



C. L. R. James: A Radical West Indian Vision of American Studies

Darrell E. Levi

American Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Sep., 1991), 486-501.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0678%28199109%2943%3A3%3C486%3ACLRJAR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N>

American Quarterly is currently published by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/jhup.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

RETROSPECTIVE

C. L. R. James:
A Radical West Indian Vision of
American Studies

DARRELL E. LEVI
Florida State University

TO MILLIONS OF WEST INDIANS, CANADIANS, AND LATIN AMERICANS, America is more than the United States: it is North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean—the Western Hemisphere. As a hemispheric endeavor American Studies takes on a broader, more profound, nuanced, and radical significance than that which confines “America” to the United States. The history and contemporary reality of the various American cultures are so intertwined that it is impossible to understand “America” in either its limited or its broader sense without reference to the experience of all the hemispheric inhabitants. At the Harvard commencement in 1983, Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes spoke for Latin Americans: “We need your memory and your imagination or ours shall never be complete. You need our memory to redeem your past, and our imagination to complete your future.”¹ C. L. R. James (1901–1989) was a West Indian American whose works, like those of Fuentes, offer the possibility of enhancing our understanding of “America” and “American Studies.”

James was an activist, an intellectual, and a “revolutionary artist” whose many books and essays dealt with radical politics, revolution, race and class, sports, culture, and pan-Africanism. He is the subject of two recent biographies.² James’s importance has been highlighted by a recent surge of interest in his work, reflected in the publication of new editions of many of his books and three volumes of selected writings.³ This essay examines

Darrell Levi teaches and researches Caribbean and Latin American History at Florida State University.

three of his books of greatest relevance to American Studies: *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938), *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (1953), and *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), James's autobiographical classic on cricket, society, politics and art.

Cyril Robert Lionel James was born in 1901 in Trinidad, a British colony until 1958. James described himself as "dark," and descended from a family of school teachers and craft workers. In West Indian racial/class terms, he was part of Trinidad's "brown" middle class, a problematical minority group, suspended between the resentful African-American and East Indian poor and the dominant white colonial and creole elites. James's mother inspired his profound love of Western literature. The young James also became adept at playing and analyzing the colonizer's cricket, a sport of great social significance in the British West Indies. Graduating from Queen's Royal College in Trinidad in 1918, James became a teacher who stressed the necessity of understanding literature, politics and economics to interpret the contemporary world. He chose to follow a literary career rather than attend a university in England. In the 1920s James wrote for literary journals such as *Trinidad* and *The Beacon* in Trinidad and the *British Saturday Review*. He also completed his only novel *Minty Alley*, one of the pioneering works of West Indian nationalist literature, which focused on the lives of poor women in Trinidad.

From 1932 until 1958, James lived and worked in England and the United States. In England from 1932 to 1938, he became a Trotskyist, lectured on politics, and reported on cricket for the *Manchester Guardian*. He collaborated with Amy Ashwood Garvey in forming the International African Friends of Ethiopia in response to the Italian invasion, and authored four books, including *Black Jacobins*. From 1938 to 1953, James lived in the United States. In 1941, he spoke and wrote for striking sharecroppers in Southeast Missouri. For many years he led a Trotskyist microfaction in New York City, until he broke with it in 1950, as the radical American Left fragmented under cold war repression, unfavorable prospects in the labor movement, and sectarian infighting. James struggled unsuccessfully to avoid deportation. In 1952, when he wrote his Melville study, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, James was interred on Ellis Island as an undesirable alien because of his politics and passport violations. Deported to England in 1953, he resumed cricket journalism with the *Manchester Guardian*.

In 1958, James returned to Trinidad to edit *The Nation*, the organ of

the island's nationalist People's National Movement (PNM). Two years later, James broke with the PNM's leader, Eric Williams, over what James considered to be Williams's neocolonial politics and returned to England where he published *Beyond a Boundary* (1963).⁴ In the 1970s, his greatest works behind him, James was allowed to lecture in the United States. He also spoke in England, Africa, and the West Indies. In 1980, he returned to Trinidad to live, hosted by the Oilfield Workers Trade Union. In 1981, he went back once more to London, residing in Brixton. He was awarded the Trinity Cross, Trinidad's highest national honor in 1986, and died in London in 1989.

James's long, productive, and eventful life expressed the struggle of a West Indian American to understand and influence such sweeping issues as revolution, imperialism, nationalism, class struggle, and popular culture. His views were the result of an often enigmatic character, to which James provided some clues in *Beyond a Boundary*. He said he was "a British intellectual long before I was ten, already an alien in my own environment among my own people, even in my own family" (28). As a teenager he experienced a personal war "between English Puritanism, English literature and cricket, and the realism of West Indian life" (30). He and other colonial students "lived in two worlds" (34), and the books they read in class meant little to them. "Two people lived in me: one the rebel against all family and school discipline; the other, a Puritan who would have cut off a finger sooner than do anything contrary to the ethics of . . . [cricket]" (37). West Indian nationalism—vastly important later in James's life—stirred but faintly during his youth. Although a friend's dismissal of the alleged superiority of things English cracked the shell of his "nineteenth-century intellectualism" (117), James's books showed considerable fascination with the nineteenth-century theme of (European) "civilization" versus (non-European) "barbarism." His education made him "a member of the British middle class" (41), and he said he knew best the British way of life. But in England he suffered the indignity of a boy asking where his spear was. Although he embraced the struggle of the black "masses," he identified more with ancient Greek education and democracy than with African civilization: "Greco-Roman we are" (152). A Marxist intellectual, James said Thackeray influenced him more than Marx.

James's enigmatic and passionate character, formal and informal training, and evolving political commitments combined with the momentous global events of the post-1929 era to force him to focus on issues now much discussed in American Studies. He was vitally concerned with the

relationship of literature and art to politics. A Third World radical, he revered what he considered the best of Western traditions, such as Greek education and democracy, Shakespeare and British sport, while condemning Western imperialism. A West Indian "brown" man (regarded as "black" in the United States), James was acutely aware of racism, which he interpreted through Marxist class analysis. James's work boldly interwove political and cultural themes such as revolution, totalitarianism, literature and sport, and his writings reflected influences from his native West Indies, from the United States, and from Europe. This rich tapestry of themes and influences is reflected in *Black Jacobins*, *Mariners*, *Renegades*, and *Castaways*, and *Beyond a Boundary*.

The Black Jacobins

The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution is about revolution and the complex relationship between Europe and Africa and the Americas. Written while James was intensely engaged in English Trotskyist and Pan-African politics, *Black Jacobins* analyzed the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) to promote African revolution against European colonialism. James intended to redress the errors and prejudices of liberal and reactionary historians, which he did without excessive dogma, and with a sense of fairness which he learned on the cricket field. He was influenced by West Indians' contemporary struggles to assert their national identity, independence, and sovereignty. More than fifty years after its appearance, *Black Jacobins* can be read profitably not only as an engaging history of the Haitian Revolution, but also for its sense of the global dimension of Western Hemisphere history, its treatment of the conundrums of race and class, and its analysis of the politics of leaders and followers.⁵

James sought to create a book "in which Africans or people of African descent instead of constantly being the object of other peoples' exploitation and ferocity would themselves be taking action on a grand scale and shaping people to their own needs" (vii). To do so, he had to write much about the local planters of colonial Saint Domingue,⁶ the merchants of France and England, and their economic interests in the African slave trade and West Indian exports. James felt that to understand the Haitian Revolution it was necessary to comprehend the French Revolution's shifting policies on slavery and empire. Reflecting the geopolitical realities of the late eighteenth century, his history of a revolution in the Western Hemisphere was more closely linked to events in Europe than to those in Africa.

James's vision of Saint Domingue as a tortured meeting ground of three world cultures, the African, the European, and the resulting West Indian creole (black, brown, and white), is broadly relevant for that sweeping arc of Afro-Euro-America from the Chesapeake through the Caribbean to Copacabana. Like the United States, the West Indies was profoundly affected by the genocide of indigenous peoples and a history of slave plantation society. There are important differences between the United States and the West Indies, but *Black Jacobins* can help remind readers of the fullness and complexity of the African, European, and creole roots of Western Hemispheric civilization.

Black Jacobins also provides ample material for reflecting on the perennial issue of race and class. For James, "the race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental" (283). He believed that reactionary historians had emphasized racial conflict in the Haitian Revolution to obscure class conflict: if in France the aristocracy were white, the bourgeoisie brown, and the Parisian masses black, those reactionary historians would have called the French Revolution a race war.

No one, least of all James, would deny that race was an important factor in the Haitian Revolution. The Afro-Haitian slave and ex-slave majority was powerfully focused on abolishing slavery and preventing its restoration. But James demonstrated beyond doubt that race *per se* was a poor predictor of human behavior in the cauldrons of the Haitian and French Revolutions. Blacks, browns, and whites—including Toussaint L'Ouverture and other leaders—were capable of both treachery and loyalty. There were whites who loved the blacks and pursued the highest egalitarian ideals of the French Revolution, and there were whites who hated blacks and strove to kill 30,000 of them if necessary to return 400,000 to slavery. There were blacks, like Toussaint, who protected and defended whites, and there were blacks, like Dessalines, who accomplished the wholesale massacre and expulsion of whites from independent Haiti. There were free blacks who despised black slaves and ex-slaves, and mulatto slaves who preferred suicide to laboring under a black master. There were mulattos who kept their slaves, clung to Parisian fashion, and betrayed the black revolution, and mulattos who made common cause with black revolutionaries.

For James, analysis of class and material interests resolved many of the apparent contradictions which resulted from viewing the Haitian Revolution

as a racial conflict. The French bourgeoisie, its English counterpart, and the planters of Saint Domingue (mostly white, but including many mulattos and some blacks) sought to maintain the profits of the slave trade and slave labor. The “masses” of Paris and the black slaves of Saint Domingue fought to end the economic, social, political, and physical abuses heaped on them by the ancien régime and the slave society. Mulattos and free blacks, occupying the middle ground in Saint Domingue’s complex class/caste society, often had a foot in two camps, but “mulatto instability [lay] not in their blood but in their intermediate position in society” (207).⁷ Race conflict existed in the Haitian Revolution, but for James the real function of racial strife was to emphasize the underlying class struggle.

In *Black Jacobins*, James also analyzed the relationship of leaders and their followers. To James, the “masses” had to be the source and strength of radical, revolutionary, and democratic change. But in the Haitian Revolution, though they knew what they wanted—an end to slavery—they did not know how to get it or what kind of society to build upon its ruins. Leaders were to provide the guidance and the training necessary to pursue the people’s objectives. James’s views reflected the Marxist insight that although economic, social, and political forces drive history, conditions develop which vest great power in individuals, who in turn act within limits imposed by circumstances.⁸

According to James, the Saint Domingue “masses” began the Revolution; Touissant joined them only after hesitating and almost betraying them. The Revolution created Toussaint, and only then did he help shape it. Toussaint’s insistence on abolishing slavery reflected the masses’ fervent desire, but his policy of protecting whites and maintaining ties to French capital, technology, and education confused them. James reckoned that Toussaint’s policy toward whites was humanitarian and perhaps politically correct, but he failed to explain to his followers how whites, the source of much ferocious evil, also could be necessary to postrevolutionary Haiti, or why he should sign treaties with the slave-holding United States. There Toussaint’s own history constrained him: first a slave who was commanded, then a revolutionary general who commanded others, he could not deign to explain his policies to his followers. Thus James concluded that for all Toussaint’s heroism, the “first and greatest of the West Indians” (418) failed when he puzzled and confused the masses, the ultimate and necessary force at his disposal. It was left to the ruthless Dessalines, more in touch with the people, to complete the revolutionary insurrection.

Black Jacobins earned a lasting place in the scholarship of the Haitian

Revolution and the Caribbean. In the fifty-three years since its publication (James made minor revisions in 1963) several types of criticisms have been made. As James expected, historians have made specific corrections based on parts of the vast documentation he could not consult. Some historians have attacked isolated parts of James's narrative, ignoring its general thrust. Differences of perspective between an Anglicized Afro-West Indian of the 1930s and younger British and North American historians also led to different interpretations. James's attempt to closely connect the *sans culottes* of Paris to the Black Jacobins of Haiti in a common trans-Atlantic struggle seems particularly vulnerable and tenuous today. There are also differences of ideology among historians: anti-Marxists find much to quarrel with in *Black Jacobins*. A harsh example is United States historian Thomas O. Ott, who inveighed against James as a "Trotskyite and politician from Trinidad," a "Negro racist" and a "traditional Marxist."⁹ More appreciative of James was historian David Patrick Geggus, whose research advanced our understanding of the international context of the Haitian Revolution far beyond that in *Black Jacobins*. Offering balanced judgments on and reasonable corrections of several points in James's book, Geggus noted that forty-four years after its original release *Black Jacobins* was still "the most brilliant single study of the Revolution."¹⁰ Franklin Knight's recent statement that the role of the Haitian masses in the revolution after 1802 remains unstudied,¹¹ tends to ignore James's work on the period before that date and to emphasize his role as a pioneer of peoples' history. What remains intact despite subsequent scholarship is *Black Jacobins*' West Indian point of view, its exploration of race and class, its analysis of the achievements and foibles of Toussaint L'Ouverture in relation to the Haitian people, and, above all, its emphasis on the role of the African-American majority in Haiti in making its own history.

Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways

Black Jacobins appeared in 1938, at the beginning of James's fifteen-year stay in the United States. *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* was published in 1953, the year James was deported to England.¹² *Mariners* suffered from James's immediate crisis. His denunciations of communism and communists—intended to persuade McCarthy Era immigration authorities of his political respectability—were too categorical and unfair. Moreover, in *Mariners*

his views of United States history and civilization were, on occasion, designed to reassure James's United States readers that he was not "anti-American." Despite these limits and the contradictions they introduced into *Mariners* (how can totalitarianism grow out of an essentially "good" political culture?), James's reading of *Moby-Dick*, *Pierre*, and three of Melville's short stories—"Bartleby," "Las Encantadas," and "Benito Cereno"—was pioneering for its time, anticipating more recent political interpretations of Melville.

Largely because of James's reading of *Moby-Dick* as a masterful indictment of the possible growth of totalitarianism in American democracy, James regarded Melville as the greatest writer in the English language since Shakespeare. James brought to Melville a mind steeped in Western literature and criticism and a Marxist sensitivity to class structure and dynamics. As in *Black Jacobins*, he explored the connection between "America" (in this case, the United States) and the world. For James, Melville's *Pequod* was a floating factory and "a miniature of all the nations of the world and all sections of society" (*Mariners*, 7) with "Americans" in command but leading the world toward disaster. Captain Ahab was a New England Quaker who had overthrown his religion for the real faith of the United States—material progress through science and technology. However, sensing the emptiness of material society, Ahab challenged the pursuit of profit and private property, becoming, in his attempt at self-redemption, "the most dangerous and destructive type that has ever appeared in Western Civilization" (15), a prototype of future Hitlers and Stalins. The officers, notably first mate Starbuck, James noted, were "New Englanders and men of great [physical] courage, competence, and sobriety," men who represented "the science, technology, technical skill and ability to lead, of world civilization" (40). However, even Starbuck's opposition to Ahab was ultimately ineffectual. Thus to James the officers were like the yes-men of contemporary regimes and lacked the moral courage to prevent Ahab's mad design.

The most unusual and valuable aspect of James's reading of Melville's world in a whaleboat was his emphasis on its working class—the crew. James emphasized that all three of the vital harpooners were Third World types: Queequeg, a South Sea cannibal; Tashtego, a Massachusetts "Indian"; and Daggoo "a gigantic Negro from the Coast of Africa" (24–25). All three "savages" were men of "magnificent physique, dazzling skill and striking personality" (24–25). Nonetheless, they and the rest of the crew were "a pack of ragamuffins picked up from all parts of the earth"

(25), the ordinary people of the world such as those who in Melville's time provided half the manpower to flesh out the United States fisheries, the army, and the navy, and who built "American" railroads and canals.¹³ James emphasized that Melville called the crew "an Anacharsis Clootz [sic] deputation for all the isles of the sea and all the ends of the earth" (*Mariners*, 25, citing *Moby-Dick*, chapter 26); Anacharsis Cloots was a Prussian nobleman who embraced the French Revolution and went far beyond most revolutionaries in proposing a universal brotherhood to oppose tyranny. For James, the crew members, like the ex-slaves in *Black Jacobins*, are the real heroes of *Moby-Dick*: "Their heroism consists in their exemplary doing of their work" (*Mariners*, 35). By contrast, James had little regard for Ishmael, the narrator-intellectual-worker caught between officers and crew, the character closest in actual type to Melville and to James.

Underlying James's interpretation of the *Pequod* as a factory, the officers as "America" (the United States), and the crew as the world are themes of civilization and barbarism. To James, the *Pequod* represented technical and scientific mastery and the ability of the United States to project its profit-seeking, power and madness across oceans. Ahab and the officers are "civilized"—competent, skilled, and modern—but their ship rushes to disaster, toward which James believed Western civilization was headed in 1953. In contrast, the crew members were "savages," but not "primitive savages" (37): "Through them seem to move the very forces of Nature, while at the same time, they are the most skilful seamen and the most generous and magnificent human beings on board" (37).

A "civilized" but maddened captain, civilized officers lacking vision and moral courage to prevent oncoming catastrophe, and a crew of "savage" but heroic workers would seem to call for a revolution (*à la Haiti*) to set things right. James asked why the magnificent, skilled workers of the *Pequod* do not rise against the hell-bent Ahab and his morally bankrupt officers. His answer was partly Ahab's malevolent genius, his ability to weld officers and crew into a "federation" which joins in human unity in pursuit of a human goal, however mad. Another part of his answer was Ishmael, an intellectual who "almost becomes one of the anonymous crew" (49) but was in the end "an intellectual Ahab" who retreated into abstractions when faced with the realization that the ship was a factory that turned men into devils. James's final answer was part historical and part literary. The crew did not revolt because revolution on an American ship in 1851 would have led nowhere: they would have had to seek port or some remote shore. There was no revolt because Melville's theme was not revolution

but totalitarianism—as James put it, “how the society of free individualism would give birth to totalitarianism and be unable to defend itself against it” (*Mariners*, 60)—for which Melville needed to let events on the *Pequod* take their course.

Melville’s pessimism was also reflected in “Benito Cereno” in which slaves on a ship, significantly named *San Dominick*, revolted only to suffer defeat in the end. This pessimism posed a problem for James, who was optimistically committed to revolution and to the radically democratic empowerment of what James saw as the heroic majority. Although he could not alter Melville’s catastrophe in *Moby-Dick* any more than he could Stalin’s perversion of Marxist revolution, James did give the crew a heroic posture facing the impending doom of the *Pequod*. Of the factory scene in which modern industry turns the crew into demons, James observed: “When you look again, you see that the crew is indestructible. There they are, laughing at the terrible things that have happened to them” (*Mariners*, 51).¹⁴ James’s images expressed his faith in the crew, which he saw as more—much more—than a backdrop for Ahab and Ishmael; indeed the crew formed his hope for resistance to totalitarianism and the core of his radical reading of *Moby-Dick*.

Mariners seems to have had little, if any, impact on subsequent Melville scholarship; most of the first edition was confiscated by the publisher for nonpayment. Nonetheless, James’s reading of Melville broke with earlier critics who wanted to assimilate the author “as a seafaring existentialist.”¹⁵ Moreover, James voiced many concerns that have been developed in more recent approaches to Melville. James shared H. Bruce Franklin’s interest in the penetration of Western by non-Western culture, although James departed from Franklin by emphasizing a sociological and political approach to Melville rather than a mythological and psychological one.¹⁶ James would have agreed with Carolyn Karcher that the political economy of Melville’s time is important to understanding his work.¹⁷ James was relatively uninterested in the familial influences on Melville that characterize the work of Karcher and Michael Rogin, but he would have shared Rogin’s views that Melville’s work was neither romantic nor escapist, that it addressed social reality and large public issues of Melville’s day such as Manifest Destiny and slavery.¹⁸ Other recent Melville research—while not drawing on James—tends to support some of his views of the significance for Melville of such subjects as labor and the authoritarian seed in United States “democratic” civilization.¹⁹ Wai Chee Dimock’s analysis of the themes of individualism and imperialism in Melville’s writings

suggests the contemporary relevance of James's concern, in *Mariners*, with the growth of totalitarianism out of democracy.²⁰ All of this suggests that *Mariners* can be seen as a preface to the extensive, provocative, political Melville scholarship of recent years, but *Mariners* also stands on its own. James's emphasis on the heroism of the ordinary crew members is rare and deeply democratic. *Mariners's* unique point of view, that of a radical Afro-Anglo West Indian who tried harder than most outsiders to understand United States culture, and who brought considerable political and literary skills to bear on the project, can still lead readers to a wider and more enlightened reading of Melville. Arguably, in the United States centralized governmental power continues to grow and popular democracy continues to decline. James explored these themes in *Mariners*, and perhaps the 1985 edition will earn James his deserved place among Melville scholars.

Beyond A Boundary

After 1953, dissatisfied with Europe and expelled from the United States, James returned to politics and intellectual work in and about his native West Indies. His experiences, his personality, and his politics led him to challenge not only national and cultural borders, but disciplinary conventions as well.

In cricket, the boundary is the outer limit of the playing field. In *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), James transcended the limits that others might erect among autobiography, sports reminiscences and analysis, politics, sociology, and art. This book, perhaps the high point of James's rich life, was a result of his rethinking of Marxism to cope with the post-1945 world.

In my private mind, . . . I was increasingly aware of large areas of human existence that my history and my politics did not seem to cover. What did men live by? What did they want? What did history show that they had wanted? Had they wanted then what they wanted now? . . . What exactly was art? What exactly was culture? (*Beyond a Boundary*, 149–50)²¹

James concluded that when "the common people were not at work, one thing they wanted was organized sports and games," which they desired "greedily, passionately" (150). It is an observation much in tune with contemporary America—North, Central, and South.

James's search for the social and political meanings of sports and games, especially cricket, led him to ancient Greece where "they hero-worshipped

the athletes to a degree which would shock our modern seekers after autographs" and where the games "became a centre for . . . intellectual life" (154). Greek games preceded democracy and "Olympia in particular was not for the common man" (155). In contrast, however, James saw the emergence of organized sport in mid-nineteenth-century Britain as tied to the emergence of popular democracy. Moreover, imperialist Britain led a global drive for organized sport, exercising world-wide influence in cricket and football (soccer). Introduced into "democratic" Britain's auto-cratc colonies, such as James's Trinidad, or neocolonial American republics such as Argentina, cricket and football reinforced popular stirrings for democracy.²²

A detailed knowledge of cricket is not necessary to profit from James's multifaceted appreciation of the sport. James argued that cricket was created in pre-industrial England "by the yeoman farmer, the gamekeeper, the potter, the tinker, the Nottingham coal-miner, the Yorkshire factory hand" (158) and became "the basis of national culture in England" (163). Cricket was, he stated, the "most complete expression of popular life in pre-Industrial England" (169). The heroic English cricketer W. G. Grace transformed it for the Industrial Age. Grace was a "national embodiment" who "like all truly great men" (James might have mentioned Toussaint and Ahab) bestrode two ages (178).

For James, the proof of cricket's universality was its success in diverse climates and cultures. In the colonial West Indies, it developed awesome powers of transformation and representation. Cricket transformed James's childhood neighbor Matthew Bondman from an "awful character . . . generally dirty" to a man who, bat in hand, "was all grace and style" (14). When Trinidadian cricket star Wilton St. Hill batted "it was a demonstration that atoned for a pervading humiliation" (99) imposed on West Indians by British imperialism. The all-black Shannon Club "played as if they knew that their club represented the great mass of black people on the island" (61).

Wherever the sport was played, cricketers learned a fundamental social ethic: "loyalty and self-sacrifice, unselfishness, cooperation and *esprit de corps*, a sense of honour, the capacity to be a 'good loser' or to 'take it' " (162). Above all, they learned a sense of fair play as expressed, negatively, in the phrase "it isn't cricket." Cricket, James wrote, summed up British ideals, but clashed with West Indian social realities, notably in the favoring of whites over better qualified browns and blacks for inclusion on West Indies international teams and for the strategically and tactically

vital role of captain. It was such manifest unfairness that introduced James, through cricket, to politics, and it is no accident that the present Prime Minister of Jamaica has written a best-selling, lengthy history of West Indian cricket.²³ Englishman E. W. Swanton wrote that the cricket ethic had shaped not only cricketers but West Indian society as a whole (49). James said this was an understatement.

James went even further than Swanton, arguing that cricket was a form of art. His argument attacked "categorization and specialization, that division of the human personality, which is the greatest curse of our time" (191), and which raised boundaries between Art and Sport. "The aestheticians have scorned to take notice of popular sports and games—to their own detriment. The aridity and confusion of which they so mournfully complain will continue until they include organized games *and the people who watch them* as an integral part of their data" (192, original italics). James's inclusion of the spectator in his analysis extended his earlier concerns with the black Jacobins and the *Pequod's* crew: crowds provide the energy which empower heroes. Cricketer W. G. Grace was "lifted higher than ever by what has been and always will be the most potent of forces in our universe—the spontaneous, unqualified, disinterested enthusiasm and goodwill of a whole community" (182). James applied this principle to art and literature as well: it is not only the artist, the writer and their works that matter, but also the viewers and readers who re-create the works as they experience them.

Careful to note that the deeds of the most accomplished cricketer were not on the same plane as those of violinist Yehudi Menuhin or actor Sir John Gielgud, James nonetheless argued that cricket "is an art, not a bastard or a poor relation, but a full member of the community" (192). As dramatic spectacle it belonged with theatre, ballet, opera, and the dance, sharing with them "the relation between event (or, if you prefer, contingency) and design, episode and continuity, diversity in unity, the battle and the campaign, the part and the whole" (193). More challenging still was James's assertion that cricket was a visual art, possessing the tactile values and sense of movement said by critic Bernhard Berenson to be crucial characteristics of the genre (196–97). Elemental physical action had played an enormous role in the visual arts throughout the centuries, and cricket might even be said to enjoy an advantage: "whereas in the fine arts the image of tactile values and movement, however effective, however magnificent, is permanent, fixed, in cricket the spectator sees the image constantly re-created, and whether he is a cultivated spectator or

not, has standards which he carries with him always" (200). James argued for the artistic nature of cricket—only baseball approached it in some ways—but also stated that his analysis could be extended to other sports. Why does all this matter? It mattered to James to show that the "Sport" desired and enjoyed by workers and "ordinary" people was of the same stuff as the "Art" enjoyed and patronized by elites and by James himself, and not inferior to it in any way. This would be a necessary corollary to the words uttered in the 1920s by James's friend and cricket great Learie Constantine, "They are no better than we" (117): whites are not better than blacks, nor British than West Indians. In the last twenty years, West Indians have dominated the international cricket world.

Soccer and baseball reproduce many of the imperial and international dynamics James described for cricket. In soccer, through its Uruguayan, Brazilian, and Argentine teams, Latin America has achieved equality with Europe and superiority over the United States. In baseball, Toronto and Montreal lend a semblance of continental reality to an event called, with less justice than the World Cup, the World Series. Intriguingly, Latin fervor for baseball is most fanatic in the past and present outposts of the United States empire: Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Panama. Baseball has transcended many boundaries—geographic, cultural, and ideological.

In *Beyond a Boundary* James's advocacy of extending the traditional limits of historical and contemporary analysis anticipated a trend which saw, in the United States, the establishment of *The Journal of Popular Culture* (1967) and *The Journal of Sport History* (1974). *Black Jacobins* established James as a precursor of contemporary studies of West Indian history, the dynamics of Third-World revolution, African-American history, and European imperialism. His reading of Melville in *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, strongly informed by his literary sensibility, forecast more radical and more political readings of North American literature. Certainly James needs to be read with an eye toward subsequent refinements in scholarship, but he deserves to be read not just as a precursor, but as a first-class thinker and writer with much to say on the soaring and tragic drama of the Western Hemisphere.

What has not been surpassed by subsequent scholarship is James's broad vision, informed by his West Indian sensibility, his radical politics, and his lengthy residences in Britain and the United States. His sense of the interrelatedness of Marx and Thackeray, democracy and totalitarianism, sport and politics remains a healthy corrective to specialization. Many of

his insights have scarcely been explored, particularly by mainstream scholars. If it is necessary to understand Europe and Africa to understand America, and if it is necessary to understand the American hemisphere to understand the United States, scholars of "American Studies" can find in the work of C. L. R. James a multitude of provocative pathways leading to a more generous and truthful definition of the field. To paraphrase Carlos Fuentes, we need C. L. R. James's memory to redeem our past and his imagination to complete our future.

NOTES

1. "A Harvard Commencement," in Carlos Fuentes, *Myself With Others: Selected Essays* (New York, 1988), 214.

2. I have borrowed the phrase "revolutionary artist" from Paul Buhle's fine biography, *C. L. R. James: The Artist as Revolutionary* (New York, 1988). An additional source of biographical information is Kent Worcester, *C. L. R. James: A Political Biography* (Lanham, Md., 1988).

3. James's major works, with date of first issue and most recent publication data, are: *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (Nelson, England, 1932); *Minty Alley* (1936; reprint, London, 1971); *World Revolution, 1917-36: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937; reprint, Westport, Conn., 1973); *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; reprint, London, 1980); *A History of Negro Revolt* (1938; reissued as *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, Washington, D.C., 1969); *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (1948; reprint, Westport, Conn., 1980); *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950; reprint, Detroit, 1969); *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (1953; reprint, London, 1985); *Modern Politics* (1960; reprint, Detroit, 1973); *Party Politics in the West Indies* (Port of Spain, 1962); *Beyond a Boundary* (1963; reprint, New York, 1983); and *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (1962-1964; reprint, Westport, Conn., 1977).

Three volumes of selected writings are *The Future in the Present* (Westport, Conn., 1977), *Spheres of Existence* (Westport, Conn., 1980), and *At the Rendezvous of Victory* (London, 1984). Margaret Busby's extensive bibliography of works by and about James is in *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, 275-99.

All citations are from the most recent editions.

4. Eric Williams, who briefly studied under James, was an Oxford Ph.D., author of the classic *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1944), and Trinidad's leader from 1957 until his death in 1981.

5. Reflecting its time, *Black Jacobins* did not treat gender extensively, but James did mention that race affected the way women were treated (262), that Toussaint L'Ouverture called for men and women together to oppose the French (287), that "Bonaparte knew the imperialist importance of a proper respect for white women

among natives" (293), and that women, men, and children were equally heroic in promoting and defending the revolution (357, 360–62).

6. The correct name for the French colony on Española; James chose to use "San Domingo."

7. James himself had to struggle with this instability, as when he chose to join a more socially prestigious cricket club comprised of lighter-skinned Trinidadians over a less prestigious one with darker-skinned members; see *Beyond A Boundary*, 58.

8. See George Plekhanov, *The Role of the Individual in History* (New York, 1940).

9. Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789–1804* (Knoxville, 1973), 199.

10. David Patrick Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue* (London, 1982), 80.

11. Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (2d ed., New York, 1990), 209.

12. In the last chapter of *Mariners* James describes his unsuccessful campaign to remain in the United States and his detention on Ellis Island, which he likened to life aboard the *Pequod*.

13. James must have been well aware that fellow West Indians provided much of the labor to build that preeminent symbol of "American" technological mastery—the Panama Canal.

14. *Moby-Dick* (New York, 1967), Chapter 96.

15. Buhle, C. L. R. James, 106–07.

16. H. Bruce Franklin, *The Wake of the Gods: Melville's Mythology* (Stanford, 1963), and Franklin's introduction to Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (Indianapolis, 1967).

17. Carolyn L. Karcher, *Shadow Over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race and Violence in Melville's America* (Baton Rouge, 1980).

18. Michael Rogin, *Subversive Genealogies: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville* (New York, 1983).

19. See the essays by Paul Royster, Emory Elliot, James H. Kavanagh and Donald E. Pease in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge, 1986).

20. Wai Chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton, 1989).

21. The *Times Literary Supplement*, quoted by James, was more inclusive: "what exactly *do* men—and women—want from work, money, life?" (150).

22. Argentine essayist Ezequiel Martínez Estrada in *X-Ray of the Pampa* (Austin, 1971) posited a struggle between the democratic workers represented by the soccer club and the aristocratic oligarchy symbolized by the race track and Jockey Club.

23. Michael Manley, *A History of West Indies Cricket* (London, 1988). When I interviewed Manley in 1984, he spontaneously delivered a lengthy account of how cricket history paralleled social history in the anglophone West Indies.