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# RE-WRITING COLONIZED SUBJECTS:

## DISCIPLINARY GESTURES IN CHARLES KINGSLEY'S *AT LAST: A CHRISTMAS IN THE WEST INDIES (1871)*

AMAR WAHAB*
*University of Toronto*

**Abstract**

The Victorian period of British travel writing in the "tropicalized" world distinguished itself from early nineteenth-century travel due particularly to changing demands for re-inventing British control in the post-emancipation period. This article unpacks the textual and visual representations of Negroes and Coolies in nineteenth-century Trinidad in the travelogue of British natural historian, Charles Kingsley, highlighting the discursive powers of these representations in re-stabilizing British rule and order in the colony. Kingsley's re-writing of colonized subjects cannot be disconnected from the re-definition and re-deployment of ideas of race and rule across the British Empire, especially in the context of post-emancipation labour shortages, the rise of the black subject and colonial anxieties about the "Negro character".

*Key words:* race, order, British rule, Negro Character, Coolie, colonized subjects, Charles Kingsley.

**Resumen**

Los libros de viajes de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX (el periodo victoriano) escritos sobre el mundo "tropicalizado" se distinguen de los que se escribieron en la Gran Bretaña durante las primeras décadas del siglo, en particular por las nuevas exigencias para la representación del control británico en el periodo postemancipación. Este artículo descubre las representaciones visuales y textuales de los negros y los culíes en el siglo XIX en Trinidad, en el libro de viajes del historiador natural británico Charles Kingsley, resaltando el poder discursivo de estas representaciones para la reestabilización del dominio británico en la colonia. La reescritura de los sujetos coloniales por Kingsley no puede separarse de la redefinición y redistribución de las ideas sobre raza y gobierno en el Imperio Británico, y específicamente en el contexto de la falta de mano de obra en el periodo después de la emancipación, el surgimiento del sujeto negro y las ansiedades coloniales sobre el "temperamento negro".

*Palabras clave:* raza, orden, dominio británico, temperamento negro, culí, sujeto colonizado, Charles Kingsley.

* Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1V6, Canada.

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# REESCRIBIENDO EL SUJETO COLONIAL:

## GESTOS DISCIPLINARIOS EN *AT LAST: A CHRISTMAS IN THE WEST INDIES (1871)*, DE CHARLES KINGSLEY

AMAR WAHAB
*University of Toronto*

**Résumé**

Les récits de voyage de l´Angleterre victorienne, portant sur un monde 'tropicalisé' par le régime colonial, montre un fort désir de réinventer un contrôle britannique à une époque où commençait l´émancipation. Le présent travail montre les représentations (descriptions textuelles et illustrations) des Noirs et des Coolies dans l´Ile de la Trinité au XIXe siècle, contenues dans les récits du naturaliste anglais Charles Kingsley, et en souligne le pouvoir démonstratif pour un projet de rétablissement de l´autorité britannique dans la Colonie. Cette reprise de tjèmes coloniaux est liée au retour et à l´expansion dans l´Empire Britannique des notions de 'race' et 'd´ordre autoritaire', elles-mêmes suscitées par l´insuffisance de la main d´oeuvre et les angoisses coloniales relatives au 'caractère nègre'. Le discours moralisateur de Kingsley s´appuie sur une comparaison des rapports industrie/ouvrier avec les rapports (nostalgiquement évoqués) maître/esclave.

*Mots-clés:* race, ordre, règle britannique, 'caractère nègre', Coolies, sujets colonises, Charles Kingsley.

**Samenvatting**

Het artikel analyseert de textuele en visuele vertegenwoordigingen van de 'Negroes' en 'Coolies' in de negentiendeeuwse Trinidad via de reisverhalen van Charles Kingsley, een Britse natuurgeschiedschrijver. Er wordt naar voren gebracht dat de kracht van de discours van deze vertegenwoordigingen ligt in het herstellen van de Britse controle in de post-emancipatie periode. Het herschrijven van het gekoloniseerde subject door Kingsley moet geplaatst worden in de context van een tekort aan arbeidskrachten, het herrijzen van het zwarte subject en het ontstaan van koloniale angst voor de 'Negroe' en kan dan niet los worden gezien van de herdefinitie van ras en heerschappij in het hele Britse imperium. De morele discours van Kingsley over de 'Negroes' en 'Coolies' in Trinidad past in de Victoriaanse periode van Britse reisverhalen waarin een zekere nostalgie overheerste voor de pre-emancipatie verhoudingen tussen meester en slaaf. Tegelijkertijd worden de 'Negroes' gepresenteerd als barbaren, die moreel decadent werden en die verantwoordelijk waren voor de achteruitgang van de kolonie.

*Kernwoorden:* ras, orde, Britise heerschappij, Negroe, Coolie, gekoloniseerde subjecten, Charles Kingsley.

## Introduction*

The Victorian period of British travel writing (1831-1900) in the tropicalized world distinguished itself from early nineteenth-century travel particularly due to changing demands for re-inventing British control in the post-emancipation period (post-1838). According to Sheller (2003, 38), travelling representations (texts, images, and signs) constituted a particular visual regime through which the tropical Caribbean was iconized and consumed. In a period in which threats to colonial rule and authority (e.g. the emancipation of slavery and resultant labour crises) demanded a reformulation of metropolitan ideas on race, European travel writers reinvented particular conventions of reading and writing tropical landscapes and colonized peoples so as to re-stabilize the image and logic of empire. In so doing, their practices of colonial vision became re-invested with powers to invent, consume, validate, and circulate New World reality, while masking the power of their gaze to distort, select and universalize particular ways of seeing the world around them. These visual economies of rule, which systematically described, measured, classified, named, and *ordered* distant places and peoples, have seminally formulated and authenticated the Caribbean as an invented reality in colonial discourse. At the same time that colonial travel narratives are viewed as sites where the Caribbean was discursively produced, Gikandi (1994, 60) also highlights the circularity of this discourse which sought to affirm the English domestic subject or English identity.

In this paper I intend to unpack the narratives and representations of Trinidad's colonized subjects, contained in the travel writing of British novelist, clergy and popular natural historian, Charles Kingsley (1819-1875). Kingsley's travelogue, *At Last:*

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*A Christmas in the West Indies (1871),*[1] was produced as a result of his travel to Trinidad in December 1869. It is regarded by 1992 Nobel Laureate, Derek Walcott, as "one of the early books to admit the Antillean landscape and its figures into English literature" (1992, 7). More over, Charles Kingsley is regarded as a historian whose Victorian travel narrative is indispensable to any attempt to understand the historical construction of the Trinidadian landscape and its inhabitants as sites of British narrative invention. In *British Historians and the West Indies* (1964), Trinidad's first Prime Minister and renowned West Indian historian, Dr. Eric Williams, referred to Kingsley's writing as "one of the best known of West Indian travelogues". The text is arranged in seventeen chapters, fourteen of which are devoted solely to Kingsley's travels in Trinidad,[2] with generous descriptions of the island's natural history, bountiful plantations and thriving urban settlements.

As part of a "Victorian rhetoric of discovery",[3] *At Last* can be read as a spatial coding of the Trinidadian landscape that goes beyond an experiential and contemplative mapping of different landscape segments. The narrative invests these various segments with historically specific meanings and set them in relation to each other, so as to generate an ideological map through which ideas of dis/order are constructed. The specific goal of this paper is however to demonstrate that Kingsley's late nineteenth-century travel account of Trinidad is one that had significant constitutive power over the positioning of Trinidad's many ethnic groups in the interest of colonial order. In a period of troubled British rule of the island, Kingsley attempted to reinvent a sense of order by discursively reproducing racialized ideas about the inferiority of non-white groups. His descriptions of colonized peoples in *At Last,* therefore demands an understanding

[1] From this point I will use the abbreviated, At Last, to refer to Kingsley's travelogue.

[2] The first three detail Kingsley's voyage out of England and "Down the Islands" on the steamer, Shannon.

[3] Term used by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) to describe the epistemological project of re-inventing the idea of discovery as a means of countering ambiguities in the production of colonial power.

of a historical context deeply affected by a changing consciousness about race and rule both in Britain and the West Indies, in which imperial travel to Trinidad was deeply enmeshed and implicated. Written in the post-emancipation period *At Last* can be read as a renewed will to power the landscape i.e. order land and people through discursive devices of exploitation and othering, in the midst of incipient counter discourses.

I will first sketch out the prevailing social discourse about race, labour and order in the British Empire in the period which produced *At Last*, to provide a context for my reading of Kingsley's representations of different colonized groups in Trinidad. I then unpack the representations of "Negroes" and "Coolies"[4] and their positioning vis-à-vis each other in the re-imaging of British rule. I however wish to alert the reader that I am not only reading Kingsley to extract a monolithic colonial narrative, but also looking out for subverted or counter narratives that contradict his will for narrative containment. These paradoxical moments give way to ambiguity or as Drayton (2000, 4) writes, "the bottomless complexity of the encounter", which complicate Kingsley's colonial gaze, and possibly provide sites of agency for colonized groups to return the gaze.

## Mid-Nineteenth-Century Obsessions of Race and Order in British West Indian Discourse

> Racial theory cannot be separated from its own historical moment: it was developed at a particular era of British and European colonial expansion in the nineteenth century which ended in the Western occupation of nine-tenths of the surface territory of the globe. There is obvious connection between racial theories of white superiority and the justification for that expansion… [Young, 1995, 87, 91-92, quoted in Cudjoe 2003, 203]

[4] These terms were used to refer to Africans and East Indians in the nineteenth century and by Charles Kingsley in *At Last*.

After being colonized by Spain for almost 300 years a slave-based plantation system was set up in Trinidad in 1783 under the Spanish *Cedula* of Population decree which resulted in the influx of French planters from Grenada, Martinique and Haiti. The end of the eighteenth century therefore witnessed an intensification of plantation agriculture and a change from Spanish-Amerindian society to French planter-African slave society. Just over a decade later the island was capitulated to Britain, making Trinidad, until emancipation in 1838, a complex Creole society composed of white elites, French Creoles, English Creoles, free coloureds, free blacks and enslaved black masses[5] —what historian Bridget Brereton has referred to as an "experimental colony". Brereton (1993, 34) states three significant features of Trinidad in the "long" nineteenth century: the island became a slave colony much later than others; its experience of plantation slavery was brief (fifty years); and the middle tier of free coloured[6] and free blacks was unusually large. After full emancipation in 1838 and subsequent failed projects to import Chinese and Portuguese labour, the Crown decided on Indian Immigration, which began in 1845 and continued until 1917.

Early post-emancipation Trinidad posed numerous challenges to the idea of British and planter class hegemony. Even as the coloured and black middle class segments of Trinidadian society were finding ways to counteract British hegemony and assert claims to self-government, the ex-slave black segments were also threatening and destabilizing the idea of order associated with plantation society.[7] Cudjoe (2003, 195) corroborates this development, writing that the subordinate groups in Trinidadian society "began to reconstitute their relationship with the dominant power as they asserted their independence and expressed their varied identities". Despite these counter currents

[5] For an interested discussion of the differences and nuances between these categories, see Brereton (1979).

[6] Munasinghe (2001, 48), drawing on the work of Campbell (1992) states that the free coloured population had near civility with whites and were among the most privileged in the Caribbean, especially with respect to land ownership.

[7] See chapter III in Donald Wood (1968) *Trinidad in Transition: the years after slavery* for a description of this "crisis".

Brereton (1979, 193) writes that, "nineteenth-century West Indian society was pervaded by the racist ideology of local and metropolitan whites", which signalled the persistence of prejudicial discourses about Africans formulated during slavery in what she terms, the period of "post-emancipation adjustment". As a result of the declining currency of British humanitarian discourse after the 1850s, Brereton states that the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a "hardening of racist attitudes on the part of the educated British and European public", which emphasized black indolence and ideas about the savageness of Africans (1979, 193).

The destabilization of early nineteenth-century racial ideology was provoked by two major events: the emancipation of slavery in the British West Indies (1838) and the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Emancipation ushered in a change of relations between planter and ex-slave, as the latter, now in greater control of their labour, in large part, decided to withhold it. Faced with a labour shortage, planters manoeuvred in multiple ways (e.g. land acquisition policies, anti-squatting legislation, wage controls, settlement options close to plantations) to keep ex-slaves' in some relation of dependence on the estates. This logic became the fulcrum about which various representations of ex-slaves would be balanced. For example, ex-slaves influx into the town, as opposed to the plantation, was represented as initiating sub-urban slums, which was viewed as a defilement of the landscape, and became a marker for reifying constructions about the moral degeneracy of African self-reliance, without the disciplining apparatus of the plantation. In addition Africans who had slave-laboured under inhumane conditions on the plantations were re-inscribed as lazy and incapable of charting their own development. This discursive invention of black indolence occupied a very central place in a discourse of great significance in the mid-nineteenth century, referred to as "the Negro Question".[8]

[8] Coined as the title of a reactive essay by British Historian, John Stuart Mill in 1850, one year after British Historian, Thomas Carlyle published his essay vehemently opposing black rights and democratic equality.

In Trinidad, William Hardin Burnley, Trinidad's largest planter and chairman of the Cultural and Immigration Society, brought to prominence the planter class' contemplation of the "experiment of Negro emancipation". His *Observations on the Present Condition of the Island of Trinidad and the Actual State of the Experiment of Negro Emancipation* (1842) charted a logic for representing and positioning the Negro vis-à-vis developing new systems of labour regulation. He emphasized the "necessity of increasing the labour population, which the planters insist upon as absolutely requisite to uphold cultivation in our sugar colonies". Moreover, Burnley aimed to demonstrate how the situation in the West Indies was unique, requiring special attention regarding labour regulation. He claimed that Negroes enjoyed "social and political advantages unexampled in extent at any period in history", and that in Trinidad there existed, "an equality among all ranks, unparalleled elsewhere" (1842, A2-A3). Burnley's main concern, however, was the "protection of capital" (A8), since if "staple productions were not maintained and something done to ensure labour as well as check the natural course of the Negro population", the island would relapse into barbarism. Burnley stated that emancipated ex-slaves exhibited "waste of time and dissipation in every shape" (A14), inventing black indolence as a means of justifying the need to "regulate black labour". Inventing black indolence was also meant to justify claims for the importation of new sources of labour into the colonies. Herein were historical claims that British intervention in setting up an experimental colony based on African slave labour, constituted as sense of dignity and civilization of the landscape and its people. Any other configuration threatened this order, though they signalled ruling class anxieties about slipping hegemony.

For example, in response to the dispersal of ex-slaves away from the plantations and into "uncultivated lands" (i.e. squatting), Burnley claimed that this mischief was being addressed through an "1838 order issued to prevent intrusion". What Burnley's discourse implied, was that the close relationship of dominance between master (planter) and subaltern (Negro), was the central tenet in the British understanding of moral order. Without this, he begged the Crown colony government to "consider the

state of helpless destitution into which the labouring classes of Trinidad will be thrown when their proprietor is ruined, and wages for labour cease" (A14). Coupled with this ideological reinvention of a labour discourse, Burnley also reinvented the idea of a paradisiacal landscape with "inappreciable wealth, which can be rendered productive to any extent in which capital and population are applied to its cultivation" (A40). Sprinkled through Burnley's text, were instances where he placed the blame of this situation squarely on the anti-slavery party, claiming that the British government had erred in "discarding the lessons of experience", while privileging "feeling and passion alone, and shocked at oppression". *Observations* however pinned down an early Victorian doctrine for circulation in Trinidad: that "regular and sustained toil had an ennobling influence on the character" (Wood, 1968, 51). Not only would Burnley's reinvented logic have provided leverage for planters' advocacy for an ensured labour supply, but his *Observations* would have found their way into the hands of philosophers/historians in Britain who were also deeply concerned with the re-configuration of British empire after emancipation.

British Historian, Thomas Carlyle, who vehemently opposed ideas of liberty and equality, and authored his infamous essay *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (1849)[9] in the first decade after emancipation, is heavily implicated in the reinvention of the "West Indian Negro". These reinventions would eventually serve to re-naturalize what was regarded as "the Negro Character" in the interest of re-stabilizing British ideas of colonial order and control. Carlyle's general tone in *Occasional Discourse* is echoed in this quote from the essay: "I have to complain that, in these days, the relation of master to servant, and of superior to inferior, in all stages of it, is fallen sadly out of joint" (quoted in Williams, 1964, 44). In fact, the essay is

[9] Dr. Eric Williams (1964, 56) claims that whereas previous British historians were "indirect" about slavery, Carlyle's essay "launched a frontal and full-scale attack". Williams refers to *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (1849) as "the most offensive document in the entire world literature on slavery and the West Indies".

a strong monotone that advocated against Negro emancipation, based on the assumption that the master-servant relationship constituted an incontrovertible idea of order. According to Williams (1964), Carlyle felt that emancipation gave the Negro a "licence to remain idle". Carlyle's shrilly-racist statements are contained in the quote below from Williams:

> [N]o Black man who will not work according to what ability the gods have given him for working, has the smallest right to eat pumpkin, or to any fraction of land that will grow pumpkin, however plentiful such land may be; but has an indisputable and perpetual right to be compelled, by the real proprietors of said land, to do competent work for his living… That he be "hired for life", really here is the essence of the position he now holds!… the gods wish besides pumpkins, that spices and valuable products be grown in their West Indies; thus much they have declared in so making the West Indies: - infinitely more they wish, that manful industrious men occupy their West Indies, not indolent two-legged cattle, however "happy" over their abundant pumpkins!… Not a pumpkin, Quashee, not a square yard of soil, till you agree to do the state so many days of service… you will have to be servants to those that are born *wiser* than you, that are born lords of you, servants to the Whites… [1964, 56-57]

Carlyle's statement served to essentialize the idea of Negro inferiority and condemnation to servility, contributing to the Victorian "gospel of work"[10] that blacks were compelled to labour under the Whites as the only means through which they could enjoy the fruit of civilized life. Black labour under the white man was positioned as a central tenet of a natural and moral order. According to Ledgister (1999, 2), Carlyle's statements were based on the assumption that "work is a requirement of natural law… and compulsion will make the Black person happier". This natural hierarchy which placed whites at the top, and the "Demerara Nigger" at the bottom was intimately tied

[10] Term used by John Stuart Mill to refer to Carlyle's logic. See Ledgister (1999, 5).

to a conception that society must be governed by natural laws, and therefore must be maintained or restored to guard against the retrograde into barbarism. Ledgister continues that "[T]he idleness of Black people in the West Indies, linked with their refusal to work on the plantation, appeared to Carlyle as a repudiation of the natural hierarchy" (1999, 4). That black idleness was anathema to this hierarchy required a discourse that would re-stabilize the position of blacks at the bottom. Carlyle called for the use of a "beneficent whip" to prevent the West Indies from degrading into a situation similar to Haiti, which would mean that the half-century investment in cultivating and civilizing Trinidad would be lost. Carlyle was also issuing a warning that if this natural hierarchy continued to change, it could mean the destruction of the West Indies as well as British society.

This doctrine was met with opposition from British Historian, John Stuart Mill, whose essay, *The Negro Question* (1850) counteracted Carlyle's *Occasional Discourse*. Mill advocated that the "abolition of slavery was based on principles of justice and moral obligations", that barbarians must be fitted to govern themselves, and that "blacks should enjoy the products of their labour" (Ledgister, 1999, 5). Despite this equally problematic but more liberal discourse, Ledgister (1999, 6) claims that Carlyle's doctrine of race and rule was shared by Charles Kingsley, as they both believed in the superiority of the "virtues of ancient Saxons". Carlyle and Kingsley also shared similar positions in the 1860s defending the severe punishments meted out against black "rebels" by Jamaica's Governor Edward Eyre as a result of the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865) in Jamaica.[11] Cudjoe claims that Carlyle's essay (1849) and the Eyre Affair (1865) contributed to a strong "anti-negro" feeling in Britain (2003, 195). According

[11] An extensive description of this rebellion and its eclipse with British intellectual thought can be found in Williams (1964) *British Historians and the West Indies*. The Rebellion was stimulated by black smallholders' request to the Crown for the rental of lands in the midst of a devastating drought. The request was rejected advising the smallholders to work for the planters. Ledgister writes that, "[I]nstead of royal justice they had received a royal rebuke for laziness" (1999, 7).

to Ledgister (1999, 8) Carlyle wrote to Kingsley that "had he had the power, he would have installed Eyre as dictator of Jamaica, as pretty much the one chance there were for saving the West Indies".[12]

British novelist, Anthony Trollope, who travelled to Jamaica in 1859 and published *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1860), also reproduced Carlyle's negrophobic views, lamenting the retrograde of Jamaica into barbarism by casting it against a pre-emancipation idealized configuration of a slave-plantation landscape. Like Carlyle, Trollope was convinced that emancipation had produced idleness and both blamed the Negro for "West Indian decline" (Williams, 1964, 72). Kingsley, Carlyle and Trollope were part of a growing consciousness that regarded mid-nineteenth century British rule (both in terms of domination and as a civilizational project) of the West Indies as one that was severely troubled by the "the Negro Question". Through their interdependent and often collaborative intellectual production, these figures created a derogating discourse about black laziness to support claims for "saving" and hence re-stabilizing imperial rule.

As we shall see in analyzing his narratives of colonized groups, Kingsley relied on this particular construct of race consciousness and order (i.e. dialectical relation between dominant and subordinate) to ideologically re-position these others on the landscape, while at the same time ensuring his own superior position and that of British rule. According to Cudjoe:

> When Kingsley visited Trinidad in 1869, he was deeply implicated in this debate [Morant Bay Rebellion] and was working through his conflicts in his own way. He was deeply disturbed also by Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), a book that turned the Victorian world upside down and inside out, around much discussion about the origin of human beings and heightened concerns about the nature of race and empire. [2003, 195]

On the heels of Carlyle's and Trollope's doctrines, Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection reinforced the idea

[12] Latter part of quote is Carlyle's words.

of race-based classification and a hierarchy that placed Caucasians as most advanced and Negroes as most backward. Brereton claims that this gave way to a crude Negrophobia, as the inevitable struggle for domination by the "highly developed races" was placed at the cost of "backward ones" (Brereton, 1979, 194). This relationship was central to British ideas about progress and order. Darwin's theory of evolution, which suggested that survival of the fittest was a random, accidental phenomenon, threaened natural history's belief in Divine design.[13] As a narrative project, travel writing that attempted a re-naturalized history of landscape and people, like Kingsley's, was not only pertinent to a British society in crisis, but it stressed how indispensable the West Indies had become to the ideological workspace of Britishness.

In addition, the fact that Charles Kingsley sailed to the West Indies and stayed seven weeks in Trinidad at the invitation of the colony's Governor Arthur Gordon (1866-1871)[14] brought all his narrative projects into the realm of imperial preoccupation. Moreover, Kingsley had rather direct ties to the West Indian plantocracy. Cudjoe claims that *At Last* "was a homecoming of sorts" since Kingsley's mother descended from a planter family that owned estates in Barbados and Demerara, and his father also benefited from "his Caribbean estates" (2003, 200). In the aftermath of emancipation, Kingsley is reported to have said: "The Negro has had all I ever possessed; for emancipation ruined me… I am no slave-holder at heart. But I have paid my share of the great bill, in Barbados & Demerara, with a vengeance: & don't see myself called on to pay other men's" (Martin, 1960 quoted in Cudjoe, 2003, 200). Therefore, not only was Kingsley directed by imperialist ambitions in his style of travel writing, but also

[13] According to Stepan (2001, 60) Darwin's evolutionary theory affected travel literature by disrupting the conventions of representing tropical nature, through an "anti-romantic" style. However Stepan (2001, 75) writes that: "Many distinguished Victorian scientists, suffering from the crisis of traditional religious faith caused by Darwinism, turned to spiritualism as a middle way between the harsh materialism of science and the old dogma of religion".

[14] In fact, Kingsley dedicated his travelogue to "His Excellency, The Hon. Sir Arthur Gordon".

his ties to the West Indian plantocracy served to corroborate his alliance with intellectual Negrophobia advocated in the works of Thomas Carlyle and Anthony Trollope. Cudjoe claims that "as part of the imperialist enterprise" *At Last* "provided British imperialism with academic authority that made it such an imposing structure in the nineteenth-century Caribbean" (2003, 202).

It is also very important to remember that *At Last* is unique in that it was one of the first travelogues to flash back to a metropolitan audience, the consequences of the Crown's decision to permit indentured East Indian or Coolie emigration (as it was referred to) as a means of supporting West Indian planter's demands for labour. *At Last* came on the heels of a resumption of indentured immigration after being suspended, out of concern by the Crown and the Anti-Slavery society, that the new system of labour harboured similar brutalities against East Indians as were meted out against Africans during slavery. An article entitled "Treatment of Our Indian Coolies at Trinidad" published in the *Trinidadian* newspaper in 1851, based on a report by the Coolie Stipendiary Magistrate of Trinidad, Major Fagan, detailed the "wretched conditions to which the coolies have been reduced by the bad faith of the colonial authorities, and the ill-treatment of some of the Planters" (quoted in Cudjoe, 2003, 136-137). In *Journal of a Voyage with Coolie Emigrants from Calcutta to Trinidad* (1859), Captain and Mrs. Swinton, also described the cruelties and sufferings of East Indians during their transport on the Salsette. According to Cudjoe (2003, 139), the *Journal* detailed issues concerning unsanitary conditions, unclean water, and inadequate food, "which contributed enormously to the death of the Indians". Both these publications, one from within the colony and one on a "coolie ship", called for a reform in the system of coolie immigration. *At Last* would have been an urgent response to this new humanitarian anxiety, further entrenching the idea of the proper welfare of Coolie labour under British rule. It is within this historical context that I now investigate the discursive construction of colonized subjects in *At Last*.

## Re-Writing the Other: Re-Naturalizing Colonized Subjects

The crisis in colonial authority which ensued in the post-emancipation British West Indies meant that the Otherness of colonized subjects had to be re-written to re-stabilize British rule and order over its Empire. Although Kingsley's descriptions of colonized subjects focused on the two groups, Negroes and Coolies about which rule was primarily concerned, he also constructed ideas of Chinese immigrants, Trinidad's Coloured Creole segment, and even indigenous Indians, relying on these other groups to discursively stabilize essentializing claims about Negroes and Coolies. In other words, Kingsley not only framed an essential idea about each group in isolation, but also constructed them (through his descriptions and images) in relation to each other. This act of discursive relationing was directly tied to the "hardened racial attitudes" of the mid-nineteenth century, which I have outlined in the previous section. Primarily concerned with the procurement of a stable and controllable labour force, the main discourse about which these groups were organized was a moral one, which equated industriousness with morality. In the following sections, I attend to Kingsley's discursive production of the Negro or what was termed, "the Negro character", and the Coolie or indentured Hindu immigrant in the aftermath of emancipation.

### *The Negro Character: The Retrograde of Paradise*

Gikandi (1994, 60) stresses that the black subject represented as Other, holds out the "mirror in which Englishness reflects on its own identity and the potential threat to the givenness of its social and cultural construct". It is from this epistemological perspective that the early post-emancipation discourse on "the Negro character" sought to restabilize ideas about British rule (in the context of labour shortage and declining profitability of sugar production) by re-positioning blacks as savage Other. The main assumption of this reinvention was a continuation of the early century's logic, that plantation labour exerted a civilizing force

on blacks, and outside this relation, blacks would regress into a state of barbarism. *At Last* was heavily implicated by its reliance on and contribution to this re-inventive project, having direct consequences for the ways in which Trinidad in particular would be subsequently imagined. Contemplating the post-emancipation period, Kingsley refers to that which abolition has been "left behind, not to be cleared off for generations to come" as a "dark shadow that hangs over all this beauty" (Kingsley, 1910, 34).

The "dark shadow" was the threat cast by the rise of the black subject either withholding labour or demanding wages. Whichever case, this threat was constituted in the British imagination through a discourse of black idleness. Not only was this myth significant in convincing the British Crown to explore new supplies of labour and new measures of labour regulation (see William H. Burnley's *Observations*), but also it had enduring power in the decades after Indian indenture immigration to Trinidad (1845). It was a dominant ideology that conditioned Kingsley's writings about Negroes in the West Indies and their subsequent re-positioning *vis a vis* other societal groups in Trinidad. Through his many productions of Negro character, Kingsley naturalized the idea of black as savage. It lead him to explicitly state that: "If any one says of the Negro, as of the Russian, 'He is but a savage polished over: you only have to scratch him, and the barbarian shows underneath' the only answer to be made is – Then do not scratch him" (Kingsley, 1910, 72). Similarly, of the Negress, Kingsley described her as "screaming and jabbering" (26), "independent" (26), "coarse" (72) and "possessing masculine figures and ungainly gestures" (72), which all contributed to the "superabundant animal vigour" (72) of Port of Spain. Yet his statement that the Negress is more independent than any lady in England (72) demonstrates how the Negro Character is constantly being referenced by notions of Kingsley's home space, to emphasize the contrast between civilized and savage subjects.[15]

[15] Gikandi (1994) makes this same point in *Englishness, Travel and Theory.* Interestingly he claims that the black woman becomes an object of both disdain and desire, in which travellers "encounter their own ambivalence toward the politics of gender in Victorian England" (65).

Kingsley's primary component of the black savagery discourse, that of black indolence is evident in his opening lines of the chapter, "Port of Spain":

> The first thing notable, on landing in Port of Spain at the low quay which has been just reclaimed from the mud of the gulf, is the multitude of people who are doing *nothing*. It is not that they have an hour's holiday to see the packet come in. You will find them or their brown duplicates, in the same places tomorrow and next day. *They stand idle in the marketplace* not because they have not been hired, but because they do not want to be hired; being able to live like the Lazzaroni of Naples, on 'Midshipman's half pay —nothing a day, and find yourself. [Kingsley, 1910, 70][16]

As a component of immorality and savagery, Kingsley's "idleness", implied that "black people or their brown duplicates" could only be civilized through plantation industry, and that any kind of labour not devoted to plantation was considered a sign of laziness. His subsequent contemplation of black idleness was strongly resonant with Carlylian logic that the "right" of the Negro was not to be idle, but to be compelled to work as a naturalized feature of relationing the Negro to the colonial landscape:

> You are told that there are 8 000 human beings in Port of Spain alone without visible means of subsistence, and you congratulate Port of Spain on being such an Elysium that people can live there —not without eating, for every child and most women you pass are eating something or other all day long— but without working. The fact is, that though they will eat as much and more than a European, if they can get it, they can do well without food; and feed, as do the Lazzaroni, on mere heat and light. The best substitute for a dinner is a sleep under a south wall in the blazing sun; and there are plenty of south walls in Port of Spain… If a poor man neither steals, begs, nor rebels (and these people do not do the two latter), has he not as much right to be idle as a rich man? To say that neither has a right to be idle is… a heresy not to be tolerated. [Kingsley, 1910, 70]

[16] Italics are mine.

At the same time black indolence is raised as an essentializing character of the Negro, Kingsley also portrays the Negro as sub-human, since they "do well without food… and feed… on mere heat and light" —and of that there is abundance in tropical paradise! In this move, not only does Kingsley naturalize the poverty of the "8 000 human beings without visible means of subsistence", as a direct result of laziness, but also their sub-human status justifies this poverty. In this statement, there is also an implicit reasoning that Negroes' "wild (subsistence) and underproductive" use of the land has justly resulted in their poverty. As he walked through urban Port of Spain, he described the "uncivilized" conditions of a site of Negro spectacle:

> On the doorsteps (of the stores) sit Negresses in gaudy print dresses… all aiding in the general work of doing nothing: save where here and there a hugely fat Negress, possibly with her "head tie across" in a white turban… sells, or tries to see, abominable sweetmeats, strange fruits, and junks of sugar-cane, to be gnawed by the dawdlers in mid-street, while they carry on their heads everything and anything, from half a barrow-load of yams to a saucer or a beer-bottle. [Kingsley, 1910, 71]

The terms "gnawed", "dawdlers", "abominable", "strange", "in mid street", and "junks" imply a sense of how savage Kingsley regards the Negro to be, while he connects their savagery to indolence —they carry "everything and anything" on their heads so their hands are left to "do nothing" but "gnaw". Kingsley's signifiers repeatedly naturalize the inferiority of the Negress who is unable to fit Victorian codes of respectability.

Kingsley scripts Negro idleness as detrimental not only to the prosperity of the planter class, but as an ideological threat to imperial order. For it is the Negro who Kingsley describes as if he were the figure of "Adam in Paradise", rather than the white man. He marks the Negro woman and man as enjoying "health, rude in every sense of the word:" "Their faces shine with fatness; they seem to enjoy, they do enjoy, the mere act of living; like the lizard on the wall. It may be said —it must be said— that, if they be human beings (as they are), they are meant for something more than mere enjoyment of life… The Negro may have

the *corpus sanum* without the *mens sana*" (Kingsley, 1910, 27). Not only are Negroes intruders and usurpers of the white man's paradise, but they seem to be prospering *without* labour, i.e. *lazy and yet prosperous*[17] —effecting an anti-Carlylian logic. Despite the laziness in Port of Spain and people "without visible means of subsistence", Kingsley remarks that "everyone he passes looks strong, healthy, and well-fed". British rule in the West Indies is even more benevolent than that in Britain itself, where there is evidence of "figures and faces, small, scrofulous, squinny, and haggard", that are a "disgrace" to "so-called civilization of a British city" (Kingsley, 1910, 70). Yet, he issues a Carlylian warning about the "perpetual Saturnalia in which the Negro, in Trinidad at least, lives":

> If the Saturnalia be prolonged too far, and run, as they seem inclined to run, into brutality and licence, those stern laws of Nature which men call political economy will pull the Negro up short, and waken him out of his dream, soon enough and sharply enough —a "judgement" by which the wise will profit and be preserved, while the fools only will be destroyed. [Kingsley, 1910, 244]

Kingsley's "Saturnalia" refers to the debauchery of laziness, that in Carlylian discourse, can only yield "brutality and licence", i.e. a retrograde into a barbaric state. Yet, he warns that this state of regression will be checked by the "stern laws of Nature", which is again, another central tenet of Carlyle's way of treating the "Nigger Question".

Throughout *At Last* Negroes are also portrayed as thieves or as defiling the spaces they inhabit, imputing a sense of their moral degeneracy. In the quote below, moral degeneracy is implied through the idea of estates being victimized by Negro pilferage:

> The Negro houses, however roomy and comfortable, and however rich the gardens which surrounded them, were mostly patched together out of the most heterogeneous and wretched scraps of

[17] Fowkes-Tobin (1999, 170) discusses the same discursive construction in Mrs. A. C. Carmichael's *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies* (1833).

> wood; and on inquiry I found that the materials were in most cases, stolen; that when a Negro wanted to build a house, instead of buying the materials, he pilfered a board here, a stick there, a nail somewhere else, a lock or clamp in a fourth place, about the sugar estates, regardless of the serious injury which he caused to working buildings; and when he gathered a sufficient pile, hidden safely away behind his neighbour's house, the new hut rose as if by magic. This continued pilfering, I was assured, was a serious tax on the cultivation of the estates around… one more evil instance of the demoralising effect of a state of things which, wrong itself, was sure to be the parent of a hundred other wrongs. [Kingsley, 1910, 183]

Not only does Kingsley represent the Negro house as a site for contemplating the Negro's moral escalating degeneracy, but he does not see the irony of the estate as a place that has long exacted its own pilferage of Negro labour. Moreover, his claim that this wrong will "parent a hundred other wrongs" pronounces Kingsley's assumption of the natural corruptibility of the Negro.

A central issue of contemplation for Kingsley is the idea of a Negro peasantry. Marshall (1987) claims that this period during which Kingsley travelled witnessed the consolidation of the West Indian peasantry. The Negro garden or provision ground is constructed by Kingsley as existing in strong geographical and ideological proximity to wild, untamed nature. In moving through one such garden he claimed that it was infested with "weeds as high as our shoulders", "difficult, as usual, to distinguish garden from forest" (Kingsley, 1910, 115). It is therefore clear that Kingsley regarded the Negro garden as a sort of regression into barbarism. The Negro is inscribed as savage because he cannot reason: i.e. he is oblivious to the potential industry in these wild gardens! This is ironic in light of Kingsley's numerous attempts to romanticize primeval nature, though in the case of the Negro garden, it is not the white man who benefits from wild paradise.

In fact, in some cases, where these Negro gardens were actually squatter plots, Kingsley found another vantage point from which to emphasize the barbarism of the Afro-peasantry. He referred to the "evil" act of squatting as "plundering Crown

woods", making it "lawless" and havens for "wild inhabitants" (Kingsley, 1910, 205). Could it be possible that Kingsley was signalling a fear that a peasant-driven economy might replace the plantation? Marshall suggests that by 1870, "the plantation-staple economy was being mixed with elements of a peasant-subsistence economy; and it seemed probably that a peasant economy could replace the plantation economy without any serious economic loss to the community" (1987, 11). Moreover, Fowkes Tobin (1999, 173) claims that in addition to opposing the plantation system, Negro gardens and markets contradicted "plantocratic beliefs about Africans' inability to manage themselves". Both these economic and ideological explanations could explain why Kingsley deploys the myth of barbarism as a defence strategy against the continued rise of the Afro-peasantry.

Yet in cases where these gardens were considered provision grounds i.e. legitimately given out by the planters for subsistence agriculture, Kingsley had quite the opposite to say: "The 'provision grounds' of the Negroes were very interesting. I had longed to behold, alive and growing, fruits and plants which I had heard so often named" (Kingsley, 1910, 305). For Kingsley, provision grounds were "little Paradises" with "orange trees laden with fruit", "huge green fruit", "beautiful mangoes", and the "most beautiful banana and plantains". This lead him to conclude that: "There is therefore no fear that the tropical small farmer should suffer, either from want, or from monotony of food; and equally small fear lest, when his children have eaten themselves sick —as they are likely to do if, like the Negro children, they are eating all day long…" (315).

Kingsley's picturesque provision grounds, unlike the Negro gardens are aesthetic and ideological proofs that the civilization of the Negro could not be disconnected from the plantation system. In addition, according to Marshall, at this time the peasantry was responsible for introducing alternate cash crops, which were adopted by planters for export (1987, 11). Kingsley claims that: "the different varieties of yam, were very curious; and their size proved the wonderful food-producing powers of the land when properly cultivated" (75). His picturesque descriptions of the provision grounds were therefore an endorsement of the connection between Negro cultivation and planter prospect.

Interestingly, his agreement with John Stuart Mill's idea that "petite culture or small-spade farming" would be the "basis of any ideal rustic civilisation" (Kingsley, 1910, 309), gave way to a Carlylian impulse to link laziness to under-productivity. For example, even though Kingsley signifies the provision ground as a "little garden of Hesperides" he also laments that "the limit of production has not been nearly reached" for he claims that the produce can be "doubled or trebled, without exhausting the soil" (315). He claimed that the soil is "so fertile" and the "climate so genial" implying that the under-productivity of Negro cultivation constituted wastage of prospect. This under-productivity is linked to claims about the intellectual inferiority of the Negro since Kingsley writes that "increased productivity" requires the "skill and thoughtfulness" which "the Negro does not yet possess" (316). For Kingsley, the Negro lacks the ambition for industry, stating that "the negro seems inclined to sink, into a mere grower of food for himself" (316).

These constructed images of Negro savagery and threat to the plantation system are reinforced as Kingsley conscripts other racialized groups into his narrative. For example, he refers to the early indigenous Indians of Trinidad as being "poor savages", "gentle natured", "accommodating", and "beautiful, deft, and happy", as he asks the question: "How different might have been the history of Trinidad, if at that early period, while the Indians were still powerful, a little colony of English had joined them, and intermarried with them" (56-57). In this move, Kingsley mourns a missed opportunity for control over Indian labour that might not have regressed in the same fashion as African labour. By projecting a nostalgic idea of prosperity that relies on a romanticized idea of indigenous people, Kingsley's reinforces his accusatory and condemnatory tone about Negro idleness. If the Indian was conscripted to magnify the Negro as a regrettable aspect of the British Empire, the coloured person was seen to have a "civilizing and Christianizing influence". Kingsley claims that: "They knew, none so well, how much the Negro required, not merely to be instructed, but to be reclaimed from gross and ruinous vices. It was not a question in Port of Spain, any more

than it is in Martinique, of whether the Negroes should be able to read and write, but of whether they should exist on the earth as all for a few generations longer" (286).

In addition, Kingsley echoed the sentiment of the Keenan Report on education in the colony (1869), by contemplating the possibility of "saving the Negro" of his vices and morally inept propensities through religious education. He stressed that: "The priesthood were and are, doing their best to save the Negro; and they naturally wished to do their work, on behalf of society and of the colony, in their own way; and to subordinate all teaching to that of religion, which includes, within them, morality and decency" (Kingsley, 1910, 286). Yet Kingsley naturalizes the Negro's intellectual inferiority to suggest that he can never truly be saved: "when the personal influence of the White missionary is withdrawn, and the Negro left to perpetuate his sect on democratic principles, his creed merely feeds his inordinate natural vanity" (287). In this statement, Kingsley was not only reinscribing the tendency to vice as a naturalized character of the Negro, but he was also possibly repudiating John Stuart Mill's counter argument that, provided with the proper instruction Negroes would themselves inculcate civilize behaviour.

Yet, there are moments when Kingsley counters his own will to totally inscribe the "Negro character" as idle. For example, going through the Pitch Lake, La Brea, he remarks, "we pushed on across the lake, over the planks which the Negroes laid down from island to island" (152). Similarly, on visiting the Cocal region, he mentions a "Negro and Coolie carrying our scanty luggage in Arima baskets" (264). He also meets "Negroes felling timber to widen the road" (267) and "watches Negroes splitting coco-nuts" for a coconut oil business. Yet, Kingsley claims "we... could but wish all success to an industry which would be most profitable, both to the projectors and to the island itself, were it not for the uncertainty, rather than the scarcity, of labour" (277). In spite of the ambiguity implied by these labouring Negroes, Kingsley seems adamant about containing his anxiety about the "scarcity" or more so, lack of control of labour by the British and planter class.

It is also ironic that on entering Port of Spain, Kingsley framed the idleness of the "people who are doing nothing" in the *market* —an icon that represented the new fruits of labour from peasant gardens and more so the fruits of independence from the plantation. Additionally, these markets represented a repudiation of planters' beliefs that Negro industry could only be effected under British rule. According to Sidney Mintz (1985), the spaces of markets and peasant gardens provided an opportunity for ex-slaves to "assert their humanity, initiative, and intelligence", thereby counteracting the condescending imperialist discourse about their idleness, savagery and intellectual incapability.

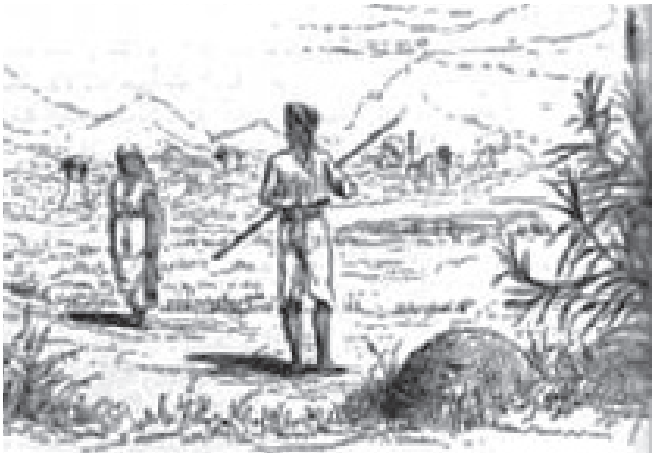
In spite of these moments of ambiguity in Kingsley's discourse, his careful and elaborate mounting of a discourse of black inferiority was aimed at justifying the set up of another, exoticizing one —that of "the promising, industrious Coolie".

## *Coolie Scripts – A Return to Order*

Prior to Kingsley's visit to Trinidad in 1871, there was considerable concern on the part of the anti-slavery party and humanitarian sections of colonial society, about the treatment of indentured Coolies imported into other British colonies, such as Mauritius and Guyana. According to Wood (1969, 107), this concern about the "abuses of coolie traffic bolstered claims that the scheme was a form of quasi-bondage". In addition, during the governorship of Lord Harris in Trinidad (1846-1854), there were complaints of Coolies being physically abused by planters, which led to the suspension of indentured immigration between 1848 and 1851. Captain and Mrs. Swinton's *Journal of a Voyage with Coolie Emigrants from Calcutta to Trinidad* (1859) had also documented instances of Coolie suffering and mortality during their shipment to Trinidad. Yet, in *At Last* the invention of Coolies is based on Kingsley's intent on depicting the prosperity of Coolie industry. Travelling in the context of a resumption of Coolie immigration to Trinidad, Kingsley's descriptions of Coolie subjects not only inscribed them as industrious, signalling a return to colonial order, but he also used the issue to illustrate the more beneficent nature of British colonial administration.

Kingsley comments extensively on the system of Coolie immigration in Trinidad, which he describes as "…admirable… satisfying the great need of the West Indies, free labourers" (95) and which he feels is a prototype for prosperity under new labour arrangements throughout the British Empire. He implores the imperial government to "adopt the system of Trinidad, and work it as it is worked there" (98). Coolie immigration to Trinidad is cast as a progressive system of which even the Indian Government is jealous, but which all takes place "at the expense of the colony". From the conditions on the voyage to treatment on the plantation to settlement, Kingsley is sure to demarcate how at each step, everything is done to protect and ensure the welfare of free Coolie labour. Not only does he state that the good treatment of indentured immigrants on the voyage "is sufficiently proved" (95), but that on their arrival in Trinidad, they are sent to the hospital. Kingsley emphatically states that it is only "the healthy that are indentured" and even more, a beneficent British rule does not allow the "separation of husbands and wives". In addition, "No estate is allowed to employ indentured Coolies, which has not a duly 'certified' hospital, capable of holding one-tenth at least of the Coolies on the estate, with an allowance of 800 cubic feet for each person…" (96).

*Figure 1*



In the sketch, "Coolies A-Field" (figure 1), both Coolie male and female labourers are depicted working in the plantation, with the factory in the distance, and the picturesque icon of the sugar cane in the immediate right of the scene. Kingsley concluded that "the average Coolie grew, during his five years' apprenticeship, a stronger, and not a weaker, man" (96), as a statement of the overall positive effects of the system of indentured labour in the colony. This statement resonated with the logic of Thomas Carlyle, that "niggers"[18] could only improve morally through industry.

In fact, Kingsley conscripts the returning Coolie to boost his claims that Coolies were "coming back a second time, bringing their kinsfolk and fellow-villagers… to a land where violence is unknown, and famine impossible". Yet, Kingsley does not appear conscious of the irony of this claim of British beneficence in relation to the "8 000 human beings in Port of Spain who are without visible means of subsistence"! (70). The Coolie labourer, confined to the plantation, Kingsley produces as "proof' of Paradise's return" or the order between capital and labour. Yet, implicit in all these assurances of protection and caring for the welfare of Coolie labour, was a fear-driven consideration that, unchecked, Coolie labour could degenerate into the situation alike to when ex-slaves withheld their labour in the immediate post-emancipation period.

The idea of British guardianship and protection of the Coolie is mounted from different perspectives. On the one hand: "these poor people are sufficiently protected by law from their white employers", while on the other, "what they need most is protection for the newcomers against the usury, or swindling, by people of their own race, especially Hindoos of the middle class, who are covetous and ill-disposed, and who use their experience of the island for their own selfish advantage" (Kingsley, 1910, 191). Kingsley is not conscious of the irony here, since it was the very British and French Creole (white ruling) segments of Trinidadian

[18] Ledgister (1999, 14) claims that: "While Carlyle used the term 'nigger' to refer to people of African origin, he appears to have meant it more broadly to apply to dark-skinned people as a reference to a form of serfdom introduced by the Dutch in Indonesia suggests".

society that were "using their experience of the island for their own selfish advantage". In fact, about "swindling and usury" Kingsley claims: "that evil Government is doing its best to put down. Already the Coolies have a far larger amount of money in the savings' banks of the island than the Negroes; and their prosperity can be safely trusted to wise and benevolent laws, enforced by men who can afford to stand above public opinion, as well as above private interest" (Kingsley, 1910, 191).

The decision to pay Coolie labourers partly in rations rather than entirely in money was taken, according to Kingsley, as it:

> [H]as been found necessary, in order to protect the Coolies both from themselves and from each other. They themselves prefer receiving the whole of their wages in cash. With that fondness for mere hard money which marks a half-educated Oriental, they will as rule, hoard their wages; and stunt themselves of food, injuring their powers of work, and even endangering their own lives; as is proved by the broad fact that the death rate among them has much decreased, especially during the first year of residence, since the plan of giving them rations has been at work. [95-96]

Kingsley's claim that the colonial government's decision was more in the interest of coolie welfare and protection from themselves, reinforced the overarching ideology of the time that *free* labour could not self-determine working conditions, but was best "cared for" under British administration. Yet, to construct this point, Kingsley relies on orientalist assumptions of Coolie prosperity being enabled by their "fondness for mere money", "harmful to each other", "self-inflicting", "self-sacrificing", and "half-educated" qualities to justify claims for British protection and regulation. If the Negro is intellectually incapable through his laziness, the Coolie is half-educated through his greed. Meanwhile, Kingsley is ambivalent not only about these very same qualities of British prosperity, but also about the indispensable roles of these immutable qualities in the island's renewed prosperity.

The discourse of protection of Coolies from themselves is also intimately connected to fears about their barbaric

regression, through the emergence of a Coolie middle class, and subsequent independence from the estates —similar to the rise of the Afro-peasantry. That Kingsley placed the threat of "regression" squarely on the "Hindoo middle class", is evident in the following quote:

> The newcomers need, too protection from their own countrymen. Old Coolies who have served their time and saved money find it convenient to turn rice-sellers or moneylenders. They have powerful connections on many estates; they first advance money or luxuries to a newcomer, and when he is entrapped, they sell him the necessaries of life at famine prices. Thus the practical effect of rations has been to lessen the number of those little roadside shops, which were a curse to Trinidad… [Kingsley, 1910, 96]

"Entrapping newcomers", "selling him necessaries at famine prices", and "little roadside shops being a curse to the colony", serve to vilify the incipient, competing Coolie middle class, while making claims for British regulation. Not only was this discourse prohibitive to Coolie middle class prosperity, but it was premised on an ideology that Coolie labour had to be centrally controlled and contained on the plantation. This was one of the main reasons why they were paid in rations rather than wages.

To ensure that Coolies remained dependent on the plantation, prevent a middle class emergence or any other configuration that would have threatened British control, Kingsley spoke of Coolie plantation labour and settlement as being in the welfare of the labourers themselves. Not only did the indentureship contract give the labourers the choice of a free return passage to "Hindostan" or exchange his right to a free passage for a Government grant of ten acres of land, but also according to Kingsley, it fostered thrift. He states that: "He (the 'Coolie') has meanwhile, if he has been thrifty, grown rich. His wife walks about, at least on high-days, bedizened with jewels… and what wealth she does not carry on her arms, ankles, neck, and nostril, her husband has in the saving's bank" (Kingsley, 1910, 98). Yet, even as Kingsley strove to present indentureship as prosperous for the coolies, he suggested that the prosperity was based on

the savage usury of the labourers themselves. For example, as he recounts an instance where one indentured man returned to Hindostan with 6 000 dollars, he suggested that this was a result of "squeezing money out of other Coolies" (98).

As per Coolie settlement on the outskirts of plantations, which would ensure an informally captive labour supply, Kingsley described what he felt was "a most satisfactory sight":

> [S]ettlers we found, clearing right and left… More than one Coolie family, who had served their apprenticeship, saved money, bought Government land, and set up as yeomen; the foundation, it is to be hoped, of a class of intelligent and civilized peasant proprietors. These men, as soon as they have cleared as much land as their wives and children, with their help, can keep in order, go off usually, in gangs of ten to fifteen, to work, in many instances, on the estates from which their originally came. [198]

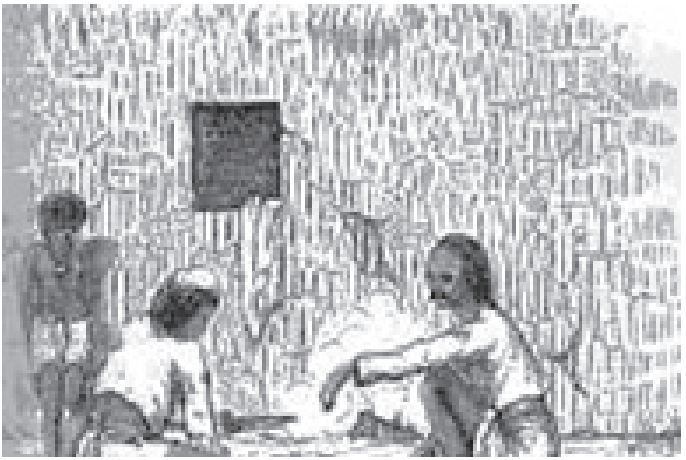
In fact, Kingsley claims that: "This fact practically refutes the opinion which was at first held by some attorneys and managers of sugar-estates, that the settling of free Indian immigrants would materially affect the labour supply of the colony" (198). This could have been a sentiment that came out of the coloured and black planter class.[19] Yet, Kingsley is quick to protect the interests of the Crown and planter class for arable land, as he states that the Coolies themselves *preferred* the "thinly-wooded, comparatively poor and unsaleable lands" (198). He thus advocates that:

> The colony at large must gain by the settlement of crown lands by civilized people like Hindoos, if it be only through the increased exports and imports; while the sugar estates will become more and more sure of a constant supply of labour, without the heavy expense of importing fresh immigrants. [Kingsley, 1910, 198]

[19] Munasinghe (2001, 52) claims that "Free Coloured planter elites openly opposed Indian immigration' arguing that it was an 'unjustified subsidy to the sugar industry'."

It is no wonder that Coolies became part of the West Indian nineteenth-century picturesque tradition[20] through their containment on or nearby plantation spaces. What Kingsley describes as a "pleasant sight", are: "Coolie settlers, who had had lands granted them in lieu of the return passage… all busily felling wood, putting up bamboo and palm-leaf cabins and settling themselves down, each one his own master, yet near enough to the sugar-estates below to get remunerative work whenever needful" (211). Similarly, Kingsley's echoed his sentiment that: "the men stood by themselves, the women by themselves; the children grouped in front; and a merrier, healthier, shrewder-looking party I have seldom seen. Complaints here were none. All seemed to look on the Squire as a father, and each face brightened when he spoke to them by name" (190).

*Figure 2*



[20] See Krista Thompson's discussion of Coolie labourers in Jamaica in her unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *The Tropicalization of the Anglophone Caribbean: The Picturesque and the Aesthetics and Politics of Space in Jamaica and The Bahamas* (2002).

*Figure 3*

In fact, his other sketches of "Coolies Cooking" (figure 2) and "A Coolie Family" (figure 3) imply a similar production of an aesthetic that served to rationalize new arrangements of labour in the interest of the British Crown. This picturesque aesthetic set up an idea of the Coolie as an enduring labouring subject who would work not merely under contract, but who would by informal persuasion, voluntarily emulate British values of industry such as peasant production, in addition to providing part-time estate labour i.e. exercise government over their own selves in the interest of plantation prosperity.

Coolie subjects were only guaranteed prosperity however, under the guardianship of the British Crown or planter. For example, Kingsley writes that at a Coolie ceremony, the men seemed "well fed, well cared for, well taught… and with a local medical man appointed for their special benefit, Coolies under such a master ought to be, and are, prosperous and happy" (191). Similarly, on visiting the 300-acre estate of a "cultivated

Scotchman" in Naparima (in southern Trinidad) Kingsley claims that "we went down to see the Coolie barracks, where the folk seemed as happy and well cared for as they were certain to be under such a master" (199). In addition, there was "plenty of garden cultivation" with people "fat and grinning" (191).

Ironic here under the colonial picturesque discourse, is how these "pleasant sights" of intelligent, civilized and happy Coolie peasant proprietors, clearing right and left, are positioned against the idea of the intellectually incapable Negro peasant proprietor who can only render the land under-productive, or even worse, against the "wild Negro" squatter, whose garden cannot be distinguished from the forest! Through this disciplining discourse of the picturesque, the Negroes' gardens imply their lack of industry —hence the reason why Kingsley paints a picture of urban poverty to justify their punishment for this. At the same time, the picturesque Coolie is also immobilized and contained on or around the plantation. So, although the images of "Coolies A-Field", "Coolies Cooking", and "Coolie Family", serve in one instance to inscribe Coolies as part of the new plantation picturesque, they also double register as ideological sites for Coolie imprisonment and segregation (from Negroes).

Yet, these "pleasant sights" according to Kingsley, must be ensured by "…a moral bond between them [employer and employed]; a bond above, or rather beneath, that of mere wages, however fairly paid, for work, however fairly done" (96). He is suspicious, stating that the existing bond of "cash-payment" ("the weakest and meanest of all bonds") should be "watched" "with such regulations as shall make it most difficult for a Coolie to be seriously or permanently wronged without direct infraction of the law…" (97). Moreover, Kingsley points out that "the law, by various provisions, at once punishes them for wilful [sic] idleness" (95). Herein Kingsley implicitly registers a fear that without a moral bond, wage payment would stimulate Coolie middle-class incipiency, loss of planter control over labour and a decline in plantation prosperity —i.e. regression into barbarism.

Although Kingsley is discursively setting up the terms and conditions under which Coolie labourers are endorsed by the imperial eye, he also relies heavily on an already prevailing

orientalist discourse[21] to produce and manage the Coolie as a cultural Other. Captain and Mrs. Swinton, in their *Journal of a Voyage with Coolie Emigrants from Calcutta to Trinidad* (1859) had already begun to impress on British audiences, the idea of Coolies as cultural others by constructing a case around immorality. Mrs. Swinton wrote:

> They have no morality whatever: if they fancy each other, they become man and wife for the time being, and change again when they please. The parents of girls will sell their children for a few rupees. I may here mention that in the island, and on the plantations which I visited, I found the same immorality was carried on, and no provision for instructing them in Christianity; on the contrary, their own heathen processions were allowed to be carried on, but good care was taken of their bodies, as there was a doctor to take charge of them. [p. 14, quoted in Cudjoe, 2003, 140].

The Coolies of *At Last* are also written in this vein, which serves to affirm their otherness, and thus construct a derogatory discourse that justifies claims for colonial civilizing agendas. This discursive discipline serves to contain and manage the idea of the Coolie and limit the possible rise of this group in the context of British economic and cultural hegemony.

Despite the picturesque depictions of Coolies on the plantation, Kingsley's introduction of the Coolie in his travelogue emphasizes their "strangeness" and alien position in Trinidad, especially in urban Trinidad:

> When you have ceased looking —even staring— at the black women and their ways, you become aware of the strange variety of races

[21] Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) gives a detailed account of how the concept of the "Orient" was systematically produced and managed by Europeans as a means of control. See Mimi Sheller's *Consuming the Caribbean* (2003) for a historical account of Orientalism in the Caribbean. She identifies some of the Oriental tropes such as "unlimited riches, unimaginable yet corruptible wealth, beyond dense jungles" and "voluptuous indolence" in the Caribbean context prior to the arrival of East-Indians in the region - a shift that she refers to as "Caribbean Orientalism" (2003, 126).

> which people the city. Here passes an old Coolie Hindoo, with nothing on but his lungee round his loins, and a scarf over his head; a white-bearded, delicate-featured old gentleman, with probably some caste-mark of red paint on his forehead, his thin limbs, and small hands and feet, contrasting with strangely with the brawny Negroes round. There comes a bright-eyed young lady, probably his daughter-in-law, hung all over with bangles, in a white muslin petticoat, crimson cotton-velvet jacket, and green gauze veil, with her naked brown baby aside on her hip; a clever smiling delicate woman, who is quite aware of the brightness of her own eyes. [Kingsley, 1910, 72]

Not only do the Coolie man and Coolie woman become scripted as culturally alien in their own particular ways, but they are inscribed against those qualities of the Negro and Negress that Kingsley perceives as uncivilized. The "delicate, gentlemanly" Coolie is figured against the "physically strong but intellectually lacking" Negro man, while the respectably-dressed, clever, smiling, delicate Coolie woman is cast against coarse, masculine and animal-like Negress.[22] Even as Kingsley uses these dignifying adjectives to signify the Coolies (suggesting that they are symbolically *in need* of such) he deploys an underlying orientalist text to inscribe the Coolie man and woman as culturally other to the New World setting. For, he describes the "Indian shawls" which "the low-caste Coolies wear", as an "Oriental instinct for harmonious hues, and those at once rich and sober" (190).

This instinct according to Kingsley was based on an orientalist assumption of the timelessness of "Oriental culture", leading him to state that the "Indian's habits have been fixed in special groves for tens of centuries" (98), so much so that Kingsley claims that he can only see "a civilization which shows

[22] Kingsley renders a similar comparative script through his experience at the races: "The Negresses, I am sorry to say, forgot themselves, kicked up their legs, shouted to the bystanders, and were altogether incondite. The Hindoo women, though showing much more limbs than the Negresses, kept them gracefully together, drew their veils round their heads, and sat coyly, half frightened, half amused, to the delight of their 'papas', or husbands…" (Kingsley, 1910, 305).

in them all day long" (100). At the same time Kingsley represents these qualities of Coolie cultural continuity as other to Trinidadian society, he is ambivalent about how it also enables his own discourses about British benevolent rule and the prospect of Coolie prosperity. For example, he rationalizes the results of a report that complained about the limited acceptance of grants of Government lands by Coolies, by stating that it is based on their "prejudices of country, creed and kin". In addition, Kingsley states that: "The Hindoo immigrant… has been trained by long ages to somewhat scientific agriculture, and civilised into the want of many luxuries for which the Negro cares nothing; and it is to him we must look, I think, for a 'petite culture' which will do justice to the inexhaustible wealth of West Indian soil and climate" (316).

Kingsley also pointed out the "evil over-early marriage among the Coolies", "wife-murders", "Coolie sacrificing" (i.e. religious rituals), and "petty assumptions of old tribal distinctions", in assembling his orientalist inscription of the Coolie as cultural Other. Regarding religious practices is particular, Kingsley felt that "Hindoos" were "heathen folk" and "savage". He wrote that:

> [t]he coolie temples are curious places to those who have never before been face to face with real heathendom. Their mark is, generally, a long bamboo with a pennon atop, outside a low dark hut, with a broad flat verandah, or rather shed, outside the door… on the walls are little pictures, often very well executed in miniature-like Hindoo style by native artists… [Kingsley, 1910, 300]

This elaborate description of "heathendom" leads Kingsley to lament on "all this trumpery and nonsense, on which the poor folk seem to spend much money" (300). He further stated: "all I could do on looking at these heathen idol chapels, in the midst of a Christian and civilized land, was to ponder, in sadness and astonishment, over a puzzle as yet to me inexplicable; namely how human beings first got into their heads the vagary of worshipping images" (300). Kingsley's sketch of "Coolie Sacrificing" (figure 4), reinforced this notion of the "Hindoo"

as a cultural Other (morally degenerate) on the "predominantly Christian" Trinidadian landscape. In fact, although sketches such as "Coolies A-field", "A Coolie Family", and "Coolies Cooking" also portrayed an image of a kept labour force, they also double registered as sites of the Coolie's cultural strangeness and a denial of New World status. This would have also placed them at a serious disadvantage to the projects of incipient national identity, which Cudjoe (2003) claims began earlier in the nineteenth century.

Thus at the same time the "first glimpse of Hindoos; and still more of Hindoos in the West Indies" convinced Kingsley about the good care and treatment of the Coolies, he also used it as a sight/site for contemplating a derogatory discourse that would justify attempts to civilize them. The very qualities of otherness which he cited, were those he undisputedly fixed as emanating from "one of the oldest civilizations of the old world, come hither to replenish the new" (Kingsley, 1910, 99). Kingsley concluded that these qualities of "Hindoo" civilization "must make it easy for the Englishman, if he will but do his duty,

*Figure 4*

not only to make use of these people, but to purify and ennoble them" (100). Hence, when faced with the problem of poor Coolie attendance at secular schools, Kingsley advocated that religious instruction was "better to effect moral discipline, rather than mere anarchy and idleness" (290).

### *Contradistinctive Ordering of Others*

Throughout the previous two sections, it is evident that Kingsley's vilification of the Negro was carried out in direct relation to the scripting of Coolie labour.[23] Both these discursive strands served to construct and organize Negroes and Coolies *vis a vis* each other, as inhabiting this comparative difference from two contentious positions. Conditioned by the colonizer's intent of creating labour competition and hence wage reduction, both Hindoos and Negroes were measured on the British yardstick of "thrift and industry", with lazy Negroes positioned below the industrious "Hindoo peasant-proprietors". Kingsley's sketch, "Coolie and Negro" (figure 5), which depicts a sitting Negro and a Coolie walking with implement to the cane field, sufficiently communicates this ideological divide. If Coolies were admitted as the new industrious subjects of British-Trinidadian Paradise, then the same terms of admission equally expelled the "idle Negro".

Moreover, this moment of economic manoeuvring also reconstituted and relied on the inscription of a moral discourse that conditionally conferred civilized status upon Coolies, while Negroes were represented as morally degenerate. Both ideological and economic manoeuvres were aimed at re-stabilizing British hegemony, and the dominance of a plantation economy, by repositioning colonized groups. This re-positioning resulted and in turn relied on constructing an antagonistic difference between

[23] Sheller (2003, 108) draws from Sara Ahmed's *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Postcoloniality (2000)* to make the point that an Other can also be recognized by "telling the difference between this other and other others".

Negroes and Coolies that started well before Kingsley's arrival in the West Indies,[24] but which *At Last* would authorize for circulation in subsequent colonial texts on Trinidad.[25] Kingsley claimed:

> No wonder that the two races do not, and it is to be feared never will amalgamate; that the Coolie, shocked by the unfortunate awkwardness of gesture and vulgarity of manners of the average Negro, and still more of the Negress, looks on them as savages; while the Negro, in his turn, hates the Coolie as a hard-working

*Figure 5*

[24] From as early as 1851 in the article "Treatment of Our Indian Coolies at Trinidad" carried in the *Trinidadian,* East Indians and Africans were being positioned in opposition to each other, mainly on the grounds of labour. The East Indians were viewed as "more valuable labourer than the African", and "In the matter of natural intelligence, the Calcutta coolie is immeasurably superior to the African. He has all the qualities of a man, without any propensities of a brute. The African is destitute of the former, but unusually festive in the latter" (quoted in Cudjoe, 2003, 136-137).

[25] For example, James Anthony Froude's *The English in the West Indies* (1888).

> interloper, and despises him as a heathen; or that heavy fights between the two races arise now and then, in which Coolie, in spite of his slender limbs, has generally the advantage over the burly Negro, by dint of his greater courage, and the terrible quickness with which he wields his beloved weapon, the long hardwood quarterstaff. [101]

In this statement, the Coolie is made to despise the "savage nature" of the Negro, while the Negro is made to despise both the Coolie's industriousness and cultural Otherness. Yet both these groups and the Chinese were all differently positioned Others in relation to the white and coloured Creole segments. Kingsley observes at the Governor's Court that the "white and coloured Creoles" were all enjoying the "star-spangled night" and "mountain ridges against the black-blue sky" while the "crowd of… Negroes, Coolies, Chinese —all grinning and peeping upward against the railing, in the hope of seeing— through the walls —the 'buccra quality' enjoying themselves" (75).

Similarly, in his sketch, "Waiting for the Races" (figure 6), Kingsley depicts these three colonized groups: Negroes who he professes to be "in their glory"; Coolies who "seemed as merry

*Figure 6*

as the Negroes" and Chinese from whose faces "flickered, at times a feeble ray of interest". Yet only in-group gestures of conversation are depicted as if each group is a separate, unrelated microcosm of Trinidadian society. The Negro is depicted reclining as a mark of indolence, though clothed in Western attire, while the Coolie is depicted through attire, as alien to the cultural setting.[26] That Kingsley imputed the Negro's savagery as well as the Coolie's otherness, though not in the same manner or degree, was also an implicit plea for increased white settlement in Trinidad. He wished of Trinidad, that "a higher state of civilization may people it with a race worthy of it… a race calling themselves Christian, calling themselves civilized" (154). He emphasized to his metropolitan readers that the "false civilisation" of Britain ("vain desires and useless show") could be abandoned, and instead "a cultivated man and wife, keeping a Coolie servant… would be a little centre of civilisation for the Negro, the Coolie" (105) in the colony.

It is therefore implicit in Kingsley's positioning of Negroes and Coolies *vis a vis* each other that he sought to re-establish the legacy of British superiority in Trinidad. Not only was this discursive project effected through an indirect plea for increased British settlement, but by organizing colonized others (Coolie and Negro) to recognize and reinforce each other through their constructed otherness.

## Conclusions

In this paper I have attempted to unpack Charles Kingsley's late nineteenth-century Victorian travel narrative, *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies*, to understand the ways in which his travelogue represented colonized subjects in Trinidad. By

[26] I have not attempted to deconstruct Kingsley's construction of the Chinese simply because not much is said about this group. His portrayal of the Chinese as dressed in Chinese attire also stresses their strangeness, but any attempt to read this must be accompanied by understanding of specific history of Chinese immigrant labour in Trinidad, and their subsequent rapid emergence into a minority middle class.

elucidating some of the key discursive shifts around race consciousness in the British Empire in the context of the post-emancipation (1838-1871) West Indian labour question, I have attempted a contrapuntal reading of *At Last*. Not only did emancipation cause an economic crisis in the profitability of the West Indian plantation, but the black subject's greater control over its own labour and self-determination, destabilized the pre-emancipation ideology of Empire in which Britishness was constituted in relation to designated others (slaves). As both planters in Trinidad and philosophers in Britain struggled to manage this ideological crisis, the idea of the "Negro character" was re-evaluated as part of a disciplinary apparatus for re-stabilizing notions of order.

Charles Kingsley's *At Last* was written as part of this post-emancipation ideological project of re-positioning "Trinidad" as a site that re-stabilized the idea of British hegemonic rule. This act of re-positioning was authorized by Kingsley's circular "master-of-all-I-survey" narrative, in which he sought to apply preconceived ideas to experience in order to re-know or re-invent Trinidad in the British consciousness. In this way, *At Last* is Kingsley's will to re-power a visual regime by re-structuring relations of dominance between colonizer and colonized groups. Gikandi (1994, 58) writes in the same tone that the representation of colonial space in *At Last* served to commemorate and thus re-stage Englishness, unencumbered.

In re-casting Trinidad in a wider moral discourse about British civilization in the West Indies, Kingsley contemplated the "Negro character" in the same mode as his British intellectual contemporaries such as Thomas Carlyle and Anthony Trollope, who rationalized Negro flight from the plantation, as a product of black indolence and moral decay. The pivot for this re-invention was the continuity of a pre-emancipation logic that the Negro could only be civilized by labouring on the plantation. Kingsley's repetitive and vilifying discourse about Negro physiognomy, attitudes, and activities such a small-scale cultivation, served to reinforce notions of their laziness, moral degeneracy and inferior status and thus represent them as "naturally" different from civilized society. Moreover, their inferiority is "marked

by their *inability to desire* property and master labour value" (Gikandi, 1994, 63). Yet there are moments of ambivalence in Kingsley's overdetermination of black indolence that reinforce the indispensability of Negro labour to British enterprise and his own travel project. His meditations on Negro gardens also reflect the degree of autonomy that Negroes had begun to express as Trinidad's Afro-peasantry consolidated. These under-currents (Other voices) Kingsley swiftly contained (silenced) by his reification of a pejorative and accusatory discourse about Negro savagery and the plantation decline. "Blackness" according to Gikandi (1994, 61) becomes the mark of radical difference, against which Englishness is constantly recentered. To put it another way, only by naturalizing blacks as different (i.e. savage) from Europeans, could pleas for reinventing a post-emancipation cultivated paradise be leveraged.

Indentured Coolies, systematically scripted as the new labour and hence the return of British plantation prosperity, are also central to the recentering of British hegemony in Trinidad. Kingsley's framing of the new labouring subject, driven by the fear of idleness, is more so a contemplation of a new discursive disciplining of labour, through which the Coolie is desirous of small enterprise *and* maintaining labour relations with the plantation. In addition, Coolie immigration is held up to the domestic space, as a monument of British benevolence —the only terms under which they are guaranteed civilized status. Yet, while Kingsley's production of the Coolie serves to recenter British superiority (by denigrating blackness), the transplantation of an orientalist discourse about their cultural saturatedness, serves to alienate them in Trinidad's Creole society. They become the strange cultural Other against which the differential civilized status of all other groups (including Negroes) are procured, based on the degree of assimilation of European culture. Yet, Coolies speak against the imperial grain in Kingsley's discursive assemblage of the threat of Coolie middle class incipiency. They employ the very orientalist assumptions of thrift, greed, self-sacrifice, etc. to enable a condition of greater independence from the plantation. This is why Kingsley has to

discursively contain this threat by emphasizing their protection and welfare at the hands of the British, while vilifying the Coolie middle class. What I find very interesting, and in urgent need of further research is how, Coolies in the New World context were seen to "orientalize" that part of the New World with which they came into contact *instead* of being "new-worldified" by contact.[27]

*At Last* is therefore a discursive strategy aimed at positioning and managing the Negro and Coolie as differently inflected but intimately related Others, in relation to Kingsley's quest for stabilizing ideas about British superiority in the colonial space. The positioning of both others as opposites in this project relied on the construction of an antagonistic difference based British yardsticks of civilization and savagery. In so doing, Kingsley was inventing a discourse that would have enduring power in (post) colonial Trinidad —what Munasinghe (2001) refers to as "foretelling ethnicity". My reading of *At Last* has in most part, replicated the "Saidian" dilemma that British imperial discourse wielded a more or less totalizing power, although at moments (e.g. signs of an Afro-peasantry or an incipient coolie middle class) there have been instances where the Others speaks back, or where the text serves as a critique of imperial processes. However, I feel that in the context of the crisis of British rule in the West Indies and its need to reinvent an epistemological reality about the colonial space that Kingsley's text was strategic in re-positioning the colonizer to speak for and on behalf of the colonized. Yet, it is because of this crisis that I feel there is still considerable room for another visit to Charles Kingsley's "Trinidad" to look for signs of slippage as instances when the colonized was not only resisting, but offering different histories of colonial power that are yet to be told.

E-mail: amarwahab@hotmail.com
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[27] This question is adapted from Edward Agnew Paton's *Down the Islands: A Voyage in the Caribbees* (1888, 206), which is quoted in Sheller (2003, 125).

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