



Interviews with **C.L.R. James**

by
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K.R. - Yours has been a long life of action and involvement, and now you are writing your autobiography, what form is it taking, and are your own reflections on your doings revealing things you hadn't fully realised before

CLR - That is inevitable. I am seeing things now in my books when I read them which I wasn't fully aware of when I wrote them. But one follows a certain logic, a certain dialectical method and with an eye on historical points, so that things are there which are inherent in the movement at what you are doing, you may not see it at the time, but as history develops, you see that you have been doing that before, that is taking place in many things that I am doing in the autobiography, I am seeing things today that I didn't see fifty or sixty years ago.

K.R. - I remember reading a section dealing with your relationships with women and I got the feeling that you tackled the topic so early in the book and gave it prominence very deliberately.

CLR - No that is not so, I tackled it early because I wanted to get it out of the way, but it will appear either the chapter before the last or two chapters before the last, but I wrote it early as there are other things that I have written earlier than before, I am not writing the book in sequence so that's why that chapter on women which I thought extremely important, I wrote it early and have circulated it to friends of mine, chiefly women because I want that to be as sound as possible.

K.R. - But why do you think it is important

CLR - Because today, in my opinion one of the great events in the world is that women are seeking to find out who and what they are, they have hitherto accepted the roles and functions that men who were in charge of society put them in, but today they're finished with that, they want to find out who I am, not what Nineteenth century Victorian Englishmen thought about me, not what people in the Eighteenth century thought about me, not what Greek people thought about me in the years when the Greek civilisation was at its best, I want to find out who I am, what I am, what I have been and what I am likely to do. That to me is one of the great events that are taking place and I wanted to say what I had to say and make a contribution to that clarification.

K.R. - But do you feel that the position you are now taking is a very different one to one you might have held as a young man

CLR - Very much so. I may as well say it, I have been married three times. There were some very satisfactory relations during those marriages but they didn't work out completely as I wished and now during the last ten years I have got to see that wherever they went wrong, the fault was mine. I was deficient in understanding and knowledge that's what I have seen, that's why I am so anxious to have that Chapter properly written, but I don't want to mix it up with the rest so I put it there by itself.

K.R. - Well apart from the Chapter on women, was there any other Chapter that struck you as needing to be written very early

CLR - Yes, the Chapters that concern me most, are at the very beginning, my life in the Caribbean. I am concerned with that because I don't want to have a few thousand words about my life in the Caribbean, and then go on to my life in the USA, in Africa, in Europe and England, United States; not at all. Much that has taken place in my life abroad was established on the foundations laid while I was in the Caribbean, so those very Chapters mean a great deal to me because they make the book a total whole. I didn't leave here and go to England and learn everything, I took with me a great deal of what I was already.

K.R. - You mean to refer to your involvement in Cricket, your involvement in Western intellectual traditions, and in our educational system

CLR - Yes, but also the people I used to meet every day. I used to meet three or four young men who were fascinated by my interest in sport. I used to write about sport in the Papers, they were fascinated by my knowledge of literature and they used to come and listen to my music and I also used to have a lot of conversations with the grounds men on the Queen's Park Savannah because Stingo, Shannon, Constabulary and Maple were all within two hundred yards of each other and I used to go up early and talk to them and they got in the habit of talking to me about things in general and these young men used to talk to me, and by and large I have found that a great deal of my attitude to people was established in the way that I used to talk to them and they used to talk to me. I used to talk to them recognising that they were not deficient in literature and therefore deficient, and they used to talk to me as someone who was ready to talk to them and treat them on the level, and those were important circumstances of my early life that had an enormous influence on my attitudes to the Labour Movement in England.

K.R. - Well I think it is very clear from something like *Minty Alley* that this is a problem with which you were engaged from the very beginning, that is the relationship between the educated West Indian and the ordinary people around him.

CLR - I will, I will spend some time on that. My father was a teacher, and there were teachers all around, his friends, they were working for the Government and their behaviour was within strictly limited areas. They weren't able to do anything out of place, there would be a little, ahh irregular fornication here and there and now and then a baby might appear, but even that they could manage, but their life was narrow, limited and very

constricted according to certain principles and attitudes. But in Shakespeare, Aeschylus, in Tolstoy, in Dostoyevsky and the rest of them, things were taking place and tremendous conflicts were taking place and I found in the Caribbean, that in the life in which I had been brought up and in which all those teachers lived there was nothing corresponding to the violent conflicts and explosions and peculiar and interesting happenings that I found in Classic Literature, so that I talked to them because they were expressing and telling me about things that I was reading about. My family kept within a very narrow range, they had to be, being teachers.

K.R. - When you took part in the activities of the Beacon, were you in any way reacting deliberately against this safe kind of background

CLR - No, but I was doing work in the background with which I was familiar owing to my interest in the kind of life and the kind of conversations that these people used to have with me, so when I had to write I couldn't write about my father and my mother and my godfather and my aunt's husband who lived rather narrow constricted lives. I wrote about these.

K.R. - But it might be worth writing about the people in our society who live narrow constricted lives under the impression that they are living full lives.

CLR - It might be worth it, it might be. there is a man who is doing it today, that is Michael Alexander, he is doing it. But I

K.R. - Where is he doing it?

CLR - In his novels.

K.R. - Michael

CLR - He's a San Fernando man, he wrote *A Year in San Fernando*

K.R. - ohh Michael Anthony.

CLR - Michael Anthony, he is writing, but even he has to realise that there are explosions in his books which are not normal in the lives of the middle class people in Trinidad. That is what happened to me, and that's why I wrote *Triumph* and that's why I wrote *Minty Alley* they were so different from the lives of the people I knew and lived with where I had been brought up, and reality so close to Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky and the rest of them.

K.R. - Now you said that when you left Trinidad, all the formative influences had begun to work upon you already. Did you know when you left Trinidad that you were going to write *The Black Jacobins*

CLR - Yes and no. I had already written and published in Trinidad, but I was interested in some black history or history of black people where they did something, and they were not being continually the subject of actions and attitudes of other people and I had discovered

in Trinidad that the only place where that was clear was in the history of the revolution in San Domingo, and I had made up my mind in Trinidad that in addition to novels and short stories. I would write that story, but I didn't think of it in terms of the *Black Jacobins*. When I went to England and then I went to France to look up the Archives there I saw the revolution of the colonial and underdeveloped peoples.

K.R. - Can you remember a date, or a year when you went to France to check on the Archives

CLR - I went to England in 1932 and I must have gone to France to see about this in 1934 or 1935, but meanwhile as soon as I went to England, I began importing books from France which dealt very fully with that literature and I began importing books from Haiti, so by the time I went to France in about '34 or '35, I already had a great deal of knowledge.

K.R. - It has not been, I don't think it has been reprinted recently, *A History of Negro Revolt*, but did you write that before *Black Jacobins*

CLR - No I wrote it afterwards. It has been reprinted in the United States, where they called it *The History of Pan-African Revolt* and I added another chapter bringing it up to date. I had written it in England in '38 but I added another chapter up to '69, I did it from '39 to about '69.

K.R. - Coming back to the *Jacobins*, it is a book that has worn very well, I mean it's fifty years later and just last year it was being dramatised.

CLR - I had dramatised it before. I had dramatised it in 1936 in England, before I wrote the book, and Paul Robeson played the leading part which was a tremendous experience in my life, to see him, every day at rehearsals for three or four weeks, that was something, he remains as I have written, the most remarkable human being I have ever seen or heard of, I can't go into that now, but then that was done, and the play was shown to him, and he said yes he would do it, and he did it, that was '36, well by 1967, the colonial struggles for emancipation had developed tremendously and I re-wrote it, because twenty five years of history, I re-wrote the play, not the book, the book is as it always has been, and I re-wrote it and it was played by a West Indian in Nigeria, Dexter Lyndersay, he played it, and then it was brought here and it was played on the BBC in London, and it was played in Jamaica.

K.R. - But how would you account for this continuing interest

CLR - Because the black, an edition, I went to England a year ago, and a new edition is being, has been published. Here it is, and the interest is in because the people in the Caribbean and people in England, are very, and people everywhere, there has been a French translation and an Italian translation, and people everywhere are interested in the African emancipation, their getting out of the situation they've been in for so many centuries, and this book speaks of a revolution that took place, but I want to say, I was disappointed, after 25 years, 1963 nobody had written again developing the ideas because after 25 years have passed, your history can be developed and then somewhere about 1975 I got a book from France, a book written by a gentleman called Jose

Foujard(?), he's a Haitian and he has written a book in which he said that the originators of the revolution and the people who founded the Haitian nations were not the slaves as I believed, although they took a great part, they were the Maroons, those who had run away and established life of their own, they came back to make the revolution and to give some foundation to the revolution and by the way, he has done that and I am deeply impressed with it, I am glad somebody has gone on and he was very much pleased with my *Black Jacobins* and he got me to write an introduction to his book, which I have done and that will be out very soon, I recommend it, it's a stage further as history ought to be.

K.R. - One of the things about the *Jacobins*, apart from seeing it as people's revolutions, seeing as the first successful black revolution and so on, it seems to me to raise the whole question of leadership, 'cause one of Toussaint's problems was who am I and what kind of leader am I, what am I to do next and it raised the question of leadership in the context of a man who had been exposed to all kinds of Western influences and who had in him, alive in him also African traditions, so he was really asking not only what kind of leader am I, but what kind of man am I as a Caribbean man

CLR - But as a Caribbean man Toussaint achieved and failed because he became entirely the representative of the French revolution and the Roman Catholic church and Dessalines was successful first because Toussaint had laid the foundation and secondly because he didn't care anything about anything except the freedom of the Haitian people

K.R. - So Toussaint's problem was that he wasn't strongly enough rooted in Haitian reality

CLR - I wouldn't say Haitian reality because he laid the foundation of the Haitian state and he broke away from slavery and manoeuvred with extreme skill and success among the various forces, but he remained to the end somebody for whom the French decree of emancipation was the basis of society, that was the way he saw things and he knew that, it seemed to him without the French the Haitians could not make their entry into modern society and therefore he hesitated at the correct moment, there is this to be said for him he manoeuvred with the French and took a lot of risks because he believed that the French could never restore slavery in San Domingo, he believed that, so the risks he took were taken with that background, so he lost his life but Dessalines was able to carry on.....

K.R. - but Dessalines had no ideas

CLR - no Dessalines was a follower of Toussaint and when Toussaint was taken Dessalines helped them to take Toussaint because Toussaint at the last moment was hesitating and Dessalines was ready to go on, and he said people believe Toussaint is the leader and until Toussaint is out of the way they will not know that I am the leader for the struggle for emancipation. So he turned a blind eye to the fact that the French said they were not going to kill Toussaint, they were only going to take him to France and he said OK, and the moment they took Toussaint away he became leader and he carried the revolution to a success, but there is this to be said for Dessalines he and Toussaint had as superior, the only soldier superior to them in that period of military achievement, was Bonaparte. Dessalines and Toussaint were commanders of the first rank, I want to make that very clear, they were not people fighting in some colonial struggle, not at all they were modern soldiers and they defeated the British, the French and Spaniards, because they

were modern soldiers. Dessalines in particular was a superb soldier, that that I have made that clear, and you know how I managed to know that, I went to Paris to look up the archives and people told me there is a Haitian here a man attached to a French army as a representative of the Haitian army, General Mamou(?) but he told me that he was General in the Haitian army, but in France he was only Colonel, and he had written an extensive two volume on the history of the campaign, and he was delighted to find a West Indian doing the history of the San Domingo and interested in the military battles so he used to sit down and tell me all about it. So that I remember we used to sit down drinking coffee and he would be having a teacup and saucers telling me the battles, and I would read the accounts that the French had given, and I would read his account, and the French, the account that Haitians had given so I got a good view and I came to the conclusion that they were no soldiers superior to Dessalines and Toussaint except Napoleon. And I have gone into detail about that

K.R. - It's a long way from Toussaint to Cipriani and Butler I suppose, but you did write a life of Captain Cipriani before you went in to

CLR - That's an interesting book, very interesting to me, I had read two lines of Marxism and they consisted "in 1848 Marx and Engels published the communist manifesto" that was all, so that was all I knew, I had read a little about Toussaint L'Ouverture but not much, but I was very much struck by Cipriani, I did not pay too much attention to Butler, Butler came later, I left here in '32, but somewhere about '30 it struck me that here was Cipriani saying all that was needed and to mobilise the people and federation and education, and here was I a government servant, I was teaching at the Government Training College, lecturer in English and History, but I had all these progressive ideas but I was doing nothing, I was handicapped by the fact that if I had said anything the Government would have thrown me out, and I had made up my mind to be a writer, so it struck me that I could do something by writing the life of Cipriani, so I went to Cipriani and told him, "I am interested in what you are doing but I am handicapped, I'm a government servant but I would like to write your biography, will you help me?", he said "certainly", and he gave me all the material, told me what I wanted to know and handed me a lot of materials and said "there it is" and I have written it and he had looked it over before I left in '32, so that book had no Marxism in it, and when I look at it now I see many mistakes etc. but by and large it had the spirit that Cipriani had brought, we want to govern ourselves and I went with that

K.R. - There is a feeling now that when Butler got on the scene all kinds of weaknesses in Cipriani's approach and attitudes began to be apparent

CLR - Now I have seen that and a lot of that has no historical sense, for this reason, undoubtedly Butler brought into the movement a whole lot of fundamental ideas and attitudes which Cipriani did not have, but the man who laid the foundation so that Butler could start something was Cipriani, I remember the days when Cipriani, when there was no Cipriani and I remember a great strike here in 1919, the water men, the waterfront men was striking and I was no more that 18 years of age but I used to talk to them, I was interested, and they used to talk to me and I know today that every single one of those males was a Garveyite, but they didn't say that, but they were Garveyites, that's where they lived, Cipriani brought the labour movement here and used to carry on at a rate and

he made the city council, where he was mayor, a focus for conflict with the British Colonial Government all that, so later when Butler began to say well we must go on, we must go on from where Cipriani had begun and to blame Cipriani for not doing what Butler did is I think unhistorical, you are entitled to say that, but you mustn't give the impression that Cipriani made all these mistakes, he did what he had, what was, began (**K.R.** - what he could do in his time) in his time, now he didn't follow along with Butler, but that time he was 70 years or thereabouts, but I am not, I don't have any sympathy for people who recognising what Butler did, condemn Cipriani for not doing it, that is without sense

K.R. - When you were growing up in these early years what sort of impact did the Garvey movement have on Trinidad, did people know about Marcus Garvey and did they hear about the Russian revolution

CLR - No, I remember George Padmore who I used to know as Malcolm Nurse, his father used to talk to my father, his father was a tremendous political mind in Trinidad, Hubert Alfonso Nurse, he was Malcolm Nurse's father and he used to talk to my father when I was a boy of 7 or 8 and I used to hear him, and something used to drive him, my father used to listen to him with great respect and consideration, but we all looked, at least my father looked upon Nurse as somebody who was in the revolution, he was the first man who said "I am not Anglican, I am not Roman Catholic, I am a Muslim", a Black man about 98 (**K.R.** - this was Padmore's father?) Padmore's father, that's where Padmore grew up and he was a man who lived in a room as big as this filled with books and I had never seen that in Trinidad before and I haven't seen it for years, but he used to talk about George Washing.., about Booker T. Washington and Du Bois but I didn't used to understand, but I remember his son and I used to be friendly, were not we were not to close, not as we became later but he used to do a lot of reading of American writings about Blacks, he continued the tradition that his father had left, I was wrapped up in English literature, European literature, English history, Greek history but I was interested in the black question and I used to read two magazines, one was *The Negro World* Marcus Garvey's magazine and the other one was *The Crisis* by Du Bois and I used to read them to be, be a part of the Black struggle but I never was in it to the extent that, that Padmore was, not that he was in it, but he used to read and was interested but he didn't want to persuade me into anything, but whenever I talked to him he would always tell me.. (**K.R.** - but the majority of Trinidadians at the time would not have heard much about Marcus Garvey) they didn't hear much about Garvey, but Garvey came here in 1929, oh yeah Garvey came and when Garvey landed here a whole lot of people went down to the wharf to see him, but as a personality, his policies were not up to much, but I tell you the things that mattered, I remember travelling by train and I was reading an article in the news -- or one of them about Gandhi and I talked to a friend of mine about it and some Indians who were there dressed in their Indian clothes said "Hey Gandhi!" in other words they knew about Gandhi and that was about 1927, 28 and secondly the Ethiopian revolt and Mussolini's attempt to take over Ethiopia had a great influence among the people here, but that was after I left but I heard that afterwards that the Ethiopian revolt was a great stirring up and I'm glad to say that when I went to England and the upheaval took place in '37 to '38, members of the Commission whom the British Government sent, said that the writings of C. L. R. James helped to stir up the people, because I wasn't only writing about the ordinary people, which meant that I was, but I had sent the life of Captain Cipriani back here, I went there in '32

K.R. - That is sub-titled *The Case for West Indian Self-government*

CLR - *The Case for West Indian Self-government* yes, and it was published in England as *The Case for West Indian Self-government*, an abridgement was published, so both of them and those that circulated a lot and besides that I joined up with Padmore writing about Ethiopia and we didn't do so much about the Caribbean, we were interested in Africa, but we used to talk about the Caribbean and the writings are lovely, the book, the novel, *Minty Alley* and *A Brighter Caribbean* had a tremendous influence on the *History of Negro Revolt* people said that they wanted some literature to get out of the old one to get into the new, and those books meant a lot to them

K.R. - Did the Russian revolution have much influence on you at that time

CLR - No, I didn't know anything about it, I used to read the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* a marvellous edition, and I used to read about Lenin and Trotsky and the Russian revolution but to me it was somewhat abstract

K.R. - But nowadays there is a kind of ignorance in Trinidad if you mention the name C. L. R. James people would say "Oh! that Communist fella"

CLR - They, they are saying that because that's what they have been taught, when I was here first working with Williams I had already published *World Revolution*, I had already published *The Black Jacobins*, my ideas were widely known but people didn't make a fuss about my being a Communist, it was when I left Williams and he got into trouble, that he began to call everybody Communist, and he didn't do too much about that with me, but he did his best and encouraged it, but Williams knew everything that I had done, by '57 I had already written plenty

K.R. - But you were once officially a member of the Communist party

CLR - Never sir! I never was a member of the Communist party, I was a member of the Trotskyist party, we were opposed to the communist and I was in the Trotskyist movement from 1934 to 1951 and then I left it, and have written very fully and completely my reasons for leaving it, all that is in this book

K.R. - *Notes on Dialectic*

CLR - Yes, and you see the people I deal with it seriously, I don't deal with it gossiping, and I deal with Hegel, Marx and Lenin and what they understood by Communism

K.R. - So at the moment what are your political affiliations

CLR - I am affiliated to nobody in particular, I have some friends in England, and I have some friends in the United States, there are people in Italy, and we are very closely associated with the ideas that we have, we exchange ideas, they translate some of my stuff into Italian and people published in England, in America and so on, but there is no affiliation in the old sense for this reason I have now come to the conclusion and that is a

contribution to the Marxist/Leninist doctrine that today and for some years now we do not need a vanguard party in the sense that Lenin and the others used to put it forward or rather in the way that Lenin was interpreted as putting forward the vanguard party, the vanguard party is not necessary for the development of the workers into Socialism, Marx wrote about the Commune and he said that is it, they used to ask him this dictatorship of the proletariat that you're talking about where is it, he said there, he wrote about the Commune, he said that is the way the workers will develop, Lenin said the Soviet, *The State And Revolution* doesn't mention the party, it deals with the Soviet and Mao Tse-tung wrote, his great contributions he said were two, number one: to defeat Chiang Kai-shek and get the Japanese out of China and the second one was the cultural revolution and the cultural revolution was aimed at the education of the workers and the peasants so as to get rid of the leadership of the movement by the party, so that Marx, Lenin and Mao Tse-tung always had a very critical idea about the party, it was necessary there were times when you had to do it, but that that was absolutely necessary to building the workers into Socialism, no sir, and that's what, I have led that and nowadays many people believe it

K.R. - But what do you think then about Caribbean politics and Caribbean societies at the present time in relation to the parties

CLR - I am saying that the vanguard party, the party with which you cannot, so people used to say, the working class cannot be led into Socialism unless there is such a party, I say that is not Marxism, and if, Lenin never had that view, he said that that party is necessary in Russia today owing to the backwardness of Russia but *The State And Revolution* gives a universal picture for all Marxists and there he didn't talk about the party at all he said the Soviet, now we in the Caribbean, I find, have to form a party for the reason, I know there are parties not necessary in England, it is not necessary in Holland, it's not necessary in Italy, my God! there are millions of people highly educated with nearly fifty or a hundred years of practical political experience behind them, so a party isn't necessary there, but who am I to tell Mugabe who has formed a Marxist/Leninist party in Zimbabwe no, I am not going to do that, but you notice the party was formed a Marxist/Leninist party and I don't know if I can say this, this might prevent this thing being published (**K.R.** - it could always be cut out) what kind of party has Dr. Williams formed here, nobody knows, I can give you a better example, the best example is Mr. Hudson Phillips, Mr. Hudson Phillips has claimed that he has formed a party that is in opposition to the party of Dr. Williams, he challenges the party of Dr. Williams, what does that party stand for, nobody knows, the other day some people in the press asked him, "but Mr. Phillips, what does your party represent, what do you represent?", and I quote, put it in inverted commas, he said "Caribbean Socialists" and then the man asked him, put it in inverted commas, "what does that mean?", and also put in inverted commas Mr. Phillips said "it doesn't mean any thing at all", so that's where they are. Can we stop for a minute
Cut

CLR - When do we have to stop

K.R. - When we feel that you are tired

CLR - Not, don't worry with me, a lot of food is being prepared in there

K.R. - Alright I think we should go through and then when we stop we will eat and then depart

K.R. - So if a bunch of young Trinidadians came up to you and said "Mr. James we are very worried about the condition of Trinidad and we have decide to form a political party" what kind of advice would you give them

CLR - They are entitled to form it, I would tell them, "do you know what are your aims? Do you know what concrete slogans you are going to put forward?" Nobody wrote more about philosophy, nobody wrote more about the economics, and the capitalist beginning their development in Russia, nobody wrote more about the philosophy of the Russian people than Lenin did, but although Lenin did that and educated his party he had three slogans for the revolution, number one: the Democratic Republic, number, instead of --, number two: the eight hour day for the workers and number three: the lands of the peasants. I would ask them "number one, have you worked out a basic philosophy of politics which you are going to put into action? you must have that, and then the slogans that you are going to use those may change but get those first and then go ahead"

K.R. - But I would have said, if a group of fellows told me they were going to form a party, I think I would be very pessimistic when they started to speak to me and I would say "well, you're dealing with a society which seems to be, which thinks it is so well off materially that almost everybody is investing in the status quo, (**CLR** - may I) and you're dealing with a party which has swept one of its most important issues so firmly under the carpet, that is the racial issue, that is between African and Indians, that you could not form a political party in this country, nobody would allow you, those who want the status quo would not allow you, and those who are investing in African Indian differences will not allow you"

CLR - I want to tell you that those are not my views and I say so with a lot of confidence because I have written that in the press, I sent it in and I notice a lot of people today are saying, a whole lot of people are saying the county is in a mess, it is drifting, it doesn't know where it is going and we're in a state of crisis, so the that PNM has not succeeded in anything it has only resulted after these years in putting the country in a state where everybody is saying what is going to happen to us next, and I don't think they have driven the racial issue below the carpet, the ULF aimed to get together oil and sugar, and Williams has written in his book -- I haven't read it because I don't read what he writes anymore, but I have been told that in it he says one of the important things that he has done in Trinidad politics is to keep apart oil and sugar, now to me that is the basis of progress in Trinidad for what oil represents and what sugar represents in the labour movement to get together and form something solid, but I don't believe that people have driven anything under the carpet, whatever was under the carpet I feel came out in 1970, after 1970 you can't talk about things under the carpet, my friend, after 1970 whatever was under the carpet has come out, but people what is their problem is they don't know what steps to take and that is the problem, but they going to have to find out and shall I tell you something else I don't know if you will want it, Dr. Williams and the PNM, I gather, are in as much confusion as anybody else, they don't know what to do, Dr. Williams don't know what, can he come forward again or are people against him, inside the PNM people are telling him "that letter that I wrote to you putting everything in your hands, give it back to me", they've taking him to court, he needs a majority in the house, a commission in

order to make Raffiq(?) and the rest of them go out of the house altogether, he has passed a law, but he can't get that committee, there are PNM people who say no, we are not going to take part in that, that is the state the country is in. Prime Minister Hudson Phillips who the other day made the tremendous pronouncement the country is a tinder box, you remember that and that don't mean that, tinder boxes don't take place under the carpet, the essence of a tinder box is that it has come out from under the carpet, you know I think the country today is in a tremendous state of uncertainty, doubt and hesitation as to what is to take place, but it's difficulty is, it's uncertain as to what steps to take and that I think is obvious from what is taking place in the rest of the Caribbean, when Bishop and the Jewel movement did something that the Caribbean needed got rid of Gairy and the rest of the Caribbean, Trinidad at the head does not look upon that as a tremendous addition to the understanding of the Caribbean and what people will think about it, that a Caribbean people got rid of him, no they are concerned not that Gerry was got rid of, but with the fact that Bishop mobilised the population against an oppressive government, they are scared stiff themselves against such an action, they

K.R. - But there is a problem there in that many people who approve of Gairy having been pushed out are worried about the recent Russian thrust in the Caribbean and they feel that the Cuban/Russian involvement in the Grenadian revolution might in the end prevent the Grenadian revolution from being a Grenadian revolution, just as the Russian involvement in Cuba might be taking away the Cuban revolution from the Cuban people, so that a lot of the resistance to Bishop or to Castro at the moment might be a fear that some people have about what the Russians are trying to do, so now we have to worry not only about America but about the Russians

CLR - I, I don't think that the Russians had anything to do with the fact that Bishop got rid of Gairy, I think that was a Grenadian necessity and a Caribbean necessity, and that was one of the great events in the history of the Caribbean people, that they got rid of him, and what I say about Fidel Castro is this, there are many things about Fidel that I am uncertain of, there are many that I am certain of, but I want to say only two things, we can't go into Cuba here, number one: Castro led the revolution before the Russians came in, (**CLR** - yes) the Russians didn't help him make it and number two: at the present time but for the help of the Cuban army, a whole area in South Africa would be under the control of the white South Africans, now you got to, to tell me plenty against Fidel, don't stand up there, Fidel didn't wait for the Russians he went ahead and there are many things I could say positive about the Cuban revolution but I don't want to go into that

K.R. - Now I think maybe we can round off this little section of the talk which has been a lot about the leaders by going back to *The Black Jacobins* and ask you if there was a section of *The Black Jacobins* that you were to read anywhere would you like to choose it and read it now

CLR - Do we come to an end here

K.R. -Just for a moment

CLR - Only a moment

K.R. - Yes, we give you a rest for about five minutes or so, maybe have lunch or something and then resume

CLR - Now there are two sections of *The Black Jacobins* that I would like to read, one is where Toussaint, one is where Toussaint was afraid that things were taking place in France and the revolution in San Domingo was being threatened by the development of the reaction in France and he wrote a letter to the French government in which he expressed his fears, but they were only fears, and they had sent him a personal present for the work he had been doing and he refers to that, now this is what I want to read, in the new edition, page 196, he says *do they, the planters think that men who have been able to enjoy the blessing of liberty will calmly see it snatched away, they supported their chains only so long as they did not know any condition of life more happy than that of slavery, but today when they have left it, if they have a thousand lives they will sacrifice them all rather than be forced into slavery again, but no, the same hand which has broken our chains will not enslave us anew, France will not revoke her principles, she will not withdraw from us the greatest of her benefits, she will protect us against all our enemies, she will not permit her sublime morality to be perverted, those principles which do her most honour, to be destroyed, her most beautiful achievement to be degraded, but if to re-establish slavery in San Doming this was done, then I declare to you it would be to attempt the impossible, we have known how to face dangers to attain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it* and then he goes on *this citizen's directives is the morale of the people of San Domingo, these are the principles that they transmit to you by me, my own you know, it is sufficient to renew my hand in yours, the oath that I have made to cease to live before gratitude died in my heart, before I cease to be faithful to France and to my duty, before the god of liberty is profaned and sullied by the liberticides before they can snatch from my hands that sword, those arms which France confided to me for the defence of its rights and those of humanity for the triumph of liberty and equality*, you see it deals with the San Domingo situation and then it broadens it out and I want to read a passage from Georges Lefebvre about the Jacobins and the Girondists and the sans-culottes, The Jacobins from page 297, 276 *the Jacobins furthermore were authoritarian in outlook, consciously or not they wished to act with the people and for them, but they claimed the right of leadership and when they arrived at the head of affairs they ceased to consult the people, did away with relations, proscribed the hébertistes and the enragés, they can be described as enlightened despots, the sans-culottes on the contrary were extreme democrats, they wanted the direct government of the people by the people, if they demanded a dictatorship against the aristocrats they wished to exercise it themselves and to make their leaders do what they wanted, the sans culottes of Paris in particular I am speaking here, saw very clearly what was required at each stage of the revolution, at least until it reached its highest peak, their difficulty was that they had neither the education, experience nor the resources to organise a modern state if only temporarily, for a balanced account of the way in which the sans-culottes themselves worked out and forced upon an unwilling Robespierre the great policies which saved the revolution see Lefevrier and I go on to say, but that the sans culottes had to force the Jacobins, but in 1980 the Sans Coulotte I think learned to give them a chance to do it, they were not so far away from education and understanding, okay*

K.R. - Well I don't know if we can eat in about 20 minutes boys, we can eat in 20 minutes

CLR. - Ask her

LOCATION: C. L. R. James' home

DATE: September 5th, 1980

TAPE #: 2

K. R. - and now yours has been a long life of action and involvement, and now you are writing your autobiography, what form is it taking, and are your own reflections on your doings revealing things you hadn't fully realised before

C. J. - That is inevitable. I am seeing things now in my books when I read them which I wasn't fully aware of when I wrote them. But one follows a certain logic, a certain dialectical method and with an eye on historical points, so that things are there which are inherent in the movement at what you are doing, you may not see it at the time, but as history develops, you see that you have been doing that before, that is taking place in many things that I am doing in the autobiography, I am seeing things today that I didn't see fifty or sixty years ago.

K. R. - I remember reading a section dealing with your relationships with women and I got the feeling that you tackled the topic so early in the book and gave it prominence very deliberately.

C. J. - no that is not so, I tackled it early because I wanted to get it out of the way, but it will appear either the chapter before the last or two chapters before the last, but I wrote it early as there are other things that I have written earlier than before, I am not writing the book in sequence so that's why that chapter on women which I thought extremely important, I wrote it early and have circulated it to friends of mine, chiefly women because I want that to be as sound as possible.

K. R. - but why do you think it is important

C. J. - because today, in my opinion one of the great events in the world is that women are seeking to find out who and what they are, they have hitherto accepted the roles and functions that men who were in charge of society put them in, but today they're finished with that, they want to find out who I am, not what Nineteenth century Victorian Englishmen thought about me, not what people in the Eighteenth century thought about me, not what Greek people thought about me in the years when the Greek civilisation was at its best, I want to find out who I am, what I am, what I have been and what I am likely to do. That to me is one of the great events that are taking place and I wanted to say what I had to say and make a contribution to that clarification.

K. R. - but do you feel that the position you are now taking is a very different one to one you might have held as a young man

C. J. - very much so. I may as well say it, I have been married three times. There were some very satisfactory relations during those marriages but they didn't work out completely as I wished and now during the last ten years I have got to see that wherever they went wrong, the fault was mine. I was deficient in understanding and knowledge that's what I have seen, that's why I am so anxious to have that Chapter properly written, but I don't want to mix it up with the rest so I put it there by itself.

K. R. - well apart from the Chapter on women, was there any other Chapter that struck you as needing to be written very early

C. J. - yes, the Chapters that concern me most, are at the very beginning, my life in the Caribbean. I am concerned with that because I don't want to have a few thousand words about my life in the Caribbean, and then go on to my life in the USA, in Africa, in Europe and England, United States; not at all. Much that has taken place in my life abroad was established on the foundations laid while I was in the Caribbean, so those very Chapters mean a great deal to me because they make the book a total whole. I didn't leave here and go to England and learn everything, I took with me a great deal of what I was already.

K. R. - you mean to refer to your involvement in Cricket, your involvement in Western intellectual traditions, and in our educational system

C. J. - yes, but also the people I used to meet every day. I used to meet three or four young men who were fascinated by my interest in sport. I used to write about sport in the Papers, they were fascinated by my knowledge of literature and they used to come and listen to my music and I also used to have a lot of conversations with the grounds men on the Queen's Park Savannah because Stingo, Shannon, Constabulary and Maple were all within two hundred yards of each other and I used to go up early and talk to them and they got in the habit of talking to me about things in general and these young men used to talk to me, and by and large I have found that a great deal of my attitude to people was established in the way that I used to talk to them and they used to talk to me. I used to talk to them recognising that they were not deficient in literature and therefore deficient, and they used to talk to me as someone who was ready to talk to them and treat them on the level, and those were important circumstances of my early life that had an enormous influence on my attitudes to the Labour Movement in England.

K. R. - well I think it is very clear from something like *Minty Alley* that this is a problem with which you were engaged from the very beginning, that is the relationship between the educated West Indian and the ordinary people around him.

C. J. - I will, I will spend some time on that. My father was a teacher, and there were teachers all around, his friends, they were working for the Government and their behaviour was within strictly limited areas. They weren't able to do anything out of place, there would be a little, ahh irregular fornication here and there and now and then a baby might appear, but even that they could manage, but their life was narrow, limited and very constricted according to certain principles and attitudes. But in Shakespeare, Aeschylus, in Tolstoy, in Dostoyevsky and the rest of them, things were taking place and tremendous conflicts were taking place and I found in the Caribbean, that in the life in which I had been brought up and in which all those teachers lived there was nothing corresponding to

the violent conflicts and explosions and peculiar and interesting happenings that I found in Classic Literature, so that I talked to them because they were expressing and telling me about things that I was reading about. My family kept within a very narrow range, they had to be, being teachers.

K. R. - when you took part in the activities of the Beacon, were you in any way reacting deliberately against this safe kind of background

C. J. - no, but I was doing work in the background with which I was familiar owing to my interest in the kind of life and the kind of conversations that these people used to have with me, so when I had to write I couldn't write about my father and my mother and my godfather and my aunt's husband who lived rather narrow constricted lives. I wrote about these.

K. R. - but it might be worth writing about the people in our society who live narrow constricted lives under the impression that they are living full lives.

C. J. - it might be worth it, it might be. there is a man who is doing it today, that is Michael Alexander, he is doing it. But I

K. R. - where is he doing it

C. J. - in his novels.

K. R. - Michael

C. J. - he's a San Fernando man, he wrote *A Year in San Fernando*

K. R. - ohh Michael Anthony.

C. J. - Michael Anthony, he is writing, but even he has to realise that there are explosions in his books which are not normal in the lives of the middle class people in Trinidad. That is what happened to me, and that's why I wrote *Triumph* and that's why I wrote *Minty Alley* they were so different from the lives of the people I knew and lived with where I had been brought up, and reality so close to Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky and the rest of them.

K. R. - now you said that when you left Trinidad, all the formative influences had begun to work upon you already. Did you know when you left Trinidad that you were going to write *The Black Jacobins*

C. J. - yes and no. I had already written and published in Trinidad, but I was interested in some black history or history of black people where they did something, and they were not being continually the subject of actions and attitudes of other people and I had discovered in Trinidad that the only place where that was clear was in the history of the revolution in San Domingo, and I had made up my mind in Trinidad that in addition to novels and short stories. I would write that story, but I didn't think of it in terms of the *Black Jacobins*. When I went to England and then I went to France to look up the Archives there I saw the revolution of the colonial and underdeveloped peoples.

K. R. - can you remember a date, or a year when you went to France to check on the Archives

C. J. - I went to England in 1932 and I must have gone to France to see about this in 1934 or 1935, (K. R. - had you written) but meanwhile as soon as I went to England, I began importing books from France which dealt very fully with that literature and I began importing books from Haiti, so by the time I went to France in about '34 or '35, I already had a great deal of knowledge.

K. R. - it has not been, I don't think it has been reprinted recently, *A History of Negro Revolt*, but did you write that before *Black Jacobins*

C. J. - no I wrote it afterwards. It has been reprinted in the United States, where they called it *The History of Pan-African Revolt* and I added another chapter bringing it up to date. I had written it in England in '38 but I added another chapter up to '69, I did it from '39 to about '69.

K. R. - coming back to the *Jacobins*, it is a book that has worn very well, I mean it's fifty years later and just last year it was being dramatised.

C. J. - I had dramatised it before. I had dramatised it in 1936 in England, before I wrote the book, and Paul Robeson played the leading part which was a tremendous experience in my life, to see him, every day at rehearsals for three or four weeks, that was something, he remains as I have written, the most remarkable human being I have ever seen or heard of, I can't go into that now, but then that was done, and the play was shown to him, and he said yes he would do it, and he did it, that was '36, well by 1967, the colonial struggles for emancipation had developed tremendously and I re-wrote it, because twenty five years of history, I re-wrote the play, not the book, the book is as it always has been, and I re-wrote it and it was played by a West Indian in Nigeria, Dexter Lindse(?) or Lyndersay, he played it, and then it was brought here and it was played on the BBC in London, and it was played in Jamaica.

K. R. - but how would you account for this continuing interest

C. J. - because the black, an edition, I went to England a year ago, and a new edition is being, has been published. Here it is, and the interest is in because the people in the Caribbean and people in England, are very, and people everywhere, there has been a French translation and an Italian translation, and people everywhere are interested in the African emancipation, their getting out of the situation they've been in for so many centuries, and this book speaks of a revolution that took place, but I want to say, I was disappointed, after 25 years, 1963 nobody had written again developing the ideas because after 25 years have passed, your history can be developed and then somewhere about 1975 I got a book from France, a book written by a gentleman called Jose Fouchar(?), he's a Haitian and he has written a book in which he said that the originators of the revolution and the people who founded the Haitian nations were not the slaves as I believed, although they took a great part, they were the Maroons, those who had run away and established life of their own, they came back to make the revolution and to give some foundation to the revolution and by the way, he has done that and I am deeply

impressed with it, I am glad somebody has gone on and he was very much pleased with my *Black Jacobins* and he got me to write an introduction to his book, which I have done and that will be out very soon, I recommend it, it's a stage further as history ought to be.

K. R. - One of the things about the *Jacobins*, apart from seeing it as people's revolutions, seeing as the first successful black revolution and so on, it seems to me to raise the whole question of leadership, 'cause one of Toussaint's problems was who am I and what kind of leader am I, what am I to do next and it raised the question of leadership in the context of a man who had been exposed to all kinds of Western influences and who had in him, alive in him also African traditions, so he was really asking not only what kind of leader am I, but what kind of man am I as a Caribbean man

C. J. - But as a Caribbean man Toussaint achieved and failed because he became entirely the representative of the French revolution and the Roman Catholic church and Dessalines was successful first because Toussaint had laid the foundation and secondly because he didn't care anything about anything except the freedom of the Haitian people

K. R. - So Toussaint's problem was that amm he wasn't strongly enough rooted in Haitian reality

C. J. - I wouldn't say Haitian reality because he laid the foundation of the Haitian state and he broke away from slavery and manoeuvred with extreme skill and success among the various forces, but he remained to the end somebody for whom the French decree of emancipation was the basis of society, that was the way he saw things and he knew that, it seemed to him without the French the Haitians could not make their entry into modern society and therefore he hesitated at the correct moment, there is this to be said for him he manoeuvred with the French and took a lot of risks because he believed that the French could never restore slavery in San Domingo, he believed that, so the risks he took were taken with that background, so he lost his life but Dessalines was able to carry on.....

K. R. - but Dessalines had no ideas

C. J. - no Dessalines was a follower of Toussaint and when Toussaint was taken Dessalines helped them to take Toussaint because Toussaint at the last moment was hesitating and Dessalines was ready to go on, and he said people believe Toussaint is the leader and until Toussaint is out of the way they will not know that I am the leader for the struggle for emancipation. So he he turned a blind eye to the fact that the French said they were not going to kill Toussaint, they were only going to take him to France and he said OK, and the moment they took Toussaint away he became leader and he carried the revolution to a success, but there is this to be said for Dessalines he and Toussaint had as superior, the only soldier superior to them in that period of military achievement, was Bonaparte. Dessalines and Toussaint were commanders of the first rank, I want to make that very clear, they were not people fighting in some colonial struggle, not at all they were modern soldiers and they defeated the British, the French and Spaniards, because they were modern soldiers. Dessalines in particular was a superb soldier, that that I have made that clear, and you know how I managed to know that, I went to Paris to look up the archives and people told me there is a Haitian here a man attached to a French army as a representative of the Haitian army, General Mamou(?) but he told me that he was General in the Haitian army, but in France he was only Colonel, and he had written an extensive

two volume on the history of the campaign, and he was delighted to find a West Indian doing the history of the San Domingo and interested in the military battles so he used to sit down and tell me all about it. So that I remember we used to sit down drinking coffee and he would be having a teacup and saucers telling me the battles, and I would read the accounts that the French had given, and I would read his account, and the French, the account that Haitians had given so I got a good view and I came to the conclusion that they were no soldiers superior to Dessalines and Toussaint except Napoleon. And I have gone into detail about that

K. R. - Amm it's a long way from Toussaint to Cipriani and Butler I suppose, but you did write a life of Captain Cipriani before you went in to

C. J. - That's an interesting book, very interesting to me, I had read two lines of Marxism and they consisted "in 1848 Marx and Engels published the communist manifesto" that was all, so that was all I knew, I had read a little about Toussaint L'Ouverture but not much, but I was very much struck by Cipriani, I did not pay too much attention to Butler, Butler came later, I left here in '32, but somewhere about '30 it struck me that here was Cipriani saying all that was needed and to mobilise the people and federation and education, and here was I a government servant, I was teaching at the Government Training College, lecturer in English and History, but I had all these progressive ideas but I was doing nothing, I was handicapped by the fact that if I had said anything the Government would have thrown me out, and I had made up my mind to be a writer, so it struck me that I could do something by writing the life of Cipriani, so I went to Cipriani and told him, "I am interested in what you are doing but I am handicapped, I'm a government servant but I would like to write your biography, will you help me?", he said "certainly", and he gave me all the material, told me what I wanted to know and handed me a lot of materials and said "there it is" and I have written it and he had looked it over before I left in '32, so that book had no Marxism in it, and when I look at it now I see many mistakes etc. but by and large it had the spirit that Cipriani had brought, we want to govern ourselves and I went with that

K. R. - there is a feeling now that when Butler got on the scene all kinds of weaknesses in Cipriani's approach and attitudes began to be apparent

C. J. - now I have seen that and a lot of that has no historical sense, for this reason, undoubtedly Butler brought into the movement a whole lot of fundamental ideas and attitudes which Cipriani did not have, but the man who laid the foundation so that Butler could start something was Cipriani, I remember the days when Cipriani, when there was no Cipriani and I remember a great strike here in 1919, the water men, the waterfront men was striking and I was no more that 18 years of age but I used to talk to them, I was interested, and they used to talk to me and I know today that every single one of those males was a Garveyite, but they didn't say that, but they were Garveyites, that's where they lived, Cipriani brought the labour movement here and used to carry on at a rate and he made the city council, where he was mayor, a focus for conflict with the British Colonial Government all that, so later when Butler began to say well we must go on, we must go on from where Cipriani had begun and to blame Cipriani for not doing what Butler did is I think unhistorical, you are entitled to say that, but you mustn't give the impression that Cipriani made all these mistakes, he did what he had, what was, began (K. R. - what he

could do in his time) in his time, now he didn't follow along with Butler, but that time he was 70 years or thereabouts, but I am not, I don't have any sympathy for people who recognising what Butler did, condemn Cipriani for not doing it, that is without sense

K. R. - when you were growing up in these early years what sort of impact did the Garvey movement have on Trinidad, did people know about Marcus Garvey and did they hear about the Russian revolution

C. J. - no, I remember George Padmore who I used to know as Malcolm Nurse, his father used to talk to my father, his father was a tremendous political mind in Trinidad, Hubert Alfonso Nurse, he was Malcolm Nurse's father and he used to talk to my father when I was a boy of 7 or 8 and I used to hear him, and something used to drive him, my father used to listen to him with great respect and consideration, but we all looked, at least my father looked upon Nurse as somebody who was in the revolution, he was the first man who said "I am not Anglican, I am not Roman Catholic, I am a Muslim", a Black man about 98 (K. R. - this was Padmore's father?) Padmore's father, that's where Padmore grew up and he was a man who lived in a room as big as this filled with books and I had never seen that in Trinidad before and I haven't seen it for years, but he used to talk about George Washing.., about Booker T. Washington and Du Bois but I didn't used to understand, but I remember his son and I used to be friendly, were not we were not to close, not as we became later but he used to do a lot of reading of American writings about Blacks, he continued the tradition that his father had left, I was wrapped up in English literature, European literature, English history, Greek history but I was interested in the black question and I used to read two magazines, one was *The Negro World* Marcus Garvey's magazine and the other one was *The Crisis* by Du Bois and I used to read them to be, be a part of the Black struggle but I never was in it to the extent that, that Padmore was, not that he was in it, but he used to read and was interested but he didn't want to persuade me into anything, but whenever I talked to him he would always tell me.. (K. R. - but the majority of Trinidadians at the time would not have heard much about Marcus Garvey) they didn't hear much about Garvey, but Garvey came here in 1929, oh yeah Garvey came and when Garvey landed here a whole lot of people went down to the wharf to see him, but as a personality, his policies were not up to much, but I tell you the things that mattered, I remember travelling by train and I was reading an article in the news -- or one of them about Gandhi and I talked to a friend of mine about it and some Indians who were there dressed in their Indian clothes said "Hey Gandhi!" in other words they knew about Gandhi and that was about 1927, 28 and secondly the Ethiopian revolt and Mussolini's attempt to take over Ethiopia had a great influence among the people here, but that was after I left but I heard that afterwards that the Ethiopian revolt was a great stirring up and I'm glad to say that when I went to England and the upheaval took place in '37 to '38, members of the Commission whom the British Government sent, said that the writings of C. L. R. James helped to stir up the people, because I wasn't only writing about the ordinary people, which meant that I was, but I had sent the life of Captain Cipriani back here, I went there in '32

K. R. - that is sub-titled *The Case for West Indian Self-government*

C. J. - *The Case for West Indian Self-government* yes, and it was published in England as *The Case for West Indian Self-government*, an abridgement was published, so both of

them and those that circulated a lot and besides that I joined up with Padmore writing about Ethiopia and we didn't do so much about the Caribbean, we were interested in Africa, but we used to talk about the Caribbean and the writings are lovely, the book, the novel, *Minty Alley* and *A Brighter Caribbean* had a tremendous influence on the *History of Negro Revolt* people said that they wanted some literature to get out of the old one to get into the new, and those books meant a lot to them

K. R. - did the Russian revolution have much influence on you at that time

C. J. no I didn't know anything about it, I used to read the encyclopaedia Britannica a marvellous edition, and I used to read about Lenin and Trotsky and the Russian revolution but to me it was somewhat abstract

K. R. - but nowadays there is a kind of ignorance in Trinidad if you mention the name C. L. R. James people would say "Oh! that Communist fella"

C. J. - they, they are saying that because that's what they have been taught, when I was here first working with Williams I had already published *World Revolution*, I had already published *The Black Jacobins*, my ideas were widely known but people didn't make a fuss about my being a Communist, it was when I left Williams and he got into trouble, that he began to call everybody Communist, and he didn't do too much about that with me, but he did his best and encouraged it, but Williams knew everything that I had done, by '57 I had already written plenty

K. R. - but you were once officially a member of the Communist party

C. J. - never sir! I never was a member of the Communist party, I was a member of the Trotskyist party, we were opposed to the communist and I was in the Trotskyist movement from 1934 to 1951 and then I left it, and have written very fully and completely my reasons for leaving it, all that is in this book

K. R. - *Notes on Dialectic*

C. J. - yes, and you see the people I deal with it seriously, I don't deal with it gossiping, and I deal with Hegel, Marx and Lenin and what they understood by Communism

K. R. - so at the moment what are your political affiliations

C. J. - I am affiliated to nobody in particular, I have some friends in England, and I have some friends in the United States, there are people in Italy, and we are very closely associated with the ideas that we have, we exchange ideas, they translate some of my stuff into Italian and people published in England, in America and so on, but there is no affiliation in the old sense for this reason I have now come to the conclusion and that is a contribution to the Marxist/Leninist doctrine that today and for some years now we do not need a vanguard party in the sense that Lenin and the others used to put it forward or rather in the way that Lenin was interpreted as putting forward the vanguard party, the vanguard party is not necessary for the development of the workers into Socialism, Marx wrote about the Commune and he said that is it, they used to ask him this dictatorship of

the proletariat that you're talking about where is it, he said there, he wrote about the Commune, he said that is the way the workers will develop, Lenin said the Soviet, *The State And Revolution* doesn't mention the party, it deals with the Soviet and Mao Tse-tung wrote, his great contributions he said were two, number one: to defeat Chiang Kai-shek and get the Japanese out of China and the second one was the cultural revolution and the cultural revolution was aimed at the education of the workers and the peasants so as to get rid of the leadership of the movement by the party, so that Marx, Lenin and Mao Tse-tung always had a very critical idea about the party, it was necessary there were times when you had to do it, but that that was absolutely necessary to building the workers into Socialism, no sir, and that's what, I have led that and nowadays many people believe it

K. R. - but what do you think then about Caribbean politics and Caribbean societies at the present time (C. J. - no) in relation to the parties

C. J. - I am saying that the vanguard party, the party with which you cannot, so people used to say, the working class cannot be led into Socialism unless there is such a party, I say that is not Marxism, and if, Lenin never had that view, he said that that party is necessary in Russia today owing to the backwardness of Russia but *The State And Revolution* gives a universal picture for all Marxists and there he didn't talk about the party at all he said the Soviet, now we in the Caribbean, I find, have to form a party for the reason, I know there are parties not necessary in England, it is not necessary in Holland, it's not necessary in Italy, my God! there are millions of people highly educated with nearly fifty or a hundred years of practical political experience behind them, so a party isn't necessary there, but who am I to tell Mugabe who has formed a Marxist/Leninist party in Zimbabwe no, I am not going to do that, but you notice the party was formed a Marxist/Leninist party and I don't know if I can say this, this might prevent this thing being published (K. R. - it could always be cut out) what kind of party has Dr. Williams formed here, nobody knows, I can give you a better example, the best example is Mr. Hudson Phillips, Mr. Hudson Phillips has claimed that he has formed a party that is in opposition to the party of Dr. Williams, he challenges the party of Dr. Williams, what does that party stand for, nobody knows, the other day some people in the press asked him, "but Mr. Phillips, what does your party represent, what do you represent?", and I quote, put it in inverted commas, he said "Caribbean Socialists" and then the man asked him, put it in inverted commas, "what does that mean?", and also put in inverted commas Mr. Phillips said "it doesn't mean any thing at all", so that's where they are. Can we stop for a minute
Cut

C. J. - when do we have to stop

K. R. - when we feel that you are tired

C. J. - not, don't worry with me, a lot of food is being prepared in there

K. R. - alright I think we should go through and then when we stop we will eat and then depart

K. R. - so if a bunch of young Trinidadians came up to you and said "Mr. James we are very worried about the condition of Trinidad and we have decide to form a political party" what kind of advice would you give them

C. J. - they are entitled to form it, I would tell them, "do you know what are your aims? Do you know what concrete slogans you are going to put forward?" Nobody wrote more about philosophy, nobody wrote more about the economics, and the capitalist beginning their development in Russia, nobody wrote more about the philosophy of the Russian people than Lenin did, but although Lenin did that and educated his party he had three slogans for the revolution, number one: the Democratic Republic, number, instead of --, number two: the eight hour day for the workers and number three: the lands of the peasants. I would ask them "number one, have you worked out a basic philosophy of politics which you are going to put into action? you must have that, and then the slogans that you are going to use those may change but get those first and then go ahead"

K. R. - but I would have said, if a group of fellows told me they were going to form a party, I think I would be very pessimistic when they started to speak to me and I would say "well, you're dealing with a society which seems to be, which thinks it is so well off materially that almost everybody is investing in the status quo, (C. J. - may I) and you're dealing with a party which has swept one of its most important issues so firmly under the carpet, that is the racial issue, that is between African and Indians, that you could not form a political party in this country, nobody would allow you, those who want the status quo would not allow you, and those who are investing in African Indian differences will not allow you"

C. J. - I want to tell you that those are not my views and I say so with a lot of confidence because I have written that in the press, I sent it in and I notice a lot of people today are saying, a whole lot of people are saying the country is in a mess, it is drifting, it doesn't know where it is going and we're in a state of crisis, so the that PNM has not succeeded in anything it has only resulted after these years in putting the country in a state where everybody is saying what is going to happen to us next, and I don't think they have driven the racial issue below the carpet, the ULF aimed to get together oil and sugar, and Williams has written in his book -- I haven't read it because I don't read what he writes anymore, but I have been told that in it he says one of the important things that he has done in Trinidad politics is to keep apart oil and sugar, now to me that is the basis of progress in Trinidad for what oil represents and what sugar represents in the labour movement to get together and form something solid, but I don't believe that people have driven anything under the carpet, whatever was under the carpet I feel came out in 1970, after 1970 you can't talk about things under the carpet, my friend, after 1970 whatever was under the carpet has come out, but people what is their problem is they don't know what steps to take and that is the problem, but they going to have to find out and shall I tell you something else I don't know if you will want it, Dr. Williams and the PNM, I gather, are in as much confusion as anybody else, they don't know what to do, Dr. Williams don't know what, can he come forward again or are people against him, inside the PNM people are telling him "that letter that I wrote to you putting everything in your hands, give it back to me", they've taking him to court, he needs a majority in the house, a commission in order to make Raffick(?) and the rest of them go out of the house altogether, he has passed a law, but he can't get that committee, there are PNM people who say no, we are not going to take part in that, that is the state the country is in. Prime Minister Hudson Phillips who the other day made the tremendous pronouncement the country is a tinder box, you remember that and that don't mean that, tinder boxes don't take place under the carpet, the essence of a tinder box is that it has come out from under the carpet, you

know I think the country today is in a tremendous state of uncertainty, doubt and hesitation as to what is to take place, but it's difficulty is, it's uncertain as to what steps to take and that I think is obvious from what is taking place in the rest of the Caribbean, when Bishop and the Jewel movement did something that the Caribbean needed got rid of Gairy and the rest of the Caribbean, Trinidad at the head does not look upon that as a tremendous addition to the understanding of the Caribbean and what people will think about it, that a Caribbean people got rid of him, no they are concerned not that Gerry was got rid of, but with the fact that Bishop mobilised the population against an oppressive government, they are scared stiff themselves against such an action, they

K. R. - but there is a problem there in that many people who approve of Gairy having been pushed out are worried about the recent Russian thrust in the Caribbean and they feel that the Cuban/Russian involvement in the Grenadian revolution might in the end prevent the Grenadian revolution from being a Grenadian revolution, just as the Russian involvement in Cuba might be taking away the Cuban revolution from the Cuban people, so that a lot of the resistance to Bishop or to Castro at the moment might be a fear that some people have about what the Russians are trying to do, so now we have to worry not only about America but about the Russians

C. J. - I, I don't think that the Russians had anything to do with the fact that Bishop got rid of Gairy, I think that was a Grenadian necessity and a Caribbean necessity, and that was one of the great events in the history of the Caribbean people, that they got rid of him, and what I say about Fidel Castro is this, there are many things about Fidel that I am uncertain of, there are many that I am certain of, but I want to say only two things, we can't go into Cuba here, number one: Castro led the revolution before the Russians came in, (C. J. - yes) the Russians didn't help him make it and number two: at the present time but for the help of the Cuban army, a whole area in South Africa would be under the control of the white South Africans, now you got to, to tell me plenty against Fidel, don't stand up there, Fidel didn't wait for the Russians he went ahead and there are many things I could say positive about the Cuban revolution but I don't want to go into that

K. R. - now I think maybe we can round off this little section of the talk which has been a lot about the leaders by going back to *The Black Jacobins* and ask you if there was a section of *The Black Jacobins* that you were to read anywhere would you like to choose it and read it now

C. J. - do we come to an end here

K. R. just for a moment

C. J. - only a moment

K. R. - yes, we give you a rest for about five minutes or so, maybe have lunch or something and then resume

C. J. - now there are two sections of *The Black Jacobins* that I would like to read, one is where Toussaint, one is where Toussaint was afraid that things were taking place in France and the revolution in San Domingo was being threatened by the development of

the reaction in France and he wrote a letter to the French government in which he expressed his fears, but they were only fears, and they had sent him a personal present for the work he had been doing and he refers to that, now this is what I want to read, in the new edition, page 196, he says *do they, the planters think that men who have been able to enjoy the blessing of liberty will calmly see it snatched away, they supported their chains only so long as they did not know any condition of life more happy than that of slavery, but today when they have left it, if they have a thousand lives they will sacrifice them all rather than be forced into slavery again, but no, the same hand which has broken our chains will not enslave us anew, France will not revoke her principles, she will not withdraw from us the greatest of her benefits, she will protect us against all our enemies, she will not permit her sublime morality to be perverted, those principles which do her most honour, to be destroyed, her most beautiful achievement to be degraded, but if to re-establish slavery in San Doming this was done, then I declare to you it would be to attempt the impossible, we have known how to face dangers to attain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it and then he goes on this citizen's directives is the morale of the people of San Domingo, these are the principles that they transmit to you by me, my own you know, it is sufficient to renew my hand in yours, the oath that I have made to cease to live before gratitude died in my heart, before I cease to be faithful to France and to my duty, before the god of liberty is profaned and sullied by the liberticides before they can snatch from my hands that sword, those arms which France confided to me for the defence of its rights and those of humanity for the triumph of liberty and equality, you see it deals with the San Domingo situation and then it broadens it out and I want to read a passage from Georges Lefebvre about the Jacobins and the Girondists and the sans-culottes, The Jacobins from page 297, 276 *the Jacobins furthermore were authoritarian in outlook, consciously or not they wished to act with the people and for them, but they claimed the right of leadership and when they arrived at the head of affairs they ceased to consult the people, did away with relations, proscribed the hébertistes and the enragés, they can be described as enlightened despots, the sans-culottes on the contrary were extreme democrats, they wanted the direct government of the people by the people, if they demanded a dictatorship against the aristocrats they wished to exercise it themselves and to make their leaders do what they wanted, the sans culottes of Paris in particular I am speaking here, saw very clearly what was required at each stage of the revolution, at least until it reached its highest peak, their difficulty was that they had neither the education, experience nor the resources to organise a modern state if only temporarily, for a balanced account of the way in which the sans-culottes themselves worked out and forced upon an unwilling Robespierre the great policies which saved the revolution see Lefevrier and I go on to say, but that the sans culottes had to force the Jacobins, but in 1980 the Sans Coulotte I think learned to give them a chance to do it, they were not so far away from education and understanding, okay**

K. R. - well I don't know if we can eat in about 20 minutes boys, we can eat in 20 minutes

C. K. - ask her

Pictures of his books

LOCATION: C. L. R. James' home

DATE: September 5th, 1980

TAPE #: 3

K. R. - when you went to England you started writing I think for the *Manchester Guardian* about cricket

C. J. - yes, I wrote an article about Barnes and I sent it to Neville Cardus, Constantine told me and told him is there any paper in Lancashire which would take this article? Cardus wrote back to me and told me we will print it, and come and see me in Manchester whenever you come in, so I went in and he told me I'm looking for a man to write for me when I can't go places, you look as if you would do, are you willing, I said yes and first day I had a job

K. R. - and when you started that job did you then feel that you must read up, what sort of cricket writers did you read

C. J. - I did not have to read up anything, there is some cricket writing that I did before I went to England, and that is as good as anything that I did in England, I emphasise that, that I didn't go to England an empty head and an empty slate to learn everything, I took certain things there and my cricket writing I took to England, I was writing here on cricket very well

K. R. - now everybody knows, at least knows the title *Beyond a Boundary* and many people have read it, it is even being used in the schools, so it is an important and famous book, when did you start writing it

C. J. - I reported cricket in England from 1932, '33 to '38, then I went to the USA and I saw no cricket from '38 to '53, but I had my cricket books with me and I did some real study as to what this game meant, particularly after the war, and when I went to England in '45, '53 I spent the time reporting cricket, first the Guardian told me to come back, I did a year with them and I looked at a lot of cricket and I started to write this book

K. R. - but did it begin as an autobiographical work

C. J. - no, I finished it about '56 as the result of my thinking in the USA between '38 and '53, I thought of a lot of things, Shakespeare, cricket and English life on the whole because I was startled by the difference between British life and the USA, so I had to think of what was the British life, so when I, I didn't write about cricket then, but I kept in touch I had the books and I read, and I went back to England and started to write the book about '54 and by '56 I had written it. Then I was invited to Trinidad and I took the manuscript with me and some of the manuscript appeared in *The Nation*, but I said nothing about it, then when I began to get ready to go back to England in '62 and '63 I wrote the last chapter, that was all I had to do, the rest of the book was there, I wrote the last chapter about the -- captain which only came in about '60 and I sent it to England where the took it at once, so that's how

K. R. - you called it *Beyond a Boundary*

C. J. - I didn't call it so, the editor called it *Beyond a Boundary*, (K. R. - what did you call it) I didn't have any name for it, he, was he called it *Beyond a Boundary*, and there is

something else that is very interesting, in the first edition there were pictures (K. R. - Clyde Walcott) of everybody and the editor in chief of Hutchinson(?), when he read the book he said take these pictures out, I don't want this book, obviously he didn't want the book to go out with a lot of cricketers in it as if it was a book about cricketers, so he took them out and he called it *Beyond a Boundary*, I said okay, but there is one thing here that I want y'all to remember, I wrote a chapter here, *What is art*, Chapter 16, and at the end of the chapter I wrote *the popular democracy of Greece, sitting for days in the sun, watching the oristaia(?), the playbyiscas(?) the popular democracy of our day, sitting similarly watching Mayers and Lindwall bowl to Hutton and Compton, each in its own way grasps at a more complete human existence, we may someday be able to answer Tolstoy's exasperated and exasperating question, what is art? But only when we learn to integrate our vision of Walcott on the back foot through the coverds with the outstretched arm of the Olympic Apollo*, and the Olympic Apollo is a famous statue of Greece, but this is what I had in mind, to compare Walcott through the coverds and I believe Walcott on the back foot there standing up, that somehow there was a quality of it that reminded me of that statue of which I am so fond I went to Greece to see it, the Olympic Apollo and his outstretched arm, and I connected them, I put them together, but it's only worthwhile when you see the picture

K. R. - but did you know that the book was *Beyond A Boundary*, I mean why did it have to be that the editor gave that title to it

C. J. - because it went into many matters of history and ah social, sociology, which were beyond the actual cricket match, so when he said that I said okay (K. R. - you knew that that was the right title) I knew it was the right title. Shall I tell you something else about the book, the book appeared in 1963 and was a tremendous success and still is, in 1964 John Arlott who used to write every year in Wisden's article, in Wisden's Almanac, a section on cricket books of the year, he wrote about this book and he says "1963 has been marked by the publication of a cricket book so outstanding as to compel any reviewer to check his adjectives several times before he describes it, and since he is likely to be dealing in superlatives to measure them carefully to avoid over praise which this book does not need, it is *Beyond A Boundary* by C. L. R. James and in the opinion of this reviewer it is the finest book written about the game of cricket", then he goes on to say "there may be a better book about any sport than *Beyond A Boundary*, if so the present reviewer has not seen it", and then he went on to point out something which gives me great pleasure, "the essay on Wilton St. Hill must be the finest portrait of a cricketer every created in prose, or for that matter in verse or paint either", now Wilton is not a world famous cricketer, he is a man whom I learnt to appreciate in the Savannah, Queens Park, and I wrote an essay on him, and for Cardus for Arlott for John Arlott to write that that is the finest portrait of a cricketer that he knows ever written anywhere in verse or in prose or in paint that, I took great, Wilton and I, I got to know him, we used to play in the Queens Park Savannah and I wrote about him and for Arlott with his wide knowledge to say that and then I have to say something else, which is very painful, I sent a copy of this book to my brother and told him look at what he says about *Beyond A Boundary*, so my brother was very pleased and he took it to the press and said look, and they wouldn't publish it, that has never appeared in the local press, never

K. R. - but ah I'm still trying to work out the frame of mind in which you wrote the book 'cause clearly you weren't writing a history of West Indian cricket (C. J. - no I wasn't) and you weren't writing the sociology of Trinidad

C. J. - no but I was writing about cricket a game that I knew and felt people were not taking it in the way that they should and I got that impression in Trinidad where cricket was practically the only art form that, and when I began to think about cricket, I began to think of what it meant, where I had grown up what it meant to us, what Learie Constantine and Wilton St. Hill meant and I transferred that to cricket in England and I said that is what and y'all are not seeing that, so I wrote about ideas that had been developed in the Caribbean, but which could gain their thoroughly European stature and importance only in regard to English cricket, and that's what I did and I had worked that out in the United States, I wasn't able to play, but I could see what baseball meant to them, and I was able to compare baseball to cricket, and I know that cricket meant more to the English civilisation than baseball did to the U. S. A., I didn't say so, but I was thinking about it so when I went back to England and went back to cricket I wrote the book

K. R. - but don't you find there is a discontinuity between the development of our cricket and the development of our social life, for instance in England you could say that you have an established society, which has its beliefs and its values or at least it used to, and that the game of cricket tended to match or consolidate or modify those where the two went together

C. J. - absolutely, cricket is a part of English life and who doesn't understand cricket does not understand the life of the English people

K. R. - but would you say the same about the West Indies

C. J. - yeah, in a different way, but it is part of West Indian life, because cricket was the first art form that became a part of the life of the West Indian community, there for the first time the merchant planter class and the ordinary people met and people could look upon them as members of the one community, so that when they went to England in 1900, the took some, Cumberbatch and Constantine and these black bowlers for the most part, Constantine was a batsman, and there for the first time after slavery they began, a sense of community came with cricket and to this day it still is a part of the life of the community and you see that in a very peculiar way, when the people in the Caribbean are really angry about what the local whites are doing to them they express it on the cricket field, they are not hostile to the British cricketers, no they have a lot of admiration for them, for Hammond and Peter May and those -- but they want to let everybody know they don't like what is going on, and their attitudes to the cricket matches when the English people come is a demonstration of how deeply they feel about cricket

K. R. - but what I was getting at is considering the great development of our cricket, that we are world champions, let's say, and yet our societies have not developed to match that

C. J. - I can tell you about that I have thought about that a great deal, where is it that West Indian people have distinguished themselves, in two spheres, perhaps three, number one in cricket, number two in writing, number three in athletics (K.R. - well amm a weak third)

but they go the U. S. A. and for years they have been winning way beyond their population, why should West Indians win the 100 at the Olympic, the 200 at Olympic, the 400 and the 800 in Cuba, why should we, we are nobody, we're just a drop in the bucket, the reason is this, cricket is something we can join, the art of fiction is something we can join, the athletics we can go to the U. S. A. and be trained, we can join, but to create something we have only created the steelband, nothing else, so in these others, in cricket, fiction and world-wide athletics we can go in, because it's there, we only have to go in and match ourselves with them and because we are not dominated by the past as they have been, our cricketers in particular and our novelists can break out in to all sorts of things, nobody has ever batted as that boy Resis(?) has, I don't say he's the best but he is a unique player, Constantine is another unique player, people have not played like them, so they could go in and distinguish themselves, but when it comes to the creation of something new, we haven't done very much, and that is waiting for us now, we have to, what is waiting for us is to show that politically we can equal what they are doing

K. R. - but doesn't doing it your way, modifying the old, doesn't that constitute something new (C. J. - modifying which old) if you join fiction and you join cricket and you do them in such a way that you do it distinctively, everybody knows that this is your brand of writing and this is your brand of cricket, isn't that just as good as doing something new

C. J. - no, we are very backward in political development, we have to do something new there, I don't think we have done much in art either, no, we haven't done much in science or these things we haven't, but these are things in particular, we need to create politically, that's the next stage, that's why Fidel Castro is so important, not that it, it is that he made the revolution and the British Caribbean are all soaked in the habit of parliamentary democracy, government and opposition, they can't get away from that

K. R. - but our cricketers could have been soaked in the MCC rules of cricket and the public school attitude to the game (C. J. - but they played) but they were not

C. J. - they were not, they began to play here, they began to play in the Caribbean in an atmosphere entirely different from what they were playing in Britain, they took up the British game and transferred it into a Caribbean construction

K. R. - so can't we take up the British parliamentary system and transfer it into something else

C. J. - that, that, that is not so easy, that is not so easy, and we took up cricket, but we haven't broken with cricket, there are centres of cricket we have maintained, but the essentials of the British parliamentary system are not even working in Britain or the United States, so we need their complete creation and I think we are going to do it, I see many signs of it everywhere, there is to begin with the feeling of dissatisfaction with what is going on, which is the preliminary to creation

K. R. - when you go over *Beyond A Boundary* you said that you were very pleased about the praise for the Wilton St. Hill essay, but before you saw that was that your favourite chapter

C. J. - no, I don't think so, I'll tell you what happened to me with that book, I wrote it and brought the script here and during my stay in Trinidad and the Caribbean I was secretary of the West Indian Federal Labour Party, I travelled up and down the Caribbean, and I was fascinated re-reading that manuscript to see how much of the West Indies I had taken with me abroad and how much of the West Indies was part of what I had done abroad, so my stay here between '57 and '63, a lot of it was due to my reading my copy of *Beyond A Boundary* which I didn't change and comparing how European that book was and yet how West Indian it was, the book has meant a great deal to me and it is tremendously successful abroad, all sorts of distinguished people in intellect and ideas abroad, read *Beyond A Boundary* and think it is a marvellous book

K. R. - well that book is, it could be, I don't regard it as such, as a contradictory book but it is a book in which all the various elements that go into the making of the West Indian or you as a West Indian seemed to exist and it's a book in which there is a concern about blackness, there is a concern about West Indian nationhood, there is a concern about art, there is a concern about cricket, there is an involvement with England and with the West, how do you feel about reconciling, how do you feel about the reconciling of all these elements

C. J. - I did not reconcile, I said that is it, I didn't set out to reconcile, now I will tell you about this reconciliation, I had, in the last chapter I wrote something which I had already come to, now in the chapter before the last I speak about my son, and when I brought him here, his mother is an American white woman, they looked at him and they saw him and they finally said, "yes, he is a James", so I said I see what they mean, *but is he a James as I know the Jameses, I can't say and as far as I am aware I am not particularly anxious that he should be, he has to live his life, not mine, he is in the family tradition a scholarship winner and goes to an excellent school in New York, It Isn't Cricket doesn't mean a thing to him, why should it, but the son of our house, an American citizen, my wife's son, is a mighty cricket enthusiast, and before he was in his teens I could trust him to go to a test match and bring back a report in which I had more confidence than much that appeared in the press. Both he and my son are readers and will read this book and if there is a proposal to sell again I hope this book will help them not merely to say no, which I expect from them, but to convince the others, that It Isn't Cricket to sell again like baseball or basketball, or whatever the game may be, and then the last sentence, which is the last sentence of this book, this hail and farewell to the ancestral creed may be of some use to them after all and in any case it can do them no harm, I had left It Isn't Cricket behind with this but Frank Worrell went to Australia and the Australians gave him a tremendous reception so I wrote another chapter, and I say I caught a glimpse of what brought a quarter of a million inhabitants of Melbourne into the streets to tell the West Indian cricketers goodbye, a gesture spontaneous and in cricket without precedent, one people speaking to another, clearing their way with bat and ball, West Indians at that moment had made a public entry into the committee of nations and then I added *Thomas Arnold, Thomas Hughes and the old master himself would have recognised Frank Worrell as their boy*, but the end of the book is that was hail and farewell to it isn't cricket, when I finished this book in England in 1956, I had been to America, I had looked at America, and I had come back and I had, and I had finished with that*

K.R. - so are you saying that it is, it was appropriate that you should contain all these elements

C. J. - yes, I grew up with them and they happened to me year after year, (K. R. - but you are not suggesting them as a model for another generation) not far, not only I'm not a model I have said here, that is a hail and farewell to that whole business, I recognise its values, I think its values will remain but what it was to the English aristocracy it's not any longer, it's not even any longer to them, today it's a game that is supported as a financial commercial business, that isn't the old cricket. So it has changed with them, for us it is different, we distinguish ourselves at cricket and realise that nobody is better than we, we have to work at other things too, but we

K. R. - 'cause I remember some years ago when there was a presentation in London, I think there was a bust of yourself

C. J. - it is there, there is a picture of it, you want it

K. R. - we'll take it after

C. J. - it is a copy of the one that, in the copy of *Minty Alley*

K. R. - when that was being presented there were certain elements in the audience who were hostile

C. J. - they were, they were hostile not to me, but Albert Gomes was there and they were hostile to him, many of them have told me afterwards they were sorry about it, but they wanted it clear that they didn't want to be at any function where Gomes was going to be, and I have always had a soft spot in my heart for Albert, because I knew what Albert was doing, he was a Portuguese man, not the old white, but he was part of the old system and he that was a type was maintaining it, that was what he was doing, but in himself personally he was a very well developed sophisticated person and I could always talk to him, so much so that when I gave that speech at U. W. I. I began by saying that I hope they would understand, that I would express the feelings, my regret that I heard that Bertie was dead, I made that speech in particular

K. R. - since writing *Beyond A Boundary* which is ostensibly about cricket, have you had any further reflections on the game that you feel could, could add a, be a kind of post script to what you say there

C. J. - I have written on Learie Constantine and I have written on Garfield Sobers

K. R. - there was a very fine piece about Kanhai's cat and mouse

C. J. - I have written on Kanhai also and there I have gone beyond, but I have to, I say that Sobers is today's, cricket is a world wide game today and Sobers corresponds to the world wide nature of cricket and what the aeroplane and television has done to cricket, Sobers is a representative of that, and Constantine represented something new, individual, something specially West Indian and that can never be forgotten and Kanhai

was playing a new type of cricket altogether, all those three are very West Indian and I refer to them, but without making a fuss about it, these are tendencies that I see appearing

K. R. - I find it hard now to attach, it seems to be implicit in your remark, a great deal of nationhood to West Indian cricket, it just seems to me that we've got some very good professionals, great ability, who are beating the rest of the world

C. J. - I don't attach nationhood to West Indian cricket, I say that West Indian cricket is a part of the nation, but there are many trends which go to make a nation, and cricket is one of those trends which have gone to make the West Indies what it is. I don't see anything wrong with that, I'm not saying that it is along those lines their future lies, not me, no I say we have brought something new and cricket was down to, down to the dregs when Frank Worrell went to Australia and then came back to England, and lifted it up again that's what we have done and we are doing that in many fields, oh yes. We haven't a native civilisation you know, in the way that the Africans have, but we are taking the old one and making, that was sinking and going to pieces and making them once more something vital to the age in which we live, that is an achievement I believe, we being what we are. I don't believe there is more distinctive writing on cricket, on fiction today than there is in Wilson Harris and in the traditional style of writing, the old American and English novels, George Lamming has brought that into the middle of the 20th century, and going off into psychological and nationalistic explanations of the Caribbean and Central American --, Harris has done that in a way that nobody is doing otherwise, so that's what we are doing. But I'm not thinking that cricket, we are cricketers and therefore, not at all, that's part of what has helped us to be, I believe we are going to make tremendous advances in the field of parliamentary democracy, we are going to show that democracy and parliament are not adverse elements, we are going to show that, it will be a new kind of parliament and a tremendous extension of democracy, but the size of these islands and the character of the populations of the islands, means we are going to make new adventures into the democratic conception and methods by which it takes place in the nation, I believe the Federation of the Caribbean is on the way, and a Federation I mean Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Martinique and Guadeloupe, the Guyanas, that's a nation and also I think that not in the far, too far distance, Venezuela and Mexico that is around the Caribbean sea, those are the elements, that, that's how I see the next 25 years

K. R. - the conventional objection to that is that there would be great language problems

C. J. - pardon me, I don't see any language problem at all, may I explain, in German you have a language which like Dutch is full of the Saxon, German original elements, but in the Caribbean we haven't any native languages as the Africans have, in Nigeria you have many languages, in Tanzania you have Swahili, in East Africa you have Swahili and so on, but in the Caribbean what we have, Italia.. ah, Spanish, French and English those languages are very close, there's no problem, all the traditional literature, a man in Tanzania want to read Plato, he's in trouble, not many people have translated or know Swahili, but all the classics, --, all the classics are in English, French, Spanish -- and we will have no trouble at all in understanding one another, in addition to that, owing to the great influence of the United States, English is a lingua franca right through the Caribbean, so we will have no trouble, if we had a native language, we'd be in trouble, but

not in trouble with English, French and Spanish, no. Now we are near to it, we are 5 past, we ought to come to an end

K. R. - yeah Tony, I think we better amm hold it there

C. J. - we hold it there for now

Cut

C. J. - I thought it good that he should tackle that subject and do it so well, there is another interesting man from there, a man called Walters(?), they say they are going to publish Party Politics in the West Indies

Tony Hall - keep talking

K. R. - it's Walters(?) and Gomes working together

C. J. - they are working together and Walters(?) is giving some economics class or sociology and he says he's supposed to do West Indian folklore with it and he's taking that as a reason for doing an extensive treatment of C. L. R. James so ----- West Indian and he and Gomes, but Gomes is a remarkable many, anyway I'm not surprised, he had intended to go into the priesthood you know

K. R. - is he a black man

C. J. - no. Portuguese, light skinned, very light skinned, he would pass anywhere as Portuguese

K. R. - I didn't know Gomes was a full time lecturer

LOCATION: C. L. R. James' home

DATE: September 5th, 1980

TAPE #: 4

K. R. - yeah so maybe you could start with amm the house, because I notice that you write a lot about the house that is near to the cricket ground and with the window exactly behind the wicket, was this the house in which you were born

C. J. - I wasn't born there, I was born in Chaguanas, where my father was teaching, but that was the family house of the James family

K. R. - that is the house in Tunapuna

C. J. - in Tunapuna, and although that house was destroyed by my aunt, she built another one on the same spot and that is there today

K. R. - and is it still a house that belongs to the James family

C. J. - it still belongs to the James family

K. R. - and what about the cricket ground

C. J. - the cricket ground has been removed, much to my regret it is somewhere else, but where that is I don't know, but I grew up with the cricket ground in front of me and from my window I could see it, and I laid the foundation of my cricket knowledge and interest there

K. R. - your father ran his school in Chaguanas

C. J. - he was a teacher in the government department, he taught in Chaguanas and then he was moved to various places, the places that I remember clearly, or the place was the North Trace, six miles above Princes Town, when you reached to Princes Town you took a cab and drove up to North Trace, and there we lived for some years. And from July to December it was very wet there, so my father and my mother sent me to Tunapuna to the James house from January to June, or rather, no from January to June they took me up to North Trace and in June/July they sent, they took us back to Tunapuna, where I lived there and went to the Tunapuna E.C. School

K. R. - so when you were at North Trace, what school did you go to

C. J. - I went to my father's school (K. R. - oh ho so you had) I went to my father's school, it was very simple, and he began to teach me for the exhibitioner's examination on the 26th of April 1909 I think it was, and all that he used to do was, he used to teach certain people for the pupil teachers exam, in those days pupil teachers had to take exams year after year, and that was supposed to be a difficult exam, at least not very easy, and all I did was at 8 o'clock I went and participated in the school teachers training, but by 1909 he was transferred from North Trace, to Port-of-Spain, to the St. Anns Government School, the remnants of it are still there, but it at one time used to be a place where people who were using aeroplanes used to have some sort of club there, and at another time in the building there used to be a library, a public library, but he went there and from 1909 to 1910 he was a teacher there, and I had a tremendous experience, because it was right next to the Savannah where I could see cricket and football and take and read the papers every morning, horse racing and I sat for the second time, for the exhibitioner's exam in December 1910, when I was 9 years old, but by early in '11 it was clear that I had won, I came first, and I went to Q. R. C. in 1911 and I stayed there till 1918

K. R. - we'll come back to Q. R. C. in a minute but what was the difference, was there a difference between the regime in your aunt's house and the regime in your parents' house

C. J. - there wasn't anything of a regime, my mother was a highly religious woman and my aunts were very religious, so I used to go to the E.C school, they used to have some trouble to get me away from watching the boys playing cricket there, but I used to go up in the back and my aunt, my grandmother would come and drag me away, and that was it, but there was no difference, they were both very religious, they was church every Sunday

morning, and as I grew older I went to Sunday school on Sunday afternoon, and that was about it

K. R. - were there any licks an' thing

C. J. - no, there were no blows, my father would give me one or two every now and then, but he had little opportunity to do that because I was bright and everything that they gave me to do I did and finished it off so I didn't get, many people believed that he worked me very hard and gave me a lot of blows, that wasn't quite true, at all, I only began to work for the examination on the 26th of April, I remember the date because he wrote it down, he said "well my boy we begin today, April the 26th, 1909", and I went to the, the pupil teachers from 3 to 4 and from 8 to 9 and I had nothing else to do, when I was in Tunapuna I would go not to any private lessons, I would go the E.C. school, and there I worked very rapidly, was in the 6th and 7th standard and did all that was required of me, I never had any trouble in school, except when I went to Q. R. C., the trouble I had there was doing what I wanted to do, and not doing what they wanted me to do, but until I went there I did my work and just went ahead

K. R. - but training for the exhibition in those days, as you say in *Beyond A Boundary* was like training a game cock or training a horse for a special race

C. J. - but there was no trouble with me, my father simply told me come and be trained with the pupil teachers, and that was enough for me, and I, I would like to mention something, near about November 1910, when the, the exhibitioner's exam was coming near, I became very bright and my father would ask, the important thing in Arithmetic was the problem, you could do interest and fractions and everything else, but the problem, the difficult one was the problem, and I remember almost before he had finished the problem I had worked out what it was, and I heard him telling my mother one day, "that boy, I mean he is carrying on in a way that I have never seen or heard of before" and one week before the exam he told me, "boy, you have done enough, just take it easy, you will be ready", I said "you don't want me to do anymore work", he said "no, you've done enough", and I went for the exam and just swept away everything, I was one of those who for good or ill reason was born bright, I don't know, I can't say whether it was to my benefit or not, but I was bright so I, that's the kind of life I have lived

K. R. - was your career at Q. R. C. as brilliant an academic career as had been expected (C. J. - no it was not) and why not

C. J. - because I paid attention to my own business, I read all the books in the library, there was some thirty something volumes of Thackeray and I had got to love Thackeray from *Vanity Fair*, a copy my mother had, I had to read them all and in addition near the end of when I was about 15 or 16 I was allowed to go down to the Trinidad public library and get some books to read and I began to read everything, in addition a very peculiar happening, during many years at Q. R. C. I took lunch, I brought my lunch from home

K. R. - where did you live at the time, you lived

C. J. - I lived at, from Tunapuna I went down every day (K. R. - you travelled) and later I travelled from Arima, but most of the time I travelled and brought my lunch with me (K. R. - this was by train) by train. So when lunch came I got out my sandwiches and I crept into the masters' room and they were all members at one time of Oxford and Cambridge, so this was about 1909

K. J. - was the staff all white

C. J. - there was one coloured man Mr. Bradshaw doing French and Spanish, but all the others were white

K. R. - what about the pupils, how many black boys were there

C. J. - there were a certain number of black boys, there were some Indian boys, but a good many of the boys were the children of the British officials, 1910, 1911, that was it, but I used to live, work there at midday and I got into the habit of going into the masters' room when the masters had gone away and I found that the masters there, this was about 1909, most of them had been at Oxford or Cambridge about 1890 or 1900 and they had brought their books to the college and stuck them in the masters' room, so I was able to have a read of a bunch of books, masterpieces, original copies of Matthew Arnold, George Saintsbury, Edmund Gosse all these were masters' books there and I read them one by one, I particularly want to mention one, it was a history of England by a Roman Catholic priest, I don't remember his name now, but he gave me a history of England entirely different from what I was being taught usually, there were volumes in there by Macaulay, there were volumes by Arthur Simonds, there were volumes by everybody, the masters were using the books that they had been taught at Cambridge or Oxford and they brought them there and put them in the masters' room so that for 5 or 6 years I had at my disposal a collection of books that could not be matched anywhere else in Trinidad and a great deal of my breadth of education and general view was due not to what they taught me in class, but to the extraordinary range of different attitudes and different methods that I gained from being able to take the books out of the masters' room while I was having my lunch, quite often I would take them away, but I would put them back, but I had a wonderful time

K. R. - were you a loner in this or were there some contemporaries

C. J. - there were one or two boys who had lunch there, but there weren't many who settled down to read and the moment school was over and the masters had gone, before I started to eat, I would go in and take out a Macaulay or take out a Saintsbury or take out a Matthew Arnold and start to read and that's what I did all the time. I would like to do something, if somebody gets a book in there for me, it is English History from 1830 or there about (K. R. - by whom) it is a series in the history of English Literature, it is a largish book, from 1830 to about 1839, I would really like to mention the name of that Catholic Priest (K. R. - was it Filing(?), Keith Filing(?)) no, but he was a man who had an entirely different view of the history that was being taught to me and all the others were repeating, so right early I was made to understand that there could be different views of history, that I was, nobody taught me that it happened from the books I was reading and this fellow wrote extremely well, I have seen his book praised by people

K. R. - it couldn't be G.M. Young(?) he's not a Catholic

C. J. - no it was not Young(?), this was a Catholic priest

K. R. - who were your distinguished contemporaries at Q. R. C. was there anybody there who became a good scholar or famous later on. Is that the one

C. J. - yes

Large space with just sounds of traffic as he looks at the book given to him

C. J. - yes I am glad to find out, his name was John Lindegard, John Lindegard and he wrote the history of England and 3 volumes of which dealt with the period before Henry the Eight, and his main aim is to show that the reformation had been the fundamental disaster in English history, you can imagine what that meant to me, I had been brought up on all the other books I had been reading, all started English literature and the English view of the world from the reformation and here was this fella writing and saying it was all wrong. From Lindegard, when I left Q. R. C. I picked up books by Belloc and Chesterton, two Catholics who continued what Lindegard had been doing, and Lindegard wrote well, Chesterton and Belloc were good writers, very dramatic and powerful, so that from early I wasn't taught these things at school, but by accident and my curiosity, I was able to get a view that history was not what one somebody said but there were absolutely opposing views, and I think that is very important in any discussion of my days at school

K. R. - was there something apart, well you were educating yourself more widely than the syllabus permitted (C. J. - far more widely) but was there a rebellious element in this, that you felt that something was wrong

C. J. - no I didn't feel that at all, I didn't feel anything rebellious, the only trouble was the masters and everybody used to say James is doing well but he ought to do much better, and if he took the trouble he ought to do much better. Mr Burslem came into school one day and he told me "James I hope I never see your face at the end of this term", in other words he was going to report me to the Board of Education and my exhibition would be finished, but he was a very kind man, a very severe man who used the rod at the slightest opportunity, but after telling me that he told me "James I want to see you", and he said that "there are some books in next door there, room I want you to put those books in order", so I knew what that meant it was making a gesture to me and before, when I was finished he said "have you finished them", I said "yes I've put them in order", he said "James you're a very bright boy, there is a new scholarship being introduced in the school now, people can chose various subjects and you do very well at Literature, so if you choose Literature you can win a scholarship and you can do very well, so I hope I'll see you doing differently from the way you've been carrying on up to now", I told him "thank you very much sir" and I went away, but I went on doing what I did, my concern was cricket, football, books on cricket and literature generally

K. R. - amm

C. J. - you asked me if I knew any bright boys, I used to teach one boy, I used to teach him, Hugh Wooding, he was a pupil when I was teaching there, and I may mention something now, I came back here in 1964, I think, and I was given an honorary degree at U. W. I. and everybody told me that they had wanted to give me that for a long time but they had been afraid, but now it seemed that the situation had cleared and they were happy to give it to me, so I used to sit down and talk to Wooding and he told me you know James in my last year Mr. A. M. Low the principal, called me downstairs and he told me, "well Wooding I want to go on vacation and I have asked Mr. James to take y'all in Literature and the book of Vergil what do you think of it?" So Wooding told me, I told him "well sir, if you asked Mr. James to take us in Literature and the book of Vergil, if it's satisfactory to you, it's quite satisfactory to us, that was the scholarship form", and then Wooding told me he went on to say "Wooding I have asked Mr. James because he knows more about Literature than all these people around the college", I didn't know that, but he had come and asked me because that was the year we were doing Pope, Dryden, Samuel Johnson and the whole of the 18th century, about 10 books we were doing and he asked me if I could read, I told him "yes I could", but he went and he got it right with Wooding, he felt that they might think that for me in the lower school to come up to teach the scholarship boys was something that was a bit unusual, but Wooding told him "if you say so it's quite alright with us", then he told him, Wooding told me, "Mr. James knows more about literature than all these people around here", I was very astonished about that, I had no idea that he had such ideas

K. R. - did you actually write the scholarship exam

C. J. - one year I wrote an exam for the higher certificate and I achieved the distinction of failing

K. R. - so you didn't complete the H. C.

C. J. - I never won the H. C., I failed, now when I failed the H. C. Mr. Burslem was so astonished that he sent a special cable to the people at Oxford asking if there had been some mistake about the failure of C. L. R. James and the sent back to say "no, C. L. R. James had not satisfied the examiners", so I had failed and I knew when I had failed, I had failed in the French translation from English into French, I had made a fantastic amount of marks in French Literature because they gave us one book on Victor Hugo that I read about 8, and everything that they had given us on, I read everything, I knew more about it than the masters did, but that, I kept quiet about that and I made a --, but when it came to translate English into French, I had been sleeping the night before very little, I was reading, I don't know what, so I wrote a volume ahh my translation into French and I had a lot of crossing out and what I should have done was to write it over again, but I was very sleepy so I said to myself to hell with it, and I gave up that, sent them that one, so they must have been very displeased at the fact that I had been very careless and indifferent about what I had sent to them, I don't believe it was too bad, but it was meant to say take this or do what you like and they said no and I said that's okay but Mr. Burslem actually sent a cable to ask but they said no I had failed, so that was it

K. R. - so how was it that amm you still taught at Q. R. C.

C. J. - ahh that was while I was a boy there, but later I became widely know delivering lectures, writing articles, (K. R. - so you left Q. R. C. in what 1918) 1918

K. R. - and then what did you do before going back to teach there

C. J. - I went to work at a sugar factory and I worked there in the chemist's department, every half hour I went round and took up some juice and put it somewhere and about half past four I tested it out for sugar content and --, it was very little, I was particularly (K. R. - but literature seems to be a good training for being a chemist) but not only that to take up some juice every half hour was practically nothing, so I carried some books there to read, so they used to be some Scotsmen around, they were engineers and they walked around to see what was happening but they would see me reading and one fella came and looked at the book, he says *The History of English Literature*, he says "what you're reading that for", I tell him "no reason sir I just like it" then he read another book *The History of European Philosophy*, he says "but what you writing about, you reading about European philosophy, all these books". Then another day I was reading a book by Kant on the something of Pure Reason (K. R. - critique) he says "what are you reading *The Critique of Pure Reason*, what does critique mean", I said "well I think he is making a criticism, not savage, but he is saying well there are things that in pure reason", he said "what do you know about pure reason", I said "I don't know, that is why I'm reading", so they looked upon me as a strange person, but then there was a vacancy a Q. R. C. and they sent for me

K. R. - how many years did you work at the sugar (C. J. - about, not a whole year) what was the name of it

C. J. - Brechin castle (K. R. - Brechin Castle) and I was there, but I know I was at Q. R. C. in 1920, you know how I know that because in 1920 the man who became Edward the 8th visited Trinidad, and the children of Port-of-Spain assembled on the grounds of Q. R. C. to make a relation with him, for him to know them and the masters of Q. R. C. were invited so Sir John Chancellor(?) the governor brought him down and all of us were presented to him, and I as a master in 1920 met the Prince of Wales, and we shook hands and then we walked around, and I walked around

K. R. - was it Mr. Burslem who sent for you

C. J. - no Mr. Hancock

Cut

Unrelated Talk

K. R. - so you stayed at Brechin castle for the year, but somehow the school kept knowing, remembered you

C. J. - even before I left the school there was a public essay published from me and I won it, or I came second, and I used to be about speaking and writing and in general in conversation, everybody recognised that here was somebody who really didn't win a scholarship but was somebody that was widely read, anybody who wanted to know anything about books come to James so

K. R. - so Hancock the new principal sent for you

C. J. - he new me from the days, he sent for me and I went there to teach and Mr. Hancock was the principal, Mr. Burslem wasn't there at the time, but when the Gov.... Sir John Chancellor(?) brought Edward Prince of Wales and introduced him to the masters there was I

K. R. - how many years did you teach at Q. R. C.

C. J. - between 1920 and 1929 when I went to the Government training college to do History and Literature, those 9 years I must have taught at Q. R. C. for about 5 years in all (K. R. - in and out, in and out) I would go and come, yes

K. R. - what did you do when you were not there

C. J. - I, sometimes I did very little, but did my reading, but also I ran a school of my own, first time (K. R. - where was this) well people came and I taught them, they sat for exam some of them passed, some of them failed, but at least it was one of the early independent secondary schools in the island, one of the first, I came back here in 1957 to find there were about twenty of them, but that was one, that was perhaps the first

K. R. - but by this time, you were a a teacher now, were there more black students at Q. R. C.

C. J. - for the most, I was a teacher at Q. R. C. till about '29 and there were, there were black students, there were browns too and some white, but I don't think they were noticeably any particular colour, but there were white students because many of the white people sent their children there before they sent them to England to university or to become doctors or lawyers

K. R. - how big was the school in those days

C. J. - about 200

K. R. - about 200, and the staff would be about 12

C. J. - the staff was about 12

K. R. - and then did they encourage you to go to the training college

C. J. - Mr. Mariot(?) who was the Director of Education wanted somebody for the training college and he sent for me and asked me would I do, do it, I said yes and he was very pleased. I learned that he was very disappointed when in 1932 I picked up myself and went to England, he said "well there you are, James is working, I got James to work at this important post at the government training college and he picks up himself and goes to England" which was quite surprising for them, but I was determined to go to write and

Constantine had told me "well come on, if you don't do so well at the start I will see about you", so I went off at once

K. R. - so it was while you were at Q. R. C. that you began writing cricket articles and playing cricket yourself

C. J. - I was playing cricket while I was Q. R. C., I played for Q. R. C., cricket and football, and then when I wasn't at Q. R. C. I played cricket and football for Maple and I was writing cricket and football for the local press from early, I was a good cricket writer from early

K. R. - were these signed articles

C. J. - they were signed articles

K. R. - would that be in the *Port-of-Spain Gazette* or in the *Guardian*

C. J. - they were in the *Port-of-Spain Gazette*, in the *Sporting Chronicle*, and then there was another magazine published by a man I used to know, he had been a reporter and I used to write for him, but I used to write also for *Sporting Opinion*, the *Sporting Chronicle* was green and the *Sporting Opinion* was red, and I would write at times for the *Port-of-Spain Gazette*, sometimes for *Sporting Opinion*, sometimes for the *Sporting Chronicle*, for everybody

K. R. - but this was a very active time too, because this was the time when you and Mendes and the whole group of people called the Beacon group, came together

C. J. - we were busy Mendes and I and there was a boy called Frank Evans who in my opinion had great ability as a writer, but he didn't follow it up, there was another one called Daly a very witty young man and there used to be a barrister called Wharton(?) who had just come from Oxford, he used to be around, would come and talk with us, Mendes was the centre of course and the present barrister Wharton(?), is the younger brother of that fellow, but in those days he was a junior so to speak, it was his brother who was a member of that grouping and came and talked to us and used to talk about Literature and we used to write, we started to write about '29, but about '24 or '25 we got interested in Literature and we used to read everything and played gramophone records about everything and talk about everything literary and historical in an intensive way, that has never been surpassed as far as I know

K. R. - y'all got reputations as iconoclasts, as rebels, as men who were

C. J. - no that had only happened about 1929 when we published a magazine called *Trinidad*, and then we showed what we were thinking, but previous to that, and I will tell you a story which I think is worthwhile talking about, there were some homosexuals around(K. R. - like Jean de Boissière(?)) no, these were local people, I didn't know who they were, local people, ordinary people, and they were giving a party, they were having a dance, and they saw Mendes and they knew Mendes was a man who was not narrow minded and they asked him if he would like to come and he said" certainly, I would like to come, but I would like to bring my friend C. L. R. James" and they said "alright, bring C. L.

R. James", but Mendes told me "well, will you go to the party", I said "certainly", but a few days afterwards he told me "James you're not invited to that party --", I said "but what is wrong", he said "one or two of them came to me and told me they would prefer that James did not come", I said "why, James isn't the kind of man hostile to y'all", they said "we know that, but he is the kind of person who will come there and spend his time looking on at everything, that's the kind of person he is and we don't want him to come there, so to speak, observing us, so if you can come, but we would like James not to come, we don't mean anything, but we want to enjoy ourselves, and we don't want James there taking note of everything ----". So that was the opinion they had of me, I mention it for that reason, I knew a lot of things, I read widely, and I was observing a lot of things, I want to mention that in 1919 there was a tremendous strike here and I knew nothing about the labour movement, I wasn't concerned particularly in those days, but I used to know the leaders, people knew I was sympathetic and I want to mention everyone of those leaders was a Garveyite, but they never let that be known, but they would let me know that in 1919 they were Garveyites, but they led a local strike movement of the waterfront workers and they tried to make it a general strike and I was there, very much interested but not taking part

K. R. - right, so when *Trinidad* came out in 1929 you say that people then realised how y'all were thinking, did it cause a furore

C. J. - it started a tremendous upheaval, people wanted to, they said what kind of thing is this that these people are writing and particularly I was under fire because I was teaching at Q. R. C. and teaching at the Government Training College, they say but this is the person who is teaching, I remember there was a Trinidad, a West Indian team going to Australia, and I made an application to be sent as a reporter because I was very well know as a cricket writer, and Mr. Cambridge(?) was the principal and I told him about it and he said well he had talked to one or two people, and he said "well James, what has happened is that some of the material that you published in your magazine has given great offence to some of the people who would be responsible for your going and that is the situation", that I might have gone (K. R. - had that thing) but for that

K. R. - in those days what amm Mendes and de Boissière, were you close with de Boissière, (C. J. - de Boissière was around) the one who wrote, he was around

C. J. - he was around, but I was close with Mendes, Mendes was a most dynamic person who insisted on this, all these books and magazines and I followed along, but there was no question about it, that the person most concerned with us and literature and history generally, was Mendes, we weren't so politically minded, we were interested in politics but it was literature and history that was our main concern, we were sympathetic to Cipriani, so that when the time came and I was getting ready to go abroad, I went to Cipriani and told him "I would like to do some work for the movement, I would like to write your biography, will you give me the material" and he gave it all to me, but that was very quiet and I wrote it, showed it to him, he said "yes that's fine", and I had it published when I reached to England, not here, I was a government servant and government servants didn't carry on, but I would write and ----- but the government didn't interfere with what I wrote in general, but there were, people were very much concerned about my moral

attitude in the things that I was doing, and I wasn't at all conscious that I was doing anything immoral

K. R. - now before you went to England in '32, you had short stories published in British magazines

C. J. - yes

Went inside due to rain

K. R. - so once Mr. McLeod(?) came you realised that there was not going to be a fight against the British

C. J. - that the British were not going to fight the independents, now I had been working along with Williams mobilising the population for independence and really trying to introduce some general concept of culture and civilisation in the Caribbean as a whole, but that was governed by the fact that the British were going to fight us in the end and the people had to be mobilised and educated as far as I could, to be able to fight the struggle to the end, but -- when Mc Leod(?) came and said that you could have the independence whenever you wanted it, it wasn't very long afterwards I began to see that Williams was not particularly interested in the struggle that we had anticipated, in fact he was certain by now that there would be no struggle and he would get it, he would get the independence, but to me that was the most, the most unimportant thing of all, I meant for change, and little by little it became clear that he wasn't prepared to go on, so I went away

K. R. - well tell us about your editing of the *Nation*, some people say that you wrote almost everything in it

C. J. - I didn't write everything in the *Nation* I wrote a lot in the *Nation*, but I was the editor in chief and I not only wrote a lot but I encouraged other people to write and I know that a lot of people could write because nobody tells them they can, but I would talk to them and help them to write, but I wrote a lot and it was my business as the editor in chief, the managing editor to make the paper the voice of the population and that is what it was

K. R. - but amm do you think that like most of us in that period you were swept along by the sense that great things were about to happen in the nation

C. J. - I was swept along by the fact that we had a great battle in front of us, that was what I was swept along, and there were two battles, number one, we had to fight the British imperialist government and number two, we had to mobilise the population, not only to fight the British, but to met the responsibilities of independence, and those were two matters in which I was very much interested and I gave all that I had to it and I must say the people were ready, they were ready

They stop for lunch

Hard to hear due to plates and glasses clinking

Bruce Paddington - So Mr. Weekes has been kind to you, allowing you to stay in the house ----- OWTU

C. J. - he is kind to me in various ways

B. P. - it's a gesture that the government should have done not just a union

K. R. - we want to have some shots of him talking to you

C. J. - that you will have to do with him

K. R. - there is no special day when he comes to see you

C. J. - no, he drops in periodically and talks to me

B. P. - so you must be pleased with the result of the OWTU and so on ----

C. J. - I'm always pleased in the ----- victory but this one has certain aspects which are a mystery to me. The OWTU stated it's case to the government minister, and what I cannot understand to this day, he not only spoke, but he was sympathetic, he actually produced a solution, which he sent to OWTU and to Texaco

B. P. - one theory is that the government are not too much on the side of Texaco as such, that amm, if anything that they would be happy to hand it over to Amoco or someone ---

C. J. - I'm afraid that that couldn't be so, I start from the beginning in a serious fight between labour and capital, the government is on the side of capital, and the bigger the capital the more the government is on that side

B. P. - I'm not saying that they would not nationalise it and hand it over to ---- but they might decide that the Amoco would do better with the capital than the Texaco -----

C. J. - to this hour I wondered why would you take such a risk because the OWTU said yes we can use this as a basis and Texaco said no, that placed the OWTU and the government on one side and Texaco on the other to me that's it

K. R. - and then Bruce is right, government --- I mean Weekes is embarrassing them because they would like to do things to Texaco if we didn't tell them to do it and Texaco must go -----

B. P. - I don't think Texaco is doing what Amoco is for Trinidad, which is being highly efficient and highly capitalistic and creating a lot more revenue for Trinidad than Texaco

K. R. - I don't think the government has corrupted Texaco sufficiently they don't have total control of Texaco and they can do what they like -----

C. J. - why are those gentlemen so, what is it they are doing

K. R. - they believe it help being able to have enough control to take when they want to take

C. J. - I don't believe the government wants Texaco to go

K. R. - they don't want Texaco to be absorbed by government, they want control over Texaco

C. J. - no but, the question is Texaco must go, that is a plain simple meaning, it means that the control of that company will not be exercised by a foreign American firm

B. P. - -----

K. R. - government would like to control Texaco

B. P. - but not nationalise it, it wouldn't pay to nationalise it also I think there is an agreement with American oil companies, if the government nationalises one the others have made an agreement between the oil companies that they will withdraw in support, I heard there is an international agreement on that -----

C. J. - but there is a local company here (B. P. - Trintoc) and the only problem they have (B. P. - is markets) is transportation (B. P. - and markets) they are not worried about markets, I have, they say but to get the oil, raw oil moving up and down will be very difficult for them, they haven't got them, but otherwise they can ----- but I believe, to tell you what I think, that the government taking over Texaco means that not only Texaco would not be taken over, it means that a hell of a lot of other companies would be in trouble, I mean you take Texaco away, you are striking a great blow on the influence of foreign companies, that is not only Texaco, it is a broad, and to tell them those who are here we want you to go and those who want to come you better don't, ah mean Texaco is not, you don't tell Texaco to go and it stays there you know, this in an event that has repercussions everywhere

B. P. - C. L. R. just to change the subject a little, what is your view of the Iranian latola's amm, you think it's a retrograde backward step

C. J. - no to get rid of the Shah is a forward step and I, and I believe that the revolution is not an Islamic revolution, that's a lot on nonsense, I, I have seen the most dynamic, the most revolutionary, the most determined to get rid of imperialism, students I have ever seen and thousands of students I have met in the United States, they carried on a campaign there such as I had never seen and I didn't see or hear one of them wanting to be Islam, there must have been Islamic theories in the USA, in Buffalo, and in -- they want to make it a modern country and the Shah must not but he, but he, he has got hold of that and I don't want to ----- but Robespierre began he was an absolutely determined monarchist in 1793, (B. P. - he was a monarchist) absolute in 1793, in 1791 he was a monarchist, but by '93 Robespierre made a wonderful speech, a speech that I remembered, he said "you have arrested the King, what you want to do, to try him, what you want to do find him not guilty and make him King again, he said the moment you arrest the King you finish with that, that's the end of that, what is this trial, what", Cromwell

didn't intend to cut off Charles, but the revolution goes a certain way and in a few years they going to see that the revolution in Iran was a revolution headed towards modernity (B. P. - at the moment they're fundamentalist and they're anti-Communist) that is the moment, that's alright, give them a chance how long has that revolution been (K. R. - there will have to be lots of changes) they're going to be violent changes, everybody now is waiting until that old fella is dead, that is the decision

K. R. - I was reading something ----- an economist recently, who said you can't understand what is going on there unless you realise it's really an Islamic revolution (C. J. - that what) that it's Islamic, that the whole thing is religious

C. J. - but that is a lot of nonsense, the people who know most are the students I used to see in New York and Washington were not in any way Islamic, some of them came to my house to talk to me, they didn't speak to me about Islam, they didn't speak to me about Jesus, they were speaking against the Shah and the need to modernise the state (B. P. - so that was before the revolution, but since the revolution the latola has brought in a fundamentalist Islamic regime) no the, the Islamic people have got hold of it because that was the doctrine that could mobilise everybody, as in the French revolution and the Russian revolution against the monarchy was the one that mattered, but very soon the French revolution floundered and ended in the hands of Robespierre and they got rid of King and Queen, and everybody, the same thing happened in Russia the same thing happened in China and that is going to happen in Iran, I bet my last dollar on it. That revolution has just begun, give it a break. Everybody now is waiting until the latola (K. R. - then what is to come will not be a continuation, it will be a further revolution) absolutely (against what is going on now) absolutely, no no the two sides are going to face each other, those who are going to join with the Islamic in order to prevent a revolution going on and those who are going to join the other members to send it further, that is, that is to come

B. P. - I wouldn't like to be a woman in Iran

C. J. - Why

K. R. - I wouldn't like to be a woman

C. J. - the women have had a very interesting role in Iran, they began to wear Islamic clothes to show themselves to be with the side of the population, but they had been wearing modern clothes in England and the United States but when they went home they put on this thing to show that they were with the people against, but when the thing was over they put on back the clothes and say well, so they went at them then, but they not concerned those women, I know some of them back to wearing Islamic clothes. Islam is a modern country you have 60,000 workers in the oil field, you know what that means, you must have schools, clothes for them, their wives and they have motor cars, you have television, you have the oil, the ships that take the oil up and down, the people who are doing that are modern people, that's a modern country, that revolution is a modern revolution but it is governed over by the Islamic as the revolution in France was still has the King and in Russia well they pretty got rid of the Tsar pretty soon, that was very quick but I may point out something, the Shah of Iran he got all the money that he wanted from

Nixon , he had no very hard work, he had people to help him organise the secret police, he had everything that, that you needed all that's good, the result of that was to grow him higher than anybody had been in the world before (K.R- that's the amazing thing how come he wasn't crushed) because he cannot be done from above, he cannot be done from above, that's what that proves (K.R- this was truly a popular) he has to be done from below. Everything that he wanted he had.

B.P.- When was the last time you met Dr. Williams

C.J. - I told him my last words in 1962 and I haven't seen him since, and it would be very awkward for me to see him, I don't want to see him and if I saw him I wouldn't know what to say

K. R. - and he has wanted to see you

C. J. - not that I know of, but I have, I was informed that he was very disturbed that I was going and would have done a lot to keep me, I was of great use to him here, I gave a certain prestige to his government and he would turn to me for a lot of questions but I would have nothing to do with it

B. P. - did you use to advise him on

C. J. - I used to advise him on many things, I was his first man of business, you know what he used to call me, you're not taking all of this down are you, (B. P. - some of it) no no

K. R. - if it is true we can take it

C. J. - no no, one has to understand what one can say and what one cannot say

K. R. - no we can't use that

C. J. - stop I will not speak

Discussion about stopping the camera

C. J. - They caught me in Cuba you know I was speaking and they asked me what I thought about China (K. R. - about China) yes and I said I don't want to speak on a platform about China, if I'm speaking on a platform about China I have to have knowledge etc., I say I'm not talking conversationally about China as if it's the only reason why where I will speak about China is if you cut that thing off

LOCATION: C. L. R. James' home

DATE: September 5th, 1980

TAPE #: 5

C. J. - and a lot of people said they're not surprised

K. R. - yes we coming back to the amm Dr. Williams thesis, he came to you and he said he has got the scholarship

C. J. - "I've got the scholarship, James what, I don't know what to do" and I told him "I know what you're going to do, give me that piece of paper there" and I sat down and I wrote two pages for him and I told him "what you are to do, I have discovered in French Literature and writing, the role that the capitalist passed on in the abolition of slavery, most people think that this was a matter of people of religious and liberal views, but" I said "the capitalist wanted to abolish this type of backward economy", I say "I haven't discovered that, the French writers have worked that out and I have read it, but I say it is written nowhere in English writing and there you can go and search it out and do that", he says "you think I can do it?", I say "absolutely" and he went to the them and said what they said, they said alright, and he went around gathering the material to make it known in English Literature what was the basic attitude of capitalism to the abolition of slavery and Williams I must say made a wonderful research job, that was a wonderful job, but periodically he would show me what he had done and I would look at it and so on and I must have seen the script about 3 or 4 times and there are parts in it that you only have to read to know I wrote them, not too long but certain passages, anybody reading them would know I wrote them

K. R. - so you were very close with him in that period, you were his mentor

C. J. - not only that when I went to, to Paris to look for material on the Black Jacobins Williams would go with me and help me search for material, he's a wonderful searcher for material you know, with a marvellous handwriting, man you show him this page and in two minutes it's perfectly written down and everything in order, and he helped me a lot with that, also with the translation of Stalin he helped me, but I helped him with that book, in fact I was the origin of that book (K. R. - you gave him the idea, he didn't come to you and say I want to write something about the abolition) no, not at all I wrote it out for him (K. R. - he said "I didn't know, he said tell me what to do") he asked me for a lot of things, I used to tell him what to do

B. P. - so what are his greatest talents, Dr. Williams

C. J. - number one energy, number two he can work 18 hours a day for 7 days running and turn up fresh, fit as ever, that is an important talent, but it is of necessity a subordinate talent and creative capacity that he has none, I have never heard from Williams one original idea, nobody has, he has none but if there is something to be done he'll do it

K. R. - they set him on a track

C. J. - -----

B. P. - he says he doesn't need ideology

C. J. - he doesn't need, he doesn't have any and to have an ideology means you have to be for something and against something and that he doesn't want to be in at all, that he, what is the state of politics in Trinidad today, nothing

K. R. - that is what the North Americans call Liberal right (C. J. - what) would you call that what the North Americans call Liberal

B. P. - Pragmatist

C. J. - no it's Pragmatist, but Pragmatist is

B. P. - just moving from Williams to Vidia Naipaul, why don't you read Vidia Naipaul now, the Americans have now started reading Naipaul he's he's, why aren't you reading Vidia Naipaul

K. R. - you rushing this you know
Discussion as to whether Naipaul should be discussed now

K. R. - could we get a cursory comment

B. J. - cursory lunch time comment

C. J. - I don't want to have to do it twice, but I could do it now once and for all

B. P. - just a little lunch time comment, right a lunch time comment.

C. J. - if I have to tell you what I have to say it wouldn't be lunch or dinner time.

K. R.- alright go on, go on

C. J.- I had an argument with George Lamming about Naipaul after some of the earlier books and in his the book about Exile Lamming had some remarks to pass about Naipaul which were quite uncomplimentary and he placed Selvon in front Naipaul and I told Lamming then "you are making a mistake, a great deal is in Naipaul still, plenty more is to come from him" and then I left it at that and then a year or two afterwards I was talking to George and he told me Nello I read that book you know *A House for Mister Biswas*, I say "yes" and he says "you know what I did", I says "no", he said "I called up his publishers and told them I wanted to get in touch with Naipaul, they told me where he was and I called his number and I told him is that Vidia Naipaul, he said yes, I say this is George Lamming, he said yes", he said "I have just read your book *A House for Mister Biswas* and I think it a masterpiece I want to congratulate you, he said thank you very much" and that was the end of that it was George's way of saying what I said about you in the book about Exile I don't believe it, not after this book, but Naipaul got into the trouble which all of these novelists in writing about the Caribbean for an English audience get into, it becomes impossible after a time to continue to write about a West Indian island for a British audience, your range is limited, it took Lamming 10 years before he got back and he got to ah *Natives of my Person*, now Lamming was in his prime and for a writer of fiction to stay 10 years before he could get to do what he wanted to do that shows he was in a bit

of a spot. Naipaul first of all he wrote *A House for Mister Biswas*, then he wrote a book about the English people what was it, (K. R.- *Mister----- and the Knight's Companion(?)*) which wasn't very good it had no life to it and then he began to write one or two political books, *Mystic Masseur* and so on, and all of which showed me a steady decline which is characteristic of most of them because they can't continue writing about the Caribbean Islands, so Mr. Naipaul writes a book about India and he calls it *An Area of Darkness* and I felt at once that there was an area of darkness, not in India, but in his head, that was a great mistake, he went back again, then he wrote a novel called *Guerrillas* which was a nasty book, I used the word nasty purposely the book caused me great offence that I had read it and was mixed up in that, I know a bad book or a book that is rightly written about sex I don't object to that, some of the greatest writers have written about sex but that was a nasty book and I knew Naipaul was in trouble and he has been pushed along a certain road and now Naipaul is writing and saying a lot about the Third World that the European and American intellectuals want to be said but they don't want to say it themselves, they will be called counter-revolutionary, but if a Caribbean man and a Third World man and a man of literary gives the same they will all say Naipaul is wonderful (B. P.-so you don't agree with his attack on people like Mbutoo(?)) not at all I am very hostile to Mbutoo(?) but I don't write, I won't write a book like *A Bend in the River* (B. P. - Why not) you know Naipaul today is in this situation there is no right wing nor left wing in a Third World there is nothing at all there is only degradation and the inability to rise from out of the mess, that is Naipaul's contribution to the situation and many people love him for that, that's the reason why there's, because they want to say that but they dare not say it because people will call them names but when Naipaul says it they say look he is one of them, he is not one of us and that is the river he is sailing along in

B. P. - But didn't Pope and Swift these people do that before them

C. J. - Pope? Pope wrote about what? Pope was a man very much appreciated by the English they gave him a lot of money, Swift attacked because they left him out, but Swift was at one time very much appreciated by I think it was ----- I don't know which but in the end he wrote, he didn't attack anybody in particular he wrote *Gulliver's Travels* which attacked the whole of the society, Naipaul didn't do him that, bourgeois society from him is safe, it is the Third World he is saying that is a mess and they love that, that's my point of view, take it down, multiply it

K. R. - But there must be intelligent or sensitive or humane people in America and the United States who would see this and resent it and say well, Mr. Vidia Naipaul is doing

C. J. - There are one or two of them who are saying it, I have read it in one or two journals, they are saying what, what is all this going on here, and he is doing that and they show that they are not, they are not too, that they realise something is going on. There is something fishy about it, but I don't mind my saying that I don't want it published, particularly 'cause the Indian community here may jump on me and I'm not anxious to go out of my way to do that, but you want it done, have it done that's what I think

K. R. - but people are very imperceptive, I thought that Naipaul doesn't only talk about Africa or the Third World, what he's saying is that what is going on in Africa and the Third World is what is going on everywhere (C. J. - now I am) look at his recent attack on

England, he says that people in England exult in being stupid, right he said there is countless stupidity, they're proud of being foolish

C. J. - I am, I am, I am, I am prepared to say what I used to say that when they used to accuse Vidia of attacking the Caribbean I would say no, he has an attitude that is critical and contemptuous of government everywhere and at one time it looked that way, but today I am convinced after what he had been writing that there is a particular role that he's playing and there's a particular support he's getting for that particular role, that's a political matter

K. R. - You think he knows he's playing that role

C. J. - I don't know, I don't know what to say, what Vidia Naipaul knows, all I know is what he writes, and I, I see the reception he gets

B. P. - so a writer should have a role not just to criticise but to

C. J. - a writer can write what he likes, I am not going to tell a writer what he likes but I am entitled to say that's what he's doing and if he, people want, now, we have had a recent example, another Noble prize winner was Mr. Arthur Lewis who has been an economist, who has brought great abilities to bear in the service of the British Finance Capitalists, his writing and they gave him a Noble prize, okay with me and Vidia is doing a nice job for them he is saying you see that Third World, the mess it is, that's fine

K. R. - but Arthur Lewis' (?) job wasn't as offensive you think as Naipaul's

C. J. - it wasn't so obviously offensive, but all of us knew what he was doing, all of us knew and it is obvious that they knew too otherwise they wouldn't give him any Noble prize

B. P. - but because a writer can be based in Trinidad writing about Trinidad, does that make him a better writer than Naipaul who has such craft and such skill, who might just be in the wrong position could be a great writer

C. J. - I am not speaking about technique and position, I am admitting what I admitted early and fought with Lamming about, not fight but, Naipaul's skill and I said he has much more to him than appears and Lamming had to admit it afterwards that it was so

K. R. - so you'll go so far as to say he was a great writer

C. J. - I wouldn't go so far because that great writer is something that I use with a lot of caution, but he is undoubtedly a man of great skill, though I find that *Guerrillas* was a nasty book, it was a bad book, badly written, and generally offensive, it smelt

K. R. - very strange to see that his later book beginning with *Guerrillas*, *In A Free State* (C. J. - *In A Free State* was a bad book) *Wounded Civilisation* those are the ones that the Americans have fastened on to, his high reputation of present is an American reputation

C. J. - on what (K. R. - it was based on those later books) which ones (B. P. - *Guerrillas*) (K. R. - *Guerrillas*, *In A Free State*, *Wounded Civilisation* and *The Return of Eva Peron*, those 4 books are the ones) maybe (K. R. - they don't talk about *Biswas* at all, never heard of it) the time is coming when I will, when I will have to say what I think of this to Naipaul, but for the time being that's what I think and the reception that *A Bend In the River* got was not surprising to me, in other words there is no right and left, there is nothing but a mess, that's what he's writing

B. P. - but many writers can write well from being expatriates Lawrence(?) writing in Mexico, Conrad, Forster and so on.

C. J. - I am not saying what's wrong, no Lawrence didn't write about Mexico, Lawrence had a certain attitude to the world and he wrote about it in England and he wrote about it in Mexico but Vibia has a certain, now there is one writer whom I haven't mentioned, a man who is not governed by the limitations of a man who is writing about the Caribbean but who from the beginning took a very strong line and wrote about the sociology and the, the ideas and the peculiar stories the myths and so forth of the Caribbean and Central America and so in those where unique of that particular society, that was Wilson Harris so he was never limited by the Caribbean social situation and he would move from a Caribbean social situation to these philosophical aspects within the same book with great skill so he remains today a man very sure of what he was doing, but George was in trouble for ten years and Vibia was in trouble too and George went one way and Vibia went another.

B. P. - but nobody is reading Wilson Harris.

C. J. - oh that is not so (K. R. - there is a small strong body) and there are books, books are appearing about Wilson Harris I have been seeing and another book is coming out on Wilson soon, oh yes, oh he is being read and is highly appreciated by some very good critics in England, oh yes, give Wilson 5 years give him 5 years. There are some of us who have sent to the Noble prize people you know and said he ought to get it and when he heard that he said he was very pleased that some people from the Caribbean had done that because there were some Europeans who had done that also and some books are coming out on Wilson and Lamming has found his way I think he is working or has finished a novel on '37 to '38 that period

K. R. - I think he is working on it

C. J. - Yes, but he told me he's finished.

B. P. - When your talking about great West Indian writers would you treat Derek Walcott as a great West Indian poet

C. J. - No, this great is a word I'm very scared of (B. P. - excellent, talented) he is an excellent, talented, a writer in the first rank, there is no doubt about it. His poetry on the whole does not appeal to me as poetry does but that is personal to me that does not prevent me from seeing the high quality of his work and the fact that he is a genuinely poetic writer struggling with a genuine problem, the problem Walcott has had is to

recognise that what he calls the language of the tribe is English Literature and to write West Indian poetry using the language of the tribe, which is, English Literature is a hell of a job and he has written quite frankly that he has been hard but I think he is managed and he is a first class writer no question about that .

B. P. - So what don't you like about his writing, why don't you enjoy reading Walcott

C. J. - Why don't I enjoy reading Walcott? Because I am a human being and I have tastes of my own. There is a writer whom I very much admire and could write a wonderful essay on him, a Russian writer called Chekhov. I have read all his writings I think he is wonderful I have read the plays many times but I don't go back to Chekhov I go and read Tolstoy I go back and read Dostoyevsky I read Lemontov I don't go back to Chekhov why don't I. How can I tell you that, I just don't

K. R. - What about Edward Brathwaite

C. J. - There is a definitive I, I don't like. I don't say I don't like ah (K. R. - Walcott) Walcott not at all, I admire his work very much I think it is splendid but a great deal of Braithwaite I read it and for me this is strictly personal poetry must take me up off the ground.

B. P. - So who does that for you

K. R. - and Brathwaite does not take you up off the ground

C. J. - it doesn't do that

K. R. - does it have anything to do with, surely his views, his views are ones that you might agree with

C. J. - I have nothing to do with a poet's views, a poet must write poetry and lift me off, and he doesn't do me and I am happy to say I find a lot of people who talk to me about Brathwaite and he went to Africa and he's interested in that and that and that, but this uplift that poetry ought to give, they don't get it from him

K. R. - but surely you're knocking Naipaul, you're criticising Naipaul because you don't like his views (C. J. - no, --) you're saying that amm poets views don't matter to you (C. J. - no, no) but the novelists views do(?)

C. J. - because Naipaul is writing -- views, Naipaul's views are a definite political contribution to the struggle going on in the world today, Brathwaite is not, he has some ideas about Africa and so on but they are not vital to

K. R. - Brathwaite would say that's his most important contribution was helping the Black people to understand who they are and where they came from

C. J. - I don't mind that, that's okay with me and if that is what he's doing I am, I say I'm in favour let him continue but I, I don't find, but I know Naipaul is an enemy that's what

B. P. - so which writers, West Indian writers and poets are uplifting you when you read them give you upliftment

C. J. - Harris and Lamming for years they have, and the way Harris has kept away from the dangers and the way George has got out of it, is to me an example of high literary quality, but I am also liking two new men, Earl Lovelace and Michael Anthony and Anthony is a marvellous person he writes about the person who sweeps the floor or the man who's out there picking a mango, he does not get above the ordinary level and yet he manages to write a book, he's a marvellous man, the limitations he accepts and works inside of those and is yet successful I think is wonderful, here's a distinguished writer, but Earl I think is wonderful, Earl and every book Earl is moving

K. R. - but when you first read *The Dragon* what was your first reaction to *The Dragon*

C. J. - I came here by accident one night and I had to go back on the Sunday morning . I had arranged to see Earl on the Saturday night but I was exhausted and I sent to tell him that I couldn't come. Then I, that I was going home. I went where I was staying and got into bed. Then the lady downstairs said, " Mr. James somebody is here to see you", I said to myself who the hell could that be. I said, "who is it please" . She said, "Mr. Lovelace." I said, "Alright let him talk", he says "well", he says "well I want to see you", I say "where are you", he says "I'm downstairs", I say "come up", so Earl comes up to me with a manuscript in his hand and he says "here is my latest book I want you to look at it". So I told him "but I can't look at it now and I'm going in the morning at 8 o'clock", he says "take it". So in the morning I take the plane and I open the book, and by the time I reach to the United States I know I have read one of the finest of modern novels, that was my immediate reaction and I have read it two or three times since and I know his books and he is moving on and he is going places, besides which I happen to know him personally as you do and he shows all the signs of a man who is on his way oh yes, but he and Michael Anthony are to me, and they are two writers who are very much along the same lines that the American black women writers are doing. There is one girl Alice Walker, there is another one called Toni Morrison and there is another one called Ntozake Shange those are three black women who have taken the American black woman, the scrubber of floors and push them right to the front of English Literature and said look at them and they are three of the finest writers in the U. S. A today and Earl is in the same. Now George Lamming and I and all of us used to write about people in the yard, I wrote about them in the yard but I was saying look at them after all, but Earl is saying, he is not pointing them out to say that they are okay Earl is saying look that's what they are, what they think or they don't think, what is right and what is not right, I have nothing to do with that, that's what they are which is something quite new, which is the attitude that the American black women are having now and the persons they are attacking are black men for the way they behave to black women, which I think that's wonderful and has caused some actual fist fights in the U. S. A., in Chicago somebody was talking about these black women and some of the men got up and said these women are not writing with sufficient breath of view, they have a narrow point of view and the end of the thing was a fist fight, the three of them Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange and Earl is with them and Michael Anthony is doing the same, writing about the ordinary person in a very simple way, is there anybody else you can think of

K. R. - who's writing well (C. J. - in Trinidad) not in Trinidad, but I like Garth St. Omer very well (C. J. - whom) a St. Lucian writer, Garth St. Omer, you read anything by him, Garth St. Omer he's published by --- and ---

C. J. - no the man I might read is Carpenter he is the one who wrote about *The Cathedral* (K. R. - Cuba, yes) ----- (K. R. - *The Lost Steps*) *The Lost Steps*, those are two marvellous books and that is a, and do you know there is something that really impressed me, does anybody see there, did I ever tell you what John Arlott wrote about my book

K. R. - we have it on tape (C. J. - yes) about *Beyond A Boundary*(C. J. - yes) yes

C. J. - and the point about Carpenter is he's writing about the Caribbean and making it something of world-wide significance, that is quite an achievement you know

K. R. - I am very interested, I was looking over *Mariners, Renegades and Castaway* (C. J. - they wouldn't print it, nobody would) nobody would (C. J. - no) I left mine, I thought I left mine in my bag here but I didn't amm

C. J. - what were you thinking of

K. R. - amm going over it you don't say very much about the whale itself, for you, you are looking at the way in which a man like Ishmael allows somebody like Ahab, the leader, the fanatic, to dominate his life, that Ishmael who is educated and refined will not stand up against a man like Ahab, that people are allowing people like Ahab to run their lives, so that the totalitarian figure in the book is Ahab, and that Ishmael is to blame, people like Ishmael are to blame, but you've left out the whale altogether

C. J. - no I said the whale, I didn't leave it out altogether, the whale is quite a phenomenon you know it was said that there was a copy of the book that didn't have the whale at all, Melville had written a copy of the book where the whale didn't come in (K. R. - a manuscript, an early manuscript) yes, but I didn't leave out the whale (K. R. - but you were more interested in the, the) I was interested in the people for me the whale was a symbolical figure, Melville was saying this is, this is that's what that's what we are pursuing, that's what the society is doing, that

K. R. - but that book came right after your break with the Trotsky movement

C. J. - it was being prepared in the time

K. R. - did any of the feelings you had about the Trotsky movement (C. J. - none) or about the political monolith

C. J. - none, none of my personal feelings go into anything that I write, if they are there they are there by accident, but I don't

K. R. - you just felt that Moby Dick was a book that had something to say about modern civilisation

C. J. - not only that, I was in America and a lot of people were writing and talking and I read the book one day and I said but these people, Melville has said what kind of a book he's writing, it's there in the book, I haven't to interpret it and these sons of bitches writing and none of them saying it, so I had to write it and said look on page so and so he said this is the kind of book I'm going to write and why is it that y'all write and don't say that and you're saying you don't understand the book unless you realise what he set out to write, you can't leave that out and write a lot of stuff and they wouldn't print it up to today, but it would be printed in time, I have no doubt, my book *Dialectic* it was written 1948, it came out a month ago, welcomed everywhere, why should I weep

B. P. - what are your views on Martin Carter's poetry

C. J. - it would be difficult for me not to give a wrong impression, I do not like revolutionary poetry as a general rule, if it strays into the field of rhetoric away from genuine poetry, I don't see why a poet should not be rhetorical if he wants to be, so that I am not a good judge, but this I can say it is genuine, number 1 and number 2 it has appealed to a whole lot of the general public, which is quite an achievement you know, to write genuine poetry and make it appeal to the public that's quite something, the genuine poets as a rule don't, but Carter was able, he came at a particular time, in a particular environment and he said something that was very much alive at the time, I don't think it is alive today, I don't think he, but at the time

B. P. - he focused on the present leaders of Africa, did you come into contact with any of them, the Kallender's(?) or the Nyerere's or they were after your time

C. J. - I know Nyerere I have met Nyerere, I have had long conversations with Nyerere

B. P. - would you say they are good African leaders

C. J. - I wouldn't say that about them but, I know he's one of the most remarkable men of the last twenty years, his Arusha(?) declaration is one of the great documents and I am very sympathetic to what Nyerere is trying to do and I am certain that the other man who got killed --- and the men who lead Mozambique and Angola and their writings and what I have read, I think they are a new generation, a strange lot and Mugabe(?) absolutely, those, those are not the old type at all, Kallender(?) wavered but that they knew people meant something was that Kallender had to go, I think personally he would have preferred that it wouldn't be so, so hot but he had to go

K. R. - but in relation to these chaps you were like a spectator, but in relation to people like Nkrumah, Nkrumah was a close associate of yours

C. J. - well yes, but I, I, Nyerere I wouldn't call him a close associate, but I've been to Tanzania and talked to him, I went as part of a delegation and I had a private conversation with him for about 2 hours

K. R. - I was coming to ask you where do you think Nkrumah went wrong

C. J. - you read his autobiography and it's full of democracy and the opposition and loyalty to the Queen, he didn't break entirely away to form an African state, he took over what the British had left, but they left behind a state that was formed to exploit the people, Nyerere has not attempted that, Nyerere has attempted to form an African state, he said so, but Nkrumah didn't but he drifted along, didn't know what exactly what he was doing, Nkrumah was a Marxist up to the state where the workers had to make the revolution, when one step was made then the intellectuals took over and they made a perfect mess of that

B. P. - when you were in America did you meet Marcus Garvey at all

C. J. - I meet Marcus Garvey in ah in London

B. P. - what sort of man was he

C. J. - what

B. P. - what sort of man was he

C. J. - will you stop that please

K. R. - you don't want it taped

C. J. - no

Cut

No Video

K. R. - but Nello why can't we tape this

C. J. - no

K. R. - -----

C. J. - no if you're going to, I, not at all, I will write it

B. P. - the black West Indian has a beautiful view of Garvey as being the most (C. J. - I don't) national

C. J. - I'm not going to say that (*Video returns*) and let that be said on tape, no I have to write that, my autobiography I'm going to deal. But I tell you something else, but in 1929 I think it was, Marcus Garvey came here (B. P. - where to Trinidad) yes, he had been expelled and everybody went down to meet him at the wharf, to see this marvellous man and Garvey held some meeting and we all went and reported for the papers, and the the City Council with I think Gaston Johnston(?) in chair invited Garvey and Garvey came and spoke so I had been going around listening and I decided that I had had enough of that, I was going to make an attempt to meet Mr. Garvey personally and I called up and said my name was so and so and I was writing for such and such papers and would Mr. Garvey give me an interview, certainly, come down in the morning at 9 o'clock, so in the morning

at 9 o'clock I was there and Garvey was sitting down in a dressing gown and said "Mr. James how are you?" and Garvey gave me one of the most revealing half hours I have ever had in my life, Garvey told me about the plight of black people in the world and what should be done to get them out of it, he did not tell me anything that I had not read 20 times in the newspaper *The Negro World*, he didn't tell me anything that I hadn't heard in the various meetings that he had held, he didn't tell me anything that I hadn't heard from a lot of people about what Garvey, but for the moment it seemed as if he had discovered those things the night before and I was one of the first apostles he was winning for us to go forward and conquer the world, I mean the power the man had

B. P. - is it possible to get a little bit of this on tape, just a little bit about your first visit with him, first meeting with him, because (C. J. - no) we have Tony Martin(?) talking about Garvey saying good things about him

K. R. - you said the bad thing already so that's not on tape

C. J. - but I don't want to say this over again

K. R. - alright

C. J. - when you come back next time, I would like to say both of them see, that's why, but there must be, a man came to me one day and he told me "Mr. James, I work for so and so", I tell him "yes", he said "I'm writing a biography of Jomo Kenyatta", I said "yes", he says" and you used to know him quite well", I said "well enough", and I want to ask you about one or two things, I said" ask", he said "I've been making some enquiries and some of the things that I have found out are not quite pleasant you know", I say "that is okay with me" and he thought, he asked me one or two questions, I told him --- I said "before I went I want to say, I want to tell you something if when you write your book, you allow things to get into it that weaken the impression of Kenyatta as one of the great fighters for colonial independence you would have written a bad book, I hope you know that", he said "yes", you find out this and that and that about the man, but he lived how he could and if you're writing your book about that man and when you write the book when people read it all they read is not about the political leader who went to jail for five years and who fought for so many years but the man who did that and that, then you, what kind of a book is that, that's why I'm very cautious about what I say about Garvey and when I say it

K. R. - fair enough

C. J. - is there any, is there any ice around (*K. R. etc. talking in background*) I don't want to go on again

K. R. - no I think we've had enough for today

C. J. - come back another day

Cut

Assistant Typing, Talking in background

A. - yes I heard about him when I was going to primary school, you know

K. R. - and how did you get this job

A. - well my cousin who is Mr. Weekes secretary well she contacted me and told me well he wanted someone to work with him

K. R. - and what do you actually do, what time do you come here on a day, I see you serving coffee and all kinds of things like that

A. - well sometimes you know you have to do that, I reach here about 9 o'clock and I do the normal routine of a secretary, you know when I reach he give me works to do typing of letters and so on

K. R. - any dictation

A. - yes dictation

K. R. - can he be a bit cantankerous and thing

A. - well sometimes but he is a very understandable person and he has a very good memory, he remembers you know mostly everything

K. R. - but you feel that he amm, you find he understands young people so that he knows what you might be thinking even before you say it and thing

A. - yes he does

B. P. - ask her an average day Ken, an average day

K. R. - yeah, yeah, just now, you find him a kind of male chauvinist

A. - pardon me

K. R. - he's not a male chauvinist

A. - no, no

K. R. - so when you come here, what ah mean how does your day begin, you collect work right away as soon as you come

A. - well we wait for the mail to come in, then I answer the letters you know and then he give me dictation and after that lunch break, come back you know and do some more dictation and so on

K. R. - so after you get the dictation you amm, you type it up

A. - I type it up

K. R. - ----- that is on the autobiography

A. - ah ha, some of it but we hold back on that for a while to do some you know ordinary work

K. R. - when you were doing the autobiography do you find your self interested in it a autobiography or do you sort of blank your mind off and say well I'm just copying because I have to type this

A. - well no sometimes I really, you know look at it you know and I understand, I learn a lot from it okay, I learn a lot of history, past and so on

Assistant Typing

K. R. - the arrangement seems to be as if you're a friend or a member of the family and you come in and you type and you ask him if he wants juice and things like that

A. - well I look at him as you know a father to me you know he's very understandable and so on, he doesn't really press me a lot you know

K. R. - so when fellas like us come down to talk to him and get in you way, what do you do go in the kitchen and

A. - sometimes yeah

K. R. - do you have deadlines to work, you're not working with deadlines so you don't fell (A. - no) too put out. What about when you go back home do people ask you what you're doing

A. - many people ask me well is he miserable you know and how does I feel working with him, well I feel you know as working with him as any other person you know

K. R. - I figure when I'm that age I go be miserable you know, I think most people of that age would be miserable. I would imagine with anybody else it would be hell doing that kind of job because all kinds of things pass through their heads and they're asking you things

A. - well when I first started with him you know I was a bit nervous right but afterwards I got into him, I found him you know very understandable and so on

K. R. - does he make lots of jokes and thing

A. - well sometimes when the electrician comes and he'll say good morning, he'll say well I know you're coming to look for the girls you know and not really me and all this thing okay

Assistant Typing

LOCATION: C. L. R. James' home

DATE: September 5th, 1980

TAPE #: 6

Shots of San Fernando
Shots of Assistant and C. L. R.

K. R. - talk a bit about stuff you'd like to read now

C. J. - now, what I would like to read now at the present time or in general

K. R. - no, what you are reading now at this point

C. J. - no I am here looking up, I want to read about that Roman Catholic hist..., parson who was a historian and whom I read when I was a boy at school, at lunch time I used to creep into the masters' room and take out books from there and some one of the masters had brought a history book by a Roman Catholic priest and that book said that the tradition of English history dealing with the reformation and Henry the 8th, all that was entirely wrong, it was a lot of lies and nonsense and I read him not because I understood what he said or accepted it, but he was definitely against all that I had been taught and learned in the other books, so to read him was quite an astonishing thing and I, I saw a reference to him here the other day, so I, I saw a reference to him ah, I know what his name was and it's a name I would really like to remember because he had a lot to do with me and I recommend it to young students today, although there would be a hell of a row if people knew that, his name was John Lindegard, John Lindegard and I remember him, not that I accept his history, not that I accepted it then, but imagine me about fifteen years old taking out of the masters room when they had gone for lunch and I was eating my sandwiches and the books were there, I went and I picked it up and reading this fellow saying that all the history that they were teaching me was all wrong, and it was a ah fiction, and it was not correct and so on, and I read this and it was brought home to me that history was a thing of which you could have different views, so I remember that fellow, he's meant a great education to me, and laterwards I began to read history books by G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, two Roman Catholics who held his view of English History and it opened my eyes tremendously, I don't believe either of them today, but my eyes were opened and I began to realise that History meant something different from what the Masters were teaching me and what all the others books were saying

K. R. - who are you reading today -----

C. J. - I am reading for the most part Marx and Lenin, then there is a professor of English and French Literature, a man called George Saintsbury, he's dead many years ago but I read him when I was a, when I was young and he opened my eyes to much and to this day anywhere I see a book by Saintsbury I buy it and reread what I have read twenty times before

K. R. - what about ----- Anti-Marxist -----

C. J. - no, I don't read with the Anti-Marxist movement, there are some people who wrote anti-novels, I wrote -----, and the anti-Marxists I don't bother with them, I'm a Marxist, I joined the Marxist movement, I began to be interested in it when I was about, in the year 1932 and I see no reason to change so the Anti-Marxists I don't bother with, I am

very much occupied, but I have read some people who were not Marxist, I spent a year or two reading an existentialist writer, he wrote a book called *Being On Time* you remember him, what's his name (K. R. - *Being on Time*, Heidegger) Heidegger, I read him for two years and Heidegger was not a Marxist but Heidegger was saying that there was a great deal in the world that Marxists and -- don't take note of and he drew my attention to a number of things that I have since got interested in but he has not changed my Marxist views at all, but I read him for two years he ---- my mind in a certain direction and now I've dropped him and he drew my attention to a number of things that I have seen -- in the city but he has not changed my Marxist views at all, but I read him for two years -----
----- but I've learned something from him, I've written about Heidegger and it has been published in one of my collections of essays, but I read Marx and I read Lenin all the time, ----- that I could put my hand on them, another man I am very fond of reading is Wilson Harris, and Wilson Harris dedicated one of his books to me and that day I pranced about, man like the cock on the hill there, I was really somebody, to C. L. R. James a book by Wilson Harris, I really felt, I read him a lot, I also read a lot of George Lamming

K. R. - could you explain more about when you say you are a Marxist, what that means in your terms

Interrupted by a technical discussion

K. R. - when you say you're a Marxist and you don't believe the Anti-Marxists what, in your terms what does being a Marxist mean

C. J. - a Marxist means that when you look at any history or any country, the thing that matters most is the struggle of classes and that was not discovered by Marx but that was in the tradition of history for many years, what Marx said was the history of classes still continues, and the history of classes that matters today is the history between the ruling class, the bourgeois and the working class, and when that history is finished it will be an account of the victory of the working class and that will finish with the idea of struggles of classes in history, so that today I look upon history as basically a struggle between the proletariat, the working class and those poorer classes and the ruling class, for me if Marxism means in Britain, in the United States, France, Holland and the advanced countries, you have the great masters of finance capital and they control the life of people in the colonies and people in a colony like in the Caribbean, that is Marxism and Marxism says that when you know that you would realise that the essence of the struggle must mean, the struggle of the oppressed classes against those who are oppressing them

K. R. - what does that mean in Trinidad terms

C. J. - it doesn't mean to pick up a gun and go shooting at ah at the people of Texaco but it means the victory that has just been won by the O. W. T. U. on, on the question of ah pensions that's the kind of struggle, that's the kind of struggle you have to carry on all the time

K. R. - Nello, you said in 1940 there was a crisis in your political lives, that you rejected the Trotskyist version of Marxism and set about to re-examine and reorganise your view of the world

C. J. - and go on and say that took us eleven years, do I say that there, it took us ten years to examine

K. R. - yes, now a lot of people in the West Indies don't make any distinction between Marxism, Socialism, Communism and being a Trotskyite

C. J. - but that is not solely in the Caribbean, that is one of the difficulties in the world at the present time, it is very difficult to define who is Socialist, who is Communist, who is revolutionary, who is not, these people to all these various groups most of them claim to be this that and the other

K. R. - what was it about the Trotskyist version of Marxism that you did not like

C. J. - I am going to be very brief about it, it began with a general attitude of hostility to Trotsky's view that the Russian state was a worker's state, but although I shared that and split with those who split, I took the view that to disagree with Trotsky on the nature of the Russian state was not the Russian question, to disavree, to disagree with a man like Trotsky on the nature of the Russian state was to raise questions of philosophy, political economy and political philosophy and therefore we had to go into everything and disagree not only on Russia, but we found in time that we disagreed with him on philosophy, on political economy and on revolutionary politics, I can sum it up because this is a thing you have to sum up on two questions, when I went to America in 1938 the Trotskyists there had no policy on the black question and I sent a paper to Trotsky and we finally agreed that what was necessary was for to realise that the black people in the United States did not need to be led by Trotskyists or Communists or trade union leaders or anybody, that they were perfectly able to lead themselves, so that on this question of the leadership of the black people I took a position and Trotsky said yes and they said yes but they were quite cunning about it and then I found out afterwards that they had a similar attitude to the leadership of the white proletariat, they were convinced that the proletariat as such, had to be led by the revolutionary party and I had been going about them telling people that the Communist will not lead you what you had to do was leave the Communist party and follow us the Trotskyites who will lead the revolution and I thought that was a lot of nonsense and I left them on account of that

K. R. - there is, I think there is a kind of ambiguity about it because we know in general that many black people who are involved in the international left, find that the international left in general hasn't taken sufficient account of the peculiar position of black people and therefore policies advocated by the international left aren't appropriate, but that wasn't your quarrel

C. J. - no, no that wasn't my quarrel, I have done a lot of analysis of the question of the blacks in Africa and the blacks in the United States, I've done an independent Marxist investigation of that which I'm entitled to do and anybody's entitled to do

K. R. - the real quarrel is about whether the people are to be lead by a group of leaders or whether the people have to generate their own

C. J. - that is the basic problem, that is my basic problem, that people don't need to be led today, now in certain, I can't tell a man like Mugabe in Zimbabwe you have no right to form a party that is a lot of nonsense, but by and large the general order should be the emancipation of the working class can only be the work of the working class itself and that you going forward telling them they must join your party that's not only a mistake but it's a blunder

K. R. - but how come you belong to a political party, the Worker's Empowerment Party

C. J. - I belong to it, I, we didn't tell them that the future of society in Trinidad depended upon us, I don't object to a party being formed, what I object to is the old party ----- communist party used to go about saying this is the party, this is the Marxist party and without this party you are certain to be defeated, that was what we had to fight against and we're glad to say we did a lot of good work on that and we've cleared that up to a large degree

K. R. - well while we're on the political thing, I mean one of the, a man of your views and so on, a lot of people still find it strange that you consented to come back and work with the P. N. M. for 4 years, this is a, a most surprising thing for people who have read your writings and known your views about party politics

C. J. - they haven't read all my writings, listen to me, when I went, I came here in '57, I didn't come here to work with P. N. M. I came here because I was invited to take part in celebrations of the Federation, then I wrote a report, I saw things and I sent it to Williams I say look here these people are ready to move you know and he said all right I like your report but will you stay and help us and I wrote the conditions under which I would stay and I will tell you my fundamental mistake, I believed and Williams believed that the British government was going to fight it out and I believed that there was going to be a struggle between the colonial people in the Caribbean and the British government that's why I stayed, but when I was there for a little while and Williams believed that too, at times I had to restrain Williams, I'd tell him don't do that, man no, you carrying it too far for the time being and then it turned out the British government sent Mr McLeod(?) there to tell us we're not standing in the road to your independence, get to be independent as quickly as you can and the moment he said that Williams was finished and I soon got to see that that was what Williams was chiefly after and when I saw that there was no battle against the British and that Williams was ready to go along with them once independence was established and he could be the leader, I said no, so make it clear, I stayed because I believed a fight was on the way, it didn't come to my mind that the British government was going to give up, I went by the past history of colonialism

LOCATION: C. L. R. James' home

DATE: September 5th/26th, 1980

TAPE #: 7

Assistant walking in road up to house

Ken & C. L. R. walking to house

Close up on C. L. R.

C. J. - it ought but I couldn't, I couldn't, the significance of the Worker's Empowerment Party was the reception it got, we used to have some good meetings, but those financial figures that they got they were dishonest I can prove that

K. R. - and amm that was so devastating that the other elements in the party couldn't amm, or they went elsewhere to

C. J. - I don't know, people in Trinidad and in the Caribbean go in for what I call election politics, three months before the election they're very busy and after the election they not spending any time on that, you see that is how it used to be in the old colonial system, a new governor came and you look, you see what he was going to do for two or three months, afterwards you dropped it and waited for the new governor, so now it is the new Prime Minister and after the elec, the other one used to be appointed by the British government, this one he wins the election and that's the end of that. Stop. (K. R. - is that changing now) I don't know what's changing, all I know is in Trinidad today, in the Caribbean as a whole, but I know Trinidad best, there is a tremendous hostility to the system of government and how people are being governed, you see it in the papers in letters, the calypso singers auhh, the problem is they want to get rid of the present system but they don't know what to do because they think entirely in terms of people, so they want to get rid of Williams but who could, but that the present system no longer enjoys the confidence and support of the people I don't see how anybody could deny that

Tony Hall - I'll just ask you a few questions so we could continue, amm so you went to England in 1932 and you had a short story published in the Saturday review in 19, 19 what year was it

C. J. - it must have been 1926 or '27 because it was published, re-published among the best short stories of 1928. Mr. Edward J. O' Brian(?) used to publish this volume of the best short stories every year, so this was in 1928 and it was, had been published in England some time before that

T. H. - how did that come about

C. J.- it was published in Trinidad here some publication people were always publishing short stories here, then a man came here, paid a visit to Trinidad, a man named Kenegan(?) Graham(?), a well known English writer and traveller, well in those days whenever somebody came we would meet them, people saw to it that Mendes and I, we were the literary people to meet Mr. Graham(?), so Mr. Graham(?) was very co-operative, and he said "well what have you been writing? you have been writing?" we said "yes", he said "what?" and I handed him my short story, Mendes handed him, he read them and he said this is a fine story I am going to get it published and I think he told Mendes the same and he took them with him to England and after a time they came out in the paper

T. H. - you mentioned Mendes, what was your relationship with Mendes like and with the British intellectuals like Huxley(?) who were also in, all in the same interest

C. J. - no, no there was no relationship with Huxley(?), Huxley(?) read our magazine and he wrote Mendes a letter from England saying how much he ah approved of it, felt that it was good work, but we had no, I had no relationship with him, I never had, now but Mendes and I for years were extremely friendly and very close literary collaborators, reading books, importing magazines, importing gramophone records and keeping in touch with all aspects of English literature that we could, that went on for years

T. H. - what, what was it like for, for young Trinidadians at the time to be, to have that kind of interest in the society

C. J. - there weren't too many people interested, there was Mendes, there was me, there was another white boy called Evans(?), a light skinned boy called Bailey(?), then our man of music was Carlton Comma at the library, he was of value because not only he had a wonderful ear for music and knew a lot about music but also we could get books from him from the library, so in that way, but there weren't too many others there were a few here and there who would be interested in this or that but not many other people

T. H. - but you went on to England in 1932

C. J. - in '32, I was teaching at the Government Training College for Teachers, teaching History and Literature and I was settled there with a good job, but I saved my money, when I was saving to have more Constantine told me "Come on man" and I went to England in '32 determined to make my living as a writer

T. H. - and what happened next

C. J. - Constantine had told me well you want to look about London a bit, to get to know some people, see, and when you feel that you need some help come up and live with me, so I went to Nelson after three months in London and I used to go around reading English books and English papers and I used to watch the cricket that Nelson used to play and one day a man very famous named Barnes, S. F. Barnes came there, he was nearly 60, but I was very much impressed with him, in the way he conducted himself, not only in the way he bowled but the way he walked around, so I wrote an article about him, purely for myself, old journalist habit, I still ---- and I showed it to Constantine, Constantine says, I say "what to do with it?", he says "send it to Neville Cardus and tell him that I told you to send it to him"

Cut

Talk about C. L. R.'s travelling arrangements

T. H. - yes just continuing from the article that Constantine

C. J. - told me to send to Cardus, and I wrote to Cardus telling him here is an article I have written, Learie Constantine has told me to send it to you and I would like to know if there is anywhere in Lancashire or round about where you can get it published, Cardus wrote back to me and said "we at the *Manchester Guardian* will publish it" and it was out in a day or two "and I want to see you, when next you come to Manchester come to the *Guardian* and ask for me"

Voices in the background

K. R. - this was your first period in the United Kingdom, ah and in that period you did a number of things, there was your association with Learie Constantine

C. J. - and that he got me my -- for an article which he told me to send to Cardus, Cardus told me to come and work with him on the *Guardian*, he wanted an assistant so I got a job straight away

K. R. - but you were also doing a lot of talks on weekends

C. J. - I was talking to a lot of people

K. R. - and this was about race relations

C. J. - no the chief, chiefly about West Indian independence, first of all I had written a book, *The Life of Captain Cipriani* and I had it there with me in Nelson and I would talk about it and Constantine would ask me what you only talking about this book for, what, what, why don't you print it, I tell him I have no money, he said find out and tell me and I found out and we printed it in Nelson, he paid

K. R. - but did you at the same time or did you during this period also have the manuscript of *Minty Alley* ready

C. J. - I had it all the time, I had it but it wasn't ready, I had it there as something I had written to practice, I had written that about 1929, I had it there, but I got to know, when I got to London

K. R. - when did you move to London

C. J. - when I became a regular corespondent assistant to Cardus, I moved to London because it was easier to move from there all over the country

K. R. - and did that bring you in a place where you would meet lots of British intellectuals

C. J. - I didn't meet many British intellectuals, I met many people of the Labour Left, I had began to study Trotskyism and then when I got to know about Trotskyism which I did from hard reading, I got to know some Trotskyist and they were in the Independent Labour Party, so I got to know Fena Brockway(?) and the other members in the Labour Party and Fena Brockway(?) became my very good friend and associate, he was already very close with George Padmore and there were people in the Labour Left who were friendly towards us

K. R. - where was Padmore at this time

C. J. - he had left Moscow and come back, come to London, because Moscow wanted to, were changing to the popular front and they wanted Padmore to say that there were two types of Fascists, the Imperialist, the Democratic Imperialist, Britain, France and the

United States and the Fascists Imperialists, Germany, Italy and Japan, Padmore says but how you expect me to write and make propaganda for black people on that basis, Germany, Italy and Japan they have no colonies in Africa and the United States have one of the leading countries for racial prejudice, so they say "but George that's the new line, you know" and George being a very determined man, packed up his things and left, came to London, he wasn't going to do that, many people stayed in the Communists and did whatever they wanted them to do, say these people mean business they are opposed, George said no

K. R. - did you join up with any party at this point

C. J. - I joined the Trotskyist movement and the Trotskyist movement at that time was inside the Labour, the Independent Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party claimed that it was no longer following the simple democratic line of the Labour party and the Independent Labour Party had split through the Left of the Labour Party, Maxton(?), Fena Brockway(?), Mc Govern(?) and they were four or five labour leaders and they were others around and they had left the Labour Party and had formed an Independent Revolutionary Party and Padmore was very friendly with them and I became very friendly with them too, but as a member of the Independent Labour Party we had gone in with the hope of winning as many as possible

K. R. - now while you were at Nelson talking about West Indian independence and Captain Cipriani, your perspective would have been the perspective of a West Indian nationalist, now when you went to London and amm joined the Trotskyite movement (C. J. - no that wasn't so) did your perspective change

C. J. - when I was in Nelson and from the time I, even when I wrote *The Life Of Captain Cipriani* you would see traces in it that I had a vague association with the Labour Party, because Cipriani always insisted that his organisation was affiliated to the British Labour Party and I wasn't to keen on politics but I went along there, then in Nelson I had a wonderful experience, Nelson was very strongly labour but I got friendly to know them because Constantine was a man of business, he was very popular and they knew that I was interested in cricket particularly when I started to write for the *Guardian* and I published my book but they warned me they say you have illusions, you believe that Mc ah, Mc Donald(?), Phillips Norton(?), Arthur Henderson(?) and these people will give you independence, he said they won't give you anything, we are Labour Party members, we are on the extreme left and they may come and say a lot of things but they will do nothing, so I had been warned before I went to London and started to read about Trotskyism and Marxism, that not to expect anything from the traditional Labour Left leaders, so that when I read Marxism by 1934, I had got through the material and I knew where I stood, I joined the Trotskyist movement because Marxism had made me to understand and the Nelson people had warned me to expect nothing from the Labour Party, so I went not to the Labour Party, but to the Independent Labour Party as a Trotskyist, we were there to see what we could get

K. R. - is it fair to ask what was the purpose of your political activity at this time

C. J. - at which time

K. R. - when you joined the Trotskyite movement and you were in London

C. J. - I was a complete Marxist as far as it is possible to be a Marxist in two years, I never wrote any more fiction, I wrote one or two stories and I became totally devoted to what seemed to me very obvious at the time, the collapse of European civilisation and I joined this movement with that in mind, the second novel I had in my mind never began, by accident about 1935 I happened to mention that I had a minor script novel (K. R. - who did you mention it to) and Walberg(?), I was talking to Walberg(?) and we had become very friendly and he said let me see it, I said it's not serious I wrote it one vacation, a chapter a day to practice my hand (K. R. - Walberg(?) was your earliest publisher) he said let me see it, I was very friendly with Brockway(?) who was really the, and Walberg introduced me, Brockway(?) introduced me to Walberg and I became very friendly with Walberg(?) and his wife they used to take me to the country with them, so that's how it was for a year or two

K. R. - and Walberg(?) published *Minty Alley*

C. J. - he, the next thing he said was I'm going to publish that novel and that was the first thing that was published and I said by all means, he gave me 50 pounds which was a lot of money in those days and he published it

K. R. - but in spite of that you weren't tempted to continue writing fiction

C. J. - no I'll tell you what happened, I was all eaten up with Marxism and with the Trotsky inspiration and Walberg(?) was a publisher of the left and he wasn't prepared to go the Stalinist way so he told me one day, we were very friendly, he told me one day "Nello I think I would like you to write a book for me", I say "what is that", he says "a book on African socialism", I told him "Fred that is not the book you know", he says "what is the book", I say "there is a mess in Russia today and that's going to explode very soon and that is the book that you should be publishing", he says "well are you prepared to write it", I say "I will write it tomorrow", he says "give me an outline", within a week I had given him an outline of 20,000 words, he said go ahead and by the end of '36, by the end of '36 I had written and he had got ready in script what became *World Revolution*, I'll tell you why, if you look in there on the shelf *World Revolution* is there, will you go, it's a book black

K. R. - a black book

C. J. - on the, on the top shelf, yes,
Cut

C. J. - with one publisher to do the book on Toussaint L'Ouverture, that was accepted immediately they had paid me money

K. R. - when was that, what year was that

C. J. - that was about '35 or '36

K. R. - okay save that eh save that we'll get that on tape (? - it's on) oh right. So before you agreed to do *World Revolution* for Walberg(?) you had already contracted to do the book on Toussaint

C. J. - I had contracted and had got the money to do the book on, that became *The Black Jacobins* (K. R. - who was the publisher there) I can't remember who was the publisher, but it was a very good English publisher, he gave me the money, he said go ahead, and I was very important because I was writing in the *Manchester Guardian* signing, first class paper you see

K. R. - but *World Revolution* got written first

C. J. - so I told Walberg look I have already contracted to do this book for these people but I don't want to do that, I want to do this one because it's urgent, I said "will you, if I give them back their money and their contract will you undertake to do *The Black Jacobins*", he said "certainly", so I took my book contract gave them back their 50 pounds or whatever it was and Walberg(?) took over the contract for that book before *World Revolution* was published and why I wanted to get *World Revolution* for you was for you to see the date on which I wrote the introduction, when the book came back to be, to be proofed I wrote the introduction, the 17th of January 1937 and that is, that I only began to look at Marxism in 1933 and I had that book ready

K. R. - we want to get a piece of *Minty Alley* at some

C. J. - but wait there is, there is a *World Revolution* in there, look there, there are five or six shelves and on the top shelf is a black book, a book black all over

K. R. - so *World Revolution* was published and then you went on to work on *The Jacobins* and you finished that before you went to the United States

C. J. - I finished *The Jacobins* about '38, early '38 and it was published before I left and I also finished another book called *The History of Negro Revolt* so between '33, '32 and '38 in England I was writing for the *Manchester Guardian* then I started to write for the *Glasgow Herald* and I published these three books and I began to do another book, a book called *Bisewarine*(?) and Walberg(?) asked me what did I think of it I told him this is a splendid book, he says go ahead translate

K. R. - so would you say that, that by this time you had very little interest in literary works

C. J. - I was reading, reading everything and that has lasted up to today, you read those extracts from the British press (K. R. - yes, yes) they are fascinated I'm interested in greek literature, modern literature, I've never stopped reading. Now wait a bit will somebody take me in (? - we could do that later) let's get it now ---- (*Taking him inside to get the book*) now look at this this book was published January the 17th 1937, which meant I had written it, written and sent it to the printer by '36 and I mention it because this is quite a book, most of the Trotskys were quite astonished when they read this book and realised that I had joined the movement only in '34, in '36 I had written that, now let me continue to tell you some more, in the 1960's, 1970 Krauss reprinted it, it seems they wanted a book

dealing with that period and they reprinted it, so this is the Krauss reprint and in my essays that I am reprinting I have republished two essays from this so it still, I thought this book was dead, but it's still alive

K. R. - so that, that am those were your activities from 1932 to 1938 but why did you go to the United States

C. J. - I was invited to the United States to have, to give a lecture tour, Cannon(?) told me, the head of the party, "we have never had anybody from Europe or from away travelling in the United States bringing the international movement to us in the U. S. A. and you are, if you are free from September, October, your cricket is over will you come", I said "certainly" and I went, then

K. R. - yeah but you stayed a lot longer than you had been planning to

C. J. - first of all the walking, secondly I wasn't well and there was a split in the Trotsky movement and I joined one section and it was a question of whether I should go back to England or stay in America and I decided to stay in America

K. R. - in fact in 1940 you rejected the Trotskyist version of Marxism

C. J. - yes but that didn't mean that I had left the Trotskyist movement, Trotsky used to say if even they reject, if by and large they accept the doctrine, what, what is the difference, we can fight that out, so I stayed in, but already my mind was against him

K. R. - did you get married in the United States

C. J. - no, no, I had been married in Trinidad, when I, I left my wife, the idea was that when I was settled in England I would send for her, so after two or three years I got settled and I sent to tell her to come, she wouldn't come, so then I got, after she wouldn't come, then I got a divorce in New York and ah I -- got married in the United States

K. R. - ah can you remember the year

C. J. - 19, 1948 I would say, 1948, '47, '48 there, there, pretty certain thereabout

K. R. - so that was your second marriage (C. J. - my second marriage) and what happened to that, did it

C. J. - I have a son by it, but we, we got divorced and I married another girl from the United States who is my wife at the present time

K. R. - while in the United States did you associate a lot with American blacks

C. J. - I was with them all the time, I worked with the Trotskyist movement, but whenever the blacks were having a conference or they wanted somebody to speak on some subject they sent for me, the blacks are, in the United States are very anxious for anyone who will speak up and I will tell you something, after some people at Howard University had heard

me speak and had read *The Black Jacobins*, one or two of them told me unofficially, "James we want you here in the United States, we want a man like you to stay here and speak" they said, I said "but I haven't a degree", they said "that doesn't matter, this Black Jacobins you write you can polish it up and rearrange it and we'll give you, make you, give you a doctorate", but ---, I said "but what", they say "all that happen you'll have to become a citizen of the United States", and I said "no"

K. R. - you've always been a citizen of Trinidad & Tobago

C. J. - oh but yes, but at that time I said no, I wasn't, I was still going back to England, going back to my reporters job, I had been commissioned by the editor of the *Glasgow Herald* to do a series of articles on the United States, my status in the United, in Britain was very good

K. R. - but you stayed 15 years in the United States

C. J. - I got mixed up with the Trotskyist movement and the black movement

K. R. - what would you say were the highlights of those years '38 to '53

C. J. - '38 to '53, the highlight was between '38 and '51 my friends and I worked out what was our main opposition to Trotsky's theories, perhaps the most important decision of my life was this, most of them thought they disagreed with Trotsky on Russia, shall we defend Russia or shall we oppose, leave Russia to itself in the coming war, I said no

Interruptions

Move inside, Shots of books

C. J. - where is my beer

Cut

K. R. - stay in the United States, was it you and your friends decided precisely why you objected to the Trotskyite version of Marxism

C. J. - the word precisely is not, not the word, it is that we realised that we had to find out why we should have a position opposite to Trotsky on so fundamental a question as the nature of the Russian state, we couldn't just disagree as the others did on defence, on no defence, we said no and it took us a lot of time and the first thing that we did and published was I think *The Invading Socialist Society* that is our basic document, 1947, and in time we left them and went back to the Socialist Workers party and stayed with them till 1951

K. R. - now sometime I think in the '50s you ran into trouble with U. S. immigration

C. J. - not much trouble with the U. S. immigration, the U. S. immigration never bothered me, they took no interest in me, neither did I in them, but about '51 or '48 or thereabouts, '49, '50, '51, '52 McCarthyism was widespread and under the, the drive for, on behalf of the establishment against anything which opposed it, they got at me and I think (K. R. -

you were imprisoned in) no I will tell you, I was, I will tell you this much, some people told me "James friends of ours are asking us how is it they allowed, the, the immigration authorities to get at James, they say normally there is a very simple thing we would do, we would take James' papers and put them away in such a way that no immigration authority could find them, which meant that James was safe", they said "but we can't do that today, there are followers of McCarthy in every office who are on the alert", so if it wasn't for McCarthyism I would have been safe, but I was a bit tired I wanted to come back to Europe where things were happening, so they put me into Ellis Island where I was placed with some Communist who behaved very well towards me

K. R. - even though they knew you were against them

C. J. - they knew, they all knew me, everybody knew me, but they behaved extremely well and we had an alliance so to speak, against them until the time came, I wrote to George Padmore and I wrote to Nkrumah, letters which said look at they have me here I am not well and what are they keeping me here for, I haven't done anything

K. R. - how long did they keep you for

C. J. - about five, four or five months. But Nkrumah wrote to Padmore and Padmore wrote to Anthony Eden(?) or Padmore spoke to Brockway(?) who had been our old friend in the I. L. P. and Brockway(?) wrote to Anthony Eden(?) and I have seen the letter that Anthony Eden wrote, *my dear friend, I am sorry to hear about your friend C. L. R. James, is his wife and child being taken care of? And we will see what we can do*, now they had been treating me as some sort of prisoner in Ellis Island, no physical violence, but the moment they got and saw that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Britain was interested in me, my God man, (coughing fit) they treated me very well and let me, let me out, I was out for a while, it was even suggested the Counsel for New York told me, I was married to an American woman, we had a son, I could stay in America if I promised not to take part in politics, I tell him that is out of the question, to stay in America and not take part in politics, what kind of

K. R. - was this the time when you conceived *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*?

C. J. - no sir

LOCATION: C. L. R. James' home

DATE: September 5th/26th, 1980

TAPE #: 8

K. R. - so you were told that you could stay in the United States (C. J. - yes) if you didn't take part in politics

C. J. - if I didn't take part in politics, which of course was an absurd thing and I said it didn't suit me and in any case I was ready to leave, I wanted to get back to Europe and I'd been away too long

K. R. - and I'd asked you too whether it was at this period that you thought about writing *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*

C. J. - no, one day I left where I was up in the Bronx and I was going to get to a book, to take the bus and there was a book shop near there, so I looked at it, about four or five small shelves and I saw *Eugénie Grandet* by Balzac, so I bought it, I think for a dime or something and I read it all the way down and when I reached where I was going to in, down in New York, I was rather retired and I read it and I had read *Eugénie Grandet* when I got back and that is very fine novel of a certain type, tight and close, so the next day, the next Sunday when I passed I was looking over the books and I saw *Moby Dick*, now I had read *Moby Dick* about 10 years before in Trinidad and made nothing of it, more than 10, about 1921 or '22, but not, but I took it out and started to read and the book fascinated me for months afterwards, it was the exact opposite in style to *Eugénie Grandet* and I felt there was a lot of Shakespeare in it, so I, I had been writing a series of essays, I had written on Poe, I had written on Hawthorn, I had written on Fenimore Cooper, in my circle getting myself right about

Phone ringing in background

K. R. - Bruce you want to get that

C. J. - so having read these books I began to take more interest in what other people had written about Melville and I got very dissatisfied, I said what the man says he's writing about they don't even touch, it is a book about workers on the one hand and managers on the other, that's what the book is about

K. R. - we're talking about *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*

Cut

Talk about travel arrangements, some relative in trouble, travel arrangements again

C. J. - so I saw this book, I read this book and when I read what the critics were saying I was horrified and it was chiefly to clarify them that I wrote this book, otherwise I wasn't going to write any book on Melville, but I couldn't stand to see a book of that quality being so superficially treated by those people, so I wrote it then, I wrote part of it in Ellis Island

K. R. - I just thought that some parts of it which ammm seemed to regret or to complain about the monolithic power of the state, the way in which they can deprive the individual of his freedom, I know that might of have had to do with your detainment, (C. J. - no my in) your detention in Ellis Island

C. J. - as far as I know, my instincts in regards to Melville were purely literary and I wrote about it in the same way that I've written about Shakespeare, I say these fellas are reading, but there's some limitation, they can't see what's there and that's what moved me, there was nothing else

K. R. - you think *Moby Dick* is a kind, the kind of book West Indians should read

C. J. - it depends whether you are a person interested in letters, interested in literature, but anybody who is interested in literature either from the point of view of writing or general reading should not fail to read *Moby Dick*

K. R. - but you don't think there are any themes in *Moby Dick* that amm West Indians would identify with immediately whether they are interested in literature or not

C. J. - it's difficult for me to answer that question because I do not look upon literature or characters in literature as something with which you identify, I read *Moby Dick* because it is a very fine piece of work and tells me a lot about individual characters and society, it is conscious of the historical stage which it has reached and where it is going, and that's why and I think anybody interested in learning about the world and about the United States should read *Moby Dick*, there is much of the United States there you know, oh yes

K. R. - what I was really heading, coming around to is that amm all your life you have been interested in Literature from other countries as well as literature from the West Indies (C. J. - yes) I don't know how up to date you are with the changes that are taking place in the educational system here and especially in the syllabus to do with English and with Literature, and we have had a turn around and there's a great deal of West Indian Literature now being put on, so I don't know whether, I mean, if you can accept my version (C. J. - I have to) that a lot West Indian Literature (C. J. - I have to hear it before I can accept it or reject it) that the syllabus is, I would say 60% West Indian and

C. J. - that I think is excessive, Literature in the world, West Indies occupy a very fine part of it and they have done astonishingly well, but that Literary education should be 60% West Indian, I , I, there is a classical Literature, I think there is some Greek, I'm not too fond of Roman, Greek there is the --- Bible and some others and then West Indian Literature should fit into that

K. R. - but who are the English writers that you think our children should read, I'm not asking you to lay down the law for everybody, but if you had to suggest some names

C. J. - two Shakespeare plays, a novel by Fielding, a novel by Dickens, a novel by Thackeray, some selections from Keats, Shelley, that's about all, I wouldn't do too much, I wouldn't go in

K. R. - you would let them off Chaucer

C. J. - no, but you can't do too much because I have in mind Greek, I have in mind French Literature, I can't see anybody studying Literature without doing that Spanish masterpiece (K. R. - Don Quixote) Don Quixote, that must be so, but I don't mind somebody telling me well instead of two Shakespeare plays I will do one and do a Chaucer, the point is to get them acquainted and let them see Literature in general, and then not 60% I would say 33%

K. R. - what about American writers, who are the American writers you would say that

C. J. - I have just told you one (K. R. - Melville) Melville is one and I regret to say the second American writer who appeals to me most is Faulkner and I think they ought to be able to find two stories by Faulkner that show he is an American writer he is not doing something as the English have done it, he is an original writer, a very creative writer

K. R. - ah Lamming has described Huckleberry Finn as the essential book of a civilisation

C. J. - I would not oppose that at all, if somebody told me, I am not going to argue books (K. R. - no, no) if you had to fit in ah Mark Twain I say yes by all means certainly

K. R. - ah about the Russian writers

C. J. - ah one has to do Tolstoy, one has to do one Dostoyevsky because you are not talking, whichever one you like, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and above all get an insight into Pushkin, I, Pushkin is to me one of the finest of writers and now I talk about Pushkin my mind is filled with Dante and it's very hard to sit down to work out, but you could work out how many years are they going to have

K. R. - well I was just thinking that amm the, the range of books that you've suggested here might cover, if we say, what would a West Indian's literary education include, but we would have to take the primary level, the secondary level, university level and conceive of that as a whole program

C. J. - yes that can be done, along the lines I have talked, but that isn't a thing that you can argue about, that you can discuss

K. R. - I think that that is one of the weaknesses in our present planning, that nobody has sat down and said we are looking at what constitutes a literary education. What they have done is quite separately thought what will we do in primary school, then in another compartment what will we do in secondary school, then in another compartment what will are we doing at university, (C. J. - that's not) but there's no attempt to build a total (C. J. - that's not my view of things, no). Right so you wrote *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*

C. J. - before I left the United States and it was printed there

K. R. - okay well that was you first book of, would you call it a book of literary criticism

C. J. - it is literary criticism because it is a critique of a work of literature, but there is a great deal of what I think is the historical aspect of what that book represents and that's what I think literary criticism ought to be, to spread it as widely as possible so that you see the book from as many angles as you can, but I'm satisfied with that book I haven't cause to change anything

K. R. - I notice very often when you talk about Literature, you make, you seem to make a distinction between prose, fiction and poetry and amm you don't go as far as this but you almost seem to say that I read my poetry and enjoy it privately, but when you're talking

about history and social change and the development of the culture and so on it is the prose writers you go to, in your mind does that separation exist

C. J. - it doesn't alter, it's not my mind but the prose writers are the ones who probe most deeply into the particular area to which they belong, nobody can like Wordsworth, Keats and ah Shelley, I'm not so fond of Byron, than I do, Chaucer ---- but the prose writers are the ones it's most easy for the ordinary person to absorb that's why I stick to them but you could do a lot with the poetry writers too, oh no I don't wish to imply anything against poetry

Bruce and Ken talking in background

K. R. - well I want to bring him back to England after '53 and then talk a little bit about *Beyond A Boundary* again and then in that, in the middle of that come to the books, if you could jot down some of the books that you remember that are on the C. X. C. syllabus

C. J. - what's that the English Literary (K. R. - yes) I don't want to touch that again you know (K. R. - West Indians you know) no, West Indians (K. R. - we coming to ask you about the West Indian books) by all means (K. R. - that are on the syllabus, I just want to bring you back from the States to England) that's all right (K. R. - and settle you down with *Beyond A Boundary*) yes (K. R. - and then move from *Beyond A Boundary* to Selvon, Naipaul and so on)

K. R. - right so the, the, the crisis at Ellis Island how did that, it got resolved because they, they suddenly realised that the British government were interested in you

C. J. - not, well they were going to get rid of me in any case, but they began treating me with a certain consideration and care that they hadn't been before

K. R. - yes, so you were deported

C. J. - I was deported

K. R. - you were then received in London

C. J. - I was very well received in London

K. R. - who met you

C. J. - my friends and various other people

K. R. - and there was no problem with British immigration wanting to find out what was your

C. J. - absolutely none, once you have been a British citizen you always are, whatever you join, they come back and they say you're okay yes ---- it was very good to be welcomed that way, officially I mean, it wasn't welcoming C. L. R. James, here was a stranger coming back and it made me feel at home that they were glad to have me back

K. R. - but to a large extent and to many West Indians the years in the United States '38 to '53 were lost years in the sense, as far as you were concerned, because you didn't touch very much upon West Indian life in a direct way, you might have been doing it in your writing, you might have been doing it in a general sense in your involvement with the Black Movements, and with Pan-Africanism and so on, but to many West Indians you were out of the picture

C. J. - they are justified, I only have to compare myself to a man like Padmore, he was a man who had an international view but he was there quite aware of the Caribbean all the time to an extent that I was not

K. R. - but on your return to the U. K. in 1953 you seemed to have got back into the West Indian groove as it were

C. J. - I got back and between 1953 and 1957 I delivered a tremendous number of lectures at the West Indian students hostel, I was there regularly whenever they wanted somebody to come to speak and there I was re-involved in the West Indian problem but usually treating it from an international point of view, dealing with the concrete but always from the international point of view, but '53 to '57 I was involved with the West Indian problem

K. R. - was this the period when you were also writing *Beyond A Boundary* so that you were working your way back through that book

C. J. - no I was writing *Beyond A Boundary* and I was finished what is today *Beyond A Boundary* except for the last chapter by '56, but I had worked out *Beyond A Boundary* in the United States, where I saw no cricket and only read about cricket but my instincts for cricket were so strong that I began to think about this game, what did it mean to me, why did it mean so much and I thought about the West Indians, so that when I came to England in '53 I was about ready to start and by '56 I was finished

K. R. - well it is possible that your preoccupation with amm or the fact that that book came to your head while you were in the United States, this was a kind of unconscious yearning back (C. J. - to go back) to the West Indies

C. J. - I don't know to the West Indies, not at all, I wouldn't say, I wouldn't say no to that, it was a yearning back to cricket (K. R. - yes) but when I began to think about cricket I began to think about the West Indies where I had played and knew, where I had been, when I left the West Indies I was an expert, I knew the game, so thinking then about cricket, I began to dig into the Caribbean, so when I started to write *Beyond A Boundary* in England I started with it as with the West Indies

K. R. - so you have been in sort of, a kind of exile all your life but you have never, as far as I know, come out into print either about the pleasures or the pains of exile and yet I feel you are the one West Indian who must have a lot to say about the pleasures and pains of exile

C. J. - there is a book up there will you, a book up there called *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*. This is, thank you, this is a recent edition of *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* it has an introduction by my very good friend Professor George Rowic(?) and on page 15 of the introduction he says *I had the great privilege of working closely with James in London in the 1960's, I had gone back, and witnessed with amazement the great intensity and variety of his political and literary activities, through his house passed hundreds of West Indians, American, African and English intellectuals, students, workers and political people, he somehow had time for a seemingly endless stream of people and spent time not only with leading intellectual figures but with students, young workers and political and ordinary people whose questions he answered with concern and from whom he consciously learned, I shall never forget his lifelong habit of interrogating people as to the histories of their lives as well as constant reading, and that has always been so. It might seem that I was away but people always wanted to hear from me something and I always wanted to hear from them something, that is absolutely me, in fact the women that I married were pretty angry about it, I would talk to everybody and intimately but not at them, I didn't do it with them as I should have done, but that, that is, bear that in mind you will understand*

K. R. - I remember that time very well because Richard Small(?) and I and a whole gang of us used to be passing through there all the time too

C. J. - I was never really away, they always came and I always talked to them and asked them about everything, where they grew up, in Cedros, in Jamaica, in Barbados, who was their father

K. R. - I remember the cross examinations

C. J. - I remember those times very much, it's a habit of mine, so I wasn't so remote from the Caribbean as one would think

K. R. - and yet, but what I'm really getting at, maybe this, I hope this isn't too personal, I know I regret that the Trinidad government or the University of the West Indies hasn't done anything for you, to say well James come back here as an honoured guest, or as an honoured figure on the campus we want you here, but they have not done this, nothing official has been done amm it's been left to George Weekes to say well come and we'll give you this place, you get on with your work. How do you really feel about that is there any bitterness in your heart or any sadness

C. J. - I have no bitterness nor sadness about it, I believe I know what is the origin of it and I would just prefer to leave it where it is, I think everybody knows also what is, so we just leave it there. I very much regret that I am not doing some actual teaching and I, the people whom I would like really to have classes with are grownups not university people, grownups from the age of about 25 to 45 those I would like to

K. R. - well amm you said a lot about the development of West Indian society in *Beyond A Boundary* and about the part, about your own development and the part that Literature played in that development, although a little while ago you were being slightly critical of the way in which our new literature syllabuses have been planned, amm a definite and a

positive step is being taken to make sure that the education, the literary education of a young West Indian would be an appropriate and relevant one, so we have this new syllabus we said in which there is lots of West Indian books, so what I want to do now is ask you a set of questions relating to West Indian literature and to the writers who are amm

C. J. - I will say this much, asking me questions like this about so intangible a thing as Literature means I will have to make brief and abrupt statements (K. R. - yes) and it must be understood that I could develop those (K. R. - yes) but for the time being I'll go at it

K. R. - but the first thing I want to ask you is a general thing about language, amm one of the justifications for the use of West Indian literature is that the language of West Indian literature is a language that the West Indian child is at home with immediately, he understands all its nuances, all its inclinations, in that literature he finds the dialect which is the language of the people who live around him and so on and therefore it is very much easier for him to get into that kind of literature

C. J. - I beg to say that I am not worried about the language that appears in West Indian writing, I don't think it is too remote from good English writing, I don't think so and I know people who feel strongly about that but I don't

K. R. - so you would not hold that West Indian Literature should make more use of dialect

C. J. - I don't think so, a West Indian writer makes use of what he needs to put his story across, and if he needs dialect more than normal let him do that, but I have no laws about that, neither for nor against dialect

K. R. - there is a lot of talk you see, that English isn't really our language

C. J. - I have heard that talk, I'm not sympathetic to it. I used to be Secretary of the West Indian Federal Labour Party and I travelled up and down the islands, I never met any body of people and I spoke always to working people who didn't understand what I was saying, I met nobody there and this separation of West Indian language from the normal English is to me, I have never felt it and I am not aware of it, some writers are a bit removed, Wilson Harris is, but when you really get down to Harris, he's writing, he's handling the language, he's adding something to it

K. R. - so that for many people Selvon, a lot of people praise Selvon simply because he uses dialect, now what, how would you praise Selvon, what do you think are his strengths as a writer?

C. J. - I am now going to speak my mind here and who doesn't like it can go to hell, I do not appreciate Selvon as a novelist in the same class as George Lamming, Naipaul and the rest, but I would like Selvon to be the journalist ---, he has a wonderful ear for dialogue, a wonderful eye for seeing the, of people and I believe that we have lost the opportunity of creating a first class journalist and a great portrait of West Indian society, in that he's not doing journalistic work and has to take this capacity and fit it in to the novel, that's what I want to say

K. R. - well a lot, a lot of people feel that even though this may be true, Selvon, Selvon has created characters and situations that ennoble the West Indies, I mean, Lamming has put it another way that Selvon has brought to life the peasant in the West Indies

C. J. - I don't say no to that, but when I say Selvon I am thinking of the others and I remember a sharp dispute I had with Lamming about Vidia Naipaul, Vidia had not yet written *A House for Mr. Biswas* and I mean his book on *The Pleasures of Exile* had a lot to say pro-Selvon anti-Naipaul and I told him George you are wrong, you will see and later he came to acknowledge it, now I have always regretted that there isn't a newspaper here that would tell Selvon look this column is yours go ahead

K. R. - well I don't want to get into an argument but I think Selvon is perhaps a deeper writer than he appears to be, if you take the Lonley Lon

C. J. - I wouldn't argue, I wouldn't argue that with you but I think the most important thing about, I don't want to argue with you but we can easily slip into an argument, you be on guard, Selvon wrote the first novel (K. R. - *A Brighter Sun*) that made people in Trinidad and elsewhere realise that here was a novel about the ordinary people, that's a great event and number two he was the first who kept on saying that is how the West Indian in London lives, that's another great event a man is --- by what he does positively, but as I say, Lamming and Naipaul I think differently, Wilson I think differently and I think that Selvon's great characteristics are those that I have mentioned, that doesn't imply that his fiction is, not at all, and I wonder what he would say if I face him with this I doubt if he would disagree

K. R. - those who, some of the arguments in favour of Selvon include an argument about his contact with oral traditions, the fact that if West Indian literature is to be a distinctive thing, ah West Indian per se right, without any kinds of imitation of other countries' literatures that one of the ways in which it would become distinctive would be with the introduction of oral elements, and that ah, so that historically he is being credited with having introduced the oral culture into the three works, so that they see him say as a kind of calypsonian in prose

C. J. - no (K. R. - no) Selvon is much more than a calypsonian, he really gets into the life of a person, the characters he singles out and draws are symptomatic of the kind of life that many people are living, I don't --- calypsonian, the calypsonian is a worker in a very small medium, to make Selvon into a calypsonian means he's a writer of bits and snippets, that's untrue, oh no

K. R. - now am you're saying that before Naipaul wrote *Biswas*, George Lamming was arguing that Selvon and Reid were more important than Naipaul (C. J. - he had written that in the book) in *The Pleasures of Exile*

C. J. - I wouldn't have argued with him if I had, I say "George this is printed you know, you are responsible", he said "that's what I think", I tell him you're wrong"

K. R. - but he himself backed down (C. J. - later) when *A House for Mr. Biswas* was (C. J. - absolutely) published. Now what is your opinion of *A House for Mr. Biswas*

C. J. - it is one of the finest of the Caribbean novels, not only is it a very fine novel, it's a Caribbean novel, it paints the picture of people who are being nationally oppressed and you can talk about pass this law and this school and this, this, the people themselves when living under a civilisation which feels itself different from them or nationally which they're not, I don't know any better book than *House for Mr. Biswas* which says what happens to them, that story is a fine book for Trinidad but everybody can read it and I think British people have said what they thought about it in no uncertain terms and from the start I said this is it

K. R. - well you wouldn't amm, you wouldn't limit *A House for Mr. Biswas* to being a novel about Indians in Trinidad

C. J. - not, absolutely not, any man who writes a great novel always takes it out of the circumstances in which it is and makes it universal and *A House for Mr. Biswas* is in particular a novel about Indians in Trinidad, but I have written this, this is, I have written that here is the whole national question how people suffer and what they have to undergo, when apparantly they can vote and get jobs and nevertheless something happens to them and that is a novel that anybody suffering or wishing to point to a nationalist problem can point to

K. R. - so if you were working only on *A House for Mr. Biswas*, if you had to talk only about *A House for Mr. Biswas* what would be your assessment of Naipaul as a novelist

C. J. - a very fine novelist, a man who could take the ordinary lives of people in the Caribbean and make it into something that had universal aspects, that's what I would say about that novel

K. R. - ah, ah, what would you say then were his greatest qualities basing it only on *A House for Mr. Biswas*

C. J. - that is difficult to say because when I read that, number one I had read his previous works, number two I used to see him and we used to talk, number three I had other works in mind and I don't know any work that I have in mind in which the national situation is so powerfully limited to the actual facts and at the same time expanded (K. R. - as *A House for Mr. Biswas*) *A House for Mr. Biswas* I have written that so, I still think so but I don't thinks the same of Naipaul today no sir

K. R. - we'll leave Naipaul today out for a little bit (C. J. - alright) and just try

C. J. - cut that out please not that I wanted to do it eh leave that out, you when you bring it in

Cut
Talking Agin

K. R. - yes so amm, you think that if *Biswas* has so much to say about the Indians in Trinidad

C. J. - I don't think he has too much to say, I think he had enough to say, just enough to put his book there, that's what he's trying to do and that he has done

K. R. - but should we study, should somebody trying to understand the book study the Indian background

C. J. - I don't, that's not my view, if you want to understand the book you can study the Indian background because you have a sociological interest in the question, but I'm thinking of that book as literature, it gives me an insight into the Indian question as many books do, but I don't see any need to study the Indian question to, in order to appreciate *Mr. Biswas*, unless you want to, that's your affair, but I don't link the Indian question to *Biswas*, that limits the book makes it a sociological document and not a piece of fiction

K. R. - but a West Indian who knows the Indian situation will be able to extract more precise information about Indians in Trinidad, from that book, than an Englishman let us say, who doesn't know

C. J. - as a writer in Russia in the year 1880 would be able to extract more from Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, that is a natural thing, that he was able to express --- because he's an Indian, but that's what I'm against (K. R. - yes) I'm not, I'm not concerned with that, I'm concerned with the man has written a book and he is aimed at doing something with the book and that has been done and if you want to go forward go ahead, but I don't want that brought in so that the book is seen not only as a work of fiction but of value in understanding the Indian character, not me, I want it clear I'm not in that

K. R. - last time you were taking the position that the later Naipaul has allowed himself to say things that many white people would like to say about Third World countries but are scared to say

C. J. - yes that is my position, you have said it and I don't see any thing more to argue, but I would like to say Naipaul writes a book about India and he calls it *An Area of Darkness*, believe me you will hardly think how much that offends me, India has been one of the great fighters against imperialism, Ghandi and Nehru and these others were not some distinguished Indians, they were people who represented the progressive forces in India and Naipaul seemed to go to India and not know any of the people from whom the Ghandi and Nehru came that is a tremendous mistake and then he went back to India and he wrote *A Wounded Civilisation* and no where do you get it that India produces people from whom Nehru and Ghandi and ---- came, nowhere and that is his fault not India's

K. R. - well I think there are two, two amm additional ah perspectives that one would need to add to those books, the first is when he calls it *An Area of Darkness* I thought that referred at least in part to a confessional attitude

C. J. - excuse me I beg to interrupt, a man who is writing a book about India and says *An Area of Darkness* must not expect that people will not consider that the area which is dark is where he came from

K. R. - he is also saying that there is in himself (C. J. - you mustn't) an area of darkness about India (C. J. - you mustn't say things like that that allow this wide difference of interpretations, no) but I think if we read that book, I mean I liked *An Area of Darkness* a lot, better than *Wounded Civilisation* and what I liked about *Area of Darkness* is at the same time as he is exploring what he thinks of objectively as the darkness that is India, he is writing painfully about the darkness in himself in relation to India

C. J. - I didn't get that as much as I should, I was so much concerned with the fact that he had called India, one of the most important civilisations in the world today you know, nearly 5 or 6 hundred million people and when you say something about India and you have a basis in the people of the Caribbean and you have some basis in England, man you should say more than what he did and I am not surprised altogether because he has written a book called *A Bend in the River* and people tell me what it is about, that there he's, there is no right and left wing, for Vidia there is no right wing even far less a left wing

K. R. - okay lets go into the second perspective in addition to his personal quest, is that, I think that philosophically there is something I wouldn't say negative, but he, he sees the world in terms of the futility of human endeavour

C. J. - I agree with you entirely, I agree because when I read his early books I said to myself he isn't only attacking these Trinidad people, this is a man whose general attitude to society is negative, but there is another man living today, an Irish man whose society is more totally negative than anybody's, you remember his name, Beckett, totally negative ah *Waiting for Godot* (K. R. - and it's not offensive) it's not offensive, but he had a certain people to deal with and he said those Indians, what Beckett is saying those people are those people that's what life is like (K. R. - but I think Naipaul) but Vidia made this mistake of making people believe that that was happening to India and other people were not like that

K. R. - yes I think that is, that is the difficulty, because he's such a very good realistic novelist who creates the immediate scene and the particular people he's writing about it always looks as if he's making a particular statement about this place now

C. J. - I beg your pardon he is stating that and it is his absence of a broad comprehensive view of society that enables him to concentrate on these offensive elements

K. R. - but there is a gradual unfolding isn't there, that if he writes about Trinidad and says that is an area of darkness, he writes about India and he says that's an area of darkness, Africa is an area of darkness, America is an area of darkness, gradually you begin to see that where he is coming from is that the whole world is an area of darkness

C. J. - I don't -- that, I, all I can tell you is I know Samuel Beckett, I know his work pretty well and he is a man has no view of any kind of future for the society but he doesn't give the impression that, that Vidia does, and what I'm concerned with is those intellectuals

who are praising him amm I have an idea of those people and I say oh no, he will get a Noble prize and Arthur Lewis will get one too, but there are a lot of economist who are not going to get any Noble prize

K. R - I was a little bit alarmed what you said about Naipaul last time, not because what you said was untrue ah but because I think that even when you say it, you say it with respect, you have no doubt in your mind that he is an important writer, but some of the things you were saying it seemed to me might encourage a lot of people in our society who have no respect for writers or for people among us who have achieved anything, they say well yes, C. L. R. say Naipaul is a shit and that is it

C. J. - I have already written in a house in party politics in the West Indies about the Indian population and there I have a session on Naipaul and I'm quite prepared to stand by that, oh yes and I blame myself for it to a large degree, because after he wrote *Middle Passage* I should have written to him and told him well Vidia you can't write that way, there are other people besides these people you know, I don't think you, and I should have written again to him to tell him about ah *An Area of ah of Darkness* but I didn't, my fault, I should have written to him or written in public and made him aware of that

K. R. - but wouldn't it be possible, if you think that amm the American critics who at the moment are praising him, if you think that they are praising him from the wrong premises, that they are praising him simply because he is saying what they would like

C. J. - I wouldn't say that, I wouldn't say simply because, that is a phrase, when you're dealing with a writer of remarkable talent simply because ain't good enough oh no, he can write and whatever he will write about if he is interested in it will have a vivid and powerful impact, that is what those critics are looking at and that's what I as a politico am very suspicious of

K. R. - that his work lends itself to people who wish to take certain political attitudes

C. J. - who will encourage, encourage it and push it forward, they have never, they have never published my *Mariners*, ah *Black Jacobins* and you saw the -- article which they said what has happened, they

K. R. - well to move abruptly from Naipaul to a writer who seems to have a much more, not optimistic, but a much more positive view of the possibilities in West Indian society and who certainly doesn't have any kind of political axe to grind

C. J. -----, now, now whom have you got in mind

K. R. - I'm thinking about Michael Anthony and specifically about *Green Days by the River* have you read that

C. J. - mm hmm, I have read three of his novels, *They Came for the Games*, *A Year in San Fernando*, *Green Days by the River* and I wish somebody would get seriously down to a criticism of what Anthony is doing and what very consciously he's not doing

K. R. - what do you think he is not doing

C. J. - he is not making any picture of the middle classes nor is he doing anything to make you feel that such and such are West Indians positive or negative, he's concerned with the ordinary man and he's letting you know and very effectively, a lot of ----- what an ordinary person in the Caribbean ordinary class is, that's what he's doing and he's doing it extremely well

K. R. - a lot of people say when they read his novels that's there hardly any story, that hardly anything happens

C. J. - they're not interested in the ordinary people and the ordinary life that they live, it is Michael Anthony's great quality that he is and can write about that and say that is it , maybe you don't like it, but I'm not going to have a murder here or a piece of whoredom here no, no, no, that is life from day to day

K. R. - so that he has travelled a long way from the early school, who wrote about the yard for instance

C. J. - not only that he travelled from Lovelace, Lovelace is writing about people in the yard also, but Anthony is writing about the ordinary people and he, he sticks to it and I find it a notable piece of literature, nobody takes those people as ordinary people and puts them in a book you know, no they put them in a book to say look how funny they are, how humorous, Anthony said this is how you live you know and I am glad to see that, that is taking place in America too

K. R. - towards the end of *Green Days by the River* amm there is a very spectacular scene where Mr. Gidharie turns the dogs loose on, on the young man, Shelly(?), do you think that amm, when you read the book did that episode jar on you, did you feel that this was uncharacteristic Anthony, (C. J. - no) it was unexpected in the book

C. J. - no, he was writing and he introduces this and I am so much in sympathy, I saw what he was doing and I said well hey he's doing it and he's doing it very well, he didn't introduce any rhetoric into it you know, nor was it over dramatic, but merely this happened and that made me quite satisfied, I said there he is again, this man is obviously, knows what he is about, but I will talk to him sometime and hope he will go further, he's a young man still

K. R. - the thing is amm we can't get away for the commentators who are always looking for social and political significance

C. J. - exactly, especially from a Caribbean writer (K. R. - yes) now I am to do a review of Lovelace's book and I may make a reference or two to, to Michael Anthony, they are writers poles apart, but I judge a writer by what he's aiming at and I know what Michael Anthony is aiming at and that he is doing it and there I stop, I could argue whether, whether that is, to what degree that is as important as somebody else, I could but I wouldn't do that, this is a fine writer, we are glad, I may talk to him sometime and tell him

what I think or in company I might, but I'm not stating anything that would lower his reputation with people, not me

K. R. - well I don't know if you do this but amm, when I read a writer who has written five or six books, I read all five or six, after a while in my mind I have a favourite Anthony novel or a favourite Naipaul novel, has that happened to you

C. J. - I like the year in San Fernando, there are not many people who can write about children you know, the United States are hopelessly sentimental about children, the British believe that they should be not see, should be seen, they shouldn't even be seen, the British believe that children should not be seen nor heard, but Michael ----- happened to a boy of eleven and he, he doesn't go from it he sticks there, that is a very fine piece of work, I admire it, I, I couldn't do it, I couldn't do anything like that, but I will speak to Michael sometime and tell him

K. R. - are you saying that you have reservations about his work

C. J. - not reservations, but I will not, I won't say anything here that people can say "oh James said", not me, I have to be careful what I say, but I, I can speak to Michael about his worth in a way that I wouldn't touch here

K. R. - just hold it a bit there amm Cliff. Bruce anything you want to add on Anthony

B. P. - no I think it's running nicely amm, we could ask about what age level ----- 'cause a lot of people feel that the children's novels -----

C. J. - I want to say they are not children's novels 'cause I read them as a grown up, but children can read some of them --- and that's no disgrace or

K. R. - yes, there is a lot of discussion now among teachers about getting books that are suitable for children

C. J. - well let them get rid of the television first, then we can begin to get books that are -- --, but as long as you have television in the house then this -- for books which don't say anything, impossible

K. R. - have you read any of Andrew Salkey's children's books

C. J. - I have read, looked at one or two and I have read them, apparently I haven't been too interested, he wrote another novel recently about life among the black people in London and the games that they were playing with murder and blackmail and so on, which I told him, I said it's a very fine novel, I know, he said I haven't got a copy

K. R. - *The Great Emancipation of Jerry Stover(?)*

C. J. - something like that, I think that's it

K. R. - but coming back to the problem of children's writing, am I'm wondering whether you run into trouble as soon as you sit down and say I am writing a book for children, it seems to me that all the books that are very good for children are also very good for adults, when you think about *Gulliver's Travels*, *Alice In Wonderland*

C. J. - *Gulliver's Travels* was not written for children, no sir

K. R. - and yet children love it

C. J. - let them love it, so much the better

K. R. - I'm wondering whether you see from that or from examples like that we can draw some conclusions about what happens

C. J. - you can't draw some conclusions about literature in general from a great masterpiece by a great master writer, he's no model or anything to go by, no the person who writes the stories for children is a person who wants to, we can't say more than that, I expect that Salkey is having some success with them, I haven't been enthralled

K. R. - am I'm, am I'm the West Indian drama I don't think you have written very much about West Indian drama

C. J. - I know nothing, I know nothing about it, the little that I have seen a man named John(?) (K. R. - Errol John(?)) has written a novel called (K. R. - *Moon On A Rainbow Shawl*) yes, I haven't

K. R. - you haven't read it

C. J. - I've read it, I've read it twice

K. R. - what do you think of it?

C. J. - I don't think much of it, it's a shame, I don't say, I don't think much of it, that's my fault that's not

K. R. - but then am I'm, you're not given to just saying I don't think much of it, you usually give reasons

C. J. - I found that, you remember my novel *Minty Alley*, the people in it, I don't find any such people, I find the people there carry out semi-dramatic, semi-sentimental actions, they don't come from inside, I may be wrong, but they, they don't come from inside

K. R. - well, I can't go much further with you because I tend to agree

C. J. - well it's very nice to find that you agree but we needn't put that in

K. R. - no, am I'm when you were going back to the London period and your association with British intellectuals and your involvement in British intellectual life

LOCATION: C. L. R. James' home

DATE: September 26th, 1980

TAPE #: 9

Talking about buying books from CLR
Talking about CLR's travel arrangements

C. J. - I read it in manuscript (K. R. - yes and if you're prepared to talk about it) I have very little to say except that the final draft is very finely done, but I don't think the subject is such that would really interest a person growing up, that, you were talking about books no for

B. P. - what about *The Dragon*

K. R. - but do you think that *The Dragon* is the sort of book that a young West Indian ought to read

C. J. - what do you mean by a young West Indian

K. R. - well, I would say anywhere from about thirteen or fourteen

C. J. - I believe today a young West Indian of thirteen or fourteen has a wider education of fundamental question than his father had when he was twice thirteen, that what's I see about all the people around me, you can't watch these films and all these things and hear the conversations, the radio scripts and all of that and I think that they could read *The Dragon* because *The Dragon* is a book that deals with values, a book that has a sense of the nobility that emanates from a handsome, gifted young woman, that is there, y'all read the book, that girl, Sylvia is her name (K. R. - yes) that is there (K. R. - the princess) the princess, she is a princess and it's very striking when a man takes a girl of seventeen from a yard, who has gone to offer herself to a man who is living in a dirty one room and says now this, I'm going make something to show you what this girl is like, to me, I go by what a writer is doing and the other characters are wonderful, there is a man there called, the man is called the calypsonian (K. R. - Philo(?)) Philo(?) ah Lovelace makes Philo(?) the calypsonian review his past life with a technical mastery, Philo(?) sings his various calypsos that he has had, his before and there you see Philo's(?) life and when he turned away from calvary hill that's there, and then he brings in that last chapter, Sylvia, Philo(?) goes to talk to the woman (K. R. - Clathilda(?)) and discusses with her what were Sylvia's problems and what Clathilda(?) told her and you get a glimpse that even then Philo(?) saw in Sylvia not somebody to sleep with but a human being who had immense possibilities, so you get in that last chapter the decline of Philo(?) listening to his calypso, a very pleasant girl comes in and talks to him, she is well dressed, she is handsome, she is easy going and so on and she sleeps with Philo(?), and then he gets up and he goes with this woman and the two of these middle class, he aspiring, and she middle class from being brown skinned, they end the book looking at the rest, at Sylvia and what Sylvia is doing, has happened to Sylvia, I think that is a masterpiece of presentation and I don't think anybody to whom that is explained will get from the book that it has a lot about sleeping

and it has a lot of the word fuck in it, no, no, what you get out of that book, something that enables upliftment

K. R. - what about the central character Aldric the dragon

C. J. - Aldric didn't know when Sylvia offered him, to come, but he called her princess, he was aware that she had such qualities, but later when they have that marvellous scene in which they go around saying "we are armed, we are the people's liberation army" that's a wonderful scene the way it is done, then in prison Aldric works out that that was merely a demonstration, they were really, now the man the badjohn what was his name (K. R. - Fisheye) Fisheye, for Fisheye that that took place was something he would remember for the rest of his life, but Aldric works it out and says "if even we couldn't have shut them down, we could have done something for ourselves, as it is we are always doing what we are doing and watching their approval or disapproval of it", which is quite profound and not over done, it is there so that Aldric's role develops and when he comes back there is one scene that Lovelace, Sylvia tells him "what you come back for, you come back for me, to get me", he says "no, I come back to give you yourself", that is really bold, I mean Shakespeare and these other writers do that, they don't, Shakespeare doesn't do it often but that was a bold one

K. R. - maybe we can end on this note or finish *The Dragon* on this note amm that if you look carefully at Lovelace's presentation of the events or what he makes up about what happened in 1970 you will see that it is a very critical view, he says that these fellas in 1970 did not know what they were about, it was just a kind of demonstration, once they got the jeep and the guns they didn't know what to do with themselves

C. J. - critical in what sense

K. R. - in the sense that they didn't know what to do

C. J. - yes, that's what I have just said (K. R. - yes) but I think he's not critical as Naipaul was critical you know

K. R. - right that is what I was going to ask you about, now Naipaul says substantially the same thing

C. J. - no he doesn't, Naipaul, the episodes, you say what is it that episode, Naipaul leaves you in that book *The Area of Darkness* that Indians do a lot of defecation, now

K. R. - I thought we're coming back to *Guerrillas*

C. J. - *Guerrillas* is another nasty book, has a sexual relation there that in my opinion simply stinks, it is, but there is a lot of sex in

K. R. - no I'm trying to compare the, what *Guerrillas* has to say about Black Power with what Lovelace says about it in *The Dragon*

C. J. - what Lovelace says is, he makes one of them realise that we had the opportunity to do something, that we are always doing something and finding out what they are thinking,

in other words he is criticising him but in order to go forward, it doesn't happen in ah (K. R. - in Naipaul) no, no there is nobody in India who is on the way out, nobody in India who has been something, but to write about India and not mention Ghandi and Naipaul, Ghandi and Nehru that is, I mean to say

K. R. - alright let me just switch back for a moment to *Animal Farm* because that is something that our kids have to study and amm as a Marxist yourself, somebody involved in that period and you would have known when that book came out and what was the immediate response to it and so on, do you remember it *Animal Farm*

C. J. - I remember it, I read it, I used to meet what's his name, the writer (K. R. - Orwell) at Walberg's(?) house, he was one of Walberg's(?) important writers and Mr. and Mrs. Walberg(?) would give a party and Orwell would come, now I remember those parties very well for two reasons, ---- would be there speaking most brilliantly, after twenty minutes the whole house was quiet and ----- his monologue, he didn't do it, it just happened that way but at the same time standing in a corner, very handsome, very reserved, but having nothing to say was George Orwell, but despite those circumstances and I was happy to know that ah the publisher had got hold of Orwell and was doing something, I wasn't swept away by the novel that's all I can say

K. R. - I find in it amm a kind of, well not a contradiction, to me it is very revealing amm I might annoy you with this now, because one of my favourite, (C. J. - you can't annoy me) one of my favourite commentators on Marxism and so on is Popper, *The Open Society And Its Enemies* (C. J. - I know him) I believe that what Orwell was doing in *Animal Farm* although he said that Socialism can go bad and we have to try to repair it from the inside I believe that *Animal Farm* shows that any form of government which, in any country where the state takes over, the open society is destroyed, he didn't see it like that I don't think, he was saying let us do a repair job on Socialism, but implicit in *Animal Farm* is the truth that Popper pinpoints about enemies of the open society

C. J. - I would not pair, to take Popper and his work with ah, with ah Orwell because I know Orwell, I believe in his other writing, he's first of all a very honest straight forward man and he was aware of the tremendous dangers that the state formed organisation runs and he was also very much aware of the left wing labour rights in Britain at the time, though there wasn't much to them and I would say all that in prose, he did it in fiction, but that he could say what he did shows that he was aware of something else, that is my trouble with Vidia, Vidia doesn't tell you this is a mess and, but Orwell was aware that that was a degradation of what they wwereas saying and what he was hoping for, I don't believe he succeeded in making that ---- clear but that that was what he was trying to do I have no doubt. He wrote another important book for, for Walberg(?) (K. R. - he wrote *The Wig and Pear(?)*) no he had written that before (K. R. - *Homage to Catalonia(?)*) that was a very fine book and it's typical of Orwell, Orwell went and he saw that the Stalinist had ruined the revolution and he wrote it, but since the editor of the new *Statesman* at the time said he wouldn't publish it because in those days, they were hoping, Orwell was a distinguished person, very fine writer and a notable journalist too

B. P. - *Nineteen Eighty Four*

K. R. - is it *Nineteen Eighty Four* you were thinking about?

C. J. - yes, I think he missed both of them, now you have to get hold to read *Gulliver's Travels* there is, and you have to have in you some of Dostoyevsky to understand, especially the book called *The Possessed* to understand how far a writer can go in showing the degradation of a human being and yet everybody understands that Dostoyevsky means well and I think Orwell didn't quite make it, I don't think he made it, it demanded more that he had, to paint what he did and still leave space (K. R. - some kind of nobility or) Dostoyevsky could do that ----- the whole world as mud but there was always a space and Orwell didn't have the ability, I think he wanted to, but the other thing was overwhelming him and he didn't have any thing to use to help him

K. R. - yes in the same way that Shakespeare could write about the, the criminality of Macbeth and still leave space for Macbeth to be a human being

C. J. - yes he leaves a lot of space, Shakespeare could do anything, I believe he is the greatest of all writers and I am glad you talk about *Macbeth* if you come back again I would like to spend ten minutes on the four tragedies, I'm gonna do that then

K. R. - you don't feel like doing that now

C. J. - no, it's two minutes to one

B. P. - shall we stop it now

K. R. - okay, yes

B. P. - could we just get some knowledge

Discussion in Background

C. J. - and do what with it

K. R. - to use in this film

B. P. - to insert it when you're talking about

C. J. - you're making a film

K. R. - of you

C. J. - yes, but

B. P. - if you're talking about Robespierre, not Robespierre, Robeson

K. R. - yes, when you talk about Robeson and there's a photograph of you and Robeson (B. P. - or a photograph of Robeson) of Robeson alone we will flash that, and if we're talking about Caribbean leaders we would have the Manley one. Did the B. B. C. reply to you?

Faint talking in background

MCU Ken Ramchand

CLR on the bed looking through some papers

CLR, Ken & Bruce looking at pictures

CLR on the bed looking through some papers