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THE EVOLUTION OF THE WEST INDIAN'S IMAGE IN
THE AFRO-AMERICAN NOVEL, WITH REFERENCE TO
THE WEST INDIAN'S IMAGE IN THE WEST INDIAN
NOVEL.

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, PH.D., 1978

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MELVIN BERT RAHMING

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE EVOLUTION OF THE WEST INDIAN'S IMAGE

IN THE AFRO-AMERICAN NOVEL, WITH REFERENCE TO

THE WEST INDIAN'S IMAGE IN THE WEST INDIAN NOVEL

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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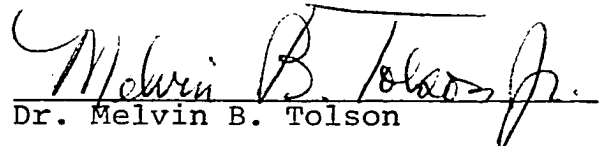
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

MELVIN B. RAHMING

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE WEST INDIAN'S IMAGE

IN THE AFRO-AMERICAN NOVEL, WITH REFERENCE TO

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APPROVED BY

_____
Dr. Melvin B. Tolson

_____
Dr. Bruce I. Granger

_____
Dr. Jidlaph G. Kamoche

_____
Dr. Alan R. Velie

_____
Dr. Jack L. Kendall

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

· INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history the Afro-American novel has
evinced an exceptional concern about the presence of West
Indians in the United States of America and their consequent
involvement in Afro-American affairs. As early as 1859,
six years after the publication of the first Afro-American
novel (William Wells Brown's Clotel: or the President's
Daughter), Martin R. Delany depicted a West Indian as the
protagonist of his serialized novel, Blake: or the Huts of
America. In the 1970's the West Indian continues to be
attractive material for Afro-American fiction, as illustrated
by John Oliver Killens' The Cotillion, 1971, and John A.
Williams' Mothersill and the Foxes, 1975. Spanning the
years between Delany and Williams are several West Indian
characters of varying degrees of thematic importance, a
fact which testifies to the persistence of the Afro-
American attempt to deal with the nature of the West Indian
and to examine the potential of Afro-American/West Indian
relationships.

That the subject of the West Indian should persist
in Afro-American fiction is not surprising, for the actual

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presence of the West Indian in America has irrevocably influ-
enced the history of the Afro-American. In fact, West
Indians have been involved in Afro-American affairs for more
than two centuries. As early as 1765 a Barbadian, Prince
Hall, was preparing himself in Boston for leadership among
the Afro-Americans in the Boston community, and in 1776 he
founded the first Lodge in Masonry for Afro-American men.[1]
In 1826 a Jamaican, John B. Russwurm, was among the first
black students to graduate from an American college
(Bowdoin), and a year later he co-edited the first issue of
Freedom Journal, at that time the only black newspaper in
the Western World.[2] And in the late nineteenth century the
renowned scholar and founding father of Liberia, Dr. Edward
Wilmot Blyden, born and reared in the West Indian island of
St. Thomas, made several visits to America to assist in the
fostering of understanding between the African, the Afro-
American and the Afro-West Indian.[3]

The relationship between these two groups was essen-
tially a harmonious one, at least until the coming of the
Jamaican Marcus Garvey.[4] Between 1921 and 1927 the charis-
matic and controversial Garvey popularized in America his

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[1]John Henrik Clarke, "West Indian Partisans in the
Fight for Freedom," printed in Negro World (June, 1966), p. 20.

[2]Ibid., p. 22.

[3]Ibid., p. 23.

[4]Lennox Raphael, "West Indians and Afro-Americans,"
printed in Freedomways (vol. 4, no. 3, 1964), p. 438.

United Negro Improvement Association (which he had founded
in Jamaica in 1914) to such an extent that the U.N.I.A.
boasted a membership of roughly six million.[5] Advocating
that people of African descent should do their part to make
Africa the political and cultural center of the African
diaspora, Garvey forced Afro-Americans to confront their
history and their future with a sense of urgency and pride.
His frenzied political and temperamental clash with impor-
tant Afro-American leaders and the American government, his
subsequent deportation in 1927, and the rapid decline of his
once prosperous U.N.I.A. marked the end of an era which had
witnessed the harmonious relationship between Afro-Americans
and West Indians.[6]

But these actualities did not put an end to the era
of West Indian immigration to New York, which, beginning
after World War I, had occurred simultaneously with the
movement of thousands of Afro-Americans from the South to
the North. Leaving their jobs as teachers, civil servants,
sales persons, policemen and housewives, West Indians
flocked to New York "to better their station in life."[7]
The convergence of Afro-Americans and West Indians in New
York created a climate of intense conflict described by

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[5]Amy Jacques Garvey, Garvey and Garveyism (New York:
Collier Books, 1970), p. 264.

[6]Clarke, p. 6.

[7]Raphael, p. 439.

Orde Coombs as a "cauldron."[8] The conflict was due only superficially to the fact that both Afro-Americans and West Indians were competing for the same jobs. The deeper reason was that the Afro-American and the West Indian were psychologically and culturally estranged from each other. The estrangement had much to do with the different strategies employed by England and America in colonizing their black populace. What Lennox Raphael calls "the minority neurosis and minority psychosis,"[9] which attended the psychology of the Afro-American, militated against his successful economic competition with the West Indian, whose majority status at home lessened his feelings of inferiority to the extent that he could believe that few doors in the American society were closed to him.[10] As Paule Marshall illustrates in Brown Girl, Brownstones (1959), the white American tended to think that West Indians were "different", a tendency which was tantamount to an automatic reduction (from the white American's point of view) in the potential for conflict between the white American and the black West Indian. So it is that the list of West Indians who achieved positions of prominence in America is quite extensive.[11]

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[8]Orde Coombs, Do You See My Love for You Growing? (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1970), p. 110.

[9]Raphael, p. 445.

[10]Ibid.

[11]In Do You See My Love for You Growing?, pp. 113-114 Coombs provides the following list of West Indians who have

It would seem that the common African heritage of West Indians and Afro-Americans, their mutual history of slavery, and the continued immigration of West Indians to the United States in the twentieth century would provide virtually unlimited possibilities for artistic exploration of the relationship between the two collective personalities as they meet within the psycho-cultural labyrinth of twentieth-century America. However, the Afro-American novelist's perception of the West Indian often takes the form of either virulent stereotypes of violent revolutionaries or would-be princes made impotent by too much pride in and nostalgia for a no longer existent and vaguely remembered West Indian or African kingdom. It becomes obvious to the critic that after the grandiose stature of Delany's Henry Blake in <u>Blake;</u> <u>or the Huts of America</u>, the nature of the West Indian por- traits in the Afro-American novel reveals a narrowing of focus, the result being acutely exaggerated delineations of one-dimensional figures. To be sure, the initial appearance of the West Indian in the Afro-American novel is memorable; however, Delany wrote at a time when the Afro-American read- ing public was so small as to be negligible. Furthermore, because of ideological changes which occurred in the Afro- American leadership between 1859 and 1916 (the date of

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achieved prominence in America: Stokely Carmichael, Shirley Chisholm, the parents of Leroi Jones, Judge Constance Baker Motley, Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte. There are, as Coombs implies, many more.

Garvey's arrival in the United States), the portrait of
Henry Blake was all but ignored by the literary public:
"there was apparently little, if any, commentary on Delany's
work."[12] Still, Henry Blake is multi-dimensional in con-
ception and heroic in stature. However, the idealization
in Delany's hero is abandoned in the next portrait of a
West Indian in the Afro-American novel (DuBois' Dark Princess,
1928) in favor of a scathing and venomous caricature, which
owes its existence to the negative reactions sparked by
Garvey's controversial career. After Dark Princess other
one-dimensional figures of the West Indian appear in the
works of some of America's major novelists--Ralph Ellison
(Invisible Man, 1952), James Baldwin (Tell Me How Long the
Train's Been Gone, 1968), and John A. Williams (Mothersill
and the Foxes, 1975). This kind of attention to the West
Indian in the Afro-American novel suggests that the topic
deserves serious critical attention.

After Martin Delany, no other Afro-American novelist
depicts a positive image of the West Indian until Edmund
Austin in 1958. The first Afro-American novelist to base a
heroic portrait on Marcus Garvey's life and work, Austin is
one of the few Afro-American novelists who anticipated the
black nationalist ideologies of the sixties, ideologies

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[12]Floyd J. Miller, Introduction in Blake: or the
Hute of America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. xii.

which spurred, among other things, the rehabilitation of the Garvey image. But Austin divests Garvey of all his political and temperamental flaws and, consequently, the character of the Garvey figure, Marcus Cox, in Austin's The Black Challenge is idealized.

One year later Paule Marshall becomes the first Afro-American novelist to attempt a realistic portrait of the West Indian personality and the West Indian community. Her publication of Brown Girl, Brownstones (exactly one hundred years after the publication of Delany's Blake; or the Huts of America) adds a new dimension to the Afro-American novelist's perception of the West Indian. But Marshall's status as a first-generation Afro-American with West Indian parentage makes her unique among those Afro-American novelists who write about West Indians. Having lived both in America and in the West Indies, Marshall draws upon her first-hand knowledge of West Indian life to avoid stereotyping of any kind. Her dual experience provides her with the insight to portray the West Indian character with more comprehensiveness than any other American novelist. Her novels, Brown Girl, Brownstones (1959) and The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), show her to be closely allied to the West Indian literary tradition. Each of her novels is West Indian in theme and setting. But for the purposes of this study Marshall will be regarded as an Afro-American; for the term "West Indian" (or "Caribbean") will

be restricted to people who were born and reared in the West Indies.

Although pejorative images of the West Indian still occur in the Afro-American Novel after 1959 (in Baldwin's Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone, 1968, and in Williams' Mothersill and the Foxes, 1975), the attitudes of Austin and Marshall toward their West Indian characters illustrate indisputably that the intensity of the Afro-American/West Indian conflict is lessening. These two novelists anticipate the amicable Afro-American attitude toward members of the African diaspora, which attitude becomes one of the positive results of the Black Power struggles of the sixties.

Two other novelists who pursue the topic of Afro-American/West Indian harmony are directly affected by the internationality of the aesthetic and psychological struggles of the sixties. As Orde Coombs points out, the struggles of Black people in the sixties made a generation of black writers decide that, "at whatever cost, they would psychologically liberate themselves from the altar of white supremacy, and, having done so, they would liberate their brothers."[13] Thus when Clarence Farmer satirizes the racial paranoia of the Afro-American in Soul on Fire (1969), he is suggesting that the Afro-American must rid himself of the negativism which is the result of his psycho-cultural

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[13]Orde Coombs, ed., We Speak as Liberators: Young Black Poets (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1970), p. xv.

experience in America if he is to make a viable contribution to his own social and aesthetic harmony and that of black people in general. And it is out of an even more obvious and evangelical enthusiasm for black international harmony that John Killens dramatizes the Afro-American/West Indian relationship in his fourth novel, The Cotillion (1971). With iconoclastic fervor Killens caricatures aspects of the West Indian stereotype only so that he can demolish the stereotype. His West Indian character, Daphne Lovejoy, evolves from a caricature of ignorance and regal pride to a symbol of the possibility for unity between the Afro-American and the West Indian. Like Austin, however, Killens is so enamored of the possibility of aesthetic and ideological harmony and so idealistic in his depiction of the Afro-American/West Indian relationship that the applicability of his West Indian portrait to the collective West Indian personality is seriously jeopardized.

This brings us to the statement of the aims of this dissertation. The first aim is to explore and assess the nature, role and psycho-cultural implications of the West Indian portraits in the Afro-American novel. A second aim is to trace the stages in the evolution of the Afro-American novelists' attitude toward and perception of West Indians and simultaneously to attempt to uncover the historical reasons for this evolution. The stereotypical portraits of DuBois, Ellison, Baldwin and Williams become more clearly understood when viewed against the thematic implications

inherent in the multi-dimensional West Indian portraits of
Delany, Marshall and Killens. Indeed the West Indian
characters of Delany, Marshall and Killens are sufficiently
complex to warrant extensive critical attention; they attest
to the seriousness and the complexity of the Afro-American
artistic attempt to portray the West Indian as he is.

And who is the West Indian? What is his concept of
himself? What are the unique aspects of his psychology?
The asking of these questions suggest, and rightfully so,
that no thorough critical assessment of the nature and the
role of the West Indian portraits in Afro-American fiction
is possible without reference to the West Indian's concept
of himself. Hence the third and final aim of this disser-
tation is to examine the West Indian's concept of self, as
that concept is revealed in selected West Indian novels. I
feel that without extensive illustrations from West Indian
works any findings related to the West Indian image in Afro-
American fiction will lack primary historical and artistic
context and will exist, consequently, in a critical vacuum.

This attempt to compare modes of thought regarding
the West Indian must take into account a fundamental dif-
ference between the two literary traditions. The Afro-
American novelist is primarily concerned, as a matter of
course, with Afro-American realities. As often as not, the
West Indians in Afro-American fiction are, not surprisingly,
little more than culturally deracinated minor characters who
are given very limited stylistic and thematic scope. As

such, they mirror the psycho-cultural situation of the Afro-
American himself. On the other hand, the West Indian char-
acters in West Indian novels do not have to attest to this
kind of conceptual limitation since they are, obviously,
the major concern of the West Indian novelists. They never
stand alone in the world of their respective novels; and,
consequently, they are not forced to carry within their
limited conceptualization the entire weight of the author's
attitude toward West Indians. In other words, the West
Indian novelist is never forced to invest any one portrait
with the totality of the author's concept of or attitude
toward the West Indian personality or the West Indian
scene. The several characterizations in a given West Indian
novel help define each other's make-up during the course of
their interaction in a way which is not true of the West
Indian in the Afro-American novel. The latter is usually
alone both in the way the author uses him to portray the
West Indian apprehension of reality and in the attitude the
author displays toward him as a West Indian. Delany and
Marshall are exceptions because they place their West Indian
characters both in American and West Indian communities.

The conceptualization of West Indian characters in
both streams of literature reveals some of the historical
differences between the West Indian and the Afro-American,
specifically their different conceptions of themselves.
It is primarily because of the Black Power struggles of the

sixties that the West Indian stereotype in the Afro-American novel gives way to an image which articulates the Afro-American's desire for a oneness of aesthetic (if not cultural) orientation between black people in the West Indies and in America. Although Edmund Austin's The Black Challenge was published in 1958, it illustrates that the militant postures which we associate with the sixties actually began, as far as the Afro-American novel is concerned, in the late fifties. We are therefore justified in associating Austin's idealistic portrait of Garvey with the new interest in the African diaspora which is later sparked by the Black power struggles. Paule Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones, however, must be seen as an exception in that it anticipates the movement away from the Garvey stereotype, which movement is one of the offshoots of the Black Power struggles, and which is illustrated ten years later by Clarence Farmer's Soul on Fire. Farmer's attitude to his brief but revealing West Indian portrait serves notice, as does the attitude of John Killens in The Cotillion, that the West Indian image in the Afro-American novel has indeed reached a new phase in its evolution.

Admittedly, the fire of black internationalism in the Afro-American novel was kindled in Delany's Blake, but for many years America was not prepared to take seriously the cultural implications of this novel (for reasons which will be discussed later). Nor did Garvey's impassioned message

of Pan-Africanism in the 1920's inspire a multi-dimensional
or sympathetic depiction of the West Indian characters in
the Afro-American novel. W. E. B. DuBois, Ralph Ellison
and James Baldwin seemed insulted by Garvey's attempt to
dictate the direction blacks in America should take.
Ironically, Garvey had a positive influence upon the sympa-
thetic depiction of Afro-American characters in the Afro-
American novel, especially in the novels of the Harlem
Renaissance. Even in this regard, however, Garveyism was
divested of much of its militancy and even more of its
internationality. It remained for the political, economic
and aesthetic winds of the sixties to stir the embers of
Pan-Africanism to a new intensity.

It should be interesting to see if Pan-Africanism
made any significant impact upon the West Indian Novel,
which usually presents the West Indian as a knowing parti-
cipant in a distinctly West Indian culture, inchoate but
definite, in the same way that Ellison and Baldwin regard
the Afro-American as a part of a distinctly American cul-
ture. Steeped as he is in the British literary tradition
and conscious of the negative effects of his colonial
history, the black novelist of the West Indies is still
undergoing the slow process of exchanging a British system
of aesthetics for one more suited to his West Indian
characters. The apprehension of this fact is important to
an understanding of the conflicting psychologies of the

twentieth-century West Indian and Afro-American, for the
West Indian pursuit of self-definition and self-actualization
is inherently associated with his attitude toward his own
colonized mentality. Garvey's anti-colonial ideology
and the anti-British aesthetics of his writings make him an
anomaly in the West Indian situation. Hence, when we remem-
ber that the West Indian portraits of approximately half of
the Afro-American novelists who depict West Indians are
inspired by Garvey, we begin to suspect that these Afro-
American novelists have a very limited perception of the
West Indian personality. Thus the nature of the West Indian
novelists' response to Pan-Africanism may well provide us
with an ideological context within which we can contrast the
West Indian portraits in the Afro-American Novel. On the
basis of such a comparison we can proceed to assess the
nature of each Afro-American novelist's insight into the
West Indian personality and/or the West Indian condition.

Until 1960 the West Indian novel, which begins in
1903 with the publication of Tom Redcam's Becka's Buckra
Baby, meant any novel written by people who were born or
who grew up in the West Indies, the islands in the Caribbean
Sea and the South American country now known as Guyana.[14]
In 1960 the Barbadian novelist George Lamming drew attention
to the West Indian novel by limiting its definition to

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[14]Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel & Its
Background (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1970), p. 3.

"the novel written by the West Indian about the West Indian reality."[15] The kind of West Indian novels discussed in this study admits to two further limitations. The first is that in the discussion of West Indian literature we shall be concerned only with novels written by black West Indians. We shall exclude, for example, novelists such as V. S. Naipaul and Wilson Harris, whose roots are Asian, not African. Thus the emphasis here will be the West Indian situation as perceived by black novelists. In selecting specific West Indian novels, I have taken my cue from the West Indian portraits of the Afro-American novelists, who generally use the English-speaking West Indies as the point of reference for their West Indian portraits; Delany's Henry Blake is an exception. Hence the second limitation of this study is that "the West Indian novel" will mean those novels written originally in English by black authors from the English-speaking West Indies--the many West Indian novels written originally in French or Spanish will be excluded. Even within this limitation the attempt to make "valid comparisons" is hazardous. In the area of comparative literature comparison of the authors, novels or characters is often made invalid by the psycho-cultural biases of the people and the works compared (and, I may add, the psycho-cultural bias of the critic). For the same reason there is always the threat that generalizations may be made invalid. Such a threat is especially present in this study because

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[15]Quoted by Ramchand, p. 3. Originally from George Lamming's The Pleasures of Exile, 1960, p. 68.

the nature of the West Indian novel, even within its severely limited definition here, is such that generalizations are, admittedly, tenuous. Still, I am convinced that there are some "useful" generalizations to be made as well as some coherent patterns to be discerned in connection with the Afro-American/West Indian relationship.

The choice of Afro-American novels to be discussed here, as well as the thematic and stylistic aspects to be explored, are clearly dictated by the nature of the topic. I have tried to isolate all those novels which contain portraits of West Indians. As has already been mentioned, such novels span the entire range of the history of the Afro-American novel. While I cannot be sure that I have found all of these novels, my research clearly indicates that the number of such novels is very small.

As far as the West Indian novels are concerned, however, the choice is not so nearly or clearly circumscribed. From 1903 to 1970 writers from the English-speaking West Indies published at least 170 novels,[16] the large majority of which are by black authors; and each novel makes its own comment on the novelist's apprehension of West Indian reality. I have therefore found it necessary to determine my selection of West Indian novels by two considerations. The first is that, again taking my cue from the West Indian portraits in the Afro-American novel, I have selected those West Indian novels which reflect authorial attitudes and objectives

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[16]Ramchand, pp. 282-286.

that support, contradict or otherwise illumine those of the Afro-American novelists. Secondly, I have tried to select West Indian novels which are already regarded as having made significant contributions to the scope and quality of West Indian fiction. It is almost inconceivable, for example, that anyone could defend any comprehensive observations about the West Indian novel without some kind of reference to V. S. Reid's New Day (1949) and George Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1953). No West Indian novels have been more historically and stylistically important than New Day or more artistically and thematically important than In the Castle of My Skin. Apart from these two novels I have made critical references to Claude McKay's Home to Harlem (1928), Banjo (1929) and Banana Bottom (1933); Edgar Mittelholzer's A Morning at the Office (1950); Roger Mais' The Hills Were Joyful Together (1953); John Hearne's The Faces of Love (1957) and The Land of the Living (1961); Sylvia Wynter's The Hills of Hebron (1962); Orlando Patterson's The Children of Sisyphus (1964) and An Absence of Ruins (1967); and Michael Anthony's A Year in San Fernando (1965). Obviously, my discussion of these novels, which span the years from 1928 to 1967, focuses on those aspects which apply to the topic of discussion. Accordingly, some of the novels are discussed at greater length than others. All of these novels reveal divergent data concerning the West Indian's sense of self.

Outside the confines of literary criticism, two informative studies of the Afro-American/West Indian conflict are worth mentioning here. The first is a chapter in Harold Cruse's The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 1967, in which the author discusses the West Indian influence in America in the 1920's and 1930's. The second is an essay, "Moving Beyond the Limbo Pole," which Orde Coombs includes in his collection entitled Do You See My Love for You Growing?. In this essay Coombs comments on the collective personalities of the West Indian emigrants in New York and their clash with Afro-Americans. Although the studies of Cruse and Coombs do not involve the literature of either culture, they do help the literary critic explore the political and social climate which indirectly affects the West Indian portraits.

As far as I have been able to determine, there is no existing literature which undertakes either a comprehensive study of the image of the West Indian in the Afro-American novel or comparison of that image with the West Indian's image of himself in the West Indian novel. Presently, the only other study which addresses a basic part of this topic is Lloyd Brown's article, "The West Indian as an Ethnic Stereotype in Black American Literature," which appeared in Negro American Literature Forum in 1971, and which I found quite useful in my chapter on the West Indian stereotype. But Brown's delineation of the stereotype

is not comprehensive, and although the article ends with
the observation that the stereotype is disappearing, it is
not concerned (except for a brief reference to Farmer's
Soul on Fire) with a critical illustration of that change.
Paule Marshall is not mentioned and the 1971 publication
date automatically places Killens and Williams outside its
domain. Incidentally, the earliest stereotypical portrait,
the trend-setting portrait of Perigua in DuBois' Dark Prin-
cess (1928), is also conspicuously absent fron Brown's dis-
cussion. And Brown is concerned neither with Delany's
Blake (since Henry Blake is not a stereotype) nor with the
social and historical realities (apart from the Garvey
movement) which inform the era of the West Indian stereotype.
The most serious limitation of Brown's article, however, is
that he does not relate his findings to West Indian litera-
ture. Thus, although he does bring to the subject a tren-
chant analysis of the psycho-cultural state of the novelists
who depict the stereotype, his article, insightful though
it is, is without a definitive context. The particular
contribution of this dissertation to the literary criticism
of the Afro-American/West Indian relationship, then, is its
chronological scope, its concern with the evolution of the
West Indian portrait, and the international or cross-
cultural nature of its focus.

The second chapter of this study devotes itself to
an examination of the origins and implications of Delany's

prototypical West Indian portrait. Undoubtedly such examination will have to involve socio-historical aspects of West Indian and Afro-American reality in the nineteenth century. It is worth remembering that Delany writes about the West Indian fifty years before the West Indian writes about himself. And it is another twenty-five years before a black West Indian writes a novel (Claude McKay's Home to Harlem). It may be interesting to see (in later chapters) how closely Henry Blake resembles the later West Indian portraits in the West Indian novel.

As implied earlier, after the publication of Delany's Blake; or the Huts of America, sixty-nine years elapsed before an Afro-American novelist gave the reading public another artistic rendering of West Indian consciousness. With DuBois' Dark Princess, 1928, the image of the West Indian begins a steep descent from its status as archetype of revolutionary black consciousness to its association with some of the worst elements of the human condition. Chapter III explores the nature and role of these negative portraits and summarizes the socio-political realities (between Blake and Dark Princess) which inform this metamorphosis of the West Indian image.

Chapter IV is devoted almost exclusively to the West Indian novel, in an attempt to illustrate the difference between the psycho-cultural states of the West Indian and the Afro-American and to suggest how this difference

renders the West Indian's perception of himself as something quite different from his portraits in the Afro-American novel. This chapter is undoubtedly the most important part of the dissertation, since it provides critical perspective on all the other chapters.

Chapter V traces the movement in the Afro-American novel away from West Indian stereotypes toward images which reflect a greater understanding of the West Indian condition. The critical attempt to assert the movement toward understanding and harmony with the West Indian necessitates extensive reference to West Indian fiction. The dissertation concludes with a sixth chapter which recapitulates the main findings of the study, suggests a further aspect of the topic which may be worthy of critical attention, and speculates as to the nature of any future West Indian portraits in the Afro-American novel.

CHAPTER II

MARTIN DELANY'S BLAKE AND THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Martin Delany's imaginative rendering of a pure black West Indian as the protagonist of his only novel, Blake; or the Huts of America (1859), has to be seen not only as an Afro-American artist's tribute to the collective consciousness of the Afro-Caribbeans but also as a political statement that the black people in America and in the Caribbean share a common essence and a common destiny. An obvious vehicle for Delany's ideology, Henry Blake incorporates the authorial insistence that Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Americans are more African than Caribbean or American. Henry's consciousness of his essential alienation from Anglo-American and Anglo-Caribbean perspectives of reality is so heightened that the critic may well conclude that the author regards it as inherent rather than acquired. In an age when the articulation of this visceral alienation could have had decidedly negative repercussions, Delany demanded of his readers not only that they listen to his ideology but that they hear it from the mouth of a pure black "foreigner"; and the Afro-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans would

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eventually have to wrestle with the implications of Delany's West Indian portrait.

This chapter is an attempt to do just that. Such an attempt necessitates considerable discussion of the socio-historical issues which affect the lives of the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American slaves and ex-slaves in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the first half of the chapter I demonstrate that this discussion grows out of the ideological concerns of the novel itself and that, con-sequently, it illumines the portrait of Henry Blake, especi-ally in its uncovering of the reasons and implications of Henry's Cuban birth. By summarizing the relevant socio-historical data concerning Cuba, the United States and the British West Indies, I show that the overall attitude of the slaves in each case was similar and that Henry epito-mizes that attitude. I suggest, consequently, that Henry's portrait should be seen as an imaginative synthesis of the Afro-American and the Afro-Caribbean. In the second half of the chapter I discuss the wider thematic issues and implications of the portrait and expose its conceptual limitations. By the end of the chapter there should be little doubt that the West Indian and the Afro-American begin their association in the Afro-American novel on an elevated and harmonious level.

On the surface Henry's conception is entirely realistic. Born in Cuba, Henry is pirated at the age of

eighteen to the Red River region of Louisiana and sold as a slave to one Colonel Stephen Franks. In bondage on the Frank's plantation, Henry marries Maggie, the Colonel's mulatto daughter. When Maggie is sold to Judge John Ballard, Henry vows to escape and to seek the liberation of all his brothers and sisters in slavery. His career falls into two stages which parallel the novel's two-part division. Part One concerns Henry's effort to organize among the slaves of the American South a revolt which would destroy the Southern plantations and secure the freedom of the slaves. Part Two depicts Henry's attempts to rescue his wife, who has presumably been taken to Cuba, and to assist in a full-scale black insurrectionist movement within this Spanish colony.

An awareness of the revolutionary role played by the black slaves is necessary for an appreciation of the political activity of Henry, for his characterization entails the author's imaginative shaping and condensation of historical attitudes to slavery. The history of slaves in America and in the Caribbean is the history of seemingly constant rebellion. As the eminent West Indian historian Eric Williams observes in The Negro in the Caribbean, from the very moment the slave was placed on the small tubs which made the Middle Passage he became a revolutionary, actual or potential:

> His first thought on reaching the islands was to run away to the woods. He became the "cimarron" of Cuba,

the "maroon" of Jamaica, the "bush Negro" of Guiana.
No bloodhounds, no posses could hunt him out; and the
existence of the runaways had to be recognized by the
island governments, leaving a standing example to the
less fortunate slaves, who resorted to suicide, abortions,
poison, murder--anything to cheat the slave-owner.[1]

Violent rebellions were occurring in the Spanish colonies

as early as 1503 (Cuba),[2] only two years after the Spanish

colonizers had brought Africans from Africa to Cuba for the

first time,[3] and in the British West Indies as early as 1639

(Providence Island).[4] Of more immediate relevance to Delany's

novel, however, are the slave rebellions in nineteenth

century Cuba in 1832, 1835, 1836, 1837, 1840, 1843, and

1844, all of which were ruthlessly suppressed.[5] The fact

that Delany's knowledge of Cuba was acquired entirely from

reading and conversation did not prevent him from treating

the topic of Cuban slavery with "uncanny accuracy."[6]

It would be categorically wrong, however, to view

Henry Blake merely as Afro-Cuban or merely as primarily

Cuban, or merely as a synthesis of the Afro-Cuban and the

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[1]Eric Williams, The Negro in the Caribbean (New
York: The Williams Press, 1942), p. 83.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Richard B. Moore, "Caribbean Unity and Freedom,"
Freedomways, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1964, p. 297.

[4]Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, "Negro Slaves in the Americas,"
Freedomways, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 327.

[5]Hall, p. 321.

[6]Floyd J. Miller, "Introduction" to Blake; or the
Huts of America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. xxii.

Afro-American. His Cuban birth is incidental to the reality
of his make-up and has no thematic function which is limited
to or derived from a specifically Cuban frame of reference.
On the contrary, Delany attempts to present Henry from such
a vantage point that what is most obvious in his psycho-
cultural make-up is his racial rather than national con-
sciousness. He is Delany's symbol for the cultural unanimity
of the Afro-Caribbean and the Afro-American.

Why, then, is Henry given a specifically Cuban birth?
The answer to this question lies partially in Delany's
awareness of and attitude toward the American-Cuban politi-
cal relationship in the nineteenth century, during which
time the United States, particularly the Southern slavo-
cracy, was engaged in a formidable power struggle for con-
trol of Cuba. An island which had (in 1841) 436,000 slaves
and 156,000 "free Negroes,"[7] Cuba was regarded by the United
States as a logical area for the expansion of its economic
(slavery) system.[8] An economy based on the sugar plantation,
Cuba transacted the bulk of its trade with the United States,
on whose banking firms Cuba relied heavily for credit. It
came as no surprise to Delany when in 1848 America, pressing
for direct annexation of Cuba, launched a program to buy
Cuba from Spain; nor did it surprise Delany that Spain, who

[7]Hall, p. 320.

[8]Hall, p. 321. All other information concerning the
Spanish-American involvement with Cuba (in this paragraph)
was taken from this same article.

would go to any lengths to maintain control over her wealthy colony, refused to sell. Spain's adamant position was a definite factor in the struggles which led eventually to the Spanish-American War of 1898. In light of the political power struggles between Spain and the United States for control of Cuba, it becomes clear that Henry's epic journey through the South and Cuba should be interpreted (in the first place) as Delany's scathing rejection of colonial and imperialist aggression and oppression on individual, national and international levels.

Moreover, Henry's involvement with the black insurrectionary forces in Cuba calls attention to an aspect of nineteenth-century Cuban history which American historians have generally underplayed—that is, the active role of the Afro-Cuban abolitionists in their struggle for self-determination and, simultaneously, for Cuban independence. What Benjamin Quarles says about the white media's coverage of the abolitionist movement in America is equally true of the white media's treatment of the factors involved in the Spanish-American War: "An account of the rich role of the Negro participant in the abolitionist crusade would add an element that heretofore has been incomplete or absent in the telling."[9] The very name by which the war is known is conspicuous in its omission of the word "Cuban." Henry's

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[9]Benjamin Quarles, Black Abolitionists, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. viii-ix.

Cuban exploits articulate Delany's contempt for this histori-
cal bias.

In a series of articles which he contributed in 1849
to The North Star, an abolitionist journal edited by Frederick
Douglas, Delany outlined what he would later incorporate
into Blake (via Henry's exploits): "the fear of both Southern
annexationists and Cuban exiles that Spain would, by liberaliz-
ing restrictions upon blacks and concurrently restricting the
freedom of slaveholders, eventually 'Africanize' Cuba."[10] The
most serious of these attempts at "Africanization" was Spain's
1853 appointment of the Marquis de la Pezula, a well-known abo-
litionist, as Captain-General of Cuba.[11] Despite Pezula's lib-
eral policies, however, Delany urged in The North Star and illus-
trated via Henry Blake that the Afro-Cubans should take direct
charge of their own emancipating revolution.[12] Delany easily
discerned that the many slave revolts in Cuba in the 1830s
and 1840s had dictated the political expediency of such a
move on Spain's part. Guided by the principle that Cuba
would be Spanish or African, Spain could frustrate the
American annexation plans by the appointment of Pezula.[13]
Through Henry's speeches and conversations with the Afro-Cubans

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[10]Miller, p. xii.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Hall, p. 321.

and Creoles,[14] Delany unflinchingly suggests that such decisions must eventually rest with the Afro-Cubans (not with Spain or America) and that Afro-Cubans should take the whole burden of nationalism upon their own shoulders. In short, they should free themselves.

The intention here is not to suggest that Blake is historically precise. Through the exploits of the protagonist Delany contrives a portrait of Cuba which is accurate in its broad outlines, but fidelity to specific historical accuracy is often sacrificed to the larger didactic purpose of the author. Thus Henry is able to persuade the Creoles to subordinate their own biases for the sake of the success of the slave revolution, when in actuality the Creoles feared the prospect of Afro-Cuban control over Cuba.[15] Moreover, as Floyd Miller observes in his introduction to Blake, Delany uses actual events and people anachronistically to facilitate the compactness and compression of his treatment of the dynamics of Cuban society.[16] Thus, Delany allows Henry's cousin, Placido, to become the muse of a rebellion set during the 1850s although Placido, the historical poet-rebel, was executed in 1844.[17] Regardless of the question

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[14]The word "Creoles" has several different meanings. In Blake its meaning is not clear, but it seems to mean the natives of Cuba who were of Spanish descent.

[15]Miller, p. xxiii.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

of historical accuracy, however, it remains true that Henry
Blake is the representation of attitudes of rebellion and
self-determination reflected in actual historical revolts
in Cuba during the nineteenth century; and it also remains
true that through him Delany gives artistic expression to
his views concerning the very real attempt of the United
States to annex Cuba.

Such an insistence does not contradict the previ-
ously stated tenet that the characterization of Henry is not
circumscribed by its relation to Afro-Cuban and Afro-American
realities. Instead, it lends credence to a further insis-
tence: Henry's universality is possible exactly because
Delany anchors his being firmly in nineteenth-century
American and Cuban socio-historical realities. The dehumaniz-
ing environment of slavery supplies the experiences which
result in Henry's confrontation with the liberating convic-
tion that his "being" is African in essence and that its
growth depends upon the availability of nutrients which were
not to be found in the soil of white-controlled slave planta-
tions anywhere. Such is the awareness which imbues the por-
trait of Henry and which overtly informs the critical attempt
to underscore his global relevance to the situation of the
nineteenth-century black diaspora. As will become increas-
ingly clear throughout this study, Henry Blake is the Afro-
American novel's first true archetype, and the revolutionary
fire of his make-up glows even more brightly when seen

against the psychological battle-fields of twentieth-century
America and the English-speaking Caribbean.

The socio-historical conditions throughout the
British West Indies in the nineteenth century reveal a
striking similarity to the conditions in Cuba and lend
added weight to the contention that Henry Blake's Cuban
upbringing in no way limits the authorial thematic focus.
By the time of the arrival of the first black slaves in
Virginia in 1619, slavery in the British West Indies, as
in Cuba, was already a gigantic economic institution. In
fact, the entire Caribbean slave population was under tyran-
nical oppression which, by the end of the eighteenth century,
was at its height:

> Spain still held on to Cuba, San Domingo, and Puerto
> Rico. Britain had seized the lion's share including
> Bermuda, the Bahamas, Anegada, Tortola, Virgin Gorda
> and other Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Barbuda, St. Kitts
> Nevis, Redonda, Montserrat, Antigua, St. Vincent, Barba-
> dos, Grenada, Tobago, Trinidad, Jamaica, and Honduras.
> The Netherlands dominated Saba, St. Eustatious, Bonaire,
> Curacao, Aruba, shared the island of St. Martin with
> France, and possessed the colonies of Surinam, Berbice,
> and Essequibo on the South American Mainland. Denmark
> ruled St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix among the
> Virgins. France controlled Guadeloupe, Martinique, St.
> Lucia, Cayenne in Guiana, and the greatest prize of that
> period St. Dominique, now Haiti.[18]

The slave revolts in the British West Indies were
frequent and violent. Between 1619, the date of the first
recorded slave revolt in the British West Indies, and the 1833

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[18]Moore, pp. 299-300.

passage of the Abolition Act in England, at least 41 major

revolts occurred.[19] There can be little doubt that the

revolts in the nineteenth century, specifically, played a

major role in England's decision to emancipate the slaves.

There was a revolt in British Guiana in 1808, in Barbados in

1816, in British Guiana again in 1823, in Jamaica in 1824,

in Antigua in 1831, and in Jamaica again in 1831.[20] By no

comprehensive evaluation of these historical realities can

the Abolition Act of 1833 be seen as a display of British

benevolence. It was, as the West Indian historian Eric

Williams maintains, the inevitable results of the aggres-

sive self-determining exploits of the slaves themselves:

"In 1833 . . . the alternatives were clear: emancipation

from above, or emancipation from below. But EMANCIPATION."[21]

Historians of the period have generally treated the topic of

the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies with the

same bias that they treat the Spanish-American War. In

fact, most writers ignored the slaves--only recently have

historians become aware of the distortions which resulted

from this crucial bias.[22] Because of their dependence on

slave labor for profit from the sugar industry, the British

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[19]Sir Alan Burns, History of the British West Indies
(London: George Allen & Unwin, Lt., 1954), index.

[20]Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (New York:
Russell and Russell, 1961), pp. 204-208.

[21]Ibid., p. 208.

[22]Ibid., p. 197.

officials and politicians could ill afford to ignore the
repeated revolts of the slaves.

If we remember that the perverse cruelty inflicted
on the Afro-Cuban slaves--some of the horrors are recounted
in Blake--was at least equaled by the British in their
involvements with the Afro-Caribbeans, we can see the angry
rebellion of Henry as the re-enactment and representation
of the attitude of the entire Afro-Caribbean community of
the first half of the nineteenth century:

> The African slaves were driven to long and arduous toil
> with cowhide whips and the dreaded "cat o' nine tails."
> Excruciating torture was imposed upon the slaves sus-
> pected of any insubordination. In Barbados slaves were
> even thrown into tayches or vats of hot, boiling sugar-
> cane juice. A house of punishment was maintained in
> Jamaica where slaves, while being beaten, were forced
> to cling to a bar suspended over a moving treadmill. To
> fall into this was to be horribly mangled to death. In
> Dutch Guiana men and women were stretched upon the rack
> and their bones smashed with iron bars. Contrary to the
> general impression, the investment of capital did not
> ensure protection to the chattel slaves. There was no
> protection at all when it became profitable to work a
> slave to death in seven years and replace him with a new
> purchase.[23]

As illustrated by Blake and recorded by history,
violent revolt is the natural consequence of such treatment
of thousands of human beings. However--and Delany is careful
to arm Henry with numerous speeches to this effect--Henry's
revolt is not based primarily upon the external signs of
inhuman treatment. The underlying reason for his revolt
and for the revolts in the entire Caribbean is the very

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[23]Moore, p. 300.

fact that black people were being enslaved. As Henry points

out, the slave's thirst for freedom cannot be assuaged even

by promises of a blissful after-life:

> I'm tired of looking the other side; I want a hope this
> side of the vale of tears. I want something on this
> earth as well as the promise of things in another world.
> I and my wife have been both robbed of our liberty, and
> you want me to be satisfied with a hope of heaven. I
> won't do any such thing; I have waited long enough on
> heavenly promises; I'll wait no longer.[24]

The historical evidence of slave revolts in America

confirms the assertion that Henry's revolutionary make-up

is applicable to the nature of all Africans enslaved in the

Caribbean and in the United States. Addison Gayle's vivid

summary of the most celebrated of the slave revolts in America

is useful here:

> Cinque, on the ship Amstad, angry, hostile, rebellious,
> leading men in revolt, knowing before Lord Byron, that
> he who would be free must himself strike the first blow;
> Denmark Vesey of the state of South Carolina, having
> seen the lash fall upon the naked black bodies of men,
> women, and children, gathering arms and men, planning
> to usher in the day of rebellion; Gabriel Prosser,
> recruiting an army from among the wretched of the earth,
> selecting only those whose bitterness equaled his own,
> moving to achieve the liberation of people; Nat Turner,
> the most celebrated of black revolutionaries, moved by
> the words of the Calvinist God, knowing intuitively that
> in a land ruled by the sword, slaves must utilize the
> weapons of war, teaching his gospel of defiance and
> revolution, moving forward in rebellion to a certain
> Armageddon; Shields Green, one of five black followers
> of old John Brown, standing on that next to fateful day
> of the raid at Harpers Ferry, staring into the eyes of
> the great Douglass, his mind transgressing past and
> present, remembering the horrors he had witnessed, black
> men hung by the neck, women and children branded and

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[24]Martin R. Delany, _Blake; or the Huts of America_
(Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 16. All other references
to _Blake_ will be to this edition of the work.

maimed for life, families destroyed, separated; remembered and turning from Douglass, speaking those words which stand as monuments of black strength and bravery, "I guess I'll go with the old man."[25]

Since _Blake_ is only the third novel by an Afro-American, although the first to be published in the United States, the Afro-American reader (or, for that matter, any other reader) may justifiably expect its protagonist to be Afro-American. After all, the history of the novel does reveal its remarkable ability to mirror the national, racial and cultural preferences, even biases, of its creators. In keeping with such expectations, the first two Afro-American novels, despite their assimilationist implications, focused exclusively upon the Afro-American situation. William Wells Brown's heroine in _Clotel; or the President's Daughter_ (1853) is an Afro-American mulatto, and the primary concern of Frank Webb in _The Garies and Their Friends_ (1857) is the plight of the freed slaves in the North. In fact, the West Indian does not become the protagonist in another Afro-American novel until ninety-nine years later (in Edmund Austin's _The Black Challenge_, 1958).

One reason for Delany's choice of an Afro-American protagonist lies in the fact that while writing _Blake_ he came to the tentative conclusion that there was no home within the American society for people of African origin.[26] The choice of a non-American hero can be seen as Delany's

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[25]Addison Gayle, Jr., _The Way of the New World: The Black Novel in America_ (Anchor Press, 1975), pp. 26-27. (My underlining)

[26]Julianne Malveaux, "Revolutionary Themes in Martin Delany's _Blake_," _Black Scholar_, Vol. 4, 1973, p. 54.

metaphor for the rejection of the American scene and as an anticipation of his own emigration. Such a hero is consistent with his overall purpose of using the novel "as a vehicle for affirming the black identity outside the American context."[27] This consideration also lends some plausibility to Victor Ullman's theory that "the entire plot of Blake was a dream of vengeance in 1859, just before [Delany's] leaving for Africa and after deciding that emigration was his people's only salvation."[28] But the assessment of Blake as a "dream of vengeance" hardly allows for the historical realism of the protagonist's attitude; nor does it assist in discovering the serious implications of Henry's portrait for twentieth-century West Indian and Afro-American life.

Another reason is the international character of the American slave environment of the nineteenth century. As already noted, the West Indian's presence in America was highly visible. West Indians such as Russwurm, Hall and Blyden had illustrated by the very fact of their all-out participation in Afro-American struggles that any dif-ferences between the two cultures were negligible. The mingling and co-mingling of Afro-American slaves with slaves from the West Indies (some of whom had been brought to the United States by their masters, who had fled an insur-rection in San Domingo at the turn of the century, and some

[27]Gayle, "Cultural Nationalism: The Black Novelist in America," Black Books Bulletin, Vol. 1, 1971, p. 5.

[28]Victor Ullman, Martin Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 40.

of whom had been sent to America after the cessation of the
African slave trade) had negated any deep-seated suspicions
which the one group might have had concerning the other and
had provided, simultaneously, the experiential grounds for
the assertion and the strengthening of their bond. Delany's
choice of a West Indian, then, attests to his awareness of
the socio-cultural harmony between the two groups, while at
the same time it gives personal and artistic sanction to
that harmony.

But the reasons for Delany's choice of an Afro-
American protagonist cannot be so superficially dismissed.
If, given the Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean realities (of
dehumanization) of the time, Delany's choice was indeed a
natural consequence, why was it not seconded in the works
of other Afro-American novelists for an entire century? A
closer look at the conditions in which Henry Blake "lived,"
while it may not provide a satisfying answer, does assist
our understanding of the complexity of the question. Had
the first serialized publication of Blake continued to the
final chapter, Henry might have made a more lasting impres-
sion on the collective consciousness of the literary public.
In reality, only 26 of its 84 chapters were printed in The
Anglo-African Magazine from January to July, 1859.[29]
Although the magazine did not cease publication until

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[29]Miller, p. xi. All other information about the
publication of Blake comes from this introduction to the
novel.

March, 1860, it did not print any further chapters of <u>Blake</u>.
Whatever the reasons—and they are not important here—the
entire novel was not printed until November, 1861, its
weekly installments in <u>The Weekly Anglo-African</u> continuing
until May, 1862. Henry's fragmented appearance, then, is
undoubtedly one reason for his lack of impact upon the
nineteenth-century reading public.

Floyd Miller offers further information regarding
the reasons for Henry's demise:

> Despite its relevance, <u>Blake</u> was generally ignored.
> There was apparently little, if any, commentary on
> Delany's work. This was partly because the complete
> novel was printed in 1861 and 1862: the Civil War had
> begun; little attention was given to the question of
> annexing Cuba; and the possibility of large-scale slave
> rebellion was dwarfed by the more immediate issues arising
> out of the war. In the light of this overt indifference,
> it is impossible to gauge what impact <u>Blake</u> may have had
> upon Northern black communities; newspaper comment during
> this period was devoted to the war itself, the Haytian
> emigration movement, and attempts to push the national
> administration to faster action on emancipation and the
> enlistment of black soldiers. Although a black actor,
> Melachi Dunmore, contemplated dramatizing Delany's
> novel, this was never seriously undertaken and <u>Blake</u>
> was quickly forgotten.[30]

Still, <u>Blake</u>'s apparent lack of popularity does not
fully account for the long absence of the West Indian in a
major role in the Afro-American novel. If, as has already
been documented, the West Indian played a highly visible
role in the Afro-American society, then the novelists
already had sufficient data to spur their artistic imagina-
tion. The intention here is not to imply, however, that

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[30]Miller, p. xii.

the multi-leveled visibility of the West Indian in Afro-American society should automatically have resulted in West Indian portraits. Obviously, the phenomena which influence the artist's choice of subject matter at any given historical moment are so many and varied as to render any such suggestion ridiculous. Yet when a figure as important (to the development of the Afro-American novel) as Delany spotlights a certain facet of the phenomenological complex, the reasons should be explicated, the implications explored, and the effects gauged.

Even if Henry's characterization was thought to be false in its implication that the West Indian could be an effective leader of Afro-Americans, one wonders why there were not more immediate portraits which reflected an opposing authorial viewpoint. The wondering presupposes, admittedly, that the topic is regarded as important enough to merit serious debate. To be sure the invectives against the West Indian did come, but not until the mid-twentieth century (with Baldwin and Ellison), by which time other socio-political and socio-cultural forces were affecting the relationship between Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean. If the reasons for these negative portraits of later writers are to be understood, it becomes necessary to examine more thoroughly the issues inherent in Henry's make-up, the portrait's further implications, and the virtual disappearance of the West Indian from the pages of the Afro-American novel.

We can begin our examination of these larger thematic
issues with the observation that Henry Blake is the American
novel's first black nationalist. That is to say, he is the
only nineteenth century portrait-in-black to be endowed
with a consciousness heightened by a sense of total aliena-
tion from the culture of the oppressors, the only fictive
voice crying in the black man's wilderness of America for
the self-determination of the African people in the Western
world, the only imaginative conception in whose make-up can
be seen the distinctive beginnings of a black aesthetic.
Henry's self-consciousness is racial--"I have come to Cuba
to free my race; and that which I desire here to do, I have
done in another place"[31]--but he wants to ensure the perpetu-
ation of this consciousness by nationalizing the African in
the West. He is the culmination of a debate which had been
gathering momentum since the arrival of the first group of
slaves in the West Indies and in the Americas.

The debate concerned the attitude and response of the
black race to its own situation in America. Given the choice,
most slaves would gladly have gone back to Africa.[32] Although
the centuries of slavery in America witnessed various stages
of frustration of this hope for an exodus to the motherland,
the idea never completely died. Against this psychological

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[31]Blake, p. 195.

[32]Edwin S. Redkey, Black Exodus (1969; rpt. New Haven:
Yale University Press, 1971), p. 1.

backdrop the history of the African race in America looms

as the history of the varied manifestations of this hope.

Edwin S. Redkey's notion that "Afro-Americans, by necessity,

defined their roles within the limits set by the white

majority,"[33] underestimates the significance of the more or

less sustained Pan-African/black-nationalistic urges which

surfaced despite the institutionalized attempt to atrophy

them. It is at least as accurate an assessment of Afro-

American history to say that the quality of black resistance

to white tyranny mitigated the black experience in America.

Read from the slave's perspective, Afro-American history

becomes the history of various levels of black resistance

to white tyranny, a resistance whose impetus was beyond the

white majority's power to originate or to suppress and whose

quality transcended the oppressors' powers of analysis.

Such is the essentially black-nationalistic view of American

history which informs the characterization of Henry Blake.

Delany was well aware that the Afro-Americans had

gradually developed a culture which became more American

than African; but he also knew that the struggle for self-

determination, the logical extension of the resistance

impulse discussed earlier, continued at different times and

at different levels of the Afro-American society. As Henry

journeys throughout the southern states (Part 1) to rally the

slaves with the call to arms, he finds what Delany had

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[33]Redkey, p. 2.

already observed about the nature of the slaves--that beneath
the combination of fear, anguish, docility, and belligerence
which characterized the slave-master relationship was the
very deep need of the slave to take the reins of his life
more securely and aggressively in his own hands. This need
for self-determination on the part of the slaves is the same
need which, as early as 1787, led a group of eighty "free"
blacks in Boston to seek financial aid from the Massachusetts
government for the purpose of returning to Africa.[34]

Henry is both black-nationalist and Pan-Africanist.
The term "Pan-Africanism," incidentally, is couched in
ambiguity, much of which stems from current attempts to re-
interpret the word and to re-direct its emphasis. In
Delany's day Pan-Africanism, loosely interpreted, meant the
literal, self-motivated emigration of black people to
Africa, where they might exist as an independent nation.
Symbolically, it meant the psychological return to an Afro-
centric way of looking at the world. Intrinsic to this world-
view is the belief in the uniqueness of the black race--
"above all else we are Negro"--and in the absolute necessity
of self-determination. Henry has Pan-Africanist leanings--
in fact, he was on his way to Africa, he thought, when he
realized that he had been duped into coming to America--but
he was more concerned with the symbolic and nationalistic
dimensions of the concept than he was with moving physically

[34]Redkey, p. 17.

to Africa.

The difference between the two terms is, in the final analysis, negligible. At the deepest levels of their meaning both Pan-Africanism and black nationalism are parts of the same ideology, expressions of the same basic apprehension of reality, passages, ultimately, to the same destination-- an internationally unified black nation with a politically independent Africa as its cultural matrix. The difference is one of emphasis and strategy: black nationalism is the political working-out of Pan-African ideology. In his conversations and debates, for example, Henry emphasizes the specific needs of the Afro-American and the Afro-Cuban as these needs relate to their immediate environment. His black-nationalism is the result of his Pan-African ideals.

Placed within this ideological context, Henry's enforced interruption of his passage back to Africa assumes symbolic proportions. His whole sojourn in America and Cuba becomes an in-lieu-of-Africa venture: if he cannot go to Africa, at least he can try to implement whatever is African in his consciousness in his American and Cuban reality. The undeniable evidence of his physical displacement-- Delany is careful to make this displacement a part of the novel's plot--makes eloquent the case for his potential psycho-cultural displacement and is reminiscent of the historical displacement of those Africans who were brought to America. The external war which Henry wages, as a consequence

of this displacement, against the bulwarks of colonialism and imperialism is the outward expression of a simultaneous internal struggle to preserve what is most dear to him--his awareness of another time and place, an awareness which his stay in the Western world has rendered somewhat hazy.

Historically, the activity of British and American philanthropists sometimes militated against the literal implementation of Pan-Africanism. The founding of Sierra Leone in 1787, for example, cannot be attributed to Pan-African ideals, since it was motivated by principles which were determined by British and American religious philanthropists, who viewed Africa as a prime target for colonization and christianization.[35] And the American Colonization Society, organized in 1817 in the wake of the Sierra Leone experiment, was itself an extension of this "disinterested benevolence."[36] It is not surprising, therefore, that only a comparatively few blacks voluntarily joined the colony: it promised a return to Africa, but it did so on colonizationist terms. Most of the 1300 freed slaves transported to Liberia by the Society before the Civil War were ex-slaves whose masters had freed them "specifically on the condition that they leave the United States."[37] Even men like Paul Cuffe, a black ship-captain from Massachusetts, who favored

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[35]Redkey, pp. 17-7.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Redkey, pp. 18-19.

commerce with Sierre Leone because it would lead to the
repatriation of free Afro-Americans and the consequent
evangelization of Africa, spoke out against the American
Colonization Society because it was neither founded nor
guided by blacks.[38] Emigration without black nationalism
was not an altogether attractive prospect.

But Africa was not regarded as the only home for
black people, a conviction which lies at the root of Henry's
Cuban enterprise. Since the 1820s blacks, for reasons of
personal safety or better chances of advancement, had been
emigrating, for example, to Hispaniola (Haiti).[39] By 1838
an estimated 10,000 blacks had emigrated to Canada, while
an unestimated number had settled in the British West Indies.
By 1843 roughly 8000 had made their home in Haiti; and after
1845 prominent Afro-American anti-colonialists were seeking
their fortunes also in Central America and Liberia. The
latter country was not generally considered "worthy of the
respect of the Negro in the United States" until the Liberian
declaration of independence, which signified that the dis-
trusted American Colonization Society could now be replaced
by an authentic black nation.[40] Delany himself, who

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[38]Redkey, p. 19.

[39]Howard Holman Bell, A Survey of the Negro Conven-
tion Movement 1830-1861 (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p.
132. All other statistics about emigration in this para-
graph comes from this chapter of Bell's book.

[40]Bell, p. 135.

initially voiced his conviction that blacks should remain
in the United States to fight for civil and human rights,
underwent so radical a change of mind that in 1852 (seven
years before the publication of Blake) he set forth in The
Condition, Elevation, and Destiny of the Colored People of
the United States a fully developed plan for a black empire
in the Caribbean.

Meanwhile the fact of emigration was disturbing to
that part of the black population desiring to remain in the
United States. Frederick Douglass, who by 1850 was the most
prominent lack leader in America,[41] voiced the collective
fears of the opposition: "I really fear that some whose
presence in this country is necessary to the elevation of
the Colored people will leave us--while the degraded and the
worthless will remain behind--to help bind us to our present
debasement."[42] At the core of this fear was the desire for
multi-leveled integration, even (given the socio-political
realities of America and the West) assimilation. Integra-
tion and assimilation had no place in Delany's thinking
and Henry Blake in his argument against these possible solu-
tions to the black man's problems.

In summary, then, the issues which were woven into
the fabric of debate in the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries were Pan-Africanism, its attendant phenomena

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[41]Bell, p. 138.

[42]Ibid.

(black-nationalism and emigrationism) and its opposite
(integration). It is against this ideological background
that the revolutionary activities of the protagonist have
their relevance and that the implications of Delany's West
Indian portrait are best understood. In the figure of
Henry Blake, Delany embodies, somewhat unevenly, representa-
tive criteria of the three alternatives (Pan-Africanism,
black-nationalism and emigrationism) and argues passionately
against the fourth (integration). Henry is Delany's state-
ment to the American Colonization Society that the black
experience in America has dictated that the nineteenth-
century journey to Africa has to begin within the black
psyche; that emigration to Africa will be culturally useless
if it is not motivated and directed by black people who are
psychologically divorced from a white value system and who
define the nature and dictate the course of their own
humanity. So it is that Henry encourages the emigration
of rebellious slaves to Canada, and he solicits aid from no
white-directed organization. So it is also that Henry
reverses the black-white Anglo-European system of aesthe-
tics. His epithets for the white race--"candlefaces,"
"alabasters"--are as negative as the modern word "honky."
When Henry declares "I am for war--war against the whites,"
he is speaking both literally and metaphorically; he is
adamantly opposed to the idea that slaves should adopt the
values of their white masters; and he knows that his pure

black body is synonymous with manhood and strength and that it should be the physical evidence of a psycho-cultural blackness. The only way for the black race in America to ensure this union of body and mind, Henry believes, is to reject everything which perpetuates feelings of inadequacy and inferiority within and about black people. Such psycho-cultural debunking is the very soul of Delany's Pan-Africanism. The organizing and politicizing of this frame of mind becomes Henry's task. He must assist the eventual institution of a lifestyle which would de-Europeanize the black mentality.

Henry is given the dual role of Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American (as Delany's mouthpiece he functions as an Afro-American). Delany suggests through Henry that black nationalism is the historical point of synthesis of both cultures. Henry's international character allows Delany to assert the similarity of the slave's position anywhere in the Western World. But what Henry's portrait reveals of the West Indian's historical relationship to his environment applies only to the pre-emancipation era. Delany sets his novel temporally between the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies (1837) and the emancipation of the slaves in America (1862). He argues 1) that such self-determinism must play a major role in the Afro-American abolitionist movement (as it did in the British West Indian struggle) and 2) that it must be the basis of the new, post-slavery order for blacks in the West. It is in the

second argument that Henry's characterization reveals severe limitations in its attempted application to both groups of black people. After Delany's death in 1885 it becomes increasingly apparent that black nationalism will not become the chief political response either in the British West Indies or in the United States. As will be shown later in this study, the black nationalist would be the exception rather than the general rule; the Martin Delanys and Henry Blakes would continue to be unpopular and little known until long after the black nationalist struggles of the 1960s rekindled interest in the Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean past.

Delany must not, however, be blamed for a future over which he had no control. The limitation of Henry's representative nature is not a flaw in his characterization. Rather, it exposes the flaw, from Delany's perspective, in the mentality of black people in the West Indies and in America. That is, if we relate Delany's black nationalist ideology to the contemporary Afro-American and West Indian cultures, we have to conclude that both cultures, in their separate ways, have become so assimilated into the body politic of colonialist and imperialist nations that black nationalism can hardly articulate an acceptable case for itself.

Nor should we regard as a flaw in Henry's characterization the fact that he exhibits a certain pliancy which

belies the rigid tenacity of his black nationalist approach:

his revolutionary ideology leads one to expect him to rail

against the "subject" status of the ex-slaves in the British

West Indies; but Henry quickly and wholeheartedly accepts

this Afro-British situation. What must be regarded as a

flaw, however, is that in his assessment of the Afro-British

situation he does not seem to recognize a contradiction:

> . . . our brethren there are all free and equal in the
> law; yet they are a constituent part of the body politic
> and subject alike to the British government and laws
> which forbid any interference in foreign affairs by any
> of Her Majesty's subjects. (p. 293)

He defends their failure to rise up and assert their inde-

pendence in the revolutionary spirit which characterized

their struggle toward emancipation:

> Simply because under the circumstances, this is not
> particularly desirable, if they were able to do so,
> which they are not. What they most desire is freedom
> and equality politically, practically carried out, having
> no objection to being an elementary part of the British
> body politic. (p. 283)

Yet he insists that the Afro-Cubans must strike for freedom

and independence at one and the same time because

> the cases are entirely different. . . . The British
> islands have been fully enfranchised by that nation, all
> the inhabitants being equally eligible to positions:
> whilst here in Cuba we are the political and social
> inferiors of the whites, existing as freemen only by
> sufferance, and subject to enslavement at any time. . . .
> Should we under such circumstances strike for liberty,
> it must also be for independent self-government, because
> we have the mother-country and the white colonists alike
> to contend against. (pp. 288-9)

His reasoning reflects an inconsistency with his revolu-

tionary position in Cuba and America. In defending the

Afro-British situation, he is justifying in essence the
exchange of slavery in the British West Indies for assimila-
tion. Whether such an exchange was practical is not, it
seems to me, the pivotal question. Whether revolution in
the British West Indies was necessary for the survival of an
Afro-centric nation is.

This tolerance which Delany, through Henry, evinces
towards West Indians illustrates, nonetheless, that Delany
would go to great lengths to sustain his visceral bond of unity
with these West Indian people. Although he was cognizant
of West Indian shortcomings, he allows no disparaging impulse
to affect his treatment of the British West Indians, an
observation which suggests that the inconsistency in Henry's
ideology is quite intentional. Not only had Delany visited
the West Indies, but his experience in America with Robert
Campbell, "a brash young West Indian school teacher," was
itself sufficient reason to justify a more tentative
approach to his analysis of the West Indian situation.
Against Delany's wishes Campbell had solicited money from
white sources for the underwriting of Delany's expedition
to Africa; the incident sorely tested Delany's patience.
Delany's published response to the Campbell situation shows
that he harbored misgivings about the ability of the West
Indian to understand the American situation:

> I drop every reflection and feeling of unpleasantness
> towards my young brother Campbell, who, being a West
> Indian, probably did not understand those white

Americans, and formed his opinion of American blacks,
and their capacity to "lead," from the estimate they
set upon them.[43]

But he transfers the blame to a group of Philadelphia whites

who allegedly engineered Campbell's monetary scheme.

> I owe it to posterity, the destiny of my race, the
> great adventure into which I am embarked and the posi-
> tion I sustain to it, to make this record . . . against
> this most glaring and determined act of theirs to blast
> the Negro's prospects in this first effort in the Chris-
> tian Era, to work out his own moral and political salva-
> tion, by the regeneration of his fatherland, through the
> medium of a self-projected scheme; and thereby take the
> credit to themselves. It was too great an undertaking
> for Negroes to have the credit of, and therefore they
> must go under the auspices of some white American Chris-
> tians.[44]

But Delany does not allow this element of misgiving to

affect his attitude toward Henry, who understands whites

(British, American and Spanish) only too well. The point

here is that in his novel Delany removes from his conception

of the Afro-Caribbean all vestiges of depreciatory sentiment.

The result is near-idealization. I find Henry to be

so convincing in the totality of his commitment, so magnet-

like in his enthusiasm for black self-determination, that he

comes close to seeming incredible. His near-idealization is

affected despite the historical considerations (already dis-

cussed) embodied in his characterization. The near-idealization

is reinforced by the fact that, despite seemingly insurmounta-

ble odds, he never loses a single skirmish with the hostile

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[43]Bell, p. 239.

[44]Ibid.

forces which he encounters during his campaign through the
youth. He moves with the invocation and the conviction of
divine support. Thus his narrow escapes seem to be accom-
plished miraculously, and his image looms larger than life.

The ideological inconsistency reflected in Henry's
attitude to the British West Indians becomes, then, an
authorial _felix culpa_ because, without evidence of authorial
intention, it saves Henry's portrait from total idealization.
It is a fact that Delany intended to idealize his portrait--
it has already been established that Henry is the embodiment
of the best elements from Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean his-
tory and the answer to the socio-political exigencies of
Delany's day. That Delany failed to accomplish total ideali-
zation must be considered fortunate. Ironically, perhaps
even paradoxically, the intent was itself the reason for
its failure. That is, his decision to render a totally
positive image of the West Indian forced his protagonist
to become too ideologically accommodating with regard to
the post-emancipation British West Indian situation. This
happy fault suggests that race politics (the implementation
of race-centered ideology), not art, was Delany's greatest
passion.

An assessment of the religious attitudes of Henry
exposes what is least coherent in his make-up. Henry does
not accept the Europeanized and the Americanized version of
Christianity. To him such Christianity is the religion of

the masters, the supreme tool of slavery; but Henry, like

Delany, is too entangled in the web of the Euro-Christian

tradition to extricate himself completely. As the General of

the Cuban Army of Emancipation, he discourages all sectarian

interests of his followers but recognizes the need for a

common religion. However, the tenets of his "one religion"

bear striking theoretic resemblance to the Christianity

which he rejects: ". . . a faith in a common Savior as an

intercessor for our sins . . . one God, who is and must be

our acknowledged common Father" (258). What he finally

embraces is Christianity, reinterpreted and redirected:

> Our ceremonies, then, . . . are borrowed from no denomi-
> nations, creed, nor church: no existing organization,
> secret, secular, nor religious; but originated by our-
> selves, adopted to our own condition, circumstances,
> and wants, founded upon the eternal word of God our
> Creator, and impressed upon the tablet of each of our
> hearts. (p. 258)

What Delany is incapable of confronting is the fact

that the acceptance of the master's religion remains, regard-

less of the nature or degree of re-interpretation, contra-

dictory to the core of his revolutionary ideology. Delany

ignores the obvious extension of his black-nationalism:

a religion--not merely a religious "ceremony"--originated

by black people, distinct from the Euro-Christian religion.

The biographical fact that Delany's plans for the African

Civilization Society included Christianization (from the

perspective of a free black people) lends more credence to

this interpretation of Henry's religious situation. Henry

does the only thing he can: having looked deeply into him-
self, he speaks out of a profound sense of need for a God
made in Henry's image, which is also the image of his people.
But he is forced by the fact of his spiritual deracination
from his African religious soil to express his radical God-
consciousness through traditional Euro-Christian forms--
prayers and hymns to "Great Jehovah." Put another way, the
problem--neither Henry nor Delany conceives of it as such--
is that Henry has authentic religious substance but no
culturally satisfying tradition out of which to implement it
and make it organic.

Still, this aspect of Henry's characterization, its
ambivalence notwithstanding, dramatizes a crucial aspect of
the religious concerns of black people in America and the
West Indies--namely, whether Christianity can be a viable
religion for black people. Through Henry, Delany pays only
superficial attention to this complex consideration; conse-
quently, his affirmative answer lacks conviction. His
handling of Henry's religious dilemma does not even reveal
a knowledge of the existence of other African religions
which have prevailed (in some form or other) in the West
Indies and hence does not even begin to span the gulf of
conflict which exists between the surviving African religious
forms and the more popular forms of Christianity. Because
of the more widespread survival of African forms in the
West Indies, there are religious postures which Henry,

because of his alienation, does not even confront, much less articulate or examine. But in the West Indies, as in America, the vast majority of people build their churches out of re-polished Euro-Christian material. In point of fact, compared to that of the Christian masses of West Indians, Henry's religious attitude is radical in its celebration of the collective black self, radical also in his conviction that black people must make religion serve their specific needs as a free people. Despite the ultimately questionable act of his pouring black wine into white wine-skins, Delany sanctions Henry's religious attitudes as forcefully as he supports Henry's revolutionary politics.

This first portrait of a West Indian protagonist in the American novel stamps the West Indian not only as a force to be reckoned with but as a self-determined being. Such an image constitutes a threat to an imperialist/colonialist world-view. It contradicts "almost every stereotype of the black that had been commonly used in that period with a positive counterexample."[45] For black people in America and in the West Indies it becomes a gauge of their self-determination. Despite its near-idealization Delany's portrait, more than any other portrait to date, illustrates a psycho-cultural synthesis between the West Indian and the Afro-American which may well be symptomatic of what on a larger scale must be the basis for the interaction of all segments of the African diaspora.

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[45]Malveaux, p. 53.

CHAPTER III

WEST INDIAN STEREOTYPES IN THE AFRO-AMERICAN NOVEL

Sixty-eight years after Delany's Blake William E. B. DuBois gave the Afro-American novel its second portrait of a West Indian with the publication of Dark Princess in 1928. In this novel Perigua, a Jamaican, echoes Delany's image of the West Indian as a violent revolutionary. However, the differences between the two authors' attitudes toward their West Indian characters are profound; whereas Delany's is sympathetic, even empathetic, DuBois's is pathetic. Henry is the recipient of Delany's admiration; Perigua is the butt of DuBois' contempt. There is also a glaring difference in the assumptions inherent in the make-up of the two characters: Henry's make-up is predicated upon self-love, Perigua's upon self-hate. When contrasted with Henry's role as protagonist, Perigua's function as a minor character articulates the difference between these two authorial reactions to the involvement of the West Indian in Afro-American society. As will be discussed later, the animosity between DuBois and the West Indian Marcus Garvey undoubtedly influenced DuBois' negative portrait of Perigua. It is also certain that nineteen

years later the portrait of Ras in Ralph Ellison's Invisible
Man (1947) contains an answer to the question of Pan-Africanism
posed in the wake of the movements like Garvey's.

Invisible Man puts the stamp of approval upon DuBois'
rendering of West Indian consciousness and reveals in the
process how a minor character can assume a role so powerful
that it indicts an entire sub-culture. Both DuBois and
Ellison portray the West Indian as he races toward his own
destruction and that of other unsuspecting people. In order
to communicate the seriousness of his revolutionary cause,
Perigua commits suicide by blowing himself away with dynamite;
and Ras is last seen astride a black horse in the middle of
a towering inferno, a spear protruding through his jaws,
thereby ending the potent flow of words which ironically
stands in contrast to the impotence of his life.

Nineteen years after Invisible Man the continuing
movement of the Afro-American novelists' rendering of the
West Indian from the heroic to the cowardly, is evidenced in
James Baldwin's Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone.
Again the West Indian character, Mr. Proudhammer, functions
in a minor role. This time he does not aspire to physical
violence but he is no less impotent than Perigua or Ras.
Born in Barbados, Mr. Proudhammer cannot make the adjustment
to the environment of Harlem because of his unfathomable
pride in his Barbadian past, which had nothing in common
with his Harlem life style. His regal conception of himself

makes him regard Harlem with blazing, self-destructive scorn; and Baldwin's scorn for him blazes with equal intensity. Unlike DuBois' Perigua and Ellison's Ras, Mr. Proudhammer is not an obvious caricature of Marcus Garvey; but he carries within his limited conception Baldwin's attitude toward the fierce pride which characterized Garvey and which, beginning with Perigua, becomes a part of the West Indian stereotype in the Afro-American novel.

John A. Williams' brief portrait of a West Indian couple in his novel, Mothersill and the Foxes (1975), attests to the persistence of negative West Indian images in Afro-American fiction. Sexually decadent, Terrence and Melanie Holdenfield embody Williams' variation on the theme of West Indian pride. Their sexual exploits become a pathetic attempt to give form and substance to an empty life style. Thus as a couple they illustrate yet another kind of impotence.

When one considers that the pattern of negative stereotypes of West Indians spans almost five decades in the development of the Afro-American novel and that three of the four novelists (Baldwin, Ellison and Williams) are perhaps the most outstanding of Afro-American novelists, one suspects that the reason for the stereotypes goes beyond the authors' individual animosity toward Garvey or West Indians in general. In his provocative article about the West Indian stereotype in the Afro-American novel Lloyd Brown suggests that the "pejorative" images of foreign blacks have been in effect a

transference of the sub-human status which has been imposed

o n the Afro-American b y white America. While I will concur

that some sort of "transference" takes place, I think that

Brown's thesis is too psychologically specific to be proved

by a literary critic, unless, of course, that critic

has more than a dilettantish familiarity with the field of

psychology. However, as Brown points out, there is much

evidence in Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1963),

a psychological study of the effects of colonialism on the

colonized, to suggest that Brown's idea is entirely credible.

Still, a more viable thesis for the literary critic who

cannot claim any professional training in the field of psy-

chology is that the pejorative West Indian images are, so to

speak, vessels into which the authors may be pouring their

fears for the potential psychological situation of the Afro-

American. Put another way, these images become in effect

objective correlatives for the authors' confrontation of the

Afro-American potential for self hate, mass destruction and

psychic disorientation.

In order to support such a contention, it is neces-

sary to attempt two objectives in this chapter. The first

is to discuss the main socio-historical realities which

underscore the collective frustration of the Afro-American

attempts to unite around a common ideology, for this

frustration is the main reason that Garveyism becomes an

attractive alternative for the Afro-American lower classes

and evokes the contempt of these novelists. Such a summary
is bound to render the portraits more comprehensible to the
reader. The second objective is to examine the specific
nature and implications of each portrait, uncovering in the
process the author's attitude toward his conceptions. It is
on the basis of the authors' attitudes that I will suggest
that the stereotypes are being used, probably unconsciously,
as objective correlatives for the authors' confrontation of
the negative potential of the Afro-American condition. An
understanding of the nature and implications of these stereo-
types is essential to an appreciation of the significance
of the fuller and more positive portraits of the novelists
(Paule Marshall and John Killens) who presage the death of
the West Indian stereotype in the Afro-American novel.

An examination of the relevant socio-political reali-
ties which occur in the years between Delany's Henry Blake
and DuBois' Perigua helps to explain the reasons for Perigua's
make-up, and they lead inevitably to the advent of Marcus
Garvey, whose controversial career in America is the most
immediate cause for the pejorative stereotypes. As previously
stated, in the decades before the Civil War the emigration-
ist and nationalist schemes of Afro-Americans flourished
largely because of the severity of the socio-political cli-
mate. According to Howard Holman Bell, generally considered
"the foremost historian of ante bellum black thought,"[1]

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[1]Edwin S. Redkey, Black Exodus (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1969), p. 20.

most of the prominent Negro leaders "paid tacit, if not open
obeisance, to the cause of emigration. . . . Actual emigra-
tion was never insignificant, and potential emigration was a
powerful psychological factor in the Negro's fight for the
suffrage and equality at home."[2] Nor did the end of the
war in 1865 lead to the immediate relaxation of the laws and
attitudes which militated against the egalitarian existence
of blacks and whites, despite the fact that Southern blacks
eagerly embraced politics after 1865 in the hope of meli-
orating the socio-political situation of Afro-Americans.[3]
By 1877 whatever political power they gained had been effec-
tively reduced by the fraud, intimidation and violence of
Southern whites.[4] And by 1890 the sharecropping and crop-
lien systems, the dominant economic aspects of the post-war
agricultural adjustment in the South, had worked to the
detriment of the poor farmers, black and white.[5] It is not
surprising, then, that largely because of these political,
social and economic realities there were varying stages of
unrest among blacks, some of whom, considering their plight
to be little better than slavery, not only believed in the
legitimacy of emigration but "wanted to emigrate rather than
stay and fight these apparently insoluble . . . conditions."[6]

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[2]Howard Holman Bell, A Survey of the Negro Convention
Movement (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 272.

[3]Redkey, p. 3.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., p. 6.

[6]Ibid., p. 7.

Thus the period between the Emancipation Proclamation
and the outbreak of World War I witnessed the fruition of
emigration and black nationalist programs and thereby ensured
ideological continuity between Delany's time and that of
DuBois and Garvey. One of the most celebrated efforts was
led by Bishop Henry McNeal Turner (1834-1915), "without a
doubt the most prominent and outspoken American advocate of
black emigration in the years between the Civil War and the
First World War."[7] Turner utilized his office as Bishop of
the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church to keep alive
the image of Africa as the promised land.[8] Like Garvey
after him, he preached that "a powerful and independent
Africa would redeem the self-respect of black men everywhere
and provide the national identity without which Afro-Americans
were made easy victims of white oppression."[9] Through his
hypothesis that "God is a Negro,"[10] implied in Blake and
later developed by DuBois and Garvey, he hoped to supply a
firm psycho-theological basis for the Afro-American's concept
of self. Concurrent with Turner's activities were those of
the distinguished Edward Blyden, West Indian Professor at
Liberia College, undertaken to assist both the actual emi-
gration of black people to Liberia as well as the theoretic

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[7]Ibid., p. 24.

[8]Ibid., p. 289.

[9]Ibid., p. 35.

[10]Ibid., p. 40.

education of blacks concerning the positive aspects of past
and contemporary African civilizations. So comprehensive
was Blyden's published research concerning Africa and the
black diaspora, so pervasive were his scholarly studies,
that both the concept of Pan-Africanism and the more modern
concept of Negritude--the affirmation that there exists
"an innate Negro character or personality" distinct from all
others--find historical roots in the writings of Blyden.[11]
It is perhaps in the Garvey Movement that the greatest heri-
tage of Blyden's ideas are to be found.[12]

The period between the Emancipation Proclamation and
the outbreak of World War I also witnessed the intensifying
of the ideological debate among the opponents of emigration,
a debate which Garvey would later throw into relief. The
scope of the debate was framed by two prominent Afro-American
leaders, Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) and William E. B.
DuBois (1868-1963). Washington taught his followers "to
accept rather than protest the segregation, disfranchisement,
and inequality enforced by whites."[13] If the blacks lived
morally, worked hard, and accumulated money, they would,
Washington argued, eventually win the respect of the white

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[11]Hollis R. Lynch, Edward Wilmot Blyden, Pan-Negro
Patriot (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 252.

[12]Ibid., p. 251.

[13]Redkey, p. 3.

masses and the equality of treatment which they sought.[14]

It was this kind of accommodationist ideology which Garvey

would later attack, as he would the ambivalence of DuBois.

In The Souls of Black Folk (1902) DuBois argued that the

Afro-American "ever feels his two-ness--An American, a

Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings;

two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength

alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[15] When Addison

Gayle, Afro-American literary critic, argues that this dual

self-consciousness is "the psychic malady of black men which

forms so much of an ambivalent history,"[16] he is echoing a

position which Garvey argues more forcefully. And his observa-

tion that much of Afro-American history is ambivalent is

valid, for the attempt to merge this double self into a

"better, truer self" only exposes the ambivalence:

> In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to
> be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America
> has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would
> not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white American-
> ism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the
> world.[17]

Ironically, adherence to DuBois' advice--that Afro-Americans

should seek to gain equal rights and opportunities through

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[14]Ibid.

[15]W. E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk in
Three Negro Classics (New York: Avon Books, 1965), p. 215.

[16]Addison Gayle, Jr., The Way of the New World:
The Black Novel in America (New York: Doubleday/Anchor
Press, 1976), p. 47.

[17]DuBois, p. 215

education and active protest--led to the re-affirmation of the dual self (Gayle's "psychic malady") which DuBois analyzed. Realistically, only a "talented tenth" would be able to acquire the kind of education of which he spoke.[18]   Thus both DuBois' and Washington's proposals admitted to the same basic strategy, despite the difference in tactics;[19] that is, each ideology expected a black elite to win the dignity desired by the Afro-Americans.   Between Washington's economic elite, on the one hand, and DuBois' intellectual elite on the other, the way was left open for an ideology geared to attract the poorer and less well-educated black masses who felt ideologically insecure and socio-economically imprisoned.   In the decade after World War I Marcus Garvey not only supplied that ideology but epitomized its spirit.

Without a doubt Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) is the single most important influence upon the Afro-American novelists' depiction of the West Indian.   From his arrival in the United States in 1916 to his deportation in 1927 this "squat rounded Jamaican with unmistakable, black features,"[20] this "short, stocky, largely self-educated but supremely confident black man,"[21] instilled a keen sense of race pride within the consciousness of the Afro-American masses.

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[18]Redkey, pp. 3-4.

[19]Ibid., p. 4.

[20]Gayle, p. 94.

[21]E. David Cronon, Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey (University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), p. 4.

Through the program of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (his own organization) and the Negro World (a weekly magazine which Garvey founded as the mouthpiece for his ideologies), Garvey insisted that the redemption of the Black people in the world could come "only through the rebuilding of their shattered pride and a restoration of a truly Negro culture."[22]

Garvey's Pan-Africanist and black nationalist ideology was similar in some of its aspects to that of Blyden, Delany and Turner. All four wanted the self-determination of the people of African descent, and all sought to inculcate black pride (inseparably a part of black nationalism) by expounding the positive aspects of black civilizations. Less intellectual than Blyden and Turner, more emotional and forceful than Delany, and more colorful than all three, Garvey made the strongest appeal to the pride of the black person with proclamations and exhortations like the following:

> When Europe was inhabited by a race of cannibals, a race of savages, naked men, heathens and pagans, Africa was peopled with a race of cultured black men, who were masters in art, science and literature; men who were cultured and refined; men, who, it was said, were like the gods. Even the great poets of old sang in beautiful sonnets of the delight it afforded the gods to be in companionship with the Ethiopians. Why, then, should we lose hope? Black men, you were once great; you shall be great again. Lose not courage, lose not faith, go forward.[23]

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[22]Ibid., p. 271.

[23]Ibid., p. 176.

And he placed the greatest emphasis on the need for black internationality, that is, the political union of the black diaspora. "The thing to do," he urged, "is to get organized."[24] Whereas the shipping lines established by organizations such as the American Colonization Society and Martin Delany's Liberian Exodus Joint Stock Steamship Company attempted to encourage the emigration of black people to Africa and other parts of the globe and to assist the self-determination of black people everywhere, the aim of the many branches of the Garvey movement was to create the political and cultural unity of the diaspora. Garvey's biographer, E. David Cronon, provides a clearer focus of the scope and the aim of the Garvey movement:

> The Black Star Line and its successor, the Black Cross Navigation and Trading Company, the Negro Factories Cor-poration, and indeed the African Legion, the Black Cross Nurses, and the other components of the U.N.I.A. itself were all a part of a general plan to weld the Negro people into a racially conscious, united group for effective mass action. Others might laugh or scoff at some of the antics of the various Garvey organizations, their serious members ludicrous with high-toned titles and elaborate uniforms, but the importance of this aspect of the movement in restoring the all but shat-tered Negro self-confidence should not be overlooked.[25]

Furthermore, Garvey's aesthetic principles were given more overt and more extensive statement than those of other black nationalists; hence his rejection of the conventional Anglo-American black/white color symbology seemed more

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[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., p. 174.

comprehensive and aggressive. His poem, "The Black Woman,"

for example, exalts blackness in a manner which was foreign

to the Anglo-American literary tradition:

> Black Queen of beauty, thou hast given color to the world:
> Among other women thou art royal and the fairest!
> Like the bright jewels of the regal diadem,
> Shin'st thou, Goddess of Africa, Nature's purest emblem!
>
> Black men worship at thy royal shrine of purest love,
> Because in thine eyes are virtue's steady and holy mark,
> As we see no other, clothed in silk or fine linen,
> From ancient Venus, the Goddess, to mythical Helen.[26]

Apart from the implication that for black people the

apprehension of the beautiful should begin with the percep-

tion of beauty in blackness, and apart from the glorification

of the black past, Garvey's black nationalism also demanded

a black religion; and in his religious prescriptions he was

more specific and more daring than Delany, DuBois and Turner.

His African Orthodox Church extended the idea of a black

Deity to other areas of the Christian dogma. "Let us start

our Negro painters getting busy," preached the Reverend

George Alexander McGuire, the General Chaplain of the U.N.I.A.

and Bishop of Garvey's African Orthodox Church, "and supply

a black Madonna and a black Christ for the training of our

children."[27] The Western black, Garvey endorsed, was unique

among the blacks of the world in his acceptance of the white

man's representation of the devil as black; the black people's

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[26]Marcus Garvey, Selections from Poetic Meditations, pp. 20-21, as cited by Cronon, p. 175.

[27]Ibid., p. 179.

devil, he argued, should be represented as white.[28]

Contrary to popular belief, none of Garvey's historical, religious, and aesthetic ideas were original. As this cursory look at his life suggests, his ideas were no more than elaborations and developments of themes already announced. In fact, even the popular depiction of his movement as a "back-to-Africa" movement is misleading, since it was never Garvey's intention that all Blacks should return to Africa; "We do not want all the Negroes in Africa. Some are no good here, and naturally will be no good there."[29] What Garvey believed, Cronon points out, was that once a strong African nation was established, "Negroes everywhere would automatically gain prestige and strength and could look to it for protection if necessary."[30] Hence, those needed for the task of rebuilding Africa into a self-determined world force were people who could supply the pioneering elements of a civilization--engineers, artisans and willing workers of all sorts.[31] The rest of the diaspora was to be ideologically united with Africa under the motto, "one aim, one God, one destiny."[32] The importance of this distinction will be

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[28]Ibid., p. 180.

[29]Ibid., p. 185.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid. This is the motto of the U.N.I.A.

illustrated later when the back-to-Africa movement of Ras

(<u>Invisible Man</u>) is examined.

But Garvey could not balance the coherence of his

ideology with soundness of leadership. His failings as a

leader eventually led to his downfall. He was reluctant to

delegate responsibility, had a penchant for surrounding him-

self with dishonest and incompetent subordinates, and

refused to listen to wise counsel. His "egocentric and

sometimes arrogant" personality drove from him those men who

might have averted the financial chaos of the Black Star

Line, which culminated in Garvey's conviction of mail fraud

in 1923 and his eventual imprisonment in February, 1925.

As Cronon observes, a good lawyer could have secured Garvey's

acquittal, but Garvey's "overwhelming conceit and irrational

suspicions" caused him to reject the counsel of experts and

serve as his own lawyer.[33]

In December, 1927, Garvey was deported from the

United States for alleged fraud. Less than a year later

DuBois published <u>Dark Princess</u>. The novel contained a por-

trait of a West Indian, Perigua, and his revolutionary

organization and was inspired by DuBois' negative reactions

to the Garvey movement. With the publication of this novel

the image of the West Indian in Afro-American fiction begins

its descent from the heroic heights of Delany's Henry Blake.

Another thirty years pass before another Afro-American

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[33]Ibid., p. 221 and passim.

novelist, Edmund Austin, attempts to reverse this downward course.

If Henry Blake is proof of the faith which Delany had in the potential for the productive leadership of West Indians in Afro-American society, Perigua is DuBois' rejoinder that the West Indian is temperamentally unfit for such leadership. In Dark Princess the West Indian Perigua plays an important role. He is the catalyst of the temporary downfall of the protagonist; or, seen another way, he is the chief obstacle to the protagonist's promising work with a nationalist organization of the darker races of the world.

Perigua's function in the plot can be illustrated by a synopsis of the novel's main events. A young Afro-American, Matthew Towns, having been forced to discontinue medical school because of his color, travels to Europe, where he comes into contact with the members of an international organization whose objective is to secure the self-determination of the darker races of the world. He is sent back to America by the leader of this organization, the "dark" Princess of Bwodpur, to assess the potential for Afro-American involvement in this global movement. His first assignment is to find Perigua, "the leader of a widespread and carefully planned uprising of American blacks."[34] Pending his appraisal of Perigua and his work, Matthew is to deliver to Perigua a letter from the

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[34]W. E. B. DuBois, Dark Princess.

Princess, the contents of which are unknown to him. Matthew eventually writes a letter to the Princess, informing her that despite the potential for significant contribution by Afro-Americans, Perigua and his followers are not worthy of the organization's support. When he receives no further communication from Her Highness, Matthew despairs of his future involvement with the organization and succumbs to Perigua's contagious schemes for violent revenge against white America. He eventually endorses Perigua's plan to blow up a train carrying members of the Ku Klux Klan to a Chicago convention. The fact that both Matthew and Perigua would also be blown up is no deterrent to either. The plan backfires, and only Perigua is killed. For his part in the attempted crime Matthew is sentenced to prison, a fate which he encourages because, with his realization of the full import of his involvement with Perigua, he loses all zest for life. After his release he allows himself to be pushed into a political career by the very ambitious Sara Andrews, whom he later marries. However, he does not regain his zest for living or his faith in the goals of the international organization until he is re-united, years later, with the Dark Princess. After overcoming many obstacles to their union, the two continue their efforts on behalf of the darker races of the world.

Where West Indians are concerned, DuBois is interested in emphasizing only those aspects of character and temperament which reveal differences between them and his Afro-American

protagonist. The cumulative effect of DuBois' introductory description of Perigua's followers, for example, is that the group takes on an identity from which Matthew is excluded:

> The room was hot with a melange of smoke, bad air, voices, and gesticulations. Groups were standing and sitting about, lounging, arguing, and talking. Sometimes they shouted and seemed on the point of blows, but blows never came. They appeared tremendously in ernest without a trace of smile or humor. This puzzled Matthew at first until he caught their broad "a's" and curious singing lilt of phrase. He realized that all or nearly all were West Indians. He knew little of the group. They were to him singular, foreign and funny. (p. 43)

This sense of alienation is heightened during his conversation with Perigua. He first has to deal with Perigua's unsettling physical appearance and mannerisms: "He was a thin, yellow man of middle size, with flaming black hair and luminous eyes. He was perpetual motion, talking, gesticulating, smoking" (p. 44). Then he is confronted by Perigua's unquestionable egoism: " 'My God, man--don't you know me? Is there anybody in New York that doesn't know Perigua? Is there anybody in the world?'" (p. 44). Furthermore, the physical setting seems to invest Perigua with mystical dimensions: "Out of the sordid setting of that room rose the wild head of Perigua, haloed dimly in the low-burning gas" (p. 44). For Matthew Perigua becomes an enigma:

> Matthew had at first thought him an egotistical fool. But Perigua was no fool. He next put him down as an ignorant fanatic--but he was not ignorant. He was well read . . . and knew the politics of the civilized world and current events surprisingly well. Was he insane? In no ordinary sense of the word; wild, irresponsible, repulsive, but with brain and nerves that worked clearly and promptly. (p. 46)

Matthew is forced to add to this already puzzling and ali-
enating image the fact of Perigua's proclivity for violence:
"'There's a lynching belt. We'll blow it to hell with dyna-
mite from airplanes. And then when the Ku Klux Klan meets
some time, we'll blow them up. Terrorism, revenge, is our
program'" (p. 46). It is apparent, then, that one of the
ends which DuBois accomplishes in this scene is the illus-
tration of two sensibilities which are polarized. The one
is Afro-American; the other is West Indian. And Matthew is the
more impressionable. Although Matthew is alienated from
Perigua's temperament, the reader knows that Matthew is at
the same time caught in the web made up of Perigua's force-
ful personality and radical ideas. As the narrator comments,
"Matthew must see. He must investigate. It was wild, unthink-
able, terrible. He must see this thing through" (p. 47).

There can be little doubt that the portrait of Perigua
and his followers is based on Garvey and the U.N.I.A. In
fact, it becomes increasingly apparent that Perigua is a
caricature of Garvey. Perigua's egotistical, even arrogant,
personality recalls Garvey's; the force of Perigua's
personality is used toward the same dominating ends as the
Garvey personality. Perigua is endowed with Garvey's
legendary oratorical abilities and theatrical flair. Fur-
thermore, the response of Matthew to Perigua (p. 13) echoes
the documented response of Afro-American leaders to the
magnetic personality of Garvey. And Matthew's letter to

the Dark Princess juxtaposes aspects of DuBois' own

analysis of the Afro-American situation with his assessment

of West Indian involvement in Afro-American society, spe-

cifically that of Garvey and his followers:

> There is still oppression and insult, some lynching, and
> much caste and discrimination; but on the whole the
> Negro has advanced so rapidly and is still advancing
> at such a rate that he is more satisfied than complain-
> ing. . . . There is bitter revolt in the hearts of a
> small intelligentsia who resent color-caste, and among
> those laborers who feel in many ways the pinch of eco-
> nomic maladjustment and see the rich Negroes climbing
> on their bowed backs. These classes have no common pro-
> gram, save complaint, protest, and inner bickering; and
> only in the case of a small class of immigrant West
> Indians has this complaint reached the stage that even
> contemplates violence.
>
>   Perigua is a man of intelligence and fire--of a cer-
> tain honesty and force; but he is not to be trusted as a
> leader. His organization is a loose mob of incoherent
> elements united only by anger and poverty. . . . Perigua
> and those whom he represents have a grievance and a
> remedy, but he will never accomplish anything system-
> atic. . . . He has no real organization. He has only
> personal followers. (pp. 57-8)

Without knowledge of more specific biographical

information of Garvey and DuBois the critic may be inclined

to argue that the portrait of Perigua and his movement is not

meant to be representative of the Garvey movement in all of

its details. To be sure, there are intentional differences

between the two movements. Perigua's considerable popularity

is still dwarfed by that of his real-life progenitor, whose

following in America, incidentally, boasted far more Afro-

Americans than West Indians. And Perigua's national and

international stature is shadow-like in comparison to Garvey's.

The scope of his involvement is much narrower, and his utter

dependence upon another radical organization is a farcical

contradiction of Garvey's vaulting pride in the self-help of

his own international organization. In short, Perigua's

portrait evidences the exaggeration of Garvey's weaknesses

and flaws and the diminution of Garvey's strengths.

From one point of view these distorting differences,

intrinsic to the very nature of caricature, merely confirm

Perigua's conception as caricature; for despite them Garvey

never seems to be completely out of the author's mind; his

spirit hovers over the entire portrait of Perigua. From

another point of view, however, these differences suggest

that Perigua's portrait goes beyond the depiction of the

Garvey (or West Indian) temperament. So much rage is infused

into the portrait that Perigua becomes the objectification

of the principle of self-hate, social destruction and psychic

disintegration. Such a principle resides potentially within

the consciousness of all black people who are encouraged by

the nature of their oppression to despise their own psycho-

cultural roots. A closer look at Perigua's portrait and at

the relevant aspects of DuBois' and Garvey's biographies

will support the contention that Perigua is a caricature

of Garvey. It will also show that there is so much rage

and fear directed toward the portrait that Garvey is not

the likely recipient of it all. Despite the dictates of

caricature and despite DuBois' resentment of West Indian

involvement in Afro-American affairs, it is almost

inconceivable that DuBois, whose ideology was similar in some important ways to Garvey's, could be so totally negative in his attitude toward Garvey. In fact Garvey is not as much recipient as he is a catalyst for the release of this rage against (and, perhaps, fear of) the potential for Afro-American self-hate, destruction and disintegration. DuBois may also be afraid that his own attempts to elevate the condition of the Afro-American may be futile. In any case, Perigua functions finally as the embodiment of DuBois' awareness and probable fear of the potential for self-hate. Hence the portrait reveals more about DuBois than it does about Garvey.

In Perigua Garvey's personality is violated, made to look ridiculous in all its facets. For all his oratory, pride and violent intentions, Perigua is hopelessly ineffectual. He is dynamic in appeal but static in political ideology. His passion for violence is so overwhelming that he is himself overwhelmed by it. The only way to heighten the consciousness of the oppressed, he screams, is through the murder of the oppressors. He is naive enough to think that his own suicide and the sabotage of a train carrying only a small fraction of the membership of the Ku Klux Klan will touch off a nation-wide violent revolution. Not only are his grandiose notions of his own self-importance highly romantic but his whole plan smacks of his ignorance concerning the nature of American society in general and of blacks

in particular. Even the better laid plans of such Afro-
American revolutionaries as Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner
could not produce the effect which Perigua envisions.
Without a doubt this West Indian lacks the insight to gauge
with any respectable degree of accuracy the collective Afro-
American temperament. A poorly devised attempt to blow up
a number of Klansmen is hardly the way to heighten the
consciousness of black people to the point at which a revo-
lution occurs. The plan ironically insults Perigua's intel-
ligence and that of the people who believe in him. Even
Matthew, who had witnessed many evidences of Perigua's
penchant for the theatrical, is shocked by Perigua's plan:
"Perigua was mad--a desperate fanatic" (p. 58). It is
toward this final image of madness and fanaticism that
DuBois' portrait seems to have been leading since the reader
was introduced to Perigua. In that first meeting between
Matthew and Perigua the reader's attention is called to a
series of visual images designed to raise suspicions as to
Perigua's sanity--flaming black hair (which occasionally
"writhed" out of place), luminous and blazing eyes, perpetual
motion, and wild and haloed head. Clearly, Garvey
is the indirect object of a vicious attack.

In light of the tempestuous relationship between
Garvey and DuBois, it is not surprising that DuBois should
initiate the literary movement which belittles Garvey's
attempt to affect Afro-American reality. As early as

December 1920 DuBois, editor of <u>The Crisis</u> (the literary

organ of the National Association for the Advancement

of Colored People) attacked the management of Garvey's Black

Star Line for the mismanagement of public funds. His criti-

cism against Garvey reached its peak in 1922 when he pub-

lished an attack on his archrival which seems almost synony-

mous with Matthew's evaluation of Perigua as mad. "Marcus

Garvey," wrote DuBois, "is, without a doubt, the most dan-

gerous enemy of the Negro race in America and the world. He

is either a lunatic or a traitor."[35]

The immediate occasion of the attack adds to the

reader's appreciation of Perigua's Ku Klux Klan scheme.

Garvey had argued that "the prejudice exhibited by the Klan

in hysteria, hate, cruelty, and mob violence was the preju-

dice common to most white Americans, which deep in their

hearts they felt, but culture and refinement prevented many

from showing any trace of it."[36] The Klan, according to

Garvey, was the invisible government of America.[37] Mean-

while, the Klan applauded Garvey's attempt to reduce the

number of blacks in America. To a leader like DuBois, who

taught that Afro-Americans should strive to secure a digni-

fied place within America's socio-political framework,

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[35]Cronon, p. 190.

[36]Ibid., p. 189.

[37]Ibid.

Garvey's conclusions must have seemed threateningly off-beat.
Hence DuBois' statement that Garvey was either a lunatic or
a traitor can be seen as an honest, if extreme, appraisal.

Perigua's attempted murder of Klan members is there-
fore a deliberate distortion of Garvey's relationship to this
radical group. However, it is one of two master strokes of
DuBois' caricature, for it exaggerates Garvey's idea that the
Klan epitomizes the nature of white America. If Garvey is
right in his attribution of a Klannish nature to the whole of
white America, DuBois seems to be arguing, then an attack
on the Klan is an attack on white American society. What
DuBois ignores, as far as the implications of this scheme are
concerned, is that Garvey was not interested in the destruc-
tion of America, despite what Garvey perceived to be its
Klannish nature. Rather, he wanted ultimately to rebuild
Africa. Nor did Garvey suggest that the destruction of
America was a _sine que non_ for Africa's re-development.
He overtly stated, however, that he wanted the white race
out of Africa, not out of America.[38] Thus, Perigua's
scheme remains a distortion; but this aspect of the carica-
ture is more effective than the others (his arrogance,
theatricality and dominating personality) because it is
less obvious.

Garvey's hatred of DuBois was equally intense. To

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[38]Shawna Maglangbayan, _Garvey, Lumumba and Malcolm:_
Black National-Separatists (Chicago: Third World Press,
1972), p. 20.

him DuBois was "purely and simply a white man's nigger" and "an enemy of the black people of the world."[39] He later accused DuBois of being the archvillain responsible for his downfall in America.[40] According to Garvey, DuBois sought to sabotage his movement in order to further DuBois' own Pan-African movement.[41] To be sure, the Pan-African Congress which DuBois called in February, 1919 (the first of its kind), did not aim at political or geographic unity as Garvey's did, and DuBois specifically rejected Garvey's separatist sentiment. Black Americans, he claimed, were still Americans.[42]

The second master stroke inherent in the fashioning of Perigua's portrait is that Perigua is given a "yellow" skin, in sharp contrast to Garvey's "pure black" appearance. And it is especially here that we can see overtones of DuBois' fears concerning the possibility of self-hate. According to Cronon, Garvey not only advocated racial purity but ridiculed light-skinned blacks by accusing them of trying to disassociate themselves from the black race.[43] The

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[39]Cronon, p. 192.

[40]Ibid., p. 131.

[41]Ibid., p. 130.

[42]Francis L. Broderick, W. E. B. DuBois: Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis (California: Stanford University Press, 1959), p. 128.

[43]Cronon, p. 191.

fact that DuBois fitted this "light-skinned" description
did little to encourage friendship between him and Garvey.
Thus Perigua's yellow color, "yellow" being a category of
the light-skinned, is a brilliantly conceived insult to
Garvey, who would hate to be represented as yellow or light-
skinned. But if we take the insult seriously, we see that
DuBois incriminates himself: he tries to offend the black
aesthetic of Garvey by subjecting his own color to ridicule.
Moreover, because Perigua's temperament and ideology cari-
cature Garvey's, the yellow coloring makes Perigua the
unconscious object of his own hatred. Seen in this light
his enthusiastic consent to his own suicide is the final
proof of his own self-hatred. Put another way, the black-
oriented aesthetic of Perigua's mind imprisoned in a yellow
body supplies the impetus for his madness and fanaticism.
The implications are serious: DuBois is afraid that the
clash between a black aesthetic and an integrationist real-
ity (the symbolic yellow skin) might lead to psychological
disorientation, madness and destruction. I am not saying,
however, that DuBois hates his own color or, by implication,
that he hates himself. But I am insisting that such self-
hatred is entirely possible and that DuBois is afraid or,
at least, aware of that possibility. Through the portrait
of Perigua he objectifies that awareness.

The yellow skin is a well-aimed blow against Garvey
because, in light of the fact that Perigua unconsciously

hates it, it implies that Garvey's policies did not embrace
all members of the black race and that his glory in the pure-
blooded alienated people like DuBois. This criticism is a
fair one because the U.N.I.A. did cater to the darker Blacks,
if only by virtue of the fact that its leader voiced anti-
mulatto propaganda. When Shawna Maglangbayan insists that the
idea of Garvey's prejudice against light-skinned blacks is a
myth,[44] she is being swept away by her need to rescue Garvey
from what she calls "Aryan propaganda," and to show Garvey
to the world as a passionate advocate of "racial unity
between all Black morphological types."[45] The simple fact of
the matter is that Garvey's glory in his "pure" blood was
inseparable from his suspicion of light-skinned Blacks and
did not--could not--engender "racial unity" in a society
where the "Black morphological types" were myriad. DuBois'
own color must be seen as incidental to his perception of
this divisive strain within the Garvey ideology.

Six years after Garvey's deportation DuBois charac-
terized the Garvey movement as one of "spiritual bankruptcy
and futility."[46] This dual image works well as an assessment
of Perigua's life and death in Dark Princess. Perigua and
his movement are eventually forgotten as Matthew and the

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[44]Maglangbayan, p. 32.

[45]Ibid., p. 33.

[46]Broderick, p. 130.

Princess resume their implementation of DuBois' brand of
multi-racial nationalism. But not before the color issue
leads DuBois to confront (via Perigua's portrait) the possi-
bility that his own black aesthetic may be contradicted by
his light skinned color. If so, then his psychological condi-
tion, like Perigua's, is fraught with negative potential.
Indeed, the two warring selves which DuBois attributed to the
make-up of the Afro-American (in The Souls of Black Folk) is
present in the make-up of Perigua. And the destructive
termination of that war (Perigua's suicide) is certainly
to be feared. So it is that despite DuBois obviously suc-
cessful attempt to ridicule Garvey, Perigua becomes an
objectification of DuBois' fears for himself and for the
Afro-American condition.

For awhile it seems as if Perigua's futility is an
accurate prophecy of Garvey's long-range significance.
Ralph Bunche takes the judgement of many Garvey critics to
its logical extension when he observes that "when the cur-
tain dropped on the Garvey theatricals, the black man of
America was exactly where Garvey had found him, though a
little bit sadder, perhaps a bit poorer--if not wiser."[47]
But Bunche's assessment contains more socio-political than
literary truth in that it overlooks the psychological
effect which the Garvey image had on the image-making

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[47]Cronon, p. 202.

attempts of Afro-American novelists during and after Garvey's

life. Addison Gayle more accurately gauges Garvey's influ-

ence on Afro-American literature:

> It was in the literature of the Renaissance era that
> [Garvey's] spirit was reincarnated, in the red clay of
> Georgia, birthplace of the fruit-plum black men and women
> of Toomer's Cane, in the African quest of Cullen . . .
> in the racy fiction of Rudolph Fisher and Langston
> Hughes, in the questioning of McKay's vagabonds and intel-
> lectuals. . . .Due to the influence of Garvey upon the
> Renaissance writers, the image of the black artist as a
> man torn between fidelity to art and fidelity to his
> race, the wanderer between two worlds, is one already
> besotted by the age. The image of the black man in
> these early years of the Renaissance, artist and layman
> alike, was that of a serious, determined individual,
> cynical and demanding, wary of white condescension and
> more assured of his own strength and resources.[48]

What Gayle is suggesting is that the Garvey movement

assisted the emergence of the "New Negro." Briefly stated,

the term "New Negro" refers to the post-World War I shift

in the collective attitude of the Afro-American to self and

to society. It implies the disappearance of the images of

the "Old Negro;" that is, the end of the era of "aunties,"

"uncles" and "mammies." As Alain Locke observes, "Uncle Tom

and Sambo have passed on."[49] Such images reveal the "Old

Negro" as a stock figure and were perpetuated "as an his-

torical fiction, partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly

in deliberate reactionism."[50] However, the "New Negro" is

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[48]Gayle, p. 100.

[49]Alain Locke, "The New Negro" printed in Nathan
Irvin Huggins, ed., Voices from the Harlem Renaissance
(New Haven: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 49.

[50]Ibid.

Despite this ideological re-direction, Garvey's overall effect upon Afro-American literature was quite positive, as far as the writers' depiction of Afro-American heroes was concerned. Such was not the case, however, with the depiction of West Indians. In fact the next West Indian portrait in the Afro-American novel, the portrait of Ras in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, is no less scathing than DuBois' in its attack upon the West Indian's involvement in Afro-American society. In Ras's portrait the Garvey movement receives an authorial treatment which may well make Ras an even more destructive portrait than Perigua. This time, however, Garvey is not the only object of attack; rather, an entire West Indian sub-culture is made to look ridiculous and impotent. It is true, of course, that Perigua is DuBois' attack not only on the Garvey ideology but also on the general West Indian involvement in Afro-American society, but in Dark Princess Garvey is so brilliantly and angrily caricatured in Perigua's portrait that while reading it one may tend to think only of Garvey, until the sheer accumulation of the anger forces one to see beyond the confines of the caricature itself. The portrait of Ras, however, calls much attention to aspects of the Rastafarian culture in Jamaica (the term "Rastafarian" will be explained later), and the Garvey image does not even momentarily outshine that of the Rastafarian cult.

Although Ellison's portrait is circumscribed by its minor role within a very complex novel, its importance

within the thematic fabric of the novel is undeniable. On

his journey from naiveté to disillusionment, Ellison's name-

less hero-narrator comes into contact with ideological

forces which spur his consciousness of his own nature and

that of American society. One of the most significant

contributions to this educational journey is made by a

communistic organization, the Brotherhood, which recommends

its philosophy of scientific rationalism as the foundation

for the eventual "brotherhood" of the American peoples.

According to the Brotherhood, power can be wrested away

from the oppressive capitalistic governmental institutions

if the masses of the American people can be scientifically

trained by Brotherhood officials to respond blindly to the

leadership of the Brotherhood. The hero does not learn

until too late that the Brotherhood's real aim is to insti-

gate a race riot in Harlem, to usher in an era of chaos out

of which the Brotherhood can establish a new communistic

order. Nor does he know that the Brotherhood seeks to

manipulate black men of ability, such as the hero and Ras,

for its own ends. The real motivation of the brotherhood

is a thirst for power, not brotherly love. It is the func-

tion of Ras the Exhorter (who later changes his name to Ras

the Destroyer) to help the hero discover the Brotherhood's

true motives and, in the doing, to enhance the hero's

understanding of Ras himself, who, despite his attempts to

be direct and obvious, is unconsciously the victim of his

own deception. Both of these objectives are inseparable
from the hero's own growth to self-awareness and his formu-
lation of an ideology which will determine the nature of his
future involvement with society. It is not until Ras has
successfully urged his followers to riot that recognition
comes to the hero, who immediately tries to communicate his
awareness to the mob:

> [The members of the Brotherhood] want this to happen. . . .
> They planned it. They want the mobs to come uptown with
> machine guns and rifles. They want the streets to flow
> with blood; your blood, black blood and white blood, so
> that they can turn your death and sorrow and defeat into
> propaganda. It's simple, you've known it a long time.
> It goes, "Use a nigger to catch a nigger." Well, they
> used me to catch you and now they're using Ras to do
> away with me and to prepare your sacrifice. Don't you
> see it? Isn't it clear. . . .?[53]

There can be little doubt that the portrait of Ras
is patterned after Marcus Garvey. His short, squat, black
figure evokes a visual image of Garvey; and he combines
"a staccato West Indian accent" with a "crude insane eloquence"
(p. 157) to achieve Garvey-like rapport with crowds. What
DuBois' hero, Matthew Towns, says about Perigua (that other
Garvey caricature) is equally true of Ras, who is indeed "a
man of intelligence and fire" but whose organization is "a
loose mob of incoherent elements united only by anger and
poverty" (p. 13). Furthermore, Ras's synthesis of arrogance
and fierce racial pride attests to the conjunction of the
DuBois-Ellison point of view with regard to the West Indian

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[53]Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York: Random
House, 1947), pp. 545-6.

temperament in general and the Garvey temperament in particular. However, Ellison divests Garvey's Pan-Africanism of its international, even its national, scope, limiting the geographic area of Ras's focus to Harlem. In Ras's ideology Harlem becomes an extension of Africa, and the presence of the white race is not to be tolerated in this city: "Godahm, mahn, . . . this is Harlem," Ras shouts. "This is my territory, the black mahn's territory. You think we let white folks come in and spread their poison?" (p. 365).

The literal shift from Africa to Harlem is significant in that it illustrates the fact that the Back-to-Africa movement had lost its impetus following the demise of the Garvey movement, which had owed much of its temporary success to the emergence of Harlem as the socio-cultural center of black life. It was the geographic focus of that period in Afro-American letters known as the Harlem Renaissance; and Garvey, one of the prime ideological forces behind that Renaissance, had sought to use Harlem as a base for his global movement. Ras's attempt to set himself up as the Emperor of Harlem is crucial to Ellison's attempt to render as futile the implementation of an Afro-West Indian ideology within an Afro-American metropolis. The results of Ras's leadership is Ellison's argument that this brand of West Indian leadership is misdirected, mislocated, and misapplied—in short, totally destructive—at least when it takes place within an American community. This argument in itself is

certainly worthy of analysis; but Ellison is so outraged
at the West Indian criticism of Afro-American leadership
inherent in movements such as Garvey's and Blyden's and in
such West Indian novels as Claude McKay's Home to Harlem
and Banjo that he strikes out angrily in his depiction of
Ras the Destroyer, who is obviously out to "destroy."

The result is a portrait which the reader may find
incredible. However negatively one may interpret the West
Indian effect on Afro-American consciousness, the portrait
of Ras the Destroyer distorts all aspects of the historical
West Indian/Afro-American relationship just as it distorts
Garvey's Pan-Africanism. Ras's leadership cannot possibly
achieve coherent results in any organized society. Despite
his exciting eloquence and racial pride, he is the personifi-
cation of chaos. His change from Ras the Exhorter to Ras
the Destroyer is only of nominal significance, for he is as
destructive during his period as exhorter as he is eloquent
during his period as destroyer. At its deepest level of
meaning the change is one of methods and tactics, not per-
sonality. The forces of violence and destruction motivate
and surround him from his first appearance as the Exhorter to
his last appearance as the Destroyer. When he is first seen
"[shaking] his fist over the uplifted faces" of a crowd as
he "shouted angrily" from a ladder, the hero-narrator
observes that "it was as though a riot would break at any
minute" (p. 157). The hero's second meeting with Ras

(still the Exhorter) is itself a bloody and chaotic confrontation, which Ras instigates, between "a bristling band of about twenty men" (led by Ras) and a crowd of youths and older people who were listening to Brotherhood propaganda as taught by the Hero and his young black co-worker, Tod Clifton. It is during this violent encounter that the reader hears Ras at his exhorting best. With his knife poised above Clifton and tears in his eyes Ras exhorts:

> "You my brother, mahn. Brothers are the same color. How the hell you call these white men brother? Shit, mahn. That's shit. Brothers the same color. We sons of Mama Africa, you done forgot? You black, BLACK! You--Godahm, mahn. . . . You got bahd hair! You got thick lips! They say you stink! They hate you, mahn. You African, AFRICAN! Why you with them? Leave that shit, mahn. They sell you out. That shit is old-fashioned. They enslave us--you forget that? How can they mean a black man any good? How they going to be your brother?" (pp. 361-2)

And moments later, as the hero threatens to hit him with a pipe:

> "Bust me with the pipe, but, by God, you listen to the Exhorter. Come in with us, mahn. We build a glorious movement of black people, BLACK PEOPLE! What they do, give you money? Who want the damn stuff? Their money bleed black blood, mahn. It's unclean. Taking their money is shit, man. Money without dignity--That's bahd shit. . . . They betray you and you betray the black people. They tricking you, mahn. Let them fight among themselves. Let 'em kill off one another. We organize--organization is good--but we organize black. BLACK! To hell with that son of a bitch." (pp. 362-4)

The third and final meeting takes place amidst the Harlem riot. The destructive aspects of Ras's character given a more limited expression, during the earlier confrontation,

are now allowed full rein. Ras's attempt to turn Harlem into a battlefield is the logical result of a personality which was "insane," like Perigua's, from the moment it first appears in the novel. The image of Harlem as a teeming metropolis dissolves into an image of chaos as it external-izes the internal characteristics of its self-proclaimed emperor.

Rastafarian elements give both a wider scope and a sharper edge to Ras's portrait. Ellison harks back to the Jamaican cult of the Ras Tafari, which had been in existence for hundreds of years and to which Garvey did not belong. The Rastafarians evolved a mythology in which Ras Tafari emerged as the true black god, long hidden from his black children by the white master's systematic lies.[54] Regarding as prophets of Ras Tafari such biblical prophets as Abraham and such Pan African leaders as Garvey, the Rastafarians regarded as Ras Tafari's foremost representative Haile Selassie, the late Ethiopian Emperor, who, according to Ras-tafarian dogma, was the direct descendant of the Biblical Solomon and Sheba. Their lives were directed by the convic-tion that Haile Selassie would eventually lead them out of bondage in the West Indies to their heritage in Africa, known by the cultists as Ethiopia. The ignorant and impov-erished of Jamaica's shanty-towns accepted this myth with a fierce tenacity which made it virtually immune to

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[54]Gerald Moore, The Chosen Tongue (Great Britain: J. and J. Harper Editions, 1969), p. 33 and passim. The other information in this paragraph about the Rastafarians comes from the same source.

attack, since "all attempts to challenge either its accuracy or the feasibility of its mass return to Ethiopia could be dismissed as white propaganda."[55] The Jamaican novelist, Orlando Patterson, illustrates the quiet but forceful nature of Rastafarian rhetoric in a scene from his novel about the Kingston slums, The Children of Sisyphus:

> "Me Brother, is hard to explain these mysteries, but as a Brethren you know the simple truth that man is God. The white man in him trickery create another God. Him say that God live in the sky and him call up there heaven; then he say that when we dead we go to heaven if we do good. Of course this is the horrible trick he use to pacify us in this life while he rob us of all that belong to us an' live off the fat of the land himself. He tell us all kind o' nonsense about blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. What Kingdom? The one in the sky, of course. But we know that the true God is Rastafari. . . . But there is another thing they hide from us. The most important of all. And that is that man is God. The spirit of Rastafari is invested in every one of us. Is just for us to find it. This, this, Brother is the wickedest sin that the white man commit on himself and us and the brown allies now perpetuate. For when they enslave us in this land of Babylon after taking us from the sweet heaven of Africa they not only enslave we body but also we mind."[56]

The Rastafarians were not generally belligerent. Under the slogan of "peace and love" they quietly resisted the basic forces of twentieth-century Western society. Thus Ras's military campaign is misleading in its intended link with the Rastafarian movement in the West Indies. In some mystical way Ras has assumed the identity of Haile Selassie

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Moore, p. 34.

(in his own mind, at least), not as he was but as Ras ima-
gined him to be. Whereas the historical fact of Haile
Selassie's gallant fight against the white invaders in 1935
and his triumphant return (riding a white horse) to Addis
Ababa in 1941[57] had served to strengthen the Rastafarian
vision and strengthen its immediacy, Ras insanely seeks to
re-create Selassie's triumph and to experience the historical
moment himself. The description of Ras as he leads the riot
highlights this process of identity transference:

> They moved in a tight-knit order, carrying sticks and
> clubs, shotguns and rifles, led by Ras the Exhorter
> become Ras the Destroyer upon a great black horse. A
> new Ras of haughty, vulgar dignity, dressed in the cos-
> tume of as Abyssinian chieftain; a fur cap upon his head,
> his arm bearing a shield, a cape made of the skin of some
> wild animal around his shoulders. A figure more out of
> a dream than out of Harlem, than out of even this Harlem
> night , yet real, alive, alarming. (p. 544)

Ironically, the hero's eventual realization of Ras's
chaotic impotence does not save him from a confrontation with
his own socio-political impotence. In fact, the hero's jour-
ney is from one level of impotence to another. The novel
ends where it begins--with the hero in an underground room,
a symbolic tomb, where he is forced to withdraw by virtue of
his disillusionment with American ideologies and organizations
and from which he hopes to be resurrected by a new vision of
reality. Whether his hibernation is due, as S. P. Fullinwider

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[57]Moore, p. 33.

holds, to his individual transcendence of society[58] or, as Gayle argues, to his choice of individualism over racial unity,[59] the fact remains that the final position of the hero is that he is utterly unrelated to anything and hence is definitionless and powerless. The only difference between Ras's impotence and that of the hero is that the one is destructive whereas the other is neutral.

When contrasted with the impotence of Ras, the impotence of the hero is, however, camouflaged. Against Ras's death wish the hero's animalistic hibernation seems appealing. Against Ras's destructive belligerence, one sees the hero's final passivity as attractive, for the hero hopes to emerge from his hole as an enlightened being. A closer look reveals, nonetheless, that Ras is invested with all the passion and the need for black community of which the hero is totally divested. Passion and racial community are essentially humane characteristics, but in Ras's case Ellison subordinates them to a temperament which makes such a mockery of them that Ras seems sub-human. If Ellison did not have an axe to grind against Garvey and the Rastafarians, he might have implied that what his hero needed for his resurrection was some of Ras's passion and some of his hunger for community--minus, however, Ras's culturally paranoid temperament. The novel ending the way it does, there is no reason

[58]S. P. Fullinwider, The Mind and Mood of Black America (Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 199.

[59]Gayle, p. 257.

for the reader to think that the hero will eventually achieve that new vision of reality which he awaits; and if he does, there is still no reason to think that he will achieve the practical implementation of that vision. In fact, the novel suggests that there has never been a place for the black man within the existing socio-political framework of America. Ironically, this is the very conclusion which Ellison denies in Shadow and Act: "For better or worse, whatever there is of value in Negro life is an American heritage and as such it must be preserved."[60] Even more ironically, it is the conclusion which was reached by American and West Indian proponents of Pan-Africanism.

It is for this final confrontation with impotence that Ras has been, in essence, sacrificed; that Garvey and the Ras Tafarians are ridiculed. Out of this recognition the critic is faced with the larger implications of the portrait of Ras. In it Ellison is attempting to transfer to the West Indian his own awareness of the impotence which has historically characterized the Afro-American's attempt to merge what DuBois called his two selves into a single American self. In effect, Ellison takes that part of the dual self which is most alien to the American ethos (the African part), frames it in what he thinks is an alien consciousness (the West Indian), and lets it gradually

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[60]Ralph Ellison, Shadow and Act (New York: Signet ed., 1966), p. 40.

disintegrate. (That Ellison regarded the West Indian as an alien entity is apparent from Ellison's own recorded statement: "[At Tuskegee Institute] there was a girl from Sierra Leone and West Indians--we tended to link them all together. The sense of the alien was strong.")[61] Given this analysis, one would expect the hero's final triumph. But Ellison is too serious an artist and too aware an historian to be duped into this easy alternative. He leaves his hero in limbo, a symbolic admission of the continued frustration and impotence of the Afro-American's attempt at self definition within an American context.

The portrait of Ras, because it is not a consistent representation either of the Garvey ideology or of the Rastafarian movement, must be regarded as a distorting amalgamation of disparate elements. But one of Ellison's implications is clear: the West Indian black nationalist is inherently not only irrelevant but also destructive to the Afro-American situation. This authorial conviction might have carried more weight if Ras's portrait had been limited to a more comprehensive and authentic representation of either the Garveyites or the Rastafarians, not both. Ellison's thesis may indeed be true, but his argument (represented by the total portrait of Ras) suffers the lack of a more clearly focused hypothesis. That is, the part-Garvey, part-Ras-

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[61]Lloyd W. Brown, "The West Indian as Ethnic Stereotype," printed in Negro American Literature Forum (Indiana State University Press), Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 1971, p. 11.

tafarian mixture--each part is distorted--makes for a dream-
like figure who cannot be recommended as authentically West
Indian, not even as an authentic West Indian stereotype.
Like Perigua Ras is the embodiment of the author's probable
fears for the frustration and impotence of the Afro-American.
He is, to this extent, Afro-Americanized.

The violence and brutality of Perigua and Ras presup-
pose the inherent meanness and brutality of the West Indian.
Whatever doubts there are concerning the correctness of
this presupposition are removed by Claude Brown in his auto-
biography, Manchild in the Promised Land, where Mr. Lawson,
a West Indian, becomes the personification of the meanness
and evil in the environment of the Harlem ghetto. The
provinciality and bias of Brown's attitude are obvious from
his own words: "I didn't like any West Indians. They
couldn't talk, they were stingy, and most of them were as
mean as could be. . . . Mr. Lawson, who was the super of
our house, was the meanest man on the Avenue. He was said
to have killed half a dozen men. . . . Killing all those
people wasn't what made Mr. Lawson mean. He was mean because
he was a West Indian."[62] Admittedly, this bias against West
Indians is acquired and revealed during Brown's childhood,
but the brutality and violence of young Brown himself and of
the Harlem ghetto in general make one suspect that Claude is

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[62]Claude Brown, Manchild in the Promised Land (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 37.

transferring the violent images of his youth to the West

Indian. Lloyd Brown astutely argues that this act of trans-

ference does indeed take place: "Young Brown, an accom-

plished expert in the violence and brutality of the black slum

at the age of ten, has automatically projected the violent

realities of the ghetto on to the legendary figure of the

incorrigibly violent West Indian. And in the process, he

has set up a generic definition of West Indian brutality:

'He was mean because he was a West Indian'" (p. 12).

Another biographical affirmation of the brutality of

the West Indian is found in The Autobiography of Malcolm X,

1967. During his jungle-like adventures in Harlem Malcolm

comes into contact with two West Indians, both of whom fit

the stereotype. The first is Brisbane, "the biggest, blackest,

worst cop of them all in Harlem."[63] He was so feared that

"Negroes crossed the street to avoid him when he walked his

125th Street and Seventh Avenue beat" (p. 88). The second

is West Indian Archie, whose brutal disposition is summed up

in a single sentence: "But no one who wasn't ready to die

messed with West Indian Archie" (p. 126). But Malcolm's

attitude toward these two men is one of great respect. He

knows that they are no meaner than he is himself. Unlike

Claude Brown, Malcolm does not see their violence as a

direct result of their West Indian temperament. Like

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[63]Alex Haley, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New
York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 37.

Malcolm, they had nurtured the brutal potential within themselves in an effort to survive in the Harlem jungle.

This image of brutality is reversed in James Baldwin's Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone, a novel which increases the dimension of the West Indian stereotype. To DuBois' and Ellison's depiction of the violent, impotent and insane revolutionary Baldwin adds the portrait of the social and spiritual coward, the West Indian who, because of his atavism and his hatred for his present, withdraws from the rigorous realities of his contemporary world to the vagueness of an idealized past. Whereas Ras wants to Africanize Harlem, Mr. Proudhammer (Baldwin's West Indian character) deems Harlem unworthy of his Afro-West Indian essence and prefers to ignore Harlem as much as he can. Thus the arrogance of Perigua and Ras (and Garvey) is modified by Baldwin into downright scorn. Mr. Proudhammer is too afraid to confront the fact that his inability to adjust to his Harlem present and his idealized view of his West Indian past thwart his spiritual and emotional growth. In Baldwin's favor it must be said, however, that the cowardly Mr. Proudhammer is more believable as a stereotype than either Perigua or Ras.

Like Ras and Perigua, Mr. Proudhammer comes to the reader via the interpretative consciousness of the protagonist, to whom, again like Perigua and Ras, he is something of an enigma. Leo Proudhammer, the protagonist/narrator of the novel, manages, nonetheless, to outline several outstanding

aspects of his father's enigmatic personality. His identifi-

cation with an idealized African past prevents him and his

family from understanding the realities of Harlem:

> He came from a race which had been flourishing at the
> very dawn of the world--a race greater and nobler than
> Rome or Judea, mightier than Egypt--he came from a race
> of kings who had never been taken in battle, kings who
> had never been slaves. He spoke to us of tribes and
> empires, battles, victories, and monarchs of whom we had
> never heard--they were not mentioned in our schoolbooks--
> and invested us with glories in which we felt more awk-
> ward than in the secondhand shoes we wore. In the stif-
> ling room of his pretensions and expectations, we stum-
> bled wretchedly about, stubbing our toes, as it were, on
> rubies, scraping our shins on golden caskets, bringing
> down, with a childish cry, the splendid purple tapistry
> on which, in pounding gold and scarlet, our destinies
> and our inheritance were figured.[64]

His nostalgia for his West Indian home, Barbados, is that

of a tourist; the images of the tropical weather, the native

dancing, the rum and the magic (voodoo) blend into a picture

of romantic joy:

> For our father . . . was a ruined Barbados peasant,
> exiled in a Harlem which he loathed, where he never saw
> the sun or the sky he remembered, where life took place
> neither indoors nor without, and where there was no joy.
> By which I mean that there was no joy that he remembered.
> Had it been otherwise, had he been able to bring with
> him into the prison where he perished any of the joy he
> had felt on that far-off island, then the air of the sea
> and the impulse to dancing would have sometimes trans-
> figured our dreadful rooms. . . . But, no, he brought
> with him from Barbados only black rum and a blacker
> pride, and magic incantations which neither healed nor
> saved. (p. 11)

The implied reason for Mr. Proudhammer's estrangement from

Harlem--Harlem is undoubtedly no comparison to his idyllic

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[64]James Baldwin, _Tell Me How Long the Train's Been
Gone_ (New York: Dell Publ. Co., 1968), pp. 11-12.

Barbados--is as unconvincing as his hopelessly one-sided
view of his African heritage. Leo's observation that Mr.
Proudhammer was "betrayed by Garvey, who did not succeed in
getting [black people] back to Africa" (p. 14), indicts
both Mr. Proudhammer and Garvey. The reader infers that Mr.
Proudhammer uses the failure of Garvey's shipping program as
a crutch to bolster his lack of constructive involvement in
Harlem society and with his family; his existence consists of
an "unspeakable factory job," "[bitter] dreams of Barbados,"
and the spreading of his drunken "black gospel" in bars
(pp. 13-14). The indictment against Garvey is clearly and
simply that he was a traitor.

The most pathetic aspect of Mr. Proudhammer's charac-
ter, however, is revealed in his relationship with his miserly
landlord, Mr. Rabinowitz, before whom Mr. Proudhammer quails
and shrinks. Although Mr. Rabinowitz epitomizes the inhuman-
ity inherent in the white landlords' treatment of the tenants
of the Harlem ghettoes--he repeatedly dishonors explicit and
implicit rights of the tenants--Mr. Proudhammer cannot even
begin to demand his human rights, much less his tenant rights,
when he is face to face with Mr. Rabinowitz, who always calls
promptly for the rent which he does not deserve and which
Mr. Proudhammer can never pay on time. At such times Proud-
hammer's whole being reveals the cowardice which he desperately
tries to hide from everybody, especially himself: "He stood
before Mr. Rabinowitz, scarcely looking at him, swaying before
the spittle and the tirade, sweating--looking unutterably

weary. He made excuses. He apologized. He swore that it would never happen again. (We knew that it would happen again.) He begged for time" (p. 13). It is only when he is dealing directly with black people that Mr. Proudhammer can display vocal or physical militance:

> But we knew that our father would never have allowed any black man to speak to him as Rabinowitz did, as policemen did, as storekeepers and pawn brokers and welfare workers did. No, not for a moment--he would have thrown them out of the house; he would certainly have made a black man know that he was not the descendant of slaves! (p. 13)

The futility of Proudhammer's ambivalence is not lost upon his son:

> It was scarcely worthwhile being the descendant of kings if the kings were black and no one had ever heard of them, and especially, furthermore, if royal status could not fill the empty stomach and could not prevent Rabinowitz from putting, as he eventually did, our collective ass, and all our belongings, on the streets. (p. 13)

Leo's awareness of his father's futility spurs his concern for his mother: "I used to wonder how she took it, how she bore it--his rages, his tears, his cowardice" (p. 15).

Unlike DuBois and Ellison, Baldwin has no specific prototype in mind for his portrait of Mr. Proudhammer, except, of course, the black people of Barbados; and even Barbados functions in the novel as the British West Indies in general. Consequently, Mr. Proudhammer has a general applicability which simultaneously blunts and sharpens the edges of Baldwin's attack upon the West Indian disposition. It blunts the attack in that it relates Mr. Proudhammer to black ghettoes anywhere in America or the West Indies.

He suffers from the spiritual inertia which stems from deep-
seated disillusionment of any kind, the kind experienced,
for example, by Matthew Towns following Perigua's explosion
plot. The only significant difference is that Matthew even-
tually overcomes, whereas Mr. Proudhammer becomes more of a
drunkard and more of a coward with each passing day. And
Proudhammer's state is not unlike that of Bigger Thomas,
protagonist of Richard Wright's Native Son, after Bigger is
imprisoned for the accidental killing of a white woman, Mary
Dalton. Bigger, incidentally, also experiences a shrinking
of his personality when he confronts his white employer and
landlord, Mr. Dalton. But unlike Mr. Proudhammer, Bigger
also experiences a spiritual regeneration while he is in his
prison cell. Proudhammer remains hopelessly trapped. Nor
is his disillusionment far removed in effect from that of
Ellison's hero in Invisible Man, who evolves to a deathlike
state in a cave and experiences an unrelatedness which is
at the core of Mr. Proudhammer's existence in Harlem. The
cave of Ellison's hero is but the outward form of the
existential cave in which Mr. Proudhammer is trapped for all
of his married life. Leo's observation that his father's
eyes were "the eyes of an animal peering out from a cave"
(p. 326) parallels the animal-like trips which Ellison's
hero occasionally makes from his underground cave. Of course,
the invisible man's physical and philosophical withdrawal is
intellectually grasped, a fact which makes it, however, no
less real.

None of these Afro-American protagonists shares Proudhammer's hopelessness. Matthew leaves his prison cell and eventually frees himself from the ennui of his non-involvement; Bigger evolves into an archetypical regenerative force even as he goes to a physical death; and Ellison's hero nourishes hopes of a rebirth. Forces are at work for the eventual liberation of all three heroes. However, the hammer in Mr. Proudhammer's make-up is as flimsy as the pride is false; hence, he cannot hammer his way out of his self-imposed confinement. It is true, however, that a similar helplessness can be seen in the portraits of some of Baldwin's other protagonists--Giovanni (Giovanni's Room, 1956) and Rufus Scott (Another Country, 1962). But one sees evidence of intense struggle in both Giovanni and Rufus before they eventually succumb to despair. One gets the impression that Mr. Proudhammer gives up without a struggle, and Baldwin ascribes to him only debilitating characteristics.

The lack of a specific prototype for Mr. Proudhammer sharpens the attack on the West Indian in that it generally indicts those West Indians living in Harlem. Apparently Baldwin has remained untouched by the attempt (during the sixties) to rehabilitate the image of Marcus Garvey in the Afro-American novel. From his position outside the penumbra of the psycho-social changes of the sixties, changes which significantly affect the Afro-American novel, Baldwin rids the West Indian of the very traits for which he had become

notoriously infamous in America--his arrogance, his fiery
temperament, and his proclivity to violent revolution--
without replacing these with any traits which engender
feelings of community. The result in Baldwin's novel, how-
ever, is spiritual castration. There is real fire and
pride in Perigua (too much of both); and the regal self-
consciousness of Ras, warped though it is, helps to trans-
form Harlem into a virtual inferno. By comparison with
these two characters, Mr. Proudhammer is no more than a puff
of air which itself abates in the presence of white authority.

Beneath all the revolutionary rhetoric of the West
Indian, Proudhammer's portrait illustrates, is the impotence of
a hated but enforced conservatism which his Afro-British
environment prevents him from fighting successfully. In
this view Baldwin echoes Harold Cruse, whose Crisis of the
Negro Intellectual gives more attention to the Afro-American/
West Indian relationship than any other Afro-American docu-
ment. "West Indians," says Cruse,

> are essentially conservatives fashioned in the British
> mold. Thus it has been observed that West Indian
> radicalism and militancy, especially in the United
> States, has been an outlet for lack of "revolutionary"
> elbow room in the black West Indies, where slow reform
> rather than radical social change has been the tradi-
> tion.[65]

Cruse also insists that most West Indians (and Africans)
complain about the lack of "group soul" among

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[65]Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual
(New York: William Morrow & Co., 1967), p. 119.

Afro-Americans,[66] that indefinable quality which West Indians

claim to have but which their Afro-British environment

threatened to annihilate. Mr. Proudhammer's failure to

identify with the black people in Harlem--"he did not under-

stand the people among whom he found himself; for him they

had no coherence, no stature and no pride" (p. 11)-- is there-

fore an extension of his own inability to identify with the

West Indians whom he left in Barbados. For him identity was

never anything other than a rose-colored dream. He never

adjusted to his Afro-British situation in Barbados because

he was always spiritually in an Africa which he never per-

sonally experienced and which he could not realistically

envision.

The scorn with which Mr. Proudhammer regards Harlem

is reciprocated by his neighbors, who "despised and mocked"

him, by his sons, who "all but ignored him" (p. 14), and by

Baldwin, whose novel suggests that for people like Mr.

Proudhammer the train of personal and social integrity has

long been gone. The novel recommends a pervasive integrity

as the most virtuous of virtues. Such integrity demands

confrontation with the disparate elements of the self. Leo

is heroic because he confronts with integrity the ambivalences

of his nature and his environment: he adjusts to his bisexu-

ality, accepts the amalgamation of African and American

cultural phenomena in his make-up, welcomes the interracial

aspect of his love-life, struggles to overcome the pressures

[66]Ibid., p. 117.

of his profession--he is a black actor in predominantly white plays performed for predominantly white audiences--and repudiates Christianity in a purportedly Christian society. Proudhammer is scorned because he is Leo's antithesis. In a cowardly fashion he evades the basic issues of his existence.

Through Leo's life the novel asks whether there is a viable place in American society for this kind of human being, or whether, in the terms of the novel's title, the train of human toleration and understanding has departed from the American depot. Symbolically, Leo's life is the answer to its own question. The train is humanity; and the attempt to be humane is, paradoxically, both the asking and the answering of the question: for not only does the attempt lead inevitably to the question of whether a humane life in America is possible for the Afro-American but it also implies that humanity resides in the persistent struggle to be humane. Given this analysis, the reader concludes that Mr. Proudhammer is scorned because he gives up the struggle for his humanity both in Barbados and Harlem. And he cannot even admit to his own cowardice. His train is indeed gone! And the tone of the passages which analyze his character leaves little question as to Baldwin's utter contempt for such a character. Baldwin's attitude toward Proudhammer, filtered though it is through the consciousness of the narrator (Leo), reveals Baldwin to be less compassionate than either

DuBois or Ellison in his treatment of the West Indian.
Perigua and Ras, despite their ridiculous ideological pos-
tures and their raging insanity, are invested with force
and substance, however misdirected and misapplied. Some
trace of authorial compassion, admittedly weak, is inherent
in their portraits. Baldwin, however, introduces the reader
to a West Indian who is undeserving of toleration even by his
immediate family. And there is no hint of compassion in the
author's attitude toward this character. Because Leo car-
ries the full weight of the novel's thematic statement within
the range of his personal make-up, his relationships and his
attitudes, the reader may justifiably conclude that Leo's
scorn for his father is also Baldwin's.

The lack of compassion in Baldwin's treatment of Mr.
Proudhammer is inconsistent with one of the thematic concerns
of the novel--that is, the need for compassion in every
aspect of life, a need which Leo himself asserts. But Leo
seems unconscious of the fact that he has no compassion for
his father; and Baldwin is content to allow his novel to run
full circle--it begins and ends with Leo in a theater--
without his protagonist confronting the lack of compassion
which defined his attitude toward his father. Put another
way, Baldwin's scorn for Proudhammer engenders this flaw
of the novel: stereotyping is a valid option for the novel-
ist, but to be effective it must assist the overall pattern
of the novel. Mr. Proudhammer conforms to the overall pattern

of the novel in every aspect of his portraiture except in the important matter of the author's attitude to the character. He is the only character in the novel whom the author regards with scorn.

Perhaps the reason for Baldwin's scorn for Mr. Proudhammer is to be found in Proudhammer's defensive attitude toward black nationalism, which is only given superficial treatment in the novel. Assimilation into the American mainstream is the hero's ostensible goal, and, by thematic extension, the ideological recommendation of the author. The real black nationalist in the novel is Leo's male lover, Black Christopher, who at the age of twenty-five, has not yet formulated a solid program for the implementation of his ideology. His is a world which Leo does not understand and makes only a cursory attempt to understand. Nor does Leo offer his lover any encouragement in his nationalist pursuits. Because Leo's career contradicts the black nationalistic attitudes and goals and because he is consequently unexposed to the exigencies of black nationalist thought, there is no motivation for Baldwin to lead the reader more than superficially into Christopher's world. The climactic moment in the portrait of Christopher comes during a conversation when he tells Leo that the Afro-Americans "need guns" (p. 369). When Leo reminds him that the Afro-Americans are outnumbered in America, Christopher rejoins: "Shit. So were the early Christians" (p. 369). As this is

Christopher's last utterance in the novel, the reader is
left wondering whether Baldwin thinks that the most an Afro-
American black nationalist can hope for is to become a black
Christ figure--the name "Black Christopher" adds weight to such
a conjecture.

The portrait of Christopher warrants some attention
here because Christopher is Proudhammer's opposite. On him
has been bestowed all the substance of which Proudhammer has
been divested. That Baldwin wants the reader to contrast
these two figures is obvious from the very last paragraph
of the novel: "Christopher and my father and I spent a day
together, walking through Harlem. They looked very much
like each other, both big, both black, both laughing" (p.
370). But although Christopher is the opposite of Proudhammer,
Leo's attitude toward his lover's black nationalism is not the
opposite of his attitude to his father's escapism (scorn);
it is mere toleration. As Leo's lover, Christopher has Leo's
impassioned hopes for his survival; as a proponent of black
nationalism, Christopher knows that he is not even under-
stood. Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone illustrates
Baldwin's toleration for the Afro-American nationalist and
his contempt for the West Indian Garveyites in America.

Because Christopher is Mr. Proudhammer's opposite,
we are forced to conclude that Baldwin's West Indian is
Baldwin's emasculated Afro-American. Christopher and Mr.
Proudhammer are parts of the same Afro-American condition.

Put another way, they represent two of the different responses of the Afro-American to his psycho-cultural situation. Considered together, they are reminiscent of DuBois' concept of the two warring selves which make up the Afro-American's self, reminiscent in that the polarity of Christopher and Proudhammer, like the polarity which DuBois articulates, is racially engendered. Like Perigua and Ras, Mr. Proudhammer is an objectification of the potential for the negative resolution of that internal war. For the physical destruction and madness which characterize Ras and Perigua, however, Baldwin substitutes spiritual impotence.

John A. Williams adds yet another dimension to the West Indian stereotype in his 1975 novel, Mothersill and the Foxes. From the spiritual impotence of Mr. Proudhammer Williams moves to the impotence of West Indian decadence. The portrait is very brief but well focused. In it Williams is intent upon exposing the amorphous and sterile existence of West Indian jet-setters who, aspiring to be more European than the Europeans and thinking themselves to be more "proper" beings than the poorer masses of West Indians because of their studies in England and their travels abroad, find island life too confining and too dull; hence they must do what they can to add zest and scope to their lives. In place of the old values of their West Indian society they substitute the glittering ephemerality of the European jet-setters. Still they cling ferociously to their

nominal status as West Indians. It is obvious to Williams,

however, that between their accidental identity as West

Indians and their adopted identity as Europeans, couples

like Terrence and Melanie Holdenfield (Williams' repre-

sentative couple) are psycho-culturally deracinated and

lost. This fact is subtly implied in Williams' introductory

description of this couple:

> Terrence and Melanie Holdenfield rode without speaking,
> their Mercedes-Benz sedan gently blowing conditioned
> air upon them. They appeared to have been stamped from
> the same mold except for color. Both were tall for
> islanders, and tending toward thinness, and both were
> extraordinarily handsome, with their carefully shaped
> heads, nose bridges, lips and cheekbones. She was jet-
> black; he was cafe-au-lait colored.
>   The Holdenfields were natives of the island, had
> studied in England, and traveled on the Continent and
> in the United States. Like the car in which they rode,
> they appeared to locals on the road to be sleek, purring
> with an almost noiseless power. Dressed with studied
> casualness, they nevertheless exuded a wealth unusual for
> natives of Grand Royale. Others of their class were
> most careful that their dress and style did not excite
> any undue jealousy on the part of those beneath them.
> There were already too many groups forming, splinters
> of those in America, vowing to break from England; the
> Caribbean for the Caribbeans, they said. Melanie and
> Terrence Holdenfield agreed. But the "proper" Carib-
> beans, like themselves.
>   They waited, as their forebearers had done, for the
> proper time, the proper deal. They were the people who
> held the land and sold it to the onrushing hordes of
> mainlanders; they were the people who were warmly greeted
> in the secret clubs, set in coves, for whites; they were
> the people who pushed forward the candidates for the
> offices that would come with independence.[67]

The introduction of the Holdenfields anticipates

their meeting with Odell Mothersill, the novel's Afro-American

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[67]John A. Williams, Mothersill and the Foxes (New
York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 132.

protagonist, who has been sent from New York to Grand Royale,
an imaginary Caribbean island preparing for independence,
to "get some adoption services set up" as a part of a govern-
mental agreement between Grand Royale and New York. Stranded
on a little-traveled road one afternoon, Odell is rescued
by the Holdenfields, who immediately invite him to spend the
night at their luxurious home, "Estate Holdenfield,"
located on a hilltop where, Odell thought, "God might build
a house" (p. 135). Sensing (from the sensuous and sugges-
tive manner of the Holdenfields) that he was in for a
sexually entertaining night, Odell is not surprised when
Melanie comes to his bed later that night and makes love
to him. But he is surprised when, at the beginning of his
orgasm, "the light comes on without a sound, . . . and in
the chair, quite naked sits [Terrence] Holdenfield, his eyes
half-closed, the pupils tiny bits of glass; even as Mother-
sill watches out of his warm, paralyzing prison, Holdenfield
comes, snapping down in his chair, groaning. . . ." (p. 140).

With this experience Odell knows that he has been
in touch with sexual decadence:

> Well. It was one thing to read about such things as
> had happened at the Holdenfields'; and it was even
> funny to hear people tell stories about incidents like
> that. But being a part of it. Thinking even that he
> might be--otherwise, why would he have turned on the
> light? What if they'd had another game in mind, a
> "menage a trois" in which each participated fully? What
> would his responses have been? Was it possible, as he'd
> heard, that pussy after a while became quite ordinary
> to some men, and they moved on to whips, to doing it on
> top of caskets, to tying women in the positions they
> dreamed up in adolescence, and, finally, gave up on

women altogether, to try something else, like other men,
or men and women. (pp. 140-1)

Odell's thoughts are to be taken seriously by the reader,

for sexual behavior has been Odell's constant preoccupation

since he was nine years old. In fact, the main plot of the

novel is Odell's movement from one sexual encounter to another

in an unconscious attempt to prove that knowledge of people,

hence knowledge of life, is to be found in explicit sexual

relationships. One may wonder whether Odell's innumerable

sexual escapades are the logical results of his seemingly

inexhaustible sexual stamina or whether Odell is taking his

professional status as social worker too seriously. The

reader may wonder, furthermore, if Odell's lack of sexual

restraint is intended to satirize the experiences of the

Afro-American male social worker. In any case, Odell thinks

that he recognizes in Melanie a kindred spirit: ". . . he

thinks of the English, French, Italian, Swedish, American,

Brazilian, Spanish, German and Danish lovers this woman had.

For the conversation earlier detailed their travels, and he

gathered that she, like him, like most people, he imagines,

had come to know nations by their lovers" (p. 139). But his

night at the Holdenfields' home convinces him that the sexual

escapades of this couple were motivated by decadence alone.

Nevertheless, we see that the Holdenfields have been

used by the author for his hero's (and his own) confrontation

of the negative potential of his sexual make-up. Odell

knows that the only real difference between himself and the

West Indian couple is that he is less culturally estranged
than they are and hence less vulnerable to the amorphous
attractions of sexual decadence. That the portrait of the
Holdenfields functions as an objective correlative is appar-
ent, furthermore, from the fact that Williams' interest in
the portrait grows out of the eclectic nature of the hero's
sexual odyssey; that is, sooner or later the hero has to
confront his fear of the negative possibilities of his own
nature. Williams, avoiding the anger and venom of the other
three novelists, chooses the West Indian couple as an objec-
tive correlative for the confrontation of that fear.

However, there are decided differences between Wil-
liams' portrait and those of DuBois, Ellison and Baldwin.
The stereotypical impotence is still emphasized--the Holden-
fields' lives have style without substance--but the authorial
venom is conspicuously absent. Unlike the other three
authors, Williams has no intention of using the West Indian
to point out ideological and temperamental differences
between Afro-Americans and West Indians. The Holdenfields
are merely representative of those West Indian couples who
abandon the aesthetic, moral and philosophical traditions
of their island life for those of Europe. Because Williams
handles his portrait with more objectivity than either DuBois,
Ellison or Baldwin, the couple is the most believable of all
the West Indian characters discussed in this chapter.
Between the emotionless voice of the narrator and the ostensibly

sexual kinship which exists between the Holdenfields and

the protagonist, any authorial hostilities which might

have colored the portrait are objectified beyond recognition.

Williams is undoubtedly influenced by the inter-

nationality of the black nationalist movement in the sixties,

epitomized by Malcolm X, who insisted that the issue of human

rights belonged to the international arena and who, as Larry

Neal observes, "linked the general oppression of Black America

to that of the Third World."[68] The nature and international-

ity of Odell's profession imply Williams' interest in the evi-

dence of (and potential for) unity between Afro-Americans and

West Indians. The international scope of Williams' interests

is reflected in his attempt, however streamlined, to depict

West Indians in their own native setting; and Odell's attempt

to foster social bonds between the United States and Port

Royale is a natural outgrowth of Williams' interest in the

international situation of black people. Moreover, Williams

acknowledges that some of the socio-cultural problems of Port

Royale--the Holdenfields represent one extreme manifestation

of these problems--have their origin in the internationality

of the twentieth century, a consideration which is illus-

trated by the briefing given to Odell prior to his journey

to Grand Royale:

> We've worked out an exchange arrangement with the gov-
> ernment of Grand Royale. Seems like a nice place. . . .
> There are a lot of what are called, to use loose

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[68]Larry Neal, An Anthology of Afro-American Writings,
eds. Leroi Jones and Larry Neal, Apollo Edition (New York,
1969), p. 647.

terminology, "illegitimate children" on the island. But up till now they haven't had to expend a lot of money on orphanages or work on any adoption techniques. Someone always took the children. Relatives, friends, even strangers. There was no such thing as a child not being cared for. (p. 90)

The critic is therefore forced to admit that Williams' attitude toward the West Indian is a sympathetic one. With this admission, he realizes that for the first time in his deliberation of the West Indian portraits in Afro-American novels he must divorce the negativeness inherent in the portrait itself from the authorial attitude toward the portrait. Williams understands the decadence of the Holdenfields and his response to their cultural deracination is not a vicious attack, something which cannot be truthfully said of DuBois, Ellison and Baldwin. His response, rather, is merely an exposure of the psycho-cultural problem and an admission of its international nature.

The perception of Williams' more sympathetic tone, however, must not be allowed to obscure the fact that the portrait itself is still an unflattering one. In 1975, years after the black nationalist struggles had begun to spur a rehabilitation of the image of the West Indian, Williams, his genuine interest and sympathetic treatment notwithstanding, is still catering to negative images of the West Indian. The critic can only conjecture what Williams might have accomplished had he shone his literary spotlight on a more healthy and culturally secure West Indian couple living in the same tourist environment. As the situation stands

now, however, what Odell says about the Holdenfields can be applied to Williams' portrait itself: "A helluva way to remember Grand Royale" (p. 141).

Having examined the nature and implications of West Indian stereotypes in the Afro-American novel we can draw several conclusions which reaffirm the thesis of this chapter. Although the individual portraits, with the exception of Williams, are inspired by anti-Garvey sentiment, collectively they assume a more comprehensive function. They indict the general West Indian temperament as that temperament is apprehended by these Afro-American novelists. By intentional distortion and juxtaposition the novelists launch an attack that is intense and devastating. To observe that the source of the attack is located in the personal and temperamental differences between the Afro-American and the West Indian, differences which Garvey is believed to have epitomized, is hardly a satisfying conclusion. To point out, furthermore, that the Afro-American novelists tended to blend temperamental and ideological considerations--a fact which distorts the representative nature of the portraits--is only to verify that we have a consistent image of the West Indian as misguided aliens. The collective attack seems to be motivated by a source which lies deeper than any of the above suggestions would tend to imply. It seems probable that Garvey was the catalyst for an Afro-American catharsis made necessary by the consistently

tragic nature of the Afro-American's colonial experience in America. It seems even more probable that the pattern of West Indian stereotypes has its origin in the Afro-American experience itself. In deriding the West Indian the novelists reveal their own awareness of the Afro-American potential for social and psychological chaos and socio-political impotence. Hence the portraits can be said to function as objective correlatives for the authors' confrontation of the potential for impotence and chaos within the Afro-American situation. The result, ironically, is that the portraits have more in common with Afro-Americans than with West Indians, a point which will become quite clear in the next chapter as we compare the psychologies of the West Indian and the Afro-American.

CHAPTER IV

A COMPARISON OF THE WEST INDIAN AND

AFRO-AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIES

There is convincing evidence that the West Indian

significantly affected the movement in Afro-America litera-

ture known as the Harlem Renaissance, especially in the

internationality of its scope. The simultaneous influx

into Harlem of West Indians and black Southerners in the

decade following World War I generated an awareness of

black presence which was itself one of the prime motivating

factors of the Renaissance. The image of the "New Negro,"

an adjunct of the Renaissance, owed aspects of its creation

to the aggressive personality and ideology of Marcus Garvey

(as has already been asserted) and to the internationality

of the Harlem environment, an environment conducive to the

social and political interrelationship of black people from

all parts of the globe. Garvey's Pan-Africanism intensified

the Renaissance curiosity about the nature of the African as

he existed in Africa, a curiosity which leads inevitably

to a confrontation with the differences between the native

African and the African living in the West. However, the most

tangible literary contribution by a West Indian to the

Harlem Renaissance and (to date) to Afro-American literature
on the whole was made by Claude McKay, whose Harlem Shadows
is generally said to have initiated the Renaissance. In
two of his three novels, Home to Harlem (1928) and Banjo
(1929), McKay wrote poignantly of the potential not only
for the interrelationship of Afro-Americans and West Indians
but also for the psycho-cultural health of black people in
a Western environment.

While the co-existence of Afro-Americans and West
Indians was expanding the scope of Afro-American literature,
the two groups developed a feeling of animosity for each
other. The fact that Afro-Americans and West Indians found
themselves in fierce competition for the same jobs rendered
such animosity an inevitability. Thus "the large numbers
of West Indians who . . . achieved status and success in the
United States"[1] did so within an emotional environment which
Orde Coombs describes as "a bristling undercurrent of
distaste."[2] The Afro-American directed language of oppro-
brium toward the West Indian, whom they called "monkey
chasers," and, when they desired to be particularly venomous,
"Black Jews."[3] Meanwhile the West Indians, for the most

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[1]Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual
(New York: William Morrow & Co., 1967), p. 123.

[2]Orde Coombs, Do You See My Love for You Growing?
(New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1970), p. 110.

[3]Ibid.

part, considered themselves superior to the Afro-Americans.[4]
According to Orde Coombs, the West Indians based this vaunted
superiority on the Afro-American blacks' lower class status
and their supposed lack of militancy.[5] Coombs's comment is
not mere speculation. It overtly defined the attitude
inherent in the fiction of Claude McKay. And in the last
chapter of his autobiography, A Long Way from Home, McKay
implies that the fact of a black minority in America pro-
motes a psychological inferiority which makes the Afro-
American's position less desirable than that of the West
Indian, who exists as a member of a black majority in the
British West Indies:

> It is hell to belong to a suppressed minority and out-
> cast group. For to most members of the powerful major-
> ity, you are not a person; you are a problem. . . . As
> a member of a weak minority, you are not supposed to
> criticize your friends of the strong majority. You
> will be damned mean and ungrateful. Therefore you and
> your group must be content with lower critical stan-
> dards. . . .[6]

McKay also accuses the Afro-American masses of lacking a
collective sense of unity:

> The whites have done the blacks some great wrongs, but
> also they have done some good. They have brought to
> them the benefits of modern civilization . . . but one
> thing they cannot do; they cannot give Negroes the gift
> of a soul--a group soul.
>   . . . there is very little group spirit among
> Negroes. The American Negro group is the most advanced

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[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Cruse, p. 116.

in the world. It possesses unique advantages for the
development and expansion and for assuming the world
leadership of the Negro race. But it sadly lacks a
group soul.[7]

In **The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual** Harold

Cruse finds McKay's conclusions about the Afro-Americans

highly suspect because, as an "outsider critically looking

in upon a unique situation," McKay "was attuned to a dif-

ferent psychology about the whole matter."[8] The provinci-

ality of Cruse's suspicions can be pointed out: if McKay's

status as a West Indian disqualifies him from truthfully

assessing the Afro-American psychological situation, then

surely Cruse's status as an Afro-American disqualifies him

from truthfully assessing the West Indian temperament.

Cruse goes on to observe that it is the West Indian's

majority status at home that attunes him to a "different psy-

chology:"

> . . . the West Indian has never accepted nor felt at
> home with [the social implications of Afro-American life
> vis-a-vis the American whites], as his psychological
> conditioning has never been as a minority. His majority
> status in the Caribbean softened the fact that he was
> still a colonial slave.[9]

There can hardly be any serious objection to Cruse's state-

ment and it seems to me that McKay's observation also deserves

serious attention. But what I wish to stress here is that

both men have made an attempt to understand the other's

psychological make-up. I suggest that an understanding of

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[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., p. 115.

[9]Ibid., p. 129.

the Afro-American and West Indian psychologies is crucial
to the novelists' depiction of representative Afro-American
and West Indian characters. The attitude of hostility which
underscores the depiction of the West Indian in the Afro-
American novel is the result of two misunderstood psycholo-
gies at war with each other on the Harlem battlefield. If
the evolution of the West Indian image is to be understood,
it becomes necessary to delineate (as fully as a limited
selection of literature would allow) these two separate
psychologies.

As we have discussed in Chapter I there was little
psychological and cultural difference between the Afro-
American and West Indian slave. But without a doubt, fol-
lowing the manumission of slaves in America and the West
Indies, the cultural experiences of the two groups began to
show marked differences and led to two different ways of
apprehending reality. The aim of this chapter, then, is to
reveal the differences between the collective psychologies
of the Afro-American and the West Indian through the exami-
nation of some of the literature of these two groups and to
show, simultaneously, how these differences make the West
Indian self-perception far different from the Afro-American
perception of the West Indian. Since much has already been
said in passing about the collective psychological state
of the Afro-Americans (as seen through the eyes of Delany,
DuBois, Washington, Ellison and Baldwin), the emphasis in
this chapter will be on the West Indian psychology as

reflected in the novels written by black West Indians.

We may begin with the observation that, unlike the Afro-American novel, the West Indian novel did not pass through a phase of protest literature.[10] This fact is the result of a crucial difference between the psychologies of these two cultural groups, a difference which has its origin in the different post-emancipation political strategies employed by England and America in their respective dealings with the ex-slaves. Whereas the Afro-American had to scratch and claw his way into the American body politic, a process which, incidentally, is still incomplete, the West Indian was generally assimilated into the English culture without any appreciable degree of belligerence on the part of either. It was, says Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, the special achievement of the British ruling class "to inculcate someone with certain values without his realizing he has been so inculcated. In the case of the West Indies, the British had, with a stroke of genius, lulled the serpent of the race to sleep."[11] This racial somnolence was effected largely through the perpetuation of a type of education which, according to V. S. Naipaul, prepared the West Indian "to believe himself heir to a Christian-Hellenic tradition."[12]

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[10]Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Homecoming (New York: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1972), p. 96.

[11]Ibid., p. 97.

[12]Ibid.

The educational process led to the establishment of a westernized black middle class whose members were given jobs at virtually all levels of society. In this way the British trained the natives to perpetuate a British sense of values. The process was rendered even more comprehensive and pervasive in light of the fact that the class structure in the West Indies was not nearly as exclusive as it was in Europe. Nor was the division between the generations as rigid as it was in Europe. The West Indian child, says Bill Carr, "rapidly becomes subject to the same impulses and assumptions" as the adult, "if in a more positive or more resigned way."[13] The lower classes were taught to admire the values of the educated middle-class, even if they did not fully grasp their psychological implications. The uneducated, although they did not comprehend the world of academia, did everything in their power to see that their children received a British-directed education, thereby beginning an academic tradition which distributed its British essence to all levels of society. The general psychological conditioning of the West Indian, then, was such that it led him to pursue the western white culture "without seriously doubting the rationality of its prejudices."[14]

In light of the "Englishness" of the West Indian

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[13]Bill Carr, "A Complex Fate: The Novels of Andrew Salkey," printed in The Islands in Between, ed. Louis James (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 108.

[14]Ngugi, p. 97.

middle classes, then, it is not surprising that the West

Indian novel never paralleled the racial protest of the

Afro-American novel. By the time the West Indian writer

was aware that there were indeed grounds for racial or

cultural protest, he was also ironically aware, thanks to

the subtleties of his colonial education, that he had already

become a part of the very process which he wanted to protest;

with regard to his racial identity he had been lulled into

complacency. C. L. R. James calls attention to this psy-

chological state in his autobiography (Beyond a Boundary,

1963):

> It was long years after . . . that I understood the limi-
> tation on the spirit, vision and self-respect which was
> imposed on us by the fact that our masters, our curricu-
> lum, our code of morals, everything began from the basis
> that Britain was the source of all light and learning,
> and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn;
> our criterion of success was to have succeeded in
> approaching that distant ideal—to attain it was, of
> course, impossible. Both masters and boys accepted it
> as in the very nature of things. The masters could not
> be offensive about it because they thought it was their
> function to do this, if they thought about it at all; and,
> as for me, it was the beacon that beckoned me on. The
> race question did not have to be agitated: It was there.
> But in our little Eden it never troubled us.[15]

James's experience is the experience of West Indians generally.

It is out of a sense of personal familiarity with C. L. R.

James' experience, for example, that the Barbadian novelist,

George Lamming, forthrightly declares: "The lack of . . .

hostile forces, the freedom from physical fear, has created

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[15]C. L. R. James, Beyond a Boundary (London:
Hutchinson, 1963), pp. 38-39.

a state of complacency in the West Indian awareness. And

the higher up he moves, the more crippled his mind and

impulses become by the resultant complacency."[16]

In the United States, on the other hand, racial

hostilities and fears have forced the Afro-American to

search for a cultural identity based on race in order to

survive. The search manifests itself in several ideological

and political directions--the Pan-Africanism of Delany, the

accommodation of Washington, the negritude of DuBois, the

protest of Richard Wright and the black nationalism of

Malcolm X. Whatever the direction of the search, however,

the element of intense racial conflict has always been domi-

nant in the collective consciousness of Afro-Americans.

And there is an obsession with racial issues throughout

the history of the Afro-American novel, an obsession which

begins (as the Afro-American novel does) with Clotel (1853),

reaches a peak with Native Son (1940), and continues to be

revealed in many novels of the 70's.

The first difference between the psychologies of

the West Indian and the Afro-American, then, is that the

one is racially complacent and the other is racially aggres-

sive. This state of racial complacency does not mean, however,

that the West Indian novel is not given to other forms of

protest. To the contrary, novels such as Lamming's In the

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[16]Louis James, "For the Time Being," in The Islands
in Between, p. 156.

Castle of My Skin (1953) and V. S. Reid's New Day (1949) are
novels of protest. But protest in the West Indian novel is
usually socio-political, not racial, in character and moti-
vation; and the attendant struggle for identity takes
place on the socio-political battle-front. Racial protest,
when it does occur in the West Indian novel, usually occurs
in the background. Socio-political protest, violent or
otherwise, often gets the novel's spotlight. Indeed, Lam-
ming's declaration that a "state of complacency" exists in
the West Indian awareness applies only to the area of racial
awareness.

But complacency easily (though not inevitably) co-
exists with security. Such is the case when the Jamaican
novelist, John Hearne praises the uniqueness of the boys
in Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin, a novel which
depicts, among other things, the growing sensibilities of
a boy from age nine to eighteen in a small peasant village
in Barbados. "There are no other children in West Indian
fiction," writes Hearne, "like George Lamming's growing
boys in In the Castle of My Skin. Whatever problems of
poverty, race prejudice, lack of social structure they
face, they operate out from a powerful individuality.
They have a cultural reference point that is truly original."[17]

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[17]John Hearne, "What the Barbadian Means to Me,"
printed in Caribbean Essays, ed. Andrew Salkey (London:
Evans Brothers Ltd., 1973), p. 19.

But their "powerful individuality" stems as much from a complacency toward their racial identity as from their sense of social and cultural identity. Indeed, the boys are burdened by a growing sense of loss, a loss which they cannot comprehend and for which, consequently, they have no name. It is only near the end of the novel that the loss is identified as the loss of racial awareness and racial self-assertion on personal and communal levels. Hearne's comment supports his contention that "[the Barbadian] is English in a way [other West Indians] are not. History englished him. . . . Nor should the Barbadian be ashamed of his 'Englishness.' It is a source of real psychic strength. . . . There is a 'wholeness' to the Barbadian that I have not found in any other English-speaking Caribbean territory."[18] Lamming's novel, however, is a gradual rejection of this "Englishness" and an illustration of the fact that twentieth-century social and political realities make this "wholeness" a thing of the past. In its wake comes the sometimes frightening awareness that the price of "Englishness" in the predominantly black islands of the West Indies is the loss of racial self-assertion.

In the Castle of My Skin is, in fact, an autobiographical novel about a growing sense of loss which is inseparable from a simultaneous pattern of social, political

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[18]Ibid., pp. 19-20.

and psychological change. This synthesis of loss and change
takes place on at least two levels. The first is the move-
ment of the individual (young Lamming and his friends--
Trumper, Boy Blue, Big Bam, Botsie, Knucker Head, Po King,
Puss in Boots and Suck Me Toe) from a level of conscious-
ness framed by intimate contact with nature and a rather
closed society to a level of consciousness where the cul-
tural reference points are too vague to engender a feeling
either of community or individuality. The period of framed
consciousness belongs to the boys' childhood, when they seem
secure in their "powerful individuality"--their cultural
references are framed by the various aspects of their
environment: tropical nature, village lore, church, family
and community. Their adolescence coincides, however, with
a flowing current of socio-political unrest in neighboring
Trinidad. The riot which breaks out in Trinidad spreads to
Barbados. The more the boys become aware of the conflict
in their society the more vague and meaningless the frames
of their cultural reference become. This condition leaves
them open to new stimuli. But none are forthcoming. Only
physical departure from Barbados promises relief from this
predicament, and only two of the boys (Trumper and Lamming)
do actually leave. Trumper, who is first to leave, goes to
America, where he receives the stimulus which supplies a
new frame for his cultural reference: in America he is
forced by the racial nature of that society to confront for

the first time some of the psycho-cultural implications of being black in the West; so it is that he discovers himself as a member of the black diaspora. "If there be one thing I thank America for," he tells young Lamming after he returns to Barbados, "[it is that] she teach me who my race was."[19] America frees Trumper from his racial complacency.

In point of fact, Trumper analyzes the West Indian situation in such a way that he uncovers the West Indian's complacency to what Aime Cesaire and DuBois call negritude. Trumper's analysis also implies that such a state, thanks to the subtle transforming powers of British colonialism, is the peculiar legacy of black West Indians:

> "Course the blacks here are my people too, but they don't know it yet. You don't know it yourself. None 'o you here on this islan' know what is mean to fin' race. An' the white people you have to deal with won't ever let you know. 'Tis a great thing 'bout the English, the know-how. If ever there wus a nation in creation that know how to do an' get a thing do, 'tis the English. . . . In America I have seen as much as a man get kick down for askin' a question. Not here. That couldn't ever happen here. We can walk here where we like it 'tis a public place, an' you've white teachers, an' we speak with white people at all times in all places. My people here go to their homes an' all that. An' take the clubs, for example. There be clubs which you an' me can't go to, an' none o' my people here, no matter who they be, but they don't tell us we can't. They put up a sign, 'Members Only,' knowin' full well you ain't got no chance o' becomin' a member. An' although we know from the start why we can't go, we got the consolation we can't because we ain't members. In America they don't worry with that kind o' beatin' 'bout the bush."
>   "What's the difference between us an' the black people over there?" I asked.

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[19]George Lamming, <u>In the Castle of My Skin</u> (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1953), p. 304.

'Tis a great big difference,' said Trumper,
"They suffer in a way we don't know here. We can't
understan' it here an' we never will. But their
sufferin' teach them what we here won't ever know.
The race, our people. . . ."
"Am I one of your people, Trumper?" The ques-
tion was almost desperate. . . .
"You're one o' my people all right," said Trumper,
"but you can't understan' it here. Not here. But the
day you leave an' perhaps if you go further than Trini-
dad you'll learn. . . . But you'll become a Negro like
me an' all the rest in the States an' all over the world,
'cause it ain't have nothin' to do with where you born.
'Tis what you is, a different kind o' creature. . . .
You ain't a thing till you know it, an' that's why you
an' none o' you on this island is a Negro yet." (pp. 304-
306)

Thus the undefined loss which has been growing in young

Lamming's consciousness is finally charged to the Barbadian

society's loss of black identity; or, put another way, the

loss is the inevitable result of his living in a society

which has been lulled to a complacency toward the possibili-

ties of negritude.

The second level of change is societal. The Barbadian

village community is brought painfully out of its self-

centered and self-justified existence to a confrontation

with some of the harsh realities of twentieth-century

colonial life. The villagers are caught up in a gradual

and puzzling awareness that the old values, whose very

definition a strong sense of community made unnecessary,

were disappearing even as their implications (because of the

riot) were beginning to be collectively grasped. The people's

psychic strength is tested by its exposure to an ethos in

which the old values are disappearing faster than new values

are emerging. The result of this imbalance, even years after the riot, is that the new order seems forever inchoate. The villagers' lives seem, above all, "a record of shifting troubled feelings groping their way toward a future that frightens as much as it beckons."[20] In the Castle of My Skin becomes an emblem of the awakening of the West Indian people to their socio-political plight as colonials and a statement that such an awakening, inevitable though it is, leads, at best, to society's recurring adolescence or, at worst, to a sense of amorphous estrangement.

Even on this level of loss and change the West Indian society's complacency toward matters of race is conspicuous. The fact that racial identity is approached only on an individual level in the novel leads the critic to wonder whether Lamming views the racial self-assertion of the black West Indian masses as an improbability or whether, consequently, the predominantly black West Indian islands must continue to strive to unify themselves around issues other than race. In any case, In the Castle of My Skin labels as real the "state of complacency in the West Indian awareness."

This racial complacency is generally discernible in the West Indian novel, both in the thematic concerns of the artist and in the collective psychology of the community which he depicts. In neither case, however, does racial

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[20]Richard Wright, Introduction to In the Castle of My Skin, p. x.

complacency imply unawareness of racial origin. In areas

like the West Indies where many races live side by side, the

topic of racial origin and racial differences can hardly be

ignored; and racial misunderstandings can hardly be circum-

vented. But in the West Indies multi-racial co-existence

has historically dictated that the sense of multi-racial

community is much more dominant in the West Indian's con-

sciousness than the sense of racial individuality or exclusion.

In most of the islands the cultural influences can be nar-

rowed down to two main streams,[21] one coming from Europe and

the other from Africa; but the post-emancipation socio-

political order has attempted "the process of mixing these

cultures and shaking them together to form some sort of uni-

fied whole," a process which, incidentally, is far from com-

pleted and which gives rise to problems, "which [are] just

beginning to be understood."[22] The impulse toward a unified

multi-racial society has historically discouraged racial

self-assertion. Thus the complacency which we have located

in the consciousness of the black West Indian is the result

of this impulse. Indeed the West Indian perception of him-

self as a member of a socio-political unit is a second

difference between the psychologies of Afro-Americans and

West Indians; and, unlike the West Indian stereotypes in

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[21]Norman W. Manley, "Roger Mais--the Writer" printed
as the Introduction to The Three Novels of Roger Mais (Lon-
don: Johnathan Cape, 1966), p. v.

[22]Ibid.

the Afro-American novel, the characters in the West Indian
novel reflect the authorial awareness of this difference.
Generally speaking, whenever in the West Indian novel the
attitude of racial complacency is revealed either by the
characters or by the author, revealed at the same time
is an experiential awareness of community. In In the Castle
of My Skin only the influence of America allows Trumper to
scale the wall of his own racial complacency and to spur
the racial awareness of young Lamming. Meanwhile, the
village community continues to function as a socio-political
unit.

The West Indian writer's complacency toward the
issue of racial self-assertion is, in fact, inseparable from
the complacency of his fictional society. It is inseparable,
also, from his thematic emphasis on a sense of community
both when he focuses on an all-black community and when he
depicts a multi-racial community. John Hearne's The Faces
of Love (1957) and Land of the Living (1961) are good
examples of novels which reveal the state of racial com-
placency and the sense of community in the West Indian psy-
chological make-up. In both novels Hearne depicts a multi-
racial society and illustrates that the nature of love has
little or nothing to do with racial origins; and in both
novels love affects the lives of people who pay, at best,
only superficial attention to their racial make-up. The
characters are aware of themselves and each other as persons,

without having to undergo the process of racial identity
(or even the search for it). Still their sense of community
is strong, and in their interactions they call attention to
complex social and political issues with little attention to
the possible connections between these issues and race.

In The Faces of Love Rachel Ascom, the black daughter
of a German woman, treats material values as the only mirror
which can reflect her essence and thereby validate her
existence. The possibility of pride in either aspect of her
racial make-up never pierces her consciousness. "I am
nothing, you see," she tells Fabricus, who is one of her
many past lovers and the narrator of the novel. "I come
from nothing and none of you people will ever forget that
when I make a mistake. Everything I become I've got to
show. That's why I buy such good clothes. Every time I
spend ten times what I should on clothes it's like a standard
I set myself."[23]

Because of her deep-seated insecurity Rachel "uses
love as a compensatory exercise of power."[24] While her
black lover, Jojo Rygin, is in prison, Rachel initiates a
romantic relationship with a white Englishman, Michael
Lovelace; but soon after the beginning of this affair Jojo
is released, and Rachel begins to manipulate the love triangle.

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[23]John Hearne, The Faces of Love (London: Faber &
Faber, 1957), p. 59.

[24]Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its
Background (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 49.

The forceful and ebullient Jojo feels sure that his coming
wealth will be sufficient grounds for Rachel's choosing to
marry him. Meanwhile, Michael, a newcomer to the West Indian
scene, undergoes no psychological changes as a result of
his participation in the activities of this West Indian com-
munity (he is the editor of the island's leading newspaper,
Newsletter). He is affected only by his love for Rachel,
which seems, like himself, unconnected to any particular
cultural reality (his or Rachel's). In fact, Hearne inten-
tionally contrives an interracial and intracultural love
triangle and then proceeds, presumably just as intentionally,
to avoid confrontation with the possible implications of
such a situation. Indeed, such implications are irrelevant
to Hearne's thematic concerns. The following passage exempli-
fies the quality of narrative introspection which the triangu-
lar situation evokes:

> She handled the situation between Michael and Jojo
> in her own way. And in her own way, I suppose, she
> handled it very well. Jojo was not in town often enough
> or long enough to be a problem. He was there just
> enough to give her what she liked him for, and what she
> had nearly forgotten while he was in prison. Michael,
> I think, must have been in love with her even at this
> time. Not like he became later on, but sufficiently to
> be foolish and vulnerable. You could see the strain of
> playing the other man begin to show itself in his quick,
> calmly observant eyes and in his smooth, confident,
> pleasantly superior face. I don't know how often or
> how deep he had been in love before, but I don't think
> he had ever done this sort of thing. . . . He hated it
> and he was caught in it. Looking back, I suppose this
> was Rachel's shrewdest use of her power. A more stupid
> woman would have pretended to be in love with Michael.
> That would have given him some rights in the case. She
> didn't. She only treated him, every day, with a fond,
> tender comradeship and admiration, in which her magnificent

sexuality came packaged and deadly, a kind of inevitable, honest and delicious flavouring to their relationship. (p. 129)

Yet Rachel is capable of self-transcendent love.

When Jojo, having found out about Rachel's duplicity, tries

to shoot Michael, Rachel sacrifices her life by throwing

herself in the way of the bullet, a gesture which forces

the narrator to recognize Rachel's essential humanity:

> She had waited a long time to find the love she wanted.
> Maybe she had known a lot about it and had been contemp-
> tuous and terrified of what had been offered her in its
> place by . . . me, and Jojo. It was hard to say. All
> I could see, as I went from my room, was her face, and
> the big, handsome body being flung death and the man
> she had chosen. There was nothing more to make of it
> than that. (p. 267)

This self-transcendent love is convincingly achieved without

any apparent consciousness of racial identity on Rachel's

part. The nearest Hearne comes to spotlighting the racial

identity of Rachel is the narrator's description of her

body:

> The German and the Negro had come out well in Rachel.
> It had given her that big, handsome body and the square-
> boned face that would not show age for a long time. She
> had been lucky, too, with her skin. It was dark and
> taut, not sallow grey like some of the German and
> Negro mixtures, and it had a vivid texture like the
> surface of a thick, broad leaf. (p. 35)

Despite the fragmented love-relationships of the novel,

there is an impression of wholeness in the relationship of

each character to the society of Cayuna (an imaginary West

:Indian island) in that each wants what is best for Cayuna

and feels a sense of participation in the larger society.

Rachel, Michael, and Fabricus try to give Cayuna an excellent

newspaper. Jojo is genuinely excited because his discovery
of oil promises both his and Cayuna's economic advancement.
And always there is a narrative attention to landscape,
time, and people, the result being that island and people
blend into a collective personality. The novel's opening
scene illustrates this synthesis of people, time and place,
which reveals Hearne's consciousness of the West Indian's
sense of community:

> Early morning is the best time of day along the barri-
> cades. Then before the sun begins to haze and shrink
> your vision, it is silent, cool and soft. The sea lies
> flat in the harbour, with a silken, rose bloom under
> the grey surface. The city across the water is blurred
> in the half-light, and the white stores and offices are
> faintly blushed with the sun coming up far in the Carib-
> bean. There is a pale, shining light across the ridge
> of the big hills behind Queenshaven, and the creamy
> morning sky above the hills is almost yellow with a glow
> of sunlight striking up from the packed leaves of the
> forest. Thin smoke goes up, blue and clean, from the
> charcoal pots in ten thousand yards where breakfast
> is cooking; and the smoke hangs, clean and blue as
> tobacco smoke, in the silver air above the city.
> At this hour the fishermen are standing up to their
> buttocks in water on the great sand bar which runs down
> the middle of the harbour, hauling on the nets. They
> stand there, wet and glistening, and empty sudden cas-
> cades of shining fish into the little black boats that
> nudge against the sand in shallow water. (p. 7)

Cayuna is also the setting for The Land of the Living,
and again cosmopolitan middle-class characters--a European
narrator, an anguished black man, a displaced Jew, and a
psychologically disoriented mulatto female--undergo, through
their involvement with each other and with the community,
"some sort of obscure, powerful resurrection of the [self]."[25]

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[25]John Hearne, Land of the Living (New York: Harper
& Row, 1962), p. 13.

Again the resurrecting agent is love, freed from the con-
straints of race consciousness, despite the obviously inter-
racial nature of the environment. Hearne, like the West
Indian novelists generally, displays his awareness that the
hotchpotch of racial intermingling in the West Indies has
made racial identity a complex consideration; but for most
of the duration of the novel he avoids the issue. When for
brief moments he does allow the theme of racial identity to
pierce the crust of the authorial racial complacency in The
Land of the Living, he locates the topic in a Rastafarian's
consciousness, from where it is equated with primitivism and
terror. So it is that a Rastafarian confronts a group of
black students and prophesies the bloody victory of the
"children of Africa" over "de white man," and their teacher
(the narrator) describes the frightening results:

> Quite suddenly all the patient, generous accumulations
> of our day trembled on the edge of a squalid violence.
> . . .
> In that heavy, expectant stillness, I could feel a
> tingle crawl damply across my skin; a miasmic projection
> denser than simple hate or even madness seemed to chill
> and darken the burning afternoon. Behind the inanely
> exultant face before us, I saw the haggard countenance
> of an antique, irremediable terror: something of itself
> desolate and inaccessible, rising from the chaos that
> lurks at the centre of our small, decent achievements
> and from which we turn avidly into the factious warmth
> of illusion, betrayal and sordid desperate alliances of
> curelty. (pp. 48-50)

Without a doubt, the confrontation with the Rastafarian
element of racial self-assertion is viewed as an intrusion
into the narrative moment, and like an intrusion the incident
is forgotten. For Hearne, implicitly, racial identity

functions only as an undercurrent in the sea of West Indian consciousness.

The failure to pursue actively the implications of racial self-assertion is not evidenced only in novels about the West Indian middle-class. Orlando Patterson's The Children of Sisyphus, 1964, a novel about the hopelessly impoverished and primitive existence of the Jamaican slum-dwellers, also approaches the issue of racial identity through a Rastafarian consciousness. The Rastafarians, in an effort to resist the influences of colonialism, project an entirely romantic view of reality upon their squalid existence and patiently wait for Haile Selassie to take them back to Africa. The thoughts of Brother Cyrus, the Rasta-farian leader, reveal this romanticism:

> They were the children of Israel suffering for the mis-deeds of their fathers. But the day of departure would soon come. . . . It was just a matter of time.
> But until the time came it was suffering and more suffering. It was damnation and injustice at the hands of white overlords and their brown lackeys. They would have to suffer at the hands of Babylon and it would be a sin to try to evade it. It would be blasphemy in the sight of God Rastafaria, who must have had just cause for punishing them.[26]

There is no doubt about the seriousness and dignity of the Rastafarian racial and cultural identity, which are achieved, however, only "at the expense of a rigid ignorance

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[26]Orlando Patterson, The Children of Sisyphus (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1965), p. 43.

and fanaticism."[27]

Meanwhile, all the inhabitants of the slum area (the Dungle) are united in their resignation to a life of hell on earth. As Dinah, the novel's central figure, finds out, there is no escape from the Dungle, whose inhabitants constitute a static community. Even more obviously than Hearne, Patterson locks the people and the land in a common condition:

> The tough, silent meagre little dogs; the uproar and clammy tang of the nearby market, stale, freakish, smells of yams and fish and meat. The clanging of pans, the pots and mugs and grey aluminum dishes being sold in the stalls on the pavement which they now passed. All was instilled in the dreary consciousness of the garbage-men, the three garbage-men, marking the tenacious trail of the mute, relentless asses. Seeming to pass, yet forever present. As fierce as the blazing heat of the morning sun. As cruel and indifferent as the vacant, black faces of the babies clinging to the naked breasts of their pregnant mothers whose swollen bellies continue to cast moving shadows of gloom on the murky streaks of the gutter by the pavement below them. As meaningless as the garbage stacked up behind them. (p. 19)

In Sylvia Winter's The Hills of Hebron, the black slum-dwellers of Cockpit Centre are also bonded by a Dungle-like sense of individual and collective defeat:

> Cockpit Centre, with its stinking narrow streets, the concrete sidewalk burning [the] feet, the gutters rushing with dirty water, mango seeds, banana skins, orange peel. . . . At nights the street lamps cast arcs of murky light on the shops, the houses, the churches, the shacks crowded together in grey slums, the bunched figures sleeping on the pavement, on the benches, in the park, but huddled together, secure in their acceptance

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[27]Louis James, "Introduction" to The Islands in Between, p. 47.

of the ordinariness of hunger, poverty and defeat.[28]

Like the Rastafarians, the inhabitants of the Cockpit Centre escape utter despair through religious fanaticism; and like Patterson, Wynter approaches the issue of racial identity only through the mystified consciousness of the religious fanatic, Moses Barton, leader of the New Believers. He claims to have been chosen by God to lead black people to a consciousness of God as a black Being and of themselves as children of a black God. He literally re-enacts the death of Christ so that his followers can draw a transcendent faith from his example:

> And thus, with his death, Prophet Moses made all the New Believers accomplices in his legend. Their belief became a necessity, was magnified into myth. The wooden cross on the Prophet's grave was the tangible symbol of their faith. There was no room for doubt--to doubt would be to question the validity of a crucifixion, of a God black like themselves, of Hebron. Moses alone had died, but Hebron, its past, present and future were entombed with him, awaiting his resurrection. (p. 248)

The critic may well wonder what the West Indian novelist would do (in terms of the racial identity theme) in a novel depicting a West Indian community independent of a European ethos. Such a novel, says Kenneth Ramchand, is Michael Anthony's A Year in San Fernando.[29] What we find, interestingly enough, is that Anthony's boy protagonist is oblivious to the very concept of race. During his year in

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[28]Sylvia Wynter, The Hills of Hebron (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), p. 29.

[29]Louis James, Introduction to The Islands in Between, p. 48.

the Trinidadian city of San Fernando his consciousness is
impressed by myriad contacts with his external world, but
there is no self-conscious search for identity,[30] a fact
which results, implicitly, from his society's lack of
interest in the subject--none of the adult characters in
the novel display the slightest conscious concern with mat-
ters of racial identity. And the novel is, as Louis James
observes, "truly indigenous to the Trinidadian common
people,"[31] an appraisal which implies a lack of aggressive
concern in Trinidad with matters of black identity.

From these brief illustrations, two patterns emerge.
The first is the authorial refusal to deal with the matter
of racial self-assertion outside the context of religious
fanaticism. The novels mirror the complacency of the larger
society. When one of the characters in Edgar Mittelholzer's
A Morning at the Office argues that "if the West Indies was
to evolve a culture individually West Indian, it could only
come out of the whole hotch-potch of racial and national
elements of which West Indies is composed,"[32] he is voicing
an ideological position which seems to inform the works of
these novelists, especially Hearne and Patterson. They all
reflect an awareness of racial differences but a reluctance
to explore the complex questions of the socio-cultural

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[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ngugi, p. 104.

implications of racial self-assertion. The second pattern
which emerges is the emphasis upon a sense of community.
West Indian writers are concerned as much with the nature of
community life as with the nature of individual relation-
ships. They insist on this sense of community even in situ-
ations of defeat and resignation. Of the novels discussed,
only Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin seems to reflect an
awareness of the negative, island-wide possibilities of a
situation which engenders simultaneously a sense of community
and racial complacency.

In the United States, however, the preoccupation with
questions of race is reflected in the racial tension evi-
denced in many Afro-American novels: and, unlike the racial
complacency in the West Indian novel, this tension leads to
the individual's sense of fragmentation and isolation rather
than a sense of community. Preoccupation with racial issues
is the Afro-American birthright, and the history of the
Afro-American novel is largely the history of the varieties
of responses to this preoccupation. This is certainly true of
the novels which reflect a stereotypical attitude toward West
Indians. It is also true that the major Afro-American
novelists demonstrate a psychological familiarity with
individual alienation and social fragmentation rather than
a state of community. This lack of community is, from one
point of view, directly attributable to the dispersion of
the Afro-American people throughout the extensive North

American continent and to the fact that the black minority

has never had the luxury of functioning in America with

even the guise of autonomy. Since the true integration of

the black population with the larger society has also been

historically resisted by the ruling socio-political class,

manifestations of various levels and forms of fragmentation

and alienation are inevitably apparent in Afro-American

society. I do not mean to suggest that alienation and frag-

mentation are unique to the Afro-American people or to the

Afro-American novel. Indeed the Western novels reflect on

the whole the authors' awareness of various forms of aliena-

tion and fragmentation in their societies. Afro-Americans

are affected, of course, by the psychological state of the

larger Western civilization. But in this part of the study

I am focusing on some of the more immediate reasons for the

alienation and fragmentation illustrated in the Afro-American

novel. That Afro-American novelists should demonstrate the

alienated and fragmented nature of Afro-American consciousness

is indicative of their attention to psychological realism.

The novels which depict the West Indian stereotype

illustrate this dual element of racial obsession and societal

fragmentation. True, they also illustrate the search for

wholeness and community, but, in keeping with the implica-

tions of any kind of search, the novels' search is motivated

by the absence of its object. And in the works of these

novelists (DuBois, Ellison, Baldwin and Williams) the search

for community and identity is generally doomed to various

levels of frustration both by the fragmented consciousness

of each novel's society and that of its main characters.

So it is that Matthew and the Dark Princess encounter social,

personal, and political obstacles in their aborted attempt

to weld the Afro-American society into a political unit

capable of assisting the political alliance of all of the

"darker peoples" of the world; by the time the novel ends

nothing significant has been accomplished in the Afro-

American society. DuBois is forced by the nature of his

realism to end the novel with a vision, rather than the

experience, of the racial internationality which the novel

romantically recommends. So it is that the restless physical

and psychological journey of the hero of Ellison's Invisible

Man is a quest for an American community or institution

which can demand his voluntary participation. The cyclical

recurrence of his frustration reflects the history of the

collective anguish which attends the Afro-American hope for

a feeling of community in America. So it is that Leo Proud-

hammer is repeatedly crossing borders, literally and psy-

chologically, in a desperate attempt to find a humane com-

munity. Like Ellison, Baldwin gives a cyclic structure to

the novel, thereby dooming Leo, symbolically, to a life of

perpetual borderline experiences. Life for the Afro-American

race, Baldwin suggests, is a perpetual borderline existence.

So it is that William's Mothersill and the Foxes shows the

futility of black social workers' attempts to make a dif-
ference in a country whose socio-political structure leads
to psychological deracination at all levels of society.

It is also significant that none of these novels are
set in a single community. They are all, so to speak,
interstate novels; that is, the scenes shift repeatedly
from state to state, from North to South and, in the case
of Mothersill and the Foxes, from America to the West Indies.
The sense of physical comings and goings, mainly goings,
reflects not only the mobility which is a reality of American
life but also the authors' awareness of the psychological
deracination of Afro-Americans.

I have isolated these two closely related differences
between the psychological states of the West Indian and the
Afro-American because it is my contention that the Afro-
American novelists demonstrate an ignorance of the psychologi-
cal make-up of the West Indian and an inability to move,
imaginatively, outside the Afro-American frame of reference.
The West Indian characters, their status as stereotypes not-
withstanding, are decidedly more Afro-American than West
Indian in their make-up. In order to support this conten-
tion it is necessary to relate Garvey to the West Indian
scene, since, as we have seen, the reactions to Garvey play a
dominant role in the make-up of three of the four stereotypes
(Perigua, Ras and Mr. Proudhammer). If Garvey was himself
estranged from the collective West Indian psychological

state, that estrangement would explain in part the failure
of DuBois, Ellison and Baldwin to portray credible West
Indian stereotypes.

Garvey's estrangement is in fact what we find when
we relate him to the collective West Indian psychological
situation. As we have seen in a previous chapter, Garvey
was far from being racially complacent; and because the
West Indian sense of community was limited, in his conscious-
ness, to a sense of black community, there can be no serious
doubt as to the reality of this estrangement. Harold Cruse
is right when he associates the presence of Garvey in the
United States with the lack of "revolutionary elbow room in
the black West Indies."[33] It is true that Garvey was given
a hero's welcome upon his return to Jamaica in 1927, but
by 1935 he had moved the headquarters of his movement to
London,[34] his attempts to rise to political heights in
Jamaica having proved dismally unsuccessful.

This lack of "revolutionary elbow room" is also
suggested by the West Indian novelists' reaction, or lack
of reaction, to Garvey. In terms of specific portraiture,
Garvey is not a popular model for these novelists. In fact,
he is all but ignored in this regard. Religious cultists,

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[33]Cruse, p. 119.

[34]E. David Cronon, Black Moses: The Story of Marcus
Garvey (University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), p. 61.

such as the Rastafarians, who expound doctrines of black unity, receive much more attention. To be sure, Garvey and the Rastafarians had a common belief in the eventual establishment of black rule in Africa and in the perpetuation of the concept of God as black. But the resemblance ends here-- so that the Rastafarian images in West Indian literature have only incidental and superficial reference to Garvey. The Rastafarian images exist fully in their own literary right. Their real-life prototype is the Rastafarian cult itself as it is practiced in some of the islands. The attempt to prove the extent to which Garveyism might have influenced the portraits of the cultists becomes a highly subjective endeavor. It is clear, for example, that the cult of the New Believers in Sylvia Wynter's The Hills of Hebron is an amalgamation of the Black God religion of Marcus Garvey and the Rastafarian doctrine of the divinity of the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie.[35] But when the leader of the New Believers, Moses Barton, tries literally to fly up to heaven in an insane effort to prove his divinity, the West Indian reader knows that it is the Rastafarian element that dominates the portrait. A similar case can be made for Marcus Heneky, leader of a cult known as the Sons of Sheba in Hearne's The Land of the Living. Heneky's doctrine of black separatism is Garvey-like in its firmness of enthusiastic resolve but its impetus is totally religious. When he

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[35]Ramchand, p. 127.

allies himself, puppet-like, with a small band of would-be
bloody revolutionaries, he loses all resemblance to Garvey.
Brother Solomon, cultist leader in Patterson's The Children
of Sisyphus, is another case in point. The narrator's
description of him exemplifies the kind of superficial
attention given to Garvey in the West Indian novel. In this
description of Brother Solomon the connection to Garvey is
clouded with so many other associations as to be negligible:

> Some said he was a prophet, a reincarnation of the
> famous Marcus Garvey, that champion of the Negro race
> who had felt the vile wrath of the white man for his
> just and wise teaching. Others . . . claimed that
> Haile Selassie had embodied his spirit in his so that
> he may watch their ways and guide them in the paths of
> righteousness until he was ready to lead them out of
> their bondage in Babylon back to Ethiopia. . . . And
> there were others who were convinced that he was a
> mystic, whatever that meant. They said that he had
> strange writings on his wall which summed up all the
> wisdom of the white man and which he could use at his
> command. (p. 34)

Moses Barton, Marcus Heneky and Brother Solomon illustrate
the lack of attention which is given to Marcus Garvey in
terms of specific characterization.

Despite much evidence of class structure and racial
intermingling in the West Indies, the impulse toward socio-
political unity of all races and classes was too strong to
be seriously challenged or threatened by Garveyism. In the
United States, however, the Afro-Americans' exclusion from
the socio-political mainstream and the recurrence of various
forms of racial discrimination and hostility rendered them
more receptive to Garvey's radical call to the black diaspora.

The fact that Garvey could trigger such a tremendous reaction
from the Afro-American community says much more about the
Afro-American psyche than it does about Garvey or the West
Indian. The Afro-American lack of what Claude McKay called
"group soul"--what I call a sense of community--is good
reason for the critic to interpret the alienating traits of
the West Indian portraits as projections of the essential
alienation which attends the Afro-American's relationship to
himself, his black community and the larger American society.
Of course, one may rightly argue that the mass response of
Afro-Americans to Garvey is proof of their "group soul" or
sense of community and that the Afro-American pre-occupation
with racial matters is also proof of their sense of community.
But such proof of a sense of community is reactionary in its
motivation. It is a response to the constant threat to
physical and psychological well-being caused by capricious
and legalized racism. The sense of community in the West
Indian novels is not reactionary in character or motivation.
Rather, it is the psychological milieu out of which the
characters act and which the novelists attempt to explore.
The spiritual and social impotence and overweening pride
which connect all of the West Indian stereotypes discussed
in Chapter III--especially those portraits of the West
Indian revolutionary--are contradicted in the West Indian
novel and may be seen as further indications of Afro-American
self-projection.

We have already shown that revolutionary ideology
based on racial self-aggression is treated with complacency
in the West Indian novel. We have already contradicted,
therefore, the Afro-American image of West Indians as Pan-
African revolutionaries. It remains now to illustrate that
the kind of revolutionary posture which does engage the
attention of the West Indian novelist is socio-political,
not racial, in origin and character. (This idea was stated
in our earlier discussion of Lamming's In the Castle of My
Skin, but the emphasis of the discussion was on the lack
of racial self-assertion and identity rather than on the
specific causes of the unrest in Lamming's community.) Indeed,
the impulse toward socio-political unity is consistent, in the
West Indies at any rate, with racial complacency, a fact
which reveals the characters of Ras, Perigua and Proudhammer
as totally alien to West Indian consciousness in the West
Indies. The socio-political nature of revolution in the
West Indian novel can be seen in several novels. Some of
the most useful in this regard are Lamming's In the Castle
of My Skin, Andrew Salkey's A Quality of Violence (1959)
and Andrew Salkey's Riot (1967). A Quality of Violence
illustrates the subterranean nature of violence which asserts
a kind of irrationality to universal human behavior, and Riot
is an account of a West Indian revolution seen through a
boy's eyes. In each case the West Indian revolutionaries
are strangers to the ideologies of Perigua and Ras and to

the dreams of Proudhammer. In fact, we may just as well confine our attention to the novelist who provides the most convincing, though most subtle, picture of the revolutionary aspect of the West Indian psyche. This novelist is Victor S. Reid, and the novel is New Day (1947).

New Day is the West Indian novel's most immediate rendering of the revolutionary consciousness of West Indians. Its publication marks the day that "a new generation of West Indian writers really began the task of breaking free from the colonial cocoon and flying with wings of their own, in a distinctly tropical sky."[36] Written entirely in the dialect of the Jamaican masses, the novel daringly espouses the view that the Jamaican, since he has a unique history, is a unique individual with a unique culture. He is not African and he is not European. He is Jamaican, and he can only be known through his historical relationship to the life and land of Jamaica. The violent and revolutionary aspects of that history are motivated not by the call to racial exclusion but by the insistence of the masses upon socio-political egalitarianism. This concern with egalitarianism connects the two historical movements which the novel frames--the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 and the Declaration of Independence in 1944.

The historical events of New Day unfold through the

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[36]Gerald Moore, The Chosen Tongue (New York: J.&J. Harper, 1970), p. 6.

consciousness of an old man, John Campbell, who sits in his room on the eve of the "new day" of independence and recalls the events, moods and impressions which led to the moment. Reid's concept of Jamaica's history, the reader soon comes to appreciate, is as much the gradual emergence of "beauty, kindness, and humanity"[37] as it is the steady resistance to social, economic and political oppression. On an island where blacks constitute an overwhelming majority and where (in 1865) the crown colony government was in the hands of a white plantocracy, any agitation from the masses was bound to assume some degree of racial flavor and fervor. But Reid demonstrates that the Morant Bay Rebellion and the continual agitation which led to independence had nothing specifically to do with black nationalism or negritude. Rather the movement had everything to do with Jamaican nationalism. Its end was a government based on the consent of "that vast, despised majority which, in the fifty years which followed the Morant Bay Rebellion, had been as power-less as it [had been] under the regime of the planters."[38] Africa was present only in so far as the people's lifestyle, customs and language still revealed aspects traceable to Africa. What was foremost in their consciousness was the knowledge that they were being exploited. And just as real

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[37] Victor S. Reid, New Day (New Jersey: Chatham Book-seller, 1949), Introduction, p. viii.

[38] Moore, p. 4.

as this awareness of exploitation, Reid demonstrates, was
another unifying factor--a collective affinity to the spirit
of place. Thus the Jamaican personality, even that of the
revolutionary, finds its identity in its combined relation-
ship to its history and geography.

The affinity to place is so strong that even as an
old man Campbell remembers its grip upon his childhood
consciousness. When he takes the reader back to the porten-
tous atmosphere of the Parish of St. Thomas a few days before
the beginning of the Morant Bay Rebellion, what surfaces
"from the debris of his memory"[39] is his impassioned aware-
ness of external nature and its affinity to his people's
collective state of consciousness:

> Is remember I remember one August morning when rain
> was a down the earth. For two weeks now the sun has no'
> shone. Black is the morning, black the evening, and
> Mas'r God's heaven does not look on us at all. Yallahs
> and Morant and Plantain Garden rivers heavy so, until
> you do not know where rivers end and land begins. That
> was the time when an alligator swam clear up to the
> barrack and took away my friend Timothy's baby bro'. . . .
> For two weeks we have not come out of the house 'cept
> to the kitchen to dry our osnaburgs at smoky damp-wood
> fires. Miserable it is, and mud a clog your toes outside
> and damp a creek into your bones inside and at nights
> you sleep on sodden kitty-up. . . .
> Then one morning when day-cloud was peeping, I woke
> and did no' hear the rain. Creeping out o' my kitty-up,
> I went to the door and pulled the latch-wood--Wayah!
> Look there! Is no' that Mas'r God's heaven looking
> down on us again?
> Blue and clean it is, O! God has washed His face,
> and His Right Hand is coming up out o' the Bay with a
> red poinciana 'twixt His Fingers.[40]

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[39]Ibid.

[40]Reid, p. 43.

Such narrative passages of sense impressions suggest that the history of the Morant Bay Rebellion has to be seen against a background of the people's affinity with the land, sun, rain, river--in short, against the background of the people's "total experience rooted in the cycle of nature."[41]

Even the revolt is described with specific references to natural elements. The planning of the rebellion begins in Stony Cut, a hilly country area of Jamaica where some of the peasants live. It is a region whose barren soil has created a people as tough as itself.[42] In church one Sunday morning Pastor Boogle, comparing the peasants' situation to that of the Biblical Israelites in Egypt, demands justice from Pharoah, the British Governor of Jamaica (Governor Eyre). The resultant march to Morant Bay is imaged as a journey from the austere heights of Stoney Cut to the hot lowlands of Morant Bay, where Governor Eyre's soldiers and the peasants join in a bloody confrontation. The peasants (forty of them are killed) are forced to flee, and their flight is from the "hot lowlands" to the "cool ravines" and "woody areas" of the mountain.

This close attention to sensual, pastoral imagery, although it occurs simultaneously with the narration of a rebellion, is not unrelated to the narrative purpose. It is

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[41]Louis James, "Of Redcoats and Leopards," in The Islands in Between, p. 65.

[42]Ibid.

inherent in the situation itself, since the rebels' sensual

perceptions and apprehensions color every aspect of their

experience. As Louis James points out,

> The simple pleasures are all they have. The ecstasy
> at the song of a kling-kling bird, the delight in
> Number Eleven mangoes--Reid gives us a long passage on
> how to eat one without losing a single drop of juice--
> the awareness of the rough texture of osnaburg cloth
> . . . are all felt on sensibilities sharpened by poverty
> and simple country life, purged by salt wind and beating
> sun.[43]

Characterization for Reid is linked to this kind of unfold-

ing of the senses, an achievement which heightens the process

of characterization at the same time as it forces the reader

to see that the process of revolution is a similar process

of unfolding. In fact, Reid is more concerned with the

merging of national, socio-political and communal processes

than he is with momentary states of consciousness of the

individual or the society, no matter how powerful the moment.

When he does call attention to a particular moment it is for

the purpose of its relationship to process. Such a moment

transpires when Campbell's father, a die-hard pacifist, comes

down the mountainside to negotiate with the British Redcoats,

who, the father naively thinks, have been sent to administer

justice. He is uncompromisingly shot down, and this moment

becomes "a paradigm of the shock at the root of the colonial

situation, the recognition of the opposition of interests,

the split in the standards of behavior for the colonizer

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[43]Ibid., p. 66.

and the colonized."[44] The moment of the father's death marks

the moment of Campbell's growing realization that the possi-

bility of Jamaica's acceptance of British paternalism is

also dead and that the attitude of resistance to colonial

exploitation is made forever stronger in the minds of people

like his brother Davie, who is an avowed revolutionary. What

might have been simply a static moment marking the end of an

era is made organic because of the contrast between the

natures of father and son and between their attitudes toward

the forces of colonialism. The continuing revolutionary

struggle of the people is an enlargement of this moment.

Unlike the West Indian portraits in the Afro-American

novel, Reid's characters can only be understood in terms of

their relationship to the other characters and to the overall

socio-political situation. When Davie, for example, assumes

control of the peasants who have fled to the Morant Bay Cays

(coral islands) after the father's death and organizes them

into a banana-growing community, he gradually reveals himself

to be an idealist who is insensitive to his community's

growing restlessness and disenchantment with his leadership.

His portrait is saved from being a mere personification

of idealism by the fact that nature participates in his

gradual ruin. The community forsakes him, his wife leaves

him, and a hurricane kills him. But the revolutionary

struggle to resist the whims of the British goes on, and

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[44]Ibid.

leadership falls eventually upon Davie's grandson, Garth,
who, having been trained in England as a lawyer, accelerates
the communal movement from the isolated idealism of Davie
to full participation in the intricacies of island-wide
politics, a movement which culminates in Jamaican independence.
Thus the form of revolution has changed from bloody violence
to peaceful negotiations, and Garth and Davie are seen to be
parts of the same revolutionary process, despite the differ-
ences between their personalities and methods. Reid diffuses
the sensual and spiritual components of every moment and in
this way plays down the revolutionary role of the main charac-
ters and recommends the collective consciousness of the people
as the real hero of the revolution.

New Day and In the Castle of My Skin suggest that to
the West Indian revolution means something quite different
from what Ellison, DuBois and Baldwin seem to imply. For
the Afro-American authors revolution stems from a racially
motivated need to assert the autonomy of black people, a
need which is inseparable from the thirst for vengeance
upon the oppressors. For Reid and Lamming it is the spiritual
pact (between land and people) that life will be egalitarian.
For the Afro-American authors the revolutionary impulse
originates in a deluded mind, where it is (in the cases of Ras
and Perigua) impotent. For Reid and Lamming it originates
in an unexplained affinity between the people and the land
which shapes them. For West Indian writers generally

revolution calls attention to socio-political ills with only
superficial attention to race, a phenomenon which Lamming
regrets but which Reid affirms.

What emerges from our discussion of the West Indian
novels in this chapter is that West Indians are more complacent
than aggressive in matters of racial identity. They are
strangers to the kind of aggressive, racial self-assertion
which affects the characterization of the West Indians in
the Afro-American novel. Even the religious cultists do
not display the thirst for vengeance (like Perigua) or
destruction (like Ras) reflected in the Afro-American por-
traits of West Indians. Of course Lamming's departure from
Barbados may well be motivated by his awareness of his need
for racial identity; but In the Castle of My Skin is Lamming's
elegy to his individual complacency only, not to the com-
placency of the West Indian community, in whose collective
psychology (the novel pessimistically implies) racial com-
placency is a permanent reality. Our discussion has also
revealed that violence is socio-politically, not racially,
motivated; and impotence is associated with religious
mysticism and fanaticism, and then only in the consciousness
of those cultists who never really enter into the mainstream
of West Indian society. It is also apparent that black West
Indians generally think of themselves--at least the novels
imply this--as willing participants and contributors to a
multiracial society, in stark contrast to the awareness of

exclusionary uniqueness which defines the stereotypes.

It is the obsession with racial identity that determines the Afro-American authorial attitude toward their West Indian stereotypes. The racial obsession revealed in the characterization Ras, Perigua and Proudhammer limits their applicability to the West Indians. But since the racially obsessive Garvey is the real-life progenitor of these stereotypes, their racial obsession is unavoidable. What is not unavoidable, however, is their propensity toward psychic disintegration and communal destruction. These elements of their make-up may be seen as representative of the Afro-American authors' personal fears for the Afro-American psychological situation. Without a sense of community and the affirmation of the wholeness of self the Afro-American, living as he does in a Western environment, is potentially the object of his own hate. The fear of this potential congeals into images of the West Indian; so that, at best, Perigua, Ras, and Proudhammer may be regarded (as I said in Chapter III) as unintentional objective correlatives for the authors' confrontation with the Afro-American potential for self-hate and physical and social destruction. As for the Holdenfields in Williams' Mothersill and the Foxes, it is sufficient to say that there is not a couple in the West Indian novel whose resemblance to them is close enough to warrant a critical comparison: decadence is not yet a thematic concern in the West Indian novel.

CHAPTER V

THE REJECTION OF THE WEST INDIAN STEREOTYPE

It is clear from our discussion of the West Indian
stereotypes that the attitude of the discussed Afro-American
authors toward black separatism has much to do with their
depiction of West Indians. Perceiving the West Indians as
would-be separatists, these authors attack the West Indian
in such a way as to reveal their own acquired desire for
multi-leveled integration with the larger society. Indeed,
the integration factor is implicit in most of the ideologies
which evoke the novelists' support. However, as our synopsis
of aspects of Afro-American socio-political history indicated
(Chapters II and III), the Afro-American has never been
at peace with that part of his make-up which urges him to
pursue integration. Because of the authors' rejection of
black separatism (Delany excepted) and because of the his-
torical and institutionalized nature of racism, it seems
reasonable to conclude that the collective attitude toward
integration is fraught with ambivalence. Consequently,
these authors cannot be at peace with those foreign blacks
(such as Marcus Garvey and Edward Blyden) who, by promoting

167

separatist movements, remind the Afro-American of his own ambivalence; and they caricature Garvey in such a way as to indict West Indians in general.

As long as West Indians are perceived as black separatists, the potential for a feeling of community between the two groups has to be described as bleak. As we have seen, the West Indian is a staunch integrationist at heart, Garvey, Blyden and the Rastafarians notwithstanding. Before the Afro-American novelists can deal realistically with the West Indian image, they must remove the Garvey film from their eyes and see the West Indian for the racially compla- cent entity that he is. Also, the Garvey image can become less negative and less threatening to the Afro-American novelists and less influential in their depiction of West Indians if they adopt a more positive attitude toward black nationalism. Such an attitude would encourage the Afro- American novelists to educate themselves about the collective personalities of other western blacks. Consequently, they would see that in the West Indies Garvey is an anomaly; and they would know that the Garvey stereotype is irrelevant to the general West Indian situation. On the other hand, the movement toward the harmony of these two groups can also be facilitated if West Indians themselves are awakened from their racial complacency by the call to decolonization, a process which, according to the distinguished philosopher- psychologist Frantz Fanon, is as pervasive and as violent as

historical colonialism.[1]

Interestingly enough, the new tide of black national-
ism which gathered momentum in the United States in the early
sixties and crested in the late sixties provided Afro-American
politicians and artists with exactly the kind of ideology
which could accommodate and motivate a new interest in and a
new attitude toward the West Indian. This resurgence of
black nationalism so re-focused the collective eye that it
could see beyond the West Indian stereotype to the essential
complacency of the West Indian racial attitude, and it called
attention to the potential for ideological unity between all
members of the black diaspora. The readoption of an aggres-
sive, sometimes violent posture was also a means of cementing
the attitudes of many Afro-Americans to their own situation.
The Black Power chants of Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown,
the violent protests of black urban dwellers--riots occurred
in Harlem, Jersey City, Watts, Detroit, Newark and Washing-
ton--the international thrust of Malcolm X's doctrines of
human rights and black determinism, all combined to illus-
trate the reality of black nationalism. The movement also
called attention to the international scope of oppression,
and its proponents attempted to forge an ideological and
emotional bond between themselves and those whom Fanon

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[1]Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York:
Grove Press, 1966), p. 29 et passim.

called "the wretched of the earth."[2] Afro-American writers

such as Imamu Baraka, John A. Williams, John O. Killens and

Don L. Lee began to commit themselves to the tenets of black

nationalism as illustrated in the works of Delany and to

the principles of what Addison Gayle calls "the Black

Aesthetic."[3] The function of the writer, they avowed, is

to aid the endeavor of the black races to "leap outside the

history and culture of the West."[4] As far as their rela-

tionship to West Indians was concerned, these more recent

Afro-American writers began to show a more amiable attitude,

an interest in the specificities of their history and cul-

ture and a desire for ideological unity with these members

of the diaspora.

So it is that a century after Delany's Blake

writers have confronted anew the dual psychologies of

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[2]Addison Gayle, Jr., The Way of the New World: The Black Novel in America (New York: Anchor Press, 1975).

[3]The Black Aesthetic is defined in different ways by such Afro-American critics as Larry Neal, Addison Gayle, Jr., Hoyt W. Fuller, Julian Mayfield and Ron Karenga. While there is no commonly accepted body of prescriptions for the Black Aesthetic, these critics agree that it is a movement in Afro-American art which aims at the de-Americani- zation of black people. Julian Mayfield's definition comes close to encapsulating the tenets of the other critics: "The Black Aesthetic, if it is anything, is the search for a new program, because all the old programs spawned out of the Judeo-Christian spirit have failed us. It is the search for a new spiritual quality, or the recapture of an old one, lost and buried deep in our African past"--"You Touch My Black Aesthetic," in The Black Aesthetic, Addison Gayle, Jr., Ed. (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 17. See The Black Aesthetic also for a fuller treatment of this subject.

[4]Gayle, p. 291.

Afro-American and West Indians with a view to mutual under-

standing. The West Indian stereotype begins to disappear,

the Garvey image is rehabilitated, and the tendency to color

the West Indian in shades of Garvey is artistically denied.

Without a doubt the two perceptions of reality are being re-

explored, and their synthesis, at least on individual levels,

is being touted as a viable possibility.

Other genres than the novel also reflect this new

image. Charles H. Fuller's play, The Rise (1958), is a re-

examination and a re-interpretation of the Garvey movement,

and in it Garvey emerges as a national symbol of black

consciousness. In Joseph Walker's The River Niger (1973) a

brotherly relationship between an Afro-American and a West

Indian constitutes one of the play's thematic threads. Louise

Meriweather's short story, "A Happening in Barbados" (1968),

explores an Afro-American woman's attempt to relate to the

tourist scene in Barbados. Paule Marshall's Soul Clap Hands

and Sing (1961) is a collection of four short stories, three

of which are set in the Caribbean and are recognizably West

Indian in characterization, theme and mood, and Marshall

convincingly explores the consciousness of young and old

West Indians in their own cultural contexts.

Edmund Austin's The Black Challenge, 1958, actually

anticipates the militancy which we usually associate with

the sixties. In this novel there are obvious parallels

between the career of Marcus Garvey and that of the protagonist,

Marcus Cox, through whose portrait Garvey is depicted as a
hero. In fact, all of the black characters in this novel
are "idealized to the point of ludicrousness."[5] Still the
novel is worth noting because it is the first Afro-American
novel to treat Garvey as a hero.

Four other Afro-American novelists reflect a new
attitude toward West Indians. We have already seen how one
of them, John A. Williams (Mothersill and the Foxes), although
he still depicted an unflattering portrait, revealed at the
same time a sympathetic attitude to this decadent couple and
an understanding of the loss of racial identity that besets
the members of the West Indian jet-setters. Clarence
Farmer's Soul on Fire condemns the anti-West Indian attitude
as a reflection of an anti-self attitude; and John Killens'
The Cotillion dramatizes the awakening of a West Indian
woman to a new vision of her white-washed past and to an
identity as a black woman. But the most comprehensive
Afro-American treatment (to date) of the West Indian situation
is attempted by Paule Marshall in Brown Girl, Brown-
stones (1959) and The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969).
Although Baldwin's Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone (1968)
informs us of the persistence of negative images in Afro-
American literature, there can be no doubt that the stereo-
type is giving way to more versatile images reflecting the

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[5]Noel Shraufnagel, From Apology to Protest: The
Black American Novel (Florida: Everett/Edwards, Inc., 1973),
p. 117.

tensions of West Indian life and the nature of West Indian consciousness.

This chapter, then, will isolate aspects of characterization and theme (in the above novels) which reflect the emergence of this new perception of and new attitude toward West Indians. It is my contention that the new perception of the West Indian, especially Paule Marshall's, has much in common with the West Indian's perception of himself as revealed in specific West Indian novels. Hence another aim of this chapter will be to assert the similarity between these two modes of perception by reference to specific West Indian novels.

Clarence Farmer's Soul on Fire dramatically reverses the authorial attitude to the West Indian. The reversal, however, is associated less with the portrait itself than with the characterization of the narrator-protagonist and Farmer's attitude towards him. The novel's protagonist has internalized the worst elements of racism so completely that he has been transformed into a sub-human monster whose only joy in life is hating. He predicates his existence upon the conviction that the white man has driven him insane and rationalizes that his insanity absolves him from all forms of responsibility:

> By driving the black man insane, the white man also
> turned him loose on the world and a license to do what
> he pleased. . . . no matter what "crimes" I commit,
> no matter how many murders and child rapings I perpetrate
> on Whitey's world, they can't begin to add up to anything

like that which Whitey himself has perpetrated in any given day during the past three hundred years.[6]

So it is that he roams the Harlem streets at night seeking to slake his thirst for vengeance on the white race. He makes the castration, rape and murder of white people his all-consuming passion.

Farmer's narrator-protagonist is a satirical figure. Through his portrait Farmer shows how racial obsession, if taken to paranoic extremes, can destroy the psyche. Look what happens, Farmer seems to be screaming, when the Afro-American scrupulously models his life on the historical values of racist terrorism—when, that is, he operates "on the assumption that the black man can only survive within the racist traditions of the American system by beating the white racist at his own game."[7] What happens is that consciousness is robbed of its humanity.

It should come as no surprise to the reader that this self-hating protagonist also hates West Indians. He leaves no doubt about his attitude toward the Jamaican, Stephen Armstrong Wilson, who recruits him for a job as truck driver, and toward West Indians in general:

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[6]Clarence Farmer, Soul on Fire (New York: Belmont Productions, 1969), p. 28.

[7]Lloyd W. Brown, "The West Indian as Ethnic Stereotype in Black American Literature," printed in The Negro American Literary Forum (Indiana State University, Vol. V, No. 1, Spring, 1971), p. 12.

> The smart-ass West Indian said he thought I looked like
> a nice kid, which meant that he thought I was a dumb
> Deep South nigger kid, big and strong and willing to do
> the job of two men, mine and his. I thought the fucking
> West Indian was a slimy son of a bitch. For some unex-
> plainable reason West Indians like to think of themselves
> as somewhat better than our good old mainland American
> niggers. You have to say this for the majority of them:
> they're certainly blacker than we are. . . . Underneath
> that blue-black West Indian skin there lurked as mean
> a son of a bitch as any down-home village police chief.
> (pp. 108-110)

But it is clear that his hatred of the West Indian is a

reflection of his hatred for all immigrants:

> The fancy-talking black immigrant motherfucker made fun
> of the way I spoke. It seemed that every ignorant immi-
> grant fuck-face, black and white, English and Irish,
> mick and spic, wop and wog, greasy Greek and low-browed
> Hunky, every newly-arrived chased-out foreigner, whether
> he came long ago or lately, made fun of the native nig-
> ger, who had been in the fucking country about as long
> as anyone except the God damned half-witted Indians.
> (p. 110)

His hatred for the West Indian is also a by-product of his

hatred for "all niggers:"

> . . . but, I suppose, being a blue-black nigger from
> sunny climes he just knew he had a natural sense of
> rhythm, a gift of negroid song--that hand-clapping,
> mindless, teeth-displaying, sweat-loving, shoulder-
> shaking, ass-wagging, crotch-bulging way that all
> niggers have with simple and simple-minded music. I
> grew to hate the foreign bastard. (p. 111)

By locating this irrational hatred for the West

Indian within the consciousness of a diseased and depraved

mind, Farmer condemns it as one of the symptoms of a per-

verted consciousness. The portrait can be seen as a satirical

response to and an aggregate of the stereotypes of Perigua,

Ras, and Proudhammer. Unlike DuBois, Ellison and Baldwin,

Farmer uses an Afro-American as an objective correlative for

his confrontation of the horrors to which racial paranoia can lead. We have seen in the Afro-American novels which we have isolated that this role has been reserved for the West Indian. By illustrating the sickness of the image-maker (the narrator), Farmer in effect helps to rescue the West Indian from the literary dungeon into which he had been thrown. The fire raging within the narrator throws light into all the dark corners of his soul so that we see exactly why he hates the West Indian: he hates because his capacity to love has been destroyed; and the West Indian, because of his color and because of his cultural affinity to the Afro-American, is too vivid a reminder of the narrator's lonely and tortured state. Hence Farmer, by satirical implication, vindicates the humanity of the West Indian and decries the narrator's regressive acceptance of his living hell.

Farmer's condemnation of pejorative images of the West Indians represents the first step in the literary attempt to rehabilitate the image of the West Indian and, simultaneously, to assert the need for those Afro-Americans who are overly pre-occupied with racist symbols and values to liberate their psyches from such pre-occupation. Farmer seems to agree with Orde Coombs that the acceptance of the West Indian is one of the ways in which the Afro-American can attest to his own psychological emancipation.[8] But if

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[8]Orde Coombs, Do You See My Love for You Growing? (New York: The Cornwall Press, 1970), pp. 120-121.

the narrator of Soul on Fire is any index of the potential

psychological state of the Afro-American, it becomes apparent

that the Afro-American has a long battle to fight before his

full psychological liberation becomes a reality. Farmer's

attitude toward his narrator and toward West Indians, how-

ever, convinces us that the battle, while it has not yet been

won, is at least being waged and that the Afro-American and

the West Indian should be on the same side. After Soul on

Fire what is needed in the literary attempt to rehabilitate

the West Indian image is a novel which suggests that winning

is possible and that, consequently, the Afro-American and

the West Indian can achieve a conscious harmony in their rela-

tionship to each other and to the Western World.

Such a novel is John Oliver Killens' The Cotillion.[9]

This work attempts, not altogether successfully, to illus-

trate that the West Indian can be aroused from the state of

racial complacency. It argues, quite convincingly, that

such an awakening necessitates a patient and unsentimental

understanding on the part of the Afro-American. It demon-

strates, furthermore, how the novelist can exploit the Afro-

American-West Indian blend in Harlem to achieve the psycho-

logical emancipation of both.

The achievement of such goals demands immediacy of

treatment and, as in Soul on Fire, confrontation with some

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[9]John Oliver Killens, The Cotillion or One Good Bull
Is Worth Half the Herd (New York: Pocket Book, 1972).

of the stereotypical attitudes toward West Indians. Accordingly, Killens chooses an international family as the center of the novel's focus. Yoruba Lovejoy is the daughter of a West Indian woman and an Afro-American man (Daphne and Matthew Lovejoy). Into this family comes Lumumba, an Afro-American artist dedicated to the Black Aesthetic, who inspires his lover, Yoruba (and eventually Daphne) to arrive at an experiential definition of blackness and to adopt life-attitudes which are consistent with that definition. True blackness in The Cotillion is "love of race which, beginning there, evolves into love for all mankind."[10] It is toward this ideal that Killens beckons (sometimes in the narrative voice and sometimes through Lumumba, who is ostensibly the author himself) as he oversees the deep-seated conflicts of this international family. It is this definition of blackness which all the members of the family eventually come to accept as the guiding principle of their lives.

The portrait of Daphne Lovejoy begins as a satire on the West Indian woman. And a caustic satire it seems to be, embodying as it does the proverbial West Indian sense of superiority and the equally proverbial West Indian desire to be physically white and psychoculturally British:

> She was Daphne Doreen Braithwaite Lovejoy. A tall
> aristocratic woman, who thought that, with a little
> luck and a slight assist from the Great-One-Up-On-High,
> she might have been the Queen of England. She surely
> almost looked the part, as she imagined queens should look.

[10]Gayle, p. 237.

Perhaps a little duskier than ordinary Western queens,
but then queens were never ordinary. She certainly
was a fine specimen of female pulchritude, Western style,
darkly so, extraordinary in all parts of her; slim,
majestic, her haughty head eternally in the air as was
her slender, turned-up nose, as if she were forever
sniffing after loftier sterile atmospheres, where folks
gave off more heavenly odors than the common folks
beneath her. Her mouth, inherited from her father's
side, was a thin almost imperceptible slash in the
middle of her face; her eyes, so proud and bluish green,
could shift from cold blue-ice to flashes of dark,
consuming fires. Her eyes were always heavy-laden "heavy-
lidded," as if invisible weights were hanging from them,
bringing them down. The blue ice was her father's Nordic
contribution, she would tell you, proudly. "The fire is
the Blackness of my mother's African disposition," she
would tell you, not so proudly.

Talk about people having bags. Daphne swore by her
bag, of crosses, lived out of her bag, and it contained
a million crosses, of all sizes and denominations. One
of her favorite crosses was that her family did not appre-
ciate a thing she ever tried to do for them. Like retir-
ing, as she did, from the ranks of the working classes
about eleven years ago, so that she could make a happy
home for them and send them off to school and work with
a hot meal every morning and have one ready for them when
they returned. Like joining them to a church way out in
Brooklyn in the Crowning Heights, and taking them out
there every Sunday she could get the ungrateful ones to
go, so they could make the acquaintance of some high-
class colored people, and thereby become imbued with some
direly needed "couth" by the process of osmosis, all
else of her tireless efforts having failed. Miserably?
(pp. 52-53)

Daphne was the kind of proud Caribbean beauty who
loftily cherished her British heritage. The only songs
that really made her heart leap wildly and warmly wet
her eyes with tears were "God Save the Queen" and "Rule
Britannia"; and as long as Britannia ruled the waves,
though, when challenged by Matthew, Daphne never remem-
bered when Britannia ruled the waves, or precisely which
waves Britannia ruled when she certainly ruled them--
nevertheless--she was comfortably confident that Britons
never would be slaves. It was a source of consolation
in these days of strife and strain and race riots and mini-
skirts. How Daphne could make such complete identifica-
tion with Britannia was a mystery to Matt Lovejoy. But
then the poor disadvantaged man had never been a British
subject. Right? He had not been born in Little England.
Cultural deprivation? (p. 59)

An easily recognizable aspect of Daphne's portrait is her complete freedom from personal conflict of any kind, despite her obvious temperamental and ideological clash with her husband Matthew (who is secure in his identity as a black man), her daughter Yoruba (who, in terms of the novel's definition of blackness, is about to come of age as a black woman) and Lumumba (who searches unceasingly for a way to overcome his personal failings as an artist and, simultaneously, to spur the cultural growth of black society). Of the four, only Daphne is oblivious to the fact that Yoruba's education is inextricably tied to her own. To her, education is not a process of assimilating experience but the mere achievement of socio-economic status. So it is that in speech, dress and taste Daphne makes known to everyone, including herself, that her blackness is nothing more than an unfortunate and circumstantial barrier which she has always done her best to overcome. She believes, as Addison Gayle interprets, that "with a little luck she might have been a queen or some other such high personage, and thus she looks with disdain upon the uncouth, unclean folk whom she considers her inferiors."[11]

That she is running away from her blackness is a realization which never dawns upon her until in a scene of personal crisis she witnesses the decadence of the world she has been attempting to emulate. This exposure comes

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[11]Gayle, p. 329.

about because of an invitation for her daughter to partici-
pate in the Grand Cotillion. Yoruba's participation in this
event is seen by Daphne to represent the pinnacle of her
success as a mother. But for the author and the reader the
cotillion represents the ultimate debasement of black woman-
hood; its organizers are a group of whitened "Negroes" (the
Femmes Fatales, led by a Mrs. Patterson) for whom, as for
Daphne, life is a prolonged elegy to blackness.

It is in the characters' responses to the cotillion
that we see Killens' concern with the issue of cultural
identity and with the psychological state of Daphne. Yoruba's
love for her mother spurs her decision to accept the invita-
tion, a decision which she is loath to reverse even at the
insistence of her lover, Lumumba, who sees the cotillion as
a monument to bourgeois insecurity: "Can't you see what this
Cotillion is all about?" he asks Yoruba.

> It makes no sense for Black people. They helping Whitey
> to cull off all the Black cream of the crop and churn
> them into little white toothless, harmless bourgeois
> in black face. Whitey's using the [Femmes Fatales] to
> do his dirty work for him. . . . We are never going to
> be liberated as long as we mimic the white boy's . . .
> cultural symbols. (pp. 172-3)

But Lumumba eventually learns to be patient with his lover/
protegé and her mother, for he recognizes something which
Killens refuses to conceal--the fact that Lady Daphne, for
all her misplaced sense of values is still a potential
candidate for blackness. The tender regard for Daphne,
which is the basis of Lumumba's decision to escort Yoruba

to the Cotillion, is a manifestation of the author's own

attitude toward this whitewashed West Indian and toward

humanity in general.

Despite the psychological flaws in Daphne's make-up,

Killens does not isolate her problems of identity from the

other conflicts in the novel. Matthew Lovejoy functions as

a foil for Daphne and as an example for Yoruba, who is

trapped between her mother's illusions and the reality of

her father's black identity.[12] Even Lumumba, who is the

prototype of the new black artist, is afflicted by doubts

about his ability to accept the painful realities of the

black experience and to love the black race as a whole,

despite the very noticeable psychic scars in people like

Daphne and the Femmes Fatales. He discovers that for both

himself and Yoruba the journey to true blackness is but a

part of the same journey which they both want Daphne to make.

Meanwhile, Yoruba discovers that her symbolic "coming out"

would represent only a pyrrhic victory if her mother remains

locked in her whitened frame of mind. At one point in the

novel Lumumba asks a rhetorical question which implies his

own coming of age as a black person and further endorses the

author's attempt to clear the path to West Indian-Afro-

American harmony, despite the varying degrees of illusion:

> Am I so damn delicate that I'm scared that in rubbing
> elbows with my black bourgeoisie brothers and sisters

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[12]Gayle, p. 328.

more of them will rub off on me than of me rub off on
them? If I'm that insecure, my Black Consciousness
must be pretty thin and superficial. I mean, they're
part of the Black-and-Beautiful thing as much as any-
body else. Every father's child of us has been brain-
washed with the whitewash. All of us is trying to make
that journey home. (p. 220)

Such harmony is eventually achieved in the novel, but
only because each character assumes an attitude of patience
with the other. As a prelude to the Cotillion sponsored by
the Femmes Fatales, Lumumba, Yoruba and Daphne accept jobs
as workers at another cotillion for the white debutantes of
Long Island. The job is engineered by Lumumba, who wants
Daphne to get a close-up view of the social decadence to
which she is aspiring. The results are exactly what Lumumba
hopes for. Daphne watches in shock and horror as the party,
which begins in apparent splendor, deteriorates:

A few of the Jacks and Jills began to swing from the
delicate glittering chandeliers like Tarzan and Lady
Jane. "Aye-oooooohaha!!!" Some sliding down the banis-
ter now, and with no hands (some dear girls with no
pants on) . . . . Some of the little devils were blowing
up prophylactics in lieu of balloons. . . . Over to the
right of the bandstand a couple of exuberant youngsters
of the gentler sex were stripping down to the very nitty
gritty of the bare essentials. There they were now in
their darling birthday suits, wearing nothing but beauti-
ful smiles. (p. 237)

Before long decadence is the order of the night as the white
debutantes and their escorts give themselves over to drunken
fighting, public copulating, and various forms of boisterous
and debased behavior. Lady Daphne is shocked and revolted:
"Almost against her will, it seemed, her Negritude caught
up with her" (p. 240). Killens' narration of her awakening

is worth a close reading:

> Finally things went too far, and Lady Daphne had to
> admit it, even to herself, that is. It started as an
> uneasy feeling with her that everything was not alto-
> gether cricket. But how could that be? . . . These
> were the elite upper classes. The WASPY people. But
> the feeling inside dear Daphne slowly grew, and by
> degrees, until finally toward the end, it could no longer
> be denied. And so, almost against her will, she began
> to shout, in a manner quite hysterial. Would you believe,
> unladylike? "It can't be! It can't be! It just can't
> be! Just can't be! They acting like niggers! Acting
> like niggers! Just like niggers—just like niggers—"
> (p. 242)

When we remember that Daphne spends years in fervent

pursuit of whiteness, her quick conversion seems unrealistic.

It is fair to say that Killens is so enamored of his ideal

of black international harmony that he undercuts the firm-

ness of resolve inherent in the make-up of Daphne, a firm-

ness which makes her virtually blind to the forces which

threaten her one-dimensional reality. The "Lady," who

apologizes for her husband's lifestyle—"[he] was black and

didn't know any better than to be proud of his damn black-

ness"—and who can hardly wait for her daughter to be

"cotillionized" to whiteness, is hardly fickle enough to

allow one night's disillusionment to destroy the social and

aesthetic foundations of her life. In attempting to give

credibility to Daphne's conversion, Killens faces the unen-

viable literary task of changing a satiric portrait to a

realistic and more versatile portrait of a type, of changing

both direction and stroke, so to speak, in midstream. The

fact that he does not quite succeed may therefore be

attributable more to the force and conviction of the carica-
ture than to the weakness of the authorial attempt to drama-
tize the West Indian's awakening to authentic racial identity.
That Killens is aware of this over-simplification is sug-
gested in a later conversation between Daphne and Yoruba:

> "Mother, let's do it up right, while we're at it?"
> "Hey?"
> "Let's make a clean break with the whole stupid
> idea of cotillion."
> "How do you mean?"
> "Let's say good-bye to the Femmes Fatales. Let's
> tell the Grand Cotillion faretheewell. Let's make a
> clean break with the whole--"
> "Stick a pin there," Lady Daphne said. "Your mother
> ain't changed that radically yet. I'm a gradual changer,
> dearie. Look how long it take to get me this far."
> "But you saw yourself how nowhere the whole thing
> was out in Long Island."
> "It ain't have to be like that with us Black people."
> Called herself Black for once in life. "We can do it
> differently--with dignity and elegance. It ain't have
> to be like these sick white peoples."
> "Mother!"
> "And besides, look at all the money your father is
> put into it already. Against his will and better judge-
> ment, he did it all for you. He already rent his tails
> and stuff, and I rent the mink stole. We can't go back
> on him now." (pp. 247-8)

So it is that the Grand Cotillion provides Daphne
with the opportunity to test the reality of her conversion
and to grasp the implications of her decision to be "Black."
Unknown to Daphne, Lumumba and Yoruba decide to "blacken"
the Cotillion by robing themselves in African dress and
hair-style and they persuade a few other couples to do
likewise. With this decision Yoruba comes to understand
the symbolic role of the Cotillion: "She thought . . .
Coming out! Yes! Coming out! I am a debutante coming out

of my old self into a new society. She felt cotillionized

for real. It was her grand debut into the maturation of her

Blackness" (p. 255). But the authorial spotlight is on

Daphne, who expects to see her daughter "come out" in

European evening dress. When early in the evening's pro-

ceedings the African-robed Lumumba seizes the microphone

and exhorts the crowd to give up their bourgeois ways, the

reader knows that he is really talking to Daphne:

> Black brothers and sisters, come out of the cotton
> patch. It's time to lay your burden down. Come out of
> the cotton patch, all you Toms and Aunt Jemimas! Fol-
> low us to liberation! Be done with false illusions.
> Come with us to the real world! . . . Up the Black
> Nation! (p. 286)

As Lady Daphne stands literally and symbolically between

Mrs. Patterson, who implores her to ignore Lumumba, and

Lumumba himself, who beckons her to join the crowd around

him, the narrator records the moment of Daphne's racial and

cultural reaffirmation:

> Lady Daphne stood there for an endless moment (seemed
> a lifetime) torn between the old and the new, between
> illusion and reality. All her life she had lived sin-
> cerely in a world of dreams and fancy. Where indeed
> was the really real world? With Mrs. Patterson or
> Lumumba? . . . "I understand. Finally I understand. . . .
> I am going to join my people." (p. 287)

Killens' attitude toward the West Indian in The

Cotillion has to be described as idealistic. His West

Indian's conversion from a surrogate Englishness to self-

acceptance, from hatred of her black characteristics to a

love of blackness, is too easily achieved. The literary

convention of the stereotype, although it is itself mocked

by Daphne's portrait, is intrinsically ill-suited for the authorial confrontation of the realistic tensions and subtleties of West Indian personality (or any other personality, for that matter). The critic may well wonder if Killens has not sidestepped the whole issue of the West Indian personality by caricaturing the stereotype. For there is in Daphne's make-up a <u>conscious</u> love of whiteness that is uncharacteristic of the West Indian. Although, as Coombs points out, West Indians (in the English speaking West Indies) generally are "insidious Anglophiles,"[13] they do not think that they are; that is, they are not conscious of their all-out attempts to erase their blackness. Whenever they do become conscious of this fact, as Trumper does in <u>In the Castle of My Skin</u>, they experience conflicts with which Killens does not deal. The relative ease of Daphne's rebirth contradicts the seriousness of her white aesthetic and threatens to negate the power of the caricature. It belies the security which, as we have observed in Chapter III, generally characterizes the West Indian and militates against the prospects of easy conversion.

It must be admitted, however, that whether Daphne's awakening is believable is a secondary consideration. What is primary in the portrait and in the novel as a whole is that Killens has struck a literary blow for the unified consciousness of Afro-Americans and West Indians. That he believes such unity to be possible is the <u>raison d'être</u>

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[13]Coombs, p. 116.

of the novel. It is not until the end of the novel that
we realize that Daphne has been a caricature of herself, that
is, a caricature of the West Indian stereotype. Indeed,
Killens is not stereotyping as much as he is mocking the
stereotype in the name of love. The Cotillion is, in point
of fact, a novel of international love.

Still, the kind of love which the novel asserts is
the author's ideal (as is the reborn Daphne), which is born
out of his conscious yearning for the aesthetic and ideologi-
cal harmony of the African diaspora. Whether West Indians
have the same kind of idealistic aspirations will determine
how close Killens' perception of the West Indian is to the
West Indian perception of self. Put another way, whether
Killens' ideal is also the West Indian's ideal depends upon
the nature of the West Indian's response to the Black Power
movement of the sixties. However, such a consideration is
better reserved until we have looked at another Afro-American
novelist who projects a more realistic attitude toward the
West Indian.

In her two novels to date, Paule Marshall undertakes
an in-depth study of the West Indian society at home (in
The Chosen Place; The Timeless People, 1969) and abroad (in
Brown Girl, Brownstones, 1959). Being the daughter of West
Indians herself and having spent a part of her adult life
in the West Indies, Marshall is undoubtedly better acquainted
with the nature of West Indian life than any other Afro-

American novelist. This more than superficial acquaintance
serves her in good stead as a novelist, for it is the basis
of her ability to create credible West Indian characters and
to affect a peculiarly West Indian atmosphere, as that
atmosphere is created by West Indians in Harlem and as it
shapes island life in the West Indies. In Marshall's novels
we notice, for the first time in our discussion of those
Afro-American novels which include portraits of West
Indians, that sense of community (on the part of the charac-
ters and the author) which we isolated in our previous dis-
cussion of the West Indian psychology. Also for the first
time, we have an Afro-American author who demonstrates,
without caricature, how racial complacency affects the West
Indian lifestyle. It is exactly because of her grasp of the
West Indians' sense of community and of their racial com-
placency that Marshall is able to exploit a wide range of
West Indian sensibilities, especially in Brown Girl, Brown-
stones. She is not apt to be swept away with idealism, as
Killens is, when she follows a character along the road to
racial identity and cultural relevance. Nor is she apt to
distort by easy symbolism (as Killens does) the subtle but
trenchant tensions which attend the stable but struggling
personality or the personality in the state of metamorphosis.
To discuss the characters and themes of her novels is to
reveal the essential "West-Indianness" of the author.

Brown Girl, Brownstones traces the development of

Selina Boyce, daughter of a Barbadian couple living in
Brooklyn. Through Selina's observation and participation in
the lives of the West Indians who board at her parent's
Brownstone home Marshall is able to synthesize her interest
in individual characters with her interest in the dynamics
of this Barbadian community. As Selina matures, so does her
and the reader's understanding of the individual and domestic
forces which shape her life and the lives of her parents.
Like Yoruba in The Cotillion, Selina is caught in the middle
of a temperamental and ideological clash between her mother
(Silla) and her father (Deighton). She gradually under-
stands that a life of hard work and unfulfilled dreams has
transformed Silla into a self-centered, scheming, possessive
and vindictive woman whose tenderness is buried somewhere
under the debris of her Barbadian past. Selina both
despises and respects her mother's desperate reasoning: if
only Silla could save enough money so that the family could
move out of the Brownstones on the impoverished Chaucey
Street to a house on prosperous Crown Heights, her fervent
desire for respectability among her own people would be
fulfilled and her immigration to Harlem would be justified.
Meanwhile, Selina feels an unquestioned love for her father,
whose manhood gradually shrinks as Silla becomes increasingly
status-starved and domineering. In an attempt to bolster
his sagging manhood, Deighton tries to assert himself in
areas outside the wide circumference of Silla's matriarchal

domain. First he tries to become a famous accountant, then a famous trumpet player. Failing in both half-hearted schemes, he rallies from his growing sense of despair when he inherits a piece of land in Barbados. He dreams of returning to Barbados so that he can become a farmer of his own land and thereby reclaim Silla's respect. But Silla secretly and fraudulently sells the land and with it the last hope for a more humane relationship with her family. She earns Selina's eternal resentment and sets in motion events leading to Deighton's exchange of an oppressive and emasculating reality for the mysticism and fanaticism of a religious cult which assures his freedom from struggle of any sort. Selina watches in helpless horror as Silla, jealous of Deighton's newly found "security" and worried about her possible loss of face in the Barbadian community, arranges Deighton's deportation from America and, by implication, brings about Deighton's suicide.

In the characterization of Silla and Deighton, Marshall demonstrates a battle of wills that is universal in its implication. In terms of sheer survival Silla wins, but only because she replaces love of self and love of family with love of the values of white middle class society. Deighton loses because he has to fight in an environment where his personal armor (love, tenderness, and casualness) are turned against him in a world where aggressive and materialistic competition is glorified. But Silla and

Deighton are both losers in the sense that the essential humanity of each is eventually destroyed.

This couple deserves comparison with another couple, Shag and Euphemia, in Roger Mais's The Hills Were Joyful Together (1953). Unlike Silla and Deighton, Shag and Euphemia are naturalistically locked into their impoverished condition in a Jamaican slum. But Euphemia's infidelity inspires in Shag a struggle for manhood that is as intense as Deighton's. In the slum society Euphemia's infidelity is public knowledge, and Shag patiently suffers the resultant loss of face. The time comes, however, when, like Deighton, he is pushed to the breaking point. He escapes not by converting to religious fanaticism but by murdering Euphemia, an event which leads ultimately to his own death at the hands of the police.

The differences between Marshall's and Mais's couples are superficial. Both couples are caught in the web of a survival whose terms are defined by the socio-economic realities and by the strength of individual wills. Although in each case tragedy occurs when the male ego is mortally wounded, the emphasis of each author is not so much upon the sexual roles of the characters as upon their inability to survive within their given environment. In each case, someone is driven by desperation beyond the boundaries of his own control.

The same undercurrent of desperation informs the characterization of the other West Indians in Brown Girl,

Brownstones and The Hills Were Joyful Together. Marshall
demonstrates her awareness of the subterranean nature of
this desperation by juxtaposing an omniscient point of view
with that of Selina, whose education concerning the individual
and collective Barbadian temperament is a gradual and incom-
plete process. So that the silent desperation which Selina
eventually perceives in the individual and collective life of
her community is apparent to the reader as soon as the char-
acter is introduced. Thus it is Marshall's aim, through
characterization, to assert the West Indian sense of community
both as a static condition (that is, as a given) and as a
self-defining dynamic process.

Like Silla, most of Marshall's Barbadians keep
desperation sufficiently at bay to ensure that each life is
as intense as it is socio-economically circumscribed. For
Suggie Skeete, for example, the controlling agent is her
rampant sexuality. Through the power of sexual passion
Suggie escapes the confines of her squalid predicament,
re-unites with her past--"a peasant girl on an obscure island"--
and achieves a sense of universality--"she became . . .
every woman who gives herself without guile and with a full
free passion--" (p. 18). Miss Mary, old and bedridden,
sustains herself by surrounding herself, literally and
symbolically, with relics of her past; and with the strength
which stems from the combination of nostalgia and imagination
she imposes order upon the monotony of her days and nights:

> In the midst of . . . dust and clutter Miss Mary's bed
> reared like a grim rock. She lay there, surrounded by
> her legacies, and holding firm to the thin rotted thread
> of her life. . . . After a time her gaze traveled the
> room, lingering on each relic, and the old dream began.
> Today, out of the heaped memories, she selected the days
> of dying: the master lying in state in the parlor . . .
> the letter announcing her lover's death in the 1904
> war even as his child swelled her stomach . . . her
> shame as she faced the mistress . . . the great war and
> the young master dying . . . the joyless years afterward
> and the mistress slowly wasting . . . and after her
> death the daughters fleeing the house as though they
> hated it, leaving behind the rooms of furniture down-
> stairs, and leaving her behind with her daughter. . . .
> (p. 20)

That daughter, Maritze, now a woman "drained of all emotion,"
imposes form and order on her own life by taking care of
her mother. However, the perceptive reader knows that Miss
Mary needs her reveries even more than she needs her daughter.

The lifeline of Miss Thompson, another of Marshall's
brownstone dwellers, is compassion. No longer young, she
is forced to work relentlessly, despite an ugly unhealed
ulcer which, "yearning like a small crater on the instep of
her foot" (p. 28), becomes a metaphor for the economically
crippled nature of her life. Her history of suffering has
made her empathetic to the suffering of others, and in that
empathy she paradoxically finds relief from her own suffer-
ing:

> Her workday had begun at nine o'clock last night in the
> office building where she worked as a cleaning woman.
> At dawn she had eaten in an all-night diner, dozing
> over her coffee; then, as the morning cleared, she had
> come to the beauty parlor. Time, there, was measured
> by the customers filing in and out the booth who,
> shielded in its semi-privacy, confessed their troubles.
> Miss Thompson's gaunt face would become almost distorted
> with compassion as they spoke; she murmured always:

"It's the truth, honey, . . ." "You telling me, . . ."
and all the while her deft hands wielded the smoking
comb, transforming their coarse hair into shiny-black
limpness. . . . Every Saturday Miss Thompson bought
something for the three small girls of the woman with
whom she had roomed for years, her dull eyes becoming
luminous as she chose the skirt or dress. (p. 28)

Clearly, Marshall's brownstone inhabitants are

united by their tenacious individuality in the face of suf-

fering. In this view of the collective personality of the

West Indian lower classes she and Mais are united. Moti-

vated by Mais's desire "to give the world a true picture of

the real Jamaica and the dreadful condition of the working

classes,"[15] Mais's The Hills Were Joyful Together projects

a starkly realistic portrait of life in a Jamaican slum.

The "yard" in which the novel is set is itself a concrete

symbol of that life, even as the brownstones on Chauncey

Street of Harlem suggest by their appearance the quality of

the Barbadians' lives. In fact, the first objective of both

Marshall and Mais is to synthesize character with place in

a manner reminiscent of other West Indian novelists (Hearne,

Wynter and Patterson) discussed in Chapter III. Such a

technique bespeaks the author's intention--and this intention

is carried out by both Marshall and Mais--to emphasize the

sense of community at least as much as the individuality of

the characters. Thus, the blend of passionate individualism

and quiet suffering noted in Marshall's characters is implied

in her description of the brownstones:

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[15]Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its
Background (New York: Barnes and Barnes, Inc., 1970), p. 179.

Glancing down the internimable Brooklyn street you
thought of those brownstones as one house reflected
through a train of mirrors, with no walls between the
houses but only vast rooms yawning endlessly into one
another. Yet, looking close, you saw that under the
thick ivy each house had something distinctly its own.
Some touch that was Gothic, Romanesque, Baroque or
Greek triumphed amid the Victorian clutter. Here,
Ionic columns framed the windows while next door Gargoyles
scowled up at the sun. There the cornices were hung with
carved foliage while Gorgon heads decorated others. Many
houses had bay windows or Gothic stonework; a few boasted
turrets raised high above the other roofs. Yet they all
shared the same brown monotony. All seemed doomed by
the confusion in their design.
    Behind those grim facades, in those high rooms,
life soared and ebbed. Bodies crouched in the postures
of love at night, children burst from the womb's thick
shell, and death, when it was time, shuffled through
the halls. (pp. 3-4)

Whereas Marshall's description of the brownstones is overtly

symbolic of the personality of the inhabitants, individually

and collectively, Mais asserts the characteristics of the

community by personifying aspects of the yard:

    The yard counted among its ramshackle structures an
old shaking-down concrete nog building. . . . A row
of barrack-like shacks to the north, with the crazily-
leaning fence out front, enclosed what was once a brick-
paved courtyard in the middle of which there was an
ancient circular cement cistern and above it a sandpipe.
. . leaking continually with a weary trickle of water
that was sometimes stronger than at others. . . .
    In the middle of the crazy front fence . . . was a
little paint-blistered, wry-hinged, buck-toothed,
obscenely grinning . . . gate.
    . . . a gnarled ackee tree reached up, scraggy,
scared, almost naked-branched to the anaemic-looking
sky. A thrifty black black-mango tree leaned over the
the southern half of the front fence. . . .[16]

The basic difference between Marshall's brownstone

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[16]Roger Mais, The Hills Were Joyful Together printed
in The Three Novels of Roger Mais (London: Jonathan Cape,
1966), p. 9. (Underlining mine.)

community and Mais's yard is that the yard is more impoverished.
But in each place a fierce battle for survival is being fought
on personal and communal levels, and there is in the con-
sciousness of each character an aspect of desperation. The
portrait of Zepher, a prostitute in The Hills Were Joyful
Together, parallels that of Suggie in Brown Girl, Brownstones;
but whereas Suggie's prostitution is based on sheer sexual
need, Zepher's is motivated by her basic generosity. This
generosity also links her to Marshall's Miss Thompson.
Although it obviously takes a different form, it provides a
similar transitory relief from the consciousness of her
impoverished condition. Meanwhile, the money which she
earns helps to lend material stability, however tenuous, to
her life.

The sense of celebration of life in both novels is
strong, although, in the case of Mais's West Indians, there
is "no ultimate escape from the disintegrating forces of
poverty."[17] In Brown Girl, Brownstones only the Afro-
American heroine, Selina, escapes from the Barbadian com-
munity against which her gradual awareness of the collective
desperation prompts her to rebel. The older she gets the
more these two states vie for dominance in her consciousness.
The contradictions at the core of the teeming life of her

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[17]Jean Creary, "A Prophet Armed: The Novels of Roger
Mais," printed in The Islands in Between (London: Oxford
University Press, 1968), p. 54.

community confuse her and, combined with the novelty of her own awakening sensibilities, threaten her with mental and emotional paralysis.

It is through Selina's growing disenchantment with her West Indian community that Marshall reveals her own criticism of West Indian life in Harlem. Selina observes with increasing uneasiness that her Barbadian community discourages social and political contact with Afro-Americans. She refuses repeated invitations to join the revered Barbadian Association, the socio-political fulcrum of the community, and she suspects the basic clannishness of the Barbadian temperament. When at the age of seventeen she finally attends a meeting of the Association, she is shocked at the Barbadians' attempt to ape the strategies and principles of the white society. "If only there was a way," Marshall relates, "to prove to them and herself how totally she disavowed their way! But how, when her own truth was so uncertain and untried? How, when she knew nothing of the world or its ways? This was the gall and the humiliation" (p. 225). When she is asked to give her opinion on the current issue of intense debate--whether the organization should change its name from The <u>Barbadian</u> Association to The <u>Negro</u> Associ-Association, Selina finally finds the courage to voice her sentiments:

> "I think the whole matter stinks. And why does it stink? Because it's the result of living by the most shameful codes possible--dog eat dog--exploitation, the strong over the weak, the end justifies the means--the whole

kit and caboodle. Your Association? It's a band of
small frightened people. Clannish. Narrow-minded.
Selfish. Prejudiced. Pitiful--because who out there
in that white world you're so feverishly courting gives
one damn whether you change the word 'Barbadian' to
'Negro'? Provincial! That's your Association." (p. 227)

Marshall's criticism of the Barbadian community in

America is an extension of Mais's critism of the slum com-

munity of Jamaica. Clannishness and provinciality in The

Hills Were Joyful Together is the result of life in a socio-

economic prison. Brown Girl, Brownstones suggests that the

community of West Indian immigrants, already united by the

insularity of their West Indian experience, is wont, because

of the novelty and uncertainty of their life in Harlem, to

reinforce this bond through socio-political rituals. Even-

tually the bond functions as a psychological wall which

imprisons the psyche as much as it guards it from attack.

Thus the further implication of Brown Girl, Brownstones is

that West Indians have a way of tempering their life in

America by recreating, ironically, the insularity which is

their West Indian birthright. The Hills Were Joyful Together

illustrates the physical, social and economic basis of this

West Indian insularity and reveals that the West Indians in

the slum areas, unlike the more economically fortunate West

Indians in America, have no other options. Whereas the

brownstone dwellers consciously recreate a psychological

insularity, the people of the "yard" in Jamaica are the

victims of a socio-economic system which enforces physical

and psychological insularity; and the more the reader

perceives their dauntless energy, the more he is aware of the stress of their oppression.[18] In any case, the psychological bond between Marshall's brownstone inhabitants and Mais's yard dwelllers is real.

Further evidence of Marshall's insight into the West Indian immigrant's psychological condition is revealed in her characterization of the West Indian intellectual who has been awakened to the search for racial and cultural identity. Again the topic is motivated by the heightening consciousness of Selina, who, following her rejection of the Barbadian Association, meets and falls in love with Clive, a Barbadian intellectual who shares Selina's attitude toward the West Indian community. Totally disillusioned by his participation in the Korean War, hating himself for his failure to achieve fame as a painter, loving and hating his childishly emotional dependence on his mother, and taking a perverted pride in the utter failure of his young life, Clive is a figure of acute malaise. Although he is aware of the constant racial tensions that affect the black race in America, he lacks the physical and emotional energy and the motivation to assist his race's struggles and to assert its humanity. He justifies his pervasive ennui with Prufrock-like precision and leads himself to Prufrock-like resignation: "Maybe," he tells Selina,

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[18]Creary, p. 53.

"our dark faces remind [white people] of all that is dark
and unknown and terrifying within themselves and, as
Jimmy Baldwin says, they're seeking absolution through
poor us, either in their beneficence or in their cru-
elty. . . . But I'm afraid we have to disappoint them
by confronting them always with the full and awesome
weight of our humanity, until they begin to see us and
not some unreal image they've superimposed. . . . This
is the unpleasant and perhaps impossible job and this
is where I bow out, leaving the field to you, my dear . . .
Selina, and to the more robust among us. Me, I can't be
so bothered. To hell with them. I'm assured of my
humanity lying here alone in this god-damn room each
day seeing things in my mind that I can't get down right
on canvas." (p. 253)

And so Clive fails to make any effort to relate either to

Barbadian or American society and prefers to exist in utter

detachment and growing despair. At times he is so compelled

to verbal expression of his psychic condition that his only

relief from words is physical collapse: "Suddenly with a

hoarse broken cry he pitched forward as though shoved from

behind by some powerful invisible assailant" (p. 266).

In a community characterized by the people's unfal-

tering persistence in the face of crippling socio-economic

realities, it is interesting that the two people in Marshall's

novel who succumb to despair are men (Clive and Deighton),

the only two fully drawn male portraits in the novel. The

reasons for this fact are not clearly discernible, but it is

clear that the malaise of Clive has precedent in other West

Indian novels, a fact which gives Marshall good reasons to

imply that psychic despair is one of the responses of that

minority of West Indians who, like the brownstones, are

"doomed by the confusion in their design" (p. 4).

Alexander Blackman, narrator-protagonist in Orlando Patterson's _An Absence of Ruins_ is a case in point. He shares both Clive's malaise and his intellectual obsession with the analysis of his own condition:

> The most I can say is that I was somehow lost in the oblivion of my being. Nothing more positive. . . . I was simply there. A crude animal thing, outside of time, outside of history, outside of the consciousness of other beings. I was just there. Yet I was enough of being just there to be aware that I had merged into everything. It was like drowning in a dream.[19]

This sense of being "lost in the oblivion of . . . being" informs his narrative consciousness from beginning to end of the novel, which is an artistic re-affirmation of the correctness of his self-analysis. Near the end of the novel he reveals his desperate need to reject the awesome weight of his own consciousness:

> It is no longer, then, that I find life worthless, but that life has found me worthless. I have been caught naked; unexpectedly. I see myself in the mirror of my shame and I . . . turn myself away, for I am impotent, cowardly, abandoned and incongruous.
> Is there no place where I can hide? Is there no dark jungle among whose tangled trees I can get myself lost forever? Is there no vast, indifferent horde somewhere amongst which I can sink and drown in anonymity?

Both Marshall and Patterson display an awareness of the psychic exile which is at the heart of the West Indian middle classes and with which the intellectual must grapple if he awakens from his racial complacency. Although both characters are too preoccupied with analyzing their own

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[19]Orlando Patterson, _An Absence of Ruins_ (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1967), p. 14.

psychic condition, features of their predicament and aliena-
tion "haunt one's memory because one feels they are real
problems for all colonial middle classes who cannot see
their link with the masses and their past."[20] Only rarely
in the West Indian novel, however, do the characters reveal
such obsessive awareness of their deracinated condition.

One of these rare characters is the West Indian Ray,
a main character occurring in the first two of Claude McKay's
three novels. Forced from his beloved Haiti by the forces
of American imperialism, Ray is McKay's portrait of a
West Indian intellectual. Like Alexander Blackman and
Clive, he is a man of tortured consciousness. But unlike
them, his awakening to racial consciousness initiates a fren-
zied search for cultural identity in America (Home to Harlem,
1928) and Europe (in Banjo, 1929). The more he searches,
the more conscious he becomes of his displacement. He
even questions the validity of the object and agent of his
search (love of his race) as revealed in his reaction to
Afro-Americans:

> These men claimed kinship with him. They were black like
> him. Men and nature had put them in the same race. He
> ought to love them and feel them (if they felt anything).
> He ought to if he had a shred of social morality in him.
> They were all chained together and he was counted as
> one link. Yet he loathed every soul in that barrack-
> room, except Jake. Race . . . Why should he have and
> love a race? Race and nations were things like skunks,
> whose smells poisoned the air of life.[21]

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[20]Ngugu Wa Thiong'o (James Gugi), Homecoming (New
York: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1972), p. 40.

[21]Claude McKay, Home to Harlem (New Jersey: The
Chatham Bookseller, 1928), p. 153.

Like Clive, he hungers for that sense of community which he experienced on his Caribbean island. The absence of this sense of community means, at least for the West Indian intellectual, susceptibility to despondency and movement toward total detachment from self and society. Hence Ray's malaise remains with him throughout his American and European sojourns; for even in Europe (Banjo), where he lives with a group of international blacks who are exiled like himself, he does not succeed in finding the community which he desires. McKay eventually embodies the quest in a female protagonist, Bita Plant, in his third novel (Banana Bottom, 1933) and shifts the scene back to the West Indies, where the search is finally rewarded.

Although Marshall's believable portrait of West Indian malaise links her to both McKay and Patterson, in her awareness of the more typical responses to the call to racial community she is more closely associated with McKay in that both she and McKay illustrates the international and progressive nature of the search. McKay's novels constitute, thematically, a trilogy, progressing in its movement from the West Indies to America, then Europe, and back to the West Indies. Marshall's two novels to date are also parts of an envisioned trilogy (she is currently writing the third novel).[22] A discussion of the similarity between

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[22]Mary Helen Washington, ed., Black-eyed Susans (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), p. 138. Washington reports Marshall as saying that the unfinished third novel

Marshall's artistic quest in America and the West Indies
and McKay's will provide even more support for my contention
that she is attuned to the West Indian psychology, as that
psychology is revealed in specific West Indian novels.

In Brown Girl, Brownstones the search which Clive
rejects is continued by Selina, whose gradual awakening to
racial identity is the result of the accumulation of her
experiences, notably her disenchantment with her Barbadian
community and her rapt attention to Clive's discourses on
the psychic condition of himself and the black race in
America. In college she uses ballet as a metaphor for her
transcendence over the spiritual limitations imposed upon her
by a racist climate; but in a moment of epiphany she comes
to understand that no degree of artistic expression on her
part can remove the film which prevents white Americans from
seeing the essential humanity of the Afro-American and the
West Indian. This moment comes when Selina, after stealing
the show in a public performance one evening, attends a
cast party hosted by the mother of one of the members of
the cast. This woman, unable to accept the idea that a
common river of humanity can link the sensibilities of a
black woman with those of her white daughter, confronts
Selina with innuendos about Selina's heritage geared to
reinforce her own blurred image of black people:

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will be concerned with Africa and that the tentative title
is Little Girl of All the Daughters.

Suddenly the woman leaned forward and rested her hand
on Selina's knee. "Are [your parents] from the south,
dear?

It was not the question which offended her, but the
woman's manner--pleasant, interested, yet charged with
exasperation. It was her warm smile, which was cold
at its source--above all, the consoling hand on her
knee, which was indecent. Selina sensed being pitted
against her in a contest of strength. If she answered
unwisely the woman would gain the advantage.

She muttered evasively, "No, they're not."

The woman bent close, surprised, and the dry sting
of her perfume was another indignity. "No? . . . Where
then?"

"The West Indies."

The woman sat back, triumphant. "Ah, I thought so.
We once had a girl who did our cleaning who was from there.
. . ." She caught herself and smiled apologetically.
"Oh, she wasn't a girl, of course. We just call them
that. It's a terrible habit. . . . Anyway I always
told my husband there was something different about her--
about Negroes from the West Indies in general . . . I
don't know what, but I can always spot it. When you
came in tonight, for instance. . . ." (p. 287)

The more the woman talks, the more she reveals her blindness

to Selina's individuality and humanity:

"You can't help your color. It's just a lack of the
proper training and education. I have to keep telling
some of my friends that. . . . I wish they were here
tonight to meet you. You . . . well, dear . . . you
don't even act colored. I mean, you speak so well and
have such poise. And it's just wonderful how you've
taken your race's natural talent for ʳᵃncing and music
and developed it. Your race needs moᵣe smart young
people like you. Our West Indian cleaning girl used
to say the same thing. We used to have those long dis-
cussions on the race problem and she always agreed with
me. It was so amusing to hear her say things in that
delightful West Indian accent. . . ." (p. 288)

The author's narration of the impact of this experi-

ence upon Selina leaves no room for doubt that Selina has

reached a moment of crisis:

Held down by her hand, drowning in the deluge of her
voice, Selina felt a coldness ring her heart. She tried
to signal the woman that she had had enough, but her

hand failed her. Why couldn't the woman <u>see</u>, she won-
dered--even as she drowned--that she was simply a girl
of twenty with a slender body and slight breasts and
no power with words, who loved spring and then the sere
leaves falling and dim, old houses, who had tried,
foolishly perhaps, to reach beyond herself? But when
she looked up and saw her reflection in those pale eyes,
she knew that the woman saw one thing above all else.
Those eyes were a well-lighted mirror in which, for the
first time, Selina truly saw--with a sharp and shattering
clarity--the full meaning of her blackness.
     And knowing was like dying. . . . In that instant
of death, false and fleeting though it was, she was
beyond hurt. And then, as swiftly, terror flared behind
her eyes, terror that somehow, in some way, this woman
. . . sought to rob her of her substance and herself.
. . . What had brought her to this place? to this shat-
tering knowledge? And obscurely she knew: the part of
her which had long hated her for her blackness. . . .
(p. 289)

With this "shattering knowledge" Selina knows that she must

leave America to search for self, the roots of that self and

a community for that self. She also knows that before she can

understand anything else about herself and her family she

must undertake to understand her West Indian heritage. So

it is that the novel ends with her decision to go immediately

to the West Indies.

     Whereas Marshall chooses the West Indies as the set-

ting for the second stage of the psycho-cultural journey,

McKay chooses Europe. The reason for the difference in

choice lies in the fact Marshall's Afro-American heroine,

Selina, does not have the image of a West Indian childhood

in her memory, whereas McKay's West Indian persona, Ray,

does. Having experienced both racial and cultural identity

and community in Haiti, Ray knows, in a way that Selina

cannot, what he is searching for. He is ready for the

European experience. On the other hand, Selina, whose ambivalent identity as Afro-American and West Indian makes her doubly susceptible to the psychological scars of racism at a time in her life when she is only beginning to comprehend the dual nature of her deracination, must establish the kind of roots that exist in Ray's memory before she is ready for any other international experience. Both McKay and Marshall know, however, that the nature of the journey necessitates a third stage.

A critical look at the portrait of Ray in Banjo is necessary to illustrate the nature and results of his European experience. _Like Banjo, the novel's hero and Ray's close friend, and like the international group of blacks with whom Ray associates in an area of Marseilles known as the Ditch, Ray is a picaroon. His portrait embodies all the picaroon aspects noted by Robert Alter in Rogue's Progress:

> The picaroon, above all else, is an outsider. Granted, he is an outsider who can make and keep friends, and in this respect he remains distinct from the tortured and isolated outsiders of twentieth-century fiction, but the way he chooses is nevertheless a devious and personal way, not the straight, clearly-marked foot-worn path of society at large.[23]

Hence for most of his stay in Europe Ray feels no real sense of community with the other picaroons, who, as Kenneth Ramchand observes, relate to each other not as members of a family but as "delegates at a conference for the

[23]Robert Alter, Rogue's Progress (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 71.

Negro stateless."[24]

But Ray's vagabond nature does not obscure the blend
of racial consciousness and desire for community which perme-
ates his entire make-up. When, for example, a Martiniquan
student rejects Ray's invitation to accompany him to a bar
on the grounds that too many Senegalese may be there, Ray
attacks him for disdaining his racial roots:

> "You are like many Negro intellectuals who are belly-
> aching about race. . . . What's wrong with you all is
> your education. You get a white man's education and
> learn to despise your own people. You read biased history
> of the whites conquering the colored and primitive peoples,
> and it thrills you just as it does a white boy belonging
> to a great white nation."[25]

There is definite progress in Ray's attempts to under-
stand the nature of his consciousness. He learns that Western
civilization threatens "to rob him of his warm human instincts,"
(p. 164) or, in other words, "to take the love of color, joy,
beauty, vitality and nobility out of his life and make him
like one of the poor mass of its pale creatures" (pp. 164-5).
Although this aspect of Ray's portrait has too much in common
with Carl Van Vechten's images of the black personality
(in Nigger Heaven, 1926), and too much of the primitivism
of Eugene O'Neill's Brutus Jones (in The Emperor Jones, 1920)
to be representatively West Indian, Ray's (and McKay's)

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[24]Ramchand, p. 256.

[25]Claude McKay, Banjo (New Jersey: The Chatham
Bookseller, 1929), p. 201.

awareness of the negative potential of Western civilization

nevertheless reflects his arrival at a crucial stage in his

psychological development. For he knows that his insight

into the nature of Western civilization is possible only

because of his participation in it, his formal education

being a case in point. The irony of his situation is a far

cry from the romanticism which directed his earlier search

in America (in Home to Harlem) and intensified his malaise.

Because his intellect has been Westernized, Ray contends,

it cannot be trusted, for fear that he may lose what Sister

Mary Conroy calls "those warm human facets of life."[26] He

decides, therefore, that he will "let intellect go to hell"

(p. 165) and that he will live on instinct.

The contradiction inherent in Ray's decision is

easily discerned. In the first place, the decision to reject

the influence of intellect is arrived at through a process

of intellection. In the second place, it is made by a man

who is himself an intellectual and who cannot possibly

change this pervasive factor of his make-up. And, in the

third place, it displays Ray's blindness to the possibility

that even instincts may be influenced by the cumulative

weight of experience. Clearly, the decision indicates

intense frustration, even desperation. It is this desperation

which Ray must learn to recognize and control before he can

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[26]Sister Mary Conroy, "The Vagabond Motif in the Writings of Claude McKay," printed in The Negro American Literary Forum, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring, 1971, p. 15.

successfully combat his malaise and before he is psychologically ready for participation in the community for which he is searching.

His subsequent decision to join his American friends, Banjo and Jake, in a life of perpetual vagabondage indicates further progress in his psychological becoming. He has outgrown his penchant for solitude, and his feeling of detachment is modified by his identity with these two Afro-Americans: "Close association with the Jakes and Banjos had been like participation in a common birthright" (p. 165). So it is that the second stage of McKay's three-part journey "home" ends with the West Indian's affirmation of his vagabondage and his essential brotherhood with those Afro-Americans whose suspicions of the tenets of Western civilization urge their literal and spiritual vagabondage.

The psychological leap from a deracinated life in Europe to a firmly grounded reality in the West Indies is the final stage of McKay's journey and is the theme of his third novel, Banana Bottom (1933). This time the questing consciousness is that of a young woman, Bita Plant. The fact that she embodies aspects of Ray's experiences indicates McKay's conscious attempt to approach her psychocultural experiences as the culmination of his earlier explorations. Like Ray, she has a West Indian background (she is reared in the village of Banana Bottom and in Jubilee, the neighboring town, where she lives with an

English missionary couple at the parsonage) and a European education (the missionary couple sends her to spend seven years of travel and schooling in Europe). With Bita's return to her native land, Banana Bottom begins to tell "the story of how she gradually strips away what is irrelevant in her English upbringing"[27] and how she reaffirms her racial and psychological identity with the village community of Banana Bottom.

Banana Bottom suggests that the return home is psy-choculturally possible if the growing-up experiences in the West Indian community leave an impression on the psyche strong enough to withstand the European experiences which threaten to erase it. McKay's first objectives in the novel, then, are to recreate the communal atmosphere which Bita left as a teenager and to illustrate that the community, seven years later, still recognizes her as one of them. As far as the community is concerned, the impression of her West Indian experiences is still there. The opening paragraphs of the novel illustrate McKay's successful attempt to highlight by understatement the collective tendency of the people of Jubilee, a town which borders the village of Banana Bottom, to transform the private experience of one of its members into a public experience and, by so doing, to lay claim to Bita as one of theirs.

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[27]Ramchand, p. 259.

That Sunday when Bita Plant played the old straight piano to the singing of the Coloured Choristers in the beflowered school-room was the most exciting in the history of Jubilee.

Bita's homecoming was an eventful week for the folk of the tiny country town of Jubilee and the mountain village of Banana Bottom. For she was the only native Negro girl they had ever known or heard of who had been brought up abroad. Perhaps the only one in the island. Educated in England--the mother country as it was referred to by the Press and official persons.[28]

Ramchand provides a commentary on this passage in which he isolates the subtle technique by which McKay shows how the community reclaims Bita and at the same time uses the incident of Bita's homecoming to reaffirm the nature of its own collective temperament:

The communal memory is of specific times and specific events. "That Sunday when Bita played"; it has its landmarks, its familiar items and its own institutions-- "the . . . schoolroom . . . the . . . piano" and "the Coloured Choristers". The private experience "Bita's homecoming" is also an event for the folk. In the second paragraph the authorial voice glides mimetically into the communal voice.[29]

The fact that Bita's return is given significance within the collective temperament of the community implies that the viability of Bita's psychological return is dependent as much upon the community as upon Bita.

It is clear that Bita grows up and returns to a community which has its own spontaneous values. As far as the people are concerned the only test which Bita must pass to prove that she has been faithful to her psychological kinship

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[28]Claude McKay, Banana Bottom (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1933), p. 1.

[29]Ramchand, p. 260.

to them is a test of spontaneity. They subject Bita to

such a test at the earliest opportunity:

> With Belle Black, the first soprano, leading them, the
> Coloured Choristers were in no way intimidated by Bita's
> years of higher and foreign culture. Indeed they were
> united in testing it. And so Belle Black, tall and
> haughty like a black thatch, started a race with the
> piano regardless of time and beat with the rendering of
> the first piece of the cantata. And she kept that up
> from the beginning to the end. Bita was able to keep
> up the pace although she had only run carelessly through
> the score once and had not practiced with the Choristers.
> She had arrived the Saturday before only. But the music
> was a simply arranged thing.
> The Choristers thought it was grand. They had a
> local reputation for excellent singing and were unitedly
> proud. So when the cantata was over and finished they
> ringed around Bita with congratulations.
> "You played fine!"
> "Perfect accompaniment!"
> "Welcome to Jubilee!"
> "Welcome back home!"   (pp. 1-2)

Obviously, Bita has easily passed their test.

McKay attempts to lend credibility to the ease with

which Bita is reinitiated into her society by the evocation

of an incident from Bita's childhood. He narrates how as

a child, ranging carefree among the fields of Banana Bottom,

Rita was raped by Crazy Bow, a mentally retarded man of the

village. As a direct consequence of the rape, she is trans-

ferred to Jubilee and tutelage under the Craigs. Empathe-

tically, the community absorbs the trauma[30] and transforms

it into music which could be heard throughout the country-

side:

> "You may wrap her up in silk,
> You may trim her up with gold,

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[30]Ramchand, p. 263.

And the prince may come after
To ask for your daughter,
But Crazy Bow was first."   (p. 14)

The implications of the song are clear: no degree of

Europeanization can remove from Bita's consciousness the

awareness of the experience which despite its violation

of the community's social and moral codes, labels her as one

of them. And, in this particular instance, there is no

stigma inherent in the label; for Bita was an innocent

child and her violater was "crazy." Therefore, Bita's return

is regarded as a natural, even expected, occurrence.

Where, then, is the tension of the novel? It is

in Bita's attempt to discard those aspects of her European

experience which threaten her perception of herself as a true

"plant" in the soil of Banana Bottom. She has already passed

her community's test, and she is assured that she does not

threaten her people's perception of herself. But now she

must pass her own test; that is, she must find out whether,

despite the distillation of her experience in Europe, she

can live fully within the Banana Bottom tradition.

The gradualness of Bita's rejection of European

values for West Indian values is seen in her conflicting

relationship with Mrs. Craig. Their clash gradually moves

from that of two incompatible temperaments to that of two

equally incompatible apprehensions of reality. Living with

the Craigs after her homecoming, Bita finds that Mrs. Craig

has mapped out her life. She is to marry Harold Newton Day,

who is the same type as the Martiniquan attacked by Ray in

Banjo[31] and who, like Bita, is being groomed to succeed the

Craigs to the ministry of the parish. Bita, realizing her

basic antagonism to Harold and her basic attraction to Hop-

ping Dick, the village playboy, begins to respond to the

attention of Hopping Dick, whom Mrs. Craig regards as a

"worthless man" and "a low peacock," who "murders his h's" and

who is "ruining [Bita's] reputation." The clash takes on

added intensity when Bita attends one of the village dances,

an event which was outlawed by the parish, and again when

Bita breaks off her engagement to Harold. The moment comes

when Bita decides to leave the Craigs and to take her resi-

dence in Banana Bottom, the village of her birth.

> Bita was certain now that the time had arrived for her
> to face the fact of leaving Jubilee. It would be impos-
> sible for her to stay when she felt not only resentment,
> but a natural opposition against Mrs. Craig. A latent
> hostility would make her always want to do anything of
> which Mrs. Craig disapproved. Bita could not quite
> explain this strong feeling to herself. It was just
> there, going much deeper than the Hopping Dick affair.
> Maybe it was an old unconsciousness thing now manifesting
> itself, because it was to Mrs. Craig, a woman whose atti-
> tude to life was alien to hers, and not to her parents,
> she owed the entire shaping of her career. . . . She
> became contemptuous of everything--the plan of her edu-
> cation and the way of existence at the mission, and her
> eyes wandering to the photograph of her English college
> over her bed, she suddenly took and ripped it from its
> frame, tore the thing up and trampled the pieces under
> her feet. . . . (pp. 211-2)

Hence the clash between two incompatible temperaments comes

also to symbolize the clash between two contradictory

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[31]Ramchand, p. 269.

lifestyles, and the return to Banana Bottom represents

Bita's total rejection of European values and her full com-

mitment to the lifestyle of her West Indian village.

She has always felt a physical affinity with Banana

Bottom, an affinity which Europe has not destroyed:

> All of her body was tingling sweet with affectionate
> feeling for this place. For here she had lived some of
> the happiest moments of her girlhood, with her school-
> mates and alone. (p. 117)

Her spiritual oneness with the people of Banana Bottom is

apparent when she attends a religious ceremony held by a

drumming cult: "Magnetized by the spell of it, Bita was

drawn nearer and nearer into the inner circle until with a

shriek she fell down" (p. 250). When near the end of the

novel she marries Hopping Dick, that marriage is the final

manifestation of total commitment. It is apparent even to

her that her consciousness is once more rooted and nourished

by "the earth upon which she was grafted" (p. 313).

It should be apparent by now that McKay's trilogy

anticipates what is perhaps the most clearly discernible

thematic and artistic thread in the West Indian novel--the

merging of character, place and community. Most of the

novels discussed in this study reveal that the racial

complacency in the West Indian psychology is rooted in this

synthesis. Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin and McKay's

Home to Harlem suggest that the awakening to the call to

racial identity and community disturbs this synthesis, which

thereafter exists only as nostalgic ideal in the imagination.

In the Castle of My Skin ends with the disruption of this synthesis; it is in one of his other novels, The Emigrants (1954), that Lamming deals with the self-estrangement and malaise which attend the West Indian who experiences physical and spiritual exile because of his search for racial identity. McKay goes further (in Banjo) to suggest that the prospects for the unified consciousness of those who have "left" the West Indies are dependent upon the reassertion of that same synthesis.

We have already demonstrated that Paule Marshall's perception of West Indians in Brown Girl, Brownstones embodies the first two aspects of the West Indian personality--that is, the synthesis of character, place and community and the psychological deracination of those who seek to become racially self-assertive. The Chosen Place; the Timeless People demonstrates that her perception of the West Indian personality also entails the third aspect--that is, the awareness that the psychological return from exile is only successful if it reestablishes the synthesis which is disrupted because of racial awakening. Whether Marshall is as optimistic as McKay about the possibilities of "homecoming" can only be known if and when Marshall publishes her third novel in the trilogy. But there are some clues in The Chosen Place; the Timeless People.

Like McKay in Banana Bottom Marshall juxtaposes the consciousness of her West Indian heroine with that of a

remote island community. Again, a static and timeless West
Indian village is pitted against a changing island. And
again an English-educated heroine traffics between both worlds.
We must remember, however, that The Chosen Place: The
Timeless People illustrates only the second step in Marshall's
three-stage journey. Hence we are not to expect the almost
idyllic resolution of the psychological tensions which Bita
experiences. Merle Kinbona, the central character, having
been painfully awakened in England to the significance of
her Europeanization, comes home to rid herself of a depres-
sion which is as intense and as pervasive as Clive's in
Brown Girl, Brownstones. But her psychic dilemma is induced
by more than racial considerations. Her whole life has been
a history of suffering. Like Bita, she finds that her
island community accepts her but, unlike Bita, she is so
psychologically tortured that she has to go elsewhere to
seek relief.

Merle, "easily one of the great characters in con-
temporary fiction,"[32] is an embodiment of West Indian his-
tory. As Jean Carey Bond observes, "ravaged Africa throbs
with her through her family origin and the childhood abuse
which she suffered"[33]--the phrase "ravaged Africa" encapsu-
lates a major aspect of early West Indian history. She is

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[32]Jean Carey Bond, "Allegorical Novel by Talented
Storyteller," in Freedomways, First Quarter, 1970, p. 77.

[33]Ibid., p. 77.

possessed of the "predatory and decadent culture of the
West"[34] in which she participated during her nightmarish
sojourn in England and which has caused a rift in the col-
lective West Indian consciousness that is still not bridged.
And she is caught between a spiritual identification with her
old West Indian lifestyle and her intellectual awareness that
the international nature of twentieth-century history demands
that the old order be modified. Hence she bears the full
weight of the psychic malady which evidences itself in personae
such as Clive, Ray and Blackman. In fact, her psychological
suffering is so intense that she is given to recurring periods
of total physical, emotional and mental withdrawal--as if
her consciousness of the economic and spiritual state of
her people is too much for her. The potential for her own
psychological health, she gradually discovers, does not lie
in her return to total identity with the people of Bourne-
hills, her island home; for such a return, Marshall implies,
is impossible. Merle must let the course of her life run
full circle, back to Africa, the land of her forefathers,
where she might find the kind of unified consciousness which
will prepare her for full participation in the growth of
her Bournehills community.

Like McKay, Marshall is mature enough as an artist
to allow the ideological statement of the novel to grow out
of her characterization so that the tripartite search for

[34]Ibid.

racial community and psychological deliverance is not an

authorial imposition upon the art of the novel. Merle's

eventual journey to Africa is, in fact, anticipated in her

sojourn in England. While in a state of a severe depression

brought on by her involvement with a decadent group of

people in England, Merle meets and falls in love with Ketu,

an African graduate student, whose strong personality gave

her strength to discontinue her decadent behavior (which

included a demeaning lesbian relationship with a rich white

woman in Hampstead) and whose love relieved her depression.

Eight years later she remembers this episode of her life

with immediacy:

> [Ketu] was one of those rare, truly committed people.
> And because he was, he hadn't been taken in, like so
> many of us poor little colonials come to big England
> to study, by the so-called glamor of the West. There
> was no turning his head, in other words. He had come
> for certain specific technical information and he wasn't
> interested in anything else they had to offer, either,
> as he once put it, their gods, their ways or their women.
> I wouldn't even try to tell you what it meant for me
> to meet someone like him. I can only tell you what I
> was able to do as a result and then maybe you'll under-
> stand. First, I was able at long last to break completely
> with that woman in Hampstead. . . . And after a while
> we were married. . . . Let's just say I became a differ-
> ent person with him.[35]

Her two happy years of married life with Ketu, during which

time a child is born, comes to an abrupt halt when "the

woman in Hampstead" reveals Merle's past to Ketu, who is so

incensed that he eventually leaves Merle and returns to

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[35]Paule Marshall, The Chosen Place: The Timeless
People (New York: Avon Books, 1976), pp. 256-257.

Uganda, taking their daughter with him. It is then that

Merle is struck with the paralyzing awareness of the cost

of her Westernization. When she decides, after living for

the next eight years in Bournehills, that she will go to

Africa to seek relief from pain, the decision grows, on the

one hand, out of her sense of womanhood and motherhood:

she wants to find her daughter and pursue the possibility

of a reunion with her husband. But, on the other hand, the

reason is that Bournehills has not engendered the therapy

which can ease the pain of her existence. Merle herself

explains the larger reasons for her visit to Africa:

> ". . . I have the feeling that just being there and
> seeing the place will be a big help for me, that in
> some way it will give me the strength I need to get
> moving again. Not that I'm going expecting to find
> perfection, I know they have more than their share of
> problems, or to find myself or any nonsense like that.
> It's more . . . that sometimes a person has to go back,
> really back--to have a sense, an understanding of all
> that's gone to make them--before they can go forward."
> (p. 498)

Only then will she be able to contribute to the life of her

West Indian people.

The necessity of Africa in Marshall's thematic

scheme attests to a crucial difference between her approach

to the matter of racial community and that of McKay. The

difference is McKay's suggestion (in Banana Bottom) that the

Europeanized West Indian needs no conscious experience of

Africa in order to find a fulfilling sense of identity and

community in the West Indies. Bita, despite her European

education, is "still herself" when she returns to Banana

Bottom and, consequently, she has comparatively little dif-
ficulty in keeping Europe, so to speak, at bay. The unreality
of McKay's position can hardly be overlooked. The fact that
Bita totally escapes moral and psychological scars in
England is incredible. Ray's own dilemma militates against
our acceptance of Bita's easy happiness. Also, other pastoral
elements of Banana Bottom cloud the final assessment of
McKay's ideological viewpoint. On the one hand, it enlightens
us to the possibility that McKay intended the novel as an
idyll, not a realistic portrait of the West Indian situation.
On the other hand, Banana Bottom is so unmistakably West
Indian in atmosphere and lifestyle that the critic is prone
to accept that the village and the heroine are intended as
authentic West Indian types. For all the easy resolution of
Banana Bottom, McKay's final answer to the question "can the
European Educated West Indian go home again?" is ambiguous.
And the ambiguity stems mainly from his characterization of
the heroine. In a crucial sense, Bita never leaves Banana
Bottom. We know that Ray has "left" Haiti (although McKay
invests him with the author's own Jamaican sensibilities
and his own private ideologies); Selina definitely "leaves"
her Barbadian community; and Merle's experiences in England
convince us that she "leaves" Bournehills. But we have no
reason to believe that Bita undergoes any psychological
change in England. Hence the eventuality of her reunion
with her people is never seriously in doubt. The critic

may justifiably wonder how McKay would have resolved
Bita's tensions if her seven years in Europe had signifi-
cantly and realistically affected her psychological process
of becoming.

Merle's West Indian modernity looms ever more con-
vincing when it is seen against the background of the people
of Bournehills, whose collective consciousness she also
embodies. Despite centuries of socio-economic exploitation,
the people of Bournehills have remained a spiritual unit,
whose stagnant existence seems paradoxically to thrive upon
resistance to Westernization. Atavistic and mystical, they
are descendants of those Africans who made only the most
necessary adjustments to the Western world. Their spirit of
resistance has created a psychological wall (much thicker
than that of the Barbadians in New York) which makes them
impervious to the thrusts of the twentieth century, whe-
ther exploitative or humanitarian. All British or American
aid is rejected in preference to their own kind of freedom.
Interestingly enough, their sense of freedom is consciously
motivated by an ancestral racial pride, which is possible
only because of their rejection of Western influences.

The plot of the novel affords Marshall a good
opportunity to examine the collective psychology of those
West Indians who have managed to make alienation from their
Western environment a self-perpetuating and "timeless"
condition. A group of Americans, led by Saul Amron, are

sent to Bournehills to make a preliminary study for a project
to assist the economy of the area. Frustrated by the
people's lack of cooperation, Saul turns to Merle, who has
their unquestioned affection and respect, for advice. But
although Merle's exposure to Western culture prompts her
intellectual assent to the contention that the lifestyle of
Bournehills is antiquated, she is still spiritually a part
of the very process which resists modernization. That
resistance is, after all, what saves her from the clutches
of her Europeanization and, paradoxically, what presages
the painful rift in her consciousness. In other words,
the Bournehills psychological wall, like that of the Barbadi-
ans in New York, imprisons as much as it protects. The dif-
ference between Merle and her people is that she has leaped
above and beyond its confines. The shock is so paralyzing
that she can never make the return leap. However, because,
as far as the people are concerned, she has never leaped,
she can help them gradually to remove it or to maintain it.
Hence all she can offer to Saul is an understanding of the
disparity between her intellectual and emotional selves.
Only then can Saul understand why the people resist his
attempts at modernization.

Through Merle's relationship to the people of
Bournehills Marshall confronts the revolutionary aspects
of West Indian history with the individual assurance of
V. S. Reid (in New Day) and the communal awareness of George

Lamming (in <u>In the Castle of My Skin</u>), although her approach
is less immediate than theirs. Whereas Lamming brings the
Trinidadian uprising to the gates of his Barbadian village
and illustrates the initial stages of the disintegration of
the old socio-economic and psychological order, and whereas
Reid takes the reader on a historical journey beginning with
the Morant Bay Rebellion, Marshall, taking a more imaginative
approach, concerns herself mainly with the symbolic content
of revolution. In <u>The Chosen Place: The Timeless People</u>,
the revolutionary spirit is symbolized by Cuffee Ned, a
figure from the Bournehills past who, tired of British
exploitation of his people's cane industry, leads a revolt
against the British. Although the revolt is finally quelled
and Cuffee Ned is killed, the people continue to draw strength
from Cuffee's example. But it is the moment of revolutionary
decision, not the process of the consequent revolutionary
actions, that impresses itself lastingly upon their conscious-
ness. Thus they become "the timeless people," frozen in a
moment of total rebellion against Westernization. It is
apparent, then, that Marshall reveals revolution not as the
continuous process toward political independence (as in
Reid's <u>New Day</u>) nor as the continual process of socio-political
and psychological disruption (as in Lamming's <u>In the Castle
of My Skin</u>) but as the eternal moment when a people, because
of their own unique psychology, chooses between the old
order and the new. For Lamming and Reid West Indian revolution

is the gradual, self-determined establishment of a new socio-political order. For Marshall it is the seemingly irrevocable decision to reject or accept change. In the specific case of the people of Bournehills, the decision is to reject change which is motivated by forces outside their own cultural habitat.

And so the Bournehills community holds an annual carnival to ritualize the Cuffee spirit. They dramatize a symbolic reenactment of the stages of Cuffee's rebellion which engenders their reality. The symbolic use to which the villagers put Cuffee's revolt is a vivid illustration of Frantz Fanon's observation that people use particular incidents in their history to keep alive the revolutionary zeal. Although the instigator of the remembered action may be an outlaw to the established power, says Fanon, he is a hero to the oppressed people and can still inspire another insurgence.[36] In Marshall's novel another insurgence is experienced; but it is consistent with Marshall's overall approach to revolution that this new insurgence accomplishes nothing more significant than the burning of some of the property owned by whites. That is all the villagers intend to accomplish--simply a manifestation of the fact that the moment of decision against the new order is eternally a part of them. Through some transforming act of will, the people have given timelessness to Cuffee and to the quality

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[36] Frantz Fannon, p. 69.

of their lives.

Merle has been caught in a similar timelessness.
When she realizes the full cost of her Europeanization in
England (loss of husband and daughter and loss of self-
definition), she experiences a mental and emotional paralysis
which seems to anchor her being to that particular spot in
time. Eight years later she tells Saul about the seeming
timelessness of her condition: ". . . there's no getting
over it. And time's been no help. These eight years have
been like a day" (p. 361). Like the people of Bournehills,
she expresses the moment symbolically:

> "Oh! If only you had seen the flat that day [my husband
> and daughter left]. It didn't look as if they had gone.
> Everything was still there--all the furniture, his desk,
> the pull-out sofa we slept on, and in the other room
> the baby's crib next to the dresser where I kept her
> things, with the drawers closed as if her clothes were
> still inside. Everything in its place, but empty. I've
> never been in a place that felt more empty. And yet I
> couldn't believe they were gone. I kept telling myself
> he had only taken her out somewhere and they would soon
> be back. All I had to do was wait. And I did. I must
> have stood for hours in the middle of that room waiting
> for them, unable to move. And in a way, you know, I'm
> still there. I'm still standing in the middle of that
> two-room flat in Leeds waiting for them to come back.
> . . . (p. 361)

Also like her people, Merle exploits the symbolic
potential of Cuffee's revolt. For her Cuffee's revolutionary
decision reaffirms the reality of her own decision to reject
European decadence. It saves her from reverting to her
former decadence during those eight years when the need to
find a balm for her timeless pain prompts her capitulation
to the desensitizing forces of decadence. Like her people,

then, Merle is the embodiment of the spirit of Cuffee Ned.

Ironically, the potential for the release of Merle and her people from their corresponding psychological prisons is embodied in their attitude to Cuffee. Despite Cuffee's heroism, his rebellion did, after all, fail to expel the physical presence of the exploiters; Bournehills is still not solely the province of its native population. Their physical imprisonment, over which they have no control, is as real as their psychological imprisonment. Saul Amron suggests--and he is probably right--that what Bournehills needs is a full-scale revolution which will succeed in dispelling the forces of exploitation so that the people may become capable of self-determined and self-engendered change. And only Merle can lead them, if and when she is ready. But regardless of the outcome of her journey to Africa, she must eventually return to the land of her birth:

> "But I'll be coming back to Bournehills. This is home. Whatever little I can do that will matter for something must be done here. A person can run for years but sooner or later he has to take a stand in the place which, for better or worse, he calls home, do what he can to change things there." (p. 498)

The Chosen Place: The Timeless People is a monument to those decreasing numbers of West Indian settlements where the people have resisted Westernization. In the final analysis, Bournehills itself represents a state of mind. With this novel Marshall demonstrates her insight into the nature of West Indian communal life at its most atavistic level and of the fierce clash (in Merle) between atavism

and modernity which is the fate of the racially conscious

West Indian. Along with In the Castle of My Skin and New

Day, The Chosen Place: The Timeless People must be counted

as a novel which makes a specific contribution to the under-

standing of the West Indian psycho-cultural relationship

to its history and to its present. When it is looked at as

a logical sequel to Brown Girl, Brownstones, it becomes clear

that Marshall is firmly located in the tradition of the

West Indian novel, as we have found that tradition to include:

(1) the authorial concern for character, time and place;

(2) the characters desire and need of community; (3) the

sense of complacency in the West Indian awareness; (4) the

journey from racial complacency to racial self-assertion;

(5) the pain of physical and psychological exile; (6) the

possibility of the West Indian's return from the state of

exile to the state of community; and (7) confrontation with

the role of revolution in the collective West Indian con-

sciousness.

Obviously, Marshall offers the most authoritative,

the most authentic and the most comprehensive comment of any

Afro-American novelist on the West Indian situation and the

West Indian personality. Her novels offer no trace of the

West Indian stereotypes. With Brown Girl, Brownstones the

attitude of the Afro-American author to the West Indian

returns to that of Delany in that Marshall fosters the

struggle toward the harmonious relationship between the

two cultures. The portrait of Selina is meant, after all,
as a synthesis of the modern Afro-American and West Indian
in the same way that the portrait of Henry Blake represents
the pre-emancipation psychological harmony between these
two cultures. For although Selina is, strictly speaking,
Afro-American, she is exposed to and affected by West Indian
influences. Like young Lamming in In the Castle of My Skin,
she is racially complacent until she becomes aware that some-
thing vital is missing in her own consciousness; and, again
like Lamming, she leaves her surroundings to go in search
of racial and cultural fulfillment. It is clear, however,
that in The Chosen Place: The Timeless People Marshall is
moving toward the delineation of the West Indian psychology
as a thing in itself. In depicting the uniqueness of the
West Indian temperament, Marshall reveals that her perception
of the West Indian is essentially the same as the West Indian
perception of itself, as that perception is embodied in
specific West Indian novels.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

A study of this nature inevitably exposes the limita-
tions of the Afro-American novelists' depictions of the
West Indian personality. Beginning with Delany's Blake,
1859, the Afro-American/West Indian relationship in the
Afro-American novel gets off to an unrealistic start
because of Delany's attempt to idealize his hero. There
is no Afro-American/West Indian conflict either in Henry
Blake's consciousness or in the novel as a whole. Such a
portrait might have seemed believable in 1859, when the con-
ditions of slavery sometimes urged the slave to heights of
heroism and to attempts to foster ideological unity between
all blacks. But twentieth-century socio-political reali-
ties in the West Indies and in the United States make us
aware that the portrait of Henry Blake no longer represents
the truth of the Afro-American/West Indian situation.

Almost without exception, the twentieth-century
Afro-American novelists discussed in this study place their
West Indian characters in Harlem, New York, a fact which
makes one suspect that these novelists see the West Indian

community in Harlem as a microcosm of West Indian life. If
the suspicion is correct, then one is justified in expecting
these writers to have taken the trouble to learn what a
West Indian community is really like. Had they done so,
they might have depicted the West Indian characters in such
a manner as to aid the reader's understanding of the dynamics
of a West Indian community or at least of a realistic West
Indian personality. We have seen, however, that, with the
exception of Marshall, these novelists are concerned more
with their perceptions of isolated West Indian personalities
than they are with the West Indian community. Consequently,
the characters are inherently limited in the degree to which
they can contribute to the reader's understanding of the West
Indian personality. Perigua (Dark Princess) and Ras (Invisi-
ble Man) are undoubtedly deranged; and Mr. Proudhammer
(Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone) does his best not to
relate to any community except that which exists in his
imagination. In each case the nature of the characteriza-
tion is influenced by the contempt which the author displays
toward the character as a West Indian. Of course, one should
not seriously find fault with an author's successful embodi-
ment of his attitude. The critical energies can be more
wisely used for the exploration of the reasons and the
implications of that attitude. Such an exploration is what
I have attempted with regard to the portraits of Perigua,
Ras and Mr. Proudhammer. In each case I have found the

author to be either unaware of or uninterested in the kind
of multi-dimensionality which we associate with the human
personality. Add to these the portrait of the Holdenfields
in Williams' Mothersill and the Foxes and we have four
instances in which the West Indian is used, in effect, as
an objective correlative through which the authors express
their awareness of the potential for self-hate (Perigua),
social chaos (Ras), spiritual impotence (Mr. Proudhammer)
and sexual decadence (the Holdenfields). Of the four
Williams alone displays an attitude of tolerance and concern.
All four, however, objectify some of the undesirable and
feared possibilities inherent in the Afro-American tempera-
ment. Admittedly, self-hate, social chaos, spiritual impo-
tence and sexual decadence must be seen as possibilities for
human beings universally, but my point has been that these
Afro-American novelists use the West Indian to embody these
potentials as they specifically apply to the Afro-American
scene.

In retrospect, the uniqueness of Delany's sympathetic
and multi-dimensional treatment of Henry Blake is quite
apparent. As far as the authorial attitude toward the West
Indian is concerned, the portraits of Williams, Austin,
Farmer and Killens, which span the years 1958 to 1975, begin
to fill the gap between the adulation of Delany and the
contempt of DuBois and Ellison, which contempt is revealed
in novels spanning the years 1928-1958. (Baldwin's Tell

<u>Me How Long the Train's Been Gone</u> is an exception in that

is the only Afro-American novel written after 1958 which

reveals an authorial contempt for the West Indian character.)

It is after we examine West Indian portraits in the West

Indian novel and relate them to the thematic exigencies of

West Indian authors that we can appreciate the kinds of

distortions and limitations which attend the West Indian

portraits in the Afro-American novel. As we have seen, such

examination exposes major differences between the West Indian

and Afro-American psycho-cultural experiences and, conse-

quently, between the two perceptions of the West Indian.

Because of the new militancy on the part of specific Afro-

American authors (Austin, Farmer and Killens) and because

of the new interest in the black diaspora spurred by the

black nationalist activities of the sixties, the West Indian

in the Afro-American novel is beginning to be depicted

sympathetically and less stereotypically, and in a manner

which reveals greater authorial insight into the psychologi-

cal makeup of the West Indian.

It seems to me that the nature of the West Indian

portraits in the Afro-American novel will continue to be

determined by the Afro-American writers' interest in pro-

moting the ideological and aesthetic unity between the mem-

bers of the black diaspora. Such promotion implies the

continued adoption of a black aesthetic and will conceivably

lead to more attempts on the part of these writers to set

novels outside the geographical and cultural boundaries
of the United States. It was Delany's interest in the inter-
national situation of black people that led to his depiction
of the Afro-Cuban socio-political realities in the nineteenth
century, and it was John Williams' interest in the plight of
black children internationally which led him to set a part
of Mothersill and the Foxes in the West Indies. It is
interesting to note, incidentally, that in an area as
racially complacent as the English-speaking West Indies
there are more black writers who have used Africa as the
setting for novels than there are in the United States, a
phenomenon which is itself worthy of critical exploration.

Without a doubt, the best support for my contention
that interest in the black diaspora will determine the
nature of any future West Indian portraits in the Afro-
American novel is the literary accomplishment of Paule
Marshall. But our discussion of Marshall's novels has
exposed her as an anomaly of the Afro-American literary
tradition, as far as the perception of the West Indian
personality is concerned. In fact, it is reasonable to
suggest that she is more West Indian than Afro-American
since she grew up in a West Indian home in a part of Brooklyn
inhabited mainly by West Indians. Hence we cannot finally
regard her as a typical Afro-American novelist. Nor can we
regard her as a typical West Indian novelist, since the
fact that she was born and reared in America separates her

from the West Indian novelists. We are forced to draw a parallel between the role of her protagonist, Selina (<u>Brown Girl, Brownstones</u>) and her own position in literature. That is, just as Selina represents a synthesis of the modern Afro-American and West Indian, so Paule Marshall can be seen as a "link" between the two cultures. As such, she makes her own special contribution to the Afro-American attempt to depict the West Indian personality.

But what about the West Indian attempt to depict the Afro-American personality? Does the West Indian novel reveal a corresponding concern with the Afro-American personality at home or abroad? How do the Afro-Americans and West Indians perceive Africans? And how are they in turn perceived by Africans? As the asking of these questions suggests, this study has focused upon a small part of a larger intra-cultural complex. Each aspect of the subject should make an absorbing study in itself.

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