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THE NEGRO IN THE WEST INDIES

BY

CHARLES H. WESLEY

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THE NEGRO IN THE WEST INDIES, SLAVERY AND FREEDOM¹

The term "West Indies" is applied to the group of islands which form a curve extending from Florida south to the northern coast of South America and eastward. They begin in the north nearest Florida with Cuba and the Bahama Islands and end with Trinidad off the coast of South America. Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, and San Domingo, and Porto Rico are called the Greater Antilles. The Lesser Antilles include the smaller islands which seem to be mere dots in the Caribbean Sea. The British West Indies, which will demand our direct attention, are also regarded from the colonial point of view as including British Honduras and Guiana on the mainland.

Due to the voyages of Columbus and his successors, these islands passed under the control of Spain in the sixteenth century. The report of their wealth and the steady stream of tropical products which flowed into Europe—sugar, coffee, tobacco, rice, cotton, and pimento—led other nations to look with envious eyes upon these possessions, and in the succeeding periods England, France, and Holland competed with Spain for its tropical trade and finally fought for the control of their colonial empires.

Barbados, Antigua, Barbuda, St. Kitts, Nevis, Anguilla, Montserrat, the Virgin Islands group, Jamaica, and the Caymans came under British control during the seventeenth century. All of these were acquired by settlement with the exception of Jamaica which had been taken from Spain, and the Virgin Islands taken from the Dutch. By the Peace of Paris in 1763 Dominica, St. Vincent, Tobago, Grenada and the Grenadines were added to the British Empire. The Peace of Paris was the high-water mark in the development of Britain's Empire in the West Indies.

The term "Negro" as it relates to the West Indies deserves some consideration at the outset. This word is not

¹ An address delivered at the sixteenth annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in New York City, November 10, 1931.

used in the comprehensive sense in which it has been used in the United States. From the earliest periods distinctions have been made as to classes among Negroes, "Free persons of Color," "Free Blacks," and "Persons of Color." There were no fixed traditions in public opinion which held together all persons who had any Negro ancestry, as is the case in the United States. There were gradations of color in the West Indies which tended to form a kind of caste system. The children of a white parent and a Negro parent were known as mulattoes. The children of white and mulatto parents were known as quadroons. The offspring of white and quadroon parents were known as mustees, and the offspring of white and mustee parents were termed mustefinos.

Officially many persons known to have Negro parents were accepted as white. As a rule, removal by descent from the Negro status had the tendency of assuring a rise in social standing, however artificial this relationship may have been. Persons having Negro blood have regarded themselves, and have been accepted as Englishmen, Jamaicans, Barbadians, etc., rather than as British Negroes. A Parish Register of Kingston referred to the persons baptized as blacks or Negro, Sambo, quadroon, mustee, brown, persons of color, and Indian. The thinking elements among the Negro population in the West Indies, however, have come to realize that the making of such distinctions has been one of the subtle ways in which divisions have developed in their ranks; and, since the color line has grown more fixed in all parts of the British Empire, for the sake of a group movement upwards for all, they are more willing to apply the term "Negro" to their number. For, once outside of their own home-islands in either South Africa, London, the British capital, Mississippi, or Alabama, they would find themselves segregated and jim-crowed and accepted as a little less than the equals of others whose faces are fairer.

The wealth of the West Indies depended upon agriculture. Tropical conditions seemed to make the economic system based upon European free labor impossible. Forced

labor first of the Indians and then of the Africans gradually developed. Fertile land was abundant in all of the islands, and an economic system arose, built upon the production of tropical commodities by slave labor. Europe could furnish the capital, and a labor supply alone was needed. The native Indians and the Indians from the North American continent were pressed into service but it was found that they were too few in number to furnish a large supply of laborers and that they could not maintain the hardships of forced labor without additions to the active number of workers.²

European traders were familiar with the value of Negro slaves, for the traders with Africa between 1420 and 1430 had brought back to Europe, and especially to Spain and Portugal, the first African slaves. In 1504 there is the first mention in the Spanish records of Negroes in the new world. In 1516 Las Casas returned to Spain and favored the use of Negro slaves to replace the declining natives of Spanish America. Within twenty years following the discovery of America, Negroes were first brought to the West Indies in large numbers.³

The story of the Negro masses in the West Indies is one of struggle under a ruthless system of exploitation by the few of the many. The profitable production of sugar required a larger and more effectively organized labor supply than any other agricultural product in the West Indies. The concentration of laborers into gangs under an overseer or head driver was the basis of the West Indian system of sugar production. Negro slavery furnished a large and continuous labor supply for these tasks. Negroes from the different tribal stocks in all stages of development and of varying innate abilities were seized upon to furnish the needed supplies.

The exact number of Negro slaves who were transported

² Edwards, Bryan. *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, Vol. II; Herrera, *Historia General*, dec. I., lib. IX, chap. 5, p. 45.

³ Bourne, E. G. *Spain in America*.

to these islands may never be known. It has been estimated that from 1680 to 1786 the number imported into the British West Indian colonies was 2,130,000. This represented a yearly average of 20,095.⁴ From 1735 to 1763 the yearly average export of slaves by the English from the Gold Coast alone was 13,000.⁵ The records and the contemporary correspondence show that the islands were generally in need of slaves and that they used all the slaves they could obtain. The demand seemed to be greatest in Jamaica, which was due to the large amount of uncultivated land and the export of slaves from the islands.⁶ Millions of Africans were carried into the West Indies during the hey-day of the Slave Trade. The transportation of slaves continued on a large scale to 1807 when the slave trade was abolished. One hundred and eighty-five ships which had the capacity of carrying 50,000 slaves were dispatched from Liverpool alone during the last sixteen months of the legal existence of the slave trade.⁷ The clandestine trade was carried on for years following the abolition.

About one-half of the Negro slave population on the sugar estates was engaged in field work. The other half comprised the artisans, herders, domestics, watchmen, nurses, the aged and the children. Every week day except Sunday and every other Saturday was a working day. The slaves in many colonies were permitted to have lands upon which they raised yams, bananas, cocoanuts, and vegetables. They also kept hogs, fowls, and cattle. Clothing, fish, rum, and molasses were issued as regular allowances on each plantation. The plantation Negroes lived in their own houses which were some distance from the "Big-House." In this respect this system resembled the Manor of the Middle Ages and the typical American plantation of the South. It is highly probable that the economic condition of some of

⁴ Edwards, Bryan. *op. cit.*, II, p. 55.

⁵ Pitman, F. W. *Development of the West Indies*, p. 70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-85.

⁷ Williams, Gomer, *History of the Liverpool Privateers*, p. 678.

the Negro slaves in the West Indies during the Eighteenth Century was advanced beyond that of the majority of the European peasants of the same period.^{7a}

In the town the Negro slaves were employed as servants, porters, carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths, masons, and coppersmiths. They were hired out by their owners and they were permitted to have apprentices. In some cases they hired themselves to others and paid their masters a fixed sum for this privilege. Industrious ones saved their earnings and purchased their freedom when this opportunity was granted. Before the abolition of the slave traffic, Negroes were encouraged to learn the trades, but after the abolition when field hands became fewer in number, Negro slaves were not permitted to enter the trades but were directed toward agriculture in which the greatest need for labor existed. In Barbados, mulatto males were taught the trades and were not used in agriculture, and mulatto females were brought up as domestics.⁸

The slave system in the West Indies was marked by two additional features, one, an increasing disproportion between Negroes and whites, and the other, the continuous growth of the mulatto group. The number of white persons in relation to the number of Negroes steadily decreased. Typical population citations will indicate this disparity. In Jamaica in 1768 there were 17,949 whites and 166,914 Negro slaves. In 1788 there were 1,314 whites and 226,432 Negro slaves. In Montserrat in 1772 there were 1,314 whites and 9,834 Negro slaves, and in 1811 there were only 444 whites and 6,732 Negro slaves. In Tobago in 1770 there were 238 whites and 3,164 Negro slaves, and in 1808 there were 439 whites and 17,009 Negro slaves.⁹

In order to remedy this situation deficiency laws were

^{7a} See U. B. Phillips's "A Jamaica Slave Plantation," *The American Historical Review*, XIX, pp. 543-558; U. B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, pp. 57ff.

⁸ Lewis, M. G., *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor*, p. 74. Long, *Jamaica*, I, p. 511 and II, pp. 288-289.

⁹ Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class*, p. 30.

passed which required each plantation to maintain a number of whites proportionate to the number of the Negro population. Antigua provided, for example, in 1750 that one white man should be employed for every thirty Negroes. Later this proportion was raised to one for every forty Negroes.¹⁰ The efforts to maintain the white population in an equitable proportion with the Negro population failed to succeed. Labor in the tropics was regarded as undesirable and the white persons who came out to the West Indies were often the worse types in England, Scotland, and Ireland.

This disparity in numbers was one of the basic causes for the frequent outbreaks among the slaves in the West Indies. Successful servile revolts are rare at any time or at any place in history. There were many unsuccessful ones in the West Indies. Military companies were organized by the governors, and all whites were obliged to serve. Companies of regular troops were stationed in the islands. The mortality being very great among these troops, Negroes were organized in companies through the purchase by the government of the best types among the slaves. The arming of former slaves in order to defend their masters was an interesting experiment for the Empire—a policy which has been followed in other places. Some of the British troops used in the Southern States during the American Revolution were composed of these West Indian Negro regiments, who left upon the pages of British history splendid records of their valor. It is equally true that the British effort in Santo Domingo against Toussaint Louverture ended in failure, and the British agreed in 1798 to withdraw their forces from the island. The valor of the West Indian Negroes has been demonstrated with the British Army and against the British Army.

The growth of the mulatto element in the West Indies was a phenomenon of more than passing interest in connection with Negro life in these islands. The planters, the overseers, and male whites who came out to the West Indies, as

¹⁰ Flannigan, *Antigua*, I, pp. 109, 122.

a rule, did not bring wives with them. Concubinage became common. The white man satisfied his lust and the colored girl who was the mistress of a planter, overseer, bookkeeper, or soldier was assured a higher economic standing which would include a home, better food and clothing, and at times a life of comparative ease.¹¹ Children born to these relationships followed the status of the mothers according to the old Roman law. If the mothers were free, the children were free and vica versa. Indulgent white fathers sometimes emancipated their mulatto children and sent them to England to be educated.

Marriage between the Negroes and the whites was forbidden in Jamaica and other colonies during the slave régime. It was reported in one Catholic parish in Trinidad that between 1815 and 1824 there were only two marriages of white persons with colored persons. The report stated further that many whites had married persons who were reported to be descended from colored parents.¹² In Montserrat a penalty of £100 was placed upon any minister who performed the marriage ceremony of a white person and a Negro. And yet, in spite of the laws and public sentiment, individual whites and Negroes mingled freely and the mulatto population continued to grow. In 1786 Jamaica had in a total population of 290,000 a free colored population of 10,000.

Illegitimacy was given wider sanction throughout the tropics than in the West and the result was the development of a mixed racial group which was raised above the pure blooded Negro group and yet was not granted equality with the white group. This attitude toward illegitimacy was not typical racially of the Negro as some writers have concluded. One author has placed much of the blame for this situation upon the Negro population.¹³ The colored population maintained a standard of legitimacy which relatively was as high

¹¹ Lewis, M. G., *Journal*, pp. 106, 107.

¹² C.O., 295/63.

¹³ Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class*.

as that of the white population. In Port of Spain, Trinidad, between 1818 and 1824 there were 304 legitimate white children baptized and placed in the parish records and 395 legitimate colored children. Ninety-four natural white children and 1,451 natural colored children were also listed.¹⁴ Plainly in this instance at least illegitimacy was not a distinct racial characteristic. Facts are always the best replies for false opinions.

Absentee proprietorship was also one of the characteristics of the slave régime which had a direct influence upon the Negro population. The groups which should have been dominant in government remained in England and sent out to the colonies a group of men of mediocre ability, poor education and little proprietary interest; and it was exceedingly difficult to find suitable men for the places of honor and trust. The entrance of unworthy and untrained men into public office was the result of West Indian absenteeism. The absentee owners in England were interested in profits. Their managers and overseers had been placed in the islands for this purpose and the proprietors did not concern themselves with the events upon their estates. Moreover, the compensation of the managers, attorneys, and overseers was placed upon a percentage basis. The tendency, therefore, was to increase production, and many of the cruelties to the Negroes may be traced to these directors of tropical agriculture.

Toward the close of the eighteenth century there was an outburst of humanitarianism which aroused the indifference of the English people to the social conditions at home and abroad. England had accepted the slave trade and the system of African bondage without protest in spite of the fact that they were anachronisms in the Christian world. The Quakers, Adam Smith and John Wesley, raised their voices against the slave trade. In 1772 the doctrine of the Somerset case was issued to the effect that slavery could not be maintained in England. In the Knight Case in Scotland in 1778

¹⁴ C.O. 295/63. pp. 5, 27.

the interpretation of the court seemed to extend the decision of freedom to the colonies. Thomas Clarkson and Wilberforce joined hands in 1787 in organizing the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.¹⁵

The subsequent pamphlet war gave opportunity for the discussion of the capacity of the Negro for freedom, and information was gathered by the anti-slavery organization upon this subject. A booklet by Ottobah Cugoana, a West Indian Negro, was published under the title *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted to the Inhabitants of Great Britain*. An autobiography of Olaudah Equiano, better known as Gustavus Vassa, was published in 1793. William Dickerson in 1789 published his *Letters on Slavery to which are added Addresses to the Whites and to the Free Negroes of Barbados and Accounts of some Negroes Eminent for their Virtues and Abilities*, which outlined the achievements of Africans who were transported to the West Indies. The debates in Parliament and proposals for abolition under the direction of Wilberforce led to the adoption of a measure in 1807 which received the king's assent on March 25, thus legally closing the slave trade.

The abolition of the slave trade brought with it weighty consequences for the Negro population, for with the supply of slaves cut off, the price of slaves arose and the cost of production was increased. More attention was given to the children, for each was a potential laborer, and infant mortality decreased. The cessation of the introduction of Africans led to the growth of a more contented Negro peasantry which used the English language from birth and was associated with the English proprietors from childhood, instead of being taken from the slaveships to the sugar plantations.

The abolition of the slave trade also made it possible for

¹⁵ Clarkson, Thomas, *History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, I, pp. 255-257.

the English people to center their attention upon the slave system. The sufferings of the slaves were brought to light by the abolitionists. The African Institution was organized and finally began to portray the state of slavery in the colonies. Frequently slave uprisings occurred during the discussions in Parliament and the Colonial Assemblies. The Governors of the colonies were called upon to explain measures and debates, by publishing proclamations so that the Negro population would not be misinformed concerning their freedom or the withholding of it.

Concern for the spiritual welfare of the Negro population was manifested toward the close of the eighteenth century, after nearly a hundred years during which no effort was made to replace the barbarism of primitive life with evangelical religion. The planters were indifferent to the spread of religion among the Negroes. The agents of the Anglican Church were slow to accept the opportunity. The successful work among them was carried on by the Moravians, the Methodists, and the Baptists. The Moravians, as evangelists who preached and lived a simple gospel, made deep impressions upon the slaves. The Methodists, led by Thomas Coke, who is called the Father of Wesleyan Missions, made the West Indies one of the chief centers of their activities. The Baptists led by the American loyalists who emigrated to the West Indies at the close of the American Revolution aroused interest in the salvation of the Negroes.¹⁶ One of the outstanding incidents in which Negroes played a part in the extension of religion in the West Indies may be noticed in the work of George Liele, a former slave who had pastored a church in Georgia and Moses Baker also a former slave in the same state. They gathered together a large number of Negroes and baptized over 500

¹⁶ Brown, *History of the Propagation of Christianity*, I, p. 257ff. Hamilton, T. J., *History of the Missions of the Moravian Church during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, (London, 1900); Coke, Thomas, *An Account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Methodist Missions*, (London, 1804). *History of the Baptist Missionary Movement*, (London, 1842).

and succeeded in impressing them with the need of religious organizations.¹⁷

Fetishism and witchcraft were rampant among the Negro population. Obeahism and voodooism were less active with the passing of the nineteenth century. Tribal magic, sorcery, and witchcraft continued to manifest themselves in rural sections for many years, which is not unlike the conditions in some of our American states.¹⁸

The active movement for the freedom of the Negroes of the British West Indies began with the organization in London in 1823 of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions. Branch Societies sprang up throughout England. Within one year there were 220 branches in existence. Wilberforce had grown old in the contest, and the leadership was taken by Thomas Fowell Buxton. The program as announced by Buxton was the emancipation of the slaves, but it was not "the rapid termination of that state, not the sudden emancipation of the Negroes, but such preparatory steps, such measures of precaution, as by slow degrees, and in a course of years, first fitting and qualifying the slaves for freedom, shall gently conduct us to the annihilation of slavery."¹⁹ This gradual emancipation program soon developed into a simple program for the amelioration of slavery. Instructions were sent to the governors of colonies urging that improvements should be made in their slave codes. The colonists were slow to respond. Improvements were made in the slave system, but the cruelties continued to exist.

The free persons of color and the free blacks continued to grow in number and to remain in their semi-free condition. In Jamaica in 1825, for example, there were 25,000

¹⁷ "Letters showing the Rise and Progress of the Early Negro churches of Georgia and the West Indies." *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. I, pp. 69ff. See also John W. Davis, "George Liele and Andrew Bryan, Pioneer Negro Baptist Preachers." *Ibid.*, Vol. III.

¹⁸ Pitman, F. W., "Slavery on the British West India Plantations in the Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of Negro History*, October, 1926, pp. 650ff.

¹⁹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, p. 113.

whites, 30,000 free colored, 10,000 free blacks, and 340,000 slaves.²⁰ The free persons were removed a degree from the Negro slaves, but they were not regarded as the equals of the whites. They did not have the right of suffrage nor were they permitted to hold office. A pamphlet concerning them published in 1824 stated that "in no part of the West Indies have men of colour the complete enjoyment of any civil right whatever and in many parts there is no security at all."²¹

These limitations were removed in the years which witnessed the rise of the active crusade against slavery. Grenada began their removal in 1824 and abolished the remaining ones in 1832. Trinidad followed in 1826, Barbadoes in 1829, and St. Kitts, St. Lucia, Jamaica, Dominica, and Antigua took the same step in the following years. In Grenada, the free colored population was more than three times as numerous as the white population, and they were described by a resolution of the Assembly as "a respectable, well-behaved class of the community and possessed a considerable property."²² The free blacks and free persons of color in Kingston, Jamaica, were referred to as persons of great wealth. It was said that seventy persons among them had aggregate wealth of "about one million of property and the heads of all families may be considered as possessing some little freehold or other."²³

Dr. Lushington, speaking in the House of Commons on June 12, 1827, called attention to the fact that there were wealthy persons among the colored population. He said that Dr. Dickinson had accumulated property valued at 120,000 pounds. Mr. Swaney had property worth 150,000 pounds, Mr. Kingall had property valued at 200,000 pounds and Mr. Benjamin Scott owned property to the value of

²⁰ *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 17, p. 1243.

²¹ *Second Report of the Committee of the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery* (London, 1823).

²² C.O. 318/76.

²³ *Hints on the Propriety of Establishing by Law the Civil Rights of the Free People of Colour in the British West Indies*.

250,000 pounds. He stated that they possessed much landed property and with the exception of one estate, all of the pimento plantations were in their hands together with a large number of coffee plantations. However exaggerated these amounts may have been, the conclusion is inevitable that there were among them persons who controlled property.

The free colored population organized for their effort to remove the limitations upon their rights. In Kingston, a committee was appointed to correspond and to keep in touch with the colored inhabitants in the different parishes of the island in order to give suggestions to one another in their efforts to remove their disabilities.²⁴ By the close of the year 1832, the majority of the disabilities of the free colored and free black classes had been removed by the colonial assemblies either of their own accord or as a result of advices from the colonial office. Shortly thereafter colored members of juries, assemblies and colored deputies in public office appeared.²⁵

The people of color manifested an interest in the condition of the slaves and their freedom. They urged the colored slaveholders to ameliorate the conditions of their slaves so as to show themselves worthy.²⁶ Their organ in Kingston stated early in 1832 that the free colored population did not hesitate to declare themselves "the firm and unbending opponents of the present system—the zealous advocates of a change from slave to free labour with a due regard to the rights of every one."²⁷ Mr. Henry Loving was sent by the free colored people of Antigua to England and on May 7, 1832, directed a letter to Lord Howick, then in charge of the Colonial Office, saying that they were not only willing to carry the program for the amelioration of the slave population into effect but that they were also willing to join in

²⁴ *The Jamaica Watchman and Free Press*, May 8, 1830.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, February 20, 1830. *Ibid.*, August 22, 1832.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, August 22, 1832. *The Isonomist*, January 17, 1832. *The Antigua Free Press*, October 18, 1832. C.O. 137/175.

²⁷ *The Jamaica Watchman*, April 6, 1833.

“putting down” the present system by every lawful means and that they would do this even “in opposition to the refractory whites.”²⁸

The loyalty of the free colored people of the West Indies to Great Britain has been proverbial. Whenever suggestions have been made of separation the colored population has remained deaf to them. The happenings in Haiti and Saint Domingo are exceptions to this rule. In 1830 because of the rumors which were current in Jamaica that if the British Government freed the slaves, the islands would transfer their allegiance to the United States, the *Watchman* stated that the free people of color had the greatest reason to oppose this because of “the many horrifying accounts of the galling despotism under which the people of colour in the United States drag on a wretched existence, by writers of eminent veracity who have detailed circumstances in regard to that unfortunate class, mark that government to be the most despicable on the face of the earth and the very name of the republic is hateful to a person of color.”²⁹ This attitude toward the United States still survives in the minds of the West Indian Negroes today.

As a result of the anti-slavery agitation, on July 5, 1833, a bill for the abolition of slavery was introduced in the House of Commons, which was to begin its operation eleven months later.³⁰ There was substituted for slavery a system of apprenticeship through which it was hoped that the slaves would be prepared for freedom. The period of the apprenticeship was proposed at first as twelve years and finally it was reduced for predial or field apprentices to six years and for non-predial apprentices or those not in the fields to four years. The compensation to slave owners was 20,000,000 pounds. Each of the colonies was to participate in this fund according to the number and value of the slaves, and the fund was to be distributed by special commissioners. The

²⁸ *The Antigua Herald*, November 1, 1832.

²⁹ *The Watchman and Jamaica Free Press*, January 9, 1830.

³⁰ *Parliamentary Debates* (1833), Vol. 17, pp. 1193-1231.

apprenticeship system developed features at times worse than slavery. The anti-slavery organization began a new crusade. They were joined by the free colored population and the religious organizations, and on August 1, 1838, the Negro of the West Indies was declared free. The slaveholders were compensated, but the slaves received nothing except their freedom.

The abolition of the apprenticeship passed without disorder. The churches were crowded on the night before the day of freedom. The Negroes had passed through the rigors of the apprenticeship with patience and forbearance. They passed to freedom in the same spirit but with evidence of joy and gratitude to God for the boon of freedom. Contracts were made with the owners for work with wages. The predictions of rebellion and disorder failed to materialize.

Slowly and painfully the Negroes found their way out of their poor economic condition. With the help of the Wesleyan, the Baptist and the Moravian missionaries they were led into habits of sobriety and industry. A system of education sponsored by the religious organizations which were aided with funds from the English Government was introduced—a similar circumstance in the introduction of Negro education in the United States after the Civil War.

From such conditions there have arisen numerous outstanding individuals. Their names are legion but attention should be called to a few of them: Edward Jordan, the Editor of the *Jamaica Watchman*, who in slavery and freedom, proclaimed in the press and on the platform the rights of his race; George William Gordon, who suffered death by hanging, as a martyr to freedom in the rebellion of 1865; Francis Williams, teacher and poet; John B. Russwurm, the first colored man to be graduated by an American college and the publisher of *Freedom's Journal*; Peter Ogden, who organized the first Odd Fellows Lodge for Negroes in America; Prince Hall, founder of Free Masonry among Negroes in the United States; Denmark Vesey, who planned the freedom of the slaves in Charleston, South Carolina

in 1822; Edward W. Blyden, scholar and author; and many other names unknown to those of us in the western area. They have pioneered the way for themselves within the British Empire, and they have furnished the leadership for many racial endeavors in the United States.

Group cohesion among the West Indians of Negro descent has been difficult to achieve. The English method of rewarding those who would be discontented with important imperial assignments has helped to drive a wedge between the fortunate and the unfortunate classes of the Negro group. Except when pressed by color prejudice, they have tended to follow their national traditions and to regard themselves as Englishmen, Frenchmen or Spaniards. Opinions are varied as to the wisdom of this attitude on the part of the Negro West Indians. Thousands, however, have been unwilling to remain shackled by imperial propaganda within the islands and contribute to the maintenance in power of their white overlords who have never ceased to exploit the Negro masses. They have migrated during the latter part of the nineteenth century, with other submerged groups from other lands, to the mainland of the Americas. They have helped to build the modern civilizations of Latin America, and they have labored in the construction of the Panama Canal. They have entered the United States in large numbers until recently restricted by law.

Negroes in the United States and Negroes in the West Indies realize that they have a common origin—Africa, and that they have come out of an economic house of bondage. Their group histories so far are quite similar. There is in each, slavery, freedom, reconstruction, with the continuance of exploitation by the dominant white group of the submerged colored one. As they face the present and the future, they are aware that the intelligent cooperation of the two main groups of Negro peoples outside of Africa may contribute directly to the solution of the world color problem, as it relates to the peoples of African descent.

CHARLES H. WESLEY