June 22, 1933, p. 3 — “Gumbo Lailai” Again in Court, *Trinidad Guardian*

*Trinidad Guardian*, June 22, 1933:3 [date checked]

**NEW ‘GOMBO LAI**

**LAI’ IN COURT**

“FORCEFUL KICK”

CASE

By Ellis Prosper

Sellyman joseph aroused a great deal of laughter in the Port-of-Spain Magistrate's Court on Tueday when he gave evidence against Felix Brooks and Carlton Alfonzo whom he accused of assault and battery.

He used words which caused Mr. L. Roberts his solicitor to characterise him as a second “Gombo Lai Lai.”

Joseph used proximo when he meant ultimo, justified when he meant satisfied.

Addressing Mr. H.A. O'Reilly, Acting Assistant City Magistrate who presided, Joseph said: “If Your Worship give me a chance I will delineate the evidence to you.”

He said Brooks slapped him and gave him a “forceful” kick. Alfonzo, he said gave him a “fearless” jabbing.

Both Brooks and Alfonzo pleaded guilty and were fined 15s. or ten days and 10s. or seven days' imprisonment, respectively.

Mr. L. A. Pujadas who represented them explained to the Court that Brooks was in love with Joseph's sister and Joseph did not approve of the match.

Joseph had been continually annoying Brooks. On the day in question Joseph called Brooks a rogue and Brooks slapped him.

They held on. Alfonzo went to separate them, Joseph struck him and he returned the blow.

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“Gombo Lai Lai” is a well known Trinidad character who delights to use big words in public.

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NOTE: Preface

Many of the court cases which were noted in the newspapers were of working class people charged with being “drunk and disorderly”, or using “obscene language”, or otherwise offending public order. A number of convictions could deem someone “an habitual criminal” or “a rogue and a vagabond”. Gumbo Lai‑Lai was a local celebrity among the people because of his spirited self‑defence and linguistically sophisticated speech. He was admired more than ridiculed by the general populace partly because his words were reasonably close to their intended meaning, and because he was perceived as a victim of the ruling class. He is still remembered for many turns of phrase, some no doubt apocryphal, including “as I was descending the proclivity at a precipitous velocity on my velocipede” (“as I was going downhill speedily on my bicycle”). A more serious charge was levelled at him in Executor's 1939 calypso “Gumbo Lai Lai before the court”.

Text

“GUMBO LAILAI” AGAIN IN COURT.

SENT TO GAOL FOR DISORDERLY CONDUCT.

“Mercilessly Provoked.”

A miserable looking individual, answering to the name of Jules Blades, familarly [sic] known as “Gumbo Lailai,” made his appearance before the City Magistrate yesterday in answer to the charge of being drunk and disorderly at St. Vincent Street yesterday.

Defendant pleaded not guilty.

Complainant said that on Wednesday about 4:15 p.m., he took some letters to the Post Office when he saw the defendant in the Street making use of very filthy language. He spoke to him and he still continued to use his dirty words. There were some clerks awaiting the car, who had to remove away from the spot where defendant was.

Defendant, going into the box, said that during his perambulations to the sotre, he was “maliciously molested and mercifulessly provocated by those substitute vagabonds.” This policeman wanted to bring him in Court again and swore by his comrades to do so. He denied having done anything. He had numberless witnesses which he did not bother to cite. “Being a conspicuous and self‑conceited man, he did his best to bring me before you once more.”

His Worship told him he was everlastingly there.

Gumbo: Yes — for cussing. I don't steal I don't gamble nothing like dat.

His Worship told him he did not steal or gamble but walked about the streets and swore.

Defendant said he did not resist at all because the policemen had power over him.

He was sentenced to fourteen days' hard labour.

July 20, 1939 — Herskovits, Letter from Albert Collins

Herskovits, MG 261, Box 12

(enclosed in Trinidad Note Book I, Toco)

Envelope: To My Attendants

Toco

Letter:

Galt Road

Sangre Grande

20.7.39

My attendance

May the blessing of all that is sacred be with you and your cirkle. this will instruct you of what we spoke about. Please bear in mind, you will want A litle Civet or deer musk A blue cloth band to go around the waist. The prayer caul and musk is to be sowned in the band placed into A new white plate and placed to the new moon for 3 hours and then Apply. It must not be removed accept the time of sexual intercourse then after bathe before handleing it. This is the caul ten shillings for it. I had to do it this way for A particular reason whilst I offer my best regard to you both

yours very humble

Albert Collins

This is the prayer

Defende quasumus Domine beata Maria semper virgine intersedente

abomni islam adversitate familium et toto corde tibi prostatum abhostium propitius tuere clementer insidiis per Christum Dominum et Nostrum

Amen

Devinum ausutium [ausutiem?] maneat semper nobiscum

us we mi