

Summer/Fall

2005

The Jako

**Derek Walcott:
The Prodigal**

**The Life and Art
of Dustan St. Omer**

**The Making of ECTEL:
A Lesson in Caribbean
Integration (Part I)**

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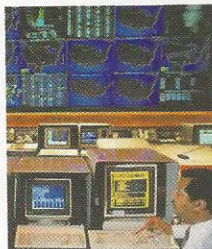
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The Spirit of the St. Lucia Arts Guild Lives On

The **T**he *Jako* in this its Summer/Fall 2005 issue features Dustan St. Omer, a man who has dominated the art scene in St. Lucia for many a decade, with his bold inimitable style and his themes and subjects so deeply St. Lucian. Here in his own words he says where and how it all began. But once again the name of the St. Lucia Arts Guild reappear. And inescapably so, because anyone maturing in this era (1950 - 1970) and who possessed any kind of artistic sensibility or talent would have found himself involved at some level in the St. Lucia Arts Guild, either by invitation or self-propulsion. It was truly a cradle where artists were nurtured, a fount where artists nurtured themselves and each other. A place of intellectual and artistic stimulation and sharing, all towards the maximal development of talent. A place where talent was truly admired and respected regardless of the colour, class (for there was class, then), or any other category the persons who possessed it fell into. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth.' Yet, for all this, a place of laughter. Lots

and lots of laughter. No one could survive in the Arts Guild without a sense of humour.

But this is not the main point here. Dustan speaks of the liberation from the shackles of colonialism and one has only to reflect on the negritude literature to know this is no simple matter. It is a metaphysical leap. Yet how well Dustan did it and how early. So many who have followed will never realize how much they owe to him.

This is the way it was. Be it Dustan, Derek, Roddy, or Stanly French, it was always a quest for greatness. A belief that we could do it. We were equal. Ours was a quest rooted in the belief of the shared human heritage and the dignity of everyone.

It was not an aspiration to equality but an assertion of equality. The strife and work were to externalise it. To make it manifest, to truly participate, to contribute to the achievement of the human intellect and its artistic sensibility.

—Allan Weekes

CONTRIBUTORS



Mc. Donald Dixon is a stage actor, playwright, director, poet, and novelist. He is the author of the novel, *Season of Mist*, and the book of poetry, *Collected Poems 1961-2001*.



John Robert Lee is a poet, librarian, preacher and Bible teacher. He has published several volumes of poetry, including the poem, *Line*, dedicated to Derek Walcott on his 75th birthday. He also writes regularly for the nation's newspapers, and has worked in radio and television.



John Phulchere is a painter, sculpturer, cartoonist, and musician. His cartoons have graced the nation's newspapers and have appeared in the *Islandwhere* magazine. He is the author of the cartoon narrative, *Fou*.



Dr. Josiah Rambally is a medical doctor with is own private practice. He has served as Registrar of St. Lucia's Psychiatric Hospital and Chairman of the Medical Board of the Ministry of Health. He conducts radio and television health programs, and is the author of *Beyond Medicine: A Medical Doctor's Spiritual Odyssey*.



Dr. Anderson Reynolds is the author of two books: the novel, *Death by Fire*, and the nonfiction, *The Struggle For Survival: an historical, political, and socioeconomic perspective of St. Lucia*.



Sharon Trezelle is a sociology lecturer at Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, Castries, St. Lucia. Some of her articles on sociological issues have appeared in the nation's newspapers. *SEEDS*, her first volume of poetry, was recently published.



Allan Weekes is a retired english and literature lecturer. He was a member of the famous St. Lucia Arts Guild and is a literary critic, a creative writing coach, and theatre director. He founded the Creole Theatre Workshop, which, under his direction, presented his kwéyòl translations of the early Derek Walcott plays. He has published one play, *Talk of the Devil*, and *An Introduction to kwéyòl* (with D. Jamala).



Dancers at 2005 Emancipation Day celebrations

The Jako

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For back issues of The Jako, please send payment of US\$10.00 to above address.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Economics of Corruption

Thanks for your timely and interesting article on corruption, which gave me a new perspective on this perennial problem. So many of us see corruption only from the narrow, moral viewpoint of dishonesty, in the sense of taking what does not belong to us. But this article shows it is much more than this. It is a cancer that affects the very fabric of society, distorting the values of those whom we have elected to serve us, influencing them to make choices against the very viability of society, which, as you so poignantly show, can lead to inadequate education, poverty, and even infant death. Maybe articles like these could raise our sensitivity and make us less tolerant of this secret evil. We must spread the information that will help root it out.

Timothee Hilaire
Castries, St. Lucia

The Development of St. Lucian Culture

First, in his article, "The Development of St. Lucian Culture," published in the Winter 2005 issue of *The Jako*, Dr. Reynolds defined culture "as the visible expression of a people's way of life." Are we to understand that music, as opposed to a visual art form, is not a cultural manifestation?

Second, in describing what led to reggae, Dr. Reynolds neglected what was probably the most important factor in the creation, promulgation and longevity of the music—the Rastafarian social and cultural revolution. Reggae came out of Rastafarianism and can be interpreted as the language or medium with which Rastafarians both celebrated, reaffirmed and spread the gospel of their religion. Rastafarianism was and still is the cultural underpinning of reggae and it is what has enabled reggae to attain the status of a major world music. Rastafarianism is the philosophy that reggae embraces, and anyone who just marginally buys into that philosophy automatically becomes a reggae lover.

Third, Dr. Reynolds dreams up a scenario whereby St. Lucian folk music is

mixed with other musical strains to magically emerge as a new musical form that would take over the world. But how can a music without a philosophy or a way of life in its underbelly sustain itself. Dr. Reynolds should keep in mind that the reason St. Lucian folk music is dying, hence his call for preservation, is because the way of life that led to it is dying. The only meaningful way of keeping a cultural practice alive and vibrant is to sustain the way of life that gave rise to it.

Rastafari

Men of the Century

The lengthy, well written, invaluable article, titled "Men of the Century" has well informed me on the political lives of Sir George Charles, William George Odlum and Sir John Compton; personalities I knew little if nothing about. The life of our great political leaders which the secondary school of my choice had failed to inform me about, but instead preferred the likes of Christopher Columbus.

It would be nice if we could see a little bit of fashion in the upcoming issue of *The Jako* or even a little of arts and craft.

I must say bravo to the Dr. Reynolds on such splendid work! I hope that the St. Lucian public will appreciate and support *The Jako* for it is indeed a treasure. To all the writers of *The Jako* I say keep up the good works.

Sylvia Auguste
Bexon, St. Lucia

St. Lucian Women in World Cup Cricket

Congratulations to *The Jako* on the publication of a well-articulated and informative Spring 2005 issue of the magazine. The quality and standard of writing is superb.

It was heart warming and quite inspiring to read of the significant contributions made by these three outstanding St. Lucian women, narrated in Terry Finisterre's article, "St. Lucian Women in World Cup Cricket." As a young woman, it was quite motivating to me to learn of the strides and inroads made by the fairer gender in a society where it is believed that cricket and other sports are a 'mans' game.

Anderson Reynolds's article, "Federation, Integration & CSME," was most informative and enlightening. I was amazed by the vivid and detailed accounts of the events which gave birth to the formation of the West Indian Federation, especially the turbulent events of the 1930's. In keeping with the trend of being an informative magazine, it would have been fitting for the flags featured in the article to be fitted with the names of the corresponding countries.

The *Jako* is without a doubt the most detailed and informative magazine produced in St. Lucia. I look forward to the next issue with great anticipation and an appetite for much learning.

Allicia Aaron-Smartt

Ronald "Boo" Hinkson & The St. Lucia Music Industry

The article on Boo Hinkson was well written and very informative. This is the best writeup I have read on any St. Lucian artist. In fact, the thing I like most about the writings in *The Jako* is that whatever the topic, you are presented with a complete picture. As a St. Lucian who moved to New York in his my teens, I have listened to some of Boo's music, and I have seen him perform once at the St. Lucia Jazz Festival, but I wasn't fully aware of all what he has accomplished. I didn't know he had scaled such heights. The thing about him performing at the super bowl was all news to me. And he did that so young! Look at how far back Boo has been doing his thing. By reading the article, I was able, in one sitting, to get a full history of Boo's career, from the time he first picked up a guitar to the present. I didn't know Boo had produced so many albums, I didn't even know that he had written crown-winning calypsos. I loved the way the article made a theme about how it boils down to producing a "body of work." That is so real. The article pointed out that dedication and adherence to standards not only pays off, but is the only way to make it big. Reading the article on Boo made me proud to be a St. Lucian. I salute *The Jako*. It is making us all proud.

Boniface Ford
New York

ARTICLE 10 OF CONSTITUTION



The Making of ECTEL: A Lesson in Caribbean Integration

by Anderson Reynolds

“How could a country truly call itself independent when a foreign international has exclusive control of the industry earmarked as one of the most important for its continued economic growth?”

The CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) with their promised benefits have in recent months undoubtedly captured the Caribbean imagination and rivalled or probably surpassed the dismal West Indies cricket team and World Cup Cricket 2007 as attention getters. This, however, may belie the fact that with regard to Caribbean integration, it is the Eastern Caribbean that has led the way. And among the subregion's many integration initiatives, probably the most intriguing has been the making of the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunication Authority (ECTEL).

Formally inaugurated June 2002, ECTEL, along with its associated National Telecommunication Regulatory Commissions (NTRCs), serves as the regulatory body that regulates telecommunications in five of the OECS territories. However, beyond serving as another example of OECS integration efforts, as a telecommunication regulator ECTEL has the added status of being the first and only one of its kind in the world, for it is the only regulatory entity that regulates telecommunications across sovereign states. Recognizing the potential of this structure as a model for other developing regions, not only did the World Bank place its financial might behind this OECS experiment, but since its inception has kept a watchful eye over it.

OECS Economic Realities

What led to the formation of ECTEL is steeped in the economic realities of the OECS. This group of islands entered the mid 1990s with economies that exhibited serious structural problems. Sugar, a mainstay of St. Kitts' economy, had been in decline since the 1980's, causing speculation that the island would soon follow the example of neighbouring Antigua and cease production altogether.

Similarly, bananas, once the largest source of income, employment and foreign exchange of the Windward Islands of Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent had suddenly taken a precipitous fall. Windward Islands banana exports had slipped by more than half, from a peak of 277 thousand tonnes in 1990 to 137 thousand in 1997, resulting in an estimated 57 percent drop in banana revenues, from EC\$383 million to EC\$165 million.

In the seventies and eighties the islands had pinned their hopes on manufacturing as an engine of economic growth and a means of achieving economic diversification. But this too proved disappointing. For example, while between 1977 and 1990 the contribution of St. Lucia's manufacturing sector to GDP grew by an annual average of 9 percent, from EC\$26 million to EC\$78 million, in the decade of the nineties its contribution to GDP declined by an annual average of more than 1 percent.

These salient realities were further compounded by the fact





St. Kitts' sugarcane landscape about to become the past.

that even in the best of economic times the Windward Islands faced double digit unemployment rates. In fact, the greater majority of full-fledged CARICOM countries suffered from perennial double-digit unemployment rates.

Yet, the data also revealed that in contrast to agriculture and manufacturing, the service sector overall, and tourism in particular, was exhibiting continued growth and in most of the islands tourism had surpassed both agriculture and manufacturing in economic importance. For example, an OECS 2002 human development report indicated that between 1985 and 1999 the contribution of agriculture to OECS GDP declined from 12 to 8 percent, and that of manufacturing dropped from 7.4 to 6 percent. In contrast, the contributions of tourism increased from 8 to 10 percent (1998), and that of both communications and financial services increased from 16 to 19 percent. Indeed, it appeared that the CARICOM countries (for example, Barbados, St. Kitts, Antigua, and the Bahamas) with the most viable and developed economies were those with the most developed tourism and financial service sectors.

In 1995, to address these structural economic weaknesses, the OECS embarked on an economic diversification program. However, recognizing that the service sector, and not the traditional export sectors of agriculture and manufacturing, was now the engine of economic growth, this new initiative concentrated on the development of the growth sector.

As part of this diversification initiative a preliminary study was conducted to identify the bottlenecks to economic growth

and diversification. Conducted by the Adam Smith Institute, the study revealed that the main impediments to diversifying the economy and developing the service sector were: (1) high cost of telecommunications services, (2) limited access to telecommunications infrastructure, and (3) a shortage of trained information communication technology (ICT) personnel.

More specifically, most OECS territories faced a telecommunication environment in which Cable & Wireless (C&W) was the sole legal provider of telecommunication services, and which was characterized by exorbitant lease line and international calling rates; poor, unresponsive and unaccountable customer service; long wait time for telephone lines; limited Internet and cellular service at exorbitant prices; free use of the spectrum resource by C&W; limited C&W license fee payments to respective governments; and uneven or inconsistent telecommunication policies across countries.

The OECS Telecommunications Reform Project

Clearly, these findings showed that a lot was riding on the back of the OECS telecommunications sector. Therefore, rather than pursuing a broad diversification program, which might lack focus and consequently may not produce desired results, the OECS embarked on a Telecommunications



Windward Islands bananas may soon follow sugar



The future awaits

Reform Project with an ICT training component.

However, this Telecommunication Reform Project was not to be for all OECS members. For when in 1997 the OECS embarked on this initiative and entered negotiations with the World Bank to secure funds for financing the project, only five of nine OECS territories—Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent—were available for World Bank funding and therefore could participate. Antigua could not be financed through the World Bank because of outstanding commitments to the Bank, and, as dependent states, Anguilla, Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands were not eligible.

Officially established in 1998, the OECS Telecommunication Reform Project had as its main aim the liberalization of the telecommunication sector. With liberalization, the OECS hoped to achieve open entry and competition in the telecommunication sector; universal service to ensure the widest possible access to telecommunications services and products at affordable rates; freedom to communicate over an efficient and modern telecommunications network; fair pricing and the use of cost-based pricing methods by telecommunication providers; the introduction of advanced telecommunications technologies and an increased range of services; fair competition practices by discouraging anti-competitive practices by telecommunications



providers; and increased penetration or usage of telecommunications services.

This was no doubt both a heady and a perilous episode in the history of the OECS. For how could a country truly call itself independent when a foreign international has exclusive control of the industry earmarked as one of the most important for its continued economic growth? How could any self-respecting country allow a foreign-owned international (or any company for that matter) to continue undermining its growth potential? Could member states of the reform project honestly maintain that colonization is over? Yet what would happen to the same country and to this most vital of its industries if, in response to the cancellation of its exclusive license and the introduction of competition, the said company packs up and leaves?

Regarding colonialism or imperialism, OECS states would have been hard pressed to find a corporation whose existence had been as intertwined with a colonial and imperial power as was that of C&W. At the end of World War I the British empire ruled over more than a quarter of the globe's population and land area. Part of what made British rule possible over such an extensive portion of the world was the communications network of the Eastern Telegraph Company, later renamed Imperial &

International Communications, and later still (1934) Cable & Wireless. First, by telegraph and later by both telegraph and telephone, the network of C&W would extend to match the reach of the empire and to become its very nerve system. In war C&W served the empire well. The company's web site boasts that during World War II its "branches around the world were fully manned and messages always got through using both the radio and cable networks. Cable ships played a vital part in repairing cables damaged by enemy action. They also cut and diverted enemy cables. For example, the Italian Malaga to Canary Islands cable was diverted to form a British Gibraltar to Casablanca cable."

Apparently, C&W's contributions to the British War effort demonstrated so clearly how vital the company was to the empire that soon after the War, in 1947, the company was nationalized and it was not until 1981 that it was privatized.

However imperialistic the nature of C&W, much more was riding on the back of this OECS experiment. As mentioned earlier, the OECS has led the way in Caribbean integration, and as for telecommunications liberalization it was leading the way in



yet another dimension. The Telecommunication Reform Project meant that the OECS and Jamaica would represent the only two CARICOM entities to have attempted telecommunications liberalization. Clearly, the success of this OECS experiment would influence the decision and the timing of other Caribbean states to liberalize their telecommunications sectors.

Unquestioningly, the OECS Telecommunication Reform Project was reaching for noble and lofty goals, but between these goals and the micro states of Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts, St. Lucia and St. Vincent stood C&W, the global telecommunication giant that held monopoly or exclusive telecommunications licenses in all five states. The exclusivity of these licenses gave the company the sole right to provide telecommunication services in these countries. So, in effect, Cable and Wireless was what economists call a legal monopoly.

OECS liberalization efforts faced a further complication in that the termination dates of the exclusive licenses differed across countries. In St. Lucia, the license would end in 2001; St. Vincent in 2004; Grenada in 2013; Dominica in 2020; and St.

Kitts in 2024. Given this wide spread in license termination dates, how could the OECS adopt a common telecommunications liberalization policy?

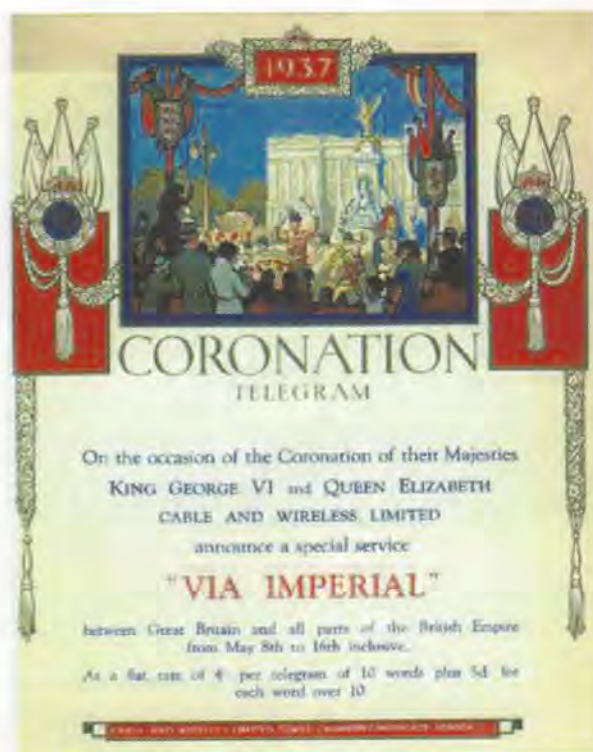
In answering this question, the Reform Project adopted the strategy that since St. Lucia's license was the first to come due, when St. Lucia was negotiating its new license arrangement, the remaining islands would join the negotiations such that there would be just one set of negotiations, which in effect implied that all the monopoly licenses, no matter their legal due dates, would end when the new telecommunications arrangement was put in place.

The Nature of Monopolies

With this joint policy approach to telecommunications liberalization, the battle lines were drawn, for no where in the world has any monopoly enterprise given up its monopoly privileges without a fight. The conduct of monopolies is well known. They produce a smaller quantity of goods and services than what is best for society and they sell these goods and services at prices higher than what would obtain under a competitive environment. And as to be expected, they make economic profits, meaning that they earn above what it would take to cover all their cost, including a reasonable (market going rate) return on their capital. In other words, not only are monopolies wasteful, but they grow fat by providing society a sub-optimal level of goods and services at exorbitant prices. Economic theory suggests that monopolies cannot help but behave as described, because given the market structure implicit in a monopoly industry, and given the assumption of profit maximization, a monopoly firm has to produce less and price higher than would be the case if the industry was competitive.

In economics there is something called a natural monopoly, which is a production situation where the long run average cost structure of the industry declines continuously throughout the feasible range of output, such that the optimal plant size (the one associated with the lowest average cost of production) corresponds to the full range of output. Under these conditions governments may legislate the monopoly status of the firm because the presence of two or more firms in the industry would invariably imply unnecessary duplication of infrastructure and thus a waste of societal resources. Many of the utility industries (water, electricity, sewage management, etc.) are considered natural monopolies. So too is the provision of fixed line telecommunication services, although recent changes in technology has made this less so.

However, although governments may give the nod to a natural monopoly, recognizing its inherently undesirable conduct, they often put measures in place to regulate the operations and pricing policies of the monopoly firm, and they place a limit on



the amount of profits the firm can retain, thus ensuring that it does not abuse its monopoly status.

Well, as a monopoly, C&W had it nicer than most other monopolies in that the company was virtually unregulated. For all practical purposes, and maybe partly because of the OECS governments' ignorance of telecommunications technology and operations, C&W was a regulator unto itself. Not only were C&W's profits unregulated, but the company was managing both the region's telephone numbering system, and its spectrum resource. So besides earning monopoly profits, C&W was using the region's spectrum for free while telecommunications companies in most other countries had to pay substantial amounts for that resource.

Now, one need not scratch too deep to understand how C&W came to enjoy such coziness. For generations C&W was the official sponsor of West Indies Cricket. So much so that the name C&W had become synonymous with West Indies Cricket, one of the few areas of West Indian life where the public does not "take it easy" and where "man, that's good enough" is not good enough.

Cricket may have accounted for the lion share of C&W's sponsorship dollars, but it was by no means the company's only charitable cause. One got the impression that the company sponsored every public event worth doing. Still, maybe what made previous governments look upon C&W with such benign eyes, was not so much the company's sponsorship activities, but that C&W had become an extension of the governments' coffers. For the governments could always count on C&W for short term loans when, for example, there were shortfalls in public servant payrolls. In other words, to some extent C&W bankrolled some of the governments. On top of that some governments of the Telecommunication Reform Project had significant ownership in C&W. The government of Grenada owned 30 percent of C&W Grenada Ltd., the Dominica government owned 20 percent of C&W Dominica Ltd., and the St. Kitts government owned 17 percent of C&W St. Kitts and Nevis Ltd.

Clearly, C&W was not about to willingly give up all this power and coziness in the name of liberalization. After all it had been playing its part, and playing it well. So not only was C&W unwilling to give up its monopoly powers, it probably considered the governments and people of the region very ungrateful for all what it had done for them. All this suggests that it would take much more than lofty goals to effectively challenge C&W's monopoly status. In fact, the reform project's proposed integration of OECS telecommunications was like no other integration initiative, because, whereas in previous integration initiatives the Caribbean territories had only their differences to deal with, here they had the added task of stripping C&W of its monopoly privileges.

New Sheriffs in Town

Economic realities coupled with World Bank backing may have been what set the OECS on the path of telecommunications integration and liberalization, but given the challenge C&W posed, staying that course had much to do with the personalities who were at the helm of these governments. By 2000, the changing of the guards of OECS political leadership was all but complete. The old guard of Sir John Compton of St. Lucia, Patrick John and Dame Eugenia Charles of Dominica, Sir James Mitchell of St. Vincent, Sir Kennedy Simmonds of St. Kitts, and Eric Gary of Grenada had given way to a younger generation of Prime Ministers that included Dr. Kenny Anthony of St. Lucia, Rosie Douglas and Pierre Charles of Dominica, Dr.

Roosevelt Douglas were part of the group (that included George Odlum of St. Lucia and Tim Hector of Antigua) labelled the "four musketeers," on account of their dedication and commitment to socialism. Even today Dr. Gonsalves, the only remaining member of the "four musketeers," makes no bones about his socialist sensibilities, albeit one softened by political pragmatism.

Roosevelt Douglas's radicalism was evident even back in 1969 when as a student at Montreal's George Williams University he took part in what became known as the George Williams Computer Riot. The riot, which was in protest of the university's mishandling of racism allegations against a professor, involved more than 200 students and was the largest student riot in Canada.

Dr. Kenny Anthony was also a proponent of communism.



The Changing of the Guards—Sir Dwight Venner and 2004 OECS Heads of State

Ralph Gonsalves of St. Vincent (2001), Dr. Denzil Douglas of St. Kitts, and Dr. Keith Mitchell of Grenada.

The new generation was clearly more predisposed than their predecessors to challenging C&W's telecommunications monopoly licenses. To begin with, it was their forerunners and not they who were the signatories to these exclusive licenses, so they need not have qualms about revisiting these agreements. Secondly, being of more recent vintage they would have been less marked by the region's colonial legacy and therefore would have looked upon C&W with less awe and would have been less inclined to see C&W as untouchable. Thirdly, it is safe to say that as a group this new breed of leaders leaned more towards socialism or communism than did their predecessors. Dr. Ralph Gonsalves and

Not only did he receive his political baptism under the wings of George Odlum, one of St. Lucia's most famous politicians and greatest advocate of left-wing politics, but during his secondary school teaching days it was reported that he help special communism doctrinaire classes for his more daring or politically conscious students.

Indeed, part of the reason the old guard of Caribbean leaders had been so keen in inviting and welcoming the 1983 US invasion of Grenada was to stem the communism tide that was then sweeping across the region.

At heart socialism or communism embraces the notion of community ownership, of a classless society in which the means of production (and thus the levers of power) are not subjected to the ownership or control of others, but are collectively owned.

Clearly, the notion of a foreign company having exclusive rights to provide a service deemed essential for the economic viability of a society does not sit well with the tenets of socialism.

St. Lucia The Ace In The OECS Deck of Cards

Another reality that gave OECS telecommunications liberalization a nudge was that it was St. Lucia and not one of the other five members of the OECS Reform Project whose exclusive license would be the first to expire and, therefore, would be the first to lock horns with C&W. From Sir George Charles to Sir John Compton to Dr. Kenny Anthony, St. Lucia had been at the forefront, and one of the greatest proponents, of OECS integration and the coordination of OECS social and economic policy. St. Lucia was one of the territories that regional organizations like the OECS could always count on to

meet its financial obligations. St. Lucia had always been an advocate of maintaining a common Caribbean front. For example, as Prime Minister of St. Lucia, Sir John Compton had worked tirelessly for the imposition of an Eastern Caribbean uniform tax on cruise ship tourists. Indeed, throughout most of its post universal suffrage history, St. Lucia has shown a tendency to uphold, even sacrifice for, Caribbean unity.

Another reason it was propitious for St. Lucia to be the one leading the telecommunications liberation charge was that in 2000 with close to 160 thousand people and a real GDP of over EC\$1161 million, the country had both the largest population and the largest economy of the five islands, and the revenue that C&W derived from the country represented the largest chunk of C&W telecommunications revenues. Therefore, one could conclude that St. Lucia was the OECS country with the greatest bargaining power in relation to the telecommunications giant.

Yet another reason St. Lucia was the best positioned to take on C&W was that by 2000 the Dr. Kenny Anthony-led Labor





Party government had gone through the experience of liberalizing what was once (in terms of both income, employment and foreign exchange) its most important industry—bananas. Following the infamous 1993 banana strike, the government had liberalized the banana industry by first dissolving the St. Lucia Banana Growers Association (SLBGA), the (quasi) state monopoly that was in charge of purchasing all of St. Lucia's exportable bananas, and then vested the SLBGA assets in a new entity, called the St. Lucia Banana Corporation (SLBC), that would be privately owned by registered banana farmers. With this governmental act, the floodgates were opened. Soon the SLBC was joined by the Tropical Quality Fruit Company (TQFC), the Agricultural Commodity Trading Company (ACTCO), and the Banana Salvation Marketing Company, all vying for a share of the banana export crop, such that by 2000 the St. Lucia banana industry was fully liberalized. The experience gained in liberalizing its banana industry would undoubtedly serve the government well in liberalizing its telecommunications sector.

The Hero of OECS Liberalization

All revolutions, all movements, have to have heroes or messianic characters, those who come to personify the very essence of the phenomenon, for at the early stages of any movement, positions are shaky, the mission can seem impossible, outcomes are uncertain, some are plagued with doubts, detractors are many and bold and confident. Therefore, to persevere, it takes nothing less than the kind of confidence that comes with righteous indignation, from the attitude that one's position is absolutely right, that one was chosen by God for the mission in question, that to be against the mission is to be against God and man.

More than six feet tall, with broad frame, bulging eyes, studied intelligence, a deep, heavy voice that does not lack for words, and often waxed eloquent, in Calixte George, St. Lucia's Minister for Communications, the OECS liberalization movement had found its hero. Calixte George's zeal, fierceness, and tenacity towards OECS telecommunications liberalization could have easily led one to conclude that he was the one, the chosen one, the one who was placed on earth for the sole purpose of liberalizing the telecommunications sectors of the OECS. One may have also concluded that Calixte George's vehemence towards C&W in the battle to liberalize OECS telecommunication went beyond getting the job done, that he considered C&W's predisposition a personal affront. Such was the Minister's total confidence in the rightness and morality of the mission that one could well imagine that if any of the Prime Ministers of the region were to have wavered, and wondered whether they had made an error in judgement, and that the risk of locking horns with C&W far exceeded the benefits, they simply had to glance at Calixte George for their compasses to return to the mission. In attempting such a momentous and important

change as regional telecommunications liberalization, in the process going against such odds as a global corporate giant, the OECS needed no less a personality with no less a passion for the cause than Calixte George.

A glance at Calixte George's education, professional history and personality suggests that indeed he was tailor made for the post. Born and raised in Castries, St. Lucia, he attended the St. Mary's College, the secondary school that produced St. Lucia's two Nobel Laureates—Sir Arthur Lewis and the Honourable Derek Walcott. There he distinguished himself by becoming the first student to obtain in one sitting distinctions in three Cambridge School Certificate science subjects, and by being among the first group of St. Lucians to gain Higher School Certificates in three science subjects, namely Chemistry, Botany, and Zoology. From there Calixte George attended the University of the West Indies where he received a BSc. Degree in agriculture with honors, and then the University of Reading, where he graduated with a MSc degree in soil science. Calixte George's research discipline and technical training would allow him to quickly grasp difficult telecommunications technology and economic

concepts, which would gain him the respect of his OECS colleagues and in the fight to liberalize OECS telecommunications would enable him to challenge C&W's arguments with great confidence and conviction.

Before Calixte George's appointment as St. Lucia's Minister for Communications, he held several top national and regional posts, including Agronomist with the Windward Islands Banana Research Project, Research Officer with the St. Lucia Ministry of Agriculture, Executive Director of the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), and Managing Director of the St. Lucia Banana Growers Association. Already endowed with the necessary mental and physical qualities for leadership, these positions allowed Calixte George to develop and fine tune his leadership style. By the time Calixte George took up the charge against C&W, he had become a leader of men, one who did not need any formal titles or positions to command

respect. Calixte George was imbued with the type of personality, which was such that anyone present in a discussion with him would first wait to hear what he had to say before voicing an opinion. As for regional stature and force of personality, it may not be far fetched to suggest that Calixte George towered over most of the OECS Prime Ministers of the time. On top of all these qualities, Calixte George had earned a reputation of being a no nonsense person who had no patience with incompetence and little tolerance for laxness and mediocrity. Also, as a trade unionist (he headed the CSA for several years) he had proved to be a skilled negotiator and a formidable rival to the John Compton administration in the heady days of the 1970's.

Therefore, as St. Lucia's Minister for Communications, Calixte George represented another reason that it was a blessing to the OECS Telecommunications Reform Project that St. Lucia's telecommunication monopoly licence was the first to expire.



David Facing off with Goliath

The Caribbean, Cable & Wireless's Cash Cow

However, Calixte George or no Calixte George, C&W was not ready to lie down and let a few tiny Third World islands get the upper hand. After all, the company's clientele stretched across the globe in 80 different countries. It provided cellular service in 24 countries around the world, and the combined GDP's of OECS countries was a mere fraction of its roughly 8 billion pounds of annual global revenues.

Besides, notwithstanding the tininess of these countries and their telecommunications systems, the global giant had plenty at stake. For although the 912 million pounds of revenues that it generated from its Caribbean operations (in 1998) represented only 11.5 percent of its global revenues, the 324 million pounds of profits derived from the region represented no less than 19.7 percent of its global profits. In other words, the Caribbean as a region was accounting for a disproportionate share of C&W profits, providing an example where size can be deceiving and leading some market analysts to conclude that C&W's global strategy was to use the Caribbean (where it does not face any competition) as a cash cow to finance its operations in competitive environments such as the US, where lately the company was attempting to gain a foothold.

The great irony that one of the largest and most cash-rich companies in the world was milking a group of poor, third world countries to invest in developed, wealthy countries must have no doubt fuelled the passion and moral indignation of Calixte George and the rest of his colleagues in their fight to regain control of their telecommunication sectors.

Facing such odds, it is not hard to imagine Calixte George picturing himself the David of the OECS, devoid of armour, but equipped with only words and moral indignation, facing off with the telecommunications Philistine giant who was protected by hordes of high priced lawyers and accountants, equipped with billions of dollars, and filled with the arrogance and disdain of the invincible, who for decades was taking the Caribbean to the bank.

In response to the OECS call for liberalization, C&W had this to say. First, to give up its monopoly rights prematurely (before the natural termination of its licenses) it would require US\$97 million in compensation. Secondly, since it had been subsidizing domestic services with revenues from its international sector, before liberalization can take place, rates must be rebalanced, meaning rates must be brought closer to their true cost, which invariably means increasing domestic rates while decreasing international calling rates. Third, to allow for a gradual adjustment, liberalization should be phased over a period of up to

five years.

The OECS Telecommunication Reform Team countered. They said that liberalization was urgent and of economic necessity for the OECS, therefore it should be introduced as quickly as possible. Second, they believed all services were priced well above cost, so although they might agree with rate rebalancing in principle, C&W has to justify it based on the cost of providing the service. Finally, the reform team said that by virtue of its exclusive licenses, C&W had prevented an additional US\$300 million from being invested in the islands, so this more than offset any compensation for the early termination of its monopoly licenses.

The Birth of ECTEL

Despite C&W's objections, convinced that a liberalized and competitive telecommunications sector was essential for the future economic and social development of their countries, and recognizing that a harmonized and coordinated approach was the best way to achieve a liberalized and competitive telecommunications sector, in St. Georges, Grenada, May 4, 2000, the governments of Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts, St. Lucia and St. Vincent entered a treaty establishing the regulatory regime that would regulate telecommunications in the five countries.

The telecommunications regulatory regime established by the treaty embodied the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL) and five National Telecommunications Regulatory Commissions, one in each of the five countries. The treaty envisioned that ECTEL would play an advisory, coordination, management, and monitoring role. More specifically, the functions of ECTEL included: (1) advise member states on the conduct and regulation of the telecommunication sector; (2) manage the spectrum resource; (3) recommend and monitor the implementation of a regional universal service plan; (4) recommend and monitor interconnection, numbering, and pricing plans; (5) develop a frequency authorization plan; (6) develop operator licensing plans; (7) prepare and recommend regulations, forms and templates to facilitate the harmonization of regulations in member states; (8) review and evaluate applications for individual licenses; (9) monitor and appraise the effectiveness of issued licenses; (10) develop fee structures; (11) recommend a regional cost based pricing regime; (12) recommend technical equipment standards and procedures for the approval of equipment for use by telecommunications providers; and (13) coordinate activities with third parties in the fulfilment of the treaty.

According to the treaty, ECTEL would comprise three enti-



ties—A Council of Ministers, a Board of Directors, and the ECTEL Secretariat. The Council of Ministers, to whom both the Board of Directors and the ECTEL Secretariat are answerable, would consist of the Telecommunications Ministers in the contracting states, and the OECS Director General or his or her representative as an ex-officio member.

The Council of Ministers would be responsible for the formulation of policy as pertaining to the management of the telecommunications sector. More specifically the functions of the Council would include: (1) promote the purposes of ECTEL and the effective implementation of the treaty; (2) give directives to the Board on matters arising out of the treaty, including the generation and disbursement of revenue; (3) approve ECTEL's budget; (4) approve forms and procedures for the application of individual licenses; (4) determine the internal organizational structure of the ECTEL Secretariat; (5) determine the fees payable to the ECTEL Secretariat for the performance of its functions; and (6) ensure that the Board is responsive to the needs of the Contracting States in the conduct of telecommunications policy.

Once the Treaty establishing ECTEL was signed, ECTEL states enacted the Telecommunications Act. The Act was the vehicle by which the telecommunications sector would be regulated, and, whereas the treaty mentioned the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commissions (NTRC's), it was the Telecommunications Act that established the NTRCs and defined their powers and responsibilities. According to the Act, besides an NTRC staff, the NTRC would comprise three to five Commissioners appointed by the Minister. The Commissioners would essentially act as the Board of Directors of the NTRC. The responsibilities of the NTRC (one in each member state) would include: (1) advising the Minister on matters pertaining to telecommunications; (2) establishing technical standards and ensuring compliance and compatibility with international standards; (3) ensuring compliance with government's international obligations on telecommunications; (4) regulating prices and standards; (5) planning, supervising, regulating and managing the use of frequency spectrum; (6) collecting prescribed fees and any other tariffs levied under the Act or regulations; (7) receiving and reviewing application for licenses and advising the Minister accordingly; (8) monitoring and ensuring that licenses comply with the conditions attached to their licenses; (9) investigating and resolving disputes and complaints of operators and other telecommunication stakeholders; (10) monitoring anti-competitive behaviour; (11) managing the universal service fund; and (12) reviewing proposed interconnection agreements and making recommendations to the Minister.

When one compares the role of ECTEL as laid out in the Treaty and that of the NTRCs as defined in the Telecommunications Act, it becomes clear that while ECTEL would function primarily as an advisor and coordinator, the NTRCs would be charged with monitoring the sector, ensuring compliance with standards and regulations, and resolving complaints and disputes among stakeholders to ensure that the sector operates as smoothly as possible.

However, this structure was not the one originally designed by the OECS Telecommunications Reform Project. The original intent was that ECTEL would be patterned after the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) model of one central authority. Thus ECTEL would be to OECS telecommunications what the

ECCB was to OECS monetary policy. Accordingly, ECTEL would have been charged with the formulation, coordination, and implementation of telecommunications policy, and the regulation of the telecommunications sectors of its member states. However, along the way, the governments of some ECTEL member states saw this structure as subjecting their countries to too great a loss of sovereignty, thus the five islands departed from the central or single authority model of the ECCB, and instead opted for the dichotomous structure established by the ECTEL Treaty and the Telecommunications Acts, in which ECTEL would be mostly responsible for helping to formulate and coordinate telecommunications policy, while each country's telecommunication Minister along with his National Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (NTRC) would be responsible for the execution of telecommunication policy in his country and the direct regulation of his country's telecommunication sector. This change in the original intent provided an example of how not to integrate, because (as will be discussed in Part 2 of this article) it has impaired the smooth coordination and implementation of OECS telecommunications policy, and has introduced duplication of function and undue political interference that has undermined the integrity of the regulatory apparatus.



The Negotiations

It was all fair and well for the OECS to establish its regulatory regime, but given it had C&W to contend with, it was a whole different ball-game to having an industry to regulate. In this game, there had to be two players. Yet how could the game take place when the positions of the opposing teams were so far apart, and when the two sides did not even have a common appreciation of the rules—much less an acceptance of them? Because of the unresolved differences between the OECS and C&W, the governments had two options. Litigate, let the courts decide, or negotiate. For OECS governments liberalization was a matter of great urgency. The future economic development of their countries depended on the liberalization of their telecommunication sectors. Furthermore, they were most definitely anxious to lay their hands on the additional revenues in the form of license fees, spectrum fees and royalties that liberalization promised. Therefore, to avoid the protracted wait that litigation was sure to bring, OECS Heads agreed to negotiate the early termination of C&W's exclusive licenses.

To conduct the negotiations the parties formed negotiating teams. Headed by Minister Calixte George, the OECS team comprised OECS Communication Ministers, who were in turn supported by a team of legal, financial, economic, and telecommunications experts. The C&W team, which comprised C&W senior officials from the region, was headed by Errald Miller, the Regional Director of Cable and Wireless.

In the negotiation process, C&W's claim of US\$97 million as compensation for the early termination of its licenses quickly became a non-issue. This left only two main contentious points. The first being the timing of liberalization or how quickly liberalization should take place. The second was C&W's claim that local access and domestic calling were priced below cost and were being subsidized by its more profitable international calling market segment, therefore a precondition for liberalization was the realigning of domestic rates closer to cost.

Regarding the first point of contention, the OECS wanted to liberalize as quickly as possible, whereas C&W wanted liberalization phased over a five-year period. On the second point, OECS governments were not convinced that any of C&W's services were being priced below cost, therefore before they could agree to rate rebalancing they wanted proof that indeed the rates in question were below cost.

As late as January 2001 the parties could not reach agreement on these issues and the negotiations reached a deadlock. In the heat of battle Calixte George publicly referred to the head of C&W's legal team as a "house nigger" and he let loose his fighting mantra: *menm bèt menm pwèl* (same animal, same body hair), which, considering the fact that he had labelled the C&W lawyer a "house nigger," could be interpreted that, since C&W

looked like the plantation slave masters, and behaved in like manner (exploiting the Caribbean to invest in America), C&W and the slave masters were the same.

Cable and Wireless punched back. The company threatened to close its St. Lucia operation and to pack up and leave. Apprehension over such an outcome rippled across the nation. In an article printed in the Star newspaper, Rick Wayne, St. Lucia's preeminent journalist, characterized Calixte George as the bull, a Don Quixote one at that, who seemed intent on smashing the OECS telecommunications china store.

Responding to the telecommunications giant's threat, OECS Heads came together as one and announced that if C&W abandoned St. Lucia, then it must leave the remaining four countries that formed ECTEL. One for all, all for one, was the battle cry that rang across the subregion. Never before had OECS flags flown so high, providing a perfect example of how to integrate.

However, the Heads of the ECTEL countries were not politicians for nothing. Though they stood holding hands, they softened the stance of the negotiating team by shuffling its composition and appointing Prime Minister Keith Mitchell of Grenada to replace Calixte George as head of the negotiation team.

Following the shuffling of the OECS negotiating team, on April 7, 2001, in a meeting co-chaired in St. Kitts by Prime Minister Denzil Douglas, the parties arrived at an agreement on liberalization. However, it was an agreement on the broad principles of liberalization. Namely, that the sector would be fully liberalized between twelve and eighteen months from April 2001; that the exclusive licenses of C&W would terminate; that upon application, OECS contracting states would give C&W non-exclusive licenses to provide at least the same networks and services.



OECS Government Signatories to the May 20, 2002 Telecommunications Liberalization Agreement

es as the company provided before the termination of its exclusive licenses; and that the OECS agreed to rate rebalancing in principle, provided that C&W costs justified its rate rebalancing claims. Once the agreement was reached, the working out of the details of how liberalization would be effected were left to joint working groups that included a legal and regulatory working group, a tariff rebalancing working group, and a communications working group.

Given this breakthrough in negotiations, it seems that inadvertently the OECS had played the good cop, bad cop strategy to perfection. The Calixte George negotiating team had waved a big stick and had given C&W a taste of how far the OECS was willing to go to make liberalization a reality, so by the time the multinational met the softer, more gentle team of Keith Mitchell it was much more willing to negotiate.

Notwithstanding, the tug of war between the OECS and C&W was not yet over. In negotiating the details of the liberalization process, the working teams reached an impasse. The OECS tariff rebalancing team found C&W's defense of rate rebalancing and the data it supplied to justify such claims unsatisfactory.

Why was the OECS at odds with C&W's notion of rate rebalancing? To answer that question it would help to first provide a brief overview of the economics of the local access network. The main functional elements of a modern telephone system are local access, switching and transmission. Sometimes called the local loop, the local access network connects end users (businesses, government, and residential customers) to the national and international network. More often than not this is accomplished by connecting a twisted pair of copper wires from the user's premises to a local switch. These copper wires (or other types of cables) and the labour required to lay them account for most of the cost of the local access network, and of the three main network elements, the local access network is by far the most expensive, contributing from one-third to one-half of the total network cost.

C&W's contention was that the revenues it was generating from its local access services (mainly domestic calling, connection fees and the basic monthly access charge) were insufficient to cover the cost of the access network, therefore all along it was using revenues from its long distance business to make up for the shortfall in access revenues. However, with liberalization, it would no longer be able to do so because competition would invariably drive down international calling rates, leaving less of a surplus to offset the deficit in access revenues. Therefore, before liberalization could take place, its access rates should be raised to be more reflective of the cost of the local access network.

The OECS tariff rebalancing team had several problems with this argument. To begin with, even without any prior analysis, it would have been difficult to convince them that C&W was losing money on any service when all reports seemed to suggest that the company was using the Caribbean as its cash cow.

Secondly, the OECS team saw C&W's method of allocating cost to services as arbitrary, non-transparent, and almost impossible to verify. In fact, given the arbitrariness of C&W cost allocation methods, the OECS team was of the view, that as opposed to determining its costs and then setting rates according to these costs, C&W's approach was to first set rates and then allocate cost to match.

Furthermore, there was the issue of which expenses were admissible as the cost of providing access and which were not. For example, should the airfare of a C&W personnel flying first class as opposed to economy class, be considered part of the cost of providing access? How about expensive paintings decorating the offices of the company?

Still, even if C&W's cost was justifiable and properly apportioned to its services, there was the concern that the cost structure in question was that of a monopoly firm, and as indicated above monopolies are wasteful. For any given level of output or service, they use a greater amount of society's resources than would firms operating in a competitive environment. So by allowing C&W to set rates based on its existing monopoly cost structure, the OECS would be locking in the company's inefficiencies, the very conditions that they hoped to change through liberalization.

Most services offered by a fixed network telephone provider use access as an input, because to complete calls, be they national, regional or international, the transmission has to pass through the local access network. Accordingly, the OECS team was also of the view that some of the revenues derived from non-access services, such as international calling, should rightly be assigned to the local access network and therefore should not even be considered a subsidy.

Finally, and probably above all, rate rebalancing was a very politically unpalatable proposition. The governments of the ECTEL countries had sold liberalization to their electorates with the promise that liberalization would lower rates. Yet, here was C&W telling them that by its very nature, liberalization meant increasing domestic rates (monthly access and local calling), the very rates that their citizens were most concerned about. Clearly, the OECS Heads were in a dilemma. They wanted to liberalize in a hurry, but doing so would place them at the risk of giving in to C&W's notions of rate rebalancing, which to them spelt political suicide.

No matter the concerns and arguments of the OECS, on the issue of rate rebalancing C&W refused to budge. After all, not only was the company in no hurry to give up its monopoly privileges, but it had already conceded its liberalization compensation claim of US\$97 million, and more importantly it had history and international best practice on its side, for in most parts of the developed world regulators have acknowledged the notion of an access deficit and as part of their liberalization process have allowed the incumbent monopolies to raise access fees and local calling rates while decreasing national long distance and international calling rates. In short, rate rebalancing.

In this contest C&W's great advantage was that it had no problems with a protracted negotiation process, because as long as the process lasted the company's monopoly status remained in place and competition would be kept at bay. In contrast, the OECS Heads did not have or did not allow themselves the luxury of time. After the last impasse over rate rebalancing, the Heads had had enough. So for the first time since the process started, they took over the negotiations, such that by May 20, 2002, they were able to reach and sign an agreement with C&W that spelled out the final details that would lead to full liberalization on April 1, 2003, five years from the date that the OECS first embarked on their quest to liberalize their telecommunications sectors. However, as we will show in the second part of the article, that May 20th Agreement would come back to haunt them.

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The Wake

Long before church bells began tolling, they had come. The news had spread across the length and breadth of the village.

They came with only their memories; frayed chips, brittle like bone, snapping at the drop of his name. They knew him intimately, even if it was only for a brief moment, and they would never forget. Albertina; Carmen whose father had succumbed to his fury; Mathilda, Terrasine

by Mc. Donald Dixon

and Clothilda, they came with the news. Gathered in the same room, under the same roof, without a hint of malice, a uniform smirk creasing their lips like a smile not wanting to be born. They

spoke as though they were life-long friends without reproach or any suspicion of any ill will. Perhaps it was the character of the man permeating through this quaint reunion, spit driveling at the edge of their mouths as they yapped and

yapped about all things inconsequential to the event that drew them together. All old women now, reliving the day-dreams of their youth. The soft glow from the kerosene lamp shone through the tears that lurked behind their eyelids, held in check by their pride. Their voices were loud and strong. As they spoke the years reeled back like the facing at a village cinema at the end of a movie before it is packed and returned to the distributors.

Louis Chambord had long outlived the planned three score and ten everyone hoped to live. He made no bones about it. He was not ashamed of his age although he was uncertain about the date of his birth. Until the end, he still visited all the rum shops in the village and was the progenitor of every ounce of gossip that was worth repeating. He had become an instructor in the ways of the world to the young men who gathered around him for a free drink. They never failed to listen attentively for they knew he could outlast them in any act requiring physical exertion, particularly when the opposite sex was involved. He was not a man to be laughed at. He could produce proof if required. He was six foot six, with a double wrist that had floored many an opponent in a moment's frustration. His body rippled with muscles like the sea, and it shone in the sun when he sweated. Despite the obvious marks of age furrowing his face, his frame was erect. He held his glass with the best of the bunch at the village bar and walked away without a shiver. After many a session, he routinely dipped into his fob to settle the damage, then strutting down the lane, his long strides looping around the potholes to his house, where he lived alone with an army of dogs that accompanied him on his daily trips to his banana patch deep in the forest.

He never bothered to marry despite social opportunities at various stages in his life, but it was common knowledge that he had many children, the last being four years old and living with his mother within shouting distance from his shack.

Louis was generous by nature and he gave, by all accounts, even when he did not have to give. A well worn gossip in the village concerned a certain politician who was campaigning at the time to be

his district representative and obviously became immersed in the strategy of canvassing his supporters and went to great lengths to secure their votes. One night after a church bazaar, the boys who made it a hobby to scour the cemetery after such occasions in search of comic relief, found him in a compromising position on a tomb with one of the village belles. His car was parked a short distance away under a lamp post. In the furor that followed, the politician ran away leaving his tweed pants and two-tone shoes neatly folded in the shape of a pillow below the headstone on the concrete slab that sealed the tomb. Luck favoured him and he made it to Louis' house unscathed, after sprinting more than a quarter mile with a raving pack of blood-hounds snarling at his heels.

Louis took out his black gabardines, the only pair he possessed, specially made to attend funerals as his friends were dying with marked regularity. He gave them to the politician to cover his scrawny bow legs that never stopped shaking from fright. Later the politician's pants arrived at Louis's doorstep in tatters, a Good Samaritan among the group delivered it. The dogs had chewed it among them for souvenirs, and by then it could only be used for patches. Someone brought the shoes while Louis was escorting him to his car to ensure that he was not molested. The politician had become preoccupied with heading home safe to his wife before the news reached her and did not remember to offer the Good Samaritan a tip. Louis did so on his behalf the following day after he was reproached.

Through these several acts of kindness Louis would always be remembered. Whether he recovered his pants in cash or kind during his frequent visits to town, he never mentioned. The politician fought and won his campaign without seeking further support in the village. Louis was given honourable mention when he gave his "Thank you" speech on the market steps in Castries, but Louis was not present to hear for himself. It did not matter to him. He had helped a soul in distress and that was adequate reward. It was of little or no importance that it had cost him a shilling in the process and a pair of black gabardines.

Notwithstanding this, Louis was not a religious man. His visits to his God were few and rare; except for funerals

which he made it a duty to attend as everyone was his friend.

Various reasons had been advanced for his apparent lack of faith, but the one most frequently repeated, and knowing him, probably is the truth, concerns a Christmas Eve night when Louis was still a young man and very much in love with the fair-skinned Albertina. They sat in one of the short pews under the belfry. For the occasion Louis had borrowed a three piece suit from his compere, who had married the year before on Boxing Day. The three piece suit was complete with a gold pocket watch and chain which he took out at intervals to check the time and impress Albertina in the course of events. A pocket watch was a symbol of prestige, particularly if it was gold. Albertina was deeply religious and followed the mass in Latin without pause. Louis was bored and fought very hard to keep sleep away from his eyes. He would have been happier attending sewenal in the heights with his friends or going from house to house eating and drinking. He had never found time for church on Christmas Eve, but Albertina was adamant and he obeyed.

He unbuttoned his borrowed jacket and loosened the waistcoat. He whispered to ALbertina about the heat, but she was wrapped in her prayers and did not hear. He shifted his attention to his surroundings, to every varnished board that made up the ceiling. His eyes strayed to the statues of the saints on the walls, lingering on their features, hoping he would recognize at least one that may have come to him in his sleep, but did not. In time his eyes settled on the statues of two

men locked in combat. One black, the other white. The white one had wings and he was wearing s short kilt that reached slightly above his knees: "I wouldn't put that on me." He thought aloud. The black man was lying on his back on the ground. Instead of wings he had a pair of black chitinous fans like a bat. They were badly scarred. The white man had a spear pointing at the black-man's throat. "Even in church we don't get a fair break." He made a mental note to ask Albertina about the statues after midnight mass.

The sermon ended on the same note it began. Louis did not hear a thing. When the plate for the offertory was pushed in his face, Louis fumbled through his pockets and produced a coin. He felt its milled edge and knew it was silver. He never checked the denomination. The rest of the mass was said swiftly, then a bald cleric came to the lectern and painfully read through the notices for the week like a calendar of church events to which no alterations were allowed. When he was through, the priest rose and gave the final blessing. However, before the priest was finished, the congregation started bolting from their pews. Louis got up, but ALbertina was not quite ready. She was still reciting her after communion prayers. He spent those few minutes fixing his waistcoat and straightening his tie as there was nothing else to do.

Albertina rose in a trance, blessing herself with a sign of the cross. She appeared to be disappointed that at last the mass was over, quite the opposite to Louis who was elated. As she edged out of the pew and turned to the altar to gen-



Gros Piton, Dustan St. Omer

ffect, Louis pounced. "Who is that man up there—the black one?"

"That's the devil." Albertina replied.

"Even in church!" Louis exclaimed. He was irritated. Whatever slight stirring he may have felt for church and religion, if only to please Albertina, died that night. Although he made generous provisions for the christening and first communion of the two sons and the daughter that Albertina bore him, he never went further than the church door on each occasion and only did so to stop Albertina from crying. It took an interval of thirty years before he began entering the church again. He did so when his old partners started slipping away, one by one, and then only for their funerals.

Louis never learned to read nor write. He could not decipher his name even if it was written in bold letters on a writ that he was obliged to read in order to save his life. Yet no one ever tried to pull cotton wool over his eyes. He was known as a shrewd negotiator and fixed prices for cattle, land and chattels with an intuition blessed with common sense. People in the village respected his judgment. He arbitrated in land disputes. They brought their wayward children to him for counselling. Some believed that he was knowledgeable in the black arts and sought his guidance at the slightest hint of misfortune in their family.

Notwithstanding his formidable stature in the eyes of the villagers, there were only two things for which he was the undisputable master—the quality of rum and the charms of beautiful women. Every rum shop in Esperance craved his patronage. Once he entered the door their sales soared. Everyone owed him a drink for some act of kindness he had done, but which he did not remember. Women flocked to him in droves, not only for his

handsome looks that remained with him throughout his life, and for his well known generosity, but also for his legendary prowess, which although spoken in whispers, preceded him wherever he went.

Nature had smiled on him with a well oiled appendage, and those who saw it flash in a limp moment, against a lamp-post, stood in awe and gaped. Men were known to shiver at a glimpse of him shaking, after a harmless act of watering the ground. Despite the gossiping, when he was alone he tended to be a recluse, he even appeared to be shy. He was slow to anger but when angry he could kill an ox barehanded.

One night, during a visit to one of his favourite haunts in Gros Islet, where he went for fried fish, after swallowing a generous portion of white rum and feeling a bit eager, he made an awkward pass at a young woman who worked at the place as a bar girl. Carmen was not good looking, but had a well rounded body, that swayed from side to side like a ship when she moved. She caught his eye. He joked and laughed with her for some time before a rough, unkempt character materialized from the shadows and began thumping her head with his fists.

He was her father. He did not approve of her mother allowing her to work at that place, because he believed it would have a corrupting influence on her. He stood every night outside, from across the street, and watched her until the place closed. He would then follow her at a discreet distance to ensure that she went straight home. That night, either Louis' presence or his daughter's constant giggles had invoked his wrath.

He was a man possessed. At first Louis simply observed him from above his glass, as he sipped his rum. The

tables around him were in a state of shock. It had never happened before. There was an uneasy quiet in the room. After the hail of blows, the father proceeded to extoll the worst virtues of his daughter, interjecting with a catalogue of names long assigned to the world's oldest profession. The girl cowered in shame and ran into the street.

Her father then turned on the patrons, including Louis. "You are all fathers here," he said, "All of you old enough to be her father. The child just eighteen years. Every night she coming home after ten o'clock. What right she have here?"

Louis smiled but remained in his chair. "You saving your daughter for yourself?" He asked.

The father was infuriated. He lunged at Louis. Using his weight as a fulcrum, Louis gripped the man's arm and slammed him across the table. He landed on his face on the floor grimacing with pain. But the blow did not stop him. He was soon back on his feet muttering a stream of foul expletives. Louis cocked his fists and landed a hard right on his jaw. The man reeled back and somersaulted over the counter into the hands of the proprietor, a thick-set buxom woman of indeterminable age. Before leaving, Louis went to the bar to pay for his quota of drinks and his small parcel of fried fish.

The man did not move. The proprietor let out a scream and dropped besides him. "He dead, Mister Louis, he dead."

The small collection of customers started thinning around Louis like he had caught tuberculosis. Soon he was the only person on that side of the counter. The daughter who had left the café in haste returned with her mother accompanied by two policemen. Louis was arrest-



A Dustan St. Omer Mural, Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, Castries

ed and charged for murder. Legend is spawned from simple action. Louis killed a man with his bare fist. He had sown the seeds of legend, his name would grow.

Louis was held in prison until his trial a year later. He was acquitted by the judge after hearing the eye witnesses, without going to the jury. The people discovered a new hero. The case cost Louis twenty pounds for a lawyer and the total abandonment of his garden for a year. Friends lifted him from the court house straight to Bouty's rum shop after the judge said he was free to go. He called for a half nip on credit, shook it in his mouth and spat it out. He ducked his friends under the pretext of going outside to urinate, balanced his feet on the pavement and headed up street in the direction of Legrand's yard to Mathilda, another child mother. She had six children before he knew her, but she had borne him a son before he went to prison. Seeing her standing in the door quite pregnant, he began pondering, how she could possibly delay delivery for three months until he got out of jail.

He stayed by Mathilda for lunch but when he heard a man rap on the door like he owned the place, he knew his days were numbered there. Memories of Ma Reynold from his boyhood days returned to him. Louis recalled going to Ma Reynold's shop in the village on errands for his mother. He had marveled at her consistent pregnancies although everyone knew that her husband was away in Cayenne and had not written a note to say whether he was alive or dead. It puzzled him until he asked his mother, "How

come Ma Reynold have no husband and she always making baby?"

"Immaculate conception, child!" His mother replied without embellishment.

He thought of Mathilda and believed she may have succumbed to a similar fate. Only this time a man had come home to lunch and had found him there.

The first time Louis attempted to get his hands under a woman's skirt was nothing short of disaster. He had completed his apprenticeship at Sidonie's joiner shop and although not yet elevated to the status of full craftsman, because he was still under age, he was sufficiently skilled to attract a few customers on the side to earn some extra coppers, which supplemented the fortnightly stipend that barely bought soap to wash sawdust from his clothes. He had just collected two shillings from Mister Gilbert, the village schoolmaster, for a bookshelf he had made from acajou which he salvaged from the partitions of an old house that had been pulled down for the oven. It was supposed to be haunted. Termites were afraid to spawn in the wood as they had done in every house in the village including the church and the school.

Louis had planned the event of getting his hands under a woman's skirt from weeks before, while he was still making the bookshelf. He made it a point of duty to pass on Notre Dame Street after work to wink at Terrasine as she bent over the coal pot outside her mother's house, roasting corn for sale. Terrasine was about two years younger than him, but was wiser in the ways of the world. Everyone in the village knew that she had

been expelled from school for something she had done in the guava bush behind the presbytery, for which the old French priest who knew everybody's secrets, rechristened her Marie Madlienne. She had already mothered two infants, a boy and a girl. They looked like twins although they were born thirteen months apart. The afternoon Mister Gilbert paid him, he passed by and dropped the two shilling piece in her lap and told her they would meet later. He returned after dark and found her fanning a slow fire under the corn in the coal pot. She appeared unconcerned. She simply told him that she had bellyache and would arrange to meet him some other time. This was his first and last investment of its kind. Never again would he pay in advance for intangibles. When they finally met, Terrasine bore him a son six months after their encounter, which was so brief that it could have been timed by a stopwatch. Her mother said that the child looked like him and he dared not contradict her.

For a short while after the birth of the child there was talk of marriage. This however had never been discussed between himself and Terrasine, but only between her mother and him. One of her conditions before giving her daughter's hand, however, was that Terrasine's two elder children would carry his name, because they had no father. She did not know with any degree of certainty whether they were for the same man. This gave Louis the courage to pick up his little suitcase of clothes and his box of tools and run from the village as fast as his legs moved.

Many years later he would meet the boy that was supposed to be his son, on a truck heading for Vieux-Fort. The boy had grown into a fine young man and was also a joiner. He was going to Vieux Fort in search of work with the Americans, who were building an air base there. The boy, after some miles into the journey, looked at him and asked, "You are Mr. Chambord?" "Yes." Louis replied. "Miss Terrasine from Esperance is my mother." They shook hands but did not speak to each other again for the rest of the journey, which was punctuated with stops along the way. Louis looked at life through tinted lenses. The good Lord gave and the good lord took, nothing was worth the pain of worries.

Memories of old Sidonie, hovering around his joiner shop with his son



Vieux Fort Light House, Dustan St. Omer

Dominic seated on his shoulders with his tiny legs around his father's neck always encouraged a good laugh. Dominic had to be held aloft in the shop because of his habit of grabbing everything in sight. But it was not Dominic's grabbing habit that brought on the laughter, but the lingering doubts in the minds of the villagers, about his paternity as Sidonie was well past his prime and Dominic's mother, Clothilda, was a young hot blood in the village who occasionally called to clean the house for Sidonie after his wife had died. Whatever doubts that were expressed, it did not bother old Sidonie, for he never disclaimed the child. Dominic grew up in the shop and when the old man died he inherited the trade.

They bunched together like a cluster of sea grapes in his tiny living room that was no larger than one of the old French vaults in the riverside cemetery near Castries, with the names inscribed in hieroglyphics. Their mouths moved faster than their hands, regurgitating the spiciest episodes of his life. They folded the crepe paper in the shape of rose and zinnia while their daughters and nieces on the steps outside were chopping a lime green bolt in the shape of leavers. The old women inside were now mumbling under their breath, eager to tell their stories, while the younger ones outside were silently eavesdropping on the men under the breadfruit tree, who were trading dirty jokes that would shock even Louis himself, if he could only hear.

Sidonie's son, Dominic, was now the village joiner. He had studied under the careful eye of his father to become the best coffin maker in the North. He had worked all afternoon planing the bois blanche boards until he saw the reflection of his face in the grain. He filled his glass from the demijohn of white rum on his makeshift work bench before going inside to measure the corpse. This was the part he hated most. He didn't mind the living, he should have been a tailor, or better still a seamstress, and he would have enjoyed that. But when it came to running his tape along the length and breadth of a corpse, he shivered. Normally his apprentices did it for him. He remembered once, when he took measurements for his father, the coffin was built four inches short. The back piece had to be removed and the poor soul was delivered to his maker with his

feet sticking out in the air. What made it worse, was rats had eaten both socks and the toes stared up at the gravediggers defiantly, while they choked with laughter, shoveling on the clay. To get the job done Dominic usually spoke to the dead. Tonight he would have the last conversation with Louis. Louis was lying naked under a white sheet. Ma Aristhee had not yet given him his last bath, she was waiting for the two green limes that she had sent her grandson to pick.

When Dominic entered the room he was alone. "Bon Soir, Misseur Louis!" he said aloud. "I come to measure you for your new house." He uncovered the corpse and paused, staring at the shriveled piece of manhood between Louis' legs. He chuckled. He wanted to meas-


Louis' thighs, he quickly counted the inches. Just as he was about to register the final inch in his mind, he felt a cold hand wrap around his wrist. It held him tight. He looked up at the face that had been lying still since morning. Louis' eyes were glaring at him from their sockets. He trembled. The grip that held him was steel. It hardened around his wrist like a handcuff. He struggled in silence, his body soaking with sweat. Ma Aristhee entered the room with her two green limes. She held her hand to her mouth, not knowing whether it was right to laugh in the presence of the dead. Her eyes were fixed on the rod of muscle that had hardened in Dominic's hands. She was unable to contain herself for long and fell to the floor, her hands drumming on



Dustan St. Omer

ure across the chest, the waist and legs. Then he measured from the head to the tip of the toes. He made a mental note. However his curiosity had been aroused. He could not leave the room until he knew for sure the length of that piece of muscle that had made Louis a legend and was so formidable, even in death. Compared to his own, this was Goliath. He adjusted the tape, his hands trembling. He heard the old women mumbling inaudibly under their breath. He heard his mother Clothilda giving her piece. He bent forward intent on completing this extra task before someone caught him in the act, which he would not be able to explain. Jamming the tape between

her chest. The old women—Albertina, Carmen, Mathilda, Terrasine—stopped mumbling and one by one they shuffled into the room. The last to enter was Clothilda. She looked at her son and gasped. He was holding the source of his origins, to her this was unnatural.

All day, the village bells tolled while the old women took turns to raise father and son apart. They succeeded, only when the hearse came, on the stroke of four and the driver assisted them. He used the hydraulic jack to raise Louis' fingers apart. By then fear had eaten away Dominic's resistance and he was well on his journey to meet his father. They will go to their graves remembering. 



The Life & Art of Dustan St. Omer

by Anderson Reynolds

“By painting a black God and religious murals populated not just with black people, but with ordinary St. Lucians, St. Omer had effectively given St. Lucians back their God and religion.”

The Father of the St. Lucia Art Movement

Considered the father of St. Lucian painting, Dustan St. Omer is by far the island's best known painter. It would be difficult to visit St. Lucia and not be exposed to his work. His murals beautify Roman Catholic churches, schools and public places around the island. Trinidad, Martinique and Puerto Rico have also been blessed with his murals. His paintings decorate many St. Lucian government buildings and commercial houses, and are among the most prized of St. Lucian art. It would be very unconvincing to declare that one is a patron of St. Lucian art and not have a Dustan St. Omer painting hanging in one's home. The works of St. Omer are as visible and as much part of the aesthetic landscape of St. Lucia as are the Pitons, and it would be just as hard spending time in St. Lucia and remaining unaware of the Pitons as it would be not to lay eyes on St. Omer's work.

Given the prominence of St. Omer's creations, it is anyone's guess how much he has influenced the St. Lucian aesthetic and identity; the St. Lucian notion of what art and beauty are, and what it means to be a St. Lucian. Often the two—St. Omer's art and the Pitons (hence the St. Lucian character)—merge into one, as the artist has painted many different interpretations of the world heritage twin peaks. If someone was unlucky enough to have never visited St. Omer's homeland or laid eyes on his paintings and so believes he has escaped coming under the spell of St. Omer's art, he probably needs to think again, because one of the first things one notices about a country is its flag, and Dustan St. Omer is the creator of the St. Lucian flag. So it may not be an exaggeration to suggest that the artist helped influence the St. Lucian aesthetic and the St. Lucian national character. The flag presents yet another instance where St. Omer's art and the famed



Pitons merge to become one, for the black and yellow triangle symbolizes the twin mountains.

Dr. (Msgr.) Patrick Anthony, founder of the St. Lucia Folk Research Center, the Jubilee Trust Fund and the George Odum Foundation, and one of St. Lucia's foremost intellectuals and art philosophers, wrote in the St. Lucia Catholic Chronicle that Dustan St. Omer is "the premier Catholic muralist in the region." Similarly, it was reported that the London Daily Telegraph said that Dustan St. Omer is the Caribbean's Michael Angelo. How fitting to liken the St. Lucian artist to the great 15th century Italian painter (among other things), for in much the same way the Italian's religious paintings on the Sistine chapel represented the best and greatest of his creations, St. Omer's Roman Catholic church murals are considered his best and most famous works. Is it any wonder that some have gone further to say that

Dustan St. Omer is to St. Lucian painting what the great Derek Walcott is to St. Lucian poetry.

It maybe an understatement to say that Dustan St. Omer is the father of St. Lucian painting, and it is anyone's guess how many St. Lucian painters that St. Omer has fathered? Or how many St. Lucian artists first picked up a brush after coming in contact with a St. Omer painting or mural? Or how many St. Lucians became conscious that there were people in the society called artists and painters only after they became aware of Dustan St. Omer the artist? "I hope some child ascribes their (statues of heroes) grandeur to Gregorias (Dustan St. Omer)," said Derek Walcott in *Another Life* (1973).

St. Omer's contributions have not gone unnoticed. From Queen Elizabeth, he received the MBE, Member of the most Excellent Order of the British Empire, pronouncing him a Squire. From the Pope, a Medal of Merit. And from his country,

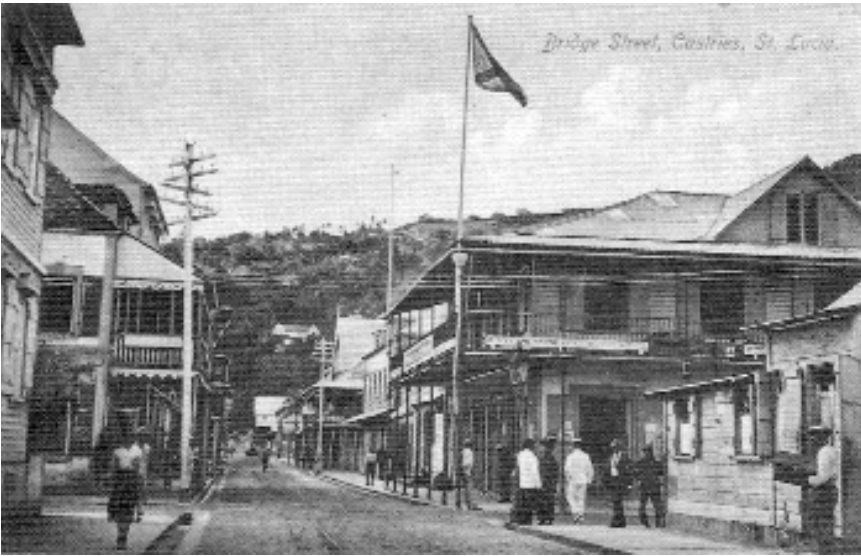
the St. Lucia Cross, for distinguished and outstanding service of national importance.

St. Lucian painter, Cedric George, originator of a new philosophy of art called Organometrics, appears to be a candidate for heir to St. Omer's artistic throne, in much the same way that St. Omer inherited the mantle from his mentor the famed Harry Simmons. An indication of that is that Cedric George seems to have received the nod from none other than Derek Walcott, who, not unlike four decades ago, in *Another Life*, praised St. Omer's art in much the same way that he now acknowledges Cedric George's paintings. If he can help it, Derek Walcott is known never to miss a Cedric George art exhibition.

A story often repeated by Cedric George is instructive on the influence of Dustan St. Omer on the St. Lucian art movement. The budding artist said that from the time he got interested in

painting, he took a keen interest in the works of Dustan St. Omer. He attended all of Dustan St. Omer's art exhibitions, and visited the artist's home to view more of his work. Dustan St. Omer had a series of portraits at the High Court in Castries from which Cedric said he drew great inspiration and determination to be a painter. The first time he saw the paintings, he got so lost marveling at them that he became oblivious to the closing of the court house and so got locked inside. Cedric said that Dustan St. Omer was his Matisse. What does he mean by that? Well, it is said that when the younger Picasso first saw Matisse's paintings, he was held spellbound and later used the older man's work as the standard to achieve and then to surpass. So maybe without a Matisse there would not have been as great a Picasso. Likewise, St. Omer's work was the gauge by which Cedric judged his art, and was the inspiration that enabled him to strive to elevate his





Bridge Street, Castries, before 1927

art to the farthest reaches of his talent and imagination. Without Dustan St. Omer, Cedric George may not have dug deep enough inside himself to pull out Organometrics.

It was with excitement tinged with awe that I signed on to interview Dustan St. Omer. Excitement, because I hoped soon to discover what was involved in the making of a great artist? What matrix of factors led to the art of Dustan St. Omer? Awe, understandably, given the greatness and national aura of the man.

On meeting the artist at his studio in River Stone, Gros Islet, I quickly recalled what a contemporary of his told me. He said that St. Omer gets much praise and admiration for his paintings, but the most remarkable thing about the artist isn't his paintings but his unbelievable self confidence. St. Omer stands more than six feet tall, with an erect aristocratic bearing that would make him stand out in most crowds. He looks upon one with an unblinking, majestic stare, and walks with a purpose and poise that leaves no doubt in anyone's mind that he commands the ground upon which he stands. He speaks in a sonorous, measured, leisurely and cultured voice that appears to have never harbored self doubt. His sudden, crackling laugh at the end of a comment never fails to surprise, and removes any residual doubt in one's mind of his self confidence.

Where It All Began

Dustan St. Omer was born in the late 1920's into a devoted Roman Catholic family. His father, whom Dustan described as a "gentle giant," worked as a custom officer. His mother was a house wife whose heightened sense of fashion sometimes rubbed the church the wrong way. Dustan was a middle child; before him a brother, after him a sister. The St. Omer household also included two other children, both boys, Dustan's half brother and a cousin. The artist characterized his parents, whom he said included his beloved maternal grandmother, as people with a "certain dignity" about them, and with an "absolutely, unquestioning, belief in God."

The family was situated in Castries, then as now St. Lucia's capital and principal town. St. Omer describes the Castries that he grew up in as a very quiet, clean, peaceful, beautiful, poetic

and even romantic little town with a village atmosphere, where lots of people still walked barefooted. It was a virtually crime-free town of kerosine street lanterns, of one or two cars, where the garbage was taken away by a horse cart, and the sewage system consisted of porters (whom residents often referred to as the bucket brigade) moving from house to house at 9PM, picking up night soil, loading it onto a sloop that dumped its cargo out in the open sea.

St. Omer reminisces that at the time Castries and St. Lucia was 99 percent Roman Catholic. The church was the centre of the life of the people. Everything was centred around it. There was the Anglican church but it was more like the church of the colonials. The St. Lucians who worshipped there were more of Bajan or Antiguan descent. St. Lucians for the most part were Roman Catholic people. When one said Roman Catholic they meant a real, original St. Lucian.

More importantly, however, and more so than today, Castries was the gateway to the island, and its natural harbor along with surrounding hills upon which could sit guns to defend the harbor against enemy ships, made it one of the Caribbean's most strategically important ports.

At the turn of the 20th century, in the days of steam boats, Port Castries was a major Caribbean coaling station, and since the days of colonial rivalry between England and France and right through the second world war the town was always home to one type of military establishment or the other. War ships made frequent visits. According to St. Omer, the Castries of his youth always had lots of sailors and there were plenty of rum shops to cater for the sailors' seemingly unquenchable appetite for women and alcohol.

Therefore, more than any other part of the island, it was in Castries that one would have been exposed to the cross currents of world news, trends and ideas. The kind of exposure that would have no doubt fuel the artistic imagination of a young Dustan St. Omer.

How It All Began

The artist does not remember when he started drawing, nor what was the first thing he drew. Neither can he remember anyone teaching him to draw or that it was after watching someone draw that he got into it. All that he knows is that he has always loved to draw and he has been drawing from as far back as he can remember. It appears that drawing came natural to St. Omer. He simply picked up pencil and paper and started drawing. Still, he offered a possible explanation of how he got started. He was told that he was a sickly child and thus spent a lot of time at home, not attending school. So he reckoned that with no children around to play with, he must have taken up drawing to pass the time.

Not only was St. Omer a natural, but apparently he had always been better at drawing than anyone around him. "I was born to be a painter," said the artist. "It is the thing I always did best. It is the thing whenever I did it, I did it better than anyone



Banana Plantation

else." He told the story about his father who, on some rainy days when he couldn't go to work, held drawing competitions among the children of the household, and would reward the winner with a candy. Of those competitions, St. Omer said that though he was the youngest of the boys he always won.

This, however, would prove just the beginning of St. Omer making his art pay off. He said he used to love images of Sacred Hearts (a catholic icon in which the heart of Jesus is shown exposed). So after watching someone painting Sacred Hearts with water colours he went home and started painting his own. He had a darling of a grandmother who used to sell in the Castries market. So when he needed money for, say, matinee, he would give her his Sacred Hearts to sell. He made three pence for each Sacred Heart, which, according to him, was plenty of money in those depression times.

Then there was the headmaster of the Roman Catholic Boys' School where St. Omer attended who had this habit of giving a candy to every boy who produced a good drawing in art class. It was a tradition out of which St. Omer made quite a few cents. Because in order to ensure that they collected their candies, some of the boys would pay St. Omer a cent to draw on their slates. They then etched the drawings with pins and used spit to hide the etchings, and in art class they traced the etchings to recover the drawings and thus collect their candies.

St. Omer's art would pay off in another way and would set him apart for special treatment. He said that the school was always involved in a bazaar around Easter, so when Easter was drawing near the headmaster used to excuse him from classes, set him up by the stage with drawing paper and water colors, and there he painted pictures for the school to sell at the bazaar. The young artist never saw a cent from the sales of these paintings but he said getting to skip classes, which he hated, and being allowed to do what he loved, was more than enough compensation.

Apparently, St. Omer's gift of drawing wasn't the only thing that set him apart. Talking about his siblings, he said his parents called his brother "the Prince of Wales" and his sister "my only daughter," but he can not remember his parents calling him by a

nickname. It seems as the middle child he had to come up with his own claim to fame. The artist said looking back it appears that from the time he was small he had an "individual mind." Because though he did not see himself as troublesome, and he was a "nice child" who didn't do unruly things but did everything for his parents to love him, so much so that his mother came to trust him totally, he was the one she used to beat all the time. To further make the point that it seems from early on he had a mind of his own, St. Omer recalled a day at the Anglican Infant School that he attended as a four year old. At that school there was a hat rack for students to hang their hats as they entered the building, and on certain days the school engaged its pupils in a drill where they would go around and take their hats off the rack. However, on the day that stuck in St. Omer's mind the students were not supposed to pick up their hats, yet each time he passed he would take his hat. He said "they burst my tail, but the next time I passed I took my hat." To this day, other than to suggest that he was unconventional right from the start, the artist can not understand why he had kept taking his hat.

School Days Were Not Happy Days

Naturally, I thought school must have played an important role in the development of St. Omer as an artist. So I was a bit taken aback to hear him say, "I hated school, I hated school bad." The artist "hated school so bad" that back then he thought it was unfortunate that no hurricanes ever struck to destroy the school buildings. But why did the young St. Omer hated school so much? He said that in those days teachers had tremendous powers over students. They were like gods. They dominated one's life. School was a horrible experience for him. He was afraid of school; while at home he received plenty of parental love, in school there was always someone with a belt or a cane ready to beat you. He hated the structure of it all. He wanted to do his own thing, which was to draw. School was preventing him from drawing as much as he would like.

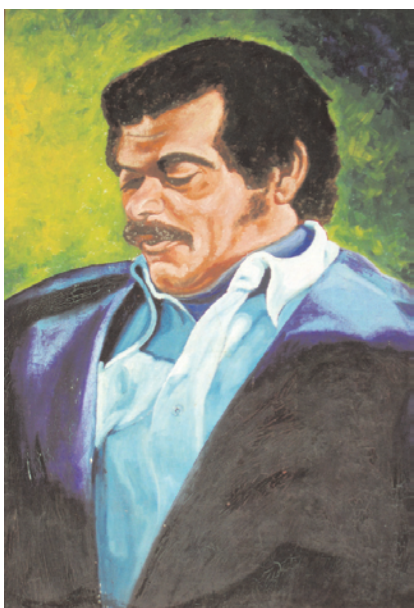
However, things changed somewhat when he started at St. Mary's College. The College was very sports oriented. The boy's started the morning by playing cricket or football in the yard. In the afternoon, games, whether it be sports or excursions to the beach, were compulsory. St. Omer said he was never good at sports, but he loved it. Another thing that made St. Mary's College bearable was that there he had the opportunity of spending time with two other kindred spirits. Spa St. Helen, who would become a famous photographer, and Derek Walcott, a future Nobel Laureate.

I expected to hear that St. Mary's College had influenced St. Omer's art, because Derek Walcott has spoken of how the good, solid education, steeped in English tradition and literature, he had received in St. Lucian had been an important part of his educational building block. For example, in *The Schooner Flight*, *The Star Apple Kingdom* (1979), he said, "I had a sound colonial education." Furthermore, Sir Arthur Lewis represents yet another Nobel Laureate who got his early grounding at St. Mary's College. But St Omer said not at all. In fact, at the time St. Mary's College didn't even offer art as a subject. Nonetheless, the three kindred spirits of Spa, Derek and Dustan were so pas-

sionate about painting that they were the ones who introduced art in the school when they requested and sat for the Cambridge examinations, which they, though untutored, passed with flying colours.

St. Mary's College may not have offered art classes, but it offered English and literature, which would have exposed the young Derek Walcott to the great literary classics. The poet and playwright would go on to provide the intellectual foundation of the 1950's Arts Guild, of which Dustan St. Omer was part, and which, as we will see later, would set off an art revolution. Therefore, to the extent that the Arts Guild had helped fuel St. Omer's art, the St. Mary's College may have indirectly, if not directly, touched on his development as an artist.

St. Omer Meets the Master



Dustan St. Omer's portraits of Walcott (left), Simmons (center), and St. Omer himself

The link between school and St. Omer's art may have been tenuous, but the same cannot be said about Harry Simmons and St. Omer the artist. In fact, if Dustan St. Omer is the father of the St. Lucian art (painting) movement, then Harry Simmons was the godfather of the St. Lucian cultural movement.

Born and raised in Castries, St. Lucia, Harry Simmons (1915-1966) received his early education at the Methodist Elementary School and St. Mary's College. Later, as Cooperative Societies Officer and Registrar of Cooperative Societies, he attended cooperative courses in Jamaica and Cooperative College in Leicester, England. Despite his limited formal education, by all accounts, Simmons was a renaissance man. Derek Walcott said he was "one of the first water colourists the West Indies has produced," and he helped "to create a community of writers and painters among whom were Sybil Atteck and Edgar Mittleholzer." Simmons became an Associate of the Royal Art Society, and although he wasn't an official art teacher, his art classes gained him the Art Teacher Diploma. Besides being a painter, Simmons was considered a botanist, historian, folklorist, journalist, and archaeologist. According to Derek Walcott, he

was an "eloquent interpreter and defender of creole and creole customs." However, Simmons wasn't simply a man stuck in his studio, or out there conducting solo forays into the history, anthropology, and wildlife of the island. He was also a man of civil society, a social and cultural activist. He played a leading role in the St. Lucia Boy's Scout, and he served on the St. Lucia Tourist Board and Library Committees. He also served on the Advisory Committee of the Extra Mural Department of the University of the West Indies, the Castries Fire Relief Fund Committee, and the Economic and Financial Advisory committee. Furthermore, he was a founding member of the St. Lucia Archaeologist and Historical Society and the St. Lucia Arts and Craft Society.

St. Omer was in his early teens when he first met with Harry Simmons. His aunt showed Simmons one of his paintings, and, impressed, Simmons asked the teenager to join his Saturday art

classes. These art classes, which were also attended by Derek and Spa St. Helen, would prove to be quite a revelation for the young St. Omer.

He said that it was on those Saturdays at Harry Simmons' studio that he got his "first introduction to real art." True, before meeting Simmons, St. Omer used to draw, but with Simmons he learned that art is not just about drawing. He learned that "Art is on the level of poetry and philosophy." Now, it isn't that the aspiring artist wasn't doing his homework. He said he used to spend hours in the Castries central library studying art books, familiarizing himself with the work of the European masters. But all along he was under the misconception that art was what was in those books, and anything outside those books wasn't art. So being an artist simply meant reproducing the works of the masters.

St. Omer's misconception was akin to someone who, in learning a foreign language, imitates down to the last detail the accent of the particular local where he is being tutored, thinking that the accent is as much an integral part of the language as the alphabet, only to discover later that while the basic language remains the same, the accent changes from local to local. Looking back, St. Omer said he wasn't surprised that he had



A couple of St. Omer's famed Madonnas

formed such an impression of art. Because, after all, this was the colonial era, "where all the values were the colonial values," and everything else was considered inferior, vulgar, uncultured.

In sharp contrast to St. Omer's notion of art, Harry Simmons told his proteges to "paint what you see, paint what was around you, paint what was yours." According to St. Omer, he made them "see that following the European thing was imitation. Simmons discovered art for us." However, the master was not all about talk. St. Omer said that his encounter with Harry Simmons represented the first time he was meeting a real artist working in a real studio, and was the first time he was seeing paintings of St. Lucian scenes. Simmons painted coconut trees, fishermen with their canoes, country folk, madrases, St. Lucian heroes. "Suddenly," said St. Omer, "in Harry's studio St. Lucia became art." Simmons' students couldn't doubt his message because, said St. Omer, "thank God he was a very good painter." In fact, Simmons was the best painter that his aspiring artists had come across, and one whom St. Omer labelled a genius for cultivating a disposition towards St. Lucia and his art when everything about the colonial era suggested a completely opposite orientation. At the time of Simmons' death in 1966, Derek Walcott wrote. "For us he was like a walking museum that contained knowledge of all styles and our first paintings slavishly imitated his ... Because of him we could not have become anything else, and whatever honours his former pupils gain are homage to his spirit." Listening to St. Omer and reading Walcott, one leaves with the impression that Harry Simmons was a man ahead of his time.

However, despite being such an eye opener to his students, according to St. Omer, Harry Simmons didn't teach them how to paint. He didn't teach them techniques and so on. But what he taught his students couldn't be found in text books or structured art classes. He unleashed the imagination and channelled the talent and creativity of his proteges towards what was inside them and what was their own. He set them off on a journey of self discovery, on a pilgrimage to claim what was rightfully theirs. He gave them new pairs of eyes with which to see their country and behold their people. And what they saw and behold was amaz-

ing beauty, beauty no less disserving of art, of theatre, of music, of poetry than any other. Simmons did nothing less than liberate the St. Lucian souls of his proteges and set these souls soaring.

St. Omer's relationship with Simmons and Walcott was important to the development of his art, but so too was his relationship with Spa St. Helen. According to Dr. Patrick Anthony, St. Helen contributed to the artistic development of both Walcott and St. Omer, because being the most worldly of the three, it was he who took Walcott and St. Omer around the island to see for themselves what Harry Simmons was telling them to paint, and as the photographer among them, it was the subjects of his photographs that would later populate St. Omer's murals and paintings.

The Curacao Experience

Race is another factor that would influence the direction of St. Omer's art. He said that in these colonial days St. Lucia was a very racist and class oriented society, where the color of one's skin was closely linked to one's station in life. He said, "A few white people were at the top—The Administrator, the Chief of Police, the Chief Justice, the Priest—and in the colonial service the red skin fellows were given the better jobs—that's what they did, they used niggers to control niggers—and the black fellows had to fend for themselves."

He said that at St. Mary's College the white boys were the "dummiest" and least talented students, but everyone knew that upon graduation they had their jobs, in the colonial service or in the commercial houses, waiting for them. But when the black boys left school they couldn't get jobs.

Fortunately for St. Omer, following World War II, there was a shortage of workers in the industrial countries. So, taking advantage of job opportunities in Curacao, which at the time had the third largest oil refinery in the world, he skipped the later half of his fifth form year and immigrated to Curacao, where he found employment as a lab assistant in one of the oil refineries.

In several ways, Curacao presented the seventeen year old artist with the experience of his life. It gave him his first taste of a worldly existence. With his salary, which he said was equal that



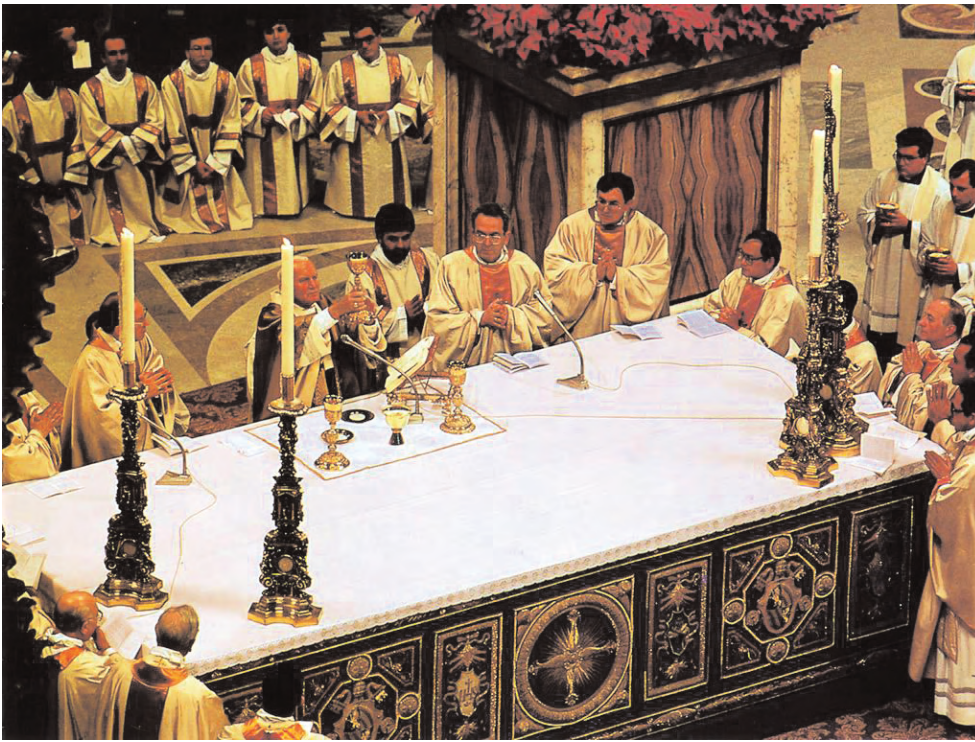
Purple Musicians

The Holy Family Mural



Church of the Holy Family. Jacmel, Anse La Raye





Vatican II

of the Administrator back home, he bought a feast of art and literature books, and his first set of canvases and oil paints. Before that he could only afford to paint with water colour. He said, "When I opened my first can of oil paint and smelled the paint, that was the greatest smell I had experienced in all my life. Every time I smell oil paint it gives me that sensation." In Curacao St. Omer met a Greek artist, the leading painter on the island, from whom he learnt a lot, including brush stroke techniques. But equally important, Curacao brought people together from across the Caribbean and thus exposed St. Omer to the thinking, passions and cultures of other West Indians.

It was there also that he met and made friends with fellow St. Lucian, the late Maurice Mason. Upon their return to St. Lucia in 1950, reeling from the ideas and exposure they had received in Curacao, St. Omer and Mason approached Walcott with the idea of an arts guild, and so was the famous 1950's St. Lucia Arts Guild born, with Maurice Mason its first president, and Derek Walcott its principle writer (playwright and poet) and intellectual footing.

The Revolution

The two decades leading to the founding of the Arts Guild and the decade after that represented one of the most turbulent periods in West Indian history. The Great Depression (1929-1939), which is considered the longest and most severe depression ever experienced by the industrialized Western world, ravaged the region. Workers were subjected to unlivable wages and deplorable working and living conditions. The result was spontaneous labor uprisings with often deadly consequences. Region-wide, between 1935 and 1939, no fewer than forty-six labor protestors lost their lives in clashes with authorities. British warships docked at bay for the sole purpose of quelling labor uprisings became a salient feature of the

regional landscape.

Under this onslaught, the cosy relationship that once existed between Britain and its West Indian subjects was shattered. Labor Unions and Political Parties fighting for universal suffrage, self-rule and self determination sprang overnight.

Along with seeking political autonomy, West Indians also began an earnest quest of self discovery and self definition. They began the cultivation of a West Indian identity as distinct from their colonial heritage. This new West Indian persona found ultimate expression in the notion of a West Indian Federation, such that for once West Indians were willing and able to put aside race, class and island barriers and buy into the concept of regional unity. For once the idealism of regional identity transcended all else.

In this turbulent era, the demand for national freedom and self determination was by no means limited to the

Caribbean. In fact, it was a worldwide phenomenon. By 1947, India and Pakistan had fought and won their independence. Starting in the fifties, the African continent had begun their independent march. Their cry for freedom and "Africa for Africans" could be heard loud and clear. In 1957, the Fidel Castro-led Cuban revolution had claimed Cuba for the Cuban people. In America, in 1955, the Civil Rights Movement had begun in earnest. Martin Luther King's famous "I Have A Dream" speech was only eight years away; and soon Malcolm X would start sewing his seeds of armed self-defense and black nationalism that would germinate into the Black Panther and Black Power Movements.

In St. Lucia, as in most of the other British West Indies colonies, the people's revolution was being fought on two fronts. On the one hand, there was George Charles, John Compton and their compatriots fighting for workers' rights, fighting for self-rule, fighting for political and territorial liberation. And on the other hand there was the St. Lucia Arts Guild fighting for the hearts, minds, and souls of St. Lucians; fighting to free the St. Lucian psyche from, as Bob Marley said, "mental slavery," fighting to decapitate the notion that provincial means inferior, that the island's creole culture wasn't worthy of art and celebration, and that black wasn't beautiful.

The St. Lucia Arts Guild represents the greatest outpouring of St. Lucian artistic creativity. Among its more notable members were novelist Garth St. Omer, playwright Roderick Walcott, painter Dustan St. Omer, and poet, playwright and Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott. The period which the Arts Guild span could certainly be a candidate for the golden era of St. Lucian art and literature, for up till today these above mentioned exponents of the Arts Guild have remained unmatched in St. Lucia in their respective fields of artistic endeavor.

St. Omer harbors no doubt about what motivated this outburst of creative energy. He said, "It was a time in history when the world was changing. The whole world was moving towards

independence and self determination, the break down of colonialism and imperialism." He went further to explain that part of the reason for forming the Arts Guild was to rid St. Lucians of their inferiority complexes. "The black boys (the Arts Guild) were up, recreating their society, kicking out the Victorian society that overlaid the country." For example, he said that in those days "It was forbidden" to speak patois in schools, then "Derek with his genius" started writing poems and plays peppered with St. Lucian patois and in which he was using the syntax of patois, thereby creolizing his writings, "and patois became legitimate, in the process giving the people back their language, and in the process giving them their self confidence, in doing that they found their equality. Because as long as you using another man's thing you are not equal, but when you doing your own thing you are yourself. You are equal."

However the Arts Guild did more than uplift the St. Lucian spirit. According to St. Omer, it started a revolution in West Indian theatre. "We open the West Indian dramatic mind. Everybody was paying tribute to us for that. At this time St. Lucia was leading the way in West Indian theatre. The rest of the Caribbean caught the bug of being local, of being original. It influenced a cultural revolution across the entire Caribbean."

How about Harry Simmons? What was his role in the Arts Guild? St. Omer explained that Harry Simmons never got directly involved in the Arts Guild. "He was an older man." He didn't help write scripts nor did he help direct plays. "But," said St. Omer, "he was a patron of the Arts Guild. He was like a father figure at the back of everything, so that gave the Arts Guild the kind of support it needed."

The Genius of Dustan St. Omer

And how about St. Omer the painter? How did these cross currents of history factor into his art? He said, "The colonial thing was a white black thing. Sometimes I used to ask God why? God gave me my talent, I got my answers. Breaking away from colonization was like a revolution. Doing my own thing, so I got the answer." And what was St. Omer's own thing? He painted St. Lucian landscapes, ordinary St. Lucian people engaged in their daily activities, and when the opportuni-

ty offered itself, religious murals populated with ordinary St. Lucians, including black Christ and black Madonnas. St. Omer explained, "If your God is white and the colonial power ruling you is white, then you are a slave forever." Yet, "the argument for Christ being black is stronger than the argument for Christ being white." So by painting a black God and religious murals populated not just with black people, but with ordinary St. Lucians, he had effectively given the people back their God and religion, in the process finally "breaking the back of colonialism." Clearly, like the Walcott brothers in theatre and Derek Walcott in poetry, Dustan St. Omer had unleashed his own revolution. Nonetheless, he could not have fully given the people back their religion without some help from what would turn out to be a very unlikely corner.

On January 25, 1959, seventy-six year old Pope John XXIII, who, following the nineteen-year rein of Pope Pius XII, was expected to be a caretaker Pope, sent shock waves across the Roman Catholic world when he announced that he was going to convene a council of the entire church, thus giving rise to Vatican II. Concluded in 1965, and representing only the 21st worldwide council in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, Vatican II was what would open the way for St. Omer to participate in the task of giving St. Lucia's back their God and religion. Vatican II introduced the then radical concept of people being responsible for their own consciences and thus allowed flexibility in how they internalize the Roman Catholic faith and how they adapt church services to reflect their culture. According to Dr. Patrick Anthony, taking to heart these radical notions, the St. Lucian Bishop, Charles Gachet, returned from the Vatican II Council "with a clear sense of the thrust towards indigenisation of the local Church and the challenge of inculturation of the faith into the culture of the people of St. Lucia."

One of the ways the Bishop sought to carry out his mission of St. Lucianizing the Roman Catholic church was to commission St. Omer to paint murals in the new churches that were being built. The first and probably the most famous of these murals was The Holy Family Mural, in the Church of the Holy Family at Jacmel, Anse La Raye, overlooking the great Roseau Valley. At the center of this religious family painting is a black, majestic Madonna with a white dove looking down upon her. Corresponding with the Madonna, most of the other subjects

Mural at The Prime Minister's Building, Waterfront, Castries





La Rose and La Marguerite flower festivals Mural



Church of St. Rose of Lima in Monchy, Gros Islet



The Last Super Mural, The Church of the

populating the mural are either of Indian (Carib or East Indian) or of African ancestry and present a rich display of St. Lucian life. There are fishermen in wind propelled canoes, a woman pulling in a seine (a fishing net), another fisherman is seen blowing a cong shell, announcing that the fish has arrived, a farmer is tending his bananas, a young man is beating a tanbou, another is playing a shak-shak and a couple is dancing to the folk music. Reinforcing the image of the Madonna, an Indian woman is seen nurturing a baby, and lest we forget that this is supposed to be a religious scene, two middle aged women are looking up at the Madonna with animated reverence, a black priest is in pious meditation, and an Indian man, with a priest standing behind him, is carrying a model for a new Church. Artists too are represented. A portrait of St. Omer turns around to gaze at the audience. In the background the Pitons and the St. Lucian sky and lush vegetation.

With this mural St. Omer did more than just change his subjects from white to black. Black becomes a motif, drawing attention to its primacy. As he explained, his use of black in this way represents an artistic breakthrough in the world of religious paintings. "In classical paintings they use black to form shadows, but in this painting I used black as a primary colour. So whereas in classical paintings they have rays of light permeating from the divine figure, I have black rays. I have St. Joseph in a beautiful black cape. So black is used as a colour and not merely as a shade." Clearly, in this mural St Omer changed the very psychology of blackness.

The second mural, which depicts St. Lucia's La Rose and La Marguerite flower festivals, was painted at the Church of St.

Rose of Lima in Monchy, Gros Islet. Like the mural of the Holy Family, a black madonna at the center of the painting dominates the scene. However, this mural is a much more festive one. According to historians the flower societies were derivatives of slavery and appear to be the slaves' or ex-slaves' attempt at mocking the English and French societies of the time. Accordingly, each flower society include representations of all the occupations and classes that made up these European and plantation societies, including armies and king and queens. To the left of the Madonna, St. Omer depicts the colourful and flamboyant La Rose society, equipped with a folk band and here everyone is joyfully singing, and dancing. To the right is the more subdued La Marguerite society with its less colourful garments to match its more sombre (than the red rose) marguerite flower. This group too is accompanied with a folk band, but its celebration is much more low key. Further bringing home the point that this mural is one of celebration, even the child sitting on the lap of the Madonna, with a ring of flowers in each hand to represent each of the flower societies, seems to be enjoying himself.

Dr. Patrick Anthony has pointed out the great irony of St. Omer's flower festival mural and the revolutionary ramifications of Vatican II. Years back the church had taken the stance that it would excommunicate anyone who joined these flower societies. And the church had so strongly opposed Banjo Man, a play by Roderick Walcott featuring the flower societies, calling it banal and labelling it as "contrary to the doctrine of the church," that the play was banned and denied its first staging in 1958 at the first West Indies Arts Festival in Trinidad. Yet, a decade later, St.



The Holy Redeemer, Desruisseaux, Micoud

Omer's depictions of the flower societies was adding beauty and grace to the church. This also brings home the point about how revolutionary at the time was St. Omer's vision of giving the people back their God and religion by painting them into religious murals.

The Church of the Holy Redeemer in Desruisseaux, Micoud, is home to St. Omer's third mural, which renders the Last Supper. In this mural, instead of a Madonna at the centre, there is a black Christ crucified on the cross. This time the Madonna occupies the upper left hand corner of the mural, and in the upper right hand corner is a black priest or a black Christ blessing the Passover. Most of the other subjects in the painting are cast in groups of two or threes and they are either in a state of pious devotion or they are joyfully partaking of the body of Christ. To reinforce that the Last Supper is of celebration as much as of worship, it is accompanied with music as represented by a guitarist on each side of the mural.

The last of St. Omer's post Vatican II religious church murals, called *The Black Jesus*, can be found in the Church of St. Philip and James in Fonds St. Jacques, Soufriere. In no other mural did the artist as emphatically attempted to give the people back their God and religion as with *The Black Jesus*. In the center of the mural sits a magnificent and majestic black Jesus. He has a well shaped Afro hair style. A white flowing robe thrown over his shoulder covers the left half of his torso, while the other is exposed to display an envious physique exuding power and strength. Two fingers of his right hand is raised in peace and love, or peace be unto you, and his left hand stretches out from under the robe to welcome all onto him. The lower half of his body is

also adorned with a flowing robe, but this time the colour of red roses. A trio of flute players, another trio of folk musicians, a disciple holding a basket overflowing with bread and fish, St. Omer's trademark black Madonna, various priests who have served in St. Lucia (including Father John, Bishop Gachet, and Msgr Patrick Anthony) all come together to form the mural. Also, and as always, there are ordinary St. Lucians carrying on with their lives. The Pitons and the rich, fertile St. Lucian countryside are in the background. And in this mural there seems to be more children than in the others as if to say "suffer little children to come onto me."

St. Omer's religious paintings have received much critical scrutiny and acclaim. Dr. Patrick Anthony said, "St. Omer located revolution at the level of religious consciousness of a people, paving the way for a radical acceptance of an indigenous Christianity."

In *Another Life* (1973), Derek Walcott described some of St. Omer's religious paintings as "brown-bottomed tumbling cherubim,/ broad-bladed breadfruit leaves/ surround his oval virgin/ under her ringing sky,/ the primal vegetation/ the mute clangour of lilies,/ every brush stroke a prayer/ to Giotto, to Masaccio,/ his primitive, companionable saints."

Dr. Antonia McDonald Symthe, dean of literature studies at St. Georges University, St. Georges, Grenada, said "These religious murals, especially the altar piece at Jacmel Church, represent St. Omer's cross-cultural fusion of European Christianity and St. Lucian provincialism. The sacred and the secular are happily merged in a bold, coloured, primal Caribbean Tapestry...While St. Omer makes use of the conventional iconog-



The Black Church of St. Philip and James



Jesus Mural
Fonds St. Jacques, Soufriere.



Prismism Mural, Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, Castries

raphy of rural landscape, that is verdant hills; rural, fertile lands—happy poverty—he invest these with symbolic fusion. For him the divine and harmonious world becomes the manifestation of divine power and glory... At the same time, while these familiar, natural images illuminate the spiritual life of the artist, they also subverted colonial expectations by replacing harps and trumpets with shak-shak, cong shells and drums. And the colour black, typically used in art to represent shadows, works in St. Omer's paintings as a primary colour dominating the centre of his mural."

In addition, Dr. Symthe said that despite the indigenoussness or provincialism of St. Omer murals, they demonstrate that the artist "is well aware of the international artistic conventions and has absorbed with intelligence and great diligence the classical vocabulary. Witness, for example, the ways in which he conveys divinity by the use of semi abstractness of prisms in the depiction of the Virgin Mary or his insistence on circles to suggest the embracing force of divine love."

Some have said that art is more about the artist than the subject matter of the art. We have seen why issues of race and class played such an important role in what St. Omer chooses to paint, but why is the artist so taken up with religious paintings? Well, throughout our discussion, the artist expressed an unshakeable faith in God and the love of his religion. He said, "Everything I receive in my life I believe that I got it from God." He also said, "I'm very proud to be a Roman Catholic. The church has played a very important role in my life. Couple years ago I paid my first visit to the Vatican and when I entered Saint Peters, which was packed with people from all over the world, I was at home there just as I was at home in St. Lucia. A worldwide fellowship." He said further, "One thing that has sustained the black man is his

religion. He may have no money, no education, nothing, but his religion gives him strength."

In his murals St Omer brought race, class and religion together to make powerful statements. With one stroke of the brush he defeated the racial atrocities that blighted his country and gave expression to his religious passions. In fact, St. Omer's murals encompass all three of the elements—the St. Lucian Landscape, ordinary St. Lucians engaged in their everyday activities, and religious personas such as his trademark Madonnas—that continue to define his work. His St. Lucian subjects, both in his murals and in his other paintings, appear robust, confident, self assured, contented, at peace with themselves and well adjusted to their society and to their way of life. With a few brush strokes, the artist has forever ennobled the ordinary St. Lucian and uplifted his people to the level of gods. St. Omer said, "My country is as beautiful as any other so I paint my beautiful country. My people are as beautiful as any other so I paint my beautiful people." To that I am sure he would add, "my religion is as wonderful as any other so I paint my wonderful religion."

To the artist, ennobling St. Lucians is not just an issue of visual effect. He said St. Lucia is an artistic country and he believes St. Lucians are a free spirited and aristocratic people, and according to him this accounts for why such a tiny country has produced two Nobel Laureates. Here is how he explains it. "You see although we were poor we were never really suppressed, at least not as much as some of the other Caribbean islands. St. Lucia had a history where slavery never lasted long. The longest continuous period of slavery is sixty years. Thanks to the French Revolution, St. Lucia was one of the first countries in the new world to gain its independence. Well, they took it back



First and second generations of St. Omer Painters

from us, but during the French Revolution the fellows came and established liberty, equality, and fraternity. St. Lucians have that kind of *lògei*, that kind of pride, because for the most part they had always been a free people. When you are free, your mind is big, you see universal, nothing you see outside is bigger than you. How could such a tiny island as St. Lucia produce two Nobel Laureates. Derek Walcott is the mainstay of English literature today. How can a little country like this produce such greatness. It is something in its society, in its nature. St. Lucians may admire you, but they don't worship you. There is a quality, an aristocratic trait in St. Lucians. Every St. Lucian is an aristocrat. And that's something I don't want the politicians to destroy."

A brief look at history suggests there maybe some truth to St. Omer's premises. Because of Carib hostilities followed by the none ending rivalry between the English and the French for St. Lucia, the island was one of the last Caribbean territories where sugar and hence slavery took hold on a large scale. Yet, even after sugar and slavery were firmly established, the constant fighting and back and forth changing ownership of the island between France and England introduced frequent interruptions in plantation life. Many slaves seized upon the chaos that accompanied these interruptions to escape from the plantations. Furthermore, unlike islands like Barbados, Antigua and St. Kitts, which were very flat and thus most of the land area came under sugar cultivation, the mountainous terrain of St. Lucia meant that large portions of land were deemed marginal and unsuitable for plantation cultivation, and therefore were available to the slaves for cultivating their own crops, thus limiting their dependence on the plantations for their survival. Also, the mountains made it easier for the slaves to escape to freedom and sustain that freedom. In fact, in his book, *They Called Us Brigands: The saga of St. Lucia's Freedom Fighters*, Robert Devaux reveals that, considering the number of discovered moron sites, moronage activity was most prominent in Jamaica and St. Lucia. All this suggest that slavery did not bite as hard in St. Lucia as in some of the other islands, and so St. Omer may be correct in suggesting that St. Lucians have always enjoyed relatively greater freedom than have some of her Caribbean neighbours. And, of course, we would need to add St. Omer's name to the list of great St. Lucians whom as he said this freedom has helped produce.

Besides Harry Simmons, who were the painters that had the most influence on St. Omer's art? To this question the artist answered that the Renaissance, and later the impressionist painters had the greatest influence on his painting. However,



Third generation St. Omer Painter

beginning at age twenty-two, he started experimenting, doing his own thing. Out of that experimentation St. Omer said he invented a style of painting coined prismism by Derek Walcott when they were painting together in the fifties. He said the best and biggest example of his prismatic work is to be found in the Church of St. Francis in Martinique. However, a lesser example of St. Omer's invention can be found in St. Lucia at the extra mural department of the Castries branch of Sir Arthur Lewis Community College. Dr. Patrick Anthony described St. Omer's Martinique prismism mural as a "Triptych explosion in Prismism."

St Omer hinted that at St. Mary's College geometry was his favourite subject, and one of the highlights of his school days was when he learned and proved that the shortest distance between any two points was a straight line. He said that this geometric concept has stayed with him all his life, has formed the basis of all his logic, and became his answer to everything. The design of the St. Lucian flag bears witness to this influence of geometry on St. Omer's artistic sensibilities. Prismism represents yet another witness. The prismism mural at the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College presents a fiery assembly of prisms and other geometric shapes, where the human form is being rapidly replaced by the geometric.

His mural's aside, most of St. Omer's paintings have a rough, unfinished look. Obviously, more often than not he uses a pallet knife to apply paint to canvass. I asked him about that. He said that yes he prefers to use the pallet knife than the brush, because he doesn't set out to reproduce pictures. Giving expression or his own interpretation to the subject is more important to him than capturing every fine detail. Besides, he said that with the pallet knife he achieves a greater sense of excitement in his paintings. Indeed, most of St. Omer's paintings have not only a visual feel to them but they possess a tactile quality, as if it were not merely a painting of the object that was on display but the object itself. His clouds seem to be dancing, his mountains seem right there to be touched, and his people seem on the verge of bursting out of their frames.

Whom God Has Blessed

St. Omer's life as an artist bears testimony to the need for governmental support of the arts, for it seems without some form of assistance from the government, the artist

Harbour Log

(Castries, August 1955)

"statio haud malefida carinis" (old Badge of St. Lucia)

Translation: "A safe anchorage for ships."

In Port yesterday:

Schooners: Augustus B. Compton,

Acadius, Adalina,

Columbia, Enterprise,

S. Enid, Rebecca E. Mitchell.

Steamer: Electra.

Sloop: Lady Edwards.

Motor Vessels: Biscaya, Privateer, Nanin, Wanderer.

Yacht: Phenix.

Arrivals:

Motor Vessel Lady Stedfast, 87 tons, under capt. L.A. Marks, from St. Vincent, consigned to Peter & Co.

Departures:

Schooner Grenville Lass to Martinique.

Motor Vessel Fernwood to Barbados.

Expected:

Motor Vessel Nina on August 11.

H.M.S. Burghead Bay on August 24.

Meanwhile:

Sylvestre JnBaptiste, alias Master,

Seaman of Mary Ann Street, Castries,

was found guilty by the Magistrate in the First District Court, on a charge of unlawfully assaulting and beating

Dorothy Drayton, Laundress of Brazil Street, Castries, on July 23.

—John Robert Lee

might not have scaled the heights that he did. Here is what he had to say about that. "Its been a tough life because St. Lucia wasn't ready for artist, and I had to raise a family and make a living. Thank God they made a job for me in the ministry of education. The person I have to thank for that is Hunter Francois. And then I taught in the ministry for about thirty years. I was commissioned to propagate art throughout the island. I was getting a salary, I could raise my family and I could paint. Other than that it wasn't possible."

Notwithstanding St. Omer's fame as a painter, the artist would be disappointed if one was to think that his life had been just about painting. Lest that I should leave the interview with such a misleading impression, the artist said, "I had a good life. I have a nice, large family. All my children (nine) are healthy and doing well. All the boys (four) are brilliant artist. The daughters are also brilliant." He said that thirty years ago one of his daughters, Sophie St. Omer, who now resides in the U.K., became the first St. Lucian finalist in a Miss World contest. Another daughter, Dr. Lydia St. Omer, who has made her home in Italy, became the first (and maybe still the only) West Indian to gain the fellowship of the Royal Society of Radiologist. As starters she received first class honours in medicine (MD), next a PhD in medicine, and then she entered the college of Radiology. Considering all




Part of the 2005 carnival band (Ritual) that took its inspiration from the creative energy of St. Omer

this, the artist said, "I am blessed. Thank God. When you believe in God everything good will happen to you. When you set your mind on trying to help others, you cannot fail. When you concentrate on yourself you become insular, very narrow."

Approaching eighty, St. Omer shows no sign of hanging his brush or pallet knife. He said that since he is retired from the government service he has to paint to make a living. This is good news for the archdiocese of Castries, because as part of its preparations for Jubilee 2006, it has commissioned St. Omer to refurbish the existing murals in the city's Minor Basilica of the Immaculate Conception and to create fourteen new stained-glass windows depicting fourteen moments in the life of the blessed Virgin Mary. However, the project which is estimated to cost nearly a quarter million EC dollars, is truly a St. Omer family affair. Dustan St. Omer is the design coordinator, a son Lugi St. Omer the fine art director, another son Julio St. Omer the second fine art director, and a third son Giovanni St. Omer is the project director.

On my second visit to St. Omer's studio, this time to take photos of his paintings, I found a young lady working with the artist on the Minor Basilica project. St. Omer proudly introduced the young lady as his granddaughter, "the third generation of St. Omer painters." And if you are wondering how come St. Omer's sons have Italian sounding names, well the artist said that he named his sons by opening an art book and picking the first name his fingers came across.

St. Omer has clearly been blessed in more ways than one, and in the process he has blessed his country and its people, who thankfully continue to show him gratitude. This year the artist was chosen to grace the cover of the St. Lucia Cable&Wireless telephone directory; the Cultural Development Foundation paid its respects by selecting him as the featured or celebrated artist of the 2005 National Arts Festival; and Ritual, a St. Lucian Carnival Band headed by poet, Adrian Augier, paid special tribute to him by consciously invoking his creative spirit in the design of its costumes and the orchestration of its street parade. Dustan St. Omer is without a doubt St. Lucia's person of the year. And how fitting that this occurred in the same year that Trinidad proclaimed Derek Walcott its person of the year and France bestowed upon him Commander in the Order of Arts and Letters, its highest cultural award. It must be true, then, that greatness comes in pairs, and when it rains it pours. 

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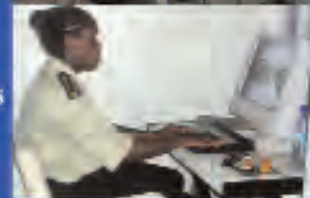


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Poetic Tribute To Emancipation Day



The share cropper, 1957, by Elizabeth Catlett

The Middle Passage

Upon this wretched earth,
I am a basket overflowing
With gifts from the past.

Upon this wretched earth;
Where sounds of haste disturb
the wonder of chirping birds,
Where pillars of black and white
destroy the mind's beautiful light,
where suckers of green invade
voluptuous valleys and sandy seas,

I tread.

Upon this wretched earth;
Where innocence is shackled through
A monstrous middle passage—
Without music,
Without poetry;
Without heart,
Without soul,

I tread.

Though labour pains
haunt my very existence,
I keep treading on old tired legs,

My feet blistered without the
Socks of Kennedy's bright boots;
My heart hungered without the eggs
Of Ma Lee's nest.

Upon the wretched paradise
of pregnant fools,
Full, fishy oceans,
Full breasted mountains,
Full, forested lanes,
I tread.

It's time to lie down,
The burial site awaits,
Where ants of the highest order
parade in black laced with white
and where sapped spirits reach for bottled counsel.
Upon this wretched earth,
where booked worms yearn for wings,
but never get further than
the backs of old masters;
I tread.

—Sharon Trezelle



Negro in an African Setting, 1934, by Aaron Douglas

The Prostitute

The diary of the prostitute
is a shut book
Closed to the eyes of poverty.
Like a ship anchored
in a deep water harbour
The prostitute awaits
the arrival of her crew,
Basking in the sunshine
of her blindness
She strokes her sandy shores
And dips her feet in the salty water.

She must not soak,
must not get all wet, for,

her hair, the crown of a dead queen
 Will bury itself in the lying ocean.
 Her hair must be straight,
 ready to curl to the wishes of her clients;
 So she just lies there,
 Deaf to the whispering wind,
 Cold to the heat of the scorching sun
 And blind to the jungled
 portraits of caged birds
 Begging for the bread
 of her peaked mountains.

She just lies there, gazing at the blank pages
 Waiting to be filled by the pens of kings,
 She dreams of whiter sands and of seas
 Where moss tells the stories of sunken submarines.
 She just lies there, hoping that new strokes
 Will broaden her hips and enrich her lips.

The first stroke had freed her from the moon's gaze,
 For the first time she did not feel the wrath
 Of the graveled earth;
 For the first time, she got lost
 Drunk with joy,
 She could now hold a pen and draw the hills
 And paint the colours of the sky.

The second stroke came like a hurricane
 Blowing the rusty roof of the British fort
 Under which she had
 crafted the twin peaks
 of her breasted mountain;

Today,
 She still lies there
 Still afraid to milk her mountain;
 Her pages, crippled by poisoned pens
 Mother the links of an unbroken chain.

— Sharon Trezelle

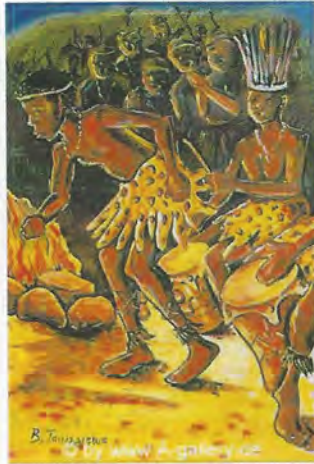
The Kilimanjaro



I entered the warmth of the Kilimanjaro,
 in the heart of Adams Morgan,
 in the nation's capital.
 Sounds greeted me—reggae, calypso,
 cadence, high-life—all of the same root.
 I occupied a dark corner
 as if I didn't want to be seen.



Dance With Me, Martin
Kamuyu, Kenya



Mbakuma Dance,
Batanayi Tawengwa,
Zimbabwe



Night-life, 1943
Archibald J. Motley



La Rose Dance,
Flower Festivals Mural

I sipped on a Guinness.
 The music was getting to me,
 or was it the Guinness?
 I figured it had to be both.
 Something about the music,
 or was it the Kilimanjaro,
 made me mellow, mellow, mellow.
 It was as if the music had entered
 the depth of my soul and become one with it.
 I looked at the faces.
 They were me multiplied by a thousand.
 They read as a map of Africa,
 Africa of both the new and the old.
 The music and the map of Africa set me thinking:
 what spirit
 what obeah
 what voodoo
 what magic
 has Africa placed on its children that nothing—
 not slavery
 not colonialism
 not imperialism—
 could take Africa out of her children?
 Some talked of samba;
 others of reggae, calypso, cadence;
 some others of jazz, blues, soul;
 still some others of high-life, juju, soukous.
 The ancestors whispered in my ears:
 "Africa in disguise."
 What feeling? What feelings?
 My heart expanded as the
 whole of Africa entered.
 I felt like screaming,
 I African, we Africans,
 Africa thy children have come home.
 I wanted to share Africa with the world,
 but instead I maintained my cool,
 continued to seep on my Guinness,
 and floated with the music.
 I wanted to take it all in,
 because feelings so deep, so warm,
 so pervasive were uncommon.
 I didn't know when next such feelings
 would come my way.
 I entered a trance.
 The music was juju.
 I floated, floated, floated to Africa,
 or was it St. Lucia, my country
 of birth and upbringing?
 I'm not sure.
 I arrived at a village.
 Is it an African village,
 or is it Desruisseaux,
 the village of my youthful roaming?
 Never mind, they are one and the same.
 I heard drums, I heard the stamping of feet,
 I heard chants that were familiar but baffling.
 Yet without missing a beat
 I joined the villagers in dance.
 My sensations became motion,

my motion became spirit.
 Suddenly the music changed; it was reggae.
 The trance broken.
 Someone grabbed me,
 set chains upon my arms and legs,
 forced me into the dark,
 repulsive dungeon of a ship.
 I screamed, vomited, suffocated.
 With sickness I arrived on a sugar plantation,
 in a strange world,
 where toil and sweat were my only solace.
 Then as if by magic I was free.
 I had survived. I had triumphed.
 In celebration, I sang along with Peter Tosh:
 "No matter where you come from,
 as long as you are a black man
 you are an African."
 A force swelled within me.
 I could overcome any obstacle.
 I was proud.
 I was superior.
 I was on top of Mount Kilimanjaro.
 I was in an extended orgasm.
 The orgasm burst. The beat quickened.
 For some reason I wanted to party.
 I tasted rum and coke,
 I saw bikinis and surfers,
 I saw the sea and the setting sun
 meeting the horizon,
 Sand tickled my feet,
 I heard steel drums,
 I found myself jumping behind a band.
 The music was calypso. I went crazy.
 I grabbed mama Africa.
 I held her tight. She held me tighter.
 I whined. She whined more.
 My blood swelled;
 Mama Africa smiled knowingly.
 She squeezed me, and I felt her
 African lifeblood flow from her to me.



Standing Female Figure
 Burkina Faso

I'm afraid to let go.
 I think heaven, paradise.
 I envision mother earth, fertility dolls.
 I see ebony Eve in the heart of Africa
 giving birth to the human race.
 I sighed, "ahhhh, what am I going
 to do with you, Mama Africa?"
 I hoped this night, this music,
 this warmth, this feeling would never end.
 But the evening eventually ended,
 and I unwillingly let go of Mama Africa,
 and walked out of the Kilimanjaro,
 trading its warmth for the December cold.

—Anderson Reynolds

Labor Day

It was Labor Day
 The roots met the branches
 The ancestors met the offsprings
 The old met the new
 Africa came to America
 Brooklyn was where it was happening.
 Rap gave way to reggae
 Reggae gave way to cadence
 Cadence gave way to calypso
 Trumpets gave way to steel drums
 Steel drums gave way to tanbous
 In the end all were the same.
 Like one the people were
 Unified by the music and vibrations
 Way back the vibrations brought the people
 Back to the old country.
 Brooklyn became Africa
 Africa became the world
 And like there was room for nothing else.
 Colors. Red, green, yellow, purple, blue
 Over black of all shades
 A mosaic in motion
 Twisting, swaying, jumping, gyrating
 Reminding the people, lest they forget,
 They are all from the same source.
 The people danced, danced, danced
 Danced to the beat of their ancestors.
 The people pranced, pranced, pranced
 Pranced to the shores of the Caribbean.
 The people whined, whined, whined
 Whined to the heart of Africa.
 On this day, the leaves, branches,
 Trunk, and roots converged to
 Become one and the same
 Distinguishable, but inseparable.

—Anderson Reynolds



My Village, by Mkumba, Tanzania



Derek Walcott: The Prodigal

by Anderson Reynolds

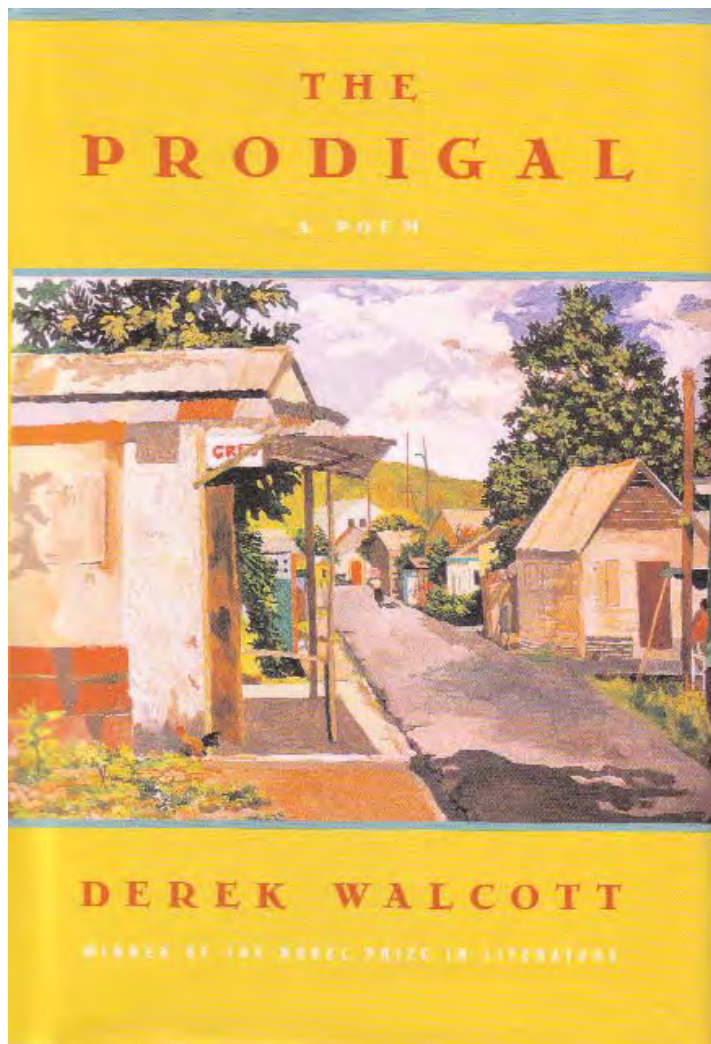
“Prodigal, what were your wanderings about? What did you swear to uphold?
This (village) filth? Or the aria that soars like a banner from its gates?”

In the discussion that followed the 2005 Derek Walcott Nobel Laureate lecture, a young man from the audience suggested to the great man that it was about time he wrote a novel. Yet a familiarity with Walcott's work would suggest that he has produced at least three volumes of verse that read much like novels because each involves a book-length narrative that has all the elements of a novel, including characters, setting, plot, dialogue, etc. The three works I have in mind include *Another Life* (1973), *Omeros* (1990), and most recently *The Prodigal* (2004).

The *Prodigal* is about an aging wanderer who has embarked on yet another journey that may well be his last. “Perhaps soon, these pages must be closed.” This journey is as much mythical, symbolic, and a trip into memory lane as it is geographical. But what is the prodigal in search of? What is the purpose of all his wanderings? At the end of his wanderings would he have found whatever he was looking for, and at what cost? Equally important, will the prodigal finally find his place, finally arrive at a resting place of contentment?

The Pilgrimage

The journey begins in autumn on a train to Pennsylvania. “In autumn, on the train to Pennsylvania, / he placed his book face-down on the sunlit seat / and it began to move.”



Although the prodigal remained unfamiliar with the “staidness of trains” (after all, there were no trains, nor large monuments, nor sky-touching cathedrals in the land of his childhood), trains held a great fascination for him. “There was sweet meditation on a train,” and because of “their web of schedules, incoherent announcements, the terror of missing his train, and because trains had a child's delight in motion,” they reminded him of novels.

The prodigal's mythical train breaks down in the middle of the nineteenth century, and there, as he steps off the train, he realizes that he has missed the Twentieth Century, time has passed him by. He has grown old. Time has passed by too quickly.

For the prodigal, autumn passes swiftly—“I missed the fall. It went with a sudden flare”—so he arrives in Europe, in Switzerland, the Alps, in the throat of winter. It is a white and cold Europe. A relentless, unfeeling, indifferent Europe rigid in its absoluteness. Not surprisingly, the prodigal, who

admits that he is “from a climate without wolves,” is terrified and alienated. He said, “My fear was white / and my belief obliterated.” Clearly, winter is not the prodigal's favourite season. In another poem, *A Village Life*, from *The Gulf* (1970), speaking of his first winter experience, in New York, the poet said, “I watched that winter morning my first snow / I was a frightened cat in that grey city / homesick, my desire / crawled across snow / like smoke, for its lost fire.”

The wintry European world that the prodigal depicts seems to work at several levels. It signals once again that the prodigal

has arrived at the winter of his life, approaching the end of all journeys. It hints at the alienation and disorientation the prodigal had experienced when he first left the Caribbean and ventured into Europe and North America. It may suggest that like the prodigal, Europe is aging. It is a civilization in decay. A wintry Europe also brings to mind the destruction and devastation that a seemingly cold, relentless, unfeeling Europe has visited upon her own people and other societies around the globe.

Notwithstanding, in Europe the prodigal experiences some joys, like Ilse, whom he encountered in the Switzerland mountain town of Zermatt, and whose "hair above the crisp snow of table linen/ was like a flare, it led him, stumbling, inane;" and like the other "secular angels" in Venice, in Milan, "hardening that horn of ageing desire and its devastations." Still, the prodigal



Zermatt, Switzerland

gal is a wanderer, a fugitive; his moments of pleasure are fleeting. He asked, "Again, how many farewells and greetings/ on cheeks that change their name, how many kisses/ near tinkling earrings that fade like carriage bells." In another place he said, "All these remembered women melt into one,/ when my small words, like sails, must leave their haven." Is it any wonder then that the prodigal sees this as his final wandering, his last book? One senses that he has gotten tired of it all, and he would like nothing better than to remain in one place and get some lasting rest.

The prodigal's journey is more thematic than geographic. The world of places and personalities that he encountered in books, paintings and history are given as much importance as those of real life. One conjures up the other and apparently in some instances, at least in his mind, they are the same. It is in

books that the prodigal first encountered the world of his pilgrimage. The terror he experienced as he gazed over the Alps in the death-grip of winter was the same terror that "magnetized a child" from a reading of "Andersen's Ice Maiden and Whittier's Snow-Bound." According to the prodigal, he met "The Ice Maiden" of Andersen's book in the Alps. "I did not know then that/ she worked as a blond waitress in Zermatt." The mountains of Abruzzi made him recall the Abruzzi of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. In the lobby of a hotel in the Italian port city of Pescara, he was there reading a book on the life of Nora, James Joyce's wife, only to run into the actress whose picture was on the book's cover and who was playing the role of Nora in the film version of the book. So touched was the prodigal by this coincident that he thought of it as not only fated but as a miracle, an epiphany.

Leaving behind the Alps, Ilse, and the Ice Maiden waitress, and after brief stops in Geneva and the lake city of Lausanne, Switzerland, the prodigal enters Italy. It is an intoxicating Italy. "The bright air full of drunken insects." Beauty is everywhere—the "erect-flame cypresses," the olive groves, the castles, the "infantry of pines," the "serene soft mountains" of Abruzzi. "O it was lovely coming through the mountains." "The widening love of Italy growing stronger/ against my will with sunlight in Milan ..." But it seems of all Italy it is the Via Veneto, a district in the city of Venus, that the prodigal is most in love with.

*I lived in two villages: Greenwich and Gros Ilet,
and loved both almost equally. One had the sea,
grey morning light along the waking water,
the other a great river, and if they asked
what country I was from I'd say, "The light
of that tree-lined sunrise down the Via Veneto.*

In Italy the prodigal visits another port city, Genoa, the birth place of Christopher Columbus. Of the Admiral he said, "O Genoan, I come as the last line of where you began." As was to be expected Genoa reminds the prodigal not only of the Discoverer (his statue was impossible to miss), but of the sad chapter—slavery, middle passage, human degradation—in the history of his people. "The port whose wharf holds long shadows and silence." "The caravel's sigh/ at the remorseful future that lay ahead." "The smell of history I carry in my clothes."

The same way that in the middle of the prodigal's terror and sadness he is able to find beauty and joy, in the middle of his intoxication there are sadness and devastation. As the prodigal feasted his eyes on the splendour of the Italian countryside, the fate of his twin brother, Roderick, suddenly surfaced, "Diabetic, dying, my double." In Pescara he met a beautiful but sad woman whose name was a "mountain flower's" and who told him that the Jews were to blame for the war in the Baltic. The atrocities, casualties, desolation, and dislocation of war, a much too often European occurrence, are brought into view. The words of the sad beauty also brought to light this European irrational compulsion of blaming the Jews for their problems and using that as an excuse to dispose of them, either through expulsion or worse through genocide as was the case in Hitler's Germany.

After Italy and the Baltics, the poet dwells on the atrocities of the Russian empire and World War II Germany, and the ease with which history can forgive and forget. Speaking of Germany, he said, "History is healing,/ and charity is its scar, its carapace."

And of Russia and Eastern Europe, "History here is the covering-over of corpses/ not only in trenches of quicklime, but also/ the dandruff of pigeondrops in the stone-wigs of statues."

After Europe, The Prodigal jumps to Columbia. However, in sharp contrast to the white, dreary weather that the prodigal encountered when he first arrived in Europe, as if to mirror the passionate yet brutal history of Latin America, in Columbia he is caught in the heat and drought of midsummer. Accompanied by the Ambassador and his assistant, and plain clothes soldiers, we see the prodigal in a car departing the Columbian port city of Barranquilla, and heading for the walled (also a coastal) city of Cartagena. The military escort is a necessity because the country



Roderick Walcott

Barranquilla's Caribbean coast, he said, "Not a new coast, but home." Referring to Cartagena, which is also on the Caribbean Sea, he said, "Our sea's first city." And, "Not a strange coast, but home."

The death of Constanzia seemed also to serve as an omen of the death of Walcott's brother. In the following scene we find the poet lying on a bed in a hotel in Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city. It is a rest without peace, and a quiet without solace. But the oppressive summer heat is not the principal source of his unrest. It is here that the prodigal extensively mourns the passing of his brother.

*... and between trees dotting the plain, fog,
thick as your clogged breath, ...*

... I read this.

March 11. 8:35 a.m. Guadalajara, Saturday.

Roddy. Toronto. Cremated today.

The streets and trees of Mexico covered with ash.

Your soul, my twin, keeps fluttering in my head

Still in mourning, the poet asked, "What was our war, veteran of threescore years and ten?/ to save the salt light of the island/ to protect and exalt its small people."

Not surprisingly, his brother's sickness and then death made him painfully aware of his own mortality.



Gros Islet, St. Lucia



Greenwich Village, New York



Via Veneto, Venus

is plagued by ransom motivated kidnapping. Constanzia, the young beautiful sergeant with "olive-green uniform" covering a "plump and rounded body," is leading the way on a motorbike. She would represent yet another beauty with whom the prodigal had shared a moment of encounter. "Earlier, I had said goodbye to the beautiful plump soldier/ to the berry-red lipstick, goodbye to eyes/ that held, I hoped, more than formal affection,/ Desire flashed from my face/ like a weapon caught in sunlight." However, this encounter would end in the most dramatic fashion. The prodigal was soon to witness her death. "A shot rang out/ and the beautiful soldier lay/ on the dry grass verge staring at the blue sky."

The shooting death of the young, beautiful soldier seemed to echo the history of Latin America with its legacy of bloody revolutions, of European rape and plunder, and suggests that the same was still going on. "Your country's discipline of sadness." Nonetheless the prodigal shares an affinity with this part of the world. Its rape and plunder were not unlike those visited on his homeland. Besides they shared the same Caribbean Sea. Of

*Threescore and ten plus one past our allotment,
in the morning mirror, the disassembled man.
And all the pieces that go to make me up—
the detached front tooth from a lower denture
the thick fog I cannot pierce without glasses
the shot of pain from a kidney
these piercings of acute mortality.*

The Cost of Exile

Besides his brother's death, on this pilgrimage the prodigal comes face to face with a great dilemma that has plagued generations of West Indians and have been the wellspring of much Caribbean literature. Though of breathtaking beauty, the islands are tiny worlds of small-minded politicians, with populations often unappreciative of one's gift and more likely to discourage than encourage one's talent. The same islands that are

visitors' paradises, present one with little opportunity to realize one's artistic potential. So at that critical, youthful age when ambition is a flame as wide as the universe, the very mountains that give the islands their uniqueness and magnify their beauty may feel like a rope around one's neck. Under these conditions, it seems that the only way one can fulfill one's ambition, keep one's creative flame alive, or at the very least satisfy the youthful, burning desire to see the world, is to trade the land of one's birth for the great metropolises of the world.

This migration of West Indian writers is not without vindication. Most West Indian writers of note spent a significant part of their adult life outside the region. Indeed, it appears that they are at their most prolific while away from their homeland. "We read, we travel, we become," said the prodigal. On the other hand, many West Indians who showed great promise in their youth but never sought the opportunities of Europe or America, soon gave up their artistic life (at least they were not heard of after awhile) after their first few outpourings. It would appear that there is something stifling about these islands. There is talent. There is prodigious talent. Derek Walcott himself has attested to that. However, it seems after the initial flowering (probably because of a lack of nurturing and limited opportunities for artists to live by their art) frustration and despondency set in.

Regarding the vindication noted above, no greater example than Walcott exists. After all, he reached the summit of the artistic and intel-



Genoa, Italy



Guadalajara, Mexico



Cartagena, Columbia

lectual world, one of only three West Indians to have done so. Interestingly enough all three spent a great deal of their productive lives outside the region.

However, as any economist will tell you, there is no free lunch and everything has a cost. What is the price West Indians have had to pay for the abandonment of their homeland and for the fulfilment of their artistic and career dreams? Well it turns out there is something about these mountains, seemingly rising out of the sea and perpetually embracing the land; these beaches of touristic delight; these patches of tropical profusion; these people of rainbow exuberance who can never refuse a stranger and who possess an appetite for life that belies the truth of their history, that keeps calling the sons and daughters of the soil, no matter the distance they have travelled, to come back home. "They are in the blood" says Walcott in *Midsummer: LIV* (1984). "The midsummer sea, the hot pitch road, this grass, these shacks that made me,/jungle and razor grass shimmering by the roadside, the edge of art;/wood lice are humming in the sacred wood,/nothing can burn them out, they are in the blood;"

At his New York apartment on the Hudson River the prodigal said of a ship that was leaving the river for the Caribbean, "Its cargo: my longing." Regardless the subject or setting of Walcott's poetry, one can always expect St. Lucia and the Caribbean to pop in for a visit. "They are in the blood."

What probably intensifies the longing and yearning for the same homeland West Indian expatriates had been so happy (and could not have waited) to vacate, is that partly because of the colour of their skin they could never become fully integrated in their adopted societies. Between the walls of the universities or the work place, among their colleagues, the West Indians by virtue of their astonishing achievements may be held in awe, but no sooner they step out into the general population, their complexion marks them for inferiority and second class citizenry. Probably, for this and other reasons, West Indians can never come to fully accept the people of the metropolises as their people, and their adopted homes as their country. Their people and country forever remain those they had left behind. Consequently, borrowing a phrase from V.S. Naipaul, "Half-a-Life" is what they are relegated to in these foreign countries.

The prodigal admits that his talent had brought him to Europe, but indeed it was a totally different place. "A conspiring pen/ had brought him thus far/ but this was a different climate,/ a different country." In another place he complains, "After the museums and the sunlit streets,/ in all that completion there is still

an emptiness."

Yet the cost to our West Indian expatriates goes beyond yearning and alienation, because there is something about our culture and the way we are raised that make us never to forget our debt to our country. One would be hard pressed to find a St. Lucian who has recently travelled abroad to study whose stated ambition or mission is not to get an education and hurry home to contribute to their country. Of course, whether they do so or not is a different story altogether, but those who did not return would forever harbor guilt about having sold out, having betrayed the faith. This guilt may partly explain the generosity of Caribbean expatriates in sending money back home. Given the high ratio of the expatriate population to the population back home, these remittances are of such magnitude that they go a long way in keeping some of these economies afloat.

In that regard the prodigal is no different. In a moment of languor and guilt, he said, "My heart/ was available for a reasonable price." For selling his soul he pleaded, "Forgive us our treacheries, so lightly lost!"



Anse La Raye, St. Lucia

The prodigal's selling of himself to Europe is not a straightforward thing. It is a slow painful process. He asked should he give up Europe or at least give Europe the half of himself that belongs to it. "And Europe? / Surrender it as the waves render the idea/ of opera and the ochre walls of Parma;/ or let it claim what's half, at least, its own/ from illegitimate or legitimate blood."

How does the prodigal reconcile or make up for this the selling of his soul? It seems he has done so by putting his gift at the disposal of small inconsequential places, for example, the Caribbean islands, because though they are small insignificant places the essence of their existence are no different than that of Europe and the other places that speak of empires. Indeed, Walcott's poetry is one that has encompassed the world without ever losing sight of his homeland. "In your ambitious, pompous panel of a country fete,/ work on those minuscule extra figures. They too have lives/ those little figures, their separate narrative/ away from but parallel to the centre/ where the monumental clangour is in progress."

The prodigal seemed to have also made reconciliation by maintaining a sense of justice and honesty. "Saying to the sea and Europe, 'Here I am,'/ division swayed by justice, poetry/ unbiased to an absolute pivot, that is my sword's/ surrendering victory over myself, my better halves."

The cost to the expatriates does not stop there. While away they seem to forget all the negatives of their homeland and reminisce on the good times they once had, and all the things they are missing. But when they return home, either for good or for an extended visit, it does not take long for them to awake to the limiting and oppressive nature of their homeland that had driven them away in the first place. Also the warmth and comfort of home that the expatriates had once enjoyed can never be fully recaptured. Not least because their outlook on life and mode of behaviour has changed—an "untethered pilgrimage" in which "what was altered was something more profound/ than geography, it was the self," says the prodigal—and culturally speak-

ing their countrymen no longer see them as fully belonging. In other words, home may no longer be home. Also, coming to grips with the realities of their homeland, the expatriates may experience a bout of helplessness of being unable to help their people, yet this was one of their stated reasons for going abroad. Worse, it may soon dawn upon the expatriates that in truth they are more at home on foreign soil than they are at home. Expatriates would often admit that after getting use to the structured societies of the developed world, it is a bit unsettling returning to the seemingly structureless societies of the Caribbean. So homelessness represents yet another cost of the fulfilment of their ambitions.

Most of these sentiments surrounding the returning expatriates find expression in *Homecoming: Anse La Raye, The Gulf and Other Poems* (1969). In this poem Walcott said, "There are no rites/ for those who have returned." And, "Never guessed you'd come/ to know there are homecomings without home." This feeling of unwelcomeness is further compounded by the expatriates sense that he has done nothing to help his people. For example, in the same poem, referring to a group of children who because of his clothes and posture thought he was a tourist so came swarming in search of gifts, the poet said, "You gave them nothing/ Their curses melt in air/ The black cliffs scowl/ the ocean sucks its teeth/ like that dugout canoe." In *The Light of the World, The Arkansas Testament* (1987), the poet went further to say, "I had abandoned them." And, "There was nothing they wanted, nothing I could give them/ but this thing I called 'The Light of the World.'" The prodigal also alludes to this sense of homelessness. He said, "unreal in either world."

However, it would be misleading to suggest that prior to Walcott's travels he was well integrated in his society. Even from a reading of Walcott's own poetry one gets the impression he was somewhat apart, that in several different ways he grew up on the edges of St. Lucian society. To begin with he was from a Methodist family in an ocean of Roman Catholicism. At best he could only be an observer of Roman Catholic rites of passages such as First Communion that more than 95 percent of the pop-



The Pitons of St. Lucia are in the blood.

ulation participated in because more than 95 percent of the population was Roman Catholic. Second, Derek Walcott's mix of Scottish, Dutch and African parentage set him apart from the vast majority of St. Lucians. In his poetry, referencing his mixed ancestry he called himself a "divided child," a "shabine," a "red nigger." Consider, for example, *The Schooner Flight*, from the *The Star Apple Kingdom* (1979). In it the Shabine (red nigger) character who takes flight from the Republic (Trinidad) on a schooner suggests that his complexion placed him at a certain discomfit in West Indian society.

*I had no nation now but the imagination.
After the white man, the niggers didn't want me
when the power swing to their side.
The first chain my hands and apologize, "History";
The next said I wasn't black enough for their pride.*

In another part of the poem, Shabine explained himself further.

*I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger and English in me,
and either I'm nobody or I'm a nation*

This outsider status can be painful and lonely, but as an outsider one gets special vantage points, and one is forced to go internal, to search for answers of why one is different. However, it is this very outlook, this sense of imbalance—after all, art is a search for balance—this sense that something is missing, that becomes the raw material for writing, for art, for intellectualization. The habit of critical, honest, objective analysis that one develops from analyzing oneself is in turn applied to society overall. V.S. Niapaul is the consummate outsider. He is such an outsider that he seemed unreconciled with his own most common choice of artistic expression. He has hinted that the novel has no future, it will soon die, and his latest novel, *Magic Seeds*, will be his last. One of the reasons put forward for the Jews' disproportionate contribution to world intellectual output is that throughout most of their history they were strangers in other people's land, outsiders looking on. To a large extent, Derek Walcott's poetry, *The Prodigal* no exception, seems to be about reconciling the cross currents, the dividedness, in his life. Dividedness between his European and African ancestry, dividedness between English and his native creole language, dividedness between his love of the islands and his love of the great metropolises. This notion is most eloquently expressed in *A Far Cry from Africa*, from the collection, *In A Green Light* (1962).

*I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?*

And in *The Prodigal*: "And the cracked heart and the dividing mind/ yawn like a chasm, from too many fissures."

The Homecoming

The prodigal arrives home in the middle of the lent season; the drought and miserly season. He has returned with foreign ways and thinking. "He had the smell of cities in his clothes,/ the steam and soot of trains of Fascist stations." Therefore, he is apprehensive that his countrymen will not recognize, much less acknowledge him. "The rock-brown dove had fluttered from that fear/ that what he loved and knew once as a boy/ would panic and forget him from the change/ of character that the grunting swine could smell." Thus the prodigal is much relieved when even the most common of his people acknowledges him. "A sow and her litter. Acknowledged prodigal."

When the rains came the poet is elated. "I had forgotten the benediction of rain/ edged with sunlight, the prayers of dripping leaves/ And I have nothing more/ to write about than gratitude. For *la mer*,/ soleil-là, the bow of the arc-en-ciel/ and the archery of blackbirds from its/ radiant bow." In another verse, "There was a beautiful rain this morning," he pronounced. So not only was the poet acknowledged and welcomed by his people, but he received a cleansing, a rebirth, showers of blessing. But as always his blessings are mixed. The rain reminded him of his brother and many of his friends who were no longer among the living. "There were so many names the rain recited:/ Alan,

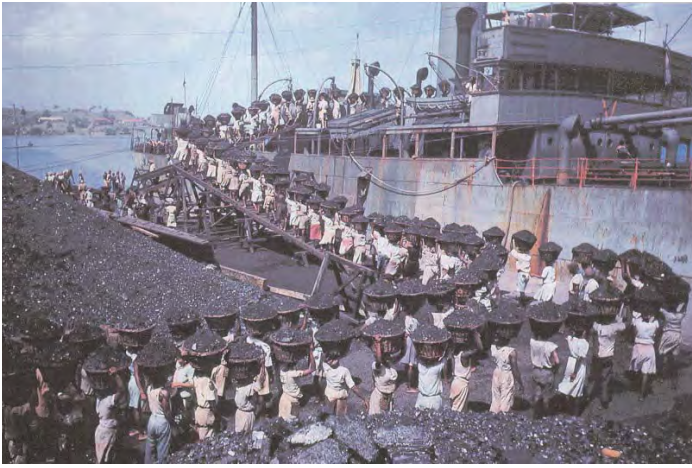


Castries' surrounding waters

Joseph and Claude and Charles and Rody." Then quoting Edward Thomas, he said, "Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon."

The prodigal is preoccupied with other thoughts that go to the very heart of the nature of our existence, of who we are. One such preoccupation is that one of the effects of visiting the "big countries," the great metropolises of the world with their long legacy of recorded history is to make us painfully aware of how small and inconsequential is our homeland. Compared to these "big countries" our islands are mere pebbles decorating the beachfront. This begs the question of what to make of that? Should we all migrate out of these islands? Should we abandon our way of life for that of these metropolises? Should we accept inferiority and be contented that this is the nature of things?

Apparently after much mental oscillation the prodigal has found some answers. He seems to be saying stop torturing ourselves with these comparisons. They are meaningless. Stop concerning ourselves with the "conflicts of origins," which side of our ancestry (Asian, African, European) is most legitimate, which side is superior. For that is of no value. Accept ourselves as we are, as we have become. One branch of our ancestry is no



The Charbonniers

less than the other.

*... There in that hall
among those porcelain-pink and dour burghers
was an illegitimate ancestor, as equal
as the African fishing through tall river-reeds
to pierce you, threshing on his stick.*

We are what we are, whatever that is. Size is not an indication of superiority. Monuments, statues, sky-touching cathedrals, trains, great libraries, do not form the essence of humanity. To the extent that all human beings are trying to solve the same riddle of life, and no society has gotten closer to the answer than any other, all are equal. Better yet, take a page from our hills, and our flora and fauna and make no comparisons and ascribe no imagined values to what you see.

*... there is nothing imperial
in our plumes ...
... we have
no envy of the white mountains, or of the white horn
above the smothered inns, no envy of the olive
or redoubtable oaks. We were never emblems.
The dawn would be fresh, the morning bliss,
if the light would break on your glaucous eyes
to see us without a simile, not just the green world
or streams where the pebbles are parables*

In Piaille (possibly Piaye, in the district of Choiseul) the prodigal witnessed what seemed to be a Kele Rite celebration that reminded him of death, which has become all too common for him. The celebration also made him recall Africa and the island's slavery past. However, probably because he has spent too much time abroad and/or because of his mixed heritage the prodigal feels disconnected, alienated from this part of his culture. "Your pale feet cannot keep time/ feel no communion with its celebrants,/ they keep another time, the time you keep/ comes with a different metre." This no doubt represents yet another cost of exile.

Throughout the book, including his homecoming, the prodigal contemplates the inevitability of old age and death. "Do you think Time makes exceptions, do you think/ Death mutters, 'Maybe I'll skip this one?'" Apart from physical decline, one problem the prodigal has with getting old is that it brings to

sharp focus both the imminence of death and all the things that would be left undone. All the great novels he had wished to read that would remain unread, all the books he had wished to write that would remain unwritten, all the journeys he wished to go on that would remain untravelled.

Still, the prodigal admits that old age is not all bad. At his ripe age he was no longer consumed by ambition, for he had long become whatever or whomever he was going to be. "I look and no longer sigh for the impossible." His craft had long arrived at the level it was ever going to reach. Indeed, time has passed him by. Since he need no longer worry about where his craft was headed, or the fulfilment of his ambitions or the fear of not realizing his potential, he has at last found peace, and he now takes delight in just being whatever he is, even if what is, is dated or may be even irrelevant. "I sipped the long delight of a past time/ where ambition was too late. My craft was stuck./ My deep delight lay in being dated/ like the archaic engine. Peace was immense."

Moreover, the poet admonishes himself that instead of complaining he should be counting his blessings that he still has all his faculties about him and that his crafts (painting, poetry, playwright) still presented him with challenges and therefore were still worth doing. "Be happy; you're writing from the privilege/ of all your wits about you in your old age,/ be grateful that each craft stays hard to do."

Also, at this ripe age the poet has gotten a second lease on life. Thanks to his homeland he is seeing things afresh. "My eyes are washed clean in the sea-wind, I feel/ brightness and sweet alarm, the widened pupils/ of the freshly familiar, things that have not moved/ since childhood, nouns that have stayed/ to keep me company in my old age."

Another facet of the poet's mature age is that at this stage in his life his legacy is probably more important to him than what is going on now. For it is an age where one reflects back and wonders what was it all about? What was accomplished and to what purpose? Was it all worth it? Did one get it right? If one had to do it over, what would one change? "Prodigal, what were your wanderings about?" Asked the poet. "Were your life and work/ simply a good translation?" "And have I looked at life, in other words,/ through some inoperable cataract?"

Referring to a St. Lucian fishing village with "its rags of shadow," the "reek from its drains," its "rum-raddled fishermen," and with a fish market teeming with flies, the poet asked, "What did you swear to uphold? This filth?/ Or the aria that soars like a banner from its gates?"

The poet had promised to uphold the faith, "swearing not to leave them/ for real principalities in Berlin or Milan." Several decades before, in *Another Life*, speaking of himself and the painter, Dustan St. Omer, he wrote:

*But drunkenly, or secretly, we swore,
disciples of that astigmatic saint,
that we would never leave the island
until we had put down, in paint, in words,
as palmists learn the network of a hand,
all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines,
every neglected, self-pitying inlet
muttering in brackish dialect*

But ironically the very craft that he had planned to put at the

disposal of his people, as it gained celebrity status, was what led him to betray the faith. "But my craft's irony was in betrayal,/ it widened reputation and shrank the archipelago/ to stepping stones." From such lines, one gets the feeling that even at the end of his wanderings, the poet still has mixed feelings about the value of his contributions. He is still in doubt about whether he had gotten it right.

As discussed above and as revealed in much of Walcott's poetry, the poet is very much divided between Europe and St. Lucia. Nevertheless, in *The Prodigal*, towards the end, the poet makes it clear what his choice would be if forced to choose. And given that there is something, though undecipherable, about this tiny place of ours that will always pull us towards it, it is not too difficult to decipher what that choice would be. "He feels the humming that goes on in the tired heart/ once you are home."

However, it is no easy feat for the poet to surrender Europe. After all, he has gotten used to Europe, Europe has become part of him, he has some of Europe inside him. Of the cities of Italy, he said, "So an adopted city slides into me,/ till my gestures echo those of its citizens,/ and my shoes that slide over a sidewalk grating/ move without fear of falling, move as if rooted/ in the metre of memory." But, not only that. The poet cannot stop marvelling at Europe. "I have seen Venice trembling in the sun,/ shadow-shawled Granada and the cork groves of Spain,/ across the coined Thames, the grey light of London,/ the drizzles sweeping Pescara's esplanade/ and stone dolphins circling the basin of a fountain."

And it isn't that the poet has illusions about his homeland, because in certain respects he sees it as of no comparison to Europe. "Compare Milan, compare a glimpse of the Arno,/ with this river-bed congealed with rubbish." Yet, the poet's choice is clear. "But, on the sloping pastures behind Gros Piton,/ in the monumental shadow of that lilac mountain,/ I have seen the terrestrial paradise."

Watching a "twin-sailed shallop rounding Pigeon island" the poet declared, "This line is my horizon./ I cannot be happier than this."

In another place he said, "This bedraggled backyard, this unfulfilled lot,/ this little field of leaves, brittle and fallen,/ of all the cities of the world, this is your centre."

Part of the reason for this loyalty to St. Lucia, the poet seems to be saying, is that the land speaks of his ancestors, the Neg Marons of St. Lucian history. "What a great gulf/ of loyalty of inheritance comes from that fact—/ that these are your ancestors, not the cloaked pilgrims/ of the one time in aureate Venice."

The Prodigal ends with the poet on a boat taking him on a dolphin-watching trip in St. Lucian waters. The further behind the boat leaves shore the more apprehensive the poet becomes of his safety. Besides, in his old age he no longer believes in myths or legends, not least the myth (as he sees it) of the existence of the dolphins. But there, when least expecting, were the dolphins joyfully leaping into air and plunging into the sea. The poet is thrilled. The unbelievable has manifested right in front of his eyes. His faith is restored. "I would not have believed in them, being too old/ and sceptical from the fury of one life's/ determined benedictions, but they are here./ Angels and dolphins. The second, first."

But this was not the first time that dolphins had brought the poet hope. In a different part of the world, in Alpine waters, the sight of dolphins at play had helped him reconciled the death of

his brother. "And those finished hopes/ that I would see you again, my twin, 'my dolphin./ And yet elation drove the dolphins' course/ as if both from and to you, their joy was ours."

The Deseasonalization of Derek Walcott

Reading Walcott is like taking a lesson in world history, literature, art, and geography, all in one. A lesson in St. Lucian, Caribbean, and world Culture, all encompassing. Depth without bottom and breadth without horizons. It is hard to decide which is more beautiful, a Walcott verse describing the beauty of a visage or the visage itself.

Reading Walcott is like listening to music, though sometimes the lyrics are in a foreign language, but the rhythm, harmony and melody matchless.

Each year St. Lucia celebrates Walcott as part of its Nobel Laureate festivities. However, few of Walcott's countrymen read his work. If some of those who have undergraduate and graduate degrees in literature-related fields and who themselves are cultural activists complain that they do not read much Walcott



It's bacchanal season

because he is too difficult to read, imagine how much less those who are not as equipped are reading Walcott's works. In fact, because of its theatre tradition, St. Lucia has a much greater exposure to Walcott's plays than to his poetry.

I have often marvelled at how lucky St. Lucia is to have one of the best poets of his time (and maybe one of the best poets of all time) devoting such a significant portion of his work to giving voice to only 160 thousand voices. Clearly, this is as unprecedented in history as Walcott's poetry itself, and as such a small place giving rise to such a giant.

During all of my growing up, I never knew about the charboniers (women coal carriers), and that port Castries was a major Caribbean coaling station. Well into adult life, it was in Walcott's poetry I first found out. From one line of one of his poems (along with my knowledge of the women banana carriers) I was able to visualize the coal loading operations of the charboniers and write a passage in my novel, *Death by Fire*, capturing the phenomenon. Years later, I came upon a photo of the charboniers in action and

to my amazement my description matched the photo almost exactly. Such is the power of a Walcott verse. What better description exist of the 1948 Castries fire than Derek Walcott's *A City's Death by Fire*. I can go on and on about the many gems I have unearthed in Walcott's work, but I think my message is clear. I just wish more St. Lucians would read Derek Walcott and allow themselves the opportunity of discovering these gems and the many others begging to be found.

In his poetry Derek Walcott often speaks about how his encounter with Europe or America fills him with the sense of how insignificant and marginal is his homeland. But in my mind we have Derek Walcott, and he is the great equalizer.

I have a friend who often repeats that we should forget science because we cannot compete with Europe and America on that basis, but we can definitely compete based on culture. Therefore, we should focus our energies on the creation of cultural products. Of course, I do not agree that we should focus on culture at the exclusion of science, but my friend is correct. We seem to be more competitive, we have made a greater mark, in culture.

It is ironic that although Walcott often speaks about St. Lucia as a place without seasons, "how it is steady and season less in these islands," his country appears to have an obsession for seasons, for seasonalizing activities. We have the nationalism and patriotic season (February), the Jazz and music season (first two weeks in May), the reading season (May), the bacchanal season (June-July), the history and emancipation season (August), the Kwéyòl and culture season (October), the Christmas season (December), and the Derek Walcott /

HOLOGRAM

(for Luke & Barbara Salisbury)

After the roll & tumble, we may find a startling company of grandfathers: long obscure poems loaded with secret perfections, put away for the quiet retreat of returned prodigals; muttering lyrics, once rejected, hold freedoms that we've twisted our lives all out of shape to find.

Poems are like children. Conceived in mystery, our minds lost in strange passions, they arrive to be fussed over, pinched, hugged and worried; dressed up, dressed down, straightened out, set clear on ways of speaking (they'll bear their own

subtleties & indiscretions, make their own intrigues, stir gossip); we compare them to others' children, are aggressive for their success, fear namelessness in their failure, excuse all weaknesses, despair over their future, humiliate ourselves to get them good recommendations.

Then, we fight to let them go, fall where they may, make their way, shape their world, talk their jargon, hope they'll be found honest. It is certain that life's not an open book: the plainest face withholds founts of sly metaphor & all sorts of reversing symbol.

Fathers, sheltering stones that revolve in our ancient bones, may they make true friends, as I have. I commit you to the future with prayers, my children, my poems, my friends.

—John Robert Lee



Barbra Cadette in the jazz season

Arthur Lewis or Nobel Laureate season (January). No sooner a season is over, the persons, activities, practices or consciousness associated with that season are quickly abandoned until next season. I would like to see Walcott deseasonalized and a course taught in secondary schools called, say, the literature of Derek Walcott, or the Life and work of our Nobel Laureates.

I think this will make the great man happy. He has intimated that though he does not mind all the attention and fanfare he is receiving from his country (of course this happens only in the month of his season, otherwise he is ignored) he thinks it is a bit misplaced. He would have liked some more attention devoted to the development of artists, both in terms of giving them scholarships and providing them proper facilities (theatre houses, for example) to practise their craft. To this I am sure he would add that the greatest honour his country folk can bestow on him is for them to read, discuss, and critique his work, instead of leaving all that to Europeans and Americans, who then come down and tell us how great he is, causing us to celebrate him (in his season) even more intensely, though with limited appreciation or understanding of what constitutes his greatness. By paying greater attention to the poet's work we will help him answer his own question: "Prodigal, what were your wanderings about?" We would enable him to confidently say that what he had "swear to uphold" (and which he did uphold) was not the "filth" of his village drains but the "aria that soars like a banner from its gates."





Diet and Health

“I have made many autopsy reports in which all organs were healthy except that the coronary artery (one or more) was blocked with fatty streaks, and that had been sufficient to bring an end to life.”

Health is the greatest wealth therefore we should treasure our health. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), an English philosopher and politician, said, "A healthy body is a guest. A sick body is a jailer."

Hippocrates a Greek physician (5th Century B.C.) said, "May your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food." Socrates, a Greek philosopher (5th century B.C.), said, "Others live to eat, but I eat to live."

Ecclesiastes 10:17 (King James Version) says, "Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness."

We need to eat for health and strength. When we go shopping, we have to spend our monies on the food and drinks that keep us in good health.

Can you imagine buying food and drinks to harm yourself and your family whom you love so much? When you buy

a new car, don't you get a manual that you need to follow to get the maximum benefit from your vehicle? Doesn't the manufacturer know more about your new car than you? So don't you trust and follow the instructions?

As Christians, we do not believe we came in this world by chance. We accept that we were created by God who provides all food and drinks needed to keep us in good health. Our Creator knows more about our bodies than any one else, so don't we need to follow his instructions for maximum mental and physical health?

Man was Created Vegetarian

Interestingly, in its craze for slim figures, prolonged life, and everlasting youth, modern society has tried,

without much success, an endless list of slim-fast diets, wonder drugs, and miracle baths, yet the Bible, which has been around for hundreds of years, provides an excellent guide to sound health and longevity. Indeed, science has verified that God's dietary instructions to the human race, as found in the Bible, are sound and valid. What was God's original diet to the human race? In Genesis 1:29 (New King James Bible) God tells us, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed, to you it shall be for food."

In other words, God prescribed for us a vegan diet free of all animal products. Why did God give mankind a vegan diet? Is it to make us miserable, so that we do not enjoy food? Absolutely not. It is because God wishes us to enjoy food that He equipped us with taste buds. When man followed God's original diet, they lived many years. In Genesis 5:5 we are told, "So all the years that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died."

Later on, because most vegetation was destroyed by the flood, God gave man permission to eat certain animals and thus man's lifespan started to decline. It is telling that when the anatomy of a man is compared with that of a carnivore (one that eats meat) and a herbivore (one that eats herbs), it is found to more closely resemble the herbivore's than the carnivore's.

There is a close resemblance between the anatomy of a herbivore and that of a man. Let us look at the intestine, teeth, jaws and saliva. Carnivores have shorter intestines than herbivores because meat has to be digested and eliminated rapidly, for its decomposition and putrefaction in the gut produces poisonous substances. Man has a longer intestine than the carnivores but shorter than the herbivores. Although vegetables need a long time to digest, they do not decay (putrefy) in the intestine.

When we look at the human teeth and those of the herbivores, their molars, which allow for chewing, resemble each other. This is very different for the carnivores who barely chew food but cut and tear meat with fangs.

The saliva of herbivores and man are also similar. Both have an alkaline (high PH) for better digestion of carbohydrates.

High Blood Cholesterol is a killer

One of the arguments against eating animal products is that cholesterol (a complex lipid—a kind of fat) is found only in animal products and not in the plant kingdom. The liver produces cholesterol which is needed to make sexual hormones, membranes of cells, and bile salts. Therefore, since animal products are rich in cholesterol and your liver is already producing it, their consumption may cause your blood cholesterol to rise to dangerous levels.

Lipoprotein is associated with cholesterol in the blood. HDL is a high density lipoprotein—the good one. VLDL is a very low density lipoprotein—a bad

one. LDL is also a low density lipoprotein—another bad one. To find out whether you have a coronary risk, divide the total cholesterol by the high density lipoprotein. Any number greater than six (6) means that you may be at risk

I have done postmortems and autopsies at Victoria Hospital for many years on locals and visitors alike. During an autopsy the condition of every part of the body must be reported on in accordance with the standard form prepared by the Ministry of Health. I have made many autopsy reports in which all organs were healthy except that the coronary artery (one or more) was blocked with fatty streaks, and that had been sufficient to bring an end to life.

Because of family history some people's livers produce more cholesterol than others. Very high on the cholesterol list are the brains of animals. They contain 2300 milligrams of cholesterol for each 100 grams of mass. Egg yolk, with 1500 milligrams per 100 grams, is next. Liver follows with 360 milligrams, and then meat (fat) with 300. Given the detrimental consequences of high blood cholesterol, it is important to ask your health provider to test your cholesterol level.

You can help reduce strokes, sudden death, and bypass surgeries by keeping your cholesterol level down. To lower your cholesterol level, decrease consumption of meat, especially beef, pork, and mutton (as well as viscera). Do not eat more than three whole eggs per week. There is no limit to egg white; cholesterol

Plant Protein will do Just as Well as Animal's

Many people display a big misconception with the question, "Where do we get our protein from, if we do not eat animal products?" This misconception probably explains the large portions of meat and meat products in people's diet.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a daily intake of 52.5 grams per day for a man weighing 70 kilos (approx. 154 pounds). Contrary to what many believe, we can get more protein from the plant kingdom than from the animal kingdom. For example, whereas 100 grams of dried soybeans contains 38 grams of protein, the same



amount of chicken has only 20 grams. Furthermore, proteins are present, although not in great amounts, in many non-animal products. Every 100 grams of raw lentils contains 24 grams of protein. Similarly, raw chick peas contains 23 grams, corn 9.4, whole wheat bread 8.9, rice 7.2, potatoes 2, tomatoes 1.3, avocados 2.1, and onions 1.2. Unlike carbohydrate and fats, proteins are not stored in the body, so we need constant intakes of it throughout life. Proteins found in cereals, fruits and many vegetables contain the twenty amino acids needed for our nutrition, including the essential ones.

One main concern about a vegan diet is vitamin B12 deficiency since this vitamin is found mostly in the animal king-

dom. Preferably, use low fat or fat free milk, and avoid cream, butter and fatty cheeses. Reduce intake of commercial sweets (e.g. pastries and desserts containing animal fats). Eat plenty of vegetables/fiber and whole grains, and for cooking use olive oil alternatively with seed oils (corn, wheat germ, and sunflower). Avoid nervous tension and stress, keep your weight down, and exercise regularly. Regarding exercising, remember that it is important to customize your exercise program to suit your fitness level, the health of your heart and your personal preferences, so check with your health care provider before starting to exercise.

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dom. Vitamin B12, however, can be found in spirulae and in some other vegetable foods, but it is an inactive form of the true vitamin B12. A lack of vitamin B12 can lead to pernicious anemia and psychosis. The daily requirement of vitamin B12 is 2.5 micrograms. Great quantities of vitamin B12 is made in the colon (large intestine), and the normal bacteria flora of the mouth can produce a sufficient amount of vitamin B12 to meet the daily requirements. Consequently, even with no additional Vitamin B12 from animal products, most vegans do not seem to suffer from a vitamin B12 deficiency. For example, poor Asians live largely on a vegetarian diet that have been found to provide only 0.5 micrograms of vitamin B12 per day, yet some authors believe that this is sufficient for the millions of Hindus on such diets.

Diet and Cancer

Harrison's 15th edition of Principles of Internal Medicine, McGraw-Hill Medical Publishing Division, page 2563, says, "The leading cause of death in alcoholics is cardiovascular disease, but cancer occupies a solid second place." Overall, it has been estimated that alcoholics have a rate of carcinoma 10 times higher than the general population.

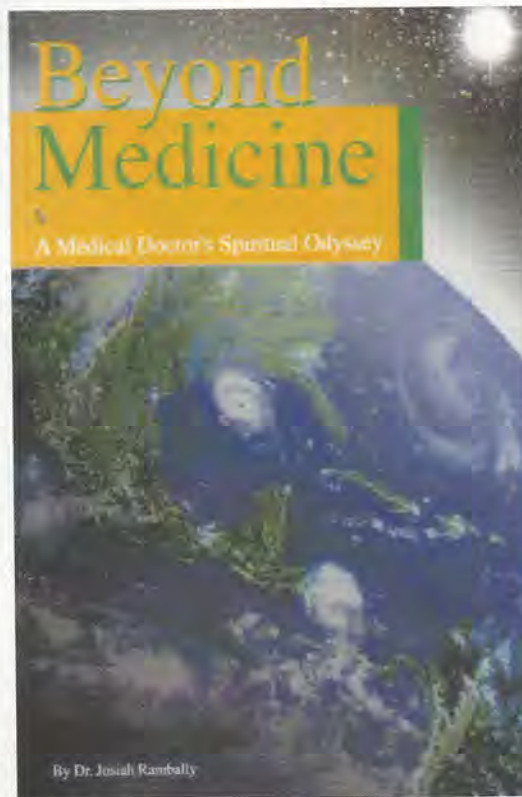
Leviticus 17:14 (King James Version) says, "For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh for the life of all flesh is in the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off".

Leviticus 7:23 tells us, "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, ye shall eat no manner of fat, of ox, or of sheep, or of goat." These are universal rules for all mankind. If you want to continue to feed on the animals, do not use their fat nor their blood.

Current Medical Diagnosis and Treatment, 42nd Edition, 2003 (Lang Medical Books), page 1224, says, "Diet is an important area of intervention for primary cancer prevention." Epidemiologic studies have found an inverse relationship between fruit and vegetable intake and the risk of common carcinomas, suggesting a potential protective role for

these foods. A recent case study in South Asia found an association between a diet rich in vegetables and a small reduction in the risk of breast cancer.

High intakes of fat and certain fatty acids have been postulated to increase the risk of breast, colon, prostate, and lung cancer. Epidemiologic studies also suggest that a high consumption of red meat (beef, pork, mutton, goat), and excess alcohol consumption may increase the risk of colorectal cancer. One kilo of grilled beefsteak has the same amount of benzopyrene (a cancer producing agent)



as 600 cigarettes. In contrast, high intakes of dietary fiber has long been thought to reduce the risk of colorectal cancer and adenoma.

Saint Francis of Sales (1567-1622), Bishop of Geneva, said, "In the control of appetite, we should think of the average. If the body is very fat, the weight is hard to carry; and if it is too thin, it cannot carry us." Obesity, which is too much adipose or fat tissue in the body, is a health hazard. It can cause hypertension; type II diabetes mellitus; hyperlipidemia, which is too much fat in our blood system; coronary artery disease; degenerative joint disease; psychosocial disability and certain cancers-including cancer of the rectum, breast, colon, uterus, and biliary tract; prostate cancer in men and can-

cer of the ovaries in women.

Obesity also causes skin disorders; clots (like thromboembolic disorders); and digestive tract diseases such as gallstones and reflux esophagitis (contents of stomach flowing back into the gullet). Obstetric and surgical risks are greater in obese people. These individuals also have a greater risk of lung and endocrine problems with increase hemoglobin concentration.

Leave The Animals Alone

Life is beautiful, so why kill many animals to feast on the meat? One problem with eating meat is that animals are given antibiotics, stress medication and other drugs to fatten them. Even the food given to cattle contains small doses of antibiotics such as penicillin and tetracycline.

Studies show that allergies, and sensitivity and resistance to antibiotics are sometimes due to the consumption of meat from animals fed or treated with antibiotics. Also, sausages, ham (dry or sweet) and most pork products are cured with nitrates and sodium nitrate. These substances give meat a rose or red color that makes them more appetizing but they can be combined with aminase in the human intestine to form nitroaminases, which are strongly cancerous.

A variety of fruits and vegetables will provide you with all the necessary nutrients your body needs for good health. Teach your children good nutrition so that their appetites are trained in the right direction for optimal health.

I need to briefly mention water because you can live longer without food than without water. It is vital for every organ in the body. The digestive system needs water to keep the stool soft, the skin needs water to keep it firm, the kidneys need water to filter the blood and to get rid of unwanted substances. Even bones require water to maintain their elasticity and hardness. We need to drink at least six glasses of water between meals. Drink about two glasses of water before breakfast. This will cleanse the stomach from all the mucus that accumulates during the night. Choose water above all other drinks.

Remember health is the greatest wealth. 🌱



SENIOR CITIZENS GET MORE AIDS!



- GOVERNMENT AID
- HEARING AID
- SEEING AID
- WALKING AID
- CHEWING AID
- PLEASURE AID

= AIDS

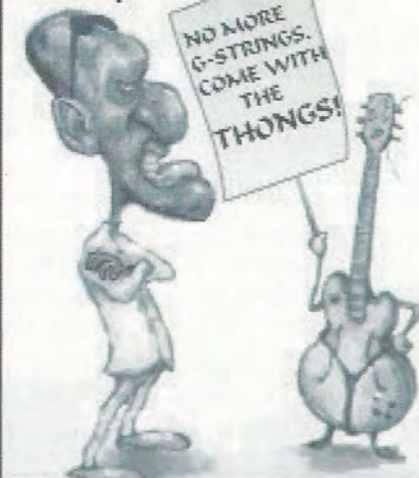
CONVERSATION WITH THE NATION...



A TRUE LEADER IS A LEADER WITH PLENTY GUTS...

HOW THE HELL YOU EXPECT ME TO RING A NOTE WIT DAT?

NO MORE G-STRINGS. COME WITH THE THONGS!



BOO: FACING A NEW KINDA MUSICAL CHALLENGE!

THE MUTATED GENERATION: THEY GROW UP SO MUCH THAT FACING THEM BECOMES AN EMBARRASSING CHALLENGE...

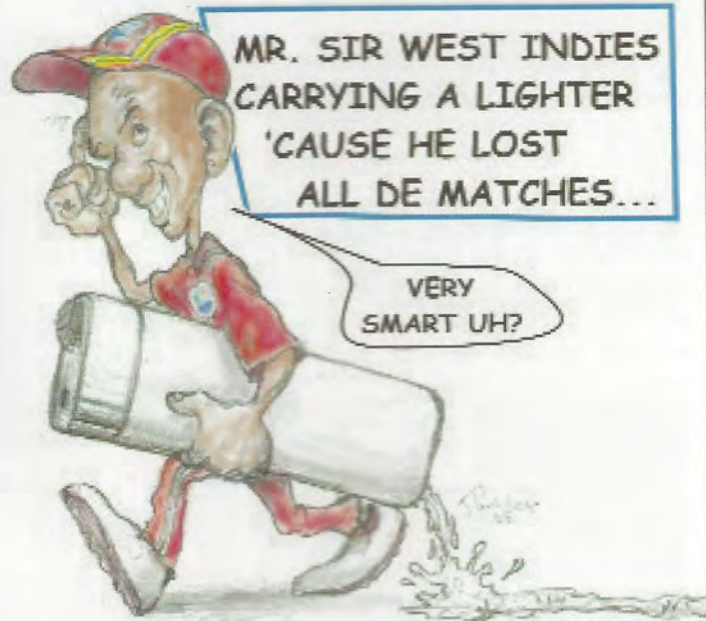
SHUT UP BEFORE I BLOCK YOUR DAMN MOUTH!



YOU BUY OR I BITE! CHOOSE!



NO MORE FREENESS UNDER WATER!



O S I M O



JUST ANOTHER STRESSFUL DAY IN THE CLASSROOM...

G-GOOD M-M-MORNING, CLASS...T-TODAY'S LESSON IS... UHM...UH...AH...

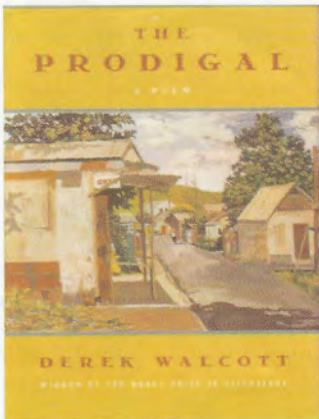


OH, GOD, HELP ME!



WELL, I HOPE YOU PEOPLE ENJOYED THE SHOW! DAT WAS JUS' A LITTLE INTRO TO STIMULATE DE LAUGH BUDS. IN DE NEXT ISSUE OF JAKO YOU'LL GET A FOUR PAGE DOSE OF FOU COMIXTURE! SEND ME YOUR COMMENTS ON FOU WEBSITE GUEST BOOK: foucomix.8m.com OR YOU CAN E-MAIL ME: artphulchere@excite.com. OR YOU CAN SEND ME GIFTS OUT OF DISGUST FOR MY CARTOONS, PREFERABLY CASH, NO CHEQUES ACCEPTED! HAI HAI JOKE! YOU EH GET IT? WELL TRUST ME, I DIDNTI I LL END DIS BLA BLA BY TANKING DEM LOCAL CELEBRITIES WHO TOOK TIME OUT TO GLAMORIZE DIS DEBUT EDITION OF FOU COMIXTURE WIT DERE HANDSOMLED FACES!

T H E J A K O



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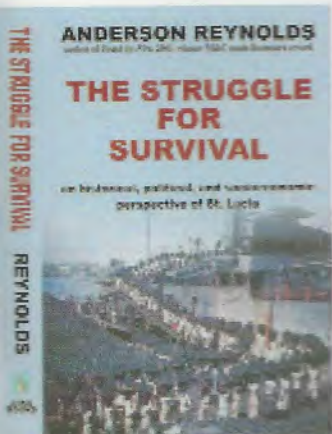
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The Struggle for Survival is an important road map of St. Lucia in the pre and post independence period." —Sir John Compton

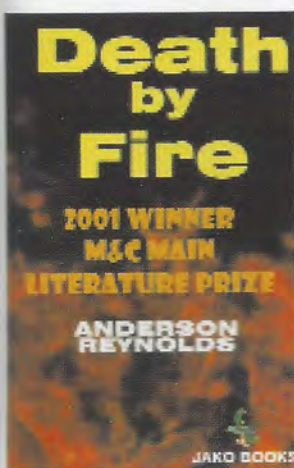
"... Excellent work ... a 206 paged gem ... a powerful commentary ... A deep sincere analytical look into the state of things in the island today. Truly a compendium of St. Lucian life from early times to the

modern era ... I thoroughly enjoyed myself reading the book."

Modeste Downes, author, *Phases*

"... an invaluable book...a source of much information. Much scholarly research has gone into the writing of this work. In a very definite way, establishes the Saint Lucian personality, the Saint Lucian national and cultural identity."

—Jacques Compton, Fellow of the Royal Society



"Death by Fire is an impressive piece of narration ... A veritable tapestry of St. Lucian life and culture ... Reading it left me with a seething appetite for more. Easily one of the most compelling pieces of literature I have laid hands on in recent years." —Modeste Downes

"The telling of the story is exceptional ... Extremely difficult to put it down ... A cunningly-woven tale ... A jour-

ney back into St. Lucian life ... (which) paints the dark side of the struggle for survival in a young country."

—Victor Marquis, *The Voice*

"A novel on a grand scale ... A broad canvas of St. Lucian life ... Required reading for anyone seeking a greater understanding of what is happening today, and who might wish to shape a better society for future generations. If one is looking for a key to the feeling and conscience of the age in which we live, this novel is a guide."

Jacques Compton, *The Crusader*



"Phases is a collection of over fifty dew drenched poems that speak powerfully to a past when living was peaceful and growing up was fun, and a present whose dynamic invokes nostalgia and a craving for a return to the past." —Augustus Cadette, author, *In my Craft*

"Some of Modeste Downes' poems are acrid, like the taste of the sea grapes that festoon the beaches of Vieux Fort. Others are nostalgic, insightful, cynical, bold, but all elements of a veritable feast." —Michael Aubertin, author, *Neg Maron: Freedom Fighters*

"...impassioned poetry ... beautifully crafted images and metaphors that linger long in the memory ... Like that of Walcott, achieves the highest eloquence of passion... produces an exquisite sense of beauty... A nationalistic and romantic poet with echoes of William Wordsworth, and Oliver Goldsmith ..."

Jacques Compton, *The Voice*



"I HEAR RHYTHMS
DISTINCTIVE
BLACK
RHYTHMS
PULSATING
BLACK
RHYTHMS
FROM THE GHETTOS
OF THE WORLD
YEARNING
CRYING
WANTING TO BE
FREE ..."

"The unique, compelling style of *Rhythms of the Ghetto* provides everyone with an unusual educational experience. (It is impossible to) ignore the message which is forcefully conveyed through the drums of Soul, Calypso, Blues, Rap, Reggae, Jazz and Gospel Rhythms.

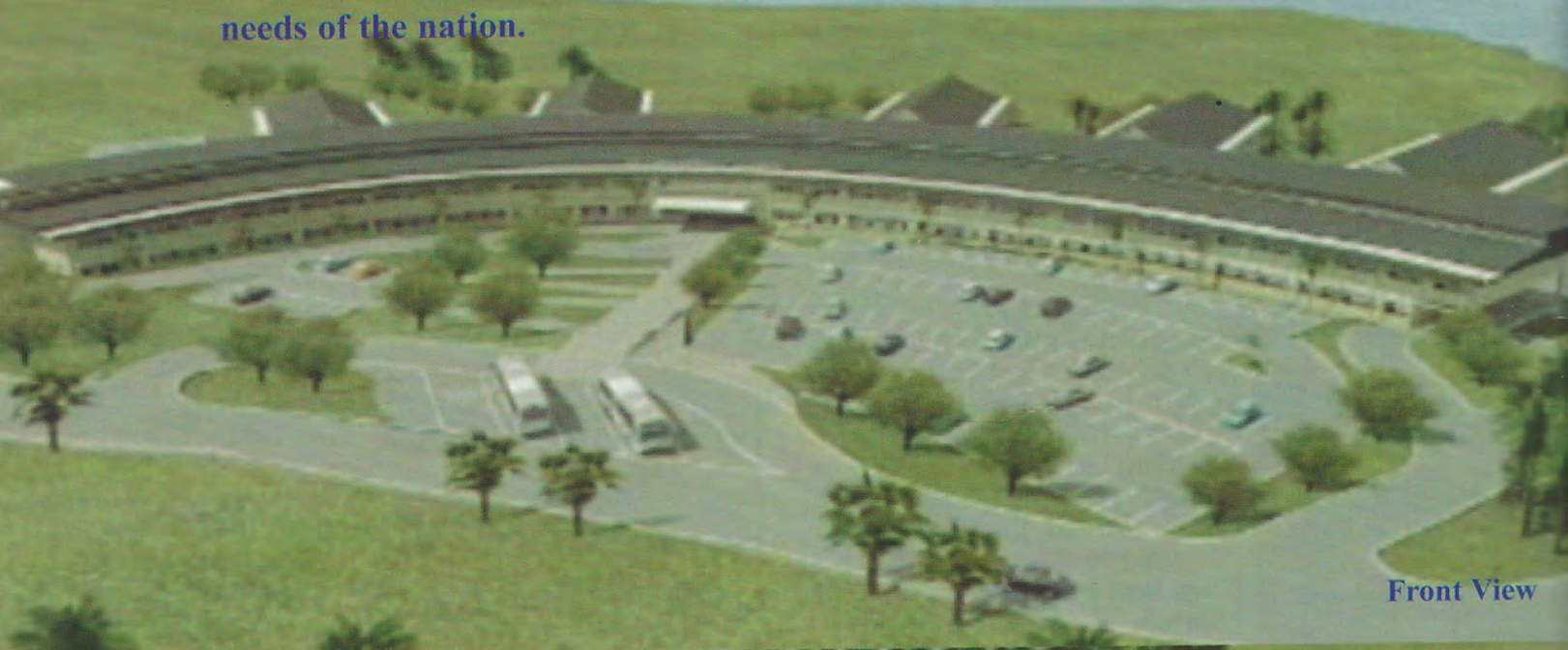
"The lyrics convey a strength, directness and fearlessness which have an empowering effect. The poems engage the reader in rational thought on social, political and cultural issues which need to be urgently addressed." —Gwen Nisbert, Senior Literature Lecturer, College of St. Kitts and Nevis

Site Plan of the New St. Lucia National Hospital



Side View

To be located off the Millennium Highway and scheduled for completion in 2009, the new National Hospital will cater for all the health care needs of the nation.



Front View

Special Features

33 Departments
A&E Dept with 2 observation beds
Paediatric Ward with 21 beds
3 Acute General Wards with 65 beds
8 Dialysis Chairs
24-Hour On-Call Center
Chapel

Obstetrics Suite:
31 Ante/Post natal beds
5 Delivery beds
Special Care Baby Unit
4 Operating Theatres
2 General
1 Day Surgery
1 Obstetrics

Back View