

Aimé Césaire: Interfaces with the Past and the Present

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The African Diaspora is the primary demographic and cultural product of the present world system, now five hundred years old. Indeed, while plans for celebration of the epitomizing event, the Columbian Discovery, are advancing, it is well to call to mind what indeed is being celebrated: nothing less than the abrupt re-arrangement of millennial geopolitical patterns, and the imposition by arms and fiat of the first planetary super polity.

The dizzying sequence of events following hard upon the conquest of Granada and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 is instructive. The voyages of Columbus, the voyages of the Cabots, the voyage of Cabral to Brazil, and the eventual circumnavigation of the globe by the expedition of Magellan, provided the basis for sea-faring exploitation of the globe by Christian Europe, an exploitation whose rewards were arrogated to the maritime powers. The maritime explosion itself made possible by the magnetic needle, is situated between two cultural events of the greatest importance, one technological, the other ideological, namely the development of printing from movable type and the Protestant Reformation. These two events interact in a fundamental manner with the maritime expansion that provided the modern world system, providing important means of communication and documentation on the one hand and an added incentive to