

**C.L.R. James (1901-1989): A Great Latin American Pan-Africanist
and Marxist.**

(Part 1).

by
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First, DuBois the scholar. A wide range of matters concerning Africa -- he dealt with each of them and laid down lines which are valuable to this day. DuBois introduced Africa to the intellectuals. Then came Garvey, who translated a view of Africa into public property: that was a stage in the development of the consciousness of the world. The next, Padmore, who became a political organizer, was a man very different from Garvey and from DuBois, but an organizer of the first class. And the last one. Fanon . . . went to Algeria and joined the Algerian Revolution.

-C.L.R. James, "From DuBois to Fanon"¹¹

The intellectual contours of James' great and voluminous writings have encompassed within their conceptual space the central historical problems and issues that have confronted Africa and the African Diaspora in the century designated by these two dates: the birth of W.E.B. DuBois in 1868, which coincided with the closing of the American Civil War and the opening of the decade of Reconstruction, a decade Amiri Baraka calls the most democratic in American history when Afro-Americans governed most of the Southern states, and the murder of Walter Rodney in 1980, a moment in which socialism as a

¹⁾ C.L.R. James, From DuBois to Fanon, pamphlet, Pan-African Institute for Self-Reliance, Michigan, 1970, p. 4.

serious political option entered African history.² The historical space of this intellectual enterprise James traces from the moment of the Haitian Revolution 1791-1804, which **The Black Jacobins** celebrates. It is this book on its first appearance in 1938 which gave indication that James' fundamental political project has been to theorize the various components of the black world as a historical unity. Within this context of historical unity, the Haitian Revolution was the beginning point of a chain of events that has continued to the Angolan Revolution and may possibly extend to the anticipated South African revolution: a chain of events governed by the same historical logic which is the contestation and defeat of European imperialism. For it was this particular imperialism which brought about the dislocation and disunity of Africa's historical unit through capitalism and colonialism. Consequently, for James the possible historical unity of the black world is only achievable through defeat of imperialism and establishing of socialism. And for James only the intellectual system of Marxism, basing itself on the material subject of the proletariat, can bring about the defeat of imperialism and capitalism. It is this political understanding that has made James situate Marxism at the center of all his historical and political projects.

The very title of the book, **The Black Jacobins** implies the inseparability of African history (in the broader sense of the tri-continental scope) and European history, for the latter has superimposed itself on the former to establish hegemony and

²) Amiri Baraka, "Black Liberation/Socialist Revolution", Daggers and Javelins: Selected Essays 1974-1979, William Morton and Co., 1984, p. 89.

domination through the instruments and mechanism of imperialism. For although paradoxically, and in a central way, the revolution initiated by the black Jacobins (Dessalines, Henri Christoph and Toussaint in 1791 was partly in support of the revolution initiated by the white Jacobins (St. Just, Robespierre and Danton) in 1789 against the French aristocracy, the Jacobins had eventually to fight against the white Jacobins in order to bring about the democratic aims (liberty, fraternity and brotherhood) which the latter held to be sacred: the disjuncture between the ideological aims and structural processes within which the white Jacobins were situated, is explained by the fact that both the receding feudalism and the then emerging capitalism were substratum of the same logic of imperialism. This dialectical struggle of African history against the oppressive forms of European history was prefigured even previous to the Haitian Revolution, by the slave revolts and the slave republics established by the Palmares in Brazil. In a true sense, the beginnings of revolutionary history of African peoples begins with the Palmares (the revolutionary ancestors of present-day Afro-Brazilians) and not so much with the great victory of the black Jacobins. The failure of James to incorporate the Palmares within his great historical vision was not a personal failure, but was a failure prevalent in the century of classical Pan-Africans which came to a close in 1960 in the Congo Crisis³: it is remarkable to note the failure of practically all the great

³) See my two essays, "The Particular Forms of African Marxism" and "The Legacy of W.E.B. DuBois: From Aime Cesaire to Steve Biko". In both of these essays I attempted to argue that although classical Pan-Africanism brought about the great achievement of the demise of classical colonialism in Africa, this Pan-Africanist political philosophy was in turn defeated by

Pan-Africanists (DuBois, Nkrumah, Padmore and Makonnen) to incorporate the Afro-Brazilians (the biggest collection of African peoples within a national territory outside Nigeria) within the scope of their historical visions and political activities. Partly as a consequence of this, the Afro-Brazilians are among the oppressed African peoples in the world, with the possible exception of us black South Africans.⁴

imperialism when it took on a neo-colonial form in the Congo Crisis of 1960. This spelled the demise of classical Pan-Africanism as a living political philosophy. The works of Kwame Nkrumah, The Challenge of the Congo and Neo-colonialism, should be seen as a recognition of this fact, and they are a historical obituary to this philosophy. The failure of the Sixth Pan-African Congress in Dar-es-Salaam in 1974 was a total expression of this historical fact: that Pan-Africanism as a living philosophy is dead. Even Baraka's Autobiography, which closes with this event in total silence. James' manifesto, "Towards the Seventh: The Pan-African Congress-Past, Present and Future", in At the Rendezvous of Victory, is unfortunately historically misconceived. What has replaced classical Pan-Africanism is the African Marxism of Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon, whose historical mission is to defeat imperialism and neo-colonialism. "The Particular Forms of African Marxism" is to appear in the forthcoming book, The Photographic Vision of Peter Magubane and Other Essays (forthcoming from Skotaville, Johannesburg in 1989); "The Legacy of W.E.B. DuBois" is to appear in the London-based Pan-Africanist magazine, Africa and the World (April 1989).

- 4) It is historically imperative that one of the most important intellectual events in the black world today incorporate within its intellectual horizon the cultural world of the Afro-Brazilians: we refer to the emergence of the brilliant literary theory of Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., which is revolutionizing our understanding of black American literary history. That this renewal of Afro-American intellectual culture is not only confined to these two major literary critics: see, the two-volume book, Studies in Black American Literature, vols. I and II, (eds.) Joe Weixlmann and Chester J. Fontenot, Parkville Publishing Company, Florida, 1986. both Baker and Gates are in the process of incorporating the works of Wole Soyinka within their vision; this is both progressive and regressive. In actual fact, Ngugi wa Thiong'o should be at the center of their enterprise. Unfortunately, their incorporation is within a Post-

Probably the book that articulates extremely well the structure of the historical unity of the black world, and the dialectical struggle between African history and European history whether in Africa or in the Caribbean or in North America, is **A History of Pan-African Revolt**, which begins with this exhilarating sentence: "The history of the Negro in his relation to European civilization falls into two divisions, the Negro in Africa and the Negro in America and the West Indies."⁵ Though this document was first published in a book form only in 1969, it consists of articles written in the middle 1930's that is, at the same time as the writing of **The Black Jacobins**. **A History of Pan-African Revolt** makes clear several things: first, that in a very complex way, the Haitian Revolution was inconceivable without the French Revolution, even though the former was a fundamental contestation of the history of the latter; secondly, that although African history and European history were in a life and death struggle in a particular corner of the world, in Santo Domingo (Haiti), this contestation is not a permanent condition of the world but only an expression of the material conditions of imperialism, for beyond the central field of imperialism and the concomitant exploitation of African peoples by a particular segment (class) of the European peoples, and beyond class divisions, European history and

Structuralist problematic: see, Houston A. Baker, Jr., "Belief, Theory, and Blues: Notes for a Post-Structuralist Criticism of Afro-American Literature", in volume II of the above-mentioned book. Two of my essays, to appear in the aforementioned book, are an appreciation and critique of Afro-American literary theory: "The Literary Theory and the Literary Criticism of Houston A. Baker, Jr." and "The Passion of Literary Theory in Contemporary Black American: An African Perspective".

⁵) C.L.R. James, A History of Pan-African Revolt, Drum and Spear Washington, D.C., 1969, p. 1.

African history will form part of a historical unity of world history within a united world community of the working classes; thirdly, that the real basis of the historical unity of the black world was/is its exploitation and the revolutionary instrument of revolt to overthrow the oppression and exploitation; fourthly, that his locating of the origins of the revolutionary history of African revolts in the Haitian Revolution, is because the latter is the only successful slave revolt in history and the only successful Negro slave revolt in history, and also because at one time the economics of exploitation in Santo Domingo made it at one time the richest colony of any European imperial power.

From its historical emergence in the Haitian Revolution and in the geographical space of the Caribbean basin, the revolutionary path of Pan-African revolts moved northwards into the historical space of North America. It is not necessary here to rehearse the fact that the slave states of the American South were largely feudal in orientation, and hence, hindered the spread of the capitalist relations of production which were centered in the industrializing north-east states of America. It was this historical contradiction, in combination with other complex historical processes, which precipitated the outbreak of the American Civil War of 1860-1865. It was Denmark Vesey who attempted to lead a slave revolt in Virginia in 1822. This slave revolt was inspired by the Haitian Revolution which had succeeded two decades earlier to defeat Napoleon who was then terrorizing the whole European continent. This was followed in 1831 by the slave uprising led by Nat Turner. All the slave revolts in America were defeated.

With the deep penetration of European imperialism into Africa signalled by the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, the chain of Pan-African revolts spread into Africa. It was in the wake of these revolts that classical Pan-Africanism emerged to articulate the political struggles of the African peoples against classical colonialism. The fact that classical Pan-Africanism was an invention formulated outside Africa, whereas African Marxism was intellectually invented within the geographical space of Africa, is not surprising since its political logic followed the dialectical movement of the confrontation between African history and European history. Within the African context, the Pan-African revolts historically shifted from slave revolts into working-class revolts. Each of them was an expression of a particular historical process. Sometimes these working-class revolts formed into combinatory systems: in that sometimes they combined with peasant revolts, or sometimes took on the social complexion of the peasantry.

It was in the context of the proletarianization of the peasantry in South Africa that the Mbambatha Rebellion of 1906 exploded. South Africa was undergoing an explosive industrializing process with the subsequent effect of the capitalist mode of production establishing its dominance and dislodging the pre-capitalist forms of production. Although this event in South Africa in many ways was an expression of a different historical horizon, nonetheless, it is interconnected to the Maji-Maji Rebellion of 1906 in the then Tanganyika groaning under German colonial domination. Both these rebellions are related to each other in both were forms of protest against the forceful uprooting of the African peoples from their land. Slightly later there

is a simultaneous emergence indifferent parts of Africa of religious revolts (to be sure, profoundly intermixed with peasant discontent): the Chilembwe uprising of 1915 in Nyasaland (today Malawi) was of this character. The rebellion led by Simon Kinbangu in Belgian Congo (today Zaire) in 1921 marked a transition between religious revolts and the development of proletarian revolts and workers' strikes.

Beginning with the railway workers' strike in 1919 and again in 1926 in Sierra Leone, and the sailors' strike in 1929 in Gambia, Africa enters the era of proletarian revolts. Also in 1929 Nigeria experiences a very combative womens' revolt against poll taxation system imposed by English colonialism and imperialism. The role of Harry Thuku in the Kenya of the 1920's was part of the expression of this historical process. Perhaps it was in South Africa that a fully politically conscious workers' movement emerged led by the Malawian Clements Kadalie. This was the formation of the Industria and Commercial Workers' Union of South Africa (ICU) in 1919. Between this date and 1926, when this workers' movement began to decline, the workers in South Africa were at their most combative and militant, a class consciousness which has only been approximated only in recent times. James even compares these seven years of the 1920's in South Africa to the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution.⁶ In the copper mines of Northern Rhodesia (today Zambia), there were many combative workers' strikes and revolts in the 1930's. At the same time, Marcus Garvey in the United States,

⁶) *ibid.*, p. 70: "The real parallel to this movement is the mass uprising in San Domingo (Haiti)".

was galvanizing the black working class in politically mis-guided directions. Perhaps it was in this context of agitation of the black working classes in the different parts of the African world, that propelled classical Pan-Africanism to a historical rendezvous with historical materialism, in that C.L.R. James himself shifted to embrace Trotskyism and George Padmore travelled in the forward march of Stalinism. Closing **A History of Pan-African Revolt** with the political judgement of the 1930's, James wrote perceptively, indicating the historical unity of the African worlds: "Though often retarded and sometimes diverted, the current of history, observed from an eminence, can be seen to unite strange and diverse tributaries in its own embracing logic. . . But Negro emancipation has expanded with the centuries; what was local and national in San Domingo and America is to-day an international urgency, entangling the future of a hundred million Africans with all the hopes and fears of Western Europe."⁷ Again James expresses the dialectical conflict between African history and European history.

In a later epilogue, included in the 1969 publication of **A History of Pan-African Revolt**, James was to summarily examine the history of African revolt from 1939 to 1969. Taking a cue from Anatole France, James argues that during these thirty years, we Africans fought, struggled and we were till still fighting. Within the African context, James examines the transformation of Gold Coast to Ghana through the role of Kwame Nkrumah with his policy of Positive Action and through the role of Convention People's Party. Concerning Kenya, he argues that the Mau Mau Rebellion was a Pan-African revolt,

⁷) ibid., p. 99-100.

fundamentally centered around the question of white settlers and land, and not about so-called African beliefs or tribal practices as colonial mythology and colonial historiography had supposed. He traces the establishing of "White Highlands", the most fertile land in Kenya reserved for white settlers, and the subsequent alienation of Africans from about 1903 to the explosion of the national liberation movement in 1952 led by Dedan Kimathi and Waruhui Itote ("General China"). It is remarkable how James' reflections of the historical role of the Mau Mau Rebellion anticipates Ngugi was Thiong'o's fundamental essay of 1982, "Mau Mau Is Coming Back: The Revolutionary Significance of 20th October 1952 in Kenya Today", a text written against the neo-colonist historiographical interpretation of this historic process articulated by certain Kenyan historians in line with their colonial masters in Britain. Going further, from the perspective of 1969, James analyzes the political and economic failure of these two countries, a pattern that was and is prevalent in much of independent Africa, and attributes these failures to the neocolonial nature of these regimes and the failure of African nationalism. In this, he confirms and elaborates on the thesis developed by Frantz Fanon in **The Wretched of the Earth**. James saw then the political experiment of Ujamaa socialism practiced by Julius Nyerere in Tanzania as one of the serious options for African countries caught in a neocolonial dilemma. His estimation of Nyerere was rightfully very high indeed, for he makes the following remark: "Tanzania is the highest peak reached so far by revolting blacks and it is imperative to make clear, not least of all to blacks everywhere, the new stage of political thought which has been

reached."⁸ It would be instructive to compare this high estimation of James to the belittling noises made then by Ali Mazrui, the American sponsored intellectual break on the African revolution, concerning the great socialist experiment of Julius Nyerere.⁹ The importance of the socialist project in Tanzania for James lay in its attempt to create a new type of society, not based on Western theories, but on concrete circumstances of African life and our historic past; related to this, it lay in the mobilization of the African people to build an African society in an African way. To see that James' high estimation of the socialist experiment or pathway in Tanzania was not a passing fancy on his part, in 1982 in a Preface to **Nkrumah and the Ghanaian Revolution**, he would still write: "First of all, Dr. Julius Nyerere in theory and practice laid the basis of an African state, which Nkrumah had failed to do, and the Arusha Declaration in which Nyerere laid down his principles is one of the great documents of post-World War II."¹⁰ Perhaps his long awaited autobiography, which he is still working on today at the age of 87, will give us his final evaluation and judgement on this great socialist experiment, crucial at this juncture given the unending flood of revisionism from the West judging this experiment to have been a failure, two years after Nyerere left the Presidency in 1986.

When James published a portion of **A History of Pan-African Revolts** in 1938 as **A History of Negro Revolt**, he was a central figure in the Trotskyist movement. But also this document of 1938 was an

⁸) *ibid.*, p. 117.

⁹) Ali Mazrui, "Tanzaphilia", *Transition*, September 1968, pp. 21-27.

¹⁰) C.L.R. James, Preface, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, Allison and Busby, London, 1982, p. 7.

expression of his participation in a movement to bring about the emancipation of Africa black people, which together with George Padmore, who had broken in 1934 with Stalinism and the Communist International,, saw as the fundamental political aim of the International African Service Bureau (founded in London in 1935). During the ten years, between 1936 and 1947, when James was a member of the Fourth International, he was second only to Trotsky in intellectual brilliance, in historical depth and in conceptual range. A remarkable document like, "Discussions with Trotsky",¹¹ which was the outcome of the discussions James had in April 1939 with Leon Trotsky, show that his participation in the Fourth International was governed by a singular aim: to bring about the emancipation of Africa, and the self-determination of African peoples in Africa, in America and also in the West Indies. In a tribute to George Padmore written in 1976, "George Padmore: Black Marxist Revolutionary-A Memoir",¹² James makes clear that these were also the political aims which characterized the historical odyssey of Padmore. In other words, when James entered and abandoned the Trotskyist movement and the organizational structure of the Fourth International, and likewise, when Padmore entered and abandoned the Stalinist movement and the organizational structure of the Communist International, in order to realize their stated aims concerning Africa, they were in effect affirming a historical principle stated by Aime Cesaire many years later in 1956 when he broke with the French

¹¹⁾ C.L.R. James, "Discussions with Trotsky" (1939), At the Rendezvous of Victory, Allison and Busby, London, 1984, p 33.

¹²⁾ C.L.R. James, "George Padmore: Black Marxist Revolutionary-A Memoir", (1976), in *ibid.*, pp, 251-263.

Communist Party, because of the latter's reactionary stand on the Algerian Revolution and the intervention of the Soviet Union in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956: that Marxism or historical materials and the Communist International Movement should be used and must be used to serve the historical causes of African peoples, and not that African peoples should be used to serve the aims of Marxism. George Padmore's political biography was a fundamental expression of this historical principal enunciated by Aime Cesaire; that later Padmore was to renounce Marxism and denounce Communism is a totally unexpected tragic outcome, for C.L.R. James today at the age of 87 is still a central figure within an international Marxist culture.¹³

Although the intellectual contours of James' historical imagination have been centrally shaping the political and cultural space of African history, during the decade of his involvement in Trotskyism, they mapped a different structure of internationalism. Though in the main James' revolutionary politics have articulated a dialectical struggle between African history and European history, the politics of internationalism and of the proletariat have compelled historical differentiations, in that there is a working class political landscape on which African history and European history can find reconciliation beyond class differentiations. James' translation of Boris Souvarine's

¹³⁾ It is a misnomer for James to continue calling Padmore a Marxist revolutionary when in fact Padmore made a total break with Marxism and Communism (the title of Padmore's last book, Pan-Africanism or Communism, is not for nothing): in other words, James is continuing in his old age the fight against the Stalinist politics of the 1930's. A noble effort, nonetheless, historically misplaced.

Stalin from French in 1939 and the publication of his **World Revolution 1917-36** expressed a different form of internationalism though not necessarily contradictory to that revealed by the historical unity of the African world. This other shafing of internationalism was to express itself in his analyses of the Hungarian crisis in 1956 and in the emergence of Solidarnosc in 1980 in Poland.¹⁴

The **World Revolution 1917-36** traverses the whole international political landscape in search of Stalinist "betrayals and treacherous acts". This book presents one of the most sharpest confrontations between Stalinism and Trotskyism. Wherever it saw Stalinism rearing its head, it sought treachery. Today this book is probably more memorable for revealing the extraordinarily political mind of C.L.R. James, rather than the correctness of the political line it was pursuing. In a chapter like, "Stalin Ruins the Chinese Revolution", James penetratively gazes at the particular segment of Chinese history, the development of the Chinese revolution. There can be no doubt that this is a superb analysis of extraordinary, far surpassing Isaac Deutscher's examination of the same historical moment, which has acquired classic status in certain English Trotskyist circles. This tremendous study of the history of the Third International, was unfortunately in service of wrong politics, the politics of Trotskyism. James himself was to make a devastating critique of Trotskyism a decade later in **Notes on Dialectics**.¹⁵ Clearly James was to see the

¹⁴) C.L.R. James, "The Workers' Councils in Hungary" (1958), The Future in the Present, Allison and Busby, London, 1977, pp. 175-182; C.L.R. James, "Poland" (1981), At the Rendezvous of Victory, op. cit., pp. 271-273.

¹⁵) C.L.R. James, Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin, Allison and Busby, London, 1980 (1948), see in particular pages, 34, 134-142, 147.

political philosophy of Trotsky as revolutionary metaphysics, as Regis Debray was to characterize it in the **Prison Writings**. **Notes on Dialectics**, which was written in the 1940's by James when he was settling accounts with his philosophical conscience of Trotskyism, has certain affinities and draws particular affiliations with certain works written within the context of international Marxist culture. This book could be seen as one the most assertive renewals of the historical legacy of Leninism since George Lukacs' book of 1924, **Lenin**. On the other hand also, it could be located within the same historical horizon as Lukacs' book of 1948 (though written in 1938) **Young Hegel**, in that they both sought to argue for the inseparability of Hegelianism from Marxism. Lukacs book sought to locate this indissolubility on the philosophical plane, whereas **Notes on Dialectics** achieve this on a political plane, in its attempted reading of the historical contradictions governing working class politics between the First International and the Third International. Following closely on the tracts of Lenin, who had argued in the **Philosophical Notebooks** (written in exile in Zurich between September and December in 1914) that it was impossible to understand Marx's **Capital** without having understood Hegel's **Logic**, James likewise argued that it was impossible to understand the politics of Leninism, especially as articulated in texts such as **State and Revolution** and **Imperialism**, without having fully understood the dialectical structure of logic present in Hegel's **Logic**. Within a Pan-African intellectual culture, it is interesting to note that at exactly the same time as James was grappling Hegel's **Logic**, Frantz Fanon, in a totally different political and cultural context, was taxing his young

mind with Hegel's **Phenomenology of Mind**, in order to unravel the Master-Slave relationship so reminiscent of the psychology between the colonizer and the colonized, which he was to lay bare in 1952 in **Black Skin, White Masks**. James' **Notes on Dialectics** presents a fascinating project, to compare his reading of Hegel with that achieved by Lenin. But much more fundamental politically, would be to trace the ancestral origins of African Marxism, which was to emerge later in the writings of Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, to this brilliant book of 1948.¹⁶ From this date onwards, Leninism was to play a politically conscious role in the historical imagination of James. For instance, when he evaluated the historical importance of the 1967 Arusha Declaration by Julius Nyerere, which he considers one of the fundamental cultural and political documents of the twentieth century (more original on the question of education than anything in Marx or Plato or Aristotle or Rousseau), James was to relate it to some of the texts written by Lenin in the early 1920's.¹⁷ Though **Notes on Dialectics** can be situated within this context of intellectual relationships, perhaps its permanent value lies in its critique of Trotskyism and renewal of Leninism, as these two passages seem to indicate: "Trotskyism, as far as thought is concerned, is the use of the categories, etc., of Lenin's practice, 1903-1923, preserved in their essential purity, and transferred to a period for which they became day by day more unsuited. Between 1933 and 1936 they became absolutely unsuited. . . . Patience. Patience.

¹⁶) See my essay, "The Particular Forms of African Marxism", to appear in The Photographic Vision of Peter Magubane and Other Essays, (forthcoming from Skotaville, Johannesburg in 1989).

¹⁷) C.L.R. James, A History of Pan-African Revolt, op. cit., p. 133, p. 141-143.

Patience. Work your way in. We have to get a notion of socialism, the notion of 1948. But we have to work through Leninism. Today our movement is not beyond Leninism. The proletariat is far beyond the proletariat of Lenin's day. But our movement is not. To get beyond him, we have to go into and through him. But the process demands, for us, the complete, the patient exposure of Trotskyism from all sides."¹⁸ From the understanding of this critique and renewal, James was to participate deeper in the American black working class struggles, which eventually lead to his detention and internship in the early 1950's. It was while in detention that his historical imagination momentarily shifted from purely political matters and concerned itself with literary matters. This is not totally surprising for James' intellectual formation was in literary culture, whereas as that of George Padmore was in political culture: in their youth in Trinidad, while Padmore was reading DuBois, Marcus Garvey and Edward Blyden, James was reading predominantly European literature, particularly Rousseau, Shakespeare and the Romantic poets.¹⁹

Arguably, the two best books ever written by James are **Beyond a Boundary** and **Mariners, Renegades and Castaways**; best, in the sense that they reveal him to be one of the great masters of the English language. In fact, the latter book situates James in a tradition of modern great English historians who are great stylists and wield great diction: the Marxist historians, Perry Anderson and Edward

¹⁸) C.L.R. James, Notes on Dialectics, op. cit., p. 34, p. 135, italics by James.

¹⁹) C.L.R. James, "George Padmore: Black Marxist Revolutionary - A Memoir", op, cit., p. 253.

Thompson, with whom C.L.R. James forms a particular constellation, and the non-Marxist historians, Joseph Needham and A.H.M. Jones. Much more than being a work of literary criticism on Hermann Melville's **Moby Dick, Mariners, Renegades and Castaways** is the first comprehensive statement in literature on the condition of Western Civilization.²⁰ James constant references to civilization is governed by the fact that the book appeared a few years after the closing of World War II, when European culture had plunged into the abyss, as much as George Lukacs' harsh tones in **The Destruction of Reason** are a consequence of German Culture's attempt to plunge human civilization into barbarism.

For James **Moby Dick** is an allegorical work which possesses the central question of our time: 'what are the conditions of survival of modern civilization?'²¹ According to James, this great novel of the nineteenth-century is of fundamental relevance in our century because it is a work about the nature of totalitarianism: the very phenomenon that occurred in Stalin's Russia under the mastercode of the planned economy, and in Hitler's Germany under the Nazi ideology of the Master Race. Captain Ahab, the principal protagonist in **Moby Dick**, subordinates the will of his crew to his master aim of catching at whatever cost the White Whale, Moby-Dick, which in an earlier see-fearing had bitten off a part of Ahab's leg. Using the method of character typification, which Lukacs made famous in his studies of realism in the 1930's, James argues convincingly that social

²⁰⁾ C.L.R. James, Mariners, Renegades and Castaways, Bick/ed., Detroit, 1978 (1953), p. 105.

²¹⁾ *ibid.*, p. 20.

relations typified in Pequod (the whale-hunting vessel) are allegorical of social stratification in society. Part of the greatness of Melville for James, is that like every great writer, he sees history in terms of men. There can be no doubt that James achieves a reading of **Moby Dick** of outstanding brilliance: for instance, he contrasts Ahab's authoritarianism to Ishmael's social and philosophical speculativeness, or the totalitarianism of Ahab to the barbarism of Fedallah. James theorizes on the philosophy of history and life embodied in this great novel, the evilness of possessive individualism. In many ways, James sees the novel as about American history. The profundity of humanism present in **Moby Dick**, leads James to write: "Except for Aristotle, nearly 2500 years ago, and Hegel who wrote a generation before Melville, no critic of literature has so profoundly of the art of great writing."²² It is interesting to note in this context, that Lukacs, in his autobiographical sketch, states that Aristotle, Hegel and Marx were the greatest thinkers incomparable with others.²³ This politico-literary reading of the great novel of 1850 to illuminate, analyze and clarify the political crisis of 1950 (the authoritarianism and totalitarianism so characteristic of Stalinism and Nazism - not that these two tragedies are necessarily comparable) was not fortuitous, for James had a profound historical sense of the developmental structure of the democratization process in Western civilization. In other words, **Mariners, Renegades and Castaways** was an attempt to analyze the historical paradox of the anti-

²²⁾ *ibid.*, p. 81.

²³⁾ Georg Lukacs, Record of a Life: An Autobiographical Sketch, (ed.) Istvan Eorsi, Verso, London, 1983, p. 182.

democratic tendencies in modern politics when the whole civilizational processes which underlay was predicated on rationalization in economic and material culture and on democratization in the sphere of politics. James sought to analyze the irrations which he though informed the politics of anti-democratic regimes. This is the same historical project that Lukacs undertook in **The Destruction of Reason**, a text examining the destruction and disappearance of rationalism in German philosophic culture (in contrast to James, for Lukacs only the Nazi ideology was characterized by irrations, whereas Stalinism was plagued by hyper-rationalism). Nonetheless, these two Marxists saw the historical importance of such an undertaking.

In a series of Public Lectures given in Port of Spain on August 1960, later assembled in **Modern Politics**, James sought to trace the philosophical foundations of modern politics and the lineages of democratization in Western civilizing process. The real intent of the six lectures was to indicate the millennial stretch of the philosophical and cultural heritage that culminates and is embodied in Marxism. James argued that in the great Greek City-States of antiquity humanity saw the highest achievement in the balance between the individual and the community: individual rights, liberties and freedom were in harmonious relation with the needs and progress of the community.²⁴ Though he gives limitless praise to these democratic entities, James was well-aware that they were an achievement in spite of the slavery which profoundly compromised

²⁴⁾ C.L.R. James, Modern Politics, P.N.M. Publishing Co., Port-of-Spain, 1960, p. 3.

them. For James Greek civilization was the best exemplification of realized democracy not theoretical democracy. He is fascinated by the fact some of the greatest thinkers Western civilization has produced, like Plato and Aristotle, were very much against the democracy in the midst of which they were living. For him this very theoretical anti-democratic philosophical positions of these great thinkers (in fact Plato, in the **Republic**, postulated a totalitarian society), was in fact the confirmation of the solidness and durability of Greek democracy. James fascination with Greek civilization was governed by the trauma of the collapse of democracy in the early part of the twentieth century, especially in the Soviet Union and in Deutschland.

It may possibly turn out that the real legacy or the great theme of James' still unfolding prodigious oeuvre is the search for the ideal forms of democracy, beyond class formations. The Greek era has a peculiar fascination in his historical imagination, for in an essay, "Every Cook Can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece", in support of Lenin's thesis that in a truly democratic and communist society every cook can possibly be a political leader, James saw the Greek City-States as the material prefiguration of the realization of total democracy for him, concrete material democracy beyond class institutions and class culture, does not contradict the possibility of great cultural efflorescence, as Greek civilization has made clear with names like, Aristophanes, Demosthenes, Pindar, Sappho and others, makes clear.²⁵ This enthusiasm of James for these States should

²⁵⁾ C.L.R James, "Every Cook Can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece" (1956), The Future in the Present, op. cit., p. 165-166.

really be seen in the context of his political trauma in the 1950's when it seemed that democracy had collapsed irretrievably, for a recent monumental study of these Greek-City State by the English Marxist historian, Geoffrey de Ste-Croix, shows clearly the historical weight of slavery on these societies (**The Class Struggle in the Ancient World**).

The historical sweep of his vision (**Modern Politics** is a very impressive quick panorama of the structure of Western civilization) passes quickly over the Roman Empire, especially Rome itself, for one supposes that James could not explain and understand the historical paradox of this epoch, the simultaneous existence within the same historical space of tyranny and a great heritage of remarkable democratic laws. This is a question that has fascinated many historians. The real quest of James was to establish the summit points which were crucial towards the realization of full democracy which will be realizable in a communist society. He touches on the cultural efflorescence of the Renaissance with exemplary figures like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. James stops to consider the achievements of the 1640 English Revolution, where with the emergence of the Leveller Party in 1646, brought in the three years in which the fundamental principles of parliamentary democracy were laid down: payment of Members of Parliament, vote by secret ballot, annual parliament, abolition of the House of Lords, abolition of the Monarchy, equal constituencies - in other words, the sovereignty of the nation rested, not with the King or with Parliament, but with the people. A later reaction was to abolish some of these achievements.

James argues that in the realm of political philosophy, between Greek Antiquity and the French Revolution, there has been one writer whose contribution to human advancement has been (is) comparable to that of Aristotle: that writer was Jean-Jacques Rousseau with his **The Social Contract**. Rousseau postulates the existence of a contract among people to form a society, in relation to which, they can elect a government in accordance with that contract (there is no contract with the government). James writes: "Other men had written about the social contract before -- Hume, Locke, Hobbes, but they had, most of them, made the contract in regard not only to the association of men but a contract in regard to government. Rousseau says the contract is not in regard to any government at all. He says the contract is between us, as people, to form a society; but we have no contract with any government; the contract is strictly between us, and the whole trend of his thought is that any time a government does not do what is satisfactory we are finished with it; the contract is broken; we have to start all over again. That is a doctrine of profound revolutionary implications."²⁶ In contrast with the other Encyclopaedists, Voltaire, Diderot, D'Alembert, who advocated representative government, Rousseau rejected this as absolute farce, and advocated what he called the general will of the population through which the people can govern themselves. James believes Rousseau was searching for something approximating what had proved attainable in the Greek City-States, the democratic relation between the individual and the community. For Rousseau, the general will of the population cannot be expressed through

²⁶) C.L.R. James, Modern Politics, op. cit., p. 13-14.

parliament or political parties, for sooner or later, according to Rousseau, these institutions develop their interests which contradict that will. James believes the French Revolution took the form of rule Rousseau had in mind, beginning with the political ideology of the Rights of Man to the development of the socialism of Babeuf. From his political reflections on Rousseau, it is clear to see the profound hold of Rousseau on the historical imagination of James: in that his adherence to Marxist philosophy has been an attempt to realize a 'structureless' entity through which the general will of the population will be expressed and realized. For him (James), the attainment of communism through Marxism will facilitate the realization of this general will beyond class and political structure; his onetime alignment with Trotskyism, indicated the hope that this could be achieved also beyond any form of institutional structures. James support of Lenin's thesis that any cook can govern is in the hope of realizing a democratic order beyond historical blockages and structural barriers. Whether this is realizable is an open historical question, which does not necessarily contradict the fact that a classless society is a real historical possibility within humanity's reach. It is the legacy of Rousseau in James' imagination that has made James uncompromising critical of all post-revolutionary or post-capitalist societies: witness his support for the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and the Solidarity movement of 1980 from a Marxist position.²⁷ This raises the question as to whether James has

²⁷) C.L.R. James, "The Workers' Councils in Hungary", op. cit.; "Poland", op. cit. In fact, for James, the Solidarnosc movement in Poland constitutes the expression of Rousseau's General Will, which he hopes will express itself

totally broken with his erstwhile Trotskyism, for his real break with Trotsky as he himself states, was because of the latter's establishing of the Fourth International rather than because of a substantive difference with Trotsky on the fundamental political principles of Trotskyism (this is also true of Isaac Deutscher's break with "Trotsky").²⁸ The other question which is raised is the fascination of anarchism for many Marxist thinkers in our time: witness the shift of Jean-Paul Sartre in his later years from Marxism to anarchism. Some of the truly astonishing pages of **Modern Politics** are those cartographing the emergence of modern philosophy beginning with Descartes' **A Discourse on Method**. The whole debate between rationalism and empiricism across the English Channel is exhilaratingly presented by James. The historical sweep of James' examination of the philosophical basis of modern politics is brought to a concentrated meeting point at the threshold of modern German philosophy after Leibniz. According to James, it is in Kant's **The Critique of Pure Reason**, through the concept of Reason, that a breakthrough and synthesis is made beyond the dilemma of the French Rationalists and the English Empiricists. Reason is a product of the experience from the external world and also the translation of the human intellect working on that experience: hence the need to establish the constitutive principles of the mind by Kant. The philosophical system of Kant was partly an effort to establish the singularity of reason in human affairs. James suddenly makes this

in the near future in South Africa. According to James, the countries of existing socialism are not socialist states at all, but rather, merely state-capitalist entities.

²⁸) C.L.R. James, modern Politics, op. cit., p. 65.

startling comment: "It is very noticeable that Kant had learnt all this from Rousseau. It is complicated to go into here, but Kant had learnt from Rousseau. In the modern world, wherever you go and you find something striking, you trace it back and you find that Rousseau had something to do with it. Kant acknowledges his debt to Rousseau quite plainly."²⁹ This unexpected coupling of Rousseau and Kant by James gives one for pause, for it recalls to mind the Della Volpean school, probably the most dominant Marxist philosophical school in Italy post-World War II. To this school also, Kant and Rousseau were seen as the crucial forerunners towards the formation of Marxism, by far surpassing the importance of Hegel in the formation of historical materialism. Lucio Colletti, who has recently abandoned Marxism for various forms of liberalisms, then the leading Italian philosopher after Galvano Della Volpe himself, saw Hegel as merely a Christian theologian, whose concept of dialectic was crucial in so far as indicating contradictions in logic rather than in historical and material reality. Colletti's **Hegel and Marxism** was an attempt to disengage the historical legacy of Hegel from Marxism. Lucio Colletti's political position today is a confirmation of the untenability of such a philosophical project. James situates Hegel at the central point within the tradition of Marxism. Nonetheless, it is striking to note the similarities between James' theorization on the formation of Marxism and certain particular national trends within an international Marxist culture. James has been a central component in the movement of Marxist culture in the twentieth-century.

²⁹) ibid., p. 21-22.

Even in the emphasis of particular works of Marx as constituting the fundamental essence of Marxism, James confirms certain international trends within Marxist. **The Communist Manifesto** is a constant source of reference in **Modern Politics**. Besides this book, James has devoted an essay to Marx's **Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts**.³⁰ In emphasizing these two books as perhaps embodying the true legacy of Marxism, James differentiates himself, on the one hand, from the Della Volpean school who have emphasized even earlier texts by Marx, especially those critiquing Hegel's philosophy of law, and on the other hand, from Louis Althusser who has emphasized the last works of Marx, if particularly

³⁰) C.L.R. James, "On Marx's Essays from Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts" (1947), *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, op. cit., pp. 65-72. It is interesting to note three contradictory positions on Leninism separated by thirteen years. In this essay of 1947 on page 67, James writes the following: "Lenin's concept of the party, his insistence on a rigid discipline, democratic centralism, more than ever necessary today, cannot be for a single moment separated from Marx's economic-philosophic concept of the destiny of the modern proletariat." My italics. In the book of 1960, *Modern Politics*, on page 65, James writes as follows: "That is why my friends and I have broken with Trotskyism. Trotsky was trying to form a Fourth International based on Lenin's conception of the party was a great achievement for his time, but that today Leninist Bolshevism is dead. Workers in advance countries, i.e., where the proletariat is large enough and strong enough to lead the nation, will only be misled and corrupted and hamstrung and defeated by parties of this kind." The italics mine also. In another context, on page 135, in the book of 1948, *Notes on Dialectics*, a third position is announced: "We have to get a notion of socialism, the notion of 1948. But we have to work through Leninism. Today our movement is not beyond Leninism. The proletariat is far beyond the proletariat of Lenin's day. But our movement is not. To get beyond him, we have to go into and through him. But the process demands, for us, the complete, the patient exposure of Trotskyism from all sides. We are not three contradictory passages is not far to see Rousseau's General Will defying historical rationality and logical consistency.

the **Critique of the Gotha Programme**, as free of any Hegelian influences. Standing in the middle of these two positions, James finds solidarity with E.P. Thompson, his close English friend, who also emphasizes these two texts. Their positions on the question of Hegel are diametrically opposed: for Thompson the concept of the dialectic is merely metaphysical sophistry, whereas for James it is a logical construction of historical validity. Behind Thompson it is not far to see the figure of Bertrand Russell.

The last philosophical foundations of modern politics James situates in Lenin's **State and Revolution** and **Imperialism**. In this context, he examines the concept of the withering away of the State and the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, among many other fascinating formulations. The relevant and crucial fact for us is that James culminates the philosophical and cultural developments within Western civilization from Greek antiquity to the early part of our century in Marxism and Modernism. By positing Marxism and Modernism as inseparable theoretical, historical and cultural constructs in our time (before the emergence of post-modernism), James situates himself squarely within the great German Marxist and aesthetic debates of the 1930's: against Lukacs who had attacked Modernism (within the context of Germanic culture, German Expressionism) as bourgeois ideological decadence, James aligns himself with Bertolt Brecht, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch in defending this cultural logic (Fredric Jameson) as an authentic artistic expression of the historical contradictions informing the beginning moment of late capitalism: in other words, for James, Modernism was an authentic symbolic representation or a real

attempt at symbolically resolving those contradictions. But within the latter constellation, James is much closer to Brecht's critical appraisal of Modernism than to Adorno's unbridled celebration of it. Notwithstanding these differentiations, it is interesting to note the convergence of James' and Adorno's views, in regarding Samuel Beckett, as probably the most fascinating Modernist. Beckett has been crucial in giving expressive form to African Modernism (African in the sense of encompassing the whole black world) by doing many translations for Nancy Cunard's classic book, **The Negro**.

James traces the origins of the literary geography of Modernism in Arthur Rimbaud, whom he considers one of the greatest poets of modern times.³¹ He mentions in passing that Rimbaud as a boy of eighteen fought in the Paris Commune of 1871 and for some time lived in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) with an African woman. What James fails to mention is the fact that Rimbaud was involved in slave trade activities. Though this does not say much against his poetry, it definitely reveals the limitations of his political character. For James what is crucial with Rimbaud is that he represents the complete rejection of the values and standards of his time. He holds **A Season in Hell** as an exemplary text of the new cultural logic which was then emerging. From Rimbaud, James draws the literary lineages of Modernism towards James Joyce, in whom there is not only a rejection standards and values, there is also a rejection of language as spoken by ordinary people. **Finnegan's Wake** is the expression of this total rejection of known language, whereas **Ulysses** exemplifies its stylistic and linguistic articulation. In rapid succession, James

³¹) C.L.R. James, Modern Politics, op. cit., p. 91-92.

notes D.H. Lawrence, whose **The Virgin and the Gypsy**, depicts the sexual degeneration of modern society, and Marcel Proust's **Remembrance of Things Past**, one of the great novels of the world, which for James presents a merciless picture of the degeneracy of the French aristocracy after the French Revolution of 1848. He then moves to mention T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, and in this context mentions the question of the relationship between Modernism and Fascism. Frederic Jameson has examined this relationship in his book, **Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, The Modernist as Fascist**, with his characteristic brilliance and profound depth. Thereafter James mentions Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, who in their different ways, rejected liberal values and bourgeois society, and in the latter a hostility to industrialism. Resting his case with Camus' **The Stranger** and **The Plague**, James writes: "I could spend the rest of the evening describing these modern writers - the finest writers of the day - who paint such a picture of gloom, degeneration, decay, perversion as I don't remember in any previous period of literature.³² What is interesting to note here, is that James is not perturbed by certain salient characteristics of Modernism which lead Lukacs to reject this international literary movement. The great absence in this listing of the great march of literary Modernism is Thackeray's **Vanity Fair**, a book which has had a profound impact on James' literary formation and literary sensibility, as he so explains in his classic

³²⁾ *ibid.*, p. 94.

autobiographical meditations and study of cricket, **Beyond a Boundary**.³³

James does not limit the concept of modernism to only literary matters, but extends it cover other artistic fields. Concerning film culture, he sees D.W. Griffith, despite his blatant racism in Birth of a Nation, as the real beginning and summit of Modernism in this field. He mentions the great new revolutionary film language in Intolerance, which compelled Lenin to invite Griffith to take charge of the then re-organized Russian film industry. Intolerance is seen by James as having also brought about a reconceptualization or renewal of historical perception. Charles Chaplin holds a premier position among film pantheons, and James considers him among the greatest artists of all time. He mentions City Lights, The Immigrants and Modern Times, a satire on capitalism. In closing the cultural moment of Modernism, James mention's Eisenstein's Potemkin and Picasso's *Guernica*. In another contest, in the essay, "The Olympia Statues, Picasso's *Guernica* and the Frescoes of Michelangelo in the Capella Paolina", James comment more broadly on this great painting of the twentieth century.³⁴ He establishes structural and thematic similarities between these artistic works which indicate the nature of the imagination characteristic of Western civilization. The point here, is that when James was engaged in dislodging European history from

³³) C.L.R. James, Beyond A Country, Hutchinson, London, 1963, p. 37 and p. 47.

³⁴) C.L.R. James, "The Olympia Statues, Picasso's GUERNICA and the Frescoes of Michelangelo in the Capella Paolina" (1970), The Future in the Present, op. cit., pp. 226-234.

its superimposition on African history, it was from an intimate knowledge of Western civilization and bourgeois culture. Concerning the cultural processes in the Caribbean, James attempted to establish the historical specificity of its various artistic expressions. In an essay of 1959, "The Artist in the Caribbean", James argued that one the central tasks in the Antilles had been the exceptional mastery of an artistic medium through which a collective consciousness could be expressed and a national identity achieved.³⁵ This question of mastery of an artistic medium crucial in that it relatedness itself to national history, the structural processes within society and the ancestral origins of the people who today form the different societies of the Caribbean. Taking Shakespeare as an example within the Elizabethan times, James examined whether the material and cultural conditions in the Antilles had developed to such an extent as to facilitate the emergence of an exceptional medium of expression. For James, the incomparableness and the greatness of Shakespeare lay in the unity of thought and feeling, both of which were experienced in terms of nature. Rousseau and Racine facilitated a different opening up of the French language. James developed the thesis that fully expressive of the national surroundings, historical development and artistic tradition of its people. The artist in the Caribbean was using artistic forms borrowed from other civilizations, fundamentally because the language there is not a distillation of a national past. It is essential to note that even in the artistic field James poses fundamental historical questions. James makes clear language, in all its complex componential forms is the fundamental instrument for

³⁵)C.L.R. James, "The Artist in the Caribbean", *ibid.*, pp. 183-190.

the recovery of a national past and a national identity: Ngugi was Thiong'o's return to write in the African languages is an indirect confirmation of this profound historical thesis. It is existence of a continuous durable past which facilitates artistic talent to tap deep cultural roots in order to create great art and to create a new artistic medium. James argues this has been the case within Western civilization; for instance from Bach into Haydn into Mozart and into Beethoven.³⁶ In other words, a great artist is a product of a deeply rooted national tradition and the transitional moment of a people: a universal artist is universal because she is national.

James felt that, if very gifted writers like George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul had not as yet achieved universal greatness, it was because of certain historical blockages: in other words, they had not been given concrete freedom of the material conditions in which to fully realize themselves. The creation and development of a national consciousness and the rediscovery of the lineages of a cultural tradition would facilitate the emergence of truly great artistic talent. This would make possible the correct posing of a question: what is Africa for the Caribbean people! Perhaps a return to the source. James mentions in passing that the finest piece of writing from the Caribbean is Césaire's magnificent poem, which has the significant title, **Return to my Native Land**. He believes that Sparrow, though working within an artistic medium which is not very high in the hierarchy of the arts, approximates true greatness because he uses a medium deeply anchored in the national consciousness and national fibre of the nation. In a later essay on Sparrow (Francisco Slinger),

³⁶) *ibid.*, p. 184.

"The Mighty Sparrow", approximated in detail from his talents.³⁷ In this text of 1961, James recalls the sentence he had written in the essay of 1959, "When our local artists can evoke the popular response of a Sparrow, the artist in the Caribbean will have arrived" to emphasize that only by probing the national soul can an artist give full expression to national aspirations and develop a national artistic medium fully expressive of the national consciousness of the people. James saw the then young Derek Walcott moving in that direction, which the passage of time has confirmed to have been correct. Giving the example of Haiti, he indicates that the Haitian intelligentsia attempted, following Haitian independence in 1802, to build a model of French civilization in the West Indies, but to no avail, and it was only when Dr. Jean Price-Mars in the early part of the twentieth century built a cultural spring by going to the African heritage in the Haitian peasants, that original cultural and literary expressiveness emerged. This was the moment of Negrismo in Haitian cultural history, and Negroismo (Nicolas Guillen and Alejo Carpentier) in Cuban literary history. Aime Cesaire's great poem was part of this cultural movement to rediscover Africa anew. The poem is much more about Africa than it is about Martinique, where Cesaire was born.

The historical and political implication of James' thesis is that only through a cultural reconnection with Africa can supreme and original forms of expressions emerge anywhere in Africa and in the African Diaspora. He writes this fascinatingly remarkable paragraph: "What

³⁷)C.L.R. James, "The Mighty Sparrow", *ibid.*, pp. 191-201.

emerges from all that is this, profoundly remarkable historical fact. The recognition of Africanism, the agitation for recognition of Africa, the literary creation of an African ideology, one powerful sphere of African independence, all were directly the creation of West Indians. The exact proportion of their contribution need not be estimated. The undisputable fact is that able and powerful West Indians concentrated their exceptional familiarity with Western thought, expression and organization on Africa and Africans when these qualities were urgently needed both in Africa and elsewhere."³⁸ This was to give great political originality to the philosophy of Pan-Africanism and great cultural originality to the literary movement of Negritude.

In an essay of 1962, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro's", forming an appendix to the second edition of **The Black Jacobins**, James gives a cultural survey of the profound political and cultural effects within the Antillean world of this historical renewal of African heritage.³⁹ It was the substitution of Africa for Europe in the historical and cultural imagination of Caribbean peoples by certain intellectuals which facilitated the spectacular invigoration and expression of national identities in the Caribbean. Dr. Jean Price-Mars' writings on the cultural richness of the Haitian peasants gave impetus to the poetical vitality stretching from Jacques Romain to Tene Depestre, who is today the foremost Haitian poet. A series of monographs by Fernando Ortiz, also in the early part of this century,

⁸⁾ *ibid.*, p. 198.

³⁹⁾ C.L.R. James, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro", an Appendix to The Black Jacobins, second edition, Vintage Books, New York, 1963 (1938), pp. 391-418.

on Cuban music, literature, people's culture, art, precipitated the efflorescence of culture: in the literary sphere, Jose Lezama Lima, Juan Marinello, Nicolas Guillen, and Alejo Carpentier began producing outstanding works; and in painting, Lem painted original surrealist works. In many ways Cesaire's poem was a continuation and summit of this African cultural renewal. According to James, the achievement of Cesaire was the following: "He has made a union of the African sphere of existence with existence in the Western world; The past of mankind and the future of mankind and the future of mankind are historically and logically linked; No longer from external stimulus but from their own self-generated and independent being and motion will Africa and Africans move towards an integrated humanity."⁴⁰ James also analyzes the literary works of Vic Reid, Wilson Harris, George Lemming and V.S. Naipaul as explorations in the search for an authentic West Indian identity. Later he was to decode the complex works of Harris using the Heideggerian concept of temporality.⁴¹ For James the novels of Harris exemplify existence in extreme situations, between and in boundaries, where authenticity and inauthenticity of beingness are easily interchangeable. As already mentioned in passing, one of the most astonishing and inexplicable limitations of the classical Pan-Africanists is that they never included Brazil within the historical and cultural coordinates of the Pan-African world. The question of Cesaire makes this historical omission all the more glaring, for in fact,

⁴⁰⁾ *ibid.*, p. 402.

⁴¹⁾ C.L.R. James, Wilson Harris: A Philosophical Approach, pamphlet University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 1966.

is not the greatness of Cesaire in some form retrospectively related to the great Afro-Brazilian poet of the nineteenth-century, Joao de Cruz e Souza, the 'Black Swan': wouldn't an attempt to establish the possible links between them broaden immeasurably the cultural horizons of the black world!⁴²

But on the other hand, C.L.R. James has been among the first to register the significant cultural mutations within Afro-American literary culture. One of the impressive events of our time has been

⁴²⁾ See a fascinating essay on Joao de Cruz e Sousa: Raymond Sayers, "The Black Poet in Brazil: The Case of Joao Cruz e Sousa", Luso-Brazilian Review, vol. 15, Summer 1978, pp. 75-100. a supplementary issue dedicated to Gerald M. Moser.

Samples from Joao de Cruz e Sousa's writings:

a) From "Crianças Negras" (Black Children)-

Of the children who come from black night, nourished on the milk of poison and darkness, from within the Dantean circles of the whip, the doomed offspring of the curse of Eve.

b) From "Consciencia Tranquila" (A Clear Conscience)-

. . . in the dark depths of the night stars watched like sentinels with shining, vigilant eyes that appalling, stumbling, limping mob that moved along as though in the depths of a strong dream: with their hands of rebellions, infernal geniuses, and with their eyes poisoned by atrocious, barbarous, morbid melancholy. It was as though they were rising in a murky, formless column from the mysterious center of the earth, with the color of primitive darkness, like skeletons and corpses, of all Shakespeare's creations, dragging the miserable, bleeding rags of their souls . . . whirlwinds and savage jungles of black skeletons, the whole of colossal Africa wailing and sobbing in an age-old wail and sob.

c) From "Antifona" (Antiphony) -

O Forms, pure and white, clear Forms

Of Moonlights, snows, mists! . . .

O vague, fluid, crystalline forms . . .

Incences of thuribles on altars . . .

d) From "Branços" (arms) -

Nervous arms, white opulences,

Misty whiteness, shinning whiteness,

Chaste purities, virginal purities,

Lactescences of rare lactescences.

the emergence of the constellation of outstanding black American female novelists, in whose midst recently Toni Morrison has emerged as a major artist with few peers in America today. James indicated this phenomenon in a short but seminal essay, "Three Black Women Writers: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange".⁴³

Specifically looking at Morrison's novel, **Sula**, Alice Walker's novel, **Meridian** and Ntozake Shange's volume of poetry, **Nappy Edges**, James formulates the principles that friendship between women, across class and racial differences, is of great importance in society, that a truly humane relationship between men and women is unachievable as long as men see women as mainly sexual instruments, and that the church within Afro-American culture has been of fundamental importance in the liberation struggle of black people. On certain pages of Angela Davis' autobiography one encounters the graphic illustrations of havoc wrought in liberation struggle by male chauvinism and sexism.⁴⁴ The historical importance of the emergence of outstanding black female writers is made all the more clear by the struggles in which Angela Davis has been participating in and simultaneously leading.

The intellectual contours of James' historical vision is profoundly informed of cultural processes. Perhaps it is this cultural singularity that makes it so remarkably penetrative when it gazes at the

⁴³⁾ C.L.R. James, "Three Black Women Writers: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange" (1981), *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, op. cit., pp. 264-270.

⁴⁴⁾ Angela Davis, *An Autobiography*, Random House, New York, 1974, pp. 180-189. Angela Davis is analyzing the collapse of SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) in the Summer of 1968 in Los Angeles.

particular political processes underlying the historical unity of the African world. Though he has not written much about the political processes that have been going in Africa, he has however brilliantly analyzed the historical crisis and the failure of Nkrumahism. In an essay, "Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana", which in consists of two essays, one written in 1966 on the fall of Nkrumah called "The Rise and Fall of Nkrumah", and the other written in 1972 on the occasion of Nkrumah's death called "Kwame Nkrumah: Founder of African Emancipation", James specifies the mistakes made in Ghana, which have subsequently proved to be so characteristic of many underdeveloped countries, particularly in Africa: an excessive reliance on the huge bureaucracy, which cultivates its own interests, totally separate or in contradiction to the needs of the working class and the peasantry who constitute the majority of the nation; the existence of a political party which is not situated in the people and representing their fundamental interests and aspirations, but rather, a party that represents the interests of the bureaucracy; the contempt for the democratic processes which eventually turns out to be a contempt of the democratic aspirations of the people; the attempted acceleration in the economic development of underdeveloped countries in the absence of a well considered economic plan and empirical research.⁴⁵ In an Introduction, which is one of most stirring political documents ever written on Africa which is only comparable to the Conclusion in Fanon's **The Wretched of the Earth**, to **Nkrumah and the Ghanaian Revolution**, James severely criticizes

⁴⁵⁾ C.L.R. James, "Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana", At the Rendezvous of Victory, op. cit., pp. 172-185.

Nkrumah for having dismissed in 1963 the Chief Justice for a decision Nkrumah disagreed with by writing the following: "But what a head of state does not do is to dismiss his Chief Justice after he has given a major decision on a matter in which the whole country is interested. The very structure, juridical, political and moral, of the state is at one stroke destroyed, and there is automatically place on the agenda a violent restoration of some sort of legal connection between government and population. By this single act, Nkrumah prepared the population of Ghana for the morals of the Mafia."⁴⁶ Following this political mishap, within weeks James wrote a letter to Nkrumah that was to bring to an abrupt their close friendship of twenty-five years.⁴⁷ James sought the remedies for alleviating the sever political and economic crises afflicting many African countries in the formation of an authentic democratic and socialist party and the instituting a socialist pattern of development.⁴⁸ In the essay, "Lenin and the Problem", written in 1964 for a Ghanaian political journal, James indicates that Lenin in the then underdeveloped country of the Soviet Union faced historically the same problems, differentiations accepted as those today wreaking havoc in many Third World countries;; and Lenin sought the remedy in the education of the working class and the peasantry, education in the widest historical and cultural sense.⁴⁹

⁴⁶⁾ C.L.R. James, "Introduction" (1977), Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution, op. cit., pp. 9-26.

⁴⁷⁾ C.L.R. James, "Slippery Descent" (1964), *ibid.*, pp. 179-186.

⁴⁸⁾ C.L.R. James, "Government and Party" (1960), *ibid.*, pp. 159-175.

⁴⁹⁾ C.L.R. James, "Lenin and the Problem: (1964), *ibid.*, pp. 187-211. This reading of Lenin might turnout to be James' original contribution to Marxism in our country.

It is in this context that James saw the 1967 Arusha Declaration by Julius Nyerere as the continuation of the fundamental principles formulated by Lenin literally in his death-bed in 1923. Despite the sever strictures of James, there can be no doubt that he held Nkrumah in high esteem. In one context, he has written of Nkrumah in the following manner: "Kwame Nkrumah was one of the greatest political leaders of our century."⁵⁰ In another context, in the dedication of **Nkrumah and the Ghanaian Revolution** to Nkrumah, he compares him, Lenin and Cromwell, in that they all failed to realize a new society, after destroying an old one.⁵¹ Nkrumah's political vision was truly pan-African, for in 1962 he wrote a letter to the various Prime Ministers of the Caribbean nations to warn them of the danger of allowing the West Indian federation to collapse. That the federation eventually collapsed is another story. Nonetheless, James in a letter to Nkrumah thanking him for his intervention, was indicate another aspect of the greatness of the political side of Nkrumah.⁵² For Nkrumah had seen that despite the enormous gulf separating the African peoples on the continent and the other Africans in the diaspora, due to slavery, they nevertheless constituted a historical unity which had which had profound political implications. James in an essay, "The Atlantic Slave-Trade", has devoted some fine pages to this question of slavery, He establishes that it was capital accumulated in slave trade that made possible the industrial revolution, which was the foundation stone of Western

⁵⁰⁾ C.L.R. James, "Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana", At the Rendezvous of Victory, op. cit., p. 180.

⁵¹⁾ C.L.R. James, Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution, op. cit.

⁵²⁾ C.L.R. James, "1962: Twenty Years After", *ibid.*, pp. 176-178.

civilization and capitalism.⁵³ Without slave trade, and the subsequent enslavement of the African peoples in the Americas, the take-off leading to industrial capitalism would have been of a slower velocity and tempo, or perhaps might not have occurred at all. The work of Eric Williams, **Capitalism and Slavery**, was a presentation of scholarly protocols to prove this thesis. James quotes Karl Marx "**The Poverty of Philosophy**, where the latter had written: "Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. . . . Thus slavery, because it is an economic category, has always existed among the institutions of the peoples. Modern nations have been able only to disguise slavery in their own countries, but they have imposed it without disguise upon the New World."⁵⁴ The enormous damage caused by slavery (to be sure, there was internal slavery in Africa predating the active participation of European imperial countries in Africa, but also this was partly an internal response to external dynamics) on African peoples was what led DuBois in his very fine study, **The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870**, to conclude it with these words: "No American can study the connection of slavery with United States history, and not devoutly pray that his country may never have a similar social problem to solve, until it shows more

⁵³) C.L.R. James, "The Atlantic Slave-Trade" (1970), The Future in the Present, op. cit., pp 235-264.

⁵⁴) Quoted on page 238.

capacity for such work than it has shown in the past."⁵⁵ James gives the dates, 1550 to 1850, approximately three centuries, as the temporal duration of this devastation.

He estimates that in this period approximately 15,000,000 Africans landed in the Americas. James intimates that some estimates go as high as 50,000,000 Africans. DuBois, in a pamphlet on Africa in the late 1920's, puts the latter figure twice as high. Philip Curtain has recently disputed these figures unconvincingly. The consequences of slavery were to lead directly to the nineteenth-century colonialism in Africa. Then James poses some very important question: "But an important area of research remains uninvestigated, which we can only mention here. What were the social and moral effects of slaving on the Africans who bought and sold slaves - what did they think of it themselves? What have been the long-term effects on the African peoples who remained on the continent?"⁵⁶ Most of the Africans who were taken into slavery came mostly from West Africa (that is into Caribbean and North American slavery, others were taken as supplementary from Angola and the Congo basin, especially those destined for Brazil), a nexus of complex languages, cultures, social institutions, religions and social relations. In the New World, the Africans had to re-invent these social processes and institutions anew, despite repression, degradation, oppression and exploitation. Despite these re-inventions and renewals, the Africans in the

⁵⁵⁾ W.E.B. DuBois, The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870, in Writings, (ed.) Nathan Hare, The Library of America, New York, 1986, p. 196.

⁵⁶⁾ C.L.R. James, "The Atlantic Slave-Trade", The Future in the Present, op. cit., p. 239.

diaspora were in many ways new people, a new environment had shaped and re-shaped them. There can be no doubt that they contributed enormously to the forging of new civilizations in the Americas. The great work of W.E.B. DuBois is a tribute to the monumentality of the contribution of blacks to American culture, and it reflects that contribution.

It is not accidental therefore that C.L.R. James dedicated an essay to the appraisal of this towering black American intellectual. In his appraisal, James emphasizes three cardinal points: that DuBois educated and organized black people in America to struggle against racial prejudice, and white people to recognize it as a social disease against the well-being of America; that DuBois was one of the founders of the philosophy and ideology of Pan-Africanism and a leading figure in the struggle for the emancipation of Africa; and that as a scholar, DuBois wrote monumental works on critical moments of American history, especially concerning the Civil War and the Reconstruction era. James mentions the relevant scholarly works of DuBois pertaining to each moment of his political and intellectual activities. James pays tribute to the intellectual brilliance of DuBois by this summary sentence: "**Black Reconstruction** is and is likely to continue to be one the finest history books ever written."⁵⁷ Probably with the exception of Marx and Rousseau and maybe Lenin, there has not been a greater intellectual influence on James than this colossal black American figure. In a tribute to George Jackson, James has this to say of DuBois: "The most important name in the history of black struggles in the world at large or in the United States is Dr. W.E.B.

⁵⁷⁾ C.L.R. James, "W.E.B. DuBois" (1965), *ibid.*, p. 211.

DuBois. All thinking about black struggles today and some years past originates from him."⁵⁸ Indeed, without him, the whole structure of African intellectual history in the twentieth-century would.

Perhaps it was this understanding of American political and cultural history from the perspective formulated by DuBois that made James reject the concept of Black Studies when it first emerged in the late 1960's as a result of the struggles waged by the Black Liberation Movement. James rejected this concept by re-formulating it anew or by articulating it from a Marxist perspective: that black American history should not be seen as concerned only with black people, but rather, should be seen in dialectical relation to America's total historical structure.⁵⁹ In other words, James re-positioned Black Studies as first and foremost concerned with profound philosophies of life and with the philosophies of history. For instance, why Paul Robeson, a great artist and a great man of enormous intellect subordinated his Will and thinking to Stalinism? How Alexander Dumas, a great French writer from the Caribbean was able at one time to hold hegemonic sway on vast stretches of French culture in the nineteenth-century? Why Lincoln at one moment felt that black American did not have the meetle to make them true Americans? Why a white philanthropist like Wendell Phillips would commit his whole vast fortune to the abolition of slavery? James felt that these were the approaches towards history which should inform the

⁵⁸) C.L.R. James, "George Jackson" (1971), p. 265.

⁵⁹) C.L.R. James, Black Studies and the Contemporary Student, pamphlet, n.d., (Lecture given in June 1969 at Federal City College, Washington, D.C.).

concept of Black Studies, though as a concept he found it problematical. James criticizes the structure of intellectual history actively working in Harold Cruse's **The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual**.⁶⁰

⁶⁰) *ibid.*, p. 22. There has been a constantly perplexing phenomenon within black American culture of devaluing the brilliance and importance of black American literate intellectuals in comparison with Afro-American musicians and African-American preachers. Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) sounded a note of this in an essay of 1962, "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'" (assembled in Home: Social Essays, William Morrow and Co., New York, 1966, pp. 105-115). A quarter of a century later, Cornel West, one of the most brilliant young intellectuals today (1988), black or white, sings the same tune: Cornel West, "The dilemma of the black intellectual", Critical Quarterly, vol. 29 no. 4, Winter 1987, pp. 42-52. Note the essay is prefaced by an excerpt from Harold Cruse's The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual (1967). In this essay West writes the following: "The richness, diversity, and vitality of the traditions of black preaching and black music stand in strong contrast to the paucity, even poverty, of black literate intellectual production. There simply have been no black literate intellectuals who have mattered their craft commensurate with the achievement of Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, or the Reverend Emanuel Scott- just as there are no black literate intellectuals today comparable to Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughn, or the Reverend Gardner Taylor. . . There indeed have been superb ones - DuBois, Frazier, Ellison, Baldwin, Hurston - and many good ones. But none can compare to the heights achieved by black preachers and musicians." (p. 44) Though I think such comparisons are aesthetically, politically, culturally and historically unsound, for polemical purposes, one can compare Houston A. Baker, Jr. with Miles Davis (taking into account the differences in age, the duration of artistic maturity within each artistic form, etc.), Toni Morrison with Sarah Vaughn, and Ishmael Reed with Reverend Gardner Taylor. These fascinating but profoundly skewed cultural comparisons may be due to Cornel West's peculiar form of Marxism: its forced attempt to forge a synthesis with Christianity (see, Cornel West, "Religion and the Left", Third World Book Review, vol. 1 no. 4 & 5, 1985, pp. 27-31). Its Utopian overtones is commendable, in that it is part of the cultural logic of our time: see, Fredric Jameson's The Political Unconscious (1981), and E.P. Thompson's The Theory of Poverty and Other Essays (1978). But on the other hand his Marxism can account for West's empty praise of Cedric Robinson's book, Black Marxism, a work which attempts to argue,

In a tour-de-force lecture, "The Making of the Caribbean Peoples", James traces the developmental structure of the history of the Caribbean people as a process expressing a historical unity among themselves.⁶¹ For James, the logic of this historical and social process, was what necessitated a political unity of these great people under the umbrella of a federation. The collapse of the federation in the early 1960's was felt acutely by James, hence his letter of gratitude to Nkrumah mentioned earlier. In the same way as Gilberto Freyre,

through its serious misreadings (misreadings may constitute the very structure of poetics a-la-Harold Bloom, but not in political philosophy), for the incomparability of a major black intellectual tradition in the twentieth century and Marxism. On the first two pages of his recent review essay, reviewing Robinson's book in the Monthly Review, Cornel West praises it for its "monumental achievement", but then on the rest of remaining three pages damagingly (and convincing too) criticizes Black Marxism for its false interpretations of DuBois, James and Wright. None of these writers had anything whatsoever to do with so-called revolutionary black nationalism (nationalism may still be progressive in the closing decades of the twentieth century, but definitely not revolutionary. The present crisis engulfing my country, South Africa, is making this absolutely clear). Cornel West is correct to indicate against Cedric Robinson that C.L.R. James is a product of European intellectual formation, like Frantz Fanon for instance, and not a product of black cultural nationalism of whatever kind. (see, Cornel West, "Black Radicalism and the Marxist Tradition," Monthly Review, September 1988, pp. 5). Is not the delay in reviewing this book of 1983 because of its indigestibility! This essay by the present author hopefully clearly shows that James is closer to Rousseau and Lenin than to Marcus Garvey or Booker T. Washington. On other matters, in another context, in a fascinating interview, Cornel West has analyzed the relationship between postmodernism and the American black music of Prince, Michael Jackson and Miles Davis (see, Cornel West, "'Interview", Flash Art, no. 133, April 1987, pp. 51-55).

⁶¹) C.L.R. James, The Making of the Caribbean Peoples, pamphlet, 1968 (A guest Lecture given at the Second Conference of West Indies Affairs, Montreal, Canada, Summer 1966, pp. 1-18). The title of the lecture undoubtedly is a tribute to his close friend, the great English historian, E.P. Thompson.

the great Brazilian sociologist who passed away two years ago, James believes that the Africans who went through the Middle Passage were anew people constituting a new historical and social category. These blacks were no longer Africans, but rather, West Indies who were slaves. Through their sustenance under adverse conditions, when the Amerindians and the European laborers had failed, the black slaves of the Caribbean made possible the perpetuating of Western civilization in the New World.⁶² Though they lost their African languages, customs and religions, they were able to master the various European languages (varying from Spanish through English to French). They responded to new challenges in serious ways. Wherever they were able to work "freely" they were able to do work of great distinction. It was the slaves themselves who, through the acquisition of technical knowledge, run the functioning of the plantations. These may account for their formidable skills in military matters when the Dan Domingo (the Haitian Revolution) broke out. From the process of the Middle Passage the slaves went into modern industry, in which they were slaves because they just happened to be black.

The social differentiation among the slaves began to emerge with the appearance of house-slave " . . . had acquired a certain respect, a subservience to the conceptions of law and order of the masters of the society which he had just entered."⁶³ From this mentality of subservience, James traces the precise form of its logical development to present neo-colonial states in the Caribbean, which is in total

⁶²⁾ *ibid.*, p. 2-3.

⁶³⁾ *ibid.*, p. 5.

contrast to the revolutionary tradition of other slaves which stretches from Toussaint to Castro. The Haitian Revolution of 1791 to 1803 was one of the major events in the Caribbean directly linked to the Cuban Revolution of 1958. James analyzes the revolutionary nature of Toussaint L'Ouverture historical vision, drawing a Constitution for San Domingo in which the island would be ruled by ex-slaves in defiance of neo-colonialist solutions hatched by Napoleon. As James writes: "His plan was the absolute local independence on the one hand, but on the other hand French capital and French commissioners to establish the relation."⁶⁴ The tradition founded by Toussaint, James saw continued in George Padmore, Frantz Fanon and Marcus Garvey. The tragedy of Haiti today, James traces to the fact that the final liberation of Haiti was achieved under the leadership of Dessalines, who was illiterate and a barbarian. The failure of Dessalines was so much a failure of a particular personality as much as the failure of political nerve on the part of the Creole ruling classes who refused to form an alliance with him, which James believes could have moderated or subsequently eliminated some of his excesses. It is to be noted that for James the study of history is to draw political lessons for the present moment. In this lecture James believe that the Caribbean in 1920 could have attained self-government and independence, instead of waiting until 1960, by which time in the forty-years in between, the imperialist governments ". . . poisoned and corrupted that sense of self-confidence and political dynamic needed for any people about to

⁶⁴) ibid., p. 10.

embark on the uncharted seas of independence and nationhood."⁶⁵ The waiting was to facilitate the emergence of neo-colonialist regimes in the Caribbean. It is interesting to note that in the same year (1966) as he gave this lecture, he was to attribute the corruption of the moral fibre of Convention Peoples' Party in Ghana and the failure of Nkrumahism to the wait of self-government and independence from 1947 to 1957.⁶⁶ The plausibility of such political judgement is still open to historical appraisal. It this singularly political vision of James' historical imagination which has concerned itself with the three corners of the African world (Africa, America and the Caribbean). The absence of Brazil within this historical vision has been debilitating. It is our task today to include this great country within our historical horizon.

⁶⁵) *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁶) C.L.R. James, "Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana", At the Rendezvous of Victory, *op. cit.*, p. 175.