

MARTINIQUE



AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

*Aimé Césaire (b. 1913) is one of the world's leading black intellectuals. He is a renowned poet, playwright, and essayist as well as one of his island's most active cultural and political figures. Born in Basse-Pointe, Martinique, Césaire grew up in a family of modest means. He distinguished himself early as a brilliant student, winning scholarships to attend the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France and the prestigious Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris. He went on to earn advanced degrees at L'Ecole Normale Supérieure, France's highest institution of learning in the liberal arts. While living abroad, Césaire became active in left-wing politics and was a founder of negritude, an influential literary and intellectual movement that attacked colonialism and celebrated the culture of Africa and Africa's diaspora. During this period, he wrote his famous prose poem *Return to My Native Land* (1947), which denounces racial injustice and champions liberation for the oppressed. In this work and in subsequent volumes of poetry, Césaire was influenced by surrealism. Employing experimental literary techniques, he explored the unconscious and attempted to uncover a black identity that had been repressed and denied by colonialism. He continued this project in his plays and essays, but in these efforts he made a more thorough analysis of the social and political aspects of life under colonial rule.*

Apart from his role as a literary intellectual, Césaire has made important contributions as a politician. After he returned to Martinique, he joined the French Communist Party and at different times was elected to the National Assembly in Paris and mayor of Fort-de-France. During the 1950s, Césaire became disillusioned with the party's paternalistic attitude toward its overseas sections and its failure to condemn Stalinism. After the Hungarian rebellion of 1956, he resigned and formed a new political organization. Césaire continues to be active in politics and remains committed to black culture issues. "Out of Alien Days" illustrates Césaire's use of imagery and expresses his political vision.

Out of Alien Days

my people

when

out of alien days

on reknotted shoulders will you sprout a head really your own
and your word

5

the notice dispatched to the traitors

to the masters

the restituted bread the washed earth
the given earth

when

when will you cease to be the dark toy

in the carnival of others

or in another's field

the obsolete scarecrow?

10

tomorrow

when is tomorrow my people

the mercenary rout

once the feast is over

15

instead the redness of the east in the balisier's heart

people of interrupted foul sleep

people of re climbed abysses

people of tamed nightmares

nocturnal people lovers of the fury of thunder

a higher sweeter broader tomorrow

20

and the torrential swell of lands

under the salubrious plow of the storm

25

*Translated from the French by Clayton Eshleman and
Annette Smith*

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In "Out of Alien Days," what does the author mean by "alien days," "traitors/to the masters," and "the obsolete scarecrow"?
2. What does Césaire call for in "Out of Alien Days" when he invokes "the fury of thunder" and the "plow of the storm"?