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Introduction

Raphael Dalleo

Bucknell University, prdalleo@gmail.com

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Introduction to special issue on “The Caribbean Radical Tradition”

Raphael Dalleo, Bucknell University

Since the global financial meltdown in 2008, radical social movements have resurfaced with a vengeance. The Arab Spring, Occupy, and Black Lives Matter seek to reshape global politics and threaten the existing economic and social order.

The Caribbean has a long history of radical movements, and scholarship in the past decade has begun to return to those movements to understand their lessons for today. Beginning with slave uprisings—the most famous and successful being the Haitian Revolution—Caribbean people have challenged the prevailing social, economic, and political systems of the day. A century ago, when out-of-control inequality and global economic collapse inspired radical movements of the 1920s and 1930s, diasporic Caribbean intellectuals and activists played key roles in those movements. And then as decolonization swept the globe in the mid-twentieth century, Caribbean experiments, in Cuba and Grenada in particular, created new notions of radical politics. In her review of recent books about the Grenada Revolution by Shalini Puri and David Scott, Laurie Lambert notes that revolution is “arguably the foundational term on which Caribbean identity has been forged.” This issue of *Anthurium* looks at a range of radical projects from the Caribbean that have forged individual and collective identities throughout the region.

It has become popular to talk about abolitionism as “the first modern international human rights movement” (Winter 71) and therefore an early manifestation of the bourgeois democratic public sphere and the modern liberal state. Sibylle Fischer describes “radical antislavery” as an alternative genealogy, “a shadowy, discontinuous formation with a rhizomatic, decentered structure” that existed transnationally as a challenge to bourgeois consolidation and emerging nationalisms (11). Tracing this genealogy, we might follow what Susan Buck-Morss identifies as Hegel’s oblique engagements with the Haitian Revolution through Marx’s readings of Hegel into twentieth century anti-capitalist movements. What Winston James notices, then, as the radicalism of Caribbean people in the U.S. during the first half of the twentieth century and their participation in international socialism and communism might be contextualized as part of a tradition dating back to slave revolts and anti-slavery revolution.

This issue of *Anthurium* therefore begins with a robust dialogues section in which Leslie James, Minkah Makalani, Christian Høgsbjerg, and Marc Matera discuss their recent monographs about the interwar radical movements in which Caribbean people such as C.L.R. James, George Padmore, Cyril V. Briggs, and Amy Ashwood Garvey participated, and in many cases made explicit precisely this link between their own activism and the radical anti-slavery of the Caribbean past. Makalani’s *In the Cause of Freedom* (2011), reviewed by Leslie James, presents a

vast transnational canvas stretching from Harlem to London with stops in Germany, Paris and Moscow. Similarly, Matera's *Black London* (2015), reviewed by Høgsbjerg, provides a meticulous description of the metropolis that Caribbean radicalism helped to shape. These books show Caribbean people interacting with African, African American, and other anticolonial and anticapitalist radicals in international projects ranging from pan-Africanism to communism. Leslie James's *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below* (2015), reviewed by Makalani, and Høgsbjerg's *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (2014), reviewed by Matera, focus on two of the most important of the figures in shaping this interwar radicalism – George Padmore and C.L.R. James. Placing these scholars and their projects into dialogue offers a detailed and nuanced picture of transnational social movements of the 1920s and 1930s, the role of Caribbean people in shaping these movements, and the important contributions of these movements to the Caribbean radical tradition.

The rest of the issue then proceeds chronologically, beginning with a return to the Haitian Revolution and proceeding through some of the radical projects it inspired. Deborah Jenson's *Beyond the Slave Narrative* (2011), reviewed by Kate Simpkins, examines the earliest Haitian writings to come out of the revolution. Jenson's study explicitly seeks to go beyond mainstream abolitionism to explore what were frequently more radical voices of revolution and resistance. Natalie Léger then reviews Victor Figueroa's *Prophetic Visions of the Past* (2015), a work she identifies as part of a bounty of new scholarship about twentieth-century Caribbean responses to the Haitian Revolution. One of these responses, C.L.R. James's play *Toussaint Louverture*, performed in 1936 but first published in 2013, is the subject of Rachel Douglas's review. Together, these reviews show how inspiring the revolution was for Caribbean radicalism beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing into the mid-twentieth century decolonization period.

The final reviews look at two other instances of twentieth-century Caribbean radicalism that in many ways bracket the decolonization period: négritude of the 1930s and the Grenada Revolution of the 1970s. Intriguingly, these reviews examine scholarship that is especially concerned with the temporality of revolution and how the radical past is remembered in the present. Roxanna Curto reviews Gary Wilder's *Freedom Time* (2015), an ambitious theoretical engagement with the thought of Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor. Wilder grapples with how these thinkers conceptualized freedom in ways not always consonant with the nation-state. As with Fischer's radical antislavery or the internationalism explored by Leslie James, Makalani, Høgsbjerg and Matera, Wilder argues that even if nationalist versions of history have sought to silence these transnational projects, looking back to them may contain the seeds of radical alternatives to the contemporary order. Laurie Lambert's review of two books about the Grenada Revolution, Shalini Puri's *The Grenada Revolution in the Caribbean Present*

(2014) and David Scott's *Omens of Adversity* (2014), delves into how one radical project sought the simultaneous and perhaps contradictory goals of national liberation and breaking free of existing political and economic systems. The negotiations of Césaire and Senghor during the decolonization period alongside the memories of the Grenada Revolution's internal failures and then external defeat by U.S. invasion paint a vivid portrait of the challenges of Caribbean anticolonialism.

Taken as a whole, this issue thus provides a rich exploration of the Caribbean radical tradition and lessons for Caribbean radicalism in the twenty-first century.

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