

Lectures on The Black Jacobins

C.L.R. James

I

HOW I WROTE THE BLACK JACOBS (14 JUNE 1971)

The Black Jacobins – how I came to write this book and what is in the book, what did I think was in the book when I wrote it and what do I find in the book now – all these are very interesting questions not only to you but to me.¹

I came to England from the West Indies in 1932. I was then thirty-one years old. I had been educated at Queen's Royal College, which provided me with a very good education. It didn't suit the West Indies, and those of us who got that type of education had to come abroad where we astonished everybody with the things that we knew. I learnt Latin, I learnt French, I learnt Greek, I learnt Roman history, I learnt Greek history. I studied the history of French literature, English literature (I did some

1 C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938; 2d ed., rev. New York: Vintage Books, 1963; reprint, London: Allison and Busby, 1980). Subsequent references appear in brackets in the text. Page references are to the 1963 edition.

science – I played about with it, but there it was). I really had an excellent education to prepare me for being a British intellectual. But I remained in the Caribbean for another thirteen years teaching at Queen's Royal College and reading hard. I had all the elements of a proper knowledge and understanding of the intellectual life of the European people, and of Britain in particular. (We didn't bother much with the United States then.)

So here was I with this extraordinary knowledge of European history and literature, and a certain attitude which I may talk to you about at another time, a certain attitude which distinguishes all of us of the Caribbean. I leave the West Indies in 1932, and I am well educated, and have a grasp of the movement of society. I don't know too much about black people, but nevertheless I don't believe all that they tell me. They tell me more or less that black people are lowly people, that we came to the Caribbean as slaves, and that it was a benefit to us to have come rather than to have stayed in backward Africa. I didn't so much believe it, but I didn't disbelieve it. I didn't think that it was what they were saying, but one thing, we moved about among white and black people, and Englishmen came and went. We met them on a level. There was nobody who came there who made me feel inferior – by inferior I mean intellectually subordinate.

When I went to England, I carried with me a book called *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies*.² That book was written in the Caribbean before I left. You see, I had a certain outlook. I had read a lot of history and I had this outlook. *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* I had also written every line of before I left the Caribbean.³ So here was I going to England to be a writer, with a first class education in the humanities which I continued for many years afterwards, through teaching and going back to teaching at Queen's Royal College. I had spent a lot of time doing journalism. I had written stories which had been published in England from the Caribbean.

I arrived in England in 1932 to write and to see what was going on. I did not have too much money and I had spent what money I had. And Learie Constantine, the cricketer, who was a very famous man, told me to come up to Nelson where he was working as a professional cricketer, and I went up there after spending three months in England. And as is a habit of mine, I spent my time reading. I was reading British

2 C.L.R. James, *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* (London: Nelson, 1932).

3 C.L.R. James, *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933).

periodicals and British books in order to get myself intellectually acclimatized to the country to which I had come. And in Nelson there I met a man called Mr Cartnell. I remember his name with a lot of affection – Mr Cartnell. And Mr Cartnell was a great reader of books. But he was a bigger buyer of books than he was a reader, because he bought many books which he didn't read. But he collected books. (People collect something: some collect butterflies, some collect match boxes, and some collect this and that. Mr Cartnell collected books, so that is not a bad type of fellow.) He had all these books. And in Nelson they saw that I was interested in books.

Mr Cartnell told me one day, "Trotsky has written a history of the Russian Revolution, and volume one has appeared. Would you like to read it." I said, "Yes, I would like to," cheerfully, and I took it and I read volume 1 of *The History of the Russian Revolution*.⁴ Now, Trotsky, Lenin and these Marxists were people who were convinced that history possesses a certain movement to it, and they expressed the view that the Russian Revolution was the climax of a certain historical movement beginning in the seventeenth century in Great Britain and the eighteenth century in France, followed by the formation of the Second International in the nineteenth century in Europe, and *then* the Russian Revolution as the climax of this whole process.

Now, of all the young people in England who were reading that book, I could understand it better than most, because I understood the historical references. I didn't have to look them up. When he made a reference to this and that and that I understood them all. And I read that book very hard. But at that time I should also say that I had decided – God only knows why, I don't; and I rather doubt if even He would too – that I would write a history of Toussaint L'Ouverture. Why? I don't know. From the Caribbean I had decided that I would write short stories and write novels, and I would do some literary criticism, and, naturally, I would write on sport. I knew all that, but I also wanted to write a history of Toussaint L'Ouverture, because I believe that of the books that I had read none were satisfactory. I had a good knowledge of history, historical writing and biography, and I didn't see a good one.

I had made up my mind, for no other reason than a *literary* reason, that when I reached England I would settle down to write a history of Toussaint L'Ouverture. So when I reached Nelson I began to import books from France on the history of the black Jacobins. I sent for the French catalogues that I had been reading in the Caribbean and I sent for all the books that dealt with it, and I got them and began to

4 Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, vol. 1, trans. Max Eastman (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932).

read them and collect my material. But I also read very carefully Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, volume one. Then, in 1933, I go down to London, and I begin to write on cricket for the *Daily Telegraph*. But the *Manchester Guardian* had promised that I would write on cricket for them, so after I had written a few days for the *Telegraph*, I sent to the *Guardian*, and said, "Look the *Telegraph* wants to take me over. What will you do?" They told me, "Come and write for us", so I got a job and I went off to write on cricket. I kept myself quiet and by the end of the cricket season, in September, I had some money and I had some time. (The cricket season lasts from May to September, and I was busy making money between May to September.) When September comes, I have some money and then I did what I had long decided that I would do, I went and bought volumes 2 and 3 of *The History of the Russian Revolution* by Leon Trotsky.

With nothing to do but wait till next May, I could move about and read. But I don't know what I am in for yet. I read the three volumes of *The History of the Russian Revolution*. That is a magnificent book. It is a tremendous book and is filled with historical development and the role of the masses and the role of the party, and so on. But in the course of reading that book I come to the conclusion that something is seriously wrong, because Trotsky is attacking Stalin and the Stalinists. His account of the revolution is an account of what he and Lenin did, and what Stalin and the Stalinists in Russia did not do, and what they have not been doing since. So I say, okay, I go to the bookshop and I buy Stalin's two volumes of *Leninism* and I read them.⁵ Meanwhile, I am still collecting material about the black Jacobins, buying materials in France and in London, wherever I see anything. I go to the old bookstores and I read.

Then I notice that both Lenin and Stalin are quoting Marx. So I say, Lenin is quoting Marx, and Trotsky is quoting Marx and saying that Lenin is doing what I am doing. So I go and buy the volumes of Marx. Nobody is educating me. Nobody is telling me what to read. I am doing all this *entirely* on my own. At the end of it, I realize that I have to do some more reading about the French Revolution. I buy some books and I read. I have money and I have time. I have money because I have been writing on cricket and they pay me well.

So by the time we come to the beginning of the 1934 season I have a whole lot of books, and I have studied Marxism. I know what Trotsky thinks, I know what Lenin

5 Joseph Stalin, *Leninism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932–33).

thinks, I know what Marx thinks, and I have come to the conclusion that the Stalinists are the greatest historical liars in the world at the present time – no use I have for them. And I work at Lenin and Trotsky and I get to some method, and meanwhile I am collecting material and reading about the San Domingo Revolution.

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At the same time, I am meeting a lot of black people and African people in London. George Padmore, an extraordinary man, comes and he says he is going to form the International African Service Bureau, and there is another man who calls himself Dr Makonnen today, but he didn't call himself that then (maybe his doctorate came later or he had suppressed it) – a wonderful man. There were other people around us. There was Jomo Kenyatta. Kenyatta, who was not distinguished for intellect (I don't think that he is up to the present time), but he was an African nationalist, a man who when you told him something, as long as it was against imperialism and for the Africans, could be depended on. There was another man, Louis Mbanefo, later Sir Louis Mbanefo, who, in 1959, became chief justice of Eastern Nigeria. There was also another man around us at the time – Ademola, later Sir Adetokunbo Adegboyega Ademola, who, in 1958, became the first Nigerian chief justice of the Nigerian Federation. Then, there was the Ghanaian J.B. Danquah⁶ and the first wife of Marcus Garvey, Amy Ashwood Garvey.

Gradually, then, I began to gain in England a conception of black people which I didn't possess when I left the Caribbean, but for which I was ready because black people in the Caribbean are not deficient in any way that one can see. They are deficient in political direction and political understanding and nationalist experience, because they have never owned anything. An African can say, "Well, this may not be very much, it is only a potato or a plantain tree, but my grandfather owned this, get out." The black man in the Caribbean never owned anything. He came there as a slave, hence he is in the habit of being somebody who was simply there. Apart from that, however, he is very bright, very bright. I began to see these Africans around me. I was very friendly with Mbanefo and we used to see something of Ademola. Then Paul Robeson came and the first thing that I did in regard to Toussaint L'Ouverture was that I wrote a play, and Paul played in it in 1936.

So I am now reading and discussing Marxism and I am beginning to see the San Domingo Revolution in a Marxist way. I didn't begin with that, but I am gradually

6 J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, with illustrations by Kofi Antubam (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1944).

getting hold of Marxism through reading Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and so forth. I am beginning to understand Marxism and I am starting to apply it to the San Domingo Revolution. And at that time I also write a play.

SMALL
AXE

Now, I used to go up to Nelson to meet Learie Constantine. He lived up there and I had spent the first year up there and I went up very often, and I was very friendly with a man called Harry Spencer and his wife. You will see their names in the dedication to *The Black Jacobins* – “To my good friends Harry and Elizabeth Spencer of Nelson, Lancashire, England”. One day I go up to Nelson and I am talking to my friend Harry Spencer. I say, “Harry, so and so.” He says, “But why don’t you write a book, you are only talking about it.” I say, “For me to write the book, Harry, I have to go to France and spend some months in the archives, and I haven’t got enough money for that.” He was a very quiet Englishman, and he looks at me and says, “How much money do you want?” I say, “It would take a hundred pounds.” A few days afterwards he says to me: “Here is seventy-five pounds. Go to France, go to the archives.” (Anybody who calls Harry Spencer “whitey” will find that I am not pleased about it at all.)

This enabled me to go to France and, while in France, I look up in the archives. I look up, I look up, I look up in the archives, I spend three or four months looking up in the archives, every morning, walk up the Seine, the bank of the Seine, go to the archives. In France they are concerned about food, as they have every right to be. At twelve o’clock they shut down, everywhere is closed up till two. Archives close up, “St James” closes up, off to eat. Very fine. At two o’clock, I go back. I work. The archives close at five or six. I go home.

In 1936, or around the beginning of 1937, I am ready to write the book and I go to the publisher Methuen and they give me fifty pounds, which is a lot of money in those days – three hundred or four hundred dollars, as an advance to write the history of the San Domingo Revolution.

I was then also a member of the Independent Labour Party, and the leader, Fenner Brockway, was very friendly with Fred Warburg of the publisher Secker and Warburg. Warburg wants to publish some books about the Left, so he sends to tell me that he wants to see me, and I go to see him. I am invited to go to the country with him and his wife, and I play cricket. They take me down to play cricket. He says, “James, I want you to write a book about African Socialism.” I tell him, “No, that is not the book for me.” He asks, “What is the book that you should write?” I tell him that he should publish a book about the mess that is taking place in Russia and the explosions that are going to take place soon – this was before the first Moscow Trials. He says to

me, "Do you think that you could write a book on that?" I tell him that I am absolutely certain that I can. He says, "Prepare me a draft." I say to myself, I am going to force this fellow, and within a week I give him twenty thousand words. He says, "All right, write the book."⁷

So I put aside my *Black Jacobins* and I write *World Revolution, 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*.⁸ But to write *World Revolution* I write about the revolution everywhere – in China, Germany, France, as well as the history of the international Marxist movement. I make a complete study of Marxism to write that book, and when I am finished writing that book I go to Methuen and I tell them, "I don't want you to publish my *Black Jacobins* anymore, here is your fifty pounds, give me back my contract." And I go to Warburg and I tell him, I would like him to publish the history of the black Jacobins, which is published in 1938, one year after I have done *World Revolution* in 1937.

So I hope you understand now that this book is not an accident. It didn't just fall from a tree. It is the result of a whole series of circumstances by which I thoroughly master, as I did in those days, Marxism. I had come from the Caribbean with a certain understanding of Western civilization. I had read the history of the Marxist movement, and I had written four hundred pages on the Marxist movement, from its beginning in 1864 to what was taking place in 1936. I was a highly trained Marxist, and that is the person who wrote *The Black Jacobins*.

We will take up what I would have written if I were to write it today, and that is not so strange as it might appear to you. Look at page xi of the introduction, the last paragraph:

Tranquillity today is either innate (the philistine) or to be acquired only by a deliberate doping of the personality. It was in the stillness of a seaside suburb [I went to Brighton and spent six months writing the book there] that could be heard most clearly and insistently the booming of Franco's heavy artillery [I am already a highly developed political person, sensitive to the political problems of the day], the rattle of Stalin's firing squads [I had already written the book which said this was happening and that is why], and the fierce

7 Cf. Frederic Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen* (London: Hutchinson, 1959; first American ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960); *All Authors are Equal: The Publishing Life of Frederic Warburg* (London: Hutchinson, 1973).

8 C.L.R. James, *World Revolution, 1917–1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1937). A reprint of *World Revolution 1917–1936* was issued by Kraus Reprint (a division of Kraus-Thomson Organization) in 1970. A paperback edition was published by Humanities Press (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey) in 1993, with introduction by Al Richardson.

shrill turmoil of the revolutionary movement [a movement of which I was a part] striving for clarity and influence.

SMALL
AXE

That was the C.L.R. James who sat down to write *The Black Jacobins*. And then I went on to say: "Such is our age and this book is of it." The book is of the age of 1937–38, when Europe was preparing for another world war, World War II. "The book is of our age, with something of the fever and the fret, nor does the writer regret it." And then comes the remarkable sentence: "The book is the history of a revolution and written under different circumstances it would have been a different, but not necessarily a better book" [p. xi]. Thus, when I talk to you on Friday about what it would be under these circumstances, I am very much aware of the circumstances in which you write a book and which produces that kind of book. Milton has a great phrase; he says, "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master's spirit." But it is more than that. It is the result of the circumstances of the age playing upon a mentality and the circumstances of people who are central to it.

Now, what did I have in mind when I wrote this book? I had in mind writing about the San Domingo Revolution as the preparation for the revolution that George Padmore and all of us were interested in, that is, the revolution in Africa. Look at page 376 in the book. I am going to read a good bit of it: "The imperialists envisage an eternity of African exploitation. The African is backward, ignorant. They dream dreams." The circle to which I belonged [the International African Service Bureau], the people whom I knew, we were all quite certain that after the coming war the African would emerge as an independent force in history. (Unless, in the words of Hegel, you are doing speculative thought, thinking about what is going to happen as a result of what you see around you, you are not doing anything.) We were quite sure. I say there in the book:

The imperialists envisage an eternity of African exploitation. The African is backward, ignorant, they dream dreams. If in 1788 anyone had told the Comte de Lauzerne, the Minister; the Comte de Peynier, the Governor; General Rochambeau, the soldier; Moreau de Saint-Mery, the historian; Bebe de Marbois, the bureaucrat, that the thousands of dumb brutes who were whipped to labour at dawn and whipped back at midnight, who submitted to their mutilations, burnings, and other savageries . . . if anyone today were to suggest to them that in three years the black would shake off their chains and face extermination rather than put them on again they would have thought the speaker mad. [p. 376]

These blacks in San Domingo did. And I had been reading the history of the French Revolution. There was a gentleman, a count somebody who left France in

1788, and he went to America or somewhere and returned in 1791. And people in France were talking about the veto. There was a constituent assembly and the argument was – regarding the decisions of the assembly – did the king have to sign them or did he have the right of a veto? And this fellow said, “What is all this, what is all this veto? When I left here in 1788 they wouldn’t know what a veto was, and now everybody is discussing should the king have a veto or not have a veto. What is all this?” I was aware of the tremendous movement that a revolutionary population makes, and we were getting ready and preparing for that, and this book was written in that way. It was written about Africa. It wasn’t written about the Caribbean. (People have written, and Bobby Hill has written, that the book has something else in mind than Caribbean emancipation.)

Now, continue. “The blacks of Africa are more advanced, nearer ready than the slaves of San Domingo” [p. 376]. “This is the appeal written by some obscure Rhodesian black in who burns the fire that burnt in Toussaint L’Ouverture.” (We were oriented towards Africa.)

Listen to this all of you who live in the country, think well how they treat us and ask for a land. Do we live in good treatment, no; therefore let us ask one another and remember this treatment. Because we wish on the 29th of April every person not to go to work, he who would go to work, and if you see him it would be a serious case. We going to stop work and anybody who go to work we going to deal with him . . . Those words do not come from here, they come from the wisers who are far way and enable to encourage us. That’s all. Hear well if it is right let us do so. We all of the Nkana. Africans. Men and Women I am glad.

(signed) G. Loveway

That is why I wrote the book, to say that the San Domingo Revolution was made in this way and it was written in order that people should think about the African revolution and get their minds right about what was bound to happen in Africa. I am glad to say that many in Africa read it, and it passed about among them and it contributed towards helping those who were taking part in the African revolution to understand what the movement of the masses was, how a revolution went. That is why I wrote the book, and that is the purpose that the book achieved.

Now, if you look on page 265, you will see something else. In the middle of page 265, you will see:

Firm as was his grasp of reality, old Toussaint looked beyond San Domingo with a boldness of imagination surpassed by no contemporary. In the Constitution he authorised the slave-trade because the island needed people to cultivate it. When the Africans landed,

however, they would be free men. But while loaded with the cares of government, he cherished a project of sailing to Africa with arms, ammunition and a thousand of his best soldiers, and there conquering vast tracts of country, putting an end to the slave-trade, and making millions of blacks "free and French", as his Constitution had made the blacks of San Domingo. It was no dream. He had sent millions of francs to America to wait for the day when he would be ready.

Toussaint was not only a black man, he was also a West Indian. A West Indian, René Maran, wrote his famous novel *Batouala* about the ways the French were treating black people in Africa; George Padmore wrote and worked for the world revolution with Africa at its centre; Aimé Césaire had in mind that African civilization would be the one to balance the degradation and the absolute dilapidation of Western civilization; Frantz Fanon worked in Algeria; Fidel Castro called the other day for "the Asian and African combination"; and I wrote my book with the African revolution in mind. It seems that those who come from a small island always think of a revolution in very wide terms. That is the only way they could come out of it. You can't begin to think of a little revolution in a small island. From Toussaint onward, they all had that in mind. I wrote:

He [Toussaint] had sent millions of francs to America to wait for the day when he would be ready. He was already 55. What spirit was it that moved him? Ideas do not fall from heaven. The great revolution had propelled him out of his humble joys and obscure destiny, and the trumpets of his heroic period rang ever in his ears. In him, born a slave and the leader of slaves, the concrete realization of liberty, equality and fraternity was the womb of ideas and the springs of power, which overflowed their narrow environment and embraced the whole of the world. [p. 265]

That is typically West Indian. I am not saying that in the abstract, that is the long line of West Indians, that is what they have done, and embraced the whole of the world. And then I go on to say what I wrote in the new edition. I wrote it in 1938:

But for the revolution, this extraordinary man and his band of gifted associates will live their lives as slaves, serving the common place creatures who own them, standing bare-footed and in rags to watch inflated little Governors and mediocre officials of Europe pass by, as many talented Africans stand in Africa to-day. [p. 265]

I wrote that in 1938. I say that is what is going to take place. Speculative thought is important, and unless you are doing speculative thought you are not doing any thought at all. You are only playing about. I was able in 1938 to say that

But for the Revolution this extraordinary man and his band of gifted associates would have lived their lives as slaves, serving the common place creatures who owned them standing

bare-footed and in rags, to watch inflated little Governors and mediocre officials from Europe pass by as many a talented African stand in Africa today.

Written in 1938.

C.L.R.
JAMES

Now, you must know where I got those ideas from. I had got myself attuned to understand that this would take place from reading Marxism and from reading the history of San Domingo. Chapter 1 talks about: "The Property" [p. 17] What were the slaves like? What was the intellectual level of these slaves? The planters hated them, calling them by opprobrious names. In 1789 there was a memoir published on slavery in San Domingo and the author says the Negroes are "unjust, cruel, barbarous, half-humans, treacherous, deceitful, thieves, drunkards, proud, lazy, unclean, shameless, jealous to fury and cowards" – all he didn't say was that they were immoral. He said enough to encompass those. That is what they were saying and that was what all of them were writing in 1789. That is what they thought of the slaves in 1789, that is the kind of people they are. That was widespread. But the civil war broke out, and by 1802 the blacks had changed. General Leclerc wrote a series of letters home to the Minister of Marines and to his brother-in-law Napoleon Bonaparte after his army had been defeated and he knew that the situation was lost. About these same blacks he wrote to Napoleon. He says, "The state in which the colony of San Domingo finds itself by the fatal destruction of its army and by the insurrections excited by the decrees of General Richepanse in Guadeloupe appears to me so disturbing that I have decided to send to you General Boudet" [p. 353]. Leclerc, in command of the French Army, sent somebody to Napoleon to tell him in person what was happening. He said, "Believe what he will tell you." And watch what he says on page 353, please: *"We have in Europe a false idea of the country in which we fight and the men whom we fight against."*

So the Negroes were unjust, cruel, barbarous – you put in all the nasty words they spoke about us, and by 1803–4 Leclerc was saying: Listen to what Boudet will tell you, we have in Europe a false idea of the country in which we fight and the men who we fight against. He said, "These are different people to what we in France thought they were. That was based on my knowledge of some African people and of what I saw was going to take place in Africa." Speculative thoughts. If that is what they thought the blacks were at the beginning and what they thought at the end, and at the present time that is what they think of Africa, we said that in the coming revolutionary upheaval, then this will take place also.

Then look at page 346. General Leclerc writing to the Minister of Marines in France. He says: "It is not enough to have taken away Toussaint. We have put

Toussaint in jail and sent him away.” He said, “There are two thousand leaders to be taken away.” They couldn’t read, most of them, but after a time there were two thousand. He says: “You take Toussaint, you think they have taken away their leaders? Bonaparte, that’s your mistake. There are two thousand leaders to be taken away.” The revolution can reach that stage. And if you can’t find leaders in the United States to lead the black struggle that means the black struggle hasn’t reached the pitch where there is a leader among every ten people. “There are two thousand leaders to be taken away.”

Now you are beginning to understand why I wrote the book, how I wrote the book, and what I wrote about. Now, there are a number of black people today, and some well educated ones, too, who are very concerned that I say that the revolution in San Domingo owed so much to the French Revolution. I don’t agree; in fact, I say that it is impossible to understand the San Domingo Revolution unless it is studied in close relationship with the Revolution in France.⁹ The San Domingo Revolution was part of the French Revolution, because when the Revolution started in France and France exploded, the blacks were watching, and after a time they said, “Well, let us get in.” They came in, they had a theory. They said, “The slaves in France have revolted and taken over the property of their masters; they are doing what we are doing here and we should go further with it here.” It wasn’t too correct historically, but in general they had the idea of the thing, and they said, “What they are doing over there we are doing here.” They got the idea that they are doing what we are doing, and let us go further with it here. They couldn’t read but they could make a revolution. (The two don’t go together sometimes. Being able to read too well prevents you being able to make a revolution, but I wouldn’t stress that as a student.)

I had studied Marxism and in order to write *World Revolution*, which I wrote having put aside this one, I made a complete study of the Marxist movement. So I was very well educated in Marxism, but when I went to study the San Domingo Revolution I had to read the great masters of history who were members of the French Revolution school. It is one of the great schools of revolutionary history in Europe. The greatest of them all is Jules Michelet. I don’t know of any greater history book than his today. People have discovered a lot, but Michelet remains the great master.¹⁰ Michelet wrote in the 1850s and people learn a great deal. Aulard came after and his

⁹ Cf. David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds, *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Jules Michelet, *Histoire de la révolution française*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1868–69); cf. Gordon Wright, ed., *History of the French Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

sympathies were Girondin, the right wing of the Revolution, and Dantonisque. He concentrated on the political events of the revolution.¹¹ Then Mathiez came as a result of the Russian Revolution, and Mathiez rendered a lifelong service to the rehabilitation of the reputation of Robespierre.¹² The modern study of the Revolution begins, however, above all with Jean Jaurès.¹³ Then there is Georges Lefebvre,¹⁴ and a friend of mine named Daniel Guérin wrote a special book.¹⁵ I had to read all of them, and I read them. Michelet wrote a certain way, and why Aulard wrote differently, and why Mathiez wrote differently from Aulard, and why Lefebvre wrote differently from these others, and why Lefebvre said that his master was Jaurès. So I had a complete study of the French historical school in dealing with the French Revolution. It is one of the greatest historical schools in the world. One of the men today, a man who is writing well, is a man called Albert Soboul.¹⁶

So that I really got hold of historical development, plus I had read Marxism, and had had to study Marxism, first to know what the quarrel between Lenin and Trotsky and Stalin was about, what were their differences. Then I begin to apply Marxism to the San Domingo Revolution. I study the San Domingo situation and begin to read the great school of the French Revolution. By the time I come to write about the French Revolution in San Domingo, I am a pretty well educated person in history and in politics. I didn't fall from the sky. I didn't go up like Moses and come back with documents. I had to work at it and I worked at it with great pleasure and passion because I was learning from it all the time.

Now, very important, in fact fundamentally important, is something that I wrote in the bibliography. I say on page 385: "Many Americans have done meticulous studies of special periods and aspects and both in England and the United States" – there is a man named Mr Bruce Quinton, a historian of the French Revolution – "one-volume studies have appeared which seek to embody the latest researches". And then I

11 F.-A. Aulard, *The French Revolution: A Political History, 1789–1804*, 4 vols. (New York, 1910).

12 Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution* (New York, 1929).

13 Jean Jaurès, *Histoire socialiste de la révolution française*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1922–27).

14 Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962–64); *The Thermidorians* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964, 1966); *The Directory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964, 1967).

15 Daniel Guérin, *Class Struggle in the First French Republic: Bourgeois and Bras Nus, 1793–1797* (London: Pluto Press, 1977). Guérin was also the author of *Negroes on the March: A Frenchman's Report on the American Negro Struggle* (New York: Weissman, 1956) and *The West Indies and Their Future* (London: Dobson, 1961).

16 Albert Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-culottes and the French Revolution, 1793–94* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); *The Sans-culottes: The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793–94* (New York: Anchor Books, 1972); *The French Revolution, 1787–1799: From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

say something of great audacity, but in my opinion of great veracity also: "They are of little value the history that these English and Americans write about the French Revolution." The writers, particularly, in England, usually tried to be what is called fair to both sides, well balanced, but you can't write a well-balanced history of a revolution because a revolution is something that creates disorder and unbalances everything. And if you are going to write on both sides, you write nothing! Now that's the way they like to see most of the explosive incidents of the revolution, which are really a series of gigantic explosions, as unfortunate exceptions, that is, they went a little too far, etcetera. A reactionary historian might miss much of the creative actions and ideas, but he is aware of conflict, he is aware that something is being blown to pieces that he supports. And quite a number of them give you a fair idea of the revolution, but you have to read the great French historians, or read the reactionary historians, to get some sense of the revolution. But if you read an English liberal, or socialistic American or liberal American socialist, they say, But you went too far, the other one came and he was excessive, too, etcetera. You may read a lot, you may write exams and pass exams, you may even get a degree, but you are not going to know the French Revolution, a tremendous event in history, which, in my opinion, is still the greatest historical event in the last thousand years of history – the French, not the Russian, Revolution, the French Revolution.

All right. Now, I have two more things to tell you before I come to an end. I want to deal with the leaders, the leadership of the revolution. Now, in the old days when Toussaint began, Toussaint used to go around and whenever there was a disturbance Toussaint was right there through the night, meeting them the next morning, and talking to them and telling them they shouldn't do that. He built up the revolutionary movement, exactly as Nkrumah built up the Convention People's Party in the Gold Coast. He went personally from place to place, and when anything happened anywhere he could be depended upon. Nkrumah would get there by the next morning to talk to them, and Toussaint would get there by next morning to talk to them too. But he becomes a ruler, he starts to take charge of laws and economic demands and justice and this and that and the other, and he loses contact with the mass of the population. That's what happens to all of them. It is a historical development. I want you to look on page 276: "Gone were the days when Toussaint would leave the front and ride through the night to enquire into the grievances of the labourers and though protecting the whites make the labourers see that he was their leader." That was Nkrumah to the last comma. Nkrumah built up the party by personal contact with the mass of the population, and then when he became ruler he lost contact with them, and

he begins to pass a lot of laws by which he can detain people without trial and so forth. Toussaint did exactly the same. There was a revolution against his regime, and look at page 279, the last line on page 278:

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Why should the blacks support Moïse against him? That question he did not stop to ask or if he did, he failed to appreciate the answer. In the districts of the insurrection he shot without mercy, he lined up the labourers and spoke to them in turn and on the basis of a stumbling answer or uncertainty decided who should be shot.

That is what came to Toussaint in the end, and that's why he didn't lead the revolution to a complete success, and that is typical of the people who make the revolution and lead it against the imperialists. They take over and something happens to them. And when we study the French Revolution and study what is taking place, we see it is not the weakness of individual men but it is a certain objective situation in which they find themselves that tends to corruption and makes them lose that interest and concern in mobilizing the mass of the population and makes them get lost in the questions of the details of government. It happens to all of them today, and it happened to one of the greatest of them all, Toussaint L'Ouverture. That is what this book is saying.

Then something else happened. Those who are with you, and become leaders, when something is required they don't want to go. The seats of power are very warm and very comfortable. Look at page 347. Now, I need only mention briefly: the revolution was made, the revolution was established, slavery was abolished, Toussaint was appointed commander-in-chief, Toussaint was appointed governor of the colony, and then Bonaparte sent a new expedition which he said, "I am going to guarantee your freedom" and so forth. And it was the new expedition that they had sent there to restore slavery. This is something you have to learn. Most of the provincial governors and the men in authority were slaves, had been slaves, and now they were men of authority, there was nobody else to put. When you go to do the archives in France (and I hope somebody will go and do it because after thirty years the time has come to do another history of the revolution¹⁷ – it wouldn't wipe this out, but something else

17 Cf. Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789–1804* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973); David Patrick Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793–1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Pierre Pluchon, *Toussaint Louverture: un révolutionnaire noir d'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Martin Ros, *Night of Fire: The Black Napoleon and the Battle for Haiti*, trans. Karin Ford-Treep (New York: Sarpedon, 1994).

should be done), you will see the reports that some of these generals used to write to the chief-of-staff. They are very fine reports, very clear. They state all that is to be stated, but when you look at the signature you could see that his name had to be written in pencil and he would trace over it in ink. He couldn't write. He could lead a section of the army, he could govern a part of the territory, but he couldn't write, and you would see the reports – the reports are there, where you will see the pencil below and he traced over it in ink. Dessalines, by means of a tremendous struggle, learnt in the end to sign his name, and he was very proud of it. They didn't have to write it in pencil for him, he could write. (He was careful, he married his wife, and his wife was a very well educated young woman.)

So those are the sort of persons who formed Toussaint's bodyguard and Toussaint's commanders. And what happened to them? Page 346, my friends:

The masses were fighting and dying as only revolutionary masses can, the French Army was wasting away, despair was slowly choking Leclerc. But still these black and Mulatto generals continued to fight for Leclerc against what they called the "brigands", and the Mulattoes and former free continued to stick to the French.

Look at page 347: "All that the old gang would do was to threaten Leclerc." In other words, they were slaves. (They were not as some of these rascals out there in the Caribbean are today.) These were slaves, slaves who went from slavery to become officials of state, heads of the provinces, and when they came there and Bonaparte sent the army, they wouldn't do anything. They said, "But you can't mean to restore slavery, I mean you can't mean to do that." A general sat with his daughters and he told the French general, "You mean these two are to be slaves?" The French general would say, "Well, I don't know, not those." And then he stayed there until Dessalines, the barbarian, who couldn't read, who could barely sign his name, led the struggle to make the revolution once more. But I want you to remember that bunch of fellows who had been slaves, they hadn't been educated, they hadn't been corrupted by education, but once they had sat in the seat of power – they couldn't write, they weren't corrupted by education – but the seats of power were such that they remained, they couldn't do anything. And Dessalines, "the barbarian", had to move and take the necessary steps to save the revolution.

Now, I have to read for you one of the great documents, one of the great documents of political history, and I will have the nerve to read for you what I have written about it. Toussaint at one time was very uncertain as to what would happen because the French government was shifting. One must remember the French Revolution started and the French government was somewhat right wing, reactionary,

and they didn't abolish slavery. Then there was a change in the French government and they abolished mulatto discrimination but they left the slaves. Then the slaves made the revolution and the slaves started to defend San Domingo against the British and the Spaniards. So they passed a resolution abolishing slavery. But then the French Revolution began to slip backwards again, and some reactionaries came back where there had been revolutionaries before. And this letter that Toussaint writes was written at a time when he was very uncertain as to what was to be the attitude of the French government: What would they do? Would they restore slavery, or would they continue to defend the abolition of slavery and maintain the famous law of abolition?

It is one of the most remarkable letters that I know. You will find it on page 195. Toussaint is writing to the Directorate, and to get the full effect of it you must remember that the Directory had sent him a sword, a pistol, gold inlaid and so forth, as a sign of its confidence in him and its satisfaction with the way he had been defending, not only the French Revolution in general but the way he had been defending French San Domingo against the attacks of the British and the French who wanted to take it back for themselves and also to restore royalty. So Toussaint didn't know exactly what was happening because the French Revolution is one thing in 1791, it is something else in 1792, it is something else in 1794, it is something else in 1797, and it ends up with Napoleon in 1799. So this is about 1797, and Toussaint is uncertain. What are they going to do? On page 195 – I will skip a bit – he says:

My attachment to France, my knowledge of the blacks, make it my duty not to leave you ignorant either of the crimes which they meditate or the oath that we renew, to bury ourselves under the ruins of a country revived by liberty rather than suffer the return of slavery.

It is for you, Citizens Directors, to turn from over our heads the storm which the eternal enemies of our liberty are preparing in the shades of silence. It is for you to enlighten the legislature, it is for you to prevent the enemies of the present system from spreading themselves on our unfortunate shores to sully it with new crimes. Do not allow our brothers, our friends, to be sacrificed to men who wish to reign over the ruins of the human species.

Toussaint felt he couldn't defend them, so he was telling them: This is your responsibility. We hear of all the plots and plans, but *you*, you will have to do it, you will have to do that, you will have to stop them. You will have to tell them that the French government will not tolerate this and that. Then he went on to say: "But no,

your wisdom will enable you to avoid the dangerous snares which our common enemies hold out for you." You are in danger, they hold out snares for you, but I am sure you wouldn't be caught, you wouldn't be caught. He says, I send you a letter which will tell you what they are. And go over to page 196:

Do they think that men who have been able to enjoy the blessing of liberty will calmly see it snatched away? They supported their chains only so long as they did not know any condition of life more happy than that of slavery. But today when they have left it, if they had a thousand lives they would sacrifice them all rather than be forced into slavery again.

And then he states to the Directory: "But no, you wouldn't do it, the same hand which has broken our chains will not enslave us anew, you know you are not going to do it. I know you directors, you're not going to do that, the same hand which has broken our chains, you abolished slavery, you will not do it. France will not revoke her principles." He is scared like the devil that France will, but he says France will not revoke her principles, she will not withdraw from us the greatest of her benefits. She will protect us against all our enemies, she will not permit her sublime morality to be perverted, the sublime morality which abolished slavery. He said: "France will not do that. Those principles which do her most honour to be degraded, her most beautiful achievement of the abolition of slavery, to allow that to be revoked. France will not do it, you will not do it, I know you will not. But if to re-establish slavery in San Domingo, this was done, then I declare to you it would be to attempt the impossible. We have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty. We shall know how to brave death to maintain it." It is a tremendous letter, and then comes a most beautiful passage: he says, "This, Citizens Directors, is the morale of the people of San Domingo, these are the principles that they transmit to you by me" [p. 197].

Abraham Lincoln was the only one who wrote about democracy in that way. Toussaint said, "These are the principles of the people of San Domingo, this is what they transmit to you by me. I am only telling you what they think," and then he says:

My own you know. It is sufficient to renew, my hand in yours, the oath that I have made to cease to live before gratitude dies in my heart, before I cease to be faithful to France and to my duty, before the god of liberty is profaned and sullied by the liberticides [before they were given a sword and pistols], before they can snatch from my hands that sword, those arms, which France confided to me for the defence of its rights and those of humanity, for the triumph of liberty and equality. [p. 197]

There is not much better than that anymore nor anywhere.

THE BLACK JACOBIANS AND BLACK RECONSTRUCTION:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
(15 JUNE 1971)

C.L.R.
JAMES

Yesterday I tried to get at the fundamental positions taken by *The Black Jacobins*. We are going to deal with that again, so today I will spend only about twenty to twenty-five minutes, perhaps half an hour, on certain things which I see in it today which can be compared, and made reference to, in regard to W.E.B. Du Bois's book *Black Reconstruction*.¹⁸

Now when I look at the preface to the 1963 Vintage Books edition of *The Black Jacobins*, I see there the appendix ("From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro") that attempts to do for the future of the West Indies – all of them – what was done for Africa in 1938. Writers on the West Indies always relate them to their approximation to Britain, France, Spain and America, that is to say, to Western civilization, but never in relation to their own history. They do not say: The West Indies began here and they have developed and this is what they are now in relation to what they were when they began. They always say: This is what the West Indies are, that is what America is, that is what France is, that is what Western civilization is, are the West Indians getting nearer or not nearer? Today there is now a tendency among black sociologists to refer the West Indian situation to what is taking place in Africa. I believe that every historian or critical observer has his own sense of values. That cannot be helped. If he hasn't got them, if he doesn't know he has them, that is his misfortune, because everybody has them. But you are definitely using that sense of value. In *The Black Jacobins*, I am referring the West Indies to the past of the West Indies. I am using a sociological and historical method which is Marxist.

Now I go on to the preface to the first edition. That edition contains some things which are very highly admired, and some other things which are very significant. I say at the bottom of the first page of the preface: "By a phenomenon often observed, the individual leadership responsible for this unique achievement was almost entirely the work of a single man – Toussaint L'Ouverture." And then I give away what I'm concerned about. "Beauchamp in the *Biographie Universelle* calls Toussaint

18 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935). Subsequent references are to the 1969 Atheneum edition and appear in brackets in the text.

L'Ouverture one of the most remarkable men of a period rich in remarkable men" [pp. ix-x]. I was out to demonstrate that we had a history, and in that history there were men who were fully able to stand comparison with great men of that period. That was my aim. I wasn't so conscious of it when I was writing, but now when I reread that passage, I see that was my aim.

It was *not* the aim of Dr Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction*. Dr Du Bois, in his preface "To the Reader", states:

It would be only fair to the reader to say frankly in advance that the attitude of any person toward this story would be distinctly influenced by his theories of the Negro race. If he believes that the Negro in America and in general, is an average and ordinary human being who under given environment develops like other human beings then you will read this story and judge it by the facts adduced.

Du Bois wasn't out to prove anything. He took it for granted. He says the average Negro in a given environment is like other ordinary human beings. "If, however, he regards the Negro as a distinctly inferior creation who can never successfully take part in modern civilization and whose emancipation and enfranchisement were gestures against nature, then he will need something more than the sort of facts that I have set down." I set out to prove it. Dr Du Bois didn't. He took it for granted. He said, So it is, and now I will write my history to show them. Well, the only way you can write this history is if you can begin with this conception. I began with it and I thought of a way, but I set out to *show* it. That is what you see in this introduction. That's why I say that "Beauchamp in his *Biographie Universelle* says that Toussaint L'Ouverture was one of the most remarkable men of a period rich in remarkable men" [pp. ix-x].

The next thing I go on to do is to take up *history* and to say what it is you do when you write history. I wrote:

The power of God, or the weakness of man, Christianity and the divine right of kings to govern wrong, can easily be made responsible for the downfall of states and the birth of new societies. Such elementary conceptions lend themselves willingly to narrative treatment and from Tacitus to Macaulay, from Thucydides to Green, the traditionally famous historians have been more artist than scientist: they wrote so well because they saw so little. To-day by a natural reaction we tend to a personification of the social forces, great men being merely or nearly instruments in the hands of economic destiny. As so often the truth does not lie in between. Great men make history [no question about that] but only such history as it is possible for them to make. [p. x]

I wrote that as a natural result of my studies, I didn't know that people would make a fuss about it, that they have been doing up to today. Great men do make history. I am

not against the theory of the contributions of great men to the historical process, but though they make history, it is only such history as it is possible for them to make. Abraham Lincoln could not transform the United States into a socialist or a highly progressive society. It was possible for him to abolish slavery, that was all that was possible, and he was a very great political figure. "Their freedom of achievement is limited by the necessities of their environment" [p. x]. When you judge the great figure you see where he was, what he was able to do and what he did. You see that nobody at that period having the forces that he had at his disposal could go beyond that, and we see how much the man did and how much he didn't do. "To portray the limits of those necessities and the realisation, complete or partial, of all possibilities, that is the true business of the historian" [p. x].

I think it was very good. I still think so, but I don't think it as good now as I thought it was *then*. It was a serious contribution to historical analysis. (On Friday when we go into the book that I would write today you will see that I take that particular subject further.) It is a tremendous subject – the role of leadership in revolution.

So that is what I was trying to do. I was trying to make clear that black people had a certain historical past. And I remember two men, George Padmore and Paul Robeson, two of the most remarkable men that I have known, when they read the book, both of them in the course of discussion said they knew we had the history. I was somewhat overwhelmed by the fact that they were thinking that we, black people, had some history but it hadn't been put forward, and that Paul Robeson and George Padmore, two of the most magnificent men that I have known, should say I knew we had the history. That affected me greatly, very greatly. So by the historical method, I tried to show that black people were able to make historical progress, they were able to show how a revolution was made, they were able to produce the men who could lead a revolution and write new pages in the book of history. That's what I was doing. You remember that at the end of the book I said that what we are concerned with is the African people. They must make the revolution, they will, and they will make it because these slaves made it, and the Africans will make it under the new conditions.

Du Bois wasn't doing that. I end the book by talking about what was to happen in Africa. Du Bois didn't do that. On the penultimate page of *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois writes: "The most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history is the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the new found El Dorado of the West" [p. 727]. He had opened out the historical perspective in a manner I didn't know. He had been at it for

many years. He was a very profound and learned historian, but he was always driven by the need of expanding and making clear to black people in what way they were involved in world history. (Today they take Du Bois and say that, in *Black Reconstruction* and *Souls of Black Folk*, he was a man concerned primarily with blackness; they limit him to what *they* are concerned with. They are quite wrong.) This, he says, *this* is the most magnificent drama in the last thousand years, and then he goes on: "They descended into Hell; and in the third century they arose from the dead, in the finest effort to achieve democracy for the working millions which this world had ever seen" [p. 727].

I have to ask you the question, though I don't expect answers. Did you ever think that the attempt of the black people in the Civil War to attempt democracy was the finest effort to achieve democracy that the world had ever seen? Don't answer, I know you have it. You have to grapple with that. "It was a tragedy that beggared the Greek" [p. 727], the Greek civilization which many people believed, and which I still believe, is the greatest civilization the world has ever known. The civilization of ancient Greece: Du Bois knew about it, and he said the tragedy of these millions from Africa was a tragedy that "beggared the Greek". Du Bois goes on to add: "[I]t was an upheaval of humanity like the Reformation [one of the great events of modern history] and the French Revolution, the central, social and political development of the modern world" [p. 727]. It was an upheaval of humanity, like the Reformation and the French Revolution, the two greatest events in the history of Western civilization.

People don't think so today, and I confess, not with any sense of shame or degradation, I wasn't thinking so when I wrote *The Black Jacobins*. Du Bois taught me to think in those terms, and many of the things he says, I don't know up to today whether they are true or not. But he was thinking this way in 1935. "Yet we are blind, and led by the blind. We discern in it no part of our labour movement, no part of our industrial triumph; no part of our religious experience." We don't see that it is a part of our religious experience – we don't see that. "Before the dumb eyes of ten generations of ten million children, it is made mockery of and spit upon; a degradation of the eternal mother; a sneer at human effort; with aspiration and art deliberately and elaborately distorted." Let me read it again: "The finest effort to achieve democracy for the working millions which this world had ever seen. It was a tragedy that beggared the Greek; it was an upheaval of humanity like the Reformation and the French Revolution" [p. 727]. That was a tremendous thing for Du Bois to say!

Now, let me go again to what Du Bois was saying. On page 703 is a passage that meant a lot to me. He is speaking of the mental frustration that the blacks in the

United States have to undergo, the kind of frustration that produces a Huey Newton, an Angela Davis, a Malcolm X and a Martin Luther King. He says, on page 703, "Such mental frustration cannot indefinitely continue. Some day it may burst in fire and blood. Who will be to blame? And where the greater cost? Black folk, after all, have little to lose, but Civilization has all." And then comes one of the great passages in the writing of history, not only of black history, but the writing of history, *period*. He says: "This the American black man knows: his fight here is a fight to the finish. Either he dies or wins. If he wins it will be by no subterfuge or evasion of amalgamation" [p. 703]. He says he has to be amalgamated and integrated into the United States society. Du Bois is quite clear about that. And when he talks about amalgamation and integration this is what he means: "He will enter modern civilization here in America as a black man on terms of perfect and unlimited equality with any white man or he will enter not at all" [p. 703].

That is a very sharp statement – "Either extermination root and branch, or absolute equality." People today talk about genocide, the establishment will commit genocide against thirty million people. There are not enough white people in the United States to commit genocide against thirty million people. They can't do that. And Du Bois isn't saying they will commit genocide. He says, either extermination, root and branch, or absolute equality. That is not genocide. He says the struggle is going to be of such a kind that either the blacks win or they will have to exterminate them altogether. There can be no compromise. And then a sentence which I would like you to ask me about when we come to the discussion: "This is the last great battle of the West" [p. 703].

I ended *The Black Jacobins* by saying Africa will be free, the Africans will be free. Du Bois doesn't end with that. Du Bois takes the whole of Western civilization, the Reformation and the French Revolution, the Greek experience, and he links them together. I think this is a really good book; I know that. It is a better book today when I look at it. I am to write another book, two books, I hope I will approach this. I ought to be able to because I have it behind me, but I want you to see what these books represent.

Now, I continue to deal with race prejudice. I want to show up race prejudice for the social, political and psychological thing that it is. Look on page 120, where I speak of the great revolutionary development in France in 1793, and where I go on to say:

What has all this to do with the slaves, the great revolutionary development in France in 1793, the Days of May? Everything. The workers and peasants of France could not have been expected to take any interest in the colonial question in normal times, any more than one can expect similar interest from British or French workers to-day.

And the American workers were not going to be bothered about the sufferings of black people. Who is going to be?

SMALL
AXE

But what happened in France was that the French Revolution developed, the great Days were: tenth of August 1792, when it made one step forward, and then the next was the great movement in the Days of May: the thirtieth of May, first and second of June, 1793. They were moving number one, and number two what else was going on? What else was going on? A rhetorical question! The blacks were making a revolution, too. So there were two things taking place at the same time: the French Revolution was jumping forward and the blacks were making a revolution. That is taking place in the United States today in only one department. The *blacks* are on their way. The mass of the population, the whites, has not moved. One section of the white population has moved, that is, the youth have moved. But the great mass of the white people in American society has not moved. And a condition of them being concerned with the black revolution, and taking steps connected with it, is that they have to move in their own right.

Two things were needed for the French Revolution to move in regard to the blacks. The French Revolution had to move and the blacks had to move, and when they moved things really happened.

The prejudice of race is superficially the most irrational of all prejudices", and by a perfectly comprehensible reaction, the Paris workers, from indifference in 1789, had come by this time to detest no section of the aristocracy as much as those whom they called "the aristocrats of the skin". On August eleventh, the day after the Tuileries fell, Page, a notorious agent of the colonists in France, wrote home almost in despair. "One spirit alone reigns here, it is horror of slavery and enthusiasm for liberty. It is a frenzy which wins all heads and grows every day." [p. 120]

I hope it is clear what I am doing. I am saying that the race prejudice that dominated France had been swept away, and the white people in France were thinking in terms of the abolition of racial prejudice as part of the old regime which had tortured them and misled them and miseducated them. And in their struggle against the old regime, they came to the conclusion that all that the old regime was telling them had to be wiped away; and this great prejudice which they had been taught, that had to be wiped away, too. And they were helped in this by seeing that the blacks, too, were making the revolutionary struggle. That is a situation that we have in the United States today, the blacks have moved. Many white people are being affected and understand the Negro question in a way that they didn't up to fifteen years ago. They could take it for granted that we're doing what we can. They can't do that today. And

that is because the black people are seeing to it the rest of the world and the people in the United States realize that there is this situation. And Du Bois has said that situation is going to mean ultimately either he is admitted into complete equality or he will be exterminated. He is not going to take it. You have to make up your mind as to life. (There are some who turn away from that and say, "We'll go to Africa." I don't want to be contemptuous of serious people, but I would like to ask, Where in Africa are they going to go?)

Du Bois is very clear. That is the book. And that is what happens in France. I hope you see the value of that in an appreciation of what is taking place in the United States today. The idea that white people will come to black people to help the black people is a total illusion. I have never known that to take place in history. I don't think it ever will. A great mass of the population doesn't take steps to help other masses of the population. They don't do that. I don't know where that ever took place. You get parsons on a Sunday morning, and usually in the week they have other things to talk about, but on a Sunday morning, with everybody, they talk about these big gestures of freedom and equality.

The blacks in the United States, first of all, had to register the fact they are prepared to fight and go to the end for the abolition of the servitude that they endured. And number two, the whites in the United States have to decide that those people who are oppressing them have taught them many things which are quite wrong, and in getting rid of those they will also get rid of racial prejudice, because they are against all that the establishment has taught them. That's what happened in France. But the whites in France didn't go to the help of the slaves, that did not happen, and I don't see that happening anywhere – maybe in a hundred years or two hundred. (But whatever will happen in a hundred years or two hundred I don't pay much attention to.)

Now, I am very much concerned with the political development, with the political development in regard to the race prejudice. Look at page 139, paragraph two:

It was not Paris alone but all revolutionary France [take note of that please]. "Servants, peasants, workers, the labourers by the day in the fields" [that was written by a French historian] all over France were filled with a virulent hatred against the "aristocracy of the skin". There were many so moved by the sufferings of the slaves that they had long ceased to drink coffee, thinking of it as drenched with the blood and sweat of men turned into brutes.

I believe that was a very useful thing to do, to show how and when and what are the circumstances under which race prejudice is struck down. What does this mean? It was part of their struggle against the establishment of the feudal monarchy and all that

went with it. That was what they were concerned about. They didn't go to help slaves because slaves needed help. I believe that is made clear. And in that book I make clear certain things. Page 361: To make the revolution they "burned San Domingo flat so that at the end of the war it was a charred desert". That was the way freedom was won in San Domingo. They burnt it flat! And unless you are prepared to destroy the country and say, "Unless you get away from here we shall destroy all that has been built", you cannot win independence. [. . .] That is what happened in San Domingo.

I don't want to spend time about the cruelty and the barbarism of the whites in San Domingo. I don't want to spend time on that. That is an inevitable part of historical development, and I don't want to talk about that because we are having now a reference at our disposal of what is happening in Pakistan. What West Pakistan is doing to East Pakistan – that's not a race question. That is the way people who possess power and feel it threatened will behave toward any set of people who they think will overthrow them. There are black people who believe that they treat us that way *because* we are black. That is not to understand history at all. The persecution of subordinate minorities or weak majorities is a commonplace of history, and you have to understand that what is taking place is part of a universal historical development. Once you believe that is happening to you only because you are black – it is happening to us only because we are black – that is a mistake. And I try to do that in this book.

I think I shall stop here. That is what I try to do in *The Black Jacobins*. I think I succeeded. The important thing about *The Black Jacobins* is that it was written in 1938. I made very few changes, about eight pages at most, for the 1963 edition. And this book is a book which is welcomed and accepted by all young people today as an exposition of what they are thinking. Yet it was written in 1938! You know what that means? You know what I see about that, what that puts into my mind, and what I want to put into yours? Not that in 1938 it was a marvellous thing to do, and to write a book which twenty-five years after is a book that the young people stand by – and they don't stand for much that is twenty-five years old! What I am thinking of is that anything that I write – anybody writes – in 1971, must have in mind that by 1985, not 1984, by 1985 people will be reading it and will know you see something that matters to them. And I wasn't writing for 1963. But I was living in an environment and I saw certain things and I put them down.

And now we go to one of the great history books. Du Bois, he wasn't doing what I was doing. He took for granted what I was proving. And I wasn't wrong in trying to prove it. You had to live in the West Indies and live in Britain in 1938, and to hear Paul Robeson and George Padmore say, "James, I always knew the history was there,

that we had it.” That meant it was necessary to write it, even among *them*, two of the most remarkable men of their generation – not black men, two of the most remarkable *men* of their generation. Even *they* felt the need for that historical grasp and the significance of past events to make actual events and to make the future realistic to them.

C.L.R.
JAMES

But Du Bois in 1935 was in his sixties when he wrote *Black Reconstruction*. This is a wonderful book! Something ought to be done about it. Du Bois begins the book with the opening chapter on “The Black Worker”. Who was thinking in terms of the black worker in 1865? Who was thinking about the black worker in 1935? Maybe ten people. Du Bois begins his book with “The Black Worker”, and then to show you that he is concerned with the working class, the next chapter deals with “The White Worker”. I mean to say, he isn’t writing about the French Revolution, where the sections of classes are very different. You see, in the United States, the American bourgeoisie has always been able to lead in doing what was required. There never, at any time, arose a serious conflict between the working class or representatives of the petty bourgeoisie against the establishment as happened in the French Revolution and happened in the English Revolution and happened in the Russian Revolution. The American bourgeoisie have always been able to lead – they led in 1776, they led in 1860, and under Roosevelt they led in 1932. But Du Bois, by 1935, had said, I am concerned about the working class. They were the people who mattered to him – and we shall see why *I* had studied Marxism and brought the Marxist analysis to bear on the black Jacobins.

Du Bois didn’t do that. He examined what was taking place, mastered all the events and mastered all the writings and so forth that were significant for the revolution, and from that he drew what were the Marxist *conclusions*. He didn’t bring the Marxist conclusions to apply to the material, as I was able to do in Britain and in France in 1938. Du Bois used the material and saw that only the Marxist analysis could fit, and he went further in regard to the demonstration of the essential verities of Marxism than anybody except perhaps Lenin and Marx himself.

Look at page 66 of *Black Reconstruction*, please: “The North started out with the idea of fighting the war without touching slavery. They faced the fact after severe fighting that Negroes seemed a valuable asset as laborers [they begin low down] and they therefore declared them ‘contraband of war’.” (Blacks are contraband of war, because horses, dogs, houses and so forth, all these, mules, are contraband of war, so the blacks are contraband of war. That’s where they start.) But they went further. “It was but a step from that to attract and induce Negro labour to help the Northern

armies.” From being contraband, you are going to help. “Slaves were urged and invited into the Northern armies; they became military laborers and spies; not simply military laborers, but laborers on the plantations where the crops went to help the Federal army or were sold North.” That was a very serious part of the military struggle. What was going to be done about the crops? Who would handle the crops and what would be the result of the crops? “Thus wherever Northern armies appeared, Negro laborers came, and the North found itself actually freeing slaves before it had the slightest intention of doing so, indeed when it had every intention not to.” That is a sentence you ought to learn by heart – that is the writing of history! They were not prepared to free any slaves, but this action of the slaves was such that they forced the North to deal with it.

Let us go on.

At first, the rush of the Negroes from the plantations came as a surprise and was variously interpreted. The easiest thing to say was that Negroes were tired of work and wanted to live at the expense of the government; they wanted to travel and to see things and places. But in contradiction to this was the extent of the movement and the terrible suffering of the refugees. If they were seeking peace and quiet, they were much better off on the plantations. [p. 67]

Now, Du Bois goes on to make a tremendous historical statement:

This was not merely the desire to stop work. It was a strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work. It was a general strike that involved directly in the end perhaps a half million people. They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the plantations.

Now, follow on: “At first, the commanders were disposed to drive them away, or to give them quasi-freedom and let them do as they pleased with the nothing that they possessed. This did not work. Then the commanders organized relief and afterward, work.” Later this became the political policy by which Abraham Lincoln mobilized the North to win the war. Without the blacks the war would not have been won. What I want to emphasize is that it was not only that the blacks brought their forces into the Northern army and gave labour. It was that the policies that they followed instinctively were the policies ultimately that Abraham Lincoln and his cabinet had to use in order to win the war. That is something entirely new in historical writing. I wonder if you understand it? I doubt it! You will in time, if you work hard at it. The policy by which Abraham Lincoln mobilized the blacks and the way in which they were mobilized against the South came from the instinctive action of the masses of the slaves. The only

men I know, two men, have written about politics in that way. They are Marx and Lenin. That is very difficult for people to understand. The policy which Abraham Lincoln and his cabinet followed was to apply on a general scale and by governmental means what the black slaves were doing instinctively. I can't say it more, and I don't want to say it more or I might become offensive.

C.L.R.
JAMES

There is more to that than even what I am saying. When did the idea of the general strike come into industry? You ought to know that. It came in 1905 in Russia, where there were modern industries that were planted on the backward feudal economy, and over many parts of Russia you had industries which were most advanced. They had been brought there for the sake of making profit, and a railway had been built, and the strike began and ran from Moscow to Vladivostok. That was the first time a general strike had taken place: 1905. You read Rosa Luxemburg, you read Lenin, you read Kautsky, and they say this is a new method of proletarian struggle against capitalist society – the general strike, which we have seen in Russia in 1905.

Du Bois knew that. He wasn't a man to shout, but he said there was a general strike that took place in 1862 in the United States by the slaves! That's what this chapter on the general strike means. He knew that in 1905 that was the historical development and it began there, but he says there was one *before* that. There was one by the slaves in the plantations. And *that* is the writing of history, that is the writing of history.

And then there is something that I am very much aware of because I know how deficient I am in this. Du Bois wrote a very solid historical work. He had the economic facts, the social and political manifestations, but Du Bois was aware of certain *psychological* feelings of black people which were a contribution to the historical development.

There was to be a new freedom! And a black nation went tramping after the armies no matter what it suffered; no matter how it was treated; no matter how it died. First, without masters, without food, without shelter; then with new masters, food that was free, and improvised shelters, cabins, homes; and at last, land. They prayed; they worked; they danced and sang; they studied to learn; they wanted to wonder. Some for the first time in their lives saw Town; some left the plantation and walked out into the world; some handled actual money, and some with arms in their hands, actually fought for freedom. An unlettered leader of fugitive slaves pictured it: "And then we saw the lightning – that was the guns! and then we heard the thunder – that was the big guns; and then we heard the rain falling, and that was the drops of blood falling; and when we came to git in the craps it was dead men that we reaped." [p. 122]

Du Bois is poetic and dealing there with psychological matters, which in reality are a contribution to an understanding of what took place. The blacks who entered, this is

what they entered with in their minds. You don't find that in *The Black Jacobins*. There are some good things there, but there is no understanding of when you go beyond the economic and the social and political and you get deep into the psychology of the people who made the revolution.

You see, Du Bois was dealing with the most advanced psychological appreciation, and yet rooted in the facts of history. Look at what he says on page 123:

Suppose on some gray day, as you plod down Wall Street you should see God sitting on the Treasury steps, in His Glory with the thunders curved about him? Suppose on Michigan Avenue, between the lakes and hills of stone, and in the midst of hastening automobiles and jostling crowds, suddenly you see living and walking towards you, the Christ, with sorrow and sunshine in his face?

Foolish talk, all of this, you say, of course; and that is because no American now believes in his religion.

But he says the blacks who were slaves had formed this thing, and when the freedom came that's how they saw it, and I think that he is certainly right.

Its facts are mere symbolism; its revelation today vague generalities; its ethics a matter of carefully balanced gain. But to most of the four million black folk emancipated by civil war, God was real. They knew Him. They had met Him personally in many a wild orgy of religious frenzy, or in the black stillness of the night. His plan for them was clear; they were to suffer and be degraded, and then afterwards by Divine edict, raised to manhood and power; and so on January 1, 1863, He made them free. [p. 124]

That is how they took part in politics. They made certain actions which Abraham Lincoln and the rest followed, but Du Bois is saying that that is how they thought about themselves, and people have to think about themselves in a manner beyond the material. "It was all foolish, bizarre and tawdry," writes Du Bois. He knows that, but he says that that was what was taking place.

Gangs of dirty Negroes howling and dancing; poverty-stricken, ignorant laborers mistaking war, destruction and revolution for the mystery of the free human soul [yes, it was a mess]; and yet to these black folk it was the Apocalypse. The magnificent trumpet rolls of Hebrew Scripture [in that superb English translation], transmuted and oddly changed, became a strange new gospel. All that was Beauty, all that was Love, all that was Truth, stood on the top of these mad mornings and sang with the stars. A great human sob shrieked in the winds, and tossed its tears upon the sea, free, free, free. [p. 124]

I couldn't do it. Du Bois was as solid on the economic basis, more penetrating, more comprehensive, than I was. He was very clear as to the economic and political

development, the political manifestation. But he saw something else which few historians could see. He was able to penetrate into the minds of the black slaves who, in addition to doing these political things, had an idea, had ideas of their own. And it is there. There is only one man I know who wrote that way, maybe two. There is the Frenchman, Michelet, whose magnificent history of the French Revolution is now being translated by the University of Chicago Press. And another historian of this stamp was a Greek – Herodotus. Herodotus wrote, saying (I paraphrase) – “I went to Egypt, I went to Assyria, I went to there and they say these things among themselves and tell some fantastic stories, and that’s what they say, but for my part I don’t believe it.” Today, we now realize, however, that the ideas that people have, the songs that they sing, the stories that they tell one another, these are historical things that matter greatly in history. Herodotus put them all in, Thucydides did not – Thucydides was a severe historian. Du Bois was aware of why the blacks *fought* and what they *thought*.

Now, I go on to page 239, and between pages 239 and 381 we have the tremendous advance that Du Bois made in his own thinking and what he put forward. I look at it now and I say, he says this was equal to the Reformation and the French Revolution, it went beyond the Greek in the tragedy of the situation, and yet he said they were singing and dancing and saw Christ coming down. It is all within one book, under one discipline, and it’s all made to fit. It’s quite something, you know. There are not many people who write that way. He saw the world in a way that the average person didn’t, and that is why he is what he is today, and why he will be what he will be tomorrow.

Now look on page 239 and we will get a glimpse of how Du Bois was thinking. In the North after the Civil War, there was the possibility of something developing. “In the North, a new and tremendous dictatorship of capital was arising.” That was what was taking place. The Morgans and the rest of them had begun during the Civil War and between the end of the Civil War and the end of the century they went on to develop capitalism with a power and a range and a corruption that the world has never seen since. “In the North, a new and tremendous dictatorship of capital was arising.” Then Du Bois says:

There was only one way to curb and direct what promised to become the greatest plutocratic government which the world had ever known. [He says that was inherent in the situation *then*, and it was possible to stop it *then*. How?] This way was first to implement public opinion by the weapon of universal suffrage – a weapon which the nation already had in part, but which had been virtually impotent in the South because of slavery, and which was at least weakened in the North by the disfranchisement of an unending mass of foreign-born laborers. Once universal suffrage was achieved, the next

step was to use it with such intelligence and power that it would function in the interest of the mass of working men. [p. 239]

SMALL
AXE

Du Bois is watching the situation. He has worked his way to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Listen to him:

To accomplish this end, there should have been in the country and represented in Congress a union between the champions of universal suffrage and the rights of the freedmen, together with the leaders of labor, the small landholders of the West, and logically, the poor whites of the South. Against these would have been arrayed the Northern industrial oligarchy, and eventually, when they were re-admitted to Congress, the representatives of the former Southern oligarchy. [p. 239]

Du Bois is saying, I have examined the situation, and what should have happened, the only thing that could save it, was this development of the industrial oligarchy, this tremendous dictatorship of capital, and then universal suffrage, then the black slaves, then the lower middle class, and you then would have had the conflict between the dictatorship of capital and the universality of the labour movement. That's what he sees. He has looked at it, but he didn't bring that to bear, as I did in *The Black Jacobins*. But in examining the situation, he said that the only thing that could have saved the situation was the unity of those people who could use universal suffrage, the unity of the black slaves, the petty bourgeoisie, and these in a universal movement against the industrial oligarchy. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat against the dictatorship of capital. He didn't *bring* it to the fight. It is obvious that he was examining the situation, and he says this was the only way that what has happened in the United States could have been prevented.

I want you now to go to page 381. We are dealing with "The Black Proletariat in South Carolina". Remember the conception he had of what would have made the United States something new. Look at the text of the footnote: "The record of the Negro worker during Reconstruction presents an opportunity to study inductively the Marxian theory of the state." He had *come* to that by watching the history as it had unfolded before him. He expands upon it in the footnote:

I first called this chapter "The Dictatorship of the Black Proletariat in South Carolina", but it has been brought to my attention that this would not be correct since universal suffrage does not lead to a real dictatorship until workers use their votes consciously to rid themselves of the dominion of private capital. There were signs of such an object among South Carolina Negroes, but it was always coupled with the idea of that day, that the only real escape for a labourer was himself to own capital. [p. 381]

He began by calling it "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and then was told that that was not so. The dictatorship of the proletariat means the proletariat is in charge, and brings the rest of the country together to establish the dictatorship of all the oppressed and all those who are suffering from capital, against the dictatorship of capital. And Du Bois had seen that and that is what he had written on page 239. And he went further and he attempted on page 381 to say something about the dictatorship of the proletariat and he said that was wrong, but those were the ideas that came to him as he studied the historical development in front of him. There was the idea of the general strike, there was the idea that the mass of the workers, the mass of the black slaves had come forward with ideas and procedures which Abraham Lincoln and these others took over. The black slaves did not lead the revolution, they were told what to do by their own instinctive action. That is what Du Bois is saying, and he says that that action has to be called a general strike, which, incidentally, you believe took place for the first time in Russia, in 1905, but which in fact took place for the first time in the United States in 1862.

Now, we are doing fine (it is a quarter past ten and we shall gain fifteen minutes). I want you to look at page 726, and here I propose to end. Du Bois, with all this information, admits:

I cannot believe that any unbiased mind, with an ideal of truth and of scientific judgment, can read the plain, authentic facts of our history, during 1860–1880, and come to conclusions essentially different from mine; and yet I stand virtually alone in this interpretation. So much so that the very cogency of my facts would make me hesitate, did I not seem to see plain reasons.

Du Bois says, I have examined all the material, there it is, and I cannot believe how anybody can read it and come to conclusions different to the conclusions that I have come to. And 1971 is not too different from 1860 or from 1935, when he wrote that! What Du Bois is saying is something very similar to something that Richard Wright told me more than once. Du Bois says, When I look at the material and I give an interpretation, and then I see that everybody else has a different interpretation, I am upset, I hesitate, I say maybe I am wrong. And Dick told me, he says: Look, you come from the West Indies. When you live in the United States as a black man, and everybody is telling you that you are backward and inferior, the parsons are saying so, the writers are saying so, the sociologists are saying so, the ethnologists are saying so, the anthropologists, historians, everybody – and when you emerge from that, they say, Yes, but you are different from them, you come over here. Dick says, After a time you begin to wonder that maybe they are right. How could all of them be wrong and I right?

Du Bois is saying the very same thing, that I can't believe that any unbiased mind with any idea of proof and of scientific judgment can read it, but that is what is happening, so much so that the very cogency of my facts would make me hesitate. I would hesitate, he says, because I can't imagine how all of them could be saying the opposite and yet there are the plain facts. Wright told me how after a time, you get confused, and start to say, "Well, maybe they are right. All of them couldn't be wrong." In coming forward as he did, Du Bois confesses that at times he was a bit nervous, a bit nervous.

Now, I go back to page 703:

Such mental frustration cannot indefinitely continue. Some day it may burst in fire and blood. Who will be to blame? And where the greater cost? Black folk, after all, have little to lose, but Civilization has all.

This the American black man knows: his fight here is a fight to the finish. Either he dies or wins. [You have to come to some conclusion about that.] If he wins it will be by no subterfuge or evasion of amalgamation. He will enter modern civilization here in America as a black man on terms of perfect and an unlimited equality with any white man or he will not enter at all. Either extermination root and branch, or absolute equality. There can be no compromise.

You have to decide about that. Then Du Bois goes on to write a sentence which I have spent a number of years on. He says: *"This is the last great battle of the West."*

What does he mean by that? You have to know Du Bois, you have to understand what he is saying, you have to understand what he will say after, before you understand that great sentence. *"This is the last great battle of the West."* Du Bois means to say that the blacks in the United States are going to achieve complete equality and that this is the last great battle that Western civilization has to fight. If they don't achieve it, then that civilization will go to pieces. But their achieving it will mean that civilization will have changed certain aspects of itself that have lasted for centuries – the last great battle of the West. That's what he meant. You may think he meant differently. I wish you luck.

I will now finish by saying something which can easily be misunderstood, but when something of importance is said it always has the possibility of being misunderstood. The American black man will make it in the United States or the black man will make it nowhere.

Thank you very much.

HOW I WOULD REWRITE THE BLACK JACOBIANS

(18 JUNE 1971)

C.L.R.
JAMES

Now, in rewriting *The Black Jacobins*, I could, under different circumstances, tell you about certain principles and then try to fit what I have to say into those principles. I will not do it, it would constitute too great a strain.

The kind of thing that I want to talk about can be seen on page 10. A Swiss traveller, Girod-Chantrons is his name, has left a famous description of a gang of slaves at work:

They were about a hundred men and women of different ages, all occupied in digging ditches in a cane-field, the majority of them naked or covered with rags. The sun shone down with full force on their heads. Sweat rolled from all parts of their bodies. Their limbs, weighed down by the heat, fatigued with the weight of their picks . . . strained themselves to overcome every obstacle.

It's a very famous description, and I used it. *Today I would not do that*. I would write descriptions in which the black slaves themselves, or people very close to them, describe what they were doing and how they felt about the work that they were forced to carry on. I don't blame myself for doing this in 1938; it is a famous inscription. It is accurate enough, but I wouldn't do that today. I don't want today to be writing and say that's what *they* said about how *we* were being treated. Not any longer, no. I would want to say what we had to say about how we were treated, and I know that that information exists in all the material. But it was easy enough in those days to go ahead.

Now, the same thing happens on pages 17 to 18, where I say: " 'The Negroes,' says a memoir published in 1789, 'are unjust, cruel, barbarous, half-human, treacherous, deceitful, thieves, drunkards, proud, lazy, unclean, shameless, jealous to fury, and cowards.' " What interests me about that is not what he is saying about the blacks. It is the kind of man who is saying that. Because if you sit down and write this about a set of people, it means there is a certain mentality that *you* have. That isn't describing *them*. However, I put that in and think I was just justified. But look on the next page, page 18. "One has to hear," – Baron de Wimpffen, another very famous traveller – "with what warmth and what volubility, and at the same time with what precision of ideas and accuracy of judgment, this creature, heavy and taciturn all day, now squatting before his fire, tells stories, talks, gesticulates, argues, passes opinions, approves or condemns both his master and everyone who surrounds him." That is again a description of an observer, a *sympathetic* observer. I wouldn't do that today. I

would write the actual statements of the slaves telling *what they were doing*. They [the documents] would be around, you have to look for them, and you have to begin by reading, and I read an enormous amount. But I wouldn't say what Baron de Wimpffen had to say about the intellectual capacity of the slaves when they were away from their masters. I would use the actual evidence and show it.

Now page 138, and then on to page 139. I had better do page 139 first: "It was not Paris alone but all revolutionary France. 'Servants, peasants, workers, the labourers by the day in the fields' all over France were filled with a virulent hatred against the 'aristocracy of the skin'." Who am I quoting? Note number 24 at the bottom of the page. I am quoting Carteau, *Les Soirées Bermudiennes*. Authentic because Carteau was a colonist, opponent of abolition, and relates his own experiences. That was pretty good for me, *but I would not write that today*. I would find – and I know they are there if you look hard enough – the actual statements where the rank and file in France and the ordinary people were saying what they were thinking about slavery. I would not say what Carteau says, and pass on, and I hope those who do this work or do similar work will bear that in mind. We have had enough of what *they* have said about us even when sympathetic. It is time that we begin to say what *we* think about ourselves, and the historical development of our past should be said by what people in those days said. The evidence is *there*, I know it is there, but I was writing history at a certain time. I am not in any way opposed or critical of the book. I knew even then that according to the time in which you are, you write history of a particular kind.

I refer you again to the introduction, the first introduction, where I say: "This book is the history of a *revolution* and written under difference circumstances it would have been a different but not necessarily a better book" [p. xi]. And I would write today a different book, and I wouldn't like to say it would be a better book (although I think it would be), but it would be a book more suited to 1971 and the particular period in which we live. Now, that is not only in regard to black people. Page 138: "The Paris masses, deserting the Paris Commune, hitherto the real revolutionary centre of Paris, organized an independent centre of their own, the famous Evêché." Now, I would spend two pages on that if I were writing this book *today*. First of all, there is the magnificent passage in Michelet where Michelet says it was democracy taking place in all of the little villages and all the country towns and the native areas which built the France that we know today. The France that we know today was not built in Paris by decrees of the Constituent Assembly; the mass of the population, the hitherto peasant and rural population, got together and created what became revolutionary France and the modern France.

Now, what is the point about the Evêché? You have to understand this to understand the revolutionary development of San Domingo. First of all, the French king called together the Estates General to solve the problems which the monarchy and the aristocracy could not solve. When he called together the Estates General, the estates said we are going to be a parliamentary body and we are going to constitute a parliament, so they called themselves the Constituent Assembly and the king had to agree. That was the first constituent assembly that we know. But most of those were educated gentlemen of a certain standing. They were the bourgeois who were well established, without political power, but they were very powerful in France, in general in the social life of France; the left wing of the aristocracy and certain progressive priests – the most famous of them all and the most progressive was the Abbé Gregoire. So that was the Constituent Assembly. Then, the Constituent Assembly, when it had arranged for the constitution, went out of existence and it established the Legislative Assembly. So the Constituent Assembly constituted and then having done what it had to do, it went out of existence and it formed the Legislative Assembly. But the Legislative Assembly was a little more to the Left than the Constituent Assembly, because it had to deal with the facts of the case.

Then on the tenth of August 1792 there took place the great revolt in Paris, and that meant the end of the monarchy. And the monarchy and the Legislative Assembly abolished itself and elected the Convention which was the important body. So we have Constituent, which made the constitution; then the Legislative Assembly, which was made by the Constituent Assembly; and then, on the tenth of August 1792, we have the revolt against the monarchy, the monarchy is finished, whereupon the Legislative Assembly says we are not good enough, we will have a Convention. Those are national bodies, but these national bodies – even the Convention – were constituted for the most part of bourgeois members of the bourgeois regime in France, who were coming into power, who carried out the tenth of August 1792, the attack upon the king which resulted in the abolition of the monarchy.

Now in Paris, one of the great revolutionary centres of the Parisian people was the Commune, the municipality of Paris. While the Legislative Assembly was representative of many progressive bourgeois, the people of Paris in the Commune were extremely forward moving – they were revolutionary. And it was they who organized the assault upon the king and the monarchy, which made the Legislative Assembly decide to abolish the monarchy and call a new Convention. Are you going with me? It was the Paris Commune that did that, but we get into a lot of politics here. Robespierre, who was leading the Convention, didn't like the Commune that

was putting itself forward as an independent grouping. He didn't like that and he carried on a lot of intrigue and he made the Commune subordinate to the left wing of the Convention, whereupon the members of the Commune said, We don't want to be subordinate to the Convention at all. The members of the Commune left the Commune and went to a bishop's palace, the Evêché, and they then formed a new organization which carried out the revolt of the Days of May 1793.

So you have the Constituent Assembly, the bourgeois and the rest of them, and the Paris Commune, a municipality, which carries out the August 1793 events that would allow the abolition of slavery to be carried out in 1794. I only mention it here on page 138, the famous Evêché. Now, the Evêché is very important in this respect. In any revolution, the real fight in the revolution always comes not to overthrow the old regime, never, that is always comparatively easily done. The real fight in the revolution breaks out between the right wing and left wing of the revolutionary forces. *That* is trouble. When they have overthrown the old regime they have a new one. What are we going to do with it? Some fellows say, Well, we've got rid of them. That is the big fight – not to overthrow the bourgeois regime. But the battle begins between the right wing and the left wing of the revolution, and that was taking place in France. The right wing was called the Girondins. And the left wing was called the Mountain. And the members of the Paris Commune met together at the Evêché to get rid of the Convention entirely, and Robespierre was very much concerned because the Evêché was a Parisian organization.

The Convention was a national body, and if the Evêché had got rid of the Convention, France would have been thrown into a savage civil war. (Are you following me?) Paris couldn't get rid of the Convention, but the Convention was under the influence of the Girondins, the right wing, and Robespierre of the left wing wouldn't do anything, because Robespierre was afraid of breaking up the Convention. And the Evêché got the people to go out on the thirtieth of May and the first of June (the famous Days of May); they surrounded the Convention telling the Mountain: "Expel the Girondins, send them out, they are no good! Those are reactionary people and they will not send the Revolution forward." Robespierre in the Convention did not want to take the step of expelling some members of the Convention. He didn't want to do anything to the members of the Convention, and the Evêché sent two or three hundred thousand people there in front of the Convention demonstrating saying: "Get rid of the Girondins." That went on for hours; it went on for days. That revolutionary period is known as the Days of May. Finally, the Evêché came to the conclusion: "We are going to send to tell the people who are leading the mass outside

the Convention to get rid of the Convention. The Evêché had taken the decision, and they could have done that. The people who they had out there would have followed them, and the Convention would have been wiped away, but just as they did that, a message came that Robespierre has chased out the Girondins and they just made it. *That is the way.* History can be very dramatic in that sense.

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Now, I want you to understand. Look at page 138: "The Paris masses, deserting the Paris Commune, hitherto the real revolutionary centre of Paris, organised an independent centre of their own, the famous Evêché; and on May 31st and June 2nd, with firmness but great moderation, made the Girondin leaders retire from the Convention." But that does not tell you what really happened. It doesn't give you some idea of the actuality of history, and if I were writing today I would see to it that two pages were spent so that people could understand what the Evêché represented, how they left the Commune and had to form a new body of leaders to be able to carry out the Days of May 1793.

Now, a revolt broke out in San Domingo in the last days of Toussaint's regime, just before Napoleon – or General Bonaparte, as he was – sent his expedition. The extreme left wing of the revolution in San Domingo revolted against Toussaint. Now, let us read page 276 and you see a long footnote at the bottom of the page about Georges Lefebvre. And look at page 338, you will see another long footnote. Those were put in for the second edition. They were not there for the first edition, and they would form an important part: they wouldn't be footnotes if the book were to be rewritten today. But I didn't want to change the book too much, because when you change a book, you change not only pages here and there but you alter the whole movement of the thing. So what I did was to put footnotes in the 1963 edition. And those who have eyes to see let them see.

Now, I am going to tell you why I put those footnotes in and what role they would have played in any book that I would be writing today. Look at page 276. That is the extreme revolutionary grouping in the San Domingo Revolution, who, before Bonaparte sent his men, revolted against Toussaint. And the man whom they were rallying around was General Moïse. Now, as I said the last time, we are going to spend some time there [p. 276]. "Gone were the days when Toussaint would leave the front and ride through the night to enquire into the grievances of the labourers, and, though protecting the whites, make the labourers see that he was their leader." That happens to most of them, and we learn history and watch what is happening so as to be on guard that that doesn't happen to us if we are engaged in revolutionary struggles. We say, now, you are likely to do that and that and that, and we tell people that this has

happened in the past. So today, when we are making a revolutionary struggle, we want to be certain that you will not do what your ancestors have done.

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Now, I go on: "Revolutionaries through and through, those bold men, own brothers of the Cordeliers in Paris [who were the extreme Left] and the Vyborg workers in Petrograd, organized another insurrection." And I go on to say, "This insurrection proved that they were following him [General Moïse] because he represented that complete emancipation from their former degradation which was their chief goal" [p. 276]. That was what the people were feeling, and as soon as they saw that he was no longer going to the end they were ready to throw him over. They actually made the revolt against Toussaint. Now, if I were writing this book today, having begun with more concrete detail about the mass of the population, by the time I reach here that would be no footnote, it would be a part of the work itself. Because we have learnt a lot since 1938, since I wrote this book.

Now look at the footnotes dealing with Georges Lefebvre. They're criticizing him today, but what a wonderful historian he is. *La Convention*, volume 1, is some mimeographed lectures that he delivered at the Sorbonne. I went to Paris in 1956, and I am wandering about as usual to see, and I saw the lectures and bought them. And this is what Lefebvre in the last years of his life had to say about the French Revolution. It isn't published anywhere in print, but it is mimeographed. (Obviously some students took it down.) The Jacobins, who were left wing, "were authoritarian in outlook", according to Lefebvre.

Consciously or not, they wished to act with the people and for them, but they claimed the right of leadership [Oh, Lord, you ought to know that this is what is happening in Africa and everywhere else today], and when they arrived at the head of affairs they ceased to consult the people, did away with elections [isn't that something that we know about?], proscribed the Hebertistes and the Enragés [the extreme Left of the mass movement]. [p. 276 fn]

That is what the Jacobins, who were revolutionary leaders, did. When that happens in Africa today, and in the Caribbean, and even in the United States, we shouldn't be sitting down saying, "Oh, terrible, you can't trust black people." That is what happened. It happens over and over again in the revolutionary movement. You have to know it.

Now, "when they arrived at the head of affairs they ceased to consult the people, they did away with elections, they proscribed the Hebertistes and the Enragés". Lefebvre then goes on to say:

They can be described as enlightened despots [some of the despots we have in the twentieth century are not enlightened, they are plain unenlightened despots]. The

sansculottes, on the contrary [the rank and file], were extreme democrats: they wanted the direct government of the people by the people; if they demanded a dictatorship against the aristocrats they wished to exercise it themselves and to make their leaders do what they wanted. [p. 276 fn]

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That is not James, that is Professor Lefebvre, the finest historian of the French Revolution and one of the greatest on the list of historians. But I could only put that in as a footnote. To have made it into the book, I would have had to alter the whole book. So I put it in as a footnote so that the observers could observe. Then I go on to say, in my own terms, "The sans-culottes, of Paris in particular, saw very clearly what was required at each stage of the revolution at least until it reached its highest peak" [p. 276 fn]. Who else among the rank and file saw clearly what was required at every stage of the revolution? Tell me, please. The black slaves in W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*, they were the ones who saw what should happen. But it's very hard for you all to understand that because you have been taught the exact opposite every day, on television and in the press, and hence you lose sight of the fact of the people down below and what the people down below are capable of doing.

I went on to say that what was going on in Paris was that they wanted to exercise their own dictatorship against the aristocracy, but among themselves they wanted to have a free democratic state. And then, I wrote, "*This was pretty much the position of the revolutionaries of Plaisance, Limbè and Dondon in relation to Toussaint.*" They said, We don't like your attitude to these whites. We want to deal with them and keep them in subjection, but we want to exercise a democracy among ourselves. And: "*Events were soon to show how right they were and that in not listening to them Toussaint made the greatest mistake of his career.*" I confess, frankly, it is reading Du Bois that I began to understand that this was a genuine historic part of every revolution. I hadn't known it in 1938 so well, but I put it in there as a footnote. How many people understood it, I don't know.

Now go over to page 338. After Napoleon – not Napoleon, General Bonaparte – sent General Leclerc to San Domingo to restore slavery, the revolution broke out again. I have made clear to you that the black slaves who had become generals and leaders of the provinces, etcetera, they were there saying: "Are they going to restore slavery? That cannot be done." In writing the book itself I had written on page 338 what Pamphile de Lacroix, a soldier who took part in the expedition, years after wrote in an account of the expedition. He made many mistakes, which we have found out after, but Pamphile de Lacroix ought to be read. And I observed what Pamphile de Lacroix said about the report which began after Leclerc had got Toussaint to come in and accept and be a general in retirement and so forth. Pamphile de Lacroix says,

But no one observed that in the new insurrection of San Domingo, as in all insurrections which attack constituted authority [as in all insurrections which attack constituted authority, *all*, ALL, A-L-L], it was not the avowed chiefs who gave the signals for revolt but obscure creatures for the greater part personal enemies of the coloured generals.

It was not the avowed chiefs. That was written by Pamphile de Lacroix. I put it in because I was bright, but I wasn't sharp enough to build the chapter upon it. If I had to write that chapter now, there would be a lot of information. I have the names of some of them. Now, I will read again from Pamphile de Lacroix: No one observed [but he did] that in the new insurrection of San Domingo, it was not the avowed chiefs who gave the signal for the revolt but obscure creatures. (They were not only in San Domingo obscure. They were obscure in Watts, they were obscure in Detroit, they were obscure creatures in Newark, they were obscure creatures in San Francisco, they were obscure creatures in Cleveland, they were obscure creatures in Harlem.) They were obscure creatures, for the most part personal enemies of the coloured generals. Is that clear? And he says that in all insurrections which attack constituted authority it comes from *below*. (It happened in the Civil War, it came from below, the Underground Railroad – those were the men who made it impossible for the North to agree with the South.)

Then I write again in my footnote (poor James, condemned to footnotes), I say, "Michelet had shown that such was also his view of the French Revolution." Michelet had said it was not the speech makers and leaders in Parliament, it was the rank and file, obscure people, who led the Revolution on the great days. And I go on to say,

Michelet had shown that such also was his view of the French Revolution. [But I go on.] But it is in Georges Lefebvre, the great contemporary historian of the French Revolution, who on occasion after occasion exhaustively examines all the available evidence and repeats that we do not know and never will know who were the real leaders of the French Revolution, nameless, obscure men, far removed from the legislators and the public orators. [p. 338 fn]

(The other night I was talking to you and saying what the black scholar should do so as to find out who are the obscure people who did what they did in Detroit, in Cleveland, in Watts, etcetera, but you didn't understand me very well. It will take time, once the ideas are there. It is always so because they [the obscure people] begin and then some intellectuals come in and make great speeches. But it has to begin from below. That's what happening in the United States today.)

Now, Lefebvre, *La Fuite du Roi*. He tells us that the right wing of the French Revolution was the Girondins, the left wing was Robespierre and the Mountain. And

the Girondins were not monarchists in disguise, they were genuine revolutionaries, and the struggle in the revolutionary crisis is between the genuine revolutionaries against the existing regime, right wing and left wing. And Lefebvre says:

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It is wrong to attach too much importance to any opinion that the Girondins or Robespierre might have on what needed to be done. That is not the way to approach the question. We must pay more attention [please my friends, we must pay more attention] to the obscure leaders and the people who listened to them in stores and the little workshops and the dark streets of old Paris. It was on them that the business depended and for the moment, evidently, they followed the Girondins. [But the Girondins did not tell them what to do.] It is therefore in the popular mentality, in the profound and incurable distrust which was born in the soul of the people in regard to the aristocracy, beginning in 1789, and in regard to the king, from the time of the flight to Varennes, it is there that we must seek the explanation of what took place. [p. 338 fn]

Du Bois knew that. That is what he wrote in *Black Reconstruction*, and I put it in there but I didn't understand it. "The people and their unknown leaders [this is what Lefebvre is saying] knew what they wanted. [The people *knew*.] They followed the Girondins and afterwards Robespierre, only to the degree that their advice appeared acceptable." But after fifty or sixty years' study of the French Revolution, Lefebvre says that they knew what they wanted. And then I continue to quote Lefebvre:

Who then are these leaders to whom the people listened? We know some. Nevertheless, as in all the decisive days of the revolution, what we most would like to know is forever out of our reach [we just don't know]; we would like to have the diary of the most obscure of these popular leaders; we would then be able to grasp, in the act so to speak, how one of these great revolutionary days begin; we do not have it. [p. 338 fn]

We haven't got it. Today a man called Albert Soboul is beginning to write the history of the sans-culottes, and there is information there which he can put together to say that is what was taking place – not Robespierre, Danton and Marat, or the leaders of the Convention or the organizers of this and that, but among the rank and file. When I come back next time, remind me, I will go even further than Lefebvre. I'll tell you now. Lefebvre is concerned with the leaders, isn't he? The obscure leaders, he says, not the prominent leaders, but the obscure ones. But turn to page 346, at the beginning: "*I have just discovered a great plot which aimed at raising the whole colony in revolt by the end of Thermidor.*" That is Leclerc writing to the minister in France. He was in command in San Domingo. "*It was only partially executed for lack of a leader.*" And then he goes on to say: "*It is not enough to have taken away Toussaint, there are 2,000 leaders to be taken away.*"

You see, in 1971, what I have to say about Lefebvre is that he is concerned with the obscure leader – *I am not*. I am concerned with the two thousand leaders who were there. That is the book I would write. There are two thousand leaders to be taken away. If I were writing this book again, I would have something to say about those two thousand leaders. I have mentioned a few here and there, but I didn't do it with that in mind.

Now, I went on to say (page 346) – and here I will come to the end of what I have to say about the writing of this book:

With a skill and tenacity which astonished their seasoned opponents, the little local leaders [the obscure ones] not only beat off attacks but maintained the ceaseless harrying of the French posts, giving them no peace, so that the soldiers were worn out and nerve-wracked, and fell in thousands to the yellow fever. When the French sent large expeditions against them they disappeared in the mountains, leaving a trail of flames behind them, returning when the weary French retreated, to destroy still more plantations and carry their attacks into the French lines. [pp. 346–347]

I was merely describing it from the outside. If I had to rewrite the book now, I would have spent four or five pages on it. Most of my research from the very beginning would be directed to getting this information – it is round about – and saying, this is what happened, that happened, and not describing it from the outside. (I'm going to wait until I see in your eyes – “All right, all right, all right, we understand” – and then I will stop saying it to you.)

Now, I go on to say on page 356: “What happened in San Domingo after Leclerc's death is one of those pages in history which every schoolboy should learn, and most certainly will learn, some day.” The national struggle against Bonaparte in Spain has been immortalized by a famous artist. Do you know his name? You should know that, you know. You don't know the famous Spanish artist who has immortalized the struggle of the Spaniards against Napoleon, that helped to defeat Napoleon far more than Wellington? A man of the day, one of the most famous European artists, a man called Goya. But that is a famous struggle because Napoleon's defeat began when the Spaniards refused to accept his brother Joseph as King. The burning of Moscow by the Russians (you know that story, *War and Peace* by Tolstoy), how Napoleon carried his army there and fought, but the Russian army retreated before him and the population wouldn't join him. They burnt Moscow and that fills the histories of the time. I say they were anticipated and excelled by the blacks and mulattoes of the island of San Domingo. And then comes something which was shameful. The records are there. I should have put it all in. I didn't. I mean, if I were

writing this book today, I would have page after page of that. And I say the records are there, I had read them, but . . .

Now, the last thing I have to do is to tell you what I was doing in *The Black Jacobins*. I introduced something about the personal psychology of Toussaint L'Ouverture. I began, you know, very stern against this analysis of individuality, very stern. Will you turn with me, please, to the introduction, on page x: "In a revolution, when the ceaseless slow accumulation of centuries bursts into volcanic eruption, the meteoric flares and flights above are a meaningless chaos and lend themselves to infinite caprice and romanticism unless the observer sees them always as projections of the sub-soil from which they came." I would normally describe and analyse a political character, but I would always say, you know, he was what he was because of the objective situation which had accumulated during decades and centuries and which at last was exploding. But by 1962-63, I had begun to see or, rather, I had thought it necessary to write something more about individual character (and if I do work on Padmore, which I may make into an autobiography, which so many people seem to want and I have been told by people that that is what I should do, I will go into individual character, which I know more about than most of the people who are babbling about it). But I went here into Toussaint L'Ouverture and that comes on pages 289-92. I am not going to read, I will tell it to you.

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I say, when you look at Toussaint, that is one of the most remarkable historical developments of any historical age. I say, Toussaint had learnt his view of the world from the French Revolution. Every time you look at what he was saying and what he was doing, you say, "the man into which the French Revolution had made him demanded that the relation with France should be maintained. What revolutionary France signified was perpetually on his lips, in public statements, in his correspondence, in the spontaneous intimacy of private conversation." We have to see him for what he was. He had been a slave, and the French Revolution had lifted them up – that was the atmosphere, that was the mental framework of his mind. And he believed that as long as the blacks had arms they could not be defeated, and Toussaint was right. But he believed that he could fix it, that he could come to some arrangements with them. I went on to make a reference that Abraham Lincoln might have been able to fix it, but nobody else could. Toussaint was arrested, Lincoln was killed.

(One day I was having a discussion with Lerone Bennett about Abraham Lincoln. I didn't intend to convince him that what he thinks about Abraham Lincoln was wrong, that would be ridiculous. What I intended to do was to make him see another aspect of Abraham Lincoln to which he wasn't paying sufficient attention,

in my view – he, undoubtedly, will do the same for me. He is a remarkable man, one of the three finest historians I have read during the last thirty or forty years. They don't come everyday like him. I wish I had the power to do what I want to do – what I would like to do with Lerone Bennett is banish him, tell him to stay out of it, leave that Johnson Publishing Company where he is working – leave everybody for one year and go away. When he comes back, I know he will bring back something.)¹⁹

Now, Toussaint had this mentality. I go into the analysis of his character, and then I go on to say that he wasn't a tragic character in the greatest sense of the term. Who are the great tragic characters in the conceptions of Western civilization (which is the only civilization I know much about)? They are the characters of the great tragedians of Shakespeare, of Racine, of Aeschylus. And why are those characters tragic? What is the grandeur of their character? It is because they are faced with things that for them are impossible to do, and in attempting to do the impossible they show qualities of human character, human bravery, human endurance which go far beyond what people do in the ordinary ways of their existence. And that's why those tragic characters are what they are. It is because with tremendous energy and force and determination not to be defeated they hurled themselves at things which they cannot solve. Hamlet: "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right." I can't make it, but the greatest of the tragedy is that he knows that, yet he still makes an attempt, and in the course of making the attempt the language and the things he does make him a magnificent character. But Toussaint did not reach that height. Toussaint had started to decline. Toussaint had not hurled himself against the French. If he had done so from the start he might have got through, but the man who hurled himself was Dessalines. Toussaint didn't hurl himself because he was a highly civilized creature, and Dessalines hurled himself because he was a "barbarian". Dessalines did not have the restraints that Toussaint had, but it was those restraints and that knowledge that helped Toussaint to build the state and the army which Dessalines was able to use.

And then I come to the last part of that, the last paragraph on page 291, and we will come to an end.

19 Cf. Lerone Bennett, Jr, *Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing, 2000). Lerone Bennett is the executive editor of *Ebony* magazine, a publication of Johnson Publishing Company. Bennett's harsh criticism of Lincoln first attracted attention in 1968, when he published an article in *Ebony* titled "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?", a question that his essay answered with an affirmative *Yes*.

The *hamartia*, the tragic flaw [which you will know if you read Aristotle's *The Poetics*] which we have constructed from Aristotle, was in Toussaint not a moral weakness. It was a specific error, a total miscalculation of the constituent events. Yet what is lost by the imaginative freedom and creative logic of the great dramatists is to some degree atoned for by the historical actuality of his dilemma. [Hamlet, Phaedre and the rest of them, it is in a play, but with Toussaint it actually took place in an historical event and therefore that is its importance for us.] It would therefore be a mistake to see him merely as a political figure in a remote West Indian island [as it would be a tremendous mistake to see Fidel Castro or Julius Nyerere or Ho Chi Minh as people in some backward little unimportant island or country. These are men who point to the future and what is inherent in the mass of the population today. And you have to see Toussaint as one of the great historical figures]. If his story does not approach the greater dramatic creations in the sense of the tragedy, in its social significance and human appeal it far exceeds it [far exceeds, what?] the last days at St Helena [with Napoleon sitting down there and writing a lot of lines, saying he did that, and he did that, and he did that and he meant that and so on, so the collapse of Toussaint is something infinitely greater than the last days of Napoleon at St Helena] and that apotheosis of accumulation and degradation, the suicide in the Wilhelmstrasse.

Whom do I refer to? Adolf Hitler. He didn't burn himself alone, he marries the woman he has been living with all the time, and then he burns them! But in the case of Toussaint, *that* was a story that matters.

What led him into that, what he had in mind and what actually defeated him is a tremendous story. And then I go on to say, "The Greek tragedians could always go to their gods for a dramatic embodiment of fate, the *dike* which rules over a world neither they nor we ever made. [The world we live in is a difficult world, but the Greek tragedians had some gods and they said that decided the world, and decided the *dike*, the fate that overtook people who went too far.] But not Shakespeare himself could have found such a dramatic embodiment of fate as Toussaint struggled against" in the last days. Because whom was Toussaint struggling against? Bonaparte, one of the most tremendous figures of the modern age, and the final clash of Toussaint against Bonaparte shows the kind of person Toussaint was. Nor could the furthest imagination have envisaged the entry of the chorus. I say there was a play there, there was a Greek drama there, the tremendous clash between Toussaint and Bonaparte, a tremendous clash, but what was the chorus that entered into it (because in the Greek tragedy the chorus was often decisive in the solution of the problem)? The chorus was the ex-slaves. They formed the chorus. "Toussaint's certainty of this as the ultimate and irresistible resolution of the problem to which he refused to limit himself, that explains his mistakes and atones for them."

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It's up to you to read that passage and realize that there I went into problems of individual and psychological analysis which previously I kept away from, but after a number of years I thought I could attempt it with Toussaint. And maybe in my autobiography I will attempt it with a much more insignificant person. I will write an analysis of Eric Williams which will astonish everybody. I know that *petit-maitre* very well.

Well, that is it, ladies and gentlemen.

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