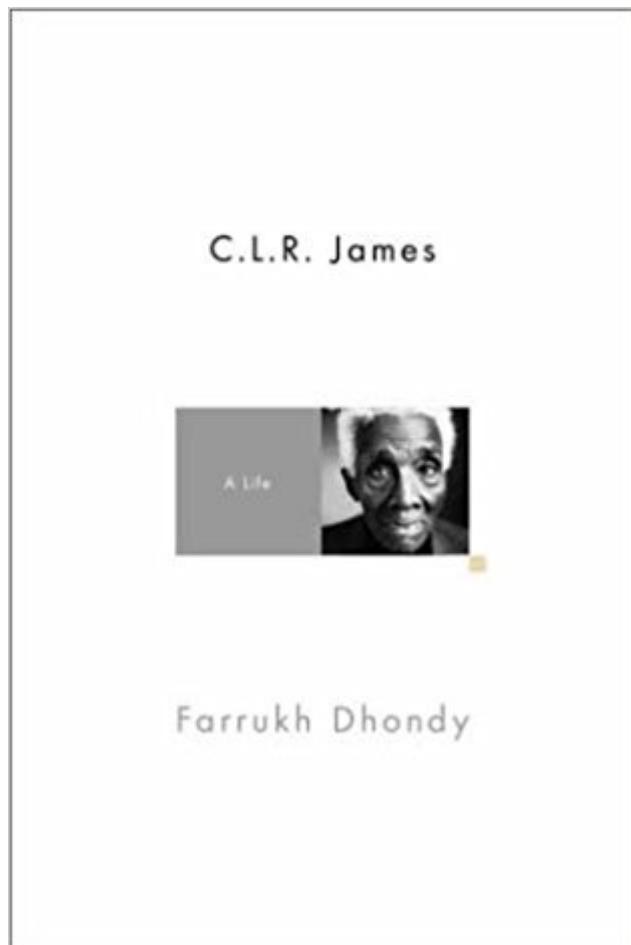


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C.L.R. James: A Life



Synopsis

A long-overdue critical appreciation of the West Indian historian and political activist who played a towering role in the cause of Pan-Africanism in the twentieth century. Born in Trinidad in 1901, Cyril Lionel Robert James was a precocious polymath all his life. By the time he was a teenager and already a certified teacher, he had embarked on a lifelong advocacy for the Trinidadian oppressed. He embraced Marxism while living in England during the 1930s, during which time he published, among other works, *The Case for West Indian Self Government* and his masterpiece, *The Black Jacobins*. James lived in the United States from 1939 until he was expelled during the McCarthy terror for his political activities. Thereafter he divided his time between London and Trinidad (where he served as Secretary of the West Indies Federal Labor Party) and, until his death in 1989, wrote works of both fiction and nonfiction that would profoundly influence the Black Power movement in the United States and independence movements in Africa and the West Indies. Farrukh Dhondy knew James personally and was given access to his papers. The result is a biography that is a revelation of the life and work of this legendary intellect and revolutionary.

Book Information

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Pantheon; 1st American ed edition (February 5, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375421009

ISBN-13: 978-0375421006

Product Dimensions: 8.4 x 5.8 x 1 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces

Average Customer Review: 1.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #5,447,638 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #102 in Books > History > Americas > Caribbean & West Indies > Trinidad and Tobago #3097 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Philosophers #4488 in Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > Australia & Oceania

Customer Reviews

Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901-1989), the influential political theoretician and literary critic, was born into a Trinidadian family of "the emergent black professional class." From an early age, he showed signs of intellectual genius (he learned to read Shakespeare's plays by looking at the illustrations); excelling at both his studies and cricket, he "was conscious of bringing himself up as a

young English intellectual." In his early 20s, James was associated with Trinidad's "literary flowering," and in 1932, after moving to London and becoming involved with the Labour Party, he published the influential *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*. Six years later, he published *The Black Jacobins*, about the Haitian slave revolts, and moved to the United States. There James worked with the Communist Party, wrote voraciously, formulated a new theory (now an academic discipline) that explicated the political import of popular culture but McCarthyism forced him to leave in 1953. Dhondy, a friend of James's and an editor at the BBC, writes lovingly and comprehensively of his subject's work and is always careful to humanize James's intellectual life with telling details and subtle analysis of such elements as his complicated relationship with V.S. Naipaul. If at times too reverent glossing over, for instance, James's abandoning his first wife in Trinidad when he went abroad Dhondy avoids hagiography and manages to wed James's political life (he founded Trinidad's Workers and Farmers Party and was an inspiration to the Black Power movement) to his writing career, which prefigured what we now call multiculturalism. An occasionally confusing narrative is further marred by a profusion of personal asides, but serious students of black history will welcome this first major critical study of an important cultural figure. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Born in Trinidad in 1901, the descendant of black slaves, James ultimately became one of the West's foremost intellectuals of the twentieth century. Because he showed intellectual promise at an early age, James was afforded the best educational opportunities, including Queens Royal College, where he later taught. Given his racial and colonial background, he brought a new perspective to the Western classics, which he embraced along with a bourgeoisie lifestyle, while maintaining a lifelong identification with oppressed peoples. His politics, including involvement in solidarity with the Russian Revolution, led to banishment from the U.S and a cosmopolitan life between London and Trinidad. He was an early critic of the Soviet Union as a totalitarian state masquerading as a Marxist state. James gained international stature as historian, Marxist analyst, political activist, and cultural critic, and is best remembered in the U.S. for his iconic status as an advocate for Pan-Africanism. Dhondy's relationship with James, a friend and fellow colonial, brings insight into the life and works of this extraordinary man. Vernon FordCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Sorry, but this book is nothing but self-indulgent drivel. C. L.R. James deserved a better telling of his life that was not interrupted by an insignificant author's musings.

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