

# Vic Reid – a pioneer in J'can literature

H/N - Literature, JA - Vic Reid

VICTOR STAFFORD Reid wrote his first novel in 1940 as a sort of release from the drudgery of life while working as a clerk at Frome sugar estate in Westmoreland.

That book was never published, but his next novel, 'New Day', which tells the story of the famous Morant Bay Rebellion, went on to earn for him international acclaim unmatched by any Jamaican writer at that time and was considered his best piece of literature. He rewrote the book six times before he was satisfied.

'New Day' attracted attention

in and out of the West Indies.

In writing the book, he made a breakthrough for West Indian literature by using the vernacular as the medium of narration. He was described as an exacting literary craftsman with unique technique in language sensitive to the Jamaican reality.

But even though 'New Day' was his starting point, his multifaceted contribution to the growth



of national awareness of the many epic struggles waged by the masses against exploitative social, economic and political relations in the past was expressed in his work as a journalist and writer, cultural anthropologist and

historian.

Vic Reid was born in Kingston on May 1, 1913, and was educated at Kingston Technical High School and by private tutors.

During his early life he worked

as a farm overseer, a newspaper reporter and at different times edited the weekly newspaper **Public Opinion** and the news magazine **Spotlight**.

History was a major subject and stimulus for Vic Reid's imagination. His second novel, 'The Leopard', an account of Mau-Mau activities in Kenya, was also described as a landmark. Vic Reid also wrote 'Mount Ephraim', set in the era of the Sam Sharpe Rebellion, and 'The Jamaicans', a moving account of the Juan de Bolas story.

Vic Reid was regarded as a pioneer in the area of fiction for young people. When "Sixty Five" was published in 1960, there was a dearth of local fiction written for young Jamaicans.

He once declared that one of his motives for writing was "to have black people feel proud of themselves and their history."

Reid was awarded the Order of Jamaica for his contribution to Jamaican literature and also won the coveted Norman Manley Award for Excellence for his work in the field.



Vic Reid ■

His talents were also recognized and rewarded by the United States, Canada and Mexico which granted him fellowships to further his career.

Reid's works have become standard text books for black studies in Jamaica, the Caribbean, England and North America.

So committed to the country was Vic Reid, that he once declared: "My love of this country will be the death of me." He died August 25, 1987, aged 74.

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