

# **The Interwar Years & the Caribbean Soldier in Social Transformation**

**A DOMINICAN PERSPECTIVE**

**By  
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The fall of great empires usually have a tap root in war, and so it was with the British Empire. In 1914 the map of the world was covered with the large swathes colored in the red of the British Empire on which "the sun never sets." By 1968, just 50 years after the end of World War I in 1918 that empire was mostly history. By 1968, Dominica possessed its own local government under the Dominica Labour Party of Premier Edward Oliver LeBlanc. In 1967, the island had become an associated state of Britain with responsibility for local government, with Britain being responsible for defence and foreign affairs.

The end of World War I, therefore, ushered in a period of nationalistic reaching that inspired a movement for self government, universal adult suffrage and social justice in the Caribbean. Ultimately, that movement would lead to the independence of almost all the British colonies in the region (as of 2007 Turks & Caicos, The British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands are still British ruled). However, in the history of the Caribbean independence movement little tribute is paid, and scant scholarly research devoted, to the British West Indian soldiers, sailors and airmen who made that dispensation possible.

In World War I, Dominicans and other West Indians had rushed to the assistance of Britain, the "mother country." Though they came brimming with nationalistic fervor and affection for "their" empire, their loyalty and love for "country" had not been reciprocated. The discrimination based on class and color inflicted upon the members of the British West Indian Regiment (BWIR) had led to the Taranto, Italy mutiny of 1918 referred to earlier. The war had improved communications among Black people

worldwide, as their travel to foreign lands exposed them to different conditions and radical philosophies such as nationalism and socialism.

In April 1916, the Irish had revolted against British rule. The so-called Easter Uprising of 1916 did not exactly ring around the world but it did start a long drawn-out process of dismantlement of the then mighty British Empire. The 1916 rebellion had, after all, been ruthlessly suppressed by British power just as stirrings of revolt in the colonies from time to time were stamped out. However, that uprising led to the birth of an independent Ireland in 1921. Other colonized peoples in the Caribbean took heed as they saw it was possible to win freedom from the strongest imperial power on earth. Marcus Garvey (Garvey's name is of Irish origin) sent congratulatory telegrams to the Irish Republican Army and saluted the Irish independence movement, seeing it as a model for the freedom movement he hoped to forge in the Caribbean and Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1917 and 1919 a series of mutinies had taken place among the armies of the major powers; Germany, Britain, France, the United States and Russia. Those mutinies would change world history, lead to the end of Czarism in Russia and gash the solid tapestry of the British empire upon which the sun never set, such that it eventually came unhinged. In 1917, rebellious Russian soldiers under the leadership of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) and Leon Trotsky had stormed the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. Their action heralded the birth of a socialist state that would later be called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Socialist agitation had also led to mutinies among white soldiers in the British<sup>2</sup> and French armies. And at Houston, Texas the most deadly and biggest mutiny of African American soldiers in history had taken place.

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<sup>1</sup> Many Irish natives had been sold into slavery in the Caribbean and their history and heritage is a little studied facet of Caribbean history and culture. That Robert Nesta "Bob" Marley's father was Irish is indicative of that commingling of the Irish and African. See, generally, *To Hell or Barbados, The Ethnic Cleansing of Ireland*, by Sean O'Callaghan for a study of British deportation of Irish rebels, dissidents and regular Irish men and women to the Caribbean.

<sup>2</sup> At Etaples, about 15 miles south of Boulogne, was a notorious British Army base camp for those on their way to the front. Under atrocious conditions both raw recruits from England and battle-weary veterans were subjected to intensive training in gas warfare, bayonet drill, and long sessions of marching at the double across the dunes. After two weeks at Etaples many of the wounded were only too glad to return to the front with unhealed wounds. Conditions in the hospital were punitive rather than therapeutic and there had been incidents at the hospital between military police and patients. Matters came to a head one Sunday afternoon (September 9, 1917) after the arrest of a gunner in the New Zealand Artillery. A large crowd of angry men gathered and did not disperse even when told the gunner had been released. It was clear that the protest over the arrest was only the tip of an iceberg and the atmosphere was tense. The arrival of military police only made matters worse and scuffles broke out. Suddenly the sound of shooting was heard. Private

On August 23, 1917, a rumor reached Camp Logan, Texas where black troops of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment were stationed in preparation for combat in Europe, that a comrade of theirs, one Corporal Charles Baltimore had been killed for interfering with the detention and interrogation of a black woman by Houston police; in fact, Baltimore had been beaten but survived and was later released. Reacting to the rumor and to racial discrimination, about 150 black troops marched for two hours through Houston. As local whites armed themselves, a violent confrontation ensued that claimed the lives of four black soldiers and fifteen local residents, and wounded a dozen others. The soldiers' leader, Sargeant Vida Henry, killed himself after the death of a national guardsman whom the troops had mistaken for a policeman. The group subsequently fell into disarray and the violence dissipated. In November, the largest court-martial in U.S. military history convened at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio to try sixty-three soldiers from the Third Battalion. Thirteen of the convicted men were executed by hanging on December 11. The following year, two additional court-martials were held and another sixteen sentenced to hang. Responding to pressure from black leaders, President Woodrow Wilson commuted the death sentences of ten of the condemned men. In total, nearly sixty soldiers received life imprisonment for their roles in the affair. The Houston Mutiny anticipated the "Red Summer" riots of 1919 in which many African American servicemen retaliated against white mistreatment.<sup>3</sup>

The events at Houston resounded across black communities in the US and undoubtedly word of the tragic happening filtered through to soldiers of colour then in British service. Adding to this infusion of anti-status quo activity and sentiment, were papers such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples

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H. Reeve, a military policeman, had fired into the crowd killing a corporal and wounding a French woman bystander. News of the shooting spread quickly. By 7.30 pm over a thousand angry men were pursuing the military police that fled in the direction of the town. However, coloured British troops were treated more harshly than the white mutineers at Etaples. Twenty three were killed and twenty four wounded. Yet despite such harsh reprisals within four days Number 74 Labour Company also struck. The authorities responded on September 11 by killing four men, wounding fifteen, and inflicting prison sentences on twenty five more. Only a month later a similar dispute took place in the First Army Area, where five men were killed and fourteen wounded. Many other strikes in the Labour Corps were similarly 'overcome', but casualty lists are not recorded. We know that in December 1917 a Guards detachment opened fire on strikers of No. 21 Labour Company at Fontinettes, near Calais, killing four and wounding nine. The severity of the repression can be explained by the fact that these particular mutineers were Chinese or Egyptians whose treatment was determined by the colour of their skins. See Dave Lamb Mutinies – Solidarity UK.

<sup>3</sup> See generally, Robert V. Haynes *A Night of Violence*, University of Louisiana Press (1976).

(NAACP), *The Crisis*<sup>4</sup> and Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), *The Negro World*.<sup>5</sup> The Caribbean soldiers who went to war were generally more literate than the populations from which they came. Scholarship ranked high among Caribbean people, and to better themselves the average Dominican and Caribbean person of ambition displayed a fervent adherence to the Victorian manners and traditions of imperial scholarship. Many of the BWIR soldiers had been former teachers, clerks and part of a new Caribbean intelligentsia to whom perusal of newspapers and world literature was now common. The information that now came to them roused their basic yearning for self respect and self determination. In a speech given by Marcus Garvey, founder of the UNIA about the East St. Louis riot that took place on July 2, 1917, he said:

The East St. Louis Riot, or rather massacre, of Monday [July] 2nd, will go down in history as one of the bloodiest outrages against mankind for which any class of people could be held guilty. (Hear! hear!) This is no time for fine words, but a time to lift one's voice against the savagery of a people who claim to be the dispensers of democracy. (cheers) I do not know what special meaning the people who slaughtered the Negroes of East. St. Louis have for democracy of which they are the custodians, but I do know that it has no literal meaning for me as used and applied by these same lawless people. (hear! hear!). America, that has been ringing the bells of the world, proclaiming to the nations and the peoples thereof that she has democracy to give to all and sundry, America that has denounced Germany for the deportations of the Belgians into Germany, America that has arraigned Turkey at the bar of public opinion and public justice against the massacres of the Armenians, has herself no satisfaction to give 12,000,000 of her own citizens except the satisfaction of a farcical inquiry that will end where it begun, over the brutal murder of men, women and children for no other reason than that they are black people seeking an industrial chance in a country that they have laboured for three hundred years to make great. (cheers) For three hundred years the Negroes of America have given their life blood to make the Republic the first among the nations of the world, and all along this time there has never been

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<sup>4</sup> *The Crisis* magazine was started by on November 1, 1910 by Dr. W.E.B Dubois and became the official voice of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The magazine spotlighted the conditions and aspirations of African Americans and blacks worldwide. Dr. Dubois had attended the 1900 Pan African Conference organized by West Indians Henry Sylvester Williams and George James Christian, among others.

<sup>5</sup> *The Negro World*, a weekly newspaper with worldwide circulation, was created by Marcus Garvey as the official organ of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities' League. The paper was produced in New York beginning in August 1918.

even one year of justice but on the contrary a continuous round of oppression. At one time it was slavery, at another time lynching and burning, and up to date it is wholesome [wholesale?] butchering. This is a crime against the laws of humanity; it is a crime against the laws of the nation, it is a crime against Nature, and a crime against the God of all mankind. (cheers)

Garvey's speech was printed in the *New York Globe* and widely distributed. The Caribbean sargeants who formed the Caribbean League at Taranto, Italy in 1918<sup>6</sup> had sworn to, "Fight for the rights of the black man and independence for the Caribbean." They may well have been exposed to such publications or the ideas espoused by the likes of Garvey.<sup>7</sup> Such a stirring and lofty purpose had never been given organized voice by Caribbean military men before. Indeed, the Caribbean League may well have been the first Pan Caribbean organization of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The first Pan African Conference held in London in 1900 had been led by West Indians such as Trinidad's Henry Sylvester Williams<sup>8</sup> and Dominica's George James Christian<sup>9</sup>, but its focus had been to ameliorate

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<sup>6</sup> On December 6, 1918, the West India regiment at Taranto, Italy revolted. Fully assimilated to British ways, they had marched into Taranto singing "Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves" only to be cut short by British soldiers that the song was not for such as them to sing. The West India regiment, scorned and humiliated, decided to take it no more. They "mutinously" refused to work. Shootings and bombings occurred. The Worcestershire Regiment had to be dispatched to restore order. But on December 17, some fifty or more West Indian sargeants met and formed an organization with an astonishingly simple name. It was called "The Caribbean League". The League, made up of sargeants from British Guiana in the South to the Bahamas in the North, demanded self-determination for the Caribbean. "The West Indies should have freedom and govern itself" they declared. The Caribbean League pledged to organize a general strike throughout the sub-region when they got back home. See *The Making of Caribbean Philosophy* by Leonard Tim Hector, the May 29, 1998 edition of *Fan the Flame*.

<sup>7</sup> Not only did the BWIR men flock to the UNIA in Dominica. The same could be said of their comrades in British Honduras, Trinidad and Jamaica who added their leadership and organizational skill to the UNIA. In 1936 the Jamaica Workers and Transport Union (JWTU) was formed with many of its members being BWIR men. The founders of this historic institution were Hugh Clifford Buchanan, a Marxist inclined mason by trade, who became the General Secretary of the union, and A.G.S. Coombs, who was born in St. Ann, Jamaica in 1901. (See Arnold Bertram's May 7, 2006 article in the *Jamaica Gleaner*). Coombs described himself as "a peasant of low birth, with very limited education and a very poor man." He served first in the Jamaica Constabulary Force and later in The West India Regiment where he rose to the rank of Lance Corporal before he left in 1927.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Sylvester Williams (1869-1911) was a prominent Trinidadian barrister in the late 19th and early 20th century. Most notably, Mr. Sylvester Williams was known for his involvement in the Pan African Movement. Arriving in Britain in 1896, Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams formed the African Association which was to challenge paternalism, racism and imperialism. Sylvester Williams stated that "the time has come when the voice of Blackmen should be heard independently in their own affairs." He studied for the bar at Grays Inn and together with Dr. W.E.B Dubois, Dominican attorney George James Christian and others organized the first Pan African Conference in London from July 23-25, 1900.

the condition of Black people worldwide. In contrast, the Caribbean League's formation was a specific call for self rule by people of the British Caribbean colonies, and a spark to racial dignity made by men of arms. Heeding that call they flocked to the UNIA ranks in droves, in the U.S. and upon their return to their respective Caribbean islands and West Africa. It was that dispersion of the ex-soldiers and sailors that assisted the global rise of the UNIA and the military discipline that allowed its rapid rise. That it persevered for so long, despite incessant and disruptive attacks from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the British secret services, is a tribute to the presence in its ranks of BWIR and US ex-servicemen.

Upon their return home soldiers such as Captain Arthur Cipriani of Trinidad formed the Trinidad Workingmen's Association, BWIR veteran Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler<sup>10</sup> was

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<sup>9</sup> George James Christian (1869-1940) was born in the village of Delices, Dominica on February 23, 1869, to an Antiguan solicitor. Christian received his early schooling in Dominica and at the Mico Teacher's Training College. He spent his early professional life in Dominica as a school teacher before being admitted to Gray's Inn London in 1899 to pursue a law degree. While at Gray's Inn, he participated in the 1900 Pan African Conference – the first of its kind - organized by Trinidadian barrister Henry Sylvester Williams of the Africa Association. During the conference he led a discussion on the theme "Organized Plunder and Human Progress Have Made Our Race Their Battlefield", where he exhibited a depth of knowledge and understanding on the issues of slavery and the continuing domination and exploitation of African States by the colonization process. Having graduated from Gray's Inn and called to the bar on June 11, 1902, He became Liberian Consul to Ghana and a member of the Gold Coast legislature. As one of a handful of black professionals at the time, and an avid Pan Africanist, his work for Ghana's self government was an early precursor to that country's independence movement. He died in the Gold Coast in 1940. George J. Christian was the uncle of Wendell, Henkell and Lemuel Christian. For many years, Henkell Christian served as Minister of Education and Health in the Dominica Government. Lemuel Christian was a famed Dominican musician and owner of the Christian Music School. He also wrote the music to the national Anthem of Dominica. Wendell Christian is the father of criminal attorney and author Gabriel Christian. See *George James Christian: Pioneer in Africa* by Dr. Thomson Fontaine of [www.thedominican.net](http://www.thedominican.net).

<sup>10</sup> Tubal Uriah Butler (1895-1977), also called 'Supreme Chief Servant,' was a Grenadian. Born in Grenada, Bluggo Cottage, on 21 January 1897, Butler was raised during a time when the sugar industry was failing. His family moved when Butler was a small child to St. George's where his father set up in his trade at a blacksmith shop. Because his father was the sexton of St. George's Anglican Chapel, free tuition was given to Butler to attend St. George's Anglican School, an educational institution in Grenada with high reputation. After Butler had finished primary grades at age 13, the family had no funds for further schooling. Butler ran up against the unspoken rules of the Grenadian social structure in St. George's. He could find no work or means for further education. The First World War was looming on the horizon. At 17 years old, Butler told military officials he was 20 years old. He became a volunteer in the First Contingent of the British West India Regiment. Butler served in the British Army from 1914-1918, stationed in Egypt. He returned to Grenada in 1918 at the age of 21 whereupon he formed the Grenada Representative Government Movement [calling for universal adult franchise] and the Grenada Union of Returned Soldiers [seeking benefits and employment]. Returning soldiers were riled about the lack of jobs and their resulting difficulty to find means of subsistence. In 1920 the capital of St. George's was almost destroyed by fire. Some have attributed the arson to the wrath of the returning soldiers. Butler also became associated with Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Grenadian authorities blamed fires on the teachings of Garvey. From November 1927 until August 1940 there was a UNIA chapter in Grenada. 'Man's rise to greatness,' a famous speech delivered by Marcus Garvey in 1937, at the Queen's

to organize Trinidad's oil workers into a strong force, and World War I veteran Norman Washington Manley, Q.C.<sup>11</sup> who had won the Military Medal for bravery while serving in the Royal Artillery, would represent striking Jamaican dock workers in 1938. Later, he would launch the nationalist inclined social democratic Peoples National Party (PNP). Other veterans joined the UNIA and organized its military arm, the African Legion.<sup>12</sup> Many of the ex-soldiers had been swayed by the stirring race-pride oratory of Marcus Garvey who had stated:

This is the age of men, not pygmies, not serfs, and peons and dogs,  
but men. And we who make up the UNIA reflect the new manhood  
of the Negro.<sup>13</sup>

In 1919 in Grenada there were bombings linked to a so-called "Dynamite Gang" of ex-soldiers of which Butler was said to form part. Those bombing episodes occurred prior to Butler's departure for Trinidad. The bombers attacked symbols of British authority and

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Park Pavilion in St. George's, may have been heard by Butler. He launched his party 27 July 1936, called the British Empire Workers' [BEW] and Citizen's Home Rule Party. On 19 June 1937 the oil workers went on strike action at Fyzabad. Butler disappeared, thus the song "Where Was Butler?" by Calypsonian Attila The Hun told everyone about this 'mystery'. In a couple of days, the action expanded into an all-island workers strike. Butler was finally arrested on September 27, 1937, tried for sedition and sentenced for two years. He was released in May 1939 and again detained on 28 November 1939 for a 5-year term in prison as a security risk. Released in 1945, Butler led strikes in 1946 and ran for political office in 1950. Butler died in Trinidad on Carnival Sunday 20th February, 1977. (Source: The Grenada revolution Online).

<sup>11</sup> Hon. Norman Washington Manley Q.C. was born in Jamaica on July 4, 1893, at Roxborough in Manchester. He attended Beckford and Smith High School and later Jamaica College where he distinguished himself as a scholar and athlete. In 1914 he was awarded the Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University. He interrupted his studies to serve as a soldier in the First World War and was decorated with the Military Medal for bravery in action. At Oxford University, he obtained the B.A. and B.C.L. degrees, the latter with First Class Honours. He obtained a Class 1 in the Bar Examinations and was awarded a Certificate of Honour. In the same year he was Prizeman at Gray's Inn. He was called to the Bar on April 21, 1921. One of the leading statesmen of his time, he was Chief Minister of Jamaica from January 1955 to July 1959, and was Premier of Jamaica from July 1959 to April 1962. He was one of the architects of the Caribbean Federation and the Jamaican Independence Constitution. His son Michael Manley, who served in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II and became Jamaican Prime Minister in 1972, was equally committed to the liberation of Africa. His government was to assist Cuba's military expedition which defeated apartheid South Africa's invasion of Angola in 1975; code name *Operation Black Carlota* – in tribute to a Cuban female slave who had led a 19<sup>th</sup> slave rebellion in Cuba.

<sup>12</sup> Bearing sabers and unloaded Springfield rifles, the UNIA's African Legion members, dressed in blue tunics, with gold braid and Sam Brown Belts. They led huge parades around Harlem in the 1920s and maintained affiliates in the Caribbean. With its own Motor Corps and Black Corp Nurses and cavalry, they served as bodyguards, performed crowd control, and added pomp and ceremony to UNIA events. Made up primarily of African American World War I veterans, they also included BWIR veterans such as St. William Grant and Bahamian James B. Nimmons (b. 1894) who drilled the Miami Florida unit in the manner of the British Army of which he had formed part. See *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves* (1894-1994) by Deborah Gray White, W.W. Norton & Company (1998).

<sup>13</sup> See *Too Heavy a Load* at page 120.

shops belonging to the mercantile classes in St. Georges. In British Honduras, that same year, rebellious soldiers took over the main administrative center in a protest for equal rights that was only quelled by the dispatch of a Royal Navy cruiser. Many vociferated that British Honduras should belong to the black and indigenous persons who formed the majority population in that colony. And in Trinidad, ex-soldiers were said to form the leadership to a stevedores strike in December 1919. Meanwhile, in Jamaica, the War Office maintained gunboats offshore, afraid of violence from returning veterans who had been touched by the spirit of Taranto.

In Dominica, many were affected by this flowering of Caribbean nationalism spawned by the war. Local leaders, such as lawyers CEA Rawle,<sup>14</sup> and Cecil Lockhart, planter J.B. Charles and Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) secretary J.R. Ralph Casimir were to agitate for self government, universal adult suffrage and one unitary Caribbean state. Returning West Indian soldiers were at the forefront of the most dramatic race and class consciousness movements of the interwar years in the region. World War I, in essence, was the midwife to self determination principles that swept through the Caribbean and furthest reaches of the British Empire; and which ultimately gave birth to the independence movement. In so doing, the actions of these activist ex-soldiers changed the status of Caribbean countries and peoples from being that of captive nations of the British Empire into free associates of the British Commonwealth.

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<sup>14</sup> An unheralded Dominican hero of the Caribbean independence and Pan African movement, J.R. Ralph Casimir, poet, writer, and dedicated promoter of our indigenous literature, creativity and culture, was born in 1898 at St. Joseph. Casimir was a founding member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association led by Marcus Garvey. He was organizer and General Secretary of the Dominican branch from 1919-1922. He also served as an agent for Garvey's shipping line, the Black Star Line. He worked as a bookbinder, commission agent, solicitor's clerk and cantor for the Roman Catholic Cathedral. He served as a Roseau Town Councilor, and secretary of several political organizations including the famous West Indian Conference of 1932. Pan-Africanism, black awareness and pride and anti-colonialism were a major focus of his writing. He wrote articles and poems to many local regional and U.S magazines. He contributed many articles to the Negro World and he was a correspondent for several publications including the Pittsburgh Courier. Between 1943 and the latest in 1975, Casimir edited four anthologies of poems and five collections of his own work. He showcased local recitals songs and Creole speeches at UNIA gatherings. He also founded the first literary society in Dominica. See further, Delmance "Rasmo" Moses of the Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences, Ralph Casimir & Orian Fund, [www.dominica-academy.org/ralph.html](http://www.dominica-academy.org/ralph.html)

Life in Dominica was hard for the returning veterans. The employment opportunities were scant, aside from the backbreaking work attendant to laboring on L. Rose Company estates at Soufriere, Bath Estate, St. Aroment, Picard, Canefield and Wallhouse.<sup>15</sup> The primacy of limes in Dominican industry is recorded in an article in the *New York Times* of January 6, 1918 in which experimentation by freezing lime juice to save on freight costs is discussed:

**New York Times**

January 6, 1918

**Freezing Lime Juice**

*Experiments Designed to  
Save Freight and Other Charges*

An interesting report on West Indian experiments in freezing lime juice to save bulk in shipments was forwarded recently to the Department of Commerce by Consul Henry D. Baker, stationed in Trinidad, B.W.I. These experiments followed the presentation to the Department of Agriculture of Dominica, the chief lime producing centre of the West Indies<sup>16</sup>, of an award for information concerning the concentration of cider in the United States by freezing. It was found that lime juice could be frozen under certain conditions with altering its essential properties for [lime juice] cordial<sup>17</sup> purposes.

Certainly, the lime juice from Dominica had staved off the scourges of scurvy that afflicted many British Navy and other sailors denied the nutritional benefits of vitamin C inherent to fresh fruit, due to their long sea voyages. Upon their return to Roseau, the newly minted war heroes would have surely been feted with lime squash or the venerable

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<sup>15</sup> L. Rose & Lime Company made its fortune in Dominica during its heyday in the period 1903-1930. That period saw the apex of the island's lime industry

<sup>16</sup> Author's emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> Lime juice cordial was a tasty drink specialized in L. Rose & Co. and still a common drink on Dominica into the 1960s. It is doubtful whether Dominican children today have any sense of that drink or have tasted it. Such is the ruin into which lime cultivation and processing have fallen on the island. The author's maternal grand uncle was a foreman at L. Rose's Bath Estate works and that relationship led to lime juice cordial being a common drink at the lunch table up through the early 1970s. Author's note.

planter's rum punch, of which lime juice is an essential element. At the end of their "welcome home parades" as they scanned the crowds of well wishers, sweaty in their khaki uniforms and other military impedimenta, the loyal BWIR men from Dominica would have pondered their fate. What would become of them? What jobs could they expect after giving such brave and unselfish service? The answers would not have come fast, as the economic opportunities for ordinary Dominicans of African or Kalinago descent were few.

While Dominica led in lime juice production in the Caribbean most of the profits were repatriated and such prosperity did not trickle down to the common man, from whose ranks most of the veterans came. Neither did L. Rose & Company's efforts or the prevailing colonial economic practice of the day, lead to a profusion of in-country science and technology necessary to spin-off value-added industries. As with the coconut and other citrus cultivation (i.e. orange, tangerine, grapefruit), it was not until the 1960s that serious agro-processing came to Dominica under the auspices of Leopold Emmanuel's Domfruit Company and Elias Nasieff's Dominica Coconut Products, Ltd. The banana trade was yet in its infancy. Vanilla – though a popular crop - did not afford much scope and was very labor intensive. If the men did not own land, their prospects in what was primarily an agricultural island seemed bleak. The British government did not devise a land lease or sale program, nor did they see the need for any system of veteran services such as the "G.I. Bill" that was implemented in the US after World War II. A haphazard system of preferences and land grants to benefit Dominica's British army veterans would, however, follow World War II and will be discussed later.

In the period between World War I and II however, very little industry was born sufficient to afford jobs to ordinary Dominicans beyond that of agriculture worker on mostly expatriate owned plantations. While veterans may have, due to their discipline and loyalty shown, gotten jobs as low level clerks, the record reveals that many made their way to Panama, Cuba, the Dominican Republic or New York to seek their fortunes. According to internal documents, it was an official British government position to

encourage the departure of radicalized ex-soldiers to foreign lands and so avoid them inciting local rebellions on their home islands.<sup>18</sup>

In New York, some were to be swept up in the nationalist outpouring of the UNIA and its famed paramilitary Black Legion. Marcus Garvey's ideology had special meaning to West Indian migrants. His West Indians roots and organizational prowess gave the migrants a sense of comfort and home, while helping their economic adjustment in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Oft times the West Indian antecedents of the veterans, even while espousing a common racial solidarity, made for difficult relationships with their African American counterparts. Convulsed by such difficulties some BWIR and Black Legion veterans returned home, among them St. William Grant of Jamaica, Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler of Trinidad and James B. Nimmons of the Bahamas. Grant, alongside Alexander Bustamante was to become a prime agitator for social change as manifested in the 1938 workers rebellion in Jamaica.

Such lack of opportunity among Dominicans made the island a haven for the UNIA and the source of much support for Garvey. Local UNIA members saw the organization as a means to erase their poverty and the lowly status accorded those of their race in the colonial construct of the times. As evidenced by the discord between Dominica's J.R. Casimir and C.E.A. Rawle<sup>20</sup> not all Caribbean leaders during the period between World

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<sup>18</sup> In the words of the Guardian: "A secret colonial memo from 1919, uncovered by researchers for a Channel 4 programme on the Taranto mutiny, showed that the British government realised that everything had changed, too: "Nothing we can do will alter the fact that the black man has begun to think and feel himself as good as the white." In a sense, history was rewritten. That meant no celebrations, no official acknowledgment." See *There Were No Parades for Us* by Simon Rogers of the Guardian Unlimited, November 6, 2002 at [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

<sup>19</sup> See *Allies, Constituents or Myopic Investors: Marcus Garvey and Black Americans* by Nicholas Patsides, Journal of American Studies (2007), Cambridge University Press

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Cecile Rawle (1891-1937) is Dominica's first national hero. He fought for self government and a unified Caribbean all his life. Born in Roseau, Dominica on March 27, 1891, his parents William Alexander Romilly Rawle and Elsie Elizabeth Sophia Garrett had move to the island from Trinidad. His father was the head of the local branch of the Panama Telegraph Company that later became Cable & Wireless. Rawle was well educated attending the Dominica Grammar School and then Codrington College in Barbados. After a successful academic career he moved to London to graduate as a barrister at the Inner Temple in London in 1913. He practiced law in Grenada and Trinidad before returning to Dominica. There was at the time no elected representation for Dominica's people in the local legislative council, so he formed the Dominica Representative Government Association. In 1925 a new constitution was granted and Rawle represented Roseau in the first elected legislature, He was an avid campaigner and activist in the political arena in Dominica. In addition to practicing law, Rawle owned the *Dominica Tribune* newspaper. In 1932 he helped organize, and was elected chairman of, the Dominica Conference

Wars I and II were interested in social democracy, racial pride politics, or independence. Most, especially those in the professional classes, were quite content to engage in business as usual and clink gin and tonic glasses, or exchange planters' punch toasts at high brow parties held at the Administrator's – later Governor's House.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, it took some bravery for the likes of planter J.B. Charles, C.E.A. Rawle, Cecil Lockhart and others to invite Captain Arthur Cipriani to the 1932 Dominica Conference, the first major Pan Caribbean conference that is seen by historians as a precursor to the British West Indian Federation of 1957-1962. In that effort at political reform, both J.B. Charles and Rawle were castigated by the Administrator as radicals bent on overthrowing the government when they pursued the rights of Dominican citizens to have political representation via their Dominica Tax Reform Association. J. R. Casimir, secretary at the Dominica Conference (who had been the chief UNIA organizer for the Caribbean region) assisted them in that cause. His UNIA related travels had taken him from Cuba in the north to Panama in Central America, to Trinidad in the South. It was such networking that consolidated regional support for the Dominica Conference of 1932. At the end of their historic meeting, the 1932 conferees stated: "*Our work is to wash out the stains that now besmirch the Union Jack, stains of injustice towards weak nations ... we are British to the core ... But we demand that our flag shall be an emblem of Equality, Fraternity and Fairplay to all peoples over whose head it flies...*".<sup>22</sup> Certainly, in their call for self determination and unity among the English islands of the Caribbean, the organizers of the 1932 Dominica Conference were invoking the spirit of the Caribbean

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which was the first meeting of Caribbean nations. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss political and socio-economic possibilities of the future. The Conference, which became known as the West Indies Conference, led the way for the West Indies Federation. The participants lobbied the United Kingdom for greater representation and autonomy, and were moderately successful. Whilst short lived, it was a major step toward independence. In 1937 Rawle accepted the position of Attorney General of the Leeward Islands and moved to Antigua. Many saw this as a British plot to co-opt a rising Caribbean leader and a potential threat to their rule. He died suddenly the same year in Antigua at the relatively young age of 47. His death has never been satisfactorily explained. At the attainment of Dominica's Associated Statehood in 1967 a bust was erected at Federation Drive, in the Roseau suburb of Goodwill, Dominica to honor the great Dominican hero and Caribbean nationalist.

<sup>21</sup> After Independence the Governor's House which once served as Administrator's House, became the State House. The last British Governor was a local born mulatto aristocrat, Sir Louis Cools Lartigue.

<sup>22</sup> See *Journey Into Our Past –The Political Life of Cecil Rawle*, By Dr. William "Para" Riviere, [www.dacademy.org](http://www.dacademy.org).

sargeants who had revolted at Taranto, Italy. However, in so doing they appealed to that sense of British “fairness” that they had been taught was inherent to that country.

Such brave stirrings were given voice by one of the most notable Caribbean writers to emerge from that era, C.L.R. James<sup>23</sup>

of Trinidad. He was to voice his frustration at the limits that confronted the Caribbean man or woman of nationalist leanings:

In the colonies any man who speaks for his country any man who dares to question the authority of those who rule over him, any man who tries to do for his own people what Englishmen are so proud that other Englishmen have done for theirs, immediately becomes in the eyes of the colonial Englishman a dangerous person, a wild revolutionary, a man with no respect for law and order, a self seeker to be crushed at the first opportunity.

Ironically, it was only by escaping the clutches of colonial Trinidad that James could see the fullest flowering of his talents in that citadel of empire, London. There, he joined the ferment of Caribbean, Indian and African Nationalisms that would sweep the developing world. In that ferment would come a new brand of Caribbean nationalist, such

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<sup>23</sup> Cyril Lionel Robert James (4 January 1901–19 May 1989) was an Afro-Trinidadian journalist, socialist theorist and writer. Born in Trinidad and Tobago, then a British Crown colony, James attended Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain before becoming a cricket journalist, and also an author of fiction. He would later work as a school teacher, teaching among others the young Eric Williams. Together with Ralph de Boissière, Albert Gomes and Alfred Mendes, James was a member of the anti-colonialist *Beacon* Group, a circle of writers associated with *The Beacon* magazine. In 1932, he moved to Nelson in Lancashire, England in the hope of furthering his literary career. There, he worked for the *Manchester Guardian* and helped the cricketer Learie Constantine write his autobiography. In 1933, James moved to London. James had begun to campaign for the independence of the West Indies while in Trinidad, and his *Life of Captain Cipriani* and the pamphlet *The Case for West-Indian Self Government* were his first important published works, but now he became a leading champion of Pan-African agitation and the Chair of the International African Friends of Abyssinia, formed in 1935 in response to Fascist Italy's invasion of what is now Ethiopia. He then became a leading figure in the International African Service Bureau, led by his childhood friend George Padmore, to whom he later introduced Kwame Nkrumah. In Britain, he also became a leading Marxist theorist. He had joined the Labour Party, but in the midst of the Great Depression he became a Trotskyist. By 1934, James was a member of a Trotskyist group inside the Independent Labour Party. In this period, amid his frantic political activity, James wrote a play about Toussaint Louverture, which was staged in the West End in 1936 and starred Paul Robeson and Robert Adams. That same year saw the publication in London of James's only novel, *Minty Alley*, which he had brought with him in manuscript from Trinidad; it was the first novel to be published by a black Caribbean author in the UK. He also wrote what are perhaps his best-known works of non-fiction: *World Revolution* (1937), a history of the rise and fall of the Communist International which was critically praised by Leon Trotsky, and *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938), a widely acclaimed history of the Haitian revolution, which would later be seen as a seminal text in the study of the African diaspora. See Wikipedia, generally.

Dominica's Dr. Edward Scobie<sup>24</sup>, Barbados Errol Barrow, Trinidad's Dr. Eric Williams<sup>25</sup> and Jamaica's Dudley Thompson<sup>26</sup> all of whom were to be linked to military service or the British war effort in World War II.

The spirit of Taranto – a sense of self determination – was most often found in carnival: a uniquely Caribbean platform for free cultural expression. During the carnival of 1927, the popular resentment at an inequitable and pervasive British hegemony led to clashes between revelers and the local police under British officer Captain William Leighton. In the Carnival clash that birthed the famous local carnival song “Adieu

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<sup>24</sup> Dr. Edward Vivian Scobie (1918-1996) was born in Dominica, a British colony. As a working journalist in London, Scobie became a correspondent for the Chicago Defender and for Ebony and Jet magazines. He enlisted to serve the British cause during World War II, serving in the Royal Air Force as a pilot officer. After the war, he contributed to many London newspapers, magazines and the wire services, and became a frequent broadcaster and scriptwriter for radio and television. From 1961 to 1963 he edited Flamingo, a monthly magazine published in London for African people in Britain, Africa and the Caribbean. Scobie was twice the Mayor of Roseau, capital of Dominica, and vice-president of the Dominica Freedom Party. Edward Scobie was Professor Emeritus of History, Black Studies Department, City College of New York. Previously, Dr. Scobie taught at Princeton and Rutgers Universities. He authored *Black Britannia* and *The Global African Experience*.

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Eric Eustace Williams (September 25, 1911 – March 29, 1981) was the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Williams was born the son of a minor civil servant, but his mother was a descendant of the French Creole elite. He was educated at Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain, where he excelled at academics and football. He won an island scholarship in 1932 which allowed him to attend Oxford University where he received his doctorate in 1938. Williams was in part inspired by C.L.R. James and other Pan Africanists of the period who he met in London and Washington, D.C., and his doctoral thesis, titled *The Economic Aspect of the West Indian Slave Trade and Slavery*, owed much to the influence of James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938). His thesis formed the basis of his most notable book, now considered a classic in economic history, *Capitalism and Slavery*. He also authored from *Columbus to Castro*, among other works. He was appointed by US President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill to represent the token Caribbean interest on the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission which set policy for the region during World War II. Arguably, he is the most eminent scholar of modern Caribbean and Pan African nationalism in that his scholarship chipped away at the myth of white supremacy. Williams' achievements brought pride to West Indians and he brought African and East Indian Trinidadians to political power in Trinidad. However, he was a gradualist and not a political revolutionary. In the 1970s he was to come in for much criticism from Black Power movement advocates who believed he had not given due regard to black economic power and ownership of the means of production. They disregarded the need for balance which he engaged in a society where East Indians and Africans had to peacefully co-exist, or the enormous nationalist political and intellectual space he had created for non-European and African peoples when he stated defiantly, “Massa Day Done.” He served as head of state from 1956 until his death in 1981.

<sup>26</sup> Dudley Thompson (aka Burning Spear) was born in Jamaica in 1917. A lawyer and Pan-African activist he defended Jomo Kenyatta (the original Burning Spear) on sedition charges for his role in the Mau Mau rebellion against British rule in Kenya. Regarded as an intellectual and long standing Pan-Africanist, a friend and colleague of George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah, C.L.R. James, Julius Nyerre and M.K.O. Abiola. Thompson in his earlier years fought as pilot during his tenure in the Royal Air Force during World War II. He served in the government of Jamaica under Michael Manley and has held a variety of official positions and was awarded the Order of Jamaica, one of Jamaica's most prestigious decorations, for distinguished service in the field of International Affairs and his contribution to the legal developments in Jamaica.

William Oh!” Leighton had sought to curb the sensay clad masqueraders of the *ban mauvais*. Though surrounded by bayonet wielding soldiers of the local Dominica Defence Force - among whose members may have been some BWIR World War I veterans – Leighton had been dragged from his horse and beaten. The incident led to the carnival festivities being banned in 1928. In 1929, with prodding from Ralph Nicholls, J.B. Charles and others, the carnival was restored to a people who chafed under difficult conditions. The Wall Street Crash of that year did not improve things and living standards on the island plummeted. As a result many Dominicans were forced to make their way to Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Cayenne (French Guiana) to seek their fortunes:

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There was no ship in the Atlantic near enough to report the formation of this storm to the east of the Lesser Antilles, so the first intimation obtainable was in the regular morning reports of the Weather Bureau observers from Barbados to Dominica, each showing a barometer reading only slightly below normal, but a wind circulation decidedly abnormal. The direction ranged from north at Dominica, through northwest....the observer at Dominica also sent, in addition to his usual code report, “evidences of approaching hurricane”...by noon [of the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1930] communication with Dominica had already ceased.”<sup>27</sup>

The report noted above heralded Dominica’s worst natural disaster during the interwar years. Dominica’s economy suffered a body blow when on September 1, 1930, a devastating hurricane struck the island. In the words of Dame Eugenia Charles who later became the Caribbean’s first female Prime Minister:

I saw the waves crashing against the bay front, as my father paced the floor of our house. He was concerned about his estate and all the poor people who would suffer as a result. We were young and somewhat excited as we had never been in a bad hurricane; but he told us shut-up and close the windows out of which we were peeping. The winds battered our house all day, but it stood the test. However,

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<sup>27</sup> Report of F. Eugene Hartwell, Weather Bureau Office, San Juan, Puerto Rico, September 1930.

our lands in the country where we had banana, vanilla, citrus, cocoa, coffee were devastated.<sup>28</sup>

Wendell Christian recalls his escape from their home during that hurricane that went on to devastate the Dominican Republic:

All we heard was that *barom la turbay!* That meant the barometer had fallen. It's not like today with CNN and Weather Channel. In those days warning was scant. In Roseau, sometimes, there would be more formal notice where they would raise the red and black hurricane warning flag at the Fort Young. Or the Fort Young would signal those within earshot to take cover by firing off one or two of its working cannons. But we were in Delices, and saw the sky darken, the winds began to howl and the Atlantic starting to kick up. We hid in our home, with my oldest sister Edris in charge. Pappy was in charge of the Pointe Mulatre Police Station and so she was the senior at home, as my mother had already passed away. Henckell was already out the house. Once the wind got going, the house was tipped to a side; off its foundations. We fled to Mr. Norbert's shop that was packed with people. Inside there was praying, crying and gnashing of teeth. We survived the storm and made our way to the Pointe Mulatre Police Station. And I can remember vividly that the sea had entered the station and deposited loads of sand, mixed with crabs at its back door. With the crabs, Pappy later made a quick crab soup for us. Later, the British government did send rations for us, the survivors, and one would go to the Police station with a ticket to get food such as rice, sugar, salted fish and flour, as all the crops had been blown down.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the devastation wrought by the 1930 Hurricane, Dominica's economy was also buffeted by the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the resultant Great Depression.

In the 1930s Dominica's economy was buffeted by the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the resultant Great Depression. Ships called less frequently at Roseau and Portsmouth; credit was difficult to obtain at local banks; the cost of staples such as flour, corn meal, salted cod fish and smoked herring skyrocketed; and the value of traditional exports such as cocoa, coffee, lime and bananas dipped. Already impoverished, the crushing weight of that international economic crisis led to worker and farmer rebellions from Jamaica in the north to Trinidad in the south. The socio-economic climate in Dominica mirrored that in

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<sup>28</sup> Dame Eugenia Charles interview by Gabriel J. Christian at Upper Marlboro, Maryland, October 2, 1996.

<sup>29</sup> December 27, 2007 interview with Wendell McKenzie Christian (b. 1921).

the other British West Indian colonies. In the words of Alberta Christian<sup>30</sup> (nee John Baptiste who was to marry Wendell Christian when he was demobilized from the British army and have seven children by him):

Men used to work hard for nothing much in return. My father use to handle big manual saws – about 8 feet long - to make boards from mahogany trees deep in the forest. He sold those boards to Smith & Lord and Shillingford. Smith & Lord was an old white owned firm that was last managed by Allan Buntin on Hanover Street. My father had lost his job at Layou Park Estate when things went bad with limes during the great depression. My Uncle Johnson Johnbaptiste had been the overseer at L. Rose’s Bath Estate and he had got my father the overseer job at Layou. A disease also had fallen upon the limes and that compounded things. Before that all around Layou Village, into St. Joseph, all down to the sea side, all by the playground was full of lime trees. On the hills above St. Joseph was full of tobacco. Harvested tobacco was tied in bales and swung down the hills to the flat, by cable. Those days are gone now. So, when my father lost his job he had to sell his cows, and he now had to go deep into the Carholm heights to farm. My mother worked at Layou in limes and tobacco. All where the gas station is today at Hillsborough were fields of tobacco. We, the children, were in school but – on occasion when I would drop off her lunch - we would prune the fields with my mother searching the plants for caterpillar pests that afflicted the crops. In the village, people used *Koudmen* to help each other to build homes or tend crops.

*Koudmen* is a form of cooperative self help, and it was in much demand as a way for people to cope with hard times. The local shops owned by black people in St. Joseph and other places were mostly *shadel mouwi*;

the term used to describe small struggling shops that sold goods in small lots. The big shops were in town, such as A.C. Shillingford, Campbell Phillip and Bridgewater. These people were local and mulatto, mostly. They would buy agricultural produce from us country folk and sell us groceries like oil, sugar, flour, and cod fish. Ayoub Dib was selling clothes and shoes; he was a Syrian. There was old Astaphan, the father of Waddy Astaphan; there was Elias George, and Josephine Gabriel, all Lebanese, as was old man Nasieff. The Lebanese had come to Dominica with a few suitcases of cheap consumer goods and in a few years they were moving to the top of our business world. They would walk all around and give

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<sup>30</sup> Born in 1929 on Layou Park Estate, where her father Aaron John Baptiste was the foreman, Alberta grew up in St. Joseph; a west coast village on Dominica. She worked as an assistant teacher, psychiatric nurse, and concluded her working years as the founding Director of the Workshop for the Blind; Dominica’s first school and work facility for the blind. It eventually broadened its reach to accept all disabled persons.

credit; when they started they dealt with the humble and did direct sales. We would walk to Roseau, often with loads on our heads or we would send the goods ahead by a boat. We would meet the boat on the sea shore, in front the old Post Office. Many boats would crowd the Roseau bay front. There were few trucks or motorable roads then. So these boats would carry charcoal, bananas, dasheen and other provisions from the land in the interior. They would crowd around the bay front, the same way mini buses now crowd the country bus stops. Another thing that helped many to survive those hard times was that some people had seine. A seine is a big net that can catch a lot of fish. In St. Joseph, Delor had a seine. Cayo in Mahaut had a seine. In Pottersville, Ma Ned the mother of famous shop keeper Hayden Thomas, had a seine too. In Charlottesville, Gewar had a seine; in Soufriere, Anthony "Papa Mo" Moise had a seine. That made him a big man in the Soufriere and Scotts Head area and allowed him to rise in politics where he later represented the Dominica Freedom Party. Where you had a seine you were rich because you could gather the bounty of the sea. We would hear about all these famous seine owners and they became legendary. Some of the seines could go as far as half a mile and men, women, and children would be pulling it in when the time came. It was a community affair. All who held the seine and helped pull it in, could get a share of the catch. The rest would be sold. We would shout in rhythmic French patois, *Hallay! Hallay!* (Pull! Pull!) and pull the seine to shore. The children of those who owned seines lived better, but the whole village benefited from the seine's haul; we had fish for days and what we could not eat right away was salted or smoked. We had salt boats – *bateu sel* - coming from Anguilla, St. Kitts, even the Bahamas and the other little islands that had sea salt ponds. They would come along the seashore, they would buy mangos, bananas, coconuts from us and they would sell salt to us. Salt was more important to us then, than it is now. We had no refrigeration to keep perishables in those days. So we would make a rack and salt fish or meat. Or we would smoke the meat or fish. That is how we survived in those tough days. We had no self government and the average person could not step inside a bank to ask for a loan. There were no trade unions or credit unions; that came after the war. And worms and malnutrition were commonplace.

In 1935, the lack of economic opportunity that was widespread in the British West Indies touched off insurrection in St. Kitts:

On 28 January 1935 cane cutters refused to start reaping the new sugar cane crop on the Shadwell plantation, on the outskirts of Basseterre, the capital of St Kitts. The employers had offered work at

8 pence (16 cents) per ton, a rate which the workers had been forced to accept under protest for reaping the previous years' crop. News of their refusal to work spread quickly to adjoining plantations where workers also refused to start the crop. A new spirit of determination to fight for their rights spread throughout the island as groups of workers went from plantation to plantation on foot. They prevented work from starting or, in the few places where the cutting of canes had commenced, they persuaded the workers to cease work. A general strike of sugar workers very soon developed. Workers at the island's sugar factory also came out on strike, demanding a wage increase. Their wages had been reduced by one penny in the shilling in 1930 and subsequently by a further one penny. On 29 January some 200 to 300 workers, some armed with sticks, entered the yard at Buckley's plantation. The manager and overseer ordered them to leave but they refused to do so. Stones were thrown and, either before or after the stone throwing - it is not clear when, the manager fired his gun into the crowd injuring several workers. Armed police arrived under the command of a former British Army major, but the workers refused to obey his order to disperse, demanding that the manager be arrested. At about 6 p.m. a contingent from the local military force arrived at Buckleys. The crowd had by then swollen to four to five hundred. The Riot Act was read and the military fired into the crowd. Two labourers and the factory watchman were killed and eight others were wounded. Next day a British warship arrived and marines were landed. A period of intimidation followed. Thirty-nine strikers were arrested and six were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of from two to five years.<sup>31</sup>

The embers from the St. Kitt's uprising were carried by word of mouth, telegraph, and newspaper articles across the region. Earlier, in 1932 and 1934, there had been labour disturbances in Guyana and Belize. Later, in 1935, St. Vincent saw unrest too:

In October 1935 the Governor of the Windward Islands arrived in St Vincent to preside over a meeting of the Legislative Council. At that time the Council consisted of a majority of colonial officials and persons nominated by the Governor, with only of a minority of members elected on the restricted franchise. On 15 October the Governor, in order to add to the Government's revenues, introduced a measure to increase customs duties on a number of items of popular consumption. It was also the Government's intention to

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<sup>31</sup> See Richard Hart's *Labour Rebellions of the 1930s in the British Caribbean Region Colonies* (Published 2002 jointly by Caribbean Labour Solidarity and the Socialist History Society. ISBN of printed version: 9537742 3 6)

maintain the high local tariff on sugar that had previously been imposed to assist the sugar producers at the consumers' expense. The legislature was scheduled to meet again on 21 October to approve the Governor's proposals and during the intervening week there was mounting opposition to these proposals which would increase the cost of living. On the morning of 21 October a crowd gathered in Kingstown, the capital, in front of the shop of George McIntosh, a popular Town Councillor. They wanted him to inform the Governor of their opposition to the duty increases and to present to him their other grievances about lack of employment and general poverty. McIntosh informed the crowd that the Governor had agreed to receive him at 5 p.m., but they were suspicious that this was a trick to avoid hearing their grievances because His Excellency usually left the island before that hour, immediately after the last session of the Legislative Council. There was an angry demonstration outside the Court House where the Council was meeting, some of the demonstrators having armed themselves with sticks and stones. Some demonstrators forced their way into the building. Windows of the Court House were smashed and motor cars of some officials were damaged. There were shouts of "We can't stand more duties on food or clothing" and cries of "We have no work. We are hungry". The alarmed Governor adjourned the session of the Council. As he and other officials emerged from the Council Chamber, the Governor was pushed and struck and the Attorney General, who had drafted the tax measures, was cuffed by an enraged protester. In the ensuing riot a crowd broke into the prison releasing the ten prisoners there and the business premises of F A Corea, a member of the Council and the island's largest merchant and plantation owner, were ransacked. Following the arrival of an armed police force, the Riot Act was read and the crowd was fired upon. One person was killed and several were injured. News travels fast in a small island and the rioting soon spread to Georgetown, twenty miles to the south, and Chateaubelair the same distance to the north. Telephone wires were cut and several bridges were destroyed. Military "Volunteers" were rushed in from other islands and armed police and Volunteers were posted to guard the cable and wireless station and the electricity plant. At midnight on 21 October a British warship arrived. On 22 October a state of emergency was proclaimed. Though the disorder in Kingstown had subsided by the end of the first day, disorders in the rural areas, where many plantation workers were involved, continued for the next two days. The police met particularly strong resistance at Byera's Hill, Campden Park and Stubbs, where demands for land and for higher wages were heard. The state of emergency was continued for three weeks. In Kingstown the working class leader who had played the principal agitational role was Sheriff Lewis. He was popularly known as "Selassie" because of

his advocacy of the cause of Ethiopia, then being invaded by Italy. Bertha Mutt, who was also mentioned in a similar role, was known as "Mother Selassie". These nick-names are interesting because they show that, even in a far away Caribbean island, there was concern about an invasion by a European power of this independent African kingdom. On 23 November George McIntosh, who had by then become the acknowledged leader of the workers, was arrested on a charge of treason felony, although he had tried to restore calm during the disturbance. The case against him collapsed at the preliminary examination before the Magistrate.<sup>32</sup>

Even in Barbados, a garrison island soaked in the fervent wine of loyalty to the British crown, the nationalist passion and yearning for freedom from want and degradation was bubbling. In 1937 it erupted:

Clement Payne, who had been born to Barbadian parents residing in Trinidad, returned to Barbados in March 1937. Shortly after his arrival he began to hold street meetings at Golden Square in Bridgetown, the capital, at which he announced his intention to form a trade union. He had made arrangements to rent a hall on 1 May to celebrate international labour day, but when the proprietor discovered his purpose the arrangement was cancelled. Payne's meetings attracted increasingly large crowds of workers. Others who assisted him with his plan to launch a trade union were F A Chase, Orlrick Grant, Mortimer Skeete, Israel Lovell and Darnley Alleyne. Alarmed at these activities, the Government took action. On entering the island Payne had declared that he had been born in Barbados. This proved to be untrue, although he had believed it to be true. He was nevertheless prosecuted for knowingly making a false declaration and fined £10, but appealed and was granted bail. On the next day he led a march to Government House, demanding to see the Governor. Payne and several others were arrested and he was refused a renewal of his bail. While in custody awaiting trial he was served with a deportation order. Payne had been unrepresented at his trial as he had been unable to pay the fee of Grantley Adams, the lawyer he had sought to employ. His followers however took up a collection and raised the money to pay Adams to represent him at the appeal. The appeal, heard on 26 July, was successful, but Payne was not released from custody. Instead, during the night, he was secretly placed aboard a schooner and deported to Trinidad. The Trinidad police were waiting for him and arrested him on a charge of possessing prohibited literature. When it became known that Payne had been deported there was an angry public reaction. On the night

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<sup>32</sup> Id.

of 27 July a large crowd was addressed by his principal supporters. Next day there was widespread rioting in the city." Shop windows were smashed, cars were pushed into the sea, passers by were attacked, police patrols, caught unarmed and unawares, fled beneath a hail of bottles and stones ... During the next two days the 'trouble' spread to the rural parishes where a few lawless souls stoned cars on the highways while bolder spirits among the hungry poor took advantage of the general fear and confusion to break into shops and raid sweet potato fields ... Shops remained closed, work came to a standstill in town and country alike." At the time of the disturbances a strike at the Central Foundry was in progress. On 28 July the lightermen, whose importance can only be appreciated when it is remembered that at that time a deep water pier had not yet been constructed, came out on strike. They resumed work on 4 August when their demands were met, but sporadic strikes and threats of strikes occurred in several other work places. The Government acted ruthlessly in suppressing the general unrest and disorder. On several occasions the police used firearms. The final toll was 14 dead, 47 injured and more than 500 arrested. Payne's principal supporters were accused of creating "discontent and disaffection among His Majesty's subjects" and of promoting "ill-will and hostility between different classes" and prosecuted for sedition. Grant and Skeete were sentenced to ten years imprisonment, Lovell and Alleyne to five years. Chase, who was charged for having incited the crowd to riot, when from the platform he had said: "tonight will be a funny day", was sentenced to imprisonment for nine months.

In 1938 worker and farmer uprising continued to spread. Gone were the days when the display of star bursts by British cruisers, or the display of gleaming bayonets by marines could cow the natives into submission as they had during the 1930 Carib War in Dominica.<sup>33</sup> At Jamaica's Frome sugar estate, the workers revolted on May 2, 1938:

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<sup>33</sup> Dominica's bloody clash with the colonial authorities during that period came in an uprising in the Kalinago territory. The term "Carib War" is often used to describe the clash between British colonial police on Dominica and Caribs on the Carib Reservation in 1930. On 19th September 1930 a major confrontation occurred at the Carib Territory between residents and a detachment of five police officers sent out from Roseau under the command of Corporal Richard Sweeney to search for smuggled goods. Two residents were killed and others wounded by police bullets, while all the officers suffered bodily injuries. There are differing versions of precisely what triggered a resort to force by contending parties: one lays blame upon the police; the other exculpates them. But there is common ground on that the economic hardships and lack of representative government were oppressive to the majority of Dominicans. Such hardship encouraged smuggling between Dominica and the French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. The incident was sufficiently disturbing to the Colonial Office in London as to require the commissioning of an enquiry into the question of the existence of an ethnic Carib "nation", so to speak, within the framework of an overall state of Dominica. The HMS Delhi used star shells, searchlight displays and bayonet wielding marines to subdue the rebellion. See *Historical Notes on the Carib Territory* by William (Para) Riviere, Ph.D. at the Research Section of the Dominica Academy of Arts & Sciences [www.da-academy.org](http://www.da-academy.org); Dr. Lennox

Hungry people are driven to desperate measures, and the suppressed have nothing to lose but their servitude. Therefore, unorganised though they were, and without experienced trade union leaders to negotiate with the employers, 600 labourers, accompanied by their wives and ragged children, marched on Monday, May 2nd, to the office of Mr. Lindo, the European manager of the West Indies Sugar Company's factory at Old Frome in the parish of Westmorland. It seems a slight disturbance had occurred on the previous Friday at the Frome estate, where a new factory was being erected. Some windows were broken, but there were no casualties and quiet was restored in an hour. The day following, between 400 and 500 labourers employed on the new factory struck for higher wages. The strikers behaved in an orderly fashion. but ninety extra police were, however, drafted to the area. On Monday, the spokesman of the deputation to Mr. Lindo asked a daily 4s. minimum for field labourers and higher rates for skilled artisans, such as carpenters and mechanics. The Company, which is owned by Messrs. Tate & Lyle, has been snaking enormous profits in recent years. Nevertheless, the manager, on the Company's authority, refused these quite moderate demands, offering a flat rate of 2s. for unskilled and 3s. 6d. for skilled labour. If the men refused to accept these terms, construction work would cease. The crowd was addressed by its leaders and the slogan "A dollar a day or no work" was taken up. The temper of the men rose. They formed into groups, and, arming themselves with sticks and tools, attacked the office and beat up the European staff. All the time the police had been standing by, and on the arrival of a fresh crowd, fixed bayonets were ordered and men were prodded out of the yard. Unarmed, the crowd took to throwing stones. A warning came from the police. The Riot Act was read and shots were fired over the heads of strikers. More stones were thrown, and the next volley, lasting for ten minutes, was directed straight at the men, women and children, who by that time numbered over a thousand. Many were wounded, and four workers were killed. One of them, an old Negro woman, was bayoneted to death. The crowd went wild, and, rescuing as many wounded as they could, they retreated into the fields, setting the canes on fire. The manager and his staff fled from the scene, but were later rescued by the police and brought to Kingston in disguise. Among the workers 93 arrests were made. Several of them have been convicted for rioting and sent to prison for periods varying from one to 12 months' hard labour. On receipt of this news the Colonial Office stated that the disturbances were entirely local in character, but events have given the lie to this statement. Even while Britain was celebrating Empire Day and the Duke of Kent was assuring the nation that the Empire is today united

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Honychurch's *The Dominica Story* and *Wild Majesty: Encounters with the Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day* by Peter Hulme and Neil Whitehead(Oxford University Press, 1992).

as never before, a general strike covered Kingston. City cleaners and wharf labourers ceased work. For days the garbage remained uncollected. Factories were closed, shops and offices were forced to shut; tram, bus and rail services ceased. Even the Fire Brigade threatened to strike. The *Daily Telegraph* bemoaned the fact that European households were without ice.<sup>34</sup>

World War I Royal Artillery veteran Norman Washington Manley, Q.C. was to later represent the Frome workers and seek redress for their grievances. In that effort he was joined by Alexander Bustamante. Both men would later go on to long careers in Jamaican politics. One of the key figures in the 1938 uprising in Jamaica, and an early ally of Bustamante, was St. William Wellington Wellwood Grant<sup>35</sup>, a World War I veteran of the 11<sup>th</sup> British West India Regiment.

In Trinidad BWIR Captain Arthur Cipriani and former BWIR private Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler were to be at the centre of the revolt. Cipriani had built the socialist Trinidad Workingman’s Association upon his return from World War I, where he had commanded black troops. A white Trinidadian of Corsican descent he resented the ill treatment of the West Indian soldiers who had been relegated to the menial role attendant

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<sup>34</sup> See George Padmore’s Labor Unrest in the Caribbean in *International African Opinion*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1938.

<sup>35</sup> St. William Wellington Wellwood Grant (1894-1977) was one of the most radical British West India Regiment World War I veterans who directly influenced the UNIA, Caribbean affairs and Pan African politics. He worked as a cook and sailor in New York and Europe and then served in the 11<sup>th</sup> BWIR during the war. After the war he was one of a number of soldiers who joined the UNIA and gave it a militaristic orientation. He organized the famed Tiger Division of the UNIA’s Africa Legion as an elite force with infantry, field artillery and machine gun sections for the liberation of Africa from European rule. To that end he recruited Africans who had served in the British and French colonial forces, such as one Abdullah Sol of the French Army, a Mohammed from Somaliland and an Ashima Takis. In a speech given in New York he stated: “*Our time will come when we are prepared to die for the freedom of our fatherland [Africa]. It was through a government carrying an army, navy, air force, marine corps and every implement of war that compelled the Nordic races to respect Japan. And when we make up our minds through uniting together and put on land a mighty army, air force, put on water of the seven seas battleships and cruisers, white men and God will call us blessed.*” More radical and militaristic than even Garvey himself, his stance led to his dismissal from the UNIA. Upon his return to Jamaica he attracted public attention as a street corner orator dressed in the full military regalia of the Universal Negro Improvement Association’s African Legion, Tiger Division. He was one of the main instigators of a dock workers strike and other industrial unrest of 1938 which then triggered the forming of the trade unions such as the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union and political parties such as the Peoples National Party and later the Jamaica Labor Party. Many credit Bustamante’s early success to the stirring oratory and appeal of Grant. While he later broke up with Bustamante (who became Jamaica’s first Prime Minister at independence) over philosophical and organizational differences, he was given a state funeral in Jamaica at his death and a park named after him in Kingston. See *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. VII. November 1927-August 1940; Edited by Robert A. Hill with Tevvy Ball, Erika Blum, and Barbara Blair, associate editors. University of California Press.

to labour battalions. His return and that of other BWIR soldiers spurred trade union and self government activism in Trinidad. On June 19, 1938, the oil field workers of Trinidad, goaded by poor work conditions struck back. In the words of West Indian nationalist and socialist activist George Padmore of Trinidad<sup>36</sup>:

It was while Butler, the strike leader, was addressing the workers on an open lot near the oilfields that the trouble started. The police, armed with pistols, attempted to break up the meeting and arrest Butler. This precipitated fighting in the course of which a police corporal was killed and several civilians wounded. On the following day the Governor ordered the commander of the local Forces to recruit a volunteer corps from among the European community. These men were armed and put in control of the oilfields at Point Fontin and Fyzabad. This was an incitement to further rioting, resulting in the death of ten workers and sixteen wounded. In the meantime the Governor cabled the Colonial Office for reinforcements. On the morning of June 22nd *H.M.S. Ajax* arrived in Port of Spain and landed hundreds of marines and bluejackets. Two days later the cruiser *Apollo* landed more troops, which were assigned to control the oil refineries and strategic points in the capital. By this time the strike had already reached Port of Spain, where lightermen, stevedores, porters, carters and public works labourers declared solidarity with the oilfields workers. Processions were spontaneously organized and the workers marched through the busy section of the town with banners and slogans declaring: “We ask for bread and they give us hot lead.” “Stop the murder of defenceless workers in the oilfields.” Despite all the military display

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<sup>36</sup> George Padmore (1902–September 23, 1959), born Malcolm Ivan Meredith Nurse, was a Trinidadian who became a leading Pan-Africanist. He was born in Arouca, Trinidad. He worked as a journalist in the West Indies; then, in 1924, travelled to Fisk University in Tennessee where he studied medicine. He later registered at New York University but soon transferred to Howard University. It was during this time that he became active in the Workers (Communist) Party and changed his name to George Padmore. Padmore was an important black student leader, and this led to his involvement in Comintern, the international communist movement. In late 1929 he left the United States and moved to the USSR where he headed the Negro Bureau of the Communist International of Labour Unions (see Profintern) and was Secretary of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers. In 1934 Padmore resigned his positions and moved to London. In London he collaborated with C.L.R. James and other Caribbean and African intellectuals. In response to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia James and Padmore organised the International African Services Bureau, of which he was chairman and James editor. In his capacity as leader of the IASB Padmore helped organise the 1945 Manchester Conference which was attended by Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, W.E.B. DuBois, Jaja Wachuku. This conference helped set the agenda for decolonisation in the post-war period. When Ghana became independent in 1957 Padmore moved there and served as an advisor to Nkrumah. Padmore died in London on September 23, 1959, where he had gone to receive medical treatment. See [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org).

that the Government mobilized to intimidate the people, the strikers refused to return to work until their grievances were redressed. By this time the strike was island-wide. Thousands of East Indian agricultural labourers on the great sugar plantations refused to work. Motor transport in many parts of the country had to stop for want of petrol; ships arriving in the harbour of Port of Spain were unable to discharge their cargoes. The entire economic life of the country was at a standstill.<sup>37</sup>

Such were the difficult conditions that the average West Indian faced. In 1938 the British Government formed a commission to inquire into the causes of the unrest and suggest reforms to ameliorate the terrible hardship confronting the British West Indian population. Led by former Conservative Party MP and Boer War veteran Lord Moyne, the review panel came to be known to history as the Moyne Commission.<sup>38</sup> The crushing poverty and injustices observed by the commissioners during their Caribbean tour compelled them to suggest reforms, such as self government, a greater role for labour unions, more assistance to the islands from Britain's treasury, slum clearance, and a Caribbean federation. In essence, the commission sought a new social contract between

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<sup>37</sup> See George Padmore's Fascism in the Colonies in *Controversy*, Vol. 2, No. 17, February 1938.

<sup>38</sup> Oppressed by racism and economic exclusion, workers and farmers engaged in uprisings in the British Caribbean during the 1930s. As a result, the British Government appointed the West Indian Royal Commission on 5 August 1938 to investigate and to make recommendations on the social and economic conditions in the various territories. The Commission was led by Lord Moyne (the former Walter Edward Guinness); hence the term "Moyne" Commission. The commission visited Dominica during its field trips. Walter Edward Guinness was born in Dublin on 29 March 1880, the 3rd son of the 1st Earl of Iveagh. From Eton he volunteered for service in the South African war, where he was wounded and mentioned in dispatches. In 1907 he was elected to Parliament as conservative member for Bury St Edmunds, which he continued to represent until 1931. He was also frequently called upon to chair commissions of enquiry - the Financial Mission to Kenya, 1932, the Departmental Committee on Housing, 1933, the Royal Commission on the University of Durham, 1934 and the West India Royal Commission, 1938-1939. During World War Two he again took political office, becoming Secretary of State for the Colonies and Leader of the House of Lords in 1941. In August 1942 he was appointed Deputy Minister of State in Cairo, and in January 1944 Minister Resident in the Middle East. On 6 November 1944 he was assassinated in Cairo by members of the Stern gang. The West India Royal Commission was a comprehensive investigation of the social and economic condition of all the British territories in the Caribbean. Led by Lord Moyne, the Commission held public hearings throughout the region, and recommended sweeping reforms in everything from employment practices and social welfare, to radical political change. The full findings of the commission were not published until 1945 but an immediate start was made upon the implementation of less controversial recommendations. The British government decided to make substantial increases in the amount of money available for colonial development of all kinds and set about creating a framework for change. See *Institute for Commonwealth Studies, Moyne Papers on West India Royal Commission*.

the colonizer and the colonized, similar to the socialist-oriented New Deal offered to U.S. citizens by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt upon the Wall Street Crash of 1929. The imperial power felt that to do otherwise, was to invite revolution in the islands already exposed to the nationalist stirrings of the UNIA. In a *Time Magazine* article of March 4, 1940, a vivid report of what the commission found is revealed. In the article, the islands are referred to as dungheaps. The colorful language and sentiment of the times, compels that the article be offered in full:

### New Deal for Dungheaps

Monday, Mar. 04, 1940

A Year and a half ago a Royal Commission headed by Anthropologist Walter Guinness, Lord Moyne, left England for the West Indies to find out what was wrong with that restless segment of Empire. In Jamaica the Commission got its first smell of economic and physical deterioration. That sunny island, whose white 2% of the population (largely descendants of "lazy and immoral" Irish girls, "Scotch rogues and vagabonds" sent there by Oliver Cromwell) rules its black 98% (descendants of West African slaves), was in such a state that the two female members of the Commission pressed handkerchiefs to their noses and one male member described it as "a dung heap of physical abomination." Among other things, for Lord Moyne & friends to discover were the facts that nearly 70% of Jamaica's 1,138,558 people reacted positively to tuberculosis tests, 75% were bastards.

From Jamaica the Commission sailed eastward along the crescent of islands that forms the Leeward and Windward groups, down through Barbados (whose 1,163 people to the square mile make up the densest agricultural population in the Western Hemisphere) to Tobago and Trinidad (that imports four-fifths of its food). Everywhere the investigators found squalor, economic decay, unrest. Ruled by professional colonial administrators, with a hierarchy of whites and an exploited mass of blacks, Chinese and East Indian coolies, the West Indies were the victims of unrepresentative government, of the low exchange value of such primary products as sugar, cocoa, bananas.

By the time the Commission submitted its report late last year, Great Britain was at war. In peacetime the Government might have made the smug point that, bad as things are in the British-ruled islands, they are a whole lot better than conditions in self-ruled Haiti and the Dominican Republic. But with a war on, it was better policy to do something to make things better. So last week up-&-doing little Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald rose in the House of Commons to announce what the Government planned to do. Cagney

Scot that he is, Mr. MacDonald did not go so far as to publish the Commission's report, said only that the Government accepted it "in principle."

What he did submit was a 20-year new deal for the West Indies. If the British Exchequer were as big as little Scot MacDonald's heart he would put every blackamoor in the islands on Easy Street. But all he could expect to get from a war-pressed Parliament was \$4,000,000 a year, to be spent for West Indian education, slum clearance, land settlement, labor departments. On all British colonies, Mr. MacDonald proposed to spend \$20,000,000 a year for ten years. In addition to their specific allotment, the West Indies may share in this appropriation too. But nothing was said about one plan that had been considered by the Commission: a federation of Caribbean possessions.

Secretary MacDonald was not expected to have any trouble getting his bill through the House of Commons. Journalist H. N. Brailsford asked in the London News why all this discrimination in favor of the Indies' natives. "Let us not underestimate their gain. It comes to nearly a halfpenny for each of them through every week of the year — two fifths of a penny to be exact."

In one fell swoop, the article offers a time capsule of the prejudices confronting the average person in the British West Indies during the interwar years, along with the precarious state within which they dwelled.

Wendell Christian<sup>39</sup> and Twistleton Bertrand were two young Dominicans who came of age in that era. They were to go on to join the British army's South Caribbean Forces during World War II. The South Caribbean Forces grouped British West Indians from the Eastern Caribbean all the way to then British Guiana and was to be embodied in 1941 in response to the raging German led U-Boat war which played havoc with British and US allied shipping in the region. It was the successor to the old British West Indies Regiment which had been disbanded in 1927 on the heels of the Taranto mutiny and ascendant nationalist agitation by the UNIA and other such organizations in the Caribbean. These young men came of age when options for young colonials such as themselves were scant. Christian recalls visiting the Roseau Public Library to peruse reports on the war from British magazines of the day. Radio, though in its infancy, carried enough information to

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<sup>39</sup> Wendell Christian is the father of this author and Twistleton Bertrand is the father in law of Irving Andre, a Canadian Judge of Dominican descent who has authored several works of Dominican/Caribbean history.

allow them to immerse themselves in celebration when they heard the blow by blow accounting of Joe “The Brown Bomber” Louis battering of the German boxer, Max Schmelling. In the words of Christian:

Twistleton Bertrand, Glenworth Emmanuel and myself sat on Lennard Green’s step listening to his radio. He was one of three people in Portsmouth with a radio; the others were Bob Garraway, Robert Douglas and Lennard Green. when we heard the Brown Bomber putting blows on Schmelling. Joe had lost the first match and when he won, he made us very proud. It was as if we had won.<sup>40</sup>

While Bertrand’s father owned a pharmacy and was a man of some means, Christian could only look to the Leeward Island Police Force as a potential employer. In 1937, he was employed as a road supervisor to tally stones and direct laborers working on the road from Portsmouth to Cottage. That job came courtesy of Austin Andre, the grandfather of Justice Irving Andre. In 1939, he also held a job as an apprentice tailor with a famous local tailor, one Mr. Fagan. So with storm clouds of World War II descending, and secure in their pride and loyalty to the Mother Country, Britain, young men such as Bertrand and Christian were to flock to the colors. Neither the political agitation of the Taranto soldier-nationalists, nor the calls to “Do for Self” of the UNIA had dimmed their adherence to empire. This time however, the British authorities were to exercise greater discretion in how the West Indian soldiers were to be treated, in manner that curbed the ignoble racist excesses of the First World War of 1914-1918.

It would appear that the intelligence gleaned from the Moyne Report went a long way in ensuring that West Indian fighting men would not be relegated to labour battalions as their forefathers had in 1914-1918. This time many would be allowed into elite branches of Britain’s military establishment, such as the Royal Air Force. Of note is that unlike their kindred in the now legendary all-black unit, Tuskegee Airmen<sup>41</sup> of the U.S. Army

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<sup>40</sup> Bertrand joined the British army’s South Caribbean Forces in 1944; Emmanuel joined the British Merchant Marine later on. Christian enlisted in the British army in 1943.

<sup>41</sup> The first Black fighter pilot noted in history was Eugene Jacques Bullard (1894-1961). He travelled to Europe to escape the racism then endemic in the United States and joined the French Foreign Legion upon the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Wounded in the 1916 battles around Verdun and awarded the *Croix de Guerre*, Bullard transferred to the *Lafayette Flying Corps* in the French *Aéronautique Militaire* and was eventually assigned to SPA 93 on 27 August 1917, where he flew some 20 missions and shot down two

Air Corps who served in segregated units, the West Indians in the RAF served in integrated units. Many gravitated towards the RAF since it offered a modicum of equality and opportunity to soar in the rarified atmosphere of freedom. The story of Jamaican pilot William Arthur Watkin Strachan typified the zest with which they enlisted. He left Jamaica with £2 10s and a suitcase and traveled to England with the sole intention of becoming a pilot. Upon arrival in March 1940, he enlisted and after three months of basic training, undertook advanced training to be a Wireless Operator and Air Gunner. In 1941, the 20-year old from Kingston joined a squadron of Wellington bombers making nightly raids over Germany. Within a year, he became a bomber pilot. He attained the rank of Flight Lieutenant and flew fifteen missions as a bomber pilot

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enemy aircraft. Several black pilots volunteered to serve the Ethiopian Air Force of Emperor Haile Selassie during the Italian invasion of 1935; to include one of the earliest known Black pilots, Trinidadian Hubert Fauntleroy Julian. Called the Black Eagle, Julian had become famous in Harlem during the inter-war years and had been made a Colonel in Ethiopia's fledgling air force by that country's Emperor Selassie. Therefore, prior to the Tuskegee Airmen, no US military pilots had been African American nor had there been any black-majority air force organization in the world – with the exception of Ethiopia's single squadron raised during the 1930s. However, a series of legislative moves by the United States Congress in 1941 forced the Army Air Corps to form an all-black combat unit, much to the War Department's chagrin. In an effort to eliminate the unit before it could begin, the War Department set up a system to accept only those with a level of flight experience or higher education that they expected would be hard to fill. This policy backfired when the Air Corps received numerous applications from men who qualified even under these restrictions. In June 1941, the Tuskegee program officially began with formation of the 99th Fighter Squadron at the Tuskegee Institute, a highly regarded university founded by Booker T. Washington in Tuskegee, Alabama. Later, Flying escort for heavy bombers, the Tuskegee Airmen racked up an impressive combat record. Reportedly, the Luftwaffe awarded the Airmen the nickname, "Schwarze Vogelmenschen," or "Black Birdmen." The Allies called the Airmen "Redtails" or "Redtail Angels," because of the distinctive crimson paint on the vertical stabilizers of the unit's aircraft. Although bomber groups would request Redtail escort when possible, few bomber crew members knew at the time that the Redtails were black. A B-25 bomb group, the 477th Bombardment Group (Medium), was forming in the US but completed its training too late to see action. The 99th Fighter Squadron after its return to the United States became part of the 477th, redesignated the 477th Composite Group. By the end of the war, the Tuskegee Airmen were credited with 109 Luftwaffe aircraft shot down, a patrol boat run aground by machine-gun fire, and destruction of numerous fuel dumps, trucks and trains. The squadrons of the 332nd FG flew more than 15,000 sorties on 1,500 missions. The unit received recognition through official channels and was awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation for a mission flown 24 March 1945, escorting B-17s to bomb the Daimler-Benz tank factory at Berlin, Germany, an action in which its pilots destroyed three Me-262 jets in aerial combat. The 99th Fighter Squadron in addition received two DUCs, the second after its assignment to the 332nd FG. The Tuskegee Airmen were awarded several Silver Stars, 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 14 Bronze Stars and 744 Air Medals. In all, 992 pilots were trained in Tuskegee from 1940 to 1946; about 445 deployed overseas, and 150 Airmen lost their lives in training or combat. Many members of the unit went on to post war fame: Tuskegee Airmen commander Colonel Benjamin Davis, became the first black US Air Force general; Harold Washington became the first black Mayor of Chicago; Coleman Young became the first black mayor of Detroit, and Chappie James became the first black four star general and head of the US Missile Command. See Tuskegee Airmen at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) and author's notes.

before ending his career after suffering the debilitating effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

**Conclusion:**

The interwar years, therefore, was the incubator within which the Caribbean nationalist leadership was forged. That leadership was drawn, in great measure, from those who had confronted racial oppression and colonial inequity, while doing military service for Britain or “King and country.” When one considers the leadership of Norman Manley, Captain Arthur Cipriani, Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler and St. William Wellington Wellwood Grant and other BWIR veterans who fought for self government and Caribbean freedom, it is clear that their bravery, discipline and stoicism was to serve their new political cause well. That leadership was to propel the Caribbean independence movement to success once World War II ended in 1945.