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My identity and outlook have been very much shaped by my roots in the skilled working class of Jamaica, my experience of colorism in the Caribbean, and racism in Europe and later the United States, and my early encounter with and attraction to Pan-Africanist and Marxist ideas. I was not quite six years old when Jamaica gained its independence from Britain in 1962. So I am also very much a product and beneficiary of the anticolonial movement that swept the postwar world. I have been very inspired by the work of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Ho Chi Minh, Ché Guevara, and perhaps above all by the work of Amílcar Cabral, George Padmore, Claude McKay, and Walter Rodney. My encounter with Marx and Engels at the age of about sixteen was a great epiphany, and I still regard their work as indispensable to the understanding of capitalism and imperialism.

Most of my generation of Afro-Caribbeans in Britain was in one way or another profoundly affected by the Rastafarian movement that swept across the Atlantic to Britain in the early 1970s. Beseigned as we and our parents were by British racism, we welcomed its attack upon white supremacy and its attempts to decolonize our minds. From the United States, Black Power also came to Britain and we became familiar with the writings and struggles of George Jackson, Jonathan Jackson, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Angela Davis, and Stokely Carmichael. Malcolm X was also important to us, but my first encounter with his work was a shocking disappointment. I first read his posthumous collection *The End of White Supremacy*, with its nonsensical Nation of Islam creation myths. It was an unfortunate introduction to his work. It took me a good while to return to Malcolm and appreciate his more mature work and thinking, including his autobiography.

With the benefit of hindsight, I now think that a key part of my intellectual and political formation was my coming into contact with the rest of the Caribbean and Africa through not just study, but also through friendship and collaboration with people from different parts of the archipelago and the continent. At university in particular, I met people from every part of the British Caribbean. And because I was for several years the president of the West Indian Society on campus, I worked closely with my fellow Caribbean students and the local Caribbean community. Under my leadership we established even closer ties with African students on campus. My closest friends at the University of Leeds, where I did my first degree, were from Grenada, Guyana, and South Africa. I also had a close friendship with a comrade from Chile who had been driven into exile by Pinochet and I knew a number of Palestinians on campus. I also developed close friendships with Asian comrades from the Indian subcontinent and East Africa, many of whom had been radicalized by the insurgent and murderous fascism of the far-right National Front in the 1970s

and early 1980s. This type of comingling developed my internationalist and Pan-Africanist outlook and sensibilities.

I moved to London in 1978 to do graduate study at the London School of Economics and lived there until I came to the United States in 1991. My work at the LSE began with the political economy of the Third World, primarily Latin America and the Caribbean, shifted to a study of the economic history of Jamaica and finally ended, while I was teaching full-time, with a dissertation on the political evolution of Claude McKay. My teaching and work on McKay drew me in a more direct way than previously into the study of Afro-American and African diaspora history.

That, then, is the world out of which I emerged to practice history. I was formed by my class and African-Caribbean origin and oriented in the world by internationalism, Pan-Africanism and historical materialism. I also happened to believe that the world as it was and is, dominated by the capitalist mode of production and imperialism, was not and is not the best of all possible worlds.

Labels do not mean much to me, but a genuinely radical history should be characterized by its preoccupation, its methodology, its tough-minded commitment, and its clarity of expression. Its preoccupation should be the story of the weak, the little people, the sufferers, the oppressed, and the exploited; their dreams, desires, struggles, victories, and defeats, their strengths and weaknesses. In short, the lives they led and the part they played in the making of our world. History from below is a misnomer. The world of the subaltern cannot be adequately understood outside of the dialectic between the weak and the strong. But I am not especially interested in the strong in their own right. Insofar as I am interested in them at all it is in order to expose their crimes and schemes, debunk their myths, puncture their vanity, expose their contradictions, and further illuminate the world of the oppressed and the exploited. I am more interested in the resistance and the strategies of resistance of the oppressed, those resisters whom Booker T. Washington disparagingly called the “kickers.”

The methodology of radical history should be holistic; that is, it should place an experience within its widest historical context in order to fully understand it. It should not be afraid to be interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. It should imaginatively draw upon any available and valid resource to illuminate its object of analysis; it should be no respecter of disciplinary boundaries—artifices of the late-nineteenth-century professionalization of the academy.

Radical history should be tough-minded in that it should be able to cope with the contradictions in the lives of the oppressed, the errors and dead ends, the pathos, as well as the moments of exhaltation, of little and big victories. It is not a profession for the squeamish or for the congenital lovers of happy endings. We should resist the blandishments of Whig history. Ours is a history of reversals and advances, ups and downs, detours and blind alleys. Tell of the downs as much as the ups;

indeed, we can learn more from the defeats than from the victories. Tell no lies, claim no easy victory, said Amílcar Cabral.

Radical history requires analysis and judgment, not just narration. It is not true that one cannot learn from history. We can, but only if we approach it intelligently. Its language should be clear in order to reach the widest audience. It should not be a tale told only to fellow historians and academics; in the wider scheme of things, they are not sufficiently important to warrant such attention and flattery. The work of the radical historian should not be judged only by what he or she does, but the language through which the work is communicated. The removal of unnecessary and pretentious jargon, the use of clear language, a language geared to a wide audience, in short, a democratic language ought to be an integral criterion of radical history. Marx's struggle with the language of *Capital*, to the extent that he effectively wrote a different book for the French translation, is a clear and humbling illustration of the revolutionary importance of clear language. It is true that there is no golden road to science, but we should not make the journey more difficult than it needs to be. Eric Hobsbawm, in particular, has shown that it is possible to impart complex historical information and analysis through good, comprehensible prose. Clear language should accompany clear thinking. The clever historian is not really that clever if he or she cannot express himself or herself clearly, not obscurely. Indeed, for the radical historian, as Walter Rodney has always insisted, it is a political duty. I lay stress on language because I see its misuse as one of the most baneful incursions into the historical profession over the last couple of decades; it has traveled hand in glove with the self-indulgent fad of postmodernism. It is a petty bourgeois affectation that is directly related to the downturn in political struggle in the heartlands of advanced capitalism since the 1980s, the product of the separation of the intelligentsia from the everyday world of ordinary people, an involuted world that feeds upon itself, talks to itself, in smug complacency and resignation. Radical history should resist such a posture.

The prospects for radical history are good. I am gratified by the growing desire on the part of people of goodwill, both young and old, for an unromanticized reconstruction of the past of those who have been largely left out of the history books. In my field, the study of the African diaspora, there are exciting developments, the most important of them being the breaking down of the parochialism and chauvinism that has long dogged Afro-American history in the United States. Indeed, it is becoming more widely appreciated that for a better understanding of the Afro-American experience in the United States, one needs to place it in a comparative and transnational framework. This type of work is perhaps more challenging than most are aware, including some who are attempting it. To be properly executed, it demands the learning of new languages and the mastering of not only a new body of learning but also new archives. It also requires great patience, humility, and

hard work. Nevertheless, progress is being made in the maturing of a new field of inquiry.

There are, in my view, serious limitations on what radical history can do to renew its connection to the left and the labor and social movements. Intellectuals, including radical historians, tend to have an overinflated view of their own importance and the role that they can play in transforming the world. One can use one's expertise to make clear the experience of the past, develop greater self-understanding of these movements, and illuminate the path taken to the present. This is best done in collaboration with these movements. It is not surprising that in both Britain and the United States (and to a lesser extent France), the best radical history has been written by members of the workers' movement who also happened to be historians. But the most important role that the radical historian can play in contributing to the present movements is to participate, and with humility, in them as activists—as citizens who also happen to be historians. The world will not be changed by its interpretation, even a superior interpretation, but by action, organization, and struggle.