Introduction

This essay has grown out of an address delivered on Wednesday January 28, 2009, at a seminar on the theme “Education through Community Issues and Possibilities for Development.” It explores the foundational ideas of Dr. Eric Williams about education as a vehicle for decolonization through nation-building, most of which he outlined in *Education in the British West Indies,* a report that he prepared under the auspices of the Caribbean Research Council of the Caribbean Commission between 1945 and 1947, and published in 1950 in partnership with the Teachers’ Economic and Cultural Association [TECA] of Trinidad and Tobago.

Drawing heavily upon De Wilton Rogers’s *The Rise of the People’s National Movement,* this essay will detail Williams’s association with the TECA and its education arm, *The People’s Education Movement* [PEM] between 1950 and 1955 when Williams made the transition from research to politics via lectures, first at the Port-of-Spain library, then before massive crowds in Woodford Square. It will also explore the issues of education, community, and nation-building during the early...
years of the PNM’s first term in office, when Williams struggled to sell his ideas(2) about educational reform and development to a skeptical and sometimes hostile hierarchy of entrenched interests.

The bulk of the essay reads Williams’s mission and performance through the lenses of 100 calypsos which serve as people’s voice, one that at times echoes and at others qualifies and critiques official rhetoric about education, social transformation and community-building. If both the PEM and the nascent PNM engaged in education as a one-way process in which a committed intelligentsia voluntarily undertakes the tasks of uplifting and illuminating their less fortunate brethren in the rural and peri-urban borderlands, the calypsonians, fierce guardians of independent grass-rooted opinion, assume the right to dialogue, to talking back to their certificated intellectual supervisors, week-end schoolmasters and school marms.

Calypsos revealed that the world of the streets, the urban yards, the ever-burgeoning ghetto, the world, indeed, of Dr. Williams’s South East Port-of-Spain constituency, has its own curriculum of constant crisis and survivalism; its alternative economy of cutting and contriving, and its own hierarchy of muscle and blood. Calypso texts uncover the distressing distance between Williams’s efforts to create through education an enlightened and articulate modern national community, and the impermeable indifference to Williams’s curriculum of the unmanageable rebels, outcasts, knife-and-razor technicians, gunslingers and blood-and-sand gladiators in his constituency who have created their own cinematic lifestyles, counter-cultural mores, values, modes of earning and granting respect and self-recognition. Although these people constituted only a minuscule percentage of the citizens of John John, Laventille, Shanty Town, Sea Lots, Morvant or Gonzales, peri-urban Port-of-Spain ‘Behind the Bridge’ and beyond, theirs became the single, dominant name for all citizens here, who now became negatively profiled in their name and through the reality and fable of their deeds.

II
 Foundations: TECA and PEM

The Teacher’s Economic and Cultural Association was formed in 1939, though it was not formally registered until July 1942. Its main objectives were to coordinate and synthesize all movements for the economic and cultural advance of the teacher and to stimulate the social progress of the people; to promote functions, lectures, scholarships, studies for the cultural advance of its members; to establish an institute (The Institute of Cultural Studies) for the literary, artistic and dramatic development of its members. TECA’s cultural programme included playwriting and production, musical concerts; the collection of West Indian folk songs and compositions; the organization of reading circles to foster a love for literature; the development of musical talent in children via operations such as the Schools’ Music Festivals which took place biennially: 1945, 1947, 1949, and 1951.

Of equal importance was TECA’s educational agenda which focused on issues such as teachers’ struggle for freedom; adult education, and the campaign of female teachers for pay equal to that of their male counterparts. TECA’s lectures and rallies took place on weekends at private secondary schools such as Progressive and Osmond High Schools. Members listened to lectures on Philosophy, Economics, Political Science and Pedagogy.
After succeeding in the campaign for equality in wages for female teachers, TECA decided in 1950 to establish an “Education Movement with a further reach than merely cultural.”(7) This was the People’s Education Movement which did not limit itself to teachers’ issues, but sought to recruit “the housewife, the teacher, the proprietor, the shop-keeper, the chauffeur, the peasant, the clerk, the labourer, the domestic and the Civil Servant.”(8) Its war cry was “All must join. None must be out. We are at war against ignorance and poverty.”(9) The PEM’s programme ran on the principle of voluntary self-help, and there were in Tobago sixty volunteers who accepted the PEM’s mission “to share knowledge with others” in the “war against poverty and Ignorance.”(10) The PEM set up units in eighteen areas throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

Soon after its inauguration, the PEM through its founders De Wilton Rogers and John S. Donaldson invited the Deputy Chairman of the Caribbean Research Council, Dr. Eric Williams, to become their ‘consultant’. At the same time, TECA, the parent organization of the PEM, published Williams’s masterly _Education in the British West Indies_ in 1950 and requested via Williams, access to the library of the Caribbean Commission with its data on vocational and adult education. TECA also wanted to prepare “a handbook on Caribbean facts and figures such as population, employment, and unemployment,” statistics, they said, that would aid them in their efforts “to improve the education and cultural standards of the people in these parts.”(11)

Williams’s growing involvement in the affairs of TECA and the PEM was the result of the need he shared with these bodies for visibility and acclamation in the context of the nascent nation of Trinidad & Tobago. Williams needed the activism and the enthusiasm of the PEM to give life to his ideas and as the springboard for his leap into politics. The PEM needed Williams for ideas and data that could validate their programme of educational outreach and for his power in structuring their wayward agenda into a coherent mission. Their need was mutual, though Williams, engrossed in engineering his own charismatic emergence as a leader of a brand new nation, seldom acknowledges either the process or the people involved in his propulsion towards leadership.

### III

**Education in the British West Indies**

This process began in 1945 when, under the auspices of the Caribbean Commission, Williams commenced work on _Education in the British West Indies_, the draft manuscript of which he completed in 1946. There was a gulf between Williams’s notion about the trajectory of research and what the Caribbean Commission required: a survey that would be a compendium of facts about the subject researched, in which the researcher, a neuter and objective gatherer of data, should have no say as to the use to which such data would be put. Williams, the academic as activist, believed that his research should be the beginning of a mission to fill the gaping void in colonial education which had left the colonized subject/object disconnected from his/her past, and hence incapacitated as a potential citizen of the yet non-existent new nation. Williams believed that relevant education would instil in the colonized the confidence they needed in order to build a nation.
Education, he argued, “is designed to serve” particular interests and purposes, implying that the interests and purposes of the colonized are of necessity different from those of the colonizers. In his Preface to the 1945 draft of Education in the British West Indies he wrote: (6)

Education in the modern world is, more than anything else, education of the people themselves as to the necessity of viewing their own education as part of their democratic privileges and their democratic responsibilities. (12)

This Preface was dated September 10, 1945. One war had just ended, another was just about to start: the struggle towards an independent nation at whose centre Williams located the engagement of the people in, and the responsibility of the people for the content, design, trajectory and quality of the education they received.

Williams shared his ideas with educators, politicians, trade unionists and other interested persons in Trinidad, Barbados, the Virgin Islands and St. Thomas. In preparing the document, he had consulted a number of his Howard University colleagues, themselves important avantgarde intellectuals, along with educators from India, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom. He wanted to make his ideas available not only for the consideration not only of the ordinary citizen in the British West Indies, but also of those people who were interested in the very important problem of education in colonial and semi-colonial countries.(13)

It must have been Williams’s openness in declaring his interest in making an impact on both the Caribbean and the wider anti-colonial world that made his bosses at the imperialistic Caribbean Commission delay publication of his report for four years after its completion. Williams shared his report with the Trinidad Economic & Cultural Association (TECA) who found in its logically argued and systematically structured pages justification for their own programme of educational reform. The possibilities suggested by Williams’s as yet unpublished blueprint, inspired the leaders of the TECA to create the People’s Education Movement (PEM), its energetic and militant arm, for whom educating teachers about pedagogy soon became that of providing lecture series on politics, economics and sociology for the edification of the general public.

In Education in the British West Indies which TECA published in 1950, Williams accorded education a major role in the engineering of radical change in societies shaped by colonialism. To perform this function, however, the education system itself needed to be radically transformed from being an agency for the reinforcement of the status quo to becoming “a midwife to the emerging social order.” (14) Caribbean societies were in the main dominated by large plantations controlled by foreign capital and producing for export, and landless labourers and small peasant farmers who had little control over their circumstances. Williams observed that “the system of land tenure... is an effective obstacle in the way of giving agricultural education the place in the curriculum that it demands.”(15)

The question of land tenure has remained one of the bitterest issues two generations after Williams’s death. The concomitant issue of agricultural education pertinent to peasant farming communities has only been partially addressed, despite the efforts of successive governments over five decades of independence. Education in the British West Indies identified most of the traditional problems and suggested possible solutions. Yet efforts to implement plans for solving problems
have proven inadequate and in some cases the problems have increased, outstripping the State’s
capacity to solve or contain them.

In considering the social structure of Caribbean societies, Williams focused especially on the
ambivalence of “mulatto” intellectuals confronted with the necessity of inventing or discovering a
national identity. While traditionally this class had found itself ground “between the upper millstone
which was white and the nether which was black,” [16] some of its more enlightened members
had in recent times discarded old colonial attitudes of despising blackness, aspiring to whiteness,
and measuring people in terms of colour and lightness of skin. Williams disclosed that

in Jamaica mulattoes are consciously seeking back into their own history, are
reviving and resurrecting West Indian songs, local artists of talent are coming to
the fore and receiving recognition in poetry, art and dramatics. A West Indian
culture is slowly but surely emerging. [17]

Williams at this early stage seemed to place great hope in this sector of Caribbean society, which by
the forties had begun to find common ground with the broader Creole intelligentsia that had for
decades been involved in associations such as debating societies, welfare societies, lodges, literary
clubs, and musical groups. TECA was one such association which had begun to make a transition
from a preoccupation with cultural matters to the beginnings of a kind of politics. Williams observed
this happening all over the Caribbean during the forties.

With the development of political consciousness, the more alert West Indians, in their clubs,
organizations and journals, are discussing federation, nationalization of the means of production,
tenancy reforms, industrialization, slavery, race relations, and other questions that constitute the
warp and woof of British West Indian – and international – society. [18]

Perceiving this new spirit Williams held dialogue in the decade between 1946 and 1956 with
distinctly different groups of committed intellectuals, notably with TECA/PEM and the San
Fernando-based “Bachacs,” described by Dr. Winston Mahabir as constituting himself, Winston
Mahabir, Dr. Mosaheb, Norman Girwar, Telford Georges, Claire Sloane-Seales, Dr. George Wattley,
Edward Lee, Gerard Montano, Donald Granado and Dennis Mahabir. [19] Bachacs and TECA/PEM
were, it seems, quite separate from each other; yet both were connected to Williams’s dream of
fathering a rational and articulate national movement, and both were dedicated to the greater plan
of mass political education, while each group felt flattered by its closeness and specialness to the
leader. Winston Mahabir, for example, claimed that

San Fernando was, even then, the intellectual centre of Trinidad, the clumsy but
honest progenitor of almost every relevant idea or movement that stirred the
people to a belief in their own potential. [20]

Mahabir doesn’t even mention the People’s Education Movement which, according to one of its
founders, De Wilton Rogers, facilitated Williams’s triumphal entry into South East Port of Spain and
the University of Woodford Square. Rogers in turn, had nothing to say about Bachacs.

The irony of this rivalry between Bachacs and PEM is that both represented different segments of
an emerging middle class that Williams would in his History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago
[21] condemn for its mediocrity, emptiness, materialism and individualism. Williams, much as he
recognized and constructed his charismatic image on his own academic superiority, placed on the educated middle class the special burden of having to subvert the very education system that had created them. Colonial education, he declared was a “distortion” that had created a middle class of civil servants, minor administrative functionaries, “parasites” who scorned manual labour and had separated themselves from the workers and peasants in what were essentially agricultural communities. The colonial curriculum, designed to serve only the purposes of the colonizer, ignored the history and culture of the colonized. *Education in the British West Indies* painted a dismal picture of inadequate enrolment in schools, high drop-out rates – nearly 80% in some cases – and consequently, high illiteracy rates.\(^{(22)}\) To change the educational systems in the colonies, one would have to change political representation.

Educational change would come only with vigorous nationalism and such nationalism could not flourish under an educational system that Williams termed “aristocratic.”\(^{(23)}\) The transformation which had taken place in post-revolutionary Mexico became the template from which Williams dreamed to construct both Caribbean education systems and Caribbean societies. Mexico had instituted a programme of “land and schools”\(^{(24)}\) through which her leaders hoped to undermine “the old Latin American convention of ‘enlightened classes exploiting ignorant masses’.” Mexico had sought to educate the peasant to acquire skills relevant to an agrarian existence. Education was practical, geared to preparing the student for work and life. It emphasized knowledge and love of country and taught civics and the Revolution’s reconstruction of history (the way that Cuba would three decades later). The curriculum included theatre (mainly of a propagandist nature), portraying national customs and manners; music, physical education, social education via “festivals, concerts and friendly gatherings.”\(^{(25)}\) It also emphasized adult education and perceived education as a means of building community. The rural school is openly envisaged as a community agency to lead in community life, help spend leisure and guide all community activities.\(^{(26)}\)

Education in the colonial Caribbean was, by contrast, divorced from the needs of the community. Teacher training and supervision at the Primary level ignored “the vital and organic connection between the school and the community.”\(^{(27)}\) Secondary education was ideally geared towards the production of scholarship winners, who were destined for “affluence and prestige” \(^{(28)}\) or dysfunctional GCE Ordinary Level candidates who filled the lower level of the Public Service. Those educated in commerce, typewriting and book-keeping, ran the risk of having to face race and colour discrimination from the banks, airlines, shipping companies, import/export firms and even department stores, when they sought employment in these institutions. Private sector business imported their staff at the higher levels and recruited only the highly coloured at the middle and lower levels.\(^{(29, 11)}\)

Williams exposed the undemocratic nature of the society and the historic roots of race and class discrimination, and wanted to create a more equitable society based on a reformed education system. He was aware of the large numbers of Church-owned and managed schools, and of the likelihood of protest coming from religious denominations if any attempt were made to replace their schools with state-owned institutions. Williams, however, asserted that: “The educational system... must safeguard the superior right of the community as a whole to control the general trend of education...”\(^{(30)}\)
The questions posed here were: ‘Who or what constituted “the community as a whole” and whose and which rights were ‘superior’ and which and whose rights were ‘inferior’ or of ‘lesser importance.’ Williams felt that the right of the community as a whole was superior to that of any of its component elements. The religious denominations were, arguably, the most important component of the educational system, insofar as the ownership and administration of the schools were concerned. Williams foresaw that educational reform legislated by the State on behalf of the undefined “community as a whole” would lead to headlong confrontation with the religious denominations.

This confrontation did indeed take place early in Williams’s long tour of duty (1956-1981). The issue was never satisfactorily resolved though the main antagonists - the State, the Church, Mandir and Masjid – did arrive at a compromise in the famous Concordat: the Education Act of 1965, which enabled the religious bodies to retain power and authority over the administration of their schools and choice of a percentage (20%) of the annual intake of suitably qualified students. Critics of the Concordat have portrayed it as a concession by the State to the old status quo of class and perhaps ethnic elitism; the maintenance of a small élite of rulers: the very élite in fact that had created Williams and the intellectual class of his generation. This was ironic when one considers that Williams had vowed to transform society by expanding educational opportunity and by making the curriculum more relevant to the national community.

Among the many recommendations Williams made in Education in the British West Indies were: compulsory education with free lunches, text books and stationery;(31) equal emphasis on education in agriculture, industry and commerce as on the traditional curriculum which was designed to prepare students for the university or Civil Service; land reform that must go hand-in-hand with agricultural and vocational education. He boldly declared that “the basic post-primary school of the future in the British West Indies should be the rural high school,”(32) which should be designed to address such problems as land tenure, cooperation, health, marketing and credit and “consciously abandon the conventions of academic secondary education and devote itself single-handedly to the service of rural people.”(33)

Williams was recommending nothing short of an educational revolution that would lead to either the abolition or the transformation of the very system that had produced Williams and his contemporaries. But he would never seriously enact a policy that he had so acerbically and clearly articulated one decade before he came to power. This may be because he anticipated that: “the establishment of special schools for vocational education incurs the danger that these schools will be regarded by the community as inferior to the traditional, academic schools.”(34)

He recognized since 1946 that the idea of “prestige” schools, that is traditional and ‘superior’ Grammar schools, was deeply inscribed in the public mind, and that his suggested emphasis on the rural school might actually serve to widen the divide between rural and urban that he was seeking to close. So he recommended an alternative plan, which was the creation of the “the multilateral school, which will include classical, modern and technical curricula.”(35) Efforts to create such schools did not destroy deeply engrained notions of “prestige” schools, which remained most people’s first choice at the secondary level of education. The issue of Government Schools versus denominational ones; of the Junior Secondary/Senior Comprehensive and Multilateral schools versus prestige schools, has survived the Williams era to become the cyclic subject of intense and
futile national debate whenever one dares open that Pandora’s box of suppressed subterranean controversy.

IV

A University of the West Indies

Dr. Eric Williams in *Education in the British West Indies* envisaged a University of the West Indies that would serve the specific needs of the West Indian community. By offering compulsory courses in Caribbean Studies and the Development of Caribbean Societies, the University would fill that void in Caribbean consciousness and inspire a new world of the Caribbean to confront the challenges of the age with a grounded sense of identity. The University of the West Indies that Williams envisaged must not be alienated from the masses and should not fatuously imitate “the educational ideas of advanced countries which were quite inconsistent with the harsh realities of the dependent areas.”[36] It must serve as an agency for the transformation of colonial society. Its journey towards educational autonomy would depend on, as it would catalyse, the society’s journey towards political and economic self-determination.

In order properly to serve the community, the University would need to function as “a developmental arm or agency of the State.”[37] As in the case of Secondary Education, then, Williams perceived of the State as a major investor in the University, whose investment conferred upon the State the right to determine, wholly or partially, the conduct of University education. This would become a delicate issue in the post-independence years: academic autonomy versus the authority (and authoritarianism) of the State; conflicting notions of how the Senates and Councils of regional universities should be constituted and should function with regard to the demands of the State.

Williams – a decade before he became Chief Minister and barring the now almost irrelevant colonial Governor, head of State – was ambivalent about the ideal relationship that ought to exist between the State and State-owned, State-sponsored University. Would not the controllers of the newly liberated nation simply replace the old colonial autocracy in their dealings with the University? Would acquiescence be demanded and, if necessary, enforced by the State? Could a situation arise in which neither the State nor the University might be serving the need of the people? On the one hand Williams seemed to allow room for the University’s participation in politics.

Modern politics, like modern war, is total. Neutrality is untenable. The University is the centre of a perpetual conflict between what it frequently considers, in all sincerity, the needs of education and the presence of the powerful economic and political groups. [38] The University, thus conceived, needed to be in a state of constant embattlement as it fought for space in the midst of equally embattled and far more powerful economic and political stakeholders. The University of the West Indies which gained its independence from London University in 1962, proved to be both fragile and vulnerable amidst political and economic forces. The year 1970 with its Black Power insurrection in Trinidad & Tobago, was a case in point. Williams, who was at the time both Prime Minister of the nearly eight-year old nation of Trinidad and Tobago and Pro-Chancellor of UWI, used considerable state power to:
(i) detain student and Faculty members of the University, on suspicion, but as it turned out, without evidence;
(ii) investigate these detainees via secret tribunals on charges of sedition;
(iii) withdraw work permits from mainly Caribbean non-nationals, products of the spirit of regionalism that a decade earlier had informed the rhetoric of the statesmen and women of Williams’s generation and of Williams in particular;
(iv) delay the issue or renewal of work permits to scores of non-political members of the academic and administrative staff.

All of this was done to terrorize the University – both students and faculty – into silence and neutrality and to throttle whatever notions of voluntary public service (that much-cherished ideal of the PEM/PNM years) had begun to develop among members of UWI. Some business firms sought to control student dissent by threatening to withdraw scholarships and bursaries from students involved in political demonstrations against the State and status quo. The days of abstract planning and neat blueprints long gone, the dream of radical transformative change faded, Williams proved to be the perfect product of the repressive colonialism against which – two decades earlier – he had thundered.

Such regression had been implicit in Williams’s earlier ambivalence over who should ‘control’ the University. He had written in Education in the British West Indies: “The University should be controlled by the State;”[39] and again, “to keep the University alive and prevent it from degenerating into a mere collection of teachers and students, the governing body should be controlled by the political representatives of the people.”[40, 16] While Williams qualified these assertions with the warning: “State control … should not be allowed to degenerate into interference either by the legislature or by the executive,”[41] he did not at the time say who would prevent such degeneration once “the political representatives of the people” were granted control of the University.

One of Williams’s repeatedly stated ideals was the breaking down of barriers between classes. The University must not be allowed to become a sort of tertiary level prestige school, crowning earlier levels of prestige in the “aristocratic”[42] Secondary system. The role of the University was to provide that knowledge and analysis of British West Indian conditions without which all plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction will be guesses in the dark.[43]

The University would do research relevant to the community and emphasize archiving, the collection of records and data. In short, the University would be replacing an imperialistic agency such as the Caribbean Research Council of the Caribbean Commission, whose Deputy Chairman Williams was due to become a few years later. Williams also saw the need for a University Press that would publish both academic and school texts.

Williams was particularly concerned that the University should be a centre for Adult education. He declared that the University should be “brought to the people” and that “among the claims of the masses to a better and fuller life, the training which only a university can supply should occupy a central position.”[44] The role of the university was not so much to remedy deficiencies in education as to help:
Adults comprehend and make the necessary readjustments to the constantly changing world and the new knowledge and new processes that are ever increasing man’s equipment and widening his horizons. (45)

He was conscious of the yearning that ran throughout his society on the brink of nationhood for all knowledge relevant to their situation as a community in transition between the virtual intellectual void of colonialism and the as yet unknown horizons of self-determination. Hence, his drive to bring the University to the people via extra-mural programmes of Adult Education that would complement its academic curriculum. Hence, too, his partnership in 1950 with TECA and the PEM, who shared and were inspired by his ideas about education.

V

PEM to PNM 1950-1955

De Wilton Rogers documents the evolution of the People’s National Movement out of TECA and the People’s Education Movement. (46) He describes a popular enthusiasm that, enhanced by Williams’s presence, verged at times on delirium, as the educated volunteered in their numbers to share what they had learned with the rest of the nation. When the PEM in 1950 invited Eric Williams to serve as their “consultant,” presumably for planning the series of week-end lectures in which the PEM was already involved, euphoria increased. TECA had published Education in the British West Indies that very year, and readers could see how the seminal ideas of that text were shared by Williams, the intellectual activist seeking a base and the PEM, the would-be-activist movement seeking a leader.

Rogers records that after consultation with Williams, the PEM drew up “a formidable list of subjects the people should study and understand.” (47) There were sixty-one items on the list which on examination seems to have been Williams’s curriculum of what he thought citizens should contemplate as they moved towards self-determination. Topics ranged from sugar, oil, tourism, housing, trade unions, social security, land tenure, cocoa, citrus, Federation, constitutional reform, crime and religions, to fashions, literary styles, rural life, drunkenness, sports, the media, marriage, friendly societies, carnival, calypso, prostitution, party structure, superstition, infant mortality and obeah. (48) There are several other items on this list which provide interesting insight into what Williams and the PEM viewed as areas of darkness into which the light of enquiry and research needed to be turned.

Only a small number of these subjects could actually be undertaken by the PEM in its current state. Rogers records that:

A Circular was sent out to persons who were interested in the education of the people. Thirty-seven teachers volunteered and entered the field working for nothing. Four actually became Inspectors of Schools, two became lawyers, one a Reverend Gentleman, another a Production Manager, another a Solicitor, one a Manufacturer’s Representative and eventually a merchant. Two became top Civil Servants, three Social Workers, two Architects, one a County Councillor, six University Graduates, a Howard University Student, now a doctor. (49)
These volunteers worked on surveys of pavement sleepers, beggars, sweepstake sellers and prices in groceries. The shortlist of topics requiring urgent research included the cost of living, night clubs, prostitution, the situation of store clerks, sugar workers, dock workers and domestic servants. It was easier to itemize the vast areas of public ignorance, than to tackle the gigantic task of collating data for public education. Over the next two decades another gap would be revealed: the divide between research and corrective action based on the recommendations of researchers and consultants.

The PEM was far more successful in promoting the political career of their consultant. Through the auspices of the PEM Williams delivered twelve lectures for teachers on the development of Western civilization, the first of which took place on Saturday 04 February 4, 1950. (50) For the next few years Williams and the PEM pursued their separate if similar agendas. The PEM extended its membership to include “the housewife, the teacher, the proprietor, the shop-keeper the chauffeur, the peasant, the clerk, the labourer, the domestic and the Civil Servant”(51) and continued its programme of week-end lectures throughout the two islands. Williams, absorbed in successive confrontations with his supervisors at the Caribbean Commission, would however resurface in 1954 when, under the auspices of Albert Gomes, the de facto Chief Minister of the Government, he delivered a series of lectures on West Indian history at the Public Library, Port of Spain. Then on 28 September, 1954 Williams spoke on “Some World-Famous Education Theories,” quoting “approvingly Aristotle’s view about the role of the State in education.”(52)

Dom Basil Matthews (OSB, MA, PhD) – himself a distinguished scholar, lecturer and author of Crisis of the West Indian Family (1953) – contested Williams’s views on the desirability of State-control of education. The anticipated quarrel with the Church over his radical ideas about educational reform had begun. It was a situation deeply relished in Trinidad & Tobago: the prospect of a showdown between two intellectual pierrots, midnight robbers or old-time batonniers. Williams is reported to have ‘won’ the debate and thus established his reputation as king of the national gayelle. He had also earned his credentials to make the shift from discussing educational themes in the Public Library, to delivering massive political speeches thinly disguised as academic lectures, in the city’s major square.

Williams’s lectures at the “University of Woodford Square” were the natural climax of the PEM’s adventures in the voluntary week-end public lectures and seminars. The country had entered a new dimension of consciousness, in which what had for some years been represented as a renaissance in culture and education could now be openly revealed as the birth of a new phase of national politics. Dismissed by the Caribbean Commission whose rulers had from the start deplored Williams’s mission of employing research to awaken popular consciousness and inspire anti-imperialist political activism, Williams was now free to pursue his real objective of assuming leadership of his country at a crucial moment in its transition towards self-rule. By naming Woodford Square a “University” he could claim to be fulfilling one of his cherished educational objectives: that of bringing the University to the masses.

Williams was however, just as careful to establish the identity he believed existed between education and politics, and in his January 1956 lectures on Federation described Woodford Square as “a setting which is both a University and a Parliament.”(53) At that founding moment Williams several times refers to Woodford Square as both a University (54) and a Parliament.(55) Indeed, the
references to Woodford Square as a Parliament are more frequent than the references to it as a University, though on page 33 as on page 2, he speaks of “our University and Parliament of Woodford Square,” sealing together the two concepts of education and governance while the PNM was in its infancy. He was also signalling that the content of public discourse, at least such discourse as he meant to conduct in that space, would be both rigorously academic and political.

Williams’s inaugural lecture as professor and philosopher-king of the University of Woodford Square took place on 21 June 1955, a few days less than a month after he was fired from the Caribbean Commission (26 May 1955) where he had since 1954 held the post of Deputy Chairman of the Caribbean Research Council. Williams’s address, “My Relations with the Caribbean Commission, 1943-1955” was a ritual of transition from his uncertain status of a colonial intellectual twisting in the little-ease of an imperialist multi-national organization, to leader of the struggle for a decolonized Trinidad & Tobago and a federated West Indies. Such a ritual of necessity involved self-signification. The protagonist-in-transition needed to identify himself, to present his credentials in the appropriate rhetorical register. According to D.W. Rogers, who with John Donaldson Snr. had organized the occasion under the auspices of the PEM, “the whole of Trinidad and Tobago was represented” (56) in the estimated 20,000 people who came to hear Williams that evening.

Williams spoke with both confidence and righteous indignation of his experience as a colonial scholar subordinate in status though superior in intellect, industry and efficiency, to his British, Dutch, American and French bosses, but always subject to their whims and schemes to frustrate, undermine and if possible destroy his work and reputation. He described numerous battles with a variety of frauds posing as foreign experts and proclaimed his intellectual, moral and incredibly once, even his physical superiority to his antagonists. He portrayed himself as “the watchman for and the spokesman of the West Indian people in the Secretariat” with respect to “the scope of the work to be done and the priorities to be given to it” and “the selection of the persons to do that work.”[57] Noting the high regard in which he was held by other West Indian statesmen – most notably Norman Manley and Robert Bradshaw – Williams portrayed himself as the key figure in the struggle for West Indian nationhood, and insisted that the issues he had explored in minute detail over fifty pages of text and maybe three hours of delivery: “are not personal but political; they involve not a single individual but the West Indian people.”[58] He had made the passage from man into symbol, and in the context of Trinidad & and Tobago, had come to represent a new kind of folk hero/archetype: the intellectual Warrior, the Big Brain of Sparrow’s William the Conqueror[59] who like his predecessor the batonnier, declared that he had never run from any of the multitude of fights that had arisen during his twelve years at the Caribbean Commission. He was the embattled man who had endured the often humiliating ethos of the Caribbean Commission because there was no one else there to represent the cause of the West Indian people and because association with the representatives of metropolitan governments enabled me to understand, as I could not otherwise have understood, the mess in which the West Indies find themselves today.[60]
He had thus educated himself into becoming in the words of his friend, NW Manley, “the most knowledgeable man in the West Indies.” (61) At the end of his deposition Williams announced his great decision:

I was born here, and here I stay, with the people of Trinidad and Tobago who educated me free of charge for nine years at Queen’s Royal College and for five at Oxford, who have made me whatever I am. (62)

My Relations with the Caribbean Commission 1943-1955 was first printed on July 5, 1955 and sold as a pamphlet for twelve cents. The lecture/address itself was repeated on June 28th 1955, under the auspices of “the Caribbean Women’s National Assembly” at Harris Promenade, San Fernando. Three weeks later Williams spoke at Woodford Square on “Constitution Reform in Trinidad & Tobago.” After that it was “The Historical Background of Race Relations in the Caribbean” and on September 13, 1955, “The Case for Party Politics in Trinidad & Tobago.” Rogers notes that From June 21, 1955 to January 20, 1956, fifty-two lectures were given under the auspices of the People’s Education Movement directly under the umbrella, and seven within the reflected cool of the People’s Education Movement. The People’s Education Movement had captured the imagination of the citizens and the folk from Charlotteville to Scarborough. Lecture 23, August 19. Lecture 24, 25 on August 20 and 21. And from Port-of-Spain to Point-Fortin. Lecture 51 on January 9, 1956.(63)

Williams’s appearance at the University of Woodford Square was, therefore, being reinforced by the activities of the PEM throughout the length and breadth of both islands. Yet it was Williams’s charisma that gave meaning to all these other efforts at public education. The Woodford Square lectures were Williams’s means not only of establishing a new Hero-Archetype – one who was neither badjohn nor batonnier, trickster nor cocksman – but also his means of dismissing former popular leaders such as Butler and Bhadase Maharaj as irrelevant to this new age.(64) All over the world, claimed Williams, the new type of leader – Nkrumah, Nehru, Azikiwe, Manley, Munoz Marin, Gaitskell – was an intellectual and university graduate. His PNM was full of such people. He concluded his blistering attack on Butler with these words: Mr. Butler as an orator cultivates the emotional appeal, I the intellectual. Mr. Butler attacks the heart, I attack the head. (65)

At the deep heart’s core, Williams valued and luxuriated in the very “aristocracy” and “prestige” that at the immediate intellectual level he wanted to destroy.

Gordon K. Lewis, Welsh Professor at the University of Puerto Rico and an occasional columnist in the PNM Weekly during the heady years of 1957-1958, wrote of Williams’s Woodford Square performances and the emergence of the PNM

It is, fundamentally, not so much a political as an educational movement; and not the least suggestive of its elements is that it has forged an alliance between intellectual and crowd that would make even an English Fabian wince with envy. For it is the urgent duty of the intellectual to realize that he is a citizen as well as a private person and that the knowledge he has acquired will never be helpful to the society he lives in if he turns his back upon the outstanding problems it confronts. In that sense, the education of Eric Williams has become the Education of the West Indies. (66)
Clearly, the University of Woodford Square lectures had not only catalyzed the birth of the PNM out of the womb of the PEM, but also established Eric Williams as a symbol, several dimensions larger than life. A short man, Williams cast a long shadow over his world and his time. Like the persona of Eric Roach’s poem “I Am the Archipelago,” Williams had become, or was perceived as having become “the Archipelago hope/Would mould into dominion.”(67) 1958, the year of Gordon Lewis’s glowing assessment of the early PNM, was also the year of the inauguration of the West Indies Federation, when the Archipelago’s ‘aristocratic’ intellectuals discovered and confronted each other in that intense and delirious quest for regional self-determination. Lewis’s article, indeed, appeared just one week after the inauguration of the Federation in Port of Spain, and was an indication of the esteem in which Williams was held among his peers in the Caribbean: men like Norman Manley, Grantley Adams, Robert Bradshaw and the distinguished Guyanese Professor, Rawle Farley, who also was in Trinidad at that time and wrote for the PNM Weekly.

VI
Shortcomings of the PNM’s Lecture Programmes

Not everyone saw Williams the way Gordon Lewis did. “The alliance between the intellectual and the crowd” proved to be a fragile thing in March 1958 when the Democratic.(25)

Labour Party led by old-style rough-and-tumble demagogues such as Bhadase Maharaj of Trinidad and Alexander Bustamante of Jamaica, though losing the Federal Elections by 19 seats to 25 to the West Indies Federal Labour Party, still managed to defeat the ‘intellectual’-led PNM 6 seats to 4 in Trinidad and the Manley-led PNP 11 seats to 6 in Jamaica. That the parties of the two foremost intellectual leaders should be so badly beaten by what Williams in 1956 had termed “a pattern of political activity from which the world outside of Trinidad and Tobago has moved away and for which it has no use,”(68) was an early sign that the education being disseminated in the University of Woodford Square hadn’t penetrated through to large numbers of the citizenry, and that the work of transformation from traditional invocation of gut-response through appealing to ethnic fears or racial solidarity, to the new style of intellectual demagoguery being offered by Williams and the PNM was going to be long and arduous.

Licks or no licks, the PNM continued its programme of ‘week-end school’, this time directed at Members of Parliament and party groups. The first of these took place late in September 1958 at the South-East Port-of-Spain Community Centre and featured the Doctor himself lecturing on “The West Indies, Past, Present and Future.” This programme of lectures included: (1) Who Must Own the West Indies (2) Colonialism: For Whose Benefit are the West Indies to be Developed? (3) The Passing of Colonialism in the Modern World (4) Developing the West Indies for the Benefit of West Indians (5) Comments and Proposals for Developing Future Week-end Schools.

The Port-of-Spain groups planned to lecture in Diego Martin on “Federation,” to run a course in history to train lecturers and to find ways of disseminating proceedings to other PNM Party groups.(69, 26)
There were, however, signs that some of these lectures were less successful than had been hoped. PNM Group #4 of Pepper Village, Fyzabad in the constituency of St. Patrick’s East said in August 1958, in the wake of the Party’s loss of the Federal Elections to the DLP, that there was “glaring evidence of complete misunderstanding of most issues on the part of many in the rural areas” and suggested that the Party should establish “a pool of peripatetic lecturers.”(70) The group also wanted a school in the area, to prevent their children having to travel 26 miles daily to and from San Fernando; a resident doctor and a housing project. It is possible that the PNM’s voluntary educators, while they were tolerated by these remote rural communities, were being perceived not as the bringers of welcome illumination, but as linkages to the centre of power, and thus a means to the end of fulfilling the concrete needs of these communities. The people may have been less interested in the education being offered by the Party’s foot-soldiers, than in the material benefits and improvements that they felt might come through a strategic attachment to the Party via its enthusiastic agents.

The March 1958 Federal Elections were a case in point, because they posed the question of whether the intellectual charisma of the recently elected Premier Williams and the impact of the PNM’s band of ‘peripatetic lecturers’ had already waned, or had, perhaps, never reached beyond the major towns. While Williams spoke of “The PNM’s political education, nationalist spirit, a sensible development programme and its principle of morality in public affairs” which, he insisted, had “caught the imagination of our centres of intellectualism and of public decency,” (71) his opponents who controlled the majority of votes in the rural constituencies rejected Williams’ and the PNM’s success as “the spread of totalitarianism, and the mesmerization of urban fanatics.”(72, 27)

Karen Beckford, PNM candidate in an August 1958 by-election for the Point-a-Pierre Constituency discovered that

To be a candidate is nothing short of being a soldier facing a war of life and death. There are all the elements of fear, determination, zeal, the horror of being cornered and the final plunge when you stand up to face a hostile and unruly audience.(73)

Beckford, inspired by Williams’s ideals and his powerful call to service of country, viewed her campaign as an example of her party’s mission.

On the PNM side was an acknowledgement that this is a new age demanding new weapons in outlook and methods; that this stage in our historical development was a point of no return, where to look backward is to fall out of step and get trampled upon by the turbulent tide of time.

In this context, the PNM has accepted the responsibility imposed on a people moving from colonialism to independence with all that is implied in terms of a more independent attitude, a rigid self-discipline, and the need to sacrifice and the surrendering of certain privileges in favour of national interest.(74)

The PNM, she continued, had embraced “the wider perspective of building a community founded on justice and equality.”(75) The campaign of the DLP “was confined to the smallest conceivable sphere of self-interest” and displayed a pragmatism that could zealously promote “dividing the people” and passionately champion a “retention of colonialism.”(76)
Beckford’s canvasser, Margery Warner, witnessed that the campaign had taught her “the great contrasts between the more enlightened urban areas and these long neglected rural ones,” where PNM’s campaigners were met with hostility, hatred, stones, “obscene language and degraded behaviour.”(77) Warner testified, pin-pointing the issue of race/ethnicity that: (28)

East Indians who work for the PNM do so at great risk. They are ostracized in their villages, spat upon, taunted and reviled. In Ben Lomond, the houses of those who received PNM candidates were stoned.(78)

Williams’s analysis of why the PNM lost the 1958 Federal Elections pinpoints both the DLP’s appeal to heartland Indians’ ethnic gut-feeling as described by Warner and implied by Beckford, and the urban/rural divide, neither of which was in any way affected by the PNM’s weekend crusade and peripatetic lecturers. Rural communities, ‘mesmerized’ by their own home grown ethnic ‘fanatics’, resisted what the DLP termed “mesmerisation” by “urban fanatics” pretending to promote the concept of “building a community founded on justice and equality.”(79) Williams dismissed Bhadase Maharaj’s manipulation of an “Indian nation” rooted in both ancestral India and diasporan contemporary Trinidad as sheer race. And it means this for us – the danger of our intellectual ship being submerged by a wave of illiteracy, San Fernando being swamped by Debe, Chaguanas by Charlieville, Point Fortin by Suchit Trace, Guayaguayare by Plum Mitan, Princes Town by the Valley Line, PNM’s University of Woodford Square by DLP’s kindergarten in Ben Lomon.(80)

He also termed the DLP coalition a “hostile and recalcitrant minority masquerading as the Indian nation.”

The crucial issue, as Williams saw it, was the one he had since 1946 pinpointed in Education in the British West Indies: the issue of education, enlightenment and rationality versus ignorance, mental darkness, repressiveness and the recourse to old-time, stone-pelting and badjohnism, chronic in his own South-East Port-of-Spain constituency, let it be said, and now enjoying a fruitful renaissance in the perennially neglected but suddenly politically important Central villages. The PNM policy, if allowed to work, would lead to healthy nation- and (29) community-building. Its foundation was education, its demand the dedication of a responsible educated class to building the national community, both in the University of Woodford Square and its multiple extra-mural centres across the country. The other way would lead to fragmentation of the already divided nation. Williams and his disciples really believed this.

The tone of Williams’s address shocked Winston Mahabir who heard it – as many commentators have since heard it – as a bitter attack on “the Indians”, himself included, as well as a contemptuous dismissal of rural communities as backward and illiterate. Williams, whom Mahabir seems to have blamed for having written “West Indian history with an emphasis on Negro West Indian history,” (81) had never exhibited the concern that Mahabir felt he ought to have demonstrated; for the ‘unenlightened’ rural Indian communities. In spite of Williams’s mission to foster, through relevant education, a new national community, when Williams achieves political power in Trinidad, he is besieged by requests from his Indian friends to carry the political education machine of the party to the Indian-dominated areas and gradually to open the doors of the party to those Indians who
shared its aspirations. Instead, he persisted for years in preaching to the converted, and admission to the party involved ridiculous and humiliating screening procedures. When PNM lost the Federal elections in 1958, Eric Williams looked no further than the Indians for a scapegoat. (82)

Mahabir’s critique of Williams was that he and his peripatetic lecturers had done little to include the rural Indian communities in their programmes of weekend lectures; had not treated these communities as if they were a part of the greater nation, and should not therefore have expected such communities to welcome the PNM or accept the Party’s mission and principles. But Mahabir’s critique raised another question: What exactly were Mahabir and the PNM Indians doing to bring into being the new ethnically-integrated national community of which (30) Williams dreamed? Different PNM party groups were free to organize their own programmes of voluntary weekend lectures. What was Mahabir himself, a Bachac of silver-tongued Bachacs doing, that he blamed Williams for not doing? More than once Mahabir mentions the pressure he was receiving from members of the Indian community for joining a “nigger party.” (83) This pressure grew more intense after Williams’s epiphanic 1958 speech, “The Danger Facing Trinidad,” and Mahabir left the party and the country, nursing a sense of dislocation, the result, no doubt, of the deferral of the great dream he had once shared with Williams.

I am now an orphan. No grandfather, no grandmother, no father, no mother. But I have two fatherlands – Trinidad and Canada between which my adult life has been divided. And I have had only one major intellectual godfather whom I have loved and hated with equal passion through many years. His name is Eric Williams of Trinidad. We first met in Canada. (84)

In advocating a vigorous programme of Adult Education in Education in the British West Indies, Williams commended the practice of St. Francis Xavier University as set out in one of their reports: “We got ideas from the people, synthesized them, and gave them back to the people.” (85) It is not clear, though, that this principle was put into practice in his University of Woodford Square lectures or the Party’s sallies into public political education each week-end. Williams’s reference to the hopeless ignorance of places such as Suchit Trace and Ben Lomond, implied that there was little to learn from such communities; no ideas to reshape, synthesize and give back to such dismal people. It was, in fact, in just such places that the burden of imposing compulsory enlightenment was heaviest and at times even intolerable. Education, Williams well knew, was a “dual process”(86) involving exchange between the teaching intelligentsia and the learning communities. But political necessity and ideological urgency prompted a much more schoolmasterish encounter between the Party’s intellectuals and the masses. As our examination of calypsos will soon indicate, the masses have constantly ‘talked back’ to their would-be (31) schoolmasters, as the curricula of the college and the communities have continuously clashed in the classrooms of the road.
Calypso evidence spanning the twenty-five years (1956-1981) of Williams’s political leadership of Trinidad and Tobago and the three decades since his death, suggests that a gap in sensibility has persisted between intellectuals and ordinary folk who have clung to the ancient belief that “common-sense make before book-sense” and have at times dismissed the entire class of intellectuals as being “too bright”[87] or more contemptuously as “educated donkeys.”[88] Chalkdust, himself a teacher, UWI graduate, Michigan PhD and seven-time Calypso Monarch as well as an author of several books and essays on Trinidad’s social history, advised the George Chambers Government in Ram the Magician (1984), “If you can’t run the country/Then call in Kirpalani.”[89]

Important aspects of the nation’s administration had been put in the hands of certificated technocrats by the last Eric Williams regime (1976-1981). Chalkdust’s calypso was a signal of the dissatisfaction felt by sections of the public at the performance of these technocrats. Ram Kirpalani was the country’s most successful businessman whose family, originally from India, had over eight decades of residence in Trinidad built a considerable conglomerate of businesses in Trinidad and Tobago and other parts of the West Indies. Chalkdust points out that (32)

Ram never went to UWI
But he got a PhD in money (90)

Academic knowledge, then, was being measured against an acumen developed through long and practical experience of the market-place. Future governments would begin to hire experienced business people – Gillette, Kuei Tung, Yetming, Carlos John, Howai, for example – under the assumption that they would bring to the management of State affairs, the efficiency and practical know-how of the private sector.

There has been an ongoing concern in calypsos with the quality, scope and content of education, and a scathing scrutiny of syllabi, teachers, schools, text books and methods of discipline. Calypsos such as Sparrow’s Dan is the Man in the Van (1963), Chalkdust’s Teach the Right History (1969), Pretender’s History in We Own Backyard (1972), Composer’s Proper Teaching (1971), Prowler’s Build More Trade Schools (1969), or more recent ones such as Delamo’s Looters (1991) or Chalkdust’s Rescue QRC (2002) and No More Licks in School (2002) are a fair sample of the larger body of songs that have reflected the nation’s preoccupation with what is being taught, what is being produced, the quality of both teachers and students, the relationship between education and employment, and Eric Williams’s original concern with transforming the national community through education.

There are as many calypsos that ask whether Williams and the seven Governments that have succeeded his unbroken relay of five, have failed, wholly or partially, to correct deficiencies in the system that were identified and denounced since Education in the British West Indies. By the early 1980’s, the dedicated cadre of intellectuals and persons of culture on whose zeal and selfless effort Williams built the PNM, have become the “head hunters” of Black Stalin’s More Times (1980) and by the end of the century they have morphed into David (33) Rudder’s “mindbenders”, “various smart men and politicians” with hidden agendas in The Ganges and the Nile (1999). Black Stalin’s grassroots citizen, faced with the almost universal duplicity of people who “come out so for your
mind,” humbles himself and “takes aside”: that is, detaches himself from the festering social and political scenario, practising what the Mighty Gibraltar grew to call “Avoidism”.

Something has snapped: some line of trust that seemed briefly to have existed in those early Williams years, a line that, however tenuously, connected the intelligentsia with the masses. Delamo in calypsoes like Apocalypse (1981), Sodom and Gomorrah (1982) and Armageddon (1984) – the years of recession and George Chambers’s cost-cutting measures – chronicles disintegration as he paints a dismal portrait of the professional class of teachers, doctors, lawyers and big and small merchants. The knowledge imparted by teachers is abused internationally to invent instruments of warfare that can eventually bring about the destruction of mankind. The lawyers in whom colonial society invested so much hope and pride have become little more than sophisticated manipulators of a perverted judicial system:

The lawyer say the answer lies in justice
Give man his pound of flesh, he would satisfy
So then you take your best brains and send them to university
And there you teach them to deal in skilful lies
And the successful ones you make into lawyers and judges
So you see how the system is likened unto an abscess (91)

Worst of all, Delamo thinks that the solution is beyond human ability, that “There’ll be no solution/ Until the last day of Armageddon.”

Rudder observes not so much the breach in the line that once bound intellectual to community, but a strange and unhealthy levelling off of classes, races: convent girl and rude bwoy, product of prestige school and graduate from the academy of the streets, strangely united in the delirium of the nightclub (Madness, 1986). He shows in Another Day in Paradise (1995) that certain of “the new Greeks” – that is the current generation of intellectuals – and the new “gorgons” – that is the region’s stony-hearted young men of crime – have come together in a coalition that is the diametric opposite of what Williams had at Independence hoped for that generation of children who, he said, held the country’s future in their book bags. In the mid-nineties the national community faces new and horrible alignments and configurations of class: For when a gorgon shoot another gorgon The doctor’s job is to stitch up the organ The lawyer’s job is to keep him out of jail Now he back on the streets: terror in your tail (92)

Calypsonians, – as products of the classroom and curriculum of the streets – have both shared in and preserved a detachment from the euphoria of the Woodford Square magical moment. The Mighty Sparrow, twenty-one in 1956 when Williams and the PNM first rode to power, sang Dan Is the Man in the Van in 1963, in which he caricatured Captain Cutteridge’s colonial reading primer as absurd, designed to produce comedians. He ends the calypso with the unforgettable couplet: They beat me like a dog to learn that in school If my head was bright, ah woulda been a damn fool (93) It was 1963, the year after Independence, and Dan Is the Man in the Van was signalling a necessity to break from the old brutality and absurdity of the inherited system of education; that is, it was in its bizarre way proclaiming a oneness with the Williams mission to reform education, from nursery to tertiary levels.
Sparrow’s *Education* (1967) was first sung twelve years after the University of Woodford Square lectures and five after Independence. It captures the fervour of the PEM/PNM years and articulates the creed of self-improvement through education, by which most citizens have lived and still do live. *Education*, sometimes termed *Education a Must*, is an excellent example of the exhortatory, nation-building calypso in which the calypsonian as solid rational spokesperson for the population at large affirms the mission of his Government to create a new world of the Caribbean. The lyrics of *Education* are a restatement of cherished Eric Williams and PNM policy. Its tone is that of the prophet as part warner and part divine messenger imparting to the new nation the message of the gods. The calypsonian temporarily abandons his guise of social critic, protestor or satirist trying to keep a government or its leader in check, and dons the mask of medium or mediator between the masses and the maximum leader who, overburdened by work and the nightmarish vision of enemies – imperialists, capitalists and worse, communists – hiding behind every fig-leaf, has begun his retreat from the dais of the University of Woodford Square into the twilight of his fortress of solitude. Weekly Press conferences have become rarer, or have degenerated into farcical exercises in which the Press can ask only those questions that the Prime Minister’s Office has instructed them to ask. Williams has become more of a monotonous voice than a flesh-and-blood presence, until pictures of him eating ham-n’-hops in public or purchasing new shoes at a department store in Port-of-Spain become big news.

But Williams had, as we have seen, inscribed his ideas about the urgency of the nation’s need for education at all levels. Education was, he had preached, the main article of faith, the major foundation block upon which the new nation and transformed community of the Caribbean and the post-colonial New World were to be built. It was the only way that a coherent and well-balanced nation could be constructed out of the darkness and shambles of colonialism. Sparrow in *Education*, then, assumes the crusading spirit and voice of the Williams of 1955, or of one of his lieutenants, exhorting the masses, delivering the message:

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Education, education, this is the foundation
Our rising population needs sound education
To be recognized anywhere you go
Have your certificate to show
To enjoy any kind of happiness
Knowledge is the key to success
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The chorus is directed at the nation’s children. Williams had said at Independence that the nation’s future lay in the book-bags of its children. This declaration stuck in the nation’s mind, and thirty years later would be invoked by Luta the school teacher/calypsonian in *Think Again* (1991) and David Rudder in *Another Day in Paradise* (1995), in ironic reflection on the sad state into which the nation and its youth had fallen, now that the children’s book-bags were “packed up with gun, knife and chain.” (94)

In 1967, however, the nation was still young and full of hope, amidst early signs of the disintegration of certain peri-urban communities. Sparrow restates the text of Williams’s sermon, though one detects in Sparrow’s insistent and repetitive exhortations, the beginnings of a certain desperation, signs perhaps that the Government’s programmes of Special Works, Better and Best Villages, Education and Community Development were not running as successfully as citizens
might have expected. Illiteracy remained a major social problem and would, well into the twenty-first century, be cited as a major cause of youths turning to crime. Sparrow in 1967 warns:

- Illiteracy, illiteracy is man’s greatest enemy
- It’s your duty, yes your duty to stamp it out completely
- Ignorance always impedes progress
- Education saves you much distress
- So learn, learn, learn as much as you can
- For the nation’s future is in your hands (95)

Why did Sparrow see the need to reinforce Williams’s and the PNM’s foundational mission statement with such repetitive insistence? On the face of things Williams’s two administrations – 1956-61 and 1961-1966 – had performed well in implementing fundamental reforms and improvements in Education. Williams himself outlined the changes that had taken place in his November 3, 1967 preface to the American edition of *Education in the British West Indies*:

1. Free Secondary Education (1960)
2. Advances in Vocational Education and teacher training
3. Creation of the Ministry of Education and Culture whose mission is the rationalization of the Education System
4. The Education Act of 1965, making the Denominational Schools part of the system “as they never were before” (i.e. the Concordat mentioned earlier)
5. Prioritizing the issue of a Caribbean Examinations system (NB. Such a system, the CXC, took another decade to materialize)
6. Independence of UWI in 1962
7. Plans to establish faculties of Law and Dentistry
8. Decentralization of UWI, leading to the location of Agriculture and Engineering in Trinidad and Medicine in Jamaica
9. The establishment of the Institute of Social and Economic Research in Jamaica
10. The establishment of Extra-Mural centres of the UWI in smaller territories
11. The establishment of Liberal Arts Colleges in Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados
12. Compulsory University courses in the Development of Civilization and in West Indian History and Society. (96)

From this list it can be seen how closely Williams and his colleagues in the federated, then unfederated West Indies, now either fully independent or on the road to that blissful state, had followed the template for educational development in the region that Williams had set out since 1946 in *Education in the British West Indies*. Yet the transformation of community, a major objective of Williams’s, the PEM’s and after 1955 the PNM’s lectures in the University of Woodford Square and throughout Trinidad and Tobago, had not visibly occurred. Indeed, Community Development had become something of an orphan child in the scheme of things. Conceived of as Social Welfare, Community Development had been attached to the Ministry of Education until 1956 when the PNM first assumed office. It was then relocated in the Ministry of Health and Social Services (1956-1958), then attached to the Ministry of Labour (1958-1959), then removed to the Ministry of Home Affairs (1959-1962); then appended to the Ministry of Local Government (1962-1964) after which it became a Division of the Prime Minister’s Office (1964). (97)
Successive governments headed by Eric Williams seemed to have little idea of how to nurture the dream of a relationship between Education and Community, or how to stimulate the transformation of Community. Social and educational voluntarism, however noble and sincere their beginning years before Williams, gave way to hard pragmatic party politicizing, in which it became dangerous to ‘invade territory’ controlled by the PNM’s border guards. UWI lecturers who voluntarily lectured to young men in Renegades panyard in 1969 on West Indian History, Government and popular Music, all received threats of death and dire injury in 1970 from unknown sources who termed themselves, ‘Desparadoes Will Protect’, ‘The Death Squad’ and ‘Simbutu Warriors’. They had trespassed on holy ground: the electoral constituency of Dr. Williams. (98) A small act of voluntary service, linking intellectuals to community – a cherished PNM ideal – had led to this manic, this delirious reaction.

From the late fifties calypsonians had been recording the grim paradox of educational improvement and community disintegration. First, there were all those ‘badjohn’ and ‘bravado’ calypsoes that Sparrow sang between the late fifties and mid-sixties: Gunslingers (1959), Renegades (1961), Hangman’s Cemetery (1961), Don’t Touch Me (1960/61), Royal Jail (1961), Bull Pistle Gang (1964), Ten to One Is Murder (1960), The Rebel (1966).

Peri-urban communities such as Dr. Williams’s Port of Spain South East constituency were sites of constant and violent male-versus-male encounter, as they had been since Emancipation. Protagonists in Sparrow’s badjohn calypsoes are usually isolated males under attack from other males, and either defending themselves or threatening to retaliate with extreme violence. In Shanty-Town People (1966), the Laventille citizen portrays himself as a decent and respectable man who has been driven to his wit’s end by the “fire and brimstone” he has had to endure from a gang of “rats” who hail from Shanty-Town, a nether circle of hell where the narrow plain at the bottom of Laventille Hill trails into the La basse and swamp. These former swamp-dwellers fight, curse, gamble, steal whatever they can, defy the Police, reduce the protagonist’s life to misery and block his passage when he tries to escape to the remote but then comparatively peaceful countryside of Claxton Bay, miles away from this urban theatre of stress and torment. Their final act of anarchism is truly grim: They thief all meh furniture and carry it to pawn Set fire to meh house and gone. (100) In Royal Jail (1961) the violence, significantly, extends towards even the Deputy Prime Minister, himself an Island Scholar, a past participant in the Party’s programme of consciousness-raising lectures and the Party’s first Minister of Education.

Dr. Solomon He and all was attacked by another gang
Just imagine the Minister of Home Affairs He and all have to walk with care
But I laugh when he give them the score
He say before they take him he taking four
But if they tackle me, my friend
They have to multiply four by ten (and that’s forty!!) (101)

Threatened, the Minister like a gunslinger who has been ‘called-out’, adopts the falsely heroic, violent rhetoric and register of the street. This signals not his oneness with the street, but on the contrary, a breakdown, a failure, the fatuity even of those earlier efforts to illumine a community comfortable with its own darkness, and capable of reducing educated national Island scholars and dedicated PNM missionaries to its own level of histrionic encounter and rhetoric.
The Rebel (1966) is unique because Sparrow creates in this calypso the persona of a young badjohn-in-formation, who portrays himself as having been the innocent victim of his social environment. The streets where he receives his informal education have their own curriculum and professors. Foremost among these are:

1. bullying older males, “all o’dem badjohns” who handle the protagonist violently, commit crimes or sometimes pranks for which the protagonist is blamed and punished
2. teachers in school, particularly the headmaster, who doesn’t sympathise with his situation and eventually expels him
3. parents who put him out from home when he is expelled from school

His self-portrait is that of an innocent, misunderstood scapegoat and victim of the perverse masculinity of his world: that of the city. He grew up in “town” and perhaps his village or block within that town. This perverse masculinity demands a constant, violent testing and initiation; a putting-down and a putting-in-place of the young neophyte who, socialized into a sans humanité environment, absorbs its values of confrontation of the Other perceived as Enemy, and of harbouring thoughts of future revenge. There are borders in this world of the city-street, raised to separate small man (i.e. little boy) from youth man (i.e. teenager) and both of them from big man (i.e. adult male). There are also harsh rites of passage from one stage to the next. The Rebel describes the street education and testing of one of these young males as he progresses from small man to youthman about to graduate into full (or empty) manhood; i.e. the status of badjohn and rebel grown strong enough to challenge his former persecutors.

Grown up, the protagonist now welcomes the aging badjohns of his youth who, it seems, have grown weak and vulnerable. Now that they need compassion, he will not be the one to provide it. This is his time to play, not badjohn – (he never admits to having grown into and become the mask he most deeply hates) – but rebel. He seems to regard the role of rebel as a worthier one, one that exonerates him from any responsibility for what he has become. It is the theme and ethic of scores of Western movies: the emergence of the rebel out of a history of suffering, oppression and trauma. More often than not, he has witnessed the annihilation of his entire family and having grown up, has returned to a town or territory to exact vengeance from his parents’ killers.

The stanza about school excludes details about the narrator’s far from happy school days. Sparrow would six years later sing Happy Schooldays (1972) where school days are portrayed as a time of joyful enactment of the poetry, songs, verbal and physical games of a childhood steeped in play and folklore. Bill Trotman, too, sang of wanting to go back to school, a world and time of pure delight. Sparrow’s rebel, however, has experienced no such delight in child’s play, and seems to have grown up in, and in constant fear of a world of men; the world of the street where the big men provide only falsely heroic role models for the small men (i.e. boys) who grow up simultaneously to rebel against and adopt the mask of the badjohn to conceal the remembered wounds of boyhood.

In school, the headmaster is the badjohn in authority, different from the badjohn on the street only in the sense that he is spokesperson for the positive strategies of straight society, and guards the doorway towards lower and middle class respectability. We aren’t told anything about him except that, exasperated by his failure to control or change this youthman, he tells him that he wishes the Police would “hold” – that is arrest, ‘take down’, incarcerate and straighten him out. The Police
constitute an hierarchical brotherhood of uniformed badjohns, precariously oscillating between their roots in impoverishment and the well-to-do class of proprietors they serve. To the bruised youthman they would be worse than the badjohns on the street.

Expelled from school, the young rebel becomes a problem of the street, because expulsion has led to a further expulsion from home where, it is implied, the system of parental discipline has also failed to contain rebellion or point the rebel towards a more positive pathway. The Rebel, this calypso of silences and spaces, does not describe either the confrontation at school with the headmaster or the one at home with parents; but one may surmise that both confrontations involve the youth caught at the point of transition between ‘youthman’ and ‘adult’, or boyhood and young manhood, and being repelled/expelled into a sort of no man’s land or wilderness of the street ‘out there’, by the gods or gatekeepers of the crossroads of transition, the schoolmaster in one case, his parents in the other.

The urban wilderness that the PNM’s peripatetic lecturers sought to enlighten and tame with their lessons on history, civics, politics and sociology, had its own codes, values, its certificate of bruises and modes of survival in which the methods of the street transcended those of the school, even though there could be considerable areas of overlap between them. “They beat me like a dog to learn that in school” declares the narrator of Dan is the Man in the Van. He could easily have been describing life on the street. Pre-emptive and retributive violence is widely accepted by both street and school as a means of straightening the young sapling that displays a tendency to bend.(102)

By the closing years of the 1950’s and immediately before Independence, the Mighty Sparrow had in Gunslingers (1959) and Ten to One Is Murder (1960) affirmed the power of what this essay has been calling the curriculum of the street. In Ten to one Is Murder the protagonist and I-narrator is Sparrow himself, making a dramatic deposition in a court case where he has been indicted for the illegal possession and discharge of a firearm during an altercation with – so he says – “ten vicious men.” The narrator needs to persuade two quite different juries: that of the Supreme Court and that of the invisible gayelle of the street.

To persuade the Supreme Court, he provides his own version of what took place one night outside a popular city nightclub. Unarmed, he was attacked by “ten criminals” who accused him of molesting a Grenadian woman. Recognising the direness of his situation where pain, injury and even death seemed to be imminent, he retreated amidst a shower of bottles and stones, and heard gunfire which caused the crowd of “fifty spectators” to scatter. To persuade the sceptical jury of the street that he is not just a coward who, contrary to the ethic of the street engrained since the days of the stickfighters, has turned tail and run away from a fight, the narrator maintains the mask, kalinda call-and-response rhythm and rhetoric of the street-warrior. The repeated refrain “Ten to One Is Murder”, chanted by the Chorus at least twenty times, is meant to brainwash the jury of the street into recognising the unfairness of a street fight in which one unarmed man is forced to confront ten men armed with knives, bottles, stones and from the sound of it, guns. Indeed, even the crowd itself, the ‘jury’ of the street, ran away when they heard the gunfire, affirming thereby that survival is the founding principle of the curriculum of the street; and survival might require either standing up to or running away from the antagonist.
Gunslingers (1959) introduces a new presence on the street: an entrepreneur of street violence who imports and sells guns, razors, cutlasses, sledge hammers, hatchets, steel or brass knuckles, “any kind of weapon that’s good for war.”[103] The narrator here does not present himself as a badjohn or even the potential victim of street gangsterism. He has evolved to the point where the street and its denizens have simply become his market, with himself being the smooth medium between supplier and purchaser. Part of his evolution, then, has been his ability to blend his commercial success as an arms salesman to the urban underclass, with his social success in having been able to establish connections with all classes of gun-traders and gun-purchasers inside and outside of Trinidad and Tobago. The nation has already, in 1959, advanced several leagues along the highway towards a classlessness in ‘bobol’, ‘ratchify’ and corruption in which every creed and race now participates.

If you don’t believe me
Wait and you will see
They coming down by the crates
From quite in the States
Ah have me contacts where they come from
Ah have me contacts in the Custom
Ah have more contacts than I can tell
Now I want to contact a place to sell (104)

Facilitated by this new, slick, ultra-modern entrepreneur, the razor-wielding badjohn of the post-World War II decade has graduated into a much more explosive anarchist in Eric Williams’s and the PNM’s perennial stronghold in Port of Spain. By the mid-sixties, his success in eroding and undermining vulnerable and emerging communities of youth is signalled in Leveller’s How to Curb Delinquency, which was sung in 1966, the same year as Sparrow’s The Rebel. The opening lines of Leveller’s calypso are startling:

Homemade bombs, guns, gelignite exploding every night
All over Port of Spain
Magistrates and clergymen, probation and policemen
Have [warned?] them, but all in vain
They worse when they come from jail
And all their talents fail (105)

Sparrow’s vendor of firearms has clearly made a killing in this, the first decade of Independence. The violence described by Leveller is far more ominous than the DLP-inspired political violence of stone-pelters and cussbirds in Ben Lomond (1958) or San Juan (1961). It is the violence that has always resided in the city, especially at its broken edges; the violence that has always resisted the warnings, entreaties and threats of those guardians of moral and civil order, the magistrates, policemen, clergymen and probation officers and teachers. Like Sparrow’s weapons salesman, the gangsters have their “contacts”; for whence are these sansculottes acquiring gelignite? the quarries? the army’s arse/nal?

Lord Blakie, who had been given the praise-name “Warlord,” had in 1965 in De Doctah Ent Deh noted the failure of Williams’s efforts to contain turbulence in the hills, and had blamed this failure on the growing invisibility of Williams himself, who, so the calypso said, could not be found in Parliament or madhouse – places one would assume he’d frequent – but was expected soon at the
Royal Jail. While Blakie unfairly attributes the outbreaks of violence to the absence of Williams who the year before had gone on his “African Safari,” Leveller traces the cause to deeper roots and suggests a number of remedies:

1. Overpopulation. Too much fertility has led to a Malthusian situation where some of the young generation have started to “turn beast”. Leveller’s proposed solution is a State-sponsored birth control programme “for ten years at least.” ([46]

2. Retrenchment, some of it due to automation in the agricultural areas where machines are displacing human workers. Leveller’s solution is an outlawing of retrenchment accompanied by a drive to “create more employment.” Leveller does not say how.

3. “Slum environments” are the third problem. Again Leveller suggests no solution to this dilemma that had been identified long before. A grand effort at slum clearance had been made in 1935 after the passage of The Slum Clearance Ordinance. The assault on major slum yards in Port of Spain led to the relocation of slum communities to peri-urban sites overlooking Port of Spain, or to the hills of San Juan.

4. Poor parenting, which Leveller terms “parental mismanagement.” Again the problem is identified, as it had been by the PEM and their consultant, Dr Eric Williams in 1950. It was an area earmarked for research and a special programme of education which, if it materialized at all, could not keep pace with the geometrically expanding delinquency problems.

5. Teachers’ intolerance. This problem is also implied in The Rebel. It has survived and even worsened over five decades. The teachers, who become surrogate parents, are themselves unable to cope and may grow resentful at having to act as parents of children whose deficient domestic circumstances render them difficult and delinquent. Leveller offers no solution to this problem.

6. Leveller finally reels off a list of other causes of juvenile delinquency in the country:
- Complex psychology
- Colonial iniquity,
- “Racial recalcitrance/ Gangster movies
- the premature young ladies” ([106]

What Leveller terms “complex psychology” no doubt derives from the child’s experience at home, at school and on the street; the suggested absence of care, love and healthy nurturing in these three locations. Three years after Leveller’s comprehensive diagnosis of the sources of delinquency, the Mighty Composer asserted in the comical/serious Child Training ([1969]) that children brought up on a harsh diet of verbal and physical abuse, or nurtured on a babble of baby-talk, will never develop the self-confidence necessary to climb out of their depressed status “beneath the underdog.” ([107]

Deficient child training, particularly among “my (i.e. black) people,” produces as they mature, more “common breed” yardfowls to eat the bread that “the devil knead.” ([108]

Leveller’s “colonial iniquity” and “racial recalcitrance” are both vague, though important-sounding phrases that may well have been picked up from Williams’s lectures or those of his peripatetic educators. Certainly, that unusual word “recalcitrance” echoes Williams’s famous dismissal of his 1958 DLP opponents as “a hostile and recalcitrant minority.” By 1966, the habit of blaming the deficiencies of the present on the iniquity of the past had begun to lose its attractiveness; while the
persistence of race and ethnicity as key elements in citizens’ self-definition simply signalled that the new world Caribbean nation that Williams had envisaged was far from being a reality.

Leveller’s inclusion of “gangster movies” in his list of negative influences on the young nation reminds his audience that foreign media influences have for decades been blamed for the neglect by Trinidadians of their own indigenous cultural forms, and their hankering after foreign life-styles. Despite the censorship of films and the call in the fifties for a prohibition of comic books depicting crime and horror, Trinidad and Tobago had, even in its drive towards cultural nationalism, been part of and irremediably shaped by the contemporary Western world. The nation’s steelbands named themselves after movies: Desperadoes, Destination Tokyo, Casablanca, her saga boys and street heroes patterned themselves on Audie Murphy, Jack Slade, Utah Blaine and would soon be attracted to the brutality of the Spaghetti Westerns. A contemporary calypsonian, Dee Diamond, sang in 2013 a calypso entitled Gangster Role Model in which he affirms that many young men and women have embraced the gangster as their hero and role-model. While one of Williams’s repeatedly stated objectives was to educate a nation of people so that it could confidently locate itself in the modern world, there must have been many features of contemporary Western civilization from which he would have liked to shield the nation, but could not.

Williams also had profound doubts about the viability of fragile local cultures. His assumption was that the ancestral origins of the various ethnic groups in his country were too remote to be retrieved, revived or understood. In “Politics and Culture” he stated the case for diasporan people accepting their disconnection from ancestral roots.

What do we in the West Indies have of our own? Something, but not too much – a few relics of the aborigines, a few survivals of the African transplantation, a somewhat stronger influence among the older generations of Indians which reactionaries strive to use for their personal ends. The rest is Europe – language, games, economy, externals of culture, values, way of life. Add to this at present a few local dances (far more authentic in the French islands than in Trinidad), our calypso whose value is not sufficiently appreciated, our Carnival and streetbands, a more pronounced tendency nowadays on the part of her painters to seek their inspiration in the local environment, some first rate literature from Roumains (sic) Cesaire, Zobel, Selvon, Naipaul and Lamming, and, most important of all, the elevation of CREOLE in Haiti to the status of national language – and what you have is a West Indian version of Europe, Europe with a difference, indeed, but Europe. It is for the future to decide how far, with national independence and the assimilation of the various groups which constitute our society, we will develop something so distinctive, so removed from the original, that it becomes indigenous. (109) Williams then defined the role of the political leader as being not only “to govern” and “improve the material way of life”, but to protect, encourage and foster “the infant indigenous culture.” Politics must help nurture culture, while culture, “through the nationalist movement in the arts and in literature” will in its turn support “the political movement and help to give it a wider international audience.” (110) Plurality of culture was challenge and opportunity, not impediment. Williams recognized that

The existence of various racial groups and different cultural strands is an opportunity for the political leader as a man of culture to weave a native, indigenous cloth – not the patchwork of coexistence but the integrated harmonious pattern of assimilation. (111)
Williams at this point (September 1958) stood more for ‘interculturation’ (112) which emphasises what is shared between transgressive ethnic cultures, a commonality in the process and product of their becoming, than for multiculturalism which seeks to distinguish between and keep distinct the differences in their origins and evolution.

What he did not here anticipate was what Leveller in 1966, Naipaul in *The Middle Passage* (1962) and a chorus of voices after the neo-Garveyite Black Power awakening of 1970 loudly declared: that the ancestral void within which the imagined patriarchal leader begins might become filled with the worst elements of European civilization; that the fragile, indigenous culture of ‘relics’ which the new post-colonial nation brings to the void or vortex, might simply crumble and give in to the culture of a new imperialism even more insidious and corrosive than the old one had been. The ‘modern world’ within which Trinidad and Tobago was rapidly learning (both on their own and via the insights and policies of their maximum leader) to locate themselves, had its considerable deficiencies, the absorption of which was catalyzing into existence a nation that was quite different from anything Williams or anyone else could have imagined or controlled.

Yet, in 1966, Leveller had an apprehension of what was soon to come. His fears about the kinds of young men and women that were emerging out of the complex blend of historical, social, racial and cultural sources would be enunciated several times over by concerned citizens in the decades that were to follow. He didn’t think that the Government fully understood the complexity and severity of the situation, and his third stanza is a direct critique of the State’s effort to curb what had begun to seem like an uncontrollable situation. In 1965 the Government, far more sensitive than Leveller gave them credit for being, had recognized the imminent collapse of communities throughout the country and had initiated an intense programme of Community Development via the construction of fifty-seven community centres and several youth camps. Such development in fact paralleled and was based on the same principle as confronting the problem of education in the post-Independence years by the construction of schools.

Such construction of buildings, as Leveller observed, was merely the beginning of the mission to transform both education and community. More schools did not mean improvement in what took place inside of them, just as more community centres did not mean a more coherent or harmonious community life throughout the nation. Indeed, because of the widening racial divisions, community centres soon became sites for inter-ethnic contestation as to which group had the right to determine how they were to be utilized.

Leveller admonished:

> You could tear down the barrack yard,
> Augment the local guard
> Expand education
> Appoint TEN committees, promote big youth rallies
> And camp down Nelson Island
> But employment is the key for Kinkhead and Company
> That is so evident
> And I wonder why they dilly-dallying: Our *intellectual* Government. (113)
Leveller is saying here that all the palliatives tried by the State have either failed or proven inadequate to contain the exploding problems. Apart from slum clearance, expansion of the Army, the building of schools, there is the habit of appointing committees to investigate problems (then ignoring the recommendations and shelving the reports of these committees). Youth rallies are a weak placebo for the enormous headache of expanding unemployment among even the certificated youth.

Ten thousand school-leavers annually Join the labour mart, (pardna! )
Each one a potential delinquent,
Some with Science and Art
But we are too small a place to afford all this waste Of talent and energy
Every hand put to work is a boost To the nation’s economy. (114)

Neither “our intellectual Government” – note the implied derogation of academic intelligence – nor grassroots Gramscian ‘organic’ intelligence such as Leveller abundantly demonstrates in _How to Curb Delinquency_, has any real idea of how to solve the ever-expanding problem of delinquency. Has Education failed or has the Government failed to create a relevant curriculum, and if so, what should such a curriculum include? Ironically, this is precisely the question that Eric Williams had been asking since _Education in the British West Indies_.

**VIII**

**Black Power: Education and Community**

Prowler’s immediate answer to the question of what might constitute a relevant curriculum was _Build More Trade Schools_ (1969). His argument was that not all children can cope with the predominantly academic education that, despite Williams’s scathing criticism in _Education In The British West Indies_, was being offered by most schools across the nation. This inability to cope had, according to Prowler, led to “a funny situation” where substantial numbers of children felt “rejected”, faced frustration and ended up as delinquents, useless to both themselves and their country. He intended his calypso as a warning about the urgency of a situation that could easily get worse.

I’m sure you hear this before
That prevention is better than cure
Is a funny situation
With the present day education
Because education in these recent years
Only cater for children with a little upstairs
I find that system is really bad
Prowler say build more trade schools in Trinidad
A boy might go through school and pass his GCE
But not all the boys going to have a brain like he.
Some may have two more years to wait
Before they accomplish a good certificate
But those whose mental capacity is limited
Those children should not be rejected
We know they can’t make the grade
Move them from school and send them to learn a trade (115)

Prowler distinguishes between the child with “brain” and “a little upstairs” who gains his certificate at the first attempt, then the slow learner who requires more time but will eventually succeed, and finally students with “limited mental capacity” for whom the educational system does not cater. While Sparrow might enjoin the nation’s children to “go to school and learn well,” (116) Prowler identifies an entire category of children incapable of carrying out Sparrow’s command. Students who fall into this category need to “learn a trade” and should be provided with appropriate “technical education.” Prowler, despite the false implication in his argument that learning a trade requires less “brain” than academic education, is trying to make a case for the society recognizing different types of intelligence and catering equally for their joint development. He is arguing – as Williams had argued – for society’s acknowledgement of the need for democratizing educational opportunity.

Yet, he is a prisoner locked into a traditional/colonial way of seeing that associates “brain” with academic competence, and relegates manual and “technical skills” to a lower level in the hierarchy of intelligences. Williams, as we have seen, termed the British Grammar School education of Queen’s Royal College and St. Mary’s, “aristocratic” (117) and set out to confront such prestigious education with new State-controlled multilateral and composite schools in which vocational skills were better catered for. But the very ‘aristocracy’ that shaped him remained embedded in people’s minds and in the system at large, and the line between ‘academic’ and ‘technical/vocational’ was never to be erased. The notion of “learning by doing” (118) so enthusiastically propounded by Williams in 1946, never truly lost the stigma that was attached to it, even though it was a better and more practical way of preparing the young person for the labour market. A false division persisted between notions of “education” and “training” that is only slowly being erased.

After proposing trade schools as a way to counter the frustration being felt by youths and to prevent delinquency, Prowler cites his own experience as one who aspired towards but failed to achieve academic excellence, but who, in spite of all his efforts, lacked the “ingredients” to become a scholar. It was, he says, his love for Calypso, which led him to become a professional singer who had no regrets for having failed to become a scholar.

But ah did like Kaiso from since ah small Even in school ah use to write little rhymes and all Ah have no regrets for not making the grade Because ah able to make calypso-singing my trade (119)
The point is well made. Kaiso-singing demands its own type of intelligence and skill and, since it is not included in the syllabus, its own “trade-school.” Prowler, despite his self-disparagement, was known to have a phenomenal memory of scores of calypsos and sustained himself by performing them.

The latter half of the 1960s were years of omen when calypsonians repeatedly intuited that the PNM’s mission to bring about salvation via education had failed in significant ways. Some communities, steeped in their own tradition of survivalism and rebellion, simply resisted penetration by the well-intentioned teachers and preachers who crossed their borders. Some resented the ugly stereotypes that their profiles had become in the eyes of the solid and respectable citizens who controlled the manufacture and projection of images in Trinidad and Tobago. Young Creole’s
Calypso, Education and Community in Trinidad and Tobago: From the 1940s to 2011

classic calypso *Behind The Bridge* (1970), like Sparrow’s *The Outcast* (1963) protested against the negative profile that had for decades been emerging of urban ghetto communities. Sparrow noted the hypocrisy of the nation’s bourgeoisie who had simultaneously expropriated Pan and Calypso for their construction of indigenous national culture, and regarded with contempt the people who created and played the pans and performed the calypsos.

Young Creole protested that South East Port of Spain and the hillside communities of John John and Laventille had produced people who were other than the thieves, street-rabs, hustlers, prostitutes and thugs that the rest of the society saw in their mind’s eye, whenever they bothered to think about these places. “Behind the Bridge” had become straight society’s scapegoat, persecuted to conceal the sins of straight society.

*Behind the Bridge* and Chalkdust’s *Massa Day Must Done* (1970), the first an angry and hurt indictment of society coming out of the heartland of Dr Williams’s constituency, the second a deconstructive revisitation of Dr Williams’s famous *Massa Day Done* (1961), one of those public lectures that he delivered at the University of Woodford Square at the founding of the West Indian Federation but seventeen months before the fulfilled dream of Independence, were two calypsos sung in the season of 1970 that contained deep and ominous pre-vibrations of the Black Power revolt that was to take place weeks afterwards. Chalkdust as in *Brain Drain* (1968) confronted Williams as one intellectual talking to another and argued that Williams had done little to end the days of “Massa”, who was still visible in the race and colour discrimination that marred social life and employment practices in so-called “independent” Trinidad and Tobago. In *Brain Drain* Chalkdust took issue with Williams’s complaint that teachers and nurses trained in Trinidad and Tobago had been migrating to America and Great Britain rather than contributing to the building of their own native land. The brain drain, which had existed long before Independence, has continued because successive Williams regimes had failed to enhance either the status or pay of teachers and nurses, and more ominously, as in the case of CLR James, because of Williams’s personal spite directed at an intellectual equal and political enemy.

addresses contained Williams’s erudition, controlled passion, analytic detachment, broad, deep understanding and even a certain empathy with some aspects of this revolt that seemed to threaten the foundations of the new society his three governments had worked, however inadequately, to construct. “Revolution and Dignity” began by recognizing the revolt as part of the “worldwide revolt against authority and traditional institutions and values.”(121) Like their African-American counterparts, Trinidadians and Tobagonians were rebelling against racism, systematic discrimination against people of colour, white economic control and the slowness of change.

Williams recognized “unemployment among youths and racial discrimination in employment” (122) as “specific grievances” that were part of the cause of the Trinidad and Tobago revolt, but felt that the youths had been exploited by demagogues and unsuccessful politicians. He then listed, as had become his wont, the significant achievements of his Government: political power and independence; the promotion of “a multiracial society with emphasis on 1,523 black and small farmers; the fostering of small businesses; youth training in youth camps; free secondary education brought “within the reach of thousands of disadvantaged families who couldn’t dream of it in 1956”; the localization of the public service. Williams asserted that “the insistence on Black dignity, the manifestation of Black consciousness and the demand for Black economic power” were “perfectly legitimate and... entirely in the interest of the community as a whole.”(124)

He felt, however, that the public and in particular the youth were not sufficiently aware of all the Government had done and was still doing to fulfil the legitimate objectives of Black Power, and announced the State’s intention to establish the Unemployment Levy, a surtax that had been proposed in 1965 by the then Finance Minister, A.N.R. Robinson, who had then foreseen the need to raise additional revenue for the purpose of job creation. Williams removed Robinson from the Ministry of Finance after the commercial sector complained that the Unemployment Levy would be burdensome and unfair to that class of persons. Now he was returning to the Levy.

Williams denounced the violence that had arisen during the six weeks of demonstrations – the arson, Molotov cocktails and the like that had begun to make their journey downhill from the heights and heart of Williams’s constituency, where Blakie and Leveller had with apprehension noted their presence in their calypsos of 1965 and 1966: The Doctor Ent Deh and How to Curb Delinquency. The Law, said Williams, would have to take its course against such illegitimate violence. He then retreated into a now habitual silence for the next six weeks, during which he declared a State of Emergency and the Army revolted,. In response the Protective Services under Tony May, who sardonically termed himself their “last great White Chief,” quelled a potential coup. Leading and peripheral dissidents, including students and Faculty of the University of the West Indies were detained in the Royal Jail and on Nelson Island where in 1958 Williams had secretly married a Guyanese Chinese dentist. Detainees were held for several weeks without trial, before a few of the peripheral academic ones were hauled before a Kangarooish secret tribunal; that found it impossible, without evidence, to construct the kind of case that could justify Williams’s decision to detain them.

In his second address to the nation, “The Black Power Disturbances”, (May 03, 1970), Williams shifted emphasis and discarded his mask of empathy and the placatory tones of the first address. The Trinidad movement was now characterized as primarily the work of dissident trade unionists
who, having failed in the General Elections of 1966 to gain political power by constitutional means, had attempted to do so in 1970 by “unconstitutional means and armed revolution.” (125)

The Shadow of CLR James leading its attendant imps such as George Weekes, Basdeo Panday, Trevor Sudama and others in the Workers and Farmers Party, had been totally demolished by Williams and the PNM in the 1966 General Elections. Yet here again was the Shadow, vibrant, hostile, recalcitrant and subversive as ever, manipulating gullible UWI students and lecturers, and plotting with other unnamable elements in the Army and elsewhere, to overthrow the Government: that is, Himself. Though he had known of this larger plot for some time, he had remained silent because he wanted the youth and the nation to learn a lesson through the shock and pain of harsh experience which, given their crass unawareness of reality and penchant for fantasy, was the only way they would learn anything.

I knew that much more was involved. But these young idealists had to see for themselves the ulterior motives of those who were seeking to use the slogans of black dignity and black economic power as the basis of enlisting mass support. They had to see for themselves how the Black Power slogan degenerated into race hatred and even to attacks on black businesses in Tobago and Point Fortin. Moreover, if I had told the general population of the larger plan I have indicated to you tonight, 75 percent of you would have been skeptical and would not have believed it. You had to be made to put your finger in the wound in order to believe it. It was only when the total breakdown of the trade union movement was imminent that I decided to act. (126)

The Black Power insurrection, then, was being represented by Williams as what Americans today would term “a teachable moment,” from which those willing to learn would become aware of the threat that had been posed to the community that the leader as visionary, protector and prime patriarch had striven to create. Williams, who after the 1958 Federal Elections had fulminated against the DLP’s and the Maha Sabha’s exploitation of the fears of Hindu nationalists and of the conservative coloured bourgeoisie, was now being true to his first vision, by exposing the corresponding dangerous ideology of African nationalism as well as the ever-present and subversive Shadow of a threatening Communism/Communism that had remained un-exorcised even by that distinguished cadre of ghostbusters, the 1963-64 Mbanefo Commission of Enquiry into Communism and Subversion. Williams the Prime Professor of the near defunct University of Woodford Square, had returned to castigate his pupils who were at one and the same time innocent and gullible UWI students and Faculty needing protection from those who would take advantage of their naive idealism, and a cynical and skeptical general public who he knew would question and critique his interpretation of events.

This second address to the nation was a masterpiece of self-justification and was meant to reassure the nation that their leader was still in complete control of the accumulated chaos of fourteen years, and in the process of resuming what had begun to come across (to calypsonians at least) as his lapsed mission of 1956. His amazing explanation of why he had finally acted, that is, to save a disintegrating Trade Union movement from destruction, was almost comical in its distortion of motive. Williams, besieged throughout his reign by myriad strikes, would have welcomed a disempowered Trade Union Movement. What had begun to happen by March 1970 was the coalition of the two largest unions – the Oilfields Workers’ Union and the Sugar Workers’ union who had planned to demonstrate their solidarity at the coming Labour Day celebrations of May 01,
1970. Williams nipped this intention in the bud by declaring the State of Emergency on April 21st, 1970.

The State of Emergency put paid to such massive public demonstrations as the funeral of Basil Davis – an immeasurably large procession of, some estimated, 50,000 people – or the February 14th march to Caroni which was a quixotic attempt to unify the national community under the banner “Africans and Indians Unite”: one of the failed objectives of Williams’s PNM. The same excited sense of imminent change that had possessed crowds of 20,000 or more to attend Williams’s 1955 lectures in the University of Woodford Square was now electrifying the even larger crowds of 1970. Williams, an economic historian sensitive to numbers and statistics, had read the signs. Time and only partial success had rendered him anachronistic. He needed to remind the now subdued (cowed) public of all he had already done for them, and to refurbish his image of provider, protector and patriarch-in-charge. He promised to strengthen national security by reorganizing and arming the loyalist majority of the Army; to support unequivocally and positively encourage “the claims of black people to social justice, economic dignity and a fuller life;” (127) to revise the current Development Plan and to reorganize the administrative arm of the Government and the Civil Service.

His third address, “National Reconstruction,” was delivered on 30th June, 1970, that is, full seven weeks after his second. It outlined the new measures the Government meant to adopt as it resumed its agenda of nation-building. Its title, “National Reconstruction”, soon to become the keywords of a new political party that would emerge out of the power struggle within the PNM after Williams’s sudden demise in 1981, indicated Williams’s recognition that 1970 had signaled a deep social fracture in dire need of repair. True, much had been achieved since Independence. The State had fully or partially nationalized key resources: the Hilton Hotel, Orange Grove Sugar Company, the new National Commercial Bank, Public Utilities such as electricity, water and sewerage, transport, Radio Guardian and Trinidad and Tobago Television. He then outlined the changes that he meant to make in both the ownership of and strategy for collecting revenue from the Petroleum Industry and announced an intention to rationalize and restructure Caroni Limited, and to make available to workers and trade union members a proportion of shares currently held by the State in various enterprises.

Important for the purposes of this essay was the Government’s plan to finance a programme of vocational education to provide trainees for newly arising jobs: the Mighty Prowler’s suggestion in Build More Trade Schools (1969). Williams announced:

> The third area selected in this programme of job creation is vocational education. Here the emphasis is not so much on the immediate creation of a new job but of training the graduates of the primary schools, the secondary school graduates with an insufficient number of General Certificate of Education passes and ultimately the graduates of the new Junior Secondary schools, to provide them with additional skills needed in this technological age to secure, at home and abroad, the job opportunities which are readily available. (128)

Aware that the spirit of voluntarism upon which the PNM had been built had all but died in less than a generation, Williams tried to rekindle it in his new effort at enhancing community via education.
I call on the citizen with higher educational qualifications, whether university or professional or technical, including ‘A’ levels, to come forward and offer voluntary service of so many hours per week to assist the less fortunate in their educational development, whether in community centre, trade centre, or youth centre, in adult education programmes whether of the academic or the technical type. Who will volunteer? (129) With an evangelical zeal rooted in the memory of his own youthful idealism Williams, resurrecting the near-defunct spirit of the PEM, sought simultaneously to recapture the past and “refashion futures like a healer’s hand.” (130) He called on doctors, nurses, the business community, housewives and young female secondary school graduates to become involved in whatever way they could, in a sort of home grown Peace Corps that he envisaged as a counter and reversal of the wave of anarchism and negativity that had overtaken and almost submerged an all-but-lost new generation.

If Williams’s clarion call was heard, it evoked only an ambivalent response in the breast of two of the most rooted calypsonians of that day and this: the “Blood Brothers” Black Stalin and Lord Valentino. Stalin’s *National Reconstruction* (1971) is subtly deconstructive rather than positively enthusiastic in its response to Williams’s addresses to the nation.

If we are going to rebuild the nation
We must first think about what break it down
We just can’t put it back on the same foundation
For to put it back on the same foundation
Will sooner or later mean more destruction
And we just can’t afford another February Revolution
And when we embark on national reconstruction
We also need mental reconstruction
Financial, educational reconstruction,
For our country is a ship we don’t want to sink
So for reconstruction, we must stop to think
That a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. (131)

Posing the question of why the old foundation crumbled, Stalin challenges Williams’s portrait of the youthful demonstrators as naive idealists misled by subversives, politically-minded trade unionists together with the rump of mid-sixties communists: the C. L. R. James disciples that having hounded in the fifties and defeated in the sixties, he thought he had scattered for good. Stalin rather focuses on the desperation that has arisen among ordinary folk, envious of the State’s sponsorship of foreign interests while locals were unable to survive in their own native land. He asked:

Whether, as they say, it was some politician
Who want to take over by revolution
And want to move the system from Democracy to Socialism
as Williams had asserted in his second and third television addresses:
Or whether Trinidadians find they ketching hell
And all them settlers doing well
So settlers and Democracy could go to hell. (132)

The nation’s proletariat and idealistic youths, sufficiently literate to have familiarised themselves with Fanon’s native-versus-settler discourse on colonialism and neo-colonialism, have not been
misled by designing men, but have simply followed the logic of their own day-to-day dialectic of ketch-ass to its inevitable climax.

Stalin next tackles the issue of why Trinidadians and Tobagonians have responded so overwhelmingly to the rhetoric of African-American Black Power. Williams had in his first address viewed this phenomenon with a certain sympathetic understanding, but in his second one had dismissed the Trinidad and Tobago movement as a mere copy of the worst and more degenerative aspects of its American prototype. Stalin again assumes a slightly different position.

Trinidad was known as such a place
Where a man of any race
Black or white, your colour was no disgrace
Then quite recently it took a drastic turn
The talk in town was, “Black Power! Burn! Burn! Burn!”
How this thing come about is what we first got to learn
Whether, as they say, “We in the Caribbean Isles
Are all Americanized”
And what happening to the Blacks in America
Is the same in the West Indies and South Africa
So for once black people are getting together (133)

The second segment of this quotation interrogates and undermines the veracity of the first, particularly the cliché entrenched in the National Anthem, “Here every creed and race find an equal place.” Trinidad’s social history, as Williams himself asserts in Education in the British West Indies and History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago, has been bedevilled by issues of race and colour from that foundational moment when the Cedula of 1783 assigned considerable acreage to French Creole immigrants on a strict basis of race and colour, thereby establishing an as yet unbroken bond between race, colour and property. The National Anthem, then, articulates a desire rather than states a fact.

The Americanization of the Caribbean Isles can mean what its critics have said it means: engulfment of Caribbean cultures, lifestyles and identities in the greater metropolitan deluge: the colonial mimicry of the Continent by the Archipelago. Or Americanization can mean genuine recognition of a common history of enslavement, discrimination and struggle, one that binds diasporan Africans to each other and to their equally colonized counterparts on the African Continent. It wasn’t that Williams had failed to recognize this neo-Garveyite aspect of Black Power, but that he could see only the danger of affirming Black nationalism in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Trinidad and Tobago, and he had tried, as any British colonial Governor might have, to stifle what he had admitted to be the legitimate protest of Black people coming into consciousness. Stalin warns:
And if one don’t want people to demonstrate
Their protest right now you should investigate
And if you don’t, anyone can tell you what’s the nation’s fate. (134) 65
Williams claimed that he had tolerated demonstrations and protests until they turned violent as seasoned subverts manipulated naïve youths and imposed a sinister agenda on the protests. Stalin rebuts: Williams’s attempt to wrestle with the tough issues had come too late. He had, in fact, chosen the negative route of
trying to put a lid on the exploding protest – a lid that would prove inadequate, because both the people and their dissent were desperately serious. …maybe the people down here in this island
Are happy people, as said by everyone
So they march through Caroni in the hot sun for fun!
Or maybe their cries for help are over the hill
And on promises made they are waiting still
And won’t stop protesting until they are all fulfilled. (135)

It is implied that the comprehensive measures outlined by Williams in his speech about “National Reconstruction” may be – just may be – another pile of promises like the previous ones: that Williams’s true strength lay in planning and promising, rather than in sound and timely implementation.

Valentino’s No Revolution (1971) was a more direct and devastating response to Williams’s addresses to the nation: the first one in particular. It began by seeming to accept Williams’s declaration that he had deliberately refrained from either commenting on or restricting the demonstrations because of his belief in people’s fundamental right to demonstrate and to express dissent. Valentino claims, however, to have foreseen Williams’s true intention to employ his power to crush dissent.

When I heard you address the nation
I know what was your intention
But some of the powers you exercise
Unfortunately I must criticize. (136, 66)

Like Stalin, Valentino rejected Williams’s thesis that the protesting youths had been misled and taken over by the older, craftier trade unionists and the opportunistic Defence Force. Like Stalin, who spoke of “settlers” – presumably white foreigners – doing well at the expense of natives, Valentino provided a concrete picture of the neo-colonial State as seen from the vantage point of the citizen “beneath the underdog.” [Charles Mingus]. He talks back to Williams, the former Professor of Woodford Square, now faded into a monotonous mutter on radio, and a ghost image on the State-owned and State-monopolised Trinidad and Tobago Television.

You must be aware
That the Black consciousness is here.
I further declare
Is time that we get an equal share
Is black blood, black sweat and black tears
But is white profits
Because all through the years Is the white man reaping the benefits
But now we are coming down from the shelves
And we are getting to know ourselves
So let us hail Geddes Granger
For bringing all black people together (137)

The Black Power Movement, thus portrayed, was a direct growth out of the national movement of the people as Williams had originally perceived it. That is, it was an anti-imperialist movement. The
difference was that Williams in “Politics and Culture” had envisaged a multi-ethnic indigenous movement of people beginning from and linked together by the common nakedness and virtual emptiness of their colonial heritage. Valentino’s movement of ‘black people’ was, at its core Afro-centric, though it had never shut the door against inclusion of the rest of the non-white lower class, and there were Indians who marched with the National Joint Action Committee, some in the front line. Valentino portrayed the Black Power Movement as a people’s movement – one that had developed clear perspectives about what it was struggling against. (67)

Because the fight was against racial prejudice,
The imperialist, the capitalist,
Yet some ignorant people talk ’bout communism
We didn’t want all this set of burning down
And the smashing of all them stores in town
Dr Williams we didn’t want no revolution (138)

The “ignorant people” included spokespersons for the Roman Catholic Church, the soon-to-be-disgraced John O’Halloran, Williams’s bestman at the Nelson Island wedding, and the Chambers of Commerce. Valentino admitted of no connection between the protesters and the looters and associates who emerged, on the whole, after the State of Emergency was declared; or with the Marxist ideologues who, waiting in the wings, would emerge substantially during the decade of the seventies. Valentino proclaimed; not Marxism; but a simple rooted “ideology” devoid of any sort of dialectical abstraction.

A citizen
Should withstand the wrong things in his country
Regardless of what happens:
That is my ideology (139)

Williams viewed such clear clean simplicity as naiveté and justified his eventual use of repressive force on the grounds that the Black Power leaders had lost control of their movement which had turned treasonous and anarchic; Valentino painted a different picture in which the anarchy was unleashed after the Police brutalized members of the dissenting public and incarcerated leaders of the movement, and he issued a direct warning to Williams the professor, historian and maximum political leader:

But justice must be done, otherwise history
Is going to punish you worse than you punish we. (140)

1970 was, among other things, a face-off between generations as well as between university-trained and patronizing intellectuals epitomized by Eric Williams, and the street-bred, organic Barber Green intellectuals of the Valentino/Stalin type, whose voices constantly ‘talked back’ to the professors. In Barking Dogs (1973), Valentino confronts Williams directly as one intellectual talking to and demanding conversation and dialogue with his equal.

Now this word is me and I am this Word
So let my voice be heard
Fix your hearing aid and hear what I say
Wipe your glasses and see things my way (141)
Such dialogue between generations and intelligences did not take place in the years following 1970, though Williams tried courageously to consider some of the warnings and to amend defects that Valentino and other calypsonians revealed in their searching and at times merciless scrutiny of the last ten years of his reign.

Valentino, reflecting in 1986 on the already ‘forgotten’ decade of the seventies, remembered that

A lot of men lived fast and died very young
In this historic decade
When Randy B used to come to town
With his flying squad on parade
The emphasis was on education
And when the young folks got too bright
The same institution
Turn around and out their light (142)

1970, then, was a turning point, a liminal year, a boundary marking the closure of a cycle; a year of reversal when Williams as maximum leader and prime educator was forced – according to his deposition – to silence the de facto spokespersons for a young generation bred, to some extent, on his ideas and his examples of defiant resistance. It was the year when the radical, national, objective historian and protest leader turned around to stifle the protest of the children produced by the very education that he had promoted. In 1970, Williams was stunned by the magnitude and irreverence of a young generation of the semi-educated for whom he had become a new version of the old colonial Governor. By 1981, he would withdraw from life bewildered by the protests of public servants, nurses and teachers, whose existence in those professions had undoubtedly been due to expanded opportunities created by five successive PNM regimes under his leadership.

IX

The Final Decade

It is not clear how many individuals or institutions answered Williams’s fervent call to voluntary service during the seventies, or the impact of their dedication on the emerging national community which Derek Walcott in The Charlatan described as being “divided by class, united by bacchanal.” (143) Calypsos during the 1970s, the final decade of Dr. Williams’s life, continued to monitor a society that seemed to be more deeply in crisis as its economy flourished during the ‘Oil-Boom’ years 1974 – 1980.

Calypsos such as Relator’s Deaf Panmen (1974), Sparrow’s Ah Digging Horrors (1975), Valentino’s Dis Place Nice (1975), Barking Dogs (1973), Chalkdust’s Ah Put on Meh Guns Again (1976), De Spirit Gone (1978), Maestro’s Mr Trinidad (1974), Stalin’s Breakdown Party (1980), among a host of others, paint a consistent portrait of a national community that is spinning out of control in most departments of human concourse, even as it is acquiring the means to solve some of its financial problems.

Calypso discourse on education and community during Williams’s final decade reformulates ideas that Williams had articulated several years before: more vocational schools, revised and locally
oriented syllabi. In his *The Answer to Black Power* (1971), Chalkdust could, for example, be repeating Williams’s address on “National Reconstruction” when he advises:

Doctor, the answer to stop Black Power
Is for you to educate
All the young people of the State
Doctor, the answer to stop Black Power
Teach the young ones before it’s too late.
You don’t need no dam GCE
To learn carpentry or joinery (144)

It is Prowler’s message in *Build More Trade Schools* and Williams’s theme in *Education in the British West Indies*.

Sparrow’s *Children Must Learn* (1972) is, like his *Education* (1967), an exhortation to parents and children to support the agenda of the State.

Parents of our nation
Have got an obligation
That is to take proper care of their child
Soon they will be men and women
Soon you will be ole and bend
So teach them the correct way, don’t let them run wild (145)

The parents’ responsibility is to teach the children “the difference between right and wrong,” “the light of true love,” thrift, self-reliance, independence, kindness, fair play, generosity and the virtue of hard work. All of these qualities, taught and inscribed in the home, will “make our land a much better place to be.” Education in the home will become the foundation for a better nation. This sermon has all the moral earnestness that one might expect from a “peripatetic lecturer” of the late 1950’s, or an acolyte inspired by Williams’s call in 1970 for a renewal of voluntary service.

The final stanza enjoins the parents to “teach them that drugs, rum and crime ain’t no friend,” and signals the growing concern of citizens with these three enemies of a healthy nation. Drugs, alcohol and crime were to become the major agencies of community destruction in this post-Independence Caribbean. They steadily designed the curriculum of the street, competing with and in many places displacing the curricula of the home and school. Sparrow in 1974 sings *No Future*, a calypso that warns young people that drug addiction will destroy their chance of success in life, while Bomber laments *The Crime Wave in Trinidad*. Wearing an academic gown and mortar-board to deliver his sermon at what had become the ‘University’ of Queen’s Park Savannah, Dimanche Gras 1974, Sparrow exhorts the nation to abandon all forms of uncivil behaviour and to remember *We Pass That Stage*. So mesmerized were the calypso judges by this back-in-times mimicry of the professorial pose, that they failed utterly to recognize the compelling originality of Shadow’s *Bass Man*, with its image of a man pressured and driven by a demon of rhythm, a man in his head, that he needed to kill.

On the other hand, Sparrow wore a different mask in *Drunk and Disorderly* (1972) and *Rope* (1972). In *Drunk and Disorderly*, the protagonist celebrates his patently self-destructive, anti-social behaviour. He’s always under Police arrest, spends his week-ends in jail, has exhausted the patience
of friends and family, and is always short of money. Neither his anarchic behaviour nor his self-
lionisation could make sense to the narrator of *Children Must Learn*. Did Sparrow’s celebration of
such contradictory roles – moralising professor/preacher, rabid self-glorying alcoholic, -- suggest a
contradiction in the actor, or in his audience who relished both supreme moralist and supreme
amoralist, or the bewildering society that has produced both masks?

In “*Rope*” the protagonist is a peacekeeper and peacemaker who takes it on himself to make the
streets safe for masqueraders on Carnival day, by taming a band of ruffians whose aim is simply to
cause trouble by violently disrupting the performance of other players. The narrator, something of
an old-time bad john – one of whose responsibilities was to keep peace on his block, – threatens to
meet violence with superior violence (“rope”) in putting down a younger generation of ruffians,
bred now on the amoral and bloody Spaghetti Westerns. There is a clash of generations and styles
on the streets, a collision of types of anarchic behaviour.

The very next year Sparrow in *Ah Digging Horrors* (1975) catalogues a score of signifiers of a
society that has gone out-of-joint and out-of-control and concludes:

- It’s a free-for-all here, I’m afraid
- I believe we need psychiatric aid
- Unscrupulous employers and unscrupulous workers couldn’t care less
- This place in a mess (146)

Clearly the peace-keeping bad john of three years earlier, the community leader of an older
generation, has failed in his attempt to control the turbulence of the age. The entire nation is
manifesting the same anomic in which civic existence has been reduced to “a free-for-all.” Williams
had in his Independence addresses and in *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (1962)
identified savage individualism and an absence of commitment to any greater concept of
community or any larger entity than self, as the worst obstacles in the pathway towards the
intelligent, aware, self-confident, rational, balanced and altruistic nation that he envisaged and to
whose construction he had dedicated his life.

*Ah Digging Horrors* describes a nation in which such individualism as Williams deplored has
intensified and broken through all restraining barriers. Such anomie is recognized by Sparrow to be
an illness of mind and spirit; maybe even madness. External manifestations of the insane society
include:

- Looting, shooting, rioting and raping
- Nurses aiding mad people in escaping (147)

“Resentment and hate,” stress taking its toll on body and mind, confusion in the domain of labour,
“police spreading brutality in the land” no doubt in recognition of the principle affirmed in *Rope*
and earlier bad john calypsos, that illegal violence needs to be tamed with greater and legally-
approved violence.

The theme of “madness” or of “total disorder” would become prevalent in calypsos throughout the
seventies and beyond. Chalkdust, assuming the persona of psychiatrist Dr John Bharat, declares in
*Somebody Mad* (1972) that the signs and symptoms suggest that the society has gone mad
because its political leader, “somebody up in Whitehall,” is mad. More seriously, Chalkdust in 1985
reads the signs again and concludes *Port of Spain Gone Insane*. A sane, level-headed calypsonian emerges singing under the soubriquet of “Crazy”. A DJ calls himself “Mad Man Maddy”. Another calypsonian begins his career in the tents in 1971 singing as the Shadow, and specializing in themes of madness, death, hell, violent bizarre revenge, the notion of demonic possession by a subterranean spirit of controlling rhythm. Reviewing at the end of the decade some of the exasperating and incongruous features of his society, Sparrow sings *You Mad* in 1979. Delamo in his reading of the signs, sings of the Apocalypse, the last days of Sodom and Gomorrah, the spiritual warfare of some impending Armageddon. (148)

In the midst of such mental confusion Dr Williams’s role of teacher, professor, father, guide and guardian of the prematurely aging nation began to seem irrelevant, his vision and mission quaint old-time things. His subjects openly referred to him as “Deafy.” Calypsoes on education such as Brother Mudada’s *Papers No Use* (1976), Explainer’s *Strings* (1980) and Terror’s *Madness* (1978) provide reasons why Williams’s project in education seems to have failed. Mudada asserts that one’s certificates are “no use” if one does not have a patron to promote one’s cause. This is true, he affirms, whether one is applying for a job with the Government or Private Sector.

They say we don’t have unity  
But to that I disagree  
Plenty people in the country  
Join themselves in one big family  
You look round for employment  
Private sector or Government  
You now in distress  
I’m going to give you a tip on the whole process  
They want:  
Ten applications  
Twenty recommendations  
Fifty O -Level  
You got to show them that you really capable  
But in spite of all your paper  
And you ain’t have a heavy godfather  
The papers no use, darling, no use, no use. (149)

Finding employment in the real world requires not only abundant qualifications, but “connections”. The narrator cites the cliché: “It’s not what you know, but who you know,” and describes how this process is causing frustration, sending some people mad, destroying such unity as already exists throughout the country and forcing many qualified persons to migrate, join the “brain-drain” about which Williams used to complain, and contribute their labour towards the building of another country’s economy. It may well be that Williams had by the mid-seventies reconciled himself to the brain-drain. In the third address of 1970, “National Reconstruction” he spoke about his Government’s plan to improve and expand vocational education to provide high school graduates “with additional skills needed in this technological age to secure, at home and abroad, the job opportunities which are readily available” (150) [my emphasis]

Mudada, however, is saying that after two decades of political leadership, Williams had neither reformed nor significantly modified the pernicious colonial system of patronage and clientelism.
Williams had noted in *Education in the British West Indies* (151) that the colonial system was characterized by restricted educational opportunities reinforced by race, class, colour and caste discrimination in the narrow job market. If one by miracle or natural intelligence excelled in the quest for certificates, one would still need a patron to gain employment congruent with one’s qualification. Mudada’s *Papers No Use* indicates that far from having disappeared, the system of patronage/clientelism has become entrenched in the practice of the neo-colonial State itself, leaving Trinidad and Tobago in the contradictory situation of its Prime Minister, on the one hand, haranguing citizens to be idealistic, patriotic and zealous in their efforts to create a united national community, and on the other retaining systems based, not on merit, but on the relationship between patron and client, thus undermining such trust and unity as already exist in the nation between individuals and ethnic groups.

Of particular importance is the connection Mudada sees between such systemic discrimination and the alienation unto madness of the victim of discrimination. Two years later, the Mighty Terror in *Madness* (1978) argued that more than narcotics, it is frustration at not being able to acquire ‘suitable’ jobs that is driving young men mad. Youths are going mad, not because of illiteracy, but because of dysfunctional education. “Youths with O Level/on the projects pushing shovel” (152) suffer a crushing sense of thwarted expectations. They have followed Sparrow’s advice in *Education* (1967) and gone to school and learned well, yet they can find no suitable work. They have believed Williams’s great message of Independence (1962), about the future of the nation residing in their schoolbags; and though these youths are too young to have read *Education in the British West Indies*, citizens of their parents’ and of Terror’s generation would have ingested Williams’s most fervently preached message since 1946, about the necessity of educating to suit the needs of the community, and about the urgent need to either replace or blend academic with vocational education.

Yet, Terror, and perhaps the great majority of his generation, had in their heart of hearts never accepted Williams’s radical recommendations about destroying the “aristocratic” and prestigious Grammar School curriculum which had, as they could clearly recognize, produced the entire coterie of scholarship-winners both on the Government and Opposition benches, who were now their neo-colonial rulers. Thus, unlike Prowler who in 1969 argued the need for more trade schools, Terror despair of a solution to the burgeoning lunacy that he claims has overtaken the nation’s youth. He reiterates and holds up to gloomy scrutiny the mantra of his generation.

Educate the youth
That’s the policy
This is very good
Surely no one would disagree
When they’re capable
What’s next to be done?
Is either a job or a profession
They can’t get a job
So they start to lime
That is a sign
Education a waste of time
I think it is sad,
Terror describes a process of spiritual degeneration from disillusion, to emptiness, despair and finally madness, gently directing his complaint in a fourth stanza omitted from the recorded version of *Madness*, “to whom it may concern;” that is Dr Williams, the psychiatrist in charge of the nation’s bewildered mind; the genius who had all the answers even before the questions were asked. Terror wants whoever might be in charge to create the type of job that would produce more Dr Williamses, more certified leaders and men-in-charge. His alienated youth must be transformed into “a man suitable for an election.” (154)

X
Education and Community in a Time of Narcotics

There was a state beyond mere madness into which Terror’s mad youths and quite a few older men, some of them disillusioned revolutionaries, slipped. Drug addiction whose destructiveness had been recognized since a committee including Archbishop Pantin and senior policeman Russell Toppin had investigated the narcotics trade in 1969, became one of the major social issues of the 1980’s. Calypsonians of the 1980’s and 1990’s sang of the deviance of schoolgirls like the protagonist of Gypsy’s *Susan* (1984) or Mastertone’s *Oh Theresa* (1989). These young women, like the youthmen since the mid-sixties, had succumbed to drugs, alcohol and sex and had become members of Shortpants’s *Lost Generation* (1985/86) and Elia Andall’s *Missing Generation* (1996). Andall, indeed, singing with the apocalyptic gravity of the *fin de siècle*, echoed Roberta Flack’s *Tradewinds of Our Times* in her belief that if the elders didn’t find their “missing” children, the children would surely find (and visit retribution on) their elders.

Calypsonians like the Mighty Duke, who in the seventies believed that salvation would be gained by teaching black children about their African ancestors and those other descendants of Africa who achieved greatness in various fields (Duke, *Teach the Children*, 1976), became warners against the threat of narcotics (*Say No To Drugs*, 1987). Sparrow, who playfully (?) celebrated the illusions of the street in *Rum Is Macho* (1979) was in 1985 pleading and preaching that *Coke Is Not It*, addressing his sermon to “the children” and naming Keith Smith the celebrated journalist from Laventille as a recovering addict who had written against the use of cocaine. As a still iconic grassroots presence, Sparrow again tried to assert his moral authority. Older than Smith, he was wise man, elder and warner. “Tell the children that Sparrow say, don’t use coke.” He noted that many people in the country had been having mental problems which he attributed to an increase in the use of narcotics.

Lord Shorty achieved great but fragile celebrity in the early 1970’s, but ruined himself financially after he wasted his earnings from the popular *Endless Vibrations* (1974) in too fine living. He then retreated to the woods of Piparo with his large, beautiful family, reconstructed his life and resurfaced in the late seventies as a holy man, a singer of Jamoo (Jah’s music) and calypso’s chief admonisher of everything and everyone. He admonished Sparrow against continuing to promote himself as a sex symbol: something that Shorty himself had because of age, experience and
enlightenment, ceased doing. He attacked the new wave Soca singers along with some of their seniors whom he condemned in Latrine Singers for singing excrement. But most of all, he warned the nation’s children – over whom he assumed fatherhood – to avoid the snares of the Devil who was now on a mission to destroy the nation and the people of the world, in his form as a vendor of cocaine.

Shame and disgrace awaited any member of the human race who allowed themselves to be deceived by Lucifer’s “bag of white powder.” Branded by calypsonians as “the white lady” and as “pretty Lucifer in powder form,” cocaine was unmasked as an enemy of humanity. Ras Shorty I’s Watch Out My Children (1997), its chorus in one version rendered in English, French, Spanish and Hindi, became approved by the United Nations in 2002 as a regional anthem against drug, particularly cocaine abuse. Like David Rudder’s (Gregory Ballantyne composed) The Future Belongs to Me, Shorty’s anthem was frequently played in schools throughout the nation and should certainly have influenced the life-decisions of thousands of the nation’s children. Both are powerful sermons. Shorty’s anthem warns the children to be vigilant and strong against temptation, while Rudder/Ballantyne instructs them about the need to “take full responsibility for all that goes down inside of” them, which one female blogger has interpreted to mean alcohol, drugs and semen.

David Rudder and Ras Shorty I along with Sparrow, Duke, Explainer (Free Base Is Waste, 1981) and other calypsonians too numerous to mention here, have opened up wide possibilities for the incorporation of ‘consciousness-raising’ calypsos into say, the Social Studies syllabus of the nation’s Secondary Schools. Since too, in both the Rudder and the Ras Shorty I DVD’s the message is danced by the very young people at whom it is directed, these performances of drug-awareness calypsos are examples of how contemporary popular culture might be positively employed to strengthen community, rather than contribute to its decay. During the late 1990’s or in the early years of the new millennium, the United States Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago along with local agencies, sponsored a drug awareness drive for young adults at whose centre was a competition for schools in which calypsos, rapso songs and other types of performance were directed against the idea and reality of drug-abuse. Here the children themselves were performing their own songs – at least that was the objective of the competition – and launching their own fight against the Lucifer of their generation.

The death of Dr Williams and the aging of the two major post-war political communities; have contributed to a situation of flux, uncertainty, confusion, instability and in the worst instances, anomie in the social and political life of Trinidad and Tobago. After Williams’s cremation and the scattering of his ashes in the Gulf of Paria, Penguin, a teacher and calypsonian envisaged the deceased and now released Doc mocking at his former nation, led now by George Chambers, a graduate of one of the old-time private high schools, ”Osmond” where in the fifties the PEM used to conduct some of their week-end lectures. Osmond was not QRC and Chambers was not Eric Williams; and though even Williams had after 1970 lost some of the respect of the people he had once “mesmerized” with his brightness, and was regularly referred to as “Deafy” by calypsonians and the public at large, nothing could match the contempt that was directed at George Chambers, who was renamed “Dummy” and made the object of every malign political joke that one could imagine.
Calypsonian and policeman “Plainclothes” sang the popular *Chambers Done See* (1984) a calypso that epitomised the public scapegoating of Chambers who had become the national *bobolee*: the Good Friday effigy of Judas Iscariot that is dragged through the streets or hung up on light poles and beaten into rags and stuffing by the still indignant devout. On its surface, *Chambers Done See* is a praise song to Chambers for his superior vision that enables him to foresee whatever is about to happen in the country. In reality this song mocks Chambers for his lack of the kind of academic qualifications that Williams in his 1956 lecture on Federation had presented as the criteria for contemporary political leadership everywhere in the world. (155) Chambers, graduate of non-prestigious Osmond and of no University, could not satisfy the criteria laid down by his predecessor and though he took the tough practical decisions that Williams refused to take, to reduce public expenditure in the recession that followed the oil boom of the seventies, he would be accused by calypsonian Gypsy in *The Sinking Ship* (1986) of having incompetently steered Eric Williams’s serenely sailing “luxury liner” into rough seas and a destructive hurricane.

Penguin imagined Williams gazing at the now troubled nation from a darkened distance and chanting his message of triumph using the traditional schoolchild’s cry:

Betty goatie, betty goatie
I doing well
Is *dem* in hell
Betty goatie, betty goatie
Tell all *dem* cross
Is *dem* who loss. (156)

It isn’t clear whether Williams is throwing his taunts from a less tormented circle of hell to which he has quickly accommodated himself, or from heaven, where with the mean-spirited sanctified, he looks down on his former colleagues who are still trapped in vice, error and confusion, and laughs at their helplessness. With Williams’s death, the old PNM that he had built disintegrated and has remained fragile after several attempts to reform and reconstruct it, including the apparent consolidation following victory at the 1991, 2002 and 2007 elections.

The traditional Opposition which has campaigned under several masks – DLP, ULF, NAR, UNC and the current PP – has been equally unstable even though its periods of electoral success, 1986 – 1991, 1995 – 2000, 2000 – 2001, and 2010 have been accompanied by promises of consolidation. What has been happening for the three decades since Williams’s death has been a drama of anomie enacted in a theatre that has offered the anguish of five general elections over the last eleven years (2000 – 2011), and a kaleidoscope of ever-shifting alliances, the internal fragmentation of major political parties, the presence of two or even three generations of post-Independence voters, unassimilated into the still-remembered, still-standing structures of the termite-ridden traditional parties.

US-style Internet campaigning, the massive and costly use of advertising agencies, radio and television sound-bytes, and a gimmicky of technicolour high-tec feting on the hustings have utterly changed the Williams style of University of Woodford Square lecturing. I once heard Basdeo Panday remark vis-a-vis the proper rhetorical approach to political campaigning:

> You should never forget that many people who come to public meetings do not come there to listen to you because they support you. They come there to be
entertained; and sometimes I’m tempted to believe that one of the major reasons why the PNM won the last election [i.e the 1991 elections] was because they had better entertainers on their public platform than we. (157)

While political actors like Panday, some of them substantial intellectuals, strove to convince audiences of their oneness with the people by bringing Calypso, Soca, Chutney entertainment to the utterly vacuous harlequinade of the campaign trail, committed and conscious calypsonians proffered the public a severity of seeing: the bitter, harsh laughter of Cro Cro’s *Three Bo’ Rats* (1988) and *Corruption in Common Entrance* (1988); the acrid contempt of Sugar Aloes’s *This Stage is Mine* (1999) or *Ah Ready to Go*; the cool mockery of Chalkdust’s *Chauffeur Wanted* (1988) or Luta’s quietly scathing response, *Good Driving* (1994); the unmasked violence of Watchman’s *Positive Vibrations* (1989) and *Attack with Full Force* (1991). Public dismay at the treacherous deviousness of almost everybody is articulated in Cro Cro’s *It’s Amazing How People Could Change* (aka *How Man Does Change*) (1998) and in Chalkdust’s *Too Much Parties* (1998). Both of these calypsos comment on the bewildering shifts in political allegiance among notable politicians, some of whom may have been members of three or four political parties over two decades.

Cro Cro’s mockery and condemnation extend to his fellow calypsonian Chalkdust, who seems to have abandoned the militancy of the seventies when he poured scorn annually on Eric Williams and his policies, and acquiesced with Panday’s UNC (United National Congress) in its efforts to contain and if possible, smother political commentary in calypsos. Chalkdust, who in his other life was Dr Hollis Liverpool, had been appointed Director of Culture and was bound to follow Government policy to the letter and therefore compromise his posture or position as a fearless critic of the Government of the day. The conscious singers fought many a skirmish among themselves over the issue of who was more ‘authentic’ than whom. In addition, Boyie Mitchell in *The Way to Go* (1991) exposed calypsonians themselves as dishonest, devious and underhand in their dealing with each other. Individualistic and envious of each other’s success, calypsonians indulged in all sorts of nastiness as they sought to undermine each other in competitions. Boyie’s protagonist who claimed to be repeating the advice of seasoned calypsonians concerning what methods to adopt as a newcomer to calypso competition if he wanted to succeed, refused to sink to the required level.

The general sense of flux that marked the end of the PNM cycle, together with the only rickety emergence of a new structure or order in either of the major parties deepened the chasm of mistrust that had separated from each other races, classes and those formless configurations that drifted between race and class. This mistrust could be seen in the reception that a song like Brother Marvin’s *Jahaji Bhai* (1996) received from sectors of the Trinidad public. Inspired by the 150th anniversary celebrations of Indian Arrival in Trinidad and Tobago which had taken place the previous year (1995), Brother Marvin, whose grandparents were African and Indian and whose wife was Indian, asked Afro-Creoles to recognize the Indian as brother, fellow traveller and worker in a land that was “fifty percent African and fifty percent Indian.” He thus shut out from inclusion more than 20 percent of the population who were of different ethnicities – Caucasian, Chinese, Syrian, Lebanese etc – or of mixed blood, like his daughter, Sparkles. The broad aim of *Jahaji Bhai* was to celebrate racial integration, but given the atmosphere of dislocation and mistrust, that calypso succeeded only in exposing the real fragmentation that existed in the national community at that moment when the PNM consolidation of 1991 seemed already to have fallen apart in the narrow electoral loss of 1995. For seeming to place emphasis on Indo-Trinidadian progress at the
expense of an Afro-Creole Other; for seeming, indeed, to ‘Other’ Afro-Creoles while giving voice
and self-identity to the Indo-Creoles, Marvin was roasted in 1997 by nineteen calypsonians who all
took issue with Jahaji Bhai.

Basdeo Panday portrayed his coalition of convenience - i.e. ULF + NAR + DAC + 2 PNM frog-hoppers
– as a government of “national unity.” Calypsonians articulated the nation’s mistrust of such a claim
in the calypso season of 1996 when Chalkdust’s National Unity, Delamo’s Stay Together Trinbago
and Watchman’s My People, either sought to expose the falsehood of Panday’s claim or desperately
preached unity in face of compelling evidence of social and political dividedness on the grounds of
racial difference. “National unity,” a myth in 1958, remained such in 1979 when Stalin sang
Caribbean Unity and was accused by a UWI professor of being sexist and racist; in 1988 when Cro
Cro sang Corruption in Common Entrance, in 1997 when Gypsy sang Little Black Boy and in 1998
when Iwer George sang Bottom in the Road. Each of these calypsos evoked weeks of controversy
as the competing ethnic communities affirmed their differences and rejected the whole notion of
national unity. The nation according to one bard had achieved not change, but exchange and
a simple rearrangement of equally untrustworthy and self-seeking leaders.

Consider, for example, a calypso such as Lady B’s Curry and Salt (1996) whose assumptions were
that with the coming to power of the Indo-centred UNC, Afro-Creole children were going to suffer
in schools at the hands of racially-biased Indian teachers. Or consider the equally dreadful
assumption of Singing Sandra who one decade later voiced her mistrust of Indian doctors in
Trinidad and Tobago hospitals who she thought were on a mission to harm black people. Such
calypsos were the product of hysteria, intensified by what was seen as Black peoples’ loss of
representation in Parliament. Tigress called in 1996 for “the drum” as an antidote to the pervasive
advance of “the roti and rum.”

Earlier than this, less than two years after the NAR’s 1986 33-3 devastation of Chambers’ PNM, Cro
Cro sang Corruption in Common Entrance (1988) in which he declared that lower class children
were being deliberately denied access to the denominationally owned ‘prestige’ schools by a
system of selection that was rigged to put “only high class in the class.” The chorus of Corruption in
Common Entrance, indeed, parodies a Caribbean children’s ring-game song: “There’s a coloured
[or ‘brown’] girl in the ring/Tra-la-la-la-la” which suggests that Cro Cro’s “high-class” children are
those coloureds who in Trinidad and Tobago once formed a wealthy, landed elite group. His high-
classes are identified by their names as French Creoles, Portuguese, maybe British, Indian with an
occasional African. His poor children are by implication Black, though there is no way in Trinidad’s
cosmopolitan and infinitely transgressive society, where persons from widely different classes and
ethnicities embrace the same principles and often the same concubines and bed-mates, that one
can accurately identify an individual by name alone. Besides, the last quarter of the last century has
been an age where people have changed names and renewed identities almost as frequently as
they have frog-hopped from party to party. All is in flux, in process of becoming, and Cro Cro, a
faithful border-guard for a no longer viable old political and racial configuration, that used to be
represented by Eric Williams’s PNM, has been bewildered, anguished and angered by change,
shifting loyalties, blindness and apathy that he considers to have overtaken the unstable Black
electorate. (158)
The message of Corruption in Common Entrance (1988) was similar to that of Mudada’s Papers No Use (1976): that is, that one needs to be highly connected in order to make one’s way in Trinidad’s universe where success is perceived to be based more on nepotism than on merit. Unidentified, but obviously well-connected cliques are exploiting flaws in the system of selecting successful Common Entrance candidates, and are placing ‘high-class’ children into “prestige” schools and relegating the majority of “black hen” children to the Junior Secondary Schools. The major flaw in the system of selection (though unstated in the calypso) was immediately identified by the many commentators on the issues raised by the song. It was the Concordat that had been arrived at in the Education Act of 1965, allowing the religious denominations to choose 20% of the entrants from the lists of students qualified to enter their schools. Could not this privileged 20% be enjoying their places at the expense of children of low class gentiles who might have earned even higher grades at the Common Entrance examinations? Critics of the Concordat had long portrayed it as a concession by the State to the old status of class and perhaps racial or ethnic elitism.

Eric Williams, himself a product of the narrow elitist system of colonial education, had vowed initially to destroy prestige and ‘aristocracy’ by democratising the system, placing education in the hands of the State, and making the curriculum more relevant to community. The Concordat, like other measures such as the Mbanefo Commission of Enquiry into subversive activity and Communism, or like the control of electronic media – radio and television – by the State, and legislation meant to control Trade Union activity such as the ISA and IRA, was a sign of Williams’s steady surrender in the 1960s to the reality of things. Part of his maturing (shared with numerous other post-colonial leaders throughout the world) involved swift acknowledgement of the power of an incumbent and inscribed system to neutralise the radical ambitions of new, idealistic politicians, until the old moribund system took possession and incorporated into its decadence, the fragile body of the new order. Cro Cro’s Corruption in Common Entrance blamed ANR Robinson and the NAR (National Alliance for Reconstruction) for what was, in fact, partially the result of the compromise that Williams’s second government had made with the religious denominations and the old power structure of which these denominations had been an essential part during the colonial era. A question that was neither raised nor implied was whether the five preceding PNM regimes had also corruptly manipulated the system in the interest of maintaining and enhancing their political base.

Corruption in Common Entrance also did not ask or answer the more fundamental question of why were the ‘prestige’ schools considered ‘prestige’ and the Junior Secondary and by extension Senior Comprehensive Schools considered inferior after twenty-five years of Williams and the PNM. Were teachers at prestige schools better qualified or trained, their syllabus more relevant, their students more intrinsically intelligent? Were prestige schools better administered? If so, why? If the same top five to ten percent of those successful at the Common Entrance were to make the State-run Junior Secondary Schools their first choice, would not these schools become ‘prestige’ schools? Also, what made certain Junior Secondary Schools gain the reputation of being prestige Junior Secondary Schools?

The Junior Secondary/Senior Comprehensive system was Eric Williams’s first great effort at achieving free mass secondary education: that is, at challenging the old restrictive class and race discrimination upon which the traditional prestige schools had been based. The problem was that the society itself, Williams’s undefined “community as a whole” (159) was more comfortable with
the old dispensation to which it was accustomed than with the new “democracy” he offered in which, initially, only 40 percent of graduates from Junior Secondary Schools were assured of places in the Senior Comprehensive Schools. So the notion of “prestige” remained lodged in the public mind, to be continuously resurrected whenever the question of choosing a secondary school for each new generation of children arose. The more the public affirmed prestige, the more it condemned as failure all alternatives to prestige and undermined the self-worth of those who had not at age eleven or twelve achieved prestige. Such black hen children would, as Cro Cro ruefully asserts, be sent “straight to the Junior Sec.”

The other question (that of Black non-achievement or under-achievement) was an even gloomier one. Corruption in Common Entrance seemed to argue that such apparent under achievement was really the result of systematic discrimination against low class (i.e. ‘Black’) people, particularly by the new coalitions of old and new non-black elites that formed the core of the National Alliance for Reconstruction. But, as this essay has illustrated, many students’ non-achievement in schools and subsequent unsuitability for the workplace, has been mainly due to their orientation towards the curriculum of the streets, their preference for the attractions of the periphery; their indifference to the warnings of their wise men and women. So that Cro Cro’s effort to indict the implied but unidentified rival ethnicity in power for the failure of “black hen children” was a sad evasion of reality. It did, however, expose the intense mistrust and near hysteria that lay, and still lies at the heart of the multicultural and multiracial state, where discourse so often is reduced to a clash and rattle of miserable stereotypes.

Trinidad Rio tried to exorcise “all this ethnic crap and social distinction” with the darkly humorous Body Parts (1999), in which he offered via a process of organ and limb transplantation to endow members of any one race with whatever part – brain, penis – or quality they envied in any other race. He promised that the ultimate result of his “human concoction” would be to produce such “a pigmented callaloo” that even the most accomplished and dedicated advocates of keeping the “pure” races separate, and the theorists about the inequalities of human races, would be unable to apply their theories to this utterly composite one hundred and fifteen percent VAT-inclusive being.

Nine years after Corruption in Common Entrance, Gypsy in Little Black Boy (1997) undertook an unmasking of why “little black boys” were failing and warned them that they themselves were primarily responsible for their own demise. Little Black Boy blames neither the schools (prestige or Junior Secondary) nor the system of selection, but the children themselves who choose not to learn; or who focus on other things besides the education that has been provided for them. The Black manchild, presumably more than any other, chooses illiteracy, via the maxi-taxi’s uninterrupted stutter of raw dancehall hard poun’ music, the culture of bling, the seductive illusory universe of the town’s nightlife, experienced too early at the unemployed, vulnerable ‘youthman’ stage of life. Gypsy outlines what this essay has termed “the curriculum of the street,” success at mastering which brings a different kind of prestige from success at school. The syllabus of the maxi-taxi offers excitement, ‘riddum’ bereft of melody and a hard force-ripe growing-up that renders the school curriculum boring. School fails utterly as an institution of entertainment, in a country where entertainment, political campaigning and national culture have long been perceived as the same thing. Little Black boys, seeking entertainment like most of their peers of richer skins, and indoctrinated into entrenched street values of posing and machismo, find themselves, like
Sparrow’s ‘rebel’ (1966) alienated from the style of school and the values and attitudes necessary for succeeding in school.

Teacher and calypsonian (eventually with Delamo joint Calypso Monarch of 1994) Luta [Morel Peters] sang in 1985 a calypso entitled *Change Your Attitude*, in which he argued that his society, caught up in the blind whirlpool of change, would not progress until people changed their attitudes. Gypsy is in *Little Black Boy* placing the burden of such a change in attitude squarely on the shoulders of the sequestered youth. This calypso evoked nearly as much debate as *Corruption in Common Entrance*, because it probed a raw wound: that of the perceived failure and decline of young Black males locally, regionally and internationally, and refused to make any excuse or indulge in special pleading for the youthmen.

Young Black males, as we observed earlier in our analysis of Sparrow’s *The Rebel*, hate being addressed as ‘boy’ – a tag that perhaps reminds them of what they have read or been told about earlier generations of servitude. They prefer – in Trinidad and Tobago, at least, – to be known as ‘small man,’ or when older ‘youthman,’ but never as boy. Gypsy however, begins his rapso-lament-warning with an irritating parody of John Keats’s “There was a naughty boy / And a naughty boy was he,” and is merciless in the negative profile that he projects of his little Black boy. As much a border guard for his foundering race as Cro Cro, he, however, adopts an entirely different strategy – one of warning, condemnation, negative rather than positive reinforcement, as he asks the little Black boy to compare his own failure with the images of social and professional success that abound in the society. The doctors, lawyers, bankers and other professional people, seem in the main to belong to other races, while the jails are full of little Black boys just like the one that the calypso targets.

Gypsy, like Brother Marvin the year before, was roasted by some of his fellow-calypsonians, notably by Pink Panther: *Get off the Black Boy Back* (1998) – for not suggesting any positive images of successful African role-models for his little Black boy to emulate. Were there no outstanding Black doctors, lawyers, bankers, sportsmen, athletes, engineers, architects, building contractors, musicians, statesmen – that Gypsy could have held up as role models for imitation by Black youths? It was the same question that some commentators had posed Chalkdust in the mid-eighties after he sang *Ram the Magician* and advised George Chambers, “If you can’t run the country / Then call in Kirpalani.” Pink Panther, like Cro Cro and Sugar Aloes a border-guard for the PNM – (Pink Panther ran as a PNM candidate in the May 24th 2010 General Elections) – has tended to point critics who portray mainly the failures of Black people and Black communities towards the brighter and more positive vista of Black achievement. Thus when Singing Sandra sang the moving and powerful *Voices from the Ghetto* (1999) with its recurrent refrain of mothers “crying, crying, crying” because of the catalogue of distress, horror and insoluble social problems in the “Ghetto” of peri-urban Port of Spain, Pink Panther’s response was *Laughing in the Ghetto* (2000) an attack on Sandra’s (and Christophe Grant’s, the song writer’s) unremittingly negative portrait of the constituency of the long deceased Dr Williams. Pink Panther argued that the so-called ghetto offers more complex profiles that include examples of success and considerable economic, educational, cultural and social achievement. It was Young Creole’s argument as well in *Behind the Bridge* (1970).

Border guards for a community, an ethnic group, a political party, a nation, can differ considerably as to the methods they employ to defend their chosen turf or ethnos. So while Panther’s protest
against Gypsy’s and Sandra’s negative profiles of Black youth and the ghetto is well taken, it must also be appreciated that Gypsy was using a method of admonition traditional in multi-ethnic societies like Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana with their relentlessly competitive ethnicities and racialisms: that of reinforcing group solidarity via the holding up of perceived or anticipated deficiencies in one’s ethnic group to insidious comparison with the perceived success of the rival or antagonistic race or ethnicity. Gypsy’s little Black boy is thus shamed into feeling responsible for the ‘regression’ of his race from whatever position of eminence it was considered to have achieved in some earlier era when its supermen of intellect, sport and rhetorical excellence controlled the land.

As we have shown, the late 1990’s were weighted down with pessimistic calypsos about the absence of positive role models and heroes and the prevalence of delinquents, drug addicts, gangsters and killers. Black Stalin had in Black Man Killing Black Man (1996) deplored the worldwide phenomenon of Black-on-Black violence, a reality that cannot be evaded by reciting the catalogues of countervailing Black achievements. Little Black Boy composed in urgency and in answer to a desperate need, was part of a greater pessimism that had slowly descended on those whose sense of well-being had been bolstered by the twenty-five years of the old Eric Williams’s PNM and even the six years of the George Chambers interregnum which had itself come to an end with the meteoric emergence of the NAR in 1986. Gypsy had with The Sinking Ship (1986) become the main prophet of the end of the old PNM, though he would learn that the apocalyptic end of an old order does not automatically mean the consolidation of a new one. The situation of little Black boys did not change under the NAR or the first new PNM (1991-1995), or during the UNC years (1995-2001).

Gypsy described Little Black Boy as a song he had to sing, and challenged his detractors to take a walk with him through South East Port of Spain if they wanted to see living illustrations of the truth of what he had sung. Things, he expected, would get much worse. In 1999, Gypsy gloomily declared that the late 1990’s were, as bad as they seemed, “the best of the latter days.” (The Best of the Latter Days, 1999). “The soul of the nation” was still being stolen, he warned, by some unidentified agency: “somebody” (Soul of the Nation, 1999). Perhaps this ‘somebody’ was the same mysterious entity that in Rudder’s Madman’s Rant (1996) had been confiscating the home-grown marijuana “real fast” but allowing the imported cocaine to slip through and be sold on the murderous turf which had gradually extended from the streets of Port of Spain to every provincial town throughout the island. Perhaps Gypsy’s ‘somebody’ was the same ghost who was “promising jobs for all” even as other people were “renting gun to make other people bawl” in Rudder’s calypso. (160). Whoever he was, or they were, this ‘somebody’ of a single identity or multiple faces was continuing his work of individual, community and national destruction. Little Black Boy was Gypsy’s shamanistic warning, differing in content from Ras Shorty I’s Watch out My Children, but working towards the same end of reinforcing the youth against this unnamable but well-known ‘Mr Big’: the “Agent from Death Valley.”(161)

Dr Williams believed education was the pathway to solving society’s major problems by building healthy attitudes and imparting relevant life-skills, and he spent much of his time and the nation’s money in widening educational opportunity and increasing popular access to education. He did not anticipate that substantial numbers of people, preferring to graduate from the academies of the street, would make only partial and inadequate use of the educational opportunities the State provided, and he found no real answer to the phenomenon of delinquency; of youths who either could not gain or had no interest in gaining access to the training and education that had been
made available to them. The State’s failure to deal comprehensively with the issue of land tenure; the greater willingness of the PNM government to provide housing than to promote agriculture; the steady depopulation of rural districts with the resurrection of some of these into gentrified suburbs; and the constant expansion of the urban ghetto from the hills of San Juan to the coastal fringe of Carenage, led to a breakdown and reconfiguration of the more coherent older communities, that no amount of either voluntary or institutionalized education seemed capable of controlling.

On the wider national scene, education created a considerable and articulate meritocracy, a new and ever-expanding middle class growing into or inheriting property, and every bit as self-centered, self-propelling and materialistic as their predecessors. Education did not, however, create the balanced minds and rational sensibilities that might transcend the considerations of race and inter-ethnic rivalry that haunted – and still do haunt – every issue and situation in society during and after Williams’s era. Trinidad and Tobago has remained a fragmented nation of competing ethnicities, and the rivalry over political power and economic success has simply served to exacerbate racial feeling and gut-emotion particularly among the educated who often promote the futile racial discourse and the chronic mistrust in Trinidad and Tobago’s multiracial and cosmopolitan societies. In spite of this, the steady expansion of mixed races as well as the constant erosion of ancestral customs in the face of Americanization and modernization, suggest that there is considerable and vibrant life outside of the traditional encounter of hostile and recalcitrant African and Indo-Creole communities. There is also in Singing Sandra’s ‘doom-burdened’ *Ground Zero* (2004) the levelling process described in Black Stalin’s *Sufferers* (1999) where “suffering makes us one.” Stalin observed that most of the racial controversy is being pursued by a settled and ever complacent middle class.

Anytime you bounce up a racist
And you hear them running they mouth
It have a whole set a people
Doh care wha they talking ‘bout
A racist is someone living happy
And all they family doing well
So race talk is not for people
In the ghetto ketching hell
Chorus.
Sufferers doh care about colour
Sufferers doh care ‘bout race
Sufferers doh care who migrate from where
And who living in who place
Sufferers doh care who from country
Sufferers doh care who from town
Sufferers only want to hear
Where the next food coming from (163)

Sufferers, Stalin suggests, employing the 1970’s Jamaican ghetto term for the lumpen poor, either unified by hunger or grown indifferent to any issues beyond the barest margins of survival, have become our most iconic, our most representative citizens. What does education mean to such a liminal, such a reduced community, on the very edge of things and gazing into unimaginable
voids? What has it meant to the grim procession of graduates from the current ‘universities’ of East Dry River, Gonzales, Maloney, Trou Macaque, Laventille? Calypsonians, functioning as monitors, patriarchs, warners and adjunct professors of Williams’s University of Woodford Square, have preached his message of education as the basis for individual and social transformation and empowerment. They have also from Sparrow (1967) to Gypsy (1997) fore-warned the youths about the consequences of failure to become educated.

The accuracy of their warnings is well illustrated by the fact that by the first week of February 2011, that is, by thirty-seven days into the New Year, the Press reported sixteen (16) murders as having already been committed in Laventille. The most recent of these murders was that of Wendell Joseph, a 24 year old pannist who, soon after he left the panyard in Eastern Quarry Laventille was ambushed and “shot dead while seated in a motor vehicle with a female friend in Barataria where he went to take her home after pan practice.” (164) Though his killing took place three miles from Laventille, Roman Catholic parish priest Fr. Dwight Merrick noted that “There have been mounted criticism and condemnation of every young man in Laventille” (165) and lamented the “short-mindedness and narrow-mindedness” of the society which has labelled Laventille as a community of gangsters while forgetting the real culprits: those who supply the guns that the youths use to kill each other.

Fr. Merrick made another point relevant to this essay: a point about the failure of the youth to benefit from education that is available to them. He said, “I pray for the day when they [the critics] will be really interested in dealing with the problem of arms, ammunition and illegal drugs coming into the country; precisely because my boys on the hill (of Laventille) are pretty much illiterate. Many are in gangs and maybe they cannot even pass any exam to save their lives; which is precisely the reason they have no clue about importing guns, arms and ammunition... They are little pawns on a chess board.

“The people who are educated are the ones bringing in these things cheaply, I would think, and putting them in the hands of the little black boys who don’t see they are being used. How come fingers are being pointed at the pawns and not at the bishops, queens and kings who have all the power?” (166)

“Question for the bards,” calypsonian King Austin would say in Guardians (1985). The issues have been consistently the same over the six decades since Eric Williams’s return in the 1940s: illiteracy, urban communities with their own social structures and hierarchies of power (and powerless); the dire and dysfunctional curriculum of the streets, trails and traces; the infestation of town and even remote rural village (Piparo for example) by guns and drugs, with marijuana being the main cash crop of certain mountain and forest fastnesses; the impossibility until Delamo’s “last days of Armageddon” it seems, of finding a lasting solution to all or any of these problems, yet the necessity to keep trying to find Elia Andall’s missing generation[s] before they find us.
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