CHAPTER SEVEN

C. L. R. James: visions of history, visions of Britain

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C. L. R. James had intended in late 1938 to travel from his London base to the United States. His plan was to work with the Trotskyist movement there, but to return to England in time for the 1939 cricket season. We may well speculate that, in fact, his American sojourn would have extended for far longer than he envisaged, had world history not intervened. Neville Chamberlain's contemptuous rejection of the 'piece of paper' Hitler offered him at Munich plunged Britain into war in the autumn of 1938. James's Atlantic crossing had to be cancelled, and he spent most of the 1940s and 1950s as a British resident. For much of that period, he was a full-time political activist in tiny far-left groups. The mass of political material he wrote during these years, both alone and in collaboration, is of lasting interest only to those fascinated by the minutiae of ultra-left politics. Still, James's interests could not be confined in a single political mould: his later British years also produced a study of Robert Louis Stevenson's sea-stories, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* (1953), and above all the remarkable *British Civilisation*. The latter, never fully completed and only published in 1992 after James's death, was a pioneering work in many ways; not least in its analysis of 'popular culture' – cinema, comic books, radio serials, mass-market fiction – as a key to understanding British society.

These were also seminal, turbulent years in James's personal life. In 1939 in Manchester, he met and fell in love with the eighteen-year old Constance Duckfoot. It seemed a hopeless passion, for Constance did not initially return his love, was twenty years his junior and (still significant, even dangerous, in the Britain of the 1940s) she was white, he black. Despite all this, Nello's devotion was eventually reciprocated, and he and Constance were married in May 1946. Yet theirs remained an uneasy union, which finally broke down in 1950–51, to James's lasting sorrow. There is no doubt that the relationship with Constance was the most important of his life. His many, lengthy letters to her,

posthumously published as *Special Delivery* (1996) are deeply touching as well as revelatory documents. They make clear not only how entranced James had become by the currents of almost Promethean, revolutionary modernity he discerned emerging in British life, but how those currents were, for him, embodied and crystallised in the image of the beloved.

Well, *some* of that happened – but most did not. James (born in Caroni, Trinidad, in 1901) did go to America, and stayed for fifteen years. His great love affair was with the young American Constance Webb, not her imaginary British near-namesake. Although most of his later life, from 1953 onwards, was spent in London, he never investigated Britain in anything like the way that, in the hugely ambitious, uncompleted *American Civilization*, he did the USA.¹ The suggestive but brief comments about Britishness in *Beyond a Boundary*, the seventieth and eightieth birthday lectures and elsewhere were never expanded upon by a man who, in his later British years, had neither energy nor inclination for new, large-scale projects.²

Speculation about what James *might* have written about Britain and Britishness may have its value. But in the absence of that imaginary seminal work *British Civilisation*, I shall try here to reconstruct the more fragmentary but important things James *did* say about Britain, Britishness and their relations to Caribbean histories and identities – and the influence those views have had, as well as the rather wider influence which, one might say, they *should* have had.

If the 'Jamesian hypothesis' around which this volume revolves – that in Bill Schwarz's words 'it was through the encounter with the formerly colonial peoples of the Caribbean that native white Britons were first able to see themselves in their true historical light' – can be sustained in relation to James's own work and influence, this must be done in somewhat *pointilliste* fashion.³ Although he produced many commentaries on British writers and sportspeople, on the character of British socialism and, near the end of his life, on British race relations, and although his *Beyond a Boundary* includes substantial if oblique reflection on the nature of 'imperial Britishness', James's relevant writings are extremely scattered and mostly brief. This must have been because British society and culture were not strange to him as America's were: 'Britishness' was for James a largely pre-given cultural milieu more often than it was the object of active investigation. Yet James in the USA was intensely engaged in analysing *that* society throughout the years that, in retrospect, he regarded as his own most intellectually fertile. Moreover, James was committed, according to the political philosophy of his mature years, to stressing what Britain had in common with other industrial societies, rather than what was distinctive about

it. In his Trotskyist writings and those for the 'Facing Reality' group, especially, he analysed British politics and industrial relations as instances of global trends which he saw working their way out also in France, the USA, Hungary and elsewhere. Yet it is not at all implausible to think that, given a different spin on the historical dice, we would have had a study of *Treasure Island* (or, perhaps more likely, of Conrad) rather than of *Moby-Dick*, one of British rather than of American culture as embodying the 'pursuit of happiness', astonishing love letters to an ideal of young British womanhood.

The nature of James's writings means also that discussion of their influence in Britain must explore not only a 'bilateral' British-Caribbean relationship, but a triangular one. That is, it must approach his stance towards and influence on Britain in part via his writings on the British *empire* and its aftermaths, shaping both 'Britishness' and 'West Indianness'.⁴ As James several times hinted – and as numerous recent historians have sought to trace in more detail – the very idea of 'Britain' could not be thought historically without coming to terms with those imperial relations.

James's thought was not confined to any of these contexts: it is recognised that his intellectual importance stems largely from the sheer range of his interests and activities. He helped pioneer a Pan-Caribbean consciousness, and also came to be associated with visions of a truly global kind, involving 'Third World' and anticolonial solidarities. Much of the writing about James which has proliferated since his death, moreover, has tended to depict him as a somewhat abstracted and emblematic figure, representing a generalised exilic or diasporic world-view.⁵ Yet he was a product of a very specific local milieu – indeed he often stressed not only the uniqueness, but the very smallness and intimacy, of that formative world. His family background, and what James once described as the 'Protestant and middle-class' values imbibed there,⁶ have frequently been analysed as abjectly imitative of hegemonic British mores. So, still more, has the kind of education he received at Queen's Royal College. Certainly, aspirations to an idealised kind of middle-class Britishness, and to the ethos of the English public school, were strongly present in the West Indies of the early twentieth century. Those who could not attend a 'real' British-model elite school might still find themselves entranced and moulded by imaginary ones, as the young Edgar Mittelholzer was by Edwy Searle Brooks's fictional 'St. Frank's College'.⁷ But, as we shall see, James was also concerned to explore how something more complex, and more ambivalent, than mere colonial mimicry was involved in his formative experiences.

There was nothing inevitable about the Englishness of James's education, or of Trinidad. Given its Spanish and French inheritance, the

island could have remained a minimally anglicised hybrid, one where the formerly dominant languages remained the preferred, and prized, idioms of the elite, like French in Mauritius or Italian in Malta. Indeed a mainly French-derived creole was still the main popular language among poorer African-descended Trinidadians until shortly before James was born, while a section of the old white plantocracy remained francophone. Trinidad could have been, and nearly was, as polyglot as George Lamming's *San Cristobel*. It required conscious decisions, acts of will – on the part of both colonisers and colonised – for a British-model educational system and cultural ethos to take root there. The island's multilingual heritage obviously helped enable James's later historical researches,⁸ but it meant that the 'English public school' education he received was part of a more complex cultural contestation than is usually recognised. Another aspect of that complexity, the presence of a large Indian-descended population, produced in Trinidad both unique forms of Afro-Asian-European cultural syncretism, but also elements of communalist politics and ethnic mobilisation which sometimes threatened to degenerate into the kind of violent polarisation which has marked Guyana. James's writings may be open to the charge of neglecting the Indian contribution to Caribbean culture; but he could not be indifferent to it.

Culturally complex this small society may have been, but for many critics that did not necessarily translate into cultural richness. 'I was moved by the fact that such a man came from something like my own background ... How, considering when he was born, had he become the man he was? How had he preserved his soul through all the discouragements of the colonial time?'⁹ V. S. Naipaul poses these questions of his 'Lebrun', a fictional character who is largely modelled on James. Their point is that, in the light of Naipaul's conviction that the Caribbean was a cultural wasteland, there was something astonishing about someone from colonial Trinidad emerging as an erudite, scholarly cosmopolitan.¹⁰

James himself did not see it like that. He argued repeatedly that the West Indian milieu was, to the contrary, an especially propitious one for cultural, artistic, social or political innovation. 'The populations in the British West Indies', James averred in apparent concurrence with Naipaul, 'have no native civilisation at all. These populations are essentially Westernised and they have been Westernised for centuries.'¹¹ But it was precisely in this absence that their potential lay. For James, what made the West Indies distinctive was their thoroughgoing modernity – created by history in (as James insisted) a more complete way than any other people, they were consequently unable to delude themselves that they had been products of tradition, of the soil, of racial

inheritance. This might seem to distinguish them sharply from the mythicised self-fashionings of the 'ancient English' and provide a basis for James's vantage point on the latter – except that, as we shall see, James insisted on the modernity of English life too.¹²

The distinctive modernity of Caribbean peoples, their formation through a very special kind of historical process, was for James just one of three crucial features, all of which together might account for the kind of impact which he – and West Indians in general – had on the world. They also, together, enabled the kind of perceptions about Britain which its Caribbean-originating minorities could bring to bear. The other two features James emphasised were internationalism and smallness of scale. West Indians, James believed, 'are essentially an international people ... therefore we are particularly open'.¹³ The scale of the island societies was if anything more important: it contrasted sharply with Britain, and enabled West Indians' special perspective on the latter. In the West Indies, it was possible for the observer or intellectual to know the whole society, whereas 'the average English worker' knew only his own area and class. In that way, the Caribbean was in James's view 'more developed' than Britain. 'We brought that [to Britain] – at least I brought that with me, Padmore had it too – we kept on seeing the whole thing as a whole.'¹⁴ Coming from a small-scale society, where it was possible to comprehend a society as a totality, produced also a particular kind of dynamism in both the arts and politics.¹⁵ For the former, it enabled comparisons with the England of Shakespeare, in which, James insisted, the playwright's genius was crucially fired by the fact that his audience was composed of the whole society, of all classes.¹⁶ It may also have helped shape something which Bill Schwarz, elsewhere in this volume, sees as a strong West Indian intellectual characteristic – a fluidity of movement between 'high' and 'low' culture, as with James's lifelong enthusiasm for calypso. Such fluidity was clearly *not* characteristic of British intellectual life when James first knew it in the 1930s. In both politics and the arts, it invited James's famous comparisons with ancient Greece: in a small-scale society, you could have a true *polis*, where 'every cook can govern'.¹⁷

Thus James turned the tables on those who argued that the smallness of Caribbean societies, with their supposed lack of any indigenous cultural tradition, doomed them to sterility, imitation, even absurdity – pessimists who included not only the scornful Naipaul, but the usually more affirmative Walcott:

Tell me, what power, on these unknown rocks –
A spray-plane Air Force, the Fire Brigade,
The Red Cross, the Regiment, two, three police dogs
that pass before you finish bawling 'Parade!'¹⁸

A fourth feature, which James also often emphasised, was not specific to the Caribbean, or to its migrants in Britain. (It can of course be argued that the other three were not so peculiarly West Indian as James seemed to claim, either.) This was something which has, since his death, become a truism: the notion of an especially acute vision to be obtained from the margins of a society, from the position of being an inside-outsider. James repeatedly made the point, and related it to Caribbean peoples' distinctive 'openness' and internationalism. But he also generalised it, suggesting that this was why, in his view, all important modern 'English' writers were outsiders to British society – even enlisting Kipling as an 'Indian' in the argument.¹⁹ By now, such claims are indeed clichés, against which one wants to rebel and say that far from always producing clarity of vision, the excentric may quite often be the eccentric, the distorted or downright silly. But when James advanced them, from the 1930s onwards – he wasn't quite the first, of course – they had novelty and force. James, though, did not fetishise marginality as some now seem to do. Nor did he write as if the distinctions between inside and outside, England and empire, were – or could easily be – blurred or transgressed to the point of dissolution.²⁰ He knew, for instance, that the capital of the West Indies was London, that this was deeply damaging, and that it must cease to be so.²¹

James's stance towards the British influence on that unique West Indian compound, and on his own upbringing, though complex, also always remained mostly positive. Indeed the central message of much of his writing, especially its autobiographical passages, is to stress how far the ethos of Britishness in families, schools and sportsfields like his was not merely *imposed*, but actively fashioned and worked for. It is worth here recalling James's unbridled scorn for those who saw in the unearthing of the colonial past 'a search for catharsis'. James did not want to be liberated from, or by, his memories: 'They do not liberate me in any sense except that once you have written down something your mind is ready to go further ... I would consider liberation from them a grievous loss, irreparable ... I do not wish to be liberated from that past and, above all, I do not wish to be liberated from its future.'²² Those who wish to be liberated from the past – so he might have added – are doomed to repeat it.

Much of this was class-specific: associated with Afro- (and to a perhaps lesser extent Indo-) Caribbean elites, with ideas about respectability, correct, non-creole English, particular tastes in literature, music, dress and so on. It has even, in James's case, been described in terms of a Victorian public school ethos. This, though, is misleading insofar as the educational system which formed James was a kind of meritocracy. It was indeed – by comparison with anything in Britain at

the time – an exceptionally pure, though also exceptionally narrow meritocracy (as Oxaal says, the bridge of opportunity was a razor's edge²³). And the cricketing manifestations of the pervading ethos were, as James always stressed, in significant and increasing part egalitarian. When, later in life, he could still call cricket 'the English game' whilst praising a great West Indian player, there is no sense of conflict or discomfort in the attribution.²⁴ James would, one suspects, have reacted with pretended puzzlement, thinly concealing sharp irritation, to arguments that his attachment to that ethos necessarily implied a debilitating 'divided consciousness'.²⁵ A great deal of recent writing about James, indeed, has revolved around such notions of divided or double consciousness, with an obvious debt to DuBois's famous ruminations.²⁶ But although occasionally James himself reflected on the idea of divisions of sensibility resulting from a colonial upbringing,²⁷ this was for him at least as much a source of intellectual strength as of psychic disturbance.

James came to Britain in the 1930s, then, from a social world which was profoundly shaped by Britishness – shaped in ways that should not glibly be reduced to colonial mimicry, to false or divided consciousness. But, as James insisted, this Britishness was part of a rich, complex, internationally open and distinctively modern cultural mix. Yet if his formation and experiences were in so many ways highly characteristic of the worlds from and to which he moved, they were not of course at all 'typical' or 'average'. Some themes which were widely significant for the generality of Caribbean migrants to Britain seem to have had little impact on him. One is very obvious. James was too well educated and worldly-wise to share the widely reported, naïve shock experienced by many migrants at certain features of British life, like the existence of a white working class, or the shabby dirtiness of buildings, streets and even people. James comments that although he 'was a strange compound of knowledge and ignorance' about Britain, he had at least read enough to know what he was ignorant about.²⁸

His views on the character of racism in Britain, also, were distinctive. James makes almost no reference to personal encounters of discrimination, and even gently suggests that friends like Learie Constantine exaggerated their experience of it: 'He had a point of view which seemed to me unduly coloured by national and racial considerations.'²⁹ James insisted, writing in 1964, on the 'empiricism' of British racial attitudes. In Nelson in Lancashire in the 1930s, he and the Constantine family with whom he was living 'were very conscious that we were, so to speak, on exhibition' as representatives of the Caribbean. And of course they were admirable, and admired, exhibition pieces – so much so that, James recalls, one acquaintance who had visited the

Caribbean felt moved to 'warn' local people that not all West Indians were as distinguished and respectable as them!³⁰

He does not seem anywhere to echo another widely noted theme of the Caribbean migrant experience. This was the contrast between West Indian societies with their complex, subtle hierarchy of skin-colours, modified or cross-cut by class distinctions, and Britain's stark counter-position of black and white. James was of course quite dark-skinned, and it may be that this difference between colony and metropole was most forcibly impressed on the lighter-coloured. He made no reference that I have found to the issue in Britain – although he had shown clear if seemingly unanguished awareness of it in Trinidad, as a much-cited passage from *Beyond a Boundary* on the social character of different cricket teams displays.³¹

He expected to find much that was familiar in Britain, and did so. More, he expected that familiarity to be recognised by others, by white Britons. Like many later Caribbean migrants, he anticipated being perceived not as an inferior alien, but as part of the national family, as someone who was also British – in some sense, and among other things. He was aware of the complexities involved. James's proclamation that when he first left Trinidad 'The British intellectual was going to Britain' is very often quoted.³² But the ironic, self-aware edge to the statement is often missed. So is the extent to which for him and his contemporaries, being British and being colonial were not mutually exclusive, opposed identities. Nor was the relation of latter to former simply one of physical transplantation or imitation. Nor, finally, was it – as many recent post-structuralist critics have argued, often claiming inspiration from James – a matter of colonial experience exposing the instability of British identity-claims, of each being the other's constitutive outside, or of each being entirely dependent on the other for self-definition.³³ Something more complex than any of these was going on. In exploring this through James's ideas, two general preliminary remarks are necessary.

Both Britishness and Englishness have been intense, increasing objects of historians' attention in recent years. One strand of this investigation has focused on the formation – and dissolution – of an imperial or global Greater Britain. But analysis of Greater Britishness has been undertaken with almost exclusive reference to British-diasporic and settler-descended communities. Far less inquiry has addressed the ways in which non-white colonial peoples also grasped for, or sought to fashion, their own versions of Greater Britishness. Arguably, the peoples of the West Indies did so more wholeheartedly, and even in a sense successfully, than anyone else in the subject empire – though fainter echoes of the process can be found, for instance, among the

Bengali elites dissected by Tapan Raychaudhuri, or the West African ones discussed by Philip Zachernuk.³⁴ James both exemplified and commented on aspects of this, as did other subjects of the present collection like Harold Moody. Yet there has been a tendency to treat West Indians' affirmations of Britishness as a simple mistake, a dream from which there was, on exposure to attitudes in Britain itself, a rude awakening. It should, perhaps, be taken more seriously than that – and the career and ideas of James suggest some ways in which we might do so. Claims to Britishness could be and frequently were used by Afro-Caribbeans in both colony and metropole in pursuit of racial justice, political representation and social equality. Nor were they incompatible with local patriotism or even with some forms of political nationalism – though such a combination evidently became ever more difficult with time, in both colony and metropole. One could at least for a time – quite a long time – think of oneself as Trinidadian or Antiguan, *and* West Indian, *and* British. The erosion of such possibilities, in British-Caribbean contexts, clearly deserves more attention than I can give it here.

The second preliminary point is that these relationships of contested identity-formation were markedly asymmetrical. If Greater Britishness was crucial to but conflictual within Caribbean identities, the converse was far less the case. The West Indies – at least after emancipation, and after the region declined in its economic importance to Britain – played a very small role in British, Greater British and empire thought. Not only did most metropolitan imaginings of Greater Britishness focus overwhelmingly on the metropole's diasporic offspring, but enthusiasm for and argument about empire in general within Britain were differentiated and particularist. The white-settled dominions were the dominant objects of attention. India came second, Africa third (and a long way behind), while the Caribbean's place was still smaller.³⁵ James, like almost every other early Caribbean migrant or visitor to Britain, registered with force the sheer ignorance and indifference about their homelands which he encountered. He often found himself treated as an exotic curiosity. When he spoke in Edinburgh in 1938, the recollection of his host Willie Tait was naïve at best: 'the workers ... thought it was great that a Black man could talk to them about socialism'.³⁶ Acquaintances like Ethel Mannin, Fredric Warburg and Reginald Reynolds, in their frequently quoted but brief reminiscences of James, treated him in a rather similar if more urbanely expressed style.

Britain, indeed, largely ignored James until his very last years. His access to British audiences and readerships was extremely restricted. In the 1930s, his cricket writing appeared in mass-circulation newspapers,

but his other work was published almost exclusively in very small leftwing journals: those of Trotskyist groups or of the slightly larger Independent Labour Party. In the 1960s and 1970s, his only regular non-specialist outlet was as a book reviewer in *New Society*. He seems to have made just one radio broadcast – as a last-minute stand-in – in the 1930s, and a mere handful, on the BBC's Caribbean Service, in the 1960s. Only after Channel 4 took up multicultural programming (with friends and admirers of James, Darcus Howe and Farrukh Dhondy, in key positions), and near the end of his life, did he make TV appearances.

Neither the Labour left of the 1930s, nor the New Left of the 1960s, embraced James: his words were not to be found in the *New Statesman*, the *Daily Herald* or *Tribune*, nor (apart from one book review) in the *New Left Review*.³⁷ He was not closely associated with any of the more prominent figures of the British left. His French collaborators – Claude Lefort, Jean-François Lyotard, Cornelius Castoriadis – were more influential than his British ones. Even after his return to Britain in the 1950s, he remained more engaged with American than with British politics, writing constantly to his US supporters. Eventually, he was firing off reams of advice from London to an American 'party' of some twenty-five people; but this was apparently still a larger following than he could command in Britain. He had, it seems, some association with the International Socialists – before they became a more rigidly organised, sectarian formation as the Socialist Workers' Party. He attended a major conference on Workers' Control at Coventry in 1967, where his interventions were vividly remembered by participants, and where he clashed but then became friendly with the famed socialist historian E. P. Thompson.³⁸ None of this, however, amounted to the kind of sustained engagement or widespread attention which a figure of James's stature surely deserved.

When James did achieve rather greater British public exposure, in the 1980s – and in his own eighties – there were some uncomfortable edges and ironies. As Paul Buhle suggests, James found himself 'a living monument of sorts' not only in his very last years but for a good third of his political life.³⁹ Despite his continued enthusiasm for new ideas and experiences, both his admirers' expectations and aspects of his own self-presentation often trapped him into replaying memories of the 1930s rather than engaging with the 1970s and 1980s. Darcus Howe claimed that in James's final years British 'whites are pretty lost, drifting hither and thither ... suddenly they discovered that here is a man who knows them. He knows them more than they know themselves.' This, Howe felt, accounted for his late-found media popularity in Britain.⁴⁰ James himself echoed the sentiment, with a surely justified boast in old age that 'I astonished them

because I knew more about English literature, and was more familiar with it, than most of them'.⁴¹ Yet it all seemed again to reflect a kind of curiosity value, rather than a real appreciation of the range of James's ideas and interests. A yet more uncomfortable irony came when in 1985 the London borough of Hackney named its Dalston library after him: while almost simultaneously, this impoverished (and incompetent) local authority was closing many of its other libraries. Their derelict and municipally-vandalised interiors, piles of books mouldering in the dust, formed a miserable kind of tribute to the passionate bibliophile James.

The late-flowering cultural presence for C. L. R. James in Britain was not matched by a more strictly political influence. The exceptions were minor: Jamesian ideas were a presence in such 1960s libertarian marxist formations as Solidarity and Big Flame (both especially strong on Merseyside, though 'strong' is a very relative term when each group numbered its members in dozens rather than hundreds) as well as their rather larger groups of co-thinkers in France and Italy, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and *Lotta Continua*. In the even smaller world of black British radical politics, a strong Jamesian influence was to be found among those who produced the journals *Race Today* (in whose pages James wrote frequently, and whose staff provided him with a home and daily care in his last years) and *The Black Liberator*.⁴²

James's most important direct influence in Britain, then, is surely not to be found in any of these milieux, but rather in his involvement in anticolonialist politics, and his impact on circles of Caribbean and African émigrés, students and activists who were usually temporary residents in the imperial metropole between the 1930s and the 1960s. These activities, and James's ideas about colonialism and anticolonialism, are already the subjects of a substantial scholarly literature, and cannot be summarised here.⁴³ His own recollections rightly highlighted the crucial role of West Indians in campaigning not only for their own region's decolonisation, but Africa's too. The 1930s International African Service Bureau – or at least its core – was entirely West Indian at the start. Africans themselves only became involved later. James claimed (with a certain exaggeration) that nobody in British politics was talking about colonial questions before he began to do so – but (more accurately) stressed that George Padmore was more important than him in arousing concern with such issues.⁴⁴ He did not, he confessed, succeed in turning future African leaders into Trotskyists, but did succeed in warning them off Stalinism.⁴⁵ James and his colleagues may have played an unappreciated role in helping ensure that Communist support in most British ex-colonies was always meagre.

Yet James's political judgements on African affairs must be adjudged

as erratic – and often seemed much at odds with his avowed theoretical principles or his enthusiasm for mass self-activation. He was capable of absurdly excessive praise for Kwame Nkrumah and his movement, and even for the pseudo-philosophy of ‘Nkrumahism’.⁴⁶ Something like a ‘cult of personality’ seemed to creep into his African writings: Ghanaian developments are attributed almost entirely to the dynamism, but then the flaws, of Nkrumah, Tanzanian ones to the genius of Nyerere, and so on. James expressed strong agreement with those African politicians like Nkrumah, Nyerere and Chisiza who denounced the British constitutional model and multipartyism as unsuitable for Africa, and endorsed the chimera of ‘single-party democracy’ instead.⁴⁷ This seems to imply that James saw retention of a substantially British inheritance as desirable, if not inescapable, for the Caribbean and for himself, but not for Africa or the African leaders he admired. The reasons for the dichotomy were never spelled out.

During James’s later periods of London residence, he became a mentor for many younger West Indian intellectuals, most of them students. Regular Friday night sessions at his north London home from 1962 onwards drew in such subsequently influential figures as Richard Small, Norman Girvan, Orlando Patterson and Walter Rodney.⁴⁸ Through them, through admirers like Tim Hector of Antigua, and of course through his writings, James had a renewed – and posthumous – political influence in the Caribbean.⁴⁹ It is striking, though again by no means uncharacteristic of the way ideas have circulated in the West Indies or even the wider postcolonial world, that this influence radiated from London, far more than it was generated during James’s own years in Trinidad.⁵⁰

On a broader, more theoretical plane, James’s views of British colonialism were built around a stark contrast between imperial Britain and what he thought of as the truer, better values of Britishness ‘at home’.⁵¹ In his earliest major political writing, he argued that colonial despotism was a kind of self-betrayal by the libertarian English. ‘Being an Englishman and accustomed to think well of himself’ the colonial expatriate is convinced that only people of his own type can possibly rule – and this insistence is only made more strident by his encountering in the West Indies ‘a thoroughly civilised community, wearing the same clothes that he does, speaking no other language but his own, with its best men as good as, and only too often, better than himself’.⁵² James went on:

It is not surprising that the famous English tolerance leaves him almost entirely. At home he was distinguished for the liberality and freedom of his views ... But in the colonies any man who speaks for his country, who tries to do for his own people what Englishmen are so proud that other Englishmen have done for theirs, immediately becomes in the eyes

of the colonial Englishman a dangerous person, a wild revolutionary ... What at home is the greatest virtue becomes in the colonies the greatest crime.⁵³

It might have been thought that this was merely a tactical argument – that James, in echoing the classic British liberal claim that empire was incompatible with the spirit of liberty at home, was telling his prospective British readership what he felt they would want to hear. But he continued to advance similar contentions almost throughout his life, and to diverse audiences. As late as 1962 he could make the rather remarkable suggestion that if only Britain had had a truly socialist government at the time of the Kenyan Mau Mau revolt, that rebellion ‘would have had socialist allies and would have been made under socialist slogans, representatives of the British government would have taken part in it and guided it’.⁵⁴ Sir Charles Arden-Clarke, the last British Governor of the Gold Coast, was praised for ‘preserving the British government from the risk of adventures in which the character of the British people would have been indelibly besmirched’.⁵⁵ The officially promulgated version of colonial policy was ‘an impudent fraud’ perpetrated on the British people by their rulers.⁵⁶

His usual acknowledgement of how much he had learned from and owed to Britain was, it is true, occasionally varied by a more harshly critical tone. Colonial leaders, he suggested, ‘didn’t learn about democracy in British schools, they learnt it in the jails into which the British had put them; and from those jails they taught the population and taught the Colonial Office what were the realities of independence’.⁵⁷ He recalled in one of his letters to Constance Webb that in his childhood history reading ‘the English always won all the battles. I resented it fiercely. I used to read and re-read the few battles they had lost. I conceived a fanatical admiration for Napoleon ... Nobody ever discussed history or literature or writing with me. But I read that history and hated the British for always winning’.⁵⁸ Yet his central thrust always remained that of the extreme, indeed shameful, chasm between the British values he genuinely cherished and their betrayal in the colonies. He recalled his disturbance on discovering that the ideas he was learning about in school, values of parliamentary democracy ‘and decent behaviour’, were not being applied in Trinidad.⁵⁹ He emphasised several times that he found greater political freedom, and far more scope for anticolonial agitation, in Britain than in Trinidad.⁶⁰

Britishness – in Britain itself – was, then, to be seen in a mainly positive light. More, it is striking how far, right to the end of his life, James emphasised egalitarian and modernising currents in Britishness. He could not without gross implausibility stress these *as* strongly as he did for American civilisation, and did not. But he always looked to forces

of change rather than ones of 'tradition', and although of course he found these mainly in the proletariat, in socialist and later in black movements, they were not only there. James's view of the society as a whole was always surprisingly affirmative.

There was an intensely personal element in this, as there was in his decision to remain in Britain in his later years. People often, he said, pointed out the disadvantages of the climate. 'But the climate is outside. I am in here, in the warm ... In any case my education, the books I was brought up on, the sports, were all British. I feel at home here.'⁶¹ Far more, though – and inevitably, for James's sensibility – the grounds were political. In the USA, he thought, 'they do not understand political democracy'. In Britain, by contrast, there was an almost instinctive respect for minority views: 'They have what I call the democratic temper which is not necessarily parliamentary.'⁶² In his most strictly marxist writings he insisted, as one might expect, on a class element in this: the 'traditional virtues of the English nation' were to be found among struggling workers rather than in 'official society'.⁶³ In similar vein, he suggested that 'the conception of "good form" and "what is not done"' exercised a kind of tyranny of the majority in Britain. Here he was no doubt consciously echoing the complaints of John Stuart Mill a century earlier. Such attitudes, James protested, would have been considered barbaric by ancient Greek democrats.⁶⁴ Despite such constraints, he suggested a little later: 'The great mass of the British people have been the sanest in Europe for many years' – but Britain, he added, is ever more obviously just part of a western civilisation which is sinking into decay and rushing to self-destruction. The leaders of the underdeveloped world, he thought, show a way out from this.⁶⁵

Yet James's marxism, no less than his transnationalism, predisposed him against mystifying or even emphasising such ideas as national character. Especially in the works of his Trotskyist years, he normally made claims about Britain only as examples of, or evidence for, what he believed to be general trends of capitalist society. Thus his most detailed discussion of British political developments was as part of his global surveys, in *World Revolution* (1937) and *Facing Reality* – one of modern publishing's less appropriate titles – in 1958. The former's discussion of Britain is written from an orthodox Trotskyist perspective, devoted mainly to denouncing the crimes, follies and betrayals of the CPGB.⁶⁶ In the latter and other writings of this era, James and his colleagues' passionate faith in grass-roots activism and spontaneous revolutionary consciousness led to some notably incautious claims. Thus James's analysis of the 1945 election indulged in what must be judged pure fantasy about the revolutionary socialist consciousness of the British working class – basing himself still at that stage on Trotsky's

1920s claims about British development, and on a highly orthodox gloss on Lenin's theory of imperialism.⁶⁷ There was indeed a repeated tendency in James's British writings – still evident long after he had ceased to be a Trotskyist – to praise the supposedly astonishing wisdom and prescience of Lenin's and Trotsky's writings about Britain.

Facing Reality referred confidently to 'The great Shop Stewards Movement, the most powerful social force in Great Britain' and attributed Labour's 1945 victory, peculiarly, to the shop stewards. The official British Labour movement was described as trapped in 'the Welfare State mentality' – but 'the British workers' knew better, and showed 'a widespread acceptance of the fact that the next stage for socialism is a Government of Workers Councils'. British social development was paving the way inexorably for this.⁶⁸ James was insistent that there was indeed a revolutionary tradition in Britain, with great relevance for the present; he alluded repeatedly to the seventeenth-century English revolution and to the Levellers.⁶⁹

A little later Raymond Williams's *Long Revolution* evoked strong praise, but also sharp attack for not, in James's opinion, truly understanding either marxism or revolution. C. L. R. also assailed Williams's insularity – attributing this to the Welsh writer's supposed Englishness, and criticising not (as one might perhaps expect) his neglect of the post-colonial world, but his failure to consider Hungary or the USA.⁷⁰

James's own intellectual formation and interests were far from insular: his literary, artistic and musical passions ranged wide. But the cast of his mind might still be judged very 'English', in more profound ways than the love of cricket or of Shakespeare. His lack of interest in economics; his 'naïve' coming to Hegel and other pre-marxist philosophers only when political pressures pushed him, Raya Dunayevskaya and other colleagues towards philosophical investigation (though thereafter his philosophical interests were broad and intense, if idiosyncratic); perhaps above all his lack of system, his failure or refusal to achieve a grand synthesis of ideas: all closely echoed dominant trends in the English intellectual life (including the marxist life) of his generation. His characteristic stress on individuals as shapers of the historical process – whether Toussaint, Nkrumah or Ahab – was not really very marxist, but it was very 'English'.⁷¹ So too, it might even be said, was his attitude to monarchy. 'I have been a republican since I was eight years old. An Englishman, William Makepeace Thackeray, taught it to me. But the British people respect and some even love the Royal Family, and we revolutionists don't make a fuss about it.'⁷² The importance of James's youthful reading of Thackeray is often noted, as a pre-marxist basis for his critique of bourgeois society – but he also himself marked the influence of Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton, right-wing

Catholic writers whose vision of English history offered a romantic, medievalist, conservative critique of modernity. That influence, and the romantic streak in James's anti-capitalism, deserve more attention. Certainly Leon Trotsky himself thought James's cast of mind all too typically English, finding in his book *World Revolution* 'a lack of dialectical approach, Anglo-Saxon empiricism, and formalism which is only the reverse of empiricism'.⁷³

Thus although James argued that West Indians could bring a special kind of critical insight to bear on Britain and the British, the critique was essentially compatible – even identical – with the better elements in 'native' British society itself. Time and again he stressed those affinities: 'The British are very guilty on the question of slavery, you will find a lot of good will still and the West Indies, they feel, are nearest to them. You see, we haven't got a different language or religion from them, like Nigerians and Kenyans; the West Indians are westernised people. The ordinary British man can talk to West Indians and get on with them ... There is a tremendous lot of good will in Britain for us in the West Indies.'⁷⁴ Elsewhere he urged that 'there is far more in common between me and ninety-nine per cent of Englishmen than between the Englishman and the Italian, the Englishman and the German, the Englishman and the French ... We use the same books, we have similar social attitudes, the same basic ideas, even the same religion'.⁷⁵

From all this flowed his insistence to British Afro-Caribbeans in his *80th Birthday Lectures* that 'you are not visitors here ... you belong here. You are living here, part of English society'.⁷⁶ Occasionally he could be more sweeping, almost apocalyptic, about the impact of West Indians in Britain: 'British capitalism went to the Caribbean and brought workers to Britain. Capitalism creates its own gravediggers. Now there are two or three million of them [sic] in Britain, and the recent upheaval in this country shows that they are a tremendous force in the struggles against this society ... the Black people here succeeded in posing the question of the revolution.' Yet he also insisted that in the 1981 riots (or 'uprisings' as they were often described in the overheated rhetoric of the day) 'the British workers did what they did because they were in Britain and they were trained in Britain ... a society that has trained them to act in the most advanced possible way'.⁷⁷

Amidst all this James could be accused of having one significant blind spot. He never distinguished clearly between Britishness and Englishness – we have observed him using the terms interchangeably in several passages above – nor said anything much about Scotland, Wales or Ireland. '[B]y and large in Britain one part of the country is not so different from another part; you have Welsh and Scots but by and large the British working-class movement is pretty strong ...', he

claimed in his *80th Birthday Lectures*. Later on that occasion James was challenged to comment on Ireland, and refused to do so.⁷⁸ On some levels this is surprising, for it was widely assumed that James, given his general political views, should have been sympathetic to Celtic nationalisms. He does seem to have believed there was a more natural empathy with his anticolonialism in Wales and Ireland than in England.⁷⁹ Moreover, it was already conventional in the colonial circumstances of James's youth, as it has been within Britain more recently, to use 'English' to refer to a native of the geographical entity England, and almost always to equate it with whiteness, while 'British' was a far more expansive, flexible and inclusive category. On the other hand, the composition and ethos of 'Greater Britain' – including its offshoots in the Trinidad of James's youth – were indeed mostly English. The great modern revival of Scottish and Welsh nationalism came only in James's last years, when his intellectual energies were much diminished. And the culturalist emphases of major strands in the Celtic national movements were potentially at odds with his insistence that West Indian claims to nationhood did *not* depend on possession of a distinct 'native' culture or language. On all these grounds, his seeming indifference to them is readily understandable.

In his most influential works, James set out to assail and demolish views of Britain's history – above all its imperial history – which he regarded as myths. The legend to be destroyed was the idea that the liberation of the enslaved, exploited or colonised could come from anything other than their own efforts – that it was or would be owed to benevolent, far-sighted metropolitan policy in relation to the colonies, or to a vanguard party in the case of the working class. The challenge gave rise to counter-myths or at least to errors of over-compensation: notably a near-messianic notion of spontaneous revolutionary consciousness. Still, his arguments retain an explosive force. The kind of Caribbean-British-imperial historical consciousness which he pioneered has perhaps dwindled since his time. Although the influence of the Caribbean on British society has been more intense and pervasive since the 1980s than it was when he first wrote, it has come far more through music, youth culture and (to a lesser degree) imaginative literature than through historical or political work. Indeed history has been the great missing element in the contemporary Caribbean impact on Britain. Rastafarianism, much reggae and rap orature, and the British offshoots of American afrocentrism have all espoused a mystical or eschatological rather than a genuinely historical consciousness. The dominant currents in cultural studies and postcolonial theory, as they have engaged with Caribbean materials, have done so in a largely ahistorical fashion, or else via a notably simplistic version of history. And

the academic history of the anglophone Caribbean, in becoming professionalised and 'nationalised' since James's time, has also tended to become more inward-looking and parochial.⁸⁰

James offered a breadth of historical vision which sorely needs renewal. He also, as I have sought to show, explored personal, and national, relationships to Britishness (perhaps, more truly, to Englishness) which were extraordinarily close, complex, many sided. James was, in his own phrase, 'of the West Indies West Indian' – but also of England, half English. He was an enemy of empire – but his was a peculiarly intimate enmity, shot through with love.⁸¹

Notes

- 1 C. L. R. James, *American Civilization*, eds, Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).
- 2 C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Hutchinson, 1969; first published 1963); James, 'The Old World and the New', in his *At the Rendezvous of Victory* (London: Allison and Busby, 1984); James, *80th Birthday Lectures* (London: Race Today, 1984).
- 3 The hypothesis is most explicitly advanced in James, 'The West Indian intellectual', introduction to J. J. Thomas, *Fraudacity: West Indian fables by James Anthony Froude* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1969).
- 4 Ideally, one would be exploring a still more complex web of global interconnections, including also ideas from and images of Africa and the USA. After all, even between the 1950s and 1970s, more than twice as many West Indians migrated to the USA as to Britain.
- 5 Perhaps most influential here have been Edward W. Said's various allusions to James, in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993) and elsewhere. For a more sceptical view of these elements in James's thought and legacy, see Brett St Louis, 'The perilous "pleasures of exile": C. L. R. James, bad faith, and the diasporic life', *Interventions*, 1:3 (1999), pp. 345–60.
- 6 Stuart Hall, 'A conversation with C. L. R. James', in Grant Farred (ed.), *Rethinking C. L. R. James* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 19.
- 7 Edgar Mittelholzer, *A Swarthy Boy: a childhood in British Guiana* (London: Putnam, 1963), pp. 91–2.
- 8 James could read and speak French when most around him in the British Trotskyist movement could not; and *The Black Jacobins* naturally relied mainly on sources in French.
- 9 V. S. Naipaul, *A Way in the World: a novel* (New York: Knopf, 1994), p. 117.
- 10 Conversely, on the strength and distinctiveness of a Trinidadian intellectual tradition lying behind James, see Selwyn Cudjoe, 'The audacity of it all: C. L. R. James's Trinidadian background', in Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (eds), *C. L. R. James's Caribbean* (London: Macmillan, 1992).
- 11 C. L. R. James, 'On Federation', in *Rendezvous*, p. 97.
- 12 His strongest statement on the unique potentials of Caribbean peoples, and their quintessential modernity, is in the 1966 lecture on 'The making of the Caribbean people', published for the first time in C. L. R. James, *Spheres of Existence* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), p. 75.
- 13 C. L. R. James, 'A national purpose for Caribbean peoples', in *Rendezvous*, p. 143.
- 14 Hall, 'Conversation', p. 22; see also James, 'National purpose', p. 43.
- 15 See C. L. R. James, 'The artist in the Caribbean', in his *The Future in the Present* (London: Allison and Busby, 1977), pp. 186–7; and James, 'Discovering literature in Trinidad: the 1930s', in *Spheres*, pp. 239–40.

- 16 C. L. R. James, 'Popular art and the cultural tradition', in Anna Grimshaw (ed.), *The C. L. R. James Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 249–50. Compare James, 'National purpose', pp. 148–50, where the development of Caribbean fiction as the expression of a new, dynamic society is likened to that of classic Russian literature. British society, by contrast, had not had enough ferment and upheaval to produce a great modern artist like Solzhenitsyn or Picasso: 'We haven't had a great writer in Britain since D. H. Lawrence': Hall, 'Conversation', p. 39. [Note the 'we']
- 17 C. L. R. James, 'Every cook can govern: a study of democracy in ancient Greece', in *Future in the Present*; see also James, *Modern Politics* (Port of Spain: PNM Publishing, 1960). Arguably, here the 'Rousseauian' James, stressing the advantages of smallness, was at odds with the marxist who saw such direct democracy as the fated future of all modern industrial societies.
- 18 Derek Walcott, 'The schooner *Flight*', in Walcott, *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), p. 8. Naipaul's scorn is most famously vented in *The Middle Passage* (London: André Deutsch, 1962).
- 19 James, 'Discovering literature', pp. 243–4.
- 20 Perhaps the most sweeping claims that James's writing (specifically, *Beyond a Boundary*) achieves such a dissolution are in Ian Baucom's stimulating *Out of Place: Englishness, empire, and the locations of identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), especially chapter 4.
- 21 See for instance James, 'National purpose', p. 155; and the comments by Kenneth Surin in 'C. L. R. James's materialist aesthetic of cricket', in Hilary McD. Beckles and Brian Stoddart (eds), *Liberation Cricket: West Indies cricket culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 317.
- 22 James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 65.
- 23 Ivar Oxaal, *Black Intellectuals Come to Power: the rise of creole nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago* (Cambridge, Mass: Shenkman, 1968), p. 61.
- 24 James, 'Garfield Sobers', in *Future*, p. 221.
- 25 Such claims are made, for instance, by Helen Tiffin in 'Cricket, literature and the politics of de-colonisation: the case of C. L. R. James', in Beckles and Stoddart, *Liberation Cricket*. Surprisingly, Tiffin believes that this supposed debility means that James's cricket writing 'fails to engage with the real issue of empire': p. 367.
- 26 In W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: McClurg, 1903). It has been argued to effect, however, that contemporary cultural criticism's stress on that point distorts and misunderstands DuBois himself, let alone such figures as James: Adolph L. Reed Jr, *W.E.B. DuBois and American Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- 27 For instance, James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 30.
- 28 James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 114–15.
- 29 James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 115.
- 30 C. L. R. James, 'Colour: another view', *New Society*, 10 December 1964.
- 31 James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 55–65.
- 32 James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 114.
- 33 The notion of the 'constitutive outside' comes from the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe – though close analogues can be found in a great deal of recent social theory. See especially Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990).
- 34 Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: perceptions of the West in nineteenth century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Philip Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: an African intelligentsia and Atlantic ideas* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000).
- 35 Though even the relatively restricted range of contacts, ideas and images involved after the 1830s can still be investigated in ways that reveal a great deal about Victorian British life and thought, as Catherine Hall brilliantly shows in *Civilising Subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).
- 36 James D. Young, *The World of C. L. R. James: his unfragmented vision* (Glasgow:

- Clydeside Press, 1999), p. 138. Young does, however, emphasise the broad range of James's contacts and interests in 1930s Britain, unearthing many pseudonymous or anonymous articles in British Trotskyist or ILP journals. One of the great merits of Young's generally disappointing book is his close attention to these.
- 37 On the vicissitudes and mainly narrow limits of James's reputation and audiences during his lifetime, mainly focused on the USA, see also Paul Buhle, 'From a biographer's notebook', in Selwyn Cudjoe and William E. Cain (eds), *C. L. R. James: his intellectual legacies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).
 - 38 Young, *The World of C. L. R. James*, pp. 259–60 and 261–3; and personal communication from Bob Purdie.
 - 39 Paul Buhle, *C. L. R. James: the artist as revolutionary* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 133–4.
 - 40 Darcus Howe and Ken Lawrence, 'Interview', in Paul Buhle (ed.), *C. L. R. James: his life and work* (London: Allison and Busby, 1986), pp. 149–50.
 - 41 Televised discussion with Linton Kwesi Johnson and Michael Smith, BBC *Arena* 'Michael Smith: Upon Westminster Bridge', 1982, prod. Alan Yentob (repeated 25 September 1983: exact date of first transmission not traced). 'Preface to criticism', in Grimshaw, *James Reader*, pp. 255–60, shows how closely James continued to follow the British cultural scene, both literary criticism and aspects of the popular arts, at that time.
 - 42 Among the few attempts to present an overview of such groups' political and theoretical perspectives, see especially Stuart Hall *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis: mugging, the state, and law and order* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 345–97. The main theoretician of *The Black Liberator*, A. X. Cambridge, later – and in more academic vein – produced important essays on James's philosophy. An explicitly Jamesian praise of spontaneity and distrust of organised politics also pervades Paul Gilroy's early work; see especially *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).
 - 43 My own interpretation of them may be found in *Anticolonialism in British Politics: the left and the end of empire 1918–1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). The character of James's anti-imperialism is debated in many of the works cited in other notes here, and in Anthony Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom: the early political thought of C. L. R. James* (London: Pluto, 1997) and John Gaffar La Guerre, *The Social and Political Thought of the Colonial Intelligentsia* (Mona: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1982).
 - 44 *C. L. R. James and British Trotskyism: an interview* (London: Socialist Platform pamphlet, 1987), pp. 5–6.
 - 45 *James and British Trotskyism*, Social Platform pamphlet, pp. 6–7.
 - 46 James, 'Government and party', in his *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (London: Allison and Busby, 1977), especially pp. 163–4.
 - 47 For instance James, 'Slippery descent', in *Nkrumah*, p. 187.
 - 48 Rodney spoke extensively of his debts to James. On the relationship, see Rupert Charles Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1998) especially pp. 34–40, 171–3 and 241–3.
 - 49 On the travails of the anglophone Caribbean left since the 1950s, including the influence of Jamesian ideas, see Perry Mars, *Ideology and Change: the transformation of the Caribbean Left* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 1998). James's impact on these currents is also discussed in several contributions to Henry and Buhle, *James's Caribbean*, especially those of George Lamming, Paget Henry and Walton Look Lai.
 - 50 Analogous phenomena among West Indian creative writers were noted already by Lamming in the 1950s, and are discussed elsewhere in this volume. One might compare the way in which someone like Thomas Mapfumo came to be seen as the emblematic national figure of Zimbabwean music only after, and because of, his international popularity.
 - 51 As noted above, much secondary literature on James credits him with challenging or subverting this very distinction. I am suggesting that this interpretation is hard

to sustain: in politics, if not necessarily in cricket, James drew the boundaries quite sharply.

- 52 James, 'The case for West Indian self-government,' in Grimshaw, *James Reader*, p. 52.
- 53 James, 'Case for self-government', p. 53.
- 54 James, *Nkrumah*, p. 69.
- 55 James, *Nkrumah*, pp. 155–6.
- 56 James, *Nkrumah*, p. 35.
- 57 James, 'Making of the Caribbean people', p. 182.
- 58 Anna Grimshaw (ed. and intro.), *Special Delivery: the letters of C. L. R. James to Constance Webb, 1939–1948* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 173–4. Letter dated July 1944.
- 59 Hall, 'Conversation', p. 20. With a typical Jamesian twist, he added that on arriving in Britain he discovered that, worse, they weren't applied there either!
- 60 Hall, 'Conversation', p. 21. In another mischievous tweak of the argument, he noted the additional advantage that in Britain he could get involved in politics without bringing disgrace on his family.
- 61 1986 *Trinidad Guardian* interview with Clive Davis; quoted in Kent Worcester, *C. L. R. James: a political biography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 208. See also his passionate affirmation of pleasure at being back in Britain, in 1953 in the *Manchester Guardian*: James, *Cricket*, ed. Anna Grimshaw (London: Allison and Busby, 1986), pp. 71–3.
- 62 James, 'The battle for survival', in *Rendezvous*, p. 138.
- 63 James, with Grace Lee and Pierre Chaulieu, *Facing Reality* (Chicago: Correspondence Publishing, 1958), p. 73.
- 64 James, 'Every cook can govern', p. 168.
- 65 James, 'Lenin and the problem', in Grimshaw, *James Reader*, pp. 332–3. James several times proposed sweeping indictments of the whole idea of western civilisation, as having given birth to Hitler and Stalin from its very heart, but did so frustratingly briefly, and perhaps inconsistently with many of his other ideas including his love for European, especially English, culture. This is a major theme in C. L. R. James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* (London: Allison and Busby, 1985). In 'Wilson Harris and the existentialist doctrine' the idea is floated that the old European order and its conceptions of civilisation had irrevocably broken down – but that the Caribbean, or even the New World as a whole, had never shared that conception of a fixed order anyway: in *Spheres*, especially p. 168. The influences of Spengler – by whom James confessed to having been much affected in his youth – and of Heidegger are evident in all this.
- 66 C. L. R. James, *World Revolution 1917–1936: the rise and fall of the Communist International* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1937).
- 67 James, 'The British vote for socialism', in *Future*.
- 68 James, *Facing Reality*, pp. 112 and 157.
- 69 For instance James, in 'Dialectical materialism and the fate of humanity', in *Spheres*, pp. 91–2; 'Marxism and the intellectuals', in *Spheres*, pp. 115–16; 'Peasants and workers', in *Spheres*, pp. 206–7; and *Facing Reality*, p. 138. James's allusions to this history were not always accurate (he seems to have thought that the Levellers were not represented at the Putney debates), but they were invariably enthusiastic.
- 70 Indeed the second half of James's review is entirely devoted to reiterating his ideas about the American working class: 'Marxism and the intellectuals'.
- 71 On this trait, especially in relation to *The Black Jacobins*, see Brian Meeks, 'Re-reading *The Black Jacobins*: James, the dialectic and the revolutionary conjuncture', *Social and Economic Studies*, 43:3 (1994), pp. 75–103.
- 72 James, 'The mighty sparrow', in *Future*, pp. 195–6.
- 73 James, 'Discussions with Trotsky', in *Rendezvous*, p. 60.
- 74 James, 'A national purpose', p. 157.
- 75 James, 'The old world and the new', in *Rendezvous*, p. 202.
- 76 James, *80th Birthday Lectures*, p. 48.

- 77 'C. L. R. James' (interviewed by Paul Gilroy) in MARHO, *Visions of History* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 271, 273 and 272. The interview was conducted in 1982, and the 'recent upheaval' was the British urban disturbances of the previous summer.
- 78 James, 80th *Birthday Lectures*, pp. 33 and 37–8.
- 79 *James and British Trotskyism*, Socialist Platform pamphlets, p. 3.
- 80 As is noted by several contributors to B. W. Higman (ed.), *General History of the Caribbean*, vol.VI: *Methodology and historiography* (London and Oxford: UNESCO, 1999).
- 81 The allusions are, in order, to the last lines of James's 'Appendix: from Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro' to the 1963 edition of *The Black Jacobins*; to Colin MacInnes, *England, Half English* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1961); and to Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: loss and recovery of self under colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).