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Explanation

This is a work in progress, which combines sections of a book I am working on. The first four pages come from a chapter which argues that the first internationally-acclaimed generation of West Indian writers, the “Windrush” generation, comprising now renowned writers such as V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming, were engaged in a critique not only of British and European high culture, but also of British popular and middle-brow novels of the mid-twentieth century that did so much to popularize tourism and calypso and to reduce the region to the iconic paradise-like and primitive island. The rest of the material comes from a chapter about the role of calypso in Alec Waugh’s novel Island in the Sun and Robert Rossen’s film adaptation. This is all part of the book’s larger argument that Anglophone Caribbean literature has been shaped through a contest and/or dialogue with discourse of tourism since both the region’s literary tradition and its tourist industry emerged in the late 19th century. In order to engage with the focus of the “Islands, Images, and Imaginaries” conference, I have emphasized that the meaning of the island was much at play in the contest between and among Caribbean and British writers of the 1950s and that calypso contributed significantly to defining the region as a group of paradise islands in much U.S. and British media.

Paper: Calypso in the World/Island in the Sun

Every morning when Foster awoke, it was the same thing. The world spun in his brain. The world spun in his brain, and he imagined the island of Trinidad, eleven and a half degrees north of the equator. He saw it on a globe, with the Americas sprawled like giant shadows above and below, and the endless Atlantic lapping the coastlines of the continents and the green islands of the Caribbean. The globe spun and he saw Great Britain and Europe and Africa. The eastern countries, Australia. Foster imagined Trinidad as it was, a mere dot on the globe. But he saw himself in the dot.

Lying there on the double-bed after his wife had got up to prepare breakfast, Foster was big and the globe was small, spinning off there in space. Sometimes he gave the globe a blow with his fist and he shattered it. And sometimes he put out a finger and he stopped it spinning.

Selvon An Island is a World

In 1955, the Trinidadian writer Samuel Selvon published his second novel, An Island is a World: the account of Foster, a Trinidadian possessed by the question of Trinidad’s place in the world and of the world that Trinidadians make themselves in Trinidad during the transition to independence and in England during the first large-scale Caribbean immigration. Selvon would become recognized as one of the most influential authors of the Windrush generation—the London-based authors of the 1950s—that established the international renown of West Indian
literature and consolidated its status within the region. He is celebrated in particular for democratizing Anglophone Caribbean literature by writing fiction entirely in creole, thus eliminating the hierarchy between a standard-English speaking narrator and characters—transforming musical calypsos into the medium of literature, thus establishing the working class tradition of calypso as a defining trope of an anti-colonial and national Caribbean aesthetics. Selvon’s concern with islands and calypso as defining aspects of Caribbean culture and identity is indicative of their larger significance in Caribbean literature of the 1950s and 1960s. 

These two tropes also played an important role in British representations of the West Indies in the 1950s. In fact, Alec Waugh published the novel Island in the Sun also in 1955. Like Selvon’s An Island is a World, Waugh’s novel narrated the transition toward political independence. A colonial tourist romance set during carnival (calypso) season in the fictional Caribbean island of Santa Marta, the novel presented the island and its carnival culture as symbolic of the region as a whole.

Throughout the 1950s, British and Caribbean writers battled over the nature and significance of the Caribbean and its people. In this contest, depictions of calypso, carnival, and islands were endowed with extraordinary significance. In the work of Selvon, Lamming, and other West Indian writers, they were evidence of the Caribbean’s modernity, cultural originality and political competence. In Waugh, they were indications of the region’s primitivism and inferiority, of the British superiority and the need of British rule. Selvon’s Foster sees Trinidad as a world of its own and at the same time very much part of the world. Consequently, he sees himself simultaneously as a national citizen and a citizen of the world. By contrast, Waugh paints Santa Marta as both a tourist paradise of beaches and a volcano waiting to erupt-- its
black working classes savage, possessed by resentment of slavery and easily incited by demagoguery.

Depictions of race pit the Windrush generation yet more explicitly against Waugh’s vision. Selvon’s *An Island is a World* and his 1956 *Lonely Londoners* like Lamming’s *Emigrants* (1954) expose the systemic racism of English society – the false promise of assimilation and the discrimination West Indians consequently faced at every level of society – in housing, employment, access to education, marriage prospects, sex life, and upward mobility. In sharp contrast, Waugh’s 1955 novel set in 1953 locates the source of all the Caribbean’s political and personal trouble in entrenched color divisions and pettiness of West Indian society. The novel’s murder, its political demagoguery, the political unrest, the failure of romance all result from West Indians’ deep belief in the superiority of lighter skin. In contrast Waugh’s England is a utopic color-blind meritocracy.

Moreover, West Indian modernist aesthetics of the 1950s countered the hyperbolic romance of the region in 1950s tourist discourse in which Waugh participated. Selvon’s philosophical and carnivalesque depictions of the Caribbean and of London, Lamming’s relentlessly grotesque presentation of sexuality and bodily functions, his dramatic shifts in narrator, his defamiliarizing pictures of the sea and land that invoke bondage rather than paradise were quite an alternative to Island *in the Sun* which was criticized for making the Caribbean appear yet more ideal than guidebooks. In keeping with the tradition, Franz Planter the photographer of the film, made the Caribbean “more beautiful, and the inhabitants thereof more attractive, than they actually were” (*Film Reviews* August-September 1957: 354).
West Indian and English writers’ images of the Caribbean and of racism conflicted so strongly and consistently because they were engaged in parallel yet opposing projects. Selvon and other West Indian writers of the 1950s sought to create a new vision of Caribbean culture, nation, and manhood as the region self-consciously advanced towards independence; they were particularly keen that their portrayals of the Caribbean working class and peasant majority as full human beings counteract the myth of British supremacy that had colonized the collective mind of much of the Caribbean middle and upper classes. By contrast, English writers represented the Caribbean and Caribbean culture as part of a larger project of formulating a new conception of English culture, nation, and masculinity during decolonization. As Peter Kalliney explains, their writing negotiated the fact that “decolonization would have dire material and ideological consequences for England” – without their empire, the English might be left with a “meager diet, bad weather, and global insignificance” (5). To achieve this new identity, J. Dillon Brown explains, the English literary establishment rejected the modernism of the first decades of the century we now see as canonical and embraced traditional linear plots and a national framework. Thus, two of the most prominent writers of the Caribbean were middle-brow and popular Waugh and Ian Fleming, who fashioned James Bond at Goldeneye, his home on the north coast of Jamaica.

Ironically, scholars have not paid much attention to this contest because we have not read Waugh or Fleming as authors of serious literature—this despite the fact that scholars, perhaps most prominently, Ian Strachan, have illuminated West Indian writers’ strong critique of tourism and the discourse of tourist brochures. In regard to “literature,” we have focused instead on the critical engagement of West Indian writers with Shakespeare and Hegel, with the
high cultural texts of the European tradition. For readers of the 1950s, West Indian high culture novels stood in self-evident relationship to the popular and middle-brow British works because they were reviewed in the same British journals, sometimes in the same article.²

A comparative study of the representation of islands, carnival, and calypso in British and West Indian literature of the 1950s and 1960s would give us a window into this dialogue, but that window would be partial because theirs was not a debate among British and Caribbean artists alone or solely about the colonial relation between Britain and the Caribbean. In addition to a literary comparison, one needs to address calypso and of Caribbean islands as they were represented in other Caribbean, British, and US media and to contextualize these through an analysis of material history.

In his signature story, “The Calypsonian,” Selvon illustrates the inter-art and international nature of representing calypso and the Caribbean in the 1950s.³ “The Calypsonian” is the ballad of Razor Blade, a Trinidadian calypsonian who turns to theft because he can only earn a living as a musician during the two-month Carnival Season—and other jobs are scarce. Ultimately, Razor Blade is the object of ironic fun—he boasts that he will be a big time criminal, but the story ends as he is about to be caught for stealing an orange. While the Blade fails as a thief, he and his ballad make a serious claim for the value of Trinidadian music by showing that it was a significant player in the United States. The Blade ponders the fact that the Andrews Sisters made the calypso “Rum and Coca Cola,” a smash hit – in fact, it became the most popular song of 1945 (Burke “The Importance of the Song”). The Andrews Sisters had access to “Rum and Coca Cola” because the U.S. entertainer, Morey Amsterdam took the song, modified it, and distributed it in the United States without crediting its author the Trinidadian,
Rupert Grant aka Lord Invader. Grant only received compensation after a complicated law-suit in the United States, and he was never granted the copyright. Selvon’s narrator explains:

“Razor Blade know the story good; whenever he write a calypso, he always praying that some big-shot from America would hear it and like it, and want to set it up good” (137).

What Razor Blade does not mention is that “Rum and Coca Cola” sung by the Andrews Sisters differed significantly from that performed by Lord Invader. Invader explicitly addressed the impact of the prostitution caused by U.S. military bases on Trinidadian society, famously singing that the relative wealth of U.S. servicemen broke up Trinidadian marriages and led even mothers and daughters to prostitute themselves—

Since the Yankees came to Trinidad

They have the young girls going mad

The young girls say they treat them nice

And they give them a better price

They buy rum and coca-cola

Go Down Point Cumana

Both mother and daughter

Working for the Yankee Dollar

By contrast, the Andrews Sisters sang of Trinidad as a paradise of tourist romance, shifting the rhyme to “the Young girls say they treat ’em nice, Make Trinidad like paradise” which was reinforced with lines such as “Out on Manzinella Beach //G.I. romance with native peach” (Burke, Rum and Coca-Cola Reader).

Despite the acclaimed success of Lord Invader and Razor Blade’s own star status, clerks in Trinidadian music stores just laugh at his claims to making music “because they does think that calypso is no song at all, that what is song is numbers like ’I've Got You Under My Skin' and
'Sentimental Journey', what American composers write. And the Blade uses to argue … that a time would come when people singing calypso all over the world like Stupidness” (Selvon 137). Selvon’s story ridicules Trinidadian society for assimilating North American and British claims to superiority. His allusion to the Lord Invader case introduces also the fact that Calypso and calypsonians were simultaneously gained status and were exploited by U.S. interests and the tourist industry. The irony of Razor Blade’s final statement is, of course, that by the mid-fifties when Selvon was writing, people were singing calypso all over the world like “crazy.”

During the Calypso Craze of the 1950s, calypsos—like novels—reflected, commented on, and even contributed to the major political and economic transformations. For Britain, the fifties marked the end of empire and the beginning of large-scale colonial migration to the mother country. For the United States, the fifties heralded the ascent to imperial superpower as well as the horrors of racism and the hopes of Civil Rights (the murder of Emmett Till in 1955 and Brown vs. the Board of Education 1954). For the Anglophone Caribbean, the decade introduced political independence, a year-round, mass-market tourist industry, and an internationally acclaimed generation of writers. In Trinidad and Tobago, calypsonians such as Mighty Sparrow helped Eric Williams and his anticolonial and nationalist People’s National Movement to power in 1956. In England, Lord Kitchener and other Calypsonians sang of their love of England but also of the racism they faced in England and of political independence. Calypso was so popular in mainstream British media that the BBC featured the Guyanese actor and singer, Cy Grant performing a calypso about the day’s news on its nightly program, Tonight (Bourne 64).

In the United States, Calypso was sung by a wide spectrum of artists from the Andrews Sisters to Harry Belafonte. Calypso was the title of Belafonte’s 1956 Calypso, which was the first album to sell a million copies. In Belafonte’s repertoire and far beyond, Calypso functioned
as an umbrella term for folk music of the Anglophone Caribbean including work songs and Jamaican mento—which dominated Belafonte’s calypso albums. For Belafonte, singing folk songs of different ethnic traditions was a means of forging a race- and class-conscious and inclusive alternative to dominant narrative of U.S. culture. His family members were plantation workers, and when he sang Day-O he was singing of and for them—making their culture part of a U.S. national culture (225).

At the same time, calypso was so closely associated with tourism that it played a significant role in defining the Caribbean as an archipelago of pleasure islands. Calypso functioned as a form of tourist advertising, its melody, its steelband sound transporting listeners in their minds from northern climes to tropical islands with palm trees and calypso. In this process, calypso came to be “island music,” and the Caribbean came to be a string of calypso-infused islands of relaxation, romance, and rum. Appearing in nightclubs, novels, films, and concert halls, calypso helped tourist discourse to cross generic and geographic boundaries.

The significance of calypso was enhanced by the fact that it advertised Caribbean tourism during a dramatic expansion of the industry as Caribbean tourism shifted from a privilege of the elite to a mass enterprise designed to accommodate the middle class (in the lower-cost off season). In Jamaica, which had daily airline service to two airports and flights by at least three airlines, the trade increased by 240% between 1950 and 1960 (Taylor 159). Though tourism had only a minor presence in some islands such as Barbados and Grenada, it expanded throughout the region during the interwar years (except 1930-35) and had been developed self-consciously as a regional industry since the mid-1940s. Thus, in the 1940s and 1950s, Island in the Sun and other novels and films, even Princess Margaret’s 1955 tour of the region, not only comprised
part of the centuries-long paradise discourse Ian Strachan defines as fundamental to the tourist industry. They also contributed to a publicity campaign to promote tourism throughout the Caribbean, organized first by first by the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission and then by the Caribbean Tourist Association which had members in the Anglophone, Dutch, and French Caribbean and included Cuba and Haiti and the Dominican Republic (Taylor 165).

In other words, in the mid-twentieth century, Calypso became the music of diverse and conflicting ideologies and interests and featured in a broad array of cultural forms. It featured in the Eric Williams’ anti-colonial nationalism and the anti-colonial aesthetics of the West Indian writers as well as the radical politics of Harry Belafonte. At the same time, calypso featured in Waugh’s pro-empire romance and was prominent in the tourist industry which reproduced much of the colonial and racial hierarchy Eric Williams, Trinidadian calypsonians, and Harry Belafonte sought to end. Tourism was a foreign-dominated export industry that diverted resources from the citizens to the tourists. It reproduced the hierarchy of the plantation giving black Caribbeans low-level, low-paying jobs while often reserving higher positions for white or light-skinned elite and foreign workers. Moreover, tourism marketed nostalgia for a mythic plantation society, in which planters lived in luxury, waited on by loyal servants. Transforming so many Caribbean people into maids and entertainers for tourists and rendering the region economically dependent on first world capital, the industry reassured North Americans and British, that the region would remain peaceful and under foreign-economic control even as it gained independence.

It would have been confusing enough had these remained separate enterprises, but they were rarely separable. Under Eric Williams’ government, Trinidad Carnival was both a vehicle
for nation building and a tourist attraction despite Williams’ rejection of tourism as neocolonial.\textsuperscript{11} As Calypso King and star of \textit{Island in the Sun}, Harry Belafonte transformed from political radical to “the first Negro matinee idol,” a sex symbol and icon of “the interracial romance of American integrationism” (Stephens 229). Beyond suggesting that Caribbean literary scholars look beyond a national framework for studying the significance of calypso in literature, the Calypso craze thus raised large questions about how music influenced literature and film—about how music influenced politics and was influenced by politics and about how music was shaped by economic interests and thereby contributed to making tourism the region’s leading industry.

Alex Waugh’s 1955 novel \textit{Island in the Sun} and Robert Rossen’s 1957 film adaptation were two of the most influential popular representations of calypso, carnival, and the Caribbean in the 1950s. They illustrate the complex inter-relation of calypso, literature, politics, and economics and reveal that the debate between West Indian novelists and popular British and American narratives of the Caribbean was not a simple opposition between anti-colonial nationalist and neo/colonial viewpoints. Waugh’s novel—with little contradiction or ambivalence—obscured the region’s complicated political realities in a colonial romance that plumped up British spirits, reinforced the US one-drop rule of black identity, and advertised the Caribbean as a sexy and exotic tourist destination incapable of governing itself. It illustrates how calypso and carnival were used in British and US media to promote the tourist industry and Anglo-American interests in the region. By contrast, the film is filled with contradiction and ambiguity. On the one hand, the making of the film—its adaptation from the novel, casting, and Caribbean filming locations—inevitably revealed—especially to Caribbean audiences—what the
romance sought to hide: the Caribbean’s modernity and political savvy; the racism of U.S. and British culture; and Britain’s weakness as a force in international politics. At the same time, the power of the romance plot and of the stereotypical tourist images the film used to portray the Caribbean coopted Belafonte and his music and undermined what appears to have been a concerted effort on the part of the director and producer to articulate anti-racist values.

A bestseller for twenty weeks, a literary guild choice and dollar book club selection, 

*Island in the Sun* was serialized in *Ladies Home Journal*, condensed for Reader’s Digest and sold to 20th Century Fox; it had millions readers in the United States alone and many readers in Britain. Waugh claimed that *Island in the Sun* sold well because it “came out at exactly at the right time, when the aeroplane had brought the West Indies within range of tourism, and in Britain’s Colonial Empire ‘the Wind of Change,’ was bringing demands of independence” (cited p. 145 Waugh, *Best Last Wine* 174). I would put it in slightly different terms: Waugh’s book sold well in the U.S and Britain because it was carefully crafted to address the needs and desires of different audiences. It dangled before middle class U.S. citizens a fantastic vision of what they might do with their newly-acquired imperial privilege and wealth—travel as aristocratic tourists in a tropical landscape where they could flirt with racial equality without losing the myth of white supremacy and purity. For the British, it offered a nostalgic and glorious vision of empire and British manhood even as the Empire melted away.

*Island in the Sun* begins at the opening of carnival season with the arrival of the Governor’s son, an eligible bachelor, and ends as he boards a plane back to England with his new wife, suggesting that like Waugh’s characters, tourists too might find romance and fulfillment in a trip to the Caribbean—at Carnival time. Carnival is not only a backdrop, but also
the condition for the romantic and political upheavals that occur in the novel. Carnival provides opportunity for the governor’s son to make love to Jocelyn Fleury for the first time, but it also serves as warning that the masses are potentially violent. Mavis Norman and Grainger Morris look at villagers “running mask” and “out of control”— “men dressed as women, waggling their posteriors as they danced,” and they are instantly reminded of the racial violence of a 1860s revolt. Mavis thinks that “the great-grandparents of these men must have looked very much like this as they pranced round that guttering building, waving their cutlasses, the glare of the fire illuminating their gloating faces.” (149-150). She looks towards Morris and asks, “We’re thinking the same thing aren’t we?” He answers, “More or less.”

Waugh presents self-government and independence as farce. Not only would such primitive and uncontrolled masses make a hash of democracy, but so would the male elite poised to govern. A prominent planter and would-be politician, Maxwell Fleury is self-hating, racist, and uncontrolled, so much so that he senselessly murders an innocent man out of misdirected jealousy. Waugh presents David Boyer, the black working-class labor organizer and politician in caricature: he was a “striking creature” with thick lips, broad nose, white teeth, and flamboyant dress (12). Self-interested before all else, Boyer goes into politics to have money for parties and nice clothes. He is so vain and insecure that a social slight from Maxwell Fleury leads him to manipulate workers to attack Fleury’s property and ultimately to murder him.12 Grainger Morris, a lawyer trained at Oxford and a champion cricketer, who has dedicated his life to helping the working people of the Caribbean. He belongs to the respectable brown-skinned middle class. While he may appear to be an ideal political leader, Waugh presents Morris as a celibate (rendered thus by his compatriots racism) and thus lacking the staples of manhood—sexual
potency and fatherhood. All three see the black majority as primitive; all three assert a paternalistic ideology, claiming that slavery was not harsh in Santa Marta. In contrast, the English governor, a paragon of English ideals, fights racism and implements universal suffrage, losing his job when racial violence breaks out.

All this politics is however at once projected onto and submerged under the novel’s romance plot. Overcoming color and class discrimination and division was one of the regions’ most difficult challenges in gaining independence. Waugh’s romance plot displaces this question onto the family, asking a romantic rather than a political question: can individuals—designated as representative of different racial and class groups—overcome their differences to marry? The novel is centered on three inter-racial couples. Their ability to marry becomes the test of whether the society can overcome its racial divisions and thus govern itself. The focus shifts from the majority black peasants and workers to the three elite couples: Euan Templeton, the son of the British Governor of the island and Jocelyn Fleury, the daughter of the island’s most prominent planter family; Dennis Archer, the Governor’s Aide-de-Camp and Margot Seaton, a beautiful Afro-Caribbean stenographer; and finally, Grainger Morris, the brown-skinned barrister and Mavis Norman, the daughter of a prominent banker and director of the tourist board. Each pair of lovers raises a different aspect of inter-racial partnership. The U.S. journalist, Carl Bradshaw, publishes a story revealing that the prominent Fleury family has African ancestry despite its white elite status. Jocelyn Fleury—horrified by the prospect of bearing a black son who would inherit a seat in the House of Lords—refuses to marry the governor’s son until she discovers that she is in fact white, the product of her mother’s adultery with an elite Englishman. This circumstance allows the governor’s family to prove its tolerance by appearing to accept a person
of color into the family while not doing so. The second couple overcomes racial difference to some degree but only because, as Morris explains to Mavis, “[Margot] isn’t all that dark” and the couple will live in London, where “they don’t worry about that kind of thing …” “Besides, Morris adds, “Archer’s going to lead a Bohemian, ragamuffin life. Artists are expected to be irresponsible. They provide the color and contrast to existence. An artist would look silly with a rolled umbrella. An exotic wife like Margot will be an asset. She’s very picturesque. (436) 13 Grainger thus reveals that Margot will not really escape racial prejudice. As an exotic token, she will “provide the color and contrast” necessary to define normal English society and enhance her husband’s career.

The third couple breaks up despite their love for one another. Morris refuses Mavis ostensibly because he feels that any white woman who married him would suffer social isolation. Thus, when Mavis is on the verge of asking Morris if he will marry her, Morris lies, saying that he’s a celibate—and then realizes that he must be a celibate if he is going to improving the lives of Afro-Caribbeans (437). His logic is so unconvincing that I suspect Waugh renders him a celibate because English literature had in 1955 yet to conceive that Caribbean women, certainly Afro-Caribbean women, could be real, respectable women. Waugh no doubt also vetoes this combination because the marriage of a white woman and a “black” man posed a significantly greater challenge to English and U.S. norms than sexual relations between white men and black women.

The politics and love-pairings that Waugh presents as revolutionary were in fact old-hat by the time Waugh wrote of them. By 1946, Jamaica and Trinidad had universal suffrage and the franchise had expanded in other colonies to include significantly more voters (Daniel 169).
Barbados, where much of the film was shot, had self-government in 1630, and universal suffrage since 1950. By 1951, the Barbados Labour Party, led by Grantley Adams, a leader of the Afro-Caribbean elite had gained the majority in the House Assembly and only two of the twenty-four members of the House were white (Sutton 42).

Barbados had a strict color and class hierarchy, probably the closest in the Anglophone Caribbean to the segregated society Waugh presents. But even the Barbados elite did not maintain the U.S. one-drop rule of racial identity that Waugh imposes in his novel. Barbados Jamaica’s chief minister in 1955, Norman Manley, like the fictional character Morris, was an English-trained lawyer, and he had been married for at least two decades to a white English woman, Edna Manley. Rather than being shunned, she became a leader in Jamaica’s cultural arena and is now celebrated as the mother of Jamaican national art. Nearly a hundred years earlier, George William Gordon, an Afro-Jamaican member of the Jamaican Assembly, had been married to an English woman. Waugh’s racy romance plot was in fact rolling race relations backwards.¹⁴

While earlier colonial romances, Stedman and Joanna, for instance, obscured the realities of slavery, the inter-racial romances of Island in the Sun obscure the political realities of the late-colonial British Caribbean. Waugh’s glamorous tourist romance promised a racy glimpse into the future of inter-racial politics and marriage, but denied the region’s recent history, placing its readers in a fantastic past in which the Afro-Caribbean elite did not aspire to political power. (Morris remains a civil servant loyal to the Governor). It is the antithesis of the liberating anti-colonial aesthetics of Selvon and Lamming. Unlike the novel, the film adaptation was a corporate project involving at many people (including hundreds if not thousands of extras). Its
“message” was as a result much less coherent. In fact, Sandra Courtney notes that the film received so many conflicting reviews from the white and black press in the United States that it would be very difficult to assess the reception. Some reviewers praised it as a courageous statement about race in America; others complained that it was superficial and opportunistic. Even segregationists were of several minds, some picketed against its “miscegenation” while others enjoyed it as a pro-segregation film.

My focus is the Caribbean audience—for film but also for the shooting of the film. My argument is that the film-making, which ought to have been a exploitative process, because the film was used U.S. actors to play Caribbean characters, restricted black characters and West Indian actors to tiny parts, and generally produced a colonial vision of the island – probably was not experienced as an a form of exploitation but rather as one of opportunity.

In Rossen’s film, calypso and carnival are yet more prominent in the film because Harry Belafonte, then King of Calypso, was cast as David Boyeur and recorded the soundtrack. It capitalized on Belafonte’s success in the previous year with the album “Calypso” and on his status as TV matinee idol adored by women across the US spectrum of color and class (Gates 138 & 134). Carnival was featured visually in the film as the Twentieth Century Fox paid for Grenadians to stage a carnival for the film—viewers see streets overflowing with masqueraders and steelbands (fig.1). As in the novel, it is the condition for the love affairs to develop. During this “madness,” Euan and Jocelyn are marooned alone at the family’s plantation and make love for the first time. Dennis is so mesmerized by the sight of Margot dancing the limbo as part of a carnival band that he leaves his white male companions to join her. When Mavis playfully dons a carnival mask depicting black woman’s face, Boyeur rips the mask from her face—
foreshadowing the fact that racial difference will destroy their relationship. Further, Boyeur’s followers break up Maxwell Fleury’s political meeting by playing calypso music. The film opens and closes with Belafonte singing “Island in the Sun,” suggesting that the action of the takes place within the frame of the song, that it might be a dramatic performance of the narrative Belafonte sings.

Yet Rossen’s film diverges dramatically from Waugh’s politics—nearly all protagonists speak eloquently against racial and class division. Even the racist coward Maxwell Fleury gives a moving speech about the necessity of bridging the island’s race and class divide. It is recognized as the first film to cast an interracial romance “using a black actor, Belafonte, and a white actress, Fontaine” (Stephens 232). These anti-racist sentiments and the legitimacy the film grants inter-racial marriage were given prominence by the Studio’s decision to cast the moment’s leading artists—Harry Belafonte, Dorothy Dandridge, Fontaine, Joan Collins, James Mason. Moreover, David Boyeur, is presented as powerful and sincere leader, struggling to improve the
lives of Santa Marta’s workers. He fights for “Equality” not “Charity” and has a new school built. By contrast Waugh’s Boyeur acted only out of vanity and self-interest. Boyeur’s new and improved character is in part the consequence of the fact that the film script merged the ideal Morris and with the demagogue Boyeur, which gave the new Boyeur both Morris’s sincerity and his girl—Mavis Norman. By then pairing Mavis with the black radical, Boyeur, Rossen radicalized the prospect of inter-racial romance, suggesting that class, race, and political party might be broken down to allow the black worker to marry a daughter of the white ruling class. Sutton notes that the Barbadian “colored middle class” and white elite were much more closely related in culture and social standing to one another than either were to the black working class (“The Scene of Action,” 34). “Does it matter” Mavis asks Boyeur—not Morris as she had in novel, when the woman is white and the man black? “Out here it does,” he answers. He must stay. “My people have the vote,” he says with passion, “They have a power now. I need to show them how to use it.” He will go to St. Kitts and across the whole Archipelago to lead them. He can’t marry a white woman because “his people” would view it as a betrayal. Mavis lashes out— he wants power for himself not for the people but quickly admits that this is not true. Boyeur’s refusal of Mavis should signify his failure to overcome the obstacle between himself and his love but the logic of the romance plot falls away when the words are spoken by the matinee idol and civil rights activist. Many, particularly African American and Caribbean viewers, would believe Boyeur’s assertion that he wanted to empower Afro-Caribbeans; they would not have cried when he shuns Mavis. In fact, Belafonte was criticized in the African American press for marrying a white woman—a story which broke just before the release of the film (Gates 138).
Boyeur’s lines in the film are taken from a speech that Waugh’s Boyeur makes to Archer in which he says of the workers: “They’ve got power now. They’ve got a vote…That’s what I’m doing for them, showing how powerful they are.” He wants to teach workers not that the power of the vote is great but that the power to striker is greater. He wants them to strike because he feels tricked and insulted by the Governor and Fleury; he wants to “teach the stuck up prigs” a lesson. Moreover, rather than seeing his constituents as citizens (or future citizens), he complains that they have “a slave mentality. That’s what’s wrong with these people… They were slaves, the half of them, in Africa before they were ever shipped here. They don’t understand freedom” (Waugh 349). In this passage, Waugh puts pro-slavery rhetoric from the nineteenth century about the African slave trade in the mouth of the novel’s black nationalist leader. By extracting these lines from Waugh’s passage against black political power, the script has transformed the import of the lines and changed Boyeur’s character from a vain and irresponsible leader—who spouts racist pro-slavery propaganda—into serious black politician, acting in the interest of the people.

These changes may well reflect the leftwing politics of the director Robert Rossen who had been a member of the communist party and blacklisted as well as those of the producer, Darryl Zanuck, who had already produced films on inter-racial relationships and working class oppression (Pinky in 1949; Grapes of Wrath in 1940). Belafonte also claimed to have demanded “considerable alterations” that made Boyeur “an earnest, sincere and dedicated leader—not a mounteback and opportunist” (WI 10/25/56 p.1).
Yet the film weaves these radical components and calypso itself into the exoticizing and discourse of tourism with which it was in stark conflict already in the opening credits which drew on colonial traditions of cartography and photography. The novel’s title is superimposed on an imitation of a colonial map which features the island of Santa Marta. It gives the viewer no
way of placing the country in relation to other geographical places, but the map does place it in the European tradition of new world colonization (fig. 2). The colonial map fades to classic tourist footage of the Caribbean taken from a plane as it descends towards an island (fig. 3). As viewers, we can imagine that we too might be on that plane. We hear Belafonte’s voice singing “Oh island in the sun// Built to me by my father's hand//All my days I will sing in praise//Of your forest waters, your shining sand…” We see the aqua blue shallows and then the beach itself; a steelband adds into Belafonte’s voice a quick party beat. We see a series of what might be described as animated tourist snapshots: waves breaking on a deserted beach; a quaint harbor with colonial fort and picturesque sailing ships; cane and banana trees blowing in the wind; women washing in the river; workers cutting cane with machetes, men carrying bananas (fig.4). Many of these shots focus on the black and working classes that Belafonte and Rossen ostensibly sought to foreground and legitimate. Yet the particular images used in the film invoke the iconic tourist photographs of the 1890s that defined the region as exotic, primitive, and safe for tourists (fig. 5). The final image in the sequence is of Belafonte as David Boyeur walking along a dramatic coastline, identifying the voice we have been listening to as that of Boyeur/Belafonte. As the soundtrack for these tourist images, Belafonte and his “calypso” become interwoven into class tourist discourse and thus separated from their modern celebrity and politics.
The sequence then repeats itself. Again, we see the colonial map. Again we hear Belafonte sing “Island in the Sun.” Again, the view from the plane, but this time, the voice we hear is that of the Governor Templeton (Ronald Squire) describing the island as if he were a tour guide: “The Island of Santa Marta is not very much different from any of the other smaller islands in the Caribbean: towering mountains, white cold sand beaches, coconut palms, and hot
tropical sun. It has a population of 100,000—9/10s of which are coloured….” This time populated by playing children. It is now even easier for us to imagine ourselves on that beach.

The sequence ends when the camera shifts to the Governor’s parlor, where he sits over tea with the visiting U.S. journalist Bradshaw who completes the conversation by asking: “Is the West Indian ready to govern himself?” The governor refuses to answer, suggesting that he will discuss this matter when Bradshaw has gotten to know the island. The rest of the film then is a tutorial for Bradshaw and ourselves on the question of black political competence. The introduction would appear to have already answered this question because the colonial and tourist images of the island combined with the calypso soundtrack have already made clear that this is a simple, beautiful place stuck many decades in the past. If Belafonte’s lyrics have introduced a nationalist flavor to the film by asserting an Afro-Caribbean Caribbean ownership and belonging to the island (“this is my Island in the Sun”), the governor’s voice, which replaces Belafonte’s and his markets the island to tourists, would appear to supersede it.15

Much as the imagery mimics tourist postcards, the plot mimics a tourist trip, beginning with the arrival of the U.S. journalist and Governor’s son, Euan Templeton (Stephen Boyd) and ending with the newest BWIA plane departing from the airport with the two couples Euan and Jocelyn Fleury (Joan Collins), Dennis Archer (John Justin) and Margot Seaton (Dorothy Dandridge). In between the protagonists engage in a series of tourist activities -- a dance at a hotel, flirting on the beach, drinking fresh coconuts listening to authentic folk music, visiting a plantation, going to carnival, dancing the limbo, seeing beautiful views.

The film glamorizes these tourist activities just as the tourist industry is expanding to include the middle class and thus potentially losing its elite status. It does this by presenting
tourist activities—going to the beach, to performances of calypso and limbo dancing—as normal activities of the Governor’s family, who were representatives of the Crown, and of the plantocracy, the local aristocracy. Moreover, its cast were among the profession’s most glamorous—Joan Fontaine, James Mason, Dorothy Dandridge, Harry Belafonte, Joan Collins. Just two years earlier Princess Margaret had similarly given tourism the royal touch on her widely publicized tour of the West Indies. She went sea bathing, bought calypso records, watched carnival performances, and went rafting on Jamaica’s Rio Grande. Calypso and carnival stood as the Princess’ greatest interests—in addition to hearing calypsonians and steelbands in practically all the islands she visited, calypsos were composed for the princess—and carnival and calypso were emphasized in the promotional booklet about the tour (Nicholson, 1-25,16,21,27,32).

The Princess may have made her trip to ease situation at home caused by her inappropriate romance with the older and divorced Peter Townsend, but she accomplished her diplomatic assignment of strengthening unity between the mother country and her West Indian subjects by being a tourist and promoting tourism as a new economic model for the region. Her promotion of tourism strengthened imperial power in two linked ways. Based on asymmetric economic relations that mimicked those of colonial trade and marketing nostalgia for colonial privilege and plantation society, tourism reinforced a colonial relationship between the West Indies and Britain (and other first world countries). Much as the film and novel, the tourist industry lessened the loss of Empire Britons may have experienced, inviting them to visit a Caribbean which was a kind of theme park dedicated to their Empire.
Princess Margaret also helped to define calypso and carnival as tourist products. In the 1950s, Calypsonians were proponents of nationalism and in particular of Eric William’s anti-colonial People’s National Movement in Trinidad and Tobago. Calypso originated as part of carnival which had historically been a site of subaltern rebellion and resistance to colonial power. However, once integrated into the tourist industry, performed for Princess Margaret and the viewers of Island in the Sun, calypso and carnival became the stuff of entertainment and thus, safe for tourists. Thus, in glamorizing tourist activities and presenting calypso and carnival as part of the tourist industry, both Waugh’s novel and Rossen’s film participated in a larger British and ultimately also U.S. project of promoting tourism as the region’s new dominant industry—one that would counteract the threat to white and northern power posed by the region’s imminent independence by keeping it economically dependent on an export industry and transforming its future citizens into domestic servants and performers in hotels.

Yet, at the same time, filming on location actually undermined this tourist fantasy at least for Caribbeans. The film was shot in Grenada and Barbados in the fall of 1956. The local press, the Barbados Advocate and the Grenadian West Indian, regularly placed stories about the filming and interviews with the stars in an among the local and international news, a process that revealed the untruth of the film’s colonial and primitivist vision of the Caribbean and returned a certain amount of humanity and individuality to the islands and their citizens, which had been melded together and rendered a generic Caribbean place and people in the film.

In contrast to Island in the Sun, the Barbados Advocate presented tourism as a means of connecting Barbados to the modern global economy – and this global interconnectedness was built into the structure of paper in two daily features: "Travel Talk," which appeared daily on the
second page and "Carib Calling," which appeared on page three. “Travel Talk” gave brief
descriptions of individuals who arrived and departed via plane; it was complemented by “Carib
Calling,” which contained short statements from those travelers and descriptions of their
activities. These travelers and the flights they took connected Barbados to a wide range of cities
in Latin America, the United States, Britain, Europe, and the Caribbean. One might imagine that
tourists of the period were wealthy, white, first-world people; historically, tourism had been the
privilege of the elite. However, "Travel Talk" and "Carib Calling" made clear that teachers,
clerks, and other ordinary Caribbean people came to Barbados on holiday. Even though many
were visiting friends and family and not staying in expensive hotels, their pictures and stories
stood side by side those of Hollywood movie actresses and foreign factory owners. The
inclusion of Caribbeans among the tourists broke down the binary opposition that undergirded
colonial and tourist discourse: the opposition between modern white tourists and primitive,
brown and black “natives.”

Moreover, the newspaper also undermined this binary by reversing the tourist gaze.
Tourists’ gained pleasure by gazing on the West Indians, considering them authentic, often
picturesque specimens embodying the difference and primitivism of the region. The local press,
in contrast, made tourists the object of local (business) desire and curiosity. Tourists were
photographed. Their activities were studied, their clothing evaluated.

Further, in covering the large-scale migration of West Indians to Britain (as well as the
smaller migrations to the United States, and Canada), the Barbados Advocate and other West
Indian papers revealed that modern travel was a two-way street. Tales of incoming tourists were
balanced by those of immigrants to Britain and North America, who added stories of English discriminatory practices and of their own protests and achievements.  

The *Barbados Advocate* also made clear that Caribbeans were accomplished politicians and that Caribbean citizens were actively involved in the political process; nationalism and national identity were real and of primary concern. In the fall of the 1956, Barbados’ election for legislative campaign was underway with large public meetings (e.g. 11/7/56 p.1; 11/14/56 p. 2) and the recommendations for the location of the West Indian Federation were hotly debated. Eric Williams came to power as chief minister in Trinidad and Tobago (*BA* 9/25/56 p.1); 

Caribbeans placed their own path to independence in the context of the larger phenomenon of decolonization and anti-colonial nationalism. The *Barbados Advocate* informed its readers in repeated articles that the Gold Coast—now Ghana—was negotiating independence. Algerians were fighting against French rule (e.g. *BA* 10/4/56 p.1); Hungarians were fighting Soviet rule (passim). Workers in Barbados and Jamaica stopped work in solidarity with the people of Hungary (*BA* 11.9.56 p.1). Students at the University College of the West Indies protested Britain’s invasion of Egypt (*BA* 11/16/56). Panamanian students demonstrated to nationalize the Panama Canal as Egypt had the Suez (*BA* 9/4/56 p.1). 

The *Barbados Advocate* vision of Barbados as a political involved and internationally connected community is echoed by the anthropologist Constance Sutton, who conducted fieldwork in a Barbadian village in between 1956 and 1958. She found that universal suffrage and the transition to independence informed the thought and action of Barbadian workers. The political leaders were members of the “colored middle class,” who relied on their legislative record to gain support. (Without capital or power in industry, Sutton notes, they could not have
encouraged support through giving out favors even if they had wanted to.) People in the village where Sutton did her research were regularly engaged in “heated” discussion of education, labor, and emigration policy; they discussed other matters such as the West Indian Federation and the rise of tourism with less intensity as these were not viewed as so directly related to their lives. There were political rallies, door to door canvassing, and visits from the candidates (Sutton, “The Scene of Action,” 47-48). Political meetings were much like those described in the Barbados Advocate and the film in which Boyeur touts his superiority to Fleury and accuses him of thinking of his workers as slaves. In film, the crowd prevents Fleury from speaking by chanting Boyeur’s name and by playing steelpan. This seems to be an exaggeration but utter departure from Sutton’s description of political rallies as “lengthy affairs that began at 7:30 or 8:00 pm and lasted till close to midnight. Although the children often dozed off to sleep, adults stood attentively throughout the whole rally. They actively participated by cheering, jeering, and interjecting comments relevant to the point a speaker was making. In addition to providing the audience with material for subsequent discussion, the rallies had considerable entertainment value as well” (The Scene of Action 49).

She was surprised by their familiarity with foreign news. When she arrived at “Endeavor” a town of just over 2,500 people, for instance, people asked her tough questions about the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (“Remembering Barbados in the 1950s”). She also noted that people in the village had significant connections to people in other Caribbean countries, the United States, Britain, and Canada. This reflected the fact that Barbados had had significant emigration and remission payments since the 1860s; these had increased three-fold since the early twentieth century (Sutton “Scene of Action 25). One seventh of the households
in the village received remittances from kin abroad and 173 residents had worked abroad and returned (Sutton “Scene of Action 25).

The events portrayed in the film and those recorded in daily papers were remarkably similar. The film had a boisterous political meeting, elections, and the prospect of self-government – so did Barbados and Grenada. The film had a colonial governor and an aide-de-camp – so did Grenada and Barbados. In the film, the governor was a paragon of integrity and strength, who represented Britain’s tradition of virtue and strength. Yet, during the very same weeks that Barbadians and Grenadians watched Ronald Squires play the perfect governor and representative of the crown, they also read articles about the shameful and illegal acts of Britain’s Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, colluding with Israel and France to invade Egypt and thus violating the U.N. treaty. Eden resigned in disgrace.

The power of the tourist vision of the Caribbean lay in its seamless romance and apparent authenticity, but the newspaper coverage exposed both film’s plot and its setting to be artificial constructions. Journalists explained that films were a series of carefully planned scenes and shots, filmed out of chronological order and later spliced together. Readers knew that in the order of filming, Margot Seaton and the Aide-de-Camp became lovers before they met. Readers learned filming locations were artificially enhanced. Fifty local carpenters built verandas, hollow pillars, and a sunken pool to spiff up the decaying 1818 Estate that featured as the Fleury’s home (BA 9/18/56 p.5). Readers knew that the turn-around for cars in front of the Hotel Santa Maria had been transformed into an elegant dance floor and the swimming cabana into a bar. While the film gave little if any individuality to the Grenadians and Barbadians who played domestic servants or who served as extras, press coverage of the filming did. A cross-section of
Grenada’s society, 170 people had been invited to be the party at the “Nurses’ Dance” and the costume director complimented the women’s appearance. At the Governor’s cocktail party filmed in Barbados, John Goddard, captain of the West Indies Cricket team, W.I. Test player Garfield Sobers, and the prominent writer Frank Collymore were guests. The Grenada paper described the filming of the political meeting, explaining that “the crowd’s private story filled with humorous and peculiar happenings … could never be recorded on celluloid.” A fish seller, Gertrude Lewis, danced so well that Belafonte took her briefly as his partner, and Walter Levine, alias “Dun,” took the mic and made the stars laugh uproariously (WI 10/28/56 p.4). In other words, when Barbadians and Grenadians watched Island in the Sun, they may not have seen a seamless romance in cinemascope, but rather their leading citizens, their carnival, police band, hotels, and city streets -- and their hero Belafonte, who featured in stories that praised for his support for the West Indian Federation and for local musicians. By contrast, Rossen and Twentieth Century Fox were cast as comical in their racial cowardice and backwardness. They presented the film as pioneering race relations with courageous depictions of film interracial romances – and for Hollywood this was true-- but as one journalist pointed out, black and white lovers were not allowed to kiss or use the word ‘marriage’ to describe their relationship ( fig. 6). These kiss-less love affairs allowed even Barbados’ elites to claim a social and sexual modernity far in advance of the United States. The local press unmade the myth Waugh so carefully constructed, making it repeatedly clear that British political leaders were deeply flawed that the United States was not the incarnation of modernity but quite backwards when it came to race, and that Caribbean politicians were not incompetent demagogues, but national and regional leaders. Rather than gems sparkling in a sun-kissed sea, theirs were Islands in and of the world.
Fig. 6 *Island in the Sun*
Robert Rossen dir., 20th Century Fox 1957

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In addition to Selvon’s short stories and novels, see for instance, Errol John’s radio play “Small island moon” which features a calypso as chorus that gives meaning to the plot development or the argument about the meaning of small island in Lamming’s The Emigrants or the significance of the calypso about the central character, Mis Bis. Even Naipaul identifies calypso as an genuine creative art of the Caribbean (Middle Passage), constructs Miguel Street as a series of calypso-like narratives, and wrote a history of calypso broadcast on the BBC entitled “From Attila the Hun to the Mighty Sparrow” (broadcast on the BBC in 1963).

Unfortunately, I am just beginning to compare the reviews of Waugh and West Indian writers.


This is the jist of the case but the case in fact involved multiple parties from the Caribbean and the United States, see Burke’s “Rum and Coca Cola Reader.”

Kitchener was commissioned to write a calypso celebrating Ghanaian Independence. Hugh Hodges claims that Kitchener’s London calypsos of the late 40s and 50s ought to be studied just as the literature of the period because a) they record the experience of W.I. immigrants to London and b) they constitute a “renascent” art form. By this last, he refers to the fact that between in the late 40s the 1950s calypso moved from being parochial and addressing “parochial issues” to addressing international matters (like the independence of Ghana); they were led in this by the “young brigade.” (25) By closely reading “London is the place for me,” “the Underground Train,” and “Sweet Jamaica,” alongside sections of Lamming’s Emigrants, and Selvon’s Lonely Londoners and Housing Lark, Hodges demonstrates that Kitchener’s lyrics, sometimes enhanced by musical setting, articulate the same complex and critical view of London and use the nuances of these literary writers, primarily in this case irony.

In the first years of Williams’ government, Lord Melody and Sparrow also defended and thus mouthed Williams’ policies, even the unpopular ones like tax increases (Rohlehr 852-855). When Carnival became part of the emerging nation state, the government could shape the performances (1).

Cy Grant performed a “topical calypso” on this BBC programme from 1957 to 1960 (Bourne 64).

Kevin Burke has complex analysis of song popularity in which he uses jukebox ratings, Billboard ratings, and sales to argue that Rum and Coca Cola was the third most popular and influential song of the 1940s (Rum and Coca Cola Reader: http://www.rumandcocolareader.com/RumAndCocaCola/importance_of.html). I do not want to make such a precise claim but I think his work makes clear that the song was very popular. For the status of Belafonte’s album, see Gates and Ketola.

Harry Belafonte became the first black TV matinee idol and the first folksinger to top the popular charts as the King of Calypso. His 1956 album Calypso, which comprised many mentos was the first to sell over a million copies (in its first year)—8 of its 11 tracks were composed by Irving Burgie (Ketola 31). "Day-O" (Banana Boat Song) (William Attaway, Harry Belafonte); "I Do Adore Her" (Lord Burgess); "Jamaica Farewell" (Lord Burgess); "Will His Love Be Like His Rum?" (Attaway, Belafonte); "Dolly Dawn"; "Star-O" (Attaway, Belafonte); "The Jack-Ass Song" (Lord Burgess, Attaway); "Hosanna" (Lord Burgess, Attaway); "Come Back Liza" (Lord Burgess, Attaway); "Brown Skin Girl" (Norman Span); "Man Smart (Woman Smarter)" (Norman Span).

In Barbados, for instance, sugar was 95% of exports and 45% of the GDP while "the hotels, the guest houses, a clubs that cater to the tourist trade employed only 0.3 per cent for the labor force” (Sutton, “The Scene of Action,” 17).

Coomansingh notes Williams’ criticism of tourism (14).

Most famously, Henry Christophe was parodied often for his fancy uniforms and the nobility he created of former slaves Boyeur’s name may be an allusion to the Haitian president Jean-Pierre Boyer (1818-1843).

Waugh’s attack on the U.S. within this ostensibly pro-US novel needs to be addressed but I have not had the wherewithal to include it in the argument as yet.

This is not to suggest that color division did not govern some colonial society in the West Indies, but rather to make clear that that there was a precedent for prominent light-skinned Afro-Caribbean politicians marrying white women. George William Gordon was executed for his ostensible role in the Morant Bay Rebellion but his marriage was the subject of controversy.
An alternative or complementary reading might see Belafonte with modernity and political radicalism as disturbing the continuity between the colonial times of the 1890s and the national awakening of the 1950s. The location may also trouble the romantic tourist narrative produced by the opening shots. Belafonte is walking along the shores of Bathsheba, Barbados—a location the poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite has commemorated as open sea to the West Coast of Africa and site of memorial to the slave trade while the lyrics claiming the island as his home may be read expressing a Caribbean patriotism or nationalism. One might also see the double introduction as two parallel narratives, the first opening the possibility of the black national or diaspora reading and the second offering the tourist version.

Here I oversimplify because Williams also nationalized carnival and giving the government control over the festival and making safe for tourism. Thus, nationalism was not a neutral force for calypso and carnival as Williams’ government sought to shape both to strengthen his government and to promote tourism (even as Williams’ did not generally promote the industry).

West Indian women factory workers were segregated in London (BA 9/22/56 p.5); returning Jamaicans reported that the U.K was Living Hell (BA 11/12/56 p.1) and West Indian students faced discrimination in housing (BA 9/27/56 p. 7).