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The Making of a Caribbeanist

by

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ABSTRACT

The Making of a Caribbeanist

This essay is in part analytical, in part autobiographical. It mixes the two elements to describe how at least one scholar in the area of Caribbean studies came to be so. The autobiographical part describes the personal career pattern of the author, his intellectual beginnings in the South Wales of the 1930s, his wartime experience, his continuing education at Oxford and Harvard, his American experience after 1947, and his final arrival in the Caribbean for a permanent residence at the University of Puerto Rico after 1955. It identifies the challenge that coming to the Caribbean meant at that time; it also identifies how the earlier British and American experience had prepared him, or to some degree not prepared him, for the entry into a tropical Third World regional society that was—and still is—so fundamentally different to the British and the American societies in terms of history, cultural patterns, color and race. This section thus, in a way, constitutes a comparative discussion of the three societies that have shaped the author—Britain, the United States, the Caribbean—and how the lessons gained from the life experience in each one have helped towards the richer understanding of the others.

The analytical part of the essay, somewhat less personal, addresses itself to the various issues and problems that naturally concern the practitioner in Caribbean studies. What are the various tools, both practical and conceptual, that the Caribbeanist should possess in order better to comprehend the complex reality of the multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious Caribbean society as a whole? What is the relationship between academic research and personal ideological belief? Is the social-science conventional wisdom of a value-free scholarship either practical or desirable? What are the consequences of the fact that since 1945 Caribbean studies have become in many ways a North American monopoly? What is the relationship between the Caribbeanist as specialist and the Caribbeanist as generalist? What is the relationship between personal research and collective research? Are Caribbean studies a modern phenomenon; or is it possible to argue—as seems plausible—that in a very real way they actually begin as early as the post-Conquest society with the emergence of Fray Ramón Pane as the first Caribbean ethnologist, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas as the first Caribbean anthropologist, Herrera and Oviedo as the first Caribbean historians? It is evident enough, at least, that Caribbean studies today, to be fruitful, must be seriously inter-disciplinary in its character.

The Making of a Caribbeanist

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Introduction: From South Wales to Río Piedras

When I first started to teach at the University of Puerto Rico in the late 1950s I immediately realized that I had entered into a new experience for which very little in my previous experience either as a university student in Britain or as a teacher in various North American universities had prepared me. As I came, by travel and residence, to understand the Caribbean island archipelago, its societies seemed strange, although not alien. There was a new language, Spanish, which I had to pick up slowly. Ethnographically, this was a regional society of a multi-layered pigmentocracy so utterly different from the white-majority societies of America and Europe. They were, in addition, small island societies, so different again from the continental sizes of the United States and even Great Britain. Size, social psychology, political condition, they were all different; and it would take me some twenty-five years or more of travel, study, research and writing to comprehend it all. It was almost as if, like the colonizers and *conquistadors* after 1492, one had wandered into a new world that by its very strangeness and complexity challenged every moral and intellectual assumption that the newcomer brought to it as part of his inherited intellectual baggage.

It was at once a challenge and an opportunity. A challenge because it made you re-examine your general moral and political philosophy in the light of a different society; an opportunity because it opened up for someone like myself who had been trained in the fields of history and political science at Oxford and Harvard a whole new field of inquiry. Had I remained in England after 1947—when I first came to the United States to teach at the University of Chicago—I might have written yet another book on the British cabinet system; and had I remained in the United States after the 1950s I might, I suppose, have written yet another book on the American presidency; both of them overcrowded fields in terms of their respective literatures. The Caribbean, by comparison, was a comparatively undercrowded field, for it is only since the 1960s that Caribbean studies, as a recognized discipline, has staked out its claim as being a respectable academic discipline. I was, I suppose, lucky to have been in at its birth; and I decided from the beginning to make the most of it.

It is not quite true, of course, that I was completely unprepared for the encounter. The British socialist tradition, out of which I grew, had always taken an active interest in the colonial problem. A whole school of English progressive opinion, influenced as much by Burke as by Marx—Hobhouse, Cole, Laski, Tawney—had argued the incompatibility of democracy with empire; it was thus easy for me to identify immediately with the struggle of colonial nationalism that engulfed the Caribbean after 1945. That tradition has not existed in the United States, which is why so many of my American liberal friends in Caribbean studies have never really understood, for example, the Puerto Rican struggle for national independence. Even today, they argue for the “liberal alternatives”: autonomy, limited transfer of powers, a sense of imperial responsibility, economic aid to the colony; all of which ignores the fundamental issue that, as Burke put it magisterially, “This servitude, which makes men subject to a state without being

citizens, may be more or less tolerable from many circumstances, but these circumstances, more or less favorable, do not alter the nature of the thing. The mildness by which absolute masters exercise their dominion, leaves them masters still.” It is because America has never really had a real philosophical tradition in either the conservative or the socialist sense that even the best of its liberals have rarely been able to understand either the conservative or the socialist case against capitalism, not to speak of the case against colonialism and imperialism.

Yet all this, in my own case, growing up as a young grammar school boy in the South Wales of the 1930s, were theoretical apperceptions at the best. Like all such apperceptions, they required the blood and bones of experience. In my own case, again, that meant a number of things. It meant getting to know the non-white population of the old “colored quarters” in the Cardiff seaport, segregated almost next door to the University College, where I took my undergraduate degree in Modern History, and where you could see the early beginnings of racism in English life. After 1947, it meant living on the colored South Side of Chicago, also next to a white segregated university; I stayed at the Settlement House run by Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake, the authors of the classic book, *Black Metropolis*. Living there as a white intruder on “the other side of the tracks,” I not only began my apprenticeship in the study of the American democracy but also my understanding of how Africa, as well as Europe, had helped shape it. To spend almost whole nights listening to jazz in small, rundown night clubs, often to the detriment of my eight o’clock classes on the Midway, was to feel a passion for Dixieland jazz that I had imbibed from a radical Yorkshire schoolmaster in grammar school in the West Ebbs valley; and when later I came to read the *literature negrophile* of Ortiz, Price-Mars, Cesaire and Fanon and its celebration of *africana*, that experience came in good stead. Although I did not know it, I was already learning about the Caribbean even before I came to it.

There were other tributaries to this general stream of influence and experience. During my teaching residency at the University of California at Los Angeles (where I in turn enlarged my American knowledge by coming to know the seedy Los Angeles subculture so finely revealed in the detective novels of Raymond Chandler), Russell Fitzgibbon, probably the dean of Latin American scholarship, opened up Latin America for me, so that later it was not difficult for me to place the Caribbean within its proper sub-continental framework. Teachers like Karl Friedrich at Harvard taught me the importance of constitutional rules in the modern democratic state; although I could never agree with his “middle way to freedom” thesis on Puerto Rico, since it seemed to me to exaggerate the absorptive capacity of American federalism. Colleagues like Lester Seligman and Morris Janowitz at the University of Chicago helped me to understand the new American sociology, a difficult task enough with its temptation to mistake obscurity for profundity, tempting me to believe that American academics, as a class, do not know how to present their scholarship with grace and flair. Colleagues again, this time at Michigan State University where I taught a brief summer course, introduced me to a lasting passion for college football, in itself an important sociological lesson, because if you do not understand how a people play you do not understand how they work. Above all else, in all of these different American academic centers the visiting Englishman came to comprehend, in immediate detail, the startling and attractive heterogeneity, the multi-ethnicity, of the American experience, so different from the hermetic homogeneity of English life, and which even fascinated an earlier visitor as critical as Martí. Much more than England, this was a rich and exciting multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural society. There was much truth to the standing witticism that the Hutchins Great Books experiment at the University of Chicago was a place where Jewish teachers taught Protestant students how to become good Catholics. Even Balliol at Oxford, where I had earlier been one of the last students of its great Master, A.D. Lindsay, and from whom I had learned the vital connection between Christianity and socialism, had not been that. The lesson of multi-ethnicity was important. For if America is multi-ethnic, the Caribbean is even more so. The

American experience was, so to speak, a dress rehearsal for any European seeking to understand the Caribbean. Without it, he might have been too much disturbed, even possibly deranged.

Life and Work in the Archipelago

Once, then, in the Caribbean, how does the visitor, soon to become permanent resident, come to grips with the Caribbean reality? How does he, or she, unravel the secret of the *magie antillaise*, if indeed that is possible?

The answer is, I think, not easy. So much depends on human nature; on the quirks of personality; on inherited assumptions. Each person will choose the methodology of research peculiar to his own discipline or his own liking. It goes without saying, of course, that basic to everything is getting a complete mastery of the literature, both past and present; that is why I myself have collected a large personal library over my years of Caribbean travel, raiding incessantly government warehouses, private collections, party headquarters, for everything one could lay one's hands on: books, government documents, party pamphlets, personal memorabilia. It goes without saying, again, that the serious Caribbeanist must have a knowledge and command of the three working Caribbean languages: English, French, and Spanish. Any deficiency there only helps to perpetuate the fragmentation that has characterized Caribbean scholarship as much as Caribbean history. The conventional methods will help: the personal interview, the less structured the better; the sociological questionnaire, although it has serious limitations, not the least that what people say is often very different to what they do and believe; the prolonged residence of the field anthropologist among his chosen group of people, a method from which we can all learn, for it provides an intimacy not otherwise easily obtained. In all of this, the inquirer must be a learner. He must not talk so much as learn to listen. He must eschew condescension, garrulity, loose expression of his own opinions.

None of this can be done satisfactorily at a distance. Too much of Caribbean studies is done by way of the quick, grant-aided research trip from some North American or European campus. In an age of jet travel there is still something to be said for the leisurely inter-island schooner trip (now unfortunately taken over by the boat-charter tourist trade) which permits time to observe, look, talk, meet people on their own ground and at their own pace of life. It does not have to be Borrow on his donkey in Wales or even the English eighteenth century nobleman doing the European Grand Tour in luxurious splendor. But it must be, surely, as it were, a familiar tour, even better if you can burrow your way into a Creole family and see from the inside. Here, a Caribbean wife or husband can always help; and I doubt if I could ever have come to know so well the West Indian middle-class family if I had not had from the beginning a Trinidadian wife. More than anything else, the outsider needs the insider. It is, I repeat, the leisurely tour that is preferable. It can produce the sort of rich imaginative book, like Patrick Leigh-Fermor's *The Traveller's Tree*, or the various books written by the Roths, father and son, who pioneered anthropological study in the British Guiana of the 1920s as they wandered through the interior in their capacity as Government land inspectors; such books tell us more than half-a-dozen doctoral dissertations composed in the coma of research.

My own Caribbean itinerary over some twenty-five years has, I trust, observed these guidelines. That itinerary has taken me from the out-island of the Bahamas to the Guyana interior forest, with much in between. It has meant incessant conversations with colonial governors, civil servants, trade unionists, political leaders, housewives, canecutters, dockworkers, religious cult devotees, schoolteachers, as well as, of course, academic people in the various regional universities. Not least of all, it has meant the long discussions in the ubiquitous West Indian rumshop, so different from both the English pub and the American saloon bar. Manning in

Bermuda, Brana-Shute in Paramaribo, and Lieber in Port of Spain street life have shown us what can be done with this engaging method alone. My own encounters would cover a whole book of memoirs. I can remember talking as early as 1958—three years before the Jamaican academics became interested in the phenomenon—with Prince Emanuel of the Rastafarian cult in a broken-down cult family center on the road to Spanish Town and understanding for the first time the rich apocalyptic vision of the Rasta theology; or talking with that grand old man, Teddy Marryshow, in his beautiful little house overlooking the Grenada Carenage, and from whom I obtained, oddly enough, a French edition of Abbe Raynal's once-famous *Histoire des Deux Indes*; or talking in a dilapidated hut in Roseau, Dominica, with the now aged and blind trade unionist who had been the secretary of the important 1932 Dominica conference on early West Indian political leaders, and who gave me copies of its report; or talking with a voodoo *houngan* in a *tennelle* in a Port-au-Prince slum district, trying to understand voodoo, for it is the most difficult of all Caribbean cults to understand, possessed of a theology as complex as that of Catholicism itself; or hearing the late Robert Bradshaw of St. Kitts telling me how, as a young factory hand, he had been fired up by listening to a public lecture by Marcus Garvey as Garvey passed through the region in 1937; or talking with those fine old union militants, John Rojas and Adrian Rienzi, in a hillside restaurant overlooking Port of Spain, telling me about the old political struggles for socialism and independence long before Eric Williams arrived on the scene; or listening to the late Sir Grantley Adams in Bridgetown, telling me how he had been blackballed by the white Bajan oligarchy for his progressive leadership in the 1930s; or chatting at five o'clock in the morning with St. Lucian black *porteuses* as they loaded the banana boats before that iniquitous system of cheap female labor was ended; or, indeed, just the fine simple pleasure of climbing the Soufriere in St. Vincent in the company of the Forest Rangers; not to mention endless talks with oldtimers like Ariel Meochair Sr. and Geraldo Guirty in the U.S. Virgin Islands who filled me in on the details of their early struggle against the old U.S. Navy administration on those islands. My only regret is that I came too late to talk with Captain Cipriani of Trinidad (who died in 1945) and don Pedro Albizu Campos of Puerto Rico (who was already in prison by the time that I arrived in San Juan in 1950-51).

It is perhaps worth noting that in all of this I was possessed of two advantages, in retrospect to be seen as of enormous importance. In the first place, there was the advantage of place. Being permanently stationed in San Juan after 1955 (due to the generous welcome of good friends at the University of Puerto Rico, including its enterprising young Chancellor Jaime Benítez and the Dean of the College of Social Sciences, Pedro Muñoz-Amato) I was strategically located, with San Juan being set within the very center of the archipelago. When the modern cheap aviation travel system was only just beginning, travel into the rest of the region was easy and comparatively cheap; you could not do the same from New York or Chicago or even Gainesville, Florida. Secondly, there was the advantage of time. A residency beginning temporarily in 1949 and permanently after 1955 meant undertaking the adventure of Caribbean studies in a vastly undercrowded and almost non-competitive field. So-called "area studies" were only just beginning in the U.S. universities. Like the members of the Julian Steward team who wrote up their work on Puerto Rico based on their fieldwork of the late 1940s, I was, so to speak, in on the ground floor, so much so that people like Robert Manners and Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz, like myself, may properly claim to be pioneers in the systematic and scholarly study of the region. There were others, too, of course, notably men like Paul Blanshard and Eric Williams who, located in the old Anglo-American Caribbean Commission, used their position to start their own contribution. But, at best, we were, all of us, only a handful. In those early days, as a result, you could conceivably be the very first university person who arrived on an island—and especially the smaller islands—to look at it and its people. You were thereby almost automatically guaranteed a sure welcome. Today, as we all know, it is different. From being an almost totally neglected region thirty years ago, the region, today, has become probably one of

the most overworked social-sciences laboratories of the world. Visiting scholars are a dime a dozen; so much so that when they now arrive, replete with their grant funds, their sophisticated technological equipment, and sometimes even an assistant or two, it is not perhaps too much to say that the local inhabitants view them with alarm. It is also perhaps not too much to say that, as the published scholarly work has immeasurably accumulated, much of it has seriously declined in quality.

Social Science Research in the Caribbean: Perils and Pitfalls

What, then, makes the good Caribbeanist? As one chooses this field of study, either by accident or design, or a combination of both, what should be its *desiderata*? What are its pitfalls? What, not least of all, are its rewards?

Any attempt to answer such questions must surely start with a full recognition that the Caribbean still remains pretty much a Third World region suffering from a grim heritage of conquest, colonialism, poverty, economic underdevelopment, cultural oppression, and political immaturity. The European colonial powers and after 1898 the United States have used it as a pawn in their struggles, so that the historic role of the Caribbean peoples has been to accept and adjust to those struggles; as C.L.R. James has put it, they have been peoples who have had things done to them by others rather than doing things themselves. That political and economic colonialism has been at times followed by an intellectual colonialism, in which metropolitan academic work has sought to justify the colonial condition; as good an example as any is the work after 1945 of the school of British academicians, imbued with the English social-welfare mentality, which argued that the root cause of the Caribbean problem was an imperfect and disfigured family structure, going back to the curious judgment of the Moyne Commission Report of 1945 that the transfer of African slaves to the region meant that the transfer “did not involve the transfer of any important traces of their traditions and customs, but rather their almost complete destruction.” An equally apposite example comes from the French metropolitan cultural tradition, seeing the solution for the French Antillean peoples as their complete assimilation into the French *mission civilatrice*, whether of the French Right or the French Left; and it received its most damning Antillean critique in the noble *Lettre a Maurice Thorez* of Aimé Césaire in 1956 in which he resigned from a French Communist Party that shared that Eurocentrist prejudice.

It is, first and foremost, the intellectual obligation of the serious Caribbeanist to divest himself or herself of such ethnocentric assumptions, whether he, or she, is a European socialist or an American liberal, or even just a self-proclaimed value-free social scientist; or even if, indeed, he or she is a Caribbean person (for it is the worst evil of slavery that at times it can even induce the consent of the slave himself). He must seek to identify those values that, shaped by the historical evolution of the Caribbean peoples, can be seen as Caribbean values *sui generis*; and then, having identified them, to attempt to give them some reasonable sympathy.

Let me be careful as to clarify what I mean by this. I use deliberately the term “reasonable sympathy.” For I do not mean that the outsider must engulf himself in some sort of romantic psychological transformation in which he attempts to become more West Indian than West Indians themselves. We have met the type, usually radical in some way or another, both European and American, who suffer from white, middle-class guilt; in their radical *chic* manner they turn not against European or American policies but against European and American cultures as such; they are instant revolutionaries, eager to advocate Fanon’s war of “holy violence” against imperialism and colonialism; they even attempt to “go native” in their life styles, oftentimes to

the amusement of the natives themselves. In many ways, they are absurd yet tragic figures, for like Peter on the morning of Calvary they deny their own selves.

Clearly enough, sympathetic identification with the Caribbean cause does not, and ought not, to mean this. It means, rather, that the practitioner in Caribbean studies, whether insider or outsider, is at the same time a citizen, with civic responsibilities. He has the right—and indeed the obligation—to speak his mind on the various issues of public life, and especially those that are related to his academic interests and concerns. In my own case—if I may again speak autobiographically—that has meant that at various times I have spoken on the Peoples National Movement platform in Trinidad in 1956, supported the early social progressive policies of the Popular Party and government in Puerto Rico, identified myself with the trade union movement all over, and openly criticized every colonialist intervention in the region from Mr. Churchill's gunboat diplomacy in British Guiana in 1952 to President Reagan's invasion of Grenada in 1983. Not to so speak and act seems to me to be the real betrayal of the intellectual.

There are two arguments that are usually heard, often in academic circles, in criticism of this position. The first argument is that it is not the business of the academic-citizen of one country or island society to intervene in the affairs of another. The answer is, surely, that however legitimate the doctrine of non-intervention may be in the area of foreign policy it is inapplicable in the area of political and social discussion. The academic belongs to an international community of scholarship and in the Caribbean to a regional community of scholarship. The University of the West Indies itself is a regional institution; it follows logically that its contribution must be regional. That, certainly, is the one reason why every Caribbean scholar should be a regionalist. Indeed, the most persuasive argument in favor of regional integration and political federation is that they become the institutional bases for the growth of a regional public opinion, in which the open discussion of what goes on in any one single member country is not regarded as the jealously-held privilege only of the citizen body of that country. To reject that argument is to open the door to the worst form of mental *insularismo*.

The second argument against mixing academic research with political commitment is that it dangerously compromises academic "objectivity." The answer, quite simply, is that this argument confuses objectivity about method with neutrality about purpose. It is one thing to insist upon honest and careful methods of research, for everybody knows (as the recent case of Sir Alan Burt in educational studies in England shows) that cheating is not impossible even at the level of the eminent professor. It is quite another to say that research does not have social purposes, for all knowledge is socially conditioned and cannot escape the impact of its social environment. It is quite true that an academic with an outspoken political philosophy may become simply a propagandist for his ideas. But the real antidote for that is not to create an artificial separation between knowledge and life but to encourage, in each one of us, a self-imposed discipline that avoids intellectual abuse. After all, the fact that I might support the Cuban Revolution does not mean that I am obliged to ignore all of its aspects with which I disagree. The ultimate safeguard is the intellectual integrity of the scholar himself, summed up in John Locke's fine admonition that "no path whatsoever in which I tread against the dictates of my conscience shall ever lead me into the mansions of the blessed."

I am not quite certain myself that much of this counter-argument does not stem from the fact that Caribbean studies today have become almost an American monopoly. Most of the published books on the region came from the United States, although there are increasing numbers from Europe and of course from the Caribbean itself; and the overwhelming majority of the memberships of the relevant associations are North American. I do not say this from any xenophobic spirit, for I myself after all am an outsider. I mention it because the fact seems to

explain the general quality of much of what passes for Caribbean “scholarship” today. For American higher education is based upon the murderously competitive pursuit of the doctoral degree. Despite protests against the system, of which the acid essay of William James, “The Ph.D. Octopus” is the most famous, it has become the very center of the university life. Combined with too early specialization at the graduate level, it has produced a veritable avalanche of books, articles in the learned journals, edited volumes of the endless academic conferences, of which it is perhaps not too unfair to say that they are at once indigestible and unreadable. Typically, they are minute researches on a minuscule topic or a small theme. Many of them are written because they are necessary certificates in the business of promotion. They rarely approach their subject matter in any original way. They rarely see the bridge between their particular field of study and the next field. They are afraid to make large generalizations or to consider issues beyond their set boundaries. The system, altogether, develops habits of its own, it begets what the French call the *fureur de l’inédit*. It begets the obligation not to write upon a topic, however important, upon which someone else is known to be writing. It begets the passion for footnoting, the conviction that no statement will be believed unless it can be referred to an earlier document or authority.

All of these traits are evident enough in the Caribbean studies literature. You will meet the researcher who will tell you that he is concerned only with his specialty or “particular interest” or “concern.” His ambition is to become the recognized authority in his “field.” He will do his research, certainly painstakingly and conscientiously, in, say, the indices of relationships between incest and juvenile delinquency in Puerto Rican slums, or the detailed diplomatic correspondences that preceded the abolition of slavery, or the life-history, with every conceivable detail, both relevant and irrelevant, of some minor figure in the Cuba of the 1840s, or the complex patterns of family “yards” in a small Dominican village, or the pattern of friendship networks in a small Barbadian hamlet, or the mathematical percentages of acceptance and non-acceptance between migrants and locals in a Bahamian or Virgin Islands township. All of these, of course, are in and of themselves respectable enough topics for investigation. But they are all written up with very little regard for the larger picture that envelops them. In this way the great classical tradition of humanism in the scholarly endeavor is seriously compromised.

There is even more to it than all this, however. As Caribbean studies scholarship becomes more specialized it also becomes more institutionalized. This again is part of the larger American pattern. The field is taken over by the research center, the “think tank,” the wealthy philanthropic foundation. The younger scholar, who is just starting his career, is increasingly dependent upon their funding and their patronage. The foundations will publish areas of their own selection in which they announce they are willing to receive applications for financial aid, so that many candidates do not work on topics of their own choosing so much as on topics in which they consider they may obtain funding. The goal is to be invited to present a “paper” to a prestigious conference, or to contribute an article to an edited volume in which the editors will take care that no one view prevails, or to spend a six-month fellowship in a comfortable host-center in Washington or Chicago. A heavy premium thus comes to be placed on “contacts” in the upper reaches of the general academic Establishments, mainly composed of bureaucrats, administrators, and senior professors in what amounts to a closed elite club. It would be unfair to claim that they exercise ideological conformity, for many scholars of left-wing persuasions get published, including those local Caribbean scholars who have begun to learn the rules of the game. But it would not be unfair to say that this conglomerate of powerful institutions helps decide the direction of research; they promote “fads,” of which the heavy emphasis upon migration in recent years—now a heavily overpublished field—is only one example.

As an “old hand” in the field I am tempted to view this growing “Americanization” of Caribbean studies as a clear and present danger. I do not mean this in a silly anti-American spirit, for American scholars as much as any others belong to the international learning fraternity. Nor is it amiss to remind ourselves that in recent years the American universities have become welcoming havens for Caribbean scholars who have left because they are political exiles or because they are unemployed persons in the restricted Caribbean higher educational field. Nor should we forget that, from the Herskovits on, American scholars have made their own seminal contribution to Caribbean studies, including, to name a few only, Oscar Lewis, George Simpson, Sidney Mintz, Richard and Sally Price, Henry Wells, Wendell Bell, and many others.

What I mean, rather, is that the general institutionalist character of American higher education is likely to have deleterious effects as it expands its influence into the Caribbean region; for if trade follows the flag, so does intellectual enterprise. It is a system based on collective, organized research; and it is arguable that no good book was ever published by a committee, except, perhaps, the King James version of the Bible. It may not penalize the “loner,” the scholar who can only work within the dictates of his or her own private intellectual passions, and who will write the great book whatever the obstacles and difficulties; but it certainly does not much encourage him. Too much of its published academic literature is sanitized informational data which exhaustively analyzes a problem but offers little help in solving a problem in satisfactorily theoretical terms. As a conceptual tool for solutions, then, it is inadequate in a region, like the contemporary Caribbean, which over the last few decades has been researched almost to the point of death; so much so that one is tempted to say that what we need now is not yet more information but rather a sociology of solutions and final purposes set within the existential conditions of Caribbean reality.

Towards a New Caribbean Sociology

Such a sociology, of course, is already apparent in much of Caribbean studies. As it grows and matures, it ought, ideally, to have some clear purposes in mind.

First, its institutional base, that is, the university, must be genuinely democratic. Too many Caribbean universities, like the University of the West Indies, are elitist, isolated from their common citizen body. Even the University of Puerto Rico, which graduates some 3000 students a year, does so as a service-institution for government and the middle-class professions, doing very little to modify or challenge the spirit of bourgeois acquisitiveness so characteristic of those professions (the calamitous decline of the sense of public service in government is only one index of that failure). In this sense, the University has followed the pattern of the large U.S. state universities (and even the private foundations) that in their personal and institutional relationships are more geared to big government and big business than they are to organized labor, not to speak of the vast unorganized underclass of American industrial society. We need to invent a new peoples’ university, marked by the alliance of the worker by hand and the worker by brain. What I have in mind is something like the old Workers Educational Association in Britain, in which sympathetic university teachers taught evening workers’ classes for free; I myself can remember, as a young undergraduate, teaching classes of unemployed South Wales miners, among the best students I have ever had. It is suggestive that I can hardly think of one UPR faculty member today who lectures in his free time to union audiences, although there are a few more who lecture to their political party audiences. It is in this sense that the socially-conscious scholar carries his learning to those denied a university education by the system. In the Caribbean, of course, Eric Williams did it tremendously in his “University of Woodforde Square”; Walter Rodney did it before his death with the Guyanese working class; and Trevor Munroe continues to do it with his

Workers Party in Jamaica. We need much more of this: in adult education; in trade union education; in consumer education.

Secondly—and this is really part of the first point—Caribbean studies must adopt a more humanist spirit. Too much of it lacks that spirit. In part, that is because of the departmentalization of the modern academic disciplines. In part, it is because the social sciences, in particular, have uncritically borrowed the investigative tools of the natural sciences. The result is that there is a sort of Caribbean studies in which we see, not human persons, but units, models, aggregate numbers. We see work, but not the worker; trade unionism but not the trade unionist; imperialism but not the imperialist; migration but not the migrant. It is the rare book, like Oscar Lewis' *La Vida* or Sidney Mintz's *Worker in the Cane*, which allows us to hear the report of the victims of the system in their own words, with their own voices. The distinction here being made, between the study of institutions and the study of people, was well phrased by Professor Alfred Zimmerman some 75 years ago when describing the origins of British sociology at that time. "The difference between the Webbs and Graham Wallas," he wrote, "is that the Webbs are interested in town councils and Wallas is interested in town councilors." So if Caribbean scholarly enterprise needs democratizing it also needs humanizing. Perhaps the first step in that direction should be to begin a philosophic revolution designed to bring back the fragmentalized disciplines into a new, human totality; to go back as it were, to the older nineteenth century conceptualizations of Political Economy and Culture History.

Along such a road it is possible that there lies the path to a new phase of Caribbean studies. We perhaps sometimes forget that the study of the Caribbean has an old and honorable tradition. Far from being a modern phenomenon, as many seem to think, it in fact goes back to the very beginnings of post-Colombian experience. As early as the sixteenth century Fray Ramón Pane is the first Caribbean ethnologist, Padre Las Casas the first Caribbean anthropologist, Oviedo and Peter Mártir the first Caribbean historians. The eighteenth-century planter-historians like Long and Edwards continued the tradition, albeit from a pro-slavery viewpoint. The great schools of Haitian and Cuban writers and bibliophiles laid the foundations of modern African studies in the nineteenth century. And in the modern twentieth century the great amateur-scholars like Ortiz and Price-Mars, trained in the European anthropological tradition, made us understand the deep roots of *africanity* and *negritude*. All of these schools, moreover, saw the Caribbean society and the Caribbean person in holistic terms; they did not assume that they could cut them up into separate slices, with each slice having an independent life of its own. It is to that tradition that we should seek to return. As we do that, we shall possibly be able to arrive at an imaginative image of what the true Caribbeanist really should be.

Conclusion

What, then, finally, should the Caribbeanist be? There is, of course, no magic formula for success in any field of intellectual endeavor. Each intellectual worker is different, for the eccentricity of human nature will always assert itself. The seminal influences will be different in each case; Eric Williams was shaped by Oxford, Fanon by Paris. Locale will also make a difference; there is a world of difference between those writers, like Lamming and Walcott, who decide to remain in the Caribbean and those, like Naipaul, who opt for the life of the voluntary exile. Fate and Chance, as always in life, will play their role: C.L.R. James lives to a ripe old age, Walter Rodney dies tragically young. The circumstances of private life will take their toll, for health and happiness are not automatically vouchsafed to any of us; the genius of a Caribbean historian like Elsa Goveia was cut short by a terrible illness that haunted her all of her life.

Within the framework of these necessities, then, what could be regarded as the duties and obligations of the professional student of the Caribbean? I say “professional,” of course, advisedly. For during my own time-span in the region it has been possible still to meet the Victorian type of the gentleman-scholar, not related to the university life, yet at the same time an assiduous student of the region. There was Richard Moore, for example, whose library on the general history of the Negro is now at the Barbados campus of the University of the West Indies. Another was the remarkable Jamaican Ansell Hart, lawyer by profession, who over a lifetime became the leading authority on the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, edited his own monthly scholarly letter, and built up two vast private libraries of Caribbeana which he donated, in turn, to the University of the West Indies, all before dying at the age of 93. But these, obviously are exceptions; and most Caribbean scholars today will be related in one way or the other to university life and teaching. They are the academic clerisy.

As such, the duties and obligations almost impose themselves. There is teaching, where the Caribbeanist must at once seek to impart his enthusiasm for the subject to his students and help recruit those, who as potential scholars, will follow in his footsteps. There is reading, where he must keep up, as best he can, with everything currently published. If he is in the general area of developmental economics and planning he will find himself involved with governmental consultancy work which, because it pays well, may well distract him from original research and writing; the discipline is full of people whose final contribution has been that of technical reports lying unread and unimplemented in agency office filing cabinets. But this of course does not make that kind of public service invalid, and I myself over the years have made reports for various territorial governments, as well as regional bodies like CARICOM, not to mention serving as External Examiner to the University of the West Indies.

Yet in the final analysis we judge the scholar, in every field, by what he or she publishes; more particularly, by the publication of the really seminal book which either significantly enlarges the body of knowledge or, by the sheer power of its analysis, sheds new light upon what we know already. Caribbean scholarly literature is rich in such titles: Ortiz’ *Contrapunto Cubano*, Price-Mars’ *Ainsi Parle l’Oncle*, James’ *Black Jacobins*, Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery*, Goveia’s *Historiography of the British West Indies*, Moreno Fragninals’ *El Ingenio*, Ragatz’s *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean*, Debien’s *Les esclaves aux Antilles Francaises*, Fouchard’s *Les marrons de la liberté*, and others. Individually and collectively, they constitute the yardstick by which we must measure each new contribution. They are at once an encouragement and a warning. An encouragement, because they demonstrate how a tiny region like the Caribbean can produce an intellectual output out of all proportion to its size. A warning, because they tell us that such work is the fruit of toil and effort sometimes almost crucifying in the demands that they make upon the individual author.

For how the individual author creates the great book, in Caribbean or other studies, is of course a Delphic mystery. The Brönte sisters created their novels out of a turmoil of Romantic passions; Trollope wrote his novels—as he tells us in his autobiography—based on a carefully planned utilitarian daily work schedule that almost reads like an accountant preparing an income-tax return. In Caribbean studies, Eric Williams turned his back on the distractions of his own Trinidadian hedonistic society, while C.L.R. James seems to have seen himself as some sort of creole Byron. Whatever the case, it is surely certain that the writer, starting, of course, with his own intrinsic genius, without which nothing else is possible, must possess dedication, industry, method, and an almost masochistic readiness for hard work. He must have the stern self-discipline that makes the great pianist like Serkin or the great guitarist like Segovia or, for that matter, that makes the great heavyweight boxing champion or the great cyclist who can win the *Tour de France*. He must be prepared to face the loneliness of the long distance runner. He

must, in a way, be the Puritan in Babylon, so that he can put aside all of the distractions that beset him in the kind of pagan, acquisitive society in which he lives; that might even mean—and it is a hard saying—putting aside even wife or husband, children and friends; for he or she, if worth their salt, will be possessed of a demonic urge to write that nothing else will satisfy or allay. Every worthwhile writer, in brief, is possessed by an addiction that no doctor can ever cure. His final reward is that he will leave behind him a body of work that age shall not wither nor time condemn.

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