

**COLONIAL  
WEST  
INDIAN  
STUDENTS  
IN  
BRITAIN**

**LLOYD BRAITHWAITE**

*Foreword by The Hon. Gladstone Mills*

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*To the University of the West Indies,  
colleagues and friends*

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# Foreword

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In 1945, a few months following the end of World War II (both in Europe and Asia), Britain experienced an inflow of students from her colonies, especially from Africa and the West Indies. Among those from the British Caribbean, a few were scholarship holders and others who preferred to postpone taking up places in tertiary educational institutions in Britain until after the war. A few others too, such as Eugenia Charles, Michael Manley and Milton ('Bob') Cato – all future prime ministers – and Michael (M.G.) Smith and Douglas Hall, future distinguished professors, arrived following a few years spent in Canada at university or in the armed forces.

But the majority of the scholarship students were beneficiaries of the 'mushrooming' of awards flowing from the four-year-old Colonial Development and Welfare Organization (CDW) with headquarters located in Barbados. Established following the Moyne Commission's visit and hearings throughout the region in the wake of the civil disturbances of the mid to late 1930s, the organization's wide-ranging activities included the award of scholarships to the United Kingdom in a variety of fields where the need for trained personnel had been emphasized in the Moyne Report (for example, medicine and nursing, social services, economics).

This scholarship programme was dominated initially by medicals when, in 1943, 14 awards apparently intended for distribution throughout the region were all inadvertently allocated to Jamaica. Benefiting from this bonanza, the Jamaican government decided to assign one to each parish. Hence, the selection of future doctors such as Henry Shaw, Ronald Lampart and Leslie Williams. The error was corrected the following year. Coincidentally, I travelled to Britain in 1944 on the *Queen Elizabeth* with that year's medical scholars which included, among others, Warren (Buddy) Wilson, Robert

Milner and Donald Watler of Jamaica, Noble Sarkar of Trinidad, Andrew Mason of British Honduras, Henry Forde and Colin Vaughn of Barbados, Frank Williams and Balwant Singh of British Guiana (now Guyana).

A year or two after the war, there was another stream which involved the flow of ex-servicemen and women who benefited from the British Further Education and Vocational Training Scheme (FEVT), also in a variety of fields. This was the source of the professional training in medicine of Arthur Wint and Vernon Lindo; in law of Errol Barrow, Ena (Collymore) Woodstock, Uriah Parnell, W. ('Derry') Marsh; Ulric Cross of Trinidad, Dusty Miller of British Guiana; in engineering of Douglas Wint and John Lawrence; in history, of Roy Augier and John Hearne; in economics, of U.V. Campbell; Julian Marryshow of Grenada and Douglas Collins.

Nor were the arts and cultural areas neglected. The British Council and other cultural institutions actively sponsored students in drama, music, dancing, painting and sculpture, while other students managed on their own family resources. Hence, during the period 1945–50 there was an impressive collection which included Louise Bennett-Coverly, Ivy Baxter, Cecil Baugh, Noel Vaz, Hazel Lawson-Street, Julian Barber, Lloyd Hall, Olive Lewin, Fay (Hale) Lindo, Daphne Segre – all of Jamaica; M.P. Aladdin, Edric Connor, Rita (Innis) Coore and Winifred Atwell of Trinidad and Denis Williams of British Guiana.

In addition to this group were the holders of the prestigious Rhodes and national or island scholarships and not an insignificant number of privately funded students. Among the CDW students who arrived in London at summer's end of 1945 were Lloyd Braithwaite from Trinidad, bound for the London School of Economics (LSE). As far as I recall, he was to join others for the two-year certificate course in Social Science Administration, including Reg Phillips and Winnie Birkbeck Hewitt (Jamaica), Ivor Robinson (British Guiana), Ken Sealy (Trinidad), and others: Sybil Hill-Francis, Rudolph Cousins and Odel Fleming (Jamaica) who had come to London with LSE on the school's return after years of evacuation to Cambridge. Following this programme also, were students from Africa, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Gibraltar and the United Kingdom.

However, Lloyd eventually transferred to the sociology degree programme. I too arrived in London in 1945 after one year in Cambridge with the school, but reading for the BSc Econ. with specialization in government. This, then,

was my first acquaintance with Lloyd Braithwaite; an acquaintance which developed into friendship during two years spent as fellow residents of the large colonial students residence, Nutford House, located between Marble Arch and Edgware Road. Later we would be colleagues for more than three decades, first at Mona, where he became an early recruit to the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) and later (in 1965) professor of sociology. In 1969 he returned to Trinidad as principal of the St Augustine Campus and a pro vice chancellor of the University of the West Indies (UWI) – continuing to teach even after formal retirement in 1984.

In those early postwar years, Britain became the incubator for potential colonial leaders: a propitious environment and seedbed for the germination and emergence of leaders especially of Africa and the West Indies – in politics, other professions and the academy. Nutford House residents included presidents to be, Nigerian Abubaka Tafala Balewa, from Bechuanaland (Botswana) Seretse Khama; Ringadoo (Mauritius); Forbes Burnham (Guyana); Prime Minister Cato (St Vincent); Attorney-General Charles Njonjo (Kenya); Chief Justices Earl Seaton (Bermuda); Telford Georges (Dominica) and Vincent Floissac (St Lucia). Concurrently too, the conditions were propitious for early stirring of West Indian consciousness among students, especially Jamaicans, whose horizon and perspective had hitherto been restricted to their national boundaries.

The population of Nutford House consisted of a mix of young students coming immediately after graduating from secondary school, and older ones with several years work experience. Lloyd Braithwaite fell within the second category. He entered LSE as a mature 26-year-old who, we discovered later, was a qualified solicitor. From the outset he stood out as a mature but open-minded student, possessing an analytical mind, always interested in participating in a discussion while tolerant of the views expressed by others. He was also a very informal person with no regard for the trappings, airs and affectations of high office.

But what I remember most about him at that time were his quiet sense of humour and wit and his facility in cleverly teasing and upsetting some of us, especially the Jamaicans, with expressions of Trinidadian ‘picong’. I recall, too, Lloyd’s positive presence in discussions in the ISER coffee room when I joined the new Faculty of Social Sciences in 1969. Sadly, this custom of an informal coffee-break discussion ended several years ago.

One of these indelible, but on this occasion less pleasant, memories stemmed from an event which occurred during the Walter Rodney and C.Y. Thomas crises of 1968 and 1969, following the exclusion of these Mona staff members from Jamaica. Lloyd, then pro vice chancellor and I as dean of social sciences were invited to a seminar ostensibly on "The Role of the Social Scientist in the Contemporary Caribbean", with myself as chairman and presentations to be made by two colleagues. During my introduction to an audience bulging at the seams, it became quite clear that the real subject was the future of C.Y. Thomas and that we had been brought there "under false pretences" to provide an imprimatur for the proceedings. The angry audience vented their frustration and rage with intensive attacks on Lloyd and me – while neither of the two presenters attempted to speak. Lloyd and I decided to sit out the 'slings and arrows' though we had every right to leave, considering the circumstances.

In the early years at Mona, Braithwaite was a member of an outstanding group of scholars in the ISER including M.G. Smith and Raymond Smith, Roy Augier and George Roberts. Later he was in a sense, the informal self-effacing 'guru' of a small group of younger intellectuals such as Lloyd Best, Alister McIntyre and Archie Singham. It was in the earlier period that he produced the significant work "Social Stratification in Trinidad and Tobago". It is no accident that during the first few years of the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Department of Sociology was its strongest member.

The background and context depicted suggest, nay indicate that Lloyd Braithwaite was eminently suited for the research involved and the writing of this book. Living in the appropriate and conveniently located laboratories of LSE and the Nutford House colonial students residence, a participant in the meeting which culminated in the formation of the West Indian Students Union (WISU) in December 1945; and given his training in sociology, his enquiring mind was stimulated and challenged.

In fact he conceived the idea as a research student at LSE and I learnt of this interest early in my tenure as liaison officer for West Indian students in the British Isles (1948–51). This post had been created (along with similar positions in respect of other colonial territories), was funded by West Indian governments and located in the Welfare Department of the Colonial Office in London. Lloyd sought information from me from time to time about our students and the assistance and facilities provided officially for them across

the United Kingdom and Eire. In fact this book was in the making for the past 50 years.

In this sociological approach, Braithwaite focuses on significant features of the foundations of the future West Indian elite, from among whom would emerge the social, political, professional and cultural leaders of these territories during the 1960s and early 1970s, following the first flush of their assumption of the status of independent states. Concurrently, of course, other future West Indian leaders were also being shaped elsewhere, for instance in Canada and the United States, while the regional University College of the West Indies was still in its fledgling state.

However, the experience of studying and living in Britain was, in some senses, unique. For some students who anticipated a warm welcome from 'Mother', the experience of duplicity and hypocrisy reflected in the attitudes and reactions of the host/hostess induced extreme disappointment and resentment. By contrast, the US approach to blacks was much more direct and honest – though also a source of frustration. Braithwaite illustrates the British approach especially in respect of housing.

For purposes of the study, he concentrates on students' reaction to prejudice and discrimination and in doing so appears to conclude that in general, this reaction was exaggerated. To some extent their allegations tend to be distorted – a function of the general picture of the problems of the group in "adjusting to an alien society". For me, one of Braithwaite's most interesting observations is the development of what he terms a "group culture of protest".

The host attitude of overt contempt for blacks during the late 1940s and early 1950s – the early period of Braithwaite's research and my years as liaison officer – was clearly evident in certain forms of commercial advertisements, such as a poster in the subway on a brand of toothpaste, which depicted black consumers in a derogatory way. The incident which remains indelibly etched in my memory concerns the British Airways large display window on London's Regent Street depicting in lifesize proportions an English traveller being transported on the shoulders of four African natives clothed in 'G-strings'. Action by a Sierra Leone liaison officer and myself, with considerable assistance from a sympathetic British member of Parliament succeeded in having the display removed overnight. But all this occurred over 50 years ago. What is the present situation? Incidentally, I note in his chapter on the Colonial Office Braithwaite's reference to the attitudes adopted by some West Indian

students towards their liaison officer. I do not recall being aware of this, though I was certainly conscious of their suspicions and distrust of the Colonial Office staff.

The incipient stirring of West Indian consciousness had been stimulated by the presence of a significant number of students following the end of the war and by the Conference on Closer Association which had taken place in Montego Bay in 1947. These sentiments were reinforced and intensified by the living together of many of them in colonial students' hostels. Capping these events and processes was the formation of the WISU. Braithwaite observes that in the West Indies the only collective representation which had caught the popular imagination was the West Indian cricket team. Further, "the consciousness of belonging to a group called West Indian is something of a relatively late development". Hence, a few students had begun to discuss the desirability of developing a connecting link for the promotion of "cooperation and unity among the people of the region".

It was natural that the new organization would play an active role in relation to the proposals made in the Report of the Commission of Higher Education in the West Indies for the establishment of the University College. But, Braithwaite points out, "the first step towards the formation of an organized opinion on the university came from outside the union (WISU)". However, perhaps the most significant action initiated by the WISU was sending a deputation to the secretary of state for the colonies to discuss the proposals. (The deputation included Forbes Burnham.) Among the issues raised, were the importance of having a university "which fulfilled our social, economic and political needs"; the need to increase the proposed ratio of female students; the appointment of qualified West Indians, if available. Interestingly, West Indies cricket and the UWI have become our strongest regional institutions. Lloyd Braithwaite has indicated that in conducting his research, he had the advantage of being able to observe the behaviour of many of those interviewed on their return home.

Although the major portion of the research which lies at its basis was undertaken long ago, this volume represents more than a historical record. The Colonial Office and its Welfare Department have long disappeared and functions of the latter have presumably been assumed by the high commissions of the former colonial territories, now independent. Some significant conclusions expressed in the penultimate chapter remain valid and relevant

currently. Thus, Braithwaite points to the positive effects of an education abroad in the development of self-confidence and of West Indian nationalism. But negative effects also emerge in the possible widening of the gap of consciousness between the middle class student and his or her environment – particularly the ‘have nots’ of the society. Further, as the author emphasized, the development of the UWI will not mean the end of the significant flow of West Indians to British universities for higher education.

This book should be read for the perceptiveness shown, the quality of analysis provided by the author and its wide ranging coverage of a subject which should be of interest to both the academic and a wider general readership.

Gladstone E. Mills  
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# Preface

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The study of colonial students in Britain has excited a great deal of attention. The problem came most to the public eye when in 1951, students at the Hans Crescent hostel went 'on squat', refusing to vacate their rooms as requested; but there were other incidents which attracted attention from time to time. This came as a shock to many concerned people in public education who thought that adequate administrative provision had at last been made to cope with the problem of colonial students.

This study was begun before the interest in colonial students became common and is part of a continuing piece of research on the education of the new elite arising in the West Indies as in so many other colonial areas. Other published studies have concentrated on the problem as primarily one of policy formulation from the point of view of colonial and university administration. The present study is one concerned with the social, political and cultural leaders of a colonial area. Special attention has therefore been paid to the general ideological effects of the education of colonial students in Britain, the emergence of group action, the appeal of communism to colonials and the emergence of West Indian nationalism.

In its original conception, it was hoped to test many of the hypotheses put forward statistically. This has not proved possible. Nonetheless, the study may be of interest, first, because it represents an intensive study of one particular colonial group. It therefore delineates a little more clearly, it is hoped, the interplay between the cultural background of the students and the reaction to British society.

In spite of this, the problems of more general interest to colonial students, for example, the problem of colonial hostels, are also dealt with and, it is hoped, illuminated by this treatment. Second, the study is based not only on

interview material but on participant observation over a period of years. Further, because of the high emotional interest aroused by the subject, the thinking surrounding the problem has, so far, primarily been policy oriented rather than sociological-theory oriented. It is hoped that the analysis of the problem in purely sociological terms is a special contribution.

Finally, in the light of the problems of bias (albeit not insurmountable) which arise in the course of sociological field work and of the differential reaction of subjects to different types of interviewers, it may be of some methodological interest to compare (that is, to consider) the results of the study of 'the colonial student problem' by a member of that group.

In the approach to the 'colonial student problem', there is another basic dichotomy. The problem, whether viewed in psychological, political or sociological terms, can be regarded either as an analysis of the reaction of the immigrant group itself or from the point of view of the host society. These two approaches are by no means contradictory. Rather, they are mutually complementary. Nonetheless, the issues tend to be confused because of the usual description of the problem as the colonial students' problem as if there were one single problem and one correct approach to it.

In this study, attention has been concentrated not upon the reactions of the host or British society but on those of the temporary student migrants. Naturally, in assessing this reaction it is necessary to take into account the reactions of the host society but the exact details of these are not entered into. On the question of discrimination and prejudice for instance, no effort is made to give the full range of British reactions to coloured colonials or other immigrant groups. The reported evidence of such prejudice and the nature of that prejudice are sufficiently well established to be taken as a given factor. Naturally, an accurate assessment of the 'racism' of members of the host society is necessary if one is to be able to assess how real or how imaginary are the allegations of prejudice and discrimination made by the colonial student.

The examination of the West Indian student reaction seeks to be larger in scope than a mere study in the reaction to discrimination. Indeed, it seeks to show how the general overall picture of the problems of the group tend to be distorted by the accent on discrimination. One difficulty in assessing the material and its importance arises from the fact that much of the student reaction to the situation is purely temporary. This renders interview material

doubly difficult. Sufficient evidence is available to show how students consciously and unconsciously distort the images of their own country and their own social role under the exigencies of adjusting to the situation. Even where participant observation is indulged in as a check on interview material, the difficulty can only be partially overcome since overt behaviour is often itself merely an expression of temporary adjustment to the situation.

In this respect, the writer has been fortunate to be able to observe the behaviour of many of the interviewees and members of West Indian student organizations on their return to the home country. This has led to a degree of caution in appraising the material and to an increased understanding which would hardly have been achieved otherwise.

## Introduction

# The West Indian Student in Britain

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### **The Problem in its More General Setting**

A generation ago, the problem of the overeducation of the colonial was considered to be an acute one. People interested in the development of the colonies stressed the fact that the 'educated African' for instance, did not fit easily into either the indigenous social structure or the framework of administration then established. Sometimes the problem was conceived as one of so changing the administrative structure that he could be more easily absorbed, or of so changing the structure of native institutions that he would become, albeit indirectly, more closely associated with the administration and hence play a more useful role. Sometimes, the problem was conceived as one of giving less education to the African so that there would be less personal maladjustment, less personal unhappiness among the Africans. The higher education of Africans – so the argument ran – was both rendering the education of Africans unhappy and making more difficult for the administration, the constructive tasks of administering justice and raising the levels of training. Perhaps due to good fortune, to divine providence, or to some innate quality, the task of the administration of the so-called backward peoples of the globe had fallen into the hands of European powers. This task would occupy

them for several years, "perhaps even generations to come".<sup>1</sup> It was within the context of feeling and sentiment that the higher educational facilities for people in the colonies were conceived. But the problem was in reality larger than the colonial issue. Large areas of the world not directly under the control of the imperial powers came indirectly under their influence through the trusteeship of the League of Nations. Classed as backward, they were placed under the tutelage of the imperial powers because of their inability to sustain themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.

The perspectives of the people in the colonies and in the trustee nations were, however, somewhat different. Within all the colonies and trusteeship territories, there developed nationalist demands either for independence or for a marked increase in participation in the administration of the territories.

The educated African, for instance, was considered maladjusted precisely because he challenged the European conception of his role in the colonial area. He felt competent to play a larger part in the governing of his area; he articulated his demands more clearly; he challenged the European not merely by a revival of primitive nativism – although nationalism had its nativistic aspects – but by an assertion (whether well or ill grounded) of the equal capacity of the African to take part in the running of his own affairs on the national level.

There can be little doubt that there were many oddities and absurdities in the case made out by the colonies for independence and increased self-government. Indeed, part of this study will be concerned with showing how in one particular area certain nationalist conceptions arise. These enabled hostile critics to pillory the educated representative of the so-called backward peoples in what appeared to the latter to be the most cruel fashion. The difficulties of the 'marginal man', the man of two worlds participating in both worlds and master of none were stressed. The doctor who believed in witchcraft, the lawyer who in secret session might consult the oracles appeared more ludicrous than the simple native untouched by European hand. If this were to be the result of higher education, perhaps it was a little premature to think in terms of higher education. So much remained to do to raise the standards of the mass of the people that it was possible sometimes to pose the question of higher education versus mass education as if there were a necessary antithesis between the two.

Nonetheless, higher education in the British colonies at any rate continued to be available to the colonial. Within the British universities, the tradition of hospitality to foreigners – long established and still unquestioned – meant that private citizens were able to obtain a higher education, no matter how inadequate might be the public provision in the colonial territory. Moreover, the problems of colonial administration within a liberal imperial framework were such that the creation of an educated African class, able and willing to profit from higher education, was almost a necessity.

The importance of the liberal tradition cannot be over stressed. In spite of the simple denunciations of imperialism which are fashionable (and not merely in colonial circles) it is clear that the process of imperial control worked within a normative framework which precluded or rendered difficult certain of the more dubious features of imperialism and facilitated the long-term development of self-government. This process has long been stressed by popular apologists for imperialism. The path of development of nationhood in the case of India for instance has been stressed as one of the glories of British imperial rule. Such claims cause hostility among most colonials and are considered an affront. Yet they contain much substance.

The logic of the development (granted, the maintenance of the democratic framework) in the United Kingdom appears impeccable. There is, indeed, from a sociological point of view nothing surprising in this development, but it presents as an 'inevitable' a development which could conceivably have taken a different form. After-the-event logic is not appreciated particularly by colonial participants. It resembles (in reverse) the inevitability of the Marxists. In the case of the latter, the belief in inevitability acts as a source of encouragement and a spur to action on the part of the revolutionary. In the imperial case, the logic of inevitable development appears to the radical colonial to be an invitation to cease his radical activity.<sup>2</sup> It appears to accept on its face value the argument of the administration that they are in fact training the people for self-government. But he is concerned less with praise for their achievement than in pointing out their sins of omission.

Further, the colonial or other representative of the 'backward' community is assured of the fact that his struggle has not been without results. His immediate perspective tends to dominate everything. He seeks to win a battle in a given situation; *everything* appears to depend upon the struggle in which he is engaged. He does in fact appreciate the moral framework established by

the imperial powers. Indeed, much of his strategy and tactics are dictated by a realistic appreciation of the situation. But ideologically, he cannot concede anything to the enemy. He turns a blind eye to the facts when it is convenient. The establishment of Indian independence appears to him to be really the product of the self-sacrifice and devotion to the Indian nationalist cause.

Moreover, the contribution of the imperial power has often been misstated. Nationalism has been imported into the colonies both directly and indirectly. Ideas of nationalism, democracy and self-government have often had their origin and support in people from the metropolitan community. The sources of these ideas are many and various; and their relative strength still remains to be properly assessed. One of the sources (and in the light of subsequent developments we can say one of the most important sources) was precisely the education of colonials abroad.

Again, by the mere setting up of certain administrative areas, the imperial government served to bring about 'national' sentiment. It is true that the development of nationalism in the colonies did not always follow these purely administrative boundaries but the existence of a central administration as a frame did produce some form of unity of common sentiment.

Nationalism as one of the main cultural patterns of the West came to be taken over by the colonial country. This development of colonial nationalism has often been deplored, but it is an almost inevitable result of culture contact in the imperial-colonial relationship. The educated colonial who becomes the leader of colonial nationalism comes to be much criticized; it should be remembered that he is a logical product of a situation not of his making. This does not lessen his moral responsibility or reduce his blame worthiness; it does however reflect on the self-righteousness of his critics and place him sociologically in his proper context. The criticism against the colonial who has received higher education is similar to that directed against the educated African in general. The latter has often been criticized for possessing a false scale of values, instead of serving his people, he thinks in terms of self-advancement; instead of going in for technical education, he wishes to become a clerk.<sup>3</sup> This false scale of values appears even more dubious when it appears to masquerade under a group affiliation with a systematic ideological justification.

This sort of criticism which developed against the educated colonial is illustrated by one who has had experience in the problems of administration