

a literary critic's approach to From Columbus to Castro
and other miscellaneous writings of Dr. Eric Williams

From Columbus to Castro purports to be more than just another history book. Its sub-title which makes it "The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969", implies that it is the definitive study of 477 years of history in these widely scattered islands. Apart from this fantastic claim is the fact that the book was written by Dr. E. E. Williams, the Prime Minister of a country which has been for some years in a state of silent turmoil. Thus the reader is particularly interested in the views of its author on the Caribbean past; his sense of how the past permeates and defines the present, and the perspectives which he offers for the future.

Since, too, From Columbus to Castro is presented as the fruit of over eighteen years experience and research, and succeeds an impressive list of books, monographs pamphlets and lectures, it is of particular interest as the intellectual climax of a long academic and political career, and as the synthesis of a lifetime's experience in both the writing and making of West Indian history. Questions which engage the reader almost before he reads the book are, "What new things does Dr. Williams have to say about the Caribbean past?", and "How coherent will his vision turn out to be?" "What, if any, is the connection between his scholarship and his politics?"

In addition to all this, From Columbus to Castro has already been used as the springboard from which the PNM means to jump into the era of the swinging seventies. It has been welcomed in by an exclusive dinner, which the publisher himself, Mr. Deutsch, travelled from London to attend; by an adulatory speech made in worship of the author by a minister of his government who, from his lack of concrete references, seems not to have read the book as yet; and by a meeting of the PNM at Queen's Park Savannah, in which Dr. Williams, fulfilling his multiple role of historian-politician and philosopher-king, unleashed on an unsuspecting public the Party's new Charter, which contains (and I quote) "the most profound concept in contemporary political social and economic thought." (end of quote). This seems rather like an attempt to oust Mr. Burnham of the Republic of Guyana in this game of Caribbean one-upmanship. Mr. Burnham had scored a first in the Caribbean by instituting the world's only Cooperative Republic in 1969. Now it is the Trinidad Magna Carta ushered in by a massive history book, which is certainly much more impressive than Mr. Burnham's A Destiny to Mould, which ushered in the Cooperative Republic.

From Columbus to Castro, then, is meant to be both the historian's bible for the new era, and the great work from which the national movement in Trinidad and Tobago will derive its intellectual dynamic against the deepening pressures of this age of neo-colonialism. It is Dr. Williams's titanic attempt to bring up to date such thoughts and perceptions as are his; to revise old insights, to include fresh ideas, and to assemble both the archaic and the immediate visions in a single massive volume, which would show once and for all how West Indian history can be impressed into the service of decolonisation; how the academic can become a politician and yet preserve his academic integrity, while at the same time reassuring former students of the now defunct University of Woodford Square, that despite his years of hermit-like invisibility, the great brain is still solidly at work.

These days it is difficult to view without scepticism anything Dr. Williams has to say either as politician or as historian. His last two history books have been the objects of quite astringent criticism from professional historians at UWI. Dr. K.G. Laurence, for example, views Dr. Williams's History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago as an excellent "manifesto of a subjugated people," but criticises the author for a tendency to overstate his case, and to omit a number of things which would significantly modify his conclusions. Dr. Laurence mentions in particular Dr. Williams's failure to credit the contribution of Albert Gomes; to assess the work of the Abolitionists; to treat the system of Apprenticeship, the effect of World War II and the American occupation on the islands; to consider the Moyne Report; or to see the long struggle for self-government as a continuous and unbroken process. He sees Williams's treatment of the post-1956 era as "frankly partisan" and ends with an implicit rejection of his methodology.

However it is obviously desirable that the books which will dictate the view of their own history which the peoples of the Caribbean will possess for the next generation should be written as historics not as nationalist manifestos. Otherwise it will be necessary for later generations to unlearn much of the "history" which the first generation learned, just as in the United States, for example, it has been necessary to rewrite the traditional views of the emergence of that great country in the eighteenth century. (1)

(2)

Dr. Laurence then goes on to define the problem as an imperfect marriage between the historian and the politician.

Dr. Williams of course is both politician and historian, and if it be said that it is the politician who gives the book its punch, it is certainly the historian who gives it its authority. That authority needs frequently to be challenged, for the nationalist politician has from time to time led the historian to swerve dangerously; but the book is a great achievement.(1)

One wonders whether the last statement is not defeated by all that precedes it.

Elsa Govcia's review of British Historians and the West Indies, first published in Caribbean Quarterly and since republished in John La Rose's New Beacon Review, Collection One, (1968), is in its calm way a devastating piece of criticism. She thinks that Dr. Williams has misnamed his book, and is able to show that he does not examine the work of seven or eight major British historians who wrote extensively about the West Indies, while he includes the work of an American who did not write about the West Indies at all. She mentions the 'combination of omissions and hasty dogmatism which mars his present work,' and concludes:

Whether in education or history, good intentions are not enough, and the road to hell is paved with authoritative half-truths. No one is ever educated or liberated from the past by being taught how easy it is to substitute new shibboleths for old. (2)

She finds the book "disappointing and even somewhat irresponsible", and sees it as "just not good enough either for the people or for the students of the West-Indies who are likely to read it." Later, she suggests that Dr. Williams write essays on the contemporary West Indian scene, which his experience as historian and politician could render valuable.

With these two warnings behind us, then, we cannot help but approach From Columbus to Castro with some degree of scepticism. Indeed, such scepticism is doubly necessary since Dr. Williams makes fantastic claims for the book, and has been prepared to use its publication as a means of bolstering up his political position in Trinidad and Tobago. Dr. Williams states his purpose in a Preface.

Few 'colonials' have to date extended their nationalism to cultural field and dedicated themselves to the task of writing -- or rewriting, where necessary, their own history.

The present work is designed to fill this gap and to correct this deficiency. Its scope is the entire West Indian area, including the Guianas -- whether their connections have been or are British or French, Spanish or American or Danish

Its goal is the cultural integration of the entire area, a synthesis of existing knowledge, as the essential foundation of the great need of our time, closer collaboration among the various countries of the Caribbean, with their common heritage of subordination to and dictation by outside interests (pp. 11-12)

From Columbus to Castro, then, has grown out of a belief that little is being done by West Indians in the rewriting of their own history, and its preface is a direct criticism of the History Department of the University of the West Indies. Dr. Williams has now come to rescue historiography in the West Indies from the doldrums, as he claimed in 1956 to have rescued Trinidad from the Crown Colony system and from political anarchy and immorality in public affairs. He must have been living in a hermit's cell somewhere, by-passed by time. He clearly has taken no account of the growing number of unpublished theses in West Indian history, the fruit of hard work, serious scholarship, and at times of nationalist pride. In this area, the lack of West Indian publishing houses willing to handle academic texts, is a felt one. Publishers know that relatively few West Indian historians will have Dr. Williams's ability to advertise their books on trips abroad, as well as on the local television and radio, since very few of them will be Prime Minister of anywhere.

Apart from its messianic urge, the preface expresses Dr. Williams's very commendable aim of working towards "the cultural integration of the entire area." This indicates that he is one of an increasing band of creative writers in the West Indies who sense the essential cultural similarity of the area. Dr. Williams, despite his abrupt withdrawal from the Federation after Jamaica left, has been an advocate of regional cooperation since the mid-forties. In the fifties when he was lecturing about the necessity for a Federation, George Lamming was producing New World of the Caribbean, a programme of readings from British Caribbean writers

Which was federal in perspective, growing as it did out of the optimism at the prospective British West Indian Federation. Now From Columbus to Castro appears while CARIFTA is in its embryonic stage, and while West Indian writers like Brathwaite and Walcott are annually widening their perspectives. Literature, history and politics are thus quietly serving as a counterpoint to each other, and Dr. Williams is certainly not alone in the great task which he says that he has undertaken. It is therefore good to hear Dr. Williams mentioning the names of some of the region's creative writers in his final chapter, and in his preface implying the indentivity of his quest with theirs, though it is by no means evident from some of his past and most of his recent political activities, that he has applied their severe critique and rejection of our sterile politics and Afro-Saxon attitudes, to himself. It seems that he has read them to no end.

Dr. Williams's notion of writing history has hardly developed since Capitalism and Slavery. He still conceives of history writing as the gathering together of a stockpile of facts to be hurled like bricks against dead and living imperialists. Capitalism and Slavery, like The Negro in the Caribbean (1942) was the product of the age when Black intellectuals first began as a body to refute the stereotypes of the African which Europeans had for centuries been vending. Those two early works were the academic equivalent of Césaire's Cahier and Damas's Pigments which the French banned and burned during World War II because this colonial had been able to show that France as a colonial power had been just as racist as Nazi Germany. Williams's early work was a significant advance in Black consciousness. The fact that it is largely a reaction to white prejudice explains its extremely factual nature. Williams knew that if he aspired to altering the past, he could do so only by a true rediscovery of fact. The meticulous citation of facts and figures was a necessary defence against the accusation which is still being made about Capitalism and Slavery, that Williams as a Black man was simply trying to write history as revenge. It was self that he sought to vindicate-- his own self and the racial one -- and the completeness of this self - vindication depended on the authenticity of the facts. Dr. Williams at this stage couldn't afford to write too much propaganda, since identity it elf depended on his telling a substantial part of the truth.

When the victim of colonialism begins to tell his version of the truth, he normally shocks the liberals within the ranks of the colonising race most. For the colonial, the study of his history is a journey into self rather than into time past, for the white liberal, it is more generally evasion of the deeper implications of racial and cultural contact under the artificial conditions of imperialism. Recently, Sylvia Wynter has argued that British critics of West Indian literature, show a similar capacity for evading its central issues and agonies.(3) She identifies their failure as a failure to admit the part their people played in West Indian history, and to see how this produced the rebellion of the West Indian mind in both its positive and negative aspects. Her argument is that such rebellion leads to a totally different approach to art, which critics brought up in a metropolitan tradition of criticism judge from the standpoint of their own irrelevant or inadequate aesthetic. They therefore sidestep the judgement which West Indian literature passes on both their culture and their role in the sordid drama of Empire, by concentrating on the aesthetic flaws rather than the wider implications of this literature.

Significantly, as Dr. Williams realises, it is the Irish writers like Swift, Orwell, Shaw and Joyce who come nearest to the corrosive irony which is the peculiar gift of the colonial experience. "I understood Britain's Irish policy and the Irish 'colonial' better after I had read Swift, Shaw and Joyce," he writes in Chapter 3 of Inward Hunger. He also mentions with approval in From Columbus to Castro Swift's scathing satire on British imperialism in Gulliver's Travels. (see p. 176) Whites who have known the pressures of colonialism themselves, generally have an approach to history and to life which resembles that of their Black counterparts. Joseph Conrad, that Polish colonial, sailor and exile in his Heart of Darkness was one of the few Europeans who realised an idea, that is a first principle with Black writers: that in the imperial collision it was the West that was on trial -- Western culture, values, mythology, scholarship, tradition, and reputation for humanitarianism. Heart of Darkness, a book which shows neither a love nor an understanding of the African, is nevertheless a macabre study of the decay of the West and ends up by expressing a profound disillusion at the process of history itself.

The Williams of Capitalism and Slavery was part of this international company of acrid ironists all bound together by the futility of their col-

lonial status. His work most resembles Swift's in tone, in clarity of style and in acrimony. Indeed, since Williams thinks so highly of Swift, a brief comparison of the two men is not out of place. Swift's family had in the past seen better times, and he grew up with a boundless ambition for high office and aristocratic position.

All my endeavours, from a boy, to distinguish myself, were only for want of a great title and fortune, that I might be used like a lord by those who have an opinion of my parts -- whether right or wrong, it is no matter, and so the reputation of wit or great learning does the office of a blue ribbon, or of a coach and six horses.(4)

Swift, then, equated authority with respectability. An Anglo-Irish politician who would have liked to be a moving force in English politics, he was exiled instead to an Irish deanery because of his 'subversive' writings as chief Tory journalist and pamphleteer. There he oscillated between contempt for the Irish whom he considered unworthy of a man of his calibre, and raged at the English who had banished him from his beloved coffee-house crowd, where he was a gentleman among equals.

Swift saw Ireland with a colonial's self-contempt as "this land of slaves" into which he had been dropped by accident.(5) His crowning ambition in Ireland was "to have none about me that denies my authority" and to live the life of a "king among slaves." (6) This, however, he regarded as a poor substitute for the attractions of high-level politics. His reaction was fascinating. First, he surrounded himself with minions, minor clerics, impoverished students seeking advancement, and later on with small businessmen and shop-keepers, over whom he exercised a more absolute authority than ever Lear could over his one hundred soldiers. Next he championed the Irish cause against a typically iniquitous piece of English legislation and was cheered through the streets of Dublin by a people he detested, as a national hero. In his pamphlet against the introduction of Wood's half-pence, he all but stated the case for Irish Home Rule, and in his famous and macabre A Modest Proposal he equated the English treatment of the Irish peasant with cannibalism, which he set out to prove could more profitably be replaced by actual state-controlled cannibalism. The argument was that since England as an imperial power was concerned only with the making of profit she ought to allow no moral scruple, no mere consideration of humanity, to stand in her way. In this satire, Swift also stated the principle of Buy Local, and in part blamed the Irish businessman for his lack of nationalist pride, and for the shoddy nature of his product. In Gulliver's Travels Swift poured all his thwarted ambition not only into a rejection of British imperialism, but of the entire process of history and politics. In short, his life was an example of the now well-known colonial love-hate complex, which binds the colonized to the colonizer, teaches him contempt for self and a twisted love for his people, and leads finally to the emergence of irony both as a quality of perception and as a psychological necessity.

This is, of course, nothing like a full summary of the life or career of Jonathan Swift. It is a simple isolation of the colonial experience insofar as it affected his career. There are several respects in which this career resembles that of Dr. Williams. In Inward Hunger Williams sees himself as the product of a largely irrelevant primary and secondary education who sets out to 'conquer' Oxford. Chapter Three of this book begins with an extremely lyrical description of Oxford's broad academic tradition. Dr. William's discovery of this heritage is seen almost as a fulfilment of self, a true discovery of identity. Then there is a latish discovery of the pain and irrelevance, the non-identity of being a colonial at Oxford -- and a Black colonial at that. The second half of the chapter is decidedly less lyrical than the first. In it Dr. Williams describes how he moved from under the protective wing of his tutor and faced what he interprets as the racial prejudice of the institution as a whole, when he tried to qualify for a fellowship at All Souls. If a grim sort of humour informs his description of the ordeal of dinner-parties, teacups and choosing the correct teaspoon at the right moment, while saying precisely the correct piece of irrelevance that passes for wit in that incestuous world, it is a kind of naive outraged innocence that informs the narration of a passage like this one:

The first incident occurred in the examination room. The examination included an oral translation from a foreign language. I choose

French. Spanish not being available. The student had to enter a long room, in which he found some forty Fellows seated around a table. In the course of translation, I made a horrible mistake. The crowd roared. I received the distinct impression that the roar was aimed at me and not at the mistake. It sobered me at once, I lost all nervousness, I looked all around the room, at one individual member after the other until quiet had been restored. I felt like-a schoolmaster upbraiding by looks a group of unruly pupils; some began to pick their nails, one looked out of the window, one twiddled with a book in front of him. When there was absolute quiet I resumed translation in a cold, unemotional voice. At the end I came to a passage of which I could not make head or tail. I declined to translate. The warden pressed me three times to have a go at it. I refused. To set the matter at rest, I told him on the final occasion that I did not wish to give rise to another such guffaw as I had already listened to. He thanked me for coming, and I took my leave.(7)

This is a remarkable passage precisely because it reveals much more of Dr. Williams and the cultural predicament of the Afro-Saxon colonial than he admits.. Beguiled by the idea that he had conquered Oxford merely because he had proved himself their best history student in years, he had dreamed briefly of joining that world of entrenched snobbery and tradition. As he saw it, the world had replied by laughing at his blackness and his ignorance of one of its languages. Like Swift, Dr. Williams found his ambition thwarted by the world towards which he aspired, and his dignity undermined. His rejoinder was also similar to Swift's. He stresses his moral superiority to his tormentors -- "I felt like a schoolmaster upbraiding by looks a group of unruly pupils"-- The Oxford Fellows, though, probably saw him as a tiny little Black boy, whom, they didn't want to torture too obviously. The entire passage is like Mr. Biswas's first appearance before the family tribunal of the Tulsis. There is a passage in Chapter 4 of A House for Mr. Biswas which seems exactly to describe Dr. Williams's pose here : "Looking stern, preoccupied and, as he hoped, dangerous, Mr. Biswas became very busy helping the carter to unload." The incident has certainly taken its full toll, maiming part of the psyche beyond all redemption. Dr. Williams's entire life since that period has been partly an attempt to prove to the Fellows of All Souls that he is not only their equal, but their superior; not anybody's pupil, but everybody's schoolmaster.

How, for example, is the reader expected to take this account of the famous confrontation between Dr. Williams and Mr. X of the Caribbean Commission, when, according to him, they were trying to use his book The Negro in the Caribbean as an excuse to dismiss him?

Throughout the discussion I was conscious of two impressions (a) that Mr. X was literally flabbergasted. I doubt that he ever expected any colonial to write or speak to him like that; (b) that morally and physically I was his superior. That he should be evasive and apologetic I fully expected. But he was more than that. At times he was quite incoherent..... when we were through he had had enough; I could have gone on (talking) for three hours (8)

Here we find the daydream which the colonial always has of humiliating Massa, his longing to ply the castigating whip for a change. Beneath it lies the need to prove self and manhood, which can never be fulfilled unless there is an audience of squirming colonizers and a chorus of applauding slaves. There is a kind of triumphant pettiness about the passage which rings embarrassingly near to the core of the colonial psyche. All colonials have had the dream. It was one of the moving forces behind Swift's satire. In the case of Dr. Williams, though, a brilliant mind constantly satirises itself. The last passage quoted reveals all the bitterness of the in-fighting of the late Crown Colony era;; the loneliness of the individual whose dignity had always to be asserted as limits were placed on personality. V.S. Naipaul, who came a generation after Dr. Williams and also attended Oxford, found it a distinctly different place from the one Williams described. In contrast to philistine Trinidad, Naipaul tells us, England has been the only place where he has discovered "generosity -- the admiration of equal for equal." (p.42, The Middle Passage, Deutsch, 1962) England must have changed after twenty years;; but under the strain of the thirties, the divided Afro-Saxon colonial psyche could scarcely be expected to cope without a weird unpredictable oscillation

between its component halves. The victim learns to feel a simultaneous blend of love, hatred and contempt for both Black and white, and he swings unpredictably between these conflicting emotions. Sometimes he expresses all of them at the same time, and in the same action. The result of this is generally irony of some sort, a peculiar rigour of mind, and a schoolmaster's desire to castigate and be respected.

This is perhaps what explains the similarity between minds as different as Dr. Williams's and Swift's. His habit of accumulating facts and figures and arranging them for ironic effect, and of sometimes summarising argument by an immense tabulation of detail is similar to a method Swift employs from time to time, to clinch his point for good and all. In the passage about to be quoted, Lemuel Gulliver receives the answer of that rational superman, the king of Brobdingnag, to his panegyric on European history and civilisation. The king's voice, which at this point is almost certainly Swift's, is the bewildered voice of the colonial rebel passing judgement on the myths which the colonising power has created for itself, and used in the process of controlling the minds of the subject people. Indeed part of Swift's Olympian laughter is at the fact that such a tiny immoral insect as Gulliver, European Man, should undertake the gigantic task of trying to change the customs and mentality of alien peoples.

He was perfectly astonished with the historical account I gave him of our affairs during the last century, protesting it was only a heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments, the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, or ambition could produce. (9)

What follows is one of the most famous passages in Swift where European Man is described as one of the most pernicious races of odious little vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the face of the earth.

Now compare this passage from Dr. Williams's From Columbus to Castro, which is simply one of many in his work.

One of the most vigorous of the abolitionists, G. Thompson, said that the immigrants into Mauritius were indolent, mendicants, runaways, vagrants, thieves, vagabonds, filthy, diseased, dissolute, immoral, disgusting, covered with sores; some were priests, some jugglers, some barbers, some wrestlers, some cooks, some grooms, some beffoons, some herdsmen, some pedlars, some scullions, bakers, tailors, confectioners, instead of agricultural labourers. (p. 346)

It may be that Dr. Williams is quoting Thompson directly without benefit of quotation marks; or it may be that he is paraphrasing Thompson. Whichever is true, it is clear that he likes the pamphleteer style of the passage, which also appears in History of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It may also be the vigorous polemical approach of such eighteenth century giants as Swift and Defoe that attracts Williams to their work. He is, like them, a polemicist of no mean order. The passage just quoted, though an extreme example, captures the main characteristics of Williams's style. Here can be seen his passion for making lists of words, facts, statistics -- the passion for cataloguing experience in a manner reminiscent of Robinson Crusoe's diary. Even for the economic historian the passion is an extreme one.

In From Columbus to Castro, as in Capitalism and Slavery, one has the sense of a careful compilation and organisation of fact to suit the exigencies of a central purpose. Examples of this accumulation abound in both books -- the later book draws heavily on material from the former -- and are especially to be seen in the chapters where Dr. Williams shows how the slave trade affected things like ship-building, textile and iron industries in England. Here he mentions every minute article made from iron and used in the trade: fetters, axes, iron-hoops, hand-cuffs, stoves, tools, guns, and a host of others. This accumulation of detail which at times threatens to break down into absurdity, is, no doubt, meant to convey the impression of the enormity of the trade, and is reinforced by a barrage of statistics, with which most other historians would have been satisfied. The device is semi-literary and semi-rhetorical.

One merit of this method of sampling fact, when, as in Capitalism and Slavery it is attended by direct reference notes, an adequate index and the meticulous citation of sources, is that it validates the work as a useful reference text, and enhances other scholars to benefit fully from the scholarship and archivist activity of the pioneer historian. Indeed, G. R. Mellor on checking Dr. Williams's Capitalism and Slavery discovered that a few quotations had been taken out of context and edited to suit his main thesis, and concluded with the warning "that unless those who are engaged in research are very careful they will find what they are looking for." (10) When, however, as in From Columbus to Castro, absolutely no indication is given as to the sources of the majority of facts and figures, and there are few reference notes, the worth of the book is immediately in question. It cannot be safely used as the reference text it was intended to be, since the student has no immediate or remote means of checking either the facts or figures. He will never be able to ascertain unless he duplicated research already done by Dr. Williams (which would be rather a waste) whether the author is vending some of the same authoritative half-truths that both Drs. Laurence and Goveia have identified in his later work.

Lack of references must therefore be cited as a grievous flaw in From Columbus to Castro, especially since a substantial part of it is devoted to the presentation of bare statistics on the sugar industry throughout the ages. By constantly citing statistics without citing sources, Dr. Williams makes it impossible for the student to view these statistics in any context other than the one he himself provides. The quotation which he takes from Mark Twain about there being "lies, damned lies and statistics" may well be true for his own work, for all the reader knows.

Another shortcoming is that at times fact seems to be indulged in for its own sake, until the pattern beneath the face of fact is obscured. Fact too often controls vision rather than vision fact. Perhaps this is because a sense of people as living complex beings rather than as economic, political or sociological abstractions, is generally missing from Dr. Williams's work. Elsa Goveia's comment on the West Indian historical experience is particularly apt here:

It is essential for West Indians to grasp in all its complexity the nature of the influence which slavery has exercised over their history. But they will not be able to do this until they can see the white colonists, the free people of colour and the Negro slaves as joint participants in a human situation which shaped all their lives. (11)

Dr. Williams would probably dismiss this, as he dismisses Mellor's thesis, as the "idealist conception of history" (p. 540), though all that Dr. Goveia seems to be asking for is "understanding of the basic pressures inherent in the situation." She would, perhaps, prefer to be regarded as a humanist historian, which is the category in which she, in her Historiography placed all those historians who, not only accepted the humanity of Indian and African, but tried to understand the complex human situation created by West Indian history.

Truly creative writing about the West Indian past and present, whether it has been accomplished by poets like Césaire, Walcott and Brathwaite, novelists such as Carpentier, Naipaul, Lamming or Jean Rys, historians such as Elsa Goveia, the C.L.R. James of The Black Jacobins, or Walter Rodney of A History of the Upper Guinea Coast; or a psychologist such as Fanon, has always been concerned with this need to understand and explore "the basic pressures inherent" in the West Indian situation. It has always been a question of trying to understand self, of self-knowledge. Ultimate deficiency in the historiography of the West Indies, has, for both colonizer and colonized, almost invariably implied a failure in self-knowledge.

In the case of Dr. Williams, there is at times, an almost deliberate abdication of the right to a self; an almost perverse reduction of experience to a rubbish-heap of statistics about sugar. In his work, people seem to be conceived of as the sum of the facts and statistics concerning their lives -- certainly a limited vision of experience, not calculated to fill anyone's inward hunger. One of the features about Swift's writing has had little influence on Dr. Williams's vision, is Swift's passionate protest most evident in A Modest Proposal, at the economists' tendency, real then as well

as now, to reduce people to statistics. In this respect the irony of the colonial experience has certainly turned against Dr. Williams. In order to counter the numerous damaging stereotypes which white people invented about Black people, Dr. Williams adopts a method of obsessive factuality, which in the end also drains Black experience of its humanity.

The true historian of the West Indies in this era will need to have a strong sense of the West Indian people such as is seldom evident in From Columbus to Castro. For in the case of the Afro-Weat Indians more than even the poor whites and the East Indians, it was an entire race consisting of several peoples, which was stereotyped as inferior, and whose every aspect of being was invaded and violated. It is therefore necessary for the West Indian historian, who like Dr. Williams seeks to bring about "the cultural integration of the entire area," (p.12) to do much more than present "a synthesis of existing knowledge" about the islands, (which Dr. Williams does not do, in any case).

The historian of the seventies has a different role from the historian of the thirties, which Dr. Williams has remained. He will have to be something of a social anthropologist, or a social psychologist, and try to chart the enduring quality of mind which enabled people to survive the evil combination of circumstances. He will have to reject the idea that the Blacks were simply the objects, and never the subjects of their history until comparatively recent times. The Blacks were the subjects of their history in so far as they negated the idea that they were less than human; in so far as they made repeated efforts at gaining their freedom; in so far as they took definite and unceasing action to help give their history its distinctive shape. They were its objects in so far as they were constantly at the mercy of their violators. Yet, as Dr. Williams himself notes, rebellion against their tormentors was as much part of the experience of Black people, as submission to them. The exceedingly repressive slave laws, as he says, bear eloquent witness of this fact. In rebelling, the slave was both expressing and vindicating a self. It is not enough, therefore, simply to mention the fact that such rebellions did occur, and then to make a list of the corpses. It is necessary, if there is to be fresh vision, to do the same depth analysis of the dichotomy of rebellion and submission, as has been done of the economics of slavery and sugar.

If the historian neglects to do this, he is bound to sink into the simple fatalism which informs Dr. Williams's huge work, in which the images of death and destruction are as pervasive as in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Some of the most icily impressive chapters of the book narrate the tale of the terrible wastage of lives, with a detachment that simply reinforces the blank brutality of the fact itself. Here, at least, the facts and figures are themselves frighteningly eloquent, and the factual method is fully justified in the face of the bleakness of the experience being described. In Chapter Four, it is the Spanish empire and the death of the Indians; later, it is to be seventeenth century Barbados; then Jamaica and Haiti; then indentureship in Trinidad and Guyana with their phenomenal mortality rates; after that it is the malnutrition, hookworm and malaria of the twentieth century West Indies As the Guyanese poet Martin Carter puts it in his poem "Black Friday 1962",

and everytime, and anytime,
in sleep or sudden wake, nightmare, dream,
always for me the same vision of cemeteries, slow funerals,
broken tombs, and death designing all.

One does not have to travel far in West Indian literature, to meet the image of death and abortion, though it is gradually being countered with images of the womb, birth, and resurrection.

It is as if the madness and eventual mysticism which Dr. Williams describes overtaking Columbus, have also penetrated the very tissue of the historical experience of these islands. This is, of course, also a favorite idea with West Indian writers. Lamming writes in In The Castle of My Skin:

A sailor called Christopher followed his mistake and those who came later have added theirs. Now he's dead, and as some say of the dead, safe and sound in the legacy of the grave. 'Tis a childish

saying for they be yet present with the living. The Only certainty these islands inherit was that sailor's mistake, and it's gone on from father to son 'mongst rich and poor.

This sense of fatality also informs Naipaul's The Middle Passage. It lies at the root of his irony, as much as it informs the acrid sarcasm which is part of Dr. Williams's response to the West Indian experience.

Time and again his conclusions about West Indian history closely resemble Naipaul's. As he traces the fierce international conflicts which took place in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is the irony that time and time again engages his mind. Consider this passage, for example, which is one of several:

From the territorial aspect, the West Indian colonies assumed an importance that appears almost incredible today, when one looks at those forgotten, neglected, forlorn dots on the map, specks of dust as de Gaulle dismissed them, the haggard and wrinkled descendants of the prima donnas and box office sensations of two hundred years ago. (p.88)

Ironical, if even a trifle sentimental. The exploiters of this age preserve a much greater sense of propriety. But the bauxite of Jamaica, Guyana and Surinam, the oil of Trinidad and Venezuela, the sugar of Cuba, and even the sunshine and the beaches of most of the islands, still seem to be exploitable commodities, and provide the enterprising descendant of the slave trader and planter, with his adequate pound of flesh. It is not the decline of the West Indies that should engage our sentiment, but rather their endurance as a perennially fertile hunting ground for everyone except the people who live there. There are several passages in Brathwaite's most recent poetry which make this point with a kind of despair. Reviewing the sterile economics and politics of the area, he concludes that:

..... the rope
will never unravel
its knots, the branding
iron's travelling flame that teaches
us pain, will never be
extinguished. The islands' jewels:
Saba, Barbuda, dry flat -
tened Antigua, will remain rocks,
dots, in the sky-blue frame
of the map. (Islands, the title-poem, p. 45)

The difference between Brathwaite (who is professionally a historian, and is about to publish one of those books on West Indian history which Dr. Williams claims that few people besides him are bothering to write), and Williams or Naipaul, who seem to be paralysed by the nightmare of West Indian history, is one of emphasis. Brathwaite is as much concerned with the fact and idea of survival, as he is with the powerful fact of mortality and weakness. Naipaul, when, as in A House for Mr. Biswas he does seriously consider the prospect of survival and rebellion, is concerned primarily with the interpenetration of rebellion and absurdity, of identity and nonentity in the West Indian response to experience. In Naipaul, the absurd West Indian situation leads to gestures at creative rebellion in the individual's efforts to arrange his meaningless world. These gestures may be Mr. Biswas's in his attempts to build a house, or Kripal Singh's in his attempts to be Premier of Crown Colony. In the small island, the barriers between plebeian and patrician are really superficial. All are caught in the circle of futility; thus rebellion itself, because it is conducted by nowhere people, culturally and economically both orphan and underprivileged, leads only to a further dimension of absurdity.

It seems to me that Dr. Williams, both in his writing and in his life, fulfills the Mohun Biswas syndrome. His sense of the absurdity of West Indian history has led to a most relentless and sustained rebellion. But as a book like Inward Hunger, or a pamphlet like My Relations with the Caribbean Commission proves, this rebellion remains painfully self-conscious, and at times betrays a longing to wield the same schoolmaster's whip whose lash still burns across his memory. The need to prove mastery returns him and his rebellion back to absurdity. An example will, perhaps, make my meaning clearer.

Massa Day Done, a speech which he made on March 22 1961, has been considered one of his greatest. It had to be. With Elections in the offing, C.L.R. James inexplicably fallen from grace, and the opposition forces growing daily more vocal, Williams needed to maintain his reputation for both rhetoric and intellect. Few Caribbean politicians would have found the former difficult. Dr. Williams began with a tirade of abuse against his political enemies which had the distinct ring of robber-talk and sans humanite picing which are both forms of folk rhetoric and must have pleased the crowd no end:

This pack of benighted idiots, this band of obscurantist politicians, this unholy alliance of egregious individualists, who have nothing constructive to say, who babble week after week the same criticisms that we have lived through for five long years, who, nincompoops as they are, think that they can pick up any old book the day before a debate in the Legislative Council and can pull a fast one in the Council by leaving out the sentence or the paragraph or the pages which contradict their ignorant declamations - for people like these power is all that matters.

The ending of the paragraph is rather a rhetorical anti-climax, but the string of explosive big words rhythmically building up to a kind of climax would have sounded good to the audience. Here was Dr. Williams, the national schoolmaster, fulfilling his dream which ^{has} become an obsession since the days of his humiliation before the Fellows of All Souls Oxford, of castigating unruly schoolboys, by a display of his intellectual superiority. It doesn't matter that professional historians have shown that Dr. Williams too tends to omit passages which contradict his argument; that was not the irony anyone would have been likely to notice at the time. Throughout the speech he stressed his intellectual superiority. To attack his ideas, he said, was to attack "20 years of assiduous research," and to jeopardise the interests of "our national community." He accused the Opposition of "intellectual dishonesty" while he and his University of Woodford Square were "dedicated to the pursuit of truth and to the dispassionate discussion of public issues." (Italics mine)

He then delivers a very fine lecture on the role of Massa in West Indian society. Massa was the one who historically brutalised Black people, and who was always opposed to their independence. He sought power for his own ends just like the house slaves in the Opposition party. In Trinidad, Massa met his match with the advent of the PNM (Dr. Williams's party) which had done so much to set right some of the major injustices which had been historically perpetrated by Massa. Next follows a list of the party's achievements in the areas of agriculture and lands, housing, health, education and so on.

The real surprise comes at the end when Dr. Williams boasts about the projected visit of Sir Winston Churchill to the island and expresses his pleasure that it is the PNM government which would proudly show him what local diplomacy had achieved in Chaguaramas, in begging him for "protection for West Indian products" and in "making representations to him in respect of West Indian migration to the United Kingdom." It is amazing how easily all the bombast deflates itself and, miraculously, still remains bombast. After the long litany which showed that Massa Day Done, Dr. Williams suddenly returns to the light of common day, where he depends on Massa's subsidies, and Massa's open door.

But the irony goes even further than this, because if Massa, by Dr. Williams's own definition earlier in the speech, was, black or white, a man who was ultimately opposed to the independence of the colonised, one couldn't choose a better example of Massa than Churchill himself. It was Churchill who was most adamant on the matter of India's Independence. He scornfully referred to Mahatma Gandhi as "a seditious Middle Temple lawyer posing as a fakir in dhoti," and asking for independence for his people. Churchill couldn't bear to think that anyone who studied in England should not be an Anglophile, or should identify with his own oppressed people. Race pride and imperium in imperio received their embodiment in Churchill, for whom Dr. Williams was proud to unroll the red carpet a few minutes after defining the Churchill-phenotype as the enemy of his people. This apparent right-about-turn would be inexplicable to anyone who did not understand Dr. Williams's Oxford experience. For him it isn't really a right-about-turn at all. It is yet another opportunity to prove to those invisibly grinning Fellows of All

Souls how well he can translate French, and beat them at their own games of dignity and diplomacy, Chaguaramas was not a PNM victory. Everyone recognised it as Dr. Williams's personal triumph...Everyone, that is, except C.L. R. James who saw it as primarily the people's, whose spokesman Dr. Williams was. To show Churchill Chaguaramas, then, was the last thing necessary to assure himself of his achievement. The achievement could not be real until it had received the applause of the right people.

But that was not the end of the speech. The more vehement and histrionic the early rebellion, the more relentless the late swing towards absurdity. After the passage on Churchill, the speech moves to its anti-climactic climax:

It is only left now for Her Majesty the Queen to visit us. After all we are an important part of the Commonwealth, and if Her Majesty can go to Australia, to India and to Pakistan, to Nigeria and to Ghana, she can also come to the West Indies (12)

Two interpretations are possible of this wonderful passage. The first is that Dr. Williams may have been welcoming the pomp and circumstance of a royal visit engineered by his own genius, as the ultimate proof of the greatness of his personal achievement, since it is difficult to see how he envisaged that the presence of the Queen per se could help the people of the West Indies in any way whatsoever. Indeed, he had earlier in the speech described the house slave:

Always better treated than their colleagues in the field, they developed into a new caste of West Indian society, aping the fashion of their masters, wearing their cast-off clothing, and dancing the quadrille with the best of them. (12)

He even mentioned post-revolutionary Haiti with its court, its titles, "its Duke of Marmalade and its Count of Lemonade, exploiting the Negro peasants." (12) Indeed, nearly twenty years before, he had written of the coloured West Indian middle classes:

The visit of a Prince of Wales, the honeymoon of a royal couple find them ready to display their loyalty to the throne, their affection for the mother country. (13)

Eight years after 1961, Dr. Williams accepted the award of Companion of Honour at the hands of the Queen, thus fulfilling both halves of the Afro-Saxon psyche, that of rebel and that of conformist to values which as rebel he despised -- or rather, said he despised.

The second possibility is that Dr. Williams may have realised the deep love which his generation of West Indians, nourished on the buns, slogans and lemonade of countless Empire Day celebrations, have for royalty, and intended to use Her unsuspecting Majesty as a gimmick to strengthen the devotion of his worshippers towards himself. Royal visits had provided excellent bread and circuses during the era of direct British rule, culminating in the fifties, when they had been relentlessly employed, first to prop up the founding Crown Colony system, and, failing that, to effect a smooth transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism. One of the biggest sins of Guyana's PPP of 1953, was its refusal to pay even lip service to the throne. Some members had even picketed the Princess Royal, telling her "Limey Go Home," in spite of the fact that her propinquity to the throne had been most carefully explained. Among the sedition charges brought up against Nazurdeen in 1953 was his alleged declaration "that the Queen was nobody but only a symbol of imperialism and that all the white capitalists in the colony (British Guiana) were her stooges." (14) Perhaps remembering the Ordeal of Teacups and Cutlery at Oxford which preceded admission to a fellowship, Dr. Williams realised that certain games had to be played by the rules. Trinidad therefore needed royalty to bless its Independence Not surprisingly, the Independence games have retained most of the features of the Empire games.

Thus, absurdity has led to rebellion which in its turn is a re-initiation into fresh absurdity. This is distinctly the Mohun Biswas syndrome, which demands that he forever leave and return to the colonial Monkey-House. The difference between Naipaul and Dr. Williams is that the former uses irony to probe and analyse the pain of his own loss, cultural orphanage, forced

ambivalence and futility, while the latter exploits irony as a means of re-assuring himself of his own moral and intellectual superiority.. This has led to a failure in self-knowledge, an inability to reconcile the broken halves of the psyche, and the necessity either to retreat from a people growing daily in awareness, or to perform feats of self-justification over Television and Radio.

It is not surprising then, to find Dr. Williams concluding from time to time in From Columbus to Castro, that West Indian history is absurd. Exasperated at the continual efforts which were being made to keep the planter class alive, he finally explodes::

West Indian History is indeed nothing but a record of the follies and foibles of mankind. (p. 229)

This closely resembles Naipaul's now famous passage in The Middle Passage, which states that "the history of this West Indian futility" can never be satisfactorily told, because "History is built around achievement and creation;; and nothing was created in the West Indies." (15) From Columbus to Castro certainly reinforces such a conclusion. In it the West Indies are seen as a theatre in which word, deed, religious idealism, belief, morality, custom, the very foundations of humanity itself, rotted under slavery, sugar and the plantation system. Dr. Williams catalogues this decay, while at the same time trying to show that West Indian history, the entire history of Europe stands condemned.

In this respect, he plays the role not only of schoolmaster, but judge two closely related roles, since they both carry with them the dual joys of castigation and condemnation. Thus Dr. Williams judges the world as each country sends its actors across the West Indian stage.

For over four and a half centuries the West Indies have been the pawns of Europe and America. Across the West Indian stage the great characters, political and intellectual, of the Western World strut and fret their hour..(p.11)

The theatre-image is a trifle imprecise. Dr. Williams seems to conceive of the West Indies more as an universal Assizes, over which he himself presides as Grand Inquisitor using West Indian history as so much evidence for or against the whole of Europe. Concerned with the moral implications of slavery, he judges each personage according to how he relates to the African, acquitting him if he can acknowledge Black humanity, and condemning him if he shows any ambivalence in the affair. It is Lestrade's role in Walcott's Dream on Monkey Mountain that he seems to be fulfilling.

Thus in Chapters 16 and 17, Dr. Williams looks at how the entire cities of Liverpool and Manchester, built up by the proceeds of the slave trade and slavery, first support the trade, and then argue just as bitterly against it, on the grounds that it helps preserve the archaic mercantile system. Nelson, Britain's loftiest hero, is tried and defrocked as one who was against any sort of abolition. (p. 261) Pitt the Younger is tried and found wanting. After examining Pitt's inconsistency on the issue, Dr. Williams concludes, " The great minister stood self-condemned." -- which, of course, saves Dr. Williams the trouble of having to find further evidence to condemn him himself. (p.263) Hume, Jefferson, Chatham, North, Colbert are all guilty. Cowper is guilty of weak sentimentality, Wordsworth of apathy, and the eighteenth century purveyors of the myth of the Noble Savage are duly ridiculed as absurd. Gladstone, in whose gentle footprints Dr. Williams himself was due to follow when he became Privy Councillor and Companion of Honour, is also sentenced, and with him, the entire flawed liberal tradition of which he was a corner-stone. The mortality rate is certainly high. Wilberforce seems to come off a little better than he does in Capitalism and Slavery, perhaps because Dr. Williams does not dwell so insistently on what his enemies had to say. But he is condemned as too wishy-washy and gradualist in his conception of change. Canning is berated for his attempt to serve humanity and mammon at the same time. (p. 297) Among the few redeemed are Clarkson, Schoelcher and Adam Smith, who were reasonably consistent in their attack on the morality or economics of slavery.

But a peculiar danger generally awaits all Grand Inquisitors -- a danger of moral self-righteousness. Two examples will suffice. First there is

Dr. Williams's judgment of Canning:

The British Government's middle-of-the-road policy of gradualism was explained by the Prime Minister, Canning. There were knots, he said, which could not be suddenly disentangled and must be cut. What was morally true must not be confused with what was historically false... It was not, nor could it be made, a question merely of right, of humanity, or of morality. (p. 297)

But Canning, as Dr. Williams should know well by now, was simply articulating the dilemma of the Prime Minister anywhere, and the classic British conservative tradition of slow concession to change. Politics are, and have always been, a perilous sacrifice of morality to expediency in the pragmatist, and a painful conflict between morality and expediency in the man of conscience. Most politicians solve the matter by doing away with conscience and identity altogether. This is really the most elementary lesson in politics. Politicians become the world's most consummate comedians when, having renounced morality and identity, they insist that a moral interpretation be accorded their every action.

Then there is one of Dr. Williams's more damaging observations about Wilberforce:

The British abolitionists relied for success upon aristocratic patronage, parliamentary diplomacy, and private influence with men in office. They deprecated extreme measures and feared popular agitation. This conservatism was largely the result of the leadership of Wilberforce, who was addicted to moderation, compromise and delay. He was a member of the secret committee of 1817 set up to investigate and repress popular discontent, in the days which foreshadowed the Peterloo Massacre. (p. 298)

Wilberforce, like Canning, seems from this passage merely to have been a product of the narrow and undemocratic pre-1832 English tradition, and one ought not to blame him too much for his "moderation" and "compromise." If one judges Dr. Williams's regime in Trinidad by the same absolute, cold morality one may be tempted to arrive at the same conclusion; that here is one who "deprecates extreme measures and fears popular agitation" -- except, of course, that which he initiates himself; one who has set up a committee and passed laws "to investigate and repress popular discontent," and to enquire into subversion; one who compromises over change, believing, as he says he does, in gradual but distinct reform. The self-righteous indignation of the historically maimed mars his vision, which too often remains at a sense of outraged innocence at European hypocrisy to make him aware of the limits of his own rebellion. This is one of the pitfalls of protest politics as it is of protest literature of any kind. Rebellion, if immature, can lead to a defeat rather than a liberation of consciousness.

This criticism is also true of the last quarter of the book, which treats of more modern^{ic} time. For example, Dr. Williams, to highlight the significance of the thirties, tabulates the unrest of that decade in an interesting passage, which, however, appeared before verbatim in The Negro in The Caribbean (see p. 93 of that work)

The road to revolution had been marked out. The revolution broke out in the years 1935-1938. Consider the chronology of these fateful years. A sugar strike in St. Kitts, 1935; a revolt against an increase in customs duties in St. Vincent, 1935;; a coal strike in St. Lucia, 1935; labour disputes on the sugar plantations in British Guiana, 1935; an oil strike, which became a general strike in Trinidad, 1937; a sugar strike in St. Lucia, 1937; sugar troubles in Jamaica, 1937; a dockers' strike in Jamaica, 1938. Every British Governor called for warships, marines and aeroplanes; total casualties in the British colonies amounted to 29 dead, 115 wounded. (pp. 473-474)

That paragraph, as it stands was good enough for the forties, but hardly for the seventies. It ought to have been succeeded somewhere by a similar tabulation for the fifties and sixties, which would tell the reader something about the continuity of both distress and rebellion. Consider

the chronology of these fateful years. Political, racial and social upheaval in Guyana, 1962-1964, followed by states of emergency, hunts for arms and subversive literature, the presence of British soldiers and warships, arson, labour disputes, long long strikes, looting, murder, mauvais langage, the total poisoning of race relations on all sides, libel cases of all varieties, commissions of enquiry serving little purpose and evading essential issues, mass emigration of skilled labour, civil servants and graduates..... Constant unrest in Jamaica.. Poverty, weekly shootings by both police and Black youth, anti-Chinese riots in 1965, searches for arms, emergency in Kingston, restriction of freedom of movement and assembly; sporadic outbreaks of arson, strikes too numerous to mention, many of them quite serious, and culminating in a serious spate of labour unrest in 1968; the bulldozing of thousands of squatters from West Kingston to make way for a new industrial complex and flats for party members; the migration of these squatters to Maypen Cemetery from whence they are also driven by social workers, fire-hoses, policemen and soldiers; the celebrated Rodney Affair acting like a regional catalyst; riots and arson in October 1968; increasing use of the army as police force..... Consider Trinidad of these times -- with Dr. Williams, strangely, refuses to do Strikes of all kinds... State of Emergency in 1965, anti-Communist witch-hunt, revealing hardly any Communist witches; the ISA to control labour through legislation unfavourably balanced to the advantage of the employer; demonstrations of all sorts; the Solomon Affair; Gas Stations probe; 1970; shootings calling out of the army, marines; appeal to the British and the Yankees abused over the Chaguaramas issue, to send help now; treason charges, sedition, another state of emergency, murder, arson, Draft Public Order Act, Karl Hudson-Phillips.... In the midst of all these things, an Independence which few can take seriously ... Obviously... Obviously....

The list can go on and on, since this is but a short catalogue of the bacchanal of the sixties. The total dead-and-wounded, the total minds shattered in the dark, the total teeth and ribs broken, the total homeless, have not been catalogued as yet. The total frustration hasn't been measured, though Dr. Williams probably has figures on that too, which he means to release before the next elections.

From Columbus to Castro, a work so rich in fact in its chapters which treat of the slave trade, the abolition, the decline of sugar in the nineteenth century, and the growth of gigantic companies in the twentieth, has virtually nothing to say about the post-World War II period. How is one to assess it worth? The first few chapters on Spanish and French imperialism in the West Indies, are old hat and can have been derived from almost anywhere. The chapters on abolition rehash arguments with which the student of Capitalism and Slavery is by now quite familiar. However, more details are given, though no one can say where most of these come from, since the writer declines the reader this privilege. The chapter on the Haitian Revolution, a clear paraphrase of C.L. R. James's The Black Jacobins, is, like Dr. Williams's treatment of all Black rebellion, analistic, rather than analytical.

As the book proceeds, the reader familiar with the rest of Dr. Williams's work finds himself wondering what is really going on. Passages he has read before, entire chapters almost, seem to repeat themselves. Chapter 18 is a simple paraphrase of Sewall's The Ordeal of Free Labour (1862), and adds little new to what Dr. Williams has already said in British Historians and the West Indies. Also, material that appeared before in Williams's book on Trinidad appears here once more. Chapter 19 on indentureship again repeats work done in History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago. Perhaps that is why it contains no close examination of indentureship in Guyana or Surinam, despite the regional scope claimed for the book. Here, as in the book on Trinidad, little attempt is made to assess the effects of indentureship on the society. Things like the problems of acculturation which faced Indian society in the West Indies, the questions of religion and language, of race relations and conflict are simply ignored, though one would have thought that some notion of these things were necessary in a history book whose object is "the cultural integration of the entire area." An opportunity is lost to examine human relations in Trinidad during this exceedingly rich late nineteenth century period, the latterday struggle of French and English cultures for the souls of Black folk, the international spectrum of races, languages, currencies and customs that was nineteenth century Port-of-Spain. Thus From Columbus To Castro repeats here, the main failing of the book on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

in that one never really sees the people of Trinidad or Tobago. Indeed, no one could ever guess from this book that the people of the different islands are profoundly different in temperament.

Chapter twenty of From Columbus to Castro contains passages which are almost a word for word transcription of passages in Chapter twelve of the History of the people of T&T. Chapter 22, that hastily written chapter on the 1865 Rebellion in Jamaica, is a brief summary of what Dr. Williams has already done better in British Historians and the West Indies. Some of the succeeding chapters, especially Chapter 26, repeat huge chunks from The Negro in the Caribbean. Chapter 25 is an impressive sketch of the growth of American influence in the region, but this analysis is not carried beyond the early forties, so that the reader cannot gauge what the position is today. Indeed, the more one reads, the clearer does Dr. Williams's secret design for over three-quarters of the book become. The real aim is humanitarian rather than economic -- to present a package deal summary of most of what he has written before, in words as near to the original as possible, with a hundred or so new pages as a lagniappe, which at the modest price of twenty-two dollars and fifty cents, would save the already hard-pressed citizen the money he would otherwise have to spend, acquiring the separate volumes of Dr. Williams's most prolific career.

One's wonder widens as one proceeds. In a book which has been exceedingly rich in facts and statistics about sugar throughout the ages, the reader learns nothing about Trinidad's oil or the bauxite of Guyana, Surinam and Jamaica, interests which are far more important today. There are works available on these things, some of it done by some of the very people whom Dr. Williams's preface apparently aimed to discredit. An analysis of the functioning of the multi-national corporation in the area, would have helped as a basis for understanding the perils which attend attempts at disentanglement of the regional economy from the metropolitan snare, and might have led to a less vacillating attitude towards the Castro regime in Cuba. Nothing much is said about tourism though it is becoming of increasing importance in the lives of these islands, threatening to split tiny impoverished societies asunder for the nth time in history.

No analysis is offered of the political movement towards a nominal Independence. The emergence of Trade Unionism is barely mentioned. The formation and failure of the British West Indian Federation are hardly ever treated. Dr. Williams's real energies seem to have been consumed by his tremendous efforts at looking backwards. Thus he has little to say about the present. The struggle for the Franchise and the important features of political consciousness which it revealed in the different islands, are not treated. Marryshow, Critchlow, Manley or Jagan might never have existed, for all we are told of them in this book. Yet the book calls itself The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969. It is probably meant to be the first volume of a really serious study.

Chapter 28 on Castroism is disappointing. It simply mirrors, rather than explains Dr. Williams's ambivalence as a Caribbean leader, on the only country that has seriously attempted to make Independence a meaningful concept. The chapter hinges around a series of quotations pro but more generally con Castro's Cuba. More often than not, Castro is depicted as an impractical dreamer who doesn't care for the economist, and indulges in "planless planning" which leaves his economy in a mess. While Dr. Williams does try in the final chapter to make up his mind about the meaning and implications of Cuba, he seems to be more concerned with stressing the superiority of his own, ironically, gradualist policy of steering the decidedly Anglican via media between the Cuban and the Puerto Rican examples. The last two chapters ought to provide the economists with a field day, since they will better be able to trace the disparity between what Dr. Williams says that he is doing, and what he is doing in fact. The least charitable of his critics see his late attempts to recognise Cuba five or six years after he defined that country as enemy number one as simply another elections gimmick, which is meant to indicate apparent concessions in the direction of socialism while the basic structure of the economy remains the same. The more generous of his critics see his new attitude towards Cuba as part of a genuine attempt to initiate gradual but definite change in Trinidad. Whichever is true, it is clear that the youth are not really with the Prime

Minister, and that whatever efforts are being made now, have almost certainly come too late.

The most important thing about Cuba seems to have been the lesson which she has taught the rest of the Caribbean that idea about change is important; that sort of rapport between the leader and the masses is necessary, and that above all self-criticism is an important feature in Independence. These are elementary lessons, but there is little evidence that they have been learned anywhere in the rest of the Caribbean. Dr. Williams has had tremendous insight. A book like Education in the British West Indies, published since 1950 (written four years before) makes it clear that the entire Education system needs to be restructured, and lays down lines along which this restructuring should take place. There should be a greater emphasis on vocational and technical training. The area should understand the irrelevance of Oxford and Cambridge to local needs of agricultural development, an arrested urbanization and the development of technical and commercial skills. A West Indian University should "consciously" and belligerently undertake to guide its society along the lines marked out by the objective economic movement and in the direction to which the demands of the people are pointing" (16) The University will have to join the mass struggle, if its academic education is to have any meaning. (17) However, if it is to have direction, "the governing body should be controlled by the political representatives of the people." (18) Thus not only was the University to play a full part in nationalist politics, but politics was to control and shape the destiny of the institution.

Dr. Williams clearly did not envisage the possibility that both the politics and the academic endeavour of the area could be sterile; that the last thing post-Independence politicians desire is that their authority should be challenged by either people or University. Everything which he wrote in the forties reads like a piece of bitter irony these days. Education has continued to be along the lines of metropolitan academism, churning out each year a fresh crop of GCE Ordinary Level students whom the Civil Service cannot consume. Education in agriculture was to have been accompanied by a vigorous policy of land reform, according to Williams's book. Fourteen years after his accession, there has been neither education in agriculture for rural areas, nor substantial land reform. The question of the sugar lands hasn't begun to be asked. The University as an institution has no obvious commitment to anything under the sun; and those few lonely souls who try to stop their own alienation by attempting to bridge the widening gap between the Campus and the Community, those who attempt to climb the fences which are being constructed with gruesome symbolism around the Campuses of the UWI, get caught up in the barbed wire. Lecturers have been expelled for alleged subversive activity, and in the Trinidad of 1970, University personnel have been detained on most fantastic charges and released because Dr. Williams himself, now in his disguise as Minister of National Security, could discover no adequate grounds upon which to hold them. Some University people, at times the most innocuous of souls, have received poison pen letters and phone calls from people who have eventually identified themselves as supporters of the Prime Minister of Trinidad, all because they tried to involve themselves at grass-roots level. It is so throughout the area. Dr. Williams quotes Che Guevara's criticisms of Cuban economic policy, without noting that the most remarkable fact about these criticisms was that they were allowed to be made, a before both the Cuban people and the world. It is not possible anywhere else in the West Indies for one so close to the centre of power to admit failure.

But without self-knowledge, there can be no self-development. It is not therefore surprising that Dr. Williams in his last chapter is in constant despair about West Indian identity. The despair is probably as much personal as social. The passage that sums up his thoughts on a Caribbean identity is worth quoting in full. The region, he says, has indeed produced writers like Lamming, Walcott, Césaire, Fanon, Naipaul and Brathwaite:

Nevertheless artistic, community and individual values are not for the most part authentic but, to borrow the language of the economist, possess a high import content, the vehicles of import being the educational system, the mass media, the films and the tourists, V.S. Naipaul's description of West Indians as 'mimic men' is harsh, but true. Finally psychological dependence strongly reinforces other forms of dependence. For in the last analysis, dependence is a state of mind. A too long history of colonialism seems to have crippled

Caribbean self-confidence and Caribbean self-reliance, and a vicious circle has been set up: psychological dependence leads to an ever-growing economic and cultural dependence on the outside world. Fragmentation is intensified in the process. And the greater degree of dependence and fragmentation further reduces local self-confidence (p. 502)

That definition of the vicious circle in which the region seems to be caught is one of the finest I know outside Naipaul. Recently, indeed, Naipaul himself has made a similar observation:

The small islands of the Caribbean will remain islands, impoverished and unskilled, ringed as now by a cordon sanitaire, their people not needed anywhere. They may get less innocent and less corrupt politicians; they will not get less hopeless ones. The island Blacks will continue to be dependent on the books films and goods of others; in this important way, they will continue to be the half-made societies of a dependent people, the Third World's third world. They will forever consume; they will never create. They are without material resources; they will never develop the higher skills. Identity depends in the end on achievement and achievement cannot be but small. Again and again the millenium will seem about to come. (19)

This is the message of The Middle Passage taken to even gloomier extremes. It cannot be denied, though it can be qualified. No one anywhere can escape the tyranny of the mass media, and it is, perhaps somewhat comforting to note that the entire bent of European literature suggests that the West Indies are not unique in their quest for identity. Identity depends in the end on self-knowledge, not on achievement. This is why people like Dr. Williams and his entire generation who have achieved so much, are still uncertain about their identity. It isn't simply a question of the poverty of the area; it may be more a matter of failing to recognise roots, whatever these are. If the education system is irrelevant, it can be changed at least partially, and along lines that Dr. Williams himself defined over twenty years ago. If increased tourism is to blame for a steady corruption of values, a more careful approach to the social effects of this aspect of the economy, needs to be made.

For Williams simply to acquiesce in Naipaul's definition of West Indians as mimic men is, first of all to fail to see that Naipaul was in that book talking particularly about West Indian politicians. As usual, Dr. Williams does not apply the lesson to himself, but sufficient has been said above to show that the statement does apply to him as much as it does to any part of the society. For Naipaul to state absolutely that West Indians will never create because to create one must have identity and to have identity one must create, seems to be a sacrifice of truth for absurdist paradox. Were Trinidad all that sterile, it could not have produced Williams, Naipaul, James, Padmore, Sparrow, Spoiler, Mannette and a host of others. Barbados, we have sometimes to remind ourselves, produced both Lamming and Brathwaite, whose contribution to our knowledge of self, and therefore to our identity, have been immense.

It is really quite naive to view our economic dependence as an insurmountable barrier in the path of identity; unless the only identity recognised were the economic one. In this respect, Dr. Williams's final definition of the Caribbean predicament is much more important than Naipaul's. His statement, however, needs to be qualified with the observation that the lower classes in the West Indies, have always been more certain of roots, religion and self than the twisted products of a metropolitan education. When they mimic, they often make something of what they copy. Thus the Black Power mass movement of 1970 in Trinidad is very superficially interpreted if it is seen only as an imitation of the American thing. It is as Trinidadian as Canboulay, the Butler marches, Carnival and the brilliant political calypsos which have been sung in 1970. The masses were transforming soul culture and international rhetoric and slogans, quite often improvising in mid-stride. The Rastafari cult, visible symbol of the worst kind of colonial neglect, have produced an artist such as Ras Daniel Heartman, a man with a deep sense of both tragedy and triumph, and has been a visible influence in the work of all serious Jamaican artists, including her talented musicians. Recently,

Jamaica's substantial contribution to world jazz as well as to her own musical identity, has been noted by James Carnegie. (20) All kinds of things are going on in the West Indies, which Naipaul and Williams seem not to consider important, although they do indicate that in spite of a terrible past, West Indians do possess considerable freedom of mind. The politicians are really some distance behind the people.* Finally what is always important about both Dr. Williams and Vidia Naipaul, is what they omit, as well as what they say.

History, as a number of West Indian artists seem to be depicting it, is the study of human survival in the teeth of suffering. Finally, Naipaul the novelist has a more complex vision of West Indian history than Naipaul the social commentator, who tends towards an almost histrionic despair. A friend of mine describes Naipaul as a man who travels about the world looking for despair. The despairing vision of both Naipaul and Williams derives in part from their closeness to an European way of seeing. By not studying the West Indian people in any true depth, Williams ironically reduces their history to a Carlylean study of the lives of a number of significant individuals. Naipaul accepts the Frouudian formula that there are no true people in the West Indies. Had Naipaul bothered with JJ Thomas's Froudacity he may have qualified his opinion. Dr. Williams fails, not in not having appreciated Thomas, but in remaining too long in the late nineteenth century ambivalence towards the world of the colonizer which was very much Thomas's. Both Dr. Williams and Naipaul seem finally to regret their position as poor relations at the European feast.

The most unfortunate thing which could happen to From Columbus to Castro, was for it to be regarded as the bible of the new era. It is distinctly a fin de siecle performance, a work that marks the spiritual end of a generation; the last will and testament of an era. The fact that Dr. Williams is much better at making statements about the past than about the present proves this. The very context in which the book was first welcomed to Trinidad also proves this. What was noticeable about Kamal Mohammed's panegyric was not only the adulatory 1956 catch-phrases which he showered on Dr. Williams, but his lament that he is the last survivor of that original young brigade. When Kamal told Dr. Williams, "Like a modern Moses you resolved to lead your people out of the house of Bondage" (21) he may well have been aware that when Moses quit the scene the Israelites were still in the wilderness. He may also have been aware of the politically disconcerting tendency which Dr. Williams shares with the Biblical cross-country walker of disappearing for long periods from the people, to talk to his personal god, then descending from Sinai with a shining face and a mouth full of divinely inspired rhetoric to dazzle their eyes and puzzle their minds with strange new laws. This time, the long sojourn on Monkey Mountain has produced From Columbus to Castro and the new Charter, "the most profound concept in contemporary political, social and economic thought."

The real point of Kamal's speech was his consciousness of the fact that with the New Year reshuffle and the final dismissal of O'Halloran and Montano, the pillars of the business interests in the party, the fact that he was an Indian was the only real reason why he still remained in the Cabinet. William Demas, after all, is the real man in CARIFTA. Kamal, feeling his unimportance to the now empty nest, and perhaps, knowing Dr. Williams's capacity for loneliness and authoritarianism was fairly lyrical with his praise. The climax to his declaration of loyalty is, however, slightly tinged with self-interest: "I feel a great sense of humility, pride, and thankfulness as the only Minister of Government who is still with you." (21) One wonders which feeling was strongest, humility which the moment required, pride at having survived where even the blue-eyed boys seem to have perished, or gratitude for benefits derived... Kamal's speech was, like From Columbus to Castro, more a funeral oration on the passing of the old regime, than a fanfare of welcome to a fresh setting forth.

* N.B. There is no time to develop this point here, but a long introductory essay which I have written to Eddie Brathwaite's trilogy, called "Blues and Rebellion" makes clear some of my feelings in this respect. I should add that neither Naipaul nor Williams knows anything of cultural developments of the non-British Caribbean.....

The last thing which needs to be commented on is the citation of the party motto -- "Great is PNM and it will prevail" -- as part of the dedication of the book to the party. This motto, cited in English in the book is still cited in Latin as well on the front page of the party newspaper -- "Magnum est PNM et prevalebit". Few better examples of worse taste can be uncovered in the party's unwholesome history than the motto of the party itself. The original Latin motto has the word "veritas" (Truth) which the PNM have replaced by the letters PNM. In other words the implications of the motto is one of Orwellian 1984 absurdity -- The Party is Truth and Truth is the Party.

Nowadays, with the nation itself daily questioning the credibility of the party, the party motto is beginning to sound like its epitaph, and that of its philosopher-king. It is the fact that the Truth prevails, which has eroded the moral ground from under the party. It may win further elections, for want of an alternative, but it will be leading no one. In so far as Dr. Williams is concerned, two attitudes seem possible. One is tempted to pass on him, the kind of absolute judgement which he has passed on all and sundry in both history and politics. In this respect a quotation from Acton, quoted in Elsa Goveia's Historiography, seems particularly apt:

A man is justly despised who has one opinion in history, and another in politics, one for abroad and another at home, one for opposition and another for office ...(22)

This, however, is too absolute and implies that Acton understood neither history nor politics. The statement does not take into account the capacity of history itself to undermine belief, or of politics to defeat morality. It should not be a matter of indulged contempt, but one of austere silence, that the senior historian of a people, who has found Caribbean history, his own past, absurd, should have himself contributed so richly to the perpetuation of such absurdity. The 1930's generation has run its time, and is slowly taking its place as just another link in the common chain. The 1950 generation will soon begin its mistakes. The people of the forties seem to quite bewildered, caught as they are, between the embarrassing frenzy of an ageing rebel, and the terrific posturing of youth, who also cannot recognize themselves as simple common links in the chain. In the struggle for power which characterises the end of this era, as of any other, what is being lost is the sense of historical continuity. Regrettably, a deficient work such as From Columbus to Castro, cannot restore it. It will help to integrate neither the people of Trinidad nor of the Caribbean area. If it does by mistake, then we are even more absurd than Dr. Williams, or Naipaul have imagined.

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