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STAYING FRENCH: MARTINIQUEANS AND GUADELOUPEANS BETWEEN  
EMPIRE AND INDEPENDENCE, 1946-1973

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A Dissertation submitted to the  
Graduate School-New Brunswick  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

written under the direction of

Professor Bonnie G. Smith

and approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

May 2011

**ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**  
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In 1946, following the Second World War, France initiated a series of constitutional reforms designed to bind the French empire more closely to the French nation. As part of these reforms, the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe – French colonies since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century – were formally incorporated into the French nation as “Overseas Departments,” juridically no different than the departments of mainland France. The push for incorporation, which came to be known as assimilation, was led by prominent anti-colonial, Communist and negritude intellectuals and activists. They believed that assimilation constituted the surest means to break down the economic, social and cultural barriers between the Antilles and France. Incorporation into the French state promised economic and social improvements as well as increased opportunities for Antilleans to work, study and participate in French life. Assimilation was imagined not as an extension of colonialism but as a form of decolonization. However, the promised social and economic improvements never materialized and in the 1950s Antilleans grew disenchanted with assimilation and its failed promises.

This project analyzes Antillean intellectuals’, students’ and activists’ dissatisfaction with assimilation and their turn towards an overtly anti-colonial politics

that posited the Antilles as separate from France. My project explores how a small people positioned and made sense of themselves in the tumultuous years of decolonization, the Cold War, world revolution and the new social movements. In order to combat French colonialism, Antilleans worked to build links with anti-colonial movements in Africa and Latin America, as well as the civil rights movement in the United States. Thinking of themselves as colonized subjects inspired an intellectual and cultural movement among Antillean intellectuals that turned away from France and toward the Americas to study their cultural and racial identity in order to make sense of themselves as simultaneously black and European, Antillean and French, subject and citizen. My dissertation demonstrates how this turn inward profoundly shaped Antillean culture, particularly Antillean literature and philosophy, and led to the discovery of Antilleans' "Other Americanness."

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*When histories collide, History comes to an end. – Edouard Glissant*

*Philosophy begins in disappointment. – Simon Critchley*

## **Introduction: Locating France and the Antilles**

In the opening pages of his theoretical masterwork, *Caribbean Discourse* (1981), the Martiniquan novelist and critic Edouard Glissant declared that Martinique and Guadeloupe – the French Antilles, both Overseas Departments (DOMs) of France – “were not Polynesian islands.”<sup>1</sup> Glissant’s declarative statement might seem obvious on its face: Martinique and Guadeloupe quite clearly were located physically in the Caribbean sea, in the Americas, part of the arc of small islands that extend south from Puerto Rico to the South American mainland and known collectively as the “Lesser Antilles.” Glissant, however, was not concerned primarily with the Antilles’ geographic location but with what we might call their imaginary location. Popular French discourse about the Antilles tended toward the exotic, emphasizing their tropical climate and “rich and sweet” (*luxé et douce*, a talismanic phrase repeatedly mentioned in the colonial discourse) people and customs. The mistaken vision of the Antilles as “Polynesian islands” celebrated the islands’ tropical and exotic elements while obscuring the legacy of sugar, slavery, racism and colonialism that constituted the true history of the French Antilles. Glissant’s turn of phrase intended to both puncture this exoticist discourse and to root the Antilles in their proper American context.<sup>2</sup>

Glissant argued that misrecognition was not only a French problem. Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans suffered from their own refusal to acknowledge and grapple with

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<sup>1</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais*, (Paris: Seuil, 1981), 11; Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, translated J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> J. Michael Dash, “Martinique is (not) a Polynesian Island: Detours of French West Indian Identity,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 11, 1/2 (June 2008), 123-136.

their history. In fact, Glissant argued, misrecognition was embedded most perniciously among French Antilleans. While the French at the very least recognized difference – “Polynesian islands” – Antilleans refused to recognize their social and cultural particularity and instead insisted on their Frenchness, embracing “assimilation” to France and turning their back on what made them Martiniquan, Caribbean and American. Antilleans embraced French mores, French language and French politics and ideology, succumbing to, as Glissant phrased it, “total colonization.” Their assimilation to France had disrupted Antilleans’ “natural course of development” and “zombified them within their world.”<sup>3</sup> Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans, culturally and politically, were caught in between life and death, as their adoption of French lifeways and their fictive understanding of themselves as French isolated them from their “own world:” the Caribbean and the Americas. Only by overcoming their devotion to France and rethinking themselves as American could Antilleans be secure in their culture, their world and their selves.<sup>4</sup>

Already a celebrated novelist and poet, Glissant’s extended essay received a wide reception in France, the Antilles and the American academy, securing his position as a major French thinker of race, identity and the colonial condition.<sup>5</sup> On the surface, Glissant’s criticism of French colonialism and his insistence that Antilleans cultivate a distinct national identity appear to be squarely within the tradition of anti-colonial activism and Third World nationalism, attacking the colonizing power while exhorting the colonized population to throw off its political and cultural bonds. Glissant’s argument, however, was more subtle and complex, for it was as much about the past as it

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<sup>3</sup> Glissant 1989, 253.

<sup>4</sup> Glissant 1989, 159-170.

<sup>5</sup> Alain Baudot, *Bibliographie Annotée d’Edouard Glissant* (Toronto: Editions du GREF, 1993), 422-470.

was about the present, and as much about place as it was about politics. Grappling with France's legacy in the Caribbean – and, more broadly, Europe's legacy in the Americas – Glissant did not avoid confronting the intractable problems of the “small places” of the Americas, caught between their colonial past and postcolonial future. Three centuries of colonialism had wrought certain unavoidable realities for the French Antilles, including cultural and linguistic isolation from their Caribbean neighbors and complete political and economic dependence on France. Colonialism, it seemed, was permanent. Despite it all, Glissant urged his comrades to continue to agitate and imagine a Martinique and Guadeloupe independent of France and reunited with the Caribbean world.

I start with Glissant's polemical analysis of the French Antilles' place in the world because his work grappled most cogently and coherently with the cultural and philosophical ramifications of the Antilles' dual situation as Caribbean islands and as departments of France. Glissant's work interrogated Antillean history, testing what was French and what was American about the Antilles and admitting what was hopelessly entangled. While Glissant argued for Antillean independence from France and the islands' Caribbean and American future, he recognized that they would always possess a doubled, ambiguous character and that it was this doubling that, in fact, made the Antilles unique. Martinique and Guadeloupe were not Polynesian islands. Nor, however, were they only detached pieces of Africa, or “France under another sky.” They were all that: French, African, American, reflecting and representing the entangled and creolized history that produced them. The French Antilles would never cease being American just as they would never cease being European. To insist on singularity in the face of multiplicity was not only absurd but destructive. Glissant's writing became the most



eloquent and nuanced expression of Antillean cultural and political autonomy and helped to popularize the Antillean perspective among metropolitan French intellectuals.<sup>6</sup>

Ironically, the same year that the *Discourse* was published, François Mitterand and the French Left's triumph in the presidential and parliamentary elections helped secure many aspects of the autonomist political project. Mitterand was elected President of France while a broad left-wing alliance captured a majority in the National Assembly for the first time since the late 1940s. Moments after being sworn in, Mitterand traveled to the Panthéon to lay a rose at the tomb of Victor Schoelcher, 19<sup>th</sup> century France's most prominent abolitionist, the architect of the 1848 slave emancipation and a revered figure in the French Caribbean.<sup>7</sup> Mitterand had promised during his candidacy to decentralize power in France's Overseas Departments and Territories by ceding significant administrative powers to regional councils and granting them local autonomy within the framework of the Republic. A year later, in 1982, the decentralization law passed the National Assembly and was signed into law; the DOMs were granted regional status and control over significant economic, political and social policies were devolved to the new regional councils. Politically speaking, the autonomist project was complete.<sup>8</sup>

Glissant's magnum opus and Mitterand's decentralization law were attempts to settle the ongoing question of where to locate the Antilles. *Caribbean Discourse* advanced a philosophical discourse of the Antilles' identity, situating the islands within

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<sup>6</sup> Glissant elaborated a philosophical reading of identity and culture, drawn both from his reflections on his homeland and its complexities and from his reading in post-structural French philosophy, particularly Deleuze and Guattari, which was published as *Poetics of Relation*. Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor, MI.: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> While researching this dissertation in Martinique, I lived in the town of Schoelcher, walked regularly on the Blvd. Schoelcher and combed through old books, journals and newspapers in the Bibliothèque Schoelcher, a collection that originated as Schoelcher's private library.

<sup>8</sup> William F.S. Miles, "Mitterand in the Caribbean: Socialism (?) Comes to Martinique," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 27,3 (Autumn 1985), 63-79.

the history, sociology, economics and culture of the Caribbean basin and the broader American experience which, in Glissant's understanding, was defined by the encounter between Europe, the Americas and African slaves. Mitterand's law admitted the uniqueness of the Antilles and recognized that the signifier "Europe" could not hope to capture the heterogeneity of the Antillean cultural and historical experience. Nonetheless, the gesture toward local autonomy acknowledged the difference of the Antilles while preserving and accommodating them into both France and Europe. Martinique and Guadeloupe, both Glissant and the law seemed to say, were irreparably torn between the New World and the Old.

This dissertation reconstructs the historical and intellectual tumult of the 1950s and 1960s, tracing the emergence of a broad "Antillean discourse" in Martinique and Guadeloupe and among the Antillean diaspora resident in metropolitan France. I follow the emergence of the "autonomist" movement across geographies and different modes of writing. While scholars have examined Antillean discourses of autonomy, their primary approach has been literary, focusing on close readings of Antillean fiction and poetry, following the emergence of Antillean cultural nationalism from the interwar *négritude* generation through Césaire's celebrated public break with the French Communist Party and to the "creolist" aesthetics of writers such as Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant. While such studies have examined the political commitments of their subjects, primarily literary projects have tended to emphasize literary arguments and contexts over broader the broader socio-political and historical context. The movement from *négritude* in the 1930s to assimilation in 1946 to autonomy in the late 1950s to creolist poetics in the 1980s follows a progression of literary movements and depicts the shifting

ideological context as the natural literary process of one avant-garde displacing another. As such, these accounts, while offering an incisive analysis of the internal textual poetics of the texts under consideration, tend to be insular and too often emphasize what is local about French Antillean writers, isolating them from the broader global and cosmopolitan context that shaped the world in which they wrote.<sup>9</sup>

As a corollary to the scholarly focus on high aesthetic textual artifacts, major figures (who admittedly remain for the most part minor figures within the larger edifice of literary studies) are treated in isolation from the intellectual and political contexts in which they worked. Aimé Césaire's colleagues and collaborators in the Progressive Party – who often formulated the day-to-day policy and ideology of “Césaire's Party” – are absent from many studies of his literary and political output. Marcel Manville's work is seldom discussed on its own merits and only raided for material about his good friend, Frantz Fanon, despite Manville's lengthy career as an activist lawyer and anti-colonial intellectual. Martiniquan and Guadeloupean intellectuals who exercised an influential role in the islands – René Ménil, Edouard de Lépine, Roland Suvélor, Gerty Archimède, Jacques Adelaïde-Mérlande – not too mention “organic” student and emigrant intellectuals are bypassed for the significant names and figures. This thesis strives to recover and incorporate the “minor voices,” attempting to reconstruct the total intellectual context in which the more famous writers moved and participated. Reading student publications, Communist Party pamphlets and speeches, Catholic lay activists and local

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<sup>9</sup> The literature on French Antillean writing is compendious. Important examples of scholars who situate the Antilles and Antillean literary production in broader intellectual and political contexts include: J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Michelle Stephens, *Black Empire: the Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

intellectuals and writers, I flesh out a broader, deeper context that accounts for the profound richness of Martiniquan and Guadeloupean intellectual and literary life.

This does not mean that I neglect major Antillean figures; Fanon, Césaire and Glissant all figure prominently in this study. Nonetheless, I embed their work within the intellectual and political context in which they worked. Césaire and Glissant, for example, simultaneously remained intimately involved in Antillean political and cultural life and lived the lives of celebrated cosmopolitan writers, moving in social circles closed to most Antilleans and most Antillean intellectuals. Césaire and Glissant both contributed important studies on Antilleans and made significant contributions to Martiniquan and Guadeloupean cultural life. Their work, particularly Glissant's attempt to found an Antillean cultural science, features prominently in this study, but it is connected to the work of other Antillean activists and thinkers. This analytic approach, which is above all an historical approach, both deepens our understanding of their work while also illuminating the social milieus and intellectual networks out of which their literary and theoretical masterpieces emerged. Rather than avoiding the "anxiety of influence," I argue that locating their work in its local, national and transnational contexts enlivens and enriches their contributions.

While informed by literary concerns, this thesis is above all historical; it seeks to link ideas to their implementation and intellectual production to its practical (and not so practical) realization. By looking at how Antillean intellectuals attempted to put into practice their theories of identity, nation and culture, I explore how ideas develop, circulate and finally are transmitted from intellectuals to the wider population. While it is

important to follow the internal warp and weave of thought's development, it is equally important to trace thought's concrete implications in the broader social context.

Part of the effort to establish context requires discerning the proper analytical scope. One of the principle assertions of my work is that the Antilles must be understood in their proper geo-political and intellectual-imaginative context. To study the postwar Antilles requires situating them in their proper context, which is simultaneously local, regional, national and transnational. Living, traveling, studying, organizing and above all writing at a moment of expanding global consciousness, whether constructive or potentially destructive, Antilleans reflected and commented on the globalizing events that, despite the islands' small size and marginal importance to global political struggles, reshaped or had the potential to reshape their lives.

To be sure, local Antillean traditions and histories remained vitally important. Debates over culture, identity, nation and citizenship in the French Antilles were and are inflected through the local experience of slavery, emancipation, citizenship, politics and culture. The Martiniquan Communists, for example, framed their postwar socialist policies as a continuation of Victor Schoelcher's utopian politics, claiming the legacy of the emancipator for their own project of economic development and redistribution. They tended to criticize their opponents as the errand-boys of the *béké* – the white planter elite – a highly localized form of political insult with deep roots in Martiniquan history. 1960s Antillean students built upon the older generation's *négritude* poetics, which itself had emerged as a critique of a tradition of Antillean poets and writers who wrote Parnassian odes to the French landscape while ignoring their own islands. Without elaborating local

context and tradition, it is impossible to understand the cultural and political genealogy from which the 1950s and 1960s texts emerged.

Too often, however, the local occludes the broader context, reducing Antilleans' fecund debates, which have contributed much to our own theories of colonialism, postcolonialism and cultural contact, to a purely internal Antillean debate. In this model, mimicry begat avant-guardism begat négritude begat Antillanness begat Creolism begat... who knows? Overconcentration on local, internal debates detaches the Antilles from a global perspective and erases Antilleans' engagement with transnational political movements and intellectual developments. In the postwar period, Antillean intellectuals placed their work within the local Antillean tradition, but strove as well to incorporate and contribute to global and cosmopolitan intellectual production. Postwar French philosophy, Caribbean regional debates, the Cold War, Third World nationalism, decolonization, the American civil rights movement and the global New Left all influenced 1950s and 1960s Antillean activists and thinkers. Edouard Glissant's *Institut Martiniquais d'Etudes*, for example, emulated French "small journals" like Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* and Domenech's *Esprit*; the Institute's studies of Antillean life were shaped by the local Antillean context, but also by French "existential" Marxism, structural and poststructural theory, the Cuban revolution and American civil rights and black power activism. The Antilles, though "small places," reflected and in turn shaped the increasingly global postwar world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Another ambition of this thesis is to 'decolonize' intellectual history. Intellectual history remains beholden to both a narrow focus on the back-and-forth of intellectuals themselves and entirely over-concentrated on Europe. I argue that studies of Hegel or Freud, for example, must take into account his influence on non-European activists, something glaringly absent from most intellectual histories. Recent work by Susan Buck-Morss and Michael Rothberg have profoundly informed my attempt to globalize intellectual history. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of

This is not to say that scholars have ignored the Antilles' connections to the larger world; important works have explored the French Antilles as a site of African diasporic discourse. The work of Antillean writers and intellectuals, and Antillean culture more broadly, has been theorized from the point of view of the black diaspora and Atlantic studies. While I am profoundly influenced by this important and pioneering work, this thesis adopts these theories with a certain critical reserve. The Black Atlantic and diaspora were first theorized in the 1960s in two influential essays by Abiola Irele and George Shepperson; Irele wrote on *négritude* poetics while Shepperson examined Pan-African theory and practice. The concepts were given fullest expression in Paul Gilroy's seminal *The Black Atlantic*, which conceptualized the Atlantic as a transnational cultural space that supported a mobile and critical mode of black expression.<sup>11</sup> Gilroy's account was influential, and both diaspora studies and the Black Atlantic emerged as major fields of inquiry. Nonetheless, many studies of the Black Atlantic, despite best intentions, have a tendency to reproduce a certain cultural essentialism, to discover black diaspora wherever Africans live outside of Africa, positing diaspora as somehow immanent to the condition of being black outside of Africa. What has been lost is that diasporas are not immanent but constructed, articulated through the imaginations of mobile, transnational black subjects.<sup>12</sup> I presume that black diaspora is a construction, a heuristic for organizing

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Pittsburgh, 2009); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Abiola Irele, "Négritude or Black Cultural Nationalism," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3,3 (October 1965), 321-348; George Shepperson, "The African Abroad or the African Diaspora," *African Forum* 2 (1966), 76-93; Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 244-277.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Ian Baucom, "Charting the 'Black Atlantic,'" *Postmodern Culture* 8,1 (September 1997); Charles Piot, "Atlantic Aporias: Africa and Gilroy's Black Atlantic," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100,1 (2001), 155-170.

and exploring what Brent Edwards has noted is the “strange and ambivalent... articulation” of African diaspora, the multivalent practices and personalities that make up a transnational black tradition.<sup>13</sup>

I remain, however, somewhat ambivalent about the concept of diaspora and its related term, Black Atlantic. “Black” was by no means the primary signifier through which Antilleans made sense of themselves and their world. While race was and remains an important quality, both subjectively in individuals’ lives and objectively as a category of social and cultural analysis, it was not necessarily the primary mediator through which Antilleans imagined themselves and constructed their relationship to the world. In practice, they subscribed to not only heterogeneous but fluid and multiple affiliations, being black in one context, French in a second and Communist in another. In many ways, “transnationalism” better describes Antillean activists’ and intellectuals’ commitments, denoting themselves within the world in multiple registers, ranging from “colonized” to “Other American” and including, but not ending at, “black.”<sup>14</sup>

Remaining aware of Antilleans’ multiple filiations is important for understanding the change that occurred among Antillean intellectuals in the postwar period and which is the primary topic of this work. The project of autonomy in both politics and culture emerged from the frustration, closure and limitation of other modes of belonging. Fred Cooper has described this phenomenon in French West Africa. As decolonization accelerated, the Union Française imploded, the Cold War faults expanded and European integration expanded, the post-World War II moment, in which expansive and even

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<sup>13</sup> Brent Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” *Social Text* 66 (Spring 2001), 66.

<sup>14</sup> The global identities that Antilleans imagined themselves to be part of reflected an instance of what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih have described as “minor transnationalism,” Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet, *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1-23.



experimental modes of sovereignty were possible, closed and the old forms of nation-based citizenship and identity were reasserted.<sup>15</sup> In 1946, Antilleans embraced French citizenship and identified as French citizens. Moderates saw in assimilation the final fulfillment of the republican project through the erasure of barriers between the Antilles and the mother country; radicals, on the other hand, saw assimilation as the precondition for the union of Antillean workers with the French, and international, working class movement. In addition, Antilleans did not simply join France in 1946; they joined the Union Française, a multiethnic and multicultural polity of 100 million people, of whom only 40 million were white French metropolitans. Césaire and his *négritude* allies, the chief architects of the assimilation law, perceived the Union Française not only as an economic and political project but as a cultural one, a concrete means to link together France, Africa and the Antilles. Assimilation, initially, offered a secure yet expanded French identity.

By the mid-1950s, however, many Antilleans felt that France had gone back on the promises described by assimilation. Economic and social conditions were still poor and integration into the French Republic half-complete. Local elites retained significant control and influence, racism in both the Caribbean and metropole spread unabated and, under the conditions of the Algerian War, arguably worsened. Further, in the name of Cold War anti-Communism, officials harassed Communist leaders and activists, often for criticizing assimilation's failed promise. The hope represented in the Union Française was also disappointed as the multiethnic empire collapsed under the demands of colonial

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<sup>15</sup> Frederick Cooper, "Alternatives to Empire: France and Africa after World War II," Douglas Howland and Louise White, eds., *The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 94-123; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 153-203.

deputies, the apocalyptic war in North Africa and the resulting financial strain. Antilleans – along with the Réunionnais and Guyanese – once members of a multiethnic empire, now stood alone as the sole and small remnants of French imperialism, the “confetti of empire” as one French wag put it. The utopian promise of 1946 was checked by the realities of decolonization and the developing Cold War conflict. Disappointment and its aftermath thus constitutes an important subject of this study. The philosopher Simon Critchley has argued that disappointment is the origin and wellspring of thought. Frustration – political, cultural, spiritual, economic – forces critical rethinking of assumptions and outcomes alike.<sup>16</sup> Antilleans’ disappointment flowed from their expectations, the hopes and dreams that they had invested in assimilation and their desire to end colonialism and become fully modern parts of France. Their hopes ran up against the reality, however, of their position within France and within the world; in other words, Antilleans ran up against the limits of their “coloniality.”

Coloniality is a term that originated with Latin American theorists Anibal Quijaño, Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo and has been applied by historians, literary critics and social scientists to describe the colonial condition in Latin American societies.<sup>17</sup> Originally coined by the philosopher Quijaño, he postulated “coloniality” in order to describe Latin America’s location in the modern world and study it within the continuum of Latin American history. Existing social science vocabulary – colonial, postcolonial, neo-colonial, etc. – focuses too much on rupture and not enough on continuity. In important ways, Quijaño argued, the conditions imposed during conquest

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<sup>16</sup> Simon Critchley, *Very Little... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004); Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso Books, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jáuregui, eds., *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

and colonization persist to the present day, whether in economic distribution, racial hierarchies, knowledge production or linguistic policy. It makes more sense, he argues, to think of Latin American history as a single colonial period, with change *within* colonial relations rather than changes *in* colonial relations. His collaborators Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo, among others, have expanded on Quijano's insight, incorporating World Systems Theory, poststructural and critical theory, creolization studies and religious studies to examine the ruptures and continuities of the New World experience in local, regional and global registers. Independence, they argue, does not guarantee substantive decolonization because while it alters formal political relationships, it does not fundamentally alter the global economic and power relations that were forged through and survived the European colonial project.<sup>18</sup>

Coloniality posits that colonial and postcolonial are relative terms, sensible only within the framework of global power and global capitalism. Rather than describing the continuing subordination of decolonized and independent nations to the dominance of Euro-American capitalism as 'neo-colonialism,' coloniality focuses on continuities in the articulation of power and capital in the Third World. Using coloniality to think about the French Antilles, the cardinal events of Antillean history – the French Revolution, the 1848 emancipation, the 1946 departmentalization, the 1982 decentralization – suggest shifts within French colonialism in the Caribbean. Antilleans' simultaneous status as citizens and colonials appears less as a contradiction and more as a specific juridical fix. Further, many Antilleans desire, however critical to remain part of France – Martinique and Guyane just voted in 2010 by overwhelming margins to reject greater local

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<sup>18</sup> Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America," *Nepantla: View from the South* 1,3, (2000), 533-580; Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

autonomy, fearing that France was trying to cut them loose – seems less a betrayal or denial of their Antilleanness than a strategic response to global power relations. Many of the figures explored in this dissertation posited coloniality *avant la lettre*. One of the Martiniquan Communists' arguments in favor assimilation and the main reason they opposed complete independence from France was their perception that independence from France only meant American hegemony. The Communists were sensitive to those power relations that decolonization had altered and those it had left intact. Coloniality is thus useful for thinking about the French Antilles because it provides a theoretical toolkit that can simultaneously think them as French, European, Caribbean and American.<sup>19</sup>

Coloniality also reminds us that Europe's presence in the former colonial world continued beyond formal declarations of independence. As the proponents of coloniality remind us, European capital and its supportive government power shaped the histories of Latin American nations well beyond the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Bolivarian revolutions. French and British capital – later supplemented by Dutch, German and American investment – was vital in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century economic development in Latin America and the Caribbean. British banks helped build railroads across the Andes and Central America, while the French were the first to take a crack at the Panama Canal, not to mention their role in Maximilien's brief emperorship of Mexico. In myriad ways, too often overlooked, Europe remains intimately connected to the New World, whether through direct political control of many Caribbean territories or through business and political relationships throughout the hemisphere. Due to America's outsized political, economic and above all,

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<sup>19</sup> Ramon Grosfoguel's work using coloniality to make sense of Puerto Rican experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was particularly useful to my own work, as, in many ways, Puerto Ricans and French Antilles share a similar political and cultural past and present. Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

ideological presence, Europe's continuing role in the Americas has been overlooked and underappreciated. While French Antilleans were aware of, even disturbed by the United States' influence in the Caribbean, their experience was profoundly shaped by political decisions made in Paris, and later in Paris and Brussels. The example of the French Antilles illuminates this link and it is my hope that this dissertation will work to restore Europe's presence to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Americas, prompting scholars to think about the Americas not as an addition to Europe but as an *extension* that forces us to rethink our idea of what constitutes Europe and what constitutes the Americas.<sup>20</sup>

Before discussing in depth Antilleans' efforts to situate themselves and to build an identity that was simultaneously French and American, it is necessary to fill in their unique historical experience of colonialism. As "old colonies" – sugar colonies repopulated with African slaves following the eradication of the indigenous Carib – colonization formed a different society from the colonial societies of "new colonialism" in Africa and Asia. Chapter One fills in the background, providing a very brief history of Martinique and Guadeloupe from their settlement in 1635 to the social struggles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first chapter traces the twin legacies of slavery and citizenship that provided the impetus for the 1946 assimilation law. The question of black "citizenship" emerged with the first free people of color at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, became an urgent claim in the chaos of the French Revolution and was partially settled with the 1848 Revolution. Assimilation, observed from the perspective of the *longue durée* of

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<sup>20</sup> This has been a mostly overlooked area of study. Some prominent exceptions, mostly in anthropology and political science, include: Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Helen Hintjens, *Alternatives to Independence: Explorations in Post-Colonial Relations* (Dartmouth, NH: Dartmouth Publishing Group, 1995); Bill Maurer, *Recharting the Caribbean: Land, Law and Citizenship in the British Virgin Islands* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

French rule in the Caribbean, seems consistent with the longer political development of the French Antilles and the conflict between what Aimé Césaire described as “Two Frances,” the first liberal and universalist, the second racist and exclusionary. The first France initiated and then reestablished slavery, denied blacks citizenship and opposed assimilation on racist grounds. The second France abolished slavery in 1794 and 1848, accepted and celebrated blacks as citizens of France and supported assimilation on republican grounds. Antilleans vested their faith in the second France, ‘the Good France,’ while cultivating French allies to combat the first France.

This short history establishes the necessary context to make sense of the events of 1945-6, which form the bulk of Chapter Two. Césaire and his allies from Guadeloupe, Guyane and Réunion mobilized the rhetoric of “Two Frances” to demand that the “old colonies” be made full departments of France under the new constitution. Colonial deputies lumped the Vichy regime in with the ‘Bad France’ and challenged their metropolitan colleagues to uphold republican principles and vote for assimilation. They were helped by the collapse of anti-assimilationist forces, discredited due to their collaboration with Admiral Robert’s pro-Vichy government during the war. Assimilationist forces, allied with the Communist Party, pushed the Constituent Assembly to fulfill the century-old promise, originally made by the abolitionist leader and author of the 1848 emancipation law Victor Schoelcher, to absorb the old colonies into France as Overseas Departments (DOMs).

Chapter Two also shows how “departmentalization” was conceived and implemented as part of the imperial reforms that birthed the Union Française, the postwar reorganization of the French empire that emerged from the 1944 Brazzaville Conference.

The Union increased imperial representation in the National Assembly, created funds for investment and economic development in the colonies and was premised on the extension of democratic rights to France's colonial subjects, aiming ultimately to transform them into colonial citizens. The Antilles were not simply incorporated into France but were incorporated into the Union and included in an expanded definition of French citizenship and French identity. Despite initial hopes for assimilation, Antilleans were disappointed almost immediately by metropolitan efforts to limit colonial democracy. Chapter Two concludes by examining Antillean efforts to overturn French recalcitrance, which seeded the doubts and disappointments that would develop into the radical critique of the French-Antillean relationship in the 1950s and 1960s.

Chapter Three develops this theme in full, concentrating on disappointment and tracing Antilleans' growing frustration with the broken promises of assimilation. Initially, Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans urged the French state to stop stalling on reforms and implement "assimilation in full." As repeated French governments reneged on their promises, Antillean intellectuals and activists responded by turning away from France and toward the decolonizing world, proposing "autonomy:" local political control within the framework of France. Autonomy did not urge independence but it was influenced by anti-colonial activism in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean and premised on rethinking the Franco-Antillean relationship. Assimilation's failure to fundamentally alter the islands' social and political disempowerment inspired French Antillean intellectuals to theorize that Martinique and Guadeloupe remained colonies and that assimilation was not liberation but a transformation of their subjugation. Studying the Antilles' social and

economic structures, its political organization and its cultural history, they criticized France for refusing to put an end to the “colonial situation.”

The disenchantment was not confined to intellectuals. Frustration with economic stagnation and political high-handedness fed into a wave of strikes and demonstrations that culminated in 1959 riots on Martinique that left three dead, several wounded and burned-out cars and shops in downtown Fort-de-France. The 1959 strikes initiated an Antillean 1960s that featured demonstrations, strikes, riots, agitation and repression, leaving dozens dead and scores more in prison. Disturbances roiled the islands well into the 1980s, producing widespread discontent with French rule. The most active anti-colonial militants cultivated ties to other anti-colonial groups, particularly Cuban and Latin American revolutionary groups, to think and organize in order to overcome capitalism and colonialism.

Chapter Four continues the theme of disappointment, focusing on the experience of Antillean students who traveled to Paris and other French cities to study. The postwar expansion of French higher education corresponded with France’s developmental policies for the Union Française to bring hundreds and eventually thousands of Antillean students to France, many benefitting from government grants and stipends. Many were idealistic, invested in the belief that their educations would contribute to the future wellbeing of the Antilles and France. However, when they arrived in the metropole, many were subjected to racial discrimination, police harassment and well-meaning but patronizing treatment. This treatment was in turn exacerbated by the exigencies of the Algerian War. Antillean students were targeted by far-right student groups and insulted by ordinary Parisians.



Perceiving themselves as full French citizens, this interpellation as colonial subjects embittered many and drove them to question their political and cultural identity.

Seeking refuge from discrimination and “incoherence,” Antillean students found themselves socializing with African, Arab and Asian students. Chapter Five explores how Antillean students, building off their experiences in the metropole, their growing links to other colonial students, and their scholarly inquiries into the condition of their home islands pushed them to question their Frenchness and to critique French rule. Antillean students participated with their colonial peers in anti-colonial demonstrations, conducted teach-ins on Antillean and colonial issues and organized against racism and discrimination, activism that inspired them to theorize themselves as colonial subjects. Decolonization seemed less distant and more intimate, less a matter of solidarity than necessity. Chapter Five examines the Antillean movement through two Antillean student organizations: the secular student unions and the Catholic student association. It explores their understanding of French colonialism, their proposals for action and their prescriptions for the future, as well as their contributions to developing notions of Antillean identity.

Veterans of the student movement did not end their intellectual or political careers with their completion of their studies. Many remained involved in the Communist or Progressive Party while others formed new political groups to push for decolonization in the Antilles. Several former students formed, under Edouard Glissant’s direction, the Martiniquan Studies Institute (IME) in 1965 to continue their analyses of the social and cultural history of the French Antilles. Chapter Six explores the work of the Institute, focusing on IME members’ analyses of Antillean psychology, Antillean culture and

Antillean racial and class structures. Influenced by Frantz Fanon, decolonization, the Cuban Revolution and postwar French Marxism and poststructuralism, the IME worked to think the Antilles from the perspective of the Caribbean, reembedding their historical becoming in the context of slavery, creolization, colonization and culture contact. The IME also continued the work of building links with other subaltern groups in the Caribbean and the Americas. The IME invited academics and artists from across the Americas to participate in its seminars and developed a relationship with African-American academics and students at America's historically black colleges. The IME's theory and practice was dedicated to both thinking and elaborating Glissant's concept of the 'Other America,' the America of indigenes, ex-slaves and other groups dislocated and disempowered by Euro-American colonialism and capital.

Glissant's intellectual project to build an 'Other America' concludes this study. It also points toward future areas of research, particularly the outsize influence of Antillean intellectuals on global intellectual history, which I discuss in the conclusion. Glissant, along with the Césaire and the short-lived Fanon, would have a decisive influence on the developing field of postcolonial studies in the Anglo-American academy. Césaire's and Fanon's work was translated into English in the 1960s and had first a profound effect on black power and black nationalist groups in the US and UK. Glissant's work was translated later but scholars of Francophone African and Caribbean writers incorporated his criticisms into postcolonial criticism. Nonetheless, as I argue, something was lost in translation from the Franco-Caribbean context to the Anglo-American context. What was specifically French about French Antilleans was lost as Antilleans were incorporated into a more generalized black experience.

This dissertation argues that thinking about what was specific and what was universal in the postwar Antillean experience contributes to the history not only of Martinique and Guadeloupe but also expands the bounds of European, French and diasporic history. Situating Antillean intellectuals' and activists' work in its multiple contexts adds to our understandings of colonialism and decolonization, to the cultural and social legacies of slavery and to the history of race in contemporary France. Further, it reveals the complex strategies and affiliations of transnational organizing, exploring how activists build solidarity and identity across borders, languages and histories. Finally, it narrates how a 'small place' encapsulates and illuminates global forces.

## **Chapter One**

### **Vicissitudes of Assimilation: the French Antilles until 1945**

The history of the French Antilles, Martinique and Guadeloupe, is not well known in the American academy, despite the prominent influence of a number of Antillean writers and intellectuals including Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Edouard Glissant, Maryse Condé and Daniel Maximin on colonial and postcolonial studies. When I told friends and even colleagues that I was moving to Martinique for nine months to conduct dissertation research, few were aware that Martinique remained a constituent part of France, that Martiniquans were French citizens and that the euro was the common currency. In order for Martiniquans' and Guadeloupeans' postwar efforts to understand their dual French-Caribbean identity to be legible to a non-specialist audience, a short history of the French Antilles is necessary. Martinique and Guadeloupe are societies formed from a long history of colonization, slavery, revolution and revolt, and this history weighs heavily on Antillean intellectuals and writers and shapes their discourses of memory, identity, race and nation.

The islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe entered recorded history in 1493 when Columbus, on his second voyage to the Americas, sailed past the islands on his way north to the Spanish settlement at Santo Domingo. Guadeloupe was named for the Virgin of Extremadura and explored, while Martinique was sighted and charted on November 11<sup>th</sup> – St. Martin's Day. In the Spanish colonization of the New World and the Caribbean basin, Martinique and Guadeloupe were bypassed for settlement. Deemed too small to possess significant mineral deposits and inhabited by particularly aggressive groups of Caribs, the Spanish preferred the large islands of Hispaniola, Cuba and San Juan as

staging areas for their invasions of the mainland Amerindian empires. The Spaniards landed infrequently on the Lesser Antilles, first using them as resupply points for ships arriving from Europe and later conducting slaving raids on the Caribs to resupply the mines and plantations of the northern colonies. Ignored and unsettled, Martinique, Guadeloupe and the other islands became known as the “useless islands.”<sup>21</sup>

French colonization and control began in the 1630s when Cardinal Richelieu, as part of his proxy war against the Spanish Hapsburgs, encouraged French adventurers to attack Spanish shipping and capture nominally Spanish islands in order to establish a base in the Caribbean. An expedition led by Pierre d’Esnambuc landed on Martinique in 1635 and claimed it for the French crown, establishing a permanent settlement at Saint Pierre. Martinique served as a base for French expansion to Guadeloupe, St. Martin’s and on to Saint Domingue. French colonization in the Caribbean was focused on the extensive and profitable colony at Saint Domingue, but settlement of Martinique and Guadeloupe continued, serving an important role in the development of the French Caribbean colonies. Martinique, particularly, was an important transshipment point for slave ships arriving from Africa; slaves were “salted” – rested, strengthened and trained – before being sent on to Saint Domingue for sale. In addition, plantations were established on both islands and the islands carried on a lucrative if illicit trade with their British, Dutch and Spanish neighbors.<sup>22</sup>

The French government encouraged settlement that, after the 1640s, forced the adventurers and freebooters that had led the colonization of the Caribbean to sell their

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<sup>21</sup> Antonio Benitez Rojo, *The Repeating Island: the Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 49; Bonham Richardson, *The Caribbean in the Wider World, 1492-1992: a Regional Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 24-33.

<sup>22</sup> Philip P. Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2008).

properties to the newly constituted Company of the Islands of the Americas (*Compagnie des Îles de l'Amérique*). The Company, sponsored by the King and his minister Colbert directed the colonization of Martinique and Guadeloupe, recruited settlers, mostly indentured servants, to move to the Caribbean. At first, the settlers traded with the indigenous Carib inhabitants. Relations between the Europeans and the indigenous soon soured and broke out into open warfare. The wars continued into the 1650s and culminated in 1659 and 1660, with the virtual eradication of Guadeloupe's Caribs and the mass suicide of Martinique's last large Carib group, which chose death over submission to French colonialism. With the Carib wars concluded, the establishment of the plantation system proceeded apace. The importation of African slave labor followed. The first slaves arrived with the first French settlers and colonizers, but Martinique's and Guadeloupe's transition to the slave mode of production only started in earnest in the last decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1660, Martinique had a population of approximately 5,000, divided evenly between free whites and enslaved blacks; by 1700, Martinique's population was nearly 21,000, 15,000 of whom were African slaves. While the slave population increased less precipitously on Guadeloupe, nonetheless by 1700 slaves outnumbered whites two to one. The expanding slave mode of production defined the islands' development into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with rapidly expanding populations of black slaves working the islands' sugar plantations, ruled over by a much smaller population of white settlers. The end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed the establishment of communities of free people of color, a population that would similarly grow throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with significant political repercussions for the white planter elite.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Boucher, 202-28, 238-9; Bernard Moitt, *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles, 1635-1848* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 19-56; John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Class in*

Like Saint Domingue, Martinique and Guadeloupe were pulled into the maelstrom of the French Revolution and the ensuing slave revolt and revolution that gave birth to Haiti. Tension had been building in the Caribbean colonies since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly as the sugar boom accelerated the importation of African slaves into the Caribbean colonies. The population imbalance between white settlers, free blacks and black slaves necessitated, as throughout the Caribbean, racial terror to maintain white domination.<sup>24</sup> French Enlightenment thinkers criticized the slave regime in the French Caribbean, denouncing its cruelty and violence, defending the enslaved in the name of a universal humanity and demanding reforms to protect slaves from their masters.<sup>25</sup> The Creole planter class, on the other hand, resented metropolitan control over the Caribbean economy, particularly mercantilist policies that prevented local merchants from trading with the Spanish empire and British North America and demanded greater local control over economic policy.<sup>26</sup>

The spread of revolution in the French Caribbean posed the questions of universality, autonomy and political rights in urgent and radical ways. Initially, slavery was not the principal matter under discussion; the main debate in the first years of the Constituent Assembly revolved around the rights of the free citizens of color (*gens de couleurs*) and how the new government's institutions would accommodate the

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*French Saint Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 51-82.

<sup>24</sup> Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 13-58.

<sup>25</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1975), 139-148; Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: the Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 23-29.

autonomous institutions of the Caribbean colonies.<sup>27</sup> During the 1789 Constituent Assembly, Caribbean planters demanded administrative decentralization and economic reform, while the free citizens of color petitioned for representation before the Assembly. The revolutionary government's economic reforms addressed many of the planters' demands for economic liberalization. The issue of rights for free people of color, however, would prove more difficult. As non-enslaved persons, possessing property and paying taxes, free people of color demanded participation in the new democratic institutions; the white planter class opposed the extension of rights and privileges to the island's freed citizens on racial and hierarchical grounds.<sup>28</sup> The dispute between whites and free people of color – particularly the inhabitants of Saint Domingue, where the population of freedmen was largest – led to unrest in the colonies and bitter dispute in the National Assembly. Free people of color argued that they were eligible for citizenship like any other Frenchmen, while the whites argued that their race disqualified them from participation in French civil affairs.

Julien Raimond and Vincent Ogé, freed métis leaders from Saint Domingue, argued that they deserved rights by virtue of their loyalty and service to both France and the revolution and their status as property owners. Free blacks rhetorically depicted themselves as identical to free whites. Girondin leaders including the Comte de Mirabeau and Jacques-Pierre Brissot tried to push the matter through the National Assembly only to be blocked repeatedly by the planters' representatives and their allies in the colonial lobby. Nonetheless, the sentiment was spreading that citizenship should be extended to

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<sup>27</sup> David Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly," *American Historical Review* 94, 5 (December 1989), 1290-1308.

<sup>28</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 61-64.



free blacks who met the requirements. After Vincent Ogé's execution by white planters in 1791, the National Assembly granted citizenship rights to all freedmen born to two free parents; after the declaration of the Republic, rights were extended to all gens de couleurs and free blacks in March 1792, signed into law by the King on April 4, 1792 and known as the April 4 law.<sup>29</sup> The planters resented the laws, however, and when rumors reached the Caribbean in August 1792 that the king had suppressed the Revolution, the planters staged a coup d'état and overthrew republican institutions in the Antilles. Fighting broke out between republicans and monarchists across the Caribbean, fighting that culminated in Saint Domingue's slave revolution, Victor Hugues' revolutionary government on Guadeloupe and Martinique's planters handing the colony over to the British rather than submit to the Republic. Out of the civil war in the Americas came the 1794 emancipation law that abolished slavery in the French empire and extended the rights of citizenship to the former slaves.

The events of the revolutionary era shaped the subsequent history of the French Caribbean, remaking political institutions as well as political discourses. The memory of the events and the divisions it provoked would form an important component in French Caribbean political culture well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the conflicts and confusion of the French Revolution, the contours of Aimé Césaire's "two Frances" first emerged. One France was the France of the planters and their monarchist and colonialist allies in the metropole. On racialist grounds, they first denied the extension of rights to free people of color and then bitterly contested the 1794 emancipation. Not only did this France combat the truth enshrined in the motto of liberty, equality, fraternity, but it also was willing to

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<sup>29</sup> Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 98-107.

betray the sanctity of the nation in order to preserve its privileges. The planters on Saint Domingue, Guadeloupe and Martinique conspired to turn the colonies over to the British rather than submit to the revolutionary government's emancipation of the slave population. The Republican Commissioner Sonthonax and Toussaint Louverture's slave army blocked the conspiracy on Saint Domingue. On Guadeloupe, the Jacobin Commissioner Victor Hugues' mixed army defeated both the planters' forces as well as the British, preserving the Revolution in Guadeloupe. The planters succeeded only on Martinique, signing an accord that allowed the British to occupy the island in exchange for liquidating the Revolution's reforms and preserving slavery. This was the France of tyranny, oppression, privilege and even treason.<sup>30</sup>

The other France, on the other hand, was the France of the revolutionaries, the defenders of republican liberty and human equality. Abolitionists and Enlightenment writers including Raynal, Grégoire, Diderot and Condorcet were members of this France, as were the republican revolutionaries of 1791 and 1792, particularly those who fought to extend citizenship rights into the Caribbean and fought to suppress the royalist counter-revolution. Sonthonax, Hugues and other colonial Jacobins were particular exemplars of this tradition. Not only did they defend republican France and the Revolution, they also worked to emancipate and empower the islands' slave population and extend citizenship to all French men and women. The second France was the France that lived up to its ideals and accepted all French men regardless of color, class or origin.

In the revolutionary era, however, the racist, colonialist France triumphed over the egalitarian, republican France. While the revolutionaries initially triumphed on

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<sup>30</sup> Armand Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique, Vol. 1: des Arawaks à 1848* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), 276-285.

Guadeloupe, Napoleon's seizure of power and sympathy with the colonialist and planter class reversed both the gains of the Revolution and, eventually, emancipation itself. In 1802, Napoleon dispatched an army under the command of General Richepance to restore slavery on Guadeloupe. Richepance's troops landed and began to disarm black and mulatto members of the National Guard. Some of the soldiers refused to disarm and, led by a black Martiniquan Colonel, Louis Delgrès, mutinied with their arms and prepared to resist. Delgrès' troops managed to hold out for a few months before, singing the 'Marseillaise,' and, under the slogan 'No slavery, Liberty or death!,' chose to fight to the death at Matouba, a fortress in the mountains above Basse-Terre. As Richepance's soldiers slowly surrounded Delgrès' troops, Delgrès and his followers ignited kegs of gunpowder they had buried around their fortifications, killing themselves and Richepance's advance guard.<sup>31</sup> While the remaining rebel slaves on Guadeloupe were quickly suppressed and slavery restored, Delgrès' example convinced Jean-Jacques Dessalines to break with France and to resist Leclerc's attempt to land troops on Saint Domingue, which initiated the final phase of the Haitian Revolution that would lead to national independence.<sup>32</sup>

Slavery was reestablished on Martinique and Guadeloupe after 1802 though its practice and conditions were circumscribed by reforms that survived Napoleon's reinstitution of slavery. While the slaves were again tied to their plantations and forced to work for their former masters, the *ancien régime* was not reconstituted unchanged. The planter class' attempt to reestablish its uncontested control over the colonies was blocked from Paris. Napoleon's administrative centralization and its attendant professionalization

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<sup>31</sup> Dubois 2005, 393-401.

<sup>32</sup> Dubois 2004, 286-298.

of the civil service meant that metropolitan bureaucrats in the Ministry of Marine (the department responsible for the colonies) could check total planter control. For the slaves, conditions did not return completely to the dehumanizing brutality of the old regime. Rules governed working conditions and punishment for misbehavior and regulated the internal and external trade in slaves.<sup>33</sup>

The collapse of the Bourbons and the establishment of the July Monarchy further weakened planter influence in the metropole and strengthened anti-slavery activists both in and out of government. Abolitionist societies were reestablished and anti-slavery activists exerted a strong hand in Orléanist colonial policy. The new government worked to centralize power in Paris at the expense of the colonial councils, establishing a 'Commission on Colonial Legislation' to study and propose colonial reforms.<sup>34</sup> Conflicts between metropolitan liberals and the Creole elite dominated Caribbean colonial policy throughout the July Monarchy. Reformers in Paris passed laws liberalizing the economy, protecting the gens de couleurs, regulating the treatment of slaves and expanding the electoral franchise, while Creoles resisted these changes through their control of the colonial councils and governorships. Periodic conflicts broke out between freedmen and Creoles that spilled over into sabotage, destruction and open combat.<sup>35</sup>

By the late 1840s the metropolitan liberals decisively gained the upper hand. In 1831, free people of color were granted full civil rights, even if enforcing those rights remained difficult and at the discretion of the colonial government. In 1833, the National Assembly revoked the colonies' autonomy and split legislative power between the

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<sup>33</sup> Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, *Sweet Liberty: the Final Days of Slavery in Martinique* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 72-111.

<sup>34</sup> Schloss, 132.

<sup>35</sup> Schloss, 152-183; Nicolas 1996, 349-381.

Colonial Council and the National Assembly and executive power between the Minister for the Marine, the King and the governor.<sup>36</sup> The Creole elite bitterly resisted these reforms, lobbying Paris to revoke or curtail the gens de couleurs' rights with lurid tales of rape, miscegenation and primitive violence.<sup>37</sup> In 1836, the National Assembly passed a law emancipating any slave who set foot on metropolitan soil and in 1839 empanelled the Guizot-Rémusat Commission to study the feasibility and process of emancipation.<sup>38</sup>

Liberals outside of government, most prominently the young abolitionist Victor Schoelcher, continued to press the government to abolish slavery immediately and without reservation. The son a porcelain manufacturer, Schoelcher had traveled around the Caribbean on business, visiting Martinique, Guadeloupe and Haiti, as well as Puerto Rico and the British West Indies. He returned to Paris in 1841 and composed his study, *Des colonies françaises*, demanding immediate abolition.<sup>39</sup> Following the 1848 February Revolution, Schoelcher was appointed Under Secretary for the Colonies in the provisional government, serving under his friend, François Arago, who became the first joint Secretary of the Marine and the Colonies. Arago appointed Schoelcher to head a committee to study the abolition of slavery. The committee recommended full and immediate emancipation in the entire empire, a proposal Arago accepted and which the provisional government made law on 27 April 1848.<sup>40</sup>

The news of emancipation took more than six weeks to reach the Caribbean. The slaves, hopeful following the February Revolution and the reports emanating from Paris that the government was considering abolition, rebelled at the beginning of May. Many

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<sup>36</sup> The Maritime Ministry was responsible for the colonies. Nicolas 1996, 349-51.

<sup>37</sup> Schloss, 174-6.

<sup>38</sup> Schloss, 165, 176.

<sup>39</sup> Nelly Schmidt, *Victor Schoelcher* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 11-32

<sup>40</sup> Schmidt, 103-109.

slaves believed they had been freed and that the *béké* were withholding news of emancipation and refusing to implement the law. The revolt culminated on May 22nd when, in order to put an end to the rebellion, the Colonial Council and governor of Martinique declared slavery abolished. When news arrived on Guadeloupe a few days later, Guadeloupe's governor moved to stem rebellion and also declared slavery abolished. Less than two weeks later, newspapers arriving from Paris announced that the provisional government had abolished slavery; official notice arrived a few weeks after with the arrival of the new republican commissioners, dispatched from Paris to oversee emancipation, who arrived in the Antilles to find slavery already abolished.<sup>41</sup>

While slavery was abolished, the essential foundation of Antillean society remained largely untouched. While France went further than Britain by granting the former slaves citizenship, as in the British Caribbean the post-emancipation colonial government attempted to preserve the plantation system and coax ex-slaves back to work on the sugar plantations. Schoelcher and his followers – the *schoelcheristes* – demanded that economic reforms, particularly land reform, accompany emancipation. But the métis middle classes, led by Cyril Bissette, worked with the planters to maintain the basic architecture of the Antillean sugar economy. The *bissettistes* were aligned with the moderate republican center while the *schoelcheristes* were associated with radical republicans and the nascent socialist movement. The main conflict hinged on the reorganization of the post-slave economy and the relationship between the islands' black majority and the *béké* elite. Bissette elected to form an alliance with the *béké*, asking Auguste Pécoul, part of a progressive faction of the *béké*, to run on a joint ticket for Parliament. Bissette argued that, with slavery overcome, Antilleans – master and ex-slave

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<sup>41</sup> Nicolas 1996 tome 1, 381-398.

alike – must have “peace and a single family.” Bissette further urged “conciliation,” counseling Antilleans to “forget the past” for the sake of the future, urging that all work together to make the colony prosperous and stable. He also argued in favor of local autonomy and self-government, particularly in the internal affairs of the colony, a position that granted the *béké* de facto control over the most important economic matters. In effect, Bissette endorsed the continuation of the *béké*’s patriarchal-plantation order, albeit cleansed of chattel slavery.<sup>42</sup>

Schoelcher was less concerned with reconciliation than with empowering the Antilles’ black majority. In his 1841 book, he had predicted that emancipation would be an empty promise without concomitant economic and social reform. Thus Schoelcher and the *schoelcheristes* argued for land redistribution, protections for agricultural workers and smallholders, the extension of republican institutions like schools and charities, and the democratization of Martinique’s economic and political order. Schoelcher predicted that the white planters would oppose even mild reforms and would work to undermine those reforms already enshrined in the new constitution. During his time in the Antilles, his experience with the *béké* had been negative and he perceived them as not only opposed to reform but to emancipation and the new republican order. Specific proposals included ending the Pacte Colonial that favored the large planters, the extension of the Republic’s social and educational reforms to the colonies and the eventual total absorption of the Caribbean colonies into France as full departments of the Republic.<sup>43</sup>

The *béké* elite reacted to this program with a mixture of panic and persuasion. They denounced Schoelcher as a “radical demagogue” and his acolytes as “Communists”

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<sup>42</sup> Chris Bongie, *Islands and Exiles: the Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 331.

<sup>43</sup> Schmidt, 114-121.

and accused them of preparing a conspiracy of former slaves to kill their masters and break up the plantations. Through Bissette and through their influence in colonial affairs, the *béké* attempted to block the most radical reforms and diminish Schoelcher's prestige and position with the new government.<sup>44</sup> The conflict between the two camps was never resolved, however, as the dispute over Martinique's future was preempted by Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* in December 1851, a coup supported by the Antillean plantocracy and bitterly resented by the black and métis majority.<sup>45</sup>

The restoration of the republic in 1871 once again put the extent of assimilation, citizenship and democracy in the Antilles into question. The return to representative institutions diminished *béké* power and restored political power to the islands' black and métis majority. The plantocracy's old adversary, Schoelcher, returned from exile and was elected to the National Assembly from Martinique and later made senator-for-life.<sup>46</sup> The *béké* continued their campaign against Schoelcher and against assimilation, describing him as a "separatist" and a "devil" and denouncing his program as "riots, assassinations, the violation of property to the cry of... Vive Schoelcher!"<sup>47</sup> Many *béké* expressed openly monarchist views and some planters even dispatched a delegation to meet with the exiled Bourbon pretender, the Comte de Chambord.<sup>48</sup> Despite the vituperation, the *béké*'s direct power was broken by the restoration of the republic; métis and black politicians controlled the parliamentary seats to Paris as well as the Colonial Council.

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<sup>44</sup> Schmidt, 129; Richard D.E. Burton, *La famille coloniale: la Martinique et la Mère Patrie, 1789-1992* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), 69.

<sup>45</sup> Schoelcher was one of the leaders of the Paris Sections' revolt against the coup on December 2-3, 1851, personally fighting on the barricades alongside Victor Hugo, Lazare Carnot and Alphonse Baudin. He chose exile over submission to Louis Napoleon and, despite Napoleon's personal invitation to Schoelcher to return to France with full amnesty in 1859, remained in London until after the collapse of the Second Empire. Schmidt, 149-159.

<sup>46</sup> Schmidt, 235-6.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Schmidt, 244.

<sup>48</sup> Burton, 94.



With *béké* power largely broken, the differing interests of the métis middle class and the black working class became more apparent and the political and electoral alliance that had enabled them to overcome *béké* power came apart. Conflict flowed also from the changing socio-economic arrangements of Antillean society. The local economy since Martinique's and Guadeloupe's colonization in the 17<sup>th</sup> century had been dominated by a small class of white settlers and planters. As colonial society developed, the *béké* not only emphasized the racial boundary between whites and slaves, but also enforced class differences with "small" lower class whites, and racial and class differences with free people of color. The *béké* resented metropolitan control, whether Bourbon mercantilist policy or revolutionary attacks on slavery and the islands' racial hierarchies.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, they faced a different threat from metropolitan capital. Emancipation in 1848 weakened the planters' competitive advantage, not by making sugar more expensive but by undermining plantation labor discipline. In addition, sugar beet production in the Europe and North America, new sources of sugar production in Africa and the globalization of world markets in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century also weakened the planters' economic position. Metropolitan control of trade – through both the General Transatlantic Company (*CGT*) and commerce – soon translated into financial interests in both agriculture and sugar processing. Historically, sugar was grown in the Caribbean and that part of the production process necessary to preserve the crop was carried out in the Caribbean; the more lucrative process of refining and processing occurred in the metropole, guaranteed by patents, charters and other forms of monopoly. Beginning under the Second Empire and accelerating after the 1871 restoration of the Republic, the local *béké* planters were forced into accommodations with metropolitan capital that

increasingly controlled the colonial trade. The 1880s “sugar crisis” completed the shift from local to metropolitan control. After 1884, Antillean sugar production and income fell off dramatically, dropping from nearly 50 million tons per year (valued at 17 million francs) to less than 20 million tons in 1892 (valued at only 7.4 million francs). The crisis accelerated the concentration of property into the hands of a few large landlords and distillery owners, particularly those who were able to weather the crisis with support from metropolitan capital. Production and prices would not begin to recover until 1900.<sup>49</sup>

The concentration of agricultural and productive capital into the hands of a few families, backed by metropolitan capital, contributed to developing class divisions on the island. As small planters declined, the Antillean economy increasingly resembled industrial labor relations, with a small owner class, a slightly larger managerial class and a large industrial and peasant workforce. The 1900 sugar strike on Martinique, which spread to Guadeloupe, was the first extended disturbance in the French Caribbean under the new conditions of production and ownership. The strike began just after New Year’s in the north on the plantations near Basse-Pointe and Macouba and spread, through working class networks, to the center of Martinique’s sugar and rum industry around Sainte-Marie in the center of the island. News of the strike spread further south and by the beginning of February, Martinique’s sugar industry was paralyzed. Ad hoc worker’s committees negotiated with the factory owners and métis middle classes for wage increases.<sup>50</sup> The factory owners proposed to a 25% raise on base salary (from 1 franc to 1.25 franc per day) while the workers countered with a 100% raise (to 2 francs per day) in base salary. The factory owners eventually relented and the workers went back at 2

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<sup>49</sup> Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande, *Les origines du mouvement ouvrier en Martinique, 1870-1900* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 109.

<sup>50</sup> Adélaïde-Merlande, 142-157.

francs per day.<sup>51</sup> Out of the worker's committees during the strike formed the first Antillean unions and the first local committees of the Socialist Party.

This change in patterns of ownership, management and the production process itself contributed, the historian Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande has argued, to the emergence of an organized Antillean working class and an organized Antillean labor movement. The class alliance of the petit bourgeois métis class with metropolitan capital split the main Antillean parties. Working class blacks felt unrepresented by the métis middle class and the Radical Party, which dominated local politics, while for the métis middle class, links to the metropole were important for their career prospects, their social standing and their children's education and future. The métis middle class further perceived metropolitan capital as an important ally in their political struggle against the *béké*. Metropolitan commercial interests in the Antilles often were ignorant of or indifferent to the Antilles' racially stratified society and thus, to many Antilleans, appeared as colorblind defenders of republican equality. Métis politicians aligned themselves with metropolitan interests, seeing in metropolitan investment the means to both improve Martinique and Guadeloupe and bond them more tightly to France. However, as the sugar economy industrialized and Antillean society divided into two opposed classes, the alliance between working class blacks and the métis middle class was squeezed. The Socialist Party and its allied unions broke with coalition politics in favor of an organization that represented solely the interests of the Antillean working class.

During the 1900 sugar strike, the colonial administration responded to the factory owners' requests to quell the strike and force the workers back to the fields. The workers responded with traditional forms of resistance, sneaking out under cover of night and,

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<sup>51</sup> Adélaïde-Merlande, 170-9.

dressed as women, setting fire to the cane fields. Two days after the first fires, the governor ordered out the troops and on February 8<sup>th</sup>, French soldiers opened fire on a crowd in the commune of François; at least 8 people were killed and dozens more were wounded.<sup>52</sup> Despite complaints to the governor, demonstrations and protests from sympathetic Socialist deputies in the National Assembly, no investigation or inquiry was ever conducted. In fact, the colonial administration concentrated on investigating the strike's organizers and attempting to discover the identities of the workers who set the fires. Despite wage concessions, the factory owners harassed worker militants and began to construct a blacklist of labor activists. Martinique's and Guadeloupe's paradoxical administration status – simultaneously colonies and communes of France – provided a veneer of democratic legitimacy while still providing the governor with extensive executive power and leeway. The Antilles' incomplete status – communities of citizens but bureaucratically colonial – enabled the local elite uncontested power over internal colonial decisions. As the Antilles' working class movement came together following the 1900 labor disputes, the nascent Socialist Party targeted Martinique's and Guadeloupe's colonial status as a vital political project. The elimination of colonial status would bring the islands under the protection of metropolitan legislation, replace the governor with a prefect answerable to Paris and eliminate the corruption of Antillean politics. This political program came to be known as assimilation and was supported by both moderate and radical political parties, though the parties differed in their definition of what assimilation would constitute.

The Socialist movement, for example, was strongly pro-assimilation but it rejected the idea that assimilation meant cross-class social unity and peace. The 1900

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<sup>52</sup> No one knows the exact number. Adélaïde-Merlande, 170; Nicolas 1996 tome 2, 157.

strikes had revealed the poverty and powerlessness of the Antilles' working class majority, which was also its black majority. The Socialists contrasted themselves with the republican left, which continued to understand Assimilation as a necessary step to achieving social harmony. Ernest Deproge, long the deputy from Martinique to the National Assembly, expressed this sentiment most clearly: "We are divided into classes and categories; this was the work of the monarchy, which is not completely destroyed. It is the Republic that is erasing the last vestiges of the past and it is incumbent on us, its representatives, to bring us closer, to make of us one and the same family."<sup>53</sup> The Socialist leaders, Guadeloupean Hégésippe Légitimus and Martiniquan Joseph Lagrosillière, rejected this view and argued that this language of family and unity obscured the fact that the Antillean majority remained poor and powerless. While Deproge and other republicans inherited Schoelcher's moderate, utopian socialism, Légitimus and Lagrosillière advocated class struggle socialism. While not revolutionaries – both were aligned with Jean Jaurès' SFIO – they nonetheless rejected the Radicals' appeals to unity and family. The argument revolved around the extent and intent of assimilation. Radicals wanted the Antilles assimilated to France through their individual citizenship and as departments. The Socialists argued instead that Antilleans should assimilate not at the level of abstract citizenship but as members of the French working class and should unite with the "shining light" of the "three million organized workers who extend their hand across the ocean."<sup>54</sup> Assimilation meant little if Martinique's black

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<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Burton, 104.

<sup>54</sup> Légitimus quoted in Burton, 116.

majority remained miserably poor and locked out of power by an alliance of métis and white elites.<sup>55</sup>

On Martinique, Lagrosillière and the Socialists emerged as the implacable foes of this arrangement, which allowed metropolitan capital, the *béké* and the métis middle classes to control the islands' politics. Despite the appeal of Socialist policies and Lagrosillière's personal popularity, he was unable to win election over the métis candidates of the Radical Party, which was silently supported by the *béké* and the factory owners. The métis-*béké* alliance referred to itself as the "party of order" and used various tactics, ranging from slander, bribery, vote-rigging, voter fraud and corruption to undermine the Socialist movement and keep Lagrosillière and his allies out of power. Further, the colonial administration was willing to use open violence to defend elite interests and guarantee that the Socialists were unable to organize or win election. During a 1923 sugar strike, Eugène Aubéry, owner of the Lareinty factory and a member of Martinique's Colonial Council, the main legislative body governing the colony's internal affairs, led a group of armed men who attacked a meeting held by Lagrosillière, killing one and wounding eight. A week later the strike was broken in Trinité when the police and their *béké* deputies shot and killed two striking workers. Martinique's prosecutor – himself married to the daughter of a *béké* planter – never investigated. Despite protests in the National Assembly, the incidents were deemed an internal colonial matter and the province of the Colonial Ministry.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Burton, 116-127; Nicolas 1996 tome 2, 164-170; Robert Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity: Socialism, Nationalism and National Identity during the French Fin de Siècle France* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 99-103.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel: A Story of Colonialism and Resistance in the Caribbean* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 7.

The most serious outbreak of violence occurred during the 1925 parliamentary elections that once again pitted Lagrosillière against the factory owners' preferred candidate, Henri Lémery. The new governor, Governor Richard, had served in Africa and Indochina; upon his arrival he proposed to stay out of politics but his virulent fear and hatred of Communism pushed him to defend the factory owners' interests against the perceived threat of Lagrosillière and his Socialists.<sup>57</sup> In his dispatches back to Paris Richard portrayed Lagrosillière as a “neo-Schoelcheriste” and a “Red,” a threat to law and order in the colony. By the time the electoral campaign ended, two Socialist members of the General Council, Louis des Étages and Charles Zizine, had been shot down in the streets in an apparent assassination plot, while in the town of Diamant, a dozen people were killed when the police opened fire on a crowd that had gathered to protect the ballot box from tampering. Ironically, Richard's preferred candidate in Diamant, Colonel de Coppens, a *béké* policeman and member of the Hayot family, was among the dead, killed in the fusillade as he escorted the ballot box to Diamant's city hall. In the end, Lagrosillière was once again “defeated” and the ‘Bloc Républicain’ (the Right) swept the municipal and federal elections.<sup>58</sup>

The incident demonstrated the tenuous nature of Martinique's democracy and the limits of Antillean citizenship under the colonial regime. When news of the incident arrived in Paris, the reaction was mixed. The new colonialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was accompanied by scientific racism and Antilleans, granted citizenship in 1848, were racialized and their citizenship called into question. The President of the Republic,

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<sup>57</sup> Price, 8-9.

<sup>58</sup> Nicolas 1996 tome 2, 203-210; Richard Price recounts this incident with great poetry and insight, counterpoising the official story, recorded in state archives, with his own anthropological reconstruction drawn from interviews, art criticism and newspaper accounts. Price, 1-48.

Raymond Poincaré, reacted to Socialist demands for an investigation with the statement that “the only question that needs to be addressed in the Antilles concerns the elimination of universal suffrage.”<sup>59</sup> The newspaper *Le Matin* asked whether France had shown “an imprudent generosity” in extending citizenship rights to ex-slaves, while Police Inspector Pégourier, tasked with investigating the violence, informed his superiors that the inhabitants of Diamant were “so *sauvage*” that they were referred to “as Africans.”<sup>60</sup> Rightists argued that Antilleans’ race determined their political preference for “red anarchy,” and that their political preferences demonstrated their savagery, barbarism and unfitness for the rights of citizenship in civilized France. The metropolitan Socialists and the Left, however, defended Antillean rights, attacking Richard for his brutality and the government for its inaction. The Party leadership dispatched the editor of *Paris-Soir*, Louis Frossard, to Martinique to investigate the violence and the larger problem of electoral fraud and political corruption. When the government continued to refuse to conduct an official investigation, Socialist deputies protested by reading Frossard’s report into the parliamentary record. Frossard took to the pages of *Paris-Soir* to lambast Governor Richard and the Minister of the Colonies Hesse.<sup>61</sup>

For the Socialists, the corruption and violence in the Antilles undermined the promise of democracy and equality instituted in the 1848 emancipation. This corruption and violence, they argued, was possible only because Antilleans, despite possessing citizenship, lived under a colonial regime answerable only to the Colonial Ministry. The Antillean white elite and their métis allies, backed by metropolitan commercial interests with government support, exploited the gap between colony and department to maintain

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Price, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Price, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Price, 44-6.



total control over Antillean social and political life. The *béké* were able to continue to rule the Antilles through fraud, vote-rigging and if necessary violence, knowing they would never face serious investigation as they were protected by the governor and the Colonial Ministry. For the Socialists, ending the Antilles' colonial status was vital to defend both democracy and equality. In addition, only by bringing the Antilles under the protection of metropolitan legislation and institutions could the Socialists hope to improve the condition of the Antillean working class, guaranteeing their ability to join unions, form political parties and contest elections. Assimilation – or as it was also known, departmentalization – emerged as the major project of both the Antillean and metropolitan Left, the solution to *béké* control of the Antilles' economy and politics as well as a necessary step to unite the Antillean and French working classes.

Despite their strident rhetoric, the Antillean Socialists were moderates, steeped in the traditions of the Jaurèsian wing of French Socialism. They favored the formation of unions and political parties, believing that the working class could only achieve its ends through the ballot box. The push for assimilation fit within the Socialists' legalistic and predominantly electoral political strategy. In the Antilles, Lagrosillière was the most prominent advocate of this position and his status as party leader meant that this strategy was the official policy of the Martiniquan Socialist party as a whole. Nonetheless, within the Martiniquan federation there was a significant dissident tendency, which mirrored the divisions within the larger Socialist Party, that supported an explicitly revolutionary rather than reformist politics. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia would cause a split in the Martiniquan and Guadeloupean Socialist movement similar to the larger fracture that split the French Socialist movement into the French Socialist Party (SFIO) and the

French Communist Party (PCF).<sup>62</sup> Dissident members of the local SFIO federation had long been frustrated with Lagrosillière's tactical moderation; despite the corruption and violence that repeatedly denied Lagrosillière a seat in the National Assembly, he stuck to Léon Blum's thesis that the working-class could liberate itself only through the ballot box.<sup>63</sup> Members of the left-wing of the local federation, namely Jules Monnerot and Léopold Bissol, criticized Lagrosillière's position for the better part of the 1910s, insisting that the working-class movement must expand beyond the electoral realm, particularly in Martinique where *béké* corruption and government indifference made the ballot box impractical. The Leftists, led by Monnerot, a professor of philosophy at the Lycée, advocated direct action, politically and industrially.<sup>64</sup>

The conflict between Lagrosillière and his Leftist critics came to a head in 1919 when Lagrosillière, like many Antillean radicals before him, "[went] down the road a piece with the factory," and entered into an electoral alliance with a 'progressive' member of the white elite.<sup>65</sup> He signed the "Sainte-Marie" accords in 1919 with his longtime rival Fernand Clerc, a Radical lawyer who represented a faction of pro-republican white colonists and civil servants. Lagrosillière and Clerc established a joint electoral list – the Schoelcherist Republican Party – and conducted a coordinated electoral campaign that emphasized ending corruption, restoring democratic protections and securing increased government investment in the local economy. Lagrosillière

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<sup>62</sup> René Méné, "Notes sur le Développement Historique du Marxisme à la Martinique: Le Marxisme du Cercle" in *Action* n° 13 (Mai 1967), republished in Méné, *Pour l'émancipation et l'identité du peuple Martiniquais* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), 251-262; Armand Nicolas, *L'Histoire de la Martinique, tome 2: de 1848 à 1939* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 195-201.

<sup>63</sup> On Lagrosillière: Camille Darsières, *Joseph Lagrosillière, Socialiste coloniale*, 3 vols. (Fort-de-France: Editions Désormeaux, 1999).

<sup>64</sup> Nicolas, tome 2, 181-4.

<sup>65</sup> The phrase is a Martiniquan colloquialism that described a very specific form of political and personal compromise – making a deal with the "factory" to guarantee an outcome, in this case, electoral victory.

eschewed usual Socialist demands in order to hold the alliance together and secure the support of métis and white middle class supporters. Lagrosillière's jettisoning of the Socialist platform infuriated his critics, who accused him of betraying his principles and his supporters. In addition, suspicious letters circulated across Martinique accusing Lagrosillière of making a deal with the three principal *béké* families that would allow Lagrosillière and Clerc to win the parliamentary seats in exchange for backing Henri Lémery for Martinique's senate seat.<sup>66</sup> Whether the letters were forgeries or not, they manipulated a recurrent theme in Antillean politics: the factory owners' eventual seduction of their erstwhile radical opponents. Following the Sainte-Marie accord, Jules Monnerot, leader of the Socialist left, denounced Lagrosillière as a "traitor" for "making an open alliance with the capitalist class."<sup>67</sup> Monnerot's faction split from the Socialist Party in December 1919 and formed the "Groupe Jean Jaurès" which, they argued, would preserve the tradition and autonomy of Socialist politics.

For the Socialist left-wing, what was at stake was the very principle of Martinique's popular movement. History seemed to be repeating itself. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the old anti-republican movement was in decline and the *béké* had shifted their support to conservative members of the republican camp, particularly two *métis* politicians, Victor Severé and Henry Lémery.<sup>68</sup> Liberal republicans, including progressive *béké*, opposed them but this opposition occurred not at the ballot box but within the republican bloc itself. Deals were made in backrooms and corruption and

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<sup>66</sup> Darsières doubts the legitimacy of these letters, ascribing their origin to a dirty tricks campaign by the three *béké* families to undermine Lagrosillière's support among the working classes; Darsières, tome 2, 256-269. Nicolas does not comment on the letters despite his condemnation of the alliance. The letters are most likely forgeries since only a few years later, Aubéry, one of the "big three," attacked Lagrosillière and his supporters. The point, however, is that the letters

<sup>67</sup> Darsières, 196.

<sup>68</sup> Price, 8.

electoral fraud, often with the winking acquiescence of the governor, guaranteed that the preferred candidate always won. Severé and Lémery, connected to the *béké* and supported financially, defeated their internal rivals and as elections for the National Assembly were frequently uncontested, were elected without opposition. The two factions of republicans, despite claiming Schoelcher's mantle, represented the interests of the white planters and the métis middle class, constituting only a small fraction of the total population. The working class in the distilleries, factories and on the docks, and the vast peasant majority, were locked out of political power. The growth of the local socialist movement after 1880 had tapped into the frustrations of Martinique's blacks, both in the field and in the towns. The Socialists had represented an end to political corruption, a counterweight to *béké* power both at the ballot box and, through the SFIO, in Paris, the promise of democracy and equality through the redistribution of economic power. Thus the lines of conflict were clearly drawn: on the one side stood the elite, who owned the land and the factories, and on the other, Martinique's black, disenfranchised, impoverished majority represented through the Socialists.<sup>69</sup>

It was within this context that Lagrosillière's alliance was seen as such a profound betrayal. Forging an alliance with Clerc, a white lawyer connected to the bosses (*patronat*) in order to win electoral victory was problem enough, but the rumored deal cut with the three *béké* families constituted, in the eyes of the already-frustrated left-wing of the SFIO, a complete betrayal of the principles and history of the Martiniquan socialist movement. To stay true to socialist principles there could never be a compromise with the *béké* proprietors. Compromise would negate the fundamental political goal of the

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<sup>69</sup> Cécile Celma, "La vie politique en Martinique des années 1910-1939" in Roland Suvelor, ed., *Historial Antillais, Vol. V* (Fort-de-France: Société Dajani, 1981), 317-359.

Socialist party: the expropriation of the *béké* landowners and metropolitan factory owners in order to redistribute wealth to the black majority. An alliance would make such an expropriation impossible. Without a program founded in the redistribution of wealth and the empowerment of the black majority, the Socialist Party's very *raison d'être* was, in the eyes of Monnerot, Bissol and their faction, thrown into question.

While the Groupe Jean Jaurès initially adhered to the national federation, arguing that Lagrosillière's position violated socialist principles and the party's political line, the Bolshevik Revolution provided a new home for socialists who wanted revolutionary change rather than piecemeal reform.<sup>70</sup> This split between moderates and radicals foreshadowed the climactic break that would occur at the 1920 Congrès de Tours, when the left-wing majority of the national SFIO declared their adhesion to the Third International and split the French Left by forming the Parti Communiste Français.<sup>71</sup> Both Martiniquan and metropolitan Socialists left the SFIO due to similar concerns: frustration with the moderation of the SFIO leadership; tactical disagreements over the SFIO's collaboration with bourgeois parties in the wartime "*union sacrée*"; and disgust with the nationalism produced out of the war.<sup>72</sup> Further, both Martiniquans and metropolitans were inspired by the victorious revolution in Russia and were inspired by Lenin and the Bolsheviks' reinvigoration of revolutionary socialism.<sup>73</sup> For Martiniquan socialists, Lenin's theses on imperialism and his criticism of the imperial system were particularly appealing. Following the Congrès de Tours and the official formation of the PCF,

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<sup>70</sup> Ménénil 2008, 254.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.; Maxwell Adereth, *The French Communist Party: A Critical History, 1920-1984* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 18-28; Robert Wohl, *French Communism in the Making, 1914-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), particularly Chapter 5.

<sup>72</sup> Adereth, 15-18.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.; Ménénil 2008, 254-9.

Monnerot, Bissol and the other dissident socialists renamed themselves the Groupe Communiste Jean Jaurès, adopted an explicitly revolutionary ideology consistent with the principles of Lenin as laid out in the Third International, and launched a newspaper, *Justice*, under Monnerot's editorship.

Adherence to the Third International and Communism also changed the meaning of assimilation. Assimilation was rooted in principles of universal humanity, equality, citizenship and solidarity; it supposed that all men were equal and that through republicanism equality and freedom would be made concrete through the republican state. Communism extended these principles but gave them a new meaning in a new context. Martiniquan Communists saw assimilation with France as part of the larger worldwide struggle for Communism. Union with France meant union with the French working class, a necessary step toward union with the international proletariat. Assimilation no longer served purely republican ends but was part of unifying the national and international working class and a necessary step toward triumph of socialism. Assimilation was not only desirable in order to safeguard democratic rights but necessary for economic, political and tactical reasons; while initially a bourgeois republican project, assimilation, like democracy, would provide the working class with the tools to seize political power and overthrow their bourgeois masters.<sup>74</sup>

The 1934 murder of André Alier, the editor of the Communists' paper *Justice* and the Party's leading activist and tactician reinforced for the Communists (and many other Antillean democrats) the need to end colonial government in the Antilles. His murder, which Eugène Aubéry, a powerful *patronat*, allegedly ordered, and the resulting failure to convict anyone of the crime, was emblematic of Martinique's corruption and

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<sup>74</sup> See Monnerot's essays published in *Justice* in the 1930s; Ménil 2008, 256-266.

institutional lethargy.<sup>75</sup> It demonstrated to many black Martiniquans that their citizenship was a fragile quantity, subject to the whims of the *béké* and the colonial administration. Alier had been investigating claims of electoral fraud surrounding Henri Lémery's reelection as senator in 1932. Despite the growing strength of the SFIO and a hard-fought campaign, Lémery was reelected easily; Eugène Aubéry and the other *patronats* had supported Lémery's reelection. Alier instead discovered corruption and collusion between Aubéry, Lémery, and other public officials. Alier published the deposition of one of Aubéry's former colleagues that alleged that Aubéry had bribed Lémery and several other public officials, including a judge who had ruled favorably in a tax claim brought against Aubéry. Leaving work on New Year's day, 1934, Alier was kidnapped by three unknown men; they tied him up, took him out by boat and threw him into the ocean. Alier managed to escape his bonds and swim ashore. He immediately filed a complaint with the police and the general prosecutor, who ignored his demands for an investigation and protection. On January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1934, Alier's bound corpse washed up on a beach near Case-Pilote.<sup>76</sup>

The Alier affaire attracted widespread attention, in Paris and across the French empire, symbolizing colonial injustice and catalyzing demands for colonial reform. The initial investigation had inculpated four men from the neighboring British colony of Saint Lucia, but the investigating magistrate was recalled to France in the middle of his investigation and a magistrate with ties to Aubéry was appointed in his place. Two of the men were tried but were freed on insufficient evidence; after that the investigation was

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<sup>75</sup> Aubéry had married into the Hayot family, one of the three old *béké* families, and through his wife's inheritance, controlled 24 plantations totaling more than 2600 hectares, plus the Lareinty works, the largest distillery and factory in the island.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 226-7; Denise Moran, *Le meurtre d'Andre Alier* (Paris: Defense-Editions, 1936).

closed. Condemnations of the murder and messages of support flooded into *Justice* from Paris, French West Africa, the United States and the British West Indies. The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, the PCF and all the major French trade unions called for a full investigation. Denise Moran, a journalist with *Régards*, suggested that the trial was not about the murder, but was a “trial of colonial liberty... the regime is on trial.”<sup>77</sup> The impunity with which the colonial elite operated, with the active collusion of the colonial administration, demonstrated the need for assimilation to end Martinique’s colonial status. Martinique’s colonial status, the gap between its institutions and those of the Republic, had allowed someone to get away with murder. Alier’s murder lent urgency to the PCF-M’s demand for assimilation; it seemed that the continuation of the colonial regime endangered not only their rights but their lives as well.<sup>78</sup>

The Vichy interregnum exacerbated the frustration and anger engendered by Alier’s murder. The Popular Front had initiated a number of reforms in the Antilles, cracking down on electoral fraud, making it easier to form trade unions and appointing black civil servants to important positions; Félix Éboué, for example, was made governor of Guadeloupe. The Popular Front also studied the possibility of transforming Martinique and Guadeloupe into full departments.<sup>79</sup> Many Antilleans perceived that, after nearly a century of contradiction, the islands would move from colonies to constituent parts of the

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<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Nicolas, *tome 2*, 228-9.

<sup>78</sup> Alier’s murder continued to have repercussions. In January 1936, following the acquittal of the two Saint Lucians for murder, Alier’s younger brother Marcel tried to shoot Eugène Aubéry. Marcel Alier himself was acquitted later that year.

<sup>79</sup> Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, *French Colonial Empire and the Popular Front: Hope and Disillusion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain’s National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); William B. Cohen, “The Colonial Policy of the Popular Front,” *French Historical Studies* 7,3 (1972), 368-393.



Republic. However, the collapse of the Popular Front in 1939 followed by the war delayed the implementation of reform.

Vichy rule in the islands was profoundly alienating for Martinique's and Guadeloupe's majority black population. The islands were caught between the global strategy of Britain and the United States on the one hand, Vichy and their German sponsors on the other. Following the June 1940 surrender of the French armies and the humiliating armistice that installed Vichy control in France and the French empire, the English immediately blockaded France's Caribbean colonies. Most of the French Caribbean fleet was bottled up in Fort-de-France harbor, along with nearly 286 tons of treasury gold. The French naval commander, Admiral Robert, negotiated an arrangement with Anglo-American forces: in exchange for essentially sitting out the war and leaving both the gold and his fleet in place, the British and Americans agreed not to attack the islands and left internal colonial affairs to Admiral Robert.<sup>80</sup>

The war years were hard on Guadeloupe and Martinique. The Anglo-American blockade meant that the islands were self-dependent for all their needs. In addition, Robert ruled the island with a heavy hand, deferring to the islands' white elite and enforcing his own brand of Vichy rule through the more than 3000 sailors under his command, most of whom were stationed in Fort-de-France for the duration of the war. The Communist Party was proscribed and Communist leaders were fired from their jobs and subject to arrest. Robert's sailors and marines were raucous, violent and overtly racist to Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans, including the métis middle classes who did not see themselves as black. Hundreds, if not thousands, of young Antilleans escaped their home

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<sup>80</sup> Martin Thomas, "Deferring to Vichy in the Western Hemisphere: The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair of 1941," *The International History Review* 19,4 (Nov. 1997), 809-835.

islands under cover of night to travel to neighboring British islands in order to join up with General de Gaulle's Free French army.<sup>81</sup> The Robert regime's racism and authoritarianism eventually provoked a backlash and in the spring of 1943 a series of disturbances led to the collapse of Robert's government and the quick accession of Martinique and Guadeloupe to de Gaulle's standard. The events began with a May Day general strike on Martinique, called by underground Free French and Communist elements; the strike was soon followed by an open insurrection on Guadeloupe. Pro-de Gaulle forces within the colonial government pushed Robert out and in order to forestall an Anglo-American invasion, declared for the Free French. The Algiers government quickly sent representatives to the Caribbean to reestablish French institutions.<sup>82</sup>

It would be the war and the Vichy occupation that ushered in Martinique's and Guadeloupe's long-delayed assimilation to the French Republic. Robert's pro-*béké* and openly racist regime, which witnessed a return to the "other France" of racism, anti-republicanism and authoritarianism, ironically accelerated and precipitated the final annihilation of *béké* political power and paved the way for the ascendancy of black political power, exercised through the Communist and Socialist parties. Many prominent métis politicians, including Henri Lémery – who was briefly a member of Laval's government – were subjected to 'national degradation' due to their wartime collaboration, losing their civil rights and ability to hold office.<sup>83</sup> Their banishment from public life,

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<sup>81</sup> Famously, a young Frantz Fanon and his best friend Marcel Manville made a night escape to the British colony of Dominica to join de Gaulle's forces. David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life* (New York: Picador, 2000), 72-111.

<sup>82</sup> The best analysis of the events of 1943 is Richard D.E. Burton, "'Nos journées de juin': the Historical Significance of the Liberation of Martinique (June 1943)" in Harry Roderick Kedward and Nancy Wood, eds., *The Liberation of France: Image and Event* (London: Berg, 1995), 227-240; also, Jennings, 120-9.

<sup>83</sup> Lémery was apparently bitter at his fate, especially since his great rival, Félix Éboué, was idolized and eventually buried in the Panthéon for his pivotal role in rallying the Empire to de Gaulle's standard. Brian Weinstein, *Félix Éboué* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

combined with disillusionment with the old Third Republic parties, combined to open the way to a new generation of politicians, most importantly the prominent poet Aimé Césaire, who allied with the Communist Party to dominate Martinique's postwar politics. His alliance with the Communists was premised on their rising national stature, reinforced by the PCF's prominent role in the Resistance and its position on the NCR. At the 1944 Brazzaville Conference and in the provisional government, Communist legislators argued for the retention of empire but reorganized along democratic lines. Antillean assimilation was considered an important part of postwar imperial reform. With the writing of the new constitution, the reform of the empire into the Union Française and the empowerment of Martinique's black majority, assimilation would, after two centuries of struggle and setback, finally triumph.

## Chapter Two

### Decolonization Through Assimilation: the Union Française and the End of Empire in the French Antilles, 1944-1951

In January 1946, Thélus Léro, a young Communist militant and a veteran of the *négritude* generation, delivered a speech to the first Federal Conference of the Martiniquan Section of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF-M) outlining the Party's accomplishments since the end of Vichy rule in 1943.<sup>84</sup> Newly elected to both the Party politburo and Martinique Colonial Council, Léro's report summed up the Communists' rapid political ascension. In just three years, the Party emerged from clandestinity to establish itself as Martinique's preeminent party, displacing both the Socialists and the Radicals; as Léro enumerated in his report, the Party's membership was swelling, its finances were solid and its organization expanding.<sup>85</sup> As well as the standard housekeeping boilerplate, Léro used the report to outline the goals yet to be accomplished. The most important goal was the incorporation of Martinique and the other "old colonies" into the Republic, a project known as "assimilation."<sup>86</sup>

For Martiniquan Communists, assimilation constituted a vital component of the postwar remaking of both France and the French empire. Appropriating the national Communist Party's *mots d'ordre* – "Union, Democracy, Rebirth" – Léro inscribed Martiniquan claims for reform into the larger national and imperial context.<sup>87</sup> Léro

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<sup>84</sup> Until 1957, the Communist Party on Martinique was known as the *Séction Martiniquaise* – Parti Communiste Française, which I have abbreviated PCF-M. The national Communist Party will be abbreviated PCF.

<sup>85</sup> Thélus Léro, *Pour la Renaissance de la Martinique* (Fort-de-France: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1946).

<sup>86</sup> "Les vieilles colonies" were Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique and Réunion.

<sup>87</sup> *Mot d'ordre* is a delightful French expression, usually translated as slogan or watchword. The construction itself, however, denotes a word that works as an organizing principle, which establishes order

translated the aspiration of many Martiniquans to end Martinique's colonial situation into the language of Communism, interpreting these desires through the Party's slogans. "The Communist Party is, in effect, the Party of French Rebirth," Léro declared. "For us too the Party must be the Party of Martiniquan Rebirth." Each part of the slogan, Léro suggested, indicated a different action toward ending Martinique's colonial status. Union signified not only assimilation – Martinique's transformation to full departmental status – but the unity of the working class, on Martinique, in France and across the Union Française; Democracy signified an end to corruption and electoral fraud, the maintenance and enforcement of the principles of the republican credo and the black working class majority's conquest of political power; Rebirth signified the relief of Martinique's poor socio-economic situation and the complete fulfillment of the 1848 promise that Martiniquans, the descendents of slaves, would enjoy all the rights and responsibilities of French citizenship.<sup>88</sup>

In 1945, "union, democracy, and rebirth" would be accomplished through assimilation: the end to Martinique's colonial status through the elimination of the administrative barriers – political, social and economic – dividing Martinique from the metropole.<sup>89</sup> As detailed in Chapter One, assimilation had long been the principal political demand of the Martiniquan Left, from the Radicals after 1848 to the Communists in the 1930s. The war lent the project a new urgency; Admiral Robert's openly prejudicial administration coupled with the racist, often brutal, conduct of the

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and coherence over dispersed phenomena. The properly employed *mot d'ordre* captures variegated phenomena under a single heading, organizes them, and imbues them with purpose and meaning. It is, in short, a word that organizes. The PCF had launched this rubric for the 1945 elections.

<sup>88</sup> Thélus Léro, *Pour la Renaissance de la Martinique* (Fort-de-France: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1946), 4-8.

<sup>89</sup> Assimilation is also known as "departmentalization" – the transformation of Martinique the colony into Martinique the Overseas Department.

occupying French navy, revealed that despite possessing citizenship for nearly a century, Martiniquans remained colonized. Robert's regime stripped away the façade of egalitarian republicanism and interpellated Martiniquans as colonial subjects, exposing an inherent contradiction in the Antillean social and political order: Martinique was a colony, part of the French empire, yet Martiniquans possessed all the rights of republican citizenship. This contradiction allowed the *békés* to disempower the islands' black majority through electoral fraud, bribery and when necessary, open violence. Critics of this system, including the Communists, argued that breaking down the administrative and juridical boundaries between France and Martinique would end Martinique's ambiguous status, recreate the island as an integral part of France and allow its people full access to all the rights, responsibilities and benefits of citizenship.

Assimilation, I argue, must be understood as a pragmatic strategy for the decolonization of Antillean society. Reading it too narrowly risks misunderstanding the movement's point and purpose, representing Martiniquans' desire for incorporation into France as the anachronistic political and cultural consciousness of a people unable to recognize difference and assert their identity against the dominant white discourse. From this perspective, assimilation appears as the colonized subject's self-abnegation perfected, a total mimicry of and desire for the masters' values, institutions and lifeways. This view was expressed most forcefully in the Martiniquan novelist Raphael Confiant's patricidal critique of Aimé Césaire. Confiant attacked Césaire for his role in negotiating the 1946 assimilation law, accusing Césaire of being overly enamored with French culture and castigating him for denying the reality of the Martiniquan cultural-political nation in his abject desire to preserve his intellectual and cultural link to the French

master.<sup>90</sup> Confiant's attack is symptomatic of a fundamental misrecognition of the historical conjecture that 1946 represented; rather than a denial of the Martiniquan nation, the 1945-6 push for assimilation represented an attempt to decolonize Martinique that transcended Confiant's narrow nationalist focus on the nation-state. Situated in the actual context of 1945 – the geopolitical division of the Cold War, the meteoric rise of the French Communist Party and the utopian space of the *Union Française* – the PCF-M and Césaire's push for assimilation appears less as a cynical or abject capitulation to *la gloire de la France* than a pragmatic response to a combination of material needs, utopian hopes and historical necessity.

To differentiate the post-war political, social and cultural project that the representatives from the *vieilles colonies* labeled “assimilation” from the word's common connotation as the dominant culture or polity's absorption of the subaltern, I suggest that it be captured under the formula that Tony Chafer, writing about postwar French West Africa, proposed: “decolonization through assimilation.”<sup>91</sup> This construction captures the fact that for the postwar African and Antillean leaders who argued forcefully for incorporation into the French Republic and Union Française, decolonization was the ultimate goal; their pamphlets, speeches, interventions and legislation testify to the fact that the purpose and point behind assimilation was the end of the colonial regimes and the decolonization of their societies, economies and cultures. Histories of decolonization produced a particular narrative of decolonization: the rise of nationalist movements, anti-

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<sup>90</sup> Raphaël Confiant *Aimé Césaire: une traversée paradoxale du siècle* (Paris: Stock, 1993); Richard Price and Sally Price, “Shadowboxing in the Mangrove,” *Cultural Anthropology* 12,1 (Feb. 1997), 3-36; Mireille Rosello, “The Césaire Effect, or How to Cultivate One's Nation,” *Research in African Literatures* 32,4 (Winter 2001), 77-91.

<sup>91</sup> Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (London: Berg, 2002).

colonial struggle, the departure/ejection of the colonizer and the nationalist movement's capture of state power, followed by the nationalists' establishment of their own nation-state, after the model of their former European masters.<sup>92</sup> Nationalist movements and their sympathizers often composed our anti-colonial histories and in the writing imbued the decolonizing narrative with a fundamental *telos*: struggle against the old colonial master and the inexorable foundation of an independent nation-state was the very definition of decolonization. The persistence of this nationalist teleology has occluded both the complexity and heterogeneity of colonized peoples' postwar aspirations and the initial decolonizing moment's indeterminateness, instead privileging a narrative of inevitable progression from colony to nation-state. Looking back from our postcolonial era, the nation-state as the post-war era's basic geopolitical building block appears obvious; from the perspective of 1945, however, that was simply not the case. In 1945 a spectrum of possible visions of postwar order extending from national independence to colonial continuity seemed equally feasible.<sup>93</sup>

That Antillean Communists did not demand national independence in 1945 does not negate the fact that their political aspirations remained substantively anti-colonial and decolonizing. The same hopes that drove anti-colonial and decolonizing struggles throughout post-war European empires – an end to minority rule, true political

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<sup>92</sup> Postcolonial criticism has questioned some of the assumptions of the nationalist discourse, particularly pointing out the fissures that divided "nationalist" movements and questioning the extent of nationalist consciousness. They have also questioned the extent to which decolonization represented a true break with colonialism, particularly as the institutions, modes of thinking and power relations remained, in essential ways, unchanged from the colonial state. However, I argue that many postcolonial critics have not questioned the teleology that essentially limits understandings of decolonization to the conquest of an independent state by the colonized.

<sup>93</sup> Frederick Cooper has argued that political independence and decolonization are by no means coterminous concepts and that at the end of World War II, even among nationalists, decolonization as political independence was only one of many possible futures. Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 466-472; Frederick Cooper, "States, Empires and Political Imaginations" in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 153-203.



democracy, redistribution of wealth, economic development, an end to racist policies of exclusion – formed the core demands of the 1946 assimilation movement. If Martiniquans chose different means to realize decolonization, the intended goal was identical: the suppression of (white) minority rule over economic and political life. Thus my insistence that assimilation must be understood as “decolonization through assimilation”: as its proponents understood it, assimilation would deliver the same tangible results as independence. Assimilation would end the colonial state’s arbitrary rule, liquidate colonial society and its racism, as well as modernize the colonial economy and its attendant plagues of economic stratification, monoculture, crumbling infrastructure, low wages and high prices, and chronic unemployment.

For postwar Antilleans, the Union Française and Communism represented important institutional affiliations that promised an end to colonial misery and the promise of a more just and egalitarian society. The Union Française not only guaranteed the expansion of citizenship and republican rights to the colonized but altered the fundamental conception of the French nation. Rather than a relationship solely between the Antilles and metropolitan France, the Union would incorporate the Antilles into a multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural polity that would radically expand notions of French identity. Similarly, Communism promised economic and social equalization and the alleviation of the Antilles’ colonial situation and economic backwardness. It also connected Antilleans to a national political imaginary and through it a transnational political imaginary, linking Antilleans, in the name of class, into local, national and global solidarities that promised a renewed conception of the human and an expanded horizon of political possibility. Both the Union Française and Communism seemed to

promise substantive decolonization that incorporated social, economic and cultural decolonization as well as juridical and political reform.

### **The Triumph of the French Left and Constitutional Reform**

Colonial reform was arguably impossible without the war, Vichy and the occupation. The occupation discredited significant portions of the French political right and center and enabled the ascension of the Left following the war; in the Antilles, Vichy's racist rule inspired Martiniquan republicans to redouble their efforts to secure full departmentalization. Admiral Robert's Vichy administration in the Antilles collapsed in June 1943 following a general strike on Martinique and an insurrection on Guadeloupe. In order to bring new territories under the Free French flag and to forestall an Anglo-American occupation, Free French forces quickly moved to reestablish control over the Antilles.<sup>94</sup> Republican institutions were restored and Louis Ponton, a member of the National Resistance Council, was dispatched from Algiers to integrate Martinique into the Free French empire. Hundreds of Martiniquans enlisted in the Free French forces, joining their compatriots who had crossed the narrow channel to St. Lucia or Dominica and freedom during the years of occupation.<sup>95</sup> Despite the end of the occupation, wartime hardship persisted; food, petroleum and other consumer shortages lasted beyond the end of the war. These shortages were felt especially hard and many Martiniquans blamed rationing and high prices on the *béké* "patronats" who controlled

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<sup>94</sup> Richard D.E. Burton, "'Nos journées de juin': the Historical Significance of the Liberation of Martinique (June 1943)" in Harry Roderick Kedward and Nancy Wood, eds., *The Liberation of France: Image and Event* (London: Berg, 1995), 227-240.

<sup>95</sup> David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (New York: Picador, 2000), 90-111; Marcel Manville, *Les Antilles sans fard* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), 48-53.

the island's commercial enterprises, accusing them of hoarding and war profiteering.<sup>96</sup>

The bitterness of *an tan robè* would linger throughout the post-war period.

The French Left won a crushing victory in the 1945 elections to the French National Constituent Assembly, tasked with writing the new constitution that would establish the Fourth Republic.<sup>97</sup> The terminal paralysis of the Third Republic and perceived right-wing collaboration during the war combined to discredit the established political parties and opened the way for the emergence of a new political constellation. The victors in the first round of elections were the Communists, the Socialists and the Christian Democrats, the three principal factions that had participated in the resistance, constituted the National Council of Resistance (CNR) and formed the provisional government. In the first round of elections, the Parti Communiste Française (PCF) commanded the largest share of the vote with nearly 26%, giving them 160 deputies in the Assembly; the reconstituted Socialist Party (SFIO) captured 23% for 142 seats; while a new party, the Popular Republican Movement (MRP) captured 24% with 150 deputies.<sup>98</sup> All three parties were members of the National Resistance Council and helped draft its 1944 political program, which called for the social and political reconstruction of France through the post-war nationalization of banks and major industries, the establishment of an extensive welfare state and the institutionalization of the principles of social democracy.<sup>99</sup> All three parties thus supported substantive constitutional and electoral reform, economic nationalization, state economic planning, a national health

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<sup>96</sup> Nicolas 1996 tome 3, 90-2.

<sup>97</sup> H. Bruce Marshall, *The French Colonial Myth and Constitution-Making in the Fourth Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 144-152.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> The MRP featured both conservatives and Christian leftists and there is some debate over the MRP's ideology. See: Richard Vinen, *Bourgeois Politics in France, 1944-1951* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 139-147; on the MRP and the CNR: Andrew Shennan, *Rethinking France: Plans for Renewal 1940-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 34-52.

care system, trade union rights and economic democratization through the redistribution of wealth. This “Tripartite Alliance” won nearly 80% of the vote and secured more than 450 seats out of a total of 586 in the Constituent Assembly elections.<sup>100</sup>

This national political context facilitated the PCF-M’s triumph in the May 1945 Martiniquan municipal elections. Georges Parisot, the new governor, observed that many Martiniquans were convinced that the emergent Communists would dominate the immediate postwar government; Parisot predicted that this conviction would lead many to vote en masse for the Martiniquan Communists and provide them with an overwhelming victory at the ballot box. It was an accurate prediction; the Communists captured the mayoralties of Martinique’s two largest cities, Fort-de-France and Lamentin (an industrial suburb) as well as the important agricultural communes Basse Pointe and Morne Rouge.<sup>101</sup> Parisot credited the Communists’ “good organization” and “disciplined troops” and suggested they had been “rewarded for a patiently prepared electoral campaign.”<sup>102</sup> René Etiemble, a professor at the Sorbonne and later an editor at *Les Temps Modernes* observed that, “the only Party that formulated the demands of the masses... [was] the Communist Party.”<sup>103</sup> The Communists secured further successes in the October cantonal elections when they captured a plurality of the General Council’s seats and in alliance with left-wing Socialists elected party member Georges Gratiant as Council president. These victories were capped four days later when Aimé Césaire – only just elected mayor of Fort-de-France – and Léopold Bissol won both of Martinique’s

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<sup>100</sup> Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 56-62.

<sup>101</sup> Nicolas 1996 tome 3, 105.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 98. Etiemble had served as Martinique’s representative to the CNR in Algeria for most of the war years. He was asked to prepare a report on Martinique for the provisional government.

seats to the Constituent Assembly in Paris.<sup>104</sup> Before the war the PCF-M had been a marginal and marginalized political group, locked out of power and influence; following the 1945 elections, it represented Martinique's dominant political force. The victorious Party had but one task: assimilation.

In Paris, Césaire and Bissol found in the National Assembly many like-minded colleagues from both the empire and the metropole. Plans for imperial reform had been circulating on the French Left since the Popular Front years, plans that were resurrected at the Brazzaville Conference.<sup>105</sup> After decades in which “association” and “*mise en valeur*” had been the watchwords of French colonial governance, assimilation was again ascendant as the underlying principle of French colonial enterprise.<sup>106</sup> The French Left's support for assimilation through decolonization was in part indebted to republicanism's universalist legacy.<sup>107</sup> Assuming both humanity's essential unity and French republicanism's moral and ideological superiority, in theory the French left supported colonial peoples' accession to formal equality under the French constitution. The lingering power of this ideological disposition was articulated in a December 1945 statement on the colonial question that the “Delegation of the Left” submitted to the National Council of Resistance.<sup>108</sup> The statement outlined a “democratic politics vis-à-vis the overseas territories,” founding this politics on several interlinked principles:

- 1) The progressive emancipation of the Overseas populations in accord and with the aid of French democracy;

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>105</sup> Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur, eds., *French Colonial Empire and the Popular Front: from Hope to Disillusion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>106</sup> Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1870-1914* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 106-132.

<sup>107</sup> Ambiguity of the universalist project.

<sup>108</sup> The “Delegation of the Left” comprised the PCF, the SFIO, the Parti Radical, the Ligue des Droits des Hommes, and the CGT. *Justice*, 15 December 1945.

- 2) The principle of the equality of men without distinction between the French of metropolitan origins and those from the Overseas Territories...
- 3) The elevation of the standard of living of the Overseas Territories by the full development of all human and material resources... the renunciation of all exclusive and unilateral exploitation... in favor of the metropole...
- 4) Application of all measures leading to the assimilation to the metropole of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion.<sup>109</sup>

These principles coincided with the French Left's historical position: that a non-exploitive colonialism grounded in Enlightenment principles of universalist humanism and internationalism would form France and the Empire into a single, mutually beneficial transnational polity. All peoples, black or white, colonial or metropolitan, deserved emancipation. In a world torn by fascism, racism and economic exploitation, French republicanism – founded in liberty, equality, fraternity – represented the surest means to put the world right.

The statement indicated the fundamentally pragmatic position that the French Communists and their allies took toward the colonial question. Only one measure in the entire statement gestured toward independence, calling on the French government to immediately enter into “conversations” with “the representatives of Indochina” in order to “prepare a common accord... towards a large measure of autonomy.” The statement was premised not only on the maintenance of the French Empire, but the progressive erasure of the boundaries that separated the metropole from its colonies. The intent of the statement was to promulgate new policies that would eradicate the old colonial structure and establish colonials under the protection of metropolitan law. The Martiniquan Communist party paper *Justice* published the rest of the statement:

- The immediate extension to the Overseas Territories of the nationalization measures prepared for the metropole...
- Suppression of the Indigénat<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

- Extension of syndical rights, suppression of all forced labor, and the application of a social, human politics in accord with the rules of the B.I.T.<sup>111</sup>
- Immediate and effective equality of access to all employees of the French Community
- Extensive development of public education and sanitation
- Decentralization of local administrations parallel to the development of elected assemblies...
- Completion of the *épuration*<sup>112</sup> in the Overseas Territories and the interdiction of the collaborationist press.<sup>113</sup>

The Left's proposals presumed the maintenance of an imperial polity; the extension of rights, economic development and political reforms would only be possible through the transformation of colonial subjects into colonial citizens consistent with the principles laid out at the Brazzaville Conference.<sup>114</sup> The statement's contribution was to combine the republican language of citizenship with the social democratic language of economic and social democracy. The Delegation of the Left mapped out the contours of a continued colonial project founded not in capitalist exploitation but on the extension of social democracy into the empire. The Delegation of the Left's statement demonstrated its continued commitment to empire while proposing a radical shift in colonialism's economic and social priorities. This ambiguous vision – simultaneously colonialist and socialist – would structure the relationship between the Left and decolonizing movements

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<sup>110</sup> The much-despised *Indigénat* was a legal edict that denied indigenes legal standing and allowed local administrators broad leeway in controlling indigenous populations. Antony Asiwaju, "Control Through Coercion: A Study of the *Indigénat* Regime in French West African Administration, 1887-1946," *Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N.* 41:1 (1979), 35-71; Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Négritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 134-9.

<sup>111</sup> French acronym for the International Labor Organization (ILO).

<sup>112</sup> *L'épuration* was the often violent post-war purge of collaborators and Vichyists from the institutions of the restored republic. Henri Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 20-32; Rioux, 29-42.

<sup>113</sup> *Justice*, 15 December 1945.

<sup>114</sup> Cooper 2005, 204-18.

throughout the Fourth Republic.<sup>115</sup> The 1945 assimilation of the old colonies constituted an early application of this vision.

### **Assimilation and the Republican Tradition**

Aimé Césaire's appointment to the Committee for the Overseas Territories, tasked with integrating the empire into the new constitution, represented a first substantive political step toward assimilation. Césaire's friend and longtime collaborator, Léopold Senghor, was president of the Committee and he immediately named Césaire *rapporteur* of the subcommittee to study the status of the four "old colonies" – Guadeloupe, Guyane, Martinique and Réunion. As reporter, Césaire exerted extensive control over the composition of the committee report and therefore the language of the proposed law. On the committee, Césaire worked closely with Raymond Vergès (Réunion) and Gaston Monnerville (Guyane) as well as his colleague Bissol. Césaire synthesized the committee's suggestions, wrote the draft law and presented the subcommittee's work before the Constituent Assembly in February 1946. The draft law's language was accepted and discussion of the law was scheduled for the end of March.<sup>116</sup>

The principle of decolonization through assimilation formed the core demand of the report Césaire vigorously presented and defended before the Constituent Assembly. What was at stake was whether imperial subjects were to be full citizens of France or persist as colonial subjects, whether commonalities of principle, right and responsibility or race, culture and geography described the limits of French citizenship. This choice –

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<sup>115</sup> Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2006), 78-81.

<sup>116</sup> Ernest Moutoussomy, *Aimé Césaire, député à l'Assemblée Nationale, 1946-1993* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993), 12-16.



between an expansive or circumscribed definition of Frenchness – in turn questioned whether France remained true to its core principles. Debates over the definition of French citizenship were prevalent in the closing years of the Third Republic and were refracted through the polarized political disputes between right and left. Broadly speaking, left-wing intellectuals defined “Frenchness” as an individual’s fidelity to French secular republican values.<sup>117</sup> The Right, on the other hand, defined “Frenchness” in racial and religious terms, opposing both the political and moral values of republicanism and denying that individuals who were ethnically or religiously different could ever truly be French.<sup>118</sup> Under Vichy the right-wing definition was ascendant, but the stain of collaboration de-legitimated its view of ethnic citizenship.<sup>119</sup> As Margaret Majumdar has noted, Césaire employed a rhetoric of two Frances, constructing a dichotomy between a True France and False France, one rooted in the universalist principles of the Enlightenment and the Revolution, the other committed to ethnic chauvinism and racialized colonialism.<sup>120</sup> The colonial question and the question of assimilation, Césaire seemed to suggest, demanded that the delegates choose to which definition of France and Frenchness they subscribed. With the stain of collaboration, the Holocaust and the

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<sup>117</sup> The classic statement of this phenomenon remains Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

<sup>118</sup> Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars Over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 36-50; also, Patrick Weil, *How to be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 87-124; Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship and National Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996); from the time of Dreyfus, this debate mostly played out over the status of French Jews. Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 34-53; David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>119</sup> Jonathan Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question: Anti-Semitism and the Politics of the French Intellectual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 106-122; Christian Delacampagne, “Race: from Philosophy to History” in Jonathan Judaken, ed., *Race after Sartre: Antiracism, Africana Existentialism, Postcolonialism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 99-112.

<sup>120</sup> Margaret Majumdar, *Postcoloniality: the French Dimension* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 234.

collaboration, Césaire in effect challenged the assembled delegates' republican credentials through testing their commitment to assimilation.

Césaire's argument was grounded in the historical tradition of French republicanism, presenting assimilation as the completion of a long historical relationship that had tied together France and the Antilles. Despite decolonization in Asia and the decline of the European powers, the Antilles remained desirous of incorporation into the French republic, which "constituted an homage rendered to France and its genius."<sup>121</sup> The Antilles and France had been linked for more than three centuries and while there had been setbacks and reversals the broad historical trend pointed toward citizenship and incorporation through the elimination of the juridical barrier between the Antilles and France. Césaire returned to the theme of two Frances, differentiating republican France from "authoritarian France." Authoritarian France's practice "was to eject Martinique and Guadeloupe from the national community," while republican France "[admitted] them to the beneficence and generosity of French law."<sup>122</sup> In a clear reference to the Vichy occupation, Césaire suggested that authoritarian France enforced and encouraged division and difference, while republican France encouraged inclusion and equality. Césaire in effect asked the men and women who would found the new republic whether they would uphold this tradition and, what is more, carry this "historical process to its logical conclusion."<sup>123</sup> Césaire connected Antilleans' struggle for citizenship, equality and rights to the struggle between republicans and anti-republicans; he framed assimilation as a victory for republican forces and continued colonialism as a victory for reactionary

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<sup>121</sup> Parti Communiste Français, Section Martiniquaise, *Assimilation: Une bataille gagnée par le Parti Communiste* (Fort-de-France, 1946), 10.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

forces. Citing the holy dates of the republican tradition – 1789, 1848, 1871 – Césaire conflated Antilleans’ steps toward assimilation with the great moments of the Republic. In front of a chamber assembled to reestablish and rebuild the French republic in Vichy’s wake, Césaire cleverly identified the expansion and victory of French democracy with the expansion of colonial democracy.

Césaire further argued that assimilation was the natural extension of not only history but of the universalist philosophy that rested at the heart of True France’s culture. Some of the law’s critics opposed it on the grounds that, fundamentally, Antilleans and French were too different; referencing Montesquieu’s climatic theory of behavior they questioned the possibility of assimilation as, “laws themselves must be proper to the people for whom they were made.”<sup>124</sup> For these conservative critics, Antilleans lived in the tropics and were descended from Africans, facts that overwhelmed their linguistic, cultural and historical ties to France and made French law a poor fit. Césaire attacked this racist position with his considerable erudition and learning, claiming that assimilation embodied the spirit of French culture and law while the racist position violated it. To loud applause, Césaire accused the law’s critics of “hypocrisy” for “sheltering... behind the great name of Montesquieu.”<sup>125</sup> He reminded the assembly of Montesquieu’s denunciations of black slavery and with reference to Montesquieu’s insistence on equality under the law argued that the proposed law was as much a “law of equalization” as a law of assimilation.<sup>126</sup> It incarnated the philosophical tradition of Montesquieu as it would, “liberate nearly a million men of color from a modern form of subjugation

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> *Assimilation: Une bataille gagnée*, 13.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

(*assujettissement*).<sup>127</sup> The great glory of the French republic, Césaire reminded the assembly, was its historical commitment to freedom and equality for all men and women, not only French men and women.

Despite Césaire's eloquent case, the Ministries of Finance, the Interior and the Colonies voiced objections to full departmentalization on two main grounds: that the implementation of all laws passed in the National Assembly would be delayed for the new DOMs and that the DOMs would be subject to the same financial regime as the metropolitan departments. In introducing Césaire to the assembled delegates, André Phillip, the Minister of Finance, voiced these concerns, stating that "despite the reporter's observations... it seems evident that all these dispositions cannot be applied without profound adaptation."<sup>128</sup> While critics of the law did not oppose assimilation in principle, they urged the government be granted wide discretion in applying metropolitan laws to the Antilles. Césaire and the other Antillean deputies were strongly critical of this proposal, no doubt remembering that well-connected planters, industrialists and politicians had exploited such juridical and administrative caveats to delay or leave unenforced labor and social laws that impinged their authority and profits. Césaire attacked this proposal for violating the unity of the nation and rendering the Antilles "diminished departments, exceptional departments." The ministers' proposed "diminishment" of Césaire's law betrayed republican principles and national inviolability and should be opposed in the name of *égalité*.<sup>129</sup>

While demands for formal political equality constituted a significant theme in Césaire's report to the National Assembly, demands for social equality were no less

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., unpaginated.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 15.

important. In his report, Césaire argued that social and political equality were linked and that to fulfill the promise of citizenship, the government must implement policies in the Antilles that encouraged economic and social equality. Economic and social conditions in the Antilles had long been severe, conditions that Vichy and wartime blockades had exacerbated significantly. In 1945, despite a century of emancipation and citizenship, despite their natural wealth and bounty, the islands suffered under the “most unjustifiable misery,” mired in a state of “feudal capitalism.”<sup>130</sup> The *békés* and their partners and allies, metropolitan capitalists and commercial firms, benefitted from this state of affairs. Just as feudal lords lived in their castles, surrounded by miserable peasants at toil in the fields, so the grand *béké* planters lived in their manor houses while the Antillean field hand sweated it out in the cane fields, beneath the “ardent sun,” returning at night to his “straw shack” and his “humble implements” to sleep beneath sheets of “old newspapers.”<sup>131</sup>

This state of abject poverty was not only an affront to the principle of *égalité* but threatened to very basis of republican governance. Césaire painted a vivid portrait of the “cruelty of Antillean reality”: low salaries, a high cost of living and no means of social protection. Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans – “French citizens like Parisians” – more closely resembled the French workers of 1840 than French workers of 1946.<sup>132</sup> While metropolitans enjoyed social benefits, Antilleans had “no indemnities for pregnant women, no indemnity for illness, no pension for the aged, no allocations for the unemployed.”<sup>133</sup> “Almost one million citizens” had no defense against “the avidity of

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

capitalism.”<sup>134</sup> Quoting Diderot, Césaire concluded that the only thing worse than slavery was ““to have slaves and call them citizens.””<sup>135</sup> The economic misery of the Antilles amid such natural wealth was a scandal; that it was French citizens reduced to conditions as miserable as slavery constituted a double scandal.<sup>136</sup>

By broaching the topic of slavery and analogizing Antillean social conditions to slavery, Césaire intervened at a sensitive and pivotal point in French discourses on liberty, equality and the political subject. Slavery and the figure of the slave provided an important metaphor and trope in the Enlightenment philosophical discourse that informed the French republican political tradition; from Montesquieu to Rousseau, slavery and liberty were postulated as fundamental opposites, antithetical to both nature and reason.<sup>137</sup> The freeman-slave pair provided an important metaphor in the French Revolution and French republicanism, with the tyrant (Louis XVI, Charles X, Napoleon III) guilty of having transformed free citizens into slaves. Almost completely absent, however, was any reference to actually existing slaves at work in the empire; most references to slavery in Enlightenment discourse cast back to antiquity for examples.<sup>138</sup>

Despite the vast economic wealth flowing into France from the slave trade and the American colonies, few Enlightenment thinkers referenced the actual, concrete slaves toiling away in the cane fields of the Caribbean.<sup>139</sup> Michel Rolph-Trouillot and other

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), 391-419; Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and Enlightenment: A Reader* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 1-9;

<sup>138</sup> Christopher Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 62-82.

<sup>139</sup> There are of course significant exceptions, including Condorcet, the Abbé Reynal and the Abbé Grégoire. Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003);

historians of Haiti have carefully documented how, until recently, the Haitian slave revolt and its role in the Jacobin revolution have been completely written out of Western and French histories of the revolutionary era; the revolution on Guadeloupe from 1794 until 1802 met with a similar fate.<sup>140</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, rereading Hegel, has argued that the Haitian revolution exerted a strong influence on Hegel's conceptualization of the master-slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, an influence Hegel went to great lengths to excise from the finished treatise.<sup>141</sup> In France the horror of the war years and Occupation, particularly the deportations and forced labor, revived the discursive pairing of slavery and liberty, with Nazism replacing ancient servitude as the exemplar *par excellence* of tyranny.<sup>142</sup> Actually existing and analogous colonial practices, such as the still-extensive use of *corvée* labor in the French West Africa, remained notably unspoken. While historically French republicanism and liberalism condemned and opposed slavery, it had done so in deracinated and abstract terms.

Césaire's equation of Antillean social conditions with slavery proved to be provocative.<sup>143</sup> The 1848 emancipation, Césaire insinuated, was incomplete, even insufficient, as colonial rule coupled to unfettered capitalism had undone the promise of

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Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: the Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 149-198.

<sup>140</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 70-83; Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Martiniquan and Guadeloupean Communists dedicated much work in the 1950s and 1960s to resurrecting the figure of Louis Delgrès from the dustbin of history. See Nick Nesbitt's discussion in *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 49-75.

<sup>141</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2009).

<sup>142</sup> Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France During the German Occupation* (New York: Picador, 2004), 298-9; Edouard Daladier, "Nazis' Aim is Slavery, Speech, 29 January 1940," reprinted in Copeland, Lamm, McKenna, eds., *The World's Greatest Speeches* (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), 461-3; Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 35-46. For an interesting reading of Césaire's linking Nazism and colonialism, see Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 66-107.

<sup>143</sup> The *Débats* note that only "l'extrême gauche" applauded this statement.

1848 and rendered Antilleans, despite formal, legal freedom, *de facto* slaves. Barring state intervention and the fundamental reform of the colonial economy, their continued servitude was guaranteed. Foreshadowing his *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire argued that freedom exceeded the law and that for liberty to be worthy of the name it could not differentiate between Europeans and non-Europeans lest it succumb to a racist logic. The true test of the depth of France's commitment to freedom and equality would be best tested in its extension to colonized peoples. Just as there existed two Frances, there were two possibilities for the Antilles, one defined by liberty and emancipation, the other by continued bondage. The challenge Césaire posed to the assembled delegates was to decide: did they support the status quo and the continuation of this virtual slavery or did they favor reform, necessarily radical, and the extension of substantive liberty to their fellow citizens? Césaire conditioned his speech to appeal to and challenge the assembled delegates' self-understanding of their history, their tradition and the task they had assembled to complete, asking whether this new republic would extend its protections and benefits to Africans, Asians and Antilleans.

Césaire concluded his speech by refuting the numerous objections that critics had made to the law and to assimilation. Some objected that integration would be too costly, other argued that assimilation would wreck the Antillean economy, while others questioned Antilleans' ability to integrate into France.<sup>144</sup> In his closing remarks, Césaire used the rhetorical trick of using Victor Schoelcher's arguments from the 1848 debate on the abolition of slavery to make his final argument. Schoelcher was a legendary figure in France for both his role in the 1848 emancipation, his incorruptibility and his fanatical,

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<sup>144</sup> See *Débats*.



even severe, devotion to the principle of liberty.<sup>145</sup> Césaire turned Schoelcher’s legendary intransigence in defense of liberty against opponents of assimilation. In his 1848 demand for emancipation without caveat or condition, Schoelcher had “put the honor” of the nation ahead of the “dictatorship of accountancy.” Just as many erstwhile republicans in 1946 questioned Antillean integration for financial or legal reasons, so too had many in 1848 opposed the immediate emancipation of the slaves on the grounds that the new republic could not afford to reimburse the owners for their lost property. Césaire repeated Schoelcher’s words to the assembled delegates: if France had to pay a great sum to “disinfect the colonies,” to be a great nation she must. Even if France had to “give a billion to the émigrés,” it would be a small price to pay, for emancipation was “not about treasure... it was about morality.”<sup>146</sup>

Césaire thus connected 1946 and 1848, his struggle to Schoelcher’s struggle, admonishing those who would privilege finances over fraternity and deny to Antilleans their due liberty and equality for the sake of mere “accountancy.”<sup>147</sup> Schoelcher was emblematic of “true France” and demonstrated the principles that true France must uphold: reason, culture, fraternity and a fanatical devotion to liberty and equality. Schoelcher’s role in the Commune and the establishment of the Third Republic and the 1848 emancipation thus knit together Césaire’s historical, cultural and political argument; the great liberator’s life and words demonstrated that the true France, the France the delegates had assembled to reestablish, embraced the unity of all French men and women, black and white, master and ex-slave, colonial and metropolitan.

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<sup>145</sup> Schoelcher refused an appointment as Senator-for-Life from Napoleon III on the grounds that he could never serve any usurper of liberty. Nelly Schmidt, *Victor Schoelcher* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).

<sup>146</sup> *Assimilation: Une bataille gagnée*, 23.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

### **Assimilation and the Union Française**

Césaire's invocation of Victor Schoelcher was not limited to the floor of the National Assembly or to the issue of assimilation for the "old colonies." Schoelcher symbolized not only the expansion of French citizenship to Antilleans but that Antillean assimilation was grounded in a much larger political-cultural change: the establishment of the Union Française. Césaire's vision for the future of France, the Antilles and the republic was not limited to the metropole nor the four "old colonies" but was rooted in a radical re-conceptualization of the French nation and people that embraced metropolitans and colonials alike. Gary Wilder has noted the influence that Victor Schoelcher had on Césaire's postwar "strategic utopian engagements with the complex problem of (colonial) freedom."<sup>148</sup> Schoelcher's spirit – along with Louverture's – mediated Césaire's arguments for not only Antillean incorporation but for the Union Française's necessity. The importance of Schoelcher's animating spirit, visible in Césaire's interventions in the National Assembly, was most clearly expressed in Césaire's role in the celebrations around the 1848 emancipation and Schoelcher's 1949 Panthéonization.

In 1949, Schoelcher's remains were transferred to the Panthéon and he was interred alongside Félix Éboué, the wartime governor of Tchad and the "first colonial resistant" who had died before the war's end in 1944, in a ceremony arranged to commemorate the centennial of the 1848 emancipation. Funerals, particularly state funerals, offer a window into a society's privileged values and beliefs. Durkheim suggested that rituals, including funerary rites, were a type of social mirror, a social

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<sup>148</sup> Gary Wilder, "Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia," *Public Culture* 21,1 (2009), 101-140.

practice in which, “individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members, and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it.”<sup>149</sup> Avner Ben-Amos applied Durkheim’s observations to the Panthéon, France’s house for the illustrious dead.<sup>150</sup> Ben-Amos reads French state funerals – of which burial in the Panthéon was the highest type – as “ceremonies of power,” performances of what Keith Michael Baker called “political culture,” moments in which ““political claims are made” that “[help] to define the identity and the boundaries of a given community.””<sup>151</sup> In French political culture, Panthéonization represents a particularly rich moment in which political claims are advanced, legitimated and naturalized.<sup>152</sup> The Panthéonization of Schoelcher and Éboué in 1949 was the Union Française’s first “ceremony of power,” a ritual that (literally) embodied and sanctified the Union’s creation and the incorporation of colonial subjects into the French body politic.

The link established between Éboué and Schoelcher was vital in this regard. Their joint burial united past and present, mingled recent sacrifice and past suffering, linked the Americas to Africa and to Europe. From the moment of Éboué’s premature death in Cairo in 1944, French officials depicted him as the personification of France’s universalist values and the embodiment of the Union Française he had helped to establish at Brazzaville. Announcing Éboué’s death on Radio France, Free French Minister of the Colonies René Pleven called him a “a great servant of the *Patrie*... one of its sons.”<sup>153</sup>

Jean Rapenne, governor of Éboué’s native Guyane, suggested that “without distinction of

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<sup>149</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* quoted in Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 50.

<sup>150</sup> Avner Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics and Memory in Modern France, 1789-1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>151</sup> Ben-Amos, 3; Keith Michael Baker, quoted in Ben-Amos, 7.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>153</sup> René Pleven, “Adresse de 18 Mai 1944” in Elie Castor and Raymond Tarcy, *Félix Éboué, Gouverneur et Philosophe* (Paris: Harmattan, 1984), 195-6.

color or race” Éboué had “affirmed the basis... of a stronger, more human Republic.”<sup>154</sup>

In his martyrdom, Éboué transcended his colonial status to demonstrate, as de Gaulle said of him, the “very genius” of France.<sup>155</sup> As Pleven would put it, he was not a great *black* Frenchman, but simply a great Frenchman, period, who had acted in accord with France’s “true interests.”<sup>156</sup>

With the approaching centennial of the 1848 revolution and the emancipation of slavery – which in 1948 became a moment to celebrate the Republic and denounce its enemies – Éboué’s life and example were increasingly linked to Schoelcher.<sup>157</sup> Schoelcher had long been a candidate for burial in France’s national tomb; Antillean deputies, later joined by their African colleagues, had demanded Schoelcher’s Panthéonization since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Schoelcher’s transfer to the Panthéon was approved finally under the Popular Front; the war, however, interrupted planning and the ceremony itself. Nonetheless, following Liberation, the project was revived; its principal champion was the Guyanese deputy to the National Assembly and later the longtime president of the Council of the French Union and then the Council of the French Republic, Gaston Monnerville.<sup>158</sup> Monnerville was also a longtime and close personal friend of Éboué; when Éboué died in 1944, Monnerville conceived that he should join Schoelcher in the Panthéon. Monnerville was the spokesman for a group of colonial deputies that urged the National Assembly to pass a bill decreeing that Éboué and

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<sup>154</sup> Jean Rapenne, “Discours, 20 Mai 1944, Cayenne” in *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Rebecca Spang, “First Performances - Staging Memories of the French February Revolution” in Axel Körner, ed., *1848: A European Revolution?: International Ideas and National Memories of 1848* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 174-7.

<sup>158</sup> Gaston Monnerville, *Vingt-Deux Ans de Présidence* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 2003).

Schoelcher be interred together in the Panthéon. The law, in elevating Éboué to secular sainthood, described him as Schoelcher's "spiritual son."<sup>159</sup>

From 1948 onwards, Schoelcher and Éboué were twinned, paired and connected, whether cast in a father/son relationship, or read as an allegory of the Republic/Empire relationship. Parallels were constructed between their lives: Schoelcher's refusal to bow before Napoleon III was analogized to Éboué's refusal to submit to Vichy; Schoelcher's plan for reform of the 19<sup>th</sup> century empire was read as a precursor to Éboué's own proposed reforms at Brazzaville; and, just as Schoelcher had delivered freedom to the slaves, the grandchildren of slaves liberated Schoelcher's hometown of Colmar from the Nazis.<sup>160</sup> At the interment ceremony, Minister of the Colonies Coste Floret stated that Schoelcher had "laid the base of the liberation" because "he planted the seed that would, a century later, germinate in the heart of a Félix Éboué."<sup>161</sup> Schoelcher, by liberating the "blacks," had made possible Éboué's gesture, a gesture of "continuity in faith in France."<sup>162</sup> The two men, across a century, laid the groundwork for the triumph of the Republic and its values against its enemies.

Further, their joint burial demonstrated the spiritual, as much as the physical, union of black and white, colonial and metropolitan. Schoelcher and Éboué symbolized the new colonial order to be built from the ruins of war, explicitly linked to the 1946 creation of the Union Française. The Panthéonization took on sacramental overtones, a spiritual demonstration of the Union's political and administrative action. Coste-Floret

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<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Serge Barcellini, "Two Memories in the Present: Léger Félicité Sonthonax, Victor Schoelcher" in Marcel Dorigny, ed., *The Abolitions of Slavery: From L.F. Sonthonax to Victor Schoelcher, 1793, 1794, 1848* (New York: Berghahn Books/UNESCO, 2003), 341-2.

<sup>160</sup> Gaston Monnerville, "Discours de 20 Mai 1949" in Castor, 268-71.

<sup>161</sup> M. Coste-Floret, "Discours, 20 Mai 1949" quoted in Castor, 263-267.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

hailed them, stating that, “the Nation today welcomes into the Temple of Glory two precursors of the Union Française.”<sup>163</sup> They made manifest, “the mystical union of... our Overseas Territories... to those of France.”<sup>164</sup> Monnerville spoke of this “moving gesture...” organized “beneath the sign of liberty, fraternity, beginning to found the true equality, each takes his place and his charge in the administration of our common affairs.”<sup>165</sup> Out of the example of their lives and the flesh of their bodies, the Union Française would render true their sacrifices and work to incarnate their dreams and their struggle to expand liberty and defend France.

Césaire picked up this theme in his own commemoration of Schoelcher in a speech delivered at the Sorbonne on the centennial of the 1848 emancipation proclamation. Gaston Monnerville and Léopold Senghor, who was Éboué’s son-in-law, also spoke at the ceremony. While Monnerville’s speech touched on Schoelcher’s republicanism and Senghor linked Schoelcher to socialism and the working class movement, Césaire returned to his theme of two Frances, this time expanding his definition of true France from the Antilles to the Union Française as a whole.<sup>166</sup> Césaire bitterly denounced the limits to Overseas citizenship and those who persisted in maintaining the colonies, “on the margins of democracy... a sort of no man’s land.” Césaire unfavorably contrasted opponents of empire-wide political and social equality to Schoelcher who, Césaire wrote, “never accepted, at any moment in his life, the constriction of the rights of man” and demanded “without any limitation on rights” the

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<sup>163</sup> Castor, 263.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Gaston Monnerville, “Discours de 27 avril 1948” in *Commémoration du Centenaire de l’Abolition de l’Esclavage: Discours Prononcés à la Sorbonne le 27 avril 1948 par Gaston Monnerville, Léopold Sédar-Senghor et Aimé Césaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), 46-7.

<sup>166</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Discours de 27 avril 1948” in *Commémoration du Centenaire de l’Abolition de l’Esclavage: Discours Prononcés à la Sorbonne le 27 avril 1948 par Gaston Monnerville, Léopold Sédar-Senghor et Aimé Césaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948).

accession of all men to full citizenship.<sup>167</sup> Césaire asserted that the lesson of Schoelcher, in the wake of “Gobineau and Hitler,” was that nothing, not expediency or utility, should be allowed to delay the expansion of the principles of liberty and equality.<sup>168</sup> The solution to the colonial situation, said Césaire, to “Musulmans (sic) vs. Christians, Jews vs. Arabs, blacks vs. whites,” was Schoelcher’s solution, to recognize the “primacy” of the colonized, to “value him (sic)” over “sugarcane and coffee, peanuts and rubber.”<sup>169</sup> The answer, Césaire argued, was Schoelcher’s answer, to treat the colonized, whether on Martinique or in French West Africa, as men.

For Césaire, his colleagues and many colonial citizens, Schoelcher and Éboué were, to slightly alter Barthes’ formulation, “speaking corpses,” testaments to and for a democratic Union and the extension of colonial citizenship to all persons of the French empire. Inspired by Schoelcher, and incarnated in Éboué, the two men’s examples demonstrated the power of republican empire. Schoelcher, in his “stubborn” and “ascetic” devotion to the logic of liberty, had made possible an Éboué who, in his fidelity to that same logic, demonstrated the legitimacy and efficacy of the French assimilating, civilizing project. For Césaire, the 1948 and 1949 ceremonies sanctified and performed the *fait accompli* of France’s assimilating, civilizing mission. Overseas subjects, through the example of Éboué, had fulfilled Schoelcher’s promise and had earned citizenship. The Union Française’s purpose was to make this citizenship real.

For Césaire and his colonial colleagues, the Union Française *was decolonization*; it promised “the hope of seeing born from their sufferings and sacrifices a more just world,” the formation of a true Union “composed of peoples and nations... freely

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 27, 30.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 27-8.

consented to.”<sup>170</sup> In a June 1946 speech arguing in support of Senghor’s expansive criteria for colonial citizenship, Césaire returned to his rhetoric of two Frances: just as there were two metropolitan Frances, democratic and authoritarian, there were two overseas Frances, the actually existing “colonialist” empire and the promised but yet achieved democratic empire.<sup>171</sup> Césaire proposed the Union as the “renewal” of “true France,” the concrete realization of that heretofore dreamed of extension of true France to the colonial realm, an extension rudely interrupted by the “violent intrusion of the colonialist administration.”<sup>172</sup> The assimilation of the “old colonies” was not an isolated gesture but part of the larger project for the liberation of colonial peoples. The Antilles had been tied to France by history; the “new colonies” would be tied to France through a new conception of the relations between peoples. The Union Française represented a revolutionary rethinking of empire, colonialism and nationalism, a utopian expansion of ideas of nation and citizenship, a new type of polity that would create new potentials for Africans, Asians, metropolitans and Antilleans through a common commitment to, and practice of, the principles of fraternity, liberty and equality.

For Césaire and the Martiniquan Communists, assimilation was not an isolated political demand; rather, it was part of the broader postwar context of imperial democratization through the Union Française and economic democratization through the postwar welfare state. Assimilation’s appeal can only be understood in this broader context; for Césaire and the Martiniquan Communists, assimilation without the Union Française or social and economic equalization would no longer be decolonization through assimilation but a species of neo-colonialism. The aggressive push for incorporation in

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<sup>170</sup> Moutoussomy, 29.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.



1945 and 1946 was premised on incorporation into an egalitarian and social democratic empire. Césaire's close involvement in the debates over the Union Française demonstrate the importance of the Union Française to his postwar conceptualization of France, Frenchness and what assimilation promised to the Antilles.

Césaire's concept of the Union Française was almost immediately put to the test. In the initial draft Constitution, colonial deputies succeeded in inserting language that expanded and broadly defined imperial citizenship. However, in May 1946 French voters rejected the Constitution due to the perception that it was a Communist-written document designed to guarantee PCF domination of the proposed unicameral legislature. Because the draft Constitution was rejected, a new Constituent Assembly was elected in June and, once seated, it immediately set to writing a new draft constitution.<sup>173</sup> The assembly elected in the June elections was more conservative than its predecessor; the MRP had captured twenty additional seats to become the largest party while the Radicals had recovered from their 1945 drubbing. In addition, Charles de Gaulle, who had resigned in protest as interim president, reemerged to present his own constitutional plan, the "Bayeux Constitution."<sup>174</sup> De Gaulle's influence and the return of the moderates to power shaped the new constitution, shifting the document away from direct democracy and toward a powerful, centralized state.

For the colonials, including Antilleans, the new constitution removed or moderated their most radical demands. The colonial lobby in alliance with fiscal conservatives and administrative centralists, including de Gaulle and Edouard Herriot, stridently attacked the draft language pertaining to the Union Française. These critics

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<sup>173</sup> Rioux, 97-111.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 104-6.

underlined the loss of colonial resources and cheap labor, the increased budgetary burden on France and worried that local control would eventually lead to independence. Others worried that colonial votes would override metropolitan votes leading, as Herriot put it, to France becoming a “colony of its former colonies.”<sup>175</sup> At the end of the writing process, in September and October 1946, many of the statutes and rights the colonials had wrested from the government, including local assemblies, a process towards colonial citizenship, increased representation in the National Assembly, recognition of local sovereignty and the future referenda on independence were removed or significantly weakened.<sup>176</sup>

Alterations to the constitution’s preamble indicated the erosion of the colonials’ position. The second draft was couched in less precise language, which deemphasized the Union’s cooperative nature and curtailed the implied rights of colonials. Alterations to the citizenship language were particularly striking. The original preamble stated that France, in “refusing to accept systems of colonization based on oppression, guarantees to all men and women living in the French Union, equal access to public service and the individual or collective exercise of the rights and liberties proclaimed or confined above.”<sup>177</sup> In contrast the same passage in the draft version the government offered for approval in September read: “Setting aside any system of colonization founded on arbitrariness, [France] constitutes the best guide for them toward their own administration and management by themselves of their interests and a guarantee of respect for the rights

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<sup>175</sup> Quoted in Frederick Cooper, “Alternatives to Empire: France and Africa after World War II” in Douglas Howland and Luise White, eds., *The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 102.

<sup>176</sup> Marshall, 276-80.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 285-6.

and liberties proclaimed or confirmed above.”<sup>178</sup> The original statement recognized the bloody history of French colonialism and committed to move beyond it, firmly denounced colonial oppression and guaranteed colonials equal access to run for office, to enroll in public service and, most importantly, to the same “rights and liberties” as any French citizen. The latter version did not acknowledge French colonialism’s history of violence and substituted for the strong word “oppression,” the anodyne and vague word, “arbitrariness.” Even more crucially, the government’s draft text weakened language pertaining to citizenship, replacing “equal access” with “respect for.” The constitution codified the weakening of imperial citizenship in a later article, limiting the right to hold office and to be represented in the National Assembly to those with “French civil status,” which, in effect, severely reduced potential office holders and electors from the colonies.<sup>179</sup>

Colonial deputies, including Césaire, were furious when this draft language was submitted to the assembly, minimizing the role of “native” deputies while simultaneously guaranteeing special representation to French settlers. Senghor, Césaire, Ferhat Abbas (Algeria), Félix Houphouët-Boigny (AOF) and Amadou Lamine-Guèye (AOF), leaders of the colonial bloc and chief architects and negotiators of the Union Française walked out of the debate over the changed language. Senghor warned that while “racism is not what you intend... that will be the result.” The colonials confronted constitutional committee president, Pierre Cot, and the Republic’s provisional president, Georges Bidault, threatening to resign en masse unless significant changes were made to the draft. Bidault begged them not to resign, accusing them of wanting to “show by your

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 288-9.

resignation that France is a racist country and you know that to be false.” The assembled deputies retorted that the real question was “whether we are Frenchmen like all the rest.” The colonial bloc threatened that unless the objectionable language was removed, they would vote against the constitution and direct their constituents to do the same.<sup>180</sup>

After lengthy negotiations and threats of boycott the colonial deputies forced the government to back down, eliminate separate representation for the settlers and strengthen the language governing colonial citizenship. Nonetheless, the damage had been done. Yacine Diallo, a Socialist deputy from Guinée, was “[shocked] and [revolted]” that he had been forced to “[bargain] over integration into the French family, which we seek.” Césaire expressed an air of dashed expectation and wounded disappointment, stating that the government’s draft constitution was “a monument of prudence. But the dramatic thing... is that prudence is not the same thing as wisdom.”<sup>181</sup> Abbas denounced the maneuvers as “neo-colonialism” while Houphouët-Boigny warned the government not to “destroy by yourselves the effect of the revolutionary act which you accomplished by calling us to sit in this assembly.”<sup>182</sup> The colonial deputies’ worries were confirmed when the government, following passage of the new constitution, went back on its promises and compromises and, exploiting the indeterminateness of the text, instituted over the colonials’ objections separate representation for settlers, limits to citizenship rights and local assemblies, separate standards for wages, social payments and investment, and administrative cordons between the metropole and the colonies.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 290-1.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 291-3.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 307-312.

While the Union Française's radical potential was undermined in the second draft constitution and the emerging "Third Force" government's refusal on financial and political grounds to fully actualize imperial democracy, in the eyes of Césaire and his Communist colleagues assimilation was similarly under attack in the Antilles.<sup>183</sup> Martiniquans resented the government's continued heavy-hand and criticized its refusal to equally apply social legislation in the Antilles. Particularly galling was a December 1947 decree that created two categories of civil servants, "metropolitan" and "indigenous," and granted the former additional benefits including recruitment bonuses, relocation expenses and a 60% addition to their base salary to cope with the rising cost of living.<sup>184</sup> In an editorial, *Justice* denounced this as an act of "racial differentiation" by a government "more colonialist than we have known."<sup>185</sup> The Martiniquan Communists also had a poor relationship with Martinique's first prefect, Pierre Trouillé; the dispute began with Trouillé's violent suppression of a sugar workers' strike in Carbet that left three dead and continued with bitter recriminations of Trouillé's handling of the General Council, his inability to reduce rising prices, his delay implementing social and developmental investment and his contemptuous treatment of the Communists. *Justice* accused Trouillé of all species of maliciousness, including allegations that he had reorganized the local black market to the *békés'* benefit and had attempted to sabotage

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<sup>183</sup> The "Third Force" was the parliamentary coalition formed by the Socialists, the Radicals and the MRP at American insistence in 1948. The alliance was formed when Blum's government expelled the Communist ministers from the government; in exchange, France qualified for Marshall Plan aid. On the Third Force, see Rioux, 151-169. While the coalition effectively locked out the PCF it was unstable and helped lead to the paralysis of the Fourth Republic. See G. Elgley, *La république des illusions: 1945-1951* (Paris: Fayard, 1969) and *La république des contradictions: 1951-1954* (Paris: Fayard, 1968).

<sup>184</sup> "A propos des Fonctionnaires," *Justice*, 8 January 1948; Nicolas 1996, tome 3, 150-1.

<sup>185</sup> "Au jour le jour de la Vie Martiniquaise," *Justice*, 15 January 1948.

Fort-de-France's Bastille Day celebration; the Communists took to calling him "Trouillé-the-expensive-life."<sup>186</sup>

The conflict with Trouillé spilled over into the metropole where the dispute became a proxy battle over competing definitions of assimilation. Césaire delivered an elegant July 1949 speech to the National Assembly criticizing Trouillé's tenure and demanding his immediate recall. He invoked the 1949 dispute over the nature and extent of colonial rights in the Union Française and lamented the broken promise of assimilation. The first constitution and its promise represented a "moment in history, a watchword that had made the people shiver with hope: transforming their countries into departments." This hope, however, had been met with riot police, violence and oppression, shattering the colonials' hope in France. Césaire reiterated the colonials' desire to be part of France – and France's scornful response. "We wanted to assimilate, to integrate, but you rejected us, pushed us away." Instead of a regime of justice, of liberty, of mutual respect and of mutual striving towards a shared and better future, instead of a "true assimilation... you offer only a caricature, a parody of assimilation."<sup>187</sup> Césaire's words possessed the tone of the wounded lover: he had placed his faith in France only to face rejection, humiliation and contempt.

Dejection, however, quickly turned to anger. In a speech delivered to a large crowd in Fort-de-France only two months later, Césaire the lover disappeared, replaced by the angry militant. Césaire vented the frustration many Martiniquans felt toward the government's rejection of civic and social equality and its refusal to carry out the "total assimilation" of the Antilles:

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<sup>186</sup> "La prefecture organise le marché noir," *Justice*, 24 June 1948; *Justice*, 8 July 1948; *Justice*, 18 November 1948.

<sup>187</sup> Moutoussamy, 40-1.

If, under the color of assimilation the French government continues to impose on us a regime of racism and colonialism the Martiniquan people will be forced to envisage another solution to their problems. What is the grand fact that has dominated Martiniquan politics since 1946? It is the refusal of the French government to treat Martinique as a French department.<sup>188</sup>

Césaire's discourse reflected the persistent divisions that continued to structure Martiniquan life. His 1946 rhetoric had disappeared completely: the shared history, the shared suffering, the sense that "French" described Martiniquans and metropolitans alike. The government's refusal to implement "total assimilation," Césaire suggested, reestablished the divisions abolished in 1946, denied that Martiniquans were French citizens and in racist fashion cast them as colonial subject. This contempt and betrayal, he suggested, had forced them to consider "other solutions" to guarantee their freedom and dignity.<sup>189</sup> France's failure to live up to its obligations and responsibilities, its continued treatment of Martinique as something other than a French colony, constituted Martinique and Martiniquans as a people and place apart from France.

While Trouillé was eventually replaced with a more sympathetic prefect, the damage had been done. Shortly after the dispute with Trouillé, Césaire began to compose the essay that would appear serially in *Justice* and other publications and eventually be published as *Discourse on Colonialism*.<sup>190</sup> The *Discourse* attacked in no uncertain terms colonialism and the colonial system, arguing that Europeans, incapable of solving their own problems, could not be expected to be capable of solving the colonial problem. The problem of the colonized was a problem only the colonized could solve. While Césaire stopped short of calling for outright independence, an important shift had taken place.

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<sup>188</sup> Quoted in Nicolas, tome 3, 154.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001). Originally published in French in 1950.

Assimilation remained as a project that represented some possibility but it was a failed, noble experiment, impossible in the real world of existing colonial exploitation and power.<sup>191</sup> While Césaire's complete break with assimilation would not come until 1955, his disappointment and frustration was already apparent in the face of the limitations the French state imposed on assimilation and the Union Française.

### **Conclusion: Assimilation Gained, Assimilation Lost**

Antilleans initially celebrated the passage of the assimilation law and their incorporation into the reborn French Republic. When news reached Martinique there were spontaneous celebrations. On 30 March 1946 the Communists, Socialists and other republicans organized a celebratory demonstration on the Savane in the center of Fort-de-France, capped by a massive torchlight procession through the streets.<sup>192</sup> A few weeks later, Césaire and Bissol were welcomed back to Martinique as heroes with another mass rally and parade through the streets of Fort-de-France.<sup>193</sup> The Communists hailed assimilation as a victory for the Martiniquan working classes; Césaire's telegram informing the Party of the successful passage of the law read, "victory for the working class... Assimilation obtained. Vive P.C." The Communists took pride in succeeding where previous generations and parties had failed and attributed their accomplishment to their intransigent doctrinal and political opposition to the "parties of feudalism" that had

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<sup>191</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>192</sup> Nadia Nicolas, "L'opinion publique martiniquaise devant la loi d'assimilation de 1946" (Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Paris I, 1973), 89. The torchlight procession – *la retraite aux flambeaux* – was a Martiniquan political tradition, held on election nights, civic holidays and other moments of political celebration.

<sup>193</sup> *Justice* 8 May 1946; Nicolas, tome 3, 116.



prevented assimilation for more than a century.<sup>194</sup> Assimilation, as *Justice* concluded, was “the future.”<sup>195</sup>

Martiniquans across the political spectrum recognized the momentousness of the law’s passage. *Le Clairon* paid tribute to “the grandiose and moving manifestation of the recognition and attachment of Martinique to France, our mother.”<sup>196</sup> *L’Information* described it as “a great date in the history of our country” while even the Catholic weekly *Le Paix*, which had been most circumspect about assimilation, recognized assimilation as an “important event.”<sup>197</sup> The Martiniquan press saluted the enthusiasm of the Martiniquan people and acknowledged assimilation’s promise for the island’s future.

Nadia Nicolas in a study of the Martiniquan press in 1946 has suggested that assimilation was a “magic word” that bound together disparate, even incompatible hopes and desires and pinned them to one moment.<sup>198</sup> This fraught expectation was the natural effect of the perceived momentousness of assimilation. Incorporation into France under the aegis of the Union Française represented the culmination of nearly a century of political and social struggles to guarantee Antilleans’ equal rights as citizens of France. The erasure of the colonial line that divided the Antilles from the French Republic, the formal end of colonial status, seemed to promise and portend a revolution that transcend the merely political to completely remake Antillean cultural, social and economic life. Thélus Léro perhaps captured this emotion best in an editorial published in *Justice*:

What we expect from assimilation is the extension to Martinique of all social laws, of metropolitan fiscal policies that impose on the privileged classes a larger contribution, the end of arbitrary government, the application and respect of

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<sup>194</sup> *Justice* 20 March 1946.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Quoted in Nicolas, 89.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Nicolas, tome 3, 103

republican laws, the economic development of our country after a plan of study, controlled by the Ministry of Production, the amelioration of our agricultural production and the industrialization of our agriculture under the direction of the Ministry of Agriculture, the sanitary protection of our population conforming to the directives of the Ministry of Labor and Public Health, and finally a political and social climate in which the social classes of France can evolve and favor the emancipation of Martiniquan workers.<sup>199</sup>

For most Antilleans, assimilation was decolonization. It ended the arbitrary split between the Antilles and France, guaranteed and enforced their rights as French citizens and extended the full force of Republican institutions into the Antilles. Further, it was expected that the French state would include the Antilles in postwar plans to construct an egalitarian social state that worked to establish equality for all French citizens. As Léro articulated, many expected assimilation to level the inequalities of Antillean society, alleviate poverty and social misery and raise the islands to the same social level as metropolitan France. Assimilation signified an almost utopian moment that would complete the delayed promise of 1848.

These utopian hopes began to come apart in the early 1950s as the government's promises were studiously delayed or ignored and Antilleans' expectations went unfulfilled. Antillean hopes for the Union Française and a new relationship between the islands and metropole were extinguished in the crises in Indochina, Madagascar and North Africa, and in the *békés'* lasting and persistent influence over the levers of departmental and metropolitan power. Criticisms of assimilation were first voiced in the Antillean student milieu in Paris and soon spread into the radical parties of the Antillean left.<sup>200</sup> The Guadeloupean Communist Party broke with assimilation first, denouncing the

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> See Chapter Four.

seeming permanence of colonialism and calling for local autonomy.<sup>201</sup> Césaire and the Martiniquan Communists followed suit a few months later, with critical articles appearing in *Justice* and Césaire demanding a change in the statute in letters to the government and on the floor of the National Assembly.

While many ordinary Antilleans remained committed to assimilation, the Left's break with assimilation profoundly affected Antillean cultural and intellectual life. Communist parties were most active in organizing and incorporating youth into their political movements. Many postwar Antillean intellectuals passed through the Communist party youth wings and, after 1958, the Progressive Party and Unified Socialist Party youth wings, on their way to later careers and ideological commitments. Thus an entire generation of Antillean intellectuals was shaped through an engagement with Marxism, whether in its Communist or Socialist form. This intellectual generation that came of age in the late 1950s and early 1960s – the generation for whom assimilation was a starting point and not an end – was profoundly shaped by the debates that the older generation of Marxist intellectuals, whether Césaire from his heterodox position outside the Party or Armand Nicolas' orthodox one within, conducted in the wake of the Left's rejection of Assimilation in 1956 and 1957. Whether they remained ardent Communists or carved out an independent place, this generation's reckoning with assimilation's betrayals and disappointments, its engagement with Marxism and its possibilities and problems, pushed them to develop theories and approaches to Antillean life capable of grasping and elucidating it in all its concrete particularity.

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<sup>201</sup> *La Revue Guadeloupéenne*, May 1955.

### **Chapter Three**

## **Decolonization, Racism and Disappointment: Antillean Students in the Metropole, 1948-1964**

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the history of the postwar Antillean student movement and its contributions to the development of a distinct Antillean identity. The chapter begins with a study of the Antillean student movement's origins in the "négritude generation" of the interwar period. The journals *Légitime Défense* and *L'Etudiant Noir* mark the emergence of a self-conscious and politically active Antillean student movement. My analysis is focused on these journals' contribution to the student movement; as such, I deemphasize their contribution to négritude literary production in favor of examining the events and concerns around which they organized. Many of these concerns – metropolitan racism, scholarships, housing – persisted into the postwar era. Additionally, the interwar student generation's philosophical and cultural investigations into Antillean identity formed the "canon" for the postwar generation.

The second part of the chapter looks at the experiences of Antillean students in the metropole in the 1950s. It is focused on the difficulties that many had adjusting to life in the metropole and the incomprehension and even active racism they experienced in Paris, Lyon and other university centers of France. I investigate how disputes over housing, religion, scholarships, activism and leisure shaped postwar Antillean students, pushing them to question France and to question the solidity of their French identity. These "disappointments," as I call them, undermined Antillean students' confidence in the assimilating project's efficacy. Disappointment coupled to Antillean students'

investigations of their societies combined to radicalize their politics and push them toward demands for autonomy and even outright national independence.

### Origins of the Antillean Student Movement

The origins of an Antillean student movement are entangled in the origin of the *négritude* movement.<sup>202</sup> The first self-consciously Antillean student movement occurred in the 1930s among the groups of young intellectuals that subsequently would be recognized as the “*négritude* generation.” Writers and intellectuals like Aimé Césaire, René Ménil, Léon-Gontran Damas, Louis Achille and Leonard Sainville were the animators of the 1930s Antillean student movement and *négritude*, which both emerged in the rich cultural milieu of interwar Paris.<sup>203</sup> The fact that the beginnings of the Antillean student movement overlapped with the emergence of *négritude* as a philosophical and literary movement has worked to overstate the movement’s *négritude*

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<sup>202</sup> There is a quite extensive literature on *négritude*, going back several decades. One of the first overviews of the movement, by Lilyan Kesteloot, is best considered as a programmatic statement from within *négritude*: Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Négritude* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1974; original in French, 1963); for an analysis of the movement from a literary perspective, Belinda Jack, *Négritude and Literary Criticism: the History and Theory of ‘Negro-African’ Literature in French* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996) and A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Négritude: The Poetry and Politics of Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); recently scholars have connected *négritude* to the broader context of anti-colonial politics and Black aesthetic production in the 1920s and 1930s: Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Brent Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora” *Social Text* 66 (2001), 45-73; Brent Edwards, “The Ethnics of Surrealism” *Transition* 78 (1999), 84-135; Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Négritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2003).

<sup>203</sup> The rich *mélange* of interwar Paris has been discussed in a number of volumes, including: Kesteloot, 56-74; Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean* (London: Verso Books, 1996), 4-8; Edwards 2003, 119-186; Wilder 2005, 149-200; Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900-1930* (State College: Pennsylvania State University, 2003); Petrine Archer-Shaw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000); Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light*; Pascal Blanchard, Eric Deroo and Gilles Manceron, eds., *Le Paris Noir* (Paris: Hazan, 2001); Christopher L. Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 9-54.

aspects while occluding its student aspects. This section hopes to untangle the student movement from the *négritude* movement. While the two can certainly not be separated, in this section I focus on the connection between 1930s Antillean political and literary activity and student unionism, to hope to achieve a broader perspective on the students' concerns and commitments and to trace the origins of Antillean cultural critique in the student experience in the metropole. If *négritude* is given somewhat short shrift, it is in the interest of recovering the entire scope and range of Antillean students' interwar experiences studying in the metropole.

The first self-consciously Antillean student movement emerged in interwar Paris among a group of young intellectuals who purposefully broke with both the mores and opinions of their parents' generation and with the dominant ideologies of Antillean political life. These students, while not necessarily from high social standing, nonetheless represented the future intellectual elites of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane. They had traveled from the Americas – many on scholarship – to the metropole to attend Paris' prestigious *lycées*, in order to prepare for the *bac* and for higher studies in philosophy, law and medicine.<sup>204</sup> Once they completed their studies, they were expected to return to the Caribbean as the agents of colonial modernization: doctors, lawyers, teachers, civil servants. In short, they were to form the next generation of the colonial *bourgeois*, that tertiary administrative class that both enabled the colony to function and represented the success of France's civilizing mission in its overseas departments.

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<sup>204</sup> Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8-10; Kesteloot, 16.

The short-lived journal, *Légitime Défense*, was the first to appear in 1932.<sup>205</sup>

Directed by a group of Martiniquan students led by René Ménénil, Jules Monnerot, Etienne Léro, Thélus Léro and Pierre Yoyotte, *Légitime Défense* was written under the influence of Marx, Freud and the Surrealists, the principle currents of interwar Parisian intellectual life. According to René Ménénil, the young students traveled in the same avant-garde social networks as the surrealist intellectuals and were friendly with André Breton and his circle.<sup>206</sup> *Légitime Défense* would, in fact, in its application of surrealist aesthetics, Marxian critique and Freudian analysis to the experience of being black constitute the first artifact of the emerging négritude generation that would have a profound effect on French literary production, Antillean culture and postcolonial studies.

*Légitime Défense* was an explicitly political statement, though its politics were cultural, mingling poetry, criticism and polemic to attack the *pensée reçue* of the black bourgeoisie of the French Antilles. It was an irreverent project and the writers delighted in the time-honored tradition of patricide and *épater le bourgeois*. They condemned their parents for their hypocrisy, ignorance, bankrupt values and political quietude. On its pages were a broad variety of articles, juxtaposing an inquiry into the condition of the Antillean working classes with essays on Martiniquan poetry, an evaluation of Antillean manners with a mocking critique of local politics. While its content was largely devoted to literature and aesthetics, it understood the cultural as inseparable from the political. Although only one issue of *Légitime Défense* ever appeared, it had its desired effect,

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<sup>205</sup> *Légitime Défense* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1979). Some of the articles were translated into English and appeared in Richardson and Fijalkowski.

<sup>206</sup> René Ménénil, "A Propos du Manifeste de 'Légitime Défense,'" *Matouba* n° 3 (Avril 1963), 9-10; Kesteloot, 37-8.

shocking the mainstream of Martiniquan society, particularly the white planter elite.<sup>207</sup> Its appearance in Martinique caused a small scandal and there were calls for the journal to be banned. No further issues appeared, in part because the editors of the review were pressured by the French administration and even had their scholarships suspended.<sup>208</sup>

*Légitime Défense* was controversial both for its strident criticism of French colonialism as well as its embrace of revolutionary Marxism.<sup>209</sup> The journal presented a scathing picture of Martiniquan society, castigating its literary culture for its imitation of outmoded French cultural forms, and its political culture for its deference and impotence. In an introductory preface, *Légitime Défense* portrayed the Martiniquan as a mimic man, a “ridiculous... darkened image” of the Frenchman.<sup>210</sup> The group condemned the “French mulatto bourgeoisie” as “one of the most depressing things on earth” and openly proclaimed themselves as “traitors to this class,” in revolt against the “administrative, governmental, parliamentary, industrial, commercial corpses.”<sup>211</sup> Jules Monnerot suggested that if “a documentary film about the formation of the French mulatto bourgeoisie” was “[sped] up” it “would reveal the bent backs of black slaves *becoming* the groveling spines of a refined coloured bourgeoisie bowing to anyone available.” This bourgeoisie, Monnerot continued, played at French refinement, with their “official rostrums, civic honours, from honours to mayor, from mayor to deputy, who knows,” but were simply “prisoners” of their “supercorrectness”.<sup>212</sup> René Ménil declared that Martiniquans, in an “objective and unconscious” manner, could only “think as European

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<sup>207</sup> Brian Weinstein, *Éboué* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 140-1.

<sup>208</sup> Kesteloot, 83.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.; Edwards 2003, 191-5; Wilder 2005, 178-9.

<sup>210</sup> On mimicry and colonial discourse, Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 85-92.

<sup>211</sup> René Ménil, et al., “*Légitime Défense*: Declaration” in Richardson and Fijalkowski, 43.

<sup>212</sup> Jules-Marcel Monnerot, “Notes Bearing on the French Coloured Bourgeoisie” in Ibid., 44-6. English variants and italics in the original.



whites,” which was the mark, Ménil argued, of a “colonized land.”<sup>213</sup> The works of Caribbean writers were “depressed and depressing,” for their “deepest tendencies [have been] suppressed” and they are thus lacking “the burden that each being attaches to himself” which creates an “organic unity to his expression.”<sup>214</sup> He must become something other, that is to say, he must become “black.”

For the young Antillean students – from bourgeois backgrounds all – to become black meant above all to become proletarian. Blackness in Martinique rested not with the Francophile *métis* bourgeois, but with the cane cutters and sugar factory workers, the jobbers and dockers, who made up the majority of the island’s population. Monnerot argued in his essay that for the “black proletariat,” used as it was by the “white hereditary plutocracy,” its life and condition “in 1932 is no better than that of... 1832.”<sup>215</sup> The black bourgeoisie had abandoned them, Monnerot suggested, and he marveled that the blacks “in the fields” had not yet “cut off the heads of those who continually betray them.”<sup>216</sup> Ménil contrasted the “boredom” of the Caribbean writer and his work to a literature that “goes towards the world and its estate, expresses fundamental needs, seeks to change existence,” what Ménil, citing “proletarian writers” in the USSR and “the surrealists,” called “useful literature.”<sup>217</sup> *Légitime Défense* did not demand a return to Africa so much as an honest reckoning of the social situation of Martinique.<sup>218</sup> The young writers, drawing upon Communism and surrealism, criticized the deferential, mimicking culture of the past to argue that the Martiniquan writer and poet must become – in a formulation

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<sup>213</sup> René Ménil, “General Observations about the Coloured ‘Writer’ in the Caribbean” in *Ibid.*, 50-3.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> Monnerot in Richardson and Fijalkowski, 45.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>217</sup> Ménil in *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>218</sup> This explains Aimé Césaire’s initial disinterest in the *Légitime Défense* grouping. René Depestre, “An Interview with Aimé Césaire” in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 84-5.

that paralleled Antonio Gramsci's concept of an organic intellectual – the tribune of the black working classes and speak with and for Martinique's majority.<sup>219</sup> Only then would they find their true poetic and political voice.

The imaginary geography of blackness for the *Légitime Défense* writers becomes even clearer when we examine their cultural heroes. Rather than looking back towards the African past, they looked sideways toward contemporary African-American writers and Surrealist poets.<sup>220</sup> While the young radicals, under the influence of Surrealist exoticism, revalorized African culture against the racism of mainstream French society, the interest of *Légitime Défense* was in creating a specifically Antillean cultural language.<sup>221</sup> It did so through identification with two interconnected imagined identities: with African-American writers and with the black proletariat of the French Antilles. René Ménéil, reflecting back, noted that the students who wrote *Légitime Défense* were an insular group, made up of Martiniquan students with few links to African or other Antillean students in the metropole.<sup>222</sup> Thus, its sources were intellectual and idealist, less the product of physical interaction with other anti-colonial groups than textually produced imagined affinities with other “black” writers, particularly the African-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>223</sup> Etienne Léro, in his article for *Légitime Défense*, stated his hope that “the wind rising from black America will quickly cleanse

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<sup>219</sup> On the concept of organic intellectual: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 9-14.

<sup>220</sup> Edwards 1999, 122-8.

<sup>221</sup> On the Surrealist affinity for Africa and the non-Western generally: James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>222</sup> Ménéil, 10.

<sup>223</sup> France, in turn, had a profound effect on the Harlem Renaissance writers. Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African-Americans in the City of Light* (New York: Mariner Books, 1998); Michael Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in Paris, 1840-1980* (Champagne-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

our Antilles,” citing Langston Hughes and Claude McKay as “two revolutionary black poets” worthy of emulation.<sup>224</sup> An excerpt from McKay’s novel *Banjo* – about black dockworkers in 1920s Marseille – was translated into French and published in *Légitime Défense*.<sup>225</sup> As Brent Edwards notes, the young Martiniquan students chose a very particular passage from McKay’s novel, a section of the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter, in which the protagonist, Ray (a Haitian) encounters a Martiniquan student who effusively praises the Empress Josephine. Ray proceeds to lecture the Martiniquan student on his false consciousness and to advocate instead for proletarian internationalism.<sup>226</sup> The passage from McKay thus illuminates the two motive intellectual forces behind the *Légitime Défense* group: the rejection of the French cultural norms of the Antillean bourgeois in favor of a black, proletarian cultural and political internationalism, as prefigured in African-American writers like Hughes and McKay.<sup>227</sup>

Reflecting on *Légitime Défense* some years later, René Ménil both celebrated its potential and criticized its limitations, historicizing the journal as an attempt, at times naïve, to understand Martinique as part of the colonial world and to theorize the Martiniquan situation from a Marxist perspective.<sup>228</sup> Ménil, responding to critics of *Légitime Défense* like Senghor, who reproached the journal for not advocating the independence of Africa or the Caribbean, and to those who reduced *Légitime Défense* to a preface to *négritude*, placed the journal in its proper context, understanding it as an attempt to “[situate] political action in the Marxist framework.” While the journal

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<sup>224</sup> Quoted in Edwards, 187.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 196-8.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Edwards points out that in a lot of ways the *LD* group misreads McKay’s novel, *Banjo*, occluding the ambiguity of the novel: McKay, a Jamaican, wrote a novel about a Haitian working in Marseille. Edwards suggests the novel is less a paean to nationalism than a description of a transnational black “vagabond internationalism.” Edwards, 196-209.

<sup>228</sup> René Ménil, “1978 Introduction to *Légitime Défense*” in Richardson and Fijalkowski, 37-9.

examined black identity and black aesthetic expression, unlike later *négritude* writers it did not subordinate “political struggle” to “cultural struggle.” *Légitime Défense* addressed,

the political and social liberation of colonial peoples; the problem of a Caribbean culture taking account of race and history; the problem of an aesthetic to be worked out on the basis of *what is particular about life in our islands*.<sup>229</sup>

If the journal broached issues of “black values” and “a general black mentality,” it did not do so in order to make culture the primary arena of conflict; rather, it conceived the “development of ‘black values’” as a constituent part of the wider anti-colonial struggle.<sup>230</sup> It was necessary to develop an alternative set of values to oppose to the assimilationist mimicry of the colonized *métis* bourgeoisie who in assimilation’s name not only turned their backs on the true condition of the black working classes but partnered with the bourgeoisie in the exploitation of Martinique. The promotion of an aesthetic that reflected the black majority was not a goal in and of itself, so much as the necessary extension of the struggle against colonialism to the level of consciousness. To the degree that it stood in opposition to the values of the assimilated colonized bourgeoisie, this mode of expression could be deemed successful; beyond that, according to Ménil, *Légitime Défense* made no claims to its validity or value. The encounter with African-American writers – and with Surrealism – were a means to an end, triggers to awaken a specifically Antillean political and cultural consciousness.

Whatever its ideological confusions, *Légitime Défense* represented the first concerted effort by Antillean students to organize and express themselves specifically as Antilleans, to, in the words of Edouard Glissant, “think as Antilleans.” Despite its

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 38. Emphasis added.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

fleeting publishing history, it would have a lasting impact on Antillean intellectual life.<sup>231</sup> Most immediately, it inspired the three principal poets of *négritude* – Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon-Gontran Damas – who were students in Paris in the early 1930s. Césaire and Senghor both attended Louis-le-Grand, an elite lycée to prepare for studies at the ENS; Césaire had known Damas at the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France, which Damas had attended in the late 1920s as there was no comparable institution in Guyane.<sup>232</sup> The three friends had read *Légitime Défense* with a mixture of interest and criticism; while they appreciated its fury and daring, they were critical of its willingness to subordinate black expression to European modes of thought like communism and surrealism. Césaire suggested that, in their own way, they practiced a form of assimilation.<sup>233</sup> The example of *Légitime Défense* nonetheless inspired Césaire and Senghor to launch another short-lived journal, *L'Étudiant Noir*.

*L'Étudiant Noir* was the product of the complex “black” milieu of interwar Paris. As Gary Wilder has carefully documented, *L'Étudiant Noir*, in both its title and editorial policy, constituted an attempt to overcome the divisions that existed between colonial students in the metropole in the 1930s.<sup>234</sup> While institutions such as the Nardal sisters’ salon provided a forum to bring together African, Antillean and even African-American intellectuals into a black public sphere, geographical and ideological differences similarly worked to push them apart. Earlier black publications such as *La Race Nègre* and *La Dépêche Africaine* collapsed as the writers splintered along ideological lines, particularly

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<sup>231</sup> Both the Martiniquan Communist journal, *Action*, and the Antillean student journal, *Matouba*, would revisit *Légitime Défense* in the 1960s as an Antillean nationalist sensibility reemerged.

<sup>232</sup> Wilder, 151-2.

<sup>233</sup> Georges Ngaly, *Aimé Césaire: une homme à la recherche d'une patrie* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1994), 59.

<sup>234</sup> Wilder, 185.

in debates over anti-colonialism and communism.<sup>235</sup> Léonard Sainville, a Martiniquan, noted the divisions, writing, “we must be realistic. It is a fact: there is some difficulty between Africans and Antilleans.”<sup>236</sup> As Wilder notes, Senghor was dismissive of the earlier attempts to forge links between Antilleans and Africans, stating that “we rarely read these journals and, when we did, we thought that their articles were poorly reasoned and badly written.”<sup>237</sup> In 1934, Césaire was elected president of the Martiniquan student group and with his presidency took over editorship of the organization’s journal, *L’Etudiant Martiniquais*. Césaire was the one who would push the journal away from its parochial concerns, inviting a number of non-Martiniquans, including his friend Senghor as well as Henri Éboué (son of Félix Éboué and Senghor’s future brother-in-law) and Gilbert Gratiant (a Martiniquan but by 1935, a teacher at the Lycée Schoelcher) to publish in the renamed *L’Etudiant Noir*. By renaming the journal, Césaire signified his aspiration – and the aspiration of the *négritude* generation – to transcend ideological disagreements over anti-colonialism and geographical divisions between Antilleans and Africans in the name of a shared blackness.

Despite these aspirations, however, it is important to point out that *L’Etudiant Noir* was not the organ of a Pan-African organization, but the journal of the Association of Martiniquan Students (AEM) and served first and foremost to represent the interests of Martiniquan students resident in the metropole. Brent Edwards has cautioned against overstating the role of Pan-Africanism and *négritude* in *L’Etudiant Noir*’s ideological commitments and interests. Of the three articles that can be described as touching on black cultural issues – Césaire’s “Nègreries: jeunesse noire et assimilation,” Senghor’s

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 180-1.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 185.

“L’humanisme et nous: René Maran” and Gilbert Gratiant’s “Mûlatres... pour le mal et bien” – only Césaire’s explicitly advocated a *négritude* position, whereas Senghor’s advocated a more traditional blending of black and European cultures and Gratiant’s was a long defense of his own poetic activity in the name of a Marxist and anti-colonialist internationalism. The bulk of the issue, as Edwards points out, was concerned with defending student scholarships.

While Edwards is right to argue that the *raison d’être* for *L’Etudiant Noir* was not to advance the new conception of black cultural politics that would become *négritude*, *L’Etudiant Noir* and the movement for which it was a tribune, the AEM, was not concerned only with the parochial matter of student funding. Julien Valère Loza, a former member and historian of the Martiniquan student movement, suggested that the AEM under Césaire’s leadership had other concerns besides the issue of funding, specifically political repression back in Martinique and the rise of fascism and racism in France, particularly in the Latin Quarter.<sup>238</sup> In terms of political repression, the murder of the Communist journalist André Alier and the failed prosecution of his murderers shocked the Martiniquan students, politically and personally; Alier’s younger brother, Pierre, was a medical student and vice-president of the AEM. The AEM in Paris organized demonstrations and solicited solidarity with other groups, including the *Ligue des Droits de l’Homme* and the Communist Party. It also aided Pierre Alier’s younger brother, Marcel, who was put on trial in Bordeaux for attempted murder after he tried to shoot Eugène Aubéry, the *béké* planter and distillery owner widely suspected of being behind

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<sup>238</sup> Julien Valère Loza, *Les Etudiants Martiniquais en France: Histoire de leur organisation et de leurs luttes, Tome 1: Des origines à l’affaire de OJAM* (Fort-de-France: Editions 2M, 2003), 29.

André Alier's murder.<sup>239</sup> For the young Martiniquans, who were expected to form the island's new elite when they completed their studies, Alier's murder was an extreme and troubling manifestation of the widespread, anti-democratic political and economic corruption on Martinique.<sup>240</sup>

Growing incidences of racism, the spread of fascist ideology and the uptick in far-right activist violence also concerned Martiniquan students. Loza points to a series of letters that Martiniquan students wrote to *Justice*, the Communist Party paper in Fort-de-France, in 1934 and 1935. In one particular incident, a Martiniquan medical student was, "assaulted at the entrance to the amphitheatre... he was beaten by a group of young men armed with truncheons (*matraques*), to the cries of 'out the door, metics.'"<sup>241</sup> The AEM, much like older black intellectuals and activists in Paris, made common cause with the French anti-fascist movement; the rise in racial incidents in Paris and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia pushed the interwar black movement towards the Popular Front.<sup>242</sup> Indeed, the sole issue of *L'Etudiant Noir* featured Guadeloupean poet Léonard Sainville's response to an inflammatory article published by the noted fascist intellectual Lucien Rebatet in *Je Suis Partout*.<sup>243</sup> Rebatet had published an article entitled "L'invasion contre les Étrangers et les métèques colonieux résidant en France" in which he criticized the influx of colonial subjects, denounced the "equality" afforded them under republican law

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<sup>239</sup> For more on the Alier murder, see chapter 1.

<sup>240</sup> On the endemic corruption of pre-departmentalization Martinique, see Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel: A Story of Colonialism and Resistance in the Caribbean* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 1-50.

<sup>241</sup> Quoted in Loza, 30. Metics were the servile class in ancient Greece.

<sup>242</sup> Wilder, 192-3. Philippe Dewitte, *Les mouvements nègres en France, 1919-1939* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), 364-370.

<sup>243</sup> On *Je Suis Partout*: David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 71-3, 109-113. On Lucien Rebatet: Alice Yeager Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 125-141.



and raised fears of racial miscegenation between black men and white women.<sup>244</sup> Rebatet suggested that such relationships were “against nature” and to the detriment of proper “racial sentiment.”<sup>245</sup> Sainville lambasted Rebatet for both the sentiment and timing of the article, noting that, “we would laugh if the violence did not strengthen our awareness of the danger we face at this time.”<sup>246</sup> Sainville criticized Rebatet’s “hypocrisy” and contempt for equality and democracy, but warned his readers that Rebatet’s position was all too common. Rebatet’s article, Sainville continued, at least might have the “great merit” of “unclogging the eyes of those colonials who have persisted in denying until now the imminent peril posed to their liberties and their lives threatened by fascism.”<sup>247</sup> For Sainville and the other members of the AEM, Rebatet’s article provided a clear indicator of the racial animus towards non-whites resident in the metropole.<sup>248</sup>

Further, the conflict over scholarships and bourses was a political issue as much as it was a narrow parochial issue. In 1934, the governor of Martinique and the Ministry of the Colonies decided to cut the 150 scholarships available to Martiniquan students dramatically: they proposed eliminating 78 out of 150 regular bourses for Martiniquan students for the 1934-5 school year, and to further eliminate 17 additional bourses effective February 1935. In short, the administration had eliminated nearly two-thirds of the scholarships available to Martiniquan students to study in the metropole.<sup>249</sup> The decision to cut the scholarships was at least, in part, one of the motivating factors behind

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<sup>244</sup> Lucien Rebatet, “L’invasion contre les Etrangers et les métèques colonieux résidant en France,” *Je Suis Partout*, 23 February 1935; republished in part in *L’Etudiant Noir* 1 (1935), 8.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.; Wilder, 191-2.

<sup>248</sup> See also: Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: the Origins of Modern Immigration Controls Between the Wars* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2006), 153-167; Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy and Embodiment in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 51-74.

<sup>249</sup> Loza, 29-33.

the publication of *EN*.<sup>250</sup> The students protested bitterly to the Ministry of Colonies and the General Council of Martinique, and enlisted the aid of Martinique's representatives in Paris, senator Henri Lémery and deputy Joseph Lagrosillière.<sup>251</sup> While Edwards is somewhat dismissive of the conflict over scholarships, it was a racial and political issue as pointed as Pan-Africanism, *négritude* or black cultural critique. Without the bourses, many black Martiniquan students would have been unable to study in France; the only students who would have been able to study in France for advanced degrees were the children of the *békés*.<sup>252</sup> The *de facto* exclusion of middle class blacks and métis from higher education would have deepened the *békés'* persistent stranglehold over the island. The liberal professions, typically dominated by the métis middle class, would have been closed to promising students, denied advancement due to lack of financial resources. The only recourse would be recruitment of white, metropolitan civil servants or the recruitment of the children of the *béké*. The defense of the bourses was thus a defense of both racial and economic equality.

What can we conclude about the interwar generation of Antillean students from its two short-lived journals? First, it is important to point out that most were elites; they either were the children of the elite or were being formed into the future of elite of the colony. Most were *khâgne* students at the prestigious lycées of Paris – Henri IV or Louis-le-Grand – in order to prepare for the rigorous entrance exams to the upper echelons of French education. Their course of study was elite as well: of the seven members of the AEM leadership, three were preparing to study philosophy, one to study medicine, one

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid. André Midas, "A Propos de l'Association," *L'Etudiant Noir* 1 (1935), 2.

<sup>251</sup> Aristide Maugée, "La question des Bourses," *L'Etudiant Noir* 1 (1935), 1.

<sup>252</sup> Aimé Césaire serving as a case in point; he came from a respectable, if humble, rural background and would have been unable to complete his studies in Paris without the support of scholarships.

business, one engineering, while the final member of the leadership, Sainville, was already an EPS (secondary school) teacher. The majority was pursuing specialized and advanced degrees in prestigious fields in the arts, philosophy, medicine and science, rather than the technocratic subjects generally prescribed to colonial students from Africa and Asia.<sup>253</sup>

Second, the political and cultural turmoil of the interwar years had a profound impact on their intellectual and political development, pushing many to reject the roles that had been planned for them by parents and administrators alike. While Brent Edwards and Gary Wilder have both questioned the extent to which *négritude* emerged from the Antillean student movement in Paris, it remains quite clear that interwar Paris had a profound effect. Paris in the 1930s was the center of a vast colonial empire and the imperial metropole brought together colonial subjects in complex and productive ways.<sup>254</sup> Even if Antillean students had few direct links to African and Asian anti-colonial militants, anti-colonial sentiment was widespread. The Popular Front and anti-fascism had a similar impact, an impact that would be reinforced following the fall of France in 1940 and the extension of Vichy rule into the French empire.<sup>255</sup> The experience of racism in the capitol, anti-colonial activism, the rise of fascism and the impotence of the Third Republic would shape the interwar generation as committed political radicals.

Finally, the interwar student generation provided both a pattern and an inspiration to the generation that would follow. While the direct links between the two generations of

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<sup>253</sup> On interwar colonial education: Peggy Sabatier, "'Elite' Education in French West Africa: The Era of Limits, 1903-1945," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, XL, 2 (1978), 247-266.

<sup>254</sup> Wilder, 149-200.

<sup>255</sup> Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); André Breton, *Martinique, Snake Charmer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

students were shattered during the war – the AEM, already a shell, was disbanded by Vichy in 1940 along with other student organizations – links of affiliation and influence remained strong.<sup>256</sup> The pages of *LD* and *EN* combined specific, bread-and-butter concerns affecting their position as Antillean students with historical and cultural inquiry, political-aesthetic criticism and an internationalist focus. This format would be repeated in the journals published by the postwar student organization, which form the core interest of this chapter. The journals mingled investigations of Antillean student life with condemnations of colonialism in Africa, poetry with political polemic, demands for greater support with criticisms of the French state. Further, the interwar generation shaped the postwar generation through both institutions and affiliation. Aimé Césaire, René Mênil and Gilbert Gratiant all taught at the Lycée Schoelcher, the Antilles' premier school, where they shaped a generation of Antillean students that included Frantz Fanon and Edouard Glissant. Finally, the interwar generation's literary and critical works – from Césaire's *Cahier* to Damas' *Pigments* to *Tropiques* – formed the canon to which the postwar generation turned as they too grappled with what it meant to be simultaneously black and French.

### **The Postwar Antillean Student Movement: Opportunity, Alienation and Discrimination, 1949-1960**

The war years shattered the institutions of the Antillean student movement and provided a definitive organizational break between interwar and postwar student organizing. Vichy disbanded the AEM in 1940, along with all other independent student

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<sup>256</sup> Jean-Pierre Worms, "The French Student Movement," *Comparative Education Review* 10, 2 (1966), 359-366.

movements and unions during its educational reforms in 1940 and 1941.<sup>257</sup> In any case, by 1940 the movement had been reduced to a shell; most of its activists had either left metropolitan France or been pulled into the war. The looming conflict pushed many students to leave France for their home colonies, while others were drafted or enlisted in the French army. Some had traveled home years before. René Ménil and Thélus Léro returned to Martinique in the mid-1930s and formed the Marxist organization, *Front Commun*, which eventually merged with the *Group Jean Jaurès* to become the French Communist Federation of Martinique.<sup>258</sup> Césaire returned to Martinique to take up a teaching post at the Lycée Schoelcher; he and his wife Suzanne, along with Ménil, published the Surrealist-inspired review, *Tropiques*, during the war, criticizing the racism of Vichy rule and frequently running afoul the Vichy censors.<sup>259</sup> Senghor joined a regiment of the *Tirailleurs Senegalais*, was captured and barely escaped summary execution and spent eighteen months in a POW camp.<sup>260</sup> Etienne Léro and Pierre Yoyotte were not as lucky; both volunteered for the French army in the name of anti-fascism and were killed during the fighting in 1939 and 1940.<sup>261</sup> Other students were scattered across the continents serving in the army, teaching or filling administrative posts. With the occupation and Anglo-American blockade of the islands, no new students traveled to Paris to take their places.

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<sup>257</sup> Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 153-164.

<sup>258</sup> Loza, 26; Nicolas, tome 2.

<sup>259</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Introduction," *Tropiques* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1994).

<sup>260</sup> Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787* (London: Routledge, 2003), 170; Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of European Blacks, Africans and African Americans During the Nazi Era* (London: Routledge, 2002), 159-60.

<sup>261</sup> Franklin Rosemont and Robin D.G. Kelley, eds., *Black, Brown and Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora* (Austin: University of Texas, 2009), 35, 40.

The return to peace and the push for economic and social development in the metropole and the empire brought hundreds of Antillean students to Paris in the years immediately following the Second World War. To meet the requirements for new posts in the civil service, national health system and modern industries, Antilleans traveled to France to study in French universities. The reconstruction of France from wartime damage was not a purely metropolitan project; reconstruction was to be an empire-wide project, rebuilding and integrating the Union Française into a single, modern economic community. The Bureau of Planning, the government office that crafted France's *dirigiste* postwar economic order, included the colonies in all its postwar planning; the government also established a special fund, FIDES, specifically for economic investment in the Union Française.<sup>262</sup> Commissions composed of central planners in Paris and local authorities studied the social and economic needs of the colonies, crafted policies to ameliorate those needs and allocated money to fund infrastructural and economic development projects across the Union Française. An important component of these plans was to educate a technocratic class that would administer and direct social and economic development. The development of the four DOMs was particularly urgent: as constituent and integral parts of the French nation, the glaring poverty and underdevelopment not only hindered their development and brought social instability, but also effaced the republican principle of equality.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Richard Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 224-247; D. Bruce Marshall, *The French Colonial Myth and Constitution-Making in the Fourth Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 224-6.

<sup>263</sup> See, for example, the study devoted to the DOMs in the first *Plan d'Équipement* (Paris, 1948).

### Education for Social Change

Following the end of hostilities in 1945, Antillean students, including ex-soldiers, returned to school en masse. The national and departmental government, in keeping with the plans for development issuing from the Planning Ministry and the Martinique General Council, allocated more money for educating Martiniquans pursuing higher studies. War veterans could apply for and frequently were granted veteran's scholarships; in addition, the overall number of available scholarships increased as well.<sup>264</sup> Despite the expansion of higher education and the rapid rise in Antilleans studying in the metropole – there were nearly 800 in 1953 compared to 446 in 1949 – overall Antilleans remained underrepresented in French universities. In metropolitan France, there was one student for every 316 French citizens; in comparison, for the Overseas Departments, there was one student for every 745 citizens.<sup>265</sup> The Antilles lacked a university, a fact that exacerbated the metropolitan-colonial disparity and decreased the number of Antilleans enrolled in higher education.<sup>266</sup>

Who were the Antillean students who made the long trip to France in the 1950s and 1960s to pursue their studies? What were their social backgrounds, education, career hopes? France, famously or notoriously, does not keep racial or ethnic statistics, making it difficult to form a composite portrait of Antillean students in the immediate postwar period.<sup>267</sup> Nonetheless, documents scattered throughout the archives enable us to reconstruct some of the social and economic background of the students. Prefectural

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<sup>264</sup> Marcel Manville, *Les Antilles sans fard* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), 58.

<sup>265</sup> *Alizés*, Vol. 3, n° 5 (Fevrier-Mars 1954), 11.

<sup>266</sup> A fact not ameliorated until 1970. See the report by the Centre des Etudes Régionales Antilles-Guyane (CERAG). "Problèmes universitaires des Antilles-Guyane Françaises," *Les Cahiers du CERAG* 18 (1969).

<sup>267</sup> Simon Patrick, "Nationality and Origins in French Statistics: Ambiguous Categories," *Population* 3 (1998), 196-200.

documents and police surveillance files, as well as student surveys and memoirs, provide a portrait, however attenuated, of Antillean students in postwar France.

According to the scant government documents available, like their interwar forbearers most Antillean students came from middle class and petit bourgeois backgrounds. The Martiniquan middle class was composed primarily of métis and black families established in the colonial bureaucracy, small-scale enterprise or the liberal professions; their children were expected by their parents to follow in their footsteps and by the state to lead and direct the postwar modernization of the island. They were, like their prewar compatriots, the future Martiniquan middle class. The memoirs and biographies available of postwar students tell a similar story. Frantz Fanon, for example, was descended from the free black population, those emancipated before 1848; his father worked in the customs office while his mother owned a small shop in Fort-de-France.<sup>268</sup> Marcel Manville was born in Trinité where his father had been a local councilor and the local school inspector. Though the family was relatively comfortable, education at a French university exceeded the imagination; his parents' loftiest aspiration was that Manville would do well enough in school to "go down to the city," or in other words, attend the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France.<sup>269</sup> Edouard Glissant's father was an overseer on the Lareinty plantation outside Lamentin; Glissant's upbringing was rural but privileged compared to the children of the field hands with whom he grew up.<sup>270</sup> Other students had parents who were politicians, local councilors, union officials, small

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<sup>268</sup> Macey, 48-50.

<sup>269</sup> Manville, 21-2.

<sup>270</sup> "Entretien avec Edouard Glissant," *Trait d'Union* (January 1959), 35.



shopkeepers and other middle class occupations.<sup>271</sup> According to a survey the Antillean Catholic students conducted, 2-3% of Antillean students in the metropole came from working class backgrounds, while at least 25% had parents who were civil servants, administrators or liberal professionals.

While social background was noted only occasionally in government records, the students' intellectual interests and career directions were assiduously recorded. *Alizés*, the bulletin published by the Antillean Catholic students, conducted a survey of Antillean students resident in the metropole for their February-March 1954 issue.<sup>272</sup> The journal compiled statistics on the Antillean student population for the years 1948 to 1953, broken down by department of origin, academic faculty and metropolitan university. For the 1948-9 school year, there were 90 in law, 105 in letters, 105 in medicine, 35 in pharmacy and 111 in sciences. For the 1952-3 school year, those numbers rose to 216 in law, 174 in letters, 157 in medicine, 36 in pharmacy and 215 in the sciences. *Alizés* noted that these percentages marked a disparity between Antillean student enrollments and the enrollments of the average French student. While some 40% of French students were enrolled in Letters and 17% in Sciences, only 29% of Antillean were registered in the Letters while 35% were enrolled in Sciences.<sup>273</sup> These enrollment numbers suggest that many Antillean students chose fields of study that would be most useful in securing a career in industry and the expanding welfare state in the DOMs.

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<sup>271</sup> Since scholarships were awarded on merit and not need, the prefecture's documents only listed the parents' occupations as part of an investigation into the students' political affiliations. ADM, Cote n° 202w12, n° 3/CAB, Prefect of Martinique to Secretary General for the DOMs, 2 January 1962, "Etudiants des départements d'Outre-Mer."

<sup>272</sup> *Alizés*, Vol. 3, n° 5 (Fevrier-Mars 1954), 6-12.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Scholarship statistics further suggest that the local and metropolitan administrations saw education as the principal means to produce a new generation of technocrats to run island affairs. In a 1962 report to the Secretary-General for the Overseas Departments, the prefect of Martinique listed the disciplines and faculties for all the Martiniquan students requesting a scholarship. His numbers indicated there were 14 in dentistry; 1 in fine arts; 26 in law; 29 in letters; 62 in medicine; 14 in pharmacy; 46 in the sciences; 14 in lycée; and 88 in technical and vocational schools.<sup>274</sup> Letters made up less than 11% of the total; law, 9%; medicine, dentistry and pharmacy, 32%; science, 16%; and technical and vocational training made up nearly 32%. In total, 80% of the scholarships granted to Antillean students for study in the metropole were committed to students studying subjects related to health care (medicine, pharmacy, dentistry), science and vocational and technical training. From its funding schedule, it is clear that the local and metropolitan governments prioritized medical, scientific and technical knowledge over the arts and the law.<sup>275</sup>

Not only metropolitan and departmental planners and politicians saw education as a means to improve the French Antilles; many Antillean students and educators conceived a similar role for the postwar generation. Louis Achille, a member of the interwar student generation and by the 1940s a professor of English at Lyon's prestigious Lycée du Parc, served as a mentor to Antillean students resident in Lyon and the metropole.<sup>276</sup> Achille, an ardent Catholic, was close to the Catholic students particularly

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Macey, 125.

and occasionally published articles in *Alizés*.<sup>277</sup> In the journal's second issue, Achille contributed a "Letter from Lyon" in which he discussed both the purpose of the new journal and the broader goals of Antillean students.<sup>278</sup> Achille's letter was adapted from a talk he had given to the newly constituted group of Antillean Catholic students in November 1951 on the theme of the "social mission" of the Antillean student. Achille situated this "social mission" in the language of Catholicism, grounding his appeal in the humanist language of "social Catholicism" and French republicanism.<sup>279</sup> Differentiating this mission from the work of politicians, Achille insisted that "the sole directing principle of all our future social work is, in my mind, the following: we must never serve men as a means to our own ends; we must serve men as an end in itself."<sup>280</sup> "Men were not made to help us to improve our situation, to promote the ideas we hold dear, to realize the order we wish... man is not only natural, but *supernatural* as well."<sup>281</sup> Achille's conception of the duty that the Antillean students owed both their society and themselves was reminiscent of the developing left-Catholicism of postwar France, best articulated by Emmanuel Mounier and the journal *Esprit*.<sup>282</sup>

Non-Catholic students similarly understood their education as both an opportunity for individual advancement and as a responsibility to put their educations at the service of the islands they had left behind. In an editorial in the first issue of *Trait d'Union*, the

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<sup>277</sup> Sister Mary Anthony Scally, *Negro Catholic Writers, 1900-1943: A Bio-Bibliography* (Kingsport, TN: Walter Romig & Co., 1945), 17-8.

<sup>278</sup> Louis T. Achille, "Lettre de Lyon," *Alizés* Vol. 1, n° 2 (December 1951), 3.

<sup>279</sup> Achille had outlined his views on this matter in an article he published while a professor at Howard University in the 1940s. Louis T. Achille, "The Catholic Approach to Interracialism in France," *The American Catholic Sociological Review* 3, 1 (1942), 22-7. During his years in the United States he also published in *Phylon*.

<sup>280</sup> Achille, "Lettre," 4.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> John Hellman, "The Opening to the Left in French Catholicism: The Role of the Personalists," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34, 3 (July-Sept. 1973), 387.

publication of the secular Association of Martiniquan Students (AEM), the AEM president Georges Lafare enumerated the tasks facing the rejuvenated Antillean student movement. Antillean students, acting through the AEM, would secure expanded scholarship opportunities and improved housing and support for Antillean students. But they also had a serious calling beyond improving Antillean student life in the metropole:

Some tell you that before your eyes one world dies, another is created. In fact, you are the center and the stake of a gigantic battle of ideas... You know that it is difficult to live today in your country... however you have yet to admit your country, so young, is yet finished.<sup>283</sup>

*Trait d'Union*'s first issue confirmed Lafare's dual mission for the AEM, publishing articles on the material condition of Antillean students in Paris with essays on Antillean poetry, Martiniquan life and other topics. R. Barclay, another member of *Trait d'Union*'s editorial board, contributed a piece urging Antillean students to harness their talents, their skills, to "finish with mutism" and speak for their "country" in both its joys and ugliness. Quoting Aimé Césaire, Barclay asked them to "'be the mouth for the misfortunes of those with no mouth, my voice freedom for those who [collapse] in the dungeons of despair.'"<sup>284</sup> Many Antillean students conceived their organizations as serving a purpose greater than their narrow interests as students, believing that their education was not only a means for individual social advancement but also for the collective advancement of the Antilles. Others, however, were interested mostly in continuing their education and securing a career, a fact that both *Alizés* and *Trait d'Union* frequently bemoaned.

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<sup>283</sup> "Editorial," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier 1955), 2.

<sup>284</sup> R. Barclay, "Il Faut en Finir," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier 1955), 15-6.

### Combating Racism and Alienation

Placement and location within the metropole could help determine a student's experience studying in France. The Antillean student population was distributed across France at multiple universities and institutions. The single largest concentration of Antilleans were enrolled in the University of Paris and the capitol's lycées, while there were significant populations of Antillean students in Bordeaux, Toulouse and Montpellier, and, to a lesser degree, in Marseille and Lyon.<sup>285</sup> Each city offered a different experience. The provincial cities posed their own problems, particularly their isolation from the established Parisian Antillean community. Frantz Fanon studied in Lyon in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Fanon's biographer, David Macey, noted that Lyon "was neither more nor less racist than any French city" but that it was "notoriously unfriendly to strangers."<sup>286</sup> Despite Lyon's small Antillean population, it possessed a significant immigrant population from the empire, particularly from North Africa. Antillean students, including Fanon, frequently reached out to North African and African students to make up for the lack of an active Antillean community in the city.<sup>287</sup>

Paris was in some ways more welcoming, in others more alienating. With its greater concentration of Antillean students, a larger, more dynamic Antillean social life was possible. AGEM and FAGEC were most active in Paris, and the capital was also the center for other African and colonial students. The French African Students' Union (F.E.A.N.F.) was headquartered in Paris, as was the North African students' union and

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<sup>285</sup> *Alizés*, Vol. 3, n° 5 (Fevrier-Mars 1954), 6-12.

<sup>286</sup> Macey, 119.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-3; "Echos de Lyon," *Alizés* Vol. 3, n° 3 (Janvier 1956), 30.

smaller student unions from other parts of the empire.<sup>288</sup> Paris also hosted the largest concentration of Antillean immigrants resident in the metropole.<sup>289</sup> But it remained, also, a large, anonymous metropolis; the city's size, in both population and area, was much larger than Martinique and Guadeloupe. The 1962 issue of *Jeunes de la Martinique*, a newspaper published for Martiniquan lycée students, published a letter of advice to Martiniquan students preparing to study in the metropole.<sup>290</sup> While the author, Louise-Hélène Marie-Anne, was encouraging, she also warned Martiniquan students that life in Paris could be difficult.

There is the large problem of the adaptation of the Antillean to French life, so hectic in comparison to our own. There is the problem of the climate... Many students feel it and the first three months are generally quite miserable... adaptation will happen if one has a bit of courage and especially, in place of 'retreating into the ivory tower,' one tries to reconnect with one's older compatriots or one's own cohort. For, you must be told that, in France, there is not the same friendly warmth that you find at home, for the good reason that in Martinique everyone knows each other, while in France there is the most complete indifference.<sup>291</sup>

She continued on to urge that students get involved with the Antillean organizations in the metropole, suggesting both FAGEC and AGEM. In FAGEC's headquarters there was a social center that sponsored meetings, events and even prayer for students, offering opportunities for isolated Antillean students to socialize. AGEM was secular, but was also an active forum for Antillean students to meet and socialize. Participating in AGEM events, Marie-Anne pointed out, would also aid students in the study of issues important to Martinique and to participate in the rediscovery and development of Martiniquan

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<sup>288</sup> Amady Aly Deing, *Les Grands Combats de la F.E.A.N.F.: du Bandung aux indépendances* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).

<sup>289</sup> David Macey, "Frantz Fanon or the Difficulty of Being Martinican," *History Workshop Journal* 58 (Fall 2004), 219.

<sup>290</sup> L.H. Marie-Anne, "Une Etudiante martiniquaise en métropole vous parle," *Jeunes de la Martinique* n° 51 (February 1962), 4.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

culture. Marie-Anne concluded by encouraging the students to study in the metropole but to be prepared for the difficulties such a sojourn could present.

While some students found the Antillean community a source of comfort, for others it contributed to their sense of alienation, even to a sense of feeling ridiculous.<sup>292</sup> Frantz Fanon chose to study at the medical school in Lyon over the medical school in Paris, in part to escape Paris' Antillean community. His good friend Marcel Manville recounted that Fanon had told him that there were "too many negroes" in Paris. Fanon himself wrote of the pettiness and insularity of Paris' Antilleans:

[they make] themselves quite comfortable in what we shall call the *Umwelt* of Martinique; by which I mean – and this applies particularly to my brothers of the Antilles – that when one of us tries, in Paris or any other university city, to study a problem seriously, he is accused of self-aggrandizement, and the surest way of cutting him down is to remind him of the Antilles by exploding into dialect.<sup>293</sup>

Fanon's brother, Joby Fanon, told David Macey that Fanon found the "ritual loyalty" of the Parisian Martiniquan community stifling and isolating, with its "culture founded on rum, the beguine and accras."<sup>294</sup> He was bothered also by many Antilleans' elitism and contempt towards African students and immigrants living in the metropole.<sup>295</sup> Fanon, in the end and in his own way embraced the republican universalist ideal and wanted to escape the limits imposed by his origins and skin color.<sup>296</sup> Maddy Lastel, originally from Guyane and active among the Overseas Catholic students, recounted the stifling and even shaming attitude of some Antilleans in the metropole. "A young man gravely remarked to me, with reproach in his voice, that I 'had europeanized myself.' 'How do you see that?'"

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<sup>292</sup> Macey 2004, 219.

<sup>293</sup> Fanon, 37-8.

<sup>294</sup> Macey, 118.

<sup>295</sup> Fanon, 38.

<sup>296</sup> Fanon, 223-32.

I asked him. And he responded to me no less gravely: ‘Your short-cut hair!’”<sup>297</sup> Lastel suggested that some Antillean students, disappointed by metropolitan indifference or hostility, fled into a fetishized and rigid sense of Antillean identity and could be critical, even hostile, to those perceived to have adjusted to metropolitan life.

Fanon’s conundrum – to remain in the embrace of Antillean identity or to strive for French culture – was a theme many students returned to in their writings. On the pages of *Alizés*, Paul Pilon, one of the review’s principal animators, published two interlinked articles on the problems Antillean students faced adjusting to metropolitan life. His first article recounted his impressions of the “Rue Thibaud,” a center the Catholic diocese of Paris had established for overseas students.<sup>298</sup> Pilon expressed concern that this center, specifically devoted to overseas students, could have a deleterious effect, enabling Antilleans and other overseas students to keep to themselves and avoid integrating with metropolitan students. “I found myself struggling with the same desire for rapprochement with elements of my same origin but I have to say that, pushing the analysis a bit, this tendency too often appears as an easy reflex, poorly disguised as a gregarious tendency. This desire for an overseas forum appears to me as an escape before the effort to create relations between white and black students, an escape, a refuge and reaction before failure.”<sup>299</sup> Pilon admitted that “this flight” often resulted from Antillean students’ encounter with metropolitan attitudes that ranged from patronizing to indifferent to openly racist. Rue Thibaud thus became for many overseas students a “sure refuge against ‘white racism’”<sup>300</sup> Pilon nonetheless counseled that despite these

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<sup>297</sup> Maddy Lastel, “Mon cher Paul...”, *Alizés*, Oct.-Nov., 1953, 21.

<sup>298</sup> *Alizés*, Oct.-Nov. 1953, 7.

<sup>299</sup> Paul Pilon, “Pourquoi la Rue Thibaud?”, *Alizés*, Oct.-Nov., 1953, 18.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.



“frequently irritating experiences,” Antillean students must strive to not only interact with white students but to learn from and with them. Pilon suggested that the Rue Thibaud must be “friendly terrain” where white and black students “would come to meet overseas elements already mingled with metropolitan students.” The Rue Thibaud should be “our open home” rather than a “convenient refuge for fearful, desperately timid and distrustful overseas students.”<sup>301</sup> Pilon feared that Antilleans would band together as Antilleans, hide in their Antilleaness, and refuse to open themselves up to the opportunities available in the metropole.

In Pilon’s article in the following issue of *Alizés*, he tackled the other side of Antillean adjustment to life in the metropole: the complete break some students made with their Antillean past. While maintaining his insistence that Antilleans open themselves to the opportunities offered by their sojourn in France, he was equally critical of those who abandoned the Antilles. Harkening back to Achille’s charge that Antillean students work towards both individual and collective improvement, Pilon reminded Antilleans of their debt to their country. “I do not criticize any less those who... forget their duty to the Antilles which obligates them to promote in their country of origin better conditions of work and life.”<sup>302</sup> Those who “‘burn their bridges’ in leaving behind the world from which they came” betray themselves and the opportunities afforded them no less than those who shelter in the Antillean community, for “they forget that they are Antillean as much as they are French.”<sup>303</sup> The task – and the complexity – for the Antillean, Pilon concluded, was to simultaneously advance “the cause of human

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>302</sup> Paul Pilon, “Vie Française our Vie Antillaise en France,” *Alizés*, Dec. 1953, 30.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.



room and that for Antilleans, who “believe themselves entirely French,” it was “terribly disillusioning” to be treated as a foreigner.<sup>309</sup>

César Assouvie, a medical student, wrote a 1953 article for *Alizés* describing his fruitless search for a room in Paris.<sup>310</sup> He noted that while there were no ““for white only”” signs in Paris and the metropole, there remained a “latent distrust, a heartbreaking indifference” towards black students.<sup>311</sup> Assouvie wrote that he had first tried to find a room in a hotel, but always was informed that the hotel was full. Next he turned to the housing agencies, set up to help students find housing in the Paris region. He tried four agencies with no luck until finally, in the fifth, an embarrassed agent admitted to him that he was being denied both housing and help due to his race. “You know, it is unfortunate, but you will have a lot of trouble finding a room because you are black. People are afraid of you and there is nothing I can do. It is lamentable.”<sup>312</sup> Assouvie noted that his experience was, unfortunately, typical, not only for Antillean students but for other colonial students as well.

Assouvie’s account echoed Frantz Fanon’s discussion in *Black Skin, White Masks* of the shock and alienation produced out of the encounter between the Antillean student, raised on, as Assouvie put it, the “humanitarian ideals of France,” and the racialized reality of actually-existing French society. Assouvie declared himself shocked, “not knowing what attitude to adopt” in the face of “this incomprehension.”<sup>313</sup> The historian Thomas Holt, reflecting on the famous passage from Fanon’s *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* – walking in the streets of Lyon, a small white girl, seeing Fanon, called out,

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<sup>309</sup> Marie-Anne, “Une étudiante martiniquaise...”

<sup>310</sup> César Assouvie, “Parce Que Je Suis Noir,” *Alizés*, Oct.-Nov. 1953, 8.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

“Look, a Negro” – has labeled this moment a form of “race-making,” a concrete moment in which the individual is blasted out of the continuum of everyday life and set apart, marked as a racialized other.<sup>314</sup> This moment constitutes a “traumatic confrontation with the Other that *fixes* the meaning of one’s self before one even has had the opportunity to *live* and *make* a self more nearly of one’s own choosing.”<sup>315</sup> The result, Holt argues, is an “exploded self.” For the Antillean student, raised, as Marie-Anne and Assouvie both pointed out, on the myth of egalitarian, color-blind France, it was a particularly shocking experience. Martiniquan-ness, Fanon pointed out, offered no respite: “Where am I to be classified... A Martinican, a native of ‘our’ old colonies... Look at the nigger!”<sup>316</sup> The fact of color overwhelmed commonalities of language, history and culture.

Unlike Fanon, however, Assouvie seems to have remained resolute in his faith in the French ideal. Assouvie cannot quite let go of the ideals inculcated in from youth, the ideal of France, of equality, fraternity, liberty. Rather than abandoning his idealized image of France, he instead mused whether “France still possesses authentic French?” His appeal concluded with a call to “the young overseas French” to take action in order to “incite the metropolitan French to be conscious of their responsibilities and duties to their overseas brothers.”<sup>317</sup> He resists, in his account, identification with his fellow colonized subject – the North African – and instead falls back upon the language of republican *fraternité* and *égalité* betrayed. Despite his experiences, Assouvie still clearly located himself as a French citizen despite his interpellation as a colonial subject. Most Antillean students would follow Assouvie’s example, dismissing racial prejudice as the ignorance

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<sup>314</sup> Thomas Holt, “Race, Race-making and the Writing of History,” *American Historical Review* 100 (February 1995), 1-20.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 2; emphases in the original.

<sup>316</sup> Fanon 1967, 113.

<sup>317</sup> Assouvie, 9.

of lower-class French. For a vocal minority, continuing discrimination and racism would stoke their radicalism.

Experiences of racism were by no means limited to the search for housing. Antillean students also complained of racial taunts, discrimination in restaurants and cafés, and harassment by working-class white youth. A young Antillean student wrote to the Martiniquan newspaper, *Présence Socialiste*, to recount an experience he had in a Parisian café in the Latin Quarter.<sup>318</sup> The student, from Martinique, was meeting with a friend, an African-American economist who worked for the OECD. The student ordered a coffee and was ignored by the waiter, who served two other patrons without having served the young Antillean. His friend, the economist, joined him, and both tried to order a coffee only to meet with the same response. Finally, the Antillean confronted the barman who admitted that, “I don’t serve foreigners.”<sup>319</sup> The two men tried to file a complaint at a police commissariat, which refused to intervene, stating it was a “commercial affair” and outside their jurisdiction.<sup>320</sup> Such incidents, *Présence Socialiste* reported, were unfortunately all too common.

Serious violence towards Antillean students was an infrequent occurrence but remained a constant threat. Both *Trait d’Union* and *Alizés* reported on incidents of racial violence towards North African and African students in Paris, and closely followed events in South Africa, Britain and the United States.<sup>321</sup> In 1959, there was a serious racial incident between several Antillean students and some working-class white youth

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<sup>318</sup> “Incidents Racistes à Paris,” *Présence Socialiste* (Juillet-Août 1964), 3; the account was also published in *Le Canard Enchaîné*.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> R.P. Joseph Michel, “Alerte aux Chrétiens” *Alizés* (Juin-Juillet 1953), 8-12, republished from *Tam-Tam*; “Février 1956,” *Alizés* (Fév.-Mars 1956), 9; Un Etudiant Martiniquais, “Experience Anglaise,” *Trait d’Union* (Mai-Juin 1955), 12-14.

and members of the neo-fascist group, “Jeune Nation.”<sup>322</sup> Martiniquan students recounted the incident for the Martiniquan paper, *Justice*, and for several metropolitan newspapers, including *Le Monde*, *Paris-Presse* and *Libération*.<sup>323</sup>

We left my place at 17h, Thursday, for the metro at the Gare du Nord. A young metropolitan woman accompanied us. It was then that 4 kids, between 15 and 18, insulted this young woman, shaming her for going around “with niggers.”<sup>324</sup>

The five students continued on towards the metro, while the four youths disappeared temporarily. Some minutes later one returned “with a group of boys in a type of uniform, black leather vests.”<sup>325</sup> One of the Martiniquan students challenged one of the youths to “repeat what you said to my face.” The group of Jeune Nation militants immediately intervened and began beating the four Martiniquan students, shouting, “Dirty niggers, you aren’t in charge here, you bother us!”<sup>326</sup> According to the student’s account, the crowd stood silently and did not intervene, though at least one onlooker summoned the police. *Libération* condemned the attack, comparing it to Little Rock and the Notting Hill riots.<sup>327</sup> *Justice* suggested that the violence was an outgrowth of the Algerian war, stating that “North Africans were attacked first, then the Black will be hunted down.”<sup>328</sup> The Martiniquan students suggested that the incident was “an ambush” and that the rage of the attackers was motivated by the fact “our comrades were found in the company of a

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<sup>322</sup> On Jeune Nation: James Shields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (London: Routledge, 2007) 93-97; Jeune Nation “raised the alarm” when Edouard Glissant was awarded the Prix Renaudot in 1958. Alain Baudot, “D’un pays (re)possédé,” *Etudes françaises* vol. 10, n° 4 (1974), 364.

<sup>323</sup> “L’Association des Etudiants de la Martinique nous écrit,” *Justice* 11 Juin 1959; “Little Rock sur Seine: Quatre Etudiants noirs attaqués gare du Nord par quinze voyous,” *Libération*, 30 Mai 1959; “Quatre étudiants antillais attaqués par des ‘Teddy Boys’ parisiens,” *Paris-Presse*, 30 Mai 1959; “Les Etudiants Martiniquais molestés se portent partie civile,” *Le Monde*, 6 Juin 1959; all three articles reprinted as “Le Racisme en France,” *Le Progressiste*, 11 Juin 1959.

<sup>324</sup> “Le Racisme en France,” *Le Progressiste*, 11 Juin 1959, 3.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> *Justice*, “L’Association...,” 11 Juin 1959.

female French student.”<sup>329</sup> Under pressure from Antillean deputies, the Ligue du Droit de l’Homme and the Parisian press, the police arrested three members of Jeune Nation. Two were released eventually, while a third, Dominique Venner, was put on trial and eventually found guilty; he was sentenced to 3 months prison and a f100,000 fine.<sup>330</sup>

Martiniquan students cast the incident as an extreme manifestation of the everyday racism they experienced in the metropole. “We know from personal experience that there exists in France a latent racism (rooms refused to be rented to students of ‘color’) which passes from the passive stage to the active stage when the climate is propitious.”<sup>331</sup> The students acknowledged that the attackers were an “active, organized minority” but nonetheless connected the attack to colonialism, particularly the colonial war in Algeria. The logic of colonialism, they suggested, was to make all “blacks,” whether citizen or no, into natives, susceptible to violent discipline. While this had been the most overt attack on Antillean students, in the wake of the attack the newspapers acknowledged that it had not been an isolated event.<sup>332</sup>

While overt violent hostility was infrequent, Antillean students had to deal with, as Assouvie put it, metropolitan “incomprehension,” a racist stereotyping mixed with condescension that students found extraordinarily frustrating. Both Frantz Fanon and Maddy Lastel described this dynamic at work. Antillean students, patronizingly told they “were not like other blacks,” were often read a laundry list of racialized “black characteristics.” Lastel recounted some of the stereotypes white metropolitans repeated

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> “Condemnation d’un agresseur des Etudiants Martiniquais,” *Justice*, 22 Octobre 1959; Venner was a leader of Jeune Nation, an editor for its paper, an OAS militant and active in French far-right circles. He eventually made his career as a revisionist historian, with close ties to Alain de Benoist and others around the Research and Study Group for European Civilization (GRECE). Christopher Flood, “The Politics of Counter-Memory on the French Extreme Right,” *Journal of European Studies* 35 (2005), 221-236.

<sup>331</sup> “L’Association...” *Justice*, 11 Juin 1959, 3.

<sup>332</sup> “Declaration contre fascisme et racisme,” *Justice* 18 Juin 1959.

for her: blacks were “dirty”; they were “hopeless;” the “negro steals;” the “negro rapes.”<sup>333</sup> A “non-racist metropolitan comrade” told her that “blacks had a supernormal sexual instinct” and that they “offend our young women with their indecent propositions.”<sup>334</sup> Fanon also noted the common phenomenon of well-intentioned condescension. He recounted an incident that the exceedingly educated and refined Louis Achille had recounted during a lecture. While participating in a Catholic youth pilgrimage, a well-intentioned priest had come up to Achille and asked him, “‘You go ‘way big Savannah what for and come ‘long us?’” Achille – in perfect, polite French – corrected him.<sup>335</sup> Fanon called this talking down to “pidgin-nigger.”

To speak pidgin to a Negro makes him angry... But, I will be told, there is no wish, no intention to anger him. I grant this; but it is just this absence of wish, this lack of interest, this indifference, this automatic manner of classifying him, imprisoning him, primitivizing him, decivilizing him, that makes him angry.<sup>336</sup>

Lastel told another story, almost a parable, of an eager, well-intentioned white Catholic student who wanted an “African” to help with a meeting that her Catholic group was holding. When a young man volunteered – a métis – the girl exclaimed, “That one isn’t black enough!” The incomprehension of even well intentioned whites added to the frustration and alienation Antillean students felt about life in the metropole.

To overcome Antillean students’ alienation and frustration, whether the product of racism or the shock of life in the busy cities of France, the Antillean student groups organized dances, colloquia, sporting matches, lectures, even vacations and tours, for their members. FAGEC, through both at the Rue Thibaud in Paris and in other French cities, organized dinners, colloquia and vacations for its membership. As a Catholic

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<sup>333</sup> Maddy Lastel, “Avertissement,” *Alizés* (Jan.-Fev., 1952), 3-5.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>335</sup> Fanon 1967, 30-1.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.



organization, many of these events were religious, but not exclusively. The association, in collaboration with the chaplaincy for overseas students, often organized communal dinners on Christian feast days such as Christmas, Lent, Easter and Pentecost.<sup>337</sup> In coordination with both the French Federation of Christian Students (FFEC) and the Catholic Student Youth (JEC), Catholic students attended camp, retreats and other leisure activities under the auspices of the Church and its youth missions.<sup>338</sup> The dinners and retreats were important for making Antillean students feel at home in the metropole; due to the distance to the Caribbean DOMs and the high cost of the sea passage, many Antillean students were unable or unwilling to travel back to the Caribbean for holidays. Aside from religious and leisure activities, FAGEC, often in coordination with the Union of Catholic African students (UECA), organized speakers, lectures and other intellectual and educational events.<sup>339</sup> These conferences included meeting with political leaders like Jacques Soustelle, Léopold Senghor and Ralph Bunche, and with artists, poets and writers like Mercer Cook, Joseph Zobel and Michel Leiris.<sup>340</sup> Judging by the marriage and birth notices that ran at the back of most issues of *Alizés*, FAGEC was also important forum through which Antillean students met, married and began families.

The AEM similarly hosted and produced events for its membership and for Antillean students in the metropole. Aside from its biennial national Congresses, annual

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<sup>337</sup> "Conferences au Carême," *Alizés* Vol. 4, n° 5 (Fev. 1953), 33-4; "Vie de Nuit Noël," *Alizés* Vol. 5, n° 3 (Jan. 1956), 31;

<sup>338</sup> For example: Claude Bamy, "Au XXe Festival d'Avignon" and "Perpignan," *Alizés*, Oct.-Nov. 1966, 15-21.

<sup>339</sup> UECA published its own journal, *Tam-Tam*. See Fabienne Guimont, *Les Etudiants Africains en France, 1950-1965* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998); Felix Germain, "For the Nation and for Work: Black Activism in Paris in the 1960s" in Wendy Pojmann, ed., *Migration and Activism in Europe since 1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 15-32.

<sup>340</sup> "Conferences," *Alizés*, Vol. 4, n° 3 (Dec. 1954), 27-9; "Chronique Parisienne," *Alizés*, Vol. 1, n° 2 (Dec. 1951), 22; "Conference du Dr. Cook," *Alizés* Vol. 1, n° 3 (Jan.-Fev. 1952), 14-16; "Visite au Musée de l'Homme," *Alizés* Vol. 1, n° 3 (Jan.-Fev. 1952), 26-7; "Chansons de Mer et Complaintes Outre-Mer," *Alizés* Vol. 2, n° 6 (Mars 1953), 33; "Nos Conferences," *Alizés* Vol. 3, n° 2 (Nov. 1953), unpaginated.

local congresses and regular meetings, the AEM organized speakers, conferences, demonstrations, sporting events and other social activities. The AEM frequently collaborated with the Guadeloupean Students Association (AGEG) and every year the two Antillean student groups organized a “Grand Ball” and the “Toussaint Louverture Cup.” The “Grand Ball” was a formal dance, usually held during spring term; the Overseas students associations were invited and the ball was open to all students.<sup>341</sup> The “Toussaint Louverture Cup” was an annual football match held between the AEM and the AGEG, with players from each group making up the opposing sides; the winner would keep the cup and bragging rights for the year.<sup>342</sup> The AEM also organized more serious events as well, including conferences from political and cultural leaders including Aimé Césaire, Eric Williams, Léonard Sainville and Michel Leiris.<sup>343</sup> Due to its more overtly political nature, the AEM, unlike FAGEC, officially sponsored and participated in demonstrations and teach-ins. The AEM also participated in anti-colonial conferences and demonstrations organized by Algerian and African students.<sup>344</sup> Further, students who participated in the AEM had the opportunity to attend UNEF’s annual conferences and to participate in the annual conferences of the International Union of Students (UIE). The

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<sup>341</sup> “Grand Ball,” *Trait d’Union* (Jan.-Fev. 1958).

<sup>342</sup> “Coupe Toussaint-Louverture,” *Trait d’Union* (Jan. 1957), 42-4; “Rubrique Sportive,” *Trait d’Union* (Jan.-Fev. 1958), 59.

<sup>343</sup> “Rapports sur les Activités Culturelles de l’A.E.M.,” *Trait d’Union* (Mai-Juin 1955), 41-2; “Document: Manuel d’Intérêt Caraïbe,” *Trait d’Union* (Jan. 1956), 13-16; “Causeries – Conférences – Débats,” *Trait d’Union* (Avril-Mai 1958), 52; “Soirée Culturelle organisée par l’AGEG à l’occasion de son 29e Anniversaire,” *Trait d’Union* (Juin 1957), 60-1.

<sup>344</sup> “Vie de l’AEM,” *Trait d’Union* (Juin 1957), 66-8; “Editorial,” *Trait d’Union* (Fev.-Mars 1956), 1-2; “La Célébration du 21 Février,” *Trait d’Union* (Fev.-Mars 1956), 51-3.

UIE frequently underwrote travel expenses and the conferences enabled Martiniquan students to travel across Europe and even to Asia.<sup>345</sup>

The accumulated frustrations of life in the postwar metropole pushed Antillean students to question their status as French citizens. Faced with racism, isolation and incomprehension, Antillean students, despite their French citizenship and sensibilities, felt more at home with African and North African students. This milieu, in turn, was more politically radical than the Antillean students, particularly with the violence unfolding in North Africa, state repression of North African students suspected of FLN membership and the murder of Algerian students by the OAS and state security forces. Paris in the 1950s, wrought and wracked by a full-blown colonial war, was fertile ground for the radicalization of Antillean students.<sup>346</sup> Their exclusion by white students and their exposure to African and other colonial students pushed Antillean students to interrogate their own identity and to question their political and cultural premises. Following unrest in the Antilles between 1959 and 1964, Antillean students increasingly thought of themselves as colonial subjects rather than French citizens. The violence of Algeria, the stagnation of assimilation and French state repression, combined with their experiences in the metropole, pushed students towards an explicitly anti-colonial position that came to embrace cultural and political nationalism. This student milieu in Paris was an early and important locus for developing theories and practices of Antillean nationalism.

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<sup>345</sup> For example: Guy Dufond, "Le Veme Festival Mondial, Varsovie," *Trait d'Union* (Mai-Juin 1955), 3-11; "VIeme Festival de la Jeunesse," *Trait d'Union* (Jan.-Fev. 1958), 42-5; "Veme Congrès de l'Union Internationale des Etudiants – Compte Rendu de Congrès en Pèkin," *Trait d'Union* (Jan. 1959), 58-61.

<sup>346</sup> Kristin Ross notes this phenomenon at work in the broader French student movement; she locates the origins of French student activism and the New Left in the Algerian War. Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002).

## Chapter Four

### ‘A Problem Posed by History Itself’: the Critique of Assimilation and the Quest for Autonomy, 1951-1964

#### Introduction

The incident was, as one historian put it, “banal:” a routine traffic accident a few days before Christmas 1959 in Fort-de-France’s crowded downtown. A motorist, in the act of backing up his car, hit and knocked over a motor scooter.<sup>347</sup> The repercussions of the incident, however, would be far from innocent. The motorist was a white *pied noir*, recently settled on Martinique from Algeria by the French government; the scooter he knocked over belonged to a young, black Martiniquan. What passed between the two men remains a mystery, but the “simple traffic accident,” as the deputy prefect put it, soon ballooned into a serious racial incident. The *pied noir* motorist, taunted by a growing crowd estimated at 300 persons, fled and called upon the feared French riot police, the CRS, for protection. The CRS, in turn, charged the crowd. Three days of rioting in downtown Fort-de-France followed in which scores of businesses, particularly metropolitan, white-owned businesses were attacked and burned, and three young Martiniquans were shot and killed. The French government, in its panic, transferred a company of soldiers from neighboring Guadeloupe to reestablish and maintain order and was on the verge of dispatching a French warship as well.<sup>348</sup> The violence redounded from the Paris newspapers to the National Assembly, where Aimé Césaire and other deputies demanded an immediate investigation.

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<sup>347</sup> Edouard de Lepine, “Parti Communiste et le Mouvement Ouvrier à la Martinique de 1945 à Nos Jours” in Roland Suvélor, *Historial Antillais: Vol. III* (Fort-de-France: Société Dajani, 1981), 238; Laurent Jalabert, *La Colonisation sans nom: La Martinique de 1960 à nos jours* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2007), 29-34.

<sup>348</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, Clipping from *Le Parisein Libérée*, 25 December 1959.

The sudden outburst of violence shocked French authorities, who moved quickly to reestablish order and uncover the root causes of the riots. The new prefect, Jean Parsi – who was crossing the Atlantic when the riots began – was directed to draft a report and submit it to the Ministry of the Colonies discerning the incident’s social and political causes and drafting policy recommendations in order to prevent further unrest.<sup>349</sup> Parsi’s report outlined what he understood to be the principal reasons for the outburst of violence. He assigned some blame to the French state, noting that the racism of some civil servants from North Africa and the overreaction and brutal tactics of the CRS had caused a routine traffic accident to spiral out of control. He suggested that *piéd noir* civil servants be reassigned off island and that the CRS be placed firmly under the control of the prefect and used only sparingly. Nonetheless, the French state was not alone in or even primarily to blame.

Parsi focused his investigation on Martiniquan activists and radicals, arguing that their “propaganda” had prepared the way for, even encouraged, December’s social unrest. “I have first of all the profound conviction,” Parsi wrote, “that the degradation of the climate in Fort-de-France is due primarily to the effects of propaganda coming from elements newly arrived on the island.”<sup>350</sup> These “elements,” Parsi continued, comprised two groups: Martiniquan students home from France for the Christmas break and radical teachers at the Lycée Schoelcher and other island schools. In the metropole, Martiniquan students had been “infected with Communist propaganda,” which they were transmitting to their peers back on the island; island youth, in turn, had been “enlisted and lead” by their elders, their professors at the lycée. Parsi warned darkly that the radicals hoped to

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<sup>349</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, Letter from Guy Lamassoure to Minister Tremeaud, Parsi’s report is attached, dated 4 January 1960.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

achieve in Martinique what had been achieved in Algeria; he even speculated that weapons were being smuggled to Martinique from neighboring Anglophone colonies.<sup>351</sup> In short, Parsi argued that if institutional racism and CRS brutality had been the spark that touched off the incident, Communists, students and Antillean radicals had prepared the ground for disorder.

Both the December 1959 riots and Parsi's report testify to the rapidly changing terms of political and intellectual debate in the postwar French Antilles. The Antillean Left, which had supported wholeheartedly the 1946 Assimilation, had moved from supporting assimilation to openly contesting French control in the Antilles, agitating for a revision of the Antilles' relationship with France to favor greater local autonomy. Some activists went further, questioning the purpose and justification for French rule in the islands and argued instead that Martinique and Guadeloupe should be reinserted into the Caribbean. The former champions of "total assimilation" now argued instead for "autonomy" and "self-determination" (*auto-gestion*). In Prefect Parsi's estimation, autonomist activists constituted a substantive threat as he believed that they hoped to initiate an Algerian or Cuban-style revolution in the Antilles.

The Left's embrace of autonomy and its criticism of France and French policy marked a significant shift not only in left-wing ideology but in Antillean politics. As Chapters 1 and 2 outlined, the Antillean Left had been, from the 1830s through 1946, the most ardent proponents of Assimilation without caveat or reservation. Since the days of Victor Schoelcher, the Antillean Left and its metropolitan allies had worked to extend French laws and rights to the Antilles and to eradicate all barriers between France and its "old colonies." It was an alliance of Communists, Socialists and Radicals that completed

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

this fight, transforming the Antilles, Guyane and Réunion from colonies into departments, campaigning on the promise that political integration would soon be followed by social and economic integration. Historically, the Left supported a vision of the Antilles and France as a single nation and strongly criticized any attempt to differentiate between metropolitan and overseas departments.

This chapter documents the emergence of the Antillean autonomist movement between the years 1951 and 1965, focusing on how “decolonization through assimilation” was abandoned in favor of an anti-colonial politics more closely aligned with the worldwide movement toward decolonization. With the dissolution and liquidation of the Union Française after 1958, the war in Algeria and the wave of decolonization after 1957, the political, economic and moral order that had composed the context for assimilation in 1946 was in decline. Following de Gaulle’s return to power in 1958, French policy shifted from empire abroad to integration on the continent. Whereas in 1946 the Antilles had been one part of a multinational, multiethnic, multicultural empire, after 1960 the Antilles alone remained. Further, decolonization in the former empires merged with an upsurge in revolutionary activity in the Third World and the intensification of the U.S. civil rights movement to challenge European and North American hegemony. The movement of peoples for cultural, political and economic self-determination, whether the liberalism of the American civil rights movement, the Panafricanism of Nkrumah, the nationalism of Lumumba or the revolutionary communism of Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara, changed the calculations of Antillean intellectuals and activists. Antillean anti-colonialism shifted from demands for total integration into the French Republic to agitation for greater autonomy in local affairs.

The changing world context and subsequent ideological reorientation of Antillean activists and intellectuals corresponded with growing disenchantment with France's administration of the DOMs. Departmentalization had come with promises that incorporation into France would eliminate the islands' persistent poverty through the extension of the social welfare state and direct economic investment; departmentalization thus engendered the hope that poverty, corruption, unemployment and economic and political powerlessness would become relics of the past. While departmentalization enabled Antilleans to finally capture political power, economic and social reform proved more difficult. French governments repeatedly refused to extend metropolitan social protections to the islands and the state's direct investments rarely proved sufficient for the DOMs' myriad infrastructural and social needs. The population's disillusionment with chronic unemployment, persistent poverty, low-wage jobs and social underdevelopment was reinforced by a series of prefects who took a high-handed approach to running the Antilles, ignoring or denigrating the elected General Council and using the full force of the French state to suppress demonstrations, strikes and other signs of social and political discontent.

After 1957, Antillean leftists challenged the terms of the 1946 law, arguing that without economic and social development assimilation was an illusion, only a means for the white elite to further entrench their interests. Observing France's inability to deliver economic democratization and social development, Antillean intellectuals and activists began to conceive assimilation not as decolonization but as a mutation in the form of French colonialism. With the old imperial order under pressure in the UN and world public opinion, assimilation allowed France to end formal empire in the Antilles without



surrendering control. Antillean activists argued that under these terms the old imperial order in fact remained intact; only the legal framework had changed. While this enabled Antilleans to demand redress in the National Assembly, it did not allow them to challenge the constitution of economic and social power. The task, leftist intellectuals argued, was to challenge the social order as well as the political order, mobilizing the Antillean masses to challenge white control of economic life. The state's refusal would unmask the colonial order for what it truly was.

Frustrated in their demand for economic reform, social investment and political equality, the Antillean left abandoned its previous pro-assimilation position and instead criticized assimilation from an explicitly anti-colonial position, demanding that France “decolonize” the Antilles and allow Antilleans the same right to self-determination as other colonized peoples. From 1957 onward, assimilation was attacked in favor of autonomy and decolonization in the Antilles turned away from France and toward the broader globe. The decolonization wave, economic underdevelopment and administrative autocracy convinced many Antilleans that colonialism had not, in fact, ended, and that departmentalization and assimilation represented only the most recent iteration of white domination of island economic and political life.

#### Disappointment and Dialectic: Frantz Fanon and the Antilles

One of the earliest critics of Assimilation was the Martiniquan psychologist and anti-colonial activist Frantz Fanon. Fanon's writing, particularly his essays for *Esprit* and his 1952 book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, constituted the first and most forceful critique of assimilation. He rejected assimilation's assumptions and questioned its utopian promises. However, Fanon's later commitment to the FLN and Algerian independence has

overshadowed his observations of the French-Antillean relationship and his criticisms of politico-cultural assimilation. Too often critics, in order to have Fanon serve as both an anti-colonial martyr and a theorist of an undifferentiated “black condition,” have neglected Fanon’s socio-historical background and treated his thinking in isolation from its original context. For example, Black Power militants and intellectuals picked up Fanon’s thought and applied it to the American milieu, reading his life and writing through the North American black experience and through North American categories and concepts. His thought’s entry into transnational frameworks of meaning and action solidified his fame and lasting influence even as it distorted its origins in the French Antilles and the French colonial situation.<sup>352</sup>

Too often lost is what was “Antillean” about Fanon, his life and, most importantly, his critical work. An important recent volume edited by Max Silverman and featuring essays by Francophone and Fanon scholars Jim House, Françoise Vergès, Robert Bernasconi and others has argued for contextualizing Fanon’s work in the French and French Antillean context. The volume’s editors prioritized Martinique and Fanon’s Martiniquanness and reinserted *Black Skin, White Masks* into the context of Fanon’s life and movement. In his essay, Fanon’s American biographer, David Macey, suggested that Fanon’s Antilleanness had been occluded by his American appropriation and by

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<sup>352</sup> It is worth noting that Fanon is the only French Antillean to receive a full English-language biography. There are full-length volumes on Edouard Glissant and Aimé Césaire, but they are specialized academic volumes focused primarily on their literary production. David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: a Biography* (New York: Picador, 2000). The literature on Fanon is quite extensive; the best introductions are as follows: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Critical Fanonism,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 457-470; Lewis R. Gordon, “The Black and the Body Politic: Fanon’s Existential Phenomenological Critique of Psychoanalysis,” Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Renee T. White, eds., *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1996), 54-84; Lewis R. Gordon summed up the debate over Fanon’s place in his *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1995), 85-104; Mrinalini Greedharrry, *Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis: From Uneasy Engagements to Effective Critique* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 15-43; Nigel Gibson, *Frantz Fanon: the Postcolonial Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Francophone indifference. Black Power activists transformed the Fanon of *Wretched of the Earth* into an “apostle of Black Power,” while postcolonial theorists have “completely delocalized and detemporalized” Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* by treating Fanon as a postcolonial critic *avant la lettre*.<sup>353</sup> What was lost in these readings was Fanon’s location within the specific spatial-temporal moment of postwar France and the contours of French racism and colonialism. Jim House argued that Fanon’s “novelty” as a thinker of race and the racial encounter “lies in the way in which he questioned the republican tradition and its mythologization of a ‘non-racist’ France from an experiential position.”<sup>354</sup> House reconstructed Fanon’s trajectory from Vichy Martinique to racially stratified Lyon, discovering the root of Fanon’s phenomenological account of race and racialization in his encounter with metropolitan France’s Manichean racial hierarchy.<sup>355</sup>

While a worthwhile and important collection that restores Fanon’s Antillean origins, the authors persist in the idea that once Fanon left France for Algeria his connection to Martinique was irrevocably broken. In fact, Fanon remained in contact with Martiniquan friends, activists and intellectuals up until his premature death from leukemia in 1961. Persisting in the belief that Fanon was isolated completely from the Antilles distorts how we understand both Fanon’s thinking about the Antilles and his legacy. Françoise Vergès, for example, devoted her essay to rethinking Fanon and

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<sup>353</sup> David Macey, “Adieu Fouldard, Adieu Madras,” Max Silverman, ed. *Frantz Fanon’s Black Skins, White Masks: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 14.

<sup>354</sup> Jim House, “Colonial Racisms in the ‘Métropole:’ Reading *Peau noire, masques blancs* in Context” in *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>355</sup> I am somewhat skeptical of the transparent way in which House treats Fanon’s experience, for as Joan Scott reminds us experience is not given but constructed. Thinking about “experience” in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* seems particularly fraught as Fanon mingles his experiences with clinical reports of his patients’ experiences, the experiences of friends and acquaintances and the “experiences” portrayed in films and novels. In addition, the overriding tone of *Black Skin* is ironic, which speaks less to experience as coming-to-consciousness than to experience as confirmation. Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17,4 (1991), 773-797; Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 241-247-255.

“Creolite,” rereading each discourse through the other. Vergès asserted that the theorists of Creolite – Glissant, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, Confiant – “politely dismissed” Fanon and that “none... [took] any of Fanon’s observations as a starting point.”<sup>356</sup> While Fanon’s legacy on Martinique remains ambiguous, his influence during his own lifetime was substantial. The novelist Edouard Glissant was quite certainly indebted to Fanon’s work and thinking: Glissant and Fanon corresponded toward the end of Fanon’s life and Fanon’s psychological studies profoundly influenced Glissant’s work with the Institut Martiniquais d’Etudes and Glissant’s 1981 book, *Le Discours Antillais*.<sup>357</sup>

In many ways perceptive, Vergès’ and her collaborators’ approach does much to restore what was Antillean about Fanon’s life and thought; what remains curiously absent from their volume is a study of how Fanon depicted the Antillean and the role the Antillean played in Fanon’s corpus. To make sense of Fanon’s engagement with the Algerian Revolution, it is important to locate the position of the Antillean in Fanon’s discourse and to discuss it in relation to Fanon’s disillusionment with France, with France’s role in the Antilles and with Antilleans themselves. This discussion aims at an understanding of Fanon’s immediate legacy – during his life and in the years immediately following his death – and puts his work in the context of Antillean intellectuals’ and activists’ turn to anti-colonialism in the last half of the 1950s.

Jim House and David Macey both suggest that Fanon’s intellectual and political odyssey was initiated in the *an tan Robé* (the Vichy occupation of Martinique), nurtured by his experiences in the French Army and France during the war and postwar Lyon, and

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<sup>356</sup> Françoise Vergès, “Where to begin? ‘Le commencement’ in *Peau Noire, masques blancs* and in creolisation,” in Silverman, ed., 37.

<sup>357</sup> Wilbert J. Roget, “Edouard Glissant and Antillanité,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1975), 60-9.

completed in the hospital in Blida.<sup>358</sup> A more complex problem is recovering Fanon's relationship to Martinique and his understanding of the French Antilles. Fanon wrote little on the French Antilles after *Black Skin, White Masks* but its pages reflected his frustration with the political situation in the Antilles, France's treatment of Antilleans and Antilleans' political quietude. The actual image of the French Antillean in Fanon's work is strangely overlooked in much Fanon criticism. In part this stems from Fanon's own slippage between describing Antilleans specifically and claiming to speak for blacks in general. But it also speaks to the Antillean's paradoxical situation in the era of decolonization.

Fanon's disillusionment with Martinique and the French Antilles dated from his wartime service. Most of Fanon's correspondence home to his mother Eléanore and brother Joby was lost, but his friend Marcel Manville discovered a few letters while researching Fanon's life for a *Présence Africaine* tribute. In one letter to his mother, Fanon expressed his disillusionment with France and his part in the war. "It has been a year since I left Fort-de-France. Why? To defend an obsolete ideal."<sup>359</sup> Despite his disillusionment, Fanon expressed to his mother his desire to remain in France with his friends Manville and Pierre Mosole, who were staying on to complete their studies. Despite this desire, Fanon was demobilized and sent home to Martinique at the end of 1945. He returned to Fort-de-France and continued his studies at the Lycée Schoelcher, worked on Aimé Césaire's 1946 campaign and prepared to enter the University of Paris'

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<sup>358</sup> House 2005, 48-50; Macey 2000, 72-111.

<sup>359</sup> Manville, 241.

dental school. Most of all, according to Manville, he longed to escape insular Martinique for France.<sup>360</sup>

Fanon was disenchanted quickly with both his studies and Paris' Antillean community. According to Pierre Geismar, who wrote his first extant biography, Fanon quit the dental school in disgust after three weeks stating that he had never encountered "so many idiots in his life."<sup>361</sup> Fanon's uncle told David Macey that he never enrolled as he had already decided to become a medical doctor.<sup>362</sup> Regardless of the exact reason, not too long after settling in Paris Fanon decided to move to Lyon. Fanon's brother, Joby, suspected that Fanon's motivation to leave the University of Paris grew from his irritation and frustration with the Parisian Antillean community. Fanon, according to both his brother and Manville, stated that there were "too many negroes in Paris." The fetishized life of the Parisian Antillean community – middle class professionals who performed their Antillean identity through, as David Macey put it, ritual devotion to those markers of Antillean life such as *ti punch*, the *biguine* and *accras* – frustrated Fanon and ironically pushed him to overcome his Antilleanness through absorption into his Frenchness.<sup>363</sup> Fanon switched to medicine and left cosmopolitan and imperial Paris for provincial Lyon, where he enrolled in the medical faculty.

It was in Lyon that Fanon composed *Black Skin, White Masks* and first came into contact with France's North African population. Due to postwar housing shortages and widespread housing discrimination against blacks, Fanon's first quarters in Lyon were in a converted brothel not far from the Molière district where the majority of Lyon's North

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<sup>360</sup> Macey 2000, 109-111.

<sup>361</sup> Pierre Geismar, *Fanon: a Biography* (New York: Dial Press, 1971), 44.

<sup>362</sup> Macey 2000, 118.

<sup>363</sup> *Ti punch* is a Martiniquan appetitif prepared with rum, cane syrup and lime; the *biguine* is a Martiniquan music, somewhat similar to 1920s jazz; *accras* are fried cod fritters.

African population lived. As a medical student, Fanon made house calls to the North African slum quarters around the rue Moncey; the house calls would provide material for one of his first articles, “The ‘North African Syndrome’” published in *Esprit* in 1951.<sup>364</sup> Fanon sought to explain the widespread psychosomatic afflictions among North African immigrants, his first attempt to grapple with colonialism’s effect on the psychological life of the colonized.<sup>365</sup> In Lyon Fanon was also repeatedly reminded that he was black and, despite his citizenship, treated as a colonial subject. The famous incident with the little girl that formed the core of the *Black Skin, White Masks* chapter, “The Lived Experience of the Black Man,” occurred in Lyon. Fanon, like many other Antillean students, was harassed for going out in public with white girlfriends. Once, while walking with his future wife Josie, a policeman stopped Fanon and accused him of being a pimp; Fanon was arrested and questioned for hours at the Lyon police station.<sup>366</sup> Harassment was common toward Antillean students mingling in interracial milieu, particularly those with white girlfriends.<sup>367</sup> Most Antilleans denounced this as a manifestation of the “bad France” and reacted coolly and calmly to the harassment. While Fanon never wrote specifically about the incident, Fanon’s anger and frustration with French racial attitudes permeates his writing.

*Black Skin, White Masks* was an incendiary critique of the hypocrisy and racism of French society and culture, whether in its ‘good’ liberal mode or ‘bad’ racist and colonialist mode. Fanon, in fact, conscientiously disposed of what he saw as the false dichotomy between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ France, stating that “a given country is either

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<sup>364</sup> Macey 2000, 121.

<sup>365</sup> Frantz Fanon, “The ‘North African Syndrome’” in Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 3-16.

<sup>366</sup> Silverman, 50.

<sup>367</sup> See Chapter Four.

racist or it is not.”<sup>368</sup> The manner or mode of racism, which social class was racist, and who was racialized did not matter. If a nation possessed a racialized structure it was a racist country. “France,” he concluded, “was a racist country.”<sup>369</sup>

While Fanon discussed French hypocrisy and racism at length, he devoted some of his most bitterly ironic passages to examining Antilleans and their relationship to France. From the beginning of *Black Skins*, Fanon was profoundly skeptical that the Antilles would ever experience “the explosion” that would wrench them from French control. “Don’t expect to see any explosion today. It’s too early... or too late.”<sup>370</sup> Antilleans’ embrace of assimilation in 1946 signaled that, for Antilleans, revolt against France was either far off or already too late. Despite the fact that Antilleans had finally accepted that it “was good to be black,” they had nonetheless, led by Césaire, the very man who taught them black pride, willingly incorporated themselves fully into the French polity and into French ways of life, thought and politics.<sup>371</sup>

Fanon’s most sustained analysis of the relationship between the Antillean and French culture and subjectivity was contained in the final chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, “The Black Man and Recognition.” Here Fanon examined the problem of “recognition” for Antilleans, particularly those living in France, through a psychological and Hegelian reading of black subjectivity’s relation to white subjectivity.<sup>372</sup> The first part of the chapter drew from Adler’s *Neurotic Constitution* and his theories of overcompensation, while the second part of the chapter draws on Hegel’s master-slave

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<sup>368</sup> Fanon 2008, 66.

<sup>369</sup> Fanon 2008, 72.

<sup>370</sup> Fanon 2008, xi.

<sup>371</sup> Frantz Fanon, “West Africans and Africans” in Fanon 1967, 17-27.

<sup>372</sup> The chapter also reflected Fanon’s complicated relationship to Sartre’s thinking, particularly on the gaze and the Other. Robert Bernasconi, “The Assumption of Negritude: Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and the Vicious Circle of Racial Politics,” *Parallax* 8,2 (April 2002), 69-83.



dialectic, refracted through Sartre's existentialist and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological readings.<sup>373</sup> Scholars have focused overwhelmingly on dissecting the intellectual influences on Fanon's Hegelian reading, his appropriation and reinterpretation of the dialectic, but have largely left unexplored the link between Fanon's unique Hegelian reading and his political context. Fanon's exploration of the dialectics of mastery and slavery in the closing pages of *Black Skins* was written only a few short years after the 1946 departmentalization and published as Antilleans were growing increasingly embittered with assimilation's compromises and betrayals.

Fanon's discussion of Adler and his Adlerian analysis of Martiniquan psychosocial behavior was necessary to set up his discussion of Hegel. Fanon argued that one of Antilleans' fundamental psychosocial problems was that they constantly and destructively compared themselves to each other.<sup>374</sup> While Antilleans were preoccupied with "self-assertion and the ego ideal," Fanon argued, the Antillean "does not possess a personal value of his own and is always dependant on the presence of the Other."<sup>375</sup> This Other both demands comparison and overcoming, producing a psychically destructive form of social interaction that leads Antilleans to compare themselves constantly to each other, to try to "dominate the other" and to define themselves and their worth through the act of comparison. For the Antillean, Fanon argued, "every act... is dependant on 'the Other' – not because 'the Other' remains his final goal for the purpose of communing

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<sup>373</sup> Nigel Gibson, "Dialectical Impasses: Turning the Table on Hegel and the Black," *Parallax* 8, 2 (April 2002), 30-45.

<sup>374</sup> *Comparaison* is a Creolism that describes the dynamics of comparison and social pressure that Fanon suggested was a mania among Antilleans. *Comparaison* denoted a simultaneous comparison and leveling – through language, joking, and mockery – that occurred when Antilleans met, socialized and circulated.

<sup>375</sup> Fanon 2008, 186.

with him as described by Adler, but simply because it is ‘the Other’ who asserts him in his need to enhance his status.”<sup>376</sup>

However, the compulsion toward comparison was not “one individual Antillean who presents a neurotic mind-set,” but was rather a social phenomenon, the logical outcome of a society that was itself “a *comparaison* society.”<sup>377</sup> Fanon argued that, at a societal and structural level, Antillean society as a whole was engaged in comparison and specifically comparison to France through its conscious imitation of French institutions, offices and social practices. For example, Fanon pointed to the tendency among Martiniquans to insist on their Martiniquanness, to constantly remind their (white) interlocutors that they were neither Guadeloupean – traditionally seen as “more African” and “less French” – nor African. The fear of misrecognition, Fanon suggested, reflected the fact that the Martiniquan sense of self was constituted through comparison: they perceived themselves as inferior to the French but superior to Guadeloupeans and Africans. To be misperceived as African or Guadeloupean was to undermine their comparatively constituted sense of self.<sup>378</sup>

Antillean society as a whole reflected this dynamic. The almost fetishistic imitation of French social and political practices, the exceedingly correct French cultural modes and mores, both imitated the colonial master and marked the Antilles’ separation from Africa, the Caribbean and the southern United States.<sup>379</sup> However, it is important to note that the comparison did not unfold between the Antilles and France, at least not

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<sup>376</sup> Fanon 2008, 187.

<sup>377</sup> Fanon 2008, 188.

<sup>378</sup> Fanon, “West Indians and Africans,” 19-21; Fanon 2008, 24-31. Fanon also referred to this as ‘lactification.’ But the fundamental move of lactification is *comparaison*.

<sup>379</sup> Antillean newspapers, whether left or right, paid close attention to racial violence in the American South. While the Antillean Left condemned the violence as indicative of capitalist society, the Antillean Right congratulated themselves on how much better life was for blacks under French rule.

explicitly and consciously; comparison always occurred between two “subordinates” even while France floated in the background as the ideal toward which individuals aspired. As Fanon put it, “the Martinican [sic] compares himself not to the white man, the father, the boss, God, but to his own counterpart under the patronage of the white man.” At every level of Antillean society, from councilors to lycée professors to the pettiest of civil servants, Antilleans were engaged in an impossible to acknowledge but nevertheless complex subconscious *comparaison* to France.<sup>380</sup>

Fanon further elaborated on the unacknowledged relationship between France and the Antilles in the next part of the chapter, an extended discussion of Hegel, the master-slave dialectic and the dynamics of recognition. Fanon’s reading of Hegel demonstrates the mark of the classic “French” reading of Hegel, developed by Alexander Kojève in the 1930s and inherited by the postwar generation through surrealism, existentialism and dissident Marxism.<sup>381</sup> Kojève posited an “anthropological” Hegel that read the dialectic not as the unfolding of absolute spirit but as the actual concrete struggles of existing human subjects. Bruce Baugh has argued that Kojève’s “anthropological turn” “allowed Hegel’s thought to be brought within the ambit of movements such as surrealism, Marxism and existentialism.”<sup>382</sup> The Kojévian Hegel provided intellectual tools to conceptualize the liberation of not only the abstract ideal but humanity and human subjects. For Fanon, the Kojévian Hegel – particularly the focus on the master-slave

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<sup>380</sup> Fanon does not explore this phenomenon, but it would be worth analyzing the link between *comparaison* and nationalist sentiment in the French Antilles.

<sup>381</sup> Ethan Kleinberg has an excellent account of Hegel’s influence and Kojève’s seminar in his study of Heidegger’s reception in France: *Generation Existential: Heidegger’s Philosophy in France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 49-83; on Hegel’s French fortunes: Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2003); Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9-38.

<sup>382</sup> Baugh, 7.

dialectic – provided a language for situating Antilleans in history and making sense of their particular form of subjugation.

Fanon argued that for Antilleans, descendants of slaves, Hegel's thought held a particular significance. Fanon was not arguing for a historicist interpretation of Hegel, understanding the dialectic as a direct rather than metaphorical disquisition on slavery and lordship, so much as he was offering Hegel's description of the conflict between master and slave as historically and philosophically insightful.<sup>383</sup> Hegel's "struggle unto death" between master and slave for recognition and supremacy was particularly important for Fanon's understanding of psychological formation. "Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, it is this other who remains the focus of his actions."<sup>384</sup> Struggle was necessary, Fanon argued, because struggle creates opposition and it is only through "encountering opposition from the other, [that] self-consciousness experiences desire, the first stage that leads to the dignity of the mind."<sup>385</sup> The slave's self-consciousness could emerge only out of conflict with the master. The dialectic of the master and the slave thus described a necessary physical and psychical struggle in the development of human subjectivity.

However, in the Antilles, this necessary struggle never took place. The real historical conflict between French master and Antillean slave never came to its climactic conflict as the 1848 emancipation, "when... the white master recognized *without a*

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<sup>383</sup> This is not to discount Susan Buck-Morss' rereading of Hegel and the *Phenomenology* in light of Hegel's likely knowledge, even interest, in the Haitian revolution and revolutionary emancipation, but merely to suggest that Fanon was not concerned with this historical moment in his appropriation of Hegel. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

<sup>384</sup> Fanon 2008, 191.

<sup>385</sup> Fanon 2008, 192.

*struggle* the black slave,” short-circuited the confrontation.<sup>386</sup> Black slaves did not liberate themselves but were liberated through the actions of their former masters. In the specific case of the French Antilles, Victor Schoelcher’s influence on the 1848 revolutionaries secured Antillean emancipation. Freedom was not produced by the slave’s self-activity; the master’s granted freedom, which meant that the “black man” had not acted but had been “acted upon.”<sup>387</sup> This lack of agency was impressed in both Antillean individual and cultural memory: the “impressive number of statues throughout France and the colonies representing the white figure of France caressing the frizzy hair of the docile black man whose chains have just been broken” testified to the slave’s impotence even at the moment of her very emancipation. The French Antillean’s freedom, his attainment of selfhood and “being-for-self,” was preempted by the master’s “gift” of freedom and therefore experienced as insufficient and unfulfilling. The Antillean had ceased to be a slave but had never defeated the old master which, according to both Hegel and Fanon, was a vital step toward mastery and being-for-self.<sup>388</sup> The master’s willed emancipation of the slave produced slaves without masters and assimilation continued this logic into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Having chosen safety over risk and remained slaves despite the demise of the masters, the Antillean would never be secure in and for himself. Without risk the Antillean would never achieve the “transformation of subjective certainty of [his] own worth into a universally valid objective truth” as their self-abnegation and impotence blocked the unfolding dialectic.

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<sup>386</sup> Fanon 2008, 191. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>387</sup> Fanon, like most historians of the Antilles, ignored the fact that the slaves, in fact, did revolt in 1848 against their masters, before news of emancipation reached the Antilles. Jacques Adelaïde was the first historian to seriously investigate Antilleans’ role in 1848, but his work was not published until the 1960s. Both Camille Darsières and Edouard de Lépine discuss the issue of Antilleans’ role in emancipation, but their work appeared in the 1970s.

<sup>388</sup> Fanon 2008, 194.

Thus France's acquiescence, even acceptance of black citizens, was experienced as "unbearable." "Unsure whether the white man considers him as consciousness in-itself-for-itself, he is constantly preoccupied with detecting resistance, opposition, and contestation."<sup>389</sup> The black Frenchman, though free physically and politically, remains bound psychologically and emotionally, for while Antilleans "went from one way of life to another," they did not move "from one life to another." Through refusing risk, through their imposed freedom, Antilleans were never reborn as masters, as consciousness-in-itself-for-itself, but remained slaves despite the master's abdication of mastery. Assimilation – which Fanon complained about to Manville and others – only confirmed that Antilleans were a reactive, not active, people, still imprisoned within their masterless slavery.<sup>390</sup>

Despite Fanon's frustration with his countrymen and countrywomen and with their having chosen safety and slavery over risk and mastery, Fanon, contrary to some accounts, did not sever his connection to the Antilles and to Antillean intellectuals. Up until his death, Fanon corresponded regularly with both Glissant and his old friend Marcel Manville. Manville, in his memoirs, reported that on his visits to Fanon in Algiers and later Tunis, Fanon always asked about political happenings in Martinique. Manville recollected that, "Frantz took real pleasure in talking to me of our Martinique, of his family, of his brother Joby, my co-disciple and friend. He made me listen to his old 78s of Stelio, father of the Marseillaise beguine. He had Josie, his wife, prepare us pickled

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<sup>389</sup> Fanon 2008, 196-7.

<sup>390</sup> Fanon 2008, 197; Manville, 247-250.

cod, not always a success, but savored a bit like Proust's madeleine."<sup>391</sup> Fanon's close friends all suggested that toward the end of his life his interest in Martinique and the French Antilles revived.<sup>392</sup> Nor was Fanon completely forgotten in the French Antilles. In the years of his Algerian exile and immediately following his death, Fanon remained an active presence and influence in Antillean intellectual circles. He participated in both Negro Writers' Congresses, delivering a talk at the 1956 Congress entitled "Racism and Culture." Fanon's books were reviewed in the Antillean press and his movements and activism reported on in the pages of *Justice*, *Etincelles*, and *Dialogues*, as well as the Antillean student press. Following his premature death from cancer in 1961, the Communist and Socialist newspapers and the student press published obituaries and tributes.<sup>393</sup>

Fanon also had a decisive influence on the Antillean generation that came of political age in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His theories of psychology, culture, colonialism and their interrelation had a profound effect on both the Antillean student movement and on anti-colonial Antillean intellectuals. His friend Manville, building from his ideas, continued to combat French colonialism in the Antilles. Manville, with Joby Fanon, established the Frantz Fanon Prize to secure his friend's legacy in the Antilles.<sup>394</sup> Edouard Glissant corresponded with Fanon at the end of his life and used Fanon's work as a starting point for his own analyses of the "Antillean situation." Particularly, he developed Fanon's psychological insights into Antillean social-psychical development

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<sup>391</sup> Manville, 243. Alexandre Stellio was a Martiniquan band leader who popularized the beguine in France in the 1930s. *Morades de morue* – pickled cod – was a paradigmatically Antillean dish, which made many appearances, along with *ti-punch*, in the literature of *doudouisme*.

<sup>392</sup> Macey 2000, 424.

<sup>393</sup> This is the suggestion of filmmaker Isaac Julien in *Black Skin, White Mask* (1996) and to a lesser degree, David Macey. Macey 2000, 9-14.

<sup>394</sup> Manville, 249-250; Macey 2000, 12-14.

and expanded them into an overarching critique of Antillean history and culture.<sup>395</sup> Fanon was also widely read and admired by the Antillean student movement. The Guadeloupean and Martiniquan student associations (AGEG and AGEM) reviewed his books, explored the implications of his thought for Antilleans, and mourned his death in 1961. Young Antillean Catholics intellectuals were also fascinated with Fanon. While troubled by his call for a violent, cathartic revolution against colonialism, they found his critique of colonialism's psychological and human effects incisive and humane. Far from being forgotten, Fanon's life and thought had an influential role on Antillean anti-colonial activists throughout the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>396</sup>

### **1959: A Pivotal Year**

Only a year before his death, Fanon committed the last words he would ever devote to the French Antilles to paper. In response to the 1959 riots in Fort-de-France, Fanon penned an editorial for *El Moudjahid* entitled "Blood Flows in the Antilles Under French Domination," denouncing the CRS' violent suppression of Martiniquan demonstrators and mourning the three lives lost. Fanon argued that the force of decolonization – independence in Guiana and Suriname, in the British Antilles and Castro in Cuba – had "raised the question of the national problem" in the French Antilles and that the government's heavy-handed response had provoked the long-predicted "rebellion." "The time has come," Fanon argued, "to clarify problems and dispel misunderstandings" in the "castrated countries" of the French Antilles. The riots, Fanon

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<sup>395</sup> See chapter Five.

<sup>396</sup> See chapter Four.



argued, decisively posed the question of the French Antillean's identity, her relation to France and her relation to the world.<sup>397</sup>

As Fanon cogently suggested, the December 1959 riots in Fort-de-France exploded out of a context of decolonization, underdevelopment and disappointment that had been steadily reshaping the French Antilles in the second half of the 1950s. The initial cause was a simple traffic accident; a *pied noir* immigrant backed his car into a parked motorbike and then allegedly cursed the bike's owner with racial epithets. The rioting that followed was organized and carried out in large part by unemployed working class youth, frustrated and angered by the government's inability to address Martinique's underdevelopment and by the persistent racism of Antillean and French society. Disappointment was reinforced by the CRS' violent overreaction to the demonstrations that left three dead and the French's state's subsequent focus on the arrest and prosecution of Antillean rioters and political leaders rather than investigating the police's reaction or formulating a concrete strategy for solving the Antilles' chronic social problems. The 1959 riots initiated a cycle of protest, agitation, repression and violence that would persist until 1968 and whose repercussions would be felt well into the 1980s.

Historians of the Antilles and Antillean observers have stressed the importance of the 1959 riots in Fort-de-France, suggesting that they represented a profound moment in postwar Antillean political consciousness.<sup>398</sup> For an entire generation of Antilleans who came of age under departmentalization, the 1959 riots constituted an intellectual and emotional break. Marcel Manville would write in his memoirs that the 1959 riots were

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<sup>397</sup> Frantz Fanon, "Blood Flows in the Antilles Under French Domination" in Fanon 1967, 167-9.

<sup>398</sup> De Lepine 1982; Nicolas 1996; Jalabert 2007; Burton 1978; Burton 1995.

“like waves, their consequences were deep,” a sort of “Copernican revolution.”<sup>399</sup>

Camille Darsières, at the time a student and later a member of the PPM, described the riots as marking a “capital turning point in the history of our country,” while Edouard de Lépine, Communist youth leader and later head of Martinique’s Trotskyists, suggested the riots constituted for the nationalist Left the “D-Day of national awakening.”<sup>400</sup> Years later, Georges Mauvois, a longtime member of the Communist Party described the riots as a “rebirth.”<sup>401</sup> For many Antilleans, the riot and its repercussions fundamentally undermined the legitimacy of assimilation. Reading the memoirs and recollections years later, there is a sense that the December riots took on a mythic quality in Martiniquan nationalist discourse and was cast as the moment at which the Martiniquan nation was born in blood. An Antillean nation seemed both palpable and necessary.<sup>402</sup>

If the disparate groups that made up the Antillean nationalist movement saw the riots as an “opening” and a confirmation of the persistence of French colonialism, the French state perceived the riots as a threat. Already concerned about the effect that the war in Algeria, the Cuban revolution and decolonization in Africa was having on the population of Martinique and Guadeloupe, the French state moved quickly to defuse the situation through reform and repression. The government empowered a committee in the Ministry for Overseas France under the direction of the Secretary for Overseas Departments, Tremeaud, who appointed his adjunct, Guy Lamassoure and the prefect of Martinique, Jean Parsi, to investigate the riots, identify agitators and propose fixes to

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<sup>399</sup> Marcel Manville, *Les Antilles sans fard* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992), 91-2.

<sup>400</sup> Camille Darsières, *Origins de la nation martiniquaise* (Fort-de-France: Editions Désormeaux, 1972), 207; Edouard de Lépine, *Questions sur l’histoire antillaise* (Fort-de-France: Editions Désormeaux, 1978), 231.

<sup>401</sup> Georges Mauvois, *Memoirs d’un foyolais* (Fort-de-France: Editions Ibis Rouge, 1992).

<sup>402</sup> For years after, for example, the Communist Youth would lay wreaths on the tombs of the three dead demonstrators.

Martinique's problems. Their task was urgent as the riots, just before Christmas, featured prominently in the Parisian press and the reports filed by correspondents and by consulted experts highlighted the Antilles' social problems, their poverty, unemployment and lack of infrastructure and services.<sup>403</sup> A cover story in the December 27 issue of *France-Soir* informed its readers of Martinique's and Guadeloupe's economic and political woes and warned that these chronic problems strengthened the nascent autonomist movement.<sup>404</sup> An article in *Le Monde* written by Christian Crabot, a retired professor at the Lycée Schoelcher, echoed the concerns outlined in *France-Soir* but was more strident in its criticisms. While Crabot similarly argued that unemployment and overpopulation were a problem, he placed the blame squarely on racism. The racist treatment of Antilleans in Paris and other parts of the metropole, which the government left unaddressed, was exacerbated by the arrival of *pied noir* settlers in Fort-de-France. He warned that unless the French state redressed Martiniquans' legitimate grievances over economic misery, racism and the oft-distant and high-handed rule of metropolitan bureaucrats, Martiniquans would prove increasingly receptive to nationalist appeals for self-government.<sup>405</sup>

Despite the seriousness of the riots, the reforms proposed by the government were, as the historian Laurent Jalabert put it, "minimal," and did not address the substantive demands raised by the autonomists. The government's principal reaction was to create an alphabet of new agencies to supervise the development of Martinique's

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<sup>403</sup> See for example: "Incidents à la Martinique," *France-Observateur* 30 December 1959/1 January 1960; "Martinique: Les Incidents prennent un tour politique," *Paris-Jour*, 26 December 1959; "La Situation à Fort-de-France," *La Populaire*, 26 December 1959; "Violents Incidents à la Martinique," *L'Humanité*, 25 December 1959; "Nouveaux Incidents à Fort-de-France," *Figaro*, 24 December 1959.

<sup>404</sup> Serge Maffert, "Population trop nombreuses et ressources trop faibles à la Martinique," *France-Soir*, 27-28 December 1959.

<sup>405</sup> Christian Crabot, "Chomage, Racisme, et centralisation excessive sont à l'origine du malaise à la Martinique," *Le Monde*, 29 December 1959.

productive forces and to attempt to diversify the economy. FIDOM, the investment agency created in the 1958 constitution, saw its funds nearly double from its initial 1958 budget; the agency invested much of the new capital to develop tourism and promote agricultural diversification. Tariffs were lowered on rum, sugar and other Martiniquan exports, and tariffs on imports, increasingly important for Martinique's standard of living, were lowered as well.<sup>406</sup> The government also instituted a new plan for military service, the Plan N mo, which ended the despised practice of sending Antilleans to fight in Algeria during their compulsory military service. Instead, Antilleans served in Guyane and were trained in professional skills to aid in the development of Guyane and, upon their return, their home islands as well.<sup>407</sup> The government also established, at the urging of Prime Minister Michel D bre, BUMIDOM, an agency that would recruit, place and provide assistance for Antilleans who wished to work in the metropole. The program was designed to alleviate labor shortages in France while simultaneously reducing chronic unemployment in the Caribbean.<sup>408</sup>

Alongside an investigation into the social conditions behind the riots, the French state tasked Martinique's prosecutor with investigating, indicting and prosecuting Martiniquans who participated in the rioting. Dozens of Communist Party members from the longshore, mining and agricultural unions were arrested and investigated, and eventually 13 Martiniquans were prosecuted while 8 others were placed under suspicion.<sup>409</sup> The post-riot repression, however, focused not on the rank and file but on

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<sup>406</sup> Jalabert, 38-41.

<sup>407</sup> Nicolas 1996, tome 3, 210-11.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 208-10; Jalabert, 37-8. Emigration was denounced bitterly by nationalists in the Communist Party, the student movement, and later by Aim  C saire, Edouard Glissant and others as a plot to depopulate Martinique and further cement *b k * control over the island.

<sup>409</sup> AN CAC Cote n  940180, Folder 206. Letter from Procureur General, Martinique, to Monsieur le Garde des Sceaux, Ministre de Justice, 6 April 1961 (n  59.138).

the autonomist movement's leadership. The French state actively targeted perceived autonomist leaders, both on the island and in the metropole. Using laws written in the 1930s to crack down on communist and fascist agitation as well as more recent laws to handle the war in Algeria, the full force of the state was turned against the leaders of the Communist Party, trade union leaders, professors and other critics of assimilation and proponents of autonomy. Simultaneously, Martiniquan defenders of assimilation attacked the PCM and its allies, castigating them as anti-French and suggesting that autonomists were a front for Cuban or Soviet interests.

The first casualty was Alain Plénel, Martinique's vice-rector for education. Plénel, a metropolitan, was a member of the Communist Party and an active anti-colonial militant and a member of the party's left-wing. In a letter to Prefect Parsi and to the Paris branch of the General Information Service (RG), Martiniquan police intelligence reported that Plénel had denounced de Gaulle's return to power in 1958 as "fascist," and suggested that Plénel was "damaging French-Martiniquan friendship."<sup>410</sup> According to the police, his status as a high-ranking civil servant caused his criticisms to "quickly encrust the brains of the autochthones."<sup>411</sup> Armand Nicolas – himself a professor at the Lycée Schoelcher and similarly under investigation – suggested that the *béké* and other members of the Martiniquan elite particularly hated Plénel because he was an elite white civil servant who not only refused to associate with them but stridently denounced colonialism and racism.<sup>412</sup> Parsi, in his report to Treméaud and Lamassoure, described Plénel's attitude as "unacceptable" and said his removal and subsequent ban from

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<sup>410</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, Letter from Commissaire Principal, Chef du Service Départemental des Renseignements Généraux de la Martinique à Monsieur le Prefect, Directeur des Renseignements Généraux, 25 December 1959 (Rapport n° 2847/RG).

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Nicolas 1996, 194.

Martinique was “indispensable.”<sup>413</sup> Nonetheless he cautioned the government not to follow through on the prosecutor’s plan to open judicial proceedings against him for “affecting the internal security of the state,” as it might occasion further disturbances that Parsi could not hope to control. The prefect instead suggested Plénel be recalled to France on official business and barred from returning to Martinique.<sup>414</sup> At the end of January the Ministry of Education summoned Plénel to Paris for consultations; a crowd of 2000 gathered to see him leave. When he arrived in Paris he was ordered not to return to Martinique; in defiance Plénel tried to return but he was prevented from boarding his flight. Finally, in April, the government dismissed him from his post as Vice-Rector and formally banned him from Martinique.<sup>415</sup>

In the same memo that criticized Plénel, police intelligence also focused on Georges Gratiant and Armand Nicolas. Gratiant was a lawyer and the mayor of Lamentin, Fort-de-France’s industrial suburb and a PCM stronghold. Nicolas was a history teacher at the Lycée Schoelcher and the managing editor of *Justice*. Both were on the PCM’s Central Committee and were members of the politburo. The police singled both out as “playing an adverse and provocative role” in the December 1959 violence, pointing to an editorial published in *Justice* on December 22<sup>nd</sup> and a meeting the party called for December 23<sup>rd</sup> to organize “anti-colonial forces.”<sup>416</sup> Following the PCM’s

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<sup>413</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, Letter from Guy Lamassoure to Minister Tremeaud, Parsi’s report is attached, dated 4 January 1960.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Nicolas 1996, 195; “Le Peuple Martiniquais est solidaire du Vice-Recteur Alain Plénel,” *Justice*, 4 February 1960; “Une mesure colonialiste: Le Gouvernement de Gaulle Interdit le Vice-Recteur Plénel de revenir à la Martinique; Le Peuple Martiniquais élèvera une énergique protestation,” *Justice*, 3 March 1960; “Le gouvernement suspend le Vice-Recteur Alain Plénel de ses fonctions – Plus que jamais, vigilance!,” *Justice*, 31 March 1960.

<sup>416</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, Letter from Commissaire Principal, Chef du Service Départemental des Renseignements Généraux de la Martinique à Monsieur le Prefect, Directeur des Renseignements Généraux, 25 December 1959 (Rapport n° 2847/RG).

Second Congress in July 1960, which featured addresses by Venezuelan and Cuban communist delegates, the government moved against the leadership of the PCM. Armand Nicolas and Camille Sylvestre were investigated for threatening the security of the state, issues of *Justice* that covered the Congress, that criticized the French government or advocated autonomy were seized, and party members at all levels were investigated and harassed by the police.<sup>417</sup> In October 1960, de Gaulle signed a directive, which came to be known as the Ordinance of 15 October 1960, which authorized the prefect to dismiss and expel from the Overseas Departments any civil servant that criticized French policies in the DOMs or advocated autonomy.<sup>418</sup> The ordinance gave the French state a powerful new weapon against the communists as many leading members of the party were civil servants. Using the new law, the state dismissed Armand Nicolas from his teaching post at the Lycée Schoelcher and Walter Guitteaud and Georges Mauvois were fired from positions with the state-run telephone company.<sup>419</sup>

The state also censored *Justice* and used the ordinance, as well as existing laws dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to harass members of the Communist Party. According to Nicolas, *Justice* was seized more than a dozen times between 1960 and 1963.<sup>420</sup> Following more unrest in Lamentin, in which three agricultural workers were shot and killed by police in the midst of an extended sugar strike, the PCM published Georges Gratiant's funeral oration for the three slain workers. The pamphlet was seized and Gratiant prosecuted for defamation and endangering state security as well as advocating the dissolution of the national territory; he was tried in Marseille and sentenced to three

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<sup>417</sup> Nicolas 1996, 198-201;

<sup>418</sup> Jalabert, 36.

<sup>419</sup> Nicolas 1996, 201.

<sup>420</sup> Nicolas 1996, 202.

months in prison and a substantial fine.<sup>421</sup> The party's General Secretary, Camille Sylvestre, was fined 200,000 francs for defamation of the military and Guy Dufond, the leader of the Communist Youth, was fired from his job as a teacher. Meetings were banned, pamphlets and newspapers were censored and confiscated, and militants were jailed for holding meetings in defiance of the prefect's orders.<sup>422</sup>

The repression spilled over into the metropole. In 1961 Marcel Manville, the novelist Edouard Glissant, the poet Paul Nizer (née Albert Beville) and other activists formed the "Front Antillo-Guyanais" to advocate for the formation of an independent French Caribbean federation.<sup>423</sup> The organization was dissolved almost immediately and its leaders were forbidden to return to the Antilles or Guyane. The state stepped up its surveillance of Martiniquan and Guadeloupean students attending lycées and universities in the metropole; the Martiniquan (AGEM) and Guadeloupean (AGEG) student organizations were placed under surveillance and students carrying their publications back to the islands were placed on watch lists and all publications confiscated. Even the Catholic student union, FAGEC, was put under police intelligence.<sup>424</sup>

The violence of the 1959 riots, the Lamentin riots and the French state's repression of anti-colonial activists ironically confirmed autonomists' contention that colonialism in the Antilles had yet to end. In the course of repressing autonomist dissidents, the French state acted like the colonial power that the communists and other critics had always accused it of being. It dismissed civil servants from their jobs without trial and exiled prominent intellectuals to Paris for the crime of criticizing in writing and

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<sup>421</sup> As a result of Gratiant's trial, PCM members stopped signing their articles in the party paper, *Justice*, to avoid repression. AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 209, Folder "PCM."

<sup>422</sup> Nicolas., 203.

<sup>423</sup> See the last section of this chapter on Glissant and the Front Antillo-Guyanais.

<sup>424</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 280, "Renseignements Généraux."



speech the actions of the French state and for proposing alternatives to assimilation and French cultural and political dominance. The Communist Party's adversarial relationship with the government and the targeting of its militants reinvigorated the party. While its previous effort to form a left-wing alliance, the Anti-Colonial Front, had been mostly ignored, the PPM, the PSU, and a group of left-wing Socialists joined its 1961 formation, the Front for the Defense of Public Liberties.<sup>425</sup> The Front issued a joint statement that read:

“The violence and repression, the incapacity of the colonialists to resolve Martiniquan problems, the accentuation of the exploitation of our country by the colonial societies, the insolence of the racists, all this shows Martiniquans that there is but one route towards progress: that is the total liquidation of colonialism. And this will not be feasible unless Martiniquans take into their hands the direction of their own affairs.”<sup>426</sup>

For autonomist activists, the repression, the violence, the half-measures confirmed that the French would never acquiesce to demands for autonomy, economic development, land reform, and the other measures they demanded. The repression confirmed that the Antilles were still colonies, departments apart; there was one law for the Antilles and another for France.

1959 would prove to be a turning point in the ideological development of Martiniquan anti-colonialism. The conflict between communists, students and critics of assimilation, on the one hand, and the French state and its supporters on the other, would spill over into overt hostility and open conflict. The events of 1959 – beginning with Castro's rebel army capturing Havana and ending with the deadly violence on the streets of Fort-de-France – would alter profoundly the conflict over assimilation and autonomy.

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<sup>425</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 209, “Front de Défense des Libertés Publiques,” Letter from Le Prefet de la Martinique à la Ministre d'Etat Charge du Sahara, des Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer et Secrétariat Général pour les D.O.M. (Cabinet), 23 September 1961.

<sup>426</sup> Excerpt from *Justice* included in Ibid.

Opponents of the status quo aligned themselves with Cuba, Africa and the growing Third Worldist movement, while the French state reacted to dissidents and activists with censorship, arrest, repression and even outright violence. 1959 initiated an Antillean 1960s that would stretch from the Cuban Revolution in January 1959 to the trial of the GONG, radical Guadeloupean activists, in the spring of 1968.

### The Persistence of Colonialism: the Communist Critique of Assimilation

While the 1959 riots and the ensuing repression and unrest in the Antilles was a major impetus behind Antillean activists' shift away from assimilation and toward autonomy, disappointment with the failed promise of the 1946 law had been building since the mid-1950s. Growing nationalist sentiment and the cultivation of ties to Third World movements had been important to Antillean activists since the 1930s, but after the 1959 riots the realignment away from France accelerated. The criticism of France and French rule became more total, questioning not only the practice of rule but the legitimacy of France's claim to rule. Shifting allegiances in the intellectual and political class fed the growth of dissidence, notably Césaire's departure from the Communist Party in 1956, de Gaulle's return to power in 1958 and the scission that saw the left wing of the Socialist Party split off to form the Unified Socialist Party. The left's shift to opposing assimilation marked a major turning point in Antillean politics. The communists, since their 1920 founding, had portrayed themselves as the unflinching advocates for total, "integral" assimilation. Jules Monnerot, Léopold Bissol and other early party leaders argued that the alleviation of Martinique's economic misery and corrupt politics, the liberation of the working classes and the full development of Martinique's potential could be fulfilled only through closer union with the metropole. The Socialists and Radicals

shared similar positions; the debate between the three parties was over tactics rather than ends.

Assimilation, in short, absorbed a wide range of hopes and desires that its primarily bureaucratic reorganization were bound to disappoint. Even in the wake of departmentalization's compromises and the stillborn dream of the Union Française, the Antillean Left continued to defend the principle behind the 1946 law. The problem, they insisted, was that assimilation had not gone far enough, that it had been betrayed by the coalition politics that paralyzed the Fourth Republic. As late as 1954, *Justice* carried articles condemning the French state's "colonialist" attitude in its continued "denial" of the rights and privileges due to Antilleans as French citizens.

The Communists, for example, had long been hostile to arguments that Martinique could be conceived as a nation separate from France. In part this was due to the fact that historically, the *béké* had supported Martiniquan independence from France; since the 1789 Revolution, the *béké* plantocracy intermittently threatened independence when French republicanism impinged on their economic and political domination.<sup>427</sup> Between 1794 and 1815, for example, the *béké* handed Martinique over to the British in an effort to preserve slavery; the planters on Guadeloupe attempted to do the same but were stymied by an alliance of white republicans, free people of color and slaves.<sup>428</sup> In 1848, the white planters threatened to secede from France and proposed joining the United States in order to maintain slavery and deny the extension of citizenship to free

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<sup>427</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>428</sup> Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), esp. 124-154; Rebecca Hartkopf Schloss, *Sweet Liberty: The Final Days of Slavery in Martinique* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 46-71.

blacks.<sup>429</sup> In 1946, some *béké* also voiced opinions in favor of independence from France and possible annexation to the United States. The Communists were suspicious of any position so closely associated with *béké* interests. The Communists suggested that independence was a *béké* plot to maintain their privilege and autocratic control of the island and further intimated that independence would serve only the interests of American capitalism. Independence would mean absorption into the American imperial orbit and even annexation, which carried with it the extension of southern Jim Crow laws to the Antilles.<sup>430</sup> As late as 1954, *Justice* attacked André Thomarel, an anti-Communist local publisher, who proposed the formation of an “Antillean Front” to unite Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane in common cause. *Justice*’s writers dismissed Thomarel’s proposal as a “farce,” “reminiscent of the proposals of the American imperialists” and “buffoonery.”<sup>431</sup> Communists remained, well into the mid-1950s, staunch defenders of Martinique’s ties to France.

Césaire’s 1956 resignation from the Communist Party precipitated its shift from a critical embrace of assimilation to the adoption of an explicitly autonomist position. While still a party member, Césaire pushed the Communists to adopt “autonomy” as their slogan (*mot d’ordre*). While Césaire had personally navigated the 1946 law to successful adoption, he had grown frustrated with the pace of reform, the refusal of the French state to live up to the obligations and promises of the 1946 law and the terminal paralysis of the National Assembly under the Fourth Republic. Observing firsthand the collapse of the Union Française and the impotence of the French government in Algeria, Césaire

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<sup>429</sup> Schloss, 184-226.

<sup>430</sup> Kristen Stromberg Childers, “Fighting Fascism in Martinique: Admiral Robert and the Legacy of Vichy,” Paper Presented at the Society for French Historical Studies, St. Louis, March 27, 2009.

<sup>431</sup> “Une farce: le soi-disant Front Antillais de M. Thomarel,” *Justice*, 25 February 1954.

questioned not only the practice of assimilation but its theoretical assumptions. No doubt influenced by his good friend and ally Léopold Senghor, Césaire argued for *autogestion*, a greater local control of internal social and economic affairs and for the Union's reorganization into a federal structure allowing increased local and regional autonomy.<sup>432</sup> Within the Martiniquan Party, Césaire convinced key figures, including the new Secretary-General Camille Sylvestre and Armand Nicolas, who had emerged as the party's chief tactician, to adopt a pro-autonomy position at the 11<sup>th</sup> Federal Conference in August 1955. The plank advocated that Martiniquans "manage" (*gestion*), rather than just "participate in," their "own affairs" (*leurs propres affaires*).<sup>433</sup> Césaire's support for local control would, eventually, carry him out of the party in 1956 and inspire the formation of the Progressive Party in 1958.<sup>434</sup> Césaire's departure, his refusal to give up his National Assembly seat and his formation of the Progressive Party effectively split the Antillean Left and autonomist movement.

Historians and scholars of the French Caribbean have tended to portray autonomy as a political project largely conceived and developed by Aimé Césaire. In this telling, Césaire, constrained by the PCF's Stalinist orthodoxy, disgusted by the revelation of Stalin's crimes and the invasion of Hungary and frustrated with the party's ambivalent position on race and colonialism resigned to found the Progressive Party in order to

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<sup>432</sup> Senghor emerged in the 1950s as an advocate for the reform of the Union Française along federalist lines. Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (London: Berg Publishers, 2002), 193-221; Robert A. Mortimer, "From Federation to Francophonie: Senghor's Africa Policy," *African Studies Review* 15, 2 (September 1972), 285-7.

<sup>433</sup> De Lepine 1981, 230-1. In his history of the moment, Nicolas would credit Sylvestre with developing the principle of autonomy. See Nicolas 1996, 167 and Parti Communiste Martiniquais 1977, 15.

<sup>434</sup> See the first issue of the PPM's paper, *La Progressiste*, for Césaire's foundational speech to the PPM constituent assembly. *La Progressiste* 1 (1958).

provide an autonomist alternative to communism.<sup>435</sup> Gary Wilder's recent description of Césaire's autonomist politics as an "untimely" form of "strategic utopianism," which looked back to Louverture's and Schoelcher's "futures past" in order to conceive an Antillean union with France that preserved local identity and control exemplifies this interpretation.<sup>436</sup> Wilder writes that "Césaire's postwar interventions flowed from a pragmatic insight that territorial sovereignty would not be the most effective way for small countries with scarce resources to secure substantive liberty in the emergent Cold War order... We may thus identify in Césaire's postwar political commitments and strategies an internal connection among the pragmatic, the ethical and the utopian."<sup>437</sup> In Wilder's estimation, Césaire's shifting political positions and alliances between 1956 and 1963 expressed a coherent political project founded in a pragmatic utopianism and a post-national ethics.

While Wilder's description of Césaire's politics is an appealing one, Auguste Armet's understanding of Césaire's politics as "ambiguous" and "incoherent" appears to be more accurate.<sup>438</sup> De Gaulle's return in 1958 upset the postwar balance of power in France and scrambled electoral and ideological alliances; the Left was divided over the

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<sup>435</sup> See, for example: William F.S. Miles, *Elections and Ethnicity in French Martinique: a Paradox in Paradise* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 207-216; Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 94-100; A. James Arnold, "Césaire is Dead, Long Live Césaire!: Recuperations and Reparations," *French Politics, Culture and Society* 27,3 (Winter 2009), 9-18; Thomas A. Hale and Kora Véron, "Aimé Césaire's Break from the Parti Communiste Français: Nouveaux élan, nouveaux défis," *French Politics, Culture and Society* 27,3 (Winter 2009), 47-62. William F.S. Miles, "Metaphysical Considerations Can Come Late, But the People Have Children to Feed": An Interview with Aimé Césaire," *French Politics, Culture and Society* 27,3 (Winter 2009), 63-75; Aimé Césaire with Françoise Vergès, *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006).

<sup>436</sup> Gary Wilder, "Untimely Vision: Aimé Césaire, Decolonization, Utopia," *Public Culture* 21,1 (2009), 101-140.

<sup>437</sup> Wilder 2009, 126.

<sup>438</sup> Auguste Armet, "Aimé Césaire, homme politique" in Christian Lapoussinière, ed., *Aimé Césaire: une pensée pour le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Fort-de-France: Centre césarien d'études et de recherches, 2003), 185-197.

1958 constitutional referendum while the Right was divided over de Gaulle.<sup>439</sup> Césaire's actions in 1958 were indicative of the confusion across the French political spectrum and Césaire's own ambiguous politics. When the referendum was first announced, Césaire and the Progressive Party opposed the new constitution and instructed their followers to vote 'No.' Césaire described the draft constitution as "Machiavellian" and argued that France suffered not from an "excess of democracy" but from a "restriction on democracy."<sup>440</sup> Aristide Maugée, Césaire's deputy, penned the official editorial directing PPM members to oppose the referendum. The constitution "ignored the voice of the Martiniquan people" as it "suppressed all potential evolution" in their political, social and cultural status.<sup>441</sup> De Gaulle's government, worried about the referendum in the empire and particularly in the Antilles, dispatched André Malraux to Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane to convince colonial holdouts, including Césaire and the PPM leadership, to reverse their position and back the referendum.<sup>442</sup> Malraux delivered a speech in Fort-de-France that played on the idea of "de Gaulle the decolonizer," the architect of Brazzaville, the liberator of oppressed France and the savior of the French Republic from its enemies, past and present.<sup>443</sup> Malraux's personal charm succeeded in persuading Césaire and following Malraux's speech at Fort-de-France's city hall Césaire declared

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<sup>439</sup> Serge Bernstein, *The Republic of de Gaulle, 1958-1969* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3-27; Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944-1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 285-313.

<sup>440</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Sur le Constitution," *Le Progressiste*, 2 Août 1958; Aimé Césaire, "Une Occasion manqué," *Le Progressiste*, 9 Août 1958.

<sup>441</sup> Aristide Maugée, "Le P.P.M. dit non à l'actuel projet de Constitution," *Le Progressiste*, 13 Septembre 1958.

<sup>442</sup> André Malraux, *Anti-Memoirs* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), 109-125.

<sup>443</sup> "Non à la Constitution gaulliste! Non à Malraux!," *Justice*, 20 Septembre 1958; André Malraux, "Discours de M. A. Malraux," *Le Progressiste*, 27 Septembre 1958.

himself reassured and urged his supporters to put their trust in Malraux and de Gaulle and back the referendum.<sup>444</sup>

Césaire's political vacillation continued after the establishment of the Fifth Republic and his reelection to the National Assembly. Only a year after the 1958 referendum, Césaire seemed to reverse his position again, publishing an article in *Présence Africaine* in praise of Sekou Touré and Guinée's 'No' vote on the Constitution.<sup>445</sup> Guinée's vote meant independence and its secession from the Union Française.<sup>446</sup> In the article, Césaire attacked the French model of assimilation, lauding Touré for his lack of ideology, his reliance on African forms of political and social organization and his insistence on the people deciding the proper course of action.<sup>447</sup> Touré's "passion" and his "confidence in his people," Césaire wrote – too often mistaken in Europe for "ambitious agitation" – had led all of Africa "onto the road to liberty" and "restored to the world a pariah continent" and in doing so, "enriched universal humanity."<sup>448</sup> Césaire celebrated Touré's accomplishment, seeing it as presaging the eventual triumph of decolonization and the liberation of all of Africa from colonial rule. Only a short time after convincing his fellow Martiniquans to vote to continue French rule over the Antilles, Césaire applauded Touré for rejecting France and guaranteeing decolonization's triumph. Césaire's embrace of Touré and support for de Gaulle was indicative of the confusion of his politics; while he supported the cultural and political autonomy that Touré's gesture guaranteed, his conception of Martinique's future was

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<sup>444</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Discours," *Le Progressiste*, 27 Septembre 1958; Aimé Césaire, "Tenir le Pas Gagné," *Le Progressiste*, 27 Septembre 1958.

<sup>445</sup> Aimé Césaire, "La pensée politique du Sekou Touré," *Présence Africaine* Dec. 1959/Jan. 1960, 65-73.

<sup>446</sup> Nomi Dave, "Une Nouvelle Révolution Permanente: The Making of African Modernity in Sekou Touré's Guinea," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45,4 (2009), 456-8.

<sup>447</sup> Césaire, "Sekou Touré," 68-9, 72.

<sup>448</sup> Césaire, "Sekou Touré," 72-3.



firmly connected to France. Césaire's autonomy was conceived within the "framework of France," a framework that historically had little patience for initiatives that decentralized power and identity.

The Communist Party bitterly criticized their former leader for first opposing and then supporting de Gaulle's referendum. On the pages of *Justice*, Césaire's former comrades renewed the attacks that had accompanied his dramatic and sudden 1956 resignation from the Communist Party.<sup>449</sup> Communist activists mocked Césaire for his "acrobatic talents," suggesting that Césaire, a "singular gymnast," had performed a remarkable feat in repudiating his own position in less than a week.<sup>450</sup> Césaire had claimed in his speech alongside Malraux that, "it is not I that has become a Gaullist, but de Gaulle who has become PPM." The Communists continued to mock his faith in de Gaulle, arguing that Césaire had betrayed Antillean demands for autonomy for vague promises from de Gaulle and his ministers. Only the Communists would oppose the compromises of "Césaire-Gaullism."<sup>451</sup>

The Communists' opposition to the 1958 referendum reflected the distance that the Party had traveled ideologically. The Party's 1957 federal conference codified opposition to France and to assimilation and installed autonomy as the party's guiding principle. Communist leaders published editorials and articles in favor of the new political line; in addition, articles exploring decolonization and anti-colonial movements in the Third World appeared more frequently in *Justice*'s pages. Party leaders were

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<sup>449</sup> Brett Edwards has published a translation of Césaire's letter to Thorez and a short introduction in a recent issue of *Social Text*. Brett Hayes Edwards, "Introduction: Césaire in 1956," *Social Text* 103 (Summer 2010), 115-125; Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez," *Social Text* 103 (Summer 2010), 145-152.

<sup>450</sup> "Après avoir dit non Césaire fait campagne pour le oui, parce que, dit-il 'de Gaulle est devenu P.P.M.,'" *Justice*, 25 Septembre 1958.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

preparing an amicable and authorized split from the French Communist Party. Camille Sylvestre, the Martiniquan Communists' nominal leader, advocated for the formation of a Martiniquan party as consistent with Marxist-Leninist theory. Lenin had stipulated that each nation have its own Communist Party. Capitalism produced both the modern conception of the nation and its potential dissolution through the globalization of productive forces; nonetheless, from a tactical point of view, the struggle had to be organized along national lines. National Communist parties would practice international solidarity but each national party would possess discretion in conducting its own struggle as each national situation was different and, therefore, each national struggle for socialism would unfold at different speeds and in a different manner.<sup>452</sup> Since the party leadership argued that Martinique formed a distinct nation separate from France, it followed that Martinique must have its own Communist Party, separate from the French Communist Party. The September Federal Conference's task was to found this party.

The September 26, 1957 issue of *Justice* published the proceedings of the Federal Conference for party members who were not able to attend.<sup>453</sup> A hundred and thirty-five delegates from across the island, joined by representatives from the Communist parties of France and Guadeloupe, met to ratify the direction laid out by the party's intellectuals and leadership and to chart out the party's future. Following two days of active discussion, the PCF-M, with the blessing of the PCF's delegate, Marcel Servin, voted to

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<sup>452</sup> "Critical Remarks on the National Question," in Lenin, *Collected Works, Volume XX* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 27-33.

<sup>453</sup> "La XIIème Conférence Fédérale dans un enthousiasme sans précédent se transforme en Congrès Constitutif du Parti Communiste Martiniquais afin d'impulser la lutte anticolonialiste du Peuple Martiniquais pour le travail, le bien-être et le respect de sa personnalité," *Justice* 26 September 1957.

transform itself into the Martiniquan Communist Party (PCM).<sup>454</sup> Sylvestre, writing in *Justice*, depicted the transformation as less a break than a continuation by other means of the Communists' historic mission. Invoking the party's founders Monnerot, Del and Alier and its historic accomplishments – the organization of the class struggle, the 1946 departmentalization law, the integration of Antilleans into the French welfare state – Sylvestre insisted that the party “simply intends... to open before Martiniquans a new perspective which must, if we are united, carry Martiniquan society further ahead.”<sup>455</sup> A specifically Martiniquan Party, Sylvestre argued, was less a change than a set of “new weapons.”<sup>456</sup> Establishment as a separate Martiniquan party did not alter significantly the PCM's ideology but it did allow local leaders increased control over strategic decisions and the ability to conduct their own foreign policy.

Despite the insistence on continuity, there were some vital innovations and some significant departures from existing Party orthodoxy. Firstly, the PCM's leading thinkers and propagandists – Armand Nicolas, Camille Sylvestre, Georges Mauvois, Georges Gratiant, René Ménil, Guy Dufond and Edouard de Lépine – centered colonialism as the problem to be tackled in their theoretical and organizational work. While the party maintained that colonialism and capitalism were intimately related, the Martiniquan Communists revised their previous position – that fighting capitalism was the key to ending colonialism – to emphasize the fight against colonialism, arguing that colonialism had blocked the Antilles' historical development and distorted the social relationships between capital, labor and state power. Colonialism had frozen the Antilles at a less-

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<sup>454</sup> Servin was, at the time, Thorez's heir apparent, so it seems logical to conclude that the transformation was blessed at the highest levels of the PCF's bureaucracy. David S. Bell and Byron Criddle, *The French Communist Party in the Fifth Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 19-21.

<sup>455</sup> “La XIIème Conférence...”

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

advanced stage of historical development and it would be impossible for Antilleans to overcome capitalism without first overcoming colonialism.

The Communists' emphasis on overcoming colonialism in order to overcome capitalism was premised on Marxist and Marxist-Leninist theories of modernity. Marx's theory of history stipulated that communism was only possible after first passing through capitalist modernity. Lenin elaborated further on the role of imperialism in spreading capitalist modernity; colonized peoples first had to eliminate the colonial regime and accede to self-determination before they too could set out onto the historical path to communism. Colonial modernity, then, was initiated in colonization but colonial social relations blocked its full realization. The PCM criticized colonialism for preserving "feudal social relations" and argued that only autonomy would establish modernity in the Antilles. In pursuit of colonial modernity, PCM activists argued for both modernization and development, unconsciously echoing their liberal counterparts in the metropolitan and departmental governments who also were preoccupied with economic development in the French Caribbean.

Maria Josefina Saldña-Portillo examined the ideological convergence of Marxist and liberal developmental discourses in postwar Latin American, comparing the discourse around modernity and development among Latin American revolutionary activists and American social scientists and modernization theorists.<sup>457</sup> Reading Rostow alongside Guevara, Saldña-Portillo concluded that there was a "discursive collusion between the age of development and the revolutionary movements therein."<sup>458</sup> The parallels between revolutionary discourse and development theory resulted not from

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<sup>457</sup> Maria Josefina Saldña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 6.

“mimetic desire” but emerged from an underlying “epistemic convergence” that Saldña-Portillo described as the “meliorist theory of subjectivity and human action,” which posited that humanity was ultimately malleable and perfectible.<sup>459</sup> With similar origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both liberalism and Marxism subscribed to the perfectibility of humanity and structured their theory of history around the improvement of not only the human condition but the individual and collective human subject.

Georges Mauvois’ and Armand Nicolas’ discussions of economics and autonomy were indicative of the link between modernity and autonomy in Martiniquan Communist theory. Mauvois was a member of the PCM Central Committee and a contributor to both *Justice* and the party’s theoretical journal, *Action*. Mauvois published a series of articles in *Justice* in 1959 that examined Martinique’s economic and social situation and through a reading of Marx and Lenin argued that decolonization remained incomplete.<sup>460</sup> In his first installment, Mauvois laid out his theoretical assumptions, drawing from Lenin to diagnose two principal markers of the Antilles’ continuing colonial status. First, the Antilles possessed economies “oriented... toward the exigencies of the economy of another, more powerful country.”<sup>461</sup> Martinique’s economy was not autochthonous but was an integral component of France’s more developed and self-sufficient economy. Its economic production was committed to monoculture export cash crops and lacked the ability to provide for Martiniquans’ basic social needs in both agricultural and industrial products as well as goods and services. This lack of self-sufficiency did not result from natural conditions, Mauvois argued, but from social relations. Embedded and

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>460</sup> *Justice*, 23 Avril 1959, 1.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

subordinated to French economic activity, Martinique's dependency was the socio-political result of colonial economic relations.

Economic dependency was reinforced by the fact that Antillean political institutions were "directly attached to the institutions of the metropolitan state."<sup>462</sup> Due to rotation policy, civil servants in the Antilles were often metropolitans and were answerable and beholden to metropolitan rather than local institutions; their loyalties and interests coincided with Paris not Fort-de-France. As such they ruled with and for those Antilleans most connected to Paris – the *béké* and their metropolitan capitalist partners. If the *béké* once had represented a nascent Antillean capitalist class, the final defeat of their overt political power in 1946 pushed the *béké* to ally themselves to metropolitan capital in order to preserve their social and economic position. Their absorption into French capital eliminated their autonomy and completed the Antillean economy's subordination and incorporation into metropolitan capital circuits. Prefects, civil servants and even Martiniquan elected representatives recognized this fact and tailored policy to match, acting in the classic role of a *comprador* class.<sup>463</sup> As the structures that shaped Martiniquan social life were derived from and subordinate to French institutions and social relations, Martinique remained a *de facto* colony despite its *de jure* departmental status. Normalization to metropolitan practices and standards eliminated the last vestiges of local economic and political autonomy. While corruption was eliminated and *béké*' control over local political processes broken, departmentalization further entrenched metropolitan dominance of Antillean affairs. Despite citizenship, Antilleans remained

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Anton Allahar, "Situating Ethnic Nationalism in the Caribbean" in Anton Allahar, ed., *Ethnicity, Class and Nationalism: Caribbean and Extra-Caribbean Dimensions* (New York: Lexington, 2005), 17-22.

disempowered economically as metropolitan capital supplanted *béké* capital and appended Antillean socio-economic structures to metropolitan structures.

In a follow-up article in the 30 April 1959 issue, Mauvois returned to the *béké*'s social role in detail.<sup>464</sup> Mauvois argued that the myth that the *béké* were as Martiniquan as the black majority, that they composed a type of “national bourgeoisie,” had to be demolished. Mauvois argued that the *béké* constituted a special case. Quoting a white colonist's statement that the fundamental goal of the Antilles' white inhabitants was to make their fortune and return to France, Mauvois argued that rather than constituting part of the “nation,” the *béké* more closely resembled the *comprador* class of intermediary proprietors, official, merchants and managers found in other colonies.<sup>465</sup> The *béké* and other whites did not form a nascent “national bourgeoisie” in Martinique but simply acted as the local administrators of French and transnational capital; *béké* and external capital were not opposed but identical. Rather than building up national capital they worked instead to export it.

*Béké* failure to industrialize Martinique clearly demonstrated their status as a colonial class. In two additional articles, Mauvois outlined the parallels between the Antilles' colonial economy and underdevelopment in the Third World. The old imperialist powers had forestalled modernity in the formerly colonized world through an “imperialist” division of the world so that, “Indochina can produce nothing but rice, Algeria nothing but wine and dates, Black Africa nothing but copra and peanuts, Brazil nothing but coffee, Martinique nothing but sugar.”<sup>466</sup> To overcome this division, Antilleans and other colonized peoples had to push for a “true industrialization” that

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<sup>464</sup> *Justice*, 30 Avril, 1959, 2.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>466</sup> *Justice*, 18 Juin, 1959, 1.

would overcome the poverty inculcated by monocultural agricultural production. The difficulty of this project was that Antilleans not only had to overcome *béké* and French recalcitrance but would have to contest the logic of imperialism by challenging the division of the world into imperial core and colonial periphery. Autonomy was meaningless without economic self-sufficiency.

Armand Nicolas expanded on Mauvois' discussion of the economics and social basis of autonomy in a series of articles in *Justice* and in a lengthy theoretical tract published in *Action*.<sup>467</sup> Nicolas began his discussion by refuting the assimilationist "equation" – "Departmentalization = prosperity, autonomy = misery" – arguing that assimilation produced rather than alleviated Antillean misery. The Antilles, Nicolas argued, possessed resources – including fertile soil, fishing, mineral wealth and natural beauty – that could form the basis for autonomous production.<sup>468</sup> However, due to colonial economic and social relations, the French colonialist interests that dominated the Antilles' political institutions ignored these resources in favor of the maintenance of monoculture. The same insistence on the Antilles' agricultural resources also prevented industrialization and infrastructural investment. Though Martinique possessed the natural features to construct hydroelectric stations, such capacities were unneeded in existing economic relations. France and French capital, Nicolas noted, preserved the Antilles "at the stage of infancy."<sup>469</sup>

French colonialism, in effect, was blocking Martinique's and Guadeloupe's ability to emerge from its infancy and achieve economic and social modernity. "*This Underdevelopment exists*," Nicolas wrote, "not because Martinique is poor and incapable

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<sup>467</sup> Armand Nicolas, "La Martinique peut et doit être autonome," *Action* n° 5 (Septembre 1964).

<sup>468</sup> Nicolas 1964, 6-7.

<sup>469</sup> Nicolas 1964, 9.



of supporting its needs due to nature, but *because for three centuries it has suffocated beneath the colonial yoke.*”<sup>470</sup> The ‘Colonial Pact,’ established in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, oriented Antillean economic production to the benefit of the metropole; while abolished “on paper” it persisted in practice, appending the Antillean economy to the French economy. Industrialization in the Antilles was forbidden as it threatened to compete with metropolitan industry; in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the government destroyed Antillean refineries and workshops in favor of metropolitan enterprises. The structure of dependence remained unchanged despite citizenship and assimilation.

To remedy this situation, Antilleans had to “liquidate the colonial regime” through creating a “new economy” that was “democratic and popular.”<sup>471</sup> Reform and industrialization had to be directed toward the people’s interests and not toward either the *béké* or the bourgeois. Nicolas outlined the main tasks that would modernize the Antillean economy and lay the social foundation for a “true autonomy:” resource exploration, exploitation of energy sources, modernization of the fishing industry, agricultural reform and modernization, commercial expansion and industrialization.<sup>472</sup> Economic modernization would provide a sound economic base for social and cultural development, or in other words, Antilleans’ attainment of true modernity.

While Nicolas was preoccupied with economic affairs, his compatriot René Ménil expanded on cultural and social matters, delineating the “problems” of Antillean being.<sup>473</sup> Ménil’s critique of existing Antillean cultural attitudes built on party proposals that intellectuals elucidate an “Antillean personality” and disseminate their findings to the

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<sup>470</sup> Nicolas 1964, 9. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>471</sup> Nicolas 1964, 19.

<sup>472</sup> Nicolas 1964, 19-23.

<sup>473</sup> René Ménil, “Problèmes d’une culture antillaise,” *Action* n° 5 (Septembre 1964).

Antillean masses.<sup>474</sup> This signaled a more strident cultural politics by the PCM.

Historically, the Communists had insisted that cultural differences between Antilleans and the French were negligible and that those who insisted on a distinct Antillean culture were racists for suggesting that Antilleans could not be fully French. Ménil, however, had long insisted that Antillean and French culture were fundamentally different and that a vital task for Antillean anti-colonialists was to delineate a distinct Antillean identity.

Ménil had been a member of the collective that published “L’Étudiant Noir” in 1932 and helped pen the group’s critique of the Communist Party for its position that Antilleans and French were culturally identical.<sup>475</sup> Ménil mocked his Communist elders for adopting the pretensions of the French middle-class, while the Communists attacked Ménil and his friends as idealists.<sup>476</sup> When he returned to Martinique in 1934, Ménil formed the Marxist group, Front Commun, which eventually merged with the Martiniquan Communists.

While Ménil became one of the principal theorists of the Party, he always maintained his criticism of cultural assimilation. Ménil collaborated with his old friend Aimé Césaire to edit the wartime journal, *Tropiques*, for which he contributed articles on the marvelous, folklore, Mallarmé, humor, Antillean poetry, vitalism in literature as well as his own poems.<sup>477</sup> Ménil taught philosophy at the Lycée Schoelcher and emerged as the party’s leading cultural critic, publishing in *Justice*, *Action* and in the French Communist Party’s literary journal, *Nouvelle Critique*. Ménil’s role in the party focused on cataloging and

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<sup>474</sup> “Suite de la Résolution,” *Justice* 26 September 1957.

<sup>475</sup> See my discussion in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4.

<sup>476</sup> Julien Valère Loza, *Les Etudiants Martiniquais en France, Histoire de leur organisation et de leurs luttes, tome 1: Des origines à l’affaire de l’OJAM* (Fort-de-France: Editions 2M, 2003), 25.

<sup>477</sup> See the reprinted articles in *Tropiques: 1941-1945* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1992).

valorizing the Antillean “personality” through critically examining Martinique’s past and present cultural production.<sup>478</sup>

Ménil argued that decolonization had rendered assimilation anachronistic and cut Antilleans off from the rest of the Caribbean and the rest of the world. Assimilation’s fundamental problem was that it was too attached to the past. If the promise of incorporation into France as citizens was once a utopian goal, historical conditions had changed. When the world was organized along colonial and racist lines, the 1848 achievement of citizenship constituted a revolutionary and world-historical act. However, assimilationists clung to the achievements of the past and refused to face up to the “realities of our times and the exigencies of modern consciousness;” they still sought to “absorb, dilute” the Antillean personality into the “French general interest.”<sup>479</sup> In their worldview the Antilles were “sterile rocks” while France was everything. Ménil posed the assimilationist worldview thus: “Who are we? Nothing. What can we be? Nothing. What are we waiting for? We are nothing, we await everything. And from whom? From the Metropole, from the Mother-Country, which is everything.”<sup>480</sup> French Antilleans who, in 1794 and 1848 had been at the vanguard of history in recognizing the potential of the Revolution and in demanding rights and citizenship had allowed their historical consciousness to ossify. They remained fixated on a superseded historical moment and refused to acknowledge changed circumstances and possibilities.

Assimilation’s logic flowed naturally from the cultural conditions of imperialism. Even as imperialism collapsed across the globe, “the colonialists... contest still the

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<sup>478</sup> Ménil focused mostly on “high” culture, penning reviews of Antillean literary works including novels by Edouard Glissant and plays by Aimé Césaire.

<sup>479</sup> Ménil 1964, 29.

<sup>480</sup> Ménil 1964, 30.

culture of Algeria, of Indochina, of Black Africa, of Madagascar.” Cultural annihilation was a necessary tool of imperialism, Ménil wrote, a necessary means of social control. If the colonizer acknowledged the colonized as human and possessing culture, “how is the colonial system justified?”<sup>481</sup> Assimilation was a manifestation of the penetration of this mentality into the minds of the colonized themselves. Three centuries of colonization and dominance had colonized not only Antillean bodies but Antillean minds. Ménil wrote that colonialism “passed into the very consciousness and life of Antilleans. The steamroller of colonial culture completed its work: the colonized themselves avow that they are nothing, that they have no pretension, no ambition.” Everything valuable, worthwhile and desirable was French and in the metropole, not in the Antilles. In their “abjection” Antilleans “beg the colonized to colonize them again and again.” Were it not for the French colonizer, culture, even humanity itself, would be absent from the Antilles.<sup>482</sup>

Ménil argued that this was the colonizer’s worldview and that the proponents of assimilation had accepted colonialist ideology as a universal truth. In reality, the Antilles possessed an “essentially inimitable” culture, one that was observably its own. Folklore, folkways, cultural practices, literature and poetry clearly reflected the fact that the Antilles possessed a “psychical community, a common mentality” that was recognizably theirs and theirs alone. Its uniqueness lay in its syncretism. Assimilationists and French politicians – for example, de Gaulle in his 1960 speech in Fort-de-France – pointed to the French aspects of Antillean culture. Their error was in mistaking history for essence. The Antilles were a “crossroads of cultures” comprising European, indigenous, African and Asian influences. If French culture was dominant, it was due to the fact that France was

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<sup>481</sup> Ménil 1964, 31.

<sup>482</sup> Ménil 1964, 31.

the colonial master and controlled the institutions and life of the islands. Antillean culture was denied, in part, “crushed under the weight of colonial oppression,” because to recognize Antillean culture meant to recognize Antilleans as a people separate from the French people.<sup>483</sup>

The most vital task, M  nil argued, was to realize that the problem of culture was not only theoretical but practical. Cultural struggle was part of social and political struggle and provided resources for Antilleans’ fight for autonomy. Culture was, in fact, the foundation on which autonomy was built; without “psychological struggle,” Antilleans would never overcome their alienation. “Colonialism triumphs,” M  nil argued, “when the indoctrinated indigene strikes himself on the breast and declares his nothingness, his ugliness, his abjection.”<sup>484</sup> The indigene, viewing herself as a “nothingness,” cannot imagine life without the colonizer who is everything. M  nil quoted Fanon’s argument that the colonizer convinces the indigene that, “‘the colonizer’s departure signifies for them the return to barbarism, vulgarization, animalization.’” For Antilleans, proud of their mastery of French civilization and language, the departure of France portended disaster. Having adopted the “prejudices of the colonizer,” Antilleans denigrated Africa and their African heritage. Without France and a French presence, the African aspects of their culture would dominate, a future Antilleans perceived not as liberation but as a threat. “A stranger to himself,” the Antillean cannot recognize his own history of abduction, resistance, defeat and struggle, nor perceive his present, a present

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<sup>483</sup> M  nil 1964, 31-2.

<sup>484</sup> M  nil 1964, 38.

marked by the decline of Europe's false claim to the universal and, through decolonization, the rise of a truly universal humanity.<sup>485</sup>

Ultimately, for M  nil, political and cultural autonomy was not an end in itself but the necessary first step that would enable Antilleans to become fully human. Without autonomy, Antilleans would never achieve the true measure of their humanity. "The basis of all culture for the colonized Antillean is the passage from the condition of colonized man to the condition of man himself."<sup>486</sup> Colonialism and dissipation in French culture blocked Antilleans from achieving their maturity, which is to say, their modernity. Appended to French culture and socialized into thinking of themselves as French, Antilleans were unable to grasp their "own existence." Only by achieving autonomy through recognizing their cultural particularity would Antilleans be able to grasp their universal humanity.

In Martiniquan Communist discourse in the late 1950s and early 1960s, autonomy and modernity were conflated. Communist notions of autonomy, configured as individual and communal self-determination, emphasized communal liberty while it simultaneously reproduced the meliorist logic of postwar modernization discourse. Colonialism was backward and blocked modernity, preserving the Antilles at the "feudal" level. Further, Antilleans who favored assimilation revealed both their subjugation to imperial hegemony as well as their refusal to fully embrace their responsibilities as fully modern subjects. On the other hand, the Communists conceived autonomy in almost classic Kantian terms, as the Antilleans' achievement of their maturity as a people through the management of their own affairs and the cultivation of their own cultural

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<sup>485</sup> M  nil 1964, 38.

<sup>486</sup> M  nil 1946, 36-7.

distinctiveness.<sup>487</sup> Assimilation, which was the continuation of colonialism by other means, delayed modernity and bound Antilleans as dependants of France. Autonomy, on the other hand, would secure Antilleans' accession to full responsibility and modernity and enable them to access, develop and achieve their full measure of humanity.

In their essays in favor of Antillean autonomy, Mauvois, Nicolas and M  nil all stressed that it was not enough for Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans alone to achieve independence. If achieved in isolation than the proponents of assimilation would be proved correct when they argued that autonomy would condemn the islands to isolation, immiseration and decline. To forestall such a scenario, all three writers stressed the importance of building ties to other decolonizing nations and to the broader Third World. As M  nil wrote, the growth of autonomist sentiment in the Antilles resulted from "the contradictions that today result from the decolonization process in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean." The problem of the Antilles was "a problem posed by history itself:" if Antilleans refused to embrace autonomy they risked missing the concrete historical moment, the concrete historical opportunity that decolonization signified. "Antilleans," he argued, "are at the hour of truth."<sup>488</sup>

While the PCM's establishment as a separate party, unique from the PCF, did not dramatically alter its basic Marxist disposition, the institutional and organization separation enabled the PCM flexibility in a number of areas, particularly in the matter of foreign policy and internationalism. Antillean Communists had been traveling to other Communist and Third World countries since the 1940s but always under the auspices of

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<sup>487</sup> Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in H.S. Reiss, ed., *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55-60; for a reading of Kant and anti-imperialism: Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 172-208.

<sup>488</sup> Ren   M  nil 1964, 31.

the French party. Following the 1957 establishment as the PCM, Martiniquan Communists were able to cultivate their own alliances and solidarities, without the mediation of the metropolitan party. From 1957, the pace of travel by Martiniquan Communists to Third World and Communist bloc countries accelerated; in 1961 and 1962 alone, Communist activists and officials traveled to Moscow, Prague, China, Chile, Cuba, Bulgaria, Guadeloupe and Guyane, beside regular trips to the metropole.<sup>489</sup> Also, the PCM invited activists to attend conferences and congresses in Martinique. At the PCM's Second Congress in 1960, delegates from Cuba and Venezuela attended and addressed the Congress while messages of solidarity arrived from the Eastern bloc, China, Latin America and elsewhere.<sup>490</sup>

While Martiniquan Communists cultivated ties to a number of foreign parties, no link was more important than to the Cuban Communists. *Justice* greeted Castro's triumphant entry into Havana in January 1959 with front-page headlines and it regularly carried articles reporting on the successes of the Cuban Revolution and on the American threat. Following the Revolution's consolidation, Martiniquan activists traveled regularly to Cuba, participated in cultural and political conferences in Cuba and responded to the Cuban government's efforts to build ties between anti-colonial groups in the Caribbean and Third World. Guy Dufond attended the Congress of Latin American youth in Havana in July 1960 while Armand Nicolas attended the Cuban Communists' annual congress in August 1960.<sup>491</sup> In exchange, Raphael Avila, a member of Popular Socialist Party, addressed the PCM's 1960 Congress as well as delivering a public conference on the

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<sup>489</sup> See surveillance memos collected in AN CAC n° 940180, Carton 209, Folder "1961-1962."

<sup>490</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 209, Folder "PCM," *Justice*, 5 Août 1960.

<sup>491</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 209, Folder "PCM," Memo n° 323/RG, "Voyage à Cuba de délégués du Parti Communiste Martiquaise," 8 August 1960.



meaning and accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution.<sup>492</sup> Following his return from Havana, Armand Nicolas delivered a series of conferences, which were eventually published in *Justice*, discussing the Cuban Revolution and its potential lesson for French Antilleans.<sup>493</sup> Cuba would remain an inspiration and important ally for the Party throughout the 1960s.<sup>494</sup>

The Communist Party's reformation as a specifically Martiniquan party, its critique of assimilation and theorization of autonomy and its attempt to establish links with anti-colonial and revolutionary movements in the Third World demonstrated its changed ideology and activism. Where, in 1946, the Communists had been the most stalwart advocates of assimilation without exception or caveat, by 1959 the party poured its entire intellectual energy into changing the relationship between France and the Antilles. Where, in the 1930s, the Communists had insisted that Antilleans and French were the same, by 1964 they argued that Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans constituted unique nations and peoples. Frustrated by the pace of reform and inspired by Third World movements, the Communists abandoned their support for assimilation in favor of an autonomy founded in working class internationalism.

#### "True Nature, True Liberty": the Front Antillo-Guyanais and the Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquaise

Outside the Communist Party, Antillean intellectuals and activists had already taken initial steps to establish institutions for achieving autonomy and links to anti-colonial movements in other parts of the world. At the 1959 Negro Writer's Conference

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<sup>492</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 209, Folder "PCM," Memo n° 2243/CAB, 12 Août 1960.

<sup>493</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 209, Folder "PCM," Memo n° 358/RG, 31 Août 1960; Armand Nicolas and Dr. Benidol, "Nous venons vivre la révolution cubaine," *Justice* 8, 15, 22 September 1960.

<sup>494</sup> Edouard de Lepine, "La Conférence Tricontinentale de la Havane," *Action* n° 10 (1966).

in Rome, Frantz Fanon, Edouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire and the Guadeloupean poet Paul Nègre met to discuss the formation of a movement that would unite Martiniquan, Guadeloupean and Guyanese activists into a single organization to push for autonomy from France.<sup>495</sup> Following the conference, Fanon returned to Tunis and his duties with the FLN and never participated directly in the group's organizing or activities. Nonetheless, the new organization – the Front Antillo-Guyanais (Antillo-Guyanese Front) – derived its criticisms of assimilation from Fanon's psycho-social critique of Antillean cultural and mental life.<sup>496</sup> While the Front modeled itself less on the FLN and more on the political parties of West Africa, the bloody struggle of the Algerian revolution remained an object lesson, a specter that haunted its activities and political rhetoric. The Front deployed the threat of "another Algeria" to demand the French government reform Antillean social and political structures lest the social situation slip toward social unrest and civil war.

While Fanon returned to Tunis and Aimé Césaire distanced himself from the group after initial talks, Paul Nègre and Edouard Glissant decided to continue with the effort to establish the Front and when they returned to Paris they began to organize among Antilleans resident in the metropole. Glissant, Manville and Nègre first participated in the Study Committee for the Reform of the Overseas Department Statute, a loose-knit group formed by Antillean, Guyanese and metropolitan activists in response to the 1959 Fort-de-France riots. The committee met in Paris to discuss the reform of the statutes – articles 78 and 79 of the Constitution – that governed the Overseas Departments' inclusion in the Republic. The meetings were chaired by Robert Attuly, a

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<sup>495</sup> Wilbert J. Roget, "Edouard Glissant and Antillanité," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1975), 64.

<sup>496</sup> Henceforth referred to as the Front.

Martiniquan lawyer and Parisian councilor, and included many of the important Antillean activists resident in the metropole as well as sympathetic metropolitan intellectuals including Michel Leiris and Daniel Mayer. The meeting reached few conclusions but appealed for “the liquidation of the colonial regime” in order to “attenuate the misery” of the Antilles. It also called for “further study” of the issue and tasked meeting participants with investigating the possibility of autonomy.<sup>497</sup>

A second meeting was held in March, which presented the group’s initial conclusions and offered several proposals for reform for consideration. The group’s initial conclusions went well beyond simple statutory reform and proposed a large measure of local autonomy for the French Caribbean. It proposed the formation in each territory of a “Legislative Assembly” and an “executive body” responsible to the assembly. It also proposed the grouping of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane into a “French-language Caribbean Federation” with a federal assembly and federal executive. The committee presented these proposals as the basis for common action and invited Antilleans to participate in a congress to discuss the proposals and begin to organize to make them a reality.<sup>498</sup>

By the time the initial congress was organized in April 1961, the organizing committee had come under the decisive influence and direction of the pro-autonomist group represented by Glissant, Nègre and Manville. At the end of March, they published an announcement in the major Antillean newspapers inviting Antilleans to a “Congress for Autonomy” to be held in Paris on April 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. Held near the Place de la

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<sup>497</sup> “A propos des récents événements, meeting à Paris: urgence de profondes réformes aux Antilles,” *Justice*, 21 January 1960.

<sup>498</sup> “Des personnalités de la Martinique et de la Guadeloupe and de la Guyane réclament une Fédération Caraïbe de langue française,” *Justice*, 17 March 1960.

République at the Hotel Moderne, between 600 and 800 Antilleans gathered to discuss the formation of a common front to push for autonomy and for an end to colonialism. Delegations came from Toulouse, Bordeaux, and Montpellier and included students, workers, activists and intellectuals. Representatives from the Antillean and Guyanese student unions, the Martiniquan and Guadeloupean Communist parties and the Guyanese Socialist Party also participated, while a dozen African, Caribbean and metropolitan organizations, unions and political parties sent observers or messages of solidarity. Out of the Congress was organized the Antillo-Guyanese Front for Autonomy.<sup>499</sup>

Congress participants outlined three principal issues for discussion and debate: metropolitan political domination, colonial economic structures and cultural oppression.<sup>500</sup> The final resolution, largely written by Glissant and Niger, was critical of the failures of assimilation to ameliorate the Antilles' and Guyane's colonial situation. Assimilation, which Antilleans hoped would bring them under the protection of republican law and accord them the rights and benefits of citizenship had, in fact, led to their further disempowerment and immiseration. While each DOM had a General Council responsible for local administration and legislation, the Overseas Ministry limited the Councils' power and concentrated administrative and policy control in the hands of the prefect, appointed from Paris and answerable only to the Overseas Ministry.

Economically and socially, the administration in Paris and in the DOMs had delayed or refused to extend social and economic policies that applied to the rest of France. In the final resolution, Glissant and Niger accused the government of "confining

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<sup>499</sup> "A Paris, dans un enthousiasme indescriptible, un millier d'Antillais et Guyanais acclament le mot d'ordre de l'autonomie," *Justice*, 4 May 1961.

<sup>500</sup> "Compte-Rendu: Le Congrès Antilles-Guyane de Paris," *Présence Socialiste*, 18 May 1961.

the Antilles and Guyane in an ‘agricultural vocation’ without any other perspective.”<sup>501</sup>

The narrow focus on agricultural production for export meant that the DOMs remained unindustrialized and that all manufactured goods used on the island had to be imported. In addition, the “agricultural vocation” created the paradoxical situation that the Antilles and Guyane, despite their rich agricultural land and produce, nonetheless had to import most foodstuffs, as agricultural lands were completely given over to monocultural export production. Metropolitan firms’ monopolistic control over key segments of the economy, from oil to transportation to wholesaling, compounded the DOMs’ economic misery and contributed to their total dependence on France.<sup>502</sup>

Finally, the DOMs suffered from cultural domination. Schools, libraries and the other cultural institutions in the DOMs “completely denied the existence of an Antillo-Guyanese culture flowing from the contact of different civilizations.” Antillean culture was reduced to “a tacky exoticism” while Antilleans and Guyanese were “inculcated” to have “contempt and hatred” for their cultural uniqueness. The resolution concluded with an appeal to organize for autonomy for the Antilles and Guyane. Antilleans and Guyanese suffered from a sense of “fatality,” a sense that the widespread social and personal misery flowed not from the “colonial system” but from a “curse.” Political domination, economic dependency and cultural annihilation produced a fatalistic resignation that further subordinated Antilleans and Guyanese to French domination. Only by “breaking with the existing statute” and “fighting to attain” autonomy could

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

Antilleans and Guyanese both overcome their fatalistic resignation and ameliorate their political, economic and cultural existence.<sup>503</sup>

At Jean-Marie Domenech's invitation, the Front's key activists published a special dossier for *Esprit* that made the case for Antillean autonomy and elucidated their theoretical and historical analysis of the Antillean situation. Niger contributed an article on assimilation, Yvon Leborgne, a civil servant in the school system, one on the social climate. Manville documented French repression, while Edmond Marie-Joseph recounted Martinique's economic problems. Glissant wrote an essay on "Antillean equilibrium" that presaged his later work in *Acoma*.<sup>504</sup> The special issue also carried poems by Henri Corbin, Gabriel Jos and Sony Rupaïre, while Domenech penned an introductory editorial.<sup>505</sup>

In his editorial, Domenech compared the Antilles and Algeria, drawing parallels between the rhetoric of pro-French Algeria politicians and the de Gaulle government's rhetoric about the French Antilles. He reminded his readers that politicians and ideologues had similarly dismissed the first rumblings of the Algerian revolution as isolated incidents of rebellion and criminality, and had similarly prescribed assimilation and reform as solutions to Algerian social misery and political isolation. While Domenech did not pretend to possess "the gift of prophecy" and while he recognized that "the Antilles were not Algeria," he nonetheless discerned "the same obstinate will to assimilate when the hour has already passed."<sup>506</sup> The "myth of the French departments" occluded the "real situation" in the French Antilles. With reference to Césaire, Domenech

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>505</sup> "Les Antilles avant qu'il soit trop tard," *Esprit* n° 305 (Avril 1962).

<sup>506</sup> Jean-Marie Domenech, "Les Antilles avant qu'il soit trop tard," *Esprit* n° 305 (Avril 1962), 1.

described the Antilles as “under a state of siege,” lacking a “Constitution” and “the rights of man and the citizen,” subject only to the “good will of the minister and the good will of the prefect.”<sup>507</sup> Everything and everyone was subject to the arbitrary authority outlined by this “state of siege.”

France remained “stupidly attached” to the project of assimilation when “another route” – local autonomy within the framework of a French community – had been already opened in the former colonies of French West Africa. Domenech argued that the collected texts, written by pro-autonomist Antilleans, emerged from the “normal desire” of the historical moment, the desire of each people “to take their place in the world and to be responsible for their own affairs.”<sup>508</sup> The particular value of the collected essays, Domenech continued, was their precise observation of the complexity of the Antilles’ “strategic and economic situation,” caught between France, independence and “the other colonialism” of American hegemony. Their proposal to develop local autonomy within the framework of a French community represented a canny solution; the historic relationship between France and the Antilles was preserved without sacrificing local authenticity or autonomy.<sup>509</sup>

The essays and poems in *Esprit* were designed to break the mythologization of the Antilles as “France beneath other skies” and introduce readers to the economic, social and cultural problems that fractured Antillean society. Marie-Joseph’s analysis of the Antillean economy and Leborgne’s of the Antillean social situation were in keeping with the Front’s general Marxist outlook on social questions, while Manville’s “Chronicle of Repression” was primarily aimed toward informing *Esprit*’s readership of the French

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<sup>507</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

government's political repression in the Antilles. It was Paul Niger's historical critique of assimilation and Edouard Glissant's study of "Antillean equilibrium" that were the signal contributions, the most productive and rich in their dissection of the received wisdom of the French assimilating myth and its life in the French Antilles.

Niger's essay contextualized the idea of assimilation in the long history of human colonization and imperialism. The roots of French assimilation, Niger argued, stretched back to Roman imperialism. The distinctive quality that separated Roman imperialism from other ancient imperial projects was that Rome, in addition to its political and economic dominance, also exercised ideological hegemony over subject peoples. Rome, according to Niger, was the first colonial project that also claimed for itself cultural universality. Through the myth and mechanism of "citizenship" Rome integrated foreign subject populations into the Roman body politic and reproduced them as citizens, which is to say, Romans. Colonization was thus total, encompassing not only legal codes and economic production, but culture, religion and language.<sup>510</sup>

Despite its civilizing purpose, however, assimilation "always had aspects of brutality, mystification and absurdity."<sup>511</sup> If the Roman "myth" of universal citizenship was challenged, Roman imperial power reacted with overwhelming brutality and violence. Niger cited the Jewish refusal to accept Roman cultural practices and the ensuing Roman destruction of Jewish Palestine. The Jews, insisting on their "elemental liberty" to "self-determination" were destroyed because an assimilating power "recognized the right to live only to those who accept the mystification of their

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<sup>510</sup> Paul Niger, "L'assimilation, forme supreme du colonialisme," *Esprit* n° 305 (Avril 1962), 518-9.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.



‘citizenship.’”<sup>512</sup> Assimilating polities brook no challenge or deviation, as opposition to assimilation is opposition to not only a particular culture or means of organizing the world but opposition to the idea of culture and civilization itself.<sup>513</sup> According to Niger, the belief in a universal culture, the desire to assimilate heterogeneous populations and the desire to found a universal polity was transmitted by the Romans to Christianity and from Christianity, through Cartesian universal rationality, into French culture. At its root, therefore, French culture was a universal, and therefore, assimilating culture.<sup>514</sup>

Assimilation, however, was not necessary to the imperial project. “Anglo-Saxon” imperial projects – by which Niger meant the British – were content to rule and exploit without cultural hegemony. The problem was that non-assimilating imperial projects were dependent, ultimately, on force, and “force is fragile,” providing over time diminishing returns to the colonizing power. Assimilation, however, while more difficult and requiring greater labor, represented a more lasting form of rule as it combined physical and mental domination. “Its efficacy comes from its doubling the classic means of pure domination – military and police force, economic dominance – with a series of political, cultural, social and psychological mystifications.”<sup>515</sup> If the colonizer can dominate social reproduction, producing assimilated colonial “citizens,” it was possible

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Niger here echoes, probably unconsciously, the debates that French colonial planners and administrators conducted in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, official policy in the French empire was “assimilating,” premised on civilizing subject populations through the extension of French legal, cultural and educational institutions into the empire. The result, however, was widespread violence as West and North African peoples resisted the annihilation of their customary laws, practices and hierarchies. As the 19<sup>th</sup> French racist thinker Gustave Le Bon put it: “With our pretended humanitarian systems, we need 60,000 soldiers to maintain peace in Algeria.” In response, French colonial planners, led by the Maréchal Lyautey in Morocco, studied British systems of indirect rule and advocated instead for “association:” the maintenance of indigenous customs and hierarchies. The focus of empire was economic and military, not cultural, they argued, and French universalism was of secondary importance to colonial order and economic prosperity. Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1870-1914* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

<sup>514</sup> Niger, 519.

<sup>515</sup> Niger, 520.

theoretically, despite assimilation's "internal contradictions," to "infinitely prolong" the colonial enterprise as assimilation's "true signification" was the "digestion," the "annihilation of the living forces of a people and country." Assimilation, as compared to other forms of colonization, was successful because it was total.<sup>516</sup>

Niger argued that transatlantic slavery contributed to assimilation's efficacy in the French Antilles. The Middle Passage, "salting" (preparing the slaves for auction) and field labor provided the annihilating force that erased the slaves' past. The slaves were "converted," "sold" and their "names were changed" and slaves from diverse cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds were mingled in the cane fields. In time, the slaves forgot their language and learned another and began to recognize the fact that they would never return home. While they remained in chains the slaves had little need of a new worldview; with emancipation in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and general abolition in 1848, the former slaves entered into a cultural and ideological order in which social advancement was contingent on accepting the colonizers' imposed cultural and social values. "Their survival and social advancement was linked to their permeability to the ideas and to the behavior of their masters. Everything was mobilized for this: the church, the school, the law. Thus was born cultural alienation."<sup>517</sup>

Departmentalization constituted the final stage in the historical development of French assimilation. Lowering the barrier between France and the Antilles would complete the process of economic, political and cultural integration instituted with the 1848 revolution. The final difference between colony and metropole would be dissolved in the unity of the republic and domination, per se, would cease to exist as Antilleans and

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<sup>516</sup> Niger, 520.

<sup>517</sup> Niger, 522.

metropolitans became the undifferentiated French people. This system, Niger argued, was nonetheless riven with internal contradictions. While France and the Antilles seemed “closely” linked, the links were essentially “artificial” which betrayed a fundamental “fragility.”<sup>518</sup> The system seemed “close” because at the “human and psychological level, Antilleans and Guyanese increasingly have the impression due to their privileges... that they could never live without France.”<sup>519</sup> Investment in social security, economic development, price supports and subsidies, not to mention health care, schools and infrastructural improvement, had convinced many Antilleans that, independent, the islands would more resemble Haiti than France.

Despite extensive investment in the Antilles, the system was essentially “artificial” because it remained unable to solve the fundamental problems that plagued Antillean society. Elites had a vested interest in maintaining the Antilles as agricultural economies, which condemned them to a perpetual state of underdevelopment, poverty and unemployment. Without “industrialization and autonomous economic development,” the Antilles were limited, despite the best intentions of economic planners, to “small receipts and false solutions.”<sup>520</sup> The maintenance of an agricultural economy guaranteed chronic under- and unemployment, low wages, poor working conditions and, more perniciously, dependence on the French welfare state to offset the gap between income and the cost of living. Without a fundamental reorientation of the economy away from export monoculture and toward autonomous economic production, the Antilles would remain poor and dependent, hostages of “false solutions.”

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<sup>518</sup> Niger, 528.

<sup>519</sup> Niger, 528.

<sup>520</sup> Niger, 528.

While France's "artificial" support of Antillean economic and social well-being allowed, for the time being, the relationship between the Antilles and the metropole to remain "close," it was a fundamentally "fragile" relationship, founded on the sense that France could "inevitably delay" the moment at which the Antillean population would become conscious of its own identity and interests. Niger argued that French hegemony was in an advanced state of decomposition, a decay that was evident in the social unrest that had wracked the Antilles and Guyane since 1946. Major strikes and civil disturbances that frequently ended in bloodshed occurred in Martinique in 1948, 1951-2, 1959 and 1961, Guadeloupe in 1952 and Guyane in 1958 and 1961; dozens were killed and wounded in clashes between security forces and demonstrators, frequently organized and led by unemployed working class youth.<sup>521</sup> Each time the French state followed its initial repression with increased investment and social security benefits, but it refused to recognize that "the solution to these problems" – agricultural poverty, chronic unemployment and economic dependency – was "impossible under the existing regime." Niger warned that the Antilles were a "powder-keg" and that without radical solutions they were "at the mercy of the least spark."<sup>522</sup>

Niger suggested that the global force of decolonization and revolution were undermining French rule in the Antilles. At the moment that French hegemony was in decline, decolonization and the self-determination of peoples were in the ascent. The timing of the 1959 riots was thus doubly significant, Niger argued, because at the moment in which Antillean "political consciousness was revealed," peoples in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean were challenging European rule. The riot shocked Antilleans out

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<sup>521</sup> Niger, 528.

<sup>522</sup> Niger, 529.

of their easy complacency and they awoke to find that “decolonization is on the march in Asia and Africa” and that China had “made a spectacular revolution of tremendous weight.”<sup>523</sup> Due to the pressure of the Algerian War, France’s sub-Saharan African colonies gained their independence between 1959 and 1960.<sup>524</sup>

It was Latin America, however, that had achieved the most substantial breakthrough. The region “where the structures of colonial domination are the most ancient and the most enrooted” had undergone a “radical” “mutation.” The advance of revolutionary movements, capped by the triumphant success of the Cuban Revolution, had “plunged the dominant classes of the so-called independent countries and the metropolitans of the dependent countries into a healthy terror.”<sup>525</sup> The tumult in Latin America was particularly important, Niger suggested, because it shared with the Antilles a long and sustained experience of colonization. The Cuban Revolution on January 1, 1959 and the Fort-de-France riots at the end of the year seemed to portend an emerging anti-colonial and revolutionary consciousness in the Caribbean.

Niger concluded his analysis of the collapse of assimilation’s hegemony over French Antilleans with an appeal for the autonomist parties to unite to combat France’s increased willingness to use violent and extra-constitutional means to suppress Antillean anti-colonial activism. He proposed that the Front was the means to unite Antilleans and Guyanese into a single organization to combat French repression. In response to increased anti-colonial activism and civil disturbance, the French government, “facing this situation, new in the history of the Antilles and Guyane, reacted with violence.” It persecuted civil servants, including teachers and lycée teachers, who expressed

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<sup>523</sup> Niger, 529.

<sup>524</sup> Niger, 529.

<sup>525</sup> Niger, 529.

autonomist sentiments; they were dismissed from their posts and some were expelled to mainland France. The state also used its extensive repressive apparatus to disrupt autonomist activism. Niger, Glissant and Manville were confined to metropolitan France and forbidden to travel to the Antilles or other parts of the empire.<sup>526</sup> France had reduced the Antilles, Niger argued, to a “state of exception.”<sup>527</sup> The only way to overcome France’s increasingly “arbitrary” rule was for the Antillean left to unite into one movement that would defend public liberties, combat French repression, rally solidarity in the metropole and organize toward autonomy.

While Niger’s essay focused principally on assimilation’s history and internal contradictions, and mapped out the vicious logic of dependency that was its inevitable social and economic outcome, Glissant concentrated his analysis on the possibilities that assimilation had foreclosed for French Antilleans. Primarily, Glissant was interested in how assimilation had reinforced Martinique’s, Guadeloupe’s and Guyane’s links to France while weakening, even annihilating, their connections to each other and to the broader Caribbean. The logic of assimilation worked to integrate the DOMs vertically to France; due to institutional and administrative practice, goods, services, people and capital moved more readily between the metropole and the DOM than between DOM and DOM, or the DOMs and their neighboring islands and territories. Assimilation – most highly developed in the French territories but present also in the Anglo, Dutch and Spanish Caribbean – led to “balkanization,” the Caribbean islands’ fragmentation into separate, even hermetic, polities linked not to each other but back to the imperial core in Europe and the United States. This “balkanization” in turn prevented the islands from

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<sup>526</sup> Marcel Manville, “Chronique de la répression,” *Esprit* n° 305 (Avril 1962), 556-7.

<sup>527</sup> Niger, 530.

uniting and achieving “equilibrium.”<sup>528</sup> Postwar reform, while working to alleviate poverty and political disenfranchisement, “completed the work of balkanization” as it transformed colonial subjects into citizens and embedded their responsibilities and rights in distant European political institutions and imaginations.<sup>529</sup>

While the colonial ancien régime had ruled arbitrarily and often cruelly, it had nonetheless enabled relations between the different imperial blocs. To begin with, the different Antillean islands emerged from the same historical and sociological context and shared similar economic and social structures and demonstrated similar cultural practices defined by the mixing of African and European cultures. “Literally risen from the Western enterprise of colonization,” all the islands were marked by slavery, plantation labor and “civilizational contact.”<sup>530</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the links between island and island were effaced in favor of the link between island and metropole. However, historically, extensive relationships had pertained within and across the Caribbean and the reality was that for most of their history people and goods moved between and within the different imperial blocs. In addition, slave resistance to the masters also worked across colonial and imperial borders. Glissant cited, for example, the Martiniquan Louis Delgrès’ death alongside his Guadeloupean, Martiniquan and Haitian troops at the Guadeloupean island fortress of Matouba, and the influence this event had on Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who re-instigated the Haitian revolution in response to Delgrès’ fight against re-enslavement.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Edouard Glissant, “Culture et colonisation: l’équilibre antillais,” *Esprit* n° 305 (Avril 1962), 588-9.

<sup>529</sup> Glissant, 591.

<sup>530</sup> Glissant, 590. Glissant seems to be making reference here to Michel Leiris’ monograph on Martinique and Guadeloupe, *Contacts de Civilisation en Martinique et en Guadeloupe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

<sup>531</sup> Glissant, 591.

Contemporary Antilleans, Glissant argued, had to rediscover what Delgrès, Dessalines, Louverture and other revolutionary Antilleans had known: that Caribbeans were one people with a common enemy and common struggle. Unfortunately, the balkanization of the Antilles, which assimilation exacerbated, had obscured shared experience through reinforcing the vertical relationship to the metropole, which produced destructive cultural effects. Rather than developing a shared sense of “Antilleanness,” Caribbean peoples instead worked to “imitate” their European masters. “Imitation is the rule,” Glissant argued, “and those who depart from it are deemed criminal.”<sup>532</sup> Imitation was particularly widespread among the Antillean elite. Created by colonialism, for the Antillean elite there was “only one wish: to perfectly copy the French.”<sup>533</sup> Envisioning themselves as French “under different skies,” the elite distanced themselves from the vast Antillean mass – the agricultural workers – and condemned their culture for its non-French (that is to say, African) elements. The elite simultaneously worked to “whiten” (*blanchir*) themselves in order to differentiate themselves from the mass while they also worked, through their control of institutions like the schools and civil service, to assimilate the Antillean working class.

The Antilles’ cultural unity, Glissant argued, was “primordial” and it was necessary to acknowledge this fundamental unity lest Antillean leftist activists reproduce the logic of assimilation and colonization. The left-wing assimilationist argument was essentially the “old formula of the colonialists:” that the Antilles and Guyane were France. Antillean alienation was from France, not from the Antilles, and could be

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<sup>532</sup> Glissant, 591.

<sup>533</sup> Glissant, 591.



overcome through inscribing Antillean social and economic ever closer into France. This argument was not new and the critique of it already well-established.<sup>534</sup>

A more complex phenomenon was the second major position on the Antillean left, favoring local nationalism disconnected from any sense of a shared past or common future. This position unconsciously repeated assimilation's logic. "The second argument is of nationalist type, narrowly conceived: 'I am Martiniquan, I am Martiniquan first of all; we will see about getting on with our neighbors, yes, but above all we must construct Martiniquan autonomy.'" Glissant argued that this position betrayed the pernicious "brainwashing" effect of assimilation on Antillean consciousness. "Habituated to thinking their problems in relation to France, certain among us *cannot open their eyes to their reality*." The distorting effect of the vertical relationship to France was "dangerous" because even anti-colonial militants were unable to conceive that "Martiniquan autonomy would never be obtained *outside of, in advance or after* Guadeloupean autonomy, and vice versa." Overcoming assimilation and balkanization were, in effect, two aspects of one project; each was impossible without the other and had to be treated simultaneously. The fight for autonomy and the fight against balkanization were equally vital because only this paired struggle would "reestablish the Antillean in the truth of his being, and militate for his total emancipation."<sup>535</sup>

Glissant argued that decolonization provided an opportune moment for Antilleans to break their centuries of dependence. The movement of peoples in Africa and Asia provided the context that would allow Antilleans to emerge onto the world stage, to, as he put it, "recover equilibrium." First, Antilleans had to learn "to think Antillean." Only

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<sup>534</sup> Glissant, 592.

<sup>535</sup> Glissant, 592. All italics in the original.

through “thinking Antillean” would Caribbeans be able to “assume in today’s world their true nature, their true liberty.” Why was this particular historical moment so filled with possibility? Glissant’s argument echoed Nègè’s, pointing to decolonization’s world historical force, which was undoing centuries of established political and economic rule. Assimilation’s failure – that it had not, despite its promise, undone the pernicious racism and endemic underdevelopment of the Antilles – worked to alienate Antilleans from the utopian myth of France and Frenchness. Alienation from France unfolded at the same moment as African, Asian and American peoples emerged from European colonial domination. The emergence of the Third World challenged European hegemony and opened new “linkages” that skirted the old metropolitan core. The Antilles, “a crossroads of culture,” were situated to participate in these new lines of communication, to serve as “a natural, ideal link” between Africa and South America.

Glissant not only understand Antillean’ struggles to overcome assimilation and balkanization in the context of global struggles for decolonization but as part of the broader movement of mankind. It was imperative that Antilleans, “privileged in the modern world” due to their cultural mixing, overcome assimilation, as their embedding in multiple cultures and worldviews would contribute to not only their own “true being” but to the “cultural enrichment of man” as a whole.<sup>536</sup> Able to “think Antillean,” cognizant of their “true being” as creole, Antilleans would discover that “their true equilibrium... resided in an opening onto the world.” Previous Antillean activists had prepared the way. Padmore’s Pan-Africanism and Césaire’s *négritude* were important precursors, but it was Fanon who truly “prefigured the destiny of the Antilles.” Fanon’s service in the Algerian cause, his discovery of his “own vocation” in the Algerian people, signified his opening

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<sup>536</sup> Glissant, 594-5.

onto the world. He “died Algerian” and the Antillean could find here their true vocation, by being simultaneously true to themselves and in that truth, opening themselves on to the world beyond both France and the Antilles.<sup>537</sup>

The Front’s position, as represented in their *Esprit* articles, fit into the broad continuum of the developing Antillean autonomist movement but nonetheless marked out an important critical distance. Both the Communists and the Progressives advocated for autonomy but did so within certain limits. For the Communist Party, autonomy was grounded in the verities of Marxist-Leninist theory: Martiniquans were simultaneously part of a nation and part of the transnational working class. For the Communists, Martiniquan autonomy was only possible within transnational working class solidarity. Thus, the relationship with France remained important as the Martiniquan working class’ relationship with the more advanced French working class was the guarantor of a real and lasting autonomy. The vertical relationship back to the metropole not only had to be preserved but was the ground on which autonomy was possible. For the Communists, autonomy was primarily a social necessity and autonomy’s cultural aspect was of secondary importance.

For the Progressives, autonomy and Martiniquan nationalism were synonymous but autonomy was primarily a cultural project within the framework of France. Much of the Progressives’ political program built off of Léopold Senghor’s proposed mid-1950s reform of the Union Française toward greater local autonomy within the framework of a “French Community.” Before 1960, Césaire’s position was close to Senghor’s and aimed to preserve Martinique as a politically and culturally autonomous unit within a multinational, multiethnic and decentralized French polity. Following the independence

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<sup>537</sup> Glissant, 595.

of the African territories in 1960, Césaire's position shifted toward a more expansive idea of autonomy but autonomy remained primarily about renegotiating the *loi cadre* between Martinique and France.

Glissant and Niger, while willing to build a broad alliance with the Communists and Progressives, conceptualized autonomy in a fundamentally different way. Autonomy was only secondarily about Martinique's or Guadeloupe's or Guyane's relationship to France; what was most important was resituating the Antilles in the "true being" of the Antilles themselves, making possible their opening onto the broader world. Autonomy from France was part and parcel of establishing horizontal relationships with their sister French colonies and establishing links to the Anglo, Dutch and Hispanic Caribbean. Antilleans were not first French, or working class, but Antilleans, and the achievement of their "true liberty" required them to "think Antillean." The Front's purpose was to further develop this thinking and to organize Antilleans to make it a reality.

The Front's activities and particularly its success mobilizing Antilleans resident in the metropole worried the French authorities. From its creation, the Front was under close police surveillance. When Marcel Manville arrived at the Hotel Moderne on Place de la République for the opening Congress, he noticed the strong presence of metropolitan police and CRS riot squads.<sup>538</sup> Not long after the Front's formation, the government, fearing disturbances in the Caribbean, aggressively pursued the Front and its leadership. The Front itself was dissolved and made illegal under a special order from the president's office, outside the usual legal channels for administering and regulating political organizations.<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> Manville, 118.

<sup>539</sup> Roget, 66.

In addition, the government barred Glissant, Manville and Niger, as well as their compatriots Edmond Marie-Joseph and Alain Plénel, from traveling to the Antilles, in effect condemning them to interior exile in France. Glissant tried to test his banishment in September 1961 when he traveled to Guadeloupe in order to plan his wedding. Upon arriving in Guadeloupe, he was arrested and placed on the next plane back to Paris.<sup>540</sup> *Justice* condemned the arrest, accusing the government of applying “Algerian methods” to the Antilles.<sup>541</sup> The Front’s activities were limited by the government’s active and severe efforts at repression but its members nonetheless managed to continue their intellectual agitation throughout 1961 and 1962. Glissant, for example, traveled to North Africa and Cuba to observe post-colonial Tunisia and revolutionary Cuba.<sup>542</sup> In June 1962, however, tragedy struck when Niger was killed in a plane crash over Guadeloupe, a crash that also killed the autonomist deputy from Guyane, Justin Catayée and several radical Antillean students. After Niger’s death, the Front effectively ceased to exist.<sup>543</sup>

With the Front’s dissolution, Marcel Manville, Fanon’s old wartime comrade and longtime friend, formed a new organization, the Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais (MPM) to continue the Front’s political agitation and organization, focusing particularly on Antilleans living in metropolitan France. The principal organizer and animator of the MPM, Manville was a radical lawyer, Communist Party militant and prominent Antillean activist, serving as attorney, organizer and spokesman for the Paris Antillean community.

Manville first traveled to the metropole as a soldier in the Free French forces that invaded Provence in 1944. After the war, Manville stayed on in France to study law at the

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<sup>540</sup> “L’Ecrivain Martiniquais E. Glissant expulsé de la Guadeloupe,” *Justice*, 24 September 1961.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>542</sup> Roget, 67.

<sup>543</sup> “La Martinique en Deuil: Le Boeing d’Air France s’écrase en Guadeloupe,” *Justice*, 28 June 1962.

University of Paris and was admitted to the Paris Bar in 1947.<sup>544</sup> Manville recollected that it was the war in Indochina that led to his political awakening. In 1946, the French navy bombarded the port of Haiphong, at the time under the control of the Viet Minh, killing thousands of Vietnamese civilians. Manville, still a law student, participated in a Latin Quarter protest at which demonstrators chanted, “Liberty in the French colonies!” Manville recollected decades later that the words initially “shocked him” but that subsequent events revealed their truth. As the crowd moved onto the Boulevard Saint-Michel, the police intervened to break up the demonstration.<sup>545</sup> In the confrontation between demonstrator and policeman, Manville, a decorated veteran, was insulted and beaten by the French police. “‘Return to the bush, you dirty nigger.’ ‘You came to eat the Frenchman’s bread!’” More wounding than the blows, Manville remembered, was the “moral bite, the bite in the heart,” all the more difficult to forgive because it could not be forgotten. The event “was a detonator” that pushed Manville to side with “the oppressed” and he soon joined the Communist Party. As with other Antillean activists, the raw experience of metropolitan racism destroyed Manville’s illusions and pushed him into open conflict with the French state.<sup>546</sup>

Beyond his role in the Antillean community, Manville was active in the Movement Against Racism, Anti-Semitism and for the Friendship of Peoples (MRAP), the French Popular Relief association (*Secours Populaire Française*, a Communist charity) and the League for the Rights of Man (*Ligue des Droits de l’Homme*, LDH).<sup>547</sup> With the beginning of the Algerian war in 1954, *Secours Populaire* asked Manville to

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<sup>544</sup> Manville 1992, 58-9.

<sup>545</sup> Manville 1992, 69.

<sup>546</sup> Manville 1992, 70.

<sup>547</sup> Manville 1992, 135.

serve as defense counsel for FLN militants arrested and prosecuted by the French state. In this capacity, Manville traveled frequently to North Africa to arrange the defense of FLN activists. Manville was involved in trials in Bône, Constantine and Algiers and also defended metropolitan FLN militants, developing a working relationship with other radical lawyers, including the Réunionnais attorney Jacques Vergès and the Corsican Léo Matarasso. Manville, Vergès and Matarasso were often the only attorneys willing to take on the defense of accused FLN activists.<sup>548</sup>

Traveling to Algeria also deepened Manville's criticism of French colonialism. His sojourns in Algeria enabled him to renew his friendship with Fanon, who hosted him during his visits. Fanon arranged for Manville to observe the treatment of FLN prisoners in the Blida hospital and to secretly meet with underground FLN militants. His observations of the racism and inequality of Algerian society reinforced Manville's anti-colonialism, convincing him of the evils of colonialism, the impossibility of reform and the need for immediate independence.<sup>549</sup> Manville repeatedly urged the French Communist Party to drop its ambiguous position and unequivocally condemn French rule in Algeria. Due to his prominent role defending FLN activists, the OAS threatened Manville with assassination and in March 1962 planted a bomb outside his apartment in Paris that exploded without causing any casualties.<sup>550</sup>

Manville recruited Antillean activists living in Paris, including former Front members Marie-Joseph and Plénel, Communist militant and poet Gilbert Gratiant and a

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<sup>548</sup> Jim House and Neil McMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 58-9.

<sup>549</sup> Manville 1992, 147-57, 243-4.

<sup>550</sup> "Me. Manville a visé par les plastiquers O.A.S.," *Justice*, 8 March 1962.

number of other left-wing activists.<sup>551</sup> While the MPM called itself a “Martiniquan” patriotic movement, its manifesto, circulated to the Parisian Antillean community and to prominent French intellectuals indicated that group saw itself as the inheritor of the Front Antillo-Guyanais.<sup>552</sup> State security shared their view and the group was under surveillance from the moment it issued its first declarations.<sup>553</sup> The manifesto enumerated six principal points for the MPM to organize around. First, the MPM saw itself as part of the broader global movement of decolonization that had reshaped the globe since the Second World War. Second, the MPM pointed to the international consensus, represented by institutions including the UN and the Vatican that all people, including colonized peoples, were deserving of liberty. Third, that all of Martinique’s political, economic and social “characteristics” indicated that it was a colonized nation. Fourth, that Martiniquans understood that their only way to put an end to their “dependence” was to achieve liberty through ending their “tutelage” to the metropole. Fifth, once Martiniquans had achieved liberty, they could enter into relations with France based on “equality and the respect of mutual interests.” Finally, these goals were only achievable if “anti-colonialist” Martiniquans united into a single movement.<sup>554</sup>

Ideologically, the MPM followed in the footsteps of the Front, concentrating primarily on organization and less on theoretical innovation. The MPM’s newsletter, *Conscience Martiniquaise*, focused on forming a united Antillean movement in the

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<sup>551</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais, Letter from le Procureur Général à Monsieur le Garde des Sceaux, Ministre de la Justice, “Object: Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais – Vote dépêche du 9 Decembre, 1963 – n°63-1372,” 11 Mars 1964, 2.

<sup>552</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais, “Le Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais Lance Un Appel aux Martiniquais,” undated.

<sup>553</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais, Letter from le Procureur Général à Monsieur le Garde des Sceaux, Ministre de la Justice, “Object: Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais – Vote dépêche du 9 Decembre, 1963 – n°63-1372,” 11 Mars 1964, 1.

<sup>554</sup> “Le Mouvement Patriotique...”



metropole and building links to Antillean activists back in the Caribbean and to sympathetic French allies. Its efforts to rally support for imprisoned OJAM activists – Manville served as defense counsel for many of the students – provided an opportunity to build links between Antilleans of different ideological commitments and to rally French intellectuals and activists to the Antillean cause.<sup>555</sup> In December 1963, as the OJAM trial was winding down, the MPM organized a ‘Round Table’ with more than a dozen other Antillean organizations as well as representatives from Guyane and Réunion, which issued a declaration calling for the formation of local assemblies and executives in each DOM and for cooperation between the French state and the DOMs’ duly elected representatives.<sup>556</sup> The MPM also worked tirelessly to rally French intellectuals, politicians and activists to their cause. Manville, Plénel and other MPM leaders recruited heavily on the French left and succeeded in organizing a metropolitan solidarity organization, the Committee for the Decolonization of the Antilles, which included a number of important left-wing professors, politicians and trade union activists.<sup>557</sup>

The MPM also prioritized organizing the growing Antillean diaspora in Paris. Michel Debré, de Gaulle’s prime minister and a deputy from Réunion, proposed in 1960 that DOM residents immigrate to the metropole to relieve unemployment in their home colonies and to alleviate labor shortages in Paris and other cities in France; Debré’s government established the Bureau of DOM Immigration (BUMIDOM) to manage his

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<sup>555</sup> On OJAM, see Chapter 5.

<sup>556</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquaise, *Conscience Martiniquaise* n° 3, 2-3.

<sup>557</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquaise, Note SN/RG/INF./8° S./n° 634 – 7 Décembre 1963 - “Des difficultés des organisations separatists martiniquaises,” 3.

proposals.<sup>558</sup> By the early 1960s, so many Antilleans had fled chronic unemployment that Paris was often referred to as the “third island.” For Antillean autonomists, migration posed a complex problem. On the one hand, it provided a needed source of work and income for the Antilles’ legion of young, unemployed workers; on the other hand, migration split “the people” and was a poor substitution for fundamental economic reorganization in the DOMs. The MPM took migration as a given – perhaps a natural position as many of its leaders were permanent residents in the metropole – and organized metropolitan Antilleans to work alongside island activists toward autonomy for the Antilles, Guyane and Réunion. “The MPM declares that Martiniquans, wherever they are found, are an integral part of the Martiniquan people... and can contribute and augment its revolutionary potential and advance the hour of its liberation.” It did not matter where the Antillean people were, only that they were united.<sup>559</sup>

Migration, in fact, had its advantages, as Antilleans in Paris were well placed to build links with other anti-colonial activists and to build solidarity and support for the Antillean cause in the national and international media. Fostering international support for the Antillean cause and building links to anti-colonial movements in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America was a priority for the MPM, as it would help to “[integrate] the Martiniquan problem into the framework of decolonization.”<sup>560</sup> Antilleans would “profit” from the “struggles of formerly colonized peoples” and from understanding their

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<sup>558</sup> On BUMIDOM: Alain Anselin, *L’émigration antillais en France: la troisième île* (Paris: Karthala, 1990); Stephanie Condon and Philip Ogden, “Emigration from the French Caribbean: Origin of an Organized Migration,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 15,4 (December 1991), 505-523; Kristen Stromberg Childers, “Departmentalization, Migration and the Politics of the Family in the Post-War French Caribbean,” *The History of the Family* 14,2 (2009), 177-190.

<sup>559</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquaise, *Conscience Martiniquaise* n°1, 3-4.

<sup>560</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquaise, *Conscience Martiniquaise* n°1, 3-4.

situation in the context of colonialism and decolonization. The MPM resolved to work with anti-colonial and anti-imperial activists in Paris and in Europe to support decolonization in the French Antilles. MPM efforts to organize solidarity for the imprisoned OJAM activists attracted solidarity statements from African, Chinese, Eastern European and Latin American activists.<sup>561</sup>

The MPM attracted the attention of French security forces, which led to its dissolution. Manville and the other leaders were subject to surveillance and police harassment; MPM publications and correspondence were monitored and even intercepted at customs.<sup>562</sup> The Prosecutor General informed the Minister of the DOMs that while he could not build a criminal case against MPM activists, a number of MPM militants were government employees and that disciplinary proceedings could be opened against them for violating rules governing the behavior of the civil service. The Minister for the DOMs, Louis Jacquinot, wrote to the education ministry, requesting disciplinary action against Alain Plénel and members of the Committee for the Decolonization of the Antilles, many of whom were lycée teachers and university professors.<sup>563</sup> Following the OJAM trial and under state pressure, the MPM dissolved in 1964. While successor organizations followed, including the General Association of Antillo-Guyanais Workers (AGTAG) and assemblies of Antillean, Guyanese and Réunionnais emigrants, autonomist organizing in the metropole after 1964 was centered primarily in the student groups in the metropole. While older activists remained involved, the burden of

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<sup>561</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquaise, Memo n° 2249 /DOM/CAB/SG. – “Diffusion d’un tract et d’un communiqué émanant du Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais (M.P.M.),” 10 Décembre 1963, 3.

<sup>562</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquaise, Letter n°4276/CAB, Préfet Martinique à Ministre des DOMs, 30 October 1963.

<sup>563</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Carton 287, Folder Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquaise, Letter n° 2247 DOM/CAB/SG – Ministre des DOMs à Ministre de l’Education, 21 November 1963.

organizing shifted to the student federations and to *gauchiste* militant groups like the Guadeloupean National Organizing Group (GONG) and the Martiniquan Revolutionary Socialist Group (GRS). These organizations looked to link the Antillean anti-colonial struggle to the upsurge in revolutionary activity that had emerged from the 1960s and decolonization, looking to China, Vietnam and the Black Panthers for models of revolutionary activism.

### Conclusion

The Left's adoption of autonomy in the late 1950s constituted a sea change in Antillean political and intellectual history. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Antillean Left was the bastion of pro-assimilation sentiment, politically, economically and culturally. The Radicals, then the Socialists and finally the Communists had organized and agitated for the full incorporation of the Antilles into the republic as coequal departments of France. Similarly, they argued that Antilleans were French like any other citizen, possessing the same basic culture, mentality and worldview.

At the end of the 1950s, however, disappointed with the compromises of assimilation and inspired by the worldwide decolonization movement, the Antillean Left broke with its previous assimilationist commitments. While the mainline Socialist Party remained pro-assimilation, the Communists, Progressives and numerous Socialist dissidents embraced instead a philosophy of autonomy, grounded in the assumption that Antilleans and French were fundamentally different and in fact constituted two separate peoples. The project for the Antillean Left for the next decade was to elaborate the nature of this difference, build institutions that would make autonomy feasible and organize the Antillean population into a pro-autonomist anti-colonial front.

While the later project would remain incomplete until 1971, the autonomist turn among Antillean intellectuals produced immediate cultural effects. Liberated from the encumbrance of French cultural forms and *négritude* nostalgia, Antillean students and intellectuals could finally begin to study themselves. This turn toward the Antilles constituted the first stirrings of an Antillean-centric cultural and social scientific analysis that would contribute much to both sociological understandings of the Antilles and to Antillean political and cultural self-consciousness.

## Chapter Five

### Antillean Students and Anti-Colonialism, 1950-1967

#### Introduction

In an editorial in the second issue of *Matouba*, the journal of Martiniquan and Guadeloupean students, Raoul Capitaine, one of the leaders of the General Association of Martiniquan Students (AGEM), threw the question of the French Antilles into stark contrast. The editorial, provocatively titled, “After Algeria, the Antilles?”, celebrated Algeria’s conquest of independence and, reflecting on native Martiniquan Frantz Fanon’s contribution to the Algerian “liberation struggle,” asked when the Antilles would accomplish their own decolonization. Students, Capitaine argued, would have an important role to play in this struggle and *Matouba* and AGEM were “determined to give themselves ‘in full’ to their country.”<sup>564</sup> Colonialism and its ideologues had failed and, despite the colonialists’ willingness to use overwhelming violence and force, nothing would stop “our people” from achieving a consciousness and realization of their “Antillean personality.”<sup>565</sup> The future, Capitaine concluded, was promising because victory was certain and inevitable.

Capitaine’s editorial, analogizing the French Antilles to Algeria, marks out the distance that Antillean attitudes toward France and toward assimilation had traveled by the early 1960s. While many average Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans remained indifferent to the wrangling of the intellectual and political class, on the Antillean Left support for assimilation had completely collapsed. Following the implosion of the Union Française between 1958 and 1961, all the major parties of the Antillean Left with the

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<sup>564</sup> Raoul Capitaine, “Après l’Algerie, les Antilles?,” *Matouba* n° 2 (April 1962), 1-2.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

exception of the SFIO shifted toward supporting some form of autonomy for the “old colonies.” Césaire’s PPM proposed a revised, federal republic along lines originally established by Léopold Senghor for French West Africa; in the early 1960s, the PPM supported a change in statute that would grant Martinique greater local control. In Guyane, Justin Catayée’s Guyanese Socialist Union (UGS) argued for outright autonomy, a position also supported by the Martiniquan, Guadeloupean and Réunionnais Communist Parties and advocated by the Unified Socialist Party (PSU). Autonomy signified local control over spending, the economy, social legislation, tariffs and investment, designed to decolonize the Antilles socially as well as politically.

However, no party explicitly advocated complete independence; in order to avoid state repression and to maintain their electoral standing, the Communists, PSU and the PPM confined their political aspirations to calls for autonomy. Among Antillean students in the metropole, however, the shift away from assimilation and toward independence had moved in a decisively radical direction. Shaped by their experiences of racism and contempt in the metropole, their personal and political ties with African and Asian students, and their studies of Antillean social, economic and cultural life, the metropolitan Antillean student population became an important location for the development of a thorough-going and explicitly radical reconceptualization of the place of the Antilles in France, in the Caribbean and in the wider world. Reflecting on their experiences, their solidarities and their studies, Antillean students concluded that Martinique and Guadeloupe constituted unique cultures and societies, confined and repressed by an unabated French colonialism. While the 1946 departmentalization was a logical step in the wake of the war, it had ceased to serve liberatory ends and had come to

served to maintain of French colonialism and French capitalist exploitation. Nonetheless, decolonization in Africa, Asia, and especially the Caribbean, represented a new opportunity for the Antilles to sever their ties to France and to remake themselves into a French, Antillean nation.

This chapter focuses on two Antillean student groups, the Catholic students' group (known as FAGEC after 1958) and the secular Martiniquan student associations (from 1948 to 1958, known as AEG; after 1958, AGEM) and their political shift toward revolutionary anti-colonialism. I accomplish this through a close reading of their journals, the Catholic students' *Alizés* and the secular students' *Trait d'Union* and *Matouba*. Drawing upon these journals, I reconstruct the Antillean student milieu in postwar France, demonstrating its links to African and Asian student organizations, its involvement in anti-colonial politics, particularly around the Algerian War, and its fascination with the developing Third Worldist critique of colonialism, capitalism and European domination. I situate their analyses in developing postwar discourses, including Social Catholicism, French Marxism, Castroism, existentialism and anthropology. Their experience and their activism demonstrates the complex manner in which ideas, individuals and social forces combined in the student milieu of postwar Paris. Through the close investigation of the students and their links to non-Antillean and non-French groups and ideas, I seek to demonstrate that the developing concept of the "Antillean personality" and the critique of assimilation within the Antillean intellectual community was not simply an internal, teleological and narrowly cultural development, but was linked to and intersected with global intellectual and political forces.



### **Between Catholicism and Colonialism: Antillean Catholic Students, 1950-1967**

The Catholic student movement constituted an important component of the Antillean student movement. Its journal, *Alizés*, was the longest running student journal and its headquarters at Rue Thibaud the most constant institution in Antillean student life. Due to its Catholicism and the patronage of the Church's youth ministry, it was protected from state repression in ways the secular student movement was not. While individual Catholic students were subject to state forces, and the movement itself was under police surveillance, *Alizés* was not subject to the same repressive measures as other student publications. Nonetheless, FAGEC demonstrated, between 1950 and 1967, a clearly radicalizing trajectory. Beginning as an organization of the Church, by the late 1950s, it had largely escaped the direct influence of its clerical overseers. *Alizés*, in the 1960s, had become entirely anti-colonialist and autonomist in its political orientation. Despite the shift to political radicalism, the students who animated *Alizés* did not abandon their Catholicism. In fact, the overwhelming intellectual activity of FAGEC militants in the 1960s was to reconcile their faith with their political commitments. As the decade unfolded, political repression increased, decolonization swept away the French empire and Marxist revolutionaries reshaped the Third World, FAGEC tried to construct a revolutionary Catholicism that provide hope to the oppressed while representing an alternative to the materialism, atheism and violence of revolutionary Marxism.

The origin of the Catholic student movement was rooted in the alienation many Catholics felt in the existing Catholic institutions of Paris. The Church established the center at Rue Thibaud to provide a space for overseas Catholic students and to assist in its

ministry. Rue Thibaud was part of the Catholic Church's chaplaincy for university students. In 1950, to accommodate the growth of the overseas student population and their unique spiritual and cultural concerns, the chaplaincy created a Chaplain specifically for overseas students and established the center at the Rue Thibaud. The center was designed to assist in the chaplain's pastoral mission and to provide a space for Catholic students to work and worship.<sup>566</sup> The bulletin, *Alizés*, followed a year later, publishing its first issue in November 1951.

Antillean students' feelings of alienation and exclusion dominated *Alizés'* early issues and the journal's writers puzzled over how to alleviate the origins of this feeling and what role their faith and the Church might play in resolving these issues. The first number set the tone and the agenda for subsequent issues, juxtaposing articles on student life and cultural events with investigations of economic, social and spiritual issues.<sup>567</sup> An editorial in the first issue, "Why this bulletin?," laid out the motivation behind the review and the thinking and concerns of Antillean students regarding their situation in the metropole. The editorial described the review as a tool to assist Antilleans to combat the alienation many felt in their new lives in France. "We arrived in France with the Faith, but, in the soul of many of us, a heavy malaise soon established itself."<sup>568</sup> Paule Bernabé expressed similar sentiments in an editorial explaining the reason behind the establishment of the Antillo-Guyanais Catholic group. "Life has changed for us, without having made us the same as Parisians."<sup>569</sup> Students complained of alienation and isolation

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<sup>566</sup> Paule Bernabé, "Groupe Catholique? Pourquoi?," *Alizés* (Dec. 1951), 3-4.

<sup>567</sup> From its outset, *Alizés* was not a strictly student publication; their pastor frequently contributed articles, as did older Antillean Catholics and other clergy members.

<sup>568</sup> "Pourquoi ce bulletin?," *Alizés* (November 1951), 1.

<sup>569</sup> Bernabé, 3.

in their lives in the metropole, feelings that disappointingly were not assuaged by the church and Christian fellowship.

Overseas students were particularly bitter that their metropolitan comrades often greeted them with indifference and confusion, demanding that Antillean Catholics adapt themselves to metropolitan religious and contemptuously dismissing the Antilleans' particular cultural practices. *Alizés* and the Rue Thibaud in part were a response to this poor reception. The Catholic Church had long given its dioceses in the Antilles latitude in religious practice; acknowledging that the Antilles constituted a unique cultural province, the church in the Antilles incorporated Antillean folk customs into non-liturgical celebrations and particularly in its efforts at lay outreach.<sup>570</sup> Antillean students had grown up with different religious practices but most importantly, a different set of cultural experiences and expectations. Their fellow Catholic students, however, perceived this difference as something to be overcome rather than embraced, an attitude that Antilleans found frustrating. Bernabé expressed this attitude and frustration: "We keep in effect our own personality, our own anxieties, our own ways of feeling and thinking, which makes it difficult for us to walk right into metropolitan Catholic groups. We become 'religious misfits' and 'loners.'"<sup>571</sup> While Bernabé affirmed the universalism of Catholicism and the need for fellowship across race, class and national divisions, he argued that this principle of universalism in fact legitimated a separate Antillean-Guyanese Catholic organization: "Catholicism, the religion of love, takes individuals as they are, in the diversity of their customs and mores."<sup>572</sup> Against a misguided belief that Catholic universalism demanded

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<sup>570</sup> Philippe Delisle, *Histoire Religieuse des Antilles et de la Guyane françaises: des chrétientés sous les tropiques, 1815-1911* (Paris: Karthala, 2000).

<sup>571</sup> Bernabé, 3.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 4.

a “standardization of life,” Bernabé instead insisted that the students’ duty to themselves and their societies was “to be Catholics *as Antilleans and Guyanese*.”<sup>573</sup>

Another source of frustration for Antillean Catholic students was the church’s denial of Catholic social teaching, particularly its teachings on social justice and colonialism. Antillean students complained that Catholic youth and student organizations largely ignored the church’s teachings on matters of both social justice and colonialism. Maddy Lastel diagnosed this ignorance as a form of “depoliticization,” constituting, in effect, a “counter-politics.”<sup>574</sup> For Antillean students, coming from a society dominated by poverty, illiteracy and economic exploitation, the church’s social mission was vitally important. *Alizés*’ directors editorialized that they were “completely convinced and we repeat often that the spiritual orientation of our country depends, for the most part, on solutions provided for the problem of social justice.”<sup>575</sup> The Catholic Church in the Antilles, Guyane and other parts of the empire were losing ground and adherents, they suggested, because the church refused to disseminate its own teachings. Antilleans, ground down by poverty, exploitation and an entrenched white elite that too often included the clergy, turned away from the church and embraced secular ideologies. And it was the same problem in the metropole: “we have only vague notions of the social doctrine of the church, we hardly know where to find this doctrine, we have almost no contact with Catholics in France who have dedicated their lives to put it into reality.”<sup>576</sup> *Alizés* thus intended to compensate for this silence through serving as a forum to remind Catholics of the church’s social teachings and to apply these principles to their own

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<sup>573</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>574</sup> Madeleine Lastel, “L’Etudiant Antillais-Guyanais et la Politique,” *Alizés* (Jan. 1953), 14.

<sup>575</sup> “Pourquoi ce bulletin?”, 2.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

experience.<sup>577</sup> Imbued with a sense that their education conferred upon them a mission and a duty to educate themselves not simply for personal gain but to advance the social and economic situation of their home colonies, Catholic notions of social justice formed an important element in Antillean Catholic students' self-understanding.

Catholic social teaching pushed the students towards both a Christian-inspired anti-colonialism as well as a critical engagement with Marxism. For the *Alizés* group, the problem of anti-colonialism was inseparable from the problem of Marxism. In this, the Antillean students shared similarities with the post-war "Catholic Left," most active in the early years of the Fourth Republic and again during the war in Algeria.<sup>578</sup> While the Antillean group rarely participated officially in events and conferences organized by elements of the French Catholic Left, many of its members were active in circles connected to both Domenech's *Esprit* and to the Jesuit organization Action Populaire.<sup>579</sup> *Alizés'* members did participate officially in a November 1956 Action Populaire conference organized specifically for overseas students and devoted to examining what relationship, if any, should exist between Catholicism, anti-colonialism and Marxism; the proceedings of the conference were later published in *Alizés*.

Antillean students, much like the broader French Catholic Left, saw Marxism less as an adversary to be overcome than as a challenge, a powerful ideology that exhibited in its devotion to social justice tendencies that were attractive to the partisans of a socially minded Catholicism. Marxism was also, of course, philosophically materialist and

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>578</sup> Hellman 1981; Michael Kelly, *The Cultural and Intellectual Rebuilding of France after the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 145-150; Oscar L. Arnal, "A Missionary 'Main Tendue' toward French Communists: The 'Témoignages' of the Worker-Priests, 1943-1954," *French Historical Studies* 13,4 (Autumn 1984), 529-556; Oscar L. Arnal, *Priests in Working-Class Blue: The History of the Worker-Priests, 1945-1954* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986); Étienne Fouilloux, *Les chrétiens français entre guerre d'Algerie et mai 1968* (Paris: Editions Parole et Silence, 2008).

<sup>579</sup> On Action Populaire: Fouilloux, 219-241.

historically, French Marxism, whether in its Socialist or Communist iteration, had been hostile to the church. The Catholic Left worried that without an aggressive promotion of Catholic social teaching, workers, the poor and other subaltern groups would perceive the church as at best indifferent to their suffering, at worst actively on the side of the social elite. This perception, in turn, would lead to a turn toward the revolutionary Marxism of the Communist Party as offering the only coherent critical theory and program for creating a just world. An embrace of Marxism, in turn, would accelerate de-Christianization as former Catholics embraced not only Marxism's political critique of capitalism but also its philosophical critique of religion.<sup>580</sup>

Maddy Lastel grappled with Marxism throughout her extensive contributions to *Alizés*. Lastel, originally from Guyane, was one of the principal animators of *Alizés* in its early years, an important bridge between the Antillean Catholics and their African co-religionists, and one of the journal's most prolific and original thinkers.<sup>581</sup> In an essay for the October 1952, entitled "Liminaires," Lastel outlined for her readers both the social duty of Catholics and the challenge Marxism posed to their Christianity.<sup>582</sup> She criticized Antillean and metropolitan Catholic students alike for their "religious individualism" and reminded them that, "we know today that there is no salvation except collective salvation."<sup>583</sup> This salvation was possible only through active engagement with the world, rather than retreat into personal piety: "Our century is marked by the importance accorded to the social."<sup>584</sup> Catholics, Lastel suggested, had to face up to the opportunity and challenge of Marxism. "The Marxist critique," she wrote, "the elaboration of a

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<sup>580</sup> Hellman 1981, 202-225; Fouilloux, 229-241.

<sup>581</sup> Lastel also published in the African Catholic students' journal, *Tam-Tam*.

<sup>582</sup> Maddy Lastel, "Liminaires," *Alizés* (Oct. 1952), 3-6.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

doctrine which extends itself into action, the reality of ‘socialism’ obliges those who would play blind to realize the urgency of these problems.”<sup>585</sup> Marxism, she argued, was not the cause but the symptom of a broader social imbalance, an imbalance that Catholics had a duty to study and remedy according to Catholic principles. Catholics could not stand apart from the world for “Christianity is a religion of incarnation which demands our insertion into the world,” and it was therefore incumbent that Christians, “participate in the construction of the world... in cooperation with all men, to the edification of a just and humane world.”<sup>586</sup> Personal, apolitical piety would cede the debate to the Marxists and accelerate the de-Christianization of both Antillean and French society.

Marxism’s challenge to Catholicism, Lastel argued, was ultimately a positive challenge, for it would force Catholics and the Catholic Church to engage with society and acknowledge the compromises both made with capitalism and colonialism. In a response to a report on de-Christianization issued by the Diocese of Martinique, Lastel embraced the Marxist critique of religion in order to criticize the “decadence” of Christianity in the Antilles, with the hope that building from that critique Christianity could be reformed and reenergized.<sup>587</sup> Looking back to the history of evangelization in the Antilles, Lastel acknowledged the efforts of the evangelizing missionaries to minister to the slaves but criticized them for their ideological capture by slave society and the rule of the masters. “The clergy accepted the ‘least evil’ solution, to prevent the worst... However, being men, some of them left contaminated by the ideas, the ways of life, operating in the colonies; the missionaries themselves owned slaves and this fact led

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>587</sup> Maddy Lastel, “La problème religieux à la Martinique,” *Alizés* (Avril-Mai 1953), 22-30.

many to adopt the mentality of the slave owners.”<sup>588</sup> Faced with a slave-owning class unstinting in its defense of its social position, and worried that religious instruction and the bible would provoke slave rebellion, the clergy in the Antilles were forced to compromise with slave society, eventually accepting its premises, and the “Word of God... served principally to maintain the slaves in resignation.”<sup>589</sup>

The compromise of the Church in turn damaged its standing with the enslaved, damage that Lastel argued persisted in post-emancipation Antillean society. “This state of affairs explains well why the black slaves, from whom the Martiniquan today is the descendent, discovered at last that this old resignation which was intended to confine his race is only a deception.”<sup>590</sup> Faced with this “deception,” Antilleans remain Christian in name only. But the Antillean’s encounter with Marxism provokes a “shock” which leads to an “awakening of consciousness.”<sup>591</sup> Antilleans, glimpsing the world fresh through a Marxist lens, look at the church anew and witness it siding with the white capitalists over the black working class; the Antillean’s “resignation,” the poverty of his faith, “justifies Marx’s reproaches.” For the Antillean religious consciousness has become a completely false consciousness. Lastel quoted the *Esprit* writer H.C. Desroches, who wrote that, ““when religious consciousness... is centered *exclusively* on resignation, it becomes a *false religious consciousness*.””<sup>592</sup> The Marxist critique of religion represented an opportunity for a re-Christianization untainted by colonialism, slave society and

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid. Emphases in the original.



capitalism. Once Marxism had exposed the contradictions of the colonial church and the alienation of the Antillean Catholic could re-Christianization commence.<sup>593</sup>

While Lastel believed that the challenge of Marxism ultimately would drive the church to take a more aggressive approach to social justice and work to retain and attract lapsed and wavering Catholics, other figures in the Antillean Catholic student movement were more concerned about the effect Marxism would have on Antillean students. The Chaplain for overseas students, Joseph Michel, delivered an address on colonialism, Marxism and the church that was subsequently published in *Alizés*.<sup>594</sup> The problem, Fr. Michel wrote, was the problem the one Lastel had diagnosed: many overseas students perceived the church as complicit with colonialism, while the students, “have the impression that only the Communists are close to helping them in the realization of their aspirations.”<sup>595</sup> Essentially, overseas students were Communist because they were anti-colonialist, rather than anti-colonialist because they were Communist. The church’s ambiguous and ambivalent position on colonialism, Fr. Michel worried, was driving Antillean students into the Communist Party despite the fact many students remained “spiritual” and therefore suspicious of Communist atheism and materialism.<sup>596</sup> While Marxism threatened de-Christianization, to counter its appeal required not condemnation but the church’s own social action:

The critique of Marxist materialism will only be heard if the social doctrine of the Church, and its requirement of justice, is proclaimed. Sticking to the condemnation of Atheist Communist is not only to mutilate the teaching of Pius XI in his encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, it is also, and above all when directed to the colonized so influenced by Marxism, to commit a grave

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>594</sup> Joseph Michel, “La Diffusion de l’Enseignement Colonial de l’Eglise condition préalable à un Apostolat près des Etudiants d’Outre-Mer,” *Alizés* (Oct. 1954), 23-26.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

psychological error. It is, in effect, to reinforce in their spirit this persuasion that the missionaries are agents of colonialism.<sup>597</sup>

Only a strong emphasis on the church's colonial teachings could counter Marxism's appeal so strengthened by its strong anti-colonialist position. Ignoring Catholic teaching, Fr. Michel argued, risked surrendering overseas students to the Communists and risked that, attracted by the Party's anti-colonialism, they would eventually come to embrace the "totality of the doctrine."<sup>598</sup>

While the animators of *Alizés* described themselves as "anti-colonial," what "anti-colonial" constituted was subject to interpretation. The concept "anti-colonial," in the context of both Antillean politics and the Fourth Republic was a term that encompassed a range of political and cultural perspectives ranging from the assimilating republicanism of the Gaullists and Socialists, through the "autonomism" of the Communists and the Socialist left, and onwards to the outright national liberation advocated by the North African students and a handful of African and Antillean radicals.<sup>599</sup> In the 1950s, "decolonization," as Todd Shepard has demonstrated, was a neologism and very much a term in the making, heterogeneous and subject to debate.<sup>600</sup> *Alizés'* contributors reflected the ambiguity of the moment and their understanding of what it meant to be "anti-colonial" reflected that fact.

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<sup>597</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>599</sup> For the Gaullist position, see Victor Sablé, *Les Antilles sans complexes: une expérience de décolonization* (Paris: Editions Larose, 1972), originally published in 1955; for the Socialist left, Daniel Guérin, *Les Antilles décolonisées* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956); for the Communists, see Chapter 3; for North African and African students, see Deing, 2009; for an overview, James La Sœur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

<sup>600</sup> Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: the Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2005), 2-11.

A debate erupted among Antillean students, Catholic and secular, over the participation of Antillean students in the Communist-organized Anti-Colonial Liaison Committee, an organization of colonial and metropolitan students set up to coordinate anti-colonial demonstrations and outreach.<sup>601</sup> Echoing her earlier articles, Lastel defended the participation of students in the anti-colonial committee, arguing that Catholics must overcome their “de-politicization” and reflect the concerns of the broader student population. “What are the problems that, for the Antillean-Guyanese students, have a political aspect? It is, above all, the problem of colonization.”<sup>602</sup> She reminded her readers of the history of their colonies and their serious economic and social problems. The only way to overcome these problems, she argued, was to “fight against the old colonial system, which perhaps changed in name but certainly not in method.”<sup>603</sup> For Lastel, however, colonialism was not an unalloyed evil but an ambiguous, compromised mode of social organization: “Certainly colonialism had its magnificent achievements, its cultural, technical and social contributions; but also, and how, its pettiness, its sordid interests, its one-sided sense of profit.”<sup>604</sup> Colonialism’s modernizing effects could not be denied, but nor could the fact that this modernization was, by and large, secondary to the pursuit of profit. Despite condemning colonialism’s “inhuman exploitation,” Lastel refused to condemn the entire enterprise in the uncompromising terms other overseas and Antillean students used, going so far as to express skepticism at the term itself.<sup>605</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Madeleine Lastel, “L’étudiant et la politique,” *Alizés* (Jan. 1953), 13-16; also, “Editorial,” *Trait d’Union* (Fev.-Mars 1956), 1-2.

<sup>602</sup> Lastel, “L’étudiant...,” 13.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>605</sup> “Anti-colonization, or better, the fight against the old system of exploitation...” Ibid., 16.

Still, for Lastel, it was “the duty of all thoughtful individuals, and particularly all Christians” to oppose colonialism as exploitation. But in Lastel’s conceptualization, colonialism was not synonymous with European rule over non-European peoples and “anti-colonialism” was not synonymous with struggles for independence. “Colonialism is a sin,” she wrote,

There is the sin of colonialism each time there is a violation of the principles that must govern the relationship between colonizers and colonized, each time the good of the metropole is sought at the expense of the colony, each time the indigenous population is exploited, each time that, under the pretext of a misunderstood national interest, the normal march towards decolonization is deliberately and unjustly delayed.<sup>606</sup>

While she condemned “colonialism,” Lastel defined colonialism as a set of interpersonal relationships rather than a system of economic and political rule. Her understanding of anti-colonial struggle followed from the broader Social Catholic doctrine, derived from Leo XIII’s encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, of “humanizing” capitalism without overturning it.<sup>607</sup> Colonialism was justified, Catholic thinkers argued, only on the condition that the colonizing project was structured to the mutual benefit of both colonizer and colonized.<sup>608</sup> Lastel followed in this tradition, arguing in essence that the true “anti-colonialism” recognized the universal humanity of colonizer and colonized and sought to humanize their relationship through an end to exploitation in the name of human solidarity. As such, Lastel defended both settlers and officials and opposed their expulsion, arguing that the enemies were not individuals but “opposition to the

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<sup>606</sup> Madeleine Lastel, “Le FFEC devant nos problèmes,” *Alizés* (Dec. 1953), 16.

<sup>607</sup> “Rerum Novarum” in David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: the Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 12-39; Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 85-114.

<sup>608</sup>

emancipation of colonial peoples.”<sup>609</sup> Lastel’s ambiguous position on colonialism was not isolated. Condemning exploitation advocating the liquidation of empire was consistent with the ambiguous positions of not only the Catholic establishment and Catholic Left, but the secular parties as well, including many members of the Communist Party.<sup>610</sup>

Her colleague, Guy Frederic, was much more critical of the entire colonial enterprise and less sanguine about the prospects for a colonialism without exploitation.<sup>611</sup> Writing in the wake of the Philippeville Massacre and the army’s retaliation, Frederic questioned the depth of the French population’s true attitude towards colonialism. Acknowledging that a series of setbacks for the French in the empire had caused “certain parts of the French population [to begin] to be conscious of colonial realities” which had long “been concealed from them,” Frederic nonetheless was skeptical of the depth of the French population’s commitment to anti-colonialism.<sup>612</sup> While “the masks” were lifted to “reveal the strong material interests that... have been camouflaged by a supposedly ‘civilizing mission,’” Frederic questioned “to what degree these manifestations correspond to a real awakening of consciousness, to a clear and objective view of colonial problems.”<sup>613</sup> Admitting that for many French the situation truly had changed and their shift to an anti-colonial position was genuine, Frederic suggested that for many French it simply was “before the threat of a New Indochina War that opinion decided to emerge from its long apathy.”<sup>614</sup> Without the personal cost of the war, Frederic doubted many French would truly care about the situation in the colonies or the exploitation and

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<sup>609</sup> Lastel, “L’étudiant...,” 16.

<sup>610</sup> Shepard, 78.

<sup>611</sup> Guy Frederic, “Superficielles ou Profondes?,” *Alizés* (October 1955), 9-11.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*

misery that was the dominant feature of most colonial societies. “It is to be feared that when calm returns to North Africa, French opinion will again fall into indifference, forgetting the other colonies where sooner or later problems analogous to those of North Africa will pose themselves with acuity.”<sup>615</sup>

Frederic doubted that the end of the “old colonialism,” as Lastel put it, would lead to a significant change in the status of the colonized and the reality of the colonial situation. Most metropolitans, isolated from the realities of the colonies, would drift back into the “dangerous venom of indifference.”<sup>616</sup> Frederic instead urged a perpetual activist vigilance, stating the “necessity of holding this opinion constantly on alert, by protesting without cease and inviting them to protest with us against the exactions of colonialism.”<sup>617</sup> While Frederic hoped that renewed activism by colonial students and anti-colonial activists could persuade the French public to demand an end to colonialism, he was skeptical that a formal end to colonialism would end the misery of the colonial world. The problem, according to Frederic, was that colonialism was simply too profitable an enterprise for French capital. “French colonialism...” he wrote, “is far from being in decline: certain French enterprises testify still to a remarkable imperialist vitality, all the more dangerous as it has for its standard the necessity of ‘developing’ the underdeveloped countries.”<sup>618</sup> Frederic realized, in a way that Lastel and many of his other peers did not, that colonialism was not in decline, but in transformation. While the days of direct European rule were in ending, this rule, particularly European capital’s

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid., 11.

control over the economic life of the colonies, was mutating and adapting. Emancipation, Frederic suggested, would be incomplete without economic reform.

Despite Frederic's pessimism, like Lastel his view of colonialism and what to do about it was essentially moderate. He condemned the "terrorism" of the FLN and the "repression" of the French state in equal measure; his belief in strident activism flowed from his belief that colonial violence could be prevented only through an immediate and conscientious movement for colonial reform.<sup>619</sup> While Lastel, Frederic and their fellow *Alizés* activists opposed colonialism and criticized the French state for its intransigence and violent repression in Algeria, Africa and the Caribbean, they also criticized anti-colonial groups for their turn to violence. Maddy Lastel, writing in the winter of 1956, simultaneously urged the French government to negotiate with the FLN rebels while condemning the FLN's use of violence.<sup>620</sup> Violence, she argued, would not prevent Algeria from "reaching maturity" and becoming independent, but it would lead to "accumulated hatreds" that would make friendship and cooperation impossible. Reflecting on conversations with anti-colonial Tunisian friends, Lastel noted that respect and admiration for France accompanied their desire for independence.<sup>621</sup> Both sides had to work to stop "the Algerian butchery" and establish an "immediate peace."<sup>622</sup> While opposed to French colonialism, Lastel also opposed violent anti-colonial revolution. For Lastel, the only Christian response was to work in friendship to establish and promote human dignity.

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>620</sup> Maddy Lastel, "Lettre aux étudiants chrétiens sur l'Algérie," *Alizés* (Fev.-Mars 1956), 6-8.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 8.

A Christian view of the colonial situation – of cooperation, reform, charity and Catholic humanism derived from Mounier, Péguy and the post-war French Catholic left – animated the articles in *Alizés* that were not explicitly devoted to politics. Beyond publishing articles on matters of interest to Catholic students, *Alizés* also published studies by Antillean Catholic students on culture, society and economics in the Antilles and Guyane. Maddy Lastel wrote an extensive report on her home colony of Guyane that filled an entire issue.<sup>623</sup> She also contributed articles on négritude poetry, relations between African and Antillean students, racism and other topics.<sup>624</sup> Other members of the group published articles on the origins of the biguine, Antillean economic stagnation, housing in Martinique, the family under slavery, the modern Antillean family, and a range of other topics. All the articles followed the mission, laid out in the first issues of *Alizés*, that students must use their knowledge and education to work towards the reform of Antillean society and to assist Antilleans in becoming aware of their history, culture, society and above all, faith.

The initial ideological orientation of the Antillean Catholic students group and its publication, *Alizés*, was moderate, wedding a generally anti-colonial politics to Catholic social doctrine. In the initial years of the decolonizing era, they tried to elaborate a position that defended the right of the colonized to ameliorate their situation while believing that a peaceful solution founded in human solidarity remained possible. As decolonizing movements unfolded across the 1950s, particularly in Algeria, the violent reality of decolonization increasingly challenged *Alizés*' peaceful vision. Further, at the end of the 1950s, the French state reacted with an increasingly heavy hand in the Antilles

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<sup>623</sup> Maddy Lastel, "Guyane, Terre Inconnue," *Alizés* (Janvier 1955).

<sup>624</sup> Maddy Lastel, "Le Rythme Nègre," *Alizés* (Fevrier 1955); "Africains et Antillais se comprennent-ils?," *Alizés* (Fevrier 1955); "Denoncer le racisme – pourquoi?," *Alizés* (Mars-Avril 1952).



and Guyane. Following the December 1959 riots in Fort-de-France and increased autonomist political organizing in Guadeloupe and Guyane, French prefects on the islands and the overseas ministry in Paris cracked down on Antillean dissidents. Meetings were banned, newspapers confiscated, activists fired from their jobs and dissident intellectuals exiled to the metropole. The “old colonialism,” it appeared, had yet to be overcome.

The increasingly heavy hand of the French state in the Antilles and Guyane unfolded at the same moment as a new generation of student activists entered the Catholic student movement, now officially constituted as the Federation of Antillean-Guyanese Catholic Students (FAGEC).<sup>625</sup> Many of FAGEC’s activists were also members of the other Antillean student groups; members of the *Alizés* editorial board and FAGEC’s federal bureau were also member of ex-members of the more revolutionary secular Antillean organizations such as AGEF, UGE and AGEM.<sup>626</sup> Coming of age during the disappointment of the late 1950s, when the Antillean public grew increasingly skeptical of the compromises of assimilation, this new generation of Antilleans students was more willing to stake out radical positions on questions of economics, society, even revolutionary activism. Responding to the violence of the war in Algeria and the repression of dissidence in their home colonies, as well as the tumult in the Third World and in France, the new generation pushed the bounds of their Catholic doctrine, taking increasingly radical political and intellectual stances, on colonialism, violence, economics and the social role of the student and the Christian.

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<sup>625</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 280, Sureté Nationale, “Les Étudiants des Départements d’Outre-Mer en Métropole,” Juin 1963, 225.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., 232-3.

FAGEC's 1963 report, "The Antillo-Guyanese Christian Facing the Problems of Decolonization," provides a window into the shift in both the ideological orientation and tactical disposition of the Antillean Catholic students group.<sup>627</sup> The report was a product of FAGEC's second national congress, held in Noisy-sur-Oise in July 1962.<sup>628</sup> Over five days, FAGEC's delegates and activists had debated the proper attitude the Antillean-Guyanese Catholic should take towards colonialism in the Antilles and Guyane. In a wide-ranging discussion that included economics, social problems, culture and the role of their faith in the decolonizing process, the students concluded that it was the duty of Catholics to take an active role in the political, economic and cultural decolonization of the French DOMs. The report and its conclusions mark out the distance traveled since *Alizés'* early years. Lastel's belief that colonialism could be reformed to benefit both colonizer and colonized completely disappeared. So too had the debate over the Antillean's proper relationship to culture, and the discussion of the role of the Catholic faith in political and social struggles. The 1962 conference and 1963 report advocated a concerted political and social struggle to decolonize the Antilles through local autonomy or, if necessary, political independence.

The first section of the report harshly criticized the betrayals and compromises of the 1946 assimilation law, situating the change in statute as part of a longer history of French colonialism in the Caribbean.<sup>629</sup> The FAGEC report depicted the 1946 assimilation as a bargain between the Antillean population and the French state, a compromise in which each side had different expectations and was bound to be

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<sup>627</sup> "Le Chrétien Antillo-Guyanais face aux problèmes de décolonisation," *Alizés* (Avril 1963).

<sup>628</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 280, Sureté Nationale, "Les Étudiants des Départements d'Outre-Mer en Métropole," Juin 1963, 225.

<sup>629</sup> "Les Formes Que Peut Revêtir la Décolonisation," *Alizés* (Avril 1963), 5-7.

disappointed. The Antillean métis middle classes, shocked by the arbitrary brutality and racism of the Vichy years, demanded that the state end the Antilles' colonial status to guarantee their rights; in effect, assimilation represented a change to the Antilles' juridical status while leaving their economic and social status largely untouched.<sup>630</sup> For the French state, assimilation represented an easy fix to the problem of decolonization. The United Nations' postwar demand for the "liquidation of the colonial empires," coupled with the United States' reaffirmation of the Monroe Doctrine at the 1949 Bogota conference, put pressure on France to resolve the status of its American possessions; assimilation offered an easy solution.<sup>631</sup> However, assimilation was defined by its ambiguity and misrecognition:

The Antillean and Guyanese wanted total assimilation, while France, likely, thought otherwise. Today *a posteriori* we can affirm without much fear of being mistaken that France accomplished a beautiful gesture in the eyes of the UN, but neither her nor the lands concerned gave the same meaning to the word 'assimilation.' Thus, equivocation and misunderstanding from the beginning.<sup>632</sup>

Assimilation, according to the FAGEC activists, was fundamentally an ambiguous moment in the history of French Caribbean colonialism. While Antilleans conceived assimilation as "integral," and thus extending from the political to the social, economic and cultural spheres, the French state saw it as simply a political and territorial fix. Incorporation into the French territory and the extension of rights neutralized UN demands for the liquidation of empire in the French Americas. France, according to FAGEC's understanding, never had any intention of implementing broader social, economic and cultural decolonization. These two competing understandings of assimilation were bound, in time, to create political crisis.

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<sup>630</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid.

Most vitally, while assimilation had delivered *de jure* formal legal equality, it had been unable to deliver economic and social equality as it had left the underlying economic and social foundations of Antillean society untouched, specifically the inequalities that had built up over the course of the Antilles' history, first as slave societies, then as colonies. Citing the unequal distribution of land, the persistence of monopolies and metropolitan domination of the commercial sector, FAGEC argued that, "the colonial economic system still exists."<sup>633</sup> Not only had assimilation not relieved the disempowerment of Antilleans, it had actually exacerbated it: "we find that assimilation as practiced has not solved the colonial society and economy that still exists in our countries."<sup>634</sup>

Despite guarantees of equal treatment as French citizens, the French state had maintained Antilleans under a separate legal and social regime, by exploiting Article 3 of the 1946 assimilation law, which mandated a delay in the implementation of metropolitan law in the DOMs.<sup>635</sup> According to the FAGEC report, the French state, through Article 3, managed to delay the implementation of laws pertaining to the retirement age, pensions, family allowances, cost of living adjustments, housing construction, unemployment insurance, employment exchanges, workplace safety, right to form a union, right to strike, rights to free assembly, right to a free press and other rights and benefits guaranteed to the metropolitan population.<sup>636</sup>

Further, the state had made little effort to tackle the fundamental social and economic equality of Antillean society. The monopolies that the state had granted under

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<sup>633</sup> "Brève Analyse de la colonisation et de sa deviation: colonialisme," *Alizés* (Avril 1963), 3.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>635</sup> On Article 3, see chapter 1.

<sup>636</sup> "Les Formes..." 6.

the “colonial pact” to large metropolitan enterprises, particularly granting the General Transatlantic Company (CGT) control of not only shipping but the cost of commercial products, persisted. Land remained concentrated in “latifundia in the hands of a few families.”<sup>637</sup> The *béké* families that owned most of the land directed agricultural production towards export cash crops, favoring a “monoculture of sugarcane and bananas.”<sup>638</sup> Due to the continued dominance of sugar and bananas, and despite large swaths of fallow land, basic foodstuffs were imported from the metropole. Finally, the state had made little effort to establish and promote “transformative industries” that would reduce the Antilles’ dependence on exterior commercial and industrial firms. The net effect, the report complained, was the “impoverishment of the Antillo-Guyanais economy to the benefit of the French economy.”<sup>639</sup>

The report’s concluded its initial investigation of the historical antecedents to the Antilles’ economic and social stagnation with a condemnation of the false promises of assimilation. Accusing the government of “bad faith,” FAGEC condemned assimilation, stating that “assimilation, such as it is, is a myth.”<sup>640</sup> A judicious examination of the historical and social facts, the report concluded, demonstrated that “the theoretically departmental statute” was “practically colonial” and had “accentuated the underdevelopment of our *pays*,” assimilation’s “sole benefit was unintentional, that is to say it drove us to become conscious of our personality and the economic and social problems specific to our islands.”<sup>641</sup> The benefit of assimilation, the authors argued, was that it threw into relief the specificity of the Antillean colonial situation and thus enabled

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<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

the Antillean to become conscious of both the uniqueness of the Antilles and of her own cultural and social situation. The abuses and inequities of the old colonial system had made an easy target and thus masked the underlying historical and structural disequilibrium. Following the 1946 law, however, the social and economic inaction could not longer be blamed on the old colonial system; the 1946 departmentalization law, in ending the Antilleans' colonial status, paradoxically revealed the persistence of their colonial economic and social status.<sup>642</sup> FAGEC's shift on the question of assimilation brought their reading of assimilation, colonialism and the situation of the French Antilles closer to the position held by both the Martiniquan, Guadeloupean and Guyanese Communist parties, and the perspective of their secular counterparts in the Antillean student organizations.

To address the failures of assimilation and to reorient their own political action in the face of the impossibility of a reform of colonialism, FAGEC turned to examples from the decolonized world to launch a critical examination of different possibilities for economic, social and cultural decolonization. In theorizing solutions to the Antilles' economic problems, the authors examined case studies from the USSR and China, Ghana, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.<sup>643</sup> The USSR and China represented the "Marxist solution" to the problem of decolonization; or rather, since neither the USSR nor China had been colonized according to the report's authors, they represented the "Marxist solution" to underdevelopment. Their rapid and radical development of backwards, impoverished, stratified rural societies seemed to offer a solution to the Antilles'

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<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> "Dimension Economique de la Décolonisation," *Alizés* (Avril 1963), 8-13.

economic stagnation and inequality.<sup>644</sup> After rehearsing the basics of Marxist, Leninist and Maoist revolutionary theory, the report focused on Soviet and Chinese economic development, noting that both Communist states had built industrial economies through exploitation of the agricultural sector.<sup>645</sup>

Despite the results, the authors could not embrace this approach due to the price in human suffering. The forced collectivizations and forced surpluses had allowed the USSR and China to industrialize, but at the cost of millions of lives and the abrogation of the dignity of the human individual. Above all, man had to be an end, not a means, something the authors believed was lost in the Soviet and Chinese Communism. “The Christian rejects the conception of the role of man in the economic development followed by Marxist theory.”<sup>646</sup> The brutal economic development of the Soviet Union and Communist China ended up simply as the mirror image of capitalist individuals, sacrificing the individual to the needs of society. The experience of the USSR and China made the FAGEC activists wary of Marxist theory generally. “We must ask ourselves whether Marxism is not a new, technical alienation. Finally, if we admit the use of coercion, it doesn’t matter under which form. The materialist character and the methods used by Communist countries commit us to vigilance.”<sup>647</sup> While the differing approaches to economic development in China and the USSR demonstrated that Marxism was not a fixed ideology, the fundamentally materialist basis of Marxism continued to trouble FAGEC activists. While they saw in Marxism a strong theory and practice of economic

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<sup>644</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid.

modernization and decolonization, they remained worried about its fundamentally utilitarian view of the individual.

Cuba represented a more promising, if untested, approach to economic decolonization. Cuba was particularly worthy of study, the report's authors argued, because of the interest many Antilleans had in the Cuban Revolution, and because, "on many points, one recognizes the resemblances between the big island and our countries."<sup>648</sup> There were three broad economic similarities: agricultural monoculture dominated by a small elite; concentration of land in the hands of a few landlords; and undeveloped mineral deposits; the principal difference was that Cuba possessed a nascent industrial sector before the Revolution, while the French Antilles remained devoid of industry.<sup>649</sup> Both the Antilles and Cuba also demonstrated political similarities, as both were nominally free but remained *de facto* colonies. The fascination of the Cuban Revolution for Antilleans was its attempt to alter the distribution of economic power through radical reforms of the agricultural sector. The authors divided the Cuban Revolution into two stages: an initial stage of agrarian reform and industrialization followed by a second stage of nationalization, financial reform and reorientation of trade.<sup>650</sup> In the first stage, the Revolution set limits to how much property an individual could own; divided the large estates and redistributed them into agricultural cooperatives for landless peasants; and established a central rural planning board to direct and improve agricultural production.<sup>651</sup> Conflict with the US pushed Cuba into the second phase of the revolution, which was marked by the nationalization of all foreign-owned businesses, a

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<sup>648</sup> Ibid.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid. The authors also noted that initially the Revolution paid indemnities to property owners.



stronger push for industrialization and the orientation of Cuban production towards the USSR and Eastern bloc.<sup>652</sup> For the authors, the first stage commanded the most interest, arguing that Cuban agrarian reform were not only desirable in the French Antilles and Guyane, but feasible, in part, through existing laws. The second stage “warned of the difficulties of decolonization,” particularly at the “political level.”<sup>653</sup> While the Cuban Revolution was “too recent” to “draw, at the economic level, many lessons,” it represented an attractive and less brutal method for decolonizing the Antillean economy while not only respecting, but promoting, the dignity of the individual.

While FAGEC activists argued that economic decolonization was important and remained a priority, it had to be supplemented with reform and renewal throughout Antillean and Guyanese society. “Decolonization would be incomplete,” the report’s authors wrote, “if it were realized at a strictly economic level.”<sup>654</sup> While fixing the economy and reorienting it towards the promotion of Antillean interests would go a long way towards ameliorating the situation, it would not automatically mend the damage wrought by three centuries of colonialism. Colonialism, the authors argued, was a violent and deforming social system, one that had led “to a clash of races, civilizations” that had “traumatized the colonized.”<sup>655</sup> Colonialism had caused the colonized subject to “doubt in his person” as “the values of society imposed on him were those of the colonizer.”<sup>656</sup> The effect was individual and collective confusion, which led to a “sociological underdevelopment” marked by income inequality, distorted demographic patterns and

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid.

<sup>654</sup> “Dimension sociale et culturelle de Décolonisation,” *Alizés* (Avril 1963), 20-25.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

finally to psycho-social problems.<sup>657</sup> “No decolonization,” the report argued, “will be effective if it does not have a social and cultural dimension.”<sup>658</sup> Catholics must devote themselves as well to the task of social and cultural decolonization.

For the authors of the FAGEC report, the radical stratification of colonial society exercised lasting and damaging effects on Antillean society, distorting both economic and social reality. The fundamental fact of colonial society was the existence of a severely polarized social hierarchy, divided into a very large and very poor class, a small, empowered wealthy class, and a small, disempowered middle class. Ubiquitous racism simultaneously produced and maintained this social hierarchy, with lasting psycho-social effects. Colonial society’s racism originated “out of the domination exercised by the civilization of the colonizer over that of the colonized.”<sup>659</sup> Over the centuries, it had developed into a “defensive reflex” of a “privileged minority” that attempted to root its “color prejudice... on scientific assumptions and arguments.”<sup>660</sup> The effect on the colonized was a psycho-social complex that particularly affected the métis middle classes; they sacrificed collective development for an individualist ethos, and squandered their wealth and produced a “demonstration effect” of overconsumption in order to prove that they too could “live like a developed country.”<sup>661</sup>

Due to the complexities of the colonial situation, the authors of the FAGEC report argued that political decolonization alone could not ameliorate the cultural and social damage of colonialism, as that would “underestimate the root causes which are strongly

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<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid. Cultural here should be understood in the small-c sense, as mentality.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

established in the subconscious and unconscious of the individual.”<sup>662</sup> Only a coming to Antillean consciousness coupled with social and economic change rooted in the doctrines of social Catholicism could guarantee the decolonization of the Antilles and Guyane. Assimilation, in fact, had been a step backwards, as it had saturated the Antillean consciousness with the materialist individualism of capitalist France.<sup>663</sup> “It is repeated to the young that the essential thing is for them ‘to arrive,’ independent of others.” This “egotistical sentiment” marked out the degree to which the Antilles were colonized; assimilation ensured only that Antilleans would become French, rather than becoming themselves. True decolonization was a “collective advancement... the accession of all the people to a material, cultural, moral and spiritual well-being.”<sup>664</sup> Assimilation, too, was merely the latest moment in a long history of moral imperialism.

The solution was to struggle against colonialism as an interlinked complex of moral, cultural, social, economic and political imperialism, and the surest means to do so was to ground the struggle for decolonization in Catholic social doctrine. Only Catholic social doctrine, the FAGEC militants argued, looked at man as a whole and considered all aspects of his existence. Marxism was only a partial solution, confined to the political and economic; so too *négritude*, which mainly focused on the cultural. Only a holistic Christian approach could affect a total decolonization of the Antillean personality. This approach had been elaborated in Catholic social doctrine, starting with Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. The report also cited Pius XI’s *Quadregesimo Anno* and John XXIII’s recent encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, which expanded and clarified the doctrine and

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<sup>662</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

spoke directly to the right of workers, women and other subaltern groups to share in the prosperity and management of their societies.<sup>665</sup>

Not only did FAGEC militants embrace John XXIII's encyclicals for their advocacy of the right to strike and the right to work, they also interpreted his encyclicals to argue for the redistribution of wealth and property in the Antilles and Guyane. John XXIII, in *Mater et Magistra*, had linked property to social responsibility and dignity; possession and security of property were "essential to the human person and an indispensable element of social order."<sup>666</sup> FAGEC interpreted the encyclical as guaranteeing a social right to property, a right necessary for human dignity. However, as property in the Antilles was concentrated in the hands of a few firms and families, the report argued that this principle legitimated the "dismembering of the large properties" and their redistribution to landless and property-less families to "[permit] to the disinherited accession of property."<sup>667</sup> The encyclical, in the authors' reading, also mandated the redistribution of wealth through an expanded welfare system, as well as greater local control of economic, social and cultural affairs.<sup>668</sup>

Constructing human dignity, however, was not limited only to the social or the economic; it was also a matter of culture. The next section of the FAGEC report was devoted to an examination of Antillean and Guyanese culture, historically reconstructing its origins in slavery, its development across the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and discussing its necessary role in making decolonization possible.<sup>669</sup> Antillean and Guyanese culture

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<sup>665</sup> "Quadregesimo Anno" and "Mater et Magistra" in O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: the Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 42-79, 84-127; Hornsby-Smith, 186-191.

<sup>666</sup> "Mater et Magistra" quoted in "Dimension sociale et culturelle de Décolonisation," 23.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid.

<sup>669</sup> "Culture et décolonisation," *Alizés* (Avril 1963), 25-27.

began, fundamentally, in slavery and the slaves' insertion into the "colonial situation." At the conscious level, the slave was "depersonalized, locked into mimicry," his personality "extinguished" by an "imposed" Western Civilization.<sup>670</sup> Nonetheless, African culture was not completely lost; it formed a "substratum" that "retrenched itself in secret," or in other words, at the subconscious level. The tension between the slaves' outward accession to an imposed Western civilization, and the slaves' inward preservation of the "African substratum," formed the central dialectic of the "Antillean personality."<sup>671</sup> Quoting the Cuban historian Gilberto Freyre, the authors argued that, "'slavery created a new way of being,'" which manifested itself in the survival of African religious and cultural practices and their adoption to the new brutal context of the plantation.<sup>672</sup>

The dominant cultural practice of both the Church and educated Antilleans – in this case, the métis elite – was to ignore or suppress the African aspects of the Antillean personality in favor of Europeanization. Emancipation in 1848 reinforced the denigration of African culture in favor of European culture. Abolition abolished physical slavery, "but it did not abolish cultural and spiritual slavery."<sup>673</sup> In fact, many ex-slaves and many elite métis had "an attitude of gratitude" toward their liberators and redoubled their devotion to the promises of French civilization and republicanism.<sup>674</sup> Following abolition, the métis elite, backed and patronized by the white planter elite, took over many of the institutional positions of Antillean life, but did not abandon white culture; in fact it dismissed popular black culture: "according to them, the Negro had no culture."<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid. The concept "Antillean personality" seems to be borrowed from René Ménéil. See chapter Three.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid.

<sup>674</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>675</sup> "Culture et decolonization," 27.

Quoting Fanon, the FAGEC activists denounced this elite as “false elite,” the “mask” that concealed the true “face” of the Antillean personality.<sup>676</sup>

Négritude had developed as a movement in part to counteract the métis elite’s denigration of black culture and mock its adoption of white, bourgeois mores and manners. However, *négritude* was only conditionally and contingently true. It constituted a necessary step for Antilleans to develop their own unique consciousness. “Négritude - it is not about falling into racism (total rejection of everything not black) but of striking a balance with Negro values – a balance destined to give us consciousness of ourselves.”<sup>677</sup> However, it was only a step, a necessary move to clear away of white contempt and métis mimicry: “the past must be the point of departure, the springboard towards the future, which will be a dialogue between the African contributions of our fathers and the Western contributions we have received.” It represented only one step on the path toward the “realization... that we are neither African nor Western.”<sup>678</sup>

The radicalization of FAGEC’s in the 1960s positions pushed them in a more and more revolutionary direction. While the French state remained preoccupied with the secular Antillean student groups, it noted with growing concern FAGEC’s ideological radicalization, and the fact that more and more members of FAGEC were also active militants of the secular student organization.<sup>679</sup> Following the tumultuous years, 1959-1964, particularly the denouement of the Algerian war, and the repression of the Antillean autonomist left and the trial of the OJAM militants, FAGEC and *Alizés* moved

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<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 280, Renseignements Généraux, 8° Section, Note n° 11052, “Les Etudiants Antillo-Guyanais Catholiques en France,” 20 November 1963.

steadily leftward.<sup>680</sup> Further, the radicalization of the broader Antillean and French student unions also helped to push FAGEC's militants not only toward a radical interpretation of Catholic social doctrine, but towards revolutionary theory itself, particularly after the 1967 GONG incident in Guadeloupe and the events of 1968 in France.<sup>681</sup> Antillean Catholics became more receptive to revolutionary theory and more celebratory of revolutionary movements against colonialism.

Issues of *Alizés* from the late 1960s increasingly departed from the ecclesiastical and parish publications that had served as its early models and came to resemble the publications emanating from the Antillean and metropolitan student movement. More and more space in each issue was dedicated to politics, economics and issues facing the Third World, and less space to strictly religious concerns. What religious writing persisted mostly addressed how Catholics and other Christians could reconcile themselves with the violent changes reshaping France, Europe and the decolonizing world. Members of FAGEC formed part of the Martiniquan delegation to the 1966 Tricontinental Congress held in Havana and a report on the conference was published in *Alizés*.<sup>682</sup> FAGEC members in Paris participated in the December 1967 "Che Guevara Week" organized by the Comité National Vietnam, which featured speeches and discussions by Daniel Guérin, Stokely Carmichael, and others, as well as a screening of "Far From Vietnam."<sup>683</sup> The journal's book section carried fewer and fewer reviews of devotional and Catholic literature, and more and more of the standard classics of the New Left, such as Guevara,

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<sup>680</sup> This radicalization in turn led to disputes within the Catholic student federation, and between the FAGEC executive and their chaplain. See Ibid.

<sup>681</sup> The GONG was an ultra-leftist Guadeloupean groupuscule that had been involved in the May 1967 riots in Point-à-Pitre that left nearly a dozen dead.

<sup>682</sup> R. Monsterleet, "Tricontinentale de la Havane," *Alizés* (Fevrier 1966), 18-22.

<sup>683</sup> *Loin de Vietnam* was the famous documentary filmed by leading lights of the French New Wave, including Claude Lelouch, Chris Marker, Alain Resnais and Agnès Varda. Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004); M. Ebion, "La Semaine Che Guevara," *Alizés* (Janvier 1968), 21-2.

Castro, Marcuse and Cohn-Bendit, as well as works further afield, including LeRoi Jones, James Forman and André Gunder-Frank.<sup>684</sup> Editorial decisions for *Alizés* reflected FAGEC activists' deepening radicalism as the 1960s unfolded.

Despite an increased radicalism and a greater openness to revolution, the issue of violence and its practice persisted as a special problem for FAGEC, particularly whether its use was ever justified. The May-June 1968 issue of *Alizés* devoted a special "dossier" to the issue of violence, its function in constituting the existing order and its role in movements for social and political change.<sup>685</sup> In comparison to Maddy Lastel's outright condemnation of violent social change in *Alizés* in the 1950s, C. Berchel, the Federal Secretary of FAGEC who composed the dossier, had a much more ambiguous, even ambivalent, perspective on violence and its role in social change. An investigation of violence was inevitable, he suggested, because, "we are more and more sensitive to the misery of the great number of men."<sup>686</sup> Berchel admitted that, for Catholics, violence was "troublesome, unbearable," but he argued that it was necessary, in order to understand violence in the contemporary conjuncture, "at the outset to retain only one bias: to radically contest all convictions that appear to take themselves for granted, whether for or against violence."<sup>687</sup> Lastel's categorical rejection of violence was to be rejected outright, as was the categorical celebration of violence that Berchel attributed to the revolutionary left. Violence was not a means, but a problematic question in and of itself.

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<sup>684</sup> *Alizés* (Novembre 1967), 18-21; *Alizés* (Mai-Juin 1968), 36-7; *Alizés* (Juillet-Octobre, 1968), 31-2.

<sup>685</sup> C. Berchel, "La Violence?," *Alizés* (Mai 1968), 11-28.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*



Berchel differentiated between two forms of violence present in the contemporary world: the violence of order and the violence of revolution.<sup>688</sup> In the revolutionary situation Berchel wished to investigate, revolutionaries frequently described the former as the “violence of social injustice,” an economic violence frequently accompanied by physical repression.<sup>689</sup> This was the violence of “oppressors, exploiters, racists, capitalists, totalitarian states” which worked for the “established order (which is in fact the ‘established disorder’).” The fact that this form of violence served the established order not only legitimated its practice but enabled its practitioners to commit violence “in good conscience.” Berchel cited as an example Westerns: while the Indians were “massacred without pity,” they were nonetheless portrayed as bad guys, as they stood in opposition to established order. Such violence was an everyday occurrence and operated “without shocking anyone.”<sup>690</sup>

Berchel, however, was more interested in revolutionary violence, which he understood as, in part, a reaction to the quotidian violence of the “established disorder.” He questioned how Christians, particularly Christians committed to the fundamental reordering of the world towards justice, should position themselves in relation to the inevitable violence of revolution. Many Christians opposed revolution in favor of “‘evolution,’” which too often, he noted, meant a theoretical demand for social justice but a practical attitude of resignation, conformism and justification of the status quo.<sup>691</sup> Many Christians claimed to find “intolerable the situation of the ‘wretched of the earth’” while confining themselves to the role of “prophets,” lamenting and damning while refusing to

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

act themselves. The reality of the day, Berchel argued, confronted the Christian committed to social justice with an immutable truth: “for those who wish to be realistic, to opt for a radical change in society, it appears *it is necessary to take on the means*.”<sup>692</sup> The ruling class, he noted, “rarely cede their privileges spontaneously... on the contrary, they have frequently taken to using overwhelming violence to maintain them.”<sup>693</sup> Revolution, for Berchel seemed not only inevitable and necessary but the just, moral and Christian course of action. But what sort of revolution?

The Gospels were unambiguous in their condemnation of violence as a means to social change. While some Christians – for example the Nicaraguan liberation theologian and priest-turned-guerilla Camilo Torres – believed that the New Testament contained implicit justification for violence, citing as an example the story of the moneychangers in the Temple, Berchel reminded his readers to focus on the words of Christ himself. Quoting Martin Luther King, Berchel highlighted the injunctions against violence and toward self-sacrifice that define Christ’s most important speeches, in the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes.<sup>694</sup> The Christian commandment was not only not to cause harm, but to accept suffering, even death, as a witness to truth and justice, a position personified in Christ’s own submission to crucifixion. “We must seriously ask,” Berchel argued, “if the teaching of the life of Christ is intelligible outside of a milieu of non-violence.”<sup>695</sup> The ideal Christian attitude to injustice is not violence, but witness and the willingness to sacrifice the self, an ideal personified in the life of Christ himself, and in the life of exemplary Christians, like King. However, if the Christian finds himself in a

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<sup>692</sup> Ibid., 13. Emphasis in original.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 14.

society already wracked by revolution, Berchel argued that these Gospel commandments are, in effect, “voided in practice.”<sup>696</sup>

For Berchel, revolution, even violent revolution, represented a vast opportunity not only for those who made it but for Christians and the Christian faith. Revolution, much like Christianity, was a “carrier of hope for men” that, through its movement, created a new type of man, one who possessed a “sense of sacrifice” and was “capable of assuming the highest aspirations.”<sup>697</sup> The revolutions of the 1960s, Berchel argued, unleashed energies that created a new and better order:

The Castroist revolution inaugurated for the peasants a new order, the Vietnam of Ho Chi Minh bears not resemblance to that of Ngo Sinh Diem, the Algerian Republic gave pride to innumerable “wogs”... This matters.<sup>698</sup>

A revolution, Berchel argued, was not only political or economic or social change, but also spiritual change, a remaking of the interior sensibilities and potentialities of individuals caught up in its pulsion. “The Revolution awakens unsuspected energies, reveals to men their selves, and gives ‘birth to their own history.’”<sup>699</sup>

Violence, however, was only a supplement to the true scope and power of revolution, a supplement that was nonetheless dangerous. Violence “does not constitute the foundation, the substance of Revolution;” it was, Berchel quoted Engels, “the birth pangs of history” but not the birth itself. The problem with violence, no matter how necessary, was that it possessed its own logic, one that was difficult to control. “It can contort the revolutionary into a killing machine, unselective and cold, almost half-

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<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid.

blind.”<sup>700</sup> Violent revolution, Berchel suggested, too often devolved into a change in officeholders, with the revolutionaries simply replacing the rulers, rather than a change in the fundamental structures of society. But non-violence altered “not only structures but also consciousness.”<sup>701</sup> While in the course of a revolution violence might become inevitable, non-violence remained the superior form of struggle, for it not only challenged the oppressor physically but spiritually and morally, and in the act of challenge, created the new men and women that would enable the revolution to endure.

Despite a pronounced degree of circumspection toward the violent revolutions in Cuba, Vietnam and Algeria, Berchel argued that Antilleans must learn from these examples in thinking about making their own revolution in the Antilles.<sup>702</sup> The first principle was not to “underestimate the radical character of the changes to be made,” for revolutionary change had to extend beyond the political and social to a revolution in “social mentalities.” Revolutionary activity, in turn, required a vital “praxis;” otherwise, “our ideology, our Christianity, is condemned without it to be only a vain utopia.” Praxis was vital because Antilleans could not “believe naively that time will arrange things;” rather, citing Martin Luther King and Che Guevara, revolution required a “methodical organization.” Above all, revolutionaries must spurn “Manicheanism” for the revolutionaries’ task is “above all to be capable of creating a new situation... to work without cease to construct the future, I want to say to free ourselves from our thoughts of our prerevolutionary situation.”<sup>703</sup> Berchel concluded with quotes from Fanon, Césaire, Guevara, King and the Gospel of Matthew that touched on this latter point; he quoted

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<sup>700</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid., 26.

Guevara, saying, ““if the revolution is not for changing men, then what is it for?””<sup>704</sup> The task for Antilleans was to make their own revolution, in accordance with their history, their hopes, their personality. While violent revolution might prove unavoidable and even necessary due to the recalcitrance of power, the proper role for Catholics and for Catholic Antillean students in particular was to use non-violent means to shape and guide the revolution toward its true purpose: the creation of new men and women and new ways of being in the world.

Berchel’s long discussion of violence was symptomatic of the changing political worldview of Antillean Catholic students. Where, in the 1950s, the chief Catholic student intellectual Maddy Lastel had insisted that colonialism could be reformed and that revolutionary political change was not only unnecessary, but potentially counter-productive, Berchel urged anti-colonialist Catholic students to actively engage in the revolutionary struggle. While Berchel found violence similarly troubling, he urged Catholic students to revolutionary activism in part to push the anti-colonial revolution in a more peaceful and thus Christian direction. Equally enamored of Che Guevara and Martin Luther King Jr., Berchel spoke to the fascination unfolding liberation movements in the wider Americas had for Antillean students. Cuba, still representative of promise and a new direction, fascinated Antillean students, as did the tension within the African-American civil rights struggle, between the Christian humanism of King and the emerging Black Power position of Carmichael and others.<sup>705</sup> Casting around for solutions to both the Antillean crisis of faith and the intractability of the Antillean colonial

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<sup>704</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>705</sup> Diane Sorensen has a fascinating chapter on Che Guevara and the circulation of his image and memory among Latin American students in the 1960s and 1970s. Diane Sorensen, *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

situation, Antillean Catholic students increasingly looked abroad for political models.

Liberation, it seemed, lay elsewhere, but certainly outside of France.

### **From Anti-Colonialism to Revolution: the Martiniquan Students Association from the Algeria to the OJAM Trial, 1955-1964**

While *Alizés* and FAGEC offered a unique network for Catholic students, many were also members of the secular Antillean student federations. For Martiniquans, it was the AEM from 1946 and the AGEM from 1958 onwards; for Guadeloupeans, AGEG; and for Guyanese, the UEG. The secular student federations in many ways served the same purpose as the Rue Thibaud and its successor, FAGEC: they provided resources for Antillean students in the metropole to adjust to life in France, organized cultural and sporting activities, published bulletins and journals discussing the concerns and interests of Antillean students and provided forums for Antillean students to meet and socialize. Importantly, however, AGEM and AGEG also provided an official function; both organizations had been constituted under the 1901 Law of Association and were recognized as the official representative bodies of Martiniquan and Guadeloupean students.<sup>706</sup> They had the sole right to petition the government and ministries in the interest of Antillean students, and they were the official representatives of the Antillean students to the French National Student Union (UNEF).<sup>707</sup>

In many ways, both AGEM and AGEG followed an ideological trajectory similar to their Catholic fellow students. Each federation began with an ideological, political and philosophical eclecticism, representing the diversity of its membership that, across the

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<sup>706</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 280, Sureté Nationale, “Les Étudiants des Départements d’Outre-Mer en Métropole,” Juin 1963, 16, 63.

<sup>707</sup> Loza, 35-6.

course of the late 1950s and early 1960s, moved in a more concretely radical direction, hardening into a thoroughgoing radicalism following the 1959-1961 events in the Antilles. While FAGEC could only flirt with Marxism, or admire it while rejecting its underlying materialist philosophy, both AGEM and AGEG would embrace fully a revolutionary Marxist perspective by 1960, a position often in advance of the official Communist Parties of France, Martinique and Guadeloupe. The student federations, much to the concern of the French security forces, became a center for Antillean revolutionary and “anti-French” sentiment and organizing.

In this section, I will trace out the three principal moments in the development of the secular federations. First, I look at the early years of the AEM and its journal, the *Trait d'Union*. While AEM was the Martiniquan student federation and the *Trait d'Union* the “Bulletin of the AEM,” the journal regularly published submissions from Guadeloupean students, and occasionally published pieces by Guyanese, Réunionnais and African students resident in France; the *Trait d'Union* was in many ways an Antillean publication. In this section, I note the ideological and philosophical diversity of the AEM while noting that a fascination with anti-colonialism and an organizational relationship with the International Union of Students (UIE) indicated its already-existing left-wing orientation.

The second part of the chapter will look at the AEM’s reestablishment as the AGEM, a transformation that codified the federation’s shift in a more radical direction, a shift confirmed through the publication of a new journal, jointly-edited with AGEG, entitled *Matouba*. In its second iteration, the Martiniquan students’ federation explicitly staked out an autonomist/independentist position, actively analyzing, critiquing,

polemicizing and organizing against “French colonialism.” This activity would culminate in the third part of this section, the foundation of the Organization of Anti-Colonial Martiniquan Youth (OJAM), which attempted to unite young Antillean radicals in the metropole with those back on Martinique, uniting AGEM with other groups including the Young Communists, the youth wing of the CGT, young members of the Unified Socialist Party (PSU) and dissident members of the Progressive Party and Socialist Party youth organizations.<sup>708</sup> OJAM, as it came to be known, organized a series of conference, demonstrations and meetings throughout Martinique and the metropole in 1961 and 1962 that explicitly advocated for “autonomy” for Martinique and spoke of the need to develop the “national” consciousness of Martiniquans. The French state saw the group as a threat and beginning in 1963, arrested nearly two-dozen members of its leadership and put them on trial for subversion and attempting to overthrow the French state. Government repression and the trial of the OJAM activists forms the last part of this section, examining how the activists used the trial, and their metropolitan intellectual allies, to put French colonialism on trial.

The Antillean student movement, in the 1950s and 1960s, represented an important locus for the development of political and cultural nationalism; many ex-members of OJAM and the AGEM would go on to play active roles in the explicitly nationalist political and cultural organizations of the 1970s. Members joined Edouard Glissant’s *ACOMA* project, some joined Alfred-Marie Jeanne’s Martiniquan Independence Movement (MIM) while others joined the Antillean Trotskyist and Maoist political organizations founded in the wake of the 1967 GONG riots on Guadeloupe and

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<sup>708</sup> Loza, 125-128; The organizing call that went out for a Conference of Martiniquan Youth was published in several Martiniquan newspapers; for example: “Congrès de la Jeunesse Martiniquaise,” *Présence Socialiste*, 31 July 1961, 3.



the May 1968 events in Paris. For many of these figures, the student federations and their publications represented their first forays into political, cultural and economic analysis, and their first experiences of organizing and activism. The student movement thus played an important role in the development and institutionalization of an explicitly Antillean political and cultural consciousness.

### An Eclectic Anti-colonialism: 1955-1958

The appearance of *Trait d'Union* in 1955 indicated the true emergence of an Antillean student movement in the metropole. The main Antillean and Guyanese student federations had been founded in the late 1940s but had been quiet. While the AEM was founded in 1948, the AEM's first national congress was only held in 1952 and *Trait d'Union* did not appear until the end of 1955.<sup>709</sup> The publication of the journal, however, both announced the emergence of an organized Antillean student movement and served as the means towards shaping and developing this movement. It was also meant to serve as a means for organizing and uniting Antillean students resident in France. The AEM was also not the only Antillean student organization in metropolitan France; students had established local Antillean and Guyanese organizations in Bordeaux (AGEGAB), Montpellier (AMEGAS) and Toulouse (AEAGT). At its inception, the AEM was principally an organization of Antillean students resident in Paris.<sup>710</sup> One of the tasks that the *Trait d'Union* was to accomplish was to unite these disparate organizations into a single, nationwide student federation.<sup>711</sup> To accomplish this task, the journal, despite its being the bulletin of the Paris-based AEM, opened its pages to submissions from

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<sup>709</sup> Loza, 39.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>711</sup> "Pour une Association Générale," *Trait d'Union* (Mai-Juin 1955), 1-2.

members of the provincial student organizations, repeatedly appealing to its readers to become actively involved in the journal.<sup>712</sup>

Marxism and the Antillean student's relationship to it in both theory and in practice constituted a barrier to greater unity among Antillean students. For Antillean students who were hostile or indifferent to Marxism, or were skeptical of the PCF and its Martiniquan analogue, the heavy representation of young Martiniquan Communists on the pages of the *Trait d'Union* was worrying. While the AEM remained a non-partisan organization and its leadership reflected the breadth and diversity of the Antillean student movement, the journal was dominated by Communist and Marxist students. During the five years of *Trait d'Union*'s run (1955-1960), the most frequent contributors were Henri Pied, Raoul Capitaine, Guy Dufond, Jacques Adelaïde and Daniel Blérald. Pied was a medical student, a member of the PCM and, according to police intelligence, one of the "chief propagandists of autonomy."<sup>713</sup> Dufond was studying literature, was the Secretary General of the Martiniquan Communist Youth and was, according to the French police, one of the "most dangerous" of the Martiniquan radicals due to his "arrogance, his devotion, his vitality and his sense of organization."<sup>714</sup> Capitaine regularly appeared in police files, while Jacques Adélaïde was a history student and member of the Communist Party.<sup>715</sup> Blérald was not, as a literature student, a member of the Communist Party, but he was sympathetic to Marxism and participated in UIE conferences in Warsaw and

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<sup>712</sup> "Editorial," *Trait d'Union* (Juin 1957), 2-4; "Editorial," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier 1956), 1-2.

<sup>713</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, Memo n° 958/CAB, "Affaire d'atteinte à l'intégrité du territoire," 16 March 1963.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

<sup>715</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 146, Memo n° 2388/CAB, "Bourse d'Etudes," 2 July 1962; Adélaïde, using his full name, Adélaïde-Merlande, would go on to be a professor at the Université des Antilles-Guyane and an important historian of the French Antilles. See "Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande, un parcours" in Lucien Abenon, Danielle Bégot and Jean-Pierre Sainton, eds., *Construire l'histoire antillaise; Mélanges offerts à Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande* (Paris: Editions du CTHS, 2002), 29-46.

Peking.<sup>716</sup> Other Marxist members of AEM, who wrote less regularly for *Trait d'Union*, included René Corail, an art student, and Marlène Hospice, a literature student.<sup>717</sup>

The editors of *Trait d'Union* nonetheless maintained an open editorial policy and actively encouraged all students, regardless of politics or ideology, to submit their work to the journal. Writing in the June 1957 issue, the editors Jacques Adélaïde and Lucien Montaise urged Antillean students to contribute to and participate in the journal's activities and said if the journal appeared as the "voice" of Marxist students, it was in part the result of the fact that non-Marxist students submitted fewer articles and studies to the journal.<sup>718</sup> When Aimé Césaire famously resigned from the French Communist Party, *Trait d'Union* published articles defending and criticizing his decision.<sup>719</sup> Despite its non-partisanship, from the early stages *Trait d'Union* was anti-assimilationist. While it remained divided over a concrete future direction for the Antilles, the broad editorial consensus was culturally nationalist and politically autonomist, perceiving its own role as spurring and developing an Antillean nationalist consciousness.

The Antillean student activists' anti-assimilationist position combined cultural nationalism and ideological Marxism with the political and personal disappointment that many felt toward the failures and betrayals of assimilation. Antillean students repeatedly criticized the fact that assimilation had been principally an administrative affair and that

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<sup>716</sup> Blérald would later adopt a Black Nationalist position, change his last name to Boukman (in honor of the legendary initiator of the Haitian Revolution) and become a well-respected and well-known playwright and Creole poet. J.L. Pallister, "Daniel Boukman: Literary and Political Revolutionary," *Dalhousie French Studies* 26 (1994), 21-9.

<sup>717</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, Memo n° 1329/CAB, "Affaire Armougon, atteinte à l'intégrité du Territoire," 9 April 1963; AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, Memo n° 637/CAB, "Affaire Armougon – Atteinte à l'Intégrité du territoire," 23 February 1963.

<sup>718</sup> Jacques Adélaïde and L.C. Montaise, "Invitation à continuer," *Trait d'Union* (June 1957), 3-4.

<sup>719</sup> Serge Patient, "La Démission d'Aimé Césaire: Espoir ou Deception?" and Groupe André Aliker, "Le Problème Fondamental," both in *Trait d'Union* (Janvier 1957); Paul Gibus, "Césaire et Stalinisme," *Trait d'Union* (Juin 1957); "Ne tirez pas sur lui," Ibid.

the hopes that so many DOM residents had invested in the promise of a “total assimilation” had been disappointed by the French state’s repeated recalcitrance to extending the full rights of French citizenship into the DOMs. In this, Antillean students reflected, perhaps somewhat more intensely, the disappointment that had alienated and radicalized a significant segment of the Antillean intellectual and political class.

Despite its anti-assimilationism, the AEM radicals stopped short of explicit calls for revolutionary anti-colonial struggle against the French state. Lucien Montaise’s article for the January 1957 issue encapsulated the Antillean students’ initial moderate anti-assimilationist political position.<sup>720</sup> Montaise article defended Antillean, particularly Martiniquan, students from the criticism of pro-assimilationist writers and politicians; mostly pro-Gaullist, they criticized the students’ political radicalism, accusing them of disloyalty, betrayal and hatred for France. Montaise rhetorically turned his critics’ argument on its head, arguing that it was Antillean students who, in criticizing France’s management of the Antilles, were in fact most loyal to the principles of French civilization. “The surprising truth, as paradoxical as this might seem, it is we Martiniquan students... who are in the process of creating Dialogue, of reconnecting with the authentic France.”<sup>721</sup> Nonetheless, for engaging with France and French culture critically, Antillean students accused of “hating France” and of being “revolutionaries,” “anti-French” and “ungrateful children of the Patrie.”<sup>722</sup> Montaise disputed this depiction, stating that the students in fact were “for justice and for truth, eminently French qualities.”<sup>723</sup>

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<sup>720</sup> L.C. Montaise, “Sommes-nous des apprentis-citoyens?,” *Trait d’Union* (Janvier 1957), 36-9.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid.

While Montaise's suggested that the students' undertaking was in part political – to forge “future citizens respectful of our responsibilities to the Antillean community” – their critique was foremost a cultural one. While acknowledging the French influence on their selves and their development, the students emphasized the non-French influence on Antillean culture and society. While “the ‘false elite’ of Martinique, ashamed of their origins” denied the reality of Antillean culture and society, AEM instead “strongly [emphasized] the importance of the Negro-African component in the making of Antillean culture.”<sup>724</sup> Assimilation had obscured this reality behind myths of the Antilles as “shards of France palpitating beneath other skies” and denied the Antilleans their own personality and history.<sup>725</sup> It encouraged “passivity and waiting... it maintains the Antilles at the depths of their impasse” and discourages “any perspective on the future.” The refused to “play the role of the servile and unthinking valet to Colonialism” and instead “[hoped] to liberate the Antilles from forms of exploitation” that had immiserated the masses and denied Antilleans “their own personality.”<sup>726</sup> Montaise concluded by mocking those who attacked the Antillean students for their Marxism and their criticisms of Assimilation and the Antilles' situation. Full of “sincere enthusiasm,” the students sought only to serve their society and for that they were “ostracized.”<sup>727</sup>

The task for the young Antillean was to break with the ossified thinking of the past and to renew the Antilles, intellectually, economically, politically and culturally. Montaise clarified this role for the young Antillean “elite” in an article published the

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<sup>724</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>725</sup> Montaise ironically quotes de Gaulle's remarks from his 1956 trip to the Antilles. Richard D.E. Burton, *La famille coloniale: la Martinique et la mère patrie, 1789-1992* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), 171-6.

<sup>726</sup> Montaise, 38.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid.

following year.<sup>728</sup> Once again mocking de Gaulle— in this instance de Gaulle’s contention that the Antilles were one of the “most beautiful French realizations” – Montaise urged his readers to think anew and break with the outmoded, fearful thinking of the past. The Antilles, he argued, “did not lack for intellectuals” only too happy to drown youthful vitality in “barren and endless talk of chauvinistic nationalism, parochialism, of pretentious wishes; they pore through the Littré to exactly define the word Nation.”<sup>729</sup> Martiniquan youth “must ‘divorce’ themselves from this resigned elite” and form a new “engaged elite.”<sup>730</sup> It was folly to “believe that, in a colonial country, we can ‘abolish inequality without abolishing the regime itself.’” The task for this new Antillean elite was to “extract” the myth of the Antilles as “‘shards of France’” from their “thoughts and hearts” and to “surpass” the “bureaucrats” and “commissions of inquiry” that had lead the Antilles into their “impasse.”<sup>731</sup>

Despite his bitter critique of Antillean society and intellectual life, Montaise offered few concrete proposals to alleviate the Antilles’ colonial situation. He understood the recent reorganization of the Communist Party into the PCM and Césaire’s establishment of the Progressive Party as signifying the promising beginning of a true Martiniquan national movement that, in coordination with their Guadeloupean and Guyanese equivalents, could form and shape a true Antillean movement.<sup>732</sup> An alliance of the Antilles and Guyane was vital because alone and isolated it would be impossible for

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<sup>728</sup> Lucien Montaise, “A propos de l’Assimilation: assimiler, mais ne pas être assimilé,” *Trait d’Union* (Janvier-Février 1958), 10-17.

<sup>729</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

<sup>732</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

each individual to form a viable independent nation. The British Antilles, Montaise argued, clearly demonstrated the truth of this perspective.

Montaise's ambiguous prescription for the future and his strategic recourse to the British Antilles was reflective of the broader ambiguity of *Trait d'Union* and the Antillean students movement. While AEM activists enunciated a thorough and developed critique of the failures of departmentalization and the betrayals of assimilation, they were yet to articulate a coherent program for the future. Even in doctrinaire statements of submitted by orthodox Communist Party activists, the vision for the Antilles' future was much more opaque than concrete. In an effort to enumerate a clear vision for the future, Antillean activists increasingly took their inspiration from anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements from other parts of the globe. *Trait d'Union* featured articles and reports that studied decolonization, development and anti-colonial organizing in the British Caribbean, North and West Africa, Haiti, Russia, Cuba and Guinea.<sup>733</sup>

Additionally, Antillean students regularly participated in the international congresses organized by groups including the International Union of Students (UIE), the World Federation of Democratic Youth (FMJD) and the Communist Party. Antillean students regularly traveled throughout the Eastern bloc, and sometimes further afield. Guy Dufond had attended the and UIE-organized 1955 World Festival of Youth And Students in Warsaw, while Daniel Blérald, Paul Gibus (a Guadeloupean student and member of FAGEC), Jacques Adélaïde and several other students attended the 1957

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<sup>733</sup> Daniel Blérald, "Aux Ecoutes des Antilles," *Trait d'Union* (Avril-Mai 1958); "VIème Festival de la Jeunesse, Moscou," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier-Février 1958); "Crise politique au Haiti," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier 1957); "Algerie l'an V," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier 1959); Paul Sobesky, "Perspectives nouvelles," *Trait d'Union* (Avril 1960).

Festival in Moscow.<sup>734</sup> Daniel Blérald also attended the 1958 UIE congress in Beijing and was invited to travel around China on a tour for nearly a month, visiting factory towns, cultural and historical sites, and concluding with the October 1<sup>st</sup> celebration and a reception for the foreign students attended by Mao and other high-ranking members of the Chinese government.<sup>735</sup> Despite his fascination with China, a careful reading of his account betrays a certain skepticism and even ambivalence; the parade of factory towns and lists of accomplishment fascinate Blérald less than China's difference, its antiquity and utter strangeness in comparison to his native Antilles.

Despite their extensive connections to Communist parties, *Trait d'Union* remained true to its intent of representing the broadest range of Antillean student opinion, up to its final issues in 1960 and 1961. Articles that appeared in 1959 and 1960 covered a range of topics and represented a range of political orientations. Paul Sobesky, a regular contributor, published an article on Eric Williams' Trinidad and the necessity of closer relations between the French and British Antilles, and another on the course of the Algerian revolution.<sup>736</sup> Blérald published an opinion piece admitting and defending the heterogeneity of the Martiniquan students association, reminding his readers and colleagues "our community is not a monolithic bloc."<sup>737</sup> Despite the reminder and appeals to unity and to maintaining ideological diversity, by 1960, the Martiniquan

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<sup>734</sup> Guy Dufond, "Le Vème Festival Mondial, Varsovie," *Trait d'Union* (Mai-Juin 1955), 3-11; "Dossier: VIème Festival Mondiale de la Jeunesse," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier-Février 1958), 42-62. On the UIE and the festivals: Philip Altbach, "The International Student Movement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5 (January 1970), 156-174.

<sup>735</sup> Daniel Blérald, "35 Jours en Chine," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier 1959), 62-71.

<sup>736</sup> Paul Sobesky, "Closer Tie of French Isles with West Indies Urged," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier 1959), 9-14 (English title in the original); "Algeria An VI," *Ibid.*, 15-17.

<sup>737</sup> Daniel Blérald, "Osons le faire," *Trait d'Union* (Janvier 1959), 82-5; Félix Chaleau, "Osons le dire," *Ibid.*, 74-81. .



student movement, much like its Catholic compatriots, was moving definitively in the direction of revolutionary Marxism.

“After Algeria, the Antilles?”: AGEM, OJAM and the Turn to Revolution, 1960-1965

Much like their compatriots in FAGEC, the radicalization of the Antillean student federation was a reaction to the events that were unfolding around it in the late 1950s. First and most shocking were the 1959 riots in Fort-de-France; almost an entire issue of *Trait d'Union* was devoted to recounting and analyzing the events of what one anonymous writer referred to as “Martinique Year 1.”<sup>738</sup> Articles discussed Alain Plénel’s expulsion from Martinique, a chronological account of the riots, police repression, the formation of the Committee for the Defense of Public Liberties and the legal and political possibilities of rewriting the Antilles’ statute in the constitution.

The second important catalyst was the Cuban Revolution. The success of Castro’s guerilla struggle profoundly changed the main Antillean student activists’ perspective on the political possibilities for the French Antilles. Active revolutionary struggle seemed not only possible but desirable and revolutionary Cuba seemed a natural ally, even patron, for an Antillean revolutionary movement. Politics, no matter how radical the desired outcome, seemed quiescent and conformist.<sup>739</sup>

Finally, in 1958, AEM activists succeeded in uniting the metropolitan student movement into a single organization renamed the General Association of Martiniquan Students (AGEM).<sup>740</sup> AGEM was an explicitly autonomist group, and autonomist

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<sup>738</sup> “Martinique An 1,” *Trait d'Union* (Avril 1960), 3. The title of the article is an homage to Fanon’s 1959 book, *L’an V de la révolution algérienne*, itself an homage to Victor Serge.

<sup>739</sup> Raoul Capitaine, “La Havane, capitale de l’espoir,” *Matouba* n° 3 (Avril 1963), 13-17.

<sup>740</sup> “Prèmière Congrès des Etudiants Martiniquais,” *Trait d'Union* (Avril-Mai 1968), 53-69.

principles were codified into its statutes.<sup>741</sup> Further, almost its entire leadership came from the editorial board of *Trait d'Union* and the autonomist tendency within the Antillean student population; those who opposed the autonomist line refused to join the new organization.<sup>742</sup> The April 1960 issue would be the last appearance of *Trait d'Union*, which was replaced in 1961 by *Matouba*, a joint publication of the Martiniquan and Guadeloupean student federations.

The journal's title indicated the political commitments of AGEM and AGEF. *Matouba* was the name of the fort on Guadeloupe where, in 1802, the Martiniquan-born Louis Delgrès and his Guadeloupean and Martiniquan followers blew themselves up rather than submit to re-enslavement. *Matouba*, the name, and Delgrès, the person, symbolized Martiniquan and Guadeloupean unity and the struggle of Antilleans to liberate themselves from white and French oppression. The cover carried a Delgrès quote: "Resistance to oppression is a natural right." In many ways, *Matouba* was a continuation of *Trait d'Union*, continuing its editorial tradition of mingling poetry, literary criticism and historical inquiry with political polemic. Nonetheless, *Matouba*, unlike *Trait d'Union*, served officially as a joint publication of AGEM and AGEF, bearing the subtitle, "Review of Antillean students from Martinique and Guadeloupe." Its editorial board balanced representatives from both organizations, and its content reflected its dual mission.<sup>743</sup> *Matouba* reported on the student federations' conferences, but in distinction to *Trait d'Union*, it devoted fewer pages to reporting on internal matters. In

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<sup>741</sup> Ibid., 56-7.

<sup>742</sup> "Editorial," *Trait d'Union* (Avril-Mai 1958), 2-3; Loza, 54-6.

<sup>743</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 280, Sureté Nationale, "Les Étudiants des Départements d'Outre-Mer en Métropole," Juin 1963, 57-60.

appearance (it was published rather than mimeographed), content and style, it seemed to aspire to be a “little magazine” rather than a bulletin or newsletter.

The post-1959 political repression in Martinique particularly concerned AGEM activists and their allies from Guadeloupe. When reports of the riots and the subsequent deaths of three young Martiniquans at the hands of the CRS were broadcast on metropolitan radio and published in metropolitan newspapers, AGEM had been meeting in its Third Congress in Bordeaux. Immediately, Antillean students organized demonstrations and rallied international and metropolitan public support. AGEM’s allies in the international student movement telegraphed the Ministry of the Interior and the Martinique prefect’s office in condemnation of the violence and in support of the Martiniquan people. AGEM itself sent letters of solidarity back to Martinique, telegraphed complaints to the prefect and Minister of the Interior Jacques Soustelle, and drafted resolutions, sent to the press, criticizing the government and demanding a “new relationship” between France and Martinique.<sup>744</sup>

AGEM, with AGEG’s assistance, organized a 16 January meeting at the Paris Mutualité to “clarify French public opinion” on the December incidents.<sup>745</sup> Participants in the meeting included Daniel Mayer of the Human Rights League, G. Phalante of the Movement against Racism and Anti-Semitism, Anta Diop of *Présence Africaine*, Michel Leiris, Marcel Manville, Albert Béville and Edouard Glissant.<sup>746</sup> The organizers intended that the meeting would present to the French public and the Paris press a colonialist

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<sup>744</sup> “Les Etudiants Martiniquais et les événements de Décembre,” *Justice*, 28 Janvier 1960.

<sup>745</sup> “Martinique An 1,” *Trait d’Union* (Avril 1960), 2-6.

<sup>746</sup> G. Phalante seems to be a mistake, and is probably Charles Palante, of the Movement Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, commonly known by its present acronym, MRAP.

explanation for the violence in Fort-de-France.<sup>747</sup> Jean Barfleur, a member of AGEF, presented the principal speech of the gathering, locating the origins of the riots in the poor social conditions of the Antilles, the result of the colonial system.<sup>748</sup> He portrayed assimilation as a failed political and social project, which had done little to improve social conditions and denied the existence of distinct Martiniquan and Guadeloupean “personalities.”<sup>749</sup> He also raised the specter of Algeria, warning that, “under these conditions, it is to be feared that the situation in our countries will worsen and degenerate into the drama that is now tearing apart Algeria.”<sup>750</sup> The meeting concluded with a demand that the government change the DOM statute and immediately withdraw the CRS and other forces from Martinique.<sup>751</sup>

The 1959 riots also marked a realization among members of AGEM that they had to more actively organize in their home islands. The deaths of three young Martiniquans at the hands of the CRS outraged many Martiniquan youth, even those not actively involved in politics. Meetings organized in late 1959 and early 1960 by the Communists, Progressives and the CGT featured significant youth participation.<sup>752</sup> The recall of Alain Plénel, the popular vice-rector of the Lycée Schoelcher, to Paris and his subsequent forced exile from Martinique, was a further source of anger; on January 30<sup>th</sup> Lycée Schoelcher students walked out of classes and nearly 200 students and young workers traveled to Lamentin airport to protest Plénel’s expulsion from Martinique.<sup>753</sup> Witnessing the renewed activism among young Martiniquans, AGEM activists resolved to construct

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<sup>747</sup> “Martinique An 1,” 4.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>751</sup> *Justice*, 21 Janvier 1960, 2.

<sup>752</sup> “Ce que pensent les jeunes des événements de Décembre,” *Justice*, 14 Janvier 1960 and 21 Janvier 1960; “Des centaines des Jeunes à notre meeting,” *Justice*, 28 Janvier 1960.

<sup>753</sup> “La Prise de conscience de la Jeunesse,” *Justice*, 4 Février 1960.

links between their student movement in Paris and the movements of young students and workers in the Antilles. Henri Pied expressed this sentiment, writing that AGEM had “another great goal,” to form a broader organization with our student comrades in Guadeloupe and Guyane... and another where all young Antilleans can find their place.”<sup>754</sup> Pied urged his comrades to transcend purely syndical concerns, their elite station, and to link their efforts to the efforts of their fellow Antilleans. In the wake of the 1959 riots, AGEM activists worked to build connections with other Antillean groups, including lycée and technical students, and workers, both in the metropole and back in the Caribbean.

Antillean activists followed up Pied’s suggestion, broadening the scope of their activism and their interests. AGEM, AGEG and the UEG worked to build closer connections between the three Caribbean student federations and discussed uniting the three groups, in anticipation of the eventual unification of their three homelands into a single confederation.<sup>755</sup> Student activists also engaged with working class Antilleans, at home and in the metropole, interviewing them for their political, social and cultural opinions, and investigating their conditions of work and life.<sup>756</sup> Kristin Ross noted how the *enquête*, or inquiry, emerged as a political tool for student militants in the 1960s.<sup>757</sup> The *enquête*, Ross writes, was an attempt to “know about the direct experience of the workers... by ‘going to the people,’ learning from them.”<sup>758</sup> What differentiated the *enquête* from other types of surveys was its explicitly revolutionary purpose, the

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<sup>754</sup> Henri Pied, “Quelques Remarques,” *Trait d’Union* (Avril 1960), 40.

<sup>755</sup> Lucien Leopoldie, “Notre nécessaire Union,” *Matouba* 1 (Décembre 1961), 10-12.

<sup>756</sup> *Trait d’Union* had carried out studies before, but it rarely involved interviews and fieldwork.

<sup>757</sup> Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 109-113. Ross links the *enquête* to Maoism, but in the case of Antillean students, few were Maoist before the 1970s.

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

dialectical relationship it established between the interviewer and the interviewed, where each educated the other in the political realities of capitalism, or in the case of the Antillean student *enquêtes*, colonialism.<sup>759</sup> In the course of the interview, the elite student was educated to the realities of the working classes, while the working class interlocutor was politicized through answering and reflecting upon the interview questions.

Antillean student activists used *enquêtes* to both gauge the nationalist consciousness of the Antillean working class and to build links between the student movement and the workers' movement. The first issue of *Matouba* featured an interview between a member of AGEG and a worker at the Labinal SA plant in Paris. The worker, G. Cocognon, was Guadeloupean and a union activist. In the interview he guided his interviewer through the process of emigration to France, employment and unemployment, factory conditions and other issues important to working class Antilleans.<sup>760</sup> Antilleans emigrated to France, Cocognon explained, and would continue to emigrate to France because compared to the chronic unemployment and poverty in the islands, "France is for them almost paradise."<sup>761</sup> *Matouba* also published an editorial by Cocognon, exhorting Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans, students and workers, to unite to fight for "autonomy" and against "monoculture" and "monopolies."<sup>762</sup>

The second issue of *Matouba* carried a more ambitious *enquête*, featuring interviews with fourteen Antillean workers from both Martinique and Guadeloupe. The interviews, conducted by AGEM militant Guy Zebus, touched on family life, work,

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<sup>759</sup> Ibid., 110-111.

<sup>760</sup> "La Vie Ouvrière, ou la condition des ouvriers Antillo-Guyanais," *Matouba* 1 (Décembre 1961), 13-14.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>762</sup> Cocognon, "Un camarade ouvrier parle de la situation polique," *Matouba* 1 (Décembre 1961), 15.

leisure, future plans, as well as politics.<sup>763</sup> Family life and residency in the metropole presented special difficulties for the workers. Several workers were married but were living alone in hotels, having been forced to leave their families back in the Caribbean due to the cost of bringing them over and the difficulty of finding housing.<sup>764</sup> Those who found adequate, permanent housing complained of living in the banlieus, a long commute from their jobs, and of the poor state of the housing. M.Z., who worked as a handler in a wine warehouse, bitterly remarked that, “What I cannot understand is that the French, among us, are better housed than us, and here it’s us who are poorly housed.”<sup>765</sup> The workers also complained of low wages, short, informal contracts, lack of union representation and racism.

Many confessed to feelings of disillusionment, isolation and alienation. They told Zebus that they spent most of their time with fellow Antilleans or with Africans, due to the hostility or indifference of the French. M.Z. stated that, “To me, I am French... But for the French, I am not French. They repeat it to me without cease.”<sup>766</sup> Another worker, M.C., an employee in the Social Security office, spoke of disillusionment. Living in Martinique he had been devoted to France, but he had since learned to “understand the French, but not love them.”<sup>767</sup> M.Y., a Renault worker, speculated that, “even if I had integrated, I wouldn’t be respected.”<sup>768</sup> Zebus seized upon this sense of alienation in his questioning, asking his subjects about their political opinions. Zebus stated that everyone he interviewed, not matter their social station, was opposed to assimilation; “France,” he

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<sup>763</sup> Guy Zebus, “La vie matérielle en France du travailleur antillais,” *Matouba* 2 (Avril 1962), 11-14.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid.

<sup>766</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

suggested, “was a school for nationalism.”<sup>769</sup> Even M.A., who owned his apartment and felt integrated into French society, supported some form of autonomy.<sup>770</sup> Older workers favored a political settlement, while younger workers suspected that “violent revolution” was inevitable in order to truly decolonize Martinique. Zebus concluded that the emigrants had discovered in France the “colonial fact” and that had left them “disillusioned.” Their disillusionment demanded a solution and it was the Antillean students’ task to connect their activism with the struggles and hardships Antillean emigrants faced in the metropole.

The *enquêtes* provided a confirmation of what many AGEM and AGECE activists already suspected and desired: that the way forward for the Antillean student movement, if it was committed to the decolonization of the Antilles, was to expand the student movement beyond the narrow milieu of the students themselves. The next task for the Antillean student movement was to begin to organize young Antillean workers in the Caribbean alongside disillusioned Antillean emigrants in the metropole into a single revolutionary organization. To accomplish this task, AGEM activists organized a “Conference of Martiniquan Youth,” to be held in Fort-de-France during the summer vacation so that metropolitan and departmental students and youth would be able to meet as a single body.

In the summer of 1961, AGEM, in coordination with the Communist Youth (JC), the Progressive Youth (JPM) and the Democratic Youth (JDM), published an appeal in the main Martinique newspapers announcing the first Conference of Martiniquan Youth, to be held August 24-26 in Fort-de-France; the meeting would coincide with an identical

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<sup>769</sup> Ibid.

<sup>770</sup> Ibid.



meeting of youth taking place on Guadeloupe.<sup>771</sup> The appeal reminded readers that youth constituted “half the Martiniquan population” and the conference was organized because they had “the right and duty to express their opinion on the construction of the future.”<sup>772</sup>

The program of the conference was broadly themed, in part to patch over theoretical and practical differences between the different Martiniquan youth organizations and encourage unity. The organizing committee outlined three broad themes that the congress would tackle: “the permanence of colonialism” despite departmentalization; to make known to the Martiniquan people that only “to establish new relations with France excluding colonialism, the sole solution actually capable of resolving the essential problems posed to Martinique and the rising generation”; and to recognize Martiniquan youth’s “contribution to the struggle of world youth for the liberty of peoples to self-determination, for peace, and for friendship between youth of the whole world.”<sup>773</sup> Despite the broad themes prepared for the conference, there was almost immediate dissension. The Catholic student group SEL withdrew from the conference almost immediately and later, the Progressive Youth, under pressure from the PPM, withdrew as well.<sup>774</sup> Dissension among the different youth organizations and the reduction of the conference to only a core group of autonomist and Communist groups provided a pretext for the Prefect, Michel Grollemund, to ban the conference a few days before it was set to start at the end of August.<sup>775</sup>

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<sup>771</sup> Loza, 99, 175.

<sup>772</sup> “Congrès de la Jeunesse Martiniquaise,” *Présence Socialiste*, 31 July 1961.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid.

<sup>774</sup> Ibid.

<sup>775</sup> ADM Cote n° 202W12, Préfecture de la Martinique, Arrête n° 61-857, 7 Août 1961; ADM Cote n° 202W12, Préfecture de la Martinique, Arrête n° 61-893, 18 Août 1961.

Despite the interdiction of the conference, AGEM activists were unbowed and resolved to continue their efforts to establish an organization that united metropolitan and Caribbean youth into a single organization. The following year, during the summer vacation, AGEM activists established a new organization, the Coordinating Committee of Martiniquan Youth and fanned out across Martinique to speak on the necessity of autonomy for the Antilles and to recruit other young activists to the new organization.<sup>776</sup> At a “boisterous” summer meeting in Fort-de-France that reportedly drew 2,000 people, activists from AGEM, the Communist Youth, FAGEC radicals and unaffiliated student radicals from the Lycée Schoelcher and Lycée Polytechnique in Fort-de-France formed OJAM.<sup>777</sup> In coordination with the Communist Youth and AGEM, OJAM produced a series of manifestoes, staged demonstrations and conferences and recruited both working and middle class Martiniquan students against “French colonialism.”

The Anticolonial Youth represented the first explicitly nationalist formation in the Antilles. While both the Martiniquan and Guadeloupean Communist parties flirted with outright nationalism, each protected both its electoral fortunes and the liberty of its leaders by advocating autonomy within the “framework of France” or a “change in statute.”<sup>778</sup> The main programmatic expression of the ambivalent Communist position was articulated in the Communist poet Gilbert Gratiant’s 1961 essay, *Île Fédérée Française de la Martinique*, in which Gratiant laid out the moral and political case for a

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<sup>776</sup> Loza, 122.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid., 120-6.

<sup>778</sup> During the wave of repression that followed the 1959 riots, the three main animators of *Justice* – Camille Sylvestre, Armand Nicolas and Georges Gratiant – were indicted for articles they had written. From that point on, PCM members stopped signing their names to particularly contentious articles.

federal solution permitting the Antilles greater local autonomy but stopped short of calling for complete independence.<sup>779</sup>

While OJAM activists similarly couched their political project in the language of “autonomy” – in part to avoid the sanction of the French state – they nonetheless understood Martinique to be a “nation,” one part of a larger Antillean nation. In an interview with *Justice*, published shortly after OJAM’s formation, an anonymous member spelled out the philosophical underpinnings of the group’s politics: “The essential theme turned around the Originality, the Authenticity and the Unity of the Martiniquan People, as much from the historical, geographical, cultural and psychological point of view as from the ethnic. From this was born the conviction that an Antillean nation, today stifled, bullied, dismantled by the diverse colonialisms in the Antilles and which can truly bloom only with the complete suppression of the Colonial yoke.”<sup>780</sup> While the student concludes with a call for greater “autonomy,” OJAM’s vision of future political action radically exceeded Gratiant’s. The ultimate project for OJAM, and its Guadeloupean counterparts, was the eventual integration of Martinique into a Caribbean, rather than a French, federation.

The goal was, in short, the “national liberation” of Martinique in coordination with the national liberation of Guadeloupe and Guyane. This future vision of Antillean political and social organization was clearly articulated in both the AGEM pamphlet, “The Students of Martinique and the Struggle for National Liberation in the Antilles,” and in the pages of *Matouba*. The pamphlet, published in early 1962, was composed of excerpts from a report submitted to the 4<sup>th</sup> AGEM Congress, held in Bordeaux in

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<sup>779</sup> Gilbert Gratiant, *Île fédérée française de la Martinique: écrit de moral politique* (Paris: Solanges, 1961).

<sup>780</sup> “Entretien avec les Etudiants Martiniquais,” *Justice*, 16 Août 1962.

December 1961.<sup>781</sup> Opening with a poem from Pablo Neruda – “Open your eyes, wronged peoples/everywhere there are Sierre Maestras!” – the report documented the economic and social misery of Martinique, concluding with a forceful argument for Martinique’s “national characteristics.”<sup>782</sup> Martinique was “a nation (*patrie*)... like Guadeloupe... like Puerto Rico, like Cuba, like Haiti, like the Dominican Republic, like Trinidad...”<sup>783</sup> The pamphlet concluded with an appeal to Guadeloupean, Guyanese and Réunionnais students to form a common front to combat their common enemy, French colonialism.<sup>784</sup>

The emerging idea of a French Caribbean nation uniting Guadeloupe, Guyane and Martinique was given clearer shape in a 1963 *Matouba* article, “For the Unity of the Antilles and Guyana under French domination.”<sup>785</sup> Unity between the islands and Guyane did not mean assimilation; it meant simply a unity of struggle. “Unity of struggle does not rest in the existence of a single Antillo-Guyanese people under French domination, and does not postulate the merger of our three peoples.”<sup>786</sup> French assimilation would not be swapped for Antillean homogeneity; each people would be free to determine its own personality. Rather, unity was based in common problems and a common need to combat the legacies of French colonialism, a legacy that could only be overcome in common. “Unity will mean only that one government will be placed at the head of our three countries, which will form a single state.”<sup>787</sup> OJAM and *Matouba* ultimately imagined that a French Caribbean federation was a necessity. Only unity could guarantee that

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<sup>781</sup> IISH, BRO 554/14, Comité Executif de l’AGEM, *Les Etudiants de la Martinique et la Lutte de Libération Nationale aux Antilles* (Paris, 1962).

<sup>782</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>783</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>784</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>785</sup> “Pour l’unité des Antilles et de la Guyane sous domination française,” *Matouba* 3 (Avril 1963), 7-9.

<sup>786</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>787</sup> *Ibid.*

independence would be economically and politically viable; once this state established, the new French Caribbean federation would be able to insert itself into the broader Caribbean and the broader anti-colonial struggle.

### **The OJAM Trial**

The formation of OJAM, its talk of an independent and viable French Caribbean state and its activists' links to Cuba was of great concern to French security forces. OJAM activists were under close police surveillance, on Martinique and in the metropole.<sup>788</sup> The state used various means, overt and covert, to undermine the new organization and harass its membership. Starting in the spring of 1963, the prefect Grollemund in coordination with the Overseas Ministry initiated a review of student scholarships. The purpose was to ascertain the political affiliations of Martiniquan students receiving government aid to study in the metropole and to begin proceedings to revoke scholarships for students involved in radical political activism. Grollemund and Police Intelligence (*Renseignements Généraux*, RG) monitored the travel, publications and public utterances of Martiniquan student activists, noting their political sympathies and recommending that those who advocated for autonomy or independence have their scholarships revoked.<sup>789</sup> Particular targets included AGEM leadership, with the Minister of State for Overseas France, working off Grollemund's list, recommended to the Ministry of Education that Marlène Hospice, Raoul Capitaine, Michel Gelard-Thomachot, Renaud Jouye de Grandmaison, Rodolphe Desiré and other radical students

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<sup>788</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 280, "Atteinte à la Surêté de l'Etat." Also, ADM Cote n° 202W12, Folder "Etudiants."

<sup>789</sup> ADM Cote n° 202w12, Memo n° 391/CAB, "A/S des membres du nouveau bureau de l'AGEM," 27 Février 1962; ADM Cote n° 202w12, Memo n° 826/SN/ST/CAR., "Activité de l'Association Générale des Etudiants Martiniquais (A.G.E.M.)," 17 Décembre 1962.

have their scholarships revoked.<sup>790</sup> At the end of the summer, Grollemund again attempted to shut down the movement in its infancy, pursuing the AGEM leaders in Martinique – Henri Pied, Renaud de Grandmaison and Josiane Saint-Louis – on trumped up charges of having subverted the Young Chamber of Commerce’s annual summer program for Martinique.<sup>791</sup> The three were arrested, interrogated and indicted in September were threatening the integrity and security of the state.<sup>792</sup>

The prosecution of Pied, Grandmaison and Saint-Louis was only a preview of the efforts the French state would undertake to crush OJAM. The following spring, the state moved with its full force against the organization, in an incident that came to be known as “the OJAM Affair” and the “Mardi Gras Plot.”<sup>793</sup> In March 1963 Grollemund announced on Army Radio that he had uncovered an OJAM plot to attack government installations on Martinique.<sup>794</sup> A young official in the tariff and customs office, Henri Armougon, had been arrested after a bundle of documents detailing OJAM plans to “attack the Gendarmes” and to “deploy troops” to “certain points” to “permit disorder to develop in the interior... and in Fort-de-France” were found by police intelligence.<sup>795</sup> While the plot had been broken up at an “embryonic stage,” its goal, Grollemund

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<sup>790</sup> ADM Cote n° 202w12, Memo n° 4312/CAB, “Agitation Etudiante – Association Générale des Etudiants Martiniquais,” 4 Octobre 1962; ADM Cote n° 202w12, Folder “Etudiants,” Memo n° 1137/CAB, 7 Juin 1962.

<sup>791</sup> Loza, 124.

<sup>792</sup> ADM Cote n° 202w12, RG, Memo n° 260/RG, 16 Août 1962; ADM Cote n° 202w12, Memo n° 1735/DOM/CAB/SG, “Association Générale des étudiants Martiniquais,” 30 Août 1962.

<sup>793</sup> Gesner Mencé, *L'affaire de l'O.J.A.M., ou le complot du Mardi-Gras* (Fort-de-France: Editions Désormeaux, 2001), 2-11.

<sup>794</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, “Atteinte à la Surété de l’Etat,” Letter from Prefect Grollemund to Minister of State for the Overseas Departments and Territories, “Affaire Armougon – Atteinte à l’intégrité du territoire,” 23 February 1963.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid., 3.

concluded, was to form the “Antillean-Guyanese Liberation Front” (FLAG), after the model of the Algerian FLN, in order to foment rebellion against France.<sup>796</sup>

Following Armougon’s arrest, seventeen more radical Martiniquan students were accused of being members of OJAM and were arrested. Grollemund and the Minister for the DOMs, Jean-Pierre Auroseau, asserted that OJAM was the public face for a guerilla *foco*, the Secret Front Organization (OSF), composed of OJAM’s leading militants. The OSF’s plan was to launch a guerilla war in Martinique’s mountainous northern interior, in imitation of Castro’s strategy in Cuba. To this end, the state alleged, OJAM members had traveled to the neighboring British island of Dominica to purchase and train with firearms and to “rendezvous” with “revolutionary elements” from “Saint-Domingue.”<sup>797</sup> French officials suggested that the uprising was designed to be a noble failure, a *propagande de la fait*, to “mobilize young Antilleans and Guyanese... towards revolutionary action” and to “alert international opinion” to conditions on Martinique in order to “get rid of colonialism and French residents.”<sup>798</sup> In their submissions to the court and to the Council of State, the prefect and the Minister for the Overseas Departments declined to elaborate on how the students planned to carry out their uprising or what their intentions were should they succeed.<sup>799</sup>

Following the arrest of Armougon, the French state rounded up nearly two-dozen young Martiniquans, both in France and in Martinique, and placed a number of other activists and students under surveillance. While the initial plot had been uncovered

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<sup>796</sup> Ibid.

<sup>797</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, “Atteinte à la Surété de l’Etat,” Unsigned Note produced by the Ministry of State for the Overseas Departments and Territories, “Note: Au sujet des mouvements autonomistes aux Antilles,” 11 March 1963.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid.

<sup>799</sup> It must be speculated that the original documents, surreptitiously found by the police, might have been forgeries all along. However, as the original documents alleged to have been produced by OJAM are safely under lock and key in the French archives, it is impossible to determine.

among activists living in Fort-de-France, Prefect Grollemund and Minister Auroseau suggested that older Antillean activists resident in Paris were the chief organizers of the conspiracy. “It appears,” Grollemund wrote, “that the promoters of this revolutionary action are to be found in Paris and that it is there that we must situate our pursuit of all available judicial action.”<sup>800</sup> Grollemund suggested that the militants on the island were the pawns of a central core of metropolitan “anti-French” activists: the Paris and Bordeaux sections of the General Association of Martiniquan Students (AGEM), and the intellectuals and activists that had been part of the banned “Front Antillo-Guyanais.”<sup>801</sup> The French police intelligence division stepped up its surveillance of older Martiniquan activists resident in Paris, focusing particularly on Edouard Glissant, Marcel Manville and Alain Plénel. All three had been members of the “Front Antillo-Guyanais” and continued to write, speak and organize against French rule in the Antilles. It also focused on the leadership of the AGEM. While it could not concretely link the leadership to the OJAM plot, the RG had collected their writings and speeches. Marlene Hospice, the national leader of AGEM, was put on the next plane back to Paris when she tried to travel to Martinique in March. Pied, Aliker and Grandmaison were arrested in March, to be tried with the other OJAM conspirators. In total, between January and March, more than twenty Martiniquans on the island and in the metropole were arrested; in April, eighteen were indicted for threatening the security and the territory of the state.

The law under which the eighteen Martiniquan militants were prosecuted was Article 88 of the French penal code, that criminalized political speech and activism that

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<sup>800</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, “Atteinte à la Surété de l’Etat,” Unsigned Note produced by the Ministry of State for the Overseas Departments and Territories, “Note: Au sujet des mouvements autonomistes aux Antilles,” 11 March 1963, 2.

<sup>801</sup> Ibid. See footnotes 1-3 on page 2 of the letter.



threatened the security or integrity of the state. The statute had originally been passed in 1934 to crack down on Communist and Action Française activists after the February 6th riot in the Place de la Concorde and the left-wing counter-demonstration on February 12<sup>th</sup>.<sup>802</sup> The statutes, as written, granted wide discretion to the prosecutor in determining what constituted a threat to the security or integrity of the state. It was used in the 1930s against a wide range of activists including African anti-colonial activists. Vichy also employed the statute to crack down on dissent, but following the establishment of the Fourth Republic it was employed less frequently. Effectively, it enabled the French state to criminalize certain forms of political dissent and empower prefects and the police to monitor and ban certain forms of political speech and activism. In Martinique, the statute was used Prefect Grollemund and his predecessor, Jean Parsi, to crack down on the Communist Party (PCM). The prefects barred political meetings and lectures, seized issues of the party publication *Justice* and fined PCM leaders for “anti-French” and “anti-state” speech.<sup>803</sup> For example, Georges Gratiant, the PCM mayor of the industrial city of Lamentin, was arrested and tried in Marseille for a fiery funeral eulogy he had delivered following the death of three of his constituents at the hands of the CRS during a prolonged and bitter sugar strike in 1962.<sup>804</sup>

In May, the prisoners were secretly loaded on to a military plane at 4 in the morning and flown to Paris to stand trial. They were interned at Paris’ feared Fresnes prison to be held for trial. The response to the trial in Martinique, in France and across Europe was critical. The PCM and the Committee for the Defense of Public and

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<sup>802</sup> Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-38* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 18-35; Dudley Andrew and Steven Unger, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 55-89.

<sup>803</sup> AN, CAC, n° 940180, Folder 206, “Affaire Lamentin.”

<sup>804</sup> Nicolas, tome 3, 225.

Republican Liberty on Martinique held numerous rallies, meetings, petition drives and demonstrations in support of the imprisoned activists; *Justice* carried extensive coverage of the trial and the ins and outs of the defense. The French Communist party and the Secours Populaire Français organized demonstrations and fundraisers in Paris to help the families of the arrested militants.<sup>805</sup> Dozens of telegrams and letters arrived from student groups in France, the Caribbean, Latin America and Europe. Both the Union Internationale des Etudiants and the French student federation, UNEF, filed formal complaints with the French government. Those AGEM activists who remained out of jail organized rallies and demonstrations in Paris and Bordeaux, working with their allies in African, Guadeloupean, Guyanese and Réunionnais student unions; they denounced the arrests as symptomatic of Martinique's persistence as a colony of France.<sup>806</sup> The newspapers and journals of the French left and center-left, including *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Combat*, *Les Temps Modernes* and *Esprit* followed the trial carefully and published unflattering profiles of French governance in the Antilles.<sup>807</sup>

The trial finally opened on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November. Manville and Léo Matarasso served as defense counsel for the accused. Both men had spent most of their careers defending political radicals; Manville and Matarasso had both been involved in defending Algerians arrested in France for being members of the FLN.<sup>808</sup> The defense's strategy consisted of two aspects: to turn the trial into an indictment of French "colonialism" in the Antilles but to nonetheless assert that French citizenship protected their clients from

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<sup>805</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, "Complot Martinique, Jan-Fev 1963, OJAM," Letter from Max Moulins to M. Cottin, "Réunion organisée par le Secours Populaire français au profit des familles de l'O.J.A.M.," 16 October 1963, 2. Moulins demanded the Interior Ministry ban this gathering.

<sup>806</sup> See *Matouba* n° 3 (1964).

<sup>807</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, "Complot Martinique, Jan-Fev 1963, OJAM," "Letter from Louis Jacquinet to Monsieur le Garde des Sceaux, Ministre de la Justice, Untitled, 28 November 1963.

<sup>808</sup> Matarasso was also Alain Cavalier's lawyer in the battle over the censorship of the Cavalier's film, *L'Insoumis*.

being arrested for their ideas and activism. The strategy was designed to attack the French state's use of emergency measures against Martiniquan activists – an attack Manville, of course, knew well – and to argue that social conditions in Martinique were essentially colonial and had led the young men to organize against it.<sup>809</sup>

To do so, Manville and Matarasso had to establish the contours of Martinique's continuing colonial status and depict the racism, corruption, disenfranchisement and poverty that plagued island life. To this end, the defense's case rested on the accused using their testimony to attack Martiniquan social conditions, as well as on using expert witnesses to testify to Martinique's social underdevelopment. In short, the defense hoped to both argue that the trial was a political trial and to politicize the trial. The first defendant, Herve Florent, condemned French civilization as decadent and argued decolonization was the only answer. He admitted that the "trial was important for him... because it was a tribune," a means to "pose the problem before the public, the press, world opinion."<sup>810</sup> Guy Dufond, believed by police intelligence to be the leader of OJAM, argued that, "Martinique lived under a colonialist and police regime" and insisted that "Martinique was not France."<sup>811</sup> Renaud de Grandmaison detailed the social situation in Martinique, noting that the *béké* owned "70% of the cultivable land" while Josiane Saint-Louis, a student of psychology, recounted for the court her own psychological shock upon arriving in France to discover the racism of French society, to learn that the French did not see her as French.<sup>812</sup> The other defendants testified in much the same

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<sup>809</sup> AN, CAC, Cote n° 940180, Folder 206, "Complot Martinique, Jan-Fev 1963, OJAM," Eleven unsigned memos summarizing the trial's proceedings from the Office of the Secretary General of the Ministry of Overseas Departments and Territories. "Flash sur le Procès des Separatistes Martiniquais: Deuxième Audience," 26 November 1963, 1.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid.

<sup>812</sup> "Procès des Separatistes Martiniquais, Troisième Audience," 27 November 1963.

manner, cataloging and denouncing Martinique's chronic inequality and poverty, the racism and contempt they had experienced in the metropole, and testifying to their formation of a Martiniquan identity as a response.

The testimony of expert witnesses summoned by the defense occupied the fourth and fifth days of the trial. The defense calibrated the witnesses' testimony to speak to three principal points: that the 1946 assimilation had been a failure, that the social situation in Martinique remained desperate and that Martiniquans constituted a separate people. Thus, defendants were justified in their strident criticisms of the French state and their desire to overturn Martinique's continued colonization. Alain Plénel testified to the decaying state of Martinique's schools despite French investment. Martiniquans were four times less likely to reach the lycée level and even then, four times less likely to complete their degree. Plénel argued that this was due to the fact that education had not been "adapted to the Martiniquan people" and it "almost totally ignored the history of the Antilles."<sup>813</sup> Elie Blouan, a Martiniquan veteran of WW I, former deputy from the Aisne and philosophy professor, detailed the poor social conditions and dashed hopes, detailing the poverty of most Martiniquans and the repression that greeted their demands for better wages.<sup>814</sup> Daniel Meyer testified to how he had voted for departmentalization in 1946 but, having addressed complaints from Antilleans in his capacity as the head of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, had grown "disenchanted" with Martinique's situation. Perhaps the most effective testimony from the first day was the deposition of Abbé Zaire, the chaplain and mentor for FAGEC. He communicated the pain of his parishioners,

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<sup>813</sup> Ibid.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid., 2.

testifying to the “disillusion and despair” they experienced when “they discovered theirs was an underdeveloped country.”<sup>815</sup>

Testimony from the anthropologist Michel Leiris and from Aimé Césaire dominated the trial’s fifth day. Leiris provided expert testimony into the culture and sociology of Antilleans. Drawing upon his essay, *Civilisations en Contact*, on the African roots of Caribbean peoples, Leiris argued for the uniqueness of Martiniquans, suggesting that Antillean families, language and social customs were syncretic, neither French nor African but Antillean.<sup>816</sup> Aimé Césaire’s remarks supported Leiris’ testimony and expanded upon it. Césaire – the architect of the 1946 departmentalization law – used his authority and charisma to indict the failures of assimilation. He spoke of the promise represented by departmentalization, the promises France had made to Antilleans, and recounted how “all these promises had been betrayed.”<sup>817</sup> He also argued that OJAM’s demand for an end to colonialism and in favor of a new form of government for Martinique was consistent not only with the Constitution but with the policy of the government.<sup>818</sup> He pointed out how de Gaulle’s government had granted autonomy to both Guyane and the Comoros and how articles 72 and 73 of the constitution empowered the Overseas Departments to shape and reshape their relationship to France. Martiniquans’ struggles – and OJAM’s activism and ideas – were part of the wave (or, as the anonymous observer put it, “epidemic”) of decolonization that had reshaped the Caribbean and the world. Martiniquans, Césaire concluded, are “passionately attached to

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<sup>815</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>816</sup> “Procès des Separatistes Martiniquais, Cinquième Audience,” 29 November 1963.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid.

France, but they have an undeniable particularism.”<sup>819</sup> “We are,” he concluded, “at the same time an African culture and a French culture. We hold on to both. We are a third personality.”<sup>820</sup> The fifth day also featured testimony from Paul Vergès of Réunion, Georges Mauvois, and a representative of UNEF, the French student federation.

Manville designed his concluding remarks to sum up the previous testimony, to argue that Martiniquans were simultaneously another people and treated as second-class citizens in France.<sup>821</sup> To do so he evoked the double standard that defined French rule in Martinique, a rule that treated Martinique as a colony and not an integral part of the Republic. He described the gendarmerie helicopters that, since 1959, circled the island by day, and the naval motorboats that patrolled the island at night. He read from a document from the Ministry of Interior granting the prefect the right to bar Martiniquans from returning to Martinique. He described how, when the OAS bombed his apartment in Paris, the Prefect’s office interdicted a solidarity protest. He recounted Georges Gratiant’s 1961 indictment and three-month imprisonment for a speech he gave at the funeral of three Martiniquan workers killed by security forces during the Lamentin sugar strike. Manville’s description of the repressive presence of French security forces, the suppression of Martiniquan rights, was meant to evoke the colonial status of Martinique, to convince the French judge but particularly the French public that Martinique remained a colonial society. The defendants’ politics, thus, were a natural reaction to an unjust state of affairs. To punish them, Manville suggested, was the worst tyranny. In a rhetorical flourish that combined the two thrusts of the defense, Manville quoted Hugo’s famous

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<sup>819</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>820</sup> Ibid.

<sup>821</sup> “Procès des Separatistes Martiniquais – Neuvième Audience – 5 Décembre 1963,” AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 206 “OJAM.”

line that “the only thing more powerful than an army was an idea whose hour had come.”<sup>822</sup> The idea of Martinique, of its particularity, and of the right and necessity to its decolonization, was an idea that had come. Neither the army nor the prefect nor the court could stop that idea from reshaping Martinique and Martiniquans’ sense of themselves.

What Manville was attempting to accomplish in his defense of the Antillean students was what the French philosopher Jacques Rancière has referred to as the “partition of the sensible.” According to Rancière, there is a “poetics of knowledge” that mingles bodies, speech and categorization in complex ways; it “allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking.”<sup>823</sup> The partition of the sensible is neither inherently a libratory gesture nor a disciplinary action; rather, it cuts both ways. For example, Rancière designates both democracy and the police as specific modes of partitioning the sensible. Manville’s effort in his concluding remarks demonstrated this double movement; he worked both to enable his Martiniquan subjects to speak as Martiniquans and to resist the “police” logic that sought to subsume them as traitorous French subjects. The broad use of expert witnesses who rehearsed the specific history and culture of Martinique served to partition Martiniquans as Martiniquans. Yet Manville also had his witnesses recount the failures of assimilation and the desperate, at times oppressive social and political life in the Antilles. He simultaneously admitted and contested their French subjectivity while arguing that they constituted a “specific intertwining of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking.”

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<sup>822</sup> Ibid.

<sup>823</sup> Jacques Rancière, “The Politics of Literature,” *subStance* 103 (2004), 10.

The success of Manville's defense was ambiguous. While he succeeded in achieving acquittals for ten of the defendants, five others, including Armougon and Desiré, were convicted to prison sentences ranging from 18 months to 3 years.<sup>824</sup> Dufond and Pied, two of the state's top targets, were not acquitted but were released for time served; Grandmaison and Josiane Saint-Louis were acquitted and immediately released. Following the sentencing, Manville immediately launched an appeal for the five convicted students. Protests immediately erupted in Fort-de-France and in Paris and the student organizations continued to bombard the government with petitions, telegrams and other forms of protest.<sup>825</sup>

In the midst of the OJAM trial, de Gaulle arrived in Martinique for his second official presidential visit. De Gaulle had visited Martinique before during a crisis, spending some time in Fort-de-France in 1960, not long after the 1959 riots. As before, de Gaulle was greeted with a rapturous welcome; thousands of Martiniquans turned out to see him speak on the Savane in the center of Fort-de-France. Césaire, General Council president François Duval, the prefect and other prominent members of Martiniquan government joined de Gaulle at the rostrum. In his speech, de Gaulle, much like Manville in his concluding remarks, was concerned with locating Martiniquans in their relation to the French. Unlike Manville, however, de Gaulle's partition brought Martiniquans into France, included them in his imagination of French identity. Looking out over the crowd that greeted the General with the tricolor, cheers and the 'Marseillaise,' de Gaulle famously declared, in what must be considered as a type of speech act, "My God, My God, but you are French!" In this statement, de Gaulle foreclosed the possibility of the

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<sup>824</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 206 "OJAM," 16 Chambre, Cour d'Assises, Département du Seine, "Copie de Jugement," 10 December 1963.

<sup>825</sup> Ibid.



students' radical conceptualization of Martinique as part of the Caribbean, foreclosed even Césaire's conception of Antilleans as simultaneously Antillean and French, and subsumed Martiniquan identity into French identity. What the police forces, the prefect and de Gaulle's prime minister, Debré, accomplished by force, de Gaulle attempted to accomplish through persuasion. *Justice* and *Présence Socialiste* mocked de Gaulle's declaration, countering with accounts of the exclusion of the Antilles from French equality and the particularity of Antillean culture, but other segments of the population welcomed the declaration, praising de Gaulle as committed to the project of departmentalization, development and inclusion. De Gaulle thus countered the unrest the OJAM trial had laid bare and worked to marginalize those Martiniquans sympathetic to thinking of the French Antilles as part of the Caribbean.

Ideologically and juridically, the French state had achieved its objective. The trial of the OJAM activists and the ensuing repression damaged Martiniquan student organizing and tempered their radicalism. OJAM remained dissolved and Antillean students did not attempt to construct a new organization that would link the metropole and the colony. AGEM remained a radical organization and continued to work with its Guadeloupean fellows, but it was diminished as a force. In many ways, the locus of Antillean radical student organizing shifted to Guadeloupe, where a new organization influenced by Maoism and Castroism, the National Organization Group for Guadeloupe (GONG) would create trouble for the forces of French order in the Antilles.<sup>826</sup> On Martinique, AGEM militants drifted out of the organization. Many would reappear in

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<sup>826</sup> The GONG was involved in the severe incidents in Guadeloupe of May 1967 that left more than a dozen dead. GONG militants were similarly tried in France in the spring of 1968; many of the same expert witnesses were called, this time supplemented by Jean-Paul Sartre. Raymond Gama and Jean-Pierre Sainton, *Mé 1967: mémoires d'un événement* (Point à Pitre: SOGED, 1985).

other organizations, including the PPM, the PCM and after 1969 the Trotskyist Revolutionary Socialist Group (GRS). However, many would, as Marcel Manville noted, abandon activism altogether and disappear from public life following the trial.

## **Conclusion**

In many ways, the “Antillean 1960s,” which began with the 1959 riots in Fort-de-France ended in the twin trials of Antillean activists in 1964 and 1968. Or at least the “hot years” did. While the GRS and its Trotskyist competitor, Workers Struggle (Combat Ouvrière), would organize a new pole of political organizing, theirs was not an independentist political dispensation. Colonialism was understood as a symptom of capitalism and the struggle against French colonialism was subordinated to the struggle against global capital. While militant independentism did not disappear entirely – Alfred-Marie Jeanne started the Martiniquan Independence Movement (MIM) in the early 1970s – it moved to the margins. But out of the failed political project of student activism emerged Edouard Glissant’s Institute of Martiniquan Studies, revolutionary in its own right, but a project that prioritized knowledge and culture over direct political agitation and activism. Several veterans of AGEM reemerged as members of the IME and contributed to its journal, *Acoma*. Glissant, the IME and its contributions to the developing sense of Antillean identity are the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 6

### “A Science of Ourselves”: Edouard Glissant, the Institut Martiniquais d’Etudes and *ACOMA*, 1965-1973

#### Introduction

Writing in the first issue of *Acoma*, the new journal published by the *Institut Martiniquais d’Etudes* (IME), the Martiniquan novelist and critic Edouard Glissant paused to reflect on the body of social and cultural research devoted to the French Antilles. Introducing a collection of papers produced by members of the IME between 1965 and 1969, Glissant noted that “the balance of the research in the human sciences” conducted in the French Antilles “remains meager.”<sup>827</sup> The near-total absence of scientific cultural studies of the Francophone Caribbean was particularly glaring compared to the Anglophone and Hispanophone Caribbean. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, governments and foundations, driven by Cold War anxieties and priorities, funded American and British fieldworkers to expand their research in the Caribbean basin in order to produce actionable knowledge that would smooth modernization projects.<sup>828</sup> Social science researchers fanned out across the Caribbean in the decades following World War II to document the region’s cultural, social and economic practices.<sup>829</sup> Despite an intensification of research, the three French Caribbean departments – Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyane – slipped through the cracks of post-war social science. As they were not independent nation-states, they did not emerge as major sites for Anglo-American researchers in the region; on the other hand, French ethnologists and

<sup>827</sup> Edouard Glissant, “Introduction à quelques problèmes antillais,” *Acoma* n° 1 (Avril 1971), 29.

<sup>828</sup> David Scott, “Modernity That Predated the Modern: Sidney Mintz’s Caribbean,” *History Workshop Journal* 58 (2004), 194-7; Vincente Rafael, “The Cultures of Area Studies in the United States,” *Social Text* 41 (1994), 91-111.

<sup>829</sup> Ibid.; Also, “Modernity, Anticommunism and the Alliance for Progress” in Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 69-108.

institutions perceived the islands as component parts of the nation and thus unsuitable for ethnographic study.<sup>830</sup> The French Antilles were simultaneously outside the scope of Anglo-American modernization studies yet did not fit into the “savage slot” of ethnographic discourse; existing on the margins of postwar discourses of the Other, Antilleans simply would have to study themselves.<sup>831</sup>

This chapter traces the emergence of an Antillean “science of ourselves” in the French Antilles through a study of the Institut Martiniquais d’Etudes and its journal *Acoma*. The IME-*Acoma* project constituted a fulfillment and coda to Antillean intellectuals’ postwar efforts to make sense of their societies and to situate themselves in national and global intellectual and political projects. The IME built off the efforts of earlier Antillean intellectuals and through critique and empirical study worked to formulate an Antillean perspective on history, psychology, culture and race. Emerging from the same disappointment and frustration that contributed to Antillean student radicalization in the 1960s, Glissant and his colleagues worked to understand what was

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<sup>830</sup> André Leroi-Gourhan compendious *Ethnologie de l’Union française* provides a fitting example of the lack of interest in the French Caribbean territories. Martinique and Guadeloupe merited only 30-odd pages out of two volumes totaling over 1000 pages. Guyane received slightly more attention but only the rainforest areas of southern Guyane that still supported a significant population of indigenous groups and cultures, as well as maroon communities. The creolized coast was less studied. Despite the general disinterest of French researchers, there were significant exceptions, including Michel Leiris and Daniel Guérin. Leiris’ book was of much interest to Antilleans but was ignored completely in France; Guérin’s was an activist account and not taken seriously by “scientific” researchers. Jean Benoist’s Center for Caribbean Research (CERC) at the Université de Montreal produced some excellent work on the French Caribbean but, located in Montreal, was marginal to the French anthropological mainstream. Michel Leiris, *Contacts de Civilisation en Martinique et en Guadeloupe* (Paris: Gallimard/UNESCO, 1955); Daniel Guérin, *Les Antilles Decolonisées* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956); Jean Benoist, *Les Martiniquais: anthropologie d’une peuple métisée* (Paris: Masson, 1963); Jean Benoist, ed., *L’Archipel inachevé: culture et société aux Antilles françaises* (Montreal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1972). There were also a few American anthropologists who conducted fieldwork in the French Antilles, most notably Richard Price. Richard Price, “Magie et pêche à la Martinique,” *L’Homme* 4 (1964), 84-113; Richard Price, “Caribbean fishing and fisherman: a historical sketch,” *American Anthropologist* 68 (1966), 1363-1383; Michael Horowitz, *Morne-Paysan: Peasant Village in Martinique* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967).

<sup>831</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Anthropology and the Savage Slot: the Poetics and Politics of Otherness” in R.G. Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), 17-44.

unique about the Antilles and produce a social and cultural discourse that reflected this particularity. The IME hoped to redirect the focus and concern of Antillean intellectuals to the social and cultural consequences of the Antilles' political paralysis, economic stagnation and cultural malaise. While many veterans of the 1960s Antillean student movement resigned themselves to frustration, or signed up with the doctrinaire Marxism of the Communists and Trotskyists, the IME offered an approach that transcended the assimilation of French republicanism and the dogmatic Marxism of the established Communist parties. Inspired by Hegel, Fanon, ethnography and transnational anti-colonial movements, *Acoma* returned to the source, proposing Antillean intellectuals undertake a close, careful and brutally honest engagement with Antillean history and actually existing Antillean life.<sup>832</sup> The intellectuals gathered around the *Acoma* project criticized the propensity of Antillean intellectuals, from Gaullists to Communists to Négritudists, to append Antillean experience to larger explanatory frameworks, which emphasized what was similar about the Antilles rather than examining what made them different. The IME instead stressed that the Antilles' incommensurability with existing social and cultural frameworks was in fact the very point at which to begin.

The Institute constituted a unique venture in Antillean intellectual history. While it resembled earlier Antillean intellectual projects, such as Césaire's *Tropiques* or the PCM's *Action*, *Acoma* differed in its aspiration to serious scholarship, its incorporation of theoretical insights and methodologies from diverse fields, and, most importantly, its

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<sup>832</sup> This turn to the Antilles should not be confused with what Jacques Derrida has critiqued as the "search for origins." As will become clear, the *Acoma* project will eschew the purity of origins and instead celebrate the Antilles' mingled, creolized situation. Derrida himself built off of Édouard Glissant and Abdelkebir Khatibi's celebration of creolized language in his later work. Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Robert Young, *White Mythologies* (London: Routledge, 2004), 32-52; Doris Garraway, "Toward a Creole Myth of Origin: Narrative, Foundations and Eschatology in Patrick Chamoiseau's *L'esclave Vieil Homme et le Molosse*," *Callaloo* 29,1 (Winter 2006), 162-5.

focus on the Antilles. In many ways, *Acoma* constituted a French Antillean exemplar of the engaged scholarship that grew out of 1960s New Left activism and which, building from new theoretical insights and methodological approaches, remade the humanities and social sciences starting in the late 1960s.<sup>833</sup> *Acoma* presented engaged scholarship that hoped to alter how Antilleans saw themselves and their society, but which was empirically grounded as well as non-dogmatic and non-sectarian.

Despite their focus on the Antilles, the IME intellectuals' work was neither parochial nor naively empirical. They applied the insights of contemporary social and cultural theory – including Marxism, psychology, ethnography and sociology – toward making sense of the Antillean experience. This catholic intellectual approach resulted from IME members' educations in France and the United States and their political commitment to anti-colonial and anti-imperial projects. It also emerged from Edouard Glissant's insistence that any conceptualization of the Antilles as hermetic, bounded entities risked not only recapitulating their insularity but accepting the priority European knowledge invested in "the One." In Glissant's formulation, "the One" was the false universality of European knowledge and culture that denied both the subject's and the world's multiplicity and claimed the Universal as its sole possession. Glissant countered that there is no One, only an All, and that thus conceived, there were in fact multiple routes to the Universal. Glissant referred to this valorization of multiplicity, heterogeneity

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<sup>833</sup> Colin Sparks, "Stuart Hall, Cultural Studies and Marxism," David Morley and Kuan Hsing-Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 71-88; Richard E. Lee, *Life and Times of Cultural Studies: the Politics and Transformation of the Structures of Knowledge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 469-521; Richard E. King, *Race, Culture and the Intellectuals, 1940-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 239-303.

and interdependence as “relation.”<sup>834</sup> Antilleans’ rediscovery of their true selves would be achieved not through naïve self-reflection, with its echoes of the Eurocentric “One” but through “relation,” an analysis and acceptance of the inter-subjective and intercultural relations that produced and defined Antillean life. To this end, IME members built links with intellectuals throughout the Caribbean basin, Latin America, Europe and, of particular importance, the United States. Relation not only described a theoretical and methodological approach but also outlined an intellectual and political practice.

This chapter reconstructs the IME’s *Acoma* project and situates its activity within both Antillean intellectual history and postwar French thought, as well 1960s global anti-imperial and anti-colonial activism and knowledge production. I begin with an initial examination of Edouard Glissant’s intellectual career and his foundation of the Institute and journal following his return from involuntary exile in France. Next I discuss both the IME’s debt to postwar French intellectual life as well as its efforts to establish links with “Other American” intellectuals and activists through teaching, conferences and intellectual exchange. Finally, I provide a close reading of three lines of theoretical

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<sup>834</sup> There has been debate over the development of Glissant’s thought. Peter Hallward constructs an historical, but ultimately Manichean reading of Glissant’s work. He divides Glissant’s intellectual production in two: an “early Glissant” devoted to Antillean nationalism that runs from 1956’s *Soleil de la conscience* through 1981’s *Le Discours antillais*; and a “late Glissant” that surrenders to capitalism and neo-liberalism’s globalizing logic, running from the *Poétique de la Relation* (1990) and *Tout-Monde* (1993) to the present. *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 66-125. J. Michael Dash, Glissant’s American translator, understands Glissant’s *oeuvre* as unitary but graduated, requiring certain cultural and intellectual steps toward accomplishing the entire work. Thus, in Dash’s reading, the early work Hallward reads as “nationalist” constitutes Glissant’s effort to ground Antilleans in their land, history and identity; once accomplished, Glissant moves on to a pure ‘poetics of relation’: Antilleans, securely established in their self, can move on to relationality. Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4-25; Dash, personal communication. Recent work by Anjali Prabhu seems to confirm Dash’s thesis that Glissant’s work retains a fundamental intellectual consistency. Prabhu reads *Poétique* against the grain and in the process unearths Marxian themes in Glissant’s later work, concerns that played an important role in his 1960s intellectual and political commitments. Anjali Prabhu, “Interrogating Hybridity: Subaltern Agency and Totality in Postcolonial Theory,” *diacritics* 35,2 (Summer 2005), 76-92. My interpretation hews closer to Dash and Prabhu’s interpretations; the issue in Glissant’s work is not change in basic core concepts, so much as it is an issue of which aspect of his theoretical program he deems necessary within the existing political, cultural and intellectual situation.

investigation in pieces published by Glissant, Roland Suvélor and Michel Giraud treating Antillean psychological structures, the development of Antillean culture and the social structuring of race and class in the French Antilles. Through a discussion of *Acoma*'s place in the Antillean intellectual tradition, its engagement with contemporaneous French philosophy and scholarship and its intellectual and political links to "Other American" and Black American intellectuals, I show how *Acoma* broke with the existing Antillean politico-cultural tradition and, by establishing the groundwork for a post-négritude identity, cleared a necessary space for Antilleans to finally think as Antilleans.

### **Edouard Glissant and the Establishment of the Institut**

Edouard Glissant founded the *Institut Martiniquais d'Etudes* (henceforth, IME) in 1967, two years after he returned to Martinique from involuntary exile in metropolitan France. *Acoma* followed three years later.<sup>835</sup> Glissant had been resident in metropolitan France since 1946, having left Martinique to take up a scholarship to study at the Sorbonne. He composed a dissertation under the supervision of Jean Wahl entitled, "The Discovery and Conception of the World in Contemporary Poetry," a phenomenological reading of Aimé Césaire, René Char and Paul Claudel. After completing his studies, Glissant concentrated on his poetry while working at the African Society for Culture, helping to organize Society events – including the famous "Debate on National Poetry" – and working to the organize the two Negro Writers' Conferences held in Paris in 1956 and Rome in 1959.<sup>836</sup> Following the Suez crisis and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, he

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<sup>835</sup> Wilbert J. Roget, "Edouard Glissant and Antillanité," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1975), 64-5.

<sup>836</sup> The Society was a research institute connected to the journal *Présence Africaine* and run by Cheikh Anta Diop. Dash, *Edouard Glissant*, 9-14; Roget, 50-8; on the *Société Africaine de Culture*: Mildred A. Hill-Lubin, "Présence Africaine: A Voice in the Wilderness, a Record of Black Kinship" in V.Y.



joined Kostas Axelos' short-lived organization, the "Cercle International," a grouping of anti-Stalinist leftist intellectuals both opposed to orthodox Communism and interested in colonial issues. Members included Glissant's old teacher, Aimé Césaire, Surrealists André Breton, Benjamin Péret and Maurice Nadeau, dissident Marxists Jean Duvignaud and Dionys Mascolo, as well as Michel Leiris, Albert Memmi and others. The group was one among many dissident Marxist groups active in postwar France; Axelos, writing in his memoirs, located it within the "workerist" tendency of Marxism and stated that the Circle formed in order to advance a non-dogmatic, critical study of issues of worker organization and Marxism. What made the Cercle unique was its effort to connect imperialism and colonialism to the problems of domestic capitalism and workers' political activism and self-organization.<sup>837</sup> While Glissant eventually left the Cercle, he retained ties to Axelos' group and in 1960 Glissant's name was among the signatures on the famous "Declaration of the 121" that was largely written by Mascolo and Nadeau with the help of Maurice Blanchot.<sup>838</sup>

The Second Negro Writers Congress, held in Rome in 1959, proved a watershed moment for Glissant. According to the literary critic W.J. Roget, while Glissant participated extensively in the Congress, he had grown disenchanted with the aesthetic and ideological orientation of the Society and *Présence Africaine*. Glissant found both organizations' views of black culture too conservative and Afrocentric. In a letter to Roget, Glissant suggested that *Présence Africaine* was driven "by nature towards a type of general theory" that attempted to define all black culture in its unity rather than being

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Mudimbe, ed., *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-1987* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 158-162.

<sup>837</sup> The group eventually developed into the more well known "Arguments" group. Roget, 48-9; Kostas Axelos, *Arguments d'un chercheur* (Paris: Edition Minuit, 1969), 150-8.

<sup>838</sup> Maurice Blanchot, "Responses and Interventions (1946-1998)," *Paragraph* 30,3 (2007), 5-45.

cognizant of its divisions and heterogeneity.<sup>839</sup> If the Congress reinforced Glissant's "disenchantment" with *négritude* and his commitments of the previous decade, it also provided the spark that would come to define the next decade of his life. In Rome Glissant met with Césaire, Frantz Fanon and the Guadeloupean poet Albert Bévillie, who wrote under the penname Paul Niger. The four Antilleans discussed the formation of a group that would unite Martiniquan, Guadeloupean and Guyanese political activists into a single organization to fight for autonomy.<sup>840</sup> While Fanon returned to Algeria and Césaire distanced himself from the project once he returned to Paris, Glissant and Niger pressed forward, recruiting other Antilleans radicals resident in France, among them the lawyer Marcel Manville and poet Gilbert Gratiant.<sup>841</sup> Following the December 1959 riots, Glissant and Niger founded the Antillean-Guyanese Front (*Front Antillo-Guyanais*) and organized a constituent assembly in Paris in April 1961. The Front argued that Antilleans deserved to decide for themselves their politico-national future through a plebiscite and criticized the French state for not allowing one in 1958. While the Front advocated for what it called "autonomy," the Front's definition of autonomy denoted outright political independence.<sup>842</sup> The French government, in the midst of the bloodiest phase of the Algerian War, immediately reacted. The Front was dissolved by special presidential decree and Glissant, Niger and other leaders of the group were barred from leaving France or traveling to the Antilles.<sup>843</sup> Its successor organization, Marvel Manville's Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais, was similarly dissolved and Manville subjected to

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<sup>839</sup> Roget, 60-1.

<sup>840</sup> Ibid., 61-2.

<sup>841</sup> AN CAC Cote n° 940180, Folder 287, "Mouvement Patriotique Martiniquais."

<sup>842</sup> Felix Germain, "For the Nation and For Work: Black Activism in the Paris of the 1960s," in Wendy Pojmann, ed., *Migration and Activism in Europe since 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 27-31.

<sup>843</sup> Roget, 62-3.

the same measures as Glissant. The Front lost much of its impetus when Glissant's friend and colleague Niger was killed in a 1962 plane crash over Guadeloupe that also claimed the life of the autonomist-minded deputy from Guyane, Justin Catayée.<sup>844</sup>

For Glissant, the founding of the IME and the gathering of the intellectual circle that would produce *Acoma* worked as a form of "return to the native land." Just as Glissant's teacher, Aimé Césaire, had taken stock of Martiniquan life when he returned to Fort-de-France from Paris in 1938, so Glissant set out to observe and take stock of the "key problems of Antillean reality."<sup>845</sup> While Césaire had indexed the misery of Martiniquan reality through the long, unorthodox poem, "Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal," mingling realistic tableaux of poverty, exploitation and disease with surrealistic imagery, Glissant established a division between his poetical and critical pursuits; *Acoma* was not conceived to be a purely literary pursuit but as "a review that wanted to be a tool for research."<sup>846</sup> While it followed in the footsteps of earlier Martiniquan publications like *L'Etudiant Noir*, *Tropiques* and *Action*, it was intended to provide a forum for serious social scientific research, as well as literary and artistic works. In many ways it resembled the small journals of post-war French intellectual life, like Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*, Domenech's *Esprit* and Bataille's *Critique*.<sup>847</sup> To "return to the native land" depended, in the first instance, on determining the native land.

To this end, Glissant gathered Antilleans from across the disciplines and of varying political orientations, though most came from one of the tendencies of the

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<sup>844</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>845</sup> *Acoma* n° 1, 30.

<sup>846</sup> Glissant communication to W.J. Roget. Roget, 70.

<sup>847</sup> *Esprit* and *Les Temps Modernes* provided a forum for Antillean intellectuals to present their work. Fanon got his start writing for *Esprit*, while Sartre published Glissant, Niger, Alain Plénel, as well as pieces by Leiris and Guérin on the Antilles.

political left. Many of the initial contributors also taught at the IME or participated in the Institute's colloquia and conferences. Several of the researchers recruited to the IME were veterans of the student movement, returned to Martinique from their studies in Paris. André Lucrèce studied sociology in at the Université de Paris, exploring education and identity in Martinique, and was president of AGEM. Marlène Hospice, a former AGEM president and veteran of the OJAM trial, had also studied in Paris where she worked on African-American literature and identity.<sup>848</sup> The former AGEM members were good candidates for Glissant's project. They were sympathetic to Glissant's autonomist political orientation; further, in the course of their studies and political activism, they found themselves returning to study Antillean social and cultural reality. For Lucrèce and Hospice, both lycée teachers, the Institute represented a logical extension of both their political and intellectual commitments.<sup>849</sup> Roland Suvélor, the chief local militant of the Parti Socialiste Unifié and the editor of the PSU's local paper, *Présence Socialiste* also joined the IME.<sup>850</sup> In addition to directing the activities of the Parti Socialiste Unifié, Suvélor was a longtime member of the Cercle Victor Schoelcher and a professor of literature at the Lycée Schoelcher. Suvélor combined his interest in literature with an historical methodology and was broadly interested in the cultural history of the Antilles. While a Marxist, his materialist approach to cultural history was non-dogmatic and resembled the *méantalité* school of French historiography.

Glissant and the IME members also imagined that the Institute and journal would provide an impetus for a new awareness of Antillean existence, the means to disseminate

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<sup>848</sup> See Chapter 4 for the OJAM trial.

<sup>849</sup> See Chapter 4 for knowledge production and activism among Antillean students in 1960s Paris.

<sup>850</sup> *Acoma* n° 2, 134; On the PSU: Michel Rocard, *Le PSU et l'avenir socialiste de la France* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

Antillean history, culture, politics and identity throughout Antillean society. While the IME and *Acoma* remained non-sectarian, contributing to a cultural-political shift in the Martinique and Guadeloupe was an important facet of the group's goals. "There is not an authentic theory," Glissant wrote in the first issue of *Acoma*, "without effective practice."<sup>851</sup> Glissant stated that the Institute was founded in order "to fashion an instrument of cultural action."<sup>852</sup> The frequent colloquia, lectures, art shows and theatre performances staged by the Institute, in coordination with the Institute's secondary school, would spread the Institute's intellectual efforts to a wider audience than the Antillean intellectual and political elite.<sup>853</sup>

Despite this praxis-oriented approach to knowledge production, the relationship between the Institute's social scientific inquiries and practical political action not be a transparent or direct one. In *Acoma* n° 1, Glissant stated that, "this review does not give itself as either a guide or a means to action... but as an instrument."<sup>854</sup> While "partisan" (by which he intends "opinioned") it did not adhere to "any ideological 'direction,'" preferring an "elucidation of perspectives" to direct political-ideological practice.<sup>855</sup> *Acoma*'s political project was not to theorize revolution or practical activism but to contest the hegemonic ideologies of the French Antilles; the IME was invested in a larger cultural struggle that rejected functionalist research carried out for the sake of political action alone. If the Institute had a political program, it was not to formulate political projects, ideological weapons or theoretical orientations for immediate practical application. Rather, it worked toward what Glissant called "clarification," a

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<sup>851</sup> Ibid.

<sup>852</sup> Roget, 66.

<sup>853</sup> Roget, 67.

<sup>854</sup> *Acoma* n° 1, 4.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid.

demystification of the Antilles' past in order to develop a better picture of the islands' present; as such, participants in the Institute and contributors to the journal were not expected to follow a particular political line nor were they expected to orient their researches toward immediate action.<sup>856</sup> *Acoma's* project was a critical theory of Antillean life, similar to Adorno's definition of critique as "the power to resist established opinion and, one and the same, also to resist existing institutions, to resist everything that is merely posited, that justifies itself with its existence."<sup>857</sup> The *Acoma* project was a type of enlightening project, one that visualized that political change in the Antilles would only arrive once accumulated error, falsehood and received wisdom were dissolved through a critical inventory of existing reality.

This critique of what *Acoma* members would come to call the "Antillean situation" unfolded across multiple fields of inquiry, ranging from intensive study of the sugar industry to surveys of black Francophone literature, touching on folklore, psychology, the popular role of the theatre and local class stratification. Reading *Acoma's* disparate essays synoptically reveals three overarching and interpenetrating thematic concerns: a psychological examination of Antillean consciousness; a racial and class study of Antillean social and economic life; and a socio-historical analysis of Antillean culture. These theoretical and methodological approaches were positive, emerging from the IME's empirical study of Antillean social problems, and also negative, constituted through critique of earlier approaches to the study of Antillean society. The Institute's thinkers, in articulating their project, reacted both to postwar reformers' disinterested

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<sup>856</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>857</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Critique" in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 281-2. Also: Joan Scott, "History-writing as Critique" in Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Alan Munslow, eds., *Manifestos for History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 19-38.

social science and to political militants' invested politico-ideological work, work that preceded their own attempt to reckon with Antillean society and culture. Glissant and his collaborators confronted, in short, the existing "problem-space" of the Antilles, the concatenation of questions, theories, methods and studies that had tried to make sense of Antillean social and cultural life.<sup>858</sup> The IME intellectuals discovered a problem-space that was more devoted to stressing the *sameness* of the Antilles than accounting for their particularity and difference.

Part of IME's politico-cultural project was to push Antillean thought beyond the three ideological tendencies that had dominated intellectual life and shaped intellectuals' analyses of the Antillean past, present and future: assimilating republicanism, communism and *négritude*. Glissant and his collaborators criticized republicanism, communism and *négritude* on epistemological grounds, suggesting that each analytic approached Antillean reality from *a priori* ideological positions. Further, these *a priori* ideological commitments flattened out and subordinated the specificity of Antillean reality to extra-Antillean universalisms: French *civilisation*, proletarian revolution and African genius. While the *Acoma* group did not oppose linking local concerns to larger political and ideological projects, they argued that the uncritical application of pre-existing categories to Antillean reality would fail to produce an accurate account of social

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<sup>858</sup> "Problem-space" is a concept borrowed from the critic David Scott, where "problem-space" is understood as a "conjunctural space... a complex of statements, propositions, resolutions and arguments." Scott developed the concept through his reading of the "question/answer" approach to intellectual history pioneered by R.G. Collingwood and extended by Quentin Skinner. Intellectual history, rather than simply filling in the context/s of a particular field of statements, attempts to reconstruct the question that the statement sets out to answer. David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3-6; David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 5-7; Stuart Hall, "Interview with David Scott" *Bomb* 90 (Winter 2005), 57-8; Louis Mink, *Mind, History and Dialectic: The Philosophy of R.G. Collingwood* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), quoted in Scott, *Conscripts*, 52.

reality. Reading through a preferred matrix, each analytic caused certain objects of inquiry to appear and others to disappear, some social forces to be stressed and others minimized. In short, these analytic schemes did violence to the particularity of Antillean social, cultural and psychical reality. Rather than an *accounting of* the Antilles, their history, culture and society, republicanism, communism and *négritude* instead *accounted for* the Antilles, subordinating their particularity to preexisting theoretical models.

The *Acoma* group's project was both to produce an empirical and theoretical inventory that took the empirical reality of the Antilles as its first principle and to critique the pre-existing ideological interpretations of Antillean existence. In order to build a specifically Antillean knowledge, *Acoma* intellectuals reexamined the empirical objects and questions they had inherited: What is the legacy of slavery? What is the relationship between Antillean culture and African or French culture? What is the role of the creole language? Are Martinique and Guadeloupe still colonies? How can and should the Antilles develop? Are Martinique and Guadeloupe part of the Caribbean, of Africa, or Europe? What does citizenship really mean? These sorts of questions dominated previous intellectuals' attempts to grapple with the reality of the Antilles and they would dominate *Acoma's* efforts as well.

### **Metropolitan Intellectual Influences**

While the IME's project was rooted in empirical Antillean reality, their analytical approaches were far from provincial. IME participants drew from the theoretical and methodological innovation of post-war French thought to shape and guide their critique of Antillean social reality. Psychology, "existential" Marxism and ethnography were of



particular importance. Liberationist psychology, for example, provided a language that pushed beyond the individual to a cultural critique of social, economic and cultural structures, while “existential Marxism” questioned the settled analytical categories of doctrinaire Marxism in favor of a Hegelianized Marxism that read class, state and economy in a flexible, dialectical manner. The concept of the “colonial situation,” drawn from French ethnography provided an overarching framework in which to situate the IME’s analyses.<sup>859</sup> The IME’s diagnoses of the Martiniquan “situation” developed from its rigid empirical comprehension of Martinique, but also from the intellectual developments that revolutionized both postwar French, and global, intellectual life.

Fanon and Fanonian psychology’s formed an important on both Glissant and the younger members of the IME.<sup>860</sup> Fanon’s psychology (and to a lesser extent psychoanalysis) constituted an important source of anti-colonial theory and complemented the post-war French Left’s appropriation of psychological theory and practice to reinforce and develop left-wing “ideology critique.”<sup>861</sup> Nonetheless, there were important differences between Fanon’s use of psychology and the French Left’s appropriation of Freud and psychoanalysis. The most important difference was Fanon’s skepticism of psychoanalysis’ privileging of the Oedipal Complex. For the colonized, Fanon argued, the Oedipal Complex was essentially meaningless; what mattered was the confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized, an encounter that Fanon read through Hegel’s dialectic of the master and the slave. In the colonial situation, Fanon argued, the fundamental psychical relationship was not between father and son, or mother

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<sup>859</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 33-8.

<sup>860</sup> See the discussion of Fanon and the Antilles in Chapter 3.

<sup>861</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Jacques Lacan and Freud’s French Revolution* (New York: Guildford Press, 1992), 47-68.

and daughter, but between colonizer and colonized, between the white man and the black subject. To reduce the colonizer-colonized relationship to a form of the Oedipal Complex was to deny the social context in which the colonized's psychical life was formed. Fanon, from his experiences in both France and Algeria, opposed treating psychic life in isolation from physical life as the two were intimately connected. Fanon developed his phenomenological approach in the meticulous, locally rooted psychological studies of *L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne* (such as his essays on the veil and radio in Algeria) and in *Les Damnés de la Terre*. The IME inherited Fanon's approach and applied it to their study of the Antilles. While Fanon often had been contemptuous of Antilleans in his writings on his place of birth, the IME extended insights and applied them to understanding the social alienation that structured Antillean history and experience.

The importance of Hegel's master-slave dialectic and its transposition into the "colonial situation" linked Fanon's and the IME's psychological inquiries to their social investigations. The French-Antillean relationship expressed a classic case of the master-slave relationship; however, the Antillean had stalled at the stage of identification with the master, had refused self-actualizing labor that would lead to freedom and persisted in their false identification to the master and were thus trapped within the dialectic. Hegel and a Hegelian reading of Marx linked the IME's research to what Mark Poster has labeled the "Hegel Renaissance" in 20<sup>th</sup> century French thought. Poster traced the various left-wing interpretations of Hegel that emerged in 1930s France and extended into the "existential Marxism" of the postwar period.<sup>862</sup> The "return to Hegel" contributed to the

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<sup>862</sup> Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). On Hegel in France: Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in 20<sup>th</sup> Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press); Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to*

emergence of a French school of “critical theory” that reworked Marx through both Hegel’s philosophizing as well as the languages and methodologies of modern social science. This French tradition included groups like *Arguments* and *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, shared similarities with and was influenced by existentialism and phenomenology and incorporated a wide range of figures that stretched from Sartre to Althusser to the 1968 student radicals.<sup>863</sup>

Beside intellectual affinities with post-war French Marxism, IME members also shared institutional and activist connections. At a very basic level, *Acoma* was published in France by the left-wing publishing house, Maspero, one of the principal producers of activist and New Left literature in France in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>864</sup> IME activists also had personal and professional relationships with a number of important figures of the French Left. Glissant’s collaborated with Kostas Axelos and other members of the 1950s dissident Marxist left. In addition to his friendship with Axelos, he was also linked through *Présence Africaine* and his friendship with Michel Leiris to Sartre and his circle. Other IME members (whose intellectual trajectories are not as well documented as Glissant’s) also associated and traveled in the social circuits of the postwar French Left. André Lucrèce and Marlène Hospice both studied in Paris and through their involvement and leadership in AGEM were connected to African and Asian activists in Paris and with Third World and anti-colonial activists in Paris. Both also traveled abroad to Russia, Eastern Europe and Cuba in the 1960s.<sup>865</sup> Michel Giraud similarly studied in Paris,

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*Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2003); Michael S. Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>863</sup> Poster, 260-3.

<sup>864</sup> For more on Maspero: Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 84-7; Anne-Louise Milne, “From Third-Worldism to Fourth-World *Flânerie*? François Maspero’s Recent Journeys,” *French Studies* 60,4 (2006), 489-502.

<sup>865</sup> See Chapter 4 for more on AGEM.

attended Althusser's lectures and was a member, along with Roland Suvélor, of the Unified Socialist Party. Besides their work for *Acoma*, IME members published essays and articles in such important French left-wing venues as *Les Temps Modernes*, *Esprit*, *Présence Africaine* and *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

The IME's core Antillean members also shared an interest in ethnography, anthropology and sociology, particularly the way these human sciences married theory to empirical research. Glissant, for example, attended lectures and seminars conducted by Leiris, Paul Rivet and Marcel Griaule.<sup>866</sup> In the mid 1950s, Glissant published a long and mostly sympathetic article on Leiris' literary and ethnographic work.<sup>867</sup> Leiris was an important link between Antillean activists and the ethnographic world. Leiris traveled to the Caribbean in the 1940s and wrote a study for UNESCO on Martinique and Guadeloupe that became a classic for Antillean students and researchers. He also remained active in Antillean politics and maintained his connections to the Parisian Antillean community and particularly Antillean students.<sup>868</sup>

*Acoma's* essays also testified to the influence of post-war French ethnography in the development of the IME's cultural project. Two particularly important influences were the Georges Balandier and Roger Bastide. Balandier was a Musée de l'Homme-trained ethnographer who was, for the time, somewhat of a novelty in French ethnography: a specialist on colonial-era West African urban life in Congo-Brazzaville and Guinea.<sup>869</sup> Through his research and his friendships with Africanists like Alioune Diop and Léopold Senghor, Balandier abandoned the fetishization of primitive societies

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<sup>866</sup> Sally Price and Jean Jamin, "Entretien avec Michel Leiris" in *Gradhiva* 4 (1988), 29-56.

<sup>867</sup> Edouard Glissant, "Michel Leiris ethnographe," *Les lettres nouvelles* 4:43 (1956), 609-21.

<sup>868</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>869</sup> Georges Balandier, *Histoire d'Autres* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1977); also; Cooper, 33-8; François Dosse, *History of Structuralism, Volume 1* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 264-8.

still prevalent in much French ethnographic fieldwork to focus instead on the transformation in Africa from largely agrarian societies to semi-industrialized urban societies linked to colonialism to global circuits of capital.<sup>870</sup> In books like *Sociologie Actuelle de l'Afrique Noire* and *Afrique Ambiguë*, Balandier tracked the social, mental and cultural formations and deformations that occurred in African societies beneath the pressure of colonialism. Borrowing Malinowski's notion of a "contact situation," he coined the term "colonial situation" to describe this process.<sup>871</sup>

One of Balandier's friends and colleagues was Roger Bastide, a UNESCO anthropologist. Bastide and his colleague at UNESCO, Alfred Métraux, had been inspired by the American ethnographer, Melville Herskovits – whom they had met in the U.S. during the war – to examine African survivals in New World cultures. Bastide directed a project in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil, while Métraux worked in Haiti's Marbial Valley.<sup>872</sup> In their seminal studies of candomblé and voodoo, Bastide and Métraux would both conclude – by way of an initial valorization of African culture – that the cultures of Haiti and Brazil, shaped as they were by slavery, could not be understood in isolation and had to be situated in complex circuits of exchange, travel, hybridization and syncretism. New World cultures were not pure monads and could not be reduced to their African, European or Indigenous component parts; rather, they were irreducibly mixed and mingled, and had to be understood in their particularity and creativity.

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<sup>870</sup> The prime exemplar of this preference for the primitive remains Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (New York: Penguin, 1992); Dosse, 128-36.

<sup>871</sup> Georges Balandier, *The Sociology of Black Africa: Social Dynamics in Central Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 39-45.

<sup>872</sup> Marcus Chor Maio, "UNESCO and the Study of Race in Brazil," *Latin American Research Review* 36:2 (2001), 118-36; Andrew Apter, "On African Origins: Creolization and Connaissance in Haitian Voodoo," *American Ethnologist* 29:2 (2002), 233-60.

“Colonial situation” emerged as an important concept for the IME researchers and appeared frequently throughout their essays. Glissant, Giraud, Lucrèce and Hector Elisabeth made use of the term in their work. Michel Giraud, in particular, cited Balandier in his essays and the “colonial situation” was the basic theory Giraud deployed in order to make sense of the development of the Martiniquan class system and its racialized dynamics. Bastide and Métraux were important as well. Métraux was referenced in two articles on Haiti, while Bastide’s work was both referenced in multiple articles as well as reviewed in *Acoma*’s “Bibliographie Critique” section. Glissant scholars Bernadette Caillier and J. Michael Dash have noted the similarities between Glissant’s preoccupations and the work of Bastide and Métraux.<sup>873</sup> Their valorization of the “impure” cultures of the America and their focus on their complex historical becoming pushed ethnographic inquiry beyond both the “savage slot” and the Lévi-Strauss’ monadic dissection of “primitive thought.” Métraux and Bastide both posited that, in order to make sense of New World cultures, it was necessary to understand how both their form and content were intimately bound up in the collision between Europe, Africa and the Americas. An ethnography of the colonial situation thus presupposed an analytic framework that privileged relation over identity.

Certain threads of postwar European thought had a vital influence on the IME’s examination of Antillean life. Psychology – and Fanon’s reading of psychology – provided a language for describing colonialism’s impact on Antillean mental life and a method for illuminating connections between colonialism and “innate” Antillean social problems. Psychology and psychoanalysis’ libratory turn in the postwar period also

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<sup>873</sup> Bernadette Caillier, *Conquérants de la nuit nue: Edouard Glissant et l’H(h)istoire Antillaise* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1988), 83-5; J. Michael Dash, “*Le Je de l’Autre*: Surrealist Ethnographers and the Francophone Caribbean,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 47:1 (2007), 89-94.

suggested a means for liberating Antillean mental life from the colonial legacy. Postwar French Hegelian Marxism offered a revision of the Marxist-Leninist tradition that broke free of the moribund dogmatism of both the French and Antillean Communist parties. Hegel's master-slave dialectic and its materialization in existential Marxism also provided an optic through which to read the formation and stagnation of Antillean society. Finally, ethnographic focus on the "colonial situation" and the "syncretism" of New World cultures explained the formation of Antillean society and culture, valorized the creativity and dynamism of métis cultures, and finally privileged a "relational" over an "identitarian" epistemology and ontology. While an empirical return to the Antilles constituted the main priority of the IME and *Acoma*, this return was only possible through engagement with global intellectual and political currents.

### **'Keep on Pushing': the IME and Black America**

While the principal task of the IME and *Acoma* was the discovery, creation and diffusion of a specifically Antillean cultural practice in order to construct a genuine and socially grounded Antillean politics, the IME also strove to connect its "cultural action" to global struggles around black identity and political consciousness. *Acoma's* project was the rediscovery of the Antilles but this rediscovery avoided both a narcissistic turn inward and epistemological provincialism by cultivating links with like-minded artists, intellectuals and students from across the Americas. The recovery/discovery of Antillean identity and culture formed one component of a larger politico-cultural project: the effort to preserve and valorize the culture of the "Other America." Glissant introduced the concept "Other America" in a 1956 essay on the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier; "Other

America” constituted the non-European nations of the New World and embraced those New World cultures that diverged from normative European values. “Other America” thus embraced such variegated cultural expressions as African-American novels, Cuban surrealist painting and Chilean poetry.<sup>874</sup> Antilleans, in Glissant’s understanding, would learn from their “Other American” brothers and sisters and would work with them to construct new cultural modes that challenged European cultural hegemony.

Glissant recruited non-Martiniquans to the IME and as contributors to the journal. Anselme Rémy was a Haitian sociologist who taught at Fisk University; Juris Sileniks taught African American literature at the University of Pittsburgh. His former student, Wilbert Roget, taught at Howard University and helped to arrange intellectual exchanges between the IME and Howard University. Other contributors included the Cuban painter Jorge Camacho, the Haitian poet Jean Metellus, the Chilean painter Matta and the Quebecois poet Gaston Miron. The participants’ biographical, cultural and intellectual diversity contributed to the broad areas of inquiry researched by the IME and published in *Acoma*. Glissant intended the project as broad in scope and catholic in its interests; only by taking “a panorama as vast as possible,” he wrote, would it be possible to critically study the entire field of Antillean life.<sup>875</sup>

While the IME drew from the whole “vast panorama” of American cultural expression, African-American culture and history were of particular interest. The most striking manifestation of this fascination with African-American culture and politics was

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<sup>874</sup> Edouard Glissant, “Alejo Carpentier et ‘l’Autre Amérique,’” *Critique* 105 (Fév. 1956), 113-119; Michael Dash has seized on and expanded this concept to describe the heterogeneous cultural expression of the creolized cultures of the New World, elevating it to its own literary trope and genre. *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 7-14.

<sup>875</sup> *Acoma* n° 1, 32.



the appearance, in the first pages of *Acoma*'s first issue, of a letter written by former SNCC activist and Black Power militant James Forman.<sup>876</sup> Forman had traveled to Fort-de-France in 1969 to research a biography on Frantz Fanon and to interview Fanon's family members and Martiniquan associates and ended up staying on in Fort-de-France for six months.<sup>877</sup> Published in its original English and translated into French, the letter – also entitled “Ten Year Plan” – was written to Donald and Flora Stone, close friends and godparents to Forman's children. In it, Forman reflected on his 1960s activism, the state of the black movement in America and outlined a “ten year plan” for the next phase of the African-American struggle for freedom.<sup>878</sup>

Forman's letter linked the African-American struggle to the struggle of blacks in France by constructing a parallel between Frantz Fanon's early death in 1961 and the death of Sammy Younge, a Tuskegee Institute student who was shot to death for challenging Jim Crow laws in 1966. A Navy veteran, in death Younge also became a hero of anti-imperialism; a few days after his murder the SNCC Executive Committee, disgusted with unabated racialized violence in the South and the escalation in Indochina voted to oppose US foreign policy in Vietnam.<sup>879</sup> Forman recounted his emotional experience interviewing Fanon's mother, confiding to his friends that “as I recorded her words, a great sense of history swelled up in me, a sense that I was participating in a moment of enormous value.” Forman had felt a similar feeling when he interviewed Sammy Younge's mother in preparation for his book discussing the young activists'

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<sup>876</sup> James Forman, “Lettre de Fort-de-France,” *Acoma* n° 1 (1971), 7-26.

<sup>877</sup> James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 550.

<sup>878</sup> *Acoma* n° 1, xxii.

<sup>879</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 188.

death and the birth of Black Power politics out of the Civil Rights movement.<sup>880</sup> The tragic fragility of mothers denied their sons – he wrote poignantly of both Younge’s and Fanon’s mothers proudly preserving their sons’ military decorations – and the sense that he was in the presence of History provoked Forman’s emotions. He felt a sense that he was “bearing witness” to unfolding history, a feeling that translated into his treatment of Younge and Fanon in his letter. Their deaths were not mere deaths, but martyrdoms, elevated and invested with meaning through their place in world history:

It was the same moment for I was talking to the mother of another dead hero, another dead black hero, another man of Africa who had given his life to humanity, another man who had paid the same price as a Che Guevara, as a Patrice Lumumba, as a Malcolm X, as a Charles Mack Parker, as a Herbert Lee.<sup>881</sup>

Locating Younge and Fanon in the 1960s revolutionary pantheon alongside the martyrs and heroes that had been cut down in the course the struggle of the “wretched of the earth” for freedom and justice, Younge’s struggle and Fanon’s struggle became component parts of the larger struggle for Black liberation.

For Forman, Fanon and Younge testified to Black liberation’s transcendence of national borders. The oppression of blacks was not limited to the United States; it extended to Cuba, to the Congo, even to “colorblind” France. Forman’s letter reflected the American black left’s shift in the 1960s to conceiving their activism as an American expression of the broader, global anti-colonial struggle, a phenomenon Cynthia Young has described as the “Third World Left.” The shift to Third Worldist politics, and the

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<sup>880</sup> James Forman, *Sammy Younge, the First Black College Student to Die in the Black Liberation Movement* (Greensboro, NC: Open Hand Publishing, 1986).

<sup>881</sup> Forman, “Lettre,” 10. Charles Mack Parker was a young African-American man accused of rape who was lynched in 1959 in Mississippi; Herbert Lee was a dairy farmer who was murdered by E.H. Hurst in 1961, a member of the State Legislature, for providing support to SNCC activists in Amite County, Mississippi. Howard Smead, *Blood Justice: the Lynching of Mack Charles Parker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Charles M. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: the Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 121-5.

diagnosis of American social-political conditions as colonial/imperial conditions, did not occur solely among Black American activists; white American students and activists, as Jeremy Varon demonstrates, Third Worldist politics featured prominently among the SDS and other student radicals.<sup>882</sup> Nonetheless, Young argues that Third Worldist politics were particularly prevalent on the Black New Left; activists such as Robert Williams, LeRoi Jones and Angela Davis drew analytic parallels between African-Americans' situation in the United States and racial and colonial subjects in the Third World. They also traveled in the Third World and worked to forge links between American black activists and anti-colonial activists in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia.<sup>883</sup> Forman's incomplete Fanon project reflected this worldview and his letter constructed an explicit analogy between the situation of American blacks and Martiniquans, Caribbeans and Africans. Fanon and Younge paid the same price, he argued,

as thousands of our brothers and sisters have paid over the years that we have been separated from our native continent, that glorious land which the Western imperialists are raping and plundering, robbing and destroying, choking and suffocating, exploiting and oppressing, mining its riches and stealing its profits, bribing its leaders and starving its children, propping up South Africa, Mozambique, Angola and Ian Smith while trying to eliminate Guinea, Tanzania, Congo, Brazzaville, Sekou Toure and Juilius (sic) Nyerere.<sup>884</sup>

Forman combined "Third World Left" anti-colonialism with the Afrocentrism of the nascent American Black Power movement. Fanon's and Younge's lives were part of the longer history and larger geography of the Black Liberation struggle, a struggle initiated

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<sup>882</sup> Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: the Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 196-253.

<sup>883</sup> Cynthia Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 18-53. In many ways Young builds off of and expands the work of Penny von Eschen and Robin D.G. Kelley. Penny von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1997); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003). See also Ramon Guti  rrez, "Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race," *Du Bois Review* 1,2 (2004), 281-295.

<sup>884</sup> Forman, "Lettre," 10.

by the abduction and enslavement of their ancestors and still incomplete in 1970. Forman rendered their sacrifice meaningful – or, in the words of Hayden White, their deaths were “emplotted” and made sensible – through inscribing their experiences, their activism and their deaths in the tragic history of Black life in the Americas and into its (hoped for) libratory and heroic future.<sup>885</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of *Acoma*’s proposed intellectual project, the choice of Forman’s letter to launch *Acoma* seems a strange choice. Due to its position at the very beginning of the first issue, the letter acts as a preface, a “paratext,” which frames and directs the reader’s interpretation of the first issue and the journal as a whole.<sup>886</sup> How then should we interpret this letter and its meaning to *Acoma*’s broader intellectual project? What was its framing and interpretative purpose? At first glance, Forman’s letter seems problematic or at least highly ambivalent, principally because his stridently Afrocentric interpretation of Fanon’s life – positing Fanon and Younge alike as “sons of Africa” – seems to contradict *Acoma*’s larger intent.<sup>887</sup> Glissant’s formed the IME and published *Acoma* in order to critique and supersede négritude’s Afrocentricity in favor of an Antillean “science of ourselves;” négritude’s desire for Africa occluded Antilleans’ coming to consciousness as Antilleans as it located their “homeland” in Africa and not the Caribbean.<sup>888</sup> Forman’s letter thus appears anomalous and problematic as his interpretation of Fanon reproduced the same Afrocentric logic that Glissant and his collaborators were attempting to move beyond.

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<sup>885</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 51-80; David Scott expands on White’s notion of “emplotting” historical facts into literary frameworks in *Conscripts of Modernity*.

<sup>886</sup> Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 196-235.

<sup>887</sup> Forman, “Lettre,” 14,

<sup>888</sup> Untitled Introduction to James Forman’s Letter, *Acoma* n° 1 (1971), 3-5.

Reading the letter again, however, and reading it through Glissant's own introductory remarks, its prefatory function seems to rest in what Hayden White called the "content of the form:" what was important about Forman's letter was not the means ("Africa") through which he theorized the link between Martinique and Black America but that he theorized the link in the first place. Forman's effort to construct parallels between life in Martinique and life in Black America broke the Antilles' "vertical relationship" with France and opened up the possibility for a "horizontal relationship" with the "Other America."<sup>889</sup> The fact that Forman chose to come to Martinique to explore the destiny of Black America, that a "black American militant searched for his truth" in the memory of Frantz Fanon and in the experience of Martinique, was striking. Forman's goal – to understand Fanon in order to better understand himself and his own struggle – was the "double sign" under which Glissant "chose to place *Acoma*."<sup>890</sup> Forman's desire to understand Fanon and Martiniquan life, and to apply this understanding to his own situation as a Black American, instantiated the "Other America" that Glissant hoped to build through the IME.

Reflecting on Forman's letter, Glissant closed with a call to arms, an appeal to ground *Acoma*'s work – and by extension Antillean politico-cultural action – in their own proper terrain, the soil of the Americas. Forman had provided an example that French Antilleans must follow:

The Antilles, the Americas. Open up to this reality. We must interrogate the voices that are important to us: the writers, the artists, the militants or combatants,

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<sup>889</sup> I borrow the language of vertical and horizontal relationships from Justin Daniel. Justin Daniel, "The Construction of Dependency: Economy and Politics in the French Antilles" in Aarón Gamaliel Ramos and Angel Israel Rivera, eds., *Islands at the Crossroads: Politics in the Non-Independent Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001), 61-79.

<sup>890</sup> Untitled Introduction, 3.

all those who explained or prepared our reality: those who the people of the Antilles and Americas formed, and for whom they have struggled so.<sup>891</sup>

Glissant, building off of Forman's letter, understood *Acoma*'s project to be in part a re-contextualization of black cultural production that would emplace the efforts of the "writers, the artists, the militants or combatants" not in a common origin of African genius but in their common New World experience of slavery, colonialism and cultural eradication. In this passage, the lineament of Glissant's theory of "Antillanité" emerges. Against *négritude*'s cultural essentialism, its backward gaze to Africa three centuries distant, Glissant counterpoised the actual Antillean cultural present, its "metisse" reality, arguing that only in the act of opening onto this reality could Antilleans "embody" their lived experience.<sup>892</sup> Glissant rejected *négritude*'s essentialist cultural politics, its vision of the African diaspora as immanent and Afrocentric, in favor of a vision of diaspora as built, made in the very act of movement, exchange, imagination and intellection.<sup>893</sup>

To build the "Other America," the IME arranged conferences and exchanges for non-Martiniquans to participate in the IME's cultural programs. In the early 1970s, the Institute arranged for students from Howard and Lincoln Universities to study language and culture at the IME during the summer term. The exchange provided an opportunity for Antillean and African-American students to discuss commonalities and delineate differences between black life in the United States and in Martinique and France. Interviews with African-American students studying in Martinique were published in

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<sup>891</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>892</sup> Ibid.

<sup>893</sup> Brent Hayes Edwards' understanding of diaspora as a *practice* and not an *essence* influenced my reading here. Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*; Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Uses of *Diaspora*," *Social Text* 66 (2001), 45-73; Minkah Makalani, "Introduction: Diaspora and the Localities of Race," *Social Text* 98 (2009), 1-3.

both issue 2 and issue 4/5 of *Acoma*.<sup>894</sup> One of the interviewer's principal lines of inquiry was to explore the role African-American universities played in the Black intellectual, cultural and political consciousness. As the IME had been founded in part to encourage and disseminate black consciousness in the French Antilles, the interviewer was interested in the historic black colleges' effectiveness in accomplishing this task in the United States. Questions also touched on campus life, cultural and political consciousness on campus, the Black Panthers and Black Power movement, relations to the broader student movement and the New Left, life in black communities, drugs and drug use and Marxism's place in Black activism. The interviewer also inquired into their impressions of Martinique and the IME.

In general, the African-American students were skeptical of the role of Black universities in developing black consciousness and in articulating cultural and intellectual projects that could be translated into political activism. The students were critical of the Black Power movement, seeing it as the ideology, even the marketing strategy, of the nascent black capitalist bourgeoisie. They preferred the Black Panthers' confrontational politics but thought the Panthers had compromised too much in building links to white activist groups; one student argued that they would be more effective if they eschewed public confrontation in favor of "clandestinity."<sup>895</sup> The students spoke positively of their experience in Martinique though admitted to a certain degree of confusion. They had wanted to see what the condition of blacks was like "in all the Americas" but the "multitude of... opinions in Martinique" were surprising. Martiniquans held a variety of

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<sup>894</sup> "La Role des Universitaires Noires dans la Société Américaine: Entretiens avec des étudiants noirs-américains," *Acoma* n° 2 (Juillet 1971), 60-70; "Interview sur les Associations Noires-Américaines," *Acoma* n° 4/5 (Avril 1973), 169-175.

<sup>895</sup> "La Role," 66.

opinions bust most, the students observed, tended “to think that there is nothing wrong with the system, they seem to accept it.”<sup>896</sup> Asked whether Martinique seemed like a black country, one student paraphrased Fanon and suggested that while he “saw people with black skin... inside it’s another question.”<sup>897</sup> Excepting their IME hosts, the Americans seemed somewhat surprised and disappointed at the low level of black consciousness among Martiniquans.<sup>898</sup> Despite the African-American students’ skepticism of the Black university’s political utility, the Black Power movement’s motivations and the Black Panthers’ tactics, for the IME activists the African-American students represented that the widespread diffusion Black consciousness was possible, a condition that the IME could only hope to replicate. The American movement had its weaknesses and contradictions but it constituted a movement nonetheless, with institutions, traditions and demonstrable political victories. For IME activists, African-American politics and cultural activism seemed worthy of emulation.

IME activists were not only interested in establishing links with militant African-American students, academics and activists; the IME also believed that Antilleans could learn cultural and political lessons from them. In addition to hosting American students at the IME, the Institute also organized a “summer session” for American academics in August 1974, inviting African-American professors, graduate students and researchers for a month-long program in Fort-de-France. Beatrice Stith Clark, a French instructor at historically black Fisk University, was one of the participants. In 1989 she contributed an article to a special issue of *World Literature Today* devoted to Glissant’s critical and

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<sup>896</sup> “Interview,” 175.

<sup>897</sup> “La Role,” 70.

<sup>898</sup> Ibid.



literary production that reconstructed the 1974 summer course.<sup>899</sup> Clark noted that the seminar invitation stressed that the IME was particularly desirous of African-American participation and “the announcement indicated that a special effort was being made to involve black American academics in the program.”<sup>900</sup> The final group was mostly composed of “American college teachers of French at black universities and colleges” and the program was designed to introduce them to the IME’s research into Antillean social and cultural life. Stith listed that the seminar touched on the following topics: “Aimé Césaire,” “Roumain and Alexis,” “Edouard Glissant,” “Frantz Fanon,” “Bilingualism: Creole-French,” and a six-part lecture by Glissant entitled “Knowledge of the milieu,” which discussed “Problems of Colonialism in Martinique,” “Social Structure,” “History and Missed Opportunities,” “Parodic Culture,” “Language and Identity,” and “Pulsions and Solutions – Antillanité.”<sup>901</sup> This standard curriculum was “complemented by guest lectures, cultural tours, and excursions.” The lectures and seminars ranged over Antillean literature and poetics, language and linguistics, and included the IME’s research in Antillean psychological, social and cultural history.<sup>902</sup>

For the Americans students, the suppositions and conclusions of the IME program were in many ways surprising. The program Glissant and the other IME members designed for the American audience did not avoid the theoretical critique of existing Antillean ideologies of self and society; in particular, Glissant insisted on submitting Césaire and Senghor’s *négritude* to rigorous historical critique. *Négritude*, Glissant

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<sup>899</sup> Beatrice Stith Clark, “IME Revisited: Lectures by Edouard Glissant on Sociocultural Realities in the Francophone Antilles,” *World Literature Today* 63,4 (Autumn 1989), 599-605.

<sup>900</sup> *Ibid.*, 599.

<sup>901</sup> The program, while focused on Martinique, indicated a broad conception of “Antillean” identity, including the Haitian poets/writers Jacques Roumain and Stéphan Alexis.

<sup>902</sup> *Ibid.*

argued, represented an historically important step in the development of Antillean self-consciousness: “Césaire tried to revalidate the part of the Antillean that heretofore had been devalued: the African element... The Africanized aspect of the Antillean, *systematically* devalued from the beginning, is reclaimed by Césaire in the early stage of the Négritude theory.”<sup>903</sup> Stith Clark noted that the assembled African-American scholars, well versed in Senghor, Césaire and the négritude theory generally, shared this appreciation. But, she continued, “we were not prepared for the theoretical bombshell that he dropped on us next.”<sup>904</sup> While négritude represented an important step for Antilleans, valorizing African culture after centuries of denigration, it possessed severe limitations in developing a truly Antillean cultural consciousness. In particular, its claim to universality formed the mirror image of the pretense of Western humanism, simply substituting Black for Western civilization. Négritude thus succumbed to an “abstract and abusive universalism.”<sup>905</sup> The universalizing move of négritude, to posit that all blacks everywhere possessed the same basic cultural humanity, thus denied what Glissant called the “diverse:” the multiple modes of being black in the world. Stith Clark noted that the Americans, ideologically invested in négritude, “were therefore somewhat on the defensive concerning what we perceived as an assault on the core of our ‘artistic negritude, anthropological negritude and political negritude.’”<sup>906</sup> Despite their objections, Glissant pressed his point, pointing out that the African militants he had met found little use for négritude in their fight against neo-colonialism, while the adoption of négritude by French Antillean elites had not translated into a society-wide political and cultural

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<sup>903</sup> Quoted from Glissant’s lectures by Stith Clark. Ibid., 601.

<sup>904</sup> Ibid.

<sup>905</sup> Quoted from Glissant’s lectures by Stith Clark. Ibid. My translation.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid.

consciousness. Stith Clark noted that the lecture became a sort of “deaf dialogue,” as the Americans were “not dissuaded from their belief that there was a universal humanity (Négritude) among all the people of African descent.”<sup>907</sup> In subsequent lectures, Glissant expanded on his theme, reiterating his theoretical demand that “Other American” writers and intellectuals practice multilingualism, that Antillean writers – French, British, Hispanic, Dutch – work to break down the “Balkanization” of the Caribbean, and that the principal task of the Antillean writer was to produce works that would “slowly and proudly enter into the popular consciousness.”<sup>908</sup>

For Glissant, the trajectory of African-American political and cultural consciousness offered a model for French Antillean intellectual activists to emulate. African-Americans, unlike Antilleans, possessed a “cultural accumulation” and “cultural refuge” that insulated them from the total cultural dominance that reigned in the Antilles. Glissant pointed to Antillean literature, which he dismissed as derivative of “universal” European forms; it did not express the culture of the people, the depths and texture of Antillean life, but merely the “universalist” pretensions and French sensibilities of “an elite of professors, small or middle bourgeoisie.” African-Americans, on the other hand, had not only developed a distinctive literature that spoke eloquently of African-American life, but a unique and organic cultural form, jazz. Jazz, Glissant suggested, was a distinctly African-American cultural form that also articulated “an existential expression for the American black.”<sup>909</sup> Both the tradition of African-American literature and the invention of jazz’s as a distinctive cultural form testified to the fact of black American identity. At this point, several of the Americans disagreed with Glissant’s contention that

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<sup>907</sup> Ibid., 602.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid., 604.

<sup>909</sup> Ibid., 600.

jazz testified to a black American identity. The pointed to white jazz musicians and to the fact that many jazz musicians had not benefitted from their art. Glissant conceded the point but argued that regardless jazz as an original art form symbolized the substantial quality of black identity in the United States. He extrapolated on this point, pointing toward Malcolm X's symbolic erasure of his last name: "The Black American has collective forms of expression, which, even if they do not postulate a civil state of identity, define a cultural identity. In other words, even if his name is always X, he can still recognize himself, through a language like jazz, for instance."<sup>910</sup> Malcolm X's erasure of his "slave name" demonstrated that for African-Americans their identity was a problem, something to be grappled with and understood. Antilleans, on the other hand had yet to even reach this stage in cultural consciousness. "But, in my opinion, he is not reduced to questioning himself about his identity, which is the Antillean's conjectural problem. The Antillean has to question his identity in a conjectural sense, while the black American questions in identity in a positive sense. It is clearly a defined question."<sup>911</sup> Antilleans still asked themselves whether or no there *was* an Antillean identity separate from French identity; Antillean identity remained an "as if," not an "is." Glissant returned again to the issue of jazz. While it was true the music industry exploited jazz musicians, the success and spread of jazz as a form of cultural expression testified to the depth and durability of African-American social structures and consciousness, which supported, maintained and continued to innovate jazz. In the French Antilles, on the other hand, the *biguine*, a musical form analogous jazz, never possessed a similar level of socio-cultural support, ceased to innovate and grew stagnant, reduced to folkloric music for visiting

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<sup>910</sup> Glissant quoted in Stith Clark. Ibid., 600-1.

<sup>911</sup> Ibid.

tourists. Antilleans themselves stopped listening to *biguine*, preferring imported French and American music. Whatever problems black America faced despite its persistent social, economic and cultural problems, despite white American repression, despite the lack of immediate solutions to these problems, Glissant concluded that it nonetheless was in possession of the proper question. Antilleans lacked even that.<sup>912</sup>

The IME's engagement with African-American life as a method and model for developing Antillean consciousness extended throughout its intellectual and political work. *Acoma*'s third issue featured an editorial that denounced the Chicago police's "assassination" of George Jackson and the severe violence used to quell the Attica uprising.<sup>913</sup> Marlène Hospice, one of the group's principal members, published a two-part study of African-American literature that began with the Harlem Renaissance and extended into the 1960s, though she focused particularly on the work of Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. She concluded that their psychological turn inward marked the limit that African-American liberal discourse had reached by the 1960s. Its vitality was spent and its prominent role ceded to Malcolm X's and the Black Panthers' emerging liberation movements.<sup>914</sup> Hospice concluded that parallels existed with Antillean literature; in both literatures, protagonists too often observed historical events and rarely intervened, preferring a guarded distance. This narrative viewpoint reflected the black bourgeoisie's

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<sup>912</sup> Glissant here seems close to the position of both R.G. Collingwood and David Scott's postcolonial appropriation of Collingwood in his *Conscripts of Modernity*. Scott, following Collingwood, rereads C.L.R. James' *Black Jacobins* as an answer to the question of how to express Afro-Caribbean identity in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. James' answer – national liberation – follows from the context of the time in which the nation-state appeared as the main framework in which political, social, economic and cultural rights were articulated. Glissant is arguing here that Antilleans can develop their own "being-in-the-World" (Glissant introduced this Heideggerean term later in his lectures) until they have formulated an Antillean identity as the proper question to be asked. Stith Clark, 604. Scott, 51-6.

<sup>913</sup> "Evénement," *Acoma* n° 3 (Fevrier 1972), 3-6.

<sup>914</sup> Marlène Hospice, "La Littérature nègre aux États-Unis (I)," *Acoma* n° 1 (Avril 1971), 111-127; "La Littérature Nègre aux États-Unis (II)," *Acoma* n° 2 (Juillet 1971), 71-85.

resignation in the face of intractable white power. She concluded that cultural production, in America and the Antilles, had to shift from the studied resignation of the black bourgeoisie to the militant consciousness of popular liberation movements.

Black American militants also figured prominently in the IME's experimental theatre piece, "Histoire de Nègre."<sup>915</sup> The play dramatized in an almost Brechtian manner – fragmentary and revealing itself as artifice – three structural moments of Black history: slavery, liberation struggles and neo-colonialism.<sup>916</sup> At a key hinge in the play, in the transition from the slave-colonial era to the neo-colonial era, the character known as the "Mythic Personality," recited the accusations and indictments leveled at Black Power militants and read off the names of H. Rap Brown, Huey Newton, Angela Davis, Stokely Carmichael and Bobby Seale in front of a projection of Angela Davis that soon shifted to Malcolm X. The character denoted as "Oppressed n° 1" – who had previously embodied a panoply of resistant black figures, ranging from a nameless maroon to Patrice Lumumba – became Malcolm X and urged the audience to "drain the racist tumor/By the revolution/By the conquest of power/By black power/Brothers from the holds and deportation."<sup>917</sup> The play – which shifted between French and Creole – integrated the Black American activists, through word, image and gesture, into the history of the Antilles, of Black America, of Blacks in the world. Rather than reducing the play's message to a return to Africa, "Histoire de Nègres" instantiated a diasporic sensibility through the juxtaposition of geographies, temporalities, personalities and events. This

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<sup>915</sup> Groupe du théâtre de l'Institut Martiniquais d'études, "Histoire de Nègre," *Acoma* n° 3 (Fevrier 1972), 71-112. The title is best translated as "Negro History," but the perjorative translation of *nègre* ("nigger") and the prosaic translation of *histoire* ("story") would also fit the play's overall intent and message.

<sup>916</sup> Marlène Hospice wrote a theoretical reflection on the play's performances. Marlène Hospice, "Sur une Spéctacle," *Acoma* n° 3 (Fevrier 1972), 113-7.

<sup>917</sup> "Histoire de Nègre," 98.

diasporic space, however, was not only a Black one; in the third part of the performance, “Oppressed n° 1” and his eternal partner, “Oppressed n° 2,” become Manuel, a Hispanic worker and Anaïssa, an Algerian immigrant woman, building a garden on the Antillean *mornes*.<sup>918</sup> The play’s use of *nègre*, black, ironically reversed racial discourse’s binary division of the world into white and black, its description of the non-white as the black. The play suggested that colonialist discourse’s Manichean division of peoples and cultures represented not only a dismissive, racializing gesture, but also demonstrated and instantiated the colonized’s fundamental unity, its shared experience of repression and denigration, its shared need to oppose and overthrow the white colonizer. The play pointed beyond the narrow bounds of a purely “black” political project to imagine an “Other American,” a Third World political and cultural project, one that posited diaspora not only as a matter of skin but one of affiliation.

The IME’s development of postwar European social and political thought, as well as its links to “Other” and African-American intellectuals, artists and activists testified to the fact that while its project was devoted to an empirical study of the Antilles, this empiricism was conceived “in relation” to the complexities of the Antillean past and present. Europe and the European heritage, as much as Africa and the African heritage, was an indivisible facet of Antillean cultural and social being. To dismiss this inheritance outright risked recapitulating “the One” rather than thinking through “relation.” Within European tradition were intellectual and cultural tools that could assist in undoing the legacies of colonialism and cultural repression. Theory and method were sterile without practice and the creation and development of links with the “Other America” worked to

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<sup>918</sup> “Mornes” are the hills of the Antillean islands. This material, the play notes, is partially transposed from the Algerian writer Kateb Yacine. Manuel and Anaïssa are adopted from the Haitian novelist Jacques Roumain’s *Les Gouverneurs de la Rose*. Thank you to Renée Larrier for this insight.

put theory into practice. If the Antilles' future was Antillean, American, then an important component of cultural practice was to begin to make that future a reality. Before Antilleans could reconnect in full with the "Other America," however, Antilleans first had to know where they had been and where they were.

### **The Traumas of History: Glissant's Psychological Inventory**

Edouard Glissant's major analytical contributions to the journal were in-depth psychological readings of Antillean social formations and the Antillean personality. While he also published poems, an excerpt from his then in-preparation novel, *Malemort*, and short, anonymous commentaries, his principal contribution was a series of papers that described what he called the Antilles' "generalized mental disequilibrium," a "disequilibrium" that resulted from the social pathologies that shaped and defined Antillean life.<sup>919</sup> Vitally, however, Glissant refused to understand social pathologies as transparently connected to social structure; rather, the relationship between the social order and the psychic order was opaque and required careful examination before it could be analyzed and mapped.<sup>920</sup> A concatenation of social, cultural and historical legacies shaped Antillean mental life. To unravel this complex, Glissant focused his analysis around "groups" – race, class, family, etc., the sociological building blocks of society – arguing that they both produced and were the product of what he defined as the Antilles' "external structuration."<sup>921</sup>

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<sup>919</sup> Roget suggests that Glissant wrote most, if not all, of the unsigned material in *Acoma* such as editorials and commentaries. Note n° 131. Roget, 88.

<sup>920</sup> In this spirit, Glissant's essays were closer to the cultural critique of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* or *Moses and Monotheism* than to the clinical and scientific Freud. John DiCensio, *The Other Freud: Religion, Culture and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1998), 115-188.

<sup>921</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981). Interestingly, the IME debates that followed these papers were published in the French edition but not in the American translation.



Both Glissant's paper on group tensions and his paper on mental disequilibrium grounded his psychological account of the Antilles in a careful reconstruction of the islands' social-historical formation. He focused on the structure of Antillean "groups," including race, class and family (i.e., the sociological building blocks of society), and the tensions that existed between them. Opposed to both a utilitarian social science that attempted to alleviate social tensions through state intervention and to a functionalist social theory that would link social tensions to social structure in a transparent, analogical relationship, Glissant proposed instead a more sophisticated historical and theoretical project. Antilleans, he argued, were not alienated on account of Oedipalism or poverty, displacement or racism, though all those things mattered; they were alienated due to a concatenation of social, cultural and historical legacies. The relationship between the social order and the psychic order was opaque and required careful examination before it could be analyzed and mapped.

Informed by psychological language and concepts, Glissant dispensed with establishment psychiatry's propensity toward ahistoricism in favor of grounding psychological development in concrete sociological and historical processes. Glissant treated psychological discourse as an historical account of individual consciousness but suggested that individual consciousness only possessed sense through its imbrication in social institutions and practices.<sup>922</sup> Psychology provided a language that narrated the psychical becoming of the individual but this individual only took shape in the collective. While Glissant's ultimate object of research was a picture of Antillean social, historical and cultural life in its totality, groups were a vital initial object of inquiry as they

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<sup>922</sup> Michael Roth, *Psychoanalysis as History: Negation and Freedom in Freud* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 15-29; Dominick Lacapra, "History, Psychoanalysis, Critical Theory" in *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 72-105.

mediated relationships between individuals and the broader complex, forming the medium means through society imprinted the individual. In other words, studying Antillean group formation and group dynamics provided an important perspective on the fundamental scope and nature of Antillean alienation.

Glissant's education with Jean Wahl in postwar Paris helped provided an important early influence on Glissant's psychological critique of Antillean culture, language and society. Wahl was a scholar of phenomenology, particularly Hegel and Heidegger, as well as an accomplished philosophical pedagogue; intellectual historians recently have recovered Wahl's vital role in mid-century French philosophy, particularly his role in the transmission of Germany philosophy to France.<sup>923</sup> Wahl was an early proponent and teacher of Hegel to France's "Existential Generation" in the 1930s; figures ranging from Levinas to Sartre attended his lectures.<sup>924</sup> During the war Wahl devoted himself to an extensive study of Heidegger and published the first French introduction to Heidegger's thought just after the Liberation.<sup>925</sup> Wahl's interpretations of Hegel and Heidegger were somewhat idiosyncratic as he refracted their philosophy through a passionate attachment to Kierkegaard and a reluctance to entirely abandon the Cartesian method.<sup>926</sup> The twin influences of Kierkegaard and Descartes shaped Wahl's approach to Hegel's thought and translated into a reading that, in the words of Bruce Baugh, privileged the empirical and concrete over the abstract in the movement of the

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<sup>923</sup> Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2003), 33-42; Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 84-7; Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 177-186; Michael Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 2-5.

<sup>924</sup> Jean Wahl, *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: 1929).

<sup>925</sup> Jean Wahl, *Introduction à la pensée de Heidegger* (Paris: 1946).

<sup>926</sup> Romauld Fonkoua, "Jean Wahl et Edouard Glissant: philosophie, raison, et poésie" in Jacques Chevrier, ed. *Poétiques d'Edouard Glissant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, 1999), 300-2.

dialectic.<sup>927</sup> Wahl's empiricism manifested itself in what Baugh calls a "pluralist realism," an openness to things as they are, which Wahl posited as the basis of freedom.<sup>928</sup> Wahl rejected Hegel's resolution of the dialectic in transcendent unity and, reading Hegel through Kierkegaard, emphasized rather the subject's *déchirement* (tearing), insisting that subjects only exist in "tension between cohesion and dispersion, division and unity."<sup>929</sup>

Romauld Fonkoua noted Wahl's profound effect on Glissant's intellectual formation. In an essay on Wahl and Glissant, Fonkoua traced how Wahl's unique readings in the philosophical tradition, especially Hegel, manifested in Glissant's thought, particularly Glissant's conception of subject-formation and the subject's capacity for purposeful action, as well as the relationship of the particular element to the universal totality.<sup>930</sup> Fonkoua argued that Wahl's concept of the concrete particular "seduced" Glissant and "revealed" to him "the conditions for Antillean thought."<sup>931</sup> Wahl's focus on the concrete, "the instant," was translated into Glissant's focus on Antillean social, cultural and historical specificity. It guided his refusal to resolve – or some might say, dissolve – the specificity of Antillean experience into a higher unity or synthesis. The concrete particular not only rescued Antillean thought from subsumption into French thought but insisted that Antillean thought was a privileged site of inquiry.

The theorization of Antillean subjectivity, its formation and its content, dominated Glissant's work from *Soleil de la connaissance* (1956) to *Le Discours Antillais* (1981). His

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<sup>927</sup> The initial French disciples of Hegel initially would prefer Kojève's reading of the dialectic as a conflict of desire and self-consciousness, though Wahl's emphasis on the concrete particular would find favor with Deluze a generation later. Kleinberg, 71-9; Baugh, 34, 38.

<sup>928</sup> Baugh, 33-4.

<sup>929</sup> Ibid.

<sup>930</sup> Fonkoua, 299-315; Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 172.

<sup>931</sup> Ibid., 299.

overarching argument theorized that the difficulty in forming an Antillean subject flowed from Antilleans' repeated refusals to recognize their *antillanité* in favor of identification with "universal" modes of belonging: French republicanism, Négritude, Communism, Gaullism and so on. To translate Glissant's critique into Wahl's words, Antilleans repeatedly rejected their concrete reality in favor of abstract ideality. Glissant's project, particularly in the IME and *Acoma*, was to elaborate on the concrete particularity of Antillean reality, in the hope that the IME's work would push Antilleans to embrace their lived experience over and against abstract and external modes of belonging. For Glissant, an embrace of the "concrete particular" was the prerequisite to the very possibility of Antillean thought and, by extension, Antillean freedom.

Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial psychology provided an important supplement to Wahl's empirical Hegelianism. Glissant would extend his friend's theories, developed in France and North Africa, and apply Fanon's insights to their native Antilles.<sup>932</sup> Just as Fanon described mental illness among Algerians as symptomatic of colonialism and colonial war, Glissant theorized that the pathologies of Antillean mental and social life were not physiological or psychopathological, but social, psychical manifestations of a society shaped by three centuries of slavery and colonization. Further, Glissant adopted Fanon's critique of Western psychiatry and his rejection of psychoanalysis' ahistorical abstraction and pretensions to universal validity. In his writings, particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon drew on and condemned the

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<sup>932</sup> Fanon of course preceded Glissant in this critique; much of *Black Skin, White Masks* is devoted to criticizing French Antilleans and investigating their situation within France and French discourse. Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 85-93; Celia Britton, *Race and the Unconscious: Freudianism in French Caribbean Thought* (Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Research Centre, 2002), 60-9.

uncritical transposition of Western psychological archetypes in order to diagnose colonial subjects without any reference to the violent deformations caused by the colonial situation. Fanon attacked the privileging of the incestuous family romance as the “primal trauma” that gives birth to both individuation and pathology.<sup>933</sup> While such a “family romance” might be true for bourgeois European society, Fanon contested its validity for the colonized. He criticized Octave Mannoni, a Freudian psychoanalyst that had treated Malagasy mental patients during the French war in Madagascar, for explaining the violent dreams of his Malagasy patients through recourse to Freudian archetypes. Fanon wrote that the family romance, far from being useful, was in fact distracting. “Freud’s discoveries are of no use to us whatsoever,” Fanon concluded, “We must put this dream *in its time*... we must put this dream *in its place*... In some circumstances, we must recall, the *socius* is more important than the Individual.”<sup>934</sup> For Fanon, psychology was less a process of relating individual illness to “universal” psychoanalytic complexes than developing a historically and socially grounded account of the context that conditioned the development of not only mental illness but colonized subjectivity. For Fanon, the “primal scene,” the fundamental and overriding determinant of the colonized’s mental life was the encounter with the white man, the white’s marking out the black man as black and the black’s subjugation to white rule and white culture.<sup>935</sup>

In the Antilles, this proved particularly destructive as the Antillean, rather than resisting as Algerians and Africans had, instead embraced “an attitude, a way of thinking and seeing that is basically white... subjectively and intellectually the Antillean behaves

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<sup>933</sup> David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (New York: Picador, 1996), 192-4; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 121-132.

<sup>934</sup> Fanon 2008, 84-5.

<sup>935</sup> In Fanon’s formulation, in the eyes of the white man any non-white is black or native.

like a white man.”<sup>936</sup> In the Antilles, then, the fundamental motor of psychological reality was not the elaboration of the primal struggle between son and father, nor the son’s unrequited desire for the mother, but the struggle between the slave and the master. While formal slavery ended in 1848, its repercussions persisted into post-emancipation psychological structures, often in subtle and insidious ways. In the French Antilles, for example, the ex-slave desired not only to be the master but in fact understood himself as already the master, obscuring that the social structures that shaped his psyche remained unchanged from the time of slavery and were dominated by the master-slave relation.<sup>937</sup> Freudian archetypes, over reliant on the family romance, were unable to account for the socio-historic specificity of the French Antilles and risked reducing Antillean mental illness to a parodic deviation from proper, that is to say, European psychological life.<sup>938</sup> Antilleans would thus be doubly subjugated: normative European models of psychic life effectively erased the violence of the colonial encounter, which constituted the primal origin of the colonized’s subjugated psychological structure.

Psychical socialization was key to Glissant’s essay on groups and group tensions on Martinique; he elaborated this process through a concept he named “structuration,” defined as “the long work by which the structure becomes what it is today.”<sup>939</sup> While

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<sup>936</sup> Fanon 2008, 126.

<sup>937</sup> Ibid., 132-4.

<sup>938</sup> Lewis R. Gordon, “The Black and the Body Politic: Fanon’s Phenomenological Critique of Psychoanalysis” in Gordon, et al., eds., *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1994) 74-84; Cedric Robinson, “The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon,” *Race and Class* 35,1 (1993), 79-91; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Critical Fanonism,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 457-470.

<sup>939</sup> Glissant, “Structures,” 39-40. It must be noted that the sociologist Anthony Giddens has also elaborated a concept called “structuration” but there appears to be no relation between Giddens’ theory and Glissant’s usage, merely a coincidence of wording. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); William H. Sewell Jr., “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency and Transformation” in *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 127-136. It is possible that Glissant borrowed it from Fanon, who uses the language of structures in his work. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1952 (Poche 1971), 67-72.

Glissant never cited explicitly his source for his conceptualization of structuration, his usage bore the mark of the doctrinaire Marxist definition of the base-superstructure relationship, Gramsci's notion of hegemony and Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology.<sup>940</sup> Regardless of its ultimate source, for Glissant structuration described the historical becoming of a society and delineated how society's institutions – understood to include everything from the economic mode of production to schooling to language – produced the individual. Translated into psychoanalytic terms, structuration resembles the super-ego as it constrains individual self-fashioning and imprints the individual with larger collective patterns.<sup>941</sup> All societies, Glissant noted, are structured and thus all individuals undergo structuration. The important point for Glissant, however, was that the Antilles' "structure" was imposed by France and that the structuration of Antillean mental, cultural and social life was in fact an "external structuration," reflective less of the particular conditions of Antillean life and subject instead to France's historical becoming.<sup>942</sup> In short, in the French Antilles, social structures and individuals' formation within those structures were French structures and structuration.<sup>943</sup>

External structuration was an important contributing factor to the pathologies that lay at the heart of Martinique's groups and produced the inter- and intra-group tensions that plagued Martiniquan society. Europe's social structure developed in the course of a long process of historical becoming, the end result of centuries of inter-European social

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<sup>940</sup> Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso Books, 2005), 31-49; Raymond Williams, "Structural," *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 301-308; T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90,3 (June 1985), 567-593; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Social Structure," *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 277-323.

<sup>941</sup> Williams, "Structural," 303-4.

<sup>942</sup> Glissant, "Structures," 32.

<sup>943</sup> One thinks of Fanon's famous example of Martiniquan school children learning about "our ancestors, the Gauls" in class. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 126.

and cultural development. Drawing on Hegel's master-slave dialectic and Marx's materialist dialectic, Glissant traced how the European bourgeoisie "[overcame]" the feudal relationship through the "work of society on itself" and from this "autonomous" effort the bourgeoisie established its cultural and social hegemony.<sup>944</sup> In other words, the contemporary European social structure of democratic capitalism was an organic outgrowth of internal social and cultural dynamics. Democratic capitalism in the Antilles, on the other hand, was, like the consumer goods that filled the shops, imported from France. The colonial state had transposed European social forces into the Antilles and had structured Antillean society in its own image. Imposed social structuration reproduced a parodic version of European society while at the same moment it blocked Antillean self-structuration. The Martiniquan black "bourgeoisie," Glissant suggested, was symptomatic of this process. While it possessed power through its hold on the political system and its occupation of prestigious social roles (teacher, doctor, lawyer), it lacked, in Marxist terms, the necessary "material base" for its power. Landed property remained in the hands of the *béké*, while metropolitan capitalists entirely controlled commerce, production and banking. Antillean "bourgeois ideology" did not result from the "self-activity" of the local bourgeoisie itself; rather, it was the derivative result of the imposition of European structures through colonialism.<sup>945</sup>

In Glissant's understanding, Antillean social organization and cultural values were disconnected from the Antilles' real economic situation. Colonialism had short-circuited the base-superstructure relationship as bourgeois hegemony was imposed on top of regressive social relationships; Antillean culture and society lacked material depth

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<sup>944</sup> Glissant, "Structures," 40.

<sup>945</sup> This phenomenon was explored in greater depth in the roundtable discussion following Glissant's paper. Ibid., 39-43.



because bourgeois social and cultural values coexisted with an essentially feudal economic order. This “lack of density,” as Glissant phrased it, contributed to the social pathologies that structured groups and group dynamics. Antilleans, Glissant suggested, were subconsciously cognizant that Antillean social structures had been imposed through slavery and colonization and that this subconscious realization caused them to “refuse” this social and cultural imposition. However, Antillean manifested their refusal by rejecting the transposed yet normative social and cultural structures that formed life in the islands.

Glissant insisted that refusal not be confused with resistance for it was experienced not as liberation but as “trauma.”<sup>946</sup> While the unconscious rejection of French structures – which Glissant called Antilleans’ “traumatic refusal” – produced pathological effects at the level of everyday, lived existence, the “refusal” itself was not pathological but displaced. Glissant used trauma in two senses. First, because Antilleans refused social structures “unconsciously” they could not grasp their resistance to French domination at the level of lived experience. The unconsciousness nature of their resistance drained its potency and possibility. Unable to manifest itself at the level of lived experience, their refusal was displaced and channeled into social pathologies rather than directed at the social structures themselves. This constitutes the second sense in which Glissant used trauma. Instead of contesting French norms and customs, Antilleans refused structuration, which led to the “pathological” social tensions – “irrational violence,” “verbal delirium,” “depression” – that metropolitan reformers and social scientists believed plagued the islands.<sup>947</sup> Antillean psychical and social problems,

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<sup>946</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>947</sup> Ibid., 37.

Glissant argued, resulted not from mental or social pathology but from misdirected catharsis.

Why was this case? Why did and how could Antilleans refuse their social structures yet remain simultaneously unable to consciously contest them? Glissant proposed an interlinked explanation rooted in history, socio-psychical development and lived experience. First, he theorized that Antilleans, despite three centuries in the Caribbean, had never truly “mastered” their “lived space-time” (*l’espace-temps vécu*).<sup>948</sup> Glissant’s never explicitly defined his concept of “space-time” and it remained a somewhat enigmatic construction in his contributions to *Acoma*. Despite never providing a precise definition, “lived space-time” in Glissant’s conceptualization denoted the Antilleans’ alienated spatial and temporal relationship to their “proper” space and time, in other words, to their proper land and history.<sup>949</sup> Antilleans’ “non-mastery” had developed a “fundamental and cataclysmic dimension,” and had blocked them from “enrooting” (*enracinement*) themselves into their home islands.<sup>950</sup> Lacking mastery of their space and their time, Antilleans did not identify with their proper space, the islands of the Antilles, nor with their proper time, their historical becoming through abduction, transportation and enslavement in the sugar fields of the West Indies. Glissant, following Hegel, envisions temporal and spatial organization as the primal scene of structuration; as Antillean time and space was produced from the sordid and traumatic history of

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<sup>948</sup> “*L’espace-temps vécu*.” Ibid., 32-3.

<sup>949</sup> Ibid. Glissant here is playing with the double meaning of the French word “propre” which denotes both the words “proper,” belonging to, and “own,” the plural possessive adjective, in English.

<sup>950</sup> Ibid. Glissant’s proposition that Antilleans “enroot” themselves in their proper space and time points us toward the fact that he was, contrary to many of his interlocutors, not always a Deleuzian or a Deluzian *avant-lettre*. One might further suggest that the concept “Relation” emerged from the failure of the politico-cultural project outlined in *Acoma* and *Le Discours antillais*.

enslavement and colonization, Antilleans experienced their society's spatial and temporal arrangements as imposed and thus rejected them.<sup>951</sup>

Antillean alienation from the land manifested itself in a perception that (and desire for) Africa was their ancestral land was. Négritude's identification with Africa and its insistence on the "rediscovery" of African culture was the conscious, high-cultural manifestation of a permanent, unconscious phenomenon that undergirded Antillean consciousness. Since Africa occupied the space of what Foucault has identified as the "origin myth" at the heart of identitarian logic, the Antillean people refused to ground their origins in the islands.<sup>952</sup> As such, Glissant argued, Antilleans had not yet "taken possession" of "their" land, by which Glissant means both physical territory as well as the relationship pertaining between a people to its territory (what Heidegger called "building").<sup>953</sup> Antilleans experienced their islands not as homelands but as alienated and foreign landscapes.<sup>954</sup> Antilleans retained a sense, Glissant argued, three centuries after enslavement and deportation that they were still just "passing through" and that Martinique and Guadeloupe were merely wayposts on a longer road that would eventually lead to their true home elsewhere.<sup>955</sup> While the "myth" of the return of Africa, in the sense of an actual physical return, long ago disappeared both as a realistic possibility and a conscious desire, a longing for a departure to an elsewhere persisted. It

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<sup>951</sup> Ibid. On space and time in Hegel see: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (London: Blackwell, 2000), 18-59. One could speculate that Glissant was familiar with Lefebvre's work as they traveled in similar Parisian circles. Glissant's thinking here also bears a certain resemblance to Heidegger's concept of "dwelling," defined as "the manner in which mortals are on the earth" and which is future-oriented as it is connected to "building." Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," *Basic Writings* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 350.

<sup>952</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, eds., *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 351-369.

<sup>953</sup> Glissant, "Structures," 33.

<sup>954</sup> Heidegger, 354-5.

<sup>955</sup> Glissant, "Structures," 34.

was sublimated into a desire for France, the metropole, Paris; French civilization, citizenship and identity were invested with an emancipatory, redemptive power, while everything local was denigrated and dismissed as provincial, backward and confining.<sup>956</sup> Antilleans, Glissant concluded, refused to “encounter” their land and recognize it as their true homeland.<sup>957</sup>

Just as the Antillean was alienated from her proper “space” so too was she alienated from her proper “time,” through her refusal to face up to and acknowledge her true history. Glissant noted that this refusal manifested itself as a near-total absence of historical consciousness, whether in the form of formal history, collective memory or individual self-knowledge.<sup>958</sup> The Middle Passage and enslavement initiated a rupture in historical consciousness: the slaves’ mnemonic identification with Africa was broken but was never replaced with identification with the Antilles.<sup>959</sup> Rather, Antillean collective

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<sup>956</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>957</sup> Ibid., 34. Glissant in essence is arguing that Antilleans are engaged in a process of “collective forgetting” that, it must be noted, is similar to Ernst Renan’s “necessary forgetting.” Were Antilleans to remember exactly how they became French, the sordid violence of their historical becoming would undermine the very Frenchness they so strongly desire. Glissant argues, against Renan, that Antillean social pathology represents “the return of the repressed.” Antilleans desperately desire Frenchness but cannot completely forget the tragic origin of both their claim and their desire. Catherine Reinhardt also explores issues of memory in the French Caribbean, drawing her methodology from Glissant. But, as with so many other students of Glissant, she draws principally from his later, “relational” and Deleuzian work, specifically his 1996 book, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*. Following Glissant’s later emphases, she focuses on French culture and state’s “silencing” of Antillean memory, while what I argue is most productive about Acoma-era Glissant is his focus on Antilleans’ traumatic “self-silencing.” Catherine Reinhardt, *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 13-17. In essence, with Freud, Glissant suggests that Antilleans have refused to carry out the “work of mourning” and are suffering for it. They repeat their submission to the master in their submission to French culture and mores. Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in Joan Riviere, ed., *Sigmund Freud: the Collected Papers, Volume IV* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 152-170.

<sup>958</sup> Glissant, “Structures,” 33.

<sup>959</sup> The Middle Passage’s definitiveness as a “break” and the implications for Afro-American culture in the New World has been the subject of animated and contentious debate. It has often played out in debates over “creolization” and overt African influence in syncretic religions like *condomblé*, *voudou* and *santería*. See the summation in: Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). See also: Stephan Palmié, “Creolization and Its Discontents,” *Annual Review in Anthropology* 35 (2006), 433-456; Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 24-7, 46-64;

memory never developed as an independent and organic cultural tradition and instead was appended to French collective memory and French historical consciousness stood in for Antillean historical consciousness. The evacuation of collective memory in turn blocked the formation of both an individual and collective sense of self and foreclosed the possibility of being Antillean in the Antilles. The superseded glance-backward to Africa constituted the obverse of the glance-forward to France as both worked to erase the present; Antilleans experienced their lives as a “lack of density in one’s own land.” They were simply “passing through,” which produced a persistent sense of “unrootedness” and contingency that annihilated the actually existing present and made self-knowledge impossible.<sup>960</sup> Antilleans originated in Africa and were destined for France but never grasped where they actually were.

External structuration was most evident in Antillean family organization and in Antillean attitudes toward work and labor. For Glissant, the family was a particularly important symptom of external structuration and a rich locus for the “traumatic refusal” of imposed structures.<sup>961</sup> In the postwar period, social science researchers and their government analogues perceived the Martiniquan family normatively, reading Antilleans’ refusal to hew to a strict nuclear structure and the persistence of extended family structure as pathological.<sup>962</sup> The chief pole around which the family was organized was the mother and the mother’s family: the mother, her brothers and uncles constituted the principal

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J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 10-16.

<sup>960</sup> Glissant, “Structures,” 33.

<sup>961</sup> Studies of the Caribbean family fill anthropological and sociological accounts of Caribbean life. Miriam Slater, *The Caribbean Family: Legitimacy in Martinique* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1976); Susan Craig, “Millstones of Milestones?,” *Latin American Research Review* 14,3 (1979), 256-263; Richard D.E. Burton, *La famille coloniale: La Martinique et la mere patrie, 1789-1992* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992).

<sup>962</sup> For an example, see Guy Dubreuil, “La Famille Martiniquaise: analyse et dynamique,” *Anthropologica* 7 (1965), 103-129; Richard Burton has an extensive discussion of this literature too. Burton, 192-236.

familial structure. Fathers, in turn, were frequently absent. Glissant linked the organization of the family to the history of familial and conjugal relationships. The family,

originates in a zero point (the Slave Trade)... and [passes] through the forced couplings of slaves, slave families tolerated by the master... the action of the Catholic church... the official recognition of the family by the civil state in 1848, and the “financial” consecration by Social Security in 1946.<sup>963</sup>

The Antillean family, created from the abyss of the Middle Passage, existed in tension between the needs of production (“forced couplings of slaves”) and bonds of affection; rarely was it concerned with patriarchal norms or genteel appearances. An anecdote underlined his point: his friends “formalized” their marriage through both the church and the state but only in order to fulfill provisions required to qualify for expanded social security payments, occurring shortly after the baptism of their twelfth child.<sup>964</sup> Glissant rejected social science descriptions of this familial organization as the pathological survival of “tribal organization,” and instead read it as a symptomatic of the unconscious “traumatic refusal” of imposed structuration. Slavery and colonialism actively undermined nuclear families, dispersing its members and deforming parental bonds through rape and the commoditization of children. The family forms that managed to emerge from this atmosphere of sexual, physical and psychological violence may not have conformed to European normative family structures but fulfilled nonetheless the need for personal affection and familial solidarity.<sup>965</sup> The persistent refusal of the nuclear

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<sup>963</sup> Glissant, “Structures,” 39. Elsewhere Glissant discusses the history of sexual violence and the forced rape of female slaves.

<sup>964</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>965</sup> On the family under slavery generally: E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family* (South Bend, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1920* (New York: Vintage, 1977); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: the World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 443-523; John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 149-191; for the Caribbean: Barbara Bush,

family structure was not an outright refusal of familial or conjugal bonds but a mediated rejection of the traumatic formation of the Antillean family.

A similar situation pertained in the Antillean organization of and attitude toward labor. Forced labor of course defined slavery, forced labor that extracted not simply the surplus value but the total value of the slave's labors; unwilling work, work unto death, constituted the fundament of the slavery-plantation complex.<sup>966</sup> Glissant provided two examples of what he perceived to be the unconscious and traumatic relationship to work. Antilleans denigrated physical labor generally and held their own labor in low regard. Glissant cited "numerous cases" of domestic workers who preferred to work "chez un blanc" even if the white employer paid less. He also described an "obstinate refusal" among craftspeople to set a fixed price for their work and the continued ritual recitation among them of the phrase "ba moin ça ou lé patron" ("give me what you want, boss").<sup>967</sup> These phenomena were linked, Glissant argued, to the initial master-slave relationship. Rather than working through labor to self-consciousness and mastery, in the traditional Hegelian schema, Antillean workers instead unconsciously rejected labor and the dignity of labor as part of their larger rejection of imposed structuration. Antilleans possessed the "unconscious conviction" that the "forms and scope of work" were not formed through autonomous work, of the work of the community upon itself, but were imposed from the

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*Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); B.W. Higman, "The Slave Family and Household in the British West Indies, 1800-1834," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6,2 (Autumn 1975), 261-287; Herbert S. Klein and Ben Vinson III, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 139-162; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 152-182; Price and Mintz, 61-80; for the French Caribbean: Arlette Gauthier, "Les familles esclaves aux Antilles françaises, 1635-1848," *Population* 55,6 (December 2000), 975-1001; Annie Fitte-Duval and Myriam Cottias, "Femme, Famille et Politique dans Les Antilles Françaises de 1828 à nos jours," *Caribbean Studies* 28,1 (January-June 1995), 76-100.

<sup>966</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 173-188 especially.

<sup>967</sup> Glissant, "Structures," 35.

outside. This rejection, Glissant further suggested, accounted for the “feudal” level of work on the island.<sup>968</sup>

In order to transcend the impasse the Antilles had reached in its social and psychic being required a “therapeutic” that necessitated the work of the community on itself through an historical and Antillean-centered research. Only through this work could the “unconscious refusal of structures” be “surpassed” and enable a reckoning, consciously and clearly, with the imposed structures that dictated Antillean life. Without a bringing to light – or perhaps “working through” – of the past could Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans being to reckon with their lived experience and work to transcend it. As long as the rejection of imposed structures remained unconscious – synonymous in Glissant’s formulation with traumatic – Antilleans move never beyond the “dead letter” of unconscious refusal. In order to “tear” themselves from their trauma and launch the “initial and initiating act” of a “politics and poetics of liberation” that would “enroot” them in their proper land, Antilleans had to become conscious of their historical becoming as a people and their actual lived experience.<sup>969</sup> The IME and *Acoma* existed, in part, to initiate this project.

### **History, Folklore, Culture**

Glissant’s theses on Antillean psychical and social structure provided the initial theoretical assumptions on which IME intellectuals grounded their own researches. A focus on the repercussions of Antilleans’ embrace of socio-cultural forms that mimicked European social forms, while simultaneously yet subconsciously refusing these parodic, derivative modes of being emerged as a common theme among many of the papers

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<sup>968</sup> Ibid.

<sup>969</sup> Ibid., 39.



published in *Acoma*. This theory of “unconscious refusal” should not however be mistaken for “false consciousness.” As I have argued, Glissant and his IME colleagues were certainly engaged in a form of “ideology critique;” their project, however, was not to deny Antilleans’ agency through portraying them as the willing dupes of French and bourgeois values. The point of Glissant’s investigation of unconscious and traumatic refusal was to unwind the complex series of transferences that produced Antillean psychical and social disequilibrium. The IME’s ideology critique shared more similarities with Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony and historic bloc than with the vulgar Marxist-Leninist critique of false consciousness.<sup>970</sup> The task they set for themselves was not to reveal to the Antillean her true culture or social conditions but to push her to create her own social and cultural relationships.

Roland Suvélor extended and applied Glissant’s analysis of Antillean psychology to his particular object of study: Antillean cultural production. To attempt to get at the bases of Antillean cultural production, Suvélor focused his analyses on Antillean folklore, selecting several Martiniquan folktales in order to develop a portrait of the Antillean “mentality.” Just as Glissant particularized and historicized Antillean social-psychical “pathology,” Suvélor rigorously contextualized Martiniquan folklore in the social history of the island. In an essay published in *Acoma* n° 2 entitled, “Folklore, Exoticism, Knowledge,” Suvélor argued that folktales and folk practices were not the innocent survivals of a surpassed tradition but instead testaments to Martinique’s violent

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<sup>970</sup> Bourgeois values had established their hegemony in Antillean society, even as they lacked an historical and material basis, through the formation of an historic bloc between Antillean bourgeois, the *béké* and metropolitan capital. Antillean subconscious resistance to bourgeois values was the traumatic result of their unconscious resistance to the formation of an historic bloc with the very forces that had enslaved and colonized them. David Forgacs, ed., *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 189-220; Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso Books, 2001), 65-75.

past. Resisting the pervasive metropolitan and Martiniquan romanticization of folklore and the creole language – which critics referred to as *doudouisme* – Suvélor read folklore and practice as cultural forms formed and shaped by slavery, the slave trade, racism, colonialism and continued dependence.<sup>971</sup>

Suvélor grounded his study in both Glissant's psychological theories and in existing theories of folklore.<sup>972</sup> He outlined several structural and historical principles that would guide his analysis. First, he argued that folklore's origin was connected to human presence in the world, the "shock" early humans experienced face to face with existence and early humans' attempt to account for and master natural processes.<sup>973</sup> Nature posed a number of problems, notably the necessity of survival. The initial forms of cultural expression attempted to make sense of and master nature and its forces: tempests, winds, rains, drought, the seasons, and so on. To propitiate and control these forces, humans developed collective cultural forms such as "the religious imagination, magical thought, stories, myths, dances, chants..."<sup>974</sup> According to Suvélor, these forms were the joint product of the collective as whole and could not be individually differentiated. Once human society attained a certain level of civilization, these collective cultural concerns were refashioned into forms - "theatre, poetry, science, religion, philosophy" – that

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<sup>971</sup> Suvélor's project had precedent in both négritudist and Fanonian critique. Both *Légitime Défense* and *L'Étudiant Noir*, as well as Césaire's later *Tropiques*, harshly criticized Martiniquan literature and its mimicry of European forms and subjects. Frantz Fanon was also critical of *doudouisme* in his devastating and harsh demolition of Mayotte Capécia's *Je Suis Martiniquaise*. On négritude critique, see Chapter 3; for Fanon, see Fanon 2008, 24-44.

<sup>972</sup> Roland Suvélor, "Folklore, Exotisme, Connaissance," *Acoma* n° 2 (1971), 22-4.

<sup>973</sup> Ibid.

<sup>974</sup> Ibid.

permitted individual mastery. The old material did not completely disappear; it was simply captured under a different form.<sup>975</sup>

Suvélor argued that two principal qualities differentiated Martiniquan folklore from other forms of folklore: its formation in the experience of deportation and enslavement and the, in his words, “acculturation” and “deculturation,” which made Martiniquan folklore a hybrid of African and European elements.<sup>976</sup> The fundamental factor that conditioned the emergence of this folklore was the fact and the experience of the slave trade. According to Suvélor, Africans were rooted in their communities, organized around relationships to a common ancestor, the clan, the clan gods, the family and the land.<sup>977</sup> Crossing the Atlantic in the “zero point” of the slave ship and passing from familial labor into the plantation economy, they were torn from their situating structures and delivered over to a brutal system devoid of any meaningful social relationships that could structure their lives. Families were broken apart, their labor was expropriated for the profit of the master, and African religious beliefs and cultural customs were suppressed in the name of God and civilization. According to Suvélor, the result of this encounter was a dialectic of acculturation and deculturation. While the “values” of the master were adopted, African forms of thinking survived; these forms shaped the “European” material. In this dynamic – and Suvélor relied on a strict separation between form and content – African folkways were drained of their content at the same moment in which European values were reworked into African idioms.

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<sup>975</sup> Suvélor’s account does not seem, at this point, so different from classic studies of “primitive” society such as Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl and even Lévi-Strauss.

<sup>976</sup> Suvélor, 28-9.

<sup>977</sup> Ibid., 25-6.

Suvélor provided the example of the “magical God” in the creole tale of Yé, recorded by Lafcadio Hearn. Suvélor argued that this folktale reworked the traditional folkloric motif of hunger into Christian language.<sup>978</sup> In the story, Yé, suffering from hunger, appealed to God for relief. Yé climbed Morne-Lacroix (one of the highest points on the island) to “knock against the sky to appeal to and summon God.” In response to Yé, God provided him with a “formula” to relieve his hunger.<sup>979</sup> Suvélor argued that this tale encapsulated the collision between African form and Christian content. The God of the tale was clearly the Christian God, as there was a clear dichotomy between God and the Devil in the tale that would not have been present in an African telling of the tale.<sup>980</sup> The “spiritual content,” the deity of the story, was the God of the master. However, according to Suvélor, God’s intervention was “formally” African. Yé did not seek God’s intervention through the two primary means of Christian communication with the Almighty – prayer and good works. Rather, similar to the heroes of African stories, he instead traveled into the deity’s realm – in this case, Morne-Lacroix – and “summoned” God. Additionally, God provided Yé not with a work of grace – direct, personalized relief from his affliction – but instead a “formula,” or in other words, a medicine, a spell, which was non-individualized because a spell was transferable. The provision of the medicine similarly testified to African patterns of thought. The Christian god would have furnished Yé with a work of grace or a miracle, either relieving him of his hunger or miraculously causing food to appear; African tales frequently depicted the God providing the supplicant with a magical spell rather than directly intervening. Suvélor argued, in short,

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<sup>978</sup> Lafcadio Hearn was a famous folklorist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; he spent two years in Martinique in the 1890’s collecting folktales. Suvélor republished the tale in *Acoma* n° 3. Chris Bongie, “Resisting Memories: The Creole Identities of Lafcadio Hearn and Edouard Glissant,” *SubStance* 84 (1997), 153-178.

<sup>979</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>980</sup> Roland Suvélor, “Yé et les maledictions de la faim,” *Acoma* n° 3 (1972), 54-8.

that African elements survived in the tale's formal qualities even while the content of the tale demonstrated the adoption of the master's Christian religion.<sup>981</sup>

From a postmodern and postcolonial perspective, it is tempting to read this mingling of African and European traditions as a rich exemplar of the cultural *métissage* of New World cultures. While Suvélor acknowledged and even celebrated the new culture produced from creolization, he remained wary of a celebration of creole folkways that did not face up to their origin in enslavement and that did not examine the limits that folkloric forms presented to a development of Antillean culture. Suvélor dedicated his essay's conclusion to outlining what he understood to be the limitations and even dangers of folklore in the Martiniquan context. After giving a brief schematic of several other types of stories – on hunger, on the “holy” mother, on magical animals – he turned to the function that folklore fulfilled in the slave context. Suvélor was skeptical of reading resistance into folklore.<sup>982</sup> First, because, like Glissant, he suggested that any latent resistance in folklore operated only at the level of the unconscious. Just as Glissant was concerned with forcing Martiniquans to become conscious of their unconscious rejection of imposed social and psychical structures, so Suvélor argued that Martiniquans, in order to develop their own culture, must become conscious of their folkloric unconscious.

Suvélor was further skeptical of folklore because he considered it to represent a particular historical stage of collective consciousness, a stage that, socially speaking, had already been superseded by Martiniquans' entry into modernity through the mechanisms of slavery, the plantation and colonization. Folklore's persistence as the primary mode of cultural expression was a mark of the “total victory” of colonization: Martiniquans were

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<sup>981</sup> Suvélor, “Folklore,” 31.

<sup>982</sup> Ibid., 29-33.

ineluctably severed from Africa yet remained alienated from the culture of the masters. The old tales had lost their purpose; continued work in this form or this idiom was culturally sterile, disempowering, and alienating. The tales had lost also their previous oral dynamism and had ossified into fixed forms that lapsed towards “anachronism” at best, “exoticism” at worst. As exoticism, the old stories become yet another mark of whites’ exploitation of blacks, a new circuit of accumulation, as the culture of the ancestors was integrated into the spectacles of a touristic mode of production.<sup>983</sup> Folklore was not a living, dynamic culture; rather, it marked the absence of, and compensated for, any form of living, dynamic culture.

Suvélor argued that only through “surpassing” folklore could Martiniquan culture develop in its own freedom and thus contribute to disalienation and political resistance.<sup>984</sup> Indigenous Martiniquan culture had essentially stuck – through the historical legacy of colonization manifested in the masters’ denial of culture, the alienation produced in the slave system, and the backwardness of socio-economic arrangements – in the folkloric form. Martiniquans thus could not do the important work on the self that could be realized through artistic production. Just as there was no true local bourgeoisie, because there was no local control of the means of production, there was no truly Martiniquan bourgeois art (for example, Suvélor suggested looking at the historical preponderance of poetry and attendant dearth of novels in Martiniquan literary production).<sup>985</sup> Suvélor argued, quoting Hegel, that collectivities that continued to express themselves through

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<sup>983</sup> Ibid., 39-40; Bill Maurer, “A Fish Story: Rethinking Globalization on Virgin Gorda, British Virgin Islands,” *American Ethnologist* 27:3 (2000), especially 684-6.

<sup>984</sup> I have translated “dépassement” as “overcoming.” The word is frequently used for French translations of the Hegelian term ‘aufhebung.’ Ben Brewster has also translated “dépassement” as “supersession,” defining the term as “the destruction and retention at the higher level.” See his glossary in Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso Books, 1986), 320.

<sup>985</sup> Ibid., 35-9.

folkloric motifs “effectively live in a reality without form... and cannot possess a free self-consciousness.” Only through “creative imagination... subjectivity... a free and clear conscience” could the collectivity, and the individuals within it, accede to mastery through self-activity on the self.<sup>986</sup>

Through his criticism of folklore, Suvélor formulated a cultural criticism that could arm Martiniquans with the tools to overcome (*dépasser*) their frozen (*figer*) condition. Like Glissant’s inventory of the Martiniquan mental state, Suvélor argued that Martiniquans must recover and face up to collective memory in order to liberate themselves from the *doudouism* of their cultural production and the equally alienating desire for French culture. In the post-assimilation social and political landscape of Martinique, in a world dominated by consumption and imported cultural forms, an invention, or as Suvélor put it, “rediscovery,” of a specifically Martiniquan culture would also be immediately political.

### **Class as Race, Race as Class**

Michel Giraud’s contribution was more explicitly political than Glissant’s or Suvélor’s essays. His paper – “Racial Conflicts Considered as Substitute for Class Conflict in the Antilles” – concerned, in his own words, “the relations between racial phenomena and social phenomena in the Antilles.”<sup>987</sup> Giraud argued that twin differentiating forces structured Martiniquan society, race and class. This “double stratification” had obscured their interlinked character and directed many observers to emphasize either race over class, or class over race, as the propulsive motor in Martiniquan social relationships. The two, however, were only “separated in appearance”

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<sup>986</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>987</sup> Michel Giraud, “Les Conflits Raciaux Considérés Comme Substitut à la Lutte de Classes aux Antilles,” *Acoma* n° 1 (1971), 44-57.

and the purpose of Giraud's analysis was to "unify the duality in surpassing (*dépassement*) it."<sup>988</sup>

Two "extreme solutions" to the simultaneous racial and class hierarchies were previously proposed. Criticizing an unnamed French sociologist, Giraud noted how some had theorized that race was the determining factor in race relations. In this theory, class structures in colonial societies were based primarily on racial factors; whites, by virtue of their whiteness, occupied the highest rung while blacks, by virtue of their blackness, the bottom rung. This was the expression, in modern class society, of the primordial "tendency of the human spirit" to negatively view blackness.<sup>989</sup> The mirror image of this theory of the racial origins of class was the opposing theory that "denied any importance to racial phenomena" and reduced them to more "*epiphenomena of social relations*."<sup>990</sup> This was clearly the doctrinaire Marxist position – and still current in the Stalinism of the French Communist Party – that race belonged to the superstructure while class belonged to the base. Race, then, was merely ideological, a *post hoc* result of class exploitation in general and imperialism in particular.<sup>991</sup> According to this theory, the overturn of class society would undo automatically the racialized character of social relations.

Giraud opposed these two conceptions and set out to elaborate "a median position that proposes a dialectical relationship" between race and class. Giraud, despite his criticism of vulgar Marxism, nonetheless argued for the primacy of the economic base in social analysis. With reference to Althusser, he stated that, "in the final analysis the

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<sup>988</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>989</sup> Ibid.

<sup>990</sup> Ibid. Emphasis original.

<sup>991</sup> The classic interrogation of this tradition in Marxist thought remains Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance" in Essed and Goldberg, eds. *Race Critical Theories: Text and Context* (London: Blackwell, 2001), 38-68.



socio-economic level... [was] the motor.”<sup>992</sup> While race was not completely determined by economics, it was ideological, and thus, superstructural: race was structured by a society’s mode of production. Giraud insisted that this was not to “[deny] the relative autonomy” of race by subordinating it to class, but to insist that the two were interpenetrating. Giraud, borrowing the term from the French ethnographer Georges Balandier, proposed that the term “colonial situation” neatly summarized Martiniquan society: a society with a capitalist mode of production in which the expropriating class was largely white and the exploited class largely black.<sup>993</sup>

For the Martiniquan case, Giraud posited the following hypothesis: that in Martiniquan society, class relations appeared as racial relations. Giraud argued that in Martinique, class stratification was experienced as racial stratification, and that class conflict was sublimated into racial conflict.<sup>994</sup> According to Giraud, this state of affairs came about historically in three key phases. The first phase was the initiation of the colonial project. Of vital importance was the fact that the origin of the Martiniquan people originated in the act of colonization. The importation of blacks as slaves following the extermination of the Carib Indians provided an early impetus to the “confusion” of class with race, since the masters were white while the slaves were black.<sup>995</sup>

The second key phase was the formation of the “mulatto group.” The progeny of “unions between masters and slaves” were, in the years before the 1685 *Code Noir*, often emancipated.<sup>996</sup> Despite the law, which undid many of their rights and privileges and set

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<sup>992</sup> Giraud, 46.

<sup>993</sup> Ibid.

<sup>994</sup> Ibid.

<sup>995</sup> Ibid., 46-7.

<sup>996</sup> The *Code Noir* made law the principle that the slave-half of a master-slave relationship was of first importance, meaning that mulattoes were automatically slaves unless expressly freed by their masters/fathers. Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code Noir ou le Calvaire du Canaan* (Paris: PUF, 2003).

strict limits to further emancipations, a mulatto group was established firmly in Martinique. Though freed from slavery, they were shut out of economic power, a phenomenon that Giraud argued was “*a fortiori* political.” The limits placed on their labor forced them to become either peasant smallholders or enter the “tertiary” artisanal and commercial sector. “Colonization,” Giraud argued, “imposed the identification between free men of color, the mulattoes and the emerging petit bourgeoisie.”<sup>997</sup>

The final phase was the post-emancipation (post-1848) incorporation of Martinique into national circuits of capitalist accumulation. The rise of industrial production made the quasi-feudal plantation economy untenable, and the white planter aristocracy was displaced by metropolitan capital. While the 1848 emancipation cemented and accelerated the growth of a black peasantry and the development of the black petit bourgeoisie, it did not fundamentally alter basic racialized class relationships. Giraud had a concrete analytic reason for calling the black bourgeoisie petit: blacks and mulattoes never seized control of the means of production like the European bourgeoisie. While citizenship in 1848 smoothed the way to membership in the professions and social mobility through education, the fundamental white control of land and production was not altered; it merely shifted into the hands of a different segment of white society, metropolitan capitalists.<sup>998</sup>

How then did class relations appear to be racial relations? The perception of an individual’s color became a marker of their relative class position. “Race does not determine membership in this social class, but... it is above all an index of this

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<sup>997</sup> Giraud, 47-8.

<sup>998</sup> Ibid., 48-9.

position.”<sup>999</sup> Giraud had a twofold argument: on Martinique, the perception of color depended on class, and the perception of class depended on color. This process of “racial marking” was dependant upon what was known about the individual. The higher one’s class, the lighter one was perceived to be, regardless of actual pigmentation. Similarly, the reverse was true: if the social class of an individual was unknown, their relative class position could be divined through their skin color.<sup>1000</sup> In short, race was “marked,” to borrow Thomas Holt’s formulation, in part by class perception, and class was “marked,” in part by racial perceptions.<sup>1001</sup>

Following Glissant and Suvélor, Giraud suggested that this transference enabled Martiniquans to avoid fully facing their social reality. The submersion of class in race, according to Giraud, had pernicious effects. The white creoles, their power largely decayed due to metropolitan capitalism, French colonialism and post-1946 assimilation, resisted black social mobility to defend their few remaining privileges. Similarly, class conflict could quickly become racial conflict. Giraud noted how a 1967 strike in Guadeloupe “degenerated into racial rioting.”<sup>1002</sup>

Giraud concluded with the suggestion that the 1946 law of departmentalization had “brought a relative radicalization” to the problem as the panacea of full citizenship had “lost its attraction.” Historically, the desire for citizenship had canalized racial and class struggle into republicanism; the Martiniquan left, from republicans to Communists, believed that full inclusion in the republic, full protection under the universal law, would

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<sup>999</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>1000</sup> Patrick Chamoiseau provides an illustrative demonstration of this phenomenon when he makes the very dark yet highly educated Aimé Césaire appear in his novel, *Texaco*. “that black blackman knew French better than a thick French dictionary.” *Texaco* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 248-251.

<sup>1001</sup> Thomas Holt, “Marking: Race, Race-making and the Writing of History,” *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1-20.

<sup>1002</sup> Giraud, 50.

erase class and race distinctions.<sup>1003</sup> Contrary to the interpretations of the Communists and the far left, class and race relations were not becoming clearer but, under the pressure of assimilation, more entangled and confused. Because Martinique had been incorporated into France, the particularity of Martiniquan social relationships risked being lost in metropolitan social relationships. The racialism that still structured Martiniquan social life would appear to be a pathological remnant to be erased through republican tolerance and economic development, thus occluding the class-nature of these racial relations. Giraud argued that only through disentangling the interpenetration of race and class could the actual structure of Martiniquan society be revealed.

## Conclusion

Glissant and the members of the IME understood their work as a break with existing methods of studying and theorizing the Antilles. Their research and publications offered an implicit and explicit criticism of the three discourses that had previously dominated Antillean thinking: republicanism, *négritude* and communism. Glissant and Suvélor criticized the afro-centrism of Césaire's *négritude*, arguing that the "return to Africa" premised by *négritude* poetics denied Antillean reality. Rather than rooting Martiniquans in their space and time, *négritude* sought to rediscover a lost past and place. Further, the idealistic fetishization of African folktales prevented Antilleans from expressing themselves in modern idioms that could accurately describe their modern reality. *Négritude* thus perpetuated the Antillean's alienation from her place and prevented the discovery of her true self. Giraud, on the other hand, focused on class and race, critiquing the Marxism of the Martiniquan and Guadeloupean Communist Parties.

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<sup>1003</sup> Ibid., 54.

The Party had long published encomiums to the primacy of the class struggle and while it attacked racism, it reduced racism to a manifestation of the Antilles “colonial status,” which itself derived from capitalism’s impetus towards imperialism. This theory of class could not take the racial dimension seriously and always reduced racism and racialism as either a false ideology sown by the capitalist class to divide the working class, or an archaic holdover from the feudal era. It refused to recognize how race and class were mutually constitutive in the Antillean context. While their focus was empirical, it was not naïve or insular, and the IME’s analyses drew from a diverse array of theoreticians and theoretical insights to clear a space in which thinking the Antilles would be possible. Understanding the Antilles in their proper time and space, understanding Antillean reality, was only possible by working with and through larger global contexts and broader global discourses of knowledge.

The IME’s opening toward the “Other America” was an attempt to make concrete their theoretical insights into Antillean reality and their prescriptions for the Antillean future. Their engagements with Cubans, Haitians, Chileans and particularly African-Americans were meant to move their activities from theory to practice. The artists’, intellectuals’ and activists’ participation in the IME and its activities fostered the construction of that “Other America” through intellectual and cultural exchange and through the bare physical fact of corporeal exchange. The movement of ideas, practices and bodies skirted the established channels of travel and exchange and instantiated ‘horizontal relationships’ between the Americas while avoiding ‘vertical relationships’ with colonial and neo-colonial powers. This “errance,” as Glissant would later theorize it, was a necessary initial step toward the development of Antillean identity: errantry

through the experiences, cultures and practices of the “Other America” would work to re-embed Antilleans in their proper space and time. Lessons gleaned from their encounter with “the Other America,” coupled to the development of “a science of ourselves,” would enable Antilleans to reorient and remake their consciousness and identity.

## Conclusion

In 1973, following years of nationalist and anti-colonialist agitation, the French state commissioned a survey to measure nationalist and independentist sentiment among Martiniquans. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, new militant groups formed to agitate for independence for the French Antilles, ranging from the socialist Revolutionary Socialist Group (GRS) to the nationalist Martiniquan Independence Movement (MIM). However, the survey confirmed that while Antilleans remained critical of French policy, they also rejected independence and continued to think of themselves as French. The survey's results were confirmed in the 1973 and 1974 elections; while they continued to vote for critics of assimilation for the National Assembly, Antilleans overwhelmingly supported pro-French candidates at the national level. In short, Antilleans remained committed to some relationship with France while contesting actual French policy; in short, Antilleans continued to favor decolonization through a politics that looked beyond narrow nationalism and to unique modes of political belonging.<sup>1004</sup>

The first chapter located the particular Antillean project of political and cultural assimilation within the *longue durée* of French and Antillean history. Particularly it focused on assimilation and the “Two Frances,” exploring the historical context for the belief current among many French Antilleans that republican France has fought against slavery and for liberty and equality, while illiberal France sustained slavery and opposed the equality of blacks within the French nation. The idea of “Two Frances” originated in the conflicts of the revolutionary 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Jacobin commissioners in the Caribbean and the National Convention in Paris abolished slavery and extended

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<sup>1004</sup> Laurent Jalabert, *La Colonisation sans nom: La Martinique de 1960 à nos jours* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2007), 63.

citizenship rights to the emancipated, while Napoleon's First Empire and the restored Bourbon monarchy reestablished slavery and limited the rights of freedmen.

The division of France into a "good" and "bad" France was reinforced during the revolutionary upheavals of 1830 and 1848. The overthrow of the monarchy during the 1848 revolution saw the final abolition of slavery in the French empire and, once again, the extension of full civil rights to the newly emancipated. That the abolition of slavery once again accompanied the formation of a French republic impressed on Antilleans the perception that the republic was the surest guarantor of their liberty and claims to social and political equality. The Vichy interregnum, marked in the Caribbean by widespread racism and violence, confirmed Antilleans' belief in the republic and convinced Antillean leaders that Martinique and Guadeloupe must become constituent parts of France in order to safeguard Antilleans political and social rights. Postwar demands for the assimilation of the French Caribbean colonies emerged from a long history of struggle between liberal and illiberal France in which the republic appeared the best hope for Antillean claims to social and political equality.

Chapter two examined the legal codification of Antillean assimilation following World War II. Antillean representatives to the National Constituent Assembly of 1945-6 used the moment of Constitution writing to convince the assembled delegates to incorporate Martinique and Guadeloupe into the integral territory of France as Overseas Departments. The chapter examined the rhetoric that the Martiniquan poet and politician Aimé Césaire deployed to convince the assembly to embrace the assimilation project. Drawing on the concept of "Two Frances," and particularly the experience of Vichy and the Occupation, Césaire juxtaposed slavery to freedom, lauding the French republic's



historic role in expanding notions of freedom and combating tyranny and oppression, challenging the delegates to live up to the universalist promise contained within the French Enlightenment and republican traditions.

Césaire also connected assimilation for the French Antilles to the establishment of the French Union, which expanded social and civic rights to the former French empire. Césaire and the Antillean deputies allied with colonial deputies from Africa and the Maghreb to shape the parts of the constitution that governed the French Union. They urged the Constituent Assembly to follow through on the promise of the 1944 Brazzaville Conference to extend both social and political rights to the colonized. The twin burials of Victor Schoelcher and Félix Éboué in the Panthéon served as an important symbolic moment to enshrine the extension of citizenship and nationality to Antilleans into the civic religion of French republicanism.

Chapter three examined the lives of Antillean students in the postwar metropole, tracing the frequent racism and hostility that many encountered in Paris, Bordeaux and other university centers, a reception that disappointed many Antillean students and led to question the extent to which the 1946 assimilation truly had changed the conditions of Antillean life. French treatment of Antillean students – which ranged from overt racism to “incomprehension” – frustrated students raised on an ideology of French fraternity and egalitarianism. The intensification of the Algerian war, decolonization and the American civil rights movement paralleled their disillusionment with French life and pushed many towards radical positions that questioned the degree to which the Antilles had actually been decolonized, the role of French colonialism and capitalism and, finally, their fundamental Frenchness. The chapter shows how the students, living among Maghrebians

and African students and in a political and social atmosphere dominated by the Algerian war, began to conceive themselves as a still-colonized people and started to organize to contest persistent colonialism in the Antilles.

As young Antilleans studying in the metropole were disillusioned by metropolitan racism and indifference, Antillean activists, intellectuals and politicians in the Caribbean similarly grew frustrated with the pace and scope of assimilation's reforms. Chapter four shows how Aimé Césaire and the Communist Party, which in 1946 had championed and pushed through assimilation, moved away from assimilation to a new political project of "autonomy" after 1955. While assimilation had secured the democratic rights of Antillean citizens, it also concentrated administrative power in the hands of metropolitan bureaucrats who, in the communists' estimation, represented the interests of metropolitan capital over the social needs of Martiniquans and Guadeloupeans. Conflicts over social rights, particularly over economic democracy and the extension of the social welfare state, and successive French administrations' refusal to bring Antillean standards in line with metropolitan standards, convinced the Antillean left that they remained colonized. While the left first argued in favor of "integral assimilation" – the full implementation of the promises of 1946 – the left, led by Césaire, soon turned instead to autonomy, the demand that economic and social policy be devolved from the central government to Antillean governments.

Criticism of assimilation's failures also led Antillean intellectuals to question their status as full members of France. Disenchantment with assimilation corresponded with the quickening pace of decolonization and the rise of Third World revolutionary movements, particularly the successful Cuban Revolution of 1959. Communist and pro-

autonomist Antillean intellectuals increasingly questioned not only French economic policy but Antilleans' fundamental Frenchness, turning to questions of culture and nation. Intellectuals around the novelist Edouard Glissant theorized an Antillean nation separate from France, while René Ménélik, the chief Communist party cultural theorist, outlined the lineaments of an Antillean national culture. Chapter five explores the transition from a decolonizing politics premised on integration into France toward a politics that looked away from France toward the broader Third World.

Chapter five returns to student activists, focusing on the cultural and political critiques of assimilation posed by Antillean student activists in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. Having made a turn toward anti-colonial politics, both secular and Catholic Antillean students, influenced by the American Civil Rights movement, the Cuban Revolution, decolonization and the upheavals of the 1960s reexamined Antillean life and history in order to construct a theory of Antillean culture and nation. While the secular students embraced a Marxist-Leninist interpretation, arguing for an independent Martiniquan and Guadeloupean nation aligned with the socialist bloc, the Catholic students grappled with the tension between their commitment to social justice on the one hand and their Catholic faith on the other.

The Marxist students looked to Cuba and China for models of revolutionary activism that would allow them to overcome the Antilles' underdevelopment and participate in a worldwide movement toward socialism. They thus theorized the Antillean nation as a working class nation in need of a working class revolution. The Catholic students refused to surrender their belief in a humanistic universalism. Drawing from their faith yet engaging with the revolutionary ideologies of the 1960s, the Catholic

students advocated a politics that transcended national boundaries to embrace a “revolutionary” ideology that called not simply for a new politics but for new men and women. Chapter five connects the students’ thinking to the national and global political and social revolutions of the 1960s and demonstrates the lasting influence of the students’ thinking on subsequent cultural and political movements in the Antilles.

The final chapter examines Edouard Glissant’s Martiniquan Studies Institute (IME) and its publication, *ACOMA*, arguing that Glissant’s IME gathered together the disparate strands of Antillean thinking and activism around issues of nation, culture, history and society into a single research project directed toward both a more complete study of Antillean life and oriented toward developing concrete forms of cultural activism that would awaken an “Antillean consciousness.” The IME project united Antillean political and cultural activists to explore Antillean reality in order to change it.

Despite its focus on the Antilles, Glissant’s project also possessed a hemispheric consciousness, urging Antilleans to break their devotion not only to France but to Africa as well. Glissant’s worked to build what he called “the Other America” and to reinsert the Antilles into the Americas. In order to make this project a reality, Glissant invited scholars and artists from across the Americas to participate in the IME and contribute to *ACOMA*. Scholars and artists from Chile, Cuba, Venezuela, the United States and Canada added to the richness of Glissant’s project. While there remained disagreements over the nature and direction of cultural politics – expressed most cogently in Glissant’s arguments with African-American scholars over the relationship between New World blacks and Africa – the IME and Glissant’s thinking about “the Other America” offered

an alternative politics for the Antilles that transcended both assimilation and nationalist political independence.

This dissertation offers a different perspective on the French experience of decolonization, race and culture. Accounts of the French decolonization have been overdetermined by the experience of Algeria. While the Algerian war was important, particularly in its contribution to the dissolution of the French Union, its violence and fury has overshadowed the fact that the French experience of decolonization was mostly peaceful. Further, studies of the Algerian experience have re-instantiated the focus on the conquest of political independence. Writing a history of decolonization from the Antilles offers a different perspective on decolonization, less tortured and violent but also more complex and opaque. Decolonization thus appears as heterogeneous phenomena that embraced multiple tactics, politics and conceptions of belonging.

The Antillean case also offers a different perspective on French histories of race. As studies of decolonization have been dominated by Algeria, so have histories of contemporary racial relations in France been read through the experience of post-colonial immigrants from the Maghreb and West Africa. These accounts have tended to focus predominantly on the intersection between histories of religion and race, grappling in particular on the tension between immigrants' Islam and the secularism of the French republic. Simultaneously citizens and colonials, black and European, Antillean and French, the Antillean experience offers an alternate history of race in France, demonstrating both the possibilities and pratfalls of the French assimilationist project.

I also propose that the Antillean case offers a different look at issues of nation, culture and political belonging as well as providing a vital case study of the potentials

and barriers toward transnational organizing and activism. As Antilleans imagined alternative political projects to continued inclusion within the French nation-state, they ran up against the limits of global power relations. Aware that independence from France likely meant absorption into American hegemony, Antillean activists strategized a hemispheric and global politics that would link their particular experiences and struggles to similar peoples in the Americas and across the globe. Communists grounded their approach in class solidarity, Catholics in a shared humanism, the IME in a broadly conceived conception of American culture. Antillean activists were forced to think outside – and even beyond – the nation to craft political projects that would secure cultural, political and economic autonomy.

The conundrums encountered by the Antillean experience of decolonization – questions of culture, nation, history and race – remain intractable today, exacerbated by our contemporary moment that has witnessed an increasingly globalized regime of economic production that is frequently accompanied by the retrenchment of national barriers and cultural chauvinism. Antillean intellectuals, from Césaire to Fanon to Glissant constantly thought political and cultural belonging outside the narrow bounds of the nation-state, conceiving the political future of the Antilles and Antilleans within transnational imaginative frameworks. Césaire’s initial project of assimilation existed within the broader polity of the French Union; Fanon criticized anti-colonialists that saw nationalism as the endpoint of decolonization; Antillean Catholic students tried to think the Antilles within the Catholic humanist project; Glissant wanted to link the Antilles to the “Other America.” All thought Antilleans’ place in the world outside of the normative bounds of national culture and state. This response, I suggest, is more vital than ever for it

offers alternative ways of thinking of belonging that transcend both the undifferentiated *home economicus* of the liberal globalization project as well as the ethnic nationalist projects that have arisen in response. As Glissant put it, the Antillean experience demonstrates strategies for moving from History to histories.

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 BN – Bibliothèque National – Paris  
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 CAC AN – Centre des Archives Contemporaines – Fontainebleau  
 CAOM – Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer – Aix-en-Provence  
 IISH – International Institute for Social History – Amsterdam  
 LC – The Library of Congress – Washington DC

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## Curriculum Vitae

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### Education

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