



The Red and the Black: The Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic

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CHAPTER

Introduction: Red October and the Black Atlantic

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The Russian Revolution of 1917 was not only one of the most critical events of the twentieth century in its own right, but it also struck powerful blows against racism and imperialism on both a practical and theoretical level which reverberated globally.¹ As the poet, novelist and revolutionary Victor Serge – one of the great humanist witnesses of twentieth-century Communism – reflected in his Mexican *Notebooks* on 1 July 1946:

the socialist movement, first, then later the Russian Revolution (incompletely) succeeded in healing the oppressed and exploited masses (and the intelligentsia that rallied to these masses) of an age-old inferiority complex of the perpetually defeated ... In this sense the fertile role of the socialist movement is inestimable ... socialism modified the modern notion of man and his rights. (Internationalism broke the circle of the humanism of the white man.)²

Yet if Serge is right that socialist internationalism ‘broke the circle of the humanism of the white man’, the impact of ‘Red October’ on key black radicals was uneven – something that emerges from the contemporaneous writings of the US-based Jamaican black socialist Wilfred A. Domingo. Writing in July 1919, in *The Messenger*, the US-based ‘black revolutionary socialist magazine’, Domingo lamented that:

It is a regrettable and disconcerting anomaly that, despite their situation as the economic, political and social door mat of the world, Negroes do not embrace the philosophy of socialism ... every oppressed group of the world is today turning from Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Wilson to the citadel of Socialism, Moscow. In this they are all in advance of Western Negroes with the exception of little groups in the United States and a relatively organised group in the Island of Trinidad, British West Indies.³

Domingo himself, however, went on to passionately make the case why ‘Socialism’ was ‘the Negro’s Hope’. He argued that:

The foremost exponents of Socialism ... are characterised by the broadness of their vision towards all oppressed humanity. It was the Socialist Vandevelde of ↵ Belgium, who protested against the Congo atrocities practiced upon Negroes; it was the late Keir Hardie and Philip Snowden of England, who condemned British rule in Egypt ... today it is the revolutionary Socialist, Lenin, who analysed the infamous League of Nations and exposed its true character; it is he as leader of the Communist Congress at Moscow, who sent out the proclamation: 'Slaves of the colonies in Africa and Asia! The hour of the proletarian dictatorship will be the hour of your release!'⁴

Domingo's reflections on the implications of the Russian Revolution and the Communist International (Comintern) for 'oppressed humanity', and in particular black and colonial liberation struggles, at a time when the League of Nations only paid lip service to the idea of 'national self-determination', speak to the key themes of this book.

Since the rise of the civil rights and Black Power movements in the 1950s and 1960s – and the corresponding development of Black Studies and African Studies, and Caribbean Studies more broadly – there has been a slow but steady rise in scholarship in the neglected field around 'the Red and the Black'. This volume represents a substantial contribution to that developing archive. In 1967, Philip Foner's anthology to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, *The Bolshevik Revolution: Its Impact on American Radicals, Liberals, and Labor*, was path-breaking in that it reproduced at least a few of the responses from the black radical and socialist press in the United States, such as *The Messenger*.⁵ Since the 1960s, important historical work has been done by many scholars, including Robert A. Hill, Gerald Horne, Marika Sherwood, Winston James, Robin D.G. Kelley, Cedric J. Robinson, Mark Solomon, Joy Gleason Carew, Hakim Adi, Cathy Bergin, Susan Campbell, Mark Naison, Minkah Makalani, Carole Boyce Davies, Holger Weiss, Kate A. Baldwin, Maxim Matusevich, Margaret Stevens, Michael O. West and Jacob Zumoff. This wide-ranging scholarship has focused on important figures, movements and organisations such as Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) and the wider relationship between Communism and black liberation struggles.⁶ This volume both builds on and dialogues with this rich body of work.

The collection (and the forthcoming companion volume, *Revolutionary lives of the Red and Black Atlantic since 1917*) brings together contributions from a range of leading and emerging scholars in the field of 'the Red and the Black' who engage with the inspiring international reverberations of the Russian Revolution across the Black Atlantic world as a means to understand the contested articulations of different struggles against racism and colonialism. Through so doing the volume makes a significant contribution to contemporary debates around race, class, anti-colonialism and ↵ revolutionary history. In particular, it challenges European-centred understandings of both the Russian Revolution and the global left who took inspiration from it. The substantive focus of the book enables us to offer new insights on the relations between Communism, various lefts and anti-colonialisms across the Black Atlantic – including Garveyism and various other strands of Pan-Africanism. This introduction charts the rich and multilayered histories of race, class and resistance in which the chapters are contextualised, and also suggests important links to contemporary politics of race and class.

The first section of our introduction explores the relations between black politics and the Russian Revolution. The second section locates the book in relation to debates around the Black Atlantic and on black internationalism, and the final section considers the broader contemporary relevance of intersections between 'the Red and the Black'. This work sheds new light on the emergence of understandings of the intersection of race and class, on the emergence of politicised forms of anti-racism, in particular those arising out of a revolutionary struggle, and on racialised forms of internationalism and agency.

In terms of the structure of the volume itself, Part I 'Racism, resistance and revolution' explores how the Russian Revolution and the birth of Soviet power began to transform thinking around race and resistance. In particular, as we shall see in Winston James's chapter, the Bolsheviks' anti-racist and anti-imperialist politics was particularly critical here in inspiring such emblematic figures as the black Jamaican poet and writer Claude McKay to become organised revolutionary socialists – in a sense 'black Bolsheviks'.⁷ Matthieu Renault and Olga Panova's chapters explore some of the rich wider theoretical and literary relationships and dynamics around race and the revolutionary process in Russia, particularly in relation to black America.

Part II of the volume, 'Spreading the revolution across the Black Atlantic', examines the formation of organisational relations between Communism (above all the Communist International) and left-wing and anti-colonialist activists in Africa, the Caribbean and in black America and the Atlantic world more broadly. As Cathy Bergin notes in her study of black activists in North America, 'Bolshevism' became spoken of as 'a model of political identity which can speak to issues of race and anti-colonialism as well as questions of class'. Holger Weiss discusses the ITUCNW – arguably in many ways the most important organisational form to emerge from this early 'Red and Black' conjuncture – and related groups such as the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers.⁸ Sandra Pujals looks at the role of the Caribbean Bureau of the Communist International in the early 1930s, Matheus Cardoso-da-Silva explores the Atlantic and transnational dimensions of the Left Book Club and Nigel Westmaas examines the roots of the anti-colonial shock election of 1953 in British Guiana (now Guyana), which saw a left-wing political party briefly come to power in the British Empire.

Finally in Part III, 'Africa, the Soviet Union and the Cold War', Marika Sherwood examines the rise of 'Pan-African socialism' in Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, exploring the ways in which Nkrumah was influenced by Communism, but also how anti-Communism emerged as a weapon in the context of the Cold War to undermine the potential radicalism of decolonisation. After 'Africa's lost leader', Patrice Lumumba, was assassinated by forces backed by Western imperialism in 1961, a university in Moscow was named in honour of him.⁹ Harold D. Weaver, in Moscow himself from 1963–64, writes on how the Patrice Lumumba Friendship University for the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America aimed to further the process of intellectual and political decolonisation, while Rachel Lee Rubin examines how it became demonised in the West during the Cold War. Finally, Maxim Matusevich, a leading Russian historian of the intersection between the Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic, offers us an afterword exploring the 'longue durée' of black encounters with the Soviet Union. Importantly, Matusevich argues that these encounters were not a 'one-way street' but had consequences for Soviet understandings of black and anti-colonial liberation. He also emphasises that these encounters could be fraught and involved important challenges and tensions alongside forms of solidarity.

Black politics and the Russian Revolution

p. 5 The Tsarist empire under the Romanovs was described by Lenin as ‘the prison house of nations’ and was a multinational state where, according to the census of 1897, Great Russians only constituted 43 per cent of the total population of the empire. Tsarist Russia was not just a critical (and as it happened fatally weak) link in the imperialist chain; it also witnessed horrendous levels of state-sponsored racism against Jewish people, from repressive legislation to vicious and bloody pogroms – orchestrated mob violence by ‘Black Hundreds’ (who also organised the first publication of the notorious anti-Semitic conspiracy theory *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*). During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Tsarist Russia had the deepest level of anti-Semitism in any country before the rise of Adolf Hitler’s Nazis in Germany, and between 1881 and the outbreak of the First World War an estimated 2.5 million Jews had fled or left, one of the largest migrations in history.¹⁰ Yet during the 1905 revolution in Russia, the St Petersburg Soviet (Council) of Workers’ Deputies elected a Jewish revolutionary socialist – Leon Trotsky – to be their chair. They also organised armed detachments of workers which successfully foiled any attempt to trigger a pogrom in the city, testament to the change in mass consciousness under way during that revolutionary year.¹¹ After the February Revolution in 1917, repressive Tsarist legislation against Jewish people began to be repealed; again the reborn Soviets came to the fore in campaigning and organising against anti-Semitism. In October 1917, Trotsky was again elected chair of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies and the Bolsheviks – a party whose central committee contained six Jews out of twenty-one members – won a majority in the All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Alongside Trotsky, who after organising the October insurrection became Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and then founder of the Red Army as War Commissar, other leading figures of Jewish heritage in the early years of Soviet Russia included Yakov Sverdlov (president of the Soviet Republic until his death in 1919), Grigory Zinoviev (who would become head of the Communist International), Karl Radek, Maxim Litvinov and Lev Kamenev. Moreover, Liliana Riga has analysed the biographical profiles of the ninety-three members (full or candidate) of the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (Bolshevik)/Russian Communist Party (RSDRP[b]/RKP) central committees (CCs) in the key revolutionary years 1917–23, inclusive. Riga found that ‘ethnic Russians were a substantial minority, but Jews, Latvians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Poles, and others made up nearly two-thirds of Russia’s revolutionary elite’.¹²

p. 6 The realities of Bolshevism’s transformational and systematic challenge to racism on the ground in Soviet Russia itself amid these early years was clearly a fraught and complicated matter, as the recent important work of Brendan McGeever has registered.¹³ Nonetheless, the impact that news of the Russian Revolution and its anti-racist (and indeed anti-imperialist) dynamics made on at least a militant minority among the African diaspora was significant. Soviet Russia, for this minority, appeared as a beacon of hope at a time in the early twentieth century when Africans and people of African descent were suffering under the state racism of European colonial dictatorships and in the Jim Crow United States. The latter had lynch-mob ‘pogroms’ of its own, such as that which took place in Illinois during the East St Louis race riot of 1917 and across over thirty cities during the ‘Red Summer’ of 1919.¹⁴ Yet this impact has been somewhat long occluded in Western scholarship on both the Russian Revolution itself and within Black Studies.¹⁵ Much of the classic and contemporary literature on the Russian Revolution tends to still remain within a national lens, though the importance of understanding the crisis of the Russian Empire and the revolutionary process in a transnational framework is increasingly being understood.¹⁶ Even historians of the Russian Revolution who were as alive to questions of ‘the international’ as E.H. Carr, writing his multi-volume classic history of ‘the Bolshevik Revolution’ in the 1950s, still focused in his section on ‘Soviet Russia and the World’ on the ‘Revolution over Europe’ and the ‘Revolution over Asia’.¹⁷ This lack of attention to the African diaspora (with the partial exception of South Africa) has even been true of many histories of the Communist International, though John Riddell’s work on editing the proceedings of the congresses is slowly helping to shift the narrative here.¹⁸

In a sense this neglect reflected two important realities. Firstly, spreading the revolution on Soviet Russia's borders into Asia was strategically a more urgent and critical task than in far-off Africa and the Caribbean. Secondly, in general terms 'the wretched of the earth' most inspired by the Russian Revolution at the time tended to be either from the Jewish diaspora, or those colonial subjects living in the Far East (such as the young Nguyễn Ái Quốc, better known by his later name Ho Chi Minh) or South Asia (for example M.N. Roy).¹⁹ The inspirational impact of a socialist revolution – and one in a country that, unlike many others in Europe, had never pursued colonial ambitions in Africa – on the African diaspora and the Black Atlantic was in many ways at first weaker and slower to materialise than one might have expected. The small number of 'Afro-Russians' aside, the number of black people who found themselves in Russia during the tumultuous year of 1917 was tiny.²⁰ Some of these – such as the black American Philip Jordan, valet to David Rowland Francis, the American ambassador in Russia – seem to have retained their loyalties to the old order.²¹ However there were other African Americans whose relationship to revolution was more enthusiastic.

Frederick Bruce Thomas, born in 1872 in Mississippi to former enslaved black Americans who became prosperous farmers, moved to Moscow at the turn of the twentieth century where he renamed himself Fyodor Fyodorovich Tomas and, through his charm and guile, became the city's richest and most famous owner of variety theatres and the renowned restaurant Maxim. Thomas would later shock a white 'Southern woman from America' by explaining 'there was no colour line drawn' in Russia. In 1917, Thomas initially tried to adapt to the new developing revolutionary situation by helping sponsor a 'soldiers' theatre' for the Moscow Soviet, but after October 1917 his theatres were nationalised, and by 1918 he had fallen foul of the new regime and so by 1919 he had fled with his family to Turkey.²²

Emma Harris, a black American born in 1875 and originally from Kentucky, decided to stay after touring Russia in the early 1900s, establishing her reputation as a singer and actress and becoming 'Russia's first black film star'. Harris reluctantly adapted to the revolution of 1917, serving with the Soviet Red Cross during the Russian Civil War and staying in the Soviet Union for twenty years before returning to the United States in 1933 shortly before her death in 1937. In March 1918, Harris had attended a huge rally in Red Square in Moscow being addressed by Lenin. According to the journalist Theodore Postan,

Lenin was explaining the meaning of the Bolshevik cause when he spied a smiling, middle-aged Negro woman in the forefront of the huge gathering. Extending his right hand in a characteristic gesture, he spoke directly to her: 'The ideal of Communism' he said, 'is to open the road for all the downtrodden races of the world. For you, comrade, especially, as we regard your race the most downtrodden in the world. We want you to feel when you come to Russia that you are a human being. The Red Army is ready to give its life at any time for all downtrodden races.' Her neighbors hoisted Emma Harris to their shoulders and bore her triumphantly through the cheering throng ...

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Equally if not more remarkable still was Coretti Arle-Titz, born Coretté Elizabeth Hardy in 1881 in New York, who had been performing as a singer and dancer in Russia since 1904. She already had some links to the Bolsheviks earlier, and embraced the revolution, touring the Red Army with the 'Concert Brigade of the South-Western Front' in the Ukraine during the Civil War and becoming 'Black Concert Star of the USSR' and a Soviet citizen until her death in 1951.²⁴

During the Russian Civil War, several hundred French colonial troops, including Africans from Algeria, Morocco and Senegal – who had been treated appallingly during the First World War, some dying of cold because they didn't have proper uniforms – found themselves sent to Odessa in Russia in late 1918 to contribute to the counter-revolutionary White armies encircling the new Soviet state. Yet it seems very few of these actually participated in any effective counter-revolutionary activity, and indeed the whole experience proved a radicalising one for these Africans, not least as there was shortly a wave of naval mutinies on French ships in the Black Sea in 1919. As J. Kim Munholland noted, 'the French command

observed that the refusal of Algerian troops to embark at Constanza for Sebastapol provided dramatic evidence of widespread disenchantment among French units. Over half of the French troops in Sebastapol were colonial soldiers, including Algerian and Senegalese ... their discipline was uncertain.²⁵ According to one Soviet account, there were 'cases of Moroccans and Algerians joining the Red Army near Odessa and Sevastopol in 1919' and 'evidence that Bolshevik leaflets were distributed in occupied Odessa among the colonial soldiers, particularly among those from Algeria, Morocco and Senegal. Some of these soldiers, together with French soldiers and sailors, took part in distributing revolutionary leaflets. Hadji Omar, a sailor from Oran [Algeria], participated in the revolt of the French fleet in the Black Sea.'²⁶ Though again corroborating evidence remains hard to come by, according to Vijay Prashad, 'some Senegalese soldiers, fighting under the flag of the French empire, decamped for the Soviet Red Army when they heard of its arrival into world history. Boris Kornilov, the Soviet poet, would later sing in his *Moia Afrika* of a Senegalese soldier who died leading the Reds against the Whites near Voronezh "in order to deal a blow to the African capitalists and the bourgeoisie".'²⁷

p. 8

The significance of October for black activists outside Russia took longer to become apparent. For example it was not until Lenin and the Bolsheviks had put 'world revolution' onto the agenda through forming the Third (Communist) International in March 1919 to replace the Second International, which had so miserably all but collapsed with the outbreak of the First World War, and publishing their Manifesto, that the Jamaican Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey first commented in public on the Bolshevik revolution. In late March 1919, Garvey referred to the fact that the founding Manifesto of the Communist International advocated self-determination for oppressed peoples, and so thought 'the nightmare of Bolshevism' was 'going to spread until it finds a haven in the breasts of all oppressed peoples, and then there shall be a universal rule of the masses'. Garvey's general interest in and even enthusiasm for the Russian Revolution is striking, even though he ultimately concluded that 'Bolshevism, it would appear, is a thing of the white man's making' and so 'we are not concerned partakers in these revolutions'. Garvey thought that for black people the best that could be hoped for in the short term was that 'the destruction that will come out of the bloody conflict between capital and labour ... will give us a breathing space to declare our freedom from the tyrannical rule of the oppressive overlords'.²⁸

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As Marcus Garvey's comments – and Wilfred Domingo's remarks from July 1919 in *The Messenger* quoted above – suggest, there were significant if uneven exchanges between Communist, socialist and anti-colonial ideas. Both Garvey and Domingo give particular credence to the Bolsheviks' critical engagements with the question of imperialism and national liberation. Lenin had developed his theory of imperialism, building on the work of his fellow Bolshevik Nikolai Bukharin during the First World War, and the Russian Revolution helped to bring the slaughter of that war to an end. Lenin challenged 'Great Russian chauvinism' and championed the rights of nations to self-determination, and the Bolsheviks transformed the old Tsarist empire into a 'Union of Soviet Socialist Republics'. Working in conjunction with others – including M.N. Roy as well as figures like Zinoviev and Trotsky – Lenin played a leading role in ensuring that national liberation movements in the colonies were seen as of central strategic importance by the Communist International. As well as M.N. Roy, other anti-colonialist activists such as Ho Chi Minh, Hadj-Ali Abdelkader and Lamine Senghor critically helped to shape the Communist International's direction. As Timothy Brennan notes, in 1920 the First Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku, with its slogan 'Workers of the world and oppressed peoples unite!', was 'the first non-Western congress with the explicit purpose of denouncing Western imperial expansion, and of uniting peoples of vastly different languages and religious affinities'. Brennan insists that the Russian Revolution, 'to put it plainly, was an anticolonial revolution; its sponsorship of anticolonial rhetoric and practice was self-definitional'.²⁹

Whether or not we wish to follow Brennan in declaring the Russian Revolution itself 'an anticolonial revolution', it is important to register the way in which the majority of the Russian people who made the revolution were regarded by many as non-European 'dark masses'. The impact and influence of the Russian

Revolution, especially given the creation of the new Communist International, on a generation of radical black intellectuals, both in North America and those who were colonial subjects of the British and French empires, was manifest and undeniable. As Claude McKay famously put it in September 1919, in Marcus Garvey's *Negro World*:

Every Negro who lays claim to leadership should make a study of Bolshevism and explain its meaning to the colored masses. It is the greatest and most scientific idea afloat in the world today that can be easily put into practice by the proletariat to better its material and spiritual life. Bolshevism ... has made Russia safe for the Jew. It has liberated the Slav peasant from priest and bureaucrat who can no longer egg him on to murder Jews to bolster up their rotten institutions. It might make these United States safe for the Negro.³⁰

p. 10 The hopes and dreams of October 1917 inspired many to not only identify with revolutionary politics, but also now bring their own narratives and histories of black struggle into established Marxist narratives of revolutionary history in an unprecedented fashion. For example, with respect to the Caribbean, the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804 now began to be registered in Communist literature and discourse in a way it had never been adequately before. Led by figures like Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the Haitian Revolution was the only successful slave revolt in history, created one of the world's first post-colonial nations and was part of the world-historic age of 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution. Karl Marx referred to 'the insurgent Negroes of Haiti' in the third part of *The German Ideology* (1845).³¹ He noted that Polish troops were sent by Napoleon to try and crush the Haitian Revolution in 1802, and 'threatened by the fire of artillery, they were embarked at Genoa and Livorno to find their graves in St Domingo'. Not mentioned by Marx, but significant for anti-racist politics is the fact that some Polish troops (and for that matter some German troops too) defected across to join the black army fighting for independence, earning the undying respect and gratitude of Dessalines in the process.³² Haiti was not at the forefront of Lenin's mind in August 1918, as he missed an opportunity to pay tribute to black or anti-colonial leaders when he wrote and signed a decree listing thirty-one revolutionaries and public figures to be honoured with individual monuments in Soviet Russia, ranging from Spartacus to Plekhanov.³³

The relative neglect of the Haitian Revolution in the international socialist movement would however soon be overcome. By the 1920s a critical mass of black revolutionary socialist intellectuals and activists had formed themselves in the United States around the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), an organisation of several thousand members at its height, and with an appeal across the African diaspora. Cyril V. Briggs, a black Caribbean activist born in colonial Nevis, was part of the ABB leadership, alongside other founders such as Grace P. Campbell, Wilfred A. Domingo and Richard B. Moore.³⁴ The organisation coalesced in 1919, in particular in Harlem, around a number of impressive Caribbean intellectuals inspired by the Bolshevik revolution, and critical of the failings of the Socialist Party of America to take race and black self-organisation seriously. Briggs and many ABB members like Campbell and Harry Haywood later joined the Communist Party in the United States. Briggs paid due respect to the heroism of the Haitian revolutionaries, declaring in *The Communist* in 1929 that Toussaint Louverture 'takes his place with the revolutionary heroes and martyrs of the world proletariat ... to the black and white revolutionary workers belong the tradition of Toussaint ... We must see to it that his memory is not wrapped in spices in the vaults of the bourgeoisie but is kept green and fresh as a tradition of struggle and an inspiration for the present struggle against the master class.'³⁵ Inspired by the Russian Revolution and Marxist theory, some of the most critical, classic and path-breaking works of 'black history' were now written, such as W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935) and C.L.R. James's history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins* (1938). The inspiration of Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930) for James in particular was clear, but both *Black Reconstruction in America* and *The Black Jacobins* represented pioneering works of Marxist historiography relating to the African diaspora, which revolutionised historical understanding of the experience of slavery and its abolition.³⁶

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One high point in the conjuncture between black radicalism and Bolshevism came in 1922 at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, which was famously attended by Claude McKay. ‘Those Russian days remain the most memorable of my life’, he would later recall.³⁷ McKay created a vibrant picture of his Russian experience. ‘Whenever I appeared in the street I was greeted by all of the people with ↵ enthusiasm ... a spontaneous upsurging of folk feeling.’ The complete inverse of his previous experiences in America and Europe, he declared that ‘Never in my life did I feel prouder of being an African, a black.’³⁸ A leading poet of the Harlem Renaissance and a member of the African Blood Brotherhood, McKay helped draft the Comintern’s resolution on ‘the black question’ on 30 November 1922. This hailed the rising black resistance to the attacks of their exploiters and called for the organisation of an international black movement in Africa and across the western hemisphere, for ‘the black question has become an essential part of the world revolution’.³⁹ McKay was also inspired to publish in Russia two little-known volumes about race and resistance in the United States, *Negroes in America* (1923) and *Trial by Lynching: Stories of American Life* (1925).⁴⁰

Black liberation was also a subject McKay passionately and eloquently addressed the Congress on:

The situation in America today is terrible and fraught with grave dangers. It is much uglier and more terrible than was the condition of the peasants and Jews of Russia under the Tsar. It is so ugly and terrible that very few people in America are willing to face it ... the Socialists and Communists have fought very shy of it because there is a great element of prejudice among the Socialists and Communists of America. They are not willing to face the Negro question ... this is the greatest difficulty that the Communists of America have got to overcome – the fact that they first have got to emancipate themselves from the ideas they entertain towards the Negroes before they can be able to reach the Negroes with any kind of radical propaganda.

McKay closed his speech by declaring that ‘I hope that as a symbol that the Negroes of the world will not be used by the international bourgeoisie in the final conflicts against the World Revolution, that as a challenge to the international bourgeoisie, who have an understanding of the Negro question, we shall soon see a few Negro soldiers in the finest, bravest, and cleanest fighting forces in the world – the Red Army and Navy of Russia – fighting not only for their own emancipation, but also for the emancipation of all the working class of the whole world.’⁴¹ While in Moscow, McKay was not able to meet with Lenin (who was too ill) but did meet with such leading Bolsheviks as Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin and above all Trotsky. Stalin didn’t bother to reply to McKay’s request for a meeting. However, as McKay remembered in his 1937 autobiography *A Long Way from Home*, the request for a meeting with Stalin ‘vanished from my thoughts when I came in contact with the magnetic personality of Trotsky’, then Commissar for War.⁴²

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Trotsky asked me some straight and sharp questions about American Negroes, their group organisations, their political position, their schooling, ↵ their religion, their grievances and social aspirations and, finally, what kind of sentiment existed between American and African Negroes. I replied with the best knowledge and information at my command. Then Trotsky expressed his own opinion about Negroes, which was more intelligent than that of any of the other Russian leaders ... he was not quick to make deductions about the causes of white prejudice against black. Indeed, he made no conclusions at all, and, happily, expressed no mawkish sentimentality about black-and-white brotherhood. What he said was very practical ... he urged that Negroes should be educated about the labour movement ... he said he would like to set a practical example in his own department and proposed the training of a group of Negroes as officers in the Red army.⁴³

McKay’s account of his experiences in Moscow in *A Long Way From Home*, however, also speaks to more fraught and troubling aspects of these relations. He describes the discomfort caused by his encounters with Grigory Zinoviev, the president of the Third International, recounting Zinoviev’s anger when he told him

that he 'came to Russia as a writer and not an agitator'. The passage of *A Long Way From Home* that discusses Zinoviev also draws attention to his feelings that 'Bolshevik leaders' were 'using me for entertainment' to 'satisfy the desires of the people'.⁴⁴ Partly as a result of this, McKay's political trajectories became progressively critical of the USSR and the terms on which it envisioned articulations between Red and Black politics.⁴⁵ Such animosity was reciprocated. As mentioned below, Olga Panova's chapter notes that Soviet critics became progressively hostile to and dismissive of McKay and his work.

If the socialist McKay had nonetheless been impressed by meeting Trotsky, even the far from socialist Marcus Garvey – amidst the rising militancy and radicalism of the 'New Negro Movement' in the United States – paid tribute to Lenin after his death. In a speech in New York on 27 January 1924, Garvey described Lenin as

One of Russia's greatest men, one of the world's greatest characters, and probably the greatest man in the world between 1917 and 1924, when he breathed his last and took his flight from this world ... We as Negroes mourn for Lenin because Russia promised great hope not only for Negroes but to the weaker people of the world.⁴⁶

While the ABB was short-lived, a younger generation of black radicals now came to the fore. Malcolm Evan Meredith Nurse, a young black Trinidadian Communist (writing under his adopted pseudonym 'George Padmore'), articulated in characteristically fiery words the tasks as he saw it for the 'New Negro' amidst the Harlem Renaissance in 1928 for the *Negro Champion*, paper of the American Negro Labour Congress:

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The time has come for Negro youth, students and workers ... to take a more definite and active interest in world problems ... we have seen our brothers massacred on foreign battlefields in defence of the very imperialist social order that today crushes them to earth ... let us join with the masses of the rising colonial peoples and militant class conscious workers to struggle for the establishment of a free and equitable world order. The New Negro has to realise that the salvation and emancipation of any oppressed group can only be achieved by those who in the face of great odds have the courage to raise the standard of revolt. For he who dares to be free, must himself strike the first blow.⁴⁷

Over the next thirty years, few black radicals would emerge to fight with more dedication for black and colonial liberation than George Padmore. After briefly leading the Communist International 'Negro Bureau' and editing its paper, the *Negro Worker*, Padmore worked with his boyhood friend and compatriot, the Trotskyist C.L.R. James, and figures like the Kenyan nationalist Jomo Kenyatta to form militant Pan-Africanist organisations in Britain during the 1930s such as the International African Friends of Ethiopia and International African Service Bureau.⁴⁸ By the 1930s, for many black radicals like Padmore the turn to the Popular Front under Stalin's leadership of the Soviet Union and the resultant sidelining of the anti-colonial struggle represented a betrayal. James would later describe in his 1937 history *World Revolution* how the Communist International was thrown into chaos by this 'about turn', and, 'following Stalin, missed the greatest opportunity in years of at best striking a powerful blow against the colonial policy of imperialism, and at worst rallying round itself the vanguard of the working-class movement in preparation for the coming war'.⁴⁹ The abandonment of Ethiopia by the Soviet Union in 1935, when it put its own national interests first and sold oil to help Fascist Italy's war machine invade and occupy one of the last independent countries in Africa, marked a serious deviation from the early Comintern's commitment to anti-colonialism.⁵⁰ This decision by the Soviet Union threw many black Communists who had previously looked to Moscow as an 'anti-imperial metropolis' into a state of confusion and disbelief.⁵¹

Yet despite the disaster of Ethiopia for black radicals, the revolution itself continued to matter. In November 1939, in an article marking the twentieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, C.L.R. James highlighted how October 1917 could still represent a living inspiration for black Americans:

No Southern capitalist or plantation owner celebrates the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. Should a Negro in the South walk down a public street carrying a banner marked 'Long Live the Russian Revolution', he might be lynched before he had gone fifty yards. And why? Because it stands for the destruction of the rotting capitalist system, with its unnecessary poverty and degradation, its imperialist war and its fascist dictatorships, its class domination and racial persecution. Every Negro with an ounce of political understanding or a spark of revolt against oppression will recognise the significance and celebrate the anniversary of the October revolution in Russia.⁵²

As James's text emphasises, there were continuing reverberations of the Russian Revolution for radicals across the Black Atlantic. This raises key questions about how to conceptualise the connections and trajectories which were articulated in relation to these reverberations; the next section seeks to explore different ways of conceptualising these relations, and also positions the volume in relation to recent debates on black internationalism.

Black internationalism, political trajectories and articulations of solidarity

The preceding section drew attention to the diverse, and often underacknowledged, geographies of connection between the Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic. Through doing so it signals an important set of questions about how these connections, relations and trajectories are understood. In this respect this volume clearly draws on Paul Gilroy's framing of the Black Atlantic, which sought to move 'discussion of black political culture beyond the binary opposition between national and diaspora perspectives'. By locating 'the black Atlantic world in a webbed network, between the local and the global', Gilroy sought to challenge 'the coherence of all narrow nationalist perspectives and points to the spurious invocation of ethnic particularity to enforce them and to ensure the tidy flow of cultural output into neat symmetrical units'.⁵³ This challenge to what he termed the 'narrow nationalism of so much English historiography' drew in part on the pioneering work of historians such as Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, whose work on the revolutionary or 'Red' Atlantic sought to reconfigure the nation-centred character that hitherto dominated histories from below.⁵⁴ Thus Gilroy engaged with Linebaugh's discussion of the seafaring experience of radical figures such as Robert Wedderburn and William Davidson, who had been 'sailors moving to and fro between nations, crossing borders in modern machines that were themselves micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity'.⁵⁵ This engagement with Linebaugh and Rediker's work emphasises that notions of the Red and Black Atlantic can be thought of as co-constituted and overlapping, rather than as neatly separate political and theoretical projects. While such Atlantic framings have foregrounded histories and geographies of connections in important ways, they have also been unsettled and challenged. Indeed, Gilroy's conceptualisation of the Black Atlantic arguably tends to ignore the impact and exchanges of the African diaspora on events outside of the 'Atlantic region'. This becomes of particular importance for thinking about the diverse relations between black radicals and the Russian Revolution, but also for their intersections with South and East Asia including anti-colonial movements such as Indian nationalism and figures such as Gandhi; other revolutionary upheavals such as the Chinese Revolution and figures like Mao; or other anti-imperialist struggles such as the Vietnamese against French and American imperialism.

Such connections have, however, been brought to the fore more explicitly in recent work and debates on black internationalism, and it is in relation to such work that this book is most directly positioned. These literatures, which partly emerged in the aftermath of Gilroy's work, have emphasised the extent to which various black radicals in the early to mid-twentieth century were at the forefront of diverse forms of

internationalist politics, and include engagements with Pan-Africanism, Communism, Garveyism and black left feminisms.⁵⁶ One of the central contributions of these literatures has been to position the coeval forms of political identities and multiple political trajectories that shaped emergent forms of black internationalism. Thus Brent Hayes Edwards has argued that to analyse the dynamic relations between black print cultures in Paris and Harlem in the interwar period it is useful to think about the importance of 'ensuring coevalness in the very structure of any black internationalist discourse'.⁵⁷

Through this approach Edwards foregrounds the 'unruly pattern of follows and alliances' shaped through different articulations of black internationalism. This renders the formation of black internationalist politics as generative, but it is also important in drawing attention to the different and contested forms of such politics. As Kate Baldwin's study of the different engagements shaped by Claude McKay, W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson through their travels in Russia has emphasised, relations between Red and Black Atlantics shaped, and were shaped by, different connections, political trajectories and articulations.⁵⁸

A central theme of recent work on black internationalism has been the productive, inventive and diverse ways in which black radicals engaged with Communism. Such work has demonstrated the complexities and the diverse ways in which these relations were articulated and have usefully unsettled earlier framings of polarities such as George Padmore's famous 1956 opposition of Pan-Africanism and Communism.⁵⁹ Recent historiography has thus emphasised the different forms of political agency and identity shaped through connections and relations between forms of left politics such as Communism and diverse forms of black radicalism in different contexts. This has complicated earlier understandings of black radicals as subordinate to the logics of Comintern organising which informed the writings of figures such as Harold Cruse.⁶⁰

Such work has certainly not evaded the important unequal relations of power and racialised articulations of solidarity which structured Communist internationalism.⁶¹ This is clearly important, not least given some of the historic failings of many Western Communist parties to take questions of race and empire as seriously as was demanded. One depressing sign of this was the repression of dissident black activists and anti-colonial militants within the Stalinised Soviet Union itself, such as Lovett Fort-Whiteman – an early black member of the American Communist Workers' Party and one of its delegates to the Fifth Congress of the Comintern, who died in a Soviet gulag in 1939.⁶² Another victim of Stalinist terror, for example, was the one-time ITUCNW vice-chair, Sandalio Junco, a black Cuban Communist once responsible for work in Latin America and parts of the Caribbean. After breaking with the Communist International and becoming one of the leaders of Trotskyism in Cuba, Junco was killed by Stalin's agents in 1942.⁶³

Recent scholarship has offered a much more nuanced engagement with the forms of political agency, identities and solidarities that black radicals shaped in their interactions with the Russian Revolution and Communism in the early to mid-twentieth century. It is in this spirit that this volume provides a diverse set of perspectives on the Atlantic circulations, trajectories and reverberations of the Russian Revolution. In order to develop a fine-grained sense of the diverse and generative connections between the Russian Revolution and the Black Atlantic world, and the different kinds of international connections and exchanges they generated and shaped, it is useful to consider the terms on which such connections and trajectories were shaped. By approaching these concerns as interrelated and thinking about the diverse political trajectories shaped through such connections and relations, this book contributes to the burgeoning work on black transnationalism. The remainder of this section maps out some of the key interventions through which the volume adds to these debates in distinctive ways.

Firstly, the volume is part of a body of a work that challenges a sense of Communism as an export which sprang fully formed from Europe and/or Russia. Rather, in line with a whole swathe of recent scholarship, we seek to be alive to the ways in which there were ongoing connections and engagements with movements,

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intellectuals and political figures beyond Europe which shaped these relations. Rather than position Bolshevism and Communism as something that simply impacted on political activism and imaginaries elsewhere, this enables an approach which can also trace the impact of anti-colonial movements on Communist practices and ideas. This also speaks to the strong tensions that existed within the European left ↵ in the early twentieth century in relation to imperialism. As Peter Linebaugh has noted, among 'the many things' that Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin agreed on in 1916 was the 'denunciation of the Social Democrats for refusing to intercede on behalf of a comrade in the Cameroons who faced a death sentence for organising an uprising against the war'.⁶⁴

In this regard the transnational impact of the Russian Revolution intersected with different political formations and histories in different contexts. A good example here is the trajectory of the ABB, which as noted above was established in the US in September 1919.⁶⁵ Most of the members of the ABB moved *en masse* into the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) in the early 1920s, an event which, as Minkah Makalani suggests, 'lies in a history outside the white Left'. He contends that the ABB had operated 'mainly within the New Negro movement' and 'had put forward a program and undertaken political activities based on its sense of the circumstances facing black people around the world'. The problems the organisation had sustaining itself 'led Briggs, Grace Campbell, Richard Moore and others in the ABB to contemplate entering the communist movement'.⁶⁶ This was however to be a fraught and contested process with significant tensions both over resources and over the relations between race and class, as Lydia Lindsey shows, for example, in her chapter on Grace Campbell in the forthcoming second volume in this series on the Red and the Black.⁶⁷

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Makalani emphasises, however, that this encounter between the ABB and Communism was a dynamic set of encounters and engagements. Thus he argues that radicals such as Briggs, Campbell and Moore 'came to the communist movement' as 'they came into the Socialist Party – as activist-intellectuals willing to stretch the boundaries of a political theory so that it might address racial oppression and colonialism'.⁶⁸ Makalani's contention that intellectuals like Briggs, Campbell and Moore actively 'stretched' and reconfigured the terms of Communist ideas and theorising is important as it stresses the role of black agency in the formation of Communist ideas and left political cultures. It is important to recognise the plurality of left political cultures in different contexts too. Otto Huiswoud, a leftist from Suriname, for example, attended and addressed the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in Moscow alongside McKay, and was one of the founding members of the CPUSA.⁶⁹ This black presence was formed through struggles against dominant left political cultures and effected important forms of political agency. As Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery note, 'the Comintern created space for anti-imperialists from a variety of regions to rethink concepts and connections'.⁷⁰ These were interventions that had significant consequences for the internationalist political imaginaries shaped by Communism in the 1920s. They also resulted in significant challenges to the outlooks of white-dominated left ↵ movements, and so had an important impact on the broader perspectives associated with the global left. Thus Winston James has argued that for 'black comrades, the Comintern represented the purest ideals of socialism, untarnished by racism and colonial ambition'.⁷¹

Indeed, as Jeremy Krikler has noted, 'socialism would only be definitively separated from racism through the actions of the international Communist movement: this is one of the enduring (but largely unnoted) contributions of Communism to socialism more generally'. This was, as Krikler makes clear in terms of the South African context, an uneven and fragmentary process. By 1922, at the time of the uprising of white workers during the Rand Revolt, he notes that 'the task had only just begun, which left South African Communists somewhat confused in their arguments and even saw some in their party compromising with racism'.⁷² Krikler's arguments here underline the depth of the articulations between the left, racism and colonialism in the early to mid-twentieth century which form an important context for the emergence of the leftist politics associated with the Russian Revolution.

Secondly, the volume considers the intensely racialised political terrain on which the Russian Revolution impacted, and signals the importance of this in understanding the reactions and engagement of the black left. Thus the global context was decisively shaped by the political legacies of what Hubert Harrison dubbed the 'white world war' with its entrenchment of various forms of discrimination, the ferocious wave of racialised violence in 1919 and the deep investment of much of the organised left in different situations in colonialism and race.⁷³ The resistances that were forged in this conjuncture were strongly influenced by the global reach and influence of Garveyism. Thus Adam Ewing contends that Garveyism had particular consequences in shaping the way that 'black workers viewed their struggle for economic justice through a prism of racial solidarity'.⁷⁴

In this regard there were both intersections and key differences between Garveyism and emergent black left politics. As Cathy Bergin notes in her chapter in this volume, Wilfred Domingo's defence of Bolshevism in *The Messenger* insisted that 'there is a great connection between the future of the Negro race the world over and the success of the theories – now under trial in Russia – which are collectively known as Bolshevism'.⁷⁵ These arguments, Bergin emphasises, were made during a period 'of vicious reaction for African Americans in relation to the "red summer" of 1919 and its aftermath'. In this context, figures such as Domingo viewed Bolshevism as 'a rallying call for racialised subjects in an environment where worker's revolution seems tangential indeed to the daily humiliations of living as a racialised subject in the US. The Bolshevik revolution is reported as a world-changing event in the black radical press precisely because it is represented as an event which has a particular vanguard role for black workers in the lexicon of class politics.'

These emergent articulations between Bolshevism and black radicalisms were constituted, however, through uneven and contested geographies of connection. 'Africa', for example, was represented at the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921 by David Ivon Jones, a white Welshman from Aberystwyth who had become a leading figure in the Communist Party of South Africa.⁷⁶ Further, while Jones had some anti-racist credentials, his report on 'Communism in South Africa', which appeared in the newspaper *Moscow* in June 1921, argued that 'The African revolution will be led by white workers', stressing the uneven forms of representation which structured these connections.⁷⁷ The Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928 and the following 'Third Period' or 'Class against class' turn saw a noticeable shift towards anti-racism and anti-imperialist activism. This period witnessed some of the most concerted involvement of Communists in black and colonial liberation struggles, such as the International Labour Defence agitation around the Scottsboro Boys case and the League Against Imperialism's agitation around the Meerut Conspiracy Case in India.⁷⁸ The relations between black agency and Communist internationalism nonetheless continued to be fraught and contested in the later 1920s and 1930s. Thus Brent Hayes Edwards, for example, draws attention to the 'uneasy, shifting, articulations with the Comintern' shaped by the collaboration between the Trinidadian George Padmore and Garan Kouyaté, from the French Sudan.⁷⁹ That both Kouyaté and Padmore eventually broke with or were expelled from the Comintern demonstrates the increasing tensions surrounding attempts to forge spaces for black political organising within the terrain of Communist internationalism.

As Bergin's chapter notes, the relations between gender, race and Communism were also fraught and contested. Thus she observes, based on her reading of the US black left press, that the terms on which race and class were envisioned in such publications were profoundly gendered. She contends that central to such gendering is the 'active assertion of the raced classed subject as a black man' and the ways in which 'the concept of liberation is usually imagined in relation to black men reclaiming traditional masculinity denied them by the pathologically fixated gendered racism of white supremacism'.

In this regard, constructions of race and class intersected with what Lisa Kirschenbaum has described as Communism's 'Man Question'. Observing that 'communist conceptions of men and revolutionary masculinity were at least as ambiguous, fraught and contradictory as communist understandings of women,

and feminism', she notes that 'representations of the ideal male communist appear "fixed and unchanging": he was a muscular, tough and disciplined fighter'.⁸⁰ The limits of such articulations between race, class and masculinity were, however, refused by black women Communist activists, who articulated powerful versions of what has been subsequently termed 'black left feminism'. Thus Erik McDuffie suggests how key figures who were part of what he terms a 'black women's international' such as Claudia Jones and Louise Thompson 'practiced a radical internationalist, feminist politics within the US and global Communist Left that was committed to building transnational political alliances with women of color and politically progressive white women from around the world'.⁸¹

The tensions between differently placed black radicals and the broader circuits of Communist internationalism is also a significant theme of various contributions here. Thus in her chapter on the Caribbean Bureau of the Comintern which was established in New York in 1931, Sandra Pujals draws attention to key ways in which Communist engagements with the politics of 'race' failed to translate effectively into Caribbean contexts. Pujals argues that despite the insights of the Caribbean Bureau 'on the potential revolutionary component of race in the region', it had little impact on Spanish Caribbean Communist parties, and observes that 'local communist organisations did very little to integrate Black workers into their groups or to actively engage in activity among them'.

Thirdly, the volume contributes to work on black internationalism by providing detailed engagements with the diverse practices and terms in which black radicals engaged with the Soviet Union. It also traces some of the key and shifting ways in which the work and ideas of key black radicals were understood in Soviet Russia, allowing a dynamic sense of these relations and exchanges. Thus Olga Panova's chapter discusses some of the key ways in which critical black radicals such as Claude McKay and W.E.B. Du Bois were read and received in the Soviet Union in the interwar period, giving us a fascinating sense, for example, of the shifting reception of McKay's work. Panova notes that while earlier in the 1920s McKay was 'lionised', his novels *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* received a much more hostile reception from Soviet critics. *Banjo* was 'unanimously regarded as ideologically harmful and a complete failure artistically' and McKay was stigmatised as a 'Bohemian lumpen-intellectual' and a 'petty bourgeois Black nationalist'.

The position of racialised minorities in Soviet Russia and the symbolic importance of their treatment, or at least official presentations of that treatment, had a significant impact on black radicals in different contexts. This can be demonstrated by the way that the Soviet Union's nationalities policy was an enduring inspiration for some black radicals (such as George Padmore, whose *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire: A Challenge to the Imperialist Powers* was published in 1946), even after they had formally long broken with orthodox Communism.⁸² Such claims to the anti-imperial and anti-racist character of the Soviet Union, however, are complicated by, and need to be situated within, what Ronald Grigor Suny has described as the rapid shift of 'the radically democratic, anti-imperial and anti-nationalist revolution of 1917' into 'an authoritarian imperial state, formally federal but hyper-centralized, and committed to the formation of nations within its borders'.⁸³

In this regard, Matthieu Renault's chapter usefully develops a close reading of Lenin's writings on the 'process of *internal colonization* of the Russian Empire's "free" borderlands'. By examining the disappearance of references to internal colonisation after 1916 he traces significant shifts in Lenin's analysis and engagement with ideas of Russian imperialism. He argues that the resulting tensions between 'two discursive strains' that existed 'simultaneously in his work' presaged 'the contradictions the Bolsheviks would face in the borderlands when performing the dual task of promoting the socialist revolution and decolonizing the Russian empire'. Renault's discussion of Langston Hughes's account of his journeys to Soviet Central Asia also focuses on some of the ways different black radicals' experiences were shaped by engaging with different parts and on different terms with the Soviet Union.⁸⁴

As the chapters by Hal Weaver and Rachel Lee Rubin on the Patrice Lumumba University emphasise, Moscow, and Soviet Russia more generally, also proved to be important hubs of connection of different anti-imperial activists and trajectories. In Hal Weaver's case this engagement draws on his own personal experience of working and researching in Moscow during the early 1960s, yet of course there were much earlier histories of such connections and exchanges. In his autobiography *Black Bolshevik*, the black American Communist Harry Haywood – a critical figure whose work is discussed in Holger Weiss's chapter – recalls meeting a range of other radicals committed to anti-imperial politics during his time studying in Moscow in the late 1920s. He describes being particularly influenced by meeting Irish radicals such as 'Sean Murray and James Larkin, Jr (Big Jim's son)', noting that 'as members of oppressed nations, we had a lot in common'. He was to credit discussions with them as having a major impact on his enthusiasm for the 'Black Belt thesis' – one of the central, if controversial, tenets of US Communism in relation to black politics.⁸⁵ Maia Ramnath's work has suggested that similar dynamics existed in terms of Indian anti-colonial activists involved in the Ghadar movement on the US West Coast who travelled to Moscow and studied at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East.⁸⁶

p. 22 Engagements between black radicals and Russia and the other radicals they met in Russia were generative. Yet, while for figures such as Claude McKay, W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson the experience of visiting the
↳ Soviet Union – a society apparently without racism – was to prove life-changing, it is important to note, however, that for others the experience was more equivocal.⁸⁷ Indeed, for some, encounters with some of the realities of the Soviet Union could also swiftly lead to disillusionment with, and foster opposition to Communism. Ted Bryce, a black seafarer from Cardiff who was of Caribbean heritage, explained to St Clair Drake in the late 1940s that his personal hostility to Communism was based on his experience of seeing forms of what he described as 'slave labour' in Archangelsk while working on the North Atlantic convoys during the Second World War.⁸⁸

Histories of Red and Black linkages and contemporary articulations of racism and resistance

With the collapse of the Soviet Union bringing to a close what Eric Hobsbawm called 'the short twentieth century', in a sense this volume is less about recovering the history of a 'Red and Black Atlantic' which remains some kind of living tradition in the twenty-first century, than about diving down in search of what might be called – to evoke the work of J. Hoberman – a lost 'Red and Black Atlantis'.⁸⁹ Some of the difficulties presented by trying to recover a 'lost past' such as this have been theorised in the late Richard Iton's work, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*. Iton observes that 'it is noticeable that there is little mention of how the transition was made' from the political struggles associated with Paul Robeson to the 'later civil rights era'. He contends that this rearrangement of 'the visceral scaffolding of black progressive politics is generally cloaked in silence, with the effect of marginalizing the intensity and significance of the earlier commitments to such an extent that, in many instances, they have simply been forgotten, and rendered unremarkable and for all intents and purposes irretrievable.'⁹⁰ He goes on to argue that 'the maps that might help us trace the connections between the pre- and post-Robeson moments do not exist, leaving the rather overpowering silence – the unpublished retraction – that has marked the borders and boundaries of the Popular Front era and classic, southern-based civil rights era politics'.⁹¹ We argue here that tracing *connections and disconnections* across the Red and Black Atlantic can redraw some of the maps of connection and articulation that Iton contends have been erased. By so doing the section draws attention to the relevance some of these connections and lineages for contemporary political debates and engagements around racism and resistance.

p. 23 The intensifying circuits of repression and anti-Communism which impacted on the articulations between black, left and anti-colonial politics after the Second World War are a significant factor in relation to the
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erasures referred to by Iton.⁹² A key strategy which was used to sunder such connections was the concerted harassment of prominent figures associated with the black Left, particularly in the United States. The treatment of Paul Robeson is well known in this regard, with his passport revoked between 1950 and 1958.⁹³ Other figures, including prominent radicals of Caribbean backgrounds in the US, were imprisoned or exiled, such as the Jamaican-born Communist Ferdinand Smith who as vice president of the National Maritime Union had been a major figure in the American labour movement.⁹⁴ The impact of such repression on maps of connection was particularly significant in relation to the black Trinidadian Claudia Jones – one of the leading Communists in the US – who developed pioneering analyses of the relation between class, race and gender in essays such as ‘An end to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women’.⁹⁵ Jones was imprisoned in Alderson prison, and as a British colonial subject was deported to Britain in 1955 where she did significant organising work among Caribbean migrants, but was largely cold-shouldered by British Communists.⁹⁶ The repression meted out to these figures contributed to a significant intergenerational rupture in the transmission of radical ideas on the black left in the US and beyond. While Angela Davis continued the tradition of Claudia Jones by joining the CPUSA and developing an analysis which brought together race, class and gender, Malcolm X for example had to find his way to revolutionary politics independently, only developing a relationship with the revolutionary left at the end of his life.⁹⁷

Marika Sherwood and Nigel Westmaas’s respective chapters on Ghana and Guyana demonstrate how different attempts to forge states with independent anti-colonial futures were quickly deposed, often with the help of either British or US intelligence. The political projects of such anti-colonial movements shaped different orientations in relation to Communism, at least to its official variety. Thus in Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah’s first post-independence government was influenced by Nkrumah’s mentor George Padmore, who increasingly tried to forge a new Pan-African socialist vision independent of Stalinism, allied to the broader Non-Aligned Movement.⁹⁸ Other black radicals such as Robeson continued to find inspiration in the Soviet Union, despite (or even in some cases because of) Stalin’s regime, due to its stated official anti-racism and anti-colonialism.⁹⁹

p. 24 As Westmaas indicates, while figures like Cheddi and Janet Jagan were certainly influenced by Communism and Marxism had a broader influence on the left in British Guiana, the reforms introduced by the People’s Progressive Party after their landslide election in 1953 had much more in common with moderate social democratic regimes.¹⁰⁰ The British government’s ‘suspension of the constitution’ in British Guiana in 1953 was part of a broader use of anti-Communist repression to depose moderate left governments, including the US-supported coup against Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, rather than being based on any realistic assessment that they represented a significant turn to Communism.¹⁰¹ Anti-Communism was entrenched on the political right but it also had a significant impact on the left. Thus union confederations like the TUC and the UK Labour Party, marshalled by the Fabian Colonial Bureau, supported the suspension of the constitution in British Guiana and, as Westmaas notes, so did post-independence Caribbean leaders such as Grantley Adams, Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley.¹⁰²

While Sherwood and Westmaas’s chapters speak in large part to the negotiation of relations between Red and Black politics and left-wing and Pan-African political parties, they also indicate that it is useful to engage more broadly with the dynamics of left political cultures in the post-war period. Doing so can foreground the diverse forms of agency shaped by black intellectuals and activists as they reworked and reshaped ideas associated with Communism. Robin D.G. Kelley and Jesse J. Benjamin, for example, in their introduction to Walter Rodney’s lectures on ‘The Russian Revolution’, which were originally given while he was lecturing at Dar es Salaam University in Tanzania in the early 1970s, draw attention to the way Rodney’s account does more than ‘simply re-narrate well-known events’ in the course of the revolution. Rather, they argue that Rodney ‘took up the more challenging task of interrogating the meaning, representation, and significance of the Russian Revolution as a world-historical event whose reverberations profoundly shaped Marxist thought, Third World liberation movements, and theories of socialist transformation’.¹⁰³ They also

indicate the importance of situating Rodney's interventions in relation to Julius Nyerere's experiments with 'African Socialism' in Tanzania.¹⁰⁴

There were also more subaltern articulations and appropriations of such black left ideas. In line with Makalani's arguments, which were noted earlier, about how left politics articulated with diverse black political formations, Robert A. Hill talks of the politicisation of the Unemployed Workers' Council in 1950s and 1960s Jamaica. He argues that this was 'a fascinating formation' made up 'of the working class'. 'They were Marxists and black militants and Rastafarians, all at the same time and in different degrees', and had their own tradition of political activism going back to the 1920s.

p. 25 They developed this kind of oral understanding of Marxism as a dread philosophy. Those men used to debate and talk about – I've learnt this from talking over the years with George Myers – those men used to talk about Soviet politburo figures like Kaganovich and Suslov and all dem dread man. At the time, Stalin for the militants of the Unemployed Workers' Council was a character of dread, and that explains to some extent the appeal that Russian communism had for them. They saw it as a doctrine that would tear down the capitalist Babylonian establishment, root and branch. Many of their parents came from the black artisan class of the 1920s, thirties and forties ... they see something that they can incorporate into [their own political tradition], because it is anti-capitalist. It is anti-oppression. Now, it doesn't mean that they are Stalinist, it just means that the Stalinist philosophy has a symbolic meaning, and it gave them a language that allowed them to translate their own dread experiences into an anti-imperialist rhetoric.¹⁰⁵

This extract indicates how particular racialised forms of internationalism and agency can shape distinctive left political cultures in different geographical contexts. Thus Hill draws attention to the ways in which Marxism was reconfigured as a 'dread philosophy', speaking to the ways in which it was appropriated and re-articulated in different forms, shaping different forms of political agency in the process.¹⁰⁶

This has significant relevance for thinking about how the terms on which Red and Black politics were articulated in different formations has important legacies in different contemporary contexts. As Westmaas notes, David Scott's critique of conventional narratives of the colonial historiography of the modern state in the Caribbean is relevant here. Scott challenges what he suggests is an 'entire paradigm' through which decolonisation and the formation of modern post-colonial states have been established – 'with its distinctive organization of chronologies and personalities and events'.¹⁰⁷ Drawing attention to the different connections that stretch beyond particular nations – a key contribution of many of the chapters in this volume – can offer different perspectives on the left political cultures, which might help in Scott's terms to denormalise or unsettle such familiar chronologies. Revisiting these connections can offer alternatives to singular accounts of the trajectories of national lefts, drawing attention to different ruptures and highlighting different and contested articulations of left politics. This can help to foreground neglected forms of political agency and highlight the coexistence of different ways of envisioning political futures from the left, alongside the parties which in most cases led processes of decolonisation.

This is significant, not in terms of seeing such political cultures as secondary to those international connections, but because, as the example Hill gives shows, it permits a focus on the dynamic ways in which elements of transnational left internationalisms get taken up and reworked in different contexts. This has important resonances for ongoing debates in terms of the left in various places. Such a historicisation of questions of racialised politics and the left is necessary for any genealogy of the emergence of politicised forms of anti-racist politics. In this respect, reasserting such lineages and political trajectories is a necessary move to reassert the missing and erased connections identified by Richard Iton.

p. 26 Reasserting these lineages of resistance also enables an engagement with the different terms on which blackness has been articulated and constructed politically, in part through solidarities and dialogues with

others struggling against oppression. It can also usefully dislocate constructions of blackness as either fixed or transcending time or space. As David Austin has argued, ‘the tendency to think of identity as a fixed and immutable essence is problematic in so far as it fails to consider the dynamic of being and becoming that essentially defines what it means to be a healthy human living an “authentic” life; an existence that takes it for granted that freedom does not imply abandoning one’s self in a sea of universality’.¹⁰⁸ Further, he suggests that a context defined by ‘the wholesale incarceration of a now economically redundant surplus black population’, and the cumulative effects of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes as ‘nearly forty years of life-shortening mass criminalization’, emphasises the ongoing character of racialised oppression.¹⁰⁹

Austin notes that in such a contemporary context, ‘retreats into pessimism, futurism, or fictitious kingdoms in which royalty rules, however benignly, over its subjects; or reductionist conceptions of identity that falsely separate blacks from the global realities of modern crisis-ridden capitalism, and how the crisis impacts blacks and other oppressed peoples across the globe, are counterproductive’.¹¹⁰ In this regard a particularly crucial contribution of work at the intersections of the Red and Black Atlantic to left political discourses and thinking is in terms of powerful ways of understanding the mutually constitutive character of race and class, and in more uneven terms through engagement with their articulations with gender and sexuality. Such contributions continue to be necessary in terms of engagements with the broader left.

Thus, in timely interventions in recent debates around race and class in US politics, historian David Roediger has challenged ‘the view of David Harvey and many others that race sits outside the logic of capital’.¹¹¹ In related terms, Roediger has observed the unhelpful effects of the continued mobilisation of an ‘iron distinction between antiracist and anti-capitalist’, and has drawn attention to the importance of figures like Walter Rodney in making these arguments.¹¹² As this indicates, the political thinking and organising articulated at intersections of the Red and Black Atlantic offers important perspectives for transcending such unhelpful oppositions. These perspectives are also necessary for shaping strategies to counter the ascendant form of racialised right-wing populism. This has in part been produced through particular narratives of a dispossessed ‘white working class’, which are articulated with the reproduction of colonial imaginaries and relations and have been shaped by entrenched whitening of ideas of class in both political and popular discourses.¹¹³ Kirill Medvedev observes that such moves resonate with the silencing of progressive aspects of the histories of the Soviet Union such as anti-racism, feminism and the decriminalisation of homosexuality, noting that when ‘the Russian state today appeals to our heroic past, this progressive history is certainly not what it has in mind’.¹¹⁴

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The chapters collected here emphasise that the important histories of interracial political and labour organising, while fraught and often problematic, have sought to construct political formations and internationalisms which have offered alternatives to the destructive logics of racial capitalisms. As Cathy Bergin and Anita Rupprecht have argued, the ‘liberal narratives, which would monumentalise and domesticate histories of slavery and colonialism, struggle with acknowledging the presence of black radicalism, black rebellion, anti-colonial struggle and the alternative cultural memories’ that have been integral to movements such as Black Lives Matter.¹¹⁵ Reinserting the fraught, always uneven and contested articulations between the histories of Communism and the Russian Revolution and the dynamic left and radical political movements of the Black Atlantic into contemporary discourses of racism and resistance cannot offer a neat story with which to challenge such persistent liberal narratives. They can, however, draw attention to forms of political agency, solidarity and connection that have shaped powerful alternatives to forms of white supremacy and colourblind leftisms, and affirmed alternative logics of equality and freedom. They can therefore perhaps also serve as inspiration for those trying to remake a new revolutionary tradition of ‘Red and Black Atlantic’ organising among the multiracial working class – now developing in renewed forms and intensity – in its struggles against capital and empire today.

Notes

- 1 Our thanks to Cathy Bergin, Ben Gowland and Winston James for their comments on a draft of this chapter, which has also benefited from assistance from Ian Birchall, Maxim Matusevich and Jacob Zumoff.
- 2 Victor Serge, *Notebooks, 1936–1947* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2019), 548. For more on Serge, see Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2012).
- 3 Wilfred A. Domingo, 'Socialism the Negro's Hope', quoted in Cathy Bergin (ed.), *African American Anti-Colonial Thought, 1917–1937* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 28, 30. It seems likely the group in Trinidad Domingo was thinking of was the Trinidad Workingmen's Association, which was very far from being a revolutionary organisation but it was moving left during 1919 amid rising class struggle on the island. The description of *The Messenger* comes from Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1998), 2.
- p. 28 4 Quoted in Cathy Bergin, *African American Anti-Colonial Thought, 1917–1937* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 30.
- p. 29 5 Philip Foner (ed.), *The Bolshevik Revolution: Its Impact on American Radicals, Liberals, and Labor* (New York: International Publishers, 1967). For a more recent relevant collection of contemporary material for this period relating to the United States, see Paul Heideman (ed.), *Class Struggle and the Color Line: American Socialism and the Race Question, 1900–1930* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2018).
- 6 See for example the work of Robert A. Hill and the team around him in editing the *Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, and also Robert A. Hill, 'Racial and Radical: Cyril V. Briggs, *The Crusader* Magazine and the African Blood Brotherhood 1918–1922' in Cyril V. Briggs (ed.), *The Crusader* (New York: Garland, 1987). Gerald Horne has written numerous works on themes around the Red and the Black, including *Black Liberation/Red Scare: Ben Davis and the Communist Party* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1994). See also Marika Sherwood, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2000); James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Mark I. Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917–36* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 1998); Joy Gleason Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013); Cathy Bergin, 'Race/Class Politics: The *Liberator*, 1929–1934', *Race & Class*, 47:4 (2006) and "'Unrest among the Negroes": The African Blood Brotherhood and the Politics of Resistance', *Race & Class*, 57:3 (2016); Susan Campbell, "'Black Bolsheviks" and Self-Determination', *Science and Society*, 58:4 (1994–95); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters Between Black and Red, 1922–1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Maxim Matusevich (ed.), *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007); Margaret Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919–1939* (London: Pluto, 2017); Michael O. West (with William G. Martin), 'Contours of the Black International' in Michael O. West, William G. Martin and Fanon Che Wilkins (eds), *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Jacob A. Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism 1919–1929* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2015).
- 7 See Winston James, *Claude McKay: The Making of a Black Bolshevik, 1889–1921* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).
- 8 For more on these organisations, see Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism* and Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic*.
- 9 On Lumumba, see Leo Zeilig, *Lumumba: Africa's Lost Leader* (London: Haus, 2014).
- 10 Edward Acton, *Russia: The Tsarist and Soviet Legacy* (London: Longman, 1995), 106–107.

- 11 Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 185, 187; Sarah Lovell (ed.), *Leon Trotsky Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), 31; Tony Cliff, *Trotsky: Towards October, 1879–1917* (London: Bookmarks, 1989), 97–99. More research is arguably needed on the impact of the 1905 Revolution among black radicals internationally. For how it inspired Gandhi, see Vijay Prashad, *Red Star Over the Third World* (New Delhi: LeftWord, 2017), 35–36.
- 12 Liliana Riga, ‘The Ethnic Roots of Class Universalism: Rethinking the “Russian” Revolutionary Elite’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 114:3 (November 2008), 649–650.
- 13 Brendan McGeever, *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).
- 14 On East St Louis 1917, see James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 94–95.
- 15 In terms of Black Studies and Russia in general, an important early contribution was Allison Blakely, *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian History and Thought* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1986). The importance of the Russian Revolution was recognised on its centenary. See, for example, Jennifer Wilson and Jennifer Suchland, ‘Black October: An Introduction’, *Black Perspectives* website, 30 October 2017: www.aaihs.org/black-october-an-introduction/ [accessed 1 February 2021]. During the Cold War, as Africa became a site of struggle, having some sense of the impact of the Russian Revolution on Africa became important in Western scholarship for ideological purposes, leading to the appearance of works such as Robert Legvold, *Soviet Policy in West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970) and Edward T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1974).
- 16 See for example S.A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 17 E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923*, Vol. 3 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).
- p. 30 18 See for example John Riddell, Nazeef Mollah and Vijay Prashad (eds), *Liberate the Colonies!: Communism and Colonial Freedom 1917–1924* (New Delhi: LeftWord, 2019). See also the recent collection, Oleksa Drachewych and Ian McKay (eds), *Left Transnationalism: The Communist International and the National, Colonial, and Racial Questions* (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020) and the special issue of the journal *Twentieth Century Communism*, 18 (2020) on ‘Transnational Communism and Anti-Colonialism’. For discussions of Africa (including South Africa) see for example Allison Drew, ‘Communism in Africa’ in Stephen A. Smith (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Matt Swagler, ‘Did the Russian Revolution Matter for Africa?’ *Review of African Political Economy* website, 30 August 2017: <http://roape.net/2017/08/30/russian-revolution-matter-africa-part/> [accessed 1 February 2021¹]; Pete Dwyer and Leo Zeilig, ‘Marxism, Class and Revolution in Africa: The Legacy of the 1917 Russian Revolution’, *International Socialism*, 157 (2018); ↵ Oleksa Drachewych (ed.), *The Communist International, Anti-Imperialism and Racial Equality in British Dominions* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2019); David Johnson, *Dreaming of Freedom in South Africa: Literature between Critique and Utopia* (Edinburgh/Cape Town: Edinburgh University Press/UCT Press, 2020).
- p. 31 19 For a recent introduction to the inspiration of the Russian Revolution for colonial subjects in general, see Prashad, *Red Star Over the Third World*. For a sense of the impact of the Russian Revolution on the Indian left in the 1920s, see Kali Ghosh, *The Autobiography of a Revolutionary in British India* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2015), esp. 96–99, and Ali Kaza, *Revolutionary Past: Communist Internationalism in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
- 20 Vladimir Alexandrov estimates that there were about a dozen permanent black residents in Moscow in the early twentieth century amid a population of over a million. Vladimir Alexandrov, *The Black Russian* (London: Head of Zeus, 2013), 59.
- 21 For the experiences of Philip Jordan, see Clinton A. Bliss, ‘Philip Jordan’s Letters from Russia, 1917–19: The Russian Revolution as Seen by the American Ambassador’s Valet’, *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society*, 14 (1958), 139–166. Jordan himself mentions a ‘negro cook who is very black, a West India negro named Green’ also working at the US Embassy in Petrograd, but apart from that there were ‘few negroes’, and ‘none like our negroes’. Helen Rappaport notes that one gets ‘fleeting sightings of other African Americans’ such as Jim Hercules, ‘one of the possibly four black American “Nubian guards” at the Alexander Palace, who served Nicolas and Alexandra and their family right up until the revolution, and who may well have been stranded in Russia for some time afterwards’. See Helen Rappaport, *Caught in the Revolution: Petrograd 1917* (London: Windmill Books, 2016), 13, 334.
- 22 Alexandrov, *The Black Russian*, 60, 140, 150.
- 23 Theodore Postan, ‘Emma Harris: She Was There When’, Black New Yorkers website of the Schomburg Center for Research

in Black Culture: https://blacknewyorkers-nypl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/harris_emma.pdf [accessed 1 February 2021⁷¹]. For confirmation of her being singled out by Lenin, see ‘Old Brooklyn Friends Hold Reception for Emma Harris After 32-Year European Odyssey’, *New York Amsterdam News*, 8 November 1933, 9. On Harris, see ‘Emma E. Harris “The Mammy of Moscow”’, Notable Kentucky African Americans Database: <https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/1930> [accessed 1 February 2021], and also the memorable portrait of her in Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 82–86; Julia L. Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia: Chasing the Soviet Dream* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 248.

- 24 On Arle-Titz, see Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia*, 248–249; and for a 1939 photo of Arle-Titz rehearsing with her pianist husband Boris Titz, see the *Chicago Defender*, 10 June 1939, 13.
- 25 J. Kim Munholland, ‘The French Army and Intervention in Southern Russia, 1918–1919’, *Cahiers du Monde Russe Année*, 22:1 (1981), 60. See also Alexandrov, *The Black Russian*, 159. On the Black Sea Mutinies, which were unlikely to have involved many Africans directly, see Ian Birchall, ‘From Slaughter to Mutiny’ in David Morgan (ed.), *Stop the First World War: Movements Opposed to the First World War in Britain, France and Germany* (London: Socialist History Society, 2016), 35–48.
- 26 References to A.N. Gromyko (ed.), *The October Revolution and Africa* (Moscow: Progress, 1983) and Larbi Bouhali, *The October Socialist Revolution and the National Movement in Algeria* (Moscow, 1957), quoted in Jonathan Derrick, *Africa’s ‘Agitators’: Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939* (London: Hurst, 2008), 115–116.
- 27 Prashad, *Red Star Over the Third World*, 39. As Paul Dukes notes of the French West African troops in Russia, they ‘took back home with them something of the message of October, including revolutionary songs’. See Paul Dukes, *October and the World: Perspectives on the Russian Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 146.
- 28 Robert A. Hill (ed.), *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 391. See also Daniel Hanglberger, ‘Marcus Garvey and his Relation to (Black) Socialism and Communism’, *American Communist History*, 17:2 (2018), 205.
- 29 Timothy Brennan, ‘Postcolonial Studies between the European Wars: An Intellectual History’, in Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (eds), *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 192–194. See also John Molyneux, *Lenin for Today* (London: Bookmarks, 2017), 76.
- 30 *Negro World*, 20 September 1919.
- 31 Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, Chapter 3, Part 4 (1845), online at: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch03h.htm [accessed 1 February 2021⁷¹].
- 32 Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 69. On the Polish and German troops’ defection during Haiti’s war of independence, see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2001), 258.
- 33 As Tariq Ali notes, Lenin’s list was ‘eclectic’ in its choices and ‘the old man was clearly in a hurry’ for ‘he missed, among others, the Europeans James Connolly, John Maclean and Thomas Müntzer, and the non-Europeans Simon Bolivar, the Rani of Jhansi and Toussaint Louverture’. Tariq Ali, *The Dilemmas of Lenin: Terrorism, War, Empire, Love, Revolution* (London: Verso, 2017), 253. Lenin’s list did include the Cuban-born Paul Lafargue, son-in-law of Karl Marx, who was the grandson of a ‘mulatto’ [mixed-heritage] refugee from Haiti and always proud of his African heritage.
- 34 On the ABB, see for example the works of Winston James and Minkah Makalani already cited, but also Jacob Zumoff, ‘The African Blood Brotherhood: From Caribbean Nationalism to Communism’, *Journal of Caribbean History*, 41:1 (2007), 200–226. For the international support of the ABB and particularly its appeal among striking West Indian workers in the Panama Canal Zone in 1920, see Jacob A. Zumoff, ‘Black Caribbean Labor Radicalism in Panama, 1914–1921’, *Journal of Social History*, 47:2 (2013), 429–457.
- 35 Cyril Briggs, ‘Negro Revolutionary Hero – Toussaint L’Ouverture’, *The Communist*, 8:5 (May 1929). Toussaint Louverture, described as ‘the Black Napoleon’, featured on the cover of the *Negro Worker*, 4:8–9 (August–September 1933).
- 36 On *Black Reconstruction*, see Brian Kelly, ‘Slave Self-Activity and the Bourgeois Revolution in the United States: Jubilee and the Boundaries of Black Freedom’, *Historical Materialism*, 27:3 (2019). On *The Black Jacobins*, see Charles Forsdick and

Christian Høgsbjerg (eds), *The Black Jacobins Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017) and Rachel Douglas, *Making The Black Jacobins: C.L.R. James and the Drama of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

- 37 James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 180. See also Claude McKay, 'Soviet Russia and the Negro', *Crisis* (December 1923), 61–65.
- 38 Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home* (New York: Arno, 1969), 167–168.
- 39 John Riddell (ed.), *Towards the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 950.
- 40 For discussion of these, see Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain*, chapter 1, and also Jacob A. Zumoff, 'Mulattoes, Reds, and the Fight for Black Liberation in Claude McKay's *Trial By Lynching and Negroes in America*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 19:1 (2010).
- 41 Claude McKay, 'Report on the Negro Question: Speech to the Fourth Congress of the Comintern', *International Press Correspondence*, 3 (5 January 1923), 16–17.
- 42 McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 206–207. For more on Trotsky and black liberation, see Leon Trotsky, *On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination* (New York: Pathfinder, 1972); Christian Høgsbjerg, 'The Prophet and Black Power: Trotsky on Race in the US', *International Socialism*, 121 (2009).
- p. 33 43 ↪ McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 208. Sadly the scheme was blocked by others in the Red Army and Trotsky himself would shortly be sidelined by the rise of Stalin. Nonetheless, as Winston James notes, some black people in Russia, mainly descendants of Africans who had settled several generations before along the Black Sea, did fight for the Soviet Union. 'They fought, distinguished themselves and rose in Trotsky's Red Army, moistened the Russian soil with their blood during the Civil War, and at least one served in the Soviet of Tblisi, the capital of Georgia in the 1920s' (James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 167).
- p. 34 44 McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 173. ↪
- 45 See also Gary Edward Holcomb, *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007).
- 46 Robert A. Hill (ed.), *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. 5 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 549, 551, quoted in Zumoff, 'The African Blood Brotherhood', 217.
- 47 Quoted in Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War and the End of Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 74.
- 48 For some recent work in this area, see for example Carol Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Christian Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015).
- 49 C.L.R. James, *World Revolution, 1917–1937: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 372.
- 50 It is perhaps interesting here to also note that Tsarist Russia had provided military assistance to the Ethiopian army against Italy during the Battle of Adwa in 1896.
- 51 Bernhard H. Bayerlin, 'Addis Ababa, Rio de Janeiro and Moscow 1935: The Double Failure of Comintern Anti-Fascism and Anti-Colonialism' in Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey and David Featherstone (eds), *Antifascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities and Radical Internationalism* (London: Routledge, 2020), 218–233. Claude McKay's recently discovered novel *Amiable with Big Teeth: A Novel of the Love Affair Between the Communists and the Poor Black Sheep of Harlem* (published in 2018) is evocative of the atmosphere in the late 1930s period in Harlem in the aftermath of this betrayal by the Soviet Union.
- 52 C.L.R. James, 'The Greatest Event in History', *Socialist Appeal*, 3:87 (14 November 1939): www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1939/11/greatest.html [accessed 1 February 2021¹].

- 53 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 29.
- 54 *Ibid.*, drawing in particular on Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's 'The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 3:3 (1990), 225–252, which set out the core arguments of their hugely influential book *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves and Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2001). See also ↪ David Armitage, 'The Red Atlantic', *Reviews in American History*, 29:4 (2001).
- p. 35
- 55 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 12–13. ↪
- 56 Key reference points here include West, Martin and Wilkins, *From Toussaint to Tupac*; Lisa Brock, Robin D.G. Kelley and Karen Sotiropoulos (eds), special issue on 'Transnational Black Studies', *Radical History Review*, 87 (2003); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*; Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*. ↪
- p. 40
- 57 Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 117.
- 58 Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain*. For a useful overview of Du Bois's response to the Russian Revolution, see Bill V. Mullen, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Revolutionary Across the Color Line* (London: Pluto, 2016), 57–72.
- 59 George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?: The Coming Struggle for Africa* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1956) and notably Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism*.
- 60 Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: Morrow, 1967). For a detailed critical engagement with Cruse, see 'Harold Cruse and the West Indians: Critical Remarks on *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*' in Winston James's *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 262–291.
- 61 See for example Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 92–116, and Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*.
- 62 Dick J. Reavis, 'The Life and Death of Lovett Fort-Whiteman, the Communist Party's First African American Member', *Jacobin*, 7 April 2020: www.jacobinmag.com/2020/04/lovet-fort-whiteman-black-communist-party [accessed 1 February 2021].²¹
- 63 For more on Junco, see Anne Garland Mahler, 'The Red and the Black in Latin America: Sandalio Junco and the "Negro Question" from an Afro-Latin American Perspective', *American Communist History*, 17:1 (2018).
- 64 Peter Linebaugh, *The Incomplete, True, Authentic and Wonderful History of May Day* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), 56. On one later leading black Communist from Cameroon, see Robbie Aitken, 'From Cameroon to Germany and back via Moscow and Paris: The Political Career of Joseph Bilé (1892–1959), performer, "Negerarbeiter" and Comintern activist', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43:4 (2008), 597–616.
- 65 James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 156.
- 66 Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, 73.
- 67 See Lydia Lindsey, 'Gendering the Black Radical Tradition: Grace P. Campbell's Role in the Formation of a Radical Feminist Tradition in African American Intellectual Culture' in David Featherstone, Christian Høgsbjerg and Alan Rice (eds), *Revolutionary lives of the Red and Black Atlantic since 1917* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).
- 68 Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, 73.
- 69 Joyce Moore Turner with W. Burghardt Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005).
- 70 Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, 'Thinking Between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51:1 (2009), 6–34, quote on 7.
- 71 James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 181.

- 72 Jeremy Krikler, *White Rising: The 1922 Insurrection and Racial Killing in South Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 110. See also James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 181–182.
- 73 Hubert Harrison cited in Brian Kwoba, 'Hubert Henry Harrison: Black Radicalism and the Colored International' in David Featherstone, Christian Høgsbjerg and Alan Rice (eds), *Revolutionary lives of the Red and Black Atlantic since 1917* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming). On different aspects of the racist violence in 1919, see Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago, IL: Lake View Press, 1978), 81–92; James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 72, 76; Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008). See also Jonathan Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself "White": White Labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa Before the First World War', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12:4 (1999), 398–421; Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialised Outsider* (London: Palgrave, 2014).
- 74 Adam Ewing, 'Caribbean Labour Politics in the Age of Garvey, 1918–1938', *Race & Class*, 55:1 (2013), 24.
- 75 See Bergin's chapter in this volume.
- 76 Baruch Hirson and Gwyn A. Williams, *The Delegate For Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883–1924* (London: Core Publications, 1995), 207–220.
- 77 Cited by Hirson and Williams, *The Delegate For Africa*, 210. For more on the South African left in the first half of the twentieth century, see Allison Drew, *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) and Johnson, *Dreaming of Freedom in South Africa*.
- 78 See, for example, James A. Miller, Susan D. Pennybacker and Eve Rosenhaft, 'Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys, 1931–1934', *American Historical Review*, 106:2 (2001). See also James A. Miller, *Remembering Scottsboro: The Legacy of an Infamous Trial* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
- 79 Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 244.
- 80 Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, 'The Man Question: How Bolshevik Masculinity Shaped International Communism', *Socialist History*, 52 (2017), 77. See also Michelle Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914–1961* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
- 81 McDuffie, *Sojourning For Freedom*, 17–18.
- 82 George Padmore and Dorothy Pizer, *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire: A Challenge to the Imperialist Powers* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1946). For more on this book, see Theo Williams, 'George Padmore and the Soviet Model of the British Commonwealth', *Modern Intellectual History*, 16:2 (2019), 531–559.
- 83 Ronald Grigor Suny, 'An Empire to End Imperialism', *Socialist History*, 52 (2017), 95–102.
- 84 For more on some of the issues around the experience of Muslims in the Soviet Union raised by Renault's chapter, see Dave Crouch, 'The Bolsheviks and Islam', *International Socialism*, 110 (2006): <http://isj.org.uk/the-bolsheviks-and-islam/> [accessed 1 February 2021].[↗]
- 85 Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 206. For a useful discussion of the Black Belt thesis and its limitations, see Christopher Phelps, 'Introduction – Race and Revolution: A Lost Chapter in American Radicalism', in Max Shachtman, *Race and Revolution* (London: Verso, 2003).
- 86 Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 140–145.
- 87 Rachel Lee Rubin's chapter includes evidence of continuing undercurrents of racism towards black students at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, for example.
- 88 Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, St Clair Drake Papers, 13/6.
- 89 J. Hoberman, *The Red Atlantis: Communist Culture in the Absence of Communism* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000).

- 90 Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61. For more on this, see for example Horne, *Black Liberation/Red Scare*; Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- 91 Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 61.
- 92 For more on this see Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Richard Seymour, ‘The Cold War, American Anticommunism and the Global “Colour Line”’ in Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda and Robbie Shilliam (eds), *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (London: Routledge, 2014).
- 93 Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson: A Biography* (New York: The New Press, 1989), esp. 381–428.
- p. 37 94 Gerald Horne, *Red Seas: Ferdinand Smith and Radical Black Sailors in the United States and Jamaica* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
- 95 Claudia Jones, ‘An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women’ in Carole Boyce Davies (ed.), *Claudia Jones: Beyond Containment* (Banbury: Ayeibia Clarke Publishing, 2011), 74–86.
- 96 Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx* and Denise Lynn, ‘Deporting Black Radicalism: Claudia Jones’ Deportation and Policing Blackness in the Cold War’, *Twentieth Century Communism*, 18 (2020).
- 97 Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (London: The Women’s Press, 1982) and Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1988). Malcolm X was deeply impressed by C.L.R. James’s 1948 ‘The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States’, which he read in the 1960s as a Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) pamphlet. See Paul Buhle and Lawrence Ware, ‘Malcolm X, C.L.R. James and Political Choices Today’, *Counterpunch*, 12 August 2015. Malcolm X went on to develop a relationship with Trotskyists in the American SWP. For more on Malcolm X’s last year, see George Breitman, *Last Year of Malcolm X: Evolution of a Revolutionary* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970) and Marika Sherwood, *Malcolm X: Visits Abroad, April 1964–February 1965* (Oare, Kent: Savannah Press, 2011).
- 98 James, *George Padmore and Decolonisation from Below*. See also Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani, *Union Education in Nigeria: Labor, Empire and Decolonization Since 1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
- 99 In the US Harry Haywood was probably one of the most significant figures in this regard and was involved in splinter groups from the CPUSA which were based on a Stalinist resolution of the national question such as the Provisional Organising Committee for a Communist Party which was founded in August 1958 and according to Haywood ‘consisted mainly of Black and Puerto Rican working class cadres’. See Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 622.
- 100 Cheddi Jagan, *Forbidden Freedom: The Story of British Guiana* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1954), esp. 73–77.
- 101 Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New School Press, 2007); Mark Curtis, *Web of Deceit: Britain’s Real Role in the World* (London: Vintage, 2003).
- 102 See P.S. Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1975), 359–362. The discussion around the suspension of the constitution in British Guiana at the 1954 congress of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) gives a strong sense of some of these debates, and also indicates the ways in which the mainstream Labour and TUC position was challenged by a minority within the labour movement, in this case delegates from the Communist-dominated National Union of Mineworkers Scottish Area. See *Fifty Seventh Annual Report of the Scottish Trades Union Congress* (Glasgow: STUC, 1954), 290–291. There was a similar process internally in Jamaica, as Norman Manley’s People’s National Party moved to the right, in 1952 expelling the ‘Four H’s’ who were leading figures of the party’s Marxist left: Richard Hart, Arthur Henry, Frank Hill and Ken Hill.
- p. 38 103 Jesse J. Benjamin and Robin D.G. Kelley, ‘Introduction: An “African Perspective” on the Russian Revolution’ in Walter Rodney, *The Russian Revolution: A View From the Third World* (London: Verso, 2018), xx. See also Yousuf Al-Bulushi, ‘Thinking Racial Capitalism and Black Radicalism from Africa: An Intellectual Geography of Cedric Robinson’s World-System’, *Geoforum* (2020, online early view).
- 104 See Matthew Quest, ‘The Historical Retrieval and Controversy of Walter Rodney’s Russian Revolution’, *New Politics*, 68

- (2020). For a defence of Ujamaa, see Ralph Ibbott, *Ujamaa: The Hidden History of Tanzania's Socialist Villages* (London: Crossroads Books, 2014).
- 105 David Scott, 'The Archaeology of Black Memory: An Interview with Robert A. Hill', *Small Axe*, 5 (March 1999), 97–99 [80–150]. For more on George Myers (who used the pseudonym Joseph Edwards), see Matthew Quest (ed.), *Workers' Self-Management in the Caribbean: The Writings of Joseph Edwards* (Atlanta, GA: On Our Own Authority!, 2014). 'Black Stalin', the name adopted by the legendary political Trinidadian calypsonian Leroy Calliste, might also speak to this grassroots popular anti-capitalist philosophy. See Louis Regis, *Black Stalin: Kaisonian* (Kingston: Arawak, 2007) and the documentary film *Come With It, Black Man: A Biography of Black Stalin's Consciousness* (2012).
- 106 The tensions between Marxism and Rastafarianism continued to be a theme in the Black Power movement in Jamaica as it developed into the 1960s, as can be seen by the chapters by Rupert Lewis and Anthony Bogue in Kate Quinn (ed.), *Black Power in the Caribbean* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2014).
- 107 David Scott, 'On the Very Idea of the Making of Modern Jamaica', *Small Axe*, 54 (2017), 43–47.
- 108 David Austin, 'Introduction: The Dialect of Liberation' in David Austin (ed.), *Moving Against the System: The 1968 Congress of Black Writers and the Making of Global Consciousness* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 73.
- 109 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 'Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence' in Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (eds), *Futures of Black Radicalism* (London: Verso, 2017), 225–240, quote on 228.
- 110 Austin, 'Introduction: The Dialect of Liberation', 73.
- 111 David Roediger, *Class, Race, and Marxism* (London: Verso, 2017), 19.
- 112 Roediger, *Class, Race, and Marxism*, 1.
- 113 Sivamohan Valluvan, *The Clamour of Nationalism: Race and Nation in Twenty-First Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).
- 114 Kirill Medvedev, 'Europeans and Russia Should Remember what Bound them Together: Anti-Fascism', *Guardian*, 8 May 2020: www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/may/08/europeans-russians-together-anti-facism [accessed 10 May 2020⁵].
- 115 Cathy Bergin and Anita Rupprecht, 'History, Agency and the Representation of "Race": An Introduction', *Race & Class* 57:3 (2016), 3–17, quote on 12.