

= Learie Constantine =

Learie Nicholas Constantine , Baron Constantine , (21 September 1901 ? 1 July 1971) was a West Indian cricketer , lawyer and politician who served as Trinidad 's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and became the UK 's first black peer . He played 18 Test matches before the Second World War and took the West Indies ' first wicket in Test cricket . An advocate against racial discrimination , in later life he was influential in the passing of the 1965 Race Relations Act in Britain . He was knighted in 1962 and made a life peer in 1969 .

Born in Trinidad , Constantine established an early reputation as a promising cricketer , and was a member of the West Indies teams that toured England in 1923 and 1928 . Unhappy at the lack of opportunities for black people in Trinidad , he decided to pursue a career as a professional cricketer in England , and during the 1928 tour was awarded a contract with the Lancashire League club Nelson . He played for the club with distinction between 1929 and 1938 , while continuing as a member of the West Indies Test team in tours of England and Australia . Although his record as a Test cricketer was less impressive than in other cricket he helped to establish a uniquely West Indian style of play . He was chosen as one of the Wisden Cricketers of the Year in 1939 .

During the Second World War , Constantine worked for the Ministry of Labour and National Service as a Welfare Officer responsible for West Indians employed in English factories . In 1943 , the manager of a London hotel refused to accommodate Constantine and his family on the grounds of their race ; Constantine successfully sued the hotel company . Commentators recognise the case as a milestone in British Racial Equality . Constantine qualified as a barrister in 1954 , while also establishing himself as a journalist and broadcaster . He returned to Trinidad in 1954 , entered politics and became a founding member of the People 's National Movement , subsequently entering the Trinidad government as minister of communications . From 1961 to 1964 , he served as Trinidad 's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and , controversially , became involved in issues relating to racial discrimination , including the Bristol Bus Boycott . In his final years , he served on the Race Relations Board , the Sports Council and the Board of Governors of the BBC . Failing health reduced his effectiveness in some of these roles , and he faced criticism for becoming a part of the British Establishment . He died of a heart attack on 1 July 1971 , aged 69 .

= = Early life = =

Constantine was born in Petit Valley , a village close to Diego Martin in north @-@ west Trinidad , on 21 September 1901 , the second child of the family and the eldest of three brothers . His father , Lebrun Constantine , was the grandchild of slaves ; Lebrun rose to the position of overseer on a cocoa estate in Cascade , near Maraval , where the family moved in 1906 . Lebrun was famous on the island as a cricketer who represented Trinidad in first @-@ class cricket and toured England twice with a West Indian team . Constantine 's mother , Anaise Pascall , was the daughter of slaves , and her brother Victor , was also a Trinidad and West Indian first @-@ class cricketer ; a third family member , Constantine 's brother Elias , later represented Trinidad . Constantine wrote that although the family was not wealthy , his childhood was happy . He spent a lot of time playing in the hills near his home or on the estates where his father and grandfather worked . He enjoyed cricket from an early age ; the family regularly practised together under the supervision of Lebrun and Victor Pascall .

Constantine first went to the St Ann 's Government School in Port of Spain , then attended St Ann 's Roman Catholic School until 1917 . He displayed little enthusiasm for learning and never reached a high academic standard , but showed prowess at several sports and was respected for his cricketing lineage . He played for the school cricket team , which he captained in his last two years , by which time he was developing a reputation as an attacking batsman , a good fast @-@ medium bowler and an excellent fielder . His father prohibited him from playing competitive club cricket until 1920 for fear of premature exposure to top @-@ class opposition while too young ; in addition , he first wanted his son to establish a professional career . Upon leaving school Constantine joined Jonathan Ryan , a firm of solicitors in Port of Spain , as a clerk . This was a possible route into the

legal profession ; however , as a member of the black lower @-@ middle class , he was unlikely to progress far . Few black Trinidadians at this time became solicitors , and he faced many social restrictions owing to his colour .

= = Cricket career = =

= = = Cricket in Trinidad = = =

In 1916 , before his father imposed a ban on competitive cricket , Constantine had played briefly for Shannon Cricket Club ; he returned to the club in 1920 . Initially , he appeared in the second team , but after scoring 50 runs in an hour during his third game , was promoted to the first eleven . Cricket in Trinidad at the time was divided along racial lines ; Shannon was mainly for black lower middle @-@ class players such as teachers or clerks . The club was competitive and highly motivated , partly as a reaction to the racial discrimination that its players and supporters encountered in their daily lives . Constantine 's cricket thrived in this atmosphere , and the club helped to form some of his political views . He particularly noticed that in Trinidadian and West Indian cricket , white and light @-@ skinned players were often favoured over black players of greater ability .

Constantine 's reputation continued to grow . An innings for Shannon in 1921 against renowned fast bowler George John received great local publicity , but according to the cricket writer and social historian C. L. R. James , this was the only time prior to 1928 that Constantine played in such an effective way . Constantine 's father , still a formidable player , did not put himself forward for selection into the Trinidad team in 1921 , in the hope that his son would replace him . The white captain of the Trinidad team , Major Bertie Harragin , recognised the younger Constantine 's promise , and selected him to play in Trinidad 's Inter @-@ Colonial Tournament match against British Guiana . Unfortunately , Constantine arrived late after a newspaper advertised the wrong starting time , and did not play . However , he made his first @-@ class debut in the following match , the final of the tournament , against Barbados on 21 September 1921 . He scored a duck in his first innings , batting at number eight in the batting order . After taking two wickets at a cost of 44 runs in Barbados ' only innings , he scored 24 in his second innings , batting at number three .

Constantine played for Trinidad in the next Inter @-@ Colonial Tournament , in British Guiana in 1922 . Although in two games he scored only 45 runs and took four wickets , commentators considered his fielding in the covers to be exceptional , and he retained his place in the team largely as a fielder . Although Trinidad lost to Barbados in the final , the Barbados captain Harold Austin , who was also captain of the West Indies team , was impressed by Constantine . Mainly on the strength of his fielding , Austin secured Constantine 's selection for the 1923 West Indian tour of England ; it was a surprising choice , as there were other candidates who appeared to have stronger claims . By this time Constantine was working for Llewellyn Roberts , a larger solicitors ' practice which paid better . As his new employer 's longer working hours restricted Constantine 's cricket practice , when he was selected for the West Indies tour he resigned his position .

= = = Tour of England in 1923 = = =

The 1923 West Indies touring team played 21 first @-@ class matches in England , of which six were won , seven lost and the others drawn . The team 's relative success , and particularly the performance of leading batsman George Challenor , persuaded English critics that West Indies cricket was stronger than previously supposed ; this was instrumental in the promotion of the team to Test match status in 1928 . Challenor was the biggest individual success of the tour , but Constantine impressed English critics , through his style of play more than his statistical achievements . He played 20 first @-@ class matches on the tour , scoring 425 runs at an average of 15 @. @ 74 and taking 37 wickets at an average of 21 @. @ 86 . Against Oxford University , he scored 77 , his maiden first @-@ class fifty ; his only other half century came against Derbyshire . He also took five wickets in an innings for the first time , in the match against Kent .

Wisden Cricketers ' Almanack recorded that his batting , while highly unorthodox in technique , could be very effective when he was in form . Wisden also noted that his bowling was fast . Several English players , including Jack Hobbs , singled out Constantine as an unusually talented cricketer on the strength of his performances in 1923 . Pelham Warner , a former England captain and influential journalist and administrator , described Constantine after the tour as the best fielder in the world ; his fielding was also praised by the press and in the pages of Wisden . James later wrote : " He is a success , but he has not set the Thames on fire , and , what is more , he hasn 't tried to . "

== Mid @-@ 1920s career ==

John Arlott later commented that , on his first tour of England , Constantine " learnt much that he never forgot , by no means all of it about cricket : and he recognised the game as his only possible ladder to the kind of life he wanted . " When Constantine returned to Trinidad , he had no permanent job and little prospect of advancement in any suitable profession . He took several temporary jobs but was often forced to rely financially upon his family . However , his success had inspired him to pursue a career as a professional cricketer in England , and he began to practise to reach the required standard . Although he scored 167 for Shannon in 1924 , and took eight for 38 for Trinidad against Barbados , Constantine 's cricket was steady but not consistently successful . He was initially dropped from the West Indies team to face the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) touring team during 1926 , though he was recalled for the second match , once again at the insistence of Austin , who wanted a good cover fielder in the team . In the match Constantine was involved in an incident over short @-@ pitched bowling . The MCC fast bowlers had bowled short at the 49 @-@ year @-@ old Austin ; in retaliation , Constantine bounced the MCC captain , Freddie Calthorpe , and only stopped after James pointed out the diplomatic row which would follow if Calthorpe , a respected figure in the British establishment , was hit by the ball . Once more , Constantine 's performances were not statistically exceptional , but his style impressed critics and spectators , and he came top of the West Indies bowling averages .

A new , permanent job with Trinidad Leaseholds allowed Constantine to devote more time to cricket . Constantine realised that to succeed as a professional cricketer , he needed to improve ; his bowling lacked true speed and , when batting , he was often dismissed playing shots which were too adventurous . After his relative failure in 1926 , he increased his level of practice , improved his fitness and trained to become a slip fielder to conserve his energies for genuine fast bowling . In the trial matches before the 1928 tour of England , Constantine secured his place on the tour by taking five for 32 and scoring 63 . He left behind his wife Norma , whom he had married in 1927 , and his newly @-@ born daughter .

== Tour of England in 1928 ==

Constantine 's main objective on the 1928 tour was to secure a contract to play cricket professionally in England . James wrote that Constantine " had revolted against the revolting contrast between his first @-@ class status as a cricketer and his third @-@ class status as a man ... The restraints imposed upon him by social conditions in the West Indies had become intolerable and he decided to stand them no longer . " According to James , Constantine would never have left Trinidad had he been able to live with " honour [and] a little profit " . In the tour 's opening first @-@ class match , against Derbyshire , Constantine began his second innings when the West Indians needed 40 runs to win ; in seven scoring shots , Constantine hit 31 runs and took the team to a two @-@ wicket victory . In the following match he scored his maiden first @-@ class century , 130 in 90 minutes , against Essex .

As the tour proceeded , Constantine continued his success ; the Middlesex game at Lord 's brought his name to the widest notice in cricket circles . Although struggling for fitness , he chose to play knowing that he was a star attraction in this high profile game . Middlesex batted first , and reached 352 before declaring the innings closed ? Constantine bowled little owing to his injury ? and the West Indies were struggling at 79 for five when Constantine came in to bat . He scored 50 in 18

minutes and reached 86 in under an hour , to avert his side 's follow @-@ on . In Middlesex 's second innings , Constantine took seven for 57 in a spell of extremely fast bowling and the county were dismissed for 136 . The West Indies needed 259 to win ; they looked likely to lose when Constantine returned to bat with the score 121 for five . He scored 103 in 60 minutes , hitting two sixes and 12 fours and guiding the West Indies to a three @-@ wicket victory . For players and spectators this was the defining match of Constantine 's career ; many years later , cricket writer E. W. Swanton suggested that there were few all @-@ round performances in the history of cricket to match it . Shortly after the game , Nelson , a cricket club in the Lancashire League , offered Constantine a professional contract .

The rest of Constantine 's 1928 tour was generally successful ; only in the three Test matches , the first played by the West Indies , was he less effective . Although he took the West Indies ' first wicket in Test cricket , dismissing Charlie Hallows , and finished with innings figures of four for 82 , he took only one more wicket during the remainder of the series and ended with five wickets at an average of 52 @.@ 40 ; with the bat , he scored 89 runs in six innings at 14 @.@ 83 . Even so , Jack Hobbs said that Constantine 's opening overs to him in the first Test were among the fastest he ever faced , Constantine believed his captain , Karl Nunes , over @-@ bowled him ; the pair did not get along well . When the tour ended , Constantine had scored more runs and taken more wickets and catches in first @-@ class games than any other tourist . He was second in the team 's batting averages with 1 @,@ 381 runs at 34 @.@ 52 , and led the bowling averages with 107 wickets at 22 @.@ 95 . It was the manner in which Constantine played which set him apart from the restrained form of cricket generally played in England at the time : his style , aggression and entertainment value made a big impression on the crowds . According to Peter Mason in his biography of Constantine , he established a unique style of West Indian cricket and possibly established the template for West Indian cricketers for years to come .

= = = Series against England and Australia = = =

At the end of the 1928 tour Constantine returned home and helped Trinidad to win the Intercolonial Tournament . He took 16 wickets in the two games and scored 133 in the final against Barbados , the highest score of his career and a record for Trinidad at the time . These were his last matches in the tournament , as the rules did not permit professional cricketers (which he became when he signed for Nelson) to take part . In 1929 Constantine played one match in Jamaica for a West Indies team against an English touring team and then travelled to Nelson to begin his professional career .

Constantine returned to the West Indies to face England (represented by the MCC as was usual in those days) in a four @-@ match Test series early in 1930 . The first Test was drawn ; Constantine scored few runs , but bowled for a long time and fielded well . After the game , he was awarded a bat for his contribution . Calthorpe , the MCC captain , criticised his use of short @-@ pitched bowling to a leg side field ; one such ball struck Andy Sandham , but Constantine only reverted to more conventional tactics after a request from the MCC manager . During the second Test Constantine scored a rapid 58 and took six wickets , but the West Indies lost by 167 runs . In the following match the West Indies recorded their first win in Test matches ; after centuries from George Headley and Clifford Roach , Constantine took four for 35 and five for 87 to secure the victory . Constantine was omitted from the final match in Jamaica , because inter @-@ island politics meant that selectors tended to pick players from the island hosting the Test . In the series , 29 players represented the West Indies and the team had a different captain in each match . In the three matches in which he played , Constantine scored 144 runs at 14 @.@ 40 and took 18 wickets at 27 @.@ 61 .

After his second season at Nelson , Constantine joined the first West Indies team to tour Australia in the 1930 ? 31 season . The side felt some trepidation over how the black members of the side would be received , but the tour passed off without incident ; Constantine later praised the reception the team was accorded . The West Indians were captained by Jackie Grant , a white man who had played for Cambridge University but was unfamiliar with his team . Constantine considered this

unsatisfactory , and felt it affected the team 's performances . The West Indies were heavily defeated in the five @-@ Test series , losing the first four matches before winning the last . Constantine achieved little in the series , scoring 72 runs at 7 @.@ 20 and taking eight wickets at 50 @.@ 87 . In other first @-@ class games , he was more successful and , although Headley performed very well , it was Constantine who proved most popular with spectators . Even before the Tests began , his fielding drew praise from the press and he was described in The Sydney Mail as the fastest bowler seen in Australia for years . Monty Noble , a former Australian captain , writing in the Sydney Sun described one innings of 59 runs as " sensational " and one of the best played in Australia since the war . Constantine scored a century in 52 minutes against Tasmania , played five other innings over fifty and took three five @-@ wicket returns . In 1950 Donald Bradman , who played against Constantine that season , described him as the greatest fielder he had seen . In all first @-@ class matches , Constantine scored 708 runs at an average of 30 @.@ 78 and took 47 wickets at 20 @.@ 21 ; he led the team 's bowling averages and came fourth in batting .

= = = Test series against England in 1933 and 1934 ? 35 = = =

By now living in Nelson and barred from the Inter @-@ Colonial Tournament , Constantine played no first @-@ class cricket for two years . His contract with Nelson made him unavailable for much of the 1933 West Indies ' tour of England under Grant . Constantine never challenged Nelson over this ; some critics suggested he was swayed by the greater financial rewards the club provided . He appeared once for the tourists in May , scoring 57 in 27 minutes and taking four wickets in a victory over an MCC team at Lord 's . The West Indian board unsuccessfully tried to secure his release for the first Test match , which the West Indies lost heavily . After he took nine wickets in the tourists ' game against Yorkshire , Nelson gave him permission to appear in the second Test at Manchester .

During the previous winter , England had played Australia in the controversial Bodyline series in which the English bowlers were accused of bowling the ball on the line of leg stump . The deliveries were often short @-@ pitched with four or five fielders close by on the leg side waiting to catch deflections off the bat . The tactics were difficult for batsmen to counter and were designed to be intimidatory . In the 1933 English season , Bodyline was a sensitive subject . There had already been controversy in the tourists ' match against the MCC , during which Constantine and Manny Martindale , another West Indian fast bowler , were criticised in the press for bowling short . Frustrated by a slow pitch which he believed was intended to neutralise his fast bowlers , Grant had ordered Constantine to bowl Bodyline against Yorkshire , and decided to repeat the tactics in the second Test . The West Indies scored 375 , of which Constantine made 31 . When England replied , several batsmen were discomfited by the Bodyline bowling ; Wally Hammond was struck on the chin and retired hurt . Constantine and Martindale bowled up to four short deliveries each over so that the ball rose to head height ; occasionally they bowled around the wicket .

Although not as fast as he had been on the previous tour , Constantine was still capable of short bursts of very fast bowling . However , the slowness of the pitch reduced the effectiveness of the Bodyline tactics , and Constantine took one for 55 ; England 's captain Douglas Jardine , who had implemented the Bodyline tactics in Australia , batted for five hours to score his only Test century . The public disapproval expressed during and after the match was instrumental in turning English attitudes against Bodyline , something Constantine considered hypocritical . In the West Indies ' second innings Constantine 's innings of 64 in an hour ensured that the match was drawn . Nelson initially agreed to release him for the third Test , with Essex all @-@ rounder Stan Nichols to be Constantine 's substitute for the club team . When Jardine heard , he convinced the England selectors to include Nichols in the England team for the Test , the deal collapsed and Constantine did not play . Most critics believed that the West Indies underachieved in the Test series ; Constantine believed that one cause was the inadequacy of Grant as captain . In all first @-@ class games on the tour Constantine scored 181 runs at 20 @.@ 11 and took 14 wickets at 22 @.@ 14 .

Constantine worked in India as a cricket coach during 1934 , playing two matches in the Moin @-@ ud @-@ Dowlah Gold Cup Tournament . He was invited to play in the 1935 Test series against England in the West Indies , and although he arrived too late for the first Test , won by England , he

played in the remaining three games of the series . In a match for Trinidad before the second Test , he and his brother Elias appeared together for the only time in a first @-@ class match , and shared a partnership of 93 . In the next Test Constantine scored 90 , his highest Test score . England needed 325 to win in the fourth innings , but lost early wickets . In the final stages of the match Constantine was warned by the umpire for bowling Bodyline , and Grant withdrew him from the bowling attack . After the crowd protested , Constantine returned to bowl ; with two balls of the match left , took the final English wicket . The West Indies won by 217 runs , with Constantine taking three for 11 ; in the match as a whole he scored 121 runs and took five wickets . The third Test was drawn , leaving the final Test to decide the series . After making a large total , the West Indies bowled England out twice to win by an innings and record their first Test series victory . As well as taking six wickets in the game , Constantine captained the team to victory after Grant injured an ankle on the last morning and asked Constantine to assume the leadership . Peter Mason writes : " Given the measures that the West Indian authorities had taken to ensure that no black man would ever captain a regional side , it was a great irony and a huge source of delight to Constantine that he should be the man to lead the team at the moment of their greatest achievement so far . " Once more , the press praised Constantine and hailed his achievements . In the series , he scored 169 runs at an average of 33 @.@ 80 and took 15 wickets at 13 @.@ 13 .

= = = Tour of England in 1939 = = =

Apart from one guest appearance for Barbados in a friendly match early in 1939 , Constantine did not play first @-@ class cricket after 1935 until the West Indies toured England in 1939 . Constantine had deliberately not signed a league contract in 1939 , to be available for the tour . However , he was unhappy with the playing strength of the touring team and the £ 600 he was offered in wages . He believed that the captain , Rolph Grant (younger brother of Jackie) , was unqualified for the job and had been appointed only because he was white . Constantine captained the side in one match , but was reprimanded by the West Indies board for not pursuing a win . The West Indies lost the three @-@ match Test series 1 ? 0 against a very strong England side , although critics judged the overall playing record of the team to be good . In the three Tests , Constantine scored 110 runs at 27 @.@ 50 and took 11 wickets at 29 @.@ 81 , including five for 75 in the final Test .

By this time Constantine bowled generally at medium pace from a short run @-@ up . To compensate for his reduced pace he mixed up his bowling style , spinning the ball and bowling at speeds varying from slow to very fast . He bowled more overs than any other member of the team , and was the side 's leading wicket @-@ taker with 103 wickets in the season . His bowling average of 17 @.@ 77 placed him first in the team 's bowling averages and seventh in the English national averages . With the bat , Constantine scored 614 runs at 21 @.@ 17 ; Preston wrote that Constantine " often electrified onlookers with his almost impudent zest for runs " . His highest innings came in the final Test match when he scored 79 in an hour and hit 11 fours . Wisden commented : " Constantine , in the mood suggesting his work in Saturday afternoon League cricket , brought a welcome air of gaiety to the Test arena . He revolutionised all the recognised features of cricket and , surpass [ed] Bradman in his amazing stroke play . " For his all @-@ round performances during the season he was chosen as one of Wisden 's Cricketers of the Year .

The third Test match , after which the tour was abandoned owing to the imminent outbreak of the Second World War , was Constantine 's last . In 18 Test matches between 1928 and 1939 he scored 635 runs at an average of 19 @.@ 24 , took 58 wickets at 30 @.@ 10 and held 28 catches . He played one more first @-@ class match when , in 1945 , he captained a team representing the " Dominions " against England at Lord 's . The match was narrowly won by the Dominions . Constantine , in the second innings , shared a partnership of 117 in 45 minutes with Keith Miller . He bowled very little , but ran out a batsman at a key point in the final innings . In all first @-@ class cricket , Constantine scored 4 @.@ 475 runs at 24 @.@ 05 and took 439 wickets at 20 @.@ 48 .

= = = Lancashire League cricketer = = =

In 1928 Constantine had signed an initial three @-@ year contract with Nelson , to play in the Lancashire League . The contract was worth £ 500 per season , plus performance bonuses and travelling expenses . He remained there until 1937 , an unusually long time for a professional to remain with one club . Constantine 's appearances boosted attendances and gate receipts for all Nelson 's matches , and was of great financial benefit to both the club and the League as a whole . In Constantine 's nine seasons at the club , Nelson never finished lower than second , won the league competition seven times and the knockout cup twice . In 1931 Constantine renewed his contract for £ 650 per season ; when in 1935 a rival league attempted to sign him , all the Lancashire League clubs contributed to his wage , which rose to £ 750 per year between 1935 and 1937 . This was far more than the then maximum wage for a professional footballer of £ 386 , or the £ 500 per season that a top county cricketer could potentially earn , and possibly made Constantine the best @-@ paid sportsman in the country . Consequently , he and his family enjoyed a good standard of living for the first time in their lives .

As Nelson 's professional , Constantine was immediately successful . Although he produced better figures in subsequent years , he considered his first season at Nelson the most enjoyable of his life , owing to the freedom and excitement of the cricket . In nine years at the club he scored 6 @,@ 363 runs at an average of 37 @.@ 65 and took 776 wickets at 9 @.@ 50 . His highest score was 192 , and his best bowling figures were ten wickets for ten runs . In each season except for 1932 , he averaged over 30 with the bat and in 1933 he scored 1 @,@ 000 runs at an average of over 50 . He took over 70 wickets every season and his bowling average never rose above 11 @.@ 30 ; in five seasons , he averaged under ten runs per wicket . In 1933 he took 96 wickets , his highest seasonal aggregate , and had he not missed two games to play for the West Indies touring team , would likely have completed the cricketer 's double (1 @,@ 000 runs and 100 wickets) , an unprecedented feat in the league .

In the mid @-@ 1930s , representatives from Lancashire County Cricket Club twice approached Constantine with a view to him joining the club ? his time in Nelson meant that he qualified to play for Lancashire , having lived in the county for the required time . There was a precedent for such a course , as the Australian Ted McDonald had joined Lancashire after playing as Nelson 's professional in the 1920s . In the case of Constantine nothing happened , as members of the Lancashire Board and , later , players in the team opposed the idea of a black man playing for the county . In any case Constantine preferred league cricket to what he perceived was the negativity and dullness of county cricket . He found the standard of play very high , stating : " Never in my life have I played harder than in Lancashire . " In his history of West Indies cricket , Michael Manley writes that league cricket at this time was intense and unrelenting , but : " it was in this special atmosphere of League cricket that Constantine was supreme . "

For the 1938 season , Constantine played for Rochdale in the Central Lancashire Cricket League , although he continued to live in Nelson . He received £ 812 for the season , and performed successfully , but did not enjoy the experience . The nature of the pitches was different in his new league ; furthermore , some of the players seemed resentful of his high earnings . There was also an incident of racial abuse which Constantine believed the Central Lancashire League committee effectively covered up . This season ended Constantine 's career in the Lancashire Leagues , although during the war he returned to play for Nelson as an amateur .

= = = Style and technique = = =

Swanton believed that Constantine was the first West Indian cricketer to make an impression on the British public : " he ... personified West Indian cricket from the first faltering entry in the Test arena in 1928 until the post @-@ war emergence of the trinity of Worrell , Weekes and Walcott . " Swanton continued : " There have been many all @-@ rounders with better records ... but it is hard to think of one who made a more sensational impact [and] impossible to imagine his superior as a fielder anywhere . " In 1934 Neville Cardus described Constantine as a " genius " and the " most original cricketer of recent years " . R. C. Robertson @-@ Glasgow called Constantine the most exciting

cricketer to watch of all his contemporaries . This was partly because his style of cricket meant that he could alter the course of a match in a short space of time , although he developed his technique to minimise risk .

Constantine 's batting was based on good eyesight , quick reflexes and natural ability . He used his wrists to adjust the angle of the bat at the last second , allowing him to counter unexpected late movement of the ball . He batted by instinct and , according to Manley , " his every stroke [owed] more to energy than calculation " . He was capable of scoring rapidly against any standard of bowling , but rarely survived for long periods because he chose not to defend . His best shots were the cut , pull and hook . Critics believed that Constantine 's batting reached its peak once he became an accomplished league cricketer . By setting himself to master the variety of pitch conditions he encountered , and adopting a style of fast @-@ scoring and occasionally unorthodox batting , he became an adaptable and effective batsman in all forms of cricket , improvising where necessary to prevent bowlers getting on top .

As a cover @-@ point fielder Constantine was , according to Manley , " athletic , panther @-@ quick , sure handed and with an arm that could rifle the ball into the wicket @-@ keeper 's gloves like a bullet even from the deepest boundary " . Many critics considered him to be one of the best fielders of all time . As a bowler , Constantine accelerated from a relatively short run into what Manley calls an " explosive " delivery . James believes he reached his best form as a bowler in 1939 , using what he had learned in the leagues . By this time his varieties of spin , pace and flight made him effective even when conditions favoured the batsmen . Although Constantine 's Test bowling record was modest , this may to some extent reflect the poor standard of fielding in the early West Indies teams , in particular their propensity to drop catches .

Manley writes that wherever Constantine played he brought " style and humour : that aggressiveness that is somehow good @-@ natured and which is the distinctively West Indian quality in all sport . Constantine 's extrovert exuberance was , of course , more particularly Trinidadian than generally West Indian . Perhaps it is this last characteristic that gave him that special quality of panache which sets him apart from all other West Indian cricketers . "

= = Life in England = =

= = = Nelson = = =

During his time in Nelson , Constantine made a deep impression and remained a celebrity there even after leaving the town ; his general community involvement was such that a regional historian described him as a " local champion " . He appreciated the greater freedom he enjoyed in Nelson as compared with Trinidad , where racial issues predominated . Although Nelson suffered from the effects of the Depression , Constantine 's high earnings were never a source of resentment ; of his time in Nelson he wrote : " If I had not come ... I could not have been the person I am today ... I am a better citizen for the time I have spent in Nelson . "

Constantine 's first season was difficult ; both he and the residents of the town were at that stage uncertain of each other . Few black people had been seen in Nelson , and although some residents wrote welcoming letters , the Constantines also received racist and abusive ones . He quickly established boundaries over what he considered acceptable , permitting and even sharing small jokes over skin colour but protesting strongly at outright racism . John Arlott wrote : " [Constantine] fought discrimination against his people with a dignity firm but free of acrimony . " Although Constantine later attributed some of the initial uneasiness to ignorance , at the time he seriously considered returning to Trinidad after the first season . His wife persuaded him otherwise , pointing out the benefits from remaining to complete his contract . From 1930 Constantine found life more comfortable ; the family began to develop friendships and to engage in the social life of the town . They continued to visit Trinidad in the English winters , but Nelson became the family 's permanent home .

In 1931 the Constantines settled in a fairly prosperous , middle @-@ class area of Nelson , where

they were to live until 1949 . During 1932 , they took C. L. R. James ? who knew Constantine through having played cricket against him in Trinidad ? as a lodger ; James had come to London but had run out of money . James was at the forefront of a growing West Indian nationalist movement , though Constantine had until then consciously avoided politics . Through James ' influence , Constantine realised that his position gave him opportunities to further the cause of racial equality and Trinidadian independence . He joined the League of Coloured Peoples , an organisation aiming to achieve racial equality for black people in Britain . He helped James to get a job with the Manchester Guardian , and in return , James helped Constantine to write his first book , Cricket and I , which was published in 1933 . Later commentators have identified Constantine 's book as an important step in West Indian nationalism , and an encouragement to future authors . At that time , James wrote , few active cricketers wrote books and " no one in the West Indies that I knew , cricketer or not , was writing books at all ; certainly none was being printed abroad . " Constantine and James drifted apart once the latter returned to London ; they remained in contact but did not always agree politically or morally . Mason believes , however that without Constantine 's assistance James may not have later established himself as a celebrated political writer .

= = = Career during the war = = =

During the war , Constantine continued his cricket career as a league professional ; also , as a popular player who could boost crowd attendances , he appeared in many wartime charity games . However , the war ended his career in top @-@ class cricket and signalled a change in his life 's priorities . Remaining in Nelson when the war started , he initially served as an Air Raid Precautions equipment officer , and as a billeting officer for incoming evacuees . After applying for a job with the Ministry of Labour , Constantine was offered a senior position as Welfare Officer by the Ministry of Labour and National Service .

Using his familiarity with life in England , and his high profile and status as a cricketer , Constantine became responsible for the many West Indians who had been recruited to work in factories in the north @-@ west of England for the duration of the war . Working mainly from Liverpool , he helped these men to adapt to their unfamiliar environment and to deal with the severe racism and discrimination which many of them faced . Constantine also worked closely with trade unions in an attempt to ease the fears and suspicions of white workers . He used his influence with the Ministry of Labour to pressurise companies who refused to employ West Indians , but generally preferred negotiation to confrontation , an approach that was often successful . Constantine 's wartime experiences caused him to increase his involvement in the League of Coloured Peoples , sometimes referring cases to them . He particularly took up the cause of the children of white women and black overseas servicemen ; these children were often abandoned by their parents . However , plans to create a children 's home for them came to nothing , leaving Constantine frustrated . He remained in his post until the summer of 1946 , latterly concerned with the repatriation of the West Indian workers at the end of the war . For his wartime work he was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1947 .

During the war , at the request of the British government , Constantine made radio broadcasts to the West Indies , reporting on the involvement of West Indians in the war effort . As a result , he was often asked to speak on BBC radio about his life in England . His radio performances met with critical acclaim , and he became a frequent guest on radio panel shows ; he also took part in a film documentary , West Indies calling , in 1943 .

= = = Constantine v Imperial London Hotels = = =

In August 1943 Constantine played in a charity cricket match at Lord 's and had booked rooms for himself , his wife and daughter at the Imperial Hotel , London for four nights . He had been specifically told that his colour would not be an issue at the hotel . When he arrived on 30 July , he was told that they could only stay for one night because their presence might offend other guests . When Arnold Watson , a colleague of Constantine at the Ministry of Labour , arrived and attempted

to intervene , he was told by the manager : " We are not going to have these niggers in our hotel , " and that his presence might offend American guests . Watson argued , to no avail , that not only was Constantine a British subject , he worked for the government . Eventually Watson persuaded Constantine to leave and stay at another hotel which , owned by the same company as the Imperial , proved to be welcoming . The Imperial Hotel incident affected Constantine deeply , both because of the involvement of his family and also because he was due to play cricket for a team representing the British Empire and Commonwealth .

In September questions were asked in the House of Commons about the incident , by which time Constantine had decided to take legal action . In June 1944 Constantine v Imperial London Hotels was heard in the High Court . Although there was no law against racial discrimination in Britain at the time , Constantine argued that the hotel had breached its contract with him . Constantine informed the court that the attitude of the hotel changed between his booking and arrival , owing to the presence of white American servicemen . The defence argued that they had met their contract by accommodating Constantine in another hotel and that he had left the Imperial voluntarily . The managing director of the hotel denied that racist language had been used . After two days of evidence , the judge found in Constantine 's favour , rejecting the defence 's arguments and praising the way Constantine had handled the situation . Although the law limited the award of damages against the hotel to five guineas , Constantine was vindicated . He did not pursue the case any further as he believed he had sufficiently raised the issue of racism in the public eye ; the case was widely reported in the press , and Constantine received great support from both the public and the government .

Although racial discrimination continued in England , this case was the first to challenge such practices in court . Critics regard it as a milestone in British racial equality in demonstrating that black people had legal recourse against some forms of racism . According to Mason , it " was one of the key milestones along the road to the creation of the Race Relations Act of 1965 . "

= = = Legal studies = = =

While living and playing cricket in Nelson before the war , Constantine had made plans for a future legal career . James helped him with his studies for a short time , and he later worked in a local solicitors ' office . In 1944 he enrolled as a student in the Middle Temple , London . To finance his studies , he continued his professional cricket career in Bradford until 1948 , and supplemented his income by coaching : at Trinity College , Dublin , in 1946 and in Ceylon in 1953 . Constantine also extended his work in journalism and broadcasting , as a cricket reporter and as a radio commentator when the West Indies toured England in 1950 . He also wrote several cricket books , probably with the help of a ghostwriter . Cricket in the Sun (1947) covered his career but also discussed the racism he had encountered and suggested then @-@ radical ideas for the future of cricket , such as a one @-@ day " world cup " . Cricketers ' Carnival (1948) , Cricket Crackers , Cricketers ' Cricket (both 1949) and How To Play Cricket (1951) were more traditional cricket books , which included coaching tips and opinions .

In 1947 Constantine became chairman of the League of Coloured Peoples , a position he held until the League was discontinued in 1951 . In 1948 he was elected president of the Caribbean Congress of Labour , and between 1947 and 1950 was a member of the Colonial Office 's Colonial Social Welfare Advisory Committee . Also in 1950 , he became involved in a controversy over the interracial marriage of Seretse Khama , the future president of Botswana . Constantine lobbied the government on Khama 's behalf , organised meetings and even approached the United Nations . Little was achieved , and Constantine disapproved of the approach of the Labour government and its Prime Minister , Clement Attlee , but declined an opportunity to become a Liberal parliamentary candidate .

Constantine neither enjoyed his legal studies , nor found the work easy , but was determined to prove he could succeed . His wife kept him motivated , restricted visitors to avoid distractions and forced him to study , making him continue when he was several times tempted to give up . The family moved to London in 1949 ; between 1950 and 1954 , Constantine passed the required series

of examinations , and in 1954 he was called to the bar by the Middle Temple .

Having turned down an offer in 1947 to return to his old employer , Trinidad Leaseholds , in 1954 Constantine agreed to join the same company as an assistant legal advisor . Uncertain about going back to Trinidad after living for 25 years in England , he nevertheless believed it was a good time to return , particularly as his daughter was moving there to marry . Before leaving England , he published his book *Colour Bar* (1954) , which addressed race relations in Britain and the racism he had experienced . It also discussed world @-@ wide racial oppression and how the lives of black people could be improved . At the time , according to Peter Mason , this was " an explosive , challenging , hard hitting tome , the more so because it came not from a known black militant but from someone who seemed so charming , so unruffled , so suited to British society " . Although not viewed as radical by black audiences , it was aimed at white British readers . The British press gave it mixed reviews and criticised him for unfairness in parts of the book ; other critics accused him of communist sympathies .

= = Return to Trinidad = =

When Constantine returned to Trinidad in late 1954 , he found a growing desire for independence from Britain . At Trinidad Leaseholds he felt isolated from other , mainly white , senior staff ; this drew him towards political involvement . Eric Williams , leader of the newly founded People 's National Movement (PNM) , was aware of Constantine 's popular appeal and recruited him . By January 1956 Constantine , with the full co @-@ operation and blessing of his employers , was party chairman and a member of its executive committee . Feeling that the PNM 's policies were in harmony with his views on improving the lives of black people , and encouraged by his wife , Constantine stood for election in the parliamentary constituency of Tunapuna in 1956 . He won a narrow victory , which his colleagues believed few in the party could have done , and resigned from Trinidad Leaseholds . The PNM formed a government , in which Constantine became the Minister of Communications , Works and Utilities .

In his ministerial role , Constantine promoted development of Trinidad 's road , rail , water and electricity infrastructure . However , in late 1958 he was accused of corruption , over a ship leasing deal . His angry response to the charge , in the Legislative Council , created a perception of arrogance among his colleagues , and suggested that he had not sufficiently adapted to parliamentary politics . According to Mason , the speech was a miscalculation which made the public , perhaps already sceptical of his commitment to Trinidad after so many years away , question his fitness for a ministerial role , a view increasingly held by commentators .

In the later 1950s , Constantine supported the campaign , led by James , to appoint West Indies cricket 's first black captain ; the success of black people like Constantine in attaining government positions while not permitted to captain the cricket team was a key factor in an ultimately successful campaign . While in government , Constantine assisted in the development of the West Indies Federation , as a step towards the independence of the islands , and his fame and familiarity with Britain played some part in the negotiations which led to Trinidad 's independence in 1962 . After he decided not to stand for re @-@ election in 1961 , Williams appointed him as Trinidad and Tobago 's first High Commissioner in London .

Peter Mason writes that Constantine 's political career in Trinidad was a success : he was efficient , active , respected and popular . Mason concedes that he was not a natural politician , often sensitive to criticism and that his experience abroad was a cause for mistrust in Trinidad , rather than seen as an advantage . Gerald Howat believes that Constantine 's political career , while not without successes , was undermined by several factors : his age , his over @-@ frequent references to his English experience , his rejection of political theorising and lack of debating skills . However , his personal popularity undoubtedly attracted support to the PNM .

= = Back to England = =

= = = High Commissioner = = =

Constantine began his role as High Commissioner in June 1961 . In the New Year 's Honours list for 1962 , he was knighted and became Sir Learie Constantine ; among other accolades he received at this time was the freedom of the town of Nelson . Mason notes that Constantine had now " passed firmly into the consciousness as a British treasure " . However , his tenure as High Commissioner ended in controversy . Constantine felt that his high profile required him to speak out on racial issues affecting all West Indian immigrants , not just Trinidadians . In April 1963 , when a Bristol bus company was refusing to employ black staff , Constantine visited the city and spoke to the press about the issue . His intervention assisted in a speedy resolution of the affair which , according to Mason , was crucial in persuading the British government of the need for a Race Relations Act . However , politicians in both Trinidad and Britain felt a senior diplomat should not be so closely involved in British domestic affairs , particularly as he acted without consulting his government . Williams effectively withdrew his support from Constantine , who decided not to continue as High Commissioner when his term expired in February 1964 .

Although as High Commissioner Constantine looked after his staff and was respected by other diplomats , Howat observes there is limited evidence that he was successful in the post : " In the one area in which he acted positively , he blundered ? the Bristol affair . In the language of the game he loved ... his timing was wrong though he was full of good intentions " . Howat adds that he did not increase his stature or reputation during his term of office . Mason believes that " there was too much of the welfare officer about him and not enough of the government focused diplomat . "

= = = Final years = = =

For the remainder of his life , Constantine lived in London . He returned to legal practice and was elected an Honorary Bencher of the Middle Temple in 1963 , despite his limited experience . He also resumed work in journalism : he wrote and broadcast on cricket , race and the Commonwealth , and produced two more books : a coaching book *The Young Cricketers Companion* (1964) , and *The Changing Face of Cricket* (1966) which included his thoughts on modern cricket . He made his debut as a television cricket commentator , although his failing health and talkative style meant he was less successful than on the radio .

In 1965 Constantine became a founding member of the Sports Council , which aimed to develop sport in Britain . Two years later , he was appointed to the three @-@ person Race Relations Board , formed through the Race Relations Act , to investigate cases of racial discrimination . In this role he spoke out against the Commonwealth Immigrants Act , a stance that led to an offer from the Liberal Party , which he declined , to stand as parliamentary candidate for Nelson . Later , he was involved in an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate the release , after a military coup , of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa , the overthrown Prime Minister of Nigeria . Constantine was appointed to the BBC 's General Advisory Committee in 1966 and became a BBC Governor two years later , although declining health restricted his involvement . The following year the students of St Andrews University elected Constantine as Rector , but again his health prevented him performing effectively in this role . In his last years , Constantine was criticised for becoming part of the Establishment ; *Private Eye* mocked him , while the new generation of West Indian immigrants believed he was out of touch . More radical black spokesmen disapproved of his conciliatory approach to racist incidents .

Constantine was awarded a life peerage in 1969 , becoming the first black man to sit in the House of Lords ; there were rumours that Trinidad had prevented earlier attempts to ennoble him . He took the title of Baron Constantine of Maraval in Trinidad and Nelson in the County Palatine of Lancaster . His investiture attracted widespread media attention ; Constantine stated : " I think it must have been for what I have endeavoured to do to make it possible for people of different colour to know each other better and live well together . " He sat as a crossbencher in the House , but was well enough to make only one speech in his time there .

Although Constantine was reluctant to leave England , his poor health necessitated a return to Trinidad , but before he could do so he died of a heart attack , probably brought about by bronchitis ,

on 1 July 1971 . His body was flown to Trinidad , where he received a state funeral before being buried in Arouca . He was posthumously awarded Trinidad 's highest honour , the Trinity Cross . Later in the month , a memorial service was held in London in Westminster Abbey .

= = Family life = =

Constantine met his future wife , Norma Agatha Cox , in 1921 . She had little interest in cricket and , although their relationship developed during the early 1920s , she resented that he gave more time to cricket than he did to her . However , the relationship lasted and she began to take more of an interest in his sporting achievements . They were married on 25 July 1927 ; their only child , Gloria , was born in April 1928 . Throughout their marriage , his wife motivated him to continue his efforts to further his career and they remained close . Norma died two months after her husband in 1971 .

= = Personality = =

John Arlott describes Constantine as a man of " easy humour and essential patience ... His outlook was that of a compassionate radical and he maintained his high moral standards unswervingly . " E. W. Swanton writes : " None could call Lord Constantine a modest man , but gifts of warmth and friendliness as well as a shrewd brain and a ready tongue helped to make him one of the personalities of his time . " He did not get along with everyone ; he and England cricketer Wally Hammond feuded for nearly ten years over what Constantine perceived as a slight in 1925 ? 26 . Subsequently , Constantine continually bowled short when he encountered Hammond on the field , until the pair made peace in the Old Trafford Test match of 1933 . After this , they pursued a more good @-@ natured rivalry and became quite friendly ; Hammond publicly expressed sympathy towards Constantine and other black West Indians for the discrimination that they faced .

In his earlier years , acquaintances believed Constantine was too conscious of colour . James wrote : " Many doors in England were open to him . That doors were closed to other West Indians seemed more important to him . " Michael Manley describes him as an extrovert who displayed great self @-@ belief in everything he did . He also notes that " Constantine was too long in England and perhaps too slight in Test @-@ match performance to make the impact on the Caribbean that he did on England . But he enchanted England . " Howat writes : " Cricket apart ... Constantine 's reputation must rest on his contribution to racial tolerance , his benevolent view of empire and Commonwealth , and his personal acceptance within the British ' establishment ' . In the end he was more English than Trinidadian and he needed that wider platform . "