"Quelle révolution fut jamais faite par le peuple innocent des colonisateurs? Qui soutient jamais un peuple contre son propriétaire? Pourtant c'est bien là la tâche de force que vouloir annihiluer non révolutionnaire râle au tison, d'accuser aux mâchoires du méchant le capitaine qui l'opprima. La guerre, en effet d'appeler autrement qu'au jour un peuple d'assimilats? Comment le distinguer déjà ou pas s'en faire? Toute race qui croit qu'elle n'a rien à dire au monde doit sentir l'attribution suprême et est tout individu sur un peuple qui croit qu'il est capable sans le recours et du changement de peuple arrive les mains vides. " Aminé Césaire Mai 1955

author of THE LAST OF FRANTZ FANON  www.christianfilosrat.com

This is a major account by one of our most knowledgeable analysts of Négritude. Christian Filosrat draws upon his relationship with the Négritude architect and with Frantz Fanon's widow to depict the foundation of one of the twentieth century's foremost principles arising out of the colonial period. Here is the wellspring of Négritude, encompassing all the complexities and contradictions of a liberation ideology. It is a brilliant explanation of a worldview that was to have been vital to the freedom and prosperity of the Caribbean and Africa, done by an expert using his first-hand knowledge of the subject, the proponents, the lands, and the societies.
NÉGRITUDE

The

ORIGIN
ALSO BY CHRISTIAN FILOSTRAT

The Last Day of Frantz Fanon/Le Dernier Jour de Frantz Fanon

Jerome’s Pillows

La Folle de Tournai

The Beggars’ Pursuit

The Gospel of Thomas

Variations on Unjust Times
NÉGRITUDE
The
ORIGIN

CHRISTIAN FILOSTRAT
“When minorities distinguish themselves, they are considered a threat to the unity of the Republic and the French people. France is allergic to the plurality of belongings.”

*LE MONDE IDÉES*, 02.06.2016, 2.

“I have the feeling that we are being told, 'OK, we are taking care of you, but leave us alone.' And the slightest social movement is taken badly.”

Victorin Lurel, Guadeloupe senator. “How the French see us.”

« Ainsi donc avant de faire la Révolution et pour faire la révolution – la vraie –, la lame de fond destructrice et non l’ébranlement des surfaces, une condition est essentielle : rompre la mécanique identification des races, déchirer les superficielles valeurs, saisir en nous le nègre immédiat, planter notre négritude comme un bel arbre jusqu'à ce qu’il porte ses fruits les plus authentiques. »

Aimé Césaire

« Mon premier souvenir à Paris. C'était un seul cri. Mon Dieu, que de nègres, que de nègres ! Parce que la gare Saint-Lazare était possédée par les Antillais. De foule, il n'y avait que nos compatriotes. Tous venaient accueillir ceux qui arrivaient par le bateau. »

Aimé Césaire

« l’assimilation, la feuille de vigne qui cache les parties honteuses du colonialisme »

Aimé Césaire
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In an article entitled, *Conscience Raciale et Révolution Sociale* (*Racial Consciousness and Social Revolution*), Aimé Césaire expressed his *négritude* for the first time in May 1935, and his expectation that his “beautiful tree…” would bear “its most authentic fruits.” The article was published in the third issue of *l’Etudiant Noir Journal Mensuel de l’Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France*. Césaire was twenty-two years old:
Figure 2 The "Conscience Raciale" article is transcribed below
Click on [http://letudiant-noir.webs.com/](http://letudiant-noir.webs.com/) for the complete periodical

« Quelle révolution fut jamais faite par le peuple innocent des curiosités? Qui souleva jamais un joujou contre son propriétaire? Pourtant c’est bien la le tour de force que veulent entreprendre nos révolutionnaires nègres lorsqu’ils demandent au nègre de se révolter contre le capitalisme qui l’opprime.

Le moyen, en effet d’appeler autrement qu’un joujou un peuple d’assimilés ? Dostoïevski le disait déjà ou peu s’en faut :
Toute race qui croit qu’elle n’a rien à dire au monde n’est qu’une « curiosité ethnique » et tout individu est un joujou qui croit qu’au rendez-vous du recevoir et du donner son peuple arrive les mains vides.

« Agissez », dit on au nègre. Mais comme agir c’est créé et comme créer c’est pétrir et faire lever sa naturelle substance, le nègre de chez nous n’agira point, qui se distrait de soi et vit à part soi.

Un mal étrange nous ronge, en effet, aux Antilles: une peur de soi-même, une capitulation de l’être devant le paraître, une faiblesses qui pousse un peuple d’exploités à tourner le dos à sa nature, parce qu’une race d’exploiteurs lui en fait honte dans le perfide dessein d’abolir « la conscience propre des exploités ».

Les exploitateurs blancs nous on donné, a nous autres exploités noirs, une culture, mais une culture blanche, une civilisation, mais une civilisation blanche, nous paralysant ainsi par mailles invisibles pour le cas hypothétique ou nous nous libérerions du plus sensible esclavage matériel qu’ils nous ont interposé. Et ils ourdissent leur trame, patiemment, inlassabl-
ement, par ruse diligente jusqu'à ce que nous mourions à la connaissance de nous-mêmes.

Des lors, s’il est vrai, que le philosophe révolutionnaire est celui qui élabore les techniques de libération, s’il est vrai que l’œuvre de la dialectique révolutionnaire est de détruire « toutes les perceptions fausses prodiguées aux hommes pour voiler leur servitude », ne devons-nous pas dénoncer l’endormeuse culture identificatrice et placer sous les prisons qu’édifia pour nous le capitalisme blanc, chacune de nos valeurs raciales comme autant de bombes libertaires? Ils ont doc oublié le principal ceux qui disent au nègre de se révolter sans lui faire prendre d’abord conscience de soi, sans lui dire qu’il est beau et bon et légitime d’être nègre.

Ils ont oublié de parler au nègre le seul langage qu’il puisse légitimement entendre puisque, différencent en cela de « l’employé du bureau de M. Gradgrind, l’esclave nègre » a le sang riche encore d’affections humaines et que c’est d’une affection humaine, comme le fait remarquer Chesterton, qu’il aimera la fidélité ou la liberté.

La vérité est que ceux qui prêchent la révolte au nègre n’ont pas foi dans le nègre et que dans
leur fierté d’être révolutionnaire, ils oublient qu’ils sont nègres, premier- ement et toujours : esclavage encore et de la plus stérile espèce.

Le héros de Paul Morand, « l’assimilé » Occide est révolutionnaire lui aussi : grace à lui, Haïti a ses Soviets, Port au Prince devient Octoberville; bel avantage s’il reste prisonnier des blancs, singe stérilement imitateur !

Tant pis pour ceux qui se contentent d’être des Occide par mépris de ce qu’ils appellent du « racisme ». Pour nous, nous voulons exploiter nos propres valeurs, connaître nos forces par personnelle expérience, creuser notre propre domaine racial, sûr que nous sommes de rencontrer en profondeur, les sources jaillissantes de l’humain universel.

Ainsi donc avant de faire la Révolution et pour faire la révolution – la vraie –, la lame de fond destructrice et non l’ébranlement des surfaces, une condition est essentielle : rompre la mécanique identification des races, déchirer les superficielles valeurs, saisir en nous le nègre immédiat, planter notre négritude comme un bel arbre jusqu’à ce qu’il porte ses fruits les plus authentiques.
Alors seulement, nous aurons conscience de nous; alors seulement, nous saurons jusqu’ou nous pouvons courir seuls; alors seulement nous saurons ou le souffle nous manque, et parce que nous aurons saisi notre particulière différence, et que nous « jouirons loyalement notre être », nous pourrons triompher de tous les esclavages, nés de la « civilisation ».

Être révolutionnaire, c’est bien; mais pour nous autres nègres, c’est insuffisant; nous ne devons pas être des révolutionnaires accidentellement noirs, mais proprement des nègres révolutionnaires, et il convient de mettre l’accent sur le substantif comme sur le qualificatif.

C’est pour cela qu’a ceux qui veulent être révolutionnaires uniquement pour pouvoir se moquer du nègre au nez « suffisamment aplati »; c’est pour cela qu’a ceux qui croient en Marx uniquement pour passer la ligne, nous disons:

Pour la Révolution, travaillons à prendre possession de nous-même, en dominant de haut, l’officielle culture blanche « gréement spirituel » de l’impérialisme conquérant.

Attelons-nous courageusement à la besogne culturelle, sans craindre de tomber dans
un idéalisme bourgeois, l'idéaliste étant celui qui considère l'idée comme fille d'Idée et comme matrice d'idées, quand nous y voyons, nous, une promesse qui ne peut ne pas s'épanouir en un buissonnement d’actes. »
Aimé Césaire, l'Etudiant Noir, Mai-Juin 1935

RACISME? NON, MAIS ALLIANCE SPIRITUELLE

Below is Racisme? Non, mais Alliance spirituelle – (Racism? No, but Spiritual Alliance) by L. Sedar Senghor (sic) that followed Césaire’s Conscience Raciale et Révolution Sociale, (Racial Consciousness and Social Revolution.)

In l’Etudiant Noir Journal Mensuel de l’Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France, Senghor’s articles followed Césaire’s. Senghor wrote in support of l’Etudiant Noir’s leader, Aimé Césaire, whose articles were above his.

(For a clearer copy of Racisme? Non, mais Alliance spirituelle click on http://leopoldsedarsenghor.webs.com/)
L'ÉTUDIANT NOIR

apoll ! c'est pour cela qu'aux yeux de ceux qui vivent en Libéria l'apollisme est un objet de déshonneur, alors qu'il s'agit d'une façon d'agir qui est finalement le plus honnête et le plus sain. L'apollisme est donc un acte de foi, un acte de confiance en l'avenir, un acte de volonté de progrès. Il est donc nécessaire que nous continuions de pratiquer l'apollisme, et que nous en fassions une part essentielle de notre vie quotidienne.

Le racisme ? Non, mais Alliance spirituelle

C'est son passé même que doit conditionner son devenir.

[Al. Gueb.]

On nous accuse de racisme, nous aimons et nous aimons. Qui au nom de la haine, du mensonge et de la trahison ? Nous, des nègres, nous devons être, confrontés à ce qui se passe dehors, nous devons être dehors.

Le racisme ? Non, mais Alliance spirituelle

C'est utopique, ça ne sert à rien. Le racisme, c'est la haine, c'est la trahison, c'est la violence, c'est l'ignorance, c'est la mort. On ne peut pas vivre dans un monde où l'on est constamment confronté à des réalités qui nous sont inaccessibles.

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LE JOURNAL MENSUEL DE L’ASSOCIATION DES ÉTUDIANTS MARTINIQUAIS EN FRANCE

That’s the sub-caption of Césaire’s 1935 periodical. (The Monthly Periodical of the Association of Martiniquan Students in France.)

There was already an association of students from Martinique in France when Césaire arrived in Paris in 1931. The association advocated for the timely disbursement of scholarship funds to the students. In 1934 Césaire and Senghor were caught in a colonial-authorities adjustment regarding the scholarships. Most of the students were of the left, communists, etc., alarming plantation owners, landlords and other rightist assimilationists in the colonies. They demanded changes. Césaire joined the association; became its leader and in the process created l’Étudiant Noir Journal Mensuel de l’Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France as a messenger. He had a habit of creating periodicals. He must have created six or seven in his career. With Césaire in charge, the scholarship administrators wavered. The Popular Front was in the ascendant by then. Césaire’s personal interventions seemed
to have made the difference, not the ephemeral *l’Etudiant Noir*.

**NEGRITUDE VS. ASSIMILATION**

Battling the French communists and pursuing French citizenship between the time of the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition and the 1936 Popular Front government, Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Leopold Senghor of Senegal asserted their *négritude* – their own racial uniqueness, in Césaire’s words, in 1935. A “miraculous weapon,” *négritude* was going to overcome the communists’ opposition to racial consciousness and resist their anti-French colonial advocacy. Then too, racial consciousness was going to purge assimilation – enslavement (“asservissement”), in Césaire’s word, from France’s colonial architecture and bring in the social revolution of “émancipation,” equality, between colonizers and natives.

(N.B.: To Césaire “assimilation” meant “asservissement” in 1935 – people in the colonies forsaking their culture, ethnicity, etc. to mimic the colonizer’s. It happened that in the French West Indies, people used “assimilation” and “départementalisation” interchangeably. So when Césaire sent this telegram to Martinique: “Grande victoire pour classes laborieuses et
functionnaires. Assimilation obtenue. Vive Parti Communiste” ("Great victory for the working classes and civil servants. Assimilation obtained. Long live Communist Party.") Everyone understood on March 19, 1946 that he meant that Martinique was now officially a department of France “no different from Brittany or Normandy.”)


In the very first issue of l’Etudiant Noir, March 1935, Césaire explains the conflict between assimilation and emancipation in the article, Jeunesse noire et Assimilation:

(. . .) car si l’homme a la peur de « l’autre », il a aussi le dégoût du semblable. Il en est de même pour le colonisé: une fois semblable a son formateur, il ne comprend plus le mépris de celui-ci et il le hait : c’est ainsi que j’ai ouï dire que certains disciples haïssent le maître, parce que le maître veut toujours rester le maître, quand le disciple a cessé d’être le disciple . . .

C’est pour cela que la jeunesse noire tourne le dos à la tribu des vieux.
La tribu des vieux dit « assimilation » nous répondons : résurrection !
Que veut la jeunesse Noire (sic) ? Vivre

Mais pour vivre vraiment, il faut rester soi. L’acteur est l’homme qui ne vit pas vraiment : il fait vivre une multitude d’hommes – affaires de rôles – mais il ne se fait pas vivre.

. . . asservissement et assimilation se ressemblent : ce sont deux formes de passivité.
Pendant ces deux périodes, le Nègre a été également stérile.
Émancipation est au contraire, action et création.

On November 22, 1956, in perhaps the most important speech in his career, Césaire asked, “Qu’est-ce-que l’assimilation? Une doctrine politique et philosophique qui tend à faire disparaître les particularités propres à un peuple et à tuer sa personnalité. Eh bien, je le dis tout net : l’assimilation ainsi entendue et ainsi définie, je suis contre l’assimilation. Je suis contre l’assimilation départementalisation.”2 (“What is assimilation?” It’s a political and philosophical doctrine that makes a people’s characteristics disappear and kills people’s personality. Well, I say, assimilation thus heard and thus defined, I am against assimilation. Period. I am against assimilation/departmentalization.”) The audience at the Fort
de France’s *Maison des Sports* from where he was giving the speech understood that he meant that regionalization – specificity – was what he was after. Self-determination without independence. The leitmotif was *négritude*.

Césaire rejected French colonial common law. Assimilation was a mortal trap. Very young, Césaire – even before he went to Paris in 1931 (He was born in 1913) and met the African Americans who would have such influence on his *négritude* proclamation – appreciated that assimilation was a formula for the disappearance of who he and his people were:

“Any race that believes that it has nothing to say to the world is only an ethnic curiosity, and every individual is a toy who believes that at the appointment to receive and give, his people come empty handed.”

Assimilation was the central pillar of France’s colonialism. The tenet of it’s racial/cultural hierarchy. Taken to its intended conclusion assimilation enshrined the status of “empty-handed toys” to Césaire’s people. *Des joujous*. Who they were faced an existential threat if assimilation
had its way, for assimilation doomed them to permanent alienation and marginalization. But alienation and marginalization could succeed only if the people of Martinique were without racial consciousness — *négritude* — i.e., estranged from themselves. To Césaire, that was the most important peril. The “beautiful tree” could not bear its “authentic fruits” unless the people of Martinique became racially conscious. Through all the gyrations during his long career, Césaire remained true to that anti-assimilation credo and sought to include a political component to racial consciousness by proposing a federal status for the French West Indies within the French state.

“Un Etat, je dis bien multinational, c’est-à-dire d’un Etat reconnaissant l’existence et non la coexistence en son sein de plusieurs nations ayant leur singularité, leur dignité, leur légitimité, leur culture, bref, leur personnalité propre et jouissant du droit qu’aucun démocrate ne peut sans contradiction leur dénier, je veux dire le droit de s’auto-déterminer et de s’autogouverner dans un cadre constitutionnel démocratiquement débattu et librement accepté.”

“A State, I say multinational, that is to say, a State recognizing the existence and not the coexistence within it of several nations having their singularity, their dignity,
their legitimacy, their culture, in short, their own personality and enjoying the right that no democrat can deny without contradiction, I mean the right to self-determination and self-governance in a democratically debated and freely accepted constitutional framework.”

Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana are now regions of France and territorial collectivities.

There’s no mention of négritude in the first or second issue of l’Etudiant Noir. In fact, there’s no mention of the term in the fourth or fifth issue. Had there not been the third issue with Césaire’s négritude manifesto, l’Etudiant Noir would have been just another ephemeral colonial-student newspaper in Paris during the inter-war years. (Most of the articles in this periodical were about colonial scholarships, administrative questions, student concerns, the poetry of African Americans, especially Richard Wright’s. But it was also in its pages that Léon Damas published Pigment and Césaire defined négritude.)

To be sure it’s Frantz Fanon’s testimonial in Black Skin White Mask that most clearly expresses négritude’s aspiration to be French:
What is all this talk of a black people, of a Negro nationality? I am a French man. I am interested in French culture, French civilization, the French people. We refuse to be considered "outsiders," we have full part in the French drama. When men who were not basically bad, only deluded, invaded France in order to subjugate her, my position as a Frenchman made it plain to me that my place was not outside but in the very heart of the problem. I am personally interested in the future of France, in French values, in the French nation, what have I to do with a black empire?  

In July 1943, an 18-year-old dissident, Frantz Fanon, risked his life, crossing to Dominica to join De Gaulle’s Free French Forces in the liberation of France. Fanon was Césaire’s student at the Lycée Victor Schœlcher in Fort de France in 1942. (See interview with Fanon’s wife Josie in *The Last Day of Frantz Fanon.* )
NEGRI T UDE VS. THE FRENCH COMMUNISTS.

In the 1920s, the French Communist Party (P.C.F.) had joined the Comintern, Communist International, subscribing to all its conditions, including the one against colonialism, which stated:

Every party belonging to the Third International has the duty to expose ruthlessly to the colonies [what their imperialists are doing to them]; to support, not with words but with action, any movement of emancipation in the colonies; to demand the expulsion from the colonies of all imperialists; to feed the heart of the workers with truly fraternal feelings for the working population of the colonies and the oppressed nationalities and maintain among the soldiers from the mother country nonstop agitation against all oppression of the colonial peoples.

It’s in his third article for l’Etudiant Noir that Césaire brings out négritude – and it’s against the communists that he does it.

The communists’ injunctions against French colonialism were as much of a threat as French assimilation was to Césaire in 1935. The communists told the people in the colonies and the proletariat in Europe that they had oppression in common, and that racial consciousness was reactionary and “a false
problem of individualism” that could only divide the proletariat.

The proletariat’s task was to overthrow the capitalist oppressors. Césaire who pursued equality with the French colonizers saw French assimilation and communism as two sides of the same coin. Racial consciousness was the only answer to achieve equality. This was in 1935.

It should be noted that in the 30’s, the anti-colonialist, pro-women communists were still marginal in French politics. (They began to have a narrow influence when they helped the Popular Front gain power in 1936. Their anti-colonialism and subservience to Moscow handicapped their political aspirations.) They were of no help to Césaire’s objectives then. After the war, the communists ruled French politics. Then too, they had changed their stance regarding French colonialism, assimilation/departmentalization. Marxist Césaire was closer to their positions than to any others. He did not hesitate to become one of their celebrated followers as they helped him gain departmental status for Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana. And although the communists kept a wary eye on him because of what they called “cette affaire de race” he was until October 24, 1956 a loyal member of the P.C.F.
But in 1935 the communists sought Social Revolution in the colonies under French rule, supporting, “not with words but with action, any movement of emancipation in the colonies; …demand[ing] the expulsion from the colonies of all imperialists.” Until his death in 2008, Césaire, never fathom Martinique other than under French rule, albeit with more constitutional autonomy. He considered himself French of African origin. Many of his friends in Paris were from the Afro-American ethnic group. Césaire was Afro-French. Négritude expressed that fact.

In 1935, Césaire couldn't see how “Social Revolution” would take place unless the people in the colonies healed their black skin white mask syndrome – (accept who they were in order to have a place among the peoples of the world) – by adopting their négritude. Against this new trend for “Social Revolution,” Césaire proclaimed the primacy of “Racial Consciousness” and, in the May 1935 manifesto, used the word négritude, which in almost a century has been the subject of much debate and all sorts of interpretations. The rewriting of négritude baffled Césaire. (“I don’t
like the word *négritude*” he said in 1966 in Dakar.)

To be sure, Césaire did not close the door to future cooperation with the communists. He was a man of the left. His enemies were the assimilationists on the right.

It's fine to be a revolutionary; but for us blacks, it's not enough; we must not be revolutionaries who are accidentally black, but in fact black revolutionaries, and it is fitting, to put the accent on the substantive as well as on the qualitative … For those who believe uniquely in Marx to cross the line, we say: For the Revolution, let us work at taking possession of ourselves, towering above, the official white culture of conquering imperialism (…) Yes, let us work at being black, knowing that it is to work for the Revolution, because it is what will make the Revolution.

He concluded by reminding the black communists that to be at home is to be in one's “true character.” (Césaire never ceased to call himself a Marxist.)
THE PARIS COLONIAL EXPOSITION OF 1931

The Paris Colonial Exposition in May-November 1931 was an historical event. Overwhelmingly successful, it had profound effects on the administration of the French colonies. The communists denounced the Exposition, and in August-September 1931 the COM-INTERN staged a counter exposition, La Vérité sur les colonies, (The Truth about the Colonies.) Their exposition was as much to denounce imperialism as to praise the Soviet Union. It failed.

Impact wise, the Exposition can be compared to Le Code Noir, The French Black Code, Louis XIV promulgated in 1685. In the planning twenty-five years, the Colonial Exposition was a colossal and costly propaganda initiative in behalf of French colonialism. Then too, the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition provided the blueprint France used to administer its colonies until De Gaulle came to power in 1958. It’s no coincidence that Légitime Defense, l’Etudiant Noir and all the other Afro-French student periodicals and movements saw light around the time of the Exposition.

After Germany charged France with the offense of assimilation, one of the 1931 Paris
Colonial Exposition’s main propaganda themes was the denial that France was assimilating colonial natives. *Mission Civilisatrice* was not assimilation, France claimed. It was assistance and shared interests. The Exposition did not discourage Césaire’s and Senghor’s pro-French-federalist cause.

By all metrics, Césaire’s *négritude* fits into the long historical span of the French West Indies. Already in 1793 Martinique is considered a department at the Convention. But *négritude* found its voice around the time of the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition and the government of the Popular Front led by the socialist parties and the communists to a lesser extent.

(Author’s note: I was carrying Léon G. Damas’s ashes to (French Guyana) Guyane (Damas had been one of the my advisors re Négritude doctoral dissertation.) and was making a stop in Fort de France for Césaire’s eulogy. Césaire was at the airport to meet me and while waiting for my bags, we exchanged our experiences with the cremation procedures of dear friends. In my case it was that Marietta Damas had had it with people moving her husband and had given me specific directions. One of them was that Damas should not be moved anymore and should be cremated in the massive oak casket (that Houphouet Boigny had bought for her.) In Southeast Washington, DC, the cremation technician, to show me he was following instructions to the letter, opened the door of the oven; then lifted the lid of the casket for me to see that he had moved nothing; even the roses that Marietta had placed on the
body were still there. The procedure of cremation had started already and I could see blue flames as though from welding torches shooting everywhere, attacking the body. After a moment of reflection, Césaire, in turn, told me of his experience with Richard Wright and hearing his friend’s bones explode during the procedure. To a reflection regarding what négritude had become at the time of Damas’s death, Césaire gave me a long soliloquy, starting with Paris’s effervescence around the Paris Colonial Exposition back in the 30s and concluding with Sartre’s Black Orpheus. Black Orpheus broke the mold, turning négritude into an aesthetic of literature stripped of socio-political value. The crux of which was that négritude had become another academic subject of post-colonial studies. That was not what Senghor intended. After Black Orpheus, no one could write about négritude without mentioning ontology, epistemology, esthetics, Hegel, integrist and so on. “You heard what I said in Dakar in 66, I don’t like the word négritude. It’s disruptive.” Then too, it bothered him that négritude had gotten disconnected from people’s reality. He then compared that disconnect with what he had witness in Haiti in 1944. The disconnect between the people and the intelligentsia. (Césaire’s interest in Haiti was immense. It was like a duty to visit him whenever I had been to Haiti.)

Aimé Césaire was the mastermind behind the négritude claim. (Martinique Students were at the head of all these engagements.) It was Césaire who postulated that without racial consciousness there would be no social revolution in the colonies. Négritude was the racial consciousness device to eliminate colonial inequalities between France
and the French West Indies and fasten them to Paris permanently. Nothing was more unequivocal. It was a social contract. Naturally négritude was hostile to assimilation, which preordained the disappearance of what Césaire and his people were.

But critiques had their way with négritude. Thirty-one years after he first spoke of it, this is what Césaire thought at the opening of the First World Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar, Senegal, (March 30 - April 21, 1966):

Mes chers amis, je dois vous dire tout de suite qu’aucun mot ne m’irrite davantage que le mot « négritude » – je n’aime pas du tout ce mot-là, mais puisqu’on l’a employé et puisqu’on l’a tellement attaqué, je crois vraiment que ce serait manquer de courage que d’avoir l’air d’abandonner cette notion. Je n’aime pas du tout le mot « négritude » et je dois vous dire que cela m’irrite toujours lorsque, dans les conférences internationales où il y a des anglophones et francophones, on introduit cette notion qui m’apparaît comme une notion de division (…)

Il est très vrai que la littérature de la négritude a été une littérature de combat, une littérature de choc et c’est là son honneur ; une machine de guerre contre le colonialisme et le racisme, et c’est là sa justification. Mais ce n’est là qu’un aspect de la négritude, son aspect négatif.
Si nous avons tellement haï le colonialisme, si nous l’avons tellement combattu, c’est sans doute parce que nous avions conscience qu’il nous mutilait, qu’il nous humiliait, qu’il nous séparait de nous-mêmes et que cette séparation était intolérable : mais c’est aussi parce que nous savions qu’elle nous séparait du monde, qu’elle nous séparait de l’homme, de tous les hommes, y compris de l’homme blanc bref qu’elle nous séparait de notre frère. Autrement dit, le poète de la négritude ne hait tellement le racisme et le colonialisme que parce qu’il a le sentiment que ce sont là des barrières qui empêchent la communication de s’établir.7

My dear friends, I must tell you right away that no word irritates me more than the word "négritude" – I do not like that word at all, but since it has been used and since it has been attacked so much, I really think that it would be a little cowardly to seem to abandon this concept. I do not like the word "négritude" at all, and I must tell you that it always irritates me when, in international conferences where there are Anglophones and Francophones, we speak of this concept, which seems to me to be a concept of division.

It is very true that the literature of Négritude has been a fighting literature, a shock literature, and this is its honor; a machine of war against colonialism and racism, and that is its justification. But this is only one aspect of negritude, its negative aspect.

If we hated colonialism so much, if we fought it so much, it was probably because we were aware that it was mutilating, humiliating, separating us from ourselves, and
separation was intolerable, but it was also because we knew that it separated us from the world, that it separated us from man, from all men, including the white man, in short that it separated us from our brother. In other words, the poet of negritude hates racism and colonialism so much because he feels that these are barriers that prevent communication from becoming established.

L. Sedar Senghor followed Césaire and supported his vision of a colonial arrangement fostered by négritude. Once Césaire succeeded in making Martinique a permanent part of France, négritude disappeared from his vocabulary. (He hardly mentions négritude in his eulogy of Leon Damas in 1978, for example.) Senghor, on the other hand, having failed to make Senegal a federal part of France, became the spokesman and foremost négritude proponent. He continued to make pronoun-cements that reflected his theory of négritude expressed in the above article, which followed Césaire’s Conscience Raciale et Revolution Sociale in the May 1935 issue of l’Etudiant Noir. He then adjusted his views to reflect what Jean-Paul Sartre said in the preface to Senghor’s 1948 Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Négre et Malgache. (Sartre gave négritude an aesthetic supportive role, as he believed that only the proletariat was revolutionary.) Later, Senghor went on to
substitute the specificity of *négritude* for a view of civilization the priest paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, advocated.

The aim of Césaire’s enunciation of *négritude* was to further anchor himself and his people under French rule – *without* French colonialism’s mandated assimilation. This called for a zero-sum proposition – *Négritude*’s gain would be French assimilation’s loss. Césaire’s triumph would be French colonialism’s demise. The black population would no longer be relegated to colonialism’s second-class citizenship – an idealized realm, an attractive natural arcadia, no Frantz Fanon’s Algeria, no violence, no independence.

Césaire then realized that although assimilation/departmentalization made the French West Indies legally part of France there was no economic equivalence. Moreover, it did not eliminate France’s assimilationist policy. With the support of the Communist Party, Césaire undertook to acquire additional legal and economic support from Paris, embarking on a struggle to make the French West Indies specific provinces (regions) of France.
Not until De Gaulle was out of the picture and socialist François Mitterrand came to power in 1981, and not until the regionalization law took effect in 1982 could Césaire proclaim the victory of specificity – négritude – over the assimilation policy.

Césaire never kept his tongue in his pocket. But he wasn’t bold. (Then too he and De Gaulle were aware that the people would not follow Césaire, not the way Guineans followed Sekou Touré.) Having neither autonomy nor chutzpah, from 1946 until 1981, Césaire dithered and struggled to get from Paris what he could for his people. The economic and historical hold of France was implacable. Here Césaire is begging for the generosity of De Gaulle, who was accustomed to double-cross him:

“Et maintenant, M. le Président de la République, permettez-moi d’ajouter que dans la Martinique de 1964, nous vous accueillons aussi avec une immense espérance, car voyez-vous, nous aussi, nous avons nos problèmes, et pour les résoudre, nous avons besoin de votre aide, de votre compréhension de votre générosité.

Problème d’une île étroite, pauvre et terriblement surpeuplée.

Problème du sous-développement d’un pays singulièrement arriéré du point de vue économique.
Problème de notre prolétariat, voué au chômage et qui ne voit dans l’émigration qu’un palliatif inhumain. Problème de notre jeunesse trop souvent acculée à la révolte parce qu’elle est sans débouché et privée de perspective. Il se trouve que nous sommes confrontés, assaillis, bousculés par tous ces problèmes en même temps.”

“And now, Mr. President of the Republic, allow me to add that in Martinique in 1964, we also welcome you with immense hope, because you see, we too have our problems, and to solve them, we need your help, your understanding, your generosity.

Problem of a narrow, poor and terribly overpopulated island.

The problem of the underdevelopment of a singularly backward country from the economic point of view.

Problem of our proletariat, doomed to unemployment and who sees emigration as an inhuman palliative.

Problem of our youth too often driven to revolt because it is without outlet and deprived of prospects. It happens that we are confronted, assaulted, jostled by all these problems at the same time.”

Is that what Wole Soyinka meant when he spoke of the tiger conveying its “tigritude?” Césaire’s “beautiful tree…” of négritude in 1935, bearing “its most authentic fruits,” intersects with the 1964 reality of Martinique’s dutiful depen-
dence on France. That is what Cesaire’s *négritude* was on the ground. In a world of colonialism, De Gaulle and his Fifth Republic, Aimé Césaire’s dependency on France that De Gaulle’s paternalistic colonialism aggravated ultimately circumscribed *négritude*. When Francois Mitterrand became president he and Césaire, having outlasted De Gaulle, took their revenge on what De Gaulle stood for. With the 1982 regionalization law, Césaire could say, “it’s historical … it’s no longer how it used to be … democracy is restored … dignity is recovered by virtue of regionalization”⁹ Since December 2015, the locally based Executive Council of Martinique is now the executive organ of the single territorial collectivity of Martinique.

No doubt the dependence on France remains. *Négritude* never said otherwise. The link between colonizer and colonized is forever a lop-sided master-bondsman connection. There is no contradiction.
CÉSAIRE AND THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY (PCF)

Led by the Stalinists Jacques Duclos and Maurice Thorez the powerful French communist party (P.C.F) was subservient to Moscow’s geopolitical interests. During the interwar years, it waxed and waned about colonialism. Until the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, fascism was the focus of Moscow’s ire. After August 1939 fascism and colonialism were no longer condemned. Once Barbarossa was under way in June 1941, Moscow changed again and the French communists joined the resistance. Moscow and the subservient French communists were engaged elsewhere as far as colonialism was concerned.

Once the communists had come on board in support of departmentalization/assimilation, Césaire not only ceased to denounce them but joined them. After the war, the P.C.F was the largest party in France. Césaire remained a P.C.F member until October 1956. By then the French Communist Party was in decline, trapped between Moscow and Algeria. J.P. Sartre and others turned against the P.C.F around the same time.
Césaire joined the P.C.F in order to get the law on assimilation/departmentalization passed in the National Assembly, where the communists held sway. On the day the law passed, he sent this jubilant telegram to Justice, the Martinique Communist Party weekly newspaper: “Grande victoire pour classes laborieuses et fonctionnaires. Assimilation obtenue. Vive Parti Communiste.”¹⁰ (Great victory for the working classes and civil servants. Assimilation obtained. Long live Communist Party.) Justice’s editor signed his articles “l’oeil de Moscou,” (Moscow’s eye.)

Césaire was a faithful party member. He went to Moscow with P.C.F leader Jacques Duclos, to attend Stalin’s funeral and praise the Soviet premier. He had written earlier an ode to the glory of the party chairman as well as poems in praise of the communist party. But in October 1956, he resigned from the P.C.F, telling Maurice Thorez, the party chairman, in his Letter to Maurice Thorez, what he had said twenty one years earlier in the Conscience Raciale et Révolution Sociale négritude above manifesto. The Cold War made the “eye of Moscow,” the P.C.F., non grata. The Soviet response to the
Hungarian uprising was an opportunity to bail out of a now marginal party that could no longer further Césaire’s old négritude and autonomy aspiration. (He wished he could cleanse his vita of his party membership.)

Like his friend Richard Wright, the party always mistrusted him, for he was a communauteuriste at heart. Unlike his friend, Césaire’s socialism/communism didn’t define him as a writer. Identity defined him. Then too, Césaire was never persecuted like Wright was by both the state and the party. He was never even accused of promoting communautarism, something the French state abhors. (Read in Le Monde: “When minorities distinguish themselves, they are considered a threat to the unity of the Republic and the French people. France is allergic to the plurality of belongings.” 11 On July 12, 2018 the National Assembly voted to remove the word “race” from the constitution.12)

But Césaire was celebrated. Like Victor Hugo he received a state funeral and his name was consigned to the Pantheon “with France’s gratitude” according to Nicolas Sarkozy. L. Sedar Senghor was asked to join the immortals at the
Académie Française. Césaire and Senghor were considered the embodiment of France’s colonial achievement.)

All their lives Césaire and Senghor seemed anchored to Paris circa 1930s. The disarrayed Fourth Parliamentary Republics was considerate to them. They could make petitioning speeches there. That changed when De Gaulle founded the presidential Fifth Republic. Without the chaotic parliament to shield their federal aspirations, Césaire and Senghor were at the merci of Charles de Gaulle to whom the French were a “European people of the white race, of Greek and Latin culture and of the Christian
religion.” ¹³ He would not extend French citizenship with voting rights to Senghor’s compatriots in West Africa. They outnumbered the French. Besides, most of them were Moslems.⁴¹ In the case of Césaire, De Gaulle told him to his face when Césaire mentioned “autonomy” to him: “Entre l’Europe et l’Amérique, il n’y a que des poussières, et on ne construit pas des États sur des poussières.” ¹⁵ (“Between Europe and America, there are only trifles, and one does not build states on trifles.”) De Gaulle was as popular as Césaire in Martinique. Disillusioned that departmentalization was a bust, Césaire called for autonomy for the new French departments and revved up his appeal for a decentralized French Republic. By the time of his death, he called himself an autonomist nationalist.

He had some successes in what he called the process of decolonization. He gained local franchises for the overseas departments, always within the context of the French Constitution. But he never seriously went near the idea of a free and independent French West Indies. The French colonial enterprise produced no more devoted champions than Aimé Césaire and L. Sedar Senghor.
Figure 4 L. Sedar Senghor at the time of the May 1935 edition of l’Étudiant Noir Journal Mensuel de l’Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France.
Chapter I

THE ENUNCIATION OF NEGRITUDE: THE NEW FRENCH NEGRO

According to Léon Damas, it was Aimé Césaire of Martinique, a student in Paris since 1931, whose idea it was to create in 1934 L’Etudiant Noir Journal Mensuel de l’Association des Étudiants Martiniquais en France, after Légitime Defense, Self Defense, had folded in 1932.

L’Etudiant Noir, (The Black Student,) was a monthly published by the association of Martinican students in France. Except for the French Guianese Damas, the other student members were from the two most assimilated colonies in the French empire, Martinique and Senegal. These students, as their names appeared on the periodical’s masthead, were A. Césaire of Martinique, L. Damas of Guyane, B. Diop of Senegal, O. Soce of Senegal, A. Maugée of Martinique, L. Sainville of Martinique, and L. Senghor of Senegal. The founding of l’Etudiant Noir, which, because of the usual financial
crunches and unavailability of credit, was published only five times, starting in March 1935, was one more manifestation in the wave of racial consciousness and cultural self-determination movements taking place all over the black world during the inter-war years especially at the time of the epoch marking Paris Colonial Exposition of 1931.

*L’Etudiant Noir* was the instrument through which a number of students from France’s colonies – never rejecting France itself – proposed to create and defend their black cultural self-determination against the total immersion into French culture that their elders demanded. Besides promoting the interests of Martinique students in France, *l’Etudiant Noir* promoted racial consciousness. Its other objective was autonomy from communism and surrealism that another group of students from Martinique led by Etienne Léro was advancing. In one corner stood Etienne Léro with communism and surrealism. In the other Aimé Césaire with the *Nègre Nouveau*, the expression in French of Alain Locke's enunciation and analysis of the New Negro. Césaire’s *Nègre Nouveau* was equally an echo in
French of the views of Langston Hughes stating that, “we younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.”

(Very shortly after, Aimé Césaire would become a fervent communist and surrealist. Etienne Léro would be killed at the outset of WWII.)

It was from the concept of the “dark-skinned self” that Aimé Césaire formulated his notion of négritude. Césaire who had studied English with Damas in Martinique under Gilbert Gratian and whose thesis was on Afro-American literature probably came upon the term in an American dictionary, perhaps during one of his translations of a black American poet, which he did for l’Etudiant Noir. The term, which did not exist in French, was Negrohood, as in “I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all but about it” in How It Feels To be Colored Me by Zora Neale Hurston, published in 1928. Why not négrité, a French word? Senghor is correct, négrité is the
spirit; not the quality that negrohood – *négritude* – connotes.

(Author’s note: I once asked Césaire whether he had read Zora Neale Hurston’s *How It Feels To be Colored Me*. “C’est possible he said. J’ai toujours été très friand de tout ce qui était Afro-Américain. Et puis, être noire, c’est la négritude.” He was meticulous in his writing and seemed very conscious that he was enunciating – in French – a new word for a new concept.)

The noun-forming suffix, “hood” is “tudo,” in Latin. Hood denotes a state, a condition, a quality, a characteristic. For example, womanhood signifies the distinctiveness of a woman. Negrohood or *négritude*, in turn, denotes the uniqueness distinguishing black people. The above meaning of the term *négritude* is the one Césaire himself used in explaining the word. Other meanings of *négritude* first appeared in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Black Orpheus*, the preface to Léopold Senghor’s 1948 *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (*Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry*). The meaning Sartre gave to *négritude* in 1948, Senghor and others extrapolated to interpret an African way of being and speak of a movement. 6

Césaire said in *Conscience Racialee et Révolution Sociale* (*Racial Consciousness and Social Revolution*):
The West Indian “must tear himself from superficial values; take possession of his most immediate black self [and] plant his négritude as one does a beautiful tree until it bears its most authentic fruits.” (…déchirer les superficielles valeurs, saisir en nous le nègre immédiat, planter notre négritude comme un bel arbre jusqu’à ce qu’il porte ses fruits les plus authentiques).

However, only in his *Return to My Native Land* published in 1939 that, among his literary works, he uses the term freely.

The term *négritude* was Césaire's own. Léon Damas, who was the first of *l’Etudiant Noir* association to publish a book of poetry under the new banner of black cultural self-determination in the French empire, never used the term in any of his works.

Césaire and his views regarding the place of the Caribbean French colonies dominated the politics and the culture of the French West Indies for almost three generations. (Césaire was mayor of Fort de France, Martinique’s capital city, and a deputy to France’s General Assembly from 1945 until 2001. He retired at the age of eighty-eight.) His views also defined the political future of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Guyane.
Négritude and the Communists

The tone and content of *Conscience Raciale et Révolution Sociale* in which Césaire goes armed with *négritude* into battle against the communists are revealing. Within none of the passages is there mention of a time schedule or blueprint for an upcoming uprising based on the principles of *négritude*. Nor is there mention of a formula through which racial consciousness would flow from the initiated to the masses, thus inspiring a national culture based on the truism of *négritude*. Césaire does not advocate a dynamic *négritude* or adheres to any political concept to sustain a forthcoming national homeland, which would take root when *négritude* is triumphant. There is no room in Césaire's *négritude* for any dialectical progression between the French West Indian's future knowledge of his black self and a free homeland. In fact, Césaire does not entertain the inalienable right of West Indians under French rule to such a homeland devoid of a colonial supervisor in his criticism of the communists. There was nothing perverse here – regardless of his inferior status or the racism inherent in
colonialism, Césaire never gave being under French rule a second thought. He wanted to be French, albeit Afro-French. He spoke French with the accent of the colonial who had spent time in France. His constituents addressed him in Créole all the time while he was in Martinique when the National Assembly in Paris was not in session. All someone had to do was call out, Mysié Césay, and he would stop to listen. (No one was more gracious to le petit peuple. It was for them that back in 1946 he had wanted Martinique to be a French department, so that le petit peuple would have something to eat and some of the rights the French enjoyed.) He always answered in French. He never spoke Créole. And they revered him for the fact that no one – not even De Gaulle – spoke French as well as he. A Martinique man who handled the French language as there was not a white man to handle it. However removed, however high his pedestal, Césaire wanted more than anything else to be a man of the people – le petit peuple.
Figure 5 Aimé Césaire occupied an apartment at 8 rue Albert Bayet in the 13th arrondissement of Paris.

Without France Césaire’s négritude would be as specious as the Harlem Renaissance without Harlem, USA.

The dichotomy between Racial Consciousness in The Black Student and Social Revolution in Self Defense is, therefore, a hazily existent one, inasmuch as the latter does not prescribe either a program through which the victorious proletariat of the French West Indies would achieve nationhood. If anything, Self Defense's goal is only slightly more general in tone and content than Césaire's, being in particular less ill defined. In fact, Césaire's disagreement with the group of Self Defense takes on the appearance of a family squabble in light of this comment from Césaire:
There were two tendencies within our group. On the one hand, there were people from the Left, Communists at that time, such as J. Monnerot, E. Léro, and René Ménil. They were Communists, and therefore, we supported them. But very soon I had to reproach them – and perhaps I owe this to Senghor – for being French Communists. There was nothing to distinguish them either from the French Surrealists or from the French Communists.  

Césaire's call for racial consciousness, i.e., négritude, against the backdrop of the French communists' campaign for social revolution, is that neither ever envisaged proposing, at the time, that the big leap be made, that freedom from France be sought. The opposite is in fact true. The objective of Césaire's call for the consciousness of one's “black self” in the French speaking West Indies was two-fold. One was the eradication of the old system of assimilation that had assumed and upheld the belief that since the black man was culturally hollow, Jacobin France's mission was to imbue him with French culture and mold him in its image. The above objective was essential to Césaire's aim of cultural and racial equality within the French nation; for assimilation intrinsically held its object in a passive posture, and hence his inferior
status. Assimilation, moreover, held him in economic and political bondage since “administrative Caesarism” was the economic and political arm of France's assimilationist grand design. The communists, in their call for social revolution in the French West Indies, having failed to address themselves to the dilemma of assimilation in a society hypothetically conscious of its racial differences would, if successful, in turn, maintain the cultural status quo. L. Sedar Senghor, in support of Césaire's thesis, asks: “After you have made the revolution what spiritual bread will you give to the black masses that you caused to lose its originality [further]?”

As in the past, they would continue to take their cue from Moscow, not only in ideological matters but also in cultural ones. The socioeconomic stewardship of the colonies would be the only change.

States Césaire in *Conscience Raciale et Révolution Sociale* above:

The white exploiters, gave us exploited blacks a culture, but a white culture; a civilization, but a white civilization; morality, but a white morality; thus paralyzing us with an invisible net in the hypothetical case we liberated
ourselves from the most evident material slavery they imposed on us (...) if it is true that the work of revolutionary dialectic is to destroy 'all false perceptions lavished on men to veil their state of servitude,' must we not denounce the paralyzing culture of identification (...)

Césaire's second objective was the establishment of cultural self-determination in the French-speaking West Indies. This aim would remove the "assimilated" label from the Antilleans' vitae. In addition, it would bring about the institutionalization of an ethnic and cultural pluralistic French federal state within which the black Frenchman, having shed his former status, would become – separately but equally – a full partner in the decisions made by the state on his behalf. In one movement in his *Return to my Native Land*, Césaire is found swearing by his *négritude*:

I accept … I accept … totally, without reserve my race which no ablution of hyssop or mixed lilies could purify my race eaten by macula my race ripe grape for drunken feet I accept … accept 9 …
The ensuing movement is the proclamation of his cultural autonomy, assimilation having been antithesized by his faith in négritude:

Take me as I am. I am not adapting to you! ¹⁰

It is to fulfill this goal that he founded his own party in 1958. In his report to the Constitutional Assembly of the Progressive Party that he had founded, Césaire defined his political objective, as follows:

I say that the idea of federalism that is contrary to separation and at the same time contrary to assimilation is the only one that will correctly solve the French West Indian problem. ¹¹

To Césaire, therefore, self-determination was a non sequitur; cooperation within what he called the "French family" based on the equality of the races and not the status quo assimilation of one race by another, colonized by colonizer, would be the logical derivative of négritude consciousness and the wave of the future. Césaire’s négritude exuded passivity.
The American experience had demonstrated to Césaire that expressions of black consciousness such as the *Negro Renaissance* were not antithetical to the blacks' goal of equal participation in the affairs of their country.
Chapter II

CESAIRE’S NEGRITUDE, THE LAST STEP IN THE PERMANENTIZATION OF FRENCH RULE IN THE FRENCH WEST INDIES

Césaire returned to Martinique, in August 1939, already a legend in French academic circles for his blazing intellect and ability to wield the French language with singular dexterity.¹ It was, however, the heralding of his négritude that set him apart from the other returning students who had all traveled to Paris to continue their studies and take their place in the colonial system. Frantz Fanon who three years later entered Césaire's French class at the lycée Schelcher, the local secondary school, recalled that:

For the first time a secondary school teacher – a man, therefore, who was apparently worthy of respect – was seen to announce quite simply to (Martinique society) 'that it was fine and good to be a Negro' … what indeed could be more grotesque than an educated man, a man with a diploma, having in consequence understood a good many things, among others that it was unfortunate to be a
Negrito, proclaiming that his skin was beautiful and that the 'big black hole' was a source of truth … He must be mad, for it was unthinkable that he could be right.²

Before his return and during the period he was militating from his Paris base against the communists, Césaire outlined his role in the new Martinique, in *Return to My Native Land*. Here he measures his determination to become the leader who will extirpate Martinique from its paralyzing colonial assimilationist inertia:

I will come back to this country of mine and I will say to it : 'Embrace me without fear. If all I can do is speak, it is for you that I will speak. My mouth will be the mouth of the misfortunes that have no Mouth; my voice the liberty of those who are stuck in the dungeon of despair.'³

Césaire's plan remained shelved for six years. On his way home war was declared in Europe. (Césaire taught French at the Lycée Victor Schoelcher in Fort de France from 1939 until the end of the war.) In the French West Indies, a Pétain Lieutenant, Admiral Georges Robert, with the help of "ten thousand" French sailors,
imposed Vichy's will on the area from 1939 to 1943. This period witnessed the crystallization of the aspirations of the people of Martinique to solidify once and for all their amalgamation into France, and Césaire's appreciation of the black masses as a class.

The presence of French sailors overtly displaying their fascist tendencies produced in the black population of Martinique the breakdown of the ironic mechanism, which until then had shielded them from the recognition of their “dark skinned self.”

In 1939 no [Antillean] in [the West Indies] proclaimed himself to be a Negro, claimed to be a Negro. When he did, it was always in his relations with a white man. It was the white man, the 'bad white man,' who obliged him to assert his color, more exactly to defend it …

The difference between the real and the mythical France conceived by an anxious people – continuously in search of one more defense against the reality of the French West Indies – is central to the understanding of the motivations there.

By a process easy to understand the West Indian under French rule perceived that the France of the sailors was
the evil France, and the Marseillaise that those men respected was not their own. Those sailors were racists. Now, everybody knows that the true Frenchman is not a racist; in other words, he does not consider the West Indian a Negro. Since these men did so consider him, this meant that they were not true Frenchmen. 7

In June 1943, the Martinican masses later supported by the army of which three-fourths were from the island, overthrew the Vichy regime there. This was done not in the name of negrohood – négritude – as Fanon suggests, but in the name of the mythical France which De Gaulle (who had opposed Pétain) came to symbolize. Like Victor Schoelcher and the Jacobins of 1794, De Gaulle proclaimed "liberty, equality, fraternity" and gained unmatched veneration in the French West Indies. He had, by opposing the forces, which Pétain and Robert upheld, become the answer to the question about the future of the West Indies within the French empire. Aimé Césaire’s political course was set. The Vichy experience had deepened the always-present fear that France could abandon Guyane and the West Indies islands. Such apprehension contributed to demands for irrevocable bonds between the mother country and the
colonies. Any political party supporting such demands would have carried the day at the elections that took place after the war. And the communists who had abandoned their anti colonialism stance were now the most clamorous advocates for permanent ties to France. Since they had also emerged from the war as the dominant party in France, they were most instrumental in bringing them to fruition.

"It is logical [then] that the elections that followed the Liberation should have delegated two communist deputies out of three."\(^8\) It only helped that Césaire, following the trend, had, in the meantime, joined the communists.

In Martinique in April 1941, Césaire founded and was director of a new periodical, *Tropiques*. His collaborator, René Ménil of the old *Self Defense* communist and surrealist team, gave this periodical its orientation and temper. *Tropiques*, to a fundamental extent, projected more of the ideologies *Self Defense* had stood for in 1932 than the "racial consciousness" propounded by Césaire in *l'Etudiant Noir* in 1935. Beginning with the first two issues, Menil sets the poetic orientation of the periodical with articles such as "*Birth of Our Act*" and "*Poetic Orient-"
Césaire who hosted surrealist guru, André Breton in 1941 in Martinique, and who had discovered that surrealism greatly enhanced his ability to dwell into his "dark skinned self," began in turn to publish in *Tropiques*’s third issue, poems with definite surrealist bents. Césaire's political perception of the Martinican masses had also been extended to include the views that *Self Defense* had expounded earlier. Whereas he had previously upheld négritude as the sine qua non driving force of change, in wake of the overthrow of the Robert-led Vichy regime, he began to associate consciousness of race with consciousness of class. In his *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, for example, Césaire writes:

This class of black peasants matured by events was for now a 'class by itself' … and no more a 'class in itself.' Determined to finish with a tired social order, it could not accept that this order continue under the guise of race privilege or of caste.⁹

The black masses of the French West Indies thus became for Césaire the proletariat, and the descendants of the slave owners who had also sided with the Petain fascists became "the tired order" to be overthrown. By 1944, Menil could,
therefore, say of Césaire in the eleventh issue of *Tropiques*:

Conceived in 1932 in *Légitime Défense*, Self Defense, this cultural movement of the French West Indian people was launched effectively only in 1940 … It was constantly oriented by sure technical means derived from human sciences such as psychoanalysis, historical materialism, ethnography. The master conductor of this movement was Aimé Césaire. ¹⁰

(Ménil who maintained that négritude was a 'reactionary doctrine,' placed Césaire’s *l’Etudiant Noir* in the ethnography column in his acknowledgement of contributors to the French West Indian cultural movement).¹¹

Nine years after he had defined his role in "racial consciousness" terms in response to the communist's call to "social revolution," Césaire had incorporated enough of the latter's precepts to have, like *Tropiques*, become the synthesis of the West-Indian students’ two interwar movements in Paris.

Recognized by Ménil and others with the same artistic and political convictions as their leader, Césaire had now achieved the goal he had set for himself in *Return to My Native Land*. It is axio-
matic that had he already made his mark in Martinique by 1945, Césaire would certainly have founded a party reflecting his Négritude/Marxist views then and not wait until March 1958. It follows that, although he was closer ideologically to the Communist Party, (PCF) than any other, his choice of the PCF for his ticket, when he became a candidate for political office was an opportunistic, albeit a logical, one. According to Susan Frutkin:

For practical purposes, the Communist Party of Martinique, as an arm of the French Communist Party, offered badly needed support and experience as well as a vehicle to national political power for these new political leaders. This was of considerable importance for those who believed that solutions to the island's problems might come from above, from a government, which had the interest of the working class and possibly the black colonials at heart.  

It is not coincidental that Césaire's disenchantment with the Party followed the general decline of the left's popularity in both France and Martinique and the rise of his own at home. His letter of resignation from the PCF to Maurice Thorez is, moreover, reflective of the views he elaborated in The Black Student in 1935, and is
symptomatic of the "accent on the substantive as well as on the qualitative" which he consistently emphasized.

His advocacy for cultural and political autonomy – négritude – within a French federal state, could only have suffered when Césaire became a member of a party that took its orders from Moscow and mirrored so closely the centralism innate to France's political order. Admittedly, négritude was 'put on ice' during the eleven years Césaire was a member of the French Communist Party. However, the PCF offered the French West Indian masses, while in power, the guarantee of a French umbrella, which is precisely the leitmotif in Césaire's enunciation of négritude.
Chapter III

CESAIRE’S NEGRITUDE IS ROOTED IN THE HISTORY OF THE FRENCH WEST INDIES

What were the anthropological factors in the region? What made Aimé Césaire conclude that he could conjure a racial consciousness ideology and find safe harbor under French rule? What measure of cultural and racial integrity could he preserve under that rule?

A Brief history of what made Aimé Césaire an Afro-Frenchman in the West Indies.

Spain’s Gambit

In his effort to find a new passage to the Orient, Christopher Columbus set foot in the Caribbean in 1492 and claimed the erroneously named "Indies” for Spain. One year later, the Treaty of Tordesillas and the issuance of the Pontifical Bulls bestowed official blessings upon the venture.

Columbus, (whose name in Spanish – Cristóbal Colón – stands for Christ bearer and
Colonizer), erected crucifixes at each new place of discovery and inquired about gold at every port – bullion being of primary importance to the economy of colonial Spain’s budding mercantilist economy.

The shipments of precious metals, which regularly crossed the treacherous Atlantic waters on the way to Spain, brought to the area scores of Dutch, Danish, French, British privateers and pirates in search of quick riches. Their light brigantines would out sail and pounce upon the heavily laden Spanish galleons. Much to the chagrin of the Kings of Spain, his ships were quickly unloaded and relieved of their prized cargo before resting at the bottom of the sea.

The men and women who searched the seas for the Spain-bound precious metals were among the first Europeans to settle in the Caribbean isles. That they were outlaws in their own countries gave the other European powers a diplomatic way out to challenge Spain's hegemony in the West Indies. In the case of France, the privateers also controlled the settlements, which later would constitute the colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe, St-Domingue, and French Guyana.
Prodded by his royal sponsors, Columbus began to emphasize the need for colonization and land cultivation during this third voyage rather than the search solely for gold. He also received the right to take convicts to populate Hispaniola (Saint-Domingue).

As an admiral, Columbus may have had no equal in his day; but, as the Americas’ first Spanish viceroy, he was a failure. His harsh rule compounded by nepotism (he made his brothers Giacomo and Bartolome mayor and governor of Isabella and Santo Tomas, respectively) drove the settlers to rebellion. Thus, when Columbus returned on his third expedition, he found that the new mayor of Isabella, Francisco Roldan, had rebelled openly against his rule. The compromise that resulted between the two men unleashed the system of *encomienda* on the Caribbean. This system, formalized by the crown and placed under the administration of Nicolas Ovando, provided each colonist with free labor as well as tribute in gold dust from Hispaniola’s natives. In return, each colonist was to provide protection to "his" natives and contribute to the maintenance of the parish priest. The *encomienda* system, instituted the year following Columbus’s arrival
in the Caribbean, laid waste to the Indian population of Hispaniola.

The destruction of the island's native population by slavery, physical and mental abuse that eroded the natives’ desire to survive coupled with lack of immunity to European diseases created a labor shortage in Hispaniola. The immediate replacements for the Caribs were not from Africa but from Europe. They ran the gamut of European society, ranging from hospital patients, landless aristocrats, convicts, and indigents. All were Catholic, however.

Voluntarily or otherwise, this cadre of ill-assorted, mismatched settlers, all took a common ship that led them to the “Indies.” The proclamation from the King and Queen of Spain, issued in 1497, is illustrative of the means employed to secure citizens for Hispaniola:

. . . we have commanded the loading of certain ships and vessels in which there will go certain people who have been paid for a certain time, and because they are not enough for the development of a town as befits the service of God and ours, if other people do not go to reside and live and serve in them at their own cost, we wishing to provide for this, issue this our decree...that each and every male person who may have committed ... any murders or any other crimes of what ever nature and
quality they might be, except heresy and lese majesté ... shall go and serve in person in Hispaniola, at their own cost, as commanded by the Admiral in our name. Those who deserve a minor penalty than death ... for a year and will be pardoned. ¹

This decree validates the notion that, besides Dominican friars and later Jesuit priests, few persons of means and education settled in the early Spanish colony.

The Spanish government had given Castile preferential treatment in matters of colonial trade and population. Castile, however, could not meet the labor needs of Hispaniola. The government had to relax its ban against non-Catholics and began the wholesale emigration of Spaniards. In 1518, the Spanish authorities offered free passage, free plots of land, and free livestock to anyone who would emigrate; but, in spite of such inducements, the shortage of colonists continued. In fact, the situation worsened when tales of gold discoveries in Peru and New Spain reached Hispaniola where the precious metal had petered out. Europeans were never able to fill the labor trough emptied by the destruction of the Caribs.

The annihilation of the Caribs, as is often told, came to the attention of the priest-encomen-
dero, Bartolome de las Casas, who, to protect against their complete decimation, proposed that Africans be brought to Hispaniola as replacements. Seemingly, the wholesale introduction of Africans to the Indies was triggered by the fact that by the time Columbus made his discoveries in the Caribbean, the Portuguese using slave laborers had already begun the successful cultivation and harvesting of sugar cane in Sao Tomé, an island off the west coast of Africa.

Europeans of this and subsequent eras believed that Africans could endure the arduous and often killing toil that neither the Caribs nor their own societal dregs could withstand. In a letter dated January 22, 1518, Alonzo Zuaro, judge of Hispaniola, wrote to Cardinal Ximenes, regent of Spain, “indeed, there is urgent need for Negro slaves. The burden of work of the Indians will be eased and unlimited ... gold will be mined. This is the best land in the world for Negoes, women and old men, and it is very rarely that one of these people die.”

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the cry from Hispaniola for more African slaves reached a crescendo. The king was still concerned about introducing non-Catholics to the island, and
limited the captive Africans sent to Hispaniola to those living in Spain. In 1501, he wrote to the governor of Hispaniola that because:

. . . our earnest desire for ... conversion ... might be impeded, we cannot consent to the immigration of Moors, heretics, Jews, re-converts, or persons newly converted to our Holy faith unless they are Negro or other slaves who have been in the power of Christians who are our subjects and nationals and carry our express permission.³

The requests for more Africans ran unabated, nonetheless. To be sure, religion was no match for economic considerations. Spain did not have enough "Negro or other slaves born in the power of Christians" to fill all the requests. Not only was there a severe shortage of Christianized enslaved Africans, but equally vital, the Africans themselves began to refute the myth that they could toil ad infinitum without succumbing. Ferdinand mused, “I do not understand why so many Negroes have died.”⁴

The basic difference between the slave labor of the Caribs and that of the Africans is understandable. Whereas the Carib population was limited in number, to the European slavers, the Africans seemed a resource without limit.
In 1455, Pope Nicholas V gave the Portuguese the key to the captive African chest:

We, after scrupulous reflection, are granting by our Bull, full and entire freedom to King Alphonso to conquer, to besiege, to fight, and to submit all the Saracens, Pagans, and other enemies of Christ, wherever they may be; and to seize the kingdoms, the dukedoms, the principedoms, the lordships, personal properties, landed properties, and all the wealth they withhold and possess; and to submit these people to perpetual slavery; to transmit them to their successors; to take advantage and make use of them personally and with their offspring.  

The Church of Rome stood as the final arbiter and the ultimate legalizer in another age when money, power, armadas, and strong alliances ruled the economic order. The Church favored the activities of Portugal and Spain, the two bastions of Christendom. By the fifteenth century, the Church, after hundreds of years of abuse and Roman politics, faced rising Protestantism – first from Germany, then England and finally the Low Countries. The Great Schism (1309-1420) compounded by the “Babylonian Captivity” of the Avignon Popes, which lasted until the advent of Pope Nicholas V, had left the papacy in chaos and in dire need of
support. For such support the Pope paid, in part, with pronouncements such as the aforementioned Bull. This Bull put Christendom’s stamp of approval on the wholesale enslavement of Africans. It was also a monopolistic device favoring King Alphonso of Portugal.

Nicholas V was called "the great humanist" for his erudition and contributions to the Vatican library. He, however, typified the ecclesiastical ruler of an age whose worldly concerns overrode spiritual leadership. The Pope's grant to the King of Portugal carried no more weight than did the Pope himself. Simultaneously, having found what they believed to be the answer to the labor shortage in the Caribbean, North America, and Latin America, the other European powers quickly defied the Pope and Portugal's patent on the African slave trade.

John Hawkins opened the flow in 1562 in violation not only of Portugal's monopoly of the West African coast, but also of Spain's hegemony in the Caribbean. With great pride to the British, he unloaded his African cargo in Hispaniola for hides, ginger, sugar, and pearls. Hawkins' coup proved that mercantile expansions were as viable as their defenses. Spain, despite the wealth it was
siphoning from the "New World," remained a relatively poor, obscurantist country incapable of defending its newfound riches. There were many political and geographical explanations for this incongruity. However, the most significant reason was that Seville, which the Spanish government had granted l’Exclusif right to trade with the Indies, was unable to provide for the colonies adequately. This fact, in tandem with the duties imposed by the Casa de Contracion, Seville’s Trading House, on every purchase, resulted in widespread smuggling.

The Spanish colonists traded with all nationals regardless of flag. A letter to the King of Spain, dated May 20, 1563, from a colonial official demonstrates the colonists’ friendly attitude toward unlicensed trade:

These people oppose justice here and bear a not friendly attitude toward me: because ever since I have arrived I have endeavored to enforce your Majesty's commands and royal cedulas particularly with respect to vessels which enter this port without manifests and are seized.⁶

If the monopolies on trade could be flouted, regardless of the Pope's Bulls, so too could territorial hegemony. The King of France, Francis I,
made his Gallic intention known as early as 1526 in this well-known statement:

“The sun shines on me as well as on others. I should be very happy to see the clause in Adam's will, which excluded me from my share when the world was being divided. God has not created those lands for Spaniards alone.”

Sir William Cecil, commenting on the Pope's Bull, stated to the Spanish Ambassador to England, “the Pope had no right to partition the world and to take and give kingdoms to whomsoever he pleases.”

With these challenges, Europe re-launched the scramble for the Indies. The European powers would war, sail, and maneuver in uncharted waters, first, to supply the Spanish colonials and later other colonists. According to C.L.R. James, “... the slavers brought more and more Negroes, in numbers that leapt by thousands every year, until the drain from Africa ran into millions.”

It was so, as this exclamation shows: “There are so many Negroes in this island [Hispaniola] as a result of the sugar factories, that the land seems an effigy or an image of Ethiopia itself.”
Spain's colonization and its methods were not lost; they, in fact, served as an example to the other European powers, which were gaining footholds in the region. The Spaniards continued to vary their own methods of expansion that later gave a national distinctiveness to their colonies. Half a century after England and France had won their “place in the sun” the character of Jamaica was hardly the same as that of Saint-Domingue.
Chapter IV

THE BIRTH OF THE FRENCH WEST INDIES

France had resolved its internal religious strife with Henry IV's Edict of Nantes in 1598. In the years that followed, it set out to defy Spain whose navy had suffered an irreparable blow at the hands of the British ten years earlier. France and England, using the system of effective occupation, penetrated three areas where Spain had declared its sovereignty but had sporadic contacts because of limited resources. Those areas were North America, upper South America, and the Windward Islands.

French buccaneers used the coasts of Guadeloupe and Martinique, along other nearby islands, to attack the Spanish flotillas and galleons on their voyages from Peru or Mexico to Castile. Spain tried repeatedly to take over the two main islands comprising Guadeloupe; however, the Caribs who had displaced the original Arawak inhabitants of Guadeloupe kept the Conquistadores at bay from the islands. Pierre
Belain D’Esnambuc, a pirate in the employ of Cardinal Richelieu, then hounded Spain’s forces from Guadeloupe’s Grand-Terre in 1626. The Spaniards never returned. Cardinal Richelieu commissioned D’Esnambuc to take possession of Barbados and other islands in the region on behalf of the American Islands Co. (Compagnie des Isles d'Amerique), a trading syndicate.

The following document establishes the French empire in the Caribbean:

We ... acknowledge and admit that we have formed and form by these presents a faithful association between ourselves to send an expedition, under the leadership of the Sieurs d'Esnambuc and du Rossey, Captains in the navy, or such others as we see fit to choose and name, to settle and people the Islands of St. Christopher and Barbados, and others situated at the entrance to Peru, from the eleventh to the eighteenth degree of the Equator, which are not in the possession of Christian princes, both to instruct the inhabitants of the aforesaid islands in the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion, and to trade and traffic in the products and merchandise which may be obtained and procured from the aforesaid islands and neighboring places, to bring them to France to Havre-de-Grace, in preference to all other ports, for the time and space of twenty years, and is more especially stipulated in the commission and authority which will be given to the said d'Esnambuc and du Rossey by My Lord Cardinal
Richelieu, Grand-Master, Chief and Superintendent of French commerce.¹

Full colonization of Guadeloupe and Martinique –“the others situated at the entrance to Peru” – began, however, only nine years later in 1635, when two of d'Esnambuc's lieutenants, Leonard de L'Olive and Jean Duplessis, landed and established the French colony of Guadeloupe. Later that year d'Esnambuc himself planted France’s flag in Martinique.

According to the custom of the day, the state chartered companies to trade and/or settle in specified areas with full ownership rights. There was, nevertheless, a corollary to these rights. Governments drew up Articles to "instruct" the shareholders of such companies in their duties to the state. For example, Article IV of the Compagnie des Isles d'Amerique’s commission stated:

They shall not admit to the islands colonists and settlements of any person who is not a Frenchman and who does not profess the Apostolic and Roman Catholic religion. If any other person should happen to enter the colony, he shall be forced to leave as soon as the governor of the island learns of it.²
This directive prescribed three mandated requisites: nationality, faith, and trade. The controls Spain had unsuccessfully tried to uphold, the French, the Dutch, and the British encouraged. Ignoring the lessons obvious in Spain's failure, they made war on each other not only in the Americas but also in Europe, Asia, and later Africa. (One legacy of this come and go struggle is that today people of the entire West Indies all speak a Creole tongue).

Article IV also presaged the level of insularity, (i.e., négritude) which later befell Guadeloupe, Martinique, and later Saint-Domingue – France would be their only contact with the outside world. These policies began with Cardinal Richelieu. Prelate by profession, Richelieu was also a political leader with enormous dictatorial leanings. He founded French Absolutism, a system, which concentrated power in the person of the king and his bureaucrats. And notably for the West Indies, it centralized the political and administrative hands regulating France’s colonies. Whereas the British planter could lobby Parliament or even buy a seat there, the planter in the French Caribbean did not enjoy the same
privileges until later. To redress wrongs, the planter had to rely upon the impact colonial events had upon France itself. Lines were drawn very early in the life of the colonies. On one side of the Atlantic were the king, his Secretary of the Navy, and his governors. On the other side were the planter and his local council. The Atlantic was also the dividing line in terms of interests. France had the merchant, the company, and the capital lender. The colonies had the planter and the enslaved Africans.

Upon the death of Richelieu in 1642, another Cardinal succeeded to the reins of government. Also an absolutist, Mazarin's fiscal and centralizing policies provoked the rebellion of the *Fronde*. By the end of the rebellion in 1653 Mazarin’s powers and policies became unquestioned to such an extent that upon Mazarin’s death in 1661 his King, Louis XIV, could safely make the apocryphal statement, *L'état c'est moi*. Mazarin also bequeathed to Louis his deputy, Jean Baptiste Colbert, who, in a short time, became the central administrative figure in France and remained so until his death in 1683. Colbert brought French mercantilism to its zenith. His was not, however, the mercantile-bullionist
system of Spain but, rather, a complex protectionist commercial arrangement geared toward positive trade balances.

France’s mercantilist code was called *L'Exclusif*, but more aptly named *Colbertism*; and like the other proponents of mercantilism, it discouraged commerce with outsiders. Its "all roads lead to Versailles" rules reinforced the one-dimensional connection between colony and mother country. Nevertheless, the French, like other colonists in the Caribbean and elsewhere, survived because of illicit trade and even prospered despite disease, war and blockades. However, contraband declined once the British Navigational Acts removed the Dutch Free Traders from the area. Encouraged by governments and investors, fierce competition in production of sugar developed among plantation owners in the various colonies. An overseer could easily boast, “though I have killed 30 or 40 Negroes per year, I have made my employer 20, 30, 40 or more hogsheads per year than any of my predecessors ever did.”

The competition within the Caribbean for the benefit of the mother country has left its isolationist mark on the area. The people remain
locked on a one-way street to France, unaware of their surroundings. “They,” observe Eric Williams, “remain profoundly ignorant of the neighboring islands, each group basking in its special isolation.”

As in the case of Spain's Hispaniola, European laborers (called “white slaves” by the Dominican priest Jean-Baptiste Labat) voluntarily went to the French island colonies as engagés (contract laborers). Then too, the government summarily shipped them to the Caribbean in order to lessen unemployment in France. Prisoners could also do their sentence in the colonies always in pursuit of laborers. In the eighteenth century, French Guyana became the major recipient of such migrants. As long as tobacco and cotton were the primary crops, the agricultural unit remained small, parceled-out farms needing few workers.

Tobacco and other previous crops required intensive cultivation but only small outlay for processing and labor. A family could economically run a farm with a few indentured servants. By contrast, sugarcane could be grown extensively with little expertise but was perishable and had to be harvested immediately. A sugar factory required a heavy investment in buildings, machi-
nery, and labor and continuous substantial supplies of raw sugarcane; thus, sugar-cane estates were much larger than earlier farms.\(^5\)

Once the *engagés* had served their thirty-six months, the company gave them a parcel of land to clear and seeds to grow a crop. These workers formed collective associations of two or three individuals and jointly worked their land holdings. However, two factors were to bring radical change to the nature of farming and the configuration of working units, not only in the French colonies, but also throughout the Caribbean. First, was the hegemony and quality of Virginia’s tobacco over the Caribbean’s; second, was the overwhelming demand for sugar in Europe and America.

With the emergence of sugarcane as a major crop, the demography and landscape of the Caribbean changed rapidly. The numerous small farms gave way to a few large estates – plantations. At the same time, comparatively cheaper African captives replaced European *engagés* whom the company had to remunerate in the form of wages after the thirty-six-month contract period. Also worth noting was that European wars were depleting France of young
men at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. In fact, the ordinance of April 8, 1699 forbade ship captains from taking on board any *engagé* under the age of eighteen.

Indissolubly linked to the expansion of French capital was the production of sugar – conceived as a multifaceted commercial undertaking whose benefits reached the lowest shopkeepers in France. Set in motion from Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Nantes, or Le Havre, ships of the *Compagnie du Senegal* (Senegal Trading Company), were loaded with French goods destined for the West Coast of Africa. Once there, an eyewitness says, the French ships "worked" the coast from Dakar to Angola, including some of the coastal islands. From there the ships set sail for the French-controlled Caribbean islands, first stopping at Fort St. Pierre, Martinique, giving that colony first choice of the Africans on board. Plantation owners paid “in raw sugar, indigo and the like, expressed in terms of weight.”⁶ The last leg of the triangular travel route called for the French ships, loaded with local produce, to return to France where raw
sugar was refined for sale in Europe and the colonies.

The enslavement of the African was the nexus in the alliance between sugar production and capital accumulation. The life and death of the slave were a major gear in this machinery. The more the colonies needed Africans, the more the slavers “worked” the West Coast of Africa. Equally, the more ships there were in circulation, the more seamen, canvas, cordage, and like articles they used. They bred slaves in the American Colonies, lessening the demands from Africa. In the French Caribbean, this was not the case. Taking Saint-Domingue as an example,

Imports from 1764 to 1774 numbered 102,474. The slave population in 1776 was 290,000. Thus, despite an importation of over one hundred thousand, without taking into account the annual births, the increase of the slave population in thirteen years was less than 85,000.”7 The rule was “to work the slaves out, and trust in supplies from Africa. 8

One consequence of the magnitude of slave mortality was that newly arrived Africans were always present in the colonies. Not yet seasoned – trained to accept captivity, rebellion was high
among them. Most of the revolts were African-led, with a sizeable number being exclusively tribal in nature.

In the seventeenth century, France continued to add to its empire. Concurrently with the beginning of the colonization of Guadeloupe and Martinique, a group of French settlers from Rouen, Normandy, established themselves on the Sinnary River (French Guyana) in 1626, twenty-two years after France’s first attempt at occupation. In 1635, another group settled the island of Cayenne. These attempts at colonization were failures and the Dutch, who were already making inroads into neighboring territories, took up colonial residence in Cayenne. In 1664, Colbert had the Dutch evicted and Lefebvre de La Barre with some one thousand settlers revitalized the French colonization attempts of Cayenne. This last group was more successful but, from the beginning, French Guyana acquired the reputation of an unhealthy and difficult area to settle. As such, Guyane never received the attention France gave to Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. In addition, unlike those other colonies, the *engagé* system was not employed in
Guyane, although the same farming pattern could be found there.

Also in the seventeenth century, France acquired the *de jure* proprietorship of the western third of the island of Hispaniola in the 1697 Treaty of Ryswick. This area, re-named Saint-Domingue, was not a new settlement. The de facto settlement of that colony began years earlier with the occupation by buccaneers stationed in the Cayman Islands and in Tortuga who preyed upon the Spanish galleons. The need to protect its fleet compelled Spain to abandon the northern part of Hispaniola to reinforce Havana, a strategic port in the crossing to Seville. As in the case of Martinique and Guadeloupe, the French filled the void. Through the *Compagnie des Indes Occidentales* (West Indies Co.), the French authorities gave the buccaneers tracts of land to cultivate tobacco. Thirty-two years before the Treaty of Ryswick, these buccaneers, managed by France, founded the town of Port de Paix following their defeat at the hands of the British on Isla de Tortuga across the bay.

As they had done in Guadeloupe and Martinique, French centralism and exclusivity absorbed
Guyane and Saint-Domingue into the fold of the French empire in the West Indies.
Chapter V

LE CODE NOIR: THE FRENCH BLACK CODE

Louis XIV promulgated The Code Noir in 1685. A compendium of laws and regulations, it remained the basic legal document by which France ruled the colonies for 163 years. The Code came from Colbert as a royal ordinance “concerning the Government, the Administration of Justice, the Police, the Discipline and the trade of Africans in the French colonies.”¹ In the spirit of l’Exclusif, however, the Code added its own monopolies of religion, race, and sex.

The Code's first stipulations were on the subject of religion. The French did not want Protestants and Jews in the colonies. To enforce this rule, the Code insisted that only Catholics could own or be in charge of slaves who were to be baptized. The slaves could not be forced to work on Sundays or holidays, under penalty of confiscation of the owner's property. Marriage was permitted only between baptized slaves who had the consent of their masters. Newly arrived
Africans, they placed under the tutelage of a baptized slave.

The children of slaves belonged to the owner of the mother thus ensuring their continued slave status. In the same vein, the status of children from the union of a slave and a freeman would depend on the status of the mother. However, Article IX prescribed a 2000-pound of sugar penalty in cases of children born of a freeman and a slave.

Article XV of the Code forbade slaves from carrying arms of any type or assembling even for weddings. The slave, who ran away for one month, lost both ears and was branded on one shoulder. For a second offense, the buttocks were slashed and a brand placed on the other shoulder. The third time, death. A freed slave who gave shelter to a runaway was fined 3,000 pound of sugar a day; a freeborn, ten pounds a day. The slave, who struck a member of his owner's family and drew blood, would be put to death. The Code also prescribed severe penalty against the slave who struck any freeborn person.

According to Article XLII, owners could not punish a slave without cause. Mutilation or torture of slaves was forbidden under penalty of
property confiscation and prosecution. If an owner or his agent killed a slave, the Code prescribed criminal prosecution.

Article XLIV declared the slave a *meuble* – movable property – that could be used as collateral. The slaves could not own property, could not hold public office, and could not bear witness in civil or criminal cases. However, Article XLVII forbade the seizing or sale of family members separately if they were the property of one owner.

A number of Articles prescribed the type of food and the amount the enslaved received weekly. The Code forbade giving rum instead of food on the slave’s day off. Slaves not fed or clothed properly could report the infraction to the Attorney General who would take the matter before the court. Article LIV enjoined owners to be good fathers to their slaves and to take care of those who were old or infirm.

In the matter of inheritance, Article LVI decreed that the slave who became his master's heir was thenceforth free.

The final clauses of the Code (Articles LV-LX) pertained to the enfranchisement of the slave. After twenty years, a slave could be free. In
addition, Article LIX gave the same rights, privileges, and immunities to freed slaves as to persons born free. However, Article LX enjoined the freed slave to be particularly respectful of their old masters, wives, and children.

Besides the aforementioned measures established to keep order, Article XLVIII also forbade, for example, the sale of slaves ages 14 to 60 unless sold with the plantation where they lived. This was to ensure no disruption in sugar production. Such were the terms of the 1685 French Code Noir.

The Code was an unusually pragmatic set of rules designed to ensure maximum agricultural productivity from the colonies.²

The significant factor was that, France, by enacting the Code Noir, gave the slaves a semblance of legal protection against the white colonists. As a result, another line was drawn between slave and master in the French colonies, as blacks differentiated France from the plantation owners; perceiving France and its representatives as more responsive to their plight than were the plantation owners.

One result of the joint colonization of the West Indies by Africans and Europeans was the rise of
the people of color. At the time of the introduction of Africans into the colonies, the government and the company did not look askance at their union with the whites. Until the introduction of the Code Noir in 1685, their offspring acquired the status of free men at birth. The colonists used them to amplify the number of whites that contract laborers and others from France were slow to increase. The Europeans accepted their interracial offspring because they were alarmed at the high ratio of enslaved Africans in the colonies. To be sure, the people of color did not have the benefits accorded a French citizen. In addition, when the white population increased and the army was settled in, the colored population's freedom withered. As masters, the whites did not care to share their privileges. Even the metropolitan government, which, in the beginning, had looked favorably upon miscegenation, recoiled when the colonists – restless under l’Exclusif – became more autonomy-minded. The government saw that the people of color would help the colonists challenge its authority. In 1778, for example, the Secretary of the Navy argued that “if, by means of such alliance, the whites ended reaching an unders-
tanding with the free people of color, the colony would easily be able to overthrow the king's authority and France would lose one of the most powerful links in its chain of commerce.”

Marriage between the two groups was banned to prevent such eventuality. The most significant result of this fear, however, was the declaration made on October 10, 1766, by the Secretary of the Navy stating that:

All the Negroes have been transported to the colonies as slaves; slavery has imprinted an irremovable stain on their posterity; and consequently, those who come from it can never enter the class of whites. If ever the time came when they could be considered white, they would, like [the whites], claim all positions and dignities, which would be absolutely contrary to the constitution of the colonies. 4

Whereas the metropolitan government across the Atlantic could only promulgate its wishes, the colonists, on the spot, could execute their stratagem to withhold privileges. The whites balkanized the people of color by dividing them into ten racial groups, 5 each group receiving its station in life according to its racial admixture.

These classifications had their roots in the relationship created between slavery and color.
Race was the determinant, the explicit indication of one's position in society and in the division of labor. The slave was an African and black; the master was French and white. The acceptance of a color-coded deterministic system, either voluntarily or passively, underlies the basic infrastructure undergirding the colonies’ living arrangement. It drew everyone into the vortex of an all-encompassing color syndrome. This system became everyone’s raison d’être, to escape the mark that would tie one to the oblivion of slavery, which was itself tied to the land. Then occurred the 1789 French Revolution that forced the oxygen out of the existent order.
Chapter VI

THE 1789 FRENCH REVOLUTION AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FRENCH WEST INDIES

The French Revolution caused the collapse of the Old Regime, the various societies pulling from opposite ends in the colonies. The plantation owners of Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, Guyane, and Martinique pulled to suspend l’Exclusif and establish free trade, restrain the colored population, and maintain slavery. The colored population looked to France for de facto equality with the white plantation owners.

Article LIX of the Code Noir decreed that freed men of color had the same rights, privileges, and immunities as the whites. Nevertheless, the plantation owners with the help of their associates in the mother country had chiseled away at the social guarantees enunciated in the Code. People of color were limited, for example, in the professions they could practice. However, they could be retail merchants and
artisans, and, thus were able to buy property. The Code Noir banned only the slaves from owning property. By the time of the French Revolution, the freed men of color owned one-third of the estates and one-fourth of the slaves in Saint-Domingue alone.¹ The colored plantation owners also participated in the commerce of l‘Exclusif.

The wealthy people of color sent their children to France to be educated. While there, the students collaborated with a number of French philanthropists in founding the "Friends of the Blacks," a pressure group that played the key role in putting the colored population's grievances on the Estates General’s agenda. On April 4, 1792,² the Estates General elevated all free men of color to the rank of French citizens, and put them under the protection of the Rights of Men and of the Citizen that had been promulgated in 1789. This bill stated, in part, “that all citizens, equal before the law, are equally welcome to hold any public office without distinctions other than virtue and talent.”

Events in the colonies followed closely events in France. At a time when ships traveling between France and Martinique took thirty-five days to cross the Atlantic, the rapid propagation
of news from France to the colonies was remarkable. Sensing the end of their world, the partisans of the old order immediately attacked the partisans of the revolution. In Martinique, the plantation owners, siding with the royalists, clashed with the businessmen, supporters of the bourgeoisie from the town of St. Pierre to whom they were heavily indebted. They were victorious at the Battle of Acajou on September 25, 1790.

Throughout the French colonies in the Caribbean, the revolution was characterized by pitched battles between the adherents of the white cockade, the royalists, and those of the tricolor. In Saint-Domingue, white plantation owners defeated the men of color led by Vincent Ogé and Jean-Baptiste Chavannes in September 1790. One observer believed that the situation in the French colonies was exacerbated by reformers of the ... day, who urging ... projects of amendment in the condition of human life, faster than nature allows, are lightning ... a consuming fire between the different classes of mankind. ³

This observer further held that the rebellion of the [N]egroes in Saint-Domingue, and the insurrec-
tion of the mulattoes, to whom Ogé was sent as ambassador, had one and the same origin:

It was not the strong and irresistible impulse of human nature, groaning under oppression, that excited either of those classes to plunge their daggers into the bosoms of unoffending women and helpless infants. They were driven into those excesses – reluctantly driven – by the vile machinations of men calling themselves philosophers (the proselytes and imitators of France, of the Old Jewry associates in London) whose pretenses to philanthropy were as gross a mockery of human reason, as their conduct was an outrage on all the feelings of our nature, and the ties which hold society together!⁴

The plantation owners followed with repressive measures against the leaders of the rebellion, alighting a new phase in the war in Saint-Domingue between the white plantation owners and the men of color. The news of Ogé’s death commanded Paris’s full attention to the plight of the people of color, culminating in the decree of 1791 and 1792. To ensure the promulgation of its laws in the colonies, Paris sent commissioners to enforce them. In Saint-Domingue, the envoy was Leger Felicité Sonthonax, a man fiercely devoted to the revolution. The commissioners sent to Martinique, Guade-
loupe, and Guyane pale in comparison. Then, also, in Saint-Domingue, Ogé's tortured death seems to have pointed to the necessity of collaboration between the men of color and the blacks \(^5\) against the white plantation owners.

Sonthonax's emancipation of the slaves in Saint-Domingue on August 29, 1793 sent the whites to the barricades and into an alliance with the British. Forces led by Toussaint L'Ouverture defeated them. The National Convention heard of this on 16 Pluvoise An II (February 4, 1794) and “so deeply moved were the deputies that they took the almost unprecedented action of decreeing on the spot, without sending the matter first to committee, the emancipation of all slaves in the French colonies.” \(^6\) The French Revolution produced many such acts. It was not all idealism, however.\(^7\)

The following year, Article VI of the Year III Constitution, established that “the colonies are an integral part of the Republic and are subject to the same constitutional laws.” The revolution had turned the system on its head. (Intellectuals Like Aimé Césaire from Martinique revered the French Revolution as much as Haitians revered Franklyn Roosevelt for disengaging the marines
from Haiti in 1934.) Three years later, the law of 12 Nivose made the colonies Départements (counties) of France. Representatives from the new French departments would now be included in the lower house of the legislature, the Council of the Five Hundred. With the exception of Saint-Domingue, the French Caribbean colonies are now overseas departments of France (D.O.M.). (The law of March 19, 1946 that Aimé Césaire promoted with the support of the communists and the socialists at the zenith of their power in France re-conferred the status of Départements (counties) upon Guyane, Guadeloupe and Martinique.)

The revolution and the execution of Louis XVI in September 1793 provoked the formation of a general coalition of European monarchs led by England against France. Customarily, England and France either blockaded or occupied each other’s colonies, until a treaty signing ceremony. England did this at the outset of the French Revolution. It occupied both Martinique and Guadeloupe, the former on March 23, 1794, the latter a month later. Martinique remained in British hands until 1802. As a result, the emancipation act of February 4 and the other
Negritude the Origin

Christian Filostrat

integration laws decreed by the French Legislative Assembly did not reach Martinique.

As to Guadeloupe, France retook it two months after the English occupation. It was the work of Commissioner Victor Hughes, who had gone to the Caribbean to announce that the people of Guadeloupe were free. With the help of most of the blacks in Guadeloupe, he defeated the British. The white plantation owners and those of color who had supported the English were “terrorized” out of the island. Their lands were confiscated and “they fled by the thousands [to Martinique in British hands] to escape the revolutionary tribunal and death.” 8 Thus was the racial make-up of Guadeloupe forever changed. The presence of fewer whites led to fewer mixed unions on that island.9 (One reason Martinique thinks it’s “more French, i.e., better” than Guadeloupe.)

Victor Hugues remained the "special agent" in Guadeloupe for four years, during which time the blacks were the virtual rulers on behalf of the revolutionary French government. Two reactionaries, Jean Baptiste Raymond Lacrosse and Edme Étienne Borne-Desfournaux succeeded Hugues. The man of color, born a slave, Magloire
Pélage, a veteran of America’s war of independence, and his cohorts, overthrew Desfournaux and Hugues in a coup in 1801.

As 1802 dawned, Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue had two former slaves at their helm: Pélage and L'Ouverture. In a proclamation addressed (in Creole) to "all the people of Saint-Domingue" the First Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte, reiterated the principles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the Constitution of the Year III, and the Law of 12 Nivose (January 2). The proclamation read as follows:

Of whatever color you may be, whatever your origin, we only want to know that you are all free, all equal before God and the Republic. During its revolution, France has known many misfortunes; while the whole world made war against it, the French fought against each other. But today all is finished, it's peace and reconciliation between Frenchmen; they all love the government and obey it. It is your turn people of Saint Domingue; aren't you French also? Come to welcome those of your nation who are arriving; you will be happy to embrace your brothers and they will be happy to embrace you. 10

There were doubts, however. Doubt on the part
of the blacks that the forces led by Bonaparte’s brother in law, General Charles Leclerc, were coming to impose slavery anew and doubt on the part of the French that the blacks would let Leclerc's forces succeed. Bonaparte, therefore, added to his proclamation,

“do not believe those who tell you that the whites want to make slaves of you again; they lie. Remember, it is the Republic that gave you liberty and will maintain it. The soldiers [Leclerc's] are here to safeguard liberty and keep the country for the Republic.”

To Guadeloupe Bonaparte sent the expeditionary forces, led by General Richepance. Arriving in Pointe-a-Pitre on May 6, 1802, the General was welcomed by Magloire Pélage. In Basse-Terre, however, the men of color and the blacks, led by Louis Delgres and Joseph Ignace refused to lay down their arms. Pelage crushed Ignace's forces at Bainbridge on May 25. Ignace then killed himself. A few days later Delgres, surrounded by Richepance on the Anglemont habitation at Matoula, blew himself up with his men. On July 16, 1802, Richepance promulgated Bonaparte’s decree re-establishing slavery and reinstituting the laws enforced in the colonies
prior to the revolution. Slavery never abolished in Martinique because of the English occupation was simply maintained. Then Saint-Domingue turned its guns on Bonaparte’s troops, defeating the expeditionary forces of Charles Leclerc and Donatien-Marie Rochambeaux in 1803. Saint-Domingue proclaimed its independence and renamed itself Haiti in January 1804. In Guyane, which had 10,500 slaves to 1,300 whites at the outset of the Revolution, slavery was reintroduced with the help of dogs. It also became a prison and grave for the political offenders of France from Saint-Domingue and Guadeloupe. The stage was then set for the penal colony Bonaparte III established in French Guiana in 1852. In Guadeloupe, some blacks continued to oppose Richepance, as Maroons. However, the all-out resistance had collapsed with the defeats of Ignace and Delgres. What marked Guadeloupe's history most during this period, however, was the repression against the insurgents by the returning émigrés. By the order of 22 Fructidor an X (9 September 1802) all blacks, including people of color, who claimed to have been free prior to 1789 were to report within three months to the prefect with documents proving status and
property ownership. Failure to do so rendered them vagrants and subject to deportation. Until 1810, France promulgated countless decrees, ordinances, and orders to restrict the civil rights of free blacks and people of color. The fears of the white plantation owners seemed endless. These repressive measures became as much a part of the history of French colonization, as did the social, political, and economic determinants such as the Code Noir, the Great Revolution of 1789, and l’Exclusif.
Chapter VII

ASSIMILATION
« l’assimilation, la feuille de vigne qui cache les parties honteuses du colonialisme »
Aimé Césaire

Germany charged France with the offense of assimilation. One of the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition’s main propaganda themes was the denial that France was assimilating colonial natives. Mission Civilisatrice was not assimilation, France claimed. It was assistance and shared interests.

The Bonaparte regime rejected the effort of the revolution to integrate the colonies. That was particularly true of Article VI of the Year III Constitution making the colonies an integral part of France and subject to French laws. Bonaparte's constitution of 22 Frimaire, Year VIII, declared the law null and void and decreed that France would govern the colonies through separate laws.

The spirit of integration did not perish, however, with the coming of Bonaparte. Too much of that spirit derived from cultural and historical “conditioning,” symbolized by the new republic, achieved through demands for equality
in the course of making the French Revolution. As Raymond Betts points out, "Bonaparte's colonial policy was the result of practical concerns, not doctrinal ones."\(^1\)

Concerning the assimilation of the colonies as departments of France and the extension of citizenship to its people, one should recall the correlation the French have always made between their own ancestors, the Gallo-Romans and the colonized, and between France and Rome.

Every French child learns that Julius Caesar defeated the brave but barbarian Gauls in 52 B.C. at Alesia. The French child is inculcated with pride at the adoption his ancestors made of the civilization, the language, and the religion of the conquering Romans. The Gauls intermarried with the Romans and, indeed, became Gallo-Romans. Because of the domination of Rome, the French child learns that his ancestors were considered the most civilized people in Europe. The Latin of the Roman soldiers replaced the Gauls’ Celtic tongue, and Rome’s monuments, laws, literature – all were copied, and ultimately adopted. Finally, in 211, the edict of Caracalla made the Gauls Roman citizens.
The French have indeed been imbued with what can be termed the “Roman complex.” From the Gallic poet Rutilus Namasianus to the historian Michelet, they all have sung the praise of Rome. The captivation with the Roman part of their heritage led the French not only to develop the Code Bonaparte, known as the modern Roman civil law, but also to set themselves up as the inheritors of what they perceived to be the mission civilisatrice of the Romans toward the barbarians.

The different attitudes France displayed toward the peoples who have passed through its rule set lasting stereotypes. The Africans were the barbarians devoid of culture, to be manipulated and coaxed into civilization while the Asiatics were held in wonder. Middle Easterners were distrusted, while Polynesians were amusing.

If the Latin part of their heritage instilled in them the Roman assimilationist political outlook, what role did their Catholicism whose origin was also Roman play in the colonization of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Saint-Domingue and Guyane? Catholic orders such as the Dominicans, the Carmelites, the Capuchins, the Brothers of Charity, and the Jesuits bought Africans just as any planter
did. The Jesuits in 1763, the year of their expulsion from the colonies, had more than three hundred Africans in slavery in Guadeloupe alone. The Catholic Church did not condemn the enslavement of Africans until the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, preached St. Paul to Philemon, God was acquiescent to slavery against which any revolt was a sinful act. St. Thomas expounded this St. Augustine’s theme into a patriarchal order. It’s the Catholic Church's influence, which, ultimately, had the greatest impact on the colonial societies. The Church rejected the protesting Catholic and looked upon him as a threat no different from the Maroon. Submission was the mark of a pious Catholic society, and in a colonial context, piety became obedience to the colonial order itself. The black man, from the Christian point of view, had to participate in his enslavement or as Sartre said, “share in the responsibility of a crime of which he was the victim” since his salvation for being African was in the very enslavement which provided him with Christianity.

The schematic result was that the French Catholic Church, which the Code Noir had given the monopoly of religion in the colonies as early
as 1685, cemented the French colonial policies at the grass roots by its submissiveness promoting rules. As the age of emancipation dawned, it was clear that France had introduced more than armed forces to uphold its sovereignty over the colonies. In fact, these other forces proved far more powerful than Bonaparte's armies.

The loss of Saint-Domingue, its most prosperous colony, dealt a crippling blow to France’s American empire. Compounded by the handicap that slavery had become on its industrial sector plus mounting rebellions in the colonies, France, surreptitiously at first, let it be known that the metropolitan government favored abolition.

The fortune of the abolitionists in France and the colonies followed closely the republic's fate. The enslaved Africans’ desire for emancipation and the people of color's agitation for equality preyed on the tribulations and conflicts between royalists and republicans throughout the nineteenth century. At the same time, Jacobins, the revolutionary front battling for the enactment of a republic, enflamed the spirit of emancipation in the colonies. The royalists influenced the plantation owners in a similar way.
Some historians believe that Bonaparte declared the slave trade illegal following his escape from Elba, as a way of swaying the British in his favor. Louis XVIII rescinded the declaration only to proclaim himself, in 1815, the end of the slave trade in the colonies. The trade, however, continued until France abolished slavery in April 1848 following Great Britain’s 1833 abolition. This last phase of the slave trade was particularly arduous for the Africans who were caught in the desperate voracity of slavers facing the end of an epoch of lucrative profits. The King, who had himself proclaimed the end of the trade in 1815, reminded the governor of Guadeloupe in an 1823 memo that,

“The social system [in the colonies] rests on particular foundations adapted to the necessities that caused them to be adopted. It admits legal slavery and thus enfranchisement; it also admits distinction in the status of persons, according to the classes of the population to which they belong.”

The King further reminded his governor of the purpose for which the colonies were created:

“The colonies situated in the West Indies have for
principal purpose to furnish consumers for French products and to produce for France exotic goods ... and to open markets where France does not have to fear either competition or foreign government regulations.”

Thus, despite the overwhelming evidence that both slavery and l’Exclusif had become burdens on the colonies, the French government still chose to maintain both. The major reason for this contradiction was the huge profits France was deriving from the institution of slavery and from the trade in slaves, which metropolitan France had, a priori, exclusive rights in its colonies.

The abolition of slavery began in earnest with the rebellions of the blacks and the men of color in the colonies. Throughout Martinique in 1822, 1831, and 1833 uprisings occurred against the plantation owners. Soon after the British relinquished Martinique and Guadeloupe back to French authority, free men of color, despite the plantation owners’ objections, began to return home. Did they bring back views of a wider world? Undoubtedly! Censored pamphlets denouncing inequality such as *The Fate of the People of Color in the French West Indies* found their way to the colonies. The government
responded with sporadic edicts against such infractions. However, in 1830, the government enacted several laws regarding the status of the people of color, abolishing laws depriving the free men of color of their citizenship rights. The procedures for manumission were simplified, and France became the automatic granter of freedom to any enslaved person who touched its soil. It is no coincidence that these laws, which were extensively debated in the legislature, passed at the time of the July 1830 Revolution that overthrew Charles X and the “ultra-reactionary” Villele cabinet. A bourgeois-royalist compromise established the "July Monarchy" of Louis-Philippe. That ended both the monarchy in France and slavery in the colonies. On February 9, 1927, the government issued an ordinance creating a General Council in each colony, and the post of Deputy to the National Assembly in Paris. There followed countless other ordinances and laws, culminating in the law of March 19, 1946, conferring the status of Départements (counties) upon Guyane, Guadeloupe and Martinique.

In France, the period of clamor against slavery was also the age of the arguably most renowned
artistic school in France – Romanticism. In its ranks were poets such as Lamartine who, as politicians, proclaimed the abolition of slavery and affixed their names to the emancipation law.
Chapter VIII

THE ASSIMILATION OF THE COLONIES

What were the anthropological factors in the region that created Aimé Césaire? What was in the history of the French West Indies that made him assume he could conjure négritude and find a safe harbor under French rule? What measure of cultural and racial integrity could he preserve under France’s colonial rule?

The defeat of Napoleon III at the hands of the Prussians opened the door to the Third Republic on September 4, 1870. With the return of the Republic, the war between Royalists and Republicans ended – the Royalists having finally abandoned the field. The men of 1848, particularly the indomitable Victor Schoelcher, were present to reimpose universal male suffrage and representation of the colonies in the French parliament. The 1875 constitution provided two seats for deputies and one for a senator from each colony. The Third Republic extended French laws to Guyane, Guadeloupe, and Martinique making these colonies, even at that time, virtual departments of France.
Unmistakable developments marked France’s growing absorption of these colonies. For example, France extended to them the 1884 right of workers to organize; it modernized colonial municipalities at the same time it did at home; it established in that decade the jury system in its Caribbean colonies; it extended the draft to men from the colonies in 1911, and placed a Customs Board in the colonies in 1924.

In regards to education, there were a number of elementary schools prior to 1880. Catholic congregations ran these schools, primarily for the benefit of the plantation owners. And a few, called mutual teaching schools, came into prominence in the 1820s to educate the children of the wealthy people of color. In 1851, the Governor General opened an alternate school system for whites and children of color to attend a secondary school in France.¹ There were no schools for free blacks or enslaved children until 1882. However, it was the opening of the non-clerical public schools in the 1880s that had next to the Catholic schools the most influential and far-reaching impact on French colonization in the West Indies.
The conflict between the republic and the Catholic Church, ally of the royalists, found its battlefield in the French schools. Until 1882, the Church controlled primary and secondary education in France. Half of the boys and all of the girls in France attended Catholic parochial schools. Increasingly, to a growing number of republicans, Catholic education stood as a threat to the republican equalitarian way of life. By dint of a series of laws passed by the Jules Ferry government in 1880, the Catholic orders were put out of the business of teaching in the French public schools. At the same time, the law of June 16, 1881 made education free, and the law of March 28, 1882 made elementary education compulsory. However, the government made no provision until 1946 to assist parents in the colonies in sending their children to elementary school. Education was, from the very beginning, of an elitist orientation, made more so by the competitive entrance examinations for the French Civil Service. The government did provide extensively for scholarships to the secondary schools – the Lycées – and for further studies at the university and at the Colonial Administration School, both in France.
Traditionally the school carries on as nationalism’s cradle and the grounding catalyst of acculturation. It was at the school bench that French colonization had its success assured in the French West Indies. (Aimé Césaire and L. Sedar Senghor were two of the colonial scholarship programs’ poster students.) Had it been left to the plantation owners to decide the fate of education in the colonies, only they would have enjoyed its fruits. In countless letters to the governors, the plantation owners expressed their fears of educating blacks. France perceived the issue differently. Education was an integral part of its civilizing mission. (The 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition emphasized that fact.) Bordeaux, which had been the major French port city in the slave trade, became the center of education for all the French colonies. And, until 1973, curricula and major exams given in the colonies were printed there. The curricula were steeped in the metropolitan tradition of classical education in which Latin, French, and French History were the major subjects. These curricula fit with the predominant French notion that Africans and their descendants were blank slates whom France had a duty to fill with its culture. History was a
subject wherein France found the opportunity to show itself in the best light; and Africa, when not projected as a barbaric continent, was depicted as an “extension of Western conquest.”⁵ In 1924, for example, former French Occidental Africa’s Governor General, Ernest Roume, speaking about educational reform, stated,

All the teachings of history and geography must show that France is a wealthy, powerful nation capable of making herself respected. France is also great because of the nobility of her sentiments and her generosity. She has never retreated from sacrificing men and money to deliver people from enslavement or to provide savage populations with peace, and the benefits of civilization. ⁶

The students who had successfully passed the baccalaureate and wished to study for a career other than elementary school teachers had, until 1970, to travel to France. This trip to the mother country climaxed the elitist course in the assimilationist educational system. Going to France was intended to immerse the colonial student in the bosom of French culture and return him as a model to the colonies. Consequently, a Guadeloupian could shout in 1936, "Vive la France," upon seeing the French-Guiana born
governor, Félix Eboué, who found the link “beautiful and was moved by it.”

(After five years in France, Aimé Césaire spoke with the broder (embroidered) “Négropolitains” French accent and no longer spoke Antillean Creole, his mother’s tongue. Senghor ne brodait pas but exuded francité.)

In 1909, a decree that would have joined the “old colonies” of Guyane, Guadeloupe, and Martinique to the mother country as Overseas Departments of France was drafted but because of the First World War never implemented. At the end of the war, to which the French West Indies had sent more than 35,000 men—23,000 were wounded, killed or taken prisoner—assimilation as a French policy reached a dead end. (During the 1862 Mexican adventure of Napoleon III and Maximilian, France had also sent a contingent of volunteers from Guadeloupe and Martinique to Mexico.) A new policy, mutated from the old, had began to take shape as early as 1881 when the "union" of the "Algerian public services to the various French ministries” was enacted. That policy was equality status for the settler-colonies of Guyane, Réunion, Algeria, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. Equa-
lity meant making them départements, local administrative units of the French state. This new policy of equality reached full bloom during the Popular Front’s socialist-communist concordat in 1936-1938. (So serious was this policy that it became clear already during the regime of the Popular Front that France could not make départements of all its colonies. The demographic features of the colonies, including race, argued against the status of départements for most of the colonies. France had forty-two million people, the colonies seventy millions in 1936. Se serait mettre la charrue avant les beaufs, as was said at the time (put the cart before the horse.) The demographic features of Algeria, including religion, were elements in De Gaulle’s decision to agree to the independence of Algeria. He feared that his village would no longer be called Colombey-the-Two-Churches but Colombey-the-Two-Mosques.

(As to the French colonies in Africa, the policy of assimilation would be rolled into the policy of association.) Islands like Martinique and Guadeloupe, – “the confettis of the French empire” – were the only territories allowed to become Départements. Their relatively small population
made them acceptable. The French, de Gaulle said, were a “European people of the white race, of Greek and Latin culture and of the Christian religion.”

From his 1955 – 56 secretary of state vantage points in the government of Prime Minister Edgare Faure, Senghor battled for a French federal collectivity. But Houphouet Boigny didn’t fancy sharing Cote d’Ivoire’s wealth with the poorer French West Africans and rejected Senghor’s plan. It was the same with De Gaulle not long after.

TAN ROBÈ

World War II is remembered in Martinique and Guadeloupe as Tan Robè (the time of Admiral Robert), which translates as one of the most difficult periods in the recollection of those who endured it. It sealed the devotion to De Gaulle there.

The capitulation of French forces and the subsequent armistice in June 1940 brought to the colonies Vichy’s authoritarian regime, represented by Admiral Georges Robert. Colonial poli-
tics came to a halt. Then, too, the entrance of the U.S. into the war meant the blockade of France’s Caribbean colonies. Provisions and supplies from France could not get through. The rationing of bread and meat strained relations between the French sailors and the black population. The sailors conducted themselves as an army of occupation and appropriated the lion’s share of the available food supply. Some overtly advocated Hitlerism and repressed the black population. Guyane fared better, as few Frenchmen cared to go there. Guyane was also less populated and did not have the same difficulties with food supplies as Martinique and Guadeloupe.

The black population vividly contrasted General De Gaulle’s Free French movement to the Vichy regime in power. Frantz Fanon, in Martinique during this period, explained that to the black population, De Gaulle represented the true France, which the sailors had betrayed. The event was reminiscent of 1789. Then the people of color contrasted the revolution’s principles with the plantation owners’ ideology. Although this period lasted but three years, it was most influential in giving De Gaulle god-like
status in the colonies, putting the colonies squarely behind his parties, the R.P.F., Rassemblement du Peuple Francais, and the U.N.R Union pour la Nouvelle République.

In the flush of triumph after the war, the Fourth Republic's Constituent Assembly voted, on March 19, 1946, law number 46-451 classifying as French Departments, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Reunion, and Guyane. Article 2 added, “the laws and decrees presently in force in France and which are not yet being administered in these colonies will be, before January 1, 1947, applicable to these new departments.” In the same vein, Article 3 stated, “immediately after the promulgation of this present law, all new laws applicable to France will also be applicable to these départements unless specified otherwise.” With this ultimate decree in France's absorption arsenal, the roughly 311 years of colonization culminated in Guyane, Guadeloupe and Martinique becoming – hypothetically – integral parts of France. Paris replaced the governor with a prefect; the colonial roads became “national roads;” the public services, the judiciary and the police became extensions of France’s own. In 1959, the Ministry of Overseas Departments and
Territories (D.O.M.T.O.M.) replaced the Ministry of the Interior, which, until that time, had authority over the colonies. The change of ministries has been the only major recognition by France that Guadeloupe and Martinique are 7,000 and Guyane 10,000 kilometers across the Atlantic. In 1960, the locally elected General Council that had until then held an advisory position vis-à-vis the governor and prefect was given finance and legislative oversight in their respective département. As part of the continuing policy of departmentalization, a French West Indian University, whose major campus is located in Guadeloupe, opened its doors in the 1970s.

One measure of the neglect Guyane has suffered since its French colonial founding is the scarcity of archival and other materials relating to its history. However, thanks to France's administrative centralism, one may follow Guyane’s evolution in the overall context of France’s colonial policies in the Caribbean.

What has marked Guyane most was the penal colony that France created at Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni in 1852. With the vague notion of providing white labor to a mismanaged colony, Europeans knew little of its geography and
climate. The prisoners, later immortalized in René Belbenoit’s novel, *Dry Guillotine*, had to spend by law a double prison term in the colony. Sentenced to remain in Guyane the length of time spent in prison, it was not uncommon for four out of seven to die yearly, or to be so broken at the end of their first sentence as to be useless to the colony. But inevitably, they further increased the racial mixture of the coastal Guyanese.

Unlike the plantations in Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe and Martinique, the French Guyanese farms generally were small. Thus, when gold was discovered in 1855, the labor drain doomed the plantations to return to the Inini jungle. Gold lured prospectors of all nationalities to Guyane; it also was the cause of border clashes with Brazil. To resolve their differences, France, through the arbitration of the Swiss, gave up 260,000 square kilometers of Guyane's territory to Brazil, reducing the colony to an area of approximately 92,000 square kilometers between the Oyapock and Maroni Rivers, making it the smallest political unit in South America and the only non-independent one there.

In 1982, to underline the unique relationship France has had with its Caribbean colonies since
the seventeenth century, they were, in addition to departments, given the status of French Regions, the Prefects serving both departmental and regional functions. The prefect’s executive authority is now in the hand of the departmental council’s chairman. Since December 2015, the locally based Executive Council of Martinique is the executive organ of the single territorial collectivity of Martinique.
Chapter IX

PEOPLES, RACES, INTERACTIONS IN THE FRENCH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN

In the French West Indies, the people who came from France and the people brought from Africa, along with their offspring, built a society at the center of which toiled the enslaved. Blackness, which characterized the slave and slavery, became the overt *primum mobile* from which positions in society were determined. Underneath color, a culture evolved from the African/slavery – European/master model that produced the dynamics through which France was assured the dominant status in Saint-Domingue, Guyane, Guadeloupe, and Martinique.

The White Groups: Creoles and French

White society in the colonies was not a monolithic unit, but was stratified along economic and racial lines. Nationality was a security valve the plantation owners could easily discard
when necessary to safeguard their interests and positions through other means. For example, the plantation owners of Saint-Domingue invited the British to take over the island during the French Revolution. Like the émigrés fleeing the 1789 Revolution, they found it more advantageous to have their patrimony in foreign hands than lose their privileges.

The white community consisted of three main groups. First, there were the *engagés* (the contract laborers) whose descendants had become small farmers or artisans. Second, there were the non-propertied government officials. Third, there were the large plantation-slave owners. Only those whose families had lived in the colonies for many generations were considered Creoles.

The first group often referred to as *petit blanc* or *beké goyave* (in Martinique) and *petit habitant* (in Guyane) could be compared to the poor whites in the United States. They were the descendants of the thirty-six month labor contractors who had toiled in the tobacco and sugar cane plantations. The limited landmass of the islands soon restricted the policy of donating land to these indentured servants at the completion of their service to the charter company. In addition,
the replacement of tobacco with sugar cane farming, which required large plantations and capital, doomed the petit blanc, literally small white, the poor whites, at first to be vegetable farmers and artisans, then minor bureaucrats. Overwhelmingly, their occupation later was that of overseer and general employees to their richer brethren. Lacking economic independence and education, they valued above all the color of their skin.\textsuperscript{1} Throughout the history of the French colonies in the Caribbean and circum-Caribbean, the petits blans, justly insecure, thought themselves threatened by the people of color. As a result, they “were largely responsible for the clamor which arose against miscegenation.”\textsuperscript{2} This group of white Creoles cared little about education beyond the mandatory age, nor did they have the means whether economic or social to provide one for their children.\textsuperscript{3} They seldom, if ever, conversed in French, and it was generally believed they never visited the mother country that their ancestors had left in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Consequently, they filled the significant function of the culturally deprived model in a colonial system of the assimilationist type. They provided a gauge against which blacks
could measure the level of French culture necessary for their own self-image. In the socialization or assimilation process, the small whites represented, who one should not resemble culturally. The small whites, despite the often-exploited position they held since the inception of the colonies, could not envision a status post. Where else would their race and color in relation to their economic status, culture, and education give them any viability? Not in France! Like the Afrikaner of old, they had no other place to go and as such were the “real partners of the colonized, because it was they who had the most need of colonial compensation and life ... They had bet everything and forevermore on the colonies.”

To sustain themselves as Creoles, the small whites allied their limited resources with the vastly superior interests of the richer whites of whom they were the political and economic victims.

In songs, the second group of colonial whites often is referred to as "Metropolitans" or oiseux de passage, migratory birds. Because of their transitory status in the colonies, they seldom became one of the upper-class whites.

With the new status of département conferred on the “old colonies” in 1946, a wave of French
civil servants and tourists flooded Guadeloupe and Martinique. Until then, the metropolitans were mostly military men and government officials of various categories whose occupations were to supervise and maintain the interests of France in the colonies. This group left France, as Albert Memmi notes, because “...one gets paid more and spends less. One goes to the colonies because positions are assured, salaries high, careers advance faster and businesses are more fructuous.”

Except for Guyane, which was shunned and where an official's tour of duty was regarded as a form of banishment, the metropolitans followed the mythical call to the exotic isles where their skin color had greater value.

As centuries of colonization succeeded one another, the metropolitan became the true colonizer. Neither the small whites nor the large plantation owners could claim this status, mainly because they had themselves been socialized and assimilated into the West Indian modus vivendi. The wealthy Creoles, after generations of island or Guyanese life, in time, adopted many of the slave culture. As such, in spite of the master slave relationship that existed prior to 1848 plus the
system instituted afterward to safeguard the wealthy Creoles’ dominant status, the wealthy Creoles were "in this together" with the other permanent residents of the colonies. Whereas, to the blacks, the wealthy Creoles represented enduring domination, the metropolitans were neither permanent nor tormentors. They merely transited the colony. Moreover, they often looked on the colonies with the inner detachment of outsiders or Parisian bureaucrats; and displayed a paternalistic attitude toward the blacks, whom many regarded as epitomizing Rousseau's "Noble Savage;" unlike the wealthy Creoles, who, fearing the "black hordes," relied on a brutal racist ideology and attitude to suppress them. This is not to say that the metropolitans were free of racist attitudes. Theirs was, however, more of the expedient than of the dogmatic type. To be sure, they represented metropolitan interests, which sometimes were contrary to the plantation owners’; and in the colonial context that meant being more responsive to black aspirations. Consequently, segments of the black population in Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue always supported the French government when called to
defend the colonies against the plantation owners, Britain, and Spain.

The metropolitans who succeeded each other in their tours of duty in the French colonies of the Caribbean brought with them the latest in fashion, literature, and ideas from a France, which the world generally regarded as liberal. Not yet having to contend with a large population of another race or religion on their soil, the French exalted in humanistic principles, which were often contrary to the interests of the maritime bourgeoisie.

At the apex of the colonial pyramid dwelled the grands blancs, grans békés, the wealthy white Creoles. Enriched by slavery and sugar cane, this subgroup of Creoles (who had earlier wanted to swell their number through interracial unions only to cast out their offspring later on) walled themselves with their privileges against all other groups. Moreau de Saint-Mery, a wealthy Creole, chronicled extensively French colonial life during most of the eighteenth century. In his Topographical, Civic, Political, Historical Description of the French Part of the Island of Saint-Domingue, Saint-Mery observed that the wealthy Creole lived in an exaggerated opulence, which astounds
the Europeans. The crowds of slaves who await orders or even signals from just one man give a sense of importance to whoever commands them. A wealthy man owes it to himself to have four times as many servants as he needs.⁷

His children learned early the master's autocratic behaviors:

Put among little slaves who are condemned to obey his slightest whim or, what is even more revolting, to suppress their own, he will not tolerate the least opposition. No despot has had more attentive homage, no more constant adulators than the child of the wealthy planter. Each slave is subjected to the fluctuations of his temper, and his childish tantrums only too often trouble domestic tranquility, for he can command any injustice his ungovernable will desires. ⁸

The character of the wealthy Creole woman did not escape de Saint-Mery’s incisive pen. Used to dominating, the Creole woman was another scourge slaves had to contend with. "Nothing," says de Saint-Mery "equals the temper of a wealthy Creole woman punishing the slave whom her husband has perhaps forced to sully the conjugal bed."⁹ And there is no widow who, despite her affection for her children, does not soon erase by a new marriage the name and
memory of the man whom she seemed to have loved so desperately. Perhaps there is no other country where second marriages are as common as in Saint-Domingue, and women are to be seen there who have had seven husbands.\textsuperscript{10}

The wealthy planter cared incessantly about appearances, and his class was obsessive about ancestral origins. Often acting the would-be gentleman, he constantly reminded himself of the following caveat: “One must keep one's origin secret when it is not a noble one, and for some envious person to find it out in the mother country is indeed too much to bear.”\textsuperscript{11} If the wealthy Creole's search for titles of nobility was the stuff of Moliere’s comedic plays, doubt about his racial purity, no matter how many generations removed, was akin to a Shakespearean tragedy. A rumor of blackness among one’s ancestors was a wealthy Creole’s ultimate misfortune. In his novel, \textit{La Caldeira}, Raphael Tardon, relates the story of such a rumor about de Saint-Méry. In this excerpt, de Saint-Méry’s wife herself doubts him and opens the door to an imagination filled by centuries of dogmatic racism:

There isn't smoke without fire, concluded Athenais. I would then have been for eight years the wife of a man of
color, and my son carries in his veins a bit of impure blood. Everybody will know it. What have you done? … In her frame of mind she saw hallucinating images of Negroes with ferocious pictures of the saber tooth tiger, spitting hate.¹²

Regarding interracial relationships, it was anathema for a wealthy Creole woman of whatever status to be involved with a man of color. It was less repulsive, however, for a wealthy white man to be involved with a black woman as long as he did not contemplate anything legal.

Like the wealthy white Creole, the metropolitan and the petit blanc, practiced endogamy in the colonies. The petit blanc was ostracized at social events, except at funerals when he was allowed to pay his respects to his richer brethren who had never invited him inside his home. So fearful were the wealthy whites of losing their remaining footholds in Guadeloupe and Martinique that consanguineous marriages were not infrequent among them. Edith Kovats-Beaudoux says of the wealthy white Creoles’ dilemma that:

Numerous marriages between wealthy white Creoles and colored people would soon end in the dismantling of the
group as a racial entity. Similarly, frequent unions with Metropolitans or foreigners would result, notably through the mechanism of inheritance, in a perceptible dispersion of wealth toward the outside world and simultaneously in an increasing control of Beké assets by foreign elements.¹³

The wealthy white Creoles, too, have suffered setbacks during the centuries of colonization. During the Haitian war of independence, for example, those who did not leave the island were virtually exterminated and later forbidden by the Dessalines constitution to own property in Haiti. In Guadeloupe, the regime of Victor Hugues and Magloire Pelage expelled the majority of Creoles who had been partisans of the white cockade against the French Revolution. Although many returned, their number never again reached the level prior to the revolution.

In Guyane, the abandonment of agriculture in favor of mining, after the discovery of gold in 1855, and the opening of the penal colony at St. Laurent, which gave Guyane its Devil's Island reputation, ruined the wealthy whites. Disturbed only by spotty colonization schemes, by the middle of the eighteenth century the lack of adequate communication with France made
Guyane a poor but self-sufficient colony. The small farmer, called *Massagan*, planted annatto and the wealthier planter, sugar cane and coffee.

In Martinique, a natural calamity befell the wealthy white Creoles on the morning of May 8, 1902. That day, the Mount Pelé volcano erupted and destroyed the city of Saint-Pierre and its inhabitants. St. Pierre had been the capital of the French West Indies and of Creoledom.

Besides the Haitian Revolution, the rise of the Second Republic in France was, perhaps, the hardest blow suffered by the wealthy white Creoles. Instituted in 1848, this government abolished slavery and gave the right of French citizenship, including universal male suffrage to the black population of Guadeloupe, Guyane, and Martinique. Although the wealthy whites did not lose their economic domination over these colonies upon emancipation, their remaining power was fraught with incertitude, and they lived in dread of retribution from the former enslaved Africans.
The People of Color

At the other end of the French colonial society was the black community. It consisted of two main groups: the people of color and the blacks. Born in the colonies, the person of color was the descendant of a white master and an enslaved African union and the marginal offspring of Europe's mercantile adventure and African labor.

At the beginning of colonization, the sexual relationship between the French men, who had ventured to Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique, and Saint-Domingue, with African slaves, was not in the legal or moral sense regarded as illicit. To the men who at first traveled alone, intercourse with women of other races was a necessity of milieu. The Spaniards, before the arrival of the French, had already crossbred extensively with Arawak and Carib women. According to contemporary accounts, “the Spaniards eagerness to take Indian women as concubines went to such extremes that it became all but impossible for an Indian male to find a wife, which contributed to the extermination of the tribal ethnic entities.”14 The Spaniards utilized
the “Mestizo” to attack Mexico, “and later as the nucleus of loyal forces that Spain sought to maintain [in Mexico] for immediate action against any uprising of the subjugated peoples.”15 The French, in turn, sought to do the same in their colonies with their mulatto offspring.

However, fifty years after the establishment of the French colonies in the West Indies, the metropolitan government, having concluded that the unabashed crossbreeding was a threat against its monopolies, made it illegal and prescribed in Article IX of the Code Noir punishments against intercourse between the free and the slave. It was thus that the concubinage of free and slave became statutorily criminal. When obeyed, it was the woman of color, who, until the Code Noir, had been of their white father's class who became (until European women were introduced on a wide scale) wife and mistress to the Europeans. The men of color, who as auxiliaries to the Europeans, could not at that time compete for women of their own color, turned to African women. To change their children's status to that of free, the unmarried free man was compelled to marry the African woman.
The wealth of the plantation owners attracted French women who, unable to marry into a noble family at home, traveled to the West Indies to be wife to a waiting planter. Not only women who had aspired to marry into nobility traveled there, however. The majority was of the lower class. They gambled on the scarcity of white women to strike it rich. The government also shipped women – from orphanages, for example – to the colonies.

Men who had no compunction at intercourse with women of other races recoiled when women of their own race arrived in the colonies. This phenomenon was not unique to the French West Indies. Records abound of racial prejudices erupting following the introduction of white women in colonies. Sexual customs had their way in the development of race relations, where Europeans settled in the tropics. However, the growth of racism toward the people of color does not date entirely to the arrival of French women, although Julien Raymond, writing in 1791, maintained the opposite view. Then too, European women looked upon women of color as rivals; however, in a slavocracy, they had little difficulty upholding their interests.
In addition to the wealthy whites’ monopolization of colonial privileges now that they had no need of the people of color either to bear their children or protect them against the enslaved Africans, incoming Europeans, especially to the islands, vied for the property that the people of color had owned for generations.

However, the overwhelming factor in the evolution of discrimination toward the people of color lay in the slavocracy itself, which so clearly divided master and slave by race. Consequently, as the colonial enterprise developed fully, it became a matter of masters' prestige, status, honor, and wealth and, later, survival as a racial entity, not to incorporate the blood of African/enslaved person into one’s patrimony – not to have any misalliances in one’s heritage. For, no matter how far removed was the person of color from ancestral Africa, the tint always followed and would be passed on. “This obsession against marrying anyone who might have 'colored blood' is one reason a wealthy white Creole knows – or claims to know – the genealogical tree of every family; the name of the family thus becomes a guarantee of purity.”

Julien Raymond wrote about a M. Guérin,
churchwarden but husband of a woman of color, who in 1762 was stripped of his office after some months because the Port-au-Prince council had decreed that a white mesalliés could not enjoy such honor. The new mores forbade only marriages between white men and women of color, not concubinage. Nevertheless, it is apparent through comments by Moreau de Saint Mery and others that concubinage lessened considerably as more and more women from France entered the households of wealthy whites.

Of course, it would not have mattered if the people of color had not been a distinctive group. But how could they not have been? Shunned by the wealthy whites who had incorporated and, at the beginning, given them freedom, education and economic viability, they were also mistrusted by their darker brethren in the slave’s pit. The stigma which slavery had imprinted on the African was, in any event, a gulf that no one who had tasted freedom could cross. The people of color, thus, turned to metropolitan France for equality with the whites in the colonies.

The military and clergy were inviting professions to young men who aspired to ennoble themselves in French society. Until 1815, the
constant state of war with Great Britain had compelled France to maintain standing armies in its West Indian colonies. Opportunities were plentiful for careers in the colonial militia. Young men of color as well as free blacks filled many of its ranks, including officer’s. The added advantage of having commanding officers from France, often in open conflict against the white Creoles, was another inducement. Besides the regular army, there were companies manned mostly by free blacks and people of color specializing in the capture of escaped slaves. Called the *marechaussé* (mounted constabulary), this detachment, which had its parent organization in France, carried out its duties ruthlessly and was greatly feared by the blacks. The fact that France could arm blacks is an indication of the extent of acceptance of the slaveocratic order by all concerned. Men of color also served in regiments in France, including the King’s regiment itself. Their loyalty to France was never questioned. (Aimé Césaire’s mango didn’t fall far from the tree.) Since the late seventeenth century, blacks have served in all the wars involving France, including the American War of Independence.
The militia and the *marechaussé* were not the only employment niches filled by men of color. In the colonial towns, they had virtual monopolies over tailor shops and barbershops. Many were barrel makers, cabinetmakers and other skilled professions. Some artisans traveled to France, to place themselves in apprenticeship to guild masters.\(^{22}\) Upon their return to the colonies, they were assured of a lucrative trade.

At the upper echelon of this group were the owners of property and slaves. They were the descendants of the first generation of mulattoes who had inherited land from their (white) fathers. According to Julien Raymond, leader of the free men of color, who himself owned property and slaves in Saint-Domingue, “Their land were, more often than not, the colonies’ best and the most productive.”\(^{23}\) However, on the eve of the 1789 French Revolution, only a few of these choice properties were still owned by the people of color. Raymond, who took part in the revolution, complains: “these same lands are now in the possession of whites who have dispossessed the people of color.”\(^{24}\)

Before slavery was abolished, the people of color feared losing their freedom and even being
sent back to the slave’s pit. 25 Where there were loopholes such as having a Carib instead of an African ancestor to ascertain one's right to freedom, a number of wealthy people of color brought such attributes into their genealogy. The majority, however, began in the second half of the eighteenth century to marry into metropolitan society. They did so for two reasons: First, the dowry for marrying into French society included the guarantee of French civil rights. By marrying a son or daughter from the mother country, one invested in France’s insurance of liberty. Second, like the wealthy white Creoles, the people of color feared the dissolution of their group and loss of their wealth either through low birth rates or through further crossbreeding with blacks. In the second instance, the reality of enslavement was always a concern.

The union of women of color with a Frenchman usually took place in the colony. The well-to-do woman of color's dowry included land and slaves. Raymond reports that in 1763 more than three hundred French men, including many noblemen, married women of color. 26 The wealthy people of color sent their sons to be educated in France, where, besides an education, they often
acquired a French wife. The sine qua non during these centuries of slavery was, for the people of color, not to be necessarily considered white per se but rather to be guaranteed the rights of French citizens. At the same time, they were obsessed with putting greater distance between themselves and the degenerating institution of slavery. To this end, they looked to France for salvation.

The Blacks

In addition, there were the blacks. Overwhelming numerically in comparison to the people of color – in 1779 the ratio was 35 slaves to each person of color in Saint-Domingue; 25 to one in Martinique; and 61 to one in Guadeloupe.27 Before the French Revolution, there were, also, a small number of manumitted blacks whom the colonial authorities counted among the free people of color in official documents. There were approximately 1,500 of them in Saint-Domingue in 179128 in contrast to 270,000 slaves. They filled the ranks of the militia and the constabulary – positions that made them exempt from the capitation (tax) and provided security from re-enslavement. Others hired themselves out in the
towns as gardeners and laborers and a few peddled their knife sharpening trade from door to door. In the French colonies, the free blacks held a very marginal and insecure economic status. And, although their position was considered higher than the slaves’, the free blacks could never truly speak of the "bliss" of freedom.

The slave was the substance upon which the colonies thrived. He was not only the labor for the prosperity of the colonial establishment, he was also the gravitational center from which all status, resentments and fears took shape in these colonies. On a typical plantation, there were three categories of slaves. The Nègre à Talent, as the French title implies was a slave skilled in a trade. He was, for example, useful in building and maintaining the planter's house. He was also knowledgeable in the extraction of sugar from the Saccharum cane and in rum distillation. Plantation owners held this group of slaves in high esteem and gave them preferential treatment. A number of them traveled to France with their masters, a few taking residence there.29

In colonies that did not practice "breeding" to replenish their slave supply and where, like in Saint-Domingue, newly arrived slaves constantly
replaced deceased ones, the skilled slave was the most creolized because he survived the longest and worked in closest proximity to the planter. The skilled slave was responsible also for introducing the newly arrived Africans to Christianity.

They called a new African *Nègre piece d’Inde* or *Nègre Guinin* or *Congo*, meaning one not born in the Caribbean. The Navy Department levied a head tax on these Africans. They predominated in Saint-Domingue because that colony was such a beehive of activity and production it required more new slaves. Saint-Domingue contributed more to France’s coffers than the other colonies, and the French government considered it its empire’s gem. It manufactured sugar at a rate that made it the wealthiest colony of its day, and the absentee owners and the maritime bourgeois spurred the plantation owners to produce still more. The result was decimation in the ranks of the slaves there. Still, by 1789, there were three times as many slaves in Saint-Domingue as in Martinique and Guadeloupe. The fact that they had not yet been culturally neutralized was as critical as their number to the future of Saint-Domingue.
The third category was the *Nègre à Culture*. Unlike the *Nègre Piece d’Inde*, he was not born in Africa but in one of the colonies. A field hand, he was used in every facet of colonial agriculture. In Guyane, he also fished and hunted for a master.

The *Nègre Maron* – the Maroon – the fourth in this repertory was a free African in the colonies. His colonial status was that of the slave who had taken residence in the hills or woods where Europeans would not dwell. The majority of Maroons devised their existence around the fear of recapture by the constabulary; and to remain free, they used every stratagem conceivable. Communities of Maroons evolved and thrived in Jamaica as well as in Dutch Guiana (Surinam) and Guyane. Today there is still a viable autonomous community of *Nègres des Bois*, Bush Negroes, in Guyane and Surinam. In Guyane, the tribes of Saramacca and Boni occupy the Inini interior. More than two thousand strong, they are related genetically to West Coast Africans. The Saramacca’s “religion, folklore, tribal organization, family patterns, modes of agriculture, art forms, and linguistic structure seemed to combine elements from Ashanti, Dahomey, and the
The French assimilated Guianese look upon the *Nègre des Bois* as "primitive." The Maroons determination to escape enslavement and maintain their own culture since the seventeenth century is still symbolized in their name for town dwellers: *Bahkra chlaff*, white man's slave.

Knowing that the Europeans would always be a threat to them, some Maroon groups were not just content to maintain their freedom by hiding; they also took up arms against the Europeans to drive them from the colony. In the early part of the nineteenth century, for example, an army of Maroons attacked the town of Lamentin in Guadeloupe. They were defeated and the survivors hanged. Nor was this the only report of action against the slave establishment in the colonies by organized groups of Maroons. Until the end of slavery, plantation owners lived in fear of the constant threat that the Maroon represented. His successes made him a mythical figure that was believed to possess supernatural strength. As such, the Maroon “was well served by the men of his race who regarded him as the personification of freedom from slavery and a living threat against their masters.” The favorite
weapon of the Maroon was poison. Believed, by the Europeans, to possess innate knowledge of various plants, the Maroon used poison against the plantation owners' live properties: slaves, cattle, dogs, mules. The rationale for their actions was, if ruined, the plantation owners would leave. Undoubtedly some did. As slave revolts became more frequent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the authorities prescribed severe punishments against the Maroons. “The price of slavery,” concludes Eric Williams, “for the [European] colonials was eternal colonialism.”

Figure 6 Unknown Maroon, Champs de Mars, Haiti

Whereas in Guadeloupe, Guyane and Martinique there is in every township a statue of
an unknown soldier "dead for France," across from the presidential palace on the Champs de Mars in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, stands the statue of an *Unknown Maroon*, broken chains in hand, blowing on a rallying conch.
CHAPTER X

THE LITERATURE OF THE FRENCH WEST INDIES AND FRENCH GUIANA AFTER EMANCIPATION

Writers in the nineteenth century French West Indies were much less prolific than Haitian writers during the same period. Although their work was of the same *bovaristic*, i.e., escapist tendency, the French West Indians felt less compelled to demonstrate how culturally western they were. Whereas the Haitian writer sought, however unsuccessfully, to convince Europe that African descendants were able to adopt European culture and, therefore, had a right to remain independent, the primary goal of the French West Indian writer was to achieve complete assimilation/amalgamation of his colony into the mother country. He wanted to be thought French. *Il y a deux choses immortelles, la France et notre amour pour elle.* (There are two immortal things, France and our love for her,) was the slogan of
the day. The blacks and people of color of Guadeloupe, French Guyana and Martinique continued to perceive their best interests in assimilation not in independence like Haiti. To them, freedom meant escape from Africa and slavery and their socio-political incorporation into France. Consequently, the French West Indian writer aspired that his work would be an extension – a regionalization – of France’s own. They were not only adherents but also exponents of the Romantic School. Many such as Privat d'Anglemont of Guadeloupe were themselves pioneers and leaders of the movement. However, these early Romanticists found it more profitable to their talents, and to their purse, to remain in France where most of them had gone to study.

The Parnassian School was founded as a reaction against the Romanticists’ lyricism and sentimentality. Its leader was Leconte de Lisle, a Creole from Reunion, a French island colony in the Indian Ocean, residing in France. The Parnassian poets strove for impersonality, detachment and exactitude in their descriptions of the exotic. In that they succeeded; their verses are precise in form, their descriptions almost
scientific and empty of feelings. The French West Indian writers of the period followed these precepts, adding local color to the Parnassians' art for art's sake to found their own regionalism.

Under the pen of the regionalists, they never speak of Africa from the point of view of writers from a colony peopled by former slaves. It was – when done at all – written as if the poet was himself a colonizer. They looked on French policies toward Africa as “our" policies.” The following lines from *Prayer for Mankind* by Fernand Thaly demonstrate this phenomenon:

Let’s look at the men marching.  
At these sweating blacks carrying us, singing.  
And if we are joyful, if we are happy  
To go meet the elephant, the unicorn or the buffalo,  
Let’s say to ourselves that it would somehow be foolish,  
A little bit simple and childish, a little bit sad and petty,  
To possess Africa, and ignore the African.  

René Maran, baptized in Martinique of Guianese parents, grew up in France. Unlike his countryman, Felix Eboué, he was also a man of letters. Before his contact with Africa, Maran,
one of the rare literary personalities from French Guyana at that time, also participated in the regionalist's movement as this stanza from his poem *Tropiques* demonstrates:

Delta of the Maranon, mouths of the Orénoque, Llanos, plantations, pieces of immensity
Where they pick while singing bunch by bunch
The tobacco summer has dried. ²

These lines in which a writer describes areas of Guyane almost in idyllic terms are the exceptional ones.

These writers, in addition to the many others, who, like them, wrote under the banner of Romanticism or of Parnassianism, etc. belonged to the colonial strata of either wealthy Creole or people of color. The latter group had been in the leading position to benefit from the elitist system of education instituted in the French West Indies and later in Guyane following the abolition of slavery. Consequently, for about a century, their works and those of a very small number of Creoles dominated the literary scene. The most famous Creole was Saint-John Perse, born in
Guadeloupe in 1887, winner of the 1960 Nobel Prize for Literature.

Through their racial and social perspectives, they portrayed the former slaves who had become their servants, field hands, gardeners, etc. as exotic pieces in their poetic games. In turn, the rare black man who achieved prominence also had a game. Although different from the one played by the people of color, it also constrained him to a form of art for its own sake. He named it stoicism. The best-known players were the French speaking Guianese Felix Eboué (1884 – 1944, the governor of France’s Equatorial Africa 1940 – 1944) whose motto was “play the game without changing the rules,” and René Maran (1887 – 1960, another Equatorial Africa colonial administrator).

Eboué applied “négritude” according to Wikipedia:

Wikipedia has a section on Felix Eboué entitled “Efforts at négritude,” stating, “Although a Francophone who promoted the French language in Africa, Éboué advocated the preservation of traditional African institutions as well. This was included in his circular La nouvelle politique indigène ("New Native Policy"), put out 8 Nov- ember 1941.” https://bit.ly/2AJBbUD
Eboué and Maran decided they were stoics ... These ideas clearly comforted Eboué at various troubled times. In conversations & correspondence he often cited a phrase from a stoic or pythagoreans [Eboué was also a Mason] to help himself or René Maran bear a disappointment or a humiliating experience ... Stoic philosophy did provide an ethical system which could appeal to
people born in the old colonies who participated in the culture and politics of the empire.\textsuperscript{4}

They adopted stoicism to sustain them in the face of racism in France and at the Colonial Ministry, which Eboué and Maran had both joined at the turn of the century.

Impassiveness toward humiliation and rationalization of shameful events in one's relations with the mother country were methods many blacks used to overcome disappointments. Fanon, the psychiatrist, explained the phenomenon in these terms: "While in Europe irony [which] is a mechanism of defense against neurosis protected against existential arguments."\textsuperscript{5} Insulated from reality by irony/stoicism, Eboué found no contradiction in serving France in Equatorial Africa as Governor from 1940 to 1944. Irony kept him apart from the Africans of the vast domain he governed, as well as from the black consciousness movements coming on line at that time, while his stoical, calm appearance in the face of insults to his race, and past promotion failures made him prone to respiratory illnesses.\textsuperscript{6}

The regionalist poets\textsuperscript{7} and men such as Eboué were not individuals shackled to the French
poetic denomination or philosophy of the day. They were men from French colonies who had chosen the manner they thought most effective to participate in the culture and politics of the French empire. In the literary sphere, there were already, before the turn of the century, the schools of subjective symbolism, realism, naturalism, and the school of political and ideological commentators. In French philosophy, nationalism, Gobinism, and violence were the tendencies when Eboué chose stoicism. For the French West Indian writers of that time to have chosen a dissatisfaction theme or for Eboué to have become a Guianese nationalist would have been against the advantages they perceived French assimilation to hold for both the people of color and the small black elite of the French colonies in the Caribbean. To that end, these men propelled Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guyana into a higher stage of colonization, “autocolonization.”

This doctrine led the colonials to be unnecessarily conservative, i.e., more than the demands from metropolitan France then required them to be, for fear of offending the mother country. An example of this phenomenon was the reaction to the publication, in 1921, of Batouala
by René Maran. Whereas in France's literary circles they praised and awarded the book the distinguished *Prix Goncourt*, in assimilationist circles in the colonies it was virulently denounced for its anti-colonial sentiments.
Chapter XI

BATOUALA AND THE COLOR LINE

In 1910, Maran, went to Oubangui-Chari, present day Central African Republic, as a colonial administrator. For ten years, he lived among the people of that territory, the Bendas; witnessed their daily life, and was appalled at what he saw. Batouala is the tale of the Mokoundji, the Chief, by that name. It is also the story of the people of Oubangui, forced to labor under the Code de l'Indigénat, France’s Black Code for its African colonies. In the story, Maran depicts the lives of the Bendas, and he uses the foreword to Batouala to denounce in explicit terms l'Indigénat and French colonial rule in Africa.

We meet the Benda's Mokoundji, Batouala, in media res. He is a chief. He has nine wives, but the one he prizes most seeks the arms of a younger man. Batouala, jealously, attempts to chase his rival away but is killed in the effort.
Penury is the upshot of France’s colonial rule where Batouala and his people live. The authorities force the people to work in the rubber plantations in order to pay the taxes necessary to support the colonial administration of which Eboué was also a part from 1910 to 1944. Coupled with the payment of taxes, there is suppression of religious practices and general disruption of the Banda’s way of life. The Makoundji depicts what life for the Bendas has become under French rule in these terms:

Not satisfied to suppress our customs, they wish to impose their own on us: ‘You must no longer play patara for money!’ We may no longer get drunk. Our dances and songs keep them awake. They allow it if we pay. ‘Pay, pay; it’s always pay.’ Government coffers are insatiable. But then everybody knows that from the first day of the dry season to the last day of the wet season our work only pays the taxes when it does not also line the commander's pockets.

We are taxable flesh! We are only beasts of burden! No, not even beasts! Dogs! Well, no, they feed their dogs, and they care for their horses. But we, we are less than these. We are the basest of the base. They are killing us off, by degrees.¹
According to Maran, *Batouala* is entirely objective:

It has taken me six years to write down what I heard and what I saw out there. In those six years, I have not yielded once to the temptation to put in one word of my own. I have preserved all objective attitudes so conscientiously that all reflections have been suppressed which could possibly be attributed to me. It does not even attempt an explanation: it is a testimony. It does not criticize; it registers. I could not do otherwise. On moonlight nights, from my long chair on the veranda, I listened to these poor folks talk. Their jokes were proof of resignation. They suffered and laughed at suffering.²

Maran then expresses his indignation at the famine and blatant exploitation that he witnessed and took part in:

I understand. What does it matter to Sirius if ten, or even a hundred, natives, in a day’s distress, seek nourishment in undigested grains of maize and meal from horse dung – dung from the horses of their pretended benefactors? Montesquieu was right when he wrote in words whose cold irony vibrates with deep indignation: ‘They are black from head to foot. Their nose is so flattened, it is impossible to pity them.’
After all, if they perish of hunger by the thousands like flies, it is because their land is being ‘worked.’ Let those die who cannot adapt themselves to civilization.³

Since he was part of the French colonial administration in Equatorial Africa, it is fair to say that in criticizing France’s policies there, he was criticizing himself. He and France were in it together. With his epoch-making novel,⁴ Maran did not wish to put distance between himself and France’s policies in Africa. As he says, “my book is not a polemic. It comes by chance, at its appointed time.”⁵ Had he done so, he surely would have also written of France's policies in Guyane his homeland, which was “suffering" as badly as Oubangui-Chari. Maran, rather, like Fernand Thaly, also regarded France’s colonial policies as "our" policies. Batouala was, therefore, written neither from a black man's sense of unease at the plight of Africans, nor as an act of rebellion against France and its colonial practices. In writing Batouala, Maran was responding to his outrage that colonial officers were disregarding France's stated "rights of man”⁶ by recruiting Bandas for forced labor to pay their taxes. For assistance, Maran invoked France's unique unwritten rule of immunity for
men of letters. It was, therefore, to his fellow writers that he appealed.

O my brother writers of France, the honor of my country to which I owe everything. Writers for all parties, whenever it is a case of fighting for a just and noble idea, I call on you, for I have faith in your generosity.

But his colleagues judged Maran in the colonial administration, in conservative circles in France, the West Indies and Guyane not as a Frenchman who like many others was denouncing colonial policies in Equatorial Africa, but as an ingrate. Had Batouala been the work of a white French author, Maran’s life would not have been threatened nor his career compromised.

Maran and Batouala, however, had their defenders. In Parliament, the two Guadeloupean representatives, Candace and Boisneuf, rose to speak in Maran's favour against charges of treason. They were of the group, together with Eboué and others, who argued that Maran's Prix Goncourt was proof that a black Frenchman was equal to a white. This fact, they believed, would enhance further the assimilation of the French West Indies and Guyane into France.
And there were others who because he was black adopted Maran – notwithstanding his claim that he had written *Batouala* as any person of conscience would have done – as the first black from the French West Indies and Guyane to speak out against the evil of French colonial rule anywhere. With René Maran's *Batouala*, therefore, an accusatory landmark against colonialism was recorded in the literature of the French West Indies.

Two years following *Batouala*, *The Color Line*, Question de Couleur, by Oruno Lara of Guadeloupe was published. Still written in the regionalist style, Lara's novel has the distinction of being the first where a man of color asserts explicitly that he is, indeed, what he is. Self-acceptance occurs while in France:

I have white parents and I am not a Negro.  
I have Negro parents and I am not white.  
We are people of color.  
No, dear friends, we are Negroes.  
You, not me.  
You, like me!  
Me? I will never say that I am a Negro!¹¹
The change in one's attitude in the face of racism in the Mother Country, from the stoic/ironic impassiveness to the defense of one's race, is also evident in Lara's novel. The protagonist has been the target of racism; he describes his reaction.

More reasons, from now on, to throw out one's chest and to show off bravely! Yes! The best thing is to face squarely that idiotic color prejudice. It isn’t a question of lowering one's head; of declaring oneself half-white, while cowardly turning one's back to the insults. And for what anyway? ... Better show oneself for what one is; say that one is black because one is and asserts the word 'black.'

No longer on the level of irony, the man accepts his identity in others’ attitude toward him.

Unlike Batouala, The Color Line, was not widely read. "The colonial system,” wrote Léon Damas, “did not permit regular contacts, from metropolitan France to colonies, or from colony to colony.” Lara's novel, however, achieved a breakthrough.

Lilyan Kesteloot affirmed that: "before Legitime Defense [published nine years after Lara’s novel] there was effectively no original
[committed] literature in the French West Indies.” The Color Line, in comparison to other works of the period, in fact, had taken a bold step in lifting the taboo from the subject of one's origin. Nevertheless, it was left to writers a decade later to give recognition to Africa as the major force in their culture.
Chapter XII

A chapter on Haiti is included because Aimé Césaire said that it was in Haiti that “négritude stood up for the first time and said it believed in its humanity.”

COMING TO TERMS WITH AFRICA.

The Americans in Haiti

Haiti had become synonymous with instability. In the capital, the masses had lynched the President, Guillaume Sam, who had taken refuge in the French Embassy, and the Germans, who had economic interests there, had turned Haiti into a geo-strategic annoyance to the United States. Had a World War, in which Berlin held center stage, not been waging on, Washington would have continued to take notice of Haiti from an angle that did not include the Marines.

The presence of white occupational forces on their soil stunned the Haitians. The belief that an attempt to re-establish slavery was under way provoked an uprising among the peasants. Called
Cacos, (red birds), the revolutionary peasants were by August of 1915 routed by a detachment of Marines. The elite that had welcomed the American occupation they believed would uplift the country from the chaos it was experiencing began to have doubts as foreign rule made its reality felt. The Americans in charge of the various Haitian institutions during the occupation were military men who showed little respect toward the traditional position of the elite. Neither the elite's education nor its display of French culture impressed them. They perceived the people of color differently than did the French. Whereas the latter considered the people of color to be closer to themselves culturally, Americans made little distinction between blacks. Although they chose men of color and not blacks (an example was the choice of Philippe Dartiguenave over Rosalvo Bobo for president in 1915) to assist in administering Haiti, the people of color, in spite of their European culture, were racially black. The Americans turned on full blast against Haiti the prejudice and racism African-Americans were accustomed. The fact that these American military men were perceived as coarse and boorish added to the elite's pique. H.P. Davis
speaking on the relations between the elite and the occupiers said:

Many Haitians of the upper class have been educated in France, ... they respond at once to courteous treatment and are equally quick to resent condescension and the feeling of racial superiority which many Americans in Haiti made little or no attempt to conceal. This resentment was particularly manifest in the not infrequent occasions when Haitians felt themselves to have been grossly insulted by Americans of obviously inferior culture.¹

    Notwithstanding a turbulent history since their independence, Haitians kept as a glorifying memory the 1791-1804 revolution that defeated Bonaparte’s armed forces. And pride that their country was the first black independent nation in the Western Hemisphere. It was again in the name of independence that the northern Cacos took up arms against the Marines and the elite was stripped naked by the racism of the occupiers. Thomas A. Bailey expressed the Haitian reaction to the American occupation in the following terms: “The independence loving Haitian Negroes resented wearing a foreign yoke, especially one imposed by white men ...”²
Specific grievances from both the peasants and the elite followed general resentment at the loss of independence. The peasants resented the corvée (forced labor) to build roads. In Port au Prince, the elite resented the imposition of a "utilitarian" curriculum in their schools. They also looked askance at the intention of the Americans to encourage the formation of a middle class in Haiti.

The Cacos revolted against the corvée and the occupation. Led by Charlemagne Peralte, they used the topography to wage guerilla war against the Marines. In the north, Peralte created a government-in-exile to take over the reign of Haiti following the collapse of the United States imposed government. Betrayed, he was killed by a platoon of Marines on October 31, 1919. Peralte’s death earned Captain Herman Hanneken the Congressional Medal of Honor. Hanneken had shot the Caco leader and dealt an irreparable blow to the only armed organization against the occupation. But Peralte’s death and the northern peasants’ struggle became a rallying point to both Haitian and U.S. groups opposed to the American Occupation.
Already in September 1915, *The Crisis*, the official organ of the NAACP, had published an editorial that began as follows:

“Let us save Haiti. Haiti is a noble nation. It is a nation that dared to fight for freedom. This is not the time or place for us American Negroes who seldom have had courage to fight, to point scornful fingers at our brothers.”

Following Peralte's death, the NAACP sent its secretary, James Weldon Johnson, to investigate the occupation. Johnson, in a series of articles in *The Nation*, reported to the American public the atrocities committed by the Marines in their "pacification" of Haiti. In one of these articles, Johnson warned that:

“The colored people of the United States should be interested in seeing that the independence and sovereignty of Haiti be restored, for Haiti is the one chance that the Negro has in the world to prove that he is capable of self-government.”

The new curriculum the U.S. administrators envisaged for Haitian schools would affect Haitian society to the core. The Americans thought that Haiti's major economic problem lay
in its limited agricultural production. To remedy the problem, they proposed to transform the country into an agrarian society. They would suspend university education in favor of farming instruction from U.S. teachers. Haitian students preparing to become members of the elite would have to enroll in these classes and earn a living by the sweat of their brows. Thus came of age a generation that saw its traditional channel to elite membership threatened.\(^5\) The disinherited generation lay the blame for the chaos and weaknesses that had resulted in the occupation at the feet of their elders.

Concomitantly with its aim to overhaul Haitian agricultural methods, the U.S. sought to revamp the country’s socio-political structure. The election to the National Assembly was blocked, and its functions taken over by a Council of State. The elite bloc bitterly opposed this action, resenting the suppression of the legislature, not only because it was humiliating, but also because it meant loss of income from political positions. Replacing the Senate and Chamber of Deputies with the small appointive Council of State would deprive many of them of one of the few respectable means of earning a living.\(^6\) The U.S.
considered that changes would favor the evolution of an American-type middle class of traders, managers, salaried professionals and bureaucrats that would counter the influence of the educated elite and the revolutionary tendencies of the peasants.

Thirteen years after the Marines had landed, the peasantry and most of the elite were, for the first time, united – opposition to the American Occupation of their country was the unifying factor. The work of Jean Price-Mars gave direction to the resistance against the occupation.

The Vocation of the Elite and The First Indigenist Movement

Jean Price-Mars (1876-1969) was a physician, an ethnologist, a senator, and a diplomat. In 1906, he visited the United States and called on Booker T. Washington whose work at Tuskegee greatly impressed him. During his superintendency from 1912 to 1915 of Haiti's public schools, he advocated Washington's style of technical training for the masses, in addition to the need for courses in agronomy.
Like the ethnologists, Antenor Firmin and Hannibal Price, and other Haitians of his generation, the idea of rehabilitating the black race also preoccupied Price-Mars. Responding to the racialist philosophers Arthur Gobineau and Gustave Lebon, who argued that blacks were incapable of advancement, became Price-Mars’s profession. In 1915, while in Paris he debated Lebon who challenged him to write a book about Haiti. In 1916, he came home to find the elite bewildered in the face of the American occupation. He undertook with a series of conferences – compiled in 1919 under the title *The Elite’s Vocation* – a campaign to reinstate Haitians’ civil and political rights the Marines were suppressing. In his conferences, Price-Mars told his audiences that Haitians’ ignorance of each other was responsible for the disintegration of the country.

What Césaire found in Haiti that distressed him that Price Mars warned about twenty-four years earlier, to wit:

It is true that when one people does not feel a spontaneous need for a national soul drawn from the intimate solidarity of its diverse classes, by a common aspiration toward a high ideal; when on the contrary, the people are divided into distinct parts – the leading class
ignoring the conditions of the masses, the latter ignoring the existence of the former, their only interaction being along economical lines – such people stand on the edge of annihilation. It only takes an external threat to its national existence for each class to be driven by its own interests. Finding a common cause is the only thing that can bring them together, to resist one way or another the invasion of their country.¹¹

To overcome this moral deficit, Price-Mars proposed that the elite impose on itself a physical and mental “discipline” and pity the masses.¹² “Not as charity…but as a manifestation that it understood and truly accepted its duty.”¹³ One of the elite, himself, Price-Mars proposed, at the beginning of the American Occupation, that the vocation of his class, whom he accused of “Pilatism” should be generosity toward the masses whom he still considered in 1916 as coming from “backward races.” Furthermore, the elite's duty was to give its oligarchic support to the type of education Price-Mars was proposing for the masses. Not the classical education the nation reserved for its select few, but the education found at Hampton Institute and Tuskegee National Institute, which exemplified what can be done for backward races when one
knows how to direct them. It is this kind of education the masses need.14 In The Elite’s Vocation, Price-Mars echoed, at times, the fascist philosophy of Sorel and Paeteo that was becoming fashionable in Europe.

Fascism was not absent from the aspirations of the young in search of a rallying point to oppose the American Occupation. For example, in the periodical La Troué (The Gap) which had but one edition, a group of young writers, including a young Jacques Roumain (1907–1944), posted the following manifesto: “We ask above everything else for unity, the term that shines at the head of fascist associations, the fascio that does so much honor to the Duce. We will make him known.”15

For many years, the educated generation that came of age during the American Occupation searched for a rallying principle to oppose foreign rule. They began by denouncing the elder elite that had driven the country to disaster. Concomitantly, they also began in editorials to condemn elite values. Whereas their elders’s beacon was the culture and literature of France, the new generation opted for Haiti’s own culture in its Caribbean context. Normil Sylvain in La Revue Indigene, (The Indigenist Review,) the first of
many periodicals published by the young generation, stated the position of the members. They intended to make their literature a true and living picture of the different manifestations in the life and thoughts of contemporary Haiti. They also intended to give the Haitian point of view in the intellectual, artistic, economic and commercial life of the country. What is more, the word *indigenous* that the elders had turned into an insulting epithet was to be carried like a banner by the young generation.16

To Normil Sylvain, inspiration was in the lullabies of the black nurses who had lulled his generation to sleep. For the first time, Haiti’s rich folklore, the sound of the drums, the blowing of the conch and the meringue were to be the source of Haiti’s poetry.17

The literature of other countries – thus ending France's monopoly – became influential. In the periodical’s third issue, Jacque Roumain wrote that it was “natural” to follow the literary design of the French writers. But it was not creative to make them the masters of the “feelings” of Haitian writers as had been the case.18 He also noted that the flourishing original black literature
Negritude the Origin

Christian Filostrat

in the U.S. was being “candidly ignored” in Haiti.19

*The Indigenist Review* committed itself, in a tone that often dismayed many of Haiti’s older writers, to seek inspiration in the very soul of Haiti and the Caribbean. Jacques Roumain, still very much of the elite, spoke of African-American literature as an example of originality. In 1927, however, the young Haitian writers noticed black literature only superficially. Although *The Review* was regarded as a *committed* periodical, its members were still seeking a central rallying point to give purpose to their effort. Their poetry remained, in spite of their editorials and articles, as trivial and devoid of Haitian originality as had the works of their elders. Moreover, the anthology the group published lacked any mention of the trauma the American Occupation had caused Haiti. But *The Indigenist Review* was a step not only away from the monopoly France held in the cultural and literary life of Haiti, but also a step toward the elite's understanding and acceptance of Haiti's cultural heritage. The periodical also gave prominence to literature in the elite's search for a
national Haitian identity as the mobilizing force to oppose the occupation.

**Price-Mars: The Call for Haitian Nationalism**

From *The Elite’s Vocation* to the publication of *Thus Spoke the Uncle* by Price-Mars, nine years of American Occupation had elapsed. During that time, Price-Mars thoroughly examined Haiti's ethnological foundation in light of studies about Africa done by the European ethnologists Maurice Delafosse and Leo Frobenius. The results were popularized in lectures and articles and compiled in a book published in 1928. *Thus Spoke the Uncle* gave the floundering Indigenist group a focal point to give originality to their literary works and face the American occupation.

The elite had erected a cultural barrier between itself and the masses, partly because of the specter of slavery and the label of uncivilized that hung over Africa. In *Thus Spoke the Uncle*, Price-Mars undertook to rehabilitate Haitian culture in the eyes of the elite, by demonstrating that Haiti's folklore was derived from civilizations to be proud of.
Analyzing the elite's attitude toward the masses, Price-Mars accused them of “collective bovarism.” This attitude, he noted, was dangerous because, in being ashamed of it’s heritage, the elite could hardly offer any contribution to human progress. Consequently, Haiti was easy prey to imperialists' designs on its territory. In their efforts to identify themselves as colored Frenchmen, "the elite forgot how to be simply Haitians; men born in certain historical conditions, having in their souls, like all peoples, a psychological disposition that gives the Haitian community its specific features.” African, he stated, was the most humiliating name by which one could address a Haitian.

This country’s most distinguished men would rather have some resemblance to an Eskimo, a Samoyed or a Tougawze than to their Guinean or Sudanese ancestors. With what pride some of the most representative personalities of our country evoke some bastard affiliation! All the turpitudes of colonial promiscuities, the secret shame of chance meetings, and the brief gamble of two paroxysms have become titles for consideration and glory.
Such aberrations are recipes for a bleak future. Price Mars again reiterated his views about the impending annihilation of Haiti. "Before the night comes," he proposes to provide an ethnographical analysis of the Haitian nation in part to respond to the challenge of the racialist Gustave Lebon.

Unlike The Elite’s Vocation where the advice is for oligarchic generosity toward the masses, in Thus Spoke the Uncle, Price-Mars summons the elite to the school of the original folklore of Haiti, the folklore of the masses. Of this work and of its importance to the movement of Haitian nationalism, which blossomed following its publication, Kleber George-Jacob asserts, “it was the star that was to guide us, to show us the clear luminous path.” “It was,” according to Robert Cornevin, “the fundamental work that marked the principal date in the national consciousness of the Haitian people.” Price-Mars, in the words of Leon Damas, was the “Father of Haitianism.”

Besides the importance of Thus Spoke the Uncle in giving the elite a focal point in the search for originality, Price-Mars, as a professor of Haitian history at the exclusive Lycée Pétion
from 1918 to 1930, instructed a generation of students in the necessity of a nationalist drive. Among his students and disciples were Francois Duvalier and Dumarsais Estimé, sons of Afro-Haitian parents. They later became presidents of Haiti, via support from the masses against the elite.

With the publication of *Thus Spoke the Uncle*, the first phase of the “indigenist” movement in Haiti came to an end. It was replaced by a militant Haitianism that rose up to ask for an end to the American Occupation. It also opened the way for a resistance literature in which the peasantry and Haiti's cultural heritage became the predominant themes.

The elite's objection to the United States agricultural and other educational programs in Haitian schools laid the basis for effective objections against the occupation itself.29

Conscious of their impotence to change the American-supported regime by force, and indignant at being deprived of their constitutional right to elect representatives who would, quite obviously, have proceeded to change it by legislation, the opposition resorted to politically inspired strikes, subversive propaganda, and student dem-
onstrations as the only then available means of expressing their protest.\textsuperscript{30}

The “propaganda” was the nationalistic poems, which young Haitian writers recited in public to incite the population against the occupation.\textsuperscript{31}

On December 7, 1929, believing a revolution was in the making, the Marines, massacred a group of peasants on the way to market. The African-American newspaper, \textit{The New York Amsterdam News}, on December 14, 1929, reported that the black population of Harlem demonstrated in the streets and on the steps of City Hall in support of their brethren in Haiti. Throughout the occupation, which lasted until 1934, blacks in America demonstrated, sometimes violently, against it. Almost every issue of \textit{The Crisis} demanded justice for the Black Republic. The \textit{Save Haiti League}, with affiliation in many states, was founded to protest against American encroachment in Haiti. Many famous African Americans went to Haiti to lend support to the anti-occupation efforts.

Langston Hughes (1902–1967) was among those who traveled to Haiti. He later collaborated with Arna Bontemps in the writing of \textit{Popo and Fifina}, a novel about Haitian children. Hughes
also joined Mercer Cook to translate Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneur de la Rosée* (Master of the Dew). Mercer Cook in turn joined the Haitian diplomat and writer Dantes Bellegarde to produce *The Haitian-American Anthology.*

In 1930, President Herbert Hoover appointed the *Forbes Commission* to investigate the occupation. The Commission concluded that Haiti's constitution should be restored, providing for an elected legislature. It also recommended a gradual withdrawal of American forces from Haiti. The pull out was completed in 1934. In 1930, the reinstituted National Assembly elected Stennio Vincent, a member of the elite of color, running as a nationalist, president.

In response to Price-Mars' appeal to relate to the ancestral tradition of their country, in verse and in prose, Haiti's writers, beginning in 1931 found inspiration in their Afro-Haitian heritage. After Price-Mars’ call, writers such as Leon Laleau could ask, “. . . Can you feel that pain/And that despair unequal to any other./To tame with French words/This heart which comes from Senegal.”32
What did this period of Haitian Nationalism Bring to Haiti?

In 1946, the Haitianist movement urged by Price-Mars to counter the elite’s *bovarism* and the American Occupation resulted in the elite’s and the masses’ consciousness of their political strength. In the wake of the “black power” movement that swept over Haiti, Dumarsais Estimé was elected President. The first black president since the American Occupation, he initiated several reforms favorable to the masses: He doubled workers' salaries, initiated a system of social security, provided water and electricity, and protected the religion of the Afro-Haitians against the protests of the Catholic Church. And, too, tourism was given a strong boost. Estimé's presidency, however, lasted but five years. The army led by Paul Magloire overthrew him. Magloire was himself forced to abdicate five years later. Francois Duvalier, exponent of the *Griots* and partisan of Estimé's 1946 revolution, was elected. He had Haiti's constitution changed, making him and his heir presidents for life.

What remains, and is more telling than any other interpretative index of this period that
witnessed the elite’s drive for Haitian nationalism, is the literary production of the generation that came of age during the 1915 to 1934 American Occupation.

There were two resulting trends from the writers of this period’s expression of authenticity. The first dealt with the African characteristics of Haitian culture. The second bore upon the fraternal bond between blacks, elites, workers and peasants. Often, both tendencies would inspire one writer and be reflected in a single work. In poetry, highly personal rhyming and rhythmic verse or prose schemes with no set patterns, definite length of lines and stanzas replaced the classical rhyme caesura, enjambement and hiatus familiar in the works of the elder writers (except in Jean Brierre's *Here I am Again Harlem.*)

Jacques Roumain, in *The Long Road to Guinea*, first published in 1942, speaks mournfully of the Haitian belief in one's return to Africa at death. This famous poem is an example of the understanding of the Haitian peasant's culture that Roumain had reached at the time of his death in 1944. “. . . There, there awaits you beside the water a quiet village/And the hut of
your fathers, and the hard ancestral stone/Where your head will rest at last.”

Langston Hughes, the translator, has captured the rhythm of death and personal metaphors of Roumain's French original. The “soul” that has taken “the long road to Guinea” belonged to Roumain himself.

Voodoo fascinated the educated elite of that period to the extent that according to Jacques C. Antoine “they saw in Voodoo the essential source of Haitian art and literature.”

(Author’s note: I was serving at the US embassy in Port au Prince in 1991. During the coup that overthrew President Aristide, I visited Dr. Legrand Bijoux, the foremost Haitian psychiatrist, with Ambassador, Alvin Adams. Dr. Bijoux had written extensively about the Haitian Family. The purpose of the visit was to get Dr. Bijoux’s technical explanation for what was taking place in Haiti and a better sense of the society. Outright, Dr. Bijoux said exactly what Jacques Antoine said in 1932, to wit: “Voodoo is essential to Haitian society . . . People are never master of their fate.” This brings me to Denise, my secretary in Niamey. She was from Benin. She thought that her mother in law hated her and wanted her baby dead. The child had diarrhea. A simple rehydration solution was all that was required. I would have a car take the baby to the hospital, but the mother never followed through. The doctor at the hospital was a woman from Georgetown, Guiana. She was married to the justice minister. She warned me what would happen.)
Also in Niamey: the number one TV news anchor in the country was summoned by the dictator, Seyni Kountché. The man was so frightened, when the Minister of Information notified him that the dictator wanted to see him, that he lost the ability to speak. His wives came to tell me this, and I went with them to their house to take him to the hospital to see what was wrong with him. However, the word was out that the dictator was looking for the anchorman, and the only medical personnel who dared give him the time of day was the Chinese acupuncturist. After putting needles where you wouldn’t expect, he told the anchorman, “Crie” – scream. The anchorman screamed and then could speak. It seems that the dictator thought that the anchorman was drunk during a broadcast and wanted to have a fatherly talk with him. That was all. The dictator loved this guy – I saw how he treated him – and wouldn’t have done more than talk to him, I’m sure. But the shock of being summoned by the severe dictator was too much. The anchorman never fully recovered. Drinking sank him, and he was banished to Agadez in the north, near the Sahara.

In the following stanzas, Charles Pressoir describes a voodoo ceremony.

One peasant plays the part of Legba,
And like our country women here,
Comes from Ouedo the black one dear,
In a short jacket, sweet Ayida.
But what can be done with a goat without horns?
Next Agoué, the Barkentine,
Lord of the Tempeasts, Master of Seas
Who cuts off heads, Agou precedes,
A murderous general, menacing, mean.
But what can be done with a goat without horns?
In a corner they roll, they roar, — the big drums
Covered with hairy wild-ass hide,
Monstrous black devils and side by side,
Mama, Papa then Cata comes.\(^{35}\)

Carl Brouard, in *The Anguished Drum*, made offerings to the voodoo god, Agouey:

The sky is dark
The wind whistles
And the furious waves
Toss here and there the weak boumba.
Powerful Agouey, have pity on us!
If you deliver us from this peril,
We will give you a green scarf, thick syrups
Succulent cakes made in Port-au-Prince.\(^{36}\)

Africa, which Price-Mars had revalorized as an integral part of Afro-Haitian culture, also became an inspiring theme to the new generation of Haitian writers. In that light, Arthur Bonhomme, under the pseudonym Claude Fabri, produced this puerile stanza:

I don’t know why,
I would like to be tonight
The hirsute ancestor
Who long ago, in the mysterious bush
Danced, ignorant, free and naked.\textsuperscript{37}

All These poems, written in alternate rhyming alexandrine, are examples of the Harlem influence brought about by the American Occupation. Through Harlem, militant Haitian writers such as Brierre and Roumain felt a sense of commonality with African Americans.

To these writers, the perception of having a common oppressor later evolved into the domineering imperialism theme, while the subjugated became the colorless proletariat. It is Jacques Roumain who, in \textit{Ebony Wood} (posthumously published in 1945), wrote the most memorable verses of Afro-Haitian and proletariat duality:

\begin{quote}
Africa I remember you Africa; you are in me, 
like a splinter in a wound, 
like a tutelary fetish in the center of the village 
make of me the stone of your sling of my mouth the lips of your wound 
Of my knees the shattered columns of your abasement...
\textbf{YET}
I only want to be of your race 
workers, peasants of all countries.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}
Chapter XIII

AVANT-GARDE MEANT PARIS IN THE 1930S

Two years after the start of Marines’ occupation of Haiti, a regiment of Afro-Americans arrived in France as part of the U.S. contingent “to make the world safe for democracy.” World War I, thus, provided the first opportunity for sustained contact between African-Americans and black men of French-ruled Africa, the French West Indies and French Guyana, who, themselves, had come to France to defend their motherland. African-American units such as the 369th regiment were incorporated into France's armed forces, adding to the comradeship that developed between African Americans and French-speaking black men. The French demonstrated throughout the conflict sympathy for the plight of African-Americans laboring even at the front under Jim Crow rules. Moreover, the 369th regiment achieved an outstanding record of valor
and distinction in combat. It was the first allied unit to reach the Rhine. And as the first American regiment in the French Army during the war, saw the longest service at the front. It was in the trenches for 191 days. The entire unit was awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honor for exceptional bravery in action.¹

The less blatant racism and the genuine gratitude of the French for their efforts in the war made France welcome to African-Americans. Shelby T. McCloy noted that:

… the Negro from far-off America ... was a different person after several months in France, where he was treated by the Whites in a manner he had never known before. Tens of thousands of Negro soldiers had that experience. A few of the privileged were able to return in the years thereafter, but in most instances they merely passed on the word to friends and relatives, who acted on their suggestion of going to France.²

These sentiments were factors conducive to the holding of the first Pan-African Congress in Paris in 1919. The deputy from Senegal to Paris since 1914, Blaise Diagne, presided, and the Congress’s architect, W.E.B. DuBois, acted as secretary. In addition, there were thirteen participants from Guadeloupe and Martinique, including the
Deputies, Gratien Candace and Achille-René Boisneuf from Guadeloupe and Joseph Lagrosilliere from Martinique. In 1921, the second Pan-African Congress was in part also held in Paris. From it resulted the formation of the second Pan-African Association whose president was Gratien Candace. Isaac Beton from Martinique was the secretary.

The participation of black American troops in the war made jazz known throughout France. And Lieutenant James Europe's 369th Regiment's band became world famous there. In addition to jazz, African-American literature and both Marcus Garvey’s and DuBois’ movements found wide diffusion in France among black ex-servicemen and students from Africa, the West Indies and Guyane.

The Field Service Fellowship was awarded to a number of black men after the war. This enabled them to study in Paris and other French cities, as well as in London, further lifting the level of contacts between black students from the French empire and those from the U.S. Alain Locke, who is regarded as “the father of the so-called Harlem Renaissance,” and whose New Negro, published in 1925, defined the metamorphosis of
black Americans after the war spent his summers in Paris from 1919 to 1938.\textsuperscript{5} Eye-witness reports indicate that following the war, black Americans of all occupations could be seen in cafés and streets of Paris's Left Bank. France was in such vogue that Mercer Cook found it necessary to remind black Americans that it was not Utopia. Because of the African-American influx to France, Mercer Cook saw that: “During my last visit to France, in 1938, I was impressed by the surprising facility with which young French Negro intellectuals could quote Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Sterling Brown, Countee Cullen, and other American Negro authors.” \textsuperscript{6}

At the same time, so extensive had Afro-American studies become in France that four years after the end of the war, René Maran could state that “the Negro question is a living one. America has made it so.”\textsuperscript{7} Maran was referring to the upsurge of black American cultural and racial ideas that had found their way to France.
The “New” American “Negro.”

Following the war, a cleansing mood set in for a short while in American northern cities, inspiring a renewal in black America. Coming back from the European conflict, African Americans as was the case with Africans and West Indians in Paris let it be known in periodicals such as *The Messenger*, *The Crisis*, and *Negro World* that Booker T. Washington's philosophy of accommodation was no longer acceptable. A number of black leaders were now demanding full equality with whites, and, by 1919, race riots were occurring in a number of American cities. African-Americans rose to oppose Jim Crowism and other racisms. They were, in Claude McKay’s poem of rebellion,

*If We must die*, exhorted not to die like hogs hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
If we must die – oh, let us nobly die!
Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall dying but fighting back!⁸

Concurrently, Harlem, “the largest Negro community in the world” became the American
metropolis where – like Paris – a diversity of black peoples and a number of whites influenced each other into giving literature, art and music a fresh vision.

It was the Parisians’ newfound love for African-American art that reverberated in white America and made Harlem and the “Negro in vogue.” Langston Hughes, describing the period when “people were crazy about Negroes,” said in this bittersweet passage:

It was a period when every season there was at least one hit play on Broadway acted by a Negro cast. And when books by Negro authors were being published with much greater frequency and much more publicity than ever before or since in history. It was a period when white writers wrote about Negroes more successfully (commercially speaking) than Negroes did about themselves. It was a period when the Negro was in vogue.⁹

These factors combined to deal a deathblow to the “old” and give birth to the New Negro that Alain Locke (1886 – 1954) documented and interpreted in 1925 as “the transformation of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America that has so significantly taken place in these few years.”¹⁰ In The New Negro: An Interpretation,
Alain Locke set out to provide a self-portrait of black America's artistic expression during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Locke wrote of the "new psychology" that was liberating the black artist from the shackles of imitation, replacing “tutelage” with "self direction." Locke made it clear, however, that the black American artist was following America's democratic ideals – no matter how strident his defiant tone. To Locke, blacks in their migration from the south to the north were also looking, above all else, for a chance at enjoying the democratic principles on which America was founded. He also saw them actively taking part in an upward social march toward the “modern" and more sophisticated region of the country.\(^\text{11}\)

As for the new radicalism in African American circles, Locke gave the following interpretation:

Each generation, however, will have its creed, and that of the present is the belief in the efficacy of collective effort, in race co-operation. This deep feeling of race is at present the mainspring of Negro life. It seems to be the outcome of the reaction to proscription and prejudice; an attempt, and fairly successful on the whole, to convert a defensive into an offensive position, a handicap to an incentive.\(^\text{12}\)
Locke’s comment found wide appeal among black groups in Paris, demanding full French citizenship. Their periodicals, manifestos and poems echoed his words.

Alain Locke's *The New Negro* gave notice that the new generation of African Americans had a wider horizon and view of their race and its place in America. The *Harlem Renaissance*, the manifestation of the *New Negro*'s vibrant artistic expression, enunciated in literature the freedom of thematic and cultural self-determination. Among the *Harlem Renaissance* literati of the period who had the most impact on French-speaking blacks in Paris in the 1930s and 1940s was besides Alain Locke, Claude McKay. His novel, *Banjo*, written while in France, epitomized the new black rebelliousness and sense of exile and embodied the alienation of an educated black man in the white world. Langston Hughes who wrote about the black lower classes in the rhythms of jazz and blues was the most followed. He was the most echoed of the new American Negro Renaissance poets because he exemplified by his personality and his works the descendant of the African slave who was striving for cultural
self-determination and full citizenship in a land where he was an outcast. Unlike Haiti, there was no independent black America, where the Afro-American was self-governing and in the majority. On the contrary, like the people of the French speaking West Indies and Guyane, African-Americans vied for equality, opposing the inequality of segregation and second-class citizenship. In America, blacks sought redress through American democratic precepts. Langston Hughes, in the 1920s, underlined that African-Americans wanted to be an integral part of the U.S. with such poems as “I, Too, Sing America.”

I, too, sing America  
I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.  
Tomorrow,  
I'll sit at the table  
When company comes. Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
“Eat in the kitchen,” then.  
Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am. And be ashamed.13
And he spoke for the *New American Negro* in presenting the manifesto whereby he proclaimed the cultural self-determination of the black American artist:

> We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased, we are glad, If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either.\(^{14}\)

Hughes' feelings toward Africa were also representative of blacks in America and the French speaking West Indies and French Guyana. Again, differing from Haiti where the Afro-Haitian's folklore was a reflection of West Africa's culture, African-American folklore, if remaining spiritually African, had been largely Americanized by dint of black Americans “striving to be a co-worker in the Kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation …”\(^{15}\)

Consequently, Hughes could truthfully state in contemplating Africa:
“So long./So far away/is Africa.” Hughes' refusal to engage in “Primitivism” was also due, as he said, to the fact that “I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me, and so I could not live and write as though I did. I was an American Negro – who had loved Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem.”16
Chapter XIV

DRIVE FOR FULL FRENCH CITIZENSHIP

Paris was the metropolis where intellectuals from all over the world met after the war. William L. Shirer, who was a newspaper correspondent stationed there during the inter-war years, described Paris in these terms:

Paris, the inimitable city, had once again become the cultural capital of the world. Attracted by its beauty, its charm, its civilities, its balmy air of freedom, its appreciation of the life of the mind and the spirit, foreigners flocked to it from all over the world in search of the civilized life which the Parisians already enjoyed.¹

The French Communist Party, in political sympathy with their aspiration for full French citizenship, courted blacks from all parts of the French empire. That made the French capital a center of awareness and possibilities to blacks under French rule. From all accounts, Paris, the most sophisticated city in the world, teemed with ethnic and racial consciousness.
The allies’ propaganda against Germany had, in part, created the breach through which blacks from Africa, America and the Caribbean poured out their political and racial assertions. The allies had proclaimed World War I to be a war to make the world safe for democracy and to ensure the right of all people to self-determination. To demand payment for the lives of the black French subjects who had just died in defense of these ideals, leagues, committees and periodicals sprang up in France after the war.

The two major leagues were: the *Universal League for the Defense of the Black Race* presided over by Tovalou Houeou of Dahomey, and the *League for the Defense of the Negro Race* led by Tiemoho Garan-Kouyaté and Abdou Koite, both Malians. ¹ There was one major committee: *The Committee for the Defense of the Negro Race* led by the Marxist Lamine Senghor of Senegal. ² They campaigned in the name of the empire’s black peoples for full French citizenship, an end to second-class status. Tovalou Houeou in the July 1924 issue of the Universal League periodical, *The Continents*, expressed his views on citizenship in the following passage:
We have shed our blood for France as our mother country; now at peace, voluntarily or involuntarily, we continue to fulfill the citizen's supreme duty of military service. Why do we not enjoy the rights of citizenship? We demand to be citizens, whatever the country. If France rejects us, we ask for autonomy. If she welcomes us, we ask for total assimilation and integration.4

In November 1931, Paulette Nardal of Martinique, who held a literary salon for black intellectuals passing through Paris, and Leo Sajou of Haiti, founded a leading bi-lingual periodical to voice demands for equality and cultural self-determination. The Journal of the Black World was a politically moderate publication with Catholic leanings. Its Importance rested on its goal, “to give to the intellectual elite of the black race and to the Friends of black peoples an organ to publish their artistic, literary and scientific works.”5 Sajou's Haitian connection seems to have been purely incidental. Only two articles concerning his homeland were published in the Journal.

In its first issue, the editorial entitled, What We Want To Do, expressed the pan-black scope of the periodical and the intention to underline the
African link between blacks and “to create between [them] without distinction of nationality an intellectual and a moral link, enabling them to know each other better; to love each other fraternally, in order to defend their collective interests and to illustrate their race.”

The works of European ethnographers about Africa, such as Leo Frobenius, were bearing fruits. The editorial noted, for example, that the periodical intended “to study and make known through the press, books, conferences, and in the schools all about Negro civilization and the natural riches of Africa, the motherland three times sacred to the black race.” Subsequently, the Journal published extracts from the works on Africa by Maurice Delafosse and Leo Frobenius.

The Journal also published works by Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Alain Locke. It was while reading this periodical that Aimé Césaire, who a few years later co-founded a periodical in which he voiced a concept others would turn into a movement, discovered these Afro-American writers whom he would echo.

Concurring with Frantz Fanon and the theme in Oruno Lara's *The Color Line*, Paulette Nardal, in the last issue of the Journal examined the
influence Paris had in the awakening and acknowledgement of one's racial consciousness.

“For the consciousness of one's race to be awakened in a number of West Indians it was necessary for them to leave their little country . . . Uprooted while in the mother country ... pushed the West Indian to implant himself further into his race.” 8

Bigotry in the mother country and the meeting with blacks from America and Africa created a critical mass of commitment to seek acknowledgement and redress.

The Revolt of Self Defense

The “profound reflection and arousal to revolt” in the racially and politically charged atmosphere of 1930s Paris spilled over in the pages of a periodical devoted to the destruction of the French bourgeoisie of color. Founded in June 1932 by a group of students of color from Martinique – a number of who had written for the Journal of the Black World that they later thought too moderate – proclaimed the class-suicide mission of its founders. Its editorial told readers
that *Légitime Défense* (*Self Defense*) was a warning, devoted, as it was, to fight “those who are not suffocated by this bourgeois, Christian Capitalist World.” Its founders believed in two ideologies, Marxism and Surrealism. About Marxism they wrote, “We believe without reserve in the triumph of the [third International], because we side with the dialectical materialism of Marx victoriously submitted to the test by Lenin.”

Leopold Sedar Senghor, in his *Négritude et Marxisme*, recalls this period of intense recruitment efforts by the West Indian Communists.

Indeed, right from the time of our arrival in Europe, we were submitted to Marxist propaganda. Some black students – especially the West Indians – had succumbed to its seduction. And they tried in turn to seduce us. They presented 'scientific socialism' as the final solution to our problems.

On surrealism they said, “We accept equally without reservation surrealism, to which, in 1932, we attach our becoming.” Readers were asked to read André Breton’s surrealist manifesto, the works of Louis Aragon, René Crevel, Salvador Dali, Paul Eluard, Benjamin Peret, Tristan Tzara, Sade, Hegel, Lautreamont, Rimbaud, to cite a
few.\(^{13}\) (The \textit{Self Defense} banner came from Breton’s manifesto.)

\textit{Self Defense} also evoked the works of Freud, which had helped liberate the subconscious from the restrictions of a stifling society and which had directly influenced Dadaism and Surrealism. From the vintage precepts of Surrealism, \textit{Self Defense} criticized West Indian writers. In one of its articles, for example, René Ménil (1907 – 2004) proposed that “the Black West Indian writer recognize first of all his own passions and express only himself – that he take the opposite direction of the useful, i.e., the path of dream and poetry.”\(^{14}\) Then, according to Ménil, he "would find fantastic images of which the African… statuettes were forms of expression.”\(^{15}\) He would also find the poems, the stories and the jazz of African Americans in addition to the works of the French Dadaists and Surrealists.\(^{16}\)

In an article on poetry entitled \textit{Poor Poetry}, Etienne Léro, the initiator of \textit{Self-Defense} and the movement’s leader, affirmed that:

It was inaccurate to speak of a West Indian poetry. The majority of the population did not read or write in French. Some people of color, intellectually and physically bastardized, literally rotten by white decadence, have
made themselves, to the French bourgeoisie that use them, ambassadors of the masses, whom, they suffocate and deny, because too dark.\textsuperscript{17}

In the West Indies, “the poet is recruited exclusively from the class which has the privilege of education and is well to do.”\textsuperscript{18} Consequently, “characteristics of the poetry’s mediocrity is clearly tied to the existing social order.”\textsuperscript{19} Etienne Léro turned to black America to create a poetry attuned to social realities in the French West Indies.

The wind from black America will quickly, we hope, clean our West Indies from its stunted fruits of a sick culture. Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, the two black revolutionary poets have brought us, preserved in red alcohol, the African love of life, the joy of African love, the African dream of death.\textsuperscript{20}

Next to Léro's article were quotes from McKay's \textit{Banjo} depicting a Martinique student of color alienated from race and culture. Léro promoted in the same breath the Russian Revolution and Mahatma Gandhi as examples to follow.

Because of its virulence, its dedication through Marxism and surrealism to be detrimental to the
colored bourgeoisie of the French West Indies, in addition to shortage of funds – the curse to all student periodicals, *Self Defense* had only one issue. That issue, however, had incorporated all the new tendencies that had burst on the Parisian cultural and political scene after the First World War and the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition. Armed with these new tendencies, dynamism, determination and ample youthful enthusiasm, the *Légitime Défense* (*Self Defense*) movement declared war on the society whence it came. The fact that *Self Defense* was published at all demonstrates the level of racial and political consciousness at work within the new generation of students from the French West Indies, Guyane and Africa who, like so many others before them, had come to France for their schooling in order to take their place in the colonial hierarchy.

The commentaries and works of those who responded to its message of rebellion reveal the far-reaching influence of *Légitime Défense*. Deserving of note, because he co-founded a periodical and was the first to publish a literary work in the manner Etienne Léro proposed, was Leon Gontran Damas.
Fifteen years after the publication of *Self Defense* during which time its revolutionary line had made great strides, Damas retrospectively wrote of Léro:

He marked a stage, a metamorphosis through which all those who understood and agreed with his message committed themselves totally to their individual adventure. What he attempted has already produced real rewards. Beginning with his poems ... a poetry was born ... It is to him and to no one else that the colonial poetry of French expression owes its new blood and a chance at salvation. It is to him and to no one else that it owes to have taken since 1932 the dream road.21

In reading Aimé Césaire’s and Léon Damas’s works, it is clear how extensively Césaire responded to René Ménil’s surrealist call and Damas to Langston Hughes’s racial beliefs echoed by Etienne Léro. Nevertheless, this periodical with the “revolutionary tone” never proposed or even hinted at a break with France itself. On the contrary, by carrying the banner of the French Communist party, it reinforced the political assimilationist drive of the French West Indies and Guyane, which the party promoted.

The Jacobins of France had, since the 1789 Revolution – congruent with their interests –
supported the political aspirations of men such as Cyrille Bissette and Armand Barbes. As the drive for full French citizenship intensified during the period between the first and second world wars, the Jacobins, who had become in the 1920s and 30s the trade unionists of the Communist-led union C.G.T. Confédération générale du travail and C.G.T.U Confédération générale du travail unitaire, supported, again openly, the aspirations of the people under French rule in the West Indies and Guyane. The French Communist party was motivated at that time in its support and recruitment of colonials by one overriding factor: the rise of fascism in Europe.

In France, the fear of Bolshevism was manifested in turn by the formation in 1927 of extreme right royalist movements such as the Cross of Fire. These movements opposed not only organized labor unions such as the C.G.T. and C.G.T.U. but also the republic itself and its Rights of Man.

The rising fascist tide compelled the French socialist and radical parties to forego their ideological differences and link their forces into a Common Front in the spring of 1932. It was no coincidence that Self Defense also saw light in
1932 and disappeared the year the Radical Socialist Front exited.
As the growth of fascism continued unabated, the communist unions staged protest demonstrations, and, from 1932 to 1936, pitched battles occurred between their adherents and the Cross of Fire’s supporters. Concurrently, the economic depression ravaging the U.S. and the European countries hit France in the early 1930s, further aggravating the Third Republic’s political crisis. From 1930 to 1935, there were two succeeding governments in France, and on July 14, 1935, to save the republic “against the imminent threat of the fascist leagues,” the radicals again joined the socialists in a Common Front pact under the slogan of “the Jacobins 1789 Revolution.” Prodded by Moscow,22 the French Communist Party shelved its abhorrence of the socialists and joined them and the radicals in a Popular Front arrangement in 1935, ensuring success at the polls in 1936.
Many blacks from the West Indies, Guyane and elsewhere were drawn, like Self Defense, into supporting and joining forces with the communists, the sworn enemies of fascism. The overwhelming reason for their support was that in
the French West Indies the line was also drawn between the white Creoles, the Békés, who had aligned themselves with the fascists and the blacks and the people of color who received support from the communists against the white Creoles. In January 11, 1934, the Creoles assassinated André Aliker, head of the Communist Party in Martinique. In addition, the opposition of the Soviet Union and the French Left to the occupation of Abyssinia by Fascist Italy further drove a number of French blacks to side of the communists. The occupation of the Rhineland by Germany and the plight of the republicans in the Spanish Civil War sealed their adherence to the belief that communism was the only force against fascism, imperialism’s offshoot.

The support the left received from the colonies to fight the rightists was instrumental in furthering the full citizenship aspirations of colonial blacks. For example, the Popular Front government promoted Felix Eboué to the governorship of Guadeloupe. He was governor as long as the Front was in power in France – two years.

The advent of the Popular Front to power was further conducive to the publication of a number of periodicals dedicated to highlighting the views
and the expectations of colonial blacks. Among these was *The Black Student: Monthly Journal of the Association of Martinican Students in France (L’Etudiant Noir: Journal Mensuel de l’Association des Etudiants Martiniquais en France)*.
Chapter XV

PIGMENT: NEGRITUDE IN POETIC REVOLT

Leon Damas published *Pigment* in the Mai 1935 issue of *l’Étudiant Noir* and in book form in 1937.¹ Had the Popular Front not been in power at the time, *Pigment* would not have been published that year.² In fact, it was seized in 1939, a few months following the fall of the Popular Front.

Besides the first few poems with surrealistic undertones,³ *Pigment* is a conspicuously plainspoken, revolutionary poetic project. Exile is its main inspiration – exile from Africa and exile from Guyane to France, where Damas’s racial consciousness awoke and took shape in the fiery cry of *Pigment*. There is also the grievance against what French colonial rule has done to Damas’s homeland, detailed in *Return from Guyane* published one year later.

From exile to cultural alienation, Damas’s moods shift constantly in *Pigment*, from humor to
irony, from rancor to shame, all ending in poetic revolutionary resolve.

Figure 8 My photo of Leon G. Damas in Washington, D.C. shortly before his death.

Damas’s racial consciousness statements in purposeful verses are never compromising. *Pigment* is read in the rhythm of jazz and blues inspired by Langston Hughes – uprooting, death, melancholy are expressed through a blood prism, while Damas never ceases, either forlornly or rancorously, to remind the listener of the degeneracy of his first exile. *Pigment* is also the ultimate aspiration of a New French Negro for Africa, for a way out of cultural alienation to
arrive at a semblance of cultural self-determination.

Damas, concurrently with his “yearning to be black,” reaches out for authenticity in dress and in behavior – an illustration of Freud’s liberating influence from western civilization and decorum, promoted by the *Légitime Défense (Self Defense)* group. Then, too, Damas never looses sight of the fact that only a minute interstice exists between one's consciousness and the actualization of that consciousness into revolt. And his awareness grows more and more acute as his frustrated feeling of revolt increases.

In one of the *Pigment* poems, *S.O.S.*, Damas uses the coming of Fascism to shout his awareness and to warn blacks in France of the mortal danger. (*S.O.S* was also the title of an Etienne Lero’s poem in *Self Defense.*)

Only then and not before
will you all understand
when they get the idea,
and they'll get that idea soon,
to go and stuff themselves on niggers
like Hitler
stuffing himself on Jews
seven fascist days
out of seven
... and cutting off the sex of the blacks to make candles for their churches.  

(Note the awareness that the Holocaust was already underway.) And the crescendo that underlines the disgrace of castration.

In the poem *On a Post Card*, Damas preoccupation with the coming war is fraught with bitterness, recalling the number of blacks who have died for France; and the colonial habit of raising monuments to the dead following each of France’s wars.  

*On a Post Card* and the next poem, *Et Caetera*, assured that the French government would censor *Pigment* – Damas’s call to revolt was too energetic; World War II too imminent. In these two poems, Damas summons blacks in the French colonies to direct their attention to the immediate problem of colonization and not to come to Europe to die for their colonizer.  

In *Pigment*’s thirty-two poems, Damas hammered out in repetitive, sometimes abrupt and disjointed, rhythmic cadence, the balance sheet of the state of blacks under French rule. In the poem *On A Post Card*, in particular, he
attacked colonialism as a parasitic institution benefiting only the colonizers. In this instance, his countrymen would be used in a war they had no stake in, and only monuments would be raised to commemorate black lives given for the mother country.

Pigment devoid of any exoticism, does not only raise its jazz and blues voice against colonialism, it appeals to the blacks themselves “to leave” the assimilationist ways “in peace” and "to start by invading themselves and their homeland.”

How was Damas judged at the time of Pigment’s publication in 1937?

At Damas’s funeral, forty-one years later, Césaire, the mayor of Fort de France, Martinique, in the vestibule of his City Hall, told the public:

[Damas] was taken for a dreamer, a dotard, a sermonizer, a charlatan … What strikes me is the seriousness in Damas, the tragedy in Damas, the pathos in Damas. Astonishing dignity for a man so many tended to take for a clown! When one really considers, it is not at all surprising – Damas was lucid to the highest degree. Truth can be cruel. The greatness of Damas is to accept it, without altering it, without erasing it, without embellishing it. As there is the Sartrian nausea, there is fundamentally the Damasian hiccup which is disgust, repulsion, attempts
never completely fulfilled because it is loaded with impossibilities of rejection and expulsion.  

Undertaken in behalf of the Paris Ethnographic Museum, Damas’s next work, *Retour de Guyane (Return from Guyane)*, is a documentary on the condition of his homeland. *Return from Guyane* would not have been published in 1938 had the Popular Front not been in power. Its criticism of French colonial policies was so resolute.

In this exposé, Damas denounces the “trash heap” character French various colonization schemes had given Guyane. Like many European powers in one or several areas of the Third World, the French had chosen New Caledonia and then Guyane as its rubbish chute for criminals of all sorts, not only to remove them from France's streets, but also to consolidate colonization.

Due to the difficulties of escape inherent in Guyane's geography, convicts walks unguarded the streets of the capital, Cayenne. “[The prisoner],” reports Damas, “roams the streets, terrorizes, rapes our children, implants his mores in the society, debases it, corrupts it, automatically depraves it; he is an outlaw that hunger
and needs make dangerous. Penitentiary officials use the criminals as laborers and domestics, a practice that has a degenerative impact on Guianese society.

In *Return from Guyane*, Damas’s outrage echoes the revolt in *Pigment*, enunciating the centuries of Guianese deprivation from French colonial rule. For example, the lepers of Acarouany, in the interior, exist in an appalling state; for, except in the capital city, basic medical facilities were non-existent in 1938. The rich Guianese soil is left to the jungle, and industry of any kind – except for the penal colony – is absent from the territory. “Guyane,” Damas reports, “is the most wretched French colony in the richest territory in the world.”

On assimilation, Damas affirms in the chapter *For or Against Assimilation*, that France’s efforts to make white Frenchmen of Guianese is futile. Taking Leopold S. Senghor as an example, he affirms that although his friend, thanks to France, has become an “eminent specialist in the French language … why would [France] at this price want [Senghor] to abandon his Serere quality [his *négritude*] admitting that he could.” On the issue of *departmentalization* – incorporation – of
the “old colonies,” he reviews the conditions of the school system in French Guyana, the state of transportation, the abuse of power by French officials, and concludes that without any significant change in its socioeconomic infrastructure Guyane would become a French department in name only. It would still be France's “garbage disposal.” [Departmentalization] will not lessen the disgust the American, the Brazilian, the Englishman, the Dutch experience when they stop in Guyane.”

He also warns France that the United States, which has the capability to develop Guyane, is expressing interest in its annexation. Both France and the colonies used the United States as boogeyman to frighten each other. France pointing at the living condition of blacks in the U.S.; the colonies at the likelihood that America would provide more for them.

*Return from Guyane* is a thesis against France's colonial policies. It is in prose the demonstration of the racial and political consciousness of the “New French Negro” that *Pigment* is in verse. Both *Pigment* and *Return from Guyane* claim cultural self-determination for the French colonies. Unlike others who insisted on complete assimilation within French culture, Damas and
his colleagues from *l’Etudiant Noir* argue for an equality of cultures whereby a black Frenchman does not have to become alienated in order to belong to a French community of diverse nations. Damas argues that the colonized can be equal to the French and still retain his own identity. Damas ends his prophetic documentary by proposing that Guyane’s vast gold deposits be mined to serve the colony.

*Mine de Riens* is introduced here in the context of *Return from Guyane*. Also because the author read the poems in the collection to Damas for sound while Damas was composing them. It’s a collection of thirty-six poems, completed just prior to his death in January 1978.

CROYEZ-M’EN by Léon G. Damas:

Croyez-m’en
comme admet sans mal de mourir
le matin mauve
du Mahury mien
à marée montante
ou basse
rien ne manque
rien assurément ne manque
au miroir déformant où se meut à m’
ce monde
malgré moi mien

Croyez m’en
si le voulez
rien assurément ne manque
hormis la mémoire muette
de mes amis morts en celui qui avait
Robert DESNOS

Mine de Riens (literally, It doesn’t seem like it) evokes the gold mines of Damas’s youth. Mine – (gold) mine – is a play on the word mine, appearance. (When Damas read these poems with the author, the latter understood Mine to mean “gold mine.”)
 mine de riens

n'attendez

a crouettons dans la nuit

sauvage-de-bons-sens

a la rubrique des chiens crevus

point trop n'en faut

excusez du feu

au banquet de cloture

passe encore

je le confesse mon reverend

parce qu'elle avait eu pour pere

on m'ecriit

je dis

qu'en savent-ils

non le vent

n'est avis

seuls ceux qui disent

et pourquoi

il ne revient

elles

elle avait dans le regard

autant elle avait

au bout du fil

sur un tableau de max ernst

s'il faut en croire

il n'y avait pas que la grisaille

me revient

chose promis

autant le voir en cage

poursuivez son reve

de qui

pour feu

vous n'entre plus

poissons

de la profuse et diffuse cier feuve

4 d'autres

(2 pages)

3

5

6

2

2

2

2

2

3

2

8

4
Mine de Riens in this case would be translated as Empty Gold Mine or Mine of Nothing, Damas being keenly mindful at the time of his death that Guyane was still an maltreated gold mine. This explains Mine de Riens’s bitter reminiscences and resentment, all derived from the awareness that Damas had not been able to change the status of his homeland.

Damas called French Guyana, la terre des parias the land of outcasts.

So keen was Damas’s sensitivity about this that it would not be wrong to call him un écorché vif.

Mine de Riens contains few of the youthful engagé poetry found in Pigment. Damas has replaced virulent denunciation against France’s colonial policies toward his homeland with a morose, regretful personal lament. The first poem in the collection, Mine de Riens, is an example:

Mine of nothings Mine de riens
wealthy riches
from the only sap des seuls seve
sugar suc
salt from the hard earth sel de la terre ferme
Afro-Amérindian mine
seeded watered fed
from the blood from the sweat of my offered pain-
not without pain so that all could be
so that all can be.

aframérindienne mienne ensemencée abreuvée nourrie
du sang de la sueur de ma peine offerte-
non sans peine pour que tout pour que fût
pour que tout soit.¹⁴

Mine de Riens is at https://bit.ly/2LWBFHG ¹⁵
Chapter XVI

CÉSAIRE, THE POLITICS OF NEGRITUDE IN THE FRENCH WEST INDIES

Césaire returned to Martinique, in August 1939, already a legend in French academic circles for his blazing intellect and ability to wield the French language with singular dexterity.\(^1\) It was, however, the heralding of his négritude that set him apart from the other returning students who had all traveled to Paris to continue their studies to take their place in the colonial administration. Frantz Fanon who two years later entered Césaire's literature class at the local secondary school, recalled that:

For the first time a secondary school teacher – a man, therefore, who was apparently worthy of respect – was seen to announce quite simply to (Martinique society) 'that it was fine and good to be a Negro' …what indeed could be more grotesque than an educated man, a man with a diploma, having in consequence understood a good many things, among others that it was unfortunate to be a Negro, proclaiming that his skin was beautiful and that
the 'big black hole' was a source of truth … He must be mad, for it was unthinkable that he could be right.²

Before his return and during the period he militated from his Paris base against the surrealist’s and communists’ principles of Self Defense, Césaire outlined his role in the new Martinique, in Return to My Native Land. Here he measures his determination to become the leader who will extirpate Martinique from its paralyzing colonial inertia:

I will come back to this country of mine
and I will say to it: 'Embrace me without fear. If all I can do is
speak, it is for you that I will speak.
My mouth will be the mouth of the misfortunes that have no
Mouth; my voice the liberty
of those who are stuck in the dungeon of despair.³

(Césaire was mayor of Fort de France, Martinique’s capital city, from 1945 until 2001 and a deputy to France’s National Assembly from 1945 until 1993. He retired at the age of eighty-eight. He was revered in Martinique.)
(Author’s note, we were going to his house a few miles outside of Fort de France. In the backseat, I was sitting next to his first deputy mayor and best friend, Pierre Alier; Césaire was next to the driver. There was a traffic jam as the car turned on Route de Redoute. Césaire jumped out of the car and started to direct traffic. Within minutes thousands gathered to watch and cheer. He was un monstre sacré, a rock star, in Martinique. On the other hand, at the National Assembly in Paris, where he voted with the socialists until his retirement in 1993, he was until Francois Mitterand’s presidency and the socialist majority at the Assembly (1981-1995) a vexing speaker, who made grandiosely erudite speeches filled with Latin phrases to demand bread for his constuency. Discourse on Colonialism [Discours sur le colonialism] 1950 & 1955 is a cri de coeur reflecting Césaire’s frustration with France’s failure to treat the “former” colonies as it did departments in France. His speeches there were such that teachers brought their students to hear him. But that was it. He was a famous curiosity at the French National Assembly.)

Césaire's plan remained shelved for six years. On his way home war was declared in Europe. In the French West Indies, a Pétain Lieutenant, Admiral Georges Robert, with the help of "ten thousand" French sailors imposed Vichy's control over the area from 1939 to 1943. This period witnessed the crystallization of the aspiration of the people of Martinique, demanding amalgamation into France, and Césaire's appreciation of the Martinique masses as a class.
The presence of French sailors flaunting their fascist tendencies produced in the black population of Martinique the breakdown of the ironic mechanism, which until then had shielded them from the recognition of their "dark skinned self.”

In 1939 no [Antillean] in [the West Indies] proclaimed himself to be a Negro, claimed to be a Negro. When he did, it was always in his relations with a white man. It was the white man, the 'bad white man,' who obliged him to assert his color, more exactly to defend it …

The difference between the real and the mythical France conceived by an anxious people – continuously in search of one more defense against the reality of the French West Indies – is central to the understanding of the motivations there.

By a process easy to understand the West Indian saw the France of the sailors as the evil France. The Marseillaise that those sailors sang was not their Marseillaise. Those sailors were racists. Now, everybody knows that the true Frenchman is not a racist; in other words, he does not consider the West Indian a Negro. Since these
men did so consider him, this meant that they were not true Frenchmen.7

In June 1943, the Martinique masses later supported by the army of which three-fourths were from the island overthrew the Vichy regime there. This was done not in the name of negrohood as Fanon suggests, but in the name of the mythical France which De Gaulle (who had opposed Pétain) came to symbolize. Like Victor Schoelcher and the Jacobins of 1794, De Gaulle proclaimed "liberty, equality, fraternity" and gained god-like appeal and unmatched veneration in the French West Indies. He had, by opposing the forces, which Pétain and Robert upheld, become the answer to the question about the future of the West Indies within the French empire. The political course was thus set.

The Vichy experience had deepened the fears that France could abandon Guyane and the West Indies islands. Such apprehension contributed to demands for irrevocable bonds between the mother country and the colonies. Any political party supporting such demands would have carried the day at the elections that took place after the war. And the communists were (now) the most uncompromising in the advocacy of
those demands. Since they had also emerged from the war as the dominant party in France, they were most instrumental in bringing them to fruition.

“It is logical [then] that the elections that followed the Liberation should have delegated two communist deputies out of three.”\(^8\) It only helped that Césaire, following the trend, had joined them.

In Martinique in 1941, Césaire founded and was director of a new periodical, *Tropiques*. His collaborator, René Ménil of the old *Légitime Defense* (Self Defense) team, gave this periodical its orientation and temper. *Tropiques*, to a fundamental extent, projected more of the ideologies *Self Defense* had stood for than the “racial consciousness” propounded by Césaire in *l’Etudiant Noir* (*The Black Student*.) Beginning with the first two issues, Menil sets the poetic orientation of the periodical with articles such as "Birth of Our Act" and "Poetic Orientation." Césaire who hosted surrealist guru André Breton in 1941, and who had discovered that surrealism greatly enhanced his ability to dwell into his “dark skinned self,” began in turn to publish in *Tropiques’s* third issue, poems with specific
surrealist bents. Césaire's political perception of the Martinique masses also extended to include the views that *Self Defense* had expounded in 1932. Whereas he had previously upheld *négritude* as the sine qua non driving force of change, in wake of the overthrow of the Admiral Robert-led Vichy regime, he began to associate consciousness of race with consciousness of class. In his *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, for example, Césaire writes:

“This class of black peasants matured by events was for now a 'class by itself' … and no more a 'class in itself.' Determined to finish with a tired social order, it could not accept that this order continue under the guise of race privilege or of caste.”

The black masses of the French West Indies thus became for Césaire the proletariat, and the descendants of the slave owners who had also sided with the fascists became “the tired order” to be overthrown. By 1944, Menil could, therefore, say of Césaire in the eleventh issue of *Tropiques*:

“Conceived in 1932 in *Self Defense*, this cultural movement of the French West Indian people was launched effectively only in 1940 … It was constantly oriented by sure technical means derived from human
sciences such as psychoanalysis, historical materialism, ethnography. The master conductor of this movement was Aimé Césaire.” 10

(Ménil who continued to perceive négritude as a “reactionary doctrine,” granted Césaire’s l’Etudiant Noir only ethnography in his acknowledgement of contributors to the French West Indian cultural movement). 11

Nine years after he had defined his role in “racial consciousness” terms in response to Self Defense's call to “social revolution,” Césaire had integrated enough of the latter's precepts to have, like Tropiques, become the synthesis of the two interwar movements of the West Indian students in Paris.

Recognized by Ménil and others with the same artistic and political convictions as their leader, Césaire had now achieved the goal he had set for himself in Return to My Native Land. It is axiomatic that had he already made his mark in Martinique by 1945, Césaire would certainly have founded a party reflecting his négritude/ marxist views then and not wait until March 1958. It follows that, although he was closer ideologically to the Communist Party, (P.C.F.) than any other, his choice of the P.C.F. for his
ticket, when he became a candidate for political office was an opportunistic, albeit a logical, one.

It is not coincidental that Césaire's disenchantment with the Party followed the general decline of the left's popularity in both France and Martinique and the rise of his own at home. His letter of resignation from the P.C.F. to Maurice Thorez is, moreover, reflective of the views he elaborated in *Conscience Raciale et Révolution Sociale* in *l’Etudiant Noir* in 1935, and is symptomatic of the “accent on the substantive as well as on the qualitative” which he consistently emphasized.

Cultural and political autonomy – *négritude* – within a French federal state, could only have suffered when Césaire became a member of a party that mirrored the centralism innate to France's political order. Admittedly, *négritude* was 'put on ice' during the time Césaire remained in the French Communist Party. However, the P.C.F. offered the French West Indian masses, while in power, the guarantee of a French umbrella, which is precisely the leitmotif in Césaire's enunciation of *négritude*. 
THE COLONIZER AND THE INHERENT RIGHT OF FIRST APPROVAL

The assimilation of Africans in Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique and Saint-Domingue began before the 1789 French Revolution had decreed these territories integral parts of the French empire. The 1685 *Code Noir*, for example, proposed to give a semblance of legal protection to the slave against his master. Because the Code came from Paris, it was a conspicuous measure by which the blacks could judge France in relation to their immediate masters in the colonies. The Revolution was, however, the main factor in the French assimilation drive of these “Old Colonies.” With its enunciation of the “Rights of Man and the Citizen,” which applied also to the blacks, the France of 1789 became the beacon, which guided
the African descendant in the belief that assimilation was deliverance.

It was precisely to consolidate the work of the revolution with respect to colonial matters that Toussaint L'Ouverture drafted the first constitution since the “Code Noir” in Saint-Domingue to make his government Paris’s partner in the management of France's richest colony. Napoleon's re-enslavement scheme, however, unleashed the desperate drive for freedom in both Guadeloupe and Saint-Domingue. Magloire Pelage's faith in France doomed Guadeloupe's self-rule chances in 1802. As a result, slavery was re-imposed there. In Saint-Domingue, on the other hand, owing in part to the great number of uncreolized Africans taking part in the revolution, freedom was maintained and independence proclaimed in 1804.

The French-educated people of color in Haiti who replaced the white Creoles in the elite position maintained a bias toward French culture. They built a social, cultural, and economic barrier between themselves and the Afro-Haitian peasantry. Lacking national perspective, neither the educated elite nor the army was up to the task of providing the necessary leadership in the hostile
Western Hemisphere and against France and the plantation owners’ lobby determined on compensation for the loss of their slaves. Consequently, Haiti, in 1915, fell prey to an American occupation, which lasted nineteen years.

In the other French colonies, blacks and people of color looked toward the France of the Jacobins to support their efforts to abolish slavery and to acquire French citizenship in their struggle against the ruling class of white Creoles. They believed that, through amalgamation and complete assimilation of the colonies, the power and wealth of the Creoles would be reapportioned and French citizenship opportunities would be accessible in the West Indies and French Guyana. Concurrently, there evolved a culture whose literature was a by-product of the efforts toward the cultural and political assimilation of the colonies. Haitian writers during the same period had for goal the recognition of their country as a “civilized” (read French speaking) albeit independent nation. Although largely reflective of the French, Haitian literature was much more fertile, its writers more inventive than writers from the remnant French colonies. Haitian writers, then, in the second half
of the nineteenth century, began to write extensively of their preoccupation with the ominous direction their country was taking. A number of them also became preoccupied with the idea of an independent Haiti rehabilitating the black race. In the French colonies, such contemplation did not take place in view of the fact that no one accepted and articulated the goal of an independent French Guyana or French speaking West Indies. On the contrary, the West Indian and Guianese writers created an exotic regionalization of French literature in their further attempts to make their colonies regions of France. They succeeded. In the 1970s Guadeloupe, Guyane and Martinique became French regions, above the departmental status they acquired on March 19, 1946.

Literature, if a wide window on society, is not, however, the only criterion by which to judge peoples’ aspirations. In Haiti, for example, the peasant, who lived much as his ancestors had done in Benin or Guinea, maintained a genuine, sustaining culture to battle the elements that nature and his country’s elites imposed upon him. When the Marines landed and once again the fear of slavery loomed large, it was the Afro-Haitian
Cacos who took to the hills to fight back. The elite who had driven the country into bankruptcy turned to them, at Price-Mars' urging, for cultural authenticity to counter the occupation. A social and racial revolution followed the drive for accuracy by the Haitian literati. Men such as Dumarsais Estimé, who had militated for the Haitianization of the elite's culture and literature, were elected to the presidency following the American occupation.

Estimé undertook to revolutionize Haiti's society as Price-Mars had done in literature. For the first time the Afro-Haitian received some benefits from his government. Haiti's ‘old man discord,’ however, re-imposed himself and the elites resumed their fratricidal conflicts until the presidency for life of Francois Duvalier put an end to the dissension.

The thoughts of Jacques Roumain, the pre-eminent writer-intellectual of that period, did not germinate in Haiti. The Afro-Haitians, to whose betterment Roumain dedicated his literary talent and his later years, still lived in stagnation. In October 1937, for example, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo’s forces murdered more than twenty thousand Haitian migrant workers in
Saint-Domingue. It seems that the intellectual vitality, the nationalism and the newly acquired knowledge that all Haitians shared a common cultural heritage, which the American Occupation and Price-Mars had awakened in the elite, never took place. It’s like Jacque Roumain never was; nothing changed in Haiti. Moreover, many of the writers, who wrote to counter the occupation as well as those who tried to revamp Haitian society, took residence abroad. A number also were killed. Price-Mars, thirty-nine years after the publication of the epoch-making *Thus Spoke the Uncle*, lamented:

... I recognize that I was wrong to think that fifteen years of foreign occupation had chased away the old man who lies in each of us; that the interference of the American army in our affairs had been enough to humiliate those among us who aspired to take back the reins with a more sober sense of justice, of freedom and social progress.¹

Most of the Haitian people remain illiterate and never read any of the oeuvres the occupation incited the few who could read and write to produce. At the invitation of the French government, Aimé Césaire visited Haiti with his wife Suzanne from Mai to December 1944. He was
shocked at the chasm between the masses and the better to do, the elite. “They were no more than strangers. They were from different worlds.”

In France, following the First World War, black Americans, Africans of the French empire, and a number of West Indians and Guianese influenced each other into enunciating and claiming their “dark-skinned selves.” In the case of the French West Indians and the Guianese, six names stand out. René Maran, whose novel Batouala opened the flow of criticism of France's colonial policies in Africa; Paulette Nardal, who co-founded the first bilingual West Indian periodical dedicated to racial assertion and cooperation between blacks in Paris; Etienne Léro, who founded the periodical Légitime Défense (Self Defense) and who gave French West Indian literature its surrealist and communist tint; Aimé Césaire, who, with L. Sedar Senghor and others, founded the periodical l’Etudiant Noir and spoke of négritude; Leon Damas, who was the first of these writers to express the négritude of people under French rule in the collection of poems, Pigment, and the documentary, Return from Guyane, on the
conditions of his homeland; Suzanne Césaire, first engaged to L. Sedar Senghor, she married Aimé Césaire in 1937. A devotee of surrealism, she co-founded the periodical *Tropique* with René Ménil and Aimé Césaire and was a pioneer in Antillean-identity analysis beyond négritude.

Again, unlike the Haitian writers whose majority was involved in the Haitianization of culture and literature by the end of the American Occupation in 1934, the majority of French West Indians and Guianese literati still produced French regionalized works also at the time when the *l’Etudiant Noir* group led by Césaire made négritude known in 1935.

The mathematics of the colonial situation in the French speaking West Indies in 1946, in relationship to Césaire's enunciation of négritude are known. What are the conclusions? The négritude propounded by Césaire was aimed at providing to the assimilated French speaking West Indian a disalienating option at the cultural level and concomitantly establish in the political arena a French federation whereby the West Indian, divested of his subordinated self, would become a partner of Paris. The call for the transformation of a unitarian French republic into
a federal union by both Césaire and Senghor was at heart a quixotic attempt to salvage a world where the distinctness of black French-speaking men was possible in a federal French state. The method, which France used to disarm on the one hand Senghor's demands and on the other Césaire’s, demonstrates the unilateralism in the decision-making procedure in force between mother country and colony.

In the case of Senghor, the establishment of a political structure already making provisions for the fragmentation of France’s Equatorial and West African colonies accompanied the enactment on June 23, 1956 of the Loi Cadre (the colonial administrative decentralizing law). Consequently, in spite of Senghor's affirmation that “the peoples of Africa do not intend to cut themselves off from metropolitan France; they want to be able to construct side by side with her their own edifice, which will consolidate and extend French territory,”² De Gaulle was set upon dismemberment of France’s African empire, thus, tolling the death knell for Senghor's dream of a federal French commonwealth. According to De Gaulle’s Minister of Information, Alain Peyrefitte, De Gaulle said,
It’s well and good that there be Yellow French-men, Black Frenchmen, and Brown Frenchmen. It shows that France is open to all races and has a vocation for the universal. However, they must remain a small minority. Otherwise, France would no longer be France. We are after all a European people, of the white race, of Greek and Latin culture and of the Christian religion.³

(Author’s note: In 1980 I was the Cultural Attaché at the US Embassy in Dakar. Randall Robinson of Trans-Africa was visiting, and I arranged an interview with him for the Dakar daily, *Le Soleil*. Among subjects discussed was the Western Sahara issue. Robinson explained his support for the Saharawis and the Polisario Front. The interview never ran. Instead, then President Senghor asked me to his office. When he said, “I have a great weakness for France,” he meant it. It made no difference if I saw him everyday. I could never meet him without being taken aback by how much Francité he exuded. But not this time. This time it was a furious Senghor I was meeting. He could not let views inimical to Morocco’s interests in the Senegalese media. He then gave me a long lecture about Arab racism, Morocco excepted. It didn’t help that the slave state of Mauritania right across the Senegal River insisted on an Arab designation. He grew bitter. I was astounded, for no one was more guarded than Senghor. But here he let it rip, perhaps because he was a few months from announcing his retirement. … I was able to quote De Gaulle’s above views before leaving.)

In the case of Césaire, it was simpler for De Gaulle to disregard Césaire’s aspiration. For,
whereas, Senghor's ambition was also victimized by African nationalists like Guinea’s Ahmed Sékou Touré, Césaire’s gamble that Senghor would include “the overseas départments in a possible federal system,”\(^4\) was sidelined by events which led to the formation of the short-lived Communauté (French Community) followed by independence for the African colonies. But Senghor’s personal commitment toward France, together with his conviction that the colonies could not go it alone without Paris’s assistance, were such that his elaborate négritude prescription served to maintain a neo-French colonial status over Dakar long after Senegal had gained de jure independence.\(^5\)

France dismissed Césaire's effort to redeem the autonomy package of his ill-fated federal dream with De Gaulle's March 16, 1964 one-liner – the West Indies are not Africa which has the geographical mass and a culture of its own to be independent – the West Indies, without France's protection, are only specks in the ocean between Europe and the Americas at any one's (read the United States’) mercy.\(^6\)

The fallacies in Césaire's formulae have their roots in the reality that the colonizer has the
inherent right of first approval – that it’s up to France to acknowledge and recognize Césaire as a new black French man mutated from the “old négritude.” If France recognizes that a partnership between the mother country and the colonies is in its interest, it may then give its consent. The one-sidedness of the colonial exclusif remains in force; the mother country is still making the decisions for the colonies.

An example of colonial exclusivity in the latter part of the 20th century occurred when, starting in 1963, the mother country decided to sponsor immigration to France from its oldest colonies: Guyane, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Reunion. Through the BUMIDOM – Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer – (Office for immigration expansion in the overseas départements,) the program’s goal was to provide cheap labor to France’s post-WWII expanding economy and concomitantly diffuse unemployment and public restlessness in the “overseas dominions” during the independence-granting period in Africa and the end of the successful Algerian Revolution. As people moved from the “ex” colonies to the mother country, people from the mother country moved to the
“former” colonies. The magnitude of this relocation scheme was such that Césaire reacted with alarm in 1978, calling the practice, “génocide par substitution” (genocide through substitution.) Césaire did not go beyond a catchy phrase regarding a program that further consolidated France’s dominion over Guyane, Guadeloupe and Martinique.

It is true that Césaire's enunciation of négritude was an emancipatory act. However, because it lacked a freedom from France component to give it wings, paradoxically as the post-World War II national liberation surge was about to begin in earnest in Africa and Asia, Césaire's négritude was but one more adjustment the descendants of the captive Africans in the French speaking West Indies and Guyane have made to remain bound to the mother country – another accommodation. The result is that Césaire's call for "racial consciousness" remained a limp force, lacking the dynamic element that would thrust it into the colonial realities of the marginal French West Indies. In Césaire's attempts to develop a common ground in which négritude could strive within a dependent French entity, Césaire had not paid heed to the fact that
“in the colonial situation, culture, deprived of the double support of the nation and the state, withers and agonizes. The condition of cultural existence is, therefore, national liberation.”\textsuperscript{9} The inherent promise of freedom which négritude contained was stifled. For “independence … is an indispensable condition for the existence of men and women who are truly liberated, in other words who are truly masters of all the material means which make possible the radical transformation of society.”\textsuperscript{10}

The contrast between Haitian nationalism, Haitianism and négritude, makes it clear that Haitianism evolved from a higher stage of cultural and political consciousness than négritude. Whereas, for example, at the end of the nineteenth century, a number of Haitian writers, such as Antenor Firmin, were already defending their race and its contribution to civilizations, writers of the French West Indies and Guyane still considered the “racial question” a subject not to be written about. Haitianism, clearly, had a better chance of sustaining the elite in Haiti in the drive for authenticity than négritude had in the French West Indies and Guyane.

As a rule, the centuries of interracial unions and colonization have added an undeniably strong
European factor to the culture of the French West Indies and Guyane, which the concept of négritude espoused by Aimé Césaire does not fully evoke. Consequently, a concept much like Haitianism has evolved from négritude that attempts to come to grips with the cultural and racial amalgamation that has taken place in the French West Indies and Guyane over the centuries of colonization. This idea is Antillanity, first given credence by Gilbert Gratiant of Martinique, in response to Etienne Léro's bitter criticism, in Self Defense, of Gratiant’s book of poems, Poems in False Verses. Of this work, Lero said, “Gratiant’s verses translate neither the social inequities of his country nor the passion of his race.”11 In 1948, Gratiant responded to Lero’s censure with a long poem, Credo of the Mixed Bloods, or I Want To Sing of France, to defend his belief in the qualities and values inherent in the interchange between Africa and Europe in the West Indies and Guyane. In 1981, Edouard Glissant conceptualized Antillanity, to assert the cultural and racial reality particular to the French West Indies and Guyane. In 1989, three writers from Martinique, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant and Jean Bernabé called for a Créolité
movement that would break the monopoly of French and promote the Creole language in the literature of Guadeloupe, Guyane and Martinique.

*Négritude* is not an anachronistic precept to the French West Indies’ and French Guyana’s current social, cultural, and political realities. On the contrary. In former colonies where fear of going it alone, shorn of the French caretaker, is the leitmotif of every day life, *Antillanité, Créolité*, etc., have no value, unless the basic consciousness of one's *négritude* is in place.

(Author’s note: I once asked Césaire whether négritude was not in fact conditional on the colonizer’s recognition of the colonized’s new appreciation of his black self. If France found négritude to its advantage, it would do with it what was in its interest; if not, France would dismiss it or absorb it by continuing to call it a literary movement. “France will acquiesce to it,” Césaire said. “As a Marxist, I know that in time, France will not only recognize it but depend on it because the black proletariat will demand its recognition through their labor, which France depends on.” This has not happened. France is not dependent on Martinique for anything. What has happened is that Martinique continues to be dependent on France. Martinique is part of France and as such also a region of the European Union.

The relationship between France and its former colonies is paternalistic. The hierarchical structure is unambiguous. According to Victorin
Lurel, a Guadeloupe senator, “I have the feeling that we are being told, 'OK, we are taking care of you, but leave us alone.' And the slightest social movement is taken badly.” The link between colonizer and colonized is forever a lop-sided master - bondsman relationship.

Because Frantz Fanon was from Martinique too, Césaire heard a thousand questions about the differences between them. I too asked him that question. There was an abyss between Césaire and Fanon. Césaire wanted to permanentize French rule in his region of the Caribbean. Négritude was his formula to finalize that. Once Fanon had found Algeria, he wanted to be free of colonial domination.

The dilemma of Césaire's négritude remains the dilemma of the French West Indies and French Guyana: a concept in search of a rooting soil, a rooting soil waiting for a national identity.
ENDNOTE

FOREWORD

1. Journal Justice, 14 mars 1946.


4. Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Mask, 203.

5. Christian Filostrat, The Last Day of Frantz Fanon, 52.


9. Journal Justice, 14 mars 1946
10. Aimé Césaire, discours prononcé à Fort de France lors de la visite de François Mitterrand le 4 décembre 1985.

11. *LE MONDE IDÉES*, 02.06.2016, 2.


14. Ibid.


CHAPTER I


2 Ibid


5 Webster’s New International Dictionary, 2nd ed., 1934. The term is dropped from subsequent editions (N.B:
The term Negritude was common in the 19th century. It’s mentioned in Ken Burns’s Civil War, for example, from texts of the period.)

The *Petit Robert* dictionary gives 1948 as the date *Négritude* was first coined.

“An Interview with Aimé Césaire,” preceding Discourse on Colonialism, 69.


Aimé Césaire, Return to My Native Land, 84

Ibid., 100


CHAPTER II

Césaire’s oratorical skill – never in his native Creole language – helped his candidacy for political office in Martinique and made him a speaker of international repute. See *James Baldwin, Nobody Knows my Name*, 41.

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, 203

Césaire, *Return to my Native Land*, 41-43.

George Robert, La France aux Antilles (1939 – 1943).
5  Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 19
6  Ibid., 21.
7  Ibid., 23.
8  Ibid., 24
9  Césaire, “Toussaint L’Ouverture” in *Oeuvres Completes*, 244
10  Renée Ménil, “Situation de la Poesie aux Antilles,” *Tropiques*, XI, 133

**CHAPTER III**

1  Eric Williams (ed), *Documents in West Indian History, Volume I*, 33
2  Ibid., 144 -145.
3  Eric Williams, From Columbus to Castro, 41- 42.
4  Idem., *Documents*, 151
CHAPTER IV

1  Williams, *Documents*, 278.

2  Ibid., 279.

3  David Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies*, 42


5  Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies*, 27.


7  Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 145.

8  Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies*, 42.
CHAPTER V

1. This was the sub-title of the Code Noir. The document under study dates from 1742, the oldest extant edition.

2. Williams, Columbus to Castro, 188.


5. The Racial groups were: Blanc, griffe, mamelouc, marabout, métis, mulâtre, negre, quarteron, sang-mêlé.

Chapter VI


2. Prior to this date, a May 15, 1791, decree gave civil rights only to men of color whose parents had been free at the time of their birth.


4. Ibid

5. McCloy, Negro in the French West Indies, 75

6. Ibid., 80.
As the men of color sought support from other blacks to defeat the whites, so did the French from the more numerous slaves to defeat the British and Spaniards to keep the colonies. E. Hayot, *Les Gens de Couleurs Libres du Port-Royal*, 1629-1823, 134.

McCloy, *Negro in the French West Indies*.

One often hears, particularly in Martinique, the hypothesis that Guadeloupe is less assimilated to France than Martinique or Guyane because “it is less mixed.” See Frantz Fanon, *Pour la Revolution Africaine*, 21.


Ibid.


**Chapter VII**


Jean-Paul Sartre, *Orphée Noir*, 22.


7 Ibid.


**CHAPTER VIII**

1 *Lettre du Gouverneur Général A. Vaillant au Ministre de la Marine*, 9 Septembre 1851, Archive de la Martinique.


3 Ibid.

4 See Brian Weinstein, *Éboué*, 16, 22; also Michel Leiris, *Contacts de Civilisation en Martinique et en Guadeloupe*, 81; McCloy, *Negro French West Indies*, 202; *Annuaire Statistique de la Guadeloupe, de la Martinique et de la Guyane*, Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques pour la Métropole et la France d’Outre-Mer.
CHAPTER IX


2 Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris, Minorities in the World: Six case Studies, 103.

3 Kovats-Beaudoux, Dominant Minority, 252.


5 Ibid., 48-49.

6 Ibid., 42.

Ibid., 53.

Ibid., 71.

Ibid., 68.

Ibid., 57-58.

Raphael Tardon, *La Caldeira*, 141-142.

Kovats-Beaudoux, *Dominant Minority*, 259


Ibid.

Kovats-Beaudoux, *Dominant Minority*, 263.


Ibid.

See Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*.

22  Ibid.
24  Ibid.
25  Ibid., 1.
26  Ibid., 5.
27  Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 190.
29  McCloy, *Negro in the French West Indies*, 29
33  Leonard Sainville, *Dominique Nègre Esclave*, 74.
37  Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, 168.
Chapter X


4 Ibid., 19


6 Weinstein, *Éboué*, 110 -111.

7 None of these poets were professional writers. For the most part, they were men in liberal professions who poetry as a hobby.


Chapter XI

1 Rene Maran, *Batouala*, 75 – 78.

2 Ibid., 11-12.

3 Ibid., 12-13.
The depiction of the 1922 Jonathan Cape English translation of Batouala read in part: “When a novel of negro life, written by a full-blooded negro gains distinction of the Goncourt Prize; when it appears with a label indicating that 8,000 copies are being sold daily; when it is made the subject of an interpellation in the Chamber and of heavy rebukes in the ‘Temps’ – then it may reasonably be assumed that the book is something out of the ordinary. And so it is.”

Ibid., 12.

Ibid., 18.

In answer to a journalist question as to why Jean-Paul Sartre was not jailed for his activities during the 1968 student rebellion, De Gaulle answered: “one does not imprison Voltaire.”

Ibid., 13.

Interview with L. G. Damas, February 7, 1977.

Weinstein, Éboué, 81.

Oruno Lara, Question de Couleur, in Corzani, Littérature Antillaise, 221-222.

Ibid., 223.

Batouala was banned in the colonies, but West Indians in France mailed a great number of copies to family and friends at home.

**Chapter XII**

1 Davis, *Black Democracy*, 279.

2 Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, 554.


6 Ibid., 245.

7 Michael Talley, The Relationship between Afro-Americans and Haitians, 36.


12 Ibid., 16.
13 Ibid., 176.

14 Ibid.

15 La Trouée, (n.p., June 1927).


18 Ibid., 52.

19 Ibid.

20 Maurice Delafosse, Les Noirs de l’Afrique. See also Delafosse, Civilisation Negro-Africaines.

21 Leo Frobenius, Histoire de la Civilisation Africaine.


23 Jean Price-Mars, Ainsi Parla l’Oncle, 44.

24 Ibid., 44 – 45.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 235.

27 Kleber George-Jacob, Témoignage su la Vie et l’Oeuvre du Dr. Jean Price-Mars, 237.


30 Ibid.


**Chapter XIII**

1 Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 55.

3 Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 35; also *Men of Bronze* produces by WNET (New York: November 8, 1977)

4 Ibid., p.57.

5 McCloy, *The Negro in France*, op. cit., p.211.


8 Claude McKay, *If We Must Die*, 14.

9 Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 228.


10 Ibid., 6.

11 Ibid., 11.


Chapter XIV


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 297.

5 La Redaction “Editorial” in *La Revue du Monde Noir* #1.

6 Ibid.

7 Interview with Aimé Césaire, Fort de France, 31 July 1971.

8 Paulette Nardal, “Race,” *La Revue du Monde Noir* #6 *op. cit.*

9 Ibid.


11 Ibid.


13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.


16 Ibid.

Chapter XV

1 Several Pigment poems were first published in the periodical Esprit in September 1934 and in l’Etudiant Noir in June 1935.

2 Interview with L. G. Damas, February 7, 1977.

3 The French surrealist, Robert Desnos, wrote Pigment’s preface


7 Césaire’s homage to Damas, August 31, 1978.

8 L. G. Damas, Retour de Guyane, 52.

9 Ibid., 163.

10 Ibid., 174.
11 Ibid., 203.
12 Ibid., 168.
13 Prophetic in the sense that some of the changes
14 *Retour de Guyane* advocated such as the closing of
the penal colony took place fourteen years later.
15 Mine de Riens is [http://hash.ly/001bt](http://hash.ly/001bt)

**Chapter XVI**

1 See James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows my Name*, 41.
2 Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 21
3 Cesaire, *Return to My Native Land*, 4 - 43.
4 Georges Robert, *La France aux Antilles (1939 – 1943)*.
5 A [West Indian] in particular an intellectual who is no
longer on the level of irony discovers his Négritude.
Thus, while in Europe irony protects against the
existential anguish, in Martinique it protects against the
awareness of Négritude. Fanon, *Toward the African
Revolution*, 19.
6 Ibid., 21.
7 Ibid., 23.
8 Ibid., 24.
9 Cesaire, “Toussaint L’Ouverture” in *Oeuvres Completes*, 244.
10 René Ménil, “Une doctrine réactionnaire: La Négritude,” *Tropiques*, XI.

**Epilogue**


4 Crowder, *Idem*.

5 Pathé Diagne, Leopold S. Senghor ou la Négritude Servante de la Francophonie au Festival Panafricain d’Alger Trente ans après.

6 March 16, 1964, Fort de France city hall remarks – “States cannot be built on specs.” “On ne bâtit pas des états sur des poussières.” In response to Cesaire’s question regarding autonomy. Of note is that the remark came not long after de Gaulle had said, “my God, my God how French you are!”

7 France gives 25 to 50 percent tax reduction to its citizens who buy property in the former colonies. See Loi Girardin in *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Economiques*.

8 Remarks at the National Assembly February 1978.


Léro, Misère d’une Poésie, 11.

In Memory of Marietta Campos Damas