



**RACE, CLASS AND ETHNICITY:
A CARIBBEAN INTERPRETATION**

**The Third Annual Jagan Lecture
presented at York University on March 3, 2001**

by

Lloyd Best

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Publisher, Managing Editor, Trinidad & Tobago Review
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Abstract

"From Belize and Havana to Cayenne and Paramaribo, there is currently a crisis of Caribbean civilization...." Thus begins this unflinching analysis of Lloyd Best into the present Caribbean politico-cultural malaise - an analysis in which no historical figure or ideology is deemed beyond the need for critical reassessment, and in which the urgent need for a creative new departure is emphasized. Asserting that the promise of independence in the Caribbean was never realized, Best calls for a new beginning that eschews the superimposition of imported theories, values, and knowledge. He implores the people of the Caribbean, instead, to creatively seek a new understanding of their region in order that it may become, in Best's phraseology, its "own first world".

PREAMBLE

I'm delighted to have been invited to deliver this Cheddi Jagan Memorial Lecture and to do so in a community format so that we can focus on practical problems and compelling issues. I'd like to thank the Committee of CERLAC both for organizing the series and for providing me this opportunity to come once again to Toronto to share ideas with the Caribbean Community in a very welcome renewal. A particular word of appreciation to Chandra and Ramabai who have already proved such solicitous shepherdesses. I feel as if I am at home, as in the glorious days of the 1960s and 1970s when I was in Canada so often and appeared repeatedly on the electronic media as well as before University audiences.

Speaking under the aegis of the Jagan Memorial is to me appealing because Dr Jagan is one of the few Caribbean leaders for whom it is not necessary to fake admiration. As you, I have profound disagreements with the whole transitional generation, however broadly or narrowly defined, whether revolutionary scholar-practitioners or not, older or younger.

But among them, Cheddi stands out for integrity and devotion to duty. He may have made costly mistakes; his brand of Caribbean radicalism might not have been the most imaginative or the most fruitful on the ground but what to me is winning is that he believed even in the most patent contradictions of what he had become committed to and he never flinched – not even from the most absurd consequences such as providing critical support to Burnham, his arch antagonist and tormentor.

When Cheddi finally gave up the ghost, my obituary notice described him as “brahminic”. He was priestly in his ministrations; The West on Trial chronicles the journey that made him so catholic in his concern for the lame and the weak and for which we cannot but salute him. I have had the added advantage of having been one of two UNTAB Planning Advisers to his 1961 Administration. I know what a gentle person he was – his ideological stubbornness notwithstanding. He was also a very handsome man with limitless charm. You had to love him and after we parted company, I came to realize that I did and I'm happy to admit it now in retrospect.

I recall I first met Cheddi in 1961 just after the Black Friday riots triggered by the Budget

proposals of my former Cambridge Economics Teacher, Nicky Kaldor. President Kennedy had said that he would send a mission to British Guyana to sift the possibility of giving economic assistance. People had sug-

gested that I be asked to serve as the Guyana professional on the team and Secretary. I would decline and go to the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes at the University of Paris from which I'd return for UNTAB within a year, after a stint in teaching and research with Professor Charles Bettelheim, then Consultant to the Government.

What I remember most from that first encounter was the simplicity and directness of Dr Jagan's method, quite the opposite of his celebrated rival's artful teasings. We spent a whole afternoon exchanging ideas in the Red House, the Prime Minister's official residence on King Street. We had a delicious lunch of white basmati rice and curried *bassa* (in Trinidad, *cascadoo*) with green salad. We both wore the then insurrectionary shirt jack in very elegant fashion. Soul brothers enjoying a great

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sense of anticipation on the basis of what turned out to be false premises. The memory, however, will endure and abide.

This evening, I feel bound to attempt, admittedly in only a skeletal sort of way, what I wish now could have the subject of our trading that memorable November afternoon. I think we owe it to ourselves to set out a theory or an interpretation of Caribbean society dealing in the issue of race, class and ethnicity but doing so in deliberately Caribbean terms. I would say that, as the indispensable point of departure, that is what we needed then, forty years ago, when we were still innocent, as we need it now, two generations later, when we are more traveled and hopefully wiser.

A CRISIS OF CARIBBEAN CIVILIZATION

From Belize and Havana to Cayenne and Paramaribo, there is currently a crisis of Caribbean civilization, which is a genuine crisis, first, because so many of us do not even suspect it – though developments in Trinidad are making it impossible not to take notice; and second, because it reduces to a crisis of self awareness.

In Trinidad, over the last year, there has been a recurring stand-off between the two branches of the Executive, the President as head of the ceremonial branch and the Prime Minister as head of the effective and instrumental branch. The gravity or hilarity of the encounter has only been enhanced by the accident through which two old foes have been obliged by circumstances nobody planned to collaborate in spite of themselves and to elevate each other to their respective thrones.

There is other detail but the essence of this situation is that this unprecedented quarrel within the hitherto exalted and impregnable one-man leadership has exposed the absurdity

and obsolescence of one-man rule all over the Caribbean. Not only in government and politics but also in every steel band and every football side, maximum leadership, Doctor Politics, central domination and personal power are an article of faith by which equal participation by the great majority is systematically frustrated.

While the people on Robinson's side perceive the problem only from Panday's antics, those on Panday's side perceive it only in terms of Robinson's manoeuvres. Since Robinson has now, to all intents and purposes, succeeded Williams as leader of anti-UNC forces by entering into the breach left by a hapless Manning, the whole country is now seeing the problem, admittedly from different angles of vision.

The upshot is this. Whether the Afro-Saxon regime was established since we've enjoyed self-government in the 1940s, or since we gained Independence in the 1960s, it is suddenly under threat. Whether the incumbents are Indos or Afros, it seems to be the same khaki pants. The public has come to realize that many arrangements, institutions and agencies are outmoded. Many methods, procedures and attitudes are simply outworn.

Many have discerned that the running quarrel between the Chief Justice and the Attorney General is merely another symptom of the same disease. As is the enduring failure of CARICOM to achieve meaningful results to help ordinary people. People also see that the quarrels over the Caribbean Court of Appeal have more to do with jealousies over power and succession rather than genuine concerns with the improvement of justice and the removal of dispossession and disadvantage.

Suspensions are heightened by the anxiety of the CARICOM leadership over developments in T&T and the willingness to precipitate a brokered solution lest the whole cover of one-man rule in the Caribbean is somehow com-

pletely blown. It seems possible that we are witnessing the end to the old dispensation under which Independence and Integration have come and gone. After more than 40 to 60 years, nobody quite knows where we have been transported by the popular movement that the labour movement served to trigger in the 1930s by the region-wide disturbances that threw up Manley, Bustamante, Bird, Bradshaw, Butler Adams and later opened the gate to Williams, Jagan, Burnham, Manley, Seaga and many others.

It is this new sense of anticipation that has generated impetus for explaining anew how Caribbean civilization actually works and what is the next step. The emerging young generation has hitherto been completely turned off by the sense of stasis and stagnation. It rejects the idea that the Caribbean is not its own first world but somebody else's third. The new generation wishes to advance not simply from proletarian agitation and violence to expert negotiation by technically competent and confident cadres: it wishes to become the proprietors of the landscape and governors of the dew.

For the first time in over nearly two generations, the explosion of discussion in the media and everywhere else has presented to the young generation a view of themselves as the subject and makers of history, not simply the object and takers. Those who favour the status quo have been complaining of tension and possible unrest and even racial and ethnic confrontation and violence.

In practice, nothing in that vein has occurred. The country has proceeded to Carnival as the central rite of the civilization. There is no doubt but that we have a sense of a revolutionary new dawn with something about to happen. It could lead to new alignments and new politics altogether but somehow with no

suggestion of violence or military activity.

The main instigators of lawlessness and recklessness are the official representatives both in government and opposition. A consistent 40 percent of the electorate stays away from the polls and the largest single force in the country might well be those who opt for None of the Above.

This is an entirely novel situation. It dictates that, instead of the tired and mechanical models the old generation has systematically imported from the experience of the North Atlantic, Marxism and Liberalism in particular, we should now seek a whole new interpretation, derived organically from Caribbean history and set in Caribbean institutions and culture.

This is where we're reached. The objective of this evening's presentation is to provide us a relevant sketch by way of a new beginning. I think that this is what Dr Jagan would have been looking for had he been able to come back as a young student.

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PUTTING SOMETHING FRESH ON THE TABLE

Now you've seen I read that. I don't usually read what I have to say but I read that because I wanted to put it on the record in that particular kind of way. And I also wanted to get it over quite quickly.

I know I have about three-quarters of an hour or so to put something fresh on the table, which I have arrived at after 40 years of very hard speculation and resisting all the blandishments of established theory. I would say as an introductory statement that I think that the origin of the Caribbean disaster under conditions of independence – almost 40 years

of hardly advancing, internecine warfare between one-man parties – I think that the origin of this disaster is the failure of self-knowledge. Though for a very good reason, in that the interpretation that we have of ourselves is always made in the third person. Through the eyes of the Other.

The situation before and after emancipation in many ways dictated that as the optimum solution since in order to become free we first had to become the colonizer. Norman Manley said it very elegantly when he said we had to acquire “fitness to rule.” That is to say, we had to see ourselves as the Colonial Secretary saw us, or as did the Minister of the Board of Trade.

And we produced a brilliant transitional generation, than which there was no better. So much so that, at the time of the upheaval in the 1930s and for a decade or so after, everybody expected the Caribbean countries to emerge as the “hotshots” of the formerly colonial countries. Nowadays it’s commonplace, in every interpretation, to say that we have fallen behind, and the Asian Tigers have gone, and we are still hoping to protect systems of non-reciprocity and preferences and sheltered markets, and old ways of doing business.

We had to write a document which we said was the most important document in the history of the country; it was titled ultimately “Time for Action: The Ramphal Report on the State of the West Indies at the Junction of the 21st Century”, and we could not get those studies off the ground until we got a grant from CIDA. Or a grant from the UNDP or a grant from anybody. The West Indian governments wouldn’t put up a cent to do the most important study ever in the history of the country they serve.

And I am suggesting that it is not because the practitioners of leadership and politics were foolish, [or that they] they lacked capacity, that they lacked integrity, that they lacked in-

dustry, or commitment of any kind. You cannot have a catastrophe of such colossal dimensions out of personal inadequacy. We had to have been describing a system problem, larger than the individual.

But it is the paradox of that situation that we were riding such a tiger, nobody could take the time off to think through an interpretation based on our own experience from which we would be the centre of the world – like every other centre. And we have made catastrophic mistakes that we have now to correct. And fortunately, there is a ferment of anxiety in the world in the transition to the 21st century that compels us, at last, to face up.

Now there have been many interesting interpretations of the Caribbean. Very rich. But only in bits and pieces – I think, looking at it as a whole. Whether you take black power and the Garvey-ite interpretation, whether you take Marxism from Padmore and James or their descendents, or whether you take the liberal interpretations that are the mainstream for giants such as Arthur Lewis who based all his work on 18th and 19th century England – Ricardo, Adam Smith - and the classical economists and devised a model that was brilliant and adequate for everywhere in the world except the Caribbean.

I don’t say that as an indictment. When you go through the statement that we have made over the course of the last 60 years or so, you have a lot of experience to sift of people of very high quality. And nothing I am going to say wishes to dismiss any of that. I think it is wrong, quite frankly, because the premises are wrong, but you can say wrong things and say a lot of right things in between, so to speak. And there’s plenty of absolutely relevant and powerful stuff there. James is perhaps the top of the heap, and he’s so fertile that every time I speak I have to say that he was my mentor and friend and teacher. And there are many others.

But I think that what is wrong with the statement that we have fashioned over these years of adventure in speculation about the nature of the universe, what is wrong is that they all take the rest of the world as the centre from which to perceive reality. And I think we have to reverse that and examine the Caribbean from *inside* the Caribbean.

I was mortified in recent years to see that almost all the discourse about the Caribbean in the international order begins from the perspective that the Cold War is over and therefore we are no longer of any strategic significance to the United States. All the scholars start from there. Or “the money is now going to Eastern Europe, because you have the transitional countries.” Everything is determined in terms of what the rest of the world does to us, rather than how we see our own situation from inside.

And I think we therefore have to start the analysis by recognizing what it is that people do recognize when they do that, which is that the whole of America today is a giant creation of impetuses and impulses which have come from the rest of world or the continent but particularly from the North Atlantic – the Mediterranean countries of Europe certainly – and what these impulses confronted when they got to these parts.

So we need to recognize that the experience in America has created many different situations, but we can perhaps lump them into three. The first being the colonies of settlement in North America, where the people who came, came to own the place. And that has consequences that we have got to trace if we are to understand why North America is different from South America and the Caribbean. There are elements of North America in South America, of course; it's not neat. So Argentina and the south of Brazil – Sao Paolo – and much of

the Southern cone – Uruguay, certainly: these are really European settler countries in America, like the United States of America and Canada, if you abstract from the autochthonous population and from the maw in the American south where they are mainly blacks.

So, we have colonies of settlement of one character. We also have colonies of conquest, mainly in South America along the spine of the Andes. All these countries are really American countries – not European countries, not African countries; they are American countries of autochthonous population. Anybody who goes to Mexico sees immediately that Mexico is an Indian country, is an American country. They *talk* about Catholicism [in these countries], but Catholicism and the con-

quistador and the Spaniard were merely a garland about the neck of Americans who withdrew into the Andes as their defense against the conquistador and created all these countries down the spine.

It is a very different relationship to the landscape from what they have in North America and from what they have in the Caribbean, which is the third part.

The Caribbean of course consists of colonies of exploitation. I take the term from [Lowell Joseph] Ragatz, the American historian. And the important thing about the colonies of exploitation is that there is no autochthonous population to speak of; they eliminated it pretty quickly. And there are no settlers – no proprietors of the landscape who are intent on owning the place and running it from the start, [who] are escaping from where they came from and ... are establishing their own house.

In the Caribbean, the key thing - described most brilliantly by Edouard Glissant of Martinique – is [that it is] a place of introduced and transplanted populations. And that's the

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first thing about it: the population is not autochthonous and it hasn't come to own the place. What is important about it, is that the population has come as a proletarian population in a way that Marx did not understand. As a proletarian population also in a way that he *did* understand, which is that it came with nothing to bargain with but labour. And during the course of the 500 years, [this population] has still not inherited the landscape and become the proprietors.

Everything that we see - the shambles that we see, has to be explained in terms of that initial condition of being transplanted and introduced from another place, and therefore having no connection with the *secrets* of the seascape.

Secondly, the people come from many different places at many different times. Many different circumstances – they come from the Senegal basin, they come from the Congo basin, they come from the Niger basin, they come from everywhere. They have no concept of Africa before they left Africa. They discovered Africa in America.

The big issue of douglarization began among the Africans [from] requiring to find a common tongue, a common art, a common music, a common culture; of founding a new civilization out of many disparate pieces. It is only through the eyes of the colonizer that all blacks seem to be one. The problem would repeat itself with blacks and Indians. They think that it's new! It's a frightening gap in self-awareness that they think that the problems that Africans and Indians have did not exist right from the very start.

The first problem is the population is introduced and transplanted. The second problem is that the population is introduced from many different cultures and institutions and they have to make it anew in a new place. And the third thing is that they were colonized. So in addition to the adaptation to each other, to

one another, they also had to adapt to the straightjacket in which they were put by the colonizer.

C.L.R. James wrote that we were brought from Africa and thrown into modern industry and organization, and we either had to adapt or die. And we have lived. (If you write nothing else down when you leave here, write that down.)

What is going on in America all over is that we are founding new societies and Louis Hartz, the Yale scholar, wrote a book called "The Founding of New Societies". But of course he wrote it from a very Euro-centric perspective and treated all the new situations in terms of three types of outcome: The first outcome he described as "feudal outcomes," like Quebec, where people left Europe before the French and industrial revolutions and therefore came with a concept of the world that was pre-industrial. He thinks that Quebec can be explained very largely by what happened as a consequence. Methodologically I find it very fertile.

Then he says that there are "liberal outcomes," with those people who left after the Enlightenment in Europe and created liberal systems. That is North America, other than Quebec. Then there are "radical fragments". Those that came into existence after the industrial revolution had initiated mass societies – large numbers of people in the cities of Western Europe – and all the radical politics that ensued from that: unions and all the interpretations of the left. That is Australia, New Zealand as examples, and so on. You can see how that can be very fertile.

Well, it doesn't describe our case. Though unfortunate, almost all of the interpretations that the radical left – and all the parties in the Caribbean are radical left parties – proposed initially disappeared; after independence, there was nothing left of the Social Democrat there. That is why the European interpretation

makes no sense, because all the parties really are one fragment of Europe, in a sense.

So many of us have been educated, or mis-educated or half-educated in Europe – Naipaul says that the most provincial Universities that you could imagine are Oxford and Cambridge, where I was educated. He says they teach the economics of England and they teach it as the economics of the world! They appropriate the whole world within their concept. They have no concept that the rest of the world is somewhere else. And we go to these Universities and we're brilliant up there and we congratulate ourselves about how little we know about ourselves. [Laughter]

All the interpretations are interpretations like that given by Louis Hartz: very fertile. Or Marx. I think we have to jettison them for the time being. I don't say that as an indictment of them. They have tremendous power and they are fertile within their assumptions, it's simply that the assumptions don't fit - as Arthur Lewis proves convincingly. And he was a real giant, a real giant. He wrote a model that was fertile for the whole world and therefore Asia could take it and use it, as I said before.

But the assumptions didn't fit because the crucial thing about the Caribbean is that the population is not autochthonous. The whole theory of international trade in the Universities is based on the assumption that people produce for their own consumption, and they sell exports with the surplus of domestic output - the surplus of domestic output over domestic consumption. You have a surplus; you sell it abroad; you earn foreign exchange and you buy imports. That's the basis of all the models of all the work in economics. In the Caribbean, we begin our lives selling only exports! We never had domestic consumption, for home use. So all the models are just

wrong!

I sat down there in Cambridge University to listen to Nicky Kaldor and all the finest professors in the world and I go "What the hell is going on? You're not talking to me at all." I grew up on a sugar plantation, like Panday or Jagan, so I knew from my experience that these theories didn't make any sense – the assumptions don't make any sense! The whole of economic theory is pure foolishness as far as we are concerned. It does not describe the initial conditions under which production started and through which people were inducted into the system. I'll come to that presently.

While in all other situations that I know in the global order, the society founded the economy, in the Caribbean it is the economy that founds the society.

We have to have a very simple description of what happened. The first principle of science is to describe what is on the ground – what happened. Before you start to speculate to the extent that you can remain

clinical and objective, you need to find out what is there!

The most important thing about the Caribbean - after the fact that the society is not autochthonous, does not belong to the place - is that, while in all other situations that I know in the global order the society founded the economy, in the Caribbean it is the economy which founds the society. You have the economy first, and then you bring in society as labour power. It has to fend for itself and it has to grow up.

We need to describe our population – as Naipaul is doing in all his work, all his novels; he's our most clinical observer, so far. He is not afraid to say the truth of what he sees. We are inducted into the situation in a state of complete terror. We have nothing to bargain with except our labour. We own nothing, no concessions are made to what we know, what we bring, who we are. We are introduced and

we are transplanted. Therefore, given the other factors I have cited – the fact that there are many of us from many different places, and the fact that we are in the straight-jacket provided by slavery and indenture and colonialism - the most important single thing to us thereafter is to find a home. To find a community – to *found* a community. That is why ethnicity is at the root of everything else.

The extreme state of alienation in which we live, the complete loneliness - because all these people are not coming as families. They're all coming as individuals, including children, come as a child slave or a child indentured worker – you come to work! They have no idea of who your family is – they don't care about that. You are there as an individual, alone. I think that is the psychological pre-condition that pre-disposes a community to find any port in a storm. If that is your condition, then ethnicity becomes important.

What is ethnicity? I took the trouble to look in all the European dictionaries in English, French and Spanish – many, many generations of dictionary. Europeans have no idea what ethnicity means! You see the definition changing every time because of the total confusion about what ethnicity is.

Ethnicity is automatic solidarity. That is to say, you do not adhere to something; you don't think about it, you don't deliberate about it – you *belong* to it. You are in it because something about you – external to you – fits you into that hole. So you're not Indian because you thought about it; you're Indian because you're born so, as somebody put it. Or you're Muslim, or Hindu, or Orisha or whatever your religion is. It is not something you have reasoned about and decide you want to stay or you don't want to stay, you're in it because you're born into it. Or people fit you

into it: if you have the colour required or you come from the same place, or you work in the same environment, in the same situation and so on.

So ethnicity is not race, as you see in all the literature. It has nothing to do with race. Ethnicity has to do with automatic belonging, so that race is one basis of ethnicity, because you believe or are made to believe that if they are all one race, they necessarily have all the same interests.

Or if they are one class. I came to a conference in Canada about two or three years ago with a lot of French philosophers and we were talking about ethnicity. I put it to them that class is an ethnic factor. Marx understood that. That is why he thought that workers of the world would get together as soon as they met each other; they would recognize each other.

When I was a student at Cambridge University, I realized that public school boys were a race apart [laughter], from all the fast-bowlers we had on the cricket side. All the fast-bowlers were from the North of England and grammar school, and they were one stone lighter than all the fellows who were from the public schools in the South of England, and were the batsmen and the captain. Of course: two different races.

Class is race in Marx. That's what he and Engels saw. He saw that when you are from one class you are really a completely different genre of being. A different category of human animal.

So ethnicity describes many different bases of automatic solidarity, and this can be class, it can be race, it can be religion, it can be tribe, it can be clan, it can be homeland – like Trinidad and Tobago: Trinidadians and Tobagoans

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seem to be the same people. They are worlds apart! And I could tell you where I corrected scripts in the University of the West Indies, in the examinations, I could tell when I was correcting a Tobagonian as distinct from a Trinidadian: a completely different view of the world! [Laughter] Yes! Completely different worldview, a different civilization altogether – a different race of people! [Laughter]

We need to understand the concept of ethnicity and why it is a compelling requirement for people in the Caribbean on any basis whatsoever. People are so terrorized by the condition under which they come and are inducted into the civilization, that they hold onto any port in a storm. What the Caribbean has done, is encourage people to have ethnic solidarities of different kinds. So you might be a Tobagonian and a Muslim, and you're holding onto ethnicity on both bases. So what we have done – we have creolized ethnicity.

People live all these ethnic identities that are convenient to them. So you have a kind of paradox: ethnicity is not thinking about what you belong to, but being in it; but at the same time, thinking about how you can use all the possibilities to get out of this hole that you're in. [Laughter]

The paradox of it is that an equally compelling requirement as ethnicity is inter-culturation, or creolization, or douglarization. So that the business of making room to accommodate the other and sharing cultures on the margin is as central to the civilization as defining a separate identity to protect you for who you were when you came. The core existence of ethnic solidarity and creole integration is par for the course in the Caribbean. Both are absolutely necessary. Part of the complication is that people practice them both at the same time – they are compelled to. If you're in America and you've come from the Congo basin or from the Indo-Gangetic Plain or whatever it is, you have to live here; you have to survive here.

You need new Gods, so that the Indians in India don't recognize many of the Hindu practices that we find in the Caribbean. Everything has to adapt in the new situation. New language, new art – and Haiti is the extreme case of that; they have invented a new language, a new art, a new music, a new religion.

Voodoo is not what you read in the newspapers. It's a whole culture. When I lived in Haiti I could tell you that a woman could walk a hundred miles in the night. Nobody would touch her; nobody's ever drunk in Haiti. People drink a lot of *clairin*, the Voodoo white rum – but only in Church! [Laughter] You never see a drunkard. When I first went to Haiti, you could leave your car in downtown Port-au-Prince with everything you bought in town – nobody'd touch it! Leave it open – they won't steal a thing.

There's an article which I published in a book from a French anthropologist who describes all these things about what really goes on in Haiti, as distinct from what you read in the newspapers about violence and Voodoo and so on. There is that, too, but it is restricted to a particular part of the civilization in Port-au-Prince. But the country outside, where the bulk of the population lives in that culture, they have invented a whole new civilization where they don't allow the state to enter. There's no state – it's a society without a state. I can't go into detail here, but I want to tell you that you need a completely different reading or interpretation about what Haiti is about – quite different from what you read in the newspapers.

We are talking about a civilization of the Caribbean which is a civilization unto itself, forged out of these peculiar circumstances of our introduced population, of individuals coming in a state of terror who have to create a new society and who need both ethnicity and creolization at the same time.

We need to tell the story – once you postulate these founding conditions. You need first of all to know what happened; what accidents took place; what forces emerged from inside; what forces - what shocks hit the society from outside, and you have to explain empirically - you have to describe first and then explain empirically - what happened over time.

The next step in developing a proper theory of what happened in the Caribbean is to describe the stages of evolution of this thing, if you understand where it started. For the system as a whole and for all its sub-types. It's a lot of work! And nobody wants to do the work because all the rewards in political science are for all this foolishness about polling. All the famous people in political science [do is] all these damn foolish polls! Polls that tell you nothing! And they write books and they get large grants and they're very famous and so on. And they know nothing about the country, which is what is showing up now in Trinidad.

In the middle of an explosion of political consciousness - we have a country where The Express could sell 80,000 copies of the constitution one Sunday! People are reading everything, going to every meeting and so on, and nobody is citing anything that anybody ever wrote in the University of the West Indies. Nothing. And all the professors there are discredited in this debate. [Laughter]

Because a piece of work needs to be done, and - I don't want to indict the University, but I want to say the main person responsible for this not happening was Arthur Lewis, our best man! Because he was so bright and could use the culture that he imported so effectively, he thought everybody could do it. But everybody couldn't.

At the University of the West Indies - when he was principal and I was a boy, I got there at the age of 23 years when they recruited me, he needed to see that we needed some time off to integrate the social sciences by locating all of them in Caribbean institutions, and Caribbean history, and Caribbean culture. But they were so anxious to get people all these useless Ph.D.s and to prove that they had a good CV and so on, that nobody had the time to do any work! They had the time only to get promotion.

Therefore, the social sciences in the University all developed as bits and pieces borrowed from Malinowsky if it's Anthropology, and from Parsons if it's sociology, and Adam Smith if it's economics - or Keynes or Marx. Wherever they went to school - in Princeton, or Yale, or Stanford, or Cambridge - they felt that was the best place in the world.

The University of the West Indies and scholarship became an aggregation of little bits and pieces that nobody understands! That is what underdevelopment is: what they are describing as underdevelopment in all these countries is that the elites are educated in London and Oxford and Cambridge and they can't add up the bits and pieces! That is what they are calling underdevelopment because they can't understand it.

But there is no pristine condition called underdevelopment. I never used the term, not in 40 years. From the time I hear it I say "who say that?" [Laughter] And "Third World" and "South": we're in the North in Trinidad; how the hell we get in the South? [Laughter]

They say we are developing countries; so the developed countries stopped developing?

They're not developing countries too? It's foolishness!

The whole of the academic infrastructure that we imported from these Universities has to be thrown out - hook, line, and sinker! We have to start fresh by doing scientific work, really scientific work! There are no scientists; they are just repeating ideology that they pick up in some book. I want you to describe what you see! Tell me how it works! What it is! And theorize on the basis of what is in front of you. That's not going on in these Universities. [Applause]

So we need to describe *the initial conditions* – how the thing was set up, how it started. What were its properties? What were its laws of motion over time? What moves it? We are beginning to see that ethnicity is a fundamental principle of organization and of mobilization. It takes place on many different bases. We have to explain the behavior of individuals, of groups and communities, and nations and regions, and so on in terms of the laws of motion that drive people: the actors, whoever they are.

The most important thing about the actors in the Caribbean is that they are of two types. One is that you have the proletarians - the multitude of the people, and you have the proprietors. I have argued for 40 years (and the Marxists are going to kill me - those who are still here) that the important thing about Caribbean society is that it is *classless*.

People don't want to hear that at all, but I will show them right now. It is classless in the important sense. I am not talking about stratification; I am not talking about rank; I am not talking about hierarchy or status - you have that. You have differences in occupation and

wealth and so on. But class requires a concept of responsibility. You have to have different responsibilities in the place. The thing about the Caribbean is that everybody has the same responsibility, which is no responsibility at all! [Laughter, applause.]

The people who run the place, don't live there. Absentee investors set up the system and they live in London, or Marseilles. They live somewhere in Europe. They have overseers and managers and so on but the decision-making capacity and the capacity to say where expansion takes place, where investment takes place, that's somewhere else. So there is no class at the top.

In the Caribbean, you have no responsible class at the top nor one at the bottom. That is why “doctor politics” and maximum leadership are absolutely indispensable to the operation of the place.

The proletarians come and they don't own anything; they say, “Give me what is mine, let me go; all I want is my wage! Give me more!” They take no responsibility for the plant. A proletarian is only dealing with labour, as Marx

said. He takes no responsibility for the place, the decisions – “I don't care about that; let me go; give me what is mine.” You have no responsible class at the top, and you have no responsible class at the bottom.

The Prime Minister of Trinidad - my very good friend, we were in the same party. Robinson, Panday, and myself, in '81 we ran together. [Laughter] Basdeo Panday is always quoting me, saying that “Lloyd Best says that everybody in Trinidad is a second-class citizen, with no first and no third.” [Laughter] Nobody accepts that anybody is better than him. Nobody is allowing himself to be called “at the bottom.” We are all hoping for something to happen. But everything that happens is an act of God. We are not responsible for it at all. [Laughter]

That is why “doctor politics” and maximum

leadership and central power and personal domination are absolutely indispensable to the operation of the place. You have to have men who are going to tell other men what to do. One of the things we have discovered in the political system - people are learning about the political system - is that in the political system of Trinidad there is only room for one politician. That politician, he appoints everyone in parliament. Whether the man is elected or not he is nominated. Nobody can become a candidate if the political leader does not want him or her.

The lower house is a sham: it is not Westminster; there are no politicians there. The only politician is the leader! When he is the Prime Minister, he is the minister of everything! Everybody is his heir; it doesn't matter what you call them. That is why Panday could put anyone to act as Prime Minister, because they know it doesn't matter who walks in. They don't dare to make one decision in their own minds. He is the minister of everything!

The logical extension of this is that the leader of the opposition, although he is a political leader in his own right, does not dare to assert that. So Manning is the perfect opposition leader, because you want somebody who is not a politician to lead it. But when you do have one like Capildeo - Williams arranged it for Capildeo to go to the University of London and teach while he was in the opposition. [Laughter, applause]

Yes! And they both agreed on it, because they understood very well, in the system that they founded after independence, that there is room for only one politician. If you can get that and make the government change and you become the leader of the government, then you become that politician and the other man has got to find work somewhere else.

We are describing a political system that has its own properties. This political system was established under slave conditions, where the

governor was in charge of everything. Because they wrote a document in 1962 – a piece of paper, they write a text; Capildeo and Williams sit down in London and they [came to an agreement], and they drafted it, and they carried it back to Trinidad and that is the constitution... That is the piece of paper they passed through parliament.

What is going on is what the country has always known. CLR James said that the governor was the viceroy, he was the boss of parliament, he was the chief of the executive, and the head of the administration. Four in one, and one in four.

We have a political system that is quite different from what the paper says. The Westminster thing can't work. What happened last year and this year was that the contradiction between what was on the paper and what educated people think is the Constitution, and what people are actually doing... came to a head in the elections of 2000, December 11th, made that patent[ly clear]. Because Panday say "I want to appoint seven losers to the cabinet." And everybody agrees with that, at one level, because in the West Indies whatever the Prime Minister says is law - for everybody, including the President, except that the President was the Prime Minister. [Laughter] The President say "I don't want this... This is a Westminster thing, and there are conventions and ways of proceeding and so on; you can't do that." You have two things that you can't do – contradictions!

Of course we are beginning to see now, we are beginning to understand, that there is a gap in our knowledge; that all the things we really do - we never recognize until there is a crisis. All the things that we would like to do, because our self-esteem is boosted by being the colonizer, we write down on paper. That forces us to recognize the difference between formal cognition - schooling, books - and native intuition - instincts, the things that people do as a matter of course because of culture,

habitat, and tradition... That is the fundamental conflict that is now at large in the Caribbean.

It is a conflict that I am arguing is going to bring the Afro-Saxon regime down. You know what an Afro-Saxon is? An Afro-Saxon is an African practicing European institutions in America. [Laughter, applause] That is a tradition we have brought down from the past. All our brilliant sons have had to be that in order to survive. We want them to do that: first in the first class, great books and so on. As Arthur Lewis said, we have to deal with the colonizer on his own ground. And Arthur Lewis was also first in the first class, you know.

This problem that we have is inherent and the reason it is tragic is that it was necessary to our liberation. But the moment we were liberated, we wanted to be something else. So that the leaders that were carried over from before independence to after independence became a liability the day after precisely because they were such vastly good material before independence.

That is why, incidentally, Moses was killed by God. When Moses led the people into the promised land, he became immediately obsolete. All the rules that he had to develop to deal with the Israelites before they crossed the River Jordan, became useless under the conditions of freedom in a whole new place - the promised land. So God put him to sleep and said "Joshua, you take over." [Laughter]

The difficulties with the West Indies, with the practical situation, is that we can't kill these people. [Laughter] Worse than that, because they are the role models of the transitional generation, the next generation comes out just like them! Then the crucial question becomes in the Caribbean, how does the culture escape

from itself when it is reproducing its best examples?

The problem of the Caribbean is much more complex than ever assumed by CLR James, who is the most brilliant of them, or Cheddi, or Manley, or Coard, or Bishop, and so on. I read their statements and it's really hilarious to see the foolishness that people talk. They were talking about "seizing power" and all this kind of thing. You can't seize no power in the Caribbean: the Americans will put you out the next morning. [Laughter]

You have to understand that Rodney and all these things that they're lionizing is pure foolishness, you know. Any sane man reading this will ask: "What are you talking about, taking the power and so on; it does not make any sense." First of all, it does not describe the people as they are; it does not describe the complexity of the relationships. It does not describe the people as the center of anything – everybody is doing something for them. The whole thing has to be thrown out!

I hope I have said enough to suggest to you why this is so. We are now being forced to confront reality in the Caribbean, the reality of what we developed, how we developed it, how we traveled over the years before emancipation [and] after emancipation and then in the current period. One of the most crucial things that ever happened in the Caribbean was that by the 1930's we realized that all the adjustments we had made after emancipation had come almost to naught. There was a tremendous upheaval by labour. All over the Caribbean, not only English-speaking, and that ushered in a whole new stage of self-determination and self-government. What we found out was that you can only find out what the job is after you have gotten it. As everybody knows, you think of all kinds of things

before you get a job and when you go you begin to see complexities.

What has happened is independence has given us a hand-on responsibility, whether we like it or not. We developed many irresponsible habits in the days before - not because there was anything wrong with us or because we were inferior, but because we never had the chance to make the decisions, to take charge and run the place. Once we became independent, we got self-government and independence, we were compelled to take charge and we begin to find out what this place really is - how it works, what the conflicts are, real things! All the absurdities of these 40 or 60 years, of all these people in the University of the West Indies - the young socialists, describing all kind of fanciful things about what Lenin said and Plekanov, and all kinds...

We are finding out our real situation, we're coming to grips, we are learning and we are growing up. The reason I came here tonight was to give you a glimpse of the way we have to proceed methodologically in describing how the system started, how it evolved, how ethnicity was crucial and how class and race are merely bases of ethnicity.

All of this means we have to reconstruct the theory of Marxism, all of Marx's simplifications. Marx understood nothing about these countries – it was just speculation by someone living over there. Marx's great power was that he really understood what was going on in England. If you want to find out what was going on in England – perhaps in France, and perhaps Belgium, the low countries - in the industrial revolution, Marx is irresistible! It is not because he was a white man, or a stupid man, or an irresponsible scholar, it is that you can only find out about things that you know

about - where you can see it and deal with it! Marx was arrogant in the sense that he wanted to speculate about the whole world. About everything he did not know about - and we imported all of that!

I am suggesting we have to change that. We have to describe what happened and we have to follow it through. I would like to have the opportunity of doing that for you - helping to do that. We [at my institute] are certainly going to bring out a lot of work, quite a few volumes in the course of the next eighteen months, in which everything I am saying here - all the research to back it up is there: 40 years of work and so on.

But I wanted to come here tonight and just pose the problem in a way that would excite your fancy

and I hope that I have done so. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

[Applause]

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

Do you honestly feel that in the Caribbean – primarily in Guyana and in Trinidad and Tobago – that we can avoid inter-ethnic conflict, serious violence? Do you really think we can avoid it? Isn't that a stage we have to go through before we can move on to what you would call "reality"?

I don't take any teleological view of the kind that is implied in what you said. There is no stage that we have to go through, or have not to go through. Everything depends on our intelligence and what we do. There are no formulas. What is wrong with the Caribbean and especially the Left, which has been catastrophic in the region - all of them: Bishop,

Manley... Manley was the most catastrophic leader I can ever imagine. In Jamaica, he talked all this left-wing talk - totally irresponsible, things that he couldn't do.

What is wrong with the Caribbean is taking over all these formulas instead of being intelligent. Describing the situation in which you are and dealing with it and knowing that there are not answers to every question. There are not solutions to every problem, and no act of God is going to help either. We have to do it.

I don't think you should bracket Trinidad with Guyana. I see no sign of any violence in Trinidad. Of course, when I read the papers tomorrow morning there might be violence, but that still won't refute what I am saying. I don't see any fundamental basis for military or insurrectionary activity in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad is a one city-state. Guyana is three countries. To go from Georgetown to the Corentyne, it's an expedition. If you want to go up the Essequibo, it's two expeditions. But Trinidad, everybody in Trinidad, goes to Port-of-Spain everyday, if you know what I mean. Everybody in Trinidad has car, television, radio, telephone - everybody has got his techno. [Laughter] This is a completely integrated place in which the cultural integration has taken over. In every office and in every school, the integration is taking place. That is why 40% of the population is "none of the above." They do not support this ethnic thing - what you are calling the ethnic thing.

Of course there are genuine reasons why Indos should be in a party that is started by Indos. They all are in the same place. There are a hundred reasons why it should be so. Good reasons, from what I have said. Ethnicity is important. But that does not mean it is virulent. You don't have to convert racial organization into racism. What you have to do is to evolve, what I have proposed there: parties of parties. You have to recognize that there are good reasons for macro-mobilization. You then have to invent systems to add them up.

The first system is to add up self-awareness - which is lacking.

Guyana is such a backward place after Cheddi Jagan. Good friend of mine that he was, he did not do the work. Not because he did not do work: he did a lot of work. Not because he was not interested in poor people, not because he did not make a large contribution. But the framework within which he made it did not liberate the imagination of the Guyanese people because so much of it was dogma. Because he believed. We have to have the honesty and the straightness to say that, and we can still love him and admire him and see that he was a great man.

Guyana and Trinidad are two quite different places and I don't see it [ethnic violence] happening in Trinidad at all. All the conditions are assembled for complete integration in Trinidad - to the extent that we want complete integration. We don't want it completely! Because what the Africans have got to see in Trinidad is that all that they fought for - when the slaves and the maroons resisted the colonizers; that is what the Indians are fighting for now when they say "we want to keep what we brought with us." You can't have it both ways. If what we did in fighting against the colonizer in the days of slavery was valid in order to keep what Africans bought with them, how can you condemn the Indians for doing that now?

What we have to do is to understand it and become part of it and let them become part of ours. Because of the fertility of the communication, I am very optimistic that in Trinidad we are going to do that. One of the reasons why we are going to do it in Trinidad first is that the objective conditions are favorable to it, and secondly we have also done the work. I can't say that of many other places. [Applause]

I agree with all that you have said, but... it has left

me with the question of what the solution is... If you have a theory toward a solution...

I have a short answer to that: The solution is to understand it. That is half of it. You have to become master of what actually happened. I think that is what humbles you. Much of the violence that we have is an expression of impotence. Violence is another form of impotence. All this hitting out and killing people and so on: people do this when they are not in charge of themselves. When you have a complete command of the situation, you don't want to fight.

The real crisis is that the people who run the country are able to run it because they know nothing about it. That is what they were trained for.

Do you think that if we are able to understand ourselves, we in some way will be able to change others?

Yes, but we begin by changing ourselves - all of us. I think what the Caribbean really has to sell to the world is the process by which we have learned to do that. Precisely because the Caribbean is an introduced population, from all the continents.

There are Chinese from China - North and South, Mandarin and Cantonese. You have Africans from every part of Africa. You have Portuguese from Europe; you have English, Irish, Scotch, Dutch, Spanish. They are all there in the Caribbean and if we all discovered who we were, where we came from, and how we came to be what we are it will give us an enormous abundance of resources to deal with the rest of the world.

What we really have to sell to the world under conditions of globalization is the experience of making one society out all of these dis-

persed elements. What were the processes, and what were the costs and the sacrifices and so on.

That is why the University of the West Indies could earn enough foreign exchange for the whole of the West Indies to pay all its bills. Our University should be bringing 200,000 - 500,000 students from all over the world to Kingston, Bridgetown, and Port of Spain, to learn all I have been talking about. They'll pay foreign exchange for that. Many industries will be spawned from that.

[Regarding your assertion] that there is only one leader [in most instances of Caribbean national politics], regardless of the fact that there is an opposition: did you see that operational in the days of Dr. Williams, or is that only operational now?

Dr. Williams invented it. [Laughter and applause]

Dr Williams soon realized, though I don't think he started that way, that the crown colony system that he inherited in Trinidad could be used to legitimize central domination by the political leader. When he referred to cabinet in the government, or general consul in the party, he really meant himself to himself. He developed an elaborate system of not listening to anybody else.

All the people since then are just pale imitations. Except that Panday has raised it to a level almost approximating that of Williams. That has a very complex story, I can't tell here. It has to do with the fact that being leader of the Indos, he got a kind of legitimization that nobody else could get because the country realized that they had to give the Indos their turn after the Afros. Panday's emergence re-legitimated the political system and

gave him almost all the resources of incumbency that Williams had had, but which Williams had systematically lost, so much so that he actually gave up the ghost in 1981 voluntarily, some say.

I coined the concept of “doctor politics” not to deal with Dr. Williams... I saw what he was doing. I had a kind of illumination. I saw what the phenomenon was. I realized that it really had a much more generalized significance. I came into the business of exploring the nature of leadership in the Caribbean and its origins.

I am giving you some notions as to why maximum leadership is what it is. It has got to do with initial conditions of introduced populations and ethnic solidarity. Because once you have ethnic solidarity, in which people belong without a hearing, then you can only have one leader because nobody else is thinking.

The system of mobilization does not require you to think. If you are Indian you are already there before you start! You don't have to think about it. But if you join a serious party you have to deliberate and think about it and then issues become open. You have to evaluate - including people, and therefore the business of personal power does not arise. But if nobody is thinking, then the leader is the Messiah. He himself is an act of God.

You have painted a dismal picture... I accept the basic premise of all of that, but I am wondering if... there is a “best of breed” model or theorization that comes from the Caribbean itself or maybe even from outside the Caribbean experience, that we could use to advance? ... Or do we have to re-invent the wheel, which is effectively what you are saying? ...How do we move beyond the crisis that you have painted?

I thought I had gone beyond crisis. I said a crisis is only a crisis when you don't know about it. The more that you begin to get self-awareness and take charge of the materials and to understand how the machine works, a

solution is inevitable to the extent that there is a solution. Which is not always the case, of course. But then you can do nothing about that.

I haven't any gloomy picture – I am extremely optimistic. We understand how this place works, I understand it!

I am not pessimistic about anything. I think Trinidad is going to make a very big leap there. One of the reasons is that we were there. If TAPIA were not there, Trinidad would be a disaster. [Laughter] I am not the first person to say that. I think that the reason why Jamaica is a disaster is because we were not there. [Laughter] I saw it happening. I saw all my colleagues falling into all this foolishness about young socialists and all these Marxist incumbents just taking over the same theories because it made them popular and because, above all, it gave them resources.

I can tell you that when I started, the international left thought I was one of them. I have been to every continent, all kinds of things, I have been everywhere. When they found out I was autonomous, I had a completely different relationship with them. I had to get quite a different audience. The most reactionary thing in the world are these left-wing movements, let me tell you - in all these countries.

These are specific experiences and you cannot transpose Russian accidents into Caribbean accidents. We are going to have situations where change is possible, where accidents will take place and give us openings that we can exploit or not, and so on. But we have to do work to understand that we can't import these things from anywhere.

The generalities that you can import from other people's experiences are very few and very algebraic. They are not unimportant, but you have to understand them as algebra - not as arithmetic. Arithmetic is a special case; algebra is a transcendental generality. You need

to understand both. But you can't import the generality into the special case. The thing about x is that it has a particular value in every particular situation. [Applause]

I am interested in this opposition you presented us of formal cognition and native intuition, or, in other words, on the one hand we have theories such as liberalism and Marxism, and on the other hand we have the experience that comes out of history that might teach us better ways... What kind of intuition are we talking about? Could you go a little more into that idea?

Epistemologically speaking, we really do not know how people learn and we certainly don't know how a culture escapes from itself. Culture is a set of predispositions and preconceptions that you acquire without learning them and they govern what you feel. Education, formal education, tries to lead you out of that - that is what the word means. By helping you to formulate a whole lot of concepts that are not necessarily derived from what you feel, but from what you observe or what is pointed out to you.

There is a necessary disjunction between what you feel and what you think - between the formal cognition and the instinctual grasp that you have. But when you grow up in a single culture, the process of learning and knowing and growing, and ripening and maturing, is the process by which you articulate the links between these two worlds of reality. Therefore, for most of the time they are congruent. Though the process of innovation is when they are not. When one of them tells you something different and compels you, the clash compels you to reassess the whole position and that is how you get into new things.

But we don't know how it happens. We can only follow the promptings that come to us from inside or from outside. We can just embark on the journey by which you can achieve congruence.

Now what happened in all colonial cases, as Edward Said saw so brilliantly in Culture and Imperialism, is that you are always torn between two lovers. The requirement of becoming free compels you to become the colonizer first. You are always parking what Wilson Harris calls "sleeping resources."

There are things that come to your imagination but you discard them because they are not good business strokes, as they say in cricket. Cutting is a bad stroke. Driving in the front of the wicket is a good stroke. There are things that are good for you and things that are bad for you, and you neglect and ignore the things that are bad for you and you go with the things that make you like the colonizer. Because this is necessary [in order] to get yourself in the situation where you can be *not* the colonizer. That's the contradiction.

That is what creates this cleavage of persona and personality that is everywhere at large among Caribbean people. They need to fight different existences. I didn't have time to deal with this; I could have told you that the logical expression of this is *mas*. No, *mas* is not carnival; carnival is a central rite which includes *mas*. But *mas* is when you are always playing the Other. There are many different Others and you are making yourself like all the Others you have to deal with, for the purpose of lubricating society - for making relations easy.

There is a fabulous piece [by another author] that I published in The Review that describes what Trinidad life was like 40 years ago, and

how all the people were playing so many different roles at one and the same time.

It is not only that *mas* compels you to play many different roles, so today you are Catholic, tomorrow you are Hindu; today you are white, tomorrow you are mulatto. Depending on where you find yourself, you are all these things. The reason *mas* is necessary is that you have to do that; but the more intriguing thing is that *mas* also requires you play yourself in many different incarnations. So you are not only playing the Other you are playing yourself. So the Caribbean personality is very complex. A Trinidadian comes to Brooklyn, the first day he talking Yankee. [Laughter] The first day!

You have to understand why he or she does this. There are very good reasons why they do it. And we are doing it all the time. But *mas* is only one of these subversions that we adopt in order to relate to many different situations.

The other thing is calypso. It has very different variants in different countries. What is calypso? Calypso is saying what you're saying but not really saying it. It's always *double-entendre*. You have all the different meanings and you are exporting them and you are expecting different people to pick up different things. That is an essential string in the bow of the Caribbean personality.

But that is not all; there are many others. Wilson Harris talks about limbo. What is limbo? Limbo is making space where before there was none. Wilson Harris argues that when the slaves came into the Middle Passage from the very first day, in those holes where they were tied and chained down, there was no space. Figuratively, they already had to make space as a key adjustment. Even if it was physically impossible, they had to create a world of mind – so that the software is what we have always developed, not the hardware, we couldn't have the hardware – what we had were the resources of imagination. Caribbean

civilization is impregnated with this resource of software. We are very powerful, very rich, very fertile because of that.

So you have *mas*, you have limbo, you have calypso – you also have pan. What is pan? Pan is making music wherever you go and whatever you find. So you see the whole business of ingenuity, of imagination, of software to make the system work, is central to the civilization.

Mas is one of the expressions, and carnival is the place where you legitimate all these adaptations by one central rite. Once a year everybody comes out and you have pan, you have *mas*, you have calypso, you have limbo, you have everything and so on and people celebrate the things and then they go back to living this hell-hole we have down there. With all these Marxists. [Laughter]

To discuss the Caribbean without mentioning Cuba [is an oversight]... I would love to hear your viewpoint... Could you comment on that 40-year experience [under Castro]?

Yes, I want to and I did, in fact. I began by saying “from Belize and Havana, to Cayenne and Paramaribo.” I don't exclude Cuba from anything I said, though I think there are mitigating circumstances in the Cuban case because Cuba has been in a greater state of war than the other Caribbean countries – which are equally in a state of war, though they don't appreciate it. They accept their submission to the United States. Not that I am hostile to the United States. But I don't accept their domination.

Cuba was overtly dominated by the United States and therefore there is some partial excuse or cause for the ship that Castro is running. But I don't think Castro is a success. I don't celebrate him.

I like him very much. I go there to the University; I speak there. I'm working with cricket in Cuba. They've asked me to help them to start a league and I sent them a ton of stuff - of bats and pads and all the things. I'm in close contact with the English-speaking West Indians, of whom there are 1.2 million there in Cuba.

I am very sympathetic to Castro and to the regime but I don't think that he made the right choice. In 1959, '60, '61, when he said "I was always a communist" – you remember that? And he went over to the Soviet Union – I was very critical of that. I thought it was the wrong decision. I could see why he was tempted to do it, but I thought that if he understood all the things I have told you here tonight he would not have done it. And Jagan would not have done what he has done.

I am not indicting him. I am saying he did not have the information and he couldn't assemble the insight to see that the shot he had to play in 1961, when he chose the Soviet Union, was to choose the Caribbean. But he made the mistake of thinking that Cuba was a Latin American country.

Now when I went to Allende's Chile, and they heard that I was from the Caribbean, I kept asking them "What about Fidel? What do you think of him?" And they said: "*Es un poco tropical*". They say he is not a Latin American at all, he's tropical, from the Caribbean.

But he didn't understand that – he thought he could make revolution in Bolivia, and he never devoted the resources he needed to devote to the kind of speculation that I am talking about here tonight, to understanding the reality and of playing the shot of mobilizing the people who came out of sugar and the plantations all over the region, who would

have risen behind him. But he didn't know that.

So he's made a lot of mistakes. He's made a mess there in many ways. But you can see this is not a reason for opposing him, or for pulling him down or not recognizing his greatness. Because you can see what he is trying to do by what he has done, and what he has tried with education. He is not there to get women and money and so on, like most of these Caribbean politicians. They want to get to be Prime Minister to get all kinds of easy life.

Castro made real sacrifices and he's built a different civilization in some ways. With education, and health, and resources for the poor people. And when he has to choose between the poor people and the rich people, he knows how to choose. So he's in many ways superior to the Caribbean politician.

But on balance he made a catastrophic mistake by becoming a Marxist-Leninist. He said: "I was always a Marxist-Leninist and I am going with the Soviet Union." The Soviet Union was one of the most reactionary countries the world has known. Inside and outside. We have to describe what Stalin really did there. How that thing emerged and so on. I don't buy all the folklore. It doesn't fit with the facts. I have no use for them [i.e. the Marxists].

And let me say I have no use for the liberals either. [Laughter] I don't buy the folklore with America either.

I wondered what sort of ideological underpinnings you are using to frame your whole discussion. Also, it was interesting listening to your comparison of Trinidad and Guyana and the inference of Guyana as a back-

ward country. What framework or assumptions were you using to make that sort of statement? Is it almost like a European saying that Africa is like a dark continent? Could you clarify it please?

I find it strange you should ask me a question like that. The [intellectual] underpinnings are the institutional and cultural realities of the Caribbean. I don't import them from anywhere – what's this nonsense about "what ideological framework are you using?" My own, of course! [Laughter & applause]

It is the only valid one and it arises from describing the facts as they are. I can't take over Marxism – Marx is describing industrial England, which I understand very well. And he was correct to do so. It is incorrect to describe the Caribbean in those terms. We have to describe the Caribbean as an imported population that came there and met a situation and then we have to say, "What happened then?" That's the only way you can proceed. That is what science is! Socialism is not scientific, it is just stupidity! [Laughter]

You have used the words "outmoded", "obsolete" and "out-dated" to describe the modes of thought that have governed Caribbean thinking over the past 40 years. We have had the privilege of being exposed to some really good, seminal works; I can recall Capitalism and Slavery by Eric Williams, The Black Jacobins by CLR James, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa by Walter Rodney, and of course Beckford's Persistent Poverty. Who would you say are the current visionaries, or current thinkers – apart from yourself, of course [Laughter] - that come close to describing the reality as you see it.

Nobody you'd know and let me say first of all:

everything you have cited there is absolutely first-class and indispensable to the work that we have to do. All I am saying is that the methodological framework into which they were cast did not apply. It is a very serious criticism, but it does not propose to, or intend to, or wish to dismiss the importance of these works. Beckford was my closest collaborator. He himself says in the book that he doesn't know which ideas are mine and which are his.

I am not embarking on any attempt to assassinate our best people. However, it is important to show the mistakes that they made in order to move on.

If we continue all this mindless adulation, just saying that everything they did was good – we are in serious trouble.

I am not embarking on any attempt to assassinate our best people. What I am trying to tell you is that it is because our best people are in the predicament that we can see it most clearly, because we know their quality,

we know their industry, we know their insight, we know their intelligence, we know their work and we know its high quality.

And yet it has made a mess. That should tell you that there is a system problem, as I said earlier, which rises above the individual. So in spite of first-class work within the paradigm that they had, we have not clarified our situation. And we are lucky to be able to do it now. Not because the present generation is in any way superior. It is that the responsibilities of independence and the hands-on experience of running the place, is compelling us to come to terms with reality.

You couldn't legitimately expect Williams and Arthur Lewis and the people who have made these statements – you couldn't expect them to do what we are doing now. Because they came out of a situation before independence, and the speculation was based very largely on received and second-hand knowledge. They didn't have the access to the materials. This historical work had not been done. But 40 or 60 years later, we don't have that excuse.

But we made the mistake in the 1950s not to design the University to do the right kind of work, and the University is lionizing all the wrong things. Which I think was the bane of both Manley and Seaga. In Jamaica, the lectures have been quite catastrophic. To some extent that includes Beckford, my very close friend.

I am very glad now to be able to see you in person... My question is more in regard to the systemic disconnect between the elites and the real situation, as you have rightly described it... What can be done to change the situation in the Caribbean and in Jamaica in particular?

The way a culture escapes from itself, as I said before, is not something that anyone can sit down and write down and declare about and be sure about. One of the reasons there is so much hilarity in so much of what we have written in the last 60 years is precisely that: the problem is generally difficult, in all cultures. One thing we can say...

First of all, we have to say that there is no law or any guarantee that says that we are going to solve all problems, including our own. Or that a civilization like that which we have in the Caribbean will survive and endure. We may go under. Many civilizations go under, because they don't find the resources of imagination to open up the questions and deal with them. And they just fall by the wayside. It is quite conceivable that will happen to us - though I see no sign of it, that we are going to go under. Even in Jamaica.

What we have to recognize is that we can only play for change, what I call "playing for change." That is to make yourself available and open to new possibilities, by doing the work of sensitizing yourself to your own situation so that when the crucial accidents take place, that you don't plan, you are ready to

deal with it. Though it doesn't say you will succeed.

CLR James has a great abundance of wisdom on all these questions, in spite of the fact that he evokes Marxism and cites all kinds of things. In the final analysis, his intelligence always dominates; his intelligence comes to the fore. He is very clear on this, about the requirement to be sensitive, alert, organized, in charge, and ready in the full knowledge that you may do everything you can do and you may still fail. Because the one thing you know is that you're not God and you can't command anything into existence.

When I look at the Caribbean today – and I should add that the next best man is Rodney, who is also very fertile, very sensitive, very intelligent – making a lot of mistakes, the big mistake being founding a Marxist party in Guyana. What kind of judgement [was that]? And you have Jagan and Burnham mashing up the place with this damn Marxism. You come there and you start a Marxist party – you have to distance yourself from that. He couldn't! He was tied up in it for all kinds of reasons I didn't want to go into here.

In spite of all these things, when you look at the quality of Rodney's statement – the insight, the industry, the work that he puts into this thing, the thing is irresistible in many ways. What is wrong with it is the paradigm in which it is set.

I am not pessimistic – even about the work that has gone. You have to make a clinical interpretation of the mistakes that it made, and what is wrong about it: you have to say it! It is precisely because I am confident that these people are going to survive and endure – that the work is of good quality, of our best people – I can't shoot them down by saying anything about them; there's no way I can shoot down Arthur Lewis or shoot down Eric Williams or shoot down Walter Rodney. Why should anybody listen to what I say?

What I say I say about them because it is important to show the mistakes that they made and to show that in spite of that, they will survive! That's how we can move on. But if we keep all this adulation, this mindless adulation of just saying that everything we did was good – we are in serious trouble. I want us to break out of that, and move on to a whole new scheme. We need a complete evaluation of everything we have done in the 60 years. [Applause]

I am extremely inspired by your insistence that the Caribbean is not fodder for theorizing that takes place somewhere else, and also for insisting that the Caribbean recognize itself - not as just the centre, but also as a centre with 500 years of experience that could offer valuable lessons for the rest of world that is now undergoing many crises of globalization - and using a lot of terms like hybridity and marronage that, many of them, were invented in the Caribbean in the first place.

It is quite clear that your optimism comes from things that are indigenous to the Caribbean... in the everyday lives and faces of Caribbean people, that the potential for change is there... I would say that women are in the forefront of many of the changes that are taking place in the Caribbean, and I just wondered if you had any other thoughts on some of the everyday ways and things that your optimism obviously comes from. Is there something you can give us to take away as well, at the end of this evening?

Not more than what is already old hat, which is that the mode of investigation must involve noticing all the things that are happening around with ordinary people. I call them accidents.

You can't find out about a country or a place or a culture or a civilization in the way that Universities are compelling their students to do – with all these surveys. Surveys have a minor place, but most of the things that hap-

pen in the world are not planned by anybody, not organized by anybody. Not anticipated by anybody.

Therefore, you have to have a mode of observation and recording that takes into account all the things that happen without planning, incidental to what people set out to do. The whole mode of graduate work needs to be much more hands-on, much more in the field, much more among people. And much less in these straight-jackets that they set up for them, by three years of research you do four surveys and five tables and so on.

The two most important things that happened to me were that I left the university; I went home in 1968. Because I went to live where I was born and where I am from, it compelled me into a kind of community existence. Not all the phony things people say we do in community work – just living normally and knowing plenty people and being compelled to do things. It compelled me to change my mode of observation, of noticing a whole flow of event and episode that qualitatively changed what I thought science was.

The second thing was that in 1976 I left the university – I resigned completely, I gave it up after 18 years and I went on my own. That added a similar dimension, with[out] all the resources of money and all the resources of incumbency – whether it is in government or the university; you really had to develop highly sensitive systems, highly efficient systems of finding things out. Because you don't have all the funding and all the “fat” that you have when you are a professor in the university and you get grants and you get support and so on and so on.

I have learned over these years that the most important thing is just to notice the ordinary run of happening in the society and there is an accumulation of evidence over time that leads you to new hypotheses and fertile insight. If there is any lesson for the academics and for

the universities, it is this: that the very nature of the university and its relationship to community must change as a pre-condition for the kind of epistemological work that we need to do in the future. [Applause]

...Could you just elaborate for me: if there is no class, how social stratification would exist still?

Stratification is easy: it's simply that some people have more than others, and in Trinidad it is clear about that. Some people have more money, more car, more woman. [Laughter] All the things that they want to get. Or more men, as somebody said. [Laughter] That is stratification – those who have more: or income higher, occupation, and so on.

But that is not class. I think Heidegger understood it better than the earlier moral philosophers, in that he had the notion of “being there.” Of particular coordinates that link you to place and time. Being in time, belonging and knowing and being are all the same thing and they require anchoring in responsibility and in place. You can't be footloose, running up and down all over the place, and have no responsibilities and make any difference. Class, as Marx understood it, of course, requires you to differentiate between different levels and types of responsibility that people have to the landscape in which they are set.

In the Caribbean, because the upper echelons who run the place economically are absentee and have all their income denominated in foreign exchange and don't have to be there, and because those who are below them in stratification terms – in terms of money and so on – are people who accept no responsibility because they don't own the place, and all they have had for a long time was their condition

to perform only a labour function, because of that the concept of class has to be radically revised to explain the Caribbean situation.

I think we have to understand class in much more complex terms. I have suggested that what we know about it is that it is one basis of ethnicity alongside race. James recognized that in Black Jacobins and everywhere else, and Rodney recognized it – all the seminal thinkers know that.

But it is not enough to recognize that race and class pose a very complex problem in the Caribbean; you really have to sort through the work – the journey of the region, all the things that have happened, and the responses of individuals and groups and communities and nations and so on, and you have to design a concept of class that makes sense of that reality.

I think I have some sense of what that is, but I am for the moment only posing it as a methodological requirement and suggesting that the concept of class that we borrow from Marx cannot be easily applied in the Caribbean. Not because we don't recognize, as Marx did, that class is responsibility, but that the designation of responsibility and the ascription of responsibility are quite different in the Caribbean case. The work has got to be done to make it clear. I don't want to say anything more at this juncture. But I recognize that we have to do something more than we have done before and that there are elements of a solution already there.

...What do you propose... to Caribbean scholars in how they should go about “de-essentializing” an essentialized construction of race and ethnicity [Africanism and Indianism] in the Caribbean?

I explained to you that ethnicity is a different order of concept from race, because ethnicity embraces all those bases on which people are solid. This may be religion, it may be class, it may be race, it may be clan, it may be language, it may be culture, it may be homeland – where you are from, and so on. We have to recognize that ethnicity is an umbrella category under which falls all the other forms of social organization.

Once you understand that hierarchical relationship between ethnicity and race as well as class, as well as the other things, then you have a basis of theorizing about why people behave the way they behave, depending on which bases of ethnicity they accept for themselves at any particular time, and what ranking they give to all the different ethnic relationships they develop over time and in any given place.

That's why I said in the Caribbean, certainly, because people are so footloose and because *mas* is a central condition of people – of playing the Other – what we have done is that we have creolized ethnicity. The reason they have made the mistake of not understanding ethnicity in Europe is that the essential premise of the sociological argument is stability. You *belong* to a certain ethnic category. That's what they do all their lives.

Marx, in a way, assumed that once you were an industrial worker in a factory, that process to which you were subject was so transcendental that it dismissed all other possibilities. If you were working class, the psychological terror of becoming a worker in a factory in the 18th or 19th century so re-made you as a person, that you could become nothing else. Once conditions were ameliorated, or once the social conditions were quite different – where the options open to you to be a whole lot of different things are far greater – then, that kind of one-dimensional description of the person falls down immediately.

The thing about the Caribbean is that, although people were inducted in the plantations which were more industrial even than the industrial England that Marx was describing, the fact of the initial conditions that I've described – of so many different people from so many different places coming into the situation, plus the business of dealing with the colonizer – all those three things from the start poses a tri-dimensional problem for the Caribbean person. You could not be locked-in in that simple analysis that people borrow from Marx because it is too simple.

Right from the start there is a dimension of complexity that you have got to deal with. The Caribbean really is the workshop of the world in that sense. Over the course of 500 years, in a short period of historic time, in very intimate social situations, small island communities – we've had to come to grips with a whole new reality in 500 years. You have a short time in a small place, and all the problems that are posed of ethnicity in the whole world are dramatized four times over in the Caribbean. So you can't miss them.

That is what we have sell, and I want to close by saying that. What we have to sell to the world is that experience. Because globalization is imposing that experience on everybody now. But we have lived it for 500 years and we need to write it down and distill it.

And pat it and prick it and mark it with “T,” and send it home. [Laughter and applause]

Thank you.