

C.L.R. JAMES

**THE LIFE OF
CAPTAIN CIPRIANI**

AN ACCOUNT
OF BRITISH
GOVERNMENT
IN THE
WEST INDIES



WITH THE PAMPHLET *The Case for West Indian Self Government*

**THE LIFE OF
CAPTAIN CIPRIANI**

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THE C. L. R. JAMES ARCHIVES

recovers and reproduces for a contemporary audience the work of one of the great intellectual figures of the twentieth-century, in all their rich texture, and will present, over and above historical works, new and current scholarly explorations of James's oeuvre.

Robert A. Hill, Series Editor

THE LIFE OF CAPTAIN CIPRIANI

An Account of British Government in the West Indies



WITH THE PAMPHLET

The Case for West-Indian Self Government

C. L. R. JAMES

With a New Introduction by Bridget Brereton

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The Texts

C. L. R. James wrote *The Life of Captain Cipriani: An Account of British Government in the West Indies* almost certainly between 1929 and 1931 in Trinidad. When he left for England in February 1932, the manuscript had been completed—one of three manuscripts he took with him, the others being his only novel, *Minty Alley*, and much of what would subsequently become *Cricket and I* by Learie Constantine, a book largely written by James.

In Nelson, Lancashire, where Constantine and his family had lived for a few years, the book was privately printed by a small local firm, Coulton & Co., in the middle of 1932. Constantine provided the funds, and James and some new friends in Nelson made up parcels of the printed book to send off to Trinidad and other places in the West Indies and to radical booksellers in London and other British cities. The book comprised 107 pages and was dedicated to Constantine. It sold for one shilling and six pence in Trinidad.

Its circulation in Britain was presumably quite limited, but Leonard Woolf, co-owner with his famous wife, Virginia, of the progressive Hogarth Press, heard about it. He asked James to abridge the book drastically, cutting out nearly all of the biographical sections related to Cipriani and concentrating on the general attack on crown colony government. The abridgement was done in Nelson, James wrote decades later, and he “travelled up and down from Nelson to London to make all the arrangements for the publication.” The result was a thirty-two-page pamphlet, entitled *The Case for West-Indian Self Government*, issued by the Hogarth Press, London, in 1933. It was number 16 in the series Day to Day Pamphlets—previous pamphlets had been authored by

such luminaries as John Maynard Keynes and Harold Laski—and sold for one shilling (James 1932, 1933, [1963] 1993: 119–21; Constantine 1933; Worcester 1996: 22–24; Dhondy 2001: 40–41).¹

James begins *Life* by stating that he was writing a political biography of the Trinidadian labor and political leader always known as Captain Cipriani, not as an account of his personal life but “as the best means of bringing before all who may be interested the political situation in the West Indies today” (James 1932: 1). The book marked his first effort to analyze history and politics through biography, a methodology that (as will be discussed later) was to be used frequently in his later writings. The dialectical relationship between leader and social or political movement—whether it was Toussaint, Lenin, Trotsky, or Nkrumah—was to engage his interest for the rest of his life.

The first chapter of *Life* analyzes the state of society in contemporary Trinidad (Tobago is not mentioned). Each sector—the colonial Englishmen; the white Creoles; the “coloured people,” by which James means those of African and part-African descent—is subjected to acerbic sociological scrutiny. This chapter contains a justly famous, much quoted description of shade prejudice and social snobbery among the people of mixed African-European descent. Just one brief paragraph deals with the Indo-Trinidadians, composing at least one third of the island population by 1930; James believed that there was “no communal problem,” no antagonism between “Negroes” and “Indians” in the West Indies. As several commentators have pointed out, here, as later in *Case*, James sweeps under the carpet the issue of ethnic divisions, specifically African-Indian divisions, which would dominate politics in Trinidad (and Guyana) in the period after World War II (James 1932: 1–19; Ledger 2010: 92).

Chapters 2 and 3 provide information about Cipriani’s life up to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, when he was already nearly forty, and about his activities during the war. It was as an officer in the British West Indies Regiment that he first came to public notice, when he courageously defended the men under his command, all volunteers, from the outrageously racist treatment they received at the hands of the military authorities.² This experience politicized the Captain, a white man from an elite Creole family of Corsican descent, and launched him on his career as the leader of the Trinidad Workingmen’s Association (TWA), the

most important labor organization in the colony during the 1920s and early 1930s. The TWA is the focus of chapter 4. (James wrongly asserts that Cipriani became president of the TWA in 1919; in fact it was not until 1923 that the TWA leadership offered, and Cipriani accepted, the presidency; James 1932: 20–49).

The longest chapter, and in many ways the heart of *Life*, deals with Cipriani's efforts to achieve legislative reforms to benefit the masses as an elected member of the colonial Legislative Council from 1925 (chapter 5). This section includes a brilliant analysis of the motivations and psychology of the nominated "unofficial" members of the Council and their hostility to the wider public interest as upheld, usually alone, by the Captain. Up against the governor and the British officials, these nominated members, and often his fellow electives too, it was almost impossible for Cipriani to achieve substantive legislative reforms in the interest of the working people. In the legislature he was "an influence more than a force," James concludes, meaning that while the Captain changed the tone and content of political discourse, both inside and outside the Council, he was rarely able to secure tangible changes (James 1932: 50–70). Cipriani also operated in the City Council of the capital, Port of Spain, which he used as another forum to confront the colonial government and work for the people. Chapter 6 details a famous struggle over the city's electricity franchise which he waged against the government and the business interests it favored (71–81).

Another struggle was over the government's attempt to introduce modern divorce legislation, detailed in chapter 7. This fairly long chapter was to attract a great deal of criticism from James's contemporaries when the book was published. A bill to allow divorce under the same conditions as in Britain at the time was first introduced in the Council in 1926, and Cipriani, following the official TWA position, supported it. In the face of intense opposition from the powerful Catholic clergy, the government withdrew the bill but reintroduced it in 1931. At this point, under huge pressure from the Church and from his fellow French Creoles, Cipriani defied the TWA line—still in favor of the Divorce Bill or at least neutral—and instead passionately supported the Catholic opposition. This alienated many key TWA leaders, especially its Indo-Trinidadian vice president, Sarran Teelucksingh, whom the Captain actually assaulted physically over the issue. Teelucksingh left the TWA,

and so did several hundred Indian members, a huge blow to TWA's efforts to create a multiethnic base. Cipriani's actions in 1931 also alienated the local intelligentsia, who saw divorce legislation as progressive and "modern," and the non-Catholic TWA leaders. His stand seriously weakened the TWA and damaged his own prestige. The contortions that James goes through in this chapter, seeking to justify Cipriani's actions, were ridiculed by several reviewers of the book in 1932 (James 1932: 82–100; Neptune 2007: 21–26; Singh 1994: 150).

Finally, the last chapter (8) provides a brief personal sketch of Cipriani as a man and a leader; it includes a long extract from a speech he made at the British Labour Party's Commonwealth Conference in 1930. This, perhaps, is the only section of *Life* where James can be fairly accused of uncritical adulation or hagiography. Interestingly he concludes the book with a promise to produce a "second volume" on crown colony government in the West Indies, its historical evolution, the differences between the colonies, and the only "solution"—a volume that never in fact appeared (James 1932: 101–7).

The much shorter abridgement published in 1933 duplicates material from *Life* but excludes nearly all the material on Cipriani himself. The first section of *Case* reproduces much of the earlier analysis of Trinidadian and West Indian society found in the first chapter of *Life*. The second and third sections deal with the working of crown colony government in Trinidad, condensing material in pages 50 to 81 of *Life* (James 1933: 1–30). The only new material in *Case* is to be found in the last pages, where James makes an explicit, and impassioned, plea for London to acknowledge the "fitness" of West Indians for self-government and to grant it forthwith (30–32).³

It must be understood that both *Life* and *Case* are essentially political, in fact polemical, works. The purpose of *Case* was self-evident, as signaled by its title: to argue for the grant of self-government ("Dominion status") to the British West Indies. But the larger work should also be seen as an intervention in a political campaign. James used Cipriani and his struggles against the colonial establishment as the "hook" with which to make the case that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and by extension all British West Indians, were ready for Dominion status and were being misgoverned under the existing system of crown colony rule. It is not an objective or even a deeply researched or scholarly biography

of Cipriani—whose political career, in any case, was only at its halfway point in 1932. (He remained active in public life until his death in 1945.) And as I will argue later in this essay, it is essentially an “apprentice” work, lacking the profound original research behind *The Black Jacobins* or the mature insights and brilliant writing style of *Beyond a Boundary*. Yet *Life* and *Case*, polemical works written by James at the start of his long literary and political career, remain of great interest to students of the Caribbean nationalist movement in the first half of the twentieth century and, of course, to students of James himself.

James, Cipriani, and Trinidad, 1919–1932

C. L. R. James was born in 1901 into a highly “respectable,” lower-middle-class black Trinidadian family of Barbadian origins.⁴ His father was a teacher and a headmaster; both his grandfathers were skilled artisans who had emigrated from Barbados in the late nineteenth century. His mother was a housewife, a stylishly dressed woman who read widely and constantly, unlike his father. This was a religious (Anglican), status-conscious, and somewhat snobbish family. After attending primary schools his father headed or in which he taught, James won a coveted “exhibition” (free place) to Queen’s Royal College, Trinidad’s only government secondary school, a prestigious English-type grammar school for boys. He was a pupil here from 1911 to 1918; he has famously written about the school and its impact on him in *Beyond a Boundary* (and elsewhere; Worcester 1996: 3–10; James [1963] 1993: 29–30).

During the period between his leaving school (1918) and his departure for England (1932), James earned his living by teaching—at different times at a private high school; at his alma mater, Queen’s Royal College; and at the Government Teacher Training College—and private tutoring. But the twin passions of his life at this time were literature and sports. He read very widely and consciously prepared himself to become a writer, of both fiction (short stories and a novel) and nonfiction (journalism and *Life*). He has described this period of his life in his classic *Beyond a Boundary* and in other writings (James [1963] 1993: 64–65, 111–16).

By the time he left Trinidad early in 1932, James had published at least five short stories, both locally and in British and American collections, and had also completed his only novel, *Minty Alley*, often described as

the first full-length “barrack-yard” fiction from the British West Indies. No subsequent novel appeared, and James was to abandon fiction for political and historical writing after he left Trinidad. But the stories and the novel were an important part of his development as a professional writer (Worcester 1996: 18–21; Ramchand 1971: 5–15; Fraser 2008).

As a young man in Trinidad, James had made himself into a writer, trying his hand at several different genres: short fiction, a novel, political and polemical essays, book reviews, sports journalism, a full-length biography (Cipriani’s), and a “ghosted” autobiography (Constantine’s). I should make it clear, however, that this introductory essay to his *Life of Cipriani* does not engage with his writing and rhetorical techniques as displayed in that work. That would be an interesting and probably rewarding project, but my concern here is different: to understand why James chose to write a biography of Cipriani, to examine how it was received in Trinidad, and to assess its significance both for early West Indian nationalist thought and for James’s own development as a historian, a Marxist theorist, and a cultural commentator.

James was born and raised in a British Caribbean colony that had developed a considerable intellectual and literary tradition by the early twentieth century.⁵ Trinidadians of European, African, and “mixed” descent, living mainly in the colonial capital, Port of Spain, were writing on the history, culture, geography, and natural resources of their island. (Indo-Trinidadians entered this project later.) The capital had a public library, first established in 1851 and housed in a handsome neoclassical building opened in 1901, and a museum; a lively newspaper press had existed and flourished, despite Trinidad’s status as a crown colony, since the mid-nineteenth century.

The island’s most important intellectual and writer in the later 1800s was certainly John Jacob Thomas, about whom James was to write an admiring essay in 1969. Thomas was a largely self-educated scholar, teacher, and author, born around 1840 probably to former slaves. He was a leading member of Port of Spain’s small group of literati and a frequent contributor to the island newspapers in the 1870s and 1880s. But he is best known for his two books. *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* was a pioneering study of the Créole or Patois spoken by most Trinidadians when it was published locally in 1869. Thomas wanted to celebrate the language spoken by his compatriots, to dispel the notion

that it was “*only* mispronounced French,” fit only for illiterate peasants. But he was also interested in Patois as a linguistic phenomenon a century before Creole studies became fashionable in the academic world (Thomas [1869] 1969b).

When J. A. Froude’s famously racist (and politically reactionary) diatribe about the British West Indies appeared in 1887, Thomas determined to answer it. His *Froudacity: West Indian Fables Explained* was published in 1889, just weeks before his death. It is a remarkably wide-ranging attack on Froude’s account of people and politics in the colonies, especially Trinidad. In part it falls into the genre of “Vindication of the Race” works: Thomas defends the progress of black West Indians since Emancipation, despite the oppression and discrimination they faced everywhere. In part it is a sophisticated attack on crown colony government in Trinidad and on the “rubbish” London had sent out as governors, administrators, and legal officers. It is especially striking for its early expression of Pan-African views: James was to write, “He is as confident as Marcus Garvey, and is far stronger in history” (Thomas [1889] 1969a; James 1969; see also Smith 2002; Brereton 1977; Cudjoe 2003: 184–92, 298–306).

Though Thomas stands out in Trinidad’s developing literary and intellectual tradition of the late nineteenth century, he was not alone. The island’s newspaper press around this period was lively, remarkably uninhibited, and often interested in debates about culture, race, education, colonialism, and the like. Thomas himself contributed frequently to the papers owned or edited by black or mixed-race men and edited a short-lived literary magazine in 1883. Many articles, op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, and literary reviews engaged with often controversial issues, such as race prejudice and discrimination against black Trinidadians and the arrogance and incompetence of British colonial officials (an important theme in *Froudacity*). Though legislation like the Seditious Publications Ordinance (1920) attempted to curb the antigovernment press after World War I, in the years of James’s youth the island possessed two daily papers, as well as smaller weekly journals such as the *Labour Leader*, to which he contributed (Brereton 1979: 94–109; Cudjoe 2003: 218–26, 271–74).

By the turn of the century several educated black Trinidadians had come under the influence of early Pan-African thinking. Henry Sylvester Williams, who organized the first Pan-African Conference in London

in 1900, was a Trinidadian lawyer, and his visit to his native island in 1901 resulted in the formation of several branches of his Pan-African Association there. Though he spent most of his adult life abroad, and the Association soon faded in Trinidad, he was much admired by his race-conscious compatriots. Williams was almost certainly the model for Rupert Gray, the hero of the novel of that title published locally in 1907 by the Trinidadian Stephen Cobham. This novel clearly fits into the category of “Vindication of the Race” and reflects the spirited efforts—in fiction and in nonfictional polemical literature—of Trinidadians to defend “their people” from the pervasive ideological and institutional racism of the day (Cobham [1907] 2006; Mathurin 1976; Cudjoe 2003: 362–72; Rosenberg 2007: 25–32; Smith 2013: 71–83). In his own way James would also engage in this project in the post–World War I period.

But perhaps what was most important to his trajectory as a young writer was his close involvement with a small group of equally young intellectuals and aspiring writers, which has come to be known as the *Beacon* group after the literary magazine of that name, which they produced in the early 1930s. The leading members of the group were white or near-white, notably the Trinidadians of Portuguese ancestry Albert Gomes and Alfred Mendes; James was one of the few black participants. He was an important contributor to its activities. They met often, talked endlessly, exchanged books and records, and critiqued each other’s writings. As James wrote decades later, perhaps tongue in cheek, “We lived according to the tenets of Matthew Arnold, spreading sweetness and light and the best that has been thought and said in the world” (James [1963] 1993: 64).

Even before the *Beacon* first appeared in 1931, James and Mendes collaborated to produce two issues of a small, cheaply produced magazine, *Trinidad* (December 1929 and April 1930). It featured poems, stories, and essays. Some of the stories were about Trinidad’s working poor, including James’s well-known “Triumph,” a piece that has been seen as “programmatically” for the genre later known as “barrack-yard fiction,” to which his novel *Minty Alley* also belongs. Gomes, who like Mendes was better off financially than James, launched the *Beacon* in 1931; Mendes was his chief collaborator. Since the 1970s scholars have consistently identified these two “little magazines” as marking a new epoch in Trinidadian and Anglo-Caribbean literature (Sander 1978, 1988; Rosenberg 2007: 123–58).

Thus there can be little doubt that writing his stories and novel, set in the urban barracks of Port of Spain, helped to stimulate James's political consciousness and his interest in the "poor and the powerless" of his island.

Of the group of young men who formed the *Beacon* coterie, Mendes seems to have been closest to James. Recalling James at this time, Mendes writes in his autobiography drafted in the 1970s, "He stood about six feet three inches, as lean as a pole, and possessed the kind of rough charm that women of all complexions succumb to so easily. His intelligence was of the highest order, his memory for music and literature phenomenal; all of this seasoned with a sharp wit and a sardonic sense of humour. . . . His life was free and untroubled, his obsessions, books and cricket. . . . I date my meeting him as the early beginning of the intellectual group he and I brought together and nurtured to a maturity that pioneered a West Indian literature" (Mendes 2002: 72). With his relatively secure financial situation, Mendes built up a large library and record collection, and the group often met at his house (or sometimes in James's room), free to borrow and listen to his books and records. Mendes and James were writing their novels (*Pitch Lake* and *Minty Alley*) at the same time, and they "fell into the habit of reading chapters to each other as the two books developed from week to week." The two aspiring authors no doubt influenced each other's development as writers; both novels—*Pitch Lake* was published two years before *Minty Alley*, both in England—can be seen as barrack-yard fiction, though Mendes's was more overtly preoccupied with race, which, according to him, was why James "did not like my novel" (Mendes 2002: 81–82).

The company of Mendes, Gomes, and the other young men making up the *Beacon* group must have stimulated James's development as a writer, a reader, and an all-round intellectual and cultured person. He was a nongraduate teacher and tutor, whose salary could only have been small, so the opportunity to borrow books, magazines, and records from his better-off friends must also have been important to him. Moreover some members of the group, notably Gomes, held fashionable left-wing views and claimed to admire the USSR and its experiment with communism. Regular discussions on world affairs and the ideological clashes of the period must have helped to stimulate James's political thinking, though his commitment to Marxism would develop only after he had

left Trinidad. In any case he became widely known among the intelligentsia of Port of Spain as a learned and cultured man, exceptionally well-read, and a versatile writer.

James was also practicing his craft as a journalist during this period. He frequently wrote articles on sports, especially cricket, for the colony's newspapers and also unsigned pieces for the *Labour Leader*, the TWA's weekly paper, from 1922 to early 1932. He was a regular contributor to the *Beacon* in 1931–32. In 1931 one of his *Beacon* pieces earned him considerable fame: he replied at some length to an offensively racist article by Sydney Harland, a scientist at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, which purported to establish scientifically the innate mental inferiority of the “Negro.” According to James himself, the piece made him the talk of the town and even engaged the nervous attention of the governor and his executive council (Harland 1931: 25–29; James 1931a: 6–10; James [1963] 1993: 113–14).

Sports was his other passion in these years, football but above all cricket, which he played regularly at club level. A famous section in *Beyond a Boundary* describes the array of sporting clubs in the Port of Spain of the 1920s, each catering to men of a slightly different class or color segment, and his own choice—after much agonizing—for Maple, the club of the brown middle class, over Shannon of the black lower middle class. Significantly he quotes at length in this section his earlier account in *Life* of black-brown relations in Trinidad circa 1930, presumably to help his British readers understand the situation (James [1963] 1993: 51–53).

James always insisted that he had virtually no interest in local politics until soon before his departure for England (James 1962: 17; James [1963] 1993: 65). Though the “race question” was obviously an issue for him, as the Harland exchange makes clear, James has written that neither the race nor the “national” (colonial) question played a major role in his life at this time. Of course, his education had been thoroughly British, he was in awe of British literature, and most of his close friends were white or near-white. In an often quoted passage from his refutation of Harland, James wrote in 1931, “I am not ‘touchous’ on the race question. If at times I feel some bitterness at the disabilities and disadvantages to which my being a negro has subjected me it is soon washed away by remembering that the few things in my life of which I am proud, I owe, apart from my family, chiefly to white men . . . who have shown me kindness, appreciation,

and in more than one case, spontaneous and genuine friendship” (James 1931a: 10; James [1963] 1993: 29–30; see also Worcester 1993: 54–80).

But many later commentators have doubted that James was as indifferent to local politics in this period as he has claimed. He must have been very much aware, for instance, of the serious urban unrest in 1919–20, mostly played out in Port of Spain, where he lived, and he later wrote that he knew a few of the leaders through cricket.⁶ Indeed he wrote that it was cricket that brought him to politics; “injustice in the sphere of sport,” especially discrimination against talented black cricketers, fired up his indignation: “Cricket had plunged me into politics long before I was aware of it. When I did turn to politics I did not have too much to learn”—a very Jamesian assertion. One biographer thinks that by the early 1920s, “he began to nurture a pronounced dissatisfaction with the restrictions placed on an educated black man in colonial society”; the roots of his anticolonialism lay “in his formative personal experiences on the playing fields and as a reader.” After all, he read Garvey’s *Negro World* as well as high-brow British periodicals, and he listened to calypso as well as the classics. Another biographer speculates that his barrack-yard stories and novel helped to fuel at least a literary radicalism and that he may have discovered Thomas’s *Froudacity* in the 1920s, also contributing to a political awakening; as I have noted, he wrote an admiring introduction to the 1969 reprint of that classic work, first published in 1889 (James [1963] 1993: 65; Worcester 1996: 11, 14; Dhondy 2001: 26; James 1969: 23–49).

Certainly by the late 1920s, if not before, James and his circle were fascinated by the Captain, the white “French Creole” who had unexpectedly emerged as the leader of the TWA and the colony’s pro-labor, anti-colonial movement. James in particular “greatly admired this white man who introduced trade unionism to Trinidad’s workers,” according to Alfred Mendes. James himself told Paul Buhle a couple of years before his death that Cipriani never encouraged him to take part in politics—he was a “literary” man, and as a public servant, teaching at Queen’s Royal College and the Training College, he was not allowed to be publicly involved in political movements. He wrote in *Beyond a Boundary* that he was never a “follower” of Cipriani, nor officially a TWA member. But he said in the 1987 interview with Buhle, referring to himself in the third person, “James was part of the movement. . . . Cipriani would come to

me and ask me what about this and so on. . . . I would speak on behalf of the movement.” Clearly the two accounts are somewhat contradictory, but no doubt his general sympathy for the man and his movement was well known by the late 1920s. It does not seem, however, that he spoke on TWA platforms, and his unsigned pieces for the *Labour Leader* were on sport (Mendes 2002: 77; Buhle 1992: 60; James [1963] 1993: 114).

At some point James decided to write a book about Cipriani, a political biography that would illustrate through one man’s struggle the nature of crown colony government and the need for self-rule. He approached Cipriani, who agreed at once and granted him several interviews, never refusing to answer questions and providing many documents as materials for the book. “He talked and I listened with my writing-pad on my knee.” James “began to study the history of the islands” and collected *Hansard*, White Papers, commission reports; “my hitherto vague ideas of freedom crystallized around a political conviction: we should be free to govern ourselves.” The planned biography broadened into an attack on the whole theory and practice of colonial rule and a sweeping analysis of society and politics in Trinidad, with special reference to Cipriani and the TWA. The arguments he makes against crown colony rule were fairly standard by 1932, but the book showed, as Kent Worcester notes, a recognition of the structural factors inherent in colonialism, even if it can hardly be seen as a Marxist work. James considered not so much the economic underpinnings of twentieth-century colonialism but the political and, especially, the ideological structures, notably racism and the “trusteeship” doctrine (Buhle 1992: 60; James [1963] 1993: 113–15; Worcester 1996: 23).

In an article about Cipriani (long dead) in a Trinidad newspaper in 1962, James related an anecdote that he repeated in *Beyond a Boundary*, which was published the following year. Sometime before he left Trinidad in 1932, he used to give English lessons to the French consul, who was very “intimate” with the governor and his circle. They would talk on many subjects. Once he asked James, “If the Governor arrested Captain Cipriani, what do you think would happen?” James immediately realized that his arrest must have been under discussion within the government. He replied, “The people will burn down the town,” and proceeded to enlighten the consul to the fact that this had already happened—during the Water Riots of 1903 the seat of government had been burned down,

during which, as James made sure to point out, the governor of the day had barely escaped being lynched by the crowd. James could see that the consul was suitably impressed. “Cipriani was never arrested and I like to believe that I had made a modest contribution to British colonial policy” (James 1962: 17; see also James [1963] 1993: 114).⁷

That James admired Cipriani is very clear from *Life*, though except perhaps for the last few pages it is not an entirely uncritical study of the man and his leadership. In the same article published in 1962, James testified to Cipriani’s influence on his intellectual and political development: “He was the man who taught me that I was a West Indian. . . . Today [1962] I think that much that distinguishes my view of politics must have come from him. Not that he ever lectured to me, but that in talking to him, listening to him and reading his speeches in a concentrated manner, something came over, or was awakened in, me which I find in my very earliest writings and speeches when I began” (James 1962: 18).

In this article and again in *Beyond a Boundary*, James asserts that *Life* was a great success, that it received very good “notices and reviews” when it was sent to Trinidad (James 1962: 17; James [1963] 1993: 119). In fact the first local reviews of *Life*, written by members of his intellectual circle back home, were distinctly cool, ranging from harsh criticism to ambivalent praise.

Albert Gomes, James’s friend and perhaps rival, penned a short but savage review in the *Beacon*. It was neither a life of Cipriani nor an account of British government in the West Indies, he wrote; it should have been called “Some Incidents in the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago with their Colour Implications.” Gomes felt, probably wrongly, that James’s “colour hang-ups” had led him to write a book that was, “as a whole, formless and devoid of any real value to the student”—and pretentious as well. Overall, bad as crown colony government was, James’s “method of criticism is not very significant or sound.” The chapter on Cipriani and the divorce controversy came in for special abuse, as merely a “dishonest and artless attempt to whitewash his hero’s mistake.” On the other hand, and ironically in view of his earlier attack on James’s “colour hang-ups,” Gomes thought the long chapter on the color question was by far the best, with “many shrewd things”: a “very entertaining essay” on the subject, though he professed not to see the link between