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The Visits of Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas in the Haitian Press and French Archives. Haiti and the Racial Issue – 1944-1964.

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Abstract

Aimé Césaire, a poet from Martinique, travelled to Haiti in 1944, and Léon-Gontran Damas, a poet from French Guiana, visited Haiti in 1952 and 1964. How were these heralds of Negritude received in the first Black republic of the Americas? How did the racial issue, significant both locally and internationally, impact their visits? This article draws on specific sources, some of which are unpublished – including articles from the Haitian press, French diplomatic archives and public records from Martinique – to understand how this issue manifested itself locally, while also examining the influence of international conjunctures at very distinct times. From each poet's feelings about their reception in Haiti, to the consideration given to debates about "race," via an analysis of the interplay of actors grappling with racial stereotypes, this contribution explores the different ways in which the racial issue has manifested itself in Haiti.

Keywords

Césaire – Damas – Haiti – press – archives

Résumé

Aimé Césaire, poète martiniquais, s'est rendu en Haïti en 1944, et Léon-Gontran Damas, poète guyanais, en 1952 et 1964. Comment ces hérauts de la Négritude ont-ils été accueillis dans la première république noire des Amériques ? Comment la question raciale, importante tant au niveau local qu'international, a-t-elle influencé leurs visites? Cet article s'appuie sur des sources spécifiques, parfois inédites – articles de la presse haïtienne, archives diplomatiques françaises, archives publiques martiniquaises – pour comprendre comment cette question s'est manifestée localement, tout en examinant l'influence de conjonctures internationales à des moments bien distincts. Du sentiment de chaque poète sur sa réception en Haïti à la prise en compte des débats sur la "race", en passant par l'analyse du jeu des acteurs aux prises avec les stéréotypes raciaux, cette contribution explore les différentes manières dont la question raciale s'est manifestée en Haïti.

Mots-clés

Césaire – Damas – Haïti – presse – archives

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Haiti is a country whose very birth has been a structuring element in the debate around racial issues since 1804 (Daut 2015). In the colony of Saint-Domingue, the implementation of the ideals of the French Revolution by insurgent slaves and “free men of color” (Larcher 2014, Dubois 2005), was both a political stance and the affirmation of a certain conception of humanity, one and indivisible. Conversely, proponents of racism and a hierarchy of human races, in which the “Black race” is at the lowest rung, used Haiti to demonstrate what they claimed was the inability of Black people to govern a country (Zacaïr 2005). Sensationalist books such as those by Spencer Saint John's (1884) and H. Hesketh Pritchard's (1910) are well-known examples, among the abundant literature listed by Laënnec Hurbon (1988). Carlo Célius points out that the conditions of the country's independence:

made it possible and necessary to formulate an anthropological project that refuted many aspects of the discourse that justified the old order. [...] Hence, in an awakening Haitian thought, tireless discussions on the equality of the races, on the aptitude of the black race for ‘Civilization’, on the proof of this aptitude by the existence of Haiti
CÉLIUS 2005, 49

From the 19th century onwards, intellectuals from all over the world paid particular attention to this country, endowed with a constitution guaranteeing rights and freedom to Black men and women, with Victor Schœlcher even describing it as a “racial democracy” (Joseph 2017, 65). In the 19th century, moreover, Haiti welcomed several groups of Afro-American migrants (Souffrant 1974, Bourhis-Mariotti 2016 and 2019). More broadly, Haiti was also a land of immigration: many Europeans (Plummer 1988) as well as West Indians (Zacaïr 2009 and 2019) settled and invested in commerce. In the 20th century, visits by Black intellectuals from different continents multiplied. After the representatives of the Harlem Renaissance movement in the 1930s (Dash 1997, Edwards 2024 [2003], Ndiaye 2009, Roumain 2003, Tolliver 2019, Stovall 2003), the writers of Negritude took an interest in Haiti. Two members of the Senghor, Césaire, Damas trio that posterity has remembered as having founded the movement, putting female contributions in the shade (Curtius 2020, Moïse 2021),¹ came to stay in the country: Aimé Césaire from Martinique, from May to December 1944, and Léon-Gontran Damas from French Guiana, from December 1952 to January 1953, then from August to September 1964.

While the first independent Black republic in the Americas has raised numerous hopes beyond its borders (Bonacci et al. 2006), the racial issue is far from resolved or overcome, as the socio-racial hierarchies in force during the colonial era have persisted beyond independence. Although the Haitian social configuration is dominated by military power, wealth and land ownership, a form of polarization persists between a light-skinned oligarchy, known as the “mulatto,” of Latin and Western culture, urban and outward-looking, and a rural population, made up of former enslaved of African descent, socially marginalized and geographically isolated: the “peyi andeyo” the country outside (Barthélemy 1991, Casimir 2000).² While Haitian society is not solely hierarchical in terms of “race” (Casimir 2009, Daut 2015, Étienne 2007), the fact remains that color prejudice is present in all social milieus, with complex games played around phenotypes:

¹ The place of Afrodescendant intellectual women in the movement that sought to internationalize black consciousness was first recognized and analyzed in the Anglo-Saxon academic world following the work of C. Boyce-Davies and E. Savory Fido (1990). Following the work of T. Deanan-Shirpley (2002), recent attention to Suzanne Césaire (Boni 2014, Bounoure 2010, Césaire 2015, Curtius 2020, Joseph-Gabriel 2023, Lee 2020) continues this historiographical interest in Afro-Caribbean women writers.

² At the time of the outbreak of the “North Plain slave insurrection” in 1791, an estimated 50% of the enslaved population had been born in Africa (Dubois 2005).

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Moreover, there is a strong correlation between color, class and culture in Haiti that impact significantly on the way people of different phenotypes are perceived. Reference to a light-skinned person as 'mulatto' in Haiti acknowledges phenotype but do not necessarily refer to social status. In Kreyòl, however, the term *milat* contains reference to class and not just color, as exemplified by the oft-cited Kreyòl quoted credited to nineteenth-century army leader Jean-Jacques Acau, "Neg rich se *milat*, *milat* pòv se neg" (the rich Black is a *milat*, the poor *milat* is a Black). Considering the differences, *milat*, though imperfect, is a more encompassing definition of someone who is both light-skinned and of a certain social class.

SMITH 2009; 198, n. 6; see also GIAFERRI-DOMBRE 2007, JOSEPH 2017

This issue also polarizes the political field:

Mulâtrisme, at one pole, a version of the hegemonic 'mulatto' bourgeoisie, which asserts the superiority of the 'mulatto' and the 'White' over the 'Black', an implicit ideology that is elaborated on a private level, and more indirectly on a public level. Its political corollary is rooted in the class struggle of the 19th century and condenses into the idea of power for the most capable, the most 'enlightened'. *Noirisme*, at the other pole, is the explicit counter-ideological version of the 'Black' ruling classes and 'Black' fractions of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, which posits the superiority of the 'Black' and his full legitimacy to govern, with the following political corollary: power to the greatest number:

LABELLE 1987, 138, see also TROUILLOT 1990

The first visit, in 1944, was that of by Césaire, sent on a diplomatic and cultural mission to give courses in literature and lectures, and to take part in the International Congress of Philosophy. The other two were from Damas's: in 1952, he was invited by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to give lectures (Racine 1983, 39) and took the opportunity to visit a country that interested him and from which several of his friends were originally from (Palisse 2020). In 1964, he was awarded a UNESCO fellowship with the support of the government of the Republic of Dahomey to work on "the survivals of African culture in the New World" (Palisse 2020, 41) and to prepare an anthology of the Black poets of the Americas (Damas 1966).³ From 1944 to 1964, the theme of "race" occupied a very special place, both in international news and on the Haitian political scene.

This period begins in 1944, the year in which Nazi Germany retreated from the war front, and ends in 1965, the year in which racial segregation ended in the USA with the Voting Rights Act. Between these two dates, the 1950s saw the Cold War and the height of the decolonization movements, particularly in Africa. In Haiti, after decades of political domination by the "mulattos," reinforced during the American Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) and ending with the presidency of Élie Lescot (1941-1946), the *noiristes* conquered power with Dumarsais Estimé, president from 1946 to 1950. Estimé was deposed by a military triumvirate, the same one that made the transition after Lescot's fall, led by Paul Eugène Magloire, who then became president (1950-1957). "The Cold War and McCarthyism in the United States were conducive to the interests of Magloire, who in December 1950 had left-wing parties and their publications banned, while signing an anti-communist pact with the Dominican dictator Trujillo" (Béchacq 2019, 138). François Duvalier, a "Black" country doctor and fervent promoter of *noirisme*, took power in 1957, instrumentalizing racial issues to establish his dictatorship until his death in 1971 (Nicholls 1975, Smith 2009, Trouillot 1990, Voltaire 1988).

³ *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 26,127 (August 17–18, 1964): 1; Malu, "Étapes d'une visite culturelle," *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 26,135 (August 29–30, 1964): 3.

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How then were the visits of Césaire and Damas commented on in the Haitian press? This article draws on a unique study of Haitian newspapers published during their visits and on various archival corpuses, including those of the Territorial Archives of Martinique and the French diplomatic archives. The significance of these sources lies in the fact that they offer several levels of reading: while the press is the expression of Haiti's literate classes, revealing the interplay of social distinction and a constrained relationship with the governments of the time, the archives provide access to Haitian political strategies and France's diplomatic interests in Haiti.

Moreover, to understand how the racial issue is articulated between international issues and local circumstances, these sources are particularly relevant as they show two levels of discourse: one, public and relayed by the press, celebrating the "Black race" and "racial solidarity," and the other, consisting of testimonies and reports in the archives, demonstrates how color prejudice and racism are expressed unfiltered behind the scenes of Haitian, but also French, power. Indeed, these archives and the press coverage of the two intellectuals of Negritude reveal the tensions and ambiguities that run through Haitian discourse on the subject.

The ideas put forward by the Negritude movement (Leiris 1955, Giraud 1994, Depestre 1989, Edwards 2024 [2003], Wilder 2015) regarding the value of "Negroes" cultures,⁴ resonate with specifically Haitian debates on the legacy of the Indigenist movement and *noirisme* (Buteau 1993, Gaillard 1993, Largey 2006, Smith 2009). The former was dominated, according to its leader Jean Price-Mars, by "the importance of associating the greatest number of people with the national culture" by studying the customs and culture of the "humble" (Price-Mars 1959, 98), including vodou, which provoked fierce polemics and a certain unease among the elite (Tippenhauer 2008). As for *noiristes* intellectuals, because of their valorization of the "Black popular masses" through a racial essentialism inspired by the theories of Arthur de Gobineau and Alfred Rosenberg, theorists of Nazi racism (Hoffmann 1990, 194), they instrumentalized, especially during the Duvalier regime, this reference to Africa shared with Negritude. While the mobilization of the notion of "race" thus remains omnipresent throughout the period studied, it is posed according to different issues and contexts.

Firstly, we will see that Césaire and Damas benefited from the special welcome given by Haitian intellectuals to their "illustrious congeners," that is, in the vocabulary of the time, to famous Black individuals from all over the world. Next, we will try to understand how these visits revealed the socio-racial configurations of the time. These configurations reflect both the global context mentioned above, and local political issues. Thus, we will analyze the reception of Aimé Césaire in 1944, when he visited Haiti under the presidency of Élie Lescot (1941-1946), at a time when the man who would become known as "Haiti's last mulatto president" was tightening his grip on the press and political power. His visit took place as World War II was drawing to a close with the defeat of Nazism, and at a time when Marxism was widespread among young intellectuals. Finally, we will study the evolution of the debate during the two periods covered by the Damas's visits. These visits occurred in a context where the struggle for Black American Civil Rights and the process of decolonization once again mobilized racial issues. At a local level, while the first visit, in 1952-53, was marked in Haiti by power struggles

⁴ In the French language, historically, the term "Negro" has a pejorative connotation when a non-racialized person refers to a person with a dark phenotype. On the other hand, in the 1920s-1930s in France, the use of the word "Negro" as a mode of identification and grouping was debated among people from the French colonies. Thus, "around 1927, the *Committee for the Defence of the Interests of the Negro Race* was symptomatically renamed *Committee for the Defence of the Interests of the Black Race*: the word 'Negro' embarrassed these men, who were militating precisely so that they would no longer be 'Negroes' but 'Black Frenchmen' [...]. But in 1927, the word 'Negro' became the torch of revolutionaries' (Dewitte 1985, 224-25). It is precisely in this then subversive perspective of turning stigma on its head by valorising Afro-descent cultural facts that Aimé Césaire, in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, uses the term "Negro" (Edwards 2024 [2003]).

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between *noiristes* and "mulattos," the second, in 1964, took place in the midst of the violence of the Duvalier regime, which put Damas in a delicate position.

1 Césaire and Damas: Illustrious Congeners Bearing a "Non-Conformist" Discourse

Since Haitian independence in 1804 and the second abolition of slavery in the French West Indies and French Guiana in 1848, local elites have looked to European, French, and Latin culture as their model of emancipation (Hoffman 1990, Mam Lam Fouck 2006). The aim was to show that in all fields, and particularly in the arts and letters, a "man of color" could do as well as a white man. This was particularly the case in the French West Indies, from 1870 onwards:

Assimilation being determined by a universalist value system, adherence to the doctrine was also seen by local elites, within the positivist spirit of the late 19th century, as the deserved consequence of the old colonies' march towards progress within French civilization
MARY 2021, 24

In the 1940s and 1950s, the Haitian press followed suit, reporting on "congeners" who had distinguished themselves elsewhere in the world. For example, articles reported the death of Félix Éboué – "Governor Éboué was a congener"⁵ – or the visit of British Guyana-born conductor Rudolph Dunbar to Haiti for a series of concerts in March and April 1952.⁶ Although they were not exactly compatriots, they were nonetheless, in a form of "racial solidarity," a source of pride for Haitians. At the same time, the content of the articles shows the special role that Haitian elites have assigned themselves in making their country a second homeland for Black people worldwide.

The recognition of Césaire abroad in 1944, and then Damas in 1952, also testifies to the "talents of the Black race" in literature. Césaire's notoriety started with the connection he made in Paris during his study stay from 1931 to 1939. He frequented the salon of the Nardal's sisters (Edwards 2024 [2003]), and helped found two journals, *Légitime Défense* and *L'Étudiant martiniquais*, which later became *L'Étudiant noir*, in which Léon-Gontran Damas, also a student, participated (Béchacq 2023, Palisse 2020). The latter two titles underline the fact that the bearers of these journals claimed a student status that inscribed them in an intellectual world and enabled them to speak out against colonialism and cultural assimilation (Leclercq 2010, Véron 2021).

Césaire's career was still in its early stages at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s, but as a graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, he represented the intellectual elite of the French West Indies and France. Published in 1939, his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* had a major impact during the war and in the Caribbean; in April 1941, with colleagues from the Lycée Schœlcher in Fort-de-France, he founded the journal *Tropiques*, which maintained the hope of a revival against the cultural stagnation and the Vichy regime. The passage through Martinique of a liner carrying exiles from Europe, notably André Breton, helped make Césaire known outside Martinique (Jennings 2020). In 1943, following the reading of *Le Cahier*, Haitian president Élie Lescot wished to invite Césaire to Haiti (Véron 2013). Damas, for his part, was an established poet and man of letters when he came to Haiti for the first time at the end of 1952. He had already published two collections of poems, *Pigment*, in 1937 and *Graffiti*, just published in 1952. He is also the author of *Retour de Guyane* in 1938, *Veillées noires* in 1942,

⁵ *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 21,457 (May 22, 1944): 1.

⁶ *Étincelle*, no. 86 (March 24, 1952): 1; *Étincelle*, April 10, 1952: 4.

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Poètes d'expression française 1900-1945 in 1947, and *Poèmes nègres sur des airs africains* in 1948 (Blérald, Lony & Gyssels 2014, Vété-Congo 2015).

The Haitian newspapers gave each of them a warm welcome, highlighting their literary and, for Damas, political successes in France. On May 20, 1944, *La Nation* ran the headline "A great Negro poet, A. Césaire, is among us." The Martinican poet is referred to in articles as "our distinguished congener," "our eminent congener" or "our illustrious congener." *La Phalange*, a Catholic daily, presents him as follows:

M. Césaire, Agrégé es-lettre and a more than remarkable poet (Breton even considers M. Césaire to be the greatest French poet of our time!) our congener arrived on Wednesday evening from his native Martinique. [...] Professor of Belles-Lettres at the Lycée de Fort-de-France, Mr. Césaire is traveling with Mrs Césaire, herself a talented writer who has given Tropiques some much-appreciated columns.⁷

Eight years later, Damas was introduced as follows: "One of the finest writers of this time, Léon Damas sat in the French parliament alongside Césaire. There, he defended the interests of our homeland and our race with remarkable courage."⁸ But Césaire and Damas, whose careers corresponded to a certain model of success within the French colonial system, were precisely the bearers, from the 1930s onwards, of a discourse against cultural assimilation:

By acknowledging Marxist ideology and surrealism, the young people who founded *Légitime défense* opposed the academic culture of the French mainland, which this trip was usually intended to reinforce, while remaining the circle of French culture. L
LECLERCQ 2010, 258

The collection of poems, *Pigments*, published by Damas in 1937, is a violent indictment of the bourgeois French culture that his entourage tried to inculcate in him as a child, and which he feels trapped in as an adult. Numerous examples can be cited, including this one, from the poem *Solde*:

I have the impression of being ridiculous / in their shoes / in their tuxedos / in their breastplates / in their false collars / in their monocles / in their melon [...] / I have the impression of being ridiculous / in their salons / in their manners / in their bows / in their multiple need for monkeying around.
DAMAS 2005, 41

In 1939, in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Césaire, faced with technical progress, presented as proof of superiority, claims, not without provocation, to be "among those who invented neither gunpowder nor the compass / those who were never able to tame steam or electricity" (Césaire 1972, 49).

Reading the newspapers of the time, we can see that beyond their literary talents, the way in which Césaire, then Damas, approached the cultural question fascinated Haitians. Césaire's discourse found a strong echo in *noiristes* circles, contrasting with the indifference displayed by the "mulatto" *La Nation*, a *noiriste* and Marxist daily, published an article entitled

⁷ *La Phalange*, 20 May 1944, no. 1356, 2. Césaire never actually obtained his agrégation. This is the only press article to mention Suzanne Césaire's contribution to *Tropiques* journal, even though Maryse Condé was the first, in 1978, to point out the importance of Suzanne Césaire's contribution to the journal *Tropiques* (Curtius 2020, 16). All the other articles focus on Aimé Césaire, some mentioning the fact that she was "a talented writer" (*La Nation*, no. 321, 20 May 1944, 4), "so cultured" (*La Phalange*, no. 1374, 12 June 1944, 1), "distinguished" (*La Phalange*, no. 1394, 5 July 1944, 1) and "graceful" (*La Phalange*, no. 1429, 16 August 1944, 1).

⁸ *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 22,881 (December 1–2, 1952): 1.

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"Aimé Césaire's first lecture 'Baudelaire, modern poet':"

Aimé Césaire knows his literature like an anarchist knows his cells. For the author of 'Le Grand Midi' is certainly not a man of regular hours, not a conformist trapped in fossilized forms and attitudes, but a rebel.⁹

The author of this article, Édris St Amand, a rebellious son of Port-au-Prince's mulatto bourgeoisie, is a regular contributor to the newspaper *La Nation*. The protest dimension of Marxism and Surrealism, to which he only partially adheres, is apparent in his description of Aimé Césaire. As for his reference to the 'Grand Midi', like the quotations taken from Césaire's writings and reproduced in various newspapers, they show that his works were already circulating in Haiti at that time (Gil 2012, 2014). Césaire's stay in Haiti was also beneficial, as he reworked his text *...And the dogs were silent* (Gil 2024).¹⁰ Césaire's lectures are thus presented, by this newspaper, as calls to revolt. On the same theme, we can read:

Aimé Césaire's time in Haiti will certainly have been of the greatest benefit to our intellectual life. Aimé Césaire will undoubtedly have advanced our culture by broadening horizons and helping to clear the way.¹¹

When Damas came to Haiti in 1952, journalists were won over from the very first lectures, but not only by the orator's literary remarks:

The great poet Léon-Gontran Damas, born in French Guiana [...] has highlighted the mission of today's writer, who has left the ivory tower for the crossroad. [...] Like Césaire and Senghor, this survivor of ancient scattered Africa professes non-conformist ideas, and his lecture, which reflects a certain awareness, ranks him among the workers of the new Renaissance.¹²

The vocabulary used for Césaire and Damas is very similar, despite the years separating their visits. While both are described as non-conformists, for Césaire this label refers to his singular treatment of French poetry, criticized through the prism of surrealism. For Damas, it refers to his advocacy of "Negro" cultures, and hence his refusal to be assimilated into classical French culture:

His athletic verb expresses the gigantic struggle waged in the soul of an entire race and all the oppressed. [...] Mr. Damas's interesting lecturing activity can be seen as a genuine plea in favor of Negro culture, a culture which, although conveyed by a borrowed expression, nonetheless offers undeniable originality and a remarkable contribution to the evolution of humanity.¹³

The *Journal Quotidien* journalist couldn't be clearer about the true purpose of the Damas's lectures:

Mister Damas, who speaks pure, fluent French, is not only a sparkling lecturer. He is

⁹ Saint-Amand, "La première conférence d'Aimé Césaire 'Baudelaire, poète moderne,'" *La Nation*, no. 332 (June 2, 1944): 1.

¹⁰ M. Césaire has a drama in preparation, entitled 'The dogs were silent,'" *La Phalange*, no. 1356 (May 20, 1944): 2.

¹¹ *La Nation*, no. 341 (June 15, 1944): 4.

¹² *Haiti-Journal*, no. 7,509 (December 13, 1952): 1.

¹³ *Haiti-Journal*, no. 7,815 (December 23, 1952): 1.

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also – and this is rarer – a liberated spirit who, under the guise of literary theories, penetrates with as much tact as courage to the heart of the delicate question of understanding between Blacks and Whites.¹⁴

In both 1944 and 1952, the authors of the articles thus emphasized the non-conformism and originality of the two speakers, due to their rejection of the dominant culture and cultural assimilation. However, as far as Césaire was concerned, most press headlines were rather superficial about the scope of the poet's speeches: few journalists noted his surrealist critique of French poetry. What's more, his presence is a good indicator of the racial problem as perceived by both the French authorities and the mulatto members of the Haitian elite.

2 1944-1946: Between the Allied Victory Over Nazism and the *Noiriste* Revolt in Haiti

In 1944, Haitian newspapers focused on the fighting in Europe and were galvanized by the Normandy landings, which made the headlines before the arrival of the Césaires, Suzanne having initially been mobilized to teach in girls' high schools, and eventually assisting her husband in the preparation of his literature courses.¹⁵ Although the Haitian press was truly Gaullist at the time, this was not always the case. Elected to the presidency in May 1941 with the support of the United States, Élie Lescot had very little room for maneuver in terms of foreign policy. American influence in Haiti began with the implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy at the end of the American occupation of the country in 1934 (Tolliver 2019);¹⁶ the country aligned itself with the United States by declaring war on Japan, then on Germany and Italy after the attack on Pearl Harbour (7 December 1941), leading to the installation of American military infrastructures (Adelaïde-Merlande 2002, Arthus 2021); finally, the Haitian economy was highly dependent on American imports and exports. The official Haitian position with regard to Free France evolved according to the relationship between the United States and the Vichy regime, on the one hand, and the Gaullists,¹⁷ on the other, depending on the global

¹⁴ *Journal Quotidien*, no. 7 (December 16–17, 1952): 2.

¹⁵ On July 25, 1944, Suzanne Césaire wrote a letter to her friend Yassu Gauclère, the wife of René Étiemble, who had stayed in Martinique in February-March 1944: “We've been in Haiti for two and a half months now. Aimé has undertaken here, not without courage, to talk about modern French literature - or rather poetry since Baudelaire. At each lecture, a crowd of ‘fine literati’ expressed their ‘delirious enthusiasm’ for this ‘authentic ambassador of French culture’. All in all, Aimé’s objectivity and passion have seen him through this strange task. We were entrusted (I’m more or less on a mission, too) with the training of future lycée teachers - a sort of refresher course, since these young men and women are already teaching - private lessons, from the 17th to the 19th century - public lessons on the moderns. To help Aimé, who had a very hard job, I gave two or three explanations of classical texts and two corrected dissertations - with journalists, lawyers and a senator as free listeners.” *Letter from Suzanne Césaire to Yassu Gauclère*, Port-au-Prince, July 25, 1944 (National Library of France, Fonds Étiemble, NAF 28279/10).

¹⁶ The occupation of Haiti by the United States (1915-1934) is linked to the expansion of the Monroe Doctrine (1823) from the end of the 19th century. Several countries were occupied in this way (Nicaragua, 1894; Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898; Colombia, 1903; Mexico, 1914; Dominican Republic, 1916) to enable the economic and military expansion of the United States, which was also facilitated by the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914. The Good Neighbour Policy, initiated in 1934, did not survive the Second World War. It consisted of sending technical, cultural and educational missions, was run by the Office for Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republic and was supported by American philanthropic organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. In Haiti, one of its outposts was the Haitian-American Institute inaugurated in April 1942.

¹⁷ Marshal Pétain's Vichy government was the only one recognized by the United States, although diplomatic relations were broken off following the Anglo-American landing in North Africa on 8 November 1942. Recognition of the successive organs of Gaullist power - the French National Committee on 24 September 1941, then the CFLN (French Committee for National Liberation) on 3 June 1943, and finally the Provisional Government of the French Republic on 3 June 1944 - was delayed all the more by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's dislike of General de Gaulle.

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geopolitical situation, but also on the state of Haitian opinion, divided between the Gaullists and the Vichyists, due to the introduction of Maurrassism in Haiti (Stieber 2012).¹⁸ Gaullist representatives in Haiti alerted their authorities to the harmful propaganda of Vichy supporters, including that of the French archbishop of Port-au-Prince, Mgr Le Gouaze. In 1944, American influence also hampered the reconquest of French influence; it was against this backdrop that the Gaullists organized Césaire's first cultural mission in Haiti.¹⁹

Over the entire period of Césaire's mission in Haiti, from May to December 1944, of the four daily newspapers consulted – the Marxist-oriented *La Nation*, *La Phalange*, financed by the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince, *Le Nouvelliste* and *Le Matin* – as well as the monthly review *Les Cahiers d'Haïti*, only the latter dealt extensively with racial issues. *La Phalange* also addresses the issue, but to a much lesser extent. *La Nation* and *Le Nouvelliste* do not address the issue head-on, but use racially charged vocabulary ("great Negro poet," "Black race," and so on), and are sensitive to how their "congeners" can distinguish themselves, starting with Aimé Césaire:

Listening to him, one could even feel more reason to be proud of his race, as he treated with admirable casualness, and not even concealed disgust, a glorious past of French poetry.²⁰

And about Césaire's literature courses:

We eagerly applaud this gesture of racial solidarity from one of our own, and invite all those who cultivate the arts to follow in the footsteps of our fellow Aimé Césaire.²¹

Journalists are not the only ones to exalt the "Black race" in praise of Césaire:

President Lescot had made a point of expressing his great admiration for a fine example of his race, just as it is a matter of legitimate pride for any Haitian, however highly placed, to recognize as belonging to the same racial community as himself, a man of the fine culture of Aimé Césaire, [...] a former student of the École Normale Supérieure de Paris.²²

¹⁸ Maurrassism, named after its initiator, Charles Maurras (1858-1962), is a French ideological and political movement that is anti-republican, anti-democratic, conservative and xenophobic, advocating an "integral nationalism," and which reached its peak in France during the 1930s. Its success in Haiti with some members of the Haitian intelligentsia was partly due to its promotion of national cultural values, including folklore, and Christian civilization. Part of the Haitian elite was therefore in favor of the Vichy regime. What's more, Charles de Catalogne, who introduced Maurrassism to Haiti and edited the Port-au-Prince archdiocese newspaper *La Phalange* from 1939 to 1941, was close to Gérard Lescot, the eldest son of the President of the Republic, who became Secretary of State for External Relations in May 1943.

¹⁹ On her return from Haiti on October 27, 1944, Suzanne Césaire sent a report to the Governor of Martinique. She confirms that she taught French and helped her husband prepare some of his courses. But above all, she reveals one of the objectives of the mission with Aimé Césaire: "These courses took on particular significance at a time when it had become urgent to recreate, in the Haitian teaching profession and among the country's elite, an atmosphere favorable to the French language and culture. [...] It should be added that the ongoing campaign to teach the masses in Creole, strongly encouraged by the government, risked leading to a kind of 'nationalization' of the Creole patois, obviously contrary to the interests of French language." *Suzanne Césaire's report on the French courses given at the Port-au-Prince Faculty of Law to student teachers of literature from Republic of Haiti*, 1944, 1M 945, Territorial Archives of Martinique: 1 & 3.

²⁰ Édris St Amant, "La première conférence d'Aimé Césaire 'Baudelaire, poète moderne,'" *La Nation*, no. 332 (June 2, 1944): 1.

²¹ *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 21,460 (May 25, 1944): 1.

²² "Grand banquet au Palais National," *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 21,488 (June 29, 1944): 1.

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Other articles in *Le Nouvelliste* refer to events involving compatriots (Philippe Thoby Marcelin, Pierre Marcelin, Max Bissainthe), whether they are valued or discriminated against: "Black writers win prizes at Latin American competition";²³ "Thanks to a Haitian, a law is introduced in Cuba against racial discrimination".²⁴ The daily *Le Matin*, which identifies Aimé Césaire as the "authentic ambassador of French culture,"²⁵ never refers to him by his phenotype. In fact, unlike the other two newspapers, it never uses racial connotations. Indeed, only one article, entitled "Race supérieure,"²⁶ denounces the ineptitude of Nazi theories, in a comparative perspective between European peoples: it leaves no room for any Haitian singularity, or that of the "Black race."

On the other hand, *Le Nouvelliste*, *La Phalange* and *Le Matin* report in extenso the agenda of cultural and social events taking place in the capital, in a style that is often pompous and obsequious, when the journalists, at the end of purely descriptive comments, congratulate the authorities on the staging of this or that event. For the same lecture by Aimé Césaire – all his speeches exalt surrealism – *Le Matin* and *Le Nouvelliste* sometimes reproduce excerpts with superficial and inoffensive comments ("We can barely express the quality of the pleasure we enjoyed under the words of Mr. A. Césaire;"²⁷ "This inaugural lecture by the poet of great lineage [...] remains a success signed by the presence of the most authentic representatives of our intellectual elite.")²⁸

La Nation, on the other hand, harnessed its subversive potential to produce a thinly veiled critique of the authorities in power, which led to the closure of the Marxist-leaning daily, run by a *noiriste* personality.²⁹ Against a backdrop of muted public opposition to the president, with "the failure of the SHADA project,³⁰ the attempt to extend the presidential term, corruption and nepotism, with a penchant for mulattoes" (Arthus 2021, 181), the glowing commentary on one of Césaire's lectures was an invitation to revolt against Lescot, the embodiment of an old world, the mulatto, Francophile, Catholic and aristocratic elite:

and why shouldn't we accept that the Surrealists, for example, rebel against the old disciplines, break the old molds, destroy the old frameworks and topple the old idols to set new milestones on new roads, if all this is to constitute the sincere contribution of a generation.³¹

As for the magazine *Les Cahiers d'Haïti*, of the thirteen issues consulted, from October 1943 to March 1945, each tackled the racial issue with original articles signed by the great names of the Haitian intelligentsia (Jean Price-Mars, Dantès Bellegarde, Félix Morisseau-Leroy, Jacques Stephen Alexis) or in reproductions of lectures given by eminent Black American intellectuals (Alain Locke, W. E.B. Du Bois) – present in Haiti because of the Good Neighbor Policy –, Cuban or even French (Alejo Carpentier, Aimé Césaire, Alfred Métraux). The magazine thus reflects the intense cultural activity in the Haitian capital in 1943 and 1944, culminating in the International Congress of Philosophy (September 24-30, 1944), to which the press devoted numerous articles, some of them magnifying Haiti's singularity:

²³ Harvey, Verna. "From the Los Angeles Tribunes." *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 21,523 (July 29, 1944): 3.

²⁴ *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 21,323 (November 16, 1944): 1.

²⁵ "7 à 9 au Cénacle d'Études," *Le Matin*, no. 11,227 (July 21, 1944): 3.

²⁶ "Race supérieure," *Le Matin*, no. 11,347 (December 19, 1944): 1, 3.

²⁷ "La conférence de M. Aimé Césaire, son grand succès," *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 21,467 (June 3, 1944): 4.

²⁸ "Importante communication d'Aimé Césaire," *Le Matin*, no. 11,187 (June 4-5, 1944): 1, 3.

²⁹ "Les journaux 'La Nation' et 'Le Réveil' sont fermés," *Le Matin*, no. 11,205 (June 27, 1944): 1.

³⁰ SHADA (Haitian-American Society for Agricultural Development), set up in July 1941 to cultivate the plant that produced latex, an essential material for the American war effort, ended in fiasco in September 1944: in addition to the expropriation of hundreds of peasants, the destruction of food plantations led to fears of a food shortage (Arthus 2021, 171; Dartigue 1992,42).

³¹ "En écoutant Aimé Césaire", *La Nation*, no. 346 (June 21, 1944): 4.

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This Congress will prove to the world that between the two Americas there exists a small Black people, a little too idealistic, no doubt, [...] but who are inveterate opponents of injustice and ideologies that provoke appalling wars; a small Black people who know that by evolving in the direction of unbridled materialism, without a guiding elite animated by Christian sentiments, a people is condemned to sink into slavery.³²

The theme of the congress, in which Césaire took part, was "The Problems of Knowledge." Thirty-two lectures were given, organized by the Haitian Society for Scientific Studies, chaired by Dr. Camille Lhérisson. Numerous world-renowned intellectuals, ambassadors from allied countries and representatives of the Catholic Church attended, including Mgr Le Gouaze, who opened the congress with a mass.³³ While some speakers emphasized the success of thought against barbarism, others, like W.E.B. Du Bois and Albert Einstein, sent congratulatory letters. A comparison of the content of the twelve inaugural and closing speeches, the twelve messages from institutions or personalities, and the thirty-two lectures reveals that "race" and its corollary, racism, are evoked. Jacques Maritain, the French Catholic philosopher from the Free School of Advanced Studies in New York, and honorary president of the congress, explicitly situates this event in the fight against racism:

It seems to me that one of the great lessons that will emerge from this Congress concerns this unity of the world [...], which is manifested par excellence in thought, when thought is not perverted by the racist demon (Maritain 1947a: 58); in the new era that is opening up for the world with the crushing of Nazism, fascism and racism
MARITAIN 1947b, 67³⁴

In his inaugural speech, Gérard Lescot, Secretary of State for External Relations and son of the President, was the only Haitian speaker to single out Haiti and the "Black race:"

We wish them every success in their work, and assure them that we are proud to see them honor our race and our Country by forming such a learned group
LESCOT 1947, 44

As for his few compatriots who mobilize the notion of race, they thus assert that certain human characteristics and faculties are not the prerogative of a single "race:"

But neither thought, nor the philosophy which is destined to fertilize the intelligence, are the privilege of a race, a nation or an individual
LHÉRISSON 1947a: 49-50

For no one as well as a race has the exclusive prerogative of any faculty of the soul, of any gift of the heart or of certain concepts of the mind
PAULTRE 1947, 277-78

But more surprisingly, the organizer of this congress, Dr. Camille Lhérisson, a biologist and endocrinologist by training, mobilizes craniology and the theory of "racial superiority" in his conference:

³² Hyppolite, Dominique. "Congrès de Philosophie," *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 21,281 (September 22, 1944): 1.

³³ "Demain s'ouvre le grand congrès de philosophie," *La Phalange*, no. 1462 (September 23, 1944): 1.

³⁴ This closing speech was reproduced in full by *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 21,290 (October 4, 1944): 3-4.

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Racial differences being differences of degree, one race is different from another only from a statistical point of view. Racial superiority is a function of the number of superior individuals a race possesses.

LHÉRISSON 1947b, 363

The fact of the discrimination that exists between the brain weights of white and Black men has no other causes. This is not due to Race, but to the "standard" of life of individuals and all the influences historically undergone by it, of a physiological or social order.

LHÉRISSON 1947b, 366

This is the only intervention of its kind based on the theories founded by anthropology in the 19th century, which legitimized the colonization of the African continent (Conklin 2015). During the 1930s, when the racial theories promoted by Nazism had become widely disseminated, anthropology's problematic relationship with the notion of "race," consubstantial with the discipline, was nevertheless part of the uncertainties of the discipline (Laurière 2005) and the vacillations of the times (Laurière 2017). In contrast to Dr. Lhérisson's position, Habib Estephano, a Lebanese philosopher, took a very offensive stance against this theory of racial superiority, a position that was, to say the least, avant-garde at the time:

Unfortunately, this same aberration of race ideas led to the creation of the monstrous theory of the superior race, the pure race that is far above all other races. We were led to this appalling war because, in Germany, we wanted to assert the purity of the superior race, the race of the lords. Allow me to say this at a Congress of Philosophy [...]: the only absolutely pure race is the Arabian horse in the desert. [...] This question of race must be considered a disgrace to human intelligence

ESTEPHANO 1947, 401

Camille Lhérisson, in his inaugural speech, salutes the presence of Aimé Césaire:

He devoted himself generously to Haitian youth. [...] At the dawn of the New French Renaissance, he knew how to rekindle the flame of Latin culture among us.

LHÉRISSON 1947a, 48

Although, unlike the Haitian press, Lhérisson does not exalt his common racial background with Césaire, he does share the celebration of French and Latin culture handed down by the Martinican poet. The archives, however, offer a completely different reading: not only was race the underlying motive for Césaire's cultural mission in Haiti, but he was also far too "Negro" in the eyes of the Haitian mulatto elite.

Henri Seyrig, Gaullist cultural attaché at the French Embassy in New York, passes on President Lescot's wish to invite Aimé Césaire to the Congress of Philosophy to his superiors. He wrote to the Governor of Martinique, Georges Ponton, in December 1943:

It seems to me very important that, in this meeting where scholars from very different countries will be brought into contact with the black world, France should show by a decisive example what our culture has succeeded in producing in this race.³⁵

Promoted by Gaullist representatives as the worthiest representative of the "Black race," Aimé Césaire symbolizes the virtuous effects of French culture on colonized peoples. Here, French

³⁵ Letter from Henri Seyrig to Louis Georges Ponton, New York, 15 December 1943 (1M945, Territorial Archives of Martinique).

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culture is mobilized as the unarmed arm of France's imperialist mission to elevate the "Black race" towards progress. Yet this role of French culture, which Césaire represents in Haiti, is not at all interpreted in the same way by members of the Haitian mulatto elite. For example, Jean Gottmann, professor of geography at the Free School of Advanced Studies, wrote of Césaire in the report of his mission in October and November 1944:

But his influence was appreciated differently by different sections of the population. For the vast majority of people in Port-au-Prince, the arrival of a Black French professor on an official mission was a real revelation. [...] But the mulatto aristocracy that makes up the ruling caste has strong quasi-racist traditions: the lighter the complexion, the less curly the hair, the easier it is for an individual to succeed in Haiti's upper echelons. To these people, the sending of a pure Black Martiniquais to represent French culture seemed hurtful: did we take them for negroes? was the reaction of some, particularly those who were most eager to follow the American orientation.³⁶

While the Gaullists politicized race by using Aimé Césaire, because he was talented and above all Black, to initiate the reconquest of a French influence tarnished in Haiti by the American presence, the Haitian mulatto elite racialized culture. Since culture was French, Latin and Christian, it was seen as the prerogative of Whites, or those who considered themselves as such, as in the case of the elite described by Jean Price-Mars as "bovaryste" – after Flaubert's heroine Madame Bovary – because they see themselves as something other than they are, (i.e. also of African descent). Moreover, it was this same elite whose power increased during the American Occupation (1915-1934), as the occupiers favored light-skinned people in positions of power (Smith 2009). Beyond the rhetoric of the press, Aimé Césaire was not fooled by the treatment he received, as he told Alfred Métraux, the Swiss-American anthropologist representing the Smithsonian Institution at the Congress of Philosophy:

[Césaire] tells me about the conflict between Mulatto and Negro and how his skin color determined the attitude of the groups towards him. Government coldness. Black enthusiasm.
MÉTRAUX 1978, 148

Aimé Césaire aroused a veritable craze among Haiti's literate and politicized youth: "Césaire was the source of our ebullition [...] his lecture was incendiary" (Bonniol 2005, 41), says René Depestre. Then, in December 1945-January 1946, the surrealist André Breton's visit and lectures lit the fuse for the revolt – led by René Depestre, Jacques Stephen Alexis and Gérald Bloncourt among others – that ousted President Lescot from power in January 1946, even though the latter had welcomed the Martinican poet's presence in Haiti. The military triumvirate that succeeded him organized elections that saw the victory, in August 1946, of the *noiriste* party "the Authentic" represented by Dumarsais Estimé.

3 From 1952 to 1964: The Haitian Press Between Anti-Segregation Struggles, Decolonization and the Duvalierist Takeover

The issue of racism in the world was increasingly discussed by newspapers in the years following the war and in 1952, during the visit of Damas, numerous articles were published on the subject. The issue came to the fore worldwide. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), created in 1945, undertook a vast program to combat

³⁶ Gottmann, Jean. "Report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on a cultural mission to Haiti," (October-November 1944), Paris, February 25, 1945, 238QO 143, Diplomatic Archives of La Courneuve.

Béchacq, Dimitri and Palisse, Marianne. 2025. « The visits of Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas in the Haitian Press and French Archives. Haiti and the Racial Issues – 1944-1964 », *African Diaspora*, 1-32.

racism as early as 1949, with the collaboration of intellectuals from many countries, including Claude Lévi-Strauss, Alfred Métraux and Michel Leiris (Maurel 2007). In 1949, a first "declaration on race" was adopted, aimed at denying the scientific validity of the concept of "race." Various texts aimed at the general public were subsequently published in a collection entitled "The Racial Question in the Face of Modern Science," of which *Race and History* (Lévi-Strauss 1952) is undoubtedly the most famous. Lévi-Strauss's work is well known in Haiti, notably through the French Institute's journal *Conjonction*, which publishes reviews of many of these titles as they come out.

As for racial discrimination in the United States and elsewhere, Haitian newspapers adopted a militant stance. In the 1950s and 1960s, they were faithful relays of every twist and turn in the anti-segregation struggle of Black Americans. In 1952, *Le Nouvelliste* ran the headline: "Letters from New York – The problem of segregation before the Supreme Court."³⁷ In 1964, all the newspapers devoted their front pages to the law putting an end to segregation in public spaces and published numerous detailed articles on the many upheavals that followed the adoption of the law and the reactions of the segregationists. On 30 August 1964, *Le Matin* published no less than three front-page articles on racial issues, including one on British Guiana, and two on the United States: "The race riots. Is this a form of conspiracy against the Black man?", "Role of American Blacks in US African policy."³⁸ *Conjonction* also took part in these debates, with René Maran publishing an article in which he expressed indignation that the debate had not been classified, and regretted that the theories published by Hitler in *Mein Kampf* had left traces in France (Maran 1952b).

However, while the Haitian press is unanimous in condemning all forms of racism outside Haiti, no explicit reference is made to the racial issue as it arises locally. From reading the newspapers, the image of the country that emerges is that of a homeland for Black people from all over the world, where racial discrimination does not exist. The Haitian press only touches on the subject by alluding to forms of conformism or an old world that needs to be swept away.

The position of the press is also somewhat ambiguous when it comes to decolonization, another major issue in the international geopolitics of the 1950s. Some of the 'illustrious congeners' quoted in the newspapers came from the French colonies. They may have been involved in the colonial apparatus or engaged in demands for equality for colonized populations, without this seeming to raise any questions or debates in Haiti. Regarding a conference by Damas on Félix Eboué, *Le Nouvelliste* writes that he: "paid tribute to the considerable man who was Governor Félix Eboué."³⁹

As was the case with Aimé Césaire's conferences, most of the headlines in the Haitian press are rather superficial, failing to mention the stakes embodied by the actors or subjects addressed. Such is the case with the mayor of Dakar and former French Secretary of State (1946-47), Lamine Gueye – who visited Port-au-Prince in 1952 at the same time as Damas – and was involved in the process of political assimilation of the African colonies (Mary 2021). The implications of this commitment and process are not mentioned by the Haitian newspapers, *Le Nouvelliste* simply announcing: "the arrival of the mayor of Dakar, Lamine Gueya [sic], a congener. He's a charming, extremely straightforward man."⁴⁰ This newspaper's silence on Lamine Gueye's role in debates on the colonial question mirrors that of the Haitian press on the subject of African independence. Several reports from the French legation in Haiti also underline this lack of interest.⁴¹

³⁷ *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 22,886 (December 11, 1952): 1.

³⁸ *Le Matin*, no. 18,513 (September 1, 1964): 1.

³⁹ "Léon Damas au Lycée Pétiou," *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 22,906 (January 10, 1953): 1.

⁴⁰ *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 22,981 (December 18, 1952): 1

⁴¹ See in particular : côte 524PO/B/131, Dossier H.3.5.2: 'Visites de personnalités africaines en Haïti,' Nantes Diplomatic Archives Centre / CADN.

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Conjonction is obviously cautious on the colonial question, and regularly opens its columns to René Maran, who publishes articles with a rather Francophile tone. The latter wrote: "A new world is evolving before our very eyes. France is at the origin of its genesis" (Maran 1952a, 29). He encouraged recognition of literature from the colonies, and praised the work of France, which had created an assembly of the French union. For him, making overseas novels known is "the way to serve France and its greatness" (Maran 1952a, 30). In contrast, René Piquion, a *noiriste* and ideologue of the future Duvalier regime, denounced René Maran as the prototype of the assimilated "Negro" (Piquion 1966, 13).

1964 was undoubtedly one of the bloodiest years of François Duvalier's dictatorship. In August, during the second visit of Damas, "the vespers of Jérémie" took place. The massacre of several families in the town, following the landing of opponents of the regime in the Grande Anse region, is generally considered to have a racial dimension (Diederich 2005). Muted or partisan, the press did not elaborate on the event, following the example of the daily *Le Matin*, which published a simple insert on its front page.⁴² While the press described the twists and turns of American domestic politics, and the vicissitudes of President Lyndon Johnson, it remained silent on what was happening in Haiti, contenting itself with publishing the official speeches and press releases from the ministries.

On the other hand, the press's anti-colonial stance is more assertive, and she frequently refers to the crisis in the former Belgian Congo or the Vietnam War. Two years after Algeria's independence, when most African states had become independent, the end of colonization became a matter of course, and Damas evoked it: "Mr. Damas, what is Negritude?" asked "Bibliophile," alias Roger Gaillard, who would later become a famous Haitian historian and literary critic. Damas replies that it is:

an awareness of a state of affairs characterized by three elements. First, colonization. Second, the resulting intellectual depersonalization of the man of color. Finally, the desire of this man to belong to the whole of humanity.

He adds that while Negritude may be outdated in Africa, "it is not in Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana, which are still considered French departments."⁴³

Damas's visit was also subject to exploitation by the regime, insofar as Negritude was claimed by François Duvalier, who claimed to be a Black man and prided himself on turning Haiti towards Africa.⁴⁴ In terms of foreign policy, he sought to strengthen ties between Haiti and African states. For their part, the ambassadors of the African diplomatic corps elevated the Haitian ambassador to the rank of "honorary member of the African diplomatic corps [...] an eloquent tribute to our country and to the race and above all to the African policy of President Duvalier."⁴⁵

Damas is also promoted to the rank of honorary citizen of the city of Port-au-Prince and *Le Matin* reproduces "the vibrant speech by the mayor of the capital:"

From the very start, Damas chose the profitable path of rootedness. He embraced the message of Dr Price-Mars, who in 1928 denounced the *bovarysm* of our elite and invited the proponents of our young literature to create a Haitian aesthetic. The disciples of Dr. Price-Mars, particularly Dr. François Duvalier, head of the historical-cultural school "les

⁴² "Le cadavre d'un rebelle tué en Grande Anse exposé," *Le Matin*, no. 18,496 (August 14, 1964): 1.

⁴³ Bibliophile, "M. Damas, qu'est-ce que la négritude?," *Le Matin*, no. 18,510 (August 28, 1964): 1.

⁴⁴ Several letters from the French Embassy in Haiti in 1960 and 1961 point to the impact, both positive and negative, of African independence on Haiti's leadership role in the Black world. See in particular: côte 524PO/B/131, Dossier H.3.5.2: 'Visites de personnalités africaines en Haïti,' CADN.

⁴⁵ p. 1. "Damas citoyen honoraire - Le vibrant discours du Maire de la capitale," *Le Matin*, no. 18,516 (September 5, 1964): 1.

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Griots", one of the greatest leaders of the peoples of the present day, Lorimer Denis, Emile Roumer, Carl Brouard, Jacques Roumain [...] set out to study the ethnic components of our personality.⁴⁶

The vocabulary of "race" and ethnicity is omnipresent, and the connection made between Negritude and *Duvaliérism* is clear: Duvalier, like Damas, would be an heir to Price-Mars and Indigenism, and *noirisme* would be the Haitian version of Negritude. However, despite the deliberate confusion, Indigenism, *noirisme* and Négritude are really three different movements and three different moments (Trouillot 1990). Duvalier's *noirisme* is characterized in particular by a rereading of Haitian history (Denis and Duvalier 1958), according to which "the grimacing face of class struggle [appears] in its eternal form of color prejudice," according to René Piquion (1968, 22-23), one of the fervent ideologues of the regime that welcomed Damas in 1964. The authors of this movement tend to refer to an authentic Haitian personality that the regime's opponents lack. To denounce Marxists in general and René Depestre in particular, Piquion writes:

By early 1932, a movement of intellectual renewal was taking shape, trumpeted by Louis Diaquoi, which, as much as the teaching of Dr. Jean Price-Mars, met with a certain suspicion on the part of all those who indulged in literary imitation, racial denial, collaboration with foreigners, in a word, assimilation.
PIQUION 1966, 181

According to the press, Damas unreservedly supported the regime. At the banquet held in his honor at the home of the Piquion couple, Damas "magnified the head of the Griot school, President Duvalier," and "Price-Mars spoke warmly of their disciples, of whom René Piquion is one of the most constant and renowned."⁴⁷ In his interview with Roger Gaillard,⁴⁸ Damas mentions the Griots as one of the movements close to Negritude, but to what extent does he consent to its recuperation? Between his inability to express himself freely and press censorship, it's hard to say. French diplomatic archives do, however, record tensions between Damas and the regime's notables over his reluctance to support the ruling power:

Mr. DAMAS would have been asked for his opinion of the current Haitian government; faced with his silence, he would have been reminded that Haiti gained its independence 150 years ago, and invited to return to Haiti only with French Guiana's act of independence in his pocket.⁴⁹

In his interview with Roger Gaillard, Damas refers to the important role played by Marxism for Césaire, Senghor and himself, in raising awareness of the link between colonialism and capitalism. Yet the Duvalier regime prided itself on its fight against communism, which guaranteed U.S. support and enabled it to repress opponents on the pretext of their supposed Marxism (Arthus 2021). But the most important clues to Damas veiled criticism of the regime come from a television interview with Jean Dominique,⁵⁰ reproduced in the press. Damas

⁴⁶ p. 1. "Damas citoyen honoraire - Le vibrant discours du Maire de la capitale," *Le Matin*, no. 18,516 (September 5, 1964): 1.

⁴⁷ "Chez les époux Piquion - La rencontre des intellectuels avec L.-G. Damas," *Le Matin*, no. 18,511 (August 29, 1964): 1.

⁴⁸ Bibliophile, "M. Damas, qu'est-ce que la négritude ?," *Le Matin*, no. 18,510 (August 28, 1964): 1..

⁴⁹ *Letter from Charles le Génissel, French ambassador to Haiti, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Port-au-Prince, 22 September 1964 (524PO/B/131/H.3.5.2, CADN).*

⁵⁰ "On en parle... On en cause... M. Léon-G. Damas à la Télévision," *Le Matin*, no. 18,513 (September 1, 1964): 1. Jean Dominique (1930-2000), famous radio journalist and promoter of free information in Creole under *Duvaliérism* and after 1986, was assassinated in front of his radio station, Radio Haïti Inter, on 3 April 2000.

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laments the lack of commitment in Haitian literature, and criticizes young writers for not knowing their predecessors well. Among the latter, he cites Jacques Roumain, whose Marxist convictions are well known, Jean Brierre, exiled since 1962 after serving time in prison, and René Depestre, also abroad and a declared enemy of the regime. Finally, he declares that he considers Jacques Stephen Alexis to be "one of the most serious hopefuls of Haitian literature." The author of *Compère Général Soleil* has in fact been missing since April 1961, when he tried to disembark in Haiti. Hopes that he was still alive were dwindling, and in 1965, Aragon published an article entitled "The murdered poet" (Aragon 1965). Damas, who maintained constant links with Parisian literary circles, could not ignore this situation. The author of the article concludes by congratulating Jean Dominique on "this interesting interview." This text is an excellent example of how certain journalists used the cultural section to relay messages of opposition to the regime.

Damas also insists strongly on his rejection of "reverse racism." When asked by Roger Gaillard whether negritude does not lead to racism, he replies that this is absolutely not the case, adding:

don't forget that the second time Césaire used the word Negritude was in Cahier d'un retour au pays natal. He said about Haiti...

Roger Gaillard cuts him off:

Yes, I know: Haiti, where Negritude stood up for the first time.

but Damas continues:

No, the quote is incomplete, here it is with its ending: '... stood up for the first time and said it believed in her humanity'. It's humanity, not racism.⁵¹

During the banquet at the Piquion home, Damas:

took the opportunity to clarify the meaning of Negritude, which is the appreciation of all that is Black and not a reverse racism, and thanked the Blacks, Whites and Yellows who, in Paris, the center of fraternity, contributed to the negritude movement.⁵²

While Damas endeavors to light counter-fires against the Duvalierists' use of the notion of "race," the beliefs underlying the latter also permeate the unofficial opinions of the French authorities of the time. In contrast to the progressivism displayed in *Conjonction* magazine, a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs reproached Haitians for not condemning the violence committed against former colonizers in the former Belgian Congo, and referred them, in a brutal manner, to their supposed "African race:"

What's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh. Nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to the Haitian, still living, as is customary, deep in the African bush, despising work, loving palaver, and subject to animistic practices. So it's only logical that he should feel closer to the Congolese than to the Belgian, and unwittingly take up the cause of his racial brothers. By the same token, if, according to some, every European has a certain contempt for the Black man, every African also has a deep-seated jealousy of the white man. And Haitians, more than any others, are no exception to this tendency.⁵³

⁵¹ Bibliophile, "M. Damas, qu'est-ce que la négritude ?," *Le Matin*, no. 18,510 (August 28, 1964): 1.

⁵² "Banquet en l'honneur de Léon-G. Damas," *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 26,133 (August 27, 1964): 1, 4.

⁵³ "Haïti, l'indépendance des États africains et les événements du Congo anciennement belge," Letter from Alain Siclé, chargé d'affaire of France in Haiti, to His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Port-au-Prince, July 18, 1960, côte 524PO/B/131/H.3.5.2, CADN.

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4 Conclusion

An analysis of the stays of Negritude writers in Haiti shows, firstly, that both Césaire and Damas were instrumentalized by representatives of the French authorities and Haitian personalities alike, on account of their phenotype and what they represented. On the other hand, it appears that the Haitian press treats racial issues differently: from the angle of celebration or solidarity in the local context, whereas situations or events involving racism are only reported if they occur abroad (Hitler's racism, segregation in the USA, and so on). Moreover, the use of the press as a source, calls for particular attention, since it is subject to the arbitrariness of power, both under Lescot's presidency and during the Duvalier dictatorship. The freedom of tone of certain journalists – Édris Saint Amand, Roger Gaillard and Jean Dominique – in the cultural columns celebrating Césaire and Damas, shows strategies of circumvention by allusion, which are all risk-taking in these oppressive contexts. The cross-referencing of articles from the Haitian press with documents from French archives, to examine these stays through the prism of racial issues, finally highlights the strength of the racial hierarchies that underpin the representations of the actors and sometimes show through in their opinions and practices. Thus, in its discourse and positions, Duvalier's *noirisme* assumed a racial essentialism that underpinned its policy of valorizing the "Black race." On the other hand, the Haitian mulatto elites shared with the representatives of the French authorities a double discourse and stereotypes on the subject of "race." Compared to Césaire, the former oscillate between official celebration of a shared racial identity and segregative practices based on avoidance. As for the latter, notwithstanding an official discourse blind to "race" or designed to combat racism, they are equally steeped in racial essentialism. This contrast between official discourse, which has been highlighted by the intersection of local and international racial issues, and the persistence of race-related beliefs shows that race continues to guide the opinions and practices of these actors, whatever their nationality.

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