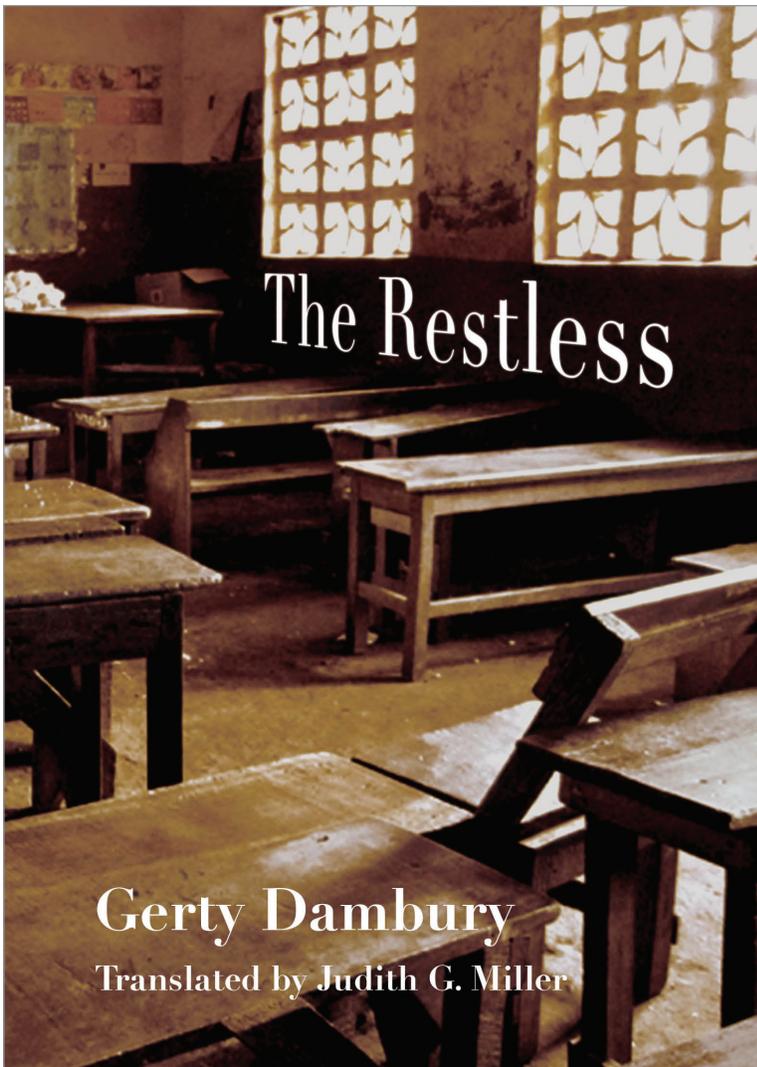


# EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

## THE RESTLESS

GERTY DAMBURY | Translated by Judith G. Miller

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



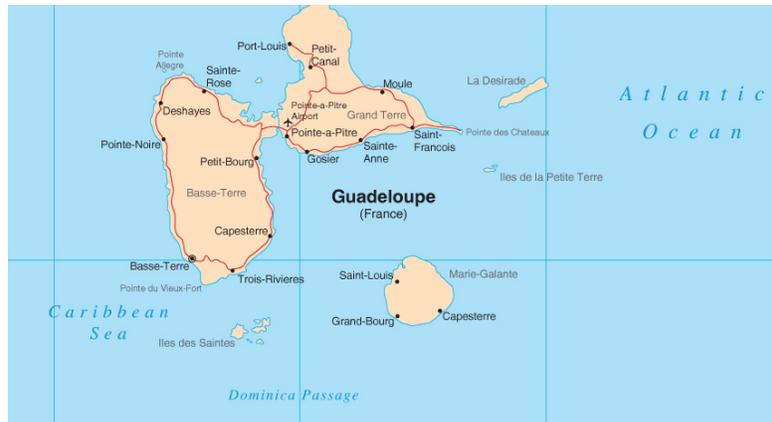
Born in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, **GERTY DAMBURY** is a playwright, theater director, novelist, poet, and activist. She received a master's in English from Université Paris 8 in Vincennes in 1978. In graduate school, Dambury participated in the women's rights movement as a member of La Coordination des femmes noires, a black women's coalition that was founded in 1976 for Caribbean and African students and exiles living in France.

In 1981, Dambury returned to Guadeloupe to teach English. There, she began writing some of her earliest plays, including *Carfax* (1986) and *Rabordaille* (1989). She also worked in the government to champion educational and social development initiatives. Eventually, she left her position to complete a writing residency in theater arts at the Festival des Francophonies en Limousin. In 1993, she published her first poetry collection, *Rassemblement*, and continued writing for the theater. Her plays *Lettres Indiennes* (1993) and *Caremes* (1998) received national praise.

In 1999, Dambury relocated to Paris, where she currently lives today. She was invited to the theater-writing residency at Chartreuse de Villeneuve-lez-Avignon in 2000 and received a master's in theatrical studies in 2006. She is an award-winning writer, most recently having won the Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe et du Tout-Monde in 2015 for *Le rêve de William Alexander Brown*.

Much of Dambury's work highlights the historical effects of slavery and colonialism in Caribbean society and culture as well as current racial, political, and socioeconomic tensions in France. Her debut novel, *Les rétifs* (2012), reflects on the violent conflict between French police and construction workers in Pointe-à-Pitre on May 26 and 27, 1967, through the eyes of a young girl named Émilienne, who tries to find her missing father and beloved schoolteacher in the days leading up to the events. The novel was translated into English as *The Restless* by Judith G. Miller.

## GADELOUPE: A BRIEF HISTORY



### **1674**

Guadeloupe is annexed to the kingdom of France as a colony.

### **1656**

Fugitive slaves Jean Leblanc and Pèdre lead a series of uprisings against the French. The conflict lasts fifteen days before the rebels are killed.

### **1759**

Britain takes control of Guadeloupe and establishes the lucrative sugar trade.

### **1763**

Britain restores Guadeloupe to France in the Treaty of Paris, which concludes the Seven Years War.

### **1789–1799**

During the French Revolution, power over Guadeloupe shifts frequently between France and Britain. Ultimately, at the end of 1799, Guadeloupe is under French control.

### **1802**

Under Napoleon, the new head of the French state, slavery is reinstated throughout the French empire.

### **1810–1815**

During the Napoleonic Wars, France, Britain, and Sweden fight for control over Guadeloupe. The Treaty of Paris in 1814 and the Treaty of Vienna in 1815 solidify French sovereignty over the island.

**1848**

Slavery is abolished throughout the French empire. However, compulsory labor laws, addressing forced or involuntary labor, are enacted. Compulsory labor laws enable forced and under- or unpaid labor, such as slavery, to continue despite the illegality of slavery in France.

**1871**

Guadeloupe is granted representation in the French National Assembly.

**1891**

The Workers Party of Guadeloupe, a socialist organization, is founded and begins printing its newspaper, *Le Peuple*.

**1897–1924**

A series of natural disasters disrupt the plantation economy in Guadeloupe. As plantation owners struggle to rebuild, socialist alternatives that appeal to workers' rights and unionization efforts grow popular. In World War I, Guadeloupe sends over six thousand troops to support French military efforts.

**1925**

Guadeloupeans are granted French citizenship and the right to vote. Tensions between plantation owners and workers continue.

**1926–1945**

Workers go on strike more frequently, seeking increased wages while fraudulent elections attempt to keep socialist candidates out of government and administrative positions. In the early 1940s, under Vichy France, the Free France movement clashes with police officers and other state officials. Guadeloupeans are required to carry labor passbooks under Vichy rule.

**1946**

Guadeloupe becomes an overseas department of France.

**1967**

Legislative elections are held in Guadeloupe. Riots break out between the construction workers' union and bosses in Pointe-à-Pitre in May. Hundreds of civilians are wounded and killed by the French armed forces and the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (the French national police), but only five deaths and twenty-seven arrests are documented in France's official report.

**2016**

France releases official documents revealing a new statistic of over one hundred people wounded and killed on May 26 and 27, 1967.

## GLOSSARY

**Antillean Creole (249):** A French-based creole with elements of Carib and various African languages used mainly in the Lesser Antilles.

**Massacre of May 1967 (9):** On May 26, 1967, construction workers rallied for two-percent wage increases outside the Chamber of Commerce in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, while union delegates negotiated with bosses. French armed forces, the gendarmerie, and the CRS, opened fire on the demonstrators. Over one hundred people were wounded, killed, and arrested. The original French reports only documented five deaths and twenty-seven arrests. French officials released new documents with a higher death toll in 2016.

**Cuban Revolution (131):** An armed revolt, led by Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement, that overthrew American-backed Cuban President Fulgencio Batista. The conflict lasted from July 1953 to January 1959. The revolt replaced the former government with a revolutionary socialist state. The Cuban revolution was extremely influential for uprisings throughout the Caribbean. Castro was a prominent figure for socialist alternatives and was idolized by many revolutionary groups in Guadeloupe in the 1960s, including GONG.

**CRS (Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité):** A national constabulary army corps independent of the regular French army. It is the general reserve of the French police and is primarily used for crowd and riot control. The CRS patrolled the workers' strike that took place on May 26 and 27, 1967, in Guadeloupe.

**Paris Massacre of 1961:** On October 17, 1961, the French national police attacked a demonstration of thirty thousand French Algerian National Liberation Front supporters. The police killed over three hundred demonstrators, with thousands arrested and injured. However, the original record only documented two deaths. This event drew attention to French colonial oppression and police violence that inspired further uprisings in other French territories, including the 1967 strike in Guadeloupe.

**Pierre Bolotte:** The prefect of Guadeloupe from 1965 to 1967. Prefect Bolette ordered the gendarmerie and CRS to open fire on construction workers and demonstrators in Pointe-à-Pitre on May 26 and 27, 1967.

**Overseas Departments and Regions of France:** An overseas department is a French territory outside of metropolitan France. Overseas departments are part of France and the European Union. Overseas region is a recent constitutional designation (2003) for an overseas department that has powers identical to regions in metropolitan France: they have elected regional councils and use the euro as

members of the eurozone. Guadeloupeans gained French citizenship in 1946. It has the legal designation of an overseas region with one overseas department. Guadeloupe has historically struggled for economic and political rights, as in the workers' strike of May 1967. Most recently, Guadeloupe participated in the 2009 French Caribbean general strikes with Martinique, another overseas region, over low-income worker salaries and the cost of living and basic commodities.

**The National Gendarmerie/Gendarmes (129):** French armed forces with military status under both the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. This military force has jurisdiction in civilian affairs. The gendarmerie is often stationed in cities, small towns, and rural areas with civilian populations. In Guadeloupe, they are used for riot patrol and to police civilians. Prefect Bolotte gave the gendarmerie orders to open fire on demonstrators during the construction workers' strike in 1967.

**Red Kepis (9):** Red French military caps. Mobile gendarmes in Guadeloupe wore these red caps, and these policemen were present during the massacre of 1967. The red cap is often referred to in recollections of the event as a symbol of police violence.

**GONG (Groupe d'organisation nationale de la Guadeloupe):** The Guadeloupean revolutionary independence group inspired by Marxist-Leninist and Maoist thought. Founded in 1963, GONG led the People's National Democratic Revolution for the Independence of Guadeloupe. This movement led to the unionization of many workers in Guadeloupe and heightened dissent against French colonial authority. Many of the construction workers involved in the 1967 strike were members of GONG.

**Caribbean Quadrille (247):** A square dance in which local music indicates the dancers' changing positions with the beat. Traditionally the dance has one caller, usually a man.

**Soviet Revolution (64):** A series of revolutions, most notably that of the Bolsheviks, a socialist political organization led by Vladimir Lenin, that overthrew the czarist autocracy in Russia and gave rise to the Soviet Union in 1917. Leninist thought inspired many activists and additional uprisings, including the GONG organization and the Communist Party in Guadeloupe.

## NOTES ON EXCERPTS

A quadrille is a square dance, traditionally with one caller and male musicians.

a story that should be told the way a caller calls out a Caribbean quadrille, in which each of the figures gracefully follows the preceding one:

- First, *pantalon* → a slow movement
- Second, *l'été* → a jumpy strut
- Third, *la poule* → a steady repetition
- Fourth, *pastourelle* → a kind of lament

We need a **strong caller** with a **powerful voice**, so we will be that caller—us, Émilienne's eight brothers and sisters.

We'll give the floor to the one who should speak, just as though speaking were dancing.

We alone will decide how many steps to the right or left each one can take. We'll decide when a dancer or a group of dancers need to leave the floor to make room for the next, or at what point a musical instrument will take up the story or **add its sounds to another's melody in order to emphasize a phrase, mark a refrain, or signal the moment to change rhythm**.

A young girl can make changes (an empowering position). We hear this story through her story.

No, wait! We'll leave the signaling of the tambourine to Émilienne! **Let her be the one to call out the changes**, to play the *tambou d'bas* that accompanies our square dances.

You say there's never before been a group of callers in a square dance?

Never seen until now, you say!

Then **we'll innovate**.

And every musician, dancer, or character—depending on whether you think we're in a novel or a dance—will become an interpreter.

Relating dance and language/speech as actions, and dancers/speakers as agents/factors

How do different musicians, dancers, characters, and speakers influence the unfolding of events, like the changing beat in a dance?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In an interview with translator Judith G. Miller, Gerty Dambury says, “In economics, financial matters, social possibilities, education—inequality is everywhere and particularly present in the lives of people of color” (246). What are examples of how race and class affect each other in the book?
2. The principal reports Madame Ladal for teaching her students about the history of slavery in French territories, the Cuban revolution, and the civil rights movement in the US (131). Why does the principal consider Madame Ladal a threat? What is the relationship between censorship and power?
3. Émilienne and her classmates band together against the school’s principal: “We want to stay together and we want our teacher, Madame Ladal” (177). Does working together empower the students and help their cause?
4. *The Restless* is based on the true story of the May 1967 police massacre in Guadeloupe. However, this event has been largely ignored by history. With this in mind, consider what factors influence which historical events are remembered and taught. Why are the histories we teach and learn important?
5. The story is structured like a Caribbean quadrille: there are many speakers called to narrate who step in and out of the story like a dance (15). Why might Dambury structure the book this way?
6. What does Nono mean when she says that “the quadrille is a perfect example of a group of people living in harmony” (32)?
7. Émilienne’s siblings share her concern for their father and comfort her when she is sad about Madame Ladal’s disappearance. Émilienne’s mother takes her to visit her father’s sisters to help find her father (111). How is Émilienne’s family affected by the conflict between the demonstrators and the police?
8. The schoolchildren protest for their teacher to be returned to them. The construction workers strike for increased wages. How are these stories related in the book?

9. The French police kill and injure many demonstrators (9). Later in the book, the demonstrators throw stones and rubble at the police (193). Is there a difference between these two acts of violence? What are the motives of each? Is either justifiable?
10. Émilienne's father is caught between two worlds: that of the bosses and that of the construction workers whom he employs and befriends (157). After the conflict, he says, "I'm ashamed of the people I associate with" (232). Why is Émilienne's father ashamed of the other bosses? What causes him to disappear for three days?

## THOUGHTS ON FURTHER READING

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## ABOUT THE FEMINIST PRESS

The Feminist Press is an educational nonprofit organization founded to advance women’s rights and amplify feminist perspectives. We publish classic and new writing from around the world, create cutting-edge programs, and elevate silenced and marginalized voices in order to support personal transformation and social justice for all people.

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