

Biography

Victor Stafford Reid was born on May 1, 1913, in Kingston, Jamaica, to Alexander and Margaret Reid. Victor, his two brothers and one sister grew up in Kingston where they attended school.

He was educated at Central Branch Primary and the Kingston Technical High School.

During his early life, Reid was employed in various positions. He also traveled to several countries. He worked as a farm overseer, a newspaper reporter, advertising executive, and journalist and at different

times edited the weekly newspaper *Public Opinion* and the news magazine *Spotlight*. In addition, he held several

posts in the Jamaican Government. These included serving as Chairman of the Jamaica National Trust Commission (1974-

1981) and a trustee of the Historic Foundation Research Centre (1980).

In 1935, he married Victoria Monica Jacobs. The marriage produced four children, Shirley, Vic Jr., Sonia and Peter.

His extensive travels helped to shape his passion of writing. One of his greatest influences was his exposure to Anancy stories and other folk tales of Jamaica which he heard from several story-tellers, but particularly from his mother.

Most of his fiction is set in rural Jamaica with which Reid identified and to which he returned frequently, for reinvigoration and inspiration. He made Jamaica, its history and its people the focus of his works; several, of which have become standard text books for studies in Jamaica and the Caribbean.

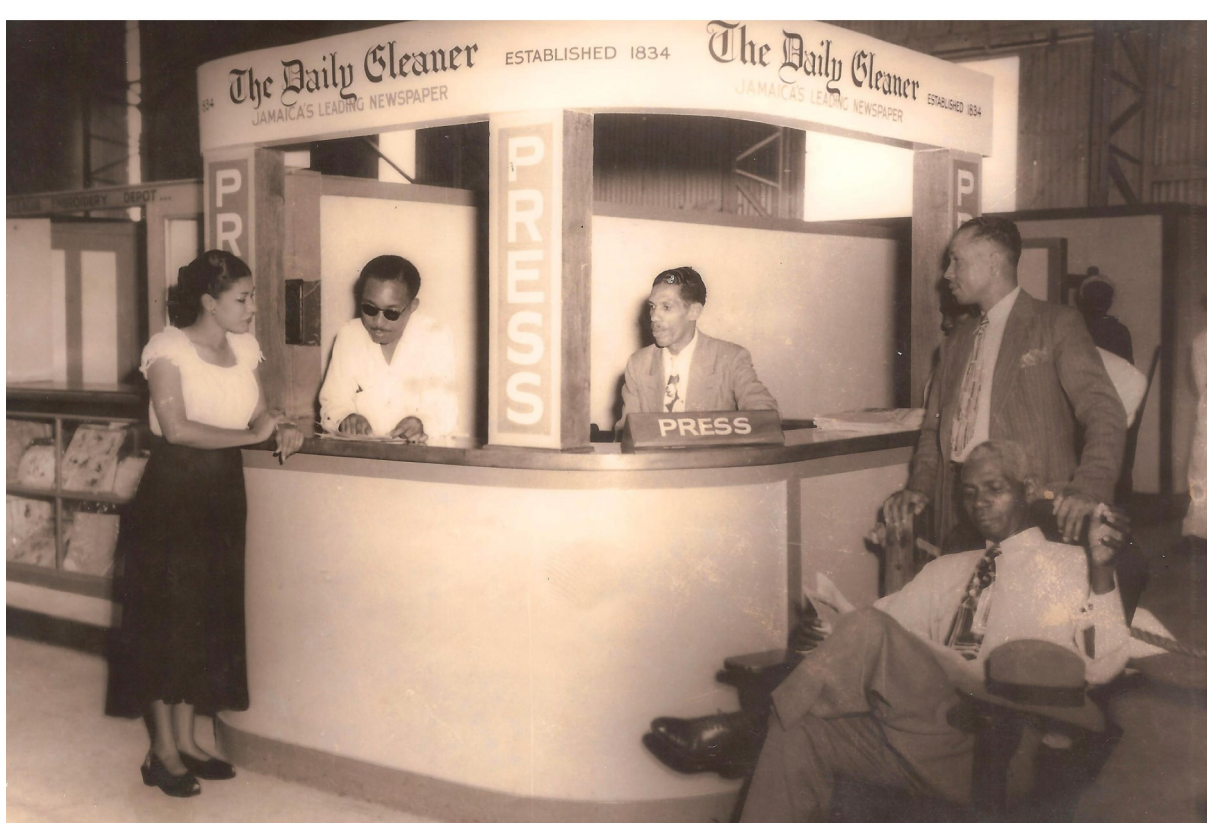
He died on August 25, 1987, at the age of 74.



SEAWELL AIRPORT, BARBADOS, 1949
(Vic Reid, C.J. Morrison, Rudolph Burke, "Advocate" owner, Gayle, T.E. Sealy, "Advocate" reporter)



Vic Reid and Theodore Sealy off to Barbados, 1949
(BWA Prop Plane)



Gleaner's Airport Desk - Vic Reid (In glasses) and Howard Brandt



Vic and eldest son, Vic Jr. at "Braemar House" (Norbrook) 1985



Vic Reid in ACCRA, Ghana, 1964



Reid at "Nine Palms" camp in Clarendon

W. L. L. L.

Who was Victor Stafford Reid

Victor Stafford Reid (Vic Reid) was one of a handful of writers to emerge from the new literary and nationalist movement that seized Jamaican sentiment in the period of the late 1930s. Critics have stated that his work is the earliest statement of the discovery of a West Indian consciousness. As a result, it acted as a catalyst for the emergence of a new school of Jamaican and West Indian writers among them Roger Mais, George Campbell and M.G. Smith. This was recognized by N.W. Manley who spoke of the link between literary work and political struggle

“The new birth in Jamaica in 1938 did many things, but one thing stands out like a bright light ... Our best young men plunged deep into the lives of the people and came up with poems, paintings and powerful books...” (Griffiths III).

Reid wrote with the intent of influencing Jamaican national pride especially among the younger generations. He was awarded the silver and gold Musgrave Medals (1955 and 1978), the Order of Jamaica (1980) and the Norman Manley Award for Excellence in Literature in 1981. He was the author of eight novels, three of which were written specifically for children; plays, and several short stories. Three of his most notable works are *New Day*, the first West Indian novel to be written in Jamaican dialect, *The Leopard* which gained international repute and the biography of Jamaica's late premier and National Hero Norman Washington Manley *the Horses of the Morning*.

As a writer, he aimed to instill an awareness of legacy and tradition among the Jamaican people. His writings reflected many of the social and cultural hardships that pervaded the periods illustrated in his works. Literary critic Edward Baugh has stated, "Reid's writing showed a fondness for the rebel with a cause... he wanted people to learn about their heritage through his writing". Reid himself confirms this in an interview conducted with Daryl Cumber Dance when he states:

“Above all, 'twas the need to ... remind the Jamaicans who they are, where they came from, to show them that the then self government we were aiming for, the then-change in the Constitution that we were getting was not entirely a gift. The fact is that historically we had paid for it, and we had been paying for over three hundred years... and therefore they should accept it with pride and work at it with knowledge that it is theirs as a right” (379).



Vic Reid age 34, with youngest daughter Fran

Victor– The Writer

Throughout his career, Vic Reid wrote with the goal of helping Jamaicans - particularly young Jamaicans - to know themselves through an awareness of their history and culture to help them to develop a sense of pride. Even today as we celebrate his centenary, Reid's work is still influential and has been appreciated both locally and internationally.

The Literary themes portrayed in Reid's writing focuses on the freedom of black culture and describe the struggles of black people. His works focus primarily on the history, hopes, and powers of the Jamaican people. Through his writing, Reid wanted to break apart the "distortions of history" portrayed by the foreign press, which described Jamaican radicals as criminals. His work was designed not only to record experiences but also to renew his countrymen's awareness of their own unique identity.



Gleaner Company dinner in honour of Reid on the publication of "New Day". At the head table from left is H.P. Jacobs, N. Croswell, Esther Chapman, V.S. Reid, S.G. Fletcher, Monica Reid, Philip Sherlock, Countess Barovier, T.E. Sealy, H.S. Wiles, and P.E. Trotman. - 1949

His first novel, *New Day* (1949), reconstructs the history of Jamaica, as narrated by 87-year-old John Campbell, from his childhood days, until Jamaica gained independence from Britain. It takes us back to the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865), and brings us forward to the first general elections in Jamaica (1944). What is remarkable about the novel is that it was written in the Jamaican vernacular (Patois). Reid's stated aim was to

“transfer to paper some of the beauty, kindness and humor of my people, weaving characters into the wider framework of these eighty years and creating a tale that will offer as true an impression as fiction can of the way by which Jamaica and its people came today” (Dance 379).

Critics have hailed *New Day* as a landmark in West Indian Literature. Gerald Moore has called it “the first announcement of the discovery of the West Indian that (he) is neither a rootless being devoid of identity, nor a lost son of Africa or Asia, but a man made and shaped by this island now”.

Victor– The Writer (continued)

Mervyn Morris describes *New Day* as “a dialect work with a sense of national mission, part and parcel of a period of national awakening in the arts as in politics” (Griffiths 113).

Reid’s second novel was *The Leopard*. Set outside of Jamaica, it was motivated by the need to give more balance to history as well as sheer anger. Reid stated that he was angry because the Western press and writers were treating the Mau- Mau of Kenya as if they weren’t human beings, as if they were sheer animals (Dance, 385).

The Leopard focuses on the controversies of human nature with respect to the co-existence of violence and hatred between Africans and Europeans. It highlights the half-Kikuyu, half-Masai boy, Nebu who hunts down and kills his white employer in the forest of Kenya. Wounded, he is in turn hunted down by a Leopard. It is a case of the hunter and the hunted. However what is significant about this book is that it marks a shift from Reid’s earlier concerns of illustrating struggles in Jamaica to illustrating a symbolic similarity in Africa. In addition it was written so convincingly by someone who had until then never visited Africa.

The Jamaicans reveals Reid’s intentions and his reason for writing - to have black people proud of themselves and their history. It focuses on a band of escaped slaves who, under the leadership of Juan de Bola, established a mountain stronghold. They reached an understanding with the Spaniards under which they were allowed to remain in their mountain stronghold in return for not raiding the Spaniards. It depicts the maroons as models of black dignity, grace and ability.

Another aspect of Reid’s writing included his desire to contribute to the education system. Previously, schools were solely taught from an English perspective and through a colonial lens. Reid, however, wanted people in school to learn about their own heritage through his writing. He wanted people to recognize that blacks contributed to the shaping Jamaica’s history. In addition his aim was to help young Jamaicans know themselves through an awareness of their history. In keeping with this, Reid wrote three novels especially for young readers, *The Young Warriors*, *Sixty-five*, and *Peter of Mount Ephraim*.

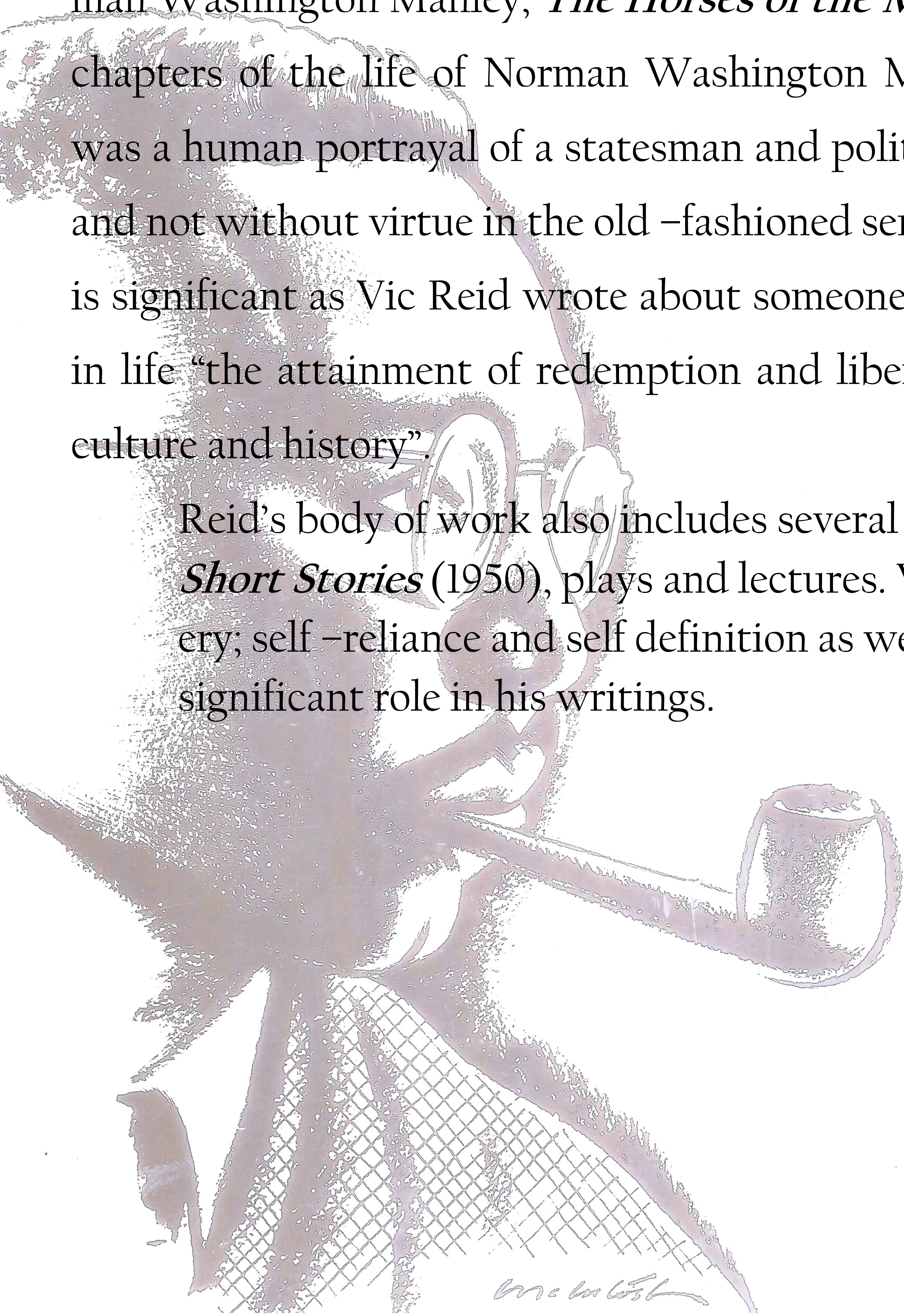
Victor– The Writer (continued)

The Young Warriors deals with the journey of five Maroon boys who pass tests of skill and endurance to become warriors in their village. When they go out hunting to celebrate, they suddenly discover that the forest is full of their enemies, the English Redcoat soldiers. What follows is a daring attempt by two of the boys, Tommy and Johnny, to seek aid from a neighboring Maroon band to prevent the Redcoats from learning Mountain Top's location. In the encounter that follows, defeat seems certain but the young warriors help to bring about a great victory.

Sixty-five is based on the true story of the Morant Bay Rebellion, a rebellion made by the freed men of Jamaica, fighting against injustices such as poor wages and not being able to purchase land. Along with *Sixty-five* and *The Young Warriors* he wrote *Peter of Mount Ephraim* which focuses on the Sam Sharp slave rebellion of 1831. The significance of all three books is that they highlight the struggles that our forefathers went through to gain freedom and independence.

Reid's final work was a biography of the Jamaican National Hero and late Premier Norman Washington Manley, *The Horses of the Morning* (1985). It highlights the various chapters of the life of Norman Washington Manley. According to Rex Nettleford "it was a human portrayal of a statesman and political visionary who was sensitive, decent and not without virtue in the old-fashioned sense of the word (XVIII)". This biography is significant as Vic Reid wrote about someone who shared his own views and purpose in life "the attainment of redemption and liberation as well as the awareness of one's culture and history".

Reid's body of work also includes several stories, collected in *Fourteen Jamaican Short Stories* (1950), plays and lectures. Vic Reid's enduring theme of self discovery, self-reliance and self definition as well as his love for his country all played a significant role in his writings.



Accomplishments

Public Offices Held

Throughout his life Vic Reid had three main posts these include:

- . 1961 - Adviser to the "Back to Africa Mission"
- . 1969 – President, Jamaica Library Association
- . 1974-1981 – Chairman , Jamaica National Heritage Trust Commission
- 1980 – Chairman, Historic Foundation Research Centre

Honors and Awards

Vic Reid has received several honors, these include:

- . 1955 – Silver Musgrave Medal in the Field of Literature
- . 1958 and 1959 – The Non-resident Canada Fellowship
- . 1959 – The Mexican Escritores Award
- . 1960- A Guggenheim Fellowship
- . 1978 – Gold Musgrave Medal in the field of Literature
- . 1980 – The Order of Jamaica
- 1981 – Norman Manley Foundation Award for Excellence for his contribution to Literature to Jamaica.

Works by Vic Reid

Vic Reid's publications include

- 1949 – New Day
- 1958 – The Leopard
- 1960 – Sixty-Five
- 1967 – The Young Warriors
- 1971 – Peter of Mount Ephraim
- 1976 – The Jamaicans
- 1983 – Nanny Town
- 1985 – Horses of the Morning



Studies of Vic Reid's Work

Davies, Barrie. "Neglected West Indian Writers. No.2. Vic Reid. *The Leopard*." *World Literature Written in English* 11. (November 1972): 83-85. Print.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "At the Sound of the Conch Shell." *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*. (March 20, 1949): 4. Print.

James, Louis. "Of Redcoats and Leopards: Two Novels by V.S. Reid. *The Islands in Between: essays on West Indian Literature*. Edited by Louis James. London" OUP, 1968: 64-72. Print.

Kinkead-Weekes, Mark. "'Africa'- Two Caribbean Fictions." *20th Century Studies*. 10 (December 1973): 37-59. Print.

Lashley, Cliff. *Towards a Critical Framework for Jamaican Literature: A Reading of the Fiction of Victor Stafford Reid and other Jamaican Writers*. Diss. The University of the West Indies Mona, 1984. Print.

Morris, Mervyn. "Introduction." *The Leopard*. London: Heinemann, 1958: vii-xvii. Print

Morris, Mervyn. "Introduction." *New Day*. London: Heinemann, 1973: [13p]. Print.

Ramchand, Kenneth. "History and the Novel: A Literary Critic's Approach." *Savacou*. 5 (June 1971): 103-13. Print

Rigsby, Gregory. "Introduction." *The Leopard*. New York : Collier, 1971. Print

Wynter, Sylvia. "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation." *Savacou* 5 (June 1971): 95- 102. Print

Vic Reid's work is also mentioned in:

Griffiths, Gareth. *Double Exile: African and West Indian Writing between Two Cultures*. London: Boyars, 1978. Print.

Harris, Wilson. *Tradition: The Writer and Society; Critical Essays*. London: New Beacon, 1967. Print.

King, Bruce. *West Indian Literature*. Connecticut: Archon Books, 1979. Print

Lamming, George. *The pleasures of Exile*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960. Print

Van Sertima, Ivan. *Caribbean Writers: Critical Essays*. London: New Beacon, 1968. Print

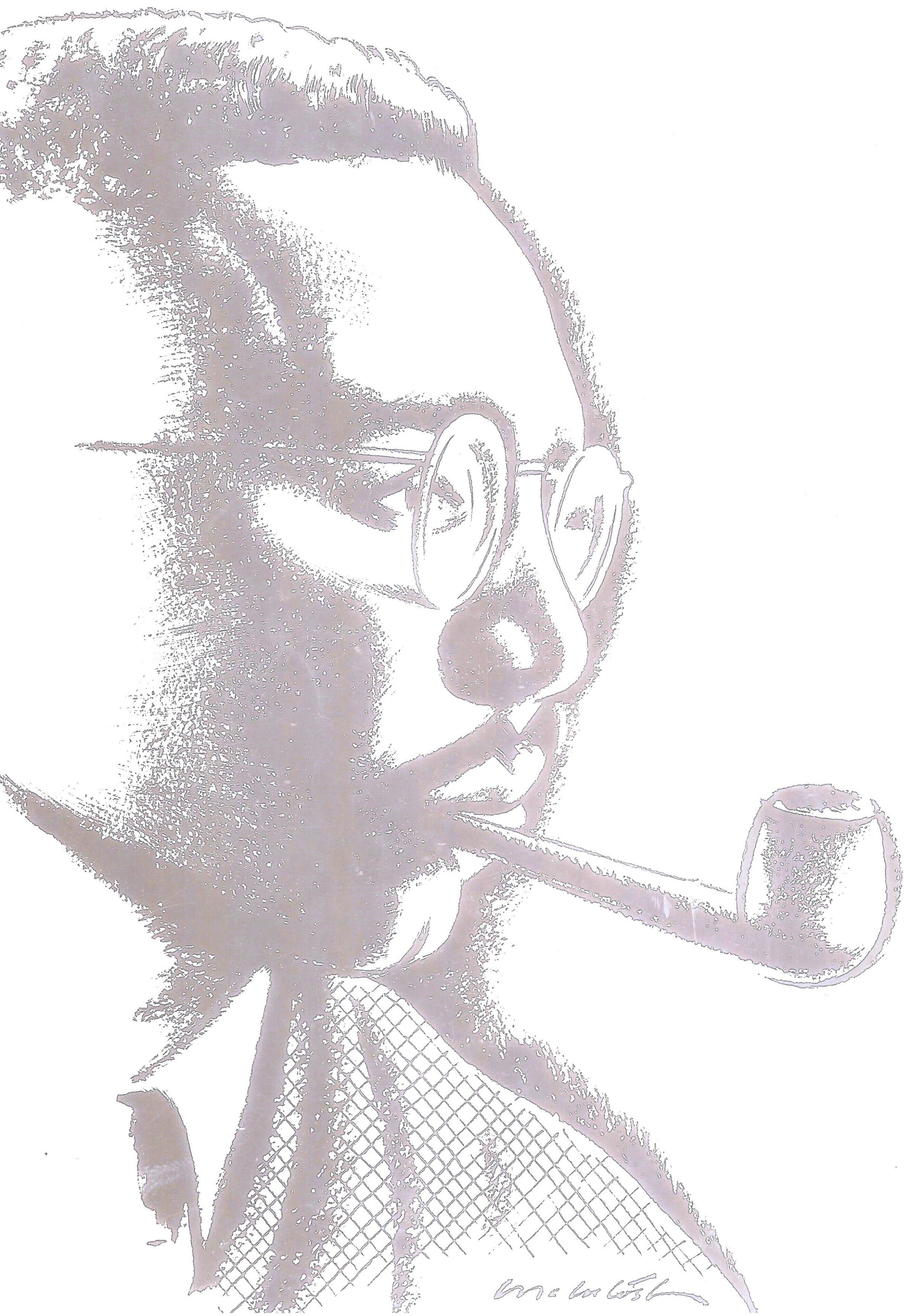
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Dance, Daryl C. "Vic Reid (1911-)." *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986: 377-85. Print.

Griffiths, Gareth. *Double Exile: African and West Indian Writing between Two Cultures*.

London: Boyars, 1978. Print

Nettleford, Rex. "Preface". *The Horses of the Morning*. Victor S. Reid. Kingston: Caribbean Authors Publishing, 1985. XVIII. Print



Introducing the Vic Reid Collection

Provenance

The library received the collection as an unsolicited gift from Mr. Peter Reid, son of Vic Reid. The material was brought from his home to the library. As far as can be ascertained there are no other collections or material existing.

Description

This collection is comprised of correspondence, manuscripts, essays, photographs, historical data, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, brochures, newsletters, magazines, pamphlets, scripts of radio broadcasts, film outlines and screen plays, remarks, diary entries and diaries used as note book. In addition it contains research materials from 1947-1987 especially those relating to Norman Manley's biography *Horses of the Morning*. The collection also contains some undated materials. These papers document his career as a writer, providing insight into his literary and business activities and publications. Of note are the broadcast typescripts of Reid's trip to Africa as part of the "Back to Africa" mission (1961).

The bulk of the collection focuses on the various literary manuscripts by Reid, published and unpublished. In addition there is a wealth of research notes and materials on Rt. Excellent Norman Washington Manley (1937-1972), Alexander Bustamante. There are typescripts of Edna Manley's diary which was published in 1989 entitled *Edna Manley: The diaries* edited by Rachel Manley.

The collected papers also contain documents of printed materials relating to Jamaica's social and economic conditions. In addition there are photographs of the late premier Norman Washington Manley with family members, friends and acquaintances. There are also photographs of Vic Reid.

There is an extensive amount of correspondence, both private and business. These include letters from other writers and activists as well as correspondence with publishers and agents.

The Collection (continued)

Significance

This collection provides first hand information on Vic Reid's literary activities, as a writer, as well as one of the founding fathers of Caribbean literary tradition. Reid typifies the emerging intellectual classes which came to light in the 1930's and led the nationalist movement for self government and independence.

His involvement in both *Public Opinion* and *Spotlight* are illustrative of the birth of national publication. As a writer of some of the first juvenile literature, Reid's collection provides a historical look at the birth of this genre in the Caribbean. Reid was an "engaging author" whose mission was not just entertainment but also education. Literary researchers should find his collection illustrative of the activist authors who he preceded and who have recognized his contribution to the birth of West Indian literature. The collection provides insight into the history of Jamaica and its culture particularly the 1930's - a time of political ferment in the country. Its source of materials for the Manley biography provides insights into the Manley family as it includes typescripts of the diaries of both Norman and Edna Manley.

Organization

The collection has been sorted and listed. There are 19 boxes of materials (124 folders of literary, financial, legal and printed materials, 7 notebooks, 9 photographs and 1 scrapbook). A finding aid has been compiled and an entry has been placed in the library's catalogue with a link to the finding aid.

