



# **Religion, Diaspora, and Cultural Identity**

**A Reader in the  
Anglophone Caribbean**

**Edited by**

**John W. Pulsis**

Foreword by John F. Szwed

Afterword by Richard Price



# **Religion, Diaspora, and Cultural Identity**

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## **A Reader in the Anglophone Caribbean**

*Edited by*

**John W. Pulsis**

*Adelphi University  
Garden City, New York, USA*

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## Introduction to the Series

The Library of Anthropology now encompasses both a classical orientation and current directions in the field. It seeks to promote an awareness of new developments and changing orientations, while continuing to stress its long-term interest in traditional anthropological fields.

The section Physical Anthropology and Archaeology continues to address the substantive and theoretical issues of biological and cultural evolution. Ethnographic Studies and Theory remains a major focus. The range of interest is global in terms of contemporary cultures and ethnic populations, and ethnohistorical in terms of past cultures and societies. Three new sections augment the more traditional four-fields approach to anthropology.

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Volumes in Anthropology and Religion explore the practice of religion and attendant notions of ritual, identity and world view from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives in a number of settings and contexts.

*Anthony L. LaRuffa*

*Joel S. Savishinsky*



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## Foreword

Anyone paging through the richness of the papers contained in this volume will surely appreciate how much they contribute to our knowledge of the West Indies; at the same time, so much fine work leads us to reflect on how recently Caribbean studies in the United States have come of age. Thirty-five or forty years ago the West Indies was barely a subject of concern for anthropology. Graduate students were often warned off the Caribbean, and told it was "too close," "too acculturated," "too Western" to provide the necessary conditions for acceptable anthropological training; it offered no challenge. Senior professors of anthropology, sounding like Rasta elders, told students in effect they should "go cross water" if they wanted to study real peoples. Persistent students at, say, Harvard could find themselves being shunted off to Social Relations.

Work on the Caribbean that did get done almost inevitably had an economic or political tilt, whether as part of a concern with comparative plantation societies, kinship, plural societies, or poverty; meanwhile, questions of religion, magic, art, music, language, ritual, and symbolism were largely ignored. Just as the complexities and challenges of creole languages were being overlooked by linguists until well into the second half of the century, their promise for altering the way we look at all languages being delayed, anthropologists were carefully limiting their subject. In those years much intellectual energy was spent among the few Caribbeanists who existed on discrediting the work of Melville and Francis Herskovits and their students on the culture of the Caribbean, and more specifically their work on continuities between Africa and the Americas: The way was being cleared for a newer, post-war model anthropology. The results were too often a portrait of a dour, insular Caribbean, or a collection of social problems; and if there was a culture there, it was (as Ralph Ellison put it in another context) nothing more than the sum of a peoples' brutalization. Reading those studies one might well have believed V. S. Naipaul when he said that nothing had ever

been created in the Caribbean and nothing would ever be created there.

How could there have been so little curiosity about the culture-building that was obviously at work? How could this have happened at the very time when emigration from the West Indies was accelerating (especially among Cubans); transplanted religions were taking hold in places like New York City, Miami and Cambridge, Massachusetts; writers such as Césaire, Brathwaite, and Walcott were rising to the top of the literary world; Lydia Cabrera (first in Havana, later in Coral Gables) was turning out volume after volume of accounts of Afro-Cuban religions, lists of African words found in Cuba, and *El Monte*, the central text of Santería; all of this, just after the mambo had been jointly created between Havana and New York City?

But why look back? Forces were in motion that would change anthropology forever: Emigration continued to accelerate; new languages began to be heard in American schools; civil rights activities spawned Black Studies students with a curiosity about the ties between Africa and the Americas; reggae and its stars penetrated the United States carrying with them deeply coded messages about cosmology; films and television shows were opening up fresh connections to our neighbors to the south. A new breed of anthropology student knew that whatever their older colleagues' misgivings, history would absolve them.

In one of his last public lectures, distinguished African-Americanist St. Clair Drake called for a new kind of Caribbean scholar, one who could follow, if nothing else, the music trail from the Caribbean to Toronto, New York, Paris, and London to understand the linkages to what he called those other capitals of the West Indies. Judging by the fascinating and provocative papers in this remarkably inclusive book, it is obvious that there are those who understood this call, or were already on their way.

What we have come to see is that many of the issues now concerning anthropologists in the United States — transnationalism, the role of identity in community and nation, the nature of hybrid or creole cultures, variability of languages — have long existed in the Caribbean, and often in better light than here.

G. K. Chesterton, quibbling with Yeats and others over Ireland, once said that far from it being weird and wild, an exception among nations, Ireland was in many respects a model nation, one with the capacity to demonstrate it was the other countries of Europe that were

weird and wild. He might well have been speaking about the Caribbean. In fact, Derek Walcott's answer to Naipaul did say something of the sort: Rather than assert that nothing had ever been created in the Caribbean, one should say that nothing will always be created in the Caribbean, because what will come out of there is like nothing one has ever seen. This collection of essays makes this point and others, and takes us more than halfway there.

*John F. Szwed*  
Yale University

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## Acknowledgments

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I would also like to thank editor Carol Hollander for her patience, as reading drafts were transformed into chapters. We have benefitted immensely from the constructive comments of Carol and the outside readers in their balanced and informative reader-reports.

Special thanks to John Szwed and Richard Price, who took precious time from their own writing and research for reading and commenting on the original panel papers and for the expanded versions printed in this collection.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Ken Bilby and Carole Yawney; in addition to their own chapters, they provided overviews for Parts I and II.

Finally I would like to thank our contributors for their enthusiasm, support and dedication as this project progressed. It could not have been done without you all, and I "give thanks."

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**John W. Pulis** is assistant professor of anthropology in the Center for African-American Studies at Adelphi University in Garden City, New York. He has published a number of articles on the topic of Rastafari, has contributed entries to the *Historical Encyclopedia of Slavery* (1997) on Afro-Christianity and the role of missions in Jamaica, West Indies, and has edited a volume of historical essays entitled *Moving On: Black Loyalists in the Afro-Atlantic World* (1998). His monograph "Gates to Zion: Texts, Voices, and the Narrative World of Rastafari" is scheduled for release later next year.

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**Wallace W. Zane** is a PhD candidate in anthropology at UCLA. He has conducted field research on Spiritual Baptists in St. Vincent and in New York and has published articles on the topic (1995).

# 1: RELIGION, DIASPORA, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: AN INTRODUCTION

*John W. Pulis*

Issues concerning displacement and a host of ideologies that have linked displacement, enforced and voluntary, to narratives concerning diaspora loom large in the hearts and minds of Caribbean people. In the opening stanzas of what is regarded as a classic convergence of lyrics and music, Bob Marley expresses the importance of displacement to local history and culture:

Exodus,  
oh yea,  
the movement of Jah people.

Open your eyes and let me tell you this;  
Men an people will fight you down (Tell me why?)  
when you see Jah light.

So we gonna walk, alright,  
through the roads of creation.  
We're the generation,  
trode thru great tribulation.

Open your eyes and look within.  
We know where we're going,  
we know where we're from.  
We're leaving Babylon,  
an we're goin to our father's land.

Exodus, oh yea,  
the movement of Jah people.<sup>1</sup>

The power of Marley's lyrics, keyed to a vernacular known as call and response, evokes memories of a black diaspora, the infamous

African slave trade, and a more recent displacement that has taken Caribbean people to Europe and North America as well as Africa. Although Marley set these themes to reggae and transported them around the world, they have been a part of local history for quite some time. Documents and testimonies printed in the 18th century attest to the fact that such themes have been worked and reworked as each generation has made its own history.<sup>2</sup>

Marley's reinterpretation provides an appropriate introduction to a collection of readings that explore the relationship between religion, diaspora, and attendant notions of cultural identity. Once considered the hallmark of Caribbean ethnology, concern for religion and worldview have taken a back seat to more secular interests and agendas. The issues and questions raised by an earlier generation of scholars and activists have, for the most part, been eclipsed by economic histories of plantations, quantitative analyses of public opinion, and statistical accounts concerning modernization, development, and the allocation of scarce resources.<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing that religion and worldview are not mirrors but activities that constitute what Kamau Brathwaite has referred to as the "nommo" of Caribbean societies, anthropologists such as Mintz and Price, literary historians such as Alleyne and Cooper, and poets such as Derek Walcott have widened the purview of economic and political studies to include cultural practices and expressive forms such as language, music, and folk religion.<sup>4</sup> Similar to the importance of geopolitical shifts to modernization theory, the turn to culture was not intended to displace economics or politics but to explore the relationship between expressive form, everyday life, and global shifts. The explosive popularity of musical forms such as calypso and reggae in settings such as New York and London, Cape Town and Nairobi, and Los Angeles and Toronto attested both to shifts in older patterns of displacement as well as the importance of such shifts and the influence of media and related technologies on the evolution of cultural practice at home and abroad. At the forefront of this turn was a related and concomitant concern with agency, with culture as a site where hegemonic forms were contested, where older and traditional forms were renegotiated, and where new or emergent forms were invented.<sup>5</sup>

The chapters in this collection address a number of issues concerning the ongoing and open-ended relation between religion, cultural

expression, and everyday life. Eleven of the fifteen chapters are revised and expanded versions of reading drafts presented at panel convened at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 1995. The remaining four were added when it became apparent that the panel papers were well on their way to becoming the core of a reader devoted to the topic. All, with the exception of one, are focused on the Anglophone Caribbean, the English-speaking islands that once constituted the British West Indies and to resident communities in Europe and America.<sup>6</sup>

Some disclaimers are called for. Like all cultural artifacts, scholarship is built upon tradition and breaking old and in many ways hegemonic patterns is sometimes easier said than done. No attempt has been made to include readings from either the Hispanic or Francophone islands. Since there are several such collections in print we have confined our attention to the Anglophone Caribbean. While focused on the Anglophone Caribbean, this collection is disproportionately weighted to the islands of Trinidad and Jamaica and is by no means representative of this larger and equally diverse grouping of island and mainland societies. This disclaimer has more to do with the chapters in Part Two than with those in Part One and we hope to include readings from islands other than Trinidad and Jamaica in an expanded and revised edition.<sup>7</sup>

Bringing a sense of order to a collection whose authors were asked to roam as far and wide as possible has been proven to be a challenge. In keeping with framework of the original panel, I have divided this collection in half and I have placed chapters into sub-sections labelled "Abroad" and "At Home" that correspond to their respective sites, landscapes, and sense of place. This division should not by any means conjure up images of isolated or disparate communities. In this post-modern age of fax machines and the Internet the relation between the two can best be characterized as a dialectical rather than a unilinear flow of ideas and people. Since this volume was conceived less as a set of theoretical essays and more as a reader devoted to ethnography or cultural description, I have asked Robert Stewart to provide an historical overview and Ken Bilby and Carole Yawney to provide brief summations of Parts One and Two for our audience.

Our choice of a reader should not in any way suggest that these chapters are devoid of theory. In addition to providing descriptions of local and global practices, this collection raises some provocative

questions and address a number of fundamental issues concerning religion and cultural change. Contrary to accepted convention, religion occupies a primary domain in the lives of Caribbean folk and issues concerning ethics, morals, and what constitutes the sacred and the profane are intertwined with a concern for unemployment and exchange rates as topics in everyday discourse. This issue, that of authority, profanity, and moral discourse, is discussed by Garth Green in "Blasphemy, Sacrilege, and Moral Degradation in the Trinidad Carnival" and by Barry Chevannes in "Between the Living and the Dead: The Apotheosis of Rastafari." The politics of names and naming practices are a major concern in Caribbean societies and Green discusses the polemics that arose concerning an entry in a recent Carnival called "hallelujah." This appellation provoked an immediate reaction by a consortium of local clergy who associated such naming practices with profanity, the appropriation by a secular and civic festivity of a word and meaning that more properly belonged to the domain of institutionalized religion. Barry Chevannes discusses the dynamics of a somewhat similar national debate that has unfolded in Jamaica. He tells us how a number of Rastafarians, members of the now legendary Bob Marley and the Wailers, have undergone a deification of sorts and have joined national heroes such as Sam Sharpe, Paul Bogle, and Alexander Bustamante in a kind of postcolonial pantheon, the Jamaican equivalent of the American founding fathers. This is a truly remarkable transition when we consider that just thirty years ago members of this religious group were branded as outcasts, the lunatic fringe of a colonial society who had little to offer in terms of a national or postcolonial identity. It is virtually impossible to think of Jamaica without thinking of Bob Marley, so enmeshed have the two become.

A second and related group of issues explored in this collection focuses around cultural production and a number of chapters look at the way cultural elements have, to paraphrase a keyword from an earlier generation, undergone a process of syncretization in the molding and shaping of a distinctly Caribbean aesthetic. When we think of syncretization we tend to think in terms of the past, as historical process, Caribbean culture as the product of an African-European encounter that led to formation of creole societies and what we know today as the modern Caribbean. Several chapters have expanded

upon this idea and discuss the way various elements and forms have been co-opted and subjected to what might best be described as a process of postcolonial creolization. Such is the case with "Pentecostal Community and Jamaican Hierarchy" in which Diane Austin-Broos discusses how penetecostalism, first introduced in the 19th century, is now considered a "native" or indigenous religion bearing little or no resemblance in the hearts and minds of local practitioners with North America. Are such processes confined to the Caribbean or has creolization undergone dispersal as well? In "Spiritual Baptists in New York City," Wally Zane raises some interesting questions as he tells us how in the pan-Caribbean world of contemporary Brooklyn beliefs and practices once confined to island-societies have undergone a linguistic or semantic broadening to include similar forms and elements from American, Anglophone, and other Caribbean societies as well.<sup>8</sup>

If an earlier generation saw the dynamics of interaction in terms of Africans and Europeans, then several chapters have drawn upon recent trends in cultural studies to move beyond polar dichotomies and have approached interaction in less formulaic terms as hybridity and multiplicity. A sense of hybridity and multiplicity is no where more evident than in James Houk's chapter on Trinidad. Entitled "Chaos, Compromise, and Transformation in Trinidad," Houk discusses how elements of Catholicism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam have been combined and reworked among the practitioners of Orisha, an African-derived religion, in new and novel ways. Whereas an earlier generation worked within fixed and timeless categories, a sense of agency and indeterminacy pervades this collection as they describe the ways older forms, elements, and meanings have been redefined in a variety of new contexts and situations. In "Noises of Astonishment: Spiritual Baptist Music in Context," Steve Glazier details how agency and innovation are brought to bear within the musical structure of Baptist hymns as performers move between and incorporate the secular with the sacred. Similar issues lay at the core of John Homiak's chapter as well. Entitled "Movements of Jah People: From Soundscapes to Mediascapes," Homiak describes how a primarily spoken means of communication has undergone substantial re-visioning as it incorporates electronic and visual media such as video and the Internet into a preexisting form and practice. Who could possible have foreseen during the interwar decades how

Rastafari would deploy such technologies as a necessary complement to face-to-face communication.

Our focus on agency is all-important and points to issues raised by Carole Yawney, Ken Bilby, Ineke Van Wetering, and to a lesser extent that of Phil Sher. If Houk, Homiak, and Glazier tell us about indeterminacy in cultural production, then Yawney, Bilby, and Van Wetering describe the ways and means through which local identities have undergone transformation in diaspora: how Africanisms invented in the Caribbean have been transported and reinvented in Europe and North America. As I mentioned earlier, the idea of diaspora looms large in the hearts and minds of Caribbean people. Unlike other areas in the colonial world, there was little in the way of a residual or indigenous formation extant in the region from which elements or traits deemed traditional could be invested with new meaning. Expanding upon James Clifford's ideas about traveling cultures and Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, Yawney and Bilby look at the relation between community, identity, and migration. In "Only Visitors Here: Representing Rastafari into the 21st Century," Yawney details how subaltern history is made. In addition to calling for a multi-site ethnography, Yawney describes history in the making, and tells us how a locally produced narrative about a black diaspora, a major theme among Rastafari since the thirties, has been circulated around the world and is seen by practitioners in the nineties as prophecy come to pass, the link that connects distant but not disparate enclaves in Africa, Europe, North America and Jamaica into a global community. In a chapter entitled "Neither Here Nor There: The Place of Community in the Jamaican Religious Imagination," Bilby tells us how practitioners of a folk religion known as "Convince" see themselves not as isolated or confined to a local district but as constituent members of a larger if not global community of religious practitioners. Convince is a local religion that incorporates aspects of Christianity and African ancestor worship and Bilby takes us into the world of a Bongo-man (not to be confused with the use of Bongo as an appellation by Rastafarians) and the community he has created.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas Yawney and Bilby discuss the importance of diaspora to the imagined and invented, Van Wetering and Sher open windows on the dynamics of encounter and intervention. In a chapter entitled

"Cultural Encounters in the Diaspora," Van Wetering adds to our understanding of displacement by discussing the politics of identity between Creole and Maroon identity formations in Europe. Maroons are descendants of escaped slaves who organized semi-autonomous communities in island and mainland-societies such as Surinam and Jamaica in the 17th and 18th centuries. They have been associated with rebellion and resistance and have co-existed in an uneasy and often hostile relation within larger Creole societies. Van Wetering tells how identities such as Maroon and Creole are by no means fixed and have undergone reinterpretation as African "arrivants" to the New World became Caribbean "migrants" to the Old World some four hundred years later.

The politics of ethnicity and the tension between Caribbean and non-Caribbean communities constitutes the topic of Phil Sher's chapter. Entitled "West Indian American Day: Becoming a Tile in the Gorgeous Mosaic," Sher discusses the sequence of events that led to rupture and conflict between the Hasidic and the Caribbean or West Indian communities in Brooklyn during the Summer of 1991. Like the festivities associated with the Columbus and St. Patrick's Day parades, West Indian American Day is both a marker and a celebration of West Indian identity in New York, that most ethnic of American cities. As Sher tell us, tensions between the Hasidic and West Indian communities concerning ethnic holidays, public venues, and the perception of preferential treatment accorded to the Hasidic community were exacerbated by the accidental death of West Indian youth. In addition to sparking a two-week period of conflict, this event called into question ideas concerning ethnicity, politics, and the merits of the "gorgeous mosaic" in New York.

There are few abstract "others" in this collection and several chapters interrogate such notions as they call into question the meaning and definition associated with categories such as religion and worldview. In "On the Right Path: Interpolating Religion in Trinidad," Aisha Khan discusses the meaning of religion to Indo-Trinidadians. As Khan tell us, religion became a site of resistance for Indo-Trinidadian people soon after their arrival in the 19th century. Expanding upon Talal Asad's call for a critique of religion as a category, what Khan describes is not a bounded or unified ideology transported intact from Asia, but a shifting and fluid system of beliefs and practices that includes elements deemed magic or extra-natural as well as



those deemed political or ideological in Trinidad. Known to practitioners as the "right path," this worldview combines Islam and Hinduism with Christianity (African and European) and is made to work both as a discourse prescribing and delimiting transgression and a marker setting boundaries and drawing distinctions between Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian identity formations in postcolonial Trinidad.<sup>10</sup>

Although postcolonial theory has subverted a retrenchant colonial discourse, it has been far less receptive to subject positions that lay outside its boundaries and definitions. In a chapter entitled "Citing[sighting]-up: Word, Sounds, and Reading Scripture in Jamaica," John Pulis discusses the way literacy and literacy practices have become implicated in change. Like Austin-Broos, Pulis describes a process wherein local practitioners of Rastafari deconstruct long accepted meanings and interpretations of Scripture, in this case the Revelation of John, and in so doing not only appropriate or lay claim to the Bible as a black text but transform it into an oral narrative or "living testament" as well. Similar to the "right path," the practice of citing-up raises questions concerning the ahistorical nature of literacy and literacy events and challenges polar dichotomies and terms of analysis such as literate/preliterate and oral/scrabal. Rather than postcolonial theory and its tendency to flatten, silence, and homogenize, Pulis has drawn upon recent work in cultural studies and the ethnography of literacy concerning aurality, oral/scrabal mixes, and reading as a subversive activity.<sup>11</sup>

Suffice it to say as I bring this introduction to a close, that the worldviews of Caribbean people have not been superseded by secular ideologies, nor can the linking of what would appear as oppositional and antagonistic forms, traits, and elements be dismissed as archaic, false, or utopian. Whether practiced at home in the Caribbean or abroad in Europe and North America, religious activities have always been sometimes subtle, sometimes volatile endeavors that have led to new forms of cultural expression. Along with providing cultural descriptions, these chapters open windows on the ongoing and open-ended relation between local and global and historic and contemporary change and point the way to new sites of struggle and intervention in the culture history of Caribbean people.

## Endnotes

1. See *Songs of Freedom: From 'Judge Not' to 'Redemption Song'* (Birmingham, UK: Island Records, 1992) for lyrics and music.
2. See *The Speech of Mr. John Talbot Campo-Bello, A Free Christian-Negro to J. Roberts, 1736*, and see also a petition lodged on 18 May 1745 on behalf of the "The Sons of Chus" in *The Journal of the House of Assembly of Jamaica* for earlier and somewhat similar reinterpretations of Exodus in the 18th century; and see Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) for the importance of diaspora, exile, and return to the contemporary Caribbean. See Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), for black vernacular and call and response.
3. For earlier and in many ways still relevant accounts of Caribbean religion see Melville J. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1937), *Trinidad Village* (New York: Knopf, 1947), and *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1941); and see George Eaton Simpson, *Black Religions in the New World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978) for an overview. For economic histories and quantitative analyses see Barry Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807–1834* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1984), Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 1993); for public opinion and political culture see the publications of the late Carl Stone especially *Class, State, and Democracy in Jamaica* (Kingston, JA: Blackett Publishers, 1985) and his earlier *Race, Class, and Political Behavior* (Kingston, JA: ISER, 1973). Individual citations to current political and economic debate are far too numerous list. See Evelyn Huber Stephens & John D. Stephens, *Democratic Socialism in Jamaica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) and the later Prime Minister Michael Manley, *The Politics of Change* (Washington, DC: Howard U. Press, 1975) and *Jamaica: Struggle in the Periphery* (London: Writers and Readers Co-operative Society, 1982) for excellent overviews and discussions of the polemics.
4. For definitions of "nommo" and what remains one of the most eloquent essays on the importance of religion to Caribbean societies see Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature," originally published in *Daedalus* and reprinted in Sidney

Mintz (ed.). *Slavery, Colonialism, and Racism* (New York: Norton, 1974); see also Rex Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity* (Los Angeles: CAAS, 1979), Sidney Mintz & Richard Price, *The Birth of Afro-American Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), Mervyn Alleyne, *The Roots of Jamaican Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1988), Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood* (Durham, NC: Duke U. Press, 1995), and Derek Walcott's, "The Muse of History," in Orde Coombs, *Is Massa Day Dead?* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) for language, music, folk culture, and programmatic statements concerning Caribbean culture.

5. Like the importance of *nommo* as an analytical or working construct, my understanding and application of terms and concepts such as agency, praxis, hegemony, and traditional and residual culture has been informed by Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1977) Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), and Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
6. Definitions and demarcations of the Caribbean according to social, cultural, and linguistic affiliation are by no means fixed and have varied over time. While I have referred to these societies in linguistic terms as Anglophone, Creole-English and varieties of English and Dutch Creole mixes are mutually intelligible and are spoken throughout the former English, Danish, and Dutch islands. See John Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles, Volume II, Reference Survey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) for Creole English in the Caribbean.
7. See Margarite F. Olmos & Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (ed.), *Sacred Possessions* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997) for the Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean.
8. See the selections in Dell Hymes (ed.), *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985 [1971]), for an overview of creolization as both a linguistic and cultural process; see Roger Bastide, *The Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpretation of Civilizations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978 [1960]), for syncretism, Africanisms, and retentions as applied to Afro-Brazilian religions; and see Kamau Brathwaite, "Caliban, Ariel, and Unprospero in the Conflict of Creolization: A Study of the Slave Revolt in Jamaica in 1831-32," in Vera Rubin & Arthur Tuden (ed.), *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation*

*Societies* (New York: New York Academy of Science, 1993 [1976]) for the application of creolization to a historical event. For a dated but critical overview of acculturation, culture-contact, and syncretism as social theory see David Bidney, *Theoretical Anthropology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); and see Mervyn Alleyne's "Introduction," *The Roots of Jamaican Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1988) and Sidney Mintz & Richard Price's "Preface" in *The Birth of Afro-American Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1992) for the state of current debate between two related approaches to the process of cultural formation in the Caribbean.

9. Cultural Studies is an eclectic enterprise in which scholars from anthropology, history, literary studies, and communications explore what Raymond Williams called "our common life together." See Patrick Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints* (New York: Routledge, 1988), L. Grossberg, Cary Nelson, & Paula Treichler (ed.), *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993), and especially Dennis Dworkin, *British Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) for histories and overviews of the field. See also Anna Lowenburg Tsing, "From the Margins," *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 9 (1994), 279-97 for the relation of anthropology and cultural studies. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford, 1983 [1976]) and *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford, 1977) for a listing of terms and definitions.
10. See James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in L. Grossberg, Cary Nelson, & Paula Treichler (ed.), *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), and especially "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 9 (1994), 302-38; see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983) and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) for understandings and definitions of diaspora, imagined, and invented culture.
11. See Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993); see William Roseberry & Nicole Polier, "Tristes Tropes: Postmodern Anthropologists Encounter the Other and Discover Themselves," *Economy and Society* Vol. 18 (1989); Frederic Jameson, "Regarding Postmodernism," *Social Text* Vol. 17, (1987); and John Beverley, *Against Literature* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1993) for overviews and critiques of postmodernism.

12. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial literature* (London: Routledge, 1989; Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory; A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and K. Anthony Appiah, "Is the post in postmodernism the post in postcolonial," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991), 336–57; and Alison Donnell & Sarah Lawson Welsh, *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996) for overviews of postcolonial theory. As the above have commented, the single most important shortcoming to postcolonial theory has been the reification of prescriptive notions of ethnicity as a dominant ideology. This is perhaps most acute in recent attempts to legitimize orality in ahistorical and essentialized terms as African language[s] transposed intact to the New World.

## 2: RELIGION IN THE ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

*Robert J. Stewart*

### Introduction

The Anglophone Caribbean consists of those islands that were formerly known as the British West Indies, and includes also the mainland nations of Guyana and Belize. The term Anglophone implies a linguistic identification, indicating those Caribbean countries where English is considered the official language, although the native speakers may have inherited "nation languages" (Brathwaite, 1984) that are either Afro-French or Afro-English Creoles. In theory, all the citizens of Anglophone Caribbean nations can at least hear and understand standard English, if not speak it.

The entire area was claimed by Spain following the voyages of Christopher Columbus. British acquisition began with effective colonization in St. Kitts, Barbados, Nevis, and Barbuda in the 1620s, and Britain seized Jamaica from Spain in 1655. Several islands that had been previously settled by France, such as Dominica, St. Vincent, and Grenada, were acquired by Britain in 1763 as a result of what is known as the Seven Years War. Trinidad was ceded to Britain by Spain in 1797 and St. Lucia, after changing hands several times between France and Britain, was officially acquired by Britain in 1814. The South American Dutch colonies of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo became British Guiana in 1815, and finally, Belize was acquired in 1840 as the colony of British Honduras.

British West Indian colonial society came to consist of a minority of European planters and plantation personnel, colonial administrators, and clergy of the Church of England. There was also a community of Sephardic Jews, especially in Jamaica and Barbados, from the earliest years of colonization. After sugar cane became the primary plantation crop in the middle of the seventeenth century, a steady

importation of African slaves brought about a black majority in the population. There was a gradually increasing number of "coloreds," as they were called — offspring of whites and blacks. British slave trading was officially terminated in 1808 and emancipation ended slavery in 1834. The demographic pattern was shifted in the nineteenth century with the migration of indentured laborers from India, China, and Africa. The aboriginal people of the islands were Caribs and Arawak-speaking Tainos. Only small remnants of these Native-Americans remain, although many people of mixed ethnicity, especially in the Hispanophone Caribbean, are of Native-American ancestry.

The history of religion in the Caribbean is similar in many respects to the history of religions in all colonial systems in that it is a story of the imposition of, the resistance to, and the competing claims of power. The experience and expression of religion are formed within particular historical contexts. The Anglophone Caribbean context provides a unique configuration of events, personalities, and cultures that makes the history of religion and religious practice in the region as dramatic as in any other time and place of religious creativity.

## Carib and Taino Religion

European colonizers found Caribs inhabiting mainly the Lesser Antilles, the smaller islands of the eastern and southern Caribbean, and Tainos in the Greater Antilles, consisting today of Jamaica, Cuba, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico. Caribs and Tainos had their own religious systems, mythologies, and cosmologies that were as real to them as the island coasts, hills, sea, and hurricanes that defined the cycles of their lives.

Nature and ancestors were important elements of Amerindian religion. In Taino belief, the major deities, creator parents of the land, were remote from the concerns of daily life. But there were many lesser deities and ancestral spirits, represented in *zemis*. *Zemis* could be wood, shell, or bone carvings, or baskets and cotton bags holding the bones of important ancestors. Spirits who dwelled in trees, rocks, and rivers could cause harm, and Tainos would take certain medicines, decorate their bodies, and wear special jewelry for protection against these spirits. Tobacco was a sacred herb that priests would

smoke to induce a state of communication with the spirits. Tainos did not dread death. There were magical islands to the south, they believed, where all the departed souls lived happily together.

Carib religion was similar in many ways to that of the Tainos, but in certain features reflected the warlike or aggressive character of the Caribs and their animosity toward the Tainos. Caribs believed that the spirits of their dead enemies could inhabit their bodies. This belief led to a form of ritual cannibalism in which the Caribs acquired, through consumption, the courage of war captives. For the Caribs, the afterlife was either a place where they were served by Tainos or a kind of hell where Tainos were their masters. Perhaps because as inhabitants of small islands the Caribs were more at the mercy of the capricious sea and winds than were the Tainos on larger islands, Carib deities were more dangerous and needed more attention to be assuaged.

Did Taino and Carib religion disappear after Europeans claimed the Caribbean and began importing African slaves? Striking similarities between African and Amerindian cosmologies have led scholars to conclude that rather than disappear after the arrival of Europeans and African slaves, both could have merged in ways that scholars continue to study. Amerindian religion could also have been preserved in "syncretized" forms with both African religion and folk Catholicism in the Spanish and French Caribbean.<sup>1</sup> In the Anglophone Caribbean, English speaking settlers and their slaves had less contact with the aboriginal peoples, but the preservation of elements of Amerindian culture remains a possibility worthy of research.

## **European Churches and Missions**

The Church of England, or the Anglican church, as it was also called, became the established church in the British West Indies. Anglican clergy ministered mainly to the plantocracy and showed little interest or were outrightly opposed to working among African slaves. The Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Foreign Parts was started as a missionary venture of the Anglican church in 1701. Perhaps the most noteworthy enterprise of the SPG in the West Indies began in 1710 when the planter Christopher Codrington bequeathed his estate in Barbados to the Society. The idea was that the SPG would manage



a Christian plantation and thereby demonstrate to planters the compatibility of slavery and Christianity. The venture eventually failed when the commercial demands of sugar production took priority over humanitarian and religious motives.<sup>2</sup>

A number of other Christian churches, known as "sectarians" or "nonconformist" because they refused to conform to the established doctrine, ritual, and authority, have had a far more profound influence on religion in the West Indies than the Anglicans. The nonconformist presence began in the 1660s when Quakers arrived in Barbados, Jamaica, and Nevis. They were not an organized missionary society, as such, and had been transported or removed from England for noncompliance with ecclesiastical laws. "Transportation" was enforced exile or banishment, a common punishment during the colonial period and the means through which many Europeans arrived in America and the Caribbean. Although they were not formally missionaries, Quakers did attempt to convert slaves and legislation enacted by the Assembly of Barbados in 1676 banned black slaves from attending Quaker meetings and forbade Quakers from instructing slaves in Christianity on the grounds that such instruction would lead to notions of equality (Caldecott, 1898, p. 66). Quakers also refused militia duty, the taking of oaths, and the payment of taxes to support the established Anglican clergy, thereby continuing their passive resistance to the dominant political and ecclesiastical authority that had caused their transportation in the first place. This was the pattern of conflict — sometimes uneasy compromise, sometimes violent hostility — that would follow when other "sectarians" began to arrive in the West Indies in the following century.

Moravian missionaries from Germany first arrived in St. Thomas in the Danish Virgin Islands in 1732, and in Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, St. Kitts and Tobago in the years between 1754 and 1790. Plans for a Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society were first formulated in England in 1784, and a few years later the Methodists initiated activity to the West Indies. The Baptist Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, the Scottish Missionary Society, and the evangelical Anglican Church Missionary Society were formed in the 1790s and they began working in the West Indies in the years between the abolition of the slave trade in 1808 and British slave emancipation in 1834.

## **Traditional African Religion**

Until the British terminated the African slave trade in 1808, black slaves were acquired over time mainly from shifting West and West Central African coastal and hinterland sources between what is now Senegal in the north and Angola in the south. There was tremendous cultural and linguistic diversity in that area, and there is always the risk of oversimplification when generalizing about African culture. In the Caribbean, the already complex cultures of Africa were fragmented, dispersed, and modified. Anthropologists and historians have, nevertheless, discerned a common thread of social and cosmological presumptions in the African diaspora that are characteristic of a broad cultural area in western Africa (Mintz & Price, 1976, pp. 5 and 6; Brathwaite, 1974, pp. 34, 40, and 41; Thornton, 1992, pp. 186–87).

In traditional African religion, which has many variations in different parts of Africa, body and movement are key elements. The body is both the place and the manifestation of one's meeting with the deities and lesser spirits in the pantheon. There is generally a belief in a supreme god, a creator and source of all power. But this high god is imagined as distant and as virtually inactive in human affairs. Involvement in human fortune and misfortune is the role of lesser deities and spirits (Sawyerr, 1970, pp. 5–6).

Ultimate reality in traditional African religion is distinctly worldly and temporal. This does not mean that it is secular in the Western conception of the term. Rather it derives from the presumption of a primal unity of the material and the spiritual (Taylor, 1963, pp. 11–12, 79, and 197). This is shown in attachment to and veneration of the land. The land ties together the living and the dead, uniting past and present generations of family, clan and nation. And the land of the departed is conceived as virtually the same as the land of the living (Mbiti, 1970, pp. 34–35, 208, and 210; Parrinder, 1969, p. 54).

The spirits of the departed, the ancestors, and the minor deities are important in the maintenance of order, stability, proper human relations, and material fortune or misfortune. To be without religion — that is, to deny or ignore the world of the spirits — is tantamount to denying one's social and, therefore, individual identity. Communication with departed family members and ancestors — through the means of libation, meal sharing, dancing, and drumming — is of utmost importance in the maintenance of social well-being. This

communication is real, active, and powerful, especially with the spirits of those who have most recently passed on (Mbiti, 1970, pp. 106, 107–10, 211–12, and 213).

Among African peoples, the sense of corporate life, in which the communities of the living and the dead are linked, is profound. It is in this context that distinctions between morally good and bad behavior have meaning. A person is “good” or “bad” according to social conduct. Actions are “good” when they conform to community custom and maintain the equilibrium of the community, “bad” when they do not. The effects of conduct on relationships determines its moral quality. The spirits of the departed are essentially part of the community, and proper communication with them is necessary for material and social beneficence, as they are the guides and guardians of conduct and moral order (Mbiti, 1970, pp. 278–79; Idowu, 1962, pp. 144–68).

African natural science, a function of religion, is based upon observation and control of the world, of its powers, possibilities, and effects on human life. Africans do not perceive cosmic powers as impersonal but as radically personalized through deities, ancestors, and the spirits of the departed. The maintenance of constant communication with them appears to be the primary purpose of African religious practice. Specialists in spirit communication seek augmentation of positive force by recognizing and invoking the powers of the spirits and by letting them manifest themselves through the psychological and physical functions of the human body. These specialists are trained in the harnessing of spiritual power to maintain social and individual health and to counter misfortune, suffering and disease (Parrinder, 1969, pp. 26–28; Mbiti, 1970, p. 84; Schuler, 1980, p. 33).<sup>3</sup>

## Conflicting Worldviews

Cosmologies from Europe, Africa and pre-Columbian America intersected, competed, and, in certain ways, were synthesized through the historical experiences of colonialism, slavery, the plantation, rebellion, nationalism, and, eventually, independence, and we can see in the region the classic contradiction between religion as the sanctification of authority and social control and religion as a source of resistance and social change. Caribbean historians have used the word “creolization” to identify the process.

## **European Christianity and Slave Society**

Continuities and changes in African beliefs, as well as the presence of the European churches in the Caribbean, can be defined largely in relation to slavery. The five hundred year history of the Caribbean from the beginning of Spanish settlement in the region has largely been the history of slave society.

The Anglican church in the Caribbean offered no systematic critique of slavery, although individual Anglican priests distinguished themselves by their prophetic outspokenness against slave society.<sup>4</sup> "Sectarian" missionaries did not preach a consistent anti-slavery ethic, but by their actions and their preaching, they would initiate fissures in slave society that would contribute to its demise, and, in the end, these missionaries could be said to have helped to bring about emancipation.<sup>5</sup>

The Baptist missionaries in Jamaica provide examples. One of the most outspoken among them, William Knibb, who arrived on the island in 1825, put it this way: "To proclaim liberty to the captive and the opening of the prisons to them that are bound, is a delightful employment, and here would I dwell that I may be thus employed." Another Baptist in Jamaica, Richard Merrick, challenged religious and secular distinctions when he explained that his purpose in running for election to local government (the parish vestry) in 1843 was to "show the poor people that I loved their bodies as well as their souls" (Stewart, 1992, pp. 16 and 17).

For evangelicals like Knibb and Merrick, a heightened sense of the nearness of God's kingdom provided a special urgency: Christian converts, whether slave or free, had social and physical needs which no Christian could ignore in conscience. This way of thinking was controversial because it undermined the current economic doctrine that society and economy are subject to their own laws with which religion should not interfere. Humanitarian evangelicalism did not turn missionaries into revolutionaries, for they retained the belief in the overwhelming priority of the life to come and the relative unimportance of the inequalities and hardships of this life. But missionary involvement with the West Indies occurred simultaneously with the organized movement in Britain for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. Missionary response to the issue of abolition would determine their relationships with both the plantocracy and with the

slaves. To steer a middle course between the two was most difficult. To demonstrate to the planters that they wished to maintain social control and to preach humanity and fraternity to the slaves proved to be irreconcilable as West Indian society responded to slave resistance and rebellion and to the pressures for abolition coming from Britain.

Evangelicals were not prepared to articulate rationales for emancipation and free society. The evangelical critique of slave society had force not as a systematic philosophy so much as the conviction of the heart, a here and now response to God's word and grace, a reflex of conscience, after it became patently obvious that slavery could not be Christianized. In their mission to the enslaved, missionaries were able to cut through the rationalizations for slavery and racial stratification but had little else to offer beyond personal redemption and self-help.

The situation that prevailed was a struggle to reconcile the realities of slavery with a traditional view of the benign Christian family, a view that accommodated slavery within a paternal relationship of unequals (Davis, 1966, p. 200). The institution of slavery was not condemned until 1823 when the Anti-Slavery Society began its campaign for emancipation. Prior to that, the main hope of Christian critics had been for the gradual Christianization of slavery and its eventual demise but not immediate abolition (see endnote 4).

Why did Christianity, whether defined as church, denomination, doctrine, or moral system, accommodate for so long a system of slave labor? How did Christian churches figure at all in the final abolition of slavery? These are complicated questions, and economic determinists, historians of ideas, and theologians of salvation history would all offer varying answers. It can be argued that abolitionism as a moral imperative in the Anglophone Caribbean can be ascribed to a changing social conscience in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century Britain that resulted from the convergence of new methods of production, concomitantly new labor relations, philosophical humanitarianism, and the idea of democracy. All these circumstances provided a soil in which a Christian ethic of freedom could flower.<sup>6</sup> The problem of slavery could have remained locked within philosophical debate, and the conceptual contradictions could have stalemated action, had not certain practical realities led to com-

mitment and action: Christian missionaries coming face to face with slavery not as an abstraction but as a bitter and daily reality, and the constant and varying manifestations of resistance and rebellion against slavery by the slaves themselves.

In the early eighteenth century English Baptists affirmed that slavery was authorized by Scripture and was part of the governing structure of the world (Davis, 1966, p. 335). It was a long way from that position to that of William Knibb, who not long after his arrival in Jamaica condemned slavery without qualification. The more common viewpoint of missionaries was qualified, however, and was represented by the view on slavery of the Scottish missionary Hope Waddell (1863), who arrived in Jamaica in 1829. "The more he has seen of the system [of slavery]," wrote Waddell in the third person of his own opinion, "the more does he condemn it, as unworthy of being maintained anywhere; bearable only when required to escape anarchy, and which it would be criminal to introduce into any country whence it can be excluded" (pp. iv-v). While this view tends toward the abolitionist one, it nevertheless reveals an ambivalence based on a fear of anarchy should slavery not be replaced by strong social controls. Such ambivalence was behind a style of missionary gradualism on slavery and other social issues, a style that would not satisfy black Christians in the West Indies.

The social role of the European missionaries was as significant as their views on slavery. Personal ambition and religious laxness were characteristic of the Anglican clergy throughout the slave period. Their church came to be regarded as little more than an ornamental adjunct of the state, the survival of a harmless home institution which would cease to be tolerated outside its own particular groove. The sympathies of the clergy were with the colonial government in each island. Those governments were basically negrophobic plantocracies. Not only were the Anglican clergy, in effect, the house chaplains for the West Indian ruling class, they were often accused by the plantocrats themselves of corruption, cynicism, and ineptitude (Ellis, 1913, p. 53; Patterson, 1967, p. 208).

Evangelical missionaries, both "sectarians" and those within the Anglican church itself, challenged the colonial clergy to attend more carefully to the Christianization of the slaves. The response, such as it was, was not enthusiastic. To the extent that Anglican clergymen began to preach, instruct, and baptize slaves it was more out of

concern to counter competition from nonconformist missionaries and from the Church of England's own Church Missionary Society, which began working in the West Indies in the 1820s.

The challenge that nonconformist missionaries and Anglican evangelicals brought to plantation society was not so much a systematic critique of the system of slavery, but rather derived from the style of their presence, from their way of relating to slaves, and by the witness they gave as whites whose values and manner of living contrasted with the way of life of the plantocracy. The first missionaries in the West Indies, the Moravians, immediately established this contrast by doing manual labor, shunned by most whites, and by using Creole dialects to preach and teach the Bible (Goveia, 1965, p. 278). While they did not refuse to minister to the whites, their priority, and the priority of every missionary group that came after them, was to establish congregations among the black people.

In general, the approach of the missionaries to the slaves was one of familiarity and sympathy. Moreover, they offered a moral alternative to the corruptions of planter life. Elsa Goveia observed that converted slaves became better in terms of Christian morality than the Europeans of the established church (p. 302). Her observation was a restatement of those made by some missionaries in the nineteenth century. In a letter from Kingston dated March 1825, William Knibb exclaimed, "The poor, oppressed, benighted, and despised sons of Africa form a pleasing contrast to the debauched white population" (Clarke, 1869, p. 17).

The missionary presence brought with it a basic ambiguity, an ambiguity which was not resolved after emancipation. On the one hand, the missionaries assumed or taught that the blacks were not inherently inferior in the sight of God. The congregationalism of the nonconformist churches, including their employment of black leaders and deacons, was based on an ideal of fellowship that contradicted the class and racial distinctions that defined plantation society. And missionaries in general avoided fraternization within the dominant white society. On the other hand, this avoidance did not mean that they became acculturated to Afro-Creole folk culture. British mores and manners epitomized Christian civilization for them, and thus they expected black members to adopt them and to drop "negroism" (Olwig, 1990, p. 107). They accepted the blacks abstractly as equal while rejecting the cultural expressions which defined black life. And

they preached obedience, resignation, and acceptance of social hierarchies.

This description of missionary ambiguity can be modified in the case of individual missionaries and certain missionary societies. The Methodist built for themselves a reputation for respectability and a dedication to the political and social status quo. The Baptists were more willing than the Methodists to take their religious ideals of brotherhood into the political arena, bringing upon themselves persecution by plantocratic vigilantes. Planters eventually became astute in assessing the diverse approaches to social issues among the non-conformist missions and devised strategies for co-opting missionaries in the interests of social control (Stewart, 1992, pp. 32–36 and 38–42).

## **Black Christianity**

White missionaries were not the only preachers from overseas to arrive in the West Indies during slavery. A black Baptist presence was established in Jamaica even before the two major missionary groups, the British Methodists and Baptists, began their work there. In 1783, George Liele (or Lisle), a freedman who had been a slave to a Baptist planter in Georgia, arrived in Jamaica and began preaching in Kingston. Moses Baker, who had been a member of the free community of color in New York City and had migrated to Jamaica, was baptized by Liele and became an itinerant preacher in the island. Liele and Baker were joined by other nonwhite preachers and this core group held the seed that would grow into the “Native Baptists,” as they came to be called. In 1806 they began to correspond with the English Baptists and, overwhelmed with the sizes of the congregations that were forming in response to their preaching, appealed for assistance. It was as a result of this invitation that the Baptist Missionary Society began to send their preachers and teachers to Jamaica in 1814.<sup>7</sup>

Native Baptists nevertheless continued to grow independently. Their black leaders, in protest against slavery and later against the slow pace of social and economic reform after emancipation, were instrumental in two major rebellions in nineteenth century Jamaica. The first was the slave rebellion of 1831–32, known as the Baptist War, led by Sam Sharpe. Sharpe and his captains were “daddies,” the title



of respect given them by their Native Baptist followers. Sharpe was also a deacon in the white-led Baptist missionary congregation in Montego Bay. The other incident was the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion led by Paul Bogle. Today, Sharpe and Bogle are official National Heroes in Jamaica.

Native Baptist spirituality and practices incorporated elements of African religion that had been creolized, or reformed, in the experience of slavery and resistance in the Caribbean. Planters tended to be indifferent to African religion and its creolized versions, except when manifestations of that religion seemed directly related to resistance and rebellion. Many slave codes forbade drumming, for example, or any rhythmic and percussive use of instruments that could substitute for the drum. The drum was a sacred instrument that summoned deities and spirits into communion with the living. But what concerned the planters was not so much this "superstitious" function, as they saw it, but the fact that the drum was a means of communication among slaves and its use signaled gatherings of slaves that were always considered potentially dangerous. Planters' suspicions extended to other manifestations of Afro-Creole religion whenever they appeared to imply a power that colonial officials could not control or that was used in resistance to their control. Obeah, the private manipulation of spirit power for personal gain or harm, and Myal, which sought to counter social evil and witchcraft, were prohibited in slave codes in Jamaica, but were never eradicated.

Myal in Jamaica, and similar forms of Afro-Creole religion in the other islands of the British West Indies, continued to grow vigorously in the years after emancipation in 1834, and incorporated elements of apocalyptic Christianity. Post-emancipation Myalists, for example, preached the return of Christ to earth, and sought to purify the earth, to dig up all Obeahs, in preparation for his return. In 1860–61, the years of a Great Revival in Jamaica, Myal and evangelical Christianity were synthesized by black people into forms of Revival that became deeply rooted in rural Jamaican consciousness (Stewart, 1992, pp. 142 and 146–47). There were similar movements with different names in the other islands after emancipation. The Noahites in Nevis in the Leeward Islands appropriated and transformed Methodism in ways in which Revivalists in Jamaica transformed evangelical Christianity. Drawing its name from Noah, a former slave

who in 1839 proclaimed himself "Prophet" and "Comforter," the movement attracted large congregations. Readings from the Bible and the singing of John Wesley's hymns in Noahite services were combined with dreams, prophecies, and ecstatic dancing which culminated in spirit possession (Olwig, 1990, p. 108). In the southern Caribbean, to the great chagrin of colonial officials, movements similar to the Noahites developed in the nineteenth century. Perhaps the best known of these were the Shakers in St. Vincent and the Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad and Tobago (Cox, 1994, and Glazier, 1983).

## **After Emancipation**

After emancipation, the already varied religious traditions in the West Indies were further diversified by the immigration of indentured laborers from Asia and Africa. African immigration into the British West Indies was not on the scale of African arrivals in nineteenth century Cuba, which continued to be a slave society for most of the century, and where the symbiosis of Catholicism and African religions produced Santeria (Brandon, 1993). Nevertheless, comparable religious forms were either started or revived in the Anglophone Caribbean with the Africans that arrived as emancipated slaves or indentured migrants. Kele in St. Lucia, Shango in Trinidad, Big Drum in Carriacou, and Kumina in Jamaica are religions which relate to the spirit world in traditional African ways, although they may include in their pantheons certain spirits that originated in other cosmologies, such as Hinduism, Native-American belief, or the Catholic tradition of the saints.

Although Chinese immigrants were among the Asians who were indentured to provide steady labor after slave emancipation, they had little impact in the history of religion in the Caribbean. They were readily assimilated by the mainstream Christian churches. In Jamaica, for example, the descendants of Chinese immigrants became a distinguishing feature of Roman Catholic congregations in the twentieth century. Immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, however, introduced major variations in the Caribbean religious scene. Where they now make up the majority of the population, such as in Trinidad and Guyana, forms of Hinduism have become defining features of the Creole religious landscape. While in India Hinduism is diversified in

myriad forms of local and family religious practices, in the Caribbean it has become a more standardized and routinized pan-Indian experience. Although many East Indians converted in response to missionary activity, initiated by Canadian Presbyterians in the 1860s, Hinduism remains a more important factor than Christianity of East Indian cultural identity in Guyana and in Trinidad's fairly cosmopolitan society.

Immigrants from India also brought Islam with them. They were not the first Muslims in the Caribbean, however. There was a Mandingo Muslim community of ex-slaves in Port of Spain, Trinidad from the early nineteenth century. Over several generations, under a succession of patriarchs, and augmented by new members from among post-emancipation African immigrants, this community maintained an African identity. They kept Arabic names and made repatriation to Africa an ideal, although only a few individuals from among them managed to get back to Africa (Brereton, 1981, pp. 67-68). While there can be no doubt that many Muslim Africans were brought to other parts of the Caribbean during the years of the slave trade, their inability as slaves to reproduce an Islamic community meant that their beliefs and practices either withered or became so diffused in Creole society that it is difficult to document a Muslim tradition in the West Indies as a whole before the beginning of Indian immigration in the 1840s. East Indian Hinduism and Islam had little cultural influence in societies like Jamaica where the overwhelming majority of the population continued to be of African ancestry, and where the most viable religious forms had been derived from Afro-Christian syntheses. But in Trinidad, where manifestations of African traditions are just as strong, and with its history of Mandingo Muslims, many people of African ancestry have adopted Islam to the extent that it has defined their community values as well as their politics. In the summer of 1990, an Islamic coup attempted against the elected government of that republic showed the extent of the black Muslim challenge to the secular state.

Jews and Syrians are economically strong ethnic minorities in some West Indian nations. While there are black Jews in the Caribbean, most are of obvious European descent. In colonies like Jamaica that had a restricted elective franchise, Jews were denied full civil and political rights until the 1830s. After that they became increasingly politically active. Older Jewish families became prominent in govern-

ment and business in the twentieth century. Many European Jews, fleeing Nazi persecution in Germany, sought refuge in the Caribbean (Martin, 1994).

Middle Eastern immigrants in the early twentieth century, mainly from what is now Lebanon, are generically called "Syrians" in the West Indies. They brought Arabic surnames with them but the majority of them were already Christians, and were absorbed largely into traditional churches, especially the Roman Catholic church.

Perhaps the most dramatic challenge in the twentieth century West Indies to the religious and secular status quo was the development of the Rastafari in Jamaica in the 1930s. The Rastafari have become a phenomenon throughout the Caribbean and, indeed, throughout the entire worldwide black diaspora. They are now commonplace to the extent that their dreadlocks, their wearing of the Ethiopian colors of red, gold, and green, their influence on reggae music, and their linguistic innovations have made them easily identifiable. But their worldview, which can be called a kind of African Zionism, has been deceptively oversimplified in popular understanding. Rastafari consciousness owes much to the religious worldview that was also fundamental to the more consciously sociopolitical movement of Garveyism, which was based in a black theology that overturned the negative valuations that colonialism had attached to the word "African." Marcus Garvey's pan-Africanism and his theology of a black God proved to have universal appeal throughout the African diaspora, foreshadowing the appeal that Rastafari style and consciousness would have later in the twentieth century. Rastafari is not only a legacy of Garveyism, however, but has roots in the Revival tradition that preceded it, as Chevannes (1994) has shown (pp. 21 & 120). The Rastafari theme of liberation from Babylonian captivity in the West and return to Africa also echoes a long established mythology in Afro-Caribbean folk consciousness in which motifs of spirit return are expressed in story, song, and religious metaphor (McDaniel, 1990). The African consciousness of the Rastafari goes deep in the Jamaican and West Indian past, and is a perfect example of the processes of continuity and change, of rooted consciousness and startling innovation, that have been characteristic of Caribbean history.

The mainstream Christian churches, such as the Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Moravians, and Congregationalists, remained important in the twentieth century Carib-