When I speak of the Caribbean in this article, I mean the English-speaking Caribbean or the West Indies, as it has been called historically. The distinction is necessary. For cricket is now being played and has been played for quite some time in a number of non-English speaking countries in the wider Caribbean. Cricket is even played these days, as I have discovered during my tour of duty, in the People’s Republic of China! And Afghanistan has a thriving Cricket Association. In fact, immediately after the defeat of the Taliban, cricket was played again with great zeal and enthusiasm. In other words, cricket is a powerful social force. This is particularly true of the Caribbean.

The importance of cricket to the West Indian peoples is beyond doubt and speculation, as there is a substantial literature, written by West Indians of the highest intellectual calibre, the most important of whom must be Mr. C. L. R. James, who have validated the thesis that there is an intimate nexus between the historical development of the English-speaking Caribbean and the social forces which are contained within the game of cricket. It must be said that there has never been any major survey to the best of my knowledge of the Caribbean people as to their love of the game; but full stands and an intelligent assessment of the game testify to its hold on the people of the English-speaking Caribbean. In any case, no one has come forward to invalidate the thesis of James and the others who have followed him in his analysis of cricket, such as Professor Hilary Beckles and the late Tim Hector.

So important is cricket to the Caribbean people that their psychological condition depending on whether the regional team has gained success or it has suffered defeat can be a barometer of their mood and condition. Moreover, defeat or the omission of favourite players can cause collective
agony and gloom. C. L. R. James in his brilliant study of cricket in the Caribbean “Beyond a Boundary” relates the following story. A Trinidad player by the name of Telemaque is left out of the national team. This is what happened when his wife found out. The words are James: “And his wife – she weighs 200 pounds – is sitting on a chair out on the pavement, crying because her husband isn’t going to Barbados with the Trinidad team, and all the neighbours are standing round consoling her and half of them are crying too.”¹ And when the West Indies suffered a major defeat at the hands of England in 1923 “West Indians at home and abroad read the scores in shame and dismay”.²

The West Indian public has also wept or they have poured their concerns into articles, letters and writings of West Indian cricket as it fell from its pinnacle of a cricketing nation to the point where the team is finding it most difficult to win a series overseas. It is not difficult to see why cricket is so important to the Caribbean. The life of the average West Indian is closely related to political, economic and social events of the society in which he or she lives. As a result, the West Indian has come to understand that cricket is an instrument for a particular purpose. It is cricket which has allowed the West Indian to measure him or herself in terms of ability, competence and skill against other nations of the world. Cricket has liberated many a West Indian from the shackles of poverty and social backwardness and has elevated many players to the status of heroes and icons.

The success of the West Indies cricket team, especially in the 1980s, gave the region a certain cachet and made it better known and respected than it has ever been. When the West Indies were dominant in the 1980s and early 90s, the region was highly respected and its views were sought

¹ C. L. R. James: Beyond a Boundary: Stanley Paul & Co. Ltd. 1963. p.73
² Hilary McD. Beckles: The Development of West Indies Cricket Vol.1 – The Age of Nationalism: The Press University of the West Indies, 1998
over a range of issues affecting the playing of the game, such as apartheid in sport. It is not
difficult to prove the importance of the game to members of the West Indian society. The West
Indies players themselves have long realised that playing for the regional team is more than
simply playing cricket. This has been affirmed by Vivian Richards\textsuperscript{3}, Michael Holding\textsuperscript{4},
Courtney Walsh\textsuperscript{5} and latterly by Brian Lara. In his biography “Beating the Field” he makes this
observation: “The West Indian presence added a new dimension to cricket and was mainly a
reflection of our culture and our need to be recognised.”\textsuperscript{6}

When the Heads of the Caribbean Community appointed the West Indian Commission in 1989 to
formulate programmes for the survival of the Community, one of the issues that came within the
purview of that Commission is the question of cricket. It is interesting to note what the
Commission had to say on the importance of the game to the peoples of the Caribbean
Community. I quote from that report:

\begin{quote}
\textit{When we lost a particularly vital World Cup match, a commentator tried to get a
dismal, undedicated performance by the West Indies cricket team into what he thought might be the right perspective by saying: “After all, it is just another game”. He made a fundamental mistake. To us it was not, it is not, ‘just a game’.}

No West Indian believer can afford to underestimate or neglect this game. It is an
element in our heritage, which binds us close and is seen as such both by the
outside world and ourselves. When first Frank Worrell in that famous tour of
Australia in 1960 and then later Clive Lloyd, followed by Viv Richards in the
1970s and 1980s, led the West Indies to a dominant position in world cricket, it
built our stature as a people both in our own eyes and in the eyes of others. When
we stood as one in the cricket boycott of South African apartheid, it really
matters. And when we failed as a team in crucial games in the World Cup
throughout the region we felt ourselves indefinably but definitely diminished as a
nation in those performances.

The performance of the West Indian team in their miracle win in the historic Test
match against South Africa revalidated the supremacy of cricket in the West

\textsuperscript{3} Viv Richards: Autobiography
\textsuperscript{4} Michael Holding: Whispering Death
\textsuperscript{5} Courtney Walsh: Heart of a Lion: Lancaster Publishing Limited 1999
\textsuperscript{6} Brian Lara: Beating the Field: p.10
Indian psyche as an enduring source of inspiration and as a demonstration of the fact that we do it better when we do it together.

It may be instructive that it was in a presentation made to the Commission on the sources of West Indian success in building a great cricket team in the late 1970s and 1980s that we heard what we thought was perhaps the most succinct recipe for success in all endeavours we pursue as a community of nations acting together.”

As this extensive quotation makes clear, cricket in the West Indies is a binding social force and a means of self-affirmation, which gives the Caribbean people a sense of purpose and a common identity. It must be a remarkable fact that cricket has been discussed by the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community on no less than 12 occasions. The Heads of Government of the Caribbean have recognised the importance of cricket to the region, and they were therefore deeply concerned about the decline of the game and the loss of Caribbean

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7 Hilary McD. Beckles. The Development of West Indies Cricket: Vol.1 The Age of Nationalism p.82
8 Cricket
4th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community: 4-8 July 1983, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
9th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community: 4-8 July 1988, Deep Bay, Antigua and Barbuda
10th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community: 3-7 July 1989, Grande Anse, Grenada
12th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community: 2-4 July 1991, Basseterre, St Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla
14th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community: 5-8 July 1993, Nassau, The Bahamas
7th Intersessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community: 29 February-1 March 1996, Georgetown, Guyana
17th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community: 3-6 July 1996, St. Michael, Barbados
20th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community: 4-7 July 1999, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
prestige. A number of steps have been recommended to reclaim the place that the Caribbean occupied as one of the premier cricket playing nations.

It is always an indication of the commitment to a particular aspect of their culture when a people emigrate and take that particular aspect of the culture with them. There is no greater testimony of the commitment of West Indians to the game of cricket than the fact that they have virtually engineered the revival of cricket in both the United States and Canada. There are now established leagues in both of these North American countries and there is every indication that the popularity of cricket is growing. Recently there was some suggestion that Disney World is or was interested in perfecting a form of the game which could be packaged and sold to a North American audience. It should be noted in this regard too that increasingly Canada is becoming a venue for a number of first class games and the Canadian cricket team has participated in regional competitions. We have come full circle. As will be demonstrated, in the 19th century cricket was the national game in Canada and was popular in the north-eastern part of the United States.

A look at the history of West Indian cricket from its humble and less successful beginnings to its development in the 1930s and 40s and then the indication of its maturing and greatness, and finally, its magnificent flowering in the 1980s. And all this coincided and was influenced by seminal, political and economic events of the region. James has maintained that it was the West Indies team, moulded into a unity by Frank Worrell that brought the West Indies into the comity of nations. As usual, his gift of language precludes any paraphrase. Here are his words descriptive of what happened in the early 1960s after the Australian tour: “Clearing their way
with bat and ball, West Indians at that moment had made a public entry into the comity of nations.”

But if we are going to look at the history of cricket in the West Indies, we must first decide what is Cricket. The origin of cricket is shrouded in uncertainty. For example, this is the claim made by the well-known English cricket writer, Henry Blofeld:

“In 1300 creaq, which any fool can see was early Anglo-Saxon cricket, appeared in the wardrobe accounts of King Edward I, but this was when the old boy was already sixty-one and could no longer turn an arm over. In those distant days the shepherds of the realm went about their duties with crooks, cricks or crooked sticks. After hooking a sheep by the back leg, for purposes we won’t dilate upon, a shepherd would turn to his mate and say with verve and jocularity, ‘Throw me a turnip, old thing.’ With his crooked stick grasped in both hands, he would try and dispatch the turnip to cowshot corner. The first cricket bats were crooked and this is, of course, a word which is but a short step from cricket.”

There is no doubt in Blofeld’s mind as to who invented cricket. But recently the French, in their usual fashion, has thrown a spanner into the works. One Mr. Didier Marchois, a former President of French Cricket Association has entered the fray. According to a BBC report of 17 November 2002, he has claimed that he has found documents which show that cricket was being played across the channel as early as the 13th century. “Off duty soldiers apparently whiled away the hours before meeting a sticky end on the fields of Agincourt at the hands of the English bowmen with a quick 20-overs bash.”

Other documents allegedly uncovered by Marchois revealed that Louis XI was asked to spare the life of a player who had killed an opponent during a match in Calais in 1478. Cricket, reputedly, was the favourite sport of the Sun King, Louis XIV. Marchois also claims that the first recorded modern match is found in the archives of the Paris

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10 Henry Blofeld. Cricket and All That: An Irreverent History: Hodder and Stoughton 2001 p.1
11 BBC Report: Funny Old Game. 17 November 2002
12 BBC: ibid
13 BBC: ibid
Cricket Club as far back as 1864. “Cricket was born in the north of France and taken across the channel by English soldiers who picked it up from us during truce periods in the Hundred Years War”\textsuperscript{15}, Marchois told the Sunday Express. It has not been recorded as yet what is the British reaction to this French excursus into a domain that for centuries they took for granted as their own.

Now that there is some idea as to when the game of cricket was invented, there ought to be a few points made about its essential features. Two teams consisting of eleven players play cricket. Each team has a captain and each player is assigned specific responsibilities. There are, for example, batsmen who specialise in going in first and who are known as opening batsmen. There are batsmen whose particular expertise is batting in the middle of the innings and are known as middle order batsmen. Then there are bowlers who are known as opening bowlers and are usually fast bowlers and other bowlers of less pace who would be termed medium paced bowlers and those who are on the slower side and are known as spin bowlers. Spin can be of two kinds: there are those who bowl offbreaks which is a ball that turns from the off to the leg, or leg breaks which can turn from the leg to the off. Leg break bowlers have a particular ball which is regarded as a major weapon and that is the googly. The googly is an off break bowled with a leg break action and which would normally completely confuse a batsman if it is well bowled. Here is one version of how the googly was allegedly invented. The googly was invented by B. J. T. Bosanquet and he claims that sometime around 1897 “he was playing a game with a tennis-ball known as Twisti-Twosti. The object was to bounce a ball on a table so that your opponent, sitting opposite, could not catch it. It occurred to Bosanquet that if he could pitch a ball which broke in

\textsuperscript{14} BBC: ibid
\textsuperscript{15} BBC: ibid
one direction and then, with more or less the same delivery, make the next ball go in the opposite direction, it would mystify his opponent.”

Cricket is played with a ball that weighs 5½ ounces, which is hard and round. The cricket ball is encircled by one large seam. The stumps, which a batsman has to defend, are 9 inches wide and 28 inches high. There are three stumps. But this was not always so. There was a time when there were only two stumps, but it happened on one occasion that the batsman was bowled several times through the space separating the two stumps and because neither of the stumps was hit, he was allowed to continue. Therefore in 1776, the same year as the war for American Independence began, a third stump was added. Generally all of the rules and regulations affecting the game of cricket were settled towards the end of the 19th century. The International Cricket Conference (ICC) now sets all the rules for cricket. All of the test playing teams are members of the ICC. Cricket, which is played over a period of six hours a day, has been described as “a game that challenges the mind even while it stimulates the eye”. C. L. R. James has made a strong case for cricket to be categorised as an art. “Cricket is first and foremost a dramatic spectacle. It belongs with the theatre, ballet, opera and dance”.

Whether England or France invented the game of cricket, the fact of the matter is that Charles Dickens has one of his famous characters, Mr. Dingle, claiming that he played cricket in the West Indies in 19th century. It’s a good point at which to begin to look at the historical origins of the game in this region.

17 Michael Manley: A History of West Indies Cricket p.17
The Background to West Indies Cricket

Cricket was a part of the culture and the other institutions exported throughout the British Empire. The British Army, another important institution in the development of the West Indian Islands, which was stationed in the West Indies, also played an important part in the introduction of cricket, particularly after the Battle of Waterloo and the ensuing peace. Cricket was a form of relief from the boredom of garrison life. Initially, only the White elite played the game but over time, they found it necessary to ask the sons of slaves to bowl until the sons of slave owners or the Army officers to provide batting practice. In due course, Caribbean populations learnt the art of cricket and eventually understood its importance in the context of the social development of the societies of which they were part.

The game was organised first mostly among schools to which the planters and the budding middle class sent their sons. Those who emerged from these schools formed clubs as post-meeting venues to ensure that they could continue to play the game of their childhood. After the emancipation of slavery in 1838, the rest of the population of the Caribbean began to engage in the same activities and practices of the elite and to create equally similar institutions of their own.

By the beginning of the 20th century competitions were organised between a network of clubs, some of which were exclusively for the privileged and some catering for the less privileged. In Guyana, it has been noted that the Georgetown Cricket Club (GCC) was a club of the white elites and members of the upper class. In time there was reaction to this, and other clubs such as the Demerara Cricket Club (DCC), Maltenoes and the British Guiana Cricket Club (BGCC) were

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18 C. L. R. James: Beyond a Boundary: Stanley Paul & Co. Ltd. 1963 p.192
formed to cater for the interests of the majority of the non-white population. This was distinctly a period during which the white domination of Caribbean societies was quite complete.

From 1925 to 1929 cricket associations were created in Barbados, British Guiana and Jamaica. In the case of the two latter countries, these associations consisted of representatives of the member clubs or district. Barbados was different. To this day their association is made up of persons who pay to join along with representatives of clubs. Anyone who is a paid up member has the right to attend a general meeting and vote in the election of the National Board of Control. Trinidad and Tobago is also very different. Until recently the Queen’s Park Cricket Club administered cricket in Trinidad. The QPCC is modelled on the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). Outsiders could be co-opted to various committees dealing with selection and umpiring and other related matters. The QPCC Management Committee is the top institution and all other organs were answerable to it. It was only recently that the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board of Control was created and this is administered by a Board consisting of representatives of clubs and leagues throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

The West Indies Cricket Board of Control, which is now known as the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) simply, which was created in 1926, reflected the social structure of the region as these were in turn reflected in the local associations. These bodies nominated representatives and alternates to the regional control organisation and in the early days, certainly as late as the 1950s, they were invariably of the White elite or members of the upper class. In time, despite efforts to perpetuate control of the Board by the dominant class of the region, the WICB was eventually to reflect the fact that the Caribbean society was multi-racial in nature and that the best talent was needed to make the Board proficient in the administration of cricket. After a series of members
of the elite who controlled the Board, it is now run mostly by members of the middle class, who themselves have played cricket, such as its current President, the Reverend Wes Hall.

**Political, Economic and Social Background: 1900-1980**

No history of West Indies cricket will be clearly understood if the political, economic and social context in which the game matured are not spelt out. There is therefore need to look at a summary of the history of the Caribbean from 1900 to 1984. This periodisation is long enough for their respective features and attributes to be seen in clear enough outline to determine the extent of their influence on the growth and development of the game in the Caribbean. Once such a determination has been made, it will be easy to draw certain conclusions as to the importance of the game to Caribbean societies and its hold on its peoples.

The English-speaking Caribbean, including Guyana on the mainland, play cricket. The political, economic and social formation of these entities resulted from certain distinct historical features. The growing of sugar in these islands, the importation of slaves, the advent of indentureship, the political awakening of the 1920s and 30s, the institution of Crown Colony Government and self Government, and finally Independence and the consolidation of that independence and the consolidation of Caribbean unity.

Sugar and other commodities grew easily in these islands and in Guyana where slaves had been imported from Africa to engage in a kind of labour that the indigenous population and the Europeans could not sustain. By the 19th century, sugar grown in these islands and shipped by White planters made such substantial profits that the islands themselves emerged as sources of
capital for the industrialisation of England. “And as the wealth was moving from Colony to the centre of the Empire, so was cricket moving from the centre of the Empire to the Colony.”

However, by the 1920s the English-speaking Caribbean had reached the point where it could be described as “an overwhelmingly black region of the earth”. While there were substantial numbers of Indians and Chinese in the respective territories, the societies were gradually becoming creolised. Nevertheless, in the 1920s the Caribbean was not an easy place for the majority of its citizens. They did back breaking labour, they were discriminated against, and there were enormous social pressures at work. The period of the 1920s and 1930s through the 1940s was one in which West Indian society began to come to terms with itself and to assert its right as an important element in the community of the nations of the world. It was a period of turmoil and change, as political parties came into being and the new generation of West Indians, educated mostly abroad, took over the political mantle. Quickly the region moved from Crown Colony to self-government. Soon there were demands for Independence. In the meantime, the peoples of the region had come to a greater understanding of the world and the environment in which they lived and it was clear that they were prepared to take on the system of discrimination, poor education, a poor health environment and generally everything that sought to undermine their dignity. It was a period during which a number of West Indian leaders came to the fore and challenged this very system. Men such as Albert Gomes and Uriah Butler of Trinidad and Tobago, T. A. Marryshow of Grenada, Vere Bird of Antigua and, of course, Eric Williams himself. The West Indian was on his way and he wished to let the world know. It is interesting that it was the avenue of cricket as well as education which would force the world to pay attention to what was going on in this part of the globe. And just as the West Indian society was

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19 Michael Manley: History of West Indian Cricket: André Deutsch 1988 p.19
finding its feet and seemed full of energy and determined to have a voice in the affairs of the world, similarly, in the field of cricket there was a similar struggle going on for dignity and recognition.

The struggle of the West Indian people in the 1940s and 50s led inexorably to the demands for freedom. West Indians were better educated now, better organised in trade unions and political parties, and they knew where they were going. The demand for independence could not be resisted. But in seeking that independence, the West Indians first sought to organise themselves in a political federation in 1958. This did not succeed. But the search for West Indian unity continued until it was finally expressed in the creation of the Caribbean Community in 1973. It should be noted here that while unity eluded the politicians, it was embraced by the cricketers. And nothing is more attractive than the West Indies playing in the 1960s than the fact that they played as a unified entity. It seemed that the fires for unity burnt more brightly on the cricket field than they did in the offices of the rulers of the region. The 1980s and the 90s were periods of economic decline for the Caribbean nations, struck down, as they were by the world economic crisis which started in the late 70s.

**The Evolution of West Indian Cricket 1900-1980**

The early references to cricket in the Caribbean appeared in the Barbados Mercury and the Bridgetown Gazette on the 10th May 1806 and on 10th January 1807. Ten years later, the Gazette notice of a “grand cricket match to be played between the Officers of the Royal West Indies Rangers and Officers of the Third West Indian Regiment for 55 guineas a side on the Grand Parade on Tuesday, September 19”. The match was scheduled to start after “gunfire” in the

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20 ibid p.33
21 Hilary McD. Beckles: West Indies Cricket op cit p.6
morning and continue until 8 o’clock and then resume at 4.30 p.m. All of this was organised by the St. Ann’s Cricket Club. It seems to have been the pioneering institution in Barbados. It needs to be noted that there is a clear conjuncture here between cricket and a major historical development, for the game referred to here is occurring on the very eve of the abolition of the apprenticeship system. From St. Ann’s, the culture of cricket spread rapidly to the neighbouring districts with which it had close contact. By 1849 therefore the parish of St. Michael, in which the local garrison was located had begun to organise to play cricket games. By 1857 Jamaicans who had been playing cricket themselves began to institutionalise the game with the establishment of St. Jago and the Vere and Clarendon Cricket Clubs. In 1863 the Kingston Cricket Club was established in Jamaica. It is important to note at this point that all of the playing and organising of the cricket was being done by the propertied and white classes of the Caribbean. The blacks and coloureds were excluded.

By the end of the 19th century, cricket was confined not only to the whites but was also being played by other groups. It was noticeable that in almost every British colony, there was a cricket club. Cricket was increasingly becoming the dominant game in the region and was soon to be woven into the very texture of the social life of the West Indies. And because it was now being played increasingly by people of all of the racial categories, it was to become an inveritable mirror of Caribbean society.

The Caribbean colonies were first to play among themselves before they bonded into what was to become a West Indian Cricket Team and to challenge the rest of the world. The first well-known contest between the colonies was that between teams from Barbados and the then Demerara. This was played in 1865 at the Garrison Ground in Barbados. Barbados won by 138 runs. The well-known fears and keen competition between what was later to become Guyana
and Barbados had begun! This paved the way for inter-island rivalry. In 1879 a team of masters and students from Harrison College in Barbados toured St. Kitts and Antigua where they won all games against the Leeward Islanders, who then as now, were thought to be less proficient at the game than those of the larger islands.22

By 1890 Trinidad finally became part of the cricket playing fraternity. Trinidad had refused to accept previous invitations from Demerara and Barbados. However, Trinidad eventually agreed to play the triangular tournament in which Barbados and Guyana participated. Jamaica became part of this network in 1891 when the Garrison Club in Barbados visited Kingston.23 In 1893 an Antigua team visited Barbados and Trinidad played host to a visiting colonial team for the first time. Queen’s Park Oval now comes to notice for the first time.24 Inter-colonial cricket was now a reality.

It is interesting to note that the first West Indies team to play overseas went not to England but to a tour of Canada and the United States. Cricket had been played in both countries for a much longer period than it had been in the West Indies. Canada and the United States had competed against each other as early as 1844, "24 years before the much acclaimed Australian Aboriginal tour in 1868".25 English teams had toured Canada and the United States in the summer of 1858. Cricket was then deemed Canada’s national sport.26 English teams had also toured the United States in 1868 and 1872.27

The West Indies tour of North America in1886 was the “brainchild” of George Wyatt of the Georgetown Cricket Club in Guyana. The team consisted of players from the main territories

22 Beckles: West Indies Cricket p.17
23 Beckles: West Indies Cricket ibid.
24 Beckles: West Indian Cricket. ibid.
25 Beckles: West Indian Cricket. op cit p.18
26 Beckles: West Indian Cricket. ibid
though at the end of it all, Trinidad could not send its players. There were seven Jamaicans, two Barbadians and four players from Demerara. The West Indies did not do well in North America and was beaten by most American cricket clubs. What is worthy of note here is that the Americans came to the West Indies on a return visit. It was a weak team and was trounced by Trinidad, Demerara, Jamaica and Barbados, playing individually. The American Civil War had “ravaged” its cricket culture.

The Holy Grail was always England, the founder of the game. Indeed, the history of the West Indies cricket between 1900 to the historic occasion in 1950 when the West Indies for the first time defeated England at Lords, a feat comparable to any other in the history of the region, is a record of a desire and determination to beat the “mother country”. And the West Indies was to dominate England completely from the mid-70s onwards until this was reversed in 2000, when England beat the West Indies for the first time in 31 years. There are records which would enable us to traverse this period with some rapidity.

Several English teams were to visit the West Indies between 1895/1896 when R. Slade Lucas brought an English team to the West Indies for the first time. This was followed by Lord Hawke in 1897/97 and Mr. Arthur Priestley who took separate teams to the West Indies. The English were to remark that the play of the West Indians had vastly improved. Mr. Priestley’s eleven on one occasion was beaten by three wickets by a combined West Indian side. Let us pause here to note that these tours were privately sponsored and it was not until 1910-1911 that the MCC sent an official side to the West Indies.

27 Beckles: West Indian Cricket. ibid
28 Beckles: West Indian Cricket. op cit 19
29 Beckles: West Indian Cricket. op cit 23
In 1902 B. J. T. Bosanquet, the originator of what is called the “googly” also took an amateur team to the West Indies. Then in 1904-1905 Lord Brackley took a side to the West Indies which included the first English professionals to touch the Caribbean shores. Another Ollivierre, brother of C. Ollivierre did well on this tour and was regarded as the best West Indian all rounder. A notable achievement was that of Cumberbatch of Trinidad. He took 8 for 27 and 5 for 30 against the Englishmen, bowling right arm medium pace

The first West Indies team to go to England, which was captained by R. S. A. Warner, the brother of Sir Pelham Warner, one of the great West Indian cricketing pioneers, was in 1900. It won 5 of its 17 matches. The team was selected from all of the major playing territories; also from St. Vincent. It was on this tour that C. A. Ollivierre was to give glimpses of the long line of great West Indian batsmen. He was so outstanding in England that he was offered to remain and to play for Derbyshire. L. S. Constantine, the father of Sir Learie Constantine, was also in this team. In 1903 the West Indies again went to England, this time under Major H. B. G. Austin. A point to note here too is the West Indies were to lose a star batsman, S. G. Smith, who qualified for North Hants and helped them to gain second place in the county championships of 1912. This was the first occasion that the great W. G. Grace was to clash with the West Indians. The West Indies was to score a major achievement on this occasion too by defeating Yorkshire.

Several other English teams were to visit the Caribbean and it was noticeable that West Indian cricket was undergoing important change. In 1928 when Carl Nunes led the West Indies to England, they emerged a group of West Indian players including Challenor, Constantine and Clifford Roach who were to issue good enough warning that West Indies cricket was on its way. Those interested in the irony of history would note here that Ireland was to defeat the West

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Indies on this tour, as much as they did in 1968! The West Indies lost the series in encountering such English greats such as Lara Wood, Tate and Jack Hobbs but one writer made the following observation: “Although the English cricketing public had regarded it as a disappointing tour, for the West Indies it had been the first step on their path to fame.”

The West Indies in the 1930s hosted the English side and then toured England. On the former occasion, the West Indies showed that they were quite a force and George Headley emerged as one of the great batsmen of the day. During the test match in Georgetown, British Guiana, he became the first West Indian to score a century in each innings. In 1930 the West Indies was to make their first visit to Australia and encountered Don Bradman for the first time. But they were badly defeated even though Headley had again demonstrated his prowess, scoring two centuries on the tour. In the tour of 1933 disappointments were also to follow but again George Headley stood out. In first class matches, he made over 2000 runs with an average of 66. Then came 1939 when the West Indies crossed swords with England again. At Lord’s George Headley scored a century in each innings as he continued his illustrious career. The fact of the matter is that from the early 1900s when they struggled against England and Australia until they won test status, the West Indies were learning the game, and learning the game in a very careful way. The results would soon be seen.

When cricket resumed in the Caribbean after the war in 1947/1948, a group of brilliant players, which included Frank Worrell, Everton Weekes, and Clyde Walcott had also come along. Headley, during this tour, was to become the first black player to captain the West Indies team. Changes were being made. He was to be followed by Frank Worrell, Gary Sobers, Rohan Kanhai and Clive Lloyd. At the end of this series, Wisden, the bible of international cricket, was

31 Ross: ibid
to give this judgement: “On current form, the West Indies must be the strongest cricketing body apart from Australia, and they should be very popular and attractive when they come to England in 1950.” The editor of Wisden must have been gazing into a crystal ball for the West Indies was to outplay England in England comprehensively, as a result of the wizardry of Ramadhin and Valentine. This defeat of England was also a turning point. After this, the West Indies was to play England competitively for an extended period and to better them. Apart from losing to England in 1957 and 1961, the West Indies was to dominate England throughout the 60s and for part of the 70s and to completely master them in the 80s.

Under Clive Lloyd, West Indies cricket really took off. And the reason for this was the increasing professionalism of the players. This has been attributed to the fact that West Indian players were to play in World Series cricket and learnt the importance of such attributes as fitness, stamina, and concentration on the game. This and the rise of a galaxy of talented batsmen such as Richards, Greenidge, Haynes, Kallicharran, Lloyd, and a battery of great fast bowlers took the West Indies to the very pinnacle of world cricket. The West Indies completed dominated cricket in the 1980s, going unbeaten for some 19 matches and comprehensively beating most of the best test playing teams.

At least three West Indian cricketers can be said to embody the spirit and purpose of West Indies cricket. In my judgement, these are George Headley, Sir Frank Worrell and Sir Garfield Sobers.

**George Alphonso Headley – 30 May 1909-30 November 1983**

George Alphonso Headley stands alone in the annals of West Indies cricket. He is the only West Indian to average over 60 in test cricket and throughout his test career, he virtually carried the

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32 Ross: op cit p. 17
33 Ross: op cit p.38
West Indies team on his shoulders. A quiet man with a shrewd cricketing brain, he came to embody the very ideals and hopes and aspirations of the West Indies. It is ironical that Headley might not have played for the West Indies team at all had he caught the boat that was to take him to Panama (he himself was born in Panama) to join his parents. He stayed and this was to the glory of the region.

Throughout the 1930s, Headley was to dominate the bowling of the English and Australian teams. He never failed in a series. At the third test of the 1929-30 series in the Caribbean, Headley was to score a century in each innings. Headley was to go on to Australia and score two centuries in that series. Then in 1933 in England, he was to demonstrate his batting genius. During the 1939 tour of England, Headley scored a century in each innings at Lords. That he was one of the greatest batmen of that age was never a question. In his batting Headley was simply not another player. He embodied the determination and aspirations of the region.

“Hence, when George Headley ignited the Caribbean imagination in those marvellous three months at the beginning of 1930, he was much more than a great batsman serving notice on his peers in the game. The aspiring middle class found in him the reassurance which they needed. He demonstrated black capacity. To the extent that they were at least half black themselves, this was useful evidence to incorporate into their own scheme of self-awareness.”

Yet because of his colour, and in spite of his great batting ability and cricketing brain, he was never allowed to captain the West Indies team until 1948. Unfortunately, he fell ill and was never to actually lead the West Indies team. Headley was never made captain but he had set the stage for Frank Worrell who was to be the first black player to captain the West Indies team.

Frank Mortimer (Maglinne) Worrell: 1 August 1924-13 March 1967
Frank Worrell grew up in Barbados in a house overlooking a cricket ground. He grew up on Pavilion Road, a mile outside Bridgetown, the capital, and was brought up by his grandmother, his parents having emigrated to the United States.

He started playing the game early and at secondary school his abilities began to take shape. At Combermere High School which he attended, Worrell’s talents were spotted by Derek Sealey, himself a former West Indian player who had represented the regional team on eleven occasions. A month after Worrell joined the school, he was given a place in the cricket team. He then went on to play for Barbados and to make his name as a result of record partnerships with Clyde Walcott. Worrell made his test debut in 1948 against England and along with the other famous “Ws”, Everton Weekes and Clyde Walcott, he was to lead the charge against England in 1950, giving the West Indies their first victory over England in England. Worrell was to have become the first black Captain of the West Indies team in 1961 and he was remarkably successful. For it is generally agreed that had Worrell not succeeded as captain in 1961, it would have been a major setback for the region. In the words of Richie Benaud, a former Test Captain of Australia: “Had Frank failed on that tour it would have set back West Indies cricket, and especially the black cricketer, by twenty years.”

Worrell then led the West Indies to a 5-nil defeat – the first white or black wash – over India in 1962. Next, he led his team to victory over England in 1963. Frank Worrell was the quintessential West Indian cricketer. It can be said that all of the yearnings and hopes of West Indies cricket met and were fulfilled in his character. As the history of the West Indies cricket showed, reflecting the social relations of that time, it was difficult for a black West Indian to captain the West Indies team. Only Headley briefly in 1948 and Constantine who had substituted as Captain for his white superior, had the opportunity of

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34 Manley op cit p.37
captaining the West Indies team. Worrell lost the series against Australia in 1960-61 but he added prestige to the game, in the way he played it and the way in which he led his men with maturity, understanding and purpose. So well had Worrell played the game that he had captured the heart and minds of the Australians. It is recorded that more than 90 thousand people took to the streets of Melbourne to see the West Indies off. They had recognised that Frank Worrell had helped to revitalise test cricket.

Worrell was important too because he realised that cricket was an important game to the West Indian. He therefore felt that preparation ought to be made for carrying out the task of representing the West Indies. He encouraged his senior players to take courses to prepare themselves for this role. He himself set the example. Worrell enrolled at Manchester University and in due course obtained a degree. Later, he was to become the Warden at the Mona Campus at the University of the West Indies.

Worrell understood that the West Indies must play as a unified team and that his success would be a success for the region as a whole. Worrell also brought dignity and grace to the game of cricket. There are some that question whether he was ever engaged in an ungraceful act in his life. And it was in his batting that that grace was to be seen. The Wisden cricket magazine said in 1950 that an innings by Frank Worrell had no beginning, it started at high noon. For beauty of stroke, timing, placement and sheer artistry, Worrell had no equal. Ivo Tennant has captured the effect that Worrell has had on the world with his batting by describing an incident in India:

"Some years after Worrell died, Gerry Alexander, who became a vet in Guyana, was in a hotel lift in India with some West Indian cricketers. An English woman got in and addressed him."

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‘You’re from West Indies, aren’t you? When I think of your country I think of Frank Worrell. Watching him play was like going to the ballet.’”36

Gary St Auburn Sobers: 28 July 1936 –

Gary Sobers was the greatest all rounder the world has known. In only 93 test matches, he scored over 8,000 test runs averaging over 50. He also took 235 test wickets and over 100 catches. Sobers was justly recognised by Wisden as one of the five cricketers of the century.

Playing first for the West Indies at the tender age of 17 and as a bowler, Sobers was to go on to perfect his skills and become a great batsman and a player capable of bowling in three styles, that is, fast bowling, orthodox left arm spin and back of the arm wrist spin. The world has never seen anything like this since.

Sobers’ exploits as a batsman are well documented. After he scored his first test hundred of 365 not out against Pakistan in 1958, the highest individual test score until it was broken by Brian Lara in 1994, he went on to dominate the bowling of all test playing nations.

Sobers went on to captain the West Indies team, succeeding his idol Frank Worrell, and he too was to carry the West Indian colours with pride and dignity. Sobers also connected with the people of the region and in him one saw the West Indian determination for perfection and for attaining what is highest in any endeavour of life.

Conclusions

We have reached the point where we can draw some conclusions. We have seen how the political, economic and social conditions in the region affected and influenced the way the West Indians played cricket. We have seen too that just as in the political and other areas the West

36 Tennant: op cit p.106
Indian went through a period of learning, recognised the need to fight for dignity, and resist the conditions which sought to hamper their quest for freedom. They recognised too that organisation was important in the pursuit of objectives and ideals. All of this too found reflection in West Indies cricket. And because the two processes influenced each other, West Indies cricket came to mirror the conditions of the region. The people were involved to the hilt. It is therefore no surprise that when a Test Match is played in the Caribbean that the old and the young, the school boy and the professor, the priest and the teacher, women and all members of different strata of the society go to the cricket ground to show their commitment, understanding and appreciation of the game. There is nothing like a West Indian crowd at a test match. They understand every aspect and intricacy of the game; it is part of their life. It means everything to them.

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1 Viv Richards: Autobiography
1 Michael Holding: Whispering Death
1 Brian Lara: Beating the Field: p.10