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# The Modern CARIBBEAN

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## Society and Culture in the Caribbean

The British and French West Indies, 1870-1980

In the decades of the 1830s and 1840s, metropolitan initiatives and internal social and economic pressures converged to effect the abolition of formal slavery in the British and French Caribbean colonies. This important change in the legal and institutional framework of West Indian society has traditionally been seen as the great break in Caribbean history, as the watershed dividing "slave society" from "free society." Thus, 1838 for the British and 1848 for the French colonies are the conventional starting points for any discussion of the "modern" (i.e., post-slavery) period.

Yet how important was formal emancipation for the people of the British and French Caribbean, where legal freedom was not the result of revolutionary initiatives nor of nationalist wars against colonialism? It is almost a truism that emancipation did not transform the nature of Caribbean societies, nor the fundamental patterns of race relations, nor the way power was held and exercised, nor even the values and attitudes that had most prestige. Because the plantation was still the most important unit in most of the islands, a rigid class/race stratification continued to exist, reinforced after 1838-48 by new divisions of race, religion, and language. Not all the Caribbean laboring people were able to free themselves from the need to work for the plantations at low wages and under servile conditions; indeed, in some territories the majority of the ex-slaves and their descendants found themselves locked into this situation at least up to the 1940s. The grossly unequal distribution of economic resources, of wealth and poverty, was not fundamentally altered in the century that followed emancipation.

While the fundamental socioeconomic structures established during slavery remained largely intact in the hundred-odd years following legal freedom, it seems clear that emancipation opened up the possibility of change. It provided

the legal conditions for social development, for the emergence of new social formations and groups. For many ex-slaves, it did make possible social and economic independence of the plantation. Emancipation allowed for popular cultures, secular and religious, to develop and sometimes to flourish, though not without difficulties. Some of the people were able to take part in political life as jurors, voters, and even as legislators. In sum, emancipation broke the stranglehold that slavery had held over the society and its institutions, and it set free new forces and new energies.

In the immediate post-emancipation decades, the Caribbean colonies were the focus of considerable metropolitan attention as the theater for the working out of a "great experiment," the attempt to transform masses of African and creole slaves into law-abiding, thrifty, hardworking, Christianized wage laborers; an attempt which, perhaps, met with more success than is often acknowledged. In these decades, the different socioeconomic groups struggled to adapt to the new legal arrangements, helped or hindered by the metropolitan visitors: Christian missionaries, abolitionists and Republicans, governors and officials, journalists and propagandists. But, by the 1870s, much of the drama seemed to have played itself out. The turbulent years of adjustment to freedom, often painful, seemed over; the great experiment had succeeded, or it had failed disastrously, according to the ideology or class interests of the observer. Metropolitan interest waned perceptibly, and the Caribbean colonies gradually became forgotten backwaters, familiar but uninteresting corners of the expanding British and French colonial empires, their apparent somnolence only disturbed by a riot here or a natural disaster there.

To some extent, the decades between the 1870s and the 1930s-40s can be seen as "quiet times" for the British and French colonies, although outbursts of violent protest certainly occurred from time to time, especially just after World War I. But fundamental social and economic structures continued to dominate, and change was slow. It seemed, in fact, as if metropolitan efforts to create a sort of stability in the post-slavery Caribbean had met with some success. Yet much was happening beneath the placid surface. Many immigrant groups entered the Caribbean from Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, bringing completely new racial, cultural, and religious elements and fundamentally changing the colonies' demographic structures. Within "creole society" proper, the society made up of the former slaves, the former slave owners, and their descendants, the most striking change was probably the growth in the middle strata. By the 1930s many members of the various immigrant communities had also entered these middle strata. Race relations became more complex, involving quite "new" elements; class stratification moved slowly away from the

crudely simple system of slave society and of the immediate post-emancipation era.

If social change had been relatively slow between the 1870s and the 1930s, the Caribbean colonies entered into a new era during the decades of the 1930s-40s, when the pace of socioeconomic development clearly accelerated. The depression of the 1930s, the labor protests between 1934 and 1938, the impact of World War II, and the efforts of nationalist movements led to important political, economic, and social transformations. Out of the regional labor protests emerged trade unions and political parties, and a new labor/political elite, which took the British colonies into postwar decolonization and eventual independence. In the French colonies, political and labor organizations were slower to develop, and the constitutional change of 1946 which made them *départements* of France was largely the result of metropolitan initiatives.

Economic developments after the war, with the partial industrialization of some colonies, the growth of mining (bauxite, oil), the new importance of tourism, and the massive expansion of the tertiary and services sector, had predictably crucial social repercussions. At the same time, and as part of the same processes, agriculture declined nearly everywhere; Caribbean peasants came under heavy pressures as subsistence farming on small plots became increasingly less viable, or less attractive to the young; landlessness increased and large sectors of the former peasant strata were proletarianized. Tourism and light manufacturing, and emigration to the metropoles, absorbed some—but, inevitably, only some—of these people. Moreover, after about 1940 the population of the Caribbean colonies increased rapidly as death rates fell while birthrates continued at high levels well into the 1960s, and uncontrolled urbanization on a large scale was experienced as masses of peasants and rural laborers sought to escape the poverty of the countryside by drifting into the towns, especially the capital cities. Postwar urbanization continues to be a fundamental aspect of Caribbean social change.

Upheavals and painful adjustment in the immediate post-emancipation decades; relatively "quiet times" of slow social formation and economic stagnation between the 1870s and the 1930s; political transformations and accelerated social and economic change after World War II: here we have in summary a chronological framework of Caribbean social development since the mid-nineteenth century. We can now try to analyze the social structure of the Caribbean colonies, their patterns of race relations, as well as the material and nonmaterial culture of their people.

## Afro-Caribbean and Euro-Caribbean Relations

One of the most important legacies of slavery was the three-tier social structure. Society in the British and French Caribbean was divided—at the time of formal emancipation—into three major tiers or sectors, in descending order of power and status: the white upper class, the colored middle stratum, and the black masses who had just been freed. Few questioned the position of the white upper class as the dominant group, backed by economic hegemony, social prestige, and often effective political power (though this was less true of the French colonies after the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870). The middle group was generally separated from the black masses by phenotype, and because its members had acquired some formal education, possessed in greater or lesser degree a command of the English or French language and of metropolitan culture, held white-collar jobs, or, as in the case of small planters and middling merchants or shopkeepers, owned some land or small businesses, they were somewhat better off economically than the masses. In the nineteenth century most people in the middle stratum were of mixed African-European ancestry, but as time went on increasing numbers of blacks, as well as persons of Asian, Middle Eastern, or Portuguese origins, entered this group. At the bottom of the three-tier structure, the creole masses were mainly of African descent, the descendants of the slaves. They were largely excluded from political life, though in the French colonies formal rights of citizenship, including voting rights, were given to black men between 1848 and 1851, and again after 1870. Usually poor and badly educated, if indeed they had any formal education at all, their life-styles and cultural/religious practices were despised by most members of the upper and middle groups.

This three-tier class-racial structure remained the basic framework of Caribbean society right up to the 1930s–40s and indeed, some may argue, to the present day. But, within the system, change and diversity were both present. Notably, a fourth tier or sector was added after the mid-nineteenth century to the social structure of some colonies: the immigrants from Asia, especially from India. In Trinidad and Guyana (and in Suriname), so many Indians settled that they came to form a large and separate sector of the population, separated from the other three groups by culture, religion, and race, and (well into the twentieth century) legal restrictions. And by their relatively late arrival, they entered the society at a time when the basic three-tier system had already been firmly established. Although Indians became a significant minority in Martinique, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Saint Vincent, Grenada, and Saint Lucia, it is

probably only in Trinidad and in Guyana that we should see them as forming a fourth distinct tier in the social structure. Neither the Chinese nor the Syrian/Lebanese communities were ever large enough to form a significant separate tier in any territory. As time went on the more successful Chinese and Syrian/Lebanese tended to move up toward, and even into, the top tier.

There were considerable variations, too, in the position of the whites in the different Caribbean societies. Most whites belonged to the upper class/tier—whether Creoles or Europeans—and the men were mainly landowners and planters, businessmen, professionals, and officials. But some colonies had a very small white population, too small in fact to form a separate class/tier. In Belize, for instance, the white population dwindled rapidly after emancipation until by 1881 only 375 white persons lived there—one percent of the total population—and 271 of these were adult men. Obviously there were very few settled white families, as opposed to European men doing a job in the colony for a few years. Guyana and the British Windward Islands also had a relatively small white community, and these territories lacked a deeply rooted white "aristocracy" such as Trinidad had in its French Creoles and Martinique in its *grands blancs*. By contrast, Barbados and the Bahamas had much larger white communities, long established in these islands and secure in their control over them.

Moreover, a few colonies had small but distinct communities of "poor whites," notably Barbados, the Bahamas, and the Saintes (a group of small islands dependent administratively on Guadeloupe). These people, though more or less all of pure English or French ancestry (for they made a great point of never marrying outside their own little groups) were extremely poor and despised by everyone including the blacks. In Barbados they were called "Redlegs," probably because of their bare, sunburnt legs, and in the Saintes and Saint Barthelemy similar isolated and endogamous communities existed, racially "pure" since the seventeenth century, like their counterparts in Barbados.

In addition to these long-established poor white groups, the Portuguese immigrants who came to the Caribbean after the 1830s were not considered to be part of the white upper class/tier, though they were Europeans. Because they arrived as penniless laborers from simple peasant backgrounds in Madeira, spoke little or no English, and possessed a distinctively Portuguese culture, their ethnicity alone could not win for them upper-class status. They were marked off as a separate group on their own, and some censuses of the period had a category "Portuguese" which was separate from "Europeans." But by the late nineteenth century some of them had been absorbed into the first or

second tiers as a result of successful trading activities, and this movement would accelerate in the postwar period as wealthy and educated Portuguese families in colonies like Trinidad and Guyana continued to enter the upper tier.

Finally, we may note that some very tiny islands hardly had any class/racial stratification system at all, for their small populations were nearly all people of African descent and roughly similar in economic position, life-style, culture, and status. Carriacou, an island dependency of Grenada, when studied by M. G. Smith in the 1950s possessed no Chinese or Indian immigrants, no white planters or businessmen (the only white residents were normally the Anglican and Catholic priests, the doctor, and the magistrate), no middle class, and virtually no mixed-race people. It was a simple society of creole blacks living a peasant and seafaring life and following similar Afro-Christian cultural patterns. In other words, Carriacou was culturally and socially homogeneous, with no clearly defined class or status system. This was also broadly true of the Saint Vincent Grenadines, Anguilla, some of the tiny French islands like Desirade, and most of the British Virgin Islands group.

Within the basic three-tier structure that came down from slave society, the most important changes after the mid-nineteenth century were the gradual increase in the size of the middle stratum and the improvement in social status experienced by the more prosperous and better educated members of this stratum.

There is no doubt that there was considerable movement up into the middle group by people from the creole masses. Often the children of ex-slaves or creole laborers were able to climb up to middle-class status through teaching in the elementary schools: a secondary education was not necessary for this and so it was a favored channel of social mobility for young people from poor but "respectable," church-oriented families. Or the climb might be accomplished through successful economic activities, usually either independent farming or one of the skilled trades. Such "self-made" men and women, often uneducated, acquired cash and land through hard work and sacrifice, and money and land enabled them to move into a social position different from and above that of the mass of laborers and poor peasants. Frequently, their children, along with the children of elementary schoolteachers, were able to win a place in a secondary school (grammar school in the British colonies, lycée in the French), and with a secondary education they might be able to enter middle-class occupations that brought with them a rise in social status. They would also acquire with their schooling a command of "good" English or French and some familiarity with European literary culture, both essential requirements for successful upward mobility. In the French Antilles, the rural petty bourgeoisie

had some access to local political offices after 1870, when many blacks were elected to the *Conseils Municipaux*; this was less possible for their counterparts in the British colonies. People in the middle stratum typically worked in white-collar jobs as teachers, clerks, shop assistants, druggists, journalists, printers, nurses, and minor civil servants. Though many lived in the towns, especially in the capital cities, there was also an important rural middle class of primary school head-teachers, postmasters/mistresses, village dispensers, and plantation staff, men and women of great local influence who were the natural social and religious leaders of their small communities.

At the higher levels of the middle stratum were the senior civil servants, professionals, and businessmen, both colored and black, but more typically of mixed racial origins. Their numbers increased after the post-emancipation period and their socioeconomic position in general improved. Indeed, some of them, usually light-complexioned, were able to climb into the top class/tier because of economic success and/or professional or educational standing.

In the French Antilles, for instance, the coloreds were the chief beneficiaries both of the decline of the sugar industry and of the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870. With no institutional barriers to their mobility, they entrenched themselves after 1870, and in Martinique especially became a virtual oligarchy with a strong grip on the colony's political life. Their chief strategy for upward mobility was to monopolize administrative, political, and teaching posts in the colonies, except for the few top positions reserved for metropolitanians, and to exploit the relative availability of secondary schools (the government lycées established after 1880) and university education in France. The eruption of Mount Pelée in 1902 and the destruction of Saint Pierre, Martinique's chief commercial center, accelerated the rise of the coloreds by killing many of the Antillean whites who had held important professional and administrative posts. Though the *békés* retained their hold on economic activities, especially the exploitation of the land, the coloreds in both Martinique and Guadeloupe (along with many rising black families) were strongly entrenched politically and socially by the time département status was granted in 1946.

Much the same sort of thing (though on a smaller scale) took place in the British Windward Islands in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Here the white population, small even before 1838, declined further and the coloreds were able to move into elite positions with relative ease.

But most members of the middle stratum, at least until the 1950s or 1960s, were not at all well-off economically. Primary school teachers, clerks, assistants

in city stores, and junior civil servants were all badly paid, but had to "keep up appearances" in a way that the laborer did not. Yet even the most financially insecure middle-class man, as a rule, felt himself to be superior to the masses, taking pride in his "clean" and "dignified" job, symbolized in dress (collar and tie, stockings, expensive shoes), language, and behavior, marking him off from the "ordinary" people. Race was also significant, for members of the middle stratum (who ranged in complexion from very fair to "pure" black) tended to be obsessed with skin color and "good" (European-type) features and hair. They emphasized the values of "respectability," which meant subscribing more or less to middle-class British/French norms of family organization, sexual behavior, and life-styles; more positively, they stressed the importance of educational advancement for their children.

It is clear that many members of the West Indian middle class adopted uncritically the European prejudices, viewing the black working classes with open contempt, or at best an indifference born of ignorance. Too preoccupied with their own successful mobility within the system, these people showed little concern for the masses. By the early twentieth century, however, a small but significant group of middle-class persons, with allies from the masses, was beginning to agitate for social and political change. After the 1930s, as nationalist movements developed, much of their leadership came from precisely the middle stratum.

Class stratification systems in the Caribbean after slavery, it is well known, were hopelessly enmeshed with racial divisions, and the simple three-tier structure corresponded (with some discrepancies) to white/brown/black. Racism pervaded West Indian society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and skin color was a crucial determinant of the West Indian's life-chances at least until the postwar era, though it would be foolish to imply it was the only determinant. (It was not always the most important determinant either: in the French Antilles, the rich black man automatically became an honorary *mulâtre*.) Nevertheless, racism, as well as sensitivity to color or shade, were strong everywhere and the pattern of race relations developed on the basis of an officially sanctioned belief that people of African (and Indian) descent were inferior, intellectually and morally, to people of European origin. Needless to say, that belief survived long after the destruction of the slave system that did so much to entrench it.

Of course, some West Indian white communities were more overtly racist than others, and discrimination against blacks was practiced more strictly in some colonies than in others. Barbados and the Bahamas, two English colonies with large creole white populations, were especially noted for open racial

discrimination which persisted well into the 1950s-60s, despite the absence of any official system of segregation. As late as 1945, a Bahamian governor noted that the local whites bitterly opposed the nomination of a colored man to the Executive Council because they and their wives might have to meet him at social events at Government House. A little later, the English writer Patrick Leigh Fermor found out that there was virtually no public place in Barbados (restaurant, club, hotel, or whatever) where he could meet and talk with the island's black chief minister, a situation that Grantley Adams (according to Leigh Fermor) accepted with resignation. In the middle 1950s, in fact, Adams felt impelled to threaten the passage of antidiscrimination laws when Barbados's chance of becoming the capital of the Federation of The West Indies was harmed by the belief, reflected in the report of the Federal Capital Site Commission, that open racial discrimination existed in the island.<sup>1</sup>

In Jamaica, the white community remained to a significant degree socially aloof from the colored middle stratum and the masses until the postwar years. W. P. Livingstone, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, noted that Europeans coming to Jamaica soon learned "that colour and race are the most powerful influences regulating the destiny of the colony" and soon came to share the prevailing racism. Livingstone's observations led him to conclude that most white Jamaicans regarded their black laborer "like a mule," abusing him whenever he made a mistake and treating him just as so much brute force; and that in the home, most white housewives dealt with their domestics in similar fashion, substituting "the lash of the tongue" for the whip. Neither the planter nor his wife tried to deal with their workers as valuable and sensible employees, Livingstone noted, because the white Jamaican did not see black men and women as fully human, let alone as equals.<sup>2</sup> At least up to the 1940s, these attitudes remained typical of most Jamaican whites, and of many middle-class coloreds and blacks too.

For race prejudice came as easily as breathing to most whites living in the West Indies: it was part of their deepest feelings, learned early in childhood if they were Creoles, or quickly picked up if they were settlers from abroad. The whites felt themselves to be a group set apart from, and far above, the rest of the population. Even in small islands where the resident white community was tiny, the whites remained isolated from the people in whose midst they lived and on whose labor they depended. This kind of attitude was especially typical of the white Creoles: for them, it was even more essential than for the Europeans to preserve their racial "purity" because of their long history of association with the blacks as slave owners and employers.

In Trinidad, for instance, the powerful "French Creoles," descended from

French, Spanish, Italian, and even German and Irish settlers who had come to the island generations ago, felt this need with special strength. They could only marry within the group and, above all, they could never marry a person suspected of having "colored blood." In one of his novels, first published in 1934, Evelyn Waugh describes a fictional French creole girl, going home to Trinidad from school in Paris to get married. She explains to someone on board the ship: "There are so few young men I can marry. They must be Catholic and of an island family . . . there are two or three other rich families and I shall marry into one of them." The poor girl was limited to seven possible candidates, and one of them was ruled out because although very rich "he isn't really a Trinidadian. His grandfather came from Dominica and they say he has coloured blood."<sup>3</sup> Apart from the crucial question of marriage, French Creoles did not mix with nonwhite Trinidadians on an equal basis. They would not be invited to private gatherings in French creole homes, and even more public contacts in political and official life, in business and the professions, or in church activities, were limited. In Trinidad, as elsewhere in the Caribbean, the whites organized exclusive social clubs (recreational, sporting, or business-oriented), and conducted much of their social life within them.

Much the same situation was to be found in the French Antilles. In Martinique especially, the *békés* formed a powerful, closely knit endogamous elite, maintaining until very recent times rigid caste-like barriers against nonwhites in all private social relations. Guérin described the Martinique elite, in the 1950s, as "an exclusive caste made up of a dozen or so families including at the very outside a thousand individuals who see eye to eye, help each other financially, take care to preserve the plantations undivided, marry within their circle."<sup>4</sup> Although only a very small nucleus enjoyed real wealth and power, the *békés'* sense of community ensured that no Martiniquan white fell into real difficulty. Endogamy was almost absolute, interrelationships were correspondingly dense, and any white Creole who fell on hard times was more or less guaranteed a job or a loan so that caste prestige was not endangered. Up to the 1970s, the Martinique *békés* preserved their social distance both from the colored middle class and from the metropolitan civil servants who had flocked into the island since 1946. In Guadeloupe the white elite was always smaller and less entrenched than in Martinique, yet it too fought to preserve its privileges and its sense of superiority. A perceptive French writer noted of the Guadeloupe white Creoles in 1890 that "a white family will not go where it will be exposed to meeting a family of mulattoes or negroes." They took refuge from the decline of the sugar industry and their political eclipse under the Third Republic in racial solidarity, declining to mix with colored society and keeping up pre-

tenses despite real poverty: "half-savages, full of bitterness and scorn for the men and things of the present epoch, very proud and almost arrogant in their poverty, always ready to mount on their high horses when one waves the burning questions of politics and colour before them."<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the social exclusiveness of the whites in the British and French Caribbean, striking though it undoubtedly is, was never absolute. No formal system of apartheid existed, and intimate relationships between whites, coloreds, and blacks, including sexual ones, continued to be formed. There was interaction at many levels, and it is clear that white Creoles were deeply influenced, in their life-styles, their ways of thought, their material culture, and even their use of language, by the Caribbean creole society and cultural complex of which they were an integral part.

### The Newer Immigrants

The pattern of race relations inherited from Caribbean slavery essentially involved relationships between black, brown, and white people, the components of the original "creole society." But after formal emancipation, people from many different parts of the world were brought into the region to supply labor for the sugar plantations. Their arrival and settlement—above all, that of the immigrants from India—further complicated the pattern of race relations and the structure of society.

Constituting by far the largest group of new arrivals, the Indians entered the Caribbean as indentured laborers between 1838 and 1917. Because of their large numbers, because they brought religions, languages, and cultural forms quite different from any found in the region, they greatly complicated as well as enriched these societies. They were neither black nor white, they were not Christians, they had their own ancient culture, there were too many of them to be simply ignored or pushed to the margins of Caribbean society.

Two other groups of immigrants from Asia were too small to pose a serious challenge to the established pattern of social and racial relations: these were the Chinese and the Syrian/Lebanese. Chinese laborers were imported, like the Indians, to work on the plantations; they brought their own language and culture. Some soon adopted Christianity and mixed freely with the Creoles; others held on to traditional cultural patterns well into the mid-twentieth century. Like the Portuguese, the Chinese tended to enter small shopkeeping, and soon the "Chinese shopman" was as typical a figure in the country towns and villages all over the West Indies as his "Portugee" fellow. The latest arrivals

were the Syrian/Lebanese, who began to come to the Caribbean around 1890. Most were Maronite or Catholic Christians, though a minority were Moslems, and they spoke Arabic. Although few in numbers, they settled in nearly every West Indian colony and quickly carved a secure niche as a closed ethnic group involved almost exclusively in retailing cloth, clothes, and household goods. Starting as humble peddlers, many Syrian/Lebanese families prospered and set up thriving stores, becoming in the postwar period an important element in the economic elite of several colonies, owning conspicuous businesses in cities such as Port of Spain, Kingston, and Fort-de-France.

Most of the post-emancipation immigrants were imported to provide labor for the sugar estates after many ex-slaves had "deserted" them. But an important additional reason for bringing in Indian, Chinese, and Portuguese laborers was to further divide the society: the planters and whites in general, as well as government officials, believed that these workers would be a check on the creole population. They hoped that the resulting divisions of race, religion, language, and culture would prevent the people from ever effectively uniting against white control. For instance, the manager of an estate in Berbice, Guyana, believed in 1848 that the safety of the whites depended on the "want of union" among the laborers, arguing that the Indians, Chinese, and Portuguese would always "stand by the whites." Things had not changed fifty years later: in 1897 a Guyanese planter said of the Indians and the Creoles: "they are totally different people; they do not inter-mix. That is, of course, one of our great safeties in the colony when there has been any rioting. If the Negroes were troublesome every Coolie on the estate would stand by one. If the Coolies attacked me, I could with confidence trust my Negro friends for keeping me from injury."<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, relations between black Creoles and Indians in Guyana and Trinidad (where Indians had come to form about one-third of the total population by the time immigration ended in 1917) were often difficult. Not that they were always bad. For instance, in both colonies, black Creoles took part in the Moslem *Hosé festival*, helping to build and carry the *tajfidis* (elaborate temple-like structures) and beating the drums. On the estates, resident workers of both races labored together and tolerated each other's ways, even though a tendency developed for Creoles and Indians to do different, specialized tasks: Creoles worked in the factory and cut canes, Indians did the routine cultivation jobs. But there were sources of friction on the plantations, and later in the villages where Indians settled after about 1870, which caused tensions between the races.

Black drivers (headmen) of Indian gangs on sugar estates were often harsh

and unfair, and creole policemen also tended to bully Indians and abuse their authority by stopping Indian workers and demanding to see their "papers" without adequate reason. In both colonies there were sporadic outbreaks of violence between the races on the plantations, though such events were not common. Off the estates, Indians came into contact with black creole villagers. Tensions might arise when Indians began to compete for jobs previously held only by black villagers; or when they bought land that had been owned by Creoles, or when the colonial governments (after 1869 in Trinidad and after 1880 in Guyana) set up special settlement schemes for ex-indentured Indians.

Still, conflict between the two races was not common between the 1840s and the 1950s, and creole-Indian relations in Trinidad and Guyana were generally peaceful, if not exactly friendly. Each group had a low opinion of the other, based on misunderstanding, ignorance of each other's culture, and the tendency to adopt European prejudices about each race. The planters, as we have seen, did what they could to discourage cooperation between the races. After the 1870s, Creoles in Trinidad and Guyana increasingly took the better-paid, skilled jobs on the estates, or moved into cocoa (Trinidad), or worked as artisans, clerks, teachers, and urban laborers, or took jobs in gold and diamond mining (Guyana) and in the oil industry (Trinidad), while most rural Indians remained field laborers or peasants, still essentially Oriental in religion and culture and well behind the other races in educational attainment. Each tended to despise the other, but each also tolerated the other's presence, and the de facto residential segregation which was the result of occupational divergences reinforced this uneasy, yet essentially peaceful, coexistence.

In the postwar period black-Indian relations deteriorated in both colonies, but notably in Guyana. There were, probably, two main reasons for this important but complex development. First, by the 1950s significant numbers of Indians had acquired a secondary education and even university and professional training, and they began to seek and obtain administrative or professional positions, positions that had traditionally been considered the special preserve of colored and black Creoles. When the vast majority of Indians remained safely isolated in the rural villages or on the plantations as laborers and as poor farmers, they presented no great threat to the creole middle stratum; but that situation had clearly changed by 1950. Second, with the grant of adult suffrage and the advent of mass electoral politics, it was almost inevitable that political parties would develop which were based on ethnic constituencies, and that their leaders would exploit racial tensions. In Trinidad, creole-Indian relations were especially tense in the period between 1956 and 1962, the last stages of formal decolonization; in Guyana, tragic communal

violence culminating in 1961-62 took many lives and left a legacy of bitterness and mistrust that clouded Guyana's political and social future after independence in 1966.

### Economy and Society

The material culture of most West Indians in the post-slavery era was dominated by poverty, underdevelopment, and a grossly skewed distribution of economic resources. The colonies' wealth was concentrated in the hands of a very small group in the society, nearly all belonging to the white upper tier/class which controlled most of the resources, along with foreign (British, French, later American) capitalists. This group continued to own most of the good farming land, especially in the larger colonies; it controlled the larger business enterprises and the financial institutions; and its members dominated the professions and the top ranks of the administration.

In Martinique, for instance, 3 percent of the total number of landowners in 1935 (208 persons) owned 61 percent of the cultivable soil, and 5 percent of the total (365 persons) owned 75 percent of the soil. By contrast, 72 percent of the owners (4,696 persons) held 7 percent of the farming land. By the 1950s just five large corporations effectively controlled Martinique's agricultural production. Indeed, the whole of Martinique's economy was in the hands of a few *béké* families who "maintain a grip on every penny of the sugar industry's profits, control the banks, the export-import trade in its virtual entirety, and run the island's administrative circus."<sup>7</sup> In 1960 one estimate concluded that the *békés* held 66.4 percent of the invested capital in the island, with 11 percent held by metropolitans; in Guadeloupe, 62 percent was held by metropolitan interests and 23 percent by Martiniquans.<sup>8</sup> Such a picture, in varying degrees, would also be accurate for most of the other islands, except, perhaps, for the smaller, impoverished territories where there was little investment or production of any kind, like French Guiana.

Most West Indians, after the post-emancipation decades, continued to work for the plantations as wage laborers, whether as full-time resident workers or as casual, irregular laborers during harvest times and at other busy seasons, supplementing their meager earnings from their own cultivations. In Trinidad and Guyana most full-time, resident workers on the sugar estates after 1870 were Indians. Elsewhere planters continued to rely on creole laborers, sometimes supplemented by Indians as in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Jamaica. In the French Antilles, resident plantation workers were the *gens casés*, housed on

the estates, to be distinguished from the *cultivateurs*, independent peasants who gave casual labor to the plantations. Wages were everywhere very low, and lower still for women and children, who formed a crucial component of the estate labor force. As late as 1937-38, official surveys found that women in such British colonies as Saint Kitts, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Jamaica were receiving between ten pence and one shilling a day for field work (weeding and hoeing), between one-half and one-third the average wage earned by men. These were more or less the same wages as women received one hundred years earlier in the immediate post-emancipation period.

But if most people were forced to seek some kind of a living as plantation laborers, some were engaged in other occupations. A significant number had succeeded in becoming independent peasant farmers during the nineteenth century. This was especially the case in Jamaica, in the British Windward Islands like Tobago, Dominica, and Grenada, and in Guadeloupe, but peasants were to be found in most places: in Trinidad, for instance, peasants produced cocoa, especially after 1870, and both Creoles and Indians grew canes as small farmers after the 1880s. Tobago, by 1900, was almost exclusively a peasant island, and so was Dominica, where the great majority of the population earned no wages in the 1930s, depending solely on their subsistence production. In the French islands, a peasantry developed slowly after 1848, especially in Guadeloupe. Here the local government granted small plots between 1898 and 1922; plantation lands also passed into the hands of peasant smallholders during the sugar depression of the 1880s and 1890s, and again after 1946 when many medium-sized plantations could not afford the new minimum wages imposed after the island became a *département*. By about 1950 Guadeloupe had some 16,000 smallholders owning two and one-half acres or less.

Although the peasants enjoyed some independence, and may have eaten better than the plantation laborers and town workers, most were very poor. Only a small minority of peasants owning, say, between ten and fifty acres could be described as prosperous, making enough from the land to feed their families well, to support children in school, and to take an active part in local religious and social affairs. The great majority farmed less than ten acres, many depending on tiny plots of under one acre, the soil often exhausted after generations of use. For these people, independent farming provided only a bare existence, if that: many were forced to seek jobs to add to their small income from the land, or to drift into the towns. The small plot of "family land"—"microscopic cabbage patches" in Guéttin's phrase—which was all that most West Indian peasants could farm certainly provided a sense of security and made outright starvation unlikely, but it could not provide anything like a

decent living for a rapidly growing rural population. Nor did the various land settlement schemes carried out by many colonial governments, especially after 1918, bring substantial improvement to the situation of large numbers of smallholders, except in a few places.

The West Indian people found many other ways to make a living. Some were seamen and fishermen, especially in the smaller islands like Carriacou, Antigua, and the Bahamas chain (where "wrecking" and sponge fishing were the major industries between the 1830s and the 1930s). Others found a living in the forests as woodcutters, in places like Dominica with its thickly wooded interior, in Guyana, and in Belize where the export of mahogany and logwood was always the chief economic activity. Domestic service employed large and growing numbers everywhere, especially women. Thousands of women were full- or part-time seamstresses and washerwomen. Lafcadio Hearn has left a romantic portrait of the Martiniquan *blanchisseuse*—whom he considered to be probably the hardest worker in the entire population—around 1890.<sup>9</sup> And the towns provided jobs for a few as stewards, porters and messengers, shop assistants, and, after the war, factory workers in the new light manufacturing industries.

West Indian laborers typically received low wages for their work; but their situation was made worse by the irregular, seasonal employment of so many. Underemployment was the norm for most. Work on the estates had always been seasonal except for the small core of resident laborers. Loggers, goldminers, wreckers and sponge fishermen in the Bahamas, stewards, porters and coalers on the docks—all faced intermittent employment and long periods of no work and no wages. The problem of low wages was made far worse by irregular earnings.

To escape low wages and seasonal employment, as well as impoverished existence on small peasant plots, thousands left the country and went to the towns. The general depression in the Caribbean sugar industry between 1880 and 1914 had an adverse impact on rural living conditions in many territories, accelerating the movement to the towns. By the 1930s this urban drift had created serious social problems, for the towns had few jobs to offer the new arrivals, and health and housing conditions soon deteriorated as people crowded into the slums. Kingston, Fort-de-France, Port of Spain, and the rest expanded rapidly with uncontrolled, haphazard settlements springing up. Fort-de-France, for instance, tripled its population between 1901 and 1946, and between 1954 and 1966 alone its population grew from 67,000 to 115,000 inhabitants.

Another way of escaping poverty and unemployment was emigration. Many thousands of West Indians took the decision to leave their colony, perhaps to leave the Caribbean, especially between the 1880s and the 1920s, and again after World War II. Indeed, emigration became a way of life for the people; in some smaller islands like Saint Kitts, Nevis, or Carriacou, the majority of adult males expected to work abroad for some years. They went wherever work was available: Trinidad and Guyana, especially in the nineteenth century; Bermuda; the Dominican Republic and Cuba; Panama and Central America; the United States. Thousands of Bahamians escaped dire poverty by migrating to Florida. Jamaicans and Barbadians went to Panama, Costa Rica, and Cuba in large numbers between the 1880s and 1920s. After World War II, migration to the metropolises became important as thousands went to Britain and (in much smaller numbers) France. The earnings of men and women who had emigrated were sent back to family members as remittances, and this money became an extremely important source of income for poor West Indians, especially between about 1880 and 1924, the great age of emigration, and again after 1945.

For most West Indians, poverty was an inescapable fact of life. An impressive array of missionaries and clergymen, officials and commissioners, journalists and writers testified to the appalling material destitution endured by the masses of the people. Impoverishment was especially severe in very small islands with precarious resource endowments, like Saint Kitts, Anguilla, or the Bahamas "Out-Islands." In these places actual hunger and outright starvation were experienced at times; in "normal" circumstances people hovered at the edge of subsistence. Generally speaking, conditions were usually better in the larger colonies, yet even here thousands lived in great poverty. In Guyana the creole laboring population was showing signs of increasing distress by about 1880, prompting the government to investigate the extent of poverty in the coastal villages and the need for relief. In Trinidad the condition of the Indian sugar workers living in the central and southern parts of the island was especially desperate by the 1930s. Their wages were both low and irregular, their diet was inadequate, and they suffered from a host of diseases caused mainly by poor food and bad sanitation. The Jamaican rural masses experienced grinding poverty, with particularly "hard times" in the 1860s and again in the 1930s. In the French Antilles, metropolitan observers as late as the 1950s spoke of the islands as "a panorama of disgrace and misery"; a member of the French legislature, in 1954, told the National Assembly that he defied anyone "to travel a mile through either Guadeloupe or Martinique without being appalled by what he can find out with his own two eyes."<sup>10</sup>

Survival in these conditions was a daily struggle. Some emigrated, some stayed but received money from relatives abroad; many had "family land" to fall back on, even if it could provide only the barest of needs; people did odd jobs or engaged in petty trading—what the Jamaicans call "scuffling" and the Trinidadians "hustling." It is important to note, moreover, that the people had a strong tradition of self-help and mutual aid. Poor as they were, they helped relatives and friends, they took in destitute children and elderly people, with a real spirit of generosity and sacrifice. W. M. MacMillan noted in his survey of the British colonies in the 1930s the "African generosity" of the people in sharing the last crumb with very poor relatives and friends.<sup>11</sup>

The consequences of poverty were squalid living conditions, ill health, and misery. Housing for the masses of the people was appalling: most lived huddled together in primitive huts (the *case-nègres* of the French Antilles), or in tiny rooms in plantation barracks, or in shacks or barrack-range rooms in the urban slums. Overcrowding often reached unbelievable levels, and sanitation and ventilation might be almost nonexistent. Conditions were perhaps equally bad in the hut of the impoverished peasant farmer and in the barrack range on the estates, though the peasant probably had a degree more security and privacy. On many plantations, the old slave barracks—the "nigger yard" in the vivid Guyanese phrase—were simply fixed up for the indentured Indians, or new ranges were built for them—"bound" or "Coolie" yard. By the 1930s most larger plantations had phased out barrack housing for their married workers, providing instead crude wooden or earth huts, an improvement in terms of privacy if nothing else. Yet the Royal Commission, which investigated social conditions in the British colonies in 1938–39, was appalled at the housing conditions of the poor, "conditions are such," it noted, "that any human habitation of buildings now occupied by large families must seem impossible to a newcomer from Europe." The poorer West Indian child, the commission went on, "may know only a small unlighted hovel with wooden shutters tightly closed by night in order to shut out evil spirits or thieving neighbors. Privacy of any sort is impossible when a family of ten or twelve have to sleep in one small room, some on the floor, some under the bed, some in it, and all in a stifling and foul atmosphere."<sup>12</sup>

Of course, these conditions affected the family life and health of the people who endured them. Because of poverty, unbalanced diet, bad water supplies, and appalling housing, the West Indian masses were chronically ill. Epidemics of cholera, smallpox, and typhoid swept the region from time to time. Endemic diseases like malaria were only brought under partial control in the 1920s and 1930s. Hookworm infestation, caused by bad sanitation, was chronic nearly

everywhere up to the 1940s, debilitating its victims. Venereal diseases were rampant, and so was yaws, an infectious skin disease: in the small island of Saint Lucia, over 1,000 cases of yaws were treated in 1935 alone. Tuberculosis, a classic disease of poverty, was the single most important cause of adult deaths in Jamaica in the 1930s. After the 1920s–30s, adult death rates began to fall steadily as the major killer diseases were brought under control, and infant mortality rates also declined in most places after about 1945; but preventable, nonfatal conditions and diseases which brought debility and suffering to the victims were still very widespread. Even minor problems like a cut or a bad tooth might become serious because medical care and medicines were unavailable or too expensive for ordinary people.

The plight of infants and children was grave; infant and child mortality was extremely high everywhere until after the 1930s. This, of course, was due to poor maternal and child nutrition, as well as bad water supplies and sanitation. Working mothers often had to stop breast-feeding after the first few weeks (if their milk had not already failed because of poor diet), and milk was expensive. Infants received gruel or "pap" which was low in nutritional value and often the source of gastric infections. In addition to malnutrition, babies and children were especially vulnerable to a host of infectious and diseases. In Grenada, around 1890, nearly one-half of all the babies born to poor mothers died before their first birthday. Of all babies born alive in Jamaica in 1896–97, 17.5 percent died before their first birthday and 26.8 percent before their fifth. In rural Martinique as late as 1952, infant mortality was calculated at 23 percent, long after adult death rates had entered a period of steady decline in the colonial Caribbean generally.

Moreover, medical care was not available to most ordinary people before the 1960s. In Guyana, nearly half of all the deaths recorded in 1871 took place without any medical care at all for the dying person. In Jamaica, the sick poor rarely got to a doctor; by 1898 there was only one doctor per 19,400 Jamaicans, and 75 percent of all deaths in 1896–97 took place without any medical intervention. As late as the 1950s, *Le Monde* reported that only about a quarter of Martiniquan patients needing hospital treatment received it because of a shortage of beds. Indeed, most West Indian peasants and rural laborers up to this period probably looked to the local healer, village midwife, or Obeah-man/woman (*quimboteur* in the French Antilles) rather than to the formally trained doctor for medical and psychological aid in times of illness.

### Religious Practices and General Culture

Religious faith and practice were important aspects of the lives of West Indians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Most were deeply religious and their whole way of life and thought was profoundly influenced by their faith. By the mid-nineteenth century, most of the people were already Christians or at least under Christian influence as the various churches and missionary bodies extended their work in the region; the Christian presence was by then very deep and permanent, in both its Roman Catholic (the French Antilles, Trinidad, Saint Lucia, Grenada, Dominica) and its Protestant (Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados) manifestations.

At the same time, African religious influences remained strong. African beliefs in the spirit world, the idea of a person having several souls or spirits with different functions, concepts of death and the afterlife, and many other African religious rites and practices continued to shape the way West Indians looked at the world. Although some blacks, especially those who personally remembered Africa or who had been influenced by African-born relatives, managed to practice their religion almost unchanged, it was more usual for them to merge African and Christian beliefs and rituals; syncretic Afro-Christian religions and sects emerged and flourished in the century after about 1860. The religious scene was further complicated by the arrival of large numbers of Hindus and Moslems from India. Though the majority of Indians kept their faiths, some accepted Christianity, and here too some syncretism between Hinduism and Christianity, sometimes with African religious elements added, began to emerge.

The well-established Christian churches, whose ministers were mainly Europeans and who looked to Europe for leadership and guidance, enjoyed the most prestige among all the social groups in the Caribbean just after emancipation. Over the next hundred years there was, to some extent, a shift in membership among black West Indians from the established churches to the various fundamentalist Protestant churches or sects introduced into the region mostly by American evangelists, such as the Church of God, the Church of the Nazarene, the Seventh Day Adventists, and the different Pentecostal churches. Still, in 1938 as in 1980, nearly every West Indian of African descent could claim formal membership in a Christian church or sect.

Yet belief in spirits was almost universal among the masses, and much of the African spirit world was still alive in their minds. The Obeahman/woman—the magical specialist who could control spirits to harm someone, or, if he or she chose, to cure and heal and ward off ill-intentioned spirits—was a powerful

figure in the rural communities of the Caribbean well into the postwar period. Lafcadio Hearn thought that in the Martinique of the 1880s the quimboiseur "wields more authority than the priest, exercises more terror than the magistrate, commands more confidence than the physician,"<sup>13</sup> though all his clients were, of course, Mass-attending members of the Roman Catholic church. The quimboiseur and the French priest coexisted, and the former was probably more important to people's daily lives. At death, Catholic rites and creolized African practices marked the passage to the afterlife.

Powerful Afro-Christian faiths emerged after the mid-nineteenth century, combining Christian and African beliefs, rites, and deities/saints. The dominant form of Jamaican popular religion after the 1860s was Revivalism, a movement that linked several Revivalist sects, all featuring practices like visions and trances, spirit possession, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and healing by touch, by water, or by other means. Revivalism satisfied the people because it combined their deepest African beliefs with Christianity, as well as giving them a chance for leadership, for it was usual that a Revivalist congregation would be dominated by a strong leader or prophet, man or woman, like Alexander Bedward who led a Jamaica-wide Revivalist movement between the 1890s and the 1920s. Many other territories developed similar sects and prophets, who were usually faith healers as well as religious leaders, using special rites often involving water and traditional herbal remedies to cure and comfort the sick. The ordinary West Indian might well prefer to go to a balm-yard (as the healer's place was known in Jamaica) rather than to a doctor or clinic, not only because the healer cost less, but also because he or she could offer advice and comfort for emotional problems as well as cures for physical ills.

The West Indian people sought relief from the harshness of their material existence in the world of religion, and in traditional festivals and popular celebrations. Most of the territories had some kind of traditional Christmas celebration which was often held right through to New Year's Day. In Jamaica the main Christmas festival was called Jonkonnu and it featured costumed troupes, street processions, miming, dancing, and musical bands. The festival combined West African characters with traditional English mimming figures. Jonkonnu was also held (with variations) in Nassau (Bahamas) and in Belize City. Many other colonies had Christmas festivals involving costumed or masked figures, processions, and street music, sometimes with troupes performing elaborate skits in public or in people's houses.

While these traditional Christmas celebrations seem to be chiefly found in the Protestant islands (Jamaica, the Bahamas, Belize, Saint Kitts, Tortola, Ant-

gna), the pre-Lenten Carnival was definitely associated with Catholicism. It was in Trinidad (British since 1797 but strongly Catholic) and in Martinique that Carnival was most fully developed. It combined, of course, Catholic and southern European influences with African traditions. With emancipation, in both islands the black masses were now free to take part in the white folks' Carnival as they chose, and gradually it was transformed into a much more rowdy, lively, popular celebration, centered on the streets of Port of Spain, Saint Pierre (before 1902), and Fort-de-France. There were traditional costumes, characters, and "bands" (groups of costumed masqueraders), ritualized dancing and stick fighting between the champions of rival bands, street processions, and the singing of topical songs on people or events (which developed, around the turn of the nineteenth century, into the modern calypso). Although the Trinidad Carnival came increasingly under official control after the 1880s, with many of its more risqué costumes suppressed on grounds of obscenity and its band fights largely put down, it never lost its liveliness or its anarchic folk spirit, out of which both the calypso and later, the steel band, would emerge.

Other popular festivals were held on the first of August in the British colonies to mark Emancipation Day and often also to celebrate Cropover (the sugar harvest), and on All Souls' or All Saints' Day in all the Catholic territories, French and British. At all these festivals, dance was important; indeed, it was crucial to the culture of the people. Traditional African dances survived in many places, like the Que-Que dance performed in Berbice (Guyana) up to the 1950s by people who considered themselves to be of Ibo origin. It involved drumming, songs (which referred to the Ibo Nation), and dancing in a circle. People of the Cromanti (Ashanti) and Congo nations held their own dances with different dance steps and drum beats. Similar Nation Dances were held, for example, in Grenada and Carriacou. In the French islands and the French-influenced British colonies (Trinidad, Saint Lucia, Grenada, Dominica), the main traditional dances were the Calenda, the Bamboula, and the Belair; the latter word was also used for the calypso-like song that was sung in *Créole* as part of the Belair dance, also known as *biguine*. These traditional dances and songs reflected a French-Creole-African complex that linked Martinique and Guadeloupe (and Haïti) to Trinidad, Saint Lucia, Grenada, and Dominica.

Of course, more modern forms of recreation were also important to the people. Horse racing was a great popular passion in all the larger colonies, attended by people of all classes and races and involving a great deal of gambling, cheating, drinking, and fighting. Indeed, gambling was an important aspect of folk life everywhere. Chinese number games were popular, like

*whé-whé* in Trinidad and *pedra pow* in Jamaica, both illegal. The Creoles of the British colonies were mad on cricket; one of England's most successful cultural transplants to its colonies. Every open space would become a cricket pitch, an oil tin would serve for wickets and a palm-leaf rib for a bat. At the higher social level cricket in each colony tended to be dominated by upper-class organizations, mainly if not exclusively white until the 1950s, but it had a genuinely popular following everywhere.

From the early 1900s, the modern mass media penetrated the region: the cinema, radio, cheap newspapers, and, finally, television after 1960. They were all vehicles for transmitting Euro-American values and ideas and for spreading the gospel of modernization, consumerism, and middle-class Western lifestyles.

The formal education systems established in all the colonies in the nineteenth century were also, of course, extremely influential in shaping social development and cultural change. After emancipation, local and metropolitan governments moved slowly to establish systems of public primary education, which involved in some cases church schools in receipt of state grants, or a combination of state-aided church schools with government-controlled secular schools. Of course, most upper-class West Indians (and many metropolitan officials too) were at best lukewarm about spreading education among the children of the masses whose only role in life was to be field laborers. A retired Trinidad inspector of schools commented in 1898, "How often have sugar planters and others said to me, 'what do you want to educate little niggers for? Put hoes in their hands and send them to the cane pieces.'" It was the mentality of the prominent Guyana planter and politician who is said to have muttered, when he heard about a newly qualified black lawyer, "another good shovelman spoil."<sup>14</sup>

With these attitudes among the upper classes and many officials as well, it is easy to understand why funds for primary education were always very limited and at times were cut altogether. Elementary schools, especially in the countryside, were often badly housed and very poorly equipped; teachers were miserably paid and inadequately trained (often they were untrained). Though most West Indian children did attend a primary school, irregularly, for a few years by the 1930s, both enrollment and attendance levels were quite low. In 1937, while 88 percent of the children aged six to fourteen were enrolled in school in Barbados, the proportion was under 70 percent in Belize, 51.5 percent in Grenada, and only 46.5 percent in Saint Vincent. And average daily attendance rates were always far below enrollment: in 1937, average attendance as a percentage of those enrolled could be as low as 57 percent (Saint Lucia) or as

high as 74 percent (Barbados). On the whole, the French did better in their colonies: the assimilation policy tended to dictate a higher level of expenditure on education, and greater efforts were made by the French to reproduce in the Antilles the full range of curricula and amenities found in metropolitan schools. By the 1960s Martinique and Guadeloupe probably enjoyed overall a stronger public education system than the British colonies. In 1966, 96 percent of the children aged seven to fourteen attended a school in the French islands as compared to 60 percent in Jamaica in 1960; 31 percent in the age group ten to nineteen attended some secondary institution as compared to only 5 percent in Jamaica.

Until after the war, secondary education was largely the preserve of upper- and middle-class children in the British colonies; only a tiny handful of children who passed through the primary schools ever got to one of the secondary institutions. Most of their pupils were white or colored, with a few blacks and (in Trinidad and Guyana) a sprinkling of Indians by the 1930s. They offered a highly elitist form of education, based on the English upper-class public or grammar school—just as the French lycée, established in the Antilles after 1880, followed the identical curriculum and used the identical textbooks as the metropolitan model. Because so few children from peasant and working-class families could gain entry to the secondary schools before the 1950s or 1960s, they served to deepen and sharpen class distinctions.

Yet with all its deficiencies the system of formal education established in the Caribbean colonies was a major social force. By the 1950s most West Indians were more or less literate in English and French, and that in itself was a major achievement. Education had also played a key role in shaping the growing middle class: the school was one of the most important social institutions allowing for upward mobility. The schools spread European values and culture among all sectors of society. They spread knowledge of French in Martinique and Guadeloupe where *Créole* was the popular language. In British colonies where English was only a minority language such as Trinidad or Saint Lucia in the nineteenth century, the schools were probably the most important means for the gradual advance of English at the expense of the French *Créole* spoken by the masses. Where there were large numbers of Indians as in Trinidad and Guyana, the schools helped Indian children to adjust to their new societies and adopt some Western ways as well as the English language. Clearly, the schools were modernizing, westernizing agencies which spread European culture and values among the people.

In this they were especially successful in the French Antilles. The schools transmitted French language, literature, and culture; they offered a strictly

metropolitan education, and any effort to modify it to meet "special colonial needs" was indignantly rejected by the middle class and those who aspired to that status. In short, they created an elite of good Frenchmen and women who, in comparison with the elites of the British colonies, had a far deeper attachment to France and French culture and a far greater alienation from their own societies. It is true, of course, that the provision of substantial material benefits by the metropole, especially after 1946, contributed to the French Antilleans' sense of identity with France. Yet, all in all, the Antilles seemed to represent France's greatest success at "assimilation" and the *mission civilatrice*. What assimilation did was to offer human and civil rights to French West Indians, but at the price of denying their cultural rights: it necessarily meant the suppression of West Indian culture and encouraged cultural alienation among the upper and middle strata to a far greater degree than British colonialism produced in the British West Indies.

Yet the decades since the 1940s have been marked, in the French Antilles as well as in the English-speaking territories, by a search for an original and authentic Caribbean culture. The elites were largely preoccupied with demonstrating their command of European culture and their intellectual "equality" with their metropolitan counterparts, but after the war a minority split away and made contact with the people, drawing inspiration from popular cultural and religious forms and trying to express in literature and art their aspirations and their anger. This movement, which had first begun in the islands with political independence (Haiti, Cuba), slowly spread to the colonial Caribbean, first to the British islands, finally to the French colonies, where, we have seen, the attachment to French culture was especially deep. It was characterized by an interest in popular languages (*Créole*, English Creoles), in Afro-Christian religion, in folk forms of dance and music, and in the daily lives of the masses. By the 1960s and 1970s this movement toward cultural authenticity was in full bloom. It was the counterpart of the contemporary search for effective national sovereignty, self-propelled economic development, and substantial social justice; and even if it was less compelling politically, it was just as important for the long-term prospects of the Caribbean people.

## Notes

1. Fernor, *The Traveller's Tree*, pp. 147-49.
2. Livingstone, *Black Jamaica*, pp. 165-68.
3. Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*, pp. 163, 166.

4. Guérin, *The West Indies*, p. 38.
5. A. Corré, *Nos Cètoles* (Ewreux, 1890); quoted in Remard, "A Social History," pp. 428-29.
6. Quoted in Moore, "East Indians and Negroes in British Guiana," chap. 7.
7. Guérin, *The West Indies*, pp. 37-38.
8. Brian Weinstein, "The French West Indies," p. 257.
9. Hearn, *Two Years*, pp. 243-47.
10. Quoted in Guérin, *The West Indies*, p. 13.
11. MacMillan, *Warning from the West Indies*, p. 114.
12. *West India Royal Commission, 1938-39, Report*, pp. 174, 227.
13. Hearn, *Two Years*, p. 181.
14. Brereton, *Race Relations*, p. 77.

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 Colin A. Palmer

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## Identity, Race, and Black Power in Independent Jamaica

**W**hen Jamaica became an independent nation in 1962, it adopted as its motto "Out of many, one people." Although many Jamaicans firmly believed that their motto was an accurate reflection of their social reality, more dispassionate observers were convinced that at best it was an expression of the national ideal and, at worst, a conscious exercise in self-delusion. Few could maintain with confidence that black Jamaicans who constituted a majority of the population wielded economic power, shared an abiding pride in their racial heritage, or even possessed a high degree of racial consciousness and identity.

It is clear, nevertheless, that one of the most agonizing and protracted struggles that the Jamaican people waged in the last half century has been that aimed at creating a racial identity. The majority of Jamaicans, probably as high as 90 percent, can make claim to an African ancestry. Yet many of these persons, particularly those who constitute the middle classes, or the more privileged sectors of society, find it difficult to come to terms with their possession of a black skin. On the other hand, many lower-class black Jamaicans have often espoused a fierce racial pride which provided them with psychic sustenance in spite of their awful material circumstances. The Rastafarians, who drew their inspiration in part from Marcus Garvey's slogan "Africa for the Africans, at home and abroad. One God, One Aim, One Destiny," have been most prominent in keeping alive the flame of a black consciousness in Jamaica and a strong identification with Africa.

This chapter examines the quest for a black racial identity in Jamaica, particularly after the achievement of universal adult suffrage in 1944 and as Jamaicans began the slow march to political independence in 1962. It focuses on the societal tensions that this search generated, analyzes the interplay