

Also by C. L. R. James

The Future in the Present (selected writings)

Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution

Notes on Dialectics

The Black Jacobins

C. L. R. James

SPHERES OF EXISTENCE

Selected Writings

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That accident needs some explanation.

Barbados is the West Indian territory where there is the clearest and sharpest social differentiation. George Lamming's novels are permeated 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 most pervasive, where the sense of insular identity (very strong in Barbados and Jamaica) has been almost non-existent. The result? Trinidadians have written more notable history; we have produced the most remarkable politicians in the West Indies, and in literature the finest study ever produced in the West Indies (or anywhere that I know) of a minority and the herculean obstacles in the way of its achieving a room in the national building—Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*.

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 I have helped to make Harris easier for West Indians to grasp. That is one trouble. Our novelists, as our cricketers, are recognised abroad for what they are, something new, creative and precious in the organisations and traditions of the West. But what they need is what Heidegger recognised in Hölderlin—a homecoming. 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 strangest 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 like them, nobody like us, both positively and negatively. I'll tell you how I will treat such a tremendous subject. I will begin by stating the kind of opinions 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. When 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 their entry 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 then: 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 Moyné Report. A number of excellent English gentlemen and ladies, of broad views, sympathetic to the West Indies, who were sent there by 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 no doubt in a primitive state.

I don't know where they got that from because the early Portuguese and the rest who discovered Africa did not find very much difference between the Negro civilisations they met and

the great masses of the peasantry they had left at home. In many respects many Africans were more advanced. These commissioners writing the report took for granted that all Africans lived in Africa in a primitive state—but Africans lived in social conditions and were subject to customs and usages which, anthropology increasingly shows, had definite social, economic and cultural value. Well, at any rate, that is much better than what they used to teach twenty or thirty years ago.

The report goes on to say that "their transfer to the West Indies unlike most other large-scale movements of population, did not involve the transfer of any important traces of their traditions and customs, but rather their almost complete destruction." Now it is impossible to produce a sentence that contains more mistakes and more gross misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

The Negroes who came from Africa brought themselves. The Amerindians could not stand the impact of slavery. Chinese came afterwards and couldn't make it: they couldn't do the work. The Europeans tried Portuguese labourers: they were not successful. People of African descent, the African from Africa, made the perpetuation of western civilisation possible in the West Indies. The report says that they left everything behind. But the Africans themselves are the most important and most valuable representatives of their civilisation—that when they came here they brought themselves, something of primary importance, never seems to come to the mind of all these people who write reports.

Now they go on to say that "the Negroes had one function only, the provision of cheap labour on the estates owned and managed by Europeans for the production of their valuable export crops. They lost their language, customs and religions, and no systematic attempt was made to substitute any other." They lost their language, yes. But they rapidly mastered the English, the French and the Spanish languages. So if they lost their language it is necessary to say they had to learn new ones and they learnt them very well. They could do that being the people that they were.

Now this Moyné report is the opinion of a whole body of MPs of various disciplines, and various other persons. These things left their mark—we had been inhumanly treated, as the "primitives" we were. We continued to be. The coming of emancipation gave a strong, if temporary, impetus to such forces as were working for the betterment of the Negro population: Churches and their attempt to teach Negroes Christianity, to read and to write, and to improve their morals so that they shouldn't have so many illegitimate children. That was a primary conception for the betterment of the Negro. I hope before I have concluded to show you how superficial, how entirely false, was this estimate of Negro morals and capability.

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 addresses 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 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 behind, 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 sitting upon our backs 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 backs 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 criticism 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 eleven thousand white peasant farmers in Barbados. They were on their way to becoming what New England in the United States became later.

But then came the sugar plantations and the Negroes were brought in order to work on the sugar plantations. That was somewhere between 1640 or thereabouts, and Lygon 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 means 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 complainings to one another (of the intolerable burdens they labour'd under) being spread throughout the Iland; at the last, some amongst them, whose spirits were not able to endure such slavery, resolved to break through it, or die in the act; and so conspired with some others of their acquaintance, whose sufferings were equal, if not above theirs; and their spirits no way inferiour, resolved to draw as many of the discontented party into this plot, as possible they could; and those of this persuasion, were the greatest number of servants in the Iland. So that a day was appointed to fall upon their Masters, and cut all their throats, and by that means, to make themselves not only freemen, but Masters of the Iland.

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 1958. They got rid of their masters and made themselves masters of the island. Masters isn't exactly the same as Lygon's statement but if I may quote a resilient 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 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 that 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 Moyné 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 failing 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 Hethersall (whose servant this was) sending letters to all his friends, and they to theirs, and so 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 Hethersall. 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 constantly 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:

... whereof eighteen of the principall men in the conspiracy, and they were the first leaders and contrivers of the plot, were put to death, for example to the rest. And the reason why they made examples of so many, was, they found these so haughty in their resolutions, and so incorrigible, as they were like enough to become actors in a second plot; and so they thought good, to secure them; and for the rest, to have a special eye over them.

Now there in sharp outline at the very beginning is the history of the West Indies. After barely ten years they all of them are knit together not merely by the common bond of colour but far more by a common oppression. They have the majority of people in the island. (I feel fairly certain that it was the sugar plantation and working in it that gave them this possibility. I don't believe they would have been able to organise themselves so well and so clearly in Africa. *That is not important.*) Anyway this thing is planned. Then this person working with Justice Hethersall betrays. He goes and he tells his masters what amounts to: "I am with you, not with them, that is what they are plotting to do."

That is permanent in the history of the West Indies and we shall see that as we go on. Note how the leaders who are caught are incorrigible, they are absolutely determined not to give way in the slightest respect: they have to be executed, all of them, because that is the only way in which their masters could feel safe for the future. That is the history we ought to teach in our schools. That is *our* history, *West Indian* history.

Now why I've chosen that is because I believe that it is symbolical of the whole of West Indian history and as I go on, especially when I come to my special study, *The Black Jacobins*, I shall go into that in some detail. Some of you may believe that you have read the book. I did more than that, I wrote it. But it is only in late years that I am able to understand and to appreciate the full significance of what I wrote in that book. We shall go into that in time.

Now I want to move to another feature which is not understood by these numerous West Indian economists, sociologists, historians and writers. This which I hold up before you is a work called *Merchants and Planters*, by Richard Pares. He is one of the greatest West Indian scholars, a scholar in that he has done a lot of studies and is a man of great learning. (He has not written one book and gone about claiming to be a scholar.) *Merchants and Planters* is a study of the Caribbean and was published for the Economic History Society at the Cambridge University Press. Pares notes that

in all the inventories which are to be found among the West Indian archives it is very usual for the mill, the cauldron, the still and the buildings to count for more than one-sixth of the total capital; in most plantations one-tenth would be nearer the mark. By far the

greatest capital items were the value of the slaves and the acreage planted in canes 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 went 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 denounce 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 Chisiza, 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, masons, carters, botswains of the mill, etc., that we cannot 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 scholar is saying. A man is described as excellent boiler and field Negro, this prevents us from putting such persons on either side of the line. He 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 the ruptured. The sickly or the ruptured were given the technical jobs to do—note the spread of technical skill.

That gave me, and I had read it elsewhere, an entirely different picture of the kind of civilisation that was in existence in the West Indies well before the French revolution of 1789. I have found other 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 that, 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, but those 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 of late 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 because 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.

And Fortescue writes what happened to the British expedition to San Domingo in 1792. This is the sentence I want you to bear in mind. This was the war in which England was fighting for its life against revolutionary France. And Fortescue says, the secret of England's impotence for this first six years of the war may be said to lie in two fatal words—San Domingo. Fortescue puts the blame on Pitt and Dundas, who had full warning that on this occasion they would have to fight not only poor, sickly Frenchmen, but the Negro population of the West Indies. Yet they poured their troops into these pestilent islands, in the expectation that thereby they would destroy the power of France, only to discover, when it was too late, that they had practically destroyed the British Army.

Now I have done some teaching, a great deal of teaching: I was a member of that noble army of martyrs for twelve years and I have met many students who knew all about the Battle of Hastings, the Battle of Waterloo, the Battle of the Great Armada. Some of them were pretty bright on Blank in the Battle of Blank, but that the British Army was destroyed by slaves in San Domingo, and England was impotent for the first six years of the greatest war in history up to 1914, they simply don't know anything about that. I wonder how many of you know that. I wouldn't press it any further.

Now an important thing is that the slaves worked collectively on the sugar plantation and I am going to read a statement now which shows what that had made of them.

A few years after the revolution began (it began in 1791 and this is about 1796), a French official, Roume, notes the change in the people.

In the North [that is where the great sugar plantations were, in the great North plain] they came out to sustain royalty, nobility and religion against the poor whites and the patriots. But they were soon formed into regiments and were hardened by fighting. They organised themselves into armed sections and into popular bodies, and even while fighting for royalty they adopted instinctively and rigidly observed all the forms of republican organisation.

This is in 1796, only five years after the revolt.

Slogans and rallying cries were established between the chiefs of the sections and divisions and gave them points of contact from one extremity of the plains and towns of the North to the other.

Over one-third of the island of San Domingo. This was not a few, but the mass.

This guaranteed the leaders a means of calling out the labourers and sending them back at will. These forms were extended to the districts in the West Province, and were faithfully observed by the black labourers, whether fighting for Spain and royalty or for the

republic, Rouse assured Bonaparte that he recognised these slogans, even during the insurrection which forced him to authorise the taking of Spanish San Domingo.

This was some years afterwards. Now I wonder what conclusions you draw from this self-mobilisation and self-discipline of a West Indian population. The conclusion I draw is the absolute impertinence and stupidity of a Colonial Office, which, as late as 1950, was wondering whether the people of Trinidad should have freedom or not, or whether they should have five members or more in the Legislature or how many in the Executive; playing a game of checkers they put one member and they see how it goes; then they put two and wait a bit; and they put another one, 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 illiterate: Toussaint used to say 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. Nyerere 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 jails into which the British had put them; and from those 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 concerned with. He does not seem to understand anything of what I am saying to you here.

Toussaint, about 1801 or 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 this 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 safe-guarded 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 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, Frantz Fanon, and other West Indians shall 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 boldness of imagination surpassed by no contemporary. In the constitution he authorised the slave-trade because the island needed people to cultivate it. When the Africans landed, however, they would be free men. But while loaded with the cares of government, he cherished a project of sailing to Africa with arms, ammunition and a thousand of his best soldiers, and there conquering vast tracts of country, putting an end to the slave-trade, and making millions of blacks "free and French", as his constitution had made the blacks of San Domingo. It was no dream. He had sent millions of francs to America to wait for the day when he would be ready. He was already 55. What spirit was it that moved him? Ideas do not fall from heaven. The great revolution had propelled him out of his humble joys and obscure destiny, and the trumpets of its heroic period rang ever in his ears. In him, born a slave and the leader of slaves, the concrete realisation of liberty,

equality and fraternity was the womb of ideas and the springs of power, which overflowed their narrow environment and embraced the whole of the world. But for the revolution, this extraordinary man and his band of gifted associates would have lived their lives as slaves, serving the commonplace creatures who owned them, standing barefooted and in rags to watch inflated little governors and mediocre officials from Europe pass by, as many a talented African stands in Africa today.

That was Toussaint, the West Indian, who having established a base at home showed himself the ancestor of Garvey, Padmore and Fanon. They had to go abroad to develop their West Indian characteristics. One West Indian who did not have to go abroad to carry out his West Indian ideas was the one who had built himself a base at home—Fidel Castro.

Let me repeat the end of that quotation:

But for the revolution, this extraordinary man and his band of gifted associates would have lived their lives as slaves, serving the commonplace creatures who owned them, standing barefooted and in rags to watch inflated little governors and mediocre officials from Europe pass by as many a talented African stands in Africa today.

I wrote that in 1938. I am very proud of it. There were not many people thinking in those terms as far back as 1938. There are not enough who are thinking in those terms today.

Let us go on with these extraordinary people, these West Indians. They won their freedom in 1803. Up to 1791 they had been slaves. All this was done within twelve years. They defeated a Spanish army of some 50,000 soldiers, a British army of 60,000 soldiers, and another 60,000 Frenchmen sent by Bonaparte to re-establish slavery. They fought Bonaparte's great army and drove it off their land.

Now for the making of our people since these glorious and creative days. Some of you, I have no doubt, are profoundly aware of the savage ferocity of some of the West Indian rulers today to the populations who have put them in power. In 1966, this is appearing in island after island in the Caribbean. What we have to do is to see the origin of this, its early appearance at the very moment when freedom was won. That will give us the historic fact and the historic origins of the fact. I shall confine myself to the period after Toussaint had been captured and sent away, and General Leclerc has been compelled to employ the Negro generals as members of his staff to help keep "order". Then the news came that the old colonial régime, slavery and mulatto discrimination, had been restored in Guadeloupe. The insurrection among the mass of the population in San Domingo became general.

What we have to do now is to see first the behaviour of the mass of the population, the rank and file, the man in the street,

the ordinary peasant, the agricultural labourer. And on the other hand, the behaviour of those who, formerly slaves, had now become generals, high officials, and members of the governing body.

This is how the masses behave. The masses from whom the masses of today (and some of us here) are descended. Back to *The Black Jacobins*:

With a skill and tenacity which astonished their seasoned opponents, the little local leaders not only beat off attacks but maintained a ceaseless harrying of the French posts, giving them no peace, so that the soldiers were worn out and nerve-wracked, and fell in thousands to the yellow fever. When the French sent large expeditions against them they disappeared in the mountains, leaving a trail of flames behind them, returning when the weary French retreated, to destroy still more plantations and carry their attacks into the French lines. Running short of ammunition, the labourers in the mountains around Port-de-Paix attacked this important town, drove out the garrison, killed the whites, burned the houses that had been rebuilt, and took possession of the fort with 25,000 pounds of powder. Who comes to capture it? Maurepas, who had commanded in the district and had so valiantly driven off the attacks of Humbert, Debelle and Hardy. He and the French, with a vigorous counterattack, recaptured the fort, but "the insurgents with incredible activity . . . men, women and children, all had got back to the mountains more or less heavily laden." The masses of the North plain ran to put themselves under the guidance of these new leaders.

Now we leave these heroic people and will go straight on to what I call the old gang, those who had become generals, administrators and part of the new government. They would not join the new revolution, but joined with the French government to suppress the revolutionaries. They had become house-slaves of the most subservient kind. Here is what I had to write immediately after that last passage describing the heroism of the mass:

All that old gang would do was to threaten Leclerc. Some of the blacks who had been slaves attempted to purchase their freedom from their former masters. These refused and singled out as their private property high officials and officers, men who had shed their blood on the battlefield and served with distinction in the administration. Christophe told General Ramel that if he thought slavery was to be restored, he would burn the whole of San Domingo to the ground. A black general dining with Lacroix pointed to his two daughters and asked him, "Are these to go back to slavery?" It was as if they could not believe it.

The whole house-slave character of these new masters of the sweets of government is summed up in the observation of a

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 Leclerc, the brother-in-law of Napoleon, who was in command of the expedition. General Lemmonier-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 braving danger when they can no longer have recourse to stratagem. I have seen a solid column, torn 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 song was a song of brave men and went as follows:

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

This song was worth all our republic 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 2,000 voices, to which the cannon formed a bass, produced a thrilling effect. French courage alone could resist it. Indeed large ditches, 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 majestic 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.

These are my 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 people and 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 stooges 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 were independent of the sugar magnates and 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 the stand 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 forgot that, never. From that time he advocated independence, self-government, and federation on the basis that the West Indian rank and file, "the barefooted 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 accident. 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 Grantley Adams. And while I do not wish to make Grantley 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 Grantley 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 politicians, 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 royalty! But, Cipriani and Grantley 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 independence, 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 independence 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 miseducated us, stood in our way, piled 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 movin' 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 Delisle, José Maria de Heredia, Marcus Garvey, René Maran, Saint-John Perse, Aimé Césaire, George Padmore, Frantz Fanon, and allow me to include one contemporary, a Cuban writer, Alejo Carpentier. I do not mention the remarkable novelists whom we of the British Caribbean have produced during the last twenty years. I end 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.

1966

Peasants and Workers

[First published in the November 1971 issue of *Radical America*, this is a major excerpt from *The Gathering Forces*, written in 1967 as a draft for an unpublished document marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian revolution. Sections of it were written in collaboration with Martin Glaberman, William Gorman and George Rawick.]

A three-way division of affairs among Russia, China, and the United States dominates world politics today. Two nations out of these three are governed, according to their official declarations, by the theories and practices of marxism-leninism. The human consciousness must inescapably satisfy itself with answers to the questions: What exactly is this all about and how did it come to be? Has it always been so, and, if not, when and how did such a state of affairs take place?

Prospects of war and peace, budgets, armies, parties, elections, trade and cultural exchanges, the United Nations, and the Third World of emerging nations, are all entangled. Hundreds of millions cover their eyes and, sick of the dehumanisation of civilised society, shut off news of interminable and unsolvable conflict between Russia and China on the one side, and American attempts to dominate the world on the other.

What is being awaited is a consummation of what began with the breakup of the Eastern Front in World War I: the arrival of the populace politically on to the streets of Petrograd and Moscow. The October revolution of 1917 was the initial landmark on the landscape of war and revolution, mass initiative and class repressions, self-liberating efforts and alienating mystifications. A breaking point in human existence began in October 1917 and now awaits resolution. After Stalinism, Khrushchevism, and the bewildering profundities of Chairman Mao, the present generation is suffused with the desire to arrive at the terminal point of the twentieth-century political upheavals.

In the same Russia today, October is celebrated by self-congratulations accompanied by displays of the latest missiles, tanks, and rockets. The United States—while still declaring how it deplures the rise of Bolshevism—compares the mellowness of the present Russian leaders with the intransigence of the Chinese. Furthermore, an event which, upon its happening, had made bright man's hopes is now used as an occasion to insist that the great majorities of the populations cannot alter or improve their conditions of life.