The Caribbean in the World:
Imaginative Geographies in the Independence Age

By

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Abstract

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"Wherever the sugar plantation and slavery existed," wrote the famed Trinidadian scholar C.L.R. James, "they imposed a pattern. It is an original pattern, not European, not African, not a part of the American main,…but West Indian, sui generis, with no parallels anywhere else." These lines appear in James's 1963 essay "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," which he appended that year to a new edition of *The Black Jacobins*, his seminal history of the Haitian Revolution first released in 1938. Writing at a time when the British West Indies' attainment of independence, coincident with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, had prompted many Caribbean politicos and intellectuals to propose that the region's diverse territories confederate into one regional nation, James argued that those territories, no matter their divides of language and history, should be understood to share a common culture and destiny. He also argued that the peoples of the Caribbean "nation" – belonging, as they did, to societies created and shaped for centuries by their links to European powers – had a unique and special role to play, among the world's formerly colonized peoples, in shaping the future of world civilization.

This dissertation engages with James's arguments to explore how, across the past half-century, the Caribbean has been imagined – both in the Caribbean and worldwide – to be a coherent cultural region. Engaging with broader debates among geographers and other scholars about the uses and abuses of the "region" as analytic and political tool, I use the concept of "imaginative geography" to explore why and how various representative figures – from popular musicians to novelists to theoreticians – have shaped understandings of "Caribbeanness," both in the islands and worldwide. Today James's dream of formalizing the West Indian "nation" into a unified state is long past, but the impetus to think in terms of region that he once exemplified has persisted – and indeed grown – among Caribbean thinkers. Moreover, I argue, his predictions about the import of Caribbean cultures in the cultural landscape of the wider world, aided by the massive outflow of Caribbean emigrants to Northern cities, have in many ways come true. From the emergence of Harry Belafonte as "the first black matinee idol" in North Atlantic pop cultures; to the rise of Fidel Castro as figurehead of the non-Aligned Third World during the Cold War; to the emergence and continued salience of Bob Marley as

the “first Third World Superstar”; to the outsized number of brilliant writers, from Walcott and Marshall to Díaz and Danticat, who in addressing experiences particular to the Caribbean, have spoken with often unexcelled eloquence to universal themes – these exponents of the Caribbean as region and idea have succeeded, for better or worse, in supplying to the world some of our most widespread stories about bondage and freedom; racial purity and mixture; art and politics. This dissertation offers an account of how and why this has came to pass, in the decade’s since C.L.R. James published his revised history of the epochal slave revolt in the French sugar colony of Saint-Domingue by which, as he put it, “West Indians first became aware of themselves as a people.”



Courtesy the University of California Library

Maoires Minores que Insulae Hispaniola, Cuba Lucaia et Caribes.
From *Beschrijvinghe van West-Indiën* (1630) Joannes de Laet, ed.

"The indigenous Carib and Arawak Indians, living by their own lights long before the European adventure, gradually disappear in a blind, wild forest of blood. That mischievous gift, the sugar cane, is introduced, and a fantastic human migration moves to the New World of the Caribbean; deported crooks and criminals, defeated soldiers and Royalist gentlemen fleeing from Europe, slaves from the West Coast of Africa, East Indians, Chinese, Corsicans, and Portuguese. The list is always incomplete, but they all move and meet on an unfamiliar soil, in an unpredictable and infinite range of custom and endeavour, people in the most haphazard combinations, surrounded by memories of splendour and misery, the sad and dying kingdom of Sugar, a future full of promises. And always the sea!"

-George Lamming

“We’re all in the Caribbean, if you think about it.”

-Junot Díaz

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I.

The Caribbean in the World: An Introduction

> "There lay the islands in the night, suspended between the stars and the sea's bottom with the abstraction of thoughts: the stages of a thesis that was still to be unraveled."
>
> -Patrick Leigh Fermor, *The Traveler's Tree*[1]

In November 1963, Vintage Books in New York released a new edition of *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James's celebrated history of the Haitian Revolution. In the quarter-century from its initial appearance in London in 1938, the book—though already a touchstone for many Pan-African and anti-colonial thinkers worldwide—had fallen out of print. Its itinerant author had moved from England to the United States shortly before World War II; returned to Europe for a few years after being expelled from the US as a subversive in 1953; and finally, in 1958, returned to his home-island of Trinidad for the first time since 1932, when he'd departed his life as a colonial schoolteacher to board a trans-Atlantic steamer with the manuscript of a novel with which he hoped to launch a literary career in the metropole.

Now 62 years old, James had returned to his homeland as a prodigal hero. Having abandoned his fiction-ambitions in Depression-era England to become a Trotskyist ("the world went political, and I went with it," he would recall), he had become in the intervening years a key cog in the Pan-Africanist movement. Impelled to return home by the British West Indies' coming independence, he arrived to Trinidad at the behest of the island's new Prime Minister, Eric Williams, a one-time student of James's at the island's Queens Royal College for Boys.[2] By 1960, James' involvement in Williams's party had soured amidst clashing egos and James's frustration at his old mentee's moderate politics. (After failing in an attempt to establish a rival party to the left of Williams's Peoples National Movement, James left Trinidad in 1962.) But the momentous developments which had prompted James's return to the Caribbean—the British West Indies attainment of independence, coincident with the triumph of the Cuban Revolution—suffused his

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[1] Patrick Leigh Fermor, *The Traveler's Tree: A Journey Through the Caribbean Islands*. 1953. (New York: New York Review Classics, 2010) 396.

[2] C.L.R. James, undated letter to Constance Webb, 1944, collected in *Special Delivery: The Letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1948* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 31.

decision to release a revised history of the epochal slave revolt in Saint-Domingue by which, as he put it, "West Indians first became aware of themselves as a people."[3]

James left the main text of *The Black Jacobins* unchanged, save for adding a few lambent paragraphs about Toussaint's demise to its final chapter—a few lines, as David Scott has brilliantly argued, which perhaps served to alter James's narrative frame of Toussaint's story from one of romance to that of tragedy (and thereby, Scott suggests, supplanting the romantic vision of anti-colonial struggle current in 1938 with a rendering more resonant with the messy complexities of postcolonial independence).[4] More substantively, the new edition included a post-script "appendix" in which James offered a new interpretation of the Haitian Revolution's significance in light of recent events and the Caribbean's future prospects. The essay's thrust was conveyed in its title: "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro"—though the two outsized figures in Caribbean history, James opens by emphasizing, are not invoked as a merely "convenient or journalistic demarcation of historical time." He continues:

> Castro's revolution is of the twentieth century as much as Toussaint's was of the eighteenth. But despite the distance of over a century and a half, both are West Indian. The people who made them, the problems and the attempts to solve them, are peculiarly West Indian, the product of a peculiar origin and a peculiar history.[5]

The salient link between Toussaint and Fidel "is not that both led revolutions in the West Indies." Rather, it is what their respective struggles—waged on different islands against different foes, separated by 150 years—evince about the Caribbean as a region possessed of intrinsic commonalities. [6] No matter the divides of language or sea, for James—a British colonial describing the events taking place on islands from the erstwhile imperiums of France and Spain – the Caribbean islands were bound together by a shared geography, culture, and history with key implications for their collective future. The past of "the disparate islands" had been marked by "a series of uncoordinated periods of drift, punctuated by spurts, leaps, and catastrophes," but the "inherent movement is clear and strong."[7] That movement, inaugurated with the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1803, had reached its apotheosis with the Cuban Revolution—an event that marked "the ultimate stage of the Caribbean quest for national identity."[8] Implied in this statement is the contention in James's "appendix" in which I'm most interested here: that one can only understand the history and destiny of the Caribbean's constituent territories and peoples by viewing them as part of a single coherent region (or "nation," in James's verbiage).

To advance his case James contends that the entire region shares a common past. Namely: "the history of West Indies is governed by two factors, the sugar plantation and Negro Slavery." Arguing that no matter the variations of intensity or kind with which

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[3] C.L.R. James, "Appendix: From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro." *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1963) 391

[4] See David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004)

[5] James 391

[6] In James's own usage, "West Indies" is synonymous with "Caribbean" (though the term, more commonly, is often used to connote the lesser Antilles once part of the British empire)

[7] James (1963) 391.

[8] James (1963) 391.

these "factors" were implanted in the region, James writes that "wherever the sugar plantation and slavery existed, they imposed a pattern…not European, not African, not a part of the American main."[9] What distinguished the life of Negro slaves in the Caribbean from the 16th century on is that "they lived a life that was in its essence a modern life."[10] Caribbean societies, at once created for and sustained by intra-continental trade, and based in what was an industrial mode of production, were places where "the slaves live together in a social relation far closer than any proletariat of the time," and where "even the cloth the slaves wore and the food they ate was imported."[11]

The implications of these facts are crucial for James in outlining the *longue durée* of Caribbean history—and, moreover, in describing the prospective role of the inchoate Caribbean "nation" in the development of the formerly colonized world—and of the West at large. "Of all the formerly colonial colored peoples," James wrote, "the West Indian masses are the most highly experienced in the ways of Western civilization and most receptive to its requirements in the twentieth century."[12] (Contemporary scholars – and not a few of his anti-colonial contemporaries—have been often put off by James's characteristic embrace of something called "Western civilization"—but the concept for James, a passionate devotee of Plato and Beethoven, cricket tests and Thackeray novels, was a deeply important one.)[13] It was not by accident that West Indians, bound together by their unique and early involvement in the broader story of European modernity, had in the preceding few decades formed the vanguard of anti-colonial thought and black internationalism (in the person of figures like Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Aimé Cesaire, and Frantz Fanon—not to mention James himself). And it was not by accident, either, that the region wherein the world's "first truly modern revolution" took place (in Haiti) had also birthed, in Cuba, the Revolution that would soon be seen as a model for the fight against imperialism for all the nations of what was in the early 1960s coming to be known as the Third World.

"No race possesses the monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of force," James quotes admiringly from Aimé Cesaire near the end of his new postscript to *The Black*

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[9] James (1963) 391.
[10] James (1963) 392.
[11] James (1963) 392.
[12] James (1963) 410.
[13] As George Lamming, the distinguished Bajan novelist (and James's friend) recently put it to an interviewer: "[James] has a view on the Caribbean and Non-Aligned Movement that you have to have reservations about. James never really abandoned, to this day, in spite of all that has happened, the idea that the supreme good fortune of the Caribbean was its link to European civilization – that was the thing – and its link to what we would regard as the major languages. This is the problem of what we would call the Euro-centered James. And related to that, James believed that [link] gave the developed intellect in the region a very special advantage vis-à-vis something called the Third World, in the sense that it was universalized by the very nature of the European in influence upon it. What he would mean is that if you had a Caribbean as one, a federated Caribbean as one, that region would have had the intellectual resources that could have been very decisive in its influence on African leadership. He means of course the case of [George] Padmore and [Kwame] Nkrumah, and that would multiply with whomever would be the Martinican equivalent of influence on French Africa and so forth. This is one of the things he would have in mind. There are people who would not buy that. People who say that the evolution of its own interpretation of Europe was inevitable. There would be an African sensibility and an African mold of perceiving reality that would find serious deficiencies in the Caribbean." From "C.L.R. James: West Indian. George Lamming interviewed by Paul Buhle." *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*, Paget Henry and Paul Buhle, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992) 28-38.

Jacobins, "and there is a place for all at the rendezvous of victory."[14] The Caribbean "race"—and more precisely, its impetus toward overcoming the region's traumatic history, an impetus which had erupted once in Haiti and again in Cuba—would have no small gifts to offer at the "rendezvous of victory." What is at stake for James in the Caribbean's people conceiving of their quest for freedom and identity in regional terms, is not merely that such a conception is the necessary pre-condition for its societies' self-realization, but that that self-realization—a goal only attainable through an understanding of the Caribbean as coherent region—will carry with it benefits of crucial import for the whole of humanity.

* * *

As with much of James's polemical work, in reading this 1963 "appendix" one is struck equally by his outsized ambition and learning and his occasionally flippant approach to evidence. (Having laid out his argument about the importance of slavery in forging West Indian identity, for example, he first argues "that [the fact that] the majority of the population in Cuba was never slave does not affect the underlying social identity" and then, later, blithely states that "Cuba is the most West Indian island in the West Indies.") Below I will discuss some of the ways various thinkers have differed or concurred with James's formulation about the Caribbean as region. For now, however, equally important as James's' argument is understanding the historical context which occasioned it.

For just as one cannot read James's 1938 account of the Haitian Revolution without understanding it as an outgrowth of James's political preoccupations at the time—namely, his understanding of Trotskyism and the devolution of the Bolshevik Revolution, on the one hand, and his understanding of Toussaint's Revolution as inspirational template for anti-colonial struggle in contemporary Africa, on the other—so too does one need to view his revisions in light of the new context of1963. And in this aspect, perhaps most crucial of all was James's preoccupation with the cause of West Indian federation, an ideal he'd advocated on returning to Trinidad and continued to do so even as the prospects of its actually happening were dwindling to nil in the early 1960s. (The final end to James's association with Williams arrived with the latter's decision to pull out of the West Indies Federation in 1962.)

Today the always-quixotic dream of formalizing the Caribbean or West Indian "nation" into a unified state is past (save, of course, for the existence of regional trade and treaty agreements, not to mention the West Indies cricket team). But part of what I will argue here is that the impetus to think in terms of region that James exemplified in 1963 has persisted—and indeed grown—among Caribbean intellectuals over the half-century since. Moreover, as I will also argue, James's prognostications about the import of those cultures and struggles in the cultural landscape of the wider world over that time—aided by the massive outflow of Caribbean emigrants to Northern cities—have in many ways come true. From the 1950s emergence of Harry Belafonte as the "King of Calypso" and the first black matinee idol in the North Atlantic pop cultures; to the 1960s rise of Fidel Castro as figurehead of the non-Aligned Third World during the Cold War; to the 1970s emergence and continued salience of Bob Marley as the "first Third World Superstar"; to the outsized number of brilliant writers, from Naipaul, Marshall and

[14] Cesaire, *Cahier de un retour au pays natal* (1939) as quoted by James (1963) 401

Walcott, to Díaz, Chamoiseau, and Danticat, who in addressing experiences particular to the Caribbean and its diasporas have spoken with often unexcelled eloquence to universal themes – these exponents of the Caribbean as region and idea have supplied to the world some of our most durable and widespread stories about some of the defining antinomies of the age: slavery and freedom; racial purity and mixture; art and politics. That they have so succeeded may well be down, in some measure, to the legacies of the material history James identifies; I certainly think so. In examining the development of what Edoaurd Glissant has called "Caribbean discourse," though, my aim is not to prove or deny James's (or anyone else's) prescriptive views about the *essential* facts of Caribbean ontology. It is, rather, to trace the lineaments and force of a conversation, joined by Caribbean people – people, that is, from an archipelago of societies forged to serve the aims of distant powers – to define their history, and their region, for themselves, in the hald-century since James addended "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro" to *The Black Jacobins*. So doing, this dissertation aims to offer a new reading of how and why – in a global era shaped by anti-colonial hopes and post-colonial disappointments, mass-migration from the nations of the underdeveloped world to the wealthy ones of the North, and new technologies affording the formation of "transantional social fields" (e.g. jetliners, the internet)—the concept of region maintains a key, if evolving, valence for people from the Caribbean, and beyond.

1.2 Geographies, Epistemologies: The Problem of Regions

> "A historian of geographic ideas…who stays within the limits of his discipline sips a thin gruel because these almost invariably are derived from broader inquiries like the origin and nature of life, the nature of man, the physical and biological characteristics of the earth. Of necessity they are spread widely over many areas of thought."
>
> -Clarence Glacken[15]

> "I think that the immediate need is to regionalize [the] struggle, that cultural struggle."
>
> -George Lamming[16]

In his influential 1939 treatise *The Nature of Geography*, Richard Hartshorne defined his discipline as "the science of regions".[17] Today Hartshorne's conception of geography as unitary science, like the impetus to singly define a notoriously diffuse field, has mostly fallen from fashion. Yet for geographers—or anyone, really, who would think about change across space—the concept of region still holds pride of place. "The geographer," as David Harvey writes, "tends to filter out small-scale variation and large-scale variation

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[15] Clarence Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) xiii.
[16] Lamming in Henry and Buhle 35.
[17] Richard Hartshorne, *The Nature of Geography. A Critical Survey of Current Thought in the Light of the Past* (Lancaster, PA: Association of American Geographers, 1939) 35.

and to concentrate his attention upon systems which have meaning at a regional scale of resolution."[18] The claim is hard to dispute. But the very vagueness of the relative terms (i.e. "small-scale" and "large-scale") suggests the truth that regions are as much rhetorical and imaginative tools as they are analytic or empirical ones.[19] Of critical use not merely to geographers, ecologists, and sociologists, but to policy-makers, marketers, and artists as well, regions are of neither uniform size nor uniform criteria. They may be large or small, climatic or cultural, human-made (a "metropolitan region") or hydrologic (the "eco-region" of a watershed or habitat). About all that one can say about regions in general is that they are units of space larger than local and smaller than global, and that they delimit areal difference: this region, marked by x and y, is different from this one marked by a and b.

To think about a region *geographically*, however, necessarily means not only to define a region by one characteristic but to explore its implication—to relate that characteristic, in other words, to that region's other attributes: if the region is defined climatically, in what relation does its culture stand to climate? If the region is defined by language, in what relation does its economy stand to its language? These are the meta-questions that have been the human geographer's stock-in-trade at least since the late-nineteenth-century moment when Freidrich Ratzel, building on the germinal ideas of his forebear Carl Ritter, elaborated the concept of *lebensraum* (living space), and Ratzel's contemporary Paul Vidal de la Blache that of *milieu* across the Alps in the South of France.[20] Since that time the history of geography as academic discipline has been, in many ways, an extended argument over the relative importance of various factors—culture and climate, society and environment—in producing the regions (or their variants "culture areas," *milieus*, *lebensraums*, *landschafts*, and "landscapes") by which humans forge communities and frame relations to their environment and to their fellows. The normative ideas informing these questions have evolved a great deal—from the

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[18] David Harvey, *Explanation in Geography* (Baltimore, MD: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1969) 484.

[19] Not to overstate the case: it is important to note that Hartshorne, like many geographers of his generation – and despite the fact that he was writing previous both to the Kuhnian revolution in the epistemology of science, and the post-structuralist turn in the humanities, was at that time already fully alive to the epistemological conundrums posed by any "scientific" conception of regions. "Regions," as Hartshorne himself wrote, "[were] not inherent in the world which the geographer studies – neither in the world of nature nor in actual world which nature and man have made." See Hartshorne 362. And further: "The most we can say is that any particular unit of land has significant relations with all the neighboring units and that in certain respects it may be more closely related with a particular group of units than with others, but not necessarily in all respects. The regional entities which we construct on this basis are therefore in the full sense mental constructions; they are entities only in our thoughts, even though we find them to be constructions that provide some sort of intelligent basis for organizing our knowledge of reality." See Hartshorne 275. On Hartshorne's "noetically constructed" approach to regions, and his Kantian outlook more generally, see also David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition* (London: Blackwell, 1992) 309.

[20] Freidrich Ratzel, *The History of Mankind*, Trans. A.J. Butler, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1896-8). Paul Vidal de la Blache, "Rapports de la Sociologie avec la Géographie," *Revue Internationale de Sociologie* 12 (1904): 309-13; "Les Genres de Vie dans la Géographie Humaine," *Annales de Géographie* 20 (1911): 193-212; 289-304; Vidal de la Blache, *Principles of Human Geography*, Trans. Millicent Todd Bingham (New York: Henry Holt, 1950). On Geography's history as academic and scholarly enterprise, see Preston James and Geoffrey Martin, *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas*, 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley, 1981); and David Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

dominance, in the early twentieth century, of environmental determinism; to the departure from environmental determinism signaled by the Berkeley School argument that the object of geography was to study how human cultures shape environment (or "landscape," in Carl Sauer's lexicon) rather than vice-versa; through to today's widespread rejection of functionalisms of either kind, and the consonant emphasis on understanding space as always already processural, contingent, produced. Even as the epistemological and methodological lenses have evolved, however, the drive to think in terms of regions persists.[21]

And so, too, persists the basic principle that thinking in terms of regions means to think in terms of *synthesis*. To "do geography," as R.C. Harris puts it, means to cultivate "the habit of seeing the complex of factors that make up the character of places, regions, or landscapes: in a word, by a breadth of synthesis."[22] By definition synthesis involves more than the collection of empirical data; it entails the organization and interpretation of said data. The tension between these two epistemic strands—the empirical and absolute on the one hand; the discursive and representational on the other—has been at the heart of the scholarly practice known as geography from the start. To speak of "geography" can on the one hand mean to invoke an empirical reality (e.g., to refer to "the geography" of San Francisco is to refer to its hills and bay); it can also, however, signify that reality's *representation* in map or text, this being the sense implied in the word itself—from the latin *geo* (world) and graph (to write). To participate in the latter, to *do* geography, means to "write the world": not merely to represent or interpret it, but to write stories—narratives with explanatory power—about it.

This sense of "doing geography" perhaps calls to mind a kind of practitioner-as-poet: a Rimbaud-ian romantic forging regions out of the alchemy of phenomenological experience and his own brain. And indeed there is something of this image in totemic figures from the disciplinary past like Alexander von Humboldt, or even Carl Sauer—wanderers of the earth's surface who synthesize their experience into cogent tales about the unitary essence of say, Patagonia or the Ozark Highlands. However, regions like Patagonia or the Ozark Highlands—or, more to point here, regions like New England or the Caribbean—do not, of course, spring fully formed from the cogitations of solitary men. Such widely and powerfully imagined regions gain popular traction as a result of complex historical processes, and as the result of an ever-changing sum of how environments are settled and experienced by groups of people, how places are framed in stories told and re-told, taught and argued over in schools, projected and contested in the media, reified by governments and contested by citizens.

In recent decades, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and historians have provided many new tools for understanding how social ideas, geographic or otherwise, operate within the "machineries" of representation in a culture to play a *constitutive*, and not merely reflexive, role in the making of social and political life.[23] Whatever extent such scholars' work has been explicitly engaged with geography, their

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[21] See Carl Sauer's seminal paper "The Morphology of Landscape", *University of California Publications in Geography* 2.2 (1925): 19-54.

[22] R.C. Harris, "Theory and synthesis in historical geography," *Canadian Geographer* 15 (1971): 62.

[23] Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996) (Reprinted from *ICA Documents 7: Black Film, British Cinema*, edited by Kobena Mercer, 1989) 443.

ideas have gained a wide resonance among geographers and other scholars explicitly engaged with questions of space. Exponents of the emergent field of cultural studies, especially, have produced work that articulates with the rich stream of recent scholarship on nations and nationalism examining such topics as the discursive construction of national identities—and nations themselves—through literature and other cultural texts; the raciological (and biological) conceptions of culture around which "national imaginaries" are based; the trajectory of the national state as the paradigmatic political unit of modernity.[24] I pause to note this body of work because scholarship on the nation—an entity which after all remains, as Akhil Gupta rightly argues, the "hegemonic representation of…spatial identity"[25]—has afforded such a crucial vein of insight into the constitutive role of geography in the production of political and cultural identities, and thus of political and cultural groups (national or otherwise) as well. For just as nations function by dint of certain "guiding fictions" about their histories, so too do they function by shared conceptions of their spatial constitution (and perhaps just as important, of their spatial outside). [26] And just as conceptions of history are not fomented by professional historians alone, so too (it bears repeating), are the production of such geographic imaginaries not the exclusive domain of the professional geographer. Whether in the form of newscast, novel, or rock song, geography does not always speak its name. It is in myths and movies, laws and songs and books, and in the geographic and historical stories told and retold therein, that nations are born and by which they are sustained.

Proving the hows and whys of the processes by which complex social imaginaries take hold and have real effects in the world is never easy. But surely one of the reasons that nations and nationalism have provided such clear lenses through which to illuminate the links between geographic thought and material reality is the truth that nations – the ones which are also states, anyway—are possessed of materials and powers: of bombs and border-fences, prisons and immigration laws—of the materials and powers, in other words, with which to make manifest the geographic stories by which they exist. And make manifest those stories they do. As Timothy Mitchell observes of borders, for example: "Setting up and policing a frontier involves a variety of fairly modern practices —continuous barbed-wire fencing, passports, immigration laws, inspections, currency control and so on. These mundane arrangements, most of them unknown two-hundred or even one-hundred years ago, help manufacture a transcendental entity, the nation state."[27] Borders are the place, that is, where a metaphysical entity (the nation) is made real. To take a familiar example: the United States' recurrent moves, during the past decade, to erect and reinforce a militarized border-wall with Mexico, suggest the role that the very

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[24] Homi K. Bhabha, "Dissemi-nation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." *Nation and Narration*, Ed. Homi K. Bhabha. (London: Routledge, 1990): 291-320; Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communites: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991). Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

[25] Akhil Gupta, "The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism." *Current Anthropology* 7.1 (1992): 6-23.

[26] The phrase is Edmund Morgan's. See Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1989)

[27] Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State" *American Political Science Review* 85.1 (1991): 91.

idea of the border (and of what lies beyond it) has come to play in US political and cultural life: as a kind of mental barrier as much as a physical one: the line in our national consciousness that separates Us from Them, Resident from Alien, Order from Chaos.

The existence of such literally concrete realities as the border-wall evince the truth that descrying the material results of the geographic ideas as tied to nations is in many cases not difficult. By contrast, illuminating the material and political exigencies of a *region* (especially a region, one might add in present context, composed mostly of islands without land borders to set up and control) is a more slippery proposition. While some supra-national regions have operationalized their existence in institutional form—one thinks here of the European Union (a regional "community," as has been made clear in recent debates over whether to admit Turkey as a member, based on a crucial if usually unspoken set of shared narratives about common history, religion, and—still more taboo but doubtless present—of shared race)—they are rare. Most regions, whether supra- or sub-national, become no more tangible than their existence in tourist brochures and books. Far be it to say, however, that for this reason alone regional imaginaries cannot have "real-world" material effects. As Edward Said famously showed in *Orientalism*, even the power of a regional discourse that originates outside its object-region—indeed perhaps especially so in such cases—can have profound effects in the way in which persons and nations from that region's member-territories are conceived of, dealt with, and acted upon in the world, in registers both intimate and geopolitical (a legacy, in the case of the "Orient," as Said's geographer-admirers like Derek Gregory have shown to penetrating effect, which continues to the United States' prosecution of The Global War on Terror).

As I shall discuss in more detail below, my study will draw upon and dialogue with Said's work, but it will differ in key ways. Not least for its smaller scope and ambition. But more substantively, for the truth that what I term here "Caribbean Discourse," following Glissant, differs in some key ways from Said's Orientalist analogue.[28] While the "Caribbean," as a region first imagined in conjunction with projects of colonial domination, shares much with Said's Orient, the Caribbean, as region and as idea, has had a very different career in the lives, and the politics, of its people and nations. Most simply (and reductively) put: citizens of Lebanon or Yemen do not, generally speaking, care about or act upon their shared membership in something called the "Orient"; people in Jamaica and Puerto Rico, by contrast, have frequently done so with respect to the Caribbean.

Below I will discuss the causes and consequence of this truth in more detail, especially as it relates to the particulars of colonial and postcolonial history in the region, and the historical relation of the Caribbean's territories both to their old colonial masters and to one another. However, this is not the place to belabor the differing discursive histories of Orient and Caribbean. For now, what I wish to affirm is simply that how a region is imagined, and reified in cultural discourse and otherwise, *matters*. No matter that the material effects of regional imaginaries and discourses are oftentimes more obscure than those tied to nations by dint of the fact that regions are less readily tied to the concrete and coercive practices of state-power, how a region is imagined and gains

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[28] See Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999).

valence in the world *does* have real material effects. For example, in the case of the Caribbean: in negotiating the existence of regional free-trade agreements crucial to the economies of member-states; in impacting the kinds of jobs available in the islands, especially as tied to tourism (they as hotel cleaners, "rent-a-dread" sex-workers or otherwise); and in determining which northern cities, neighborhoods, and occupations wherein Caribbean emigrants may settle in and build futures.

Perhaps most important to affirm here, however, is the truth that regions are contingent. Like all geographic imaginaries, they are produced out of certain histories and material realities, and are re-produced and re-negotiated in the context of changing circumstance – political and economic, demographic and ecological. Which is not to say, of course, that geographic imaginaries respond in immediate, one-to-one ways, to changes "on the ground": on the contrary, it is the very point of geographic ideas to gain authority as they become embedded in cultural institutions and government policies, and thereby traffic in the other direction to leave their imprint on the societies they nominally describe. As Said writes of texts emerging from Orientalist discourse that purport a certain kind of knowledge about the Orient: "such texts can not only *create* knowledge, but also the very reality they appear to describe."[29] As Krista Thompson has shown in the context of the Caribbean, for example, the circulation and reproduction of a certain photographic representation of the "Caribbean picturesque" had a profound impact on the organization of space (and the "tropicalization") of the built environment on islands with tourism-based economies.[30] Tracing some of the other means by which such processes have transpired in the Caribbean is one key impetus for this study.

My dissertation will not and cannot be comprehensive in meeting this aim. But what I hope to achieve is an accounting of some of the key ways and means by which the Caribbean—as region and as idea—has been imagined during the past half-century, and an accounting of how those imaginings have impacted not only the life and culture of the Caribbean and its diasporas, but have gained an outsized resonance in the cultural landscape of the wider world.

1.3 The Caribbean as Region and as Idea

> "Wherever the sugar plantation and slavery existed, they imposed a pattern. It is an original pattern, not European, not African, not a part of the American main, not native in any conceivable sense of that word, but West Indian, *sui generis*, with no parallels anywhere else."
>
> -C.L.R. James[31]

> "The unity is sub-marine."
>
> -Edward Kamau Brathwaite[32]

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[29] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978) 94.
[30] Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006)
[31] James (1963) 391.

At least since the October day in 1492 when Christopher Columbus dropped anchor off the shore of an island he took to be part of Asia and wrote in his journal of "the most beautiful land I have seen," the Caribbean has been the object of fantasies projected from without, and of steady debate—waged by colonial overlords and postcolonial residents alike—about the relation in which its islands stand to one other, and to the rest of the world. A far-flung archipelago cross-cut by different languages reflecting distinct colonial histories; peopled by the diverse descendents of persons brought to work plantations of indigo and cane; linked in deep and divergent ways to old colonial masters in Europe and to the mainland-nations of North and South America—the Caribbean's existence as a coherent region has been anything but a foregone conclusion.

In place-names lie stories, and in the etymology of *Caribbean* are embedded key clues about the past that created the region as imagined today. The sea which gives the region its name was, for the first two or three centuries after Columbus's arrival, nameless: registered by the Spanish as an undifferentiated part of the Mar del Norte (as they termed all parts of Western Atlantic), and known to English navigators as the Spanish Main (the term, confusingly, that they also used for the South American littoral to the sea's south – what the Spanish called Tierra Firme). When exactly the Caribbean Sea – a body of water more-or-less discrete, ringed by the Antilles and the Central and South American main, saltier than the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean it abuts– first began to be called the Caribbean is unknown. But in 1773 the British cartographer Thomas Jefferys wrote in the introduction to his 1773 *West Indies Atlas*: "It has been sometimes called the Caribbean Sea, which name it would be better to adopt, than to leave this space quite anonymous."[33] He did so on his map. The term "Caribbean" refers to the Carib, the indigenous group predominant on the lesser Antilles at the time of first contact, but by the time of Jeffery's *Atlas* already largely erased by war and disease from the area bearing their name.

In Spanish lore, the Carib were differentiated from the more peaceable Arawak (whom the Carib had themselves driven from many of the islands) by their practice of cannibalism. Evidence of the Carib actually eating people is scant. But the term "Caribbean"'s phonetic resemblance to "cannibal" (and, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, to the name of Caliban, oft-discussed as the originary Caribbean figure in Western letters) suggests how this "savage" region was viewed by the European powers who *made* its member-societies as they exist today.[34] Islands forged from without and defined, from the start, by their links to Europe, and, in different ways, to Africa and Asia, the societies constructed in the stead of the Indians were built with the express purpose of feeding

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[32] Brathwaite as quoted by Glissant in an epigraph to his *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000)

[33] Jefferys quoted by Carl Ortwin Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) 2.

[34] For notable appearances of Caliban in Caribbean letters, see, e.g., Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Caliban: Notes Toward A Discussion of Culture in Our America"(1971), in *Caliban and other Essays*, Edward Baker, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Aimé Cesaire, *A Tempest* (*Une Tempete*, 1967). New York: Ubu Repertory, 1997.); and Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poem, "Caliban," in *Island: poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

nothern appetites for sub-tropical stimulants, most crucially sugar.[35] That the region is named for the Sea suggests the sea's centrality to Caribbean life and Caribbean economies—and perhaps more abstractly, as influential Caribbean theoreticians like Edouard Glissant have argued, suggests its role as nurturing muse and metaphor in Caribbean cultures.[36]

The question of defining the Caribbean and its essential nature, *a la* Glissant and the thinkers in whom I'm most interested here, has necessarily also been about defining *where* the Caribbean is. While the location of the Caribbean Sea itself is clear, the question of what territories in that sea's orbit qualify as "Caribbean" is anything but. Even bracketing for a moment the oft-discussed existence of distinct "Caribbeans" in diasporic sites like London, New York, and Toronto, cities which are today home to more people from the Caribbean than the islands themselves, there has been voluminous debate as to which of the more proximate lands near the Sea belong to the region more strictly defined.[37] For scholars who have made of the Caribbean an object of study, the region generally includes the Greater and Lesser Antilles (the former made up of Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico; the latter of the great string of islands reaching down from Anguilla toward Trinidad and the north coast of South America). It may or may not, however, include mainland territories bordering the Caribbean Sea like coastal Colombia, Panama and Yucatan; nearby islands and mainland South American countries which do not touch the Sea but share the Antilles' colonial past (e.g. Guyana, Surinam, Bermuda); one or both of the nearby archipelagos of the Bahamas and the Florida Keys; and even, sometimes, the U.S. South (often represented by the quintessentially "Caribbean" city of New Orleans).

A large number of the contemporary scholars who have attempted rigorous historical studies of the Caribbean *in toto* have limited their object of research to the Greater and Lesser Antilles (as often as not, one suspects, for reasons of limiting manuscript-length as much as anything else).[38] Even those who have defined the Caribbean on ecological bases, as a "natural region," have diverged. Carl Sauer, in his classic historical geography *The Early Spanish Main*, argues that the Caribbean coasts of South and Central America (i.e. the eponymous Spanish Main, whose name 16th-century English sailors extended to include the Sea its coast abuts) belong to the same region as the islands–on the basis, as Sauer writes, that the Caribbean "qualifies as a natural region, fuzzy about the edges but having common characteristics: it is the rim of land about a Mediterranean sea; it is the double corridor between North and South America; and it is

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[35] On the role of sugar in the development of the Caribbean and the larger capitalist economies of the Atlantic world, see Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Role of Sugar in Modern* History (New York: Penguin, 1986). On the larger rise of New World slavery and its role in the historical geography of the Caribbean, see Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1988)

[36] See Glissant (1997).

[37] As George Lamming puts it: "there is a Caribbean world that exists, in a very decisive kind of way, in many metropolitan centres, whether in North America or Europe. There is a Caribbean in Amsterdam, Paris, London, and Birmingham; in New York and other parts of North America…an external frontier with a very decisive role to play in the future cultural and political development of the Caribbean." Lamming, "Concepts of the Caribbean," in *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) 1-9.

[38] To cite one notable example: D. Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change Since 1492* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

the region of tropical climate to the north of the Equator that is stirred by the trade winds."[39] Historian Jan Rogozínski, by contrast, prefaces his *Brief History of the Caribbean* by excluding any mainland territories on the grounds that "the islands and the mainland really form two separate regions…two geographic zones…endowed with very different natural environments, and have followed divergent paths since the conquest."[40]

Such differences notwithstanding, the general consensus among Caribbeanists today is perhaps well-represented in UNESCO's landmark *General History of the Caribbean* (2003), in whose preface Federico Mayor explains the inclusion of the coastal regions of South America "from the Guyanas to the riverine zones of Central America," by citing the fact that "those parts of the mainland were the homes of people engaged from time to time in activities which linked their lives with those of the people of the islands."[41] Mayor's description reaches back to the Pre-Colombian era, and to intercourse between the coastal Carib and their island cousins, not to mention the antagonized Arawak. His statement, however, applies equally to modern times, when the long life of plantation slavery in (for example) coastal Colombia and Venezuela left implanted in those areas a myriad of so-called "Caribbean" traits–-historical economies based in slavery and monocrop agriculture, a strong presence of African-descended peoples and cultures, a maritime orientation of culture and economy—all of which they share in common with the Antilles, thus qualifying them as Caribbean (the same could of course be said, and is by some, about the US South).[42]

And yet even among specialists today, the ambiguity around what qualifies as Caribbean—the tension, that is, between "Caribbean" as descriptive idea, and The Caribbean as semi-empirical region—remains strong. In 2006, the Caribbean Studies Association held its annual meeting in Salvador, Brazil. "By hosting the conference in Brazil," the conference materials stated, "we seek to challenge the popular understandings of the Caribbean by emphasizing the cultural, historical, and social spaces rather than the national and territorial in its conceptualization."[43] To many scholars, such an unclear sense of what exactly is being discussed is problematic. More to the point here, the descriptor "Caribbean" has often come to function, in both academic and popular discourse, as a kind of floating signifier for a few nebulous traits familiar to carnival-attendees worldwide and common to societies forged in the legacies of New World slavery.[44]

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[39] Sauer (1967) 4.

[40] Jan Rogozinski, *A Brief History of the Caribbean: From Arawak and Carib to Present* (New York: Plume, 2000) 5.

[41] Federico Mayor, "Preface" to *General History of the Caribbean*, vol. 1. Ed. Jalil Sued Badillo. (Paris: UNESCO Publishing and Macmillan Publishers, 2003) vi. As quoted by Silvio Torres-Saillant in *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 12

[42] Edouard Glissant, for example, pointedly includes the American South in his conception of *antillinaté*, in *Caribbean Discourse*. See Glissant (1999).

[43] See the CSA's call-for-papers to its annual conference in 2006: http://www.caribbean-studies.org/ACCSA2007/en/call.html

[44] It is in this sense that the musical historian Ned Sublette, for example, argued in a recent interview that New Orleans be understood not as a "Caribbean city" but rather as a city located "at the northern edge of what I call the Saints and Festivals Belt—which some people erroneously call the Caribbean, though it reaches across the Gulf of Mexico past the Caribbean to Brazil…" Sublette, interview with Garnette Cadogan, *BOMB* May 2008.

The linked questions of what and where the Caribbean is are hardly "just" academic. On the contrary, for the administrators of the CARICOM trading block—or, indeed, for those of the Toronto's Caribana parade or Brooklyn's Labor Day Carnival—defining what qualifies as Caribbean is important. As even a cursory glance at the scholarly or political literature shows, debates over who or what qualifies as Caribbean (or more fraught still, as "West Indian") are shot through with claims and counter-claims based in language, culture, race—debates often tied to excluding certain persons from the Caribbean community (most often, in this respect, Haitians), and all highlighting the extent to which "Caribbean" has come to function as idea-tional construct and label, not least for "Caribbeans" themselves.

Which is not, I hasten to add, to say that material history doesn't matter. On the contrary, the products of material history—the lasting legacies of plantation slavery in particular—have contributed to a certain "complex" of commonalities visible across Caribbean societies that are of primary significance to how the region has been imagined and re-imagined across time.[45] Scholars and writers have chosen to identify and explicate these commonalities—in politics, in gender relations, music, economy and lifeways—along different lines. The very fact that so many thinkers from across the Caribbean's diverse language groups and territories have felt impelled to identify and explicate the commonalities in itself suggests those commonalities' very existence. The specific theories have often differed—from Fernando Ortiz's lyrical portrait of the racial and cultural forms flowing from the material exigencies of building a society based in the production of sugar and tobacco, to M.G. Smith's idea of the "plural society" of racial hierarchy as the plantation's lasting legacy.[46] And many have offered qualifications or additions to James's arguments that all Caribbean history is "governed" by the sugar plantation and Negro slavery. (Michaelle Ascencio, for example, adds to sugar an intriguing climatic factor in writing that the Caribbean having "had to endure two ills of very different sorts, one natural and the other social…: hurricanes and sugar."[47])

My purpose here is not to affirm nor debunk James's (or anyone elses's) contentions about the "essential" facets of Caribbean ontology. It is rather to essay a series of attempts at answering the question of how and why a number of representative figures, all identified (and self-identified) to some extent as Caribbean, have conceived of and/or helped shape wider imaginings of the region (in the Caribbean and its diasporas, and outside them) over the past half-century. While I stop short of an overarching prescriptive argument about the necessary content and purpose of Caribbean cultures in light of Caribbean history, I do expect that the commonalities of theme and concern in my cases here will evince the extent to which a rough understanding of shared historical and geographic concerns informing the work of the region's exemplary artists is possible—a set of commonalities expressive of, and growing from, much that is shared in popular histories across its lands: of peoples descended from African and Asian workers

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[45] On the "plantation complex," and its legacies, see the term's coiner, Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and also, e.g., David Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

[46] M.G. Smith, *The Plural Society in the British West Indies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965); Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint* (1944) (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

[47] Michaelle Ascencio, *Lecturas antillanas* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1990.) 117, as quoted by Torres-Saillaint 13.

conscripted on distant continents to work their plantations; of social orders still suffused with the racial hierarchies born by the plantation system; of national economies characterized by the struggles to forge alternate paths for development once the mono-crop plantation economies fell; and, in more recent decades, of moribund post-independence economies based near-exclusively in attracting tourists from the same countries which once consumed its sugar and rum; of alternative paths to development obviated by the debt-disciplining by the IMF, and the growth of sizable diasporas of national subjects who have by necessity moved to northern cities in search of work.

The traumas of this history—and the hyper-awareness of the past that bore them—provide the basis for Derek Walcott's famous insistence that the "muse of history" provides the unifying fundament to Caribbean culture.[48] So, too, do they mean that the muse of *geography* provides a crucial thread running through this culture—and running through the resultant ways and means by which the Caribbean is understood and imagined in the world.

1.4 Imaginative Geography and the Caribbean

> "There is no use in pretending that all we know about time and space, or rather history and geography, is more than anything else imaginative."
>
> -Edward Said[49]

> "To establish his own identity, Caliban, after three centuries, must himself pioneer into regions Caesar never knew."
>
> -C.L.R. James[50]

Early in Agatha Christie's 1964 thriller *A Caribbean Mystery*, the book's narrator describes its setting, a West Indian island where Miss Marple has gone on vacation to recover from a bout of pneumonia. This is a place, we are told, where everything stayed "the same everyday—never anything *happening*." In his *Intellectual History of the Caribbean*, Silvio Torrres-Saillant comments that the narrator's remark "presupposes the existence of a body of opinion about the region that the author assumes will resonate with her audience."[51] And so it does. Of what this body of opinion exactly consists Christie's leaves unnamed. But we might fairly suppose with Torres-Saillant that it is characterized by its having been forged over the course of three-plus centuries of English colonialism—a "body of opinion," in other words, expressive of the narratives upon which colonial domination was based: whether about "civilizing mission" or destinies manifest—and always predicated on a conception of the Caribbean as inhabited by

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[48] Derek Walcott, "The Muse of History" (1974). *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds. (London: Routledge, 1996) 354-358.
[49] Said (1978) 55.
[50] C.L.R. James, Preface to *Beyond a Boundary* (1963)(Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) xxi
[51] Torres-Saillant 11.

subject or lazy races; as outside history; as a place where all that might ever "happen" is a murder mystery involving octegenarian Britishers washed up on exotic shores.

This line of critique and its associated ideas are by now familiar: the question of how knowledge and power articulated with one another in the service of modern empires has impelled a wealth of scholarship in recent years. Among the more notable—and certainly most well-known—of books produced in this mode is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), in which Said applied Michel Foucault's then novel theory of discourse to describe how one particularly powerful discourse in European intellectual history—that of "Orientalism"—came to function, over the course of centuries, to legitimize and describe "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"[52]—and moreover, served to *invent* that selfsame magical region as the Occident's necessary and constitutive "outside," as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences."[53] Said's dense work is not without its frustrations, among them the author's tendency to read from specific works of art—namely a few English and French novels—a generalized and universalizing discourse (and thereby departing markedly from Foucault's conception of discourse upon which *Orientalism* is nominally based).[54] Such issues aside, Said's pathbreaking work of "cultural analysis in a geographic key"[55] opened up a wealth of ways to examine how, through language and representation, difference is folded into distance—into how, that is, the figure of the Other, and the figuring *of* the Other, necessitated and was constitutive of a corresponding *space* marked as Other. The processes by which this space is imagined, and the content of the traits attributed to it—its unchanging, a-historical nature perhaps most crucial among them—is what Said terms "imaginative geography."[56]

In Said's conception imaginative geography is a discourse of power at once enabled by and constitutive of colonial domination. Imaginative geography is the means by which a space is imagined as possessed of certain attributes—especially negative traits like emptiness, backwardness, immorality—so as allow that space and its people to be interacted with (and dominated) in particular ways. It functions by forging a series of mental partitions between "the same" and "the other," constructing a gap between the two by "designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is theirs."[57] "We might think of imaginative geographies as fabrications," Derek Gregory usefully comments, "a word [fabrications] that usefully combines 'something fictionalized' and 'something made real,' because they are imaginations given substance."[58]

In the Caribbean—a place continually imagined and re-imagined by Europeans as a concomitant of imperial projects in the region—there exists a long tradition of just this sort of imaginative geography. Its lineaments have not been detailed in one

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[52] Said (1978) 2.
[53] Said (1978) 4.
[54] See James Clifford's cogent critique "On *Orientalism*." *History and Theory* 19.2(1980): 204-223.
[55] The phrase is Nelson Moe's. From *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 5.
[56] See Said (1978), Chapter 2: "Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental" 49-72.
[57] Said as quoted by Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present* (New York: Routledge, 2005) 17.
[58] Gregory 17

comprehensive study, but one could certainly be written. Indeed, the erasure of all but a few scraps of lore and stories from the Caribbean's indigenous inhabitants has meant that the regional geography we do have access to, begins, in a sense, with the moment Columbus writes of his arrival off the coast of what he thought was East Asia, and it is, from that point forward, an imaginative geography intimately tied to the process of empire-builders and fortune-seekers from Europe – continuing through the diaries and strivings of conquistadors seeking El Dorado or the Fountain of Youth; to the more sober-minded tracts of Dominican soul-savers like Bartolome de las Casas; through the nearly four centuries of maps, travelogues, and reports of explorers and scientists—from Walter Raleigh's *Discovery of Guiana* (1595) to Moreau de St. Méry's *Description de Saint-domingue* (1772) to James Anthony Froude's *The English in the West Indies* (1888)—impelled by the impetus to figure out how best to exploit, administer or gain wealth from the Caribbean; through to the output, in the final decades of Europe's empire's declines and since, of travel writers in the British tradition ranging from the empathic (Patrick Leigh Fermor's under-appreciated classic *The Traveler's Tree*) to the much less so (e.g. Evelyn Waugh's *92 Days*, and V.S. Naipaul's *The Middle Passage* (complicating factor of Naipaul's Caribbean provenance aside)); and continuing, in a crasser but more popular sense, with the fierce panoply of TV adverts, glossy brochures and guidebooks figuring the islands as touristic Eden—in effect selling the Caribbean, an unchanging place of smiling natives and eternal sun, as Mimi Sheller and others have detailed, as commodity.[59]

This accumulated pile of detritus and figuration is important to anyone who would seek to write on the Caribbean as region or idea, and my study is no different. However, the particular mode of imaginative geography in which I am interested here departs from the Said-ian conception, in that what I am most interested in is the Caribbean qua *Caribbeans*. Where Said's study of Orientalism focuses near-exclusively on Orientalism as a discourse of power forged by people and institutions conceiving of themselves as outside and superior to the Orient they invent—my study focuses on the development of a Caribbeanist discourse by people who self-identify, or are identified as, Caribbean, and on the ways in which the figures who are my topic here, by either will or effect (or both), have helped forge imaginative geographies of the Caribbean. To the extent that this imaginative geography—"autocthonous" or whatever one might wish to call it—involves relations of power, it involves the aim of *em*powering the member-states and peoples of the Caribbean vis-à-vis the colonial empires from whom they gained their independence, or, more recently, vis-a-vis the United States, which has assumed the role of chief hegemon in the region since.

Given the imperial legacy which left the Caribbean denuded of most of its native peoples, the efforts of Caribbean persons to describe their region necessitates the composition of a kind of "counter-geography" of their islands. The underlying impetus is well-caught by Toni Morrison (a writer who, if not Caribbean per se, is principally engaged with the fact and legacies of plantation slavery that is the key question for its thinkers and writers). "I want to draw a map," writes Morrison, "so to speak, of a critical geography and use that map to open as much space for discovery, intellectual adventure,

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[59] On the reciprocal relations between travel writing and imperial projects, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992). See Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (New York: Routledge, 2003)

and close exploration as did the original charting of the New World—without the mandate for conquest."[60] The history of such efforts reaches back at least as far as Simón Bolivar's "Jamaica Letter" (1815) the liberator's sharpest articulation of pan-American unity of culture and purpose in throwing off European rule; continues to Cuban and pan-American patriot Jose Martí and his "Nuestra America," wherein Martí posits the race-mixing and creole cultures of the Caribbean as a source of native-born strength for the entire hemisphere; through to lesser-known scholars such as John Jacob Thomas, the Trinidadian mentor of C.L.R. James and author of such works as the *Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (1869), which sought to identify and celebrate the shared dynamism and of language and culture across the Caribbean basin (and who was supremely placed to respond, in 1890s Port-of-Spain, to Froude's wholesale dismissal of Afro-Caribbean culture)[61]; and can be powerfully heard in Pedro Mir's celebrated "Countersong to Walt Whitman" (1945), in which the Dominican poet sang of himself in ways that drew explicitly and powerfully on a conception of the Caribbean as unitary and particular kind of space within America (I/ a son of the Caribbean/Antillean to be exact/ The raw product of a simple/ Puerto Rican girl/ and a Cuban worker/born precisely, and poor/ on Quisqueyan soil/ Overflowing with voices/ full of eyes/ wide open throughout the islands…).[62]

Whether explicitly so or not, these writers and many others more recent have been engaged in what Marwyn Samuels has called the "geography of alienation"—engaged, that is, in the search for *roots*.[63] This search is of course not unique to people from the Caribbean; the search for roots—the desire to find or make the places in the world "that bind, and with which one can relate"—would seem to be a human universal (just as, in Samuels's observation, it is "the paradox or dilemma of human existence that the search for roots always reveals the lack of rootedness.")[64] Yet the Caribbean, a place where the two features we sometimes think of as uniquely contemporary in their effects on human identity—the mixing of cultures and peoples from different continents, and migration and displacement as a fact of life—have been a plainly evident fact of life for centuries, is in some key ways distinct. The same sense of (national) rootedness postulated by Simone Weil, for example, as the necessary corrective to meaninglessness in the context of France, is not available: indeed it is in some senses the very shared sense of lack among Caribbean peoples which, one might argue, has provided an essential well-spring of pan-Caribbean thought. [65]

The peoples of the Caribbean have always felt alienated from the historical privileging of and normative "sedentarist metaphysics" entailing that connections of peoples, cultures, and nations to place, connections normatively discussed in terms of

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[60] Toni Morrison, *Playing the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) 3.
[61] On Thomas, see Selwyn Cudjoe, "The Audacity of it All: C.L.R. James's Trinidadian Background" in Henry and Buhle 39-55.
[62] Pedro Mir, *Contracanto a Walt Whitman* (Guatemala: Ediciones Saker-Ti, 1952). Translation mine.
[63] Marwyn Samuels, "Existentialism and Human Geography." *Humanistic Geography: Prospects and Problems*, David Ley and Marwyn Samuels, eds. (Chicago: Maaroufa Press, 1978) 22-41.
[64] Samuels 34.
[65] See Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Toward Mankind* (1953) (New York: Routledge, 2001)

roots, have been the most essential determinant of identity, national or otherwise.[66] This particular alienation has been of persistent importance as the Caribbean's colonies have sought to reconstitute themselves as nations over recent decades. The fractured popular histories of displacement and genocide, the constant outward orientation of its economies, the fact that for the disappearance of the native population *all* its diverse peoples have roots elsewhere—all contribute to the sense of lacking the homogeneity, the stable, rooted culture, and the ancestral history crucial to normative (Western European) paradigms of nation-building.[67] This is perhaps one reason, as I will discuss below, that the independence era brought to the Caribbean a powerful urge to think of the region's liberation in regional terms. It is this history, Edouard Glissant argues, which made the transformation of the Caribbean's lands into *territory*, national or otherwise, a futile one. For Glissant, "The massacre of the Indians, uprooting of the sacred, has already invalidated this futile search. Once that had happened, Antillean territory could not become a territory, but rather, a rhizomed land."[68] Without explicating Glissant's complex (Deleuzian) conception of the "rhizome," his point here is that the cultures of the Caribbean's islands are nurtured not by the imagining of a unitary root in those lands themselves, but an entangled web of root-systems reaching into their soils from elsewhere—resulting in cultures most crucially forged, as he puts it, "*in relation*."

The cultural exigency of these realities are posed in song by the Jamaican vocal group the Melodians on the soundtrack to *The Harder They Come*, the 1971 film which introduced their island's reggae music to the world: "How can we sing a song of joy/ in a strange land?" goes the verse to their exilic hymn, "By the Rivers of Babylon". The overarching drive in much expressive culture from the Caribbean, to pose and seek answers to this question, is heard in the desire to articulate and evoke and move toward those *roots* that are lacking in the islands themselves. "Roots make the commonality of errantry and exile," as Glissant begins his *Poetics of Relation*, "for in both instances the roots are lacking. We must begin with that."[69] That today the theme of rootlessness—as tied to mass-migration, "globalization," "postmodern life"—has become a leitmotif of conversations about contemporary culture the world over, I will suggest, is one of the reasons that Caribbean artists have gained such a wide global resonance. One thinks here, for example, of another reggae song—the title-single on Bob Marley's 1977 *Exodus*, the record which secured his worldwide fame: a song which, in recounting the biblical tale of Exodus, evoked deliverance from bondage but also movement toward home or away from it, movement without the certitude of earthly sanctuary at its start or end—a theme which resonated not only with Marley's own errant life as Jamaican émigré and touring musician, but with the experience of those masses of West Indians, and emigrants everywhere, then crossing oceans and deserts in search of better. "We know where we're

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[66] The phrase is Liisa Malkki's. See Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees" *Cultural Anthropology* 7.1 (1992): 24 –44. See also Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, "Are We All Creoles Now?: Ethnicity and Nation in a Heterogeneous Caribbean Diaspora." *Ethnicity, Class, and Nationalism: Caribbean and Extra-Caribbean Dimensions* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005) 49.

[67] Eric Hobsbawm, for one, has recently questioned whether nationalism is even an appropriate term for the process of identity formation in post-colonial multi-ethnic states like Trinidad & Tobago. See Hobsbawm (1990).

[68] Glissant (1997) 11.

[69] Glissant (1997) 11.

going/We know where we're from," went Marley's verse, "We're leaving Babylon/ We're going to a promised land…"

The elaboration of mental maps and the search for roots are all part-and-parcel with the aims of people everywhere to forge their core sensibilities of self and community.[70] But part of my project here, along with exploring how some of the Caribbean's exemplary artists have explored these question, is to suggest some reasons as to *why* their work—much of which has played a crucial role in forging imaginative geographies of the Caribbean—has found such resonance beyond the Caribbean itself. Beyond the crucial facts of Caribbean literatures existing in "global" European languages as James emphasized, and the more recent presence of Caribbean peoples and cultures and globally important media centers London, Paris, New York, one such reason, I suspect, is the profundity and imagination of Caribbean culture in engaging with what I'll call here the muse of geography: If the "muse of history" informs all Caribbean culture so too must the muse of geography: it is a necessity of the artistic imagination for persons living on impoverished islands whose ancestors were brought to those islands in chains, to inquire as to why and how they got there, and how, in the future, they might salve the fractures and wounds wrought by history—be it by "flying away home to Zion" or launching a revolution in the islands themselves. The universality of these questions, and the often inspired ways in which Caribbean artists have often translated their answers into the idiom of pop, is, as I will argue here, one of the key reasons their work has gained such an astonishing worldwide resonance.

1.5 The Caribbean in the Independence Age (Or, My Historical Frame)

> "In the Caribbean, the national culture has always been international because the economy has always been international…There is no way to remove the international from the national in the Caribbean."
>
> -C.L.R. James[71]

> "The Caribbean is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago…and as a meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center. [It] flows outward past the limits of its own sea with a vengeance."
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> -Antonio Benítez-Rojo[72]

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[70] As Said eloquently describes it, "geographic knowledge [always has]…a crucial role to play in keeping one grounded, literally, in the often tragic structure of social, historical, and epistemological contests over territory – this includes nationalism, identity, narrative, and ethnicity – so much of which informs the literature, thought, and culture of our time." Said, "Globalizing Literary Studies" *PMLA* 116.1 (2001): 64-68.

[71] James as quoted by Stefano Harney, *Nationalism and Identity: Culture and the Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora* (London: Zed,1996) 163-164.

[72] Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 4.

In the years following World War II, the Caribbean was hardly the sole part of the world to gain its freedom from imperial rule; indeed, the expansion of the United Nations by over a hundred members in the span of one short generation, was perhaps the most significant feature of the twentieth century's latter half. But within this global story—a story that includes the creation of the "Third World," and the reconstitution of many of its territories as the hot battlegrounds of the Cold War—the Caribbean occupies what is in many ways a singular role: as the site where Europeean empires forged their first overseas colonies, held on to them the longest, and arguably left their deepest impacts. "No part of the so-called Third World," as Sidney Mintz puts it, "was hammered so thoroughly or at such length into a colonial amalgam of European design."[73]

Of course Mintz's assertion, like my opening sentence about the Caribbean above, elides the truth that the arc and impact of colonial rule varied a great deal among the Caribbean's territories—and moreover, of course, that much of the Caribbean (most notably Haiti) attained its independence long before the global dismantling of Europe's empires after World War II. Just as colonialism didn't function in the same way everywhere, so too did decolonization vary drastically in timing and effect—with Spain relinquishing effective control of Cuba and Puerto Rico to the United States (after the Spanish-American war) in 1898; France (Haiti aside) not doing so at all with most of its colonies, instead turning Guadeloupe and Martinique into "overseas departments" in 1946; and England granting to its former colonies full sovereignty in the Commonwealth beginning in the 1950s. There are, however, a few notable factors about the way in which post-war decolonization—as worldwide historical trend and as local fact for some in the Caribbean—was experienced regionally in the 1950s. The first is that no matter when its islands attained their independence, the geopolitical logics of the inchoate Cold War dictated that in the Caribbean—by dint of its geographic location and strategic significance to the United States—the end of European rule would mean immediate passage to the "soft" empire of the United States.[74] The second is that the postwar wave of decolonization which resulted in the independence of Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, et al., coincided with what was perhaps the most significant single event in the contemporary Caribbean history—which also happened to be of similar significance to the rise of the larger Third World as cause and idea: the 1959 triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

The importance of the latter event to Caribbean history and geography is difficult to understate. As suggested by the title of James's "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro" (and echoed in similarly-titled works by regional statesmen-cum-scholars Juan Bosch and Eric Williams—*De Cristobal Colón a Fidel Castro* and *From Columbus to*

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[73] Mintz as quoted by Philip D. Morgan, "The Caribbean Islands in Atlantic Context, 1500 – 1800." *The Global Eighteenth Century*, Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) 52-64.

[74] The Caribbean's status as what C.L.R. James called "an American sea" in 1963 of course far predated the postwar period. Washington's general approach to the region as it fell from European control was signaled during Cuba's gaining its independence from Spain during the 1890s, an event followed by Washington's passage of the Platt Amendment, arrogating to the United States unrestricted right to intervene in Cuba's affairs as its president's saw fit – and by the incursion, in other Caribbean nations like Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, of U.S. soldiers during the first half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless: as I discuss here, the new stakes and logics of the Cold War – as would soon be emphasized in the Cuban missile crisis – introduced a new urgency to relations.

Castro, respectively)[75], this revolution on the region's largest island was of profound import to conversations about a "new stage" in Caribbean history, and the future course of the already fraught nation-building projects in which its small, new, fragile island-states were just beginning to embark.[76] Not least because for much of the next decades the defining aim of US policy toward the region was to prevent "another Cuba" (much as, one might note, the overarching aim of Europe's slave empires a century before had been to prevent "another Saint-Domingue"). And conversely, because in places like Jamaica, the question of how and whether to pursue relations with Cuba—or model its path—defined post-independence domestic politics for a generation. The complex and crucial history of the Cuban Revolution's impacts on intra-Caribbean political history has only begun to come fully to light.[77] But its impacts and legacies, not only on politics but on pan-Caribbean thought and culture, have been of deep significance to the region's history since Fidel's *barbudos* marched into Havana—and the people on nearby islands about to become newly sovereign nations, watched them do so along with people from throughout the Third World. The period since that time—a period I term here the Independence Era—is the historical frame for my study.

* * *

One of the reasons decolonization in the Caribbean was so important, writes James in "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," is that in the preceding decades, persons from the Caribbean and its diasporas had necessarily formed the vanguard of anti-colonial thought in Africa and worldwide. James' contentions about why this is so – beyond the basic fact truth of Caribbean peoples being possessed of the longest and deepest knowledge of European civilization among "previously colonized colored people"—boil down to two facts, both tied to the basic challenges of forging affirmative identities on small colonial islands which "confined black men to a very narrow strip of social territory."[78] The first fact is that "West Indians' *own* road to national identity lay through Africa"[79] (a truth early espoused by Marcus Garvey, the inter-war social entrepreneur from Jamaica who proposed an "Africa of kings and queens" as the crucial source of rooted identity for all New World blacks). The second is that for both facts, "the first step to freedom was to go abroad."[80]

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[75] Juan Bosch, *De Cristóbal Colón a Fidel Castro: el Caribe, frontera imperial* (1970)(Madrid: Editorial Sarpe, Biblioteca de la Historia, 1985); Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean* 1492 – 1969 (!970) (New York: Vintage, 1984). On the relation of these texts to James's, and how "the triumph of the…Cuban Revolution gave many Antillean intellects the impression that a major milestone in the region's history," see Torres-Saillant 150-153.

[76] Eric Hobsbawm, for one, has questioned whether nationalism itself is even an appropriate term for the process of identity formation in post-colonial, multi-ethnic states such as those found in the Caribbean. He sees little similarity between the creation of –for example – Trinidad and Tobago, and the great upheavals and realignments of Europe in the previous century that produced its modern nation-states. See Hobsbawm (1990) 160.

[77] See, e.g., Jason Parker's revelatory *Brother's Keeper: The United States, Race, and Empire in the British Caribbean, 1937-1962* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[78] James (1963) 402.

[79] James (1963) 402 (Italics mine).

[80] James (1963) 402.

To illustrate both points, James invokes the figure of Aimé Cesaire. Devoting three pages of his short appendix to the "father of Negritude," James describes how "in 1939 a black West Indian from the French colony of Martinique published in Paris the finest and most famous poem ever written about Africa."[81] The poem in question is Cesaire's *Cahier de un retour au pays natal*. In it Cesaire describes the depradations and poverty of his Caribbean birth-island, but then, seeking an essential font of identity, turns to Africa, and renders his blackness—his "Negritude"—in the imagistic cadences of high-modernist Europe, as the source of his humanity and virtue (…My Negritude is not a stone, its/ deafness a sounding board for/ the noises of the day/ My Negritude is not a mere spot of/ dead water on the dead eye of/ the earth…). For James the first import of Cesaire's *Cahier* is the poet's discovery of the truth "that salvation for the West Indians lies in Africa, the original home and ancestry of the West Indian people."[82] As with James's own *Black Jacobins*, though Cesaire's *Cahier* is a book about the West Indies written by a West Indian in Europe in the 1930s, "it is Africa and African emancipation that [the author] has in mind."[83]

What is perhaps most resonant for James about Cesaire's *Cahier*, however, in the context of the early 1960s is an aspect he doesn't mention: the poet's very ambiguity about the "pais natal" referenced in the poem's title. For while Cesaire was inspired, he claimed, to write the poem while looking out at an island off the Dalmation coast in Europe, and his opening lines descry the miseries of West Indian life, his imagistic and narrative turn to Africa suggest that the "native land" of his title is perhaps purposely abstract. "For Cesaire, a 'native land' was something complex and hybrid," as James Clifford puts it, "salvaged from a lost origin, constructed out of a squalid present, articulated within and against a colonial tongue."[84]

For James, the political events which precipitated his own "retour au pays natal" after a quarter-century of life as a Pan-Africanist living in Europe and North America, must have given to Cesaire's poem a new and especial resonance as he returned to Trinidad in the late 1950s. As Anna Grimshaw, one of James's more perceptive commentators, puts it, "He saw the approach of independence in the Caribbean as a unique historical moment, one leading to the creation of a new society in which the fundamental question of political life, the relationship between individual freedom and social responsibility, was posed anew."[85]

The flipside of the hopes raised by return from abroad, of course, were the disappointments which followed fast upon it—disappointments symbolized by James's own determination, in 1962, that his own future lay outside Trinidad. His disappointments in independence, and his decision that his own livelihood and future lay outside the Caribbean, was to be replicated by many millions from the region over the next decades.

Yet just as James himself continued in exile to write on the Caribbean as unitary whole, even within the disappointments of independence—in part *because* of those

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[81] James (1963) 399
[82] James (1963) 399
[83] James (1963) 402
[84] Clifford 204.
[85] Anna Grimshaw, "Popular Democracy and the Creative Imagination: The Writings of C.L.R. James 1950-1963." *Third Text* 10 (1990): 22.

disappointments—the persistence to think in terms of region has only grown. The ideal of formal political federation proved impossible. But if there is one overarching trend in intellectual work from and on the region over the past half-century, it would be hard to top the efflorescence of books on the Caribbean's coherence as region; nearly without exception the region's foremost intellectuals have made their names—in the Caribbean and abroad—not by examining their home-islands in isolation but by acting on the impetus to conceptualize and describe the Caribbean and "Caribbeanness" as a whole (even if their explanatory examples are drawn principally from their own island or language group). If the recent move in the social sciences toward "transnational" scholarship has become *de rigeur* only recently in many parts of the world, it has been a prominent feature of Caribbean intellectual culture for decades—and since the "independence moment" of the late 1950s, has been perhaps *the* dominant current in that intellectual culture.

This dissertation draws on and will be in conversation with these theorizers of a region that, Torres-Saillant argues, "never ceases to look at itself through its intellectual production."[86] It will, however, be based less in the work of such theoreticians than on popular artists whose art exerts a greater purchase on popular imaginative geographies, and will explore the reasons for their extraordinary worldwide resonance. Yet one of the reasons for both of these macro-trends—the persistence of Caribbean intellectuals to think in terms of region, and the extraordinary popularity of its cultural workers—is tied to a shared factor: the continued and massive emigration of the Caribbean's peoples toward Northern cities.

If the Caribbean is indeed a "meta-archipelago that expands beyond the boundaries of its own sea with a vengeance," as Benítez-Rojo's argument goes, a key reason why is the circulation of the books, records, and other cultural texts in which I'm interested here (all of whose movements are only further abetted by our internet age of netflix and itunes and youtube, etc. etc.). Another reason, just as key, is the very literal flow out of the Caribbean's people away from their "own sea." Indeed if one were asked to identify one overarching and unifying trend in the history of the Caribbean's societies over the past half-century, a prime candidate would have to be the unceasing outflow of their peoples to New York and London, Toronto, Miami and Montreal, in search of work. The impacts of this trend are many. They include, in the political realm, the dispersal of the region's national subjects throughout foreign territories (where many are still allowed to vote in elections "at home"); and in the cultural one, in the truth that as much "Jamaican," "Puerto Rican" or "Haitian" culture is today produced and consumed in Brooklyn, Brixton, and Hialeah, as it is in the Caribbean strictly termed. Moreover, on the streets of these cities, immigrants from the various islands have "found themselves neighbors," as Jason Parker writes, "…in immediate and dialogic ways not much available in their often isolated home islands," a discovery which sparked all manner of

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[86] Torres-Saillant 150. On Caribbean intellectualism and the historical factors informing the role of intellection and educational achievement as a means toward upward mobility and social status in the Caribbean, see also Orlando's Patterson's essay "Global Culture and the American Cosmos." Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Paper Series on the Arts, Culture, and Society, Paper # 2 ((May 24, 1994), especially the section "Afro-Caribbean Intellectualism." Web.

discussion about what it meant to be Caribbean, to "belong," in a sense, to a region whose members were no longer quite so estranged.[87]

The presence of Caribbean émigrés in northern cities of course long predates the postwar period; it isn't for nothing that as early as the 1920s New York was known as the "capital of the Caribbean."[88] Yet the importance of the unceasing outflow has become only more significant in recent decades—not least because that outflow is today in no way uni-directional: due to advances in air travel and telecommunication it involves circular migration, back-and-forth travel, and remittances, monetary and cultural, of profound import to the constitution and trajectory of Caribbean nations whose "nation-space" is spread over a range of geographic sites outside the national territory.[89] The impact of such "transnational social fields" on the formation of cultural identity and political subjectivity has been the topic of a wealth of scholarship in recent years.[90] Much of this work has focused on the trajectory of nations and their associated nationalisms (or, more abstractly, on the fate of the nation-state in general as a paradigmatic social technology of modern politics). My study, however, focuses on out-migration as a *regional* phenomenon—as a shared reality which is not solely a key unifying theme of "Caribbean culture," but an essential condition of possibility for the very creation of the imaginative geographies of the Caribbean in which I'm interested here.

1.6 The Caribbean in the World – Cases and Methods

> "Our traditional assumption overlooks the important influence which individual persons may exert on the motivations and actions of hundreds of millions of other people, with resultant consequences of major importance in the geography of areas small and large."
>
> -Richard Hartshorne[91]

> "In order not to become irretrievable exiles, we must clench to the idea that we belong to a large homeland, that we do not sail unaccompanied; we need the certainty that we each individually have formed part of a great collective history and culture."
>
> -Antonio Benítez-Rojo

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[87] Parker (2008) 7. On the comparative constitution of Caribbean communities in New York, and interactions among their members, see *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York*, Ed. Nancy Foner. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)

[88] See Jason Parker, "'Capital of the Caribbean': The African American West Indian 'Harlem Nexus' and the Transnational Drive for Black Freedom." *Journal of African-American History (JAAH)* 89 (2004): 98-117.

[89] On "nation-space" see Bhabha (1990).

[90] See, e.g., Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, eds. *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, and Nationalism Reconsidered*. (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1992); and by the same editors, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994).

[91] Hartshorne 283.

Near the end of C.L.R. James's 1963 appendix to *The Black Jacobins*, he writes of the ongoing efforts of West Indians to discover what the new nation they are forming will offer the world. He states:

> In dance, in the innovation in musical instruments, in popular ballad singing unrivalled anywhere in the world, the mass of the people are not seeking a national identity, they are expressing one. The West Indian writers have discovered the West Indies and West Indians, a people of the middle of our disturbed century, concerned with the discovery of themselves, determined to discover themselves.

The present dissertation is an attempt to understand the results of the search James describes here. It is not and cannot be comprehensive in meeting this aim. Written, however, at a distance of fifty years from the "independence moment" that shaped James's essay, it represents and exploration of how imaginitive geographies of the Caribbean have developed during that time—and to suggest some of the ways those imaginative geographies have shaped, and continue to shape the material and cultural "place" of the region in the history of the wider world. "Spatial form controls temporality," David Harvey reminds us. "Imaginative geography controls the possibility of social change and history."[92] With this truth tacitly in mind, many of the people involved in building a new imaginative geography of the Caribbean have been concerned to overturn colonialist views of its islands—as inhabited by savage cannibals; as places "where nothing happens"; as a region, in Froude's estimation, where "there has been no saint… since Las Casas, no hero unless philonegro enthusiasm can make one out of Toussaint. There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own."[93] Not every artist or figure I discuss herein, certainly, is explictly engaged in the political project of overturning such ideas in the collective mind of the region and the wider world. All, however, whether immersed in political work or simply affirming their own personhood in their work, have been involved in the task of building a sense of the Caribbean and its people as possessed of "a character and a purpose of their own."

It will be noted that my case-studies vary across a wide range of disciplines and artistic media. This is intentional. Despite my own background in literary studies, it has long struck me that works purporting to trace large-scale social discourses with world historical-effects (e.g., in current context, Said's *Orientalism*), may be seriously lacking if their evidentiary basis and analytic scope lies solely in literary texts. Certainly the novel, in many contexts, can play a key role in shaping—or, as useful for a scholar, *evidencing*—social trends and imaginative geographies (and I have written about a few novels, and novelists, here). Just as certainly, though, one would be hard-pressed to contest the truth the meanings and narratives embedded in a pop record, say, heard and experienced by infinitely more people than a comparative novel, bears the same serious scrutiny—likely more. *All* the machineries and regimes of representation in a culture, to paraphrase Stuart Hall, play a constitutive role, and not merely a reflexive one, in the

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[92] David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 160.
[93] James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies* (London: Longman, Greens, and Co., 1888) 34.

making of social and political life. This truth lies at the heart of all that follows, as does a sense, for example, the truth that *movement*—as ideal and aim, as experienced in the migration and envisaged in the prospect of returning "home"—can be understood as a key animating principle of Caribbean cultures, and of Caribbean imaginative geographies, during a half-century wherein the airplane has perhaps replaced the caravel and canoe as our most apt metaphor for Caribbean ontology.[94]

"I have never thought it necessary," wrote D.W. Meinig at the start of his magnum opus on the Shaping of America, "to tell geographers that my Geographical Perspective on 500 years of History was a selective and personal perspective."[95] It hardly needs stating that the same goes for the current project, its cases conceived of as far more illustrative than comprehensive. In acknowledging the "selective and personal" nature of what follows here, though, I make no claim for lessened scholarly rigor. On the contrary: acknowledging such subjectivity is part-and-parcel with this project's ethical and epistemological stance against the old modernist tendency—extremely visible in the work and affects of a C.L.R. James—to present one's work in the delusion that one can know Everything about Everything. This dissertation, based around a historical argument about the place and role of the Caribbean's imaginative geographies in the wider world, is an attempt to marshall the evidence needed to make that argument in as potent and felicitous a form possible. But I do not pretend for a moment that the narrative I offer herein—the "through line,"as it were, linking many different stories—isn't also a kind of imaginative geography of my own devising. That imaginative geography—shaped by own life, experiences, and elective affinities—may derive its language and system of citation from books, but it also grows from biographical seeds ranging from childhood memories of my mother's love for Harry Belafonte, to my own discovery, as an adolescent devotee of Marley's reggae, that the novels of Alejo Carpentier and Jamaica Kincaid offered a potent mirror for my own teenaged strivings for what it meant to be at home in the world. John Gillis, in his brilliant book *Islands of the Mind*, suggests that islands, far beyond being of obsessive interest for many of the world's peoples, have also structured *how* they think: Beyond thinking about islands, people have often thought *with* them, as metaphors and symbols and whatever else. And certainly, as much as I have spent much the last decade of my intellectual life thinking about the Caribbean, I have also thought *with* the Caribbean—and have continued to do so, as I have visited and lived in its

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[94] This riff on the canoe and the caravel as guiding metaphors for the first two epochs of Caribbean history is borrowed from B.W. Higman's introduction to his exemplary recent book, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

[95] D.W. Meinig. "The Shaping of America 1850-1915," *Journal of Historical Geography* 25.1 (1999) 1-16. Meinig continues: "I have assumed they would readily understand that no single person could—in however many volumes—offer anything like a full perspective on such a vast topic (or, indeed, on any topic)…[My work's] emphasis on change obviously binds patterns to processes and requires attention to both. If I tend to privilege pattern, it is because I believe therein lies the special task and contribution of geography. A 'perspective' is an overview, not an analysis. This one makes reference to a great many processes associated with the production of patterns, largely through the use of generalizing concepts about regional formations, nation building, imperialism, and much else.." The works he references, of course, is his magisterial four-volume work *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press), composed of *Volume 1: Atlantic America, 1492-1800* (1988); *Volume 2: Continental America: 1800-1867* (1995); *Volume 3: Transcontinental America, 1850-1915* (2000); and *Volume 4: Global America, 1915-2000* (2006)

islands, the increasing wealth of my affective ties to places and people have only grown the ways that the Caribbean, as both place and idea, continue to shape the way I wonder after freedom and difference; race and culture; and politics and art.

The content of my relationship with that which I study is irrevocably shaped by certain kinds of limits and privilege, not least the social capital afforded by being a white man with an American passport. That truth, though, cannot be an endpoint, but beginning. "The starting point of critical elaboration," wrote Gramsci, "is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical processes to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory."[96] I believe he was right. But I also believe that just as a scholar who waits until her research is "done" to begin writing will never write, so too is the process of taking inventory invoked by Gramsci a process that does not end. Our inventory accretes as we go. And it should not surprise the reader if, in the text that follows, the "I" of lived experience intrudes on the veneer of academic objectivity. "Write what you love": I have done so here, in conversation with a thinker I do, too.

[96] Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, as quoted by Said (1978) 25. Citing this passage in his introduction to *Orientalism*, Said famously pointed out that the only available English translations inexplicably leaves out what Gramsci wrote next: "Therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory."

II.

Jamaica Farewell:

Belafonte's Caribbean and the (Political) Erotics of Transnational Pop

In one of the more memorable passages of Barack Obama's autobiography, *Dreams from My Father*, Obama describes a moment sitting with his mother in a Manhattan movie house watching the Marcel Camus film *Black Orpheus*. Observing with growing discomfort the delight his white mother takes in the images of brown-skinned bodies dancing their way through a Brazilian slum, Obama describes realizing how much of his cherished mom's life and politics – and indeed her attraction to his Kenyan father – had been born of her curiosity about difference – or perhaps erotic attachment to it. This curiosity was first instilled, she'd often told her son, when she'd fallen in love as a Kansas schoolgirl with the music and person of Harry Belafonte. In Obama's book this moment arrives as a subtle lesson about the intimate registers on which race can act in our lives. But what it suggests as well is Belafonte's larger significance to post-war US culture, as a figure whom Obama's mother was hardly alone in coming to regard to as "the most beautiful man on the planet."

Harry Belafonte is arguably the first black pop star to become as widely desired for his body as for his music. Too often dismissed as a schmaltzy translator of "authentic" folk culture for suburban consumers, Belafonte was a cannily brilliant artist who used his popularity as the "King of Calypso" to introduce black male sexuality to a "mainstream" 1950s US public—through music (*Calypso*, 1956, the first LP to sell more than a million copies), film (*Island in the Sun*, 1957, starring opposite Joan Fontaine), and television (*Tonight With Belafonte*, 1958, for which he won an Emmy—the first black person to do so). A decade before interracial marriage became fully legal in the United States, Belafonte's performance-cum-translation of Caribbean music—viewed as playful, foreign, and thereby more racially and sexually safe—allowed him to straddle racial, sexual, and political taboos in ways unthinkable to his black contemporaries.

In June 1956, Belafonte released *Calypso*.Featuring the iconic hits "Banana Boat Song (Day-O)" and "Jamaica Farewell," his landmark album of Caribbean folk tunes remained the # 1 record in America for an unprecedented 31 weeks before being toppled by Elvis Presley's *Elvis*. Launching a decade during which Belafonte's fine-featured grin would be omnipresent on magazine covers and TV screens across America, *Calypso* set off a putative "calypso craze" that, for a short but signal moment in the late 1950s, was even poised, according to not a few cultural commentators, to upend rock-'n-roll as the dominant fad among America's teens ("Warning: Calypso Next New Beat; R.I.P. for R'n'R?" trumpeted *Variety* in December 1957).

In retrospect, the traction gained by this notion seems perhaps to have had less to

do with the music's actual popularity among youth than with the wishful thinking of parents less scandalized by Belafonte's open-collared-but-still-dignified eroticism than by the louche circlings of Elvis's pelvis. But nonetheless: it is hard to undersell the significance of a record which inaugurated the curious genre of "world music"; inspired the name of the most popular vocal group in America before the arrival of the Beatles—The Kingston Trio; and perhaps most important, "proved that Americans were more ready than had been assumed," as Belafonte himself has put it, "to hear the voices of others or the culture of other people."[1]

Many explanations have been proferred about how Belafonte—not only brown-skinned but an avowed leftist, and a singer and actor of unexceptional talent—achieved his astonishingly wide-ranging appeal in 1950s America. Not irrelevant, of course, was what his close colleague Odetta once implied in her response to the question of How Harry Got Over. As she put it: "Have you *seen* the Man?"[2] But quite apart from his looks were Belafonte's inspired moves as a performer: first, his stylistic innovation in taking folk music up off its stool, so to speak, and making the presentation of dusty old songs an occasion for dynamic modern theatre; and, second, his use of the Caribbean, or more precisely, his performance-cum-translation of Caribbean music—viewed by US audiences as playful, foreign, and thereby more racially and sexually safe—to forge an image as erotic symbol and romantic lead.

In creating a massive new audience for Caribbean music in the US and worldwide, Belafonte introduced into the US pop landscape new narratives about work, history, and universal humanity that would find key resonances in the Civil Rights movement soon to come. The story of how he gained his successes is a story about epochal changes in the recording industry—technological, cultural, economic—during the post-war period; a US "folk revival" that shaped his sensibility and paved the way for his success; and the course of American Empire in a region just then passing from under the rule of Old Europe and into the shadow of "soft" imperial umbrella of the United States. What it is also a story about, though, is a concomitant set of changes in how music was being recorded, consumed, and imbricated within political processes in the Caribbean in the 1950s, a decade when the run-up to independence was inspiring in the West Indies a vociferous debate among politicians, intellectuals, and musicians over the constitution and existence of genuine of authentic West Indian culture," whether framed in terms of its constituent isles or the region in toto. With that debate came a kind of re-discovery—or invention—of national folk cultures in the region Belafonte's *Calypso* and his career, as I mean to show here, was conditioned as much by this conjuncture in the Caribbean as it was by changing circumstances in the culture industries and politics of the United States.

This truth notwithstanding, during the 1950s Belafonte was frequently traduced in the Caribbean as an inauthentic peddler of island culture for foreign ears. What tired debates about "authenticity" elide in Belafonte's case then as now, though, is the extent to which his *Calypso* record, like his life, was the product of a broader Caribbean whose

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[1] Belafonte, Harry. "A Musical History of America's Africans," in the liner-book to *The Long Road to Freedom: An Anthology of Black Music*. New York: Buddah Records/RCA, 2001.

[2] Odetta as quoted by Henry Louis Gates in his *New Yorker* profile of Belafonte ("Belafonte's Balancing Act," *The New Yorker*, 26 September and 2 October 1996), collected in Gates, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man* (New York: Vintage 1998) 162.

circuits and nodes—from Martinique, Jamaica and Trinidad, to New York and London; involving the travel of emigrants and tourists, records and musicians among and between different islands and diasporic cities; culminating in the gathering of musicians from across the Caribbean's diasporas in a Hollywood recording studio—were anything but uncommon to a part of the world whose cultures, to paraphrase Damián Fernandez,were "born transnational."[3] If the music and narratives of the Caribbean played an essential role in affording Belafonte's successes in the USA, so too did his work's impacts on America play a crucial role in shaping cultures, politics, and imaginative geographies of the Caribbean. The musical and material histories of the Caribbean and those of the United States have long been intertwined. From the importance of the US Navy's in Trinidad to the advent of that island's famed steeldrums (hammered from the the Navy's spent oil cans), to the roots of rock n' roll in Cuban rhythms—the national sonic histories of many of the Caribbean's islands, and of the American mainland, are in many ways inextricable. Perhaps at no time was this more plainly clear, though, than in those key decades after World War II, when the last of the Caribbean's territories passed from under the imperial umbrellas of Europe to the political and cultural aegis of the United States. During those same years, emigrants continued in their droves to leave the islands and settle in northern cities and Harry Belafonte, evoking the lands they left behind—and with a repertoire born in key ways, as I mean to show here, of the Caribbean's territories' drive for independence—not only altered the cultural and political history of post-war America, but also shaped the ways the Caribbean islands' sought, during those same years, not only to market themselves to the world, but to imagine themselves as forgers of a new regional culture.

2.2

Born in Harlem in 1927, Belafonte was the fruit of a family-tree rich in the same pan-Caribbean roots he'd later evince in his music. His Jamaican mother was the daughter of Scotswoman and a black West Indian, his Martinican father the son of a French farmer called Bellafanti and his Haitian wife. A sporadically employed shipboard chef, Harold Sr. parted his namesake's life early on, though not before imparting, by his favoritism for his lighter-skinned second son Dennis, deep caste-and-color based scars that Harry would rarely omit mentioning in reminiscences of his childhood. A hyper-active boy given to schoolyard scraps, Harry's tendency to find trouble on Harlem's streets (along, perhaps, with the race-riots that embroiled the neighborhood in 1935), helped convince his mother Melvine to ship her boys off to her native island when Harry was 8.[4]

As Belafonte and his marketers would so often claim, his years in Jamaica—where he remained until he was 13, moving back and forth between Kingston and rural St. Ann—exposed him to music that would later become important to his repertoire. His West Indian years were also crucial to nurturing the internationalist conscience and horror at race-prejudice that would animate his life's work. Darker than his brother and many in his family, Harry did not have the physiognomy of the island's

[3] Damián J. Fernandez, *Cuba Transnational* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005)
[4] See Belafonte's interview with Michael Eldridge "The Remains of the Day-O," *Transition* 12.2 (2002)

creole elite—but nor, of course, was he black or "Jamaican enough" to fit into the island's lower (i.e. African) caste. "Those class distinctions," he told the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1957, "seemed a peculiar set of values. Then at thirteen I came back to New York, and ran smack into racial discrimination. This was not only very painful, but something I could not reason out. It sort of shut me up inside myself."[5] Still bad at sitting still, and burdened by dyslexia besides, Harry dropped out of high school in the 9th grade.

At 17 Belafonte escaped Harlem's tenements a second time by joining the Navy. The war was nearly over and he never saw action overseas, but after scoring high on an IQ test he was enabled to enroll at the Navy's Shopkeeper School in Hampton News, Virginia, and it was there in his segregated company that he gained an autodidact's political education. Reading W.E.B. Dubois's *Color and Democracy* on the tip a friend, he perused Dubois' footnotes to check out more titles from the Hampton Institute's library, where he soon also found a primary interlocutor in Margurite Byrd, a light-skinned daughter of Washington DC's black bourgeoisie with whose charms and book-learning he became immediately smitten; she was studying at Hampton to become a child psychologist. "He reminded me of a big kid," his first wife has said of their courtship in New York after the war, "who was about to get into trouble if somebody didn't watch and help him. I had to keep him from becoming a delinquent."[6] Riding the subway, Harry was given to such acts of petty rebellion as defacing advertisements that annoyed him, scrawling, on a car placard for a cosmetic lotion promising to maintain the soft white beauty of straphangers' hands: "But what about Negro hands?"[7]

Casting about for a job—and, perhaps as crucial, an appropriate channel for his anger—Belafonte found both one day in December1945 on Harlem's 125th Street after happening into a play at the American Negro Theater in Harlem. Setting his mind there and then to become an actor, he joined the theater as a stagehand; soon he was appearing in its plays. With paid work for black actors in mean supply, though, he sought to make rent by pushing carts in the garment district, and for a time, by launching a scheme with his best friend, a fellow ANT actor with West Indian roots called Sidney Poitier, to peddle an aphrodisiac made from queen conch extract.

Near-exact contemporaries who still term each other best friends 60 years later, Belafonte and Poitier shared more than the conjunction of sex appeal and island roots figured in that ill-fated venture. Though like Harry, Sidney was born in the United States (he in Miami, in 1927) he was raised by tomato-farming peasants on remote Cat Island in the Bahamas; his early years were marked by the same characteristically Caribbean back-and-forth movement between the islands and the mainland as his Harlem-born friend's—and, too, by the same formative experience of US racial mores when he arrived permanently to make his way in the world at sixteen. "I couldn't understand it," Poitier has said of alighting in Jim Crow Florida during World War II. "Every sign in Miami. 'White' and 'Colored,' every rebuff, was like saying to me, 'You're not a human being.'"[8] Folk wisdom and social scientists have long concurred that West Indian

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[5] Belafonte as quoted in "Belafonte Gives it All he's Got," by Jeanne Van Holmes. *The Saturday Evening Post* 20 April 1957: 28.

[6] Margurite Belafonte as quoted by Arnold Shaw in *Belafonte: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Chilton Company, 1960) 46.

[7] Shaw 45.

[8] Poitier as quoted by Shaw 26.

immigrants—often possessed of comparatively higher levels of education and social capital than US blacks; raised in societies whose professional and government classes (notwithstanding colonialism) were brown-skinned—have oftentimes enjoyed advantages over American-born blacks in the US labor-market.[9] The same factors no doubt contributed to the pathbreaking 1950s success of two black film actors who, if in some ways quite distinct in their image—the one darker and the very picture of quiet decorum; the other light-skinned and increasingly quick-to-anger—shared in their West Indian diction and pasts a vaguely "foreign" allure that allowed them a popularity among whites unthinkable for the progeny of American slaves—and allowed them, as well, to scarcely blink at their success in doing so. "I firmly believe," as Poitier has bluntly put it, "that we both had the opportunity to arrive at the formation of a sense of ourselves without having it fucked with by racism as it existed in the United States."[10]

If Harry and Sidney were best friends, theirs was a rivalrous relation forged in the midst of competing for the same roles, and of often withering judgements back-and-forth about those roles' suitability to advancing their shared political ideals. Indeed one is impressed that they remained so close given the disdain of Harry, in particular, for some of movie parts Sidney took on (a notable pair of which—*Lilies of the Field* (1963) and *To Sir With Love* (1967)—he only gained after Belafonte, in typically bullheaded fashion, rejected the roles as regressively one-dimensional takes on black manhood).[11] But it had been so from the start. "Sidney stole my career," Harry has often joked. Cast in a fall 1948 ANT production of *Days of Our Youth,* Belafonte, on the fateful night a Broadway scout attended the show, was called in to pull an extra shift at one of his odd jobs (this one hauling garbage as a janitor's assistant). Thus did his nervous understudy, Sidney Poitier, appear in his place, and, duly noticed by the right people, gain a role in an all-black Broadway production of *Lysistrata*, which led to Darryl F. Zanuck offering him a job in the film *No Way Out* (1950)—and, of course, to very much more from there.

* * *

Belafonte, struggling to makes end meet uptown and with a baby on the way, launched a half-hearted sideline career as a jazz-pop singer. Having been urged by friends to appear at an amateur night at a Manhattan jazz spot called The Royal Roost, he ended up landing a regular gig. While able to carry a tune—he'd appeared in a few musicals—singing was hardly his passion. Nonetheless it was better than hauling garbage, and the now pencil-mustached Harry—whose suave act, as his then-manager fairly put it, "resembled a vanilla Billy Ecsktine"—enjoyed some modest success, winning positive notices in *Variety* and other of the trade papers. In sharing club dates with more inventive players like Max Roach and Charlie Parker, he also won a first-rate musical education. But still

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[9] See, e.g., Mary Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999)

[10] Poitier as quoted by Gates 159. When I read Poitier's words back to Belafonte, he responded in kind, with the following anecdote: "Well, I think that for both Sidney and myself – our Caribbean-ness, it was a mark of distinction. Because Sidney carried himself in such a way, that people took as proud, imperial; they said he's special…But that's every fucking Jamaican I know! And a lot of 'em are a pain in the ass! There's no question of inferiority" (never mind Poitier's Bahamian roots). Harry Belafonte. Personal interview. 9 Sep. 2010.

[11] See Gates 170

his heart wasn't in it. The be-bop gigs were all about melodic invention, while pop crooning, as he put it, was "about exploiting the feelings of immature women."[12] Neither idiom was about inhabiting the lyrics of the song, which is what excited Belafonte the actor about performing.

After a disheartening nightclub stint during the 1950 Christmas season in Miami, Belafonte doffed his tux and rang his manager to say he was through. Back in New York he used his modest savings from his act to open a burger joint in Greenwich Village. The initial aim of The Sage, where Belafonte manned the grill while his friend and business-partner, the novelist Bill Attaway, waited tables, was to succeed as a business venture. But it became important for other reasons. Being downtown exposed Harry to the performances of Burl Ives and Josh White and other talismansof the inchoate folk revival centered around the Village Vanguard down 7th avenue from where he flipped burgers. At the restaurant his future band-leader, the jazz clarinetist Tony Scott, was a regular; a local cantor taught him "Hava Nageela". "The restaurant," he'd recall, "was getting harder and harder to sustain." But "The folk singers would come in, and we'd run tabs on people…they came in from all across America. Black and white. They chatted, talked politics. It was a world that totally seduced me. I began to see my place in the world. I could be an actor: a guy from the badlands, a chain gang singer. I could sing Jewish folk songs. I could juggle emotions."[13] Belafonte, in other words, could make of folk's authenticity-fetish an occasion for performance, and an opportunity to apply the techniques of the Method that he'd studied with the help of the GI Bill at the nearby New School with his close friends Marlon Brando and Tony Curtis.[14]

Running tabs for broke musicians is not how to succeed at business, and The Sage soon folded. But Belafonte had his new act, which he debuted at the Vanguard in late 1951. Intentionally not learning guitar as to leave his hands free for gesture and emoting, he performed folk songs from Israel, Ireland, Japan and Jamaica. The act was a hit. "It moves many to tears, this presentation of our international folk heritage," wrote *Metronome*'s reviewer.[15] Belafonte had found the performing persona he would take to the top. But it was not, fittingly, in a jazz club or on a record but rather on the theatrical stage where he had his big break—and where he also perhaps discovered, as well, that a Caribbean grounding for his globalism could be the proverbial magic bullet. Cast in *Jon*

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[12] As he put it of the jazz dates, to KHRM radio in Los Angeles in 1957, "So powerful was the influence of the music they [Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, etc.] were playing that I felt driven to a certain experimentation in that field, but only a small segment of the public was ready for it. I became subservient, tonally and musically, to what those cats were playing, so there was little room for concentration on the lyrics or story. I had to think exclusively in terms of vocal gymnastics. It was a valuable experiment, but I knew it wasn't my style." As quoted by Colin Escott, companion book the CD box-set *Harry Belafonte: Island in the Sun* (Hamburg, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2002).

[13]Belafonte in an interview with Joe Smith, as quoted by Escott 9.

[14] Shaw 42-43.

[15] "Harry has the most attractive package in the folk field," wrote Barry Ulanov in the January 1952 *Metronome*. "Combining his newly found stentorian tones with the unrestrained guitar of Craig Work, Harry moves and tears his way through a variety of songs – Negro and Brazilian Negro, American white and European – the best of music that man has made and hasn't signed, the best of the music of the primitive and the untutored. It moves many to tears, this presentation of our international folk heritage; it also makes much of a music that has been prettied and fussed and turned tastelessly indoors in the past. Here, it has a beat and a boom and a fine representative quality, and it's here to stay this way, I think, and more power to it – if there can be any more power to it than what the new Belafonte gives it."

Murray Anderson's Almanac, which opened on Broadway in December 1953, Belafonte's role in the revue was not a speaking but a singing one. The production had a disappointing run, but it was a triumph for Belafonte; he sang three songs, among them a show-stopping rendition of the Jamaican folk tune "Hold 'Em Joe." With Harry fairly shouting the tune's suggestive chorus ("*Me Donkey Want Water! (Hold him Joe*!)"), the song evinced many of the fruitful juxtapositions that would soon become his hallmarks—a pastoral theme set against urbane orchestration; a simple workman-protagonist with unsubtle vocality.

Belafonte was duly awarded the 1953 Tony award for Best Supporting Actor. He of course appreciated the accolade, but in his underwhelmed response one glimpses the complex mix of ambition and self-regard possessed by many successful performers: Miffed that he'd received an acting award for his singing, Belafonte sent his wife Margurite to accept the prize on his behalf. The recognition may have pushed his quick-to-depress anger-buttons about what roles were available to blacks on Broadway. But it augured much about his career's larger arc and the particular gifts affording its heights. "He was an actor," as the show biz writer Maurice Zolotow archly put it, "playing the best role he was ever to get: the role of a singer."[16]

In the event, better roles (or at least better-paid ones) did soon arrive in the form of calls from Hollywood. In late 1953, Belafonte was cast with Dorothy Dandridge in the saccharine MGM drama *Bright Road*; the next year he again starred opposite Dandridge in another all-black picture, 20th Century Fox's *Carmen Jones*. Otto Preminger's stilted re-rendering Bizet's *Carmen* in the US south, with backwoods Blacks standing in for Bizet's faux gypsies, was eviscerated by commentators like James Baldwin as a retrograde disaster ("More than any movie I can recall seeing," Baldwin wrote in his much-anthologized review, "it cannot afford, dare not risk, imagination.")[17] But with its elaborate song-and-dance numbers and two gorgeous leads necking in Technicolor splendor, it was also a commercial hit. The first all-black picture to do such business, *Carmen Jones* introduced Belafonte's visage and voice to a crucial new public just as he was restarting his musical career. Having re-signed to RCA Victor in 1952 as a folk act, Belafonte cut two LP-records for the label in 1954 and 1955. First came *Mark Twain and other Folk Favorites*, next was *Belafonte*; both records followed the fashion of Harry's eclectic stage-show by featuring a mix of British and Scottish folk tunes, African American chain-gang hollers, and a smattering of Caribbean-based songs (notably on *Belafonte*, his already oft-requested cover of the calypso "Matilda"). Both albums eventually sold very well. Belafonte, however, had already become convinced that a full album of Caribbean songs was what he needed to do. The A&R men at RCA were dubious. But one night at dinner he won their boss's support. George Marek's call was in some ways a bold one. But with the record companies seeking to figure out how best to exploit the relatively new format of long-play record, it was perhaps not so much of a stretch as it might seem.

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[16] Zolitow as quoted by Shaw 131

[17] James Baldwin, "Carmen Jones: The Dark Is Light Enough,. *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: Beacon, 1955) 46. Original publication in *Commentary*, January 1955, as "Life Straight in De Eye". The script and score for *Carmen Jones* were based on the Broadway show, and accompanying libretto by Oscar Hammerstein II.

2.3

The years after World War II brought with them a sea-change in the record industry, with a booming consumer economy joining with new technologies—multi-track recording on tape, stereophonic sound, the 33 1/3 rpm long-play (LP) record—to change fundamentally how music was recorded, marketed, and listened to in America and worldwide. Sheer advances in fidelity made listening to records in the home a more pleasurable and wonder-filled experience than ever before. Moreover, the advent of the LP, introduced by Columbia Records in 1948 and allowing for upwards of 20 minutes of music on each side (or much more than that if listeners took advantage of new turntables allowing for a stack of records to play one after the other), augured crucial changes in the music being recorded. The first such obvious changes were to allow, for example, for the recording of extended solos on jazz records. More abstractly, the advent of the LP would also forge, a few years later, the modern concept of the "album" with which we're familiar today: as a linked suite of songs offering a coherent artistic statement by their creator. In terms, though, of the format's immediate impacts on the record industry when it appeared in the 1950s, perhaps most crucial was how the LP radically expanded the number and kind of consumers buying recorded music.

During the preceding decades when every home had a radio but the phonograph was still a semi-rare appliance, consumers of 78-rpm records were for the most part music devotees of one kind or another: sophisticated "intellectual" connoisseurs of classical or art music; serious fans of genres like country, R&B, or jazz; or teenagers and the young, for whom the 78 rpm single (soon to be supplanted by the new lightweight 45) was the favored means of wearing out the latest pop hits on bedroom turntables or drugstore jukeboxes. Of these three groups of fans, only the first switched immediately to the LP, whose advantages over the old "album" of heavy, thick 78s—which required the listener to rise every few minutes to play back an entire symphony—were plain. Black fans of R&B, like other working-class fans of genre musics often released by small independent labels rather than New York or LA-based conglomerates, stayed with 78s well into the 1950s. Likewise although a decade hence college kids would become the great consumers of long-play rock albums, in the LP's early days young people stuck to singles. In the early 1950s, the new format's primary consumers were those young people's parents: those "greatest generation" denizens of prosperous post-war suburbs who, possessed of newfangled hi-fi equipment for their Levittown living rooms, were newly in the market for recorded accompaniment to their cocktail parties or romantic evenings by the fire. The advent and rise of the LP, in ways historians of technology like Langdon Winner might appreciate, was at once a result and expression of larger social trends—e.g., "white flight"—at a time when "the living room," as the editor of *High Fidelity* magazine wrote, "was establishing itself as the center of American recreational life."[18] Among the new developments theformat helped usher in over its first half-decade,

[18] The quote is from John Conly, editor of *High Fidelity* magazine, from his article "The Higher Fi," in *The Atlantic*, December 1956. On the ways in which social relations – i.e,, power – can be embedded, and abetted, by technological objects' development and use, see Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" in *Daedalus*, 109:1, Winter 1980 (also collected in Winner's book, *The Whale and the Reactor:*

as the musical historian Elijah Wald has traced, was a new "adult market" for recorded sound.[19]

At first this market was dominated by Broadway cast recordings like *South Pacific*—a hit with such staying power that it remained the top-selling LP in America throughout 1949, 1950, and 1951. Soon enough, though, cast recordings were joined by records explicitly aimed at providing for those suburban "dens" their sonic wallpaper. Crooners like Johnny Mathis and Perry Como ruled the roost, Paul Weston launched an eponymous genre with his hit *Mood Music* LP in 1953, and the television comedian Jackie Gleason scored that year's top album with *Music for Lovers Only*; he followed it up the next year with the top-sellers *Music, Martinis and Memories*, and *Music to Make you Misty*. With the emergence in those years of mood music also came that of "exotica". If the aim of mood music was to forge a particular atmosphere in people's parlors—cozy, nostalgic, sexy—that of its close cousin was to bring the distant parts of the world into those same spaces. Exotica's great purveyor, the Hollywood bandleader Les Baxter, perhaps distilled the genre's impetus in the liner notes to his 1951 LP *Rituals of the Savage*. "Do the mysteries of native rituals intrigue you," they asked during a year in which his *Voice of Ixtabay*, recorded with Yma Sumac's Inca orchestra, became the year's #3 seller. "Does the haunting beat of savage drums fascinate you?…This original and exotic music by Les Baxter was conceived by blending his creative ideas with the ritualistic melodies and seductive rhythms of the natives of distant jungles and tropical ports to capture all the color and fervor so expressive of the emotions of these people."[20] During the first blush of the hi-fi craze in the early 1950s, many stereo enthusiasts were as interested in sounds as they were in music, whether tropical bird calls, lions' roars, or "sound-effects" records. The appeal of exotica was in some ways closely linked to this simple fascination with foreign sounds, although aiming to reach a wider audience than (mostly male) sound-effects enthusiasts who read magazines like *HiFi & Music Review*. Belafontes's political aims as an artist were perhaps radically opposed to those of Baxter, but by the time he made *Calypso*, the idea of creating a foreign, exotic world over the course of a whole LP was hardly new (one key advantage for Belafonte, though, of course being that he didn't need to hire Inca princesses to lend his albums their "exotic" tinge: he could embody it himself).

Among US record labels venturing into "primitive" music, of course, not all were on the queasy tip of exotica. Moe Asch's famous Folkways label, for one—founded in 1948 with the promise "to document, to give a voice to people who are really saying something"—had from the start sponsored the recording of traditional musics in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia.[21] Perhaps the more interesting among US record impresarios venturing afield to make records in places like the Caribbean during the 1950s, were not representatives of new folk labels but rather of the audiophile wing of the recording industry, exemplified by Emory Cook, a legend among 1950s sound scientists who

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A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986)) For a critique of Winner's ideas, see Bruno Latour, "Which Politics for Which Artifacts?" *Domus* June 2004.

[19] Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock'N'Roll* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). See especially Chapter 14, "Big Records for Adults" 184-198.

[20] Liner-notes to Les Baxter's *Ritual of the Savage* (1951), as discussed by Wald 187.

[21] On Moses Asch and Folkways records, see Tony Olmsted, *Folkways Records: Moses Asch and his Encyclopedia of Sound* (New York: Routledge, 2003), and also Peter Goldsmith, *Making People's Music: Moe Asch and Folkways Records* (Washington DC: Smithsonian, 1998).

created some of the first stereophonic records—and who also, as it happened, was a great enthusiast of Caribbean music. Having founded his Sounds of Our Times label in Stamford, Connecticut, in 1950, Cook's LPs were designed to showcase his state-of-the art recording and playback equipment (among them his "binaural" stereo albums playable on his patented Rek-o-Ket turntable, a dual-cartridge device that cost $165 in 1953): one early hit was a recording of thunder storms over Long Island Sound; another was "Rail Dynamics," a hi-fi rendering of train sounds captured on the tracks and trestles of the New York Central line between Peekskill and the city that sold more than 50,000 copies by 1956.[22] "Sound is a way of daydreaming—an escape into the wild blue," Cook told *The New Yorker* that year. "A bad recording interferes with that escape, forcing the listener's imagination to strain against alien elements."[23] When he branched out into recording music, Cook did so not near home but first down in New Orleans and then in the Caribbean. Entranced by the acoustic challenges of capturing steelband and calypso tunes as they sounded in live carnival context, he began traveling to the islands to make field recordings in 1954 and opened a Cook Records office in Port-Spain soon after. Such were Cook's media profile and predilections, that when he decamped in February 1956 for Port-of-Spain, Trinidad with twenty reels of tape to record that year's carnival celebrations, *Time* reported on his trip.

Whatever Cook's precise motivations were, his contributions to the recorded history of calypso and other Caribbean musics were major. When he arrived in Port-of-Spain in February 1956 on the same trip reported by *Time*, the *Trinidad Guardian* was already opining that "Cook has done more to popularize the music of the Caribbean than any other record-maker in the U.S."[24] Within months that judgement would have to be amended in favor of Belafonte and his RCA sponsors. But part of what is crucial about Cook's activities in Trinidad is how they didn't merely help to spread calypso to the US, but also helped to forge a new record-buying public in Trinidad. Already in February 1956, reported the *Sunday Guardian*, Cook's recording of Antigua's Brute Force Steelband the previous May had sold 1000 copies in Trinidad in a single December week – the most of any LP record yet on the island.[25] (Cook's landmark recordings of the '56 carnival season, as it happened, which captured the ascent of arguably the music's greatest modern practitioner, The Mighty Sparrow, would become, for those American and international consumers piqued by Belafonte's *Calypso* later that year, among the go-to recordings for a "more authentic" calypso sound.)

How exactly the activities of record impresarios like Emory Cook and Moe Asch—representatives, that is, of the audiophile and folkie wing of the North American record biz—influenced George Marek and Belafonte to pursue their Caribbean-themed record for mainstream RCA is hard to say, but the international element had been present in Belafonte's work for the label from the start. Apart from the Caribbean-inflected tunes on *Mark Twain* and *Belafonte*, Harry's first RCA single in 1952 was a novelty cover of the Japanese love-song 'Gomen Nasai" ("Forgive Me"). Marek, a Vienna-born Jew

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[22] See Richard Gehr, "Cooking Up Calypso," emusic.com, March 22, 2006. Web.
[23] Daniel Lang, "Ear Driven" (2-part profile of Emory Cook), *The New Yorker* 3-10 March 1956.
[24] "Millions in US to Hear Calypso, Steelband in Carnival Atmosphere," *Trinidad Guardian*, 10 February 1956: 7.
[24] "George Marek" [Obituary], by Bernard Holland, *The New York Times* 8 January, 1987.
[25] "Carnival Music to Be Recorded," *Sunday Guardian* (Trinidad) 5 February, 1956.

who'd emigrated to New York in his teens, had gotten his start in the record business seeking to popularize Old World art music for US listeners. First as music editor at *Good Housekeeping* and later as chief of Artists and Repertory at RCA, he'd played a key role in doing so, releasing such records as *Classical Music for People who Hate Classical Music* and remarkably penning 14 books as well—among them respected biographies of Beethoven, Schubert, and Toscanini, and titles such as *A Front Row at the Opera*, which presented capsule-librettos and background on the great European operas for benighted Americans. While classical music was his passion, Marek was a proselytizer for the sound arts in general with a keen marketer's mind. He had overseen RCA's own "mood music" series and initiated the label's shift to packaging its records in bright colors and vivid pictures and offering them for sale in drugstores and supermarkets. Getting customers hooked on "music, any kind of music," was to be the record man's aim. "As the cigarette people believe," he said, "the habit is everything."[26] Marek's ambit at corporate RCA was far different from that of say, Moe Asch at famously un-commercial Folkways; but it seems fair to say that his interest in what Belafonte had to say about Caribbean music went much deeper than the profit-motive. "He was very much an intellectual," as Belafonte would late recall of their dinner, "hugely sensitive to oppression. He loved culture, and he was very open toward all kinds of music."[27]

Belafonte himself, likewise a lover of culture "hugely sensitive to oppression," had been drawn to the folk idiom possessed of his own strong ideas about the political potentialities of music. Perhaps the first of these was his belief in the "universality" and communicability of folk cultures among diverse peoples, a sense evidenced in his catholic stage show and, in 1955, by his effort to create a suite of folk tunes from across the planet inspired by Edward Steichen's "Family of Man" photography exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art. For Belafonte though, like all folksingers (and as evidenced in the failure of his Steichen-inspired TV special *Sing Man, Sing!*) there existed an often difficult tension between universalism and "authenticity." Belafonte's act had perhaps its most crucial antecedents in performers like Lead Belly and Josh White: black men from the South, who, if known in later years as versatile New York-based singers, had biographies that like the folk revival in general flowed north from the vernacular traditions of the old Confederacy (in Lead Belly's case, the chain gang songs of Louisiana; in White's, the Piedmont Blues of North Carolina). In White especially, a performer known for his sexual magnetism and physical style, Belafonte found a key mentor from whom he lifted not just White's number "Timber" (which became a rousing highlight of his own act), but also his signature unbuttoned shirt (albeit releasing a button or two more).[28] Given, however, that Harry was a New Yorker lacking roots in what James Baldwin called the "old country," he had already begun to attract critiques for being "synthetic in folk"; he was not, as the purists would have it, "rooted in regional soil."[29]

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[26] "George Marek" [Obituary] by Bernard Holland, *The New York Times* 8 January, 1987.

[27] Belafonte in Michael Eldridge's *Transition* interview, "The Remains of the Day-O"

[28] On White's story generally, and the two's relationship, see Elijah Wald's biography, *Society Blues* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000)

[29] In mid-1953, the music writer Don Freeman, writing in *Down Beat*, opined that "Belafonte is synthetic in folk singing. His roots are not in regional soil, as Richard Dyer-Bennett's are in Kentucky or Leadbelly's in Texas. Belafonte is a native New Yorker, the possessor of a not-large but extremely flexible voice and a flair for theatre…a guy who collaborates with others to revamp different folk tunes."

It is hard to imagine a white Harvard-dropout like Pete Seeger being traduced for a lack of authenticity at that time. Within the particular racial ecology of the US folk revival, the cultures of both blacks and whites from the down-home hinterlands served as "authentic" source material, but it was whites in northern cities who largely served as the curators of a Folk tent under which blacks were rarely sheltered unless "authentic" exponents of rural styles from their home states. (While a young Bob Dylan got famous flak from the folk puritans for going electric, his adaptation of the talking blues form and his failure to sing songs exclusively from his native Midwest were less controversial.) Belafonte was frustrated by such conversations and sang songs from all over the world, critics be damned. But what one also gleans from his pronouncements and choices was his wanting to have it both ways. "Going into folk music," he said at the time, "was originally a study of tradition, of my own people's tradition, an attempt to find a culture in which I could learn and the structure within which I could function successfully."[30] Here his evocation of "my own people's tradition" could of course be taken to imply the traditions of Martinique and Jamaica, of Americans, or of African-descended people everywhere. One senses that Harry, whose art and politics were always shaped by a distinct racial consciousness, was here implying the last. Whatever the singular "tradition" he meant to study though, that study was as much a creative endeavor as a scholarly. This holds true, of course, for all exponents of any folk movement – whether left-wing or right politically—seeking to forge a new national narrative. But part of what is so interesting about Belafonte—whose decision to "go Caribbean," as it would happen, didn't come from some hootenannyunion-hall debate but rather a TV show—was his self-consciousness about the necessary artifice involved in all performance.

Invited to appear on a guest segment on NBC's Colgate Comedy Hour in September 1955, Harry's initial thought was to devote his twenty-minute segment to a folk-blues story built around that colossal railsplitter of Negro folklore, John Henry. In discussing his plans for the show with his old writer-friend Bill Attaway—who, as it happened, was now employed as a staff writer at NBC whose portfolio that fall included the Colgate Comedy Hour—the idea cropped up to present a musical theme with Caribbean flavor. Enlisting the help of a New York-based calypso composer called Lord Burgess (né Irving Burgie), Attaway and Belafonte conceived with Burgie a segment called "Holiday in Trinidad." The show, which aired on October 2, 1955, had the Colgate Hour's emcee Jack Carson playing the role of tourist on an island-hop through the Caribbean who, stopping off in Trinidad, watches Belafonte sing a series of songs adapted by Burgie from Jamaican and Trinidadian folk sources, among them "Hosanna," "Come Back Liza," and, perhaps most notably, the "Banana Boat Song" (or "Day-O" as it was then known)—Belafonte's first public performance of his most famous number. The show didn't get great ratings; but it gave to Belafonte the template and idea for his new record.

Just as Woody Guthrie had done in his name-making *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1940), Belafonte's breakthrough (albeit to a scale unimaginable to folkies like Guthrie) would come via the nostalgia-soaked evocation of a landscape from his youth. Crucially though, the world *Calypso* figured wasn't so parochial as to evoke Jamaica specifically, but a generic pan-Caribbean: a fantasy island-world easy on the ears and minds of Americans'

[30] As quoted by Shaw 87

predilections for sand and sun, but also capable of tapping into the nostalgia and realities of West Indians in New York. To what extent the political climate in the Caribbean and its diasporas, with Federation and the approach of independence predominating in culture and politics (and as Emory Cook's and others' recordings in Trinidad's carnival tents would show, featuring prominently in calypso lyrics) impacted on Belafonte's record is perhaps difficult to precisely prove. But in examining the recording process itself, and the relationship of the songs he recorded to the folk revival then ongoing in the West Indies, it comes clear how Belafonte's *Calypso* was the product of a distinct historical conjuncture whose twin poles were, on the one hand, the movement toward independence (and perhaps federation) in the islands themselves, and, on the other, the development and continued growth of Caribbean diasporas during the post-war period in northern cities.

2.4

When Belafonte, as an older man, recalled his childhood, he spoke of how

> As a young child of West Indian parents growing up in Harlem, I remember how filled with wonderment about the great diversity that sat within the Black Community there. Not only was there a West Indian community that gave much to the causes of the Caribbean, but also, a few blocks from where I lived, I could hear Cubans all day long playing Latin music. I could also hear the folks from the English-speaking Caribbean playing the music of the lower Caribbean.[31]

The Harlem of Harry's youth was a mecca for dark-skinned people from across the planet, was, more specifically, also already being called the "Capital of the Caribbean."[32] In the interwar period, North Atlantic cities like like London, Paris, and New York were the essential sites for building black diasporic consciousness, as scholars like Paul Gilroy and Brent Hayes Edwards have assiduously shown.[33] London in the 1920s and 30s was the hub of George Padmore's International African Service Bureau; Paris the seedbed for the inchoate Negritude movement; New York (and Harlem specifically) was home to West Indian revolutionists like Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican-born founder of that astonishing feat of global organizing the United Negro Improvement Association. If Garvey represented a kind of black internationalism, the city was also host to a panoply of agitators and fundraisers for particular nationalist movements reaching back at least to figures like José Marti, the 19th-century poet-laureate of Cuban independence (and pan-Caribbean spirit) who spent most of his adult years working as a journalist in New York, and was as much a New York writer as a Cuban one. In a city wherein immigrants from

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[31] Harry Belafonte, excerpted interview with Alex Miller, June 21, 2000, included in the liner-book to *The Long Road to Freedom: An Anthology of Black Music*

[32] Jason Parker, "'Capital of the Caribbean': the African-American-West Indian "Harlem Nexus" and the Transnational Drive for Black Freedom, 1940 – 1948," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 89, 2004.

[33] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Double-Consciousness and Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003)

the various islands "found themselves neighbors in immediate and dialogic ways not much available in their often isolated home islands," as Jason Parker puts it, the possibilities for pan-Caribbean political organizing impacted the movements for self-government and federation in key ways.[34] Already true in the 1920s, this became only more so in the years after World War II, when the immediate approach of self-rule in the British West Indies joined to a swelling flow of immigrants to New York from Trinidad, Jamaica, and Barbados, Haiti and the other half of Hispaniola (and of course, as immortalized in "West Side Story," Puerto Rico). What implications physical proximity had for political organizing held true in spades for the city's soundscape. Not merely replete with various Caribbean musical forms from mambo to calypso to mento and jazz, New York's bar-rooms and block-parties provided an essential space for those forms' evolution-by-interbreeding, in ways that inevitably found their way back to the Caribbean proper (the Nuyorican midwifery of salsa being only the best-known of such).

When Belafonte gathered his ensemble in Hollywood's Radio Recording studio in November 1955 for the first of two double-sessions that would produce *Calypso*, he did not do so as the exponent of any particular national tradition. But the collaborators he convened evinced the truth that his record and his sensibility were in key ways a distinct product of the pan-Caribbean New York in which he'd grown. Under the direction of his bandleader Tony Scott, the players included Frantz Casseus, the Brookyln-based "father of classical Haitian guitar" (and contributor of "Merci Bon Dieu" to Belafonte's repertoire);[35] the Puerto Rican percussionist and session-leader Herman Díaz (responsible for such key moves as mic-ing the drums on "Day-O" up front so as to make them more prominent in the mix); and perhaps most notably, the Brooklyn-born Bajan singer and composer Irving Burgie (aka Lord Burgess) who would write—or perhaps more accurately, adapt from folk sources—the most iconic hits on *Calypso*, and who would go on, when his parents' natal island gained its independence in 1966, to pen Barbados' national anthem.

The actual ways and means by which Belafonte came to the songs he recorded that day have long been obscured. One source was of course his own childhood sojourn in Jamaica, where he was likely exposed to local folk songs of work and play, but also to the music of leading calypsonians from Trinidad and other islands circulating both in person and on record throughout the region. As the Jamaican music writer Garnette Cadogan has suggested, it also likely that he heard groups like the Cudjoe Minstrels, a seminal Jamaican folk ensemble who were extremely popular across all Kingston's classes during the mid-30s when Belafonte was in the city (and whose repertoire included songs like "Hold 'Em Joe").[36] In the 1950s Belafonte himself was never terribly specific about where he heard such songs (his ethnologist's devotion to visiting the Library of Congress and studying folk traditions notwithstanding), offering instead nostalgic reverie that echoed the tone of his ballads. "I still have the impression of an environment that sang," he'd recount in 1957 of his time in Jamaica. "Nature sang and the people sang, too. The streets of Kingston constantly rang with the songs of piping peddlers or

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[34] Jason Parker, *Brother's Keeper: The United States, Race, and Empire in the British Caribbean, 1937-1962* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[35] On Casseus, see "Frantz Casseus," by Marc Ribot, *BOMB* 82 (Winter 2003).

[36] Personal communication, Garnette Cadogan. Belafonte was also likely present in Kingston for the Cudjoe Minstrels famed series of shows at Jamaica's National Stadium in 1938.

politicians drumming up votes in the lilting singsong of the island. I loved it. I loved also night gazing. I used to climb up a mango tree and lie back and munch mangos and gaze through the leaves at the star-filled sky."[37]

One doesn't wish to begrudge Belafonte his night-gazing, but among the truths suggested by this gauze of nostalgia is that it was not during his time in Jamaica that he came to hear most of the songs he'd later translate for a mass audience. Apart from gaining an overall "feel" for Jamaican music, it was not during his time on the island that he had come to most of the songs he'd later translate for a mass audience. One hardly needed to to climb a Caribbean mango tree to hear Caribbean music. And indeed for some decades, seekers of styles ranging from cha-cha-cha to calypso on record would likely have had more success in New York than even in Havana or Port-of-Spain. Belafonte may have been responsible for forging a massive American audience for Caribbean music, but by the time he did, Caribbean music—and calypso more specifically—had long been a recurrent feature of the US pop landscape. Indeed the very history of calypso on record likely began in New York, where in 1912 the Victor Gramaphone company recorded "Sly Mongoose" as played by the day's leading calypso composer Lionel Belasco.[38]

Two decades later, the first calypso record to gain significant radio play in the Caribbean and worldwide was also made in the city, when a Trinidadian bandleader and a phonograph and radio merchant in Port of Spain arranged for the makers of top hits from 1934's carnival celebrations in Port-of-Spain to visit the New York studios of the American Record Corporation (soon to become the US arm of British-based Decca) and cut a few tunes. [39] The resulting records provided a great spur to the sale of gramaphones in Trinidad and made the names there of calypsonians Atilla the Hun and The Lion, whose session was fortuitously heard by the crooner Rudy Vallee, who invited them to appear on his NBC variety show the next day. (As Atilla would boast in his "History of Carnival" the next year, "Now you can hear our calypso/ On American Radio….").[40] Decca, for its part, would invite a contingent of calypsonians back to New York annually for much of the next decade, introducing to stateside audiences such seminal calypsonians as Lord Invader (later called "the Trinidadian Bertolt Brecht" by Derek Walcott), King Radio (whose 1930s composition "Man Smart, Woman Smarter" became a staple for Belafonte) and The Caresser (whose infectious dirge "Edward VIII," about the abdication of Britain's monarch for the sake of an American divorceé's love, became a crossover smash in 1937—and was also later covered by Belafonte).[41] In 1944, the

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[37] Belafonte in Van Holmes (1957).

[38] *Sunday Express,* Progress Supplement, 29 April 1979: 8. As cited by Keith Q. Warner, *Kaiso! The Trinidad Calypso* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1982) 22.

[39] On the arrangement between the Trinidad merchant Eduardo Sa Gomes and New York Trini bandleader Gerald Clark (along with their aim to "exploit what they hoped would be a dual audience for calypso: a moneyed "colored" bourgeosie in the islands and a sizeable pan-Caribbean emigrant class in New York,"), see Michael Eldridge, "There Goes the Transnational Neighborhood: Calypso Buys a Bungalow," *Callaloo* 25.2 (2002): 620-638.

[40] Hun continued by stating that in Trinidad calypsonians might be treated as "hooligans," but "In New York you're an artist and a gentleman,/Take for instance Lion and me, /Having dinner with Rudy Vallee.")

[41] On the 1930s "calypso craze," which predated its 1950s iteration by 20 years but likewise never really took off, see, e.g., "Calypso Boom," *Time* 29 August 1939: 21. "Strange Art of Calypso: Topical Songs from Trinidad become a Record Vogue," *Newsweek* 9 October 1939: 33. "Calypsonian Crescendo: Native Trinidad Recordings Attract Much Interest Here," *Billboard* 16 December, 1939: 9 –10. "Old Calypso

Andrews Sisters scored a runaway US hit with their cover of Lord Invader's "Rum and Coca Cola," a tune, brought to the states by the comedian Morey Amsterdam just as US servicemen were returning in droves from their far-flung ports of call, which offered a typically wry commentary on the (sexual) commerce that had sprung up around the US navy's new base in Chagauramas, Trinidad ("*Rum and Coca Cola/Way Down Point Cumana/Both mother and daughter/working for the yankee dollar*"); it sold an estimated 5 million copies worldwide.[42] Soon after, Louis Jordan and Ella Fitzgerald's version of the proto-feminist murder ditty "Stone Cold Dead in the Market" (composed in 1939 as "He Had it Coming" by the Trinidadian ex-pat Wilmouth Houdini) became a jukebox staple across America that survived as a vocalists' standard into the 1950s, perhaps becoming, in the process, the only song to be covered by both Pat Boone and Maya Angelou.[43]

Belafonte's *Calypso* had more recent folk-based antecedents as well. One such proto-type was by a London-based singer from Trinidad called Edric Connor and his group The Caribbeans, who in 1952 released an LP called *Songs from Jamaica* on Britain's tiny Argo label. Apart from featuring songs that Belafonte would later cover – "Linstead Market," "Hosanna," "Hill –an'Gully"– *Songs from Jamaica* was explicitly tied to the political conjuncture of its making in the West Indies. "The careful preservation of its folk-music is to a nation a matter of the highest import," intoned British academic Hugh Paget on the liner-notes gracing its back-cover. "This has a special relevance for Jamaica today, where a rising sense of Jamaican national consciousness is being transcended by an awareness of a common West Indian cultural heritage which is one of the conditions of the successful federation of the West Indian colonies into a new nation."[44] Connor's record, which featured simply-arranged folk tunes sung in an operatic voice reminiscent of Paul Robeson, hardly sold. But its maker did go on to enjoy performing career that in some ways mirrored Belafonte's. Continuing to make folk records from the Caribbean he also went on, in 1958, to appear in Gregory Peck's film version of *Moby Dick* as the harpooner Dagoo, singing "Hill and Gully Rider" as the harpooners chased a whale– a role it is perhaps hard to imagine him winning without Belafonte having introduced to stage and screen the glamour of the Caribbean "ethnic" in preceding years. (Re-issued in the US in 1957, *Songs from Jamaica*'s new cover-art perhaps distilled the "sexing-up" of Caribbean folk music ordained by Belafonte's ascent: While on the cover of his initial Argo release, Connor's stentorian tones were matched by a quaint painting of a noble straw-hatted peasant, the new cover featured a sexy brown-skinned lady in a bikini.)

Still more important than Connor for Belafonte, though, was Louise Bennett, the legendary ethnologist and comedienne from Jamaica who made it her life's work to

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Songs from Trinidad are now becoming a new US fad," *Life* 8 April 1940. All as cited and discussed by Eldridge,

[42] Warner 26

[43]For this tidbit and other background on "Stone Cold Dead in de Market," my thanks to Frnaklin Bruno and his paper at the 2009 Experience Music Project Pop Ponference in Seattle, April 19, 2009 "Stone Cold Dead in de Market: Exploiting the Voice in Post-war Calypso."

[44] Hugh Paget, liner notes to Edric Connor and the Caribbeans, *Jamaican Folk Songs*, Collected and arranged by Tom Murray. The Argo Record Company Limited, 29 George Street, London W1. RG 33.

record and celebrate the folk cultures and patois vernacular of an island.[45] Acknowledged by Hugh Paget in the liner notes to Edric Connor's *Songs from Jamaica* as an invaluable aid in compiling its repertoire, Bennett had by the 1950s already spent two decades combing Jamaica's countryside for work songs, Anancy stories, and children's games.[46] Known to generations of countrymen by as "Miss Lou," Bennett worked tirelessly on stage and on the radio to convince them of their culture's beauty and worth, her success in doing so Is perhaps less evident in the work she herself left behind, than in the recurrent appearance of the sayings and songs she popularized in Bob Marley's reggae, and the deep patois-inflection of contemporary pop culture in Jamaica more broadly.[47] While those traces of her work are perhaps Bennett's main legacy, she did commit some of her researches to vinyl for record-buyers in Jamaica and abroad. Paid a one-time fee of $50 by Moe Asch to make an album of those songs in 1954, Bennett's *Jamaican Folk Songs*, an 8-song sample of her work, was released on Folkways later that year. (She would also make a *Jamaican Children's Songs* album for Asch a few years later.)

The fruits of Bennet's labor became visible at a time when, as Deborah Thomas has detailed, the discovery—or creation—of "Jamaican folk culture" unfolded as a concomitant process with the forging of creole ("brown") nationalism in Jamaica.[48] That her started becoming more visible at a time when the discovery and celebration of authentic "West Indianness" was an obsession for intellectuals and politicos across the wider regionalso made her a key figure in a pan-West Indian folk revival similarly exemplified by figures like Beryl McBurnie in Trinidad, a researcher into the "history of the West Indian dance" whose landmark book on the topic—including dances of African, Indian, Arawak derivation, from many difference islands—appeared in Port-of-Spain in 1958.[49] "I think that any West Indian who remains in his territory," the young St. Lucian playwright Derek Walcott wrote in his Foreword to *West Indian Dance*, "and is dedicated to the cause of defining and expanding our West Indian spirit will find this little book…of immense value." "The artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation," the Martinique-born Frantz Fanon would write in his anti-colonial bible *The Wretched of the Earth* a few years later, "turns paradoxically toward the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact the castoffs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all."[50] One could do worse as a way to describe the motivation and effect of Miss Lou's work on her island, and in certain ways—not least her influence on Belafonte—for the larger Caribbean and its diasporas. In the context of the Caribbean, she may not have been able, in a temporal sense, to "renew contact with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of

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[45] See Mervyn Morris's classic essay on Bennet's undersold importance in the history of Jamaican letters and pop culture alike, "On Reading Miss Lou Seriously" (1964) collected in The *Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, Alison Donnel and Sarah Lawson Welsh, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[46] Paget concludes his liner-notes: "It has, in fact, long been clear that there is an urgent need for the publication of an authentic collection of Jamaican folk-songs based upon careful research into the original words and music. This has now been done by Mr. Tom Murray, with the aid of Miss Louise Bennett; all West Indians and indeed all who believe music to be a vital part of the culture of all people, or who value it for its own sake, owe them a lasting debt of gratitude."

[47] See Garnette Cadogan, "Mother of Us All," *The Caribbean Review of Books* 10 (November 2006).

[48] See Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004)

[49] Beryl McBurnie, *West Indian Dance* (University of the West Indies, Augustine, Trinidad, 1958).

[50] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963) 210.

life," as Fanon directed would-be cultural nationalists to do in Africa.[51] But Bennet, in seeking to record and valorize the patois sayings and songs of Jamaica's once-rural people, was certainly and seeking to reverse the "cultural obliteration" carried out, over centuries, by colonial masters who'd denigrated the lived language of Jamaica's slaves and their descendents, as opposed to the Queen's English, as so much worthless trash.[52]

The precise nature of Belafonte's relationship to Bennett before he made *Calypso* is unknown by me, but he has spoken on the record about her larger influence on his work in preparing *Long Road to Freedom*. "She was our well of knowledge," he told the *Los Angeles Times* on the occasion of her death in 2006. "When she spoke she told stories in the tongue of the indigenous and the tongue of the average person. It was a remarkable experience."[53] And folk enthusiast that he was, it is a safe bet to claim that he had her 1954 Folkways record.

Listening to Bennet's recording of "Day Dah Light" on *Jamaican Folk Songs* one hears immediately its more famous derivation, even though Bennett's voice is accompanied only by a simple guitar, with Miss Lou snapping out the up-tempo lyrics in tuneful patois:

> Day -O
> Day Dah Light and Me Want Go Home
> (Day day light and me want go home)
> Come Mr. Talleyman come tally me banana
> (Day dah light…)
> Come fix yuh cotta Mattie, yuh no take bunch banana
> (Day dah light…)
> Six hand, seven hand, eight hand bunch…
> (Day dah light…)
> Six hand, seven hand, eight hand bunch…
> (Day dah light…)
> Me come a fi work me no come a fi idle
> (Day Dah light and me want go home)[54]

The song was precisely what its lyrics implied, a work tune sung by workers who, toiling at night to avoid the broiling Caribbean sun, loaded freighters on Jamaica's docks with fruit bound for the world. From his covers of chain gang chants to original compositions like the riverboat-man's lament "Mark Twain," work-songs had always

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[51] Fanon 169.

[52] Without pausing overlong, here, to delve into debates surrounding the existence and form of the "folk" in the West Indies (not least since I'll be taking up that debate in the next chapter), it is worth noting that those debates have long held a central role in conversations surrounding the birth and form of "West Indian literature." See, especially, George Lamming's contentions, in *The Pleasures of Exile*, on how "the West Indian novel has…restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality," and Gordon Rohler's rather more subtle treatment of the theme (and critique of Lamming), in his essay "Literature and the Folk" (1971), collected in Rohler, *My Strangled City* (Port of Spain, Trinidad: Longman, 1992) 52-85.

[53] "Louise Bennett-Coverley, 86" [Obituary], by Jocelyn Y. Stewart, *Los Angeles Times* 2 August, 2006.

[54] Gratitude to Nadia Ellis, and an anonymous friend, for helping parse this lyric for my non-Jamaican ears, especially the line "come fix yuh cotta [head-wrap], Mattie [female proper name], yuh no take bunch banana."

been a key part of Belafonte's repertoire. For folkies more generally, such songs were a key means of evoking life as it was lived in particular regions, and more expansively (for those with left-labor sympathies especially) of tying those lives to the particular political economies that made those places. This tack of course held true in spades for "Day da Light," a tune about a fruit whose history distilled the broad outline of Caribbean history more broadly: from the arrival of the Asian banana tree to the New World with Columbus's in 1492; to the fruit's dual role, for the islands' African slaves, as site of deathly labor and sustaining nourishment; through to its 20th century function as a staple of export-based Caribbean economies (a role, as it happens, that like the dockloading scenes evoked in "Day da Light," would persist in the post-colonial era with ex-British colonies like Jamaica granted preferential "banana quotas" to send their fruit to the erstwhile mother country.

Whatever the historical allusions "Day da Light" suggested to Belafonte, its adaptation as "Day-O" (from whose royalties Bill Attaway and Irving Burgie, co-credited as its authors, become wealthy) made a few key changes to the song—namely: slowing it down drastically and re-shaping the lyrics into American English—that helped make it intelligible to mainland audiences, and, just as importantly, made it possible for Harry to present it as a drama-filled workman's lament.

Day-O! Day-O!
Daylight come and me want go home
Day! Mis-a day, mis-a-day, mis-a day, mis-a-day-o,
Daylight come and me want go home

Work all night and I drink a rum
(daylight come and me want go home)
Stack banana till the morning come
(daylight come and me want go home)
Come Mr. Tallyman, tally me banana
(daylight come and me want go home)
Come mr. Tallyman, tally me banana
(daylight come and me want go home)

Lift six foot, seven eight foot bunch!
(daylight come and me want go home)
Six foot, seven foot, eight foot bunch!
(Daylight come and me want go home)

Apart from socio-political content, of course, the banana had long been freighted with another set of associations in American culture. That Belafonte, as one female columnist wrote at the time, was a beautiful man "blessed with sufficient West Indian tradition to remind women of romance under the sun," no doubt played into his success with a song about a fruit whose very latin name, *musa paradisica*, evoked the "muse of the tropics." By the time Belafonte waxed "Day-O", the banana's image as a symbol of tropical sexuality in North Atlantic cultures had been shaped across the preceding decades by Josephine Baker's banana dance and Carmen Miranda's banana-headdress;

the gyrating charms of Señorita Chiquita Banana, the United Fruit Company mascot voted by US troops during World War II as the "woman with whom they'd most like to share a foxhole" (besting Betty Grable); and, a few years later, by an ad campaign from rival Dole with the slogan "anything less than nine-inches won't do."[55]

Curiously enough, the first version of the song that many Americans heard in 1956 was not Belafonte's but rather that of The Tarriers, a Chicago-based Weavers-spinoff led by the future actor Alan Arkin whose version became a hit shortly after RCA released Belafonte's *Calypso* LP in June 1956 without bothering to release a single. (The Tarriers wasn't the only alternate version: within months, there were a half-dozen other versions of "Day-O" on the charts.) By summer's end, though, RCA had mended its error. When Belafonte's version was released as a 45 rpm single and the song became identified with Harry—a figure whose work, as Elijah Wald puts it, was at once "exotic, erotic, intellectual, artistic, and folkloric"[56]—it shot to #5 on the Billboard charts and remained near the pop peak for months, jostling for position with "Blue Suede Shoes" and "Sixteen Tons." "The Banana Boat Song" was the tune that brought Belafonte to the pop summit; but the tune from *Calypso* that perhaps did the most to shape his larger place in the culture—and to shape the culture at large—was "Jamaica Farewell," not the least of its impacts was to inspire the name of the Kingston Trio, the phenomenally popular college folk act who would remain, over the following half-decade until the Beatles hit in 1964, the best-selling pop vocal group in America. Both Belafonte and the song's author, Irving Burgie, would claim that it was drawn "from various Caribbean folk songs," but "Jamaica Farewell" was not a folk song in the sense of having been passed along orally, with indeterminate author. All indications point to its lyric being penned by Burgie from scratch. The same, though does not hold for the melody, which Burgie lifted from an old Jamaican mento tune called "Iron Bar" (as he would eventually have to admit in court, since "Iron Bar" had been copyrighted in the UK as far back as 1944). As he'd done to turn "Day-da-light" into "Day-O," though, Burgie again slowed the up-tempo "Iron Bar" to ballad speed. And again the effect of this change, joined to the tune's new, clearly enunciated lyrics in Standard English, was to create for Belafonte a new pathos-filled character to perform.

That protagonist, like Belafonte's larger personage on stage, was a Caribbean of indeterminate origin, perhaps a sailor, certainly a romantic, hailing from an island world of hard-working men and willing women. Foreign but safe, with carefully enunciated soothing lyrics, the supply adaptable songs he sang like "Jamaica Farewell" would, become an international standard recorded in dozens of languages and even used as the theme-song of Naxalite Maoist revolutionists in India—perhaps distilling, in its wide resonances, the Caribbean's dual associations with revolution and pleasure.

Down the way where the nights are gay
And the sun shines daily on the mountaintop

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[55] On the United Fruit Company's marketing innovations, including the invention and reception of Señorita Chiquita, see *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*, by Peter Chapman (New York: Canongate, 2007). On the Dole advert, and the political economic history of bananas more generally, see Dan Koeppel, *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2007).

[56] Wald 193.

I took a trip on a sailing ship
And when I reached Jamaica, I made a stop

But I'm sad to say, I'm on my way
Won't be back for many a day
My heart is down, my head is turning around
I had to leave a little girl in Kingston town

Down at the market you can hear ladies cry out
While on their heads they bear
Ackee, rice, salt-fish are nice
And the rum is fine any time of year

But I'm sad to say, I'm on my way
Won't be back for many a day
My heart is down, my head is turning around
I had to leave a little girl in Kingston town

Sounds of laughter everywhere
And the dancing girls swing to and fro
I must declare my heart is there
Though I've been from Maine to Mexico

But I'm sad to say, I'm on my way
Won't be back for many a day
My heart is down, my head is turning around
I had to leave a little girl in Kingston town

2.5

The character voiced in "Jamaica Farewell" if a Caribbean traversing the north, was also, as embodied by Belafonte, an acceptable romantic hero for whites. And it was precisely this role, as the idealized Caribbean man—and acceptable object of white affection—that he would play in his most successful film, 1957's *Island in the Sun*. Famously banned across much of the US south for the implied on-screen relationship between Belafonte's character and his co-star Joan Fontaine, what is perhaps most notable about the film, a flawed adaptation of Alec Waugh's eponymous novel (the same book, incidentally, that inspired the name of Christopher Blackwell's Island records, the record company that would go on to inaugurate the curious new "genre" of world music in the person of Bob Marley) is that although the film was set in the Caribbean, it is hard to read as about anything other than the United States: a kind of exporting out, in a fantasy island milieu not unlike that of *South Pacific*, of US racial mores and anxieties—with the idealized West Indian, Harry Belafonte the singing politico and folk hero, standing in for the more

troubling US black.[57]

In the film, Harry's character does not, in the end, marry Fontaine's (or even kiss her—their most intimate moment occurs when drinking from the same cocoanut). His ultimate rejection of her ("My own people wouldn't understand") seemed to reinforce the era's anti-miscegenationist norm. As happens, though, with all performers who achieve the sort of fame Belafonte had attained by early1957, his own life had by then become its own kind of spectacle for public consumption whose dramatic turns, as it happened, didn't follow those of a film which arrived in theatres at precisely the same month as news that he had divorced his pretty black wife, and, as Harlem's *Amsterdam News* put it, "BELAFONTE WEDS WHITE DANCER." The white dancer in question was Julie Robinson, the daughter of socialist Greenwich Village Jews who'd come of age in the same bohemian milieu where Belafonte had found himself as a performer (the pair had met through Marlon Brando). A sharer of Harry's political enthusiasms who was also no stranger to racial integration carried out in public, Julie had a few years earlier become the first white member of the dance company of Katherine Dunham (who, it's interesting to note, was by the 1950s doing for American dance much what Belafonte was doing for pop music, hiring Caribbean choreographers to create pieces for her troupe, and sponsoring the emigration to the US of eminent drummers and other musicians from Cuba, Haiti, and Jamaica to score them).[58] As if to underscore Harry's deep cross-cultural appeal, the same *Look* magazine feature that declared Harry "the first black matinee idol" in June 1957 also featured his first full photo shoot with Julie.[59] No matter that the reasons for his amicable divorce were clear enough (Margurite, long before Harry met Julie, had grown tired of the limelight and her husband's long absences) his change of spouse dealt his popularity among blacks a blow. "Many Negroes are wondering," blared *The Amsterdam News*, "why a man who has waved the flag of justice should turn from a Negro wife to a white wife"; Harry, for his part, was moved to pen a cover-story for *Ebony* called simply "Why I married Julie" (his baleful answer: "I was in love with her").[60]

Apart from his newly strained nature of his relationship with black audiences (which would remain a sore topic for years) in the early months of 1957 Harry was on top of the world. The owner of America's number 1 and 3 albums (his previous effort *Belafonte* had climbed the charts on the coat-tails of its follow-up), he was the country's most popular and highest-earning nightclub act. He was preparing for his own TV special (*Tonight With Belafonte,* for which he would soon win an Emmy—the first black person to do so). That his career reached such a plateau while *Island in the Sun* was still in theatres seemed to suggest how the movie—shot in Grenada and Barbados the previous summer, and using adoring locals during Belafonte's crowd scenes—served to reinforce

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[57] Even *Time* magazine's reviewer noted as much (if simplistically), wryly noting that in the Caribbean, where Belafonte himself was the product of two mixed marriages, the same racial norms around intermarriage didn't exist. *Time*, "The New Pictures", 24 Jun. 1957.

[58] See Katherine Dunham as interviewed for *Sworn to the Drum: A Tribute to Francisco Aguabella*, Tom Luddy and Les Blanc, dir. (Flower films, 1995)

[59] "The Storm Over Belafonte," *Look* June 1957.

[60] "Will Harry's Marriage Affect His Status as Matinee Idol," *The Amsterdam News* 20 April 1957. As quoted by Shaw 214. Belafonte, *Ebony*, July 1957. "I believe in integration," he began his piece, "and work for it with all my heart and soul. But I did not marry Julie to further the cause of integration. I married her because I was in love with her and she married me because she was in love with me."

Belafonte's larger persona in the American pop landscape: as a folk hero rooted in (and embodying) the Caribbean, whose allure—at once moral, erotic, and tropical—were all closely linked to the imaginative geography of the islands evinced in the song Irving Burgie composed for Belafonte to sing over the movie's credits (which would, in the event, be his last Caribbean-flavored hit to climb the Billboard singles chart).

> Oh island in the sun
> Built to me by my father's hand
> All my days I will sing in praise
> Of your forest waters, your shining sand
>
> As morning breaks, the Heaven on high
> I life my heavy load to the sky
> Sun comes down with a burning glow
> Mingles my sweat with the earth below
>
> Oh island in the sun…
>
> I see woman on bended knee
> Cutting cane for her family
> I see man at the water-side
> Casting nets at the surfing tide
>
> Oh island in the sun…
>
> I hope the day will never come
> When I can't awake to the sounds of drum
> Never let me miss carnival
> With calypso songs philosophical
>
> Oh island in the sun…

2.6

One thing, of course, that was largely missing from *Island in the Sun*, like *Calypso,* was calypso. (On *Calypso*, the only two covers of bona fide calypso tunes from Trinidad were "Man Smart, Woman Smarter," and "Brown Skinned Girl"). The record's misleading title seems to have been chosen not to imply that all the songs on the album were calypso, but rather to give it a name that it evoked the larger Caribbean (not least for cause of phonetic similarity). This fact didn't stop the American press from dubbing Belafonte "The King of Calypso." Belafonte loathed the title, well-aware that his ersatz Caribbean style bore only an occasional and oblique relation to the calypso tradition as it existed in its putative home-island of Trinidad, which is to say as a music site-and-time specific to yearly carnival celebrations whose "chantwelles" earned their reputations by improvising

extempore lyrics about local affairs or cutting picongs (witty insults) against rival calypsonians. "Listen," Harry told one reporter as his records climbed the charts and clips about the King of Calypso proliferated, "I'm a singer, period. I sing all types of folk material—English, Irish, Israeli, from every section of the world. I don't believe in being cultish and I don't want to be known as the guy who put the nail in the coffin of rock 'n roll." About the same time, he informed another interviewer, "My two big records right now aren't calypso at all—even though everybody seems to have hung that tag on them. One is a West Indian ballad [Jamaica Farewell]. The other is a West Indian folk song ["Day-O"]."[61]

No matter the protestations of the craze's putative "king," throughout 1956 and early 1957, the American press ran innumerable stories purporting to explain why and how calypso was poised, as Harry put it, to "put the nail in the coffin of rock 'n roll." Hollywood was so convinced of the story-line (or at least of the profitability of playing it up) that 1957 brought a spate of "teen pics" from major studios based around the theme, among them Universal's *Calypso Heat Wave*, Allied Artists *Calypso Joe*, and, perhaps most memorably, *Bop Girl Goes Calypso* from United Artists.[62] Belafonte, for his part, not only disavowed the putative "craze," but also predicted its demise. "The present hysterical type of fervor for any melodies that even remotely resemble calypso will wear out and drive it to premature obscurity," he wrote in the *New York Mirror* in early 1957. "I wish to be accepted strictly on my merits as an artist who sings songs of all the world, rather than be representative of any specific area—and certainly not as a symbol of a contrived craze."[63] One detects some disingenuousness here, with Belafonte's frustration at the "contrived craze" leading him to (not uncharacteristically) distance himself from the distinctly Caribbean performing persona he'd created for himself.

This conflicted relationship to his own persona, in certain key ways, also relates to the larger evolution of black performance in America—a history that's best viewed not as a straight line—from grinning minstrelsy to affected anger, say—than as a kind of recurrent loop inseparable from the larger saga of race in America, and the larger Atlantic world. Belafonte may indeed be the first black pop star to become a sex symbol for all Americans (and ergo a symbol of the nation's evolving toward a "post-racial" future). But suggesting as much isn't to say that black men weren't objects of whites' attraction when they were being paraded across the slaver's auction block, or that Belafonte's winning over white fans wasn't partly due to his act's resonance with performance-styles much older than he. His conflicted feelings about smiling on stage—and his later projection of a scowl as his public face—were linked to his vexed awareness, as a black man, of the mutually enforcing relation between racism and mass entertainment in American history and life.

This was but one of the contradictions he could never quite square in public pronouncements about his art, with his insistence on celebrating "authentic" cultures bumping up against his felt need—political as well as performative—to eschew elements of those cultures he found "undignified." (It was for this reason that he largely avoided popular calypsos based in lewd double-entendre—his cover of the ultra-suggestive oral-

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[61] Belafonte as quoted by Escott.

[62] Michael S. Eldridge, "Bop Girl Goes Calypso: Containing Race and Youth Culture in Cold War America". *Anthurium* 3.2 (2005). Web only.

[63] Belafonte *The New York Mirror* May 1957, as quoted by Shaw.

sex ode "Melda Massi" notwithstanding). "What I have sought to do with my art," he upbraided an aggressive Trinidadian interviewer who questioned his choice of repertoire, "is to take my understanding of the region and put it before people in a positive way. And doing these songs gives people another impression than the mythology they have that we're all lazy, living out of a banana tree, fucking each other to death."[64]

Among calypsonians in Trinidad, Belafonte's success was met mostly with disdain predictable for a Johnny-Come-Lately who'd never even visited calypso's "home island." That disdain, though, was also naturally tempered by a grudging gratitude for the monumental rise of global interest in calypso at precisely the moment—the 1956 carnival season—that calypso became an officially national music in Trinidad, with the advent of self-rule and the ascent to power of the party that would govern Trinidad throughout the independence period, The People's National Movement, bringing with it the "nationalization" of carnival as a PNM-sponsored emblem of Trinidadianness (and, at this moment of federation, as emblems of West Indianness" as well).[65] With Belafonte's ascent in America came a stream of A & R men and booking agents to Trinidad looking for talent, and reporters from short-lived magazines like *Calypso Stars* and *Calypso Album* writing up calypsonians in features that their relations and émigré fans could snap up in London and New York. "Harry Belafonte!" sang calypsonian King Solomon during a memorable performance captured in a carnival tent by Emory Cook in 1957, "Hear what the critics say/ They say that they are positive, you know/ that Trinidad is the mother of calypso." Apart from the sentiment voiced, one is struck by Solomon's recourse to nameless "critics" to prove his point—a tack perhaps suggesting a more interesting and important truth about calypso than his assertion that Harry Belafonte was unfamiliar with the musicians roots: that like all traditions, calypso's past as a national music was as much invented as real, and it was a music whose formal strictures and bounds—along with its "true" location in Trinidad—had been elastic from the start.

In the run-up to Trinidad's attainment of independence, the island's ownership of calypso was taken for granted by many, the common sentiment distilled in The Roaring Lion's famous reply to Franklin Delano Roosevelt when asked, after a famous performance for the US president in 1940, from whence he came—"the land of calypso!"[66] But as the music's best chroniclers have long emphasized, Trinidad's reputation as the seat of calypso has been at least as much about the large island's historical role as a destination for immigrants from other, smaller islands, as it does to do with the music's unique evolution there (as opposed, say, to in Granada, Barbados, Antigua, or St. Lucia, all of which have rich calypso traditions of their own). "From its inception," the ethnomusicologist Jocelyne Guilbault puts it, "calypso emerged from a

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[64] Belafonte as quoted by Gates 168.

[65] On the "nationalization" of calypso in the independence era, see Jocelyne Guilbault, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 47 –56. As Guilbault cites the eminent calypso historian Gordon Rohler on the exclusion of non-Trinidadian bands from carnival competitions: "Since the thirties, musical bands would come across from Guyana to play in Trinidad Carnival. Up until Independence Guyanese calypsonians participated…[But] When Trinidad became this thing called a nation, immediately people kept saying, you know, you cannot have these people participating in a *national* competition." Rohler as quoted by Shalini Puri in "'This Thing Called a Nation': An Interview with Gordon Rohler." *Marginal Migrations: The Circulation of Cultures within the Caribbean*, Shalini Puri, ed. (Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003) 254.

[66] Roaring Lion as quoted by Guilbault 1.

migratory circuit of people and commodities"[67]—circuits which include the arrival and dispersal of new immigrant groups from Africa, Asia, and Europe to Trinidad and other Caribbean territories; communication and travel, more recently, between and among the islands and Northern diasporic sites like New York and London; and inter-island migration and movement in the Caribbean—movements reaching back, in the case of calypso, to the Haitian revolution, with the advent of Trinidad's Lenten carnival traced to the arrival to Trinidad of thousands of francophone Sainte Dominguens fleeing Toussaint's rising in the early 1800s (with the result that most calypso in Trinidad during the 19th century was sung not in English but in French creole).

The truth that calypso played an invaluable role in the forging of nationalist sentiment during Trinidad's movement toward independence has contributed to a tendency among social scientists to approach calypso as a national music *par excellence*. But one need only glance toward the haze of indeterminacy surrounding the source of the music's very name to glean that it has been a pan-Caribbean music from the start, with theories as to its etymology ranging from "calypso" being named for a famed "lady of easy virtue" of the same moniker who plied her trade on the Dutch island Curacao in the early 1800s; to being derived from the Carib Indian word "carrieto," or joyous song; from a corruption of the French patios "cairrousseaux," meaning a dancing party; from the Spanish "caliso," a term used for a topical song in Anglophone St. Lucia; or the Hausa word "kaiso," from West Africa, meaning something akin to "bravo"—an exclamation still heard in Trinidad as an affirmation superlative calypso (a usage which itself gestures toward often fraught debates on this multi-ethnic island, where persons of South Asian descent have played an increasingly prominent role in carnival musics, about whether calypso, like Trini culture at large, is at its heart "African").[68] About all that anyone can agree on about calypso's moniker is that it is not an allusion to the Greek goddess of song—although indeed this too may be so, if one credits the argument that the name is perhaps traceable to English or American visitors to the island who, asking the locals what their music was called, and shaped whatever they heard in response to a word which in their tongue seemed apropos.

Whether or not there's any truth to this last origin-story, it's very plausibility suggests the extent to which calypso has always been shaped by visitors from without. Like inter-island travel and international commerce, in the 1950s tourism was hardly new as an influence on the music's sound. From even before Port-of-Spain's carnival was scheduled to coincide with the arrival of a cruise boat in the 1920s, the packaging (indeed the invention) of calypso as national emblem of Trinidad had as much to with enticing money from visitors as anything else—a fact which, in Trinidad and elsewhere, had key impacts on the music's form (not least in hastening the transition from French creole to English as calyposo's *de rigeur* language in the early 1900s).[69] When in February 1957 *Life* magazine ran a cover-story called "US tourists rush to the Caribbean," featuring a two-page spread about calypso singers performing in the US, the story highlighted Lord

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[67] Guilbault 29.

[68] On the increasing "creolization" of Trinidad's carnival and ethnic antagonisms occasioned thereby, See Jelly-Schapiro "Are We All Creoles Now?: Ethnicity and Nation in a Heterogeneous Caribbean Diaspora" in *Ethnicity, Class, and Nationalism: Caribbean and Extra-Caribbean Dimensions* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005)

[69] Michael D. Anthony, *Parade of he Carnivals of Trinidad, 1839 – 1989* (Port of Spain: Circle Press, 1989), as cited by Guilbault 36.

Flea, a Jamaican song-and-dance man then appearing with his group The Calypsonians at venues like Miami's Calypso Room, The Dunes in Las Vegas, and in films like *Calypso Joe*. "In Jamaica," Flea remarked with refreshing candor, "we called our music 'mento' until very recently. Today, calypso is beginning to be used for all kinds of West Indian music. This is because it's become so commercialized there." He continued: "Some people like to think of West Indians as carefree natives who work and sing and play and laugh their lives away. But this isn't so. Most of the people there are hard working folks, and many of them are smart business men. If the tourists want 'calypso', that's what we sell them."[70] This may have been anathema both to the folk ethnologists and cultural nationalists in Trinidad, but it cut much closer to the truth and meaning of "calypso" not only in the US but, increasingly during the 1950s, across a region long accustomed to viewing itself through the eyes of visitors from without.

* * *

Apart from political developments that made 1956 a watershed year in the calypso's history, the annum that Belafonte became the faux Calypso King was also notable for the ascendance in Trinidad of the figure widely regarded as the music's greatest modern practitioner, The Mighty Sparrow. A fearsomely talented singer and songwriter from Grenada whose birth-name of Slinger Francisco was even better than his sobriquet, Sparrow would become so synonymous with calypso in the "independence years" that C.L.R. James would dub him "the first and only genuinely West Indian artist." James expounded, in his 1960 essay "The Mighty Sparrow":

> His talents were shaped by a West Indian medium; through this medium he expanded his capacities and the medium itself. He is financially maintained by the West Indian people who buy his records. The mass of people give him all the encouragement that an artist needs. Although the calypso is Trinidadian, Sparrow is hailed in all the islands and spontaneously acknowledged as a representative West Indian. Thus he is in every way a genuinely West Indian artist, the first and only one that I know. He is living proof that there is a West Indian nation.[71]

One of the qualities that separated the Sparrow from pretenders to his throne—apart from his distinctive voice and phrasing, melodic inventiveness, and commanding presence—was the sheer creative energy that allowed him to churn out reams of high-quality songs on a variety of topics each carnival season where his rivals only managed a few. Perhaps it is unsurprising then, that Sparrow would offer the day's most memorable response to the Belafonte-led calypso craze to the north, which he did on his first full-length LP, *King Sparrow*, released by Emory Cook in 1958, distilling in "No More Rocking and Rolling," the mix of pan-West Indian pride in the Belafonte-led calypso conquest of North America with localist reproach about the "real" calypso in Trinidad that perhaps characterized broader attitudes toward Belafonte across the islands:

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[70] See http://www.mentomusic.com/flea.htm#time. Life February 11, 1957. Other quote is from *Calypso Stars* article,

[71] C.L.R. James, "The Mighty Sparrow" (1960). *The Future in the Present* Vol. 1 of *Selected Writings* (London: Allison & Busby, 1977) 191-201.

I say calypso sweeping the place, like if she come out of space
Mama! Calypso sweeping the place, like if she come out of space
I can remember rock-and-roll had the whole place under control
But since calypso leave Trinidad, rock-and-roll really suffering bad!

No more rocking, no more rolling
No more jumping up like a fool
Whether you're crazy, or you're lazy
Man you've just got to take it cool
This is calypso, and everyone know
It's strictly rhythm and rhyme
Whether you're young or old,
jump in the line and shake your body in time!

Plenty people trying their best, but they making a mess
Just for the money, they will put on a show, and tell you that's calypso
But you should come to Trinidad, see how the people jumping mad!
For as soon as soon as we hear the true melody, the jumping spirit comes naturally!

We have no more rocking, no more rolling
No more jumping up like a fool
Whether you're crazy, or you're lazy
Man you've just got to take it cool
This is calypso, by the Sparrow
It's strictly rhythm and rhyme
Whether you're young or old,
Jump in line and shake your body in time!

2.7

As it actually happened, of course, by the time *King Sparrow* appeared on shelves in the islands and stateside, the North American "calypso craze" was, as it were, stone cold dead in the market. When Belafonte's *Calypso* was knocked from atop the Billboard top 100 in April 1957 by a certain Elvis Presley, it only reinforced the obvious: the contrived competition between calypso and rock 'n' roll and calypso was over before it began. Even with the help of movies like *Bop Girl Goes Calypso*, American teens who had liked "calypsos" like "Day'O" and "Jamaica Farewell," it turned out, had little appetite for the real thing—or even ersatz calypso by performers other than Harry. Indeed after Belafonte's iconic hits, the only other calypso tune to make the US charts was his follow-up single, "Mama Look a Boo Boo" (a ditty about an ugly boy, which characteristically had an entirely different resonance in its native land when sung by its famously homely composer Lord Melody). A rash of imitators tried, but apart from Rosemary Clooney's

schmaltzy noisemaker "Mangoes, Papaya," and Terry Gilkyson's "Marianne," no one succeeded in launching a new calypso hit (and even Gilkyson achieved no identification as an interpreter of calypso). Even Belafonte, for his part, made what seemed a conscious break from ersatz calypso in 1958 by accurately dubbing his next record *Belafonte Sings the Blues* (it did much less well).

Over the next decade he would remain a steady presence on the pop chars with a series of albums (a few even Caribbean themed), but having founded his own film and TV production company at the 1950s' close, he would devote increasing amounts of time to working behind the scenes as a producer, enjoying a number of landmark successes in that role, among them bringing Miriam Makeba to the US and helping to introduce African popular music to the US, and, in 1983, by producing *Wild Style*, the landmark film that ushered hip-hop—a subculture, as the film emphasized, born among Jamaican and Puerto Rican immigrants to New York—into the mainstream. (Belafonte's advocacy for hip-hop would eventually come full circle, in a sense, when he reportedly convinced Fidel Castro, in the late 1990, that rap music was a revolutionary culture worth his state's support.)

An increasingly vocal spokesman in the early 1960s for the American Civil Rights movement, Belafonte's contributions went beyond lending his voice and face to the cause, with the steady stream of royalties from his records not only affording King's health insurance (for which Belafonte paid for a decade), but an apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan where he stayed when he was in the city (and where he would write his famous speech against the Vietnam War).

Quite apart from his beneficence to revolutionaries, though, Belafonte's larger import to American culture lay in his becoming, during those key years, the first brown-skinned man to become a pop icon for all Americans, a "universal" stature out of which he would make an enumerated spectacle during his stage shows. "Women over forty!" he'd entreat during the famous chorus to "Matilda". "Now the intellectuals!" The redeemers of America have always had to be black men, but it was Belafonte, in a key way, who showed how the glamour of the ethnic could be employed to forge a blackness safe enough for the masses. In the America of 2009 it is difficult not to think, in looking at those scenes, of our current politics and president, in whose charisma and complexion and slim frame it is hard not to see a strong echo (and whose ascent, we might note, carried an especial resonance across the Caribbean, where last year a still-active Mighty Sparrow made a sensational return to near the top of the calypsonian heap with a song he called simply: "Barack the Magnificent").

If Belafonte's import to the cultural history America is indeed that large, it is also true, as I'd to suggest here, that his import to cultural geographies the Caribbean is not limited to the lasting popularity (or lack thereof) that his work gained in the region and its diasporas. In the Caribbean, as the communications scholar Humphrey Regis has shown, "external orientation" and success, can be much better predictor of cultural import than an artist's success at conveying "authenticity" or pleasing an avowedly "local" audience in the islands themselves.[72] In an age when the advent of mass-tourism was making the

[72] See Humphrey A. Regis, ed., *Culture and Mass Communication in the Caribbean: Domination, Dialogue, Dispersion* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001). In Regis's article therein, he details how "the Caribbean liking or preference for Caribbean music may be related to the Caribbean perception of the popularity of the music outside the region."

regions' concern with how they were viewed from without especially key, few figures shaped the dominant tropes of the Caribbean's self-representation as region—in music, film, and otherwise—and conversations about those tropes, as Harry Belafonte. That he did so while also shaping the culture and politics of the United States as profoundly as he did only serves to underline how he exemplifies the ways in which the prototypical Caribbean characteristics identified by James—outward orientation, familiarity-with-Europe's languages and mores, *movement*—abetted his influence on both the cultural geography of the Caribbean, and the social history of the wider world. That sense, as I found when speaking with Belafonte one day last fall, across the street from New York's Museum of Natural History, is one he himself shares. When I asked him about how he thought his Caribbean roots, and experiences traveling back-and-forth to Jamaica as a child, had shaped his approach to combating American racism, and reaching all the audiences he sought to reach in the world, he thought for a moment. "I had no particular crisis with white people," he eventually said, "because I never really saw them as in any way superior…We [Caribbean people] didn't buy that notion." "And that passage back-and-forth" between Jamaica and Harlem, he continued, "became the seed of my interest in universality, in my firm belief that I was…universal."[73]

It remains, in the following chapters, to limn how that "universal" attitude and resonance, especially as it relates to the invention of the "folk" in Caribbean politics and letters, were taken up by others.

[73] Harry Belafonte. Personal interview. 9 September 2010.

III.

Brown Girl, Brownstones:

Africa, Islands, and the Migrant Fictions of Paule Marshall

At a small book party in a Harlem storefront in the fall of 1959, it would have taken a lot to distract attention from the guest of honor, a striking 30-year old woman, 8 months pregnant at the time, who was celebrating the publication of her debut novel. The arrival of Langston Hughes, though, certainly did the trick. The party was just getting under way when he appeared in the doorway. His arrival awed everyone—including the writer being feted, whom Hughes had never met before deigning to toast the release of her "somewhat standard coming-of-age story," as she too-modestly describes her first novel today, "about a girl not unlike myself born and raised in a Brooklyn community that was both African American and West Indian."[1] Hughes was famously generous to younger writers, and he arranged for this one to accompany him on a State Department-sponsored tour of Europe. Taking a fond interest in Paule Marshall and her career, he continued, until his death in 1967, to offer her encouragement in the form of postcards penned in his trademark green ink, and regular late-night phone-calls entreating her to hurry up and finish her second novel ("I have a book out for every year you've been alive!" he'd crow).[2]

Hughes wasn't alone in admiring *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, a bildungsroman which mines its author's experience to tell the story of Selina Boyce, a child of immigrant-parents from Barbados whose self-realization entails transcending the insular mores of her mother's home and a tight-knit West Indian community in Brooklyn. *The New York Times* dubbed it "fine". Sidney Poitier bought the film rights; its young author won a Guggenheim to write her next book.

Today *Brown Girl, Brownstones*—which fell out of print shortly after it first appearance, only to be rescued from obscurity by the Feminist Press in the 1970s—is a staple of college courses on black and immigrant literature, roundly hailed as a landmark: one of the first novels to make the voice of a brown-skinned immigrant on New York's outer orbit matter as literature to its Manhattan publishers and prize committees. New York City and its nation have of course always gained a life-giving energy from those immigrants who have made the borough of Queens, for example, home to speakers of more languages than any comparably-sized bit of the earth's skin. But it is only recently—in celebrated novels by writers like Edwidge Danticat and Junot Diáz; Francisco Goldman, Kiran Desai, and Joseph O'Neill—that the experiences and pasts of those immigrants have assumed a due place in its literature. The story of how this has

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[1] Paule Marshall, *Triangular Road* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2010) 3.
[2] Marshall (2010) 33

come to pass is of course not attributable to one author alone. But no account of that history can be complete without acknowledging a novel about whose protagonist Edwidge Danticat, writing in her forward to the current edition of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, terms "one of the most fascinating and memorable female characters in American fiction."[3]

"Paule Marshall's work wasn't, for me, just restricted to her splendid novels," says Hilton Als, the writer and *New Yorker* critic, who grew up in the Brooklyn home of a Barbadian mother whose well-loved copy of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* she gave her son to read when he was eleven. "She was a [first generation] West Indian American—like my mother—who was able to transform her experience and get out. Not many women of her generation managed to do that—to find an art that exposed them to the larger world. So doing, Marshall inspired other people like myself to do the same."[4] In his memoir-cum-novel *The Women*, Als recounts looking Marshall up in the Manhattan phonebook to tell her, when she picked up the phone, how he and his mother lived not far from where Selina grew up.[5]

The young novelist feted and pushed by Hughes is now 80, and she has gone on—in five well-received novels published over the past five decades, plus two story-collections and a new memoir—to enjoy a career as distinguished as any laborious writer of non-genre fiction can reasonably hope to have. That her lauded debut, though, quickly fell out of print and didn't much figure in the rise of interest in "black literature" that attended the rise of Black Power and Black Studies during the 1960s, perhaps relates to the same reason that she has never attained anything like the notoriety of a Langston Hughes. Quite apart from Marshall's female protagonist and largely female cast, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* was a book written "to make the immigrant story applicable to blacks."[6] Its central concerns lie largely outside the defining themes of the "African-American literary tradition" exemplified by her mentor: the United States' core drama of race as it looks from the vantage of the descendents of slaves in the old Confederacy.

If Marshall's marginality vis-à-vis the African-American literary tradition in the U.S.A. is explained by her Caribbean heritage and immigrant background, however, her biography and oeuvre which also lie outside most normative accounts of the emergence of "the West Indian novel" in the past half-century. That tradition, as descried in Kenneth Ramchand's classic study *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (1970) and exemplified by the generation of (uniformly Anglophone, near-uniformly male) émigré writers who emerged in post-war London, was forged around the same mores and models of West Indian nationalism generally: namely, as Belinda Edmondson has shown, an ideal of Victorian manhood and Oxbridge learning, evinced by an attachment to literary Englishness, crucial to the kinds of "literary authority" with which "scholarship boys" like Naipaul, James, and Brathwaite vested their work.[7] (Not that James attended those schools, but he was, in many ways, the most Victorian of them all.) Along with that

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[3] Edwidge Danticat, Forward to Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl Brownstones* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2006) ix.
[4] Hilton Als. Personal email. February 14, 2010.
[5] See Hilton Als, *The Women* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996)
[6] Marshall quoted in Felicia R. Lee, "Voyage of a Girl Moored in Brooklyn," *New York Times* 11 March 2009:
[7] Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970)

tradition's masculinist mores came its guiding, high-modern theme of "exile": a concept, Edmondson argues, that has usually been gendered male in Caribbean diasporas, and serves to further disclude, from mainstream West Indian discourse, the "immigrant" literature of (female, U.S.-based) writers like Marshall, Michelle Cliff, and Jamaica Kincaid – yet another factor serving contributing to those writers not gaining their rightful place in literary conversations about a region whose twentieth-century history has been defined by ceaseless out-migration to Northern cities, and whose self-image has always been shaped by how it looks from the vantage of those sites.

Marshall's work, I will argue here, has every bit as much to say about the history of the Caribbean as region and idea in the independence-age, as canonical works by the likes of George Lamming, Claude McKay, Jean Rhys, and Vidya Naipaul, emitting from the U.K. Not least since her writing, like all those writers', is both shaped by, and preoccupied with, incessant movement between the northern mainlands' metropoles and the islands themselves.[8] But also—as I mean to show here, through a reading of her oeuvre against and with her recent memoir, *Triangle Road*—since her work is so consumed with a set of questions central to Caribbean literature for several decades: questions surrounding the existence and constitution of the "folk" in the Caribbean region (and in West Indian literature, specifically); around the place and role of *Africa* in imaginative geographies of the region and its traits; the promise of redemption that exists beyond narrow nationalism. In taking up those questions from a subject-position outside the normative frame of masculinist. Anglophilic norms of "the West Indian novel," Marshall offers an ilumnating lens not merely on Caribbean regional discourse, but on a potent set of ideas about what the Caribbean represents, within the context of the wider Americas, as a region through which attempts to ease the painful legacies of racial slavery, for the hemisphere as a whole.

3.2

Born in Brooklyn in 1929, Valenza Pauline Burke was a child of what she calls the West Indian wing of the Great Migration: those 300,000 souls who fled England's old plantation colonies during the twentieth century's first decades, arriving to America's shores, "like a dark sea nudging its way onto a white beach and staining the sand," as she writes at the start of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*.[9] Both her parents were from Barbados. Her mother Ada had made the voyage north by steamship at 18, her $50 "show money" at Ellis Island (then required in cash of all black immigrants granted entrance there)

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[8] All the writers cited here – all Caribben writers, period – stand in contrasting relation to the post-colonial political project of building new nations and/or a new regional consciousness. Notable in this respect is the case Naipaul, whose writing has long bespoken deep *alienation* from his "half-made" home-nation of Trinidad and its region, especially as regards the "Afrocentric" tinge of its postcolonial politics. These truths though, just like Marshall's non-birth in the Caribbean, can and should not expunge him from the larger literary conversation about the Caribbean as region and idea over the past half-century. On Naipaul's ambivalent relation to his homeland, and West Indian-ness generally – especially in contrast to his fellow Indo-Trinidadian,émigré to London, Sam Selvon – see Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, "'Are We All Creoles Now?' Ethnicity and Nation in a Heterogeneous Caribbean Diaspora" in *Ethnicity, Class and Nationalism: Caribbean and Extra-Caribbean Dimensions*, Anton Allahar, ed. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005)

[9] Marshall (2006) 4.

provided by a brother who'd been one of the legion of Anglo-Caribbeans recruited by US contractors to build the Panama Canal.[10] Her father was a hustling charmer who'd first escaped the "damn little two-by-four island" by enlisting as a contract laborer to cut sugarcane in Cuba, and then made his way to Brooklyn by stowing away on a freighter bound for the Domino Sugar Refinery on New York Harbor.[11] Sam Burke was a charismatic figure who parted his wife's home when their girls were still young, first for one of his many mistresses, and then by joining the flock of a faith huckster in Harlem called Father Divine, whose cult, his once-worshipful daughter has written, "delivered him at last from the long futile search for a vocation worthy of his still undefined talents."[12]

If black literature in the United States has been largely about two migrations—from Africa to America, and from the Old South to the New North—Marshall's work evinces an equally important but frequently overlooked migration—that of people-of-color from the southern Americas and elsewhere to the United States. In recent years, that migration has figured centrally in Junot Díaz's portrayal, in his Pulitzer-winning *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, of the legacies of Caribbean violence among Dominicans in New Jersey, in Edwidge Danticat's writings looking at the same among Haitians in Brooklyn—and even in Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*, which, though nominally about a Dutchman in New York, gains its vivid texture from its depictions of West Indian life in the city. No less a bestseller than Barack Obama's *Dreams From My Father*, whose author recently praised O'Neill's novel from the Oval Office, exemplifies the recent shift in "African-American literature": the move beyond the two migrations that have long defined it, to make the experience of immigrants from abroad central to the texture of black life in America.[13] By the same token, the exposure of Caribbean immigrants to the racial anxieties and hopes of black people in North American (or European) cities came played a crucial role in shaping black Amercan political and expressive culture[14] – and, most germane to my subject here, in shaping the evolution of "Caribbean literature," and the ways that Caribbean peoples came to understand themselves as belonging to a coherent region.

Like many contemporary immigrant families, many of the books mentioned above are set in households dominated by women. Marshall was raised in one such, her home run by a woman with such force of personality that her fictional analogue is called simply "the mother," her kitchen overflowing, at weekends, with cousins and friends filling its air with the smells of codfish and souse and with the tuneful, cutting speech of an island to which they'd never return. "It was always the mother and the others," she describes them in her novel, "for they were alike – those watchful, wrathful women

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[10] Marshall (2010) 79
[11] Marshall (2010) 63
[12] Marshall (2010) 92
[13] See Joseph O'Neill, *Netherland* (New York: Pantheon, 2008). For Obama's endorsement of that book, see David Leonhardt, "After the Great Recession," *The New York Times Magazine*, 28 April 2009: MM36.
[14] On the roles of Caribbean émigrés in the evolution of black political cultures worldwide, and the ways West Indians' "immigrant experience" has shaped racially-inflected nationalist discourses in the islands, see, e.g., James, Winston. *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998), and, on more recent times, Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

whose eyes seared and searched and laid bare, whose tongue lashed the world in unremitting distrust."[15] Rising early each morning to take the subway to Flatbush or Sheepshead Bay with their aprons and working shoes under arm, the lucky ones had steady madams for whom they cooked and cleaned. Others wandered the avenues in search of a day's work. All aimed, one day, to save up the "few raw mout' pennies" that would "buy house."[16] "Lord, lemme do better than this! Lemme rise!" cries Selina's mother Silla, down on her knees scrubbing "the Jew floor."[17]

Tensions between Brooklyn's West Indians and its Jews have long been one of the borough's defining narratives—at least from the outside: mixed Jewish and West Indian neighborhoods like Crown Heights rarely make the Manhattan news except as setting for "ethnic violence". But the views of West Indians like Marshall's mother**,** as Marshall makes plain in *Triangular Road*, her tersely elegant memoir, are less about ethnic animus than admiration: If the Jews had arrived penniless to "the City of the Almighty Dollar" but now owned the brownstones where her people rented rooms and the shops where they bought milk and meat, why couldn't they do the same? Bajans (as Barbadians called themselves) were the self-described "Jews of the West Indies," and they condescended as such to other dark-skinned arrivants to New York like Jamaicans ("disgraced the King's English by dropping their "h's," as Marshall's mother put it); Trinidadians ("lived only for their yearly carnival"); and worst of all, black Americans from the South ("needed to stand up more to the white man")[18]—"keepbacks" all, who striving Bajans blamed for slowing their efforts to seize a piece of "this man country."[19]

For a bright, brown-skinned girl in war-era Brooklyn, for whom growing up meant becoming a New Yorker and a Negro, the immigrant ways of Marshall's mother—her prejudice and penny-pinching, her provincialism and Barbadian Business Association—were naturally appalling. The plot of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* turns on Silla's acting behind her husband's back to sell his inheritance—a cherished plot of land back home—to buy the Brooklyn home that is both setting and engine for the book's plot. Blaming Silla for driving her father from their lives, Selina bucks and deceives her mother at every turn. First searching after other models of how to be a woman in the world—a promiscuous Bajan boarder called Suggie who stands as a reminder of the pleasure-loving islands who Silla boots from their home for her wickedness; a black American hairdresser who guides Selina into a broader sense of blackness despised by her mother—she eventually determines to leave Silla's home. Matriculating to City College, her mother's words ring in her ears as she goes: "G'long! You was always too much woman for me anyway, soul. And my own mother did say two head-bulls can't reign in a flock."[20]

Marshall's own mother may never have done anything quite so craven as Silla Boyce. But it seems clear that the main tension at the heart of Marshall's first novel—between a mother's first-generation ambitions and the differing ones of her equally strong-willed daughter—were very much drawn from life. These are the tensions

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[15] Marshall (2006) 10-11.
[16] Marshall (2006) 11.
[17] Marshall (2006) 224.
[18] Marshall (2010) 86
[19] Marshall (2006) 23
[20] Marshall (2006) 307.

that have long governed the internal dynamics of immigrant families. And they are certainly the tensions, in the case of a West Indian girl like Marshall—whose forging of her identity as a writer entailed discovering her kinship with black people everywhere, and with members of the Republic of Letters worldwide—that informed her need to escape her mother's immigrant world, in order to write about it. Of course separation from one's mother, as Marshall and her fiction keenly know, is only separation of a kind. And it is the tension between these felt truths—the need to separate from her mother and her community in order to write about them, and her guiding interest, as a writer, in exploring possibilities for new community and the unmatched human bond between mothers and daughters—that animate much of her work.

3.3

In *Triangular Road*, Marshall explores that work's nurturing themes. Her memoir—which is based on a series of lectures Marshall delivered at Harvard in 2005—is divided into four sections: an opening homage to Hughes in which she recounts (beginning with his appearance at her first book party) her friendship with him, followed by three section which aim to explore, in sequence, the three parts of her "tripartite self," described by North America, the Caribbean, and Africa. Each section is organized around an incantatory phrase reminiscent of her mentor: "I've known rivers" (on her current home by the James River in Richmond, Virginia); "I've known seas" (on the Caribbean; her family's past and her efforts to discover it); and, finally, "I've known oceans"(on the Atlantic, and a trip taken to the continent from which came her ancestors). The device befits a writer for whom the theme of migration has always been so central—and in whose mind the vocations of writing and travel, as she recalls in her memoir, have always been closely linked (even before she found that earning a living as a writer would entail moving among a series of teaching positions accepted to "support her habit"). After reading books like Hughes' *Big Sea* in high school, she writes, it was her dream "not only [to] become a writer, but a 'travelin woman' as well."[21]

In "I've Known Rivers," Marshall recounts a recent walk by the James. She describes scrambling down the forested bank of the wide stream called "the riv-ah" by locals, and what has brought her to the shore of "America's most historic river" (a temporary teaching position at Virginia Commonwealth University which became a permanent gig). Watching the James flow past—its polluted waters roiling over "anti-Diluvian rocks" and carrying, on this Labor Day weekend, a passal of white twenty-somethings floating by in inner tubes drinking beer—she allows the "runaway part of her mind" to wend its way, with the river, toward the sea. Marshall recalls that the James not only provided the site of England's first North American colony in 1607 at its mouth; it also became, after the building of that colony's capital of Richmond on its banks, the principal artery of entry for enslaved Africans brought to North America—and thus a river also deeply linked to the small coral island where her parents were born. Barbados, lying off to the east of the volcanic Antilles in the Atlantic, functioned for centuries as the

[21] Marshall (2010) 29.

first stop for slavers crossing the water from Africa, and a key transshipment point for human chattel thence distributed up and down the hemisphere.

The scene sets the stage for the memoir's next chapters, which take Marshall's "runaway mind" from the James' mouth and back, from there, to the Caribbean, and finally to Africa. Composed in the same easy, forthright voice as her novels, her memoir is marked by the same evocative bits of "beautiful-ugly" Bajan speech ("Soully-gal, you sure is a real-real mout' king!"), and gift for description ("a flotilla of several large bright-blue rubber rafts can be seen performing a bouncy dance") that accent her fiction. [22] Here, though, the memoir-form serves less as a means of plumbing the inner life of Marshall's protagonist—herself—than as a means of explicating the histories and ideas informing her work.

Marshall begins her chapter on the Caribbean (which takes up more than half of this meandering volume) with a long section tracing her parents' migration story**.** She then traces a literary coming-of-age which delves into the same themes of self-realization she limns in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. Writing of how the escape that a neighborhood branch of the Brooklyn Public Library provided from her mother's home, she then recalls how, inspired by Paul Laurence Dunbar's "way of capturing the Southern black dialect as poetry," she separated from her mother by changing her own name to "Paule" at 13; and also of how, as she would later realize, it was in fact the klatch of women in that home from who gained her primary love for stories and language ("What I had been hearing in the kitchen of that brownstone house," she'd write, "was a kind of poetry in their West Indian dialect"). Readers looking to understand the inner contours of Marshall's young life may do much better to look to *Brown Girl, Brownstones* than to her memoir. But the coming-of-age traced in her memoir shares not a few core similarities with her *bildungsroman* and larger oeuvre—beginning with the ultimately central role, in each, played by women.

3.4

When *Brown Girl, Brownstones* first appeared in 1959, there existed precious few novels based around a black woman protagonist with a complexly full interior life (Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maude Martha* and a few others excepted). It is easy to see why, in the 1970s, those celebrants who rescued Marshall's debut from obscurity held her up as a feminist pioneer. She donned the mantle proudly. "I'm concerned about letting [women] speak their piece," she told *Essence* in 1979, "letting them be central figures, actors, *activists* in fiction rather than just backdrop or background figures…My feminism takes its expression through my work. Women are central for me. They can as easily embody the power principles as a man."[23]

In Marshall's fiction, men are certainly present; often they are as fully and perceptively drawn as her women. But indeed rarely are they characters in whom one could say the "power principles" live. Even the initially likeable males in *Brown Girl,*

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[22] Marshall (2010) 88; Marshall (2010) 42.

[23] Marshall in *Essence*, as quoted by Mary Helen Washington in her Afterword to *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (2006) 324.

Brownstones—Selina's gentle boy-man of a father, driven to grief by her bullying mother; Clive, the garrulous artist with whom she finds her sexual awakening—are not, in the end, figures with more to offer their loved ones than fleeting pleasure and lasting pain. Like the boyfriend we glimpse for a final time prostrate and mumbling on his couch, they are, in the last analysis, weak. In Marshall's work, such men always read less as political gestures than people drawn from life. This, one suspects, is perhaps for much the same reason that mainstream white feminists who spoke in the 1970s of "subverting the patriarchy," so often failed to connect with black women—women, that is, who had grown up in matriarchal homes where the notion of "strong women" vested with power-in-the-family was less wishful ideal than matter of course.

Given her core and defining interest in women, Marshall's second book has long stood out from her oeuvre. A volume of four short novellas keyed by its epigraph from Yeats ("An aged man is but a paltry thing/ A tattered coat upon a stick, unless/ Soul clap its hands and sing"), *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* revolves around a surprising theme for a young "ethnic writer" who—in 1961 as today—would have been expected to continue writing about characters nearer her own experience: that of four aging men confronting their own senescence. The four geographically diffuse tales—about a bitter Barbadian returned to his home-island after years of hard work to build his drramhouse; a Jewish professor of French literature in Brooklyn; a dissolute old powerbroker in British Guyana; a nightclub comedian in Brazil losing his crowds' love—all explore the fate of a man who has attained some of the material status that eluded Marshall's father. Each, for whatever his outward success, is plagued by a loneliness he tries, unsuccessfully, to salve by connecting with a woman.

The book does feel like a young artist's effort to prove, not least to herself, that she could write empathic prose about characters intuitively sympathetic. That Marshall succeeds—for the most part; these tales' schematic moralism does, at times, threaten to overrun their art—is testament to her craft. Reading these stories in light of the shape that work that followed, though, it's hard not to feel as though the character in whom Marshall—and in turn, we—are most interested is not the male protagonist at its heart but the female antagonist around whose rejection of him each story is built. When Max Berman, the Jewish French professor who stars in the book's finest story, lures a pretty young colored student, to his country home upstate "to discuss her paper on Gide," and she rejects his advances, Berman bows "to her for the last time, acknowledging with that gesture his responsibility for her rage, which went deeper than his, and for her anger, which would spur her finally to live." Striding away from her sad professor, one can easily imagine Miss Williams—a Virginia schoolteacher who has come here to satisfy a curiosity about white folks and books, but leaves confirming what she knows of men—strolling into one of Marshall's later novels, "her head lifted as though she carried life as lightly there as if it were a hat made of tulle," and joining, there, with one of Marshall's women searching after a new self, affirmative and whole.[24]

As critics like Mary Helen Washington have argued, one can read Marshall's entire oeuvre, after *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, as a series of explorations into the

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[24] On the search for "wholeness" in Marshall's fiction, see Joyce Pettis, *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1995). Also noteworthy, among recent critical studies of her work, is Dorothy Hamer Denniston, *The Fiction of Paule Marshall: Reconstructions of History, Culture, and Gender* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995)

questions laid out at the end of that book.[25] That book's climactic scene finds Selina, once she's made it out of Brooklyn and to the Upper East Side, being put violently in her place as a negress by a white classmate's mother. The experience prompts in her a new feeling of racial connection—a kinship not merely with "the whores, the flashy men, and the blues rising sacredly above the plain of neon lights and ruined houses" but also, more strikingly for this headstrong teen, with "the mother and the Bajan women, who had lived each day what she had come to know"—and inspires her, at the novel's close, to travel to her mother's home island. We don't follow on her trip. But all Marshall's novels to follow—from *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969), set in an out-of-the-way West Indian island; to *Praise Song for the Widow* (1983) which follows a middle-aged black woman on a search for authentic life in the Caribbean; to *Daughters* (1991), a tale of West Indian women in New York and the islands which hinges on travel between the two locales—enact Selina's quest to reconnect with her past and her people. Each has, at its center, a woman seeking after an identity affirmative and whole, in a world run by men and sundered by history.

That Marshall, as a young colored girl, could even contemplate embarking on such a quest herself, as both writer and "travelin' woman," was by dint of belonging to the second generation. Adriana Burke—who, by the end of Marshall's teens, was suffering the "ultimate humiliation" of renting a cramped apartment owned by a fellow Bajan—certainly had no time for such silliness. About all she does have time for, her no-good husband long gone, was warning her daughters against his kind and her fate. She spelled out the consequences of what would happen should Marshall or her sister

> become "little wring-tail concubines caterwauling about the streets looking for men." Or worse, should we ever come before her with our stomachs "tumbling big with wild-dog puppy." Again shaming her before every Bajan in Brooklyn. Oh, no, we would have to pack our little "georgie bundles" (Elizabethan for suitcases), take our wild-dog puppy and *"Get from out my eyesight!"*[26]

It may have been the voices of "the mother and the others" in her childhood kitchen whom Marshall came to credit with instilling her love for stories. But it was also, by her late teens, the timbre of Adriana's "Xanthippe voice that by now had become a force greater than herself," which drove her beyond that kitchen to seek and make the stories, in the wider world, by which she might explain and salve that bitterness for herself.[27]

3.5

As any immigrant's child knows, there can be few career paths so perplexing to a first-generation parent as that of a starving artist—particularly, it would seem, when that parent is a West Indian in Brooklyn at a time when "Telephone company hiring colored!" In the narrative Marshall traces of becoming a writer, her relationship with her mother (to

[25] See Washington's Afterword to Marshall (2006).
[26] Marshall (2010) 94.
[27] Marshall (2010) 94.

whom she dedicated *Brown Girl, Brownstones* in 1959) naturally figures prominently. Perhaps more interesting here, though, are chapters tied to the more grown-up question of how, once becoming a writer, to earn a living writing books of which one can be proud. Here, too, the themes and obsessions of her childhood have a way of recurring.

While working at the Manhattan offices of the magazine *Our World* after college, Marshall managed to sell her first novel to Random House. She describes, in her memoir, meeting with the august head of that storied firm. Slowly pushing her six-hundred page manuscript across his desk to the young writer, Hiram Hadyn offers his felicitations on the contract she's just signed—and then, patting the thick sheaf of paper, declares that now its time for her to get back to work. "And the work, dear author," the Brahmin editor says, "is for you to take this swollen, overwritten baby tome of yours and to extricate from it the slender, impressive first novel that's buried there." Counseled to take her advance someplace cheaper than Manhattan to buy the time needed for revising, Marshall seizes on the idea of going to the Caribbean. Leaving her publisher's midtown offices, she takes the subway directly to the Lower East Side, where she buys, from the Orthodox shopkeepers in their yarmulkes and fedoras, the two extra-large leather suitcases she'll take with her to the land of her parents, to try to gain, in finishing her novel there, the understanding needed to forgive them.

This anecdote speaks, on the one hand, to how Marshall met the challenges of getting work done. (At a time before the advent of mass-tourism to the Caribbean, when the US dollar went a very long way in Barbados.) It also introduces a fact of Marshall's writing life that would come to be such a recurrent theme in her fiction: that of travel as a means both toward discovering the past and forging new syntheses. Marshall's trip to Barbados (where she would remain for a year) was partly undertaken to better understand the characters about whom she was writing. What her journey's initial routing, though, through the Jewish blocks of New York's Lower East Side also suggests, is another shared fixation with her mother. As Hilton Als has written of his youthful predilections in West Indian Brooklyn: "I felt that Jews, unlike Negroes, had made something out of their suffering —something distinct, rich, and literary, to which I wanted to belong."[28] If the dreams of immigrant-parents involved emulating Delancey Street's merchants, those of their writer-children accorded with those merchants' bookish cousins on nearby blocks.

Marshall has described how, in writing *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, she aimed "to make the immigrant story applicable to blacks." In a city where Jews had long given to that "immigrant story" its exemplary fiction—from Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917); to Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925); to Henry Roth and Bernard Malamud and beyond—this was tantamount to identifying her experience with that of those books' Jewish characters and creators.[29] And so is it born out in the novel. "Her house was alive to Selina" is how we meet the skinny ten-year old with bangles on her arms whose story Marshall presents, from the start, as aligning closely with that of the daughters of Dutch and Scots and Jews whose ghosts, still, linger in this brownstone "behind [whose] grim facades…bodies crouched in the postures of love at night, children

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[28] Hilton Als, "The Overcoat," *Transition* 73 (1998): 8.

[29] Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917)(New York: Penguin Classics, 1993); Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers* (1925) (New York: Persea, 2003).

burst from the womb's thick shell, and death, when it came, shuffled through the halls."[30]

Part of what separates a Selina Boyce and her progeny, of course, from a David Levinsky and his, is race: Whereas the longue-durée fate of striving Jewish immigrants in the USA has been about "becoming white," for brown-skinned West Indians that particular possibility was always closed.[31] To Marshall, an aware black writer coming of age in the era of Civil Rights in America, and decolonization across Africa and the Caribbean, the recognition of this truth—and the aim of positing essential bonds among black people battling white supremacy worldwide—would become just the key facet of her work. Yet in her writing in this vein, too, the idiomatic traditions of the Jews—from the very concept of "diaspora," to her description, in *Triangular Road*, of the Atlantic as a "whole sea permanently sitting shivah"—continue to shape the yearnings and diction of the female descendents of enslaved Africans who are her great subject.

3.6

Long before Marshall titled her memoir *Triangular Road*, the implicit geography of her work has been of a kind of Middle Passage in reverse. Reaching back from Brooklyn to the Caribbean, her characters' traversal of space is always also a movement back in time. This is certainly the case in *Praisesong for the Widow*, in which Marshall's protagonist, leaving her modern cruiseship for a small schooner to a small island off Grenada—Carriocou—where she connects with the drums and mores of her ancestors. And it is certainly the case, too, in Marshall's most-ambitious work, *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, a parable of Western Civilization's relations with its Others that attempts, in one 500-page package, to coordinate all Marshall's obsessions—the antinomies between white and black; country and city; "development" and tradition; the ineluctable weights of history on the present. Telling the story of what transpires when a team of American social scientists—a celebrated Jewish anthropologist from Philadelphia; his superficially liberal Main Line wife; a young demographer and statistician—descend on the remote "African" corner of an out-of-the way Caribbean island at the head of an ambitious project for development and research, the novel's pivotal scenes include a pig sacrifice with hints of vodun; a riotous carnival; a love affair, for the anthropologist, with the book's moral center, a native islander called Merle Kinbona who dreams of returning to Africa itself.

With its vivid depictions of what separates the fictional Bourne Island from the overdeveloped world, and the of what separates the people of out-of-the-way Bourne Hils—who use their yearly carnival to reenact slave revolt led by one "Cuffee Ned," centuries before—from their island-state's leaders in its capital, *The Chosen Place* is a novel at pains to show how its subject-peoples' lives remain structured both by the lasting impress of slavery and the linked iniquities of modern capitalism. This may be a book

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[30] Marshall (2006) 3-4.

[31] On West Indian racial formation in America (and its particular forms in New York, specifically) see Mary Waters's standard work, *Black Identities: West Indian immigrant dreams and American realities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)

that seeks to "[make] a statement about what is happening in the Third World," as its author herself has said.[32] But not the least of its notable qualities, as Arlene Kreizer has argued in a perceptive reading of the novel alongside Fredric Jameson's controversial essay on "Third World Literature in the Era of Multi-National Capitalism," is that *The Chosen Place* resists the model of "national allegory" Jameson ascribed all such narratives.[33] Which is not to say that the novel isn't allegory of a kind: Saul, the anthropologist, described Bournehills' "shabby woebegone hills and spent land, its odd people who seemed other than themselves," as a place that "might have been selected as the repository of the history which reached beyond it to include the hemisphere north and south"—a place, he continues, that stands as "a lasting testimony" to the truth that all that gone in, in slavery days, "was not yet over, only the forms had changed."[34] This, like all of Marshall's later books, is a novel about redressing historical wrongs wrought by slavery throughout the hemisphere, and that locates the greatest prospects for such redress in the Caribbean. But what is notable about how this book's characters seek to "counter the violence of official history and the fragmentation wrought by the imperatives of multinational capital," in Kreizer's words, "through counter-memory and a desire for personal and cultural wholeness," is the means by which they do so. *Pace* the mid-century model of historical thinking, reified in Jameson, that locates Third World prospects for redeeming history's hurts in new national states, the quest enacted by Merle in *The Chosen Place* turns on a kind of "post-nationalist consciousness"—and is animated, as in many of Marshall's books, by what Kreizer calls "the practice of diaspora."[35]

For Marshall's characters, the return to the islands is a return to roots, to the "folk" of just the sort described by George Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile* when he credited the West Indian novelists of his generation (i.e. émigré men living in London) with looking "in and down at what had traditionally been ignored." He continued:

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[32] As Marshall has put it: "I would like to see it [*The Chosen People*] described as a Third World novel, because it is set in a mythical island in the West Indies. Readers spend an awful lot of time trying to identify the place rather than seeing its larger meaning: the fact that it makes a statement about what is happning in the Third World in general [politically and psychologocially." See "Re-Creating Ourselves Al Over the World: A Conversation with Paule Marshall," by Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, in *Conversations with Paule Marshall*, James C. Hall and Heather Hathaway, eds. (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2010), as discussed by Arlene Kreizer, *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) 92.

[33] Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multi-National Capitalism," *Social Text* 15.1 (1986): 65-88. Kreizer 89.

[34] Marshall 402. The full passage, as discussed by Kreizer, continues from "north and south": "And it would remain as such…[D]eep down, at a depth to which only a few would be permitted to penetrate, it would remain fixed and rooted in that other time, serving in this way as a lasting testimony to all that had gone on then: those scenes hanging on the walls [Merle's collection of drawings of slavery and the Middle Passage], and as a reminder—painful but necessary—that it was not yet over, only the forms had changed, and the real work was still to be done; and finally as memorial—crude in the extreme when you considered those ravaged hills and the blight visible everywhere, but no other existed, they had not been thought worthy of one—to the figures bound to the millwheel in the print and to each other in the packed airless hold of the ship in the drawing."

[35] Kreizer 89.

> For the first time the West Indian peasant became other than a cheap source of labor. He became, through the novelist's eye, a living existence, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in riot and carnival. It is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality.[36]

In a well-known critique of Lamming's piece, Gordon Rohler limned some of the contradictions at the heart of Lamming's treatment of the relation between the West Indian and the metropolitan writer—and the relation between his delusive "abstract and absolute poles of 'folk' and 'urban'".[37] Lamming, Rohler writes, "does not…go far enough towards indicating that the real problem lies in capturing the complex movement of individuals and societies caught in the fluid continuum between the theoretically 'peasant' and the theoretically 'urban.'"[38] The thrust of Rohler's argument revolves, on the one hand, around undercutting Lamming's claims about what role that novels—as opposed West Indian people themselves—can play in "[restoring] the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality." On the other, they center around tracing the various *ideological* projects involved in constructing an "authentic" well of folk culture on which the Caribbean writer can draw. Whatever the necessary delusions tied to that project in the West Indies, one of the more notable of its positive contents is as strongly exemplified in Marshall's work as anyone's: the allying of that "authentic" folk culture with the West Indian peasantry's connection to another place entirely: Africa. In Marshall's imaginative geography of the Caribbean, what marks the region as distinct within the larger Americas (and certainly as distinct from her native city) is its peoples' nearer ties to what she regards as the true fundament of black identity in the New World: an Africa that is an "imaginative geography and a history," as Said wrote, "which helps the former colonized people acquire a sense of identity through its imaginative value."

Marshall's affective ties to the Caribbean—and in particular, its "out-islands"—is perhaps nowhere more clearly evinced than *Praisesong for the Widow*, whose climactic scene finds her Avey Johnson, a mid-aged New Yorker embarking on a search for her roots, taking part in an elaborate ritual on tiny Carriacou. Having joined the annual "Excursion" of old folks from nearby Grenada, Avey finds herself bathed in the dances and lifeways of the Big Drum and the "nation dance" in which only the older folks in their company take part, many hectoring Avey with an insistent query: *What nation you is?* The query, as Kreizer has argued, again serves to underscore Marshall's interest in forms of national belonging other than those coterminous with the island-state where the event takes: her interest, specifically, in the island as a locus of what VéVé Clark terms

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[36] Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, as quoted by Rohler, "Literature and the Folk" (1971) *My Strangled City and other essays* (Port of Spain: Longmans, 1992) 52.

[37] In pointing to the difficulty of separating the "rural" from the "urban" in small island cities, Rohler also echoes James's arguments about the same.

[38] He continues: "Had [Lamming] done so, he would have expressed less surprise at the fact that middle class writers were preoccupied with lower class people in defiance of earlier traditions of West Indian behavior. It is clear that these writers, among whom can be included Lamming himself, had recognized a certain fluidity in their societies, which at times made it difficult to define differences between classes, behaviour, attitudes, language, and categories of sociologically definition. Or rather, they had realised that genuine writing about the West Indies involved a grasp of how people, classes and attitudes interlocked at times, and retained their distinctness at others." Rohler 54.

"diaspora literacy."[39] Here, her protagonist revels in watching the people she's visiting people moving in such a way that her guide cries out, "She's a Temne, oui!"; "Moko. Is the song of the Moko nation you're hearing now"; "Cromanti. Is Cromanti people you see in the ring now"; "Congo, oui. They had some the prettiest dances…"; before he himself yells out, "*I's a Chamba!*" in such a way that "in his pride his shoulders had almost come straight."[40] Carriacou's Big Drum dance, which occurs on an Anglo island whose people retain the patois tongue of its one-time French owners, doesn't merely enact hundreds of years of Caribbean history. The dance also bespeaks its participants' embrace of their roots in various African cultures.[41] Bracketing for a moment the complex histories—and processes of memory—that have informed the Big Drum dance participants' claiming of individual ethnic identities from African, the important point about this rite, for Marshall's protagonist like her creator, is that the Big Drum dance is "an African institution."[42]

Marshall's work may be most distinctive, in the African-American literary tradition, for emplacing in its corpus a "third migration"—from the Caribbean to America. In the context of Caribbean literature, her work is characterized by its interest in a migration *back* to the islands, and to their peasants' "African" precincts, as a means of creating an authentic black literature of the Americas. As such, though, it is also engaged with another problem. Marshall, like many members of the generation of writers who arrived after Countee Cullen asked "What is Africa to me?"—and many West Indian writers in the independence age—has long been preoccupied with the redemptive prospects of one migration more. In her novels, Marshall has never brought her characters all the way back to Africa. But it is perhaps only predictable that her own return to "the third part of her tripartite self" should figure, in *Triangular Road*, as a moment of redemption. That journey—which Marshall undertakes as a member of an American delegation to a 1977 Pan-African arts exposition in Nigeria—takes up the book's short final chapter. Reading her account of "*Omawale*" ("The child has returned" in Yoruba), one might feel glad that Marshall hasn't ventured back there in her fiction. Confronted with the place that has long resided in her characters' minds as the locus of a whole and rooted identity, much of the nuance with which this exemplary chronicler the

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[39] Arlene Kreizer, *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) 90. On "diaspora literacy," as discussed by Kreizer, see VéVé A. "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness." *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*, Hortense J. Spillers, ed. New York: Routledge, 1991. 40-61.

[40] Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow* (New York: Plume, 1983): 238-239.

[41] See Lorna McDaniel, "The Concept of Nation in the Big Drum of Carriacou, Grenada." *Musical Repercussions of the 1492 Encounter*, Ed. Carol Robertson (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1993), and *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou: Praisesongs in Rememory of Flight* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida). On those rites in the larger context of Carriacou, see M.G. Smith, *Kinship and Community in Carriacou* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press). For a recording of accompanying music, and erudite explanation for various of the dances origins in nearby islands, see Andrew Pearse, "The Big Drum Dance of Carriacou" [Recording Insert]. Ethnic Folkways Insert FE 4011

[42] As McDaniel puts it: "The institution of the Big Drum does not separate the spiritual focus and human interaction from politico-national organization in worship. They merge. The people themselves see the Big Drum as 'an African institution' and celebrate their African origins as Cromanti (Akan), Igbo, Manding, Chamba, Kongo, Arada, Temne, Moko, and Banda. We see a humanity in the nine ethnic groups which gave rise to nine repertoires of dance and song, and nine rhythms that encode the legacy of the oppressed." McDaniel (1993) as quoted by Pearse.

New World condition—that nourishing muddiness of identity, possessed by all of us not indigenous to this hemisphere—has always suffused her fiction, is supplanted with something like essentialism, as she writes of an easy felt kinship with people from as widely divergent locales as Zimbabwe and Timbuktu.

Far be it, though, to begrudge a great female elder her belief. Especially when that belief is part and parcel with the human pathos with which she has always vested a body of work whose virtues put her near the front rank of postwar American novelists, and give Marshall a prideful place in the ongoing story of how the voices of persons from more and more parts of our polyglot polity have entered our literature. Perhaps what one should see as more crucial than these achievements though—especially after reading a memoir which raises as many questions as it answers—is the model she has always offered in her fiction to those paddling the waters she helped chart.

In *Triangular Road*, she describes how she struggled, in a beautiful house in the Caribbean rented with the Guggenheim money garnered from *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, to write a second novel equal to her ambition. In trying to craft, from reams of historical research on the people of her mother's home-island, the book that would become *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, a terrible block descends. The block, she recalls, only lifted when she allows herself to fully know that as

> a novelist, a storyteller, a fabulist, as it were, my responsibility first and foremost was to the story, the story above all else: the old verities of people, plot, and place; a story that if honestly told and well crafted would resonate with the historical truths contained in the steno pads.[43]

"All of it," she continues, "would be there for those capable of reading in depth." And so, indeed, it is, in all the best novels of a writer distinguished above all by her mastery of those "old verities." But what indeed saves it—and sets it apart from the agit-prop masquerading as art penned by most "Afrocentric" writers in 1969—is its author's deep acumen for those "old verities of people, plot, and place." The subtly rendered character at the book's center is freighted with much—as obeah woman, symbol of her island, embodiment of history. But Merle Kinbona is never more nor less, like all Marshall's best characters, than a human being struggling with how, despite the hurts of her own personal history, to love and be loved, and with "the hope and desire for reconciliation of her conflicting parts."[44]

When Kenneth Ramchand published his landmark study of *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, his work was informed by another "reconciliation…of conflicting parts": the dream (and dissolution) of the West Indies Federation.[45] That fact, as many critics have since noted, shaped both the book's aims and its oversights—its focus on Anglophone literature at the expense of other books and languages from other of the Caribbean islands, especially. For many intellects and artists of the 1960s and after, the two searches for wholeness invoked here – the one personal, the other explicitly political—were closely allied. For Marshall, a New Yorker, and a woman largely marginalized from the conversations taking place largely in London and the islands, this

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[43] Marshall (2010) 148.

[44] Marshall, *The Chosen Place the Timeless People* (1969) (New York: Vintage, 1984.) 401.

[45] On the historical context in which Ramchand's work emerged, and critical responses to it since, see, e.g.,

was never the case: her "search for wholeness" was personal, and literary. As an immigrant-woman writer, Marshall blazed a crucial trail for many who came after—perhaps most notably in the person of Jamaica Kincaid, who, like Marshall, named herself as a means of giving herself permission to write. (Kincaid, before her own self-invention as a *New Yorker* writer, arrived to New York from the West Indies as a teen au pair called Elaine Potter Richardson.) But the particular historical and geographic imagination suffusing Marshall's work, and its conception of the Caribbean's place in the larger epic of Americas, also allies it with the key themes of avowedly "Caribbean" culture in years to come: movement and "roots"; the problem of Africa; the use of performance as a way to access counter-memory figure historical redress; the role—and limits—small island-nations can play in addressing, if not redeeming, history's hurts.

Those problems, quite beyond being "merely" literary, have long suffused conversations on the Caribbean's defining characteristics—and also suffused conversations surrounding a national event that represented, in the 1960s and after, the font of *regional* hope for overcoming its savage past: an event, fittingly, which figures in the climactic scene of *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, as Bournehills' carnival-revellers, enacting their slave-forebears' rebellion, ally histories old and new to figure a new future, in the form of

> [a] large contingent of the Twenty-sixth of July Guerilla Band made up entirely of young people from the Hieghts….Dressed in olive fatigues, heavy combat boots and helmets camouflaged like leaves, the young men sporting beards and puffing cigars, and all of them, even the women, brandishing cardboard machetes and grenades, the members of the guerilla band came charging toward Queen Street and the Bournehills troupe, singing the praises of Cuffee as they came and firing toy machines and pistols.

What we are seeing: the embodied memory of a people, on one small, representative Caribbean isle, collapsing the memory of a slave-rebellion past to contemporary hope, for redressing that same history of wrongs, embodied in the Cuban Revolution. It is to Cuba, and the larger resonance of its Revolution with Caribbean geography and history, that I now turn.

IV.

Cuba in the Caribbean / Cuba in the World:

Andrew Salkey's *Havana Journal* and the Congreso Cultural of 1968

"Now I understand that our history is History itself…"

-Roberto Fernández Retamar

"I have always been a Jamaican of presentiment, an islander of chance, a loyal follower of the still small voice."

-Andrew Salkey[1]

On a warm May day in 1967, a group of West Indians convened in the North London flat of a young Jamaican writer called Orlando Patterson. Patterson, years before gaining eminence as a Harvard sociologist, was known to his peers as the author of *Children of Sisyphus* (1964), a novel on Kingston slum-dwellers notable for its sympathetic portrayal of a millenarian cult—Rastafari—then unknown beyond his hometown.[2] Among attendees at this impromptu meeting of the Caribbean Artists Movement were Edward Brathwaite, the Barbadian historian and poet; John La Rose, the Trinidadian publisher with whom Brathwaite had founded their group; and George Lamming, the Barbadian novelist whose *Pleasures of Exile* (1960), his classic account of how living abroad in London had enabled men like these not only to work as writers, but to hold discussions which, impossible on their isolated islands, allowed them to "become West Indian".[3] Also present, on this day, were Pablo Armando Fernández, a Cuban poet and sometime cultural attaché with the Cuban embassy, and Andrew Salkey, the Jamaican writer and

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[1] Andrew Salkey, *Havana Journal* (London: Pelican, 1971) 31.

[2] Orlando Patterson, *The Children of Sisyphus* (London: Hutchinson, 1964).

[3] On the Caribbean Artists Movement's founding by Brathwaite, La Rose, and Salkey, and the group's guiding aims – e.g., to increase the recognition of West Indian art forms within the British society; to create an aesthetic not solely informed by European ideology; to cultivate an audience for Caribbean arts among West Indians in London; see Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972* (London: New Beacon Books, 1992). For Lamming, see *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

broadcaster whose BBC program, "Caribbean Voices," had featured many of his colleagues' work—and to whose account of their meeting we owe knowing it occurred.[4]

Salkey narrates this gathering at the start of his *Havana Journal*, a book whose journey is prompted by Fernández's alerting his comrades to an upcoming event to which they're all invited—a Congreso Cultural including writers, scientists, and technologists who Cuba's Revolutionary Government were summoning to Havana in Janaury, 1968. Salkey also writes of how Fernandez's "interest in West Indian art is sympathetically West Indian and without the telling curiosity of an intellectual whose society has, fairly recently, said no to colonialism and neo-colonialism."[5] He continues:

> Pablo's warmth and directness infectiously West Indian;…; also has a Caribbean-American style which I recognize in my own contemporary urban Jamaican middle class gloss, not so much in my own personal life-style, but in the style of those who stayed at home. Pablo's is obviously a 'survival', dwindling and dying; the Jamaican's, surviving and well-watered; there's been a Socialist Revolution in one man's country, and a semblance of some sort of evolution in the other's, ninety miles away.

Salkey may not say, here, exactly what he means by "West Indian." But these signal much about his concerns in the narrative to follow—a book in which Salkey insists on understanding Cuba's Revolution (and its people) as "West Indian". Moreover, in using Cuba as a way to thinking through and understanding *what* West Indian-ness is, Salkey's *Journal* is also notable for examining the relationship between Cuba's Revolution and the emergence, in spaces like Orlando Patterson's London apartment, of a new pan-Caribbean identity. So doing, it offers an extraordinarily rich lens on how imaginative geographies shaping that identity can be made to involve (or not involve) the region's largest island.

By dint both of its sheer size and the extremes of recent history—its mid-century swing from most debauched of tourist havens (and the Caribbean nation most firmly under sway of the United States), to its post-1959 role as anti-imperial paragon—Cuba has played a role perhaps equal to all its region's other islands combine, in forging popular imaginings of the Caribbean's twinned predilections for revolution and pleasure. The means by which it has come to play this role are many and varied. In this chapter, I will examine a few of these. I will do so, in part, by tracing the longer history of nationalist discourse in Cuba, and how the leaders of its current Revolution have sought to reconcile that discourse with an espoused commitment to political solidarity—and cultural commonality—with its Caribbean neighbors. More centrally, though, I will do so by offering a reading of Salkey's account of a group of West Indian intellectuals, most visiting Cuba for the first time, attempting to synthesize their experience of its Revolution with their shared preoccupation to conceive of the Caribbean as coherent cultural region. In the context of Cuba's larger history, Salkey's book is notable for recording an event which took place at what now looks like the high-water mark for the Revolution's international repute: the Congreso unfolded mere months after the martyrdom of Che Guevara in Bolivia, and just before Castro, disappointing many of his liberal-left

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[4] Salkey (1971) 10.
[5] Salkey (1971) 11.

admirers worldwide, made his Revolution's obeisance to the Kremlin definitively plain. His *Journal* of going to Havana is also notable, for my purposes here, for the fact that C.L.R. James is along for the ride—not least, as it happens, for the purpose of negotiating the Cuban publication of his recent revision of *The Black Jacobins*.

In that new edition, as noted herein, he'd added an afterword which argued, among other things, that the Cuban Revolution represented a continuance of a macro-historical regional "movement" begun by Toussaint L'Ouverture a century-and-a-half before. He had also tacitly argued that Cuba, no matter its Revolution's promise or fate, was a West Indian nation: more than that, "it was the most West Indian island in the West Indies."[6] On what basis this was so, beyond the prevalence and sway of the sugar plantation in island life, he hadn't said. But one clue he offers is that Cuba was also the place, decades before, where another "particular feature of West Indian life" first emerged, this one not political-economic, but intellectual. James wrote:

> It was just one year after the Platt Amendment that there first appeared what has turned out to be a particular feature of West Indian life—the non-political writer devoted to the analysis and expression of West Indian society. The first was the greatest of them all, Fernando Ortiz. For over half a century, at home and in exile, he has been the tireless exponent of Cuban life and *Cubanidad*, the spirit of Cuba. The history of Spanish imperialism, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, all the related sciences are his medium of investigation into Cuban life, folklore, literature, music, art, education, criminality, everything Cuban. A most distinctive feature of his work is the number of solid volumes he has devoted to Negro and Mulatto life in Cuba. A quarter of quarter before the Writers' Project of the New Deal began the discovery of the United States, Ortiz set out to discover his native land, a West Indian island. In essence it is the first and only comprehensive study of the West Indian people. Ortiz ushered the Caribbean into the thought of the twentieth century and kept it there.[7]

Among the notable aspects of James's argument about Ortiz, is the rhetorical move he makes from writing about what is distinctly and ineffably *Cuban* about Ortiz and his work, to claiming that his study represented "the first and only comprehensive study of the West Indian people." Using the pronoun "*the*" rather than "*a*," James signals his belief in a "West Indian people" extant across the region—and perhaps, his belief that a study of Cuba represents a particularly helpful way in to understanding the Caribbean at large. A striking assertion—perhaps all the more so for the fact that James makes it on behalf of Caribbean island large enough to have a distinct and deep sense of *Cubanidad*, or nation-ness, impossible on smaller islands. This fact, which bears heavily on the interesting dialactic between "nation" and "region," lies at the core of many conversations about imaginative geographies of the Caribbean. It is also bears heavily on Andrew Salkey's account of all that transpired when he and his merry band undertake a visit during which they take part in discussions about Cuba's status as "representative nation" of the Caribbean and the larger Third World; debate "the role of the intellectual"

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[6] C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage, 1963) 411.
[7] James (1963) 414.

in fomenting regional Revolution; and perhaps most challengingly, confront their host-nation's vexed approach to race.

4.2

If asked to suggest an ideal guide to the Caribbean in toto—and to its multilingual aspects, more precisely—one could hardly do better than Andrew Salkey. Born in Panama, like many children of West Indians imported to build that nation's canal, Salkey was of Jamaican and Haitian extraction. Raised largely in Kingston, he emigrated to London for college, and, after graduating from UCL, spent a few years teaching secondary school English in Walworth. Having helped found the West Indian Students Association during his student days, he had grown close to the group of young Caribbean writers whose ascent and aims were heralded by Lamming's publication of *The Castle of My Skin* in 1954, followed closely by the Trinidadian Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* in 1956. Though he joined the BBC in the mid-50s, the prolific Salkey was more than merely a broadcaster; also published two novels of his own about London's West Indians in the late 50s.[8] More successful than those interesting if flawed volumes, perhaps, were children's books such as *Hurricane* (1964), and compendia of folk-tales well-known to a generation of West Indians today. But it was in his work with the BBC, as Stuart Hall has said, where Salkey perhaps left his largest legacy, becoming "the key figure" in his group of ex-pat West Indians, in Hall's estimation, and making his BBC program "a glittering showcase for a generation of writers…who had made London their second home."[9] Along with his keen observer's eye, strongly evinced in his *Havana Journal*, Salkey's crucial gift perhaps lay in the social intelligence that allowed him to act, for a generation of self-involved intellectuals, as nexus and glue. Long after leaving the BBC for a teaching post at Massachusetts' Hampshire College, his commitments to community-building was expressed in his editing and publishing numerous collections of Caribbean fiction, essays, and poetry (including, apropos of the present subject, his 1977 anthology *Writing in Cuba Since the Revolution*).[10]

Salkey begins his journal proper some months after the encounter in Patterson's apartment. The interim period has witnessed Che's murder in a Bolivian jungle, and Salkey agreeing, in its aftermath, to contribute a personal tribute to *Viva Che*, a commemorative volume to be published by London's Lorrimer Press. He gets us properly under way on Boxing Day, 1967. The small party of *Congreso* delegates with whom he boards an Iberia flight to Madrid, to pick up their Air Cubana flight to Havana, are two South Africans (Alex le Guma, novelist, and Dennis Brutus, activist and poet); two British delegates (Dr. David Cooper, psychiatrist, and George Hutchinson, a physicist);

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[8] It is perhaps indicative of Salkey's middling success in fiction – and his open-minded humanism, as well – that his best-known novel, *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, is most often recalled not for the quality of its prose as for its narrator's ambiguous sexuality.
On the recent re-release of *Autum Pavement*, and Salkey's oeuvre in general, see Jonathan Ali, "Lonely Londoner," *The Caribbean Review of Books* 22 (July 2010).

[9] Stuart Hall, "OBITUARY: Andrew Salkey," *The Independent*. 16 May 1995.

[10] See, e.g., Andrew Salkey, ed. *Writing in Cuba Since the Revolution* (London: Bogle-l'Ouverture Press Ltd., 1977)

and Salkey's fellow West Indians John La Rose and C.L.R. James—who arrives to the airport, our reporter writes, "clutching the well-thumbed coffee table *Michelangelo* which he rarely leaves behind on long journeys."[11] The group is to meet Orlando Patterson and George Lamming, both of whom have spent the fall at Jamaica's University of the West Indies, in Havana. Describing their stopover in Madrid (where James remarks that "a certain part of our Caribbean, and Fidel's, begins here"), Salkey is at pains to emphasize the differing outlooks of their party, and contrasting hopes for their trip—from de la Rose ("appeared largely doubtful"); to James ("frankly pessimistic"); to Salkey's feeling of closeness to Lamming and Patterson ("brother nihilists, who must show up, even for nihilism's sake"). His first chapter ends with touch-down at Rancho Boyeros, Havana. "Misty, damp, and very, very warm,"is how he describes his first impression of an island which will, in due course, largely win over he and everyone of their company by the time they leave a few weeks later.

The impact of The Revolution on Salkey's eyes, to paraphrase Nancy Morejon, is stark.[12] Noting the lack of busts of Fidel (and with it a lack of any cult of personality around Cuba's leader), Salkey describes his first impressions of the island, as he will throughout his text, by means of analogy with other islands: "First look at Havana," he notes, " reminded me of the Jamaican ride-in from Palisadoes Airport to Central Kingston." He then describes his hotel along Havana's seawall, the Nacional, as "delightfully tourist-soiled, old as Batista and much older, shabby reminder of the Myrtle Bank Hotel in Kingston." More than the old travel-writers tack of making the unfamiliar imaginable by comparison with the familiar, Salkey's invocations of Jamaica, and other of the Indies, are incessant, ranging from how he describes Havana's morning light ("greens and pinks, similar to down-town half-tones in Kingston and Port of Spain," to the aspect of a weekend eve (" typically Saturday night down-town West Indian…: an extra-loud sound system, couples strolling around eating and others dancing and rubbing up vigorously").[13] The concerns and belief underlying such notes is made plain, on one of Salkey's first days in Havana, as he, Robert Hill, and John La Rose talk with one of their Cuban hosts about Cubans' love for big American cars. "We're all West Indian in that," Hill jokes. Marcos deflects the comment with an excursus on imports and transport economics.

> "We're all West Indian, Marcos." John emphasized.
> "What does that really mean?" Marcos wanted to know.
> I tried. "We've all got a touch of the thirties and forties B-film locked inside us. In fact, West Indian 'pop' taste is built up on that, I think. The Revolution's got to live with that for some time, Marcos, whether it likes it or not, and more so if it's really a Caribbean one."[14]

The resigned "I tried," here, betrays the extent to which arguing over essences is always hard: where "West Indian," here, seems to evoke a certain material attachment to the effluvia of American capitalism, it echoes a belief in *essential*, hazy Caribbean

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[11] Salkey (1971) 13.
[12] Salkey's epigraph, for part one, is from Nancy Morejon: "loving the Revolution's impact on the eyes."
[13] Salkey (1971) 34.
[14] Salkey (1971) 35.

commonality of the sort figured by Antonio Benítez-Rojo in his *Repeating Island* (much of whose anecdotal evidence about Caribbean-ness, it's worth noting, is drawn from his native Havana).[15] But this too, also bespeaks Salkey's obsessions, shared with James, about understanding what and how made up a "West Indian"—and by extension, during a visit to Havana, focused on what, precisely, was West Indian about the Cuban Revolution.

Beyond mere intellectual parlor-game, that question also bore, at the time, on political debate unfolding in Cuba and among its friends, over the degree to which the Cuban Revolution was tied to its region (and its fellow Third World nations), or beholden to a distan empire symbolized by an influx of Soviet technicians regarded by many Cubans, as Salkey writes, "as sweaty experts without deodorants."[16] With the Cultural Congress arriving at a time when Fidel was moving to berate the Kremlin for failing to support Che's Bolivian mission, the perception of many Castro admirers—Salkey included—was that Cuba "could…reasonably claim the right of the position of leadership of the Socalist Revolutionary World."[17] Within months of the Congress, many of those same sympathizers would break with the Revolution when Castro supported Moscow's crushing of the Prague Spring's youthful ideals. But in January of that year, the Revolution's sheen, for those disposed to admire it, was definitely still on. And one of the key fascinations of Salkey's book, is the way it represents an encounter between the kinds of pan-West Indian thought engendered in London after the war, and the intriguing mix of Cuban nationalism and Third Worldism current in Cuba—to say nothing of the worrying narrowness-of-thought betrayed, at times, by Cubans like Marcos, who neatly ends the above exchange about West Indian-ness with the curt phrase, "Fidel knows that."

Given the heady times, and the wish, on the part of Salkey and his cohort, to believe in the Revolution, such moments are largely allowed to pass by his party—all of whom, to a man (and they're all men) are moved to tears by watching Fidel dub 1968 "the year of the heroic revolutionary." What makes Salkey and co. valued observers, though, are those moments when he, and they, do betray some skepticism. One such occurs when their group arrives at the Hotel Nacional, and Salkey attempts to engage two of their Cuban hosts in a debate about class and colour in the Caribbean. Having noted, during his first hours in Havana, "the prevalence of Black and not-so-light-skinned

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[15] See Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), and, in particular, his recollection of how, during the Cuban missile crisis, he'd been reassured of a certain Caribbean instinct for sublimating violence, by the sight, in the street below his Havana balcony, of a woman moving in "certain kind of a way"(i.e., a polyrhythmic way). See Benítez-Rojo 23. See also Salkey (1971) 39, and how one of his Cuban hosts addresses this question: "We used to be called 'the Paris of the Caribbean', you know. He chuckled. 'There was a sophisticated international style already existing on many levels in the soicty. Certain inlcuences and people have gone, that's true, but the attraction for style, a natural way with it, has remained, especially in popular entertainment, and in other things, in printing, poster-work, in design generally, in the way we dress, in all sorts of ways of doing things, in spite of the fact that we're living through lean times."

[16] Salkey (1971) 29.

[17] Salkey (1971) 72. On Castro's most vocal criticisms of the Soviet Union in late 1967 and, again, at the Cultural Congress in 1968 – along with their eventual repercussions for its relationship with Cuba – see "The Red Year," by Javier Hernández, *ReVista: The Harvard Review of Latin America* 8.11 (2009); and Carlos Ripoll, "The Cuban Scene: Censors and Dissenters," http://www.eddosrios.org, n.d.

workers…on lowest rungs of menial ladder at airport and on catering staff at the hotel,"[18] he asks the Cubans for their thoughts. They dismiss his concerns pointing out that "Comandante Juan Almeida, who's the head of our armed forces, is a Negro."[19] Salkey, resisting the urge to suggest that Almeida's position may be a result of the same kind of liberal tokenism that brought Ralph Bunche to a prominent post in segregated America, lets the matter rest – albeit storing away his queries for a later day. The race question may pertub, but it duals for attention, in his impressions of the island, with his being impressed by the Cubans' possession of "a capacity for national feeling" that far surpasses anything he's known in Jamaica. The two phenomena—an unwillingness to talk about race, alongside intense the nationalism—are not unrelated, as I'd like to show here. They go to the heart of the tangled encounter of West Indianness and *cubanidad*, and of the Cuban Revolution's relationship with both. The grammar of nation, of course, is necessarily a grammar of race as well. And no small part of the story of cufbanidad—and the larger saga of Cuba's relationship to the Caribbean—is a story about race.

4.3

For Cubans as much as for outsiders, Cuba has long been as much an idea as a country. At least since José Martí, the great poet laureate of Cuban independence began composing odes to the island's "half-breed" soul in the late 1800s, there has existed in Cuba an obsession with reflecting upon and debating the national character. This tradition is perhaps most memorably manifested in Fernando Ortiz's argument, beloved of James, that all of Cuban identity and culture—from the rumba to the mulata to the cigar—can be understood as outgrowths of an economy based in producing tobacco and sugar for export.[20] The discussion has taken many forms, but perhaps the dominant current in Cuba's politics and intellectual culture has always been the struggle over cubanidad, or

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[18] Salkey (1971) 22.
[19] Salkey (1971) 22.
[20] See Fernando Ortíz, *Cuban Counterpoint* (1940) (Durham:Duke University Press, 1995). Though *mestizaje* is mostly a product of popular discourse, it has a key correspondent in Cuban social scientific discourse, namely the principle of "transculturation," advanced by the anthropologist Fernando Ortíz, in his germinal 1940 work *Contrapunto Cubano* (Cuban Counterpoint), when he proposed that "the real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transculturations." (Ortíz, 98) Ortíz, by way of exhibiting his theory of the transcultural, presented a contrapuntal grammar of Cuban racial symbology, in which Cuba's representative races were reflected in its two great pride-making crops, tobacco and sugar—tobacco: black, sugar: mulata--; he argued that the Cuban nation was a product of the economies (social, cultural, symbolic, capital) built around these two commodities. Ortíz's book is notable, among many other reasons, for its imagining of a young, heterogeneous New World nation—a nation which might, in a normative economy of "nationness," be defined by its fractious lack of a homogeneous social body (and defined, as such, to use Diane Nelson's metaphor, as "a wounded body")—as a contrapuntal, polyrhythmic whole, made up of divergent yet mutually constitutive, malleable parts. Ortíz's vision of Cuba and its unique transcultural attributes, if far more nuanced than the popular discourse of *mestizaje*, also mapped onto the prideful nationalism of the latter, and remains current on the island. That Ortíz's schema is based in a material economy that barely exists today (tobacco remains an essential cash crop, but Cuba produces merely a fraction of the sugar it once did, and produces less every year) makes reading *Cuban Counterpoint* against contemporary discourse on race and nation in Cuba only the more interesting.

Cubanness. Fidel's revolution, before it was Marxist-Leninist or Castroist or anything else, has been framed and experienced in Cuba as a nationalist struggle, with identity—cubanidad—its fundamental legitimating ideas. As Anthony Smith has written, "nation-building is the basic Third World ideology and project," and the Cuban Revolution, which triumphed at the very height of decolonization movements across the global south, has certainly born this out. Alongside its other ambitions, it has been about crystallizing what it means to *be Cuban*; about determining on the island the destiny of the Cuban people; and about asserting the greatness of Cuba as a nation—though, critically, as a nation with particular, representative attributes in the Americas, and later, with particular internationalist credentials as a moral leader and anti-imperialist paragon of the Third World.[21]

Salkey, for his part, takes note of this truth in one of the craftier aspects of Fidel's propaganda arm: the prevalence not of Fidel's image on that ride in from the airport—and not Karl Marx or Che's, for that matter—but that of Martí: the brilliant poet, essayist, and revolutionary who led Cuba's fight for independence from Spain in the 1880s and 90s, whose image the Revolution holds up as that of the nation's patriarch—and, not incidentally, as the greatest Pan-American leader since Bolívar. The Revolution's embrace of Martí is no simple matter of political exigency; it signals in crucial ways the ideological fundaments upon which Fidel's cause is based. The Revolution, framed and experienced in Cuba as a continuation of the national epic, embraces the aspects of that narrative posited by Martí, as the struggle to free the island from the dominance of all external empires, be they Castillian or *yanqui*. As a national struggle, it has also necessitated the development—or continuation—of a discourse concerning that nation's particular attributes and identity. And that discourse, especially in its racial aspects, also evinces strong continuities with the ideas of Martí—and just as significant, the particular subject-position from which he presented them.

When Fidel Castro claimed, not long after the Revolution's victory, that Cuba was an "Afro-Latin" nation, his tacit custodianship of *cubanidad*, as a member of the island's upper classes, had deep roots in a history of Cuban men of privilege (and usually, light skin) defining the nation's identity. Batista was a mulatto cane-cutter's son; Fidel and his brother Raúl were the children of wealthy Spanish landowners—putative members, that is, of a class of Cubans who thought the déclassé rule of an uneducated army colonel a national shame. Not every member of Cuba's elite who came to support Castro against Batista in the 1950s was driven by prejudice; Fidel has always been a strong antiracist, in his way. But the machista worlds of elite Cuban politics and culture have always been paternalistic, beginning with Martí's seminal 1891 work *Nuestra America* (Our America), wherein he articulated his nationalist vision, proclaiming that "el mestizo autoctano," (the native-born half-breed) had "vanquished the exotic creole" as the embodiment of authentic *cubanidad*.[22] He continued: "the rachitic thinkers and theorists juggle and warm over the library-shelf races [razas de libreria], which the open-minded traveler and well-disposed observer seek in vain in Nature's justice, where the universal identity of man leaps forth from triumphant love and the turbulent lust for life."[23] Martí, in other words,

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[21] Anthony D. Smith, *State and Nation in the Third World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983) 232.
[22] Jose Martí, "Nuestra America" (1892). *The America of Jose Martí*: *Selected Writings*, Trans. Juan de Onis (Chicago: Funk & Wagnalls, 1954)
[23] Martí 150.

arrogated to Cuba—and to the larger *mestizo America* it superlatively represented—a degree of racial enlightenment that would soon lead the way for all of humanity.[24]

Such high-minded sentiments could only be voiced at a willful distance from reality: "To invoke 'Nature's Justice,'" as Vera Kutzinski writes, "in a country where slavery had not been formally abolished until 1886 [was] at best problematic, at worst hypocritical."[25] Marti's oft-repeated claim that "there [would] never be a war between the races in Cuba," was proven wrong scarcely a decade after his death, when, in 1912, some 3000 Black followers of Evaristo Estenoz, founder of The Independent Party of Color and agitator for racial justice, were massacred by the forces of President José Miguel Gómez.[26] To understand the dynamic informing Martí's views, perhaps no fact is more telling than the fact that the mostly white leadership of the Independence Wars self-identified as "*mambíses*." Claiming kinship with the rebellious runaway slaves whom the Spanish had historically termed "mambí", creole leaders symbolically marking the nation for which they fought as one descended from the rebellious black, rather than from the slave-holders to whom they were more likely familially linked.[27] Since that time, (white) Creole elites have often valorized coloredness—or "mixedness"—as the wellspring of autocthonous Cuban identity, while eliding the oppressive racism under which *actual* Cubans of color often lived their lives. The same current has persisted – from Nicolás Guillén's iconic 1930 poem "Mulata" to innumerable paintings of the copper-skinned Virgen de la Caridad[28] —of holding up the sexy mulata as embodiment of cubanía, while affording to actual brown-skinned Cuban women little place in that nation beyond its brothels and kitchens.[29]

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[24] This idea, famously echoed, a generation later, in José Vasconselos *Raza Cosmica* (1925), had a crucial antecedent, as well, in Martí's forebear Simón Bolívar, whose righteous pan-Americanism, espoused in his famous "Letter from Jamaica," (1815) declaimed that "we are a small human species, we possess a world encircled by vast seas, new in almost all its arts and sciences." He expanded his arguments a few years later, in his message to the Congress of Angostura (1819): "Let us bear in mind that our people is neither European nor North American, but a composite of Africa and America rather than an emanation of Europ; for even Spain fails as a European people because of her African blood, her institutions, and her character. It is impossible to assign us with any exactitude to a specific human family. The greater part of the native peoples has been annihilated; the European has mingled with the American and the African, and the African has mingled with the Indian and with with European. Born from the womb of a common mother, our fathers, different in origin and blood, are foreigners; all differ visibly in the epidermis, and this dissimilarity leaves marks of the greatest transcendence." See Retamar (1989) 4-5.

[25] See Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993) 5.

[26] Martí 308-312. On the events of 1912, see Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 120-125.

[27] Fernández Retamar (1989) 16. Retamar explains, fitting the mambí phraseology into his "Caliban" framework: "The most venerated word in Cuba – mambí – was disparagingly imposed on us by our enemies at the time of the war of independence, and we still have not totally deciphered its meaning. It seems to have an African root, and in the mouth of the Spanish colonists implied the idea that *independentistas* were so many black slaves – emancipated by that very war for independence – who of course constituted the bulk of the liberation army. The *independententistas*, white and black, adopted with honor something that colonialism meant as an insult. This is the dialectic of Caliban. To offend us they call us *mambí*, they call us *black*; but we reclaim a mark of glory the honor of considering ourselves descendents of the *mambí*, descendants of the rebel, runaway, *independentista* black --

[28] Nicolas Guillen, "Mulata" *Obra poética 1920-1972* (Guadalajara: UdeG.1978) 93-94

[29] See Verena Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Color in 19th Century Cuba* (1974)(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

A similar dynamic is visible in the way Castro—after racial discrimination was officially banned in Cuba, in 1961—blithely declared that racism was defeated in Cuba. As in 1891, the actual situation was more complex. The masses of Afro-Cubans who'd lived in illiterate destitution since slavery—and seen 6,000 of their forebears massacred in 1912—had the most to gain from socialist projects in housing, healthcare and education. That Cuba's 4 million blacks still provide a key base of Communist Party support is a measure of how much their lives improved under Fidel. But as well-known critics like Carlos Moore have pointed out, Castro's blind spots with regard to race have at times also been pernicious; the outward valorization of blackness/coloredness has often existed alongside "a firm refusal to allow…Blacks themselves to define the content of their own oppression, or define the terms of their ethnic emancipation."[30]

By the time of the Cultural Congress of 1968, Fidel had not uttered a word on the subject of race-discrimination at home since 1960. (He wouldn't touch the topic, according to Moore, until the 3rd Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1986.) Interestingly, though, the silence at home was conjoined to a keen use of race in propaganda abroad, as Fidel—from the time of his lodging at the Hotel Theresa during his 1960 to the UN, on—had invoked America's mistreatment of its blacks as an example of his Revolution's enlightened approach. Even before Cuba became militarily involved in Mozambique and Angola in the 1970s (and Fidel, at the same time, began invoking Cuba's "Afro-Latin" identity with increasing frequency), Havana's Tri-Continental Solidarity Office, was churning out propaganda posters hailing Ho Chi, Minh, Lumumba, and the Black Panthers in the same series.[31] Added to this fact is the simple demographic truth that in the Revolution's early years, the vast majority of those who left for Miami and elsewhere were white. Thus did the Revolution gain a core of domestic support that was black, and a visible foreign opposition that was white. This early racialization of the Revolution—and its foreign opposition—was a key factor in the elaboration of a conflicted approach to race over the Revolution's first few decades in power.[32]

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[30] See Carlos Moore, *Castro, the Blacks and Africa* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Sutdies, UCLA, 1988) 28. Without pausing overlong on Moore's controversial text, *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa*, it is worth noting his unique vantage as the Cuban-born son of Jamaican cane-cutters who – as he relates in a poignant recent memoir, which takes its title from a Cuban slur for Jamaican and Haitian laborers – survived the Depression by scrounging for slaughterhouse scraps in the manner of ugly black buzzards, or *pichónes*. Moore's saga begins in rural Cuba, where he was tormented by the fists and slurs of white schoolmates, before moving to New York City, as a 16-year old in the late 1950s, and falling into the black radical demimonde of Malcolm X and Maya Angelou. After directing an occupation of the UN General Assembly to protest the US-sponsored killing of Patrice Lumumba in Congo, Moore – who met Castro during his own visit to the UN in 1960, during which he famously stayed at Harlem's Hotel Theresa – became enamored of Fidel's Revolution and repatriated to Cuba for the cause. After doing so, he dared to question the race prejudice of certain of its ministers, transgressions for which he was imprisoned and later exiled to Africa (where he became deeply involved in independence-era politics in Guinnea-Bissau and Nigeria). Moore's individual story, beyond explaining the exaggerated animus that has at times marred Moore's work, also illumines much about how the Revolution – putative foe of racism at home, avowed friend of African freedom struggles, embracer of the "African culture" it putatively shared with its Caribbean neighbors – was not without its stark contradictions when it came to color. Moore relates his personal tale in the memoir *Pichón: Race and Revolution in Castro's Cuba* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 2008)

[31] On OSPAAAL posters see Lincoln Cushing, *Revolucion! Cuban Poster Art* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004)

[32] On 19 April, 1971, Castro summed up the question of Cuba's racial identity, and its implied if hazy links to the rest of the Third World: "We still have no name; we are practically unbaptized – whether as Latin

For Salkey, one of the more confounding aspects of his encounter with Cuban race-mores is the frequency with which he hears the term "Afro-Cuban." Why, he wonders, "was it so naturally popular, so nationally acceptable? Asking an ceramicist about her own identity and that of her work, she replies: "I am not African. We are all Cuban in Cuba. We find much in the African past in this country, because of slavery. It is a pool we dip into as we like."[33] This helps Salkey somewhat, but still he's mystified—sensing that the term, "used 'culturally', artistically, in the contexts of things, artifacts, evidences, relating exclusively to the past, [serves to] deny it any likely connection with the Black presence in the new Cuban society."[34] Quite beyond that observation, what is also notable about this little dialogue on the term "Afro-Cuban"—and conversations about race in general—is that this topic prompts in him the realization "that I had come to Cuba primarily as a West Indian, knowing implicitly, incontrovertibly, that Cuba was a West Indian island, quintessentially so, a chain-link with my own island and of the southerly archipelago to which they both belong historically." [35] Here, Salkey does not dilate on what, precisely, the "chain-links" binding his island to Cuba historically might be. But it is instructive that his description of Cuba as "quintessentially West Indian," a la James, should arrive in the context of a discussion of race (and of his vexed relation with the term "Afro-Cuban" specifically). And given what he says later on, it seems far to say that the core indicator of "West Indianness" he gleans, here, are the shared material history, and social legacies, of racial slavery on an island which became, in the 19th century (after the Haitian Revolution erased Sainte Domingue's sugar-producing capacity, and slavery's end, three decades later, greatly reduced Jamaica's) the regions great grower of sugar—and importer of Africans—for the remainder of the century.

Sadly, James himself was not along for the ride that day. One suspects, though, that he would have had some things to say. *Pace* the Black Power fashions of his day, James was also attached to the truth that he himself, as a Caribbean man, was much better versed in the culture and mores of Europe than anything "African." This, indeed, lay precisely at the heart of his views about how and why the Caribbean's peoples, among the formerly colonized peoples of the world, were uniquely placed to shape the future of world civilization. That argument, as we shall see below, is one he made again at Havana, recalling the kindred insights made by James Baldwin at one of Congreso Cultural's key antecedents: the 1956 *Presence Africaine* gathering of black and anti-colonial writers in Paris, aiming to translate the "Spirit of Bandung" to the cultural realm (a gathering, interestingly, at which many of the delegates in Havana were also present).[36] Describing

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Americans, Ibero-Americans, Indo-Americans. For the imperialists, we are nothing more than despised and despicable peoples. At least that was what we were. Since Girón [the Bay of Pigs] they have begun to change their thinking. Racial contempt – to be a Creole, to be a mestizo, to be black, to be simply, Latin American, is for them contemptible." Fidel Castro speech, 19 April, 1971, as quoted by Retamar 16.

[33] Salkey (1971) 272.

[34] See Salkey (1971) 268.

[35] Salkey (1971) 268. He continues: "I was looking at the Revolution from the position of a very insecure neighbor, outpaced and anxious. All that I was allowing of myself to show was merely my sincere visitor's curiosity."

[36] Baldwin quotes Cesaire on this topic as follows: "Any political and social regime which destroys the self-determination of a people also destroys the creative power of a people," and then: Baldwin himself, skeptical of such essentialist arguments as Leopold Senghor's arguments about how, for example "Black

the speech delivered by Aime Cesaire at the Sorbonne, Baldwin recounts his admiration for the erudition and power with which the Martinican poet bewailed colonialism's abuses in the cultural realm.[37] But after parroting Cesaire's declamation that "we are here to proclaim the right of our people to speak, to let our people, black people, make their entrance on the great stage of history" he also points out, with typical insight, one key oversight in Cesaire's invocation of celebrating cultural forms, and artists, not shaped by Europe:

> For they were all, now, whether they liked it or not, related to Europe, stained by European visions and standards, and their relation to themselves, and to each other, and to their past had changed. Their relation to their poets had also changed, as had the relation of their poets to them. Cesaire's speech left out of account one of the great effects of the colonial experience: its creation, precisely, of men like himself.

The creation of such men—and women—as James would have been pleased to point out, was precisely what the Caribbean's societies had to offer the world. And it is a point that Salkey, too, with his unease about the term Afro-Cuban, unserstands as well—though he, crucially, is interested in a third category beyond (or drawn from) Africa and Europe: the West Indian. This truth is evidenced, in his text, less by anything—perhaps nowhere more strongly than when he encounters the cousin of a friend in Havana who he describes, on sight, as "A Kingston man-o-yard if ever I saw him outside his natural habitat."[38] True, Salkey writes, this man had been had been born of Jamaican parents in Cuba, but he wasn't, in his swing and swagger, combined with his getting along with the new order "Afro-Cuban. He was, rather Cuban – and something else: that most adaptable of all creatures, a West Indian."[39] Again Salkey is content to leave this ascription in the realm of the ephemeral, but given what precedes – his discussion of the man as not Afro-Cuban, but Cuban – the source of the adaptability he sees, it is perhaps fair to see, is two-fold: the deep history that brought Africans to the New World and forced them, on the plantation and after, to create something new; and the newer historical fact, emblematized and experienced by Salkey himself, of an immigrant peoples' adapting to life in the Nortern metropoles from whence he, and his West Indian fellows, have come to Havana.

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people are more feeling" than whites, offers this meditation on the question ("Princes and Powers"): "Is it possible to describe as a culture what may simply be, after all, a history of oppression? That is, is this history and these present facts, which involve so many millions of people who are divided from each other by som many miles of the globe, which operates, and has operated, unders such very different conditions, to such different effects, and which has produced so many different subhistories, peobelms, traditions, possibilities, aspirations, assumptions,languages, hybrids – is this history enough to have made the earth's black populations anything that can legitimatiely be described as a culture? For hwat, beyond the fact that all black men at one time or another left Africa, or have remained there, do they really all have in common?" "And yet it became clear that there WAS something…What they held in common was Their precarious, their unutterably precarious painful relation to the white world. What they held in common was the necessity to remake the world in their own image, to impose this image on the world, and of themselves, held by other people." See Baldwin, "Princes and Powers" (1957) in *Nobody Knows My Name* (Boston: Beacon, 1961).

[37] Baldwin 33-35.

[38] Salkey (1971) 304.

[39] Salkey (1971) 304.

Organized by Cuba's state-sanctioned union of artists and writers (UNEAC), the Congress, predicated on the principle that "the people need culture to cleanse their spirit of the enemy's poison," aimed to explore and declaim on the role of culture in revolutionary struggles worldwide.[40] With hundreds of delegates from some 70 countries (including "eight observers from U.S. student organizations opposing the war in Vietnam"), its organizers "[did] not expect to arrive at conclusions on every point, but to unify and make progress while obtaining all opinions."[41] The Congress was also convened, significantly, in association with Casa de las Americas – an institution founded right after the Revolution, at Che's behest, whose aim was to become a kind of hemispheric clearing house for the building of a new literary culture in the Americas. The congress was also presided over by Casa's director, Roberto Fernández Retamar—who, a few years later, would become famed for his essay "Caliban": as significant (and significantly cross-cultural) a statement on Caribbean ontology, and modes of writing it demanded, as the independence age has produced.[42] (More on this below.)

The conference itself, per Salkey's account, was perhaps more interesting for its participants than many of its minutes which devolved, in the high-minded moralizing way of such gatherings, into arguments over whether, for example, the use of lions in an exhibit meant to represent old imperial Spain, was inhumane[43]; if "revolutionary intellectual" was a better phrase than "intellectual man of action"[44]; and whether, as James asserts at one juncture, the luxurious treatment being received by the delegates is hypocritical—a suggestion rebuffed, by his host Retamar, with the suggestion that "all the delegates concerned should turn themselves from luxuriating delegates into hard-working luxuriating delegates, and in that way everybody, the Congress and the Third World and Cuba, will be well served."[45] (The good-natured exchange, Salkey reports,

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[40] Havana: Prensa Latina press-communique, 0238 GMT, 6 January 1968, attained from US State Department via FOIA request by Sarah Seidman. Unclassified 10-04-2010 by 60324 UCBAW/DK/SBS.
[41] Prensa Latina 0238 GMT 6 Jan 68. Attendance figures were summarized in *El Mundo*, Havana, 4 Jan. 1968, as follows: "The largest contingent of Havana Cultural Congress participants is from Europe, with 244 guests from 20 countries. Of these, the largest delegation is from France, with 70. England, 34; Spain, 30; Italy, 23; Rumania, 14; and Belgium, 11. Delegates from the USSR, Czecheslovakia, the GDR, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary are also attending. The Western Hemisiphere is represented by 98 participants from 21 countries, including Canada (with 16 intellectuals) and the United States (with 10). There are also eight observers from U.S. student organizations opposing the war in Vietnam. The largest contingent from Latin America are from Mexico, with 22 delegates, and Argentina, with 10. From Asia, there are delegations from the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Korea, Mongolia, Laso, and Cambodia. Also, writers and scientists are representing Japan, Ceylon, India, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Syria. From Africa, there are 22 guests from 10 countries: 7 from Guinea, 8 from Algeria, 3 from Morocco, 12 from Portuguese Guinea, 2 from South Africa and 1 each from Angola, Cameroon, Somalia, Eritrea, and Mozambique. As translated by FBI in documents attained via FOIA request by Sarah Seidman. Unclassified 10-04-2010 by 60324 UCBAW/DK/SBS.
[42] See Roberto Fernandez-Retamar, "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America" [1971] in *Caliban and Other Essays* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1989)
[43] Salkey (1971) 205.
[44] Salkey (1971) 199.
[45] Salkey (1971) 105.

was included in the next day's *Granma*). More interesting were the debates Salkey narrates from the forum in which he took part—on "the responsibility of the intellectuals with respect to the problems of the underdeveloped world." That commission featured, among others, the famed Argentine writer Julio Cortazar, James, and their host Retamar.[46] The debate concerns the very category of "the intellectual." It heats after a series of predictable homilies to Che, each more fawning than the last, all echoing Sartre's description of the martyred doctor-guerilla as "the most complete human being of our age."[47] James, stirring the pot, stands to declaim his view that "the intellectual should be abolished as a class."[48] The rejoinder from Retamar, when it comes, is typically elegant, pushing the polemic aside by insisting that the the redefinition of the intellectual could not be undertaken in the Commission, since the Congress had already defined the intellectual—be she a writer or a farmer—as "any person who depends on his intelligence and creative powers in order to understand the world around him."[49] Salkey's recounting of this debate is leavened by his describing an encounter, during a lunchbreak, with a St. Lucian elevator operator who appears again and again in his book. This time, the elevator operator asks him how he was liking Cuba, a query, judged by Salkey to "seem correct and moving," to which he replies: "very much." The St. Lucian smiles, and replies: "You should come live here. London's too cold, man."[50]

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[46] The full list of commissions was as follows. *Commission 1*: Culture and National Independence; *Commission 2*: the integral growth of man; *Commission 3*: The responsibility of intellectuals with respect to the problems of the underdeveloped world; *Commission 4*: Culture and mass media; *Commission 5*: Problems of artistic creation and of scientific and technical work. See Salkey (1971) 99.

[47] Another exemplary exchange, taken down by Salkey, involves an Ecuadoran delegate called Jorge Enrique Adoum, and the great British historian Eric Hobsbawm, brought on by Adoum's quoting Che, to the effect that "To serve the people presupposes quality; beauty does not clash with Socialism." Hobsbawm, classically, asks for more specifics, noting that "he had no very real liking for beautiful thoughts pondered in isolation and left up in the air." Salkey (1971) 140.

[48] James (1963) 110.

[49] Salkey (1971) 112.

[50] Salkey (1971) 114. His first inscrutable encounter with the elevator operator, on his second day, transpires as follows: "Down in the lift to the second floor for breakfast on veranda-area by the pool, and listening to the lift-attendant from Saint Lucia (living in Cuba for thirty-seven years), mentioning light-heartedly the story that some of the West Indian old-timers in Cuba are 'funny' people. Stories I'd heard in London that West Indians are not so interested in the Revolution, and that they stay near the British Embassy, aren't strictly true, he said; but there's more than a grain of truth in the stories concerning temperament, particularly where cautious political behaviour and proletarian conversatism are concerned.

"We' tough to get t'rou' to, you understan' me,' he said, smiling and no doubt knowing that I fully understood what he meant. 'We funny that way, man.'

'How d'you mean funny?'

'Well, as 'ow we 'custom' the British way, all the Revolution business sort o' different an' so.'

'But they're Cubans now, after all these years, and their children too. Aren't they?'

'Sure. We speak Spanish an' we' been 'ere long time, 'an as you say, the children grow up as Cubans an' we's Cuban now. But still – '

'What?'

'Funny.'

'Like how so?'

'Well, the ol'-timers hol' on the ol' ways, jus' like 'ow some o' the ol'-time Cubans them can't change too sudden an' 'ave some o' the 'ol-time ways still an' all. It' not we alone who slow on the change, you know. But the British way we' got makin' mos' o' we get on funny.'

'Do they want to go back to the West Indies?'

For researchers if not general readers, one highlight of Salkey's *Journal* is his detailed transcription of delegates' papers like James, whose arguments in Havana largely reiterated the points laid out in his new afterword to *The Black Jacobins* (whose impending publication in Cuba, Salkey wryly notes, would mark "the first time it'll be read in the Caribbean").[51] Standing to address the Commission as one of its most honored members, "Professor Jamms" argues, in familiar pointed fashion, that "the world ushered in by Christopher Columbus and Martin Luther no longer exists," its foundations shattered by "Lenin, Ghandi, Nehru, Mao Tse-Tung, Nkrumah and Fidel Castro." He then notes that "the Caribbean, the territory and type of people which our hosts and the organizers of this Congress belong," had played a highly significant role in the destruction of imperial control of the underdeveloped world, notably in Africa.[52] Arguing that the reasons for this truth "must be one of our basic premises" at the Congress, he goes on to describe how men like Fanon, Padmore, and Garvey could *only* have emerged from the Caribbean, he goes on to insist that "the history of Western civilization cannot be written without the names of [prominent Caribbean writers like] St-John Perse, Aimé Cesaire, and the present group of West Indian novelists…along with the American revolutionary leader Stokely Carmichael, who was born in Trinidad. James goes on to explain that no small part of the explanation for the West Indies' large influence on the culture of the wider world is to do with the truth that the mass language of those territories have been, for centuries, the languages of Europe. He concludes by urging that the folk cultures of the West Indian masses, once translated to the world, would continue to have a profound effect on the course of Western Civilization.[53]

'No, man. That' not in it. They can't go back now. That' even 'arder f'them to do. They' really 'custom to Cuba, but it' not today Cuba that they 'custom' to, you understand'.'

'Are they unhappy?'

'No, man. They' not un'appy. They' keepin' up some o' the ol' ways, like the little t'ings they' been doin' f'years, like church-goin' an' so. Fidel don't trouble that. Church' them still open all 'bout the place. Some t'ings change an' other t'ings changin' real slow. Fidel knockin' the door easy an' he know' wha' he doin'.'

'You're all right then?'

'Yes, man. I' doin' O.K. I don' 'ave no complaint at all.' He smiled. 'You 'ear anyt'ing 'bout Sain' Lucia these days? 'Ow t'ings down there now?

'Same way.'

'That's wha' I 'ear meself.'

When I asked him what the West Indies needed to have in order to bring about radical social and political changes, he said, 'Slow or fas', David got to 'ave Goliat'.'

[51] Salkey (1971) 82. "Both Edmundo and Pablo said how much they were looking forward to the publication of *The Black Jacobins* in Cuba. Marcos said slyly to Robert and me. 'It'll be read for the first time in the Caribbean, eh?' I took his meaning and agreed. Robert winked. 'It's had a good run in the English-speaking West Indies, among a very small readership,' I said. 'We appreciate C.L.R. in Cuba,' Marcos said. 'He should live here.'

[52] The full quotes, with personalities named, is as follows: "The Caribbean, the territory and type of people to which our hosts and the organizers of this Congress belong, has played a highly significant role in the destruction of the political control of one area. Such names as Marcus Garvey, George Padmore and Frantz Fanon – all three from the Caribbean – occupy a role in the destruction of European control of Africa entirely out of proportion to the size of the area to which they belong. In this Congress, the reason for that must be one of our most basic premises."

[53] The latter aim, naturally, is presented as concomitant with James's wish that "the intellectuals…prepare the way for the abolition of the intellectuals as an embodiment of culture." Salkey (1971) 117.

What James's fellow delegates made of James's arguments, sadly, isn't recorded by Salkey. Yet it's hard not to think, in reading Retamar's "Caliban," that his work's influential arguments weren't shaped in dialogue with ideas like those presented by James at the Congreso Cultural. In his essay, published by Casa de las Americas in 1971, Retamar argued that Caliban—the enslaved islander in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, whom his master Prospero teaches to speak so as to be able to communicate with him (but for other uncertain ends, too)—was the appropriate metaphor for the cultural situation in the Americas, and more particularly, for "the inhabitants of these same isles where Caliban lived." Tracing the racist mores of colonizers who extended Columbus' myth of flesh-eating Carib Indians to all the colored people with whom they populated the Caribbean, Retamar echoes Martí and Bolivar's conceptions of the Caribbean isles as "places where *mestizaje* is not an accident but rather the essence," and whose people, no matter that mixed African and Indian heritage, "continue to use the languages of our colonizers."[54] Contesting the once-influential idea, in Cuba and beyond, that Ariel was the *Tempest* character most germane to the Caribbean situation, he then argues forcefully that it wasn't in fact Ariel but his more degraded fellow-servant, Caliban, whose predicament every leader and artist worth his salt in the Caribbean, from Toussaint to Fidel and 1960s salseros and beyond, exemplified.[55] As notable as the contents of that argument are the circumstances that occasioned it: namely, on the one hand, the prompt for thinking about pan-American (and pan-Caribbean) culture set off by the Cuban Revoluton; and, on the other, the efflorescence of writing on or around the figure of Caliban emanating, as Retamar writes, from his fellow West Indian isles in the 1960s—from the Martinican Aime Cesaire's reworking of Caliban's tale in *Une Tempete* (1969); to the Barbadian Edward Brathwaite's *Islands* (1969), wherein is included a poem called "Caliban" significantly dedicated "to Cuba"; to another Barbadian, Lamming, describing with typical nuance how "language…Prospero's gift to Caliban, is the very poison in which

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[54] Retamar 4-5.

[55] Retamar notes how, for some time, the most influential rendering of the Caliban myth had been the Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó, whose argument, in his *Ariel* (1900), had been the USA was our hemisphere's Caliban, while Prospero's eyes and ears, Ariel, best approximated to its Latin south – an idea so influential that Cuba's first Marxist revolutionary, Julio Antonio Mella, founded an Ariel Polytechnic Institute in 1920s Havana.Retamar's full passage in this aspect: "Our symbol then is not Ariel…but rather Caliban. This is something that we, the *mestizo* inhabitants of these same isles where Caliban lived, see with particular clarity: Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, and taught him his language to make himself understood. What else can Caliban do but use that same language – today he has no other – to curse him, to wish that the "red plague" would fall on him? I know no other metaphor more expressive of our cultural situation, of our reality. From Túpac Amaru, *Tiradentes*, Toussaint Louverture, Simón Bolívar, Father Hidalgo, José Artigas, Bernardo O'Higgins, Benito Juárez, Antonio Maceo, and José Martí, to Emiliano Zapata, Augusto César Sandino, Julio Antonio Mella, Pedro Albizu Campos, Lázaro Cárdenas, Fidel Castro, and Ernesto Che Guevara, from the Inca Garciloso de la Vega, the *Aleijandinho*, the popular music of the Antilles, José Hernández, Eugenio María de Hostos, Manuel González Prada, Rubén Darío (yes, when all is said and done), Baldomero Lillo, and Horacio Quiroga, to Mexican muralism, Heitor Villa-Lobos, César Vallejo, José Carlos Mariátegui, Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Carlos Gardel, Pablo, Alejo Carpentier, Nicolás Guillén, Aimé Césaire, José María Arguedas, Violeta Parra, and Frantz Fanon – what is our history, what is our culture, if not the history and culture and Caliban?" Leaving aside, for a moment, the gross gender-imbalance of Retamar's list, it is instructive here that while that list may include many names from across Latin America, Retamar maintains a privileged spot, for "we, the *mestizo* inhabitants of these same isles where Caliban lived," to "see with particular clarity" the situation of the colonized world in toto.

Caliban's achievements will be realized and restricted."[56] Of especial note in Retamar's implicit cultural geography, is the principle that all "inhabitants of these same isles where Caliban lived" shared a certain predicament and destiny – and, moreover, that that common identity was linked to language. Not since they shared a language, but because the *circumstance* of their relationship to language, and their history with Europe, joined them in essential ways.

It is a pity that neither Cesaire's nor Lamming's own contributions to the Congreso of 1968 weren't recorded by Salkey. Yet for an exemplar of the role that Cuba was playing in the region, one is struck by his lengthy encomium to the Haitian poet René Depestre, accorded as much space in his journal as any delegate. Less a delegate, in point of fact, than a resident-exile from the depredations of Duvalier in his homeland, Depestre had lived in Cuba since 1959, having arrived at the invitation of Che Guevara, and taken part, since that time, in such founding Casa de las Americas, and helping to organizing the Congreso. The Haitian's words and presence, in Salkey's text, stand to exemplify not merely figurative links between the Haiti's Revolutionary history and Cuba's present, but an explicit link between events in Havana and the "Spirit of Bandung" invoked, for example, at the *Presence Africaine* gathering in 1956 (where Depestre had also been present). Terming Depestre's paper "deeply felt and brilliantly expressed," Salkey reproduces much of its elegant bulk in his *Journal*:

> It is reasonably stated that our people have been absent from all the appointments of love that the human being has made in the course of the last three centuries with science, literature, art, beauty, tenderness, philosophy. Really, we have been present in our own way: that is, with our sweat and our suffering. We have been in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the 'biological fuel' which before the age of electricity made possible the Age of Enlightenment and the other universal adventures of Western civilization. Right now, a new expansion of science is taking place, where relativity intervenes as well as the atomic forces of disintegration, electronic brains, the theory of cybernetics, the exploration of the cosmos, and so on! Imperialism and neo-colonialism make plans to keep our people in the steaming back kitchen of history, but our people, for whom we feel responsible here, have decided to come out of the kitchen with arms in their hands to impose, within the concert of other nations, their triple Asian, African and Latin American presence, because, having raised their heads, they do not want any more that history which deals with all humanity. Our people now consider themselves the responsible agents of the evolution of the world, and their dynamic and enriching presence they want to do away with the terrible scandals and the generalized reification of life. We select from among our liberating forces the fraternal values of community and of solidarity.[57]

Depestre's main concern, claimed for the Congress as a whole, "is to determine how we should carry out common actions for the whole decolonization of the diverse cultures of the Third World."[58] The situation he describes is one in which old-school colonialism, if

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[56] Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, as cited by Retamar 12-13.
[57] Salkey (1971) 154.
[58] Salkey (1971) 152.

expelled through the door, "has happily re-entered by the window": U.S. empire and neo-colonialism, enforced and enabled by "an autocthonous bourgeoisie with treasonous, open arms," is responsible for the repression of entire peoples in Indonesia, Latin America—and as he knows too well, by "the totalitarian nightmare imposed on the Haitian people by *Ton-Ton Macoute* Duvalier." Depestre advocates for Revolution as the only way toward decolonization, offering the Fanon-ian argument that "there can be no possible development of the national culture without a radical, violent, disalienating rupture with the colonial past"—a rupture he cites as already having occurred in two countries in particular: Cuba and Vietnam. "The Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions, while necessarily adapting themselves to the contributions of the industrial civilization, are still asserting with immense vitality, their cultural peculiarity and their potential universality."[59]

Depestre's encompassing discourse, notable for its internationalist spirit, foreswears any explicit mention of either race or region. Yet my concern here centers around how his discussion of the core dialectic between the national and inter-national[60]—and how, also, his lines on "biological fuel" bear an especial resonance for this man coming from Haiti, the Caribbean island upon whose wealth, built on racial slavery, the French bourgeoisie's wealth, and thus, in a sense, their Revolution, were both based. If this leap sounds far-fetched, it certainly isn't in the context of Salkey's text, which, moves on from his admiring description of Depestre's speech to a vexed description of the "shade groupings" within which Cubans of a certain age grouped themselves; and then—in perhaps the most memorable extended passage of his work—to transcribing an extended interview with Cuba's last surviving *cimarron*, or runaway slave: a figure who, in the text, stands to underscore crucial links not only between the Caribbean archipelago's islands and their histories, but between, as James might have it, "Toussaint L'Ouverture and Fidel Castro."

Esteban Montejo (b. 1860) tells Salkey, in vivid detail, about his life as a cane cutter on 19th century plantations—describing how he made his romantic interest in an early girlfriend clear ("we lived so close together, in the dirt, in the shit, in the heat, always together, that it was impossible for her not to know"); the differences and commonalities among Musongo, Ganga, and Mandinga slaves; the social implications of how "the slave-woman had to use her body two ways, in the field and in the bed of the master, or in the bushes with her slave man"; his hope, voiced to this Jamaican interlocutor, that many of his old West Indian friends might also make a Revolution "across the water." Sprinkling his discourse with enigmatic insights ("Cuba is small and Cuba is big at the same time"), Esteban describes how, after the island's war for independence, "the Cubans accepted the Spaniards, the enemy, more than the Blacks" and recounts his friendship with Julio Antonio Mella ("a worker like myself, a good man"), before closing with an enthused homily to the great and good Revolution that

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[59] Salkey (1971) 154.

[60] Salkey (1971) 156. Depestre's peroration, interestingly, brings him to a place quite closely resembling Cesaire's "rendezvous of victory," as he urges that as the delegates go about building Che's New Man, they would, with "this basis of action…unite the resources of knowledge, reason, imagination, sensibility and maturity, in order to build, correctly and intelligently, a world where the unity of the species will finally find its unrevealed aurora and its manifest plenitude, within the planetary process of integration and universalization of all cultures, which tomorrow will become the measurement of our total humanity."

"changed the old life of Cuba." If ever there was an organic intellectual – or living exemplar of James's idea, based in the cultures and lives forged by the plantation that Cuba is "the most West Indian island in the West Indies"—here he is.[61]

4.5

Salkey's viewpoint in his *Havana Journal*, like that of most of his party, is the work of a man both sympathetic to the cause and curious as to whether and how a Revolution like Cuba's could, one day, take root in other islands shaped by the plantation. He, in other words, has brought his own interests and concerns to a gathering which, for many other delegate-artists similarly sympathetic to the Revolution's aims, were using their visit to the island to evaluate for themselves whether and how artistic freedom was being respected in a country.[62] Salkey, for his part, does harbor questions about what Fidel's famous—and famously nebulous—dictum regarding culture looks like in practice: "Within the Revolution, everything; outside the revolution, nothing." Those questions emerge, most forcefully, when Salkey and James visit the editorial offices of *Pensamiento Critico*, a student-publication which, since its founding in 1967, had been touted by Fidelistas as an example of the Revolution's openness to critique. There, James asks the editors whether the state had condoned their launch; "they were aware of our intent," the editors concede.[63] In Salkey's account, the worries prompted by such exchanges are largely passed over in favor or generous hopes that freedom would be respected. For other visitors though, what they found in the country—where gifted young writers like Carlos Franqui and Gullermo Cabrera Infante had already seen cause to flee over concerns censorship—was enough to sour them on the Revolution. They would be joined, in the next two years, by many more. A few months after the Congreso, prize-winning writers Herberto Padilla and Anton Arrufat were denounced at October's UNEAC conference, where attendees were reminded of their duty "to contribute to the revolution through their works."[64] In 1969, a new literary prize was begun, this one to be judged by the armed forces, and awarded on the not of artistic value but political merit.[65] Two years later, Heberto Padilla was arrested and forced to denounce his colleagues.

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[61] Salkey (1971) 172.

[62] The phrase is from Castro's "Palabras a los Intellectuales" delivered at the inaugural meeting of UNEAC, at the Biblioteca Nacional, June 30, 1961. Per Retamar's urging that those oft-cited words not be repeated again out of context (not that Fidel's latter abstractions elucidate the former): "Within the revolution, everything; outside the revolution, nothing. Outside the revolution, nothing, because the revolution also has its rights; the first right of the revolution is to be, to exist. No one, to the extent that the revolution understands the interests of the people, to the extent that the revolution expresses the interests of the nation as a whole, can maintain any right in opposition to it." For full text, see http://www.ministerio.cult.cu/historia/palabras.doc.

[63] Salkey (1971) 56

[64] For an exemplary statement of disillusionment on the part of the Revolution's liberal-left admirers who attended the Congress, see David Gallagher, "Literary Life in Cuba," *The New York Review of Books*, 23 May 1968, as well as the exchange it prompted with an attendee more sympathetic to Castro, in the November 7, 1968 issue of that same publication (with a letter from Margaret Randall, response by David Gallagher).

[65] See Carlos Ripoll, "The Cuban Scene: Censors and Dissenters," posted at www.eddorios.org, n.d.

Among the Revolution's erstwhile passionate allies who parted ways with the Revolution—and Cuba—in the wake of that episode, sealing the Stalinization of the Cuban state's approach to culture, was René Depestre. (He emigrated to France, and went on to a distinguished career with UNESCO.) What had looked in 1968, to many observers, like the flowering of a communist society respectful of the individual creativity, quickly turned into anything but.

Reading Salkey's work through the lens of history, one is stuck by all the ways in which his *Journal* represents a snapshot of what now looks like the high-water mark of Cuba's international repute among progressive nations and the anti-Stalinist left worldwide. Taking note of Castro's critiques in 1968, a sanguine Moscow, aware of Cuba's near-total dependence on their aid, simply moved to lower Cuba's allotment of Soviet oil for the next few months. When that April, Czech youth stormed the streets of Prague, advocating for the "Socialism with a Human Face", the hopes of demonstrators were squashed by invading Soviet tanks. Castro, having taken Moscow's meaning, spoke in favor of the Warsaw pact. All of this, if breaking the hearts of many lefty writers and idealists in the First World, did little to dent the beacon Cuba continued to represent, for many of its Caribbean peers, as an alternative path to development in an age when all the region's nations were coming to consensus that breaking their dependence on monocrop agriculture – King Sugar – was essential to their emergence as independent economic actors on the world stage.[66] (That consensus ironically reinforced by Cuba's catastrophic last-hurrah effort at making sugar its economic bulwark, Castro's failed "10 Million Tons" campaign in 1970.) Actively courting that admiration, and nurturing its ties to the region, Cuba became an active participant in the new regional trade group, CARICOM; began sending its surfeit doctors to peer countries in the region (a practice it continues today in Haiti and Venezuela); and—in a move directly calibrated to appeal to the largely black leaders of the region's new independent states—began touting its credentials as an "Afro-Latin" nation (if not, in practice, doing much to combat institutional racism or valorize Afro-Cuban culture at home).[67] In geopolitical terms, of course, the fall of Europe's old empires had left the Caribbean islands to exist beneath the soft imperial umbrella of the United States, a new master prepared to do whatever necessary to prevent "another Cuba" from emerging in what Washington remained determined to maintain as an "American lake."

The extent to which that determination extended was evinced most explicitly in Grenada in 1983, but for the decade before that, not a few Caribbean territories became well-acquainted with the potential costs of emulating Cuba's Revolution. Many, in any case, continued to regard the island as an anti-imperial role-model for both the region and the wider Third World—a resonance felt from the spate of babies, in those years, named "Che" by intellectual parents in the British West Indies; to socialist-minded leaders like Michael Manley in Jamaica openly courting Castro as a crucial regional ally. That that decision proved disastrous for Manley's country—in terms both of the guns with which

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[66] Salkey and his Cuban hosts cite the need for "dramatic diversification of the economy" – decreased dependence on sugar – right after he has his sugar flashback. Salkey (1971) 236.

[67] See Robert Huish and John M. Kirk, "Cuban Medical Internationalism and the Development of the Latin American School of Medicine," *Latin American Perspectives* 34.1 (2007): 77-92. As of 2007, "Cuba [had] 42000 workers international workers in 103 different countries, of whom more than 30,000 are health personnel, including no fewer than 19,000 physicians."

the CIA flooded its streets, and the unpayable debts with which Jamaica was saddled by the IMF—suggests much about how and why the Cuban Revolution, incredibly still ongoing today, never successfully exported its model to another Caribbean island. It also goes to show, as I'd like to argue here, how Cuba's Revolution, like the island from which it sprang, was drawn of *regional* phenomena, and has had repercussions as such. Not least, as I'll turn to exploring in the next chapter, in shaping not only the material conditions in which neighboring islanders lived during the 1970s, but helping condition the possibilities affording the emergence of the Caribbean performer who came to be known, in the 1970s, as the "First Third World Superstar."

V.

Geographies of *Exodus*:

Bob Marley and the Muse of History

Approximately 100 miles from Jamaica's bustling and wary capital lies Nine Miles, a dusty hamlet located in St. Ann parish. To reach Nine Miles from fabled Kingston—that old pirates' haven dubbed "killsome" by its contemporary poet-laureate Peter Tosh—you wind northward through blue-green hills crosscut by ochre bauxite mines, passing the standard Caribbean show: banana trees and corollas of hibiscus and crotons, which do everything and nothing to obscure those who inhabit the landscape: descendents of African slaves and runaway Maroons, who waged guerilla war against the eighteenth-century British before spending much of the following centuries, as the novelist Austin Clarke wrote, "growing up stupid under the Union Jack."[1] Deep in the Dry Harbor Mountains of St. Ann, you come to the small village of Alexandria; nine miles beyond you arrive in the even smaller hamlet of Nine Miles.

Today Nine Miles has become something of a hallowed place on an island transformed, over recent decades, from British sugar colony into impoverished nation kept barely afloat by the fickle funds of sun-seeking tourists. For it was in this remote place that Jamaica's most pervasive icon, Nesta Robert Marley, was born 65 years ago. Marley died, as all latter day saints must, while still a young man. (He expired of cancer at 36, in 1981.) But his music and his image—from the recurrence of "One Love" in tourist commercials ("Come to Jamaica/and feel alright") to the dreadlock hairstyle he made a symbol of Caribbean-ness everywhere—has become as central to Jamaica's mythology as rum, ganja, and the sex-trade for middle-aged tourists.

Few of those visitors trysting to the strains of "Could You Be Loved" in thatched-roof beach bars venture up to Nine Miles. Those who make the effort to come here – hiring cars in resort towns like Ocho Rios for the bumpy ride into the bush; arriving to the high-walled complex that's been built around the small house where Marley was born and is now entombed; greeted, when they do, by dreadlocked locals peddling mixtapes and spliffs—are more akin to pilgrims visiting Mecca. Japanese or North American, Brazilian and German—these, by and large are Believers: chanters-along to "Get Up, Stand Up"; affirmers of the Marley-an ideal, voiced in "War," that one day the color of skin will no more matter than that of eyes; worshippers of a prophet-cum-artist who was at once lover and fighter and poet and historic chronicler, in songs like "Slave Driver," of how the ignominies of our plantation past persist in the present.

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[1] Austin Clarke, *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack*, (London: Ian Randle, 2003).

That few Jamaicans should venture to this remote locale makes sense: the dust and poverty of the "real Jamaica" exerts somewhat less allure for those who've grown up in it than for curious foreigners journeying away from coastal idylls. Which isn't to say that the man whom Nine Miles' visitors come to revere isn't equally reverenced, in many ways, by his fellow countrymen and women. Jamaican pop may have long ago transitioned "from red, gold, and green…to gold chains"—as the dub poet Mutabaruka described the music's evolution from "conscious" roots reggae to the fast and crass dancehall style that has held sway since the 1980s. But on the island today, it's still hard to pass more than a couple days without hearing the strains of a Marley tune or glimpsing his visage or lyrics on the side of a shanty.[2] In Jamaica, Marley t-shirts aren't only for tourists. By far the most famous Jamaican ever, his was a rise to fame that corresponded precisely with his island's own struggle, in the decades after its attainment of independence in 1962, to forge a new national identity. Marley did more than any figure to alert the world to Jamaica's mere existence. That he did so by singing of a life that resonated strongly with the lives of so many of his countrywomen and men—his impoverished rural childhood and later move into Kingston; his move from Kingston to a Northern city in search of life—meant that he was perhaps destined, from the start, to became a kind of Representative Man: capable of meaning all things to all people both here and around the world.

In this chapter, I mean to explore the means by which Marley has become perhaps the foremost global symbol not merely of Jamaica but the Caribbean and its defining antinomies—between upset and pleasure; slavery and freedom; first world and third. To trace the contours and dimensions of Marley's resonances in death, I will trace the lineaments of his life—the historical context within which his rise to fame transpired; the technologies that afforded it. By now Marley's biography has been told and re-told in a dozen books: obsessed over by fans, it is as much a part of his legend as the music. His story has become well-known. In rendering that story, though, with special attention to its implicit geographies—from Nine Miles to Kingston; to America to Africa and England and the world—I mean to show how the geographies that both shaped Marley's sensibility and afforded his success not only enabled him to address with unexcelled power the enduring legacies of the Triangle Trade whose routes his own life re-traced, they allowed his music to resonate with so many people worldwide whose lives that particular history didn't directly touch.

One ready explanation as to why Marley's reggae found such a wide and lasting global resonance is the power with which it spoke to the typically Rastafarian—and Caribbean—yearning for "roots": a yearning, as commentators sophisticated and less so have pointed to as the salient characteristic of our postmodern, globalizing world.[3] This may indeed be so. But part of what I wish to do in this chapter, by thinking through the loci and figuring of "roots" in Marley's songs and in his life, is to show how it is the poetical power and poetry with which Marley spoke to something subtly different—the fact and ideal of *movement*—that both informed a large measure of his success and became, in sum, his most emblematically Caribbean characteristic.

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[2] Mutabaruka as quoted in definition for "Dancehall," *Jamaicanmusic.com*. n.d.

[3] See, e.g., Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (London: Routledge, 1952).

5.2

When Bob Marley's cancer-riddled body was flown to Kingston from his Miami deathbed in May 1981, and it was loaded into a hearse to make its winding way to his home village; mourners lined the roadway for its entire 100 miles. By then Marley was also well-known to college kids everywhere. Few of his admirers, though, could have foreseen the celebrity he has attained since. He is the only third world performer to be elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.[4] In 1999, the BBC named his "One Love" the "Song of the Millennium"; the same year *TIME* declared his 1977 *Exodus* the "Best Album of the Twentieth Century."[5] Voted the third-greatest songwriter of all time in a 2001 BBC poll (behind Bob Dylan and John Lennon), Marley's posthumous greatest-hits collection, *Legend* (1984), is among the top-selling compilations of all time. On the 2007 Forbes list of "Top-Earning Dead Celebrities," he ranked twelfth, with his estate earning an estimated $4 million.[6] His Twenty-nine years after his death, there is perhaps no country where his songs—wry ballads and martial anthems, with soothing or stirring melodies—aren't familiar. Bob Marley is the planet's most ubiquitous third world figure, and, arguably, its most recognizable popular musician and political icon.

What is significant about Marley's fame is not merely its continued breadth but the meanings that have attached themselves to his image. In death Marley has not only become a Dali Lama-type figure; he has acquired a political resonance akin to Nelson Mandela's. His face, a latte-complected oval described by wisps of beard and regal ropes of hair, stares out from bed-sheets, t-shirts, and posters. He's plastered above college desks alongside Che Guevara; a "soul rebel" forever frozen, as Paul Gilroy puts it, in the process of becoming a revolutionary.[7] Grinning and wise, he's the sex-shaman who condones, from his post on the dorm room wall, our seasons of don't-worry-about-a-thing experimentation, the pothead *as* revolutionary.

The musical history of the island that birthed Marley's work is in many ways familiar: of black slaves, mainly West Africans brought to work the island's fields of indigo and cane, joining the diverse cultures they carried with them to those that they found in order to make something new. Like many of his contemporaries—country youth who migrated to the city seeking new kinds of work, only to end up in its swelling slums—Marley absorbed the political and musical currents that flowed through Jamaica and its capital in the years surrounding independence. Among these sounds were spirituals sung in clapboard churches and folk songs toiled and danced to in shacks and

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[4] I use "third world" here under advisement: since the end of the Cold War which birthed the term, "third world" has bee largely supplanted, in both popular and scholarly discourse, by alternatives like "developing world" or "global south." I use "third world" here to connote the phraseology that obtained during Marley's life and its immediate aftermath, and the degree to which his story is tied to the third world as both actual "place" and more crucially still, as political project. See Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

[5] "BBC's all-star millennium bash," *BBC News Online*, December 2, 1999; and for the *Exodus* citation, "The Best of the Century," *Time* 31 December 1999.

[6] See "Dylan the Greatest Songwriter," *BBC News Online*, May 23, 2001. And "Top-Earning Dead Celebrities," *Forbes* 29 October, 2007.

[7] Paul Gilroy, "Could You Be Loved? Bob Marley, Anti-Politics, and Universal Sufferation," *Critical Quarterly* 47.1-2 (2005): 226-245.

fields; newer rhythms from neighboring islands—mambo from Cuba, calypso from Trinidad—brought by seamen who plied their ports; and increasingly, with the advent of the transistor radio and the spread of "sound-systems" (effectively, portable block-parties) on Kingston's streets, American doo-wop and rhythm-and-blues.[8]

In a city full of artists and social entrepreneurs seeking to forge a new national culture even as they reconciled themselves to the musical empire to their north, Marley and his peers—like many of their contemporaries in the third world at the time—adopted these metropolitan sounds to their lives on the margins. Marley lived through—and came to inform—the rapid evolution of Jamaican popular music: first mento, the calypso-inflected dance style dominant in the 1950s, which gave way by decades' end to the kinetic hop called ska; then, in the mid-sixties as ska slowed, the languid shuffle called rocksteady; and, finally, as the music settled a few years later, the driving, spacious groove of reggae—the style Bob Marley translated to a worldwide audience.[9]

Emerging from the alleyways and harbor-side recording studios of Kingston in the late 1960s, reggae combined sweet vocal harmonies with an odd new rhythm. Adapting a cadence common to boogie blues, the style's young innovators transformed its salient musical feature—the offbeat accents between main beats—into the dominant trait of their new sound, thereby forging a music at once familiar and eerily strange to foreign ears.[10]

Capturing the hopes and dreads of a Jamaica's tumultuous post-independence years, reggae—abetted by the presence of large Jamaican émigré populations in media capitals London and New York, and the truth that its lyrics were sung in English—gained a global audience wider than any other pop music from outside Europe or North America. In so doing, reggae and its foremost exponent not only made Jamaican music known to the world. They also augured the advent of "World Music," the curious marketing label

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[8] On the advent of sound systems and their longtime role as the "key institution in the political economy of music in Jamaica," see Jason Toynbee, *Bob Marley: Herald of a Postcolonial World* (London: Polity, 2007) 20 - 23; and Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, NC: Duke University, Press, 2000) 41-114. As Toynbee and Stolzoff both note,

[9] On the larger history of Jamaica's musical history on record, see Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton, *The Rough Guide to Reggae* (New York: Rough Guides/Penguin, 2001); Garth White, "The evolution of Jamaican music, pt. 1: proto-ska to ska," *Social and Economic Studies*, 57.1 (2008): 5-19; Kevin O'Brien Chang and Wayne Chen, *Reggae Routes: the Story of Jamaican Music* (London: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998); Dick Hebdige, *Cut and Mix: Culture, Identity, and Caribbean Music* (London: Routledge, 1987); and for the more sonically inclined, the unexcelled 4-CD set *The Story of Jamaican Music: Tougher than Tough* (Island/Mango 518 399-2, 1993), executive produced by Chris Blackwell, edited by Chris Salewicz, and with extensive liner notes by Steve Barrow.

[10] The precise genesis of the rhythm that came to be called "reggae," like the etymology of its name, has long been hazy. Most famously introduced as a musical term in the Maytals' 1968 rocksteady hit "Do the Reggay," it seems clear that the word – *pace* later claims by Maytals leader, Toots Hibbert – was already in use to describe a new form of rocksteady when the Maytals' tune appeared. Whether it was Hibbert (as he claimed), Hibbert's producer Clancy Eccles (as Steve Barrow claims), or Eccles-rival Bunny Lee (as artist Derrick Morgan claims), "reggae" seems most likely to have been adapted from the Jamaican patois "streggae" (for "loose woman") – though the term's onomatopoeic resemblance to the music's signature guitar-sound seems to have played a role as well. Bob Marley, for his part, once told an interviewer that the word derived from the Spanish word for 'king". See Timothy White, *Catch A Fire: the Life of Bob Marley* (New York: Holt, 2006) 16; Barrow and Dalton, 83; Lloyd Bradley, *Reggae: The Story of Jamaican Music* (London: BBC Books, 2007); "Frederick 'Toots' Hibbert: The Reggae King of Kingston," by Fiona Sturges, *The Independent* (UK) 4 June, 2004.

by which Third World pop came to be sold in the North—and granted to Jamaican music an astonishing influence in contemporary culture still audible in musical genres from rock to rap to samba to jazz.

Marley's songs employed the poetics of the King James Bible to bespeak romance, revolution, and the uncertain relation between emancipation and freedom. Initially, they distilled for many the ideals and pratfalls of a decolonizing age—the few decades after World War II which added 100 new nations to the UN. The songs have endured, however, as emblems that transcend their era; they have become "universal," a de rigeur soundtrack from Liverpool to Lagos, Tennessee to Tibet, Sydney to Sao Paulo.

An ingenious songwriter who was also an electrifying performer, Marley was perhaps most critically a brilliant synthesist of musical styles – albeit one whose best music resounds with a fidelity to life on the island for which he remains a potent symbol today; a music whose "thud sobbing," as Derek Walcott once wrote, evokes "a sadness as real as the smell of rain/ on dry earth."[11] His songs made the places he's from—the Jamaican countryside and the Kingston ghetto—the province of a worldwide listening public. In addressing themselves also to the past that made those places, the songs have established him as a writer who, more than any other, found a way to translate the Muse of History into the idiom of pop—a muse, as I mean to explore and show here, which is always already a Muse of Geography as well. [12]

5.3

Like the Age of Three Worlds of which he became an essential cultural symbol, Marley's life began in 1945. [13] Like his fellow St. Ann's native Marcus Garvey, the jazz age activist-impresario whose radical Ethiopianism—his belief that Africa was the true home for New World Blacks: "Africa for the Africans, at home and abroad"—informed the Rastafarian faith Marley embraced as a young man, Marley descended from the Maroons. His mother, Cedella Malcolm, was 18-years old, dark-skinned and homely; people called her Ciddy. His father was a white Kingstonian who claimed (falsely, it seems) to be British-born. Known by the vainglorious honorific of "Captain," Norval Marley was a small, roughhewn itinerant of the expiring Empire; he served briefly with the Royal Army in World War I (stationed in Shropshire) and later worked as a policeman in Lagos, Nigeria.[14] He was past 60 when he rode into Nine Miles on an old white horse and wed young Ciddy. Their marriage certificate listed his profession as "clerk," hers as "domestic."

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[11] Derek Walcott, "The Light of the World." *The Paris Review* 101 (1986): 192-195.

[12] See Derek Walcott, "The Muse of History" (1974). *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999)

[13] See Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (New York: Verso, 2004)

[14] Long shrouded in mystery, Norval Marley's story recently became somewhat better known thanks to Christopher John Farley's research – which uncovered, among other facts, that Norval Marley was born in Kingston in March 1881 to Robert and Ellen Marley (né Bloomfield); that his grand-uncle, Francis Marley, was a member of England's parliament in the 1920s; and that the "white side" of Nesta's family was perhaps actually "mixed" from the start, given that Robert Marley and Ellen Bloomfield's marriage certificate listed his race as "white" and hers as "colored."

Soon after granting his son his peculiar name, the Captain wandered off back to the city. Mother and son lived in a dirt-floored hut just up the way from Ciddy's father Omeriah Malcolm, a local potentate who owned the largest house in Nine Miles and most of its tillable acres; he had fathered some 25 children by a dozen women in the district, and was regarded as a powerful *myalman*, said to descend from a line of Ashanti medicine men around whom the spiritual life of St. Ann's Maroons had revolved for centuries.[15] Young Nesta was a serious child who sang in the church choir with his mother. When not in a village school or exploring the forest, he spent days alongside his grandfather, working "Mass Amy's" sloping plots of dasheen and yam. The trajectory of Nesta's life, like that of Jamaica's populace at large during the postwar years, would bring him from the island's countryside to the capital and to northern cities beyond.[16] A significant part of his later allure, though, came of the eloquence with which this urbane citizen of the world affirmed his rural roots—in songs ranging from "Natural Mystic" to "Talkin' Blues"[17]—as the source of his spiritual nature and core sense of self.

The synthesis of urban and rural exemplified in Marley's work was abetted by the truth that in Caribbean island-societies like Jamaica's, the proximity of countryside and city, as C.L.R. James noted in "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," made communication between them easy.[18] Marley's first experience of the city all Jamaicans refer to as "town" came early, when his mother acceded to the wishes of Nesta's absent sent her son to Kingston to enroll in private school there at the age of 7. Norval Marley was an outcast from his merchant family, apparently disowned by his mother for cause of his dallying on the colored margins of society. He was also, sadly, a man of failing mental health who ceased caring for his son not long after Nesta came to his care. In mid-century Jamaica as today, informal tradeswomen known as hagglers—couriers of smallholders' produce sent to "town"—provided a key loop of communication between countryside and city referenced by James.[19] It was one such who alerted Nesta's mother, a few months after she'd sent her boy to Kingston, that she'd seen him wandering Kingston's streets alone during school hours.[20] Ciddy promptly boarded a bus for the city herself and, after a frantic search, found her boy, and brought him back to St. Ann's.

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[15] On the spiritual traditions of Jamaica's Maroons, see Katherine Dunham, *Journey to Accompong* (New York: Holt, 1946)

[16] Though marred by a tendency toward hagiography and fictionalized re-creation of key events, Timothy White's *Catch a Fire: The Life of Bob Marley* (New York: Holt, 2006), remains the definitive Marley biography; it is now in a fourth edition. Among the dozen other treatments of Marley's life, see also Stephen Davis, *Bob Marley* (New York: Schenckman, 1988), a lively, well-reported account of Marley's story by this noted rock journalist; and Toynbee's *Bob Marley: Herald of a Postcolonial World* – the most "academic" of the lot, and a book bolstered by a sharp empiric analyses of the larger world historical and political economic context for Marley's rise to fame in the 1970s.

[17] In Nine Miles today, one of most kitschy aspects of the kitsch-filled Marley museum and mausoleum is an ornately painted rock, situated beneath a tree outside Marley's final resting place, alleged to have inspired the lyric, in "Talkin' Blues," that "rock stone was my pillow too"

[18] James, p. 392

[19] See Ann Norton and Richard Symanski, "The internal marketing systems of Jamaica," *Geographical Review* 65.4 (1975): 461-475, as cited by Toynbee 46.

[20] See Cedella Marley Booker, *Bob Marley: an Intimate Portrait by his Mother* (London: Penguin, 1997) 40-41.

Mother and son though, would not remain in the countryside for long: Jamaicans were moving in droves from the island's countryside to its city, and they soon joined the flow.

In Jamaica as in many parts of the erstwhile agrarian world, rural-urban migration spiked sharply after World War II.[21] Between 1943 and 1960, Kingston's population grew by some 86%. By the time Ciddy Booker rode a truck down to the city with her son in in 1958, approximately half the capital's population (nearing 400,000 on the eve of the island's independence) had been born outside it.[22] The allure of Kingston—where most rural migrants settled in the city's mot overcrowded areas—was based less on the existence of work than the prospect of leaving behind a backwards past for the modern future. Ciddy Booker, fortuned to find work cooking and cleaning for a wealthy family, settled in Trench Town, the one-time squatter camp just west of the city center which had built up to absorb the influx from the countryside; there Marley witnessed firsthand the poverty of the "sufferahs" whose aspirations he would later give voice to in his songs.

A slight, country-clothed "yellow-bwoy" who shared the light complexion of Jamaica's "creole" bourgeoisie but not their social station, young Bob was an easy target for the city's bullies. As an adult, he would speak of "not hav[ing] prejudice against myself": "Me don't dip on the black man's side nor the white man's side," he famously put it; "me dip on God's side, the one who create me and cause me to come from black and white."[23] Many critics have alluded to how Marley's "Caucasian features" played a key role in abetting his ability to "cross over" to gain white fans where darker-complected colleagues like Peter Tosh failed.[24] More abstractly, fans and critics alike have often Marley's "bi-racial" heritage as an explanation for his perspicacity regarding the absurdity of racial hierarchies and the violence (epistemic and real) done by their application, often reverting, in so doing, to the tired tropes of mixedness-as-pathology.[25] While guarding against such de-moded tendencies, it also seems fair to posit, as does Gilroy, that Marley's particular physiognomy within Kingston's specific racial formation, afforded experiences of "the antipathy and suspicion that can be directed from both sides of the colour line at persons whose bodies carry the unsettling evidence of transgressive intimacy between black and white."[26] To what that awareness amounted and how it shaped Marley's art must remain in the realm of speculation. Nonetheless it certainly seems fair to posit, as does Christopher John Farley, that Marley's quasi-anomalous position in Jamaica's caste system—and his desire to prove himself to black peers—informed his drive for success as a young man.

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[21] For a useful survey of rural-urban migration in the developing world, especially as uncoupled from economic development in the cities, see Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006). On the particulars of such migration in Jamaica during the immediate post-war period, see Colin Clarke, *Kingston Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change, 1692-2002* (Kingston, JA: Ian Randle Publishers, 2006).

[22] Clarke 136.

[23] The quote, though oft-repeated and virally circulated, may actually be inaccurate. According Roger Steffens, noted collector of Marley-ania and chair of the reggae Grammy committee, the quote is a flawed rendering-in-English of the Jamaican patois. According to Steffens, during the interview in question Marley actually said "Me no deh pon the Black man's side…," meaning "I'm not there on the black man's side." Negligible difference in meaning, but perhaps significant. Roger Steffens, personal correspondence, April 2009.

[24] See, e.g., Chris Salewicz, *Bob Marley: The Untold Story* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2010)

[25] See Gregory Stephens, *On racial frontiers: The new culture of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Gilroy (2005) 230.

[26] Gilroy (tk) 231.

Whatever the nature of his particulars of Marley's psychology and its relation to the city's racial formation, his story-as-artist is also inseparable from the unique conjuncture wherein he came of age: a place and time which, even without Marley, would have been crucial to the history of popular music in the twentieth century. To name one example, Jamaican music in the 1960s sowed critical seeds for the emergence, a decade later, of hip-hop, the most popular genre of music in the United States, and the world, today. The figure commonly credited as the progenitor of hip-hop in 1970s New York, DJ Kool Herc (né Clive Campbell), was a Jamaican-born immigrant who'd grown up watching Kingston disc jockeys "toasting"—rapping over their records' instrumental breaks—at city dances.[27]

In and out of school in his early Kingston days, by his mid-teens Marley was mostly out. He worked briefly as a welder, but spent much of his time hoping to score a career—or at least a moment of ghetto notoriety—in the nascent music business that had sprung up in the capital. Since youth, Marley had nurtured dreams of being a musician: "You nuh hear me say," he'd told his mother, "is nothing else me want to do besides sing." At 16 he cut his first single, an aphoristic ditty called "Judge Not" released by Kingston's Beverley Records on the eve of independence in 1962. The following year, he formed his first group.

As a teenager, Marley spent his time listening to American vocal groups like the Drifters and working out harmonies with two neighborhood friends, Winston McKintosh and Neville "Bunny" Livingston. Marley was a tenor who ranged to a ringing falsetto; McKintosh was a tall, brash, bass profundo youth who went by the name of Peter Tosh; Livingston (later Bunny Wailer) was, like Bob, a tenor and a childhood acquaintance from St. Ann. Calling themselves the Wailers, the trio were soon recording with the island's top session musicians for Clement "Sir Coxsone" Dodd, helmsman of the city's largest sound-system and owner of Studio One, then the most important recording studio in Jamaica.

Their repertoire included covers of North Atlantic hits by the Beatles and Dion and the Belmonts and a few scripture-inspired tracks that Marley would update in later years—including a riff on Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready" called "One Love," one of his most famous songs. For all the records the Wailers sold for Coxsone—their first of many #1 Jamaican hits, in the spring of 1964, was "Simmer Down," a Marley-penned peace paean to the city's "rude boys" (stylish street-fighting members of youth gangs)—they never received royalties. Bob, Bunny, and Peter survived on a small weekly stipend from the producer; Marley often slept on the studio floor.

In those years, the development of Jamaica's record industry was near-exclusively a phenomenon tied to dominating sound systems on the local market. To be sure, some island-entrepreneurs—partly inspired by the shortlived "calypso craze" that attended Harry Belafonte's success in the 1950s—made attempts to bring Jamaica's music to the world. At the 1962 World's Fair in New York, Byron Lee and the Dragonaires failed miserably in attempting to convince fair attendees that "the ska [is] poised to conquer the

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[27] See Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005), justly cited as the definitive history of the genre.

twist."[28] More successful across the sea and a year later in London was Christopher Blackwell, the young scion of an old colonial family of means who founded a record company named for Alec Waugh's *Island in the Sun*, and promptly scored a novelty ska hit in the UK with Millie Small's "My Boy Lollipop" in 1963. If Blackwell's initial aim with Island records was to license and sell his home-island's music in the mother country, its ambit quickly shifted to the much more successful hustle of selling the folk acts like Fairport Convention that made him wealthy. When Jamaican music finally emerged, nearly a decade later, as the source of something other than novelty hits, Blackwell was again centrally involved. Perhaps the key development in that story, though, perhaps had less to do with music, *per se* than the appearance of a Jamaican film that gave to that music its essential aspects of narrative and image.

5.4

In 1972, Jamaican filmmaker Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come* became a surprise hit at the Venice Film Festival. In the film, the reggae singer Jimmy Cliff plays a country-born slum dweller who becomes a gun-toting outlaw, a folk hero with a Star of David t-shirt who ducks into the studio to cut hit records as he flees from the cops. Along with a superb soundtrack featuring some of Kingston's best acts, the film introduced reggae and its culture to the world.

That fall, the Wailers met with Chris Blackwell, whose label had just released the *The Harder They Come* soundtrack. By now, the 27-year old Marley had scored a litany of local hits with the Wailers, married a local Trench Town girl (and sometime vocal collaborator) called Rita Anderson, and also spent time working in the United States, where his mother had emigrated in the early sixties. Frequently glossed over as a kind of liminal time before he began his career in earnest, Marley's Delaware years—beginning with an 8-month stay in 1966, but continuing off-and-on for the next four years—inserted his story into the "transnational circuits" intrinsic to the development of Caribbean cultures at large and his own music during subsequent years. Holding down a union job at Wilmington's Chrysler plant made plain the links between slavery and wage-slavery (inspiring such songs as "Night Shift"), and exposed him to the culture and politics of post-Civil Rights black America whose vocabulary and mores would lend vocabulary and pathos to such later songs as "I Shot the Sheriff," and "Burnin' and Lootin."[29] Marley may have turned down a friend's invitation to attend Woodstock in the summer of 1968, but the new sounds and style of Marvin Gaye and Sly Stone left their audible mark as well.[30]

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[28] See "Jamaican Ska Roots – Origens do Ska / Reggae". www.youtube.com. My thanks to Garnette Cadogan for this reference, and his illuminating talk on same, at the 2009 Experience Music Project Pop Conference, "Ska as the Jamaican Twist." Seattle, WA. 19 Apr 2009.

[29] See Gilroy (2005) 233-234.

[30] "Yeah, music all the while, them time there," Marley would later recall of his Delaware times. "Marvin Gaye just come with some music and some other people. Stevie Wonder and them." As quoted by Farley 109. Woodstock anecdote as related by Bob's Wilmington friend and the keeper of an Africanist gift shop in town, Ibis Pitts. See Farley 109.

Ironically enough, Marley's first American sojourn had also corresponded with the signal event in the growth of radical black internationalism in Jamaica—the visit to the island of H.I.M. Haile Selassie in April 1966—that convinced his new wife and friends to adopt the faith he would make synonymous with reggae. Marley had embraced Rastafari shortly after his return that year; his lyrics were increasingly bathed in the distinctive biblical and political language of Rastafari. The sect had been born in Kingston a few decades before, when a group of Marcus Garvey's followers celebrated the 1930 coronation of Ras (prince) Tafari Makonnen—Haile Selassie I—as Emperor of Ethiopia to be a fulfillment of Garvey's supposed prophecy to "look to the East for the crowning of the African king."[31] Worshipping Selassie as the living Christ, the Rastafarians went on to develop an elaborate eschatology drawing from the King James Bible. Their outlook and speech were shaped by these scriptures: frowning on modern medicine and eschewing the eating of meat; encouraging the ritual smoking of marijuana (for "good meditation" according to their reading of the Old Testament); and praiseful mentions of "Jah" (as they called Selassie, after the King James' Jehovah) and scornful decries of "Babylon" (the corrupted capitalist West). Moreover, citing the Samsonite edict of Leviticus 21:15 ("they shalt not make baldness upon their head"), they prohibited the cutting of hair.

In recent years, a wealth of new scholarship has emerged tracing the little-understood roots and growth of the Rasta faith—a movement with roots in many of the independent religious sects extant in Jamaica in the early 1900s. Garveyism may have been most key in this mix, but Rasta theology, as Noel Erskine have shown, also had roots in such sources as the social gospel of the Salvation Army and the revival movement of Alexander Bedward, whose followers, writes Charles Price, "were among the first Jamaicans to turn the cultural resources of the moral economies of Blackness, and a morally configured Black identity, into a collective identification and social movement capable of posing an organized challenge."[32] An evangelical preacher who himself sometimes claimed to be Christ incarnate, Bedward eventually led his followers to Garveyism by suggesting that he and Garvey were akin to Aaron and Moses: the priest and prophet sent to lead Israel's children home to Zion.[33] (Another aspects of Bedwardism later echoed by Rasta was its interest in diction: Garvey's middle-name, Mosiah, was said by the Bedwardites to be a mix of "Moses" and "Messiah.") For most of their first decades the Rastas remained socal outcasts, small in number and resident in squalid camps on Kingston's outskirts.[34] By the time of Selassie's visit, though, they were growing fast in number and influence.[35]

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[31] See Robert A. Hill, *Dread History: Leonard P. Howell and Millenarian Visions in Early Rastafarian Religion* (Chicago: Frontline Distribution International, 2001).

[32] See Noel Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); and Charles Price, *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

[33] On Bedwardism, see also A. A. Brooks, *History of Bedwardmism —OR— The Jamaica Native Baptist Free Churgh, Union Camp, Augustown, St Andrew, JA. B.W.I.* (Jamaica: The Gleaner Co, Ltd., 1917)

[34] For an intriguing early encounter by an outsider with Rasta, in the "dungle" where many adepts lived in the 1940s, see Patrick Leigh Fermor, *The Traveler's Tree: A Journey Through the Caribbean Islands* (New York: New York Review Classics, 2010) 348-352, as discussed in my introduction to that volume.

[35] See Rex Nettleford, M.G. Smith, and Roy Aguier, *The Rastafarians in Kingston,*

Becoming emblematic of black pride during the political upheaval of the late 60s, their sway over elections was symbolized, in 1970, by Michael Manley wielding a "rod of Joshua" he claimed to have received from the emperor.[36] For Marley, the language and look of Rasta carried another benefit which would, in following years, crucially aid their global success: as a means of articulating a connection with "Africans" everywhere (never mind that locks, like ganja, were borrowed from Indian immigrants to the islands).

When the Wailers met with Blackwell, all nappy locks and practiced scowls with the singular charisma of beautiful young men at once busted and proud, they made a stark impression. Blackwell later recalled, "It was like the real character [Ivan] from *The Harder They Come* walking in the office." The group was stranded and needed a break. Since departing the aegis of Coxsone Dodd, they had worked with Lee "Scratch" Perry, the eccentric studio genius and ex-Dodd protégé who had helped them develop a potent new sound.[37] After being poorly paid by Dodd, then battling for a time to keep their own hole-the-wall record label afloat, their work with Perry had proven frustrating; remuneration was negligible. Blackwell, in contrast, gave the group 4000 pounds to make an album—their first real payday. They refused to sign a contract: they felt their word was good enough.

Few figures in the Marley Legend divide opinion so deeply as Blackwell: a character represented, by some, as a "bloodsucking vampire" of Babylon; by others (especially record biz types) as the substitute-father and friend whose renowned instincts as a marketer and A&R man afforded Marley's success. Whatever one's views, it's inarguable that Blackwell's support represented more than a simple risk taken on an unproven act. By1972 reggae had produced a few British chart hits (notably Desmond Dekker's "Israelites" which went to #1 in 1969). Most industry mavens, however, still regarded the genre as "singles-based music"—as so much disposable pop. Blackwell's hope, as Jason Toynbee has detailed, was that savvy record-buyers (and the increasingly powerful rock press) were ready to embrace a reggae singer as the creator of a rock album, the relatively new art-object that the Beatles had helped establish as the stock-in-trade of rock stardom. Aware of the *auteur*'s sanctified role within this new culture, Blackwell also moved to change the Wailers' name to Bob Marley and the Wailers.

He flew to Kingston a few weeks later to check on his charges. The music Marley played him astounded him: falsetto harmonies over chicken-scratch guitar; gorgeous melodies incongruously carried by electric bass; syncopated drums subtly prominent, the group having placed the drummer's kit in the center of the studio, that its pulse might bleed into the pickups of all the other players. Blackwell, ecstatic, set to turning these tracks into the album he wanted to market. Choosing nine of the dozen-odd songs from the Kingston tapes, he extended the length of each in the mix. To further ingratiate these exotic sounds to young Brits then swearing allegiance to guitar gods like Eric Clapton, Blackwell asked Wayne Perkins, an Alabama blues-rock guitarist who happened to be

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Jamaica (Mona: University of West Indies Press, 1967). Among interesting aspects of Selassie's visit – and its bearing on the Wailers – is that Mortimo Planno, the charismatic Rasta asked by the Jamaican state to host the Emperor, also became the Wailers spiritual mentor, and de facto manager, for the next few years.

[36] On the significance of Rasta to that tumultuous era of Jamaican politics, see Obika Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960–1972* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), as well as Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[37] See David Katz, *People Funny Boy: The Genius of Lee "Scratch" Perry* (London: Payback Press, 2001).

working on his family band's record at Island's studios, to overdub steel-stringed leads on the Wailers' tunes.

Marley was initially skeptical about Perkins' contribution, but came around on hearing the subtle color his work added; he signaled his approval by offering Perkins a draw on his personal marijuana cigar (or "spliff"). In the group photograph taken for the dustjacket—the album, *Catch a Fire*, came packaged in a cardboard-replica of a Zippo cigarette lighter—and on the UK tour the Wailers undertook on its release, Perkins, who was white, was not included. Marley's appeal lay in the same elixir of electrified primitivity that had proved so potent in Jimi Hendrix. But his act, unlike Hendrix's Experience, had to be recognizably Jamaican, and thus black.

If the sound was a mélange, the songs (with titles like "400 years" and "Concrete Jungle") left no doubt as to the world and the history out of which they came. From "Slave Driver":

> Every time I hear the crack of a whip/ my blood runs cold
> I remember on the slave ship/ how they brutalize our very souls
> Today they say that we are free/ only to be chained here in poverty…

5.5

By the autumn of 1976, after a series of critically-acclaimed albums and concert tours, Marley was on his way to being a global star. The success of his first album had been followed by *Burnin'* (1973), featuring "Get Up, Stand Up," the Tosh-Marley composition that would become the official song of Amnesty International. Shortly after *Burnin'*, Peter and Bunny departed to pursue solo careers.[38] The first album Marley released without the "original Wailers," the gorgeous *Natty Dread* (1974), contained the ballad "No Woman, No Cry," perhaps his best-known song: a nostalgia-soaked ode to sensitive manhood set in post-independet Jamaica's signal urban development: the housing projects which, built in place of Kingston squatters camps by one ruling party or the other, undergird the emergence of both the patronage politics that came to dominate Jamaica's political system and that of a new social type—the "yardie"—by whose guns and lifeways that system is still reproduced today.

> I remember when we used to sit
> In the government yard in Trenchtown
> Oba, ob-serving the hypocrites
> As they would mingle with the good people we meet
> Good friends we have had, oh good friends we've lost along the way
> In this bright future you can't forget your past
> So dry your tears I say

[38] For a sensitive and detailed "group biography" of the original Wailers' relationship over the years, and Bunny and Peter's post-Wailers' lives and careers, see Colin Grant, *I & I, The Natural Mystics: A Group Biography of the Original Wailers* (New York: Norton, 2010).

No woman, no cry
No woman, no cry
Oh my Little sister, don't she'd no tears
No woman, no cry

Two years later, *Rastaman Vibration* (1976) produced the first reggae single to gain significant U.S. radio airplay—"Roots, Rock, Reggae" (whose lyric ironically presaged its success: "Play I on the R-and-B/ Want all my people to see/ We bubbling on the top 100/ just like a mighty dread"). The record came packaged in a textured dust-jacket, perfect for rolling joints on, which made it a coveted dorm room novelty. That he first attained fame in America not among US blacks but white college students—to whom Marley was (and remains) as much marijuana mascot as musician—was troubling for him. Desiring fame, however, he seems to have embraced all those he charmed irrespective of race (while making a special effort to attract a black audience, which he did by the time he performed an emotional series of sold-out shows at Harlem's Apollo Theater in October 1979).

For Jamaica's proliferating Rastafarians, who already regarded a mortal man as divine, Marley had attained the status of prophet. Called simply "Mr. Music" on island radio, he was now living in a large uptown home where he counted Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley as neighbor. In moving uptown, however, Marley hadn't so much left Trench Town behind as brought it with him. In *The Book of Exodus*, a rambling memoir-cum-meditation on the making of Marley's next record, veteran music journalist Vivien Goldman quotes his explanation:

> [It's] not the people me a talk about, but the ghetto is a prison. When the law comes out, they send them into the ghetto first, not uptown. So how long does it take you to realize—bwoy, well they don't send them uptown, y'know! So we'll make a ghetto uptown.[39]

An experiment in what the Rastas called "social living," the fabled uptown property resembled a commune. The property housed Tuff Gong International, the record company that fulfilled Marley's longtime Garveyite aim to own his means of production; it served also as home, rehearsal space, and crash-pad for assorted "bredren" (brethren) and hangers-on. Each day running-mates and admirers from the old neighborhood arrived at the gates to pay respects—and to ask for a hand; few left without one.

The communal ethos extended to sexual matters, too, and though Marley fathered three children with Rita in the early years of their marriage, he had by the mid-1970s moved through a series of other relationships that also produced children. Rita had begun, not without pain, to evolve into her de-sexed role as queen-mother for the whole brood.[40] (All told, Marley acknowledged fathering at least eleven children, by seven different women.) Soon enough, Marley found a primary companion. The reputed subject of his tenderest songs on *Exodus*, Cindy Breakespeare was a middle-class beauty queen from

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[39] Marley as quoted by Vivien Goldman, *The Book of Exodus: The Making and Meaning of Bob Marley and the Wailers' Album of the Century* (Pittsburgh, PA: Three Rivers Press, 2006) 53.
[40] See Rita Marley with Hettie Jones, *No Woman, No Cry: My Life with Bob Marley* (New York: Hyperion, 2004).

the new neighborhood—the 1976 Miss World—with whom he shared, as Goldman puts it, "a passionate interest in exercise [and] health."[41]

As Marley went about building his uptown court, Kingston's downtown districts were being run by 20-something warlords. (One of the more notorious, Bucky Marshall, once told Goldman that his power was owed to the fact that "I shoot harder.")[42] Gangs fought over turf in proxy battles for the nation's two political parties: the left-wing People's National Party (PNP), led by the charismatic Prime Minister Michael Manley; and the center-right, CIA-supported Jamaican Labor Party (JLP) of Edward Seaga, a one-time anthropologist and record producer who had, in the '50s, recorded the Wailers' old Trench Town mentor, the Rastafarian Joe Higgs.[43] If Marley's youthful entrance into the music industry corresponded with Jamaica's gaining of independence in the 1960s, his music and life in the following decade was crucially shaped, like the larger world, by the political and cultural logics of the Cold War. Conspiracists' claims that the CIA arranged Marley's death are overboard; that he remained a person-of-interest to Washington's shadow powers, though, is certainly so (as his biographer Timothy White uncovered in obtaining, via a FOIA request, CIA documents pertaining to the agency's Marley file).[44]

In the run-up to the 1976 election that would determine whether Manley's PNP would govern for another four years, the parties' affiliate gangs went to war. Marley, though a personal friend of Manley and sympathetic to his socialist ideas, eschewed what he termed "politricks." In a city where one's party affiliation had more to do with whose toughs protected your block than anything else, he sought to project a public persona studiously neutral.

Nonetheless, days before Marley was scheduled to perform a "Smile Jamaica" concert aimed at tempering the violence, a crew of gunmen rolled through his home's gates. Shots echoed about the yard. Marley, standing in the kitchen peeling a grapefruit, took a bullet in his left arm. He insisted on performing at the National Stadium two nights later, pointing defiantly before a rapt crowd of thousands to the wounded limb at his side. He left the island the following morning, however, and didn't return for more than a year.

5.6

Away in London, Marley poured himself into composing and recording. One day, his bass player, "Family Man" Barrett (reputedly so-called for fathering 52 children), returned from an afternoon of LP-browsing with the soundtrack to *Exodus*, Otto Preminger's film starring Paul Newman.[45] Listening to the strings and cymbals of the movie's theme, Barrett riffed on its chord changes to shape the bass-line of their record-to-be's title track; Marley wrote lyrics around the refrain "movement of Jah people." The

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[41] Goldman 167.
[42] Goldman 279.
[43] On Seaga's richly complex life and politics, see Patrick E. Bryan, *Edward Seaga and the Challenges of Modern Jamaica* (Mona: University of West Indies Press, 2009).
[44] See Timothy White, Appendix 3 in *Catch a Fire: the life of Bob Marley* (New York: Holt, 1998) 427-432.
[45] Goldman 152.

proximate recourse to the *Exodus* theme may have derived, for Marley and his cohort, from Barrett happening on Ernest Gold's soundtrack: the film itself, though—like the cowboy and other films that shaped the sensibility of Western-themed records like Scratch Perry's *Return of Django*—had played to packed houses in Kingston during the Wailers youth, pointing up the import of international cinema to shaping national cultures during those years. Preminger's *Exodus* had carried a special resonance. "In all Third World countries, people would have responded to the film just like Jamaicans," said Lister Hewan Lowe, Marley's Jamaican publicist, of seeing the film as a child at Kingson's Carib theater as a boy. "In the movie, a boat full of Jewish refugees from the Nazis is held offshore by the British, and if they can't land, they'll be sent back to die in Germany. Paul Newman stars as the Jewish freedom fighter, and he slips and slides around things and outmaneuvers people and manages to get all those people out. They go on hunger strike, and at the end, he's willing to let them all die right there, except for the children. Then a mother comes with a baby in her arms, and when he says, 'All women and children off the boat,' the mother answers, 'No, we'll stay here. We'd rather die than live in slavery."[46]

Marley decided, during a year spent among West Indian émigrés in the jobless chill of stagflationary late-'70s Britain, that the new album would be based around the biblical tale. The story evoked deliverance from bondage, but also movement toward home or away from it, movement without the certitude of earthly sanctuary at its start or end. Its themes spoke not only to Marley's flight from Jamaica and the errant life of 747s and hotel rooms that he already sensed would describe the rest of his days; they resonated also with the experience of those masses of West Indians, and emigrants everywhere, crossing oceans and deserts hoping that "better must come."

With its thumping bass-drum signatures and slick production, *Exodus* was a record aimed at cracking the American market at its disco-era peak. The recordings may have lost some of their earlier verve, but the band had only gained in cohesion and power. Marley was a notorious disciplinarian; he'd presided over daily Kingston rehearsals and then over marathon sessions in the London studio. The group's longtime rhythm-core, the Barrett brothers—Aston, "Family Man" on bass, and Carlton, "Carly," on drums—were now joined by the vocal harmonies of the "I-Threes" (Rita Marley, Judy Mowatt, and Marcia Griffiths), the keyboard prodigy (and Moog synthesizer enthusiast) Tyrone Downie, and Junior Marvin, the flash British guitar player, a one time child-actor who had, on the day he joined the Wailers, turned down an invitation to join Stevie Wonder's band instead.[47]

If Marley's evolving sound and growing pop success, in those years, was abetted by his taking on board the technological and sonic trappings of North Atlantic pop, so too was his reception eased by his evolving craft as a performer. Already by the time of his first appearance on British TV in 1973, Marley had dropped the slick-suited

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[46] Hewan-Lowe as quoted by his erstwhile Island records colleague Goldman 156.

[47] On the Wailers' backing band and the story of its most crucial members, Aston and Carlton Barrett (especially as pertains to their pre- and post-Bob careers), check John Masouri, *Wailing Blues: The Story of Bob Marley's Wailers* (London: Omnibus Press, 2008). On Junior Marvin and his Stevie Wonder moment, see Goldman, p. 204. Apart from Marvin's playing, the group's sound was also helped along by his friend Roger Mayer, the brilliant guitar technician behind the wah-wah peddle effect on Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze". Mayer offered Bob his services and helped Marvin find the perfect "chuck" guitar-sound that drove the group's new sound. See Goldman 205.

showmanship of his ska youth to adopt the workman's wardrobe to affect the disinterest so essential to live rock performance: performing while appearing not to.[48] With the growing scale of his spectacular stage-show in the late 1970s, Marley had addended to those techniques a prophetic mien compounded by the propulsive force of his new sound.

Watching the 'Live at the Rainbow' video, recorded early in the *Exodus* tour, one sees one of the great live acts in the history of pop: Marley looms at the fore, a booted dervish of denim and dreadlocks, now bounding about the stage, now standing stock still with his arms in the sign of the cross, his faultless tenor at once tuneful and plain, each lyric invested with the pathos less of song than incantation.

5.7

As Marley's heirs in Jamaica and Miami today grow wealthy from the estate they now control, the selling of his memory, in relics of plastic and cotton, makes safe and simple what was in flesh refractory and complex. That one can as easily find that 'Live at the Rainbow' DVD for purchase in Bangkok and Lima as Linstead and Brixton, however, is a fact attributable in no small measure to Marley's ambition to bring the live show to as many people as possible.[49] During the nearly four years between the release of *Exodus* and the bright May day when Marley's body was interred on the St. Ann hillside where he was born, he crisscrossed the globe with increasing ferocity, filling enormous stadiums from Tokyo to Milan and smaller ones from Auckland to Libreville. By the end he became a symbol and spokesman of anti-colonial aspiration for the oppressed (or "downpressed" as he called them) everywhere.

Marley gave perhaps his most famous performance at the 1980 celebration marking the re-birth of the last outpost of Empire in Africa, Rhodesia, as the sovereign nation of Zimbabwe.[50] That spring, his anthemic "Zimbabwe" ("Every man got a right to decide his own destiny") was a continent-wide hit. African musicians – from the Chimurenga War's dreadlocked "Lion of Zimbabwe," Thomas Mapfumo, to Alpha Blondy, who began performing reggae in the Ivory Coast – were already lending Marley's look, and sound, to the soundscape of demands for freedom across the continent.[51] Marley's crowds could not see his worsening health. His bandmates, however, watched him after many shows remove his right boot filled with blood. One afternoon in Paris, as the European leg of the *Exodus* tour drew to a close, Marley, a

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[48] See Toynbee 178.

[49] As Gilroy puts it: "The Jamaican rebel style was heard, copied and then blended into the local traditions of Brasil, Surinam, Japan, Australia, and numerous African countries, particularly Zimbabwe, Zaire, South Africa and the Ivory Coast. It would be a huge mistake to imagine that this development happened by accident or resulted from a natural process. We should not overlook the grueling undertaken by Marley's hard-working band. Their success was founded as much on the demanding labour of transcontinental performing as on the poetic qualities he invested in the language of sufferation he made so compelling," Glroy (2005) 230.

[50] See Ree Ngwenya, "Bob Marley in Zimbabwe: the Untold Story," in *Every Little Thing Gonna Be Alright: The Bob Marley Reader*, Ed. Hank Bordowitz (New York: Da Capo, 2004).

[51] On reggae's complex resonance and evolutions in Africa, see Louis Chude-Sokei, "When Echoes Return: roots, diaspora and possible Africas (a eulogy)" *Transition* 104 (2011): 76-92.

lifelong soccer enthusiast, organized a pickup game beneath the Eiffel tower. Mid-game, a member of the press corps stomped on Marley's already injured right big toe. Infection set in, and though doctors repeatedly told him that the toe had to be amputated, he refused. How a simple soccer injury became much more is not medically clear; what is, though, is that in July 1977 he was diagnosed with a malignant melanoma on the toe, and the cancer spread to his stomach, liver, and brain, finally killing him.

"In the Caribbean," C.L.R. James wrote, "the international can never be removed from the national".[52] What fans sensed in this plain-clothed mulatto with the Gibson guitar cannot be detached from the island where Marley grew up: a place where circular migration and blending cultures have been the dominant fact of life for centuries—one of a complex of islands whose sons and daughters, as the Guadeloupe novelist Daniel Maximin puts it, all know how "to take their roofs with them."[53]

In his final years, Marley returned to Jamaica only for brief stays, most notably in 1978 for the "One Love Peace Concert" during which he enjoined party leaders Manley and Seaga to clasp hands on stage in the midst of another bloody election campaign. His final concert tour came to a premature end on September 23, 1980. The highlight of Marley's performance in Pittsburg that night was the newly-penned acoustic valediction "Redemption Song," in which Marley raised for a final time the unmet need for emancipation, and publicly claimed, for the first, the mantle of Joseph, son of Jacob, whose spirit the Rastas had long claimed him to embody:

> Old pirates yes they rob I
> Sold I to the merchant ships
> Minutes after they took I/ from the bottomless pit
> But my hand was made strong/ by the hand of the almighty…

Visibly ailing, Marley pronounced his thanks, as had Joseph before the archers, for a"hand made strong by the hand of the almighty"[54]; on his left middle finger he wore a black-and-gold ring given him by Selassie's grandson in London, a ring which had belonged to the Emperor himself, and, it was said, millennia before that to King David in Jerusalem.

Marley's own belief in an earthly divine was less messianic than radically humanist. "If you know what life is worth," went the lyrics to "Get Up, Stand Up," "you will look for yours on earth." His insistence that mortals could make the kingdom of righteousness on this plane was joined to a subtler wariness about grounding Zion in the vulgarities of blood or land. The rights he proclaimed worth standing up for were not civil rights that derived from sovereign states, but the abstract human rights that are the emblematic utopian gesture of our age. Those rights, he believed, can't be entrusted solely to governments of men to uphold, nor even—as he came to know by the time he stood in Abyssinia for the first and last time in 1978—to a holy emperor.

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[52] C.L.R. James, as cited by Stefano Harney, *Nationalism and Identity: Culture and Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora* (London: Zed Books,1996) 163-164.
[53] Daniel Maximin, *Lone Sun* [L'Isolé soleil] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), translated by the author, with an Introduction by Clarisse Zimra.
[54] Genesis 49

Marley didn't speak publicly of his visit to Ethiopia where he found, two years after Selassie's demise, not a temple to his Lord's name, but an unmarked grave in a parched land peopled by subjects glad to see their ruler's end. Given the chance to plant roots in Shashamane, the high African valley where Selassie had set aside 500 fertile acres for the "Black people of the West," Marley declined. It was, if in some ways a simple choice, also a profound one for a man animated by that particular modern longing common to peoples thrown together: in the Caribbean—islands whose indigenous inhabitants were brutally erased—the deep sense that if only we name, and know, and be with our roots, our unease might be lessened, the fractures of the plantation and after made whole.

In Marley's last years, the meaning of his Zion became clear, if not in the way he once might have liked. "One bright morning when my work is over, man gon' fly away home," he sang; but until he flew home—not to Africa but to the dust and confusion of the Caribbean isle where he was born—it was to be, as the title to one of his albums put it, "Babylon by Bus." The secret betrayed to those he charmed in his travels was that the pains of life in the Babylon System he abhorred could and must be overcome, that they could, as the lyric went, be "brutalized with music"—that he was, as we moderns must be, at home uneasily in the wilderness.

VI.

Ground Zero(es) of the New World:

Geographies of Violence in Junot Díaz and Edwidge Danticat

In early 2008, two writers born on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola—Junot Díaz from the Dominican Republic and Edwidge Danticat from Haiti—garnered unprecedented plaudits from the anglophone literary establishment in the United States. Díaz was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction, for his brilliant novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*; Danticat won the top prize in Biography from the National Book Critics Circle for her family memoir *Brother, I'm Dying*, a book which was also a finalist for the National Book Award in nonfiction. To top off their shared victories, the two were awarded that year's two Dayton Peace Prizes, in fiction and nonfiction respectively (the award, which honors "the power of literature to promote peace and non-violent conflict resolution," claims to be "the only "international peace prize awarded in the United States.")

Literary prizes provide a notoriously dodgy gauge of literary merit. But one could not help but be struckby the extraordinary breadth and depth of the resonance gained by two writers born in the Caribbean but raised in the Dominican and Haitian republics of New York, and writing in their shared second language. Beyond this base commonality was themes of their prizewinning works, both of which explicitly engaged with the brutal histories their parents had left behind on their shared island—or perhaps better put, engaged with how they hadn't left those histories behind at all. Whether in the shape of the mild-mannered Brooklyn barber whom Danticat's father recognizes as a onetime assassin for Baby Doc Duvalier, or the ways in which Díaz's New Jersey Dominicans' flash back to the sexist violence of the Trujillato (and reenact that violence with their daughters)—these writers' characters, fictional and non, are people who incessantly return to the Caribbean in the mind. And when they actually travel to the islands in body, it is only to realize again and again that they've never really left.

For all these reasons, Díaz and Danticat's work is easily emplaced within a literary story about the ways in which "the new immigrant writing," much beloved of publishers and prize-committees, has moved beyond the old immigrant narrative of assimilation-and-ascent, to explore the ways in which contemporary migrants exist in, and create "transnational social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders."[1] And both, certainly, are also engaged with their own nations' traumas and destiny in ways that accord with the kind of "third world literature" whose narratives'

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[1] Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Sciller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, eds., *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, and Nationalism Reconsidered*. (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1994).

self-realization, as Fredric Jameson famously argued, reproduces that of the nation.[2] What I am concerned to examine here, though, are the ways that Díaz and Danticat's work transcends both these modes of analysis, and the ways they have done so by evincing an avowedly regional—*Caribbean*—approach to history and to writing. In this chapter I will show how Díaz and Danticat's books are based in, and makes the case for, certain conceptions of the Caribbean's place in the larger history of the New World. Exploring each writer's preoccupation with what Díaz famously called the *fukú americanus*—"the curse or doom of the New World," set in motion with Columbus arrival in the New World—I will examine how Díaz and Danticat, each in their own way, seek to illuminate the Americas' "hidden history of violence." So doing, I mean to show how each writers' books, through the stories they tell and through their engagement with what Glissant calls "Caribbean Discourse," offer a new way of understanding historical traumas not merely in the Caribbean, but in the Americas at large—up to, and including, such events as the epoch-making attacks of September 11, 2001.

In Díaz and Danticat's contemporary work, the traumas of long-ago history are much more than mere background, or back-story. The *fukú* lives in the present—in the Dominican Republic, in the corpses dumped in canefields, for three decades in the middle-1900s, by the henchmen of Rafael Trujillo (or, Díaz terms him, "Our Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid, our Once and Future Dictator, a *personaje* so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up."). It also surely lives in Haiti, whose nightmarishly violent Revolution of 1791-1804, according to its vodun houngans, unleashed sprits which are still haunting the landscape today—a truth of which its poor, the sufferers of Duvalier's depredations of which Danticat writes, would need little help believing. And as Díaz's tragic hero Oscar Wao knows too well, suffering daily indignities in his Rutgers dorm, the *fukú* can most certainly survive the "second migration" from the Caribbean to New York (or Miami, or New Jersey).

Putting together the shards left by traumatic history, and mending the wounds those shards impart, has always been a central preoccupation for Caribbean writers, as Walcott and a hundred others remind us.[3] Neither, age-wise, belongs to the Caribbean's "Independence Generation" who put great store by the promise of decolonization as means to redemption (and both, in any case, hail from nations nominally "free" since the 1800s, but long beset by neo-colonial thugs). And while Díaz and Danticat are writers deeply engaged with nation—and with the particularly Caribbean obsession with nation expressed in the famous lines from Walcott which serves as the epigraph to Díaz's book (I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me/ And either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation…)[4] –they are also writers, like all diasporic writers from the Caribbean, who are centrally engaged with the *impossibilities* of nation for small islands, and with more encompassing kinds of Caribbean identity. Long resident in "the northern capital of the Caribbean" that is New York, they are also preoccupied with relations among the region's people, and

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[2] Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15.1 (1986): 65-88.

[3] See Derek Walcott's Nobel lecture, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory"; especially the lines concerning how "Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent". See Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1993)

[4] From Derek Walcott's "The Schooner Flight." *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1979)

with those people's prospects for conciliation with one another—and in the first instance, for these two from the two halfs of Hispaniola, with *each others'* nations. Exploring the attributes of diaspora as a space where the memory of violence can be salved (and the issue of Dominican-Haitian rapprochement, more specifically, broached) is a central concern for both writers – as is the question, at once literary and historiographic, about how one writes prose equal to a history that could produce and condone a dictator "so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up."

6.2

Start at the beginning. That's were Junot Díaz does, in the opening lines of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*:

> They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, *fukú* – generally a curse or doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite "discovering" the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices. In Santo Domingo, the Land He Loved Best (what Oscar, at the end, would call the Ground Zero of the New World), the Admiral's very name has become synonymous with both kinds of fukú, little and large; to say his name aloud or even to hear it to invite calamity of you and yours.

The Admiral, of course, is Cristobal Colon—Colombus—whose very name, like the history set in motion by his arrival in Santo Domingo in 1492, is an obscenity: a nightmare from which Oscar, obliquely introduced here, will spend this novel trying, if not trying to awake from, then to reconcile himself with. The opening lines of Díaz's opus, toggling back-and-forth from past to present, and introducing the inter-twined concepts of history and malevolent metaphysics, herald not a few key points of the book *in toto*: that something distinct and powerful entered world history through that "nightmare door" in the Antilles; that the people of the island where that history commenced may stand in special proximity to its mal-effects; that even so, that history (like those mal-effects) is anything but past, that it reaches out and onward, suffusing the lives of characters in the Rutgers dormitories and chemical-perfumed New Jersey towns, hard by the erstwhile shadows of the towers whose felling, on September 11, 2001, represent but another Ground Zero in the Americas' history reaching back to Columbus.

The 'Jersey demi-monde where much of the action in *Oscar Wao* takes place is one that Díaz has showed us before. In *Drown*, the lauded book of short-stories that made his name in 1996—and commenced the 11 years of tortured waiting for his novel to appear—Díaz brought readers into the worlds where he grew up. (Born in Santo Domingo in 1969, Díaz emigrated to New Jersey at age seven.) With stories alternately

set in a desperately poor Dominican *campo* where young boys grow accustomed, each year, to shitting worms that their mamis don't have the medicine to treat, to the scarcely-better off life of public housing in New Jersey, where those same boys hide the "government cheese" when girls come over, and where—as Díaz's narrator counsels in perhaps that book's most memorable piece, "How to Date a White Girl, Brown Girl, or Halfie"—"Tell her about the pendejo who stored cannisters of Army tear gas in his basement for years until one day they all cracked and the neighborhood got a dose of military-strength stuff. Don't tell her that your moms knew right away what it was, that she recognized the smell from the year the United States invaded your island."[5]

With its similar setting and echoes of similar anxieties and themes—the "immigrant experience"; the shadow history of U.S. empire; a boy's struggle to get laid—one can read Díaz's novel as a kind of continuance of *Drown* with more capacious aims. Commencing as a story about a corpulent "ghetto-nerd" struggling with daily indignities and an in-progress fantasy novel in his college dorm, giving Oscar's tale its due, it quickly becomes clear, necessitates telling a host of other stories as well: of what horrors befell Oscar and his sister Lola's mother, Belícia, during a childhood whose horrid memories of which she long ago "deposited in the dark, uncharted trenches of her soul"[6]; of the state murder of Oscar's grandfather, Abelard, for daring to question Trujillo's right to make his daughter a concubine; of the larger course of Dominican history, under a the surreal reign of a demonic dictator who, made "the *fukú*…real as shit, something your everyday person could believe in."[7]

With a structure that moves back and forth, like its opening sentences, from present to past, Díaz's novel alternates chapters on Oscar's story with ones showing us what befell his mother in the years leading up to her deciding, before he was born, to board a plane with "other First Wavers…Many waters waiting to become a river." Fleshing out connections between the worlds Díaz showed us in *Drown*—connections, that is, between an immigrant family's present and past—*Oscar Wao* is also more. This is a novel which, tracing its hero's quest to know his family's history, becomes little less than a re-telling of modern Dominican history, filling in the "paginas en blanco" left by a dictator who sought (sometimes with U.S. backing) to write a national history in their own image.[8] Rendered in the colloquial, self-reflexive voice of Oscar's roommate (and his sister's sometime *novio*), Yunior, it is also a kind of meditation on historiography and the powers and limits of writing itself.

This, in other words, is no small book. And it employs, as one would expect, no small number of special tricks to complete its task. Beginning with the footnotes that literally and figuratively undergird the narrative—and which signal, from the first one on

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[5] Díaz, *Drown* (New York: Riverhead, 1997) 252.
[6] Díaz (2007) 258.
[7] Díaz (2007) 2.
[8] As Díaz has put it: "I don't think there's a Dominican writer, past or present, who's matched the awful narrative puissance that Trujillo marshaled; his "work" deformed, captured, organized us Dominicans in ways we can barely understand, and this "work" has certainly outlasted his physical existence. (And unless I'm nuts, this writing continues to be more popular than the work of any of the competition—me and my peers included. What I write about the Haitian community moves maybe three people, but what he "wrote" about the Haitian community still moves the fucking pueblo.)" See Danticat, "BOMB Interviews: Junot Díaz by Edwidge Danticat," *BOMB* 101 (Fall 2007).

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Trujillo, the lasting impress of history on the present. Rendered in the same colloquial spanglish voice as the narrative above, Díaz's footnotes contain capsule-histories of various and sundry characters ranging from the native prince Hatuey ("the Taino Ho Chi Minh") and venal post-Trujillo leader Joaquín Balaguer, ("appeared as a sympathetic character in Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat*").[9] Serving as but one more way to underscore history's presence in the Now, Díaz's footnotes may also signal key aspects of the novel, and the circumstances of its creation.[10] Rejecting claims that his citational practice is akin to that of the "postmodern white boy gang," Díaz has claimed that the primary inspiration for his notes in *Oscar Wao* were those employed by the Martinican Patrick Chamoiseau in his great novel of Fort-de-France's slums, *Texaco*—wherein, as Chamoiseau has said, his footnotes mimicked the experience of writing in a place "where roosters crow outside, people are talking, something's always interrupting the flow." Whatever the extent to which one credits Chamoiseau's theory or Díaz's embrace thereof, Díaz's citation of his Francophone colleague signals the extent to which his work is engaged with a multi-lingual conversation about Caribbean letters also signaled in Díaz's choice of Derek Walcott, rather than a Dominican like Pedro Mir, for his epigraph (a choice on which he's dilated in interviews).[11] *Wao* may be a national novel—and it's certainly that: it's a national epic—but it is, more significantly here, an avowedly *Caribbean* novel. Not least in the ways it embraces, in its use of footnotes and other devices in the narrative, Walcott's dictum that all Caribbean art seek "the restoration of [our] shattered histories."[12]

Narrated by a character who is himself a writer, these literary obsessions are signaled by how Yunior, in his prefatory remarks about the *fukú*, describes the concept of

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[9] Among other aspects of Díaz's footnotes that may bear further scrutiny is what their interpolated addressee ("In case you missed your two minutes of Dominican history…") signal about this book's desired audience – and perhaps contradict Diaz's prior arguments concerning how "so many Latinos and black writers who are writing to white audiences, who are not writing to their own people. If you are not writing to your own people, I'm disturbed because of what that says about your relationship to the community you are in one way or another indebted to." Which isn't to say that one can't have it both ways, or to suggest that *Oscar Wao* isn't a book, as more than reviewer argued, "that might be read by the people its about – a by no means small achievement." (See "Fiction is the Poor Man's Cinema: An Interview with Junot Díaz," by Diógenes Céspedes and Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Callaloo* 23.3(2000): 892-907. And James, "Wonder Boy" Rev. of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. *Caribbean Review of Books* 15 (February 2008)

[10] As Anne Garland Mahler has described the rhetorical effect of Díaz's footnotes: "While the footnotes give the appearance of an academic text in which there is a separation between the content and the historical data that inform it, the footnotes are written in the voice of the narrator and serve to further integrate Dominican history into the fantastical fiction created by Diaz, collapsing the difference between historiographical and fictional registers by inextricably blending the two." See Anne Garland Mahler, "The Writer as Superhero: Fighting the Colonial Curse in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*" in *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 19.2(2010): 119-140.

[11] See "I am my own fuku" Junot Díaz interviewed by Giselle Rodriguez Cid, *The Caribbean Review of Books* 15 (February 2008). Therein, Díaz says: "[the epigraph was a toss-up between [Walcott] and the other great Caribbean titan, Pedro Mír, but so many people had already used Mír's incantatory lines, it would have felt like a re-tread."

[12] The line is from Walcott's Nobel lecture, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory" In larger context: "Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole…Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent." See Walcott (1993).

zafa: the *fukú*'s antidote, uttered whenever the Admiral's name is spoken (and by "my tío Miguel in the Bronx, whenever…the Yanks commit an error in the late innings"). The idea of *zafa*, we're told, may have been "bigger…in Macondo than in McOndo," but that doesn't mean some don't still employ it – and that this novel, in its way, may be a form of *zafa*: an antidote to history itself. Beyond the belief in writing's power embedded in this argument, what is also notable about this language of antidotes and spells, in the context of this novel, is how that language accords with the *particular* literary idiom – science fiction—that Díaz, early on, insists is uniquely applicable to describing the history his novel limns. As Yunior puts it his preface: "[Oscar] was a hardcore sci-fi and fantasy man, believed that that was the kind of world we were living in. He'd ask: what more sci-fi than Santo Domingo? What more fantasy than the Antilles?"[13]

The contention embedded in that query goes to the heart of this book's novelty—but also, it's important to note, isn't wholly new. For although Oscar's frames of analogic reference may be foreign to older readers unfamiliar with Middle Earth and the Fantastic Four, the thrust and content of his query—predicated on the conception of Caribbean ontology, and the modes of writing needed to represent it, as distinct—is one that goes back nearly to the start of something calling "Caribbean literature." To wit:

> Y es que, por la virginidad del paisaje, por la formación, por la ontología, por la presencia fáustica del indio y del negro, por la revelación que constituyó su reciente descubrimiento, por los fecundos mestizajes que propició, América está muy lejos de haber agotado su caudal de mitologías. ¿Pero qué es la historia de América toda sino una crónica de lo real maravilloso? [14]

6.3

For all the years accompanying the putative "Boom" in Latin American literature, Alejo Carpentier's 1948 essay on "Lo Maravilloso Real"—and its concluding query—have served as a kind of misleading ur-query for magical realism: "For what is the history of America, but a chronicle of the marvelous real?" In this part of the world, as Carpentier puts it, where "for the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black, for the revelation that constituted its recent discovery, for the fertile *mestizajes* it launched, America is very far from having exhausted its wealth of mythologies." Carpentier's essay, which first appeared as the preface to his novel of the Haitian Revolution, *The Kingdom of this World*, was predicated 1) on the Caribbean as a synecdoche for the Americas at large, and (2) based in a conception about what was *essentially* distinct about a part of the world where, say, a humble enslaved draughtsman in Sainte Domingue, inspired equally by a voodoo rites of his fellows and The Declaration of the Rights of Man, could lead the only successful slave revolt the world has ever known.

During the era of Latin America's literary ascendance led by Gabriel García-Marquez and Mario Vargas-Llosa, "Lo Maravilloso Real" was endlessly cited as the manifesto underlying such now-hackneyed tropes of magic realism as the years-long

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[13] Díaz (2007) 6.

[14] Alejo Carpentier, "Lo Real Maravilloso" orig. *Tientos y Diferencias* (Montevideo, UR: Arca, 1967)

sleeps, flying beauties, and miracle-wielding gypsies who populate *Cien Años de Soledad* (a book whose author and setting, its worth noting, is a product not of Andean Colombia, but the slave ports and banana fields of its Caribeño coast). Since that time, not a few younger writers have bewailed the fantasist expectations under which Latin American novelists, all of whom were now expected to ape Marquez's style, even during decades when the lived realities of brutal violence and surreal *dictaduras* might have made for a different kind of literature, at once more topically exigent and more surreal than anything the Boom's putative leaders, with their propensity for befriending dictators right-wing and left, could dream up.[15] In the Caribbean itself, the essentializing tendencies of Carpentier's "marvelous real" have attracted fair critique from thinkers questioning his tacit belief that European surrealists, say, will always suffer a paucity of vision because their perceptions grow from outside a continent where "magic" remains a part of every day life. (It was this belief that led Carpentier to reject out-of-hand André Masson's Martinique-inspired paintings, for example, while sanctifying the Afro-Cuban surrealism of Wilfredo Lam). Others have pointed out, more damningly still, how Carpentier's argument suffers from leaving intact actual inequalities, and oppressive conceptions of difference, as they were developed over centuries of colonial conquest.[16] As the Haitian philosopher Jacques Gourgue has put it: "Surrealism and the real marvelous would be intrinsically linked to poorly industrialized countries…[and so] justify hazy ideas and illogical actions that one would prefer to leave hidden behind centuries."[17]

The debate over magical realism has been a confused one from the start—not least since writers like Alberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez, editors of the notorious *McOndo* anthology (1996) who bewailed the formulaic magical-realist expectations placed on MFA students at the University of Iowa, failed to note how Carpentier had anticipated and seconded many of their contentions about formulaic fiction.[18] Given

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[15] See Francisco Goldman, "The Great Boláno", *The New York Review of Books* 19 July, 2007. As Marlon James put it in identifying Díaz with this new generation led by Bolaño: "In his own way, Díaz moves to the front ranks of new Latino novelists for whom the patron saint is the Chilean Roberto Bolaño. Writers who, like Bolaño, disavow magical realism largely because the sheer madness of their respective oppressive regimes was surreal enough. These are writers who distance themselves from the blind elitism of their forbears, calling out, explicitly or implicitly, novelists like Gabriel García Márquez for befriending dictators like Castro, and Vargas Llosa for rewriting the history of monsters so that they become heroes." See Marlon James's review of Díaz, "Wonder Boy," *The Caribbean Review of Books* 15 (February 2008)

[16] The point is Michael Richardson's. See his introduction to *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, Richardson, ed. Trans. Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 13.

[17] Gourgue, 'Du surréalisme au réalisme merveilleux', *Conjonction* 194 (April-June 1992): 7. As quoted by Richardson 13. Gourgue continues: "The 'irrationalities' that Europeans venerate among us have been combated by them to reach the present technical domination."

[18] The point here is Monica Hanna's. See Hanna 512. Carpentier: "Pero, a fuerza de querer suscitar lo maravilloso a todo trance, los taumaturgos se hacen burócratas. Invocando por medio de formulas consabidas que hacen de ciertas pinturas un monótono baratillo de relojes amelcochados, de maniquíes de costurera, de vagos monu- mentos fálicos, lo maravilloso se queda en paraguas o langosta o máquina de coser, o lo que sea, sobre una mesa de disección, en el interior de un cuarto triste, en un desierto de rocas. Pobreza imagi- nativa, decía Unamuno, es aprenderse códigos de memoria. ("De lo real" 117), Translation: "The result of willing the marvelous or any other trance is that the dream technicians become bureaucrats. By invoking traditional formulas, certain paintings are made into a monotonous junkyard of sugar-coated watches, seamstresses' mannequins, or vague phallic monuments: the marvelous is stuck in umbrellas or

longstanding disagreements and misconstruals of *what*, exactly, magic realism is, it is perhaps little wonder that one of the more striking aspects of *Oscar Wao*'s critical reception has been the disagreements among critics over whether the novel represents a rejection of magical realism, per se, or a brilliant new exemplar of the form.[19] Díaz may be an avowed partisan of "McOndo, not Macondo"—a member of the generation who grew up with a conception of history shaped by violent realities anything but magical in their cause or effect (and who face that history head-on in their work). But his novel bears more than a few key debts to the magical realist tradition. Beginning with its asking us, from the first, to ascribe, to the contours of the historical narrative to follow, some grandly metaphysical energy (the *fukú*). But even more notably, for my purposes here, in its insistence that there *is* something distinct in Caribbean ontology and history that demands a distinct mode of storytelling—or, at the least, suffuses all stories emanating from this part of the world where "the Nightmare Door" of New World history first cracked open.

This set of intertwined truths—along with what *distinguishes* Díaz's work from the magical realism of old—are laid starkly to bare in one scene from his novel. That scene finds Oscar and Lola's mother, Belí, clinging for life in a darkened sugarcane field after her doomed affair with a man we know as The Gangster (who also happens to be Trujillo's brother-in-law) comes to its inevitable end. The boots and billy-clubs of power leave Belí's skull "egg-shelled," her ribs broken, her body left to expire in the dark. "And now we arrive at the strangest part of our tale," our narrator informs us. "Whether what follows was a figment of Beli's wracked imagination or something else I cannot say," he says, before saying that as Beli lay there for dead, she was visited by a mysterious creature. Lying in the cane, there appears a kind of Mongoose with black pelt and leonine eyes. It murmurs repeatedly to Belí that she must move—that she must crawl toward the road if she is to survive, as we know she must, to give birth to the daughter and son whose story we're reading. And so, in the event, she does. At the creature's urging, she drags herself far enough toward the darkened highway that a band of passing *bachateros*, on their way home from a gig, pauses long enough to take pity on the beaten woman. Her life is saved when the band, resisting the prudent course under Trujillo's reign, to avoid meddling in dark affairs, loads her in their lorry, and takes her to hospital in town.[20]

In this appearance of a magical mongoose—who also appears (a la the cyclical apparitions of *Cien Anos de Soledad*) to other of this novel's characters, at other points in time—we have what seems a prototypical moment of magical realism. What marks this

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lobsters or sewing machines or whatever on a dissecting table, in a sad room, on a rocky desert. Poverty of the imagination, Unamuno said, is learning codes by heart."

[19] See e.g. Hanna, who writes of Wao, that "throughout the text, magical realism is presented as a Caribbean mode of understanding and representing history," as opposed to James, who argues that Díaz "disavows magical realism largely because the sheer madness of their respective oppressive regimes was surreal enough."

[20] The Mongoose figure is footnoted as follows: "The Mongoose, one of the great unstable particles of the Universe and also one of its greatest travelers. Accompanied humanity out of Africa and after a long furlough in India jumped ship to the other India, a.k.a. the Caribbean. Since its earliest appearance in the written record – 675 B.C.E., in a nameless scribe's letter to Ashurbanipal's father, Esarhaddon – the Mongoose has proven itself to be an enemy of kingly chariots, chains, and hierarchies. Believed to be an ally of Man. Many Watchers suspect that the Mongoose arrived to our world from another, but to date no evidence of such a migration has been unearthed."

moment as self-consciously (post)modern, though, are two. First is the ironical distancing that Yunior employs, to insist that the story, as it were, is unclear—he doesn't know what happens. The second is more complex, since it both identifies with a key trope of magical realism and tweaks it. Our narrator may not know what happened—but he acknowledges, too, that one can never totally discount such tales in this part of the world.

> Beyond the Source Wall few have ventured. But no matter what the truth, remember: Dominicans are Caribbean and therefore have an extraordinary tolerance for extreme phenomona. How else could we have survived what we have survived?

The argument: Dominicans, at the end of the day, are *Caribbean*. And that that's all we need to know, really, about what informs their tolerance for "extreme phenomena." Díaz, like Carpentier and Marquez before him, may credit the importance of imagination in understanding, and giving language to, the surreal aspects of American history. Part of what marks Díaz as distinct from his forebears, though, is his tacit insistence that those imaginative tropes are derived not from some long ago myths, or anything essential in the Americas' soil, but from the extreme history of violence and the very real modes of coping, "irrational" and otherwise, to which people have turned to survive it. This is a kind of magic (or sci-fi, if you will) that grows out of the very real history of violence (or *surreal* history of violence, if you like) with which all Caribbean families have contended across recent decades. Implicit to this argument are an engagement (unlike, as many have accused others have accused Marquez) with what Díaz has called "the Americas hidden history of apocalypse"—and an insistence, too, that that history can be most effectively figured in the idiom that our narrator subtly references in his admitting, about the tale of the mongoose, that he doesn't know exactly what did happen: "Even your Watcher has his silences, his paginas en blanco."

The reference is to the same comic book, *The Fantastic Four*, from which Díaz takes his book's first epigraph: "of what import are brief, nameless lives to…*Galactus*?" And here, as at the book's outset, Díaz's use of *The Fantastic Four* underscores the ways in which Yunior has chosen to frame this story along the lines of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's comic, and to model himself, in turn, on the comic's Watcher, who comes to earth to observe—and sometimes shape—the actions of the four protagonists. (As Díaz himself has noted, Oscar Wao's four main characters—Oscar, Lola, Belícia, and Abelard—are loosely modeled on the Four.)[21] Alongside all that's conveyed by Díaz choosing to make a comic-book one of this novel's key inter-texts, Yunior's choice of Kirby and Lee's book—a work, as Monica Hanna has noted, about "freaks" and outcasts—"emphasizes the focus of his historiography on antiheroes, outsiders, and the forcibly marginalized."[22] All of this, of course, is invisible to readers ignorant of *The Fantastic Four*, as may be the other references, buried elsewhere in the text, to the *X*-

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[21] This observation comes not from a critic but Díaz himself. See Monica Hanna, "Reassembling the Fragments: Battling Historiograpies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*" *Callaloo* 33. 2 (2010): 498-520. 515.

[22] Hanna 515.

Men; Tolkien; and *The Watchmen*—a book which Oscar takes with him on his final journey, notable for its pregnant closing question: "Who watches the watchmen?"[23]

Díaz's use of comics, like his footnotes, aren't new to contemporary fiction. Indeed some of the best-known figures in American fiction—especially forty-something "white boys" (as Díaz might term them) like Michael Chabon and Jonathan Lethem, who have used comic-book metaphors of superpowers and invisibility to describe the hopes and frustrations of male adolescence. Part of what's novel about Díaz's own use of comic books, though, is his insistence on their metaphors' unique ability to speak to kids in the inner city (especially in a *machista* Domo-culture where womanizing and brawn are the sole marks of manhood).[24] "You really want to know what being an X-man feels like?," he writes, "Just be a smart bookish boy of color in contemporary U.S. Ghetto."[25] Yunior, explaining how Oscar got his name, describes how, dressing up as Dr. No for Halloween one year, had born a distinct resemblance, in the eyes of his collegiate peers, that famed fat *maricon*, Oscar Wilde. The latter's surname, as such things go in college dorms, was then nonsensically shortened to "Wao." ("And the tragedy?" Yunior relates: "He started *answering* to it.")[26] Not content merely to narrate his roommate's troubles, Yunior also can't resist intervening when, for example, Oscar finally finds a popular girl in his dorm with whom to spend some time, and Yunior—currently dating three women himself—rather than being happy for his boy, does his best to sabotage a relationship he begrudges his roommate. ("A heart like mine, which never got enough affection growing up, is terrible above all things.")[27]

As certain feminist critics have noted, the largely male set of desires and "optics" endemic to Díaz's fiction, can have a way of echoing, in their particular anxieties and concerns, the very machista mores such critics would like to see Díaz more pointedly deconstruct.[28] The point is surely fair. Yet also of the same limited critical use, I would argue, as endless debates over whether hip-hop lyrics, in describing violent settings and acts, reinforce those behaviors or question them. And in this respect, nerd-boy culture—with its dreams of bulging muscles and voluptuous super-ettes; super-powers and invisibility; the ability to pay any bully—speak in particularly potent ways to the uncertain masculinity of adolescence—and also, as Oscar's tale shows, in particularly potent ways to the cult of reclaiming manhood that has been endemic to Third World nationalisms from Fanon to Malcolm X ("either I'm no one, or I'm a nation"). In any case: the test of fiction—and hip-hop songs—is whether its characters' enact stories

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[24] Diaz has also spoken of how comic-book sci fi also speaks to – and derives from – "race-thinking" as well: "Without shit like race and racism, without our lived experience as people of color, the metaphor that drives, say, the X-Men would not exist! Mutants are a metaphor (among other things) for race, and that's one of the reasons that mutants are so popular in the Marvel Universe and in the Real. I have no problem re-looting the metaphor of the X-Men because I know it's my silenced experience, my erased condition that's the secret fuel that powers this particular fucking fantasy. So if I'm powering the ship, at a lower frequency, I'm going to have a say in how it's used and in what ports of call it stops." See Danticat, *BOMB* (2007).

[25] Diaz (2007) 22.

[26] Díaz (2007) 180.

[27] Díaz (2007) 185.

[28] For a feminist critique of how Díaz's early work, in the critics eyes, reify traditional gender roles and violence, see Lucía Suárez, *The Tears of Hispaniola* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006). And especially Chapter 3, "Exposing Invisibility: *Drown*" 91-119.

complexly true to their flaws, believable in their foibles and successes both. Oscar is, it must be said (as are his sister Lola and mother Beli, with her tragically familiar tale of attaching emotionally to machista men whose machismo dictates that they treat her cruelly).

Beyond such concerns, the point I'd like to make here, about the larger place Díaz proposes for comics and sci-fi in approaching *Caribbean* history—is that he himself makes plain the link between "Caribbean discourse," and what we might call "sci-fi discourse." One key way he does so, as noted above, is by pairing his epigraphs from Walcott and *The Fantastic Four*: "Of what import are brief, nameless lives…to *Galactus*?"[29] There as elsewhere in the book, the allusion may be obscure for those unfamiliar with 1960s comics. But the world it figures—of a world shot through with unequal power relations; of malevolent unseen forces; of countless lives, begun in what was once called the Third World, treated as disposable by the powers that be – shouldn't be. And it is based on this truth that he makes the link not just implicit but plain. This occurs some ways through the novel, when our narrator next mentions *Fantastic Four* in a footnote: "It's hard as a Third Worlder," he writes, "not to feel a certain amount of affinity for Uatu the Watcher; he resides in the hidden Blue Area of the Moon and we DarkZoners reside (to quote Glissant) on "*la face cachée de la Terre*" (Earth's hidden face)."[30]

Tossed off with a one-word reference in this footnote, and not likely to be caught by casual readers, this nod to Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* resounds as a loud signal for readers steeped in a conversation about Caribbean literature within which Glissant's voice, for decades up to his death last year, has long been one of the most prominent. As his collegial commentator Judith Graves Miller, for one, put it while he was still with us: "[Glissant is] the most important theoretician from the Caribbean writing today…No one writes of Antillean literature; no one *writes* Antillean literature without reference to Édouard Glissant."[31] Whether that perhaps hyperbolic praise is strictly true, Miller's words point toward the acknowledged existence of something called Antillean literature—and to the truth that Díaz, in embracing that tradition's most prominent voice in reference to a comic book, is engaging with, and writing from a position within, that conversation, whose core aims and anxieties are perhaps distilled in Glissant's own choice of epigraph, in his influential *Poetics of Relation*, from two of his anglophone colleagues from the region: "Sea is History" (Walcott); and "The Unity is Submarine" (Brathwaite).[32]

Without pausing overlong on Glissant's complex body of thought, it is enough here to note that his thought has long been defined by an insistence in conceiving of the Caribbean, and Caribbean literature, as a multi-lingual totality—and by an insistence, too, that that Caribbean literature may occupy singular location and power in the cultural

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[29] The lines are from Stan Lee & Jack Kirby, *Fantastic Four* 1.49 (April 1966).
[30] Diaz 92.
[31] Graves Miller, back-jacket copy for Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000)
[32] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, front matter. On Brathwaite's relation with Glissant more broadly, see Kelly Baker Josephs, "Versions of X/Self: Kamau Brathwaite's Caribbean Discourse" *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 1.1(2003). Web only.

history of the world.[33] Equally crucial is the fact that Glissant's conception of *antillanité*—Caribbean-ness—is based not in something essential or given. The thin threads "woven together from one side of the Caribbean to the other" may be glimpsed, for those looking, in "cultures derived from plantations; . . . social pyramids with an African or East Indian base and a European peak; languages of compromise; general cultural phenomenon of creolization; pattern of encounter and synthesis; persistence of the African presence; cultivation of sugarcane, corn, and pepper; site where rhythms are combined; peoples formed by orality."[34] But these commonalities, he is careful to emphasize, are "not inscribed in consciousness."[35] The existence of *antillanité*, as both literature and political project "to [actualize] a collective Caribbean identity," exists only in the telling – in the ways that writers like Brathwaite, committed to building some sort of unity from the mass of fragments, articulate that unity in literature.

In considering how to place Díaz within "Caribbean discourse," the case of Brathwaite is instructive, since his work is marked, on the one hand, by a concern with finding a Caribbean unity, and, on the other, by his commitment to "nation language"—lived, oral speech—as a means of forging authentic Caribbean literature, transcendent of history's violence.[36] "Nation language," as its name implies, may be a theory closely tied to the idea of the nation—a vision of forging a literature not in colonial verbiage and pentameter, but from the mash of creolized tongues and experience that produced, on each of those islands, unique oral languages of their own. With his theory's basing in the Anglophone Caribbean (to say nothing of poetry rather than prose), the applicability of Brathwaite's "nation language" conceit to Díaz's novel may be a stretch. And indeed his novel's language, a kind of Spanish-inflected immigrant's English, mirrors not the quotidian tongue of Santo Domingo's streets, but the hybrid language evolved by its emigrants. And yet: one must certainly credit that Díaz's work, with its analogous attempts to produce a literature rendered in what Glissant called "the language in use 'at present,'" is also consciously aimed to engage with many of the questions at the heart of discussions over Caribbean literature for a very long time.

Quite beyond the interesting question of how his book has been received at home in the Dominican Republic, the key test of Oscar Wao as Caribbean text perhaps lies in examining its reception by critics and readers from other of the region's islands and diasporas. And that reception, by and large has been rapturous. The Jamaican novelist Marlon James's rave in the *Caribbean Review of Books* (an outlet published in Port of Spain) stands to underscore the point. "Oscar Wao," he begins, "is more than simply an innovative work or a groundbreaking one":

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[33] See Glissant (2000) 33. Glissant writes: "The Caribbean, as far as I'm concerned, may be held up as one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly, one of the explosive regions where it seems to be gathering strength."

[34] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999) 221.

[35] Glissant (1999) 221.

[36] For Brathwaite's articulation of "nation language," see Brathwaite, tk. About Brathwaite's coinage, and poetics, Glissant writes: "[I]t is the language of enslaved persons. For him, nation language is a strategy: the slave is forced to use a certain kind of language in order to disguise himself, to disguise his personality and to retain his culture. And he defines that language as 'forced poetics' because it is a kind of prison language" (Glissant, 16).

> It is, in my opinion anyway, where Caribbean fiction must go. This is the type of book that will make people want to write books. A work that divorces itself from colonial and postcolonial reference points and admits that we're far more influenced by hip-hop, Starsky and Hutch, reality TV, Jay-Z, the card game Magic: The Gathering, Spanglish, dancehall, and reggaeton than we care to admit. In this regard, with its sampling, borrowing, stealing, and co-opting, *Oscar Wao* may be the first true hip-hop novel.[37]

Bracketing for a moment James's elision, here, of the descriptors "Caribbean" and "hip-hop" (even though there are may be interesting reasons for that claim, in hip-hop's Jamaican roots), it is telling enough, here, that the praise he lavished on Díaz's book is framed in terms of its merits as "Caribbean novel". Narrated by a writer, driven by an old-school concern with writing's moral weight ("John Gardner would be proud," he notes), this is a book tasked with no less an aim than illuminating, if not mending, the Caribbean's untold history of violence. Whether or not Oscar's quest, like the novel bearing his name, is ultimately successful is left unanswered at this novel's end. The *fukú* works its way inside those it harms; it prompts Lola to says sadly to her machista man Yunior, on one of their last nights as *novios*, that "ten million Trujillos is all we are"; and it brings an idealistic kid, like Oscar, to his end in a canefield just like the one where his mother was beaten near to death.[38] But surely, it seems to ask and say, there's something heroic in speaking that violence's name, tracing its contours—and understanding how, for example, a dictator "aspired to become an architect of history, and through a horrifying ritual of silence and blood, machete and perejil, darkness and denial, inflicted a true border on the two countries, a border that exists beyond maps, a border that is carved directly into the histories and imaginaries of a people."[39]

6.4

What "people" is Díaz referring to here? Dominicans, we might suspect. But the "people" to whom he refers, given the line about "machete and perejil," may well be the larger collectivity of Dominicans and Haitians together; the Caribbean "people" whose being torn asunder by is the selfsame topic of a writer who Díaz has called a "quintessential American writer, tackling the new world's hidden history of apocalypse and how one survives it".[40] Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* is set hard by the Haitian border and in the shadow of Pico Trujillo, the highest peak in Hispaniola just re-named for the dire dictator whose diabolic deeds drive its narrative. The novel tells of how Trujillo, in 1937, went about forging his nation in contra-distinction to the *negros* who cared for its babies and cut its can, egging on peasant-militias to kill its immigrant workers with machetes. Tracing this tale through the intimate lives of a small coterie of

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[37] James, "Wonder Boy."
[38] Díaz (2007) 324.
[39] Díaz (2007) 225.
[40] Díaz, as quoted by Maya Jaggi in her Danticat profile, "Island Memories." *The Guardian* 20 November, 2004.

characters—a Haitian house-girl, Amabelle, and her cane-cutting lover; the Dominican family for whom Amabelle works; their parish *padre* and neighbors—Danticat's narrative unfolds in the ominously named village of Alegría. This is a place where Haitians have long lived, but where, as one character puts it, "to them we are always foreigners, even if our grandmemes' grandmemes were born in the country." In *The Farming of Bones*, enough die beneath *Trujillistas*' machete blades that the river the flows by Alegría, at novel's end, runs red.

Shining light on a horrific historical event whose occurrence was so successfully shrouded in silence by Trujillo (along with Haiti's complicit leadership at the time, and both government's US backers) that estimates of the death toll, to this day, range from several hundred to 35,000, Danticat's book gives vivid life to desperately poor laborers who "communicate with the simple flutter of a smile all those things we could not say because there was the cane to curse, the harvest to dread, the future to fear."[41] Many of the Haitian laborers here are new arrivals: Amabelle's man Sebastien, we are told, has come because ["his] father was killed in the great hurricane that struck the whole island—both Haiti and the Dominican Republic—in 1930."[42] But many others are "non-vwayajè Haitians": people, as one would expect in the borderlands of this not-terribly large island, who have lived and inter-married for generations in Hispaniola's central mountains. (Naturally enough, Trujillo himself had a Haitian grandmother.) Like all the work of this writer from a nation whose people, as the journalist Mark Danner has put it, have the distinction of "walking in history,"[43] *The Farming of Bones* is a novel that makes plain its links between Haiti's revolutionary past, and the novel's present. "When Dessalines, Toussaint, Henry…walked the earth, we were a strong nation," laments one Haitian character during a town meeting. "Those men would go to war to defend our blood. In all this, our so-called president says nothing, our Papa Vincent—the poet—he says nothing at all to this affront to the children of Dessalines, the children of Toussaint, the children of Henry; he shouts nothing across this river of blood."[44]

If all this sounds a bit pat, that's because it is. *The Farming of Bones* isn't the best book in Danticat's oeuvre. It is, however, a novel which, in engaging a forgotten episode in Caribbean history, sought, like Díaz's work, to make an intervention in the Hispaniola's historiography. To striking effect, one might add, since the book set off a storm of cordial back-and forth correspondence between Danticat and the Dominican historian Bernardo Vega.[45] Vega, who first wrote Danticat to thank her for citing his work in her acknowledgements to the novel, took issue with her representation of Dominican

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[41] Danticat, *The Farming of Bones* (New York: Vintage, 1998) 131

[42] This quote seems to emphasize intrinsic links between Haiti and the Dominican Republic (and ins such a way as to echoing Michaelle Ascension's argument that shared vulnerability to hurricanes is one of the Caribbean nations' key common attributes), continues: "He lost his father and almost everything else. This is why he left Haiti. This is why I have him. A sweep of winds that destroyed so many houses and killed so many people brought him to me." Danticat (1998) 25.

[43] See Mark Danner, "To Heal History, Look to History, Not Nature," *The New York Times* 21 January, 2010.

[44] Danticat (1998) 212. Another fact bearing on Vincent's "betrayal" of his people, although not mentioned in the novel, is that the presence of Haitian cane-cutters in the Dominican Republic was, in many cases, the result of agreements he brokered with Trujillo to send cheap labor across the border. See Milo Rigaud, *Stenío Vincent, révélé par la justice et par l'opinion publique* (Port-au-Prince: H. Deschamps, 1957), as discussed by Saurez 37.

[45] On Danticat and Vega's correspondence, and contrasting points of view, see Suarez 13-17.

civilians as complicit in massacres which were prosecuted by Trujillo's military on the orders of their commander-in-chief. The particular scenes to which Vega objected, in writing that Dominicans in the border-regions were terrified during the massacres, and hid from the military, were Danticat's descriptions of Dominican townspeople spitting on Haitians and forcing them to say the word *perejil*. Danticat responded to Vega that she makes sure to emphasize, in all her public talks, that the massacres resulted from orders issued by Trujillo to his army—but she also insisted that much of the victims' testimony she'd read made it impossible, as well, for her to believe that no friends and relatives of soldiers' took part in the killings—as did the fact that the only time she'd seen her great-uncle cry was when he heard Dominicans use the word *perejil* to slander a dark-skinned candidate for their country's presidency. (Her great-uncle, Danticat explains, was a cane cutter forced to undergo the perejil ritual by his neighbors in the border-region.) Danticat's response to the historian, beyond evincing the swirl of controversy that still surrounds this hazy event, also serves to exemplify the larger aims of a writer whose fiction, drawn of an approach to history that is never un-tied from personal and family memoy, has long been devoted to making plain how "our past is more akin to flesh than air."[46]

Born in Port-Au-Prince a few months after/before Díaz on the other end of the island, Danticat has had a career distinguished by a similar kind of early success—and more remarkably still, by the aplomb with which she survived it. Having arrived to Brooklyn at age 12 with but a few words of English, Danticat's debut novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory,* was published scarcely a decade later. With that novel landing on Oprah's book club, Danticat—whose second work, *Krik Krak*, featured its photogenic young author on the cover—appeared in danger, for a time, of being pigeon-holed as a kind of rough Haitian equivalent to Alice Walker. Fortunate for her that she possessed none of the writer's block that afflicted a Díaz, nor, evidently, a desire to hue to the Oprah-friendly pieties of her elders, she went on to grow in accomplishment with each book, first with *The Farming of Bones* (1998), and then, in 2004, *The Dew Breaker*, an ingeniously structured story-collection-cum-novel that takes place not in the Haiti of her girlhood or ancestors, but in the immigrant precincts of Flatbush and Queens where she reached young adulthood. The *Dew Breaker*, in ways strikingly similar to Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, endeavors not merely to draw connections between island traumas and American lives, but to show how violence past continues to shape the present. More than implicitly pointing to the longue durée of history that's impoverished Haitians and made them leave their island, but showing how the violence of a contemporary dictatorship is by no means escaped by that migration, a point it makes by tracing the life of its eponymous protagonist—a "dewbreaker," or hitman, in the Duvalier regime—through the lens of various characters come into contact with him by varying degrees: the daughter whom he's always told his facial scar came from being imprisoned in one of Duvalier's jails (rather than guarding its inmates); the young reporter who, interviewing a Haitian bridal seamstress in her home out by JFK airport, learns of how this woman, who tells of a tormentor from her past moving in down the block, is a person whose "tremendous agonies [fill] every blank space in their lives"; a customer in the Dew breaker's barbershop who, decades after their first encounter, recognizes him as one of those

[46] Danticat (1998) 281.

assassins known for knocking on their quarries' doors with the dawn, arriving at dawn to take those their dictator needed dead.[47] Here as in Díaz, the aim of shedding bare "the Caribbean's hidden history of violence," and how that history is lived and re-lived by her characters, is Danticat's chief aim. The personal is political, goes the old saw. The personal is historical, too, insist her books—perhaps none more potently, as I'd like to suggest here, as in her two recent works of nonfiction.

6.5

"My family's story isn't the *Dew Breaker*," Danticat has said, "and thank God." Thank god, indeed—even as she insisted, in the same piece, that they could have been: not much space, in Duvalier's Haiti, between the roles of victim and executioner. In Danticat's 2007 "family memoir," *Brother, I'm Dying*, Danticat fleshed in aspects of her own story long gestured at in interviews, and glimpsed in her fiction, but never laid bare in writing. She writes of how, at age 2, her parents left her for a new life in America, leaving her in the care of her uncle Joseph and *tante* Marie; of being told at age 12, by an unfeeling officer at Haiti's US Embassy, that she and her little brother were going to be allowed to join their parents in America "for better or worse"; of boarding a plane with her brother who put a pat of melting foil-stuck butter in his pocket; of moving to settle in a cold land she didn't know, that defining passage she has compared to the flight of Assotto Saint, the Haitian American poet and performance-artist, who, reunited with his mother at 14, after 10 years of separation: "i wanted to write a happy care-free poem / for my childhood / lost too fast…. / somewhere in the air / between port-au-prince & new york city."[48]

Like many novelists' memoirs, *Brother* can be read as a book that reveals the source-material for much of Danticat's fiction—from the grandmother with whom she shared a bedroom with in her uncle's house, whose stories became the basis for *Krik Krak!*; to relating how, as a teenager in Flatbush, riding in the passenger seat of the livery cab her dad drove for 14 hours each day to make a living, she discovered, in the same Brooklyn Library where Paule Marshall determined to become a writer, the "Livres Haitiennes" section that convinced her to break her silence forever. Unlike the kind of valedictory epitaph common from older writers', though, Danticat's book is not a memoir occasioned by an author's urge to reflect on her own experience in light of literature. It is, rather, an urgent tale precipitated by a trauma of recent vintage.

That event is the death of her Uncle Joseph in US custody, a victim, when fleeing violence in homeland, of paranoid policies in the wake of 9/11. Rendered more piquant by the truth that Joseph's death corresponds, in the life of Danticat's family, with her first pregnancy, and her father nearing his own death from pulmonary disease—perhaps a result from those years in the livery cab—the recounting of her uncle's death and its meanings, Danticat makes clear from the start, necessitates a larger plumbing of a family-history that is also her nation's. "I am writing this because they can't," she writes at the start of her tale. She then backs up to the 1950s, to tell of how her father, proprietor of a

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[47] Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* (New york: Vintage, 2004) 137.
[48] Assotto Saint as quoted by Danticat in *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

shoe-shop in Port-au-Prince where Duvalier's Tonton Macoutes often walked in and left with whatever they wished, taking whatever they wished, met her mother when she walked into the same story; and of how, after having Edwidge and her little brother Fred, her father and mother determined they couldn't make a living in Haiti, and thus must emigrate to work in America, they leave their young daughter and son with Mira's brother Joseph, pastor of a church in the capital's poor suburb of Bel Air. Like Mira a backer of the charismatic oppositon-leader Daniel Fignole, in the 1950s, Joseph becomes, though his church, a key figure in his neighborhood, staging such quiet acts of resistance as reading plays by Camus and Genet in its backyard. Joseph and his little family may escape attention, but their lives, like all Haitians in those decades, were touched deeply by Duvalier's violence. When the Edwidge's elder cousin Marie Micheline ("I adored her since she was kind and pretty") becomes scandalously pregnant with a neighborhood boy, she is rescued from shame by a man who, suspiciously okay with wedding a young woman pregnant by another man, turns out to be pathologic member of Duvalier's Tonton Macoutes. Acting with the impunity accorded such men, he moves his young bride to a remote mountain village where he imprisons her in a cabin and subjects her to horrid abuse. It is, in Danticat's uncle's life, one of the casual acts of heroism we come to expect from him that he goes, under risk of death, to rescue Marie Micheline, carrying her down the mountain by dark to give her new life and become the "second father" he also ways, in more quotidian ways, for young Edwidge and her brother.

That Joseph and his family survive not the Duvaliers' reign of terror, and then the throat cancer that left him to speak using a voicebox, is but one cruel irony of a personal history that reaches its climax in tk 2004, a time, like so many in Haiti's history, wracked by political unrest (this particular bout caused by conflicts over returning to power of Bertrand Aristide). When a crazed gang of youth ransack his church, and Joseph is driven from his home, and homeland, with just his briefcase and the clothes on his back. Arriving to Miami and requesting temporary asylum in a country he's visited countless times to see his family or for health issues, he is denied a visa with no explanation and sent, with the nephew accompanying him, to Krome: the special Federal detention facility, in South Florida, earmarked especially for "processing" Haitians. Recounting how she herself, living in a home just miles from the airport, was repeatedly denied information, by the INS, about what had befallen the uncle who didn't arrive at her house as scheduled, she alternates, in her account, between a tone of intimate despair and one ccool-ly forensic; she reconstructs, with the help of INS records with a FOIA-request, what befell Joseph during a nightmarish few days which saw him not only locked up, but then denied proper medical care when he suffers a seizure shortly after entering Krome, his body convulsing as he vomited through the tracheotomy hole in his neck. Reflecting on what she saw when she finally does gain entry to Krome, Danticat writes of how the tableau on display there—with rows of black bodies, some in shackles, being poked and prodded, their teeth inspected by doctors—can't help but resonate (how could they not?) with a deeper history. Her own "processing" of what befell her uncle, in Danticat's book, involves thinking about the larger histories that forged the conditions of possibility for its happening—along with new Department of Homeland Security regulations which make even its aftermath a horrid ordeal. For Danticat, the issue of how and whether his body can be repatriated to his homeland in a plane's cargo-hold—it can't: he is buried next to his brother in Queens—prompts in her a reference to Garcia Márquez. "A person does

not belong to a place," the Colonel says to his family, "until someone is dead under the ground."[49]

A "topical" memoir pointing up not a few collateral effects of the War on Terror, *Brother I'm Dying* is also a book that insists on examining Haitians' current predicament in the light of the larger imperial history of what José Martí termed the "continent's fair-skinned nation". In this Caribbean tale, like every one, history is never far from the surface. More specifically, though, it is also a book that insists on approaching the contemporary Caribbean, a region forged, from the start, by imperial endeavor, as ground-zero for the contemporary empire which, as Junot Díaz put it, made Hispaniola "Iraq before Iraq was Iraq"—and whose current flexing of imperial might, now, was prompted by a pair of planes, not unlike the thousands that carried Haitians and Dominicans to New York, smashing violently into those two towers in lower Manhattan.

6.6

"My favorite flights depart late in the afternoon or early in the evening," writes Danticat in a memorable piece from her exemplary 2010 essay-collection, *Create Dangerously*. From the time of her first flight, from Haiti to a new life in America, as Danticat writes, her main experience of planes had been for the three-or-three yearly trips home to see her family. Now, as a successful author, she has had to conquer her flyer's unease, to embark on book-tours that often find her on a plane each day for two and three weeks on end. But increased frequency or no, planes still evoke memories—of melted butter in her brother's pocket, of her uncle's death, of her own journey to America. Such thoughts are especially present, as she writes, on those planes that leave near dusk:

> While on those flights, I always imagine what the plane must look like to a very small child from the ground, a silvered speck racing across a flaming orange sky, nurturing the child's own dreams of escape, like they once did Assoto Saint's and countless others.[50]

Emigrating by plane travel, as Danticat has said, a la Díaz, "[resembles] space travel in the sense that you leave one completely different world, get in a steel machine that flies and suddenly you're a resident of a vastly different planet." The prevalence of airplanes in the social worlds and imaginations of people on islands where every family history includes plane-flights like the one Belícia Cabral flying over Nueva York, or little tk Danticat melting the butter in his pocket. If the canoe and then the caravel defined much the first centuries of the Caribbean's human history, to paraphrase B.W. Higman, now, I would argue, the guiding metaphor might be the jetliner[51]: the technology that affords each of the two unsatisfactory means by which these islands ex-peasants have attempted, in the wake of King Sugar, to survive: the tools of both tourists entering, and, as key, ceaseless out-migration to First World cities.

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[49] García Marquez as quoted by Danticat (2010) 17.
[50] Danticat (2010) 118.
[51] See B.W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

All of these resonances are present in Danticat's essay "Flying Home"—but that essay, like *Brother, I'm Dying*, is also a piece that in certain ways is occasioned by, and revolves around, the aftermath of 9/11. That particular day's flight found Danticat returning to New York from a book tour in Japan. Falling asleep after arriving to her home from the airport in the early morning, she is perplexed, when she wakes for a moment to watch her TV, that its only "snow" she sees. When she is awoken a second time by an urgent phone call from her father, telling her that the towers have been destroyed, she realizes that that snow was a result of the TV transmitter atop one of them being felled in the attacks. Danticat's book about "the immigrant artist at work"—a book nominally addressed to that age-old PEN question: what is the writer's role?—it becomes clear through its course, is a book about how one write about a series of traumatic events in the writer's hemisphere and world: Columbus' arrival to the New World; the attacks on 9/11; the Haitian Revolution; the earthquake that laid Haiti low months before this book appeared.

"Create dangerously, for people who read dangerously," she writes.

> This is what I've always thought it meant to be a writer. Writing, knowing in part that no matter how trivial your words may seem, someone may risk his or her life to record them. Coming from where I come from…that is what I've always seen as the unifying principle among all writers.

Any kind of literature, of course, may fit this criterion (Danticat quotes Osip Mandelstam: "Only in Russia is poetry respected – it gets people killed.")[52] But the interpretation of "create dangerously" on which she settles comes from Camus, who suggests that writing is "a revolt against silence—a revolt against her own silence, in Danticat's case, as a soft-spoken immigrant girl in Brooklyn; and, later on, revolt against her people's silence about violence they'd lived. This, she explains, is why she wrote *The Dew Breaker*, and why, too, she chose from that book an epigraph from Mandelstam:

> May be this is the beginning of madness…
> Forgive me for what I am saying.
> Read it…quietly, quietly.

Writing of her own formative experience as a reader—the experiences, that is, that made her become a writer—Danticat recalls discovering Jacque Stephen Alexis, the Haitian physician-writer "who wrote such beautiful prose that the first time I read his description of freshly baked bread, I raised the book closer to my nose to sniff it."[53] She then describes how Alexis, trying to return to Haiti from exile in 1961, was imprisoned and murdered as a suspected plotter against Duvalier. Turning again to Camus, she writes that promisingly of his view that "a person's creative work is nothing less than a slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three images in whose presence his or heart first opened."[54] For Danticat, one such image is the one she recounts at her book's start, from the era of Alexis's killing, of two young men, members of the

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[52] Danticat (2010) 11.
[53] Danticat (2010) 13.
[54] Camus as quoted by Danticat (2010) 18.

exile group of young dissidents to Duvalier, called Jeune Haiti, whose execution by the dictator's firing squad, in 1964, was captured on a film she's watched again and again.

The presence of all this in Danticat's work, fiction and non-, is clear enough. What, though, does it all have to do with the "immigrant artist" in general? Does the category even matter? In *Create Dangerously*, she anticipates the query. Here she is in America, writing in her second language. But who, after all, isn't an immigrant in our global and globalizing world? "Even without globalization," she writes, "the writer becomes a loyal citizen of the country of his readers." She quotes approvingly from her friend Dany Leferriere, a fellow Haitian novelist in exile, who published a novel called Je suis un écrivain *I Am a Japanese Writer*. "I am surprised," he wrote there,

> how much attention is paid to writer's origins…I repatriated, without giving it a second thought, all the writers I read as a young man. Flaubert, Goethe, Whitman, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Cervantes, Kipling, Senghor, Césaire, Roumain, Amado, Diderot, they all lived in the same village I did. Otherwise, what were they doing in my room? When, years later I myself became a writer and was asked, "Are you a Haitian writer, a Caribbean writer or a Francophone writer?" I would always answer that I took the nationality of my reader, which means that when a Japanese reader reads my books, I immediately become a Japanese writer.[55]

All of this though, too, can be said of all writers too. And yet, and yet – *is* there something distinct about the ways in which the Caribbean writer, hyper-conscious, always, of an "outside," seeks to address that outside and connect with its readers? Is there a literary analogue to what Belafonte described about his own work: "I always felt universal, being from the Caribbean"? Danticat doesn't answer to this question isn't absolute, even as she notes that "the nomad or immigrant who learns something rightly must always ponder travel and movement, just as the grief-stricken must inevitably ponder death."[56] Reading as much, one imagines that being from Haiti, say, one can't not ponder the traumas of history; of its Revolution; and the relationship of the land of her home to the land (and region) of her birth.

Writing on the bicentennial of its triumph, she approaches the Haitian Revolution's relationship with America by noting how closely the words of Toussaint (obliquely quoted in *The Farming of Bones*) resemble those spoken by Jefferson a few years before. "In overthrowing me," said L'Ouverture when he was captured by the French, "they have only felled the tree of Negro liberty… It will shoot up again, for it is deeply rooted and its roots are many." The words closely resembles Jefferson's dictum that "the tree of liberty needs to be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants"—and call to mind, for her, the United States' failure to respect "Negro liberty," for much the first century of Haiti's existence.[57] Noting that original sin as crucial to Haiti's isolation, economic and otherwise, in the wider world, she also notes that "in *The Kingdom of this World*, …Alejo Carpentier allows us to consider the

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[55] Laferriére as quoted by Danticat (2010) 15. The idea expressed her echoes Roland Barthes' argument that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination."
[56] Danticat (2010) 16.
[57] See Danticat (2010) 97.

possibility, with which his own Cuba would later grapple, that a revolution that some consider visionary might appear to others to have failed."[58] The recourse here to Carpentier isn't innocent, as Danticat reminds us that it was during a visit to Haiti—and a visit, moreover, that prompted memories of its Revolution—that caused him to elaborate his theory of the marvelous real. "I was treading earth where thousands of men eager for liberty believed," he wrote in 1948. "I entered the Laferriere citadel, a structure without architechtonic antecedents….I breathed the atmosphere created by Henri Christophe, monarch of incredible undertakings… With each step I found the marvelous real." He continues, describing this strange amalgam—of glorious questing for liberty, with the presence of Africa on American soil—of "the machete suddenly buried itself in the belly of a black pig, which spewed forth guts and lungs in three squeals," she quotes him, describing the famed rite that turned these men into revolutionaries, through the medium of Africa:

> Then, called by the name of their masters, for they had no other, the delegates came forward one by one to smear their lips with the foaming blood of the pig, caught in a wooden bowl….The general stuff of the insurrection had been named…And in view of the fact that a proclamation had to be drawn up and nobody knew how t owrite, someone remembered the goose quill of the Abbe de la Haye, priest of Dondun, an admirer of Voltaire who had shown signs of unequivocal sympathy for the Negroes ever since he had read the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

"Would the Abbe lend a hand and a pen? was the burning question," Danticat concludes her essay on Carpentier. "Eventually, a proclamation was drawn up and a revolution was launched, with or without the Abbé's goose quill." Beyond reminding us that Haiti – and the Haitian Revolution, more precisely—is the source for *lo real maravilloso*, this particularly enduring theory of Caribbean unity, Danticat's dialogue with the Cuban Carpentier also signals her crucial interest in evincing and engaging an interest in what unifies "Caribbean diasporic peoples."[59]

The point is brought home nowhere more strongly than with the place—or person—with which she closes that essay on flying, and 9/11. One of the people in the ashes south of Canal street, she writes, was a Jamaican-born sculptor called Michael Richards,

> who had created a bronze cast statue of himself dressed as an African American World War II combat pilot, a Tuskegee airman, with dozens of miniature airplanes shooting through his body. Richards had a studio on the ninety-second floor of Tower One of the World Trade Center and was there when the first plane struck the building at 8:45 AM. He had spent the night working on, among other things, a piece showing a man clinging to a meteor as it plunges from the sky. Richards had been interested in aviation and flight and had used them in as motifs in his work for many years.

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[58] Danticat (2010) 101.
[59] See Danticat *BOMB* (2007).

Why does she seize on Richards, we might ask? One reason, certainly, is his interest in planes—but another, it's perhaps fair to say, is his Jamaican heritage: his past, that is, as a young boy who may have watched planes fly over his island, once, and dreamed those dreams of escape. The themes, of course, ring true with much else in Díaz and Danticat's work both, with their overlapping interests in the Caribbean, and in the contemporary salience of planes, for a region wherein, as I'm reminded every time I fly there, the preeminent and best-read regional publication is *Caribbean Beat* magazine—the in-flight magazine of Caribbean Airlines, and a symbol, if ever there was one, that contemporary migration isn't a one-way street. Alive to the new realities of immigration at a time when immigration is no longer a one-way street, at this time when, as Danticat has put it, immigrants, no longer "disappear joyfully into America's melting pot":

> These days immigrants are transnational global ambassadors for both the country they live in and the one they've moved from. Even as they pay taxes and contribute to the economic structure in the United States, they also build schools and clinics and support businesses in the countries of their birth, helping to rebuild the fabric that forced their own migration [and possibly slowing down the exodus of others.][60]

True before the 14th day of January, 2010, when the earth leveled not a few of those schools and clinics, to say nothing of the lives of "200,000 maybe more," as the succinct dedication to Danticat's book goes, these words are only more true today.

6.7

How to write about the unthinkable? "I have not written one word," the Palestinian American poet Suheir Hammad, paradoxically wrote soon after September 11, "no poetry in the ashes south of canal street."[61] This, in the earthquake's aftermath, is Danticat's instinct too. That she doesn't shy from the uneasy task of speaking for the collective, in that horrible moment, suggests much about a writer who doesn't merely take seriously her role as a writer (if not, as she's wisely replied to an interviewers' query about whether she writes "to bear witness": "I try…but I do it more for my own salvation and emotional survival than anything else."), but has had the patience to gently point to all the larger historical truths evinced by the truth an earthquake, in this horribly impoverished land of ramshackle homes and throw-away concrete, could kill 200 thousands and not 2 or 20, is a story bound up in that same history of the second free nation in the New World being isolated and abused by the first, for much the first two centuries of its existence: a story experienced, in the present, by Danticat arriving to the Port-au-Prince airport after the

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[60] Danticat, Foreword to *A Community of Equals: The Constitutional Protection of New Americans* by Owen Fiss (Boston: Beacon, 1999) xi, as quoted by Lucía M. Suárez, *The Tears of Hispaniola: Haitian and Dominican Diaspora Memory* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida) 31.
[61] Hammad, as quoted by Danticat (2010) 123.

earthquake to find US military guarding its perimeter.[62] "Whose borders are they protecting?" she asks. "I soon get my answer. People with Haitian passports are not being allowed to enter the airport."[63] When she boards her flight home, full of relief workers from the States, its pilot welcomes his passengers with cry, before take-off, of "God Bless America." Danticat, settling into her seat, to scream out "God Bless Haiti Too!"[64] As I write, what the devastation wrought by the quake will mean for Haiti's people remains unclear. The disaster, certainly, has focused world attention back on a country whose revolution "entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened"[65]—and, hopefully perhaps, too, on the history that's transpired there since that time. Whatever happens, the role of the writer aware of that truth is to know that "so much of our experience as Caribbean Diasporic peoples, so much of it, exists in silence." And it is to ask, "How can we talk about our experiences in any way if both our own local cultural and the larger global culture doesn't want to talk about them and actively resists our attempt to create language around them?"

In the present context, it matters that those words, echoing so closely Glissant and Walcott and a hundred others I've touched on in this thesis, were spoken by an author with whom her work, like this chapter, is also in conversation. The question comes from a conversation Díaz and Danticat held for the magazine *BOMB* in 2008, shortly after each of their prize-winning books appeared. The interview concludes with Danticat asking her friend whether, in the end, the *fukú americanus* was—or can be—vanquished in a book like his:

> For me…the real issue in the book is not whether or not one can vanquish the *fukú*—but whether or not one can even see it. Acknowledge its existence at a collective level. To be a true witness to who we are as a people and to what has happened to us. That is the essential challenge for the Caribbean nations—who, as you pointed out, have been annihilated by history and yet who've managed to put themselves together in an amazing way. That's why I thought the book was somewhat hopeful at the end. The family still won't openly admit that there's a *fukú*, but they're protecting the final daughter, Isis, from it collectively, and that's close, very close to my dream of us bearing witness to (in Glissant's words) "the past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us (but that) is however, obsessively present."[66]

I suspect James would have approved.

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[62] Danticat as quoted by Saurez 21.
[63] Danticat (2010) 168.
[64] Danticat (2010) 173.
[65] See Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995) 73.
[66] Díaz to Danticat, *BOMB* (2007).



Joshua Jelly-Schapiro

Headstone of C.L.R. James (1901- 1989).
Tunapuna, Trinidad, March 2011.

"Time would pass, old empires would fall and new ones take their place, the relations of countries and the relations of classes had to change, before I discovered that it is not quality of goods and utility which matter, but movement; not where you are or what you have, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there."

-C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*

Afterword

By Way of Conclusion

Sitting at my desk the week this dissertation is due, just down the hall from where Carl Sauer led seminars in a room that now bears his name, I reach for my well-thumbed copy of what may be the best-known book by a scholar whose ideas about "the morphology of landscape" founded the Berkeley School of geographic thought for which his old department is still best known. Paging through the thick leafs of *The Early Spanish Main*—graced with handsome maps of Espanola and the Bahamas; rich descriptions of flora and fauna; fine-grained re-counting of Arawak lifeways; re-constructions, climatic and political, too, of how and when Columbus and his men settled one Caribbean isle after another—it is with a certain pride that I'm reminded that this work of a geographer, and emblematically so, remains arguably the most vivid portrait we have of Columbus's arrival to the New World, and of the first few decades of a colonial endeavor which looks, a half-millenium later, like the birth of our global modern world.

"The geography in the mind of Columbus," wrote Sauer at the start of *The Early Spanish Main*, "was a mixture of fact, fancy, and credulity."[1] Everyone knows how the admiral bequeathed to us the misnomers "Indians" and "Indies", but Columbus's credulous fancy extended further—to his identifying Cuba's eastern tip as "Cipango" (what would have been the nearest part of the Far East), say, and then, when he arrived in Espanola and heard the indigenous word *cibao* (for "stony mountain"), revised his map to term *this* island Cipango, and to identify tales he heard of a "caniba" people, who came to raid, with "the people of the Great Khan, who must be very close by." Thus it was, Sauer writes, that "Khan, cannibal, and Carib…given the same etymology."[2] Untangling these tales, and "correcting" Columbus's geography with an *accurate* depiction of the island-region on which he washed up, is no small part of the impetus for Sauer's work: a monograph which, for all its literary elegance, also bears the mark of scientist's exactitude not merely in its descriptions of place and people, but in its guiding belief that one could define the Caribbean, as a "natural region," with exactitude, too. But in reading his lines about Columbus, one also can't help but feel that Sauer's own geography, for all its learning, is also, in its own way, "a mixture of fact, fancy, and credulity." The way *all* of us see the world, and divide it into discrete units-of-analysis (i.e., regions) is that: a mixture of what we know, what we hope, what we believe. Indeed it couldn't be otherwise. That truth is one of the ideas guiding this dissertation.

The academic practice of Geography, like most fields formalized as "disciplines" in European universities during the 19th century, was forged within the political-economic rationale of an imperial era: an era when geography's core-brief—to chart "areal difference"—could not be help but be allied to, and shaped by, its sponsoring states' aims

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[1] Carl Ortwin Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 23.
[2] Sauer 23.

of determining how best to exploit the world's constituent regions for imperial gain. That geography's guiding idea in those years – environmental determinism –should have expressed and bolstered the retrograde race-thinking of its day by affirming, say, that natives of tropic climes are fated to lives of moral and economic lassitude, is hardly surprising. No small part of Sauer's import, and the crucial sway he exerted on geography's trajectory in the 20th century, lay in his success at turning those ideas on their head—by insisting that the impress of peoples' culture on their areas was the determining aspect in "landscape"; that "culture is the agent, the natural area the medium"; that environmental determinism, in a word, was hogwash.[3] The tacit anti-racism of his ideas, and the wealth of tools for limning "cultural landscapes" he advanced, found estimable expression not only in his own work, but in dozens of dissertations, over the course of decades, alongside which this one will sit in his erstwhile department.

If Sauer, more than any of his peers, was responsible for pulling Geography out of the recalcitrant 19th century and into the evolving 20th, his scholarship and ideas—in their social-scientific and anti-modern bent; in his attraction to the "folk" and the rural; in his empiricist concern, via the precepts of "chorology" or otherwise, with defining the world's "culture areas," separable and complete, by generic tools—contain aspects outmoded in this our hyper-modern, urban 21st century. To be sure: the regional geography embedded in my own foil and prompt for this thesis—the work of C.L.R. James—shares a certain kinship with the don of the Berkeley School: Sauer would have seen much to admire, one suspects, in James's assertion that the trait conjoining all the Caribbean's constituent territories grew out of the "pattern…*sui generis*," established by cultivation of sugar for export. What, however, I find most attractive in James—what I find in him that's worth building on, and departing from, too—are the ways in which his regional geography, for all its crucial basing in Marxian materialism, is also, from the start, based in the *interplay* of the material and the discursive. The material history of plantation slavery may forge the basis for the "West Indian" pattern he identifies—but the story of a regional culture forged in that history is a story, as he emphasizes from the start, based in cultural mixing, and enabled by language. The story of the Caribbean his geography tells, within the larger epic of modernity, is a story about African people, torn from their continent and grouped together in a highly rational-ized working environment, who must, unlike most of the formerly colonized people of the world, become steeped in the *languages* and cultures of their masters: the same languages through which those people will, later on, come not only to define their history—and their region—for themselves, but to shape the larger course of world civilization.

In the tumultuous half-century after World War II that is my focus here, not only was the United Nations born, but 100 member-nations were added to its ranks. The Age of Empire in which geography's modern precepts was forged fell away, and with its demise came movements of national liberation, in what I've termed here the Independence Age, by which previously-subject peoples sought to imagine, and enact, a new futures for themselves. If any overarching pattern is to be ascribed to what was once termed the Third World, however, in the brief decades since many new nation-states

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[3] See Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape." University of California Publications in Geography 22 (1925): 19-53.

raised hopes for a new history along with their new flags, it is those hopes' disappointment, joined to economic hardship—and the continued, linked dispersal of their people to wealthier Northern nations. This has certainly been the case in the Caribbean—a region where, given its crucible-stature in the larger epic of the New World and the emergence of the "modern" itself, that story has perhaps felt particularly piquant. But a region too, as I hope to have shown here, whose contemporary history – and the pride of place that history has held for previously colonized people, the world over, seeking to redress their own histories—offers an especially rich lens on the ways that human beings, as Stuart Hall put it, seek to forge identities by "placing themselves within the narratives of the past."[4]

The ever-increasing numbers of immigrants from the world's younger nations, coming to live in Northern cities, a historical trend intrinsically linked to the disappointments of Third World nation-building projects, is a development with many implications. One such is the emergence of what some scholars have termed "deterritorialized" nation-states—of nations whose "nation-space" is produced and maintained by people who, though living in many different places, remain crucially involved in their home-nation's polity and economy by means of wire-transfers, jet-liners, and the internet. Another implication, as I've sought to suggest here, is that for trans-migrants living in First World metropolises (or, indeed, in their small home-nations) have found it increasingly useful to forge identities—racial, religious, diasporic, regional—which, transcending the narrow bounds of failed nation-states, are designed to function on a global scale or in the cosmopolitan world cities of the North Atlantic.[5] But this development, certainly, is one of the reasons regional imaginaries retain a key valence for Third World peoples generally, and trans-migrants from the Caribbean particularly. Just as the import of place, *pace* globalization's more deluded celebrants, isn't disappearing in a world as structured by spatial divides between haves and have-nots, rich nations and poor ones, as it's ever been, so too is the region, as a means of "thinking identity" in relation to space, going nowhere. Chorology as a human science may have expired with the century of its birth, but regions—shaped by material history, figured in discourse, living in culture—are anything but dead in our global life.

This truth, as I hope to have shown here, is especially apparent in the Caribbean and its diasporas, where—from the time of nationalist struggles for self-determination a half-century ago, through to the persisting *regional* inflection of its intellectual culture today—have been particularly strong. James, I believe, was right: these islands, so strongly imbricated within the birth of modern capitalism, and one of its signal historic traumas—the Atlantic slave trade—a special role in how the world's people have faced up to our history, and think about how, through building new identities, history's hurts may be salved. In these islands and their diasporas, wherein many of the phenomena we think of as uniquely modern in their effects on identity—movement and cultural mixing as a fact of life; livelihoods based in global trade; the learning of languages not one's mother tongue, and the turning those tongues into something new–-have been plainly

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[4] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 392-403.

[5] See Jelly-Schapiro "Are We All Creoles Now? Ethncity and (Imagi-)Nation in a Heterogeneous Caribbean Diaspora"

evident for centuries. This is among the reasons I suspect the Caribbean may have particular keen lessons to offer those of us aiming to understand the mutual relations of geography and culture in our global world today. To say as much, isn't to suggest that the Caribbean is exceptional. It is to say, echoing the exceptional Glissant, that this is a part of the world where the Poetics of Relation—the interplay of cultures, and myriad histories, by which *all* culture is produced, worldwide—may make itself especially visible.

The existence of a coherent Caribbean, like any region, is based in discourse –in conversation, that is, among people who not only often don't speak the same language, but may not always agree: it is based, as Glissant reminds us, in the forging of culture *in relation*. The most subtle makers of Caribbean discourse, over the past half-century, have all been alive to this truth—and to the truth, too, that this archipelago's geography is both reality and metaphor for the quest, as Walcott had it, "to [restore] our shattered histories."[6] The very *strength* of the Caribbean as region and idea—even as its people seek to forge the kinds of coherent histories, and geographies, out of which new, whole, identities can be made—derives from the truth that its discourse-of-region, for all its interest in seeing commonality, is perpetually resistant to the totalizing or uniform: difference, here, can never be erased wholesale. Of that truth, and the particular shape that quest takes in the Caribbean, for *all* its peoples, Glissant writes:

> "Herein lies the explanation of why the quest for identity becomes for certain peoples uncertain and ambiguous: there is a contradiction between a lived experience through which the community instinctively rejects the intrusive exclusiveness of a single History and an official way of thinking through which it passively consents in the ideology "represented" by its elite."[7]

"The struggle against a single History," he continues, "[and] for the cross-fertilization of histories, means repossessing both a true sense of one's time and identity: proposing in an unprecedented way a revaluation of power." In these lines, I think, lie key clues as to how geography must evolve, today, to be equal to understanding how human beings, individually and together, continue, as they always shall, to route their lives, and hopes, through place: the places we live and the ones we recall; the places we imagine; the places we want to go.

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[6] Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993).

[7] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, Trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989) 279.

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