

Liberating the Caribbean Imagination: Illuminating The Lloyd Best
Archive in Trinidad and Tobago through digitization, preservation, and
access

A proposal to the Latin American Materials Project from The Lloyd Best Institute of The West
Indies and The Watkinson Library at Trinity College, Hartford, CT
April 26, 2019

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Description and Rationale

Title

Liberating the Caribbean Imagination: Illuminating The Lloyd Best Archive in Trinidad and Tobago through digitization, preservation, and access

Project Description*

The Lloyd Best Institute of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago is partnering with Trinity College in Hartford to digitize the Lloyd Best Archive, preserve it according to OAIS standards, and make it accessible. The collection consists of newspapers, research papers, correspondence (personal and professional), hand-written notes in copybooks, speeches, flyers, pamphlets, consultancy reports.

Lloyd Best was a Caribbean man and an economist by training. Best spent his life trying to understand, develop, and integrate the Caribbean. His thinking, writing, teaching, publishing, organising, and political activity were all devoted to these ends. This project seeks to make his work available to a wider audience while preserving his rich contributions to Caribbean history, thought and culture.

We seek funding to digitize his archive, preserve it for the long term using Preservica and make these materials openly accessible. We plan to digitize the archive in Trinidad with the exception of the Audio Visual Materials which will be digitized by The MediaPreserve.

Reasons for Consideration*

Best's lifelong conviction was that the Caribbean needed to find its own path towards a development defined on its own terms. For him, the greatest challenge facing the region was that of liberating the Caribbean imagination, and rebuilding its damaged psyche after the devastation of the colonial experience. As he saw it, the task of the Caribbean people was to create a new society out of the many fragments of cultures brought here, under duress, in the service of European colonial expansion. He was fierce in his insistence that the Caribbean should embrace this responsibility without falling into the trap of borrowed ideologies and borrowed solutions.

This perspective led him to develop the Plantation Theory of Economy and Society, which explains the modern Caribbean as a product of its unique history. Out of this historical framework, he developed a broad range of culturally relevant proposals for reforming almost every sphere of Caribbean life—education, economy, government, art, culture, science, sport, business, community and family.

Lloyd Best drew his inspiration from looking at the lives of Caribbean people and urged others to do the same. He believed that the people of the Caribbean could master the challenges of creating a viable civilization if they were true to the reality they observed in front of them. With this in mind, he encouraged his students to map the landscape around them from the perspective of their respective disciplines. He saw enormous scope for original research and encouraged young people to commit their energies to whatever work excited and inspired them.

Best, the second of twelve children, was born in 1934 in Tunapuna, Trinidad. After completing his secondary education at Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain, Best went to

Cambridge University on an island scholarship. He moved on to Oxford University for his post-graduate education, then worked in Paris for a short time. In the late 1950s, a period of heightened political consciousness in the Caribbean, when the Independence movement was gaining momentum, Best returned home from Europe. From that time on, he dedicated his life to the Caribbean, seeking connections with others who shared his vision and goals and championing the Caribbean cause all over the world.

Lloyd Best believed passionately in the importance of democratic engagement and organized discussion groups everywhere he went. In the 1960s, he founded the New World Group, a highly influential group of intellectuals in the Caribbean. He later founded the Tapia House Group in Trinidad, out of which came a political party, the Tapia House Movement, and the weekly *Tapia* newspaper. Tapia contested the 1976 elections without success, but later became a key force in building the opposition alliance that led to the birth of the National Alliance for Reconstruction. Best chose to stay out of that party, which swept to office in 1986. He was twice Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, in 1974-75 and 1981-83.

Best worked as an economist throughout his career, most often with the United Nations Development Programme. He was a senior lecturer in economics at the St Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies, but resigned in 1976 to start the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of the West Indies, now known as the Lloyd Best Institute of the West Indies. In 1977, he launched the *Trinidad and Tobago Review* newspaper, which continued to be published until 2012. In 2007, Best died of cancer at his home in Tunapuna, about a mile from the house where he was born. The Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean continues its work in his name and in honor of his belief in the people of the Caribbean and in the eventual triumph of the Caribbean spirit.

This is an extremely unique and rich archival collection. Digitizing, preserving and making this archive accessible would make it an excellent resource for scholars both in the Caribbean and beyond. It would also allow for collaborative research among Latin American and Caribbean scholars, activists and educators.

Authors

Authors of the collection: Lloyd Best, Sunity Maharaj-Best, and others
Proposal Author: Christina Bleyer

Proposal Contributors

Sunity Maharaj-Best

Carmel Best

Christina Bleyer, PhD, Director of Special Collections and Archives, Trinity College

Maurice Wade, PhD, Professor of Philosophy, International Studies and Public Policy, Trinity College

Details and Sources

Resource Types*

- Archival materials including paper and photos
- Newspapers
- Printed Ephemera
- Other: Audio Visual Material

Regions*

Latin America and Caribbean

Countries of Origin*

Trinidad and Tobago

Major Languages

English

Source Format*

Paper
Audio
Video

Target Format

Digital

Identifiers

N/A

Links

<https://lloydbest.institute/about-the-lloyd-best-institute-of-the-caribbean/>

Source and Holdings

Location	Format	Holdings/Range	Notes
Lloyd Best Institute of The Caribbean	Paper and Audio Visual Materials	Approximately 100 linear feet of paper based Archival Materials and the following AV materials 9 U-matic tapes 13 reel-to-reel 5 Beta 49 VHS 60 audio cassettes 50 mini-dvs 1 DV-Cam	All are in good condition, though film needs to be digitized/preserved as soon as possible

Source and Holdings Notes

The Lloyd Best Archive is held at The Lloyd Best Institute of The West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago. It comprises the corpus of his work and all of the materials that need to be digitized are together at the institute.

Physical Details

Most of this collection is 8.5x11 paper. There are oversized newspapers that are a bit fragile and will require some special handling and possibly digitization through the use of photography. The collection also contains photographs that are in good condition and audio visual materials in the formats listed above. All materials are housed at The Lloyd Best Institute of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago.

Existing Reformatted Materials

This archive has not been digitized.

Intellectual Property Considerations

Copyright to these materials belong to the three daughters of Lloyd Best who wish to make these materials accessible and available with open access.

Appendix 1: Letter of Support from Maurice Wade, PhD

April 25, 2019

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am extremely pleased to write in enthusiastic support of the proposal to the Latin American Materials Project put forth by The Watkinson Library and The Lloyd Best Institute of The West Indies.

My own work in recent years has focused on Afro-Caribbean thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and C.L.R. James and I am currently working on the social and political ideas of Lloyd Best (more on this below). I have also been working for the last year with undergraduate students to develop an online archive of Caribbean anti-colonial thought that will eventually become a continuing project of Trinity College's Center for Caribbean studies. Undergraduate students will, with faculty supervision, work to update, expand, and improve the archive in the years to come.

Christina's proposal clearly articulates the importance of digitizing and organizing the Lloyd Best archive, so I will begin by addressing my relationship to the archive. On my first visit to Trinity College's study-abroad site in Trinidad and Tobago (Trinbago), I had the good fortune to visit the Lloyd Best Institute of the West Indies. There, I met Sunity Maharaj-Best, Best's widow, and had the opportunity to learn a bit about Best's ideas. Also, at that meeting, I learned of a very large collection of hand-written notebooks of Best's that he apparently referred to as his 'copybooks'. Sunity gave me permission to work on these copybooks in order to study the philosophical foundations and sources of Best's social and political ideas and activism. She felt that a philosopher's approach would be best suited for working through the content of these handwritten texts. And, for some time, I have been engaged in the very slow process of deciphering them.

Accordingly, I am more than a little familiar with the thinking of Lloyd Best and have long wished that the means could be secured to preserve and organize the large collection of his various materials. On each of my visits to the Lloyd Best Institute of the West Indies, I have felt the fear that eventually these materials could be lost, would likely be lost, if they remain only in paper form. Indeed, at an earlier stage of Best's career, his office suffered a fire and many of his papers, periodicals, and books were lost. Even barring a catastrophe of this sort happening again, the toll that time will take on these materials, if they remain only in paper form could be, would likely be, extremely considerable.

This fear motivated me, some years ago, to secure a small Faculty Research Grant from Trinity to purchase a couple of scanners and to hire a student part-time to scan Best's copybooks. We made some progress, but the copybooks are only a very small part of the collection of Best's materials that need to be preserved and organized. And, the student and I simply did not have the skills and expertise of a trained archivist.

So, I was thrilled to learn of this project. The work that they will do will completely allay my fears about the possibility, likelihood, of the loss of the Best archive. This project will result in the preservation of these materials against the inevitable ravages of time should they remain only in paper form. Christina is an expert archivist and so has the skills not only to ensure the digitization of these materials but to turn them in to an organized archive and thereby to render them in a form that will be a boon to scholars. This is very exciting!

Best's copybooks were only intended to be read by Best himself and they show his thought in embryonic form. They were not written to be easily intelligible to anyone but Best himself. I have found that deciphering the copybooks is made somewhat easier as I become increasingly acquainted with Best's thought as it was articulated in more fully developed form in lectures, editorials, essays, etc. Having the Best archive digitized and collected in collaboration with an expert archivist, like Christina, one who is very conversant with the needs of scholars, will be extremely valuable for my own work. And, I am confident that the kind of access that will be enabled by this work will motivate other scholars to plumb the depths and breadth of Best's ideas and activities. For instance, scholars working within or on the decolonial studies paradigm will find much kinship between that paradigm and Best's ideas and will find those ideas very fruitful for further developing their own work, especially those decolonial scholars working to illuminate both the historical and contemporary social realities of Trinbago in particular and the Anglophone Caribbean more generally.

This project is extremely important and will greatly help efforts at locating Best within what I refer to as the greater archive of Caribbean social and political thought and activism. It will certainly make my work on Best considerably easier and more fruitful. It will also be very, very valuable to my project of working with undergraduates to develop an online archive of Caribbean anti-colonial thought. I very strongly urge, and enthusiastically recommend, that the Latin American Materials Project support this endeavor in order to bring this project to fruition. The expertise and the commitment needed to ensure success in this work are present. I am certainly more than willing to provide any assistance that might be helpful to this project.

If I can do anything to further support this proposal, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Maurice L. Wade
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Appendix 2. Link to estimate from MediaPreserve:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6lbcgXO2zumeEZ6bFZROWFXZGNTZ0VsRGFjSVAtSW9XY0VN/view?usp=sharing>