

Ethnicity, identity and nation in the Caribbean

Michiel Baud

Race/Ethnicity

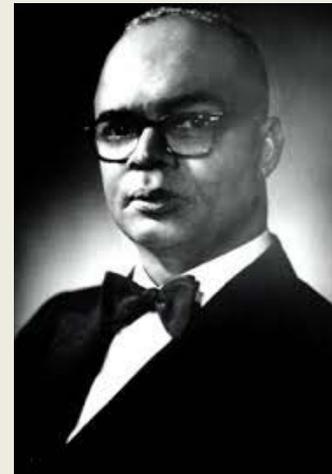
- Crucial theme in Caribbean;
=> direct connected to history of labour,
economic development and nation building!

Both:

- (hidden) dailyness (*habitus*), and
- Political and ideological theme => Caribbean intellectuals

Racial dailyness

Eric Williams (1938): “The pathetic importance attached to the quality and texture of hair in Trinidad affects women in particular, but also men. For example, Trinadadians always commented on my good hair and are surprised to hear that I have no Indian blood in my veins”.



Ethnic/racial politics

- Ethnic categories are multi-interpretable and 'contested'
- And have political and economic connotations
=> They are 'used' by political parties and social movements

- Directly connected to colonial legacy:
=> Colonial society, export agriculture and ethnic segmentation
- But also used in anti/post-colonial struggle and symbolism

Racial and ethnic 'layers'

- Indigenous population: Caribs and Arawaks, but also Trio, Waiyana.
- Spanish => first colonial group
- North-Western Europeans (incl. (Sephardic) Jewish colonists)
- Africans => slave population
- Asians => second half of 19th century.
- 'Arabs' => immigrants from Middle-East
- *cocolos* (internal Caribbean migration)
- 'Modern' immigration ('new' Chinese!)

Contrasting perspectives

1. Primordialism

- 'pure' roots
- fixed culture with
- Fixed characteristics

2. Constructionism

- Culture always 'created'
- Culture changes
- Cultural elements always contested and debated

Crucial: meaning attached to ethnic and racial differences

Ethnic meanings connected to:

- phenotype ('somatic norm image')
- Colonial legacy
- Inequality
- Citizenship
- Cultural change
- Gender

Ethnic relations

More than only 'race'!

- To be understood in local context (race/raza; colonialism)
- Interrelated with class and gender
- Permanently 'invented' and defined again.

Ethnicity (Baronov/Yelvington, 2009)

Ethnicity: “A set of ideas concerning a group’s real or imagined cultural links with an ancestral past”.

“Some set of common characteristics that sets them apart from the broader society”

Mintz and Price

- Afro-Caribbean culture is *created* in history of forced migration
- Is *new* Caribbean culture => *creolisation*

[Mind you!: they only write about Afro-Caribbean culture!]

Ethnicity as a strategy

- Existing 'ethnic' characteristics can be used or ignored ('hot' and 'cold').
- Ethnic symbols are used for identity, politics, nationalism etc.
- Ethnicity closely connected to class and gender.

Essential question:

What is meaning of ethnic and racial classifications in different historical periods and contexts?

Political ethnicity (Also: Baronov/Yelvington, 224-29)

- Black nationalism (Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon) => racial conflict
- Racial nationalism (Dominican Republic)
- Mestizaje – creolité => racial mixing as essence of Caribbean culture. Also idea of *racial democracy* (José Martí)
- Multiculturalism => creolisation

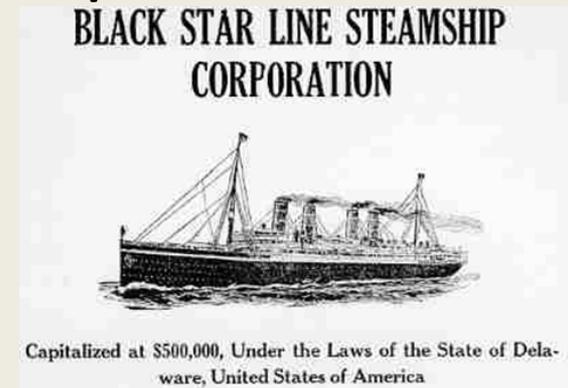
Maar ook:

- Anti-colonialism (Williams, Martí, De Kom)
- Anti-imperialism (anti-US) (Rodney)
- Socialism (Juan Bosch, C.L.R. James)

- Usually a combination!

Black nationalism

- Marcus Garvey, Universal Negro Improvement Association (1914)
- Aimé Césaire, Négritude
- Frantz Fanon: *Black skin, white masks* (1952)
- Later *Black Power*: Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael



Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950)

"I am talking of millions of men who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, debasement."

Also the beginning of Fanon, *Black skin, white masks*

- In the Sky's Wild Noise: A documentary on Dr. Walter Rodney

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqfcbmncFI0>

Rodney, 'Black Power' in the West Indies

- Break with imperialism
- Assumption of power by black masses
- Cultural reconstruction of the society in the image of the blacks

- Anti-colonialism
- Internal post-colonial (political) struggle
- (Psychological) emancipation

'Black contact zones'

- Plantation in Caribbean and Central America
 - Diasporic cities: New York, London, Paris
 - African independence movements
- => UNIA (Garvey) => 2 million followers; 1100 sections (221 in Caribbean!)

José Martí, Cuba (1853-1895) => mestizaje

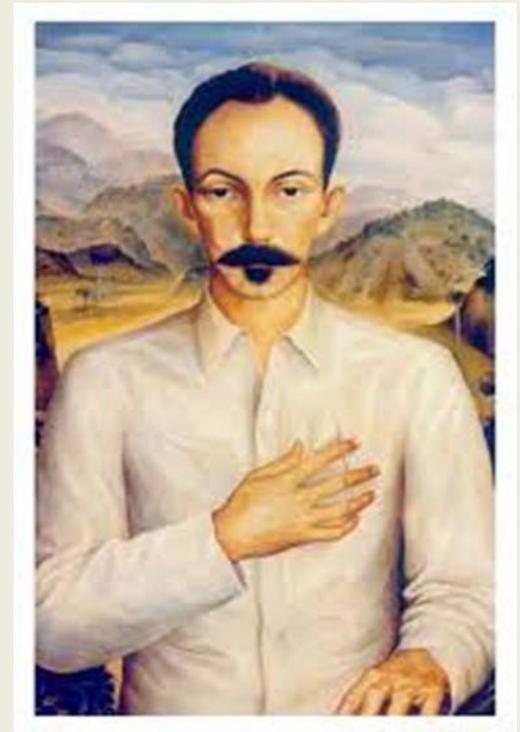
Nuestra América => Independence of Spain and
US

Engaged (public) intellectual

Nationalism and pan-Americanism

Ethnicity and race not central

=> mestizaje is future



Fernando Ortiz, Cuba (1881-1969) =>
acculturation

Contrapunteo cubano: tabaco y azúcar

Connected to *folclorismo*, interest in African-Caribbean culture and religion

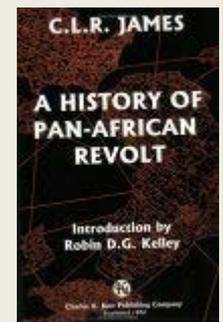
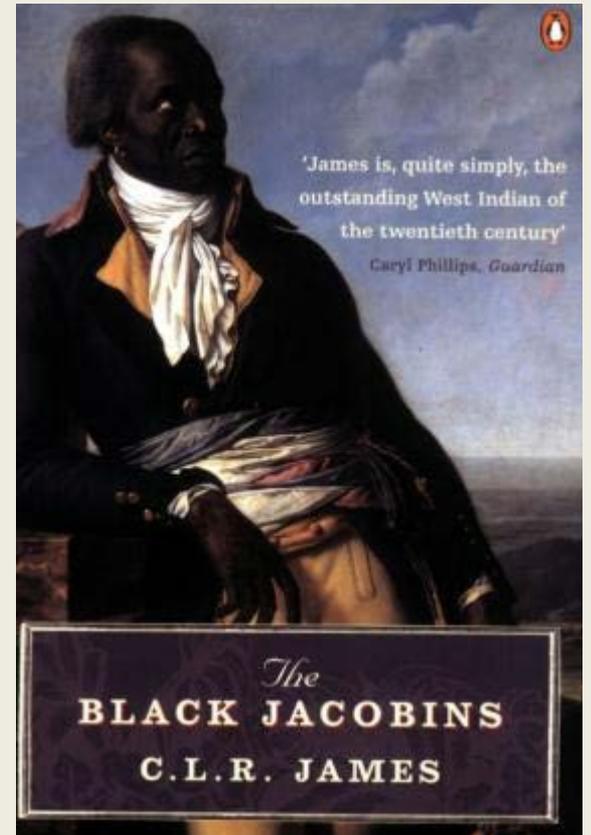
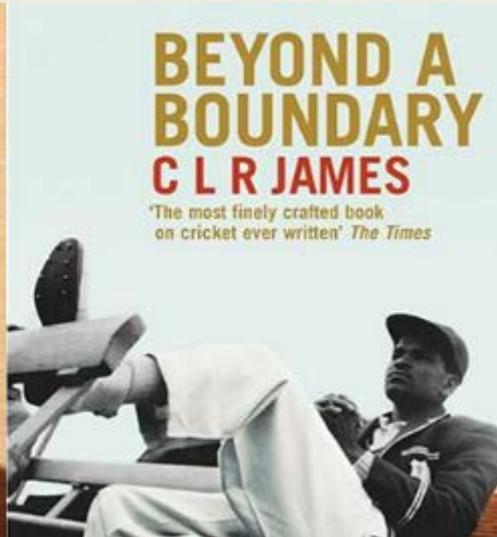
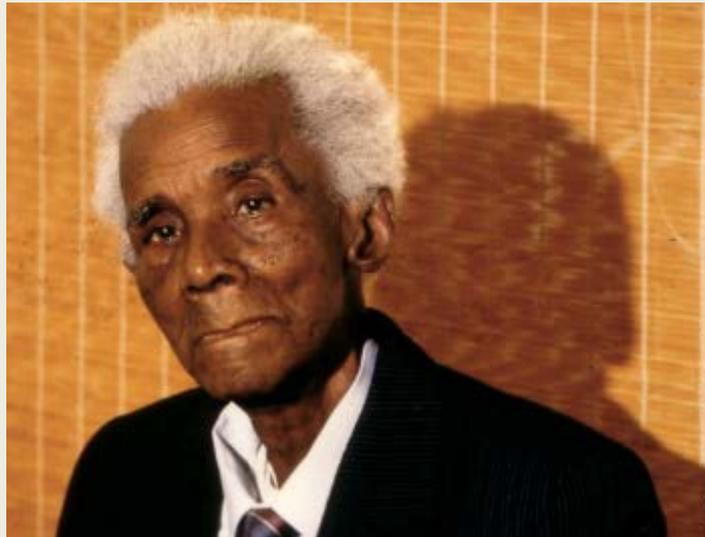
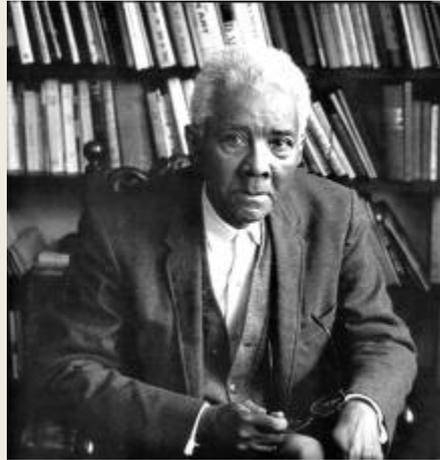
Today often presented as inspiration for Cuban cultural and creolisation studies: Casa de las Americas

C.L.R. James, Trinidad (1901-1989) => class

Socialist => class more important than race or ethnicity

Black Jacobins (1938) Ex-slaves as revolutionaries

Culture (cricket) as anti-colonial instrument

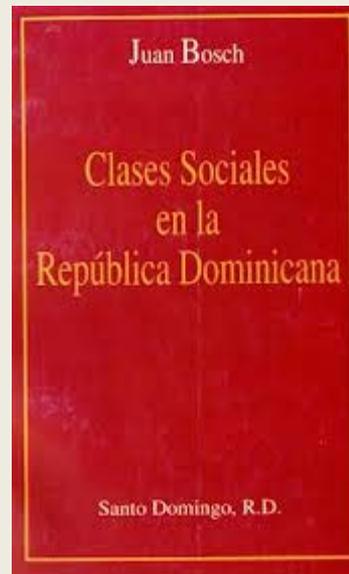
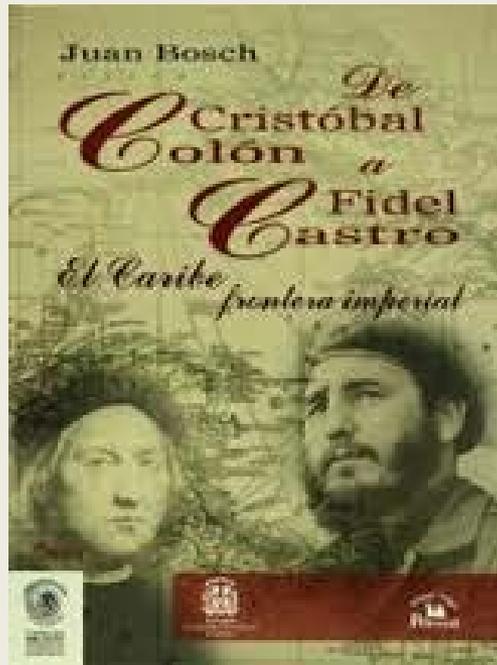


Juan Bosch, Dom. Rep. (1909-2001)

Socialist, nationalist, historian

Novelist and politician

=> Long-term history is crucial: relations of production, not race or ethnicity (typical for Dominican situation?)



Manuel Arturo Peña Battle, Dom. Rep. (1902-1954)

Conservative nationalist => ideologue of Trujillo-
regime

Racist, anti-Haitian and Hispanistic => Dom. Rep.
basically 'white' and European

Fear for Haitian immigration ('Silent invasion')

Predecessor of Joaquín Balaguer

Thus:

Ideological interpretations of ethnic relations in very different directions: Socialism, anti-imperialism, nationalism, négritude/black power, conservatism.

But always a reaction on economic, political and post-colonial processes.

Nationalism, political autonomy and identity crucial

- Ideas inspired on local and Caribbean situation. But connected to mondial contexts
=> here again colonial legacy crucial: English, French, Spanish language areas and debates!

For this global anti-colonial movement: Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations. A People's History of the Third World* (2007)

- ⇒ Not a coincidence that many Caribbean intellectuals speak from the 'motherland' (b.v. De Kom, Van Lier, Helman, maar ook Marcus Garvey, CLR. James, Fanon etc.).
- ⇒ There they connected to global debates!