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RACE, CLASS, AND RESISTANCE IN THREE CARIBBEAN NOVELS

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Declaration for PhD thesis

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ABSTRACT

This research gives an analysis of the hierarchical socio-economic system inherent in Guyana, as is illustrated in the novel, *Apata*, by Harold Bascom; in Trinidad and Tobago, as is illustrated in *The Dragon Can't Dance*; and in Jamaica, as is illustrated in *The Harder They Come*. The inhabitants of these societies respond to their oppression with ideological and physical resistance. This study determines that the efforts to overcome the system have failed, due to ideological and organizational weakness.

The study begins with an introduction that makes the case for literary analysis as a tool to examine the conditions of a society. Specifically, the introduction is giving focus to the topic of race, class and resistance in three Caribbean novels. Following the introduction is a chapter discussing race and class in the Caribbean. The discussion of race and class is contextualized within Marxism's development and adaptation throughout different societies. Then the specific analysis of Caribbean scholars, many using the tool of dialectical materialism, is applied to the historical circumstances of Caribbean societies, detailing slavery through post emancipation colonialism and the post-independence neocolonial era. After this examination of race and class, this study looks at the resistance to the oppressive conditions inherent within the socio-economic structure of the Caribbean societies.

The great bulk of this study is focused on an analysis of each novel. In *Apata*, it is clearly shown that characters are denied and given opportunities based on their race or colour, which results in resistance. *The Dragon Can't Dance*, which focuses on a range of characters rather than one primary character as in *Apata*, is analysed to show how race and class determine the quality of one's life, how individuals seek escape from their condition, how they survive with their condition, and what their response is to their condition. In *the Harder They Come*, the main character has his dreams dashed by the hierarchical, racialized, socio-economic system. A number of scholars are drawn on to substantiate a number of points in relation to race, class, and resistance in Caribbean societies. The author of this study concludes with a determination of the way forward for Africans in the Caribbean and the wider African diaspora.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page.....	1
Declaration	2
Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Race and Class in the Caribbean.....	17
Putting up a Resistance.....	50
<i>Apata</i> : Race and Class Analysis.....	62
<i>Apata</i> : Black Resistance!.....	103
<i>The Dragon Can't Dance</i> : Race, Class, and Resistance.....	115
Race and Class Analysis.....	117
Passive Resistance, Survival, Surrender, and Masquerade.....	147
<i>The Harder They Come</i> : Race, Class, and Resistance.....	198
I. <i>The Harder They Come</i> : Country Analysis.....	201
II. <i>The Harder They Come</i> : Kingston Analysis.....	230
III. I'm a Black Survivor.....	258
IV. Get Up! Stand Up: Time for Resistance!.....	279
Conclusion: Beyond Neo-colonialism.....	312

Introduction: Race, Class, and Resistance

The Caribbean region is comprised of land masses so beautiful that people travel from all over the world to experience the natural attractions, in addition to the culture that this area of the globe has to offer. Despite all of its natural splendor, this region is beset with problems. Norman Girvan writes,

Although Caricom countries show wide variations in the main social indicators, acute problems of social development are manifest in all. Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, with relatively high indices of human development, also have relatively high rates of open unemployment at 20 and 22 percent respectively. Jamaica and Guyana have lower unemployment rates (15 and 12 percent respectively) but a growing proportion of the employed labour force is classifiable as 'working poor'. The proportion of the population living in absolute poverty in 1992 is estimated at 43 percent in Guyana, 34 percent in Jamaica and 22 percent in Trinidad and Tobago; or about 1.4 million persons in the three countries.¹

This quote only scratches the surface of the Caribbean's problems; poverty, prostitution, crime, police brutality, and political corruption are among the ailments plaguing the region. Progressive intellectuals identify the structure of development within Caribbean societies as the main cause of the region's woes. Trevor Farrel states that, "The English-speaking Caribbean from Jamaica in the North to Guyana in

¹ Girvan, Norman, "Report on the Caribbean Symposium on Social Development," *Poverty, Empowerment and Social Development in the Caribbean*, Ed. Norman Girvan (Kingston: Canoe Press, 1997) 2.

the South is in a state of quiet but endemic crisis”². Farrell goes on to say that, “It is quite clear that the development strategies employed in the region have not worked, and are not working”³. Examining the development challenges, understandably, would fall within the focus of the region’s intellectuals, political analysts, social scientists, economists, and other technocrats. These professionals have a huge role to play within this process, but not to be overlooked is the role of the literary artist and the literary analyst.

The answer to the problems of Caribbean development lie within the pages of Caribbean literature, for many Caribbean literary artists accurately depict the complexities of Caribbean life through a tapestry of characters, settings, poetic reflections and narrative action woven into a convenient and compact teaching tool, from which readers can learn much. This is possible because literature does not exist in isolation from history—from our real life experiences. Literature is simply a reflection of our human experiences. Selwyn Cudjoe reveals an even more astute understanding of literature’s relationship to human experience:

Contrary to what many critics believe (and even promote), art, one of the most complex acts of man’s being, is not and should not be separable from life. Art can be perceived as the chronicler of human history, the reflector of the spiritual dimension of human experience, and the camera eye (the capturer) of social

² Farrell, Trevor, "Some Notes Towards a Strategy for Economic Transformation," *Caribbean Economic Development*, Ed. Stanley Lalta and Marie Freckleton (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers Limited, 1993) 330.

³ Farrell, Trevor...330

transformations, manifesting human history in all its
rich and variegated hues ⁴.

This quote shows the great significance of literature. It documents our thoughts, actions, and interaction with reality, freezes human activity in time, and acts as a mirror allowing us to view ourselves and subject ourselves to scrutiny. It gives a human face to history in a way that a compilation of statistics, facts, graphs, charts, and the like could never replicate. Literature has the unique ability of capturing the intangible qualities of humanity, difficult to measure quantitatively, but effectively illustrated in narrative form. This sentiment is echoed in the writing of a writer and scholar named Chinweizu, who says,

...literature is simply the written part of a dialogue which people conduct among themselves about their history...among the aims of a society's literature are the following: to help deepen and expand its people's awareness of their world by illuminating corners of their experience; to clarify their histories and identity, and thus prompt them to correct action; to throw light on that society's moral problems and supply inspiring examples. This list, of course, is not exhaustive.⁵

Whether one agrees with Chinweizu as to whether this should be a function of literature or not, it must be acknowledged that this, at least, is a possible function of literature. Chinweizu goes on to speak about the role of the literary critic and scholar:

...a literary work, by itself, is like a diamond in the dark. It needs light from the reader's mind to make it sparkle. The richer and stronger the light from the reader's experience, the more radiance the work will

⁴ Cudjoe, Selwyn R., *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (Chicago: Ohio University Press, 1980) 56.

⁵ Chinweizu, *Decolonizing the African Mind* (Lagos: Pero Press, 1987) 258.

give out. Criticism can play the role of an illuminator which, by its commentaries, situates the literary work within the history of the primary audience to whom it is addressed; which places it within the literary tradition of that group, and discusses the moral, social, philosophical and other issues to which the work draws attention. This localization is imperative because specific works of literature are products of specific histories, and the best way to appreciate them is to put them in the context of their specific societies.⁶

When literature and the study of literature is perceived in this way, its true significance is fully realized, and it can help us in unlocking our true potential for growth and dignified development.

So, if Caribbean literature is, indeed, an accurate reflector of Caribbean life, it must be expected that Caribbean literature will illustrate two subjects, among others, which have been prominent within the fabric of Caribbean societies since Columbus first voyaged to the region: oppression and resistance. The inhabitants of the Caribbean have been subjected to national, racial, social, economic, and gender oppression, beginning with the Amerindian people and continuing right up to the present day. Richard Hart states, “The European states that colonized the Caribbean region were acquisitive and aggressive. They inflicted great suffering on the aboriginal Amerindian peoples, in several islands to the point of extinction”.⁷ Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and a prominent Caribbean historian, gives an example of the oppression of the indigenous population of Hispaniola in his book *From Columbus to Castro* saying, “by 1495 the Spaniards were engaged in open

⁶ Chinweizu...258

⁷ Hart, Richard, *From Occupation to Independance* (London: Pluto Press, 1998) 8.

warfare with the Indians. Naked, armed only with bows and arrows, the Indians were no match for the Spanish crossbows, knives, artillery, cavalry, and dogs trained by the Spaniards to hunt them down”⁸. Another prominent scholar, John Henrik Clarke further makes the point that Europeans subjected the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean region to oppression, stating,

The Carib and Arawak Indians were curious about Christopher Columbus and his crew, and at first treated them as strange and new guests in their homes. They did not know that soon after arrival, the guests would turn on the hosts and make them slaves. The destruction of the Caribs and Arawaks in the Caribbean Islands through disease, rape of their women and sometimes out-and-out murder, destroyed the labor supply on these islands and made it a necessity for the Spaniards and other Europeans to create a rationale for the enslavement of the Africans.⁹

This quote speaks to not only the oppression of “Caribs and Arawaks” but the introduction of enslaved Africans as a source of labour. Presently, the majority of the inhabitants of the Caribbean region as a whole are descendants of these enslaved Africans, so this dissertation will dedicate a great deal of focus on their oppression, while not negating or overlooking the oppression of other groups within the region, such as the Indians and Amerindians in countries like Guyana and Trinidad.

Throughout the region and throughout the history of the Caribbean, the oppressed people of the Caribbean, whether Amerindian or African, have never

⁸ Williams, Eric, *From Columbus to Castro* (Great Britain: Andre Deutsch, 1970).

⁹ Clarke, John, H., *Christopher Columbus and the Afrikan Holocaust* (New York: A & B Publishers Group, 1993) 68.

passively accepted their subjugation, but rather have resisted oppression in whatever way possible. Individuals and movements have sprung forth to resist oppressive systems. Haiti won its independence from France in impressive fashion and Cuban revolutionaries defeated a United States puppet, Batista, and continue to defy The United States of America up to this present day. The majority of plantation societies in the Caribbean have some story of slave revolt or maroonage with notable examples in Jamaica where the Spanish and British were thoroughly frustrated with maroon resistance. Several Caribbean countries (Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana, and the list goes on) have won their independence from western colonial powers with leaders such as Alexander Bustamante, Eric Williams and Cheddi Jagan. Resistance has even manifested in the walk, talk, dress, and music of the Caribbean region with individuals asserting their refusal to conform in the most creative ways. Resistance is indelibly etched into the psychology of the Caribbean experience. Since slavery, the reality of racial and social hierarchies has been a source of misery for many of the inhabitants of Caribbean societies, and a rallying point for change.

It is important to focus on not only racial and social oppression and the resistance to that oppression but the inability of resistance in the region to transition into genuinely well developed societies. Haiti is the torch bearer of successful revolutions in the Caribbean, having won its independence in impressive fashion, but Haiti is also the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, and its name has become almost synonymous with international aid and charity. Alvin Thompson confirms this, writing,

Indeed, the region is still perceived by both locals and foreigners as being incapable of standing on its own financially, and requiring the constant injection of finance capital in the form of loans and grants-in-

aid. Haiti is looked upon as the fatal example in this respect, although Guyana and the Dominican Republic may rival it for its unenviable position.¹⁰

And despite the promise of a better life brought by independence, Caribbean societies, in large part, have failed to realize an acceptable quality of life, socially, economically and otherwise, for the majority of its inhabitants. In recent years, the largest of the Caribbean countries formerly colonized by the British, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Guyana, have found themselves in the international news for all the wrong reasons. In 2010 Jamaica had to deal with the “Dudus Coke” affair, where the army and police had to fight a war with the drug lord’s minions before Coke’s eventual surrender—the subsequent political drama involving Coke’s extradition ultimately leading to the Prime Minister, Bruce Golding’s resignation. Trinidad, not to be left out, made international headlines for a spate of violence in 2011, resulting in a state of emergency and a curfew. Most recently, Guyana has been the subject of international scrutiny for an incident where police fired live ammunition into a crowd of protesting African-Guyanese residents in a community called Linden, killing 3 people and injuring 20.

These separate occurrences provide a small insight into the large problems still existing in these three Caribbean countries, and similar examples, to a lesser or greater extent, can be found throughout the archipelago. Cuba, the most successful country in defying western hegemony, has been strangled by international embargos for decades. So, while valiant efforts have been waged against the oppressive conditions and elements endemic in Caribbean society, a great deal of hardship

¹⁰Thompson, Alvin. *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1997) 31.

remains, which brings me to the specific argument that this dissertation puts forth. An analysis of Caribbean literature, specifically, three novels, *The Harder They Come* by Michael Thelwell, *The Dragon Can't Dance* by Earl Lovelace, and *Apata* by Harold Bascom, reveal a literary commentary, which is reflective of problems endemic to socially and economically oppressed Caribbean societies and the failure to overcome them.

Franklin Knight informs the reader that “Race, class and ethnicity, then, have been prominent themes in Caribbean literature for a very long time”¹¹ Race, class, and resistance have played a prominent role in the aforementioned novels, the primary texts examined in this dissertation.

Apata, by Harold Bascom, is a novel that describes the experiences of a young black man named Michael Apata, an inhabitant of Guyana, who is frustrated by the unfair treatment he receives within his society, and he eventually attempts a robbery that led to him being hunted by the police and ultimately killed.

In *the Harder They Come* by Michael Thelwell, a novel based on the popular movie of the same title, readers see a similar character to that of Michael Apata and a tale, too, where race, class and resistance play a prominent role. Ivan grew up in a rural village of Jamaica, and, with dreams of becoming a reggae star and living the big city life, he moves to Kingston where he encounters the harsh realities of capitalist Jamaica. He eventually becomes involved in the drug trade and later murders multiple police officers, becoming an instant folk hero to the poor sufferers of Kingston. His life, too, ends in a manhunt and a hail of gunshots.

¹¹ Knight, Franklin. “Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Caribbean History.” *General History of the Caribbean*. Ed. B.W. Higman (London: UNESCO, 1999) 204.

Another novel in which race, class, and resistance play a prominent role is *The Dragon Can't Dance* by Earl Lovelace. Lovelace portrays the lives of several characters within a poor area of Trinidad known as Calvary Hill. Like the aforementioned novels, *The Dragon Can't Dance* illustrates a narrative where individual characters, namely, Aldrick and Fisheye among several other followers, engage in a criminal act – taking policemen hostage – for which they were eventually imprisoned. Unlike *Apata* and *The Harder They Come*, the hero figures in this novel are not murdered in the end. This dissertation will prove that the characters that inhabit the societies portrayed in these three novels are indeed oppressed by a system of racial and social oppression, and the hero figures that emerge are unable to lead the black poor to the overthrow of that system due to their ideological and organizational deficiencies.

There are two very significant works that have dealt with the subject of racial and social oppression and resistance in Caribbean literature, namely, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* by Selwyn Cudjoe and a chapter in Brian Meek's book, *Narratives of Resistance*. Cudjoe's book achieves, in essence, what this dissertation attempts to do, with some key variations. Cudjoe gives a historical background and analysis of Caribbean resistance. He then goes on to analyze a total of twenty five literary works, grouping them on the basis of themes, detailing the resistance richly inherent in the cultural forms of the Caribbean. The major difference between Cudjoe's work and mine is that I take much more of a narrow focus, committing my entire work to the study of three works as opposed to twenty five; also, the works I am examining were published either in the same year (*The Harder They Come*, 1980), the year before (*The Dragon Can't Dance*, 1979), or several years after (*Apata*, 1986) the

publication of Cudjoe's work (1980). In this way, my work can be seen as a continuation of the mission Cudjoe first embarked on.

My work also shares some key similarities and differences with a chapter in Brian Meeks book, *Narratives of Resistance*. Meeks' chapter is titled, "The Harder Dragon: Resistance in Earl Lovelace's *Dragon Can't Dance* and Michael Thelwell's *Harder They Come*." Interestingly, Meeks has joined these two works together in his analysis, as have I, but only for 24 pages in contrast to the focus the works receive in this entire dissertation. Also, Meeks chooses to compare *The Harder They Come* with *The Dragon Can't Dance*, which in my view, leads to the discovery of nuanced differences not worth mentioning. For instance, Meeks says, "Calvary Hill is poor; but in Kingston there is grinding poverty".¹² Despite this slight difference, Meeks presents many striking similarities and a profound analysis of the two novels, which is very helpful. I find Meeks introduction of the chapter particularly interesting as he defends Wilson Harris' call to "bridge the gap between history and art"¹³, asserting the benefits of social scientists engaging in literary criticism. This seems to motivate Meeks to write this chapter on these two novels, and I, too, am motivated by the potential benefits of combining social science with the study of literature.

In constructing this dissertation, firstly, this study will examine the historical, socio-economic landscape of the three Caribbean nations illustrated in each novel, namely, Guyana, Trinidad and Jamaica. Specifically, issues directly related to race and class will be highlighted through the work of Caribbean scholars whose expertise is in the area of Caribbean development and history. It is important to survey the

¹² Meeks, Brian. *Narratives of Resistance* (Kingston: The University of West Indies Press, 2000) 85

¹³ Meeks, Brian...76.

environment which are reflected in these narratives and to closely investigate specific issues of development that are illustrated in the novels. Caribbean scholars, such as Clive Thomas, Sidney Mintz, Norman Girvan, Trevor Farrell, Brian Meeks, Alvin Thompson, among others, have all examined aspects of Caribbean development, which would enrich the reader's understanding of the novels and the argument being made in this dissertation. The work of these and other scholars will be accessed through, mainly books, including many Caribbean anthologies. The specific areas of focus of these scholars include migration into various Caribbean societies, racial and color discrimination, poverty, the role of the artist and the music industry, capitalist development's impact on the environment, the impact of multinational corporations, intra-racial violence, the drug trade, carnival, rebellion, and other areas.

The remaining chapters will examine each novel closely, highlighting areas in which the racial and socio-economic oppression and resistance are clear. Examples of racial and social oppression along with resistance will be analyzed with the support of the aforementioned scholars, the majority of whom espouse an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, anti-racist analysis and sentiment. This dissertation puts forward the position that each novel represents the artist's commentary on the failings of the Caribbean societies on which the novels are based, specifically, in relationship to racial and social oppression. This dissertation, therefore, asserts that solutions exist that would have provided relief in the literary world created by these artists, which, symbolically, represent solutions for these three Caribbean societies and the region as a whole.

The concluding chapter, titled, "Beyond Neo-colonialism" focuses on the possible solutions, which emerge from the analysis of problems associated with Caribbean development illustrated in the novels. These solutions center on various

expressions of Pan-Africanism, such as Garveyism; regional cooperation, as has been attempted in the case of Federation and, currently, Caricom and OECS. A commentary on Cuba will close the dissertation, exploring a Cuban style development, which, in recent times, seems to be liberalizing certain aspects of their closed economy.

Race and Class, in the Caribbean

In their book, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi, a UC Berkeley ethnic studies professor and Howard Winant, a UC Santa Barbara sociology professor, provide useful information in understanding the phenomenon of race. From the onset, they make it abundantly clear that race is, relatively, a new concept in human history. They write,

Race consciousness, and its articulation in theories of race, is largely a modern phenomenon. When European explorers in the New World "discovered" people who looked different than themselves, these "natives" challenged then existing conceptions of the origins of the human species, and raised disturbing questions as to whether all could be considered in the same *family of man*.¹

Omi and Winant go on to say that arguments in regards to race were religious in nature:

Religious debates flared over the attempt to reconcile the Bible with the existence of "racially distinct" people. Arguments took place over creation itself, as theories of polygenesis questioned whether God had made only one species of humanity ("monogenesis"). Europeans wondered if the natives of the New World were indeed human beings with redeemable souls. At stake were not only the prospects for conversion, but the types of treatment to be accorded them.²

Not only were arguments in regards to race religious in nature but scientific as well.

Omi and Winant continue detailing the history of the concept of race, writing,

¹ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, "Racial Formations," <http://homepage.smc.edu>

² Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, "Racial Formations," <http://homepage.smc.edu>

In the colonial epoch science was no less a field of controversy than religion in attempts to comprehend the concept of race and its meaning. Spurred on by the classificatory scheme of living organisms devised by Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae*, many scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries dedicated themselves to the identification and ranking of variations in humankind. Race was thought of as a biological concept, yet its precise definition was the subject of debates which, as we have noted, continue to rage today.³

Samuel Yeboah, author of *The Ideology of Racism*, also recounts Europeans' scientific justification for racial demarcation and oppression:

Anthropology was used by some to provide further 'scientific evidence' of the natural inferiority of the blackman. Measurements were taken of the head, face, ears, nose, trunk, limbs and skeleton, including the bones of the skull; alleged differences between blacks and whites were found, proving the 'natural inferiority' of the former. For example, the Dutch surgeon, obstetrician, artist, sculptor and an authority on medical jurisprudence, Pieter Camper, speculated that a wide facial angle (measured by the extent to which the jaw juts out from the rest of the skull) indicated a higher forehead, a bigger brain, more intelligence and a more beautiful appearance. The angle, he claimed, grew wider as one went from Africans, through Indians, to Europeans.⁴

Yeboah further cements his point in regards to religion and science, saying,

³ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, "Racial Formations," <http://homepage.smc.edu>

⁴ Yeboah, Samuel. *The Ideology of Racism* (London: Hansib, 1988) 57-58.

The early scientific racists thus offered 'scientific evidence' which had the effect of defining colour, not as an identifying mark of a class of people (e.g. blondes, brunettes, etc.) but as a cause of inherent inferior characteristics. The ideological origin and nature of the doctrine of inherent black inferiority had become most effectively obscured! The doctrine was now enshrined in 'science'. As the influence of Christian dogma waned and 'Thus saith the Lord' no longer conclusively settled all arguments, science became the new authoritative voice; and as the status of science increased, so did the belief in 'scientific theories of which the doctrine of black inferiority was one. An ideology generated within an economic (social) relationship to justify the Europeans brutality to, and exploitation of, the African had now penetrated the cultural (social) relationship.⁵

Again, Yeboah expresses a view that is reflected in Omi and Winant's analysis. In speaking to the ideology that justified the unjust treatment of non-white races, Omi and Winant write,

The expropriation of property, the denial of political rights, the introduction of slavery and other forms of coercive labor, as well as outright extermination, all presupposed a worldview which distinguished Europeans—children of God, human beings, etc.—from "others." Such a worldview was needed to explain why some should be "free" and others enslaved, why some had rights to land and property

⁵ Yeboah, Samuel. *The Ideology of Racism* (London: Hansib, 1988) 57-58.

while others did not. Race, and the interpretation of racial differences, was a central factor in that worldview.⁶

While the history that Yeboah and both Omi and Winant recount, regarding the scientific and religious justification for the construct of race, racial oppression, and the ideology of racism, paints a grim picture, in recent decades a transition has been made. Despite the fact that "...the attempt to establish a biological basis of race has not been swept into the dustbin of history...,"⁷ social scientists have discarded the scientific explanations of race and embraced race as a social construct. Omi and Winant writes, "The social sciences have come to reject biologicistic notions of race in favor of an approach which regards race as a social concept. Beginning in the eighteenth century, this trend has been slow and uneven, but its direction clear."⁸

They go on to say,

Within the contemporary social science literature, race is assumed to be a variable which is shaped by broader societal forces. Race is indeed a pre-eminently socio-historical concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded. Racial meanings have varied tremendously over time and between different societies.⁹

For the purposes of this dissertation, this understanding of the concept of race is suitable for the analysis of the Caribbean societies reflected in the three selected novels. Importantly, Yeboah and Omi and Winant have described the concept of race

⁶ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, "Racial Formations," <http://homepage.smc.edu>

⁷ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, "Racial Formations," <http://homepage.smc.edu>

⁸ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, "Racial Formations," <http://homepage.smc.edu>

⁹ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, "Racial Formations," <http://homepage.smc.edu>

in the context of inequality, particularly the historical circumstance of Europe's hostile and oppressive relationship with non-Europeans. Therefore, at the very genesis of the concept of race, there was an inextricable relationship to class, for race was a means of justifying the relegation of entire cultural groups to the lowest social, economic, and political levels of an international hierarchy.

The term “class” requires some definition. According to an essay written by Franklin Knight, titled, “Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Caribbean History,” “The most generally accepted usage of class refers to a group of individuals who consider themselves, or are considered by others, to represent a unit according to some commonly understood method of classification.”¹⁰ For the purposes of this dissertation, the concept of class is simply a stratification of people along social and economic lines. Many of the Caribbean scholars referred to in this dissertation use an analysis that draws on Marxism, and, therefore, for a richer understanding of the class concept, this dissertation must now turn to Karl Marx. In the preface to Marx’s book, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx states the guiding thread of his world-view:

...In the social production of life, men enter into definite relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of

¹⁰ Knight, Franklin W., “Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Caribbean History,” *General History of the Caribbean*, Ed. B.W. Higman (London: Unesco, 1999) 203.

production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general.¹¹

This gives a very clear and basic foundation for Marx's views as it relates to the stages of development, such as primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, and capitalism; the relations of production, such as master, slave, land lord, peasant and working class and owning class; the superstructure which supports the stage of development; and the class consciousness of the social relations. Marx goes on to give a basic understanding of the class conflict that accompanies this reality:

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.¹²

Marx goes on to explain the transition to the new stage of development. From the point of view of socialists, the transition from capitalism to socialism is the goal. Marx writes,

With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production,

¹¹ Marx, Karl, "Marx on the History of His Opinions," *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W Norton, 1978) 4.

¹² Marx, Karl...4-5

which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production. No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself.¹³

This is the foundation of the Marxist philosophy, which has influenced so many. The tool that Marx used to come to these conclusions is referred to as “dialectical materialism.” Stalin refers to dialectical materialism as

...the world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party. It is called dialectical materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of studying and apprehending them, is dialectical, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is materialistic.¹⁴

Stalin goes on to explain the origins of Marx and Engels’ concept of dialectics while distinguishing it from its earlier form: “When describing their dialectical

¹³ Marx, Karl....5

¹⁴ Stalin, J.V., “Dialectical and Historical Materialism” *MarxistPhilosophy.org*. Marxist philosophy. Sep 1938. Web. 16 Nov. 2015.

method, Marx and Engels usually refer to Hegel as the philosopher who formulated the main features of dialectics. This, however, does not mean that the dialectics of Marx and Engels is identical with the dialectics of Hegel.”¹⁵

This is confirmed in Marx’s own words when writing, “My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite.”¹⁶ Stalin gives a clear explanation of Marxist dialectics in his essay titled, “Dialectical and Historical Materialism,” writing,

Dialectics comes from the Greek *dialego*, to discourse, to debate. In ancient times dialectics was the art of arriving at the truth by disclosing the contradictions in the argument of an opponent and overcoming these contradictions. There were philosophers in ancient times who believed that the disclosure of contradictions in thought and the clash of opposite opinions was the best method of arriving at the truth. This dialectical method of thought, later extended to the phenomena of nature, developed into the dialectical method of apprehending nature, which regards the phenomena of nature as being in constant movement and undergoing constant change, and the development of nature as the result of the development of the contradictions in nature, as the result of the interaction of opposed forces in nature.¹⁷

¹⁵ Stalin, J.V., “Dialectical and Historical Materialism” *MarxistPhilosophy.org*. Sep 1938. Web. 16 Nov. 2015. pg 1

¹⁶ Marx, Karl, “Capital, Volume One,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W Norton, 1978) 301.

¹⁷ Stalin, J.V., “Dialectical and Historical Materialism” *MarxistPhilosophy.org*. Marxist philosophy. Sep 1938. Web. 16 Nov. 2015. pg 1.

This definition of Marxist dialectics is supplemented with an explanation of Marxist philosophical materialism. In explaining this concept, Stalin writes,

Contrary to idealism, which regards the world as the embodiment of an 'absolute idea,' a 'universal spirit,' 'consciousness,' Marx's philosophical materialism holds that the world is by its very nature material, that the multifold phenomena of the world constitute different forms of matter in motion, that interconnection and interdependence of phenomena as established by the dialectical method, are a law of the development of moving matter, and that the world develops in accordance with the laws of movement of matter and stands in no need of a 'universal spirit.'¹⁸

Both definitions of "dialectics" and "materialism" combine to produce the concept of dialectical materialism, which Marx developed in critical response to Hegel. Marx writes in the Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Das Kapital*,

To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.¹⁹
(301)

This tool that Marx here described, known as dialectical materialism, is the means by which those that ascribe to the Marxist worldview, decipher truth. Stalin also

¹⁸ Stalin, J.V.... pg.4.

¹⁹ Marx, Karl, "Capital, Volume One," The Marx-Engels Reader, Ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W Norton, 1978) 301.

explains a concept closely related to dialectical materialism, known as “Historical materialism,” which he says “...is the extension of the principles of dialectical materialism to the study of social life, an application of the principles of dialectical materialism to the phenomena of the life of society, to the study of society and of its history.”²⁰ Dialectical and historical materialism have been an important tool for intellectuals, activists, social scientists and others all over the world in analyzing their individual societies as well as the world economic system.

It is important to acknowledge that not all persons who have taken on the title of Marxist all come to the same conclusions. A Hungarian Marxist philosopher by the name of Georg Lukacs made an important statement in his book, *History and Class Consciousness*, writing, “Orthodox Marxism, therefore, does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx’s investigations. It is not the belief in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a ‘sacred’ book. Orthodox Marxism refers exclusively to method.”²¹ Lukacs, therefore, is undaunted when a particular conclusion that Marx has asserted is refuted, for the method of discovering truth is what makes one Marxist. Lukacs, in an essay titled, “The Changing Function of Historical Materialism,” challenges the proletariat. He writes,

...the whole of history really has to be re-written; the events of the past have to be sorted, arranged and judged from the point of view of historical materialism. We must strive to turn historical materialism into the authentic method for carrying out concrete historical research and for historiography in general.²²

²⁰ Stalin, J.V., “Dialectical and Historical Materialism” MarxistPhilosophy.org. Marxist philosophy. Sep 1938. Web. 16 Nov. 2015. pg 1.

²¹ Lukacs, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971)1

²² Lukacs, Georg...(223)

The challenge of applying the tools of Marxism to the history of different societies was taken on by several other scholars, coming to conclusions which rested on the foundation of Marx. For example, Vladimir Lenin, founder of the Russian Communist Party, leader of the Bolshevik Revolution and architect and the first head of the Soviet state, made a significant contribution to the body of literature and ideas surrounding class struggle.

Very early in Lenin's intellectual journey, he recognized that he could not simply accept all Marx's conclusions uncritically, but, rather, he must curtail his world view to the specific circumstances of the society in which he lived. In a chapter called, "The First Transformation: Leninism," Wolfgang Leonhard writes,

Lenin's very first writings reveal a certain conflict between the Marxist theoretician and the active revolutionary. Marxist theory stated that the social transformation of society was possible only in an economically advanced country, where the industrial workers constituted the majority of the population. This was not the case in czarist Russia at the turn of the century. Did one really—this is the feeling one reads between the lines of Lenin's writings of those years—have to wait that long? Would this not, under Russian conditions, mean an excessively long postponement of the revolution?²³

Leonhard leaves little doubt of Lenin's departure from Marxism, stating, "Lenin, the practical revolutionary, rebelled against the theory to which he had committed

²³ Leonhard, Wolfgang, *Three Faces of Marxism* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1970) 47-48

himself”²⁴. Illustrating the way in which Lenin embraced Marx’s ideas and furthered them, Wolfgang Leonhard, wrote,

There is no doubt that Lenin and his comrades-in-arms regarded themselves as Marxists and indeed as having helped Marxism to victory in one country, Russia. There is also no doubt that many of the political concepts of Marx and Engels can be found in the works and writings of Lenin, in Leninism. Lenin’s internationalism, his opposition to nationalism and chauvinism—even, and especially, in his own nation—his abhorrence of all sycophancy and of the glorification of Russian experience (and of his own person), his support of an evolutionary, voluntary socialist transformation of agriculture, and, most of all, his emphatic support of the different roads to socialism in different countries—all this and much more proves that Lenin adopted many fundamental tenets of Marxism and developed them further. Side by side with this continuity, however, we immediately find six important changes from Marx’s and Engel’s original political concepts.²⁵

Leonhard goes on to list the six significant changes from Marxism to Leninism, writing, “The first change concerns the Party...The second point is the importance of political tactics...The third area of change concerns the socialist revolution...A fourth major change was the new interpretation of the dictatorship of the proletariat”.

Leonhard also includes, “Lenin’s concept of the transitional measures on the road to socialism...,” which he says “...similarly reflected specific Russian conditions.” In

²⁴ Leonhard, Wolfgang...48

²⁵ Leonhard, Wolfgang...87

discussing Lenin's final change, Leonhard writes, "Lenin finally made some important changes in the concept of the classless Communist society of the future."²⁶ These quotes clearly indicate that Lenin by no means regarded Marxism as static and resistant to adaptation.

The adaptation of Marxism was not only limited to Lenin and Russia, but in places like China. Leonhard writes,

The Chinese Communists claim to have developed a Communist ideology of their own. They describe themselves as followers of 'the great thought of Mao Tse-tung.' The Peking leadership maintains that this is not simply a Chinese interpretation of Marxism but that 'Marxism has developed to a completely new stage—the stage of Mao Tse-tung's thought.'²⁷

As he did with Russia, Leonhard details some key differences in the circumstances of the Chinese and the ones Marx described in his writing:

These were problems the Communist Party of China, founded in 1921, had to deal with from the start. In China neither the conditions existed for a social revolution in the sense of Marx and Engels, nor even those for a socialist revolution in the sense of Lenin. The Chinese Communists were operating in a vast semi-colonial, semi feudal country, economically even more backward than the czarist Russia of 1917, a country where the working class did not even account for 1 per cent of the population. Moreover, China was largely controlled by

²⁶ Leonhard, Wolfgang...87-88.

²⁷ Leonhard, Wolfgang...210.

foreign powers, and the country's national liberation, therefore, played a decisive role.²⁸

Leonhard continues, shedding light on historical, cultural, and economic peculiarities in China:

Finally, the many centuries of isolation, the Confucian tradition, the ethnocentric idea of the 'middle kingdom'—China invariably saw herself as the center of the world—were bound to have their effect on the development and character of the Chinese Revolution and on Chinese Communism. Instead of a socialist revolution, what China needed first of all was an anti-feudal revolution and the overcoming of its medievalism. Under these circumstances, it was not the working class but the peasantry that had to represent the main force of the revolution—a revolution inseparably linked with China's national liberation struggle against foreign powers.²⁹

This quote describing the conditions which led to the development of China's own peculiar strain of socialism is yet another example of how Marx's ideology adapts based on different circumstances.

China and Russia are not the only examples of Marxism being adapted to the needs of different societies. Lacouture Jean refers to Ho Chi Mihn "As the leader of the Vietnamese nationalist movement for nearly three decades, Ho was one of the prime movers of the post-World War II anticolonial movement in Asia and one of the most influential communist leaders of the 20th century." Jean concludes his article of the Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Mihn, saying, "As a Marxist, Ho stands with the

²⁸ Leonhard, Wolfgang...211.

²⁹ Leonhard, Wolfgang...211.

Yugoslav leader Tito as one of the progenitors of the ‘national Communism’ that developed in the 1960s and (at least partially) with Communist China's Mao Zedong in emphasizing the role of the peasantry in the revolutionary struggle.”³⁰ As this quote clearly illustrates, Marxism was adapted to the Vietnamese context by Ho Chi

Not only was Marxism adapted in Asia and Europe but also Africa. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, also used a Marxist analysis to explain specific conditions on the African continent. Nkrumah declared that, indeed, a class struggle existed in Africa in his book, *Class Struggle in Africa*. He writes, “A fierce class struggle has been raging in Africa. The evidence is all around us. In essence it is, as in the rest of the world, a struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed.”³¹ Nkrumah confirms that every society has its own peculiarities, stating,

Each historical situation develops its own dynamics. The close links between class and race developed in Africa alongside capitalist exploitation. Slavery, the master-servant relationship, and cheap labour were basic to it. The class example is South Africa, where Africans experience a double exploitation—both on the ground of colour and of class. Similar conditions exist in the U.S.A., the Caribbean, in Latin America, and other parts of the world where the nature of the development of productive forces has resulted in a racist class structure. In these areas, even shades of colour count—the degree of blackness being a yardstick by which social status is measured.³²

³⁰ Mihn. Jean, Lacouture, "Ho Chi Minh." Britannica Biographies (2012): 1. History Reference Center. Web. 9 Jan. 2016.

³¹ Nkrumah, Kwame, *Class Struggle in Africa* (London: Panaf, 1970) 10.

³² Nkrumah, Kwame...27.

Nkrumah also asserts that the principles of scientific socialism, which are known as Marxism, are universal, and he scoffs at any concept of “African Socialism” that denies the class struggle in Africa. Other African leaders and intellectuals that embraced the principles of socialism include, Julius Nyerere, Sekou Toure, Thomas Sankara, and others.

All of these examples lead us to the Caribbean, which has a number of scholars who have analyzed the class situation in the Caribbean, which is inextricably linked to race. These scholars warn the reader of a universalism that obscures the specific circumstances of the Caribbean.

Sidney Mintz, an anthropologist with a wide body of work on the Caribbean, who has taught at some of the United States’ leading universities, including Columbia, Yale, and Princeton, illustrates the need to adapt Marxism to the historical circumstances of the region. He states,

...theories concerned with class consciousness and the role of different classes in revolutionary movements will probably undergo serious revision when the nature of Caribbean societies is fully understood. The historical significance of the proletariat and the supposed inertness of the peasantry, as set forth in European Marxist sociology, has already been called into serious question. Deeper understanding of the evolution of classes in Caribbean societies, far from European metropolises but deeply influenced by European capitalism in their historical development, may eventuate in a more effective cross-

cultural treatment of the concept of class consciousness, and a new view of the political potentialities of the anciently disinherited.³³

Carl Stone, Jamaican sociologist, also speaks to adapt Marxism to the specific circumstances of the region. He writes,

Marxist development thought presumes that the task of revolution lies in taking hold of the productive forces created by capitalism and using them for the benefit of the majority classes rather than for the purpose of capitalist profit generation. These essentially Western European assumptions have no basis when applied to Third World regions like the Caribbean where the priority development task lies in building a strong and viable production base as a long history of retarded growth through colonialism, dependence and imperialism has left a legacy of an undeveloped productive capacity.³⁴

Rex Nettleford also adds his voice to the chorus of scholarly opinion criticizing an untailored Marxist application to the region, which potentially can become ethnocentrism and cultural hegemony. In *Cultural Action and Social Change* Nettleford writes,

That Race (and ethnicity) must be worked into the Marxian dialectic to meet the realities of Caribbean existence is a responsibility serious Caribbean socialists must face or find that yet another theory from Europe will have failed to deliver the goods simply because we would have ignored Marx's own injunctions, by not relating our efforts

³³ Mintz, Sidney W, "The Caribbean Region," *Slavery, Colonialism and Racism*," Ed. Sidney W Mintz (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974) 63.

³⁴ Stone, Carl, "Prospects for Socialist Transformation: Reflections on Jamaica, Guyana and Grenada," *A Caribbean Reader on Development*, Ed. Judith Wedderburn (Kingston: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1986) 22-23.

sufficiently to the specificity of Caribbean history and realities. What is more, the cultural hang-up of hanging on to the philosophical drippings of Europe in the name of intellectual universalism may or may not be itself economically determined, considering that the disease permeates all strata of post-colonial societies like Jamaica.³⁵

Nettleford, Mintz, and Stone are among a host of Caribbean scholars whose work specifically examines the conditions of the region, avoiding the universalism criticized in the above quote. It is to these scholars that any serious study of class within the Caribbean region must turn.

Walter Rodney, the Guyanese activist and scholar, gives a good account of the social relations in the Caribbean and how they differ from Europe, saying,

The way that I would demonstrate this dialectic of struggle and change more consistently is by turning to the Caribbean. There we have a situation where, as C.L.R James always maintained, we have a most advanced working-class people. In a European formulation, somebody working in a rural setting is not considered to be advanced. But really our people have been operating within the aegis of capitalism for five hundred years, which is longer than the working class in the United States. We have been confronting capital, firstly on the slave plantation, and then subsequently on that same plantation after slavery. We have, in fact, a particular kind of material framework. It is not quite the same as a European capitalist framework, but the conditions of work are in effect capitalist and class alienating—that's the most

³⁵ Nettleford, Rex M., *Cultural Action & Social Change* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1979) 9.

important thing. The consciousness which springs from this is quite obviously a class consciousness and has been there for many decades and comes out sporadically in various kinds of revolts, the most recent and important of which were, of course, the period of labor revolts in the 1930s.³⁶

Rodney indirectly references slavery, which, as Eric Williams argues in *Capitalism and Slavery*, gave birth to capitalism. Slavery in the new world is as clear an example of social and economic oppression as exists in the history of the world.

Guyanese scholar and economist, Clive Thomas, gives a short but poignant description of slavery to contextualize his socio-economic analysis of the Caribbean and its relationship to international capitalism. In his book, *The Poor and the Powerless*, he writes

While the phenomenon of slavery is too familiar for there to be any real need in a work such as this to elaborate on details, there are nonetheless a few points worth emphasising. First, the sheer scale of the operations should be fully recognised. The slave trade lasted for nearly four centuries and, although estimates vary, involved the movement of no less than 13-15 million people to the Caribbean and North America. This colossal venture was principally undertaken by four European countries: Britain, France, Holland and Portugal, all of which held slaving bases in West Africa. The object of these bases was to secure a monopoly of slaves, both of their own possessions and for sale to the Spaniards. The slave trade was organised around an

³⁶ Rodney, Walter. *Walter Rodney Speaks* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990) 73.

annual triangular movement of people and products. Ships stocked with 'trade goods' (textiles, weapons, tools, pots, pans and trinkets) would leave Europe on a four-month journey to West Africa, where the 'trade goods' would be exchanged for slaves. The slaves were then transported as quickly as possible along the infamous Middle Passage to the Caribbean islands. Here several weeks would be spent selling slaves, resting and recuperating as well as acquiring cargoes of sugar, hides, tobacco and cotton to take back to Europe.³⁷

Clive Thomas goes on to describe the socio-economic stratification of the colonial-plantation society:

...the plantation labour force was highly stratified. Dominated as it was by capital, there was a sharp distinction between owner-supervisor and worker. The former, through controlling of capital, virtually monopolized political, economic and social authority. The latter was at worst, a slave and at best, a 'freed' labourer in a system with a long and all pervasive authoritarian tradition. The sharp and rigid class distinctions were integrated into an equally severe system of racial differentiation, in which the various ethnic groups were physically separated. Initially all the slaves were Africans and all the supervisors European. It was not until after emancipation that other racial groups were added in large numbers to the work force.³⁸

³⁷ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 20.

³⁸ Thomas, Clive Y...25-26

In his book, *Persistent Poverty*, George Beckford, the Jamaican economist, also illustrates how slavery created plantation economies, clearly stratifying these societies along social and economic lines based primarily on race. He writes,

The predominant social characteristic of all plantation areas of the world is the existence of a class-caste system based on differences in the racial origins of plantation workers on the one hand and owners on the other. This is an inherent feature of the plantation system. In every instance, the system was introduced by white Europeans who had to rely on non-white labour for working the plantations. Race, therefore, was a convenient means of controlling the labor supply.³⁹

Franklin Knight adds his voice to the analysis of class in the Caribbean era of slavery.

Using the account of an Englishman in Jamaica, Knight writes,

The castes were hierarchically arranged, with the whites, regardless of their number, the dominant group—socially, economically, and politically. The intermediate caste, generally called ‘free persons of colour’, were divided into two main classes of free mulattos and free blacks. Slaves comprised the third caste. Race and status formed the principle criteria for caste divisions, but no consistent characteristics determined class position within the various castes. For example, within the white caste, an economic index—primarily the ownership of a large plantation and slaves—separated principle whites from subordinate whites. Yet all whites, regardless of status, enjoyed local superordinacy over all other groups. Within the caste of free coloured,

³⁹ Beckford, George. *Persistent Poverty* (Kingston: West Indies UP, 1972) 67.

endogamy mainly determined status. Generally, persons of mixed blood belonged to the higher of the two categories. Among slaves, however, a variety of considerations determined class rank: artisanship, competence in a European language, location (field or domestic), as well as geography.⁴⁰

Knight is useful here in detailing the nuances of class divisions within castes, mentioning, as well, the group referred to as the “mulattoes” or “coloureds.”

Alvin Thompson details the origin of this group:

There was another group: the miscegenated offspring of unions between the various groups identified above. These added another dimension to race relations in the region and the confusion between race and colour is best exemplified here. They were often referred to as the coloured race. During the period of slavery marriages between blacks and whites were forbidden either by law or custom in most colonies. White men, however, commonly developed concubinal relations with black women or coerced them into sexual unions. The practice went adrift from intellectual moorings, which held that blacks were inferior humans, and perhaps not humans at all.⁴¹

Thompson goes on to describe how the miscegenated offspring of black and white unions were labelled and classified:

The children of mixed unions did not fit into any of the specific racial or colour categories mentioned. They were included under the

⁴⁰ Knight, Franklin W., “Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Caribbean History,” *General History of the Caribbean*, Ed. B.W. Higman (London: Unesco, 1999) 210.

⁴¹ Thompson, Alvin, *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997). 224.

amorphous category designated coloureds, but they were also often classified in a wide range of sub-categories. By the eighteenth century Caribbean society had become intensely colour-conscious, with a long gradation of colour categories from black to white.⁴²

Thompson goes on to explain where “coloureds” fit in the socio-economic hierarchy:

During slavery Caribbean society became stratified along lines of colour, roughly with the whites at the top, the coloureds in the middle and the blacks at the bottom. Broadly speaking, the degree of access to political and economic power and the accompanying social prestige was related to the colour of one’s skin; but skin colour in itself did not guarantee material or social success in a society full of contradictions.⁴³

Throughout the British West Indies, slavery was abolished in 1834, but the racial hierarchy that existed during slavery continued after emancipation. Longtime University of the West Indies Professor, Woodville Marshall comes to this conclusion about Caribbean emancipation:

The legislation which ended slavery hinted at momentous, probably revolutionary changes in Caribbean society. It transformed the legal status of more than 80% of the population by abolishing the legal oddity of property in persons and by substituting equality for all before the law. It altered the labour base of the community by substituting a wage labour system for unpaid slave labour. It outlined the basis for the existence of a greatly enlarged community of free

⁴² Thompson, Alvin...224.

⁴³ Thompson, Alvin...224.

persons by removing that legal authority which had enabled a small minority to exercise virtually arbitrary power over the activities and even lives of the large majority. But it is not that obvious that radical changes or a revolution did immediately take place.⁴⁴

Marshall is careful here to point out that from a legal standpoint, emancipation was a revolutionary step, but, still, “radical changes” were not immediate. The primary reason for this was that those who owned the means of production and those that provided labour were still the same, and the power dynamics among these classes were not overturned, though more complex.

Bridget Brereton, a History professor at the University of the West Indies, and Kevin A. Yelvington, an Anthropology professor at the University of South Florida specializing in Caribbean history, among other areas, explain how the social and economic relations between the groups persisted following emancipation:

Formal emancipation, of course, did not mean equality for the ex-slaves, nor did it effect a transformation in social and power relations in the region. The white elites continued, by and large, to monopolize ownership of the major economic resources, to exercise political ascendancy (subject to the colonial powers), and to enjoy the greatest social prestige.⁴⁵

Brereton and Yelvington go on to describe the two opposing groups in the social and economic milieu:

⁴⁴ Marshall, Woodville, “ ‘We be Wise to Many More Tings’: Blacks Hopes and Expectations of Emancipation,” *Caribbean Freedom*, Ed. Hilary Bekles and Verene Shephard (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1996) 12.

⁴⁵ Brereton, Bridget and Kevin Yelvington, “Introduction: The Promise of Emancipation,” *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition*, Ed. Bridgette Brereton and Kevin Yelvington (Kingston: UP of the West Indies, 1999) 6.

The course of postemancipation history in the different islands and colonies was shaped by the clash between the aims of the two main contending groups, the planters (mainly but not invariably white) and the ex-slaves. Especially in plantation societies, where enslaved Africans had been the only important source of labour since the 1700s, the planters sought to make the freed men and women into semi-serfs tied to the estates by customary tenure arrangements and obliged to labour for them for minimal wages.⁴⁶

Brereton and Yelvington do a good job of describing the way in which the property and economic relations remained the same. Marshall, also, gives a strong account of factors that stifled the ascendancy of the majority of ex-slaves. Marshall writes,

The blacks' hope for a form of economic self-sufficiency, based on the exploitation of the best available labour market and on a range of own account activities, was frustrated by a thick web of restrictions on mobility, tenancy, occupational differentiation, squatting, use of plantation property; and by depressed wages and limited opportunities for plantation labour that mass immigration produced.⁴⁷

Based on the restrictions to blacks' economic self-sufficiency that the above quote describes, Marshall is forced to conclude that,

To that first generation of adults in freedom, it was painfully obvious that emancipation was unfinished business, unfinished because, by the

⁴⁶ Brereton, Bridget and Kevin Yelvington, "Introduction: The Promise of Emancipation," *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition*, Ed. Bridgette Brereton and Kevin Yelvington. (Kingston: UP of the West Indies, 1999) 6.

⁴⁷ Marshall, Woodville, " 'We be Wise to Many More Tings': Blacks Hopes and Expectations of Emancipation," *Caribbean Freedom*, Ed. Hilary Bekles and Verene Shephard (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1996) 18.

1860's and 1870's, many of them had been returned to a dependence on the plantation and to a standard of living not far removed from the slavery many of them had known.⁴⁸

Despite the continuance of dominance by the white elites, emancipation did provide the space for the emergence of a small group of middle class non-whites or a petit bourgeois class. Franklin Knight details the conditions that led to the confidence of this group:

Although powerless, Africans and other non-whites in the Caribbean did not feel, in most cases, that they were any type of minority within their communities. Of course, demographically they were not. Yet, with the exception of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, the small number of whites elsewhere did not form any cohesive representation of majority cultures and exemplary role models for non-whites. The whites were, throughout most of the Caribbean, a divided and diminished lot. And by the beginning of the twentieth century they had become even more so. Non-whites therefore genuinely felt that they had the principle responsibility to construct their societies and they set about it with a great deal of self-confidence and enthusiasm.⁴⁹

Knight speaks of the role of education in joining the ranks of the middle class. He writes,

Education remained the great social elevator of Caribbean masses, especially the black Caribbean masses. A primary level education,

⁴⁸ Marshall, Woodville, “ ‘We be Wise to Many More Tings’: Blacks Hopes and Expectations of Emancipation,” *Caribbean Freedom*, Ed. Hilary Bekles and Verene Shephard (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1996) 20.

⁴⁹ Knight, Franklin W., “Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Caribbean History,” *General History of the Caribbean*, Ed. B.W. Higman (London: Unesco, 1999) 219

sometimes combined with a speaking knowledge of Spanish, French or Dutch, could open opportunities in commerce with neighboring islands. A secondary school education—relatively widely available by the end of the century—was essential for entering the lower ranks of the bureaucracy and the professional services. A system of scholarships enabled the able but poor to attend the schools and gain the preparation that moved a small but steady stream of the lower classes into the middle classes and general acceptability. While the number of such scholarships was never large, competition was extremely fierce...⁵⁰

Knight goes on to illustrate the economic opportunities that gave this small strata of non-whites their confidence.

Throughout the nineteenth century a new petit bourgeois class had steadily emerged throughout the Caribbean. It derived its strength from the new professionals and bureaucrats, some of whom were locals, from the expanding managerial strata, and from merchants and new estate owners who lacked the ancestry and traditions of the old planters. This was a far more homogenous class, and a few of them did enter the political system. There was, however, no great shift in the locus of political power. It still remained under firm control of the old-style planter and merchant class.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Knight, Franklin W....220.

⁵¹ Knight, Franklin W....219.

Clive Thomas, also, details the role of education and economic opportunities in the emergence of the Caribbean middle class in post-emancipation society. He writes,

...a local class of merchants and traders who dealt in retailing, wholesaling and the provision of transport and financial services was brought into existence. While as a class these groups shared property interests with the economically dominant plantation interests, ultimately they were excluded from it on racial grounds. This period also witnessed the formation of a group of educated people who achieved much social mobility through education. While concentrating on professions such as teaching, public service, law and medicine, this group constituted the corps from which the local political elite came to be drawn. In pursuit of its political interests it forged an alliance with the masses to struggle for constitutional reform under a widened franchise, which eventually, after the Second World War, merged into the larger demand for independence.⁵²

Clive Thomas makes a revealing point here in discussing the role of the middle class in the movement towards independence, which will be revisited briefly.

A key development in the racial, social and economic dynamics of post-emancipation Caribbean society was the immigration of Asian labour and in some cases European labour. Franklin Knight writes,

In Jamaica the major divisions could be drawn along a spectrum running from black to white. But in many other parts of the Caribbean,

⁵² Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 40.

the situation was more complex. In Trinidad and Guyana (then British Guiana) the presence of large proportions of East Indians complicated the reality of race, ethnicity and class as well as religion and other social factors. Outsiders might have been baffled by the reality, but local people knew who they were, and where they were placed in the social hierarchy.⁵³

In an essay entitled, “The Evolution of Long-Term Labour Contracts in Trinidad and British Guiana 1834-1863,” longtime University of the West Indies professor, K.O. Laurence, gives very useful information regarding migration to Guyana and Trinidad, which were most affected by the migrations. He writes, “The question of indenting immigrants to labour for a term of years in the West Indies dates from the very start of the post-emancipation immigration movement.”⁵⁴ Laurence details about the specific terms and lengths of contracts, the evolution of the contracts, the colonial policy in regards to contracts, the planters’ desires, and other details surrounding indentured servitude.

Alvin Thompson gives a brief overview of Asian migration to the Caribbean, writing,

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a number of Asians, chiefly East Indians, Chinese and Javanese, were introduced as indentured or contract labourers. Together, the total introduced into the region numbered perhaps just under one million. Several Chinese, in addition, migrated as entirely free persons, that is, not as contract

⁵³ Knight, Franklin W., “Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Caribbean History,” *General History of the Caribbean*, Ed. B.W. Higman (London: Unesco, 1999) 222.

⁵⁴ Laurence, Keith, “The Evolution of Long-Term Labour Contracts in Trinidad and British Guiana 1834-1863,” *Caribbean Freedom*, Ed. Hilary Bekles and Verene Shephard (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1996) 141.

labourers. Many Asians returned to their homeland, either immediately after the expiry of their contracts or after they had acquired some capital, but the majority of them remained in the region.⁵⁵

Thompson goes on to describe the percentage of the population the migrants occupy and the relationship with Africans:

At present East Indians constitute an absolute majority of the population in Guyana and significant minorities in Trinidad and Suriname. In other territories they represent much smaller percentages of the population, and in some instances are not a homogenous or even a clearly identifiable group. In the three territories with large East Indian populations, there is competition and sometimes conflict between them and the Africans as each group strives for political, economic and social power within those societies.⁵⁶

Thompson makes it clear that the conflict was colonially driven, explaining,

From the early days colonial policy aimed to create and exploit divisions among the ethnic groups, especially among the working people. Bringing together various racial groups in competitive economic relationships was in itself a potential source of division and conflict.⁵⁷

Thompson details the competition between migrants and ex-slaves saying, “The wages and other expenses that the plantocracy were required by law to provide for contract labourers generally fell far below the expense of hiring other forms of

⁵⁵ Thompson, Alvin, *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997) 7.

⁵⁶ Thompson, Alvin...7.

⁵⁷ Thompson, Alvin...216.

labour.”⁵⁸ As a result of this depression of wages Thompson says of the migrants: “The contract labourers were held in contempt not only because they were viewed as new categories of slaves, but also because they were often assigned jobs which special slaves or free persons would otherwise be employed to perform.”⁵⁹ 218 Thompson also asserts that the negative perceptions went both ways, writing,

Indians and Chinese in turn complained that Africans were on the side of the plantocracy in oppressing them. It was not uncommon, especially in the early days of indentureship, for Africans to be employed as policemen or overseers on the plantations, thus exercising authority over the indentured labourers, who intensely resented it.⁶⁰

The conflicts Thompson describes would form the foundation for decades of conflict among Indians and Africans in Guyana.

Clearly, the Africans and East Indians competed with each other for their place in the socio-economic hierarchy, particularly, in Trinidad and Guyana. The power of the white elite was left intact. Even after independence, when political power was transferred to non-white hands, economic power still rested comfortably in the hands of the white elite.

Hamber and Greenwood explain the typical stages of independence. They write, “The movement towards independence was by evolution, not by revolution,” meaning that it was not achieved by armed struggle, violent insurrection, or any other act of rebellion. Hamber and Greenwood go on to explain that, “The movement

⁵⁸ Thompson, Alvin...216.

⁵⁹ Thompson, Alvin...219.

⁶⁰ Thompson, Alvin...219.

towards independence is a constitutional one.” These authors speak about the stages involved in the process, including electing representatives of the legislature, handing over executive power to locally elected officials, and, at the last stage, the Governor relinquishing responsibility for foreign affairs, defence, and internal security. At this point, a country was fully independent.⁶¹

Jamaica became independent in 1962 under the Prime Ministership of Alexander Bustamante, the leader of the Jamaican Labour Party. With the support of trade unions in Jamaica, Bustamante was also the first Chief Minister of Jamaica back in 1944 when all Jamaican citizens got an opportunity to vote because of pressure from the universal adult suffrage movement. A strong advocate for universal adult suffrage was Norman Manley, who formed the People’s National Party in 1938 and would compete with Bustamante’s Jamaica Labour Party throughout the 40s and 50s, eventually winning a majority in parliament in 1955 and 1959. It is perceived that Manley’s support of the West Indies Federation, which was an attempt at forming a Caribbean union, led to his defeat to Bustamante in 1962, the first election for a fully independent Jamaica.⁶²

Trinidad and Tobago also became independent in 1962 under the leadership of Eric Williams. Universal suffrage was granted to Trinidad in 1945, and governments of locally elected officials were formed in 1946 and 1950 before Eric Williams, and the newly formed People’s National Movement, won a majority in 1956 and 1961, leading Trinidad and Tobago to full independence in 1962.⁶³

⁶¹ Greenwood, R. and S. Hamber, *Development and Decolonization* (London: Macmillan, 1981) 54-55

⁶² Greenwood, R. and S. Hamber...55-56.

⁶³ Greenwood, R. and S. Hamber...56-57.

British Guiana, now known as Guyana, got its independence in 1966 under the leadership of Forbes Burnham. After universal suffrage was granted to Guyana in 1953, Cheddi Jagan became the country's first Chief Minister. At the time Forbes Burnham was chairman of Cheddi Jagan's People's Progressive Party (PPP). Burnham left the PPP and formed the People's National Congress, which lost to the PPP in 1957 and 1961. Eventually, Burnham became Premier by forming a coalition with the United Force in 1964. There were no other elections before the date of independence and Burnham became Prime Minister of a fully independent Guyana. The political competition between the PPP and the PNC became a racial conflict, unfortunately, with East Indians and Africans voting along racial lines. There was a great deal of violence during the time. Also, Jagan ran into trouble with the colonial office for openly embracing communism.⁶⁴ Ironically, Burnham, who was much more pragmatic on the question of socialism early on, would later declare Guyana a socialist republic.⁶⁵

With independence, the era of neo-colonialism ensued. As is reflected in the three novels examined, the inhabitants of these islands, specifically, the black poor are subjected to a sub-standard existence due to their social and economic relationship to the colonial, capitalist power structure. Despite the oppressive conditions of which the inhabitants of these societies endure, resistance has always been forthcoming in various forms.

⁶⁴ Greenwood, R. and S. Hamber...58-59.

⁶⁵ Barry, Tom, Beth Wood and Deb Preusch, *The Other Side of Paradise* (New York: Grove Press, 1984) 323.

Putting up a Resistance: Ideology and Action

African people were brought to the Caribbean as enslaved people, and slavery is a brutal system of oppression. Every system of oppression that has been imposed on a group of people has been resisted in some form or fashion. Some systems were overthrown, some evolved, and some remained, but all were resisted. For African people and other oppressed people in the Caribbean, emancipation and independence have still not brought about the improvement in the living situation that was desired. Studying the nature of resistance in the Caribbean can serve as enlightenment when reflecting on the fight for liberation.

Firstly, enslaved Africans resisted from the very beginning. In his essay, “Resistance and Rebellion of African Captives in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Before Becoming Seasoned Labourers in the British Caribbean,” Richard Sheridan, referencing several studies, says, “...Africans first resisted being captured and enslaved in their homeland, and that every stage in the transatlantic traffic was marked by behavior which was uncooperative and belligerent.” (182) Sheridan goes on to say,

It should be noted that resistance to capture and enslavement was both non-violent and violent. The captives expressed their resentment either in covert and indirect manner which fell short of violent behavior, or they resorted to violent resistance. Covert resistance took such forms as refusing to walk and carry loads in caravans or coffles, refusing to be shackled with leg and arm-irons and chains, refusing to enter boats and ships, running away, committing suicide, inflicting injuries or self-mutiliation, and refusing to eat. Exacting vengeance by violent means took such forms as poisoning with herbs, destroying property such as

slave ships and their component parts, resorting to conspiracies and collective violence or rebellion by wielding knives, cutlasses, or firearms taken from the oppressors.¹

In his book, *Rasta and Resistance*, Horace Campbell describes resistance on the slave ship. He says, "...despite these chains, when the slaves were taken on deck for exercise they struck, undid the chains, hurled themselves against the crew in attempts at insurrection, and oftentimes threw themselves overboard"².

In his book, *Flight to Freedom*, Alvin Thompson, speaks on the violence the plantation owner inflicted on the enslaved and the slaves' resistance. He says,

In slave societies, state violence raised major questions of how to cope effectively with it, and various enslaved groups and individuals went through the whole gamut of possible reactions: prayer, go-slow, downing of tools, feigned sickness, destruction of crops, poisoning, desertion and armed revolt. It was the last two options, often combined with others, that became the ultimate tool for the enslaved people in their quest for freedom.³

There are many successful resistance efforts. The most famous and successful of these is the Haitian Revolution. In Eric Williams' book, *From Columbus to Castro*, he details the Haitian victory over their French enslavers:

¹ Sheridan, Richard, "Resistance and Rebellion of African Captives in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Before Becoming Seasoned Labourers in the British Caribbean, 1690-1807," *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom*. Ed. Verene A. Shepherd (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 182-83.

² Campbell, Horace, *Rasta and Resistance* (St. John's: Hansib Publications, 1997) 14.

³ Thompson, Alvin O, *Flight to Freedom* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006) 31-32.

The Negro troops of Dessalines and Christophe were irresistible, and yellow fever no more spared the French soldiers than it spared the British. Fifty thousand Frenchmen perished in Bonaparte's attempt to restore slavery in Saint-Domingue. The French cause was hopeless from the start. Saint Domingue was the first link in that Bonapartist chain which led to the attacks on the peoples of Spain, Russia and Prussia, and the eventual downfall of Bonaparte. On November 19, 1803, the French army capitulated. (254)

Williams goes on:

On January 1, 1804, at a meeting of all his generals, at the very spot where Touissant had been treacherously captured, Dessalines' secretary read out the declaration of independence of the new republic—the second in the New World—which, to remove every vestige of a detested rule, took its ancient Indian name of Haiti and struck out from its flag the white of the French tricolor. The generals abjured for ever allegiance to France, and swore to die rather than live under French domination. Dessalines, entrusted with dictatorial power, assumed the title of Emperor, the very title which Bonaparte was to arrogate to himself in the same year. Mercantilism, which died in Britain's American colonies, was thus damned in France's premier Caribbean colony.⁴

In addition to the Haitian revolution, there were other notable rebellions in Trinidad, Guyana and elsewhere, as well as in several maroon communities, including

⁴ Williams, Eric. *From Columbus to Castro* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970) 254.

Jamaica and Suriname. Resistance would characterize the institution of slavery and beyond.

Colonialism was no less resisted than slavery. Eric Williams describes the anti-colonial movement saying, “The colonial nationalist movement in the Caribbean, like the colonial nationalist movement everywhere, was concerned with the abolition of colonialism. Inevitably in the parcellation of the area and its historical association with different metropolitan countries, the movement took different forms”. Eric Williams goes on to speak about the anti-colonial movement in the Republics, like Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic; and the British Caribbean, like Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad, along with American territories, like Puerto Rico.⁵

In *Groundings with my Brothers*, Walter Rodney makes reference to the revolts of 1938. He says, “Slavery ended in various islands of the West Indies between 1834 and 1838. Exactly 100 years later (between 1934-1938), the black people in the West Indies revolted against the hypocritical freedom of the society”⁶. Other forms of resistance in the colonial era included labour movements and anti-colonial political movements.

Most notable during the colonial period is the rise of Marcus Garvey, who organized millions of Africans around the world into one organization in hopes of building a united, black nation. Garvey provided ideological and organizational resistance to colonialism, addressing the black inferiority complex, which is a barrier to racial progress. In *Philosophy and Opinions Vol.II*, he says,

⁵ Williams, Eric...463.

⁶ Rodney, Walter, *The Grounding with my Brothers* (London: Bogle-L Ouverture Publications, 1969) 27.

The Negro needs a nation and a country of his own, where he can best show evidence of his own ability in the art of human progress.

Scattered as an unmixed and unrecognized part of alien nations and civilizations is but to demonstrate his imbecility, and point him out as an unworthy derelict, fit neither for the society of Greek, Jew nor Gentile.

It is unfortunate that we should so drift apart, as a race, as not to see that we are but perpetuating our own sorrow and disgrace in failing to appreciate the first great requisite of all peoples—organization.

Organization is a great power in directing the affairs of a race or nation toward a given goal. To properly develop the desires that are uppermost, we must first concentrate through some system or method, and there is none better than organization. Hence, the Universal Negro Improvement Association appeals to each and every Negro to throw in his lot with those of us who, through organization, are working for the universal emancipation of our race and the redemption of our common country, Africa.

No Negro, let him be American, European, West Indian or African, shall be truly respected until the race as a whole has emancipated itself, through self-achievement and progress, from universal prejudice. The Negro will have to build his own government, industry, art, science, literature and culture, before the world will stop to consider him. Until

then, we are but wards of a superior race and civilization, and the outcasts of a standard social system.⁷.

As this quote suggests, black independence was a central theme in Garvey's teachings and, with such a large following around the world, it must be surmised that Garvey made a great contribution towards anti-colonial sentiment in the Caribbean and beyond.

Clive Thomas gives great insight into the Caribbean's independence movements. He says,

The growth and spread of the national independence movement was the most characteristic feature of the region immediately after the Second World War, but, as in other areas of social life, its development was uneven. By the 1960s, however, some territories had gained their independence: Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago, Guyana and Barbados. Although the broad mass of the population (particularly the peasants, workers and unemployed produced the main pressures against the colonial system, the leaders of the mass movements, in other words those who negotiated the mechanics of the independence settlements, came from petty-bourgeois, professional or other intermediate strata. None the less, there was no doubt that the struggles for a broader franchise, more local autonomy, improved access to resources for the local population, better pay and labour conditions, better prices for agricultural produce, more security of living standards for agricultural produce, more security for independence itself, represented an

⁷ Garvey Marcus. *The Philosophy and the Opinions of Marcus Garvey. Vol. 2* (Dover: The Majority P, 1986) 23-24.

exceptionally important period in the development of populist politics in the region.⁸

Though many Caribbean countries successfully eliminated colonial rule in the 1960s and 1970s, a new era, known as neo-colonialism, was ushered in. This new form of colonialism brought no real change in the material conditions of the oppressed and, therefore, resistance continued. Kwame Nkrumah, who dubbed the phrase, “neo-colonialism,” explained the concept in the book of the same name. He says,

Once a territory has become nominally independent it is no longer possible, as it was in the last century, to reverse the process. Existing colonies may linger on, but no new colonies will be created. In place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism we have today neo-colonialism.⁹

In his book, *A Just and Moral Society*, Selwyn Cudjoe is extremely critical to the concept of neo-colonialism. He says, “...nothing fundamental in our relationship to the former colonizer has changed” (85). In speaking about the elite that inherited the society, he says,

They have traded places with the slaveholders and the colonizers, and so they have become the new slaveholders and colonizers (that is, the new or neocolonizers)...They are supported by and thus align themselves with foreign interests which we call multinational

⁸ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 71.

⁹ Nkrumah, Kwame, *Neo-Colonialism* (London: Panaf, 1965) ix.

corporations. Their basic aim remains the same: to control the society for their own benefit.¹⁰

Clive Thomas gives great detail to the resistance that has taken place in the neo-colonial era. In *The Poor and the Powerless*, he says,

By the early 1970's the nationalist strategies of economic development seemed to have exhausted their possibilities. The global crisis of capitalism, the oil crisis and calls for a new international economic order had interacted with local developments in the various territories of the region to produce a more or less generalized crisis. Everywhere in the region there was evidence of deep ferment and the desire for fundamental social change. At the grassroots level this erupted into strong direct action, culminating in the Rodney riots in Jamaica and the black-power protests in Trinidad and Tobago. At the same time new political, civic and social organizations were coming into existence. The New Jewel Movement in Grenada, The Working Peoples' Alliance in Guyana, the Antigua Caribbean Liberation Movement, Monali in Barbados and the Workers' Party of Jamaica, were all established during this period and all put forward programmes promising to open up new directions of social change and political development in the region.¹¹

In terms of cultural resistance, Thomas says,

Signs of resistance were also evident in many areas of cultural life—in the renaissance of the calypso, the new thrust and direction of reggae

¹⁰ Cudjoe, Selwyn, *A Just and Moral Society* (Ithaca: Calaloux, 1984) 85.

¹¹ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 184

music, the growth of West Indian literature and even in the rise of Rastafarianism among the youth. Civic organizations like the Caribbean Conference of Churches and its local councils, human-rights organizations, friendly societies and solidarity organizations sprang up all over the region to give a voice to the concerns of the poor and the powerless. New bold efforts were made to implement grassroots' forms of self-organization and cooperation in such diverse areas as the arts, agriculture, education and recreation, often with support from other like-minded organizations. There was also lively intellectual activity in the region as the various theories (for example, the idea of dependency and Marxist theories of social change) were embellished as a new kind of Caribbean society played an extraordinary potent role. These developments set the stage for such major national experiments as Jamaica's democratic socialism, Guyana's cooperative socialism and Bishop's endeavors in Grenada.¹²

Particularly interesting is the cultural resistance that has manifested in Caribbean neo-colonial societies, consisting of the rebel walk, the rebel talk, the rebel music, the rebel dance, and the rebel fashion. This is an outward expression of resistance to the concepts of European cultural superiority and African cultural inferiority. This expression was integral to the persona of reggae superstar Bob Marley and even reggae itself.

¹² Thomas, Clive Y...184.

Before concluding, a chapter on resistance must mention something concerning ideology. Selwyn Cudjoe provides a good explanation of the role of ideology in the liberation efforts. He says,

In each phase of our social development a specific ideology has governed the way people organized their labor and related to one another. Generally, there have always been two opposing ideologies in our society: the ideology of those who subjugated other men to their will and that of those who resisted in the name of a people's intrinsic right to be right. Thus ideology presumes a struggle among different groups.¹³

The first task of those interested in liberation is to reject the ideology of the oppressor group and embrace the ideology of liberation. Catherine Sunshine, in a book called *The Caribbean: Survival, Struggle, and Sovereignty*, speaks about the intellectual roots of a movement that emerged during the 60s and 70s focused on liberation. She writes,

Progressive intellectuals began organizing in Guyana in 1963, calling themselves the New World Group. The Group acquired branches in Trinidad and Jamaica and began to publish a journal, *New World Quarterly*. Consisting primarily of scholars associated with the University of Guyana and the University of the West Indies (UWI), *New World* challenged the assumptions of traditional Caribbean social science. The economists of the group, including Maurice Odle and Clive Thomas in Guyana, and Lloyd Best in Jamaica, compared the

¹³ Cudjoe, Selwyn, *A Just and Moral Society* (Ithaca: Calaloux, 1984) 81.

economic dependency of the plantation system to that of the Puerto Rican model. Political scientists like James Millette in Trinidad and Trevor Monroe in Jamaica focused on the failure of West Indian politicians to alter the colonial power structure after independence. Historians Walter Rodney, Woodville Marshall and Douglas Hall reinterpreted the region's history, not from the perspective of the colonizers but from that of the Afro-Caribbean; while sociologist Orlando Patterson analyzed the effects of colonialism and slavery on the Caribbean Man.¹⁴

Sunshine goes on to give valuable insight into the origins of these scholars' world view:

These scholars and other like them were the product of an educational system which selected the brightest individuals for advanced training at universities in Europe and North America. Upon their return to the Caribbean, graduates traditionally would move into coveted civil service, professional, and academic posts, ensuring their absorption into the upper middle class and their identification with the status quo. This pattern began to splinter with the second generation of intellectuals when some made the unprecedented choice of siding with the popular classes. This reflected, on the one hand, their experience of racism abroad: brown-skinned persons who drew a social advantage from their fair complexion in the West Indies found themselves labeled black in Europe, with all the racism that entailed. The second and

¹⁴ Sunshine, Catherine, *The Caribbean: Survival, Struggle, and Sovereignty* (Washington: Epica, 1980) 52.

more important factor was their exposure to the anti-colonial and Pan African movement in Paris, London, and the United States.¹⁵

Sunshine then goes on to describe the influence of the Marcus Garvey movement along with Frantz Fanon on the intellectual anti-colonial movement:

The intellectual roots of this movement went back to Marcus Garvey, and flowered anew in the 1950s around the struggle to decolonize Africa. A seminal influence in the fifties was the writing of Frantz Fanon, a Martiniquan psychiatrist practicing in colonial Algeria who became involved in the Algerian war of independence from France. Fanon focused on the destructive effects of racism and colonialism on the personality of a colonized people, calling for violent resistance as the only way in which the colonized could liberate themselves from this oppression. Even more shocking at the time was Fanon's criticism of the black intelligentsia for failing to lead an active anti-colonial struggle—thus calling into question the whole decolonization process which passed power gradually into the hands of a black and brown elite.¹⁶

The ideology espoused by these scholars is a necessary component of the national liberation struggle. This is the ideology that the black poor, in large part, lacks, and therefore, overcoming its historical oppression is a very difficult task.

¹⁵ Sunshine, Catherine, ...52.

¹⁶ Sunshine, Catherine, ...52.

Apata: Race and Class Analysis

Apata is a novel that illustrates the racial and socioeconomic dilemma of the colonial and postcolonial subject. In two interviews with the book's author, Harold Bascom, one conducted by myself and the other conducted by a Guyanese news site, salient details of the origin and inspiration of this narrative, as well as the philosophical influences of the author, emerge. Bascom revealed that he wanted to be a film-maker, and *Apata*, he had hoped, would become a film:

Yes, I was going to become a film maker and nothing was going to stop me. I even wrote two film scripts and tried to shop them around Georgetown. I wasn't getting anywhere though. It was then that I made the decision that maybe if I wrote a novel—an adventure novel specifically—maybe some producer 'outside' might become interested in making it into a movie and I might get the chance to be a director of my own film.¹

Based on the significance of cinematography in the discussion of the rebel-hero, this is an interesting disclosure which will be discussed in greater detail later. Bascom goes on to inform the reader about Clement Cuffy, the inspiration for the main character of the narrative, Michael Apata:

When I was eight and growing up in a coastal village with the name New Road Vreed-en-hoop—this is on the West Coast of Demerara, Guyana, South America—there was a desperado on the loose and his name was Clement Cuffy. Here wasn't a regular Black criminal with a

¹ Jordon, Micheal. "Harold Bascom - From Dreaming 'Country-boy' to Three-Time Guyana Prize Winner (part 1 of 3)." *Kaieteurnews*online, Kaieteurnews, 10 September 2011. Web. 23 June 2013

cutlass (machete); this was a black man at large with a Winchester rifle, and there was fear in all of the coastal villages where Clement Cuffy was supposedly at large. As an adult seeking something to write, it was easy to cast my mind back to standing in front of my parents' yard and seeing the lorries (trucks) rumbling by and up to the villages of Parika where the 'bad man' was supposedly hiding and terrorizing people. It was easy for me to remember the day the trucks came rumbling back to the City along with the rumors that they had, at last, cornered and killed Clement Cuffy. It was easy to remember that time and the fear that was present in all homes in my village I guess.²

In the previous quote, there is the implication that Clement Cuffy, through the threat of violence, possessed some sense of power, and as a child, Bascom, perhaps, was in awe of this figure. He goes on to contextualize Cuffy's criminality within a racial paradigm:

As an adult intending to embark on writing a full length first-novel, the true story of Clement Cuffy was grist for my imagination—more so, because as an adult I had grown a very radical consciousness of how dark skinned people—especially men—fare in a post-colonial society in which we chanted easily: *If you white you see the light; if you brown—you stick around; if you black—stay back.*³

Bascom then goes on to explain his empathy with this criminal figure:

My choice to take this true story of a black criminal was easy since as a grown man I found it easy to understand how Clement Cuffy could

² Bascom, Harold. "Re: Your Answers." Message to Natalio Wheatley. 24 February 2011. Email.

³ Bascom, Harold. "Re: Your Answers..." Email.

have turned a common criminal. I easily empathized with him—another dark-skinned man like myself; the psychological scars I bore for being dark in British Guiana made it easy for me to identify with Cuffy and to create a fictional drama about a young radical Blackman who flipped after being deprived of opportunities because of the color of his skin.⁴

Here Bascom deals directly with the focus of this dissertation: the racial and socioeconomic oppression inherent in various Caribbean societies, and the resistance to that oppression. Having established the context for the writing of this narrative, it is also important to situate the author's philosophical influences. In response to a question as to whether he was a part of, or influenced by the black power movement, Bascom replied,

I was not actively involved in the Black Power movement; I admired what they were doing, however. At the time when I wrote *APATA* I was conscious of the Black Power movement—the Panthers, Eldridge Cleaver etc. I knew of Malcolm X, but much of it was more or less passive. My deepest radical consciousness that infected *APATA* was born from reading Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*; it was my bible. I later read *Black Skins, White Masks*. From reading Fanon I came into my intellectual strength as a black man in a post-colonial context. My eyes became open. Then I read Aime Césaire's, *Return to My Native Land*, and delved into Negritude.⁵

⁴ Bascom, Harold. "Re: Your Answers...Email.

⁵ Bascom, Harold. "Re: Your Answers...Email.

It is enlightening to know that Bascom's "deepest radical consciousness" was as a result of his reading of Frantz Fanon, a man whose personal story and his major works, *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skins, White Masks*, encapsulate the black man's resistance and, more broadly, the "third world" man's resistance to a system of racial and social oppression. Fanon actually participated in the Algerian revolution. Fanon speaks extensively of the abusive relationship between "colonizer" and "colonized," and he also makes use of a socialist analysis appropriated to the colonial situation. Fanon's impact on Harold Bascom and Apata is clear and is illustrated in the text.

Another interesting aspect of the interview with Bascom was his answer to the question of whether he was influenced by socialist ideology. He asserted, "If Fanon was socialist—then yes. Never read much into Lenin and Marx and Mao—though I was influenced by osmosis in a way: my brother George who was studying political science infected me."⁶ This response is consistent with the philosophical position that analysis of the colonial and postcolonial situation is most appropriately rendered by intellectuals, such as Fanon, Rodney, Nkrumah, Campbell, Chinweizu, and so many others, who were governed by a world view in which race and class are accounted for. Therefore, an analysis of Apata will follow this paradigm. Such an analysis will ultimately reveal that the majority of inhabitants of Guyana, as illustrated in this novel, are subjected to a system of racial and social oppression, and the failure to overthrow that system is primarily due to organizational and ideological weakness.

The novel is filled with examples of how race determines one's socioeconomic status. One example of this is revealed early in the story when Apata

⁶ Bascom, Harold. "Re: Your Answers...Email.

is travelling on a ferry from his grand-parents' home in Bartica to his home in Georgetown. Apata observes two "criminals" on board the ferry and asks one of the passengers to tell him who these men were. The female passenger then told Apata the story of the two men. One of the men was an Indian man named Chingarus, who murdered his wife after finding her with a black man. The other man, a black man named Parkinson, is of particular significance. The passenger says of Parkinson,

'They say he kill a man in front of a White man office. They say that he went to get a job with some White people and was plenty o' them there, and the White man had a Black stooge who uses to pick out who and who the White man should give work to. Is like the White man tell heself that since he don't know plenty 'bout Black people, who bad and who good, was best he get a Black man to tell him who must get work, which is the lazy kind and who is the boderation kind'⁷

This quote clearly shows the socio-economic relationship between the Europeans, the African-Guyanese, and the Mulattoes. The European is clearly in a position of power. He is the employer, and the African-Guyanese are the potential employees. Of course, employment is very important to an individual's livelihood, and in this situation, the African-Guyanese, in order to gain this employment, had to rely on Europeans who, historically, have oppressed African-Guyanese. This is a power relationship that is consistent throughout the narrative.

Brian Moore confirms the power of the white elite in an essay called, "The culture of the Colonial Elites of Nineteenth-Century Guyana. He writes,

⁷ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 24.

For most of the post-emancipation nineteenth century, the colonial elites of Guyana were composed essentially of British whites and their descendants. These were mainly Scottish, English and Irish immigrants serving in different capacities, from lowly overseers and book-keepers on the sugar estates to planters, merchants, and colonial officials. In between there were professionals such as lawyers, doctors and priests, army and police officers, bank and store clerks.⁸

As this quote demonstrates, the white represents the elite of Guyanese society while Blacks and Indians represent the working class and peasantry; a small strata from among the Blacks and Indians make up the middle class.

Returning to the novel *Apata* and Parkinson's story, the "black stooge" is a key element, adding to the discussion of race and class. This stooge's name is Paris and the passenger describes him to Apata as "wan red man!",⁹ meaning that he is light-skinned and has a mixed European and African heritage. It is implied that his mixed heritage is the reason why he has an elevated socio-economic status. The European chose Paris to choose which African-Guyanese were employed and which African-Guyanese were not employed. While the narrator of Parkinson's story naively assumes that the European does this because he has no knowledge of the African inhabitants of Guyana, what is more likely is that the Europeans use this miscegenated race as a buffer between themselves and the African-Guyanese, so that all of the aggression of the oppressed will be directed at the "red man" rather than the Europeans, the true possessors of power.

⁸ Moore, Brian L., "The Culture of the Colonial Elites of Nineteenth-Century Guyana," *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, ed. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998) 96-97.

⁹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 26.

Tracy Nicholas makes very clear the role of these coloureds, which correlates with Paris' role in *Apata*: "Between the rich and poor of Jamaica is a small buffering group—the coloreds/Creoles/mulattoes. Because of their lighter complexions, they have achieved higher education and consequently a more substantive level of income."¹⁰ Nicholas' assertion here provides some explanation for Paris' behavior as the buffer between black and white, rich and poor. Through the passenger's description, the reader can see that Paris delights in this role: "What the White man didn' realize was that once any black man get that position he wouldah tun bigass and wouldah want to show off on he matty Black man.' " The woman goes on to speak about Paris and how he abused his elevated position saying, "He uses to look around good! And according to who is villager from he side, that man he go take on."¹¹

This is a good example of corruption that is the result of a relationship between the European owning class and the local elite. Such nepotism is not uncommon under such circumstances. Parkinson is the victim of Paris' corrupt behaviour, more so because of their personal dislike for each other because of a dispute over a woman. In this instance, Paris has mistreated the wrong man, for Parkinson became so angry at this injustice that he delivered a blow to Paris' head with a soft piece of iron, which killed him. Of course, the European, who was following closely behind Paris, is left unscathed, showing that the Europeans socio-economic power within Guyanese society is not challenged, but anger is reserved for the Mulattoes who have an advantage over the Africans due to their mixed heritage.

The dynamic between the European, the African and the Mulatto is also illustrated in the section of the story describing *Apata's* academic ambitions. The

¹⁰ Nicholas, Tracy. *Rastafari A Way of Life* (Chicago: School Time Publications, 1996) 19.

¹¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 24.

characters in the story clearly see education as a means of transcending one's social circumstance. This is a common perception of many within contemporary Caribbean societies as well—education, the great equalizer. Even among the scholars I have quoted, this is a common position. Early in the story, Apata is a student at Charlestown Secondary School in Georgetown and has the talent and the ambition to win a free place at King's College High School, which is the best school in Guyana for boys and would afford him greater academic opportunities.

He expresses this ambition to his girlfriend Beverly: " 'Beverly, when I get that free place to King's College, I'm going study harder. I'm going to win prizes and scholarships. I want to be like Mr. Norman Cameron, Beverly. I want to go to the University of Cambridge.' " Apata goes on to say, " 'When I return from England Bev I'm going to be a big man. You're going to be my Queen. I'll have a big house like those in Kingston, and I'll personally plant a garden of roses for you.' " ¹²

Apata makes a direct connection with being educated in England and becoming a "big man" and having a "big house". At this point, he has the naive perception that he can meet his ambitions despite his race. He also seeks social mobility at this stage rather than questioning the system where there is a divide between the rich and the poor—between those who have big houses and those who do not. The events that unfold throughout the story fundamentally change his perception, ambition and intent. The most significant factor in the evolution of his perception is the denial of a free place to him at King's College.

The series of events that lead to Apata's rebuff from King's College begin with an ongoing dispute between him and a fellow student at Charlestown Secondary

¹² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...35.

named "Wendell Vanier." The reader learns that Wendell Vanier is "...the son of Mr. Vanier, an ex-pork knocker who as a pork knocker had enough sense not to squander his fortune as many of his counterparts, now poverty-stricken, have done"¹³. "Pork knocker" is Guyanese slang for a small-scale gold miner. And so, Mr. Vanier seems to have been successful in his gold-mining and managed to escape from poverty. Mr. Vanier's ascendancy into the middle class seems to be the main impetus behind both his and his son's haughtiness. The Vaniers are representative of a light-skinned middle-class, contemptuous of the black peasantry, which Michael Apata represents. Both Michael Apata and Wendell Vanier play out this class and colour conflict early in the novel, competing academically, sparring verbally, and having two physical altercations. Ultimately, Apata is punished for his challenge to Vanier, just as the African peasantry is punished for their challenge of the coloured middle class.

The first words the reader hears from Vanier is an insult, referring to Apata as a " '...Black Buck Man.' "¹⁴ "Buck" is a racial slur against both Amerindian and African-Guyanese. Apata responds with a demand for respect due to him having Amerindian blood. Apata is clearly the more principled of two and attempts to take the higher ground when he encounters Vanier's provocations. Whenever Vanier insults Apata, reference is made to his blackness as though "blackness" were synonymous with negativity. Vanier calls Apata a " 'Black Bitch' "¹⁵ and the narrative is littered with other examples of "blackness" representing negativity.

Though Apata does not seem ill-tempered or irrational, he does seem to have a strong sense of pride and principle that would defeat any possibility of him backing down. Thus, it is inevitable that the class conflict between the two will descend into

¹³ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...55.

¹⁴ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...39.

¹⁵ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...41.

violence. In reference to the tension between the two, the narrator says, "He knows Vanier is prodding him for a fight. It has been like this a very long time. Their birth-signs do not agree in any way. Vanier always tries to cross his path." The narrator then goes on to say, "Apata ...keeps trying to preserve his good conduct as he's away from home. But the chap's pushing him and he, Apata, is only human."¹⁶ Inevitably, these two boys fight, but the fight is quickly parted before the arrival of the Indian Headmaster, Mr. Narish Jagnauth.

Vanier's competition with Apata goes far beyond the physical. The reader is told in the novel that, "This push against him has so far come from Vanier in all things. In school, particularly, the only student who ever beat Vanier, in terms of class grades, has been Apata. The 'bush man' as Vanier and his kind have continually thrown it."¹⁷ "Bush man" is meant to be an insult and makes reference to Apata's roots in the peasantry. And so, to be a peasant, just as it is to be black, is made to be disparaging. Furthermore, for a "bush man" to perform better than "Vanier and his kind" is an affront to the racial and socioeconomic hierarchy in Guyana, which says that white is better than black. Therefore, the Mulatto middleclass should out-perform the African peasantry, but Apata challenges this fallacy.

The following passage is significant in examining the relationship between race, class and academic advancement and Apata's defiance of the status quo:

'Who gets the highest mark? Apata? Michael Apata?'

'Yeah man, "bush man". That boy from Bartica.'

'De man good on land as well as on water.'

'Yeah...WE BOY! Charlestown High! WE BOY, man!'

¹⁶ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...40.

¹⁷ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...40.

'From Bartica to King's College!'

'WHO ELSE WIN FREE PLACE FROM THIS SCHOOL? WHO ELSE?'

'Vanier.'

'VANIER?'

'Yeah.'

'OH TAIL! APATA BEAT VANIER?'

'The man get the highest mark in the whole country, girl.'

'APATA? THE WHOLE COLONY?'

'You can't take it, nuh?'

'But that chap so so black and...'

'The boy face may be black, be he brains alright though.'

'I thought Vanier wouldah get that kind of marks Apata get.'

'Why? Because Vanier red and he father rich?'

'Vanier got all them new books that he's bring to school.'

'And Apata got all that brains he's bring to school!' ¹⁸

It is clear to see from this quote that Apata has surprised his school-mates, not only by scoring the highest marks on his exams in Guyana but, in the process of doing so, also scoring higher than Vanier. Reference is made to Apata's blackness in disbelief that one of his race/nationality could achieve such a feat. The students also make mention of him being from Bartica, a place that identifies him as a peasant and, in the eyes of his school mates, should correlate with failure rather than success. In

¹⁸ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...43.

contrast, the students are surprised at Vanier's performance, not because he was expected to fail but because he was expected to score higher than Apata, given his colour, class, and access to resources unavailable to the peasantry. The students take Apata's success as their own and give one of the few displays of racial pride in the novel. One of them says, " 'Mih boy Apata... 'B' stands for Blackman... 'B' stands for brains..."¹⁹ The confidence that the African peasantry exhibit in this instance is dangerous to the unjust system which maintains the status quo. In addition to a number of other factors, the African-Guyanese are kept in a lower socio-economic position because of a supreme lack of confidence. Individuals like Apata cannot be allowed to exist, so he is held back by the power structure despite his obvious talents.

In the midst of Vanier and Apata's battles, there are other characters in the story who provide an objective viewpoint. These characters are Indian and function as a neutral force in the story. They are neither of African or European heritage, and in this story, they provide an impartial mediator in the battle between the light-skinned and dark skinned inhabitants of Guyana. This narrative transpires during the colonial era, when Indians did not have the political might they have now. In Apata, the Indians have no power to change the power dynamic between Europeans and the African-Guyanese, but they are clearly sympathetic to the African-Guyanese character. One character who plays this role is the Indian Headmaster, Mr. Narish Jagnauth.

At this stage, it is necessary to mention some background and context to the discussion of the Indian presence in Guyana and the Caribbean in general. Eric Williams, in his monumental work, *From Columbus to Castro*, explains that the

¹⁹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...44.

European planters, after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, advocated for large scale immigration from India in order to sustain the sugar industry in the Caribbean. Despite some initial opposition, the planters got their wish after the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1838.²⁰ Williams writes,

Between 1838 and 1917, no fewer than 238,000 Indians were introduced into British Guiana, 145,000 into Trinidad, 21,500 into Jamaica, 39,000 into Guadeloupe, 34,000 into Surinam, 1,550 into St. Lucia, 1,820 into St. Vincent, 2,570 into Grenada. In 1859, there were 6,748 Indians in Martinique...a total introduction of nearly half a million Indians into the Caribbean.²¹

The racial tensions between Indians and Africans in Guyana are well known, but the seeds for that discord were planted in the purpose the planters intended for importing the indentured labour. Michael Craton writes,

There was now a sufficient supply of indentured immigrants to provide the necessary permanent force on the plantations, while there were also enough freed East Indians competing with black creoles for seasonal labour that the employees were guaranteed workers when they needed them at wages they considered affordable. Thus the employers enjoyed the luxury of a competitive labour pool, with the additional bonus (for them) of a competition increasingly with ethnic discord.²²

Craton goes on to say,

²⁰ Williams, Eric, *From Columbus to Castro* (Great Britain: Andre Deutsch, 1970) 347-48.

²¹ Williams, Eric, *From Columbus to Castro* (Great Britain: Andre Deutsch, 1970) 348.

²² Craton, Micheal, *Empire Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Ian Randle publishers, 1997) 389.

The immigration of East Indians had its most obvious effects in propping up, and in the cases of Trinidad and British Guiana even extending, a sugar industry threatened with decline. Also, in providing a new work-force of bound labourers and enlarging the competitive labour pool, it both reinforced the sociopolitical power of the planters and militated against any attempt by the wage-earning ex-slaves and liberated Africans (as well as the formerly indentured East Indians themselves) to become an effective proletariat.²³

Alvin O. Thompson further strengthens the view that planters sowed seeds for conflict saying, "From early days colonial policy aimed to create and exploit divisions among the ethnic groups, especially among the working people." He goes on to say that, "The contract workers were held in contempt not only because they were viewed as new categories of slaves, but also because they were often assigned jobs which special slaves or free persons would otherwise be employed to perform."²⁴ Indians and Africans' lack of unity clearly works against both groups' self interest.

In an essay called, "Labour and Society in the Nineteenth Century," Francisco Scarano writes,

In British Guiana...the workers organized fairly widespread labor stoppages in 1842...and again in 1848. But while the first of these appears to have fulfilled at least some of the strikers' objectives, the second, which erupted after the arrival in British Guiana of nearly 6,000 contract workers from the Portuguese island of Madeira, was

²³ Craton, Micheal, ... 390.

²⁴ Thompson. Alvin, *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997) 218-219.

much less successful because the contract workers weakened the freedman's leverage vis-à-vis the planters.²⁵

Alvin Thompson is careful not to blame the Indians or Africans for this but squarely puts the blame on the planters while optimistically contemplating the potential of an Indo-African unity: "...had the working groups been able to form durable alliances they could have been a powerful bargaining force against the planters. The latter, however made sure that such alliances never emerged..."²⁶ In the post-emancipation era, authors of *the Other Side of Paradise*, obviously opposed to the Burnham government of Guyana, speak to the politicians' role in racial conflict:

Despite the shared problems of the Guyanese people, the widespread repression combined with political bickering and racial animosity have previously prevented the creation of a broad-based coalition to oppose the unpopular government. But one beneficial result of state capitalism has been the increased unity of the Indo-Guyanese sugar workers and the Afro-Guyanese bauxite workers employed by the government. Groups of workers in the two industries have set up "unity committees" to coordinate strikes and distribute scarce food. The Burnham regime has tried to foment racial divisions to prevent unified political opposition, but the economic deterioration of Guyana

²⁵ Scarano, Fransico A, "Labor and Society in the Nineteenth Century" *The Modern Caribbean.*, Ed. Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer (Chapel Hill: The university of North Carolina press, 1989) 69.

²⁶ Thompson, Alvin, *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997) 216.

has worked to build a feeling of solidarity between the two main racial groups.²⁷

This quote, while recognizing forces determined to divide the Indian and African, confirms that, indeed, Indians and Africans have successfully formed partnerships in Guyana. Perhaps, this spirit of unity is what Harold Bascom draws on in creating the character, Mr. Narish Jagnauth, who clearly is sympathetic to Apata, an African Guyanese.

Mr Jagnauth gives the reader an objective view of the conflict between Apata and Vanier, symbolizing the conflict between African and Coloured and the peasantry and the middle class. The text reveals Mr. Jagnauth's attitude towards Vanier. After Vanier and Apata's fight is parted the text says, Jaggy [Mr. Jagnauth] looks intently at his pair of fighters. Vanier looks as though he has had the worst of it. Something about that makes Jagnauth feel good.²⁸ We get further insight into the Headmaster's attitude towards Wendell Vanier when the narrator says, "...his boy...", in reference to Vanier, "...in Jagnauth's estimation, is spoilt."²⁹ The narrator goes on to say of Mr. Jagnauth, "He watches young Vanier intently and wonders if the boy's lightness of skin helps to spoil his mind." When Apata tells the Head Master that Vanier is "insultive and vindictive," the narrator says that "To Jagnauth, it is not a suprising thing to hear that Vanier is insultive" Mr. Jagnauth then recalls a story where Gordon Vanier, Wendell's father, having come into money, rejected his own mother saying, "TOUCH ME NOT WOMAN ... FOR POVERTY IS CONTAGIOUS' ".³⁰ Mr.

²⁷ Barry, Tom, Beth Wood and Deb Preusch, *The Other Side of Paradise* (New York: Grove Press, 1984) 328.

²⁸ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986) 42.

²⁹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 55.

³⁰ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 60.

Jagnauth's observations and conclusions about the Vaniers draw connections between their lightness of skin, their socio-economic status, and their unpleasant behaviour.

The relationship between colour, class and character is consistent throughout the novel. One example of this is seen early in the novel where a boat captain, described by the narrator as a "...ruddy-skinned Negro,"³¹ is confronted by one of his passengers who, upon boarding his vessel, says, " 'OH CHRIST, MAN! YOU NEARLY PUSH ME IN THE RIVER, MAN! OH GOD, MAN, YOU BORN IN A PIG PEN? OR IS BECAUSE YO' RED?'"³² This quote illustrates a passenger who concludes that the Captain's rude behaviour is either due to his lightness of skin or because he is somehow likened to a pig.

The comparison of the Mulatto to a pig does not end with the passenger's insult to the red-skinned boat captain, but continues later in the story when Apata and others visit Georgetown's Education Office. As Vanier, Apata, and an Indian boy named Cecil Gunraj wait to see Edward Carrington, the European responsible for admissions into King's College, they observe Ms. Hamilton, the secretary, being rude to "...an old Negro woman with a swollen foot wrapped in a brown gauze-like material." Apparently, this woman has come to the office for some money that is owed to her but is discourteously dismissed by Ms. Hamilton, whom the text describes as having "...a kind of skin hue of golden brown."³³ The narrator goes on to say of Ms. Hamilton, "Her hair is straight and piled high in a sophisticated style. Her face is heavily made up and lends a coldness to her personality."³⁴ The author is careful to give detail, not just of the colour of her skin, but her hairstyle and makeup,

³¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 17.

³² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 18.

³³ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 60.

³⁴ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 60.

which seems to be an accompaniment to her middle class position, along with her bad attitude.

Apata responds to her behaviour by saying, " 'Some of these people in responsible positions really hoggish.' "³⁵ Ms. Hamilton is described here as "hoggish", which is reminiscent of the passenger's description of the Boat Captain earlier in the story as being "...born in a pig pen."³⁶ Apata associates her behaviour with having a "responsible position", which seems to be another way of saying a middle-class position. While Apata seeks to defend the "old Negro woman" who obviously represents the same class as he, Vanier attacks the woman saying, " 'I don't know why them kinda people come into clean offices like this.' "³⁷ This comment puts Vanier and Apata into direct conflict as they play out their class allegiances. Apata responds saying, " 'What's so clean about this office man?'... 'People like that painted up red hog at that desk?' "³⁸ In this instance, Apata makes reference to her skin colour and her make-up when calling her a hog, further cementing the connection between race, class, and temperament. Vanier seeks to embarrass Apata by informing Ms. Hamilton of what his rival has said, which leads to Apata striking him, and a fight ensues. Cecil Gunraj, the Indian character and neutral force, tries to part the two, but not before the European, Edward Carrington notices them. The result is that Apata is denied a place to King's College, but Vanier is given a place.

Immediately after Apata's hopes of attending King's College are dashed, he laments the injustice of his plight to Gunraj saying, " 'Both of us should have been

³⁵ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 60.

³⁶ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 18.

³⁷ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 60-61.

³⁸ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 61.

disqualified from entry, Gunraj. It isn't fair.' ”³⁹ Gunraj, like Mr. Jagnauth, is clearly sympathetic with Apata. The text says,

In Gunraj heart he feels a great anxiety. Today he has seen how evil the world can be. He was there and saw what Wendell Vanier did to Michael Apata. Gunraj feels the hurtfulness of what has happened and wonders how, then, the dark-skinned boy must feel, having been unjustly victimized.⁴⁰

It is clear that Gunraj can acknowledge the injustice due to Apata, but the reader cannot see a point in the text where Gunraj, Mr. Jagnauth, or any other Indian in the narrative openly confronts the European upper-class in response to this injustice. In this way, the Indian in the story displays impotence. They choose simply to stand on the sideline and watch the battle between the Africans, Europeans, and Coloureds. Gunraj says, "I know it ent fair man Apata. Boy you ent got luck." "⁴¹ The narrator then confirms Gunraj's impotence by saying, "Gunraj feels stupid and inadequate for having nothing to say that might help his unfortunate acquaintance."⁴² Gunraj illustrates the lack of fairness but is unable to condemn those responsible. He reduces the situation to a matter of luck, to which Apata appropriately responds, "I don't think is luck man." "⁴³ Rather it is a system that has been constructed on a racial hierarchy where Europeans progress and Africans are held back.

Edward Carrington himself acknowledged his role in holding back Apata, and it is implied that this is due to his race. He and his wife have a frank exchange about the incident. Carrington says to his wife,

³⁹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 62.

⁴⁰ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 62.

⁴¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 62.

⁴² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 62.

⁴³ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 62.

'I still cannot stand Kaffirs,' he says, 'especially when they're dark and carry a savage Africanism about their faces, animal cruelty on their brows and thick grotesque lips.' He sighs.

'But Edward, you must fight against that part of yourself. OH, EDWARD!'

... 'This morning...' he says, 'I broke the pen and hanged the chances of a brilliant Black who should have been allowed a chance to go to the best school here for boys...'

'King's College?'

He nods.

'What was he like?'

'Like a terrible black jungle cat.' ⁴⁴

In this quote, Edward Carrington shows his disgust for the African people of the world, using the term, 'Kaffir', a derogatory word for African people. He obviously detests all that is African and associates anything African with negativity. This short quote is filled with examples of disparaging language in reference to African people. He speaks about the "...savage Africanism about their faces, animal cruelty on their brows and thick grotesque lips." "Savage", "animal", "cruelty", "grotesque", and "terrible black jungle cat"⁴⁵ are all words and phrases that describe African people from the perspective of racist Europeans.

Racism is a concept which emerged out of slavery, using the myth of African inferiority to justify the oppression of the African by the European. John Henrik

⁴⁴ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 69.

⁴⁵ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 69.

Clarke confirms this in his book, *Christopher Columbus and the Afrikan Holocaust*.

He says,

The European, coming from a society where nature was rather stingy and where he had to compete with his brother for his breakfast, his land, and his woman, had acquired a competitive nature that the African could not deal with. In order to justify the destruction of these African societies, a monster that still haunts our lives was created. This monster was racism. The slave trade and the colonial system that followed are the parents of this catastrophe.⁴⁶

Samuel Kennedy Yeboah further cements the point. In reference to European aggression against African people during the era of slavery, Yeboah states,

For those who perpetrated such acts of bestiality, a rational justification had to be found, for surely, those laying claims to being humans, could not otherwise inflict such savage and barbarous acts of inhumanity on other innocent human beings! The justification was what later came to be known as ‘the doctrine of inherent black inferiority’. The black man, it was claimed, was inherently inferior and could not, therefore, be accorded equality of treatment with the white man. The white slave traders could consequently not be bound by the same ethical and moral codes when dealing with black people.⁴⁷

Yeboah goes into great detail explaining how various European scientists and theorists sought to prove the inferiority of the black man. In summation, he writes,

⁴⁶ Clarke, John, H., *Christopher Columbus and the Afrikan Holocaust* (New York: A & B Publishers Group, 1993) 58.

⁴⁷ Yeboah, Samuel. *The Ideology of Racism* (London: Hansib, 1988) 44.

The early scientific racists thus offered ‘scientific evidence’ which had the effect of defining colour, not as an identifying mark of a class of people (eg blondes, brunettes, etc.) but as a cause of inherent inferior characteristics. The ideological origin and nature of the doctrine of inherent black inferiority had become most effectively obscured! The doctrine was now enshrined in ‘science’. As the influence of Christian dogma waned and ‘Thus said the Lord’ no longer conclusively settled all the arguments, *science* became the new authoritative voice; and as the status of science increased, so did the belief in ‘scientific’ theories of which the doctrine of black inferiority was one. An ideology generated within an economic (social) relationship to justify the Europeans brutality to, and exploitation of, the African had now penetrated the cultural (social) relationship.⁴⁸

As the reader clearly can see, racism is a myth created to help facilitate the exploitation of one group by another. This myth was spread and infected colonials, such as Edward Carrington, as they administered colonial policy. The following quote by Yeboah illustrates this process accurately:

These theories were to have a profound influence on the formation of social attitudes and the course of race relations in Africa, America, Britain and elsewhere. For in future the blackman was to be stereotyped and categorized into a pigeon-hole of ‘inferiority’ not on the basis of the individual’s personality, intellectual capability, or

⁴⁸ Yeboah, Samuel. *The Ideology of Racism* (London: Hansib, 1988) 59.

inherent talent, but on the basis of membership of a class defined by an immutable natural characteristic: skin color.⁴⁹

The myth of racism, spoken about by both Clarke and Yeboah says that Europeans are civilized and Africans are savages, Europeans are beautiful and Africans grotesque, and Europeans are intelligent but Africans are animals. These ideas give philosophical support to the hierarchical system where Europeans are in power and Africans are powerless. And this racist philosophy underpins the actions that the powerful take to maintain the status quo.

A perfect illustration of this comes from Edward Carrington, who even acknowledges that Apata is "...a brilliant Black who should have been allowed a chance to go to the best school here for boys..."⁵⁰ but still chooses to keep him back. While Edward Carrington is clearly a racist, what is of more concern is that he is in a position of power to determine who progresses in Guyana. And of course, Apata, who is representative of the oppressed African world, is held back and Vanier, who is representative of the Mulatto middle-class, is allowed to progress.

Not only is Apata disallowed from attending King's College, but his best friend, Gerald Tross, is disallowed as well. In contrast to Apata, Gerald is not held back by a powerful European like Edward Carrington, but by his own African father, Ulric Tross. The circumstances that shape Ulric's decision to remove Gerald from King's College are all directly related to the contradictions in Guyanese society involving race and class. Ulric Tross is a peasant farmer that lives in a rural area, and his brother, Frederick Tross, is a teacher at King's College, living in the city. Gerald, Ulric's son, is a talented young African-Guyanese who got an opportunity to go to

⁴⁹ Yeboah, Samuel. *The Ideology of Racism* (London: Hansib, 1988) 59.

⁵⁰ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 69.

King's College through the assistance of his uncle, Frederick, as well as his own academic prowess. Gerald is caught between his father and uncle, which in essence is a class conflict. Ulric has decided that Gerald will not go to King's College any longer unless he scores the highest academic marks in his class. If he does not accomplish this unlikely feat, he will return to the village of Parika and help his father with his farm. Ulric's decision is based on his negative opinion of his brother and, essentially, the African-Guyanese middle-class.

Ulric does not want his son to become like his brother, who has joined the middle-class through his educational achievements and cultural integration. Ulric does not like Frederick's taste in music or his choice of a white woman for a wife. While Ulric speaks an English based creole, which is most common among the majority African and peasant population, Frederick speaks what is generally accepted as Standard English, most common among the European, the Coloured and African middle-class. The following passage describing Parika, where Ulric and his family are from, highlights the social and cultural difference between Frederick and Ulric:

Parika is a farming village. Here the land is sacred and the average person is a farmer and talks of the soil. The average person here is close to the soil and has no craving to speak Queen's English. Here, at Parika village, it is known that the Georgetown city dwellers claim that they have fun listening to the broken-English speech patterns—the creolese of the deep-country dwellers. But here at Parika there's no great value to proper delivery. The only ones villagers here expect

proper delivery from are the school people, the Headmaster and his teachers choked with bow ties and respectability.⁵¹

This quote speaks of the farmer from the country, of whom Ulric is an example, and the city dweller from Georgetown, of whom Frederick is an example. The emphasis is placed here on the speech patterns of both villager and city dweller, which represent the social and cultural divide among the two groups. The city dwellers make fun of the villagers for their speech and the villagers reject the "Queen's English" which represents the culture of the European ruling class and colonizer. It is only within the realm of education where such speech is permitted, highlighting the school's role in the Africans' assimilation into European culture.

The Kenyan scholar, Ngugi Wa Thiongo'o, illustrates this cultural conflict very clearly in his book, *Decolonising the Mind*. Ngugi writes about experiencing education in his native tongue and the trauma he and other young Kenyans were subjected to when the language was changed to English. He writes,

...all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all others had to bow before it in deference.⁵²

Ngugi goes on to speak about the degrading of his native tongue:

...one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment—three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks— or

⁵¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 78.

⁵² Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1981) 11.

was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY.⁵³

Conversely, the use of English was treated differently. Ngugi writes,

the attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige, applause; the ticket to higher realms. English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, sciences, and all the other branches of learning. English became the main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education.⁵⁴

Ngugi sums up this process by saying, "Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds."⁵⁵ Ngugi illuminates the problem that Ulric Tross rebels against: the destruction of the African world.

Similarly, Caribbean scholars have touched on the problem of language and European cultural dominance in Caribbean societies. The subject is discussed in Rex Nettleford's book, *Cultural Action and Social Change*. In reference to Jamaica and the conflict that exists between Standard English and Dialect, Nettleford says, "Linguistic autonomy becomes the pride of a people and some would even die in defence of it."⁵⁶ Here, one has no choice but to think of Ulric, who seems willing to die in defence of his "creolese." Nettleford goes on to say, "Most Jamaicans speak their native-born, native-bred tongue—'patois' or 'Jamaican Talk'—most of the time. But it is Standard English of the metropolitan brand which, though functionally a

⁵³ Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1981) 11.

⁵⁴ Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, ... 12.

⁵⁵ Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, ... 12.

⁵⁶ Nettleford, Rex M., *Cultural Action & Social Change* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1979) 13.

second language, is culturally mandatory if one is to get on in the society.”⁵⁷ Here, Nettleford speaks directly to the role of the use of language in education in stifling Jamaicans’ social progress. He continues,

The institutional guarantee through the O-level/A-level British school-leaving examinations...is reinforcing. This has led in the past to a serious neglect...of closer examination of the learning needs, language-wise, of the Jamaican child whose first language is, after all, his creole tongue. The question is yet to be answered as to how many are the young humans who have been relegated to stations of lifelong inferiority or a sense of irredeemably low status because their own linguistic potential has not been properly explored?⁵⁸

Nettleford further establishes the point: “But what excuse can there be for depriving him of his rich native tongue forged out of the specifics of his and his forbears’ experience simply to make room for what is consecrated the universal and powerful language?”⁵⁹ And in what can be an effective closing argument to the debate of language, Nettleford writes that the

...problem is not simply the matter of the call for mandatory fulfillment of proficiency in the use of the master’s tongue now seen by some to be a universal necessity, but rather the threat that the unrelieved promotion of such cultural manifesto poses for that self-realisation and hope of independent discovery in the world of human expression through the use of the languages that are themselves the organic linguistic expression of the vast majority of the people of

⁵⁷ Nettleford, Rex M., ... 13.

⁵⁸ Nettleford, Rex M., ... 13.

⁵⁹ Nettleford, Rex M., ... 14.

Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean. The negation of a much hankered after cultural diversity is one thing; the continuing effort to effect the final deculturation of masses of Caribbean people another.⁶⁰

The “deculturation” that Nettleford refers to here is essentially what Ulric Tross is rebelling against. Though not possessing a sophisticated understanding of the problem or the solution, he clearly rejects the loss of the local dialect and local culture in general.

The text in *Apata* not only addresses class and language but also the peasants relationship with the land. The narrator states,

The villagers send their children to school for it is always a good thing to be able to read and write and it is a good thing if, through the magic of education, a man has a doctor or a lawyer in the family. But those are side things because farming and the land come first. The Indians and the Negroes are farmers here; and the Negroes here, unlike those in the city, are not foolish as the city Negro who feels that to love the land and be a farmer is to be insignificantly peasant.⁶¹

This quote illustrates the dilemma of education within the village. The villagers accept education as a means of broadening the knowledge and skills of the community, but reject the cultural suicide and the contempt for the peasant that accompanies such education. Ulric is a patriot of the village and will not allow his son, Gerald, to become a member of the middle-class and reject the culture that is indigenous to him as his uncle Frederick has done.

⁶⁰ Nettleford, Rex M., ... 15.

⁶¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 78.

The following exchange between Ulric and Frederick further expounds on class and cultural conflict which is illustrated throughout the novel:

'Why is it,' Frederick was saying, 'you suddenly want Gerald to do farming in the height of his schooling Ulric?'

'Ah tellin' yo' that if he ent pass what he going do? Just keep going to school and in de end get wan office job? Fuh play bigsass pon he own country people? NOT ONE BACKSIDE FREDDY ! De other-day some ah dem Georgetown office people come round tekking something dem ah call census and dem hinsult plenty ah' we ah Parika village! Office man? Me nah want Geral' foh tum office man.'

'Then why didn't you, in the first place, keep him in Parika and get him used to the cows and pasture life?'

'CAREFUL HOW YO' TALK CHAP! The farmer threatened, 'NAH TRY TO HINSULT ME, YEH!⁶²

In this dialogue, Ulric justifies halting Gerald's education by saying that he does not want his son to get a job in an office, where such an education will most likely lead. He then speaks about how some people in office positions came to Parika and insulted many people in the village. This is consistent with other parts of the novel where those who have middle-class positions are insulting towards the peasantry. This was the case in Edward Carrington's office with the secretary, Ms. Hamilton's behaviour towards the African woman and also with the insulting behaviour of Vanier, whose father is middle-class and who will most likely acquire a middle-class position. It is significant that in this dialogue Ulric warns Frederick not

⁶² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 46.

to insult him, which illustrates that this antagonistic relationship between the middle class and the peasantry even extends into the family. Ulric goes on to explain why he let Gerald go to King's College initially, giving insight into the peasantry's desire for social mobility through education:

'Hear, hear. When mih see how you tek education and get scholarship and to go away, mih tell mihsel', 'Ulric, you has a good boy...Gerald' making proper good marks in de village primary school, and he passing he exams good, nah hol' am back.' Yes, dat is what I did tell mihsel'. Ah wanted mih boy to take in education like you Freddy, mih was always proud o' you, ah wanted mih boy Gerald to study and get bright and go away and come back with a lovely White wife. Dat is why when the opportunity show de way that I send Gerald to King's College high school as you help me do.'⁶³

What Ulric's explanation clearly shows is that those in the peasantry identify social progress as having the ability to leave Guyana and go to a white country, most likely England, Guyana's colonizer, and obtain academic qualifications. This is even consistent with Apata's ambition early in the novel where he expressed a desire to go to Cambridge University. This education from the white country will thus enable individuals to rise beyond their humble beginnings and join the ranks of the middle class. Again, this is consistent with Apata's dreams of returning to Guyana and having a big house. And of course, to most in the peasantry, the pinnacle of success is marrying a white person, a clear sign that one has integrated into the white world.

⁶³ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 46.

The scholar, George Beckford, gives profound insight into the interplay between education and class illustrated in the conflict between Ulric and his brother Frederick. He writes,

Among the ranks of black people educational opportunities opened up more for the half-castes than for the rest. What limited social mobility they could achieve as a result depended in large measure on the extent to which they could succeed in divorcing the culture of black people and assimilate that of the whites. This set the stage for a dynamic process by which black people sought social mobility by aspiring continuously to a European way of life. Education, residence, manners of speech and dress, religious beliefs and practice, social values and attitudes, and general life style all served to distinguish blacks who had 'made it' from those who had not. The white sub-culture of plantation society was thereby reinforced by the joining of the club by some of the blacks. But even so the caste line still prevents their total acceptance by the dominant white class.⁶⁴

Clearly, this quote accurately describes Frederick, who exhibits many of the characteristics described here, and, potentially, Gerald, if he was allowed to attend King's college. Beckford continues,

The sub-culture of the rest of the black people has remained basically that which they developed on the slave plantation. Consequently, plantation societies today maintain the traditional features of stratification by color and race, as well as a certain degree of social

⁶⁴ Beckford, George. *Persistent Poverty* (Kingston: West Indies UP, 1972) 64-67.

integration. All black people in these societies regard the white European culture as superior and, in a dynamic sense, they all aspire to it. Those still fully immersed in the plantation sub-culture aspire to getting their children away from it, even if they see no possibility of getting 'out' themselves.⁶⁵

This quote also is clear in illustrating the psychological motivation for Ulric, who is “fully immersed in the plantation sub-culture, initially deciding to get Gerald “away from it.” However, Ulric’s ambitions for Gerald are destroyed for very specific reasons. Similar to Apata, whose unjust treatment at the hands of Edward Carrington seemed to have sparked greater insight into the racial nature of Guyana’s unfair social system, Ulric’s state of mind was transformed on the basis of his experience with his brother's white wife. Apparently, Frederick's wife, Pat, makes Frederick and Ulric's mother use the back door rather than the front door when entering her home, a policy that Ulric finds offensive. Ulric recalls the incident when he sees Frederick's wife, saying,

'Look at she! Ugly pink-faced bitch! Always telling the old lady that she jus' polish the front and if she could please use the friggin' back door. Always tryin' to explain 'bout de kind-ah polish rass! Then always skinnin' she blasted teeth and tellin' the old lady that she's part of the family and could come through the back door without minding ... RASS LIKE SHE! Me boy ent going to be no poonks to marry one ah dem rank rass. Is bes' me boy be a man like me than to grow to be a rass like Frederick! Don't even come to see the old people much. He

⁶⁵ Beckford, George. ... 67.

wife can't stand de dust. Oh she's allergerick ... allerajic ... whatever the bleddy word is ... to dust!'⁶⁶

Ulric is clearly quite hostile towards Frederick's European wife, using insults with reference to her colour. The reader is told that Pat teaches at King's College, clearly a prestigious institution. But Ulric pays more attention to her social relationship to his family and community. When Pat requests that Ulric and Frederick's mother use the back door rather than the front, it implies that the mother is of a lower social position and not worthy of respect. It is reminiscent of the days of slavery when African people could not use the front door. In addition to that, the suggestion that the polished floor is more significant than showing hospitality to a guest is in itself demeaning.

Gerald, though told nothing of the conflict between Ulric and Frederick, manages to conclude that this has to do with Pat and her treatment of his grandmother:

From what he has seen of her Gerald has come to a conclusion. It relates to the growing coldness between his father and his uncle and it could have something to do with the fact that twice his uncle's wife has asked his grandmother to use the back entrance. Both times Gerald was home. As a matter of fact, he was polishing the floor when the 'both times' happened. He felt bad about the incident. He knew that his grandmother felt bad about them. He was sure that Pat, his uncle's wife, knew that asking her mother-in-law to use the back door might cause trouble. This was evident in the great pains she took when she

⁶⁶ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 49.

patronized the old, grey-headed lady with the tired gait. It is something which angers Gerald Tross even now.⁶⁷

Here, Gerald confirms that Pat's actions were unwelcome by himself, his father, and grandmother. In Gerald's estimation Pat must have been aware of the inappropriateness of her actions, and so, "...he wonders if her concern about the polish had not been used as a means of veiling her disrespect for a Black woman who was, probably, no more than a common native in her European estimation." In addition to this insight, "Gerald is sure that there were many times when he only just missed the look of scorn on her face every time she had to hold his grandmother's hand in greeting."⁶⁸

Gerald can clearly see the haughtiness of the European woman towards the African grandmother, but still is not confident in his conclusions because this woman who is apparently hateful towards Africans is married to an African herself. A baffled Gerald thinks to himself, "Why? How is it she's married to his uncle when she apparently doesn't like Black people?"⁶⁹ Thinking wishfully, he hopes that he is wrong: "It would be good if I'm wrong for if I'm right I would be rather confused because Uncle Frederick's a Negro too."⁷⁰ Gerald's confusion is due to a lack of understanding of the cultural suicide which is necessary for the African middle-class to make in their alliance with the white elite.

The African-Guyanese middleclass, a small sector of the population, dislikes the culture of the African-Guyanese peasantry and African Guyanese workers, who are the vast majority in Guyana. So, it is not unusual for Frederick to be with a

⁶⁷ Bascom, Harold. *Apata*...52-53.

⁶⁸ Bascom, Harold. *Apata*...53.

⁶⁹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata*...52.

⁷⁰ Bascom, Harold. *Apata*...53.

woman who hates black people as well. He and his wife are unified in this hate. The psychology of Frederick in his union with Pat deserves additional comment.

Frantz Fanon commits a whole chapter of his monumental work, *Black Skin White Masks*, to “the Man of Color and the White Woman.” His opening paragraphs capture perfectly the psychological rationalization for Frederick’s choice of wife:

Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white. I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white. Now—and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged—who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization.... I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.⁷¹

A clearer description of Frederick’s motivations could not be found.

Frederick’s marriage to Pat is the ultimate confirmation of his assimilation into the European culture and acceptance into the European world. It is clear that Gerald's father is opposed to this cultural negation and, thus, seeks to distance his son from Frederick once he recognizes the influence he has on his son. The text says,

...he heard the strange, quick-running slippery music that made his brother wave his hands effeminately in front of him whilst he closed his eyes. White man music! England! He remembered one time when

⁷¹ Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Mask* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 63.

his son Gerald came home from the city and was listening to the same kind of running slippery music. Whilst he had listened he had done the same things with his hands as his uncle Frederick. Puzzled, he had asked his son, 'What kind-a music you ah listen to, and wave up you' han like-ah dem woman?' And Gerald had replied, 'Symphony music Daady! This is good music, the real music! He remembered that his son had closed his eyes like Frederick and like Frederick, too, uttered strange phrases that sounded like 'Okrus', or 'Opus eleven' and 'Beetleoven' and 'Monzurt'.⁷²

While, Ulric's removal of Gerald from King's College may not shift the power dynamics in Guyana or make any significant difference in the status of the African peasantry, it is clear that he will not allow his son to be on the side of the African middleclass. Ulric has made it clear where his allegiance lies—he stands with the majority, those inhabitants of Guyana who have been relegated to the lowest social position within a power structure controlled by Europeans. Ulric's brother Frederick has chosen to stand with the middle-class which gains its prominence in society through its relationship with Europeans and conformity to European culture and conventions.

As is the case with Frederick, race has a profound influence over whom one wants to marry in Guyana. As a result of the European's dominance in Guyanese society, as well as the world, some African-Guyanese seek social acceptance and mobility through their romantic relationship with the European. In addition to the social benefits, the Africans desire the Europeans because they perceive the

⁷² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 48.

Europeans to be more beautiful, due to the historical process through which the African's image was slandered and the European's image celebrated. So, the closer individuals are to white, the more desirable they will be.

In a book called *Brainwashed*, Tom Burrell discusses why black features are not considered beautiful and the impact that has on the black community. He says, “many of us have been conditioned to believe that whites are the pretty people, that their traits and physical attributes are more suitable than our own ugly features.”⁷³ He goes on to explain the features of the black image, which are frowned upon, such as the nose and lips—“if a nose is too wide or too flat, it’s the direct opposite of the white standard—narrow and prominently bridged. The bigger the lips, the more our appearance becomes the antithesis of the accepted thinner European mouth.” Burrell also mentions the skin—“we find ourselves using a sliding scale, somewhere between black and white, with lighter or whiter always defined as better”—and hair—“ ‘fixing that nappy hair’ is to cover up, or ‘cure,’ the scourge of blackness.”⁷⁴ Burrell speaks about “...the centuries of brainwashing that equated black with ugly, inferior, and undesirable.”⁷⁵ He gives examples of how African Americans

...were bombarded with images and words that stigmatized our appearance as the byproduct of a virulent disease. At the same time, the aesthetic superiority of white beauty—alabaster skin, sleek noses, silver-thin lips, and straight, lustrous hair—was widely promoted as the absolute standard of beauty.⁷⁶

⁷³ Burrell, Tom, *Brainwashed* (Carlsbad: Smiley Books, 2010) 66.

⁷⁴ Burrell, Tom...67.

⁷⁵ Burrell, Tom...68.

⁷⁶ Burrell, Tom...69.

He goes on to say, "The color grading and class stratification structure intensified under the plantation system. Division among slaves was aggravated by the privileges some slavemasters awarded their light-skinned offspring. Even if the slaver didn't acknowledge his children, the known fact they were spawns of the perceived superior race solidified, in some instances, skin color as an indicator of status on the plantation."⁷⁷

The perception that African features are ugly is evident within the text. Apata has a romantic interest named Beverley. In the beginning of the narrative Apata, who is dark skinned, asks Beverley, "if you did red...you-you'd like me?"⁷⁸ This statement does not question his own loyalty to the African peasantry, but Beverley's loyalty. Apata questions if her skin colour was lighter, signifying that she had an image more closely associated with Europeans, whether that would impact her relationship with him. The expectation is that a lighter skinned woman would not be with a darker skinned man, so Apata asks Beverley the question. Apata knows that Beverley loves him, but his question speaks to the depth in which the society is entrenched in racist philosophy. Immediately following Apata's question, he shows regret for his statement saying, "What nonsense questions I ask you sometimes Beverley?"⁷⁹ His regret is due to the recognition that Beverley is worthy of his confidence, and later in the narrative, Beverley's devotion to Apata is tested and proven.

Beverley's mother, Mrs. Pearl Bailey, is completely opposed to her daughter's romantic relationship with Apata. There is a strong implication in the text that her disapproval is due to Apata's racial and class status as a dark skinned boy from the

⁷⁷ Burrell, Tom...

⁷⁸ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 34.

⁷⁹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...34.

peasantry. The narrator says of Mrs. Bailey, "She knows that there's a tenderness between her daughter and Michael, but she doesn't like it."⁸⁰

The narrator goes on to describe Mrs. Bailey's romantic ambitions for her daughter: "There's a boy who Mrs. Bailey hopes Beverley would take to. He is the son of Mr. Bernard the milk man."⁸¹ Mr. Bernard's son, Dennis is clearly a member of the light-skinned, privileged middle class in the village and a mother's obvious choice for her daughter's husband, if she sought escape from her racial and class status. The narrator first describes Dennis' parents, bringing attention to his genetic makeup: "Mr. Bernard is part Indian part Portuguese part Chinese and a whole lot of Negro. His wife is a brown-skinned woman, mixed also, who was a runner-up, some years ago, in a popular beauty contest. Having come together they produced quite a handsome boy by a European yardstick of judgement." The narrator goes on to say, "Dennis skin is creamy. The pupils of his eyes are hazel. His hair is like an Ethiopian's and his manner is as tender as his voice is tender."⁸² The narrator is careful to say that Dennis is handsome based on a European concept of what is attractive. It would seem that Beverley's mother, Mrs. Bailey, abides by the European standard, while her daughter does not, causing conflict between the two.

Along with Dennis' genetic makeup, his socio-economic status is a significant factor for Mrs. Bailey. Dennis' father is quoted as saying to his son, "boy, when me dead you getting all them cow you see grazing on dat dam, you getting the butcher shop downstairs and the two in the market..."⁸³ Dennis is ensured a secure financial future due to his father's assets and so would his future wife. The narrator blatantly

⁸⁰ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...71.

⁸¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...72.

⁸² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...72.

⁸³ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...72.

states what can already be clearly seen as Mrs. Bailey's motivation for favoring Dennis saying,

...her mother likes Dennis and wishes her daughter, who'd soon be grown enough, could see him as a future husband. Inheritance is lined up for him. The procreation of children with opportune skin hues seem lined up too. And those are things, main things, Negro mothers can find themselves hoping to happen to their daughters in this time.⁸⁴

As the quote states, this method of escaping from the social and economic hardship is common among "Negro mothers." This desire for "white" and rejection of "black" is a common theme throughout the novel, and it ultimately results in the black peasantry's hatred of themselves.

What makes Beverley so significant is that she rejects this self-hatred which permeates her environment, affirming her devotion to Apata and, symbolically, to the black peasantry. When Beverley informs her mother that Apata wants to marry her, she is confronted with her mother's self-hatred but holds steadfastly to her romantic commitment. In response to Michaels's desire to marry Beverley, Mrs. Bailey is quoted as saying to her daughter, " 'NOT OVER MY DEAD BODY BEV'LEY!...NOT THAT MICHAEL!' "She goes on to say," "...YOU ENT MARRYING THAT UGLY BLACK-FACE CHAP. AND FURTHER MORE I DON'T WANT HIM VISITING HERE.' " In addition to insulting Apata, Mrs. Bailey calls Beverley, " '...YOU AMBITIONLESS THING!' " ⁸⁵ Beverley, however, remains grounded in her dedication to Apata saying, " 'is only Michael I would ever marry. And Mommy, you can't make me marry anybody else but who I want to

⁸⁴ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...73.

⁸⁵ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...91.

marry.’⁸⁶ Beverley’s commitment is admirable, but, ultimately, she is prevented from marrying the man that she loves. Apata is rejected yet again due to his race and class, which sets the stage for what is to follow: resistance.

⁸⁶ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ...91.

Apata: Black Resistance

Through various examples, the text demonstrates that there is a racial hierarchy in British Guiana. The white people occupy the highest socio-economic position in the country, the black people the lowest, and the Mulatto somewhere in between. As a young person, Apata is naive to this racial hierarchy, but his innocence is lifted in the face of outright racial discrimination. Once confronted with the reality of the slavelike position reserved for him in Guyanese society, he decides to resist.

His resistance first reveals itself ideologically. In Apata's reflection of the relationship between blacks and whites, the text says,

he had told himself that White men felt that all Negroes could have been symbolized as nails to be driven in with consecutive hammer blows until some great White thing began to hold together. Nails to be driven, though, if by chance, buckle partly in, are to be clawed out and discarded without thought.¹

This is an interesting development in Apata's thinking, for he has realized that the very purpose of his life, and the lives of all other blacks, is to serve the interests of white people. When they fail to serve those interests, they are discarded. The text goes on to describe Apata's realization of his place in the world:

...he had reflected on how he had become a true nail. It was after he had lost the house at Bartica to the very Portugese businessman who had ruined his grandfather. It was after the years on the interior rivers as a diamond diver and later tug boat crewman. It was after he had

¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* (London: Heinemann Educational books, 1986) 111.

been chased from Beverley's home and had walked away into a madness of a vagrancy of sorts.²

The events of Apata's youth, where all his ambitions and those around him were crushed, led him to a clear understanding of the nature of the system that governed Guianese society. In several different instances, Apata articulates the intersection of race and class. Apata is quoted in the text as saying, “ ‘What we have here is a color movement, not true? 'White sees the light. Brown stick around, BLACK STAY BACK!’ ”³

This statement is consistent with Apata's experience earlier in the novel and the reality that Apata is exposed to daily. Apata was held back in school, despite his superior intellect, because of his race and his ambition. Apata has learned that all his potential opportunities for success have been reserved for whites or those who try their best to pass for whites.

Apata gives an example of black people who could not achieve their dreams due to their skin colour. Speaking to Alexander, a fellow laborer Apata says, " 'I know two chaps in school,'...'who wanted to become pilots.' " After Alexander confirms that these friends were black he responds, “ ‘Dah's a ambitious young man. But fuh we people it guh be lil hard fuh he turn dat. Nah true?’ ”⁴ Alexander, too, can see that black people are held back from the piloting profession, along with other professions, which are within the confines of the middle and upperclass.

Apata goes on to say who enjoys the benefits, opportunities, and prosperity in his country and who does not. He says, “ ‘...For a man to make an easy mark in this country he's got to be a European or a Yankee. In short you've got to look pink.

² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 111-112.

³ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 99.

⁴ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 98.

Even an African albino can make it in British Guiana.’ ”⁵ Apata recognizes that this racial hierarchy has a direct impact on the quality of life of black people. The only jobs which are open to Apata and his class are low wage. As a result of that Apata makes the statement, “ ‘There is something most common among Black people,’ ... ‘Poverty.’ ”⁶

This racial hierarchy is acknowledged by all races in Guyana. The whites are very much aware of their power over the blacks and, therefore, their superiority. And they often exploit their superior position within the hierarchy. An example is Archibald Glenn, the white man that Apata and many other blacks work for on the river. The text says, “Glenn knows that the Guianese locals see White folk as superior beings.”⁷

Glenn's exploitation of the black's inferiority complex actually leads to his own demise. Glenn is a homosexual and uses his superior position to sexually exploit his black workers. Glenn attempted to do the same to Apata, and Apata played the role of the inferior native in order to get Glenn in a vulnerable position where he could take away his rifle and shoot him. When Apata is in the presence of Glenn he speaks the native Guianese Creole, even though he can speak Standard English flawlessly. This is to reinforce Glenn's belief of Apata's inferiority. Apata seems happy and privileged to be in Glenn's favor. The text says that the white man, “...looks speculatively at the native, who Glenn muses, is dying a dozen deaths from being in the awesome presence of a white man.”⁸ Here, Glenn's arrogance is consistent with other white characters in the novel, namely, Edward Carrington and

⁵ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 99.

⁶ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 113.

⁷ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 118.

⁸ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 118.

the Crime Chief, Plumb, who is tasked with capturing Apata after he robs a Post Office.

The blacks are also aware of their socio-economic position within Guiana. Not only are they aware, but they have accepted their subservient position. This has to do with their belief that white people are truly superior as well as the fact that white people have the power to jail and kill those who challenge them. When Apata's fellow workers learn his plan to get Glenn's rifle, they caution him saying, “ ‘...of course if a man like Glenn kill a man like we, you know, he won't get wrong. He White. That is number one. And we is just natives from British Guiana, number two...”⁹

Apata is obviously frustrated with the blacks' lack of ambition. His intolerance of the blacks' acceptance of their plight reveals itself in conversation with Mr. Alexander, one of Glenn's workers. Apata makes reference to Mr. Alexander's wife and six going on seven children, saying, “ ‘...the house they live in...is not much of a house. It is too small. So, tell me, are you satisfied with life?’ ”¹⁰

Mr. Alexander responds to the question of his contentment with the circumstances of his existence by saying, “ ‘Well...I...I must say, yes. I alive. Me wife an' children alive. So I must thank Gawd fuh small mercies.’ ”¹¹ As Mr. Alexander's words demonstrate, the blacks only expectation of life should be to do enough just to get to another day rather than living life to its fullest potential. Mr. Alexander says at one point in the novel: “ ‘...What we should be saying now is 'thank Gawd we have dis lil wok.’ ”¹² The principle behind these statements is that things could be worse

⁹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 115.

¹⁰ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 100.

¹¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 101.

¹² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 100.

and the blacks should appreciate the fact that they have the little they have. Apata is clearly vexed by this ideological position and says at one point, “ ‘It's as though our only rights are to crave after rum, to shoot shit and chase pussy. It's as though we must be contented forever with mere existence!’ ” He then goes on to say “ ‘And if people like us desires more than that then we don't know our places.’ ”¹³

Apata continuously tries to inspire the blacks in the novel to reach beyond the limitations they have been confined to by a system of racial oppression. He does so by emphasizing that black people have the ability to do anything that white people do and also they have the ability to transform their circumstance. Apata says, “ ‘you know what's keeping ‘us people’ down? It's the anatomical fact that God gave each of us a brain. Provided you have a brain in your head, Mr. Alexander, you can make life.’ ”¹⁴ Apata constantly seeks to instill confidence in those who have accepted their lowly status.

The question of how Apata gained such great confidence in his ability as a blackman remains to be answered. It is obvious that this is not common among the blacks of Guiana. Mr. Alexander contemplates at one point in the novel, “...why the boy refuse to be like everybody else?”¹⁵ The answer is found with Apata's grandfather, Josh Smith, who laid the foundation for Apata's ideas of racial pride. In speaking about his grandfather Apata says, “ ‘Grandfather Josh likes to argue about politics. He's one old man I know who doesn't suffer from...from...you know tha way most of our old people glorify and make demigods of the British royalty?’ ”¹⁶

¹³ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 98.

¹⁴ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 99.

¹⁵ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 103.

¹⁶ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 67.

There are a few examples of blacks who make demigods of the British royalty within the text, which clearly contrasts with Josh Smith. One example is Mr. Alexander, who says, “ ‘ ...mih hear de Queen comin! Dat going be Christmas before Christmas, boy.’ ”¹⁷ Mr. Alexander is a representative of the oppressed class of black Guianese, but yet he is excited about the arrival of the Queen of the state that colonized his people.

Another example involves another of Glenn's workers named Walson, “...whose uncle possesses a book on Royal Families.”¹⁸ When the topic of the Queen traveling to British Guiana comes up, several of Glenn's workers react with glee. One worker uses the opportunity to speak about, “ ‘ ...King Eze from Africa...,’ ” who had traveled to Guiana before. Walson responds to this attempt to speak about a black king by saying, " 'Man? We ent talking 'bout Blackman king. We talkin' 'bout de Queen o' Buckin'ham palace, man. We talkin' bout White people. Truh-to Gawd people. We ah talk 'bout straight straight nose. Nothing like 'ah what we have lump up on we black face...' ”¹⁹

This is a blatant example of self-hatred on the part of the black workers who will elevate European royalty over African royalty and white over black. Even Apata was once affected by this all consuming ideology of white supremacy saying, “ ‘When I was small ...I thought Her Majesty never used to perform the excretory function.’ ”²⁰ Of course, all this changed with the influence of Apata's grandfather.

There is the strong implication within the text that Josh Smith, with his ideas of racial pride, was very much influenced by Marcus Garvey. The text says, “there is

¹⁷ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 99.

¹⁸ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 105.

¹⁹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 105.

²⁰ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 109.

the monarch of Ethiopia over his grandparents' Victoria bed and on a wall, that can be seen from any part of the living room and dining room, a picture of Mr Marcus Garvey."²¹ In addition to Apata's grandfather, Josh, Apata's father, Harry, was also influenced by Marcus Garvey, most likely due to his father, Josh Smith. One of Harry's longtime friends says of Harry, “ ‘the false name he had was 'Garvus' 'cause he was a man who did proper believe in Marcus Garvey.' ”²² While Apata's father died when Apata was a baby, Harry's belief in Garvey is key in establishing the philosophical foundation that was laid by Josh Smith, who raised both Apata and Harry. Marcus Garvey's message of race pride is obviously a key component of Apata's rebellion.

It is also implied within the text that Josh Smith taught Apata the unjust nature of the system. He exposed the racial hierarchy that exploited non-white people for the economic benefit of whites. The text says that Apata

...remembered his grandfather talking so often of White men who acted as though the Negroes and Indians who worked for them and made them rich were savages to be isolated, hence, the White men living away on the hills and higher terrain. Living where they believed the stink of the natives would not be.²³

Having benefitted from such powerful teachings by his grandfather, it is not difficult to perceive why Apata thinks in the way he does.

Mr. Alexander, however, has not gotten the benefit of Josh Smith's parenting, so he has a great lack of confidence and ambition, but, still, Apata encourages him.

The text says, "Old Josh Smith's grandson always tells Mr. Alexander that he ought to

²¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 30.

²² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 30.

²³ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 111.

expect more from life."²⁴ Apata believes that the blacks should get the opportunities to be successful socially, professionally, and economically.

It is quite clear that whites will benefit from the lion's share of opportunities, with the mulatto receiving preference to the blacks from the whites. Apata also reminds us that the only way that blacks can receive any type of benefit from the system is to assimilate white culture and discard their own. Apata says, “ ‘...remember that we can make more for ourselves if we sail to England, spend seven years there then return White minded and full of criticism of our own folk, culture, beliefs and traditions with a lot of bloody English mannerisms packed tight into our knotty nigger heads.’ ”²⁵ As Apata's situation illustrates, the opportunities to go to England are very scarce, and so the majority of blacks will have to seek other means towards a more prosperous life.

Ultimately, Apata is advocating a revolution, meaning replacing the current racial hierarchy with an alternative, which will empower the poor blacks. Apata says, “ ‘...if you are denied the scope to make something of yourself...You should do something about it.’ ”²⁶

Alexander is not the only one of Glenn's workers that have accepted their place in the system. Apata tries to encourage Thomas and Barth as well. In speaking about his refusal to accept his degraded state in the system, Apata says, “ ‘Grandfather Josh used to say poverty is a sin. Right now many of us live from pay day to pay day. I don't want to live like that any more.’ ”²⁷

²⁴ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 103.

²⁵ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 99.

²⁶ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 99.

²⁷ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 113.

Mr. Alexander recognizes that for the majority of blacks in Guiana, there is no question of changing one's circumstance. People are born into their circumstances, and they play their various roles throughout their life. So, Barth responds, “ ‘Yo' gat fuh born wit' silver spoon in you' mouth to live otherwise, boy.’ ” But Apata is persistent in his belief in his ability to effect change. He says, “ ‘...A man can make his own silver spoon...’ ” He goes onto say, “ ‘I have decided that I will live as big as any Portuguese businessman in Georgetown.’ ”²⁸

After establishing that the blacks have a right to have the same opportunities as the whites and that they should do something about this inequality, the question becomes, "what should the blacks do to right the situation"? Apata decides that the way to improve his circumstances is to rob a Post Office. This decision is significant and ultimately leads to Apata's downfall. Instead of taking an approach that would change the way that Mr. Alexander, Thomas, Barth, Walson, and other members of the oppressed black class think, he has chosen an individualistic path that will put him against institutions much more powerful than he is.

Despite Mr. Alexander's lack of confidence and ambition, he is able to identify the problem that Apata will encounter. Once Mr. Alexander gets an understanding of Apata's mentality, he tells a story about a man named Aaron in order to illustrate where such rebellious thoughts might lead. Mr Alexander narrates,

‘...Aaron uses to stand up in 'Town during Hitler war-years and talk out against the Governor an' everything 'bout de British Government...how they usin' black people youths dem, sending them to fight and then

²⁸ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 113.

when they come back after the war finish they getting' nothing but ingratitude.'²⁹

It is obvious that Aaron embodied the same spirit of resistance that Apata is now exhibiting, but Mr. Alexander goes on to tell the reader what happened to Aaron as a result:

'In the end, what happen to the man Aaron? Dem nah lock he up at Mazaruni here? Eh? Mih boy, Aaron was a Black man with good brains and prophetic. You see where it put he? Small boy, hear. With all de sense we Black people might have is like one place it does quickly end we up. Dat is in front de wig an' de gavel!'³⁰

Aaron took the opportunity to rise up against what he perceived to be injustice. And the result of that was his imprisonment. This is because those who had the opportunity to set up the system also have the power to maintain it. They have a state apparatus in place to maintain the racial hierarchy that they have established.

Mr Alexander further makes the point saying, " 'Mih boy, lots' a we got sense. All o' we get brains. But where it puttin' we when we put it to work? Only a few places I know. ..like Mazaruni settlement jail and below the gallows.' ”³¹

Michael may not have ended up below the gallows, but he ends up dead nonetheless. As intelligent as he is, after robbing the Post Office, he is eventually caught and killed. This proves that his plan, involving criminality, was doomed to failure.

²⁹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 100.

³⁰ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 100.

³¹ Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 99-100.

It is impossible to free the society of this institutionalized oppression without the recognition that the majority of people who suffer under the tyranny of this system are responsible for initiating change. The "sufferers" will not be willing to initiate change unless the myth of white invincibility is removed. When Apata told Thomas and Barth that he would rob the Post Office, confirming that he would in fact challenge the system, the response was, "The Crime Chief is a White man, Mike!"³² The thought of a white Crime Chief is paralyzing to the blacks who completely lack confidence. This brings to mind the significance of the program of uplift of Marcus Garvey, which was important in combating the myth of black inferiority and instilling racial pride.

In addition to a program for the inculcation of racial pride, like Marcus Garvey, Apata could have started an organization focused on economic development. Under the leadership of Marcus Garvey, the Universal Negro Improvement Association owned several businesses and never had to engage in robbing post offices as Michael Apata did.

It was also important to build an organization, like Garvey did, that is focused on the advancement of the interests of the black poor in unity with other oppressed groups. The competition between Indian and African is completely contrary to the interests of both groups and allowed the colonial and neo-colonial powers to oppress the workers and peasantry. This organization could engage in politics in Guyana, either contesting political office or holding those in political office accountable. What Walter Rodney did with the founding of the Working Party Alliance is a good

³² Bascom, Harold. *Apata* ... 113.

example and, perhaps, would have been more successful if not for the assassination of Walter Rodney.

Ultimately, *Apata* is a powerful commentary on the failure of Guyanese society to confront the challenges of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Confronting the challenge requires more than individual rebellion; it requires a united majority, regardless of racial differences, working towards the creation of a society based on equality, justice, and sustainable development.

The Dragon Can't Dance: Race, Class, and Resistance

The Dragon Can't Dance presents another illustration of a system that oppresses the inhabitants of a Caribbean country on the basis of both race and class, which leads to the resistance of that system. Rather than placing primary focus on the life of a single character, as in *Apata* and *The Harder they Come*, *the Dragon Can't Dance* takes a detailed look at the lives of several characters in a poor community called Calvary Hill in Trinidad. Each character has a place in the racial hierarchy and the class structure, which allows for a more detailed examination of the relationship between race and class in the Caribbean. Like Guyana, Trinidad is an island with a diverse racial mix, with the descendents of slaves, indentured servants from India and China, Mulattoes, and Whites. This narrative takes place between 1962, when independence was granted from Britain, and 1971, which contrasts with the timeline in *Apata*, which takes place in the 1950's, before independence was granted from Britain in 1966. This may account for the much greater visibility of white people in *Apata* than in the *Dragon Can't Dance*. Also, it must be taken into account that Earl Lovelace, simply, provided sketches of the inhabitants of a community, Calvary Hill, where whites did not live. Despite the absence of white characters in the novel, there is, clearly, a racial hierarchy in the novel, and, in fact, the invisibility of whites provides for a more complex discussion of how the global racial hierarchy manifests itself in the Caribbean. An Indian character is presented in detail, and this is also significant in dissecting the place of the Indian in Trinidad from a racial and socio-economic standpoint. Class is a very important topic of discussion in the narrative. Lovelace presents characters where the relationship between race and class is very clear but also illustrates black characters of different classes and their interactions and attitudes towards each other. And so, oppression goes beyond the discussion of race

and into the nature of the socio-economic system that accounts for privileged positions within the same racial group.

This novel gives great insight into the response of the masses of people to a system that oppresses them on the basis of their race and class. Important questions that this chapter seeks to answer are, “how do the black poor survive in the midst of their oppression”, “do they resist their oppression, and if so how”, and “how effective is this resistance?” Also, this chapter will explore the significance of Carnival, and, more specifically, masquerade within the theme of resistance and human dignity. Ultimately, this chapter will examine the failure of the black poor to overcome the system of oppression and to maintain their human dignity and will seek solutions to correct this problem.

I. Race and Class Analysis

The novel opens with a description of Calvary Hill, where the numerous characters that Lovelace illustrates live. It would seem as though Calvary Hill is a fictional depiction of an area of Trinidad named "Laventille." Roy Mc Cree confirms this in a book called, *Behind the Bridge: Poverty, Politics and Patronage in Laventille, Trinidad*, writing, "Laventille is the mountainous or hilly area which is located in the south-eastern region of the capital city of Port of Spain, Trinidad. It has been referred to thus as the Laventille Hills."¹ He goes on to say, "Laventille was seen by some residents to be divided into five broad regions, which were further subdivided into some fifteen pocket areas...In this conception, Laventille was the entire south-eastern area of Port of Spain subsuming all else." He then confirms Laventille is Calvary Hill saying, "This all embracing conception of the area is also found in the work of Lovelace (1979)..."² This work even begins with a quote from Lovelace.

In Lovelace's description of Calvary Hill, he provides readers with an insight into the poverty that the black poor are subject to daily. Earl Lovelace describes the environment in such a way that one has to surmise the possible impact upon a people's sense of humanity in living under such deplorable conditions. The novel reads,

...Calvary Hill, where the sun set on starvation and rise on potholed roads, thrones for stray dogs that you could play banjo on their rib bones, holding garbage piled high like a cathedral spire, sparkling with flies buzzing like torpedoes; and if you want to pass from your yard to

¹ Mc Cree, Roy, "History and Development," *Behind the Bridge* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: I.S.E.R University of the West Indies, 1997) 33.

² Mc Cree, Roy...35

the road you have to be a high-jumper to jump over the gutter full up with dirty water, and hold your nose. Is noise whole day. Laughter is not laughter; it is a groan coming from the bosom of these houses – no – not houses, shacks that leap out of the red dirt and stone, thin like smoke, fragile like kite paper, balancing on their rickety pillars as broomsticks on the edge of a juggler's nose”³.

Earl Lovelace is poetic in his description of this grinding poverty. He has described the poor housing, the lack of sanitation, the bad infrastructure, and the hunger that, even, the stray dogs experience. He goes on to describe the condition of the children of Calvary Hill, which immediately highlights the unending cycle of poverty that is passed down from generation to generation, and, also, the survival techniques that the children inherit from their parents in order to physically and psychologically cope with their degraded state:

“...children, lean and hard like whips, their wise yellowed eyes filled with malnutrition and too early knowing – innocence was in the womb – children imitating the grown-up laughter and the big man pose of their elders, who survive here, holding poverty as a possession, tending it stubbornly as Miss Cleothilda tends her flower garden...”⁴

This is consistent with the view of a contributor to the book focused on Laventille, *Behind the Bridge*. Godfrey St. Bernard writes,

According to the World Bank (1995), just over one-fifth of the population of Trinidad and Tobago were estimated to be poor while just over one-tenth were estimated to be extremely poor. According to

³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 9.

⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* ...10.

the Ministry of Social Development (1996), 35.9 percent of the nation's households were estimated to be in the municipal district of San Juan/Laventille.

In an essay titled, "At War With the System," Earl Lovelace, very clearly, confirms that the conditions reflected in *The Dragon Can't Dance* reflect Trinidadian society. He writes about the origins of the treatment, which results in these conditions: "We are at war. This society has always waged war against us. In slavery, in colonialism, and in indentureship, we were brutalised, fragmented, dehumanised, and today the society has not ceased to assault us"⁵. Lovelace goes on to describe this war being waged against Trinidadians:

Today, it is our brothers and sisters who have to pimp and whore; it is our brothers and sisters who are spilt up, brutalised. It is we who bear the brunt of taxes through the prices we pay for goods; it is we who work in this society, it is our people who live in dilapidated houses, go without food, without jobs. It is our little brothers and sisters who are pot-bellied and whose yellowed eyes stare in their thin faces. It is we who are dying in this wasteland of fashion, unrelated fashion, in a country with a system that has reached the height of its decline. It is we who, when we observe the waste, see our lives wasted, and those of our brothers and sisters, must vomit at the obscene spectacle of this raff and scramble that is supposed to be human living.⁶

Selwyn Cudjoe adds to the picture painted by Earl Lovelace. In reference to the African inhabitants of Trinidad and Tobago, he says, "Today, we find ourselves

⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark* (San Juan: Lexicon Trinidad LTD, 2003) 30.

⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark*...30.

at the bottom of the barrel without finances, still not sure who we are, filling the prisons in disproportionate numbers, becoming unemployable increasingly, and still looking to find a way out of the barrel.”⁷ (Afro-Trinbagonians) The novel is littered with examples of the grinding poverty and the social deterioration that both Lovelace and Cudjoe acknowledge in Trinidad and Tobago.

The system that governs the people of Trinidad and Tobago and is responsible for the poor socio-economic conditions in Calvary Hill and other communities is a system based on a racial and social hierarchy. In many, but not all, instances, there is a correlation between race and class. At the top of the racial hierarchy are the whites, at the bottom are the blacks, and the Mulattoes, with their mixed ancestry, are somewhere in between. The whites live a privileged existence within Trinidad, while the blacks, for the most part, live in the squalor described earlier, and the Mulattoes, while not living at the same level as whites, take pride in their privileged status among the blacks, socially and economically. This racialized socio-economic system is the same as the one in Guyana, which was illustrated in *Apata*, and the same as the one in Jamaica, illustrated in *The Harder They Come*.

Many scholars acknowledge that Trinidad as well as the rest of the Caribbean is a society divided classified by race and class. In his book, *A Continent of Islands*, Mark Kurlansky says,

After centuries of European colonialism, these are class-conscious societies. They have, with independence, torn down the superficial racial barriers, the white-only clubs, or the Indian clubs, or Chinese

⁷ Cudjoe, Selwyn R, *Afro-Trinbagonians* (Wellesley: Calaloux Publications, 2001) 60.

clubs. But they still have the idea of clubs, of exclusivity, of class.

Race is just one of the many ways in which class is tallied.⁸

Bridget Brereton, the author of an essay titled, "The Development of an Identity: the Black Middle Class of Trinidad in the Later Nineteenth Century," explains the economic power of the whites and the economic disenfranchisement of blacks in Trinidad and Tobago:

The islands commercial establishments were almost exclusively owned by whites in this period, and even the 'clerks' or store assistants employed in these firms tended to be young white Creoles or Britons, though certainly many black and coloured clerks were also employed. Large scale commerce was effectively closed to Afro-Trinidadians, but a few of them owned and operated small business: a bookshop, pharmacies, printing establishments and newspapers. On the whole, the established plantation and commercial sector, dominated by a few white families, offered few opportunities to educated and socially mobile non-whites.⁹

Clearly, whites, both local and foreign, remain a significant economic force in Trinidad and Tobago, but the class that plays a much more significant role in *The Dragon Can't Dance* narrative is the middle class. Brereton gives enlightening information about this particular group. She says,

After the emancipation of the slaves in 1838, a black and coloured middle class developed slowly in Trinidad, as in the British West

⁸ Kurlansky, Mark, *A Continent of Islands* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc., 1992) 42.

⁹ Brereton, Bridget, "The Development of an Identity: The Black Middle Class of Trinidad in the later 19th century." *Caribbean Freedom*, Ed. Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996) 275.

Indies as a whole. Its origin lay in the 'free persons of colour' and the 'free blacks' of slave society, and after 1838 this nucleus was expanded as ex-slaves and their descendants, liberated Africans, and coloured and black immigrants from the Eastern Caribbean rose to middle class status.¹⁰

Speaking on the factors that helped to distinguish the middle class, she goes on to say,

Members of the coloured and black middle class, then, were distinguished from the black masses by their education, their familiarity with European literary culture, and their 'white-collar' jobs. They were distinguished from the dominant whites by their African descent. They were, generally speaking, excluded from the white elite, who dominated the political as well as the economic social life of the colony. They were not a part of the ruling class, but their literacy and their intellectual skills, which they valued highly, clearly marked them off from the black and East Indian masses.¹¹

In terms of the composition of the middle class, Brereton says, "The nucleus of the black middle class was the 'free people of colour' and the 'free blacks' of pre-emancipation society." Brereton adds,

The second and larger group within the black middle class was made up of blacks and mulattoes who were not descended from wealthy

¹⁰ Brereton, Bridget, "The Development of an Identity...274.

¹¹ Brereton, Bridget, "The Development of an Identity...274

coloured planters and who had achieved their status mainly through their own efforts and through education.¹²

One member of the middle class in the novel, clearly fitting the description of the second group described by Brereton, is a Mulatto character named Cleothilda, one of the residents of Calvary Hill. Cleothilda was in a beauty pageant, several years before the narrative took place, that makes very clear the racial hierarchy in Trinidad. One of the characters, Caroline, says of Cleothilda, “ ‘Is seventeen years since she place third in the Carnival Queen competition in Port of Spain: two white girls, one first, the other second, and the girl, a black girl who in as Miss Ebony and who shoulda win the whole thing, fourth, and she third... ’ ”¹³ Caroline is careful to say that the black contestant should have come first but, obviously, came last due to her race. The two white girls came first, seemingly, because a black or Mulatto should not be ranked before them. Mark Kurlansky confirms that this type of racism exists, saying, “In Trinidad and Tobago dark-skinned contestants seldom win beauty contests”¹⁴ (44). Cleothilda, while logically being disappointed in her position in relation to whites, values her “queenship” over the blacks— a reality manifested throughout the novel.

The text makes clear Cleothilda’s privileged economic and social status. She is a member of the middle class. It says of Cleothilda, “She owned a little parlour stocked with goods ranging from haberdashery to groceries...”¹⁵. The ownership of a parlour gives Cleothilda a clear economic advantage and separates her from the other inhabitants of Calvary Hill. The text reveals that Cleothilda gives credit to some of

¹² Brereton, Bridget, "The Development of an Identity...275.

¹³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 21.

¹⁴ Kurlansky, Mark, *A Continent of Islands* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc.,1992) 44.

¹⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 17.

the inhabitants of Calvary Hill, which reflects the black poor's weak financial position. As a result of the economic strength this parlour gives Cleothilda, she is seen in the novel "...flaunting her gold bangles and twin gold rings..." and after shopping "...displaying her more expensive purchases..."¹⁶ It is not difficult to detect that Cleothilda is a class apart from the poverty that is described in this novel. Her queenship manifests itself economically and socially.

As a result of her race and class, Cleothilda manifests a great deal of arrogance in her interactions with members of the black poor. Consistently, she is referred to as a queen in the novel, which clearly indicates her superior position in the class structure. Cleothilda's queenship is accepted and acknowledged by the black poor, and this is a relationship that she struggles to maintain the entire novel. The text says, "...her nose lifted above the city...choking with the importance and beauty, which she maintained as a queenship which not only she, but the people who shared the yard with her, had the duty to recognize and responsibility to uphold"¹⁷

Another quote makes it abundantly clear that her Queenship would not be possible without her being a Mulatto. The text reads,

"...the Hill knew that she knew: that to her being queen was not really a masquerade at all, but the annual affirming of a genuine queenship that she accepted as hers by virtue of her poise and beauty, something acknowledged even by her enemies, something that was not identical with her mulattohood, but certainly impossible without it"¹⁸

Giving some background on Mulattohood in the Caribbean, Mark Kurlansky writes,

¹⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 17.

¹⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...17.

¹⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...18-19.

The Caribbean had a chronic shortage of women. There were few among slaves because they seldom were bought and the slave birth rate was low. Nor were there enough white women for the white men who went to the New World to seek their fortunes...

In time, dark women became an alternative for white men. In Europe this was considered unacceptable behaviour...But there were just not enough white mates to go around in the colonies.

Karlansky goes on to say that, "The mulatto class did well for themselves, owning land and even slaves until the eighteenth century..."¹⁹ but he makes sure to emphasize the great limitations and discrimination that white society imposed on them as they grew in power.

Not only would Mulattos be exposed to resentment from white society but the blacks would also resent the mulatto lordship over them. Miss Caroline is one of the black characters in the novel who is indignant at the superiority of Cleothilda. She seeks to force Miss Olive, who affirms Cleothilda's own superiority, to recognize the reality of the racial hierarchy saying, " 'You don't have eyes in your head to see that is because the woman skin lighter than yours and mine she feel she better than the people on this Hill...' " ²⁰ The only instance in which Cleothilda seeks to treat the black poor with any type of dignity is around Carnival time where there annually persists the masquerade of equality. But the texts says of Cleothilda, "All year long she carried on hostile, superior and unaccommodating..."²¹ And so Caroline is adamant that Miss Olive should have no tolerance with Cleothilda's "once in a year"

¹⁹ Kurlansky, Mark, *A Continent of Islands* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc.,1992) 46.

²⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 21.

²¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* ...18.

displays of friendship. Caroline says, “ ‘...And all the friendly-friendly thing she give off for Carnival is just a smoke-screen to hide the wretch she really is, to make you forget long enough the things she do all through the year, to relax you, so she could come again and lord she-self over you, and push her finger in your eye again’ ”²² But Miss Olive always allows Cleothilda to get away with these yearly, insincere fits of friendship, followed by the usual hostility that the black poor is subject to from other classes. Miss Caroline has identified the reason behind Miss Olive’s accommodation, saying, “ ‘What preventing you from putting she in her place? Or maybe you really feel she is some kinda queen’ ”²³

Another character that represents the middleclass is Guy. But unlike Cleothilda he is a black man. And so, other factors must account for his privileged position. Bridget Brereton explains this issue, saying,

Middle class status, in Victorian Trinidad, seemed to depend on two essential criteria: an occupation which involved no manual labour, and command of European, or British, culture, especially the ability to speak and write correct English. These two criteria were more crucial than either material prosperity or lightness of skin colour.²⁴

This quote provides some historical context for someone like Guy’s inclusion in the middle class, considering his colour, but being dark skinned required even more acculturation of whiteness. The text gives the reader some clues as to how Guy compensates for his blackness on the road to success:

²² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...21.

²³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...22.

²⁴ Brereton, Bridget, "The Development of an Identity: The Black Middle Class of Trinidad in the later 19th century," *Caribbean Freedom*, Ed. Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996) 274.

He was a stocky, black complexioned man, and he made it a duty to be always neat and clean, to have his shirt pressed and well tucked into his trousers, his face shaved, his hair well parted, and a bit of cologne dabbed behind his ears and under his chin. He wore his neatness and cleanness as a compensation, so that the world would say: 'He black, but he never dirty.'²⁴

As the quote illustrates, Guy carries himself in such a way that is acceptable by the standards of the white world. It is obvious that this is not the standard of the black world because the quote shows that the world did not expect black people to be neat and clean. So, he is meeting expectations, which carry him outside the realm of his own blackness. This is similar to the character, Frederick, in *Apata*, who, though black, has used his ability to assimilate the norms of white society to enter into a privileged relationship with the white world.

Guy works as a landlord in the Calvary Hill slum. Like Cleothilda, he makes a living by collecting the little money that the poor inhabitants of Calvary Hill have. Just as Cleothilda gives credit on purchases in her parlour, Guy has tenants who, too, cannot pay. One such tenant, Aldrick, has not paid rent for ten months. So despite the black poor's inability to sustain themselves financially, Guy and Cleothilda opportunistically position themselves to benefit from the community's economic weakness.

At one point in the narrative, Guy is demanding money from Aldrick, who wants Guy to give him some time. Guy responds saying, " '...People think I own these buildings...The owner in my arse every day for his money.' "²⁵ And so, we see

²⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 108.

²⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 108.

that Guy is the middle man between the slums and rich outside interests. These outside interests do not provide economic development for the people of Calvary Hill, but strain them for whatever they can give financially.

The fact that Guy can do this to people of his own race reveals his ideology. He values his individual well-being above that of the community. The text says, "...he was blind and unfeeling to anything that did not bring in money, that could not be sold at a profit..."²⁶ A man with such an ideology should not be in a position of power, but after being a slum-lord, Guy became a City Councillor. And this reveals something about the nature of the system in Trinidad, where men like Guy were given big positions in the midst of a poverty they continually fail to address.

Guy's class status reveals itself through his ability to take care of a woman. The novel measures several men's economic strength based on their ability to take care of a woman and family. Throughout the novel, Guy has a romantic interest in Miss Olive's daughter, Sylvia. Guy reveals his intentions towards Sylvia by offering to buy her costume for Carnival. Guy's ability to buy the costume symbolizes his capability and willingness to be her man.

Aldrick also has an interest in Sylvia and, it would seem, Sylvia had an interest in Aldrick. And so, even after Guy offered to buy her costume, Sylvia came to Aldrick and said to him, "'I ain't get my costume yet.'" ²⁷ Aldrick recognized that Sylvia saying this to him had a deeper meaning. The text says, "What he heard was the challenge and the promise in her remark..."²⁸ That challenge and promise was for Aldrick and herself, as representing the black poor, lifting themselves out of their degraded state, without exchanging their dignity for money.

²⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...216.

²⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...42.

²⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...43.

Initially, Aldrick shies away from this challenge due to his own fear. When Sylvia asks him whether he would marry her he says, “ ‘Me? Married? I can’t afford a woman. You don’t see how I living? No chair, a little bed in a little room. A woman want things. I ain’t have nothing here except my dragon costume to put on for Carnival.’ ”²⁹

So, Aldrick concedes to Guy and, symbolically, the middle class triumphs over the lower class because, as the text tells us, “ ‘...Guy could afford her....’ ”³⁰ Guy gives Sylvia the opportunity to transcend the boundaries of her class. Aldrick admits this fact within his thoughts: “Better Guy, the son-fa-bitch, who might, if his heart soften, even try to get her a job in a store downtown, give her some kinda protection, some kinda chance to escape this hill.”³¹ As the quote shows, under the current conditions in the narrative, Guy is much more able to take care of a woman.

The middle-class’ ability to maintain a woman and family is juxtaposed with the lower class’ inability to do so. This is made plain in the example of Aldrick’s father, Sam Prospect, who is repeatedly referred to as “the miracle man.” The text says “... he left the cocoa estate in Manzanilla to go to Port of Spain, without money or schooling or trade...” (39) and also says that Sam was “...who she [Sam’s wife and Aldrick’s mother] was crazy enough to go with...”³² Sam’s wife is probably as crazy as Sylvia would be, or any other woman from the black poor, to make a partnership with a man from the black poor, who has no hope of relieving them from the hardship of life. Sam’s inability is described in the quote, saying, “...he went from job to job, giving one up for another after a month or two, or maybe it was fired, working longest

²⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...32.

³⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...101.

³¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*... 31-32.

³² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*... 39.

as a barman in a rum shop, fathering five children and ever so often disappearing, leaving the children and their mothers waiting..."³³ And so, it would seem that this is the life of the black poor: to struggle to make something of yourself but be held back by a lack of education and skills, a lack of financial resources, and a lack of opportunity. And the hope of a better life is never realized by Sam or his class, but, still, the text describes "...Sam, promising again to get a good job and settle down and see about her and the children..." and "...trying to the very end of his days to be the man he had left Manzanilla to become..."³⁴

In a book called, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous*, by Haki Madhubuti, he speaks about the black man's inability to perform the function of a man in a patriarchal, western society. He says,

In a patriarchal society, Black men must be able to offer their families a measurement of protection and, at a minimum, basic life-giving needs, such as clothing, shelter, food, education and security. The West and most of the world define manhood as the ability to protect and provide for one's family. If a man doesn't do that, according to most cultures, he is incomplete (i.e., not a man). A good many Black men are not able to deliver in these areas.³⁵

With the lack of security provided by their mates, inevitably, the woman in the slums must become a miracle worker; she must take up the mantle of providing for the family when the man has had his manhood stripped by racial and class oppression. The narrator laments, "Oh, the miracle of their surviving: the miracle of his mother

³³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*... 40.

³⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*... 40.

³⁵ Madhubuti, Hakim R., *Black Men* (Chicago: Third World Press Publishers, 1967)

bringing up five children...” The narrator describes Aldrick’s mother’s method of survival: “...she, sending little notes by Aldrick to his aunts and grandmother: ‘Send a little money, send a little sugar, until Sam come home,’ and when Sam did not come home, leaving the eldest boy to take care of the smaller ones, going out to work, washing and cleaning, a maid in white people kitchen...”³⁶

Herein, we see the way in which the black poor survive. The women are relegated to the position of domestics in white people’s kitchens, a situation no different to slavery. The men of the black poor, being emasculated by racial and class boundaries, struggle to provide for their families. As a result of this, women will favour a man from the middle-class such as Guy. The text says of Guy’s treatment of Sylvia, “ ‘...He is a man treat you good from the beginning: TV, radio, fridge, stereo, dress, show...’ ”³⁷ The manner of life described here is much more desirable than the experience of Aldrick’s mother.

Having shown examples of the mulatto and black middle-class and the black poor, it is appropriate to show examples of the white upper class, the most privileged group in Trinidad. Bridget Brereton gives some background on the white elite of Trinidad, writing,

Although Trinidad was late to develop as a slave society, by the 1830’s when slavery was abolished in the British empire, the island possessed the classic three-tier social structure typical of the Caribbean sugar colonies. At the top was the white minority, people of European birth and ancestry. This small group. Always less than 10 per cent of the total population in the period under consideration, and only 1.9 per

³⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 40.

³⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...201.

cent by 1960, was a true elite for this whole period: it was dominant in the economic, social, and political life of the island.³⁸

Though the examples are few in the novel, the reader can get a good understanding of social and economic advantage of whites. One of the previous quotes gives an example when describing Aldrick's mother "...washing and cleaning, a maid in white people kitchen..."³⁹ The fact that white people are in a position to pay domestics demonstrates their financial strength. The text offers another example when speaking about the new bands that participate in the carnival festivities: "...the white bands: well-off light-skinned boys from prosperous families and good schools..." The text goes on to say "...they had this easy passage in everything else, in schools, in jobs, in positions..."⁴⁰ The text gives yet another example: "...white people were still in the banks and in the businesses along Frederick Street. The radio still spoke with a British voice."⁴¹ The narrator describes how carnival was infiltrated by sponsors: "...the Fuller Brothers and Sampoco Oil, and Cicada Cigarettes."⁴² The reader is not told the race of those who owned these companies but that can be surmised based on the following quote: "...you had the sponsors: the sponsor's wife and the sponsor's daughter and the sponsor's friends, a whole section of them, their faces reddened by the excitement and the sun, smiling and jumping out of time..."⁴³ All these quotes show that in education, socially, culturally, and economics white people are at the top of the hierarchy. They own the businesses, the financial centres,

³⁸ Brereton, Bridget, "The White Elite of Trinidad, 1838-1950," *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, ed. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998) 32.

³⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 40.

⁴⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...63.

⁴¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...66.

⁴² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...70.

⁴³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*... 68.

they are given good education and they have a stable family life, which is a far different reality to that experienced by slum-dwellers like the ones at Calvary Hill.

In addition to black, mulatto, and white races, Earl Lovelace illustrates a member of the Indian race, Pariag, a descendent of those that came from India as indentured servants. Pariag has the desire to be part of Trinidad's diverse community, forging a racially harmonious community where each race would be respected. Pariag would leave the community of "New Lands," where he grew up, and he would join the community of Calvary Hill with his wife Dolly. The text describes the world he wanted to escape.

Ever since he was a small boy he wanted to break out of the little village world where he had watched his brothers and his father and grandfather work, bound still in that virile embrace to the sugarcane estate to which his grandfather had been the first to be indentured, renewing their indenture year after year as if it were an inheritance that no repeal of law could force them to relinquish, unwilling to step beyond the boundaries of the village⁴⁴

This quote suggests that there was an order that existed since Indians first came as indentured servants that this race of people are unwilling to transgress. They are unwilling to leave the sugar plantations and the village, refusing to integrate into the wider Trinidad community and create a shared destiny. Rather, they isolate themselves and recreate India in their new Trinidadian home, "New Lands."

Selwyn Cudjoe provides useful insight on the philosophy of Indians who have migrated to Trinidad and their isolation. He says,

⁴⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*... 78.

...Indo-Trinbagonians have always seen themselves as Indians first and Trinbagonians second or third. To be sure this existentialist positioning has been sustained by a religion that places the pundit, the holy man and the guru at the center of their existence where no essential distinction exists between religion and politics; theology and everyday life. Inherent in being an Indian in Trinbago is a serious disequilibrium between one's racial and/or ethnic affiliation and one's nationality. I am sure that many of you have gone to a cricket match at the Queen's Park Oval when the West Indies was playing India or Pakistan and wondered how come so many Indians or Pakistanis managed to fly to Trinidad to support their team. The un-varnished truth is that many Indians identify strongly with their racial kin in a way that Afro-Trinbagonians find striking, further supporting of the proposition that many Indo-Trinbagonians their Indianness come first; their Trinbagonianism a distant second or third.⁴⁵

Earl Lovelace adds to this in his essay, "The Ongoing Value of Our Indigenous Traditions":

The Indians also were tied to their culture because in this new land where they were strangers, it gave them a sense of being. They had their pundits and Divali and Hosay and their weddings and teeluck and had no reason to want to change them. Their religion gave them a hold on self in a situation where without it they would have been purely

⁴⁵ Cudjoe, Selwyn R., *Afro-Trinbagonians* (Wellesley: Calaloux Publications, 2001)

economic animals, and quite naturally they held to it. There has been, so far, nothing dignified to put in its place.⁴⁶

Pariag represents the departure from tradition in many respects, leaving the country in favour of the city, wanting to associate with blacks as well as Indians, participating in Carnival. And so, Pariag does not represent the ideal Indian as does his uncle, Ramlochan, who is described as

“...his father’s eldest brother who by some miracle of work and luck and cunning had become the fastest growing businessman in New Lands, employing one by one his relatives, not only giving them work and paying them money, but having a say in who should marry who, who should buy what property, and who at times the others should refuse to talk to...”⁴⁷

Ramlochan represents a class of wealthy Indians who receive privilege based on their own hard work. Ramlochan has taken responsibility for providing jobs for his clan, as is the case in India. Ramlochan represents the best of what Pariag can become in the “New Lands” community. But Pariag rejected this life in favour of a dream that had not yet materialized—for separate groups of people to emerge from their isolation and live as one. But Pariag was still struggling to escape the niche carved out for him in the world.

In another instance of Pariag departing from tradition, he had no desire to have an arranged marriage, but he was forced to do so despite his reluctance. Pariag leaves for the city with his wife, Dolly, who was probably as crazy as the narrative’s poor black women who are with poor black men, romantic partners who are, seemingly,

⁴⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark* (San Juan: Lexicon Trinidad LTD, 2003) 35.

⁴⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 78.

pursuing an evasive dream. Pariag would be disappointed in his ambitions for racial harmony, due to racial tensions that existed since Indians first came to Trinidad.

Pariag would progress economically due to racial and familial stability and economic independence. When he went to the city, he got work in a short period of time. The text says, “The first job he got was with Seepersad, an Indian businessman from Tunapuna.”⁴⁸ It is important to note that he got a job from an Indian businessman. This shows a level of solidarity in the Indian community that does not exist in the black community. Businessmen like Guy were not interested in providing employment for the black poor, but only had an interest in making money from them. Characters like Sam Prospect could not keep a job, but Pariag had an Indian member of the middle-class who had a commitment to his race, and, therefore, he had no problem with employment. There were also two other Indians working along with Pariag.

After becoming tired of the job he had with this Seepersad, Pariag saved his money and started his own business. The text says, “After Pariag left that job, he took the little money that he had saved and bought a basket and a big iron pot and some peanuts and channa, a tasty bean that was a favorite of the town people. He started selling roasted peanuts and boiled and fried channa.”⁴⁹ Here Pariag displays the entrepreneurial spirit that is lacking among the black poor. Once leaving the job where he worked for the Indian businessman, he did not go looking for another job with someone else. He recognized an opportunity to provide a service to the black poor, based on something the community craved. The only other place in the novel where we see this entrepreneurial spirit is with a man named Colts who sells snow-

⁴⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...80.

⁴⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...83.

cones at the local football games. Pariag would eventually come to own his own business in Calvary Hill.

Pariag's wife Dolly contributed greatly to their economic success. She played a significant role in the businesses Pariag was running. When Pariag had the idea of getting a bicycle, not for economic reasons, but as a strategy to gain the notice and acceptance of the slum-dwellers, Dolly was the one who thought of the bicycle as an important tool in growing their business. The text says, "The bicycle appealed to her. It was a good idea... Barra and doubles would make good business, better business than channa and peanuts. She would make the delicacies herself, and Pariag would sell them on his bicycle."⁵⁰ So, it is evident that Dolly is committed to his success. She also worked in the shop they would own by the end of the narrative. There is no reason to doubt that if the black, poor women of Calvary Hill had romantic partners with businesses that they would support them, but their partners were on the street corners, in the bars, or out gambling like Sam Prospect.

In a book called, *Black Economics*, Jawanza Kunjufu offers profound insight into how foreigners experience economic success in black communities. Though he is describing African-American communities, the similarities with the Caribbean are striking. He says,

I believe the major asset foreigners bring to America and specifically in the African American community is their culture. A culture that: (1) teaches them to see themselves as a people, as a collective, and not as individuals; (2) encourages them to share their resources together; (3) urges them to pool their economic resources together to start their

⁵⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...92.

businesses and to acquire additional properties; (4) impels them to work long and hard and to consider long term gratification at the expense of every one purchasing a Cadillac and a condominium the first year; (5) has the accent on being employers rather than employees and producers rather than consumers; (6) and encourages an entrepreneurial spirit, to study business principles and develop a product or a service that will be demanded in the international market.⁵¹

The qualities described in this quote are the qualities that the black poor in Trinidad and Tobago lack, and, therefore, groups, like Indians and Chinese, with cultures that are intact, become extremely successful, Pariag being one example.

With Pariag's economic success, he consolidates himself as a member of the middle-class, which also makes him a threat to the mulatto and black middle-class. At the point when Pariag buys himself a bike, the racial tensions between black and Indian reveal themselves openly. While Pariag thought that his buying the bike would lead the community to respect him and accept him, he simply alerted them to what they did not have. And so, Pariag buying this bike was interpreted as him "showing off" and also as a sign of his economic success.

Cleothilda and Guy lead the rally of open hostility against Pariag. Guy says to Aldrick, " '...Just now he will be buying a car, and after that a shop....Just now he will own this whole street...' " ⁵² Cleothilda presents her fears to Miss Olive, saying, " 'Next thing he will want is to open a parlour' " to which Miss Olive replies, " 'No!'

⁵¹Kunjufu, Jawanza, *Black Economics* (Chicago: African American Images, 1991) 47.

⁵² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 108.

⁵³ Guy and Cleothilda, as representatives of the middle-class, seek to rally the members of the working poor against the Indian. In order to do so, they present the illusion that they were all equal. Cleothilda says to Miss Olive, “ ‘Twenty years I live here...And if was one thing you could depend on was the equalness of everybody...’ ”⁵⁴

Cleothilda makes an interesting argument here. She would like to obscure the class differences with a racial solidarity. This is often done in reverse in a multi-racial society, obscuring class differences in multi-racial and national unity. Selwyn Cudjoe speaks to this in a speech titled, “Afro-Trinbagonians: No Longer Blinded by Our Eyes”: “...Afro-Trinbagonians—and particularly Afro-Trinidadians—have seen themselves as Trinidadians and Tobagonians first; and Africans second or third, hence the short-hand wisdom: ‘All ah we is one.’ ”⁵⁵ Cudjoe is asserting that Afro-Trinbagonians tend to prioritize the national interest while other racial groups prioritize their racial interests. As a result, the African interest is not secured. Cudjoe goes on,

...this is one reason why the relative position of the Afro-Trinidadian vis-à-vis the Indians declined even during the reign of the PNM, an African based party that possessed political power. This decline—or disinclination to assist other Africans—resulted from a nationalist perspective that subjugated the interest of Africans to the national interest. In other words, although the party’s fundamental base is African, it never felt it necessary to speak about or to attend

⁵³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* ... 104.

⁵⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* ... 103.

⁵⁵ Cudjoe, Selwyn R, *Afro-Trinbagonians* (Wellesley: Calaloux Publications, 2001)

specifically to the needs of Africans. It remained smug in the position that what was good for the national interest, had to be good for Afro-Trinbagonians. Such a position could be described as trickle down social theory, that believed that whatever is good for the country must conduce to the interest of the African without any conscious awareness that he was losing ground even as the country prospered. Today, such a theory must be seen as a major shortcoming of PNM's thinking and one that needs to be re-visited.⁵⁶

Walter Rodney is critical of the same mentality. He says, "What we must object to is the current image of a multi-racial society living in harmony—that is a myth designed to justify the exploitation suffered by the blackest of our population, at the hands of the lighter-skinned groups" (Groundings with my Brothers 29). Clearly, based on the quotes from Cudjoe and Rodney, Cleothilda is employing a strategy usually used to obscure the interests of black people within a multi-racial society. Cleothilda uses the "all ah we is one" philosophy to obscure the interests of the lower class within the black racial group, which is especially interesting given the mulatto's desire to be set apart from the African.

The novel makes it clear that Cleothilda was concerned about her social and economic privilege. The text says, "It didn't take Miss Cleothilda long to discover that a new situation had begun to exist in the Yard, a situation she felt threatened her position as 'queen' "(135). Therefore, Cleothilda's actions are clearly tied to maintaining her position as queen in the yard.

⁵⁶ Cudjoe, Selwyn R, *Afro-Trinbagonians*...32.

Miss Olive is misled by Cleothilda and seeks to obscure Cleothilda's privilege: -“ ‘somebody had a pot or two or a dress or two more than you; but everybody was one.’ ” Miss Olive goes on to say, “ ‘If a man had money he didn't go and buy things to show off. You, Miss Cleothilda, you buy nice curtains and you have radio and furnitures, but I don't call that showing off – you always had them. It ain't something that you buy, just to show off.’ ”⁵⁷ Miss Olive's words make it seem as though Cleothilda has some right to the “queenship” that she possesses on Calvary Hill and, therefore, is not open to the same scrutiny that the Indian is. And it would seem that nationalism is a factor here, as the Middle-class is protected from the aggression of the black poor, but the Indian is not.

Miss Olive is fooled, but the more enlightened Aldrick is not. Aldrick recognizes that Guy and Cleothilda are protecting their class interest. He says, “ ‘Guy and Cleothilda ain't fooling me. The Indian is a threat to them, he ain't no threat to me’ ”⁵⁸; later on he says, “ ‘...Guy and Cleothilda trying to protect what they own’ ”; and, then he further solidifies his point saying, “ ‘...the little they have they frighten the Indian come and give them competition. That must threaten them. The rest of us ain't threatening them at all...’ ”⁵⁹ Aldrick makes it quite clear that he is conscious of Guy and Cleothilda's attempts to turn him and the rest of the community against the Indian, and he makes a distinction between Cleothilda and Guy and the rest of the community. Aldrick also condemns the idea that Guy and Cleothilda are harmless: “ ‘Cleothilda with she parlour, doing what she like when she like, don't care 'bout

⁵⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 103.

⁵⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...110.

⁵⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...111.

nobody; Guy collecting he rent, buying up property, and trying to fuck all the little girls on the Hill...' ”⁶⁰ Aldrick is not at all sympathetic to their concerns.

So, the Indian is an alternative to the mulatto and black middle-class. The Indian does not feel the need to display a sense of superiority over the black poor as do the mulatto and black middle-class. And so, Miss Caroline does not have to shop at Miss Cleothilda's parlour because she has another choice. In a conversation with Miss Olive she says, “ ‘...She can't twist me and turn me as she do you and Philo...', ” then goes on to say, “ ‘...First I don't credit at her place...' ”⁶¹ Here, Miss Caroline points out that due to Cleothilda's economic position, she holds some power over the black poor, but then illustrates that she has no power over herself. She then presents an alternative to Miss Olive: “ ‘...you don't have to credit from her. The Chinese man will let you open an account with him.' ”⁶² Here, the Chinese man plays the same role as the Indian. But, ultimately, the black poor have no control over their own lives.

In addition to being subjected to a racial and social hierarchical system on the national level, the inhabitants of Calvary Hill were also subjected to an international system of economic exploitation. Though Trinidad became politically independent in 1962, from an economic standpoint, the masses of people are still controlled by a foreign entity. When Britain, a white nation, relinquished political control of Trinidad, they ensured that businesses from their nation and other white nations continued to determine what the economic condition of the mass of people would be. This is a vital component of “Neo-colonialism” or a new form of colonialism.

⁶⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...111.

⁶¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...21.

⁶² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...22.

In the novel, a lawyer defending a group of poor black rebels confirmed that this was the situation that existed in Trinidad. He says“ ‘Our country is young, our colonial inheritance is stifling...someone else has been deciding how these people should live, someone else not living where they are living, someone else not living their lives...’ ”⁶³ This part of the narrative takes place in 1971 and the lawyer makes reference to how young Trinidad is as a nation free from Britain’s political control, but confirms that the colonialism is still very much a part of the lives of the black poor. He makes reference to the fact that black poor do not decide how they should live, but an external force does. It is not made explicit but this external force could also include the black government collaborators, as several characters in the novel do implicate the government in their suffering. The lawyer continues to identify this new colonialism:

...for if these people had been deciding for themselves how they should live, do you believe they would choose street corners for their sons and prostitution for their daughters and hungry bellies for their infant children? If we say that, then we deny them humanity...We suggest the existence of better races, better people...’ ”⁶⁴

This lawyer makes an important point that goes to the heart of the debate surrounding the state of degradation among black people. Many argue that the misery of the black poor is of their own making, and the only way to save them from themselves is by a foreign entity governing them. This speaks to a belief in the “savage” nature of the black race and it is obvious that the lawyer does not agree with this position. But if a foreign entity is indeed responsible for the black poor’s misery,

⁶³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...184.

⁶⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...184.

as the lawyer puts it, “ ‘Then, how hollow now sound our railings against slavery and colonialism...’ ”⁶⁵

The sentiments of this lawyer also reflect historical sentiment in Trinidad and Tobago. In February 1970, there was a black power revolt in Trinidad and Tobago led by the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC). In an essay titled, “The February Revolution in Trinidad,” Herman L. Bennett describes the argument of the activists. He says,

The critics of the nature of independence agreed that colonial attitudes still prevailed everywhere in the West Indies. They charged, for example, that the substitution of a national flag, anthem, and motto was at best ‘symbol manipulation’ initiated by the indigenous elite. This elite, Rodney and NJAC pointed out, could not envision a self-reliant existence. Dependency, on the other hand, delayed societal reconstruction which would ensure popular and indigenous control; political, economic, and cultural autonomy; and a more equitable distribution of the nation’s resources. Given the extent to which the West Indies were still dominated by foreign elements, the nature of this criticism can be described as nationalist.⁶⁶

Bennett goes on to describe the details of the revolt, including the fact that several activists are arrested. It is possible that Lovelace is referring to the events of February 1970 in *The Dragon Can’t Dance* and providing a defence for the actions of the activists through this lawyer.

⁶⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...184.

⁶⁶ Bennet, Herman L., “The Black Power February (1970) Revolution in Trinidad,” *Caribbean Freedom*, Ed. Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1993) 550.

In his book, *A Just and Moral Society*, Selwyn Cudjoe gives his analysis of the failure of the neo-colonial government in Trinidad to transform the society, which is the same sentiment echoed in the Black Power revolt of 1970 and the words of the lawyer in *The Dragon Can't Dance*. In reference to the ruling party of Trinidad and Tobago at the time, the People's National Movement (PNM), Cudjoe says,

...the PNM was an anticolonialist movement. That is, it was more against colonialism than it was for (or a representative of) the construction of a new social order. In this context, the PNM program can be considered as a reformist document in that it attempted only to remove some of the worst blemishes of colonialism. It could not, nor did it set out to, construct a new society with new values that were consistent with our new state and stage of social development.⁶⁷

Cudjoe goes on to draw some conclusions about the PNM, one of which said,

they were against the colonial ideology; yet they never told us what constituted a new and independent ideology for the construction of a new state. It is only with The Chaguaramas Declaration of 1972, made under pressure from the Black Power Revolt of 1970, that Dr. Williams and the PNM were forced to come up with an ideology for the society, and even that ideology was primarily anti in its content, being both anticapitalist and anti-imperialist.⁶⁸

Cudjoe goes on to discuss neo-colonialism in Trinidad, which was a strong theme in the Black Power Revolt:

⁶⁷ Cudjoe, Selwyn, *A Just and Moral Society* (Ithaca: Calaloux, 1984) 70.

⁶⁸ Cudjoe, Selwyn, *A Just and Moral Society* (Ithaca: Calaloux, 1984) 70.

The obvious brutality of colonialism/capitalism gave way to formal independence and neo-colonialism... In this phase, capital (both local and foreign) is used to exploit rather than to develop the country. As in the colonial era, profits are expatriated abroad, and the work people are in an even worse condition.⁶⁹

Lovelace's illustration of characters in *The Dragon Can't Dance* presents the neo-colonial society that the inhabitants of Trinidad and Tobago are subjected to. The way in which class and race intersect is a strong feature. The rebellion by Fisheye and his band and the ideology of their lawyer bring attention to the international nature of the system and its continuance of colonial relations. The question remains to be answered: what is the response of the black poor to the challenges of this oppressive system?

⁶⁹ Cudjoe, Selwyn, *A Just and Moral Society*...85.

Passive Resistance, Survival, Surrender, and Masquerade

Once establishing that there is a racial hierarchy, class divisions, and a new colonialism, the black poor's response to their oppression must now be examined. It is logical to assert that if the racial hierarchy, class divisions, and colonialism that existed since the times of slavery still exist but in a new form, the resistance that was practised during slavery also still exists but in a new form. In describing the heritage of the resistance of the black poor, the novel says,

...blue-bloods of a resistance lived by their ancestors all through slavery, carried on in their unceasing escape – as Maroons, as Runways, as Bush Negroes, as Rebels: and when they could not perform in space that escape that would take them away from the scene of their brutalization they took a stand in the very guts of the slave plantation, among tobacco and coffee and cotton and canes, asserting their humanness in the most wonderful acts of sabotage they could imagine and perform, making a religion of laziness and neglect and stupidity and waste...¹

The novel goes on to confirm the continuity of the resistance practised by the black poor saying,

...continuing it still after Emancipation, that emancipated them to a more profound idleness and waste when, refusing to be grist for the mill of the colonial machinery that kept on grinding in its belly people to spit out sugar and cocoa and copra, they turned up this hill to pitch

¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 10.

camp here on the eyebrow of the enemy, to cultivate again with no less fervor the religion with its Trinity of Idleness, Laziness and Waste...²

The form of resistance that this quote describes is “passive resistance”, rather than active resistance. In the situation where those who were enslaved could not escape or use violence against their oppressor, they committed acts of sabotage on the plantations to blunt the full force of their exploitation and, more so, to assert their own humanity, through constant objection to their oppression. In his book, *Empire, Enslavement, and Freedom in the Caribbean*, Michael Craton speaks to the concept passive resistance:

...defining slave resistance merely as plots and acts of rebellion is unduly limiting, giving a misleading impression of the effectiveness of slavery as a socioeconomic system. To discover fully how the slaves themselves shaped slavery, contributed to its evolution, helped to speed its demise, it is necessary also to understand forms of resistance short or actual (or proposed) overt action. These ranged from covert violence, to manifestations of internal rejection and anomie, to forms of apparent (though dissimulated) accommodation and acceptance that were, perhaps, as subversive as other forms.

Importantly, Craton goes on to speak of the continuity in pre and post-emancipation resistance:

Resistance then was a constant...it was a dialectic of adjustments between masters and slaves and in respect of all forms of resistance, open and covert, gradually verged from total rejection towards forms

² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*... 10-11.

of industrial action and proto-peasant activity as part of the process of creolisation, and in due course spilled over into the post-emancipation period.³

In an essay titled, “The Ongoing Value of Our Indigenous Traditions,” “Lovelace speaks to the need for resistance, its relationship to human dignity, and also explains the passive resistance illustrated in *The Dragon Can’t Dance*. He says,

...the greatest struggle of all has been the struggle against enslavement. That was a struggle for the recognition of Africans as persons, human beings. It was a struggle by Africans for human justice and the upholding of their dignity as human beings against a system that used captive people as property, that set them to work at the end of the whip to provide wealth for plantation owners.⁴

Lovelace goes on to describe “...four ways in which Africans struggled against enslavement in the Caribbean...,”⁵ one of which Lovelace calls, “Cultural Resistance and Self Affirmation.”⁶ In speaking of the enslaved for whom other options of resistance were unavailable, Lovelace says,

The vast majority of people could not escape. They included those who had perhaps tried revolt, running away, maybe even the purchase of individual freedom, but were left to struggle under enslavement.

For Africans under enslavement, the central theme of their living, their central concern, was resistance, expressed not only in sabotage, in feigned laziness, feigned illness, and other forms of subversion, but

³ Craton, Micheal, *Empire Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Ian Randle publishers, 1997) 186.

⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark* (San Juan: Lexicon Trinidad LTD, 2003) 31.

⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark*...31.

⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark*... 32.

institutionalised in art. They claimed sovereignty over their voices, their bodies and their imagination. These were the only areas over which they had any control: what they could sing, how they could dance, what they could think. Remember they had no economic power, no political power.⁷

For Lovelace and many other scholars, when one lives within an oppressive situation, resistance is a way of life and an ideology. For, to comply with one's oppression can be interpreted as agreeing with it. And this would have been a surrender of their right to a life of dignity. And it is this right of dignity that the black poor struggles to assert for most of the novel.

The text speaks of a spirit that "...the whole Hill — could lay claim to..." Then goes on to say,

...that spirit, that hope that had lived in the Yard, upheld in Miss Olive's patient resentment, Caroline's anger, and her own[Sylvia] vitalness...that beauty that belief that there was ahead a better life, a nobler life, for which they, the whole Yard, were candidates out of their steadfast insistence on their right to a humanness unlinked to the possession of any goods or property..."⁸

So, in the midst of all oppression they faced in Calvary Hill, they always asserted, even passively, their right to an existence where they were not relegated to the lowest class because they did not own anything. They, at least, retained the hope of a different future through their stubborn grip to their own dignity.

⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark...* 32.

⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 151.

This quality is prominently displayed in Aldrick's character. The text speaks about Sam Prospect passing down this quality to his son Aldrick and his other children: "Maybe that was his gift to his children, this sense of miracle and manness, this surviving on nothing and standing up still on your own two feet to be counted as somebody in a world where people were people, were human, by the amount of their property" (41).

For a man to announce to the world that he is a human being in such a world is a hard task indeed, and Aldrick learned to do this from an early age. The text tells the story of Aldrick as a child going to school, where he had to go with an improper lunch because of the poverty his family experienced. The other children at school would laugh at him and Aldrick learned to protect himself from embarrassment. This was a survival mechanism to protect himself from pain. The text reads,

All his life he had managed in such ways to disconnect himself from things which he couldn't escape and which threatened to define him in a way in which he didn't want to be defined, and go untouched, untouched by things that should have touched him, hurt him, burned him."⁹

This is how Aldrick manages to live in the Calvary Hill community, admitting to have nothing, and still proclaiming himself a man. In an essay called, "Black Community Building," Earl Lovelace speaks to the psychological toll of this process of survival and still asserting one's dignity:

So, the thing is that it has not been easy for Black people to survive.

When a people have to put up with a certain amount of brutality, they

⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...131.

need to strike out. They need, in terms of their own manhood and self, to fight because men are not really just about surviving. We are not here just to be alive, to walk, to be imprisoned and just to stay alive. We want to be more than that. We want to do more than that.¹⁰

Lovelace goes on:

And so, when it was that Black people under this kind of oppression survived, it took a great psychological toll. In fact, I believe it took as much guts to survive, I mean, to put up with this kind of thing, as it took to kill a man or to strike out. And when you look at the kind of people that have been produced in this period, you will note that Black men have walked with bowed heads in order to get through...And it took a great deal of strength for some of us to rein in our manhood, as it were, to rein in our true human feelings in the face of the kind of brutality that we've had to face. So, in this process of survival, we have paid a great physical and psychological price.¹¹

The primary way that Aldrick asserts his dignity is through his masquerade as a dragon in Carnival. Carnival seemed to be the one time of year that the black poor made a threatening gesture towards the system. They dress up in costumes and act out a performance, like a play, to announce a warning to the oppressors and to acknowledge their own dignity in the midst of their suffering. The text says, "Once upon a time the entire Carnival was expressions of rebellion."¹² And this expression of rebellion was necessary in the context of a people who had resisted passively and

¹⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark* (San Juan: Lexicon Trinidad LTD, 2003) 154.

¹¹ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark* ...154.

¹² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 121.

who had made "...a religion of laziness and neglect and stupidity and waste...",¹³ so that they would always be reminded of their right to a better life.

Aldrick took pride in being the most celebrated figure in that tradition.

Aldrick demanded respect while masquerading as a dragon. The text describes Aldrick performing the masquerade and the effect this had on some of the onlookers, who were most likely white: "...he watched terror strike pale faces as he lunged towards them...He wanted them to know that he would always be threatening there, a breath away from them."¹⁴

This is a threat made to the proponents of the system that if they do not recognize the humanity of the black poor, violence could ensue. During Carnival, Aldrick was "...saying to the city: I am a dragon. I have fire in my belly and claws on my hands; watch me! Note me well, for I am ready to burn down your city..."¹⁵ To further emphasize the black poor's threat of violence in order to force the recognition of their humanity, the text goes on to say, "He wanted everybody to see him. When they saw him, they had to be blind not to see him. They had to be deaf not to hear that people everywhere want to be people, and that they going to be that anyway, even if they have to rip open the guts of the city."¹⁶

But this threat was simply a masquerade. The text says that, "...people said they wished everyday was Carnival."¹⁷ The people have this wish because the characters they play would be a reality rather than a masquerade. When Carnival was over, the people went back to the survival techniques that got them through the year.

¹³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...10.

¹⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...124.

¹⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...123-124.

¹⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...124.

¹⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...125.

The form of masquerading illustrated in *The Dragon Can't Dance* is a recognized form of rebellion and resistance and a true reflection of Trinidadian Carnival with its origins in Africa. In Hollis Liverpool's book, titled, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, which explores the Carnival tradition of Trinidad, he gives some important insight into this. Concerning the urban masquerades between the 1860s and 1880s, he says,

The masquerades of the period, while continuing to show linkages to West African traditions, were expressions of resistance to barrack yard life, White dominance, and upper class values and pretensions.

Among their many masquerades, they portrayed a pantheon of devils and dragons the origin of which many researchers, including J.D Elder and Earl Lovelace, link with Africa. Writer Earl Lovelace even wrote a novel based on the dragon, demonstrating how resistance to authority was exemplified by dragon masqueraders. The late Charles Bennett, who masqueraded as a devil for over fifty years, showed the link between the 'Devil' masquerade and West African masquerade traditions in terms of their meaning and purpose, when he said: 'When the moment comes for me to take up that mask, and I take the mask and put it on, I become a different being entirely. I never feel as if I am human at all. All I see in front of me is devils! Real! Similar to West African masqueraders, the 19th century 'Devils' of Trinidad were not themselves, but were reacting to the teachings espoused by Christianity and the upper class which informed them that should they commit crimes and sins, especially sins against their neighbours such as theft and envy, they would go to Hell at death and meet devils.

Realising that the real devils were the Whites, and laughing at Christian teaching to a certain extent, the Africans masqueraded as the 'Devil.' So popular was the 'Devil' masquerade that the Port-of-Spain Gazette reported that 'to dress as the devil seemed to be most people's ambition.'¹⁸

In *The Dragon Can't Dance*, there are those in the Calvary Hill community who masquerade as dragons all year long. They daily perform the dragon for the same reasons as Aldrick: to assert their dignity and to threaten the powers that be into recognizing their humanity. These are who are described in the novel as "hooligans" and "bad johns", as the "fellars on the Corner". The text describes them as "...holding their backs pressed against the sides of shop buildings from the dawn until the scream of police jeeps drive them sullenly on the run, to bring into their waiting a sense of dangerousness and adventure they are happy to embrace..."¹⁹ These rebels are happy when the police harass them because it confirms for them that they pose a real threat and this in itself gives them a sense of their own power. For these slum dwellers, any type of recognition, even though it is negative saves them from being invisible and ignored. The text goes on to say, "...in these daily police raids they see as much an acknowledgement of their presence as an effort to wrench from them sovereignty of these streets. This moves them to strain all the harder to hold their poses on the walls, to keep alive their visibility and aliveness"²⁰ And so, Carnival, as well as "the Corner" is a constant announcement that this problem of the black poor will not be silent and easily forgotten.

¹⁸ Liverpool, Hollis, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion* (Chicago: Research Associates School Times, 2001) 264.

¹⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 11.

²⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 11.

The character known as Fisheye is the “bad john” or “hooligan” of the novel. During slavery, he would have been known as the “bad nigger” or the “bad negro”. Fisheye is one of the “fellars on the Corner” who use the threat of violence as a means of asserting their dignity. In fact, Fisheye not only threatens violence but regularly engages in it. However, his violence, for the majority of the novel, is misguided. He simply wanted to be known as a warrior regardless of whom he was fighting or whether the battle made sense. The text says, “...the truth was that he wanted nothing but to live, to be, to be somebody for people to recognize, so when they see him they would say: ‘That is Fisheye!’ ”²¹

So, this need to be recognized manifests itself in Fisheye’s badness, his physical prowess, and his fighting ability. The text gives an example of this saying,

...when he came out of prison, wearing his six months’ hard labour and the knowledge that he alone for almost half an hour had battled more than a dozen policemen as a string of medallions pinned on the chest of an old soldier from the West India Regiment on Remembrance Day, believing that everybody knew of his exploits...”²²

Exploits such as these gave Fisheye a certain celebrity status in the community and was a way in which the black poor celebrated their own heroes. “...the baddest man in town respecting him, and everywhere he pass on the Hill, people calling out to him, not because they were afraid of him, but out of a warm embracing brotherhood and comradeship.”²³

²¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...59.

²² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...53.

²³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...57.

The “bad john” character and his celebrated status is not just fiction. As Hollis Liverpool explains, the “bad john” character exists in Trinidadian society. He says,

Synonymous with the rise of the steelband was the rise of the village ‘bad john,’ who, as it were, represented the fighting spirit of his band or village; he appealed to the authorities by his uncouth and anti-social behaviour for improvements in his village’s social conditions. The Cannes Brulees leaders and champion stickfighters, it must be understood, gave way to the badjohns of the 1930 to 1962 era. Bad Johns fought against the Police, the authorities, and amongst themselves. They knowledgeably brought to their district or area a kind of importance in which they revelled. Their behaviour was in itself a kind of resistance against society that refused to see any good or anything creative in the lower class. They were recognised by all villagers as the leaders in their respective communities, not in any more or (immoral) sense, but as persons whose opinions must be heard before any communal action was undertaken, and whose thoughts and ideas influenced the activities of the steelbandsmen, masqueraders and villagers. In fact, one of them, the leader of the Desparadoes Steelband, was dubbed ‘The Speaker.’ Like the jamettes of the 19th century, badjohns blazed a trail of destruction and physical injury wherever they went and many feats have been associated with their names. The aliases of a few give an insight into their characteristics and fighting abilities: There were men such as Firecong, Cutouta, Skipper, Straight to Heaven, Scorpion, Crime, and Kilroy. In a world

where secondary education was beyond the reach of many, 'to be recognised as a badjohn was to hold an A-Level Certificate.'²⁴

Badjohns like Fisheye wanted to be celebrated as the stars in movies were celebrated. This may explain the allure the black poor had for Western movies. The heroes of Westerns often faced what seemed to be insurmountable odds but through their own strength and ability, they overcame their enemies. And so, these rebels masquerade as cowboys. The text describes this phenomenon:

...their gangs, Marabuntas, Apple-Jackers, Brimstone, Shane – hard names derived from the movies which on some nights they slip off the walls to see, Western movies of the gun talk and the quick draw and the slow crawl, smooth grand gestures which they imitate so exquisitely as though those gestures were their own borrowed to the movie stars for them to later reclaim as proper to their person...²⁵

The text gives another example of the black poor's masquerade as a cowboy, speaking of Fisheye:

He began to go to the cinema. Every night almost, he went to Royal or Empire, whichever was showing a western double; and after the show, walking home up the Hill, the picture fresh in his mind, walking kinda slow, he would feel for a few moments his strength, his youth, his promise fill him, and he would walk, the fastest gun alive, his long hands stiff at his sides, his fingers ready to go for the guns he imagined holstered low on his hips.²⁶

²⁴ Liverpool, Hollis, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion* (Chicago: Research Associates School Times, 2001) 419-420.

²⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 12.

²⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...50.

Fisheye would imitate a cowboy later in the narrative when he takes a police officer hostage. But this incident leads to him getting several years in prison. This is in addition to the time he spent in prison previously for the brawl involving the police officers, of which he is so proud. So, it is evident that when this masquerade as a cowboy is performed, the results are far different from the movies, for the black poor is punished for any rebellion against the power structure.

In *Afro-Trinbagonians*, Selwyn Cudjoe sees this identification with cowboy movies as a part of our cultural alienation. Cudjoe quotes a man, who he does not identify, who corresponded with him concerning this issue. He quotes,

‘The Black Power era, notwithstanding, while Indo-Trinidadians were watching Indian movies, listening to Indian music and rallying behind their religious leadership which was also their political leadership, Africans were busy watching Westerns, war movies, Kung Fu kick ups, and so on which only hastened our cultural alienation from ourselves.’²⁷

Clearly, the “cowboy-like” image adopted by the black poor has not helped in overcoming the challenges this group faces.

The “cowboy” warriorhood the badjohns exhibit found a place of expression in the steelbands. In joining the steel bands, Fisheye found circumstances through which he could test himself and be celebrated as a warrior. The text says, “...for those were the days when every district around Port of Spain was its own island, and the steelband within its boundaries was its army, providing warriors to uphold its

²⁷ Cudjoe, Selwyn R., *Afro-Trinbagonians* (Wellesley: Calaloux Publications, 2001) 34.

sovereignty.”²⁸ The text goes on to say, “In this war, in this army, Fisheye at last found the place where he could be a man, where his strength and quickness had meaning and he could feel pride in belonging and purpose to his living, and where he had all the battles he had dreamed of, and more, to fight.”²⁹

Hollis Liverpool puts the steelbands in the context of the social and economic circumstances of the time:

...during the period 1935-1962, most pannists were frustrated over social and economic conditions. It was a period, we have already seen, of labour unrest, rising prices, trade union emergence and suppression, and domination of the oil industry by British capitalists. As unemployed young men with little or no status in the society, they sought, according to Borde, through their steelband music to show the elite that they were creative in their own way, and that they were not the men of straw the upper class made them out to be. For Hugh Borde, ‘panbeating’ was an act of rebellion against a Government and a ruling class that regarded them as ‘rogues and vagabonds’ and treated them as outcasts.’³⁰

In an essay called, “The Emancipation-Jouvay Tradition and the Almost Loss of Pan,” Earl Lovelace further elaborates on the comfort that the lower class found in steelband:

...steelband had already become the rallying point for especially the dispossessed Jouvay youth, its charisma established even before it hit

²⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 54.

²⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...54.

³⁰ Cudjoe, Selwyn R., *Afro-Trinbagonians* (Wellesley: Calaloux Publications, 2001)

the streets, the sounds reproduced everywhere in classrooms, schoolboys beating the desks and getting the rhythm, fellars coming back victorious from a football match playing mouth band, imitating the different instruments of the steelband and reproducing pan/drum sounds: fellars all about walking in steelband rhythm and shadowing the wrist movements of a man beating pan. We had something. We, its supporters, its followers, were not awed by the genius that had created it; we shared in its creation. New people were developing new pans, sinking new notes in the steel. Ordinary people were tuning steeldrums; ordinary men and women were becoming arrangers of music. In a sense we had produced the rallying icon for our generation that, if we were mindful, showed us self-confidently embarked upon the mastery of technology, which we would need to compete in the modern world.³¹

Both Earl Lovelace and Hollis Liverpool confirm that steelbands would fight with one another. Lovelace says, “Bands kept up between themselves ongoing feuds.”³² Liverpool adds, “There were times when Steelbandsmen fought among themselves on Carnival day, either to dispute or to protect their turfs and instruments.”³³ In these quotes, a need can be seen for these rebels to find a means of expression for their warriorhood, for, it seems, this is a vital part of their psychological survival. For if they stopped fighting, they would have to deal with the

³¹ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark* (San Juan: Lexicon Trinidad LTD, 2003) 39.

³² Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark*...39.

³³ Liverpool, Hollis, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion* (Chicago: Research Associates School Times, 2001) 418.

complexity of having to solve the problems of the black poor, which requires much more than a masquerade.

In the midst of the disputes between the steelbands in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Fisheye only becomes aware of the fruitlessness of this fratricidal war through the enlightened words of his girlfriend Yvonne who says, “ ‘But why you have to fight one another?’ ”³⁴ Yvonne adds much more complexity to the mode of thinking of the “bad john.” She forces him to think of the reasons and consequences of his actions. She points out that fighting in itself is not desirable unless it serves a greater cause. She makes a suggestion that advances Fisheye’s outlook on life, saying, “ ‘...Why you can’t join up?’ ” Fisheye responds to this question in such a way that confirms that these separate band of warriors had never entertained thoughts of fighting anyone besides themselves, saying “ ‘And fight who?’ ” And Yvonne shows her sophistication with the illustration that the fight should be in response to the racial oppression black people face. She says, “ ‘Fight the people who keeping down black people. Fight the government,’ ” to which Fisheye responded, “ ‘You know you really talking sense.’ ”³⁵

This exchange between Yvonne and Fisheye illustrates the need for the education that the black poor need in order to affect change in their communities. The reality of organizing to change one’s circumstances seems distant from slum-dwellers such as Fisheye. The reality of living life from day to day only concerned about surviving, even psychologically, is much more common. But once enlightened by Yvonne, he has a different perspective.

³⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 58.

³⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...59.

From this moment forward, Fisheye becomes a representative of the black poor, in their conflict with the race and class enemies who oppress them. The text gives an analysis of the situation that existed among the bands saying,

The two bands, Desperadoes and Calvary Hill, existing not more than a mile from each other, peopling different sections of the same slum that ringed this side of the city, two peaks on the same rebelling Hill, had been for years locked in a war that they themselves must have created out of their own need to cultivate and uphold that spirit of rebellion and warriorhood, splitting what must have once been one tribe in that cause more holy and essential than brotherhood for their human hopes and surviving.³⁶

Fisheye makes the transition from the commitment to the war described in the previous quote to the war in defense of the slums:

He didn't think about the government or about black people or anything. He didn't think of the steelband as an army to fight any other bands. He didn't think of anything. But as soon as Yvonne said it, he saw it: these steelbands could be one army. He, Fisheye, could be general in it.³⁷

Fisheye further demonstrates the shift in his thinking, describing the oneness of the struggle among all these warring factions saying, “ ‘We is all one army – Desperadoes, Invaders, Tokyo, Casablanca, Rising Sun: all o’ we is one. We’s the

³⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...59.

³⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...59.

same people catching hell.’ ”³⁸ And so, Fisheye’s mission becomes clear: “ ‘Fight the people that keeping us down. Take over the government.’ ”³⁹

Though this is a very simple statement, this narrative reveals that fighting the people that keep black people down and taking over the government is no easy task. Questions to be asked are “what methods are to be used in accomplishing this; how might people participate; what system will be implemented once power is achieved”, along with a multitude of other important questions. So, even though Fisheye is heading in the right direction, he still has a lot to learn.

After, Fisheye gains insight into one of the biggest hurdles in organizing the black poor: the confidence in the ability of the black poor to overcome their circumstances. Fisheye, went to his fellow band mates proposing a unity among the bands in a fight to take over the government, but he was laughed at. These rebels considered the very notion of taking over the government as ridiculous. In their eyes, those with the responsibility for making decisions for the black poor do not dwell among the black poor. Fisheye would conclude of his friends in the steel bands: “ ‘They just wanted to be bad Johns. Me, I was a general all the time.’ ”⁴⁰ Though these bands eventually made peace with each other, they would not join Fisheye in his war against the powers that be.

There is a point in the narrative where the black poor simply abandon their warriorhood. This was as a result of being tired of the fight they did not believe they could win. This was a concession by the black poor, a surrender. An appropriate phrase to describe the philosophy that governed this surrender is “if you can’t beat them, join them.” The narrative does not speak of a specific event that led to this

³⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...59.

³⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...60.

⁴⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...60.

surrender. But the phrase which is used in such instances in the novel is “times change”. This was the situation in relationship to the steel bands. As Fisheye encouraged them to do, the bands decided to fight no longer. The novel said, “They did not sign peace, peace overtook them.”⁴¹ This speaks to the reality that this was not an action taken to determine the destiny of the black poor, but to accept to accept the destiny that was given to them.

The text goes further to explain, “...the war between them had ended long before. Fellars really didn’t want to fight each other anymore. The bad John, the warrior, had lost zest for the fratricidal war.”⁴² Not participating in a fratricidal war is a good thing, but the aggression wrongly directed internally at the black poor should have been redirected to the powers that be. Instead, their warrior spirit died. This was not Fisheye’s hope in suggesting peace. The text says “...he felt that the peace would bring, would begin, cooperation, that fellars would come together; and, that coming together, they would see their strength, see their potential.” It goes on to say, “But this peace was no furtherance of his dream. It was a pleasant peace, a nice peace, a peace of ending rather than of beginning.”⁴³

Fisheye had hoped for a new beginning. He desired the building of a movement that could empower the black poor, but this was not to be. The text says, “It didn’t cause the bands to turn their eyes away from each other outwards to the world beyond the pan yards and street corners, beyond the haunts of steelbandsmen to

⁴¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...61.

⁴² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...61.

⁴³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...61.

a larger arena, a bigger world, a world with a more comprehensive reality, where resided the levers of power that moved people, that moved them.”⁴⁴

The narrator makes the point that the black poor could not take any action outside the boundaries of their class. The rulers transcended the boundaries of their class but not the black poor; aggression could travel from the upper class downward but not the lower class upward. The text goes on to say, “It was as if they were purposely blind to this world, as if they believed that their gestures were only relevant when directed at each other, that meaning for them was anchored in the world of the steelband and of the street corner. So that the peace did not join them or move them, it merely ended the nature of the violence between them.”⁴⁵

The black poor’s surrender is a prominent theme in the novel. This surrender is as a result of the desire to progress and the inability of the pose of rebellion to facilitate their survival. The novel speaks of Aldrick and Fisheye as “...two captains, veterans of rebellion, Dragon and bad John, surrounded by six or seven young men, flagbearers of a disappearing warriorhood...”⁴⁶ These two characters joined forces in the novel to continue their pose of rebellion in the midst of the community’s surrender. The text reads, “It seemed to him that they were losing a battle with the times, with the people on the Hill. The people wanted to move on, to change, to make peace with their condition, to surrender that rebellion they had lived for generations...”⁴⁷

The black poor’s surrender of their rebellion manifests itself in their acceptance of the “white bands” coming into Carnival and acceptance of sponsorship.

⁴⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...61.

⁴⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...61.

⁴⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...152.

⁴⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...166.

This is seen as a surrender because they have made peace with the rich and the prosperous, those who are implicated in the black poor's wretched state. Fisheye tells his friends in the steel band to run the white bands out but his bandmate responds " '...They helping to make steelband respectable... Us...we respectable.' ”⁴⁸ This statement suggests a lack of confidence on the part of the black poor, who have bought into the theory of white superiority that associates “whiteness” with respectability and blackness with the opposite.

Fisheye seems amazed at this saying “ ‘You mean you want them to accept you, Reds. You want them to accept you?’ ”⁴⁹ Far from wanting the white bands' acceptance, Fisheye wanted to go to war with them. The same situation exists with the sponsors. These were rich companies who wanted to use the steel bands to advertise their products and increase their sales. Fisheye protested the sponsors strongly but to no avail.

Hollis Liverpool speaks to this phenomenon in his book, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*. He says,

In the 1950's, oil companies, banks, airlines and large enterprises began to sponsor steelbands. Sponsorship involved the provision of uniforms, pans, concerts and sometimes foreign tours for band members. In return the companies advertised their goods and names on the blazers of the members and on the pans and banners of the band.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...63.

⁴⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...63.

⁵⁰ Liverpool, Hollis, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion* (Chicago: Research Associates School Times, 2001) 397.

Liverpool explains that the steelbands were not respected by the larger society because of the working class nature of the activity, but this perception changes. He goes on to explain the factors influencing the steelbands acceptance:

Several factors then were responsible for the eventual acceptance of the steelband movement in the mid 1950s after it was plagued by violent inter-feuding, and stigmatised by many as an art of the lower classes. Such factors include: participation of middle class youth of European descent in the early 1950s; the sponsorship of bands by companies; the formation of a Steelbands' Association; the support of prominent citizens; the ability to play European Classical pieces; and above all, the wave of nationalism that swept Trinidad from 1956 to 1962. By 1962, the majority of middle class people who had first spurned the movement began to accept the steelband as the national music of the country.⁵¹

Earl Lovelace also speaks extensively on the factors that changed the character of the steelband movement. In speaking of the role of the PNM and Eric Williams, specifically, he says,

...the opportunity of binding the steelband to indigenous effort, of fulfilling the Emancipation-Jouvay dream of liberating a society to self-confidence and creativity was never undertaken. By the time Williams ended his political career, he had left his Emancipation-Jouvay constituency thoroughly mystified and as distressed as when he had met them. The violence of the steelbands had been removed; and if

⁵¹ Liverpool, Hollis, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion* (Chicago: Research Associates School Times, 2001) 397.

over those years we permitted a single badjohn, his name was Eric Williams.⁵²

Lovelace continues focusing on the result of the change in the steelbands' class character:

In that time, steelband had moved to the Savannah, followed briefly by the Emancipation-Jouvay movement. There it would be subjected to the sanitised rules and regulations of a colonial middle class that continues to address battles that had been long fought and won. Its musical offering remains frozen in the mode of European classics, the melodic line emphasised at the expense of the rhythmic, the whole wide world of musical possibilities ignored. And is no one even a little bit alarmed that the calypso music now played at Panorama by steelbands is less capable of moving people to dance than the deejayed rendition of the same calypso sung by the calypsonian?⁵³

These changes in the steelbands movement represented a surrender that is illustrated in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, but it was not just the steel bands that surrendered; The novel tells us that the majority of the black poor surrendered as well. They could not see a future in this masquerade. The text explains that

...multitudes of people keenly felt the need to cut their ties with the Corners in their own communities. These were people who had inherited the rebellion bequeathed them by their parents...but people for whom times had changed...They had jobs now, had responsibility

⁵² Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark* (San Juan: Lexicon Trinidad LTD, 2003) 42.

⁵³ Lovelace, Earl, *Growing in the Dark* (San Juan: Lexicon Trinidad LTD, 2003) 42-

now for the surviving families, they could no longer afford rebellion at the Corner.⁵⁴

Of course, to support one's family is a noble reason to seek an alternative, for allowing one's own family to starve is yet another type of surrender. The text speaks of "...their daily surviving, a ritual impelled not even by greed, set in motion by that most noble and obscene reason: the wife, the children, the belly, the back, the foot; the need to keep on keeping on..."⁵⁵

At this point in the novel, Fisheye is unsympathetic to the need of the people to find a way to survive. He reveals his own ideological weakness in this instance. He tells Aldrick, " 'You can't sorry for these people...They is traitors, everyone of them. They only want a excuse to be slaves again.' "⁵⁶ The question of whether the people of Calvary Hill are traitors is an interesting one. But at this point Fisheye offers the people no alternative.

Both Sylvia and a character name Philo offer detailed examples of the black poor's surrender. Both of these characters would manage to escape their class, one through romance, the other through entertainment. Aldrick, who is interested in Sylvia, but has nothing to offer her, reflects on the life that is awaiting Sylvia in Calvary Hill. This is a life which is undignified and difficult. The text says,

In the seventeen years he had lived on this hill he had seen generations of girls graduate from these beginnings to night clubs, to brothels, to the city's streets, to live in that strict and lascivious immodesty, like wrongsided nuns, on their way to becoming battle-axes, the mother

⁵⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 164.

⁵⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...152.

⁵⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...165.

superiors of whoredom, irreverent and wise; if they were lucky, dropping their unwanted progeny at the home a grandmother or aunt or friend, and if they were not, being forced to return periodically from the scene of their labours to nurse their children.⁵⁷

So, it would seem to be unreasonable to ask Sylvia to endure that manner of existence for the rest of her life. But Sylvia had a hope of a different future but, misguidedly, relied on a man in the community, Aldrick, to deliver the promise of that future through marrying her and attempting to provide for her. It is at the moment that Aldrick displays an unwillingness to do so that Sylvia surrenders her hope that the black poor can help themselves. She makes a romantic alliance with a member of the middle-class, Guy, which sacrifices her hope and integrity. The narrator makes the astute observation that “Maybe she had not so chosen Guy as refused the impotence of dragons.”⁵⁸

The disappointment of waiting on the black poor to uplift itself drove Sylvia to Guy and, therefore, drove her to the loss of herself. The text says,

She no longer moved with the whirring blur of hummingbirds’ wings, was no longer full of the brimming vitality of a Shango Priestess. With Guy keeping her now, she had shoes and new dresses, and every Friday evening she went into the city to have her hair straightened.
(137)

So, the price of Sylvia’s surrender is plain to see: she has become Westernized and has lost her African identity. Sylvia has traded the essence of who she was for trivial material objects even though her survival is no longer in question. She is a

⁵⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...30.

⁵⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...203.

member of the middle-class now, which is apparent in the company she keeps. The text says she was "...caught between Guy and her giggling friends and Miss Cleothilda..."(137) Sylvia should not be condemned for wanting to survive, especially when she sought an alternative in Aldrick, but was rejected.

Philo is a calypsonian who is friend to Aldrick and an admirer of Cleothilda for many years. He is a member of the black poor but suddenly becomes famous as a calypsonian and his fortunes change. This gives him access to a middle-class lifestyle and privileges he could not have before.

An example of a privilege he gains access to through his sudden rise is the favour of Miss Cleothilda. Prior to his fame, Cleothilda would treat him badly. Miss Caroline speaks about it in a conversation with Miss Olive, saying, "...she insulting him to his face: she don't want no calypso man! Why he don't go and look for a woman of his class? And, tell me, what class she is."⁵⁹ It is clear here that Philo cannot gain Cleothilda's affection because of her middle-class status, for she preferred a man of her own class. Miss Caroline goes on to say that Philo could get a woman of his own class and colour easily: "...Black as he is, when he put on clothes and comb his hair he could get any reasonable woman; but is she he want..." She also makes clear the reason Philo wants Cleothilda, saying, "...And what make her so precious so? That fading yellow red-nigger skin..."⁶⁰ While it is apparent that Philo's infatuation with Cleothilda has a great deal to do with his pedestalization of the light-skinned above the dark-skinned, it is also clear that his access to one of his desires had been restricted by his class. Once he gains fame through Calypso, Philo gains access to her bedroom whenever he likes.

⁵⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...22.

⁶⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...21.

Another desire that was previously denied to Philo was the Calypso King Crown. Philo participated in the Calypso competition for several years and never won. He always sang about the miserable conditions of the black poor, but that never gave him any commercial success, obviously because those who could give him that success was opposed to that message. So in this instance, Philo surrendered his message. Rather than addressing the conditions of the black poor, he creates music which stereotypes black people as hypersexual and less civilized. Philo says, “ ‘...I know you must be saying that I change, that this is not my style, my kinda song, that I ain’t protesting again, I ain’t singing against the bad things in the place. But, man, you have to sing what the people want to hear.’ ”⁶¹ He goes on to say “ ‘Man, year in year out, I singing about how people hungry, how officials ain’t doing their duty, and what I get, man? What I get? I want to win the Calypso King crown...’ ”⁶² Singing about all the problems the poor experienced had no material benefit for Philo, but, with the success of his Calypsos, he was able to travel to America and England and even leave the slums of Calvary hill for the rich neighborhood of Diego Martin.

Hollis Liverpool gives some background on the origins and role of Calypso. He says,

Kalenda songs restricted the Africans to the Kalenda yards and the stickfights. To help withstand their everyday problems Africans needed other social sites. As such, they turned to and developed the Calypso. It was a song encompassing all the African cultural traits relating to music: percussive rhythmic beats, the call-and-response pattern, extemporaneous singing and satire. A West African song of

⁶¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...112.

⁶² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...113.

praise and blame, it pulled from the Kalenda its militaristic rebellious spirit, and from the work songs, bongos, Baptist and Shango faiths, its melodies and rhythms. It provided for the Africans a sense of fulfilment and became for them a weapon with which they could safely attack the Whites and upper classes. Its history can be traced to the enslaved Africans, who, on the plantations of Trinidad, sang of their hopes, fears and experiences of enslavement.⁶³

Liverpool further emphasizes the role of calypso in Trinidad. He says,

Using the Calypso as an art form to sing on issues openly during the period, calypsonians expressed the desire and will of the oppressed to state publicly what was in the hidden transcript, while using metaphors, puns, innuendos and the Calypso Tent itself as safety masks. Within the culture of protest, however, the Masquerade, the Steelband and the Calypso were symbols of power and freedom for the lower classes.⁶⁴

The tradition of Calypso, described in the aforementioned quotes, represent the traditions that Philo has abandoned in favour of his individual progress. The society that he belonged to is controlled by the middle and upper classes and, therefore, criticizing them will bring no reward. He, therefore, abandons the struggle.

So, he joins the middle-class which puts him in direct conflict with the rebels of the black poor. Fisheye says of Philo, “ ‘...He not one of us again. Cleothilda and Guy is his friend...’ ”⁶⁵ The reader also learns that “...Aldrick didn’t feel so

⁶³ Liverpool, Hollis, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion* (Chicago: Research Associates School Times, 2001) 185.

⁶⁴ Liverpool, Hollis, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*...443.

⁶⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 158.

comfortable with him”, even though Aldrick was one of his close friends.⁶⁶ Aldrick could not justify remaining friends with Philo who was now a part of the world he was opposed to. The text explains the rebels’ rejection of Philo:

At the Corner, power lay not so much in the might of the small company as in their steadfast pose of rebellion, in their rejection of the ordinary world, its rewards and promises. How could Philo, with his flashy clothes and his car and his women, all gained in the service of that other world against which they were rebelling, be their friend?⁶⁷

Philo is defiant at first but even comes into conflict with himself. It would seem as though Philo would like to experience the brotherhood and camaraderie of the Calvary Hill community but not share in their struggle. As a result of that, Philo is no longer accepted but he is not at peace with this situation. At one point he pleads, “It don’t mean I don’t care, or that I give up the battle...”⁶⁸ and the text also said that “...Philo was bent on proving that he had not changed...”⁶⁹ Philo makes a case for himself saying that his actions were necessary for his survival, which is the same reason that everyone else has abandoned the pose of rebellion. Philo questions what was a viable alternative:

He didn’t make life. All he was doing was trying to get through, to make a space for himself in the world. Because he bought some new clothes and a car they viewed him as a traitor. Traitor to what? To

⁶⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...154.

⁶⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...158.

⁶⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...113.

⁶⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...155.

what cause? What did they want him to do? Continue to stand on the Corner watching people pass.⁷⁰

Though Philo has a strong case, he begins to doubt himself towards the end of the narrative. After saying, “ ‘I is a Calvary Hill man. I ain’t no hifalutin Diego Martin jackass,’ ”⁷¹ Philo eventually admits, “ ‘...I am one of them...these Diego Martin People.’ ”⁷² One more example of his shift in thinking is when he travels to Calvary Hill and says, “ ‘How come they do not see that I’m a traitor.’ ”⁷³ Philo’s insecurities confirm that, though he achieved middle-class status, he is still in a problematic position due to his stereotypical depiction of black people and his abandonment of the black poor.

The novel presents another flawed response to the system of oppression imposed on the black poor: giving support to corrupt political parties who would not take the necessary steps to liberate the black poor. When Fisheye’s girlfriend, Yvonne, left him the text explains “...she had gone with a fellar active in the new political party, the PNM.”⁷⁴ Yvonne left Fisheye because of her discontent with the bad john lifestyle; Fisheye would do the same, becoming frustrated with the bad john’s lack of vision and becoming an unofficial member of the party.

The narrative speaks of the hope that Fisheye had in the political mobilisation:

This was the thing that the steelband might have become, if fellars had sense, if they had vision. This was it, something joining people to people and people to dreams and dreams to hope that man would battle

⁷⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...232.

⁷¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...234.

⁷² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...235.

⁷³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...238.

⁷⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...64.

for more than to proclaim the strength of his arms, would lift their arms to break down these shanty towns and clean up the dog shit of the streets and the filth of gutters and build something clean, something tall.⁷⁵

This quote describes the political party's noble intent in solving the problems of the black poor. It sold a dream to Fisheye and the black poor that this political party could offer them a more dignified life than what they currently experienced. The text says of Fisheye: "He wanted to enter it, to join it, become part of it, this wonderful thing that was going to fight colonialism, was going to stand up for the people, was going to create jobs and make us a nation."⁷⁶

The political party had huge support in the community, but whether they would deliver on their promises was still in question. Fisheye certainly thought so, but this was, perhaps, due to his naivete. The narrator illustrates the point: "No. It was not talk. Thousands of people were there...It was a real thing. It wasn't a hustle to him. Or maybe it was too countrified still, too given to dreams, too swept along by hope, too great a believer in his own strength, in the possibility that he could, in company with men, make something happen."⁷⁷ Unfortunately, the political party would prove that the hope and trust that the people had in them was misplaced.

Firstly, Fisheye, and, most likely, other members of the black poor could not understand much of the political concepts but were caught up in the emotion and rhetoric of the political party. This put the black poor in a position where they could not be a part of the political debate and also hold the politicians accountable to their

⁷⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...65.

⁷⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...66.

⁷⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...66.

responsibility to the black poor. The text says of Fisheye, “He couldn’t understand the words. He doubted that they could explain them; but you really didn’t need words to understand. You don’t need words to understand the roaring of an ocean.” The text goes on to speak about the concepts that Fisheye could not understand “Manifesto, Nationhood, Culture, Colonialism. It was something to talk to Yvonne about.”⁷⁸

Fisheye acknowledged the intelligence of Yvonne and looked to her for direction. The text says, “Maybe Yvonne might have been able to explain to him. She went to high school, she knew things.”⁷⁹ The black poor as a whole should have had an indepth knowledge of politics. As the text put it, “Maybe life, real life, was not just fighting. Maybe you had to have brains, you had to have a manifesto and a programme; you had to go to college.”⁸⁰ And so, the need for a political education program to educate the black poor is glaringly obvious.

Secondly, the PNM were not willing to make changes in the socio-economic system which would empower the black poor. The text says, “The elections came, the PNM won. No fight. He [Fisheye] couldn’t understand that.” This is a poignant observation by Fisheye. Fisheye is confused as to how you can win where there is no struggle.

And the truth is that the black poor has not in fact won because there has been no struggle in their interest. A black-skinned elite simply replaced the colonial masters in the position of authority and continued the socio-economic system that preceded them. The text confirms this, saying, “...white people were still in the

⁷⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...65.

⁷⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...66.

⁸⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...67.

banks and in the businesses along Frederick Street. The radio still spoke with a British voice. He[Fisheye] couldn't understand."⁸¹ A victory would have been the black poor taking over the positions in banks and along Frederick Street, and speaking on the radio with the voice of the black poor. This would require a struggle with the wealthy white interests, and this was not the role that the PNM would serve.

Finally, the PNM would simply practice political nepotism. After being elected, the PNM simply did favors for their supporters. One of Fisheye's friends, Reds, put it best when he said, " 'We support them. They must take care of us.' " And the PNM did take care of Fisheye who was one of their big supporters by giving him work on a program. Reds says to Fisheye " 'You don't have to work, just go on the job and give in your name.' " ⁸² The situation that the novel describes here is an example of corruption endemic among the political authorities responsible for the black poor. Rather than commit to the economic development of the black poor, the politicians just feed their supporters and leaving those who did not support them to starve. Even though Fisheye was not deserving of work the text says, "The boss called him in the office and told him he would be a foreman, and he shrugged his shoulders and said all right."⁸³

In Selwyn Cudjoe's book, *A Just and Moral Society*, he gives scathing criticism of the PNM and other parties. Of the PNM, he says,

PNM has completed its historical task (that of leading the people to formal independence) and lost all its moral capacity to govern. There is too much corruption in public and private places; too much

⁸¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...66.

⁸² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...67.

⁸³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...67.

inefficiency and lack of accountability in the public sector; too little moral and ethical fiber in the nation as a whole; too little concern for our fellow citizen; and so the social bond that is supposed to keep our people together as a strong and caring nation has dwindled away. The PNM, which initially drew its ardent supporters from the working people, has now turned its back on its most faithful adherents. If there were any doubts about its position, the 1984 budget certainly washed them all away. The PNM has betrayed those who served it most faithfully.⁸⁴

And so, all the speeches, promises, and rhetoric were simply a part of a ploy to get into power. The political party had no commitment to the education, economic development, and fair treatment of the black poor. They simply wanted power and, once in power, wanted to stay in power. As is common, the politicians are members of the black middle-class, who benefitted from “decolonization” by being able to assume political power. Without the black poor they would not have achieved as much as they have, for it’s the black poor who always is ready to fight on their behalf. But, as the narrative shows, the black middle-class is the true beneficiary, not the black poor. The text says “All politicians belong to the same society, and is only the people who fight.”⁸⁵ The failure of the politicians to alleviate the misery of the black poor means that other options for upliftment must be explored.

Since the political parties had failed to represent the black poor’s interests, Fisheye, Aldrick and their band of rebels engage in an adventurous act of rebellion, which results in their imprisonment. They took a police officer hostage and drove

⁸⁴ Cudjoe, Selwyn, *A Just and Moral Society* (Ithaca: Calaloux, 1984) 77.

⁸⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 67.

around in a police jeep for a day then they were eventually captured and put on trial. They named themselves “the People’s Liberation Army” and they used the police bullhorn to speak to the people in the city, encouraging them to rise up against the system. They showed that they had the correct intentions, but they also showed that they were disorganized. The text says, “To require a plan was to question the very truth of their cause and the bravery of their soldiers.”⁸⁶

So, they had a just cause but never got to the point where they could strategise for victory. Their concern at that point was to win the masses of people to their point of view, to encourage people them to fight against the system. But ultimately, this small band had no power and those who did have the power, the police and judicial system, jailed them. So, this method was ineffective.

The revolt that takes place in the novel is a reflection of the black power revolt in 1970 led by the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC). Selwyn Cudjoe also illustrated why NJAC is not a suitable group to lead the uplift of the black poor. He says,

Generally...NJAC has suffered from a poor assortment of ideas, the inability to work out its ideas clearly, and the tenacious perception by the populace that it is a racist, nationalist organization. In fact, NJAC remains a classic example of a people’s perception of what a party stands for being more important than what the party actually stands for, and this has always acted to its detriment. In contemporary politics, perception is just as important as policy. Moreover, the confusing policies and obfuscating perceptions of NJAC have always hindered

⁸⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon can't Dance*...171.

the party. The inability of the NJAC to make its ideas penetrate the broader spectrum of political discourse of the society speaks concretely to its ill-defined image and confusing policies.⁸⁷

In his essay, "The Challenge to the Post-Colonial State," Herman Bennett also documents reasons for the black power revolts failure, which includes criticism of NJAC:

NJAC's Jacobinism and reluctance to organize the demonstrators around specific objectives, plus the fact that the majority of the demonstrators were narrowly focused on reforms within the conventional political system, were in part responsible for the February revolt's failure to effect change in Trinidad. Yet, the larger responsibility for the movement's failure rests with the fact that the revolt involved only a small segment of the population. The lack of participation suggests that discontent was not as pervasive or as intense as some observers argued. Moreover, even if NJAC had had a more coherent ideology, structure, and program of action, it is doubtful that the revolt could have brought the government down. Throughout the rebellion, the government forces were never seriously challenged. Nevertheless, the movement awakened the Trinidadian elite to the plight of young urban blacks who out of frustration embraced Black Power as a viable alternative to their deplorable predicament.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Cudjoe, Selwyn, *A Just and Moral Society* (Ithaca: Calaloux, 1984) 80.

⁸⁸ Bennett, Herman L., "The Challenge to the Post-Colonial State," *The Modern Caribbean*, ed. Franklin Knight and Colin Palmer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 143.

The failure of the black power revolt along with the failure of the political parties, the badjohns, the steelbands, and calypsonians all are examples that the *The Dragon Can't Dance* gives of the black poor's unproductive responses to their own oppression; it is clear why the black poor have not been able to overcome their oppression. One such reason is that the black poor lacks a clear ideology on race, class, and resistance. In the narrative, the black poor, represented by Miss Olive, accept the mulatto, Miss Cleothilda's social and economic advantage over them. Miss Olive continues to patronize Cleothilda's parlour despite her assumed, "queenship" over the rest of them. Miss Caroline refuses to patronize Cleothilda's parlour until Cleothilda begins sleeping with Philo. The text speaks of the effect Philo sleeping with Cleothilda had on the community: "They saw it as the surrendering in Miss Cleothilda of a superiority that she could no longer claim, as a kind of coming down, a fall, that equalized all of them and that qualified her as a person in their eyes."⁸⁹

This view is problematic. Firstly, Philo only has access to Cleothilda once he joins the middle-class, which means that the racial harmony that the community promotes is insincere. Also, it would seem that Cleothilda's acceptance of Philo validates the black poor's humanity because of their own inferiority complex. Though Miss Caroline is angry at Cleothilda over her condescending behaviour towards the black poor, she really wants to be accepted by Cleothilda, which automatically places her in an inferior position.

Also, the community never entertains the possibility of collectively opening their own parlour. They only see themselves as consumers who will choose between Indian, Chinese, or Mulatto. So equality is not based on economics, but based on how

⁸⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (Port of Spain : Persea Books, 1979) 148.

they interact with one another. Cleothilda propagates the myth in the novel, “ ‘All o’ we is one. We have the same pains – Indian, Chinee, white, black, rich, poor. All o’ we is one. All of us have to live here on this island.’ ”⁹⁰ This statement is a blatant attempt on the part of Cleothilda to obscure the advantage she and others enjoy over the black poor. And it’s the black poor’s acceptance of this view that prevents them from acting in their own class interest.

Philo is another example of a lack of ideology on race and class. Philo, himself, was confused as to whether he was a traitor or not. Only Fisheye seemed clear that he was a traitor, by virtue of having access to the life that he did. Philo felt that the rebels on the Corner should have been proud of his success and happy that one of them made it. This, too, is a perspective that is unhelpful. Philo does not recognize any responsibility he has to the community’s upliftment. His philosophy seems to be “everyman for himself” and whoever is lucky enough to escape their circumstances should be celebrated. But it is clear that the black poor should not celebrate someone else’s meal while they starve, even though this is often the case. Philo has a responsibility to the community that he does not acknowledge. Despite this, the community, except for Fisheye, Aldrick, and the rebels on the Corner, accepts him to the point where Philo questions, “ ‘How come they do not see that I’m a traitor.’ ”⁹¹ This is because the black poor on a whole does not have an ideology based on both race and class that would identify Philo as a traitor.

The lawyer that defended Aldrick, Fisheye and their band of rebels is a good example of the responsibility that each member of the community has to the black poor. The text describes the Lawyer’s rise to the middle-class and how he refused to

⁹⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...149.

⁹¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...238.

abandon the poor: “When he was nine he won a college exhibition from San Juan Government School and entered QRC – Queen’s Royal College – the premier secondary school in the country; there he won a scholarship, placing third in the Cambridge examinations in the entire island, and went on to Oxford where he studied Law.”⁹² It is clear that the path the lawyer has taken, with his high academic achievement, leads to an escape of the poverty that Philo, Sylvia, and the entire community desired. But this lawyer was a patriot. The text says, “now he was back home, back home after having been through elite schools; but he had not forgotten poverty...” The text explains the black poor’s response to this lawyer’s commitment to them: “...fellars marvelling that he, one of them, their own, had been so far away, Oxford, England, and could still have that appreciation to come and sit down and take a drink...”⁹³

It is not simply his ability to take a drink with the black poor that identifies him as progressive. Philo, too, took drinks with the black poor though this was mostly out of guilt. The lawyer’s commitment to the black poor manifests itself in his defense of the black poor from the persecution of the state. Philo did not even defend the black poor culturally and ideologically, making songs instead which ridicule black people. The major difference between the lawyer and Philo is an ideology on race and class that informs how to relate to the black poor. The text says, “...he had read Marx and grounded on Fanon and Malcolm X and he was on the outskirts of what called itself a Socialist Movement...”⁹⁴

The text presents two more characters that represent aspects of the ideology that would liberate the black poor. The first is Raymond, with whom Sylvia

⁹² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...182.

⁹³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...182.

⁹⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...182.

entertained a relationship: “ ‘...All the boy intend was to do is comb up he hair in a big Afro, put on a dashiki, and spin her dreams of Africa...Wouldn’t work, cussing the boss anywhere he work, frightening them with his fierce eyes and his beard and his head full of hair and a silver bracelet on his left wrist and small black fist on a string round his neck...’ ”⁹⁵ Raymond represents an African nationalist, who recognizes an African identity and is committed to black people globally. He represents a confidence in black culture. He wears the Afro and black fist also, which are symbols of black power, common during “the Black Power Movement”. The Black Power Movement represents black people’s desire and right to be in control of their own lives, rather than subject to the control of other nationalities. However, a class consciousness is not inherently identified with Black Power.

The other character is Talbot, with whom Sylvia also entertained a relationship while Aldrick was in prison: “ ‘...Talbot ...is a revolutionist, without a penknife in he pocket, fulling Sylvia head with foolishness about Cuba and China and Vietnam, want her to go with him on top S’erra Aripo mountains. He against capitalist. He against the government. The boy against everything, even dancing.’ ”⁹⁶ Talbot represents a socialist ideology that is committed to the liberation of the working class. The socialist ideology mandates the overthrow of the ruling class, as was the case in Cuba, China, and Vietnam, and places the ownership of the means of production and responsibility for governance in the hands of the working class. But, of course, to oppose dancing is an obvious cultural conflict when applied to Africans. The combination of Raymond and Talbot’s ideologies is necessary for the liberation of the black poor in Trinidad. They address both race and class and if the black poor

⁹⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...217.

⁹⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...218.

internalized an ideology that would address their liberation in those two areas, they would be able to confront their oppression with confidence.

The novel demonstrates that ideology is nothing without action. And the absence of organization among the black poor is glaringly obvious. This leads to an impotence among the black poor, regardless of the ideology. This impotence manifests itself in a lack of economic, political, social and other forms of power.

Even Raymond and Talbot, who have clearly developed ideologies, are represented in the novel as men who cannot contribute anything towards the survival of their families. Sylvia, though obviously drawn to them due to their ideology, chooses Guy for his financial ability. Cleothilda makes the point when speaking about Raymond saying that he “ ‘...Wanted Sylvia to go ‘way to Sans Souci and work garden with him... You ain’t in Africa; and even in Africa it have cities and clothes and people have to eat...’ ”⁹⁷

She goes on to say “ ‘...Raymond want four five woman, because, as he say, that is the African way. But, the boy ain’t working nowhere. He is chief without no property, and when Guy finally get him out the house, he was owing four months’ rent...’ ”⁹⁸ Cleothilda makes the point here that the ideology is not relevant if it does nothing to impact on one’s current state of existence.

She makes the point even more clearly when speaking about Talbot. She ridicules the way in which Talbot promises financial sustainability after the revolution: “ ‘We don’t have nothing now, but after the revolution,’ ”⁹⁹ Cleothilda goes on to say, “ ‘...Everything is after the revolution!...people does live life every

⁹⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...217.

⁹⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...218.

⁹⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...218.

day...and they have to live somewhere. So if you want to go up S'erra Aripo with a pack of biscuits and a tin of sardines, that is the life you have to prepare to live.

People don't, can't put off living.' ”¹⁰⁰ The truth of Cleothilda's words is inescapable. Sylvia could not survive with Raymond and Talbot, and initially rejected Aldrick for the same reason.

The lack of organization among the black poor is manifested in the experience of Aldrick, Fisheye, and their band of rebels. Though not being very advanced in terms of their ideology, they understood the principle that they were treated unfairly in the current socio-economic system. Their names and conversation reflected a certain level of consciousness. The text speaks about one of the rebels named “...Danny...who had chosen for himself the name Liberty Varlance...”¹⁰¹ His name is an acknowledgement of the black poor's need for liberation and his role in the matter. Another example is “...Pistach, a sharp witty fellow who was always talking about Fidel Castro...”¹⁰²

The text suggests here that these rebels understood revolution well enough, being familiar with a figure such as Fidel Castro, but their greatest limitation was the inability to change their circumstances. This is on display during the episode in which the rebels from the Corner held the policeman hostage. Aldrick makes a speech to a gathering crowd that affirms his ideology, but confirms his impotence. Aldrick says, “ ‘Make no peace with slavery...for you have survived. You are filling up the shanty towns, prisons, slums, street corners, mental asylums, brothels,

¹⁰⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...218.

¹⁰¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...170.

¹⁰² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...170.

hospitals. Make no peace with shanty towns, dog shit, piss. We have to live as people, people. We have to rise up...' ”¹⁰³

Here there is the point being made that the people should not simply accept their miserable state, but when there comes time to present solutions, Aldrick is unable to present anything that could give the people confidence: “ ‘...But how do you rise up when your brothers are making peace for a few dollars? When sisters selling their souls, and mothers and fathers selling their children. How can you rise with rent to pay and children to school, and watch hunger march across your yard and camp inside your house? How can you not make peace?’ ”¹⁰⁴

The emptiness of their actions is apparent as the text says, “Aldrick, feeling an increased impotence as they talked on, talked words that stirred feelings but did little else...”¹⁰⁵ Of course, the people are not convinced in the course the rebels have taken because Aldrick himself is not convinced of their course. They have done nothing more than perform a masquerade, but they do not possess true power. And it is only power that can make change. The pathway to power begins with organization.

So, the first thing that these rebels should have done was abandon the pose of rebellion. This “dragon masquerade” only served as a tool to assert the dignity of the oppressed before the oppressor, rather than achieve power. The narrator illustrates the point saying, “...It would be there at that Corner that Aldrick realized that he did not have the courage to do it; that even though he knew that this pose of rebellion was not power, that to abandon it for that living paraded before him was a more profound treason, a surrender, a death he had not yet achieved...”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...179.

¹⁰⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...179.

¹⁰⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...180.

¹⁰⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...153.

Aldrick was afraid to abandon the pose of rebellion for he believed that this would be his compliance with his oppression, but the alternative was to seek real power. The lawyer defending the rebels further illustrates the point: “ ‘The action undertaken by these men was an attempt to not even seize power, as we have seen, but to affirm a personhood for themselves, and beyond themselves, to proclaim a personhood for people deprived and illegitimized as they: the people of the Hill, of the slums and shanty towns...’ ”¹⁰⁷

The system was under no real threat because the rulers of the system are aware that the black poor have no real power and simply know how to express their anger and frustration. The novel reads, “ ‘...They trusted that they would be unable to make of their frustration anything better than a dragon dance, a threatening gesture...’ ”¹⁰⁸

The following quote in the novel makes it clear that the community knew that the masquerading bad johns could not win:

That is why we deserted. Long, even before you came to know it, we knew that we couldn't win. You had to fight and be conquered to understand; we knew in advance. We don't have the ammunition, they are too strong; victory against them is a dream we have no chance of achieving. Welcome now to reality, welcome now to the Hill of accommodation.¹⁰⁹

It is clear that the black poor did not have the power to threaten the power structure, and, therefore, the masquerade, the dragon dance, is simply a cry for help. It is done with the hope that the powers that be would have sympathy for the poor

¹⁰⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...183.

¹⁰⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...183.

¹⁰⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...193.

and, through the authorization of the rulers, have mercy and grant the poor the standard of life they deserved.

But this point of view removes the responsibility from the black poor in their winning liberation. Aldrick, realizing this, makes the point: “ ‘...We wasn’t ready to take over nothing for we own self. We put the responsibility on them to act, to do something...The way children cry, so their parents will pick them up...’ But one of the imprisoned rebels respond “ ‘they responsible...They is the authorities’ ”¹¹⁰

This view legitimizes the control that other races and classes assert over the black poor. This view does not question the control foreign entities have over the black poor but questions how that authority is used. But Aldrick confirms that until the black poor take control of their destiny, they will be vulnerable to all manner of evil: “ ‘...We is people with the responsibility for we own self. And as long as we appeal to others, to the authorities, they will do what they want. We have to act for we.’ ”¹¹¹

So, it is clear that the dragon masquerade has not been productive. This method of resistance should be abandoned in favour of organization. Aldrick confirms that this was the reason for their failure saying“ ‘...all we could do is a dragon dance; all we could do is threaten power, to show off power we have but don’t know how to organize, how to use.’ ”¹¹²

After abandoning the pose of rebellion, the next step towards the black poor achieving liberation is changing the way they relate with the community. Rather than shaming the community for their surrender, they should establish their leadership by

¹¹⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...189.

¹¹¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*...189.

¹¹² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 186.

showing the pathway to success. The text confirms the community's relationship with the rebels saying, "...they saw Fisheye, Aldrick, and the other fellars at the Corner...who continued to fight on, whose eyes disturbed, challenged, accused them of abandoning their sacred war..."¹¹³ The text also confirms the antagonistic relationship that has developed between the community and rebels: "...these people began to view them, these rebels, not so much as the disturbing conscience they had become, but as the root cause of their problems."¹¹⁴

This is a mistake on the part of the rebels because it is impossible to win without the masses of people unified in the fight. This is why Fisheye makes the statement while in jail, " '...you know why we play a mas...Is because a man alone, that is all he could play...' "¹¹⁵ This is a powerful point that Fisheye has made, reasoning that they failed because they were on their own. And throughout the novel, the narrator refers Aldrick, Fisheye, and their band as the only remaining warriors in this fight. For example, the text says, "Aldrick had a feeling of being the last one, the last symbol of rebellion and threat to confront Port of Spain."¹¹⁶ And this is the primary reason why this band is imprisoned rather than leading a revolution.

Aldrick still has confidence that they could have grasped real power saying, " 'We coulda do more than play a mas.' "¹¹⁷ However, doing more than masquerade would require their leadership of the masses rather than their isolation from the masses. Despite the rebels ill-treatment of the black poor, they still had an opportunity to salvage their relationship with the black poor who still possessed

¹¹³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 166.

¹¹⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 166.

¹¹⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 190.

¹¹⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 121.

¹¹⁷ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 186.

“...that need to touch that freedom that was once their own, that lived still, to join themselves to that hope that in themselves they had somehow abandoned...”¹¹⁸ The black simply just had to be shown the way to success.

Once the people recognized the leadership of this band of rebels, they would have to solve the problem of the people’s survival. Even though Fisheye persecuted the people who abandoned the pose of rebellion and called them traitors, he comes to the same conclusion that they do, saying, “ ‘...I know that you have to have real power, and if you don’t have it, man, you have to survive with them that have it. It’s a joke, man, this business of being bad, a bad John...’ ”¹¹⁹ The reality is the community will not commit to a cause that does not take into consideration their immediate survival. As Cleothilda has reminded the reader, people live everyday and one cannot put off eating until after the revolution.

The text shows us that the people did not want to abandon the fight for their right to a better life, but was forced to do so by their circumstances: “They felt guilty turning away from it. Yet, they needed to move on...they were unable to hold in their minds the two contradictory ideas –their resistance and surviving, their rebellion and their decency...”¹²⁰ And so the responsibility of the rebels was to resolve the conflict between resistance and survival. They should have taken these two concepts out of binary opposition. And these two concepts can co-exist; it simply requires organization.

The black poor can organize themselves economically, educationally, and politically. Just as Cleothilda, Guy, and Pariag engaged in economic activities for

¹¹⁸ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 153.

¹¹⁹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 190.

¹²⁰ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 164.

their own benefit, the black poor could have done the same. They could have established structures that would ensure equal ownership for everyone, such as business cooperatives. This would have addressed the question of their survival. They could also have established programs responsible for teaching the black poor skills and concepts important for their survival. Black patriots, such as Yvonne and the lawyer, could have contributed due to their intelligence and level of education. Though the government is responsible for the education of the black poor, the black poor can recognize that they are not being treated fairly and take matters into their own hands. The black poor could also have organized themselves into a political party that would have a program, platform, and policies that genuinely reflected the needs of the black poor. This would prevent representatives of the middle-class, only intent on power for themselves, from taking advantage of the black poor. These steps would have led to a situation where the black poor would empower itself to the point where it could eventually compete with and confront those who would exploit them based on their race and class.

The novel is an excellent example of the experience of the black poor in the Caribbean region, under a system that oppresses based on race and class. It describes rebels who continue to fight, because they know they have to, but who have become simply concerned with performing rituals that have lost their context. While all the while, the people's suffering continues.

Aldricks words embody the fruitlessness of the rebellion that has come to embody the Caribbean region: “ ‘... ‘ ‘...They killing people in this place...Little girls, they have them whoring...And I here playing a dragon, playing a masquerade

every year, and I forget what I playing it for, what I trying to say...Is like nobody remember what life is and who we fighting and what we fighting for...' ”¹²¹

But even in the midst of the directionless rebellion, the novel teaches there is still hope. This hope manifests itself in Fisheye's enlightenment of the joke of being a “bad john”; in the respect that the sufferers have for these blind rebels on the Corner and the symbol they represent, though they will not join them; in Philo's acknowledgement that he was a traitor; and, finally and, perhaps, most importantly, Sylvia's abandonment of Guy, in search of Aldrick.

For the whole narrative, Aldrick, paralyzed by his own impotence, could not summon the courage to marry Sylvia and build a future for themselves, members of the black poor. Sylvia was forced to compromise the hope of that union, for her own survival. With Aldrick and Sylvia's union, symbolic of the black poor's commitment to each other, there is hope in the novel that the black poor can rise up. The narrator describes the quality that is embodied in Sylvia's character that leaves room for optimism:

“...the spirit, the fire, the speed; the beauty that...was...the declaration of a faith in life and a promise to life, that promise which shone on the faces of some children even through the fogs of slums, making of their poor rags a halo the better to make them shine, be seen, to make the world step back a pace and doomed by that aura that sets apart for the gaze of ordinary people the most beautiful of anything, of fruit or

¹²¹ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 110.

flower or fowl or beast, so that only the rashest and most irreverent would think to pluck it from its rootage.”¹²²

The text also gives hope of racial harmony in the character of Pariag. Once rejected by the Yard he became isolated from the blacks, simply administering a service to them and making money from them, assuming the traditional role that was expected of the Indian in the novel. The text speaks of the situation that Pariag had unknowingly plunged into when moving into the community of Calvary Hill:

“Pariag had stumbled into the Yard, and without welcome, had been asked to bear the burden of a battle he did not know was his own, that was never shown him to be his own, and which could not be shown either, because none of them in the Yard could explain it...since they could not explain it to themselves, since it was something lived for generations, lived so long that it had become a life, beyond explanation. And even if they could have explained it, could they have offered him that life? Could they have offered him the dragon, Carnival, rebellion, the possession of nothing?”¹²³

By the end of the novel, Pariag realizing that he was trapped in this historic battle he did not choose says, “ ‘...I wanted to show them me; but, only a part I show them.’ ”¹²⁴ Pariag could have shown the community that he was committed to a principled relationship with them rather than a competitive, exploitative relationship. And rather than the black poor offering him “...the possession of nothing,”¹²⁵ they

¹²² Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 215.

¹²³ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 204.

¹²⁴ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 211.

¹²⁵ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 204.

could have built a world where the black poor and the Indian had something, not gained at each other's expense, but through their cooperation.

To do so, Pariag did not have to lose himself culturally; he could have been himself and made a contribution; he could have valued his history and traditions and expected the black poor to do the same. The text says, "No. We didn't have to melt into one. I woulda be me for my own self. A beginning. A self to go in the world with, with something in my hands to give."¹²⁶

So, the reader sees the potential for a future whose fruition is never revealed in the novel, but there is the possibility that this hope can manifest itself in reality and, perhaps, this will inspire a novel in the future detailing how Aldrick, Sylvia, Pariag, Fisheye, and the other characters rose to their full potential as a community.

¹²⁶ Lovelace, Earl, *The Dragon Can't Dance*... 210.

The Harder They Come: Race, Class, and Resistance

The Harder They Come, a novel based on the movie of the same name, is a beautifully crafted tale that is strikingly similar to both *Apata* and *The Dragon Can't Dance*, bringing together several different elements of race, class, and resistance. Like *Apata*, this narrative involves a police manhunt that ends in the death of the main character Ivan. Ivan, who was born with a spirit of rebellion, leaves the country in favor of the city, where all his naïve dreams might be fulfilled. As with *The Dragon Can't Dance*, the reader is presented with a very powerful portrayal of black poverty and survival as Ivan struggles to cope with the harsh realities of life imposed on the black poor in Kingston, Jamaica. Ivan seeks various means to escape the social and economic boundaries of his class, but, eventually, his hopes are dashed, much like those of Michael Apata, held back by a system of oppression and its agents.

The reader is given two clues as to the time frame in which this narrative takes place. Firstly, Ivan's grandmother dies early in the narrative, and it gives a date for her death, which is 1950. Ivan leaves the country for the city immediately after his grandmother's death, and, at one point, it says that Ivan had been in the city for six years. The narrative continues after that, but there is no indication of how many years have passed since 1956. There is no direct indication that Jamaica has gained political independence from the British, which occurred on 6th August, 1962 (Manley 13). But the novel does illustrate a multi-party political system where the local population votes for representation.

This narrative illustrates a society that is divided on the basis of, both, race and class. The portrayal of the black poor and the black middle class is very clear. While the interaction between whites and blacks is limited in the novel, it is blatantly clear that whites occupy a socially and economically privileged position in society. The

lack of visibility of whites presents a major contrast with *Apata* and also illustrates the difference between colonialism and neo-colonialism. Under neo-colonialism, blacks or coloureds hold most of the prominent positions within society, but corporate power remains in the hands of white Americans and Europeans. Thelwell also illustrates Indian characters but without the significant roles and the great depth of detail that we see in Lovelace's novel.

One thing that this novel does better than the other two novels is to illustrate the contrast between the country and city. The country is presented as a place where inhabitants are virtually untouched by the capitalist system, at least initially, while the city is at the heart of capitalism in Jamaica. The social and economic conditions inherent in the country and city contrast sharply, with the conditions in the city appearing to be worse.

The novel also depicts the black poor's response to an oppressive life in the city. The role of the "Ganja" or marijuana trade in the survival of the black poor is a key element of the discussion. The Jamaican music industry as well is presented as a means of "making it" for poor blacks in the city of Kingston.

Another significant element of the discussion of race and class, which is not given much attention in the other two novels, is religion. Religion is presented in the novel as a means of ideological support, in the case of Christianity, and ideological opposition, in the case of Ras Tafari, to the socio-economic system of Jamaica.

The Harder They Come provides great insight into the way in which the system protects the interests of the privileged classes, using the media, the police, the army, and various other means at its disposal. Just as is the case in the other two novels, the narrative ends with the defeat of the black poor. This chapter will analyze

the system of racial and class oppression in the novel and illustrate the ideological and organizational weaknesses which lead to the defeat of any resistance to the system.

Firstly, this chapter will examine the Jamaican countryside as a geographical area in which black people are untouched by the capitalist system and, therefore, free from racial and class oppression. The country will be contrasted with the city, which is the centre of capitalism in Jamaica. And, the process through which capitalism encroaches on the countryside, destroying the independence which once dwelt there.

I. Harder They Come: Country Analysis

As illustrated in the novel, the countryside of Jamaica had a different social structure to that of the city Kingston, Jamaica. The countryside was reflective of African communal society while the city was reflective of a society ravished by capitalism. The beginning of the narrative is set in the country and gives great detail to the history and way of life of that society.

The novel explains how the communities in the country came to dwell in Jamaica and came to be independent: "...they had come—Akan, Ashanti, Yoruba, Mandingo, Wolof, Ibo, and Bantu—turning their backs on the slavery that had welded them together into a new people."¹ This quote carefully indicates that these people dwelling in the countryside are the descendents of some of the tribes of the continent of Africa who were taken from their homeland by Europeans and enslaved in Jamaica. Philip D. Curtin confirms this in his book, *Two Jamaicas*. He says,

In many ways Negro culture was more truly native to Jamaica than European culture, although both were alien. Unlike the whites, the blacks' voyage from their homeland was strictly a one-way affair. Once in America, the only contact with Africa was the reinforcement of later arrivals, and, after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the flow of Africans to Jamaica was the heaviest period of slave imports, 63,045 new slaves coming into Jamaica between 1801 and 1807. As a result the proportion of African to creole slaves in 1807 was high, and, even though this generation was beginning to pass away by the 1830's, there was still a sizable minority who remembered Africa.²

¹ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 15.

² Curtin, Philip D, *Two Jamaicas* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) 24.

Not only does this quote confirm that the enslaved blacks came from Africa but it shows that the knowledge and culture of Africa remained strong. Curtin goes on to identify and describe some characteristics of the tribal groups that came:

Although the African tradition was strong, it was not a single cultural tradition. The slaves brought to Jamaica had belonged to different tribal or national groups in Africa. The strongest of these numerically were the Kramanti or 'Coromantyn' – the Ashanti-Fanti people of the Gold Coast – and the Ibo of the Niger delta. Each group had cultural characteristics which were individual slaves. The Kramanti were considered stronger, and thus better workers, but prone to rebellion, and therefore dangerous. The Ibo, on the other hand were supposed to be tractable, but deceitful and given to suicide if ill treated. The Mandingo, from the region between the Niger and the Gambia, also were brought to Jamaica in fairly large numbers and always attracted attention because many had been exposed to some Moslem teaching in childhood. They were considered more peaceable than the Kramanti, but less industrious than the Ibo. Other groups were the 'Pawpaws' from Dahomey and a few Congo and Angola Negroes from south of the Bight of Benin, but they came in smaller numbers and probably had less influence on Jamaican culture.³

Curtin uses the blending of various West African cultures to assert that Jamaican culture is American, essentially a new creation:

³ Curtin, Philip D, *Two Jamaicas* ...24-25.

This diversity of national origin was an important factor in making Jamaican Negro culture American rather than purely African. The great majority of Jamaicans had come from West Africa; their differences were only regional variations of a common culture area. Since the whites were not anxious to force Europeanization any further than was necessary for plantation work, the slaves were left to educate their own children. Consequently there developed a new culture, compounded of the diverse elements of the African heritage and some European elements – always tending to emphasize these elements that were common to all groups. This process of cumulative adaptation and amalgamation of Negro cultures had continued for a century and a half. By the 1830's the Afro-Jamaican culture was solidly established, and it was passed on to each new generation as it had long passed by a process of assimilation to new arrivals from Africa.⁴

It is important to note that these tribes were independent groups, which were developing progressively for centuries before contact with Europeans, but this development was interrupted by slavery. Of course, a people used to independence will not simply accept enslavement, so many enslaved individuals escaped to the hills and formed free communities. The novel makes reference to this community of runaways when saying "...turning their backs on the slavery that had welded them together"⁵, meaning that they escaped to the hills.

⁴ Curtin, Philip D, *Two Jamaicas* ...25.

⁵ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 15.

The community in Jamaica famous for escaping slavery and battling their British enslavers are the Maroons. In his book, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels*, which focuses on Brazil, Stuart B. Schwartz writes,

Throughout the Americas wherever slavery was a basic institution, slave resistance, the fear of slave revolt, and the problem of fugitive slaves plagued colonists and colonial administrators. This resistance took a number of forms and was expressed in a variety of ways. Day to day recalcitrance, slow downs, and sabotage were probably the most common forms of resistance, while self-destruction through suicide, infanticide, or overt attempts at vengeance were the most extreme in a personal sense.⁶

Schwartz goes on to say, “By far, the most common form of slave resistance in colonial Brazil was flight, and a characteristic problem of the Brazilian slave regime was the continual and widespread existence of fugitive communities called variously *mocambos*, *ladeiras*, *magotes*, or *quilombos*.”⁷ The quilombos are the Brazilian equivalent to the Maroons in Jamaica, and flight was as popular in Jamaica as it was in Brazil.

Selwyn Cudjoe says of the Maroons in Jamaica in his book, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature*,

...some African slaves took to the hills and joined other Africans who had been hunters and herdsman and who knew the mountainous territory. These were the first Maroons, a group which refused to

⁶ Schwartz, Stuart B, *Slaves, Peasants and Rebels* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1992) 103.

⁷ Schwartz, Stuart B, ...103.

accept slave status and which, by constant and effective guerrilla warfare, eventually forced the English to negotiate treaties.”⁸

In *Rasta and Resistance*, Horace Campbell gives some background on the Maroons, stating, “The core of the Maroon community was the small band of slaves left behind by the Spaniards when the English captured Jamaica in 1655. These slaves formed free communities which gave refuge to the runaway slaves.”⁹ Cudjoe and Campbell’s background information on Maroons helps in understanding Ivan’s community of Blue Bay, which, clearly, is a Maroon community.

Several references are made to the Maroons in the narrative. The first example is when a young girl’s eyes are described as “maroon eyes”. The text says, “Her eyes were the warm honey brown color that the people called ‘maroon’ eyes, after those legendary African warriors who had held these hills for a century and a half against the military might and clever schemes of the British.”¹⁰ The text goes further to indicate that the community described in this novel is in fact descendants of the Maroons. An old man known as “Maas’ Nattie” confirms this when planning Ivan’s grandmother’s funeral by saying, “ ‘Bwai wait til you see dis yah funeral—is goin’ be like when a ol’ time maroon queen maddah dead. Bwai, you did know say you come from cromanty people dem, yes Miss ‘Mando father was a maroon-man...’ ”¹¹ All these references to Maroons clearly indicate that this was a Maroon community.

Not only do the Maroon people symbolize physical resistance, but also ideological resistance, for they successfully proved, during and after slavery, that

⁸ Cudjoe, Selwyn R., *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (Chicago: Ohio University Press, 1980) 9.

⁹ Campbell, Horace, *Rasta and Resistance* (St. John's: Hansib Publications, 1997) 20.

¹⁰ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 57.

¹¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 75.

African people can prosper independently of Europeans. Kofi Agorsah confirms this in his book *Maroon Heritage* saying,

The Maroons, clearly became the frontline fighters in the struggle against slavery in all its forms. Before any known struggles for independence in the New World, Maroon communities had developed strong ideas and strategies for self-sufficiency, self-help and self-reliance and fought with great skill and courage for the right to self-determination.¹²

This quote clearly shows that, even before slavery was formerly abolished, Maroons understood that the path forward was self-reliance and autonomy, ideas which clearly form the foundation for great black leaders, such as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Kwame Nkrumah.

There is a counterargument that the freedom that enslaved Jamaicans desired would not yield positive results. Philip D. Curtin explains that one of the arguments against the abolition of slavery was the ruin it would bring to Jamaica. He writes, “Belief in the slave system, however, could not be abandoned overnight. Jamaicans had formerly argued that freedom would necessarily bring ruin to the island. This belief gradually dissipated, but it was still strong during the first years of freedom.”¹³ Certainly, an end to slavery did not bring ruin to these Maroons, but their autonomy brought prosperity.

The text describes how the independent life of the Maroon community was possible in the new country of Jamaica, which was so far away from the home where Africans fostered independence for centuries. One factor that worked in the Africans

¹² Agorsah, E Kofi, *Maroon Heritage* (Kingston: Conoe p, 1994) 4.

¹³ Curtin, Philip D, *Two Jamaicas* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) 123.

favor was the similarity in the landscape. Jamaica has very fertile land and similar climate to Africa, so this allowed the Africans to construct a life in the mountains which mirrored that in their home continent. The text says, “It was a new life in a different country but in its deepest rhythms and style it was not so different or so new.”¹⁴ The text also explains the major components of independent life they were able to replicate in Jamaica: “They came with their ancient tools and processes, bringing the foods they knew and their animals...and their sense of life and community, their songs, stories, and dances, and their sensitivity to life and respect for age and for manners. There on the steep side of the valley all were transplanted and all grew and prospered.”¹⁵ The quote indicates that the Africans brought that which they needed to survive economically and socially. The economic necessities, the food, the tools, the knowledge and the skills, are important to survive, as will be displayed later in this chapter. In the enslaver’s greed, they actually assisted the Africans in the process of building independent African communities in Jamaica by searching for foods familiar to the Africans that could be grown locally, decreasing the expenses of importing food:

In the days when sugar was akin to gold, and the metaphor for wealth in European society was ‘wealthy as a West Indian planter,’ that same planter class, anxious to increase profits, used the Royal Navy to scour the Empire for plants that would feed their slaves and lessen their dependence on imported food. They had succeeded too well for their own interests, bringing yams, ackees, melons, assorted tubers and peas from Africa, mangoes from India, breadfruit, apples, and coconuts

¹⁴ Thelwell, Michael, *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 16.

¹⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 15.

from the far reaches of the Pacific, finally bringing to the land the riches that helped to end slavery and their world. For the Africans, taking seeds and cuttings, had simply left the plantations to establish free communities in the hills.¹⁶

Through agriculture, these Maroons and their descendents were able to establish their own economic independence. This is prominently displayed in the text as Ivan's grandmother, Miss 'Mando is a farmer, as is her long time friend, Maas' Nattie. The father of Ivan's best friend, Dudus, is a fisherman, and Ivan, too, would have been both a farmer and a fisherman, had he stayed in his country village. The text says, "When Dudus's father had finished he had three piles: the bigger table fish which would go to market, a pailful of smaller fryers, and a variety of odd fish of lesser value...It was then that Ivan's commitment to the life of a fisherman was confirmed beyond question..."¹⁷ Fishing is an economic activity where an individual can be completely independent of any foreign entity. This symbolized the way in which this community, not only survived, but prospered.

In *Flight to Freedom*, Alvin O. Thompson discusses the Maroon economy. He writes, "The main occupational divisions that scholars have identified in Maroon communities, based on their dominant economic activities, are agriculturalists, miners, fisherfolk, traders, manufacturers, livestock keepers, bandits, and service providers." ¹⁸ He goes on to say of one of the major pillars of the Maroon economy, agriculture,

¹⁶ Thelwell, Michael ...30.

¹⁷ Thelwell, Michael ...23-24.

¹⁸ Thompson, Alvin O, *Flight to Freedom* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006) 239.

The large Maroon communities did not suffer from a shortage of food. They grew large quantities of wholesome food, and their cupboards were never bare, except when military expeditions destroyed their supplies. In fact, it appears that they commonly overflowed, in striking contrast to what obtained among enslaved persons on the plantations. The extent to which abundant food supplies was an attraction to would-be Maroons remains uncertain, but it must have influenced some of them to flee to greener pastures.¹⁹

An essential aspect of the Maroon communities' survival was the retention of African cultural traditions. Being an amalgamation of various West African ethnicities, the Maroon communities developed a social structure that is clearly African in nature though a new creation. Kofi Agorsah writes:

African traditions featured prominently in the formation and transformation of the way of life of these groups throughout the period of their struggle...It is recorded that the majority of the Maroons consisted of slaves derived from West Africa, whose cultural traditions should help to identify any retentions and how these may have contributed to the survival of the Maroons.²⁰

Maroon communities, like many West African societies, are communal and possess social organization that allows the community to make the best use of its economic resources. These communities took steps to ensure that each individual was looked after in the context of the collective, that lessons were taught that would

¹⁹ Thompson, Alvin O, *Flight to Freedom* ... 243.

²⁰ Agorsah, E Kofi, *Maroon Heritage* (Kingston: Conoe p, 1994) 4.

impart the values that social stability depends on, and that this would be a continuous process.

There is an occasion described in the narrative that gives some insight into the level of social organization that existed in these communities. Maas' Nattie is having what is described as a "shelling match" to which the whole community was invited. Though these events required a great deal of resources to be successfully put on, no admission fee is required. Rather a process is put in place to ensure the economic aspect through collective participation:

No payment was ever considered for these events but whenever one had a major project needing many hands, one simply made preparations and announced it. You were then obliged to attend the functions of all who came to yours. 'So and so owes me a day' was an obligation that had to be honored. The other attraction beyond economic necessity was the social aspect of these occasions.²¹

Horace Campbell speaks to the necessity of the social organization reflected in this passage from the novel:

The survival of the Maroon communities depended on the mode of social organisation of the villages. In order for the Maroons to survive they had to organise a system of production and exchange, superior to the plantation levels of co-operation, reminiscent of African communalism where they divided the tasks as they hunted, fished and gathered wild fruits. (Rasta and Resistance 20)

²¹ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 47.

In addition to the social organization which is required to make the event possible, the social interaction at the event is also significant. Stories are told which emphasize lessons that uphold the values of the community. For example, Maas' Nattie tells a story saying, " '...today is de anniversary of de battle of Adowa.' "22 The text goes on to say,

The old man proceeded to recount, to the admiring interjections of his audience, how in 1896 in Ethiopia the poorly armed, supposedly ill-trained peasants of Ras Menelik defeated and put to the sword the Italian armies of conquest. 'Black man like we, from the rising of de sun to de setting dereof, slay or put to flight over ten t'ousand of de enemy.'23

This story is meant to remind the community of the accomplishments of black people and their ability to overcome their circumstances, even when confronted with the strength of the Europeans. This lesson is well received as the text says, "The end of the story was greeted with shouts of 'Words, sah,' 'Wisdom, yes.' 'So black man fe strong.' "24 These lessons would serve the purpose of counteracting the inferiority complex imposed on black people when functioning within a system that favors whites. This is but one example, as several other mediums and several other lessons are regularly shared in social settings, where community members actually competed in the measurement of their wisdom. The text says, "That was the signal for stories to be told, songs to be sung, riddles and proverbs and rhymes to be exchanged, each side trying to outdo the other in eloquence and wisdom."25

²² Thelwell, Michael ...48.

²³ Thelwell, Michael ...48.

²⁴ Thelwell, Michael ...48.

²⁵ Thelwell, Michael ...48.

Story-telling is clearly another African characteristic retained in Ivan's village. Horace Campbell makes reference to gatherings where the enslaved practiced this tradition: "It was at these nocturnal sessions that African stories were told; there was the telling of folk tales and the use of oral history to solidify the consciousness of being an African."²⁶ Here, Campbell's statement seems to confirm Maas' Nattie's intention of solidifying an African consciousness as well as educating the community about the history and resistance of African people.

Detailing the links between West African societies and the Caribbean, Kofi Agorsah echoes a similar sentiment. He writes,

another area of social continuity is the African tradition of folklore and oratory, which often featured animal trickster (Ananse) and Rabbit.

The nature of folklore, the mode of presentation as well as the use of formal speech patterns, have left their impact. Some of these folklore traditions have forms similar to biblical story-telling or are evident in libation (prayers) and in proverbs.²⁷

Another positive aspect of these social gatherings was the opportunity for girls and boys to interact with each other under the supervision of elders. The main character, Ivan, first met his childhood sweetheart, Mirriam, at Maas' Nattie's shelling match. The text says Mirriam was "...polite and helpful, clearly well brought up, and was such a pretty little pickney too." The text also says that Ivan's grandmother, Miss 'Mando was "...not at all displeased."²⁸ While, this was not an arranged marriage, it would seem that Miss 'Mando would certainly influence her

²⁶ Campbell, Horace, *Rasta and Resistance* (St. John's: Hansib Publications, 1997) 23.

²⁷ Agorsah, E Kofi, *Maroon Heritage* (Kingston: Conoe p, 1994) 31.

²⁸ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 57.

grandson to choose a partner who could maintain a stable household and, therefore, be a part of a stable community.

Miss Mando's hopes of Ivan's eventual union with Mirriam offers a good example of an African cultural feature, which has not been retained fully. Kofi Agorsah confirms that West African, "customs related to birth, death, and marriage seem to have been revived, though not in their entirety."²⁹ Ivan's village does not have formal initiations and puberty rites for their young people, who will eventually be married, but some of the moral education involved in the process clearly survives. Agorsah outlines the features, saying,

Such education involves the teaching of housekeeping skills, the fundamentals of subsistence practices such as farming, cattle keeping and fishing, or craftwork such as weaving, carving or smelting. Some emphasis is also placed on morality in greeting, obedience of and respect for elderly people, food preparation, human relations and knowledge of local traditions, as well as sanctions related to these modes of behaviour.³⁰

These aspects of premarital moral education are clearly important to Miss Mando and surely a reason why she favours Mirriam as a possible mate for her grandson. This social function is nowhere to be found in the city of Kingston.

Yet another process derived from African tradition that is emphasized in the Maroon communities is open sharing as opposed to stealing. The country fosters a spirit of cooperation rather than competition. This is on display when Ivan asks another member of the community for a fruit from his tree and is granted permission.

²⁹ Agorsah, E Kofi, *Maroon Heritage* (Kingston: Conoe p, 1994) 31.

³⁰ Agorsah, E Kofi, *Maroon Heritage* (Kingston: Conoe p, 1994) 18-19.

The text says, “Ivan could have taken it without asking but he was Miss ‘Mando’s grandpickney and no thief.”³¹ This quote shows that Ivan was not just accountable to himself for his actions but accountable to his guardian, Miss ‘Mando. The shame that would be associated with stealing would definitely impact a member of the community’s social standing. Perhaps, if Mirriam was known as a thief, Miss ‘Mando would not think her suitable to be a possible wife for Ivan. This shame of stealing and willingness to share is in great contrast to the city, where there is neither.

Despite the community’s social cohesion and economic independence, they did have to rely on particular industrial products produced outside the village. This reality indicates that the community has much further to go if they would like to eliminate any dependence on the outside world. The text says, “They were almost self-sufficient. The few necessities that neither their land nor labor could provide—tools of steel and glass, cloth, oil for their lamps—they bought with money they earned by selling surpluses at the government market in the nearest town.”³² This quote speaks to the need for trade with areas that have industrial and technological products along with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and technological resources in order to maintain and develop autonomous and modernized non-capitalist Maroon communities. This is entirely possible, but the evidence of this never materializes in this narrative, for a parasitic capitalist economy encroaches on their communal development.

This country community is threatened, firstly, by the allure of capitalism through the apparent benefits of the system. Symbolically, it is Ivan’s desire to leave his community and go to the city which signals the end of this community’s

³¹ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 64.

³² Thelwell, Michael ... 15-16.

independence. Ivan becomes entranced with what the capitalist system has to offer and, though this is not explicitly explored in the novel, loses respect for his own traditions and the foundation of independence that his ancestors laid for him in the hills.

There is a historical context for Ivan's desire to leave the country and go to the city. Michele A. Johnson writes,

In the twentieth century, rural Jamaicans attempted to escape into urban centres because of increased difficulties resulting from the contraction of the sugar industry, accompanied by the improvements in production techniques and the mechanisation of agriculture, which caused a reduction in the need for labour; the higher fertility of the rural population, which led to overpopulation in parts of rural Jamaica; and the difference in levels of income between the rural and the urban areas. As a result, between 1920 and 1970 Jamaica experienced more incremental increases in migration than at any earlier period.³³

It is during the period described in this quote that Ivan leaves the country as was the case for many residents of rural areas in Jamaica. Alvin Thompson identifies the cause of the city's attractiveness to the establishment of foreign industries:

This is seen notably in the heavy urban concentration of industries, resulting in an exacerbation of the uneven development between town and country. Any economic links established between the two areas are coincidental, usually through the attraction of workers from the

³³ Johnson, Michele, "Young Woman from the Country: a profile of domestic servants in Jamaica, 1920-1970," *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom*, Ed. Verene A. Shephard (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 408.

rural areas to the new urban industrial centres and the remittances sent back to family members.³⁴

Of course, this migration to the city had some negative impacts. Alvin Thompson says, “The new industries also tend to attract more persons to the cities than jobs available there, thus worsening unemployment there” (156). Michele Johnson agrees:

The effects of internal migration were felt strongly in the urban destinations, and most especially in the growing Kingston and St. Andrew metropolitan area. There was in these areas, by the 1950’s, overcrowding, unemployment and depression. Opportunities for better employment which had pulled potential servants to Kingston often failed to materialise and in the absence of any system of social security, the results of growing unemployment were fully manifested.³⁵

Ivan is oblivious to the negative effects of this internal migration, indicated in this quote and illustrated later in *The Harder They Come*. He is simply enchanted by the concept of the city and, simultaneously, disenchanted by the life in the country.

The novel opens with Miss ‘Mando pondering on how Ivan is straying from the community way: “Pickney seemed to grow up so quickly now, filled with strange and alien notions, disrespectful of age and authority, seeming to share a rough and casual disdain for the manners and values of the elders.”³⁶ Though at this point, the reader is not told where these strange and alien notions come from, this quote foreshadows Ivan’s fascination with the city.

³⁴ Thompson, Alvin. *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1997) 156.

³⁵ Johnson, Michele, "Young Woman from the Country: a profile of domestic servants in Jamaica, 1920-1970," *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom*, Ed. Verene A. Shephard (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 409.

³⁶ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 16.

The place in which Ivan's fascination reveals itself most clearly is when he is introduced to Miss Ida and her Rough Rider Café. Miss Ida represents all that is desirable about the city. She is beautiful, sexy, and free from the conventional boundaries of the village. As a result of not integrating into the norms and values of the community the text says, " 'Some a the Christian people in Blue Bay...them no like Miss Ida...Dem say she a sportin' lady.' ”³⁷ Her café represents a space where the community can indulge in “worldly pleasures,” or, to be more specific, listen and dance to music with a message that does not correspond with Christian or cultural values and, though it is not explicitly mentioned, possibly, have sex or a sexual interaction with a woman, which falls outside the traditional values of the society. The text says, “...Miss Ida had come from town to establish the first café ever known in the district, a place where some people went at night to drink rum and beer and to dance to calypso and other music that came over the music box.”³⁸ The music is significant in the discussion of capitalism because it is produced through the capitalist system, also transmits capitalist values, and promises success in the capitalist hierarchy. The text says, “This was city music, café music, the music of pleasure and fleshy delight, and Miss Ida was its incarnation.”³⁹ And so, Miss Ida and the music are like adulteresses, who are there to tempt men to depart from their values and commitments.

Ivan was committed to the land, to tradition, and to his place in his village, but within moments of first meeting Miss Ida and listening to the city-music, Ivan decided, “He would be a singer of songs, a music-maker, a dancer. It was a strange

³⁷ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 24.

³⁸ Thelwell, Michael ...24.

³⁹ Thelwell, Michael ...29.

and mysterious world, this city where such music came from.”⁴⁰ The city and the music are mentioned together frequently. It would be through entertainment that Ivan would seek success in the capitalist world. Ivan reveals his ambitions saying, “...ah going turn meself famous.”⁴¹

Capitalist ideology is communicated to Ivan through the media and Miss Ida. Ivan has an awareness of life outside his village due to the newspapers, the radio, and Miss Ida. And so, these mediums are tools of capitalist ideology. A Caribbean scholar, Merle Hodge confirms this saying, “In our region the media is a channel through which North American music, fashion, diet and general lifestyle are relentlessly imposed upon our consciousness.”⁴² Of course, historical circumstance has led to the belief that the North American capitalist lifestyle is superior and the lifestyle Ivan experienced in Ivan’s village as inferior. Hodge continues, “Our own cultures, meanwhile, have never had the space to assert themselves. We only barely perceive that we have cultures of our own and have no great confidence in them.”⁴³

Ivan is clearly a victim of the media’s cultural assault. The novel speaks about, “...the eagerness and longing with which he pored over city newspapers with their pictures of singers and bands, their accounts of dances and clubs, envying glamour and fame of the entertainers.”⁴⁴ In reference to Miss Ida, the text says, “She told stories of the clubs and entertainers she had known, the great dances she had been to.”⁴⁵ Also, reference is made to the negative role of the radio when Ivan tries to get

⁴⁰ Thelwell, Michael ...30.

⁴¹ Thelwell, Michael ...68.

⁴² Hodge, Merle, "Towards People's participation in Caribbean Development," *A Caribbean Reader On Development*, Ed. Judith Wedderburn (Kingston: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1986). 92

⁴³ Hodge, Merle, ...92

⁴⁴ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 68.

⁴⁵ Thelwell, Michael ...68.

Miss ‘Mando to use the radio: “He couldn’t even get her to listen to the Sunday programs of devotional music, since she regarded it sacrilege to play God’s music on the same devil’s instrument that brought the sinful music of Babylon.”⁴⁶ Babylon is often used in reference to the capitalist system and its agents who oppress the black poor. And so, it is clear that the media has a huge role in eroding traditional community values with the decadent values of capitalism.

There is an ongoing battle in the novel between the ideology of capitalism and the ideology of black independence and communalism. A girl named Mirriam, who is Ivan’s childhood girlfriend, and Ivan’s grandmother, Miss ‘Mando, are the country’s first line of defense against the dangers of city-life. Ivan acknowledges their discontent: “What was wrong with Mirriam? What she really want, anyway? She an’ Granny, bwai, dem never stop, man, nevah stop. Any little t’ing that remind dem of me plans, dem jus’ swellup and vex.”⁴⁷ They both express displeasure at the radio, as well as Ivan’s plans to go to the city. At one point Mirriam screams at Ivan, “ ‘Turn the damn somethin’ off...’ ”⁴⁸ in reference to the radio Ivan had turned on. Miss ‘Mando had a similar outburst at one point saying, “ ‘Get dah damn foolishness out de house.’ ”⁴⁹

In another instance of opposition to capitalist development, Mirriam repeats the words of her cousin, Raphael, “ ‘Yes, dem say that we poor, that we black, yes an’ ignorant too—an’ it even could be true y’know—but dem time deh, when is just me an’ me raft an ‘ the river an’ the mountain dem, is nobody deh a world who is better

⁴⁶ Thelwell, Michael ...69.

⁴⁷ Thelwell, Michael ...68.

⁴⁸ Thelwell, Michael ...67.

⁴⁹ Thelwell, Michael ...69.

off than me.’ ”⁵⁰ Mirriam goes on to say that her cousin has “ ‘...more sense than you an’ all dem whe’ call him fool.’ ”⁵¹ These quotes make a counter-argument to the idea that capitalist development is progress. Both Mirriam and Miss Mando think that Ivan is a fool to leave his village, for they view the life he has there as being far superior to the life in the city.

Ultimately, the capitalist ideology wins out, and Ivan decides to depart the country for the city. His grandmother, Miss ‘Mando, dies, and, symbolically, any desire to stay in the country dies as well. Maas’ Nattie, foreshadowing the difficulty Ivan would face in Kingston, advises him to stay true to his roots. He tells him not to steal, to have manners and to not go to the courthouse. The phrase that sums it all up is, “ ‘...Bwai, don’t grow ‘way from you raisin’...’ ”⁵² But , inevitably, Ivan will learn the nature of the city and the nature of the system and realize that success within that system is reserved for a small group; and he will realize that the values of the village are difficult to practise within the confines of the capitalist system.

Not only is the ideological battle against capitalism lost in Ivan’s departure for the city, but the battle against capitalism is lost for the whole village. By the time that Ivan leaves the village and returns home several years later, there are vast differences. Capitalist companies are operating in the area extracting bauxite and operating tourism related businesses. Ivan, in disbelief, cannot comprehend the sudden change in the landscape, and asks a man about some of the activity he is seeing. Ironically, the man tells him that what he is seeing is “ ‘Progress...Industrial waste—from de bauxite plant.’ ”⁵³ The industrial waste that comes along with “progress” is one

⁵⁰ Thelwell, Michael ...66.

⁵¹ Thelwell, Michael ...67.

⁵² Thelwell, Michael ...110.

⁵³ Thelwell, Michael ...313.

indication of the negative effects that come along with capitalist development, which is not progress at all from the perspective of an environmentally conscious, independent minded black community.

The presence of bauxite in the novel reflects the historical development of Jamaica. Clive Thomas writes in his book, *The Poor and the Powerless*,

In 1972, when Jamaica was the world's second largest producer of bauxite, US investments in this industry in Jamaica were valued at over \$500 million. As a result, the US was dependent on the region for a strategic military mineral resource, as well as for fuel and consequently sought to play a major role in ensuring the flow of these products.⁵⁴

Thomas also explains the industrial waste Ivan witnessed in his trip back to the country, saying, "Environmental and health regulations were also deliberately kept lax to make the area comparatively more attractive than the industrialized countries, where progressively tighter regulations on pollution were raising the costs of these types of operations."⁵⁵ Clearly, this type of development is not progress from an environmental perspective.

Environmentally, the tourist industry has also caused environmental damage in Caribbean islands like Jamaica. According to Alvin Thompson, in his book, *The Haunting Past*, "An important feature of the growth of the manufacturing and tourism industries has been the violence being done to the natural environment."⁵⁶ Speaking specifically of the tourist industry, in her book, *The Last Resorts*, Polly Pattullo agrees, saying, "the catalogue of environmental destruction directly attributed to the growth

⁵⁴ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 111.

⁵⁵ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* ...111.

⁵⁶ Thompson, Alvin. *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1997) 161.

of the tourist industry is long. It includes the erosion of beaches the breakdown of coral reefs, marine and coastal pollution from watersports, the dumping of waste and the non-treatment of sewage, sand-mining and the destruction of wetlands and salt ponds.”⁵⁷

The readers of the *Harder They Come* see examples of the havoc wreaked against the natural environment described in Pattulo and Thompson’s books. The text describes Ivan’s surprise in finding out that hotel villas on the beach have displaced local fishermen, “The gate was closed but he could see a white gravel driveway, mowed lawns and whitewashed villas behind hedges of flowering shrubs. His disorientation was complete. Nothing fit into his memory. Dat a de fisherman dem beach. Wha’ kin’ a raas private?”⁵⁸ The transformation Ivan witnessed on this beach seems to be a Caribbean wide phenomenon, which Polly Pattulo describes, “In a generation, the land and seascape have been transformed: the bays where once local fishermen pulled in their seine nets, where villagers went for a sea-bathe or where colonies of birds nested in mangrove stands now provide for the very different needs of tourists.”⁵⁹

One of the fishermen that was displaced in this process is Maas’ Burt, the father of Ivan’s friend, Dudus. Dudus describes his father’s new line of work in the tourist industry: “Maas’ Burt, he said, was still going strong, but he did no more fishing. Now he took tourists out to see the reef. He had a boy who dived down and chipped off pieces of coral which they dried and sold.” Ivan seems displeased with the destruction of the reef, asking, “ ‘You mean ‘im dig up de reef,’ ” to which Dudus

⁵⁷ Pattulo, Polly, *Last Resorts* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1996) 105-106.

⁵⁸ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 314.

⁵⁹ Pattulo, Polly, *Last Resorts* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1996) 105-106.

replies, “‘Is not ‘im one...Is good money’ ”⁶⁰. And so, the short sighted focus on the tourist dollar obscures the long term consequences of environmental degradation, for unmitigated capitalism respects nothing except individual wealth.

Both Pattulo and Thompson make reference to the type of destruction inflicted on the coral reefs described in the *Harder They Come*. Firstly, Thompson says, “The destruction of coral reefs, with the consequent damage to other forms of marine life, is also a daily by-product of tourism, as corals are mined both by locals and visitors to satisfy foreign demand for the product.”⁶¹ Pattulo goes into even greater depth, saying,

Globally, 90 percent of reefs are said to have been damaged. The reefs of the Caribbean are no exception; overfishing and tourism have become the coral reefs’ greatest enemies. All over the Caribbean, environmentalists and divers have reported tales of reef abuse: snorkelers and scuba divers break fragile branching coral with their flippers and kill the marine life by spearfishing; tourists destroy the shallow, exposed coral walking on it in plastic sandals (the Buccoo Reef in Tobago); sailors in dive boats and yachts let their anchors drag over the coral, ripping it to shreds (US Virgin Islands) and dump their garbage overboard to further damage reefs (the Grenadines); fishermen either dynamite the reefs or overfish them, their catches of lobster and conch going to feed tourists (US Virgin Islands); souvenir shops loot the reef for stock, loading their shelves with shells, dead coral and seahorses (Bahamas); and beach vendors sell the rare black coral made

⁶⁰ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 317.

⁶¹ Thompson, Alvin. *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1997) 161.

into earrings (Grenada) and the backs of endangered turtles
(Barbados).⁶²

In addition to the environmental impact, something must be said of the social and economic impact of tourism in the village of Blue Bay. As has been illustrated before, fishing is very important to the communal economy. Fishing, like the land, ensures universal access to the means of production, for independent communal villages never attempted to divide and own the sea. So, anyone had the right to fish and make a living from fishing. But, with the fishermen being pushed out by the villas, a capitalist economic structure replaces the communal structure that preceded it.

Not only does Maas' Burt abandon the legacy of fishing passed down for generations, but so does his son, Dudus, signalling the death of this communal industry. Dudus worked as a waiter in a café. In reference to Dudus, the text says, "He didn't regret the fishing. Working at the café was easier and cleaner and the money better."⁶³ According to this quote, Dudus has bought into the capitalist mentality, which will provide some jobs and some money, but the community will no longer be economically independent.

Yet another example exists of the destructive social and economic impact of tourism in the novel. Ivan, upon arriving at Blue Bay after a long absence, reads a sign saying: "Private Property/Sunset Cove Condominiums/soliciting forbidden."⁶⁴ This sign is significant in that it outlines one of the basic principles of capitalism, which is the private ownership of property, ensuring class divisions. In response to seeing the sign, Ivan even emphasizes the word "private": "Dat a de fisherman dem

⁶² Pattulo, Polly, *Last Resorts* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1996) 109-110.

⁶³ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 316-317.

⁶⁴ Thelwell, Michael ...314.

beach. Wha' kin' a raas private?"⁶⁵ Also, the sign says that soliciting is not allowed, ensuring that local people are excluded from the economic structure, unless on the terms of the owners.

Alvin Thompson confirms that this private ownership and lack of access is a Caribbean wide phenomenon. He says,

Formerly the beaches were regarded as the public domain and places to which locals repaired for leisure and pleasure. With the development of the tourism industry the beaches and contiguous coastlines have acquired high economic values and the social value to the locals has eroded substantially. This is seen for instance, in the closing of large stretches of beaches by hotel owners, restrictions upon access of locals to certain beaches either legally or illegally, and the erection of tall buildings which obscure the seascape from the road.⁶⁶

Polly Pattullo adds to this wonderfully, even elaborating on the restriction on locals soliciting:

The restrictions, either by design or by effect, on locals sharing the beaches with tourists are part of a strategy to 'safeguard' tourism for the visitors. Within the hotel grounds, the tourists' environment can be controlled, but the beach remains, in law at least, a public space. Yet with the arrival of tourists, this area also becomes part of the holiday maker's sphere of influence. As a result, not only do casual vendors

⁶⁵ Thelwell, Michael ...314.

⁶⁶ Thompson, Alvin. *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1997) 159.

tend to be restricted, but local behaviour begins to be scrutinized and contained.⁶⁷

The novel reveals that the tourist development in Ivan's village is owned by white people and caters to white people. The text says, "Miss Ida had sold the café to a white man and left."⁶⁸ Not only was the ownership white but also the patrons: "The café was unchanged except that where there had been sandy beach there was now a tiled floor enclosed by a low wall. In this area, a group of white people reclined in long chairs. They had tall glasses at their elbows, wore swimsuits, and were turning red in the sun"(314).

Of course, when a foreign individual or group owns a business or controls an industry, they can develop policies and business practices that primarily benefit ownership regardless of the impact on the local community. Though Miss Ida's café used to be open to the enjoyment of the local community, since the change of ownership, it is primarily for the private enjoyment of white people. This is demonstrated when Ivan goes to the café looking for Miss Ida. The black worker tells Ivan, " 'This is a private club, main.'⁶⁹ "

Again, Polly Pattullo and Alvin Thompson provide some helpful insight on the question of ownership. Pattullo begins with questions:

Who profits from tourism and controls its parts: land and hotels, labour and management, transport, marketing, distribution, entertainment? Is it the descendants of the United Fruit Company, the transnational companies in New York, London, and Paris who run the airlines and tour operators and many of the hotels? Is it the local governments who

⁶⁷ Pattullo, Polly, *Last Resorts* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1996) 82.

⁶⁸ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 316.

⁶⁹ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 314.

reap the taxes and duties generated by tourism or the local elites who accrue commission fees as wholesalers and importers and who now own and manage hotels? Or do the Caribbean workers in the industry—the guesthouse owners, waiters, taxi drivers, farmers, tour guides—also benefit? Or, indeed, have those with nothing to do with the industry indirectly benefitted from tourism?

Airlines, tour operators and travel agents and hoteliers are the key players in the tourist industry jigsaw. These three institutions, in particular the airlines and tour operators, are largely owned, controlled and run from outside the region. Sometimes, through vertical integration, they are corporately linked, controlling every stage of the tourist's holiday.⁷⁰

Thompson expresses a consistent point of view in *The Haunting Past*. He says,

This industry[tourism], too, is dominated by TNC's [trans-national corporations], which own many of the tourism plants in or associated with the region such as hotels, airlines, cruise ships and tour-operating businesses...They still have firm control of the industry in management, marketing and transportation. In a real sense, therefore, they control its vital arteries.⁷¹

Not only did tourism and capitalist industry bring social and economic marginality to the people of Ivan's village; not only did it replace their communal system with a system of private ownership and exclusion; not only did it degrade the

⁷⁰ Pattulo, Polly, *Last Resorts* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1996) 15.

⁷¹ Thompson, Alvin. *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1997) 159.

beautiful, lush country environment; it also had a huge impact on the inhabitants' culture. There is a prominent example in the text when Ivan is confronted by a black worker at the club Miss Ida used to own: "The black worker tells Ivan, " 'This is a private club, main.' " ⁷² This black man's abandonment of his own accent seems to anger Ivan. The text reads, "It was the 'main' that did it. Ivan realized that the nasal, barely comprehensible sound coming at him was the waiter's version of a yankee accent—his master's voice, so to speak." ⁷³ Ivan displays a great deal of anger towards the black worker, who has chosen to disrespect him, a member of the black peasantry and has not acknowledged the dignity that is due to him. Ivan threatens him saying, " 'A de fucken' white man work you love so—better dan you life?' " ⁷⁴ This symbolizes Ivan's anger at, not only the racial hierarchy, but the community who has happily complied with this hierarchy.

Capitalism has destroyed the dignity of Ivan's community. Where once there was an independent community, there are only black people who work for and cater to the needs of white people. Where there was once a community that looked after themselves and were responsible for their own destiny, there are only modern age slaves, shells of their former selves. The memory of independence, with the coming of capitalism, has been erased from the black collective consciousness. The text explains, "There was no evidence of the passage of his generations, the ancestors whose intelligence, industry and skill had created a self-sufficient homestead there." ⁷⁵ And it must be expected, that economically independent black communities will sooner or later become engulfed in the capitalist system, for capitalism, unchecked, is

⁷² Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 314.

⁷³ Thelwell, Michael ... 315.

⁷⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 315.

⁷⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 320.

all consuming. The transformation of Ivan's village from communal to capitalist is an appropriate place to discuss Kingston, which can be considered the belly of the beast known as capitalism.

II. *Harder They Come*: Kingston Analysis

Having examined the systems that governed the country, both before and after capitalism, it is appropriate to now examine the city, which held so much allure for young Ivan. The city presents capitalism in its most potent form. The class divisions are sharp and the racial hierarchy is clear. There are first the black poor, those who are at the very bottom of the system, who depend on the black middle class and white owning-class for work. There are also the black and mulatto middle class, who exploit the black poor, while colluding with the white elite. And finally, there are the white owning class who are at the very top of the social and economic hierarchy.

Tracy Nicholas states this clearly in his book, *Rastafari*:

Dividing lines on the island are very clear—they are determined by class and color. Except under certain circumstances, in Jamaica black-skinned people comprise the lowest class. Brown-skinned people may subsist at a slightly higher level, while light-skinned people find their way to the middle and upper classes—the ‘good life’—with comparative ease. But nothing in Jamaica insures success so easily as being white—and the closer a person is, both in coloration and manner, to being white, the better is his or her chance for success.¹

In an essay called, “Race and Color in the Caribbean,” H. Hoetink expresses a similar perspective. In recounting a social anthropologist, R. T. Smith’s, dissection of Jamaica’s class system, he writes,

His three-tiered class structure shows an upper class mostly of native whites...and a sprinkling of Syrians and Chinese; a middle class of

¹ Nicholas, Tracy. *Rastafari A Way of Life* (Chicago: School Time Publications, 1996) 18.

colored merchants, bureaucrats, members of the intelligentsia, and an upwardly mobile group of blacks that only in the past half century increased markedly in number; and finally a lower class, overwhelmingly black.²

Carol Narcisse also supports this view. She writes,

Race and ethnicity have, historically, been strong determinants of access to economic and political power in Jamaica. Racial and ethnic minority groups and a mulatto or 'brown' elite have had distinct social and economic advantages as part of an historical legacy of colonialism and slavery. With strong networks of mutual aid based on kinship bonds and connections, these groups have been able to consolidate their historical privilege into successful corporations which are supported by government incentives such as generous licenses and government contracts. They are a powerful interest group, many members of which influence national policies in ways that redound to their benefit.³

The inequalities based on race and class, described by Smith, Nicholas and Narcisse, are prominently displayed in this novel. Ivan's journey to Kingston would illuminate the stark contrasts among groups. Contrary, to the expectations of Ivan, the city was not this place where fame and prosperity is available to one and all. He would meet great poverty in the city, and the black poor would be the class he joined.

² Hoetink, H, "Race and Color in the Caribbean," *Caribbean Contours*, Ed. Sidney W. Mintz and Sally Price (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985) 73.

³ Narcisse, Carol, "Social Integration and Disintegration: The Caribbean Experience: Jamaica," *Contending With Destiny*, Ed. Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 207.

In *The Poor and the Powerless*, Clive Thomas provides an in-depth analysis of the group on the lowest economic strata in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. He begins by saying, “the region’s employed working class is concentrated in four major areas—the mineral-extractive sector, in the large scale plantation-type agricultural enterprises, in the emerging import-substitution sector and in the services sector.”⁴ Evidence of workers in these areas is clearly visible in *The Harder They Come*.

Clive Thomas goes on to say that, “the working class is typically distributed among enterprises that are both large and small, foreign and local, highly concentrated in urban settlements and in isolated communities.”⁵ Ivan’s narrative also confirms this observation by Clive Thomas. Thomas also states that, “A significant proportion of the female labour force is concentrated in lowly-paid domestic work in individual households and in the more recently-established sweat-shops in the export-processing zones, where firms show an overwhelming preference for female employees.”⁶ Ivan’s mother, Daisy, is a good example of a female domestic servant.

Clive Thomas also describes the factors that contribute to a lack of unionization of the working class in addition to describing the “...substantial sections of the working class in the region...” who “...have some access to private property in the form of self-operated taxis, small landholdings or small stores from which they supplement their incomes.” Thomas continues saying, “Significant sections also exploit their skills as higglers (street vendors), carpenters, seamstresses, electricians or plumbers on a part-time, spare-time basis. These links to small property inevitably

⁴ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 188.

⁵ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* ... 188.

⁶ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* ... 188.

complicate working-class perceptions and behaviour.”⁷ Clive Thomas ends his overview of the working class in the Caribbean discussing seasonal workers in agriculture and tourism, the lowest strata of state employees, and the unemployed. Thomas gives staggering statistics regarding unemployment, stating, “unemployment rates in the region typically range between 12 and 30 percent and can often represent as high as two-thirds of the labour force between the ages of 18 and 26.”⁸ The unemployed as well as other members of the working class are prominently displayed in the novel.

The group that resides at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy, which I refer to as the black poor, is first recognized through the poor social conditions they experience. Poverty is a key concern in Jamaica and other countries in the region, as Norman Girvan points out in *Poverty, Empowerment and Social Development*:

Although Caricom countries show wide variations in the main social indicators, acute problems of social development are manifest in all. Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, with relatively high indices of human development, also have relatively high rates of open unemployment at 20 and 22 percent respectively. Jamaica and Guyana have lower employment rates (15 and 12 percent respectively) but a growing proportion of the employed labour force is classifiable as ‘working poor.’ The proportion of the population living in absolute poverty in 1992 is estimated at 43 percent in Guyana, 34 percent in

⁷ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* ... 189.

⁸ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* ... 190.

Jamaica and 22 percent in Trinidad and Tobago; or about 1.4 million persons in the three countries.⁹

In the same book, Majorie Newman-Williams and Fabio Sabatini express a similar sentiment with a specific focus on Jamaica:

The incidence of poverty rose sharply until 1992 and has decreased to 28 percent in 1993. People who suffered most under economic adjustment include farmers with no access to land (60 percent of the poor live in rural areas), the unemployed and underemployed, children (four in ten Jamaican children under 14 years of age live in extreme poverty, while between 2,000 and 2,500 are in the streets) and youth, single mothers and women (42 percent of households are headed by females).¹⁰

The analysis of scholars is consistent with evidence from the novel. While riding on the bus, Ivan visually encounters the deplorable conditions that the poorest strata of Kingston society experience. Upon arriving in the city, Ivan immediately noticed how dirty the place was and the inadequate housing. The text says, "Then he could see broken boards, dirty newspapers, rags, bottles, tin cans, bloated corpses of animals, the rusty and rotting shells of cars, and worn tires all thrown together in a chaotic jumble."¹¹

The novel depicts a very unappealing sight of garbage and desolation and, even more amazingly, goes on to describe people who are in the midst of this

⁹ Girvan, Norman, "Report on the Caribbean Symposium on Social Development." *Poverty, Empowerment and Social Development in the Caribbean*, Ed. Norman Girvan (Kingston: Canoe Press, 1997) 2.

¹⁰ Newman-Williams, Marjorie, "Child Centred Development and social Progress in the Caribbean," *Poverty, Empowerment and Social Development in the Caribbean*, Ed. Norman Girvan. (Kingston: Canoe Press, 1997) 63.

¹¹ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 120.

unsanitized environment: “Ragged people were digging in the rubble, pulling and tugging, while over their heads squadrons of vultures wheeled in the smoky air. The mountain of trash seemed to stretch very far, then gradually without perceptible demarcation or boundary it became something else. But what?”¹² In this dumping ground for waste, the readers get an insight into the level of poverty that is experienced by the black poor, for not only is this possibly a location to search for food, but it also is a location to search for material for housing: “A jumbled and pathless collection of structures. Cardboard cartons, plywood and rotting boards, the rusting and glassless shells of cars, had been thrown together to form habitations. These shanties crowded each other in an incoherent jumble of broken shapes without road or order.”¹³ The shanties described here are for the obscenely poor, but the novel also describes, “...high tin fences surrounding tenement yards, the residences of the city’s more fortunate poor.”¹⁴

Not only is the housing deplorable, but the roads as well. Hilton, a wealthy member of the mulatto middle class decides, “If the damn government didn’t do something about the roads he’d have to stop bringing his car into the city.”¹⁵ Of course, the black poor does not have the option of not bringing their car into the city, for they live in the city, unlike Hilton.

The novel also describes the black poor’s hunger. Ivan has no place to stay, no job, and no means of buying food when he first comes to the city. This is contrasted with the country, where Ivan ate heartily. The text speaks about his initial time in the city saying, “He remembered his first weeks in the streets, hungry ‘til he

¹² Thelwell, Michael ... 121.

¹³ Thelwell, Michael ... 121.

¹⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 132.

¹⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 244.

was weak, dumb, frightened, sleeping on the concrete floor of the market.”¹⁶ It also says of Ivan, “True he was almost delirious with hunger and had been living like an animal in the streets, subject to God knows what kinds of degradation.”¹⁷

Ivan’s mother, Daisy, who left the country for the city long ago, too, experiences hunger in the novel. The text says, “She should be hungry, at least she knew she should be. Her fatigue-wracked body was too tired to feel it, but she should eat. What was there in the room? A tin of sardines... That and some soda crackers.”¹⁸ Daisy’s mal-nutritioned state is unfortunate, considering the abundance of food in the country. Daisy herself acknowledges this when expressing outrage over her employer’s accusations that she was stealing food: “ ‘...Imagine, me Daisy Martin, t’ief food? Suppose she evah go back to me “bush” an’ see what food deh at mi maddah yard...’ ”¹⁹

Perhaps, the most profound display of individual poverty in the book is found in the depiction of “Ras Sufferah.” “Sufferah” is a term commonly used to describe the black poor because of the way that they suffer, and, of course, Ras is the title taken on by those that adhere to the religion known as Rastafari. Ivan meets Ras Sufferah pushing a heavy cart of empty bottles up a hill. Sufferah loses control of the bottles and Ivan helps him so the bottles would not break. The Rastafarian then explains the importance of these bottles to his survival. He says,

‘...Breddah, you understan’ say is every penny whe’ I man own inna dah cart? Anyhow it gallop down da hill an’ crashup, I man finish—done y’know. Den how my pickney dem to eat? Dem maddah have

¹⁶ Thelwell, Michael ...206.

¹⁷ Thelwell, Michael ...185.

¹⁸ Thelwell, Michael ...134-135.

¹⁹ Thelwell, Michael ...135.

pot pon fire fullup wid bare water waiting fe me to bring somet'ing fe
put in dere...'²⁰

Ras Sufferah and Daisy are examples that clearly show that a harsh economic reality exists not just for the newly arrived like Ivan but for those who have lived in Kingston for years, decades, and even a lifetime. Though there are many more examples of the poverty of the black masses in the novel, it is already clear from the given examples that there is a class of people who struggle to survive on a daily basis. I refer to them as the black poor.

The middle class experience far greater prosperity than the black poor.

According to Carol Narcisse,

In the post-emancipation period a 'middle class' of coloureds' and educated Jamaicans emerged. This class has dominated the civil service, political party leadership, managerial levels of the private sector, the professions, the hierarchy of traditional religious institutions, the legislature and the judiciary. This group, therefore, has considerable influence and control over a range of productive sectors and resources of the country.²¹

Clive Thomas provides additional insight:

The concept of the *middle class* is especially vague, in that it usually comprises a complex array of the lower ranks of the landholders, professionals, teachers, middle-level management in state and private

²⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 163.

²¹ Narcisse, Carol, "Social Integration and Disintegration: The Caribbean Experience: Jamaica," *Contending With Destiny*, Ed. Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 207.

enterprises and in small-scale commercial operations, and shopkeepers, artisans and traders working on their own or with family labour.²²

Thomas ends his discussion of the middle class saying, “The middle class is sometimes equated with what is called the ‘intermediate strata’, which is a term used to describe the middle ground or gap between the relatively clearly-defined peasantry and working class and the large propertied classes.”²³

In an essay titled, “The Black Middle Class in Nineteenth Century Jamaica,” Patrick Bryan weighs in on subject of Jamaica’s middle class. He writes,

Between the mass of rural labourers and small-scale cultivators on the one hand, and the white and coloured elite who dominated ownership of the island’s major resource—land—there was an evolving strata which constituted part of the island’s middle class. This middle class has been described by R.T. Smith as two-tiered, drawing a distinction between a middle class of traders and a middle class of professionals some black, some brown.²⁴

Obviously, no class or race is completely homogenous, but it is generally accepted that there was a black and brown middle class and, even whites of a lower tier elevated above them on the basis of race.

The novel gives a few examples of this class and their lifestyle. It is clear to see the difference between how the black poor and middle class live. Ivan, while looking for work in the yards of the rich, actually enters a residence. The text says,

²² Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 190-191.

²³ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 191.

²⁴ Bryan, Patrick, "The Black Middle Class in Nineteenth century Jamaica," *Caribbean Freedom*, Ed. Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996) 284.

“He stood in the open gateway and stared at the house. It was so big, so substantial, so beautifully painted...Everything so clean, so fancy, so expensive.”²⁵ This description of the middle class’ surroundings is far different from the earlier description of the black poor’s habitat. The text describes Ivan’s observation of a resident, if not owner, of the residence, “She was not white. But he couldn’t think of her as black either, though there was not much difference in their color. He was black. She was rich.”²⁶ This is a significant observation by Ivan. The fact that blackness here is not just a color but a socio-economic construct, that is in direct conflict with financial prosperity. In Ivan’s mind, to be black and rich are contradictory and, therefore, cannot co-exist, but Ivan’s observation does not settle the question of her identity. This vague racial and social identity suits the middle class’ designation as the intermediate strata and would reoccur with other characters in the novel, namely, Mr Hilton.

Mr. Hilton is another example of the black middle-class. He is a record producer. His great wealth is revealed in a description of the morning after a sexual encounter with a white woman. In reference to the effect of Hilton’s effect on the white woman the text says, “The room impressed her. A couple huge paintings against one wall...The most elaborate stereo component system she had seen anywhere outside the movies...the rich mahogany of the headboard.”²⁷ Another indication of Hilton’s wealth is shown when Hilton explains an American writer’s reaction to his house: “ ‘...he was some kind a writer...he look at the house and the view...him say, anybody who live here, and look out on this every morning, need to

²⁵ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 171.

²⁶ Thelwell, Michael ...171.

²⁷ Thelwell, Michael ...237-238.

be reminded once a month that he is not God.’ ”²⁸ In addition to Hilton’s magnificent house, which had several domestic workers, Hilton also has an expensive car. The text says, “In front of the house, a man gave one last finishing lick to the shine of a long, very white convertible.”²⁹ When the white lady compliments him on his car, he responds, “ ‘...I tired a this one...Ah order a new one—a Mercedes...’ . ”³⁰ All these examples make it explicitly clear that Hilton has a great deal of financial resources at his disposal.

Hilton seems to be a Mulatto. The text describes him, saying, “...he was olive-skinned with a goatee...”³¹ Hilton seems to want to downplay the question of race, in favour of a Jamaican nationalism. This is possibly due to the fact that he has too much pride to take a lower position to whites. The white woman asks Hilton, “‘What do you consider yourself, black or white?’” Hilton responds “ ‘Jamaican’ ”. When she asks “ ‘...what kind of Jamaican,’ ”³² Hilton responds, “ ‘You Americans...Always thinking about race. We don’t y’know.’ ”³³ Hilton says something which is clearly not true, suggesting that Jamaicans do not regard race. There are several instances in the novel where race is, not only mentioned, but the hostility between the groups is revealed. And so, Hilton’s liquidation of racial divisions is reminiscent of Cleothilda in *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, who parades the phrase, “all ah we one” throughout the novel, as a way of protecting her place in the racial hierarchy. In addition to protecting his place in the racial hierarchy, Hilton seems in direct competition with whites:

²⁸ Thelwell, Michael ...243.

²⁹ Thelwell, Michael ...243.

³⁰ Thelwell, Michael ...243.

³¹ Thelwell, Michael ...238

³² Thelwell, Michael ...240.

³³ Thelwell, Michael ...240.

All this new talk about ‘social obligation,’ that was what he called a patriotic obligation. All these white women rushing down here like ants take them bed, and acting like them shit made Bruce’s patties. And on top of that: at the same time they acting so condescending and superior, they out there rubbing up with every little black waiter an’ doorman dem can find. Somebody had to show them that not everyone on the island ignorant and poor, that some of us have culture and breeding and understand, what’s the term, gracious living. And could lay the rod too.³⁴

This is a great example of the black middle class espousing nationalism and ignoring class. He dismisses “social obligation”, which speaks directly to the question of his responsibility to the poor, in favor of “patriotic obligation”, which speaks to his responsibility to Jamaica. This responsibility manifested itself in disproving the myth of black inferiority and, in fact, espousing a black superiority, particularly, in the realm of sexual intercourse. The text reads, “Say this for them, they knew quality—it hard to say which impress them more, the house or the rudeness. He wondered what it was about American white woman made them holler so loud. Something was going on up there, the men couldn’t be doing their job.”³⁵

The sexual competition between white and coloured that are illustrated in Hilton’s words are well documented in Jamaican history. According to Philip Curtin, “The white Jamaican on the estate had traditionally formed alliances with female slaves, and the same pattern of sexual relations carried over into the towns, where it

³⁴ Thelwell, Michael ...245.

³⁵ Thelwell, Michael ...245.

added to the bitterness of the colored men.”³⁶ The bitterness that Curtin describes here can certainly be applied to Hilton. Curtin goes on to say,

The Jamaican custom of interracial sexual alliances was received, quite naturally, with very different feelings by white and colored men...For colored men...the practice added sexual competition to other sources of racial animosity. In the town, for example, there was a colored ‘society’ with its separate social functions. Here, where the chief entertainment was dancing, colored men gave dances for colored girls, but white men also gave dances for the same colored girls, and the colored men were rigorously excluded.³⁷

The historic sexual competition between the coloureds and whites can possibly give context to Hilton’s sexual expeditions with white women. Subconsciously, this may be the brown middle class’ way of repaying white men for sleeping with colored women. From a psychological standpoint, Hilton’s rhetoric regarding the conquest of the white female is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s chapter on *The Man of Color and The White Woman in Black Skin White Masks*:

Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white. I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white. Now—and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged—who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization... I marry white

³⁶ Curtin, Philip D, *Two Jamaicas* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) 44.

³⁷ Curtin, Philip D, *Two Jamaicas* ... 45.

culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.³⁸

There are clear parallels between Fanon's discussion of the black man and white woman and Hilton's sexual relationship with white American women, who the novel suggests were frequently with Hilton. Hilton perceives his sexual conquest of white women as acceptance in the white world and, even beyond that, conquest of the white world. As a Jamaican, his desire to gain acceptance in the capitalist structure of Jamaica mirrors the rise of the middle class in Africa in colonial times and their subsequent struggle for decolonization:

European occupation triggered a revolution within African societies. As we have seen, in their efforts to reorganize African agrarian and mining production to supply the needs of industrial Europe, the conquerors found it necessary to train cheap African labor for new tasks. Within a generation this bore unexpected political fruit. A new class of westernized Africans, petit bourgeois in outlook, had been produced. Their position was based, not on their class origins in traditional Africa, but purely on their possession of western education and skills. Not owing their rise to the traditional rulers of Africa, and having quite often been alienated from African traditions by their indoctrination in western ways, these new men felt no particular loyalty to traditional rulers and their ways.³⁹

³⁸ Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Mask* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 63.

³⁹ Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators black Slaves and the African Elite* (Lagos: Pero Press, 1987) 86.

Having described the origins of this class, Chinweizu goes on to explain the origin of their struggle within colonial society:

And except for the handful of them who had traditional ruling-class backgrounds and who still retained their loyalty to their origins, this class of new men could not fit into the traditional political structure. Weaned on European attitudes and values, deriving their livelihood from their western skills, they felt more at home in the service of the new and alien order than in the old and traditional, and they sought an adequate place for themselves within it. But what they thought they deserved was not made available to them within the authoritarian politics to demand what they conceived to be their rights within colonial society.⁴⁰

Chinweizu continues to discuss the nature of the middle class' anticolonialism:

They criticized the absence of democracy in colonial society. They demanded that such libertarian principles as one man-one vote; liberty, equality, fraternity; no taxation without representation; all men are created equal, be applied within colonial Africa. Their campaign for civil liberties for conquered Africans, their complaints against colonial abuses, and their demand to be treated as equals with their conquerors angered their white-supremacist colonizers. Colonial administrators developed a harsh contempt for these educated Africans, who, from their clubs and beer parlors, were demanding admission to the segregated European clubs; who petitioned endlessly for civil rights

⁴⁰ Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators black Slaves and the African Elite* ...86-87.

and for participation in the high administrative processes that sustained the rule of their conquerors; who wanted their conquerors to rise and depart from Africa just as they were settling down to enjoy the fruits of their conquest.⁴¹

The situation, as Chinweizu describes it, seems to be very similar in Jamaica, the Caribbean and the entire colonial world. Philip Curtin provides powerful details of the Jamaican nationalism Hilton displays:

The pro-British alignment of the colored Jamaicans is all the more surprising, since they were also the Jamaican group with the strongest attachment for their own island. Even before emancipation they thought of Jamaica as their country and developed a feeling of patriotism—a feeling very uncommon among creole whites, who still thought of England as ‘home’ though they might never have been there. Both the greater patriotism and the leaning toward British policies were the natural outcome of the colored man’s position in Jamaican society. Even after legal discrimination was gone, his status halfway between the two ‘pure’ racial groups made for the psychological insecurity. His attempt to emphasize the European part of his racial heritage made him reject the African part, but at the same time the local white caste refused to recognize him as a European and an Equal. His insecurity, however, could be partly compensated by greater loyalty to Britain and greater loyalty to Jamaica.⁴²

⁴¹ Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators black Slaves and the African Elite* ...87.

⁴² Curtin, Philip D, *Two Jamaicas* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) 46.

The racial composition of the middle class and the resulting insecurity perfectly explains their loyalty to Jamaica in particular. In another example of Hilton's nationalism and anti-Americanism, he says that he, "...Don't believe in flying up to Miami to buy clothes. Support local industry. Good for the country.'"⁴³ Hilton, like the rest of the middle-class, would be opposed to the opening of Jamaican markets, for foreigners to compete against local businesses. In a documentary called *Life and Debt*, several members of what Clive Thomas refers to as *the propertied classes* openly speak against the policies that protected the Jamaican market from multi-national corporations. During Jamaica's structural adjustment program imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the economy was opened to foreign competition resulting in the decline of local Jamaican industries, such as the dairy, beef, and poultry industry.⁴⁴

Alvin Thompson confirms this in his book, *The Haunting Past*, where he says, "In concert with the World Bank, which is controlled by the same group of countries that control the IMF, the IMF seeks to encourage the debtor third-world countries to open their doors to foreign investment on more liberal terms, including the sale of national assets to TNCs."⁴⁵ He goes on to say that "The IMF...insisted on the...removal of import restrictions" which, "...drove the already faltering domestic economy into competition with external producers."⁴⁶ Thompson clearly shows that this competition with external producers is not in the interest of local industry. Therefore, the Jamaican propertied class cannot be pleased with these foreign businesses, and Hilton's nationalism can be viewed within this context.

⁴³ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 239.

⁴⁴ *Life and Debt*. Dir. Stephanie Black. 1996.

⁴⁵ Thompson, Alvin, *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997) 167.

⁴⁶ Thompson, Alvin, *The Haunting Past* ... 170.

While Hilton has a progressive perspective on nationalism, he has an oppressive perspective on class. The text illustrates Hilton's attitude towards the working class and his relationship with them, saying "He liked them or rather his position with them, but he wan't no fool. It was a jungle down here and he was the baddest cat in that jungle."⁴⁷ The description of the society as a jungle is accurate, since capitalism is based on the principle, "the survival of the fittest," meaning that the strongest individuals will prosper, while the weakest will suffer. The text further explains the capitalist ideology that Hilton buys into, saying,

Sure life was brutal and hard for them down here. But he come and find it that way, and what was his was his. He was no local charity. They'd gobble up everything he had and nothing would change, except him. Yeah, he liked the people but he sure as hell wasn't going to share their poverty. For what?⁴⁸

The text displays a crafty argument in favour of the Jamaican middle-class, illustrating that charity would not solve the problem of poverty and the fact that the middle class was not responsible for the class divisions, but would not be on the lower end of the system. Obviously, this perspective does not take into account the potential the middle class has to implement a new system where prosperity can be shared, rather than poverty. It is clear that there is a critical view of Hilton's middle class ideology in the narrative, with the text saying, "The do-gooders could sit up at the university and talk damn foolishness. Not only was his conscience clear, he slept

⁴⁷ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 247.

⁴⁸ Thelwell, Michael ...247.

good, ate good, fucked good, and was happy.”⁴⁹ So, despite the obvious flaws in this middle-class ideology, Hilton is unmoved, primarily because of his material comfort.

The material comfort that Hilton experienced is important to consider in analyzing his middle-class ideology. The previous quote regarding Hilton’s material comfort is reminiscent of Malcolm X’s discussion of the house negro, which Malcolm likened to the middle class: “The house Negro...lived better than the field Negro. He ate better, he dressed better, and he lived in a better house.”⁵⁰

Walter Rodney also sheds some light on the brown middle class’ hostility towards the black poor, which is illustrated in Hilton’s attitude and behaviour. In his book, *The Groundings with my Brothers*, he says,

The West Indian brown man is characterised by ambiguity and ambivalence. He has in the past identified with the black masses when it suited his interests...but the vast majority have fallen to the bribes of white imperialism, often outdoing the whites in their hatred and oppression of blacks.⁵¹

Philip Curtin also provides great insight into the brown middle class’ attitude towards the black poor:

...the brown people were very close to the attitudes and general outlook on the world of their white neighbours, at least in the sense that some colored people were found holding every shade of opinion found among members of the white class. The people of color were very conscious of their European heritage and extremely proud of it. While

⁴⁹ Thelwell, Michael ...247.

⁵⁰ X, Malcolm, "Short Statements 1964-1965," *By Any Means Necessary*, Ed. George Breitman (New York: Pathfinder P, 1989) 183.

⁵¹ Rodney, Walter, *The Grounding with my Brothers* (London: Bogle-L Ouverture Publications, 1969) 29.

fewer colored people than whites went to school in England, those who remained in Jamaica worked hard to suppress anything that might imply African origin. They discriminated socially against the darker members of their own class, they were just as prejudiced as the whites in their relations with Negro slaves, and finally a minority of the colored group joined the whites in the fight against emancipation.⁵²

The hatred and oppression that Rodney describes gives clarity to the relationship Hilton has with the black poor. He is a clear representative of his class.

The white upper class residing in Kingston is not so visible in the narrative. This makes sense due to the fact that Jamaica is overwhelmingly a black country with a very small percentage of whites. Despite being a minority, they have wielded a considerable amount of power throughout Jamaican history. In an essay titled, “The White Minority in Jamaica at the end of the Nineteenth Century,” Patrick Bryan states, “At the end of the nineteenth century the whites in the island of Jamaica constituted a dominant minority. This fact is not particularly suprising since the foundation of the British regime in the second half of the seventeenth century whites had enjoyed control of land, labour and capital.” Before ex-slaves were granted the right to vote, Bryan describes white political power, writing, “They also enjoyed nearly undisputed control of the political system by enforcing a limited suffrage that effectively eliminated access to political decision-making by all except a powerful white minority.” Bryan, also, speaks to white economic power, stating, “Control of the means of production and of the political system conferred on them considerable

⁵² Curtin, Philip D, *Two Jamaicas* (New York: Atheneum, 1970) 45-46.

social authority.”⁵³ Clearly, whites represented the elite of Jamaican society during slavery, and Bryan confirms their continued dominance post-slavery, writing,

Post-emancipation society was to be more of the same thing: white oligarchical hegemony buttressed by new legal sanctions, continued domination of the resources of the colony and the conversion of the slave force into a proletariat tied to the sugar estates.⁵⁴

It is also clear that independence, while giving local representation, did not free the society of the white elite’s economic domination. In an article titled, “The Development of the Jamaican Economy since Independence,” Omar Davies and Michael Witter write, “Despite acquisition of interest in the mining operations of some of the bauxite companies, majority ownership and control remains with the multinational corporations.” In addition to the mining sector, Davies and Witter speak about foreign domination of the agricultural sector, the export economy, the banking sector, among others.⁵⁴

For the avoidance of doubt, Davies and Witter make it very clear that the racial hierarchy is unchanged since independence, writing, “The basic class structure has not changed. There has been some upward movement of black people into the middle class, and even less into the upper classes. On the other hand, there has been no downward movement of the ethnic minorities into the lower classes.”⁵⁵ The white elite’s economic power is certainly secure in the neo-colonial era.

⁵³ Bryan, Patrick, “The White Minority in Jamaica at the end of the Nineteenth Century,” *The White Minority in the Caribbean*, Ed. Howard Johnson and Karl Watson (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998) 116.

⁵⁴ Bryan, Patrick, “The White Minority in Jamaica at the end of the Nineteenth Century... 116-117.

⁵⁴ Davies, Omar and Michael Witter, “The Development of the Jamaican Economy since Independence,” *Jamaica in Independence*, Ed. Rex Nettleford (Kingston: Heinemann, 1989) 99.

⁵⁵ Davies, Omar and Michael Witter, ... 98-99.

The economic power of the white elite is, also, commented upon in an essay entitled “Race, Identity and Independence in Jamaica” in which Rex Nettleford identifies some concerns of the black power movement in Jamaica:

...a listing is made (from Who’s Who in Jamaica) of what the advocates call ‘intensified white economic power in Jamaica’. Over one hundred commercial businesses are controlled says the information sheet by ‘four white families. In most cases they are outright owners. For the rest they are either Managing Director, Chairman of the Board of Directors, or Directors of these Companies.⁵⁶

Clive Thomas goes further than the four families mentioned above:

... complexities exist among the *propertied classes*. For example, close family ties within the manufacturing bourgeoisie have enabled 21 families in Jamaica (usually with residency or citizenship rights in North America or Europe) to dominate the locally-controlled sections of manufacturing, construction, and distribution developed since the Second World War.⁵⁷

These quotes clearly reflect the power of a small minority in Jamaica. In addition to the entrenched white families in Jamaica, tourism from North America is a key part of Jamaica’s economy, where the majority of tourists are white. This is an illustration of a position of privilege. Also, Jamaica is dominated by Trans-National Corporations from countries with majority white populations. Undeniably, these corporations are likely to have some white employees in a position of privilege.

⁵⁶ Nettleford, Rex. “Race, Identity, and Independence in Jamaica,” *Caribbean Freedom*, Ed. Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996) 519.

⁵⁷ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 190.

Despite the invisibility of the white upper class in, the reader is given some clues to their presence. On the way to town for the first time, Ivan witnesses many large houses with black men doing yard work, and Ivan wonders who the owners are: "...Ivan saw only an occasional black man watering a lawn or polishing the car. He knew, without having to ask or speculate, that these men were not the owners. Who those fortunate ones were, and how many people lived in such enormous and rich-looking houses remained a question. Maybe that was what the city was like."⁵⁸ It is evident that Ivan's question as to who lives in such houses is answered as he lives in Kingston, for when he travels back to the country and witnesses white people living in Maas' Nattie's house, he says, "A white woman in Maas' Nattie house... White people no live all like hereso. Dem stay a hotel an' dem big house over de city."⁵⁹ Ivan confirms that white people, generally, live in big houses in the city, which, in turn, confirms their socio-economic privilege, greatly contrasting to the conditions of the black poor, whose housing reflects their desolate condition.

Another reference to a wealthy white person is found in the story of a character named Thalia. Thalia is a domestic worker in a white man's house and she came into conflict with some of the male garden workers, due to her haughtiness. Thalia rejects one of the garden boys on the grounds of race and class. Thalia says, "What you have dat I want? You have money? You have looks? You have color? You have education? No! You doan have nothing in you favor. You ugly, you poor, you ignorant and you black... You think garden bwai money can get me."⁶⁰ This is an instance in the novel that is reminiscent of Sylvia in *The Dragon Can't Dance*,

⁵⁸ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 118.

⁵⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 322.

⁶⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 227.

who rejects several different potential mates due to their financial status. Thalia is in the same position and rejects the black poor, while giving access to the white rich: “Clearly she wasn’t about to have anything to do with any of them. The knowledge that she was desirable enough to get a more affluent lover, perhaps even one with a car, rankled deeply. The rumor that she was carrying on with her rich white employer was also cause for resentment.”⁶¹ The rich white employer’s privilege is displayed in his large house and also his ability to be romantic with Thalia. This is also true of Hilton and the white woman. Besides this reference to the rich white, the only other reference to any white people is in the country, where they are tourists and also owner of Miss Ida’s café. But it is to be assumed that they own the bauxite plant, the condominiums, and the tourist hotels and fancy restaurants mentioned in the novel.

The novel does illustrate the Queen, however, reminding the reader of Britain’s role as colonial master in Jamaica. Her image is played in a movie theater before the beginning of a movie: “...strains of ‘God Save The Queen’ filled the theater...a giant technicolor Union Jack appeared, swirling folds of imperialist grandeur...Then a small woman in military uniform sitting erect on a huge horse. The Queen.”⁶² This is an example of the political hierarchy that white countries are on top of. In addition to these references to the white upper class, there are also references to tourists and whites in other positions of privilege.

In the novel, marginal references are made to both Indian and Chinese. There are a few interesting positions by scholars concerning the role that racial and national groups other than African Jamaican and European play. Walter Rodney expresses the commonality of experience among the African and Indian:

⁶¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 227.

⁶² Thelwell, Michael ... 147.

When the Indian was brought to the West Indies, he met the same racial contempt which whites applied to Africans. The Indian, too, was reduced to a single stereotype—the coolie or labourer. He too was a hewer of wood and a bringer of water. I spoke earlier of the revolt of the blacks in the West Indies in 1938. That revolt involved Africans in Jamaica, Africans and Indians in Trinidad and Guyana. The uprisings in Guyana were actually led by Indian sugar workers. Today, some Indians (like some Africans) have joined the white power structure in terms of economic activity and culture; but the underlying reality is that poverty resides among Africans and Indians in the West Indies, therefore, refers primarily to people who are recognisably African or Indian.⁶³

Walter Rodney expresses a different view of the Chinese:

The Chinese, on the other hand, are a former labouring group who have now become bastions of white West Indian social structure. The Chinese of the People's Republic of China have long broken with and are fighting against white imperialism, but our Chinese have nothing to do with that movement. They are identified with Chiang-Kai-Shek and not Chairman Mao Tse-tung. They are to be put in the same bracket as the lackeys of capitalism and imperialism who are to be found in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Whatever the circumstances in which the Chinese came to the West Indies, they soon became (as a group) members of the exploiting class. They will have to relinquish or be deprived of the

⁶³ Rodney, Walter, *The Grounding with my Brothers* (London: Bogle-L Ouverture Publications, 1969) 28.

function before they can be re-integrated into a West Indian society where the black man walks in dignity.⁶⁴

Alvin Thompson speaks to the antagonism between African and other groups:

Africans, in particular, have resented the economic advancement of other, more recently arrived, groups in the region, such as the Chinese, Syrians and Portuguese, who emphasise it was hard work, dedication and sacrifice that have accounted for their advancement. Africans believe that these groups were given much better opportunities by the colonial governments: greater patronage, access to loans, etc. They repudiate the argument that Africans failed to make equivalent progress through a combination of laziness, lost opportunities, lack of business acumen and a spendthrift mentality.⁶⁵

Alvin Thompson does emphasize the Europeans' role in instigating conflict and, also, the groups' common oppression:

Europeans stopped short of pitting the different ethnic groups against each other in head-on-conflict, conscious that this was likely to lead to race riots, to the detriment of the planters' interests. However, they fostered a certain degree of rivalry and animosity, in the hope that these would keep the various groups apart and make it easier to exploit them. Although there were several instances of animosity and petty conflict between Chinese and Indian contract labourers on the one hand and the Africans on the other, there were apparently no incidents of large-scale communal violence among them during the period of

⁶⁴ Rodney, Walter, *The Grounding with my Brothers* ...28-29.

⁶⁵ Thompson, Alvin, *The Haunting Past* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997) 222.

indentureship. This suggests that there was sufficient spatial and economic distance between them to reduce competition or prevent it from coming to the boil. It may also reflect a certain consciousness among them that they were all victims of European exploitation. They, especially the contract labourers who worked alongside slaves, must have been aware of their similar material and social conditions when compared with the ruling classes.⁶⁶

There does not seem to be a clear consensus among scholars as to what the attitude towards other non-white groups in Jamaica, but it is clear that these groups are focused on economic success. One illustration of this in the novel is when Ivan is driving to town for the first time, and the reader is told that an Indian named “Coolie Man” is the driver and owner of the bus. This is a position of privilege that has been gained, most likely, due to Coolie Man’s hard work, as was the case with Pariag in *The Dragon Can’t Dance*. Another reference is made to an Indian named Coolie Roy, “...who was studying accounting in night school and was assured of a big job when he finished his studies.”⁶⁷ The information about Coolie Roy’s school and job were communicated to Thalia by a group of garden boys that she offended with her rejection of the black poor. And so, they needed Coolie Roy to play a trick on Thalia and, therefore, needed someone of middle class status. It is unclear whether his school and job was made up or is true, but if it is true, it will fit the paradigm of Indian success through hard work that *The Dragon Can’t Dance* and *Apata* have established. There is also one reference made to a Chinese man owning a shop.

⁶⁶ Thompson, Alvin, *The Haunting Past* ...220-221.

⁶⁷ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 228.

The racial hierarchy in Jamaica as illustrated in *The Harder They Come* is very clear. The novel simply reflects the conditions of Jamaica and the region as a whole. Certainly, the experience of the lower class, which I refer to as the black poor, is not consistent with the expectations of a progressive society. In addition to examining these poor conditions, this study must look at how the black poor copes with its plight and place in the system.

III: I'm a Black Survivor

It is interesting to explore the method through which the black poor survives in the novel. In the midst of the degradation and suffering, it is necessary to focus on the strategies the black poor establish in order to maintain their existence. Carol Narcisse says,

The range of short term coping and longer term survival strategies which a large percentage of the population employs is extensive. Moral codes have changed to allow for greater possibilities for action aimed at enabling survival in a hostile socio-economic and physical environment. The strategies serve to both maintain as well as undermine community and social relations and the country's economic development.¹

Ivan made an observation of one of the survival strategies when he first arrived in town. The text says,

From what he had seen so far, everyone in Kingston was a seller of something or another. From a loaded donkey cart a man was selling green coconuts, slicing off the tops to get at the cool milk inside. Next to him another sold balls of shaved ice covered with syrup. One woman dispensed spicy meat patties from a portable tin oven. From a glass case another sold fried fish. Young men walked around with boxes slung from their necks in which were nuts, candy, dried shrimp, popcorn, guava cheese, and assorted confectionaries. Others had little

¹ Narcisse, Carol, "Social Integration and Disintegration: The Caribbean Experience: Jamaica," *Contending With Destiny*, Ed. Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 226.

stands where they hawked glittering trinkets: pocket knives, key chains, earrings, bracelets, and novelties of all sorts.²

The reader does not experience this level of entrepreneurship in *The Dragon Can't Dance* or in *Apata*. This quote provides insight into the effort that the black poor has put into their own survival. There is not the sense, however, that the black poor is prospering, but that they are barely surviving. It would seem that the money does not exist to purchase what the vendors are selling or there is not enough money to go around, and so there is intense competition. The text reads, "Some vendors, aggressively seeking business, pressed their offering on passersby. Others contented themselves with bawling out the virtues of their wares, while some, displaying an artist's pride in their creations and performances, sang witty verses in praise of theirs to tunes that were clearly original."³

The economic activity described in *The Harder They Come* is historically accurate. In an essay focusing on the informal economy of Jamaica, Kirton and Witter discuss *Sidewalk Vending* and *Higglers*. They say,

Sidewalk trading refers to all buying and selling activities that take place on the streets or sidewalks. In contemporary Jamaica, this is a myriad of activities including, in particular, the traditional food trade by higglers on the kerb sides of parochial markets and the trade in imported and locally manufactured consumer goods. It is this latter group of vendors, especially those who import and sell foreign

² Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 125.

³ Thelwell, Michael ...125.

consumer goods, that have attracted the focus of public discussion and some attention by policy-makers.⁴

These authors go on to describe side walk vending as a means of survival for those failed by the formal economy:

Its modern origins are rooted in the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s as economic scarcity provided market opportunities for earning incomes. It is partly because of the recent growth and development of sidewalk vending, along with that of other sectors of informal activity, that the informal economy, as an avenue of opportunity for those who cannot either be absorbed by, or have recently been displaced from the formal economy, and, consequently, as an area of social life deserving of more attention from policy makers.⁵

Sidewalk vending was not the only means of survival illustrated in the novel. Since there were many individuals, including Ivan, who did not have the money to buy from the vendors, begging and stealing was commonplace. Carol Narcisse identifies begging and stealing as survival strategies of the poor and vulnerable. Concerning begging, she writes, "...people beg for money, clothes and food. Tricksters abound with well rehearsed stories, entirely fabricated. Children are often sent out to beg or are kept with adults who beg because they increase the sympathy factor."⁶ Narcisse also points out that "...pickpocketing, petty theft, robbery" are a

⁴ Kirton, Claremont and Michael Witter, "Aspects of the Informal Economy in Jamaica," *Caribbean Economic Development*, Ed. Stanley Lalta and Marie Freckleton (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers Limited, 1993) 283.

⁵ Kirton, Claremont and Michael Witter, ..284.

⁶ Narcisse, Carol, "Social Integration and Disintegration: The Caribbean Experience: Jamaica," *Contending With Destiny*, Ed. Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 227.

means of survival. Both of these survival strategies are displayed prominently in the novel.

Ivan has been trained not to steal, and is even appalled when he first gets to town and witnesses two boys steal some fruit from a vendor. The text says, “Instinctively Ivan wanted to challenge the thief...,”⁷ but Ivan would eventually come to steal regularly. The text says, “He spent much time hanging around the market because of the hustle and bustle there. There he could make a few coins carrying a shopper’s basket, or beg or steal a piece of sugar cane, mango, or orange.”⁸ And so, it is clear to see that economic necessity leads to the erosion of values. Ivan has no other means of surviving, and this leads to thievery and crime in general. When Ivan first comes he is a victim of thievery. The text mentions “The gang of youth, stridently volunteering their services as porters and agents.”⁹ This is yet another way the black poor make money: helping to carry luggage in exchange for a small fee. But when a gullible person, as Ivan was, comes along, they will steal the luggage. In this way, Ivan lost nearly all his money and the gifts that were to go to his mother.

It is interesting to examine Amos Wilson’s explanation of the type of black on black crime we see in *The Harder They Come* and the entire globe. He begins his analysis with the impulses created by the global white economic system:

The White American economic system and the global White supremacist economic system depend on the unrestrained African American and worldwide African impulse to consume gluttonously all the items manufactured by Whites or other ethnic groups, regardless of

⁷ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 126.

⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 174.

⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 124.

value or utility. These economic systems depend on African peoples defining and evaluating themselves in terms of their consumption of European or other foreign-made goods; not as producers for their own utilitarian and other needs, and the consummatory needs of other peoples. In his assigned role as consumer *par excellence*, and not as producer, the African is motivated to value consumption above all other activities. He is tantalized by the European marketing system to consume indiscriminately and to perceive the capacity to consume, to display luxurious adornments, and engage in a caricature of the lifestyles of the 'rich and famous' as the most veridical measure of human worth, power and prestige.¹⁰

Wilson goes on to explain how those impulses produce a criminal mentality.

His analysis certainly puts the criminal behaviour in the novel into perspective:

This illusion of 'somebodiness' and worth attained via consumption and conspicuous display without the concomitant 'ownership of the means of production,' without the socio-political power and organization to attain such ownership, requires that an impulsive-compulsive orientation toward monetary profligacy and debauchery be introjected at the center of the African personality. One man's profligacy and debauchery are the source of another man's wealth and power and psychopolitical hegemony. The dissolute African American, without the support or ownership of, or compelling interest in developing the means of producing for his own consummatory

¹⁰ Wilson, Amos N, *Black on Black Violence* (New York: Afrikan World Infosystems, 1990). 138-139.

proclivities, without having access to workable 'legitimate strategies for acquiring those means, is perfectly 'set up' to be pushed into criminal activities in order to assuage his artificially induced desires.¹¹

Another option available to the black poor is seeking low wage employment. Ivan's mother is an example of this. She worked as a domestic worker in a rich family's home, as is the popular mode of work for the female black poor. The text says, "Today was Thursday, cleaning day, and she'd had to cook and serve the family's supper too. Kneeling on hardwood floors, while she scrubbed and polished them with a coconut brush, had left a burning ache in her knees, which were covered with an ugly pad of calloused skin, leathery and discolored."¹² The experience of Ivan's mother as a domestic worker highlights the suffering the black poor goes through to survive. The text describes vividly how tired she is and how much her back aches, all for a meagre salary.

Daisy's example is not an isolated phenomenon but a part of a larger trend, particularly among women. Michele A Johnson states, "According to the available data, a significant proportion of Jamaica's female labour force between 1920 and 1970 was employed as domestic servants."¹³ Johnson explains one reason why females were targeted: "Women were also sought as domestic servants because they were cheaper to employ."¹⁴ Daisy's experience certainly confirms the poor conditions that domestic servants were subject to.

¹¹ Wilson, Amos N, ... 139.

¹² Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 134.

¹³ Johnson, Michele, "Young Woman from the Country: a profile of domestic servants in Jamaica, 1920-1970," *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom*, Ed. Verene A. Shephard (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 402.

¹⁴ Johnson, Michele, ...403.

Carol Narcisse identifies low skilled jobs, such as “...day work (household and gardening) and casual labour”¹⁵ as a survival strategy for the poor and the vulnerable. Ivan tried this route of low wage employment, though unsuccessfully. The novel says,

Sometimes he heard rumors of work. At first, dependably, the adrenaline would flow and he would walk to the place, full of hope and confidence, only to flounder on the rocks of no skills, no political affiliation, no sponsors. And the rich neighborhoods? Those he grew to hate deeply and rancorously, seeing them as hostile and dangerous places full of humiliation and insult and, possibly, danger.¹⁶

This quote brings attention to how the system fails the black poor by not providing them any employment. In *The Poor and the Powerless*, Clive Thomas says “...a large proportion of the working-class labour force (particularly among the youth) are long term structurally unemployed.”¹⁷ When the unemployed seek work from those with the power to give work, such as the middle-class, they are often denied. When Ivan asks a black middle class woman in a rich neighborhood for work, she refuses to help him, but when he asks for some money she says “ ‘I don’t believe in young healthy boys begging...go try to make something of yourself.’ ”¹⁸ She obviously does not believe that she has any responsibility towards the black poor and, in fact, harbours great hostility. Ivan struggles to comprehend the reason for this: “Nobody spoke in other than a cold, and for some reason that he couldn’t understand,

¹⁵ Narcisse, Carol, "Social Integration and Disintegration: The Caribbean Experience: Jamaica," *Contending With Destiny*, Ed. Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 226.

¹⁶ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 174.

¹⁷ Thomas, Clive Y., *The Poor and the Powerless* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988) 190.

¹⁸ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 172.

hostile tone, as though he were personally guilty of some offence against them.

Sometimes, uncalled, the dogs ran along the fence barking and snarling...¹⁹ What is being expressed in this quote is an open hatred directed at the black poor by the middle-class. This is not a hatred that is simply being expressed by an individual.

This hostility is articulated even more clearly in Hilton's character. Hilton carries a gun and is forthright about the purpose of having the weapon. The text says, " 'This island full a people who don't wan' work. Want everything but don' wan' do nutten. You get me? Some like animals—break into your house, kill you, take anything you have. What I have is mine—work hard for it an' no nigger going come and take it so.' "²⁰

As was demonstrated when Ivan was searching private residences for work, the middle class accuses the black poor of not wanting to work, but when given an opportunity to help them, they generally refuse. Hilton is no different. Hilton is a record producer, which means he is an important part of the process of producing reggae music. Reggae music has a great appeal to the black poor, as it captures their experience more so than other music. The text says,

This reggae business—it was the first thing he'd seen that belonged to the youth and to the sufferahs. It was roots music, dread music, their own. It talked about no work, no money, no food, about war an' strife in Babylon, about oppression, depression, and lootin' an' shootin', things that were real to him. Even Mr. Brown, scared as he was of Preacher, had to admit that whether or not it was sinful or sacreligious

¹⁹ Thelwell, Michael ...170.

²⁰ Thelwell, Michael ...240.

it was at least their own music—and he guessed that had to be an improvement.²¹

Not only did the content of the reggae music appeal to the black poor but it also was a tool to lift the black poor out of their social economic misery. Carol Narcisse identifies music—“...becoming a DJ or singer following sound systems”²²—as another important strategy among the poor and vulnerable. This is confirmed in the novel where it says that Ivan “... had heard stories of poor boys who were singing this new music, cutting records and becoming star boys.”²³

In order for Ivan to meet his ambitions of becoming a star boy, he needs the assistance of the middle class Hilton, who has the social and economic resources to navigate through the capitalist system. Rather than help Ivan, who is a talented singer and song writer, Hilton purposefully holds him back to maintain his middle class authority over him. The text explains the relationship Hilton had with the black poor entertainers, saying, “He had yet to see one that didn’t think that just because they cut a few sides they should be millionaires, or who later didn’t claim to have been robbed.”²⁴ Clearly, the entertainers are dissatisfied with the money they receive, considering the wealth that Hilton has created for himself, using the artists’ talent. When Ivan expresses his discontent with the money he receives for his recording, Hilton points out the limitations of the black poor and their reliance on the middle class:

²¹ Thelwell, Michael ...221-222.

²² Narcisse, Carol, "Social Integration and Disintegration: The Caribbean Experience: Jamaica," *Contending With Destiny*, Ed. Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 227.

²³ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 222.

²⁴ Thelwell, Michael ...282.

‘...I’m a fair man. You doan like the terms? Is a pity we didn’t discuss dem before...Produce it yourself den. You can buy the tapes an mix dem yourself, eh. Let’s say fifty dollars an hour for studio time, fifteen an hour for the sidemen eh? You soun’ like a businessman—you can raise that easy, right? Den I’ll even press dem fe you. Flat rate per thousand, say dollar fifty each. Over a thousand, a dollar each. What could fairer dan dat? You think you can sell a thousand—two, three? Jus’ decide and place your order, O.K.?...Cash in advance...Oh, you don’t want to order a run? Cho man, you disappoint me. But think it over all de same—you know where to find me.’²⁵

Here, Hilton illustrates that the black poor do not have the resources to produce their own records and, therefore, are at his mercy, as one who does have resources. As a result of Hilton’s economic advantage, he can offer Ivan a meager fee, and because of Ivan’s desperate economic condition, he has to accept it. And so Ivan eventually accepts the terms that Hilton offers him. Hilton recognizing Ivan’s rebellious nature, decides that he cannot allow him to become too famous. The text says, “This fellow seemed to have a little something extra—spirit and a feeling, hard to put into words exactly. But, whatever—if he was to be any good to anybody he’d have to be brought into line.”²⁶ And so, Hilton refuses to push the record simply to kill Ivan’s spirit, so he will not seek to transcend his class position. When Ivan realizes this he says, “...You mean to say Hilton rich enough to keep money outta ‘im

²⁵ Thelwell, Michael ...283.

²⁶ Thelwell, Michael ...283.

own pocket, jus' fe keep one poor black bwai inna 'im place?'²⁷ And so, Hilton, as a member of the middle class, cannot be depended upon to help the black poor solve their economic problems.

Ras Sufferah encounters a similar situation as Ivan. Ras Sufferah takes a cart full of bottles to a bottle factory, where there is a member of the black middle class who will buy bottles from Ras Sufferah. Kirton and Witter identify the retail trade of empty bottles as a part of the robust informal economy of Jamaica.²⁸ When Ras Sufferah delivers the bottles, great hostility is exhibited towards him perhaps because of his low position on the socio-economic hierarchy. When the middle class man threatens Ras Sufferah that he should just come back the next day, despite the fact that Ras Sufferah walked over 10 miles at the least, Ras Sufferah pleads for mercy. The middle class man responds, " 'No man, all you damn Rasta is the same—lie down under mango tree an' smoke unu ganja all day, den come talk 'bout 'gimme a break.' ' "²⁹ After Ras Sufferah's pleadings, the middle class man agrees to buy the bottles but did not accept all the bottles. The text says, "When they were through, the pile of rejects was considerable."³⁰ Just like Ivan in his dealings with Hilton, Ras Sufferah does not get the money he believes he deserves. Ras Sufferah destroys the bottles which were rejected, which implies that the bottle factory may have wanted to use them even though they did not pay for them. This exploitation is characteristic of the black middle class' treatment of the black poor.

²⁷ Thelwell, Michael ...297.

²⁸ Kirton, Claremont and Michael Witter, "Aspects of the Informal Economy in Jamaica," *Caribbean Economic Development*, Ed. Stanley Lalta and Marie Freckleton (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers Limited, 1993) 284.

²⁹ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 164.

³⁰ Thelwell, Michael ...165.

Another factor that impacts on the black poor's ability to work and survive is political nepotism. As is the case in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, what party someone supports can affect whether or not that person is employed. The narrative gives an example when Ras Sufferah points out to Ivan in one seeking work on a construction site, " 'Is government work, dis—only dem party member dem get work here.' " ³¹ While some members of the black poor, like Ivan, lack skills and can be justifiably rejected for a job, even those with skills and the wrong political affiliation are rejected. The text says, "Like Ivan, most were dressed in the eclectic style dictated by poverty and chance. None could have been said to look particularly hopeful—not even the elite minority...who appeared...very experienced and professional." ³² So it is clear that providing economic development for the black poor or doing efficient work is not the goal of the political party. Rather, providing jobs seems to be a manipulative ploy to stay in power. As a result, the masses cannot look towards politics as a means of alleviating their economic problems.

The political nepotism illustrated in the novel is a real-life reflection of Jamaica. Carol Narcisse writes,

Growing out of differences of opinion about the development path which Jamaica was to take, from the 1940's onwards contests for political and trade union power and leadership became increasingly divisive, eroding the spirit of 'building a new Jamaica' and of putting national and community interest before party and individual interest. Jobs, money, infrastructural development and other scarce benefits became, by the 1950s and 1960s, the 'carrot and stick' of the political

³¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 167.

³² Thelwell, Michael ... 166.

process promised and given in return for political support to enable state power and withheld as punishment for non-support of the winning party. This system thrived through the use of organised violence and the creation of politically homogenous enclaves where allegiance could be tightly controlled, nurtured and when necessary, enforced. Poverty dependence became the prerequisites for that system's success.³³

In an essay titled, "Power, Policy, and Politics in Independent Jamaica," Carl Stone also comment on the political tribalism in Jamaica. He writes,

The elected political executives placed a high premium on government constructed housing. Beyond its social and economic value, it has major political meaning in that it represents a prime area of political patronage allocations and an opportunity to establish political strongholds by careful selection of who gets opportunities for access to these housing schemes. In the typical sense, JLP and PNP governments pack the housing schemes they construct with persons who are strong party supporters. The result is the creation of tightly knit, politically partisan communities that reflect strong one-party tendencies.³⁴

From the perspective of the black poor, one of the greatest assets they have is marijuana or "ganja". According to Horace Campbell in his book, *Rasta and Resistance*, "large-scale use of ganja in Jamaica and the Caribbean in the most recent

³³ Narcisse, Carol, "Social Integration and Disintegration: The Caribbean Experience: Jamaica," *Contending With Destiny*, Ed. Kenneth Hall and Denis Benn (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000) 227.

³⁴ Stone, Carl. "Power, policy and Politics in Independent Jamaica." *Jamaica In Independence*. Ed. Rex Nettleford. Kingston: Heinemann Publishers (Caribbean) Limited, 1989. 26.

history...dated from the importation of indentured Indians into Jamaica.”³⁵ He goes on to illustrate the popularity of the custom, saying, “Ganja has been and continues to be used widely by the working people of Jamaica. It is smoked, brewed as medicinal tea and tonic, cooked in food and applied externally.”³⁶ One of the symbols of Jamaican life widely recognized all over the world is the use of ganja and the rasta.

In *The Harder They Come*, A taxi driver acknowledges the importance of ganja to Ivan, saying, “ ‘Fuck bauxite’...the single greatest resource the island had was ganja. Didn’t Ivan know the Prime Minister and the entire cabinet each had their own secret plantation.”³⁷ This quote speaks to the reality that even the politicians must acknowledge ganja’s economic viability.

Tim Wren confirms that this is a true reflection of Caribbean societies. He says, “The effects of corruption spawned by the drug trade are less visible, but in recent years they have reached the most senior elected officials and their families.”³⁸

The high demand for ganja, combined with the fact it is illegal, makes employment in the ganga trade readily available for members of the black poor, who are cut off from most other avenues to economic development. An essay titled “Drugs, Debt and Structural Adjustment in the Caribbean,” explains how the poverty that resulted from the structural adjustment program imposed by the IMF contributes to drug activity: “Structural reforms in many instances results in increased poverty, making illicit forms of activity such as narcotics trafficking more attractive.”³⁹

³⁵ Campbell, Horace, *Rasta and Resistance* (St. John's: Hansib Publications, 1997) 107.

³⁶ Campbell, Horace, *Rasta and Resistance* ... 107.

³⁷ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 331.

³⁸ Wren, Tim, "Regional and Global Action to Combat Drugs in the Caribbean." *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean*. Ed. Ivelaw L. Griffith (New York: Palgrave, 2000) 246.

³⁹ Bernal, Richard L and Winsome J. and Lamar, Stephen E Leslie, "Debt, Drugs and Structural Adjustment in the Caribbean," *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean*. Ed. Ivelaw L. Griffith (New York: Palgrave, 2000) 58.

Tim Wren also provides significant insight, contextualizing the attractiveness of the drug trade within the detrimental economic impacts of global competition:

“Preferential trade agreements are under threat from global trade liberalization... and economic restructuring is causing increased unemployment. Against this background of uncertainty the drug trade has become a significant phenomenon.”⁴⁰

Another scholar, Ivelaw Griffith, admits that drug trafficking has positive economic benefits and, therefore, cannot be completely condemned:

Scholars and statesmen alike are able to condemn without compunction the drug phenomenon’s precipitation or aggravation of socio-political effects such as crime, corruption, and moral degradation. But they have to temper their inclination to level wholesale condemnation when it comes to the socio-economic areas, for they are forced to recognize that drugs do have positive-sum aspects—income generation, employment creation, and resource distribution, no matter how skewed, among them.⁴¹

Hilton and Ivan’s girlfriend, Elsa, acknowledge the importance of the ganja trade to the black poor. In the novel, Hilton says, “ ‘...Ganja is de only t’ing that bring money into shantytown...’ ”⁴² Elsa, who was raised as a Christian and in opposition to the trade of ganga, acknowledges ganja’s role in her survival and also one of the traders sons, “Man I” :

Now she knew it was ganja money that paid the rent on the little house she presided over with such satisfaction. And bought the tonics,

⁴⁰ Wren, Tim, "Regional and Global Action to Combat Drugs in the Caribbean." *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean*. Ed. Ivelaw L. Griffith (New York: Palgrave, 2000) 246.

⁴¹ Griffith, Ivelaw, "Introduction: Drugs and Political Economy," *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean*. Ed. Ivelaw Griffith (New York: Palgrave, 2000) 1.

⁴² Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 370.

special foods, and medicine that the boy had to have. Once already, Man-I, failing fast and needing blood transfusions, had to be rushed the hospital. If it weren't for the ganja money what kind of life would he have? Painful and probably short.⁴³

Even though ganja provides employment for the black poor, it assumes the same capitalist structure of working class, middle class, and the owning class. One of the traders, Ras Pedro, speaks on what ganja means to black people and how that is changing, "He said the herb was something Jah gave to the black man to comfort him in his period of oppression. It was, he said, the only good thing that black man had that white man didn't try to take for himself—an' now they were starting to turn their greedy gaze in that direction too."⁴⁴ What Pedro is essentially saying is that recognizing that ganja is economically viable, the white man, who has created a system that benefits himself, through owning and controlling the resources and the labour of the world, seeks to incorporate ganja into that system.

The international trade between Jamaica and America in drugs is very well recognized. The essay titled, "Drugs, Debt, and Structural Adjustment in the Caribbean," states, "US government surveys of marijuana production identify Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the countries of the Eastern Caribbean as significant producers of marijuana, both for local consumption and for export."⁴⁵ Much of these exports go to North America. In the 2013 International Narcotics

⁴³ Thelwell, Michael ...303.

⁴⁴ Thelwell, Michael...303.

⁴⁵ Bernal, Richard L and Winsome J. and Lamar, Stephen E Leslie, "Debt, Drugs and Structural Adjustment in the Caribbean," *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean*. Ed. Ivelaw L. Griffith (New York: Palgrave, 2000) 70.

Control Strategy Report, it states that, “Jamaica remains the largest Caribbean supplier of marijuana to the United States.”⁴⁶

The trade in marijuana between the United States and Jamaica is apparent in the novel, and this brings attention to the large amounts of money involved in this business of which the black poor receive very little. Ivan learns news that a plane coming from Jamaica carrying ganja was stopped by police in Miami. The estimated value of the ganja was seven hundred thousand United States dollars. It is only after learning this information that Ivan learns that there is a class structure in place where the black poor is on the bottom end. If ganja is being exported to the United States, it must be making much more money than the local traders are aware of. The text reveals Ivan’s thoughts on the matter: “Seven hundred t’ousan’ dollah! Who a go get dat he? An’ we a run from soldier an gunshot every day? Fe what? Small change.”⁴⁷ Ivan comments on one of the fundamental arguments against capitalism: the unfairness of workers doing all the work, but benefitting the least. Ivan makes reference to the danger that is involved in the work and the little pay they receive in relation to the upper class of the trade. This is clearly the position of the working class.

Another quote illustrates the class structure of the ganja trade. After the seizure of the plane carrying the ganja, there was increased pressure on the ganja trade in Jamaica, which the text comments on: “The entire grassroots economic system, embracing grower, curer, cutter, distributor, and a variety of ingenious

⁴⁶ “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Volume I.” www.state.gov. Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs United States Department of State. March 2013. Web. 25 June 2013.

⁴⁷ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 331.

middlemen...was completely disrupted.”⁴⁸ This quote speaks about the various different types of workers in the ganja trade but also speaks on the “middlemen” or the middle class.

A character named Jose is one such middle man. Jose collects money from the traders in exchange for providing them protection from the police. The text says, “...they feared Jose, or at least his mysterious connections. But still an’ all, his protection held up, most of the time. They all grumbled about the size of the cut, but within the organization they had made a living.”⁴⁹ As the quote illustrates, Jose provides the black poor a service through his connection to the upper class, and the black poor accepts their meagre pay because they can survive on their pay, and they fear the consequences of stepping outside the class boundaries.

Another quote reveals Jose’s middle class position with the traders. At one point in the narrative, one trader, Ras Pedro, who is also Ivan’s partner in business, asks Jose for some relief in terms of the payment due to the sickness of his son. Pedro says, “ ‘Ah bring what I can, still, but de bwai sick, Jose,’ ”⁵⁰ to which Jose responds, “ ‘Is not my concern dat, y’know. I sorry fe de bwai—truly, but if you trade, you pay.’ ”⁵¹ In this stance, Pedro reveals the same lack of compassion for the black poor as the other middle class characters in the novel. This attitude is in contrast to the spirit of cooperation and communalism expressed in Ivan’s home village during his childhood. Pedro, who believes in such communalism, acknowledges this capitalist attitude saying, “ ‘So...all you deal wid is money. Nuten else—jus’ money?’ ”⁵²

⁴⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 336.

⁴⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 363.

⁵⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 338.

⁵¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 338.

⁵² Thelwell, Michael ... 338.

During this same conversation, Ivan displays his displeasure with Jose's mentality, while illustrating Jose's connection to the upper class: " '...I nah pay you till nex' week Jose. Tell you boss dem to tek my share outta de money from Miami...' ”⁵³ It is obvious to Ivan that there are those who are making a lot of money from the ganja trade and Jose gains his power through his connection to them. The following quote illustrates Jose's upper class connections: " '...I been talkin' wid de high-up man dem in de trade. I tell dem say you traders deserve a break...Dem agree. Dem say, so longst as we settle dis Rhygin business an' lif' de heat off de trade—den we can get a break ina de export...' ”⁵⁴ So, as can be seen through the previous quotes, the ganja trade has taken on a capitalist structure that benefits the upper class mostly. The upper and middle class enrich themselves at the expense of the lower class, who do all the work and take all the risk. The faces of the upper class are never revealed though government ministers' names circulate in rumours. It would not be surprising if the same racial and class elements who control all the other capitalist enterprises, also control the ganja trade.

Despite the role the ganja trade plays in the survival of the black poor, the state is constantly involved in attempts to destroy it. In an essay titled, “Drugs, Debt and Structural Adjustment in the Caribbean,” it says,

Caribbean countries have directed considerable effort at eradicating or confiscating the supply of domestically grown marijuana.

Governments throughout the region have opted for different methods of eradication. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Belize, for example, manually eradicate marijuana plants by cutting and burning plants that

⁵³ Thelwell, Michael ... 338.

⁵⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 378.

have been located through periodic aerial reconnaissance. In countries where such practices are not impractical for political reasons, the use of herbicides through aerial spraying or manual application plays a role in eradication efforts.⁵⁵

The eradication efforts explained here are reflected in the novel. The text describes an operation to destroy a ganja farm:

The helicopter strike force of 'Operation Friendship' spent four weeks scanning remote hills in every area known to produce herb. Neither the aircraft nor the teams of soldiers which followed hard on their tails missed very much. Either by fortituous accident or design the operation came just as the crop had begun to mature.⁵⁶

Ivan and Pedro are not happy as they watch:

They stopped and looked in silence at the burning mountain. Six, seven, no, ten columns spewed into the air and mingled into a single dark cloud hanging like a pall over the peaks. Four helicopters, angry dragonflies, hovered and darted through the smoke like giant prehistoric insects routed from their nests by fire.

'Ah bet you, not a root a ganja doan leff up deh,' Pedro said.

'De whole harves' fe dis year.'

Clearly, based on the above quotes, the ganja trade is not a secure livelihood, and individuals in the trade are subject to great danger, loss, imprisonment, and, even, death. And this is not to mention the fact that the drug trade destroys many innocent

⁵⁵ Bernal, Richard L and Winsome J. and Lamar, Stephen E Leslie, "Debt, Drugs and Structural Adjustment in the Caribbean," *The Political Economy of Drugs in the Caribbean*. Ed. Ivelaw L. Griffith (New York: Palgrave, 2000) 70.

⁵⁶ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 335.

lives and is considered to be immoral. Narcotics trafficking cannot be a solution for the black poor as illustrated in this novel.

The negative circumstances that the black poor is subjected to are not to be taken lightly. Great mental, physical, and emotional turmoil is produced through attempts simply to survive, which is a difficult task, and survival is commendable, but the black poor must do more than survive to live a dignified existence. The black poor must resist—not as a means to an end but to secure a brighter future.

IV: Get up! Stand Up! Time for Resistance!

Having examined the racial hierarchy, the socio-economic structure, and the methods of survival of the black poor in the novel, it is now important to illustrate the black poor's resistance to this oppressive system. Both ideological and physical resistance will be discussed. The character that most characterizes resistance throughout the novel is the main character, Ivan, also known as Rhygin, but resistance also reveals itself through several different characters in the novel.

Ivan, while in the city, is the embodiment of the black poor, but is also the embodiment of rebellion. This is revealed through his two names. In the narrative when Ivan goes to the church for relief from his miserable circumstances, the preacher's thoughts concerning his name is revealed in the text. It says, "Ivanhoe. Funny how popular that name was among the poorer classes."¹ So, if the name "Ivan" represents the black poor's social and economic limitations imposed by the system, then the name "Rhygin" represents the will of the black poor to break free from the system's social and economic constraints. The text says of the name "Rhygin", "It wasn't a word you heard so much anymore, only from old people. Raging, strong but foolish too, overconfident, not knowing where the limits were."² The spirit that this name represents is filled with rebellion and passion. It is that spirit that will not allow one to simply accept injustice or bullying. The text reveals Miss 'Mando's meditations on Ivan's spirit, saying, "No, him spirit really strong, she thought, sitting there in the glow of the fire, it really strong. But him is not a bad pickney at all, y'know. Him is just one of dem people who tink say them can box-box

¹ Thelwell, Michael *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980) 183.

² Thelwell, Michael ... 20.

up the world an' spit in life face."³ The important thing to note about the name "Rhygin" is that it characterizes a particular lack of strategy and lack of tactfulness. It can also be misdirected in the wrong context. And so, the spirit had to be guided through a solid ideological foundation.

Ivan was given good ideological grounding in his country village, prior to leaving for the city. The influence of Maas' Nattie and Miss 'Mando are key in establishing the ideology that would influence his resistance. Both these characters were members of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and also descendants of the Maroons. The text describes "...Maas' Nattie, who was the richest black man in the district. He was very small and very, very black and rode a big gray horse. All the people respeck 'im. He had been to Panama and had made a lot of money digging a canal."⁴ Maas' Nattie going to Panama is significant not only in pointing out an important historical period for Jamaica, but also because Marcus Garvey, too, went to Panama to dig the Panama Canal, and there could be the possibility that Maas' Nattie met Marcus Garvey. For Ivan, Maas' Nattie's trip to Panama represents the strength of the black man and Maas' Nattie's own individual strength:

Ivan wasn't sure what that was[the canal], but all the white men that came to dig it got sick and died, so they had to send for black men. An' Maas' Nattie had gone and had not died. Even some of the black man dem dead off, even though everyone knew black man stronger than white man, otherwise black man would a did dead out long time, from all the pressure white man put 'pon dem. But Maas' Nattie had

³ Thelwell, Michael ... 19.

⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 38.

become a foreman, an' did the job and come back with plenty money
which he used to buy up plenty land⁵

This quote illustrates that Maas' Nattie has succeeded in an area where most white men have failed, and even among black men, Maas Nattie is distinguished. He is an example of black wealth and his accomplishments provide a model to be emulated by Ivan. Within the communal system of the village, Maas' Nattie represents all that a black boy could aspire to. But Maas' Nattie was not simply a successful black man; he was a flagbearer for Marcus Garvey and the UNIA and for black liberation in general. The text reads,

Before going away he was a tailor's apprentice...he would be sitting on Maas' Nattie knee listening to his stories about Cudjo the maroon warrior and Ma Nannie his sister who was a witch and a warrior too, and about the great Marcus Garvey who was "the black man savior" and who was born not forty miles away. Maas' Nattie never told Anancy stories or talked about duppi and evil spirits, but spoke of real black men like King Prempeh and King Chaka, and Ras Menelik whose black armies defeated the Italians and took back his country which was in Africa⁶

This quote illustrates Maas' Nattie's ideology of liberation from racial oppression. Garvey is recognized here as the black man's savior which is a very strong indication of the positive effect Garvey had on Maas' Nattie. Other indications of this is Maas' Nattie saying a popular Garvey slogan while sleeping. The text says

⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 38.

⁶ Thelwell, Michael ... 38-39.

of Maas' Nattie's descent into sleep, "A couple of Spanish sentences might conclude with Marcus Garvey's 'Rise up ye mighty race and accomplish what ye will.'" ⁷

During Miss 'Mando's funeral, both Maas' Nattie's and Miss 'Mando's allegiance to Marcus Garvey was made even more clear. Maas' Nattie informs the reader that Miss Mando was a member of Marcus Garvey's organization: " '...the woman you burying was one of the stauches' and mos' steadfast and earlies' members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in these parts.' " ⁸ Maas' Nattie also says, "...next to her Gawd and her people dem, de t'ing that was mos' precious to her was the vision an' inspiration of the honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey, the Leader an' Redeemer of de People.' " Maas' Nattie goes on to say " '...Miss 'Mando's... 'las wish was to bury like a soldier of the Lawd and of Garvey.' " ⁹ And as the quote says, Miss Mando was buried like a soldier of Garvey, specifically, draped in the U.N.I.A flag. The text says, "When the coffin was brought out...Maas' Nattie, in a departure from tradition, substituted a red, green, and black cloth for the usual white one." ¹⁰ In addition to the flag, Garvey's slogan also was ritualized: "He stretched out his hand and the old woman marched forward and handed him a cloth somewhat smaller than the one he had draped over the coffin during the wake. It had embroidered on it in shaky gold lettering AMANDA MARTIN 1880-1950 and in smaller letters Rise up ye mighty race." ¹¹ These numerous examples serve the purpose of informing the reader of the great deal of dedication that two most influential people in Ivan's life, Maas' Nattie and Miss 'Mando, had to the vision and philosophy of Marcus Garvey.

⁷ Thelwell, Michael ... 59.

⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 87.

⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 87.

¹⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 82-83.

¹¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 87.

In the novel, Ivan's ideological grounding is debatable, for his actions do not always appear to be virtuous, but it is clear that the influence of Garvey plays a role in his rebellion. In response to Miss 'Mando's story of Ivan diving off a very high bridge, Maas' Nattie recognizes Ivan's spirit saying, "... 'Dat boy have de spirit of de young Garvey, a strong spirit, Ashanti spirit'..."¹² Maas' Nattie also compares Ivan's spirit to the Maroons, saying, "... 'Y'know, you granfaddah was a maroon man... A cromanty man from Accompong maroon town. Well, Ah always say you tek after him... it look to me you have dat same spirit.'..."¹³

On account of Ivan's rebellious spirit, Maas Nattie and Miss Mando recognized that Ivan had the potential to make brash and unintelligent decisions. Throughout the novel, Ivan seems to be a battle within himself to remain principled and intelligent. Maas' Nattie advises Ivan to act intelligently despite his spirit of rebellion, saying, "... 'No matter how you heart big, sometime you have fe take low... When you black an' no have money, you have fe tek low sometime. Is so life go—strong man nevah wrong an' poor man can't vex. Use you head, boy...'..."¹⁴ Maas' Nattie emphasizes, however, not to be taken advantage of, which is an important distinction. Maas' Nattie believes in justice, but he also believes in managing one's emotions and impulses in favor of a better result. Maas' Nattie says,

'...Now Ah not saying you fe let people piss down you back an' call it sweat. No. Not so! But you have fe use you head more dan you mouth. You gwine have fe wrap up heart burn in a you chest and force you mouth to smile. When hot word come a you mouth, you gwine

¹² Thelwell, Michael ... 38.

¹³ Thelwell, Michael ... 111.

¹⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 111.

have fe swallow dem down so burn you belly bottom. Use you head
bwai, you head more dan you mouth.’¹⁵

In the later stages of the narrative, Ivan, along with other members of the black poor, are engaged in class warfare. Hilton, the record producer, makes reference to this class conflict saying: “...the old Jamaica, the lower class taking a kind of vicarious pride in the elegance of the more highly placed. But that was less common than it used to be, now it was more like class warfare.”¹⁶ The quote is significant in that it points out that this class warfare did not always exist and illustrating this was due to “vicarious pride” in the achievements of fellow black people. This is a very common ideological argument against class warfare, ensuring the protection of the system. It wins the black poor to a nationalistic position, allowing them to celebrate the achievements of black people, who in recent history have been the downtrodden; and it presents the illusion to the black poor that they can one day transcend the boundaries of their class and be just like Hilton and other wealthy black people. The text reveals Hilton’s sense of security, even dwelling in the midst of the black poor:

He had seven outlet stores and the studio and everyone of them in a high crime area. When is the last time anybody even so much as break a window? He had the best strategy right under his shirt and every little dirty criminal in the city knew it. There wasn’t another man in his position who could feel as secure down here. He not only felt perfectly secure, he liked it. None of the so-called middle class people he knew either understood or believed that. They were snobs, that was

¹⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 111.

¹⁶ Thelwell, Michael ... 244.

why they couldn't understand when he said he actually liked it down here with the quashie.¹⁷

Hilton points to ethos of strength that he exhibits as the reason for his security. He believes that if the black poor, who he often refers to as "quashie," lose respect for him then he would be in trouble. The text says, "It was a matter of respect and what they respected was brute force and ignorance. Why you supposed he didn't have to hire guards for his shops? The faintest scent of weakness and you're finished."¹⁸ Due to the state of ideological development among the black poor, Hilton is safe, but this situation changes in the narrative.

Ivan is the catalyst for the middle class' lack of security. He becomes a folk-hero for the black poor. Hilton illustrates Ivan's effect on his security: " '...I been doing business among quashie fe years now. I have six stores an' a studio right down deh. During dat time nobody evah tek as much as a record jacket outta one a dem. Dis mornin', four of me store windows shatter...that damn sign RHYGIN WAS HERE.' "¹⁹ It is clear that it is not Ivan who committed this crime, but rather members of the black poor inspired by Ivan. Hilton goes on to say, " '...I study dem. Dem changing. Dem insolent now. Why not? Dem have star-bwai, a hero. A little raas sufferah like demself who police can neider kill nor ketch...' "²⁰ Hilton makes reference to the point that Ivan is a hero among the black poor because the police have failed to capture him after he shot and killed several of their policemen. This reason is significant but not the only reason.

¹⁷ Thelwell, Michael ... 247.

¹⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 247.

¹⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 370.

²⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 371.

In actuality, Hilton is partly responsible for the black poor's ideological shift, producing music that advocates dissatisfaction with class oppression. Ivan makes two songs with Hilton: "the Harder They Come" and "You Can Get It If You Really Want It" which resonate with the black poor. The text speaks about the song titled "the Harder They Come," saying, "The second song had an assertive and rebellious spirit...the total effect was a combination, a fusion of words, melody, and rhythm into a passionate affirmation of a vision as hard, resistant, stubbornly desperate and macho as a shantytown itself."²¹ It goes on to say,

There was no way these songs could fail to appeal to shanty-town youth, Hilton thought, and make some money. It was the kind of music he was always being criticized for publishing: that the government was always threatening to ban from the air as being subversive, putting ideas in the sufferahs heads."²²

This text makes it abundantly clear that the government sees this song as dangerous in influencing the black poor to be subversive. Hilton, however, ignores this due to his own greed, which is actually a failing of capitalism, placing profit above all else. The subversive nature of Ivan's song is revealed in his lyrics. Thelwell's narrative reveals the analysis of Ivan's lyrics by a character who is a Marxist political scientist:

This reading was immediately engaged by a young political scientist of Marxist inclinations. His widely circulated analysis saw, in such lines as 'I'd rather be a freeman in my grave/ Than living as a puppet or a slave', an expression of the legitimate, historical anger of dispossessed

²¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 281.

²² Thelwell, Michael ... 281.

urban youth. The lines ‘The oppressor is trying to keep me down/
drivin me underground’ were not only prophetic, but indisputable
evidence of ‘a nascent crypto-revolutionary impulse.’²³

These lyrics, along with the Marxist analysis, legitimizes Ivan’s rebellion, as it has sound ideological grounds. This is the most visible evidence of Miss ‘Mando’s and Maas’ Nattie’s influence. The Marxist analysis goes on to say,

The flip side, ‘You Can Get It If You Really Want’ was an explicit call for ‘redistribution of wealth and a clear expression of a primitive Marxist consciousness.’ That this was not an isolated radicalism at work, was made obvious by the failure of the police to find Rhygin. The masses clearly saw him as an embodiment of their latent revolutionary feelings, for who could believe that they were not hiding and protecting him?²⁴

This quote discusses the “redistribution of wealth” as an “expression of a primitive Marxist consciousness”. The ideas expressed in this song reveal much more of influence from Marcus Garvey and the traditional communal African values, but there is much similarity in this concept and Marxism. This analysis is also questionable in saying that this was not an “isolated radicalism” as the text gives very few examples of active support by the community in protection from the police manhunt, but there are many examples of passive support. But this quote is quite accurate in representing Ivan’s lyrics and rebellion as resonating with an oppressed community.

²³ Thelwell, Michael ... 358.

²⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 358.

The middle class' and the Government take concrete steps in the ideological aspect of the class conflict. The first step is to present the dead police men in a sympathetic light through giving money to their grieving families. This would encourage the black poor not to see them as agents of their oppression but people with families just like them. The text says,

Prior to the appearance of this document, the middle classes, as represented by the Chamber of Commerce and the Manufacturers' Association, had been silent and presumably ambivalent. Hard on the heels of the Marxist interpretation, however, the two groups, acting in concert, took out advertisements announcing the establishment of a fund to aid families of the victims and generously to indemnify whoever could supply information leading to the capture of the 'mad dog' killer.²⁵

One example in the text that indicates this was an not effective method is illustrated in the words of Man-I, Ras Pedro's sick son, who says, " 'I glad 'im shoot dem still.' "²⁶ Another example is in the folk hero status of Ivan after the shooting. The text says, "Opinion among the poor...was immediate and almost unanimous from the first day. Even the high-ups were intrigued by the dramatic and heroic elements."²⁷ So, it would seem that this strategy failed.

Initially, the middle class strategy of providing a reward for anyone who betrays Ivan is not effective as those closest to Ivan are committed to him. Ivan's

²⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 358.

²⁶ Thelwell, Michael ... 352.

²⁷ Thelwell, Michael ... 355.

partner Ras Pedro, says, “ ‘Is all a we Ivan fighting for, y’know’ ”²⁸ and then goes on to say, “ ‘Ivan is fe we. All de trader support ‘im.’ ”²⁹ Perhaps the most poignant example of the black poor’s ideological victory in defending Ivan’s actions is illustrated through the words of a character named Sidney, who says,

‘...Nutten no deh, rank as when a poor man smell money...for is nutten ‘im woulden do fe get it. Me know dat...for me poor all me life. De high-up man dem know it too, for dem rich all dem life...Me is not so criminal dat me no know who abuse me, who scorn me, who down-press me all me life...If dem high-up man a go pay all dis money fe de life a one dutty little criminal, den dem really a buy somet’ing much biggah. You evah see dem give way money yet?...Somet’ing much more dem want, man, an’ dat is what Sidney who sell everyt’ing a’ready, will not sell...’³⁰

Sidney acknowledges that the powers that be never gives away money, and so what they are paying for is their continued dominance over the black poor. But the black poor will not see this if they simply focus on their short term, individual interest. And this is actually the case in the narrative, where many of the traders who initially supported Ivan begin to contemplate betraying Ivan in favor of receiving a great share of the benefits of the ganja trade. Most of them made reference to the need to feed their families. Even Elsa, Ivan’s girlfriend, seem to contemplate betraying Ivan in favor of the money to survive.

Another method used by the government in the ideological war among the classes is the censorship of the media. The text says,

²⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 365.

²⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 365.

³⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 379-380.

By order of the Minister and in the interest of the public welfare, the record ‘The Harder They Come’ and its reverse side, ‘You Can Get It If You Really Want’ were proscribed and prohibited from broadcast over the public airwaves, sale in stores, or electronic amplification at any public gathering. Performance of the music or lyrics by any singer or group of musicians was similarly prohibited under penalty of a fine of up to two thousand dollars and/or six months at hard labor—mandatory³¹

This quote is a good example of the media’s role in the suppression of a liberation ideology. Ivan was singing about the ills of the system and open rebellion, and the government had the power to discontinue this message. The newspaper was placed in a similar situation as the radio, with pressure being placed on them to report in the interest of the system and state. As is the case with Hilton, the newspapers’ desire for profits has eroded their allegiance to the system, hence causing friction between them and the state. The newspapers printed headlines such as, “LONE GUNMAN BLASTS OUT OF POLICE TRAP. I have made a record of crime history, Rhygin boasts.”³² This resulted in the newspaper editor speaking to a government official over the phone. The editor’s side of the conversation went as follows:

‘It is not a question of glorifying crime. It’s the nature of the story, naturally dramatic...No! The Robin Hood element was not being overemphasized at least not by him or his editors...The readers, that’s

³¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 359.

³² Thelwell, Michael ... 354.

who! How could anyone expect them not to respond to the underdog motif? One man against an army?³³

The editor's words reveal that the government is concerned about the sympathetic view that the community has of Ivan and the negative view they have of the police. This ideological support to Ivan is supported by the media due to their desire for increased profits. The press does not acknowledge their responsibility to the state in this matter, but rather makes reference to the rights of the press. The press also shifts the blame for the community's support of Ivan onto the police for not succeeding in capturing Ivan. The text reads,

The conversation was beginning to sound distressingly like government interference with the freedom of the press, after all. Besides, without wishing to tread on any official toes, one might point out –respectfully—that if the elusive Rhygin were becoming some kind of folk hero, it was less a consequence of anything the press did than of the quite inexplicable failure of the police and military to come up with one poor, powerless, semiliterate rude-bwai³⁴

It is clear, however, that the media has an important role to play in the promotion of ideas. Ivan was able to spread his ideas through his music, and the newspaper contextualized him as a hero fighting against incredible odds. These were factors that helped Ivan win the ideological aspect of the class war.

The class conflict also reveals itself in Ivan's relationship to the middle class in the ganja trade and the music industry. Ivan challenges the existing structure,

³³ Thelwell, Michael ... 354.

³⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 355.

where he is on the bottom end. Ivan's desired independence in the ganja trade goes hand and hand with his desired independence in the music business. The text says, "Big plans, bwai! They should stop buying herb. Instead he and Pedro should capture some hilltop land in country and grow some. They should supply the other traders. Then he'd make records again, but this time as an independent producer of his own songs."³⁵

Clearly, Ivan shows great ambition, here, but his ambition would be perceived as a threat to the middle class. This is displayed in an exchange with Jose. Once discovering that ganja is being exported for great profit Ivan tells the middle class Jose, " 'If dem selling dis t'ing fe export, me an' Pedro have a acre an a half y'know. Why de t'ree a we can' sell it direck an' mek some real money?... ' "³⁶ Ivan also says, " '...But which law say dat all like we so can' mek big money too...' "³⁷ Ivan, here, considers a course of action that will eliminate dependence on the upper and middle class and provide an equal share of the profits. This would be a more communal way of conducting business, consistent with the ways of Ivan's village in the country. Jose's response is similar to Hilton's when Ivan pointed to the unjust share of money he received for his record; Jose, basically, challenges Ivan to trade on his own, without the benefit of his resources, saying, " '...I doan know nutten 'bout any export...If you no like our deal, is a tousan' man ina We' Kingston alone, whe' jus' a dead fe trade wid I...' "³⁸ and he contextualizes economic position based on what he has in relationship to less fortunate members of the black poor, rather than in relation

³⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 329.

³⁶ Thelwell, Michael ... 332.

³⁷ Thelwell, Michael ... 333.

³⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 332.

to the upper levels of the trade, saying, “ ‘...You bettah raas glad you mekkin’ a livin’ at all...’ ”³⁹

These two competing ideologies lead to conflict and, initially, transformation. The text says that “Both Jose and Pedro seemed almost frightened whenever he asked about the upper levels of the trade,”⁴⁰ but towards the end of the narrative the traders had decided to trade without Jose. Hilton speaks on the implications of this saying, ‘...once quashie get desperate enough to trade without you, law and order finish in shantytown...’ ”⁴¹ By saying law and order, Hilton means the traditional class structure will be finished once the grassroots traders do business without the middle class, and though Hilton is not in the ganja trade, he is threatened because of his middle class position. Proponents of the system, recognizing the danger that Ivan poses, choose to sanction action against him which leads to a physical warfare between a member of the black poor and the state, who is responsible for protecting the interests of the upper and middle classes.

There is a cultural and religious aspect to the resistance of the black poor in the novel. This cultural resistance is epitomized by the religious sect known as the “Rastafarians.” They provide an alternative to Christian church, which is dominated by the ideology of white superiority. An example of this racial hierarchy in the church reveals itself in the story of “Izaac,” who attended a seminary in the city, but, as the text describes, returned with a “...broken and injured spirit.”⁴² The text also says Izaac had “...a short stay in the lunatic asylum.”⁴³ Izaac was transformed for the worst, so some people in Ivan’s village speculated that “...Izaac’s misfortunes were

³⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 333.

⁴⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 333.

⁴¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 371.

⁴² Thelwell, Michael ... 80.

⁴³ Thelwell, Michael ... 80.

the work of the ‘white and brown man dem’ at the seminary. They were threatened by Izaac’s brilliance and piety. Besides which, in their pride and arrogance of class, they resented the effrontery of the young peasant who had the nerve to sit among them and aspire to the cloth and pulpit.”⁴⁴ And so, Izaac’s experience in the seminary makes it clear that there is a racial hierarchy in the seminary where the “white and brown man” is at the top and the black man is on the bottom. Not only is there a hierarchy in the seminary, where preachers were ordained, but the white image is exalted as the true image of God. Hence, whiteness is to be worshipped, as God is to be worshipped. The text describes Ivan’s reaction to the image of Jesus: “He gazed in amazement at the picture of Jesus. How bright the blue eyes. How pink the skin of the face.”⁴⁵ It is with this image of God that the church indoctrinates the black population.

The narrative illustrates a church in the novel, which provides an example of an institution of white ideology. Firstly, this church was built by a white parent church in Memphis, Tennessee. The text describes this parent church adopting this local church “...as something they called a “foreign witness,”⁴⁶ which suggests that they are simply an extension of the parent church. This brings historical images of the christianizing missions that Europeans embarked on in Africa and other places in the world. The church takes in, mostly, poor women, who, due to economic necessity, must accept the teachings of the church. The text says,

This was a small dormitory for young girls, usually the orphans or wayward daughters of church members. They were sent to school and made to contribute by their labor, in return for which they were given a

⁴⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 80.

⁴⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 136.

⁴⁶ Thelwell, Michael ... 182.

place to live and the necessities...Everyone received a Christian education and the opportunity to make something of herself. The only requirement was piety and obedience.⁴⁷

One of the lessons that the black poor is taught in the church is to wait until the afterlife to receive one's blessings. Ivan is greatly opposed to this perspective. When Elsa calls him a dreamer for his delusions of grandeur in the capitalist world, he responds, saying, " 'Me? Dreamah? Is who go to church an' talk about milk an' honey in de sky...Well me nah look fe no milk an' honey in de sky, is right down yahso I deh look mine...' " ⁴⁸ Ivan's message that the black poor have to receive their blessings while they are alive are also reflected in the lyrics of the song, "The Harder They Come". It would seem that Ivan is conscious that the church is a tool to pacify any resistance to the system by emphasizing the afterlife, rather than the present life where life is difficult. The black poor are encouraged to look for a reward in Heaven.

The church, also, indoctrinated the church members to despise Rastafarians. The text reveals the indoctrination of one such member, Elsa. It says,

In his house Ras Tafarians were the ungodly, the very servants of the anti-Christ, deniers of God, spreaders of heresy. They were worse even than obeah men and balmyard cultists, for their doctrinal error and spiritual degradation was aggressive, willful, and defiant. Their hostility to decent society and devotion to ganja compounded their perversity and added to it the real possibility of madness. As with

⁴⁷ Thelwell, Michael ... 187.

⁴⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 292.

everything else Preacher said, she had accepted that too,
unquestioningly⁴⁹

Elsa's experience with Rastafarians proves that the church is unjustly stigmatizing practitioners of this religion. Elsa lives with two Rastas after leaving the church, Man I and his father, Pedro, and, visibly, develops great affection for both of them. The previous quote also makes reference to "hostility to decent society", which the church obviously frowns upon. This hostility is directed towards the upper and middle classes who oppress the black poor, the class in which Rastafarians reside.

There seems to be a relationship with religion and class in the novel. The character, Ras Sufferah's very name indicates a relationship between his Rastafarian religion and his economic suffering. At one point in the novel, the "Lower Kingston Businessmen's Association" is referred to as "these respectable, Christian businessmen."⁵⁰ And so, the attack on Rastafari is an attack on a sector of the black poor that are opposed to the system of oppression, popularly regarded as "Babylon". The Church protects the system and the privileged classes, which they commonly refer to as decent society.

The Rastafarians' racial and ideological resistance displays itself when they try to take over the city. The Rastafarians, deciding that there was too much evil in the city, gathered a small army to purge Kingston. One of their first targets was the church. The text says,

The Parish Church stood at the northern end and the celerity and
certainty with which he headed for the official church of the
establishment should have answered any questions as to whether the

⁴⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 301-302.

⁵⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 245.

insurrection were political or theological in its inspiration. On the door, Raccoon posted a declaration denouncing the Anglican Bishop and all his works. It summoned him to confess his error, to renounce the white man's false religion, to proclaim the divinity of Ras Tafari and the primacy of the true faith and the Church Triumphant. Raccoon then performed a Bhingi, a ceremony of exorcism for the evil influences in the building.⁵¹

This passage confirms that Rastafarians in the narrative identify Christianity as the white man's religion and as a source of their oppression. Though this passage makes reference to theological concerns, it is clear this conflict goes beyond mere religion. Another passage shows that the Rastafarians are opposed to racial oppression and the erosion of African culture:

Most of the youth coming up were growing the locks and taking African names, Ras Dis and Bongo Dat, talking about I-man dis an' I-man de other, everything was "dread" and it was bare "Jah dis an' Jah de next." The movies were still a great part of their scene, but now they shouted for the Indians and never took the white man's side, much less his name. But to ask Bogart such a rude question doh? If white man was 'im faddah? (205)

And so Rastafarians not only display hostility towards the church and the state, but to members of the black poor who are influenced by white culture and identified with white people. Ivan and his friends were greatly enamoured by cowboy

⁵¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 210.

movies, commonly referred to as “Westerns.” These male characters take on the names of these characters, who are all white, which is scorned upon by the Rastafarians, who all take African names. Despite the black poor’s fascination with Westerns and their white stars, even they resist the concept of white superiority. Before the beginning of the films, the image of the Queen would appear. The text says, A few loyal souls stood up automatically. Ivan himself started to rise until he heard shouts of “unu siddown.” Jose then tells Ivan, “ ‘you really was a go stan’ up fe dat white woman?’ ”⁵² And so, this quote makes clear that the black poor actually displayed hostility towards anyone who recognized the Queen’s authority. This is consistent with the Rastafarians who, during the insurrection, the text says, “....made what seemed to some a less than wholehearted attempt to pull the Queen’s statue down.”⁵³ It would seem, then, that the only conflict between the Rastafarians and other members of the black poor is the assimilation of any aspect of white culture.

Though the Rastafarians organized a rebellion, they never actually harmed anyone, but rather were harmed themselves through the response of the police. The only other instance of any confrontation with the state is where Ivan shoots and kills several police officers. This is an important aspect of the novel because the rebellion develops from purely ideological grounds to actual physical resistance. Prior to this development, the resistance was mostly passive. After the police officers were killed, a manhunt ensued in which Ivan was gunned down by a number of police officers. The killing of Ivan is significant because it symbolizes a failure of resistance against the system of oppression. It is important to know, however, why the black poor within this novel fail to overturn this system of oppression.

⁵² Thelwell, Michael ... 147.

⁵³ Thelwell, Michael ... 210.

The key reasons for the black poor's inability to free themselves from the strangle hold of an unjust system is the black poor's ideological and organizational weakness. As was the case in *Apata* and *The Harder They Come*, the black poor are unable to internalize ideas and devise strategies to ensure their empowerment. Rather, they make futile attempts to cope with their oppression, based on incorrect ideas and individualistic tendencies. There are a number of instances in the novel where this is displayed.

Firstly, organizational and ideological weakness reveals itself in Ivan and the black poor's obsession with Western cowboy films, which are illustrated in various instances in the novel. Speaking of Ivan's identification with the cowboy, the text says, "...in his innermost heart Rhygin was a cowboy. To miss a western, almost any western, brought sadness and deprivation to his spirit."⁵⁴ The text reveals further insight on Ivan's western cowboy obsession, saying,

An English psychiatrist at the university developed and published a psychological profile based on the lyrics. He concluded that Rhygin was 'obsessed with a 'wild west' image of himself, had delusions of destined greatness, a typically psychopathic obsession with heroic violence, and a paranoid and unjustified sense of being oppressed.'⁵⁵

This English psychiatrist, with the exception of the comment made about an "...unjustified sense of being oppressed", absolutely addresses the fundamental issues that plague Ivan's character. Due to the influence of the western cowboy films, and the white media in general, Ivan exhibits the negative characteristics described in the previous quote. Ivan is not alone in this, for he is simply an extension of the black

⁵⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 195.

⁵⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 357.

poor who, too, share this obsession. The text says of the black poor audience, “Young, black, poor, “sufferahs” and the children of “sufferahs,” they constituted an audience so rapt and attentive, so impressionable and apparently uncritical that their identification was almost total.”⁵⁶ This quote illustrates that the movie has an unchallenged influence over the perception of the black poor. Ultimately, this powerful influence of the western confuses the black poor about their cultural and historical context, allowing them to vicariously fantasize about foreign realities. The text illustrates the effect of the movies, saying,

...what they were about to receive was merely a dose of a new and greater mystery. One that revealed to them new worlds, alien and totally different from the grinding reality of their daily lives, but worlds that were in a strange, tangential way no less real and compelling, different realities but realities nonetheless.⁵⁷

The alien reality that the movies reveal is essentially white. The movies described white characters in a world where they were the subjects and in which they were glorified. The text says, “With the parting of the curtains a wall had collapsed and Ivan was looking into a different world, where pale people of giant dimensions walked, talked, fought, and conducted their lives in a marvelous and convincing reality.”⁵⁸ The text described the actors in these movies, saying, “White men in long coats...who robbed banks, escaped in big cars, fought each other and the police, and died sudden and violent deaths.”⁵⁹ This quote describes the life style of much of the black poor, who have allowed the white media to influence the strategies they employ

⁵⁶ Thelwell, Michael ... 147.

⁵⁷ Thelwell, Michael ... 147.

⁵⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 147.

⁵⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 148.

to survive. Robbing banks and fighting each other will not free the black poor from their racial and socio-economic oppression, and, as the previous quote illustrates, fighting the police individually will ultimately end in failure. This is definitely the case in Ivan's situation. Ivan engaged in criminal activity, he sliced up a fellow member of the black poor with a knife, and fought with the police, but eventually was murdered by the police.

Even until the end, Ivan remained committed to his cowboy fantasies. When the police arrived the text says of Ivan, "If he just lay in the thick of the grass, they would never find him."⁶⁰ But despite this fact, Ivan, as the black cowboy, says, "...Show doan over a raas! Star bwai can' dead after all...done de army business...Who is de bad-man unu have. Sen' 'im out, nuh—one man who can draw...Sen' out you fastes' gun—de bes' man unu have..."⁶¹ Ivan sought to escape his immediate reality and escape into the realities described in the cowboy films. And so he switches from "de army business" which does not fit the cowboy films, to the showdown, where two single combatants draw guns against each other to determine the winner. Unfortunately for Ivan, the army would not play this game with him and he is shot by multiple army marksmen. The influence of the cowboy films obviously distorted Ivan's perception of reality and results in his death.

While the white cowboys do fight among themselves in the westerns, collectively they fight and defeat the indigenous people of the Americas, known as the Indians. Identification with the white cowboy, who is a colonizer in America, rather than with the Indian, who is colonized just like the black poor, represents a major ideological failure of the black poor. The Rastafarian segment of the black poor does

⁶⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 390.

⁶¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 390.

not share this same failure. The text says of the Rastafarians, “The movies were still a great part of their scene, but now they shouted for the Indians and never took the white man’s side, much less his name.”⁶² For the rest of the black poor to take the side of the white cowboy against the Indians indicates a desire to become an oppressor.

This desire to become an oppressor is manifested in Ivan, who is in a constant struggle between the values of his childhood village and the capitalist values of the city. The text describes how much he loved Miss Ida, who represented the city and, Miss ‘Mando, who represented the country:

He looked at her calloused hand, now earthstained, that held the pipe and as she raised it to her lips he saw the ridges of hard muscle in her arms ripple like those of a man. Miss Ida’s arms, he remembered, were smooth and round, and it was as if he were seeing his grandmother for the first time. Even though he had just met Miss Ida he loved them both—but what a difference there was between them!⁶³

This love of Miss Ida and the city, and, symbolically, the love of the capitalist system, is a major ideological failing of Ivan and the black poor. Even when Ivan is rebelling, he is challenging his place in the system, rather than the system itself. This is illustrated in several areas. For example, when Ivan speaks of his plans to become more independent in the ganja and reggae business, Ras Pedro, who represents traditional, communal African values, says, “ ‘...you wan’ tu’n capitalis’ too?’ ”⁶⁴ For Ras Pedro, Ivan begins to espouse the values of his oppressors, rather than implement a new system. Ras Pedro would have a series of verbal exchanges with

⁶² Thelwell, Michael ... 205.

⁶³ Thelwell, Michael ... 40.

⁶⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 329.

Ivan that provide a critical view of his actions and ideology, which are very much influenced by their oppressors.

Another quote illustrates this. Ras Pedro discourages Ivan from buying a gun, saying, “ ‘Ivan envy you not de oppressah...an’ follow not in any of ‘is ways. Dat a Babylon business, brute force an’ destrucshan.’ ”⁶⁵ While guns are a necessary aspect of liberation from racial and socio-economic oppression, Ivan values the weapon for the power he would possess over others and for the consistency with the image of the western cowboy.

Another example of Ivan valuing the lifestyle of the city comes when Ras Pedro comforts Elsa, Ivan’s woman, about his bad behavior, saying, “ ‘...Being ‘im young an’ ‘im spirit hot, Babylon de Great look good to ‘im...’ ”⁶⁶ Ivan spends his money on fancy clothes, displaying extravagance that one who is successful within the capitalist sphere displays. For clothes is a sign of social standing. So, even though, Ivan had not yet joined the ranks of the middle or upper class, being fascinated with the ways of “Babylon,” he constantly sought after the symbols of capitalist success.

Yet another example of Ivan’s internalization of capitalist values reveals itself when the state shut off the ganja trade in Jamaica and ganja was hard to come by. Ivan applies the capitalist principles of supply and demand to determine the price of the remaining ganja, while Ras Pedro favors a method, which is fairer to the consumer. The text says,

They had an extra crocus bag...As long as it lasted, he felt, it should go to their regular customers and at the old price, which was what they paid. Ivan saw such a course as madness. Things were bound to get

⁶⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 310.

⁶⁶ Thelwell, Michael ... 303.

worse. They should hold it. Before long, weed of such superlative quality would be worth its weight in gold, fuck gold, ten dollar bills.⁶⁷

Ras Pedro responds to Ivan's capitalist mentality saying, " 'Reap not where dou has not sown' 'an' take dou not de path of de oppressah.' "⁶⁸

And, perhaps, the most blatant example of Ivan's capacity to become an oppressor is illustrated in his treatment of a character named "Bhyah," otherwise known as "Coolie Rasta". Ras Pedro's son was sick, and they needed to sell some ganja to make money for medicines. Ivan goes to ask Bhyah for some ganja that they couldn't pay for immediately, but against the wishes of Ras Pedro, Ivan goes armed with the possibility of taking the ganja by force. When Ivan asks Bhyah responds,

'An' if Ah say no? What den? You a go bu'n gun inna me belly? Shoot ol' Bhyah like 'im was a peadove?' ... 'Me see, long long time, what you have inna you shirt, young bwai...—is so Ras Pedro sen' you to me?...Pedro nevah do such a t'ing. Some a dem other trader, yes. But not Ras Pedro, 'im is not a hog...' 'Im is a conscious young man'⁶⁹

Bhyah here points out the ruthless way in which Ivan considers dealing with him and also makes reference to Ras Pedro as not sharing that philosophy. Bhyah then introduces Ivan to a more principled interaction, reminiscent of the village where Ivan came from. Bhyah says, " '...Ah gwine give unu whatever ganja is here. Tell Pedro nex' time come 'imself, an' I will bu'n kali fe de little bwai recovah. Tell 'im Coolie Bhyah sen' a love' " and then goes on to say " 'Tell Pedro pay whenevah.' "⁷⁰ Despite Ras Pedro's inability to pay, Bhyah demonstrates the compassion that

⁶⁷ Thelwell, Michael ... 335.

⁶⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 335.

⁶⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 341.

⁷⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 341.

governs the interaction of individuals in a communal system. Bhyah's decision to give Ivan the ganja was made in consideration of the difficulties that Ras Pedro and his son was facing, and, even, showed willingness to assist in curing the sick young boy.

This is in contrast to Jose, who showed no compassion to Ras Pedro when Pedro appealed to him for a postponement of his weekly payment due to his boy's sickness. Bhyah functions differently and recognizes that Ras Pedro, like himself, is an adherent of communal traditions and would have preferred that he come instead of Ivan, who has strayed from his roots in the village and functions with the same principles as Jose. Ivan is given an earlier lesson in maintaining the values of his village when he seeks to steal a piece of fruit from a vendor. Recognizing that she is being stolen from, the lady, with a knife in her hand, stops Ivan and tells him, " 'Ask! You mus' ask, mi son. Cho, you can tek it—it won't bruk me. But you doan look like no ol' criminal to me. Bwai, listen me. Ol' time people have a word; dem say 'because a man sleep in a fowl-nest, it doan mean say fowl-nest' is im' bed.' ”⁷¹ This woman has essentially gotten to the root of Ivan's problem, which is the fact that he has internalized the values of the “fowl-nest”, or capitalist values, and has not even considered the methods practised in the village of honesty and sharing. Both Bhyah and this female vendor remind Ivan that the values of the village can sustain him, even when in the city.

Ivan's desire to become a capitalist is reflected in the entire black poor, with the exception of the Rastafarians. Those members of the black poor, who were infatuated with western cowboy films, for example, had the strong desire to join the

⁷¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 341.

ranks of the middle or upper class, even as they hated the privileged members of society. The text says, “They smoked ganja, dreamed valiant dreams, and cursed the rich, the “high-ups” of society, and the police...”⁷² The text then goes on to describe the dreams through which the black poor hoped to escape their socio-economic circumstance:

Even as they cursed the rich, they cherished fantasies of “big money,” sudden wealth of their own. Everyone knew a boy, just like them, who had won sweepstakes, made a killing at the Chinese-run lotteries, “Drop Pan” or “Picka Peow,” or pulled off a big job.” Or a face man who lucked into the bed and fortune of a wealthy old white woman and earned his money “doing night work” by the inches. Or else it was the giant samfie, the great hustle, which they knew came at least once in his life to every man.⁷³

This quote demonstrates that the black poor has not been won to the ideological understanding that they will only see improvement in their socio-economic condition once they establish a system, which will cater to the needs of the majority in the society. Though the black poor benefit least from the capitalist system, they have bought into its philosophy whole heartedly. The influence of the white media on the black poor and their identification with the white cowboy films, in particular, results in a strategic failure and cultural and ideological confusion.

The Rastafarians do not suffer from the cultural confusion that the rest of the black poor suffers from, but they, too, are ineffective in confronting their oppression

⁷² Thelwell, Michael ... 201.

⁷³ Thelwell, Michael ... 201.

due to their ideological and organizational weakness. The biggest example of this is the non-violent ideology held by the Rastafarians. Though they promote and maintain traditional, cultural and communal values which are indigenous to Africa, ultimately, they are impotent in their attempts at liberation. In the text, Ras Pedro says, “I nevah hol’ a weapon ina my han’—not since I get conscious of Jah love...But it nevah stop de army from kill off Man-I maddah...”⁷⁴ Here Ras Pedro’s limitations are illustrated as he admits his non-violent stance could not save his son’s mother, who was killed by the army.

Another example is given during the Rasta insurrection, where the Rastafarians sought to take over the city, despite their military weakness:

Then came the drummers followed by the troops, the dread warriors of Nyabbingi, fairly dancing in their zeal, and who oddly enough showed no weapons save for wooden staffs and a few makeshift spears and swords. They were armed, apparently, mainly with their faith.”⁷⁵

Herein, one of the fundamental flaws of the Rastafarian resistance is the idea that they will be made victorious, simply, through their belief. This idea is proved false when the police came and easily defeated them. The text says, “When the police returned, however, it was in force. Six buses roared up to the park. Riot-ready troopers carrying long clubs and wooden shields poured out of the buses...”⁷⁶ The text goes on to say, “Then they advanced methodically, swinging their clubs like reapers in a grainfield.”⁷⁷ The police’s effortless defeat of the Rastafarians prove that this segment of the black poor is performing a masquerade, reminiscent of the

⁷⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 365.

⁷⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 209.

⁷⁶ Thelwell, Michael ... 212.

⁷⁷ Thelwell, Michael ... 212.

characters in *The Dragon Can't Dance*, displaying only the illusion of power. The Rastafarians impotence results in a resistance which is purely symbolic in nature. This is typified in the Rastafarians' efforts to pull down the statue of the Queen of Britain: "They made what seemed to some a less than wholehearted attempt to pull the Queen's statue down. This structure proved every bit as massive and unyielding as the portly, popeyed white lady whose figure it represented, so they contented themselves with draping it in dark cloth."⁷⁸

The text goes even further in demonstrating the Rastafarians lack of power when describing their method of seizing political power: "Emissaries were dispatched to inform the Governor and the Prime Minister of the change in their status and to summon them to formally hand over the reins of government and 'bend the knee' to the new authority."⁷⁹ The rest of the black poor acknowledge that this insurrection is not the way to true power, saying, " 'Wait? Dem t'ink a so man capture city nuh? Is mus' joke dem man yah, a joke.' "⁸⁰

The Rastafarians, clearly, do not have the confidence of the rest of the black poor and the Rastafarian leadership even loses the confidence of the Rastafarian community. The text says, "The most serious damage seemed to be to the political careers of Prince Emmanuel David and Raccoon, neither of whom appeared to enjoy any further influence with their brethren."⁸¹ Had the Rastafarians had an ideology that would allow them to use the same force that the police use against them, and, had they had the confidence of the majority of the black poor, they could have organized

⁷⁸ Thelwell, Michael ... 210-211.

⁷⁹ Thelwell, Michael ... 211.

⁸⁰ Thelwell, Michael ... 211.

⁸¹ Thelwell, Michael ... 211.

themselves to provide an alternative to Jamaica's racial and socio-economic hierarchy.

As the previous example which the Rastafarians provided illustrates, the black poor's failure to free themselves of their oppression is also due to their inability to cope with the police, army, and other agencies of the state. Firstly, the narrative contains examples of police who were specially trained in countering any efforts towards resistance or revolution. This means that the ideological foundation had already been laid for the officers of the state; they were organized and were using strategies which were proven. The text says of the black poor's initial encounter with this specially trained police force, "They didn't know it then but they had encountered the first graduates of the modern school of counterinsurgency and riot control that the United States had established in Panama for the benefit of its good neighbors in the south."⁸²

Secondly, the narrative speaks of the tools that are at the disposal of the police, which allows them to forcefully impose the system on the unwilling. Ivan speaks of the police aggression as it heightens with time: "An' de police, dat was worse. Definitely. When I come town most a dem ride bicycle an walk dem foot. Mos' dem do is box you up or lick you wid baton. But now? Now dem drive car an' carry machine gun too..."⁸³ The military might of the state is a significant factor in suppressing resistance.

On more than one occasion in the novel, the police use aggressive force against the black poor. When Ivan was hiding from the police, they brutally beat Ras Pedro and a character named Sidney in order to force them to reveal Ivan's

⁸² Thelwell, Michael ... 217.

⁸³ Thelwell, Michael ... 206.

whereabouts. Also, when Ivan has a conflict with a character named Longah, he is given several lashes by the courts to teach him to fear the consequences of non compliance with the laws of the system. Another example of the black poor's inability to cope with the state is in the ganja trade. The police control the trade and, at one point, shut down the trade. The traders usually pay for their protection, but when the police see fit, they arrest the traders or even kill them, as was the case with Man-I's mother. Finally, the state's power over the black poor is illustrated through the killing of Ivan. Despite the justness of Ivan's cause and all his courage, ultimately, he was no match for the might of the state.

The final reason for the black poor's inability to free themselves from their oppression is their inability to devise a strategy for liberation that addressed the question of survival. The black poor did not have an independent economy which was fully in their control, and, therefore, had to depend on the capitalist system. Once one depends on the capitalist system, it is hard to rebel against it. This point is on display when Ivan is hiding from the police, and the police shut down the ganja trade in order to encourage the traders to betray Ivan. The philosophy behind this is that the traders will be so concerned with how they will feed their families that they will betray their own principles. Maas' Ray, the police commissioner, says, " 'As of today, until you bring dat raas bwai to me, not an ounce ganja coming in this town. Not a wrap, not a leaf, not a stick, not even a damn puff... We goin' se how much unu love Rhygin when unu belly empty.' ”⁸⁴ In response to the police's embargo on the ganja trade one trader says, " 'Business a business, ol' man My belly empty. My

⁸⁴ Thelwell, Michael ... 368.

pickney belly empty, too.’⁸⁵ At this point several members of the black poor are ready to give Ivan up. When Ras Pedro tells Elsa that some of the traders still support Ivan, even she says, “ ‘Dem mussa no have pickney,’ ”⁸⁶ meaning that they could not hold so stubbornly to their allegiance to Ivan if they had to consider the survival of their family. This question of survival is one of the main reasons behind the maintenance of the system. The black poor depend upon people like Hilton, the rich people in their fancy houses, the church, and so on, for their very survival. And until, the black poor devise a strategy to survive without those who represent the system, they will not even attempt to fight them.

It is entirely possible for the black poor in this narrative to overcome their circumstances, for the model of success is within the narrative. The description of Ivan’s childhood village holds the key to the black poor’s success. That society was based on cooperation and a shared responsibility towards each individual. This allowed them to depend on each other for their very survival. The ideology and social organization upon which that society was grounded are the fundamental elements of any successful resistance. The full participation of the masses, committed to the principles of cultural, social, and economic independence, would transform the black poor’s circumstances without the need for a physical altercation. And even, if the state initiates aggression against the black poor, the chances of success for the black poor would be greatly increased by their combined military might, because they have weapons and do fight, but, narrow-mindedly, against each other.

⁸⁵ Thelwell, Michael ... 379.

⁸⁶ Thelwell, Michael ... 382.

Conclusion: Beyond Neo-colonialism

This study has examined race and class from a historical perspective in order to clearly illustrate the environment that has inspired three great Caribbean novels: *Apata*, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, and *The Harder They Come*. Several Caribbean scholars, many of whom use the dialectical materialist analysis of the Caribbean, confirm that, indeed, Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica, along with most, if not all, of the islands in the Caribbean archipelago are subject to a system of social and racial oppression, which was founded with slavery and colonialism and continues up until this day in the form of neo-colonialism. This system is reflected in these novels, which functions as a form of commentary on Caribbean society. In each one of these novels, individuals engage in valiant expressions of resistance against the system of oppression, which is reflective of the history of the region, but every attempt was met with failure, which, too, is true, for the most part, of the region's history. The question then becomes, "what are the solutions to the problems inherent in neo-colonial society?"

As illustrated in the novels, the masses in the Caribbean are oppressed on the basis of race and class, among other aspects of identity used to discriminate. Therefore, the worldview of inhabitants of the region must take into account race and class in the fight against oppression. In this regard Pan-Africanism is a useful tool.

Omi and Winant write that

The power of the Pan-African perspective remains its ability to link the specific forms of oppression which blacks face in various societies with the colonialist exploitation and underdevelopment in Africa. The impact this theoretical current had in the U.S. stemmed from its

argument that black identity conferred membership in a single world wide black 'nation'—the African diaspora itself¹

Pan-Africanism, therefore, becomes a way of linking different Caribbean societies together in a common struggle for societal progress. A very practical means of Pan-African unity is the attempts at Caribbean unification through the Federation and currently with Caricom and the OECS. The Federation failed and Caricom has not met the expectations of the majority. A successful Caribbean union could solve many of the problems the region currently experiences.

Catherine Sunshine describes the attempt at forming a federation saying,

Negotiations leading up to the formation of the regional body gradually stripped it of all but token powers over the member states. When it was finally launched in 1958, the Federation as barely a shadow of the united and progressive new nation which the labour movement had envisioned in the 1940s. By 1961, after first Jamaica and then Trinidad pulled out to 'go it alone' to independence, the Federation collapsed²

The collapse of the Federation was certainly a failure for former colonies of relatively small sizes and limited resources. A united Caribbean could have helped to create a Caribbean market and to pool resources and build an economy less dependent on foreigners, which has been an unequal relationship since the birth of the

¹ Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

² Sunshine, Catherine, *The Caribbean: Survival, Struggle, and Sovereignty* (Washington: Epica, 1980) 42.

Caribbean. While being good conceptually, Elizabeth Wallace asserts, “Ultimately the Federation failed because insularity triumphed over national loyalties,”³

Unfortunately, Caricom still has not fulfilled the promise of Caribbean unity, struggling to get initiatives, such as a single market economy, off the ground. While some modest progress has been made, the scale necessary to lessen the dependence on former colonial countries has not been achieved by a long shot.

Another progressive step for the Caribbean is recognizing and struggling against neo-colonialism. While presenting at the 6th Pan-Africanist Congress Rodney says, “That Pan-Africanism must be an internationalist, anti-imperialist and Socialist weapon.”⁴ This means that the masses of people must not allow their aspirations for better conditions to be stifled by a local elite, which disguises its own selfish interest in the national liberation movement.

As societies like Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago teach us, the challenges of living in a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society must be confronted. Ultimately, societies must be built on the foundation of common ground among diverse groups. Whether through assimilation or cultural pluralism, groups like Indians, Africans, and Chinese, need to forge stronger ties of understanding towards building a common future in the Caribbean, especially in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago.

Revolution also must be reinterpreted. The question must be asked, “Is violent revolution and the overthrow of capitalist governments a practical possibility. The

³ Wallace, Elizabeth, “The Break-Up of the British West Indies Federation,” *Caribbean Freedom*. Ed. Hilary Bekles and Verene Shephard (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1996) 473.

⁴ Rodney, Walter, “Towards the sixth Pan-African Congress: Aspects of the International Class in Africa, the Caribbean and America,” *Pan Africanism: The Struggle Against Imperialism and Neo-Colonialism*, Ed. Horace Campbell (Toronto: Afro-Carib, 1975) 39.

example of Grenada and the New Jewel Movement is prominent here, for an invasion by the United States reversed the revolution there. Are there more evolved models to be considered? Cuba, for instance, is currently making a transition towards liberalizing certain aspects of its economy and becoming better integrated into the world economy, dominated by capitalism. This was also the case with the Chinese. Perhaps, the idea of socialist revolution needs to evolve in acknowledgement of the success of China and, possibly, a new Cuba.

Additional concerns must be addressed. For example, many scholars have examined the conditions necessary to have a successful socialist revolution and have considered whether those conditions exist within Caribbean societies. They point to how well-developed the Caribbean countries' working class is, the weakness of the state, or a host of other seemingly important factors. At times, it seems that intellectuals, with their passion for theories and the stimulation of academic discourse, overcomplicate a concept that is rather simple. What the majority of inhabitants want are better conditions of living: a good job or business providing steady income; a comfortable home for their family, good governance, fairness, justice and equality; a safe environment; good health; and the opportunity to explore their passions. These goals are entirely possible, and they require, above all else, unity of thought and unity of action. For example, a people who were united in the belief that we should hold our elected representatives accountable for the way that they govern not just on election day but on a continuous basis would surely get better governance. A people who were united in the action that they would not support a particular business if it did not hire members of the community would surely have more employment. Unfortunately, establishing unity is an area where African people and Caribbean societies as a whole have struggled. We have divided ourselves on the basis of

politics, religion, education, profession, gender, ideology, and, even, what sports team we support or the area where we grew up. As a region, we have been attempting unity for decades, and our efforts have not yet brought forth the fruit of meaningful unity. As a result, our human and material resources have been exploited by those in a position of strength who possess selfish motivations. Therefore, the most pressing concern for the Caribbean is to identify leadership that can successfully unify the thought and action of the majority of inhabitants of each territory and the region as a whole, with all the diversity therein.

Based on this study, “Race, Class, and Resistance in Three Caribbean Novels,” a few important factors come to mind in discussing the successful unification of thought and action in a society. Firstly, leadership is important. This is not to say that people should only be motivated by personalities, but the reality of accomplishing goals is that there should always be someone responsible for accomplishing a goal. An organization or movement without a leader lacks accountability. Someone must be designated to perform specific tasks related to achieving a goal. That person must be selected on the basis of the qualities he or she possesses, which will help him/her to perform well in the role. There must be a chief executive, but every person in an organization must have a role, and in that person’s role, he or she leads. When leaders do not perform, they must be replaced.

Secondly, we must agree on broad principles that are tried and tested. An argument between socialism and capitalism or Christianity and Islam will lead to never ending division, but a debate on whether communities should provide support for the most vulnerable or whether forgiveness is more favorable than bitterness and division would yield much better results. One such principle any successful organization should adopt is the need for participation and democracy. Every

individual should be given access to the necessary information and allowed the opportunity to help decide on a course of collective action. Of course, individuals must be allowed a certain scope of activity for individual decision-making, but, broadly speaking, many people agree with being more involved in the governance of their lives.

Another principle that must be adopted is the need for equality. For this principle to be meaningful, it must be applied to all areas that contribute to a good standard of life. We must have equal access to quality education, meaning that all schools are adequately funded, all teachers maintain a high level of competence in their profession, and students have the adequate resources to perform well, among other things. We must have equal access to a job that is safe and provides income and benefits to meet the needs of our families. We must have equal access to a healthy lifestyle, including access to healthy food, healthy air, health facilities, clean water, and other aspects of a healthy lifestyle. We must have equal access to security, equal access to public information, equal access to public platforms to express ideas, and equality before the law. Equality does not mean that everyone has to be the same, but that everyone has access to a minimum standard of what is required for a good life.

Another principle that must be encouraged if the Caribbean is to make progress is the encouragement of cooperation rather than competition and collectivity rather than individualism. Societies that are based on competition generally are exploitative and are inhabited by many unhappy people. Cooperative societies, on the other hand, generally are better functioning with a great deal more satisfaction among its inhabitants. I do acknowledge that competition has its place. Competition can be a good way of determining who is the strongest in a particular area, which is important in determining the best person for a job or other area of responsibility. So,

even winning the competition is placed in the context of serving others. Competition can also help expose one's weaknesses. As Jet Li's character explained in the movie "Fearless," the true competition is with oneself—seeking ways to continually improve oneself. When one competes against an opponent, that person can help to expose flaws in one's abilities. This information can be used to correct areas of weakness. What is of primary importance is that every individual in the society is committed to the development of the society as a whole and, therefore, to each individual within that society. An adoption of such an approach to building a society would be much more constructive.

Yet another good principle that would lead to much more successful Caribbean societies is the encouragement of interaction among people based on good social and moral principles. Most religions promote the moral principles I refer to here. Social and moral principles, such as showing kindness, patience, forgiveness, consideration for others, respect, and the encouragement of focus, discipline, good communication, a strong work ethic and many other principles can help to develop strong individuals and a strong society. These principles must be taught within the family structure, the schools, the media, and must be expected in the work-place and community.

It is interesting to examine the institutions that promote unity of thought, namely, school and the media. In the era of neo-colonialism, most schools have continued to provide an education that fails to challenge the neo-colonial order. One of the most important subjects in school has to be history, but this seems to be a weak area of our education system. For example, most schools begin Caribbean history with "Amerindians," Columbus, and slavery. This approach seems to focus on the land masses as opposed to focusing on the people. Therefore, people should be taught

about African culture, migrations outward from the birthplace of humanity into the rest of the world, and then introduced to slavery as simply a difficult period and interruption to the development of societies.

Of course, the history of peoples from India, China, Europe and other Caribbean migrants should also be given attention, which would help in facilitating mutual understanding among various groups. In addition, to the problems related to the teaching of history, schools in the region have not done a good job of teaching about scholars like Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, Horace Campbell, Clive Thomas and others. Moreover, our education system is geared towards facilitating the current global economy, which only marginally favors the Caribbean territories.

The media of the Caribbean region is generally the media of the United States, England, or some other European power. The values therein are antithetical to the principles described above. Sex, violence, and general immorality is broadcasted and promoted on a daily basis, and what is worse is that black people tend to be portrayed in the most negative ways. Rap and dancehall music, while somewhat reflecting the life of the slums or ghettos, serve the purpose of glorifying the most negative characteristics of black life, providing negative examples to young people of how they should behave. To have a great deal of influence over the media would be one of the primary goals of any successful movement. We cannot have unity of thought without access to information and forums to debate ideas and promote principles.

In terms of unified actions that inhabitants of the region can take, we should develop an economic program that would focus on producing goods and services for local and regional consumption. Right now, Caribbean economies produce goods and services for various white countries, like the United States, England, France, Australia, Canada, and the like. Generally, this is an extension of the slave economy.

Strangely enough, we consume goods and services and, rarely, consider producing goods and services for ourselves. In Haiti, Jamaica and other places, multi-national corporations produce clothing to sell internationally. Many Caribbean nationals have helped assemble brands like Tommy Hilfiger, Hanes, and others. Clearly, we have the skill that is required to actually produce the clothing, but what is lacking is the investment capital. The example of Marcus Garvey still remains. Garvey was able to buy steamships, run printing presses and many other small businesses, simply, through the pooling of resources with thousands and even millions of people. Imagine if a great majority of workers decided to unite and invest in a clothing factory. Imagine how much more powerful it would be if all the people of the region decided that before buying a Tommy Hilfiger shirt or a Ralph Lauren skirt, they would support this Caribbean business. This approach to business would have a revolutionary impact on the economy of the Caribbean, but it requires unity.

The people in the narratives examined in this dissertation had no true leaders. They had characters like Apata, Aldrick and Fisheye, and Ivan who had a concept that something was amiss and rebelled. Their rebellion ended in failure and, in two of the three cases, death. These characters did not study the nature of the oppressive system imposed on the people and take proactive measures to overcome the challenges this system presented. There was no strategy to develop unity of thought and action. No economic plan to control the businesses in the community or to teach history and instill pride in the young people. There was no political organizing or demands for better governance. These novels illustrated, perfectly, the problems associated with Caribbean life and, even, problems associated with change. Thus, in the present, the misery remains.

In 2013, we are still trying to find the blueprint for black empowerment, but Marcus Garvey already laid the foundations. Garvey recognized that the process of enslavement robbed black people of their self-esteem and pride. Garvey set about a program of racial uplift through great oration, charisma, education, displays of strength and courage, the establishment of racial symbols of pride and statehood among other things. Garvey had millions of followers and inspired leaders the world over. The black power movement as well as a great deal of anti-colonial sentiment was sparked by the Garvey movement. The broad movement for racial upliftment has suffered some setbacks, especially under the era of Neo-colonialism, but it is time to revive the spirit of Marcus Garvey within the masses of Caribbean people and the wider African diaspora. Perhaps then, the problems illustrated in the communities in *The Harder They Come*, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, and *Apata* will be no more.