Decolonization and the Other

Decolonization and the Other: The Case of the British West Indies

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PREFACE

In 1949 Vic Reid's novel *New Day* became the first to be labeled West Indian Literature. Many more books and authors would follow. The novels were about the islands of the British Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados. Although each country maintained a unique identity, their populations also defined themselves regionally as West Indians and today acknowledge some similarities, especially in history and culture. This study is about the novelists and the impact they had on the West Indies between 1950, the date associated with the advent of West Indian literature, and 1980, by date by which literary works began to focus on the problems of specific islands and moved away from a West Indian perspective. This work contributes to the fields of British colonial history and West Indian history in that it seeks to present the novels in relation to social and political developments in the British West Indies in the last years of colonial rule and the first years of independence. By looking at the events that shaped the British West Indies and individual islands, it will be possible to view the novels as post-colonialists do, to provide a more complete picture of the region in the twentieth century.

I wish to express by sincere gratitude to all those who aided me in this endeavor. In particular, I am indebted to the people at Oklahoma State University who read the original draft of this work and offered their comments: Dr. Elizabeth Williams, Dr. Ronald Petrin, Dr. Joseph Byrnes, and Dr. Donald Brown. I thank the people at the University of Houston Library who helped facilitate my early research. I am particularly grateful to the faculty at the University of Florida, Center for Latin American Studies, who helped me delve into their collection to find relevant sources. Without all their assistance, this task would have been much more difficult.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Art is the mirror through which a society perceives itself," according to Michael Manley, long time prime minister of Jamaica.[1] This study is about the society of the British Caribbean and one of its chief art forms – novels. It considers the way West Indian novelists portrayed their society. The study focuses on a historic period from the late 1930s to 1980 using the perspective of West Indian literature from its advent in 1949 until 1980, when literary works began to focus on the problems of specific islands and to move away from a West Indian perspective. This study will include novels written by authors from Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and Barbados about their native islands.[2] Although each country maintains a unique identity, their populations also define themselves regionally as West Indians and today acknowledge some similarities, especially in history and culture.

The thesis of this work is threefold. First, West Indians began to define themselves as such to distance them from their British colonial rulers and establish an identity of their own. Second, although their novels were written mainly for a European or American audience, they did reach an audience on the islands and had an impact there in defining the culture of the region. Third, even though these authors did not intend their novels to be used to provide a history of the West Indies, they presented a realistic view of the black and East Indian segments of West Indian society between 1950 and 1980, so they can be used to supplement historical works in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the islands.

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[1] Michael Manley, *The Politics of Change: A Jamaican's Testament* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1975), 173.

[2] The British West Indies also includes the Leeward Islands of Dominica, Montserrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, and Anguilla; and the Windward Islands of Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and St. Lucia. Because West Indian novelists wrote about the three largest islands, the smaller ones will not be included in this study. See Appendix A for a breakdown of the area and population of the islands.

What led these novelists to define themselves as West Indian were their experiences in England after 1945. Residents of the British Caribbean colonies always considered themselves British. When they arrived in England in great numbers to find work or pursue careers after World War II, they discovered that the British viewed them as foreigners. At the same time they found that no matter what island they came from they shared certain things in common. They used the English language brought to them by the British, although the accents varied. They had a common history, also brought to them by the British, although some of the details of life on individual islands varied. The inhabitants of the islands shared common life-styles with similar racial and class differences. Their experiences caused them to ask what exactly made them West Indian. The answer was particularly important to the inhabitants of these islands where there was no indigenous population to provide a culture. The novelists who explored these issues were the descendants of slaves, as was George Lamming of Barbados, or indentured servants brought to the islands as laborers, as was Sam Selvon of Trinidad.[3] Their search for an identity constitutes a main focus of their work.

Although these authors wrote for British or American audiences, this study will argue that they had an impact at home. Evidence will show that the novels were not read by most of the population. In fact, in the 1950s there were only a few small local publishers in the West Indies and no significant reading public. A majority of the population was illiterate or semi-literate. There is clear evidence, though, that the political elites were familiar with the ideas and themes presented in the novels. Norman Manley, founder of the People's National Party, one of the first political organizations in Jamaica, reflected on the importance of authors like Roger Mais, a personal friend of Manley's, to the nationalist movement of the 1950s. In 1962 V.S. Naipaul wrote *The Middle Passage* after Eric Williams, the prime minister of Trinidad, invited him to tour the region and write about his impressions. In the 1970s Austin Clarke returned to Barbados to spend a year working for the government of Tom Adams. Clearly, West Indian novels and novelists were known to the political leaders of the region.

This study also will argue that because the novelists relied on the technique of social realism in their work, their novels can supplement the historical record of the period. Realist novels portray everyday life as

[3] Trinidad and Tobago were united as one colony by the British in 1889 but for purposes of this work I will refer to the country as Trinidad.

observed by the novelist.[4] Political leaders and literary artists followed a parallel course for most of the twentieth century. The two groups differed mainly in their choice of how to begin to define themselves as distinct from the British; the new island leaders chose to act through their efforts to gain political independence; the novelists chose to explore their West Indian heritage through works of fiction. Studying political developments alongside literary compositions will provide a comprehensive view of West Indian society in the immediate pre- and post-independence periods.

This study emphasizes the socioeconomic problems the people of the West Indies faced during the last years of British colonial rule and the early years of independence. Although popular culture, particularly the use of music as a form of protest and the importance of some religious groups to the islands, will appear in some of the novels, it is not the goal of this study to assess the impact of music or religion in this time period. This study also omits the white minority population and its relationship to the emergent regional identity, except where it interacts with the majority population. The focus of this study is the black majority population and the significant East Indian minority on the island of Trinidad.[5]

The novelists that are important to this study are those who became known for producing West Indian literature. West Indian literature is defined by literary critics as the literature of the former and current island dependencies of Britain in the Caribbean. As a defined body of work, this literature dates from 1950. Prior to the 1950s, literary critics generally spoke in terms of a small number of works of local literature emanating from Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, or any one island. The British encouraged this cultural isolation of the individual islands by treating each colony independently and discouraging close ties among the colonies. In the 1930s some West Indians began to explore their own culture but with no critique of the British. In fact, their goal was to educate their fellow middle-class islanders who were not aware of the plight of the majority lower-class population who inhabited their own islands. C.L.R. James of Trinidad, for example, wrote about the urban poor in the 1930s.

West Indian literature went through three phases, each of which overlaps with another so that there is no sharp division among them; many

[4] For a discussion of the realist novel see Jerome Blum, "Fiction and the European Peasantry: The Realist Novel as a Historical Source," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 1 (April 8, 1982): 122-139.

[5] See Appendix B for a racial breakdown of the population on the islands of the British West Indies.

authors wrote in more than one phase.[6] Early works, from 1949 to the mid-1950s, were often anti-British, reflecting anti-colonial feelings and despair at the slow process of independence. It was the generation who migrated to Britain after World War II in large numbers that launched a serious investigation into life in the West Indies. Writers of this period were critical of the British who had ruled them for so many years and encouraged them to believe that they too were British. They came from different islands but confronted the same problems. Most importantly, they believed they had to establish a new identity in order to move forward from colonial domination to independence. Vic Reid of Jamaica wrote the first of the novels described as West Indian literature. George Lamming of Barbados and V.S. Naipaul of Trinidad were the most famous of the group. Although their early novels differ in style and attitude, they generally take an anti-colonial stance, focusing particularly on the racial and class divisions the British left in their wake. They all seek to identify a history of the majority islanders distinct from that of Britain and to encourage West Indians to view themselves from the perspective of their own accomplishments.

In the late 1950s and the early 1960s, with anti-colonial attitudes still apparent in many novels, the focus shifted to the political development of the islands. In this phase novels reflected a growing sense of nationalism, the hopes for regional cooperation, and interest in local culture. At the same time many authors began to take a closer look at the type of local leader who was emerging. The same men who authored the early novels wrote in this period, but some new authors contributed to the discussion. Neville Dawes, for example, published his first novel in 1960.

By the late 1960s and the 1970s a new generation of novelists like Austin Clarke and Orlando Patterson emerged to join those who were established already. Many of this generation also wrote as émigrés, but most often from places like Canada and the United States. Although some of them continued to focus on the same problems as the first generation of writers, such as racial and class divisions, they also began to place more emphasis on the problems of the first generation of native leaders who came to power in 1962. The novelists believed these men had failed to produce a significant change in the lives of most islanders. Another new

[6] Most analysts agree that the formal phase of West Indian literature began in 1950; see King, "Introduction," 3-4. Frank Birbalsingh breaks the phases of West Indian literature into slightly different periods, beginning with the novels produced in the 1930s. See Frank Birbalsingh, "Introduction," in Frank Birbalsingh, ed., *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), xi.

topic was the problems faced by returning émigrés who found it difficult to go back home to work for the new governments. They often discovered that they no longer fit into native societies that had changed significantly in the years following independence. For example, Austin Clarke of Barbados wrote from Canada about the problems of a returning émigré, a book based on his own experiences in Barbados; Orlando Patterson of Jamaica taught sociology in the United States and wrote novels about the issues he studied as an academic.[7]

By the 1980s the problems of individual islands, many of which developed differently after independence, would take center stage. West Indians would become less apparent as the larger perspective became "Caribbean" in focus. Caribbean implied a relationship among islands regardless of their imperial and linguistic experience. Because the focus of this study is the West Indian perspective, it ends before this shift in emphasis takes place.

Methodology

This study relies on novels to provide information about West Indian society and peasant mentalities between the late 1930s and 1980. Literary critics argue that literature is politically neutral; they believe that it should be studied in isolation, without reference to any social or political context. They are interested in style and form rather than in what a novel might say about any one period of time.[8] Historians rely on empirical data to inform their judgment. This often results in a study that focuses on the elites in society and ignores the masses. Historians study events and rely on multiple sources to verify events. By relying on novels that present an interpretation of society, historians can include the views of ordinary citizens to a specific period in time. According to James Smith Allen, "the critic's concerns are essentially . . . analytical and present-minded; the historian's . . . comparative and focused on the past."[9]

Realist novels, upon which this study relies, emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. According to Jerome Blum, realist novelists

> wanted to show life as it really was to portray truthfully the actions and ambitions, the striving and the disappointments, the kindnesses and the

[7] See Austin Clarke, *The Prime Minister* (Ontario: General Publishing, 1977) and Orlando Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins* (London: Hutchinson, 1967).
[8] James Smith Allen, "History and the Novel: Mentalite in Modern Popular Fiction," *History and Theory* 22 (October 1983): 240-241.
[9] Allen, "History and the Novel," 241.

> brutalities, the triumphs and tragedies of everyday life. To achieve these ends they wrote about what they themselves had observed at first hand. That meant that their fiction dealt always with their own time. . . . to reinforce their representation of reality they chose to write about ordinary men and women and especially about the lower orders.[10]

Most West Indian novels were written by men who lived through the events they described.

Many investigations of West Indian literature to date have been undertaken within the framework of "post-colonial studies." According to post-colonial theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, when imperial culture interacts with indigenous culture one result is post-colonial literature. They believe that the term "post-colonial" describes more than a time frame that exists once colonialism has ended. It actually begins when a colonial people begin to write about their status under foreign domination. They argue that "post-colonial studies are based in the 'historical fact' of European colonialism."[11] Even novels that viewed colonial society from a new perspective without challenging the role of the ruling authority become post-colonial because they focus on local culture.

Post-colonial studies began as literary studies because English was the language of culture propaganda and often the language of dissent. Early studies of the literature focused on style; the relationship between the novels and life on the islands merited some attention but no serious study. In recent years historians have begun to study the ties between literature and post-colonial realities and to explore the developments between the literature and social and political relationships in post-colonial societies.[12] Robert Young, British post-colonial theorist and historian, said,

> At a certain level, most forms of colonialism are, after all, in the final analysis, colonialism, the rule by force of a people by an external power . . . Those who today emphasize its geographical and historical differences may in effect be only repeating uncritically colonialism's own partitioning strategies. Yet at this point in the postcolonial era [1995], as we seek to understand the operation and effects of colonial history, the homogenization

[10] Blum, "Fiction and the European Peasantry," 124-125.
[11] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 2; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 195.
[12] Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 210-211.

> of colonialism does also need to be set against its historical and geographical particularities.[13]

Writing specifically of the West Indies, George Lamming added,

> One of the functions of the novel in the Caribbean is to serve as a form of social history. The novelist thus becomes one of the more serious social historians by bringing to attention the interior lives of men and women who were never thought to be sufficiently important for their thoughts and feelings to be registered [by the British].[14]

Historians have been slow to incorporate colonial or post-colonial literature and the insights it can supply into the mainstream scholarship. According to Blum,

> The notion of using novels as sources runs up hard against a highly regarded canon of historical scholarship. This maintains that conclusions about what happened in the past can be established only by referral to events that have actually occurred and for which, preferably, there are at least two independent witnesses. Obviously fiction cannot meet this standard.[15]

A different perspective was argued by Amilcar Cabral, though; he asserted that history exposes contradictions and conflicts in a society and culture provides insights into how to resolve those conflicts.[16] "Whatever may be the ideology or idealist characteristics of cultural expression, culture is an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history."[17] Literature provides a look at local conditions and experiences that a political or social approach might ignore. In his exploration of African literature in the twentieth century, Shatto Gakwandi points out the importance of post-colonial literature. In social realist novels,

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[13] Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 165.
[14] George Lamming, "Concepts of the Caribbean," in Birbalsingh, ed., *Frontiers*, 5.
[15] Blum, "Fiction and the European Peasantry," 125.
[16] Amilcar Cabral was a writer and politician who led the African national movements in Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands. He also led Guinea-Bissau's independence movement. See Patrick Chabal, *Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003) and Ronald A. Chilcote, *Amilcar Cabral's Revolutionary Theory and Practice: A Critical Guide* (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner, 1991).
[17] Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Sources: Selected Speeches* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 42.

> the individual is treated as a social unit, most often he is silhouetted against the institutions, traditions and general behavior of his society so as to underscore his insignificance. His aspirations, achievements and disappointments are seen as conditioned by his place in a given society and can be used to raise wider ethical, moral and social issues.[18]

The novel provides a way to present the lives of the peasant and urban slum dweller and show how the conditions of society affect them. Literature allows the historian access to local experience, feelings, emotions, and the rituals of everyday life. Lynn Hunt argues that "literary works do not just reflect social and political reality; they were instruments for transforming reality."[19]

While they searched for their roots in the West Indies, novelists also helped create the defining features of West Indian society and culture. Benedict Anderson emphasized the importance of literature in defining what he called an "imagined community." Anderson argued that nationalism emerged when language got into print and was transmitted through books, allowing subjects to identify themselves as members of the community of readers. Language and literature allowed post-colonial societies to invent a self image through which they could act to liberate themselves from imperialism. In the twentieth century the imperial power needed bureaucrats to help them run local governments, so they began to open education to more local inhabitants. By doing so they produced a native intellectual community that had no real power.[20] The native intellectual community in the West Indies included writers and politicians who worked to forge a new nationalism. There were three particular problems they had to confront: anti-colonialism, class, and race.

Anti-colonialism can be found in every phase of West Indian writing. In the view of these authors the West Indian experience represented the worst features of colonialism. The native population was annihilated almost completely by colonial invaders. The slave trade and plantation slavery isolated African blacks from any leadership role on the islands. The indenture system that replaced slavery stranded East Indians when the white plantation owners who brought them there failed to honor the return clauses of their contracts. According to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, African writer and post-colonial theorist,

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[18] Shatto Arthur Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 127.

[19] Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 17.

[20] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, [1983] 1991), 15, 49, 140.

> The colonial plantation system tried to impose on the Afro-Caribbean man and woman, a double alienation: from Africa and from the Caribbean movement. The aim was still the same: make him look down upon his achievements, his capabilities, his vision of self, and look up to Europe as the Alpha and Omega of human civilization.[21]

Thiong'o went on to say that the response was resistance. West Indian writers used anti-colonialism to begin to redefine themselves. Even when West Indian writers focused on contemporary reality they could not ignore the influence of colonialism on current history.

Class differences, which always existed in West Indian society, have formed a key theme for West Indian novelists as well. During the long colonial period, the British formed the upper class, educated and professional mixed race and black inhabitants of the islands made up the middle class, and the majority uneducated black population on each island made up a lower class of urban laborers and slum dwellers, and rural peasants. In the early twentieth century when the black middle class began to lobby the British for increased rights and eventually independence they enlisted, and often received, the help of lower-class workers, particularly from urban areas. By the mid-1950s, the middle-class leaders had become aware of the fact that their values were not necessarily those of the general populace. The middle class and the working class maintained an alliance, though, until 1962. That year brought the collapse of the West Indies Federation, the first attempt on the part of the British and local governments to gain independence for their islands as a group. This failure divided the classes when on each of the islands leaders searched for others, or each other, to blame. From this point, class became a theme that West Indian writers explored as they detailed the differences between the black middle and working class and both of these and the peasants.

Race is also a key theme in West Indian literature and a complicated issue in the West Indies. Views on race changed as the islands went from colonies, through the Federation period, and on to independence. Blacks dominated the population, but the black population itself is stratified by color; under the British colonial system the lighter one's skin tone, the greater the opportunity for advancement. That bias did not disappear completely after independence. Frantz Fanon, the French-Caribbean author and post-colonial theorist, has said,

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[21] Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "Decolonization: A Prefatory Note," in Amon Saba Saakana, *The Colonial Legacy in Caribbean Literature* (London: Karnak House, 1987), 10.

> National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the fragile travesty of what it might have been [because] the nation is passed over for the race . . . [This is] the historical result of the incapability of the national middle class to rationalize popular action.[22]

In the West Indies two specific racial issues spoke to the inability of nations to satisfy the demands of their people in the late twentieth century. Trinidad, with its tensions between blacks and East Indians, experienced the most intense racial conflict during this period. Blacks and East Indians had hated each other ever since plantation owners brought East Indians in to replace the former slaves who refused to work on the plantations. The result was a black peasant class that struggled to survive while East Indians received wages for their labor. From the white perspective, East Indians ranked just above blacks. The enmity generated survived long after the indenture system ended in the early twentieth century. The introduction of black power politics, as assertion of black rights imported from the United States, though, was also a prominent part of the history of some islands, particularly Jamaica and Trinidad. Although native black politicians dominated the governments on all the islands after independence, middle- and lower-class blacks did not always benefit from political reforms. The black power movement focused attention on the fact that most Caribbean businesses were owned by whites, so economic power often rested in white hands. In 1970 a black power riot during which lower-class blacks demanded more reforms from black leaders and more economic control of the island by local blacks disrupted life in Trinidad.

Another topic that received some attention in most of the novels is gender. Although none of the authors deal specifically with the role of women in West Indian society, they wrote at a time when women's studies were beginning to compare popular images of women with practical knowledge about the lives of these women. In the West Indies black women always functioned as workers, first on slave plantations and after emancipation as mothers who took care of the home. A system developed, copied from the British example, where women stayed home and men worked. Women were viewed as reliant on men, even when that was not the reality. At the same time, black men who wanted to reject the British model resisted the idea of marriage. By the twentieth century a pattern was established among the majority lower-class black population of the

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[22] Frantz Fanon, "National Culture," in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 156.

islands. Women adopted a role in which they relied on men. West Indian novelists portray women in a variety of ways but many show women who play a significant role in the development of West Indian society even while they appear to maintain their subservient role in that society.

Although the importance of these issues varied from time to time, they did appear consistently in the novels of West Indian authors who were not trying to write a new history of their people but who were trying to find a place for the West Indian in what had been a British view of the islands. As Vic Reid said in the introduction to his groundbreaking novel *New Day*,

> What I have attempted is to transfer to paper some of the beauty, kindliness, and humour of my people, weaving characters into the wider framework . . . and creating a tale that will offer as true an impression as fiction can of the way by which Jamaica and its people came to today.[23]

This study attempts to provide a true impression of the West Indies in the immediate pre- and post-independence years by linking the works of novelists to historical developments, especially in politics. In the West Indies the local political relationship to literary output in the post-colonial era has not been explored.[24] This study seeks to do that. The task of this historian is to relate the literary output of West Indian literature to the specific social and political realities of the islands. Comparisons can allow us to reach conclusions about the novels' influence. Factual information allows us to test the evidence presented in the novels. Viewing the literature in conjunction with the realities of political and social change in the West Indies will allow us to see that both historical and literary research contribute to an understanding of life in the West Indies between 1930 and 1980.

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[23] Vic Reid, *New Day* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham Bookseller, [1949] 1972), v.

[24] Some examples of this type of study undertaken for other post-colonial regimes include Gakwandi *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, and Meenakshi Mukharjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

CHAPTER TWO

LOCAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO DECOLONIZATION, 1930S AND 1940S

The twentieth century brought a political and literary revolution to the West Indies. Writers became the vanguard of movements to portray the masses sympathetically and promote political and social change. It was the political and social developments of the period that encouraged writers to explore their own culture. This chapter will take a detailed look at West Indian society and political developments from the 1920s to the 1940s. During these years West Indians began to perceive of themselves as different from the British. They looked for ways to identify themselves as West Indian. In politics, some island leaders demanded more autonomy under British colonial rule, which resulted in the first organized and sustained challenge to British authority. Although the activists who began the mission of improving life for the average West Indian achieved little in the way of permanent change in the 1920s, they initiated a process that would grow and develop after World War II. They also took the first steps toward forming a West Indian identity.

Political Developments of the 1920s-30s

Activism in the British Caribbean after World War I began with the organization of labor unions that made political demands. Many returning soldiers believed their service to the British during the war had earned them the right to more influence in determining the course of West Indian history. In Trinidad in 1919 and 1920, the revived Trinidad Workingmen's Association (TWA) organized a series of strikes by urban industrial dock workers to protest rising food and clothing prices, which the workers believed the merchant elite was imposing unnecessarily, and the difficulty in finding employment.[1] The TWA spoke for skilled black workers, many

[1] *New York Times*, December 8, 1919, 21; *New York Times*, December 14, 1919, 16. The TWA was founded in 1897 as the first workers movement in Trinidad.

of whom had fought or worked overseas. The strikes lasted for fourteen days; when violence erupted, the British intervened militarily. However, the growing support in favor of increased political representation for non-whites in the islands convinced the British secretary of state for the colonies to launch an investigation into the political situation in the West Indies.[2]

Major E.F. L. Wood, the parliamentary undersecretary for the islands since 1921 and later Lord Halifax, led the investigation. Wood suggested that ninety-five per cent of men do not want to strike but they are led to it by their leaders. The Wood Report (1922) warned that "the whole history of the African population of the West Indies inevitably drives them towards representative institutions fashioned after the British model. . . . We shall be wise if we avoid the mistake of endeavoring to withhold a concession ultimately inevitable until it has been robbed by delay of most of its usefulness and of all of its grace."[3] The report recommended that a minority of elected members be included on Legislative Councils, which were advisory bodies, but that they be elected on a restricted franchise. Jamaica and Barbados already had elected members; in 1924 Trinidad held elections, but they made little difference. Only about six per cent of residents qualified to vote. With little leadership and no political parties to guide voters, the few islanders who voted elected the same conservative, white, middle-class men who would have been appointed by the government.[4]

One notable exception was Captain Arthur A. Cipriani of Trinidad, an upper middle-class, white-skinned Creole of French descent who appealed to the common man. While serving in the British West Indies Regiment in

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Interest in the organization faded over time, although it remained in operation until its revival in 1919. Amon Saba Saakana, *The Colonial Legacy in Caribbean Literature* (London: Karnak House, 1987), 66.

[2] *Times* (London), December 15, 1919, 14; *Times* (London), December 16, 1919, 13, 27; *New York Times*, December 8, 1919, 21; *New York Times*, December 14, 1919, 6.

[3] Great Britain, Colonial Office, *Report by the Hon. E.F.L. Wood, M.P. on his visit to the West Indies and British Guiana* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922), 6-7.

[4] *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, June 23, 1922, 3; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, February 1, 1923, 5; *Times* (London), April 2, 1921, 8; *Times* (London), July 15, 1921, 14; *Times* (London), August 27, 1921, 7; *Times* (London), October 19, 1921, 12; *Times* (London), October 28, 1921, 8; *Times* (London), November 24, 1921, 9; *Times* (London) December 1921, 11; *Times* (London), December 22, 1921, 9; *Times* (London), June 13, 1922, 7, 10; *New York Times*, December 17, 1919, 3; Colonial Office, *Wood Report*, 10; Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Praeger, [1962] 1964), 216-219.

France during World War I, he had fought unsuccessfully to get blacks equal treatment. He returned to Trinidad and became the leader of the TWA in 1923. Cipriani described the organization as an educational association. It provided him with a loyal electorate and would set the pattern for successful West Indian politicians of the future. Cpiriani worked through the parliamentary system but consistently defended workers' interests by attacking employers and the government. He taught Trinidad's workers that they could oppose colonialism and channel their social discontent into political activity. He worked to achieve compulsory education and to remove franchise qualifications. He urged the British to introduce workmen's compensation, a minimum wage, and an eight-hour workday. He opposed all forms of discrimination. Throughout his career both the British and the local middle class opposed his efforts. Local employers used intimidation tactics against workers who considered joining the union, often threatening to fire them.[5]

The tight control that Britain exercised over unions caused many leaders to shift their emphasis to direct political action. When Trinidad enacted a trade-union ordinance in 1932, it provided little protection for unions. It did not allow them the right to picket peacefully and provided no immunity from legal action. It did not let unions register under the Companies Ordinance, which the TWA had done, and it prohibited the use of trade union funds for political purposes. Cipriani decided not to register the TWA as a union. Instead, he disbanded the organization in 1934 and replaced it with the Trinidad Labour Party of which he became head. He switched his emphasis from strikes to political agitation.[6]

In Barbados events developed along similar lines in the same period. Blacks in Barbados organized a variety of self-help socio-economic organizations such as friendly societies and lodges that provided aid to those in need. They also founded the Barbados Labour Union in 1919. By the mid-1920s Barbadians came to believe that mass political action could provide better options for meeting social and economic needs than unions could. In 1924 Charles Duncan O'Neale, a middle-class black socialist, organized the Democratic League (DL), the first political party in Barbados, supported by black and middle-class professionals and the black

[5] Great Britain, British Information Services, *Trinidad and Tobago: The Making of a Nation* (New York: British Information Services, 1962), 7; Albert Gomes, *Through a Maze of Colour* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Key Caribbean Publications, 1974), 15.

[6] F.W. Dalley, *Report on Trade Union Organisation and Industrial Relations, 1947* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1947), 5; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, May 19, 1932, 22; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, June 21, 1932, 5.

working poor. It worked to expand political activism among the middle class. When O'Neale died in 1936, however, the DL collapsed.[7]

Meanwhile, Grantley Adams was elected to the Barbados House of Representatives in 1934 as a candidate representing the black middle class. Adams believed that it was the deteriorating economic and social conditions of the workers, and not the Crown Colony system, which were the underlying cause of strife in Barbados.[8] He believed he could accomplish more if he had the support of the Colonial Office. Adams argued that raising wages was the solution to all working-class problems.[9]

In 1937 a new leader emerged. Clement Payne arrived in Barbados from Trinidad, where he had been born to Barbadian parents. A gifted speaker, he rallied crowds by promising to educate them and to agitate for better conditions. He described middle-class coloureds as lackeys of employers more concerned with their own position in society than with curing the ills of the majority of the population.[10] He encouraged mass participation in the political process by blacks and promised to work to develop labor and political organizations on the island. After British officials secretly deported Payne during riots in Bridgetown, the capital, Adams, who believed Payne was too radical, stepped in to mediate the situation. Adams continued to work with the British to improve life in

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[7] W. Marvin Will, "Insurrection and the Development of Political Institutions: The 1937 Rebellion and the Birth of the Labour Parties and Labour Unions in Barbados," *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 40 (1992), 16-17.

[8] Under the Crown Colony system of government the British governed the islands directly from London. The British introduced the Crown Colony system to the islands gradually in the nineteenth century. Trinidad was the first to be converted by the British in 1810; it had had no elected assembly under the Spanish who controlled the island previously and the British chose not to change the political dynamics. Antigua and Grenada were among the last to convert to the system in 1898. Barbados, which suffered less severely from Emancipation because slaves, with no local land available to them, had remained to work on plantations for a salary, never adopted a formal Crown Colony system. Instead Britain introduced an Executive Committee system in 1881 through which an Executive Committee of elected representatives worked with an Executive Council to introduce legislation. This method also increased home government power, but allowed the local Assembly to work as usual.

[9] *Times* (London), October 17, 1934, 13.

[10] In the West Indies the term coloured is used to describe the mixed race, light skinned population. These were the people most often hired by the British to work for the government. This allowed them to achieve middle-class status on the islands.

Barbados as he had in the past, by supporting British rule while lobbying for increased wages to improve the economy.[11]

In Jamaica, Marcus Garvey founded the People's Political Party (PPP) in 1929. Garvey was born and raised in rural Jamaica. He had been active in promoting black pride and black culture through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which he founded in 1914. UNIA encouraged blacks to achieve success through education. It focused on developing a sense of African nationalism and anti-imperialism and encouraged literary and artistic expression among its members. In 1918 Garvey opened a branch of UNIA in New York City and spent most of the next nine years in the United States.[12] The PPP endorsed constitutional change to give Jamaica representation in the British Parliament. It advocated minimum wage legislation, promotion of local industries, land reform, and public housing. Garvey called for set hours and wage guidelines for sugar workers and legislation that would end the exploitation of children. Inspired by Garvey, Kingston dock workers went on strike in May 1919 for higher wages and double time on Sundays. They achieved limited success when they negotiated a pay increase. In 1935 Garvey moved to England and the party collapsed. He died there in 1940.[13] Despite the fact that the organization was short-lived, it had a significant impact on the West Indian working classes. Labor leaders who followed would build on the racial consciousness that Garvey inspired.

The increased political power of blacks made little difference to prevailing political and social conditions. The Crown Colony system was still in place. The Colonial Office was adept at granting limited reforms such as the restricted franchise to keep the islanders from initiating violent protest. The result was little change in the system. As the 1930s

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[11] Adams, in his capacity as a lawyer, represented Payne when he was accused of making a false declaration of his birthplace; Adams won Payne's release but authorities arrested Payne again and deported him on July 26, 1937. *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, February 2, 1938, 11; *Times* (London), July 29, 1937, 13.

[12] Garvey was convicted of fraud in the United States for selling stock in the Black Star Shipping Company through the mail in 1925 and sent to jail in Atlanta. In 1927 he was released and deported to Jamaica. Peter Abrahams, *Jamaica: An Island Mosaic* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957), 164-168; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, September 20, 1919, 14.

[13] *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, December 15, 1919, 3; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, October 24, 1927, 17; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, January 22, 1935, 16; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, May 18, 1940, 1; *Times*, (London), October 27, 1914, 7; *Times*(London), April 28, 1919, 11; *Times* (London), May 2, 919, 11; *New York Times*, May 28, 1929, 10; *New York Times*, June 29, 1929, 15; *New York Times*, September 28, 1929, 7; *New York Times*, November 1, 1929, 1.

progressed, though, the black working class became more strident in its demands.

The 1930s were difficult years on the islands. The world-wide depression caused severe problems. Exports dropped and world prices fell for goods that could be sold, including sugar, which continued to be a major source of income on most islands. Unemployment rose. Workers were particularly critical of government employees who still had jobs – jobs that were not open to most of the population because of race or lack of education. The British controlled many of the positions in the governments; some lighter-skinned, educated West Indians held more minor positions. West Indian peasants were hit even harder than urban workers. Rural peasant protests propelled East Indians, natives of India whom the British imported after Emancipation to work as indentured servants on the plantations, into labor movements in Trinidad for the first time.

Political concessions by the British had little impact on the economy. Exports remained down. There was little attempt on the part of the British government, which did not intervene at home either, or local leaders to diversify the economy. As late as 1938 unskilled sugar workers earned very low wages: thirty cents in Barbados; thirty-five cents in Trinidad; and forty-eight to sixty cents in Jamaica.[14] The problem of low pay was compounded by the fact that work on sugar estates was seasonal. During slow periods, lasting about six months, employment dropped by fifty per cent. In Jamaica nearly half the wage-earning population was engaged in seasonal work and about eleven per cent were unemployed continuously. In Trinidad agricultural workers were employed on average four days a week. In Barbados living standards for agricultural workers were at late nineteenth-century levels.[15] To make matters worse, West Indians who had worked in Cuba and the United States also lost their jobs and returned home. Their numbers increased the unemployment rate at the same time that their families lost the subsidies they had been receiving from these overseas jobs. Eric Williams, West Indian historian and future prime minister of Trinidad, estimated that in Barbados residents had received an

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[14] At the same time unskilled sugar workers in Cuba earned eighty cents a day. West Indians reported monetary figures in West Indian dollars. In the same time period, the British used figures based on the British pound in their reports. *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, January 3, 1939, 17*; Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, June 29, 1939, 13; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, August 22, 1939, 18; Eric Williams, *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 35.

[15] Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 443-446.

amount equal to one-third of the island's total exports in subsidies from relatives working overseas. Much of this money was lost due to unemployment. Trinidad's economy did not suffer as much as some others; it benefited from the oil industry. Unskilled oil workers there made seventy-two cents a day. Yet they were not compensated for industrial accidents or overtime work and had no retirement plan. Still, even in Trinidad most workers held lower paying jobs in agriculture that paid twenty to forty cents a day.[16]

Economic discontent brought strikes which often ended in violence. The first occurred on sugar estates in Trinidad in 1934. The following year there was a march of dock workers protesting unemployment in Jamaica. Several days later banana carriers also went on strike. In 1937 and 1938 more rioting occurred in Trinidad, Barbados, and Jamaica. In Trinidad what started as an oil strike turned into a general strike and led to a sympathetic strike in Barbados, which escalated when the British deported Clement Payne, the labor leader who was demanding trade unions. Jamaica had another strike, which began at the Frome Estate of the West Indies Sugar Company. When the company announced job openings, hundreds showed up for a just a few positions. Those who did not get work rioted. From there the riots spread to include unemployed workers in Kingston.[17]

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[16] *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, February 11, 139, 10; *Times* (London), August 1, 1938, 9; Eric Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1942), 143; Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 443.

[17] Great Britain, Colonial Office, *West India Royal Commission Report* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1945), 196; T. S. Simey, *Welfare and Planning in the West Indies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 23-24; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, May 2, 1938, 1, 8; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, May 20, 1938, 1, 10; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, May 31, 1938, 10, 18; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, June 3, 1938, 7; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, March 31, 1939, 18; *Times* (London), January 18, 1934, 11; *Times* (London), June 19, 1934, 13; *Times* (London), May 22, 1935, 15; *Times* (London), May 23, 1935, 15; *Times* (London), May 27, 1935, 13; *Times* (London) May 29, 1935, 13; *Times* (London), May 30, 1935, 15; Times (London), July 3, 1937, 16; Times (London), July 6, 1937, 15; Times (London), July 15, 1937, 8; *Times* (London), July 29, 1937, 13; *Times* (London), August 18, 1937, 9; *Times* (London), December 18, 1937, 11; *Times* (London), January 7, 1938, 11; *Times* (London), January 8, 1938, 9; *Times* (London), January 10, 1938, 11; *Times* (London), May 24, 1938, 16; *Times* (London) May 28, 1938, 14; *Times* (London), August 5, 1938, 11; *Times* (London), September 2, 1938, 11; *New York Times*, June 21, 1937, 4; *New York Times*, June 22, 1937, 18; *New York Times*, June 23, 1937, 16; *New York Times*, July 6, 1927, 7; *New York Times*, May 24, 1938, 15; *New York Times*, May 25, 1938, 17; *New York Times*, May 26, 1938, 14; *New York*

The level of participation differentiated these strikes from previous ones. In the past, strikes were the work of the black and colored middle class demanding a real share in the government process. In the late 1930s, strikes were led by the black working class demanding a government that would respond to the economic crisis. Although racial tensions were on the increase by the late 1930s, particularly because poor blacks suffered most from economic distress and had few options available to improve their lives, and the strikes often led to riots, black workers did not target whites and there was very little property destroyed. Once the police or military arrived, the riots generally ended quickly but peacefully. In 1937 in Trinidad fifteen were killed and fifty injured. In Jamaica in 1938 twelve were killed and fifty wounded. Over the entire period in Jamaica twenty-four died and 115 were wounded.[18]

The strikes of the late 1930s gave rise to the labor leaders and political parties that would guide West Indians toward independence. In 1938 Alexander Bustamante, a colored Jamaican, began to make speeches supporting the striking workers in Kingston, who adopted him as their spokesman. Bustamante, a money lender who had no high school diploma, went to Cuba, Panama, and New York in search of work and returned to Jamaica in 1934 when he could no longer find any. Peter Abrahams, who interviewed Bustamante in 1956, described him as a colorful, flamboyant, and theatrical man who spoke the language of the streets.[19] He railed against the poverty in Kingston, attacked the ineffectiveness of the Legislative Council, and the lack of concern among employers for the plights of their workers. In 1938, after the Frome riot, he was arrested along with some of the strikers. After authorities released him, he founded the Bustamante Industrial Trades Union (BITU) in May 1938, which accepted all workers. Within months it had a membership of several thousand agricultural and waterfront workers. British officials jailed Bustamante again from 1940 to 1942 for subversive activities. Upon his release he founded the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), which drew

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Times, June 1, 1938, 13; *New York Times*, June 5, 1938, 31; Gomes, *Through a Maze of Colour*, 28.

[18] *New York Times*, July 6, 1937, 7; *New York Times*, May 26, 1938, 14; *New York Times*, June 5, 1938, 31; *New York Times*, June 8,1939, 9; Simey, *Welfare and Planning*, 23-24; Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 93.

[19] Abrahams, *Jamaica*, 171. Alex Zeidenfelt described Bustamante as reckless, using "rough and tumble tactics which are generally frowned upon by the more orthodox and conventional union leaders." Alex Zeidenfelt, "Political and Constitutional Developments in Jamaica," *Journal of Politics* 14 (August 1952): 532.

its support largely from the BITU and worked on behalf of the working class and poor peasants. Many West Indian political parties included the word "labour" in their title in order to get workers support. Despite its use by the JLP, the party favored the expansion of capitalism and the free enterprise system.[20]

Not all Jamaicans subscribed to Bustamante's views. Norman Manley, from a colored middle-class family and a cousin of Bustamante, was a British-educated lawyer and a Rhodes Scholar. He served in the British army from 1915 to 1919, finished his Oxford education and returned to Jamaica in 1922. In 1936 he negotiated a deal with the United Fruit Company to establish the Jamaica Welfare Ltd., a fund to be used for the welfare of the rural population. The goals of the organization were to help people take advantage of opportunities and to inspire hope and self-confidence. The Jamaica Welfare group worked through education to find and implement solutions to rural problems. It operated until 1949. Manley founded the political competition to Bustamante, the People's National Party (PNP), in September 1938, "to support the progressive forces of this country and to raise the living standard of life of the common people of this country."[21] Manley spoke for middle-class reformers who accepted capitalism and private ownership but wanted social reform, like land reform, more educational opportunities, cooperative ownership, progressive taxation, expanding government services, and greater political influence. Manley was careful, though, to support labor issues in order to gain worker support. He insisted that those seeking increased political power and those aspiring to economic self-sufficiency were working toward a common goal. PNP leaders described the party as socialist, although social democratic would be more accurate, with ties to the British Labour Party. Manley insisted that PNP socialism was neither revolutionary nor anti-religious but rather democratic and Christian. The three basic goals of the PNP in its early years were self-government, universal adult suffrage, and social reforms, the most important of which

[20] Abrahams, *Jamaica*, 171; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, June 28, 1938, 7; *Times* (London), May 25, 1938, 4; *Times* (London), May 30, 1938, 14; *Times* (London), June 2, 1938, 13; *Times* (London), June 16, 1938, 15; *Times* (London), June 24, 1938, 15; *New York Times*, May 24, 1938, 15; *New York Times*, May 25, 1938, 17; *New York Times*, May 26, 1938, 14; *New York Times*, May 29, 1938, 9; *New York Times*, June 2, 1938, 45; *New York Times*, June 16, 1938, 10; *New York Times*, October 25, 1938, 15; *New York Times*, February 10, 1942, 4.
[21] *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, September 19, 1938, 1.

was public ownership of Jamaica's major resources. Even the PNP, though, cooperated with the British to achieve its goals.[22]

In Trinidad, too, it was the deteriorating economic conditions of most workers that precipitated strikes in the 1930s. Workers were finding it increasingly difficult just to survive. Tubal Uriah Butler, a black agitator who would replace Cipriani as Trinidad's labor leader, organized oilfield workers in the mid-1930s. Eric Williams described Butler as "a queer political concoction of God, Marx and the British Empire."[23] Butler was born in Grenada, served in the West Indies Regiment, and moved to Trinidad in the early 1930s to work in the oil fields. He could appeal directly to oil workers because he was one of them. Butler was loyal to Britain, believing that he was defending the rights of British citizens in Trinidad. He blamed the island's problems on foreign-owned businesses. In 1937, he formed the Negro Welfare, Social, and Cultural Association to lobby for trade union and health insurance laws, increased access to upper level government positions for blacks, and social legislation for workers. His program particularly appealed to black industrial workers in the oil fields. They worked for foreign-owned companies, under white foreign managers with a high standard of living, while they remained extremely poor. In June 1937 he organized a peaceful strike that turned violent when the police tried to arrest him. Butler remained in hiding until 1938. Even when the British offered a $500 reward for his arrest, West Indian workers refused to turn him in, although no worker could hope to earn that amount of money in five years. When the British offered him safe passage to give evidence before a British Commission, Butler accepted; the British arrested him. Even after his imprisonment, Butler continued to support the British government, believing that it was local rulers and the oil companies that were to blame for Trinidad's problems. Without Butler's influence, though, a more moderate labor movement asserted itself under the leadership of Adrian Rienzi, a Trinidadian of East Indian descent.[24]

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[22] *Times* (London), September 20, 1938, 11; *New York Times*, January 3, 1939, 3; *New York Times*, February 16, 1939, 5; Rex Nettleford, ed., *Norman Manley and the New Jamaica: Selected Speeches and Writings, 1938-1968* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971), xiv, xvi, 4, 57-64; Abrahams, *Jamaica*, 152-153.

[23] Williams, *The Negro in the Caribbean*, 93. Albert Gomes called Butler "the most picturesque grass-roots politician in the West Indies, with the possible exception of Alexander Bustamante. See Gomes, *Through a Maze of Colour*, 130.

[24] *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, May 16, 1939, 18; *Times* (London), July 20, 1937, 15; *Times* (London), September 28, 1937, 13; *Times* (London), October 5, 1937, 13; *Times* (London), December 20, 1937, 11; *Times* (London), February 2, 1938, 13;