people together in the factory and involved them in new social relationships. The home stands in contrast to all other capitalist institutions as the last stronghold of pre-capitalist isolation. Here, existing in the home outside the mainstream of society – the factory – the woman prepares her husband for a social labor process which is denied to her.

The repetitious, monotonous, lonely, unceasing and incomplete work of women in this society is opposed to women as human beings. Working for individuals whom she knows and loves does not compensate for the fragmented and meaningless labor she is forced to perform. Even her imaginative enterprises in the home are limited to certain spheres and are always individual.<sup>658</sup>

In effect, Selma's speech focused on the contradiction within capitalist society in which women, who are largely responsible for their social reproduction via the home, are not considered labourers and as such are not compensated for their work. Further, women are inescapably forced into doing housework, while their creative capacities are thwarted much in the same way they are for the factory worker.<sup>659</sup> To be sure, as a wife and a new mother at the time, Selma had first-hand insight into this paradox. Through the encouragement of C.L.R., she delineated her ideas at greater length – the place of housewives within a political anti-capitalist paradigm to be precise – in the form of a pamphlet that was published and distributed by the JFT in 1952.<sup>660</sup> Titled "A Woman's Place," Selma traverses the lives of women with housework as

---

<sup>658</sup> Selma James, "On the Woman Question: An Orientation," *Marxist Internet Archive* in the "Raya Dunayevskaya Collection," <https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1951/women/index.htm>.

<sup>659</sup> These arguments were raised as early as 1936 by Communist Party USA member Mary Inman in a manuscript. It was rejected by the party, but portions were serialized in a San Francisco daily called *People's World* and ultimately published in a 1940 book called *In Women's Defence*. Selma James' position here essentially mirrors one of the essays in the book. See Mary Inman, "The Role of the Housewife in Social Production," *Viewpoint Magazine*, October 31, 2015, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-role-of-the-housewife-in-social-production-1940/>.

<sup>660</sup> Selma talks about C.L.R.'s encouragement. See Selma James, *Sex, Race, and Class – The Perspective of Winning: A Selections of Writings, 1952-2011* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 13.

her focal point, integrating narratives and comments from other women along the way.<sup>661</sup> She believes that the pamphlet was “safe” rather than radical because it was not overtly political and merely “about women and the family.”<sup>662</sup> Nonetheless, the piece highlights the need for women’s independence in striving towards equality with men and resistance to the many ways in which they experience alienation in the home.

When the JFT transitioned away from the SWP to call themselves the Correspondence Publishing Committee (“Correspondence”) in 1951, Selma became an integral part of the organization’s newspaper, the *Correspondence*, once its publication began in 1953. Underpinned by the anti-vanguardism of C.L.R. and his colleagues, the newspaper promulgated the idea that society’s most oppressed groups – workers, Blacks, women, and youth – should speak for themselves, thereby stirring their self-activity. In a letter to a member of Correspondence written months before the first issue of the newspaper, C.L.R. himself reiterated the group’s position that “the woman question for us is the question of the proletarian woman or the proletarian wife who is condemned without choice to drudgery, degeneration and frustration.”<sup>663</sup> C.L.R. is principally concerned that while working-class women have garnered some attention from the “bourgeois press,” the proletarian (house) wife’s “Suffering in silence is almost ignored.”<sup>664</sup> He, therefore, affirms that the task of Correspondence and Bolshevism more generally is to “at all times insist upon the recognition of the circumstances of the proletarian woman as being fundamental to an elucidation of the woman’s question as the worker is basic to the whole problem of modern society.”<sup>665</sup> In addition, according to Robert Hill, it was James

---

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., 15-31.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>663</sup> C.L.R. James, quoted in Selwyn R. Cudjoe, “‘As Ever Darling, All My Love, Nello’,” 239.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.



who insisted that a section of the paper be devoted to women and edited by women.<sup>666</sup> Thus, Selma was tasked with editing the Woman's Page, which would expressly give voice to a variety of women's issues. She recalls that it gave her a chance to write her own column, naturally called "A Woman's Place," where she reported on how "women at the grassroots responded to national and international affairs – if they even knew about them."<sup>667</sup> Moreover, C.L.R.'s endorsement of the Woman's Page signifies a marked difference in his methodology a few years earlier in his *American Civilization* manuscript.

Kamugisha observes that C.L.R.'s about-face by the early to mid-1950s is plain in a 1958 publication called *Facing Reality* where the latter professes that "the real battle for the new relations is being fought above all in the American working class."<sup>668</sup> A similar stance would again be raised in a 1960 lecture series entitled *Modern Politics*.<sup>669</sup> Kamugisha himself surmises the following from C.L.R.'s commentary in the two pieces:

The tensions in middle-class heterosexual relationships merely signal the problem, one which the middle class is loath to deal with – it can only resort to the dissolution of these unions, or greater "antagonism in sex and personal relations." The working classes alone have the potential to transform these relationships into something new, and hence enable women to "live a complete life."<sup>670</sup>

Although C.L.R.'s conclusion that revolution is the answer to gender injustice mirrors what he wrote in *American Civilization*, the difference now several years later is that his point of departure for this critique begins and ends with the working class. This exhibits the influence of Dunayevskaya, Lee and Selma during the intervening period. Even so, it is worth mentioning

---

<sup>666</sup> See Robert Hill, "Literary Executor's Afterword" in James, *American Civilization*, 330.

<sup>667</sup> James, "Columns from the Newspaper Correspondence," *Sex, Race, and Class*, 32.

<sup>668</sup> C.L.R. James, Grace C. Lee and Pierre Chaulieu, *Facing Reality* (Detroit: Bewick, 1974), 74, quoted in Aaron Kamugisha, "The Hearts of Men?," 87.

<sup>669</sup> Kamugisha quotes from C.L.R. James, *Modern Politics* (Oakland: PM Press, 2013), 120, to illustrate this point including the following: "for many centuries women were the most oppressed section of society, and it is common knowledge, common talk, writing among philosophers, that society was usually to be judged by the position that women occupied in it." See Kamugisha, "The Hearts of Men?," 87.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

that there is nothing in his comments on the Woman Question that point to an understanding of the role that race plays in its framing.

By 1956, Selma had married C.L.R. James and left the United States following his deportation order and divorce from Constance Webb in 1953.<sup>671</sup> Although she continued to be an organizer around women's issues, she did not register any significant publications again until 1972 when she made waves with a radical, unequivocally feminist program that had its embryonic roots in the original "A Woman's Place" pamphlet. In the depths of the women's movement in England where she had settled by the early to mid-1960s, Selma crystalized her view that women's exploitation within capitalist society was both under-interrogated and should be used as a galvanizing principle among Marxists. She made the ground-breaking call for "wages for housework" in a paper that was presented at a national conference of the women's liberation conference in 1972 called "Women, The Unions, And Work." Selma's piece, which was released as a pamphlet after the conference, shook the Left and women's activists in England and beyond. There are six stated demands contained in the document, which include the right for women and men to have a shorter work week; for them both to have a guaranteed work income; equal pay regardless of gender, geography or what may be considered "skilled" and "unskilled" work; for women to exercise their right not to have children; and for free community controlled nurseries and childcare.<sup>672</sup> At the core of what Selma is trying to convey is that men, chiefly those who belonged to unions or are otherwise invested in the labour movement, would need to recognize their privilege within a system that divided men and women in relation to capital. The following year in an article called "The Perspective of Winning," she

---

<sup>671</sup> Caryl Phillips notes that James and Webb's marriage collapsed as Webb "had at least one affair," while "James freely indulged in many." She added that as committed bohemians "the strain of their life together...proved too much for them." See Phillips, "Obituary: Constance Webb – writer wife of CLR James."

<sup>672</sup> Selma James, "Women, the Unions, and Work," in *Sex, Race, and Class*, 72-73.

avers that “Our feminism grasps finally the totality of exploitation, in the home and out of it, and therefore grasps the totality of working-class struggle, in the home and out of it.” She then explains how the notion of wages for housework comports with this view:

To the degree that we organize a struggle for wages for the work we do in the home, we demand that work in the home be considered *as work* which, like all work in capitalist society, is forced work, which we do not do for love but because, like every other worker, we and our children would starve if we stopped.

To the degree that we demand a wage and demystify housework, showing it is forced work, we open the possibility of refusing it without guilt. We refuse it with the power to begin to acknowledge and articulate our own needs, and to demand that they be met.

...To the degree that we organize our power, we undermine the power relation that causes and then confirms the chauvinism of men against us. We open the way for their unification with us because we build our confidence, undermine their sense of superiority and *offer them power – but no longer over us*. We break the relation of domination of men workers over women workers in the factory, the hierarchy of labor power out of the home, which is and must be a reflection of the husband-wife relationship in the home – *between all men and all women*.<sup>673</sup>

Selma’s intervention in working-class mobilization with women at the centre is as radical as any of the mediations James made throughout his career as a Marxist organizer. Yet, there is very little from C.L.R.’s writing after 1960 that would infer that his partner’s feminism motivated him to write as thoughtfully or as critically about women’s liberation. His 1963 memoir on cricket, *Beyond a Boundary*, was a prime opportunity for him to signal an understanding of or commitment to the subject, outside of an organizational position or political strategy. However, while he highlights the important roles his mother, grandmother, two aunts, and sister play in his life in the semi-autobiographical book, they do not feature prominently, and there are no remarks that hint at a real deliberation of the Woman Question in relation to them.

<sup>674</sup> Nevertheless, C.L.R.’s re-entry into the arena of political theatre four years after this

---

<sup>673</sup> Selma James, “The Perspective of Winning,” in *Ibid.*, 81-82 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>674</sup> In addition to concurring that these women are “given peripheral positions” in the book. Anima Adjepong argues that, in essence, James’ elision of these women can likewise be applied to his analysis of cricket and the fight against colonialism and racism, which relies on gendered language while also marginalizing women. See, Anima Adjepong, “Periodically I Pondered over It: Reading the Absence/Presence of Women in *Beyond a Boundary*,” in

publication elicits some intriguing questions about patriarchy and the portrayal of women characters in the work, especially as it is a revision of a play that was first performed in 1936.

### *Radical women of The Black Jacobins on stage*

In 1967, the premiere of *The Black Jacobins* play was staged at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.<sup>675</sup> It is a re-working of James' first piece, *Toussaint Louverture*, though more accurately an added layer to the repository on his telling of the Haitian Revolution, including editions of *The Black Jacobins* book.<sup>676</sup> A key aspect of this version of C.L.R. James' account of the monumental event is its shift away from Toussaint as glorified protagonist. Commensurate with his political orientation in the 1940s and 1950s with the JFT, the play tries to put greater emphasis on the self-activity of the masses as continually propelling change, rather than vanguardists like Toussaint and top generals Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe alone.<sup>677</sup> Thus, peasant leaders and low-ranking soldiers are given a voice, while certain devices are employed to demarcate them as representatives of the popular masses relative to their more well-known counterparts habitually willing to engage in some compromise with imperialist powers. This leads to an increased presence of women on stage, but like the first iteration of the play, there are only two women in *The Black Jacobins* that have a meaningful speaking role – Madame Bullet and Marie-Jeanne.

The Madame Bullet character bears some resemblance to Pauline Leclerc of *Toussaint*. She too is the incisive, independent wife of a White man that would benefit from the restoration

---

*Marxism, Colonialism, and Cricket: C.L.R. James's Beyond a Boundary*, eds. David Featherstone, Christopher Gair, Christian Hogsberg, and Andrew Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 123-136.

<sup>675</sup> The references below are drawn from C.L.R. James, "The Black Jacobins," in Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Reader*, 67-111. It mistakenly dates the script 1936 rather than 1967.

<sup>676</sup> For a discussion on the genealogy of *The Black Jacobins* see Rachel Douglas, *Making Black Jacobins: C.L.R. James and the Drama of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

<sup>677</sup> For more on how this is devised on stage see Rachel Douglas, "Making Drama out of the Haitian Revolution from Below: C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* Play," in *The Black Jacobins Reader*, eds. Charles Forsdick and Christian Hogsberg, 278-296 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

of slavery in San Domingo, but is more complex, and her use more significant than her predecessor. Madame Bullet's husband, Monsieur Bullet, is the owner of a plantation where an enslaved Toussaint toiled for years. However, in most of the period covered by the play, she and Toussaint are engaged in a love affair.

Certainly, James' sketches a relationship between these two characters that would have been most unusual under the circumstances. The affair is revealed at the end of the first scene of the play, not long after the audience learns that Monsieur Bullet has a sexual relationship with Marie-Jeanne, who is described as "a mulatto slave" and "companion" of Madame Bullet (Grimshaw 72). Yet, the interaction between Toussaint and Madame Bullet is a sharp contrast to Monsieur Bullet's encounter with Marie-Jeanne. The latter couple are only seen together once, and there is no verbal exchange between them, but according to stage directions he "embraces her" and she "submits willingly but is not responsive" (Grimshaw 72). This evokes the sexual violence typically born out of the master-slave dynamic under Atlantic slavery, and at the very least, the audience is left with the impression that Marie-Jeanne does not desire Monsieur Bullet. In fact, when he is instructed by Toussaint to leave immediately for the sake of his survival from the rebels descending upon the colony's slave plantations, she does not react or look toward him and goes on her own path. On the other hand, Madame Bullet, who seems aware of her husband's infidelity, is said to be hesitant to leave, even though Toussaint has made plans to ensure her safe passage alongside Monsieur Bullet. She then asks: "Toussaint, what is going to happen to you? You have arranged for everyone. But where are you going?" When he responds that he is going "to join the revolution," they share an intimate moment as "she moves her hand up towards Toussaint's lips" and he then "takes her hand in his own and kisses it" (Grimshaw

73). Thus, unlike Monsieur Bullet's connection to Marie-Jeanne, and in spite of their glaringly different backgrounds, Toussaint and Madame Bullet display mutual affection for one another.

The script demonstrates that their romantic involvement is not transient. In Act 2 scene 4, taking place eleven years later in 1802, when she turns away from his embrace and announces that she is leaving the country, it becomes obvious that not only has their affair run the gamut of the revolutionary period, but she has been wholly devoted to his cause and him: "I have come to say goodbye...I have spent many years of my life in San Domingo. They have been exciting years. First the revolution, then the abolition of slavery, and then you. Now it's over. I want to go" (Grimshaw 93). For his part, Toussaint insists that if she leaves, he will "be left alone" and that "Over the years, you have been the only one I can count on" (Grimshaw 94). In comparison to his presentation in *Toussaint*, this statement is striking, and an indication that James is open to defying the traditionally phallogocentric nature of his story. Indeed, Madame Bullet shares sober political insights with Toussaint that insinuate she has a deep comprehension of his project at large. Further, her access to him allows her to explicate the perspective of the land-owning Whites who are invested in his leadership and fearful about what the rise of a more militant actor like Moise may portend for them. As she challenges his decision-making on how to deal with Moise, Madame Bullet figuratively anticipates Toussaint's downfall. In the end, he is too consumed by the weight of being at the head of an unprecedented process of insurgency and all its complexities to accept her wisdom.

Hence, through Madame Bullet, James depicts a female character that is strong, sagacious, and autonomous, even while her placement helps to expose Toussaint's strategic missteps above all. Without a doubt, she appears to have her origins in the Southern abolitionist

White woman James outlines for Constance Webb when describing his idea for the play about Harriet Tubman.

However, in this piece, it is the Marie-Jeanne character that best reflects the radical feminism he was exposed to in the 1950s and 1960s. Like Madame Bullet, Marie-Jeanne also represents the development of a character from *Toussaint*, namely Suzanne, Pauline's servant. Yet, in *The Black Jacobins*, she is arguably fundamental to the narrative, doing far more than asking her mistress's permission to join the band of revolutionaries and echoing a song that heralds their arrival. In Act 2 scene 1, nine years after she gained passage from the Bullet plantation, she is featured making critical contributions. During this scene, she uses a sexual encounter with the French governor of San Domingo, General Hédouville, to extract information about the political and military strategy of the counter-revolutionary forces. Noteworthy here is Marie-Jeanne's craftiness in getting Hédouville to tell her things he "shouldn't speak about" (Grimshaw 86). Although not known to the audience at the time, the whole interaction is a performance in which she seduces him, encourages him to drink and gains his trust. This is unbeknownst to a jealous Dessalines too when he enters following Hédouville's departure. Dessalines tells her why she should choose him as a partner instead, but Marie-Jeanne is less than impressed:

DESSALINES: Marie, I tell you again, for him you are just another mulatto woman. I want you to marry me. In the church. I am General of Division now, Marie. Port-au-Prince is my headquarters. I am building a palace there. It will be finished in two months. If you will marry me I will put three hundred men on it and finish in a month. I am Governor of the Province. You will be the wife of the Governor.

MARIE-JEANNE: General Dessalines, I do not want to be the wife of the Governor of a Province.

DESSALINES: (Standing) You prefer to be the woman of this Frenchman.

MARIE-JEANNE: I prefer to be what I want to be. You don't own me, General Dessalines. Nobody owns me. Slavery is finished. (Grimshaw 87)

This dialogue shows an inkling of Marie-Jeanne's gender politics. Akin to the rebel prototype that James projects in his fictional work of the late 1920s, Marie-Jeanne is an unequivocally sovereign actor, rebuffing the desires of men, whether revolutionary or not, to possess her. She makes her own decisions, and in this context, that means employing dangerous tactics to help sustain the Toussaint-led campaign against slavery and towards independence. Her objectives are achieved not only through her sexuality and grasp of the various forces at work – in which she occupies a specific space due to her identity as a Mulatta – but also her literary skills. She is open to teaching this ability that would have been rare among San Domingo's formerly enslaved population, including her Black ex-slave maid Celestine. In the scene, Celestine, who is most apprehensive in the presence of the menacing Dessalines, reads aloud Marie-Jeanne's letter meant for Toussaint informing on the "treachery of General Hédouville" (Grimshaw 88). When Dessalines realizes that this is why Marie-Jeanne had intimate meetings with Hédouville, and perhaps the Spanish General Marquis, and Monsieur Bullet before him, he is virtually speechless. She has disarmed him to such an extent that he admits his disappointment in not knowing how to read and implores her to read from a book as she had done on a previous occasion before an audience (Grimshaw 88-89). Marie-Jeanne obliges, but the play communicates that all the actions of this character are done on her own accord and principles, and not at the whim of any man.

Ultimately, she does marry Dessalines, and her radical commitments reach new heights as he explains to Toussaint in Act 3 scene 1 when the latter asks if she is well: "Too well. Marie-Jeanne insists on fighting side by side with me. And she likes life in the bush more than all that music and all those books" (Grimshaw 100). Thus, with guerrilla combat added to her repertoire, Marie-Jeanne's fidelity to the revolution manifestly knows no bounds. What's more she admits



to Dessalines that she did not love him at the time they were married but became captivated with him once she grew to understand the type of man he was and his “devotion to Toussaint” (Grimshaw 105). This revelation further accentuates Marie-Jeanne’s connection to Toussaint, which persists throughout the play, as even in love and marriage her belief in Toussaint is at the forefront. As the play ends, Marie-Jeanne is a stand in for Toussaint's tragic demise. She nearly collapses with grief when she learns of his death and weeps as she forcibly dances with Dessalines, now the Emperor of Haiti, in the final tableau (Grimshaw 111).

*The Black Jacobins* play is unquestionably dominated by male voices and James’ juxtaposition of Toussaint’s and Dessalines’ determined praiseworthy leadership remains. Still, the insertion of Madame Bullet and Marie-Jeanne has a considerable impact. They act to temper the masculinist hero narrative that is usually gleaned from James’ other renditions on the Haitian Revolution pre-dating this one. Although coming from vastly distinct social classes, and serving different purposes in support of the revolution, Madame Bullet and Marie-Jeanne are both free, outspoken, insightful, and multifaceted, even next to formidable personalities like Toussaint and Dessalines. Marie-Jeanne occupies more space and is the more magnetic between the two women. Her passion, audaciousness, and allegiance to the permanent end of the institution of slavery reads as a distillation of the women James fleetingly talks about in *The Black Jacobins* book. So, in addition to fighting “side by side with the men,” she also assists “the men with a fearlessness and disregard” that shows her “revolutionary temper.” Therefore, Marie-Jeanne symbolizes the essence of this bottom-up uprising as well as anyone else.

#### *Black women, White women, and intimate life*

It should be noted that although these women characters effectively disturb the patriarchal inclinations of the play, Raj Chetty has produced research which suggests that James

did not initially intend for Madame Bullet and Marie-Jeanne to play major roles in the theatrical piece. Chetty cites correspondences between James and the director, Dexter Lyndersay, and handwritten notes from the latter, to show that James had to be pushed to recognize that the two were “major” figures in the plot rather than just “key” as James submits in his initial version.<sup>678</sup> Additionally, while he speculates that Marie-Jeanne may have been drafted by one of James’ feminist collaborators, he also points out that “his reflections about women in the play reveal that he appears to have been particularly inclined to focus on Madame Bullet.”<sup>679</sup> Of course, given the historical setting, Madame Bullet is undeniably compelling. At the same time, as with the aforementioned Southern abolitionist White woman character, it is plausible that James is also contemplating his own romantic relationships and the still proscribed nature of Black and White unions across the Western World in the 1960s, especially between Black men and White women. Be that as it may, James’ inability to see the value in elevating Black women as self-determining agents of change without being prodded – even under creative license – evinces his reluctance to see them as equal, much less central, in the province of his revolutionary thought.

Setting aside race, the absence of works from C.L.R. on the Woman Question during this period, given the opportunities he would have had to comment on the subject and the support he probably would have received from Selma, is conspicuous. There could be several reasons for this lack, including a general slow-down of his writing, surely connected to his elderly status by the 1970s; not wanting to overshadow the efforts of his wife, or simply feeling that he was not able to offer anything new to the discourse. It is also possible that C.L.R. James was not interested in a further theoretical understanding of gender and the significance of women’s rights outside the strictures of his Marxist purview. On the other hand, Kamugisha argues that for at

---

<sup>678</sup> See discussion on this in Raj Chetty, “Can a Mulatta Be a Black Jacobin?,” 95-97.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid., 96, 97.

least a decade before his death, James is preoccupied with questions about gender and what it has meant in his life. There is no indication of this in any interview or publication in these years, apart from the early 1980s when he spoke and wrote about the literary talents of three Black women based in the U.S. with great enthusiasm. In this 1981 piece, “Three Black Women Writers: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange,” James not only expresses appreciation of the artistic talents of these women but praises them because he believes their offerings signify a new “social movement in the United States”:

Marx pointed out many years ago that women were more exploited than the proletariat...Now women are beginning to say: “Who and what are we? We don’t know. Hitherto we have always tried to fit ourselves into what men and what masculine society required. Now we are going to break through that.” These three women have begun to write about black women’s daily lives.<sup>680</sup>

Certainly, there is a degree of introspection from James here. Almost 30 years earlier he advocated for a section in *Correspondence* that working-class women would write and edit, expounding upon the issues they encountered in their everyday lives. However, his interest at that time was exposing the pitfalls of capitalist society by amplifying the particularized exploitation faced by working-class women. The insinuation was that a communist revolution would emancipate them from gender oppression. Now, the 80-year-old James appears to have accepted that women’s freedom is not only constrained by economics but patriarchy as well. In addition, he recognizes that it is through women’s self-activity or writing about their experiences without the dictates of hetero-patriarchy – capitalist or otherwise – that a new domain of resistance is unlocked. Moreover, the zeal with which James reviews these pieces in this article reveals that he believes there is something special about Black women of the Morrison, Walker, and Shange ilk that speaks volumes for the decades of the long struggle in the United States that

---

<sup>680</sup> C.L.R. James, “Three Black Women Writers: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange,” in Grimshaw, *The C.L.R. James Reader*, 411.

he has either followed or been directly involved in. Kamugisha further elaborates on what “Three Black Women Writers” denotes for James:

The chief value of these works for James is their ability to open up new horizons of possibility in human relations not dreamt of in socialism, or in previously articulated versions of African American communities. Resistance to patriarchy and sexual commodification, the ambivalent role of the church in the black community formation, and friendships between women are all themes within these texts that James believed announce a new stage of self-awareness within the black community and are part of the new world struggling to be born.<sup>681</sup>

Thus, it is as if James has finally seized the exclusive radical promise of Black women, or the basic reality that race and gender intersections imply unique experiences for them. Despite this, and James' intention to write a chapter in his unpublished autobiography on his experiences with women to remark on “one of the great events in the world...that women are seeking to find out who and what they are,” Kamugisha notes that James is hamstrung by the twinning of the personal and the political “in (his) attempt to come to terms with his relationship with women.”<sup>682</sup> Indeed, excerpts of the chapter indicate that James is critical of the type of husband he was in each of his three marriages. Concerning his first wife, Juanita Young, he recalls that she told him: “without hostility, [that] the only time you have any pleasure with me is when you are on top of me. I did not know what to say.”<sup>683</sup> He adds that his second wife, Constance Webb, had once commanded the following: “Look here, tell me what you want from me, what can I give you. Tell me please but don’t leave me in this situation. Tell me something.”<sup>684</sup> His third wife Selma James on the other hand argued that he took her for granted for many years and invisibilized her aid to his work.<sup>685</sup> There is undeniably a connecting theme here of all three women feeling under-appreciated.

---

<sup>681</sup> Aaron Kamugisha, “The Hearts of Men?,” 89.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>683</sup> C.L.R. James, quoted in Cudjoe, “‘As Ever Darling, All My Love, Nello’,” 216.

<sup>684</sup> C.L.R. James, quoted in Kamugisha, “The Hearts of Men?,” 90.

<sup>685</sup> For a brief discussion of Selma’s grievances, see Rosengarten, *Urbane Revolutionary*, 93, 94.

In his reflections on his relationships with his wives during the years just before his death, the elderly C.L.R. James recognized his flaws:

I was lacking in the fact that I never completely committed my life and my way of living to her life and to her way of living, and when she asked me what I wanted, I hesitated and didn't work at it because it meant that to request of her what I wanted meant ultimately that my freedom and independence to live my own life as I wanted would also be committed to her. And the fact remains that I did not want anything in particular from her, due to my ignorance and stupidity. I wasn't aware what was there, because she was in many respects quite a remarkable person. So that is the situation.<sup>686</sup>

It seems rather incontrovertible that James did not treat his most intimate partners as equals and uncritically replicated normative gender roles in these relationships. Furthermore, although there is a sense that C.L.R. is thinking specifically of Constance Webb and Selma James in his reflections above, Chris Johnson argues that C.L.R. James failed to recognize the way he treated other women, including his first wife who, “ultimately refused to remit her pay cheque in order to sustain his jet style lifestyle.”<sup>687</sup> After leaving his first wife in Trinidad, Johnson maintains that James’ exploitation and dominance of women, in general, was rampant and purposeful in Britain and the United States where he “surrounded himself with talented, independent women to whom he was powerfully attracted as literary, ethnographic, and sexual objects. Intellectuals, journalists, political organizers, and theorists – women crafted the translations, analysis, and organizational apparatuses for which he readily accepted credit.”<sup>688</sup> Johnson also rejects the idea that James had evolved in his later years, pointing to the philosopher’s attempt to undermine the value of Selma’s career independent of him, while dismissing the idea that she deserved to be compensated for her role regarding his work.<sup>689</sup>

## Conclusion

---

<sup>686</sup> C.L.R. James, as quoted in Selwyn R. Cudjoe, “‘As Ever Darling, All My Love, Nello’,” 217.

<sup>687</sup> Johnson, “Sex and the Subversive Alien,” 192.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid., 199.

C.L.R. James' writing career, which was almost 60 years, illustrates that he was not oblivious to matters about women and gender in his works, even as there are divergences depending on the type of prose. As discussed at length in another chapter, he imbues the qualities of revolutionary consciousness in the women characters of his fictional works, yet as was argued here, the same exercise is almost nonexistent within the expanse of his political writing, aside from when he concocts a dramatization of historical events or is prompted to speak directly to the Woman Question. This is peculiar since, as the overarching postulation in this chapter sets out, James was engaged with women who patently challenged gender norms, played a relatively proximate role in his philosophical development, and whose activities were nothing short of inspirational. For example, as he undertakes to dedicate himself to Marxist organizing, there were radical women thinkers in his orbit who supported and guided him in this process, while an experienced internationalist like Amy Ashwood Garvey helped to agitate the bounds of his Pan-Africanist consciousness. Nonetheless, his moving account of the Haitian Revolution produced during this transitory stage, is male-centered, with hardly any mention of women at all, and the message that tacitly prevails is that anti-colonial victory for the oppressed masses must be secured through a Black patriarchal order.

While it may never be known how deep of an impact his first wife had on his output, or the women he worked with in England in the 1930s, it is undeniable that James profited immensely because of his partnership with Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace (Lee) Boggs in the United States. Dunayevskaya in particular forged pathways that James may not have been able to reach on his own, while their positions were generally indistinguishable throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s. The discursive intellectual activity between him, Dunayevskaya and Lee was indispensable to his growth during these years, which were his most active theoretically and as

an organizer. In fact, notions of women's rights, equality, oppression, and empowerment – the Woman Question – were on his radar in this period, starting with Constance Webb. His comments on the subject through the correspondence with Webb implies that he undertook sincere ponderings on what he was being asked, yet sounds most radical when he shares his idea for a play focused on legendary anti-slavery revolutionary, Harriet Tubman. Although he is keen on the woman-centered narrative, it is another unlikely woman character, a Southern White abolitionist crafted in the spirit of the strident women of “Triumph” and *Minty Alley*'s “Maisie,” that stands out here. Again, notwithstanding how James' coveting of Webb may have influenced this disclosure, the juxtaposition between his real-life expressions on gender at the time and what he conceptualizes for his story is fascinating, as there is a discernible deviation between them. Most striking though is that it underlines a trend in James' analysis that sees him repeatedly elide or devalue Black women in the context of radical political action. Furthermore, when he does attempt to seriously tackle the Woman Question for the first time in the incomplete manuscript of *American Civilization*, it is rooted in a capitalist critique that though persuasive, centers on the tribulations of middle-class White women.

Irrespective of his scant attempts to write on women and gender issues from a social or political perspective, James did recognize the importance of highlighting the plight of working-class women in the revolutionary struggle by the early to mid-1950s, which was best demonstrated through his editorial work in *Correspondence*. Dunayevskaya, Lee and others in JFT or *Correspondence* may have had a hand in this, but Selma James' feminist views surely impacted his thinking above all. He encouraged her to articulate these ideas, even though he did not say much about them in the newspaper or elsewhere. It was not until he returns to his work

on the Haitian Revolution, a revision of *Toussaint*, that C.L.R. produces something substantive that approaches Selma's radical feminism of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

The Madame Bullet and Marie-Jeanne characters in *The Black Jacobins* play come across as vintage C.L.R. James, circa 1930, when he was engrossed in writing fiction. While these women have their foundation in the original piece, they are afforded bigger roles in the 1967 version, where they both embody complexity, self-determination, vision, and courage that dislocates the phallogentric line of James' previous narratives on the historical event. Marie-Jeanne is the more remarkable of the two, but notes attributed to James and its director hint at the former not intending for this character to be as fundamental to the play when he first envisioned it. Thus, following a trend in James' nonfiction writing, he did not consider the revolutionary merit of enlarging the function of a non-White woman prior to the encouragement of *The Black Jacobins'* collaborators.

It would take nearly a decade and a half after the play premiered that James, presumably on his own volition, recognizes the bountiful avenues stirred by Black women towards a socialist future. "Three Black Women Writers" offers insights that ostensibly dovetail with his literature 50 years earlier. Indeed, he finally embraced the concept, in the material world, of (Black) women's self-activity subverting patriarchy and spurning revolutionary change writ large. Still, this article further corroborates that any critique that James had on the Woman Question did not properly consider race, as he appeared to take Whiteness for granted in the preceding decades.

To be sure, there was much contradiction for C.L.R. James throughout his life between both the personal and the political on the topic of women and gender. By his admission, in his personal life, he left his three wives feeling underappreciated. Yet, these women were more than intimate partners to James, as they supported his work thereby helping to enable his growth as a



philosopher. Moreover, as he is looked upon as an eminent figure in the Black radical tradition, despite the shortcomings of his gender analysis, the contributions and influence of women close to C.L.R. James should not be understated throughout the breadth of his opus.

## Chapter 8 – Willful Blindness: Aimé Césaire, the Nardals and Suzanne Césaire

Aimé Césaire's philosophy of negritude inextricably links him to two other scholar-politicians, Léon-Gontran Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor. Together, the three men are known as the founders of this anti-colonial theory designed to actuate Black upliftment and sovereignty. As noted in preceding chapters, Damas and Senghor played an instrumental role in shaping Césaire's evolving outlook as a student in Paris. The trio attended salons, read much of the same texts, debated the problems of the day, and led the journal *L'Étudiant Noir* (The Black Student) for several issues. Nevertheless, this chapter will argue that, as with C.L.R. James, Césaire's intellectual development was also significantly impacted by the women around him. To be sure, while Césaire may only count the other two negritude "fathers" as conceptualizing the framework, there is enough information available to establish connections between women in his immediate circle and the poet, writer, and philosopher that he became.

To illustrate these influences, the works of the Nardal sisters will be explored in some depth from around the time that Césaire becomes radicalized. His proximity to one of them specifically and his first published pieces will then be examined and compared with their writings and concepts. A look at the ideas of his wife Suzanne (Roussi) Césaire will proceed to consider what role she may have played in Aimé's ability to flourish in the years that he composed *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*) and beyond. Secondarily, underlying the probe into these relationships are questions about Aimé Césaire's stance on women's rights. Moreover, it will be elucidated through the following analysis that he would not have been the thinker that he became without the engagements he had with these women.

## The Nardals and the Development of Negritude

In another chapter, it was proposed that, in addition to experiences during childhood and adolescence in Martinique, Césaire's encounter with various Black organizations, movements, journals and people within the first few years that he arrived in France is responsible for his turn to revolutionary thought. Indeed, the embryonic beginnings of negritude itself can be found in these exposures. What's more, although he, Senghor and Damas are widely known as the founders or "fathers" of negritude, there are women who came before them that broached the very same ideas captured within the philosophy and arguably facilitated its breakthrough with their own activities.

As has already been stated, *La Revue du Monde Noir* (The Review of the Black World) is one of the periodicals that had some sway on Césaire and his negritude collaborators in their early stages, and it was co-founded by a Martinican woman named Paulette Nardal. At this juncture, it is worth looking at some of the efforts of this woman as well as her younger sister Jeanne ("Jane") Nardal and their proximity to him.

Paulette and Jane Nardal were two of seven sisters born into an upper-middle-class family in Martinique around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>690</sup> They both had the privilege of attending the Sorbonne in Paris where Paulette was the first Black person to ever attend the university. Their entrenchment in the Latin Quarter exposed them to other members of the French intelligentsia, artists, as well as Black people from Africa, the West Indies, and the United States. This experience would be reflected in the causes they took on during their time in the city. While Paulette worked as a journalist and wrote for several publications on a variety of

---

<sup>690</sup> See Jennifer Anne Boittin, "In Black and White: Gender, Race Relations, and the Nardal Sisters in Interwar Paris," *French Colonial History* 6 (2005): 120–135 and Emily Musil Church, "In Search of Seven Sisters: A Biography of the Nardal Sisters of Martinique," *Callaloo* 36, no. 2 (2013): 375–390.

topics in the years following the completion of her studies in English, it was Jane – a recent graduate of classic literature and French – who co-founded the Comité de défense des intérêts de la race noire (Committee for the Defence of the Interests of the Black Race)’s journal *La Dépêche Africaine* (The African Dispatch) in February 1928. Paulette joined on as a writer a few months later that same year. As was commented on elsewhere, this publication essentially promoted politically reformist positions in its approach to addressing colonialism, while also making space for notions of Black pride and Pan-African cultural unity.<sup>691</sup> The Nardal sisters alone accounted for much of the Pan-Africanism or “pan-noirisme” in several sections of the journal. Their “global literacy,” as T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting describes it, was largely informed by the other people of African descent that they frequently interacted, especially the writers and artists that were part of the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>692</sup> Moreover, in the very first issue of *La Dépêche Africaine*, Jane Nardal penned an essay that reflected this influence.

Appearing in the “Dépêche économique et sociale” section of the inaugural edition of *La Dépêche Africaine*, “Internationalisme noir” (Black Internationalism) would be Jane Nardal’s attempt to conceptualize a united way forward for people of African descent wrestling with the tentacles of colonialism. In particular, Jane considered the post-war situation of the colonized in the metropole. She observed a kind of cultural renaissance that was taking place in response to their marginalization that promulgated racial unity. She writes: “Henceforth, there would be some interest, some originality, some pride in being Negro, in turning back toward Africa, the cradle of Negroes, and remembering a common origin.”<sup>693</sup> Jane’s turning back towards Africa is central and resembles a crucial element of negritude. Yet, she saw great value in accepting the

---

<sup>691</sup> See description in Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 168.

<sup>692</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 37.

<sup>693</sup> Jane Nardal, “Internationalisme noir (Black Internationalism),” translated in Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 106.

cultural diversity that Black people in the African diaspora had inherited through Euro-American colonialism and believed that the use of terms like “Afro-Latin” or “Afro-American” was a way to evoke a shared experience that embraced this history. Furthermore, in addition to pronouncing that “certain benefits of white civilization do not necessarily lead to the rejection of one’s race,” Jane surmised that while colonialism “despoiled” African heritage, its corollary was “that of a linking together, of unifying in a racial solidarity, and, in spite of the feuds between the conquering peoples, tribes who hadn’t the slightest idea in this regard.”<sup>694</sup>

It should be said that Jane’s supposition on Black internationalism in the article explicitly relies on ideas around “The New Negro,” as articulated by Alain Locke in the 1920s. Locke was an African American professor of philosophy, a poet, and an author who is credited as one of the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1925, Locke released an anthology called *The New Negro*, which featured the works of Black writers and poets who were predominantly based in New York City’s Harlem neighbourhood. Still, Locke and his colleagues also spent time abroad, connecting with Black people from the African continent and the Caribbean. Locke saw these engagements as not only part of creating new epistemological understandings of (cultural) Blackness, but also a new internationalism that forged these possibilities.<sup>695</sup> The congregation of Black people from the United States, the Caribbean, the African continent, and Europe in Paris would have played a critical role in this outlook. It was this environment and other multinational spaces that helped bolster Locke’s belief in building bridges politically and culturally toward the self-determination of people of African descent around the world. Locke’s Black

---

<sup>694</sup> Ibid. Sharpley-Whiting observes further that Nardal’s kudos to European civilization in this way has parallels to Senghor’s negritude. Nardal also “invoked Africa in her poems on the Antilles before it became fashionable.” See Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 57, 17.

<sup>695</sup> See Alain Locke, “The New Negro” in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 13, 14, quoted in Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2.

internationalism and *The New Negro* more generally inspired Jane Nardal so much that she asked Locke's permission to translate it months before her article appeared in *La Dépêche Africaine*.<sup>696</sup> Although her translation of Locke's work was never published, Jane's ability to recognize and build this connection to the Harlem Renaissance through her "Internationalisme noir" piece and other varied activities during this period was instrumental in setting the stage for the development of negritude. Jane, along with at least one of her sisters continued to demonstrate a vested interest in the Harlem Renaissance and the opportunities it heralded for Antillean intellectuals and students in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Aside from poems written under a pseudonym and a literary critique also published in *La Dépêche Africaine* in 1928 that is "concerned with questions of race and representation in modern culture and humanism," particularly the exoticization of the Black colonized subject, Jane Nardal does not appear to have written any significant articles after "Internationalisme noir."<sup>697</sup> While she continued to be an influential presence among the Black intellectual community even if she may have left Paris to return to Martinique as early as 1929, it was her sister Paulette who would become more active in the city as the decade turned into the 1930s.<sup>698</sup>

In December 1929, Paulette Nardal's first noteworthy article "En exil" (In Exile) was published in *La Dépêche Africaine*. The short fictional piece is about a Black woman of little means from the Antilles who lives and works in Paris as a domestic. The protagonist, Elisa, toils day after day, unmoved by what the metropole has to offer: "This life – which left no room for contented idling, for happy and animated conversations in the evening with her roommate and

---

<sup>696</sup> Edwards Hayes, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 126.

<sup>697</sup> Sharpley-Whiting discusses the 1928 article "Pantins exotiques" (Exotic Puppets). See Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 45.

<sup>698</sup> Hakim Adi makes the claim that Jane Nardal returned to Martinique in 1929, but she also been named as a host of the Nardal salon that Césaire and his colleagues would attend in the early 1930s. See Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (London, Bloomsbury, 2018), 98 and Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 52.

her other friends, exiled like her – just seemed too painful. She would get herself repatriated as soon as possible.” Instead, Elisa longs for “that sweet Martinique that she should never have exchanged for the mirage of Paris.” She still could not get used to the “cruel” and “implacable” winters in the latter, nor the “closed or indifferent physiognomies of whites.” Thus, Elisa dreams about the warm embrace of her hometown in Martinique where one can “inhale the salt air with delight,” engage in “Small talk” and “Enormous bursts of laughter,” all while the villagers recount African tales adapted to Martinican folklore and “the soul of old Africa” echoes through a drum in the distance like “an anxious call.”<sup>699</sup>

As Paulette herself notes a little more than two years later in “L’Éveil de la conscience de race chez les étudiants noirs” (The Awakening of race consciousness among black students) it was not novel for Antillean writers to glorify “small, faraway homelands.” What is different here is the infusion of race consciousness and an ode to Africa that was largely absent in contemporaneous works. The link then between the short story and the ideas explored in her sister’s “Internationalisme noir” article is obvious. Indeed, Shireen Lewis stresses that “En exil” stands out, as Elisa’s sense of self is actually “based on a communal black identity rooted in Africa.” Lewis adds that “Nardal’s portrayal of her protagonist’s embrace of her African heritage is quite remarkable since...during the inter-war years, most black francophone people from the Caribbean were ashamed of their blackness and their African heritage.”<sup>700</sup>

Along with her continued work as a journalist and a translator, Paulette, and at times Jane, and their younger sister Andrée, hosted a weekly salon in the Parisian suburb of Clamart beginning in 1931 – mere weeks before the “Exhibition coloniale Internationale de Paris” (International Colonial Exhibition of Paris) and months before Césaire’s arrival to France that

---

<sup>699</sup> Paulette Nardal, “En exil” (In Exile) translated in Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 116-118.

<sup>700</sup> Lewis, *Race, Culture and Identity*, 59.

same year. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, the Colonial Exhibition showcased colonial possessions that for the government of France helped to promote their imperial identity as a benign exchange of culture and mutually beneficial exchanges. The Parti Communiste Francaise denounced the Colonial Exhibition as a celebration of colonialism that failed to expose the entrenched violence, exploitation, and domination inherent in this approach to people and cultures outside of the French metropole. The Colonial Exhibition would have been one of many topics that the patrons of the Clamart salon took an interest in, as the “transracial, ethnically diverse, and gender-inclusive” Sunday meetup attracted progressives from around that French Quarter.<sup>701</sup>

The Nardal salon was a truly social space with tea drinking, dancing, recitations of Antillean poetry and the singing of American blues and spirituals.<sup>702</sup> Furthermore, in addition to discussing “world news...colonial and interracial problems, the growing place of men and women of color in French life...every manifestation of racism” as their cousin Louis Achille recalls, Sharpley-Whiting notes that the hosts and guests to the salon also, ironically, reveled in the “affirmation of black cultural expression” that the Colonial Exhibition generated.<sup>703</sup> While the Colonial Exhibition was dismissed by anti-colonialists for sanitizing the relationship between France and its colonies, the Nardal sisters and their peers were moved by the African artwork, music and other cultural pieces that were displayed with great pomp. Still, for Achille, the Clamart salon stood out for its “feminine influence” which “set the tone and the rites for these convivial afternoons as opposed to a corporate circle or a masculine club.”<sup>704</sup> Sharpley-Whiting further argues that it was this combination of a feminized space, the diversity of persons that

---

<sup>701</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 53.

<sup>702</sup> Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 174.

<sup>703</sup> Louis Achille quoted in Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 52.

<sup>704</sup> Louis Achille quoted in *Ibid.*, 53



attended and the kind of topics explored that made the Nardals' gathering distinct from other women-led salons in Paris at the time.<sup>705</sup> There was therefore a multitude of factors that enticed Césaire and his negritude colleagues to frequent the Nardals' home.

The Clamart salon ultimately helped to inspire and galvanize the African and Antillean elite who comprised the influential journal *La Revue du Monde Noir*, of which Paulette Nardal is credited as being a co-founder. However, in the first issue of the magazine when the group explained their objective, it appeared to be an extension of Jane Nardal's Black internationalism, as it called for an "intellectual and moral tie" among people of African descent across the world that would allow them to "better know each other, to love one another, to defend more effectively their collective interests and to glorify their race."<sup>706</sup> Nevertheless, in a preeminent article she wrote for the journal's final issue, Paulette Nardal suggests that until recently, people of African descent from the (French) Caribbean simply had not possessed the same level of race consciousness as their counterparts from the United States.

In "L'Éveil de la conscience de race," Paulette Nardal states outright in the first sentence that despite the title she is primarily concerned with exploring the increasing sense of racial consciousness among Black people from the French Caribbean. She points out that it had not been widely stimulated, largely because of the function of French colonialism and its predilection towards assimilation. In her view, it is "natural" that this group of colonized persons "products of race mixing, black and white, imbued with Latin culture, and ignorant of the history of the black race, should in the end turn towards the race that honors them the most." This is a contrast to the situation of "black Americans" who though similarly of mixed ancestry, found "pride in the past of the black race" since they had to endure the "systemic scorn displayed

---

<sup>705</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 53.

<sup>706</sup> *La Revue du Monde Noir*'s mission statement as quoted in Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 172.

by white America toward them.” For people of African descent in the United States, because race has imperiled the country since the abolition of slavery it “became the core of their concerns.”<sup>707</sup> Paulette further accentuates the differences between the two groups by contrasting the development of literature among Black people in the U.S. with Black people from the French Caribbean across three distinct historical periods. Through the cursory analysis, she argues that the latter has lagged with respect to demonstrating race consciousness in their products. Yet, she remarks that by this early 1930s period there were signs that a change is afoot with her journal at the forefront:

...[P]arallel to the aforementioned isolated efforts, the aspirations that were to crystallize around *La Revue du monde noir* asserted themselves among a group of Antillean women students in Paris. The women of color living alone in the metropolis, who until the Colonial Exposition were less favoured than their male compatriots, who have enjoyed easy success, felt long before the latter the need for a racial solidarity that would not be merely material. They were aroused to racial consciousness.<sup>708</sup>

Here, Paulette declares that Black women from the Caribbean preceded their male counterparts in advancing race consciousness and were likewise leaders in *La Revue du monde noir*, which by then had amassed a significant readership among people of African descent living in France. She also cites theses written by Black women students, including her own, to illustrate that they are trailblazers in pushing race consciousness. Nonetheless, she makes a call for university students to pick up the mantle and “take advantage of the riches that the past of the black race and the African continent offers them.”<sup>709</sup> To be sure, the goal for Paulette is to stimulate serious attention within the budding Black intellectual class in these matters so that they could foment the “intellectual and moral tie” that Black internationalism called for.<sup>710</sup>

---

<sup>707</sup> Paulette Nardal, “The Awakening of Race Consciousness among Black Students,” translated in Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 119-120.

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>710</sup> It should be stressed, as Boittin notes that Nardal is referring to Black intellectuals specifically since working-class Black people had come into their race consciousness well before. See Boittin, “In Black and White,” 124, 125.

It would be hard to imagine that the activities of the Nardals, and Paulette Nardal in particular, did not have a resounding impact on Aimé Césaire's quickly burgeoning intellectual development before it ultimately coalesced into his brand of negritude. Césaire read *La Revue du monde* "with enthusiasm," especially as it exposed him to several pieces by writers of the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>711</sup> Moreover, he would heed the call of Paulette Nardal for students to delve deeper into themes of race consciousness, as his dissertation topic subsequently changed to "The Theme of the South in African American Literature."<sup>712</sup> Even as Césaire embarked on his career as a writer, Paulette was nearby.

### **Writing for *L'Étudiant Noir*: Paulette Nardal and Aimé Césaire**

As president of L'Association des étudiants martiniquais (The Martinican Students' Association) in 1934-1935, Césaire facilitated a revamping of the student group's journal, *L'Étudiant Noir*, alongside Léon Damas and Léopold Senghor. The publication, beginning with the debut issue in March 1935, and featuring writings by Césaire, Senghor, and others, is generally regarded as the space where negritude was officially born.<sup>713</sup> Given the patronage of the so-called negritude fathers to the Clamart salon, it is perhaps no surprise that Paulette Nardal was among this roster of contributors.

The essay that Paulette published in this first issue of *L'étudiant noir*'s is entitled "Guignol ouolof (Wolof Clown)."<sup>714</sup> It is a first-person narrative short story about an Antillean

---

<sup>711</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 57.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>713</sup> See Kesteloot's discussion in *Black Writers in French*, 83-92. This view has since been challenged by scholars like Edward Ako who may have been the first to do so. See Edward Ako, "L'Étudiant Noir and the Myth of the Genesis of the Negritude Movement in Research," *African Literatures* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1984): 341-353. Kesteloot's commentary has since been redeemed after the third issue of the journal was published by Christian Filostrate. See Filostrate, *Negritude, Agonistes, Assimilation*, 123-126. Also see Miller, "The (Revised) Birth of Negritude," 743-749.

<sup>714</sup> The article appears in its French original and is translated in Edwards Hayes, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 181-184. All the translations from the article below are Edwards Hayes'.

woman in the metropole who recounts an experience of seeing an oddly dressed peanut vendor, a Black man – whom we assume from the title of the article is from Senegal – while sitting in a café. The man is clad in a black cape with epaulettes and “the flat cap of a German officer,” along with a monocle, all of which are designed to give his “absurd costume” a desired “grotesque effect” in contrast to the White vendor’s “sober brown livery” uniform. The narrator adds that while the Black vendor’s appearance may be “revolting” from the point of view of “an overly Westernized Antillean Negro woman” like herself, this “caricatural Negro is there for the greater pleasure of the white customers.”<sup>715</sup> As the story continues it appears that Paulette’s critique is more interested in the attitudes of assimilated people of African descent, rather than Black people who degrade themselves for the benefit of whites alone: “in accepting to wear this ridiculous outfit that he did not arrange himself, he helps to anchor the whites’ prejudice against the Negro, grotesque, histrionic, showman, unperfectible, all those things so displeasing to assimilated Negroes who take themselves seriously...”<sup>716</sup> The intention of the piece comes to light at its conclusion when the narrator indirectly asks the Black vendor if he did not “find it hard to wear that ridiculous costume, and to make people laugh?”:

His voice hoarse and slightly lowered, he replies with a great deal of sense: “No more than a comic actor in the theater. Besides, I used to be an actor. I like doing this ridiculous job as much as being unemployed, or living off women...” And then, with a smile of an inimitable finesse: “The Whites want us to make them laugh; me, I really want...at least, I can eat...”<sup>717</sup>

Thus, through “Guignol ouolof,” Paulette tacitly calls for assimilated Black people from the Caribbean, especially those with class privilege, to look past superficial differences that may exist among people of African descent in the metropole and recognize the need for unity in the face of struggles that may literally be disguised. Again, for Paulette, race consciousness would

---

<sup>715</sup> Edwards Hayes, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 183.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid.

<sup>717</sup> Ibid., 183-184.

play a central role in achieving this goal. Gary Wilder surmises then that this parable is about “transcending racial self-hatred and class divisions within the black community in order to embrace one’s status as nègre publicly.”<sup>718</sup> Yet, the narrative also stipulates that it is not enough to connect or make assumptions about another person of African descent based on their skin colour alone. As Brent Hayes Edwards observes, the essay’s various layers, nuances and subtleties allude to her groundings in Jane Nardal’s Black internationalism, which is perhaps most evident when the “overly Westernized” Black Antillean woman contemplates the “absence of real solidarity” beyond “solidarity of colour” during her encounter with the African vendor.<sup>719</sup> Further, while the story’s conclusion reveals that they both are “endlessly imperilled in a racist metropolitan context of spectacle,” it illustrates that Black Internationalism is not “pre-determined ‘solidarity’ but a hard-won project only practiced across difference, only spoken in ephemeral spaces.”<sup>720</sup>

Jane Nardal’s vision also manifested in this inaugural issue of *L’étudiant noir* by way of an article by Léopold Senghor called “L’humanisme et nous: René Maran (Humanism and Us: René Maran).” Indeed, three years before Senghor’s article, *La revue du monde noir* announced an article by Nardal entitled: “Pour un humanisme noir (Advocating a Black Humanism)” would be appearing in a forthcoming issue.<sup>721</sup> Aside from the inspiration he derived from the title of Jane’s piece – which was never published – Senghor’s work attempts to draw on her ideas as he delves into the notion of cultural mixing akin to Jane’s discussion on the synergies of African/American and African/Latin in “Internationalisme noir” with a review of René Maran’s novel *Batouala* as his backdrop. At the same time, Senghor distinguished himself from Jane,

---

<sup>718</sup> Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 187.

<sup>719</sup> See the discussion about the essay in Edwards Hayes, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 184-186.

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>721</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 17. In footnote 64 she cites the basis for the expectation that this article would be appearing as “Our Next Issue” contents of *La Revue du monde noir* 5 (March 1932).

describing “l’humanisme noir (black humanism)” as “a cultural movement which has as its goal the black man, with Western reason and the black soul as the instruments of its research; for both reason and intuition are necessary.”<sup>722</sup> He suggests that Maran brings this to the fore with his objective investigation of Black culture in the novel by relying on both the Black soul and on Western reason. Nevertheless, although Senghor’s essay can be considered as the beginning of his brand of negritude, the weight of both Jane and Paulette Nardal on the first publication that the so-called negritude fathers are involved in was apparent.

Amid a journal that tried to distinguish itself from other periodicals of the time by striving to build alliances among colonized people of African descent irrespective of their respective births in Africa, the Caribbean, or the Americas it is only Césaire’s first known work that appeared in the same issue of the *L’Étudiant Noir* that is unequivocal in its proclamation against assimilation and pushed towards the racial solidarity evoked in Paulette Nardal’s piece.<sup>723</sup>

Césaire’s article, “Négries: Jeunesse noire et assimilation (Negroes: Young blacks and assimilation)”<sup>724</sup>, is certainly a more direct condemnation of assimilation and self-hatred than Paulette’s “Guignol ouolof” but could be read as a complimentary article that also expands on ideas that she expressed in “L’Éveil de la conscience de race.” Perhaps making a connection to Paulette’s peanut vendor, Césaire begins his piece by telling the story of a Black man who

---

<sup>722</sup> Leopold Senghor, “L’humanisme et nous: René Maran,” *L’étudiant noir: Journal mensuel de l’Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France* 1, no. 1 (March 1935), 4. The translation is Edwards Hayes’. See Edwards Hayes, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 179.

<sup>723</sup> Ako makes this point about Césaire’s position on assimilation and racial solidarity in his discussion of the essay. Ako’s larger argument is, notwithstanding Césaire’s offering, the notion that negritude was born in what was thought to be the only issue of the journal is a myth. See Ako “‘L’Étudiant Noir’ and the Myth of the Genesis of the Negritude Movement,” 343-344. Wilder observes that the three other articles that deal with assimilation and racial solidarity complicate these matters more than Césaire does in his piece. See Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 187-191.

<sup>724</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Négries: Jeunesse noire et assimilation,” *L’étudiant noir*, 3. All the translations of the article that follow are mine.

stumbled upon a tie and bowler hat that belonged to a White man, put it on himself and “left with a laugh.” Even though it is not the protagonist’s intention to take the act seriously, “the Negro allowed himself to be caught in the game: he got used to the tie and the bowler hat so well that he thought he had always worn them; he made fun of everyone who did not wear it and renounced his father...he wanted to be assimilated.” It is almost as if Césaire is elaborating on the path of Paulette’s vendor while he condemns assimilation as “foolishness” and “madness.” The Wolof Clown’s Westernized Antillean counterpart is surely subsumed by his declaration that “if assimilation is not foolish, it is certainly foolish to want to be assimilated, it is to forget that one cannot change fauna; it is to ignore ‘otherness’ as the law of nature.” Further, Césaire avows that assimilation “born of fear and timidity, always ends in contempt and hatred,” as it is “dangerous business” for both the colonizer and the colonized. Ultimately, he makes his own call for Black youth to free themselves from the shackles of assimilation so that they may “act” and “create” to find themselves and properly contribute to the “humanization of humanity”:

In the end, to be oneself, one must fight oneself: one must destroy indifference, extirpating obscurantism, cutting sentimentalism at its root; and what to cut especially, Meredith will tell us: Black Youth, it is a hair that prevents you from acting: it is Identical, and you’re wearing it. Shear yourself to the edge of fear, from which the identical cannot escape. Shave yourself: This is the first condition of action and creation: Long hair, this is affliction.<sup>725</sup>

With this first published work, it is clear that Césaire’s course towards honing and firmly articulating negritude is well underway. In fact, as was previously discussed, he explores and coins the term negritude some weeks later in the May-June issue of *L’étudiant noir* in “Conscience raciale et revolution sociale” (Racial Consciousness and Social Revolution). In that article, he interjects negritude, which is essentially the antithesis to the uncritical adoption of assimilation, with the notion of social revolution: “Yes, we work to be blacks, in the certainty

---

<sup>725</sup> Ibid.

that it is working for the Revolution, for the former will make the Revolution which will be in its strength, and the former in its strength that is in its true character.”<sup>726</sup> Still, Césaire’s expression of negritude aside, the similarity between Paulette’s ideas and what materializes in “Jeunesse noire et assimilation” is undeniable. Although he is more vociferous in his castigation of assimilation, the result is precisely the kind of race consciousness that Paulette urged from Black students in “L’Éveil de la conscience de race” and maintained was being interrogated in her salon and *La Revue du monde noir*.<sup>727</sup>

To be sure, the point here is not to propose that Jane or Paulette Nardal are directly responsible for Aimé Césaire’s philosophical outlook in the 1930s. Rather, the aim is to underscore that given some of the parallels between the ideas of the Nardals and Césaire, as well as his physical proximity to them, it is quite plausible that they left a significant impression on him through his evolution as an intellectual. This is especially the case with Paulette Nardal. In addition to facilitating his introduction to the writings of the Harlem Renaissance and African Americans more broadly, the development of race consciousness for Antilleans was something that she actively encouraged, and her salon was a meeting space for patrons like Césaire to engage in a plethora of related thoughts. As a leader behind the journals *La Dépêche Africaine* and *La Revue du Monde Noir*, the social and political organization Comité Internationale pour la Défense du Peuple Ethiopien (International Committee for the Defence of Ethiopian People), as well as an active participant in the feminist front, Paulette was a standout who would be almost impossible for any up-and-coming radical intellectual not to pay attention to. Yet, years later, Césaire cited that his three main influences in bringing negritude to fruition were the writers and

---

<sup>726</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Conscience raciale et revolution sociale,” 2.

<sup>727</sup> Nardal states that her goal with these platforms was “bringing back the Negro into the human community” and “getting him to rid himself of his complexes.” See Paulette Nardal’s letter of November 17, quoted in Jacques Louis Hymans, *Léopold Sédar Senghor: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), 42.



artists of the Harlem Renaissance; the surrealism school of poetry; and the African scholars he met in Paris, namely Léopold Senghor.<sup>728</sup> Even though his connection to all three was facilitated through Paulette Nardal, he calls the journal she co-founded “superficial” in a 1967 interview, and in another interview five years later he dismisses her salon as far “too bourgeois” for him.<sup>729</sup>

One can only speculate why Césaire recalls the formation of the concept the way he did. It may be that he had become so consumed by the popularity and praise that he and the other two negritude compatriots had amassed in the more than three decades after he uttered the words in *L'étudiant noir*, and so invested in the philosophy as a brand, that he could not consider the role that the Nardals played in its progression.<sup>730</sup> On the other hand, while they were both strong proponents of race consciousness, Césaire and Paulette did have a different view of how race consciousness should manifest. Distinct from Paulette, it is evident as early as 1935 that Césaire believed that self-determination for people of African descent, collectively or otherwise, could not be achieved unless assimilation is totally problematized and repudiated. He made this position even clearer when he explored what the processes of negritude signified for him in the earlier examined passage from *Cahier* below:

...my negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of the day  
my negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's dead eye my negritude is neither  
tower nor cathedral

it takes root in the red flesh of the soil  
it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky  
it breaks through opaque prostration with its upright patience.<sup>731</sup>

---

<sup>728</sup> See Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 79-94.

<sup>729</sup> James Arnold quotes from an interview that Césaire did with Georges Ngala in 1967 and implies that Césaire had little contact with the salon. See Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 11.

<sup>730</sup> Sharpley-Whiting points to the fact that negritude, or the negritude men, unlike the Nardals, had been extolled by European luminaries Robert Desnos, Jean-Paul Sartre and André Breton. See Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 17.

<sup>731</sup> Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 37.

Césaire's race consciousness is undoubtedly about constructing a distinct, resilient Black identity with boundless creative potential that existed outside of French culture. It could not be confined to ideas seemingly set in stone, technologically advanced monuments, or structures. Rather, it is rooted in nature and its intangibles, as well as the omnipresence of land, slowly, but surely, combatting oppressive forces that tried to control it and define it. Paulette's writings indicate that she simply did not have the same view. Although her message in "L'Éveil de la conscience de race" is about solidarity and resistance to self-hatred, as with Jane Nardal, she sees some value in assimilation and does not deliver an unambiguous anti-colonial message in this article or any of her writings. Further, by her own admission and contrary to Césaire, Paulette's race consciousness is apolitical as her concerns are with "bringing back the Negro into the human community" and "getting him to rid himself of his complexes."<sup>732</sup> Certainly, Nardal was not the anti-colonialist that the young Césaire was evolving into by the mid to late 1930s. Yet, it is noteworthy that a much older Césaire still could not see the part the Nardals played in the genealogy of negritude. This is perhaps emblematic of how women have historically been forgotten or erased altogether within the context of significant theoretical, political, and social works and activities. Ironically, by the early 1930s Césaire should have had some familiarity with feminism through Paulette Nardal herself.

Paulette's feminist stance is obvious in "L'Éveil de la conscience de race" where, as discussed above, she unflinchingly proclaims that Black women were leading the charge in promulgating the notion of race consciousness among people of African descent from the French Caribbean. She argues there that until Black women intellectuals coalesced around her salon during the Colonial Exposition, and "enjoyed easy success" with the journal she co-founded, *La Revue du monde*, they were rendered virtually invisible in relation to their male counterparts.

---

<sup>732</sup> Paulette Nardal letter of November 17, quoted in Hymans, *Léopold Sédar Senghor*, 42.

Moreover, Paulette's woman-centred narrative is rather palpable in her other pieces, such as "Guignol ouolof," and closer consideration of "En exil" as well as another article that was published in *La Dépêche africaine* helps to underscore her political project even further, which itself reveals connections that could be made to Césaire.

Again, a story with themes of migration, exile or the aspirations of diasporic communities is not a novelty in the late 1920s, but one written by a Black woman who made these connections with a Black woman as its protagonist surely is. In "En exil." Paulette covers a particular migration experience that she would have difficulty relating to – that of an aging poor Black maid from Martinique, feeling isolated and resentful of her life in the metropole. The fictional story is purposefully gendered beyond the revelations of Elisa's employment. For instance, as the central character makes her way through the streets of Paris, she encounters an unfriendly group of students who yell: "Oh! What a beautiful blond!" upon seeing her. As Christopher Ian Foster observes, in addition to this scenario playing out the way it does because Elisa is a woman, "The conceit of the white college students' joke is to address Elisa precisely as what she is not: a young white blonde woman – the "beautiful blonde."<sup>733</sup> He adds that it also "acts as a linguistic symptom of the ways the French colonial nation-state managed race, immigration, and black sexual reproduction." On the other hand, aside from using this joke to tacitly connect to "larger national-colonial structures and anxieties in which race, gender, and sexuality are policed and disciplined," Paulette's protagonist also captures the sentiment of people of African descent, irrespective of their gender, who are disillusioned by the cold metropole in contrast to the warmth of their Caribbean origins.<sup>734</sup> The narrative illustrates this not only with its comparative

---

<sup>733</sup> Christopher Ian Foster, "Toward a Caribbean Migritude?: Immigration, Sexuality and the Gendered Caribbean Body," *Small Axe*, Salon 18 (February 2015), online: <http://smallaxe.net/sxsalon/discussions/toward-caribbean-migritude>.

<sup>734</sup> Ibid.

description of the weather, but viz a vis the culture and people Elisa encounters in France. Unlike France, Martinique is full of lively banter, rich folklore and “the whole soul of old Africa...passes through this Antillean tom-tom.”<sup>735</sup> Therefore, through Elisa, Paulette distills the frustration of the Black colonized subject while projecting their hope into a return of self, geographically, culturally, and historically.

With its conspicuous similarities to *Cahier*, it would not be a leap to submit that “En Exil” had some inspiration to Césaire’s ruminations before he drafted his narrative about alienation, disconnect, longing and return. *Cahier* is a much longer and more intricate work with an unapologetically provocative objective, but his closeness with Paulette, at least through their collaboration in *L’étudiant noir*, signals that he likely read “En Exil” and perhaps even discussed its themes with her at some point. Then again, the most striking and distinguishable feature of the article is a trend in Paulette’s work that raises questions about what aspects of her activities resonated with Césaire – her commitment to amplifying women’s voices.

To be sure, in more ways than one, she maintains that Black women too could be configured as vehicles through which the Black experience could be recognized. To this point, Paulette published a second woman-centred article in *La Dépêche africaine* entitled “Une Femme sculpteur noire” (A Black Woman Sculptor) in 1930.<sup>736</sup> She explores the biography genre somewhat with this work about Augusta Savage that appears in the August/September issue of the journal. Savage was a sculptor who belonged to the Harlem Renaissance cohort that ventured out of the United States toward France in the 1920s. She had already earned recognition for her talents several years before Paulette’s article was published. Her arrival in Paris in 1929 was facilitated through a fellowship she won for a piece called “Le Gamin”

---

<sup>735</sup> Paulette Nardal, “In Exile,” translated in Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 118.

<sup>736</sup> Paulette Nardal, “Une femme sculpteur noire,” *La Dépêche africaine* 3, no. 27-28 (August–September 30, 1930), 5.

(Gamin) – a life-size bronze depicting a young Black boy – and her work had been featured at several art galleries during her time in the city. Paulette shared pictures of Savage’s work including the Gamin, along with two other renowned sculptures: “Divinity nègre” (Negro Divinity) and “Tête de jeune fille” (Bust of a Young Girl). Her fascination with them is unsurprising, as all three pieces could be construed as a reclamation of the Black body, a recurring theme of negritude. However, the article is also committed to providing a background of the person behind the art. Paulette touches upon the obstacles that Savage faces as a woman and as a person of African descent living in the United States, where her art is still not valued the same way as it is for White artists. Nonetheless, Paulette deems Savage’s work as embodying “the modern genre characteristic of Negro art.” Indeed, she even implicitly connects the sculptor’s “Divinity nègre” to a message conveyed through “En exil” as she affirms that the former is “born from an imagination nurtured by African legends and folktales.”<sup>737</sup> Moreover, Paulette’s discussion on Savage encapsulates themes or ideals of Black internationalism, race consciousness and feminism that are critical in virtually all her undertakings in the late 1920s and 1930s. Still, despite Aimé Césaire’s proximity to Paulette during the first four years that he lived in France at minimum, tenets of feminism did not filter into or have any discernable weight over his writing the way the other ideas she encouraged did.

### *Early Césarian Thought and Gender*

As early as Césaire’s first known piece “Jeunesse noire et assimilation,” it is clear that at the very least he is not attuned to challenging gender norms linguistically or otherwise, or even mentioning women. In the article, as he describes the three linear “episodes” in the maturation or “history of Black people” – servitude, assimilation, and emancipation – he equates the final

---

<sup>737</sup> Ibid.

stage with becoming “men” while the first two reflect passivity: “‘Men,’ they will call us, for only a man walks without a tutor on the great paths of thought. Servitude and assimilation resemble one another; they are two forms of passivity.”<sup>738</sup> In contrast to the “sterility” imposed on them through servitude and assimilation, Césaire submits that “Emancipation...is action and creation.”<sup>739</sup> The necessity of this great path of higher development is principally the short article’s thesis. Moreover, even as he refers to Black youth generally as those who want to “act and create” and “have its poets and novelists” and “contribute to universal life, to the humanization of humanity,” there is nothing to indicate that this group is gender inclusive. For example, in one of the concluding stanzas he avers that “to be oneself it is necessary to struggle; first of all against those lost brothers who are afraid to be themselves. This is the senile mob of the assimilated.”<sup>740</sup> Thus, to be authentic, to achieve freedom and to repudiate assimilation is for Black youth to reject passivity and reach manhood.

Césaire’s gendered rhetoric is also present in “Conscience raciale.” In this follow-up to “Jeunesse noire et assimilation,” he continues to insinuate that freeing oneself or acting is an activity that specifically resides within the purview of men: “‘Take action!’ they say to the Negro. But since acting is creating, and since creating is kneading and leavening your natural substance, our Negro at home will not take action if he is distracted from himself and if he lives apart from himself.”<sup>741</sup> Césaire’s main argument in the article is that for Black people “social revolution” should not be pursued in the absence of racial consciousness. The consciousness of self, including affirming one’s beauty and humanity, is a necessary task that even for the revolutionary is gendered. He warns that while the “revolutionary philosopher...elaborates the

---

<sup>738</sup> Césaire, “Jeunesse noire et assimilation.”

<sup>739</sup> Ibid. Edwards Hayes also discusses the gendered rhetoric of emancipation in the article. See Edwards Hayes, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 180.

<sup>740</sup> Césaire, “Jeunesse noire et assimilation.”

<sup>741</sup> Césaire, “Conscience raciale et revolution sociale,” 1.

techniques of liberation” and the “revolutionary dialectic” permeates, the “Negro” has been told “to revolt without first making him become conscious of himself, without first telling him that it is fine and good and legitimate to be a Negro.”<sup>742</sup> For Césaire, this Negro, or conduit through which real revolution is to take place is a man. In fact, the article makes no reference to women at any juncture.

To be fair, it could be argued that Césaire is merely a product of his time and is making an appeal to an audience that he knows is predominantly men who likewise understood the world through a particular gendered angle. In addition, the style of writing during this period is one in which the term “Man” or “Men” was generally assumed to encompass both men and women – notwithstanding the sexism therein – and synonymous with humanity. This is certainly the case with the communist or revolutionary works that he draws on for “Conscious raciale.” Moreover, both *L’étudiant noir* articles are quite short and therefore may be too small of a sample size to make a definitive judgement upon the extent to which it can be said that Césaire is moved by Paulette Nardal’s feminism. On the other hand, scrutiny of works from his preferred field of creative writing in Chapter 6, including his celebrated *Cahier*, reveals that he did not adopt a comparable consciousness regarding gender roles and the positioning of women concerning Black agency. Again, the pattern of liberation imagined under a patriarchal structure with an exclusive embodied male hero follows him in that arena as well.

### **Suzanne Césaire and the Building of Césairean Negritude**

Around the time that Aimé Césaire began writing what would become *Cahier*, he married a fellow Martinican literature and philosophy student, and member of the L’Association des étudiants Martiniquais named Suzanne Roussi in 1937. By that time, the 22-year-old woman had

---

<sup>742</sup> Ibid.

essentially been exposed to many of the same people, spaces, and ideas as Aimé. Although she did not publish anything in the 1930s it is believed that she helped with the composition of *Cahier*.<sup>743</sup> After the couple moved back to Martinique, she was instrumental in the founding of a locally driven anti-colonial journal that allowed her to exhibit her talents as an author and a theorist for several years. Given Suzanne's exploits, her proximity to Aimé and their mutual interests, her work through the journal in this period immediately after the latter published *Cahier* and continued to build his philosophical framework is worthy of some examination.

With the Second World War on the horizon, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, along with their first child Jacques, returned to Martinique in 1939 and both obtained teaching positions at the Lycée Victor Schoelcher. As the war progressed, however, there were dynamic changes in Martinican society following France's quick defeat by Germany in 1940 and the armistice that was eventually signed between the two countries in June of that year. Recall, as was remarked upon in an earlier chapter, the fall of the Third Republic led to the so-called French State or Vichy regime by July 1940, which was headed by Philippe Pétain. Pétain's right-wing government sought to roll back significant democratic elements of the French Revolution that had immediate consequences for the metropole as well as its colonies. The high commissioner to the French Antilles under the Vichy government was Admiral Georges Robert. In addition to putting an end to Black male suffrage and replacing Black mayors with White creole businessmen, Robert presided over a surveillance state that not only curtailed movement but arbitrarily detained and deported dissenters.<sup>744</sup> Hence, in James Arnold's words, "The insensitivity of this military regime also made it difficult for Martinicans to ignore the fact that

---

<sup>743</sup> See Abiola Irele, "Introduction," in Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, edited by Abiola Irele, second edition (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2000), xxxv.

<sup>744</sup> For more on the events of this time, including Robert's actions see Kristen Stromberg Childers, "The Second War as a watershed in the French Caribbean," *Atlantic Studies* 9, no. 4 (December 2012): 409-430.



they were a colony like any other, a conclusion that the official policy of assimilation had masked somewhat.”<sup>745</sup> It is in this context that the Césaires delve into a campaign of resistance of sorts through a literary publication, starting in 1941.

Again, *Tropiques* was co-founded by Aimé and Suzanne Césaire alongside fellow Martinicans René Ménil, who headed the *Légitime Défense* magazine in 1932, Lucie Thésée and Aristide Maugée. It provided the intellectuals with an opportunity to both challenge the Nazi collaborationist Vichy government and further develop the parameters of negritude. On the other hand, *Tropiques* stood out as a uniquely Black Antillean cultural production that largely relied on surrealist prose. Furthermore, although in the previous decade proponents of surrealism and negritude appeared to be incongruent, they found some common ground in the journal. Namely, the need for the colonized to resist assimilation, find their own identity and create their own works. Put differently, “*Tropiques* advocated not for *négritude* per se but for the emergence of a multiplicity of aesthetic practices and discourses that interrogated the effects and psychological predicaments generated by the ideological principles of assimilation in the context of French colonialism.”<sup>746</sup> As Sharpley-Whiting observes more plainly, the journal’s writers, in particular the Césaires, “adopted their critical tool of choice *Negritude* inflected with surrealism.”<sup>747</sup> Nevertheless, for more than two decades now, scholars have argued that while she does not have the breadth of publications as her husband and other negritude writers, Suzanne Césaire should be recognized as an independent thinker who distinguished herself from her peers in ground-breaking fashion.<sup>748</sup> In her article “Unheard Voice,” Maryse Condé asserts that Suzanne

---

<sup>745</sup> Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 12-13.

<sup>746</sup> This apt description was provided by Anny Dominique Curtius in her article about Suzanne Césaire’s works. See Anny Dominique Curtius, “Cannibalizing Doudouisme, Conceptualizing the Morne: Suzanne Césaire’s Caribbean Ecopoetics,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 3 (July 2016): 513-534., 515.

<sup>747</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 83.

<sup>748</sup> For example, Maryse Condé, “Unheard Voice: Suzanne Césaire and the Construct of a Caribbean Identity,” in Adele Newson and Linda Strong-Leek, eds., *Winds of Change: The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women*

“departs very early from canonical Négritude.”<sup>749</sup> For Condé, one of the ways Suzanne is decidedly different from those who identified with the philosophy is the socio-spacial specificity of Martinique in her writings: “The emphasis laid on a specific Martinican identity is not shared by Aimé Césaire and the other Négritude poets who simply saw the Caribbean people as Africans who had lost the sense of their identity.”<sup>750</sup> Although, as was weighed up in Chapter 4, there is an interpretation of Aimé’s negritude that challenges Condé here, Suzanne’s abilities as a philosopher in her own right are indeed apparent across her known body of work, particularly the articles she wrote for *Tropiques*. Many of her interrogations are novel and would not be earnestly taken up for several decades after they were published.<sup>751</sup> At the same time, the collaborative nature of the journal implies that Aimé would have some degree of engagement with her ideas. What’s more, even if Aimé did not express his views on (anti)colonialism and negritude in the same way as Suzanne, he undoubtedly benefitted from having someone so close to him who would have pushed the boundaries of his developing outlook with her unique insights.

A glance at Suzanne’s first publication in *Tropiques*’ opening issue suggests that the contrast between her and her negritude colleagues is not obvious. In the article “Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations,” she engages the observations of Leo Frobenius in *Histoire de*

---

*Writers and Scholars* (New York, Peter Lang, 1998), 61-66, print. Robin D.G. Kelley calls Suzanne Césaire “one of surrealism’s most original theorists.” See Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon P, 2002), 170. Kara Rabbitt, “Suzanne Césaire’s Significance for the Forging of a New Caribbean Literature,” *French Review* 79, no. 3 (2006): 538-548.

<sup>749</sup> Condé, “Unheard Voice,” 64.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid.

<sup>751</sup> Kara Rabbitt points to similarities with her ideas and the theories of Frantz Fanon in the 1950s, but also the “collective debt to Suzanne Césaire’s explorations” in more fleshed out early 1980s works by Daniel Maximin and Edouard Glissant. See Kara Rabbitt, “The Geography of Identity in Suzanne Césaire’s ‘Le grand camouflage,’” *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 3 (Fall, 2008): 121-131., 129.

*la civilization africaine*, which again Aimé and others had also done.<sup>752</sup> In her own words regarding the concept of Paideuma, Suzanne explains that the Ethiopian and Hamitic life formations, rather than being omnipresent or visible are “buried deep in the depths of the consciousness of the European, Asian and American peoples who supposedly comprise ‘high civilizations’,” while on the continent of Africa they are present “in an almost pure state among so-called primitive tribes.”<sup>753</sup> To be sure, Suzanne’s intimation about the antagonism between the two civilizations, along with the preservation of ancient cultural practices that Frobenius’ elucidates, is precisely what enamoured her male negritude peers.

Nonetheless, although Suzanne finds Frobenius’ anthropological study and ethnographic conceptions a useful framework, her discussion is not merely a repeat of essentialist trappings. Instead, she narrows in on his idea of “continual progress,” which he argues “from primitive barbarism to the highest modern culture is a false idea.”<sup>754</sup> Suzanne adds that for Frobenius, in general, humanity “doesn’t create civilization and then try to take it higher. On the contrary, it develops in multiple directions transformed by the inner Paideuma, from one sudden shock to another...”<sup>755</sup> Frobenius’ hypothesis was not only helpful in challenging colonialist discourse but also offered the colonized an opportunity to define their own identity and break free from the psychological hold that ravaged them for centuries. Suzanne advises that there is now a “fresh shock” brought on by the Second World War and that people of African descent then may be on the tipping point of “an eruption on a new sentiment of life” that is ultimately spurred by a “fresh surging of Paideuma.”<sup>756</sup> Implicitly, she stresses that this is an opportunity for Black people in

---

<sup>752</sup> See footnote 27 in Chapter 6 of this dissertation for citations regarding the importance of this text to Aimé especially.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid., 87.

Martinique to confront the internalization and normalization of assimilation with “audacity” and “courage” and practice “speaking seriously,” as it has become “now imperative to dare to know ourselves, to dare to admit our nature, to dare to consider what we want to be.”<sup>757</sup> Suzanne’s call to action had parallels, including Aimé who condemned Martinique as “silent” and “sterile” in an article that appeared in the same issue.<sup>758</sup> However, her critique further develops his previously discussed draw on Frobenius in *Cahier* by illustrating quite directly that more than a valorization of African culture, Frobenius’ work also provided a means through which to mediate modern Black Martinican identity.

Suzanne Césaire truly begins her inspection of the Black Martinican subject in an article that is published in 1942 entitled “Malaise d’une civilisation (A Civilization’s Discontent).” In the essay, after posing the question of why there is a lack of Martinican cultural works, she emphasizes the need for having a socio-historical understanding of people of African descent on the island. She cites the slave trade, the institution of slavery and colonialism as the main culprits for the dearth of “sculptures, the decorated fabrics, the paintings and the poetry.”<sup>759</sup> For Suzanne, the “appalling conditions of brutal transportation to a foreign land,” including “slave traders and the sufferings of our enslaved fathers,” along with “an obligatory submission, upon pain of flogging or death, to a system of ‘civilization’” and finally the belief that people of African descent had to imitate their oppressors to “gain...strength,” all resulted in them alienating their true self and assimilating to French culture.<sup>760</sup> Again, invoking Frobenius, she claims that as an Ethiopian or “plant-man” the Black Martinican has failed to produce authentic

---

<sup>757</sup> Ibid. The assumption that she is referring to Martinique and Black Martinicans specifically comes from the last two lines of the piece where she says: “Here, also, people are born, live, and die. Here also, the entire drama plays out.”

<sup>758</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Presentation” in Richardson and Fijalkowski, *Refusal of the Shadow*, 88.

<sup>759</sup> Suzanne Césaire, “A Civilization’s Discontent” in Richardson and Fijalkowski, *Refusal of the Shadow*, 96-100., 97. First published in *Tropiques*, no. 5 (April 1942)

<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

art since “not recognizing his true nature, he tries to live a life that is not his own.” Emulating a Hamitic or European “animal-like” nature rather than “an Ethiopian sentiment of life,” the Black Martinican is embroiled in “collective self-deceit,” which has led to “Repression, suffering, sterility.”<sup>761</sup> Thus, Suzanne proposes that it is through the “Ethiopian attitude” or “plant life” that people of African descent on the island have been “called upon to know ourselves finally by ourselves and here before us are splendors and hope.”<sup>762</sup>

Even though the Black Martinican is the focal point of Suzanne’s critique in this article, there is a reading of it, together with “Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations,” that suggests a fidelity to essentialisms resembling Sengohrian negritude, as she seems to reify the idea of people of African descent having innate and immutable qualities. It is difficult to see then how the mere focus on the Black Martinican would distinguish her from him or other negritude intellectuals as Condé postulates. Yet, Suzanne does more than simply equate this Black subject to a plant-man, as ancestral or biological ties do not alone comprise its makeup. Rather, as she explains in the conclusion of “A Civilization’s Discontent” – and implicit in *Cahier* – these are only constituent parts that should be joined together with other necessary elements. Recognizing the value and coming together of this accretion is essentially what will build a socially and historically appropriate identity that engenders freedom:

It is not at all a matter of a return to the past, of the resurrection of an African past that we have learned to understand and respect. It is a matter, on the contrary, of the mobilization of all the combined vital forces on this land where race is the result of a continual mingling. It is a matter of becoming conscious of the formidable mass of different energies that until now have been trapped within us. We must now use them [our different energies] in their plentitude, without deviation or falsification. Too bad for those that consider us dreamers. The most disturbing reality is ours. We will act. This earth, our earth, can only be what we want it to be.<sup>763</sup>

---

<sup>761</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid., 100.

Hence, Suzanne posits that the Black Martinican is rightly an aggregation of several cultural forces, all of which can help to appellate a self-affirming identity and compel them to “act” – and produce authentic art among other things. Put differently, although African heritage (i.e., Ethiopian or plant-like) should be evoked and lauded, civilization learned through assimilation (i.e., Hamitic or animal-like) should not be eschewed, even as the Black Martinican declares his/her anti-colonial subject position on a path towards liberation. Moreover, as the concluding words of the essay above allude, diving into the depths of the consciousness of the colonized to uncover this true self can be attained through a particular tool of non-conformity or alternative reality characteristic of surrealism. Without a doubt, for Suzanne, the art form is central to the construction of this identity and her project overall.

Suzanne Césaire’s belief in the use of surrealism as an anti-colonial instrument is evident in almost all her essays in *Tropiques*. Still, it is important to note that even before the theory is mentioned in any of these pieces, she underscores the need for Martinicans to aspire to a kind of cultural elevation, namely through poetry. Her view that this type of expression had transformative capacity is revealed in her second article for the journal, “Alain et l’esthétique (Alain and Esthetics)” where she explores the philosopher Emile-Auguste Chartier (Alain)’s “methodical” system of fine arts that puts poetry at the top:

As for poetry, it elevates man to the highest degree possible of contemplation and majesty...it helps us move beyond ourselves, and it goes yet further, it leads us into “a new time,” into a new world. The true and real poem, which shows us the human in terror, in despair, and in horror even, must pull us out of these hells and lead us to the mysterious beaches of consolation. The pain, once expressed, is dominated. The words, assembled following the rhythm, have vanquished the unhappiness. Poetry, more so than music and more serenely, is the expression of a kind of happiness, born out of a feeling of deliverance.<sup>764</sup>

---

<sup>764</sup> Suzanne Césaire, “Alain and Esthetics” in *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)*, Daniel Maximin (ed.) and Keith L Walker (trans.) [Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012], 11-18, 14. First published in *Tropiques*, no. 2 (July 1941).

<sup>764</sup> Ibid.

The commentary above illustrates Suzanne's conviction that poetry can restore, empower, and even promulgate sentiments of freedom. Notions of freedom and the merits of surrealism in this respect is something that Suzanne assesses in her next essay through a discussion inspired by work by André Breton that would appear in the same issue of *Tropiques*. Known to be the founder of surrealism, Breton met the Tropiques group in April 1941. Suzanne delightfully praises Breton in "André Breton, poète (André Breton, poet)," especially the possibilities that his philosophy opened up. She firstly remarks on the theorist/poet's ability to dig deep amidst "anguish" and "horror" to find "joy" in his "marvellous" world.<sup>765</sup> Further, through surrealism there is a great latitude of freedom as "objects and beings no longer have defined shape, and time no longer exists."<sup>766</sup> It is unsurprising that Suzanne is drawn to these features of surrealism, as she explored similar positions in the above-mentioned essays where she relies on Frobenius to advance her case for the (re)construction of Black Martinican identity. Furthermore, surrealist poetry procures perspectives inherent in the same knowledge of oneself that she continually advocates and is exhibited in Breton's work: "this poetic profusion, is the secret multiplicity of his desires, his real self, that self suddenly intoxicated to know itself, surprising itself with its freedom."<sup>767</sup> Freedom, in and of the self, entails entering abysses of the "unconscious" and the "marvelous," while through "frequenting abysses... The poet becomes a prophet."<sup>768</sup> Certainly, this description conjures up the style of *Cahier* and other poems authored by Césaire that is expounded upon elsewhere. For Suzanne, Breton and surrealism more broadly represent what people of African descent in Martinique should aspire to – as her husband was.

---

<sup>765</sup> Suzanne Césaire, "André Breton," in *Ibid.*, 19-24, 19. First published in *Tropiques*, no. 3 (October 1941).

<sup>766</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>768</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

It should be noted that Suzanne Césaire does ultimately coin her specific term for the authentic poetry she expects to emerge from Martinique in her subsequent piece. In “Poetic Destitution,” she levels criticism at poetry that Martinicans are expected to revere, in particular, the work of Jean-Antoine Nau whom she says describes the island’s landscape “more amorously” than anyone else.<sup>769</sup> Nau’s poems indicate he “looks,” but “he has not ‘seen’” the colony beyond the surface and he may “pity the Black,” but he “has not experienced the Black soul.”<sup>770</sup> Needless to say, this is not the kind of literature Suzanne believes Martinicans should strive to emulate: “Literature? Yes. Hammock literature. Literature made of sugar and vanilla. Tourist literature...Poetry, not in the least.”<sup>771</sup> The article closes with what she portends as authentic: “Come on now, real poetry lies elsewhere...we decree the death of sappy, sentimental, folkloric literature...Martinican poetry will be cannibal or it will not be.”<sup>772</sup> Thus, cannibal poetry – authentic, transformative and in defiance of old linguistic paradigms – is what will construct an affirming, anti-colonial, vitalized identity.<sup>773</sup> Again, surrealism provided an opportunity to spawn such products.

As much as Suzanne lauds surrealism, she determinatively speaks about the fact that it was intentionally taken up by the *Tropiques* collective as a tool of resistance. It is exemplary of the possibilities for the Black Martinican subject that Suzanne had set out in her preceding articles. Beyond what Breton and the surrealism movement itself envisioned, she insists in the

---

<sup>769</sup> Suzanne Césaire, “Poetic Destitution” in Maximin, *The Great Camouflage*, 25-27, 25. First published in *Tropiques*, No. 4 (January 1942).

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>773</sup> Sharpley-Whiting defines Suzanne Césaire’s use of cannibal poetry in the following way: “In her use of the word cannibal, Césaire issues a literary decree regarding the orientation and even existence of Martinican poetry, plotting conceptually the course of an original West Indian literature. The Martinican writer would assimilate, cannibalize, and appropriate white, Western culture, its various theoretical tools, and its language in the exploration and articulation of the specificities of Martinican experiences and reality.” See T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 83.



article “1943: Surrealism and Us,” which is an underlying critique of Robert’s authoritarianism – or what she calls “a time when the most horrible disaster in its history swoops down on France” – that “our surrealism” is an emblem of freedom which will “finally...transcend the sordid contemporary antinomies: Whites-Blacks, Europeans-Africans, civilized-savage...” What’s more, “Colonial idiocies will be purified by the welding arc’s blue flame. The mettle of our metal, our cutting edge of steel, our unique communions – all will be recovered.”<sup>774</sup> Thus, the article, which was also foundationally tied to Martinique, is a culmination and clear articulation of her overall project. This includes debunking colonial binaries and assimilation while advocating for the Black Martinican subject to be reconstituted through a self-exploration process that embraces plurality. More to the point, surrealism opens the door to a poetic form that liberates the mind and can be used as a tool to cannibalize or enable purification as this modern identity is moulded.

This review of Suzanne Césaire’s oeuvre is important for several reasons. Most salient in the realm of understanding Aimé Césaire’s political and scholarly development though is the fact that she was his intellectual partner at a crucial stage in his life. Aimé returned to Martinique some 8 years after his departure transformed. In France, he would have been accustomed to meeting, debating, and sharing ideas with other theoreticians, including people from the African continent and across its diaspora on matters about their plight. It was through this largely high-level process that Aimé first conceptualized his take on negritude. On the other hand, the circumstances in Martinique are different. In addition to grappling with the new responsibilities of being a husband and a father of a growing family, the transition meant figuring out how to stimulate his philosophical interests and connect them to concrete action. This was quite a challenge with the backdrop of shifting geo-political affairs that subsumed and further

---

<sup>774</sup> Ibid., 38.

complicated politics in the Caribbean. Aimé had been politicized in France but had not engaged in any major pragmatic decolonization endeavour, while his only leadership experience was as president of L'Association des étudiants martiniquais. Indeed, *Tropiques* was founded at a time when Aimé was virtually unknown as his only publications were articles for a peripheral student journal and his now-famous *Cahier* which had not been widely circulated. There is a lot that signals Suzanne helped him find his footing. They shared a home, and a workplace, and the two would have spent a significant amount of time producing their ground-breaking journal. Additionally, Suzanne's writings illustrate a spirited battle in defining negritude and thinking through its application, which was Aimé's preoccupation before and during the war as well. In truth, there is an undeniable likeness between these works and the landmark *Cahier*. At the same time, it is not clear the extent to which Aimé was affected by her views in his theoretical framing.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Suzanne Césaire's oeuvre is her endorsement and use of surrealism. This should be underscored as Robin D. G. Kelley argues that she is "one of surrealism's most original theorists" linking it to "broader movements such as Romanticism, socialism, and Negritude."<sup>775</sup> Kelley and others have asserted that she should be regarded as an innovator rather than just a disciple of André Breton.<sup>776</sup> Yet, Aimé has been characterized similarly too. Further, even while he published works after Suzanne's pieces that could be deemed surrealist, it would be a stretch to say that he was inspired to use the poetic style by Suzanne alone, since, by his admission, he had already gravitated towards it before their encounter with Breton.<sup>777</sup> This is not to say that Suzanne's commitment to the art form had no impact on Aimé's embrace of it. Certainly, Suzanne's proclamations indicate that she was no

---

<sup>775</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, "A Poetics of Anticolonialism" in Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 15.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid., 17.

less invested than he was and probably supported his surrealist writings during this period as she did with *Cahier*.<sup>778</sup> To be sure, even as she coined the term “cannibal poetry,” he would later more or less explain that this is a central facet of his negritude.<sup>779</sup>

While one can extrapolate that there is direct inspiration emanating from Suzanne’s more inventive viewpoints in her husband’s opus, as is the case with Paulette Nardal, Aimé also does not openly acknowledge the role that she may have played in his growth. Nevertheless, simply put, although the extent to which she had input in his model of negritude is not calculable, the notion that she was inconsequential in the formation of the refined product is not plausible. Akin to C.L.R. James’ relationship with Raya Dunayevskaya, Suzanne was contemporaneously steeped in the same dynamic metaphysical space as Aimé. The latter two were on similar wavelengths concerning their beliefs and were forced to reconcile theory with the material reality on the ground during the Second World War period like their opposite number in the U.S. As a partner in life, epistemological toil, and political struggle, Suzanne undoubtedly aided Aimé’s emergence as a defiant poet and anti-colonial philosopher on a world stage in the years after the war. Moreover, it can be inferred that he did in his way – through poetry, of course – speak to Suzanne’s value in his life. For example, he wrote a poem in *Tropiques*’ January 1942 issue where he praises her and hails their partnership: “Windows of the swamp flower ah! flower/Upon the heavy silence of the night for Suzanne Césaire from sonorous butterflies/Friend/We shall spread our oceanic sails/Towards the lost surge of the pampas and the

---

<sup>778</sup> Kelley points to two collections of poems by Aimé Césaire from the *Tropiques* period where his “surrealist imagery is undeniable.” See Ibid.

<sup>779</sup> In explaining negritude Césaire says, “I want to emphasize very strongly that – while using as a point of departure elements that French literature gave me – at the same time I have always strived to create a new language, one capable of communicating the African heritage.” Quoted in Reiland Rabaka, *The Negritude Movement: W.E.B Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aime Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 180.

rocks/And we shall sing to the low tides inexhaustibly the song of the rising dawn.”<sup>780</sup> In another piece called “Son of Thunder” that first appeared in his 1948 collection of poems *Soleil cou coupé* (*Solar Throat Slashed*), it looks as if that Aimeé may again be paying tribute to his wife, melding her significance to him with their beloved tropical environment<sup>781</sup>:

And without her deigning to seduce the jailers  
at her bosom a bouquet of hummingbirds has exfoliated  
at her ears buds of atolls have sprouted  
she speaks a language to me so sweet that at first I do not understand but eventually I surmise she  
is assuring me that spring has come counter-current that all thirst is quenched that autumn is  
kindly disposed to us  
that the stars in the street have blossomed at high noon and dangle their fruits very low<sup>782</sup>

Paralleling the comfort and nourishment he gains from the landscape with his partner is perhaps the best way for Aimé to honour the woman who maintained that people of African descent are innately plant-like. Further, he may be expressing here that it is her sagacity in taking on matters of importance to him that left him inspired. Therefore, even as Aimé did not always follow the same patterns of thought as his wife, he likely saw her as an intellectual equal. Such a position would not have been common in the 1940s. It is not known how much exposure Aimé would have had to feminist discourse or women’s rights issues generally at this juncture in his life. Although there is some decisive feminization that Suzanne undertakes in her essays, reading a gender analysis or positioning her writings as explicitly feminist is dubious.<sup>783</sup> Nonetheless, in a speech at an awards ceremony of the Fort de France Colonial Boarding School

---

<sup>780</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Just to live, A Narrative” in Maximin, *The Great Camouflage*, 58. First published in *Tropiques*, No. 4 (January 1942).

<sup>781</sup> In his review of *The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire*, Allan Graubard states that “Son of Thunder” is “a poem whose subject may refer to his wife, Suzanne, beautifully merged with their island.” See Allan Graubard, “*The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire* by Aimé Césaire” in *Pacific Rim Review of Books* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2018), 7-9., 8. Daniel Maxim cites a quote from Aimé near the end of his life that essentially captures the significance of Suzanne to him: “we breathed together with faith in the future.” See Maximin and Walker, *The Great Camouflage*, 60.

<sup>782</sup> Aimé Césaire “Son of Thunder” in A. Arnold and Eshleman, *The Complete Poetry of Aime Cesaire*, 353.

<sup>783</sup> See Kara Rabbitt, “In Search of the Missing Mother: Suzanne Césaire, *Martiniquaise*” in *Research in African Literatures* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 36-54.

for Girls in June 1945, Aimé waded into the subject of gender parity.<sup>784</sup> This would have been an apt topic for the newly elected mayor of Fort-de-France, as the month before he won his seat along with fifty-seven women who were successful in different constituencies throughout the island following the first election that women were permitted to vote since gaining franchise in 1944.<sup>785</sup>

In the address, he states that women are “more faithful to the cosmos” than the “tyranny of logic” and have “less method” because they have “more nostalgia.” In addition, they are “the memory of the species” having “preserved intact the memory of marvellous dramatic shifts that have punctuated humanity’s first experiences...” Aimé then reveals his objective in spinning essentialist discourse: “what one calls the ‘irrealism’ of woman is only the will to return to thinking its irrational force, of course, its aberrant force, I concede, but also its force of forward thrust, creation, and of renewal...” Hence, with the familiar refrain of returning to a forgotten past and of “creation” and “renewal,” there is an insinuation that it is through women that his negritude revolution would emerge, or they are at least as important as men. Of course, for Aimé, poetry is the conduit that facilitates such radical possibilities, so in his speech, he quotes a “revolutionary phrase” from one renowned French poet in a letter to another: “When the endless servitude of woman is broken, when she will live for and by herself, man – heretofore abominable – having given her release to her, she herself will be a poet! Woman will find strange things. We shall take them. We shall understand them.” He concludes the talk by underscoring the need for women to recognize that they are equal to men and in a common fight with them:

---

<sup>784</sup> Aimé Césaire, speech at the awards ceremony of the Fort de France Colonial Boarding School for Girls, June 1945. This speech appears excerpted in Maximin and Walker, *The Great Camouflage*, 59. All the quotes that follow in this paragraph come from this reference.

<sup>785</sup> Lewis, *Race, Culture, and Identity*, 66. The link in the footnote (footnote 29) for the article i.e. Max Cantinol, “La Femme Martiniquaise et la Politique: <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/martinique.poli-tique/pages/femmes.htm> does not appear to be active.

And now, young ladies, you understand that I was not wrong a short while ago when I said that we share a common cause and that we are liable to the same justice, that before the world's tribunal we are held to the same responsibilities, and that in the great outline of the universal project of humankind, we are held to the same qualifications.<sup>786</sup>

Aimé's speech gives some insight into his take on the so-called "Woman Question" that would have been gaining steam in the immediate post-war period in Leftist circles. In Martinique, Paulette Nardal was among the activists leading the charge. She published an essay in January of 1945 called "Woman in the City," where she makes a statement on women's equality that sounds remarkably like the words Aimé would utter later in the year: "Regarding social duty, she is man's equal. As an individual, she is also intelligent and free. But as a social being, her services are bound to humankind."<sup>787</sup> Nardal's potential guidance in rhetoric aside, that Césaire believed women should be regarded as equals, poets or otherwise, who could also pick up the mantle concerning the spread of negritude should not come as any surprise. Indeed, he had a partner in Suzanne that in many ways proved herself to be an intellectual match.

## Conclusion

It is not in dispute that Aimé Césaire holds his putative co-founders of negritude in high regard for shaping his drive towards building the philosophy. The purpose of the discussion here was to extrapolate what function women who operated in the same spaces or were close to him may have had on his radicalization and growth as a theoretician. This was done through an examination of the works of the Nardal sisters and Suzanne Césaire.

Although Jane Nardal does not have many publications, her lauding of Black internationalism was an important tenor for her sister and others who formed the basic elements of Black anti-colonial revolt that would become known as negritude. She is not the first person

---

<sup>786</sup> Aimé Césaire, speech at the awards ceremony of the Fort de France Colonial Boarding School for Girls.

<sup>787</sup> Paulette Nardal, *Beyond Negritude: Essays from Woman in the City*, trans. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Albany: State University of New York, 2009), 21.

to propagate the concept that emanates out of the Harlem Renaissance. Still, for Jane, it was an important way to encourage cultural renewal among Black people that would see them pridefully “turning back toward Africa” and embracing the specificity flowing from their respective colonial experiences. Figures in the United States were spearheading this movement in the 1920s, and she and her sister connected them and their products with the Black intelligentsia in France, including Césaire.

Jane and her sister were both notable as organizers, editors, and writers of periodicals that he would have read at the time, such as *La Dépêche Africaine* and *La Revue du Monde Noir*. Ideas about Black subjectivity and resistance would have flowed from these pages, while Césaire’s attendance at the Nardals’ salon, hosted by Paulette, would have also been a space that enabled him to mould a revolutionary paradigm of Black resistance. Indeed, in these pivotal years, Paulette was also close when he penned his first published pieces. Even though her approach to negritude can be distinguished from Césaire’s, there are similarities that intimate she influenced his writing. The juxtaposition of “En exil” and *Cahier* is where this is most perceptible. Moreover, contrary to Césaire’s recollection, it should be stressed that any notion that Paulette was not a significant contributor to his blossoming as a philosopher is improbable. She, and to a lesser extent Jane, unlocked horizons for him to survey epistemic terrain that eventually led to his, Damas and Senghor’s formulation of negritude, even as they each had their slant on it.

If the Nardals introduced Aimé Césaire to pieces of knowledge that put him on a radical trajectory, then it could be said that Suzanne Césaire helped to cement his articulation of negritude. To be sure, as Aimé burrowed through the non-conformist attributes of surrealism in the composition of his first published poem, *Cahier*, he, and Suzanne had already wedded.

Given her scholarly credentials and the fact that she patronized many of the same circles that he did in the 1930s, one can reasonably assume that the two mulled over the device during his process of writing the iconic piece. This is further supported by an assessment of articles that Suzanne wrote in *Tropiques* where she touts surrealism and other properties ordinarily associated with negritude. What's more, although she had her inclinations, Suzanne was an intellectual partner to Aimé and played a fundamental part in the sharpening of his anti-colonial methodology and politicization.

Finally, there is little in Aimé Césaire's opus that indicates he had ever seriously put his mind to the Woman Question, or the placement of women in his life like C.L.R. James did. Paulette Nardal's outward feminism indicates that he would not have been unaware of its characteristics, but his writing, including *Cahier* and other creative efforts described elsewhere, shows that his revolutionary model remains mostly patriarchal. Aimé's swift dismissal of the Nardals decades after his collaborations with them further suggests that he did not truly absorb the lessons that Paulette especially would have epitomized in this sphere. Still, he did exhibit an appreciation of what Suzanne meant to him through multiple poetic pieces, while his speech at the Fort de France Colonial Boarding School for Girls points to a belief in gender complementarianism that arises at some junctures of his creative writing publications.

Qualifying the impact of women on Aimé Césaire's growth in stature is an immeasurable exercise. Nonetheless, any honest study of his contributions to the Black radical tradition would be incomplete without acknowledging that like Senghor and Damas, the women in his life were also foundational in his postulation of negritude or revolutionary thought writ large. Furthermore, it appears irrefutable that Césaire's adherence to patriarchy obscures his capacity to accept the feminine roots of his ideas.



## Conclusion – Reflections of a Revolutionary Journey

Between contemporaries C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire, there are insights, theories and perspectives that effectually sketch out the importance of the Black radical tradition. To probe major topics of colonialism, race, class, women, and gender in their lives and works, I whittled out two broad themes to explore in this dissertation. The analysis traced the origins and tentacles of their philosophies to illustrate the multi-dimensional nature of this field and their impressive gifts to it. This project should be seen as an introduction to James and Césaire, intended to inspire more study of their philosophical station and other figures who fall within the ambit of this branch of Black studies.

What follows below is a more deliberate comparative examination of them that summarizes the two sections above, even as it speaks to the similarities and divergences in their journey to revolutionary thought. Thus, this final section does not necessarily add anything new, rather it brings the discussion to a close with an up-front exercise analogizing James and Césaire.

### *Colonial beginnings (section one)*

Insight into the early lives of C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire reveals that there are certain people, events, and ideas that they are exposed to which had a foundational impact on both stimulating their critiques and shaping the mode of analysis they ultimately developed. This begins in the respective colonies that they are born into with specific influences such as the colony's socio-political dynamics; their parents' aspirations; their education; and their proximity to anti-oppressive resistance activity.

Still, it is helpful to reiterate and make explicit the parallels and incongruencies between James and Césaire before they began engaging in ideas that evoke the Black radical tradition. For

instance, they both came from families that stressed middle-class values and believed that higher education, along with an intimate knowledge of Western culture, would be the key to socio-economic mobility. In the James household, much like the Césaires, a strong emphasis was placed on preparation for formal education and securing scholarships for secondary education that was unaffordable to the vast majority of people in both colonies. The intensive training, which included total immersion in Western thought, imparted within them a degree of discipline and proclivity for reading that made them extremely knowledgeable as young adults. Although neither of them necessarily had a passion for the rigours of the top-flight secondary schools they attended, both enthusiastically embraced the culture emanating from their respective imperial metropolises, before finally being confronted with anti-colonial ideas that caused them to pay more attention to the inherent value of cultural productions specific to colonized people and their immediate experiences and environment. Indeed, European culture(s) was ascribed great worth for Césaire and James before they departed from the West Indies, so much so that they essentially fantasized about what their lives would be like in Europe while they still lived in Martinique and Trinidad respectively. Ironically, it was their early captivation by Western thought that enabled them to realize its limitations in the struggle for genuine anti-colonial liberation for people of African descent.

There were, however, differences between their paths toward radical perspectives as adults. The nature of British colonialism and French colonialism was intrinsically different, which meant that Trinidad and Martinique's historical, social, political, and economic development were different. These divergences shaped how the inhabitants of each colony viewed themselves within the context of an imperial empire. For example, C.L.R. James' sense of British identity versus West Indian identity was different from Aimé Césaire's during their

early lives in the Caribbean. For the former, it was evident in the budding development and acceptance of indigenous forms of Creole culture like calypsos, as well as the way people spoke, and how they related to one another. James did not loathe West Indian identity or culture. Rather, he believed that Creole culture was Western, distinguished only by the aforementioned characteristics connected to the particularities of Trinidadian/West Indian identity. This is also why he could slam any assumptions about the Black “race” being inferior, as he did in his article, “The Intelligence of the Negro.”

For Césaire, his experience before he left Martinique entailed the general denigration of Black culture, while distinct Martinican identity was not tangible and perhaps assumed not to exist. Under the French colonial policy, assimilation was supreme, as the culture and identity of the colonized in their colonies were tied to their French citizenship. The relative dearth of culture and seemingly unchanging social conditions in the colony is what made Césaire declare before leaving Martinique that he believed France would be a “promise of fulfilment.” James also believed that England would provide opportunities for him that Trinidad was ill-equipped to fulfill, but the difference was that James wanted to amass worldwide acclaim as a writer, an unlikely prospect if he remained in the Caribbean. Both the middle class and the Black masses on the island were experiencing a kind of self-actualization in the 1920s via political agitation. Indeed, the actual political disconnect between the colony and the metropole under the British colonial situation nurtured anti-colonial sentiment among Trinidadians, including a burgeoning Creole identity, during this period. Contrastingly, the all-encompassing tendency of assimilation left Martinicans feeling that they could only lobby for better treatment as French citizens. These social conditions help to explain why Césaire felt that leaving the colony was a necessary psychological break, whereas James saw his departure as key to his professional ambitions.

James' exposure to anti-colonial ideas then also differentiates his life in the West Indies from Césaire's. In the decade or so that he was in Trinidad before leaving for England, James was surrounded by events and people, who implicitly or directly challenged the validity of British colonialism and any notion of Black inferiority in relation to Whites. Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani and the TWA spent most of the 1920s pushing for economic and social reforms, while political reform in the colony came in the form of a constitutional amendment that allowed for national elections in 1925. Garveyism/Black nationalism, socialism, and communism were all ideas that James would have encountered, as the labour movement developed and became more militant during that decade, principally condemning the exploitation they endured at the hands of the White Creole elite in Trinidad, many of whom were seen as more bound up with Britain than Trinidad. Critique of the White elite in Trinidad paved the way for an anti-colonial movement to emerge that would accentuate the distinct identity of formerly enslaved peoples of African descent, whilst conjuring up self-affirmation among this group. This was inclusive of cultural productions, and James' fictional works, along with his involvement in the journals *Trinidad* and *The Beacon*, are a testament to these aspirations, even if he did not have a radical stance against capitalism or imperialism at this juncture of his life. His first attempt at political critique, *The Life of Captain Cipriani*, illustrates this tenor as it was unquestionably a nationalist document, which rebuffed the Crown Colony system of government that left the masses in the British West Indies disenfranchised. Nevertheless, his exposure to revolutionary ideas, especially as he was on the verge of leaving the colony, was indispensable in shaping the perspective he would soon develop in England.

Césaire on other hand does not appear to have been exposed to anti-colonial agitation during the same period while he was still in Martinique, likely due to the effectiveness of

assimilation policies in the French West Indies. There were political organizing efforts that pushed for greater rights for Black Martinicans in the colony, but again this would typically be based on a belief that their French citizenship afforded them these privileges and not a notion of Black nationalism or Martinican nationalism. So, even though there was a sense of resentment for the unfair nature of the colonial relationship, and other exploitative social and economic relations in society, this did not generate the kind of anti-colonial animus that percolated in Trinidad in the 1920s and early 1930s.

It is only when Césaire lived in Paris that he came in close contact with people who unapologetically admonished the French Empire for its colonial policies. The Latin Quarter had a sizeable contingent of Black students, who came from the French West Indies, Africa, and even the U.S. It was in this environment, that Césaire was inundated with radical ideas that stimulated a political consciousness within him. He regularly met with people originally from French colonies which compelled him to come to terms with the realities of assimilation, in addition to absorbing the writings of anti-colonial intellectuals. Cases in point were the journals, *La Revue du Monde*, *Légitime défense*, and writers who were deemed to be part of the Harlem Renaissance. In these writings, the focus was on culture as anti-colonial, anti-Western and Pan-African, all while playing an instrumental role in the redemption of the identity and self-worth of the colonized. Césaire's works would ultimately closely resemble these patterns of thought concerning the predicament of people of African descent.

Lastly, there is generally an assumption among scholars that intellectuals like C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire become great figures with noteworthy inputs because of the time they spent in the Western world. It is hard to refute this position, as the most influential writings of James and Césaire also reflect this. Yet, these theorists should not be seen as divorced from their

formative colonial contexts. One cannot understand them without examining their early life, particularly their familial, educational, and professional ambitions, as well as the socio-political circumstances of the society at large.

It is probably easier to make the case that Césaire was more influenced by his experience in France than James was in England, to endorse a revolutionary outlook. At the same time, however, again, Césaire did not have the kind of intense exposure to certain ideas as James, which could stem from the fact that the latter truly became an adult and worked professionally for more than ten years before he went to Europe. Furthermore, it should be noted that the *Légitime défense* group aside, not every person from the French West Indies or other French colonies was radicalized after spending such little time in France. Although it took nearly four years before Césaire's critiques are published once abroad, it still points to the likelihood that there were experiences in Martinique that determined which ideas he would gravitate towards. His father's support for socialist Joseph Lagrosillière, and Césaire's association of previous generations of his family with revolt and defiance under oppressive circumstances, suggests that he would have gravitated towards a radical worldview if sufficiently pushed. He did not have this opportunity in Martinique, mainly because he was consumed by school, with very little time for leisure.

As for James, his rebellious spirit was also evident before he engaged with anti-colonial ideas through his renouncement of arduous secondary school studies in favour of a personally selected curriculum; playing semi-professional cricket; and pursuing a profession that was not generally lucrative. James' obsession with cricket could itself be seen as a form of resistance in the same way his mastery of Western literature was. Put differently, there was likely a sense of defiance that he felt seeing colonial subordinates, including himself, excel at a sport imposed on

them by the colonizer – something he and his Maverick club colleagues would also experience through their proficiency at the latter's literary canon.

*Marxist groundings (section one)*

The purpose of these chapters was to examine how the theories of Karl Marx, Marxism, and Marxist organizing shaped the political thought and activity of C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire from the early 1930s to about the mid-1950s. These years were crucial for them, as they would ultimately have a formative impact on their philosophical output and political efforts when their anti-colonial posture turned towards conceptions of independence and decolonization in the years that followed. To be clear, the works of James and Césaire during this period cannot be reasonably understood without considering the impact that Marxism had on their life at this time.

Although they developed the most salient aspects of their political consciousness while in England and France respectively, there are differences in how they engaged with the ideas of the Left upon arrival. For instance, while both were near Marxist ideas in the cities where they lived throughout the 1930s, their reasons for being there were different, and they were at different stages in their lives. James went to England specifically to be a writer, having already completed his formal education training and began his professional life as a teacher and author in Trinidad and Tobago. At least through the first year that the 31-year-old was in England, he was able to focus on reading and writing, as any concerns over financially supporting himself were generally covered by his close friend Learie Constantine. Césaire, on the contrary, was a student who was aware like most Martinican students at the time that his stay in France would be temporary and contingent upon his scholarly endeavours. He surely did not have the time to commit to the causes and study to the extent that James did. In reality, it is difficult to assess the measure of

influence that Marxism had on Césaire because there is simply very little available information concerning his activity and writing during this decade. Until his death in 2008, there was only one accessible issue of *L'Étudiant Noir* alongside his ground-breaking *Cahier* poem. However, when examining the available works, and all his affiliations in the 1930s are taken into account, the picture becomes clearer. It has long been known that Césaire read magazines that focused on anti-colonial ideas and Black cultural resistance, while he was specifically drawn to the surrealist movement in France. It is hard to imagine that Césaire would have ignored the politics of the surrealists as he gravitated towards their approach to prose; or his countrymen of *Légitime défense* who were close to the Parisian surrealists; or the Black poets, writers, and artists that he admired who came out of the Harlem Renaissance movement; and the other Left-leaning figures throughout the city's Latin Quarter. Thus, his membership of the Young Communists' League and his evocations of Marx in "Conscience raciale" were consistent with what he would have been exposed to while in the metropole.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that James spent his time in England seeped in Marxism. In addition to joining the radical ILP, he found himself among a small group of Marxists who invested a significant amount of time studying Marx and contemplating revolutionary thought in the realm of political economy. During these years, he became as committed to anti-colonialism as socialism and communism, which was revealed by both his writings and his organizational participation. James made a name for himself as a Trotskyist, with articles, speeches, and a book – *World Revolution* – that all earned him praise as a Marxist who was unequivocally critical of the Joseph Stalin-led Soviet Union. His anti-colonial focused work in the 1930s is arguably more impressive, as he had his *Case for West Indian Self-Government* pamphlet distributed by a London publisher; wrote a play about the leader of the



only successful rebellion of enslaved people in the “New World”; and co-founded one of the most militant Pan-African groups of the era, IASB, serving as the editor for its journal *International African Opinion*. Like Césaire, James’ most famous publication, *Black Jacobins*, was also produced in this decade. The book is a clever combination of his anti-colonial, anti-racist outlook, and Marxist foundation. While James had pushed Marxists to properly assess the misguided path the Soviet Union was taking concerning the direction that Lenin had intended and against the backdrop of Marxist theory, *Black Jacobins* brought together proponents of the proletarian revolution and anti-colonialists to a moment when they converged in revolutionary glory. He sought to inspire people of African descent in their continuing struggle against colonialism towards material freedom, just as the enslaved from Haiti had done, while at the same time bringing class politics into their purview. For his leftist comrades, James endeavoured to illustrate the propensity of Black people, maligned in the labour movement, to be its most revolutionary vanguard force.

Césaire’s *Cahier* is an introspective journey of the self in resistance to inferiorizing white supremacist culture that abstractly traverses Marxist thought. He proposes negritude as an action of historical self-analysis and redefinition for people of African descent, especially against the forces of colonialism. Yet, before this piece was written, he introduced the idea in “Conscience raciale.” In the piece, he chastised Black revolutionaries, perhaps like James, who somewhat uncritically advocated for the integral inclusion and championing of the colonized or Black working class in the proletariat revolution. By adopting Marxian concepts in his analysis, Césaire compels them to think about the psychological ramifications of racism and oppression for Black subjectivity, illustrating that for people of African descent, Marxism by itself simply does not go far enough. Although he doesn’t dismiss Marxism, he does not believe that a

genuine uprising among the colonized in Africa and the West Indies can take place without Black self-consciousness as the catalyst for action. Césaire saw a dichotomy between cultural resistance and political mobilization and essentially argued that the former could not come after or at the expense of the latter. *Cahier* was a manifestation of this exploration and spells out negritude as a radical humanist theory expanding the universalist principles of surrealism and Marxism and that would ground his politics in the ensuing years. Nonetheless, when it came to practical organizing, Césaire inevitably gravitated towards a group in the 1940s that was rooted in the aspirations of the working class, the PCF.

His association with the CPSU and the Comintern from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s meant that Césaire would find himself on the other side of the Marxist coin in relation to James for how socialist or communist revolution would come about, or more specifically what role the Soviet Union should play in facilitating this process. To be fair, Césaire was drawn to the PCF and the Comintern for the same reasons that so many Black anti-racists, anti-capitalists, and anti-colonialists were connected to Stalin's Soviet Union. Since at least the 1920s, the Russian state placed the plight of colonized people and racism on their agenda and continually reached out to people of African descent, often sponsoring groups, campaigns, and other activities in places like the United States. As an elected official by 1945, Césaire joined the party that he believed most closely aligned with his political convictions and philosophical outlook. His fidelity to Marxism and anti-colonialism then was the impetus behind his membership with the PCF. These commitments would become more evident during his tenure with the party through several works, including *Discourse on Colonialism*. In that book, Césaire again incorporates Marxist analysis to accentuate his anti-colonial position, penetrating conventional orthodox Marxist thought, while making a scathing critique of Western/European civilization generally. Ironically,

his resignation letter indicates that he left the PCF for the same reasons he joined, and he criticized the party, Stalinism and the Comintern just as James had done for nearly twenty years. Nevertheless, his parting words made clear that he was still beholden to Marxism and the proletariat communist revolution, alongside his anti-colonial objectives.

James' activities in the same period were very much a reflection of the new, strikingly different socio-historical circumstances of the United States. When considering anti-colonial resistance in the West Indies and on the African continent, the goal to aspire for him was clear: self-determination. However, in the United States, James encountered a situation that was beyond compare. The formerly enslaved of this country were minorities in this now-independent former colony and were continually denied basic rights by virtue of their skin colour. As a result, James' attention shifted somewhat from worldwide anti-colonialism to the specificity of people of African descent in the United States who were, for all intents and purposes, living as a colonized people. Although initially he was opposed to African Americans vying for their separate state within the country and took a view of Black organizations that resembled a kind of Marxist dogmatism – or rather favoured vanguardism in his approach towards them – as James spent more time interacting with American workers and developing a deeper understanding of the socio-historical dynamics of the country, his stance was markedly refined by the late 1940s and into the 1950s. His grassroots political organizing in concert with even further scrutiny of Marxist theories led him to construct a point of departure for critique and action that could equally be applied to all oppressed groups, including people of African descent. The so-called Negro Question consumed him until he delivered his “Revolutionary Answer” after spending years observing the activities of Black people in the country and writing regularly on social, political, and economic issues that affected them. This focus on their material conditions was

consistent with Marxist logic, but it also helped James come to terms with and discuss the peculiarities of race for Marxists, who like himself a decade earlier, believed that “the race question was subsidiary to the class question in politics.” Indeed, it was precisely because of the experience of people of African descent in the United States, buttressed by his examination of working-class organization locally and internationally, that James advised that their autonomous self-activity should be supported, thereby connecting the theory to what he presented in *The Black Jacobins*. Moreover, while he had abandoned the paternalistic approach to how African Americans would realize a socialist revolution, he still believed that they embodied the most revolutionary potential among all oppressed groups in the country.

To be sure, there was an appreciable difference between Aimé Césaire and C.L.R. James concerning their knowledge of Marx and investment in commenting on the ebbs, flows and nuances of global political economy. What brought them to Marxism, however, appears to be identical – their unwavering anti-colonial, anti-racist sentiment, and Marx’s promise of social revolution. Marxism meant both understanding the conditions of the oppressed and declaring that their ascendancy was imminent. The two knew that the status quo needed to be overthrown and turning to Marxism seemed to be the most logical methodology for them to turn to at the time, though used by each in varying degrees, whilst they nurtured their tactics and philosophical approaches. Certainly, James’ and Césaire’s correctives of Marx, namely in regards to race and particularities of Blackness is what set them apart from other Marxists of this era and is illustrative of their place within the Black radical tradition. What’s more, both recognized the importance of the independent Black struggle and what it had historically meant for people of African descent and what it would mean for the present and the future. The pride they took in appealing to the self-consciousness of people of African descent is unquestionable, even as it

may have been rhetorically deployed differently by the poet Césaire and James’ tireless political writings.

Furthermore, what is most striking is that by the mid-1950s they had both in essence reached the same conclusion about Marxist organizing or the workers’ struggle and the Black oppressed: self-activity. Not a form of self-determination prescribed by the SWP/WP, CPSU/Comintern or any other leftist outfit. Instead, people of African descent would find their path to freedom under their self-conscious activity, building autonomous organizations “made for them, made by them, and adapted to ends that they alone can determine.”<sup>788</sup> Without a doubt, for Césaire, (inter)subjective, psychological, cultural resistance and renewal for people of African descent, as a precursor to political emancipation, would ideally flourish in such groupings. And for James – while acknowledging the value of negritude within the spontaneous, self-activity of Black people – total liberation could not be achieved therein unless they ultimately subscribed to a political program, irrespective of what came first.<sup>789</sup> Hence, the two were not necessarily at odds with one another, despite their differing points of emphasis in their conceptualization of self-determination.

#### *Women, gender, creative writing, and radicalism (section two)*

Finally, the examination of C.L.R. James’ and Aimé Césaire’s approach to women and gender in their intellectual lives provides useful nuance to understand their respective philosophies. While there may be low expectations for either of them to incisively tackle gender

---

<sup>788</sup> Ibid.

<sup>789</sup> C.L.R. James mentions the value of negritude for Haitians in the early twentieth century when they needed to find a “national rallying-point” to resist imperial forces such as the United States. See C.L.R. James, “From Toussaint L’Overture to Fidel Castro,” an appendix which appears in *The Black Jacobins*, 394. He also states in an interview with respect to negritude that “there is nothing negative about it.” However, James says that Césaire’s membership with the PCF or his Marxist leanings is proof that “negritude could not take the place of a political program.” See Alan J. McKenzie interview, “Radical Pan-Africanism in the 1930s: A Discussion with C.L.R. James,” *Radical History Review* 24 (Fall 1980), 68-75., 73-74.

oppression because of the period of their formative intellectual development, the point must be made that both had opportunities to expand their analysis to attend to this phenomenon.

James' track record on these matters is certainly complex. His fictional writing in the 1920s produced women characters who unequivocally challenged traditional gender roles. Women in these stories who are the most independent, defiant, and imaginative like Mamitz, Celestine and Maisie are all rewarded for their disposition. Meanwhile, the author shows little sympathy for characters like Anita, Irene or Mrs. Rouse who appear committed to maintaining patriarchal status quo. Even though James is likely trying to subvert both Trinidad and Tobago's middle-class and Victorian mores by casting a light on working-class barrack-yard sub-culture, his take on gender in these pieces is unheralded for an anti-colonialist of the time. He centers the experiences of women in ways that tacitly undermine customs, including the role of men. One such example of this is in *Minty Alley* where James illustrates the limitations of masculinist predilection by both Benoit and Haynes in stark contrast to Maisie who is mesmerizing precisely because she excoriates normative standards of womanhood. While he had a different objective in mind at the time, if judged by these creative outputs alone, such attention to gender construction and focus on the lives of women could arguably lead James to be characterized as a proto-feminist. Nonetheless, subsequent work suggests that he was more aloof about women and gender issues than these texts indicate.

Césaire's earliest writing in *L'étudiant noir* shows no discernable trace of women or gender critique. Anti-colonial resistance, racial consciousness, and social revolution for people of African descent, youth or otherwise, are alive for him, but it is very much a patriarchal endeavour. For the most part, *Cahier*, published about four years after "Jeunesse noire et assimilation" and "Conscious raciale," is an extension of the same ideas touched upon in these

articles. Still, in this long poem, while there is a deeper commitment to the use of gendered language, he also exhibits dexterity in his exploration of masculine and feminine assumptions. The portrait of Martinique he projects is one of sexualized symbols within a gender binary setup that powerfully aids in the pronouncement of negritude and hints at overturning features ascribed to the dynamic in the final stanzas. Thus, Césaire certainly has an awareness that men's and women's roles and expectations are social constructions. Yet, embodied femaleness is ultimately left out of the transformation of Césaire's radical subject and revolution broadly. This is a theme in his opus beyond *Cahier*. Even as the feminine principle, whether positive or negative, is imperative within his radical imaginary, poems and plays such as "Lost body," "And the Dogs Were Silent" and *A Season in the Congo* reinforce the notion of man as exclusive liberator.

A similar trend surfaces in James' work as well. Aside from his article on "The Women," the inspiring women that he wrote about in Trinidad virtually disappear completely when he produces works in England on the Haitian Revolution. Indeed, even when there is an opportunity to engage in the kind of embellishment traditionally afforded to playwrights in the theatre genre, women are as insignificant for James in *Toussaint Louverture* as they are in his historical account of the event in *The Black Jacobins*. Even the protagonist's wife plays an ephemeral part in both manuscripts. Furthermore, patriarchy is accepted wholeheartedly. The position that the revolutionary process is necessarily masculinist and its hero, in the end, is a man, is shared by both James and Césaire, at least until the end of the 1930s when the former moves to the United States. James may not have produced any poems or plays thereafter that invite the same kind of scrutiny during his decade and a half in the United States that one can glean from Césaire's efforts, but what is clear – save for correspondence with Constance Webb

and the play on Harriet Tubman that he tells her about – is that any investment in writing about gender or women dissipated when he directed his focus towards non-fictional writing.

Like *Cahier* for Césaire, James' celebrity grew in Leftist circles following the release of *The Black Jacobins*. However, his sojourn in the United States is the period when he is at his most active, as he sharpened his Marxist analysis and became an intellectual heavyweight. It seems impossible to separate this development and the heights of his success from the women that are in his immediate circle during these years. Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee Boggs deserve primary recognition as they partnered more closely with him than anyone else, directly inspiring and/or supporting a great deal of his philosophical growth. As a result, James' status as an author, historian and Marxist reached legendary levels. One could see how they may have formed part of his contemplation of the Woman Question, but it was his intimate partner, Selma James, that would be in the best position to truly push him. As a worker, organizer, and mother, Selma helped C.L.R. to see the centrality of the working-class woman and housewife to the revolutionary movement. Although her feminist consciousness may not have compelled him to add any profound commentary or literature to this cause, "Three Women," and the remarks he makes about his treatment of women in his later years, reveal a meaningful shift in his analysis of women and gender from the 1930s when he pivoted to exclusive political, economic, and historical study. The aura of her positions on women's empowerment though can be best observed in *The Black Jacobins* play. It features two women that interrupt the phallocentrism of his decade's old portrayal of the Haitian Revolution, even as he was probably pushed by collaborators to give them major roles, namely Marie-Jeanne, who personified the revolutionary characteristics of Black and Mulatta women that he ephemerally covers in *The Black Jacobins* book. Nevertheless, without question, outside of creative work like this theatrical piece, C.L.R.



James' political writings and other reflections – save perhaps “Three Women” – do not really attend to the connotations of race and gender intersections, especially for Black women. Indeed, the particular sidelining of Black women to the peripheries of his conception of revolutionary action speaks volumes.

Without a doubt, women also play an instrumental role in Césaire's ascendancy. In fact, before he vocalized his answer to assimilation and the concurrent denigration of people of African descent, it was Jane and Paulette Nardal who appear to have helped to shape his outlook. They founded journals, wrote articles, and facilitated a salon, all of which Césaire consumed, that contained nascent elements of the kind of negritude he and his colleagues would espouse by the second half of the 1930s. Although he rubbishes the notion that they had an impact on his thought, this is highly improbable given his proximity to them, especially Paulette, and the parallels that exist in his early articles and hers, even if he was more resolutely anti-assimilationist. However, a stronger case can be made for the influence of Suzanne Césaire. She was more than just Césaire's wife, but rather his closest intellectual partner, much in the same vein as Dunayevskaya and Lee Boggs were for James. As Césaire plunged into refining his negritude, Suzanne was alongside him, starting with his composition of *Cahier* and then the war-time years of their subversive *Tropiques* journal. Her essays in *Tropiques* illustrate that she laboriously mulled over the anti-colonial philosophy in a way that he could only stand to benefit from. There are marked differences between Suzanne's and Aimé's approaches, but the way that she would have inspired him as they spent hours in the same working, living and epistemological space is surely incalculable. Aimé acknowledges this in poems like “Son of Thunder.” This was a time when his productivity is considerable as he wrote many poems in the 1940s that would be captured in three different collections before he became more focused on politics in the 1950s

and 1960s. Yet, Suzanne was not a feminist, and even though he demonstrates an awareness of women and gender matters in his capacity as a politician, Aimé's plays show that his writing is still saturated with patriarchal senses. Although women do crucially assist in the advancement of the plot in all these pieces, they play relatively minor roles and are archetypes, symbols, or both. The scripts may be based on historical events that lend themselves to male-centred narratives, but like James' production on the Haitian Revolution, there was considerable room for both gender critique and larger more intricate roles for women characters if the playwright had the will to go in that direction.

C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire are by no means feminists and writing about gender oppression was not something that either of them set out to undertake at any point in their careers. Still, interrogating this blind spot is critical to understanding the limitations of the esteemed contributions they have made to the Black radical tradition. Whether the tool is poetry, non-fiction or theatre, patriarchy exudes its contents, despite challenges to hegemonic structures therein. There are ebbs and flows in the course of these oeuvres which give the impression that perhaps on a sub-conscious level, both men turned their minds to the issue. Only James though would put pen to paper in one of his last publications, yet this was done cursorily. To be sure, the two are arguably more alike than they are different on this topic. It must also be underscored that neither Césaire nor James ever publicly recognized the integral role that women played in making them into the supreme philosophers and activists that they became. In this way, women are not only relegated in the works of these revolutionary theorists but in their lives as well. Hence, one of the main goals of the final section was to respond to these silences by uplifting the names Raya Dunayevskaya, Grace Lee Boggs, Selma Deitch James, Jane and Paulette Nardal, and Suzanne Roussi Césaire, who provided immeasurable intellectual sustenance to C.L.R.

James and Aimé Césaire. Any in-depth study of either figure is frankly incomplete without taking stock of the effect that these women had in moulding their celebrated ideas.

This dissertation's fundamental aim was to venture into the genesis and expanse of the revolutionary thought of these two figures to illuminate the trajectory of the Black radical tradition and its indispensability to humanist discourse. They are useful as comparators since, on a surface level, in addition to being active in the same era, they had similar childhood experiences with regard to their formal education, both were politicized in Europe, and they later went on to become world renowned for their works. Their dissimilarities at first blush also make them attractive, including being born into different colonial contexts, having different primary influences in their path towards intellectual maturity, and relying on diverging modalities to express their theoretical positions. However, amidst the framework of in-depth evaluation undertaken here are convergences that reveal how these ideas, notwithstanding their shortcomings, are inspired by a belief in universal improvement of the human condition by attending to the liberation of people of African descent, subsumed by intersecting colonized, working class and oppressed identities.

Without a doubt, critical to my examination is not the deification of C.L.R. James and Aimé Césaire, their works, or the Black radical tradition itself. Rather, the hope is that by tracing the contours of their life and works, scholars, activists and revolutionaries alike can better understand and meditate on structures of patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, and White supremacy that continue to have a deleterious impact on world's majority today.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ablelove, Henry and E.P. Thompson, eds. "(Interview with) C.L.R. James." In *Visions of History*, by MARHO – the Radical Historians Organization. London: Manchester University Press, 1983.
- Adjepong, Anima. "Periodically I Pondered over It': Reading the Absence/Presence of Women in Beyond a Boundary." Essay. In *Marxism, Colonialism, and Cricket: C.L.R. James's beyond a Boundary*, edited by David Featherstone, Christopher Gair, Christian Høgsbjerg, and Andrew Smith, 123–36. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Adi. *Pan-Africanism: A history*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018.
- Ako, Edward. "L'Étudiant Noir' and the Myth of the Genesis of the Negritude Movement." *Research in African Literatures* 15, no. 3 (1984): 341–53.
- Alliot, David, and Aimé Césaire. *Le communisme est à l'ordre du jour: Aimé césaire et le P.C.F., de l'engagement à la rupture (1935-1957): Essai*. Paris: Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2013.
- Annan, Adaku T. "Revolution as Theater: Revolutionary Aesthetics in the Works of Selected Black Playwrights." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987.
- Anquetil, Gilles. "Le Long Cri d'Aimé Césaire n'a Pas Fini de Résonner." *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Groupe Nouvel Observateur, April 17, 2008.  
<https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/documents/20080417.BIB1140/le-long-cri-d-aime-cesaire-n-a-pas-fini-de-resonner.html>.
- Arnold, A. James. "The Erotics of Colonialism in Contemporary French West Indian Literary Culture." *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 68, no. 1–2 (1994): 5–22.  
<https://doi.org/10.1163/13822373-90002658>.
- Arnold, A. James. *Modernism and negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aime Césaire*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- Bailey, Marianne Wichmann. *The Ritual Theatre of Aimé Césaire: Mythic Structures of the Dramatic Imagination*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1992.
- Batie, Robert. "Why Sugar? Economic Cycles and the Changing of Staples on the English and French Antilles, 1624-54." Essay. In *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, 207-225.
- Beckles, Hilary McD., ed. *An Area of Conquest: Popular Democracy and West Indies Cricket*

- Supremacy*. Kingston: Ian Randle, 1994.
- Beckles, Hilary McD. and Verene A. Shephard, eds. *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1996.
- Beckles, Hilary McD. and Verene A. Shephard, eds. *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World: A Student Reader*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000.
- Betts, Raymond. *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- Blouet, Brian W. "Land Policies in Trinidad, 1838-50." *Journal of Caribbean History* 9 (1977): 43-59.
- Boggs, Grace Lee. "C.L.R. James: Organizing in the U.S.A., 1938-1953." In *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*. Edited by Selwyn Cudjoe and William Cain, 163-172. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.
- Boggs, Grace Lee. *Living for a Change: An Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
- Bogues, Anthony. *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Bogues, Anthony. *Caliban's Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James*. Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997.
- Bois, Pierre. "Aimé Césaire, un poète en colère." *Le Figaro*. December 20, 1974. [https://www.lefigaro.fr/assets/pdf/Cesaire\\_par\\_%20Pierre\\_Bois.pdf](https://www.lefigaro.fr/assets/pdf/Cesaire_par_%20Pierre_Bois.pdf)
- Boittin, Jennifer Anne. "In Black and White: Gender, Race Relations, and the Nardal Sisters in Interwar Paris." *French Colonial History* 6, no.1 (2005): 120–135. <https://doi.org/10.1353/fch.2005.0003>.
- Bornstein, Sam, and Al Richardson. *Against the Stream: A history of the Trotskyist movement in Britain 1924-1938*. London: Socialist Platform, 1986.
- Boucher, Phillip. *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (E-book). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992).
- Bouwer, Karen. *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2010.
- Brathwaite, Kamau. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

- Breton, André. "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)." Essay. In André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969.
- Breton, André. "Second Manifesto of Surrealism (1930)." Essay. In André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969.
- Brereton, Bridget. *A History of Modern Trinidad, 1783-1962*. Port of Spain: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1981.
- Brereton, Bridget. *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Buhle, Paul, ed. *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work*. London: Allison & Busby, 1986.
- Cannon, James. "Speech on Russia (15 October 1939)." *New International* 6, no. 1 (February 1940): 8–13. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1939/ussr.htm>.
- Cannon, James. *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970. First published by New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1943.
- Carby, Hazel. "Proletarian or Revolutionary Literature: C.L.R. James and the politics of the Trinidad Renaissance." *New Formations*, no. 10 (1990): 99-108.
- Carby, Hazel. *Race Men*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Carr, Edward Hallett. *The Bolshevik Revolution: 1917-1923*. 3 vols. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985. New York: MacMillan, 1952.
- Césaire, Aimé. *A Season in the Congo: a play by Aimé Césaire*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Groove Press, 1968.
- Césaire, Aimé. *A Tempest*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York, N.Y.: G. Borchardt 1986. First published in 1968.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*. Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Césaire, Aimé. "Chevelure." In *The Complete Poetry of Aime Cesaire*. Translated by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman, 367, 369. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017.
- Césaire, Aimé. "Conscience raciale et revolution sociale." *L'étudiant noir: Journal mensuel de l'Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France* 1, no. 3 (1935): 1-2.

- Césaire, Aimé. "Décolonisation pour les Antilles." *Présence Africaine: Revue culturelle du monde noir* 7 (1955).
- Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.
- Césaire, Aimé. "Et les chiens se taisaient (tragédie)/And The Dogs Were Silent (Tragedy)." Play. In *The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire*, edited and translated by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman, 168-303. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017.
- Césaire, Aimé. Introduction to *Les Antilles décolonisées*, by Daniel Guérin, 9-17. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956.
- Césaire, Aimé. *La tragédie du roi Christophe: théâtre*. Paris: Presence Africaine, 1963.
- Césaire, Aimé. "La voix de la Martinique." *Il Litératournaïa gazéta*, no. 34 (March 19, 1953).
- Césaire, Aimé. "Letter to Maurice Thorez." Letter. Translated by Chike Jeffers. *Social Text* 28, no. 2 (2010): 145-152. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2009-072>.
- Césaire, Aimé. "Lost Body." In Arnold and Eshleman, *The Complete Poetry of Aime Cesaire*, 497, 499.
- Céaaire, Aimé. *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry, 1946-82*. Edited and translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990.
- Césaire, Aimé. "Négries: Jeunesse noire et assimilation." *L'étudiant noir* 1 (March 1935): 1.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Edited and translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith; with an introduction by André Breton. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press 2001.
- Césaire, Aimé. "Panorama." Essay. In *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, edited and translated by Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Filjalkowski, 79-87. New York: Verso, 1996. First published in *Tropiques*, no.1 (April 1941).
- Céesaire, Aimé. "Presentation." Poem. In *Refusal of the Shadow*, 88. First published in *Tropiques*, no. 1 (April 1941).
- Césaire, Aimé. "Réponse à Depestre poète haïtien (Eléments d'un art poétique)". *Présence Africaine: Revue culturelle du monde noir* (n.s.), no. 1-2 (April-July 1955).
- Césaire, Aimé, and Francoise Vergès. *Resolutely Black: Conversations with Francoise Vergès*. Translated by Matthew B. Smith. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020. First published in French as *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai: Entretiens avec Francoise Vergès*. Albin Michel, 2005.

- Césaire, Aimé. "Son of Thunder." Poem. In *The Complete Poetry of Aime Cesaire*, edited and translated by A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman, 353. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017.
- Césaire, Aimé. *The Original 1939 Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (bilingual edition). Edited and translated by Albert James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013.
- Césaire, Aimé. *The Tragedy of King Christophe: a play*. Translated by Ralph Manhiem. New York: Groove Press, 1969.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Une Saison au Congo, théâtre*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Victor Schoelcher et l'abolition de l'esclavage: suivi de trois discours*. Lecture: Éditions La Capucin, 2004.
- Césaire, Suzanne. "A Civilization's Discontent." Essay. In *Refusal of the Shadow*, 96-100. First published in *Tropiques*, no. 5 (April 1942).
- Césaire, Suzanne. "Alain and Esthetics." Essay. In *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)*. Edited by Daniel Maximin. Translated by Keith L Walker, 11-18. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012. First published in *Tropiques* no. 2 (July 1941).
- Césaire, Suzanne. "André Breton." Essay. In *The Great Camouflage*, 19-24. First published in *Tropiques* no. 3 (October 1941).
- Césaire, Suzanne. "Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations." Essay. In *Refusal of the Shadow*, 82-87. First published in *Tropiques*, no. 1 (April 1941).
- Césaire, Suzanne. "Poetic Destitution." Essay. In *The Great Camouflage*, 25-27. First published in *Tropiques*, no. 4 (January 1942).
- Census of the colony of Trinidad and Tobago, 1946 § (1948).
- Chetty, Raj. "Can a Mulatta Be a Black Jacobin? C.L.R. James, Feminism and the Place of Collaboration." *Small Axe* 23, no. 3 (November 1, 2019): 87-103. <https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-7912286>.
- Chetty, Raj. "Race Fundamentalism: Caribbean Fundamentalism Theater and the Challenge to Black Diaspora." PhD diss., University of Washington, 2013.
- Childers, Kristen Stromberg. "The Second War as a watershed in the French Caribbean." *Atlantic Studies* 9, no. 4 (December 2012): 409-430.



- Church, Christopher M. *Paradise Destroyed: Catastrophe and Citizenship in the French Caribbean*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.
- Church, Emily Musil. "In Search of Seven Sisters: A Biography of the Nardal Sisters of Martinique." *Callaloo* 36, no. 2 (2013): 375–390.
- Clément, Vincent. "Latitude and Longitude of the Past: Place, Negritude and French Caribbean Identity in Aimé Césaire's Poetry." *Caribbean Studies* 39, no. 1-2 (December/January, 2011): 171-193.
- Cole, Lori. "Légitime defense: From Communism and Surrealism to Caribbean Self-Definition." *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 4, no. 1 (2010): 15-30.
- Condé, Maryse. "Unheard Voice: Suzanne Césaire and the Construct of a Caribbean Identity." Essay. In *Winds of Change: The Transforming Voices of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars*. Edited by Adele Newson and Linda Strong-Leek, 61-66. New York: Peter Lang, 1998.
- Craton, Michael. "From Caribs to Black Caribs: The Amerindian Roots of Servile Resistance in the Caribbean." Essay. In *In Resistance*, 96-116.
- Crouse, Nellis M. *French Pioneers in the French West Indies, 1624-1664*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1940.
- Cudjoe, Selwyn R. "'As Ever Darling, All My Love, Nello': The Love Letters of C.L.R. James." Essay. In Cudjoe and Cain, ed., *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*, 215-243.
- Curtius, Anny Dominique. "Cannibalizing Doudouisme, Conceptualizing the Morne: Suzanne Césaire's Caribbean Ecopoetics." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 3 (July 2016): 513-534.
- Davis, Gregson. *Aimé Césaire*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- de Boer, Jelle Zeilinga and Donald Theodore Sanders. *Volcanoes in Human History: The Far-reaching Effects of Major Eruptions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Degras, Jane, sel., ed. *The Communist International: 1919-1943 Documents, Volume I 1919-1922*. London: F.Cass, 1971. *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/documents/volume1-1919-1922.pdf>.
- Desparte, René, and Aimé Césaire. "An interview with Aimé Césaire (1967)." Translated from Spanish by Maro Riofrancos. In appendix to, *Discourse on Colonialism*, by Aimé Césaire. Translated by Joan Pinkham, 79-94. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000. First published in 1955.

- Dhondy, Farrukh. *C.L.R. James: a life*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2001.
- Donnell, Alison and Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds. *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Douglas, Rachel. *Making Black Jacobins: C.L.R. James and the Drama of History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Douglas, Rachel. "Making Drama out of the Haitian Revolution from Below: C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* Play." Essay. In *The Black Jacobins Reader*, edited by Charles Forsdick and Christian Hogsberg, 278-296. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Douglas, Rachel. "Unsilencing the Haitian Revolution: C.L.R. James and The Black Jacobins." *Global Currents* 19, no. 2 (2022): 281-304.
- Downes, Aviston. "Colonial Education, Cricket and Masculinity in the Caribbean, 1870-1920." *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 22, no. 1 (2005): 3-21.
- Dubois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. With an introduction by David Levering Lewis. Toronto: Free Press, 1998. First published in 1935.
- Dunayevskaya, Raya. "A New Revision of Marxian Economics." *The American Economic Review* 34, no. 3 (September 1944): 531-537.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1944/revision.htm>.
- Dunayevskaya, Raya ("Freddie Forest"). "An Analysis of the Russian Economy: A – Overview." *The New International* 3, no. 11 (December 1942): 327-332.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1942/russian-economy/ch01.htm>.
- Dunayevskaya Raya ("Freddie Forest"), "Marxism and the Negro Problem – A Discussion Article (June 18, 1944)." In *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*. *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/259.pdf>
- Dunayevskaya, Raya. "Marx's Humanism Today." Essay. In *Socialist Humanism*, edited by Eric Fromm. New York: Doubleday, 1965. Proofed and corrected by Chris Clayton, 2006. *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1965/marx-humanism.htm>.
- Dunayevskaya, Raya. "On Women in the Post-War World, and the Old Radicals (1951)." Excerpts from an Unpublished Rough Draft of an Essay, "Our Organization", 64-66. *Marxist Humanist Initiative* under "Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya".  
<http://www.marxisthumanistinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/On-Women-in-the-Post-War-World-and-the-Old-Radicals.pdf>. This piece appears to have been developed further in a section of a document entitled "Our Organization: American Roots and World Concepts" under the sub-category "The Women", a draft of which was

- presented by Dunayevskaya at the first Convention of Correspondence Committees in July 1953, 33-39. In *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, 2077-2083. *Marxist Internet Archive*. <http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/2042.pdf>.
- Dunayevskaya, Raya, C.L.R. James and Grace Lee (Boggs). "Philosophic Correspondence, 1949-1951." List of 35 Letters. In *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, 1595-1734. *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/1595.pdf>.
- Dunayevskaya Raya ("Freddie Forest"). "The Miner's Wives (1950)." In *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, 1478 *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/1477.pdf>.
- Dunayevskaya, Raya, trans. "The Teaching of Economics in the Soviet Union." *The American Economic Review* 34, no. 3 (September 1944): 501-530.
- Dunayevskaya, Raya ("Freddie James"). "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is a Capitalist Society." *Internal Discussion Bulletin of the Workers Party* 7 (March 1941). *News and Letters Pamphlet* (October 1992).  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1941/ussr-capitalist.htm>.
- Durán, Alan West, ed. *African Caribbeans: A Reference Guide*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003.
- Editorial. "Local Fiction." *The Beacon: A Monthly Review* 1, no. 10 (January-February 1932) [Privately published, 1931]: 1-2.
- Edwards Hayes, Brent. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Edwards, Norval. "The Foundational Generation: From Beacon to Savacou." Essay. In *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, edited by Michael Bucknor and Alison Donnell, 111-123. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Fanon, Frantz. "West Indians and Africans." Essay. In *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, by Frantz Fanon. Translated by Haakon Chevalier, 17-28. New York: Grove Press, 1988. First published by Monthly Review Press, 1967.
- Filostrat, Christian. *Negritude, Agonistes: Assimilation against Nationalism in the French-speaking Caribbean and Guyane*. New Jersey: Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers, 2008.
- Flaugh, Christian. "Of Colonized Mind and Matter: The Dis/Abilities of Negritude in Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability*

- Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010): 291-308.
- Foster, Christopher Ian. "Toward a Caribbean Migritude?: Immigration, Sexuality and the Gendered Caribbean Body." *SX Salon* 18 (February 2015).  
<http://smallaxe.net/sxsalon/discussions/toward-caribbean-migritude>.
- Fonkoua, Romuald. *Aimé Césaire*. Paris: Perrin, 2010.
- François-Lubin, Bertrand. "Les méandres de la politique sociale outre-mer." Essay. In *1946 – 1996: Cinquante ans de départementalisation outre-mer*, edited by Fred Constant and Justin Daniel, 73-83. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997.
- Frutkin, Susan. *Aimé Césaire, Black Between Worlds*. Miami: University of Miami Center for Advanced International Studies, 1973.
- Gardiner, Becky. "A life in writing: Selma James." *The Guardian*. June 8, 2012.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jun/08/life-in-writing-selma-james>.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Colour Line*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Gomes, Albert. "Black Man." *The Beacon: A Monthly Review* 1, no. 4 (July 1931): 1-3. Privately published, 1931.
- Gomes, Albert. "Editorial Commentaries." *The Beacon* 2, no. 5 (September 1932): 5-7.
- Gomes, Albert. *Through a Maze of Colour*. Port of Spain: Key Caribbean Publications Ltd., 1974.
- Grant, Collin. *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Graubard, Allan. "The Complete Poetry of Aimé Césaire." Review. *Pacific Rim Review of Books* 12, no. 1 (2018): 7-9.
- Hale, Thomas, and Kora Véron. "Aimé Césaire's Break from the Parti communiste français: Nouveaux élans, nouveaux défis." *French Politics, Culture & Society* 27, no. 3 (2009): 47-62.
- Harland, Sidney C. "Race Admixture." *The Beacon* 1, no. 4 (July 1931): 25-30.
- Henry, Paget, and Robert Buhle, eds. *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.

- Hill, Robert. "Literary Executor's Afterword." In C.L.R. James, *American Civilization*, edited by Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart, 293-366. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993).
- Hogsbjerg, Christian. "'A Kind of Bible on Trotskyism': Reflections on C.L.R. James's World Revolution." *CLR James Journal* 19, nos. 1-2, Fall 2013: 243- 275.
- Hogsbjerg, Christian. "C.L.R. James and the Black Jacobins." *International Socialism* 2, no. 126 (Spring, 2010). *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj2/2010/isj2-126/hogsbjerg.html>
- Hogsbjerg, Christian. *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Hogsbjerg, Christian. "'We Lived According to the Tenets of Matthew Arnold': Reflections on the 'Colonial Victorianism' of the Young C.L.R. James." *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 2 (2013): 201-223.
- Horner Kaufman, Janice. "Maximin, Cixous, and Césaire: Créolization, Intertextuality, and Coiled Myth." PhD diss., French Department, University of Virginia, 1997.
- Horner Kaufman, Janice. "Tracing the Paideuma in Aimé Césaire's Poetry: From Solar Throat Slashed (Soleil Cou-Coupé) to Cadaster (Cadastre)." *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 77, no. ½ (2003): 85-104.
- Hymans, Jacques Louis. *Léopold Sédar Senghor: An Intellectual Biography*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971.
- Inman, Mary. "The Role of the Housewife in Social Production." *Viewpoint Magazine*. Viewpoint Magazine, October 31, 2015. <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-role-of-the-housewife-in-social-production-1940/>. Originally published in 1940.
- Irele, Abiola, ed. Introduction to *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, by Aimé Césaire. Edited by Abiola Irele. Second edition. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2000.
- James, C.L.R. *A History of Negro Revolt*. London: Race Today Publications, 1985. First published in 1938.
- James, C.L.R. *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, with an introduction by Robin Kelly. Chicago: C.H. Kerr, 1995. First published as *A History of Negro Revolt* in 1938, and an epilogue was added in 1969, expanding the text, following which it was titled *A History of Pan-African Revolt*.
- James, C.L.R. "A Negro Organization (1939)." Essay. In *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism: Documents on the Negro Struggle*, edited by George Breitman. *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1940/negro1.htm#sd>.

- James, C.L.R. ("J.R. Johnson"). "After Ten Years: On Trotsky's The Revolution Betrayed". *New International* 12, no. 8 (October 1946): 235-240. Marxist Internet Archive <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1946/10/revbetrayed.htm>.
- James, C.L.R. *American Civilization*, edited by Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993. Written in 1950.
- James, C.L.R. *Beyond a Boundary*. London, U.K.: Stanley Paul, 1963.
- James, C.L.R. "Black Intellectuals in Britain." Essay. In *Colour, Culture and Consciousness*, edited by Bhikhu Pakekh. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974.
- James, C.L.R. "Books and Writers." *The Beacon* 1, no. 1 (March 1931): 22-24.
- James, C.L.R. *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939-1949*, edited by Scott McLemee and Paul LeBlanc. New York: Humanity Books, 2000.
- James, C.L.R. "Discovering Literature in Trinidad: The Nineteen Thirties." *Journal Commonwealth of Literature*, no. 7 (July 1969): 73-81. Also in *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings*, by C.L.R. James, 237-244. London: Allison & Busby Ltd, 1980.
- James, C.L.R. "Editorial." *International African Opinion* 1, no. 1 (July 1938): 2-3.
- James, C.L.R., Grace C. Lee and Pierre Chaulieu. *Facing Reality*. Detroit: Bewick, 1974. First published in 1958.
- James, C.L.R. "Fighting for the Abyssinian Emperor." *New Leader* (June 5, 1936): 2. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1935/new-leader.htm>.
- James, C.L.R. "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro." In appendix to *The Black Jacobins*, by C.L.R. James, 391-418.
- James, C.L.R. "Intervening in Abyssinia." *New Leader* (October 1935). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1935/new-leader.htm>.
- James, C.L.R. "La Divina Pastora." In *The CLR James Reader*, edited by Anna Grimshaw, 25-28. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. First published in *Best Short Stories*, edited by Edward J. O'Brien. London, 1928.
- James, C.L.R. "Michel Maxwell Phillip: 1829-1886: Sometime Solicitor General of Trinidad: An Impression." *The Beacon* 1, no. 6 (September 1931): 16-24.
- James, C.L.R. *Minty Alley*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997. First published in 1936.

- James, C.L.R. "Perspectives and Proposals." Essay. In *Marxism For Our Times: C.L.R. James On Revolutionary Organization*, edited and with an introduction by Martin Glaberman. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999, 130-179. First published in 1963.
- James, C.L.R. "Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question" and "Notes Following the Discussion." *Internal Bulletin*, no. 9 (June 1939). In *C.L.R. James on the "Negro Question,"* edited by Scott McLemee, 3-16. Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1996.
- James, C.L.R. (J.R. Johnson). "Resolution on the Russian Question." Essay submitted to the National Convention of the Workers Party. In pamphlet: "The Russian Question: Resolutions of the 1941 Convention on the Character of the Russian State (September 19, 1941): 16-30. In *Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, 52-68. *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1941/09/russia.htm>  
<http://rayadunayevskaya.org/ArchivePDFs/52.pdf>
- James, C.L.R. "Revolution and the Negro." *New International* 5 (December 1939): 339-343.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1939/12/negro-revolution.htm>.
- James, C.L.R., and Constance Webb. *Special Delivery: The Letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1948*. Edited by Anna Grimshaw. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- James, C.L.R. (J.R. Johnson). "Stalinist Russia is a Fascist State: Towards a Clarification of the Discussion." *Internal Discussion Bulletin of the Workers Party* 7 (March 1941): 7-37.  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/workersparty/wp-ib/n7-mar-1941-buletin-workers-party.pdf>.
- James, C.L.R., Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee. *State Capitalism and World Revolution*. E-book. Oakland, CA.: PM Press, 2013.
- James, C.L.R. "The Black Jacobins." Play. In C.L.R. James, *The C.L.R. James Reader*, edited by Anna Grimshaw, 67-111. New York: The C.L.R. James Institute, 1991. First published in 1967.
- James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Second Edition. Revised. First published in 1938.
- James, C.L.R. *The C.L.R. James Reader*. Edited by Anna Grimshaw. New York: The C.L.R. James Institute, 1991.
- James, C.L.R. "The Intelligence of the Negro: A Few Words with Dr. Harland." *The Beacon* 1, no. 5 (August 1931).
- James, C.L.R., Raya Dunayevskaya (Freddie Forrest), and Grace Lee (Ria Stone). *The Invading Socialist Society*. Detroit: Bedwick Editions, 1972. First published in 1947. *Marxist*



Internet Archive. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1947/invading>.

James, C.L.R. *The Life of Captain Cipriani: an account of British Government in the West Indies*. With the Pamphlet, "Case for West Indian Self-Government." With a New Introduction by Bridget Brereton. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. *The Life of Captain Cipriani* first published in Lancashire: Cartmel & Co., 1932. "The Case for West-Indian Self-Government" first published in *Day to Day* series, no. 16. London: Hogarth Press, 1933. Excerpted in *The C.L.R. James Reader*, 49-62.

James, C.L.R., and Paul Buhle. "The Making of a Literary Life". Interview. In *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*, edited by Paget Henry & Robert Buhle, 56-60. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

James, C.L.R. "The Problem of Knowledge." *The Beacon* 1, no. 4 (July 1931): 30-32.

James, C.L.R. "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA." *Fourth International* 9, no. 8 (December 1948). In *C.L.R. James on the "Negro Question"*, 138-147.

James, C.L.R. *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History; A Play in Three Acts*. Edited by Christian Hogsbjerg. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. First published in 1936.

James, C.L.R. "Triumph." In *The CLR James Reader*, edited by Anna Grimshaw, 29-40. New York: Wiley Blackwell Readers, 1992. First published in 1929.

James, C.L.R. "Turner's Prosperity." In *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings*, 9-13. London: Allison & Busby 1980. First published in *Trinidad* 1 (December 1929).

James, C.L.R. "West Indian Intellectual." Introductory essay to a new edition of *Froudacity*, by J.J. Thomas. London: New Beacon, 1969. First published in 1889.

James, C.L.R. *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*. Edited and introduced by Christian Hogsbjerg. Durham, Duke University Press, 2017. First published in 1937.

James, C.L.R. "The Women." *Port of Spain Gazette* (August 11, 1932). In *Letters from London: Seven essays by C.L.R. James*, edited by Nicholas Laughlin, 93-107. Oxford: Signal Books, 2003.

James, Selma. "On the Woman Question: An Orientation (1951)." In *The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*. Marxist Internet Archive. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/dunayevskaya/works/1951/women/index.htm>.

James, Selma. *Sex, Race, and Class – The Perspective of Winning: A Selections of Writings, 1952-2011*. Oakland: PM Press, 2012.



- Jarret-Macauley, Delia. *The Life of Una Marson: 1905-1965*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998.
- Johnson, Chris. "Sex and the Subversive Alien: The moral life of C.L.R. James." *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 14, nos. 1&2 (May 2011): 185-203.
- Kamugisha, Aaron. *Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Kamugisha, Aaron. "The Hearts of Men?: Gender in the Late C.L.R. James." *Small Axe* 15, no. 1 (March 2011): 76-94.
- Kaplan, Cora. "Black Heroes/White Writers: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Literary Imagination." *History Workshop Journal*, no. 46 (Autumn 1998): 32-62.
- Kalikoff, Hedy. "Gender, Genre and Geography in Aime Césaire's 'Cahier D'un Retour au Pays Natal.'" *Callaloo* 18, no. 2 (Spring, 1995): 492-505.
- Keating, P. J., ed. *Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose*. Middlesex, 1970.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. "Foreword." In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, by Cedric J. Robinson. Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2000: 9-22.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.
- Kesteloot, Lilyan. *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude*. Translated by Ellen Conroy Kennedy. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974.
- Kesteloot, Lilyan. *Histoire de la littérature négro-africaine*. Paris: Karthala, 2001.
- King, Nicole. *C.L.R. James and Creolization: Circles of Influence*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001.
- LaCoss, Donald. "Introduction: Surrealism, and Romantic Anticapitalism." In *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, by Michael Lowy, xiv-xv. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.
- Langley, J. Ayo. "Pan-Africanism in Paris, 1924-36." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (April 1969): 69-94.
- Lagrosillière, Joseph. *Socialiste Coloniale*. Éditions Désormeaux, 1996.

- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. "Socialism and the Peasantry". In *Lenin Collected Works: Volume 9 (June-November 1905)*, by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Edited by George Hanna. Translated from the Russian by Abraham Fineberg and Julius Katzer, 307-315. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972. First published in *Proletary*, no. 20 (September 27, 1905). *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/oct/10.htm>.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution" a.k.a. "The April Theses." In *Lenin Collected Works: Volume 24 (April-June 1917)*, by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Edited and Translated from the Russian by Bernard Isaacs, 19-26. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964. First published in *Pravda* no. 26 (April 17, 1917). *Marxist Internet Archive*. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm>.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. "Trade-Unionist Politics And Social-Democratic Policies", section III of *What Is To Be Done?: Burning Questions of our Movement*. In *Lenin Collected Works: Volume 5 (May 1901 – February 1902)*, by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Edited by Victor Jerome. Translated by Abraham Fineberg and George Hanna, 347-530. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961. *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iii.htm>.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline*. In *Lenin Selected Works: Volume 1 (January – June 1916)*, by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 667-766. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963. pp. 667-766. First published in mid-1917 in pamphlet form, Petrograd. *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>.
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich. "Lessons of the Commune." [1908] in *Lenin Collected Works: Volume 13 (August 1916 – March 1917)*, by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Edited by M. S. Levin. Translated from the Russian by M.S. Levin, Joe Fineberg and Others, 475-478. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972. First published in *Zagranichnaya Gazeta*, no. 2 (March 23, 1908). *Marxist Internet Archive*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mar/23.htm>.
- Léro, Etienne. "Misère d'un poésie." In *Légitime défense*. Vaduz: Krause Reprints, 1970.
- Léro, Etienne, Thélus Léro, René Ménil, Jules-Marcel Monnerot, Michel Pilotin, Maurice-Sabas Quitman, Auguste Thésée, and Pierre Yoyotte. "Légitime défense: Declaration" [1932].
- Lewis, Shireen. *Race, Culture and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Négritude to Créolité*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006.
- Macharia, Keguro. *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press, 2019.
- Makonnen, Ras. *Pan-Africanism from Within*. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

- Martin, Tony. *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*. Dover, Massachusetts: Majority Press, 1986.
- Maxwell, William J. *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* [E-book]. London: Verso, 2012.
- Marx, Karl, and Fredrick Engels. *The German Ideology*, edited by C.J. Arthur. New York: International Publishers, 2001.
- Marx, Karl. "Alienated Labor." In *Selected Writings*, by Karl Marx. Edited by Lawrence H. Simon. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994.
- Marx, Karl. "Preface." In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, by Karl Marx. First published in 1869. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf>.
- Marx, Karl. "The Third Address May 1871 [The Paris Commune]." In *The Civil War in France*, by Karl Marx, 24-31. First published in 1871. [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_Civil\\_War\\_in\\_France.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_Civil_War_in_France.pdf).
- Marx, Karl. *The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955. First published in 1847. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Poverty-Philosophy.pdf>.
- Maxwell, William J. *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- McKenzie, Alan J., and C.L.R. James. "Radical Pan-Africanism in the 1930s: A Discussion with C.L.R. James." *Radical History Review* 24 (Fall 1980): pp. 68-75.
- McCoy, Shelby T. *The Negro In The French West Indies*. Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1966.
- Mentor, Ralph. "A Study of Mr. James' Political Biography." *The Beacon* 2, no. 6, (October-November 1932): 15-17.
- Miller, Christopher L. "The (Revised) Birth of Negritude: Communist Revolution and 'the Immanent Negro' in 1935." *Publications of Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)* 125, no. 3 (May 2010): 743-749.

- Moitt, Bernard. "Slave Resistance in Guadeloupe and Martinique, 1791-1848." Essay. In *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, 919-931.
- Morgan, Peter. *Fire Mountain: How One Man Survived The World's Worst Volcanic Disaster*. London: Bloomsbury, 2003.
- Morrissey, Marietta. "Women's Work, Family Formation, and Reproduction among Caribbean Slaves." Essay. In *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, 670-682.
- Murray Jr., Hugh T. "Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign." *Science and Society* 35, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 177-192.
- Nardal, Jane. "Internationalisme noir (Black Internationalism)." In *Negritude Women*, edited and translated by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, 105-107.
- Nardal, Paulette. *Beyond Negritude: Essays from Woman in the City*, edited by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009.
- Nardal, Paulette. "En exil." In *Negritude Women*, 116-118.
- Nardal, Paulette. "The Awakening of Race Consciousness among Black Students." In *Negritude Women*, 119-124.
- Nardal, Paulette. "Une femme sculpteur noire." *La Dépêche africaine* 3, nos. 27-28 (August–September 30, 1930): 5.
- Ngal, M. a M. (Georges). *Aimé Césaire: un homme à la recherche d'une patrie*. Dakar-Abidjan: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1975.
- Nicolas Armand. *Histoire de la Martinique, Tome 2 (De 1848 à 1939)*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996.
- Nielsen, Aldon Lyndon. *C.L.R. James: A Critical Introduction*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997.
- Nizan, Paul. *Les Chiens de garde*. Paris: Les Editions Rieder, 1932.
- Northrop, David. "Indentured Indians in the French Antilles (Les immigrants indiens engagés aux Antilles françaises)." *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 87, no. 326-327 (1er semestre, 2000). Les Juifs et la mer, 245-271. doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.2000.3777>

- Okihiro, Gary ed. *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986.
- Ormerod, Beverley. "Césaire's 'Cahier': An Aesthetic of Commitment." *Dalhousie French Studies*, no. 1 (1979): 61-74.
- Padmore, George. "An Open Letter to Earl Browder." *The Crisis* 42, no. 10 (October 1935).
- Paul-Emile, Barbara. "Gender Dynamics in James's *Minty Alley*." *CLR James Intellectual Legacies*, 72-78.
- Phillips, Caryl. "C.L.R. James: Mariner, Renegade and Castaway." In *A New World Order: Selected Essays*, by Caryl. Phillips. London: Secker & Warburg, 2001.
- Prendergast, Christopher, ed. *A History of Modern French Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph. *La Révolution social démontrée par le coup d'état du 2 décembre*. Paris: Garnier, 1852.
- Pyne-Timothy, Helen. "Identity, Society and Meaning: A Study of the Early Studies of C.L.R. James." In *CLR James Intellectual Legacies*, 51-60.
- Rabaka, Reiland. *Africana Critical Theory: Reconstructing the Black Radical Tradition from W.E.B Dubois and C.L.R. James to Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral*. New York: Lexington Books, 2010.
- Rabaka, Reiland. *The Negritude Movement: W.E.B Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aime Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea*. London: Lexington Books, 2015.
- Rabbitt, Kara. "In Search of the Missing Mother: Suzanne Césaire, *Martiniquaise*." *Research in African Literatures* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 36-54.
- Rabbitt, Kara. "Suzanne Césaire's Significance for the Forging of a New Caribbean Literature." *French Review* 79, no. 3 (2006): 538-548.
- Rabbitt, Kara. "The Geography of Identity in Suzanne Césaire's 'Le grand camouflage.'" *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 3 (Fall, 2008): 121-131.
- Ramchan, Kenneth. *The West Indian Novel and its Background*. London, U.K.: Faber, 1970.
- Ramesar, Marianne Soares. *Survivors Of Another Crossing*. St. Augustine: University of the

- West Indies School School of Continuing Studies, 1994.
- Raxer, Raisa. "Black and White and Re(a)d All Over: L'Étudiant noir, Communism, and the Birth of Négritude." *Research in African Literatures* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 1-14.
- Reddock, Rhoda. "Contestations over Culture, Class, Gender and Identity in Trinidad and Tobago: 'The Little Tradition.'" In *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture*, edited by Verene Shepherd and Glen Richards, 111-126. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002.
- Reddock, Rhoda. "The first Mrs. Garvey: Pan-Africanism and feminism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century British colonial Caribbean." *Feminist African* 19 (2014): 58-77.
- Richardson, Michael, ed. *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*. Translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson. New York: Verso, 1996.
- Renard, Rosamunde. "Labour Relations in Post-Slavery Martinique and Guadeloupe, 1848-1870." *The Journal of Caribbean History* 26, no. 1 (January 1992): 37-61.
- Rennie, Andrew Bukka. *History of the Working Class in Trinidad & Tobago in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1919-1956)*. Port of Spain: The Majority Press, 2011. First published in 1973.
- Roberts, Stephen H. *The History of French Colonial Policy, 1870-1925*. Connecticut: Archon Books, 1963. First published in 1929.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. London: Zed Press, 1983.
- Roopnarine, Lomارش. *Indo-Caribbean Indenture: Resistance and Accommodation, 1838-1920*. Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2007.
- Rosemount, Franklin, ed. *André Breton: What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*. New York: Pathfinder, 1978.
- Rosemont, Franklin, and Robin D.G. Kelley, eds. *Black Brown and Beige: Surrealist writings from Africa and the Diaspora*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.
- Rosengarten, Frank. *Urbane Revolutionary: C.L.R. James and the Struggle for a New Society*. Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2008.
- Rowell, Charles H. "It is Through Poetry That One Copes With Solitude: An Interview with Aimé Césaire." With English translations. *Callaloo*, no. 38 (Winter, 1989): 49-67.
- Ryan, Selwyn. *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: a study of decolonization in a multi-racial society*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972.

- Sander, Reinhard, ed. *From Trinidad: An Anthology of West Indian Writing*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978.
- Sander, Reinhard. "Introduction: The Beacon and the Emergence of West Indian Literature." *The Beacon: Volumes I-IV, 1931-1939*, edited by Reinhard Sander, xix. New York: Kraus, 1977.
- Sander, Reinhard. *The Trinidad Awakening: West Indian Literature of the Nineteen-Thirties*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- Savage, John. "'Black Magic' and White Terror: Slave Poisoning and Colonial Society in Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Martinique." *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2007, George Mason University Press), 635-662.
- Shachtman, Max. "On the Russia Question (October 1939)." *Internal Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (November 1939): 1A-23A.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/shachtma/1939/10/russiaquestion.html>.
- Shakes, Nicosia. "History and Drama in C.L.R. James' Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History." *C.L.R. James Journal* 19, nos. 1 & 2, 23rd Anniversary Issue (Fall, 2013): 38-60.
- Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. *Negritude Women*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Shepherd, Verene. *Women in Caribbean History: The British-colonised Territories*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999.
- Short, Robert. "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920–36\*." In *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, edited by Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, 18-36. [E-book] (London: Routledge, 2020): 18–36.
- Small, Robert. "The Training of an Intellectual, the Making of a Marxist". *Urgent Tasks*, no. 12, C.L.R. James: His Life and Work (Summer 1981).  
<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/sojournertruth/rsmall.html>
- Senghor Léopold Sédar, ed. *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*. Paris: PUF, 1948.
- Senghor, Léopold Sédar "Ce que l'homme noir apporte (What the black man contributes)." Essay. In *L'homme de Couleur*, edited by Cardinal Verdier, 292-314. Paris, Plon, 1939.
- Senghor, Leopold Sédar. "L'humanisme et nous: René Maran." *L'étudiant noir: Journal mensuel de l'Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France* 1, no. 1 (March 1935).

- Senghor, Léopold Sédar “The spirit of civilization, or the laws of African negro culture,” *Presence Africaine* nos. 8-9-10 (June-November 1956), 52-64. The 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists (Paris/Sorbonne, September 19-22, 1956).
- Singh, Kelvin. *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad 1917-1945*. Jamaica: The Press – University of the West Indies, 1994.
- Singh, Vashti. “East Indian Education in Nineteenth-century Trinidad: Exclusion or Integration?.” In *The Legacy of Indian Indenture: Historical and Contemporary Aspects of Migration and Diaspora*, edited by Mauits S. Hassankhan, Lommarsh Roopnarine, Hans Ramsoedh, 139-161. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Smith, Faith. “Coming Home to the Real Thing: Gender and Intellectual Life in the Anglophone Caribbean.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 93, no. 4 (Fall, 1994): 895-923.
- Stalin, Joseph Vissarionovich. “Concerning Questions of Leninism.” Dedicated to the Leningrad Organization of the C.P.S.U.(B.) *Works* 8 (January-November 1926): 13-96. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1926/01/25.htm>.
- Stephens, Michelle Ann. *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Thomas, J.J. *Froudacity: West Indian Fables By James Anthony Froude Explained*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889.
- Tomich, Dale. “The Dialectic of Colonialism and Culture: The Origins of the Negritude of Aimé Césaire.” *Review* 2, no. 3 (Winter, 1979): 351-385.
- Trotsky, Leon and C.L.R. James, “Self-Determination for the American Negroes.” In *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, edited by George Breitman. First written in 1939. *Marxist Internet Archive*. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1940/negro1.htm#sd>.
- Trotsky, Leon. “A Letter to the American Trotskyists.” *The Militant* 2, no. 10 (June 1929): 171-173. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1929/03/letter-american.htm>.
- Trotsky, Leon. “The Negro Question in America.” In *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, edited by George Breitman. New York: Merit Publishers, 1967. First written in 1933. *Marxist Internet Archive*. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1940/negro1.htm#prinkipo>.
- Trotsky, Leon. *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Vols. 1-3. Translation by Max Eastman. Ann Arbor: University Michigan Press, 1957.
- Trotsky, Leon. *Permanent Revolution*. Berlin: Left Opposition, 1930. First English and



- American editions, re-translated by John G. Wright, for Progress Publishers/Militant Publishing Association, 1931. *Marxist Writer's Internet Archive*.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/pr-index.htm>.
- Trotsky, Leon. *The First Five Years of the Communist International*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972.
- Unknown Author. "Guadeloupe-Martinique: Behind 50 years of Departmental Status, the French Colonial State Still Maintains Its Grip." *The Spark* (May 5, 1996). <http://the-spark.net/csart124.html>.
- Ward, Stephen. *In Love and Struggle: The Revolutionary Lives of James and Grace Lee Boggs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).
- Webb, Constance. *Not Without Love: Memoirs*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003.
- Widgery, David. "A Meeting with Comrade James." In *C.L.R. James: His Life and Work and Urgent Tasks* 12.
- Wilder, Gary "Race, Reason, Impasse: Césaire, Fanon, and the Legacy of Emancipation" in *Radical History Review*, Issue 90 (Fall 2004): 31-61.
- Wilder, Gary. "Untimely Vision: Aime Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia." *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (Winter, 2009): 101-140.
- Wilder, Gary. *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Williams, Eric. "Capitalism and Slavery." Essay. In *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, 455-465.
- Williams, Eric. *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*. Great Britain: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1962/1964.
- Williams, Eric. *The Negro in the Caribbean*. Manchester: IASB, 1942.
- Worcester, Kent. *C.L.R. James: A Political Biography*. Albany: State of New York Press, 1996.
- Wright, Richard. "I have seen black hands." *The Richard Wright Reader*, edited by Ellen Wright and Michael Fabre. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Yelvington, Kevin. *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition: Essays on Post-emancipation Social and Cultural Life*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1999.

Zebrowski, Ernest Jr. *The Last Days of St. Pierre: The Volcanic Disaster That Claimed Thirty Thousand Lives*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002.