C. L. R. James

SPHERES OF EXISTENCE

Also by C. L. R. James

The Nature of the Peace (selected writings)
Notes on Dialectics
The Black Jacobins

Selected Writings

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This accident needs some explanation.

Barbados is the West Indian territory where there is the clearest and sharpest social differentiation. George Lamming’s novels are pervaded by the sense of the role of different classes in West Indian society. His work is an expression of Barbados.

Of the larger territories, Trinidad is the one with the most diversified past, where different foreign influences have been more pervasive, where the sense of national identity (very wrong in Barbados and Jamaica) has been almost non-existent. The result? Trinidadians have written some notable history, they have produced the most remarkable politicians in the West Indies, and in literature the fine study ever produced in the West Indies (so far as I know) of a community and the burdensome obstacles in the way of achieving a room in the national building—Nickleby’s A House for Mr. Relfoe.

British Guiana is the only West Indian territory of space and with easily identified relics of the past. Hence Harris, not only in his theoretical ideas but in his fiction. His novels add a continental dimension to West Indian insular literature.

Enough for the time being. The literature is expressing some very vital reality, I hope we have helped to make Harris easier for West Indians to grasp. That is one trouble. Our novelists, our cricketers, are recognized abroad for what they are, something new, creative and precious in the organizations and traditions of the West. But what they need is what Hölderlin—A by-necoming. Harris should not be confined to London. He should be speaking from end to end of the West Indies.

1965

The Making of the Caribbean People

This lecture on what James has called “perhaps the strongest community in existence” was delivered in Canada in the summer of 1966, at the Second Montreal Conference on West Indian Affairs.

This evening I am to speak on “The Making of the Caribbean People”, a people in my opinion unique in the modern world. That is the theme which I will develop. I know nobody loves them, nobody likes us, both positively and negatively. I’ll tell you now I will treat such a tremendous subject, I will begin by stating the kind of opinion that educated people, and well-meaning, progressive people, have of us, the Caribbean people. Naturally on such a wide subject, in such a limited time, I will have to be quite precise in the quotations that I give. They are chosen because they have more than passing value. Hence I have stated what is the general opinion, I shall then proceed to state my own, which is utterly and completely opposed to the opinions held by most educated people. West Indians and non-West Indians, I will do that by going into history and sociology of the West Indian at the beginning of these enter into modern Western society. I shall concentrate to a large degree on what took place between 1600 and 1800. When I have established that, then I will move more rapidly through our history and what has been happening since. But I will depend on what has been established in the early part, to be able to move rapidly and easily into matters which are more familiar to us.

First of all, what is the general opinion held about us by people who are West Indians or who are interested in the West Indies?

I will begin with a quotation from the Moynor Report. A number of excellent English gentlemen and ladies, of broad views, sympathetic in the West Indies, who were sent there by the King George V in 1938 on a Royal Commission. They wrote a report which is one of the foremost reports that has ever been made about the West Indies. They were not hostile to the West Indies. They were merely profoundly ignorant of what they were dealing with. Here is a quotation from that report:

Negroes were taken from lands where they lived in doubt in a primitive state.

I don’t know where they get that from because the early Portuguese and the rest who discovered Africa did not find very much difference between the Negro civilizations they met and
THE MAKING OF THE CARIBBEAN PEOPLE

Now I want to add to that a statement by no less a person than Professor Arthur Lewis. You will find it in a pamphlet that I have published in Trinidad. It is a statement made to an economic conference which he addressed as follows: The professors of economics, the economists—so says Professor Lewis—do not know much more on development than the ordinary person does. Economic development depends on saving some of what you have now, in order to improve yourself later. He says, that is all there is to it, there is no special economic theory or economic knowledge required. He says; that what is required is the effort and readiness to sacrifice by the great part of the population. And, he concludes, people don't know whether the population, the West Indian population, will make that effort or not. He makes more than implies that it is a question of doubt as to whether the West Indian population has got that necessary feeling, that impetus to make the sacrifices necessary for the development of the West Indian economy.

I want to dissociate myself completely from Professor Lewis's view. I have never found that West Indians, when called upon in a critical situation, do not respond. That is their life. I believe that they can't help responding. Beginning as we do in a new civilisation and leaving such elements that they might have brought with them, they have always responded to a fundamental and serious challenge. That has been our way of life. That is why we are still alive. What has happened to us is that economic and social forces are working upon us back and preventing us from developing ourselves in vital spheres. Where we have had an opportunity to work freely, there we have shown great distinction. Where we have not shown it is because we have been prevented. It is not the lack of capacity. I want you to understand that, I strongly remove myself from the view expressed by Professor Lewis that it depends on us whether we shall rise to the occasion. If those on our back get off our backs, we shall be able to rise: we have done pretty well with the burdens that we have always carried and are still carrying.

This whole business consists of civilisation and doubts of a "primitive" people. We began with nothing and have learned a great deal, but we still have a lot to learn! That is not my view of the West Indian. I think that we have learned all that it was possible for us to have learned. We have learned far more than other people in similar situations have learned. The difficulties that we have met with, that stood in our way, were difficulties of a breadth and weight which would have crushed a people of less power and less understanding of the fact that we had to do all we could to get somewhere.

Now I want to begin with Lygon's History of Barbados. It was written in 1653. You can't begin much earlier. He had been in Barbados up to 1647. The island was populated by Englishmen in the 1620s, and Lygon says that at the beginning,
or very soon after, there were slaves thousand white peasant farmers in Barbados. They went on their way to becoming what New England in the United States became like. But even the slave plantations and the Negroes were brought in order to work on the sugar plantations. That was somewhere between 1640 or thereabouts, and Lyon gives this account of what happened to the Negroes who at that time had not been in Barbados more than about ten years. I will give a full account of what he says. Don’t think it’s a little long; it is very important and makes a great deal for our future understanding of the whole three hundred years of West Indian history that follows it.

I want to interpolate here that I fully agree with Gilberto Freyre that the African who made the Middle Passage and came to live in the West Indies was an entirely new historical and social category. He was not an African, he was a West Indian black who was a slave. And there had never been people like that before and there haven’t been any since. And what I shall make clear is the uniqueness of our history and the unique developments which have resulted.

Back now to Lygon:

A little before I came thence, there was such a combination amongst them, as the like was never seen there before. Their sufferings being grown to a great height, and their daily complaints to one another (of the intolerable burdens they labour’d under) being spread throughout the island; at the last, some amongst them, whose spirits were not able to endure such slavery, resolved to break through its, or in the plantations, and faced their masters, as some of their acquaintance, whose sufferings were equal, if not above theirs; and their spirits no way inferior; resolved to draw as many of the discontented party in the island, as possible they could; and those of this persuasion, were the greatest number of servants in the island. So that a day was appointed to fall upon their Masters, and cut all their throats, by that means, to make themselves not free men, but Masters of the Island.

Now that is the very beginning (and the continuation) of West Indian history. They wanted not only their freedom but to remove their masters and make themselves masters of the island. That is what happened essentially in San Domingo about 150 years afterwards and that is what happened in Cuba in 1858. They got rid of their masters and made themselves masters of the island. Masters isn’t exactly the same as Lyon’s statement but if I may quote a resolute lawyer: “The principle is the same. I believe the above to be characteristic of the West Indies and our history. When West Indians reach a certain stage they wish to make a complete change and that is because all of us come from abroad. Liberty means something to us that is very unusual. There were many generations of slaves in Africa, of that we are quite sure. And in Africa they took it and it is no doubt fought against it at certain times. But when we made the Middle Passage and came to the Caribbean we went straight into a modern industry—the sugar plantation—and there we saw that to be a slave was the result of our being black. A white man was not a slave. The West Indian slave was not accustomed to that kind of slavery in Africa; and therefore in the history of the West Indies there is one dominant fact and that is the desire, sometimes expressed, sometimes unexpressed, but always there, the desire for liberty; the ridding oneself of the particular burden which is the special inheritance of the black skin. If you don’t know about West Indian people you know nothing about them.

They have been the most rebellious people in history and that is the reason. It is because being a black man he was made a slave, and the white man, whatever his limitations, was a free subject, a man able to do what he could in the community. That is the history of the West Indies. No hint of that appears in the report of Lord Mopyne and if we read any number, not only of government reports but works of economists and historians, some of them West Indians, they have no conception whatever of the people they are dealing with, where and whom we have come from, whom they are dealing with and where we are headed.

To go on with Lygon:

And so closely was this plot carried, as no discovery was made, till the day before they were to put it in act: And then one of them, either by the falling of his courage, or some new obligation from the love of his Master, revealed this long plotted conspiracy; and so by this timely advertisement, the Masters were saved. Justice Hethersoll (whose servant this was) sending letters to all his friends, and to their them, and to one another, till they were all secured; and, by examination, found out the greatest part of them. Now it is interesting to note that this fellow who betrayed the plot was working with a Justice, Justice Hethersoll. Whether he loved his master or some other reason (that is a matter for the psychologists), I don’t know. What I think, what I suspect, is that working in the house of a Justice of the Peace, he had acquired a certain respect, a subservience to the conceptions of law and order of the masters of the society which he had just entered. And I say that because we shall see this type con-

stantly reappearing, it is most prominent in West Indian society today: the house-slave. A man is a part of the mass of the population; the mass of the population moves in a certain direction, and for some reason or other, he goes and betrays the cause. We have the West Indian pattern of betrayal from the very beginning.

Lygon continues:
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greatest capital items were the value of the slaves and the acreage planted in cane by their previous labour.

So that the greatest capital value (this is about 1760) of the sugar plantation, was the labour of the slaves and the acres they had planted. All sorts of economists do all sorts of studies about the West Indies but they don't know that. They write little studies how this was worth that and that was worth this, and this was worth the other. But that the real value of those economic units was the slaves and the land they had developed by their labour, this escapes nearly all except this English scholar.
Pares goes on to say:

Yet, when we look closely, we find that the industrial capital required was much larger than a sixth of the total value. With the mill, the boiling house and the still were an army of specialists—almost all of them slaves, but none the less specialists for that.

If you take little away from this meeting and you take that, you will have done well.

There was an army of slaves, but he says they were specialists; they were slaves it is true, but nevertheless they were specialists. That is very hard to grasp. Try hard. This tremendous economy that made so much wealth particularly for British society—it was the slaves who ran those plantations. Note that you get what Pares is saying: the statisticians never write down what was the real value of the important industrial capital of the plantations. And he says (this is terrific):

They were not only numerous but, because of their skill, they had a high value. If we add their cost to that of the instruments and machinery which they used, we find that the industrial capital of the plantations, without which it could not be a plantation at all, was probably not much less than half its total capital.

I hope there are some economists here who have done research in this field, who will stand up and take part in the discussion; about what they have written, or to be more precise, what they have not written.

It takes an Englishman to write this. And here let me, in advance, correct a misunderstanding very prevalent today. I pronounce European colonialist scholarship. But I respect the learning and the profound discoveries of Western civilisation. It is by means of the work of the great men of Ancient Greece; of Michelet, the French historian; of Hegel, Marx and Lenin; of Du Bois; of contemporary Europeans and Englishmen like Pares and E. P. Thompson; of an African like the late Chinista, that my eyes and ears have been opened and I can today see and hear what we were, what we are, and what we can be, in other words—the making of the Caribbean people.
Pares goes on to say:
But when we examine specifications of the negroes, we find so many boilers, well made, of iron, a mixture of iron and brass, that we might well feel much confidence in our categories, especially when we find individuals described as "excellent boiler and field negro." So that about 1766 Negroes ran the plantations. That is what this sign means. An iron mill is described as excellent boiler and field Negro, this prevents us from putting persons on either side of this mill, not only worked in the fields but he also did the necessary technical work. Further complication arises from the fact that specialist jobs were awarded to the sickly and theruptured. If they were sickly or the ruptured were given the technical jobs to do—not the spread of technical skill.

That gave me, and I had read it elsewhere, an entirely different picture of the kind of civilization that was in existence in the West Indies, which, following the French revolution of 1789, I have found some evidence elsewhere and it seems to me that they, the slaves, ran that society; they were the persons responsible. If they had been removed the society would have collapsed. That is perfectly clear in certain writings about Trinidad and Tobago. But the West Indian economists, the West Indian sociologists, the West Indian historians; they write but I have never met any one of them who understood, and I would be very glad if either here, or if you feel ashamed about it, in private, you will let me know, one or two of you, why this had to be done by an Englishman, an English scholar. I want to put it as sharply as possible. Slaves ran the plantations; those tremendous plantations, the great source of wealth of so many English aristocrats and merchants, the merchant princes who cut such a figure in English society (and French too, but we are speaking of English society). Those plantations were run by the slaves. That is what Pares is saying. Slave labour was not an advanced stage of labour. Plantations created millions and from top to bottom slaves ran them.

And now we are able to understand one of the greatest events in the history of the West Indian people which I will now spend some time upon in the light of what we have said of the earlier part. It will deal with the San Domingo revolution. I wrote the book, The Black Jacobins. I studied that society very closely but it is only 15 years with my acquaintance with the West Indian people and actual contact with them, political and in some degree sociological, that I have learned to understand what I wrote in this book. And I have learned to understand it better as I read educated persons writing about the West Indies, it becomes clear that they have no understanding whatever of the West Indian people.

I will take an excerpt here and there and spend a word or two on each, but I prefer to deal with the extracts themselves. The first one is from Fortescue, the historian of the British Army.
This was some years afterwards. Now I wonder what conclusion they came to from their self-mobilisation and self-discipline of a West Indian population. The conclusion I draw is the absolute importance and stupidity of a Colonial Office, which, as late as 1950, was wondering whether the people of Trinidad should have freedom of so not, or whether they should have five members, or more, in the House of Commons, or how many in the Executive; playing a game of checkers, they put one member and they see how it goes, then they put another one in there a bit, and they put another one in, but he did not do so well so they take him away. And that is the kind of business, that is what they were doing, they said, to train the people for democracy. But look at our people in 1796. They were literate. Toussaint said that two-thirds of them had made the Middle Passage and could not speak a word of French. They knew a few words of patois. But they worked on sugar plantations. They were masters of the technical necessities of the plantation, and when the time came they were able to organise themselves over the whole of the North Plain, and their leaders could call them out and send them back home merely by the use of political slogans. Any population which could act in this way while only a few years from slavery was fitted for full parliamentary democracy 150 years afterwards.

British colonial officials have understood nothing about the development of colonial peoples. They have stood in the way of their forward movement from colonial status to freedom. The people who understand this had to go to jail. Gandhi and Nehru went to jail for any number of years. Nkrumah went to jail. Dr Hastings Banda went to jail. Nkrumah went to jail. All of them, and that priest from Cyprus, he went to jail also. So you notice that they didn’t learn about democracy in British schools, they learnt it in the jail, in which the British had put them; and from these jails they taught the population and taught the Colonial Office what were the realities of independence. I don’t mind what nonsense the British historians and economists write. But our writers, our West Indian writer, he is the man I am comparing with. He is not seen to understand anything of what I am saying to you here.

Toussaint, in 1801, 1802, came to a conception for which the only word is genius. He wrote a constitution for San Domingo and he didn’t submit it to the French government. He declared in the constitution that San Domingo would be governed by the ex-slaves. French officials asked him: what is the place of the French government in the constitution? He replied. ‘They will send commissioners to talk with me’—and that was all he would say.

His plan was absolute local independence on the one hand, but on the other hand French capital and French commissioners to establish the relation. He begged them to help him develop and educate the country, and to send a high official from France as a link between both governments. The local power was too well safeguarded for us to call it a protectorate. All the evidence shows that Toussaint, working alone, had reached forward to that form of political relation which we know today as Dominion status. This was forty years before the famous report on Canada, forty years before the Durham report. Toussaint said, we must have absolute independence but we admit the sovereignty of France; France must send educators, officials, and a commissioner who will speak with me. In this political proposal he was far beyond politicians and officials of the time.

This point they were only able to reach in 1932 at Ottawa, when they accepted the complete independence of the colonies, with a High Commissioner to speak with the local governments of Canada, of Australia, etc. Over and over again I am aware in these early days of struggles by these early West Indians, that they laid down lines which could be followed without too much difficulty by their descendants, but for the obstacle of their political education by the Colonial Office. (Toussaint knew and introduced a literacy campaign.)

You may think that Toussaint L’Ouverture was an exceptional person. So he was. But you will see the same tremendous spirit, energy and political creativeness in Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Franz Fanon, and other West Indians whom we say ‘too numerous to mention’ or ‘too near to home’? That is the breed. Until the Colonial Office gets hold of us to educate us.

But listen to this typically West Indian passage. It is about Toussaint again. I quote from The Black Jacobins:

"Firm as was his grasp of reality, old Toussaint looked beyond San Domingo with a breadth of imagination surpassing his contemporaries. In the constitution he authorised the slave-trade because he saw a need in the situation and he was not seen to understand anything of what I am saying to you here."

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French historian who was part of the French expedition:

But no one observed that in the new insurrection of San Domingo, as in all insurrections which attack constitutional authority, it was not the avowed chiefs who gave the signal for revolt, but obscure creatures for the greater part personal enemies of the coloured generals. This subservience to a ruling class by new rulers is rampant all over the Caribbean today, and I understand it much better when I read and get it into my head that after just ten years of freedom and becoming masters of San Domingo, that was the way they behaved to the emissary sent by Bonaparte. They were totally and completely subservient and it took a man like Dessalines, an absolute barbarian, to lead the people finally to their freedom. Dessalines could not write: 'the name of many a Haitian general had to be traced for him in pencil for him to trace it over in ink. But he was the one who could lead the rebellious mass of the population. All the educated ones, all those who were not so educated but who had sat for a while in the seats of power, they were prepared to submit to any indignity in order to remain, not with power but merely the symbols and the profits of power.

I have two more quotations, one written fifty years later by a soldier who had fought against them, and one written at the time by General Lazere, the brother-in-law of Napoleon, who was in command of the expedition. General Lemoignon-Delafosse (who believed in slavery) wrote in his memoirs:

But what men these blacks are! How they fight and how they die!

One has to make war against them to know their reckless courage in bravering danger when they can no longer have recourse to stratagem. I have seen a solid column, born by grape-shot from four pieces of cannon, advance without making a retrograde step. The more they fell, the greater seemed to be the courage of the rest. They advanced singing, for the Negro sings everywhere, makes songs on everything. Their voices were brave men and went as follows:

"To the attack, grenadier,
Who gets killed, that's his affair.
Forget your ma,
Ready, back, reader,
Who gets killed, that's his affair."

This song was worth all our republican songs. Three times these brave men, arms in hand, advanced without firing a shot, and each time repulsed, only retired after leaving the ground strewn with three-quarters of their troop. One must have seen this bravery to have any conception of it. Those songs shouted into the sky in unison by 20,000 men... to which the cannon formed a bass, produced a thrilling effect. French courage alone could resist it. Indeed large dictches, an excellent artillery, perfect soldiers gave us a great advantage. But for many a day that massed square which marched singing to its death, lighted by a magnificent sun, remained in my thoughts, and even today after more than 40 years, this magnum and glorious spectacle still lives as vividly in my imagination as in the moments when I saw it.

And finally General Leclerc wrote to his brother-in-law Napoleon Bonaparte:

We have in Europe a false idea of the country and the men whom we fight against.

That was written by a defeated general over 150 years ago. Today, 150 years after, not only in Europe and the United States, but in the very West Indies itself, there is a false idea of the country in which our people live and the quality of the people who live in it.

There are our ancestors, these are my people. They are yours too, if you want them. We are descendants from the same stock and the same kind of life on the sugar plantations which made them what they were. Faced with certain difficulties, we would respond in the same way. That seems to be inherent in people who have made the Middle Passage and had to learn all that they can and build a new life with what they gathered from the standards, the ideas and the ideologies of the new civilisation in which they live. But I repeat: We had brought ourselves. We had not come with nothing.

I do not think it was at all accidental that after a dozen years of fighting these men showed themselves equal to the soldiers of Napoleon, the finest army Europe had then known. They are our people. They are our ancestors. If we want to know what the ordinary population can do, let us know what they have done in the past, it is the way of life, not blood. The Negro people in the Caribbean are of the same stock as the men who played such a role in the history of their time. We are the product of the same historical past and the same type of life, and as long as we are not being educated by the Colonial Office (or the steves of the financial interests), we shall be able to do whatever we have to do. We have to remember that where slavery was abolished by law, the great mass of the Negro slaves had shown that they were ready to take any steps that were necessary to free themselves. That was a very important step in the making of the Caribbean people.

We now have to move on to more modern times, and we shall be able to do that more confidently and easily because what we are, both positively and negatively, is the result of what we have been. I shall use two examples, the example of Trinidad and the example of Barbados. Trinidad first. I shall use this to explain the particularity of the insular history of the different islands. We know that Trinidad produced the most remarkable politician
of the British West Indies during the twentieth century, Arthur Andrew Cipriani. Now, where did he come from? In Trinidad we had a number of Frenchmen who came to the island in the last years of the eighteenth century. First of all they were able to
find a source of economic progress independent of the sugar
estates. They worked cocoa estates, therefore they were independent
of the domination of the colonial officials. They were, some
of them, men of great culture, and fully able to stand up
against the domination of sugar planters and colonial officials.
They had a language of their own, in addition to their economic
independence. They had a religion of their own, they were
Roman Catholic and therefore were able to feel a differentiation
between their religion and the Protestant religion of the British
domination. Therefore, while they shared to some degree the
superior status and opportunities that all local whites had, they
were constantly aware of themselves as a body of people distinct
from, and even opposed at times to the British colonial caste.
That was the origin of the independent political attitude that
Cipriani took from the beginning of the war in regard to the
opportunities for West Indian self-assertion that the war of 1914-18 opened to the West Indian people, at least in the general
opinion of the times. So we get it clearly. Cipriani was able
to take this step he did because the French Creoles had a
long tradition of independent economic life and social
differentiation.

That to begin with. But there was more to Cipriani. I
remember seeing the soldiers who went to the war of 1914-18.
Many of them wore shoes consistently for the first time. To
the astonishment of everybody (I believe not excluding the men
themselves and Captain Cipriani), they became soldiers who
were able to hold their own in the complicated techniques of
modern warfare and the social relations that accompany it; to
hold their own with soldiers not only from Britain, but from
some of the most advanced countries of the Commonwealth.
Cipriani never forget that, never. From that time he advocated
independence, self-government, and federation on the basis
that the West Indian rank and file, "the barefoot man" as he
called him, was able to hold his own with any sort of people
anywhere. He had seen it in war, a stern test. That was the basis
of his ceaseless agitation from island to island in the British
Caribbean, mobilising labour against capital for independence
and federation. So you see that Cipriani was no historical ac-
cident. That he was able to discover the tremendous qualities of
the Caribbean population (with this I began) was due to the fact
that history had presented him with political opportunities
unfolding the capacities of a highly developed people. These
soldiers were the descendants of Toussaint’s army.

Now another example, Barbados. Barbados, one of the most
highly developed, most highly civilised territories in the extra-
-European world. You will have noticed that of the middle-class
people in the early years of political activity, there was only one
member of the black middle class who took a prominent and in
fact very important part. That was Sir Granley Adams. And
while I do not wish to make Granley and the fine work he did
merely a product of historical circumstances, I have to say that
of the Caribbean territories, Barbados alone had an unbroken
tradition of political activity and actually had a House of
Assembly. In Barbados therefore there was something for
Granley to join. He had to sacrifice a great deal. At times his
life was in danger. But we have to know, that in those
revolutionary days, nowhere else did any member of the black
middle class enter into politics. Today a whole lot of them are
very noisy politicos, the way is very easy, you get a good salary,
you can become a minister, and you can go to England and be entertained by royalties! But, Cipriani and Granley Adams
started before World War II. In those days there was nothing
but work and danger.

And now I come to my final contention. As late as 1945 the
number of people in the Caribbean who had the vote was less
than five per cent. I say that if we look properly at who and what
we were, we were long ready for self-government and in-
dependence, most certainly by 1920. And I go further, and I say
that by delaying the achievement of self-government, having to
appoint a Royal Commission after the upheavals of 1937-8, and
by the mean and grudging granting to so many the vote, so
many to become ministers, and all the palaver and so-called education
by which the British government claimed that it trained the West
Indian population for self-government, a terrible damage was
inflicted upon us. In reality, our people were miseducated, our
political consciousness was twisted and broken. Far from being
guided to independence by the 1960s, from 1920 onwards, for
forty years the imperialist governments poisoned and corrupted
that sense of self-confidence and political dynamic needed for
any people about to embark on the uncharted seas of in-
dependence and nationhood. We are still without that self
confidence and that dynamic today. We lack them because for
the last half-century, we were deprived of making the Caribbean
people what our history and achievements had made possible
and for which we were ready. That then is my conclusion. They
have not educated, they have mis-educated us, stood in our way,
plied burdens on our backs. Let me quote one of our most
profound analysts:

Free is how you is from the start, an’ when it look different you got
to move, just move, an’ when you move’ say that it is a natural
freedom that make you move.

That is George Lamming, than whom no one has a clearer view
of words like independence, freedom, liberty, . . .
Still we have made history. As evidence of what we can make of ourselves, I need only add some of the names our people from the Caribbean have inscribed on the pages of history. Here I shall give a list of names, a list without which it is impossible to write of the history and literature of Western civilisation. No account of Western civilisation could leave out the names of Toussaint L’Ouverture, Alexander Hamilton, Alexander Dumas (the father), Leconte de Lisle, José María de Heredia, Marcus Garvey, Revù Marau, Saint-John Perse, Aimé Césaire, George Padmore, Franz Fanon, and allow me to include one contemporary, a Cuban writer, Alej Carpentier. I do not mention the remarkable novels by whom we of the British Caribbean have produced during the last twenty years. I and this list by a name acknowledged by critics all over the world as an unprecedented, unimaginable practitioner of his particular art—I refer, of course, to Garfield Sobers.