

[SQUEAKING]

[RUSTLING]

[CLICKING]

**MICHEL** We're so glad that we can welcome Jean Casimir, Professor--Pwòf! Ti Jan Bosal. So his name is actually-- I love  
**DEGRAFF:** the name-- Ti Jan Bosal. And I think you will get to hear more, perhaps, about--

**JEAN CASIMIR:** The only one who called me like that.

**MICHEL** Well, that's your name on Twitter. That's his handle on Twitter, is @TijanBosal, which has-- which is quite loaded  
**DEGRAFF:** in symbolism.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Yes.

**MICHEL** And that's why I love it. So I can say that the entire semester, all of our discussions have prepared us for his visit  
**DEGRAFF:** in many ways because the topic of this class, Jean, Ti Jan Bosal, it's really about the use or the misuse of language in the way we create our identity or the way we misidentify ourselves, vis-à-vis our compatriots, vis-à-vis the world.

And as we saw, actually, through each of them you get to hear how, growing up, we are socialized into certain beliefs about language that can either give us power or can remove power from us. And then we've discussed various ways in which we can regain that power, or we can keep that power alive.

And that's what your work is all about in the particular case of Haiti. So we've read parts of your book and through chapter 8 on the beauty and the power of the sovereign people of Haiti, where you show so clearly the key importance of language. As you call it, it's a living archive.

Because when you write about people who have been oppressed, people who have been excluded, where do you get your archives? Because they didn't write the history. History is written by the Europeans, by the winners.

And one way to recover that history is through language, and in the case of Haiti, through Kreyòl, right? And that's one of the main aspects of Jean's work that I feel is extremely important for me.

And for me personally, why Jean is so important, in terms of my own liberation, it's because this is what I grew up with. So I grew up with this textbook. So this is my history textbook. This is where I learned the history of my country.

And it's actually-- it's quite amazing to think of it. I think of the concept that you brought up yesterday, on Monday, of "deformation," the point that colonized people, either in the Caribbean, or Palestine, are deformed through historical factors-- yet Haiti is a proud, independent country.

In the Caribbean, people know about Haiti. In fact, there are songs written about Haiti, about Haiti's struggles for independence.

Yet Haitians like myself, we learn history from a book that received the imprimatur, the approval of what? If you read here, this is the imprimatur of the Catholic Church. So the Catholic Church is the institution that approves the version of history that teachers teach us about our own history.

And then the part that's very striking is the preface, which I put here because it's so striking. And I'm just going to read the bottom part of it.

So here it says: "The mean people will teach you how to detest evil and the good people will teach you to honor virtue. And then our heroes will teach you patriotic pride and the price of liberty."

And we have to admire the efforts of Las Casas, Boutin, Alexis-Jean-Marie Guilloux, the value of souls for eternity. Now does anyone know about Las Casas? So tell me, Merelin, what do you know about Las Casas?

**AUDIENCE:** I know he mostly resided in the Dominican side of the island. He was basically a priest, kind of, but he was also a history person, a historian. He was an author. He kept track of every single thing. He was very much pro-Indigenous. And he tried to defend them, but just basically recording history.

**MICHEL  
DEGRAFF:** Yes, actually that's a good point. So Las Casas, he was very much pro-Indigenous. And he was so pro-Indigenous that what he did when he knew that the Indigenous people were dying off, they were dying of yellow fever, of various abuses, of genocide.

He thought that the best way to save the so-called Indians is to bring in the Africans, because he had this theory that Black people are-- in fact, he invented the notion-- well, they invented the notion of Blackness, that Blacks are destined for slavery. Therefore let's bring the Africans in to save the Indigenous people. He said that was the deal he made with the powers of Europe. So he was a major promoter of the slave trade.

And this is who, we're being asked, in the name of virtue to honor and to adore Las Casas. And the others, Boutin, Guilloux, they are missionaries, basically. You see? Do you see any name of a Haitian freedom fighter? There is no Dessalines here. There is no Toussaint here. There is no Boukman here.

You see? And this is what we have to adore. And then it says at the end, "Love this little book and be docile to its lessons."

[LAUGHING]

Yeah, be docile to the lessons of the book. You see, so that's our history book.

Now this is a literature book, a literature book written by a French brother called-- Catholic brother called Raphaël Berrou, and a Haitian linguist called Pradel Pompilus, a well-known Haitian linguist.

And one of the favorite authors in this book is Carl Brouard, who wrote-- this is something that the priest would have us recite by heart-- that the question of Kreyòl is ridiculous. What development can Haiti expect from its Kreyòl? Kreyòl will be nothing but a patois. There is nothing to do about this.

And then it goes on to say, parents, never speak Kreyòl to your children. French is a habit that you are to develop. Therefore, be pitiless in correcting your children when they use Creolisms. You see?

So do you imagine a country where most parents speak only Kreyòl? That book asks that parents never speak Kreyòl to your children. Do you imagine? So it means really that if they were to follow this, they would just-- they would never speak to the children. They have to-- this is--

So this is just as background to tell you why. And actually, this is more, actually, of the same. So this is my report card from Saint Louis de Gonzague. Actually you went-- were you at Saint Louis de Gonzague?

**JEAN CASIMIR:** I studied at Saint Louis de Gonzague.

**MICHEL** So we share that same school. So Jean Casimir went to Saint Louis de Gonzague. Maybe 50 years apart? Maybe, I  
**DEGRAFF:** don't--

**JEAN CASIMIR:** No, no, yes, but I spent three years in Saint Louis de Gonzague.

**MICHEL** OK, OK. So do you remember these report cards? They had colors.  
**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Oh, yeah, yeah--

**MICHEL** They were color coded. They were-- let me try to remember. Pink for very well-- Oh, green? I don't remember the  
**DEGRAFF:** color. But it was color coded. So this was-- I was a good student, right? "Très bien," very well.

But this is the cost of this "très bien." You have to adhere to these directives. So basically, students have to be present. You cannot bring weapons to class. Knives are forbidden. You cannot loiter. And then rule number four, the use of Kreyòl is prohibited.

You see that? So to be "tres bien," you better not speak Kreyòl. So now to move on to today-- so that's why I've been so, so happy to bring in Casimir-- and here, I want to give thanks to the history unit at MIT. I want to give thanks to MIT Global Languages. And also Global France is also sponsoring Jean's visit, and MIT Haiti also is sponsoring Jean's visit.

And so Jean gave this talk on Monday [5/2/22]. Vivian [Sansour] was there and it was an amazing-- really an amazing talk, which you might get to hear more about today [5/4/22].

But really what Jean is teaching us to do is how to reread Haitian history, not from the perspective of the Las Casas, the Boutin, the Guilloux, the brothers of the colonial instruction. He's asking us to reread Haitian history from the perspective of the formerly colonized, from that of the captives.

And he's doing-- and Jean is-- I like to say that Jean is one of the rare, very rare Haitian intellectuals who've been producing texts in Kreyòl for-- Jean, actually when was the first text you produced in Kreyòl on history and sociology? When was that?

**JEAN CASIMIR:** I'm going to tell you, in the '70s, in the journal "Sèl with the fathers and the-- I don't remember the-- I have it at home, actually. I found it now.

**MICHEL** Yeah, that's avant garde. That's really forward thinking that in the '70s, that was before the famous Reform  
**DEGRAFF:** Bernard.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Oh, yes indeed.

**MICHEL** That was before that. We had this reform in '82 that basically said, look, the schools are failing Haitian children.

**DEGRAFF:** We have to use Kreyòl as a tool of instruction. And before that, Jean was producing text in Kreyòl on history. And we're very pleased that Jean has so happily agreed to translate some of his work in Kreyòl that we're putting on Platform MIT Haiti.

And so actually we spent time today discussing the next article that will go with that very topic, "decolonial versus colonial." So that's why I feel really honored. And we should all be pleased to have Jean with us today. So this is actually--

And I love this, it says technology in the lakou-- the lakou is this communal unit where we Haitians live. That's where we get our sovereignty-- where we trigger protest, the kind of protest that can actually lock down a country. "Peyi lok" is the term that's used in Haiti when there's a protest, you basically shut down the country out of protest.

And that twokèt, what Jean does, which is actually very relevant to our work here-- and I can think of what Gabby is doing for her project-- is how to use technology to be able to move social change forward. And in this twokèt, he talks about how Haitians, even very poor Haitians-- or very impoverished Haitians, I should say-- managed to use the phones, WhatsApp, to be able to create protest.

So in a way, that's a bit what we're doing: using technology like in the platform to push forward the Kreyòl movement. And I wanted to-- because Jean used to work for United Nations-- how many years did you spend, Jean, working for the UN?

**JEAN CASIMIR:** I spent 15 years working there. But I was the representative of Haiti at UNESCO.

**MICHEL** You were?

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Yes, but I never went. I resigned before going.

**MICHEL** OK, OK. This is great. This is great, Jean, because I'm going to show you what your successor is doing now.

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Yes.

**MICHEL** Dominique Dupuy. I call her "Anbasadèz pa m" [i.e., "my favorite ambassador"], you know, because she's doing amazing work. But UNESCO, what I want to show you is to show you the power of hegemony, and how hegemony even affects science, because UNESCO is the unit for education, science, and culture at the UN.

And UNESCO's basic mission is to promote linguistic diversity and equity and human rights. Yet in UNESCO's recent survey for the Atlas of World Languages, look at this table here.

They ask each country to check the box here based on their language. And so here are the choices: Either you speak a linguistic isolate, or you speak a language, "langue," or you speak a mixed language, or you speak a Creole language, or you speak a Pidgin language.

So there is a concept of language without any adjective, that's the unmarked category. And then if you speak Creole, then you're basically in a separate category. And when you look at the guide for the atlas, it tells you that a Creole language is not on par with a language. Why? Because it comes from a Pidgin. That's the argument, that because Creoles come from Pidgins, therefore they don't belong to that category.

You see and something which I see there's loads of evidence, data analysis, against that. So I want to close by showing Jean's successor, many years after Jean-- This happened in early April.

So basically what she did was amazing. She challenged UNESCO's categorization of Creole languages. And let's just listen to this. And then it's going to be your turn to tell us more about your work in this class. Let's play this.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

- [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

[END PLAYBACK]

**MICHEL DEGRAFF:** So as we speak, as we speak, I'm looking forward to hearing from Ambassador Dupuy about how UNESCO at last is responding. Because at first they said, "Well, our experts tell us this is what Creoles are. We have to trust our experts." But she's been pushing back.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Which experts? Which experts? Tell us which experts?

**MICHEL DEGRAFF:** Exactly. So but now actually, in the past couple of days, there's been some back and forth. And I'm hoping maybe before the meeting ends-- in fact, I just sent her a picture of this now-- to remind her that we are here waiting for some result of what she's doing.

So I think that should give enough context as to why this person that we have here is so, so important, both for me personally, but also for us, fighting for emancipation really. So let's go around the room and introduce ourselves to Professor Jean Casimir.

**AUDIENCE:** Hi, I'm Jazhara--

**MICHEL DEGRAFF:** Actually, I think we're told that with the-- with the mask, it might be a bit-- so as you speak, if you could just remove it, and put it back, but just when you speak. And you can put it back afterwards. Yes.

**AUDIENCE:** Hi, I'm Jazhara Solan. I'm from Jamaica, and that's the reason why I was so interested in taking this class. My project is on the role economics can play in forming the opinions on different languages.

So it usually tends to be-- the rich tend to determine what language is acceptable in society. And so I'm researching that.

**MICHEL DEGRAFF:** All right. Any questions for Jazhara?

**JEAN CASIMIR:** No, I mean the only question I can see is that-- well, I don't know if this is a compliment for you. But as far as I'm concerned, Jamaica and Haiti are so similar, they look like twins, you know? And I say the only difference is that Jamaica was under the British, who were coming up with their empire. And we were with the French going down, so we've got independence. The only difference is they, not us, no?

And what is important for Jamaica and for myself also is that we have a language. Now I had a Jamaican professor, friend of mine, good friend of mine, historian. He said Jean, when I am in Jamaica, people speaking Jamaican, I don't understand them. He was genuinely Anglophone. He can't speak Jamaican Creole. And I will give-- I could give you endless example now of this Creole giving the note of a different country.

And Jamaica is certainly the country where you have the free village system established and acknowledged by the empire. That's quite important, that's what I call the counter plantation system.

**AUDIENCE:** So my name is Rachel Robinson. I'm also Jamaican. Oh, the mask-- And so I was interested in taking this class because I've never really had the opportunity to take a class like this about Caribbean identities and Creole languages. And I didn't really know too much about it. And I thought this would be such a great space to learn more about it.

Throughout like my life I guess I would say I've had some struggles with my Jamaican identity, and knowing my history, my culture, and like really claiming it as my own, given that I wasn't born there. And I just-- I just don't know as much.

So this class has helped me a lot in growth in really claiming it, and getting more excited to learn more, to reach out to my parents, my grandparents, my family members, and things like that. So one of the projects I did in this class was about our identities. And I kind of talked about my struggle. And this was earlier on, so I hadn't made as much growth I think as I have now.

But I just talked about different things that I struggled with, and ways that I want to try to fix that and grow. And yeah, that was probably like my favorite thing that I've done, because it just was so almost healing to talk about myself. And I put a lot of pictures of my family. And that was just really nice to see. Yeah.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** I don't have much to add except that, for instance, the production of music in Jamaica and in the Caribbean-- I don't have to add, I just mention that. And you can imagine the rest, to tell you the beauty of the sovereign people, because it's not music from the high classes that make Jamaica-- that put Jamaica on the map.

**MICHEL  
DEGRAFF:**

**AUDIENCE:** Hello, I'm Iana Ferguson. I'm from St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I took this class because I grew up in St. Vincent, so I've always had knowledge of Caribbean history from a Caribbean person's perspective. So I was interested to see how it would look from an American's perspective in this class. And so that's why I took the class.

My main project in the class is examining the linguistic chains in the Caribbean. And the running theme was the song "Redemption Song" by Bob Marley. So I used the lines, "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds." And that was my main idea for my project. So I'm investigating why people in the Caribbean speak the way that they do.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** St. Vincent is a very, very special country. Actually, St. Vincent is the link between the Amerindians and the African-born people, with the Garifunas in Belize. You can imagine St. Vincent. And the Garifunas in Belize, which are Belizeans, their lost paradise is St. Vincent, it's not Africa.

And if they call us Creoles, the Black coming from the Caribbean, because they are distinct. They are from St. Vincent and they are Garifunas and they are the living presence of the Caribbean-- of the Caribs, sorry.

And St. Vincent has some other interesting aspects also with regard to Creole. When the British took over Trinidad, I mean when the Spaniards gave Trinidad to the British, the British could not put order in Trinidad because the police and the population speak Creole. And the British always thought that the police and the population were "de connivence"-- what is that in English?

**MICHEL** Conspiring--

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** --conspiring against the British. So they did, they had a set of Bajans and Vincentians come at policemen because they were monolingual. So that helped the British. No, but-- that is another-- [LAUGHING]

**MICHEL** Language can be used as a tool for--

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Oh, yes. You see what I mean? And also now they feel at ease because the Bajans and the Vincentian do not speak Creole. That gives them another opportunity.

But St. Vincent is very important for this. It also, ah, the co-presence of Black Caribs and Red Caribs. And this is in itself also very, very, very important.

They have a way of calling the Caribbean plantation America. So what do we have to do with plantation? Plantation is a European institution. I mean, so let's see the diversity within our countries. You see, and that's a very, very, very diverse country.

**AUDIENCE:** So my name is Merelin Maldonado. I was born in the Dominican Republic. I've lived in New York for about 12 years now. And I think my main reason behind taking this class is that I have grown up in a very Dominican neighborhood, a very Dominican household.

So I had very, I wouldn't say negative, but more tolerant ideas about Haiti. And I wasn't really that knowledgeable about Haiti. But I wanted to learn more, you know, sort of like de-indoctrinate myself from what I had known before.

And because of that, in this class, I've gotten the chance to learn more about Dominican Spanish through my own research. But also we were able to read *The Farming of Bones* by Edwidge Danticat. And I really like getting to interview the people around me and seeing, what they actually know about the history between DR and Haiti, because I barely knew anything.

And I just wanted to look more into that, and just seeing how much we don't know and how much more work we have to do is just so surprising to me. And yeah, I think that's why I took this class.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Well, as I was telling you before we started, the DR and us-- well, I still would say we are two wings of the same bird, even though this sentence was used for Cuba and Puerto Rico.

But that's the fact, we live together. We are the-- I think the only case of two countries in the same island. If they are two cases in the world, we are one of them, no?

But what is interesting is how we have increased the diversity of the Caribbean. When I spent 10 years in Trinidad working with the UN, and my friends in the academic community think of in terms of plantation America.

And they would say free village societies and Bush Negros and counter plantation, this is marginal. The core of development is-- no, I mean if you take that line, you have equality at the end of time. You will never reach-- because plantation is what plantation is, a capitalist institution, economic institution.

While, to face that institution, we had created all the things like the bush societies, like the free village system. And the place where you can see that is the DR, because, when you see the DR, this is what Columbus started, washing away all the old Tainos and all, ah, vestiges of pre-Columbian, what you imagine as pre-Columbian civilization.

And then starts a set of coexistence of remnants of the Spanish group, the poor Spaniards who could not follow with Cortez toward Cuba, et cetera, no? Then the Spanish Blacks, Latinos, who were enslaved in Spain and came to the Dominican Republic. Then a set of enslaved they imported from Africa, then a set of runaways from Jamaica who went and established themselves in Santo Domingo, all these before even the French took over in the western part of the country.

You see what I mean? And this will give you a type of society. What is also very important and interesting in Dominican Republic is that they have that Spanish tradition of the ejidos. Ejidos is a form of communal ownership of the land, which the Amerindian had and the Spaniards conserved it.

And this gave a certain freedom of the population and an element to negotiate the plantation system. Well, and the DR brings something back to the diversity of the Caribbean. The Spaniards came back.

I mean they recolonized the country, not during long, but enough to do much harm and to establish white supremacy, not only in the country, but in the head of the oligarchy of Saint-Domingue.

And this reconquest will be done against the Haitian position, which had abolished obviously slavery, et cetera, et cetera, at a time when Cuba and Puerto Rico still had slaves. And one of the problems of the Spaniards is that they said, "You want to enslave us? No way!" You see what I mean?

This is very, very interesting. And it's very important. It's not to such an extent that in the DR and in Haiti, they are brothers and sisters and they have no problems. But the two oligarchies, they are like cat and dog. They can't stand each other.

But underneath they are very friendly. And they are making their money quietly. But you should hear them. So they prepare the population to hate each other. This is their job, to make us fight, et cetera.

I think that you have a very good position to observe the diversity of the Caribbean and the importance of the non-plantation system, even though you have probably one of the best actual systems of plantation.

**MICHEL** There's a book called *Why the Cocks Fight*.

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Yeah?



**MICHEL** So it's a book about the history of the DR and Haiti. As you mentioned, they make sure that they fight.

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**MICHEL** Why? Because when you go to the cockfighting, the humans are the ones making the cocks fight. The cocks don't want to fight. The cocks are not meant to fight so much. So it's such a powerful metaphor, that the DR and Haiti, why do they fight? Why they fight, basically like why the cocks fight, because they have other people pushing them to fight Yeah.

**AUDIENCE:** Hi, I'm Gabrielle. And I'm Jamaican. And I took this class because I really don't know much about my people's history like that. So anything that says Caribbean culture lessons or something, I was always interested in because I was raised by my mother.

And although she has fun stories about school life in Jamaica and stuff like that, she never really told me much about the history of Jamaica. So I only knew surface level stuff. And I wanted to go in more.

And my project was on how European nations to this day have some type of economic power in the Caribbean, despite them trying to form their own economic power, and how Europe kind of uses hegemony to build off of that. And I thought that was pretty interesting.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** It is indeed. I must say that Jamaica has probably the best historians of the Caribbean. Yesterday I was privileged enough to have dinner with one of them, which is Vince Brown, Vincent Brown, who just came out with a tremendous book you certainly have all read now, Tacky--

**MICHEL** *Tacky's Revolt.*

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** I mean one of the best stories of how the Africans in the Caribbean fought for themselves and maintained themselves. Jamaica has this peculiarity of having forced the British to recognize this difference.

And this is to my mind very important how we have been able to defend ourselves to keep our differences and to reproduce it.

So what you have is that, for instance, one of the reasons why Haiti was independent, I mentioned the fact that the British was going up. But the other reason is that when in 1804 and the French was-- before in 1791, when the French were in crisis, 60% of the Haitians came from Africa, was African-born people.

And it is those people "Tacky's revolution" is describing, a set of people coming straight from Africa. You see what I mean? So this gives you an idea of the conservation of an identity you have received in your village. And here, the opposition you have against the system that is-- and how are you finding that.

But in between, what is important, and this is where the Caribbean appeals, is that you come from Congo, you come from-- you are Ashanti, you are Wolof, you are Zulu, you know what I mean? And we all are coming to becoming Jamaicans.

So the process of unification is where we are going to create a new identity, which is Caribbean. While, to follow your-- the institution created by Europe wants you to be homogenized individuals without a community, without an identity proper. So you are supposed to be British.

For instance, I was one day with two of my great friends, both of them. But one of them is from the DR, the other one from St. Lucia, and really high-level persons. And the friend from the DR say, oh, we are Afro-Latin. I say, I beg your pardon, because in the English-speaking countries, it's nearly an offense to tell somebody they're Afro-Saxon.

[LAUGHTER]

And she defined herself as Afro-Latin. And I say, well, me, I'm no Afro-Latin. What are you, then? Well, I happen to be Caribbean, Caribbean, and Caribbean, full stop. [LAUGHS] There is no Afro-Saxon, no Afro-Latin. We are Caribbean.

In our diversity-- and this is what makes us really peculiar and different from any other form of Blackness, you know what I mean, no matter where you go. Well, I will not expand on that because--

**MICHEL** It's fascinating.

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Yes, yes indeed.

**MICHEL** So Gabby made a TikTok-- talking about the technology and peyi lòk. So should we watch Gabby's TikTok together?

**DEGRAFF:**

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

OK, so what is CARICOM? CARICOM, shorthand for the Caribbean community and common market, is an organization made up of the Caribbean and Latin Americas to promote economic growth and integration with the rest of the market.

On their own website, they describe themselves as developing countries who have connections to markets in both North and South America. So their goal? basically, to be taken seriously and get Caribbean economies on the market.

However their plan of execution is essentially to sell themselves to the ones who matter the most in the game, European nations. Their "Who we are" statement on their website kind of seems to confirm this, as they describe their community as multilingual, and go on to include English, French, and Dutch as their main languages.

Now the language portion of this is really important because it is very symbolic when it comes to colonized-and-colonizer relationships. In the Caribbean, for example, most people speak some Creole or Patois derived from a blend of Indigenous and African languages, as well as the *language* of their colonizer.

These languages, despite being common tongues, are often treated as lesser. And the most prevalent example of this is Haiti's relationship with the French, who-- surprise, surprise!-- has had a stake in keeping Haiti a country.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

Haiti's government has had a history of disregarding their mother tongue of Kreyòl, despite it being one of their two national languages [ed. note: "two official languages"]. The second one, take a wild guess.

Funnily enough, roughly 5% to 10% of Haitians can actually speak French fluently, and those are usually the elite. Considering the active push in schools to speak French by literally only teaching in French, you can see why schools in Haiti aren't exactly thriving, and why they needed to join CARICOM in the first place.

So Haiti, like the rest of CARICOM, wants better economic opportunities for their country and their people. Yet the French seem to be getting in the way, as they have historically always done.

So Haiti needs out of the disparities the French have put them in. Yet French rely on Francophone countries to keep them relevant and in power. So what do they do? Money. They throw money at the situation, and then declare that they know best.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** That's impressive. Wonderful.

**AUDIENCE:** It's funny, too. That's what's so good about it.

**MICHEL** Well done, well done.

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** "Have a wild guess"!

[LAUGHTER]

**MICHEL** Vivien, you're last.

**DEGRAFF:**

**AUDIENCE:** I'm Vivien. Hi, I'm Vivien. And I'm in this class-- I'm from Palestine. And I have been over the last decade and a half of my life working with peasant communities in recovering ourselves through recovering our seed heritage.

And so I'm very interested in imagination and how our imagination can help us in the journey of liberation. So for me, the Caribbean is such a rich place to learn from and to understand from other people's experiences that have a lot of similarities, and obviously a lot of uniqueness to it.

How do we find our power and our beauty in them? And how can our beauty, as we uncover it-- we've been told it's ugly-- how can we really accentuate our beauty, if you can extract it again to regain power in ourselves.

So I find a lot in the Caribbean for me, and the beauty of it, and the beauty of also finding power inside the wounds that we have. That's why I'm in this class.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Thank you, Vivien. I will not comment on that. No, no, no, no. I mean, this is very important because in fact, I think the results of the work I've done in the book we have in front of us is that our sole wealth is our imagination, because if you take the people coming from Africa in the Caribbean, we are the majority.

Now we came like worms. We had just nothing. And we are individuals, naked, naked individuals with no contact, nothing. There doesn't exist an individual in the world who is alone. I mean an individual is-- comes from a community.

So the first thing we built was a community. But building a community was exactly opposing the power of the plantation system, no? With what did we build the community? With our mind, with our imagination.

To give you only one example, the European family is based on private property, no? The definition of an enslaving [INAUDIBLE] is he or she who cannot possess anything that does not belong to his master. So obviously we had nothing, no?

Yet we create family. We find a way of bypassing this element. Obviously our families will be called non-family, promiscuous, or all sorts of things. They try to deface the product of our imagination. And up to now, up to now, they cannot cope with our family system.

If there are two institutions, products of our imagination that are defaced, vilipended, that we despise, it's voodoo and family. And they are the less understood institutions.

All over the Caribbean, we call it the "Shango Baptist," call it "Obeah," no matter. They don't even know what they are talking about. And family, they don't understand family, our family. For instance, in Haiti, family is supposed to be, ah, patriarchal, matrifocal-- God knows what, all sort of names.

They don't know what it is. They just don't know what it is, because, let's see, you know what happened-- just to finish this comment. Two persons in any countryside of Haiti, old people, they go to church, they get married because they are celebrating their 50 years of living together. This is when they get married.

They don't get married to have the right to go to bed with one another. No, no, no, no. After being to bed, after having their kids, their grandkids, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, now the whole village is going to celebrate their marriage.

I mean you see our conception of wedding is not the western conception of wedding. How could we have that if not imagining another institution, working in another setting, creating a story? Or this is that wealth that bothered them because we are different.

And a friend of mine in-- not a friend, but a professor in a Zoom of the Catholic Church said, listen, what my problem is the following. If you are a people that is being exploited by some big master, you will tend to look like the master, so you can defend yourself. He's saying that.

But you people, from the beginning you say no. So how did that happen? You see what I mean? Obviously this is what I'm telling you. We were-- from the beginning, we were not from this line of thought.

The problem is how are we going to maintain that identity we had, no? Well, the difference is that we could not because we came like individuals. So we have to create another community. And this community is Caribbean made. It is not from Africa. It is not from Europe. It is local. You see what I mean?

We create something in difficult condition, and we are still there. We do have problems. I cannot prove to anybody there that Haiti is not the poorest country in the world, put it that way.

**MICHEL**  
**DEGRAFF:**

Most impoverished, I like to say.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** But like some of the people said-- and by the way, a great Caribbean man, Lloyd Best, said this is the most developed country of America. As far as Lloyd Best is concerned, as far as imagination, as far as self-confidence, as far as identity, as far as fighting to stay, because we could disappear, other nations have disappeared, the Taino disappeared.

We could disappear. The Haitian probably will disappear. But the day we forget our basic values, it is when day when we disappear, not before. I will not speak of my friends from Palestine. They are on the verge of, and we are on the verge of. I mean we are on the verge of, but we will disappear.

But you have in the Caribbean, for instance, in Dominica, cave called "La Cave des Indiens," the cave of the Indians, where they found together the bones of 200 Indians who killed themselves.

**MICHEL** Wow.

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Yeah, with the manioc, with the--

**MICHEL** Poison?

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Poison, they poisoned themselves because they do not want and cannot live under the Spanish, the Spaniards. In Mexico, there is also a wonderful example of El Cañón del Sumidero. El Cañón, the canyon, Sumidero is well.

Well, what happened is that this group of the First Nation is fighting against the Spaniards. And the Spaniards' army is coming and they just cannot win. So they put the kids, the ladies, and the warriors. And they are fighting and they all-- they retreat, they retreat. Everybody fell into the Canyon.

And up to now, you can visit Mexico. You will visit the Canyon del Sumidero. I mean certainly there has been genocide. But the point is that we have chosen a collective suicide. I mean this is how we lived. You see what I mean? We prefer to live like that instead of bending our head.

We have done that already. So OK, we are fighting. We are poor. We are weak. But we ain't going to lower our head. And this is-- I say Caribbean because I'm talking about the Caribbean. But I'll give you an example of Mexico. And I'm sure you will find that all over, Mexico with the arrival of.

So one of the points that, in fact, unite us here it is that we have never thought we were second to nobody, never, never. And we cannot think that. This is why we say equality is the starting point. It is not the goal.

We have to plan on the basis that we are equal. So I mean, we have in Haiti a long tradition of contact with the Palestinians. In fact, the right arm of Aristide at some point in time, may he rest in peace.

**MICHEL** Izmary?

**DEGRAFF:**

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Izmary, he was Palestinian. And oh, yes, indeed. And well, he was with us in the fight. And he died for that also.

**MICHEL** So what's your project about? Can you tell us about your project?

**DEGRAFF:**

**AUDIENCE:** My project?

**MICHEL** Yes, for the class.

**DEGRAFF:**

**AUDIENCE:** Which one?

**MICHEL** The one you want to share, the one you want to say.

**DEGRAFF:**

**AUDIENCE:** I have been extremely interested in Vodou. And actually, I'm learning a lot about Vodou in terms of spiritual practice, but also finding a lot of parallels that I'm finding with practices in Palestinian heritage that are being-- we're being told are not right to think in that way.

Like our imagination and our spirituality, whether it's through people who dream or people who relate to nature as also a source of information, through also being taught by the Catholic schools and all the religious institutions, that this is not the way we should think. And that this is primitive and we should throw it away.

And so I'm interested so much in Vodou because it's also another way of knowing the world and being in the world that is very liberatory. And I think there's so much wisdom there that can really improve our ability to live, not just in dignity, but also with other beings that we are equal to other beings.

And I feel like this is an urgent learning for today. So I am-- I've interviewed a priestess, a manbo, who is wonderful. And she's a great storyteller. So it also shows how telling stories and how stories are so important in knowing ourselves. What is the story we tell ourselves, and the ability to create a new story like the lakou and, you know--

And so I am exploring that also with myself and my own dreaming.

**JEAN CASIMIR:** Yes indeed.

**MICHEL** Yes, thank you. That was great. So thanks to all of you for sharing such personal aspects of yourselves. So now  
**DEGRAFF:** it's 1:00. So technically we're supposed to enter the second part of this, which is Jean, you will introduce, say a few words about the chapter 8 that we all read.

Then we go around the room and we each ask a question. But I wonder whether it's a good time for a break before, because-- what do you think, Tom? What do you say?

**CAMERA** That's how you usually do it, right?  
**OPERATOR:**

**MICHEL** Yeah, so let's take a break. Let's see, it's 1:00, so let's come back at 10 after 1:00. It's 12:58, 10 after 1:00. And  
**DEGRAFF:** then, OK, so get some coffee, stretch your legs, and come--