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# Black Radicals and Marxist Internationalism: From the IWMA to the Fourth International, 1864-1948

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Black Radicals and Marxist Internationalism: From the IWMA to the Fourth  
International, 1864-1948

By

Charles Holm

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Jeannette Eileen Jones

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2014

# Black Radicals and Marxist Internationalism: From the IWMA to the Fourth International, 1864-1948

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University of Nebraska, 2014

Advisor: Jeannette Eileen Jones

This project investigates historical relationships between Black Radicalism and Marxist internationalism from the mid-nineteenth through the first half of the twentieth century. It argues that contrary to scholarly accounts that emphasize Marxist Euro-centrism, or that theorize the incompatibility of “Black” and “Western” radical projects, Black Radicals helped shape and produce Marxist theory and political movements, developing theoretical and organizational innovations that drew on both Black Radical and Marxist traditions of internationalism. These innovations were produced through experiences of struggle within international political movements ranging from the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century to the early Pan-African movements and struggles against racism and colonialism in the early twentieth century. Taking into account recent contributions to the historiography of Black Radicalism and international Marxism in the twentieth century, this thesis fills an important gap by examining how the “Black International” influenced Karl Marx himself during the American Civil War. It also addresses the contentious and problematic relationships between Black socialists and white Marxists in the American Socialist Party, within the context of emerging Pan African movements and the broader debates surrounding Marxism in the lead up to World War I. Additionally, this thesis reexamines the relationships between Marxism and Black radicals following

the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, incorporating into its discussion the largely neglected theoretical and organizational activities of the Marxist left that gravitated around Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition following 1928, rather than focusing strictly on figures who remained organizationally and theoretically tied to the Communist International during the 1930s and 1940s.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Long before Karl Marx wrote ‘Workers of the world, unite,’ the revolution was international.”  
 -- C.L.R. James, “Revolution and the Negro,” 1939<sup>1</sup>

“What comrade James tells us now is very important,” said the exiled Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky on April 5, 1939. Trotsky and the Black radical Marxist internationalist C.L.R. James were discussing whether or not the newly formed Socialist Workers’ Party in the United States should initiate the creation of a mass based “organization of Negroes as Negroes—not for the purpose of winning some elements to our party but for the purpose of doing systematic educational work in order to elevate them politically.” The discussion took place in Coyoacán, Mexico. At the time, James argued that a “Marxist analysis of Negro history and the problems of the day” gave “insight into the development of the Negroes which nothing else can.” James, born in Trinidad in 1901, came to Mexico via California after completing a national speaking tour of the United States. He arrived in the United States in 1938 from England as an important figure on the international Trotskyist left, and where he had been instrumental in building Pan-African political organizations.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.L.R. James’ “Revolution and the Negro” (December 1939), in *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939-1949*, eds. Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1994), 81.

<sup>2</sup> For a full transcript of James and Trotsky’s exchange in Mexico, see “The Discussions in Coyoacán” (April 1932), in *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism & Self-Determination*, ed. George Breitman, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 33-69. Two excellent anthologies of James’ writings during his years in the United States are *C.L.R. James on the ‘Negro’ Question*, ed. Scott McLemee (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi) and *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C.L.R. James 1939-1949*, eds. Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1994). On James’ early Marxism, also see Anthony Bogues, *Caliban’s Freedom: The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James* (London: Pluto Press, 1997).

The interaction between C.L.R. James and Leon Trotsky in Mexico represents a much longer historical interaction between Black radicals and Marxist revolutionaries that dates back to the late nineteenth century, framed by Karl Marx's view of Black revolution during the American Civil War. Beginning with the influence of Black revolution and slavery on Marx's own developing theoretical and political outlook, the current project investigates this historical relationship through the first half of the twentieth century. It argues that contrary to scholarly accounts that emphasize Marxist Euro-centrism, or that theorize the incompatibility of "Black" and "Western" radical projects, Black radicals helped shape and produce Marxist theory and political movements, developing theoretical and organizational innovations that drew on both Black and Marxist traditions of internationalism. These innovations were produced through experiences of struggle within international political movements ranging from the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century to the early Pan-African movements and struggles against racism and colonialism in the early twentieth century.

Taking into account recent contributions to the historiography of Black radicalism and the international Marxist left, this thesis examines how the "Black International" influenced Karl Marx himself during the American Civil War. It also addresses the contentious and problematic relationships between Black socialists like W.E.B. Du Bois and Hubert Harrison and white Marxists in the American Socialist Party within the context of emerging Pan African movements and the broader debates surrounding Marxism in the lead up to World War I. Additionally, this thesis reexamines the relationships between Marxism and Black Radicals following the Bolshevik Revolution

in 1917, incorporating into its discussion the largely neglected theoretical and organizational activities of the Marxist left, most importantly the work of C.L.R. James, that gravitated around Leon Trotsky's ideas and the Left Opposition following 1928, rather than focusing strictly on figures who remained organizationally and theoretically tied to the Communist International during the 1930s and 1940s.

This project contends that within anti-slavery, anti-colonial, and anti-racist movements, Marxists produced important theoretical perspectives, organizational practices, and transnational political solidarities. The “foundational core” of both Marxism and Black internationalism as a Black radical tradition is “universal emancipation,”<sup>3</sup> and the historical relationship between the two does not suggest an inherent antagonism. As Vivek Chibber has recently argued in his critique of post-colonial theory, Marxism's “cross-cultural” framework resists the label “Eurocentric,” despite its European origins. “The history of Marxian analysis,” Chibber points out, “exhibits an enduring appreciation of the fact that” non-European and non-Western societies “seem to be driven by logics that require fresh analysis and even, at times, a modification of received categories.”<sup>4</sup> The theoretical and historical contributions of Black radicals W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James in the 1930s fall within this Marxist

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<sup>3</sup> Michael O. West and William G. Martin, “Contours of the Black International: From Toussaint to Tupac,” in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*, ed. Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2013), 285, 292. Chibber specifically cites Lenin, Kautsky, Trotsky, Mao, and Gramsci as Marxist thinkers who developed theories that rejected teleological, deterministic, and stagiest modes of thought. While acknowledging that some “of these theories...are deeply flawed and can be criticized on various grounds,” Chibber argues such criticism should not take place on the grounds commonly used by postcolonial theory. Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory*, 293.



tradition.<sup>5</sup> In order to make these claims, this work builds off and draws from an important and growing body of work examining the relationship between Black radicalism and Marxism that has appeared in the last three decades.

Several scholars have focused almost exclusively on the relationship between Blacks and the Communist Party (CP) in the United States, while others have investigated Black radicalism and Marxism more broadly within the context of a “black international.” Defined by Michael O. West and William G. Martin the “black international” emerged through struggles and “resistance to oppression by black folks” that led to “the conscious interconnection and interlocution of black struggles across man-made and natural boundaries—including the boundaries of nations, empires, continents, oceans, and seas.” As such, it envisioned “a circle of universal emancipation, unbroken in space and time.”<sup>6</sup>

Works focusing primarily on African Americans and the Communist Party provide a number of important insights for this project. Addressing the shortcomings of Cold War era historiography pertaining to American Communism, which often reduced American Communists to agents of Moscow while neglecting the indigenous roots of American radicalism, these works broke important ground.<sup>7</sup> Within this revisionist trend, Mark Naison’s *Communists in Harlem during the Great Depression* (1983) and Robin D.G. Kelley’s *Hammer and Hoe* (1990) both pay attention to the agency of Black party

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 71.

<sup>6</sup> West and Martin, “Contours,” in West, Martin, and Wilkins, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Draper’s is the most important and influential representative of the Cold War historians. See Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking, 1957) and *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (New York: Viking, 1960). For a brief discussion of Draper’s importance, see also D. Palmer, introduction to *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 7-15.

members. Naison uses the stories of individual Black Communists in Harlem to show the role they played in shaping the priorities and theoretical perspectives of the organization, while Kelley's work emphasizes African American culture as influencing the way Communism as a movement and idea came to exist in the southern United States, both for white and black comrades inside the CP.<sup>8</sup>

Mark Solomon's *The Cry Was Unity* (1998) takes an approach distinct from Naison, whom he criticizes for going too far in correcting the Cold War paradigm by over-emphasizing local autonomy within the Communist Party. Solomon argues that acknowledging the "coherent political culture" established by the Communist International does not require acceptance of the monolithic influence of Moscow.<sup>9</sup> Acknowledging the insights provided by cultural historians like Kelley, Solomon also considers how the turn toward cultural history often produces abstract and vague explanations for African American radicalism. Solomon places consciousness of racial oppression and class at the center of the radicalization of Black Communists, rather than locating the source of their radicalism inside a distinct cultural experience. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore's *Defying Dixie* (2008) also differs from Kelley by arguing for a direct link between the Communist Party and the formation of the modern civil rights movement. Gilmore additionally stresses how issues of race, class, and nation posed

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Great Depression* (1983; repr., Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists in the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). Another important work opening up the revisionist trend is Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: The Life and Times of a Black Radical* (1979; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African-Americans, 1917-1936* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi, 1998), xxi.

important theoretical questions from the very beginning of the Communist Party's strategy for organizing African Americans.<sup>10</sup>

While the scholarship mentioned above makes important contributions to understanding African American experiences, relationships, and contributions within the Communist Party during the early twentieth century, other works take up the broader question of Marxism and Black Radicalism in the African Diaspora. Many scholars are now involved in critically evaluating themes such as Black internationalism, Pan-Africanism, and the Black Radical Tradition in relation to international Marxism and to Marxist theory and practice generally. Some have approached the subject from a perspective that accepts cultural distinctions between Marxism as a Western project and Black Radicalism as a specifically African phenomenon. Others take a broader historical perspective, often coming at their subject from a transnational, comparative perspective.

Within this body of scholarship, Cedric J. Robinson's *Black Marxism* (1983) stands out as an influential and important book that has impacted more recent studies. Its re-publication in 2000 with an introduction by Robin D.G. Kelley has had a significant impact on its reception among scholars. Robinson argues that Marxism and the "Black Radical Tradition" are irreconcilable programs for cultural reasons. For Robinson, Marxism as a Western construct clashes with a Black Radical Tradition produced by struggles having a "specifically African character" antithetical to Western radicalism.<sup>11</sup> Cornel West's review of *Black Marxism* (1988) provides an early critique of Robinson's

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<sup>10</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: Norton, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 5.

work for failing to point out the precise origins for the sources he claims lay at the foundation of the Black Radical Tradition, while Nah Dove's "An Afro-Centric Critique of Marx's Logic" (1995) uses Robinson to argue against Marxism as a viable source of African resistance.<sup>12</sup>

Another foundational work, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), challenges what he sees as "ethnic absolutisms in cultural criticism produced by both blacks and whites."<sup>13</sup> Gilroy's orientation toward the Atlantic world builds on a "transnational and intercultural perspective" to illuminate how Blacks developed a counter-culture within and against modernity, and how ethnic identities and political cultures have been transformed and continue to change through exchanges of culture and politics within the Black Atlantic.<sup>14</sup> This counter-culture, according to Gilroy, is produced by Blacks rejecting modernity's separation of ethical, cultural, and political realities and concerns, a project Gilroy sees as converging with Marxism. However, the priority Marxism gives to "systemic crisis" over "lived crisis," according to Gilroy, shows where this convergence ends. The Black counter-culture and philosophical discourse places the "memory of slavery" at its center, prioritizing lived experience (or its memory). Likewise, according to Gilroy, whereas Marxism views labor to be "the centre-piece of emancipatory hopes,"

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<sup>12</sup> Cornel West, "Black Radicalism and the Marxist Tradition—*Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* by Cedric J. Robinson," *Monthly Review* 40, No. 4 (September 1988): 51-56; Nah Dove, "An African-Centered Critique of Marx's Logic," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 19, No. 4 (1995): 260-271.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 15. Gilroy cites Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, respectively, as cultural historians who provided the inspiration for viewing "the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world." Their developed collaborative project on the revolutionary Atlantic was published in 2000. See Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

for “the descendants of slaves, work signifies only servitude, misery, and subordination.”<sup>15</sup>

Gilroy’s transnational orientation marks an important turn in the historiography of Black politics and culture. Winston James’ *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia* (1998) contributes to this body of work by drawing on Anglo and Spanish Caribbean experiences of the African Diaspora excluded from previous scholarship.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, the transnational work of Carole Boyce Davies’ *Left of Karl Marx* (2007) and Erik S. McDuffie’s *Sojourning for Freedom* (2011) fill important gaps in the historiography regarding the role of Black women.<sup>17</sup> Davies treats Trinidadian born Claudia Jones’ contributions to Black feminist thought and Marxist theory, using an “internationalist” orientation that combats “the imposed erasure and silencing of Claudia Jones that was the final goal U.S. officials intended by her deportation.”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, McDuffie’s work on Black left feminism “moves black women from the margins to the center of narratives about black radicalism, diasporic social movements, U.S. and transnational women’s movements, and American Communism during the early and mid-twentieth century.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gilroy, 39-40.

<sup>16</sup> Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Both Davies and McDuffie add to and move beyond the groundbreaking work by Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000; repr., New York: Routledge Classics, 2009). Collins’ scholarship limited itself to discussing Black feminism within the framework of the nation-state. Both are also influenced by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). See also Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).

<sup>18</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 6.

Gary Edward Holcomb's *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha* (2007) marks an important contribution to and critique of this transnational turn. Holcomb acknowledges "black transnational criticism of McKay" as valuable, but notes that it often sets his engagement with Marxism in complete opposition to his involvement with the black radical politics of movements like Négritude.<sup>20</sup> Holcomb's work was preceded by William J. Maxwell's *New Negro, Old Left* (1999), which blended historical and literary analysis to show how individuals like Claude McKay reshaped Marxist theory in the 1920s as Marxism itself later became a central influence for Black writers in the 1930s. Maxwell argues therefore that "when African-American literature drew from 1930s Communism, it tapped a partial product of its own legacy."<sup>21</sup>

Minkah Makalani's recently published *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (2011) likewise argues that while Black radical internationalism and Marxism are not identical, Black radicalism took shape over time often in conversation and struggle with Marxism and Marxist inspired movements.<sup>22</sup> Makalani's work focuses on Black Radicals "who considered restructuring the dominant political economy a central feature of ending racial oppression and considered some form of socialist economic organization essential to racial liberation and national self-determination for colonial Africa and Asia."<sup>23</sup> Framing his overall analysis within the "diasporic identity" of Black Radicals seen as a "transnational formation,"

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<sup>20</sup> Gary Edward Holcomb, *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 4.

<sup>21</sup> William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>22</sup> Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 15.

Makalani also examines how “histories of racialization” generated radical politics.<sup>24</sup> He emphasizes the limitations of Marxism and concludes that the history of Black Radical internationalism itself suggests the need for a new theoretical framework. Makalani stresses how “radical black internationalism took form within black social movements and then created room in organized Marxism for the emergence of a black international.”<sup>25</sup>

Lastly, Hakim Adi’s, *Pan-Africanism and Communism* (2013), makes the case that from its founding in 1919, the Communist International took up what was called the “Negro Question” in demanding and organizing anti-colonialist movements at a time when groups led by W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey had not yet developed clear programs for Pan-African liberation.<sup>26</sup> He highlights the role of the Communist International in the United States, France, Britain, the Caribbean, West Africa, and South Africa, and describes the Communist International itself as a Pan-African institution.<sup>27</sup> Adi briefly but importantly notes how the oppression of Africans and colonial exploitation concerned Marxism and Marxist thinkers, including Karl Marx himself, from Marxism’s formation as a theory and political movement in the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, there is no scholarly consensus on the relationship between Black Radicals and Marxism. On one side, scholars view Marxist theory and political

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>25</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 7. Makalani draws on the discussion of the “black international” and the Communist International in West and Martin, “Contours,” 16.

<sup>26</sup> Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939*, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2013), xviii.

<sup>27</sup> Adi’s earlier work focused primarily on West African student politics and movements in Britain. See Hakim Adi, *West African in Britain, 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 3.

organizations to have played an important role in struggles against racism and colonialism in the early twentieth century, not only in the United States but also internationally. These authors tend to view certain Black Radical and Marxist traditions as complimentary and at times congruent. On the other hand some scholars claim irreconcilable culturally based differences between Marxism and African or Black Radical traditions. These scholars see Black or African rooted radicalisms based on non-Western cultural traditions as the most appropriate resources for building struggles against racism and imperialism, often minimizing or dismissing the role of Marxist theory and politics in contributing to those struggles historically. The most useful scholarship to this study highlights the relationships between Marxism and Marxist inspired movements and Black Radicals, using transnational perspectives that critically engage with the theoretical and historical connections between Black radicalism and Marxist theory and practice.

The interpretive limitations of the extant scholarship on Black Radicalism and Marxism stem, in part, from what I see as a flattening of the history of Marxism itself. The existence and importance of different revolutionary Marxist traditions are often not significantly acknowledged, leading scholars to rely on culturally based explanations for Marxism's supposed inability to provide a fruitful space for developing Black struggle and internationalism. Often, contributions stemming from Marxist engagements are attributed to a Black Radical and culturally based critique of Marxism, rather than rooted in a Marxist analysis itself. While culturally specific factors clearly shape political movements and theoretical production, cultural approaches often elide the complex



historical development and ideological terrain of both Marxist and Black Radical traditions.

As Naison points out, Black and white radicals in the United States engaged Marxism at different historical moments with “important questions regarding the role of revolution and reform, nationalism and integration, protest and legal action, in the struggle for black equality.”<sup>29</sup> This project will investigate these confrontations and fill some of the gaps in the extant literature by reexamining the historical relationship between revolutionary Black internationalism and Marxist internationalist traditions. It will begin by exploring how the Black International influenced Karl Marx during the American Civil War, revealing the way Black revolutionary movements shaped his views on slavery, capitalism, agency, and working class revolutionary possibilities. Rather than seeing the formation of the International Workingmen’s Association in 1864, the decline of American slavery, and the publication of Marx’s *Capital Vol. I* in 1867 as chronological happenstance or serendipitous occurrences, this project points to the direct influence of a revolutionary Black internationalism stemming from the Haitian Revolution on Marx’s critique of capitalism and his understanding of revolutionary working class politics.

The history considered here is “an interracial history of modern radical thought” and politics, which proceeds with an awareness that “black radical thought” has often been subjugated “within sanctioned Marxian policies and orientations,” as William J. Maxwell correctly stresses.<sup>30</sup> It makes use of primary source texts concerning the

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<sup>29</sup> Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, xvii.

<sup>30</sup> Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left*, 11.

development of Marxist and Black Radical movements and ideas, starting with the writings of 19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionists and of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In addressing the relationship between Marxism and the Black radicals in the early twentieth century, the study will pay particular attention to texts written by W.E.B. Du Bois and Hubert Harrison, especially Harrison's writings that sought to develop a Marxist theoretical and organization perspective for the American Socialist Party regarding race, Black agency, and revolution. In addition, it will use materials associated with the emerging Trotskyist movement in the United States, Europe, and within the broader African Diaspora following 1928, focusing primarily on works by the Black Caribbean Marxist C.L.R. James. These sources help fill the gap left by histories that have focused primarily on Comintern and CP documents in the 1920s and 1930s, and provide a broader historical context for understanding the intellectual and political trajectories of Black Radicalism and Marxist internationalism.

While Black (and white) women played vital and important roles in many of the organizations and movements I discuss, the majority of sources incorporated in the following study come from predominately male voices. This has not been intentional, and as my research unfolded I regretted my neglect in this area. From Lucy Parsons, who was born in 1853 and helped lead struggles against lynching, unemployment, women's rights, and racial oppression until her death in 1942, to Eslanda Goode Robeson, who visited the USSR in the 1930s and played an important role in anticolonial movements from the 1930s to her death in 1965, Black radical women were central to the historic development of Black radicalism and Marxist internationalism. Both these women have largely

remained marginal to histories that have instead focused on their male-counter parts.

Lucy Parsons has been overshadowed by her husband Albert Parsons, who was executed 1887 and become known as one of the “Haymarket Martyrs” following a massive strike for the eight hour work day in Chicago in 1886, and Eslanda Goode Robeson’s life has been treated largely on the margins of biographies and histories focused on her husband, the African American entertainer, radical activist, and Communist sympathizer Paul Robeson.<sup>31</sup> Acknowledging this here does not justify the absence of a significant discussion of Black women’s contributions later in my work, but is intended as a self-conscious critique.

Another important acknowledgment to be made is that like Robin D.G. Kelley, who spent two years “as a member of the Communist Workers’ Party...attending study groups, writing internal position papers, and helping organize demonstrations,”<sup>32</sup> my own reading and understanding of the Marxism has developed over a number of years not only through scholarly research but also in my role as an activist involved in movement building, and these experiences will inevitably inform my argument. Thus letting primary source documents “speak” within their historical contexts is crucial to negotiating my own biases, as well as supporting my critique of the portrayal of Marxism as intrinsically Eurocentric and antithetical to the Black Radical Tradition. I will also draw on recent theoretical and secondary source literature that provides an alternative conceptual

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<sup>31</sup> For biographies of these women that address these issues, see Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: An American Revolutionary* (1976; repr., Chicago: Haymarket, 2012) and Barbara Ransby, *Eslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 37.

framework for understanding the legacies of relationship between Marxism and Black Radicalism.

Chapter One traces the historic development of the Black international and its revolutionary traditions beginning with the Haitian Revolution in 1792 through the American Civil War. It will argue this history directly affected Marx's engagement with radical abolitionism, working class internationalism, and theorizing of capitalism.

Chapter Two places the experiences of Black Radicals interacting with the American Socialist Party before 1919 within the context of emerging Pan-African movements and Marxism as developed in relation to the Socialist International. It will highlight how figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Hubert Harrison had contentious relationships with the Socialist Party during this period on issues of racism and questions of revolutionary socialist politics. Chapter Three explores the consequences of the Bolshevik Revolution and the creation of the Communist International in 1919 their resonance for Black internationalism and Marxist theory. It argues that after the rise of Stalinism, Marxism continued to be a theoretical and political resource for Black radicals building anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist movements based on visions of universal emancipation. In this period C.L.R. James in particular made innovative theoretical and organizational contributions within the Marxist internationalist tradition. Lastly, the conclusion addresses this history in relation to debates about the viability of Marxism and Black radicalism today.

## CHAPTER 1 THE BLACK INTERNATIONAL AND KARL MARX: FROM HAITI TO LONDON

“In my view, the most momentous thing happening in the world today is the slave movement — on the one hand, in America, started by the death of Brown, and in Russia, on the other... the signal has now been given.”

--Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, January 11, 1860<sup>1</sup>

The encounter between Black Radicalism and Marxism predates the twentieth century. From the Haitian Revolution through the American Civil War, a revolutionary tradition of Black internationalism emerged, directly impacting the development of Karl Marx’s theories and political outlook, perhaps most concretely in the formation of the International Workingmen’s Association (IWMA) in 1864, often referred to as the “first” International, and in the publication of Marx’s masterpiece, *Capital: Volume I*, in 1867. This chapter will argue that, as a result, during this period Marx did not remain concerned primarily with European events, and that his politics and social analysis placed slavery and struggles against white supremacy at the center of his vision of a world-wide working class revolutionary movement.

Marx’s own orientation toward slavery and Black resistance highlights the influence of a Black internationalism rooted in resistance to slavery and racial oppression within the African Diaspora. The Haitian Revolution can be seen as the key historical event that helped spread this influence across the Atlantic during Marx’s lifetime.

According to West and Martin, the Haitian revolution “provided the spark that fired a

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<sup>1</sup> Marx to Engels, January 11, 1860, in *MECW* (New York: International Publishers), 41:3-5, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed November 20, 2013, [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/letters/60\\_01\\_11.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/letters/60_01_11.htm).

new and revolutionary black internationalism” rooted in a long history of armed struggle against slavery that transformed the nature of slave resistance itself.<sup>2</sup> Marx came to expect that the Civil War in the United States would have similar consequences for the international working class as a whole, marking its “ascendancy.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, according to Mathew Clavin, many “African Americans and their white allies” considered the American Civil War to be “a second Haitian Revolution.”<sup>4</sup>

Although Marx encountered this Black revolutionary tradition from a distance, its history and presence within contemporary struggles shaped the outlook of his most important writings on the relationship between race, class, and capitalism. During the American Civil War, Marx’s theory and political practice made common cause with the Black international’s struggle against racism and slavery, not as peripheral aspects of some reductionist or Euro-centric understanding of class struggle, but as central components of Marx’s truly global vision for working class self-emancipation. His publication of *Capital* in 1867 laid part of the foundation for developing a Marxist perspective on racism that remained largely unexplored by socialists in the early twentieth century, but came to provide future Black and white Marxists theoretical tools

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<sup>2</sup> West and Martin, “Contours,” 8. West and Martin argue that during the Age of Revolution, “the black international evolved into two traditions...revolutionary and revivalist.” The primary concern here is the revolutionary tradition, although the two often cross. See also Michael O. West and William G. Martin, “Haiti, I’m Sorry: The Haitian Revolution and the Forging of the Black International,” in *Toussaint to Tupac*, eds. West, Martin, and Wilkins, 90, 91-97. Here the authors point out that Paul Gilroy’s work, *The Black Atlantic*, is virtually silent on the Haitian Revolution.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, “Address of the International Workingmen’s Association to Abraham Lincoln,” *Bee-Hive* (London), January 7, 1865, in *The Civil War in the United States*, ed. Richard Enmale (New York: International Publishers, 1937), 279-281. The address related the American Revolution against Britain as having led to the rise of the middle class, and expected the “American antislavery war” would open up a new “epoch” for the working class.

<sup>4</sup> Mathew J. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 5.

for challenging white supremacy in building an international struggle against racism, colonialism, and capitalism.

Some scholars have accepted Friedrich Engels' suggestion that Marxism, or "scientific socialism," as Marx and Engels called it, came about by synthesis of French revolutionary politics, German philosophy, and British political economy.<sup>5</sup> In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels' wrote; "Like every new theory, modern socialism had at first to link itself with the intellectual data ready to hand, however deeply its roots lay in material economic facts,"<sup>6</sup> but in a recent biography of Marx, Jonathan Sperber points out that it is not sufficient simply to understand the intellectual context of Marx's ideas. The historian must also examine them in relation to Marx's personal life and within the context of nineteenth century history more broadly.<sup>7</sup> Contextualizing Marx in this way means incorporating the political and social upheavals taking place during what Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm calls "the Age of Revolution."<sup>8</sup> Erupting at the close of the eighteenth century and continuing into the first years of the nineteenth, the Haitian Revolution marks a significant starting point for discussing the revolutionary Black internationalist tradition that would influence Marx's theory and political perspectives during the American Civil War.

The Haitian Revolution crucially gave strong impetus to a revolutionary tradition of Black internationalism that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. Noting that

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders, eds., *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1964), 276.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1892; Reprint, Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1975), 45.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth Century Life* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), xv-xvi.

<sup>8</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (1962; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

opposition and resistance to slavery began among enslaved Africans beginning with “their sojourn in the Americas,” West and Martin argue that during the Age of Revolution “black antislavery increasingly became more interconnected, ideologically and organizationally.”<sup>9</sup> Despite its omission or scant reference in much of the historiography concerning the “Age of Revolution,” according to these scholars the Haitian Revolution not only transformed black resistance to slavery throughout the Atlantic, its world-historical impact immediately exceeded that of the American, French, and the British industrial revolutions if measured in terms of mass participation, social transformation, and political change.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Black International: From the Age of Revolution to the American Civil War**

The Haitian Revolution took place on the island of Saint-Domingue. A French colony in the late eighteenth century, Saint-Domingue was “the centerpiece of the Atlantic Slave System,” according to David Brion Davis. It exported in 1787 nearly as much sugar to European and American markets as the colonies of Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil combined, and alone it produced over half of the world’s coffee supply on the basis of slave labor.<sup>11</sup> Saint-Domingue became a central hub for European economies within the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This slave trade was part of a global market primarily based on a “triangular trade” in which ships from colonial home countries would sail with goods to exchange for slaves in Africa then taken to the colonies in

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<sup>9</sup> West & Martin, “Contours,” 5.

<sup>10</sup> West & Martin, “Haiti, I’m Sorry,” 79. Hobsbawm’s work on the period barely references Haiti, and only as it relates to the French Revolution. See Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, 69. For a useful overview of recent literary and historical scholarship on the Haitian Revolution see Celucien L. Joseph, “‘The Haitian Turn’: An Appraisal of Recent Literary and Historiographical Works on the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 5, No. 6 (September 2012): 37-55.

<sup>11</sup> David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158.



exchange for colonial goods, with the ships returning to Europe in order to sell those products at an immense profit.<sup>12</sup> Demand for enslaved Africans increased dramatically during the eighteenth century alongside increased demand for sugar in Europe, and consequently, slave traders transported nearly three million Africans to the Caribbean in this period. According to Howard Winant, these Africans were usually captured during slave raids, often sold and resold, and confined “under conditions of filth, thirst, malnutrition, and disease” even before leaving Africa and embarking on the Middle Passage.<sup>13</sup> The Middle Passage marked an enslaved African’s voyage from Africa to a destination usually in the Americas. Ottobah Cugoano, who “suffered this infernal traffic,” recalled how it impressed upon those who experienced it a feeling that “death was more preferable than life.”<sup>14</sup>

Yet people and goods were not the only things that circulated within the trade’s “transnational circuits.” Ideas and cultures, religious beliefs, and revolutionary political movements also spread. As Sylvia Frey argues, Black sailors established connections between “Caribbean island communities... the great metropolitan ports of Europe, the docks of Atlantic North America, and the village markets and forts of Atlantic Africa,” facilitating the “development of a black diasporic consciousness” by forging new Black

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<sup>12</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; Reprint, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 51-52. Most recent scholarship notes that it was really a quadrangular trade, and that the second stop was in the Caribbean and then to the mainland colonies of North and South America. This is partially why Haiti (and the broader Caribbean) was so important in connecting the Black international in the Western Hemisphere.

<sup>13</sup> Howard Winant, *The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 45, 57-58.

<sup>14</sup> Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery, 1787*, in *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives from the Enlightenment, 1772-1815*, eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and William L. Andrews (Washington D.C.: Civitas, 1998), 94.

identities “out of disparate and often antagonistic ethnic” ones.<sup>15</sup> One of these sailors was Olaudah Equiano. Born in Africa in what is today Igboland, Nigeria, travelling the world first as a slave, and after 1766 as a free Black sailor, Equiano worked as a slaver on the eastern coast of North America before he purchased his own freedom, and in 1776 he even managed a plantation. In the late 1780s he began devoting his time and energy toward abolition work and the Black community in London, where he began to identify primarily as an “African,” proudly pronouncing his dedication to his fellow “African brethren.”<sup>16</sup>

Frey points out that modern historians often ignore connections Africans like Equiano established “on mainland North America and in the Caribbean” during the Age of Revolution. She notes how approximately one thousand Black volunteers from Saint-Domingue fought in the American Revolution as a result of the Franco-American alliance established in 1778, some of whom went on to become leaders in the Haitian Revolution. These soldiers and the use of French Caribbean islands as bases for American ships during the war between England and its thirteen colonies created a “contraband trade” in revolutionary ideas. Indeed, as Frey argues, these Black “American Revolutionary War veterans formed human links in a chain that flowed from the American Revolution

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<sup>15</sup> Sylvia Frey, “The American Revolution and the Creation of a Global African World,” in *From Toussaint to Tupac*, eds. West, Martin, and Wilkins, 47, 50-51.

<sup>16</sup> See Olaudah Equiano, abridged version, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, in *Black Atlantic Writers of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas*, eds. Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 159-268, 247.

through the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution and back around to mainland North America.”<sup>17</sup>

The American Revolution that began in 1776 has generally been considered as a monumental event in the history of democracy and human rights. Gerald Horne challenges this widely accepted position by highlighting how slavery had already become the bedrock of the North American economy before 1776, and that the revolution provided “a renewed lease on life” to a “chattel slavery grounded in racist chauvinism.”<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it did effect the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts and parts of New England while encouraging other Northern states to commit to gradual emancipation. It also helped spread an ideology among white and Black participants that emphasized personal freedom and inalienable rights. These ideas were transmitted by sailors “black, white, and brown” throughout the Caribbean. The French Revolution also had an immense ideological and material impact on the Haitian Revolution, especially the revolutionary ideas outlined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the first article of which stated that: “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can be founded only on the common good.”<sup>19</sup>

These ideas appealed to the free people of color in Saint-Domingue, mostly “persons of African and European ancestry,” many of whom owned slaves. They

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<sup>17</sup> Frey, “American Revolution and the Creation of a Global African World,” 62-63. C.L.R. James pointed out these international connections and their significance in 1939 in an article from which the opening quote of this essay is pulled. See C.L.R. James, “Revolution and the Negro,” in McLemee and Le Blanc, 81.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), xi. Horne writes that in this way the 1776 revolution “was truly a lineal ancestor of 1861 and, thus, a counter-revolution of slavery,” referring to the secession of the Southern pro-slavery states during the American Civil War.

<sup>19</sup> D. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 156-163; Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*, 241-242; Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, art. 1.

welcomed the French Revolution and used it as an opportunity to claim “full citizenship rights” from the colony’s white ruling class. This included the “right” to their enslaved laborers as property. Property itself was enshrined as “an inviolable and sacred right” by the Declarations of the Rights of Man. When the white ruling class refused to recognize their citizenry, confrontation spread between the two factions and war began. During the chaos that ensued, the “slaves made their move,” and in an effort to stop the spread of the rebellion, France attempted but failed to unite the free blacks and white colonists against an overwhelming slave population. When France finally recognized the self-liberation of the revolutionary slaves in order to prevent the loss of their colony to the Spanish Crown, the Black revolutionary movement led by Toussaint Louverture temporarily realigned itself with the French.<sup>20</sup> In February 1794, the French National Convention issued an official declaration abolishing slavery “in all the colonies” that defined “all men living in the colonies, without distinction of color” as “French citizens.”<sup>21</sup>

With the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte in France signaling the end of the French Revolution, however, the revolutionary processes unleashed in St. Domingue continued. Napoleon sent an army to crush the Black revolution in 1801 and eventually intended to reinstitute slavery in the colony. Louverture died in a French prison after his newly established government dissolved, and the French set about enacting a policy of

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<sup>20</sup> West and Martin, “Haiti, I’m Sorry,” 75; Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, art. 17; C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev., New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 19. The revolution’s leader, Toussaint Louverture, was a free black at the outbreak of the revolution, a member of a “small and privileged caste.” According to James: “The leaders of a revolution are usually those who have been able to profit by the cultural advantages of the system they are attacking.”

<sup>21</sup> French National Convention, “The Abolition of Slavery,” February 4, 1794, in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*, eds. Laurent Du Bois and John D. Garrigus (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2006), 132.

extermination with a plan to import new human cargoes from Africa to replace them. Threatened with outright extinction, Black revolutionaries responded in kind under the leadership of Jacques Dessalines, who following the official declaration of Haitian independence in 1804 began killing whites who remained on the island.<sup>22</sup> The “Haitian Declaration of Independence” declared it impossible for the new Black Republic to consider the French as future allies, and resolved “to put to death anyone born French whose profane foot soils the land of liberty.”<sup>23</sup>

In the span of a little over ten years, the Haitian Revolution had abolished slavery and destroyed its colonial ruling class, spurring a number of international repercussions. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker consider it “the first successful workers’ revolt in modern history,”<sup>24</sup> and it greatly impacted the spread of slave revolts and Black resistance. Indeed, following the revolution, John E. Baur argues that the “spectre of Haiti” haunted the ruling classes of slave owning societies in the Western Hemisphere, who feared the exportability of its example.<sup>25</sup> The revolution encouraged support for revolutionary violence and resistance against the institution of slavery among white and Black abolitionists in the United States and throughout Europe.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> West and Martin, “Haiti, I’m Sorry,” 77, 78.

<sup>23</sup> Haitian Declaration of Independence, January 1, 1804, in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean*, eds. Dubois and Garrigus, 189. See C.L.R. James, *Black Jacobins*, 373. James wrote, “The massacre of the whites was a tragedy; not for the whites. For these old slave-owners, those who burnt a little powder in the arse of a Negro, who buried him alive for insects to eat, who were well treated by Toussaint, and who, as soon as they got the change, began their old cruelties again; for these there is no need to waste one tear or one drop of ink. The tragedy was for the blacks and the Mulattoes. It was not a policy but revenge, and revenge has no place in politics.”

<sup>24</sup> Linebaugh and Rediker, 319.

<sup>25</sup> John Baur, “International Repercussions of the Haitian Revolution,” *The Americas* 26, No. 4 (April 1970): 412.

<sup>26</sup> Clavin, 21.

In 1804, therefore, the Haitian Revolution had in some ways only begun. With regard to slavery in the United States its earliest effects were contradictory. It strengthened arguments in the United States calling for a ban on the slave trade, while simultaneously arousing fears among whites leading to new laws restricting the possibility for manumission and greater support for sending free Blacks to colonize areas outside the United States. According to Clavin the Revolution provided an inspiration for many abolitionists and a warning sign to slave owners of things to come. The movement to abolish slavery grew with the movement to expand slavery and by the outbreak of the American Civil War individuals across racial, religious, and class lines put the Haitian Revolution to use in support of diametrically opposed causes. David Brion Davis points out for most whites it showed why freed slaves would be incapable of participating in republican institutions. Among abolitionists, however, it often strengthened their resolve, providing them a powerful weapon with which to attack slavery and white supremacy.<sup>27</sup>

The Haitian Revolution's influence is demonstrated by the linkages made with it among enslaved and free Blacks seeking to overthrow slavery in the United States. A conspiracy in 1822 to "launch a major massive slave insurrection," organized by Denmark Vesey, a free black man living in Charleston, South Carolina, can be directly linked to the influence of the Haitian Revolution. Evidence presented at Vesey's trial and the words of other free blacks present near Charleston around the time of the conspiracy connect Vesey to the events in Haiti in its conception and practice of violence in attacking slavery. David Walker, who published a manifesto in 1829 calling for violent slave revolt and unity among free and enslaved blacks in the United States, shared

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<sup>27</sup> Clavin, 4, 9, 29, 83; D. Davis, 161, 174.

Vesey's belief in the righteousness of Haiti's revolution, and expected Haitian assistance in the event that a massive slave rebellion broke out in the U.S. Another free black in Charleston during the 1820s, who like Vesey worked as a carpenter and could read, Daniel Alexander Payne engrossed himself in knowledge about the Haitian Revolution and developed strong desires to both take up arms and move to the black republic.<sup>28</sup>

David Walker's *Appeal*, urging enslaved blacks in the United States that the time had come to take up arms against slavery, called Haiti "the glory of the blacks and the terror of tyrants."<sup>29</sup> According to Stephan H. Marshall, Walker's manifesto sought "to pierce the horizon of exclusively religious and moral criticism of slavery prevailing in the Anglo-American world and to reconfigure what amounted to a cultural criticism into a sophisticated political-theoretical analysis and normative critique."<sup>30</sup> It did so by embracing the black international's revolutionary tradition, grounded in a long history of armed struggle against slavery and emblematically represented by the Haitian Revolution. Walker himself helped organize celebrations of Haitian independence in Boston, and his *Appeal* connected the emancipation and liberty of African Americans to African people internationally.<sup>31</sup>

Although not sharing a "definitive link" to the Haitian Revolution, according to Clavin, the slave revolt in Southampton County, Virginia led by Nat Turner in 1831

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<sup>28</sup> Clavin, 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*, 3rd Edition (1830; repr., Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1993), 40.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen H. Marshall, *The City on the Hill from Below: The Crisis of Prophetic Black Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 27.

<sup>31</sup> West and Martin, "Haiti, I'm Sorry," 95. West and Martin argue that Walker "stood athwart the two traditions in black internationalism: the revivalist and the revolutionary."

confirmed that slave owners had “good reason to fear the men and women they enslaved.” West and Martin argue that Nat Turner, a Baptist preacher, fused the revolutionary and revivalist traditions of black internationalism, and alongside the 1831 Christmas Rising in Jamaica helped give rise to a black Christian “liberation theology based on armed struggle.” Yet whereas the Christmas Rising encouraged support for abolition within the British Empire for whom the cost of slavery had been rising, following the Turner revolt new laws were passed throughout the southern United States making it illegal to teach literacy skills to slaves in the fear that Turner himself may have been influenced by reading manifestoes like Walker’s *Appeal*. Radical abolitionism at the time of Turner’s revolt had been on the rise, yet a strong pacifist current (among mostly white abolitionists) was reinforced by its proponents following the bloodshed.<sup>32</sup>

Also following Turner’s rebellion, booming demand for cotton driven by British textile manufacture led to harsh repression of potential slave insurrections in the United States. In Madison County, Mississippi, sitting at the edge of the global cotton market, the enslaved population doubled between 1830 and 1835, and white men were accused of facilitating a rebellion with enslaved blacks. Walter Johnson writes that in Mississippi, fears of insurrections among slaves undermined the ideological beliefs beneath the South’s “social and spatial order” based on racial slavery and white supremacy. Fears of insurrection led to dozens of deaths and tortured confessions. Slave-owners responded to fears of slave insurrection by attempting to control enslaved blacks’ access to public spaces, trading routes, travel, and in Madison County, Mississippi, by targeting suspect

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<sup>32</sup>Clavin, 14-17; D. Davis, 208-210; West and Martin, “Haiti, I’m Sorry,” 96.



whites “who acted black,” like John Murrel, who himself stood accused of organizing a slave insurrection.<sup>33</sup>

In the context of increased repression and paranoia on the part of white slave-owners, according to John T. McCartney, the American Anti-slavery Society founded in 1833 “condemned armed insurrection” outright.<sup>34</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, a founding member, had been accused by some Southerners for encouraging slave rebellions like Turner’s through his paper *The Liberator*, which began publication in January 1831. While Garrison responded that ultimate responsibility for “instigating the slaves to revolt” lay with the slave-owners, he also stated that Turner’s revolt was not to be celebrated, and that he and others “preached to the slave the pacific precepts of Jesus Christ,” believing that only “through the agency of moral power—of public opinion—of individual duty,” should the horrors of slavery be abolished.<sup>35</sup>

These arguments against armed struggle dominated abolitionist rhetoric, until they were radically rejected by white abolitionist John Brown and his followers in 1859. Brown’s actions forced the issue of violent resistance against slavery into the abolitionist agenda, nationally and internationally. While David Brion Davis compares his actions to Nat Turner’s, whom he describes as indiscriminately and “primarily aimed at killing whites,” Davis also points out that John Brown’s raid on the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry “hoped to begin the destruction of slavery by igniting a slave revolt and creating in

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<sup>33</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013), 46-72, 57.

<sup>34</sup> John T. McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African-American Political Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 37.

<sup>35</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, Editorial, *The Liberator*, September 3, 1831, in *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*, ed. Kenneth S. Greenburg (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 69-72.

the South a free-soil refuge for fugitives.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, some of Brown’s financial and abolitionist supporters dreamt of a second Haitian Revolution. Although few in the antislavery movement at this time endorsed armed struggle, Brown developed his plans for nearly a decade, in the meantime taking his fight to Kansas in order to wage war against proslavery settlers who had gained the support of President Franklin Pierce in 1856. That year, Brown targeted and killed proslavery settlers outside Lawrence, Kansas in what became known (to many who considered him a “crazed fanatic”) as the Pottawatomie Massacre.<sup>37</sup>

Contrary to accounts that describe Brown as a crazed fanatic or lunatic, however, his actions were deliberate and thought out, consciously drawing upon Black traditions of resistance to slavery. Brown sought to build a movement against not only slavery but all forms of white supremacy. His vision and plans were rooted in his appreciation for Black culture and history, and inspired by slave resistance from early maroon settlements to the Haitian Revolution and Nat Turner’s rebellion. In a “cultural sea of racism” from which few white Americans escaped at the time, according to David S. Reynolds, John Brown not only lacked prejudice toward Blacks, but alone among white abolitionists at the time modeled “both his own lifestyle and his plans for abolishing slavery on black culture.”<sup>38</sup>

Although many abolitionists who became aware of Brown’s plans at Harper’s Ferry considered it a “fanatic’s fantasy, especially his pipe dream to create an

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<sup>36</sup> D. Davis, 208, 210, 291.

<sup>37</sup> Clavin, 47; For an account of Brown’s actions in Kansas, see David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionists: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 138-178.

<sup>38</sup> Reynolds, *John Brown*, 118; Clavin, 51. Drawing on Reynolds, Clavin describes Brown as “a bold and defiant rebel who drew on a long tradition of slave and abolitionist resistance,” standing “at the forefront of a radical social movement that sought to end not only bondage but white supremacy as well.”

independent, interracial state along the southeastern border of the United States,” according to Catherine Clinton the fearless abolitionist, self-emancipated slave, and conductor of the Underground Railroad Harriet Tubman fully supported Brown and offered him knowledge that could help prepare his armed attack.<sup>39</sup> Frederick Douglass, who like Tubman escaped slavery through an act of self-emancipation, thought Brown’s plans misguided but insisted upon his sanity. Indeed, even after Douglass was forced to flee to Canada due to his associations with Brown, he continued to sing his praises.<sup>40</sup>

Brown shared David Walker’s contempt for mere moralizing, and his actions challenged the pacifist wing of the abolition movement to act. Although Brown shared and may even have been inspired by Garrison’s passionate call for “IMMEDIATE EMANCIPATION” as the central demand of abolitionists following Nat Turner’s insurrection, unlike Garrison, for whom the ideas of slave revolts were repulsive, Brown took inspiration from these self-emancipation practices.<sup>41</sup> During his trial, Brown admitted “a design on my part to free the slaves,” but denied ever having intended to commit “murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection,” having hoped instead “to free the slaves...without the

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<sup>39</sup> Catherine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2005), 127, 124-139; see also Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 2004), 165-175.

<sup>40</sup> James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 94-105. Oakes dismisses Brown’s attempt to persuade other abolitionists to “endorse revolutionary violence” as symptomatic of “their own political irrelevance,” (97) and describes Douglass’s praise for Brown demonstrating his having “embraced the romance of revolutionary violence” (101).

<sup>41</sup> Garrison, Editorial, *Liberator*, September 3, 1831, in Greenberg, 72; Reynolds, 51-52. Reynolds writes: “Rebellion by slaves against their masters was the issue that crystallized the difference between Garrison and Brown. Slave revolts repelled Garrison and contributed to his pacifism. In contrast, they inspired Brown and contributed to his violence—so much so that many contemporaries (both opponents and supporters) assumed that he modeled his antislavery terrorism after the violence of rebellious slaves.”

snapping of a gun on either side,” as when he participated in the freeing of slaves in Missouri and helped them escape to Canada the previous year. However, Brown considered all his actions to be just according to “the law of God,” declaring that:

...if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments—I submit; so let it be done!<sup>42</sup>

Before his execution, the abolitionist orator Wendell Phillips gave a rousing speech in New York City regarding the significance of Brown’s actions:

I think the lesson of the hour is insurrection. Insurrection of thought always precedes the insurrection of arms. The last twenty years have been an insurrection of thought. We seem to be entering on a new phase of this great American struggle.<sup>43</sup>

Phillips did not come to this conclusion superficially in the emotional and, for many abolitionists, “thrilling” moments following the raid on Harper’s Ferry.<sup>44</sup> He had already studied the lone historical example where slavery had been abolished through an armed uprising of slaves themselves: the Haitian Revolution.

In 1857, Phillips began giving a speech titled “Toussaint L’Ouverture: The Hero of St. Domingo,” one of his most popular speeches published in numerous abolitionist newspapers leading up to the American Civil War, and in more widely read publications, including the *New York Times*. Other abolitionists began speaking on and celebrating the

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<sup>42</sup> John Brown, “Last Address of John Brown to the Virginia Court,” November 2, 1859, in *John Brown’s Raid on Harper’s Ferry: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Jonathan Earle (Boston: Bedford Books, 2008), 86-87.

<sup>43</sup> Wendell Phillips, “Harper’s Ferry,” New York, November 2, 1859, in *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1872), 263.

<sup>44</sup> Louis Mendad, *The Metaphysical Club: The Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 28-29. Mendad writes that “John Brown transformed pacifists into warriors” and “gave the abolitionists a taste of blood, and they found it thrilling.”

legacy of Louverture and the Haitian Revolution during this period, including William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and the lesser known Oneda DeBois, a formerly enslaved Black woman who courageously spread the message of this Black revolution below the Mason-Dixon Line in 1863. These speeches on Louverture and the Haitian Revolution helped further radicalize the abolition movement, and during the war were used to encourage the arming of Black soldiers against the Confederacy.<sup>45</sup>

Phillips' own speech promoted the Black revolution led by Louverture and openly accepted violent means for abolishing slavery based on the example set by revolutionary slaves themselves. "As Europe marshaled to crush" the Haitian Revolution, Phillips explained:

...the black man met the attempt, as every such attempt should be met, with war to the hilt. In his first struggle to gain his freedom, he had been generous and merciful, saved lives and pardoned enemies, as the people in every age and clime have always done when rising against aristocrats. Now, to save his liberty the negro exhausted every means, seized every weapon, and turned back the hateful invaders with a vengeance as terrible as their own.<sup>46</sup>

According to historian Robin Blackburn, among abolitionists increasingly disenchanted with the idea that slavery could be overcome without a fight, the Haitian Revolution confirmed the legitimacy of waging armed struggle, giving encouragement to the idea that "revolutionary methods might after all be required" to destroy slavery.<sup>47</sup>

In 1862, Phillips delivered a different speech criticizing President Abraham

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<sup>45</sup> Clavin, 39-42, 93-97.

<sup>46</sup> Wendell Phillips, "Toussaint L'Ouverture," December 13, 1861, in *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters*, 486.

<sup>47</sup> Robin Blackburn, "The Force of Example," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* ed. David P. Geggus (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 19.

Lincoln's refusal to embrace such revolutionary methods. Describing Lincoln as "a first-rate second-rate man," he declared:

We are not to shrink from the idea that this is a political war: it must be. But its politics is a profound faith in God and the people, in justice and liberty, as the eternal safety of nations as well as of men. [Applause.] It is of that Lincoln should make his politics, planting the corner-stone of the new Union in the equality of every man before the law, and justice to all races. [Renewed applause.] If military necessity did not call for a million of blacks in the army, civil necessity would dictate it.<sup>48</sup>

Phillips called on the government to arm Black soldiers in order to permanently destroy the institution of slavery in a revolutionary war. He called for a complete transformation of American society and demanded an end to white supremacy. In less than a month following this speech, his words would be reprinted in Europe by Karl Marx.

### **Slavery, Solidarity, and Revolution: Karl Marx Engages the Black International**

Born in the city of Trier in 1818, one of Germany's oldest cities, Karl Marx grew up in a Jewish family that had recently converted to Protestantism so that his father, Heinrich Marx, could continue his legal practice. Following the French Revolution, Trier had been occupied by French troops serving under Napoleon Bonaparte (who had attempted to reinstitute slavery in Haiti), and some Jewish families strongly identified with his regime as it opened up new opportunities for Jewish residents and provided them status as citizens. When Napoleon's rule collapsed, Heinrich Marx and his family remained a minority, despite conversion to Protestantism, in a predominately Catholic region. Even if not fully integrated into their society, his family provided the young Karl Marx with a comfortable middle class existence with his father instilling in him Enlightenment values at a young age. Eventually, Marx would acquire a doctoral degree

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<sup>48</sup> Wendell Phillips, "The Cabinet," August 1, 1862, in *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters*, 457-458.

from the University of Jena for his dissertation on Epicurean philosophy while living in Berlin in 1841.<sup>49</sup>

Marx spent a large portion of his life working as a journalist, beginning with the *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1842. From then until he arrived in London as an exile following the failure of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, many of Marx's earliest political efforts were as editor and contributor to liberal and revolutionary presses in Germany.<sup>50</sup> It was as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1842-43 that Marx became an activist. His articles from this period display shifting theoretical positions concerning Hegelian philosophy, a profound commitment to freedom of the press, and (perhaps most importantly) an increasing sympathy with the poor and working class against property owners and the wealthy. The Young Hegelians Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feurbach, and Arnold Ruge influenced the young Marx greatly, also shaping his radicalization. As editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne, he increasingly expressed hostility toward Prussian authorities, demonstrated in his articles defending poor wood gatherers and abused winegrowers.<sup>51</sup>

Marx resigned from the paper in March 1843, two weeks before it was shut down by the authorities who could not stand its hostile attitude toward the religious and political agenda of the ruling Prussian regime. In Paris the following year, he would meet Friedrich Engels, with whom he would collaborate with for the rest of his life. While in

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<sup>49</sup> For information on Marx's early life, see David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 1-61 and Sperber, *Karl Marx*, 3-70.

<sup>50</sup> David Fernbach, introduction to *The Revolution of 1848: Political Writings Volume One*, by Karl Marx (1973; repr., New York: Verso, 2010), 1-60.

<sup>51</sup> Sperber, 78, 101-107. For an account of the importance of Marx's *Rheinische Zeitung* articles to his developing historical and ethical perspectives see Cornell West, *The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), 24-35.

Paris Marx also started to identify as a communist, and began to take a serious interest in economics alongside his passion for German philosophy and French revolutionary history.<sup>52</sup> It would be in Brussels, where Marx spent most of the next three years, where he and Engels would originally develop their unique method and theory of history, here referred to as “historical materialism.”<sup>53</sup> There they also began participating in underground workers’ movements, creating the Communist Correspondence Committee and eventually merging this grouping with the League of the Just, a secret society of conspiratorial communists, transforming it into a more open, democratic (but still secret) organization. In 1848, the League commissioned Marx and Engels to write the *Communist Manifesto*, in which they famously stated that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” and called for international working class solidarity.<sup>54</sup>

Following the defeat of the revolutions that swept Europe in 1848,<sup>55</sup> on which the *Communist Manifesto* had little noticeable impact, Marx fled to London, where he spent most of the remainder of his life. Living in dire poverty at first, Marx began putting his journalistic experience to use writing between the years 1853 and 1862 for newspapers not only in England but also in the United States and as far away as South Africa.<sup>56</sup> On

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<sup>52</sup> Oscar J. Hammen, *The Red '48ers: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 58-63, 93.

<sup>53</sup> Hammen, *Red '48ers*, 114.

<sup>54</sup> David Fernbach, introduction to *The Revolutions of 1848*, 25-28; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978), 473, 500.

<sup>55</sup> The 1848 revolutions broke out on a truly European-wide scale, and although failed on Marx's terms, did contain many achievements in terms of politicizing mass groups of people formerly excluded from official realms of political action. See Mike Rapport, *1848: Year of Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

<sup>56</sup> Sperber, 291-296.



August 30, 1862, with the American Civil War well underway, Marx published an article for the Vienna based German language daily *Die Presse*, praising Wendell Phillips. Marx wrote that Phillips “for thirty years... without intermission and at the risk of his life proclaimed the emancipation of the slaves as his battle cry.”<sup>57</sup> Included in his article were excerpts from Phillips’ “Cabinet” speech delivered only weeks earlier in Abington, Massachusetts, in which the abolitionist claimed President Lincoln intended to “end the war and save slavery.”<sup>58</sup>

In 1857, the same year Wendell Phillips first gave his “Toussaint” speech, Marx prepared a plan to write a major study of capitalism (the first and only volume published during his lifetime being *Capital Vol. I*), while his writings as a journalist began increasingly to focus on issues of slavery and race in the United States.<sup>59</sup> Until then Marx had only intermittently made references to slavery. Although in 1846 Marx argued that slavery was “as much the pivot upon which our present-day industrialism turns as are machinery, credit, etc.,”<sup>60</sup> following his exile to London, he devoted sparse if any attention to slavery in the Americas outside a few references found in his earliest published critiques of political economy such as *Wage Labor and Capital*, published in 1849. There, Marx wrote: “What is a Negro slave? A man of the black race. The one

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<sup>57</sup> Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 99-100; Karl Marx, “Abolitionist Demonstrations in America,” *Die Presse* (Vienna), August 30, 1862, *Civil War in the United States*, ed. Enmale, 201-206.

<sup>58</sup> Phillips, “The Cabinet,” in *Speeches, Lectures and Letters*, 448.

<sup>59</sup> Ernest Mandel, introduction to *Capital: Volume One*, by Karl Marx (1976; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1990), 25-27.; K. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 83.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Marx to Pavel Vasilyevich Annenkov, December 28, 1846, *MECW* (New York: International Publishers), 38:95, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed November 20, 2013, [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/letters/46\\_12\\_28.htm#1](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/letters/46_12_28.htm#1).

explanation is as good as the other,” adding that “A Negro is a Negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations.”<sup>61</sup>

In political terms, the year 1857 appeared to Marx full of renewed revolutionary possibilities not seen since 1848. When an economic crisis hit the United States and spread to Europe, Marx saw it not only as an opportunity to ridicule liberal “political economists who pretend to explain the regular spasms of industry and commerce by speculation” as resembling “the now extinct school of natural philosophers who considered fever as the true cause of all maladies,” he expected it would signal the beginnings of the next wave of revolutionary movements in Europe.<sup>62</sup> In the United States itself massive demonstrations by unemployed workers in 1857 led some of Marx’s former Communist League co-revolutionaries, who had emigrated to the U.S. after 1848, to organize the New York Communist Club.<sup>63</sup> According to historian Walter Johnson, however, Southern slave owners in the United States also saw the crisis as an opportunity. They saw in the economic downturn a chance to reopen the slave trade and implement their “truly global vision of pro-slavery empire,” as seen in numerous attempts by pro-slavery enthusiasts to reestablish slavery in raids against Cuba and Nicaragua throughout the 1850s.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Karl Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital*, April, 1859, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Tucker, 207; K. Anderson, 83. Kevin Anderson argues the first quote was Marx simply restating “the common assumption of the day that Blacks were predestined for slavery.”

<sup>62</sup> Karl Marx, “The Trade Crisis in England,” *New York Daily Tribune*, December 15, 1857, Marx-Engels Public Archive, accessed March 31, 2014, <http://marxengels.public-archive.net/en/ME1036en.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 100.

<sup>64</sup> Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 15-16.

In this context, Marx's increased interest in American slavery became central to his theoretical and political outlook. Although historian Robin Blackburn suggests Marx's support for the North and even his correspondence with Abraham Lincoln is "well known," few have rarely considered "the antecedents and implications" of his support for the North during the war.<sup>65</sup> Scholars have largely ignored Marx's writings on the conflict in discussions of Marxist theory, especially regarding intersections of race and class.<sup>66</sup> Yet these writings "on the margins"<sup>67</sup> and the political and organizational statements made by the International Working Men's Association attest to the legacy of the Haitian Revolution and the impact of revolutionary Black internationalism on Marxism during its formative period and should be seen as central to Marx's project.

According to Anderson, by the early 1860s Marx had "developed an appreciation of African Americans as revolutionary subjects."<sup>68</sup> Evidence of this is found most strikingly in a letter Marx wrote to Engels on January 11, 1860:

In my view, the most momentous thing happening in the world today is the slave movement — on the one hand, in America, started by the death of Brown, and in Russia, on the other. . . . Thus, a 'social' movement has been started both in the West and in the East. Together with the impending downbreak in Central Europe, this promises great things. I have just seen

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<sup>65</sup> Robin Blackburn, *An Unfinished Revolution: Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Verso, 2011), 5.

<sup>66</sup> K. Anderson, 79-80. Anderson suggests that the neglect of Marx's Civil War writings is largely due to the perception that they have little to do with his "core concerns, or even his core concepts," as they are composed largely of articles Marx wrote as a journalist. See also Sperber, xvi; Sperber also points out that Marx's journalism has been generally ignored or downplayed in biographies of Marx, although he himself barely touches on the significance or content of Marx's writings as a journalist during this period.

<sup>67</sup> See K. Anderson, 1-4 for an explanation on why Marx's "marginal" writings are more central than previously acknowledged.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

in the *Tribune* that there's been another slave revolt in Missouri which was put down, needless to say. But the signal has now been given.<sup>69</sup>

In this letter Marx clearly supports the idea of an armed struggle against slavery waged by slaves themselves and supports participation in this struggle from whites as evidenced by his reference to John Brown. He also places the “slave movement” in the United States in a global context, relating it to the agitation against serfdom in Tsarist Russian and events in central Europe. Importantly, Marx’s reference to John Brown and rebellious slaves evidence how their actions resonated internationally.

Referring to the self activity of enslaved Blacks as at the center of global events in 1860, Marx’s letter to Engels confirms the immensity of the Black international’s impact on radical transatlantic abolition movements and other revolutionary projects, including Marx’s own perspectives on revolution, and challenges the notion that Marx had always placed white, industrial European workers at the center of his theory of working class revolution. The global abolitionist movement that Brown and Marx actively participated in, the “first transracial, international social movement in history,” according to Winant, was heavily influenced by the Haitian Revolution and the self-emancipatory actions of enslaved blacks in the United States and the broader Western hemisphere. Haitians themselves officially mourned Brown’s death.<sup>70</sup>

Considering the significance of Brown’s attempt and the uprising of slaves in Missouri, Marx’s letter engaged with the Black international’s revolutionary tradition still

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<sup>69</sup> Marx to Engels in Manchester, January 11, 1860, in *MECW* (New York: International Publishers), 41:3-5, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed November 20, 2013, [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/letters/60\\_01\\_11.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1860/letters/60_01_11.htm).

<sup>70</sup> Winant, *World is a Ghetto*, 53; Clavin, 53.

emanating from its foundational event, the Haitian Revolution.<sup>71</sup> Contrary to Cedric Robinson, who insisted that Western radicals would be “no more receptive” to Black Radicalism than “the apologists of power,” and that Marx’s idea of history and revolution revolved strictly around European workers,<sup>72</sup> in 1860 Marx not only acknowledged the revolutionary self-activity of the enslaved Black masses but also considered it centrally as one of the most important struggles of the day. The Black revolutionary tradition that preceded Marx should therefore be understood as impacting his own developing perspectives on revolution during the Civil War, just as it had influenced the radical abolitionists like Vesey, Walker, Payne, Brown, and Phillips. It is likely that during this period Marx came across Phillips’ “Toussaint” speech working as a foreign correspondent for the *New York Tribune* from 1852 until 1862 when it was widely published.<sup>73</sup>

Like Phillips, once the Civil War broke out, Marx supported transforming the war into a revolutionary struggle to abolish slavery. The importance of Phillips’ “Cabinet” speech for Marx is difficult to overstate. He considered it “of greater importance than a battle bulletin.” When he quoted Phillips as arguing that the “political war” being fought

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<sup>71</sup> See Blackburn, *Unfinished Revolution*, 57 and Karl Marx, “Peculiarity,” in *The German Ideology*, [1845-1846], *MECW* Vol. 5. Marxist Internet Archive, accessed march 31, 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch03h.htm>. Marx did not study the Haitian revolution according to Blackburn, who argues that even though he made references to slave resistance, he “tended to believe that slaves needed external deliverance.” Yet in chapter three of the *German Ideology*, written in 1845/46, Marx considers briefly “the insurgent Negros of Haiti and the fugitive slaves of all the colonies” as wanting to liberate themselves, referencing “the slave who takes the decision to free himself.”

<sup>72</sup> Robinson, 3-4.

<sup>73</sup> Karen Schueller, “From Liberalism to Racism: German Historians, Journalists, and the Haitian Revolution from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries,” in Geggus, 31. Before 1848, Marx would have been aware of it not a participant in the debates about the meaning of the Haitian Revolution in Germany. Karin Schueller notes that “in the first half of the nineteenth century...no other Latin American state was covered as much in the German press.”

“for the maintenance of slavery” was hopeless, Marx was, of course, like Phillips, referring not to Confederate leader Jefferson Davis but to Abraham Lincoln, whom both Phillips and Marx criticized for not waging a revolutionary war to abolish slavery.<sup>74</sup> Lincoln himself proclaimed as late as August 1862 that his “paramount object” was to “save the Union...*not* either to save or to destroy slavery.”<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Lincoln promised in his first inaugural address that he had no intention either “directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists.”<sup>76</sup> Marx had nevertheless supported the Union cause from the beginning, and according to Robin Blackburn, had “insisted on the war’s antislavery logic.”<sup>77</sup>

While early in the war Lincoln and many abolitionists continued to believe the United States Constitution limited the federal government’s ability to act regarding slavery, in a letter to Engels on August 2, 1862 Marx argued that the North could not continue to conduct the war constitutionally and needed, for quite practical reasons, to begin conducting it “on revolutionary lines.” Marx implied that this would involve arming Black soldiers, and that failing this, a revolution would break out anyway. He wrote, disagreeing with Engels, who was beginning to doubt Union victory:

I do not entirely share your views on the American Civil War. I do not believe that all is up... The North will finally wage war seriously, adopt revolutionary methods, and overthrow the domination of the border slave statesman. A single nigger-regiment would have a remarkable effect on

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<sup>74</sup> Karl Marx, “Abolitionist Demonstrations in America,” *Civil War in the United States*, ed. Enmale, 201-206; Phillips, “The Cabinet,” in *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters*, 448.

<sup>75</sup> Abraham Lincoln, letter to the editor, *New York Tribune*, August 22, 1862, in the *Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress*, Manuscript Division (Washington D.C.: American Memory Project [2000-2002], accessed November 24, 2013, <http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mal/mal2/423/4233400/001.jpg>).

<sup>76</sup> Abraham Lincoln, “First Inaugural Address, Final Version,” March 4, 1861, in the *Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress*, Manuscript Division (Washington D.C.: American Memory Project [2000-2002], accessed November 20, 2013, <http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mal/mal1/077/0773800/001.jpg>).

<sup>77</sup> Blackburn, *Unfinished Revolution*, 38.

Southern nerves...If Lincoln does not give way (which, however, he will), there will be a revolution.<sup>78</sup>

Although using a phrase that today would rightfully be considered extremely racist, Kevin Anderson argues that in this letter Marx has an anti-racist purpose, and “makes his strongest case to date on the issue of Black troops, not only for military purposes, but also for political and psychological ones.”<sup>79</sup>

Racism however did greatly undermine the political will of Northern and Southern whites to support the revolutionary aims Wendell Phillips and Karl Marx were pushing in calling for the federal government to arm Black soldiers. In Marx’s perspective, the Confederacy waged “not a war of defense, but a war of conquest...for the extension and perpetuation of slavery,” and if the South succeeded in negotiating a peaceful secession and an end to the war, slavery would not only spread but so to would the “principle that only certain races are capable of freedom,” a principle that would exclude freedom not only from those of African descent, but also Germans and Irishman in the North.<sup>80</sup> Following the 1862 elections during which the Republican Party lost seats in Congress, Marx specifically addressed the racism of Irish laborers and independent white farmers:

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<sup>78</sup> Marx to Engels, August 7, 1862, in *Civil War in the United States*, ed. Enmale, 252-253; K. Anderson, 98. On abolitionists and the Constitution, see James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 2-8.

<sup>79</sup> K. Anderson, 98.

<sup>80</sup>Karl Marx, “The Civil War in the United States,” *Die Presse* (Vienna), November 7, 1861, *Civil War in the United States*, ed. Enmale, 71-83; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 418. According to Johnson, the South’s “imperial vision of the future of slavery, patriarchy, and white supremacy...was a vision in which the subject races of the world were made useful through their subordination to the energy and foresight of white slaveholders; in which class relations were made concomitant with the natural division of the races; in which the patriarchal authority of white men was vitalized through the linkage of their households to the larger political economy of slavery.”

The Irishman sees the Negro as a dangerous competitor. The efficient farmers in Indiana and Ohio hate the Negro almost as much as the slaveholder. He is a symbol, for them, of slavery and the humiliation of the working class, and the Democratic press threatens them daily with a flooding of their territories by “niggers.”

Typically when discussing Irish workers Marx had spoken of them in revolutionary terms, yet in this *Die Presse* article from November 23, 1862 he refers to them as “rabble” for, according to Marx, allowing the pro-slavery Democratic Party to gain votes in places like New York City.<sup>81</sup> For Marx, racist ideas had a material impact on the working class that led them to engage in reactionary, anti-revolutionary actions undermining class struggle and supporting pro-slavery, anti-worker politics.

Marx’s role in the early years of the International Workingmen’s Association was informed by his understanding of the centrality of the struggle against slavery and racism in achieving international working class solidarity. According to David Fernbach, perhaps the most crucial influence paving the way for the creation of the IWMA were the political questions “raised by the American civil war” for the working classes of Europe, especially the “large section of the English working class” affected by the “cotton famine.”<sup>82</sup> Marx described the position of the British ruling class and substantial portions of the British press that leaned toward recognition of the Confederacy already in 1861:

Their extenuating arguments are basically as follow. The war between North and South is a tariff war. Furthermore, the war is not being fought over any issue of principle; it is not concerned with the question of slavery but in fact centers on the North’s lust for sovereignty. In the final analysis, does it not remain a futile endeavor to subjugate eight million Anglo-

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<sup>81</sup> Karl Marx, “The Election Results in the Northern States,” *Die Presse*, November 23, 1862, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed March 31, 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1862/11/23.htm>. K. Anderson, 103-104.

<sup>82</sup> David Fernbach, introduction to *The First International and After: Political Writings Volume 3*, by Karl Marx (1973; repr., New York: Verso, 2010), 10.



Saxons by force! Would not a separation from the South release the North from all connection with Negro slavery and assure to it... a higher level of development up to now scarcely dreamed of?<sup>83</sup>

In the same article, Marx pointed out that many sympathetic to the South argued that “the war in the United States is nothing but a war aimed at preserving the Union.” These arguments dissipated among large sections of the British working class with the implementation of Lincoln’s emancipation policy.

In March 1863, the London Trades Union Council, a major organizational contributor in the formation of the IWMA, adopted a message to be conveyed to Abraham Lincoln, praising Lincoln’s government for welcoming “as men, as equals under God, the colored peoples of Hayti and Liberia,” and for opening “the gates of freedom to the millions of our negro brothers who have been deprived their manhood by the infernal laws which have so long disgraced the civilization of America.”<sup>84</sup> The IWMA, founded in September 1864, expressed a similarly internationalist and anti-racist vision greatly influenced by Marx’s own perspectives.

For Marx, revolution had once again become the order of the day, signaled by the waging of a revolutionary antislavery war in the United States, British working class support for liberation struggles across Europe, and the solidarity campaigns organized by workers in France and England in support of insurrection in Poland in 1863.<sup>85</sup> Inspired by these events, Marx’s “Inaugural Address” to the IWMA, drafted in October 1864 and

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<sup>83</sup> Karl Marx, “The North American Civil War,” *Die Presse* (Vienna) October 25, 1861, *Civil War in the United States*, ed. Enmale, 57-71.

<sup>84</sup> “Resolutions and Address to President Lincoln,” London Trade Union Council, March 26, 1863, in John Bright, *Speeches of John Bright, M.P. on the American Question* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1865), 192.

<sup>85</sup> Fernbach, introduction to *First International and After*, 10-11.

published in November in a number of different languages simultaneously, stated that “experience has shown how disregard of that bond of brotherhood which ought to exist between the workmen of different countries, and incite them to stand firmly by each other in all their struggles for emancipation” led those struggle to failure. He went on to herald British working class resistance against the British government recognizing the Confederacy as having “saved the west of Europe from plunging headlong into an infamous crusade for the perpetuation and propagation of slavery.”<sup>86</sup> The “Provisional Rules” of the IWMA likewise stated that previous struggles aimed at working class self-emancipation “failed from the want of solidarity between the manifold divisions of labour in each country, and from the absence of a fraternal bond of union between the working classes of different countries.”<sup>87</sup>

These perspectives came largely from Marx’s own observation and study of the American Civil War, including the actions of Black revolutionaries and radical abolitionists. They were drawn from his admiration and support for solidarity among sections of the British working class itself and enslaved Blacks in the United States. In Lancashire, England, employment in the cotton industry had plummeted around 1862, but workers there were widely reading an anti-slavery pamphlet by the abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who used his contacts in England to spread his message. The solidarity workers displayed with the abolitionist cause despite their economic hardship impressed Marx, as they created a movement with political force formed by individuals, “despite their exclusion from political representation,” according to David Featherstone. These

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<sup>86</sup> Karl Marx, “Inaugural Address of the International Working Men’s Association,” October 1864, in *First International and After*, 81.

<sup>87</sup> IWMA, “Provisional Rules,” September 1866, *First International and After*, 82-84.

solidarities, “forged through the actions of dispossessed workers,” demonstrated to Marx, “that the emergence of politicized working class internationalism was driven not only by key theorists or political figures,” but were created “from below.”<sup>88</sup> Featherstone further recognizes that the IWMA’s origins in Europe by organizations dominated by men “emphasizes the racialized and gendered terms on which solidarities were configured,” its formation resulted in “practices through which prejudice could be challenged, reworked and brought into contestation,” generating “exchanges and connections which cut across and refused powerful divides.”<sup>89</sup>

Karl Marx not only helped establish these practices in the IWMA, but also theorized them. In *Capital: Volume One*, published in 1867, Marx wrote that “Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin,” and pointed toward new movements arising “from the death of slavery,” the first of which being the movement for the eight hour work day.<sup>90</sup> Yet if written as conceived by Marx in 1857, these words may not have been included in the final text. Marx decided to add the chapter on “The Working Day” in which they appear only as the struggle to abolish slavery in the United States caused him to rethink *Capital*, perhaps even causing him to completely restructure it, according to John F. Welsh.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 1-4.

<sup>89</sup> Featherstone, *Solidarity*, 6. Featherstone notes the IWMA “fashioned a distinctively male-centered construction of internationalism.”

<sup>90</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, 1867, trans. Ben Fowkes (1976; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1976, 1990), 414.

<sup>91</sup> John F. Welsh, “Reconstructing *Capital*: The American Roots and Humanist Vision of Marx’s Thought” *Midwest Quarterly* 43, No. 3(October 1992): 275-287.

Welsh argues that in deciding to replace his original plan to first publish a volume covering the history of theories of surplus value, and instead restructuring *Capital* to focus attention on “the lived experiences of workers in the labor process,” Marx “allowed himself to learn from the socio-historical process” by theoretically engaging with “resistance inside and outside the factory” in relation to the development of capitalism. Grounding his work “in the words and deeds of slaves, serfs, and workers as they pursued the creation of new social formations,” Marx developed a theory of “the history of struggle in everyday life,”<sup>92</sup> and saw this struggle originating in the processes and relations of production. In *Capital*, as Ernest Mandell points out, Marx integrated “the development of the class struggle between capital and labour into his analysis of the production of surplus-value.”<sup>93</sup>

*Capital* showed that Marx considered slavery as bound up in this class struggle, as well as the role slavery played in the development of capitalism itself. He writes:

While the cotton industry introduced child-slavery into England, in the United States it gave the impulse for the transformation of the earlier, more or less patriarchal slavery into a system of commercial exploitation. In fact, the veiled slavery of the wage labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal.<sup>94</sup>

In this excerpt, Marx displays an analysis of racial slavery under capitalism as a “system of commercial exploitation,” not a “pre-capitalist” relic as Cedric Robinson has interpreted him.<sup>95</sup> Elsewhere in *Capital*, Marx argues that both free and unfree workers

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<sup>92</sup> Welsh, “Reconstructing *Capital*,” 283, 285.

<sup>93</sup> Mandell, Introduction to *Capital*, 35.

<sup>94</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 925.

<sup>95</sup> See Robinson, 4. Robinson acknowledges that slavery was a basis for what Marx called “primitive accumulation,” but implies Marx made the mistake of arresting “the relationship there, assigning slave labor to some “pre-capitalist” stage of history.”

were sources of “surplus labour” before capitalism, but that the labor of enslaved Blacks “drawn into a world market dominated by the capitalist mode of production” was transformed as the “civilized horrors of over-work are grafted onto the barbaric horrors of slavery,” and “the over-working of the Negro, and sometimes the consumption of his life...became a factor in a calculated and calculating system.”<sup>96</sup> Marx’s discussion of slavery in *Capital* evidences his ongoing ability to see Black labor and life as anything but marginal to understanding the emergence of capitalism, and how overcoming working class racism and divisions were a precondition for working class revolutionary internationalism.

The revolutionary tradition within the Black international informed Marx’s ideas about abolitionism, race, capitalism, and working class self-emancipation during the American Civil War. As the Haitian Revolution encouraged and helped spread an international social movement against slavery, represented in the United States by its influence among figures like Denmark Vesey, David Walker, John Brown, and Wendell Phillips, Karl Marx crossed its path when he embraced slave rebellions, argued for the arming of Black soldiers, and supported international working class solidarity against slave-owners and capitalists in a war he considered in revolutionary terms. Like the revolutionary Black international, Marx’s vision of internationalism centered on the idea of universal emancipation accomplished through struggle.<sup>97</sup> By the 1860s his conception of international working class unity and revolution extended throughout the Atlantic world and across the borders of ethnicity and race.

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<sup>96</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 344-345.

<sup>97</sup> West and Martin, “Contours,” 5.

## **Revolutionary Possibilities and Defeats: Reconstruction and the Paris Commune**

During the American Civil War, Marx considered the struggle against slavery as central to building an international working class struggle aimed at eradicating capitalist exploitation and oppression. Its abolition would benefit workers, white and Black, not only in the United States but throughout Europe, by creating conditions that would allow for greater working class organization in opposition to capitalism. For this reason, building solidarity and support for the North during the war became one of his highest priorities, and he attempted to do so through the IWMA.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the abolition of slavery in the United States, however, the IWMA considered the revolution incomplete. Immediately following the Civil War, the organization sent a declaration of congratulations “To the People of the United States of America” for abolishing slavery, but included a warning:

Let your citizens of to-day be declared free and equal, without reserve. If you fail...there will yet remain a struggle for the future which may again stain your country with your people’s blood. We warn you then, as brothers in the common cause, to remove every shackle from freedom’s limb, and your victory will be complete.<sup>99</sup>

Importantly, this address acknowledged and sought to instill among American workers that freedom without equality would be incomplete, and if equality remained unrealized, and freedom only partially so, violence and renewed struggles against exploitation and racial oppression would erupt. In a separate address, the IWMA informed then President Andrew Johnson that his duty was to “uproot by the law what has been felled by the

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<sup>98</sup> Blackburn, *Unfinished Revolution*, 7, 7-13.

<sup>99</sup> Karl Marx, “To the People of the United States of America,” *The Workmans’ Advocate*, October 14, 1865, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed March 23, 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1865/to-americans.htm>.

sword.”<sup>100</sup> However, Marx would soon see Johnson’s Reconstruction policy as the reactionary re-shackling of labor, Black and white.<sup>101</sup>

Despite its original radical stance against racism, its solidarity with and support for abolition and full equality for Blacks in its declarations and meetings during the Civil War, the IWMA largely neglected the status of African Americans during Reconstruction. Although the Colored National Labor Union’s at its founding convention in 1869 voted to send a delegate to the IWMA, the organization never received an invitation to join. Marx himself became more narrowly focused on European affairs, apparently hoping a strong working class movement in the United States was on its way following slavery’s abolition. Philip S. Foner points out that American radicals close to the IWMA failed to “conduct as consistent a struggle against racism in white working-class circles as they had waged in convincing antebellum Northern workers to give priority to the abolition of Negro slavery,” and many were outright racists themselves.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, revolutionary possibilities continued to exist both in the United States and Europe. In the defeated states of the Confederacy, the formerly enslaved took advantage of a “society turned bottomsides up,” and according to Steven Hahn transformed politics on a “magnitude unprecedented in the region, nation, or hemisphere.” The revolutionary attempt, led by African Americans, to transform the South following the Civil War allowed “a substantial section of the working class...the opportunity to contest the power of their superiors” to an extent previously unheard of in

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<sup>100</sup> Karl Marx, “Address of the International Workingmen’s Associations to President Johnson,” *Bee-Hive*, May 20, 1865, in *Unfinished Revolution*, 214-215.

<sup>101</sup> Philip S. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (London: Greenwood Press, 1977), 35;

<sup>102</sup> P. Foner, *American Socialism*, 39-42.

United States history.<sup>103</sup> Blacks were elected to office in every former Confederate state, often in large numbers, and organized with the Republican Party and through “Union Leagues” to defend their political and social gains. Black activists organized communities to vote, and formerly enslaved Black workers resisted efforts to reinstate forms of labor discipline associated with their previous enslavement. Black women played a central role in organizing and enforcing political actions and decisions, especially against “traitors” who refused to vote for or support the Republican Party. Black churches also became crucial institutional sources for mobilizing the Black community, becoming one among many centers of “black power” that “staunched the efforts of local elites to enforce new forms of black submission while enabling freemen and women to negotiate the terms of freedom from new circumstances of strength.”<sup>104</sup> As Hahn points out, “in a manner that only one other revolution before the twentieth century approached (that in St. Domingue), Radical Reconstruction occasioned a massive transfer of power at the state and local levels.”<sup>105</sup>

The IWMA, largely resulting from its addresses to Americans during and following the Civil War, gained a significant following in the United States during this period. In New York it may have even gained the support of a Black led “militia,” but it never established organizational affiliates in the South. Blackburn argues that while a small number of “Southern black workers sought to join” the movement for the eight hour day (a movement Marx saw emerging from the “death of slavery” as mentioned

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<sup>103</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 218.

<sup>104</sup> Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 238. See *Ibid.*, 216-264 for an overview of the revolutionary efforts made by Blacks to organize and transform the South during the first half of Reconstruction.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-238.



above), wage labor in the South remained relatively insignificant, and “the differing problems of workers in the South and North made it more difficult to promote an alliance between them.”<sup>106</sup>

In Europe itself the IWMA grew rapidly post-1865, strongly influencing a strike wave across Western Europe beginning in 1867. As a result of this success, the IWMA’s French sections in particular faced severe repression. In Germany one of the strongest working class based political movements in Europe emerged, although the General Association of German Workers founded there in 1863 failed to affiliate with the International. In England the British trade unions that originally gave the IWMA organizational and political support become largely reformist. Their failed internationalism when it came to standing in solidarity with the Fenian movement in Ireland led Marx to argue that Irish self-determination and independence from England would determine the possibility of revolution in England, whereas previously he had taken the perspective that Ireland’s emancipation from English rule would come about only as the result of a successful workers struggle in England itself.<sup>107</sup>

Following the defeat of the French during the Franco-Prussian war in September 1870, the most significant revolutionary upsurge for Marx following the American Civil War broke out. The Paris Commune that emerged first from “a patriotic movement of the workers and petty bourgeoisie against the ruling classes’ capitulation to the Prussians,” according to Fernbach, was later blamed on the IWMA by the French government, although in reality Marx originally forewarned that workers in Paris would be unable to

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<sup>106</sup> Blackburn, *Unfinished Revolution*, 72.

<sup>107</sup> Fernbach, introduction to *First International and After*, 20-29.

defeat the united ruling classes of France and Prussia and the International invoked workers there to support building a more democratic regime and to continue building its own working class organizations in preparation for struggles that would emerge in conditions better suited for a revolutionary upsurge.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, the Commune was established and lasted 72 days as the working classes and revolutionaries in Paris took over the city. They created institutions rooted in the self-activity of the masses, abolished Paris' standing army and replaced it with a workers' militia, halted and transformed extortionist rent practices against tenants and loan schemes, and established a Labor Commission that attempted to abolish exploitative work practices such as overnight work for bakers, and supported workers' control over production.<sup>109</sup>

The head of the Commune's Labor Commission, Leo Frankel, was both Jewish and an affiliate to the German language section of the IWMA. As such, his appointment to one of the revolution's most significant bodies reflected the Commune's internationalism, as it stood opposed to the "rabid nationalism and racism" the French government used in its imperialist pursuit "to dominate the European continent as well as snatch colonies further afield," according to Donny Gluckstein.<sup>110</sup> Addressing the General Council of the IWMA two days after the Commune's defeat, Marx himself declared that the "antithesis to the Empire was the Commune." As a revolutionary upsurge that relied on the self-activity of workers to effect their own emancipation from class rule, Marx labeled the Commune's enemies as effecting a "slaveholders' rebellion,"

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 30-32.

<sup>109</sup> Donny Gluckstein, *The Paris Commune: A Revolution in Democracy* (2006; repr., Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 1-19.

<sup>110</sup> Gluckstein, *Paris Commune*, 29-31.

calling the attempts to crush the Commune part of a “slaveholders’ conspiracy.”<sup>111</sup> The political commitments Marx made following 1865 were clearly orientated toward Europe, yet his observations of the Paris Commune demonstrate that the American Civil War continued to occupy his thoughts. Although he described the Commune as an event “when plain men for the first time dared to infringe upon the governmental privilege of their ‘natural superiors,’ ... under circumstances of unexampled difficulty,”<sup>112</sup> during Radical Reconstruction in the United States Blacks engaged in a similarly revolutionary movement that began earlier and lasted longer.

Following the suppression of the Paris Commune, the IWMA moved its headquarters from London to New York. Marx believed North America continued revolutionary possibilities existed. The defeat of Commune aroused widespread working class outrage in the United States, and in its wake Marx’s *Civil War in France* became a widely read text among “reformers and radicals” alike. In New York in December 1871, the internationalism it represented found expression in a demonstration organized “to pay tribute to the Commune’s tens of thousands of martyrs” whose participants included black militia men, female IWMA members, Irish immigrants, trade unionists, Cuban independence activists, representing “a broad spectrum of socialist, feminist, Radical, and Reform politics,” according to Blackburn. Yet the American IWMA dismissed the importance of organizing non-wage workers, affecting its appeal to Southern Blacks and women, and although it continued to oppose oppression facing these groups in theory, they did not prioritize their efforts around them, and the IWMA General Council tended

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<sup>111</sup> Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in *First International and After*, 208, 220, 221.

<sup>112</sup> Marx, *Civil War in France*, in *First International and After*, 213.

to conceive “workers’ interests were somehow natural and sociologically given without the benefit of ideology or politics.”<sup>113</sup>

Thus, although the IWMA had developed perspectives promoting inter-racial solidarity and opposition to slavery and racism as impediments to working class internationalism, it largely failed to acknowledge the importance for waging a continued struggle against racism in the United States following the American Civil War. When in 1877 the federal government effectively ended Reconstruction by withdrawing federal troops from the South, according to Hahn “a new era of state-organized violence in defense of private property and respectable property holders” was “ushered in” that proved disastrous for African Americans and “other working people.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, the end of Reconstruction marked a “double defeat” against Southern Blacks and Northern workers and a victory for Jim Crow and “privatized violence” against Blacks and labor.<sup>115</sup> The majority of white workers failed to recognize their struggle as one linked to the ongoing struggle of African Americans against racial oppression. W.E.B. Du Bois in 1935 argued that the “resulting color caste founded and retained by capitalism was adopted, forwarded and approved by white labor, and resulted in subordination of colored labor to white profits the world over.”<sup>116</sup> In this new era, Black and Marxist internationalists continued to envision alternative, emancipatory possibilities and developed theoretical and organizational innovations toward their realization.

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<sup>113</sup> Blackburn, *Unfinished Revolution*, 77-78.

<sup>114</sup> Hahn, 312.

<sup>115</sup> Blackburn, *Unfinished Revolution*, 83.

<sup>116</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in American, 1860-1880* (1935; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1998), 30.

## CHAPTER 2 MARXISM, BLACK RADICALS, AND THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL, 1877-1919

“The whole world is under obligation to the Negro, and that the white heel is still upon the black neck is simply proof that the world is not yet civilized.”

--Eugene Debs, “The Negro and the Class Struggle,” 1903<sup>1</sup>

Following the American Civil War, capitalism expanded and transformed almost every sector of society. In the United States, the war had not only “freed the slaves,” according to historian H.W. Brands, it also “emancipated the capitalist classes” from democratic constraints as the United States government became capitalism’s biggest sponsor.<sup>2</sup> Near the end of Reconstruction, federal courts began using increased powers of jurisdiction to protect and serve corporate interests, although originally intended to protect recently freed slaves by enforcing the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments. The near universal defeat of Reconstruction in 1877 coincided with the dissolving of the International Working Men’s Association and the end of the first attempt to organize a strong socialist movement informed by the ideas of Karl Marx in the United States. Also in 1877, nearly every former Confederate state adopted a system of convict labor closely resembling slavery, allowing companies to brutally exploit a predominately Black workforce with support from the law.<sup>3</sup> By 1901 the reconfigured judicial system in the South had made “one of its primary purposes the coercion of African Americans to

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Debs, “The Negro in the Class Struggle,” *International Socialist Review*, November 1903, in *Writing and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, introduction by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., (New York: Heritage Press, 1948), 64.

<sup>2</sup> H.W. Brands, *American Colossus: The Triumph of Capitalism, 1865-1900* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1988; New York: Perennial, 1989), 586-587; Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: A History of the American Left* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Verso, 2013), 32-33; Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 39-57.

comply with the social customs and labor demands of whites,” resulting in the almost universal disenfranchisement of African Americans in those states.<sup>4</sup> Yet even as “the old fists of exploitation and oppression” returned with a vengeance in the South, Blacks continued to organize politically, both inside and outside electoral arenas.<sup>5</sup>

On a global level, between 1876 and 1900, European imperialists would colonize over ninety percent of Africa, dividing the continent between Portugal, Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, and Italy. During this period European colonial powers conquered Chinese markets, while an emerging Japanese power expanded into Korea and Taiwan, France colonized Indochina, and the United States expanded westward and took control of Puerto Rico, Guam, Samoa, and the Philippines.<sup>6</sup> European empires had been financed beginning in the fifteenth century through “subjugation of the Americas and the enslavement of Africa.”<sup>7</sup> Yet in 1880 most places in Africa were self-governed. In contrast, by 1900 only Liberia and Ethiopia laid outside European control.<sup>8</sup>

This period marked “the Nadir of race relations” in the United States, and between 1882 and 1930 alone at least 3,220 African Americans were lynched in an atmosphere where Southerners commemorated the murder of Black men, women, and children with celebratory postcards.<sup>9</sup> In Africa, colonialism took its toll, as in the Congo Free State and the Belgium Congo, where between 1880 and 1920 approximately 10

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<sup>4</sup> Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Hahn, 313.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World: From the Stone Age to the New Millennium* (1999; Reprint, New York: Verso, 2008), 393-398.

<sup>7</sup> Winant, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa: The Politics of Independence* (1961; repr., Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 3.

million Africans died from murder, starvation, disease, and exhaustion while King Leopold II's empire grew off the profits to be made from rubber in an increasingly global market.<sup>10</sup> According to Mike Davis, millions of people died from artificially created famines in this "golden age of Liberal Capitalism" (1870-1914) as a result of the expanding British-centered global economy forcing China, Brazil, and India to obey the "principles of Smith, Bentham and Mill."<sup>11</sup> As capitalism developed, so too did an international working class, and new mass based parties based on Marxist ideas about capitalism and class struggle began to emerge.

Between 1871 and 1905 in Europe over thirty new socialist parties came into existence.<sup>12</sup> According the Oakley C. Johnson, "the world's second country to have a functioning Marxist political party" was the United States, after the formation of the Workingmen's Party in 1876.<sup>13</sup> This party issued a Declaration of Independence that year in Illinois that echoed the *Communist Manifesto*, stating that the "history of the present competitive system, extending back to the middle ages, is a history of oppression, robbery and despotism."<sup>14</sup> Also in 1876, a non-socialist group formed by African Americans, the National Independent Political Union, issued a "Negro Declaration of

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<sup>10</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1999), 225-234.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (New York: Verso, 2002), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 63.

<sup>13</sup> Oakley C. Johnson, *Marxism in United States History Before the Russian Revolution, 1876-1917* (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), 17.

<sup>14</sup> "Declaration of Independence by the Workingmen's Party of Illinois," July 4, 1876, in *We the Other People: Alternative Declarations of Independence by Labor Groups, Farmers, Woman's Rights Advocates, Socialists, and Blacks 1829-1975*, ed. Phillip S. Foner (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 99-104.

Independence” heavily criticizing the Republican Party.<sup>15</sup> As the Republicans shifted away from efforts to transform the former Confederacy into an economy based on free labor buttressed by legal and political, if not social equality, during the economic depression of the 1870s white supremacy flourished, and some Black leaders who had only recently acquired a level of political influence in the South began to resent the neglect with which their interests were treated within the Republican Party. Although increasing frustrations among African Americans with the Republican Party following the 1877 Compromise that ended Reconstruction did not lead many to abandon ship, among those who did a few, including former Republican activist Peter Humphries Clark, some would find themselves attracted to the emerging American Marxist left.<sup>16</sup>

### **Marxism after Marx: The Second International and the American Socialist Party**

Marxism did not become the dominant theoretical reference point for socialists in the United States until the beginning of the twentieth century. Until then, Marxism mainly existed in isolated immigrant communities familiar with its language of class struggle, a language largely absent from more established American radical traditions. In the later half on the nineteenth century, Marxist radicals in the United States therefore “found themselves strangers in a strange land.”<sup>17</sup> Among the middle class, an explicitly non-Marxian socialism gained popularity among reformers, but even these often felt uneasy labeling themselves “socialists” due to its association with the European

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<sup>15</sup> “Negro Declaration of Independence by the National Independent Political Union,” February, 1867, in *We, the Other People*, ed. P. Foner., 89-94.

<sup>16</sup> Foner, E., *Reconstruction*, 524-553; P. Foner, *American Socialism*, 45-57. Peter Humphries Clark was the first African American, according to Philip S. Foner, to identify himself publicly as a socialist. He attended the Republican National Convention in 1876, but in 1877 ran as a candidate on the Workingmen’s Party ticket, and in 1878 sat on the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Labor Party.

<sup>17</sup> Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, 58-62.



immigrant working class.<sup>18</sup> Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward*, published in 1888, had a greater influence among native born American socialists during the late nineteenth century than the ideas of Marx and Engels, and it became the first American novel to outsell Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. His work helped make socialism "respectable" in the United States.<sup>19</sup> One of the earliest and most influential Black socialists in the first decade of the American Socialist Party (SP), George Washington Woodbey, gained his first introduction to explicitly socialist ideas by reading Bellamy's book in 1896 while living in Nebraska where he ran for Congress as candidate for the Prohibition Party. When Woodbey joined the Socialist Party, he continued to be influenced by elements of Bellamy's thought and remained a practicing Christian, although his pamphlet *What to Do and How to Do It*, written for the party in 1903, contained evidence that Karl Marx's ideas informed his political outlook.<sup>20</sup>

What exactly were Marx's ideas, and why did they appeal to an African American minister at the beginning of the twentieth century? Speaking at Karl Marx's funeral in March 1883, Marx's lifelong collaborator and revolutionary friend Friedrich Engels boldly suggested that if Charles Darwin had "discovered the law of development of organic nature," then it was Marx who had "discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science,

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<sup>18</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (2003; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64-65.

<sup>19</sup> Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, 70; Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1953), 79.

<sup>20</sup> Philip S. Foner, "From Slavery to Socialism: George Washington Woodbey, Black Socialist Preacher," in *Socialism and Christianity in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century America* ed. Jacob H. Dorn (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1998), 65-66, 71. On the prohibition movement, see McGerr, *Fierce Discontent*, 81-88.

art, religion, etc.”<sup>21</sup> Marx himself wrote in a preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, published in 1859, that he had uncovered, through an engagement with Hegelian dialectics and political economy, that:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

It was not, according to Marx, “the consciousness of men that determines their being,” but rather “their social being that determines their consciousness.”<sup>22</sup> These comments from Marx outline in a useful if condensed manner the historical materialist conception of history.

After Marx’s death, what became known and accepted as “Marxism” within the international socialist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was largely a product of efforts made by Engels, in partnership with German socialists Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein, along with Marx’s daughter Eleanor. Many of Marx’s writings were not available to those who developed Marxism immediately following his death, and while some may have read the *Communist Manifesto*, even this would not have guaranteed exposure to Marx’s own viewpoints, as early translations made critical errors, exaggerating or downplaying key passages. Karl Kautsky’s popularizations of Marx often left out nuances or strongly emphasized one aspect of Marx’s work over

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<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Engels, Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 681.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 3.

another.<sup>23</sup> During his own life, Engels claims Marx became so displeased by many of his interpreters and followers that he declared: “If anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist.”<sup>24</sup>

Cedric Robinson argues that the “hadiest tradition” of Marxism can be identified in the writings of Marx, Engels, and V.I. Lenin, regardless of the variations and differences between these thinkers.<sup>25</sup> During the period of Socialist International, however, these differences and variations are important for understanding debates about Marxism’s relationship to movements against racism, colonialism, and capitalist exploitation, and why many Black radicals in the United States maintained a contentious, and sometimes oppositional, attitude toward organizations like the American Socialist Party.

The American Socialist Party (SP), founded in 1901, always contained a mixture of Marxist traditions. Ira Kipnis describes the early party as ideologically split, even though nearly “all party leaders gave lip service to the philosophy of scientific socialism as expounded by Marx and Engels.”<sup>26</sup> James Weinstein finds that in addition to a right-left spectrum within the party, there existed other categories like the Populist Socialists who often “contradicted traditional Marxism,” and Christian Socialists such as Woodbey,

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<sup>23</sup> David Renton, *Classical Marxism: Socialist Theory and the Second International* (Cheltenham, England: New Clarion Press, 2002), 29-45, 85-96.

<sup>24</sup> Engels to Eduard Bernstein in Zurich, London, November 2-3, 1892, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed March 31, 2014, [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82\\_11\\_02.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82_11_02.htm).

<sup>25</sup> David Renton, *Classical Marxism*, 29-45; Engels to Eduard Bernstein in Zurich, London, November 2-3, 1882, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed March 31, 2014, [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82\\_11\\_02.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1882/letters/82_11_02.htm); Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 1. It is important to note that Robinson uses the term “tradition,” loosely, as he himself acknowledges, when discussing Marxism.

<sup>26</sup> Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (1952; repr., Haymarket Books, 2004), 107.

who seemed “at odds with traditional doctrine.”<sup>27</sup> Another historian, Robert Hyfler, accepts Kipnis’ notion that many party members only gave “lip service” to Marxism, but emphasizes party leaders Victor Berger, Morris Hillquit, and John Spargo also used Marxist ideas in a conservative way by placing “an unusually heavy emphasis on the unconscious factors of social change and a gradualist and progressive interpretation of history which circumscribed the need for activism.”<sup>28</sup>

Whereas Kipnis sees the issue of racism as directly related to the decline of the SP as a revolutionary working class party, continually split between its reformist and revolutionary tendencies,<sup>29</sup> Weinstein suggests that until 1919 the party as a whole shared both an “anticapitalist perspective” and a “commitment to thoroughgoing social transformation,” and that differences of opinions between factions did not diminish the “revolutionary” outlook of the Party.<sup>30</sup> But on basic questions as to whether or not anti-racist work would be an essential component in building an organization that aimed at the overthrow of capitalism, or whether or not the SP supported non-parliamentary means of achieving socialism, fundamental differences did exist, and these differences were also present within the Socialist International.

Founded in 1889 by the emerging social democratic parties of Europe, the Socialist, or “Second” International became the center of international Marxism until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Led by its strongest affiliate and original instigator, the

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<sup>27</sup> James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 19, 331.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Hyfler, *Prophets of the Left: American Socialist Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1984), 15.

<sup>29</sup> Kipnis, *American Socialist Movement*, 423.

<sup>30</sup> Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 5.

German Social Democratic Party (SPD), 391 delegates from 20 countries attended its founding congress.<sup>31</sup> In 1888 Karl Kautsky wrote a commentary on the SPD's *Erfurt Program*, the major theoretical reference point on organization for parties affiliated to the new International. His text emphasized the inevitability of socialism through increased working class consciousness resulting from the development of capitalism, and theorized that socialists participating in parliament as representatives of a "self-conscious class" of proletarians changed the nature of parliamentary politics by transforming it from "a tool of the bourgeoisie" into "the most effective means" in the working class struggle against capitalism. Kautsky argued that within the labor movement craft unionism would naturally decline as a "militant division" of workers increased more rapidly than the skilled and comfortable "aristocratic tendency," differentiating itself from the "common mob which still vegetates, helpless and hopeless." Eventually, this "militant proletariat and socialism" would become identical."<sup>32</sup>

Kautsky viewed the party as representative of the working class as a whole, suggesting that outside the party working class consciousness could not exist. In this schema, African Americans not willing to join could be viewed with contempt as non-revolutionary elements to be represented by their enlightened leaders within the Socialist Party. African Americans and other workers and oppressed people corresponding to the "servant," "menial," or "slum" categories provided by Kautsky could likewise be considered distractions from working class struggle.<sup>33</sup> As a leader of the largest socialist

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<sup>31</sup> Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 86.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle (Erfurt Programme)* (1892; New York: Charles H. Keer & Co., 1910), 188, 183-184.

<sup>33</sup>Kautsky, *Class Struggle*, 188.

party in Europe and the Second International, Kautsky's ideas tremendously shaped the development of Marxist theory and politics during the early twentieth century.<sup>34</sup>

Even before official party unification, the proponents of a unified American socialist movement that became the SP voted to send delegates to the Second International's Paris Congress in 1900.<sup>35</sup> Like its European counter-parts, the SP became increasingly split over what Geoff Eley describes as "questions of purity or compromise, maximalism or constructive participation, revolution or reform."<sup>36</sup> The right-wing, led by Victor Berger, generally argued for a gradualist, reform-centered agenda that saw the election of a majority of Socialists to state and national offices to be the party's primary aim, and did not see any prospect for achieving socialism until capitalism had sufficiently developed. He and others in the party adopted a highly deterministic understanding of Marxism, a tradition David Renton describes as the "science of discovering the inevitable."<sup>37</sup> This section of the party also justified their positions by drawing on the ideas of SPD leader Edward Bernstein, author of *Evolutionary Socialism*, who dismissed the necessity of working class revolution and emphasized that socialism could be accomplished through parliamentary reforms.<sup>38</sup> He considered Marxism, or "the materialist interpretation of history," to be based first and foremost on:

...belief in the inevitableness of all historical events and developments. The question is only, in what manner the inevitable is accomplished in human history, what element of force or what factors of force speak the decisive word, what is the relation of the different factors to one

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<sup>34</sup> Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854-1938: Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), 88.

<sup>35</sup> Kipnis, 88.

<sup>36</sup> Eley, 87.

<sup>37</sup> Weinstein, 5-8; Renton, *Classical Marxism*, 38.

<sup>38</sup> Kipnis, 117.

another, what part in history falls to the share of nature, of political economy, of legal organisations, of ideas.<sup>39</sup>

Bernstein's argument tended to neglect Marx's emphasis on human agency. Certainly Marx argued that people "make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>40</sup> But as Renton argues, Marx's own theory and practice "makes full sense only if Marx is seen as an advocate of human agency," evidenced among other things by his involvement with the IWMA.<sup>41</sup>

The left-wing of the SP, representing the revolutionary wing of the party to which Eugene Debs belonged, stressed human agency and the need for raising class consciousness and for struggle at the point of production. They tended to view elections as an organizing tactic. The role of the Socialist Party was not to assist capitalism in the concentration of industry, as Bernstein in Germany and Berger in the United States argued, but to strengthen the capacity and ability of the working class to wrestle political power from the ruling class, and to support reforms that contributed to that end.<sup>42</sup> These members took Marx's statement that "philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various way; the point, however, is to *change* it," quite literally.<sup>43</sup>

### **Racism in the Socialist Party**

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<sup>39</sup> Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation* (1898, First English Edition, 1909; Reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 7.

<sup>40</sup> Karl Marx, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 595.

<sup>41</sup> Renton, 45.

<sup>42</sup> Hyfler, *Prophets of the Left*, 15-46, 67-95; Kipnis, 300-301.

<sup>43</sup> Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," 1845, in *Marx-Engels Readers*, 145. These theses were first written in 1845, but remained unpublished until 1888.

Considering race, the viewpoint shared by many within the Socialist Party reflected the dominant tendency of Second International Marxists to reject, as unimportant, social divisions not directly tied to an individual's relationship to the world of production.<sup>44</sup> According to Eley, parties affiliated with Second International therefore generally gained popularity only among "certain kinds of workers," appealing most successfully in places like Germany to industrial workers, but failing to gain significant support among religious groups, individuals with transgressive sexual identities, young people, ethnic minorities, and the "working class of criminal subcultures, casualized labor markets, and the migrant urban poor."<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, women and European immigrants did find themselves attracted to socialist parties during this period,<sup>46</sup> but in the United States the dominant understanding of Marxism within the Socialist Party proved especially narrow when it came to addressing white supremacy in its first decade of existence, and the party attracted few Black members.

Not all of the party's pronouncements on race should be understood as "Marxist" however. On the right, Victor Berger maintained a "pyramidal view" of race that according to his biographer, Sally Miller, contained "definite ethnic lines dividing superior and inferior peoples," with whites "at the top...yellow below, and black at the bottom."<sup>47</sup> During the Socialist Party's 1908 national convention, Ernest Untermann

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<sup>44</sup> Hyfler, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Eley, 83-84.

<sup>46</sup> See Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983). Buhle's study offers an examination of women socialists and specifically addresses what she sees as "the interplay of two parallel traditions, immigrant and native-born, with wholly different modes of organization and world views" among socialist women. M. Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, xiii.

<sup>47</sup> Sally M. Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1973), 28.



used a similar social Darwinist “struggle for existence” logic in justifying his determination to maintain white supremacy, while Berger implied race to be a “second-hand” issue not valid for “scientific and materialist” analysis linked to class struggle.<sup>48</sup> His views on race were anything but Marxist, as he himself acknowledged. According to Miller, Berger therefore justified them by pointing out that Marx “had not known twentieth century America.”<sup>49</sup>

In 1910, Berger’s wing of the SP gained control of its National Executive Committee and along with it the power to affect important policy making decisions.<sup>50</sup> That year, Untermann wrote a piece for the Milwaukee *Social-Democratic Herald*, defending the Socialist Party’s resolution on immigration adopted by its 1910 convention against criticisms that it violated the principles of Marxist internationalism. Untermann claimed that his own experiences as a worker showed that “these theories were refuted by practice” and that “race peculiarities are facts” that had to be “respected, even by Socialists.”<sup>51</sup> While during this period the party embraced European foreign language groups, significantly boosting its size, it supported legislation that would completely exclude immigration into the United States from Asian countries, according to Kipnis, as it already had “a Negro race problem.”<sup>52</sup> Berger and Untermann’s racist views do not reflect a Marxist, but rather an anti-Marxist perspective on racism.

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<sup>48</sup> Socialist Party of America, *Proceedings: National Convention of the Socialist Party, 1908*, ed. John M. Work (Chicago: Socialist Party, 1908), 110-11.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, *Victor Berger*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Miller, 48.

<sup>51</sup> Ernest Untermann, “The Immigration Question,” *Social-Democratic Herald* (Milwaukee) December 10, 1910.

<sup>52</sup> Kipnis, 272,282.

Marxists in the early twentieth century United States engaging with the so-called “Negro Problem,” or “Negro Question,” on the other hand, attempted to come to terms with racism and its relationship to working class struggle. Although it would later take on international dimensions, in the context of the SP the “Negro Question” originally referred to how party members sought to understand the relationship between the racial oppression of African Americans, capitalism, and class struggle, and what the role socialists should have in challenging segregation, discrimination, and racist violence under capitalism.<sup>53</sup>

In the 1890s a forerunner to the SP, the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), began publishing articles covering the conditions of African Americans, and by 1900 its New York daily newspaper *The People* regularly printed articles on racial violence targeting African Americans. As the first American socialist news publication to consistently take up the “Negro Question,” its articles reflected the dogmatic perspective among white Marxists that embedded in the statement that “only through socialism could the race problem be solved.” As Phillip S. Foner points out, SLP leader Daniel De Leon argued that because “Negroes were just workers like white workers under capitalism,” any specific appeal or program based around their grievances was unnecessary.<sup>54</sup> For over a decade the SP generally retained a similar perspective that did not consider racism to warrant special attention in devising its strategy for working class liberation, or in its approach to organizing non-white workers.

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<sup>53</sup> Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1936* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013), xviii.

<sup>54</sup> P. Foner, *American Socialism*, 70-72.

A four time Presidential candidate for the SP and part of its left-wing, Eugene Debs wrote an article in 1903 for the *International Socialist Review* titled, “The Negro in the Class Struggle,” condemning racism among party members, especially in the South. “Socialists are to be found, and by no means rarely,” Debs wrote, “who either share directly in the race hostility against the Negro, or avoid the issue, or apologize for the social obliteration of the color line in the class struggle.” Yet because he defined class struggle in “colorless” terms, arguing for the repeal of resolutions that had been passed on “the Negro Question” at the founding national convention of the party, Debs stated that socialism had “nothing special to offer the Negro” and could not “make separate appeals to all the races.”<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, as a Marxist Debs opposed the idea that racism could be reconciled with socialist ideas. In response to his attack on racism, a “staunch member of the Socialist Party” challenged Debs, claiming that “the physical difference between the white and the black races” was permanent and proved that calls for equality were misguided. Debs called the anonymous critic “entirely ignorant of the philosophy of Socialism,” quoting the “Negro resolution” he had previously argued against, and made it clear that to “exclude any human being from political equality and economic freedom” on the basis of race was a clear rejection of “the fundamental principles of Socialism.”<sup>56</sup>

The original resolution on the “Negro Question” referred to by Debs in both these articles had been introduced by, debated, and supported by the three Black delegates, William Costley from San Francisco, John H. Adams from Brazil, and Edward D.

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<sup>55</sup> Eugene V. Debs, “The Negro in the Class Struggle,” *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, 63-66.

<sup>56</sup> Eugene Debs, “The Negro and His Nemesis,” *International Socialist Review*, January, 1904, in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, 66-73.

McKay from Richmond, Indiana, to the SP's founding convention in 1901. Some white delegates opposed and amended it, claiming special attention to one section of the working class contradicted the party's mission to be the party of the entire class. Opposition also came from members fearing such a resolution hampered the ability of the party to gain votes in the South. The resolution that eventually passed dropped the original resolution's references to lynching and segregation.<sup>57</sup> It could be argued that the SP at this point appears to have prioritized white votes over Black lives.

Indeed, ultimately the "no special appeal" argument not only facilitated a tolerance for racist ideas and practices within the organization, it greatly explains why the SP and Marxism failed to attract much support or enthusiasm among African Americans during the first decade of the twentieth century. Indeed, while the SP grew in the early 1900s, Africans and African Americans were developing important internationalist networks with potentially revolutionary implications independent of the Second International, and which would find little space within the organized Marxist left in the United States during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

### **Pan-Africanism, Migration, and the Socialist Party: W.E.B. Du Bois and Hubert Harrison**

As part of the African Diaspora, African Americans and other people of African descent living in the Western hemisphere developed a long and rich history of resistance as well as social and political thought opposing white supremacy, exploitation, and the oppression of non-European peoples predating and independent of Marxism.<sup>58</sup> During the

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<sup>57</sup> P. Foner, *American Socialism*, 94-98.

<sup>58</sup> See Robinson, 130-166 and Winant, 51-82 for excellent overviews of African and African American resistance to slavery, racial oppression, and exploitation.

late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century, the “black international” played an important role spreading ideologies of emancipation and examples of revolutionary anti-slavery struggles for Black emancipation. During the early twentieth century, this “black international” took on clearer organizational forms, according to West and Martin, moving “from the realm of ideological coherence to actual political organization,” while expanding its coordinates to include “the African continent, now under the colonial yoke” of Europe, whereas previously it had been mostly confined to the “west bank of the Atlantic and a few outposts along the Atlantic coast of Africa.”<sup>59</sup> One of the earliest signs of this organizational coherence can be seen in the holding of the first Pan-African Conference in 1900.

According to Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, the beginning of an organized Pan-African movement occurred with the founding of the African Association in 1897 and the holding of the first Pan African conference in London three years later.<sup>60</sup> Henry Sylvester Williams convened the first Pan-African Conference in July 1900. Born in Barbados in 1869 and emigrating to Trinidad at an early age, Sherwood notes how Williams “grew up in a village where the majority were of African descent, and included Africans with memories of Africa.”<sup>61</sup> Although little historical evidence exists, between 1891 and 1893 he appears to have lived somewhere in North America likely attending school and possibly working on a railroad. During this time there were debates at black conventions surrounding emigration to Africa, and although he probably did not attend,

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<sup>59</sup> West and Martin, “Contours,” 8.

<sup>60</sup> Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from African and the Diaspora since 1787* (New York: Routledge, 2003), vii-viii.

<sup>61</sup> Marika Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa, and the African Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 5.

Williams would have likely read about the Congress on Africa held in Chicago in 1893 through the black press, and engaged himself with the opinions of attendees, including those of former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, on a wide range of subjects including proposals for African American emigration to Africa. He enrolled at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia in 1893, and moved to London in 1896.<sup>62</sup>

In 1897 Williams founded the African Association as a “black men” only organization. Exceptions were made for honorary members who demonstrated support for its mission to bring together the diverse African people oppressed and subjugated under the British Empire in protest against their conditions.<sup>63</sup> This association created the plans for the Pan-African Conference held in 1900, with Williams reaching out to African American leaders like Booker T. Washington of the Tuskegee Institute, W.S. Scarborough, president of Wilberforce University, and David Straker, a judge from Detroit, Michigan for support. Attended by thirty three delegates, the conference included representatives from the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean. Six delegates attended from the United States, including W.E.B. Du Bois, Black feminist thinker Anna J. Cooper and Ada Harris from Washington D.C., and Bishop Alexander Walters of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Sherwood, *Origins of Pan-Africanism*, 12-24. It should be noted that the Chicago Congress on Africa Sherwood refers to has also been suggested as the beginning of the Pan-African movement by P. Olisanwuche Esebebe. It lasted a week, and was attended by many notable figures. See P. Olisanwuche Esebebe, *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776-1991*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1994), 39. For the sake of convenience, and as most scholars still generally see the 1900 conference to be the “first” Pan-African conference, this sections relies on Sherwood and Adi’s viewpoint referenced earlier.

<sup>63</sup> Sherwood, 39.

<sup>64</sup> Adi and Sherwood, *Pan-African History*, 190-191; David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1993), 248-251; Esebebe, *Pan-Africanism*, 39. Esebebe notes that Bishop Walters also attended the 1893 Chicago Congress.

Although Booker T. Washington did not attend the conference, his association with the event did impact its success. David Levering Lewis argues that Washington supported the conference as believed exposing the U.S. delegation to European racism toward Africans would make their conditions in the American South seem “more tolerable.”<sup>65</sup> In his famous “Atlanta Exposition Address,” delivered in 1895, Washington argued that “the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly,” and that values of work and economic progress should be emphasized before Blacks in the South could begin to address questions of social and political equality. He addressed white business owners looking toward “those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South,” and encouraged them to rely rather on “the eight million Negroes” who he portrayed as reliant, loyal, and loving workers who would not participate in “strike and labor wars.”<sup>66</sup>

The Pan-African Congress, on the other hand, emphasized in its discussions the exploitation of labor, the rights of trade unionists, and the importance of the franchise. It established a new Pan-African Association with a platform that included the demand for civil and political rights for Africans throughout the Diaspora.<sup>67</sup> Significantly, the conference adopted an appeal, “To the Nations of the World,” which rejected the commercial interests defended by Booker T. Washington.<sup>68</sup> The “Appeal” contained W.E.B. Du Bois’ famous dictum: “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem

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<sup>65</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 249.

<sup>66</sup> Booker T. Washington, “Atlanta Exposition Address,” September 18, 1895, in *African-American Social and Political Thought, 1850-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009). 356-359.

<sup>67</sup> For a summary of the conference’s proceedings, see Sherwood, 75-97.

<sup>68</sup> Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography*, 251.

of the color line.” It addressed issues of British colonialism, condemned the oppression of African Americans, and defended the self-determination of “the free Negro States of Abyssinia, Liberia, Haiti, and the rest.” As part of the Black international, it connected the fates of Blacks in Africa with those in the United States, and with the “brown and yellow myriads elsewhere.”<sup>69</sup>

Following the 1900 conference, Henry Sylvester Williams attempted to organize and spread the Pan-African Association in Trinidad, Jamaica, London, and the United States, and following the organization’s collapse in 1903 he travelled to South Africa where he practiced law and became active in “coloured” and African politics, until returning to London in 1905, where he remained politically active until his death in 1911. Williams was a significant activist and political figure within the African Diaspora at the turn of the century, an important part of the Black international driven by an increasingly global “race conscious” politics centered on opposing European colonialism by building political unity among people of African descent worldwide.<sup>70</sup>

Another Black West Indian, Hubert Harrison, arrived in New York City in September 1900 only two months following the Pan-African conference. Born on the Caribbean island of St. Croix, according to his biographer Jerry Perry, Harrison came to the United States at the age of seventeen when few other West Indians were migrating in that direction. His decision to leave for New York was nevertheless part of an increasing

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<sup>69</sup> Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography*, 248-251; Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Radical Black Democrat*, Rev. Ed. (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 39-40; W.E.B. Du Bois, “To the Nations of the World,” 1900, in *My Life and My Work*, by Alexander Walters, 257-264 (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1917).

<sup>70</sup> Sherwood, 103-123, 136-155; Lara Putnam, “Nothing Matters but Color: Transnational Circuits, the Interwar Caribbean, and the Black International,” *Tupac to Toussaint*, eds. West, Martin, and Wilkins, 107-129.



pattern of migration from the Caribbean caused in large part by lack of economic opportunity and experiences of colonial repression. Economic and political forces pushed and helped sustain migration from the region to other parts of the world, and by the time Harrison left St. Croix, migration from the island had played a major role in decreasing its population by thirty percent over a sixty five year time period. Yet only 703 Black West Indians chose to immigrate to the United States in 1900, constituting about a tenth of one percent of the total number of immigrants who came to the United States that year.<sup>71</sup>

Harrison and W.E.B. Du Bois came from very different backgrounds, although sharing some important similarities. Growing up, Du Bois encountered little of the brutality and racial discrimination faced by many African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. As a child in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, he observed the plight of Irish workers in the town, including Irish domestic workers, who appeared to be at the bottom socially when compared to the African Americans he encountered. Less than thirty Black families lived in Great Barrington at the time, which had a population of five thousand, and intermarriages with whites were frequent.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, growing up in St. Croix, Harrison did not experience the harsh realities of race present in the United States until moving to New York. In St. Croix class and race often coincided. Legal segregation based on race was largely absent on the island, as was lynching, with St. Croix's color line drawn between "Negro," "colored," and a mostly "white" elite.<sup>73</sup> Both Du Bois and

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<sup>71</sup> Jeffery B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 49-50; W., James, 9-49.

<sup>72</sup> Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 5.

<sup>73</sup> Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, 21-22, 30-33.

Harrison would take advantage of educational opportunities in their youth, and complete high school degrees. Yet beyond these comparable circumstances and achievements, in most respects they had radically different experiences in their early years.

Du Bois went on to complete his undergraduate degree at Fisk University in Tennessee, where his confrontations with the inequalities and discrimination facing Black students shaped his developing consciousness of race. In 1891 he obtained an M.A. from Harvard University, after which he spent time studying in Germany at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin, and in 1895 Du Bois received his PhD from Harvard for his dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*.<sup>74</sup> Harrison, on the other hand, after finishing his high school diploma through night classes in New York while working various jobs during the day, never enrolled in college. Claiming to have acquired a doctorate in science while studying in Europe between 1907 and 1909, he did so in order to gain employment and in reality spent most of the remainder of his life in and around the streets of Harlem.<sup>75</sup>

Du Bois' education reflected his limited access into a largely white world of power and privilege in American society based on class and race, while Harrison's experiences in New York were conditioned by the realities of immigrant and working class life at the turn of the century. They both, however, were drawn to the Socialist Party. Yet when Du Bois and Harrison officially joined the SP they did so along very different paths and with significantly different political outlooks.

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<sup>74</sup> Marable, 8-22.

<sup>75</sup> Perry, 55-57.

Noting the increasing attention paid to Du Bois' radicalism among scholars, particularly in African American and African Diaspora studies, Mark Van Wienen and Julie Kraft offer a framework for understanding Du Bois' radical engagement with socialism predating his relationship with Marxism and the Soviet Union beginning in the late 1920s.<sup>76</sup> Du Bois had attended meetings of the German Social Democratic Party while studying in Berlin, and according to Wienen and Kraft, by 1904 he shared their convictions pertaining to "the equitable distribution of wealth and public ownership of industry."<sup>77</sup> This is shown in Du Bois' response to a letter from Isaac Max Rubinow inquiring about Du Bois' thoughts on socialism in relation to the "Negro question." Du Bois wrote in November 1904 that he held "many socialistic beliefs," including that "the Negro problem is partly the American Caste problem, & that caste is arising because of unjust & dangerous economic conditions."<sup>78</sup> Wienen and Kraft argue that in his novel, *The Quest for the Silver Fleece*, originally written in 1905 and published with revisions in 1911, Du Bois also gave an original expression of socialism conceived in terms of "African American folk culture."<sup>79</sup> In *Quest*, they argue, Du Bois provides a clear

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<sup>76</sup> Mark Van Wienen and Julie Kraft, "How the Socialism of W.E.B. Du Bois Still Matters: Black Socialism in *The Quest for the Silver Fleece*—and Beyond," *African American Review* 41, No. 4 (2007): 67.

<sup>77</sup> Wienen and Kraft, "How the Socialism of W.E.B. Du Bois Still Matters," 68. Marable suggests that Du Bois first acquainted himself with socialist and Marxist writings at Atlanta University, while Lewis emphasizes his criticism of SPD ideological feuding and the elitism through which he viewed the German working class. Marable, 89; Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography*, 144.

<sup>78</sup> Rubinow to Du Bois, November 10, 1904, in *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. Herbert Aptheker, vol. I, 1877-1934 (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 81-82; Du Bois to Rubinow, November 17, 1904 in *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. Herbert Aptheker, vol. I, 1877-1934, 82.

<sup>79</sup> Wienen and Kraft consider the novel's socialism in the novel's "downstairs" sub-plot driven by Du Bois's character Zora, "an illegitimate and untutored black woman" through whose "folks genius Du Bois convey an alternative, communitarian set of values," and they cite Zora's dialogue about a stolen brooch as an example of this. See Wienen and Kraft, 68-69 and W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Quest for the Silver Fleece* (1911; Reprint, Miami: Mnemosyne, 1969), 79.

indictment of capitalist exploitation and racism through the lens of a communitarian socialist tradition, and in this regard, the novel can be seen as an important backdrop to his decision to join the Socialist Party in 1911.<sup>80</sup>

The formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) also marked an important moment in Du Bois' move toward the SP. It was the culmination of an attempt by Du Bois and others to shift the struggle for African American civil rights and equality away from the "politics of accommodation" represented by Booker T. Washington.<sup>81</sup> Originally ideologically close to Washington, Du Bois increasingly viewed his political leadership harmful to the cause of racial justice in downplaying open political struggle. Washington's "politics of accommodation" transcended the boundaries of the United States through his support and active participation in German colonial ventures in Africa.<sup>82</sup> In *The Souls of Black Folks*, published in 1903, Du Bois compared Washington to Confederate leader and slave owner, Jefferson Davis, as a betrayer of the Black legacy found in escaped slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass. According to Stephan H. Marshall, at this time it was Douglass' insistence on the dignity of enslaved Africans and affirmation of struggle that appeared for Du Bois "as the highest expression of America's founding principles."<sup>83</sup>

Before the NAACP, Du Bois and other Black leaders began to challenge Washington's political influence through the Niagara Movement in 1905. In New York a

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<sup>80</sup> Wiene and Kraft, 68-70.

<sup>81</sup> McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies*, 54.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 60-61, 69-70. For Washington's involvement in German colonialism, see Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>83</sup> Marshall, *City on the Hill Below*, 104-106.

small number of white Socialists supported their efforts, although the socialist press largely ignored it. SP member Mary White Ovington became the first white member of the Niagara Movement and along with several other SP members later joined the NAACP. Their involvement impressed Du Bois and increased his admiration for the party. When he joined in 1911, his decision was conditioned both by his developing Pan-African internationalism and his prior commitment to economic justice.<sup>84</sup> His path to the SP overlapped with his efforts to diminish the political leadership Booker T. Washington, whose power and influence more directly impacted the life of Hubert Harrison.

Harrison lost his job as a post office employee in early 1911 after publicly criticizing Washington in two letters written for the *New York Sun*. Charles W. Anderson, an African American operative for the New York Republican Party, who was a staunch supporter of Washington and close political friend of the New York City postmaster, met with Washington after the appearance of these letters and initiated the campaign that resulted in Harrison losing his job. This influenced his decision to become a paid organizer for the SP. Harrison hit the ground running in his new role, but his removal from the post office devastated his family economically. His children would later recall the severe poverty imposed on his family by the actions of Washington's political machine.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Foner, P., *American Socialism*, 183-195; Marable, 89-90. On the role of socialists like Ovington and others in influencing Du Bois's decision to join the Socialist Party there is a fair amount of agreement among historians, and in this respect Weinen and Kraft go too far in seeing the "socialist commitment" they locate in *The Quest for the Silver Fleece* as the primary motivating factor behind Du Bois' entry into the party. See Wiene and Kraft, 68.

<sup>85</sup> Perry, 132-133.

Evidence suggests Harrison may have become a member of the SP in 1908 or 1909, but the significant years of his involvement with the party began in 1911. Besides a source of employment, the party presented a radical alternative vision to capitalism that Harrison found appealing, and provided a political alternative to the Democratic and Republican parties, and the existing Black leadership and organizations that appeared to Harrison ineffectual in achieving their goals. Unlike Du Bois, who joined without serious prior engagement with Marxist political economy or philosophy, Harrison displayed familiarity with Marx's concepts and methods and a critical ability to use and transform these in his attempt to insert a revolutionary Marxist perspective against racism within the party.<sup>86</sup>

Like Du Bois, Harrison's first encounters with socialist and other radical ideas preceded his involvement with the SP. He was deeply attracted and influenced by the ideas of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. An autodidact like Eugene Debs, who also gained an appreciation for Thomas Paine long before becoming a towering figure on the American left, Harrison was drawn to Paine's revolutionary ideas and adopted Paine's "militant unbelief and democratic dissent" as an example for his own political and philosophical commitments.<sup>87</sup> He embraced Paine's sentiment expressed in his *Rights of Man* that "my country is the world, and my religion is to do good," much like African American party member Reverend Woodbey, who himself quoted Paine during the 1908 national convention of the SP debate on immigration restrictions, arguing that Berger and

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<sup>86</sup> Perry, 146-147; W., James, 124.

<sup>87</sup> Perry, 60; Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1949), 39; Hubert Harrison, "Paine's Place in the Deistical Movement," *Truth Seeker* 38, no. 6 (February 11, 1911: 87-88, in *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, ed. Jeffery B. Perry (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 40-42.

Untermann's support for immigration restrictions violated "the principles of international Socialism."<sup>88</sup>

In New York, Harrison immersed himself in histories of African and African American people, social and natural science, and literature. Some rumored he read up to six books a day.<sup>89</sup> As part of his self-education Harrison also organized a study circle among fellow Black postal workers in 1907 and his involvement with this group inspired him to begin planning a work on the history of Blacks in America focusing particularly on Reconstruction. He also founded a literary club in 1908 with Charles Burroughs, who had been a member of the postal worker reading circle.<sup>90</sup> As a postal worker and through these activities, Harrison developed a deep class consciousness, and according to Perry, became "an active participant in the vibrant community and intellectual life created by working-class Black New Yorkers."<sup>91</sup>

Alongside his developing working class consciousness Harrison's encounter with the harsh realities of race in the United States deeply instilled in him a profound racial consciousness. Only a month before his arrival in New York City, riots had erupted in which mobs of white citizens and police officers attacked the city's Black population. Rampant white supremacy limited the economic and social opportunities for Black residents in areas of employment, housing, and education.<sup>92</sup> In 1904 another race riot erupted in New York City's "Hell's Kitchen," including the San Juan Hill neighborhood where Harrison then lived. In a letter published in *The New York Times*, Harrison

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<sup>88</sup> Socialist Party of America, *Proceedings: National Convention of the Socialist Party, 1908*, 106.

<sup>89</sup> W., James, 124.

<sup>90</sup> Perry, 84.

<sup>91</sup> Perry, 86-87.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

challenged widespread racist coverage of African Americans in New York City and identified himself as “a Negro” and “proud of it.”<sup>93</sup>

Harrison displayed a Black internationalist sentiment and increasing affection and concern for Africa, pledging his life to working toward Africa’s liberation, “even in the land of thine exile,” in his diary in 1907.<sup>94</sup> As a teacher and lecturer in the black community of Harlem, he made education a key aspect of his pledge and considered his efforts similar to those of Du Bois. Intimately involving himself in the life of his community, which was overwhelmingly Black and working class, Harrison maintained a deep interest in its history and wrote Du Bois about asking for his opinion on notes he had gathered for a possible work on Reconstruction. Du Bois was apparently impressed and sent two books to Harrison on African American history and economics.<sup>95</sup> Yet in many respects his political development led him away from Du Bois. In 1908, Du Bois publicly supported William Jennings Bryan for president of the United States, breaking with the Republican Party that had traditionally received wide support among African Americans. Harrison, on the other hand, focused first and foremost on criticizing the Republicans and using the election to raise consciousness in the Black community.<sup>96</sup>

Another difference between Harrison and Du Bois upon their joining the Socialist Party presents itself in their considerations of Abraham Lincoln. In launching the call for the formation of the NAACP in 1909, Du Bois signed a statement describing Lincoln as

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<sup>93</sup> Hubert Harrison, “A Negro on Chicken Stealing: Assails the Statement That His Race Is Addicted to Vice,” letter to the editor, *New York Times*, December 11, 1905, 6, in *Hubert Harrison Reader*, ed. Perry, 31-33; Perry, 68.

<sup>94</sup> Cited in Perry, 92.

<sup>95</sup> Perry, 89, 98, 99-100.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.



“the great emancipator” who “labored to assure freedom” for “colored men and women.”<sup>97</sup> Harrison began forming a much different perspective after reading the *Letters and Addresses of Abraham Lincoln*, a book edited by socialist and future NAACP activist Mary McLean.<sup>98</sup> Based largely on passages from this collection, Harrison presented lectures and articles on Lincoln beginning in 1911 until his death in 1927, describing him and the Republican party as willing to “sell out the Negro” as late as 1864.<sup>99</sup> The statement signed by Du Bois sought to attract the attention of middle class whites as well as Blacks, while Harrison’s articles on Lincoln were intended for Black working class audiences in a deliberate effort to break their allegiance to the Republican Party. In appropriating Lincoln for different political purposes, they revealed not only their different class and social locations, but also important divergences in their relationship to the politics of international socialism.

### **Harrison’s Marxist Challenge to the Party on Race and Revolution**

Harrison and Du Bois joined the Socialist Party during a period of rapid growth and after the conservative wing of the party had come into control of its National Executive Committee. Challenging this leadership, Harrison set out his views on the relationship between racism and capitalism, socialist organization, and working class revolution from an engaged Marxist perspective in a series of articles for the *New York Call* beginning in November 1911. Harrison’s first article, “The Negro and Socialism,”

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<sup>97</sup> Committee on the Negro “Call” for a National Conference, February 1909. Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, accessed February 20, 2014, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/founding-and-early-years.html#obj2>.

<sup>98</sup> Perry, 101.

<sup>99</sup> Hubert Harrison, “Lincoln and Liberty: Fact versus Fiction; Chapter Two. Lincoln Not an Abolitionist, Republicans Opposed Abolitionist Doctrine,” *Negro World* (March 12, 1921), 8, *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 130-133.

approached race as having a “history... much as the class struggle and the system of production have theirs.” The article examined the history of white supremacy from slavery to the present as a system under which white “superiors” fixed and determined the status of non-white “inferiors.”<sup>100</sup>

In another article, Harrison attacked popular ideas about race and racism as being fixed by human nature, ridiculing the notion of innate racial prejudice by pointing to laws and institutions intentionally created for its maintenance. Instead, Harrison considered race as socially constructed and drawing itself into existence from the “social atmosphere.” According to Harrison, racism, once established, “takes care of itself” so long as the conditions of caste from which it emerged are maintained.<sup>101</sup> Although Harrison found the ideas of Lamarckian evolutionary theory especially interesting and occasionally fluctuated between the position maintained in these 1911 articles and an acceptance of race in more biological terms, he primarily considered it as a “shifting reality” dependent on social and historical factors.<sup>102</sup>

Harrison’s Marxist approach to race challenged racist and reductionist arguments within the SP in an attempt to transform its theoretical and organizational outlook from within. He confronted, as Debs had earlier, members “calling themselves Socialists who do not quite understand what Socialism means.” For Harrison, socialism demanded an end to “exploitation of one group by another, whether that group be social, economic, or

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<sup>100</sup> Hubert Harrison, “The Negro and Socialism: I—The Negro Problem Stated,” *New York Call*, November 28, 1911, *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 52-55.

<sup>101</sup> Hubert Harrison, “Race Prejudice—II,” *New York Call*, December 4, 1911, *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 55-57.

<sup>102</sup> Perry, 119-122; Hubert Harrison, “The Brown Man Leads the Way, review of *The New World of Islam* by Lothrop Stoddard (concluding Part),” *Negro World* 11, November 5, 1921: 5, *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 315-319.

racial.” Calling this “the position of Marx, Engels, Kautsky, and every great leader of the Socialist movement,” Harrison developed an innovative Marxist analysis and proceeded to map out several practical lessons on race for the SP. He argued that socialists had to educate and organize “the Negroes of America,” intentionally recruiting them into the party in order to wage battle against capitalist exploitation and racism.<sup>103</sup>

Harrison also noted that while Blacks live “behind the color line,” socialists had largely been unwilling to reach them, and when willing were generally unsuccessful except where they were able to make “special” appeals. If the party thus required special work in order to organize Black members, it also required “special equipment,” including a historical and cultural knowledge of racism and Black people, and an ability to appeal to the “head as well as to his heart.” Additionally, Harrison called on the party to utilize more “colored organizers.” He praised Black party member Reverend Woodbey, who had “been very effective” as a national organizer. Although a radical agnostic bordering on atheist himself, Harrison’s praise for a Christian minister showed a pragmatic and culturally sensitive approach that encouraged appealing to African Americans through the cultural values of the Black Church.<sup>104</sup>

Harrison took the SP to task for excluding sections of the working class from their program both in theory and in practice, developing a theoretical position on solidly Marxist grounds. In connecting racism to changing historical circumstances, highlighting its relationship to class under capitalism, and stressing the need for socialists to become

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<sup>103</sup> Hubert Harrison, “The Duty of the Socialist Party,” *New York Call*, December 13, 1911, *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 57-59.

<sup>104</sup> This interpretation nuances Perry’s argument that in writing polemics against the Christian church in 1910 Harrison began “distancing himself from the most powerful institution in the Black community,” and “limited his prospects as a mass leader of African Americans.” See Perry, 136-137.

conscious of it in order to wage struggle against it, his analysis foreshadowed the Marxist critiques of racism that emerged among radical economists in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>105</sup> Harrison's arguments had practical implications for transforming the Socialist Party into the "all inclusive class conscious working class movement" it claimed to be.<sup>106</sup> His articles made several important interventions. Race and racism were not innate, but products of history that could be explained by historical materialism and socialism had to be an inclusive movement not narrowly defined by the perceived interests of the white working class.

An additional series of articles published in the *International Socialist Review* toward the end of 1911 and early 1912 further elaborated Harrison's theoretical arguments and position on practical work within the party. In the "The Black Man's Burden," Harrison referenced "the colored peoples of the world" but focused his attention on the political, economic, educational, and social "facts" pertaining to "the black man's burden in America."<sup>107</sup> Harrison argued that a perspective on class struggle that denied the importance of Black people to working class revolution only made sense "as long as

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<sup>105</sup> Perry, 165-166. Perry notes that some of Harrison's ideas took positions similar those Marx developed in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. While he does not explicitly describe Harrison's work as "Marxist," he importantly notes the "groundbreaking" nature of his theoretical work. Melvin Leiman, *The Political Economy of Racism* (1993; repr., Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010), 146-181. Melvin Leiman argued that "Marxism helps to illumine the fundamental realities of racism by its tripartite emphasis on the changing socioeconomic structure, the relationship of class to race, and the political consciousness of the historical agents." Leiman noted however there were both strengths and weaknesses among Marxist theorists dealing with race in first two decades following World War Two.

<sup>106</sup> Hubert Harrison, "How to Do It—And How Not," *New York Call*, December 16, 1911, in *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 60-62.

<sup>107</sup> Hubert Harrison, "The Black Man's Burden [I]," *International Socialist Review* 12, April 1912, *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 62-67 and Harrison, "The Black Man's Burden [II]," *International Socialist Review* 12, no. 11, May 1912, in *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 67-71.

we do not ask the other side to state their case.”<sup>108</sup> The voices of the overwhelming majority of the earth’s population who were not white needed to become a central component of Marxist theory and Socialist Party politics, Harrison maintained, in order to build a class conscious movement against capitalism and racism.

In “Socialism and the Negro,” Harrison analyzed the exploitation of Black workers as “keener than that of any group of white workers in America” due to the history of slavery and racism. Yet despite the relationship between race and class, he points out that “no particular effort has been made” by Socialists to organize this section of the proletariat, while the “capitalists of America” had been consciously subsidizing “Negro leaders, Negro editors, preachers and politicians” to reinforce subservience to white supremacy. The ruling classes “know that if they can succeed in keeping one section of the working class down they can use that section to keep the others down too.” On the tactics of the SP, Harrison discussed political and industrial struggle. In the south, where Socialists needed to take a firm stance against Jim Crow and the “disenfranchisement of the Negro,” Harrison recognized “the voteless” Black proletariat’s agency and ability to “help toward the final abolition” of capitalism, and urged for a strong position from the party in support of industrial unionism.<sup>109</sup>

Like his articles for the *New York Call*, Harrison’s interventions in the *International Socialist Review* were aimed at both theoretical and practical questions plaguing the party concerning socialism, the role of elections, and working class organization, and early in his membership he found himself closely associated with the

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<sup>108</sup> Harrison, “The Black Man’s Burden [I],” 63.

<sup>109</sup> Hubert Harrison, “Socialism and the Negro,” *International Socialist Review*, July 1912, *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 71-76.

politics of revolutionary socialism and the party's left-wing. He strongly supported the SP's electoral campaigns, and as an organizer during the 1911 New York municipal elections helped increase its vote by nearly 3,000. Elected to Local New York's Committee on Plans and Organizations shortly thereafter, Harrison was appointed to head a new effort based on his proposals for organizing in the Black community.<sup>110</sup> In addition to his paid work as an organizer, however, Harrison consistently maintained a revolutionary perspective.

Harrison used party support for an old-age-pension reform bill introduced by Victor Berger in the United States Senate to push for demands addressing Black grievances, arguing according to Perry that "reforms challenging white supremacy could point the way to revolutionary consequences."<sup>111</sup> Harrison saw reforms and revolution to be intricately connected questions and challenged New York party leaders like Morris Hillquit, who believed in gradualism and evolutionary socialist ideas similar to those promoted by Eduard Bernstein. In this respect, his arguments placed him in close relation to Bernstein's biggest critic in the German SPD, Rosa Luxemburg, who considered reform and revolution as inseparably linked questions.<sup>112</sup> In the struggle for socialism, Luxemburg wrote, Marxists should consider "struggle for reforms... its means; the social revolution, its aim."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> P. Foner, *American Socialism*, 208; Perry, 155-156.

<sup>111</sup> Perry, 158.

<sup>112</sup> Norma Fain Pratt, *Morris Hillquit: A Political History of an American Jewish Socialist* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 67; Rosa Luxemburg, "Reform or Revolution," 1900, in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg: Reform or Revolution and the Mass Strike*, ed. Helen Scott (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 41-109.

<sup>113</sup> Luxemburg, "Reform or Revolution," *Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, 41.

Harrison also moved closer to the left of the party in his support for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Founded in 1905, the IWW organized workers traditionally excluded by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Whereas the AFL welcomed unions into its federation that explicitly denied membership to non-white workers, the IWW defined itself as a revolutionary union and organized groups excluded or ignored by the AFL and the Socialist Party at the time. The IWW organized irrespective of race or skill and promoted “direct action” at the site of production and mass strikes as weapons in the struggle of the working class against capitalism.<sup>114</sup> In a debate with Morris Hillquit in 1912, IWW leader and SP member Bill Haywood condemned the racism of AFL unions and like Harrison promoted industrial unionism a “powerful weapon” that could be used by disenfranchised Black workers, women, and children in the fight against capitalism.<sup>115</sup> The central importance of mass strikes and industrial unionism to revolutionary socialism was also articulated by Rosa Luxemburg following the 1905 revolution in Russia, which she considered “the first historical experiment on a very large scale with this means of struggle.”<sup>116</sup> Likewise, speaking at the IWW’s founding convention in 1905, Lucy Parsons, a woman of mixed European, African, and Native American heritage, had urged men and women in attendance to “take example from” the “spirit...displayed in far-off Russia and far-off Siberia.” Parsons criticized men who sought to “represent” her at during elections, and like Harrison and

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<sup>114</sup> Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapsin, *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path Toward Social Justice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 12; Sharon Smith, *Subterranean Fire: A History of Working Class Radicalism in the United States* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 79; Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of the IWW and Syndicalism in the United States* (1966; Reprint, Chicago: Ivan R. Deen, 1999) 5. Eley, 83-84; Perry, 174.

<sup>115</sup> P. Foner, *American Socialism*, 216-217.

<sup>116</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, “The Mass Strike,” 1906, *Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, 111.

Haywood understood that working class women at the time had a powerful weapon in their ability to withdraw their labor during strikes.<sup>117</sup> The anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells would one day be compared to Parsons, who was a revolutionary more inclined toward anarchist philosophy than the politics of party organization and who had as early as 1886 called for Blacks to arm themselves against lynch mob in the South.<sup>118</sup>

Beginning in 1910, the leaders of the Socialist Party began cracking down on supporters of industrial unionism like Haywood and Harrison, creating a set of rules for organizers limiting their ability to criticize AFL unions at street meetings.<sup>119</sup> An astute observer sympathetic to the right wing of the party noted the roots of this conflict during the 1908 national convention, as the leadership started a “campaign for the subordination” of industrial unionists and other revolutionaries by passing a resolution against supporting “direct action” over “political action” and by narrowing party democracy in the interest “of eliminating generally the cumbrous tyranny of the rank and file.”<sup>120</sup> Harrison therefore found himself in a minority position due not only to his work among African Americans, but also for his support for and affiliation with rank-and-file IWW militants and revolutionary socialism. As a result, Local New York began limiting Harrison’s ability to speak on behalf of the Socialist Party, and branches began losing their independence in choosing speakers as measures first directed at Harrison became

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<sup>117</sup> Lucy Parson, Speeches at the Founding of the Industrial Workers of the World, June 29, 1905, in *Unfinished Revolution*, ed. Blackburn, 256, 251.

<sup>118</sup> Paula J. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword of Lions* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 91.

<sup>119</sup> Kipnis, 254.

<sup>120</sup> Robert F. Hoxie, “The Convention of the Socialist Party,” *Journal of Political Economy* 16, No. 7 (July 1908): 447-448.



more generally applied.<sup>121</sup> In February 1913, the SP voted to expel Bill Haywood.<sup>122</sup> Harrison continued his membership but supported a “Resolution of Protest” in defense of Haywood following his removal. As a result, in May of 1914, the Local New York Executive Committee voted three to one to suspend him. “To them,” writes historian Philip S. Foner, “it was not permissible for a black man, speaking as an official socialist lecturer, to publicly condemn the AFL for its racism and praise the IWW for its egalitarianism.” Harrison never rejoined the party, refusing to remain loyal to an organization that seemed to have abandoned revolutionary socialism through its ongoing support for openly racist institutions and ideas.<sup>123</sup>

Du Bois decided to leave the party on his own accord in 1912. Prior to joining, he had publicly supported Democratic candidates for office, and in 1912 resigned his membership in order to endorse Democratic Party candidate Woodrow Wilson for President.<sup>124</sup> It would have been impossible for him to remain in the party while endorsing Wilson over Eugene Debs, as members were expected to support Socialist Party candidates.<sup>125</sup> During the Second International’s 1904 Amsterdam congress the SPD had introduced a resolution that passed 25 to 5 arguing, according to Eley, that “the primacy of the class struggle precluded cooperating with bourgeois parties, and vice versa.”<sup>126</sup> In 1912 Du Bois felt the election required critical support for Wilson and

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<sup>121</sup> Perry, 189-190.

<sup>122</sup> Kipnis, 417-418.

<sup>123</sup> P. Foner, *American Socialism*, 217; Perry, 218.

<sup>124</sup> Marable, 90

<sup>125</sup> Kipnis, 125-126.

<sup>126</sup> Eley, 90-91.

considered a vote for Debs a futile endeavor. Despite Debs' stance against segregation, Du Bois viewed the party's racial policy to be controlled by racists like Victor Berger.<sup>127</sup>

### **The Outbreak of War and the Collapse of Marxist Internationalism**

Leaving the party at different times and under different circumstances, Du Bois and Harrison developed a similar perspective on the centrality of Black struggles and perspectives to socialism. Du Bois wrote in 1913, that "the great test of the American Socialist" would be the "Negro Question,"<sup>128</sup> Harrison anticipated him in July 1912, writing that "the crucial test of Socialism's sincerity" was whether or not the party supported the struggle of Black people, "the most ruthlessly exploited working class group in America."<sup>129</sup> Du Bois concluded his 1913 essay implying that if the Socialist Party continued to tolerate racism within its ranks it would grow only at the expense of the continued lynching, rape, torture, and disenfranchisement of Black people, thus abandoning socialism and succeeding only in creating an "industrial aristocracy" premised on the exploitation and oppression of a Black minority by a white majority.<sup>130</sup> The Socialist Party between the outbreak of World War I and Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 generally failed to incorporate the criticisms of Du Bois and Harrison.<sup>131</sup> During this period, events dramatically shifted aspirations for a revolutionary, working class socialist movement away from the Second International, and in the United States the

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<sup>127</sup> Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography*, 421.

<sup>128</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "Socialism and the Negro Problem," *The New Review: A Weekly Review of International Socialism* February 1, 1913, Accessed February 12, 2014, <http://www.webdubois.org/dbSocialism&NProb.html>.

<sup>129</sup> Harrison, "Socialism and the Negro," in *Hubert Harrison Reader*, 73.

<sup>130</sup> Du Bois, "Socialism and the Negro Problem," February 1, 1913.

<sup>131</sup> Some changes did occur, including the Socialist Party adopting a more outspoken position against lynching, and the New York Local implementing some of Harrison's ideas about Black oppression and organizing. See P. Foner, *American Socialism* 254-262.

Socialist Party, which had never significantly attracted Black radicals under its banner, was already in decline.

When World War I broke out in 1914, involving troops and battle zones that extended from Europe into Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, it devastated the Second International.<sup>132</sup> Geoff Eley writes that “war ambushed Europe’s socialists,” who largely considered themselves “powerless to stop the war,” quickly moving to support it instead.<sup>133</sup> Although the war did surprise many, Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido document how the parties affiliated with the Second International “should have been the least likely group to share that reaction,” as they had for over a decade “warned on literally thousands of occasions—in congresses, articles, and speeches in every conceivable forum—that imperialism was inextricably linked with the threat of war.”<sup>134</sup> When parties affiliated with the Second International ended up supporting their national governments during the war, the Russian revolutionary V.I. Lenin argued it signified “the ideological and political bankruptcy of the International.”<sup>135</sup>

African Americans had varying positions on the meaning of the war. In 1915, Du Bois wrote an article titled “African Roots of War” in which he considered the “paradox” of “democratic despotism,” under which labor links itself with capital in demanding a share in the wealth gained through acts of imperialism. Du Bois explicitly criticized

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<sup>132</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 23. Although Hobsbawm states that “military actions outside Europe was not very significant, except in the Middle East,” this is not accurate. See Edward Paice, *World War I: The African Front, An Imperial War on the African Continent* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2008).

<sup>133</sup> Eley, 124-125.

<sup>134</sup> Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, introduction to *Discovering Imperialism: Social Democracy and World War I* (2011; Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 78.

<sup>135</sup> V.I. Lenin, “The tasks of revolutionary Social-Democracy in the European war,” September 1914, in *Lenin’s Struggle for a Revolutionary International: Documents, 1907-1916, The Preparatory Years*, ed. John Riddell (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1984), 220-221.

socialists for failing to comprehend this relationship, which connected European economic growth and European movements for “democracy” with the continued and increased oppression and exploitation of Africans in Africa and in the Diaspora, lynching in the Southern United States, as well as groups of laborers from Asia, as “the white working man has been asked to share the spoil of exploiting ‘chinks and niggers.’” Moreover, Du Bois described the colonized people in China, India, and Egypt as “the stuff that Revolution is born of,” and argued that the “grandchildren of the European slave trade” would play a vital role in the liberation of Africa.”<sup>136</sup>

Like Du Bois, Harrison also wrote and lectured on the implications of the war in beginning in 1915.<sup>137</sup> In “The White War and the Coloured World,” written in 1917, Harrison echoed some of Du Bois’ sentiments in calling for “a free India and an independent Egypt; *for nationalities in Africa flying their own flags and dictating their own internal and foreign policies.*”<sup>138</sup> Du Bois’ and Harrison’s analyses that the war could lead to new possibilities for anti-racist and anti-colonial movements led Du Bois to openly support the war, while Harrison cleverly framed his criticism of U.S. involvement in the war, choosing to “pretend what Woodrow Wilson said” in order to “safely hold up

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<sup>136</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “African Roots of War,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 115 No. 5 (May 1915): 710. W.E.B. Du Bois, “African Roots of War,” 709-714. . W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Amherst, Special Collections and University Archives, accessed March 31, 2014, [http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/dubois/?page\\_id=894](http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/dubois/?page_id=894)

<sup>137</sup> Perry, 230, 266-269; Foner, P., *American Socialism*, 271-287.

<sup>138</sup> Harrison, “The White War and the Colored World,” *The Voice*, August 14, 1917, in *Harrison Reader*, ed. Perry, 202-203; Perry, 281-327.

to contempt and ridicule the undemocratic practices of his administration and the actions of his white countrymen in regard to the Negro.”<sup>139</sup>

Already in 1914, Du Bois wrote that “colored Americans...as Americans who fear race prejudice as the greatest of War-makers” made support for France and England against Germany necessary, as their victory would “tend to postpone if not make unnecessary a world war of the races.”<sup>140</sup> In 1918 he argued that African Americans should “close ranks” and “forget” their “special grievances” in order to help defeat Germany.<sup>141</sup> Harrison, on the other hand, rejected the idea that “Negroes should not want Justice” during the war. He portrayed Woodrow Wilson as “the world’s foremost champion of Democracy...whether it be in Germany or in Georgia.” The President had to be taken at his word that the war was about “democracy,” so that it could be used to raise exactly those “special grievances” Du Bois’ article attempted to silence.<sup>142</sup>

As former members of the Socialist Party, Du Bois and Harrison took positions similar to those of other former members and leaders of Social Democratic parties in Europe, who choose to support the war out of principle, or to use it for political ends.<sup>143</sup> Yet among Marxist internationalists who continued to maintain militantly anti-war positions during this period, future leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin argued that the only position revolutionaries could take was to transform the imperialist war into a

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<sup>139</sup> Hubert Harrison, editorial comments on “Is Democracy Unpatriotic?” in *When Africa Awakes* (1920; repr., Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1997), 24. This is Harrison’s own interpretation of his apparent support for U.S. and African American support for participation in WWI.

<sup>140</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The World War and the Color Line,” *Crisis* Vol. 9 No. 1 (Nov. 1914): 28-30.

<sup>141</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Close Ranks,” *Crisis* Vol. 16 No. 3 (July 1918): 111.

<sup>142</sup> Hubert Harrison, “Is Democracy Unpatriotic?” July 1918, in *When Africa Awakes*, 24-27.

<sup>143</sup> See Markku Ruotsila, “War and Revolution,” *John Spargo and American Socialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 73-90 and Kenneth E. Hendrickson Jr., “The Pro-War Socialists, The Social Democratic League and the Ill-Fated Drive for Industrial Democracy in America, 1917-1920,” *Labor History* 11, No. 3 (Summer 1970):304-322.

struggle “against the reactionary and bourgeois governments and parties of all countries.”<sup>144</sup> Lenin rejected the notion that the “right of nations to self-determination” could have anything “to do with the imperialist war, i.e., a war for the division of colonies, a war for the *oppression* of foreign countries, a war *among* predatory and oppressing powers to decide *which* of them shall oppress *more* foreign nations.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Lenin, “The tasks of revolutionary Social-Democracy in the European war,” in *Lenin’s Struggle*, ed. Riddell, 223.

<sup>145</sup> V.I. Lenin, “Turati favors ‘rectification of frontiers,’” in *Lenin’s Struggle*, 809-810.

### CHAPTER 3

## BLACK RADICAL MARXISTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL, 1919-1948

“If the First International foresaw the road that lay ahead and indicated its direction; if the Second International assembled and organized millions of proletarians; then the Third International is the International of open mass action, the International of revolutionary realization, the International of the deed.”

--Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the Entire World, 1919<sup>1</sup>

Revolution in Russia broke out in February 1917 in the midst of World War I. As Jane McDermid and Anna Hillyar point out the revolution began largely “on the initiative of women workers and soldiers’ wives” on International Women’s Day.<sup>2</sup> It was the unfolding revolutionary movement that brought the Bolsheviks to power later that year, more so than Lenin’s ideas or theories, “that first had an impact on Africa and the African Diaspora.” According to Hakim Adi, Africans fighting in the armies of Europe came across Russian revolutionaries in France and in Soviet Russia, where they were sent to help crush the workers’ revolution. Some Blacks joined the Red Army, including members of Russia’s “own African Diaspora.” The revolution’s influence could be seen in places like South Africa and Egypt, where the earliest Communist Parties in Africa were formed.<sup>3</sup> After the establishment of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1919, the ideas and politics behind the Bolshevik Revolution would spread and find an

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<sup>1</sup> “Manifesto of the Communist International to the proletariat of the entire world,” March 6, 1919, in *Founding the Communist International, Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress, 1919*, ed. John Riddell (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1987), 323.

<sup>2</sup> Jane McDermid and Anne Hillyar, *Midwives of the Revolution: Female Bolsheviks and Women Workers in 1917* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1999), 146.

<sup>3</sup> Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 10, 11; on Allied intervention against the revolution, see W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War, 1918-1921* (1989; Reprint, New York: De Capo Press, 1999), 163-191; on the formation of the South Africa Communist Party, see Sheridan Johns, *Raising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League & The Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932* (Belleville, South Africa: Mayibuye Books, 1995); on Egyptian Communism, see Tareq Y. Ismael and Ria’at El-Sa’id, *The Communist Movement in Egypt, 1920-1988* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

international audience among radicals. Lenin understood Marxist internationalism to mean international revolution against imperialism and capital. “The ultimate victory” of socialism in an isolated national revolution, he argued, “would be hopeless.”<sup>4</sup>

Although the revolution in Russia inspired many Black Radicals, other organizations also emerged that attracted mass followings among Blacks internationally during this time. Hubert Harrison founded the Liberty League and his own publication, *The Voice*, emphasizing a “race first” message over the “class first” ideologies of the Socialist Party, and one of the League’s first members was Marcus Garvey, who had recently immigrated to the United States from Jamaica. His Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) would dramatically outpace the Liberty League in significance, attracting a world-wide following with its calls for Black pride and racial solidarity. Another important early member of Harrison’s League, the West Indian migrant radical Cyril Briggs went on to start the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) in 1919.<sup>5</sup>

The ABB immediately gravitated toward the newly established Comintern. Founded by Briggs and other West Indians migrants, according to Makalani, the ABB “functioned as a group of activist-intellectuals intent on guiding the black freedom movement toward a pan-Africanist proletarian revolution.”<sup>6</sup> The Socialist Party and Harrison’s Liberty League influenced Briggs’ early positions on race and class

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<sup>4</sup> V.I. Lenin, “Report on War and Peace,” March 7, 1918, in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 542-549.

<sup>5</sup> A list of Liberty League founding members appears in Perry, 315-317. See also W. James, “Hubert Harrison, the ABB, and the UNIA,” in  *Holding Aloft*, 122-184.

<sup>6</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 45; W. James, 122-123. Winston James stresses that the ABB’s leadership and a high percentage of its membership throughout its existence had Caribbean backgrounds.



consciousness. Many Black Socialists who joined the ABB, including Richard B. Moore, Otto Huiswood, William Bridges, W.A. Domingo, Lovett-Fort Whitman, Helen Holman, Williana Burroughs, and Hermie Huiswood, had disagreed with Harrison on his adaptation of a “race first” doctrine, and for a while many continued to view the Socialist Party as a legitimate political site for their radical politics. But by 1921, these ABB members had largely left the Socialist Party. Greatly influenced by Lenin’s ideas on imperialism and anti-colonial struggles, Briggs and others began reading Marxist texts and involving themselves in the effort to build a mass-based Communist Party in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Lenin and the Comintern in 1919 initiated a revolutionary Marxist attempt to grapple with racism and colonial oppression facing people of African descent.<sup>8</sup> Lenin’s own work, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, published in 1917, condemned imperialist war, annexations, and the oppression of colonized people by European nations in no uncertain terms, and his theses on the “National and Colonial Questions” adopted in 1920 at the Second Congress of the Comintern positioned anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles and movements as central to socialist revolution, and called on revolutionaries to attack racism.<sup>9</sup> According to Solomon, Lenin saw both “working class

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<sup>7</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 73; Perry, 314-315; P. Foner, 266; W. James, 127 According to Winston James, although leaving the Socialist Party and adopting a “race first” politics, Harrison continued to share a fundamentally socialist viewpoint until his death, and “never wavered from the materialist analysis of society” or the opinion that capitalism stood opposed to “the interests of black people.” His “reluctant” black nationalism was a strategy, not a political principle.

<sup>8</sup> Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> See V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1917, in *Selected Works* by V.I. Lenin (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), 667-766 and Lenin’s “Theses on the National and Colonial Questions,” adopted by the second congress of the Communist International in 1920, in *Worker’s of the World and Oppressed People’s Unite: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920 Vol I.*, ed. John Riddell (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991), 360-368.

movements in advanced countries and national movements for liberation” in the colonies as “two aspects of a linked social process.”<sup>10</sup> Black radicals in the United States influenced by Lenin’s work argued, according to Penny M. Von Eschen, “that the bonds black Americans shared with colonized peoples were rooted not in a common culture but in a shared history of the racism spawned by slavery, colonialism and imperialism.”<sup>11</sup>

The “Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the Entire World,” read at the Comintern’s founding Congress in 1919 by Leon Trotsky, had wide appeal among black radicals:

Workers of the world: in struggle against imperialist barbarism, against monarchy, against the privileged classes, against the bourgeois state and bourgeois property, and against all forms and kinds of social and national oppression, unite!<sup>12</sup>

This Manifesto strongly influenced Cyril Briggs, who as founding member of the ABB and through its publication, the *Crusader*, increasingly connected racial and colonial oppression with capitalism and class. If his earlier articles reflected a racialist understanding of culture and politics, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution he later used the *Crusader* to develop an analysis of race and class that connected Blacks globally around struggles against colonialism and racism, and for working class revolution and Pan-African liberation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Solomon, *Cry was Unity*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 40.

<sup>12</sup> “Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the Entire World,” March 6, 1919, in *Founding the Communist International: Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress, March 1919*, ed. John Riddell (New York: Pathfinder, 1987), 324.

<sup>13</sup> Solomon, 39; Makalani, *In the Cause*, 49, 55.

The ABB's 1921 program placed the international Black working class at the center of a global movement for black liberation in alliance with European working class revolutionaries and supported interracial working class solidarity in the struggles of racially oppressed and colonized people. It argued for Black revolutionaries to establish a relationship with and support the Comintern, and to "refuse to pledge loyalty to the flags of our murderers and oppressors."<sup>14</sup> According to Makalani, the ABB envisioned "an international force of anti-imperialist, antiracist, and working class struggles ending oppression everywhere."<sup>15</sup> The Comintern shared this vision, and Black radicals were attracted to it as it adopted a vehemently anti-racist program and committed itself to the overthrow of colonialism and racism internationally while stressing the ability of colonized and racially oppressed people themselves to play a determining role in those struggles.<sup>16</sup>

Makalani argues that during the 1920 Comintern congress, Asian radicals like M.N. Roy, who had written his own set of "theses" on the "National and Colonial Questions," helped create the "theoretical openings" in the Comintern that allowed Black radicals to view it as "a vehicle for African diasporic liberation."<sup>17</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley additionally argues that at its fourth congress in 1922, the Comintern encouraged "America's black Bolsheviks to speak with authority" within the international

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<sup>14</sup> "Program of the African Blood Brotherhood," *Communist Review*, London, 2 No. 6 (April 1922): 449-454, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed March 31, 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/other/abb/abb.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 58.

<sup>16</sup> Hakim Adi, "The Negro Question: The Communist International and Black Liberation in the Interwar Years," in *Tupac to Toussaint*, West, Martin, and Wilkins, 155-156.

<sup>17</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 73-74.

Communist movement.<sup>18</sup> It did so by taking up and passing a set of “theses” regarding the “Negro Question,” developed largely by Black radicals and ABB members like Claude McKay and Otto Huiswood.

At the 1922 congress, Huiswood delivered a “Report on the Negro Question” that considered racism as “chiefly economic in nature” but also the product of a “particular antagonism of white workers against black workers” taking “special form,” especially in the United States due to the legacy of slavery. He discussed “exploitation of blacks in Africa,” but remained primarily concerned in his speech with developments facing African Americans. Huiswood argued that Black organizations like the NAACP, Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, and the ABB were “directly or indirectly...to some degree in opposition to capitalism.”<sup>19</sup> He read the Congress’s “Draft Theses on the Negro Question,” proposing four guidelines for Communist work:

- 1) The Fourth Congress considers it essential to support every form of the black movement that undermines or weakens capitalism and imperialism or prevents its further expansion.
- 2) Black workers should be organized everywhere. Where black and white working masses live side by side, every opportunity must be utilized to form a united front.
- 3) Work among blacks should be carried out primarily by blacks.
- 4) Steps should be taken immediately to call a general conference or congress of blacks in Moscow.<sup>20</sup>

In his own report, McKay, a Jamaican born radical who lived a truly transnational life, noted the “special position in the economic life of the world” occupied by people of

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<sup>18</sup> Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Otto Huiswood used the pseudonym “Billings” during the Congress. See “Report on the Black Question,” in *Toward the United Front: Proceeding of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922*, ed. John Riddell (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 800-805.

<sup>20</sup> “Draft Theses on the Negro Question,” November 25, 1922, in *Toward the United Front*, ed. Riddell, 80-806.

African descent, the influence of the 1919 manifesto on black radicals in the United States, and the difficulties for organizing in the American south where white comrades were “expelled by the white oligarchy” and Black comrades were “lynched and burned.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite the influence of Black radicals in the ABB on the Comintern, evidenced strongly by the role played by McKay and Huiswood at the 1922 congress, the newly formed CP failed to attract significant numbers of Black members throughout most of the 1920s. The Workers Party (WP), established as the legal wing of the Communist Party, repeatedly refused or neglected to address seriously inter-party racism or take up the theoretical and organizational implications of the fourth congress’ theses on the “Negro Question,” which had stressed the importance of developing anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Asia and the history of Black resistance in the United States, and called on the party to support “equal political and social rights” for Blacks and to challenge racism inside trade unions.<sup>22</sup> Many Black radicals remained inactive or left the early Communist Party as white leaders dismissed issues of race, in part in order to appeal to southern whites. As Makalani points out, “Black radicals had already rejected such thinking by Socialists and were loath to join a new movement that offered more of the same.”<sup>23</sup>

To further contextualize the failure of the early Communists to attract meaningful numbers of Black members, it must also be noted that the party as a whole failed to grow,

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<sup>21</sup> McKay used the pseudonym “Sasha” during the congress. Claude McKay to Fourth Congress on Negro Question, November 22, 1922, in *Toward the United Front*, 807-810; Holcomb, *Code Name Sasha*, 2. Gary Holcomb notes that McKay left Jamaica for the United States in 1914, spent a year in England in 1920, returned to New York, left for Europe to attend the 4<sup>th</sup> Comintern Congress in 1922, spent nearly a decade in France and three years in North Africa, and then returned to the United States.

<sup>22</sup> “Thesis on the Negro Question,” November 30, 1922, in *Toward the United Front*, 947-951. This resolution was unanimously adopted.

<sup>23</sup> Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 30-31; Makalani, *In the Cause*, 97-102, 75.

having in 1923 an estimated membership numbering around 15,394, while by 1929 less than 10,000 members remained.<sup>24</sup> This can be partially attributed to the fact that, from 1918 until the mid-twenties, the Federal government created a massive intelligence apparatus targeting left-wing groups but especially “any African Americans who spoke out forcefully for the race—editors, union organizers, civil rights advocates, radical political activists, and Pan-Africanists,” making black radicals a central target of America’s first Red Scare, according to Theodore Kornweible Jr.<sup>25</sup> The *Messenger*, the ABB’s *Crusader*, black Communist party members or sympathizers, and the UNIA led by Marcus Garvey were all targeted by the federal government, and each suffered as a result. Not until 1923 did the Communists themselves abandon their own underground and illegal organization.<sup>26</sup>

### **Marxism and Black Radicals in the Comintern, 1924-1935**

The Comintern held its Fifth Congress in June 1924 during which French and British parties were explicitly criticized for failing to stand in support of self-determination for their countries’ colonies, while the CP in the United States continued to be rebuffed for its failing on the “Negro Question.” According to Adi, the Fifth Congress continued to reveal confusion regarding whether or not African Americans were “a subject nation, an oppressed race, or simply a particularly disadvantaged section of the American working class.” Lovett Fort-Whiteman, an African American delegate to the Congress, influenced its decision to establish a Negro Commission to take up such

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<sup>24</sup> William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 261.

<sup>25</sup> Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *“Seeing Red”: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), xii.

<sup>26</sup> Foster, *History of Communism*, 195; Kornweibel Jr., *“Seeing Red,”* 25.

questions, and the Commission was first led by Fort-Whiteman himself, who was also instrumental in organizing the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC).<sup>27</sup>

Held in October 1925 in Chicago, the ANLC's first conference focused primarily on conditions facing African Americans, although Fort-Whiteman invited delegates from Africa and the West Indies. However, the conference only attracted 39 delegates to the because it was openly billed as a Communist led event, and because Communist parties outside the United States refused to show much interest in organizing an international organization specifically for Black workers. Fort-Whiteman was removed from his leadership position of the ANLC in 1927. He went on to attend the Comintern's Sixth Congress in 1928, remaining in the U.S.S.R until his death in 1939 in a Soviet labor camp.<sup>28</sup>

How did Fort-Whiteman go from educating Stalin and figures like Ho Chi Minh during the Comintern's fifth congress in 1924, to being beaten and starved to death in a Soviet gulag in 1939?<sup>29</sup> Answering this question requires addressing how events in the U.S.S.R. and internationally affected Black and Marxist internationalism during the rise of Stalinism, beginning with the adaptation by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Comintern in 1924 of a resolution celebrating the possibility of "socialism in one country," rejecting the fundamentals of Marxist internationalism, and the positions of

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<sup>27</sup> Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 120-131; Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 33-34. Adi footnotes the circumstances of Fort-Whiteman's death without explanation, simply stating he "died in prison." Ibid., 34n163.

<sup>29</sup> Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 43, 154. According to Gilmore, while in prison "Fort-Whiteman had not been able to meet the work quota" and like other prisoners in his situation, "his food rations were decreased, in a blatant attempt to mark the weaker prisoners for death." Ibid, 54.

both Lenin and Trotsky, that the socialist revolution had to be international.<sup>30</sup> As Bryan Palmer argues, Stalinism was “not so much a personalized denunciation as a designation of political defeat,” a defeat marked broadly within both the U.S.S.R. and the Comintern by repression, bureaucratization, and terror. Stalinism was the rise of a “socioeconomic phenomenon of bureaucratized governance and political rule” inside the Soviet Union that buried earlier traditions of democracy and internationalism found within the Bolshevik Party under Lenin.<sup>31</sup> Fort-Whiteman’s proposal in 1924 to convene a Negro Labor Congress may have been timely, Makalani argues, as the Comintern began “to move away from the orthodoxy that had guided previous discussion of colonialism and the Negro question,”<sup>32</sup> but fundamentally the “move away from orthodoxy” marked its rejection of the Bolshevik party’s conception of Marxist internationalism.

The founding of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) in July 1928, headed then by African American James Ford, an African American recruited to the party through the work of the ANLC, was a “historic decision.” The ITUCNW was influenced by the work of African American Communists like Fort-Whiteman, who according to Adi “had been amongst the most critical of the slow progress that was being made on the Negro question by the communist parties of Britain,

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<sup>30</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin, 1917-1929* (1979; repr., New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 75; Leon Trotsky, “Socialism, in One Country,” in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1937; repr., New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), 302-312.

<sup>31</sup> Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 4-7. For an outline of pre-Stalinist politics and Marxism inside the Soviet Union, see Sam Farber, *Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy* (New York: Verso, 1990); also, for a detailed and dynamic look at the Bolshevik party on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution, see Alexander Rabinovich, *Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976).

<sup>32</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 117; Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 29-35. In his discussion of the ANLC, Adi does not mention “socialism in one country.”



France, the United States and South Africa.”<sup>33</sup> The Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 also appointed a Negro Commission that accepted two transformative resolutions submitted to the Congress. These were the “Native Republic” thesis regarding Blacks in South Africa and the “Black Belt” thesis regarding Blacks living in the United States.<sup>34</sup> The “Black Belt” thesis called for a “national revolutionary movement among the Negroes” in the southern United States and considered the “agrarian problem” to be at the heart “of the Negro national movement,” although the resolution in which it was passed also maintained that Communists should continue calling for “full social and political equality” for African Americans.<sup>35</sup> In South Africa, the Comintern similarly urged organizing for full equality in addition to calling for “an independent Negro Republic.”<sup>36</sup>

The adaptation of these resolutions happened in the context of Stalinism in power. While recent historiography has rightly highlighted the way in which Black and white Communists exerted a bottom-up, locally rooted cultural influence among daily life in the party, as well as the influence Black Communists exerted within the Comintern after 1928, returning to the question of Stalinism illuminates the larger trajectory of Marxist and Black internationalism and helps clarify why “U.S. Communists, black and white, did little to prevent the Gulag death of accused antirevolutionary Lovett Fort-

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<sup>33</sup> Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 45.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>35</sup> “The Communist International Resolution on the Negro Question in the U.S.,” October 26, 1928, in *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1919-1929*, eds. Philip S. Foner and James Allen (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), 191.

<sup>36</sup> “The Communists are for a Black Republic,” *Daily Worker*, February 26, 1929, abridged, in *American Communism and Black Americans*, ed. P. Foner and Allen, 199.

Whiteman.”<sup>37</sup> It also helps contextualize the post-1928 anti-Stalinist revolutionary Marxist tradition that developed its own set of relationships within the African Diaspora. Claiming continuity with the internationalism of Lenin and the 1917 revolution, in the United States radicals aligning in opposition to Stalin would lay the foundations for an “American Trotskyism,” and participate in the formation of a “Fourth International,” in which C.L.R. James, the Caribbean Black radical and Marxist internationalist, played a central theoretical and organizational role.<sup>38</sup>

Leon Trotsky, a central figure in the 1917 Revolution and the civil war that followed was expelled from the U.S.S.R. in January 1929 on charges of “counter-revolutionary activity.”<sup>39</sup> During the sixth congress of the Comintern, stripped of his party membership and exiled to Soviet Central Asia, he nevertheless smuggled documents to Congress participants critiquing the congress’ proposed “Draft Program of the Communist International,” focusing his polemic against the idea of “socialism in one country” and describing the U.S.S.R. as “closer to capitalism, and a backward and uncultured capitalism at that, than to socialism.”<sup>40</sup> Stalin had already argued in 1924 that such criticisms of the Soviet Union required it to “bury Trotskyism as a line of

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<sup>37</sup> Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left*, 70. Maxwell notes that acknowledging the influence of Comintern directives and memos does not require one to dismiss “the idea that domestic concerns as well as Soviet ones impressed U.S. Communists where they lived and politicked.”

<sup>38</sup> For the origins and history of these movements, see George Breitman, Paul Le Blanc, and Alan Wald, *Trotskyism in the United States: Historical Essays and Reconsiderations* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996); Constance Aston Myers, *The Prophet’s Army: Trotskyists in America, 1928-1941* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Brian Palmer, “Trotskyism in the United States, 1928-33,” *Revolutionary Teamsters: The Minneapolis Trucker’s Strikes of 1934* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), 269-292.

<sup>39</sup> Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed, Trotsky: 1921-1929* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), 328.

<sup>40</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, (1936; Reprint, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1996), 91.

thought,”<sup>41</sup> and within the Comintern the attempt to stifle dissent and debate by labeling it “Trotskyist” accelerated during the sixth congress. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore states that following the failure of the 1925 ANLC Congress in Chicago, some even attached the label “Trotskyist” to Fort-Whiteman.<sup>42</sup>

Former ABB member Harry Haywood and Stalinist stalwart Nikolai Nasonov had submitted what came to be the sixth congress’ resolution on the “Negro Question.” Their resolution included the “Black Belt” thesis and considered African Americans as an oppressed nationality, and was submitted to the sub-committee established prior to the congress to take up questions for consideration by the Comintern’s Negro Commission. Haywood writes in his autobiography that it was Nasonov, who had spent time in the United States as a leader of the Young Communist League, and other “Soviet comrades” who insisted on considering African Americans an “oppressed nationality,” and that Stalin himself seemed to be pushing it as well.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the adaptation of the “Belt Black Thesis” in 1928 came about with little input or discussion from Black party members in the United States. Even after its adaptation the American party remained largely silent on its importance until after 1929, in part due to inter-party factional struggles against supporters of Trotsky and continued opposition and indifference to it among Black Communist leaders themselves.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Joseph V. Stalin, “Leninism or Trotskyism,” November 19, 1924, in *The Errors of Trotskyism*, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1924/trotskyism.htm>.

<sup>42</sup> Gilmore, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978), 218-219, 223.

<sup>44</sup> See the editorial comments regarding “The Communist International Resolution on the Negro Question in the U.S.,” in *American Communism and Black Americans*, ed. P. Foner and Allen, 189.

The Sixth Congress marked several transitions within the Comintern and inside the U.S.S.R itself. That following year the U.S.S.R. began implementing Stalin's first "Five-Year Plan," a blueprint for economic development that involved massive forced collectivization of agriculture and rapid industrialization and that resulted in the deaths of around four million people from famine alone.<sup>45</sup> For its international perspective, the Comintern adopted its so-called "Third Period" line, suggesting that "capitalist stabilization" following World War I had ended and that the "the system of world imperialism" was also coming to an end due to:

First, the antagonisms and conflicts between the imperialist States; second, the rise of the struggle of vast masses in the colonial countries; third, the action of the revolutionary proletariat in the imperialist home countries; and lastly, the leadership exercised over the whole world revolutionary movement by the proletarian dictatorship in the U.S.S.R.<sup>46</sup>

This Soviet-centered perspective characteristic of the Comintern during Stalin's regime deeply affected on-the-ground organizing of Black Communists during the 1930s and 40s, as perspectives within Communists parties shifted with the changing priorities of the Soviet state. This was a complete reversal of Lenin's argument that "internationalism demands, first, that the interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of that struggle on a world-wide scale, and, second, that a nation which is achieving victory over

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<sup>45</sup> Helene Carre d'Encausse, "The Counterrevolution from Above," in *The Stalin Revolution*, ed. Robert V. Daniels, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Lexington, MS: D.C. Heath and Company, 1990), 131-139; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 140.

<sup>46</sup> "The Contradictions of Capitalist Stabilisation and the Inevitability of the Revolutionary Collapse of Capitalism," *Program of the Communist International Together With the Statues of the Communist International*, February 1929, Marxist Internet Archives, accessed March 19, 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/6th-congress/index.htm>.

the bourgeoisie should be able and willing to make the greatest national sacrifices for the overthrow of international capital.”<sup>47</sup>

On the heels of the sixth congress, the American CP held its national convention in March 1929 and elected Cyril Briggs, along with other former ABB members Otto Huiswood and Otto Hall, to its Central Executive Committee. Huiswood told the convention that the party had made improvements on its work among Blacks, yet called for a “persistent ideological campaign” against white racism in the party.<sup>48</sup> James Lovestone, the party’s organizational leader who had spoken against considering African Americans an oppressed “nationality” in 1928, maintained majority support among convention delegates. Despite this, he would be expelled from the party in June 1929, and his most ardent supporter in the Comintern, Nikolai Bukharin, would be forced to resign from his position as chair of Comintern’s Executive Committee for having originally opposed Stalin’s forced collectivization plans.<sup>49</sup> William Z. Foster, a lifelong American radical, led the campaign against Lovestone and would eventually become America’s leading Communist official. In 1929, however, the party remained in disarray and “shrunk to a small revolutionary sect” with only 7,000 members run by a Comintern imposed “secretariat of four,” according to Foster’s biographer, James R. Barret.<sup>50</sup>

In his own history of Communism in the United States, Foster displayed his dogmatic Stalinist perspective in describing the expulsion of the “Trotskyites” from the

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<sup>47</sup> Lenin, “Theses on the National and Colonial Questions,” in *Worker’s of the World and Oppressed People’s Unite*, ed. John Riddell, 360-368.

<sup>48</sup> Otto Huiswood, “The October Plenum,” *Daily Worker*, November 1, 1929, in *American Communism and Black Americans*, ed. P. Foner and Allen, 220.

<sup>49</sup> Gilmore, 69-70; Solomon, 97-98; Carr, *Russian Revolution*, 143-144.

<sup>50</sup> James R. Barret, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 162.

CP in October 1928. According to Foster, Stalin had brilliantly “proved in theory...that it was possible to build socialism in one country, the Soviet Union, and that the Communist Party’s policies were leading to precisely that goal.” James P. Cannon, who had supported the opposing arguments made by Trotsky while in Moscow in 1928, was expelled from the CP along with Max Shachtman and nearly 100 others. In towing the Stalinist line and portraying this expelled group as “splitters, disrupters, and political degenerates,” Foster nevertheless accurately observes that these developments “had a direct relationship to the sixth congress of the Communist International.”<sup>51</sup>

The Comintern’s Third Period influence in the United States proved detrimental to open discussion and inter-party democracy in Communist Party, even while the party grew and led many successful organizing campaigns. “Theoretical dynamism and intellectual innovation virtually ground to a halt,” and as a result, “it was now clear,” according to Makalani, “that a radical black internationalist politics would have to take root outside both the party and the United States.”<sup>52</sup> For some Marxist internationalists, however, there remained the possibility that by mounting an organized opposition against Stalinism the Comintern could still be won for revolutionary Marxist internationalism.

In the United States, the group expelled in 1928 from the Communist Party for supporting the Left Opposition against Stalin included no Black members, and indeed only around fifty or so African Americans belonged to the CP at this time.<sup>53</sup> Between 1928 and 1933, although expelled from the Communist Party, most oppositionists

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<sup>51</sup> Foster, 269-270.

<sup>52</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 136.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Phelps, introduction to *Race and Revolution*, by Max Shachtman (New York: Verso, 2003), xxix.

considered themselves an internal faction within international Communism and did not seek to establish a new party organization.<sup>54</sup> James P. Cannon reflected that in considering itself a “faction,” this group dedicated the majority of its work “towards the Communist Party,” not recruiting and building independent mass movements.<sup>55</sup> The faction criticized certain policies and practices while supporting others. On the “Black Belt thesis” and self-determination slogan, however, the Communist League of America (the early organizational name for the Trotskyist aligned opposition in the United States) decided at its first two national conferences against including either support or criticism, although most members did not recognize the “Negro struggle” as a “national” one.<sup>56</sup>

Regardless of their critique, the Black Belt thesis did transform the CP’s approach to Black workers and the need to confront white supremacy in the United States. The “Negro Question” became central to many organizing efforts North and South, and white members were expected to participate in these efforts. From Harlem, New York, to Birmingham, Alabama, Communists organized campaigns around housing, unemployment, police brutality, lynching, segregation and Jim Crow. The Communist led international campaign to save the “Scottsboro Boys” can especially be seen as a major catalyst for increasing the party’s success among working class Blacks, while promoting the possibility of inter-racial solidarity as the basis for revolutionary change.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Paul Le Blanc, “Trotskyism in the United States: The First Fifty Years,” in *Trotskyism in the United States: Historical Essays and Reconsiderations*, 14; Constance Ashton Myers, *The Prophet’s Army*, 32.

<sup>55</sup> James P. Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism, 1928-1938: Report of a Participant*, (1944; 4<sup>th</sup> ed., New York: Pathfinder Press, 2002), 120.

<sup>56</sup> George Breitman, introduction to *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism & Self Determination* (1967; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 15-16.

<sup>57</sup> Gilmore, 118-128; Walter, T. Howard, introduction to *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 1-27; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 78-91; Makalani, *In the Cause*, 133-134; Naison, 57-94.

The Scottsboro boys were nine African American youth (the youngest only thirteen years old) accused by two white women, Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, of rape in March 1931 in the town of Paint Rock, Alabama. Eight were convicted and sentenced to death by all-white juries. The Communist Party immediately began organizing a campaign in their defense, with Black members leading its efforts, involving the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR), the International Labor Defense (ILD), and the ITUCNW led by George Padmore.<sup>58</sup> Black women also played an important role in the campaign, and some, including Harlem radicals Louise Thompson, Audley Moore, and Bonita Williams were recruited to the party partially due to its involvement in the campaign.<sup>59</sup> Early non-Communist support for the campaign came from the NAACP through its field secretary William Pickens, who wrote the Communist *Daily Worker* on April 19, 1931 expressing public support and providing a monetary contribution for the ILD's efforts. Pickens' letter praised the ILD for moving "more speedily and affectively than all other agencies put together" in defense of the Scottsboro boys.<sup>60</sup>

Yet the Communists waged a hostile and aggressive campaign against "Negro reformists" like Pickens, reflecting the Comintern's "Third Period" position against alliances with liberals and social democrats, who were described as "social fascists" for seeking, according to the Stalinist line, to "undermine revolutionary working-class unity and save capitalism."<sup>61</sup> Harry Haywood, the party's leading Black proponent of the self-determination thesis, claimed the NAACP had attempted to "defend the lynchers,"

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<sup>58</sup> Howard, introduction to *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> On black women Communists and the Scottsboro case, see McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 74-83.

<sup>60</sup> William Pickens, Letter to the editor, *Daily Worker*, April 19, 1931, in *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, ed. Howard, 30-31.

<sup>61</sup> Solomon, 164.



describing Du Bois and Pickens as “professional racketeers battering on the misery of the Negro masses” and therefore concluded these “assistant hangman to the bosses” needed to be attacked and exposed as enemies of the working class struggle.<sup>62</sup>

George Padmore organized and led the campaign to save the Scottsboro boys on an international level through the ITUCNW. In Europe, Padmore helped coordinate a speaking tour for Ada Wright, mother of one of the defendants, and published articles and pamphlets about the case. The ITUCNW helped spread an international protest movement that reached across Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, and into the U.S.S.R itself.<sup>63</sup> Established publically in Hamburg, Germany in 1930, the ITUCNW’s founding conference was attended by 17 delegates and passed resolutions committing the organization to agitating against war and racism and in support of internationalism, and mandated that it make connections with African workers, establish new trade union organizations where there were none, and publish material and propaganda supporting the struggles of Black workers.<sup>64</sup> Delegates left the Hamburg conference and travelled to the U.S.S.R., which Padmore himself in 1931 described as:

...the only country that knows no oppression, knows no exploitation, has no imperialist aims and supports the revolutionary liberation movements of the workers and toiling peasants of all countries as well as the emancipatory struggles of the Negro toiling masses for self-determination.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Harry Haywood, “The NAACP—Assistant Hangman,” *Labor Defender*, January 1932, in *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 59, 61. The label “social fascist” simply referred to the fact that Pickens and Du Bois were not Communists, and as leaders of a liberal organization, the NAACP, during the Third Period established by the Comintern, they were considered enemies of working class struggle, indeed, counterrevolutionaries.

<sup>63</sup> Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 146-147.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-114.

<sup>65</sup> George Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of the Negro Toilers* (London: Red International Labor Union, 1931), 111.

Padmore's depiction came in the middle of the first Five Year Plan, and reflected beliefs held among many African Americans attracted to the Communist Party in the early 1930s. Black Communist women Louise Thompson and Thyra Edwards also visited the Soviet Union during this period, and according to McDuffie "the country served as a political terrain for nurturing their nascent black left feminism."<sup>66</sup> However, reality in the Soviet Union did not reflect the ideas and portrayals made by Padmore and others.

For women in the Soviet Union, the Bolshevik Revolution had originally brought an expansion of rights, including easier access to divorce, destigmatization of "illegitimacy," legalization of abortion, and mandated equality with men. By the early 1930s, these policies began to reverse, as Stalin's regime pushed "traditional" family values, outlawed abortion, and criminalized homosexuality. Inequality in the Soviet Union also increased during the first Five Year plan, and privileged party functionaries began to hide their status by segregating themselves off from the masses of workers, who were given rations that did not meet their basic needs. Stalin tolerated and even encouraged anti-Semitism as a device with which to attack opposition members like Trotsky.<sup>67</sup> Clearly the U.S.S.R, despite Padmore's suggestion, practiced brutal forms of oppression and exploitation, including ethnic and racial discrimination, in the early 1930s.

Besides promoting, whether intentionally or as a result of deception, a false image of the Soviet Union as a land of milk and honey, in repeatedly defining non-Communist

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<sup>66</sup> McDuffie, 63.

<sup>67</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Russian Revolution*, 86-87, 160; d'Encausse, "The Return of Inequality," in *The Stalin Revolution*, 131-139; Joshua Rubenstein, *Leon Trotsky: A Revolutionaries Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 141.

left-wing and liberal groups as “social-fascists” during the early 1930s, Padmore and other Black Communists embraced a position that proved disastrous when applied by Communists in Germany. “Ruinous as it was everywhere,” C.L.R. James wrote in 1937 that in Germany, this perspective “reached its high scope and led the great German proletariat to its doom.”<sup>68</sup> The German Communist Party (KPD) pursued, according to Herman Weber, a “catastrophic ultra-left course against social democracy,” labeling Social Democrats “social fascists” and considering them the main enemy over the Nazis, facilitating the downfall of the Weimar Republic.<sup>69</sup> Leon Trotsky argued as early as 1930 targeting Social Democrats as its main enemy would prove disastrous not only for Social Democracy, but for any hope of a proletarian revolution in Germany.<sup>70</sup> With the Comintern refusing to question its policies and complicity in fascism’s victory in Germany, in 1933 Trotsky and his followers in the International Left Opposition concluded that the Comintern was no longer a revolutionary organization and decided it was necessary to build a new, “Fourth” International. Trotsky began developing a theoretically sophisticated analysis of Stalinism during this period, and Trotskyist groups started building new parties by linking themselves with mass struggles of the turbulent 1930s. In the United States, they helped build the massive labor upsurge that eventually led to the creation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, or the CIO.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> C.L.R. James, *World Revolution 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (1937; repr., Amherst, NY: Humanities Press, 1993), 312.

<sup>69</sup> Hermann Weber, “The Stalinization of the KPD,” in *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern*, ed. Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan, and Mathew Worley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 29.

<sup>70</sup> Leon Trotsky, “The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany,” September, 26, 1930, in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971), 55-74.

<sup>71</sup> Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 416; Foster, 295. Haywood’s autobiography remains silent on the Comintern’s role in Germany during the 1930s, while Foster’s history of the Communist party blamed the rise of Hitler entirely on the result of the Social Democrats’ “lesser evil” policy; Perry Anderson,

In February 1933, African American Communist William Patterson, leading the ILD defense for the Scottsboro boys, continued promoting the line that “Negro reformists, Socialist leaders, renegades—these agents of the ruling class must be isolated from the masses they seek to lead.”<sup>72</sup> During the same month, Arne Swabeck, a Danish immigrant and a founder of both the American Communist Party and the Communist League of America (CLP), left the United States for Prinkipo, Turkey to visit Trotsky in exile in order to discuss, among other things, “The Negro Question in America.”<sup>73</sup> Patterson lambasted the Trotskyists with whom Swabeck associated for not playing a large role in the mobilization to save the Scottsboro boys, without acknowledging that it had been James P. Cannon, future leader of the American Trotskyist left, who had largely built the ILD and its earlier united front strategies.<sup>74</sup> Despite Patterson’s extreme sectarianism at this time, he helped develop the Scottsboro case into an international campaign against Jim Crow, and along with George Padmore, Cyril Briggs, and Jomo Kenyatta transformed the campaign into a Pan-African call to arms where African Americans used anti-colonial arguments against the United States government, which

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“Trotsky’s Interpretation of Stalinism,” in *The Stalinist Legacy: Its Impact on Twentieth-Century World Politics*, ed. Tariq Ali (1984; repr., Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), 120-121; Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and where is it going?* (1937; repr., New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972); Le Blanc, “First Fifty Years,” in *Trotskyism in the United States*, 17; Bryan D. Palmer, *Revolutionary Teamsters: The Minneapolis Truckers’ Strikes of 1934* (2013; Reprint, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

<sup>72</sup> William L. Patterson, “Scottsboro—Our Next Tasks,” *Labor Defender*, February 1933, in *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 105.

<sup>73</sup> See Leon Trotsky, “The Discussion in Prinkipo: The Negro Question in America,” February 28, 1933, in *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, 20-31.

<sup>74</sup> William Patterson, “ILD Statement,” March 1933, in *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 115; James P. Cannon, *Notebook of an Agitator: From the Wobblies to the fight against the Korean War and McCarthyism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1993), 3-71. Also see Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 252-284.

according to Gerald Horne helped empower Africans in the diaspora, “creating a virtuous circle of solidarity.”<sup>75</sup>

In 1935 when the Comintern adopted a new line that significantly altered the CP’s strategy in organizing Black workers and forging international alliances. The party now urged alliances with “liberals, progressives, and socialists against fascism,” and Black Communists became marginalized from the major role they had previously played in the Scottsboro campaign. A Scottsboro Defense Committee composed of organizations previously denounced as “social fascist,” including the NAACP, took over the case.<sup>76</sup> Importantly the ILD under Patterson had helped push the NAACP and other organizations to a more radical, grassroots styled approach to the campaign, as opposed to their original play-it-safe liberalism which could often be interpreted as supporting the racial biases against the Scottsboro Boys. The CP’s campaign forced others to radicalize, and without their efforts the Scottsboro Boys likely would have been executed.<sup>77</sup>

The new line that transformed the CPs efforts in the South came to be known as the “People’s,” or Popular Front strategy.<sup>78</sup> During the Popular Front, the CP came to see itself as “the party of the nation,” and rebranded communism” as “twentieth century Americansim.”<sup>79</sup> Caribbean Marxist and Black internationalist C.L.R. James at the time argued that in becoming “ardent lovers of their country, and having tied the revolutionary

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<sup>75</sup> Gerald Horne, *Black Revolutionary: William Patterson and the Globalization of the African American Freedom Struggle* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 46-47.

<sup>76</sup> Howard, introduction to *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 18.

<sup>77</sup> Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 48, 63.

<sup>78</sup> Georgi Dimitrov, “Unity of the Working Class against Fascism: Concluding speech before the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International,” August 13, 1935, in the Marxist Internet Archive, accessed March 21, 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/unity.htm#s5>.

<sup>79</sup> Foster, 323; Maurice Isserman, “The ‘Americanization’ of 1936-1939,” *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1982) 9-14.

proletariat to the bourgeois war machine,” it was “obvious that these people are Communists no longer.”<sup>80</sup> James rejected the Popular Front as promoted by the Comintern, for it urged Communists to defend and support governments actively engaged in maintaining colonialism. In anticipation of World War II James wrote: “the Third International has refurbished the doctrine of national defense, is ready to fight for tricolor or stars and stripes, and clamours to defend the Union Jack.”<sup>81</sup> The Marxist tradition he advanced had been present during the Bolshevik Revolution, and had given theoretical and organizational encouragement within the Comintern to Black revolutionaries like Cyrill Briggs, Lovett Fort-Whiteman, and Claude McKay. Yet by 1937, this tradition no longer found theoretical or political space within the Comintern.

Already in 1933, Briggs, along with Richard B. Moore, were removed from their positions in the Harlem party where they had spent fifteen years organizing with the ABB and later as Communists, and were replaced by James Ford, who had no experience organizing in Harlem. Both Briggs and Moore would be expelled from the party in the early 1940s. According to Holcomb, Claude McKay, who in 1923 began articulating with Leon Trotsky a “project of black Marxism,” gave up on the promise of socialism as embodied by the Soviet Union after Trotsky and the Left Opposition were expelled from the party beginning in 1927. And in 1935, Fort-Whiteman, the first African American to join the Communist Party, was labeled a “counter-revolutionary” by Black party member William Patterson, among others, for his continued outspokenness criticizing the Comintern on questions of race. He died during the Great Purges in 1939 at the

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<sup>80</sup> C.L.R. James, *World Revolution*, 385. James was specifically referring to the French and Czechoslovakian Communist parties in the Comintern.

<sup>81</sup> C.L.R. James, *World Revolution*, 12-13.

Sevvostlag Prison Labor Camp in Siberia. Between 1937 and 1938, approximately 1,500,000 others in the U.S.S.R. were arrested and roughly half of these executed. Most victims were accused like Fort-Whiteman of counterrevolutionary crimes.<sup>82</sup>

### **Marxism and Black Internationalism Outside the Comintern**

Born in Trinidad in 1901, C.L.R. James travelled to England in 1932 where he encountered his childhood friend Malcolm Nurse, then known as George Padmore. Later he would claim that had Padmore invited him to travel to Moscow that year, he would have accepted the offer.<sup>83</sup> Padmore himself broke with the Comintern only a few years after James' arrival in England. The *Negro Worker*, which Padmore had edited as head of the ITUCNW, ran three articles in early 1934 accusing him of placing racial unity above class and called him a traitor for suggesting that the Comintern was manipulating Blacks for an alternative agenda. He was officially expelled from the party in June.<sup>84</sup> In the mid-1930s Padmore and James both maintained what Anthony Bogues calls “a radical black internationalism influenced by Marxism but having a troubled and complex relationship to communist parties and the Communist International.”<sup>85</sup>

The anti-Stalinist Left Opposition played an important role in the development of this tradition. Trained in what James B. Cannon called “the school of internationalism,” in the United States they attempted to overcome the “national mindedness, not in theory

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<sup>82</sup> W. James, 287-288; Holcomb, 39; Leon Trotsky, Letter to Comrade McKay, March 13, 1923, in *The First Five Years of the Communist International* Vol. 2 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972) 476-479; Gilmore, 148-154; Moshe Lewin, “The Scale of the Purges,” in *The Soviet Century*, ed. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2005), 106-112.

<sup>83</sup> Paul Buhle, *C.L.R. James: The Artist as Revolutionary* (New York: Verso, 1988), 12, 44.

<sup>84</sup> James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 33-34.

<sup>85</sup> Anthony Bogues, “C.L.R. James and George Padmore: The Ties That Bind—Black Radicalism and Political Friendship,” in *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary*, eds. Fitzroy Baptise and Rupert Lewis (Miami, FL: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009), 186.

but in practice,” that had been a “great weakness of the American Communist movement.”<sup>86</sup> Arne Swabeck’s meeting with Leon Trotsky during his exile in Turkey was an important part of this work. Trotsky argued that “Negros are a race and not a nation,” although he saw that nations were not static, stating that in Africa nations were in the process of being formed. Like many pan-Africanists and Communists, he considered American Blacks to be important for the development of African leaders but noted that Africans would “in turn...influence the development of political consciousness in America.”<sup>87</sup> Thus Trotsky took a reciprocal rather than unidirectional view of Black leadership and Black liberation.

“In relation to the Negroes,” Trotsky described white workers as “the oppressors, scoundrels, who persecute the black and the yellow, hold them in contempt, and lynch them,” and explained that as a result black workers united with “their own petty bourgeois” to defend their basic rights. Trotsky admitted he had “never studied” the questions presented by the argument for African American self-determination and noted that he leaned “toward the standpoint of the [Communist] party” on the question of self-determination for Blacks in the southern United States. When Swabeck argued that the slogan used by the Communists placed too much emphasis on race and Black Nationalism, Trotsky countered that Swabeck’s perspective simply adopted “the ideology of the white workers” who were “indescribably reactionary.” Whites needed to reject

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<sup>86</sup> Cannon, *Report of a Participant*, 137-138.

<sup>87</sup> Trotsky, “Negro Question in America,” in *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism*, 24.



racism and strongly support self-determination, for when “the white worker performs the role of the oppressor he cannot liberate himself, much less the colonial peoples.”<sup>88</sup>

Following this exchange, a young Left Oppositionist named Max Shachtman wrote “Communism and the Negro,” a pamphlet intended for distribution among the Trotskyist left responding to the Prinkipo discussions and arguing against Trotsky’s belief that self-determination would become a revolutionary idea among African Americans. Shachtman held that self-determination did not pertain to Blacks living in the United States but should only be upheld regarding anti-colonial movements against imperialism. His Marxist analysis sought to come to terms with race and racism in American history and considered Black freedom dependent on white-Black working class unity, just as much as working class emancipation required battling racism. Shachtman placed African Americans at the center of the American Civil War and considered slave insurrections in class struggle terms. He also emphasized the possibilities of Reconstruction for racial equality. Christopher Phelps therefore argues that “Communism and the Negro” anticipated and prefigured W.E.B. Du Bois’ work *Black Reconstruction* in 1935.<sup>89</sup>

Shachtman not only disagreed with the slogan for African American self-determination by rejecting that blacks constituted a nation in the Southern United States, according to Phelps, he denied “the validity of independent black movements.”<sup>90</sup> Shachtman’s position also echoed the ultra-left Third Period Communist hostility toward

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 25, 26, 29-30.

<sup>89</sup> Christopher Phelps, introduction to *Race and Revolution*, by Max Shachtman (New York: Verso, 2003), xi-lxiii.

<sup>90</sup> Phelps, introduction to *Race and Revolution*, xxi.

the “Negro petty bourgeoisie” by claiming that “progressivism” was “tantamount, objectively, to the reactionary and treacherous support of Jim Crow racial segregation!”<sup>91</sup> Clearly rejecting Trotsky’s perspective, Shachtman wrote that “reference to the ‘white laborers’ is profoundly characteristic of the attempts of the Negro petty bourgeoisie to deepen the antagonism existing between the proletarians of both colors for its own benefit,” and “rogues like Garvey to cultured liberals like Du Bois” were responsible for “distilling the poisonous brew of Negro chauvinism.”<sup>92</sup>

Shachtman did, however, consider the “*special* exploitation and oppression of the Negro”<sup>93</sup> to be an international question:

For the masses in Latin America, the struggle for liberation from Yankee oppression is bound up by thousand invisible threads with the movement of the American working class to overthrow the power of its imperialist exploiter. But that movement, in turn, is inseparably connected with the position and interests of the black millions.<sup>94</sup>

In this respect, Shachtman was again close to Du Bois’ position articulated in 1935 that the “emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black.”<sup>95</sup> Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction* was itself greatly informed by his intense study of Marx’s writings beginning in 1933 as he became increasingly frustrated with the NAACP, which

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<sup>91</sup> Max Shachtman, “Communism and the Negro,” in *Race and Revolution*, [1933?] edited by Christopher Phelps (New York: Verso, 2003), 58.

<sup>92</sup> Shachtman, “Communism and the Negro,” in *Race and Revolution*, ed. Phelps, 62.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>95</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in American, 1860-1880* (1935; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1998), 16.

he saw as moving away from its original mission. He began to see Marxism as a resource for transforming the civil rights organization into a more militant organization.<sup>96</sup>

Du Bois' work applied Marxist categories and analysis to the American Civil War and Reconstruction. Robinson rightly highlights that Du Bois' work "possessed a theory of history—a theory based on a foundation of economic analysis and class struggle,"<sup>97</sup> and Anthony Bogues sees *Black Reconstruction* as a "text of political intervention" and as "historical and political theory."<sup>98</sup> It was published as the Communist Party moved from its ultra-left condemnation of groups like the NAACP as "social fascist" into its Popular Front phase. Du Bois considered the power achieved by Blacks in the South during Reconstruction to be "one of the most extraordinary experiments of Marxism the world, before the Russian revolution, had seen," with "those who were leading the Negro race in this vast experiment...emphasizing the necessity of the political power and organization backed by protective military power."<sup>99</sup> *Black Reconstruction* was rooted in an intense study not only of *Capital* but also Marx's Civil War writings and documents from the IWMA, in which Marx himself developed a "Marxist" interpretation of the meaning of the American Civil War and the tragedy that would occur if Reconstruction failed.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and The American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 302-348.

<sup>97</sup> Robinson, 195.

<sup>98</sup> Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (London: Routledge, 2003), 78.

<sup>99</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 358.

<sup>100</sup> Anderson, 80; David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois, The Fight for Equality*, 263. Du Bois references several IWMA statements and Civil War writings by Marx and had, by his own account, assembled "one of the most comprehensive private libraries on scientific socialist in the country."

In 1937 Communist historian James Allen published a similar work viewing Reconstruction as a revolution led by a bourgeois parliament that failed to achieve victory in a strictly bourgeois-democratic revolution.<sup>101</sup> Allen's work directly responded to Du Bois and, according to Noel Ignatiev, reflected the CP's Popular Front ideology, whereas Du Bois' history failed to provide "a historical justification for the Popular Front"<sup>102</sup> in positing a revolutionary perspective for abolishing the "new capitalism" under which workers in imperialist countries were "appeased and misled by a ballot whose power the dictatorship of vast capital strictly curtailed...bribed by high wage and political office to unite in an exploitation of white, yellow, brown, and black labor" on an international scale. Du Bois wrote:

...the rebuilding, whether it comes now or a century later, will and must go back to the basic principles of Reconstruction in the United States during 1867-1876—Land, Light and Leading for slaves black, brown, yellow and white, under a dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>103</sup>

He could offer this critical and important historical and theoretical insight in 1935 largely because he remained outside the Communist Party, although within a few years he would move closer to it ideologically.<sup>104</sup>

Du Bois's perspective was also crucial because his emphasis was on the need for a revolutionary perspective when the CP was becoming less outspoken on the strategies needed for uprooting white supremacy, losing its "ability to point out to the wavering or the uninformed that white supremacy could not be subdued

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<sup>101</sup> James S. Allen, *Reconstruction: The Battle for Democracy, 1865-1876* (New York, 1937), 123-125.

<sup>102</sup> Noel Ignatiev, "The American Blindspot": Reconstruction According to Eric Foner and W.E.B. Du Bois," *Le Travail*, Vol. 31 (Spring, 1993): 251.

<sup>103</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 634-635.

<sup>104</sup> Marable, 154-156

by legal wizards alone” as it prioritized maintaining Popular Front alliances.<sup>105</sup> Du Bois became more sympathetic to the Popular Front strategies, helping to build what Von Eschen calls a “black popular front” through the Council on African Affairs (CAA) after Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union.<sup>106</sup>

Formed in 1937, the CAA was strongly influenced by Black Communists but included influence from “the full range of black American liberals, church leaders, and professional and middle-class organizations.” Until it disbanded in 1955 the CAA played an important role in raising the profile of anti-colonial struggles in Africa in the United States and throughout the African Diaspora.<sup>107</sup>

Du Bois’ role in building a specifically “black popular front” does not invalidate C.L.R. James’ claim in 1949 that Du Bois’ major contribution in *Black Reconstruction* was to recognize “that the Negroes *in particular* had tried to carry out ideas that went beyond the prevailing conceptions of bourgeois democracy,” which James saw as “aimed at the heart of the whole Stalinist popular front conception.”<sup>108</sup> Like *Black Reconstruction*, James’ book on the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins* published in 1938, uncovered the subjugated history of a Black led revolutionary movement. It was intended as a political intervention for anti-colonial revolutionaries and Marxists alike.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Horne, *Black Revolutionary*, 75.

<sup>106</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 19.

<sup>107</sup> Von Eschen, 17-21, 143.

<sup>108</sup> C.L.R. James, “Stalinism and Negro History: Part One,” November 1939, in *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism*, ed. McLemee and Le Blanc, 188-199.

<sup>109</sup> Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets*, 74, 90; James, *Black Jacobins*, 376-377. James wrote in 1938 that “blacks in Africa are more advanced, nearer ready were the slaves of San Domingo,” anticipating widespread anti-colonial revolution linked with the movement of “International socialism.”

James became a Trotskyist in London in 1933 as an active member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the revolutionary faction within the Labour Party that split to form the “Marxist Group” in 1932. James became one of international Trotskyism’s leading theorists, speaking widely on Stalinism during the Moscow trials, and editing for a brief period the Marxist newspaper *Fight*. Eventually the “Marxist Group” split from the ILP in 1936 when it showed signs of abandoning its anti-imperialist program in order to maintain links with the Labour Party. James battled the organization’s move to the right in internal debates erupting over the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935, an event that propelled him into close political collaboration with his former childhood friend, George Padmore.<sup>110</sup>

Padmore’s increasingly anti-Stalinist politics following his expulsion from the Communist Party were partially a result of the U.S.S.R’s actions regarding the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, bringing him closer politically to James. Despite Communist involvement in building a “Hands Off Ethiopia” campaign, the U.S.S.R. continued to trade with Italy following its fascist aggression in Africa.<sup>111</sup> Padmore joined James, Amy Ashwood Garvey, and Jomo Kenyatta in building the International African Friends of Ethiopia (IAFE) in London, which was founded by C.L.R James in 1935. When the IAFE disbanded, James and Padmore collaborated again on the International African Service Bureau (IASB), formed in 1937, with James serving as editor of its

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<sup>110</sup> Bogue, *Caliban’s Freedom* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), 28-33; On James and Padmore’s political friendship, see Bogue, “C.L.R. James and George Padmore,” in *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary*, ed. Baptiste and Lewis, 183-202.

<sup>111</sup> Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*, 177-180. See also Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 129-132.

journal, *International African Opinion (IAO)* for a brief period in 1938.<sup>112</sup> According to Kelley, James and Padmore may have considered Ethiopia a “backward” region, where slavery existed under the rule of a “feudal oligarchy under a reactionary emperor,” yet they called upon the international working class to see it as an issue of self-determination against imperialist aggression.<sup>113</sup>

Informed by his involvement with Marxism and the African Diaspora in London, especially his work in opposing imperialism against Ethiopia, James wrote his famous history of the Haitian Revolution, the *Black Jacobins*, in 1938. His historical writing was greatly influenced Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*, the first Marxist text that James seriously engaged.<sup>114</sup> First published in three volumes in 1932, Trotsky’s *History* examined revolution as “the direct interference of the masses in historical events” and stated that “the changes introduced between the beginning and the end of a revolution in the economic bases of the society and its social substratum of classes, are not sufficient to explain the course of the revolution itself, which can overthrow in a short interval age-old institutions, create new ones, and again overthrow them.”<sup>115</sup> His work, Paul Blackledge argues, displayed his theory of “combined and uneven development” and a “Marxist

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<sup>112</sup> Buhle. *Artist as Revolutionary*, 55-56; Makalani, *In the Cause*, 197-199. For a concise survey of *IAO*’s content see Mathew Quest, “George Padmore’s and C.L.R. James’s *International African Opinion*,” in *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary*, eds. Baptiste and Lewis, 105-132.

<sup>113</sup> Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 130-132. For the central importance of London as a site of black internationalism, see especially Minkah Makalani, “An International African Opinion: Amy Ashwood Garvey and C.L.R. James in Black Radical London,” in *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem*, ed. Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 77-101.

<sup>114</sup> Bogue, *Caliban’s Freedom*, 28.

<sup>115</sup> Leon Trotsky, preface to *History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (1932; repr., Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), xv.

conceptualization of the role of the individual in history.”<sup>116</sup> James later wrote that

Trotsky’s *History* was a “summons to action” and “a roll of drums”:

Every aspect of the struggle is scientifically analyzed and expounded, and the reader is not so much rhetorically exhorted to join up, but as he sees the difficulties and feels the unbounded confidence and unshakable will which attacks and overcomes them, the knowledge and the power, he becomes part of this wonderful adventure. Resentment at oppression smoulders in hundreds of millions of people all over the world. What they lack is confidence in their own powers. How can we fight and win? The answer is in the *History*.<sup>117</sup>

James’ praise for Trotsky’s writings provide a lens through which to interpret his own historical writings in 1938. As a Marxist, his writings sought not only to interpret, but intervene politically in order to change the world.

Written between “the booming of Franco’s heavy artillery” in Spain and “the rattle of Stalin’s firing squads and the fierce shrill turmoil of the revolutionary movement striving for clarity and influence,” *Black Jacobins* applied to the Haitian revolution a Marxist theory of history, comparing the slaves of Saint-Domingue to “revolutionary peasants everywhere,” but also suggesting “they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time.”<sup>118</sup> James also wrote *A History of Negro Revolt* in 1938, which placed an international black working class at the center of global-capitalism, emphasizing the internationalist emancipatory vision he saw emerging from global African struggles:

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<sup>116</sup> Paul Blackledge, “Leon Trotsky’s Contribution to the Marxist Theory of History,” *Studies in East European Thought* 58, No. 1 (March 2006): 2.

<sup>117</sup> C.L.R. James, “Trotsky’s Place in History,” September 1940, in *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism*, ed. McLemme and Le Blanc, 123.

<sup>118</sup> James, *Black Jacobins*, xi, 85-86.



...Negro Emancipation has expanded with the centuries; what was local and national in San Domingo and America is today an international urgency, entangling the future of a hundred million Africans with all the hopes and fears of Western Europe. Though dimly, the political consciousness immanent in the historical process emerges in groping and neglected Africa...The African bruises and breaks himself against his bars in the interest of freedoms wider than his own.<sup>119</sup>

James' political interventions were deeply connected with his conception of history presented in these texts. In assessing the importance of Leon Trotsky as part of "that small company of human beings who have been instruments in assisting new worlds to be born," James could have described his own work, for in both *Black Jacobins* and *A History of Negro Revolt* he brought new worlds full of emancipatory possibilities to life through a historical analysis rooted deeply in an Marxist internationalist worldview.<sup>120</sup>

As part of the Fourth International, James left England for the United States in October 1938, embarking on a six month speaking tour that turned into a fifteen year stay. His London experience may have been a "uniquely diasporic moment," Makalani notes, but McLemee also argues that his experiences in the United States "obliged James to become aware of himself—at some heightened pitch of self-consciousness—as black."<sup>121</sup> In April the following year, he would visit Leon Trotsky who had in 1937 been granted asylum in Mexico, and the two would discuss theoretical and organizational perspectives concerning the newly formed Socialist Workers Party's relationship to Black

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<sup>119</sup> C.L.R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (1938; 1969 with a new preface; repr., Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 106.

<sup>120</sup> C.L.R. James, "Trotsky's Place in History," in *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism*, ed. McLemee and Le Blanc, 105.

<sup>121</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 205; Scott McLemee, introduction to *C.L.R. James on the 'Negro Question'*, ed. McLemee, xvii.

Americans. His proposals and contributions were connected, however, with his IASB work.<sup>122</sup>

James and Trotsky agreed after their first discussion that on the question of self-determination for African Americans the SWP would not raise the slogan, but would commit itself to supporting such a call in practice should it become a central demand among African Americans themselves.<sup>123</sup> Trotsky and James also came to agree that the SWP should support and take the initiative in creating an independent organization for Blacks, which James imagined would be similar to the IASB.<sup>124</sup> James' resolution at the 1939 SWP convention, "The SWP and Negro Work," stated such an organization would "*not be either openly or secretly a periphery organization of the Fourth International. It will be an organization in which the masses of Negroes will be invited to participate on a working-class program corresponding to the day-to-day struggles of the masses of Negro workers and farmers.*" James foresaw SWP members being "a powerful influence in such an organization."<sup>125</sup>

By 1940, James left the SWP and helped establish a new organization, the "Workers Party." In 1941, after the outbreak of World War II, he wrote that the war involved "competing imperialisms" fighting, among other things, for control of Africa. He argued that imperialism in Africa pertained to "every American worker, not only

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<sup>122</sup> Buhle, *Artist as Revolutionary*, 70; Phelps, introduction to *Race and Revolution*, xlii-lxii; Scott McLemee, introduction to *C.L.R. James on the 'Negro Question*, ' xx-xxii; "The Discussions in Coyoacan," in *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism*, ed. Breitman, 38-69.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 48. James stated they had reached "100% agreement" on this question.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-69.

<sup>125</sup> The 1939 SWP convention passed two resolutions submitted by C.L.R. James. "The Right of Self-Determination and the Negro in the United States of North America," in *The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Monad Press, 1982), 353-356; "The SWP and Negro Work," in *Founding of the Socialist Workers Party*, ed. Breitman, 357-360.

Negroes,” and argued that Marxism best explained not only the development of capitalism in the colonies, but also how fight it.<sup>126</sup> Bogue notes that during his time in the Workers’ Party, James “argued that a principal task of the party was to publish Marxist studies on the Civil War and the historical significance of the CIO, the study Marxist economics and to complete a serious study of the Negro Question.”<sup>127</sup> By the time he briefly rejoined the SWP from 1948 to 1951, James had published numerous articles on these topics, culminating in 1948 in the publication of “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States.”<sup>128</sup>

### **C.L.R. James and Black Marxist Internationalism**

During his sojourn in the United States, C.L.R. James made considerable contributions toward Marxist analyses of race, culture, nationalism, and revolution. Indeed, Makalani acknowledges that this period saw James “engaged in some of the most important theorizing of class and Marxism in the mid-twentieth century.”<sup>129</sup> In “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States,” James proclaimed that not only did Black struggle have “a vitality and a validity of its own,” this struggle could “intervene with terrific force up the general social and political life” of the working class and “exercise a powerful influence upon the revolutionary proletariat”:

In this way we challenge directly any attempt to subordinate or to push to the rear the social and political significance of the independent Negro struggle for democratic rights. That is our position. It was the position of Lenin thirty years ago. It was the position of Trotsky which he fought for

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<sup>126</sup> C.L.R. James, “Imperialism in Africa,” June, 1941, in *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism*, ed. McLemee and Le Blanc, 131, 138, 139.

<sup>127</sup> Bogue, *Caliban’s Freedom*, 65.

<sup>128</sup> Bogue, *Caliban’s Freedom*, 61; C.L.R. James, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States,” 1948, in *C.L.R. James on the ‘Negro Question,’* ed. McLemee, 138-147.

<sup>129</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 224.

during many years. It has been concretized by the general class struggle in the United States, and the tremendous struggles of the Negro people.<sup>130</sup>

Makalani argues this was “an elegant challenge to historicist Marxist logic that would subordinate race and black people to class and white workers.”<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, James maintained that “consideration of the independent Negro movement does not lessen the significance of the proletariat—the essentially proletarian leadership. Not at all. It includes it.”<sup>132</sup>

James was a Black Marxist internationalist. His engagement with Marxism began in the early 1930s, and following his split from organized Trotskyism in the early 1950s he remained intricately bound up with the internationalist tradition of revolutionary socialism. His contributions to a greater historical awareness of Black struggle, colonialism, and racism occurred during his closest association with the internationalist Marxist left. It should come as no surprise that even by 1961, he continued to emphasize the centrality of class for developing a revolutionary internationalist perspective when some of his closest comrades were not only downplaying class but further arguing that the working class itself was disappearing. Rebuking these claims, James shot back:

... the world around us is in social and spiritual torment precisely because of the abandonment of the idea that the proletariat is the only part of society which can give the impetus to the reorganization of society... To the realization of that truth humanity must come or perish. To all who adhere to that cause we are comrades, missing no opportunity to advance it. To those who do not know this but are drawn towards resistance to capitalism, we are friends. But to those who, having for years accepted it,

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<sup>130</sup> C.L.R. James, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States,” 1948, in *C.L.R. James on the ‘Negro Question,’* ed. McLemee, 139.

<sup>131</sup> Makalani quotes only the section of James’ text immediately preceding his references to Lenin and Trotsky. Makalani, *In the Cause*, 226-227.

<sup>132</sup> James, C.L.R., “Revolutionary Answer,” in *C.L.R. James on the ‘Negro Question,’* 145.

are now determined to depart from it, we are enemies, outspoken and relentless.<sup>133</sup>

The “stubborn fact” that James never abandoned his revolutionary socialist commitments never contradicted his “ability to take what is ‘peripheral’ and show that it is, in fact, central to an adequate understanding of politics and society.”<sup>134</sup>

During the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States that followed World War II, the Marxist tradition to which James made such a rich contribution became subsumed under Stalinism, which itself became widely equated with “socialism” and “Marxism.” In the early 1950s, James developed important criticisms of the Stalinism as it affected the development of Marxist theory and practice alongside his comrades in the Johnson-Forest Tendency; Raya Dunayevska, a Russian revolutionary and Leon Trotsky’s former secretary, and Grace Lee, a Chinese American women who as part of the Tendency translated the first English edition of Marx’s *1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.<sup>135</sup> In the preface to the first edition of their *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, they argued that a “proto-Stalinism” had spread throughout the Fourth International, and attributed this partially to attempts to dogmatically maintain Trotsky’s own theory of the USSR as a degenerated workers’ state.<sup>136</sup> Stalinism existed to prop-up “Stalinist exploitation of the Russian workers” and “as a weapon against the traditional bourgeoisie in the struggle for the domination of the world working class

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<sup>133</sup> C.L.R. James, “Lenin on the Working Class,” in *Marxism and the Intellectuals*, May, 1962, Detroit Michigan, in Marxist Internet Archive, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1962/destruction-paper/index.htm>.

<sup>134</sup> Le Blanc, introduction to *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism*, eds. McLemee and Le Blanc, 26.

<sup>135</sup> Paul Buhle, introduction to the 2013 edition of *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, by C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee Boggs (1950; Reprint, Oakland, PM Press, 2013), xviii.

<sup>136</sup> C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee Boggs, introduction to the first edition of *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, 1950, xxxvii.

movement without impairing the position of the rulers inside Russia.” Although it may have established itself “in the minds of the public” as a revolutionary Marxist doctrine... it remained the enemy of Marxist internationalism.<sup>137</sup>

Marxism was not the only major casualty of the Cold War, however. Von Eschen argues that the internationalist anticolonialism forged among Black intellectuals like James, Padmore, and Du Bois also suffered, as “questions concerning political, economic, and social rights in an international context were neglected in favor of an exclusive emphasis on domestic political and civil rights.”<sup>138</sup> Marxists had played important roles in those struggles, and although Marxism understands class struggle as a central component of analysis and politics, examining its historical relationship with Black radicals shows that it does not necessarily reduce all struggles to class, nor to “Western” models of civilization.

C.L.R. James himself argued as much in the epilogue to *A History of Negro Revolt*, republished in 1969. James wrote that the movement against British colonialism in Kenya known as the “Mau Mau” revolt was decisively shaped not by “African beliefs and tribal practices but land and white settlers on the land,” but this did not mean that Africa did not produce its own “historical achievements,” and James rejected the notion that “African people spent their years in imitating, trying to reach or, worse still, if necessary going through the primitive early stages of the Western world.” He pointed toward developments in Tanzania he saw demonstrating an attempt “at creating a new type of society, based not on Western theories but on the concrete circumstances of

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<sup>137</sup> C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee Boggs, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, 27.

<sup>138</sup> Von Eschen, 5.

African life and its historic past.” But he rejected the notion of “African socialism,” considering the label to be a caricature of the “socialist” states of Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R.<sup>139</sup>

Robin D.G. Kelley points out that while James’ belief that “Africans ought to draw on their own resources and cultures in order to build a socialist society is hard to contest,” he was mistaken to believe that “pre-colonial African societies were inherently democratic” and would provide organizational forms for building a “modern socialism.”<sup>140</sup> Fundamentally, however, James’ critique of Western civilization was not entirely new to Marxism. James’ belief in the viability of African social forms as a basis for building socialism is comparable to Marx’s own writings on Russian peasant communes in 1887. According to Kevin Anderson, in these writings Marx denied having “created a unilinear theory of history,” or “a deterministic model of social development.”<sup>141</sup> Marx made clear, however, that socialism in Russia (considered as a “non-Western society”) could not be based on a pre-capitalist form of social organization, but, according to Anderson, “could arise only in the context of a wider social transformation involving the Western working classes.”<sup>142</sup> From Karl Marx to C.L.R. James, despite important theoretical and political divergences, a tradition of internationalism among Black and white Marxists developed with important historical, theoretical, and political consequences for movements against slavery, racism, and

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<sup>139</sup> C.L.R. James, epilogue to *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, 1969, 113,127, 128,131.

<sup>140</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, introduction to *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, 30.

<sup>141</sup> Anderson, K., 228.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 234.

colonialism within the Black international and working class movements, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION: THE RELEVANCE OF HISTORY

Leon Trotsky, writing to a group of revolutionaries in South Africa interested in the program of the Left Opposition in 1932, put forward a vision of international working class emancipation and liberation for “all the oppressed in the human ocean of the colored races to whom belongs the decisive word in the development of mankind.”<sup>1</sup> In giving the “colored races” the decisive word in world history, Trotsky’s perspective could hardly be considered Eurocentric. Indeed, the roots of his vision within the Marxist tradition trace back to Karl Marx himself, where it was developed in part under the influence of the Black international emanating from the Haitian Revolution and through its impact on the American Civil War. Black radicals like Hubert Harrison and C.L.R. James, among others, showed that Marxism had much to contribute to understanding the development of racism, and the history of Marxism shows that it played a vital role in building international, inter-racial solidarity against racism and colonialism from its development in the nineteenth century, to the creation of the Comintern in 1919 and later among anti-Stalinist Marxist internationalists during the 1930s and 40s.

This project has examined the relationship between Black radicals and Marxist internationalism not to defend Marxism on its for its own sake, nor to deny the failures of many white Marxists to fully appreciate Black life and resistance. Rather it investigated this relationship to reveal how certain criticisms directed at Marxism have failed to consider it as a developing, inter-cultural, and multi-tradition project that has itself played

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<sup>1</sup> This quote comes from Leon Trotsky, “Closer to the Proletarians of the ‘Colored Races,’” June 13, 1932, in *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism*, ed. Breitman, 84-85.

a crucial role in uncovering histories of Black resistance and revolutionary traditions. Certainly one can agree with Cedric Robinson's observation that "a civilization maddened by its own perverse assumptions and contradictions is loose in the world,"<sup>2</sup> but contrary to Robinson's viewpoint, this seems precisely the most powerful argument for the continued relevance of Marxism. The perspective that emerges from this research also differs from Makalani's conclusion that although Marxism provided an important resource for anti-racist and anti-colonial activists in the past, "a new theatrical apparatus for the future" is urgently needed, although it fundamentally shares his suggestion that the value in revisiting the history of Black radical internationalism lies in that it forces one to rethink revolutionary politics and history. Doing so can provide not only "theoretical tools and structures of feeling with which one might imagine a reality beyond the boundaries of our liberal democratic present,"<sup>3</sup> but also theoretical tools, understanding, and organizational lessons on how to get to that imagined beyond.

This kind of engagement is precisely what allowed someone like Karl Marx, a German who never touched foot in North America to develop significant insights into "the dialectics of race and class" during the American Civil War. Influenced and engaged with the historical significance of Black resistance and slavery, Marx's involvement with abolitionism led him to consider white racism an impediment to Black labor, recognize Black revolutionary subjectivity, and argue the need for international solidarity and support for political and social equality for former slaves.<sup>4</sup> Hubert Harrison's writings likewise demonstrate his own sustained engagement with and attempt to theorize these

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<sup>2</sup> Robinson, 318.

<sup>3</sup> Makalani, *In the Cause*, 230.

<sup>4</sup> K. Anderson, 239.

issues from a Marxist perspective informed his deep class and racial consciousness developed during his time as a postal worker witnessing brutal forms of racial oppression in New York City. Harrison maintained “a deep and subtle understanding of Marxism” that rejected “dogmatic” and “mechanical” views and challenged deterministic Marxist ideas by arguing that “the problems of racism and white supremacy, although clearly economic, had political, ideological, and psychological components that also had to be considered.”<sup>5</sup>

Harrison’s Marxism during his membership in the Socialist Party, along with C.L.R. James’ work in the 1930s and 40s confirms Chibber’s argument “Marxism always comprised an eclectic range of theories,” but unlike postcolonialism it has distinguished itself as a theory in seeking an “internal coherence and systematicity.”<sup>6</sup> In doing so Marxism always risked becoming exclusionist or “outdated.” In this context philosopher Cornel West rejects “Marxist thought as a philosophy of history and Marxism as it has appeared in diverse ‘actually existing’ Communist regimes,” while maintaining that “Marxist theory as a methodological orientation remains indispensable—although ultimately inadequate” for understanding racial oppression.<sup>7</sup> But as Babacar Camara has pointed out, West’s rejection of class reductionism seems to imply that Marx himself “reduced” everything to “class struggle and economics.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed for West, even the

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<sup>5</sup> Perry, 197-198.

<sup>6</sup> Chibber, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Cornel West, “Race and Social Theory,” in *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic/Civitas Books, 1999), 256.

<sup>8</sup> Babacar Camara, *Marxist Theory, Black/African Specificities, and Racism* (New York: Lexington Books, 2008), 84-85. Although sharing Camara’s view, his critique of West seems overly hostile at times, considering West’s rightful concern with the real existing history of class reductionism among Marxist thinkers and radicals.

“refined Marxist view” is too reductionist for it maintains “that the economic sphere is the ultimate determining explanatory factor for grasping the role and function of racism in modern societies,” and explains the lack of even these “sophisticated Marxist treatments of racially structured societies” largely on “the European character of Marxist scholarship on race.”<sup>9</sup> As argued above, however, Marx’s own viewpoint during the American Civil War engaged with the oppression and revolutionary actions of enslaved Africans and resisted not only economic and class reductionism, but is difficult to critique on the grounds of its “European character.”

Marxism admittedly considers class to be central, but this has not limited the ability of Marxists to embrace, and in fact develop intersectional analysis. Although not significantly discussed in this work, Black Communist women originally developed such a mode of analysis in their theory of the “triple oppression” of African American working class women beginning in the 1930s.<sup>10</sup> The Caribbean revolutionary and Communist Party member Claudia Jones, a working class activist-intellectual like Hubert Harrison, made significant political and theoretical contributions outside the officially sanctioned institutions for “intellectual activity.” Her work has been neglected in part as it existed within “a Marxist tradition of the development of working-class intellectuals for whom the study of political theory and its praxis were crucial,” according to Carole Boyce Davies.<sup>11</sup> In her 1949 essay “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women,” Jones analyzed the oppression and exploitation of “Negro women—as workers, as

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<sup>9</sup> West, “Race and Social Theory,” 261, 258.

<sup>10</sup> McDuffie, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, 25, 9-10.

Negroes, and as women” and considered how capitalist exploitation, sexism, and racism affected Black women simultaneously.<sup>12</sup>

Jones’ theory importantly did not fail to distinguish between exploitation, which Marxism understands as stemming from class relationships under capitalism, and oppression. Her essay shows how Marxism explains their relationship, and can help locate strategies for resisting and dismantling racist and sexist oppression under capitalism. Rather than replacing Marxism, therefore, Jones’ developed an intersectional framework that was been further developed by Black feminists beginning in the 1960s. This framework can certainly be deployed from a non-Marxist perspective, but was not originally developed to “replace Marxism” or its emphasis on the centrality of class in understanding “the *connection* between the system of exploitation and oppression,” according to Sharon Smith.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Marxist critiques of colonialism do not necessarily deny cultural elements but insist that these questions must be related to questions of political economy, and that the post-decolonization/postcolonial world must be critiqued in relation to capitalism itself.<sup>14</sup>

This argument becomes more profound today as it seems there is no escape from the capitalist system Marx first described at length in *Capital*. In fact, in this context the least useful aspect of Marx’s writings on “non-Western” societies is arguably his occasional openness to a “multilinear social dialectic” that allowed for alternatives to

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<sup>12</sup> Claudia Jones, “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Women,” 1949, in *Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies (Oxfordshire, UK: Ayebida Clarke Publishing, 2011), 77.

<sup>13</sup> Sharon Smith, “Black Feminism and Intersectionality,” in *International Socialist Review*, 91 (Winter 2013-14): 21. The ISR, a “journal of revolutionary Marxism,” takes its name from the original *International Socialist Review* associated with the early American Socialist Party.

<sup>14</sup> Crystal Bartolovich, “Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies,” in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6.

social development not merely repeats of the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe.<sup>15</sup> Marxism can however illuminate how across geographic and cultural divides people today have become “subject to *the same basic forces* and are therefore part of *the same basic history*.” Chibber locates two universalisms as defining the “basic forces” in today’s globalized capitalist system: the “logic of capital” and “social agents’ universal interest in their well-being, which impels them to resist capital’s expansionary drive.” He argues that these in no way inevitably lead to “a blindness to difference” in this now truly globalized capitalist context.

It has however produced new conditions and possibilities for resistance at the international level. For example, Peter Dwyer and Leo Zeilig argue that although Africa “has been tied to the international accumulation of capital since the first slave ships from Europe anchored off the West African coast,” globalization has “buried the myths of independent capitalist development, national autonomy, and ‘socialism in one country.’”<sup>16</sup> Class struggle is deeply rooted in the history of Africa since at least the beginning of the modern slave trade, and Africans on the continent have consistently agitated and organized against colonialism and racism.<sup>17</sup> Today new movements are emerging against imperialism and austerity organized around unions, massive social movements, and political parties with Marxist orientations. Indeed, revolutionaries in both Egypt and South Africa, where the two first Marxist parties in Africa were formed,

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<sup>15</sup> K. Anderson, 244.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Dwyer and Leo Zeilig, “Shina Mushandi Shinga! Qina Msebenzi Qina!” in *Class Struggle and Resistance in Africa*, ed. Leo Zeilig (Cheltenham, England: New Clarion Press, 2002), 172. The title of this chapter means “Worker, be resolute! Fight on!” Ibid, 204n1.

<sup>17</sup> See Jonathan Derrick, *Africa’s ‘Agitators’: Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

have lately displayed a resurgence of Marxist based organizing and analysis. Self-identified as part of the Trotskyist tradition, the Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt organized with the movement that brought down Western backed dictator Hosni Murbarek in 2011 and continue to oppose the current military regime.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in South Africa the National Union of Mine Workers declared in February of 2014 that it will establish an independent political movement to challenge the worsening economic and social conditions that have emerged under the African National Congress' watch since the end of apartheid, and consider Marxism to be essential in their efforts to “effectively contribute to the struggle for the emancipation of the entire world working class from the yoke of capitalism and to win the fight for socialism.”<sup>19</sup>

Internationalism continues to offer new possibilities in the struggle for universal human emancipation strongly rooted in the struggle waged throughout the Black international beginning with the Haitian Revolution. Capitalist exploitation has become nearly universal for the world's working classes and its expansion has been attended by racism and colonialism, both historically and today. It continues to inflict the greatest violence upon the African continent and people in the African Diaspora. Yet this process has been and continues to be challenged by Black and white resistance to racial rule and white supremacy. As Camara argues, Marxism helps reveal “the reality of an exploitation and domination behind all the noisy discourses” that would seek to downplay the material

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<sup>18</sup> Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt, “Egypt’s Revolutionary Tides,” First published January 26, 2014. Republished in English January, 29, 2014 SocialistWorker.org, accessed March 31, 2014, <http://socialistworker.org/2014/01/29/egypts-revolutionary-tides>.

<sup>19</sup> NUMSA President Opening Speech Marxist-Leninist Day School, February 2, 2014, Accessed March 31, 2014, <http://www.numsa.org.za/article/numsa-president-opening-speech-marxist-leninist-political-schools/>.

conditions upon which modern forms of racism and exploitation continue to be rooted.<sup>20</sup>

As such, it continues to be a vital resource in the struggle against these conditions for those who believe another world of universal human emancipation is possible. This struggle demands, as Lenin wrote in 1902, a revolutionary commitment to “respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter *what class* is affected.”<sup>21</sup>

The historic relationship between Black radicals and Marxist internationalism provides numerous examples of figures who attempted to live up to just such a demand.

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<sup>20</sup> Camara, *Marxist Theory, Black/African Specificities*, 112.

<sup>21</sup> V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?* In *Lenin Anthology*, ed. Tucker, 42.



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