

Peter Hulme

**Elegy for a Dying Race:
The Caribs and their Visitors**



1992 LECTURE SERIES

Working Papers
No. 14

Department of Spanish and Portuguese

**University of Maryland
College Park
1993**

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ISSN 1046-1671

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Elegy for a Dying Race: The Caribs and their Visitors¹

Introduction

One April morning in New York, about 110 years ago, a young North American called William Agnew Paton was suddenly asked by a family friend if he fancied a trip to the West Indies, where the friend, a doctor, was going for a rest and change of air. Paton agreed; and they left that afternoon. When he got back he wrote one of the first modern travel books about the Caribbean, called *Down the Islands: A Voyage to the Caribbees* (1888). Like many subsequent travellers, Paton found himself most fascinated by the island of Dominica:

Of all the Caribbees, Dominica most awakened my curiosity and excited my imagination. It seemed so inaccessible, so mysterious, a great wilderness in the midst of the sea, unexplored and unexplorable. What wonder that the Caribs longest remained in possession of it; the mention of its name suggests an inquiry into the history of that interesting race. Just as at Barbados it seems natural to inquire into the statistics of sugar-planting, in St. Lucia to rehearse the stories of the wars between England and France, so in Dominica one is tempted to discourse of the legends of the Carib people, to learn of their struggle for liberty, their mad fight for existence. The legends of this ill-fated people seems to haunt the mountain-heights and

¹ Much of the material in this paper was collected during the compiling of *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day*, ed. Peter Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead (Oxford, 1992); the interpretations are also indebted to long discussions with my co-editor over the last three years. A version of this paper was given at a conference on "The Anthropology of the Native Caribbean: The View from 1992" in July 1992 at Leiden. The proceedings will be published next year (Whitehead, ed. forthcoming 1993).

valleys where they longest made a stand in defence of their old homes, as echoes calling back from hill and glen.

In the least-explored mountain-retreats and gloomiest valleys of Dominica there still exists a miserable remnant of this once powerful and numerous nation, a few wretched survivors preserving some traditions, and until within a few years a vestige of the ancient language of a great and warlike people — the undisputed, unconquerable masters of all the Caribbean islands in years gone by. For years and years after the coming of Columbus the 'Caribs' and the 'Canibals,' the 'Robbers' and the 'Man-eaters,' successfully resisted all attempted invasions, and were only after ages deprived of their inheritance, as the ancient Britons were in the end dispossessed by the Danes and Norsemen. Inch by inch, foot by foot, in continual struggle the natives defended their island settlements. It is the old story of the North American Indians over again, of savage races in all parts of the world when in conflict with Europeans — a competition of arrows and clubs against gunpowder and rum; savage cunning against civilized diplomacy. This process of civilizing the Caribs went ruthlessly on — Carib against Spaniard, Frenchman, Dutchman, Englishman, Carib against the whole world, until there remains of the ancient possessors of these islands but a handful on Dominica and a wretched band of halfbreeds (half Carib, half runaway-slave) on the island of St. Vincent; nor will it be many years until the last Carib shall be gathered to his forefathers, leaving nothing but a tradition — the imperfectly remembered story of a once mighty people (96-7).²

Paton's words constitute a classic example of the elegies that have constantly been written for the Caribs from the eighteenth century onwards. The magnificent scenery of Dominica is evoked

² William Agnew Paton (1848-1918), U.S. publisher and writer. He also contributed to the Columbus landfall debate.

and the story of “a once mighty people” recalled — their ancient dominance of the Caribbean, their fiercesome reputation as cannibals and fighters, their brave struggle to defend their liberty. Now, however, all that remains is “a miserable remnant,” a “handful” of this ill-fated people, whose eventual and inevitable demise is broached in that elegantly turned phrase: “nor will it be many years until the last Carib shall be gathered to his forefathers.” The civilizational process is not exactly called into question. Progress is no doubt inevitable, “savage cunning” no doubt doomed; but a sentimental pity still attaches to the “interesting race.” The tone of the writing is so elegaic, so romantic, so involved, that it is initially surprising to learn, if ultimately appropriate, that Paton never set foot on Dominica, let alone visited the Caribs: his boat merely anchored in the roadstead off Roseau while it took on passengers and mail.

Paton’s elegy speaks of the Caribs in tones very different from those belonging to the dominant story that has been told in the west about the native Caribbean. This, for example, is almost all that the standard modern history of the West Indies has to say about the Amerindian population:

The Arawaks... were a kindly and peaceful people. They had no reason to be otherwise... In Columbus’s time the Arawaks occupied all the greater islands of the Caribbean; but in the easternmost island, Puerto Rico, they were already suffering from the raids of an intrusive and far more warlike people, to whom the Spaniards gave the name of Caribs. Carib means cannibal; and cannibalism... was one of the characteristics of these canoe-borne marauders who were pushing north along the line of the Lesser Antilles and enslaving or destroying the earlier inhabitants in their way. (Parry and Sherlock 1956: 1-3)

The contrast between peaceful Arawaks and Carib marauders has been a staple part of the western picture ever since 1493, and in many ways that contrast still dominates scholarly as well as

popular notions.³ However, during the period that interests me here, the thirty or so years from the late 1870s through to the outbreak of the First World War, the conventional historical picture was broadened and complicated by the realization that there were Caribs still living on the islands of Dominica and St. Vincent. Writing in 1938 Douglas Taylor, the foremost authority this century on the Dominican Caribs, pointed out that Frederick Ober, the American ornithologist, “appears to have been the first person since the middle of the eighteenth century to take the slightest interest in this last isolated island tribe” (1938: 110).⁴

“The first person from outside the islands’ would make the sentence more accurate, but Ober’s writings — starting with *Camps in the Caribbees* in 1879 — do constitute almost a second ‘discovery’ of the Caribs, and make the 30 years around the turn of the century an especially interesting focus for study.

The ‘moment’ itself was heavily overdetermined. Significant factors include the Columbus quatercentenary of 1892-3, which involved the exhibition of Caribbean Amerindian artefacts at the Chicago Columbian Exposition; the debate about the extinction of native cultures, initially joined over the fate of the last Tasmanians; the ‘coming of age’ of anthropology as a scientific discipline; and the beginnings of tourism in the Caribbean. Of special importance was the degree of US interest and involvement in the area, which developed through the second half of the nineteenth century and culminated in the war with Spain over Cuba and the annexation of Puerto Rico in 1898.

After Ober the most important figure was Hesketh Bell, the colonial administrator responsible for the formalization of what is now the Carib Territory on Dominica. Other significant writers from the period include the American and English doctors, W.S. Birge and Frederick Treves, the American and Scottish naturalists A.

³ Cf. Hulme 1986 and 1992 for further analysis.

⁴ For some minor exceptions to Taylor’s statement, see Hulme and Whitehead, ed. 1992: 231-7; and cf. Chester 1869: 16-17. The exceptionally mountainous topography of Dominica meant that the Caribs were not hurried into expulsion as they were from St. Vincent (Gullick 1985; Gonzalez 1988). There are obvious parallels between visitors to the two islands, but I concentrate here on the Dominican Caribs.

Hyatt Verrill and Symington Grieve, and the French Catholic priest, René Suaudeau. Some account will be given of this body of writing, and then some analysis offered.

Ornithological Eyes: Frederick Ober

In the Preface to *Camps in the Caribbees* Frederick Ober writes of “leaving the beaten path of travel” in order to “penetrate beyond the line of civilization.” He offers his readers the Caribbean forest, “where everything reposes in nearly the same primitive simplicity and freshness as when discovered by Columbus, nearly four centuries ago.” “My only claim,” he writes, “is that these sketches are original, and fresh from new fields — new, yet old in American history, — and that they are accurate, so far as my power of description extends. They have not, like the engravings, had the benefit of touches from more skilfull hands, and they may be crude and unfinished, and lack the delicate shadings and half-tones a more cunning artist could have given them; but they are, at least, true to nature” (1880: v-vii).⁵ Ober’s first account of life among the Dominican Caribs is indeed full and sympathetic, though his scientific attitude is nicely caught by the way in which his lamentation over the death of the community’s oldest inhabitant, from whom he had wanted to collect a Carib vocabulary, is

⁵ Frederick Albion Ober (1849-1913) almost literally stumbled upon the Caribs during an ornithological field-trip to Dominica in 1877. Ober had an early interest in natural history: a boyhood collection of stuffed and mounted birds from his local area in Massachusetts impressed Alexander Agassiz of the museum at Harvard University. From the early 1870s Ober worked for the Smithsonian Institution and wrote extensively for the journal *Forest and Stream*. He spent two years (1876-78) in the Lesser Antilles, discovering twenty-two species of birds new to science. His ornithological findings were printed in the annual report of the Smithsonian Institution, but he also produced a travel book for the general reader, *Camps in the Caribbees: The Adventures of a Naturalist in the Lesser Antilles* [1879], the first account of Carib life on Dominica to be published for several decades. Ober later published a popular *Guide to the West Indies*, and had a successful career in real-estate in Hackensack, New Jersey. When, after the Spanish-American war there were rumours that England and the U.S.A. were going to swap the Philippines and the British West Indies, Ober was a strong proponent of US annexation of the West Indies as a whole.

alleviated by the idea of exhuming her skeleton and taking it back for the Smithsonian's collection.

It may have been that the quickening of interest in the Caribs of Dominica in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was related to the long run up to the Columbus quatercentenary in 1892, and the associated World's Fair at Chicago in 1893. Certainly Frederick Ober was called upon to act as Commissioner for the Caribbean, a task he writes about in *In the Wake of Columbus* (1894), calling the Chicago Exposition "the grandest work of its kind the world has ever seen; the crowning event of a century filled with wonders and miracles of man's invention" (Preface, n.p.). His work took him back to Dominica:

My [1891] visit to the Caribs of Dominica was for the purpose of ascertaining how many of them, of pure blood, could be prevailed upon to go to the Exposition; it being the intention of the managers to gather there all the representative Indians of North and South America.

The Caribs, as the last living representatives of the Indians found in these islands by Columbus, possess a peculiar interest for the ethnologist, and it was my desire to secure from them not only an exhibit, but the best types of the people themselves. There are very few of pure Indian blood remaining, as in the course of generations, they have become mixed to a great extent with the blacks.

Altogether, there may be two hundred Caribs in Dominica, and of this number some fifteen families are uncontaminated with negro blood. They live in the same primitive style as did their ancestors when found by Columbus; dwelling in huts of palm, tilling a little land, making cassava bread from the manihot plant, fishing when the sea is smooth, hewing out canoes from the great gum-trees, and weaving baskets (464-5).

This passage, like many in Ober's writings about the Caribs, tempers the nuances of elegy with the harder tones of ethnological scientism. The Chicago Exposition is a Linnaean tableau for the display of "all the representative Indians" of the Americas, and Ober's task is to encourage "the best types" of the Caribs to attend

which, in this instance, means the families “of pure Indian blood.” As so often in these discourses, the sense of decline — which calls forth the elegaic tones — is combined with a sense of continuity which guarantees the authenticity of the ‘representatives’; they need to live in the same primitive style as their ancestors, his sketches are from “new fields — yet old,” his penetration “beyond the line of civilization” has brought him to a world where everything remains “in nearly the same primitive simplicity” as in the time of Columbus himself, as if the wake were still visible after four centuries, undisturbed by the turbulent history of the colonial period.⁶ The instructions to Ober and his colleagues were quite specific: “Objects traded to the natives by whites are of no importance and are not desired; the plan being to secure such a complete collection from each tribe as will illustrate the condition and mode of life of the tribe before contact with Europeans” (Johnson, ed. 1897: II, 319).⁷

Travellers’ Tales: A.H. Verrill, W.S. Birge, Frederick Treves, Symington Grieve

Ober set the tone. The travellers that followed were usually aware of his work. Paton refers to it and Verrill, also an ornithologist, presumably knew Ober well. 1887 was a busy year. James Anthony Froude, anatomist of the British Empire, was in Dominica at the same time as Paton, and wrote that the Caribs “still lingered in the forests” (1909: 113), though, like Paton, he himself did not get as far as the northeast coast to visit them. A.H. Verrill did, though his account is part of a much later retrospective survey of a long career as ornithologist and writer. The New England doctor, W.S. Birge, also visited the Caribs that year, and his written account also had to wait — though in this case only until 1900.

⁶ This was period in which, according to Adam Kuper, “primitivism” was invented as the founding concept of anthropology (Kuper 1988).

⁷ As far as I am aware there is no information as to whether Ober succeeded in taking the Caribs to Chicago. Relevant work on the Exposition and on the exhibition of indigenous peoples in the period includes Fogelson 1991, Hinsley 1990, Rydell 1987, Bogdan 1988.

Verrill calls his *Thirty Years in the Jungle* (1929) “neither a book of travel, a novel, a narrative of adventure, nor a treatise on jungle life; but, in a way, ... a combination of all” (v) — which may act as a warning to read it with some care. He has, he writes, tried to demonstrate “the customs, beliefs, habits and admirable traits of the wild, unspoiled aborigines, for the purpose of studying whom most of my expeditions have been undertaken” (xii).⁸ On this first visit to Dominica he spends much time in Laudat, where he describes most people as having Carib features, although the family he stays with also have a Carib servant called Beché with whom he goes hunting for parrots.

Beché’s native village is La Soir (presumably La Soie). When Verrill visits, the inhabitants were “shy, friendly, smiling and hospitable, and it was hard to believe that it was these peaceful, timid aborigines who, for nearly two hundred years... brought terror to the hearts of all enemies, white, black or yellow” (27-8). The tribe numbered about two hundred, he recalls, with less than a score speaking Carib (28). Beché had been purchased as a child and was virtually a slave — “although a very well-treated one” (28).

The chief, an elderly fine chap, became fascinated with a pair of scissors I was using, and as I had bestowed several small gifts on Beché’s parents and other members of the tribe, I presented the scissors to the chief. The old fellow grunted, grinned, and hurrying off returned presently leading a very pretty Carib girl, perhaps fifteen years of age. Through the medium of Leon as interpreter, he informed me she was his daughter and that she was mine in exchange for the scissors.

In vain I protested and declined to accept the girl, who appeared to take the deal as a matter of course. To the chief my protests meant merely that I was not satisfied with the bargain, and he became quite excited, declaring she was the prettiest girl in the village, and he appeared

⁸ Alpheus Hyatt Verrill (1871-1954), author, naturalist, explorer. Born in New Haven, he was the son of one famous naturalist and named after another. Amongst his many books are *The American Indian*, *The Book of the West Indies*, and the children’s adventure story, *Carib Gold*.

quite peeved and even insulted at my attitude. It would never do to incur the displeasure of the chief, and something had to be done which would satisfy all the parties concerned. So I accepted my involuntary purchase, appeased the ruffled chief by giving him a file and a knife for full measure, and, explaining that I could not be encumbered by the girl on my long trip to Morne Diablotin, I gave her into her father's keeping until I should return to claim her. Evidently Carib custom provides that goods left unclaimed beyond a certain time can be disposed of, for when I next visited La Soir, nearly twenty years later, I found my feminine chattel married to a strapping Carib in whom I failed to recognize my old friend Beché, and the mother of several yellow-skinned aborigines (28-9).

It is remarkable how many of these narratives turn on a diverted or repressed sexual encounter between western traveller and Carib girl; and I will want to comment on the significance of this theme. It emerges in something like its purest and most naive form in W.S. Birge's *In Old Roseau*, published in 1900.⁹ The first half of the book sees Birge lazing around "old Roseau" doing very little. One day he stands on the bridge overlooking the Roseau River, at a loose end. He tires of watching the "Dominican damsels washing clothes in the river, every one conspicuous by her bright-colored petticoat, very short, coming some three inches above the knees, showing in most of them an exquisite contour of dusky limbs below" (66), and turns inland to look at the mountains: "Those are the Dominican Mountains,' I said to myself, 'and what lies beyond? Is it not the Mahoe country, inhabited by the remnant of that once powerful tribe, the Carib Indians, so memorable in the early Columbian history?' " (67).

He recalls reading Washington Irving and quotes him at length on the subject of the Caribs:

⁹ William Spoford Birge (1857-1925), a doctor resident in Provincetown, Massachusetts, at the time of the publication of *In Old Roseau*. He also published *Senhor Antone, A Tale of the Portuguese Colony, My Lady's Handbook: Health, Strength, and Beauty*, and *True Food Values and Their Low Costs*.

Columbus found the Caribs a powerful and warlike people, entirely different from the peaceful mild-mannered natives that he first encountered. They were trained to war from their infancy; their distant roamings by sea made them observant and intelligent. They went, on predatory enterprises, in canoes made from the hollowed trunks of trees, to the distance of one hundred and fifty leagues. Their arms were bows and arrows, pointed with the bones of fishes, or shells of tortoise, and poisoned with the juice of a certain herb. They made descents upon the various islands, ravaged the villages, carried off the youngest and handsomest of the women, and made prisoners of the men, to be killed and eaten. When the men went forth on these expeditions, the women remained to defend their shores from invasion. The natives of the other islands only knew how to divide time by day and night by the sun and moon; whereas, these had acquired some knowledge of the stars, by which to calculate the times and seasons (68-9: compressing several paragraphs from Irving [1981: 187-9]).

The resulting visit enables him to entitle Part II of his book "Reminiscences of a Sojourn Among the Remnants of a Once Powerful People" (63), a sojourn which begins when Birge travels to the Mahoe country with Jean Baptiste Pierre, the son of a French father and Carib mother, who proves a perfect 'informant,' fully accepted as Carib and yet with a sense of himself as an outsider. He also has two sisters, Louise and Marcella, aged 15 and 17: " 'Bon jour, monsieur,' exclaimed the elder of the two, as she came forward and extended her hand, 'we with plaisure welcome ze gentleman.' A flush stole over the olive cheeks, and the rich red lips parted in a smile, showing a set of pearly teeth that would have created envy in the heart of a society belle" (77).

A variety of incidents ensues, including one in which Birge is deliciously embarrassed by the number of clothes that the two sisters are prepared to shed in order to cross a swollen stream, and another in which Marcella enters his room at night and kisses him softly on the forehead. The day before he leaves, Marcella comes to ask questions about his life in America. He describes himself as

“an old bachelor” (97). She wishes she could go to his country, and he asks her what she would do there:

“Why —” there was a slight hesitation in her voice, and a deeper tinge of color overspread her cheeks — “I would live with you, monsieur.”

“That could hardly be, my child; I have no home of my own, besides it would not be considered the proper thing in my country” (97).

They spar in this fashion for a while, the dialogue interspersed with his comments about “her magnificent hair” falling about “her dainty neck and shoulders” (98) and “those great dark eyes” (98). Birge claims to be taken aback by her line of questioning: “I had looked upon her as hardly more than a child” (99).

“Oh! monsieur,” she continued; “you leave Mahoe to-morrow — do pity poor Marcella. Take me with you. I do not ask to be your wife, zat would be impossible. You no marry poor Carib girl. I will be your slave. Anything you wish, monsieur; only take me with you. You do not love me, but you can like me one little bit. I love you, monsieur, so much.”

Her bosom heaved with emotion, and throwing her arms around my neck, she pressed her warm cheek against my own, her raven tresses hanging in reckless profusion around us both. I will not attempt to describe what transpired during the next few moments. How I tried in vain to reason with her, telling how different from her own were the ways and customs of the American people. How the climate was bleak and cold. How she would soon wither and pine like a tropical flower transplanted from the warmth and sunshine of its own heather. It was of no avail and, finally, when I disengaged her arms from about my neck, she flung her quivering form upon the ground and wept as if her heart would break. I thought it best to let her feelings have sway, and walked away and left her (99-100).

In Old Roseau, written thirteen years later, has a touching dedication: "To My Wife, who has been a constant companion and help through years of a busy professional life, this little book is dedicated with a feeling of respect and honest affection." The opposite page is decorated with a picture of the seventeen-year-old Carib beauty, Marcella.

Frederick Treves's travel books, written over the first twenty years of the century, offer a kind of "report on Empire," a fairly leisurely survey written in a distinctly less anguished tone than that, say, of Froude, some thirty years earlier.¹⁰ In *The Cradle of the Deep* (1908) he recounts his West Indian voyage, including a visit to Dominica, although it appears that Treves — like Paton and Froude — did not visit the Carib Territory. Dr Henry Nicholls, a not insignificant medical figure himself, who had taken an interest in the Caribs, clearly acted as an intermediary, offering the figure of the young girl Victorine as an emblem of 'Caribness' for Treves to contemplate and around whom to weave his historical meditations. As I have said, it is not uncommon for visitors to focus on an adolescent girl: Victorine, whose photograph forms Treves's frontispiece (fig. 1), is wearing more clothes than most.

Treves recapitulates the familiar history, though with a slant distinctly sympathetic to the Caribs. For example, the Arawaks are described as "savages of a low type, indolent, gentle and unprogressive," whereas the Caribs were "fierce, warlike and intelligent." "They could claim to be a race of fine people," he

¹⁰ Sir Frederick Treves (1853-1923) is best known as the foremost surgeon and anatomist of his day. Born in Dorset he was educated at William Barnes's school where he met Thomas Hardy, a life-long friend. The textbooks on surgery that Treves wrote in the 1880s and 1890s were standard works in their field until after the second world war. He was appointed surgeon extraordinary to Queen Victoria in 1900 and gained world-wide fame by successfully conducting an appendectomy on King Edward VII two days before his coronation, a service which gained him his baronetcy. A later generation knows him better as the doctor who befriended Joseph Merrick, the Elephant Man. Treves's last book, *The Elephant Man and Other Reminiscences* is the source of all subsequent work on the topic. Shortly after his elevation to baronet, Treves retired from surgery. He had published an account of his experiences of the South African War, *Tale of a Field Hospital*, and the success of this book encouraged him to spend the next twenty years travelling and writing about his travels. There is a recent biography: Stephen Trombley, *Sir Frederick Treves: The Extra-Ordinary Edwardian* (1989).



Figure 1

writes, and in support quotes Francis Drake as calling them “very personable and handsome strong men.” He goes on to conjure a powerful picture of October 1492 from the viewpoint of a “naked savage of San Salvador” (“Now, on this October morning, there came from out of the unknown three fearsome things that moved upon the sea”).

During my stay on Dominica I was able, through the kindness of Dr. Nicholls, to make the acquaintance of a pure-blooded Carib from the Reservation. She was a girl of ten, whose name was Victorine. She was a picturesque little maid, with pretty manners and singularly sweet voice. Her complexion was yellow-brown, her hair long, lank and black. She had the lacquer-black eyes of a Japanese doll, almond shaped and a little oblique, a fine mouth and lips, slightly prominent cheeks. The type of her face was distinctly Mongolian, without the least suggestion of the negro in its outlines... Victorine could claim at least an interesting ancestry. Her people roamed the island for centuries before Columbus came. They saw the sailing hither of the first great ship the Marie Galante. They watched the landing of Drake and Hawkins when they came for 'refreshing,' just as now they may gaze at blue jackets coming ashore from the modern ironclad. Victorine may not be "the daughter of a hundred earls," but among her forefathers might have been that "King of the Cannibal Islands" who is for ever famous in the English nursery song.

She might still have been attracted by a scarlet cap, a string of beads, or a hawk's bell. None of these being at hand, she was offered her choice of certain commonplace articles. With a remarkable precision and with more than mere instinct she selected a purse and two half-crowns, those being the largest of the coins laid out before her. It was impossible not to feel that the most fitting present for this little wild thing, with her brown skin and piercing eyes and her wilder ancestry, would still have been a hawk's bell (Treves 1908: 173-4).

Victorine may be picturesque and wild, but the real interest lies in the even wilder ancestry that she can claim — or, to be more precise, that Treves can claim for her. Again, though, as with Ober, the interest is dependent upon the purity of the blood which serves to underwrite the connection back to Columbus and to the primitivism which Treves is determined to find. Victorine's instinct may be determinedly 'modern' as she unerringly selects the two

half-crowns: Treves has to resort to the notion of grammatical impossibility in order to present the hawk's bell which he feels would have been most fitting.

In the cases of Verrill and Birge, the sexual encounters narrowly avoided were with teenage girls. Treves's Victorine is slightly younger, as is the semi-naked girl who appears in Symington Grieve's photograph of a couple of years earlier, having her hair washed in a stream (fig. 2).¹¹ The connotations are again

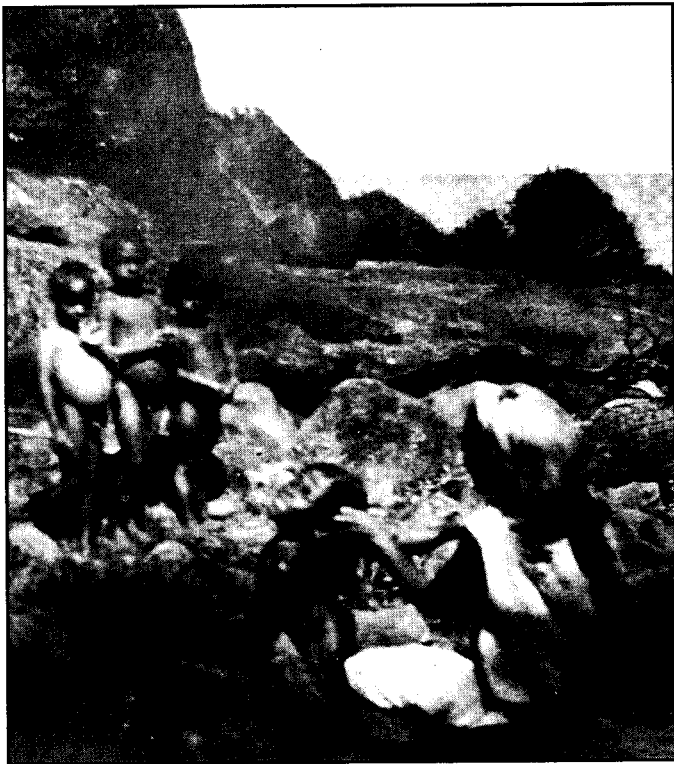


Figure 2

¹¹ Symington Grieve (fl. 1885-1923) was a Scottish naturalist whose other books include *The Great Auk, or Garefowl* and *The Book of Colonsay and Oronsay; Forty-four Years of Research and Discovery in Early Scoto-Irish, Norse, Icelandic, and Danish History*.

complex. These are 'wild' Indians, but their ferocity belongs to the past, so they are, it seems, best represented by the children, especially young girls, who suggest the 'freshness' of that supposedly primitive world, enhanced by the metonymic transfer of wildness to the setting. In this respect Grieve's photograph belongs to a long tradition not seriously challenged in the native Caribbean context until H.M. and E.L. Ayers' photographs in the early 1940s (Taylor 1941).

The Administrator's Visit: Henry Hesketh Bell

1893 was an important year for Dominica and, indirectly, for the Caribs themselves. The controversial tour undertaken in the 1880s by Joseph Chamberlain's friend, the historian James Anthony Froude, had given impetus to the decision of the British Government to, in Hesketh Bell's words, "make a definite effort to put Dominica on its legs," a decision taken under the influence of Chamberlain's campaign to improve and develop the much-neglected colonies of the British West Indies. Froude had expressed his special interest in Dominica and in the Caribs (though, as mentioned before, he did not manage to visit them). But his opinion of the island was simply that "in our hands it is falling into ruin," for which his remedy was a good administrator with wide powers (Froude 1909: 173-4). After serious tax riots in La Plaine in 1893, quelled by troops from H.M.S. Mohawk shooting into a crowd of protestors and killing four people, a Government Commission under Sir Robert Hamilton¹² had investigated the problems more formally (Hamilton 1894), and Bell (appointed in 1899) was presumably given some suggestions. He certainly speaks of Chamberlain's often expressed interest in the Caribs, possibly awakened by the two letters written by rival Carib chiefs to the Government Commissioner; certainly Bell's 'decision' to recognize the Carib Reserve was taken quickly and before his first visit to the north-eastern coast.

¹² Sir Robert G.C. Hamilton (1836-95) was a long-serving civil servant who had just retired as governor of Tasmania when he was appointed to head the Royal Commission to Dominica.

The ultimate consequence of this outside interest during 1893 for the Caribs was then the formalization of the 'Carib Reserve' ten years later. What Ober had initiated was a concern for the Caribs — expressed from beyond the island of Dominica — which led ultimately to the island itself, at least through its colonial officials, having to take the Caribs more seriously than before. This raised for the first time in many years the question of representation: who would represent the interests of the community to these outsiders? As a result (one can speculate), the institution of 'chief' came again to have an importance not seen since the mid-eighteenth century. An early glimpse of this renewed importance is provided by the letters addressed to Sir Robert Hamilton during the course of his royal commission to Dominica in 1893, one from the 'official' chief, Auguste François, and one from his 'rival,' Bruni Michelle, who clearly had to do without the assistance of the official interpreter. I quote them here in full.

LETTER from CARIB CHIEF

Dominica, Dec 7 1893

SIR,

I, as CHIEF of the Caribs residing in the district of St. Marie, in this island, have been asked to lay a few facts before your Excellency as a cause of discontent.

1. We require a school in the quarter, and as there is none, the children are brought up in ignorance.
2. A hospital is also much needed, and our sick are taken to town with great difficulty. The distance to town is considerable, and the roads are in very bad condition.
3. I conduct the affairs of the settlement, and receive no remuneration from the Government.

4. I very respectfully ask to be heard in person.

I am, &c.

(Signed) AUGUSTUS FRANCIS

His Excellency Sir Robt. G.C. Hamilton, K.C.B.

Her Majesty's Special Commissioner to enquire into
Dominica Affairs

Read over to the above Augustus Francis by the
Interpreter, and sworn by him to truly represent the wants
of the Caribs.

PETITION from BRUNI MICHELLE, Rival Chief of the
Caribs. To HER MAJESTY.

In the Name of God.

MY LORD,

We humble beg of your kindness to accept our
petition of your poor people, Indians or Caraiibe, of
Salibia, to unbrace the favarable opportunity to addressing
to you to emprove the marcy of our Beloved Mother and
Queen Victoria, for her poor and unfortunate childrens.
We dont have nothings to supported us, no church, no
school, no shope, no store. We are very far in the forest;
no money, no dress, etc., etc. They call us wild savages. No
my beloved Queen, it is not savages, but poverty. We
humble kneel down in your feet to beg of your assistance.

Accept from your humble childrens of Salibia, in the care of

MR. BRUNI MICHELLE

11 December 1893 Make at Salibia.

(Hamilton 1894: 91 and 117).

*

Henry Hesketh Bell has a key role in the modern history of Dominica. During his six years as Administrator, right at the beginning of this century, he was responsible for many attempts at innovation, which laid the basis for the island's future development. In particular, his determination to create a proper road system, though not fully achieved even in his (very long) lifetime, began to make overland visits to the Carib *quartier* more feasible for relatively casual visitors. Bell himself made two official visits within his first two years on the island, and a third in 1903 to announce to the Caribs that Chamberlain had accepted that the area of Dominica where they lived should become a recognized Carib Reserve. An official account of this visit had been published the previous year by the Colonial Office (Bell 1902). Drawing on this report but also on notes and letters from the time, Bell wrote another account in his autobiographical *Glimpses of a Governor's Life* (1946).

Bell, like many colonial officials, was something of a writer and an amateur anthropologist. His penchant for graphic descriptions is apparent even within the pages of his official report to the Colonial Office. During his tenure of office on Dominica, Bell took anthropometric measurements of Caribs and others, seeking instructions in the proper techniques from the Royal Anthropological Society in London. After his retirement he took

extensive notes with a view to writing a book on the Caribs, but never did.¹³

Bell's early book, *Obeah: Witchcraft in the Caribbean* [1889], written on Grenada, contains an extraordinary scene in which the discovery of a Carib zemi prompts a romantic reverie full of beautiful native maidens and scenes of ghastly human sacrifice, all introduced by a more sober historical *resumé*:

The island of Grenada was first colonized by the French in the middle of the seventeenth century, and old French historians gravely aver that the island was duly and legally purchased from the Caribs. We find, however, that the price paid was two or three bottles of rum and a few knives, so we can easily understand that the unfortunate natives hardly considered themselves sufficiently compensated for their loss of independence and consequent misery, and we can scarcely blame them for repelling the invaders by all the means in their power. Might, as usual, overcame Right, and the unfortunate Indians were hunted into the woods like animals, and mercilessly destroyed wherever met with. They defended their soil, however, with the utmost bravery, and, unlike the Indians of the larger islands, preferred death to slavery. The last of the Grenada Caribs perished by throwing themselves off a precipitous cliff into the ocean, and the rock was thenceforward known as 'le Morne des Sauteurs' (1893: 85).

¹³ Sir Henry Hesketh Joudou Bell (1864-1952) had a long career in the Colonial Service, beginning as a junior official in the West Indies (where he was born) in 1883 and ending as governor of Mauritius in 1925. He was Administrator of Dominica from 1899 to 1905. He wrote several books about Africa and the Caribbean, as well as the autobiographical memoir referred to. He kept extensive diaries, scrapbooks and files. On his death the diaries were bequeathed to the British Library, where they are not available for inspection until 2002; the rest of the material was left by his niece, Mrs. Llewellyn-Taylor, to the Royal Commonwealth Society Library on her death in 1969. The RCS divides the material into eight sections: I Scrapbooks; II Synposes of diaries; III Notebooks; IV Letters; V Files; VI Pictorial; VII Books; VIII Sundries. 'Scrapbooks' contain the newspaper clippings quoted; 'Files' has material on the Caribs which Bell was collecting for his book.

Bell arrived in Dominica in September 1899. He took his first extensive riding tour, with Leslie Jarvis, his private secretary, in December; and visited the 'Carib Reservation' as he calls it in his diary, on 7 February 1900. This visit was reported in *The Dominica Guardian* for Wednesday 21 February 1900 in an article written by Bell in the third person, written up for his report to Chamberlain, and then recalled in *Glimpses of a Governor's Life* (1946):

In spite of their cannibalistic habits, these Yellow Caribs appear to have been a fine and rather noble race of savages. They fought like sportsmen, and numbers of instances of heroic fortitude, on their part, are recorded by the early writers on the West Indies. They fought openly and to the death, with spears and tomahawks, bows and arrows, and appear rarely to have descended to the use of poisoned weapons. When in full war-paint they must have presented a fearsome appearance, for they painted their bodies a bright red with the juice of the roucou (annatto), and their flashing eyes were encircled by broad rings of gleaming white pigment. Their long black hair was decorated by coronets of brilliant feathers, while necklaces of human teeth hung from their necks. French and Spanish missionaries, who wrote about them, describe these Caribs as of tall stature and handsome shape, and lay stress upon their pride and self-possession. Many of the characteristics of these people so closely resemble those of the North American Indians that one is inclined to conclude that the Yellow Caribs of the Leeward and Windward Islands must originally have been an offshoot from the brave and handsome race that peopled the broad prairies of North America.

One can imagine the terror which these dauntless savages created in the minds of the early settlers in the islands farther north. Without a sign of warning, the long black canoes, crowded with painted warriors, would, in the darkness of the night, suddenly round a headland and swarm into the little harbour of a peaceful settlement. Before the white men could fly to their arms or concert a plan for defence, the scarlet-hued savages, yelling like

fiends, would be in their midst. In an instant the little town, with its brown thatched dwellings, would be in a blaze. Overpowered by numbers, the unfortunate traders and artisans, fighting as best they could in the glare of their burning homes, would fall under the stone hatchets and tomahawks of the Caribs, leaving the shrieking women and children at the mercy of their captors, doomed to a horrible fate in a distant land...

I quote this passage at length because it gives such a powerful impression of the extraordinary psychological investment made in the Caribs by some of these Anglo-American writers; and because it demonstrates so clearly that, for Bell at least, the Caribs are an ideal type of the American Indian of Bell's homoerotic imagination — the "brave and handsome race." Almost inevitably the people themselves were a let-down:

At the entrance to the Reserve we were met by the old Chief of the Caribs, surrounded by about 150 of his people grouped around a small "triumphal arch" made of coco-nut branches and decorated with flowers and fruit. I must say that their appearance was a considerable disappointment. After all I had read about the Caribs of the old days, their fine physique, their heroism in battle and their engaging cannibalistic habits, I had conjured up visions of splendid men of the Red Indian type, and half expected to see them covered with feathers and red paint.

The reality was far from my imagination. These last remnants of the magnificent savages that were once the terror of the Caribbean seas wore a distressingly dull and prosaic appearance. Auguste, the Chief, was clad in an old and dilapidated black morning-coat that shone green in the sunlight, with a pair of white cotton trousers, while, on his head, was precariously perched — as it was manifestly much too small for him — one of those flat-topped, hard felt hats beloved of churchwardens. His old wife, who was blind, stood beside him, was dressed in a clean, print gown, and on top of her white head-kerchief wore a man's black, soft felt hat, crushed flat. All the rest of the Caribs were

similarly dressed in ordinary European clothing, and there was nothing but their faces to show any difference between them and the ordinary Creole inhabitants of the island...

I was pained to see that, out of the three or four hundred individuals, who are now the sole representatives of the dauntless race which occupied all these islands in the time of Columbus, not more than 120 are now of pure blood. I said what I could to make them realize that they are now the last remnant of a fine race and that they should try to keep their breed pure, but I fear that the claims of ethnology will not have much effect on them (Bell 1946: 16-17, 19-21).

The first photograph taken of a Carib chief (fig. 3) seems calculated to confirm this impression of a "dull and prosaic

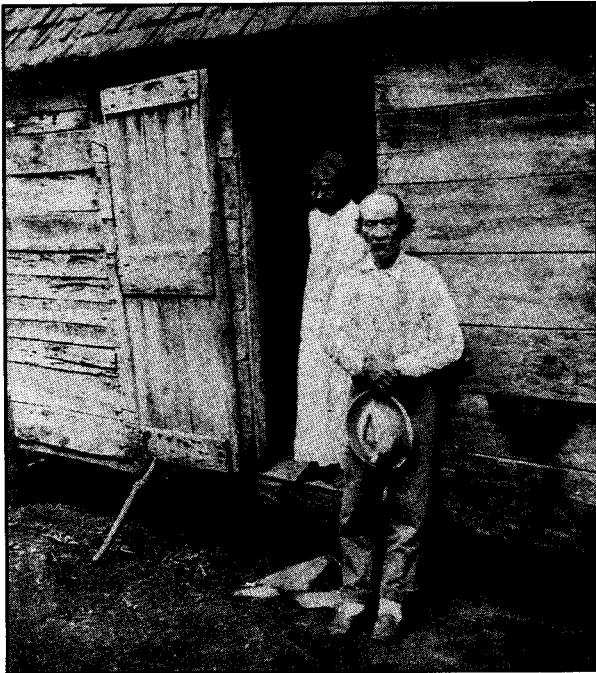


Figure 3

appearance" with little indication of majesty or indeed of the "American Indianness" that Bell was expecting.

Parliament had quickly accepted Bell's report, on Chamberlain's recommendation, so Bell's next official visit to the Carib Territory, reported by the local newspaper on 17 March 1903, was undertaken to advise the Caribs of the adoption of his proposals. Bell spoke to them in English: his remarks were translated into patois. He stressed his sense that they had not been treated in the past with either justice or consideration; reviewed his finding that no definite boundaries had been assigned to their settlement, which was why he had lately caused their lands to be surveyed. (And the plan of the survey was here shown to them). The Secretary of State for the Colonies was taking a lively interest in their welfare, Bell stressed, and had approved of the extension of their Reserve to a total area of 3,500 acres. This land would be granted to them and their offspring, and would remain theirs so long as they were loyal and peaceable subjects of the Crown. Mr. Bell was also glad to tell them that the Government would duly recognise 'Francis Auguste' as their head and chief of the tribe, and that a small grant of £6 a year would be paid to him during his life.

The Chief presented an address to Bell, which was read by Mr Angol, the school-teacher at Salybia, in which he gave profuse thanks to Bell and to the Colonial Secretary, especially for the long-promised elementary school, which had now been in place for several months. About the land-grant he announced, in the address's most memorable sentence: "We, as a relic of a bye-gone time, are placed by a kind providence in the safe keeping of the British Empire, and we commemorate this day's event as giving us a recognised foothold in this great Empire."¹⁴

Despite his initial disappointment at seeing the present-day Caribs, Bell obviously soon recovered his enthusiasm. According to his diary, he "Started writing a book on Caribs" on 26 September 1903.

¹⁴ *The Dominican* (19 March 1903), quoted from Bell's Scrapbook. The plan referred to is reproduced in Hulme and Whitehead, ed. 1992: 257.

Plan of book

After describing discovery of islands by Columbus and giving particulars of the earliest visits to Dca & other islands, by Europeans, give a full description of the Caribs, their manners & customs etc, before they became affected by contact with foreigners. Inspire the reader with a sympathy for the savages, by a picture of their noble character, courage, independence of spirit, and the justice of the cause...

This is perhaps the *locus classicus* for the Carib elegy: nobility, independence, and justice are combined with a focus on the pristine state 'before contact,' with present issues almost exclusively limited to, and certainly circumscribed by interest in what can count as 'survivals' of that earlier state. The victim, as always, is history.

An interesting sidelight is cast on Bell's attitude to the Carib chief in letters written a few years later by René Suaudeau, a Catholic priest resident in Salybia (Sainte-Marie).¹⁵ Writing to his parents, Suaudeau offered another description of the Carib chief:

When I speak of the king of the Caraïbes, you must not imagine a king sitting on a throne with a crown on his head and a sceptre in his hand... He is an old Caraïbe, blind for the last year, to whom, four or five years ago, the

¹⁵ By the beginning of the twentieth century there were enough parish priests on Dominica to ensure fairly regular visits, and most of the Caribs were, at least nominally, Catholics. Father René Suaudeau came out from France as a young priest in the early years of the new century. He was parish priest at Wesley and made regular visits to the Carib villages to his south, especially to the church that had been established at Sainte-Marie (Salybia). He wrote regularly to his parents in France and, after his early death in 1908, they asked his religious order to publish the letters in his memory. It was Suaudeau who arranged for a photograph of Auguste and his wife to be taken. In a letter of 15 March 1906 he wrote to his parents: "You will soon receive a photograph of the king and queen of the Caribs. Several days ago I was in Sainte-Marie and an Englishman and his son belonging to a great and noble family came to see me. They had a photographic machine with them. I asked them to photograph the king and queen, which they were delighted to do."

leadership of the Caraïbes was entrusted. He received his command from the Queen of England and collects 200 francs a year; but in reality he commands nothing. His wife is blind too. The first time I went to their house it was to take Almighty God to his wife and to confess the old king, who is called Auguste; but without knowing that they were king and queen of the Caraïbes. When I found out later, I was really surprised by their sickly appearance. At the same time I found out from the people of Sainte-Marie, and from Father Bellaudeau himself, that the king had been a thief all his life and that his son now stole for him.

On Friday afternoon, the governor of Dominica, to whom I had lent the presbytery at Sainte-Marie for two days, came here to thank me, and we chatted about all this.

He said to me: Father, it was I myself, two years ago, who got a pension of 200 francs for that old sorcerer direct from the king of England. And I'm really sorry I did so (Suaudeau 1927: 51-3, trans. in Hulme and Whitehead, ed., 1992: 238-40).

The Re-invention of the Caribs

As must now be obvious from the materials I have been quoting, my particular interest here is in what might be called, somewhat grandly, the historiography of western versions of the anthropology of the native Caribbean, the invention and re-invention of the Caribs over the last 500 years. This historiography does not exist for its own sake, however intrinsically interesting much of it might be; it needs writing in order to help us better understand the ideological genealogy of anthropological conceptions past and present — including our own; and therefore to help us understand what we can and cannot know about the anthropology of the native Caribbean, past and present. The anthropological, archaeological, historiographic, linguistic and discursive analyses are all, ultimately, part of the same project.

'Re-invention' is self-evidently an overstatement; indeed the first thing that always needs stressing is the extent to which the

contemporary picture of native Caribbean anthropology has changed comparatively little from that first sketched by Columbus in 1492 and 1493 (Hulme 1992). Nonetheless, the central hypothesis implicit within this paper is that there was a significant shift in images of the native Caribbean about a century ago, and that this 're-invention' casts light on the paradigm of native Caribbean anthropology subsequently established by linguists and anthropologists such as Douglas Taylor and Irving Rouse in the 1930s and 1940s, and which became the conventional wisdom of the still not replaced *Handbook of South American Indians* published in 1948 (Rouse 1948a and b). By way of conclusion, then, I would like to address some of the ideas of 'Caribness' that came to dominate this period around the turn of the century, all of them related to, indeed descended from, the 'Caribness' invented in the colonial period, but all of them significantly different too from the original colonial version.

The first point to stress is that the supposed ferocity and martial qualities of the Caribs are confirmed but reassessed. The obvious reason for the reassessment is that that 'ferocity' is not any longer a danger to any of the colonial or would-be colonial powers in the area. Equally important, though, in this largely English-speaking rewriting of the history of the native Caribbean is that what Bell calls their 'heroic fortitude' had been aimed entirely at European colonial powers and principally at Spain; and Spain features in English and, of course, especially in U.S. writing of this period as a decadent colonial power holding back the possible development of islands like Cuba and Puerto Rico. Frederick Ober's account of his visit to Cuba while collecting material for the 1893 Chicago Exposition offers a good example of this attitude, seeing the Exposition as a symbol of U.S. progress and efficiency, neither of which Ober found in Cuba; an island notable, according to Ober, for the bureaucracy and corruption of its Spanish rulers (161). The ideological ground is here being laid for the military intervention of 1898.

What tends to happen over this period is that the conventional dualism — peace-loving Arawaks destroyed by ferocious Caribs — is maintained but discursively re-inflected. Frederick Treves, for example, calls the Arawaks "gentle," a traditional adjective to describe them, but embedded within a sentence which runs

“savages of a low type, indolent, gentle and unprogressive,” whereas the Caribs are “fierce, warlike” ... and “intelligent” (quoted above p. 14). The moral dualism established by the Spaniards comes close to being reversed: Bell has the Caribs preferring death to slavery “unlike the Indians of the larger islands” (above p. 22). Birge’s resume of Washington Irving (above pp. 11-12) strikes a similar note: “powerful and warlike,” but also “observant and intelligent.” Indeed Irving — not now read or taken seriously — may well be responsible for this degree of reassessment of the Caribs during the nineteenth century. Although Irving’s qualities as a historical scholar have often been called into question, he was properly sceptical about the orthodox picture of the Caribs which was, he says, “coloured by the fears of the Indians, and the prejudices of the Spaniards.” Irving’s conclusion is that “the warlike and unyielding character of these people, so different from that of the pusillanimous nations around them, and the wide scope of their enterprizes and wanderings, like those of the nomade tribes of the old world, entitle them to distinguished attention” (1981: 192).¹⁶

The idea of ‘Caribness’ also comes to stand for pure ‘American Indianness’ of a fully romantic tint. The history of the Caribs is “the old story of the North American Indians over again,” according to Paton (above p. 4), and Hesketh Bell was clearly expecting to meet a version of Sitting Bull on the Carib Reserve. There’s a complex dynamics here, which I do not have the space to unravel fully. On the northern continent the American Indian was still persistently present and intermittently dangerous. Frederick Ober visited the Caribbean for the first time just a few months after Custer and his men were killed at the Battle of the Greasy Grass; Birge, Paton and Verrill all went to Dominica before the

¹⁶ Irving’s biography of Columbus was published in 1828 with 175 editions and translations between then and 1900 (Irving 1981: lxxxvi). Irving worked with the Spanish texts from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, recently made available by Navarrete, but tended to inflect the materials in (loosely speaking) a ‘romantic’ way. New scholarly work was appearing at the end of the century (by Justin Winsor, John Boyd Thacher, etc.), but the popularity of Irving as a writer ensured his influence at least until the Great War. Ober also refers his readers specifically to Irving (1894: 271).

decisive massacre of Wounded Knee at the end of 1890. American Indians were already sentimentalized in certain forms of fiction, and they were already being packaged and domesticated for exhibition in shows like that put together by William Cody (Sell and Weibrigh 1955); but at least until 1890 they were an active military force in some parts of the U.S.A.

Perhaps by contrast to this potentially complex situation, the Island Caribs offered originality, as among the first Indians encountered by Columbus; they seemed too to offer survival in something like their primitive form — and there was little sense then, as there is still often little sense now, of a complex colonial history involving their interaction with a number of imperial powers. But above all they offered distance: their ‘purity’ as an exemplar of Indianness was a function first of the distance of Dominica from the U.S.A., secondly of the special nature of the island, which all writers affirmed, and thirdly of the inaccessibility of the Caribs even within the island itself. I started the paper with Paton because the purity of his idea of the Caribs is unsullied by anything so mundane as contact with them.

The third element to highlight is the trope of impending disappearance, which is novel when applied to the Caribs, I think, although well-established by the 1870s within the language of Social Darwinism to refer to the fate of so-called primitive peoples. Four terms recur almost obsessively in these discussions. The surviving Caribs are always a ‘remnant’ or ‘vestige’ of the original. ‘Remnant’ suggests, appropriately enough, the material left over after the completion of an industrial process, but may also connote the rags which the Caribs are often described as wearing. ‘Vestige’ belongs to the languages of biology and sociobiology, and is the word used by Douglas Taylor at the beginning of his pathbreaking 1938 article for the *Bureau of American Ethnology*: “it is with the purpose of recording, before it becomes too late, something of this vestige of a once virile and powerful people, that my own attempt at knowing [the Caribs] has been made” (1938: 109). Froude and Ober both use the verb ‘linger’ to describe what the Caribs are now doing, almost an insult itself in an age that was beginning to value speed. Patrick Leigh Fermor, the post-war travel writer, has the Caribs ‘lingering on the shores of extinction.’ The *Oxford English*

Dictionary defines 'to linger' as "to stay on or hang about in a place beyond the proper or usual time."

Mention should also be made of the question of racial purity, which is closely associated with the topic of disappearance, as Fermor's words indicate, since it turns out, as his sentence develops, that the Caribs lingering on the shores of extinction are going to be swept away by 'a black tide' (Fermor 1984: 118; cf. Hulme 1990). This concern for matters of racial purity may in part explain the increasing interest in the Dominican as opposed to the Vincentian Caribs at the turn of the century. It is certainly the case that there had been more interest in the Vincentian Caribs than in their Dominican counterparts during the first two thirds of the nineteenth century — although, admittedly, the absolute amount of material is very small for drawing conclusions of any kind. The probable explanation is that the wars at the end of the eighteenth century had focussed more attention on St. Vincent although, from the little evidence available, it also seems possible that until the eruption of Souffriere in 1902 disrupted Carib lifeways so seriously, the Vincentian Caribs adhered to more aspects of traditional Carib life than did the Dominican Caribs. However, although Ober visited both Carib communities, subsequent interest tended to concentrate on Dominica, and the crucial factor here seems to have been the persuasion — whether correct or not — that the Dominican Caribs were racially purer, and therefore more authentically 'Carib.' Ober's words on this subject are telling:

How similar has been the fate of the Caribs to that of the Seminoles of the Southern States! At the beginning of the present century, the latter were peaceful and happy, cultivating their gardens with an intelligence that shows them to have been superior people. They, too, were driven to war, stripped of their property, and hunted by white troops. Their resistance lasted for seven years, but in the end, nearly all were captured and transported far from their homes. Of them a remnant lingers in the hunting-grounds of their fathers, engaged, like the present Carib, in agricultural pursuits. With them, too, the negro found a home, married with them, and to them communicated the curse of his race (Ober 1880: 218).

Over the last half-century the overwhelming consensus has been that the native inhabitants of the Caribbean reached the islands from the mainland of South America. In the context of what Ober says here, and bearing in mind the insistence by Paton, Bell and others on Carib association with the American Indians on the northern sub-continent, it is worth pointing out both that the dominant origin thesis in the early part of the nineteenth century gave the Caribs an *African* homeland, a theory expounded at length by Bryan Edwards in the late eighteenth century and still defended by James Kennedy in his address on the subject of American Indian origins read before the Ethnological Society of London in 1854 (Kennedy 1854); and that this thesis was contested by the idea of a Floridian origin, famously proposed by Charles Rochefort (1665) and popularised by Washington Irving.

Three larger themes cut across and interconnect with these changes of emphasis. I can best approach the first of them by referring to the standard guide book to the West Indies in the first half of this century, Algernon Aspinall's *The Pocket Guide to the West Indies* first published in 1907. At the end of the chapter on Dominica, Aspinall has a short paragraph on 'The Carib Settlement' which runs as follows: "By those desirous of visiting the Caribs the coastal steamer should be taken to Marigot, whence their settlement can be reached on foot or horseback, the distance being eleven miles" (Aspinall 1912: 239). What interests me is that phrase "desirous of visiting the Caribs." The verb 'visit' has ten principal meanings according to the OED: 1. to comfort (usually referring to a visit by God); 2. to examine or subject to scrutiny; 3. to harm; 4. to afflict (usually referring to sickness); 5. to punish; 6. to call upon as an act of friendliness; 7. to attend (as a doctor); 8. to go to look at or examine; 9. to go to worship; 10. to go to for the purpose of sightseeing.

In what sense in 1907 can the Caribs be visited? Let us rule out the extremes of punishing or worshipping or curing, let us rule out social calls by those already acquainted with one another. If you take the following entry in the OED, the Caribs are 'visitable' in two senses: 'Liable to visitation by some competent authority' and 'capable of being visited'. What is common to both these senses — and herein lies the point of holding up for inspection this seemingly innocent word — is that the party being visited has no choice in the

matter. The Caribs are not 'visitable' in the third OED sense — 'having some social position in a neighbourhood,' and therefore 'capable of being visited on more or less equal terms by those of some standing in society'; they are very definitely 'liable' or 'capable' of being visited, passive recipients of the 'visits' of those who deem them 'visitable,' in either a supervisory or a touristic capacity.¹⁷

I would want to argue that this sense of 'visiting' is a relatively new phenomenon in the nineteenth century and one that characterizes this period of writing about the Caribs. It is to be distinguished from all the other possible kinds of contact — basically going to kill, to trade with, to convert, or to study. 'To visit' is the verb that belongs to sightseeing and tourism, but it also incorporates — at this period and at this place — independent travel and intellectual curiosity, without which we would have little first-hand evidence to draw on. 'Mass' visits, that is to say in groups of ten or more, are a phenomenon only of the last twenty years.¹⁸

To be visited is to be observed. This period sees the introduction of anthropology into the great exhibitions. As Frederick Putnam, head of the Department of Ethnology and Archaeology for the Chicago Columbian Exposition put it: "[The native tribes] have about vanished into history, and now is the last opportunity for the world to see them and to realize what their condition, their life, their customs, their arts were four centuries ago" (quoted in Hinsley 1990: 347). It is not irrelevant that the Chicago Exposition took place in the White City, a temple to technology with the tribal remnants of the Americas camped on the periphery to provide a base line against which white America could judge its progress into modernity. 'To see' was in these cases — to

¹⁷ Frederick Ober's guide book, published a year after Aspinall's, helpfully suggests that "in order to save yourself the trouble of the journey you might set a servant on the watch for Caribs when they come to town — as they frequently do for their marketing" (1908: 365).

¹⁸ Arguably the first 'visitor' in the sense I am using the word, was Père Labat, who did not live among the Caribs and did not try to convert them; so it is not surprising that he became the eminence grise of these 'visitors,' always being quoted, nor that he was the one French writer eventually to have been abridged and translated into English and to have had his biography written (Labat 1931; Young and Helweg-Larsen 1965).

paraphrase Roland Barthes — an intransitive verb, a self-contained activity that was limited to the visual dimension and rarely involved significant communication. The emblem of this contact is the photograph (cf. Green 1984).

The second of these larger themes to be picked out as a characteristic of this period of writing about the Caribs, is the suppressed — or sometimes not very suppressed — eroticism of the encounter. The psychodynamics of the colonial encounter has not been paid sufficient attention. You can find in the Spanish sources, for example, a deeply repressed identification between the Spanish and the Caribs; indeed the strongest form of this argument would be that what exists as 'the Caribs' in the early Spanish sources is a disavowed and projected self-image: marauders from across the seas who kill the native men and 'marry' the native women. That identification is much more open in the Anglo-American sources quoted here: the peaceful and gentle Arawaks have become pusillanimous and backward, the ferocious Caribs have become manly and sporting and even imperialistic — just like the British have been and the North Americans are in the process of becoming.

In this respect comparisons reveal much. Irving Rouse has always used the analogy of the Norman Conquest of Britain as a way of discussing the pre-Columbian Caribbean, with the Arawaks as the true Englishmen and the Caribs as the Normans, foreign invaders attempting to impose an alien culture on an autochthonous development, an analogy entirely in keeping with the early Spanish accounts (most recently Rouse 1992: 25). Paton, however, goes even further back in British history to see the Caribs as the Ancient Britons slowly dispossessed by the Danes and Norsemen, a truly originary struggle that dignifies Carib history (above, p. 1).

The politics of erotic encounter are obviously rather different, though they do form an equally staple feature of colonial discourse (Hulme 1986). What can be called the 'Pocahontas syndrome' takes many forms, but it always involves a native woman who is more responsive to the European colonist than her male counterparts, often saving his life as Pocahontas does for John Smith, or Yarico for Inkle in the Caribbean version. To be emphasised here is the way in which the theme of the welcoming Carib girl reproduces the

original Arawak/Carib division — which was itself already inflected discursively as a female/male division: not just because Carib men ‘married’ Arawak women, but because Carib women were seen as ‘masculine’ and Arawak men ‘feminine.’ In the narratives here under consideration the previously Arawak features (gentle, peaceful, welcoming) become attached — at least in the colonial imagination — to Carib women; just as in St. Vincent in the eighteenth century Arawak features would become attached to the so-called Yellow or pure Caribs while the impure Black Caribs retained the original martial Carib features.

In all of these cases, I would argue, the supposedly ethnographic description is in fact a function of the ideological and/or psychological needs of those offering the descriptions. However, although the body of material is relatively small, a national distinction could also be discerned here, with two very different images of empire on offer. The U.S. travellers are, in however mediated a fashion, imagining — even if, or especially if, they deny it — a sexual relationship with an adolescent Carib girl, a relationship that figures on the larger ideological map as the desire for a degree of involvement which cannot, for whatever reason, be achieved. That desire is no doubt in one register the great American search for innocence, but it is also, I would argue, the negotiation of a more direct political relationship between an expansionist U.S.A. and the Caribbean islands. Treves and Grieve, on the other hand, the British travellers, encounter pre-pubescent girls. There is certainly an element of the ethnopaedophilic here, but perhaps the dominant feature is the infantilization of the Caribs. As Britain’s power in the region declines, the representative figure amongst the aboriginal population becomes a child in need of protection.

The final issue raised by these materials is in many ways the most difficult, but also the most pressing. The visitors discussed here invariably met the Carib chief, if only because white-skinned visitors were so few that such visits were events of moment, significant occasions within the scant political life of the Carib communities. However, as soon as these visitors started to provide a connection to the outside world, even to Roseau itself, then the question of political representation became an issue of some importance. There are traces of this in the letters to Hamilton of

two rival chiefs, in the remarks that Suaudeau and Bell make about François Auguste, and in Auguste's own words to Bell in his speech of welcome.

When faced with the multiple significations imposed upon the Caribs by outsiders, from Columbus to the present day, the temptation is to endow with special significance the examples of direct Carib speech or writing, the few places where Carib priorities seem to lodge themselves within the dominant discourse. These moments are indeed worth careful attention, but exactly what they represent is by no means unproblematically clear. In two cases, Auguste François's letter to Hamilton (above pp. 19-20) and his address to Bell (pp. 26-27), an initial question is posed by the act of translation or interpretation, which immediately sets a screen between the reported words and any supposed 'original.' Auguste François's letter is then turned, presumably by the interpreter or one of Hamilton's officials, into the 'correct' format, just as he himself is turned into Augustus Francis. Similarly, when he addresses Bell in 1903, that stunning self-designation, "we, as a relic of a bye-gone time," suggests that Mr. Angol, the new school-teacher who reads Auguste's speech, may have had more than a hand in writing it.

Because it so comprehensively breaks with the 'proper' conventions of the chiefly word, Bruni Michelle's letter to Hamilton certainly strikes the modern eye as the most unmediated of these Carib words. Contextualisation is almost impossible here. Although Suaudeau has much to say about Auguste's unpopularity amongst the Caribs, this letter is the only evidence that there was a rival chief in the 1890s, and seems to be Bruni Michelle's only appearance in written records. For all that, his stark plea, written almost exactly a hundred years before the end of the United Nations year of indigenous peoples, stands in ironic counterpoint to western discourses. Its string of negatives — "no church, no school, no shope, no store, ...no money, no dress" almost parodies Gonzalo's utopian fantasy in *The Tempest*, and that engagement with the ethnographic view ("they call us wild savages") and rejection of it ("it is not savages, but poverty") has an almost unbearable poignancy as the Caribs in Dominica — along with many other West Indians — confront the appalling consequences

of the European single market in 1993, which threatens to devastate their economy.

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