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Preface

The issue of racial consciousness and cultural identity among people of African descent in the Caribbean has been the subject of many studies. Writing in 1960, V.S. Naipaul argued that, largely because he lived in a borrowed culture, more than other people, the West Indian needed writers to tell him who he was and where he stood in the world.¹

In the case of the French-speaking Caribbean and Guyane (French-ruled Guiana), writers of the Haitianist and Negritude Schools made pronounced attempts in this direction in the 1930s and 1940s. This exposé identifies why they failed to make any measurable change in the sociopolitical existence of their countries.

This is first an account of the consequence of France's colonization of the Caribbean and Guyane through a general overview of the history and analysis of the relation of forces and peoples in Haiti, Guyane, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. Next, Haiti's literary elite take center stage to elucidate through their poetry the effect Haiti's history has had on them and vice versa as well as the resultant sociopolitical condition befalling their country. Along the line of using poets to illuminate these colonial societies' perspectives and to bring into sharper focus the history of the French-speaking West Indies, writers from Martinique, Guyane, and Guadeloupe reveal why there is a continuing French presence in the Caribbean.

This study is also an effort to come to grips with the differences between Haitianism and Negritude as it considers the historical, sociopolitical, and literary roots and dimensions from which both arose.

The profit motive led the European powers into a race for the "New World," culminating, ultimately, in wars and territorial compartmentalization. Later, the production of sugar required a greater supply of workers than had tobacco farming. In Africa, the Europeans found the supply whose extraction — in the words of Walter Rodney — would also underdevelop the black continent.² The "discovery" of the Indies and the beginning of primitive capital formation in Europe led to the uprooting of millions of blacks from Africa and thousands of white indentured servants from Europe. In time, there arose a master-slave society and a pot-pourri of African and European cultures, dominated by western values derived from the Catholic ideal in St. Domingue, Guadeloupe, Guyane, and Martinique, France's "place in the sun."

In order to maintain their domination over this new society and overcome their numerical weakness, by the middle of the 19th century, the French had imposed in their Caribbean colonies their peculiar system

of amalgamation. Unlike the British who considered their imperial territories as peripheral to the British Isles, the French made their overseas territories integral parts of France. To reach this goal, the French called for a policy of integration and assimilation of the inhabitants and territories of the French-speaking West Indies and Guyane, notably following St. Domingue's revolution.

Important consequences accompanied the implementation of this policy, designed to create a subservient class to uphold France's colonial dominance. It created, for example, a dual community within the society of the colonized. On the one hand, there were the French-trained elite of color that became an integral part of the colonial enterprise. As this elite sought to strike an economic and intellectual alliance with France, it chose France's ways of life and socialized itself into accepting the tenet that to prevail one had to acquire French colonial values. Concomitantly, this class upheld the western view that Africa was a heathen abode with no culture or worthwhile civilization. As Jack Moddis says, colonialism succeeded in perpetuating itself in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the West Indies, because not only it had the means of violence at its disposal but also, most importantly, because it managed to win important native groups to its side.³ On the other hand, there were the blacks. Outsiders to the colonial bourgeois society, they were the reactive agents of colonialism, conditioned into assuming that in order to throw off the shackles of slavery one had to repudiate Africa. Africa had become synonymous with slavery and slavery with African blackness and negroness.

To prevent rebellions and revolts, the small colony of whites, encouraged by the metropolitan policymakers, embarked upon a system of ethnic balkanization. However, St. Domingue, due mainly to its greater need for slaves, escaped from this policy. The result was the slave revolt, which created the independent nation of Haiti in 1804.

Moreover, although the mother country implemented a policy of linguistic imperialism, there nevertheless developed, due to ethnic amalgamation, an admixture of African and European languages resulting in a Creole language typical of the French speaking West Indies.

This study seeks to assess four aspects of the French colonial enterprise in the Caribbean. First, it examines the black and the people of color's desire for cultural and socio-political assimilation into France, and appraises the expansion of the black educated elite and its relationship to France concerning the status of the colonies.

Second, it shows that the racial and cultural consciousness that took place in Haiti during and following its 1915–1934 United States

occupation was an indigenous movement whose purpose was the rehabilitation of Haiti's culture for the benefit of the Haitian elite. Haitianism, therefore, is not part of the student movement in Paris between the two World Wars whose goal was to denounce the system of French assimilation and the status of the colonies at the time.

Third, it compares and contrasts the movement of Haitianism with Negritude concerning Africa. It argues that, whereas the Haitians could draw from the well of their own Afro-Haitian culture to reach Africa, the Negritude proponents considered themselves exiles from Africa — moreover alienated from any original West Indian or Guyanese culture.

Fourth, it demonstrates that socio-political conditions in France played a pivotal role in the movement that led to the rise of the school of Negritude. As a concomitant of its colonial policies, the French government created an educational system that required students to go to France for their university degrees and, sometimes, high school diplomas. In 1932 the mother country became the cradle of the movement to counter the French policy of assimilation, when a group of university students from the French-speaking West Indies and Guyane proposed a *New French Negro* guiding principle to overhaul their colonial society.

One of the questions discussed is, what motivated the students of 1932 to start denouncing the colonial status-quo of their society? These students could have, following the example of their elders, joined the colonial administrative machinery and lived comfortably, at the end of their studies in France.

This study covers the period ranging from the beginning of European interest in the Caribbean to 1946; involving discussion of the foundation of the French West Indies, slavery, emancipation, and colonization. The years 1928 and 1932 are respectively Haitianism and Negritude starting dates. They stand as frames of reference for, in the case of Haitianism, Jean Price-Mars's denunciation of the American occupation of Haiti; and in the case of Negritude, a group of students' assault against assimilation.

1946 is the year the French-speaking West Indies and Guyane became *départements* (counties) of France. That same year, the Estimé revolution took place in Haiti in the name of Haitianism.

The study concludes with a discussion of the culturo-political paradox of Negritude in the Caribbean and Guyane through a discussion of the Aimé Césaire principle which opposes political self-determination at least for Martinique where Césaire held total sway for over fifty years — against the background of an interview with Frantz Fanon's widow, Josie Fanon, part of which addresses the issue of national liberation.

