

# ADDO'S VIEW OF THE CARIBBEAN IN THE WORLD-SYSTEM

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**I**n the early 1990s, while I was still a postgraduate student, and Herb was my Ph. D supervisor, we held a series of staff/student seminars at IR, and Herb made a presentation on “the Caribbean in the World-System.” Fortunately, I taped that session, and today I will pay tribute to Herb by presenting to you some of the key concepts made in that presentation. I must say what a pleasure it was for me, listening to the tape, to hear Herb’s voice again, to appreciate the conviction, courage and confidence with which he spoke, and to be swept away by his boisterous laughter.

Herb spoke not in what he called the vulgar narrative level, or the mythical narrative level; not of transition, but of transformation. He argued that the transitional narrative level cuts across the confinement, limitations and contradictions that stymie a serious look at history. It is by reading history backwards that we can understand the past in relation to the present, understand the mistakes which we made and able to avoid them in the future. This is the view which he brought to his analysis of the Caribbean.

He saw the Caribbean as unique because it is the most penetrated part of the entire capitalist world-system. He argued that the Caribbean is the first part of the world to be thoroughly employed to build capital and that Eric Williams made this point very clear in *Capitalism and Slavery*. In his view, the

Caribbean was created by the world capitalist system as a microcosm of itself, within itself. It is an area where the world capitalist system has endeavoured to transform an essentially non-European part of the world into an image of the European system, and they failed miserably. In the course of trying, though, they left many scars which constantly remind us not only of our past, but in fact, must inform the rest of the world where it is going. He argues that the history of the Caribbean tells us what is promised for the rest of the world which happens not to be European. In his words, “the part of the world that has suffered most is the Caribbean, the part of the world that defines the future of others yet to be penetrated fully, yet to suffer fully, that future is shaped by the Caribbean.”

He observed that “Caribbean people do not see themselves as they are, or ought to be, but as others see them.” They feel insignificant, for the most part. But Herb pointed out that the Caribbean is very significant, because of the number of its people who have influenced third world thinking in terms of intellectual creation and input into something called Third Worldism; Padmore, Garvey, C.L.R. James, Fanon, Eric Williams and so on. He marvels that such thinkers emerged from a population of five (5) million people—the contribution is completely out of proportion with the population size. He explains this disproportional contribution which this little part of the world has made to a larger idea of transforming the world by pointing out that it is

the experience of Caribbean intellectuals that led to the insights—the experiences of domination, exploitation and racism were most mature in the Caribbean. He said that these experiences were not native to West Africa. Rather, in that area “there were just a bunch of aspiring middle class people” who did law and a few historians who got together and decided that the time had come for them to take over because they felt they knew as much as the white man.

Herb used the analogy of cricket to illustrate the insightfulness of the Caribbean intellect. He said, “I have been asked many times, how come you don’t play cricket in Africa? And I say, we play cricket, but the quality of our cricket cannot in anyway be the competitive quality of cricket in the West Indies. You only have to talk to the West Indian to understand the fineness, the breadth and the depth of their understanding of cricket, and that is analogous to the fineness, the breadth, and the depth of the West Indian awareness of the real world capitalist system.” Hence, Padmore, Garvey, Williams, C.L. R. James and others.

He cautioned that having been the vanguard of thought, we are now returning to be like Haiti—the first Black Country to expel imperialism and colonialism, but now spending all its time trying to imitate the brutalities of imperialism and colonialism. He said that the time has come to regenerate intellectual leadership in the Caribbean. We need a new breed of thinkers, sayers and seers in the Caribbean, because the Caribbean’s job is not yet done.

Unfortunately, we are desperately following the path defined by Europe, trying to imitate Europe, and this is what is stymieing the

Caribbean. The invasion of American T.V. in the Caribbean is blanking any form of creativity in the minds of our children because they are all becoming like Americans. And this wave of imperialism would certainly affect the Caribbean region first and foremost because the Caribbean has always led and shown the way of the future of other developing countries. In illustrating how twisted our views have become, he draws the example of our regarding—as our poor relations the farmer living in Toco, eating well, relaxing, sleeping with doors unlocked, and the rich relative as the one in Goodwood Park surrounded by barbed wire and when the alarms, and dogs are added he is virtually living in an air conditioned prison. Meanwhile, the farmer in Toco is breathing fresh, clean air.

Herb enjoined us to put our minds back on our problem in the Caribbean context, defined within our understanding of the global systems and not pick other people’s solutions and impose them on our society. He believed that not until we destroy our confidence in developmentalism completely, can we really move towards human-centered development. He made clear that he is not talking about de-linking or self-reliance or any of those vulgar concepts because they are meaningless and reactive. He is talking about choices we make in the way we live our lives so that we can be in harmony with the context in which we live, and not an imitation of Europe. There is much more that I could share with you, but time does not permit. One last thing, though. In the presentation, Herb said that he included himself as part of the Caribbean. We are honoured that such a great intellect adopted us and made himself a part of us.