

## GEORGE LAMMING "POLITICS AND CULTURE" (1980)

Lamming, George. "Politics and Culture." Conversations: Essays, Addresses and Interviews, 1953-90. Ed. Andaiye and Richard Drayton. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1990. 77-83.

Lamming's graduation address to the Cave Hill campus of the University of the West Indies underscores the Marxist problematic of the Base/superstructure model within which many authors and critics in the region operate. Men, he says citing Marx, make their own concrete history but we can only make that portion of it which our concrete circumstances allow. We do not choose the time or place of our birth . . . but the process of our thought, the hidden nature of our needs, the character and quality of our imagination may be decisively influenced by these origins. Our struggle towards freedom is experienced always within the external constraints of Nature and the invisible limitations of our own consciousness. (77-78)

He starts by outlining the prevailing economic mode of production, describing Barbados (like any of the other islands as "one large cane farm" (78) in which the slaves and their descendants all "lived within the shadow of the plantation" (78). "Our relation to bread" (78), he writes, "our relation to God, our relation to the courts of law were influenced daily by these demons" (78). This was a region, he points out, "not designed for social living. It was intended exclusively for production" (78). The peasant class was a "source of fortune for hostile strangers" (78), a "reservoir of cheap labour, the material base upon which kingdoms of luxury and convenience would be constructed elsewhere" (78).

He traces, too, the social relations of production consisting of a "dominant class, exclusively white" (78) (white was the "symbol and source of all authority" [78]) wielding economic and political power over the "children of an old and enduring servant class" (78): to be "black was to be a commodity identified with the cheapest of labour" (78). He describes, as well, the institutional and ideological superstructure erected upon these "foundations" (78) paramount among which is the "ideology of racism; a morality whose guiding principle was the excessive privilege of the skin" (78). In brief, the "priest and the planter, school and church, legislation and the law, all gave their weight to this social and economic arrangement" (78), all "in name of decency, honour, and Christian democracy" (78).