

The Impact of Hubert Henry Harrison on Black Radicalism, 1909-1927

Brian Kwoba

University of Oxford, Pembroke College

D.Phil Thesis, Faculty of History

Trinity Term, 2016

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Short Abstract

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This thesis focuses on Hubert Henry Harrison (1883-1927), a Caribbean-born journalist, educator, and community organizer whose historical restoration requires us to expand the frame of Black radicalism in the twentieth century. Harrison was the first Black leader of the Socialist Party of America to articulate a historical materialist analysis of the “Negro question”, to organise a Black-led Marxist formation, and to systematically and publicly challenge the party’s racial prejudices. In a time of urbanization, migration, lynching, and segregation, he subsequently developed the World War I-era New Negro movement by spearheading its first organisation, newspaper, nation-wide congress, and political party.

Harrison pioneered a new form of anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, coloured internationalism. He also inaugurated the socio-cultural tradition of street corner speaking in Harlem, which formed the institutional basis for developing a wide-ranging, working-class, community-based, Black modernist intellectual culture. His people-centred and mass-movement-oriented model of leadership catalysed the rise to prominence of Marcus Garvey and the Garvey movement. Meanwhile, Harrison’s African identity and epistemology positioned him to establish an African-centred street scholar tradition in Harlem that endures to this day.

Despite Harrison’s wide-ranging influence on a whole generation of Black leaders from W.E.B. Du Bois to A. Philip Randolph, his impact and legacy have been largely forgotten. As a result, unearthing and recovering Harrison requires us to rethink multiple histories—the white left, the New Negro movement, Garveyism, the “Harlem Renaissance”—which have marginalized him. Harrison figured centrally in all of these social movements, so restoring his angle of vision demonstrates previously invisible connections, conjunctures, and continuities between disparate and often segregated currents of intellectual and political history. It also broadens the spectrum of Black emancipatory possibilities by restoring an example that retains much of its relevance today.

Long Abstract

The Impact of Hubert Henry Harrison on Black Radicalism, 1909-1927

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My thesis argues that the historical restoration of Hubert Henry Harrison (1883-1927) requires a re-thinking of Black radicalism in the early twentieth century. As a writer, orator, journalist, educator, and political activist, Harrison was the driving force of the New Negro Movement, influencing on a generation of Black leaders from W.E.B. Dubois to Marcus Garvey. According to Harlem activist and Harrison contemporary Hodge Kirnon, Harrison was “the first Negro whose radicalism was comprehensive enough to include racialism, politics, theological criticism, sociology and education in a thorough-going and scientific manner.” Trade union leader A. Phillip Randolph called Harrison the “father of Harlem radicalism,” yet Harrison has only recently begun to be restored to Caribbean, American, and African-American history. While furthering the project of Harrison’s restoration, my thesis attempts to interpret the meaning and implications of this for Black radicalism in and beyond Harrison’s time.

At the start of the twentieth century, people racialised as Black in the United States lived under a grisly terror of racial oppression. Lynching, segregation, and political disfranchisement reigned supreme, particularly in the south, where the systems of peonage and sharecropping circumscribed the economic situation of most African-Americans. These conditions precipitated a “Great Migration” from south to north, at the same time as concomitant trends like urbanisation, industrialisation, and technological development got a boost from the First World War. Adverse economic conditions precipitated a large wave of Caribbean migration to the United States, particularly to Harlem, which was also a major northern destination for African-American migrants from the south.

While Black life in the Caribbean was ultimately rooted in the history of European trans-Atlantic enslavement, Harrison’s native St. Croix (like many other Caribbean islands) lacked the traditions of lynching, Ku Klux Klan-style terrorism, and violent white supremacy that characterised the United States. For that reason, the encounter of Caribbean migrants like Harrison with the strict US regime of racial oppression comprised a major factor in their political radicalisation. In addition, given Manhattan’s role as a leading site of technological, political, and social modernism, Harrison’s move there from St. Croix at the turn of the century represented a geographic move as well as a diachronic move from an agrarian to a modern industrial context.

After losing his job as a postal worker for publicly criticising conservative Black president of the Tuskegee Institute Booker T. Washington, Harrison became a leading organiser in the Socialist Party of America. In 1911, as a full-time speaker and organizer for the party, Harrison emerged as the first Black party leader to articulate a historical materialist approach to the so-called “Negro question.” Posing the question of ‘Socialism or Southernism?’, he also became the first Black socialist to systematically challenge the party’s white-dominated racial politics while still a member. The Colored Socialist Club

he organized in Harlem represented the first official Black-led formation in the party's history. Harrison's failure to convince the party to take seriously the task of organising Black communities revealed a historic weakness of progressive US politics, what I call leftist white supremacy. I argue that the failure of Harrison and others of his generation to articulate a theory of racial oppression that consistently problematised its whiteness demonstrated how deep and how normalised whiteness had become, including amongst white radicals. Most importantly, Harrison's experience taught him a key lesson about the centrality of race and racial oppression to US politics and he proceeded to agitate with a race-conscious approach for the rest of his life.

A major theme of this thesis concerns Hubert Harrison's relationship to the New Negro Movement, which formed the local segment of a larger international political awakening in the aftermath of the First World War. I analyse Harrison's seminal role as the founder of the Liberty League of Negro-Americans and the *Voice* in 1917, which represented the first organisation and newspaper of the movement. In 1918, William Monroe Trotter, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., and Hubert Harrison organized the Liberty Congress of Negro Americans in Washington D.C., the only organizationally-independent gathering of Black dissidents during the war. The Liberty Congress elected Hubert Harrison as its chairman and presented a petition to the US Congress against lynching, disfranchisement, and segregation, demonstrating Harrison's emergence as a leader of the New Negro movement at a national level.

In 1920, Harrison and Harlem activist William Bridges founded the Liberty Party, an electoral outlet which ran Garvey movement leader Rev. James Eason for president, which was the second all-Black party and Black presidential candidacy to emerge in US history. In addition, Harrison developed a new form of radical internationalism—a political conception he called the 'Colored International'—as a call for an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and race-conscious global alliance among the colonised peoples of the world. This formulation built on previous internationalisms like the Eurocentric internationalism of the socialist movement, but also broke new ground by advocating solidarity amongst the 'darker races' against structural white supremacy at a global level.

Harrison's primary impact on his community came by way of his prodigious work as an educator, particularly in the "Outdoor University," as community residents called the street corner oratorical tradition he initiated in Harlem. Speaking from 'the Campus' at the center of Harlem's bustling 135th street and Lenox Avenue, Harrison's intellectual range covered such topics as anthropology, English literature, evolutionary biology, theological criticism, ancient African civilisations, and global geopolitics. In addition to his outdoor speaking, Harrison taught indoor courses in economics, comparative religion, world problems of race, and embryology. In so doing, he initiated the tradition of the Harlem 'street scholar', institutionalising his legacy in spaces like the 135th street public library, which he helped convert into what is now the internationally-renown Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Harrison's wide learning and political experience leading social movements combined to produce a new model of Black leadership. Unlike Booker T. Washington's model of industrial education or W.E.B. Du Bois' focus on a 'talented tenth', Harrison placed the common people of African descent at the centre of his vision and advanced a mass-movement and race-first orientation to confront the domestic problems facing Black communities. This model came into sharp relief in the crucible of the First World War,

when the most prominent protest-oriented Black leader, Du Bois, utilised his influential position as editor of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's *Crisis* magazine to call on African-Americans to forget their special grievances and 'close ranks' behind the war effort. Harrison, by contrast, stuck to the anti-imperialist analysis which he and Du Bois initially shared, and continued to agitate for the "democracy" that Black people lacked at home but were sent to fight for in Europe. Harrison's opposition to the war and support for armed self-defence against lynching and white riots represented a consistent and principled model of leadership which located him in the tradition of such forebears as Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, and William Monroe Trotter.

Perhaps the most spectacular outcome of Harrison's political contribution to Black life can be found in his relationship to the Garvey movement, which became the largest international mass movement of Black people in history thanks to Harrison's influence. I argue Hubert Harrison and his Liberty League of Negro-Americans innovated or developed many of the key political, ideological, cultural, and organizational components that Garvey would copy for his own movement: the United States and Harlem in particular as a headquarters, a mass movement rather than industrial school orientation, and the ideology of "race first" comprise some of the most decisive examples. Seen in this way, Garvey appears as Harrison's most prominent disciple.

Harrison eventually joined Garvey's movement and gave expression to its radical wing as editor of its *Negro World* newspaper. However, as a result of his first hand observations, Harrison began to conclude that Garvey was egomaniacal, corrupt, dictatorial, imperialistic, and a liar. Harrison took steps to reform Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association from within in an attempt to make it more class conscious, politically engaged, and anti-imperialist. For that reason, restoring this history reveals a radical but hitherto largely invisible wing of Garveyism, which Harrison called the "incorporated section" of the New Negro movement.

On the theme of New Negro politics, I also explore Harrison's unique and distinctive African identity and consciousness. Prior to 1922, most of the prominent African-American leaders—from nineteenth century emigrationists like Alexander Crummell to 20th century figures like Du Bois—held paternalistic views toward Africa which amounted to some version of the civilisationist 'uplift the backward natives' mentality. This largely mimicked the white imperial powers' justification for colonialism. Harrison, by contrast, evinced a radical humility toward continental Africans that served as the foundation for an entirely different diasporic identity and relationship to the continent based on learning from Africans and studying their historical achievements and contemporary civilisations. Harrison's final organising project, the International Colored Unity League, represented a culmination of this work, reflecting new lessons learned about Black nationality like the need for a concrete resolution of the historic problem of African American land dispossession.

Many of Harrison's achievements could be described, as they were at time, as contributions to the New Negro movement. However, Alain Locke's 1925 *New Negro* anthology effectively usurped and re-conceptualised the meaning of the New Negro in American life. Locke's interpretation and his proclamation of a "Negro Renaissance" (later re-branded as a "*Harlem Renaissance*"), deliberately erased Harrison and a whole generation of Black radicals, thereby converting a class-radical, "race first,"

internationalist, working-class movement into an apolitical, middle-class, patriotic, arts-based commercial fad, beholden to the financial and political interests of white publishers. I argue that Harrison's critical assessment and rejection of the 'renaissance' phenomenon poses an existential question for the arts-and-culture framework on which it is based, adding fresh fuel to the debate about the nature of the "Harlem renaissance" and the academic industry it has come to represent.

All in all, Harrison 'crystallised' many of the ground-breaking transformations taking place in Black identity, global consciousness, and political movements in his era. Building on political tributaries from both sides of the colour line—from Marxism and Freethought to Black protest and pan-African subjectivity—he synthesised critical political and intellectual currents, helping to develop Harlem as the international "Mecca" of Black culture. Harrison's protégés went on to become leading Black communists, street scholars, and community organisers by building on his foundations.

Inevitably, engagement with Harrison's legacy raises the question of why he was forgotten in history. In brief, it comes down to such factors as: Harrison's humility and aversion to lavish praise, his failure to maintain long-standing ties to any single organisation, the biases of prominent organisations and individuals that he criticised, the hostility of white and Black elites to Black radicalism, and the failure of Harrison-conscious individual scholars and Harlem community members to overcome all of the preceding factors. Harrison's death set off a struggle over his memory, a struggle that powerful social forces largely won. At least, until recently.

In that sense, this thesis builds on the slow but steady growth in Harrison-inclusive historiography, arguing that because Harrison is such a unique and under-appreciated figure, his restoration requires us to radically expand our intellectual and political framework for Black politics in the 20th century. Indeed, unearthing and recovering Harrison requires us to rethink and re-frame multiple histories—the white left, the New Negro movement, Garveyism, the "Harlem Renaissance"—which have marginalized him. Harrison figured centrally in all of these social movements, so restoring his angle of vision illuminates previously invisible connections, conjunctures, and continuities between these disparate and segregated currents of intellectual and political history. As a result, Harrison's return broadens the spectrum of possibility for Black emancipation more generally by providing an example that retains much of its relevance today.

Acknowledgements

I want to first acknowledge and give thanks to the many scholars, including Rev. Ethelred Brown, John Henrik Clarke, John G. Jackson, Portia James, Philip Foner, Robert Hill, Winston James, Joyce Moore Turner, Ernest Allen, Richard B. Moore, Harold Cruse, J.A. Rogers, Irma Watkins-Owens, Thabiti Asukile, Wilfred Samuels and so many others who have helped preserve the memory of Hubert Henry Harrison.

The most influential scholar on my decision and ability to undertake this research remains Jeffrey B. Perry. I owe Perry a general and existential debt of gratitude. Quite simply, I would not know about Hubert Harrison or have decided to make him the focus of my doctoral research if not for his decades of scholarly work and decisive initial encouragement of my interest. Perry cultivated a relationship with Harrison's descendants, which led to his gaining access to the vast collection of Harrison's personal documents and the eventual creation of the *Hubert Harrison Reader*, and Hubert Harrison Papers at Columbia University. Perry's biography, *Hubert Harrison: Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918* comprises a magisterial work of literature which has set the bar for writing about Harrison at a level one could only hope to reach by the better part of a life's dedication and labour. His enthusiasm for the 'father of Harlem radicalism' remains infectious and inspirational.

I give thanks for my academic supervisor, Stephen Tuck, for his patience with me and especially for the free reign he gave me ideologically, intellectually, and politically. He provided me with valuable and consistent guidance, helped me hone and refine my thinking, and constantly pushed me to situate Harrison in a wider world. From agreeing to supervise me as a doctoral student, to encouraging me to go after what inspired me, the countless meetings wherein he shared his feedback and suggestions, teaching Harrison in his undergraduate class and allowing me to teach his class, establishing the Race and Resistance seminar at TORCH, hosting the Callaloo conference and 50th anniversary of Malcolm X at Oxford events...there is just so much to thank Stephen for. Above all, without his unwavering and enthusiastic support, my academic experience at Oxford would have been much more difficult.

I give thanks to the activists and social justice advocates who inspired or supported me in the course of my doctoral program: Steve Cohen, Ben Weber, Victor Yang, Tyler Alabanza-Behard, Mbongeni Ndlovu, Adam Elliot-Cooper, Shakina Chinedu, Patricia Daley, Dalumuzi Mhlana, Simukai Chigudu, Anu Henriques, Lina Ahmed Abushouk, Kofi Klu, Esther Stanford-Xosei, Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman, Hope Levy-Shepherd, and so many more. I give thanks for the Oxford Pan-African Forum, "I, Too, Am Oxford," Skin Deep, the Oxford Black Students Union, the Oxford African-Caribbean Society, the Oxford Africa Society, and the Campaign for Racial Awareness and Equality. You know who you are and you taught me generously.

I give an extra special thanks to Rhodes Must Fall, particularly Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh, Tadiwa Madenga, Ntokozo Qwabe, Athi-Nangamso Esther Nkopo, Marc Shi, Ndjodi Ndeunyema, Roné McFarlane, Arthur Eirich, Max Harris, Zakir Gul, Oluwafemi Nylander, Miriam Kilimo, Rachel Victoria, and Julian Brave NoiseCat for helping to humanise Oxford as we attempted to decolonise it too.

I give also thanks to the many Oxford resident community activists outside the university—Junie James, Sister Pat Green, Chaka Artwell, Dan Glazebrook, and Angelique Bayley—for keeping me grounded.

I thank my readers Michael Kebede, Claudio Sopranzetti, Imaobong Umoren, Musab Younis, Lloyd Pratt, Pekka Hämäläinen, Mara Keire, Kristin Hoganson, and the American History Graduate Seminar at the Rothermere American Institute, who all gave valuable feedback on individual chapters.

I thank my atheist *padrino*, Ricardo Ortiz-Perez, for visiting me in Oxford and teaching me so much about working-class politics on so many different levels and historical settings.

I thank my mother for her tireless help with editing my chapters...and for raising me! I simply would not be the person I am without her wellspring of warmth, encouragement, and love. A poem about my love, thanks, and spiritual debt to her would cost a million epic verses.

Finally, I give a big thanks to my life companion and partner Anastassia Baichorova, for her rock-solid loyalty, organisation, determination, and thoughtful and discerning feedback. I thank her for supporting my participation in various activist projects and for joining with me in them. I would never have applied for a doctoral degree at Oxford without her urging, one of the many loving and intelligent suggestions of hers that has made me a better person.

In Loving Memory of
Kwame Ajamu Montsho Somburu (1934-2016)
One of Harlem's most memorable, knowledgeable, and dedicated revolutionaries.

Preface: The Racial Politics of Typography

In the early twentieth century, well-known figures like W.E.B. Dubois, Hubert Harrison, and Robert R. Moton fought for the capitalization of the ‘n’ in the printed word ‘Negro.’ They felt that because the group that is today most commonly referred to as “African-American” formed a distinct ethno-racial minority in the United States, it deserved to have its name capitalized, much like Jewish, Italian, or Irish people did. As a term of racial classification, “Negro” in many ways corresponded to Caucasian, whose capitalization was not controversial. Although most newspapers did not capitalize the ‘n’ in the word ‘negro’ in 1900, by the 1930s many mainstream publications and newspapers had changed their editorial policy. The *New York Times*, for example, began to capitalise the ‘n’ in ‘Negro’ on the grounds that “it is an act in recognition of racial self-respect for those who have been for generations in ‘the lower case’.”¹

In the modern period, the Spanish-derived word *Negro* is no longer used, having been replaced with its English equivalent. For the same reason to that stated above, I choose to capitalize the ‘b’ in “Black” when referring to this group. I do this not only to pay respect to the previous struggle for typographical dignity, but also as an analogous contemporary assertion of dignity as against the status of inferiority that continues today in new forms for people of African descent in the United States and beyond.

¹ ‘Negro with a capital ‘N’,’ *New York Times*, 7 Mar 1930: 20.

List of Abbreviations

ABB – African Blood Brotherhood

AFL – American Federation of Labor

ALP – Alain Locke Papers, Howard University

EC – Executive Committee of the Socialist Party's New York Local

HHP – The Hubert Harrison Papers, Columbia University

HHR – J. Perry (ed.) and H. Harrison, *A Hubert Harrison Reader* (Wesleyan, 2001).

ICUL – International Colored Unity League

IWW – Industrial Workers of the World

MGP – R. Hill (ed.), *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vols. 1-11*. (Berkeley: 1983).

NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

UNIA – Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League

WAA – H. Harrison, *When Africa Awakes*, (New York, 1920).

Introduction:

The Impact of Hubert Henry Harrison on Black Radicalism

Hubert Henry Harrison...was not only perhaps the foremost Afro-American intellect of his time, but one of America's greatest minds. No one worked more seriously and indefatigably to enlighten his fellowmen; none of the Afro-American leaders of his time had a saner and more effective program but others, unquestionably his inferiors, received the recognition that was his due. Even today...a very small proportion of the Negro intelligentsia has ever heard of him.

--J.A. Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color* (1947)¹

Independent Black journalist and historian J.A. Rogers was contemporary and friend of Hubert Harrison who wrote the above passage in a two-volume work twenty years after Harrison's passing in a book entitled *World's Great Men of Color*.² Focusing on notable African-descended figures throughout human history, his chapter on Harrison followed chapters on other leading Black figures of the early twentieth century including Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Although his words are nearly 70 years old, Rogers' estimate remains largely true to this day. On the one hand, Hubert Henry Harrison (1883-1927) exerted a titanic ideological, cultural, and political influence on

¹ J.A. Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color Vol. 2*, (New York, 1947), p. 611.

² T. Asukile, 'The Harlem Friendship of Joel Augustus Rogers (1880-1966) and Hubert Henry Harrison (1883-1927)', *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2010.

Black life during his lifetime. On the other hand, his impact and legacy have been largely forgotten. While Harrison has in recent years begun to be rediscovered, this thesis aims to interpret and analyse the impact of this orator, journalist, educator, and unsung trailblazer of African-American history.

Above all else, Hubert Harrison spearheaded the New Negro movement in Harlem, which formed a key node of the international Black political awakening of the early twentieth century. Harrison's Liberty League of Negro-Americans and *Voice* represented the first organisation and newspaper of the movement, and the national Liberty Congress of Negro-Americans that he chaired in 1918 comprised the only organisationally-independent national gathering of Black dissidents during the heady days of World War I. Building on the groundwork laid by such paradigm-shifting figures as Ida B. Wells, T. Thomas Fortune, William Monroe Trotter, and W.E.B. Du Bois, Harrison advanced a new model of mass-movement oriented, bottom-up, and consistently anti-imperialist Black radicalism.

As a cultivator of New Negro consciousness in the Black 'Mecca' of Harlem, Harrison also exerted a decisive influence on Marcus Garvey's rise to prominence as the most popular champion of Black racial pride internationally in the 1920s. Many of the key ideological, cultural, and organizational components of what became Garveyism came straight out of Harrison's Liberty League. In fact, Harrison's influence on Garvey led to the emergence of the largest single international movement of Black people in history. In addition, as editor of the premier global Black newspaper the *Negro World*, Harrison symbolised the class-conscious wing of Garvey's Universal Negro

Improvement Association, giving voice to the radically internationalist and anti-capitalist tendencies within it.

Harrison's most lasting impact came by way of his prodigious work as an educator. In particular, he established in Harlem the socio-cultural institution of soapbox oratory that some residents came to call the "Outdoor University."³ Perched on his stepladder at 135th street and Lenox Avenue, Harrison's subject matter ranged across such topics as sociology, English literature, evolutionary biology, theological criticism, ancient African civilisations, sexuality, and global geopolitics. In addition to his outdoor soapbox speaking, Harrison taught courses indoors in labour economics, comparative religion, world problems of race, and embryology. As William Pickens, field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) put it, Harrison was "a 'walking cyclopedia' of current human facts" and it made no difference whether he spoke about "Alice in Wonderland or the most extensive work of H.G. Wells; about the lightest shadows of Edgar Allen Poe or the heaviest depths of Kant; about music, or art, or science, or political history."⁴ Harrison's street corner oratory was so popular that ordinary people regularly turned out to hear him in numbers large enough to block traffic.⁵

'The Foremost Afro-American Intellect *of His Time*': Black America in the Early Twentieth Century

³ E. Brown, 'A Brief History of the Harlem Unitarian Church', 11 Sept 1949, E.E. Brown Papers, Unitarian Universalist Association Archives, Boston.

⁴ W. Pickens, 'Hubert Harrison: Philosopher of Harlem', *Amsterdam News*, 7 Feb 1923: 12.

⁵ W. Pickens, 'Evolution Discussed On Harlem Streets', *Associated Negro Press*, August 23, 1926.

Hubert Henry Harrison was born in 1883 to labouring-class parents of unmixed African ancestry on the Caribbean island of St. Croix. Harrison obtained a ninth grade education in the Danish colony as well as some religious training in the Anglican Church.⁶ After his mother died in 1899, he sought out better life prospects in the United States, joining a wave of tens of thousands of US-bound Caribbean immigrants who moved to New York City in the early twentieth century as a result of adverse economic conditions on their islands of origin. Thanks to the assistance of his sister Mary, he managed to relocate to New York City as a bright seventeen-year-old in 1900. In order to appreciate this young orphan's eventual impact, one must understand the context in which he lived.

In the early twentieth century, people racialised as Black in the United States lived under the grisly terror of racial oppression. Lynching, segregation, and political disfranchisement reigned supreme, particularly in the south, as the system of peonage and sharecropping circumscribed the economic situation of most African-Americans. In the north, historians have recently uncovered a shocking, albeit long-hidden history of white-supremacist municipal racial 'cleansing' between 1890 and 1940 and the creation of thousands of all-white "sundown towns."⁷ Many of these towns emerged from the nationwide epidemic of so-called "race riots" in which white mobs perpetrated horrific pogroms, property destruction, and other terrorising attacks against entire Black communities.⁸ Generally speaking, lynching and mob attacks were different regional

⁶ J. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: the Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*, (New York, 2009), p. 39-46.

⁷ E. Jaspin, *Buried in the Bitter Waters: the Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America*, (New York, 2007). J. Loewen, *Sundown Towns*, (New York, 2005).

⁸ White mobs attacked Black communities in East St. Louis in 1917, Philadelphia in 1918, Knoxville, Tennessee Washington, D.C., and Chicago Charleston, South Carolina, Longview, Texas, Omaha, Nebraska, San Francisco, California, Bisbee, Arizona, El Dorado and Elaine, Arkansas, Bogalusa, Louisiana, Montgomery, Alabama, Pickens, Vicksburg, and Ellisville, Mississippi, Lake City, Florida,

weapons of oppression. As Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal put it, “lynching was primarily a rural weapon which was characteristic of the South” whereas white “riots were an urban weapon and characteristic of the North.”⁹ As a result of these conditions in the north and south, untold numbers of African-Americans taking direct action in the form of what historian James Loewen called a “Great Retreat” from northern rural and small towns to big cities, alongside the better-known “Great Migration” from the Jim Crow south to northern urban centres like Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York.¹⁰

Alongside unremitting oppression and anti-Black violence, the late 19th and early 20th century also saw the emergence of a new, post-Reconstruction generation of Black resistance to racial oppression. Ida B. Wells, for example, founded and led a fierce anti-lynching movement from the beginning of the 1890s.¹¹ T. Thomas Fortune founded the National Afro-American League in 1890 to contest the ill treatment of African Americans.¹² William Monroe Trotter and W.E.B. Du Bois founded the Niagara movement in 1905, which eventually gave way to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1910.¹³ The National Association of Colored

Gary, IN, at least seven cities in Georgia, Corbin, KY, Norfolk, VA, and New London, CT in 1919. C. McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America*, (New York, 2011). D.F. Krugler, *1919, The Year of Racial Violence*, (New York, 2015). J. Voogd, *Race Riots and Resistance: the Red Summer of 1919*, (New York, 2008). C.V. Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, (Baton Rouge, 1971 c1951), p. 351.

⁹ G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1962), p. 566.

¹⁰ While “Great Retreat” comprises an notable first attempt to conceptually distinguish the phenomenon in question from the “Great Migration,” it remains problematic for at least two reasons. First, it implies that Black people fleeing the Jim Crow south were somehow *not* ‘in retreat.’ Secondly, “Great Retreat” (like its migration-focused counterpart) comes across as a rather grandiose and almost celebratory phrase to describe the massive and desperate scattering of African-American refugees fleeing a decades-long, nationwide epidemic of pogroms and other mechanisms of white racial cleansing. See J. Loewen, *Sundown Towns* and E. Jaspin, *Buried in the Bitter Waters*, and C. Lumpkins, *American Pogrom: The East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics* (Athens, 2008).

¹¹ I.B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago, 1970).

¹² E.L. Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune: Militant Journalist* (Chicago, 1972).

¹³ S. Fox, *Guardian of Boston* (New York, 1970).

Women's Clubs emerged in 1896 to give greater voice and organizational strength to Black women who shared the motto of "lifting as we climb."¹⁴ Working-class Black women in the south developed social networks, built community institutions, went on strike, and deployed an arsenal of tactics to resist their racial, economic, and gendered subjugation.¹⁵ All across the country Black people exercised their agency in resisting oppression in large and small, collective and individual ways.

While Black life in the Caribbean was ultimately rooted in the history of European trans-Atlantic enslavement, Harrison's native St. Croix (like the rest of the Caribbean islands) lacked the phenomenon of lynching, Ku Klux Klan-style terrorism, and violent white racism that characterised the United States.¹⁶ For that reason, the encounter of Caribbean migrants like Harrison with the strict US regime of racial oppression would comprise a major factor in their political radicalisation.¹⁷

This dynamic period of African-American history, coinciding with what historian Rayford Logan called the "nadir" in race relations at the turn of the century, took place alongside large-scale industrial and technological transformations.¹⁸ Booker T. Washington's speech at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition in 1895 gave a Black voice to the "new south" vision of economic development taking place as many African-American workers moved from sharecropping or domestic work to sawmills, tobacco

¹⁴ D.G. White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York, 1999)

¹⁵ T. Hunter. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1997).

¹⁶ In the United States, poor and working-class whites formed a social control buffer between Black labour and white capital. In the Anglophone Caribbean, by contrast, a middle-class Black or Brown social layer performed this function. There, whites were a tiny minority and therefore relied upon socio-economic promotion of non-whites into positions social management and administrative control. For this reason, the construction and function of race, though based on white superiority in both cases, remained fundamentally different. For more on this, see T.W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race Vol. 2*, (London, 2012).

¹⁷ For more on Caribbean migration and the racial aspect of the radicalisation of Caribbean migrants in this period, see W. James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean radicalism in American, 1900-1932* (London, 1997), esp. CHs 1-3.

¹⁸ R.W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York, 1954).

stemming, railroad construction, and various other industrialised occupations under Jim Crow conditions of life and work.¹⁹ Meanwhile world-historic technological changes emerged with the rise of alternating current (AC) electricity and, by the 1920s, commercial radio.²⁰

Alongside new industry and technology came social, cultural, and political changes. By 1915, there had arisen an explicit and millenarian talk of the “New Politics” which would broaden the boundaries of American democracy, a “New Woman” who would be free to work outside the home and determine her own life and sexuality, a “New Psychology” which would free the human personality through Sigmund Freud’s novel method of psychoanalysis. The creative spirit of the age found expression in a “New Art” that took the form of Cubism, Expressionism, Surrealism, and other modernist impulses, and a “New Theatre” that addressed serious political and social issues rather than the sentimental and romantic dramas of the Victorian era.²¹ Even the president, Woodrow Wilson, spoke of a “New Freedom” in a book by the same name that he published during his first year in office.²²

It is in this context that Harrison came to embody the historic break with moderate “Old Crowd” Black leaders and the emergence of a “New Negro” who exhibited an uncompromising racial pride and militant political consciousness.²³ Thus, Harrison’s turn-of-the-century transition from the tiny agricultural island of St. Croix to the vast megalopolis of Manhattan was not only a geographical move, but also a kind of

¹⁹ J. Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labour*, (New York, 1998), p. 302.

²⁰ W.B. Carlson, *Tesla: Inventor of the Electrical Age* (Princeton, 2013).

²¹ A. Heller and L. Rudnick (eds.), *1915: The Cultural Moment: The New Politics, the New Woman, the New Psychology, the New Art, and the New Theatre in America*, (New Brunswick, 1991).

²² W. Wilson, *The New Freedom*, (New York, 1913).

²³ H. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 76.

diachronic historical leap from the rural agrarian to the urban modern world.²⁴ He also catalysed a generational leap forward in political consciousness.

Upon his arrival in New York City in 1900, Harrison took up residence with his sister Mary in the majority-Black San Juan Hill area on West 62nd street. Housing conditions there were oppressive and educational opportunities for Blacks were extremely limited, as the first evening high school in the “Negro district” would not be established until 1905.²⁵ His sister greatly aided in getting him settled, a common experience for migrants like Harrison. As literary scholar Louis Parascandola has pointed out, Caribbean women made critical contributions to the social network of the immigrant community, especially when they were the first members of their families to arrive in the US. Caribbean-born people like Cyril Briggs, W.A. Domingo, and Richard B. Moore, who would become important Harlem-based activists, all joined and were supported by women family members when they first got to the United States.²⁶

After seven years in Manhattan’s west side San Juan Hill neighbourhood, Harrison moved to Harlem in 1907, which would become the largest and most concentrated Black neighbourhood in New York City between 1900 and 1930.²⁷ In addition to family support networks, benevolent associations like the American West Indian Association, New York Colored Mission, and the White Rose Home for Colored Girls played key roles in finding jobs and housing for so many newly-arrived Black migrants to the city.²⁸ Real estate firms like Philip Payton’s Afro-American Realty

²⁴ As his biographer put it, Harrison’s life “truly [moved] from the nineteenth century to the twentieth.” Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 52.

²⁵ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, 54-55.

²⁶ L. J. Parascandola (ed.), “*Look for Me All Around You*”: *Anglophone Caribbean Immigrants in the Harlem Renaissance*, (Detroit, 2005), p. 9.

²⁷ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 87.

²⁸ I. Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*, p. 44, 49.

Company laid the groundwork for some \$2 million in Black property ownership in Harlem by 1928.²⁹ Various Black churches like the African Orthodox Church, AME Episcopal ‘Mother Zion’, Abyssinian Baptist, Bethel AME, the Harlem Community Church, and St. Marks Methodist Episcopal all found a home in the ‘Black Manhattan’ uptown.³⁰

Because Black people had to work throughout the city but were *de facto* barred from access to housing in most neighbourhoods, Harlem became the epicenter of New York City’s Black community. This led to an economic life based on, as historian Joyce Moore-Turner put it, “two Harlems: one of the day and one of the night.” During the day, white business owners and clerks, public school teachers, policemen, doctors for the Harlem hospital, restaurateurs, salesmen, and truck drivers came uptown. Black Harlem residents who weren’t working on railroads and steamships went downtown by day to work as elevator operators, bellhops, domestics, seamstresses, and other service jobs. During the night, white New Yorkers from downtown came up to hop from cabaret to cabaret, listen to blues and jazz, and engage in more salacious forms of entertainment. Black Harlemites in the entertainment industry worked as musicians, actors, dancers, sex workers, bartenders, and waiters.³¹

Thanks to the influx of African-American migrants from the south and Afro-Caribbean migrants from the Antilles, Harlem became its own hub of economic, cultural, and international exchange. Fraternal orders like the Prince Hall Masons, the Odd Fellows, and the Elks grew in Harlem and fostered mutual economic protection societies as they helped to forge Black class and gender identities and solidarities through their

²⁹ Ibid., p. 42-43.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

³¹ J.M. Turner. *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana, 2005), p. 28.

rituals of brotherhood.³² Meanwhile, ethnic voluntary associations for Virgin Islanders, Jamaicans, Bermudians, and Barbadians sprang up. Not to mention the proliferation of Black political formations like the Liberty League of Negro-Americans, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the African Blood Brotherhood, and the Harlem Tenants League. By 1930, Harlemites had built and cultivated such a rich tapestry of social and community institutions that writer, diplomat, and NAACP field organiser James Weldon Johnson could write, “throughout colored America, Harlem is the recognized Negro capital. Indeed, it is Mecca for the sightseer, the pleasure-seeker, the curious, the adventurous, the enterprising, the ambitious, and the talented of the entire Negro world.”³³

Hubert Harrison both taught and learned from this confluence of multiple currents of transnational migratory experience, social vibrancy, and multi-ethnic Afro-descended cultures. Thanks to New York City’s size, technological development, and cosmopolitan character, Harrison would cultivate and lead social movements that channelled radical ideas at a key node of global economic, social, and political transformation.

‘Even Today A Very Small Proportion...Has Ever Heard of Him’: Harrison in History and Historiography

Individual scholars and Harlem community members have certainly attempted to preserve Hubert Harrison’s memory. For example, following Harrison’s death at age forty-four in 1927, his friend and collaborator Rev. Ethelred Brown renamed his

³² J.W. Trotter, ‘African American Fraternal Associations in American History: An Introduction’, *Social Science History* Vol. 28, No. 3, Fall 2004: pp. 355-366.

³³ J.W. Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, (New York, 1930), p. 3.

Unitarian church the “Hubert Harrison Memorial Church.”³⁴ For a radically anti-Christian agnostic like Harrison to achieve a status tantamount to sainthood by a Black Church in Harlem gives a sense of the immense *spiritual* power he carried as he walked through that community.³⁵ Though perhaps the most institutional example, the Hubert Harrison Memorial Church would not be the last effort to keep Harrison’s memory alive.

In the 1960s, others like Harlem activist Richard B. Moore and Black studies professor Harold Cruse included Harrison in their writings about Harlem’s intellectual history.³⁶ In the 1970s, historian Philip Foner wrote Harrison back into the history of the Socialist Party at a time when few others seemed interested in Harrison’s legacy.³⁷ In the 1980s, historians Wilfred Samuels and Portia James published the first academic journal articles on Harrison, pan-African scholar John G. Jackson wrote a pamphlet on the “Black Socrates” for the American Atheists, and Jeff Perry completed the first doctoral dissertation on Harrison.³⁸ In the 1990s, various other scholars wrote Harrison-inclusive articles or book chapters on the New Negro movement and Black radicalism in Harlem.³⁹

³⁴ The HHMC hosted guest lectures by various Black activists, as a tribute to the life and legacy of its namesake. ‘Hubert Harrison Memorial Church’, *Amsterdam News*, 26 Dec 1928: 12. HHP box 16, folder 21.

³⁵ According to Wikipedia, the historical St. Hubert was the patron saint of hunters, mathematicians, opticians, and metalworkers. Due in part to pressure from atheistic radicals on the left and anti-Harrison conservatives on the right, the HHMC lasted only 9 years. E. Brown, ‘A Brief History of the Harlem Unitarian Church’, 11 Sept 1949, E.E. Brown Papers, Unitarian Universalist Association Archives, Boston.

³⁶ J.A. Rogers, *World’s Great Men of Color*, (New York, 1947). R.B. Moore, ‘Africa Conscious Harlem’, *Freedomways* 3 no. 3, (Summer 1963): 315-34. H. Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, (New York, 1967).

³⁷ P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II*, (Westport, 1977).

³⁸ W.D. Samuels, ‘Hubert H. Harrison and the ‘New Negro Manhood Movement.’’ *Afro-Americans in New York Life & History* 5.1, Jan 1981. P. James, ‘Hubert Harrison and the New Negro Movement’, *The Western Journal of Black Studies*. 13.2 (Summer 1989): 82-91. J.G. Jackson, *Hubert Henry Harrison: The Black Socrates* (Austin, 1987). J. Perry, ‘Hubert Henry Harrison, The ‘Father of Harlem Radicalism’: The Early Years: 1883 Through the Founding of the Liberty League and ‘THE VOICE’ in 1917’, (Ph.D. diss) Columbia University, 1986.

³⁹ E. Allen Jr., ‘The New Negro: Explorations in Identity and Social Consciousness, 1910-1922’ in A. Heller and L. Rudnick (eds.), *1915: The Cultural Moment: The New Politics, the New Woman, the New Psychology, the New Art, and the New Theatre in America*, (New Brunswick, 1991). I. Watkins-Owens,

Unfortunately, the aforementioned examples have been exceptions to the general rule of Harrison's general erasure in mainstream history and memory. For example, a recent survey of African-American history by Harvard University professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. makes *no mention* of Hubert Harrison.⁴⁰ Similarly, the University of Oxford's five-volume *Encyclopedia of African American History* mentions his name only four times, always in passing.⁴¹ As in the time of J.A. Rogers' 1947 tribute, Harrison at best remains a deeply underappreciated figure in American, African-American, and Afro-Diasporic history.

In recent years, a small but growing wave of interest in Harrison's life and legacy has begun to emerge, thanks above all to the tireless efforts of independent scholar and historian Jeffrey B. Perry.⁴² In particular, Perry has published the only book-length treatments of Harrison's life and writings in existence.⁴³ His book *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1919* comprises the first volume of a two-volume biography that formed the foundation of my own interest in exploring Harrison's achievements. Perry's work has exerted a great intellectual influence on me, particularly in terms of understanding Harrison's historical importance as a pioneer of Black radical praxis. At the same time, while Perry's book handles the personal and biographical

Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930 (Bloomington, 1996). J.H. Clarke, 'Introduction' in H. Harrison, *When Africa Awakes*, (Baltimore, 1997 c1920). W. James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, (London, 1999). J.M. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Urbana, 2005).

⁴⁰ Gates, Henry Louis. *Life Upon These Shores: Looking at African American History 1513-2008*. New York: Random House, 2011.

⁴¹ Finkelman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of African American History - 1896 to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

⁴² O. Power-Greene. 'No Negro Renaissance: Hubert H. Harrison and the Role of the New Negro Literary Critic', in J.O.G. Ogbar, *The Harlem Renaissance Revisited*, (Baltimore, 2010), p. 28. T. Asukile, 'The Harlem Friendship of Joel Augustus Rogers (1880-1966) and Hubert Henry Harrison (1883-1927)', *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 34.2, Jul 2010. S. Streeby, *Radical Sensations: World Movements, Violence, and Visual Culture* (Durham, 2013).

⁴³ J.B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: the Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1919* (New York, 2009). J.B. Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader*, (Wesleyan, 2001).

details of the first part of Harrison's life with great detail and sophistication, it ends with Harrison's chairmanship of the Liberty Congress of Negro-Americans in 1918. This leaves the latter part of Harrison's life, from 1919-1927, relatively under-explored, at least until he publishes the second volume. Perry's annotations in the *Hubert Harrison Reader* add useful context for some of the writings dating from the latter part of Harrison's life, but his comments are at once meticulous and concise. Both volumes demonstrate, among other things, that Harrison's wide-ranging political and intellectual experience cannot be captured in a single book, let alone a doctoral thesis.

This study overlaps with and builds upon Perry's momentous reclamation at the same time as it differs from his work in a number of ways. Primarily, if one likens Harrison to a tree, then Perry's work is primarily focused on the tree itself, whereas this study seeks to see the tree 'in the larger forest'. In other words, my thesis is more concerned with political and intellectual history than it is with biography in the traditional sense. Therefore, unlike Perry, the chapters that follow do not devote much space to subjects like Harrison's parents, his childhood in St. Croix, his friendships, or his relationship with his family. I do touch on these aspects of Harrison's personal life occasionally, but usually as a way to explain or contextualize the trajectory of his ideological and political evolution—and that of the wider world surrounding him.

A more obvious difference between my work and Perry's obtains in the realm of topic selection and perspective. As with other prolific historical figures like W.E.B. Du Bois, scholars working on Harrison inevitably gravitate toward those subjective dimensions of his life and thought which they find most compelling. This thesis is no different. Some of my work overlaps with, for example, the socialist history covered by

Perry and other scholars like Winston James. I felt this was necessary to establish the context and chronology for Harrison's subsequent political trajectory and to add further perspective on it, given that Harrison's tenure in the Socialist Party formed such a decisive moment in his political evolution. However, the majority of my thesis covers material that has either not been adequately addressed by Perry and others, or falls within the latter part of Harrison's life, about which very little scholarly work has been published in general. In particular, I use Harrison as a point of departure from which to take a fresh look at a number of topics like Harrison's role in the Garvey movement and Harrison's African politics, which Perry has not emphasized.

In chapter 1, I analyse Harrison's experience in the Socialist Party of America (SP). Harrison was the first Black socialist to articulate a historical materialist analysis of the "Negro question." He was also the first Black party member to systematically and publicly challenge the party's racial prejudices against African-Americans. He spearheaded the first official Black-led formation of the SP, the Coloured Socialist Club, which implemented a special outreach program for Black communities. Yet Socialist Party historiography has paid scant attention to him.⁴⁴ Even studies focusing on the party's treatment of the "Negro question" have, at best, mentioned him only in passing.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ I. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912*, (New York, 1952). D. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History*, (New York, 1955), A. Fried, *Socialism in America: from the Shakers to the Third International: A Documentary History*. (Garden City, 1970), J. Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925*, (New York, 1967), I. Howe, *Socialism and America*, (New York, 1985), and H.W. Morgan, *American Socialism 1900-1960*. (Englewood Cliffs, 1964). J. Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History* (Lincoln, 2015). J. Nichols, *The "S" Word: A Short History of an American Tradition...Socialism*. (London, 2011). The one exception to this trend, which recounts Harrison's role building the Colored Socialist Club for local NY, is P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II*, (Westport, 1977), esp. p. 204-18.

⁴⁵ R.L. Moore, 'Flawed Fraternity – American Socialist Response to the Negro, 1901-1912', *The Historian*, 1 Nov 1969. S. Miller, 'For Men Only: The Socialist Party of America and Issues of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Vol. 2, No. 3, New Perspectives on Socialism I (Jul., 2003), pp. 283-302. W.P. Jones, 'Nothing Special to Offer the Negro': Revisiting the "Debsian

Thanks to Winston James and Jeff Perry, Harrison's socialist experience and subsequent influence on Harlem Marxists has begun to enter the historiography of the Black-Red encounter.⁴⁶ My chapter builds on this work by systematically cataloguing Harrison's contributions to the socialist movement and historicising his battle with the perennial problem of white racism on the American left.

In chapter 2, I survey Harrison's development of the New Negro movement as a grassroots social movement for Black empowerment. Harrison established its first organization and newspaper in 1917, and chaired its first nation-wide congress the following year. Although short-lived, Harrison's efforts to build the Liberty Party as an electoral wing of the New Negro movement in 1920 comprised only the second attempt in US history to form an all-Black political party. And, in reaction to the Eurocentric internationalism of the white left, Harrison developed a new form of radical internationalism: the political theory of the "Colored International" as a global alliance of the colonised peoples in Africa, Asia, and the Americas against capitalism, imperialism, and white domination. Until very recently, histories of Black internationalism and Third Worldism elided Harrison's coloured internationalism and its significance.⁴⁷ For that

View of the Negro Question."', *International Labor and Working Class History*, No. 74, fall 2008: 212-224.

⁴⁶ W. James, 'Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America: On the Ideology and Travails of Afro-America's Socialist Pioneers, 1877-1930' in C.M. Payne and A. Green (eds.), *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*, (New York, 2003). J. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: the Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1919*, (New York, 2009). J.M. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Urbana, 2005). M. Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939*, (Chapel Hill, 2011). H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939*, (Trenton, 2013), p. 6-9.

⁴⁷ Examples that minimise or ignore Harrison include: M.O. West and W.G. Martin, *From Toussaint to Tupac: the Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, (Chapel Hill, 2009). V. Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, (New York, 2008). M.A. Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham, 2005). L. Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill, 2013). Recent exceptions that do include Harrison include B.H. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge, 2003) and M. Makalani, *In the*

reason, Harrison's global vision remains a unique and hitherto-neglected chapter in the history of radical internationalism.

In chapter 3, I argue that Harrison developed a modern epistemology that synthesised knowledge from scholarship and social movements on both sides of the colour line. I show his prodigious learning and mastery of a wide-range of subjects by his voracious appetite for reading, writing, and speaking. I then explore the significance of the tradition of outdoor stepladder speaking and street scholarship that Harrison established as a grassroots, community-based social infrastructure for cultivating a new intellectual and political culture in Harlem.⁴⁸ This outdoor oratorical tradition, combined with Harrison's indoor scholarly legacy, opens a window for understanding his philosophy of education, which went beyond the confines of the classroom to establish a radical model of free education of, by, and for the common people.

In chapter 4, I argue that Harrison's leadership of the New Negro movement represented a new mass-based and group-centred model of Black leadership, which stood in contrast to the industrial education model of the nineteenth century as well as the arts and letters of the liberal 'talented tenth'.⁴⁹ By analysing Harrison's clash with Du Bois over US entry into the First World War, I argue that Harrison's opposition to the war and refusal to 'close ranks' and remain silent on the special grievances of African Americans represented consistent and principled Black dissent. Finally, I locate Harrison's approach in the larger pantheon of distinguished Black leadership, including forebears like

Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939, (Chapel Hill, 2011).

⁴⁸ R.L. Crowder, 'The Historical Context and Political Significance Of Harlem's Street Scholar Community', *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Jan 2010: 45.

⁴⁹ W. Moses, *Creative Conflict in Africa-American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey*, (New York, 2004). J. James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals*, (New York, 1997).

Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells, as well as contemporaries like Booker T.

Washington and William Monroe Trotter.

In chapter 5, I focus on Harrison's relationship to the Garvey movement. I argue that Harrison and his Liberty League of Negro-Americans modelled the key ideological, cultural, and organisational components that proved decisive in growth of Garveyism into the largest international Black movement in history. Historians of the Garvey movement have recently deepened and broadened our understanding of Garveyism, both within and outside of the United States.⁵⁰ However, these newer studies, like the older Marcus-centric historiography have generally failed to appreciate how much Harrison and his Liberty League of Negro-Americans shaped the Garvey movement's content, trajectory, and growth.⁵¹ In this chapter, I also analyse his trenchant criticisms of Marcus Garvey, and the steps Harrison took—including from his influential position as editor of the

⁵⁰ For studies on Garveyism in the south, see M. Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: the Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South* (Chapel Hill, 2007), p. 82. C.N. Harold, *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban South, 1918-1942* (New York, 2007). For women in the Garvey movement, see U.Y. Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: the Life & Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill, 2002). T. Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-Africanist, Feminist, and Mrs. Marcus Garvey no. 1, or A Tale of Two Amies* (Dover, 2007). N. Assata, *Women in the Garvey Movement*, (Mitcham, 2008). For recent studies on the impact of Garveyism abroad, see A. Ewing, *Age of Garvey* (Princeton, 2014). F.A. Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, 2010).

⁵¹ T. Martin, *Race First: the Ideological and Organizational struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, 1976). R. Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion* (Trenton, 1988). E.C. Fax, *Garvey: The Story of A Pioneer Black Nationalist*. (New York, 1972). E.D. Cronon, *Black Moses: the story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison, 1955). R. Hill and B. Bair, *Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons*, (Los Angeles, 1987). M.M. Garvey and A.J. Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, (New York, 1926). E.U. Essien-Udom and A.J. Garvey (eds.), *More Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, (London, 1977). A.J. Garvey, *Garvey And Garveyism* (New York, 1970). A. Edwards, *Marcus Garvey, 1887-1940* (Port of Spain, 1967). L.S. Nembhard, *Trials and Triumphs of Marcus Garvey* (Millwood, 1978). E.D. Cronon (ed.), *Great Lives Observed: Marcus Garvey*, (Englewood Cliffs, 1973). T. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*, (Berkeley, 1971). J.H. Clarke (ed.), *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa* (New York, 1974). R. Hill, *Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vol. 1* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 210, n. 1. J. Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society*, (Baton Rouge, 1986). C. Grant, *Negro With A Hat* (London, 2008).

movement's *Negro World* newspaper—to try to move the UNIA in a more political, class-conscious, and anti-imperialist direction.

In chapter 6, I explore Harrison's African politics and his contribution to African consciousness in Harlem. Like Garvey movement history, the historiography of pan-Africanism has failed to include Harrison until very recently.⁵² I therefore take a close look at Harrison's distinctive and radical humility towards the African continent and its peoples, which formed a decisive break from the paternalistic and civilisationist mindset of nineteenth century Black nationalist thought. I argue Harrison's insistence that the role of Black people in the diaspora was not to teach but to *learn from* continental Africans presented a stark contrast to the most prominent of Black leaders of his day, even before his call for a territorial resolution of the land question for African-Americans.

In chapter 7, I demonstrate how this history of the New Negro movement has been largely overwritten, first by Alain Locke's 1925 *New Negro* anthology, and then by the similarly arts-and-culture-based "Harlem Renaissance" framework that emerged in the 1970s.⁵³ In the late 1990s and early 2000s, some scholars began to challenge this framework and re-assert the role of class radicalism and Black (inter)nationalism in the African-American literary output of the interwar period, but their narrative either ignored or underestimated the efforts of Hubert Harrison, who pioneered the original New Negro

⁵² C.L.R. James, *History of Negro Revolt*, (London, 1938). G. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa*. (London, 1956). C. Legum, *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide*, (London, 1962). I. Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*, (London, 1968). R. Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, (London, 1973). P. O. Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism : the Idea and Movement, 1776-1963*, (Washington D.C., 1982). A recent book on the history of Pan-Africanism which includes Harrison is H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: the Communist International, Africa, and the Diaspora, 1919-1939*, (Trenton, 2013).

⁵³ A. Locke (ed.), *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, (New York, 1925). N. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, (New York, 1971). D. L. Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, (New York, 1989, c1981).

movement in Harlem.⁵⁴ I argue that Harrison's critical assessment of the 'renaissance' phenomenon—combined with his deliberate erasure by its architects—poses an existential question for the arts-and-culture framework that has dominated the historiography on this period of Harlem's history since Locke.

Rehabilitating Harrison in these histories reveals him to be a key 'crystalliser' of the historic Black awakening of his age. Formations like the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the Garvey movement, the African Blood Brotherhood, and Black Communism all find a common ancestor in Harrison's Liberty-League of Negro Americans. Likewise with the new radical Black print culture of papers like the *Messenger*, the *Negro World*, and the *Crusader*, which all find a common ancestor in the *Voice*. The movement-building and socio-cultural tradition of street corner speaking in Harlem, carried forward from Marcus Garvey and A. Philip Randolph to Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Malcolm X, find a common ancestor in Harrison's 'Outdoor University'.⁵⁵ In short, he embodied the ground-breaking paradigm shifts taking place in Black identity, global consciousness, and New Negro politics.

Harrison's breakthroughs naturally drew on a wide range of political traditions and intellectual tributaries. The militant Black abolitionism of Frederick Douglass, the anti-lynching crusade of Ida B. Wells, the independent and outspoken Black journalism of T. Thomas Fortune, the classical Black nationalism of Edward Wilmot Blyden, Alexander Crummell, and John E. Bruce, and the European radicalism of Marxism,

⁵⁴ W. J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars*, (New York, 1999). A. Dawahare, *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature Between the Wars : A New Pandora's Box*, (Jackson, 2003). An exceptional book, which mentions Harrison and his erasure from Locke's famous *New Negro* anthology is B. Foley, *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro*, (Urbana, 2003).

⁵⁵ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 7-8.

anarchism, and anti-religious freethinkers of the nineteenth century all provided foundational elements in Harrison's working-class and radical Black modernism. For this reason, his restoration to the history of African-American life requires us to re-think and radically expand the intellectual and political framework with which we approach it in this period.

Harrison's relative under-appreciation raises a number of research questions that come into focus with this study: What looks different with Harrison reinstated in the history of the social movements in which he participated? What hidden corners does his field of vision expose and what does one learn by seeing them? How do Harrison's ideas, politics, and projects relate to those of other Black figures before, during, and after his time? What larger local, national, or international forces did he embody, synthesise, and propagate?

Harrison's vantage point illuminates multiple and overlapping historical continuities and conjunctures. For example, as a result of Harrison's efforts to organise Black workers, one can see how the Socialist Party's aim to become "the political expression of the economic interests of the workers" crashed, at least in part, on the rocks of its racial blindspot.⁵⁶ This development in turn contributed to the emphasis on racial consciousness and 'race first' emphasis of the subsequent New Negro movement that Harrison spearheaded. Thanks to Harrison's Liberty League of Negro-Americans, one can see how and where the New Negro movement's most famous symbol, Marcus Garvey, was able to find a model for building the largest single international organisation of Black people in history.

⁵⁶ 'Socialist Party Platform of 1912' *Socialist Campaign Book* 1912, re-printed in A. Fried, *Socialism in America*, p. 391.

Harrison offers a prime example of historian Robin D.G. Kelley's observation in *Freedom Dreams* that "revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement."⁵⁷

Harrison's inauguration of the tradition of street corner oratory in Harlem established a social infrastructure that would provide scaffolding for various movements, from Black socialism and communism to the 'street scholarly' African studies of a John Henrik Clarke. His vision of the 'Colored International' articulated the first anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and *anti-white-supremacist* internationalism in US history. It was but one of many of Harrison's freedom dreams.

Ultimately, each of the historiographies for the themes I engage with—the socialist left, the New Negro movement, Garveyism, pan-Africanism, and the Harlem Renaissance—have generally marginalized Hubert Harrison. Yet he figured centrally in all of them. Therefore by putting Harrison back into the picture, one gains access to a vantage point that bridges many of the divides between these disparate and often segregated sub-fields. In short, my study of Harrison offers a point of departure for a kind of 'unified field theory' of Black radicalism in early twentieth century Harlem.

Thanks to his wide-ranging intellect and prolific writings, Harrison's historical rehabilitation has bearing on a number of academic disciplines besides history. Harrison could easily be studied from many more angles: literary and theatre criticism, communication and media studies, education theory, modernist studies, epistemology, Black and Africana studies, American studies, Caribbean studies, political theory, decolonial studies, and cultural studies, to name a few. As for the discipline of history, the scholarly neglect of Harrison raises the inevitable question: How and why was he so thoroughly forgotten?

⁵⁷ R.D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, 2002), p. xi.

Given the intensity of anti-Black racism and anti-radicalism in the United States, Black radicalism has historically been a persecuted and elusive subject. On that level, one could argue that most of the Black radical figures of Harrison's day—from Grace Campbell and Benjamin Fletcher to George Washington Woodbey and W.A. Domingo—have been marginalized in American history in general and African-American history in particular. What is different about Harrison is his role as a pioneer and great influence on scores of others—a level of influence that is perhaps matched only by the depth of his erasure. Why and how could someone so influential be swept away?

I return to this question in the concluding chapter because I think it can be better answered after looking more closely at how significant—and subversive of the status quo—was Harrison's impact. For now, suffice it to say that upon his passing in 1927, a foreboding silence from certain key periodicals signalled that those with the power to ignore Harrison did just that. Harlem activist Hodge Kirnon, writing two months after Harrison's death, noted how the prominent race magazines—*the Messenger*, *the Crisis*, and *Opportunity*—all failed to run obituaries and how the absence of any mention of him had become a subject of popular discussion. “This concerted silence is ominous,” wrote Kirnon, “it does appear that there is something wrong somewhere.”⁵⁸ Something wrong indeed.

Harlem resident and Harrison collaborator Edgar Gray offered an explanation of that something. “Your big Negro newspapers and business houses, schools and other organizations who had positions allowed themselves to be so hateful that they would not hire [Harrison]. He died, yes, died for his convictions, but he died at 44, starved, underpaid, abused, hated by jealous men who feared the force of his mind and the

⁵⁸ H. Kirnon. ‘Kirnon Flays Monthly Magazines’, *New York News*, 28 Feb 1928. HHP box 18, folder 8.

immensity of his information.”⁵⁹ In addition to the repressive power of prominent institutions, Gray’s comment that Harrison died for his convictions also speaks to the suspicions that surrounded the circumstance of his death.⁶⁰ Harrison had no college degree and was humble to an extreme degree. Because he never hankered after publicity, it became easier for others to take credit for his accomplishments. Harrison also did not maintain any long-standing ties to any single organisation and was sharply critical of social forces like the Christian church, the Socialist Party, Booker T. Washington, the NAACP. As his biographer has noted, Harrison’s fearlessness in challenging prominent institutions and figures seems to have stung those who otherwise might have kept his memory alive.⁶¹

Sources and Methodology

In terms of documentary sources, the Hubert H. Harrison Papers at Columbia University contain a wealth of materials including letters of correspondence, newspaper clippings, and Harrison’s diaries and scrapbooks, all of which are rich with historical information and detail. This collection, which Jeff Perry compiled and organised, naturally formed my primary research archive.

In addition to the Hubert Harrison Papers, I consulted the personal papers and collections of various figures who knew Harrison or played important roles in Black life during his lifetime, such as the Alain Locke and Major Walter Loving papers at Howard

⁵⁹ E.M. Gray, ‘Why Great Negroes Die Young’, *New York News*, 31 Dec 1927.

⁶⁰ Perry has related to me that the Harrison family was always suspicious of Hubert’s death, which ostensibly occurred from a routine appendicitis operation.

⁶¹ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 13-14.

University, collections for John E. Bruce, Arturo Schomburg, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, *The Messenger* magazine, and Richard B. Moore at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and radical Black newspapers at the Library of Congress. I also drew upon the Socialist Party papers at New York University and archives in the New York Public Library.

Given Harrison's politics, the government took a keen interest in his activities and therefore I consulted military intelligence and Bureau of Investigation documents at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. in order to gain a sense of Harrison's significance in the eyes of the federal government. Because Harrison was such a prolific writer and activist, I consulted collections of documents from various organizations and periodicals that he published in, including the left-wing *New York Call* and *International Socialist Review*, and Black newspapers like the *Amsterdam News*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, and *Negro World*. Robert Hill's edited volumes of primary sources in *The Marcus Garvey Papers* and *The Crusader* also proved invaluable.

In crafting my narrative, I used a standard historical approach of doing textual analysis of newspapers, magazines, letters of correspondence, and situating them in their context by consulting the secondary literature on the time period and various personalities, organizations, and historical events that shaped it. At the same time, this thesis could as easily have emerged from a Black or Africana Studies department. For that reason, my work is also guided by the intellectual principles of that tradition: that scholarship on people of African descent must centre the experiences, thought, and culture of Black people, present Black people as active agents in the shaping of history, prioritise Africana intellectual traditions and theoretical frameworks, orient itself toward

critiquing manifestations of oppression, and contribute toward empowerment and liberation.⁶² To this end, I offer some reflections on Harrison's relevance today in the concluding chapter.

As I hope to show in this thesis, J.A. Rogers was right. Hubert Henry Harrison worked "seriously and indefatigably to enlighten" his community, but "others, unquestionably his inferiors, received the recognition that was his due."⁶³ If my research achieves nothing else, I hope it makes clear that Harrison's restoration to the history of Black radicalism opens the door to an expanded appreciation of its emancipatory potential.

⁶² This articulation of Black Studies principles is adapted from S. Keita Cha Jua, 'From Malcolm Little to El-Haji Malik El-Shabazz A Life of Revolutionary Transformation', the Black Scholar Forum on Manning Marable's *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*. Online URL: <http://brothermalcolm.net/marable/pdf/sundiata.pdf>, last accessed 13 April 2016.

⁶³ Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color Vol. 2*, p. 611.

Chapter 1

‘Socialism or Southernism?’: Hubert Harrison and the Socialist Party

Introduction

In 1878, the “Fireburn” labour rebellion led by Queen Mary and three other women erupted on St. Croix culminating in a general strike on the island the following year.¹ Hubert Harrison was born in 1883, a mere four years after the historic class struggle of his parents’ generation. This undoubtedly sowed the first seeds of labour radicalism in him, seeds that would blossom years later when Harrison took up his first full-time political job as an organiser in the Socialist Party of America (SP). Building upon an African-American socialist tradition that began in the nineteenth century, Harrison made distinguishing theoretical and practical contributions to the ‘party of the working class’ whose relevance would endure far beyond his tenure in it. Historian Winston James has pointed out that Harrison broke with the Christian orientation of his predecessors to become the first prominent secular and anti-clerical Black socialist, and that Harrison represents the first Black socialist to publicly criticise the party’s racial policy while still an active member.² Although not the first person in the US to undertake

¹ K.F. Olwig, *Small Islands, Large Questions: Society, Culture and Resistance in the post-Emancipation Caribbean* (London, 1995). P. Jensen, *From Serfdom to Fireburn and Strike: The History of Black Labor in the Danish West Indies 1848-1917* (Christiansted, 1998).

² W. James, ‘Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America’ in C.M. Payne and A. Green (eds.), *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*, (New York, 2003), p. 367-8. James lists Harrison’s support for armed self-defence as a contribution, but as I know, Harrison only began to

a sustained analysis of the relationship of Black people to socialism, Harrison wrote a series of articles outlining the first systematic historical materialist analysis *by a Black socialist* of the relationship between race and class in the United States.³ In addition, Harrison organised the first official Black-led organisational formation in the Socialist Party's history.⁴

Although Hubert Harrison emerged as the most prominent Black party leader during its peak numerical and political power in 1912, most historians of the Socialist Party have not even mentioned him.⁵ Even studies focusing specifically on the party's approach to "the Negro Question" have overlooked Harrison's innovative contributions.⁶ One exception is Philip Foner's *American Socialism and Black Americans*, which unearthed the main contours of Harrison's contributions to the party.⁷ Unfortunately, apart from Foner, the blindspot regarding Harrison in Socialist Party historiography continues to the present, with a recent 600-page "complete history" that mentions Harrison only twice, once in passing and one other time to grossly misrepresent his

explicitly call for armed self-defense in 1917, after he had left the socialists. Furthermore, this was a more widely-held political position, not limited just to Black socialists.

³ The first to undertake a sustained analysis of the class position of Black people in the United States seems to have been Isaac Rubinow. P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II*, (Westport, 1977), p. 202.

⁴ This is not to say that there had not been informal or unofficial Black-led socialist formations before. For example, the United Socialists comprised a Black formation that emerged independently of the official Socialist Party in Oklahoma in 1907. It maintained the right to expropriate property and even engaged in an armed shootout with local and federal authorities. J. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest* (Baton Rouge, 1978), p. 99.

⁵ The standard histories make no mention of Harrison. These include I. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912*, (New York, 1952). D. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History*, (New York, 1955), A. Fried, *Socialism in America: from the Shakers to the Third International: A Documentary History*. (Garden City, 1970), J. Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925*, (New York, 1967), I. Howe, *Socialism and America*, (New York, 1985), and H.W. Morgan, *American Socialism 1900-1960*. (Englewood Cliffs, 1964).

⁶ On the "Negro question," see R.L. Moore, 'Flawed Fraternity – American Socialist Response to the Negro, 1901-1912', *The Historian*, 1 Nov 1969. S. Miller, 'For Men Only: The Socialist Party of America and Issues of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Vol. 2, No. 3, New Perspectives on Socialism I (Jul., 2003), pp. 283-302.

⁷ Foner covers the Colored Socialist Club and some of Harrison's arguments on race and class. P. Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, p. 204-18.

views.⁸ Studies of the better-known Black socialist of this period, A. Philip Randolph, have all but ignored Harrison until quite recently.⁹

Though not focused primarily on the history of the Socialist Party, Winston James and Jeff Perry have done much to restore Harrison to his proper place within the Black socialist tradition.¹⁰ Evidence for their impact can be seen in more recent scholarship on the Black-Red encounter in which Harrison has begun to appear more prominently as an influence on the first generation of Black Communists.¹¹ This is a welcome corrective to the previous generation of scholarship on African-Americans and the Communist Party, which offered him (at best) only a passing mention.¹²

Harrison's tenure with the SP is relevant to this study because of the formative nature of his experience in the party. In particular, his failure to change the party's ways led him to break with the socialists and develop a "race first" perspective that would shape his political organising for the rest of his life. To appreciate Harrison's contributions to the socialist movement, I will begin with a brief overview of the status of

⁸ J. Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History* (Lincoln, 2015). J. Nichols, *The "S" Word: A Short History of an American Tradition...Socialism*. (London, 2011) mentions Harrison just once, in passing.

⁹ J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*, (New York, 1972). T. Kornweibel, *No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the Messenger, 1917-1928*, (Westport, 1975). P.F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge, 1990). Recent studies that go beyond mere passing mention of Harrison are C.L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (Urbana, 2010). A.E. Kersten, *Reframing Randolph: Labor, Black Freedom, and the Legacies of A. Philip Randolph* (New York, 2015).

¹⁰ W. James, 'Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America'. J. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: the Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1919*, (New York, 2009).

¹¹ J.M. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Urbana, 2005). M. Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939*, (Chapel Hill, 2011). H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939* (Trenton, 2013), p. 6-9.

¹² C. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London, 1983), M. Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana, 1983), R. Hill, *The Crusader Vols. 1-3* (New York, 1987), R.D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Depression*, (Chapel Hill, 1990), E.O. Hutchinson, *Blacks and Reds: Race and Class in Conflict, 1919-1990*, (East Lansing, 1995). M. Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African-Americans, 1917-1936*, (Jackson, 1998). G. Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: the Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*, (New York, 2008).

Black labour and race politics in the SP of the early 1900s. I then trace Harrison's case for organizing Black workers as socialists and the short-lived Coloured Socialist Club that came out of it. Finally, I will analyse the racial dimension of his break from the party as a way to explore the politics of race in the white left of the early twentieth century.

A Black Working-Class Immigrant at the Turn of the Century

Upon his arrival in New York, Harrison followed a path tread by most West Indian migrants to the city: working various service jobs to eke out a living. At different times, he earned a living as a messenger, a bellhop, elevator operator, and as a stock clerk in a Japanese-fan company.¹³ After some years of initially struggling to find steady work and pay rent, Harrison eventually secured a job as a clerk at the post office in 1907, which at last afforded him a more consistent and salaried employment. As a postal worker, Harrison chafed under the twelve-hour days, six to seven day workweeks, poor ventilation, and abusive managers. He also witnessed the tense labour organising competition between the pro-management United National Association of Post Office Clerks (Local No. 1) and the pro-worker National Federation of Post Office Clerks (Local no. 10), which was affiliated with the American Federation of Labour(AFL).¹⁴

Despite the oppressive working conditions, Harrison was grateful on some level to secure employment as a postal worker. Postal work was one of the better-paying jobs that a Black immigrant could hope for as the first decade of the twentieth century drew to

¹³ H. Harrison, diary entry, 28 Sept 1914. HHP box 9, diary 1. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 56.

¹⁴ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 83, 86.

a close, and he was consistently promoted for his diligent work ethic each year over the next four years.¹⁵

As industrialization proceeded apace in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the apartheid-like economic regime of the United States employed most Black migrants only at the bottom of the labour market. For example, Charles S. Johnson of the National Urban League pointed out that in 1925, the Black worker “may be a porter in charge of a sleeping car without a conductor, but never a conductor; he may be a policeman but not a fireman; a linotyper but not a motion picture operator; a glass annealer, but not a glass blower; a deck hand, but not a sailor.”¹⁶ Indeed by 1930, most Black people outside cities were concentrated in menial jobs like sharecropping, mining, and domestic service.¹⁷

Within cities, Black workers lacked opportunities for mobility and had no equivalent avenues comparable to “the Jews in the garment industry, Italians in grocery stores and contracting [and organized crime], the Chinese in laundries,” or the political patronage jobs of the Irish. Some urban Blacks could find work in the entertainment industry as musicians, actors, dancers, or comedians in cabarets, traveling vaudeville shows, and bands. However, with acts following the ethos of productions like Bert Williams and George Walker’s “The Real Coons,” these jobs often reproduced racist stereotypes that contributed to the degraded status of Black labour in the first place. In urban districts, illicit services such as gambling and sex work which accompanied the entertainment sector, and their disproportionate susceptibility to arrest by the police

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ J. Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labour*, (New York, 1998), p. 303-4.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 306.

compared with similar activities in other communities did not help to elevate the material or social status of Black workers.¹⁸

Although the growth of the Black industrial working class offered new opportunities for multi-racial union organising along industrial lines, in the first two decades of the twentieth century it often prompted white workers to cling ever more tightly to their racially-based economic privileges. For example, as the largest federation of organised labour (the AFL), generally abided by the exclusion of Black workers from its affiliates.¹⁹ In terms of housing and geographical space, white workers in small towns across the country engaged in hysterical mob attacks and pogroms against Black communities, culminating in the formation of thousands of all-white “sundown towns.”²⁰ Meanwhile, Jim Crow laws affected disenfranchisement and segregation, and the coercive mechanism of the lynch rope haunted the African-American psyche, particularly in southern Black communities.

In this context, Harrison wrote a pair of op-ed pieces in the *New York Sun* in December of 1910, which defended progressive Black critics of Booker T. Washington, the powerful president of the Tuskegee Institute and a nation-wide “Tuskegee Machine” of ideological repression inside the Black community which had achieved nearly full-spectrum dominance by 1900.²¹ Washington had recently claimed while traveling in London that the south offered better opportunities for Blacks “than almost any other

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 318.

¹⁹ In the first two decades of the twentieth century, labour organizations open to Black workers were few and far between. They included the Industrial Workers of the World, the United Mine Workers, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers in Louisiana, and the International Longshoremen’s Association in New Orleans. But most of these ‘integrated’ unions failed to challenge the racially-discriminatory divisions of labour within their industries. E. Arnesen (ed.), *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History Vol. 1*, (New York, 2007), p. 248.

²⁰ J. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York, 2005).

²¹ L. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York, 1972), p. 254.

country in the world.”²² Harrison’s response used numerous facts and simple logic to argue that insisting on the real grievances of the race and fighting against them was a better course of action than the denial-based approach that Washington articulated.²³ In retaliation, the Black Tuskegee-aligned Republican party official Charles Anderson arranged for Harrison to be fired from his job at the post office. Given Harrison’s exemplary workplace performance record, this was an unequivocally underhanded and vindictive act of the Tuskegee Machine.²⁴ But far from silencing Harrison, the termination in 1911 seems to have fuelled his growing interest in radical politics, leading him to join the Socialist Party as a full-time speaker and organiser.

According to Jeff Perry, Harrison joined the party for many reasons. Foremost among these was an intellectual interest in socialism, which emerged from his wide reading in economics and Single Tax movement literature.²⁵ As a working-class immigrant, he undoubtedly also found it attractive for its radicalism with respect to the cause of labour and numerous immigrant members. As a leading proponent of the anti-religious *Freethought* movement, Harrison also undoubtedly appreciated that the party had a secular approach with many freethinkers in its ranks.²⁶ An obvious factor in his decision to become a full-time party organiser was his need for a job following his termination from the post office. Additional factors, such as socialism’s application of science and reason and its autonomy-positive approach to women and foreigners, also

²² Perry, *HHR*, p. 164.

²³ H. Harrison, ‘Insistence upon Its Real Grievances the Only Course for the Race’, *New York Sun*, 8 Dec 1910: 8.

²⁴ See Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 132-4.

²⁵ A.N. Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, (Princeton, 1916).

²⁶ *Freethought* was an intellectual movement for secularism advanced by thinkers who favoured reason, empirical evidence, and logic over theology, faith, and the Christian church. It counted various agnostics, atheists, and other critics of religion in its ranks. For more, see S. Jacoby, *Freethinker: A History of American Secularism* (New York, 2004).

likely attracted him to the party.²⁷ The most distinguishing line of difference that shaped Harrison's experience in the party was the colour line, so before delving into Harrison's contributions, I review in brief some context regarding the Socialist Party's racial politics.

Race Politics in the Early History of the Socialist Party

Formed in 1901 out of a merger between the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Party of America steadily grew in the first decade of the twentieth century to become perhaps the largest class struggle-based political party in US history.²⁸ By 1912, it boasted over 100,000 members, with over a thousand of them holding elected offices throughout the country. It had 323 newspapers, including the *Appeal to Reason* with a circulation of 761,000.²⁹ Ethno-linguistic associations of Italians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Poles, and Finns made up nearly a sixth of total party membership. It commanded the allegiance of exceptional women like Helen Keller, Margaret Sanger, Kate O'Hare, and Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, and featured a Women's National Committee. It attracted muckraking journalists like Upton Sinclair, John Reed, and Gustavus Myers, as well as NAACP founders like Charles Edward Russell, William English Walling, and Mary White Ovington. With moderate reformists and radical revolutionaries, northerners and southerners, immigrant and native-born

²⁷ Perry has presented in great detail the reasons for Harrison's interest in the Socialist Party. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 146-8.

²⁸ A. Fried (ed.), *Socialism in America: From the Shakers to the Third International, A Documentary History*, (Garden City, 1970), p. 12-15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

workers, the party Harrison joined was a “seething complex of diverse, often antipathetic, groups, persons, and political tendencies,” as historian Albert Fried put it.³⁰

Perhaps in part because the party maintained an overwhelmingly white American leadership, it featured markedly nativist politics. In one of the first book-length histories of the party in 1952, historian Ira Kipnis wrote “the only official statement on the rights of the foreign-born was one passed by the party’s national committee in 1907. It urged Socialists to stand for equal civil and political rights for all residents regardless of race or nativity.” On the face of it, this resolution appeared quite progressive for its time, but in reality, “nothing was ever done to implement this resolution. And the immigration controversy which developed in 1907...indicated that a good proportion of the party, anxious to win the support of A[merican].F[ederation]. of L[abour] leaders, had no desire for immigrants in the country, much less in the party.”³¹ To be more specific, the party apparently had no desire for *non-white* immigrants, since Finns, Italians, Germans, Jews, Poles, Russians and other socialists of European descent each had autonomous ethno-linguistic federations, newspapers, and even community centres of their own that were affiliated with the party. By contrast, the party generally wanted nothing to do with Asian immigrants, whom *Appeal to Reason* called the “Mongolian hordes” and the “yellow peril.”³² What about African-Americans?

Ida M. Raymond, the state secretary of the Socialist Party of Mississippi, provides a prime example of Southern socialist opinion on race. According to her, northerners could not understand the “Negro question” in the south because northern Blacks represented mostly “the better class of colored people,” who “know their position and do

³⁰ Ibid. p. 387.

³¹ I. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York, 1952), p. 130.

³² D. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, (New York, 1955), p. 43-49.

not presume to step outside of that line.” Black people in the south, by contrast, were “worse than the ‘Uncle Tom’ of slavery days” because they were “always scheming whereby they may get the advantage of the white man.” She went even further. The south, she pleaded, “has had a taste of what the negroes would do if they were to be allowed full political rights accorded them by the Constitution, and can you blame them if they, remembering those awful days [of Reconstruction], should fear a repetition of the time when the Ku Klux Klan had to take matters in their own hands and save their women, their homes, and their country from the terrible outrages that were perpetrated by the Negroes as long as they were allowed the constitutional rights without limitation?”³³ Raymond here displayed the typical white-southernist narrative about Reconstruction, one that was indistinguishable to that of far less “progressive” Southern whites. That a sitting state secretary of the party could so publically and unapologetically praise the Ku Klux Klan provides ample explanation for why so few Black workers identified with socialism.³⁴

Like their southern counterparts, some northern-based party’s leaders held openly racist views about Black people. One wing of the party “declared that the whites disliked the Negroes because Negroes were inferior, depraved degenerates who went ‘around raping women [and] children.’” Victor Berger, a German-speaking Jewish immigrant in Wisconsin and the first Socialist Party representative elected to the United States

³³ Raymond, Ida M. “A Southern Socialist on the Negro Question.” *The New Review*, no. 12 (December 1913), also quoted in Perry Vol. 1, p. 214.

³⁴ Though the editors of *The New Review* had previously published Harrison’s and Du Bois’s articles on the topic of “Socialism the Negro,” they refused to publish Harrison’s response to Raymond. After pointing out her factual error—that the Klan was founded in 1865, three years *before* Blacks in the south got voting rights—Harrison pointed out that as long as Southern white socialists maintained their racial superiority complex, “we shall have to keep from saying that Socialism stands for the full civic and political equality of all workers.” The editors’ refusal to print such a sentiment spoke to the difficulty of even having a free and open debate about race, even in the pages of a left-leaning socialist journal. H. Harrison, ‘Southern Socialists and the Ku Klux Klan’, letter to the editor of the *New Review*. Perry, *HHR*, p. 76.

Congress, declared “that the free contact with the whites has led to the further degeneration of the negroes” and that white women “who were ‘depraved’ enough to associate with Negroes only did so because capitalism prevented them from earning a living ‘in a natural way.’”³⁵ With attitudes like this featuring so prominently, it is not surprising that, according to Kipnis, “there is no record that the party ever actively opposed discrimination against Negroes from 1901 to 1912.”³⁶ Of course, anti-Black positions were not the only ones in the party regarding African Americans.

Given the historic north-south divide in US history, perhaps it is not surprising that the most interest in African American rights seems to have come from the north. For example, a Russian Jewish socialist in New York City named Isaac Rubinow called for greater attention to the “Negro problem,” writing a series of fifteen articles in the *International Socialist Review* that concluded with “a challenge to the party about whether it would be wise enough to address the issue” of race prejudice.³⁷ Apparently, the only positive response came from local New York, even though “prior to 1911...local New York never once discussed the recruiting of Negroes, nor did it raise any specific demands of interest to blacks.” According to historian Philip Foner, only two branches—5 and 7 of Harlem—had more than one or two Black members at the time.³⁸

Similar to Rubinow, the most famous left-wing leader and perennial SP candidate for president Eugene V. Debs, opposed discrimination and called on Black workers “to

³⁵ Kipnis, p. 132.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ As early as 1904, Rubinow had written to Du Bois after seeing a report of a speech Du Bois gave regarding the economic side of the “Negro question.” Rubinow argued that the foundation of race prejudice was to be found in economic exploitation and that the emancipation of Black people was inseparable from the emancipation of the “whole working class.” Rubinow to Du Bois, 10 Nov 1904, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts. Online, URL: <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/html/mums312-b005-i048.html>. Last accessed 13 February 2015.

³⁸ Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, p. 204.

reject the false doctrines of ‘meekness and humility.’” He had refused to speak to segregated party branches in the South and welcomed African Americans to the labour and socialist movement as the best path racial equality. Yet even this prominent left-wing leader insisted that the Socialist Party had “nothing special to offer the Negro” on the grounds that “the class struggle is colorless.”³⁹ Consequently, Debs did little to mobilize the party to fight against lynching, Black disfranchisement, or other specific manifestations of racial oppression faced by Black workers.⁴⁰

◇ According to Kipnis, the left wing of the Socialist Party generally believed that the South should not be permitted to build segregated locals, that Southern Socialists should fight to abolish race prejudice and engage in active propaganda and organizational outreach to Black workers.⁴¹ Other historians have contested this view, citing racist left-wing party leaders like Jack London and Ernest Unterman, and anti-prejudice moderates like Isaac Rubinow. According to historian R.L. Moore, “the left wing of the party harbored several of the most virulently racist socialists” and therefore, “lines drawn on the Negro question simply did not conform to lines drawn on questions of Marxist theory and tactics.”⁴² Yet even if Kipnis’ contention about the left wing was true, the left did not control the party machinery. Debs, for example, avoided the struggles of inner-party leadership, refusing to participate in the conventions that formulated party priorities, policies, and practices at a national level.⁴³

³⁹ E.V. Debs, ‘The Negro in the Class Struggle’, *International Socialist Review*, Nov 1903, re-printed in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, (New York, 1948).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 133-134.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² R. L. Moore, ‘Flawed Fraternity—American Socialist Response to the Negro, 1901-1912’, *The Historian*, 1 Nov 1969, p. 16.

⁴³ R. Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs* (New Brunswick, 1949), p. 308.

‘The Negro and Socialism’: Harrison’s Case For Recruiting Black Workers

Given this context, Hubert Harrison found himself uniquely positioned to advance a different approach to the so-called “Negro question.” In 1911-1912, he wrote a five part series of articles on ‘The Negro and Socialism’ for local New York’s newspaper *The New York Call* and a three-part series for the nationally-distributed and Chicago-based *International Socialist Review*, which articulated the key elements of his case for building the socialist movement in Black communities.⁴⁴ Overall, the series represented two of Harrison’s signal contributions to the socialist movement: the first systematic and historical materialist analysis of race and class by a Black socialist and the first public challenge to the party on its racial politics. Rather than recount each detail of the articles in his series, I will instead summarise his arguments on each of these themes.

Contribution #1: Black Workers in the Class Struggle

Harrison’s starting point concerned the class position of African-Americans. As he put it, “the ten million Negroes of America form a group that is more essentially proletarian than any other American group.” Not only that, but Black workers were generally paid less than other workers for their labour and worked longer hours under worse conditions. Therefore, “the exploitation of the Negro worker is keener than that of any group of white workers in America.”⁴⁵ <my commentary>Pointing to the socio-economic position of Black people was a logical starting point for making a case to a

⁴⁴ Perry, *HHR*, p. 51-2.

⁴⁵ H. Harrison, ‘Socialism and the Negro’, *International Socialist Review* 13, July 1912.

party that denounced the capitalist system and conceived of itself as “the political expression of the economic interests of the workers.”⁴⁶

As for how Black workers got into their acutely proletarian position, Harrison argued that it comprised the historical outcome of slavery. He recounted the brutality of Christopher Columbus, the European conquest of the indigenous people of the Americas, and how the Europeans wanted a fresh supply of labour to produce wealth for them as a result. He argued that “since the Negroes were brought here as chattels, their social status was fixed by that fact.” In other words, the notion of Black people as sub-human arose from the need of Europeans to justify the enslavement of African labour.⁴⁷ Race prejudice was a product of economic subjection, a problem with “roots in slavery past and present.”⁴⁸

Harrison argued that race prejudice benefitted the ruling class and ultimately harmed both Black and white workers. He maintained that race prejudice harmed Black workers because they could get no protection from the courts, the ballot, and public opinion. Meanwhile, even white workers who enjoyed these protections could not demand higher wages, better conditions, or strike action without the employers threatening to replace them with Black workers. Therefore, white workers were also

⁴⁶ ‘Socialist Party Platform of 1912’ *Socialist Campaign Book* 1912, re-printed in A. Fried, *Socialism in America*, p. 391.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Harrison even pointed out that “the Indians of Florida and California had been enslaved and under English rule white men, women and children from Ireland had been sold into American slavery” and that “many of the English working class condemned to penal servitude shared the same fate.” This was to become a crucial piece of Eric Williams’ argument that it was the cheapness rather than the colour of the labourer that drove the Europeans toward enslaved labour from Africa. E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, (Chapel Hill, 1944).

⁴⁸ H. Harrison, ‘Socialism and the Negro’, *International Socialist Review* 13, July 1912: 65-68.

harmed by race prejudice. The capitalist class sustained race prejudice in order to keep wages low, strikes infrequent, and workers divided.⁴⁹

Harrison further argued that the ruling class deliberately fostered race prejudice by its control of the mass media. “The newspapers, owned by the capitalist class of the South, with their brother barons in the North, have entered upon a campaign of deprecation, vilification, calumny and lies in an endeavour to use the ignorance and superstition of the workers against workers.” He described how they do this by such tactics as playing up crimes allegedly committed by Black people, remaining silent about examples of Black ingenuity and African achievement, perpetuating the prejudiced notion of Black men as rapists, and telling other lies about African-Americans.⁵⁰

The core argument of those who defended the racial hierarchy was the theory that it emerged from biological differences between racial groups. For example, the December 1913 issue of the socialist monthly *New Review* published an article called “The Inferior Races From an Anthropologist’s Point of View,” by the associate editor of *American Anthropologist*, Robert Lowie. He argued that “biologically, it seems obvious that non-Caucasian races resemble more closely the non-human ancestors of man than do the Caucasians. Psychologically, the high civilization achieved by the white race seems to prove even more clearly its superiority over other varieties of *Homo sapiens*.” Lowie went on to argue for a fundamental difference between “the European and the darker races” on the grounds that Caucasians has larger brains than Pacific islanders, who in turn

⁴⁹ H. Harrison, ‘Race Prejudice –II’, *New York Call* (December 4, 1911): 6.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

had larger brains than “African Negroes.”⁵¹ Naturally, if racial differences were a matter of biology, then the ‘race prejudice is innate’ argument would be unanswerable.

In response to arguments of this sort, Harrison took the example of the Southern aristocrat, the “ablest defender” of the idea that race prejudice was innate. He questioned why the southern aristocrat with his inborn racial hatred preferred to have Black people them nursing his children and serving him. Harrison insinuated further that there was no innate repulsion between white men and Black women, or else there would not exist so many racially mixed people. There was nothing natural about race prejudice. After all, if it were innate, then it “would not be necessary to teach it to children by separate schools or to adults by separate cars.” Referring to Jim Crow laws, he reasoned that “every single fabric in the great wall of segregation which America is so laboriously building is an eloquent argument against the belief that race prejudice is innate. If it were innate it would never be necessary to bolster it up by legislative enactments.” Harrison adamantly rejected the idea that race prejudice was innate, insisting that race prejudice could not be justified “on scientific, social, or ethical grounds.”⁵²

Harrison placed the arguments supporting race prejudice into their social context. “The ideas, opinions and ideals dominant at any stage of human culture do not descend out of the air. They are created and shaped by the basic conditions of society.” He then cleverly took a Marxist argument about class and extended its logic to the domain of race. “Whenever large groups of men find profit in injustice to other men they will evolve a system of ethics to reconcile their minds to that injustice. They cannot continue to do wrong without calling that wrong right. That is why the capitalist class cannot even think

⁵¹ R. Lowie, ‘The Inferior Races’, *The New Review*, December 1913

⁵² H. Harrison, ‘Race Prejudice – II’.

justice so far as the workers are concerned. And that is why men who think that they can see a social or economic advantage for themselves in the degradation of the Negro will continue to think that degradation right.”⁵³ Because it was so profitable to exploit them, the American ruling class could not even ‘think justice’ for white workers *or* for African-Americans.

Harrison explained how maintaining Black economic subjection required maintaining political subjection and disfranchisement. “Politically,” he wrote, “the Negro is the touchstone of the modern democratic idea” because “the presence of the Negro puts our democracy to the proof and reveals the falsity of it.” He gave the example of the United States Declaration of Independence, which seemed to articulate a “splendid truth. But,” he noted, “the black man merely touched it and it became a splendid lie.” After all, he reasoned, if Blacks were to get political freedom, they would free themselves from economic exploitation and contempt, implying “a revolution...startling even to think of.”⁵⁴

From this, Harrison concluded that because “the mission of the Socialist Party is to free the working class from exploitation” and since “the Negro is the most ruthlessly exploited working class group in America,” then “the duty of the party to champion his cause is as clear as day.” This was the keystone of Harrison’s whole line of argument: the party had to extend the message of socialism to African-Americans. Not only that, but he argued the party needed to organise African Americans, teach them the tenets of socialism, and stimulate them with the hope of a new republic founded on the “brotherhood of man.” Citing Karl Marx, Harrison felt this was possible because “the

⁵³ H. Harrison, “Summary and Conclusion.” *New York Call*, December 26, 1911.

⁵⁴ H. Harrison, ‘The Negro and Socialism: I – The Negro Problem Stated’, *New York Call*, 28 Nov 1911: 6.

working class united, and conscious of its proletaria[n] aims, can, against the world, achieve anything.”⁵⁵

Of course, Harrison was not the first Black socialist in the United States. That distinction goes to Cincinnati native Peter Clark (1829-1925). Clark was a schoolteacher who began his career as an education activist who fought for and eventually won the establishment of the first Black public school in Cincinnati. He was also a conductor on the Underground Railroad, and helped with the editorial management of Frederick Douglass’ newspaper *The North Star*. According to historian Philip Foner, Clark also organized the first trade union of teachers in American history. He was a top orator in the state of Ohio who protested strongly “against the colored man being listed in the assets of the Republican Party as a voting machine, which simply does the work of its master, and is then shelved until next election.” Historian Nikki Taylor has recently published the first full-length biography of Clark, which sheds new light on this hitherto neglected pioneer of the African American socialist tradition.⁵⁶

Harrison was also not the first Black socialist to write articles in support of socialism. Black socialist preacher Rev. George Washington Woodbey of California became known as the most able Black socialist orator in the state, faced imprisonment and arrest for his outdoor speeches, wrote popular pamphlets on the case for socialism, and even served on the California state executive board of the party.⁵⁷ Woodbey also influenced another Black preacher, Rev. George Slater to join the socialist movement. Like Woodbey, Slater wrote articles and pamphlets, preached a socialist message often in

⁵⁵ Perry, Vol. 1. p. 172.

⁵⁶ Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*. N. Taylor, *America’s First Black Socialist: The Radical Life of Peter H. Clark*, (Lexington, 2013).

⁵⁷ Foner, p. 155.

Christian terms, and denounced Booker T. Washington, emigration to Africa, and capitalism. Harrison undoubtedly built upon their examples and took the precedents they had established even further both intellectually, as well as organisationally.

Contribution #2: Special Race-Sensitive Outreach to Black Communities

Like Woodbey and Slater, Harrison argued that socialists had to recruit Black workers. The party could not object to giving special attention to African-Americans, given that it had carried on special outreach work among Poles, Slovaks, Finns, Hungarians, and Lithuanians. But because white social movements had historically “broke down” as soon as they crossed the colour line, African-Americans were generally unaccustomed to joining or participating in them, and would therefore require a unique approach if socialists were to make inroads in Black communities. Harrison pointed to the role of special literature, such as Rev. Slater’s 1911 pamphlet *The Colored Man’s Case as Socialism Sees It* and another by Eugene Debs with a picture of wage slavery and chattel slavery, which he found to be quite effective in outreach to Black workers.⁵⁸ He also described the special “form of address” for this project, which according to him was to make the “ABC arguments” of socialism but crammed full of facts drawn from African-American history and experience so as to tailor the case for socialism to Black workers’ particular concerns.⁵⁹

Speaking from his own experience with the effectiveness of the above approach, Harrison maintained that Black socialists had a special role to play in recruiting African

⁵⁸ Foner, p. 208.

⁵⁹ H. Harrison, ‘How to Do It—And How Not’, *New York Call*, 16 Dec 1911: 6.

Americans to the party. He argued that in order to recruit in the Black community, “one must know the people, their history, their manner of life, and modes of thinking and feeling.” He urged his comrades to learn “the psychology of the Negro and how to address [the socialist message] both to the ‘heart’ and to the ‘head.’” He argued that Black comrades could do better outreach to Black communities because all of the aforementioned considerations would be second nature thanks to their Black racial experience, which white comrades lacked.⁶⁰

Harrison offered some suggestions about how white socialists should relate to Black people. Observing that many socialists often said things like ‘I have always been friendly with colored people’ and ‘I have never felt any prejudice against Negroes,’ Harrison suggested that if a comrade’s heart were in the right place it would appear in their actions. “Treat them,” he urged “simply as human beings as if you had never looked at the color of their faces.” This approach, nowadays called ‘colour-blindness’, remains a problematic ideology, for a variety of reasons.⁶¹ But in 1911, Harrison’s suggestion that white comrades treat African-Americans as though they had no colour represented an attempt to affect a more egalitarian racial ethos amongst white party members, as compared with the explicitly anti-Black prejudices that so many of them harboured.⁶²

Harrison concluded his case with a call for radical humility, a distinctive, recurring, and unique feature of Harrison’s political thought. “Socialists in general need to learn a great many things about the Negro—not only of his racial psychology, but also

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ One major weakness of colour-blindness is its failure to acknowledge and address the systematic unearned social privileges afforded to people racialised as white. See, for example, M. Williams, ‘Colorblind Ideology is a Form of Racism’, *Psychology Today*. Online, URL: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/culturally-speaking/201112/colorblind-ideology-is-form-racism>. Last accessed 23 February 2015.

⁶² H. Harrison, ‘How to Do It – And How Not’, *New York Call*, December 16, 1911.

of his history and of his present achievements in the various lines of human endeavour. If the white man of Europe knows nothing of the Negro, the white man of America knows a great deal that isn't so. And one has to unlearn much before he can begin to learn."⁶³ If the party was to recruit amongst African Americans, then white comrades would need to acknowledge their ignorance of Black people and adopt a posture of respect and humility towards them.⁶⁴

Harrison remained sober about the difficulties of changing racial attitudes. "I do not expect that the advent of Socialism will at once remove race prejudice—unless it remove[s] ignorance at the same time...But...I do expect that it will take the white man from off the black man's back" because ultimately, "socialism is here to put an end to the exploitation of one group by another, whether that group be social, economic, or racial." Harrison argued that this egalitarian ethos drove the thinking of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Karl Kautsky, "and every great leader of the Socialist movement" because egalitarianism was "imbedded in the very fabric of the Socialist philosophy."

Contribution #3: Challenging the Party Race Prejudice

Socialism would either live or die on the race question. So Harrison argued, by posing a question that was not only pertinent but ominous: "Does the Socialist party feel that it needs the Negroes as much as the Negro needs Socialism?" He publicly challenged the party to match its actions with its rhetoric. "If we feel that we can advance to the conquest of capitalism with one part of the proletariat against us, let us say so. But I

⁶³ Harrison, 'How to Do It – And How Not'.

⁶⁴ "White ignorance" is basically false belief or the absence of true belief due to white racial socialisation. S. Sullivan and N. Tuana, *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, (Albany, 2007).

haven't the slightest doubt that our program requires all the proletariat." He felt that if the party were to take organizing Black workers seriously, it would only "add to the strength of the organized, all inclusive class conscious working class movement."⁶⁵

On the other hand, if the party ignored Black workers, then Black workers would inevitably be used against the labour movement, "as the [racially exclusionary AFL-affiliated] craft unions have begun to find out." Harrison argued, "The capitalists of America are not waiting. Already they have subsidized Negro leaders, Negro editors, preachers and politicians to build up in the breasts of black people those sentiments which will make them subservient to their will." As a result, "we find that the prevailing social philosophy among Negroes—that which white capitalism will pay to have them taught—is one of submission and acquiescence in political servitude." Here he implied that the Tuskegee Institute garnered the financial support of rich whites thanks to Booker T. Washington's advocacy among Black people of an attitude of submission to the status quo.⁶⁶ If the party did not recruit Black workers for socialism, then society would continue recruiting them for capitalism. Thus the issue had been "squarely presented: Southernism or Socialism—which? Is it to be the white half of the working class against the black half, or all the working class?"

The Colored Socialist Club: Harrison's Organisational Contribution

Overall, in terms of its scope, depth, and timing, Harrison made a groundbreaking and incisive case that the Socialist party needed to change its theoretical and practical

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ We will revisit the relationship of Harrison and Washington's diverging conceptions of Black progress more thoroughly in chapter 4.

approach to Black workers. And initially, his argument bore fruit. In October of 1911, the secretary of the party's branch 5 in Harlem, Samuel Romansky, wrote to local NY headquarters that because Harrison understood Black life and history and was a good public speaker, the branch proposed that he be "made a paid speaker and organizer for Local New York for special work in negro districts."⁶⁷ The following month, secretary of the Executive Committee (EC) Julius Gerber admitted that "we have carried our propaganda to the Polish, Hungarian, Slavic, Lithuanian and Finnish workers; to the organized and unorganized men and women. But so far one section of the working-class in America has not even been approached. Local New York has taken this fact under advisement and has perfected plans for the work among Negroes."⁶⁸ Harrison had found a receptive ear in the New York EC and the Harlem branch moved to make him the local's first full-time Black organiser to help the party reach Black workers.

In practical terms, support from the New York leadership opened the door to a new organisational formation, the Colored Socialist Club (CSC). The CSC represented a Black-led but multiracial party formation, which held meetings and distributed socialist literature specifically oriented toward Black people. Under Harrison's leadership, it held weekly meetings in Harlem, and educated participants about the specific role of Black workers in the class struggle as well as what socialism could do for African-Americans: "if the overturning of the present system should elevate a new class into power; a class to which the negro belongs; a class which has nothing to gain by the degradation of any portion of itself; that class will remove the economic reason of the degradation of the

⁶⁷ Romansky to Gerber, 12 Oct 1911. The Socialist Party Papers of Local New York, Reel 6. New York University.

⁶⁸ Gerber to Local New York, 21 Dec 1911. The Socialist Party Papers of Local New York, Reel 6. New York University.

negro. That is the promise of Socialism, the all-inclusive working class movement. In the final triumph of this movement lies the only hope of salvation from this second slavery of black men and of white.”⁶⁹ Guided by the notion that socialism would abolish the economic system responsible for Black oppression, the CSC within weeks affected a “tremendous increase of Socialist sentiment among the Negroes of Harlem” according to its organiser.⁷⁰ The club represented the first Black-led special organisational formation in the party’s history.⁷¹

Interestingly, the strongest opposition to the formation of the club came not from white but Black comrades. In particular, W.E.B. Du Bois and Black socialist preacher and Niagara movement veteran Rev. George Frazier Miller of Brooklyn raised public concerns in the party’s *New York Call* that to the whole project smacked of segregation. They thought, mistakenly, that the project was aiming for a Black-only branch. Harrison responded to their concerns by making it clear that no segregation was intended and if it was then the EC would never have selected him as its spearhead and organiser. In a statement suggesting Du Bois and Miller had gone public with their concerns without first consulting him, Harrison pleaded that anyone familiar with him and his politics would have known that he was not aiming for segregation but for special outreach to Black workers on their own terms, which is why the CSC meetings took place in Harlem.⁷²

Unfortunately, as the result of sudden reversal by the EC, the experiment would be short-lived. In late February 1912, less than three months after it got off the ground,

⁶⁹ Harrison, ‘Summary and Conclusion.’

⁷⁰ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 175.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁷² Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, p. 212.

the EC abandoned the project, supposedly due to lack of available funds, poor attendance, and concerns about a party structure based on “segregation.” Given that the club was funded by donations from local branches and ethno-linguistic associations, the excuse of a depleted party treasury did not hold water. As for attendance, Harrison acknowledged that attendance had recently been uneven but argued that attendance was spotty at other party meetings, and in those cases did not necessarily indicate lack of interest. He claimed that the party had not “done its full duties yet” to support the club.⁷³ Given Harrison’s race politics, and his own clear and public repudiation of the notion that a separate Black-only branch was intended, the segregation charge also remained dubious.⁷⁴

The real reason for the EC’s sudden abortion of the CSC remains unclear. Historian Philip Foner suggested that Harrison grew suspicious that Rev. Miller may have been right in suggesting that the real basis of initial support from the executive was to insulate white socialists from Black members.⁷⁵ It certainly did not help that Du Bois, the most prominent Black intellectual in the country, editor of the NAACP’s *Crisis*, and a Socialist Party member, had publicly urged the EC to oppose the Harrison-led project. Given that Miller and Du Bois had been friends and colleagues since the Niagara Movement in 1905, their ties to an NAACP that was funded and dominated by white liberals whose politics did not accommodate autonomous Black political leadership, the re-appearance of the ‘segregation’ charge as an official reason for terminating the club after Harrison dispelled it, their lack of familiarity with Harlem, and their apparent failure

⁷³ Foner, p. 207-215. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 166-172, 175-6.

⁷⁴ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 170.

⁷⁵ Foner, p. 215.

to consult Harrison directly about his objective in organising the CSC, one wonders if they lobbied the NY leadership privately to terminate the project.⁷⁶

Although Du Bois opposed the Colored Socialist Club, his engagement with Harrison's work seems to have nevertheless influenced the *Crisis* editor, ideologically. Though Du Bois never avowed Harrison's impact on his own thinking in this period, the line of influence becomes clear when comparing Harrison's writings of 1911-12 to Du Bois' writings of 1913. For example, in 1912 Harrison argued that "the Negro" formed "the crucial test of Socialism's sincerity."⁷⁷ As Harrison's biographer has pointed out, the very next year found Du Bois arguing that "the Negro problem...is the great test of the American socialists."⁷⁸ In 1911, Harrison argued that "the Negro has lived behind the color line, where none of these social movements have come to him" and "those that did broke down as soon as they had to cross the color line."⁷⁹ Just over a year later, Du Bois wrote "what has Socialism to say to these black men? Is it going to ignore them...because they do not forthwith adopt a program of a revolution of which they know nothing or a movement which they are not invited to join?"⁸⁰ In 1911, Harrison argued that the socialist movement "can succeed only by espousing the cause of all sections of down-trodden humanity."⁸¹ In 1913, Du Bois spoke of how "the test of any great movement toward social reform is the Excluded class."⁸² In other words, Du Bois eventually made very similar arguments to Harrison's, most likely as a result of having considered Harrison's writings in the *New York Call* and *International Socialist Review*

⁷⁶ Though Du Bois and Miller sustained a decades-long familiarity, it does not appear that any letters of correspondence between them in this period survives in the Du Bois papers.

⁷⁷ H. Harrison, 'Socialism and the Negro', *International Socialist Review* 13, July 1912: 65-68.

⁷⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, 'Socialism and the Negro Problem', *The New Review*, 1913.

⁷⁹ H. Harrison, 'How to Do It—And How Not', *New York Call*, 16 Dec 1911: 6.

⁸⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, 'A Field for Socialists', *The New Review*, 11 Jan 1913.

⁸¹ H. Harrison, 'Summary and Conclusion', *New York Call*, 26 Dec 1911.

⁸² W.E.B. Du Bois, 'A Field for Socialists', *The New Review*, Jan 11, 1913.

during and after the debate about the CSC. By breaking new ground in his public challenge to the party's policy toward Black workers, Harrison thus paved the way for other prominent Black voices, like that of Du Bois, to do the same.⁸³

The Negro as a 'Crucial Test': Harrison's Break with the Socialists

Harrison not only argued at a theoretical level that the Socialist party's treatment of Blacks was the crucial test of its sincerity, but he came to embody that very test. 1912 marked a decisive year for the party, as the moment in which it would clarify its position on the "race question" as well as on the question of "political" versus "industrial" socialism. In particular, the party would move sharply to the right at the same time that Harrison moved further and further to the left. <I begin this section with the position taken by the national party on racial matters. I then look at the dynamics of the divergence between the party's political trajectory on one hand and Harrison's on the other.

Ideologically, the party clarified its official position at its national convention in May of 1912. The convention did not address the "Negro Question" directly as only one delegate (IWW leader "Big" Bill Haywood) even mentioned it.⁸⁴ Yet at the convention, the Majority Report of the Committee on Immigration fatefully declared that

Race feeling is not so much a result of social as of biological evolution. It does not change essentially with changes of economic systems. It is deeper than any class feeling and will outlast the capitalist system. It persists even after race prejudice has been outgrown. It exists... as a product of biology... We may temper this race feeling by education, but we can never hope to extinguish it altogether.

⁸³ Du Bois may have chosen to throw in his lot with the NAACP rather than the SP in part because of the way the party downplayed the need for agitation against racial oppression.

⁸⁴ Foner, *American Socialism*, p. 250.

Class consciousness must be learned, but race-consciousness is inborn and cannot be wholly unlearned...Where races struggle for the means of life...economic and political considerations lead to racial fights and to legislation restricting the invasion of the white man's domain by other races.⁸⁵

In other words, race prejudice was biologically rather than socially determined, timeless and inborn rather than contingent and extinguishable. In taking this position, the party unequivocally rejected Harrison's pre-convention arguments about the political, historical, ideological, and above all *socio-economic* roots of race prejudice.

Alongside its essentialist resolution on racial difference, the 1912 convention also marked the beginning of the party's precipitous move to the right. It passed an amendment to the party constitution that read, "any member of the party who opposes political action or advocates crime, sabotage, or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working class shall be expelled from membership."⁸⁶ The amendment, which Eugene Debs supported,⁸⁷ was quickly used to attack the leftist, pro-IWW wing of the party, beginning with the recall of the radical IWW leader "Big" Bill Haywood from the National Executive Committee. The moderates, thinking that a purge of the 'anarchistic' elements of the party would improve the party's respectability and thereby strengthen it, were in for a big surprise. Haywood's recall precipitated an exodus of his supporters, and party membership dropped below 80,000 from its high point of 135,000 at the time of the 1912 convention.⁸⁸ The party executive used the fateful amendment in other reactionary

⁸⁵ W.E. McDermut, assisted by C.W. Phillips, ed. J. Spargo, *National Convention of the Socialist Party Held at Indianapolis, Ind., May 12 to May 18, 1912*, (Chicago, 1912), p. 209-210, quoted in H. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 81-2.

⁸⁶ P. Carlson, *Roughneck: The Life and Times of Big Bill Haywood*, (New York, 1983), p. 198.

⁸⁷ P. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917*, (New York, 1965), p. 399.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 199.

ways, for example by abruptly terminating funding for the Women's National Committee on the grounds that its existence and activities were "unessential."⁸⁹

As the party was moving to the right, Harrison was moving to the left. He spoke in Elizabeth, New Jersey in November, 1912 advocating industrial unionism, syndicalism, and "direct action on the economic field," a tendency which emerged from the reaction among rank-and-file workers to the "old style craft unionism which had utterly failed to keep step with the march of industry." Harrison criticized the AFL style of unionism for representing overwhelmingly "the skilled and better paid workers, leaving the great army of unskilled men, women and children with nothing to protect their interests." He also noted, approvingly, that some workers were showing disdain for the Socialist Party's purely electoral and non-industrial approach. Harrison's speech revealed his sympathy with the racially inclusive and industry-wide organizing strategy of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). He spoke in favour of industrial sabotage, direct action, and the general strike, citing various examples of their application in recent European labour battles. All of these themes located their advocate in the left wing of the party.⁹⁰

Harrison in this period also revealed his move away from the moderate, middle-class, elections-focused wing of the party by his support, not authorised by the party, for the massive 25,000-strong Paterson, New Jersey silk strike of 1913. In the course of that strike, he shared speaking platforms with such national left-wing labour leaders as "Big" Bill Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tresca, and Arturo Giovanitti.⁹¹ One can

⁸⁹ S. Miller, 'Other socialists: Native-born and Immigrant Women in the Socialist Party of America, 1901–1917', *Labor History* 24:1, 1983: 84-102.

⁹⁰ 'Harrison Lecture', Elizabeth NJ, 7 Dec 1912. HHP Flat Box 740.

⁹¹ S. Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Strike, 1913* (Philadelphia, 1988).

only imagine the electrifying effect that this forceful Black orator must have had on the scores of striking European-descended workers who filled the strike support meeting halls.

We consider, whether right or wrong, every blow struck by labour against capital is a blow for labour...As for the Socialist party, no one asked the Socialist party to come into this strike. Let it stay out—if it dares! In season and out of season, we Socialists must go to the workers to hear what we must do. The revolution is not coming from above, remember, but from below, working its way up from the depths...We are not here because they invaded our rights. We have none. We never had any. We are working not to get rights, but to get might, and when we have *that*, we will have right!⁹²

This speech highlighted Harrison's militancy (arguing not for rights but for power), but also his radical humility ('we must go to the workers to hear what we must do'). It also revealed his conception of revolution coming 'from below' and his criticism of (and growing distance from) the Socialist Party. The Paterson *Evening News* found Harrison's statements "unfit to print," to which Flynn replied "he tells plain facts and the bosses don't like them."⁹³ Even the Socialist party's *New York Call*, which he had criticised for refusing to print a letter from a prominent speaker at the IWW's Paterson Defence Conference, praised one of Harrison's speeches, reporting that "he filled in the remarks

⁹² 'Sabotage Coming in Silk Mills if Boyd Is Jailed: Negro Agitator Shouts That if Paterson Owners Want to Lose \$200,000, Let Them Go Ahead', *New York World*, 1 Dec 1913, HHP flat box 740.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 145-146.

of the [other] speakers as the ocean does a chain of islands.”⁹⁴ Harrison embodied a major asset to the socialist movement but his passion for industrial unions, mass strikes, and industry-wide organising at the point of production proved bothersome to forces far closer to home than the mainstream press.

In response to Harrison’s outspoken independence and increasingly left-wing politics, the executive committee of local New York began to move against him. First, they reduced his pay to one third of that offered to white speakers. Then, they removed him from the party’s speakers list and forbade all branches from scheduling their own speakers. They declined a request to have him speak in favour of “industrial action” for other branches. They cast suspicion upon him by smearing his name in the party press for his public support for outspoken left-wingers like Alexander Scott and F. Sumner Boyd who had been arrested for pro-sabotage speeches. They attempted to prohibit him from speaking and from publicly debating the anti-socialist lecturer Frank Urban, despite the fact Harrison earned his living as a lecturer. Eventually, they suspended him for disobeying their order. For its failure to state what party laws or policies he had violated, Harrison suggested the EC’s behaviour represented “a most contemptible form of persecution.”⁹⁵

On account of his experience, Harrison looked with increasing approval upon the IWW as an alternative to the Socialist Party. In a January 1914 letter to the editors of *The New Review* responding to the Southern white socialist Ida B. Raymond that they refused to publish, Harrison pointed out that the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), a rapidly-growing radical industrial union, “has no scruples about affirming the full import

⁹⁴ *New York Call*, circa 29 Jan 1914, HHP, flat box 740.

⁹⁵ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 190, 209, 212, 216-18.

of its revolutionary doctrine at all times and all places—even in the South” and that “it actually opposes race prejudice, with success, as in Louisiana, where it organized 14,000 black timber workers, together with 18,000 white timber workers, with ‘mixed’ locals, too, in spite of Southern sentiment.” Because of these facts, Harrison boldly stated “I wonder, now, whether any Socialist, Southern or other, could blame me for throwing in my lot with the I.W.W.”⁹⁶ A few months after this letter, Harrison would resign from the party.

As his biographer put it, despite being “the leading Black organizer, orator, and theoretician of the Socialist Party,” Harrison’s attempt to “carry on special work aimed at African Americans, to agitate for revolutionary socialism and industrial unionism...and to be free to debate and speak publicly” without prior permission from party leaders had “touched some very sensitive nerves in the Socialist Party.”⁹⁷

Hubert Harrison’s break from the Socialist Party proved a decisive moment because it forced him to drastically scale back his estimation of the prospects for white radicals manifesting class solidarity with Black workers. Initially, he had taken the socialists at their word, assuming that they stood for the emancipation of the whole working class, but experience demonstrated that his arguments did not take amongst northern socialists in New York City, let alone in the south.⁹⁸ Ultimately, in the words of John Henrik Clarke, Harrison “was a socialist until he discovered that most socialists are not true to the teachings of socialism.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ H. Harrison, ‘Southern Socialists and the Ku Klux Klan’, letter to the editor of the *New Review* (unpublished). The letter was published years later in the *Negro World* of 8 Jan 1921. See Perry, *HHR*, p. 76-78.

⁹⁷ Perry, p. 218.

⁹⁸ H. Harrison, ‘The Duty of the Socialist Party’, *New York Call*, 13 Dec 1911.

⁹⁹ J.H. Clarke, ‘Introduction’ to Harrison, *WAA*, (Baltimore, 1997), p. vi.

The “Negro Problem” as Leftist White Supremacy

Harrison’s experience in the Socialist Party raises a larger question about race in the United States. Although race was not the only factor precipitating his break with the party, I want to focus on it more deeply here because of the particular impact the racial dimension had on his subsequent political and ideological trajectory: after leaving the SP, Harrison devoted himself to organisation and agitation in and among Black communities. Given the decisive role of theory for solving any problem, one must interrogate the dominant theoretical framework of race theory in order to get at the root of the problem that Harrison faced. In so doing, it becomes clear that although they criticised the dominant racial framework, neither Harrison nor any of his contemporaries managed to concisely and consistently identify and problematise whiteness.

W.E.B. Du Bois, in the very beginning of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) put his finger squarely on the peculiarity of the dominant conception of race at the turn of the century. “Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question...How does it feel to be a problem?”¹⁰⁰ Herein we find the origin of the difficulty that Harrison and many other Black radicals would encounter in the early twentieth century, namely that the issue of racial oppression was considered a “Negro problem.” Framing the issue in this way rested on a simple but fatal assumption: that the matter only (or primarily) arose on account of the presence of Black people. The shift from “Negro problem” to a “Negro question” did not fundamentally alter this assumption.

¹⁰⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Oxford, 2007 [c1903]), p. 7.

To be fair, the Socialist Party was not the first to adopt this troublesome starting point. Criticism of the ‘Negro problem’ framework goes back at least to Frederick Douglass who in the nineteenth century had said that “this so-called but mis-called Negro problem is one of the most important and urgent subjects that can now engage public attention...it involves the honor or dishonor of the whole American people.”¹⁰¹ In other words, the “problem” had to do with more than just African-Americans. Note how even though he implies it, Douglass does not say ‘*white* people’ but instead the more neutral sounding “whole American people.” Whiteness itself remains unidentified and therefore normalised and unproblematised.

Following in a similar vein to Douglass, Harrison also criticized the one-sidedness of the “Negro problem” framework, without locating the fundamental problem in whiteness. At different times, Harrison variously called the issue a problem of “social adjustment,”¹⁰² a “Negro problem...primarily of the white man’s making,”¹⁰³ and a “race problem.”¹⁰⁴ These passages demonstrate that although he reflected critically on “Negro problem” and saw that it was ‘primarily of the white man’s making’, he did not fully conceptualise the problem of whiteness.

A concise theory of racial oppression would have been to simply call it a *white* problem. After all, it is white people who enslaved African-Americans, white people who created the racial hierarchy before the Civil War, and again white people who segregated,

¹⁰¹ A. Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York, 2003), p. 58.

¹⁰² H. Harrison, ‘The Negro and Socialism: I – The Negro Problem Stated’, *New York Call*, November 28, 1911.

¹⁰³ H. Harrison, ‘The I.C.U.’, HHP box 17, folder 10.

¹⁰⁴ H. Harrison, ‘The Real Negro Problem’, *Modern Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (Sept-Dec 1926).

disfranchised, and lynched their way back to racial supremacy after Reconstruction.¹⁰⁵ In other words, what I have been talking about all along was not a “Negro problem” but indeed a *white* problem or a *white* question, i.e. a problem of *white domination*. The folly of conceptualising racial inequality as a “Negro problem” or even a “race question” is no accident; it reflects a fundamentally *white angle of vision*, thereby masking the white supremacy of the racial hierarchy.

Harrison was not the only Black thinker at the time to struggle with these frameworks. Black socialist A. Philip Randolph argued that “the term ‘Negro Problem’ is a misnomer...the problem that has been occasioned by the presence of the Negro is only incidentally a race problem, but fundamentally, an economic problem.” ‘Occasioned by the presence of the Negro’ again puts the shoe on the wrong foot. Even when he identified the problematic agency of both ‘white capitalist’ and ‘white laborer’,¹⁰⁶ Randolph failed to explicitly problematise whiteness, leaving instead “so-called Negro problem,” “race problem,” or “economic problem” as the only conceptual options. Even “anti-Negro problem” would have been far more illuminative than “Negro problem,” as it would have pointed in the direction of the specificity of anti-Blackness as a distinctive form of oppression.

This theoretical gap persisted well into the twentieth century. To be sure, for a brief period in the early 1930s, the Communist Party attempted to wage a campaign to eliminate “white chauvinism” from its ranks, identifying and problematizing something

¹⁰⁵ D.R. Egerton, *Wars of Reconstruction: the Brief, Violent History of America’s Most Progressive Era* (New York, 2014). P. Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: the Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley, 2005).

¹⁰⁶ A.P. Randolph and C. Owen (eds.), ‘Resolutions of the Convention of the Friends of Negro Freedom’, *The Messenger*, Sept 1920.

related to whiteness.¹⁰⁷ Then in 1935, W.E.B. Du Bois theorised the “psychological wage” allotted to white workers and the ‘blindspot’ in the American memory of Reconstruction.¹⁰⁸ However, the explicit articulation of racial oppression as a problem concerning whiteness did not get lasting traction until the civil rights and Black Power struggles of the 1960s, when white Marxist theoretician Theodore Allen advanced the notion of “white skin privileges.”¹⁰⁹

That it took radical thought in the United States so long to arrive at a lasting problematising of whiteness—despite criticism of the ‘Negro problem’ framework since the nineteenth century—illustrates how deeply-rooted and psychologically internalised the domination of whiteness has been historically. The recent emergence of the subfield of Afro-pessimism suggest that anti-Blackness has been even more deeply rooted than whiteness.¹¹⁰ This would make sense, given that anti-Blackness emerged as early as the Spanish racialization of Africans as *negro* in the medieval period, long before the invention of the “white race” in the late 17th and early 18th century.¹¹¹ Old habits die hard.

For these reasons, I argue that Harrison’s racial struggle with the SP demonstrated one of the Achilles heels of progressive US politics, what I call *leftist white supremacy*. Because this is not a phrase in common usage, it bears definition and explanation. By

¹⁰⁷ M. Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936* (Jackson, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York, 1995 [c1935]), p. 700–701.

¹⁰⁹ Allen built on Du Bois’ notions of T.W. Allen, “A Call . . . John Brown Memorial Pilgrimage . . . December 4, 1965,” John Brown Commemoration Committee, 1965. N. Ignatin (Ignatiev) and T.W. Allen, *White Blindspot & Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalized?* (Detroit and New York, 1969). Online URL: <http://www.sds-1960s.org/WhiteBlindspot.pdf>, last accessed 28 June 2016. For further discussion, see J. Perry, ‘The Developing Conjuncture and Some Insights from Hubert Harrison and Theodore W. Allen on the Centrality of the Fight against White Supremacy’, *Cultural Logic*, 2010.

¹¹⁰ By Afro-Pessimism, I refer to the recent revival of scholarly interest in theorising the specificity of anti-Blackness that has emerged in the work of scholars like Jared Sexton and Frank Wilderson III, building on foundations laid by Franz Fanon, Hortense Spillers, Orlando Patterson, and Saidiya Hartman.

¹¹¹ L.R. Gordon, ‘Theory in Black: Teleological Suspensions in Philosophy of Culture’, *Qui Parle*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 2010), pp. 193-214. C. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London 1983), p. 83. T. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race Vol. 2*, (London, 2012).

“white supremacy,” I am *not* referring to the thought or behaviour of extreme right wing or Ku Klux Klan-type organizations. Rather, I use this phrase to refer more generally to the racial hierarchy in the United States in which those racialised as “white” are privileged above all other racial and ethnic groups. By “white” I refer to that segment of the population (overwhelmingly of European descent) that became racialised as “white” in the aftermath of Bacon’s rebellion and the invention of an all-class “white race” as a ruling-class social control formation, as Ted Allen has so masterfully demonstrated.¹¹²

In the early twentieth century, white supremacy and anti-Blackness formed the two extremes of a racial hierarchy that structured fundamentally the thought and behaviour of the overwhelming majority of individuals and organisations in the United States. Therefore, ‘*leftist white supremacy*’ refers to those manifold theories and practices that consciously or subconsciously perpetuate the white-supremacist racial hierarchy in the context of left-wing politics.

The Socialist Party offers a prime example of this problem. As Harrison’s experience demonstrates, different valences of leftist white supremacy—from Ida Raymond’s Klan-friendly ‘Southernism’ to the Debsian ‘nothing-special-to-offer’ theory of class colourlessness—revealed a major gap between the party’s claim to represent “the political expression of the economic interests of the workers” and the reality of who it actually represented.¹¹³

Conclusion

¹¹² Allen, *Invention of the White Race*.

¹¹³ ‘Socialist Party Platform of 1912’ *Socialist Campaign Book* 1912, re-printed in A. Fried, *Socialism in America*, p. 391.

Harrison made at numerous contributions to the socialist movement. Besides introducing a secular form of Black socialism and publicly challenging leftist white supremacy inside the party, Harrison broke new ground by spearheading the Colored Socialist Club, the first Black-led and Black-focused organisational formation in party history. Like his Black Christian socialist forebears, he also demonstrated that developing a special appeal to Black people with arguments drawn from the Black experience was more effective than the ‘nothing special’ approach of Eugene Debs. At the level of theory, he was the first Black socialist to articulate a historical materialist analysis of the relationship between race and class in the United States.¹¹⁴ Finally, his argument that African-Americans, as the most essentially proletarian group, comprised the “touchstone” or standard by which all progressive movements must be judged decisively broke with the overwhelmingly white angle of vision which predominated in US socialist theory up to that point.

The party’s anti-Black behaviour—aborting the Colored Socialist Club, cutting Harrison’s pay, declaring racial difference a matter of genetics rather than political economy—rendered it unable to retain Harrison’s participation. At the same time, defeat clarifies the mind. In the aftermath of his failure to change the Socialist Party, Harrison’s race consciousness grew by leaps and bounds because he saw first hand how the socialists insisted on maintaining white domination above the call of solidarity with the most thoroughly and essentially proletarian group. The party, in Harrison’s words, put “race first and class after.” If this was to be the political position of white *radicals* (never

¹¹⁴ Thinkers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, and many others would later expand upon the foundations present in Harrison’s analysis. See, for example, W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, (New York, 1935). S. McLemee, (ed.). *CLR James on the Negro Question*, (Chapel Hill, 2004). E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, 1944).

mind white liberals and conservatives), then Black people needed likewise to operate from the assumption of ‘race first’—as a self-defence mechanism against the racial superiority complex to which white people right across the political spectrum were manifestly committed.¹¹⁵ Thus Harrison learned through experience how much larger a barrier racial oppression was for the project of fighting for human emancipation in the United States.

To his credit, Harrison did not get discouraged from political organising by his failure to change the socialists. Instead, he determined to place the needs and interests of the Black community and its struggles against racial oppression at the centre of his worldview. In 1915, the year after he left the socialists, Harrison concluded that in order for Harlem to get “more schools and playgrounds, lower rents, higher wages, [and] better treatment at the hands of policemen,” African-Americans would have to unite to demand these things for themselves. “For the money, the organization, the push, we must depend upon ourselves and not upon white people.”¹¹⁶ This commitment to Black people would in shape Harrison’s political outlook for the rest of his life, starting with his pioneering role in the New Negro movement, the focus of the next chapter. Easily his most important and decisive political contribution to Black life in the late 1910s, Harrison’s efforts gave expression to a larger awakening in race consciousness internationally that opened entirely new vistas and opportunities in the struggle for Black self-determination.

¹¹⁵ The phrase “race first” is often associated with the Garvey movement but it originated with Harrison. See Chapter 5.

¹¹⁶ H. Harrison, ‘Our Civic Corner’, *NY News*, 9 Feb, 1915, HHP box 13, folder 2.

Chapter 2

Hubert Harrison and The New Negro Movement in Harlem

Unbeknown to the white people of this land a temper is being developed among Negroes with which the American people will have to reckon.

–Hubert Harrison, *The Voice* (1917)

Who or what was the “New Negro”? This question has been contested since the late nineteenth century when it was first placed on the agenda.¹ In 1900, Tuskegee Institute president Booker T. Washington published *A New Negro for a New Century*.² In the first decade of the twentieth century, when activists like Ida B. Wells, William Monroe Trotter, and W.E.B. Du Bois openly challenged Mr. Washington, they represented a new mentality amongst African-Americans as against the older post-Reconstruction approach of the “Wizard” of Tuskegee. During WWI, when Du Bois called on African-Americans to ‘close ranks and forget our special grievances’, he lost all credibility in the eyes of what was emerging as a militant ‘New Negro *movement*,’ and was placed in the category of “Old Crowd Negro” by Black socialists like A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen.³ Then in 1925, Alain Locke published a compilation entitled *The New Negro*, which once again re-interpreted the meaning of that phrase.⁴

¹ H.L. Gates, ‘The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black’, *Representations*, no. 24 (1988): 129-55.

² B.T. Washington (ed.), *A New Negro for a New Century*, (Chicago: 1900).

³ We return to Du Bois’ infamous ‘close ranks’ story in Chapter 4.

⁴ A. Locke, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, (New York, 1925).

In this chapter, I focus on the same ‘new Negro’ identified in a memorandum dated August 15, 1919 for the Director of Military Intelligence. It noted how “radical propaganda had made noteworthy headway among the coloured people in this country,” that Black soldiers had returned from the war in France with a new racial awareness, and that the growth of publications like the *Messenger* and subversive organizations like the Industrial Workers of the World and radical socialists were “daily winning new converts” in Black communities. As military intelligence put it, “the long continued propaganda... urging the coloured people to insist upon equality with white people and to resort to force, if necessary, in order to establish their rights, is now bearing abundant fruit. Beyond a doubt, *there is a new negro to be reckoned with* in our political and social life.”⁵ Written during the “Red Summer” when white mobs launched attacks against Black communities in at least 38 different cities and towns across the country, US military intelligence captured quite accurately the key features of the “new Negro” in American life.⁶

The New Negro movement of the early twentieth century has recently attracted renewed attention from scholars in fields such as African-American Studies, History, and Literature.⁷ In his introduction to the recent anthology *Escape From New York*, historian and social theorist Davarian Baldwin argues that this resurgence of scholarly interest constitutes no less than a “field in formation” which deploys the “New Negro” as an

⁵ My emphasis. J.E. Cutler to Director of Military Intelligence, ‘Attachment’, (Washington, D.C., 15 Aug, 1919), Memorandum for the Director of Military Intelligence. 10218-361. National Archives., re-printed in R. Hill *MGP*, Vol. 1, p. 491.

⁶ ‘For Action on Race Riot Peril’, *New York Times*, 5 Oct 1919: 112.

⁷ H.L. Gates Jr. and G.A. Jarrett (eds.), *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture 1892-1938*, (Princeton, 2007). D. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*, (Chapel Hill, 2007). A. Pochmara, *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance*, (Amsterdam, 2011). See chapter 7, n. 8, 9, 14, and 15 for more New Negro studies.

analytic without a prefigured definition, in order to broadly chart the Black experience of the historical period “as an overlapping and contested architecture of race consciousness that moved around the United States, travelled along a range of expressive frequencies, and was translated (or not) in other languages and frames of local and global discourse.” Accordingly, the invitation of this new field “stresses the need for scholarship to ‘catch up to history,’ to create studies that match the breadth and depth of the actual New Negro experience.”⁸

The recent scholarly work on the New Negro has thus created new intellectual space within which to revisit this trope in African-American history. In particular, the ‘New Negro’ outside of New York City is getting more attention, prompting a move toward its re-definition as a political and international phenomenon, extending from the Black encounter with Japan, China, and the Philippines, to Mexico, New Orleans, Chicago, and London.⁹ Although the move toward de-centring New York City has greatly enriched, revitalised, and broadened New Negro studies, it also has left a gap regarding Hubert Harrison’s seminal role in Harlem.

The widening of New Negro scholarship dovetails with another recent scholarly turn, the emergence of a historiography for various non-European internationalisms. In their recent compilation, *From Toussaint to Tupac: the Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, Michael O. West and William Martin theorise the “Black International” as the interconnection and interlocution of a struggle across the African diaspora against

⁸ Quotes from D. Baldwin, ‘Introduction: New Negroes Forging a New World’, in D. Baldwin and M. Makalani (eds.), *Escape From New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis, 2013).

⁹ Ibid., M. Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill, 2011). M. Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

oppression, unbroken in time and space across the boundaries of nations, empires, continents, oceans, and seas.¹⁰ The history of the Third World overlaps in some ways with Black internationalism.¹¹ Though absent from studies of ‘Third Worldism’, Harrison’s call for a ‘Colored International’ stands as a notable theory that overlaps with Black internationalism and precedes the Third World project.¹² To his credit, historian Minkah Makalani has produced a recent study which rightfully features the Harrison’s influence on Black internationalism in the early twentieth century.¹³

This chapter builds on the historiographical turn toward rethinking the New Negro movement by focusing on some key contributions of its principal architect in Harlem. In particular, I focus on Harrison’s work to establish the Liberty League of Negro-Americans and *the Voice*, his critique of the NAACP, his role in the Liberty Congress of Negro-Americans, the Liberty Party, and his theory of the Colored International.

A New Negro Organisation: The Liberty League of Negro-Americans

Following his disastrous experience in the Socialist Party, Harrison did not waste much time in shifting his focus to organising and agitating for social change in his home neighbourhood of Harlem. Between 1915 and 1917, Harrison preached an “advanced

¹⁰ M.O. West and W.G. Martin (eds.), *From Toussaint to Tupac: the Black International Since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2009).

¹¹ V. Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*, (New York, 2008). C. Lee, *Making a World After Empire* (Athens, 2010). C. Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York, 2007). M.T. Berger, ‘After the Third World? History, Destiny, and the Fate of Third Worldism’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2004: 9-39.

¹² H. Harrison, ‘Wanted—A Colored International’, *Negro World*, 28 May 1921.

¹³ M. Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill, 2011).

type of radicalism with a view to impressing race-consciousness and effecting racial solidarity among Negroes,” according to Caribbean-born Harlem activist Anselmo Jackson.¹⁴ On December 24, 1916 Harrison gave a talk entitled “When the Negro Wakes: A Lecture on ‘The Manhood Movement’ Among the Negro People of America” which, according to Jeff Perry, “stands as the birthday of the ‘New Negro Manhood Movement.’”¹⁵ The New Negro Manhood movement was more often called the “New Negro movement,” probably in reaction to the voices and participation of Black women like Madame C.J. Walker, Eslanda Cardoza Goode, Gertrude Miller-Faide, Lucille Randolph, and Irena Moorman-Blackston.¹⁶

After over two full years of increasingly race-conscious agitation, Harrison was ready to give a more concrete political form to his project for advancing the Black community. So when the US declared war on Germany in April of 1917 with the stated aim of making the world “safe for democracy” Harrison cleverly seized the opportunity to make not the world—but African America—“safe for democracy.” Such was Harrison’s authority and influence that when he put out a call for a mass meeting on June 12 to protest against lynching and racial oppression, some 2,000 people turned up, packing the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church on West 123rd street. The meeting elected Harrison president of a new organization, the Liberty League of Negro-Americans, and raised funds to propagate its “race first” message and demands with a new newspaper, *The Voice*.

The programme of the Liberty League represented a ‘New Negro’ agenda for African-America. In its inaugural mass meeting, the League passed resolutions calling on

¹⁴ Anselmo Jackson, quoted in Hill, *MGP Vol. 2*, p. 271.

¹⁵ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 272.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 315-317, 331-32.

all “true friends of democracy” to help Black people secure their democratic rights, and demanded that the government acknowledge the danger to democracy of the continued violation of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution, which (on paper) abolished slavery, granted citizenship and equal protection of the law, and enshrined for Black people the right to vote. The League declared it would fight segregation, Jim Crowism, and peonage, and would “protest and agitate by every legal means until we win these rights from the hands of our government.”¹⁷ In addition, Harrison declared that since lynching amounted to lawless murder, Black people must be the ones to maintain the law and “put down the law-breakers by organizing all over the South to defend their own lives whenever their right to live was invaded by mobs which the local authorities were too weak or unwilling to suppress.”¹⁸

The Liberty League got off to an auspicious start. The day after the League’s momentous launch in Harlem, William Monroe Trotter organised a meeting for Harrison at Faneuil Hall in Boston. One of Harrison’s key forerunners and influences, Trotter founded the militant *Guardian* newspaper in 1901 as the mouthpiece for a principled challenge to the political hegemony of Booker T. Washington.¹⁹ Harrison’s Boston speech for the Liberty League “suggested that the coloured people rise against the government, just as the Irish against England, unless they get their rights.” Garvey

¹⁷ H. Harrison, ‘Resolutions Passed at the Liberty League Meeting’, *The Negro and Nation*, (New York, 1917), pp. 11-12.

¹⁸ H. Harrison, ‘Resolutions Passed at the Liberty League Meeting’, *WAA* (ibid), p. 11-12. It is hard not to notice that in 1917, Harrison’s Liberty League articulated what would eventually re-surface as the key demands of the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

¹⁹ Trotter’s militant activism led and inspired the younger generation of ‘Tuskegee-Protestants.’ Most notably, W.E.B. Du Bois joined Trotter in founding the Niagara movement in 1905, which became the precursor to the formation of the NAACP in 1909. Trotter, however, broke with Du Bois in 1908 and never joined the NAACP, instead forming his own National Equal Rights League as a Black-led and Black-funded organisation. W.A. Edwards, ‘William Monroe Trotter: A Twentieth Century Abolitionist’, *Trotter Review*, Vol. 2:1, Article 6 (1988). S. Fox, *Guardian of Boston* (New York, 1970).

scholar and historian Robert A. Hill has noted that “Harrison could have been referring to only one thing: the Irish Easter Rising of the previous year. What is especially noteworthy is the fact that his suggestion was uttered *before* the outrages committed against blacks in the East St. Louis riot.”²⁰ In other words, Harrison preached the politics of “race-first” as a practical, militant, and radical approach that drew inspiration from the Irish and other anti-imperialist struggles internationally.

Out of this second official Liberty League meeting, a collaboration emerged between the Boston and New York organisations. The launching of the Liberty League went so well that Black men and women across the United States and the West Indies donated money, pledged support to it, and became members of the organization.²¹ The League elected Harrison the chairman of a national planning committee, which issued a call to Black organizations across the country to send delegates to “a great race-congress” which would meet in Washington, an important development to which I will return later in this chapter.

Building on the groundwork laid by anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells and her attempt to get the NAACP to support a federal anti-lynching bill in 1909,²² the Liberty League submitted a petition to the House of Representatives on July 4, 1917 to make lynching a federal crime. It would take another year before the NAACP would begin to support such legislation, and even then it would do so only with great hesitance and

²⁰ R. Hill, *The Crusader, Vol. 1*. (New York, 1987), p. xii-xiii.

²¹ A. Jackson. ‘Analysis of the Black Star Line’, *The Emancipator*, (New York, 27 Mar 1920), reprinted in R. Hill(ed.), *Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vol. 2* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 271.

²² P. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, (New York, 2008), p. 474.

political timidity.²³ The League also demanded that Blacks in the North disclaim allegiance to all political parties and instead organise the Black vote independently to swing elections in favour of Black interests.²⁴ The latter effort would come to a fuller fruition in the emergence of the Liberty Party, to which I will return later in the chapter.

The Liberty League had an immediate and natural appeal not only to the younger “New Negro” but also to some of the older and more seasoned veterans of the struggle. John E. Bruce, the elder statesmen of independent Black internationalist journalism, wrote a letter to Harrison after the founding meeting of the Liberty League, calling the League’s call to action “at once the most safe and practical of all that have been put forward in the past forty years. Your plan to go before Congress with your races grievances is The plan.” Bruce suggested to Harrison that he “weed out the handkerchief heads from your privy council and surround yourself with men loyal and true” because he believed that Harrison was “laying a bigger foundation than you perhaps realize in the formation of this Liberty League.”²⁵ These were encouraging words, from a friend, elder, and mentor who represented a bridge between the post-Reconstruction generation of Black struggle and the New Negro and Garvey movement generation. William Monroe Trotter similarly lauded Harrison and thanked him for his service to the race.²⁶ These commendations would find further confirmation in the way Harrison’s newspaper would inspire a whole new generation of New Negro papers.

²³ C. Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, Vol. 1: 1909-1920*. (Baltimore, 1967), p. 231-2. R. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950*, (Philadelphia, 1980), p. 43-46.

²⁴ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 12-13.

²⁵ Bruce, John E. Letter to Harrison dated 7/8/17, HHP box 1, folder 18.

²⁶ Trotter to Harrison, 17 Nov 1917, HHP box 3, folder 45.

Harrison's *Voice* Provokes a New Era of New Negro Movement Journalism

In the early twentieth century, the Black press underwent a transformation, particularly within northern urban African American communities. The Great Migration from the south and the “Great Retreat” from the epidemic of white riots, led to the movement of over 1 million African Americans from rural to northern urban centres. The concentration of African Americans in cities like Chicago and New York, and their entrance into a cash economy created a whole new readership and market for Black newspapers.²⁷ Meanwhile, access to more and better schools opened the door to historic decreases in African-American illiteracy, which went from 70% in 1880 down to 23% by 1920.²⁸ Politically, the rise of Jim Crow segregation heightened racial consciousness and grievances prompting Black editors to challenge the hegemony of Booker T. Washington, whose ‘Tuskegee Machine’ had exerted such a strong influence by the turn of the century.²⁹ Numerous new periodicals started to appear, including papers like the *Boston Guardian* in 1901, the *Chicago Defender* in 1905, the *Amsterdam News* in 1909, and *The Crisis* in 1910. Although in existence for less than two decades, even this Tuskegee-independent generation of Black newspapers seemed inadequate to give full voice to the sentiments of Harrison’s radical New Negro movement in 1917.

In order to usher in a stronger representation of the radical New Negro voice in the Black press, Hubert Harrison founded the first newspaper of the militant New Negro movement, *The Voice*. Harrison, in the very first issue published on July 4th 1917,

²⁷ T. Kornweibel, *No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the Messenger, 1917-1928* (Westport, 1975), p. 44.

²⁸ T. Snyder, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (National Center for Education Statistics, Washington D.C., 1993), p. 21.

²⁹ L. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York, 1972), p. 254.

declared that the paper would “in all things maintain the principle of ‘Africa first’.”³⁰ He explained the purpose of the new paper by way of a nautical metaphor. Likening the *Voice* to a small ship “swimming in a sea of servility,” Harrison envisioned how “the breakers of race prejudice roll between it and the shore it seeks; the sharks of racial treachery abound in these waters, and overhead the lightnings of lick-spittledom and the thunders of its malice would seem to threaten its chances of getting safe to shore.” This language evoked the resilience and perseverance of enslaved Africans during the so-called ‘Middle Passage.’³¹ Yet, despite the dangers, *The Voice* had no fear because “it puts itself under the protection of that Providence which is—the plain people of Negro ancestry.” Harrison here articulated his commitment to the Black working class, as opposed to a ‘talented tenth’ who already had various publications of their own.³²

Harrison’s paper grew quickly among the Harlem masses and they sustained its production, politically and financially. The initial \$200 of seed money for the paper was raised at the historic Bethel AME Church meeting on June 12, 1917 that launched the Liberty League. In the first months of its existence the people backed Harrison’s paper “with their personal help, their pennies and their loans,” which they often gave at street

³⁰ *The Voice*, 4 July 1917, HHP box 6, folder 25. “Diaspora” was not a term commonly used for people of African descent in 1917, so Africa took on a racial rather than geographic meaning in this context. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 8.

³¹ I say ‘so-called’ here because “Middle Passage” comprises an *abominable euphemism* for a process in which Europeans kidnapped, shipped, and enslaved some 15 million African human beings, precipitating millions of deaths in the wars they sparked between African groups on the continent and the millions of corpses dumped into the Atlantic ocean by Europeans. The phrase “slave trade” is similarly objectionable for its reduction of unspeakable horror to an economic transaction. I prefer the term “Maangamizi,” which refers to the centuries-long Black ‘hellocaust’ of chattel, colonial, and neo-colonial enslavement of African peoples, and the term also carries the appropriate connotation of intentional rather than accidental calamity. S.E. Anderson, *The Black Holocaust For Beginners*, (Danbury, 1995). M. Ani, *Let The Circle Be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora*, (New York, 1988). K.B. Medina, *Africalogical Perspectives: Historical and Contemporary Analysis of Race and Africana Studies*, (Lincoln, 2006), p. 55-58. M. Muchie, P. Lukhele-Olorunju, and O. Akpor (eds.), *The African Union Ten Years After: Solving African Problems with Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance*, (Pretoria, 2013), p. 451.

³² H. Harrison, ‘Untitled, 1st issue’, *The Voice*, 4 July 1917, HHP box 6, folder 25.

meetings and indoor talks that Harrison would give.³³ During the week of August 7th, one month after its founding, Harrison recorded that the print run of *The Voice* had reached 11,000 copies.

Not everybody in the Black community supported the upstart newspaper. Despite the enthusiasm of many ordinary people for *the Voice*, “the ‘Big Negroes’ withheld their help—even in the matter of advertisements.” Nevertheless, the paper remained fiercely independent and “would not cringe before the Exalted Ones,” instead opting to place its fate in the hands of the “Negro masses.” Harrison initially tried to undercut the more established newspapers with a low price, but eventually had to raise it to their going rate of 5 cents. Harrison assured his readers that with a rise in price to 5 cents, the *Voice* would “not need to bite its tongue, to ‘sell out’ to white politicians, nor to hold back from ‘showing up’ the highly placed Judases who are selling the race and its future for a mess of pottage.”³⁴ So, while financing a newspaper that was so fiercely radical and independent was not easy, Harrison appealed to his readers directly for support.

In some respects, Harrison advanced a class conscious strategy of appealing to Black workers rather than a ‘talented tenth’, not only for financial support but as part of a grassroots production process. For example, in a September 4 editorial entitled “Send Us The News”, Harrison expressed the desire to offer more news than the three competing newspapers combined. To successfully do this, the *Voice* editor called on the readership to join in creating stories for the paper. “This is essentially the people’s paper. So bring us your news; and if it is legitimate, we will publish it.”³⁵ Harrison not only wanted to

³³ H. Harrison, ‘Owing to the High cost of Manhood The Voice has gone up to 5 cents’, *The Voice*. (date unknown), HHP box 13, folder 2.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ H. Harrison, ‘Send Us The News’, *The Voice*, 4 Sept 1917, HHP box 6, folder 18.

reach the masses, but to actively involve them in producing the content of the paper—another example of the working-class character of his vision for the New Negro movement.

Besides including the masses in production, Harrison sought to uplift their self-esteem by avoiding the degrading ads that other Black newspapers at the time featured. “All Negroes have been waiting for years for a paper which they could open in street cars and other public places without feeling ashamed at the ‘Kink-No-More,’ ‘Kongolene Knocks Kinks,’ ‘Oxonized Ox Marrow,’ ‘Raddrizator Hair Straightening Outfits,’ and the big black person turned into a white person in two ticks, which disgrace so many of our ‘colored’ journals.”³⁶ Harrison felt that newspapers that featured ads for skin bleach and hair straightening products were degrading to Black self-esteem and pride in being African. He distinguished between “selling space vs. selling self” as a way to emphasize that it wasn’t ads in and of themselves that were the problem, just ads which were demeaning to Black people.³⁷

The *Voice*’s articulation of New Negro politics sparked the proliferation of a whole range of innovative papers that would define a new era of radical Black journalism. In November of 1917, a few months after *The Voice* was born, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen started *The Messenger* as their own socialist newspaper focused on the concerns of Black workers.³⁸ 1918 witnessed the emergence of Amy Ashwood and Marcus Garvey’s *Negro World*, and William Bridges’ *Challenge*. 1919

³⁶ H. Harrison, ‘Announcement: The Voice For Sale’, *The Voice*, (date unknown), HHP box 6, folder 50.

³⁷ H. Harrison, ‘Selling Space vs. Selling Self’, *The Voice*, 10 July 1917, HHP box 4, folder 73.

³⁸ Randolph and Owen originally edited the *Hotel Messenger* for the Headwaiters and Sidewaiters Society of Greater New York, but the union fired Randolph and Owen for publishing an article exposing corruption inside their union. C. L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (Urbana, 2010), p. 86-7.

saw Cyril Briggs' *Crusader* burst onto the scene, alongside smaller papers like August Bernier's *Clarion*. 1920 saw the emergence of W.A. Domingo's short-lived *Emancipator*.

The influence and inspiration of Harrison's *Voice* seems, paradoxically, to also have been its downfall. Because it stimulated so much new radical Black journalism, including competition for a limited pool of readers and subscribers, the *Voice* eventually ran into financial troubles. Generally speaking, Harrison was a poor manager of finances. As J.A. Rogers put it, Harrison's "enthraling oratory should have paid him well, yet, like so many scholars, he was so thoroughly wrapped up in his work that this aspect of the situation quite escaped him. Whatever money he received usually drifted to him as food to a polyp attached to the piles of a pier."³⁹ Harrison's lack of attention to finances undoubtedly limited the newspaper's lifespan. Harrison's male chauvinism seems to have also played a role, a factor which becomes clearer when one looks closely at how other Black newspapers survived.

Most of the radical Black periodicals of the time relied upon women for their existence. Geraldine "Deenie" Trotter worked tirelessly to keep the Boston-based *Guardian* afloat.⁴⁰ Lucille Randolph funded and helped financially manage *The Messenger*.⁴¹ The first African-American woman millionaire beauty product manufacturer Madame C.J. Walker gave financial support to *The Messenger* and the *Negro World*, which Amy Ashwood also played a key role in launching and

³⁹ J.A. Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color II* (New York, 1947), p. 438.

⁴⁰ W. Harrison, William, 'Phylon Profile IX: William Monroe Trotter-Fighter', *Phylon* 7 (3), 1946: 240.

⁴¹ As the owner of her own beauty salon, Lucille Randolph was far more financially savvy than her husband A. Philip. She was also a key political co-thinker in her own right as demonstrated, for example, by her run for alderman in the 21st Assembly district of Manhattan on the Socialist ticket in 1923. A.E. Kersten, *Reframing Randolph: Labor, Black Freedom, and the Legacies of A. Philip Randolph* (New York, 2015), p. 75 n. 62.

distributing.⁴² Bertha Florence Johnson, the wife of Cyril Briggs, took on the role of business manager for *The Crusader*. As historian Joyce Moore Turner has pointed out, many wives and key women have remained unknown in the historiography of Black radicalism, regardless of the extent of their assistance with financial support of their husbands.⁴³ Not to mention all of the clerical, ideological, and emotional labour and support they provided behind the scenes.

Harrison, by contrast, had a difficult and strained relationship to his wife, Irene Louise “Lin” Harrison (née Horton). Harrison harboured the vice of borrowing money, a habit which followed him in life “as a curse” on account of his terrible management of finances.⁴⁴ This undoubtedly put an economic strain on his family in general and his wife Lin in particular. Harrison’s diary records numerous occasions of her growing extremely angry with him and their engaging in verbal and sometimes physical altercations. Harrison over the years moved in and out of the apartment where his family lived to avoid the quarrels with Lin and devote more of his time to studying, thinking, and writing. About one such decision to move out, he remarked in his diary that as a result of it, “perhaps there will be time yet to do a man’s work in the world.”⁴⁵ This comment reveals his patriarchal outlook, and Lin clearly suffered mentally and emotionally from his overall lack of participation in raising their five children.⁴⁶ Harrison’s male blindspot in relation to gender—though not unusual for men of his time—appears even more contradictory in light of his progressive outlook on other issues like race and class.

⁴² A. Bundles. *On Her Own Ground*. (New York, 2001), p. 261. P. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, (New York, 2008), p. 587. T. Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-Africanist, Feminist, and Mrs. Marcus Garvey No. 1, or A Tale of Two Amies* (Dover, 2007), p. 37.

⁴³ J.M. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (New York, 2005), p. 37.

⁴⁴ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 56.

⁴⁵ H. Harrison, (diary entry), 15 June 1914, HHP box 9, folder 2.

⁴⁶ According to his children, Harrison loved them very much, but nevertheless neglected his family responsibilities. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 206.

One of the many consequences of Harrison's failure to fully attend to his family is that he was unable to look to Lin for financial support of *the Voice*, unlike so many other male editors whose papers could not have survived without the good graces, financial and otherwise, of their wives.

Moreover, Harrison seems to have been unable to secure a stable external source of funding. This may have been due, in part, to his refusal to compromise his principles. For example, whereas *The Messenger* featured ads from Madam C.J. Walker's hair-straightening products, Harrison rejected ads like this because of the way he felt they were demeaning to Black people by perpetuating white standards of beauty. While maintaining the political high ground, this position undoubtedly made it harder to raise money for the paper. Thus, generally speaking, the *Voice* seems to have failed mainly due to Harrison's own faults, particularly his gendered conception of household and family work, combined with his bad financial management.

Despite financial difficulties, Harrison still strove to put out publications that would express a militant, uncompromising, and independent New Negro viewpoint. Thus after the decline of the weekly *Voice* in the spring of 1919, Harrison began editing a monthly magazine that autumn called *The New Negro*. Similar to *The Voice*, this was "a magazine for the New Negro," a journal "intended as an organ of the international consciousness of the darker races—especially the Negro race."⁴⁷ Harrison's work to build the New Negro movement dovetailed in some ways with another prominent race-conscious organisation, but to understand why he never joined it, I now turn to Harrison's thinking about the race-conscious white progressives who founded it.

⁴⁷ H. Harrison, 'The New Negro', *The New Negro*. Vol. 3. No. 7, (August 1919), HHP 17.8.

A New Negro Analysis of White 'Friendship' in the NAACP

Harrison's work to found the first organisation and newspaper of the New Negro movement offer the clearest examples of his commitment to the politics of racial protest as a strategy for African-American advancement. Yet when Harrison left the socialists in 1914, there already existed a prominent New York City-based racial protest organisation in the form of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which Harrison felt had done "splendid work" in fighting lynching and segregation.⁴⁸ Yet because of its dependency on white funding and its moderate political orientation, it was not the proper vehicle for realising Harrison's vision.

Since its formation in 1909, Harrison had been a keen and critical observer of the Association. For example, he attended the conference of its immediate forerunner (the National Negro Committee) and noted with disapproval how the conference had censored from the official report of its proceedings comments made by Mrs. Celia Parker Wooley of Boston, who claimed that in response to race hatred by white people, there was a growing Black hatred of white people.⁴⁹ This exemplified his opposition to the Association's strategy, which he saw as overly dependent on moral suasion of white people and the notion that certain attitudes toward them were more "fit and proper" than others. As against this politics of respectability, Harrison saw "the need for a more radical policy than that of the NAACP."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 58.

⁴⁹ H. Harrison, 'The Line-up on the Color Line', *Negro World*, 4 Dec 1920, re-printed in Perry, *HHR*, p. 216.

⁵⁰ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 58.

Harrison's decision to move in a more radical direction sometimes provoked stiff rebukes from the Association. For example, shortly after forming the Liberty League and the *Voice* in the summer of 1917, he received a condescending letter from acting chair of the NAACP and Socialist Party member Mary White Ovington.⁵¹ It read:

My dear Mr. Harrison,

I don't see any reason for another organization, or another paper. If you printed straight socialism it might be different.

Yours truly,

MARY W. OVINGTON.

Given their different social sets, it is not clear why Ovington would have been in correspondence with Harrison at this point unless, for example, Harrison had reached out to the Association for financial support for *the Voice*. In any case, because she saw no need for an independent Black organization or voice outside the control of the NAACP and the Socialist Party, what Harrison was doing was unreasonable. If only Harrison would stick to 'straight socialism' (i.e. white leftism) rather than New Negro militancy, then perhaps he could be tolerated.

Harrison called Ovington's letter "bossy and dictatorial," and responded unambiguously. "These 'good white people' must really forgive us for insisting that we are not children, and that, while we want all the friends we can get, we need no benevolent dictators. It is we, and not they, who must shape Negro policies. If they want to help in carrying them out we will appreciate their help." Black people needed their

⁵¹ M.W. Ovington with R.E. Luker (ed.), *Black and White Sat Down Together* (New York, 1995), p. 87.

own organizations and newspapers as a basic matter of self-determination, something the white-owned NAACP and Socialist Parties could not provide.⁵²

Harrison derisively called the NAACP crowd ‘Professional Friends of the Negro’ for their paternalistic relationship to the very Black people they claimed to support. He criticised the way “Vesey Street Liberals” told Black people to ‘go slow’ in seeking equality, that ‘Rome was not built in a day,’ and that ‘half a loaf of is better than no bread’.⁵³ He gave the example of an editorial in the *Evening Post*, owned by the white liberal NAACP co-founder Oswald Garrison Villard, which went silent about lynching during the war, called for the “severest punishment” for the Black soldiers’ uprising against racial oppression in Houston, and only selectively criticised segregation. Examples like these showed the conditional and problematic nature of white liberal ‘friendship.’ To make matters worse, “many Negroes who have a wish-bone where their back-bone ought to be” were guilty of parroting the same line, as Harrison described the editorials of conservative Black newspapers like the *New York Age*.⁵⁴

The solution was for Black people to “insist on being our own best friends.” If white ‘friendship’ meant “compulsory compromise foisted on us by kindly white people, or by cultured Negroes whose ideal is the imitation of the urbane acquiescence of these white friends, then we had better learn to look a gift horse in the mouth whenever we get the chance.”⁵⁵ Rather than submit to “Caucasian overlordship,” Black people needed independent Black leadership. Having paid for his independence first by losing his postal job, then by losing the support of the Socialist Party, Harrison resolved to be led by white

⁵² H. Harrison, ‘Our Professional ‘Friends.’’, *The Voice*, 7 November 1917, re-printed in *WAA*, p. 55-60.

⁵³ The NAACP offices were located on Vesey Street. F. Dearborn (pseudonym for H.H.), ‘The Black Tide Turns in Politics’, HHP, box 8, folder 6. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 56.

⁵⁴ Harrison, ‘Our Professional Friends,’ in *When Africa Wakes*, p. 55-60.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

masters and their Black parrots no longer. “We, the Negroes of the Western world, do pledge our allegiance to leaders of our own race, selected by our own group and supported financially and otherwise exclusively by us.”<>

Interestingly, Harrison’s case did not rest solely on his own experience, or even that of the Black community as a whole. He cited how “whenever a leader of the Irish has to be selected by the Irish it is an Irishman who is selected” because “no Irishman would be inclined to dispute the fact that other men, even Englishmen like John Stuart Mill and the late [Scottish socialist] Keir Hardie, could feel the woes of Ireland as profoundly as any Irishman.” Here was an argument by analogy: those who did not have the lived experience of being Black could never completely ‘feel the woes’ of those who themselves were Black. Therefore African-Americans, like the Irish, needed leaders selected from among those with the relevant lived experience for the job at hand.

Harrison went further and introduced a class analysis into his argument. During slavery, he wrote, “it was those whom Denmark Vesey of Charleston described as ‘house niggers’ who got the master’s cast-off clothes, the better scraps of food and culture which fell from the white man’s table, who were looked upon as the Talented Tenth of the Negro race. The opportunities of self-improvement, in so far as they lay within the hand of the white race, were accorded exclusively to this class of people who were the left-handed progeny of the white masters.”⁵⁶ Written in the context of criticising the NAACP, Harrison’s contention that white elites selected Black leaders who were closest in economic proximity and outlook to them comes across as an indirect criticism of W.E.B. Du Bois, the left-handed editor of the NAACP’s *Crisis* magazine<>. Harrison’s

⁵⁶ Ibid.

organisational and journalistic forays with the Liberty League and *the Voice* would soon earn him a political leadership role in the New Negro movement at a national level.

The New Negro Movement Goes National: the Liberty Congress of Negro-Americans

In April of 1918, Harrison received a letter from Adam Clayton Powell Sr. and William Monroe Trotter inviting him to a meeting “to help arrange for a great liberty Convention” to be held in Washington, D.C.⁵⁷ As noted previously, Harrison and the Liberty League had already developed a plan the previous year for taking the grievances of the Black community to the United States Congress, which made him a natural candidate for co-organizing a conference for that purpose with Powell and Trotter. The purpose of the national gathering was to extend democracy (for which the US was supposedly fighting in Europe) to African-Americans and “to take positive measures to secure from the Government guarantee of the abolition of disfranchisement and of all caste discriminations, civil and political.”⁵⁸

The federal government saw the impending National Liberty Congress of Colored Americans as a threat and attempted to stop it.⁵⁹ Though they were not able to prevent or even temporarily forestall it, the Wilson administration and US military intelligence managed to organize a competing conference for Black newspaper editors in the same month, in order to steal the thunder from the Liberty Congress and rally the biggest opinion shapers in the Black press around a patriotic agenda. The government-sponsored

⁵⁷ Powell and Trotter to Harrison, 3 Apr 1918, HHP box 3, folder 13.

⁵⁸ ‘Liberty Congress Plans Indorsed[sic]’, *St. Louis Argus*, May 17, 1918.

⁵⁹ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, pp. 373-378.

gathering included the editors of major African-American newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, the *New York Age*, *Amsterdam News*, and the *St. Louis Argus*. It included notable pro-war Black leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois of the NAACP, Robert Moton of the Tuskegee Institute, and Emmett J. Scott, the Special Adviser on Black Affairs to the Secretary of War.

Most tellingly, the conference was addressed by such champions of Black progress as the Secretary of War Newton Baker, George Creel of the Committee on Public Information (the federal government's war propaganda department), and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, who would later gloat about writing the constitution of Haiti whilst he was the island's *de facto* governor.⁶⁰ A key organiser of the conference was Joel Spingarn, who at the time was both chairman of the board of the NAACP and an agent of US military intelligence in the anti-radical branch focused on "Negro subversion."⁶¹

The Liberty Congress took place in June of 1918, and Harrison ended up becoming the main leader of the event, thanks in part to Liberty Leaguer Irena Moorman-Blackston who paid for him to travel from New York to D.C. that summer and joined him as one of the few Black women delegates at the Congress.⁶² In his diary, Harrison remarked about the Congress proceedings that when his turn came to moderate the gathering, his conduct of the business at hand was apparently such a clear improvement upon what went before that he was unanimously elected chairman of the Congress. As

⁶⁰ 'Colored Editors and Leaders in Conference', *St. Louis Argus*, July 5, 1918. On Roosevelt writing Haiti's constitution, see H. Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*. (New Brunswick, 1995), p. 111.

⁶¹ We return to this important fact in Chapter 4. R. Talbert, *Negative Intelligence: The Army and the American Left, 1917-1941* (Jackson, 1991), p. 119.

⁶² J. Perry. *Hubert Harrison*, p. 380.

Harrison recorded in his private diary, “I had been presiding hardly an hour before enthusiastic commendations were expressed from the floor. If I were given much to megalomania my head would have grown as big as the church.”⁶³ Harrison here offers a glimpse into the emotional excitement that pervaded his experience of the historic gathering.

Harrison, while taking on the mantle of leadership at the Congress, also recognized its importance. He noted that it had delegates from 33 states, from as far away as Oklahoma, and that the delegates included many Black men of prominence and achievement, doctors, lawyers, ministers, editors, and teachers. Being chairman in this setting was not an easy task. For example, to Harrison’s dismay, “many of the delegates were bent upon interminable wrangling and disputation of a childish sort, and it was only by the most skilful combination of tact and repression that they were constrained to do practical work.” Yet overall, Harrison had positive reflections about the experience, concluding that “on the whole, this was the most notable gathering of Negro Americans in a generation--and most of the delegates felt this.”⁶⁴ The Congress was not only historic for its size and representation, but also for its impact.

The Liberty Congress took aim primarily at federal government policy. In particular, the Liberty Congress “asked for a joint session of the two houses of Congress to consider the grievances of the 12 million people of the Negro race and their demand for democracy at home” from the nation which was at war supposedly to ‘make the world safe for democracy.’ Harrison reported that there was a committee on resolutions, suffrage, and a petition to the US Congress to accomplish this aim.

⁶³ H. Harrison, Diary entry, 1 July 1918, HHP box 9, folder 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Naturally, the local African-American community in Washington D.C. took an interest in the historic gathering of Black activists in their own city, particularly on account of their fiercely outspoken orations. Harrison's diary entry of 1 July offers a window into this dimension of the Congress. The first speaker of the evening was U.S. Congressional representative Leonidas Dyer of Illinois, who had presented an anti-lynching bill to Congress in the aftermath of the East St. Louis anti-Black pogrom of 1917. After the Congressman came a stirring speech from Allen Whaley, William Monroe Trotter's assistant. Building on Dyer and Whaley, West-Indian born Dr. M.A.N. Shaw of Boston was the next to take the podium, about whose speech Harrison noted "I have never heard that speech surpassed. I could have listened all night." Harrison begged the audience to adjourn and hear him speak on the following night instead because it was getting late. In response there were cries from all over the church for 'Harrison! Harrison!' The audience took a vote to decide the matter and four-fifths of the audience stood to indicate their support for Harrison speaking. He held their rapt attention until 12:35am.⁶⁵

At least two things make the Harrison-chaired National Liberty Congress historically significant. For one thing, it was the only organisationally-independent national gathering of dissident African-Americans during the war. Though the Liberty Congress chose not to openly and explicitly oppose the war itself on account of the Sedition and Espionage Acts<>, it did create space for Black leaders across the country to convene and express a national New Negro consciousness and protest movement out of the militant sentiment that pervaded the younger and more forward-thinking people of African descent across the country.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Secondly, it set a precedent for independent national Black gatherings in Washington D.C. In the short term, a gathering similar to the Liberty Congress took place in Washington in December 1918, followed by the National Equal Rights League's Liberty Conference in June of 1919.⁶⁶ In a longer-term sense, the Liberty Congress must be counted as a political forerunner and ancestor of A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement in 1941 and the famous March on Washington in 1963.⁶⁷

“Follow the Example of the Irish”: the Liberty Party and New Negro Political Independence

The political party Harrison would co-found offered a concrete political vehicle for a historic trend which he both exemplified and stimulated: the New Negro break from the Republican Party. According to Harrison, the emergence of the New Negro in politics signalled the realisation among African Americans “that they were sold out by the Republican party in 1876,” and the fact that lynching and disfranchisement had increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century “with the continuing consent of a Republican Congress, a Republican Supreme Court and Republican President.”⁶⁸ Of course, he understood that even after Reconstruction African-Americans had remained loyal to the Republican Party because it touted itself as the party of Abraham Lincoln and emancipation in order to win the northern Black vote.⁶⁹ For that reason, Harrison

⁶⁶ R. Hill. *MGP, Vol. I*, p. 318 n. 1.

⁶⁷ J. Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: The Troubles I've Seen* (New York, 1997).

⁶⁸ Harrison here was speaking in 1912, before Woodrow Wilson had been elected. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 42.

⁶⁹ D. Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name* (London, 2012).

attempted (as early as 1911) to dispel Black illusions in the Republican Party by turning a critical eye toward Lincoln's actual ideological and political track record, developing a critique that radically re-conceptualised the dominant Lincoln narrative in US memory and historiography.⁷⁰

In 1920, Harrison would now attempt to provide an even more concrete political alternative to the Republican (and Democratic) parties by way of a small but historic political achievement: forming the second all-Black political party in US history, the Liberty Party.⁷¹ To be sure, Harrison's Liberty Party was a relatively weak and short-lived project, and as a result there is very little source material available about it. Nevertheless, the story sheds light upon another dimension of Harrison's brand of New Negro politics.

For Harrison, the creation of a Black political party was a logical outgrowth of the New Negro movement. The basic idea was that in the context of the corrupting influence of the Wall Street-oriented Republicans and Democrats who only countenanced Black representatives who towed their party's line, African-American voters needed to "be concentrated for the realization of racial demands for justice and equality of opportunity

⁷⁰ H. Harrison, 'Notes on Lincoln and Liberty: Fact vs. Fiction', (10 Feb 1920), HHP box 13, folder 3. H. Harrison, 'Lincoln and Liberty: Fact versus Fiction; Chapter Two. Lincoln Not an Abolitionist, Republicans Opposed Abolitionist Doctrine', *Negro World* (12 March, 1921). H. Harrison, 'Lincoln and Liberty: Fact versus Fiction; Chapter Three. Lincoln and Republican Party Favor Perpetual Slavery', *Negro World*, (19 March, 1921), re-printed in Perry, *HHR*, p. 130. Decades later, historian Lerone Bennett hit upon a similar deconstruction of Lincoln mythology, which culminated in L. Bennett, *Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream*, (Chicago, 2001).

⁷¹ R. Hill. *MGP*, Vol. 1, p. 210-211, n. 1. In 1904, the National Negro Liberty Party, which ran George Edwin Taylor as its candidate for president, emerged out of "at least a decade of efforts at state and regional levels across the south to secure pensions for ex-slaves" and general Black dissatisfaction with the Democrats and Republicans. It was the first all-Black political party in US history. Though the NNLP did not last long, it certainly paved the way for the similar effort by Harrison some 16 years later. For a history of Taylor and the NNLP, see B.L. Mouser, *For Labor, Race, and Liberty: George Edwin Taylor, His Historic Run for the White House, and the Making of Independent Black Politics*, (Madison, 2011), esp. Ch 5. O.H. Ali, *In the Balance of Power: Independent Black Politics and Third-Party Movements in the United States*, (Athens, 2008), p. 108.

and treatment” by carrying the doctrine of ‘Race First’ into the arena of electoral politics.⁷² Yet domestic political experience was not the only impetus for forming an all-Black party.

The Liberty Party also emerged, in part, from a specific political lesson that Harrison drew from international freedom struggles, particularly that of the Sinn Fein (‘we ourselves’) movement of Ireland. He wrote, “in the British Parliament the Irish Home Rule party clubbed its full strength and devoted itself so exclusively to the cause of Free Ireland that it virtually dictated for a time the policies of Liberals and Conservatives alike. *The new Negro race in America will not achieve political self-respect until it is in a position to organize itself as a politically independent party and follow the example of the Irish Home Rulers.*”⁷³ In other words, if the Irish were able to influence British politics by banding together despite being an oppressed minority, then Black people could do the same to influence US politics despite being an oppressed minority.⁷⁴ “Sinn Fein” in the Irish setting was analogous to “Race First” in the New Negro segment of African American sentiment.

For this reason, Harrison’s urging Black people to vote only for Black candidates in the 1920 elections had a simple logic.⁷⁵ Given the two-party structure of US politics the only mainstream Black candidates one could vote for would have had to be white-funded Republicans or Democrats. Having Black electoral candidates who were not beholden to white masters would therefore require forming a third party.

⁷² Harrison, *WAA*, p. 45.

⁷³ Emphasis in original. H. Harrison, ‘The New Policies for the New Negro’, *The Voice*. Sept 4, 1917. HHP 5.35. reprinted in *WAA*, p. 40.

⁷⁴ William Monroe Trotter had made a similar argument as early as 1904. S.R. Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, p. 36-37.

⁷⁵ Hill, *MGP*, Vol. 2, (Berkeley, 1983), p. 254, n. 2.

William Bridges first put out an explicit call for a Black political party in his *Challenge* magazine, one of the many Black radical broadsheets in Harlem which had followed the example of Harrison's *Voice*. Bridges' springtime call for a Black party was then reproduced in the Harrison-edited *Negro World* in June of 1920.⁷⁶ Then in August, Hubert Harrison, William Bridges, and Edgar Grey, founded the Liberty Party in a bid to concentrate and amplify the Black vote, independent of the Republican and Democratic parties. As an election-year successor to efforts like the Liberty League and Liberty Congress, the Liberty Party held street meetings in various northern cities including Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Harlem.⁷⁷

By September, Bridges was writing to Harrison of Liberty Party meetings he had organized in Milwaukee. He gushed about "what a tremendously big proposition this Negro political party is going to be here in the West" and how the only opposition he was encountering was from "a few of the preachers and the majority of the big 'niggers'."⁷⁸ In other words, many prominent Blacks did not support the Liberty Party, a situation further underscored by the fact that despite his enthusiasm, Bridges reported that the meetings he organized in Wisconsin drew fewer than twenty people. Harrison, as chairman of the NY section of the party, was dissatisfied with Bridges' conduct of party affairs and offered to "repair the damage" by speaking to young Black audiences in Eason's home base of Philadelphia, a city where the terrain for New Negro politics was probably more fertile than in Milwaukee.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ H. Harrison, 'A Negro for President', *Negro World*, 19 Jun 1920, re-printed in *WAA*, p. 44

⁷⁷ R. Hill. *MGP*, Vol. 2, p. 254, n. 2.

⁷⁸ W. Bridges to Harrison, 3 Sept. 1920, HHP box 1, folder 9.

⁷⁹ Harrison to T. W. Swann, 11 Sept. 1920, HHP box 2, folder 24.

In October 1920, the Liberty Party held a meeting of about 150 people, in which the names of prominent Black leaders including W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Kelly Miller, William Pickens, William Monroe Trotter, and Rev. James Eason were nominated as presidential candidates. In a telling political measurement of the times, the Philadelphia-based minister and Garvey movement leader Rev. James Eason got the most votes and became the party's candidate for president.

The Liberty Party seems to have broken down following Bridges' visit to Wisconsin. Ostensibly, he went there to convince the IWW and Victor Berger of the Socialist Party to support the Liberty Party. However, upon Bridges' return to Harlem, he called on Black people to support the Socialists. Due to infighting between Harrison and Bridges, likely over Bridges' newfound endorsement of a white political party, the Liberty Party ultimately collapsed.⁸⁰ A post-election article in the *Negro World* later reported that Bridges was on deck to be expelled from the party for secretly working for the Democratic Party as a Tammany Hall district captain.⁸¹

Though not successful, the party was nevertheless historically significant for two reasons. First, it built on George Edwin Taylor's 1904 candidacy by running—for the second time in US history—a Black presidential candidate.⁸² Similarly, it comprised the second formation in US history of a Black political party and thus represented a forerunner of the efforts to form a Black political party that would take shape in the 1960s, like the Freedom Now Party.⁸³

⁸⁰ R. Hill, *MGP*, Vol. 2. p. 254, n. 2.

⁸¹ 'Negro Party Brands Bridges As A Faker', *Negro World*, 6 Nov 1920, HHP box 13, folder 7.

⁸² Taylor ran unsuccessfully as the presidential candidate for the short-lived National Negro Civil Liberty Party. B. L. Mouser, *For Labor, Race, and Liberty: George Edwin Taylor, His Historic Run for the White House, and the making of Independent Black Politics* (Madison, 2012).

⁸³ Of course, various other efforts at building Black political power took place in the 1960s like the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, the Black Panther Party, and the Black Liberation Army. Ali, *In the*

The 'Colored International': A Global New Negro Vision

Lurking behind Harrison's organizational and journalistic achievements, one can discern a distinctive ideological breakthrough in something Harrison politically theorized as "the Colored International."⁸⁴ Budding first within the international program of the Liberty League, blooming through his editorship of *The New Negro* magazine, and fully blossoming on the crest of his tenure in the Garvey movement, Harrison advanced a race-conscious internationalist politics that built upon previous examples, yet broke fundamentally with them to produce a historically new—"colored"—internationalism. I now trace the evolution of this political theory to show more clearly its novelty, its relationship to white radicals, and some of its contemporary relatives.

Origins of Coloured Internationalism: The Liberty League of Negro-Americans

Thanks to Harrison's internationalism, the Liberty League declared solidarity with the struggles of oppressed peoples across the world right from its inaugural mass meeting. Mentioning explicitly the Irish, the Russian people, and the anti-colonial struggle on the Indian subcontinent, the Liberty League boldly articulated an international duty to the darker races of the world, and a "special sympathy" for the "250 millions of our brethren in Africa." The official resolutions passed at the founding Liberty League meeting also included the following prophetic passage:

Balance of Power, p. 141. H. Walton, *Black Political Parties: An Historical and Political Analysis*, (Ann Arbor, 1972), p. 199.

⁸⁴ H. Harrison, 'Africa Here and There', *Negro World*, 12 Nov 1921, HHP box 13, folder 7.

*We...ask that when the war shall be ended and the council of peace shall meet to secure to every people the right to rule their own ancestral lands free from the domination of tyrants, domestic and foreign, the similar rights of the 250,000,000 Negroes of Africa be conceded. Not to concede them is to lay the foundation for more wars in the future and to saddle the new democracies with the burden of a militarism greater than that under which the world now groans.*⁸⁵

Harrison here demonstrated his deep grasp of global geopolitics by his prediction—in 1917—not only that the First World War would culminate in a “council of peace” whose ostensible purpose would be promoting self-determination, but also that more wars in the future would follow if Africans and other colonised peoples were not granted the right to rule their own ancestral lands. This is precisely what happened with the emergence of World War II and various wars of liberation in the colonised world.

The League even raised a new flag to make visual its international allegiance. Declaring it had a “duty” to the “seventeen hundred millions” across the globe who were “colored—black and brown and yellow,” Harrison’s organisation sought to “affiliate itself with similar organisations of the darker races in other lands; to sympathise with their just aims and afford them such aid as may be within its power.” To concretise in iconographic form this political commitment to the people of colour in their global

⁸⁵ Emphasis in original. H. Harrison, ‘Resolutions’, *The Voice*, (New York, 19 Sept 1917), reprinted as ‘Resolutions Passed at the Liberty League Meeting’, in *WAA*, p. 11-12.

majority, the League adopted a tricolour of black, brown, and yellow in perpendicular vertical stripes, which symbolized “the dual relationship to our own and other peoples.”⁸⁶

The *New Negro* Magazine Extends the Liberty League Vision

Following the decline of the *Voice*, Harrison maintained and extended the Liberty League’s internationalism by way of *The New Negro* magazine of 1919. This monthly emerged, in Harrison’s words, from “the need and value of extending racial consciousness beyond the bounds of the white countries in which we find ourselves,” the need for a common current knowledge of world events and their relevance to the “darker races” and oppressed peoples everywhere, and the need to see the Black struggle in an international context.⁸⁷

One gets a sense of Harrison’s emerging theory of coloured internationalism by surveying the content covered in *The New Negro*’s pages. One of the journal’s issues included articles on such topics as race and ethnicity in Harlem, labour organizing in British Guyana, the ‘new spirit’ in Trinidad, Latin America, Egypt, lynching in the south, and ‘poems for the people’. Another issue featured pieces on African history, US military rule in the Virgin islands, West African Women, the white curriculum of the education system (including within Historically Black Colleges and Universities), inter-racial marriage, “race riots” in Britain, and anti-colonial revolt in India.

The purpose was not only to chronicle key world events, but to interpret them in race-conscious ways and maintain a critical view of “the interpretations put on these

⁸⁶ H. Harrison, ‘Declaration of Principles’, *Clarion*, (1 Sept. 1 1917), reprinted in Perry *HHR*, p. 89-92.

⁸⁷ H. Harrison, ‘The Need For It’, *The New Negro*, Vol. 4. No. 1, (September 1919), HHP 17.8.

world events by the controlling culture of the white world.” Harrison explained the intent of *The New Negro* to cultivate the “international consciousness of the darker races.” To do this, it maintained contact with “colored writers in Asia, South Africa, West Africa, Egypt, Europe, America and the West Indies” so that “by this means its readers will receive all the different currents of ideas that flow into the sea of racial consciousness.”⁸⁸

‘Wanted—A Colored International’: Harrison’s Historic Call to Action

This theoretical framework received its most sweeping, comprehensive, and politically-advanced expression in a call to action Harrison wrote in 1921 for the *Negro World* entitled “Wanted—A Colored International.”⁸⁹ Harrison began by putting forward the keystone of his theory of international relations: people of colour suffered the most in the world because, in addition to the economic exploitation which all people suffered, they had to endure the oppression which issued from the “degrading dogma of the colour line; that dogma which has been set up by the Anglo-Saxon peoples and adopted in varying degrees by other white peoples who have followed their footsteps in the path of capitalistic imperialism; that dogma which declares that the lands and labours of the coloured races everywhere shall be the legitimate prey of white peoples.” In short, white supremacy comprised a global political system of domination.

Harrison cited numerous examples of how the colour line manifested itself domestically. He mentioned how under American “democracy,” lynching, and the economic, social, and political oppression were relegated to the “dark alleys” in the

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ H. Harrison, ‘Wanted—A Colored International’, *Negro World*, 28 May 1921, re-printed in Perry, *HHR*, p. 223-28. All the quotes in this section are taken from this source, unless otherwise noted.

minds of white American political, religious, and labour leaders. In particular, he noted how president Wilson become famous for preaching a “new freedom” while pregnant Black women were roasted by white savages in Wilson’s section of the South, that Christian churches grew alarmed over the souls of Central Africans while the bodies of fellow Black Christians were brutalized at home, and that the ‘aims of labour’ conspicuously excluded all reference to the masses of Black workers who white labour leaders condemned to the “shards and sweepings” of economic life in the country. Moreover, African-Americans had already appealed to Christian sentiment, to patriotism, and to publicity to no avail, so they could not wait for white people but had to rely on themselves.

He then extended the analysis beyond US borders.

When we look upon the Negro republics of Haiti and Santo Domingo where American marines murder and rape at their pleasure while the financial vultures of Wall Street scream with joy over the bloody execution which brings the wealth of those countries under their control; when we see the Virgin Islanders in the deadly coils of American capitalism gasping for a breath of liberty, and Mexico menaced by the same monster, we begin to realize that we must organize our forces to save ourselves from further degradation and ultimate extinction.⁹⁰

The same US government that oppressed African Americans at home did committed atrocities against non-white peoples across the Caribbean and Latin America.

Harrison analysis located imperialism and the global problem of white domination in capitalism. Specifically, the capital accumulated from the exploitation of white workers in Europe and America eventually sought outlets for investment outside national boundaries and thereby become the reason for the exploitation of workers in Africa and Asia. Therefore, Harrison argued, the purpose of treaties and agreements between

⁹⁰ Ibid.

capitalist powers was to unify and standardize the exploitation of “black and brown and yellow” peoples so that “the danger to the exploiting groups of cutting each other’s throats over the spoils may be reduced to a minimum...Hence the League of Nations, which is notoriously not a league of the white masses, but of their gold-brained governors.” Here one catches a glimpse into Harrison’s view of what he called the “capitalist internationalism” of the League of Nations as a mechanism of domination over working class people, both white and non-white.

After dominating within their ‘home’ territory, the capitalist countries had united internationally to harmonize their domination of the non-white world such that “the subject races and the subject classes are tied to each other like Kilkenny cats in a conundrum of conflict which they cannot escape until the system which so binds them both is smashed beyond possibility of ‘reconstruction.’ And thus it becomes the duty of the darker races to fight against the continuance of this system from without and within.” Here Harrison offers the crux of his call to action: linking working people and people of colour all over the world in a race-conscious, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist struggle to smash the reigning system ‘beyond possibility of reconstruction’.

Because white domination and imperialism were an international problem, it would require an international solution. In particular, “a call should be issued for a congress of the darker races which should be frankly anti-imperialistic and should serve as an international centre of cooperation from which strength may be drawn for the several sections of the world of colour.” Harrison argued that this congress should include the voices of oppressed people from places like India, Egypt, China, West and South Africa, the West Indies, Hawaii, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Algeria, and

Morocco. The congress “should be made up of those who realize that capitalist imperialism which mercilessly exploits the darker races for its own financial purposes is the enemy which we must combine to fight with arms as varied as those by which it is fighting to destroy our manhood, independence and self-respect.” By his inclusion of armed struggle in the vision, Harrison here made clear that his was no half-way vision of revolution.

Coloured Internationalist Terms of Engagement with White Radicals

Interestingly, despite his experience in the Socialist party and general critique of white liberalism, Harrison did not rule out working with white radicals who were genuine in their commitment to overturning systems of domination. As he put it, “the international of the darker races must avail itself of whatever help it can get from those groups within the white race which are seeking to destroy the capitalist international of race prejudice and exploitation which is known as bourgeois ‘democracy’ at home and colonial imperialism abroad.” He likely took this position because he knew that the exploitation of white workers in the West contributed to the accumulation of capital and its drive to expand beyond the boundaries of white nations. If there were white workers who wanted to fight it, they could become allies in the struggle.

However, whatever alliances were possible with white political forces had to be on Black-emancipatory terms. African-Americans could not allow white leftists to break down Black racial solidarity, and “until we can co-operate with them on our own terms we choose not to co-operate at all, but to pursue our own way of salvation.” Harrison was

unequivocal about the need for radical humility on the part of white leftists. “Sauce for the black goose ought to be sauce for the white gander, and the temporary revolutionists of today should show their sincerity by first breaking down the exclusion walls of white workingmen before they ask us to demolish our own defensive structures of racial self-protection.” In other words, African-Americans had every right to put ‘race first’—and white leftists had no business criticising it—as long as the root problem of structural white supremacy remained intact. White radicals seeking collaboration across the colour line could demonstrate sincerity by first breaking down the racial superiority complex of white workers. “Those who will meet us on our own ground will find that we recognize a common enemy in the present world order and are willing to advance to attack it in our joint behalf.” In other words, white radicals who demonstrated in practice their opposition to white supremacy could join forces with the Colored International for a common purpose.

Context and Significance of Harrison’s Coloured Internationalism

Harrison’s discourse on the ‘Colored International’ comprised a revolutionary theorisation of global race-consciousness that built on previous theories of internationalism. Following the decline of the International Workingmen’s Association, which comprised the First International, a global federation of socialist and social-democratic parties came together to form the Second International.⁹¹ At the outbreak of the First World War, however, most of the European parties of the Second International

⁹¹ H. Katz, *The Emancipation of Labor: A History of the First International* (Westport, 1992). D. Hallas, *The Comintern*, (London, 1985).

capitulated to the pressures of patriotism and ended up siding with their own respective national ruling classes rather than the proletarian internationalism which they had espoused on paper before the outbreak of war.⁹²

In the wake of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, a third, Moscow-based Communist International or ‘Comintern’ emerged that called, among other things, for a global struggle against capitalism, imperialism, and for the national self-determination of oppressed people.⁹³ In the United States, this policy did attract Black radicals to the Communist Party, including Harlemites close to Harrison like Richard B. Moore and Cyril Briggs. Just as Ida B. Wells was for the post-Reconstruction period, or Harriet Tubman during the civil war, a Black woman can be found in the keystone position of the Black radical tradition in Harrison’s time.

Grace P. Campbell, for example, comprised the backbone of the African Blood Brotherhood. The organization’s headquarters was in Harlem and met in her apartment, and did not meet when she was out of town. Like Cyril Briggs and Richard B. Moore, Grace P. Campbell joined the Socialist Party in the late 1910s on the crest of the New Negro radicalization and Black socialist tradition that Harrison pioneered in Harlem. When white Socialist Party spokesman Algernon Lee lectured at the Harlem People’s Educational Forum and re-iterated the Eugene Debs’ argument that the party had nothing special to offer Black people, the Black socialists in the audience hissed and contested his remarks so sharply that Lee threatened “actions would be taken against them if they persisted with their questioning and demands.” Leading forum participants including

⁹² R.C. Nation, *War on War: Lenin, the Zimmerwald Left, and the Origins of Communist Internationalism* (Durham, 1989).

⁹³ L. Trotsky, *First Five Years of the Communist International Vol. 1* (London, 1973).

Campbell and Richard B. Moore resigned from the party, joining with Cyril Briggs to form the ABB.⁹⁴

Although Briggs and Campbell founded the African Blood Brotherhood as an independent revolutionary Black internationalist organisation, by 1921 it had become an appendage of the Communist Party. Whatever its benefits, this development effectively tethered the organization to the white internationalism of the Comintern.⁹⁵ Comintern Eurocentricity at that time can be measured by the resolutions of its third congress, which took place in Moscow in July of 1921, a few weeks after Harrison's call for a Coloured International. Out of the forty-one unanimously-passed 'Theses on the International Situation', thirty-six of them (87.8%) concerned Europe or the US, as opposed to Africa, Asia, or Latin America.⁹⁶ Only 291 words out of 8,318 (3.5%) were devoted to colonised peoples. Therefore, the Comintern in this period represented an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist internationalism without a clear understanding of the white problem in general, and leftist white supremacy as a component part of it.

As for Harrison's relationship to the Communist Party, one particular story paints a telling picture. In 1921, Communist leader and founding member Rose Pastor Stokes convened a meeting of Black radicals in her home.⁹⁷ Attendees included Claude McKay, W.A. Domingo, Hubert Harrison, Edgar M. Grey, and Cyril Briggs. Stokes made an offer to finance Harrison's Liberty League of Negro-Americans in exchange for his help with

⁹⁴ W.D. Samuels, 'Five Afro-Caribbean voices in American culture, 1917-1929: Hubert H. Harrison, Wilfred A. Domingo, Richard B. Moore, Cyril V. Briggs, and Claude McKay' (PhD. dissertation), 1977, Schomburg Center, [microform] Sc Micro F-10718, p. 85-86.

⁹⁵ R. Hill, 'Introduction', *Crusader Vol. 1* (New York, 1987).

⁹⁶ L. Trotsky, 'Theses of the Third World Congress on the International Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern', *First Five Years of the Communist International Vol. 1* (London, 1973). Online URL: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch21.htm>. Last accessed 18 August 2015.

⁹⁷ For more on Stokes, see S. Tamarkin, *Rose Pastor Stokes: The Portrait of a Radical Woman, 1905-1919*, (PhD dissertation) Yale University, 1983. A. Zipser and P. Zipser, *Fire and Grace: The Life of Rose Pastor Stokes*, (Athens, 1989).

recruiting Blacks into the Communist party. Harrison rejected the proposition on the grounds that “we will not allow either communists or Quakers to break down our developing racial solidarity, and we shall denounce every attempt to stampede us into their camps on their terms until they shall have first succeeded in breaking down the opposing racial solidarity of the ranks of white labour.”⁹⁸ In other words, he opted to keep the Liberty League Black-led, Black-funded, and focused on autonomous Black struggles, “thus foiling any plan that the communists might have entertained of using him as their stalking-horse against Garvey,” as historian Robert Hill put it.⁹⁹ In short, once bitten by the white left, Harrison remained twice shy towards its overtures.

As Jeff Perry has pointed out, Harrison articulated the call for a “Colored International” in the spring of 1921, not only in the context of turning down an offer from the Communist party, but also while he was in the process of distancing himself from Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association. Garvey’s UNIA international convention of 1921 was full of Black people from across the diaspora, but it continued to advance as its international program one of colonising Liberia, and selling shares for the international shipping venture of the Black Star Line corporation.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, although supremely race-conscious and Black-affirmative, Garvey’s vision embraced the construction of an empire based upon the accumulation of capital.

In that setting, Harrison’s coloured internationalism represented a theory that combined the class-consciousness and anti-imperialism of the European Marxists with the race-conscious sensibilities of Black nationalism and the broader “rising tide of color

⁹⁸ Harrison, ‘Wanted—A Colored International’.

⁹⁹ R. Hill, *MGP. Vol. 2.* p. 681-682 n. 1. R. Hill, *Crusader Vol. 1* (New York, 1987), p. xi. T. Kornweibel, *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925*, (Bloomington, 1998), p. 141-142.

¹⁰⁰ A.J. Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism* (New York, 1970), p. 11.

against white world supremacy” that so frightened white supremacist intellectuals.¹⁰¹ Put another way, Harrison posed an race-conscious alternative to the Eurocentrism of the white left and an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist alternative to the Black capitalism and imperialism of Garvey.¹⁰²

By this measure, *no other major figure or organization in the U.S.* had an international program like Harrison’s in 1921. Tuskegee Institute foreign policy comprised what historian Andrew Zimmerman has aptly called the “Segregationist International.”¹⁰³ As essentially a program for the “globalization of the new South,” it was neither anti-capitalist, nor anti-imperialist, nor opposed to global white supremacy.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, W.E.B. Du Bois’ pan-African congresses of 1919-1927 did much to promote independence in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean.¹⁰⁵ However, they were dominated by figures like Blaise Diagne and other pro-capitalist representatives of the “talented tenth.” Although race-conscious and critical of imperialism, Du Bois’ pan-African congresses in this period were neither anti-capitalist nor class-radical.

Of course, the individuals and forces I am comparing did not remain static. Du Bois, for example, became a communist in the 1930s, adding class consciousness and Marxism to his anti-imperialist and race consciousness. Similarly, the Communist Party in the US developed a more forceful race consciousness in the 1930s.¹⁰⁶ My point is simply that for the early 1920s, Harrison’s internationalism broke new ground in political theory. In fact, his call for a “Colored International” presented the first conscious

¹⁰¹ L. Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (New York, 1920).

¹⁰² Perry, *HHR*, p. 223-24. See chapter 5 for more on Harrison and the Garvey movement.

¹⁰³ A. Zimmerman, *Alabama In Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton, 2010).

¹⁰⁴ See chapter 6 for further discussion of Tuskegee foreign policy.

¹⁰⁵ E.F. Provenzo and E. Abaka (eds.), *W.E.B. Du Bois On Africa* (Walnut Creek, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ R.D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*.

articulation of a radically anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, *and anti-white-supremacist* internationalism in US history.

Moving from theory to practice, something akin to Harrison's envisioned Colored International did eventually take shape in the form of the 1927 League Against Imperialism conference in Brussels. Conceived as a kind of radical alternative to the League of Nations, it gathered Communist, Socialist, and nationalist leaders from South Africa, Algeria, Indonesia, Palestine, Iran, India, China, Afro-America, Peru and Puerto Rico.¹⁰⁷ Though Harrison did not make it to the conference, his Liberty League alumnus and race-conscious communist protégé Richard B. Moore drafted the final 'Resolution on the Negro Question' which the Brussels conference adopted.¹⁰⁸ The League's call for the rights of darker nations to rule themselves in turn laid the ground work for various subsequent regional pan-American, pan-African, and pan-Asian conferences culminating in the Bandung conference of 1955.¹⁰⁹

Restoring Harrison's coloured internationalism expands the frame of an important moment in twentieth century political theory. For example, the Colored International can be counted among the ideological forerunners of what historian Vijay Prashad called the "internationalist nationalism" of the Third World.¹¹⁰ In a similar way, it also offers a unique tributary for what historians Michael West and William Martin have recently theorized as the "Black International," conceived as the interconnection and interlocution of global and universally-emancipatory Black resistance to oppression transcending the

¹⁰⁷ V. Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, (New York, 2008), p. 20 and n.8, p. 286.

¹⁰⁸ J.M. Turner and W.B. Turner (eds), *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem: Collected Writings, 1920-1972*, (Bloomington, 1988), p. 189.

¹⁰⁹ Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, p. 21-22.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 12. I recognise the modern critiques of the phrase "third world" as a demeaning term, but it was apparently used more affirmatively and assertively by oppressed peoples in the immediate post-WWII conjuncture.

boundaries of nations, empires, continents, oceans, and seas.¹¹¹ The place of Harrison's coloured internationalism as an antecedent to 'Third Worldism' and as a relative of Black internationalism speak to the relevance of Harrison not only for New Negro studies, but also political theory and the history of African-American political thought.

Conclusion

To sum up, Harrison's role as a principal architect of the New Negro movement is incontrovertible: Harrison had spearheaded the first organisation, newspaper, nation-wide congress, and Black political party of the New Negro movement. Following the example of the *Voice*, the New Negro movement witnessed the emergence of radical Black newspapers like Randolph and Owen's *Messenger*, Garvey's *Negro World*, Briggs' *Crusader*, Bridges' *Challenge*, and Domingo's *Emancipator*. After Harrison's own foray into the white left and subsequent founding of the Liberty League in 1917, the following years witnessed Black radicals joining the Socialist and Communist Parties, the emergence of the African Blood Brotherhood, and most spectacularly, the Garvey movement. Among the most distinctive features of Harrison's political thought emerged in his world-historic and visionary call for an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist "Colored International," a prescient theorisation of the global process that eventually found expression in the Brussels and Bandung conferences.

Anyone who doubts Harrison's seminal role need only take a look at the confirmation provided by the US government's intelligence apparatus. According to

¹¹¹ M.O. West and W.G. Martin, *From Toussaint to Tupac: the Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, (Chapel Hill, 2009), p. 2.

Major Walter Loving, the highest-ranking African-American officer in military intelligence, New York City comprised the “fountainhead of all radical propaganda among Negroes.” Major Loving spent two full years attending radical Black meetings, speeches, and events across multiple cities and states in plainclothes. His work culminated in the “Final Report on Negro Subversion” that he prepared for the Director of US military intelligence. In a report that included sections on forces like Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, Black socialists A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, and Black activist war veterans, Loving considered Hubert Harrison’s influence “more far reaching than that of any other individual radical” in the Black community.¹¹² If Harlem was the fountainhead of Black radicalism and he reached the Black masses with an influence more far reaching than that of any other radical, then it should be clear why Hubert Harrison belongs in the centre of the current resurgence of interest in New Negro studies.

Having established his relationship to the New Negro movement raises questions about Harrison’s influence and ideas. What ideas did he seek to imbue the movement with? How and why did Harrison’s influence reach so far in the community?

Harrison’s coloured internationalism formed a clear example of the way in which he drew on radical political currents from the European, Black, and non-Western worlds, combined them, and synthesised new ideas befitting his station and that of the communities on whom he focused his energy. In the next chapter, I zoom out to look at the more general Black intellectual and political culture that Harrison’s coloured internationalism exemplified. As we will see, Harrison cultivated a radically-free

¹¹² Maj. W. Loving, ‘Final Report on Negro Subversion’, 6 Aug 1919, Major Walter Loving Papers, Box 113-1, Folder 12, p. 11.

education model by drawing on a centuries-old, grassroots, and West African oral tradition.

Chapter 3

The ‘Outdoor University’ and Black *Griot* of the Harlem Acropolis

Introduction

As a Black radical, Harrison inevitably had to grapple with the conservatism manifested amongst most African Americans before the rise of a ‘New Negro’ sentiment during WWI. In 1914, he identified a number of factors in the ideological and political moderation of Black communities. The first was Christianity, which he argued “still enslaves the minds of those whose bodies it has long held bound.”¹ Second, whites had historically restricted Black access to education. This was particularly acute in the south, where the majority of African Americans lived, with some counties spending as little as 58 cents per year on a Black child’s education.²

A third factor in Black conservatism concerned the way in which intellectual segregation along the lines of race limited Black access to the critical currents of modern European thought. Noting the lack of Black participation in the radical movements of the day like “Single Tax, Socialism, and Anarchism,” Harrison remarked that “Christian America created the color line; and all the great currents of critical opinion, from the eighteenth century to our time, have found the great barrier impassible and well-nigh

¹ H. Harrison, ‘The Negro a Conservative: Christianity Still Enslaves the Minds of Those Whose Bodies It Has Long Held Bound’, *Truth Seeker* 41, 12 Sep 1914, reprinted in Perry’s *Reader*, p. 42.

² H. Harrison, ‘Bridging the Gulf of Color’, 22 April 1922, HHP box 4, folder 23.

impervious. Behind the color line one has to think perpetually of the color line, and most of those who grow up behind it can think of nothing else.”³ In other words, racial segregation blocked modern European radicalisms such as socialism and anarchism from reaching most African Americans because it forced critical-minded Black people to focus so much of their discretionary effort on the problem of racial segregation itself.

This was bad for Black people but also bad for white people. “One of the most regrettable features of the great American race-problem today is the wide gulf existing between the mind of the Negro and the mind of the Caucasian.”⁴ Racial oppression dived not only social and spatial relations between white and Black, but also intellectual relations. As a result, when able Black intellectuals emerged, like “Alain Locke, the scholar, William Browne, the mathematician, and Ernest Just, the biologist, their superiority, unperceived by their own race, escapes the assessing observation of the whites; and so, [due to] lack of proper recognition, fails to exert its full force as standard and example.” Thus racial oppression made both white and Black communities blind to Black intellectual achievement which could benefit society as a whole, if properly recognised.

In this chapter, I will look at the response that Harrison developed on various levels for this problem of Black intellectual conservatism and under-education. At an individual level, he expended a great effort to read widely across various disciplinary boundaries, a task facilitated by the way in which Manhattan formed a nexus of multiple social and international influences. At a collective level, he developed a new intellectual socio-cultural and informal educational institution in his home neighbourhood based on an ancient oral tradition from Harlem’s African heritage.

³ Harrison, ‘The Negro a Conservative’.

⁴ Harrison, ‘Bridging the Gulf of Color’.

At an intellectual level, he advanced an epistemology based on his synthesis of modern knowledge from both sides of the colour line. This effectively unified the epistemological divide between the new theories and social sciences of the white world and a new Black epistemology emerging from the ‘rising tide of color’ from various non-Western histories, cultures, and intellectual developments. By synthesising historical and contemporary trends from Africa, East Asia, the Islamic world, and Europe, he would become “the pioneer of the Negro intellectual renaissance,” as Caribbean-born activist Richard B. Moore put it.⁵

I begin this chapter with a portrait of Harrison’s desegregated epistemology by demonstrating his broad and expansive self-education. I then analyse the socio-cultural tradition of community oral culture through which he developed the “Outdoor University” as an institution for working-class adult education and politicisation. I then turn to Harrison’s indoor educational legacy in the community, finishing the chapter with a picture of his educational theory.

“One of America’s Greatest Minds”: Harrison’s Prodigious Learning

In order to grasp the culture of broad ideation that Harrison stimulated in Harlem, one must grasp the intellectual breadth that he himself possessed. According to NAACP field organiser and Yale graduate William Pickens, Harrison could speak “more easily, effectively, and interestingly on a greater variety of subjects than any man I have ever

⁵ ‘Lament Death of Dr. Hubert Harrison: Eulogized by Several Who Knew His Life and Worth’, *Amsterdam News*, 28 Dec 1927: 1.

met in the great universities.”⁶ This quote points towards the vastness of Harrison’s intellectual world, despite his economic deprivation and lack of a college degree. How did he achieve it?

Harrison showed great mental agility long before his foray into public life. For example, the *New York World* of April 1903 ran an article about a twenty-year old Harrison entitled “Speaker’s Medal To Negro Student: The Board Of Education Finds A Genius In A West Indian Pupil.”⁷ The story quoted one of Harrison’s teachers who spoke of how he was the only one to pass the “rigid” final exams with a perfect score of 100 percent in the mostly-white school. Henry Carr, an English professor at his school, noted prophetically that “he will be heard from if learning has anything to do with success.”⁸ Thus long before Harrison had any major public or political profile, his teachers saw great potential in him.

Not satiated by what he learned in his evening high school, Harrison undertook to educate himself further outside of the formal classroom. Primarily, he nurtured a ravenous appetite for reading anything and everything he could get his hands on, a point which will become clearer in a moment. Also, beginning sometime around 1905, Harrison began to practice his skills in intellectual debate at the Black church lyceums of St. Mark’s and St. Benedict’s. These lyceums offered a lively community built around enriching guest lectures, political and philosophical debates, and friendly-but-fierce oratorical battles. In this setting, Harrison encountered and befriended Black bibliophiles like John E. Bruce and Arturo Schomburg, and also got a rigorous training in critical

⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

⁷ J. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 56.

⁸ Ibid.

thinking, public speaking, newsletter editing, and organisational politics through the internal struggles for elected leadership positions.⁹

As a result of his intellectual curiosity and exposure to secular thinkers, Harrison soon broke with Christianity to become a militant agnostic. Harrison published in freethinking publications about subjects like Thomas Paine's place in the history of the Deistical movement, praising Paine as the one who brought "militant unbelief and democratic dissent" down from the clouds to the level of ordinary people.¹⁰ According to Black atheist educator and Harrison protégé John G. Jackson, Harrison advised his audiences to read such classics of theological criticism as Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, Constantin-François Volney's *Ruins of Empires*, John William Draper's *Conflict Between Religion and Science*, Andrew Dickson White's *Warfare of Science and Theology*, and the *Lectures of Robert Ingersoll*. Freethought publication *The Truth Seeker* ranked Harrison in the same category as the leading freethinkers of the day like Mark Twain, Thomas Huxley, Ernst Haeckel, Moncure D. Conway, and Luther Burbank.¹¹ By 1911, he represented the most prominent Black voice in the *Freethought* movement.¹²

As a result of his foray into the Freethought milieu, Harrison developed a keen familiarity with religion. For example, Harrison taught a course in comparative religion in 1914 at the New York City Modern School, which formed the part of the radical education movement that emerged in response to the execution of Spanish anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer.¹³ Harrison's course covered Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, the

⁹ Ibid, p. 70-78.

¹⁰ H. Harrison, 'Paine's Place in the Deistical Movement', *Truth Seeker* 38, no. 6, 11 Feb 1911:87-88, reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 40-42.

¹¹ *Amsterdam News*, 21 Dec 1927, HHP box 18, folder 8.

¹² 'Hubert Harrison Dies', *Amsterdam News*, 21 Dec 1927: 1.

¹³ P. Avrich, *The Modern School Movement* (Princeton, 1980).

teachings of Confucius and other religions of China, Islam, and the debt of Christianity to paganism. He gave lectures with titles like “Religion and Government” which focused on “the Adulterous Union of Church and State”; “Religion and the Proletariat” about why all religions were reactionary; and “Religion and Culture,” which looked at the conflicts between religion and culture and offered “An Agnostic’s Apology—The Duty of Free Thinking and Plain Speaking.”¹⁴ Harrison also lectured on subjects like “How God Grew, The Evolution of the Idea of God” and “Jesus Christ and the Working Man: A Challenge to the Christian Socialists.”¹⁵ Thanks to his vast command of religious thought, he reportedly once even declined an offer to take a position as the president of a theological seminary.¹⁶

While writing, speaking, and agitating for the socialist cause, Harrison taught a course in labour economics at the Rand School of Social Science, a socialist-oriented institution for developing workers’ class and political consciousness.¹⁷ His course covered feudalism, capitalism, the wage system, and class struggle with a reading list that included Karl Marx’s *Wage Labor, and Capital*, Karl Kautsky’s *The Class Struggle*, Paul LaFargue’s *The Evolution of Property*, and Mary E. Marcy’s *Shop-Talks on Economics*.¹⁸ He also incorporated readings from social theorist Lewis Henry Morgan and founder of

¹⁴ ‘The Modern School, Francisco Ferrer Association, Hubert Harrison’ (advertisement) HHP, flat box 740.

¹⁵ ‘“How God Grew, The Evolution of the Idea of God’ by Hubert Harrison at the Radical Forum’, *NY Call*, 29 Nov 1914. ‘Jesus Christ and the Working Man: A Challenge to the Christian Socialists’, Hubert Harrison at the Harlem Casino for the Radical Forum’, *NY Call* 4 October 1914. HHP, flat box 740.

¹⁶ J. Jackson, ‘Black Athiests of the Harlem Renaissance, 1917-1928’, speech to the 1984 American Athiests Convention, Online URL: http://nationofatheism.tripod.com/cgi-bin/the_black_atheist.html. Last accessed 17 February, 2016.

¹⁷ F. Cornell, ‘A History of the Rand School of Social Science, 1906 to 1956’ (PhD dissertation), Columbia University Teachers College, 1976. R. C. Schwartz, ‘The Rand School of Social Science, 1906-1924: A Study of Worker Education in the Socialist Era’ (PhD dissertation), SUNY Buffalo, 1984.

¹⁸ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 208-9.

German socialism, Ferdinand August Bebel.¹⁹ Harrison also studied the work of critical modern European economists like Eugen Böhm-Bawerk and Thomas Edward Cliffe Leslie.²⁰

Although he studied Freethought, religion, and economics, his real forte was perhaps a subject which he lived daily and therefore felt more acutely than the others: Black culture. For example in June of 1918, Harrison delivered a lecture on “Negro History and its place in Negro Education.” In the presentation, Harrison brought to bear his knowledge of anthropology and sociology, explaining the sacred traditions and evolutionary stages of various African societies. He interpreted African psychology, family customs, and the African notion that “maternity is a matter of fact and paternity is a matter of faith.” According to Harrison, this proverbial wisdom demonstrated the great love African people have for the maternal figure and their respect for women. He also compared the temperament of West Indians with that of West Africans and contrasted different dimensions of American society with those of African societies.²¹

Another of Harrison’s intellectual-building hobbies was reading novels, essays, and poetry, and as the first Black staff lecturer for the New York City Board of Education, he gave numerous public talks on English literature. Between the fall of 1922 and spring of 1924, for example, he gave lectures on the literature of Charles Dickens, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain, Alfred Tennyson, Edgar Allan Poe, and H. G. Wells. In another series, he lectured on Sir Walter Scott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Macaulay, Victor Hugo, Charles Reade, Bret Harte, Rider

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 467 n. 27.

²⁰ H. Harrison, ‘Just Suppose: A Riddle for ‘Scientific Radical’ Liars, With Apologies to C. OW’, *Negro World*, 10 April 1920.

²¹ S. Wilberforce, ‘Harrison Delivers Inspiring Lecture’, *The Voice*, 1 July 1918. HHP box 18, folder 7.

Haggard, Thomas Carlyle, James Russell Lowell, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Keats, James Fenimore Cooper, William Wordsworth, Mary Johnston, Herman Melville, Bliss Carman, George Bernard Shaw, “Negro Poets of Note,” and “the Negro in American Literature.”²² On the birthday of Lewis Carroll, Harrison even gave a talk at the North Harlem Community Forum on *Alice in Wonderland*—for children!²³

Alongside his enthusiasm for literature, Harrison read widely in the new social sciences like anthropology and sociology. In a polemic with A. Philip Randolph, Harrison explicitly cited a range of anthropologists and sociologists including Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, Georges Vacher de Lapouge, and Charles Jean Marie Letourneau, Herbert Spencer, John Lubbock, Edward Burnett Tylor, Ludwig Gumplowicz, Friedrich Ratzel, Lewis Henry Morgan, James George Frazer, and Georg August Schweinfurth.²⁴ In other words, Harrison was acquainted with contemporary social thought emerging from France, England, Poland, Germany, the United States, Scotland, and Latvia, to name a few.

Not content to focus only on general anthropology, Harrison also took a keen interest in “scientific” justifications for racial hierarchy. In 1926, the *Amsterdam News* covered one of Harrison’s talks at New York University, noting that Harrison’s lecture on “Science and Race Prejudice” surprised his listeners by omitting any mention of the so-called “Negro problem.” It was apparently the first time a Black lecturer at the university did not focus on that subject.²⁵ As the report put it, the speaker handled his subject matter “in the objective manner of the scientist” by “bringing to the bar of psychology and

²² H. Harrison, ‘Public notices, Record, and References’ (Scrapbook), HHP box 13, folder 5.

²³ Ibid., ‘135th St. (Harlem) Library Notes’, *Negro World* 3 Feb 1923.

²⁴ H. Harrison, ‘Just Suppose: A Riddle for ‘Scientific Radical’ Liars, With Apologies to C. OW’, *Negro World*, 10 April 1920.

²⁵ ‘Hubert Harrison to Lecture at N.Y.U.’, *Amsterdam News*, 13 Oct 1926: 9.

sociology all the proponents of race prejudice” including Count Arthur de Gobineau, James Anthony Froude, Edward Augustus Freeman, and Thomas Carlyle from the nineteenth century, and Houston Chamberlain, Madison Grant, William McDougall, Lothrop Stoddard, and Albert Edward Wiggam from the twentieth.²⁶ As both a student of social science and ardent critic of race prejudice, Harrison took care to study and deconstruct the various scholarly figures who defended the racial hierarchy on pseudo-scientific grounds.

Following his initial talk at NYU, he proceeded to show his grasp of global geopolitics with a follow-up lecture there on “Locarno, Imperialism and the League of Nations,” which analysed the post-WWI treaty that had recently been signed in Locarno, Switzerland. When his audience asked him to return a third time, Harrison modestly declined, “playfully declaring that, if such invitations were kept up he would have to apply for an adjunct professorship in the university.” Nevertheless, the students persisted and they scheduled Harrison, the “famous Negro scholar” without a university degree, to lecture yet again on the provocative question ‘Is the Politician Necessary?’²⁷ One can only imagine the electrical excitement of a downtown NYU auditorium jam-packed for the series-culminating encore lecture from Harlem’s “Black Socrates.” Following the success of his July lecture, he ended up teaching a class in the fall semester on “the American race problem,” whose ten-item reading list included seven works by Black authors, apparently the first majority-Black syllabus taught at the institution.²⁸

²⁶ ‘Negro Scholar Receives Remarkable Tribute at New York University’, *Amsterdam News*, 4 July 1926.

²⁷ Ibid. The *Amsterdam News* noted the extreme anomaly of the lecture series, whereby “a black scholar, without even touching on the Negro problem, discusses with the authority of modern scholarship problems of science and international affairs and is warmly welcomed and sought after by white university students, the intellectual cream of the white race.”

²⁸ ‘Hubert Harrison to Lecture at N.Y.U.’, *Amsterdam News*, 13 Oct 1926: 9.

The NYU experience speaks to Harrison's great interest in the global politics of race. On this score, Harrison eventually developed a course whose lecture titles included: Race and its Reactions in History and Science; The White Race's Rise to Power and Prestige; Race and Color Problems in America and the West Indies; The Brown Bridge of Britain's Empire--From Egypt to India; China and the Powers; Soviet Russia: Its Bearing on White Rulership over Darker Races; and The League of Nations and the Future of the Darker Races.²⁹ In 1926, he taught a "World Problems of Race" course for Willis N. Huggins and Richard B. Moore's Institute for Social Study in Harlem. In that capacity, he gave talks with titles like The Rise of the Modern Idea of Race, The Revolt of Islam, The Black Man's Burden in Africa, Cultural and Religious Aspects of Race, Japan: the Frankenstein of European Imperialism, and The Nemesis of White Imperialism.³⁰ In courses like these, one glimpses the educational expression of his coloured internationalism.

Somehow, global geopolitics, sociology, scientific racism, canonical English literature, economics, Black culture, and comparative theology were not enough. In 1917, Harrison gave a series of lectures on sex and sexuality.³¹ The title of the talks included: The Sexual Appeal of Spiritualism, Marriage Versus Free Love, Is Birth-Control Hurtful Or Helpful?, Why Men Leave Home, The Society for the Suppression of Vice, and The Origin of Our Sex Ideals. This series demonstrated Harrison's radicalism in regard to Victorian sexual mores with his themes of opposition to moral conservatism and his

²⁹ H. Harrison, 'The Summer College Course', *Voice of the Negro* 1:4, May 1927, HHP box 17, folder 10.

³⁰ 'World Problems of Race Course Syllabus', *The Institute for Social Study*, 1926, HHP box 13, folder 5.

³¹ 'Six Lectures on Sex by Hubert H. Harrison at the Temple of Truth', HHP Flat box 740.

openness to free love, birth control, non-monogamy, and the historically-contingent and socially-constructed nature of human sexuality.³²

Inevitably, Harrison took a keen interest in philosophy. For example, speaking about sixteenth-century philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* and *The Novum Organon*, Harrison noted that "these were the first works since the era of Islamic science in which a European writer had massed all the available information about the universe into a systematic survey." He further noted that since Bacon's time, the same thing had been done in works such as Baron D'Holbach's *System of Nature* (1770), Alexander von Humboldt's *The Cosmos* (1851), Auguste Comte's *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830), Ludwig Buchner's *Force and Matter* (1864), Thomas Haeckel's *The Riddle of the Universe* (1895), Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* (1862), and John Fiske's *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* (1871).³³ In a diary entry about how poverty and hunger comprised "a damned powerful modifier of a man's philosophy of life" he noted his perplexity at how the first major German pessimists Arthur Schopenhauer and Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann never suffered economically. He also wondered how much economic deprivation shaped the thinking of nihilist philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner.³⁴

Harrison's interest in European thought was complemented by his interest in Africana culture. In 1921, Harrison gave a Thursday lecture series devoted to African life and customs, African kinship relations, African spirituality, African secret societies, and African systems of government. A concurrent Sunday series featured titles like the Black

³² Harrison, it must be noted, opposed sterilisation. For more on his birth control advocacy, see Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 222.

³³ H. Harrison, 'First Principles', (publication unknown), 16 July 1921, HHP box 13, folder 7.

³⁴ H. Harrison, diary entry, 7 Mar 1908, HHP box 9.

Man in History and Civilization, Egypt and Ethiopia, the Cradles of Civilization, One Thousand Years of West African History, The War of Races in Africa (on early colonization and the slave trade), and the Partition of Africa.³⁵ According to the Howard University Record, Harrison's 1919 talk at the historically-Black institution was inspirational and "will no doubt lead to much Pan-African thought at the University."³⁶

Harrison demonstrated various other unusual skills and intellectual faculties. For example, in April of 1921, Harrison began a stint as an instructor at the New York School of Chiropractic in Harlem, where he delivered a 12-lecture course on the subject of embryology.³⁷ He also was an early theatre critic in Harlem, and began to write a book about the sociology of the Black theatre.³⁸ At one point, Harrison tutored private students in grammar, composition, literature, history, Latin, English, rhetoric, and geography. Journalist Floyd Calvin wrote that Finns and Hungarians remembered Harrison as "the man who devised a way of teaching them English without knowing a word of their language."³⁹ Yet Harrison was no stranger to other languages. According to his biographer, he spoke or read English, Danish, Latin, French, German, and Arabic.⁴⁰

If the above is any indication, and it is undoubtedly only a sampling, Harrison came to master a truly staggering body of information. As Pickens put it, Harrison was "a 'walking cyclopedia' of current human facts" and it made "no difference" whether he spoke about "Alice in Wonderland or the most extensive work of H.G. Wells; about the lightest shadows of Edgar Allen Poe or the heaviest depths of Kant; about music, or art,

³⁵ H. Harrison, 'Know Thyself!' *Negro World*, 16 Apr 1921. HHP box 13, folder 7.

³⁶ *Howard University Record*, Vol XIII No. 3, Mar 1919, p. 144, HHP flat box 740.

³⁷ H. Harrison, diary entry, 6 April 1921, HHP Box 9, Diary 1. H. Harrison, 'Frightful Friendship vs. Self-Defence', HHP box 13, folder 7.

³⁸ H. Harrison, 'Negro Society and the Negro Stage, Preamble [Part 1]', *The Voice*, 19 Sep 1917, re-printed in Perry, *HHR*, p. 371.

³⁹ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 194-95.

⁴⁰ J. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 7, 406 n. 22.

or science, or political history.”⁴¹ Though surely an impartial list, Harrison demonstrated mastery of theological criticism, comparative religion, economics, Black arts and culture, sociology, anthropology, scientific racism, international geopolitics, philosophy, sexuality, English literature, African history, and evolutionary biology. This command of vast knowledge concerning Africa, East Asia, the Islamic world, and Europe brings us to his epistemological desegregation.

Because of its wide range, Harrison’s thought represented no less than the overthrow of white domination in the realm of knowledge. His knowledge of white theory and epistemology—from Western philosophy and social science to English literature and European history—was clearly encyclopedic. So too was his knowledge of Black theory and epistemology—from ancient African civilisations and modern day West Indian politics to Black culture and African American literature. Harrison’s epistemology obliterated the colour line in modern thought.

Part of how Harrison did this can be explained by his intellectual acumen, about which his contemporaries readily reflected. For example, Harlem resident Oscar Benson, in a tribute following Harrison’s death, remarked that “nearly every genius whether he be writer or speaker is accused by critics of following some certain school of thought. Of Shakespeare they say Bacon; of Emerson, Plato; of Nietzsche they say Schopenhauer... Therefore they strip most men of the reputation of being original and no man is genuine or a genius without being original. [But] Hubert Harrison...instituted a new school of thought.”⁴² Harlem activist Hodge Kirnon made a similar point with a twinge of humour. “I think it was Thomas Carlyle who defined genius as the infinite

⁴¹ W. Pickens, ‘Hubert Harrison: Philosopher of Harlem’, *Amsterdam News*, 7 Feb 1923: 12.

⁴² O. Benson, ‘Literary Genius of Hubert Harrison’, *NY News* 24 Dec 1927.

capacity for taking pains, but another able thinker conceived it as the ability to do without effort what others have to labor to perform. Hubert Harrison's great ability took the middle ground between these two opposing views."⁴³ As J.A. Rogers put it, Harrison "was not only perhaps the foremost Afro-American intellect of his time, but one of America's greatest minds."⁴⁴

Yet Hubert Harrison, of course, was not the only learned mind in Harlem. Writing from his home neighbourhood, he noted how "I can walk a mile from the place where this is written and converse with the ablest economist of our race. A few blocks north I can shake hands with our best biologist (barring Ernest Just). I am acquainted with a journalist who slings niftier prose than anyone else whom I know, and a scholar whose book reveals a wider historic knowledge of racial contacts than any other scholar, white or black. Their names? Well you would not recognize them if I gave them here. For Harlem doesn't 'boost' Harlem."⁴⁵ Harrison here touched on one of the intellectual consequences of racial segregation: the brains that do exist in Black communities often go unrecognized (and therefore unknown) by the dominant white society. Evolutionary biologist Stephen J. Gould spoke to this problem when he said "I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops."⁴⁶ Thus Harrison was surely not the only under-appreciated mind in Harlem, and undoubtedly worked out much of his thinking in the context of the larger community to which he

⁴³ H. Kirnon, 'Hubert Harrison: An Appreciation', *Amsterdam News*, 4 Jan 1928: 16.

⁴⁴ Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color Vol. 2*, (New York, 1947) p. 611.

⁴⁵ H. Harrison, "'No Negro Literary Renaissance' Says Well-Known Writer", *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 Mar 1927.

⁴⁶ S.J. Gould, *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History* (New York, 1980), p. 151.

belonged, particularly the social institution he developed there in order to cultivate a whole new intellectual culture.

The ‘Outdoor University’ and Black *Griot* of the Harlem Acropolis

Harrison developed a deep knowledge of many subjects as he simultaneously stimulated a new intellectual and political culture in his neighbourhood. Primarily, he did this by cultivating the art of street-corner oratory in Harlem. As historian Theodore Vincent put it, Harrison was “the man most responsible for building the tradition” of stepladder speaking in that community.⁴⁷ To understand the significance of this historical development, I will begin this section by exploring various dimensions of the oral culture that Harrison developed in Harlem. I then place it in the context of oral traditions in ancient Greece and west Africa.

In 1926, William Pickens observed one of Harrison’s street corner speeches between 137th Street and 138th Street on Seventh Avenue with cars, busses and boisterous fire-engines passing right behind him. Harrison’s subject that evening was the theory of evolution, and he illustrated it along different lines of material and biological development, both “the Darwinian science of the evolution of life, and the Marxian philosophy of the evolution” from capitalism to communism. Pickens reported seeing one of the biggest street-corner audiences that he had ever encountered in an area that had become famous for street-corner lectures, and how “not in my life have I seen a more attentive audience at a lecture on a subject of this magnitude.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ T. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (San Francisco, 1972), p. 40.

⁴⁸ W. Pickens, ‘Evolution Discussed On Harlem Streets’, *Associated Negro Press*, August 23, 1926.

To be effective, street corner speakers had to hold the attention and interest of their audience. Much like they later would do at the Apollo Theatre's 'Amateur's Night', a dissatisfied audience could boo a prospective speechmaker off the platform quickly and unceremoniously.⁴⁹ For this reason, as historian Ralph Crowder pointed out, stepladder orators were "experts in utilizing the cultural dynamics of public debate in urban Black communities. Spontaneity, improvisation, call and response, and the ability to read the shifting climate of the audience were all essential skills for effective oratory."⁵⁰ Thus the art of street corner speaking comprised an interactive process wherein the speaker formed the focal point while working-class Harlemites vocally exhorted or heckled the speaker, enforcing their own standards and expectations, and otherwise participating actively in a dialectical affirmation and collective communication process.⁵¹

Street corner oration was no dry academic lecture, but a lively, dynamic, and entertaining form of address. It bears mentioning that Harlem residents could not peruse Facebook or YouTube after a hard day's work in the 1920s, nor could they have watched shows on a home television set. Although radio formed an increasingly prominent mode of mass communication in the early twentieth century, most of the Black-oriented programming it featured before WWII consisted of demeaning, nineteenth-century-style blackface dialect comedy.⁵² Therefore Harlem residents in the 1920s often went out in the evening to partake of cultural and social life of the street corner orators. Community members knew the time and place where speakers would declaim, and would congregate

⁴⁹ L. Holloway, 'Show Time for Sad Time at Apollo', *New York Times*, 7 Aug 1992.

⁵⁰ R.L. Crowder, 'The Historical Context and Political Significance Of Harlem's Street Scholar Community', *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Jan 2010: 45.

⁵¹ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 85.

⁵² W. Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* (Philadelphia, 1998), p. 8-9. Radio remained dominated by white ownership and programming until the 1970s. G.A. Williams, *Legendary Pioneers of Black Radio* (Westport, 1998).

in those spaces “with such regularity that only foul weather or the police interrupted the message of the stepladder radicals.”⁵³

Street corner speaking in Harlem comprised a distinctively Black urban spatial medium of communication, collective processing, and knowledge co-creation. As historian Ira Reid put it, “street-corner speaking became the device through which loyalties were analyzed, interpreted, and received into group action.” In other words, the institution centralised and harmonised the intellectual pulse of the community. And if frequency of engagement was any measure, then the orators in fact may have exerted far more influence than any other social actor. In most of Black America, the church formed the key community institution and there was no shortage of Christian congregations in Harlem.⁵⁴ However, following Harrison’s example, street speakers would hold forth on a range of themes that would not have been aired in church, including radical criticism of religion and the church itself.

More importantly, the outdoor forums occurred far more frequently than religious services. Indeed, unlike a weekly trip to church, secular outdoor gatherings formed an almost nightly event, offering spirited nodes of collective public engagement at multiple sites throughout the neighborhood. For example, according to historian Joyce Moore Turner, Black Marxists were out on some corner almost every night except Sunday in the 1920s. “On the same evening [Richard B.] Moore, Ethelred Brown, and H. Leadett would be speaking at Lenox Avenue and 128th street, while [W.A.] Domingo, John Patterson, and Frank Poree were holding forth at Lenox Avenue and 133rd street...by 1921 the

⁵³ Crowder, p. 42.

⁵⁴ I. Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930* (Bloomington, 1996), p. 57.

socialists were rotating their soapboxes among nine different sites.”⁵⁵ One need not go into detail about the pan-Africans, Garveyites, and other independent voices to know that socialists were far from the only street corner speakers on offer.⁵⁶ Thus public speakers in Harrison’s day represented major ideological shapers in the community.

As important as newspapers and print culture were for shaping circuits of ideational exchange nationally and internationally, the oral medium of the soapbox became a central socio-cultural institution for the shaping of Black thought at a local level in Harlem. And if the street speaking formed a central community institution, then “the Campus” on the northeast corner of 135th and Lenox comprised its main stage, thanks to the subway stop there that formed the central transit hub for neighborhood residents.⁵⁷ Not only did small businesses naturally coalesce around that intersection, but so did would-be orators who sought an audience continuously infused by mass subway exhalations of passengers who rode Number 2 and 3 trains to and from their workplaces downtown. Only the best could hold forth at this site, thanks to its central geographical location and the heightened expectations the community placed upon its orators.⁵⁸

The social institution depicted above offered not only a lively evening social activity, but also carved out space for the emergence of a collective intellectual culture. Multiple nights per week, Harrison could be found perched atop a stepladder on ‘the Campus’ or other nearby sites, engaging a mass audience on such subjects such as the East St. Louis massacre, Edgar Allen Poe, the Songhay empire, Karl Marx’s theory of

⁵⁵ W.B. Turner and J.M. Turner (eds.), *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem* (Bloomington, 1988) p. 30.

⁵⁶ On the weekends, indoor forums at places like the New Harlem (formerly Lennox) Casino, the 135th street library, and Lafayette Hall offered further educational lectures. Ibid. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 96. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 227.

⁵⁷ A.P. Davis, ‘Growing up in the New Negro Renaissance’, in A.P. Davis and J.S. Redding (eds.), *Cavalcade: Negro American Writing from 1760 to the Present*, p. 429.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

class struggle, the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar, and so on. James Weldon Johnson once said of Harrison's street lectures that they were 'more than equivalent to a year at college.'⁵⁹

Naturally, Harrison was well-acquainted with the models of white radical working-class education, having taught both in the socialist Rand School of Social Science and the anarchist Modern School. But for the Black community of Harlem, Harrison developed a new and distinctive model of his own: an outdoor, free, and neighbourhood-wide social architecture for the intellectual development of anyone and everyone who cared to participate. The approach comprised nothing less than a radical working-class educational model, what some community residents referred to as the "Outdoor University."⁶⁰

As founder of Harlem's 'Outdoor University', Harrison's oratory invariably held the rapt interest of his listeners far beyond his home neighborhood. For example in September 1912, the *New York Times* noted how Harrison "shattered all records for distance in an address on Socialism in front of the Stock Exchange building" on Wall Street. The report noted how he was still going strong at the beginning of the third hour of his oration, but eventually his voice grew "huskier and huskier" as "his auditors drew closer and closer" until he was reduced to a hoarse whisper before the big bell announced the closing of the Exchange for the day.⁶¹ The Freethought publication *Truth Seeker*

⁵⁹ H. Harrison, *The Embryo of The Voice of the Negro* Vol. 1 No. 1, Feb 1927, HHP box 17, folder 10.

⁶⁰ E. Brown, 'A Brief History of the Harlem Unitarian Church', 11 Sept 1949, E.E. Brown Papers, Unitarian Universalist Association Archives, Boston.

⁶¹ 'Topics in Wall Street', *New York Times*, 14 Sep 1912: 16.

noted how on numerous occasions, his two-and-a-half-hour talks drew fifteen hundred people.⁶²

If stories like these offer any indication, one can only imagine the cumulative impact Harrison had by giving talks of this kind multiple nights a week for some twenty years on any and every subject imaginable to mass audiences in and beyond Harlem. Not to mention the multiplier effect from Harrison's influence on A. Philip Randolph, Marcus Garvey, Richard B. Moore, and scores of other orators who took up the stepladder emulating his example.⁶³

Some first-hand observers compared the intellectual culture of the 'Outdoor University' to that of ancient Greece. As William Pickens put it, "the Age of Pericles and Socrates in ancient Athens had nothing on the present age of Harlem in New York." Harrison earned the nickname of 'the Black Socrates' because of how "night after night he was to be found on the streets and avenues of Harlem preaching his doctrines of uplift and encouragement to the masses of his people."⁶⁴ Wondering why and how people could listen with rapt attention to a street talk, yet were often uninterested in attending indoor lectures, Pickens remarked "perhaps, like Socrates, we must pursue truth on the street corners...and seek the Beautiful and the Good in the mob and among the outcasts."⁶⁵ Indeed, Harrison's selection of the public sidewalk as a venue dovetailed with his humble target audience.

⁶² Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 225.

⁶³ For a list of some two dozen of the most notable Harlem street speakers, see opening section of chapter 6.

⁶⁴ 'Call Harrison's [illegible] Celebrated Harlem Mass Leader Dies After Operation', *NY News*, 24 Dec 1927, HHP box 18, folder 8.

⁶⁵ W. Pickens, 'Evolution Discussed on Harlem Streets', *The Associated Negro Press*, 23 Aug 1926, HHP box 8, folder 19.

However similar it may have been to the great Lyceum sessions of Plato and Aristotle's day, Harrison's African identity and heritage as a descendent of West African peoples—much like his Harlem audiences—suggests that a better analogy might be found in the oral tradition of the *griot*. Griots are central to any analysis of west African epistemology and traditionally played a key role in the shaping of thought and ideation. Different ethno-linguistic groups have different words for this role (in Wolof *guewel*, Mande *jeli*, Songhay *jeseré*, and Fulani *mabo*). According to scholar Thomas A. Hale, the key contribution of the griot and female griotte to the evolution of west African thought was their role as repositories of history would could “reinterpret the past to listeners in the present” by re-telling past events in a “fluid, situationally specific synthesis of past and present values.”⁶⁶ Publically recounting the history and sophistication of ancient African civilisations to demolish dominant notions of Black inferiority was but one such example of the griot-like capacity in which Harrison served. That he represented a kind of Harlem griot can further be seen in the multi-dimensional role Harrison established for the stepladder speaker, as storyteller, spokesperson, translator, poet, teacher, social interpreter, exhorter, and orator.⁶⁷

Harrison's path to establishing a mass-based open-air forum for radical intellectual exploration was not easy. On more than one occasion Harrison found himself in the middle of free speech struggles of the kind made famous by the Industrial Workers of the World, particularly when the New York Police Department would arrest him for

⁶⁶ T. A. Hale, ‘Griot’ in *Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought Vol. 1* (New York, 2010).

⁶⁷ T.A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Bloomington, 1998).

obstructing the sidewalk.⁶⁸ They even once fined him for his obligatory US flag display not being large enough.⁶⁹

At other times, white mobs physically attacked Harrison for expressing his views. In August 1914, for example, a *NY World* article reported that several times over the preceding month Harrison had narrowly escaped being mobbed because of his denunciations of “the Church in general and the Catholic Church in particular.”⁷⁰ One night, he gave a lecture at 181st street and St. Nicholas, in the predominantly Irish neighbourhood of Washington Heights. His talk had been interrupted by frequent angry remarks from the crowd.⁷¹ Upon its termination, some fifty angry listeners followed him into the underground passage leading to the subway station, pursuing him with “murderous intent.”⁷² Then, right in front of the ticket window, “the mob which had been shouting threatening remarks after him, rushed and began to beat him.” Harrison, reportedly having armed himself with a wooden table leg, parried a blow from one of the mob ringleaders, William McElroy, and then struck him on the head, inflicting a bad wound. In the end, the police took Harrison to the 177th street station house and locked him up on a charge of felonious assault while McElroy was taken to the Washington Heights Hospital.⁷³ The white mob’s menacing of Harrison comprised the kind of altercation that, under different circumstances, might have ended in a lynching.

⁶⁸ P. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 4, The Industrial Workers of the World 1905–1917*, (New York, 1997). Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 207, 223. Fights like this to defend Harlem soapbox speaking spaces continued well into the 1930s. R.L. Crowder, ‘The Historical Context and Political Significance Of Harlem’s Street Scholar Community’, *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, Jan 2010: 46.

⁶⁹ ‘DR. HUBERT HARRISON FINED FIVE DOLLARS’, *Amsterdam News*, 8 Aug 1923: 1.

⁷⁰ ‘Negro Speaker Turns on Mob in the Subway Fells Man with Iron Bar—Angry Crowd Had Followed Him from Street Lecture’, *NY World*, 12 Aug 1914, HHP flat box 740.

⁷¹ R.H. Bayor and T.H. Meagher (eds.), *The New York Irish*, (Baltimore, 1996), p. 401.

⁷² Perry, p. 224.

⁷³ *Truth Seeker* 50:35, 1 Sep 1923: 567, HHP flat box 740.

Although Harrison was often heckled by those who disagreed with him, it did not dampen his fire in the slightest. The famous writer Henry Miller recalled how Harrison, “no matter what the provocation, always retained his self-possession, his dignity.”

He had a way of placing the back of his hand on his hip, his trunk tilted, his ears cocked to hear every last word of the questioner, or the heckler put to him. Well he knew how to bide his time! When the tumult had subsided there would come that broad smile of his, a broad, good-natured grin, and he would answer his man—always fair and square, always full on, like a broadside. Soon everyone would be laughing, everyone but the poor imbecile who had dared to put the question.⁷⁴

Whatever challenges came his way—and in New York City they inevitably did—he found ways to meet them, often turning them to his advantage. According to the *New York Times*, Harrison’s wide knowledge, jocular wit, and lyrical language eventually “disarmed all those who came to scoff and turned them into his admiring pupils.”⁷⁵

Harrison’s Outdoor University comprised a free education, not only in terms of cost or in defence of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, but also for free-ranging ideation. The spatiality of the open-air forum elegantly bypassed the ideological confines of such forces as the Church, the white left, the Tuskegee Machine, public schools, the corporate media, Tammany Hall political machinery, and the conservative Black press. Harrison’s outdoor speaking struck listeners as “virile and unconventional,” noted Pickens. “A fellow who is burdened with the weight of a church, a school...or some other institution is afraid to say some of the things which Harrison said boldly on

⁷⁴ H. Miller, *The Rosy Crucifixion, Book Two: Plexus* (New York, 1965), p. 560-61.

⁷⁵ ‘The Death of Hubert Harrison’, *New York Times*, 31 Dec 1927.

this street-corner... This street talk was unchained, free, even daring.”⁷⁶ Harrison’s method thus promoted an extremely rare space where Black thought could range freely *in public*.

Finally, it bears mentioning that Harrison’s model represented a grassroots, mass-based medium of popular education and intellectual development. In particular, those without any formal schooling (e.g. African-American migrants streaming in from the Jim Crow south) could access a fount of knowledge of, by, and for those with a similar racial and socio-economic position as their own. For this reason, the Outdoor University of Harrison’s day presented a Black ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’.⁷⁷ As Harlem activist Hodge Kirnon put it, Harrison “taught the masses and he drew much of his inspiration from them. He became their most articulate intellectual expression.”⁷⁸ And he did not confine himself to the open-air forum.

Harrison’s Indoor Scholarly Legacy

Harrison helped develop not only the outdoor speaking tradition, but numerous of Harlem’s first indoor educational forums. Beginning in 1914 he founded the Radical Forum, a multiracial space which he described as the first work he freely undertook from his own conscious ambition. He felt that all of his previous efforts—from his postal job to socialist party membership to getting married—had been forced upon him to one degree

⁷⁶ W. Pickens, ‘Evolution Discussed on Harlem Streets’, *The Associated Negro Press*, 23 Aug 1926, HHP box 8, folder 19.

⁷⁷ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, 1972).

⁷⁸ H. Kirnon, ‘Hubert Harrison: An Appreciation’, *Amsterdam News*, 4 Jan 1928: 16.

or another.⁷⁹ This suggests he felt his educational work by 1914 was the most true to his own desires. Then in 1916, he started a similar forum at the 135th Street public library, aimed more squarely at broadening the intellectual range of the Black community in particular. Before this forum, he wrote, Black Harlemites gathered “mainly to discuss only two topics: religion and politics.” On account of Harrison’s wide-ranging interests, his forums addressed these two topics as well as others like sociology, economics, art, history, and science. Crucially, according to Harrison, the library forum in particular “preached the propaganda of RACE when no one else had courage or initiative enough to do so. It was the earliest promoter of the study of Negro history in Harlem and many hundreds and thousands of Harlemites drew their earliest inspiration from it.”⁸⁰ The 135th Street public library forum would not be his only indoor educational legacy.

Harrison taught at Willis Huggin’s Institute for Social Study.⁸¹ Huggins was an activist in the early Garvey movement who became a teacher in the NY public schools and fought to get Black history into the curriculum. Following in Harrison’s footsteps, Huggins held community history classes at Harlem’s 135th Street YMCA and founded the Blyden Bookstore and Blyden Society (originally called the Harlem History Club), named for pan-African scholar Edward Wilmot Blyden.⁸² These spaces facilitated the self-education of numerous community residents, including notable street scholars like

⁷⁹ H. Harrison, diary entry, 28 Sept 1914.

⁸⁰ H. Harrison, *The Embryo of The Voice of the Negro* Vol. 1 No. 1, Feb 1927, HHP box 17, folder 10.

⁸¹ Other Harlem activists associated with the institute included Williana Burroughs, Elliott Rawlins, Richard B. Moore, Louise Jackson, Eugene Corbie, N.E. White, Miss Mabel Byrd, Peter B. Codrington, and Grace P. Campbell. ‘World Problems of Race: Syllabus’, Institute for Social Study broadside, HHP, box 16, folder 46.

⁸² The bookstore and society were named for noted Caribbean-born pan-African scholar and intellectual Edward Wilmot Blyden. R.L. Crowder, ‘Willis Nathaniel Huggins (1886-1941): Historian, Activist, and Community Mentor’, *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 30.2, Jul 2006: 127-151.

John G. Jackson and John Henrik Clarke, the latter of which would emerge as the spearhead of the Black and Africana Studies movement.⁸³

Harrison also greatly influenced Richard B. Moore, who in the 1930s became a leading Black communist in Harlem. Following his own break with the white left, Moore founded and ran the Frederick Douglass Book Store on West 125th Street for twenty-five years. He began collecting books in 1918, as he later explained, “having been led into the field by Hubert Harrison.”⁸⁴ As a result of his tours speaking for the Communist Party’s Scottsboro boys campaign in the 1930s, Moore became known as one of the top orators in Harlem, another skill he learned at the foot of Harrison’s stepladder. Harrison served on the committee tasked with transferring bibliophile and independent archivist Arthur Schomburg’s collection to the 135th Street public library, leading eventually to the formation of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Harrison’s catalytic relationship to the development of Black intellectual culture in Harlem had important precedents. In particular, Harrison’s tenure in John E. Bruce’s Negro Society for Historical Research provided a forum wherein he and others (like Arthur Schomburg) could find intellectual guidance regarding the independent study of Black history.⁸⁵ Nineteenth-century titans of Black history and independent pan-African scholarship like Edward Wilmot Blyden and Alexander Crummell mentored Bruce, who

⁸³ J. Carruthers, ‘John Henrik Clarke: The Harlem Connection to the Founding of Africana Studies’, *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 30.2, Jul 2006: 173-194.

⁸⁴ E. Des Verney, *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, p. 86.

⁸⁵ Crowder has made the point that Carter G. Woodson’s Association for the Study of Negro Life and History comprised mostly university-educated African-Americans, where as Bruce’s NSHR had mostly Africans, West Indians, and African-Americans from outside the academy. Crowder, ‘The Historical Context and Political Significance Of Harlem’s Street Scholar Community’, p. 54.

in turn became a mentor to both Harrison and Schomburg.⁸⁶ Although Bruce lived in Yonkers and Schomburg in Brooklyn, their influence and encouragement undoubtedly provided Harrison with much inspiration for bringing an independent Black scholarly tradition to his own neighbourhood of Harlem. As an autodidact, Harrison developed an analysis of the limitations he observed in institutions of formal schooling that revealed the thinking behind his insistence on pursuing knowledge outside of them.

A Harrisonian Theory of Education

Harrison did not acquire his exhaustive range of knowledge from birth, but from old-fashioned hard work. As Harlem resident and friend Oscar Benson explained in an elegiac tribute to Harrison, “I once asked him to give me a proximity of the number of books he read in one day and he shocked me by saying perhaps five or six.”⁸⁷ The librarian at the 135th Street public library remarked how no one checked out more books than Harrison.⁸⁸ He eventually obtained eye glasses, apparently in part because of the weakening of his vision due to his regimen of nightly reading by lamplight.⁸⁹ Yet Harrison did not read voraciously just because he enjoyed it.

Harrison saw reading as a key path to developing the kind of knowledge necessary for challenging racial oppression. Making young people into men and women fit for a free world required an educational system that would “shape their souls for

⁸⁶ R.L. Crowder, ‘John Edward Bruce, Edward Wilmot Blyden, Alexander Crummell, and J. Robert Love: Mentors, Patrons, and the Evolution of A Pan-African Intellectual Network’, *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 20.2, 31 Jul 1996: 59.

⁸⁷ O. Benson, ‘Literary Genius of Hubert Harrison’, *NY News*. 24 December, 1927.

⁸⁸ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 58.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 85.

continued conflict with a theory and practice [with] which most of the white world that surrounds them are at one.”⁹⁰ Education had to prepare students for long-term struggle against the world view and practical results of white supremacy.

Because most sources of power were controlled by white people, Harrison felt it incumbent upon people of colour to get wise—literally. He insisted that Black people must “develop to the fullest that organ whereby weakness has been able to overcome strength; namely, the intellect... We Negroes must take to reading, study and the development of intelligence as we have never done before.”⁹¹ He repeatedly stressed the need for Black people to take responsibility for their own learning, and he encouraged a culture of reading by selling books at his outdoor talks, starting a lecture forum at the 135th Street public library, and initiating the first regular book review column in a Black newspaper.⁹² One of the reasons he saw independent reading as crucial to the educational process can be found in his grievances with the official school system.

Harrison described the system of public education as one that “poisoned the streams” of public knowledge. For example, the history curriculum taught to children comprised little more than “official fairy tales in which men who had swindled their governments and robbed the people... were represented as sturdy democrats, ascetics and paragons of all the virtues.” Students in the system were thus indoctrinated at a tender age into a “cult of national patriotism,” such that when they became adults they would be “ready to be turned into cannon-fodder whenever the knowing ones who managed public affairs wanted to have their mines and factories in other lands protected, or to secure a market for the sale of goods for lack of which their own people were starving.”

⁹⁰ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 129.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁹² Perry, *HHR*, p. 291.

Normalising and acclimating young people to glaring contradictions like this one—between grinding poverty at home and capitalist wars for profit abroad—formed a key function of the education system in Harrison’s view.⁹³

Harrison also criticised the way schools inculcated a white-supremacist world view. Noting how the education system in the United States and the Caribbean was “shaped by white people for white youth, and from their point of view, it fits their purpose well,” he decried how “the examples of valor and virtue on which [student] minds are fed are exclusively white examples. What wonder, then, that each generation comes to maturity with the idea imbedded in its mind that only white men are valorous and fit to rule and only white women are virtuous and entitled to chivalry, respect, and protection?” He concluded that any place that claimed to be an institution of learning for Black people, especially historically-Black colleges and universities, needed to counteract white domination in the curriculum by offering courses in Black history and African languages and cultures.⁹⁴ Interestingly, although the course he taught in the fall semester of 1926 at NYU included a majority-Black reading list, Africana Studies would not begin to emerge in the formal academy until street scholars like John Henrik Clarke and Black student activists built the Black Studies Movement of the 1960s.⁹⁵

Harrison felt these problems in primary and secondary education originated in the narrow-mindedness of the higher educational institutions. He lamented, for example, how common it was “for the head of a college to discharge a professor who had become too radical—by which was meant a proneness to such truths as were subversive of the

⁹³ H. Harrison, ‘The Living Lie’ (unpublished, undated), HHP box 5, folder 7.

⁹⁴ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 129-131.

⁹⁵ F. Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore, 2007).

overlordship of those who supplied the funds for the maintenance of the college.” The trustees and financial interests exerted undue influence over who and what could be taught. Moreover, because professors were dependent on the universities for their livelihood, they eventually “came to constitute a class functionally similar to that of the priesthood, a class of defenders of the existing institutions and of the ideas which buttressed them.” By weeding out the truth tellers and subordinating intellectual content to the interests of donors and funders, universities generally perpetuated the status quo.

For all of these reasons, Harrison maintained that for true learning it was necessary to go beyond the confines of formal schooling. “Go to school whenever you can,” he insisted, “but remember always that the best college is that on your bookshelf: the best education is that on the inside of your own head.”⁹⁶ To this end, he noted the existence of free schools and colleges, free public libraries and the second-hand bookstores where anyone could “commune with poets, philosophers, scientists, historians, novelists, and draw ‘sweetness and light’ from the noblest souls of the past and present.” To buttress his argument he noted that Abraham Lincoln, Toussaint L’Ouverture, and Frederick Douglass were all educated leaders, even though none of them had gone to college or even high school.⁹⁷

When boiled down, Harrison’s educational philosophy found its base in the notion that one must strive to “read, reason, and think on all sides of all subjects.” His exhortation, particularly to young people, was to “Get education. Get it not only in school and college, but in books and newspapers, in market-places, institutions, and movements. Prepare by knowing; and never think you know until you have listened to ten others who

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

⁹⁷ H. Harrison, ‘Education out of School’, *Boston Chronicle*, 23 Feb 1924.

know differently—and have survived the shock.”⁹⁸ This notion that one had to test one’s knowledge against ten other ways of knowing represented a rigorous and dynamic model of active learning. It also reflected Harrison’s own experience of surviving not only the shock of countless books, Church lyceum sessions, and street corner hecklers, but also the fierce intellectual contestations within the Freethought, Socialist, and New Negro movements.

Conclusion

Harrison’s response to Black conservatism, indoors and outdoors, were largely forgotten, but not to people who saw it first hand. His achievements did something that, while overwhelmingly ignored by the white world, represented something profound to numerous Black observers in the community itself. Richard B. Moore maintained that Harrison represented the figure most responsible for making Harlem “the Mecca of Negro intellectual culture.”⁹⁹ Harlem socialist and Harrison protégé A. Philip Randolph, speaking of the culture established at 135th and Lenox, said simply “It was one of the great intellectual forums of America.”¹⁰⁰ Randolph’s assessment was undoubtedly accurate, but it was probably an understatement. Between the free-ranging European and Africana epistemology and the intellectual inflow from the Islamic world, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Campus in Harlem could not have been anything less than one of the great intellectual forms of the *world*.

⁹⁸ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 93.

⁹⁹ ‘Lament Death of Dr. Hubert Harrison: Eulogized by Several Who Knew His Life and Worth’, *Amsterdam News*, 28 Dec 1927: 1.

¹⁰⁰ J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (New York, 1972), p. 77.

Harrison pursued knowledge not merely for its own sake, but also for the sake of uplifting the community. Between the Outdoor University and the indoor forums for independent scholarly research, historian Ralph Crowder articulated the dual nature of Harrison's educational contribution. He was, in Crowder's words, "the only person to work effectively in the two dimensions of the Street Scholar experience, [both] self-trained historical research and street corner speaking."¹⁰¹ Figures like A. Philip Randolph and Marcus Garvey could hold their own as orators, but were not particularly known for rigorous independent historical research. On the other hand, bibliophiles like John E. Bruce and Arturo Schomburg commanded vast knowledge of Black history but did not relish the sidewalk stepladder. Harrison, by contrast, remained committed both to the outdoor and indoor wings of the collective learning process that he sparked in his home community. For that reason, he was called the "father of the Harlem intellectual."¹⁰²

Restoring Harrison to this story expands the spectrum of its possibilities, both for educational theory and for intellectual history. We have seen his criticisms of the public education system. With the Tuskegee model in mind, Harrison called industrial education a "humorous phrase" on the grounds that it fostered ignorance and prepared Black people to be little more than "hewers of wood and drawers of water."¹⁰³ In response to the liberal arts wing of Black educational thought, Harrison insisted that "those who have knowledge must come down from their Sinais and give it to the common people. Theirs is the great duty to simplify and make clear, to light the lamps of knowledge that the eyes of their race may see; that the feet of their people may not stumble. This is the task of the

¹⁰¹ Crowder, 'The Historical Context and Political Significance Of Harlem's Street Scholar Community', p. 56.

¹⁰² 'Celebrated Harlem Mass Leader Dies After Operation', *NY News*, 24 Dec 1927.

¹⁰³ H. Harrison, 'Humorous phrases', *The Voice*, 14 Dec 1917. H. Harrison, *The Negro and the Nation*, (New York, 1917), p. 13.

Talented Tenth.”¹⁰⁴ Even the radical and working-class pedagogy of the Rand and Modern Schools offered examples of white social movements that largely “broke down as soon as they crossed the color line.”¹⁰⁵

Harrison’s educational work, both in formations like the Liberty League and the Outdoor University represented the intellectual culture of the Harlem ‘Mecca’ of the New Negro movement. They also demonstrated that Robin D.G. Kelley’s observation that “collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge.”¹⁰⁶ Establishing these formations required great courage and leadership, so I now turn to Harrison’s conception of Black political leadership, how it came into being in the crucible of the First World War, and where his theory and practice of leadership located him in the pantheon of other notable African-American leaders in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

¹⁰⁴ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁵ H. Harrison, ‘How To Do It – And How Not’, *New York Call*, 16 Dec, 1911:6.

¹⁰⁶ Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, p. xi.

Chapter 4

‘The Descent of Dr. Du Bois’: Harrison’s Leadership in the Crucible of War

Introduction

Harrison’s role as pioneer of the New Negro movement in Harlem emerged against the backdrop of the great contest for African-American political leadership in the early twentieth century. This was a multidimensional struggle for the heart, soul, and identity of entire communities. Local, national, and international leaders shaped the multiple Black responses to the dramatic events of the period, from lynching and the East St. Louis pogrom to the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Harrison’s leadership marked that of new and younger generation which would not buckle under the financial and social pressures that maintained discipline amongst the older, more established leaders.

In thinking about Black leadership, I’m guided by the work of African-American historian Manning Marable. He defined leaders as “individuals who have the ability to understand their own times, who express or articulate programs or policies that reflect the perceived interests and desires of particular groups, and who devise instruments or political vehicles that enhance the capacity [of that group] to achieve effective change.” Stressing the contextual side, he encourages a view which acknowledges leaders do leave their stamp on the world but never by themselves and never without broader social forces

that have created the space for the voices of particular individuals to emerge above others.¹

Marable has identified two major strains of leadership in Black political history. The first is the messianic style of leadership which features an individual, usually male, who possesses a charismatic presence and an ability to “articulate deeply held grievances and hopes among their people.” Examples includes figures like Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey. Because the church has historically been such a central social institution in the community, Marable noted, “the political culture of black America since slavery was heavily influenced by the Bible, particularly the Old Testament saga of Moses and Joshua as ‘deliverers’ of an oppressed, enslaved people who found themselves in a foreign land.”² A second strain of Black leadership is the collectivist tradition. Civil rights movement leader Ella Baker offers a prime example because of how she criticized Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s messianic and top-down approach, instead encouraging the students who formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to strive for a more grassroots and democratic orientation. In short, Baker advocated “group-centered leaders” rather than “leader-centered groups.”³

Harrison, I argue, leaned closer to the collectivist tradition than the messianic one. While he was certainly a charismatic orator on the stepladder and could powerfully articulate African-American grievances and hopes, he also ridiculed the dogmas and conservatism of the Church and tended to avoid self-aggrandisement and publicity.⁴ Furthermore, he placed Black poor and working people at the centre of his worldview

¹ M. Marable, *Black Leadership* (New York, 1998), p. xvi.

² Ibid., p. xiii.

³ Ibid., p. xv.

⁴ H. Harrison, ‘The Negro a Conservative: Christianity Still Enslaves the Minds of Those Whose Bodies It Has Long Held Bound’, *Truth Seeker* 41, 12 Sep 1914.

and devoted himself exclusively to their education, politicisation, and economic advancement *as a group*.

This chapter focuses on two of the major contours of Hubert Harrison's leadership in the New Negro movement. First, I analyse the mass movement orientation of his leadership of, by, and for those he called the 'plain people of Negro ancestry.' As part of this 'group-centred leader' approach, I also analyse Harrison's support for armed self-defence, as a strategy both for stopping individual lynchings and for defending entire communities, as in the case of the so-called "race riots" which swept the country before, during, and after the First World War .

I then turn to a second dimension of Harrison's leadership, namely his consistent and principled political dissidence in the crucible of the war. On this score, I will begin with a look at the acute clash between Harrison and Du Bois in the fervour surrounding the entry of the US into the war. I then review Harrison's anti-imperialist, race- and class-conscious theorisation of it. Finally, I examine his skilful navigation of wartime censorship and state repression—including his success in maintaining his political principles without being detained or deported—as an important dimension of his leadership of the New Negro movement.

Lastly, I close with a meditation on Harrison's place in relation to other paradigmatic Black leaders of his era. Harrison built upon foundations of his forebears like Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells, as he simultaneously developed his own approach to leadership against more immediate influences like Booker T. Washington, William Monroe Trotter, and W.E.B. Du Bois.

A Leadership Centred on the ‘Common People’

Hubert Harrison’s chronic proximity to economic dispossession undoubtedly influenced his conception of Black leadership. He was born of field labouring Afro-Caribbean parents and arrived in New York as a working-class immigrant. Harlem resident Oscar Benson recalled how Harrison “loved children, the poor, the common folks; those who were victims of circumstances.”⁵ As Harlem activist Hodge Kirnon Put it, “no trace of the Brahmin spirit was to be found in Harrison. He lived with and among his people—not on the fringes of their social life.”⁶ These comments speak to the relationship between his socio-economic background and his focus on those of similarly humble origins.

Harrison did not harbour any shame about his class identity. Writing in his private diary as early as 1908, a year after securing his postal job, he noted “what a damned powerful modifier of a man's philosophy of life is poverty and the pressure of hunger! If ever I forget this as a starting-point for any scheme of things that I may construct I hope I'll go hungry for three days so that I may remember it.”⁷ Later in life, the *Amsterdam News* quoted him sounding a similar theme. “I have often thought that this contact with the stern realities of poverty was good for me. It has kept my heart open to the call of those who are down and has kept me from giving myself such airs as might make a chasm between myself and my people.”⁸ Far from feeling shame for his humble class

⁵ O. Benson, ‘Literary Genius of Hubert Harrison’, *NY News*, 24 Dec 1927.

⁶ H. Kirnon, ‘Hubert Harrison: An Appreciation’, *Amsterdam News*, 4 Jan 1928: 16.

⁷ H. Harrison, diary entry, 7 Mar 1908, HHP box 9, folder 4.

⁸ *Amsterdam News*, 21 Dec 1927, HHP box 18, folder 8.

status, he recognised its positive impact for keeping him grounded and connected to his community. Similarly, Harrison avoided personal publicity and actually hated praise.⁹

Surely in part because of his own class background, Harrison's conception of leadership put the masses at the centre of a collective and bottom-up conception of racial advancement. He explained his views on this subject most clearly in a 1924 column he wrote for the *Boston Chronicle* entitled "The Common People." Sounding a class-radical theme, Harrison ventured openly "to plead for those of our poor brothers and sisters who are despised and rejected of men. For after all they are the real tests of our theories of brotherhood and racial solidarity."¹⁰ Just as he had identified Black people as the real test of the Socialist Party's class solidarity, Harrison identified Black workers as the touchstones of racial solidarity.

Not only were ordinary people the key to the solidarity of the race, but they were for Harrison its main lifeblood. "By and large, the Common People are the real race. They may not have much to give, but, such as it is, they give it without stint; [with] loyalty, respect, friendliness and help in the hour of need." Harrison had many friends in Harlem and was recognised by the community, who appreciated his contributions to it and supported him in ways that the elites never did. For Harrison these people comprised "a perpetual reservoir of healthy enthusiasm and their rough but genuine appreciation is like a tonic to the soul that is sick of the shams and insincerities of those who call themselves 'cultured.'" For Harrison, the common people "are the dependable back-bone of every good cause and the making of many."¹¹ Thus Harrison placed the common people at the centre of Black life and maintained a profound respect and humility toward

⁹ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 8. H. Harrison, 'On Praise' (autograph manuscript), 8 Apr 1920, HHP box 5, folder 46.

¹⁰ H. Harrison, 'The Common People', *Boston Chronicle*, April 17, 1925. HHP 6.43.

¹¹ Ibid.

them.

Harrison applied this conception of the common people to his leadership style in practical ways. As noted previously, the Outdoor University demonstrated his belief in the ability of the grassroots to learn, think, and develop. Another example of Harrison's group-centred leader approach was his vision of the relationship between the editor and the readership of *The Voice*. He declared that *The Voice* had no fear because "it puts itself under the protection of that Providence which is—the plain people of Negro ancestry." Drawing on his freethinking secularism, Harrison replaced a divine conception of providence, with one grounded in the living community of Black people. And just as they accepted the *Voice* editor with all his imperfections, so too would he take them with their imperfections and dedicate himself to their elevation. Harrison retained a deep and abiding love for Black people.

His focus on the 'despised and rejected' also animated his celebration of the great potential he saw in the youth of the community. In another of his *Boston Chronicle* columns, he wrote that regenerating the community required young people. After all, "it is to them that the race must look for the removal of its inner and outer disabilities." He felt that too often older people sometimes hold onto grudges or other psychological and political baggage whose ossification too often became a fetter on the forward progress of the community as a whole. Once old leaders had become a fetter on racial progress, "they must make way for Youth—gladly or sadly, but they must make way."¹² A new generation of Black leadership would necessarily emerge from young people.

Harrison's Leadership on Lynching and Self-Defence

¹² H. Harrison, 'The Feet of the Young Men', *Boston Chronicle*, March 22, 1924. HHP 6.43.

An important aspect of Harrison's group-centred vision of leadership emerges from the New Negro movement's stimulation of Black armed self-defence. Recent scholarship has highlighted a long and rich Black tradition of armed self-defence that transcends political, socio-economic, and gender divisions.¹³ Much like that of its historical forebears, the New Negro impulsion towards survival by any means necessary did not emerge not from abstract theorising but the cold realities of lived experience. On that score, Harrison's example forms a case in point.

Like so many other voices in the New Negro movement, Harrison saw the need for self-defence as a deeply pragmatic concern. Harrison had been attacked for espousing his radical views on street corner stepladders. Incidents like these taught Harrison a practical lesson: armed self-defence was indispensable for Black survival. Harrison would take this lesson and apply it more broadly to lynching, the Klan, and the outbursts of white mob attacks against Black communities, which culminated in the so-called "Red Summer" of 1919.

Harrison's advocacy of self-defence against lynching rested on the idea that the murderers got away with it because of the cost of taking Black lives was so low. As long as Black lives were as cheap as chickens' lives then white bigots would have no more hesitancy in killing Black people than killing chickens. "But as soon as Negroes graduate into the class of big game and demand a respectable toll of killed and crippled for each

¹³ Advocates of Black armed self defence included abolitionists like Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Martin Delaney, and Henry Highland Garnet, post-Reconstruction leaders like Ida B. Wells, T. Thomas Fortune, John Edward Bruce, and even early twentieth-century figures like W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson. N. Johnson, *Negroes and the Gun: The Black Tradition of Arms*. (Amherst, 2014), p. 31, 58-9, 105, 122-3, 154. M. McLaughlin, *Power, Community, and Killing in East St. Louis*. (New York, 2005), p. 166. C. McWhirter, *Red Summer: the Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America*, (New York, 2011), p. 237. D. Krugler, *1919, The Year of Racial Violence: How African Americans Fought Back* (New York, 2015), p. 5.

life that goes out, then only those who have the courage of big game hunters will venture to go gunning for them. It is well known that the ‘crackers’ who have that kind of courage don’t amount to more than one in ten thousand.”¹⁴ In short, *Black people have the power* to make Black lives matter.

Support for armed self-defence divided Harrison and other New Negro militants from some of the “Old Crowd” leaders. For example, an editorial in the *New York Age* by Fred R. Moore, the sixty year old long-time lieutenant of Booker T. Washington, asserted that “the representative Negro does not approve of radical socialistic outbursts” like support for self-defence because such statements would “alienate public sympathy” for the cause of Black people.¹⁵ Harrison was unsparing in his criticism, declaring that it was not just the brutality of the whites, but also the “cowardice of Negroes and the lick-spittle leadership of the last two decades which, like *The Age*, told us to ‘take it all lying down’.”¹⁶ The new sentiment among African Americans would not be content to remain silent, but would instead preserve Black lives by any means necessary.

Harrison’s support for self-defence applied not only to individual lynchings and Ku Klux Klan violence,¹⁷ but also to collective anti-Black violence, such as exploded in East St. Louis in 1917. On July 2 of that year, white residents launched what would become one of the most infamous orgies of anti-Black violence in US history, attacking and killing Black men, women, and children indiscriminately and setting fire to numerous Black homes and businesses. The white mobs were unrestrained as local policemen

¹⁴ H. Harrison, ‘The Ku Klux Klan’, *Negro World*, 31 Nov 1920, HHP box 13, folder 7.

¹⁵ P. Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of African American History - 1896 to the Present Vol. 1*, (Oxford, 2009), p. 374. H. Harrison, ‘Arms and the Man’ in *WAA*, p. 16-20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ H. Harrison, ‘The Ku Klux Klan’, *Negro World*, 31 Nov 1920.

encouraged the attacks and National Guardsmen even joined in the killing.¹⁸ Historian Charles Lumpkins summarised the outcome, writing “white attackers had destroyed property worth three million dollars, razed several neighbourhoods, injured hundreds, and forced at least seven thousand black townspeople to seek refuge across the Mississippi River...by the official account, nine white men and thirty-nine black men, women, and children lost their lives...others said that more than nine white people and many more—perhaps up to five hundred—black citizens had perished.”¹⁹ East St. Louis, in other words, represented a traumatic experience, one which was indelibly seared into the consciousness of African-Americans throughout the country.

In response to the attacks, African Americans in East St. Louis organised and coordinated a powerful armed self-defence operation. In particular, the historically-Black Denverside neighbourhood remained untouched during the pogrom thanks to the use of armed guards and snipers posted on its outskirts.²⁰ The Black AME Church served as a hub of resistance, where the Black community gathered to plan its defence and whose church bell was used strategically as an alarm system.²¹ McLaughlin also recounts how Black businessman Dr. Le Roy Bundy solicited military training from Black war veterans and coordinated drilling exercises with the Black fraternal society, the Odd Fellows.²² Thus Black East St. Louisans drew on their own resources and community institutions in order to prevent white incursions, escape from the attackers, and offer safety to refugees of the attacks. McLaughlin concluded that “by holding back the white mobs, African

¹⁸ M. McLaughlin, *Power, Community, and Racial Killing in East St. Louis* (New York, 2005). p. 2.

¹⁹ C. Lumpkins, *American Pogrom: The East St. Louis Race Riot and Black Politics* (Athens, 2008), p. 1-2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, CH 6.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 171.

²² A. Meier, *Negro Thought In America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington*, (Ann Arbor, 1963), p. 137.

American resistance significantly limited the scope of the race riot and the number of casualties.”²³ And East. St. Louis was not simply an isolated example of organized Black resistance, but represented a broader pattern of Black self-defence against white riots that took place in dozens of other cities in this time period.²⁴

In response, Harrison encouraged various different forms of mass resistance among Blacks. He denounced the white mobs and supported the armed self-defence of East St. Louisans.²⁵ He further noted approvingly the working-class character of the Black arms that emerged to defend lives and property from white mobs in Chicago and Washington D.C.²⁶ And, like Ida B. Wells had done, he also supported migration as a form of resistance. “When you consider [that all the intellectuals in] thirty years were unable to reduce the number of lynchings, and that the ordinary uneducated Negroes did this just by picking up their feet and coming away from the South in large numbers, it becomes apparent that these Negro masses sometimes have more effective brains in their feet than the ‘intellectuals’ have in their heads.”²⁷ One can imagine Harrison making this point before a Harlem street corner audience full of recent southern Black migrants convulsing with bouts of laughter at his pithy sense of humor that affirmed both their intelligence and their decision to move out of the south.

The Crucible of War and the ‘Descent of Dr. Du Bois’

²³ Ibid., p. 167.

²⁴ C. McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America*, (New York, 2011).

²⁵ H. Harrison, ‘The East St. Louis Horror’, *The Voice*, 4 July, 1917. reprinted in *WAA*, p. 14-16.

²⁶ H. Harrison, ‘The Common People’, *Boston Chronicle*, April 17, 1925. HHP 6.43.

²⁷ H. Harrison, ‘The Right Way to Unity’, *Boston Chronicle*, 10 May, 1924.

When the Wilson administration declared war on Germany in April 1917 in order to “make the world safe for democracy,” Harrison responded by launching the Liberty League of Negro-Americans, *The Voice*, and spearheading the Liberty Congress to call attention to the special grievances of African Americans. W.E.B. Du Bois evinced a rather different political reaction to the exigencies of war. Because Du Bois had become a key national leader of African Americans following the death of Booker T. Washington in 1915, his clash with Harrison would prove to be a turning point in the relationship of the Black masses to his leadership.

Initially, Du Bois stayed true to form and denounced incidents of anti-Black violence like the East St. Louis massacre in July 1917 and the execution of the thirteen Black soldiers in Houston who revolted against racial oppression in August.²⁸ However, Du Bois took a political turn to the right once the Bureau of Information started complaining to the NAACP board about the content of his editorials in *The Crisis*. Du Bois’ toning down of his comments on race relations culminated in a July 1918 editorial, wherein he wrote perhaps the most regrettable editorial sentence of his whole life. “Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy.”²⁹ Du Bois, with all his prestige and political authority, thus called on Black people to “forget” the special problems like lynching, segregation, disfranchisement, and pogrom-like anti-Black massacres—grievances he had spent years protesting—in order to better “close ranks” with “our own” white citizens while US troops fought in Europe.

²⁸ R.V. Haynes, ‘The Houston Mutiny and Riot of 1917’, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Apr., 1973), pp. 418-439. C. Calvin Smith, ‘The Houston Riot of 1917, Revisited’, *Houston Review* 13 (1991) :85-95.

²⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘Editorial’, *The Crisis* Vol. 16 no. 3, July 1918, p. 111.

Harrison, editorializing for the leading New Negro newspaper of the time (*The Voice*), responded with an analysis that was both devastating and prophetic. He first pointed out that Du Bois, of all people, knew best that the “special grievances” of African-Americans could not “perceive either their lives, their manhood or their vote (which is their political life and liberties)” while lynching and Jim Crow reigned supreme. Evoking the Declaration of Independence by referring to ‘life’ and ‘liberty’, Harrison subtly reminded his readers that the United States itself remained the chief agency of Black oppression. He then articulated a New Negro alternative position to that of Du Bois’, using the logic of government’s own stated framework, concluding that “instead of the war for democracy making these [rights] less necessary, it makes them more so.”³⁰ In other words, a war for democracy meant redressing Black grievances took on an even greater urgency—if people of African descent in the US were to remain patriotic and loyal Americans.

Following his articulation of the militant New Negro political alternative to “close ranks,” Harrison castigated Du Bois’ claim to Black leadership. In particular, regarding why Du Bois had reversed himself on fighting for grievances, he suggested that perhaps it was because the “people whom our white masters have ‘recognized’ as our leaders (without taking the trouble to consult us)...have already established an unsavoury reputation by advocating this same surrender of life, liberty and manhood, masking their cowardice behind the pillars of war-time sacrifice.” With masculinist language, Harrison here suggested an analogy between the ‘house negro’ of the antebellum era and those hand-picked “leaders” like Du Bois who advocated ‘close ranks.’

³⁰ H. Harrison, ‘The Descent of Dr. Du Bois’, *The Voice*, 25 July 1918.

Harrison exposed the backstory of Du Bois' capitulation and its significance. That Du Bois advanced his call to close ranks and forget about Black grievances right around the time he had applied for a captaincy in the war department, suggested that "the two things fitted too well together as motive and self-interest." Harrison pointed out that the government had investigated *The Crisis* for sedition, had convened a national conference of Black newspaper editors whose proceedings none of the editors would discuss afterwards, and Du Bois was the most prominent of the editors that the government called in. "The responsibility, therefore, for a course of counsel which stresses the servile virtues of acquiescence and subservience falls squarely on his shoulders." By using words like 'subservience', Harrison placed Du Bois in the same league as Booker T. Washington. Moreover, the succession of events appeared "too clear to admit of any interpretation other than that of deliberate, cold-blooded, purposive planning" in Harrison's estimation.

Historical scholarship has confirmed Harrison's assessment about deliberate planning. Major Joel Spingarn was not only a personal friend of Du Bois, but as chairman of the NAACP board, he was technically Du Bois' boss and employer. Spingarn had recently become a field-grade officer in the anti-radical branch of US military intelligence that specialised in "Negro Subversion" in order to set up a "counter espionage system among colored people themselves."³¹

As a military intelligence officer, Spingarn undertook various methods by which to suppress 'Negro subversion'. He ordered an internal audit of the NAACP's leaders, branches, and members. He tasked white NAACP board member Charles H. Studin with censoring the *Crisis*. Studin, acting on the direct urging of director of military

³¹ R. Talbert, *Negative Intelligence: The Army and the American Left, 1917-1941*, (Jackson, 1991), p. 119.

intelligence General Marlborough Churchill, assured the general that that no pains would be spared to make every issue of the magazine “comply with the wishes of the Government” because helping to win the war was now the *Crisis*’s “paramount purpose.”³² Spingarn’s attempt to recruit Du Bois to spy on Black radicals during the war formed a key part of the strategy, leading to Du Bois’s infamous “close ranks” editorial which, according to historian Mark Ellis, “crucially influenced the decision of the War Department” to offer Du Bois the captaincy in military intelligence.³³ As Harrison rightly suspected, ‘deliberate, cold-blooded, and purposive planning’ was certainly afoot and the capitulation of the *Crisis* editor to it marked the “descent of Dr. Du Bois” and his authority as a Black leader among many New Negro militants.³⁴

Although Spingarn shaped the overall strategy of US military intelligence regarding “Negro subversion” in 1918, Du Bois was no mindless pawn in the game. In fact, some months before applying for his own commission, Du Bois had referred a young Black graduate of Harvard to the director of military intelligence for an army commission.³⁵ In June of 1918, the *Crisis* editor worked closely with US Army Major Spingarn in setting up the pro-war editors conference to undermine the Liberty Congress. He went along with the censorship of the *Crisis*, and worked with Spingarn to recruit Black agents for military intelligence. Du Bois hoped that creating a Black presence within the U.S. army intelligence apparatus would mean “that when the question of unrest among Negroes arises, these men would be able to point out to the government

³² W.G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America’s War for Democracy, 1914-1920*, (Chapel Hill, 2001), p. 114.

³³ M. Ellis, “‘Closing Ranks’ and ‘Seeking Honors’: W.E.B. Du Bois in World War I”, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (June 1992), p. 96-124.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Talbert, *Negative Intelligence*, p. 118-9.

why the unrest existed and offer a remedy.”³⁶ If this sounds like wishful thinking, an explanation can found in the fact that opposing the war would have meant leaving the NAACP the *Crisis* entirely, not to mention possible arrest and imprisonment. Such a break with the NAACP would eventually come, but not for another fifteen years.³⁷

For both Harrison and Du Bois, the threat of state repression was real. At the Liberty Congress, Harrison, Trotter, and the other delegates were careful to articulate their aims in language compatible with the official war aims. They spoke in these terms not because they supported the war, but because the Espionage Act (1917) and Sedition Act (1918) prohibited wartime dissent and “disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” about the government. The government used these acts to arrest and imprison not only Black war critics like A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, but even prominent white dissenters such as Eugene Debs.³⁸ Thus, by framing the struggle to end lynching, segregation, and disfranchisement as aligned with Wilson’s war aims, the New Negro radicals avoided this fate. As one federal agent tasked with monitoring the radical Black press in this period put it, “[T]hese coloured editors have a certain talent for spreading a seditious feeling without uttering any actually seditious words.”³⁹ Harrison’s editorship of *the Voice*, demonstrated this quality and his successful avoidance of jail and deportation allowed him to continue spearheading Black wartime dissent in and beyond Harlem.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

³⁷ D.L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: the Fight for Equality in the American Century, 1919-1953* (New York, 2000), p. 573.

³⁸ T. Kornweibel, *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I* (Bloomington, 2002), p. 183. ‘Harding Frees Debs and 23 Others Held for War Violations’, *New York Times*, 24 Dec 1921:1.

³⁹ R. Hill, *The Crusader Vol. I* (New York, 1987), p. xvi.

After the war concluded, Du Bois attempted to recover from his catastrophic fall from grace as a Black leader by writing a post-war editorial about how Black people must “return fighting,”⁴⁰ but for many New Negro militants, the damage had already been done. Harrison, having maintained his radical critique during the war, was able to take Du Bois to task after it ended. “The Negro leaders of the future will be expected not only to begin straight, take a moral vacation, and then go straight again. They will be expected to go straight all the time; to stand by us in war as well as in peace; not to blow hot and cold with the same mouth, but ‘to stand four-square to *all* the winds that blow.’”⁴¹ For Harrison, Black leadership in the age of the New Negro had to rest on the principle of political and moral consistency.

The “White World War”: A New Negro Theory of Imperialism

Beginning in 1915, Harrison’s speeches outdoors and indoors began to dissect the racial and economic politics of the “white world war.”⁴² Because he maintained an oppositional course despite the extreme pressures from government repression, the pro-war mainstream media, and the patriotic Black press, Harrison’s leadership during the war marks him as a leader who maintained consistently anti-imperialist politics. Having no high paying job or elite celebrity status to defend, Hubert Harrison maintained a certain clarity of vision, noting how the rhetoric of “democracy” was used “mainly as a

⁴⁰ W.E.B Du Bois, “Returning Soldiers,” *The Crisis* 18, May 1919, p. 13.

⁴¹ Harrison, *WAA*, , p. 70-73.

⁴² H. Harrison, ‘Some Reasons Why Such a Collection is Necessary’, [undated c1925], HHP box 6, folder 28.

convenient camouflage behind which competing imperialists masked their sordid aims.”⁴³

To understand the role of political theory and analysis in his ability to maintain a dissenting course as a leader, I undertake a close textual reading of two key editorials he wrote during the war. Then I will look at how Harrison’s ideas related to some of the other dominant strains of radical thought like European Marxism and independent Black thinkers like W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke.

Though he had been speaking about the subject since 1915, Harrison seems to have penned his first analysis of the First World War in a piece for *The Voice* in August of 1917 entitled “The White War and the Colored World.” He argued that twelve out of seventeen hundred million people in the world were “colored—black brown and yellow,” and at relative peace until the eruption of a European conflagration. Therefore, he argued, it was “a war of the white race wherein the stakes of the conflict are the titles to possession of the lands and destinies of [the] colored majority in Asia, Africa, and the islands of the sea.” The white race was superior “not because it has better morals[,] more religion, or higher culture,” but because it had the guns, soldiers, and economic resources to dominate other peoples.

With this framework, Harrison contested the official justification for the war: it was not about the democracy of the Allies versus the tyranny of Germany, but a war of clashing European empires. More specifically, the struggle represented a conflict of interests that would determine “whose will shall be accepted as the collective will of the white race.” Although he lamented the loss of life that the war entailed, he found consolation in the hope that the white world’s blood-soaked bout of fratricidal slaughter would inevitably weaken its ability to oppress and dominate the non-white people of the

⁴³ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 5.

world. As a result, Harrison looked forward to the darker peoples of the world getting independence, because the “majority races” would not be coerced into accepting white domination forever.⁴⁴

The following year, while the war still raged, Harrison articulated an even more expansive and rigorous theorisation of the war. He argued that “democracy” could not have been the reason for war given that millions of Black people in the US were disfranchised and terrorised by lynching and Jim Crow. Similarly the claim that the war was about defending “small nationalities” was disproved by the British domination over small nations like Ireland and Egypt.

As evidence for his theory of the war, he cited to the writings of Sir Harry Johnston. Johnston represented the foremost British authority on Africa, having received an English Knighthood-level honour-title for his successes in securing treaties and land on behalf of British claims in the colonial ‘scramble for Africa.’⁴⁵ Johnston had predicted that if the British were victorious, Africa would repay Britain and her allies the cost of the war. “The war, deny it who may, was really fought over African questions,” he wrote, because “the Germans wished, as the chief gain of victory, to wrest rich Morocco from French control, to take the French Congo from France, and the Portuguese Congo from Portugal, to secure from Belgium the richest and most extensive tract of alluvial goldfields as yet discovered.” He argued Africa would “eventually show itself to be the most richly endowed of all the continents in valuable vegetable and mineral

⁴⁴ H. Harrison, ‘The White War and the Colored World’, *The Voice*. 14 August 1917. HHR p. 202.

⁴⁵ “Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston”. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016. Online URL: <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Harry-Hamilton-Johnston>, accessed 19 May 2016.

substances.”⁴⁶ Johnston represented a telling figure both for his expertise and honesty about European interests in continent. Usually, noted Harrison, the real aims of the war were not so “frankly avowed.”⁴⁷

Harrison then turned to the economic backdrop of the war, deploying some of the Marxist analysis he had learned in the socialist movement. He argued that, at its root, the world war was “a natural and inevitable effect of the capitalist system” because that system was based upon the wage relationship between those who owned the “gigantic forces of land and machinery” and those who worked them. “Under this system no capitalist employs a worker for two dollars a day unless that worker creates more than two dollars worth of wealth for him. Only out of this surplus can profits come. If ten million workers should thus create one-hundred-million dollars worth of wealth each day and get twenty five or fifty millions in wages, it is obvious that they can expend only what they have received.” The working class created more wealth than the cost of its remuneration, and therefore workers could never buy all the commodities they collectively produced, even if they spent all of their wages. As a result, the economy of every capitalist country produced a surplus of commodities over and above that which its workers could afford to buy.

But, as Harrison put it, “before these products can return to their owners as profits they must be sold somewhere. Hence the need for foreign markets, for fields of exploitation and ‘spheres of influence’ in ‘undeveloped’ countries.” Because the wages of workers at home could not afford to buy the surplus products, they would have to be sold outside of the country. “But, since every industrial nation is seeking the same outlet for

⁴⁶ H. Johnston, ‘The Future of Africa’, reprinted in *The Crisis*, June 1917, p. 75. Quoted in H. Harrison, ‘The White War and the Colored Races’, *New Negro* 4, Oct 1919: 8-10.

⁴⁷ H. Harrison, ‘The White War and the Colored World’, *Ibid*.

its products, clashes are inevitable” in the form of competition for markets, “and in these clashes beaks and claws—armies and navies—must come into play. Hence beaks and claws must be provided beforehand against the day of conflict, and hence the exploitation of white men in Europe and America becomes the reason for the exploitation of black and brown and yellow men in Africa and Asia.”⁴⁸ In short, capitalism’s drive for endless expansion is what lay at the root of the world war.

In light of these economic fundamentals, Harrison then drew out the implications, both about capitalism and white supremacy. Because economic competition lay at the root of the war, it was “hypocritical and absurd to pretend that the capitalist nations can ever intend to abolish wars.” Moreover, “economic motives have always their social side,” and in this case European exploitation of the “lands and labour of colored folk expresses itself in the social theory of white domination.” Harrison pointed out how when people of color “who make up the overwhelming majority of this world” demand decent treatment, white supremacists accused them of impudence or of seeking social equality, but if white people insisted on the right to manage their ancestral lands free from domination then it was called ‘democracy’ or ‘self-determination.’ He then predicted that wars would be wider and more terrible as long as the theory of white domination sought to suppress the global majority under the “iron heel of racial repression.”

As in his 1917 editorial, Harrison concluded by offering a hopeful and uncannily accurate prediction about the outcomes and consequences of the ‘white world war.’ Noting how the very basis of white world domination—superior guns, money, and resources—was being destroyed in the war, the white nations would be less able to

⁴⁸ Harrison, ‘The White War and the Colored Races’, *New Negro* 4, October 1919, 8-10, re-printed in *WAA*, p. 116.

enforce their will upon the darker races of the world. Harrison predicted that as the darker races felt the weakening of white rule they would “first ask, then demand, and finally secure” the right of self-determination. This would lead to independence for such nations as Egypt and India, and eventually to “independent African states as large as Germany and France—and larger,” necessitating a shifting of the whole basis of global politics, business, and international control. This is precisely what happened following World War II, as the destruction of European economies and the rise of third world nationalism led to formal independence in most of the colonised world. So although it would take another 50 years and a second global war for Harrison’s predictions about African and Asian independence to come true, his prognosis in 1918 was startlingly prophetic.

Thus Harrison illuminated simultaneously the ideological, economic, imperial, military, racial dynamics, *and* long-term implications of the ‘white world war.’ The war, therefore offers a prime example of the eclecticism of Harrison’s radical thought, as well as the concision of his pen in distilling and illuminating complex processes into clearly understandable language for a non-elite audience.

Harrison arrived at his geopolitical forecast by drawing on multiple influences. For example, according to historian Jeffrey Stewart, Alain Locke was the first African-American to argue that imperialism caused the First World War in his lecture entitled “The Great Disillusionment” to John E. Bruce and Arturo Schomburg’s Negro Society for Historical Research (NSHR) on 26 September, 1914.⁴⁹ In that lecture, Locke argued that the war was fundamentally a contest between the British and German empires for control of the “unconquered” domains of Africa and Asia, a “war of race” which would

⁴⁹ A.L. Locke and J.C. Stewart(ed.), *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race* (Washington D.C., 1992), p. xl.

break the “pretensions of European civilization to world-dominance and eternal superiority.”⁵⁰ It is likely that Harrison attended this lecture, as he was a member of the NSHR since 1911, and had served as its secretary.⁵¹

By his own admission, Harrison derived his position on the war largely from reading “newspapers and books that have been written and published by colored men in Africa and Asia during the past three years.”⁵² One such publication was Duse Mohamed Ali’s *African Times and Orient Review*, a magazine designed to express pan-African and pan-Asian perspectives on current events of particular interest to a non-white international audience.⁵³ He read African newspapers like *The Lagos Weekly Record*, *The Gold Coast Independent*, and *The African Telegraph*. He looked up to African leaders like J.E. Casely Hayford and John Mensah Sarbah who founded the proto-nationalist Aborigines' Rights Protection Society to challenge the British colonial government in the Gold Coast.⁵⁴

Ironically given their conflicting approaches during the war, a major influence on Harrison’s analysis seems to have been W.E.B. Du Bois. In 1915, Du Bois wrote his famous piece “The African Roots of War” in the *Atlantic Monthly*, whose influence can be seen throughout Harrison’s theory. Du Bois, for example, denounced the methods of European colonialism in Africa and argued that “Africa is a prime cause of this terrible overturning of civilization.” Du Bois spoke to the way economic exploitation of the poor and weak at home created the “dream” of exploitation abroad, and that it was both capital

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

⁵¹ J. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 157.

⁵² H. Harrison, ‘The White War and the Colored Races’, *ibid.*

⁵³ J. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 256.

⁵⁴ Harrison, Hubert. ‘A Difference of Opinion.’ *Negro World* (7 Aug 1920). A copy of *The African Telegraph* with a petition to Britain from South Africans can be found in HHP box 17, folder 1.

and labour which united in the new democratic Western nations on the basis of “white hegemony” to “share the spoil of exploiting ‘chinks and niggers’” who populated the “darker nations of the world.”⁵⁵ Given Du Bois’ stature as the leading Black ‘protestant’ in 1915 (the same year Booker T. Washington died), Harrison inevitably drew heavily on Du Bois’ unpacking of the racial, economic, and global geopolitics of the imperialist roots of the war, while at the same time sharpening and deepening Du Bois’ analysis by adding Marxist economic theory, an analysis of militarism, and a more explicit critique of the ideological justifications for the war.⁵⁶

Ultimately, Du Bois did not hold to his original analysis once the pressures of wartime loyalty kicked into high gear. Du Bois declared in 1915 that “lying treaties, rivers of rum, murder, assassination, rape, and torture have marked the progress of Englishman, German, Frenchman, and Belgian on the dark continent.” But in his infamous “close ranks” editorial of 1918, he now proclaimed, “that which the German power represents today spells death to the aspiration of Negroes and all the darker races for equality, freedom and democracy.” The idea that only *German* power was the greatest evil in the world would have been news to the ‘darker races’ in their millions living under British, French, and Belgian rule—as Du Bois himself had so eloquently argued three years earlier. Du Bois’ statement in 1918 sounded like that of an agent of the War Department in part because that was a role for which he was indeed auditioning.

In addition to domestic and international Black thinkers, another clear influence on Harrison’s thought came from the Marxism of the socialist left. Harrison taught

⁵⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘The African Roots of War’, *Atlantic Monthly*, (Boston, May 1915).

⁵⁶ Harrison himself said he began formulating his ideas about the ‘white war’ and his international consciousness while lecturing for the Radical forum in 1915, the same year Du Bois published ‘The African Roots of War’. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 96.

economics at the socialist-oriented Rand School of Social Science, and left-wing socialists in the US like Helen Keller, John Reed, and Eugene Debs denounced the war in class conscious and economic terms.⁵⁷ European Marxists often had more advanced theories of the war than their counterparts in the US. Lenin, for example, theorised imperialism as the new, ‘highest stage’ in the historical trajectory of global capitalism whereby the process of concentration and centralization of capital had reached its international monopoly phase.⁵⁸ Nikolai Bukharin, perhaps the most advanced theoretician of the Russian revolutionaries, saw imperialism and the capitalist world economy as a single socio-economic organism administering an international division of labour.⁵⁹ Yet the classic works of these and other prominent European Marxists like Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leon Trotsky were not translated to English until years after the war, so their writings were not readily accessible.

While his economic theorisation of the war did not go as far as the Europeans, Harrison had an analytical component which the leading Marxist theoreticians lacked: race consciousness. While some Western Marxists like Lenin did support the slogan of self-determination for oppressed ethnic nationalities, they did not theorise anti-imperialist politics in *racial* terms.⁶⁰ Harrison himself noted this, remarking in 1919 how although some minimal signs of racial awareness could be seen in a recent Bolshevik declaration, nevertheless “eyes which for centuries have been behind the blinders of Race Prejudice

⁵⁷ H. Zinn and A. Arnoe (eds.), *Voices of A People's History of the United States*, 2nd ed (New York, 2009), Ch. 14.

⁵⁸ V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, (Moscow, 1982 [c1916]).

⁵⁹ N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy*. (London, 1972 [c1917]).

⁶⁰ V.I. Lenin, ‘The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination’, *Collected Works* Vol. 22, (Moscow, 1960). p. 143-156.

cannot but blink and water when compelled to face the full sunlight.”⁶¹ In other words, white leftists had a long way to go in terms of developing race consciousness. By contrast, Harrison’s racial analysis was not of mere secondary or incidental relevance to the class question, as white Marxists in the US had previously treated it. As early as 1915, Harrison began pointing out that “the racial aspect of the war in Europe was easily the most important” because of the implications of ‘democracy’ and ‘self-determination’ for the colonised and coloured majority of the world’s population, despite the fact that so few white publications—socialist or otherwise—commented about the racial dimension of the war.⁶²

Using the Marxists own method, Harrison’s leadership in the realm of theory emerged in his dialectical view of the relationship between race and class consciousness. For example, Harrison pointed out that when British workers insist that “no one will maintain that the Africans are fit for self-government,” it represented the same elitist principle whereby the British ruling class told those same workers, “no one maintains that the laboring classes of Britain are fit for self-government.” Both positions sprang from a superiority complex, one racial and the other class-based. The “selfish and ignorant” white worker with such a superiority complex thus failed to realise that his destiny was inseparably bound up with “the hundreds of millions of those whom he calls ‘niggers’.”⁶³ Working-class ‘self-government,’ i.e. workers’ control of the means of production, formed the cornerstone of socialism. So if white workers maintained such elitist attitudes toward African workers, they clearly lacked the respect and humility toward racially

⁶¹ H. Harrison, ‘The White War and the Colored Races’, *New Negro* 4, October 1919, 8-10. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 116.

⁶² Harrison, *WAA*, p. 113-114.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 119, 121.

oppressed people necessary for a truly ‘proletarian internationalism’ of the kind that Marxist theory claimed to profess.

Harrison’s Place in the Historical Pantheon of Black Leadership

What is Harrison’s place in the historical arc of Black leadership? A. Philip Randolph captured the meaning of this arc in profound tones when he reflected late in life on how “we are creatures of history, for every historical epoch has its roots in a preceding epoch. The black militants of today are standing upon the shoulders of the New Negro radicals of my day, the twenties, thirties, and forties. We stood upon the shoulders of the civil rights fighters of the Reconstruction era, and they stood upon the shoulders of the black abolitionists. These are the interconnections of history, and they play their role in the course of development.”⁶⁴ Where does Harrison fit in that course of development?

Hubert Harrison broke new ground in the realm of Black leadership. First and foremost, he created a new intellectual culture by his institutionalisation of the ‘Outdoor University’ model of mass education. In the crucible of the First World War Harrison emerged as a leading example of consistent and principled anti-imperialism. Finally, Harrison pioneered and encouraged a mass-movement orientation for Black struggle domestically, alongside a new race-conscious, anti-capitalist coloured internationalism. Harrison did not conjure these elements out of thin air, but instead sampled and remixed the efforts that came before him, in order to synthesise a new model of Black leadership of his own. In order to more fully appreciate Harrison’s place within in the wider pantheon of Black leaders of his time, one must appreciate the men and women upon

⁶⁴ J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (New York, 1972), p. 21.

whose example he built or improved, particularly Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington, William Monroe Trotter, and W.E.B. Du Bois.

A logical person with whom to begin a discussion of post-Reconstruction era Black leadership is Ida B. Wells(1862-1931). Born to enslaved parents in rural Mississippi during the fiery trial of the American Civil War, Wells grew up during the Black political heyday of Reconstruction. In part as a result of losing both parents to yellow fever at age sixteen, she developed a fierce resilience and independence that would drive her political activism, including her early legal challenges to discrimination on the railroads. Thanks to her passion for justice, Wells became the first woman owner and editor of a Black newspaper (the *Free Speech and Headlight*) in US history and the first journalist, Black or white, to systematically research the causes of lynching.⁶⁵

Charging Black men with raping a white woman comprised a common justification for lynching and a difficult charge to contest given the taboo on discussing sex in the Victorian culture of the nineteenth century south.⁶⁶ However Wells experience as an activist, and her positionality as a Black woman afforded her a unique angle of vision with which to see through the myth of the ubiquitous Black male rapist—and call it out for what it was.⁶⁷ By openly analysing and exposing the sexual and racial politics underlying the ‘common-sense’ justification for lynching, this four-and-a-half-foot-tall, unmarried, descendant of enslaved rural southerners without a college degree precipitated a radical re-thinking of the ‘Southern Horror’ underlying Jim Crow and effectively broke

⁶⁵ P. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*, (New York, 2008). Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*, (New York, 2009), p. 45, 103.

⁶⁶ L. Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill, 2008). G. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, 1996).

⁶⁷ Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely*, p. 100-103.

the white-supremacist and patriarchal ideological apparatus that sustained it.⁶⁸ In so doing, she effectively founded what would become an trans-Atlantic anti-lynching movement.⁶⁹ Harrison would build on the political urgency of anti-lynching, the journalistic fearlessness, and the grassroots approach of Ida B. Wells for his leadership of the Liberty League.

Because of her outspokenness and her gender, Wells did not take Frederick Douglass' place as the leading voice of African-America upon his death in 1895. Instead, that role went to the measured, moderate, and male figure of Booker T. Washington (1856-1915). Born into slavery in rural Virginia, Washington moved 'up from slavery' to eventually become the president of the Tuskegee Institute, a model school for industrial education in the south.⁷⁰ His famous 1895 'Atlanta Compromise' speech crystallised his rags-to-riches ascendancy as white America's new Black leader of choice. It also gave voice to the sentiment of the conservative, "respectable," and protest-averse Black propertied social layer to which Washington now belonged.⁷¹ By buying up controlling shares in Black newspapers, planting spies in civil rights organisations, punishing those who dissented from his views, and receiving king-making powers from the White House, Washington's political 'Tuskegee Machine' achieved nearly full-spectrum dominance in Black politics by the turn of the century.⁷²

Washington's notion that their labour was the greatest resource African Americans had to offer—and therefore they should focus on economic entrepreneurship

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

⁶⁹ S.L. Silkey, *Black Woman Reformer: Ida B. Wells, Lynching, and Transatlantic Activism* (Athens, 2015).

⁷⁰ B.T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, (New York, 1901).

⁷¹ Marable, *Black Leadership*, p. 31.

⁷² Ibid., p. 34-5. L. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York, 1972).

instead protesting for political or social rights—dovetailed with the pro-capitalist and anti-union principles that won him financial backing from Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, and other Northern white capitalists who depended on cheap and compliant southern Black labour.⁷³ Internationally, Tuskegee collaborated with Germany and Britain who found to its ‘civilising’ educational model to be of great usefulness for stabilising white colonial rule over Black Africans.⁷⁴

Harrison developed his leadership against the ubiquitous influence from Booker T. Washington, not least by losing his Post Office job to the Tuskegee Machine. Education-wise, Harrison was well aware that the Tuskegee Institute refused to teach history, philosophy and other liberal arts subjects, instead focusing on menial work skills overseen by a rigid and authoritarian regime of discipline and punishment.⁷⁵ In light of the intellectually free-ranging free education system of the Outdoor University, one can see why Hubert Harrison described industrial education as “a device for keeping Negroes ignorant.”⁷⁶ In the 1920s, Harrison would on occasion make use of Washington’s favourite Biblical injunction to ‘cast down your buckets where you are.’ But he seems to have done so mainly to encourage militant domestic Black political struggle as against Marcus Garvey’s emigrationist vision of founding a Black empire in Africa.⁷⁷

William Monroe Trotter (1872-1934) offers yet another version of Black leadership in this period, somewhere between the approach of Ida B. Wells before him and that of W.E.B. Du Bois who came to prominence subsequently. Trotter came from a

⁷³ D. Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1865-1915* (Westport, 1978), p. ix. B. Kelly, ‘No Easy Way Through: Race Leadership and Black Workers at the Nadir’, *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 7:3, 2010, p. 84. R. Norrell, *Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 3.

⁷⁴ Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*, Ch. 5.

⁷⁵ Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*, Ch. 3.

⁷⁶ H. Harrison, ‘Humorous phrases’, *The Voice*, 14 Dec 1917.

⁷⁷ For more on Harrison’s relationship to Marcus Garvey, see chapter 5.

northeastern, patrician, and Harvard-educated background. With his Boston-based *Guardian* newspaper, he advanced the first forceful, public, and consistent challenge to the hegemony of Booker T. Washington. Washington's legal prosecution of Trotter and his associates for openly challenging Washington at a public speech (sensationalised as the "Boston riot" of 1903) played a major role in driving a wedge into the ideological dominance of the Tuskegee Machine, setting the stage for subsequent challenges that would only grow louder as the first decade of the twentieth century drew to a close. Harrison would build on Trotter's New England Suffrage League, particularly in the domain of putting pressure directly and fearlessly on the federal government to address lynching, disfranchisement, and segregation.⁷⁸

W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), although initially cordial and collaborative with Booker T. Washington, eloquently announced his break with the Tuskegee president in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois, like Trotter, was lighter-skinned, went to Harvard University, and came from a relatively privileged economic background. The two worked together for a time in the Niagara movement in 1905 which, though short-lived, laid the ground work for the emergence of the NAACP following the outrage of northern white liberals at an anti-Black pogrom in Springfield, Illinois in 1908.⁷⁹ Although a key political forerunner of the organisation, Trotter broke ranks with Du Bois and the NAACP, primarily because of his opposition to white leadership for an organisation meant to secure Black rights.⁸⁰ This prompted him to form the National

⁷⁸ Trotter's NESL was a regional organisation which endorsed federal antilynching legislation, federal aid to Southern schools, desegregation, and enforcement of the Fifteenth Amendment. S. Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, p. 77.

⁷⁹ C. Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, Vol. 1: 1909-1920* (Baltimore, 1967).

⁸⁰ Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, p. 140.

Equal Rights League, which functioned as a kind of all-Black version of the NAACP but with a comparatively smaller membership, prestige, and influence.

In part because of his openness to white leadership and funding, W.E.B. Du Bois was effectively anointed by a section of wealthy northeastern liberals as the leader of the “protestant” or “anti-Bookerite” wing of Black politics. Du Bois, feeling that racial oppression could not be overcome without cooperation from white people, ceded operational control of the NAACP to the white founders like Oswald Garrison Villard and Mary White Ovington while fighting to maintain autonomy for himself over the organisation’s monthly *Crisis* magazine, which he edited from its inception in 1910.⁸¹ Du Bois and his associates took up the anti-lynching cause by use of publicity and political lobbying, alongside various legal challenges to segregation. As previously noted, Harrison keenly observed the NAACP, but built Liberty League largely to fill the need for a protest organisation with a more radical approach.

Harrison’s ideological divergence from Du Bois readily appears in the realm of their conflicting class commitments. Du Bois, in ‘The Talented Tenth’ (1903) argued that the Black masses could not be more quickly raised up than by the work of an “aristocracy of talent and character.” Du Bois wondered rhetorically, “was there ever a nation on God’s fair earth civilized from the bottom upward? Never; it is, ever was and ever will be from the top downward that culture filters. The Talented Tenth rises and pulls all that are worth the saving up to their vantage ground.”⁸² Although Du Bois’ advocacy of “talented tenth” Black leadership in this period is well-known, less well-known is a point historian Evelyn Higginbotham has made, that the notion originated not with Du Bois, but the

⁸¹ C. Kellogg, *NAACP*, p. 250-254.

⁸² W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘The Talented Tenth’ in B.T. Washington, et al., *The Negro Problem: a series of articles by representative American Negroes of today*, (New York, 1903).

nineteenth century, Rockefeller-funded, white liberal American Baptist Home Missionary Society.⁸³ In any case, the notion that civilisation comes ‘from the top downward’ to those ‘that are worth the saving’ was a notion that Du Bois himself would, by the 1930s, eventually renounce.⁸⁴

Hubert Harrison, by contrast, advanced a conception of leadership based on the Black working class. He maintained that the lack of Black unity was the fault of elites like Du Bois, who “have generally gone at the problem from the wrong end. They have begun at the top when they should have begun at the bottom.” For Harrison, the “attempt to unite the ‘intellectuals’ at the top is not the same thing as uniting the Negro masses. For, very often the ‘intellectuals’ assume the airs of superior beings who are made of finer clay and expect that the others will run to seek them out.”⁸⁵ Given the elitism and self-serving tendencies of patrician intellectuals, the right way to achieve Black unity consisted of aiming for solidarity from below, with the grassroots.

As I will show in the next chapter, Harrison’s Liberty League prepared the ground for the rise of the Garvey movement. In that sense, he represented a bridge between the African American domestic struggle against racial oppression and the pan-African, and Black internationalist struggle of the post-WWI period. Harrison’s positionality in the Black Mecca of Harlem and as the first nationally-prominent Black leader of Caribbean origin set the stage for a generation of West Indian-born organisers like Cyril Briggs, W.A. Domingo, Richard B. Moore to assert their place not only in Black politics in the

⁸³ The ABHMS saw the education of a middle-class Black social stratum as a key mechanism for racial management, one that would complement the ‘schooling for the new slavery’ of Hampton and Tuskegee. E. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: the Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge, 1993), Ch. 2. J. James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth*, p. 16-17.

⁸⁴ Over time, Du Bois became increasingly radical in his economic thought as he began to sympathise with the ideas of Karl Marx and communism. James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth*, Ch. 1.

⁸⁵ H. Harrison, ‘The Right Way to Unity’, *Boston Chronicle*, 10 May, 1924.

United States generally, but within Black socialism and communism in particular.⁸⁶

Harrison also opened new doors for Black radical participation, like anti-religious freethought, street corner oratory, and Black street scholarship.

Conclusion

Hubert Harrison's conception of Black leadership demonstrated both continuity with and a historic advance upon that of his forebears. In terms of continuity, he combined the mass movement, class-conscious, internationalist politics of the Socialist Party, the urgent and fearlessly outspoken anti-lynching crusade of Ida B. Wells, the Black autonomous organising and federal-level advocacy of William Monroe Trotter, and the secular scholar-activist example of Du Bois. In terms of breaking with the past, Harrison focused on the 'common people'-centred approach based on organic, collective, and bottom-up unity, and opposed the selection and anointment of middle-class 'talented tenth' leaders by the sponsorship of white capital.

His commitment to armed self-defence as a response to white terrorism complemented his principled anti-imperialism during the heady weeks and months of US participation in the European war. Harrison, Trotter, and other New Negro movement figures' proverbial 'crossing of swords' with a pro-war Du Bois marked the latter's descent as a leader in the eyes of many young Black radicals. It also exemplified Harrison's position as a key figure who set the tone for consistent and militant New Negro leadership before, during, and after the war. For that reason it is perhaps no surprise that Marcus Garvey sought him out in the months following the "Red Summer"

⁸⁶ James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders*.

of 1919 and asked Harrison to join and help lead the Universal Negro Improvement Association. It is to that story that I now turn.

Chapter 5

Teacher and Disciple: Hubert Harrison and the Garvey Movement

Introduction

In 1914, Amy Ashwood and Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities Imperial League (UNIA). Originally, the UNIA was conceived as a Jamaican equivalent of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, a project for Black racial uplift based on industrial and trade-school education. Following Garvey's encounter with Hubert Harrison and his Liberty League of Negro-Americans in Harlem, the UNIA adopted a mass-movement orientation that led to its growth into the largest single international movement of African-descended people in history. Naturally for any social organism that large, the Garvey movement contained within it a multiplicity of Black historical, ideological, and political tendencies. Harrison's relationship to the movement must therefore be understood in this larger context.

Garveyism represented, at least on an official level, an attempt to forge and sustain a modern global Black nationality. As international relations scholar Robbie Shilliam has pointed out, the UNIA developed a range of state-like features including paramilitary units, a civil service, a travel passport, a court system, its own flag and

national anthem, a semi-official church, an auxiliary health service, a shipping line, and industrial enterprises which sought to carve out an exclusively Black-owned economy. Not to mention its formal bureaucracy, complete with potentates, dukes, presidents, and other governmental titles. Pointing additionally to the fact of its semi-official recognition by the League of Nations in 1922, Shilliam argues that the Garvey movement “managed to coalesce, however briefly and imperfectly, an extra-territorial Pan-African sovereign authority.”¹ Yet world-wide Black nation building was by no means the only dimension of Garveyism.

With tens of thousands of members spread across hundreds of Black communities along both banks of the Atlantic ocean, the ground-level substance of the Garvey movement inevitably went beyond the formal trappings of its Harlem-based headquarters and officialdom. Various politically and racially-awakened elements of the African diaspora joined the Garvey movement, “from dockworkers in South Africa to sharecroppers in the United States, from cocoa farmers in Ghana to intellectuals in Nigeria, from ethnic mobilizers in Zimbabwe to activists in Cuba.”² Garvey’s Harlem-based *Negro World* newspaper was translated into French and Spanish editions, and gave voice to the movement’s multiple and sometimes contradictory tendencies, both “individualist and collectivist, nationalist and internationalist, working-class and bourgeois.”³ Whereas in Trinidad, UNIA members led some of the spectacular labour battles of the postwar period, the organisation’s leading Black women in New Orleans

¹ R. Shilliam, ‘What About Marcus Garvey? Race and the Transformation of Sovereignty Debate’, *Review of International Studies* (2006), 32: 379–400.

² M.O. West and W.G. Martin (eds.), *From Toussaint to Tupac: the Black International Since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2009), p. 11.

³ M. Younis, ‘Will Drops of Ink We Make Millions Think’: Interwar African American Nationalism’ (unpublished), forthcoming doctoral thesis.

spoke of Garveyism as “our church, our clubhouse, our theatre, our fraternal order and our school, and we will never forsake it while we live.”⁴ Therefore, beneath the nation-building aspect, the Garvey movement comprised a kind of “pan-African potter’s clay,” a inspiring source of global Black race pride that captured the Black imagination largely thanks to its malleability and adaptability to different local and national contexts.⁵

Recent scholarship on Garveyism has deepened and complicated our understanding of the movement by de-centring the role and actions of its namesake. New studies on topics like the Garvey movement in the urban and rural south, Garveyism and Black culture, women in the Garvey movement, and Garveyism outside the United States have broadened our sense of who built and comprised the movement at a local level across time and space.⁶ These narratives complicate and build considerably on the first-generation histories of Garveyism, which tended to focus on the main themes of Marcus Garvey’s life and political trajectory. These studies mention Harrison either briefly or not at all.⁷ A subsequent wave of scholarship generated studies with at least some mention of

⁴ C. Harold, *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban South, 1918-1942* (New York, 2007), p. 45.

⁵ West and Martin, *From Toussaint to Tupac*, p. 11.

⁶ For studies on Garveyism in the south, see M. Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: the Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South* (Chapel Hill, 2007). C.N. Harold, *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban South, 1918-1942* (New York, 2007). For women in the Garvey movement, see U.Y. Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: the Life & Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill, 2002). T. Martin, *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-Africanist, Feminist, and Mrs. Marcus Garvey no. 1, or A Tale of Two Amies* (Dover, 2007). N. Assata, *Women in the Garvey Movement*, (Mitcham, 2008). For recent studies on the impact of Garveyism abroad, see A. Ewing, *Age of Garvey* (Princeton, 2014). F.A. Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, 2010). R.T. Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming! Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens, 2012). On culture, see J.G. Spady, *Marcus Garvey: Jazz, Reggae, Hip Hop and the African Diaspora* (Philadelphia, 2011).

⁷ Studies that mention Harrison briefly or in passing include: T. Martin, *Race First: the Ideological and Organizational struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, 1976). R. Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion* (Trenton, 1988). E.C. Fax, *Garvey: The Story of A Pioneer Black Nationalist*. (New York, 1972). E.D. Cronon, *Black Moses: the story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison, 1955). R. Hill and B. Bair, *Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons*, (Los Angeles, 1987).

Studies that don’t mention Harrison at all include: M.M. Garvey and A.J. Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*

Harrison's being an influence on Garvey.⁸ Jeff Perry has argued that Harrison was the "principal radical influence" on the Garvey movement and that "repeated emphasis on political struggle" comprised his key contribution to it.⁹ These themes, while correct, have yet to receive a systematic exposition.

In this context, restoring Harrison to the history of the Garvey movement furthers the recent trend of exploring its broader social history. In this chapter, however, rather than looking at the ripples of Garveyism which radiated throughout the global pond of the African diaspora far away from its Harlem nerve centre, the focus here will be on the formation and casting of the pebble from whence those ripples emanated, a process that looks very different through the lens of Harrison's eye glasses.

First, I will demonstrate how Hubert Harrison and his Liberty League of Negro-Americans innovated or developed many of the key political, ideological, cultural, and organizational components that Garvey would copy for his own movement: the United States and Harlem in particular as a headquarters, a focus on social movement building rather than industrial education, cultivating "race first" and African consciousness, the use of street-corner oratory, support for nationalist struggles of other oppressed peoples, and a tricolour to symbolise Black liberation. Seen in this way, the most common historiographical narrative—of Garvey as the pioneer and Harrison as an optional

of Marcus Garvey, (New York, 1926). E.U. Essien-Udom and A.J. Garvey (eds.), *More Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, (London, 1977). A.J. Garvey, *Garvey And Garveyism* (New York, 1970). A. Edwards, *Marcus Garvey, 1887-1940* (Port of Spain, 1967). L.S. Nembhard, *Trials and Triumphs of Marcus Garvey* (Millwood, 1978). E.D. Cronon (ed.), *Great Lives Observed: Marcus Garvey*, (Englewood Cliffs, 1973).

⁸ T. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*, (Berkeley, 1971). J.H. Clarke (ed.), *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa* (New York, 1974). R. Hill, *Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Vol. 1* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 210, n. 1. J. Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society*, (Baton Rouge, 1986). C. Grant, *Negro With A Hat* (London, 2008). A. Ewing, *Age of Garvey* (Princeton, 2014).

⁹ Perry, *HHR*, p. 156. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: Voice of Harlem Radicalism*, p. 5.

precursor—falls short. In fact, Harrison was the pioneer and Garvey emerged as his most prominent disciple. This opens the door to a paradigm shift regarding the origin story of Garveyism and a new appreciation for one of the movement's most decisive influences.

In the second part of the chapter, I explore why and how Harrison moved from being a UNIA supporter and leader to one of Marcus Garvey's fiercest and most authoritative critics. Here, I will look at the substance of Harrison's creeping unease and eventual revulsion toward the corrupt and unscrupulous behaviour he witnessed. In the final section, I explore his efforts—as a dissenting voice within the UNIA leadership—to push the organisation in a more politically-engaged, class conscious, and anti-imperialist direction.

Hubert Harrison and the Rise of Marcus Garvey in Harlem

Garvey like the rest of us all followed Hubert Harrison. – W.A. Domingo¹⁰

Radical Harlem activist Wilfred Adolphus Domingo was the president of an elevator operators trade union who later became a West Indian food import merchant in Harlem. He knew Marcus Garvey from their boyhood days in Jamaica and did a great deal to help Garvey get settled when he moved to New York City. Domingo showed Garvey around, introducing him to various Harlem activists like Hubert Harrison, whose Liberty League they would both join in 1917. In the summer of 1918, following the fracture and splitting of the Liberty League, Domingo helped Garvey start the newly-founded Harlem UNIA's *Negro World* newspaper by finding him a sympathetic printer.

¹⁰ J.B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: the Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918* (New York, 2009), p. 2.

Domingo became the newspaper's first editor, and taught Garvey how to chair meetings with a parliamentary procedure. Eventually, Garvey put him "on trial" before the executive committee of the UNIA for writing openly socialist editorials for the *Negro World*. Domingo won his "case" but resigned in the summer of 1919 on the grounds that Garvey's methods were "medieval, obscure, and dishonest," particularly the Black Star Line shipping venture, which he believed to be "bordering on a huge swindle."¹¹ Domingo was the first—but would not be the last—Black socialist to introduce Garvey to Harlem, edit his newspaper, teach him new skills, and eventually resign in disgust from the UNIA.

Marcus Garvey's story is well known. He was born in the rural peasant community of St. Anne's Bay, Jamaica in 1887. He trained as a printer's apprentice and led a strike of print workers in 1907. He travelled extensively in Latin America, observing the poor working conditions and treatment of Caribbean migrants, which provided stimulus for his emerging global Black racial consciousness. He made his way to London in 1912, where he would work for Duse Mohammed Ali's *African Times and Orient Review*. Reading Booker T. Washington's autobiography *Up From Slavery* inspired Garvey to attempt to start a Tuskegee-aligned industrial school with his future first wife Amy Ashwood in 1914. The Universal Negro Improvement Association they founded initially faltered, prompting Garvey to attempt to raise money in the US and visit Washington's Tuskegee Institute in Alabama for support.¹²

¹¹ Domingo, W.A. Letter to Alain Locke. Sept 21, 1925. Box 164-25, Folder 28. Hill, Robert. UNIA Papers Vol. 1. p. 528. L. Yard, *Biography of Amy Ashwood Garvey, 1897-1969: Co-Founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Washington D.C., 1980), p. 44. Perry, Hubert Harrison, p. 315, 331-2.

¹² W.A. Edwards, 'Garveyism: Organising the Masses or Mass Organisation?', in R. Lewis and P. Bryan (eds.), *Garvey: His Work and Impact* (Trenton, 1991), p. 218.

Garvey first arrived in New York City in 1916, but his first attempt to make an impression there failed miserably. At this first speech in Harlem, Garvey “completely lost his nerve and was obviously self-conscious. So serious was his attack of stage-fright, that he fell off the stage, much to the amazement of the audience.”¹³ Clearly, he did not yet possess the masterful oratory for which he would later become known.

To his credit, Garvey would not be deterred after his false start in Harlem. He went on a tour of the US, speaking in numerous cities and continuing to raise money to set up a Tuskegee-style institution in Jamaica. By the time he returned to New York in the spring of 1917, he had run out of money and strained his relationship with his partner Amy Ashwood such that he seriously considered returning to his home country. As summer approached, he found himself in anything but an auspicious situation in the city that would eventually become UNIA headquarters. Luckily for Garvey, he would soon encounter a unique opportunity for redemption thanks to the father of Harlem radicalism.¹⁴

Whereas Marcus Garvey found himself down and out in the spring of 1917, Hubert Harrison and his ‘New Negro Manhood movement’ was on the rise.¹⁵ As noted in a previous chapter, when Harrison put out a call for the formation of the Liberty-League of Negro-Americans on June 12 to protest against lynching and racial oppression, 2,000 people packed the Bethel AME Church in Harlem. Because Harrison sought to collaborate with Black people of the “New Negro” type who were similarly interested in

¹³ A. Jackson, ‘Analysis of the Black Star Line’, *Emancipator*, (27 Mar. 1920), reprinted in R. Hill, Robert (ed.). *MGP Vol. 2* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 271.

¹⁴ R. Hill, ‘Reporter Sues Garvey’, *Chicago Defender*, (28 Sept. 1918), reprinted in *MGP Vol. 1*, p. 282. A. Jackson, ‘Analysis’, *The Emancipator*, (27 Mar. 1920), reprinted in *MGP Vol. 2* p. 272. C. Grant, *Negro with a Hat*, p. 95.

¹⁵ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 272 and 406, n. 27.

self-help and racial uplift, he welcomed the little-known but energetic West Indian called Marcus Garvey and allowed him to speak at the Liberty League's inaugural mass meeting. By all accounts, Garvey shined in his speech before Harrison's audience. Garvey's oratorical skills had apparently grown tremendously during his cross-country tour. Observers of Garvey noted that he eulogized Harrison, offered an impassioned endorsement of the Liberty League, and joined it.¹⁶

Thus by the time Garvey returned to Harlem in 1917, he had not only improved his oratorical skills. He could also see by comparison how deeply the Liberty League approach had resonated in the Black 'Mecca' of Harlem, whose racial consciousness and community political culture Harrison had worked so hard to cultivate. Garvey himself reportedly acknowledged the challenges he had encountered while trying to gain a foothold in the United States, and admitted that he "had made up his mind to return to Jamaica in the spring of 1917, when he became associated with Mr. W.A. Domingo and Mr. Hubert Harrison. Subsequent events soon proved conclusively to him that what was wanted was real Negro leadership. He remained and started *The Negro World*, and organised the branch of the U.N.I.A. in New York."¹⁷ Garvey was about to return to Jamaica, but "subsequent events" convinced him to build a UNIA branch in Harlem. What were those events?

Liberty League alumnus and Caribbean-born Harlem activist Richard B. Moore offered a window into precisely what the 'subsequent events' consisted of: after joining the Liberty League, Garvey built the UNIA chapter from a dissent faction within the Liberty League. By Moore account,

¹⁶ J.W. Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York, 1930), p. 253. Jackson, 'Analysis of the Black Star Line'.

¹⁷ *Negro World*, 10 Sept 1921: 5.

Despite the welcome and favourable introduction accorded to him by Harrison, Garvey was not slow to take advantage of the schism that developed in the Liberty League. This dissension arose over the ownership of *The Voice*, which Harrison insisted was his own while several members held that this newspaper, which was supported by the League, should belong to the organization. In the split which ensued, Garvey influenced a number of assenters to join with him to launch in New York [a new chapter of] the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League.¹⁸

While other historical sources about the cause and substance of this factionalism in the Liberty League are scarce, a government informant corroborated it.¹⁹ Two important points stand out. First, that Marcus Garvey was himself a member of the Liberty League. Second, that he build the Harlem UNIA alongside a group of alumni of Hubert Harrison's organisation.²⁰

Hubert Harrison's pioneering example of the Liberty League, therefore, effectively convinced Garvey not only to stay in the US and make Harlem his base of operations.²¹ Garvey would eventually use the Harlem UNIA to develop and deploy his masterful skills as an orator, organiser, and propagandist in order to build an unprecedented following far beyond Harlem. Thus, Hubert Harrison helped give birth not

¹⁸ R.B. Moore, 'Marcus Garvey and His Critics' in Clarke, John H. (ed.). *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa* (New York, 1974).

¹⁹ R. Hill, 'Introduction', *The Crusader*, (New York 1987), p. xi.

²⁰ Other Liberty League alumni who helped found the Harlem UNIA included Sam Duncan, Louis Leavelle, Isaac Allen, Charles Seifert, John E. Bruce, Irena Moorman-Blackston. Perry, p. 334.

²¹ R. Hill (ed.), 'Convention Reports', (New York, 29 Aug. 1921) in *MGP Vol. 3*, p. 709. A. Jackson, (ibid.), p. 272. J.W. Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York, 1930), p. 253.

just to any old UNIA chapter, but to the NY division that would comprise the international headquarters of the Garvey movement.

Harrison's Contributions to the Ideology, Politics, and Culture of Garveyism

Although Harrison's Liberty League decisively impacted Garvey's rise and spawned what would become the international headquarters of the UNIA, Harrison's influence on Garveyism did not end there. He in fact "had a profound influence on the thinking of Marcus Garvey during the formative years of his movement in America," according to historian John Henrik Clarke.²² In particular, Harrison contributed many of the ideological, political, and cultural elements that became cornerstones of Garveyism as the UNIA copied and adapted various features from Harrison's Liberty League. I now turn to a comparative analysis of Garvey's views before and after his encounter with Harrison and the Liberty League in June of 1917, in order to see this line of influence more clearly.

Prior to his trip to the United States, Garvey aimed for a conservative, Tuskegee-based approach to racial uplift. For example, in 1915 the UNIA advertised its intention to establish an "Industrial Farm and Institute" which would provide training in agriculture and the trades, and train "our young women to be good and efficient domestics."²³ Garvey took great inspiration from Booker T. Washington's autobiography *Up From Slavery*, and upon the passing of the Tuskegee president in 1915, Garvey acclaimed him

²² J.H. Clarke, *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa* (New York, 1974), p. 197.

²³ Hill, *MGP Vol. I*, p. 165.

as “the greatest hero sprung from the stock of scattered Ethiopia.”²⁴ Harrison, as noted previously, lost his job for publicly criticising Washington in 1910.²⁵

Like Booker T. Washington, Garvey evinced an explicitly *white-friendly* orientation in the first three years of the UNIA’s existence. For example, in his speech to the first annual meeting of the UNIA in Jamaica in August of 1915, Garvey emphasised that because so many Black Jamaicans were engaged in “villainy and vice of the worst kind, immorality, obeah and all kinds of dirty things,” the UNIA’s task was to “go among the people and help them up to a better state of appreciation among the cultured classes and raise them to the standard of civilized approval. To do this we must get the co-operation and sympathy of our white brothers.”²⁶ In other words, Black people, being uncivilised, needed to be raised up to a higher ‘standard’ if they were ever to meet with ‘civilized approval’ from white people. Startling as this white-positive statement may sound in light of the militant Black nationalism for which Garvey would later become famous, it was no slip of the tongue.

Once again, when the new Tuskegee president Robert Moton came to Jamaica for a visit in early 1916, Garvey prepared a detailed memorandum about how he wanted to solve the race problem “on the broadest humanitarian lines” by which he meant “on the platform of Dr. Booker T. Washington...hence you will find that up to now my one true friend as far as you can rely on his friendship is the white man.”²⁷ Garvey then boasted of

²⁴ In the 1920s, Garvey developed a more critical view of Washington, but for now he remained squarely in the Tuskegee school of thought. ‘UNIA Memorial Meeting for Booker T. Washington’, *Daily Chronicle*, 24 Nov 1915, reprinted in Hill, *MGP Vol. 1.*, p. 166.

²⁵ H. Harrison, ‘Insistence upon Its Real Grievances the Only Course for the Race’, *New York Sun* 8 Dec 1910: 8.

²⁶ M. Garvey, ‘Universal Negro Improvement Association: Address Delivered by the President at the Annual Meeting’, *Daily Gleaner*, August 26, 1915, quoted in R. Hill, ‘The First England Years and After, 1912-1916’, in J.H. Clarke (ed.) *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa*, (New York, 1977), p. 59.

²⁷ Quoted in R. Hill ‘The First England Years and After’, p. 62.

how the white colonial establishment, including “his Excellency the Governor, the Colonial Secretary, Hon. H. Bryan, C.M.G, Sir John Pringle, Hon. Brigadier-General, L.S. Blackden, [and] all members of the Privy Council, have been our patrons on several occasions and they are still friends of the Association.” Not only that, but “the Brigadier-General has lectured to us, also His Lordship Bishop J.J. Collins, S.J., His Worship the Mayor of Kingston, Hon. H.A.L. Simpson, M.L.C., Mr. R.W. Bryant, J.P., ex-Mayor of Kingston who has visited us more than a dozen times, and many other prominent dignitaries of the country.”²⁸ The notion of multiple white colonial governors and officials lecturing UNIA gatherings would have been almost unthinkable after 1917, but as late as June of that year, Garvey still sought support from Tuskegee president Robert Moton.²⁹

By contrast, Hubert Harrison aimed for a ‘race first’ approach to Black uplift as early as 1915. Harrison’s race consciousness emerged from his experience with the white-funded subservience of Booker T. Washington’s Republican-aligned Tuskegee Machine that had him fired in 1911, the ‘white first’ leftism of the Socialist Party he grappled with in 1912-1914, the white supremacist policies of Democrats like Woodrow Wilson, and the white ‘Vesey Street Liberals’ who dominated the board of the NAACP as ‘professional friends of the Negro’. Harrison concluded on the basis of his own experience that the interests of the Black working-class could not be advanced through Democrats, Republicans, Socialists, or any of the various white-controlled political formations. In 1915, Harrison turned toward agitation primarily in his home neighbourhood of Harlem because he had come to the conclusion that Blacks “must

²⁸ Ibid, p. 63.

²⁹ Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. 203, 207.

depend upon ourselves and not upon white people.”³⁰ In other words, Harrison began practicing the notion that Black people should give place a premium on self-reliance and racial solidarity over all other matters before Garvey ever set foot in the United States. The Garvey movement would come to popularise this as the doctrine of “race first”.³¹

“Race first” became the ideological slogan of the Garvey movement, but its genealogy can be traced directly to Hubert Harrison. In 1915, Woodrow Wilson’s speeches employed the slogan of “America First” as his position on the outbreak of the war in Europe and declared his support for those were for “America first, last, and all the time.”³² Harrison re-mixed and re-purposed these themes, declaring shortly after founding the Liberty League in 1917 that “any man today who aspires to lead the Negro race must set squarely before his face the idea of ‘Africa First’” and “when it comes to a showdown, we are Negroes first, last, and all the time.”³³

As he would later make clear, Harrison used the term Africa “in its racial rather than geographical sense,”³⁴ and when his attempt to establish “Africa First” as the guiding doctrine of the New Negro movement failed to stick, he amended the slogan to ‘Race First’.³⁵ This latter variation proved more tangible to African-American and Caribbean communities who lived racial inequality on a daily basis but did not necessarily identify positively with Africa, particularly given the Western media

³⁰ H. Harrison, ‘Our Civic Corner’, *NY News* (9 Feb, 1915). HHP box 13, folder 2.

³¹ T. Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, 1976).

³² A.S. Henning, ‘Wilson For America First; Cry For 1916 Is Announced By President’, *Chicago Tribune*, 12 Oct 1915: 1.

³³ H. Harrison, (title unknown), *NY World* 17 Oct 1917. HHP Flat box 740. H. Harrison, ‘New Policies for the New Negro’, *The Voice*, 4 Sept 1917.

³⁴ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 8.

³⁵ In the original 1917 version of ‘New Policies for the New Negro’, Harrison wrote ‘Africa First’ and then in the 1920 re-print, he changed it to ‘Race First’. H. Harrison, ‘New Policies for the New Negro’, *The Voice*, 4 Sept 1917. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 39-40.

depictions of it as one large “uncivilised” jungle. W.A. Domingo confirmed the Harrisonian genealogy of ‘race first’, with an article in July of 1919 entitled “Race First!” which noted that “perhaps no phrase has done more to consolidate the sentiment of the Negroes of the world than that summed up in the two words: ‘Negro First.’ If we remember correctly, the slogan was coined by the well-known lecturer and scholar, Hubert Harrison.”³⁶

A further example of Harrison’s influence can be seen in Garvey’s speeches. For example, Harrison’s articulation of ‘race first’ in 1917 noted how “just as the white men of these and other lands are white men before they are Christians, Anglo-Saxons or Republicans; so the Negroes of this and other lands are intent upon being Negroes before they are Christians, Englishmen, or Republicans...our first duty [as Negroes] is to ourselves.”³⁷ In other words, towards Black people, European-Americans’ generally acted in accordance with their privileged racial position first, before their religious or political beliefs entered the picture. To counter this racial oppression, Black people had recognise and affirm the centrality of race to their experience within a white-dominated country. Hence, the need to put “Race first.”

This formulation was later echoed by Marcus Garvey in his speech for a UNIA event at Carnegie Hall in August of 1919. “We are neither Democrats nor Republicans nor Socialists nor Bolsheviks nor I[ndustrial].W[orkers of the].W[orld], all of them are white men, and when they were robbing us from Africa, they robbed us with all parties...therefore, we are not going to waste time over the white man’s politics. All the

³⁶ W.A. Domingo, ‘Race First!’ *Negro World*, 26 July 1919, re-printed in Hill, *MGP Vol. I*, p. 468-470.

³⁷ Harrison, ‘New Policies for the New Negro’.

time we have to waste is with pro-Negro politics.”³⁸ Black people needed a pro-Black orientation in a world so thoroughly dominated by political variations on the overarching reality of white superiority. This was a reprisal of Harrison’s argument in 1917 for “Race first.”

Yet as noted earlier, it was Harrison and not Garvey who possessed years of practical experience grappling with Democrats, Republicans, and Socialists. For that reason, this post-Liberty League injunction by Garvey not to waste time with ‘white man’s politics’ undoubtedly built upon the ‘Negro First’ doctrine which Harrison began preaching from Harlem street corners in 1915, when Garvey was still in Jamaica, pining after a Tuskegee model of Black uplift through white patronage.³⁹ In short, Harrison pioneered the ‘race first’ doctrine in 1915-1917 that Garvey adopted for the UNIA and amplified from 1919 onwards.⁴⁰

Marcus Garvey’s white-friendly, Tuskegee-oriented approach to domestic Black uplift before 1917 dovetailed with his conservative outlook internationally. In the realm of foreign policy, the pre-Liberty League Garvey took a position of loyalty and support for the British and French in the “Great war” that raged in Europe, declaring “Thrice we hail: ‘God save the King! Long live the British Empire” and “may continuous victory follow the French army against the foe, and France once more resume her peaceful and civilizing influence on the world.”⁴¹ Thus Garvey’s pre-Liberty League conservatism in foreign policy reflected his admiration and emulation of European empires. Harrison, by

³⁸ M. Garvey, ‘UNIA Meeting at Carnegie Hall (speech)’ (New York City, 25 Aug. 1919) in *MGP Vol. 1*, p. 506.

³⁹ R. Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. 506. See also J.M. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders*, p. 62.

⁴⁰ I’m unaware of any documentation of “race first” as a Garvey movement slogan before Domingo’s editorial of June 1919, from n. 36 above.

⁴¹ Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. 194, 203. ‘Resolution Adopted by Negro Improvement Association’, *Gleaner*, 17 Sep 1914, reprinted in Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. 70.

contrast, did not attribute any ‘civilizing influence’ to Britain and France, but instead spoke as early as 1915 of how the white nations were fighting over who would control the coloured majority of humanity who lived in Asia and Africa.⁴²

As against support for British imperialism, Harrison introduced the Irish question to Marcus Garvey’s field of vision. Garvey movement scholar Robert Hill argues, convincingly, that the Irish struggle “assisted in focusing Garvey’s political perspective” far more than any other foreign nationalist movement.⁴³ However, one searches in vain to find a single mention of Ireland in the Marcus Garvey Papers before Garvey’s encounter with Harrison’s Liberty League. This is not surprising given Garvey’s aforementioned support for the British empire before 1917.

On the other hand, Harrison’s *Voice* editorials—the best source available for surmising the content of Liberty League discussions—record numerous explicit references to Ireland. As noted previously, explicit support for the Irish national struggle, among others, appeared both in the inaugural resolutions and the declaration of principles of the Liberty League.⁴⁴ In June of 1917, Harrison had urged Black people to “rise against the government, just as the Irish against England, unless they get their rights.” Subsequent editorials in *The Voice* likewise found Harrison arguing that African-Americans must follow the path of Sinn Fein and organise their vote independently like those who called for ‘Home Rule’ in Ireland.⁴⁵ Garvey’s 1916 belief in the “protecting and civilising influence of the English nation and people,” was politically incompatible

⁴² Harrison, *WAA*, p. 96, 113.

⁴³ Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. lx-lxxviii.

⁴⁴ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 11. H. Harrison, ‘Declaration of Principles’, *Clarion*, 1 Sept 1917, reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 89.

⁴⁵ Hill, *The Crusader, Vol. 1*. (New York, 1987), p. xii-xiii. Harrison, ‘The New Policies for the New Negro’, *The Voice*, Sept 4 1917.

with cause of Irish freedom.⁴⁶ These facts suggest that Harrison taught Garvey about the relevance of Irish politics to Black people.⁴⁷

The single most important impact Harrison's Liberty League had on Marcus Garvey was its role as the catalysing element of the UNIA's transition from an Tuskegee Institute emulator to a mass social movement-building project. When Garvey toured the US in 1916, he met other West Indians who discouraged him from the idea of building an industrial institution for Black Jamaicans.⁴⁸ Yet he did not have a clear alternative project in mind and nearly returned to Jamaica in the spring of 1917. The Liberty League, on the other hand held out a model, not for building a white-funded, brick-and-mortar, industrial school, but a New Negro *movement*, with a 'race-first', *Black*-funded, coloured internationalist movement to secure life, liberty, economic power, education, and political rights for Black people.

Garvey, to his credit, had the brilliance and marketing savvy to take this idea and develop it into a global Black nation-building project. But the idea and concrete model for how to convene a mass organisation that combined for the first time African-Americans and West Indians of various national origins on a large scale with a program of collective Black self-help—this largely came from Harrison's Liberty League.⁴⁹ Therefore, Garvey's UNIA grew into the largest international mass movement of Black people in history, i.e. became *Garveyism*, thanks to a crucial strategic reorientation on movement building rather than industrial education, which Harrison modelled.

⁴⁶ Hill, 'The First England Years and After', p. 64.

⁴⁷ William Monroe Trotter made a similar argument about the Irish as early as 1904, and Frederick Douglass supported the Irish struggle in the nineteenth century. S.R. Fox, *Guardian of Boston*, p. 36-37. T. Chaffin, 'Frederick Douglass's Irish Liberty', *New York Times*, 25 Feb 2011.

⁴⁸ (Author unknown) 'Garvey's Speech', Collegiate Hall, 25 Mar 1921, John Henrik Clarke Papers, folder: correspondence with Robert Hill.

⁴⁹ Perry, *HHR*, p. 252.

Marcus Garvey eventually came to be associated with the notion of “back to Africa,” although the precise lineage of this dimension of Garveyism has neglected a key factor. Tony Martin has attributed the roots of this sentiment to early mentors of Garvey’s in Jamaica like Dr. Robert Love, who knew such notable nineteenth century Black nationalists as Bishop Henry McNeil Turner and Henry Sylvester Williams.⁵⁰ Robert Hill has attributed Garvey’s African turn to the hostility and wrath which he incurred from the coloured elite ‘Browns’ against his early efforts to build the UNIA in Jamaica and his exposure to pan-African consciousness in England during his time there on the eve of WWI.⁵¹

While these factors may have provided the seeds or spark for Garvey’s move from humanitarian celebration of white approval to militant Black nationalism, pan-African thinking was certainly not the centrepiece of the Tuskegee model he initially aimed for, nor would it have sat comfortably with the “civilizing” role that he allotted to European colonial powers like France and Britain. Although the original 1914 UNIA program objectives did include a call “to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa,” Harlem activist and *Negro World* writer Hodge Kirnon noted how “an association of Negro peoples with the redemption of Africa as its ideal...seemed entirely foreign to Garvey’s mind” when he first founded the Harlem UNIA chapter.⁵² Therefore some other factors must have been at work in Garvey’s shift towards Africa.

⁵⁰ T. Martin, *Race First*, p. 111-12.

⁵¹ Certainly Garvey’s brief apprenticeship with pan-African journalist Duse Mohamed Ali’s *African Times and Orient Review* in London had some effect on Garvey’s African consciousness, but according to Robert Hill, Garvey’s experiences in England and Europe “did not produce in him anything that could be described as truly radical. Had it done so, his efforts at organization upon his return to Jamaica would have been much less collaborative with the colonial system.” Hill, ‘The First England Years and After’, p. 65-70.

⁵² Garvey, A.J. 1970, *Garvey and Garveyism*, New York: MacMillan. p. 11. H. Kirnon quoted in R. Hill, ‘Introduction’, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. lxviii.

One of the subjective factors in the development of Garvey's African consciousness was undoubtedly the influence of Hubert Harrison.⁵³ For example, a commitment to the politics of "Africa first" was literally inscribed upon one's very membership in the Liberty League in 1917 [see fig. 1 below]. Richard B. Moore insisted that more than any other individual in Harlem, Hubert Harrison "gave forth from his encyclopaedic store, a wealth of knowledge of African history and culture which brought [African] consciousness to a very great height" in the community.⁵⁴ The official Liberty League principles declared that "with the 250 millions of our brethren in Africa we feel a special sympathy, and we will work for the ultimate realization of democracy in Africa—for the right of these darker millions to rule their own ancestral lands."⁵⁵ As with the cause of Ireland, the theme of solidarity with millions Black people in Africa was one that would become a cornerstone of Garvey speeches only after his experience in the Liberty League.⁵⁶

⁵³ Given the importance of Harrison's own relationship to African politics and identity, I will take a closer look at this in chapter 6.

⁵⁴ R.B. Moore, 'Africa Conscious Harlem', *Freedomways* (Summer 1963), pp. 315-34.

⁵⁵ H. Harrison, 'Declaration of Principles', *Clarion*, 1 Sept 1917, reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 89.

⁵⁶ Garvey regularly claimed to represent "400,000,000 Negroes of the world." Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. lxxiv, lxxvi, lxxvii n. 134, lxxix, 397, 416.

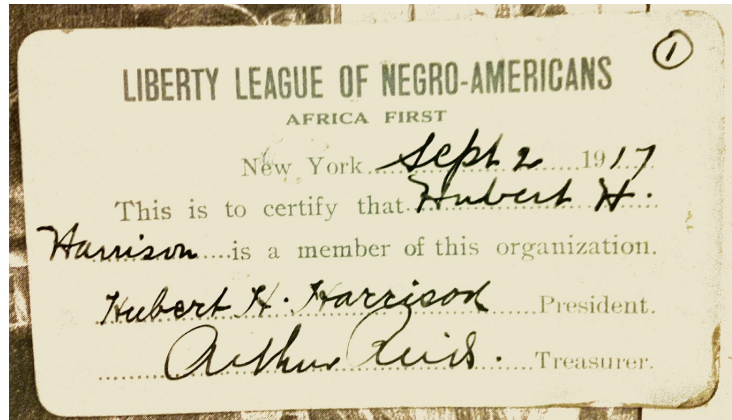


Figure 1. “Africa First” on Hubert Harrison’s Liberty League membership card. Hubert Harrison Papers, Columbia University. Flat box 740.

Harrison’s years of work agitating for Black racial and political consciousness in Harlem, including his establishment of the street-corner speaking tradition there, presents another dimension of Harrison’s influence on Garveyism. As Caribbean-born *Voice* and *Negro World* writer Anselmo Jackson put it, prior to Garvey’s arrival, Harrison

was preaching an advanced type of radicalism with a view to impressing race-consciousness and effecting racial solidarity among Negroes...The very atmosphe[re] was charged with Harrison’s propaganda...he was the forerunner of Garvey and contributed largely to the success of the latter by preparing the minds of Negroes through his lectures, thereby moulding and developing a new temper among Negroes.⁵⁷

Although difficult to measure, this aspect of Harrison’s influence on Garvey cannot be underestimated, given the many years of work that Harrison put in to establish the

⁵⁷ A. Jackson, ‘An Analysis of the Black Star Line’, *Emancipator*, 27 March 1920.

‘Outdoor University’ and the larger public oral and griot-like community culture that would become a socio-cultural fixture in Harlem. Likewise with Harrison’s *Voice* newspaper, which stimulated a range of different New Negro forays into journalism, including the *Negro World*. Even the Black Star Line had its genesis in Charles Seifert, a book collector and Black history enthusiast, and one of the many Liberty League alumni who helped found the Harlem UNIA chapter.⁵⁸

Despite its initial success, the Liberty League ran into difficulties in the months and years following its inception. For reasons of space I cannot recreate the full story here, but Harrison’s biographer Jeff Perry has recounted in great detail the shifts in personnel from the Liberty League or the *Voice* toward the UNIA and the *Negro World*, such that the mantle of New Negro leadership largely moved from Harrison to Garvey between 1917 and 1920.⁵⁹ In short, following Harrison’s gross mishandling of his dispute with the League’s board over control of *The Voice*, a number of Liberty League organisers, including some with entrepreneurial inclinations and less radical views, seemed to have drifted toward other projects, like the UNIA and August Bernier’s *Clarion* newspaper.⁶⁰ As Perry demonstrates, these shift came about not in a rapid, sweeping, or clear-cut fashion, but as the result of various ideological, political, and financial struggles between numerous individuals and political currents that competed for influence within the dynamic and vibrant wartime New Negro movement in Harlem. As

⁵⁸ R. Hill, ‘On Collectors, Their Contributions to the Documentation of the Black Past’ in T.C. Battle, W.P. Coates, and E.D.V. Sinette, *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors: Preservers of Black History* (Washington D.C., 1990), p. 47. H. Harrison, ‘Marcus Garvey at the Bar of United States Justice’, *Associated Negro Press*, c. July 1923, reprinted in Perry, HHR, p. 197. See n. 20 above for other Liberty Leaguers who founded the Harlem UNIA chapter.

⁵⁹ For more on the process whereby Garvey claimed the mantle from Harrison, see Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 332-339.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

multiple observers, including Harrison, would later agree, the success of the UNIA emerged out of the ruins of the Liberty League's failure.⁶¹

Toward the end of 1919, when the Liberty League had waned and the UNIA was growing rapidly, Garvey acknowledged Harrison's importance and authority by offering him a position as an editor of the *Negro World*. Unlike the other editor William Ferris, Harrison had the experience of launching, editing, and publishing a newspaper of his own. Therefore he brought desperately needed experience to the job and transformed the layout of the paper to fashion it into the pre-eminent international Black publication of the African diaspora. As Perry has pointed out, "before Harrison's editorship [*the Negro World*] had a circulation of about ten thousand. On May 1, 1920, [four months after Harrison took over] it went from six to ten pages per issue, and in June it reached a circulation of fifty thousand as it swept the globe with its race-conscious message." Of course, the paper travelled so far not only due to Harrison's skilful editing, but also as a result of the enthusiasm of Black dock workers and longshoremen who clandestinely smuggled it into British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean to evade postal censorship by white colonial authorities.⁶² Nevertheless, it was under Harrison's leadership that the paper saw a five-fold increase in its circulation, in part because he was now liberated from the financial woes he encountered while publishing the *Voice*.⁶³

Another sign of Harrison's importance to the Garvey movement and its pan-African dimension can be found in Garvey's selection of Harrison to chair the UNIA's

⁶¹ A. Jackson, (ibid.) in Hill, *MGP Vol. 2*, p. 271., J.M. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders* (Urbana, 2005), p. 61-62. H. Harrison, 'On Garvey's Character and Abilities' (Diary entry), (24 May, 1920), re-printed in Perry, *HHR*, p. 188-190. R. Hill (ed.). 'Convention Reports', (New York, 29 Aug. 1921), *MGP Vol. 3*, p. 709.

⁶² Martin, *Race First*, p. 93-99.

⁶³ H. Harrison, 'Wednesday March 17, 1920' (Diary entry), reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 183.

first international diplomatic mission to Liberia. The purpose of the mission was to secure backing from the Liberian government for land on which the UNIA could establish colonies of Africans from the diaspora.⁶⁴ Harrison was originally to be accompanied by veteran Black journalist John E. Bruce, who had connected Garvey with the Liberian president, and Elie Garcia, a Haitian businessman and Black Star Line official.⁶⁵ Harrison composed an outline the duties of the commissioners, the principles which should guide their conduct, the results for which they were to work, and a projected budget of expenses for the project.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, the commission as originally envisaged did not materialise for reasons to which I will return later in the chapter, and Elie Garcia would be the only one of the original UNIA commissioners to travel to Liberia. However, Garvey's selection of Harrison to chair the 'back to Africa' movement's first official delegation to the African continent represented a clear example of Harrison's stature in Garvey's eyes.⁶⁷

In the realm of visual culture, the UNIA took yet another idea from the Liberty League: a three-coloured flag for Black liberation. Garvey's UNIA adopted a tricolour to symbolise the blood which must be shed for liberty (red), the racial colour of people of African descent (black), and the luxuriant vegetation of Africa (green).⁶⁸ Given the popularity in the 1900s of such anti-Black songs as "Every Race Has A Flag But the Coon" and the feeling of statelessness which drove the nation-building aspect of Garvey's Black nationalism, iconography was no minor matter. As graduate student

⁶⁴ M.B. Akpan, 'Liberia and the Universal Negro Improvement Association: The background to the abortion of Garvey's scheme for African colonization', *Journal of African History* 14:1, Jan 1973, p. 105-127.

⁶⁵ R. Hill, *MGP Vol. II*, p. 120, n. 1.

⁶⁶ H. Harrison, '17 March 1920' (diary entry), HHP box 9.

⁶⁷ Harrison, 'On Garvey's Character and Abilities', HHR p. 188.

⁶⁸ T. Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*, (Westport, 1976), p. 44.

Musab Younis has pointed out, when the *Negro World* ran a ‘Why I am a Garveyite’ competition in 1927, “multiple winning entries referenced as a particular attraction the organisation’s flag.”⁶⁹ First prize winner Joseph Lloyd, for example, spoke with pride of how “when the flags of the various nations are being unfurled I shall see the banner of the Red, Black and Green, the flag that had been given to us by our leader, Marcus Garvey.” Another contestant remarked that Garvey “has given us...the only flag representing the Negro peoples of the world.”⁷⁰ Yet the idea of a tricolour for Black liberation that the UNIA created in 1920 (and which remains a Pan-African symbol adorning various African countries’ flags to this day), came directly from the design of the Liberty League flag of 1917. According to Harrison, the UNIA’s red, black, and green represented an adaptation of the Liberty League’s black, brown, and yellow flag, originally designed to symbolise both the “three colors of the Negro race in America” as well as “our dual relationship to our own and other peoples.”⁷¹

As *Negro World* editor, Harrison did a unique service for the Garvey movement in defending it from attacks by Black socialists. In the spring of 1920, for example, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen’s *Messenger* and W.A. Domingo’s *Emancipator* attacked the political doctrine of “race first.” They argued that “class first” formed a sounder policy for Black workers since capitalism produced race prejudice as a divide-and-rule mechanism for keeping wages low and workers exploited. Harrison forcefully defended the “race first” principle on the grounds that the Socialist Party itself practiced a ‘race first’ doctrine for white workers with its biological conception of racial difference,

⁶⁹ M. Younis, ‘Will Drops of Ink We Make Millions Think’: Interwar African American Nationalism’ (unpublished), forthcoming doctoral thesis.

⁷⁰ ‘Why I Am a Garveyite’, *Negro World*, 8 Jan 1927.

⁷¹ Perry, *HHR*, p. 90, 197.

that it tokenized its Black exponents in the tradition of ‘white man’s Negroes,’ and that Randolph and Owen’s financial subsidy from a white organisation fundamentally threatened to “betray the race into alien hands just as surely as ‘the old crowd’.”

According to Jeff Perry, Harrison’s defence of ‘race first’ temporarily silenced criticism from the Black socialists. With his past experience as the Socialist Party’s first Black historical materialist theoretician, very few other people in the country (much less the UNIA) knew the party and its racial politics better than Hubert Harrison. Therefore, Garvey could not have hoped for a better polemicist for this battle, another example of the important ideological role Harrison played for the Garvey movement.⁷²

Taken in sum, it becomes clear that Hubert Harrison and his Liberty League of Negro-Americans either created or modelled many of the key political, ideological, cultural, and organizational elements that Garvey adopted and amplified to build the UNIA: settling in the United States and Harlem in particular (rather than returning to Jamaica) for a base of operations, the numerous Liberty League alumni (including Garvey) who founded the flagship UNIA chapter, the years of preparatory work imbuing Harlem with both ‘race first’ and African consciousness, the establishment of the street-corner oratorical tradition for building a following, the mass movement rather than Tuskegee Institute orientation, support for the Irish and other nationalist struggles, the iconography of a flag to symbolise Black liberation, the idea of a weekly New Negro-oriented newspaper, and the Black Star Line. Not to mention Harrison’s other formative

⁷² For the Socialists case, see ‘Opinion of Owen & Randolph Editors of the “Messenger”’. *The Emancipator*. April 3, 1920. Domingo, W.A. “Race First Versus Class First.” *The Emancipator*. 3 April, 1920. For Harrison’s case, see Harrison, *WAA*. p. 55. Harrison, Hubert. “Race First Versus Class First.” *Negro World* March 27, 1920, reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 107, “Just Crabs” *Negro World* April 1920, reprinted in Perry’s *Reader*, p. 109, and “An Open Letter to the Socialist Party of New York City.” *Negro World*. May 8, 1920, reprinted in Perry’s *Reader*, p. 113. Perry, *HHR*. p. 110.

contributions, like his refashioning of the *Negro World* into the premier newspaper of the international African diaspora and defending “race first” from attacks by Black socialists. In so many ways, Marcus Garvey represents Hubert Harrison’s most famous disciple.

Of course, to argue that numerous features of Garveyism originated with the Liberty League is not to deny Marcus Garvey’s other influences. Garvey’s UNIA tapped into a rich history, particularly of African-American Black nationalist valences of the nineteenth century. In his historical contextualisation of the Garvey movement, Wilson Moses has documented how in the decades before Garvey’s rise, patterns of “authoritarian collectivism, separatism, mysticism, and civilizationism [had already] appeared in black bourgeois cultural and institutional life.” Garvey would manifest all of these tendencies and more according to Moses, including the patriarchal, disciplinary, and uniformed “pseudomilitarism” of the Hampton-Tuskegee model, the ‘back-to-Africa’ emigrationism of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and Chief Alfred Sam, the “lodge hall gentility” of the Black Greek letter and fraternal order traditions, and the entrepreneurial ethos of Booker T. Washington’s the National Negro Business League. In this sense, much of the substance of Marcus Garvey’s thought represented the culmination of its nineteenth century influences.⁷³

Restoring Harrison to the origins of Garveyism also need not deny Marcus Garvey’s own unique abilities as a publicist, organiser, and inspiring visionary. As many of his harshest critics conceded, Marcus Garvey did more to raise the self-esteem and racial consciousness of Black people internationally than perhaps any other single Black figure in history. Though this is not the place to offer a comprehensive analysis of Garvey’s positive qualities, historian Joyce Moore Turner has drawn out some of the

⁷³ W. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, 1978), p. 197-198.

most important contrasts between Garvey and Harrison. She observed that Garvey was astute in adopting Harrison's ideas but that he also took care to eschew the political orientation that Harrison embodied. This undoubtedly broadened Garvey's appeal, particularly amongst less class-conscious social layers. In addition, Garvey proved "clever enough to provide religious sentiment and ritual while maintaining a nondenominational base; flamboyant enough to create a world of fantasy—a royal court where the individual's self esteem was elevated...and visionary enough to paint a picture of a glorious past and future."⁷⁴ Indeed, Garvey has been called a "Black Moses" for adroitly cultivating a religious and messianic leadership style to which Black churchgoers could relate.⁷⁵ Harrison, on the other hand, generally favoured an anti-religious, scientific, and *Freethought*-oriented approach, which probably limited his appeal to the large faith-oriented sector of the Black community.⁷⁶

Style-wise, Garvey certainly emphasized the glittery drama of performance, often sporting a Napoleonic hat festooned with white feathers and a flashy military general's uniform with gold epaulettes. This majestic pomp and circumstance seems to have added to his mass appeal—particularly for West Indians who grew up under the British cultural influence of reverence for royal regalia. In marked contrast to Garvey's self-aggrandizement, Harrison represented a "Black Socrates," who evinced a professorial disposition, wide-ranging intellectual interests, aesthetic modesty, and an explicit

⁷⁴ J.M. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders*, p. 62. The moniker "Black Socrates" was a nickname given to Harrison by Black Harlemites at the time.

⁷⁵ R.K. Burkett, *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, (Metuchen, 1978).

⁷⁶ Despite his militant agnosticism, Harrison's International Colored Unity League, founded in 1924, sought to work in alliance with rather than against the religious devotion of Black communities. See chapter 6.

aversion to lavish praise.⁷⁷ Whatever their merits, these characteristics seem to have limited Harrison's mass appeal.

It bears mentioning that social movements are founded and built collectively and cannot be reduced to the singular, often male individuals who become anointed as The Leader. My argument, therefore, is not for simply replacing one 'great man of history' with another. Rather, I aim to build on the recent historiographical trend of de-centring Marcus Garvey from the history of Garveyism by showing that Harrison offers a unique angle of vision with which to take into account individuals whose hitherto-unsung contributions to the movement illustrate its richly textured social history. It just so happens that Harrison was a major political and intellectual leader in his own right whose numerous contributions to Black radicalism—not just those he made to Garvey and Garveyism—have been largely forgotten.

Harrison's Assessment of Marcus Garvey

Garvey...personified the qualities that the good leader should possess.

--Garvey scholar Tony Martin⁷⁸

He has plastered the air with lies.

--Hubert Harrison

⁷⁷ "Black Socrates" was a nickname given to Harrison by Black Harlemites. T. Asukile, 'The Harlem Friendship of Joel Augustus Rogers (1880-1966) and Hubert Henry Harrison (1883-1927)', *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 34.2, Jul 2010, p. 59.

⁷⁸ T. Martin, *African Fundamentalism: A Literary and Cultural Anthology of Garvey's Harlem Renaissance* (Dover, 1991), p. 3.

Harrison is no optional extra in the history of the Garvey movement, but a figure central to its origins and evolution. However, in addition to his multi-dimensional and decisive contributions to the movement, Harrison's first-hand observations of Garvey's leadership and behaviour did not endear him to the Jamaican. As a result of working full time in the UNIA headquarters, editing the *Negro World*, attending the first international UNIA convention, and observing Garvey up close in other settings, Harrison came to conclude that Garvey was egomaniacal, corrupt, dictatorial, imperialistic, and a liar. The word that Harrison uses over and over in his critical remarks about Garvey is "mountebank," or 'a person who sells quack medicines, as from a platform in public places, attracting and influencing an audience by tricks.'⁷⁹

Of course, Harrison was not the only observer to criticize Marcus Garvey. As noted earlier, W.A. Domingo had concluded as early as 1919 that Garvey's methods were "medieval, obscure, and dishonest" and the BSL was "bordering on a huge swindle."⁸⁰ Ida B. Wells, who generally supported the Garvey movement and spoke on occasion at UNIA events, also lamented how Garvey became "drunk with power."⁸¹ In 1921-1922, Black Marxists like Cyril Briggs and the African Blood Brotherhood led a mini-crusade against the Black Star Line in general and Marcus Garvey in particular through the pages of the *Crusader* magazine. And in 1922-23, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen of the Socialist Party worked with an assortment of NAACP leaders to launch the "Garvey Must Go" campaign, which openly called on the federal government to deport Garvey. Garvey had no shortage of Black critics, competitors, and enemies.

⁷⁹ 'mountebank', *Dictionary.com Unabridged*, Random House, Online URL: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/mountebank>, last accessed 9 July 2016.

⁸⁰ W.A. Domingo to Alain Locke, 21 Sep 1925, Alain Locke Papers, box 164-25, folder 28. R. Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. 528.

⁸¹ I.B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: the Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago, 1970), p. 381.

However, Harrison's criticisms of Garvey remain unique for at least three reasons. First, because of his authoritative status as an architect of the New Negro movement and father of Harlem radicalism. Second, the Harrison and his Liberty League catalysed the emergence of the Garvey movement and shaped much of its content, culture, and orientation. Finally, Harrison's criticisms, unlike that of a Briggs, Randolph, or Du Bois, did not stem from a place of organizational competition, but from Harrison's own concrete experience and intimate knowledge as a high-level UNIA leader and insider. I now turn to some of Harrison's main grievances and the background for their emergence.

In May of 1920, a few months after starting his job as editor of the *Negro World*, Harrison had already developed such strong misgivings about his new employer that he decided to record them in his private diary. Harrison first mentions Garvey's penchant for saying too much in public, regardless of the consequences. He gave the example of the Liberia commission, which he was unable to chair in part because of Garvey's insistence on publicising it prematurely. According to Harrison, the trouble began when some "pin-headed preachers" in the UNIA offered an "insane collection of bombastic rantings as to what the 'Commission' would do" at a public meeting in Liberty Hall. This happened before Harrison and John E. Bruce's replacement on the commission, Rev. James Eason, got their passports. Then, Hudson Pryce (a newly-hired *Negro World* associate editor) called Garvey and explained to him that if the information about what the commission would do in Liberia appeared publicly in the *Negro World*, the State Department would almost surely decline the commissioners' pending requests for passports. Garvey insisted the plans for Liberian commission comprised 'good propaganda' and ordered that they go

into the paper. “So, there will be no passports for us,” Harrison concluded, “and it is mainly due to Marcus Garvey’s prime defect, bombastic blabbing. He talks too much and too foolishly.”⁸²

In the same diary entry, Harrison then proceeded to articulate his “general estimate of Mr. Garvey’s character and abilities.” His primary concern was Garvey’s egomania. After recounting how he had given Garvey a platform at the historic Liberty League launch in June of 1917 and encouraged his audiences to attend Garvey’s speeches, Harrison lamented how Garvey refused to return the favour once he began achieving fame and political fortune of his own. When UNIA members would ask Garvey to call in Harrison and make use of his ideas and abilities, Garvey would say that ‘Harrison has his own propaganda’ and is ‘dangerous,’ probably a reference to Harrison’s wide ranging intellectual palette and multi-dimensional radicalism.

Harrison concluded that “the first big defect, then, in Mr. Garvey’s make-up is a defect in the size of his soul. He is spiritually as well as intellectually a little man. That is why he doesn’t want around him men who are of larger girth either way.” Harrison felt that if Garvey did find someone in his organization who loomed larger, “he does not utilize them in any way which would aid, amplify, or modify his chaotic plans and notions. [But] if he can use them as hired bravos, then so far, so good.” Harrison was disinclined to be a ‘yes man’ for any leader or organization, yet he felt this is precisely what Garvey demanded from UNIA leaders and members. As Harrison put it, Garvey “quarrelled with every person he ever worked with unless they were willing boot-lickers and glorifiers of himself. His insane egotism and jealousy were boundless.”⁸³ Unfiltered

⁸² Harrison, ‘May 24 1920 (diary entry)’.

⁸³ H. Harrison, ‘May 24 1920’ (diary entry), HHP box 9, re-printed in Perry, *HHR*, p. 189-190.

estimates like this, appearing in a private diary, offer a window into Harrison's most candid feelings and observations.⁸⁴

Like many others both within and outside the UNIA, Harrison expressed unflinching criticism regarding Garvey's handling of the Black Star Line(BSL). The BSL, incorporated in 1919, formed a central economic enterprise of the UNIA and an attempt to create a Black-owned shipping company that could serve African, African-American, and Caribbean merchants, as well as Black passengers who faced Jim Crow conditions on white-owned shipping lines.⁸⁵ Harrison initially campaigned for the BSL, but very soon grew wary of its financial management. He cited Garvey's inability to account for monies which he collected before incorporating the BSL as evidence that the whole operation comprised little more than a "money getter" from the start. Yet apparently it was a rather leaky money getter, because according to Harrison, Garvey's "ignorance of ships and shipping matters has resulted in his paying out tens of thousands of dollars unnecessarily and he has been victimized again and again by the white men from whom ships and ship' accessories were bought." He further regretted the way Garvey "lies to the people magniloquently, bragging about impossible things while not owning the ships outright." Harrison felt that the BSL fired the imagination of UNIA supporters primarily because "Garvey has a great talent for lying."⁸⁶

Harrison's initial misgivings about Garvey's dishonesty grew into full-blown revulsion during the first UNIA convention in August 1920. For example, Harrison

⁸⁴ H. Harrison, 're Garvey and U.N.I.A.', HHP box 4, folder 61.

⁸⁵ Martin, *Race First*, p. 152.

⁸⁶ Harrison, 'May 24 1920'. Historian Judith Stein has corroborated the claim made by Harrison (and other critics like Cyril Briggs) that the BSL did not technically own all the ships its claimed to own. See Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey*, Chs. 4, 5, and 10 for an overview of the BSL and its discontents. H. Harrison, 'Convention Bill of Rights and Elections, August 31 1920 (diary entry)', reprinted in Perry's *Reader*, p. 193. H. Harrison, 'Marcus Garvey at the Bar of United States Justice', *Associated Negro Press*, c. early July 1923, reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 194-199.

remarked about the opening fanfare of the convention that it comprised a “splendid success” overall because Madison Square Garden was “packed from top to bottom” with some 15,000 attendees, in Harrison’s estimation. Yet Garvey claimed that 25,000 *delegates* were present.⁸⁷ So not only did Garvey inflate the attendance figure, but he also declared every attendee to be an elected representative of a Black community with voting rights in the convention. But how many such delegates were actually present?

During the convention elections, Harrison noted how the official balloting showed that Francis Ellegor, the sole nominee for the office of Commissioner-General, got 103 votes, “the highest number cast for any office.” Garvey himself, the sole nominee for President-General, received 92 votes. Although not all the voting delegates signed it, a count of the signatories to the UNIA *Declaration of Rights* reveals 123 “duly elected representatives” of the African diaspora. Robert Hill, editor of the multi-volume *Marcus Garvey Papers*, compiled a list of names based on accounts printed in the *Negro World*, the *Negro World Convention Bulletin*, and the records of the Bureau of Investigation. His count for convention delegates came to 144. “Yet,” lamented Harrison, “despite such facts, [Garvey] is again declaring in circulars out today that there will be 20,000 delegates in the parade on Tuesday.”⁸⁸

Harrison’s disgust with Garvey’s behaviour at the convention led him in some cases to boycott its proceedings in protest. For example, although Harrison initially played a key role in “adding the necessary kick” to the UNIA’s *Declaration of the Rights*

⁸⁷ Hill, *MGP Vol. 2*. p. 499.

⁸⁸ Hill, *MGP Vol. 2*. p. 577-578. Hill, *MGP Vol. 2*. p. 682-683. Perry, *Reader*. p. 191. Garvey’s claim about ‘delegates representing the whole African diaspora’ is made even less accurate by the fact of Garvey’s treating permanent and long-time US residents (including Harrison) as “delegates” representing their country of origin.

of the Negro Peoples of the World, his disgust with Garvey's authoritarian behaviour in the draw-out process of drafting the document led Harrison to refuse to sign it.⁸⁹

When the convention turned to elect UNIA officers, Harrison remarked that "Garvey shamelessly electioneered for the candidates whose names he had 'suggested' to the Convention while condemning canvassing and electioneering for others." In one instance, Garvey handled a vote that ended in a tie by insisting that he had the right to cast an extra vote as the President General, "and thus [Garvey] elected his henchman" observed Harrison. Though Garvey ultimately got his way in such 'elections', his anti-democratic behaviour "revealed Garvey to the delegates and lined up much sentiment against him." When delegates nominated Harrison to be the official "Speaker In Convention," he got the highest number of votes, but then subsequently withdrew from the balloting, effectively resigning in protest, much to the dismay of his supporters.⁹⁰

Harrison's dissonance and dissatisfaction with Garvey's behaviour during the convention did not go unnoticed among UNIA officials. Rev. James Eason revealed to Harrison that the UNIA's International Organiser Henrietta Vinton Davis had begun intriguing against him in an effort to get Garvey to dismiss Harrison from the editorship of the *Negro World*. Hodge Kirnon corroborated the story, telling Harrison that according to Philadelphia division UNIA president Fred Toote, Davis and BSL office worker Harry Watkis had asked Toote to use his influence with Garvey to have Harrison removed from the paper on the grounds that Harrison was 'an enemy of the movement.' When Toote asked them for specific examples to support that claim, they couldn't produce any, "but

⁸⁹ Report by Special Agent P-138 8-14-20. DNA RG 65, file OG 329359. TD. Harrison, 'Convention Bill of Rights and Elections (diary entry)' 31 Aug 1920, reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 192-194

⁹⁰ H. Harrison, 'Convention Bill of Rights and Elections (diary entry)' (*Ibid*).

insisted on the general blanket-assertion” anyway. Apparently an anti-Harrison faction had emerged within the UNIA leadership.⁹¹

By the end of the convention, Harrison felt Garvey had become an embarrassment. “In plain English,” wrote Harrison in his diary, Garvey “has made an ass of himself and has made the movement a matter of ridicule.” Although he manifested private reservations about Garvey a few months before the convention, Harrison seems to have been disabused of whatever faith he had left in Garvey’s leadership by the end of August 1920. Of the convention’s closing reception, Harrison concluded “thus ends the most colossal joke in Negrodom, engineered and staged by its chief mountebank.” These unfiltered opinions, recorded in Harrison’s diary, comprise a devastating indictment based on his concrete first-hand experience and observations of Marcus Garvey. Thus while the first UNIA convention comprised a great propaganda victory and helped raise and consolidate the profile of the Garvey movement to the outside world, for Harrison it became the single most disillusioning hammer-blow to his interest in Marcus Garvey. As I will show in a moment, Harrison would seek various ways to act on his conclusions after the convention.⁹²

Alongside the vastly inflated claim of having 20,000 or 25,000 (rather than 150) delegates at the 1920 convention, Harrison also took issue with Garvey’s claim about the size of the UNIA membership. In his list of Garvey’s “lies,” Harrison recorded a note that read “4,000,000 members vs. 73,000 Off Rep 4/8/21.” This suggests that not only did

⁹¹ H. Harrison, ‘Aug 18, 1920 (diary entry)’, in HHP box 9, folder 2. Davis was a prominent woman in the Garvey movement who had given up a career in Vaudeville stage performance to devote herself to building the UNIA. She went on numerous speaking tours as the ‘International Organiser’ of the organization, spoke in favour of reparations for slavery, and was extremely loyal to Garvey, regarding him as “a man chosen by God to lead his people.” On her advocacy of reparations, see *Negro World*, 17 July 1920: 9. W. Seraile, ‘Henrietta Vinton Davis and the Garvey Movement’, *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, New York, 1983: 7.

⁹² Harrison, ‘Convention Bill of Rights and Elections (diary entry)’.

Garvey not have the 4 million members that he claimed, but that the actual membership numbered 73,000 in 1921. Was this accurate? According to historian Lerone Bennett, Garvey had sold 40,000 Black Star Line shares.⁹³ Robert Hill wrote of the BSL that it had some 35,000 shareholders.⁹⁴ In their introduction to *Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons*, Garvey movement historians Hill and Barbara Bair say that by 1925, the movement had “tens of thousands” of members.⁹⁵ Whether UNIA membership stood at 35,000, 40,000, 73,000, or some other figure in the range of “tens of thousands,” to say that Garvey inflated the UNIA membership with his claim of having 4 million members in 1920 would be an understatement.⁹⁶ Hubert Harrison had simple explanation: “He has plastered the air with lies.”⁹⁷

In addition to Garvey’s egomania, domineering behaviour, and dishonesty, Harrison recoiled at what he perceived to be Garvey’s misappropriations of funds. In the months before UNIA conventions Garvey would advertise a Convention Fund in the *Negro World*, which frequently ran to tens of thousands of dollars. “Yet,” Harrison remarked, “no visiting delegate ever got even a glass of lemonade that that delegate didn’t pay for. What [Garvey] did with the Convention funds is as much a mystery today as the Liberian Loan fund, the fund for ‘Certificates of Race Loyalty,’ the ‘African Redemption Fund,’ the money collected in 1918 to send delegates to the Peace Congress and the other ballyhoo devices by which money was extracted from his dupes while he prated of ‘dying for his race.’” Garvey seems to have created multiple fundraising projects whose results appeared to Harrison as mechanisms for extracting money from his

⁹³ L. Bennett, *Wade in the Water: Great Moments in Black History* (Chicago, 1979), p. 210.

⁹⁴ R. Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. xlviii.

⁹⁵ R. Hill and B. Bair, *Marcus Garvey: Life and Lessons*, (Los Angeles, 1987), p. xv.

⁹⁶ Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. 9.

⁹⁷ H. Harrison, “Aug 28 1920 (diary entry)”, reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 191.

followers. Harrison's tone reveals his emotional bitterness toward the corruption he perceived in Garvey's financial operations.⁹⁸

As for what Garvey did with these funds, Harrison revealed one possible explanation through his comments regarding Garvey's lavish lifestyle. According to Harrison, when Garvey first arrived in the US, "he was so poor that some of us had to give him food and clothes. He wouldn't work, not he. He had discovered a method of living without working. Today, he is well-fed, well-groomed, and well-off. In his flat for which he pays rent of \$150 a month, there are splendid couches swinging by chains from the ceiling." By comparison, Harrison's entire salary as *Negro World* editor was \$120 per month. Harrison went further, noting that "Garvey is a worshiper of Garvey. On the [BSL ship] 'Yarmouth' he had two life-sized oil-paintings of himself. His office and his apartment contain dozens of such paintings." Given Harrison's life-long economic hardships and financial struggles as the breadwinner for a family totalling seven, these comments betray a distinct element of working-class anger toward Garvey's apparent use of UNIA coffers for personal ends.⁹⁹

One of Harrison's major grievances concerned what he called Garvey's "cowardly evasions on lynching." Recall that Harrison's pre-UNIA work in the Liberty League had been oriented primarily on the domestic Black struggle against lynching and disfranchisement rather than on the shipping lines and other business ventures that Garvey championed. In that context, the comment suggests that Harrison began to feel that going from the Liberty League and Liberty Congress petition for federal anti-lynching legislation to Garvey's financially dubious stock selling schemes represented a

⁹⁸ H. Harrison, 'Marcus Garvey at the Bar of United States Justice'.

⁹⁹ Ibid. Other observers concurred with the picture of Garvey's early years in the US making do with meager rations. See, for example, T. Martin, *Amy Ashwood*, p. 51.

frustratingly backwards step politically. Though Garvey did occasionally issue flashy rhetorical threats that the UNIA would “lynch a white man for every lynched Black person,” he did not make agitation against lynching a consistent part of the UNIA program. In fact, to the chagrin of the NAACP and the favour of white southerners, Garvey denounced the effort to pass federal anti-lynching legislation on the grounds that it was just an attempt by the Republicans to appease Black people and that the legislation would be un-enforceable in practice. He reportedly even once thanked white southerners for ‘lynching race consciousness into Black people.’¹⁰⁰

In terms of foreign policy, Harrison chafed at the UNIA’s imperial designs on the African continent. One of the items on an undated list of Harrison’s grievances about Garvey reads “changed policy from Negro self-help to Invasion of Africa.”¹⁰¹ Harrison most likely made this comment in regards to the UNIA’s colonisation project in Liberia. Apparently, the Liberian government came to the same conclusion as Harrison in 1924, when it summarily expelled the UNIA from Liberia.¹⁰² Harrison’s opposition to the “invasion of Africa” also undoubtedly reflected his discomfort with the way Garvey envisioned going back to Africa as a project to establish a Black empire “on which the sun shall shine as ceaselessly as it shines on the Empire of the North today,” as Garvey put it. Garvey explicitly advanced Caesar’s Rome and the British empire as antecedents for his majestic vision.¹⁰³ Harrison opposed empire building, instead calling for an international alliance of the ‘darker races’ against capitalism and imperialism.

¹⁰⁰ H. Harrison, ‘re Garvey and U.N.I.A.’, (undated c1922?), HHP box 4, folder 61. M. Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism* (Chapel Hill, 2007), p. 69, 141.

¹⁰¹ Harrison, ‘re Garvey and U.N.I.A.’.

¹⁰² I.K. Sundiata, *Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slaver, 1914-1940*, (Durham, 2003).

¹⁰³ H. Harrison, ‘re Garvey and U.N.I.A.’, HHP 4.61. R. Hill, *MGP Vol. 1*, p. lx.

Harrison also recorded “ignorance” as a distinctive grievance, which included a note suggesting that Garvey too often spoke about Africa “as a country.” Confident that “the present Negro population of Africa is quite able to work out its own salvation” without the paternalism of foreign tutelage, Harrison insisted that “the destiny of the American Negro lies in the future of America and no one need think that he will mortgage that future for the sake of a barbaric dream of African Empire with Dukes of Uganda and Ladies of the Nile.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, Garvey’s claim to be the ‘Provisional President of Africa’ usurped the self-determination of continental Africans and deluded US Blacks with a reactionary imperial fantasy.

The list recounted above amounts to some of Harrison’s major problems with Marcus Garvey. In sum, Harrison objected to Garvey’s ‘bombastic blabbing’, ‘insane egotism’, ‘jealousy of successful subordinates’, ‘lies’ about the number of convention delegates, ‘lies’ about the size of UNIA membership, ‘shameless electioneering’ at the convention, financial corruption of the BSL, numerous ‘ballyhoo devices’ for getting money from UNIA members, the lavish lifestyle, ‘cowardly evasions on lynching’, and the ‘invasion of Africa’. Other than that, Garvey was surely a perfect leader in Harrison’s eyes.

Harrison’s Attempts to Change the Direction of the Garvey Movement

Harrison did not resign himself to acquiescence in the face of his many problems with Garvey, but instead took steps to reform the UNIA from within. The most lasting

¹⁰⁴ H. Harrison. ‘The Negro and the Nation’, Radio Broadcasting of American Telephone Telgraphic Co., (21 June, 1923), reprinted in *HHR*, p. 290.

method by which Harrison undertook to shift the course of the Garvey movement was by compiling and publishing his book *When Africa Awakes: The "Inside Story" of the Stirrings and Strivings of the New Negro in the Western World*. With essays culled mostly from his editorials in the *Voice*, the *Negro World*, and the *New Negro* magazine, it offered Harrison's radical analysis of a wide range of subjects including the story of the Liberty League, lynching and self-defence, the 'white world war', New Negro politics, liberal white 'friendship', and education. Published right in the middle of the UNIA convention in August of 1920, the timing was undoubtedly a strategic intervention designed to shift the course of the Garvey movement.

In the introduction to the book, he emphasised how it started with an account of the 12 June 1917 inaugural meeting of the Liberty League of Negro-Americans because "*the labors of tongue and pen out of which that meeting emerged were the foundation for the mighty structures of racial propaganda which have been raised since then*. This is a fact not generally known because I have not hankered after newspaper publicity."¹⁰⁵ Harrison's reference to "mighty structures of racial propaganda" undoubtedly referred to the massively-popular *Negro World* he was editing, the Black Star Line, and the UNIA's electrifying impact on the pride and self-esteem of the global African diaspora. In short, he was saying 'the Liberty League was the foundation for the Garvey movement, but unlike some people I have not sought out the limelight'. Publishing a book during the convention was surely among the first major efforts he undertook to push the Garvey movement in a new direction, but it would certainly not be the last one.

One particularly notable step Harrison took, despite the fact that Garvey conceived the UNIA as a generally non-political organisation, was to make explicit and

¹⁰⁵ Emphasis in original. Harrison, *WAA*, p. 8.

consistent calls for political action in solidarity with the African descended peoples of the Caribbean. For example, Harrison took advantage of his position at the helm of the *Negro World* to advance a call for protest against “American imperialism” in Haiti. He denounced the fact that white American “cracker marines” installed a president of their choosing, subverted the legislative bodies of the Haitian republic, butchered Haitian citizens in cold blood, and forced “peoples of African descent” there into slavery, building roads without pay. “What boots is it that we strike heroic attitudes and talk grandiloquently of Ethiopia stretching forth her hands when we Africans of the dispersion can let the land of [Toussaint] L’Overture lie like a fallen flower beneath the feet of swine?” In tones redolent with the UNIA’s pan-African mythopoeitics, he was effectively asking what the UNIA would do about Haiti.¹⁰⁶ Yet he did not merely ask the hard questions.

Ignoring the predominantly apolitical orientation of Marcus Garvey, Harrison openly called for the political mobilization of African-Americans to put pressure on the US government on behalf of the “peoples of African descent” in Haiti. In *Negro World*, he called for organizing large-scale propaganda meetings in such places as Faneuil Hall, Madison Square Garden, and Black churches, adding that “we could in our newspapers and magazines agitate for the withdrawal of the forces of the American occupation, as the Irish did on behalf of Ireland; we could, at least, get up a gigantic petition with a million signatures and carry it to Congress. Even a ‘silent protest parade’ would become us better than this slavish apathy and servile acquiescence in which we are now sunk.”¹⁰⁷ By referencing positively the NAACP’s silent protest parade following the East St. Louis

¹⁰⁶ Harrison, ‘The Cracker in the Caribbean’, *WAA*, p. 105-8. H. Harrison, “Hands Across the Sea.” *Negro World*. 10 September 1921, HHR, p. 238.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

pogrom, he advanced a clear case for analogous political action in solidarity with Afro-Caribbeans.¹⁰⁸ Black people in the US needed to protest on behalf of Black people in the Caribbean, not only because rights of civil protest were usually illegal in those places, but also because it was the US government, which African-Americans could theoretically influence, that was committing the atrocities.¹⁰⁹

Another notable aspect of Harrison's attempt to politicise the UNIA was his efforts to form the Liberty Party that I mentioned in chapter 2. The Liberty Party chose as its presidential candidate Rev. James Eason, who was one of the most popular of UNIA leaders, as demonstrated by his election to the position of "Leader of American Negroes" at the 1920 convention.¹¹⁰ The fact that Harrison was editor of the *Negro World* and a dues-paying member of the officially-apolitical UNIA at the time of the Liberty party's formation demonstrates his fierce independence and yet another example of his attempt, as Perry has argued, "to draw followers from the Garvey movement and the broader 'New Negro' movement into political action."¹¹¹ Thanks to his own authority and prestige as founder of the Liberty League, Harrison could not simply be dismissed from his post at the *Negro World*, but his constant efforts to politicise the UNIA rankled the faction in the leadership that began intriguing against him at the convention.

Harrison utilised the social infrastructure of the Outdoor University to try and affect a change within UNIA. When Garvey left the country to tour the Caribbean in the spring of 1921, Harrison took advantage of Garvey's absence and tried to shift the ideological direction of the UNIA by way of his street corner speeches. As US military

¹⁰⁸ D.L. Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York, 2009), p. 352.

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 107.

¹¹⁰ Hill, *MGP Vol. I*, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Perry, *HHR*, p. 148.

intelligence put it, Harrison was “conducting meetings nightly and attacking the great leader, Garvey, without using his name.” Harrison remained on the *Negro World* editorial staff because Garvey was “afraid” to dismiss him entirely, but the tension led Garvey to demote Harrison to the position of contributing editor.¹¹²

Beginning in the spring of 1921, Harrison also explored the possibility of a collaborative effort to strengthen the anti-capitalist sentiment within the Garvey movement. Claude McKay, the queer Jamaican-born Marxist who wrote the poetic anthem of the New Negro movement (“If We Must Die”), provided a revealing example.¹¹³ In his autobiography, McKay recounted how when his good friend Hubert Harrison came downtown to congratulate him on getting the job of assistant editor of *The Liberator*, Harrison suggested having a meeting that would include the “black Reds.”¹¹⁴ The meeting took place at the *Liberator* office, and in addition to Harrison and McKay, Grace Campbell (a Black socialist and leading organizer of the African Blood Brotherhood), Richard B. Moore, W. A. Domingo, Cyril Briggs, Joseph Fanning (an ABB member who owned the only Black cigar store in Harlem), and Otto Huiswoud (first Black member of the Communist Party) were present. According to McKay, “the real object of the meeting...was to discuss the possibility of making the Garvey Back-to-Africa Movement more class-conscious.”¹¹⁵

There are various notable things about McKay’s account. First, that Harrison instigated the meeting. As Jeff Perry so aptly put it, Harrison was not only “the most

¹¹² H. Harrison, ‘September 4, 1920 (diary entry)’, HHP 9.2. H. Harrison, ‘April 7, 1921 (diary entry)’, in HHP 9.2. Hill, *MGP Vol. 4*. p. 13, p. 14 n. 3.

¹¹³ Here, I use ‘queer’ in the same sense that the academic discipline of Queer Studies does. E.P. Johnson and M. Henderson, *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, 2005).

¹¹⁴ ‘Claude M’Kay, African Poet, Made Co-Editor’, *Chicago Defender*, 2 Apr 1921: 1.

¹¹⁵ C. McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (New Brunswick, 2007), p. 89.

race-conscious of the class radicals” in the Socialist Party, but subsequently “the most class-conscious of the race radicals” in the Garvey movement. As noted earlier, Harrison vociferously defended the “race first” position from attacks by his “class first” Black socialist protégés, and in 1921 he refused a funding offer from the Communist Party to become the party’s ‘stalking horse’ against Garvey. Yet Harrison clearly sympathized enough with their Marxist critique—of Garveyism as a petty-bourgeois movement for Black capitalism and imperialism—to initiate a discussion with the key Black socialists in Harlem about building class consciousness inside the Garvey movement. Harrison’s discussions with ‘Black reds’ undoubtedly helped stimulate the unsuccessful attempt by Cyril Briggs and the African Blood Brotherhood to push the second international UNIA convention in a left-wing direction.¹¹⁶

The month after his meeting with McKay and the Black Marxists, Harrison undertook to develop a coloured internationalist politics within the Garvey movement. In May of 1921, for example, the *Negro World* published Harrison’s call to action entitled “Wanted—A Colored International,” as noted in chapter 2. It comprised his most compelling and sophisticated articulation of the call for an alliance among the ‘darker races’ against the “white capitalist internationalism” of “race prejudice and exploitation which is known as bourgeois ‘democracy’ at home and colonial imperialism abroad.”¹¹⁷ Then again, during the UNIA’s second international convention that year, the August 14 issue of the *Negro World* carried William Ferris’ editorial in defence of Black empire building as well as a piece by Harrison called “A New International”, which repeated

¹¹⁶ R. Hill, *MGP. Vol. 2.* p. 681-682 n. 1. R. Hill, *Crusader Vol. 1* (New York, 1987), p. xli. For Briggs’ account of the ABB experience at the 1921 UNIA convention, see C. Briggs, ‘The Negro Convention’, *The Toiler* v. 4 (New York, 1 Oct. 1921), pp. 13-14, accessed 12 Jan 2016, at <http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/groups/abb/1921/1001-briggs-negroconv.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ H. Harrison, ‘Wanted—A Colored International’, *Negro World*, 28 May 1921.

more concisely his earlier argument for a 'Colored International.' That a single issue of the paper contained pieces both for and against Black imperialism exemplified some of the contradictions in the soul of UNIA during that convention, and Harrison's characteristic position as the voice of radicalism in the pages of the *Negro World* in this period.

After the expulsion of the Black Marxists from the second UNIA convention, Harrison seems to be among the first to expose an aspect of Garvey's outlook which many others would also find objectionable: the distinctive resemblance of Garvey's approach to that of the Ku Klux Klan. As early as November 1921, Harrison contacted the *Sunday World* to try and publish a piece called 'Inside the Garvey Movement' to expose how Garvey's vision paralleled that of the Ku Klux Klan. It was a prophetic observation because Garvey did indeed meet with the Ku Klux Klan the following year, on account of their common interest in racial purity and complete separation. Garvey's statements of accommodation towards the Klan and Jim Crow would eventually spark vehement opposition among many African-Americans, including the famous "Garvey Must Go!" campaign mentioned earlier.¹¹⁸

Harrison believed that he had a wealth of material and sought to convince the *Sunday World* editor of "the bombshell nature of it," but he expressly stipulated that if they did publish his exposé on Garvey, then his name should not appear in any connection with it. Fearing reprisals, Harrison knew that he dare not reveal himself in

¹¹⁸ J. Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, p. 154. H. Harrison, 'Mr. J.O.H. Cosgrave, Sunday World (letter)', (13 November 1921), HHP 2.16. The critique of Garvey's likeness to the Klan would be levelled by the Black socialist and communist left. See, for example, A.P. Randolph, 'The U.N.I.A.', *The Messenger* #5, 1923, reprinted in E.D. Cronon, *Marcus Garvey* (Englewood Cliffs, 1973), p. 117. New Orleans Garvey quote taken from Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, p. 154. Stein's chapter "The UNIA Goes South: Garvey and the Ku Klux Klan" gives an overview of this subject.

print as such a sharp Garvey critic, in part because his job as a contributing editor for *Negro World* would be placed in jeopardy. In fact, Garveyites ended up physically attacking or threatening various Garvey critics including W.A. Domingo, Rev. Ethelred Brown, Mokete Manoedi, and Rev. George Alexander McGuire. Even worse, Garvey loyalists (possibly acting in line with orders from on high) eventually murdered dissenting ex-UNIA members Rev. James Eason and Laura Kofey.¹¹⁹ Therefore, although it does not appear that Harrison's piece was ultimately published, he certainly had good reason to be cautious.

After fully breaking with the Garvey movement in 1922, Harrison kept his candid opinions of Garvey out of print. However, he did relax his caution about denouncing Garvey in writing following the conclusion of Garvey's trial and conviction for mail fraud in June of 1923. The story of the trial has been recounted elsewhere, but in short, the Bureau of Investigation settled on deportation for mail fraud after casting about for various methods of politically neutralizing the perceived threat to national security that Garvey posed as an 'alien race agitator.' The US government successfully convicted Garvey of using the mails to defraud people of money sent for shares in the Black Star Line. Harrison thought the trial was "fair" probably because of his own negative opinion of Garvey, but a political trial, particularly of a Black mass leader in white America, could not have been fair in any objective sense.¹²⁰

Harrison lamented how even after the trial Garvey loyalists "still believed that Garvey never did a crooked thing in his life." He felt that Garvey's guilty verdict

¹¹⁹ R.B. Moore, 'The Critics And Opponents of Marcus Garvey', in J.H. Clarke, *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa*, p. 230-231. Eason's and Kofey's murder are covered in R. Hill, *MGP*, Vols. 5 and 7.

¹²⁰ For more on the trial, see J. Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, Ch. 10. H. Harrison, 'Marcus Garvey at the Bar of United States Justice', *Associated Negro Press*. c. early July 1923, reprinted in Perry's *Reader*, p. 194.

represented a “colossal collapse” which demonstrated that “wind, noise, and bluster are not the foundations for anything permanent.” At the same time, he argued that the original program of the UNIA was still a good one, based as it was on the notion of “race first” and Black people not “begging to the white race for help, leadership or a program.” Harrison’s remark about how the best of what Garvey did came from the Liberty League revealed his frustration and disappointment with the conservative trajectory of Garvey’s approach to Black empowerment.¹²¹

Although Harrison ultimately failed to push Garvey and the official, Harlem-based UNIA leadership in a more radical direction, it was certainly not for lack of trying. He published a book, called for political solidarity with Afro-Caribbeans living under US military occupation, founded the Liberty Party that ran a UNIA leader for president, conferred with Black socialists about how to make Garveyism more class conscious, agitated against imperialism and for a Coloured International, and voiced public criticisms of ‘His Supreme Highness, the Potentate’. Harrison did not always express his dissent openly and forthrightly in the way that he did toward Booker T. Washington or the Socialist Party, in part for fear of reprisals and probably in part because the Garvey movement was, on some level, a kind of ‘grandchild’ of the Liberty League and his “race first” New Negro movement in Harlem. By his efforts to reform the UNIA and giving consistent voice in the *Negro World* to its most political, internationalist, anti-lynching, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist tendencies, Harrison symbolised and gave expression to the radical wing of the Garvey movement.

Conclusion

¹²¹ Perry, *Reader*, p. 196.

Restoring Harrison Garvey movement historiography requires a re-thinking of its origins, content, and trajectory. I began by looking at Hubert Harrison's contributions to Garvey's rise. As noted, Harrison and the Liberty League had a decisive impact on the geographical base, social movement orientation, founding personnel, "race first" ideology, African consciousness, solidarity with other nationalist struggles, politicising the Harlem community, and the iconography of the Garvey movement. Not to mention Harrison's transformation of the *Negro World*. Although all these dimensions of Harrison's relationship to Garveyism are linked, the Liberty League's mass movement orientation in particular remains a singularly decisive one because without that, Marcus Garvey might never have transcended the Tuskegee orientation and become the symbol of Garveyism—the dynamic and global step towards Black nationality that resonated so deeply throughout the African diaspora in the early twentieth century. And just as Harrison exerted a great influence on the Garvey movement, so too did it influence him and his sense of possibility, particularly in regards to his International Coloured Unity League, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

After Harrison's influence on the emergence and substance of Garveyism, I surveyed his misgivings about Garvey's egotism, jealousy, lies, financial corruption, electioneering, lifestyle extravagance, failure to address lynching, and Black imperialism. Harrison was able to make these criticisms not only because of his radicalism, but also because his commitment lay not with a particular leader or organisation, but with, as he put it, "the principles of the New Negro Manhood Movement, a portion of which had

been incorporated by [Garvey] and his followers of the UNIA and ACL.”¹²² This characterisation offers a unique and telling indicator of Harrison’s vantage point. If the UNIA represented the ‘corporate sector’ of the New Negro movement, then Garvey was its CEO. As an anti-capitalist and coloured internationalist, Harrison naturally had a radically different vision of New Negro politics and the meaning ‘race first’. Yet after the failure of his Liberty League and the rise of the UNIA, he climbed aboard Garvey’s ship and gave it his best shot in order to advance the principles of the new race, class, and political consciousness of the New Negro movement to which he was committed.

Lastly, I surveyed Harrison’s dissident activities while still a UNIA member and *Negro World* editor, including his attempts to make the organisation more political, more anti-imperialist, and more class-conscious. In the end, the conservative and messianic Black nationalist influence of figures like Paul Cuffe, Martin Delaney, Edward Wilmot Blyden, Bishop Henry Turner, Chief Alfred Sam, and Booker T. Washington ultimately took centre stage in Garvey’s vision for the UNIA.¹²³ Hence the ultimate revulsion towards it amongst so many in the radical wing of the New Negro movement.

As demonstrated in the next chapter, Harrison’s final project, the International Coloured Unity League promoted race consciousness, economic cooperation, and a separate territorial state for Black people. Undoubtedly this orientation flowed from the powerful lesson in the dynamics and potential of Black nationality which he experienced in the Garvey movement. It also represented a model of grassroots pan-Africanism that flowed fundamentally from the grounding of Harrison’s identity and world view in his African consciousness. Therefore, I now turn towards Harrison’s African politics.

¹²² Harrison, *WAA*, p. 55.

¹²³ W. Moses, *Classical Black Nationalism: From the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey* (New York, 1996), p. 31-34.

Chapter 6

‘LEARN WHAT THEY HAVE TO TEACH US’:

Hubert Harrison’s African Politics

Introduction

Black radicals who lived in Harlem recalled Hubert Harrison as the spearhead of African consciousness, which I define as a positive identification with Africa amongst people racialised as Black. In a 1963 reflection, Caribbean-born Harlem activist Richard B. Moore recalled how the tradition of African consciousness was “well-known” in Harlem because it had been so continuously stimulated by the outdoor soapbox speakers. Because of where he locates Harrison in the wider community of orators, his account is worth quoting in full. His article, entitled “Africa Conscious Harlem,” recorded how

free lance advocates such as William Bridges, Strathcona R. Williams, Alexander Rahming, Edgar M. Grey, Arthur Reid, and the Basuto “Prince” Mokete M. Manoede held forth constantly on African history and stressed unity with the African people. Militant socialists like Chandler Owen, A. Philip Randolph, Rev. George Frazier Miller, Grace P. Campbell, Anna Brown, Elizabeth Hendrickson, Frank Poree, Otto Huiswood, W.A. Domingo, Tom Potter, Frank D. Crosswaith, Rudolph Smith, Herman S. Whaley, John Patterson, Victor C. Gaspar, Ramsay, Ross D. Brown, and the writer of this account—all steadily emphasized the liberation of the oppressed African and other colonial peoples as a vital aim of their world view. Above all Hubert H. Harrison gave forth from his encyclopaedic store, a wealth of knowledge of African history and culture which brought this consciousness to a very great height.¹

¹ Moore, Richard B. “Africa Conscious Harlem.” *Freedomways*. Summer 1963. pp. 315-34. Moore wrote this article at the request of John Henrik Clarke.

Moore's account, as a first hand observer and practitioner of the oral tradition he described, remains notable for its authenticity regarding the most memorable Africa-conscious orators in the Harlem of the interwar years. In particular, his reservation of Hubert Harrison for the final and most salutary mention in the list—the one with an impact “above all” the others—was clearly no accident.

Unfortunately, Harrison's neglect in Garvey movement historiography is repeated in that of the pan-African movement. The history of pan-Africanism, defined broadly as the objective of unifying people of African descent for economic and political liberation, often begins with Black people of the diaspora such as Henry Sylvester Williams and the series of pan-African conferences which began in the late nineteenth century.² Discussion of the pan-African movement of the New Negro era has tended to focus on Du Bois' pan-African congresses with Garveyism as a counter-point.³ Therefore, Harrison has only very recently begun to register in the historiography of Pan-Africanism.⁴ Meanwhile, although scholars like Winston James and Jeff Perry have noted the uniqueness of Harrison's humility towards African peoples, there is very little scholarly work that systematically analyses Harrison's African politics.⁵

This chapter will argue that Hubert Harrison stimulated the emergence and development of African consciousness in and beyond the Black 'Mecca' of Harlem in at

² C. Legum, *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide*, (London, 1962). I. Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*, (London, 1968). R. Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, (London, 1973). P. O. Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism : the idea and movement, 1776-1963*, (Washington D.C., 1982). J.A. Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900-1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (Oxford, 1971).

³ C.L.R. James, *History of Negro Revolt*, (London, 1938). G. Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The coming struggle for Africa*. (London, 1956).

⁴ A recent book on the history of Pan-Africanism which includes Harrison is H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: the Communist International, Africa, and the Diaspora, 1919-1939*, (Trenton, 2013).

⁵ See, for example, J. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: the Voice of Harlem Radicalism 1883-1919*, (New York, Columbia). W. James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, (London, 1997).

least four ways. First, by modelling a positive identification with Africa for Black people of the diaspora in a time when Afrophobia was rife in US popular culture. Second, by undertaking a program of rigorous study of African peoples, both in the modern world and in history, and engaging with a community of pan-African scholars and bibliophiles. Third, Harrison advanced a model of political humility that overturned the widespread nineteenth century civilisationist view of Africa. Finally, he founded the International Colored Unity League (ICUL) as a grassroots pan-African project to broadly unify West Indians, Africans, and African-Americans, including Black churchgoers, for a program of economic, social, and political self-sufficiency.

The ‘Untamed, Untamable African’: Harrison’s African Identity

In his 1925 poem “Heritage,” Countee Cullen expressed a haunting and inexorable question for people racialised as Black in the Americas.⁶

*What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,*

⁶ M. Jackson (ed.), *Countee Cullen: Collected Poems* (New York, 2013).

Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,

What is Africa to me?

Most Black people on the western banks of the Atlantic ocean got there as a result of a centuries-long process of war, conquest, kidnapping, and the so-called “Middle Passage,” and the genocidal process of the *Maangamizi* or great catastrophe deliberately perpetrated against African peoples.⁷ For that reason, the question of what Africa means to people racialised as Black in the US presents an inescapable and inherently uncomfortable reckoning with the trauma of enslavement and the evisceration of one’s ancestral heritage.

In a 1907 diary entry, Hubert Harrison provided an unequivocal answer to this soul-searching question with a righteous claim to his African heritage.⁸ His moving account demands undivided quotation.

Poor heart-sore and soul-starved Mother Race, who shall minister to thy deep desires, who shall bind up thy wounds and raise thee up again if these and such as these are to be thy prophets and thy priests? Oh Africa! When shall be the term of thy long degradation? Behold here, even now, I pledge thee, O my Mother, that I shall devote my years to thee, shall work for thy redemption even in the land of thine exile and set before mine eyes an ideal of service to thee inextricably blent with service for myself; shall love thee and be proud of thee and glory in thy power now lying dormant and shall strive to bring it to the light. Take my youth,

⁷ See chapter 2, n. 31 for an explanation of *Maangamizi* and the problem with the phrase “Middle Passage.”

⁸ H. Harrison, ‘Pledge to the Mother Race from an Untamed African’, (diary entry) 11 Nov 1907, HHP box 9.

*my labors, my love, my life, my all and do thou when I shall have died for thee,
take me to thy bosom, an untamed, untamable African.*

This “Pledge to the Mother Race from an Untamed African” expressed a profound inner striving, an oath both doxological and prophetic. Written in a private diary at the age of twenty four, before he would begin his career as a public figure, Harrison’s intimate and moving pledge revealed the deeply emotional and spiritual devotion that would guide him for the rest of his life. This raises a question: how did Harrison maintain such a strong identification with Africa despite the psychological trauma inflicted by white slave owners that sought to annihilate African pride in those they enslaved and their descendants?

Harrison could identify as an African at this early stage of his life in part because of the vestiges of African cultural heritage that survived the *Maangamizi* and passed from one generation to the next right through to his childhood on St. Croix.⁹ Noting that the people of the Virgin Islands were “almost entirely of African extraction,” he explained how the social characteristics of the Black population of the islands could only be fully understood and appreciated “by reference to similar characteristics to be found in the West African Negroes from among whom the slaves for the Danish Islands were mainly drawn—the locale extending from the Upper Gold Coast to the south-eastern limits of Nigeria.” The social customs of those on St. Croix were “rooted in the African communal system,” aspects of which the Afro-descended peoples largely maintained.¹⁰

⁹ See chapter 2, n. 30 for an explanation of the term *Maangamizi*.

¹⁰ H. Harrison, ‘The Virgin Islands’, (Nov 1923), HHP 6.48.

Harrison related his childhood memory of the free public gardens on every plantation, which were stocked with trees bearing “mangoes, mammy-apples, sour-sops, avocado-pears, sugar-apples, and bananas.” The fruits could be freely picked by anyone, even passers-by. In addition, every family of agricultural labourers like the one Harrison was raised in had a “half-acre of provision land on which yams, tannias, okra, sago and potatoes” were grown for family consumption, “the surplus being regularly disposed of in the towns on Saturday...in markets that exactly reproduced those to be found in the hinterlands of Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Cameroons, and Yoruba.”¹¹ These childhood memories of communal land tenure, cultivation, and tropical produce reveals Harrison’s historical consciousness of the African roots of Black culture in the Virgin Islands, the cradle of his deep-seated African identity.

To grasp the significance of this, a glimpse at the place of Africa in US popular culture at the time remains instructive. For example, African travelogues like Henry Stanley’s *How I Found Livingstone* (1890) and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which depicted the exploits of white explorers in the “dark” continent, comprised the best-selling books of the day, saturating US audiences with primitivist notions about the African ‘savage.’ Large-scale exhibitions—from the 1893 World’s Colombian Exposition in Chicago to the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair—featured exhibits with “primitives” and “cannibals” taken out of their African or Native American context and put on real-life display. In 1906, one such exhibit featured the Congolese man Ota Benga alongside chimps and orangutans in the “Monkey House” section of the Bronx zoo.¹² The fact that the very next year a young, Black, working-class Caribbean immigrant living

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² J. Campbell. *Middle Passages*, (New York, 2006), p. 138-141.

just next door in Harlem could *forcefully assert a positive African identity* demonstrated Harrison's uncanny resistance to and adamant rejection of the popular Afrophobia of the day. Over time, he would cultivate his Caribbean childhood-influenced African identity and deepen his African consciousness much further.

Hubert Harrison's Africana Studies

In addition to identifying as an "untamed, untamable African," Hubert Harrison evinced an untamed and untamable thirst for knowledge about Africa that set him down a life-long path of reading, study, and critically engaging with the literature and people of the continent. I now turn to Harrison's methods of studying Africa, particularly the lectures, newspapers, and books he read, his critical engagement with authors like E.D. Morel, and his relationship to his African history mentor Arturo Schomburg.

In order to learn about continental Africans, Harrison sought out lectures and periodicals by them. For example, he went to hear Sierra Leonean educational reformer Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford lecture on the subject of women in West Africa.¹³ He read African-edited newspapers like *The Lagos Weekly Record*, *The Gold Coast Independent*, and *The African Telegraph*. He regarded the Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protection Society co-founders J.E. Casely Hayford and John Mensah Sarbah as the "tiptop of Negro intellect, enterprise, and achievement."¹⁴ He subscribed to and re-printed articles from publications like Duse Mohammed Ali's London-based *African Times and*

¹³ H. Harrison, diary entry, 19 Mar 1921, HHP 9, Diary vol. 1. A.M. Cromwell, *An African Victorian Feminist: Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford, 1868-1960*, (London, 1986).

¹⁴ Harrison, Hubert. 'A Difference of Opinion.' *Negro World* (7 Aug 1920). A copy of *The African Telegraph* with a petition to Britain from South Africans can be found in HHP 17.1.

Orient Review. In other words, he did not merely *preach* the notion that Black people should ‘learn what Africans have to teach us’. He practiced it.

And, as was his wont with subjects like literature, sociology, economics, and science, Harrison read voraciously about Africa. One gets a tiny glimpse of this by sampling some of the books he reviewed for the *Negro World*. For example, Harrison noted that George W. Ellis’ book *Negro Culture in West Africa* spoke about the Vai people of Liberia, and their “domestic industries and arts, successful social institutions and a system of writing—the Vai syllabic system—invented by themselves.” He commented on *In The Shadow of the Bush* by P.A. Talbot, about the Ekoi people of Northern Nigeria and how the book documented their religion, agriculture, industrial arts, science, law, philosophy, and culture, “their method of telling news by drum-tap code, [and] their secret hieroglyphic language called Nsibidi.” Harrison spoke of *A Transformed Colony* by T.J. Alldridge about Sierra Leone, “which includes Sherbro island in which are found the curious soap-stone images called nomolis carved by the hands of black sculptors thousands of years ago.” For understanding the Congo, Harrison recommended fellow freethinker Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Crime of the Congo* and E.D. Morel’s books *King Leopold’s Rule in the Congo* and *The Black Man’s Burden*.¹⁵

Harrison did not just read voraciously, but engaged critically with the books he read. A clear example of this can be seen in his review of *The Black Man’s Burden* by E.D. Morel, the British journalist who founded the Congo Reform Association to publicise the atrocities in King Leopold’s Congo Free State.¹⁶ Harrison appreciated how Morel’s books spoke plainly about the facts of colonial rule. Analysing Morel’s treatment

¹⁵ H. Harrison, ‘Books About Africa’, *Negro World*, 11 Dec 1920.

¹⁶ A. Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston, 1998).

of the British acquisition of Rhodesia, the “atrocious butcheries” of Queen Victoria’s ‘responsible’ government, Lothar von Trotha’s German conquest of the Herero people in Namibia, the Belgian King Leopold II in the Congo, France’s taking of Morocco and the French Congo, Italy’s attack on Tripoli, and the Portuguese raids on Angola and the Cocoa Islands, Harrison asked, poignantly “What then, must black people conclude, is the collective character of white Christians? The facts here given as a small slice of their imperialistic record show them to be crooked and contemptible liars, cold-blooded bandits and canting, psalm-singing hypocrites.”¹⁷

Harrison also endorsed Morel’s analysis of the propaganda dimension of inter-imperialist rivalry among the colonial powers in Africa. “If the English-speaking public still thinks of Belgium’s Congo as the supreme atrocity, it must be remembered ... that England [with] its cable monopoly, controlled the news of the world and Belgium did not. The English (and Americans) could, therefore, ‘play up’ the Congo atrocities to a gasping world while the Belgians couldn’t ‘play up’ [the atrocities of Britain].” The propaganda battle for ‘hearts and minds’ represented an important factor in the ability of a given imperial power to advance its interests against its rivals. He quoted approvingly of Morel’s contention that “each one of the imperialist groups can be perfectly trusted to tell the full and complete truth about the other,” and therefore only “by collating these several national truths we can get the entire international story.”¹⁸ One had to look at what all the imperial rivals said about each other in order to get beyond the particular and one-sided narrative that each one of them propagated in their own self-interest.

¹⁷ Harrison, ‘Books About Africa’.

¹⁸ Ibid.

While approving of Morel's honesty about colonial atrocities and propaganda, he also criticised Morel's saviourist political framework. In particular, Morel criticised colonial atrocities not to hasten the end of colonialism, but to advocate a more "humane and practical" version of white rule over Africans. "As long as the African can furnish fit scope for Mr. Morel's sympathies as an object of compassion so long and so far is Mr. Morel his champion and defender. But he refuses to rise above that philanthropic role and consider the black race as humanly the equal of his race in rights or as an independent shaper of its own destiny."¹⁹ Harrison criticised how Morel did not have the humility to see African people as equal human beings with agency, humanity, history, and civilisation of their own. Despite a sharp critique of Morel's framework and assumptions, Harrison suggested that Black people seek out the book anyway because it supplied so many of "the facts on which we rest our case against the white man's domination of our motherland."²⁰

Alongside contemporary work like Morel's, Harrison also studied Africans in history. As historian Winston James argued, Harrison saw Africa as "primarily a teacher; not an unschooled child in need of 'civilization' and instruction" thanks to his "unrelenting and systematic study of the African past."²¹ In particular, Harrison came to see Egypt as the foundation for Western civilisation, and his study of ancient African history defied the limitations of Eurocentrism to reveal what he called "civilization's Black beginnings."²² This placed Harrison in an African-American tradition of critical

¹⁹ H. Harrison, 'The Black Man's Burden', *Negro World* 11 Dec, 1920, re-printed in Perry, *HHR*, p. 326-330.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ James, Winston. *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*. p. 129

²² 'Dr. Hubert Harrison Opens Lecture Series', *Amsterdam News*, 6 Oct 1926: 9.

thinking about history that went back at least to the early nineteenth century.²³ As with thinkers like Crummell, Blyden, Douglass, and others, his study of classical African civilisations contributed to his break with Eurocentrism and white ideological domination.

Harrison pointed to European sources regarding the Egyptian influence on Western civilisation. For example, he advocated reading the second book of the so-called “father of history,” Herodotus. The significance of the Greek historian’s book was, as Harrison put it, Herodotus reported “that many of the Egyptians were black and all of them were dark; that the Greeks derived their art and science and religion from them; that the black Ethiopians gave civilization to Egypt and often reigned and ruled over them.”²⁴ Harrison pointed out other Greeks who acknowledged ancient Greece’s debt to Egypt, including Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and Diodorus.²⁵ Furthermore, if Greeks influenced European civilisations and Egypt influenced the Greeks, then the origin of Western civilisation was not European but African, not ‘white’ but ‘black.’²⁶

Like many other Africa-conscious thinkers before him, Harrison thus challenged the dominant Eurocentric view of history.²⁷ He argued further that modern power relations created the motive for re-writing history in a Eurocentric fashion. As Harrison put it, the white race had “lied and strutted its way to greatness and prominence over the

²³ W.H. Moses, *Afrotopia: The Roots of African American Popular History* (Cambridge, 1998).

²⁴ H. Harrison, ‘In the Melting Pot (re Herodotus)’, *New Negro*. Vol 4. No. 2 October 1919.

²⁵ H. Harrison, ‘Dr. Harrison’s [illegible]... Writer Said Both Science and History Try to Rob Negro of Past Heritage’, *Pittsburgh Courier*. 31 December 1927. HHP 18.

²⁶ H. Harrison, ‘The Black Man’s Burden-Poem part two’, 7 Nov 1920, reprinted as “Unity League Leaflets—No. 1” (New York, 1925?). HHP box 4, folder 15. Of course, the ancient world did not abide by conceptions of race like ‘white’ and ‘Black’ which predominated in the United States of the twentieth century. See F.M. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: the Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, 1983).

²⁷ Moses, *Afrotopia*, esp. Ch 3. The analysis of ancient Egypt as a Black and brown civilization from which the Greeks learned arts, sciences, and philosophy formed a cornerstone of the tradition of African-centred thinkers, and would later be deepened and expanded upon by various scholars, culminating most recently in the *Black Athena* debate initiated by M. Bernal, *Black Athena (Vols 1-3)*, (London, 1987-2006).

corpses of other peoples...It has read back into history the race relations of today, striving to make the point that previous to its advent on the stage of human history, there was no civilization or culture worthy of the name.” White people re-wrote history to justify their current racial domination, rendering it “respectable, ‘scientific,’ and ‘natural’.”²⁸

Alongside white superiority in the narrative of human history came Black inferiority. “Today it is necessary to pretend that the ancient Ethiopians (whose very name means 'black-faced') and Egyptians were ‘white’ as well as the black Fulani, since otherwise geometry, architecture, astronomy, medicine, iron-smelting and religion would have to be credited to people who would be forced in our country to ride in 'Jim Crow' cars.”²⁹ Because Black inferiority was a foundational ideological element of the modern racial hierarchy, it was necessary to distort and falsify the historical record to make it appear that the ancient Egyptians were not Black and brown people.

Harrison offered various ancient African civilisations besides Egypt to expose this epistemic injustice. He wrote about Carthage, the ancient north African metropolis with “seven-story houses, central heating systems, electors, theatre programs, sports, cheer-leaders, marbles, checkers, eye-glasses, bills of exchange, bankers and a banking system, and cross-word puzzles.”³⁰ He wrote about Great Zimbabwe and how the structures, ruined temples, and residences there testified to the existence of a Black African people who lived in a highly sophisticated society.³¹ He also referenced the “lordly sweep” of West African city states in “Benin and Yoruba, in Sokoto, Kanem and Timbuktu,” and

²⁸ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 114.

²⁹ H. Harrison, “Dr. Harrison’s...” *ibid.*

³⁰ Harrison, Hubert. “Digging for Lost African Gods.” *Opportunity*. August 1926. HHP 4.42.

³¹ H. Harrison, ‘Who Built the Great Zimbabwe?’ Rev John H Harris, Worcester Lodge. HHP box 6, folder 63.

also the empires of Songhay and Ghana which ruled “over a territory as vast as two-thirds of the present United States, maintained agriculture and the industrial arts, commerce and science, while semi-savage Europe was burning witches, eating food with its fingers, and touching for the King’s evil.” By unearthing African civilisations which vastly exceeded their contemporary European counterparts in sophistication, he stood the dominant Eurocentric view of African history on its head. And, as was his wont, he backed up his claims with European explorers and writers like Albert Felix Dubois, Dr. Heinrich Barth, and Flora “Lady Lugard” Shaw.³²

Harrison’s study of history, particularly the history of people of African descent going back to ancient Egypt and Ethiopia, undoubtedly influenced his respectful attitude and positive identification with African people. It also, as noted, allowed him to see through the false pretence of claims to white racial superiority and Black racial inferiority. While Harrison read voraciously, he also worked out his ideas with a network of African-centred scholars who shared his interest in the African past, particularly the premier Black book collector, archivist, and independent scholar in New York City, Arturo Schomburg.

A ‘Unique Negro’: Africana Studies Mentor Arturo Schomburg

By the late 1910s, Harrison began to more actively cultivate a friendship and mentorship with Arturo Schomburg. Schomburg was born in 1874 in Puerto Rico to a Black Barbadian mother and a white German father. His politicisation began in the late

³² H. Harrison, ‘The Black Man’s Burden-Poem part two’, 7 Nov 1920, reprinted as “Unity League Leaflets—No. 1” (New York, 1925?). HHP box 4, folder 15.

nineteenth century as an activist in the struggle for Cuban and Puerto Rican independence, and he even served as the secretary of Cuban independence fighter Jose Martí's newspaper *Patria*. In 1898 he left the Cuban and Puerto Rican independence movements due to sectarian infighting, and came to identify more strongly with the Black struggle in the Americas and his own African roots. Alongside John E. Bruce, his mentor and surrogate father, Schomburg founded the Negro Society for Historical Research (NSHR) in 1911, bringing African, Caribbean, and African-American historical scholars into a common organisation for the first time.³³ Harrison served as secretary of the organisation.³⁴

Although Harrison seems to have focused more on freethought and Socialist Party organising during his first few years of the NSHR's existence, he seems to have grown closer to Schomburg as he moved closer towards a 'race first' and 'Africa first' outlook. In March of 1918, for example, Harrison recorded in his diary that he met up with Schomburg at 135th and Lennox, and that they "had a long talk on books relating to the Negro and African affairs, lasting till one o'clock. He has a private library which has become famous as the best public or private collection of books on the Negro that there is in the United States. And he has read more widely on Negro History than any man whom I have met."³⁵ Harrison had known Schomburg since his lyceum days in 1905 but the fact that he only recorded such salutary comments in his private diary in 1918 suggests that he did not initially cultivate a very close relationship with the Puerto Rican. This may have

³³ For a biographical treatment of Schomburg, see E. Des Verney Sinnette, *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, Black Bibliophile and Collector: A Biography*, (New York, 1989).

³⁴ Perry, *HHR*, p. 325.

³⁵ Harrison, Hubert. (Diary entry) 28 March 1918. HHP box 9.

been due, at least in part, to geography. Schomburg lived in Brooklyn, a long train ride away from Harlem, where Harrison reported they met and talked late into the night.

Schomburg had an unparalleled knowledge of Black history. He knew that the fables of Aesop were “originally related as folk-lore by a Negro from Aethiopia to the Greeks, who in turn published them.” He knew of the pre-Columbian African presence in Panama and Mexico, anticipating the ground-breaking scholarship of Ivan Van Sertima’s *They Came Before Columbus* by over half a century.³⁶ He knew that in North Carolina there were many enslaved Black people who could read and write Arabic, and that Black men like Juan Latino, Anton Wilhelm Amo, Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, Francis Williams, and James William Charles Pennington had received degrees in European universities in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries. Schomburg wrote passionately of the rich tradition of Black abolitionism as lived through figures like Gustavus Vassa, Julien Raymond, Baron de Vastey, Prince Saudners, Peter Williams, Absalom Jones, Nathaniel Paul, James Varick, Richard Allen, Frederick Douglass, James McCune Smith, William Wells Brown, Martin Delany, and Alexander Crummell.³⁷ In a *Negro World* piece entitled ‘A Unique Negro’, Harrison declared of Schomburg that “for sheer erudition on Negro history and literature he is unrivalled.”³⁸

Harrison’s estimation of Schomburg’s intellectual prowess only grew as the two became closer. Apportioning humility where humility was due, Harrison admitted frankly “I pride myself on knowing something of Negro history and literature and of the books treating of those subjects; but I unhesitatingly declare that Schomburg's knowledge on

³⁶ E.D.V. Sinette, p. 54-55, 156. I. Van Sertima, *They Came Before Columbus*. (New York, 1976).

³⁷ A. Schomburg, ‘The Negro Digs Up His Past’, re-printed in A. Locke (ed.), *The New Negro* (New York, 1925), p. 231-237.

³⁸ H. Harrison, ‘A Unique Negro’, *Negro World*. 7 May 1921, HHP box 4, folder 66.

these points must be at least eight or ten times as extensive as my own.”³⁹ Such a declaration meant a lot coming from Hubert Harrison, given his own addiction to reading. Yet whereas Harrison read widely in eclectic subjects like English literature, sociology, geopolitics, theological criticism, and economics, Schomburg maintained a singular, laser-like focus on books about people of African descent.

As much as Harrison learned from Schomburg’s guidance and archival collections, he also inevitably influenced the Puerto Rican. For example, Schomburg harboured an aversion to writing, apparently because of his self-consciousness about being a non-native speaker of English. Harrison, himself no stranger to the pen, strongly encouraged Schomburg in that direction, announcing publicly in the *Negro World* that if Schomburg “would but write as he reads” then “when the sun of the New Negro shall be shining in the zenith of its glory yet to come, [Schomburg’s] name would be hailed with acclaim as that of the first great historiographer of the Africans of the dispersion.”⁴⁰ Perhaps in part due to the urging of Harrison and others, Schomburg eventually produced his masterful article “The Negro Digs Up His Past,” which had a profound influence on a young John Henrik Clarke’s decision to become a teacher of African world history.⁴¹

This influence on Schomburg would be felt even more strongly by Harrison’s role in moving his vast collection to the Black ‘Mecca’ whose intellectual culture he did so much to stimulate. In 1924-25, Harrison served on the committee (alongside James Weldon Johnson and Black businessman John Nail) which formulated the plan for transferring Schomburg’s vast collection into the holdings of the 135th street branch of

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ J.H. Clarke, ‘The Influence of Arthur A. Schomburg on My Concept of Africana Studies’, *Phylon*, Vol. 49, No. 1/2, Spring-Summer 1992, p. 5.

the New York Public Library in Harlem, where it has only grown since then into a pan-African research ‘Mecca’ of its own. Indeed, the Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture remains to this day one of the top research institutions in the world for Black and African history.⁴²

Harrison’s friendship and association with figures like Schomburg offers a glimpse into the wider intellectual world that shaped his study of Africa. I have mentioned his association with Schomburg and John E. Bruce in the NSHR and Bruce’s enthusiastic support for Harrison’s Liberty League. Harrison was also in dialogue with a wider community of African-oriented scholars like William Leo Hansberry of Howard University, Carter G. Woodson of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, independent journalist and historian J.A. Rogers, and Monroe Work, author of the *Negro Year Book* at the Tuskegee Institute.⁴³ Engaging with figures such as these placed Harrison in a community of like-minded scholars who, like him, sought to restore African history and develop a Black epistemology outside the confines of the white academy.

“LEARN WHAT THEY HAVE TO TEACH US”: Harrison’s African Humility

As a result of his African identity and rigorous contemporary and historical studies of the peoples of the continent, Harrison came to articulate and exemplify a

⁴² DesVerney, *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, p. 134.

⁴³ W. L. Hansberry, ‘Negro People in the Civilization of the Prehistoric and Early Ancient World’ (syllabus), Howard University, 1923, HHP box 8, folder 8. C. Woodson to H. Harrison, 6 May 1927, HHP box 3, folder 55. Perry, *HHR*, p. 339-340. T. Asukile, ‘The Harlem Friendship of Joel Augustus Rogers(1880-1966) and Hubert Henry Harrison (1883-1927)’, *Afro-Americans in New York Life & History*, Jul 2010, Vol. 34 Issue 2. M. Work to H. Harrison, 20 Jul 1922, HHP box 3, folder 56. Perry, *Reader*, p. 322-23.

historic turn in diasporic political consciousness. In particular, he broke with the paternalist attitude of the nineteenth century that looked down condescendingly on Africa and African people. In 1918, the same year he recorded his excitement at a deepening of his intellectual collaboration with Schomburg, Harrison wrote “*Africa is turning over in her sleep, and this agitation now going on among American Negroes for the liberation of Africa is a healthy sign of her restlessness.*”⁴⁴ In this single sentence, Harrison re-framed the ‘New Negro’ interest in African freedom as something not initiated by an isolated group of Black people in the US, but as a sign of the restlessness of ‘Africa’, which he often spoke of “in its racial rather than its geographical sense.”⁴⁵ In other words, Africans as a *global* people were waking up. He took this idea even further, leading to a statement that expressed quite possibly the most profound and radical humility of any Black political leader in the US at that time toward the African continent. “Instead of futile expectations from the doubtful generosity of white land-grabbing, let us American Negroes go to Africa, live among the natives and LEARN WHAT THEY HAVE TO TEACH US (for they have much to teach us).”⁴⁶ This idea—that the task of Black people in the diaspora was not to teach but to *learn from* the ‘mother continent’—upended the whole train of colonial thinking that predominated at the time.

In order not to leave any doubt about what he meant, Harrison spelled out his case quite explicitly. For its breadth and conviction, Harrison’s argument is worth quoting in full.

⁴⁴ H. Harrison, ‘Africa at the Peace Table’, *The Voice*, (New York, 26 Dec, 1918), reprinted as ‘Africa and the Peace’, in *WAA*, 33-35.

⁴⁵ Harrison, ‘Introductory’, *WAA*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ H. Harrison, ‘Africa at the Peace Table’.

Let us go there—not in the coastlands—but in the interior, in Nigeria and Nyassaland; let us study engineering and physics, chemistry and commerce, agriculture and industry; let us learn more of nitrates, of copper, rubber and electricity; so we will know why Belgium, France, England and Germany want to be in Africa. Let us begin by studying the scientific world of the African explorers and stop reading and believing the silly slush which ignorant missionaries put into our heads about the alleged degradation of our people in Africa. Let us learn to know Africa and Africans so well that every educated Negro will be able at a glance to put his hands on the map of Africa and tell where to find the Jolofs, Ekois, Mandigos, Yorubas, Bechuanas, or Basutos and can tell something of their marriage customs, their property laws, their agriculture and systems of worship. For not until we can do this will it be seemly for us to pretend to be anxious about their political welfare.⁴⁷

In this passage, Harrison elaborated on his call for humility toward African people. First of all, Africans had sciences and industry of their own. They had their own cultural traditions, agricultural and legal systems, and cosmologies. It was folly for anyone to claim to care about Africans' welfare without first studying African societies on their own terms, rather than through the superiority complex of a 'civilising' mission. Winston James has correctly identified this approach as among "the most distinctive features of Harrison's political thought" for the way it contrasted with the dominant thinking among the mainstream of US Black intellectual culture, to which I will return later in the chapter.⁴⁸

To be sure, the emigrationist tendency in nineteenth century Black nationalism rested on an identification with the African continent and an impetus to re-locate there. But not to learn. Leading emigrationists like Edward Wilmot Blyden and Alexander Crummell thought Africa a backward land in need of 'civilising.' Crummell, for example, wrote that the continent was full of "millions of torpid and benighted souls" representing "the power of the devil in his strongholds," and therefore the task of the "sons of Africa"

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ W. James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, (London, 1997), p. 129.

in the US was to “usher therein light, knowledge, [and] blessedness” because “the Gospel *must* be reached in all the world. The Master commands it.”⁴⁹ Even Martin Delany, though freed somewhat from the evangelical zeal of the missionary impulse, still saw Christianity as “the most advanced civilization that man ever attained” and spoke of “Africa for the African race, and Black men to rule them” on the assumption that only a “new element” (i.e. advanced and intelligent African-Americans) could foster industrial development in Africa and other such “well-regulated pursuits of civilized life” which “the natives” lacked.⁵⁰ Therefore, although Delaney ranked among the most advanced of the classical Black nationalist thinkers, he and his generation all fundamentally maintained a superiority complex toward continental Africans.

By contrast, Harrison’s call on Black people to stop “believing the silly slush which ignorant missionaries put into our heads about the alleged degradation of our people in Africa” comprised a ground-breaking advance in consciousness from the superiority complex of the emigrationists.⁵¹ Having undertaken a rigorous study of African history, Harrison came to conclude that there was nothing superior about Africans in the diaspora over Africans on the continent. In so doing, he developed an approach to the continent which rejected the central assumption of the nineteenth century thinkers, Black and white, who thought that Africans somehow lacked “civilisation.”

Harrison exposed the civilisationist mindset by demonstrating its utter falsity. If civilisation meant a stable society with a system government, laws, industry, and

⁴⁹ A. Crummell, ‘The Relations and Duties of Free Colored Men In America to Africa’, reprinted in O. E. Uya, *Black Brotherhood: Afro-Americans and Africa*, (Lexington, 1971), p. 63-71.

⁵⁰ M. Delany, ‘A Project for an Expedition of Adventure to the Eastern Coast of Africa’, O. E. Uya, *Black Brotherhood*, (Lexington, 1971), p. 71-82.

⁵¹ Delany, Henry Turner, Crummell, and Blyden all saw the “Middle Passage” as providential, even if highly painful. I. Sundiata, *Brother and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery 1914-1940*, (Durham, 2003), p. 7.

commerce “then the Hausas and Mandingoes, the people of the Ashanti and Dahomey, and the Yorubas of the Gold Coast had and have all these, and they are consequently civilised,” wrote Harrison. “So were the Zulus and Bechuanas, the Swazis and Mashonas of South Africa, as well as the Baganda people of Uganda.”⁵² He pointed out that if civilisation meant medical knowledge, then groups like the Yoruba and numerous Southern African peoples “possess an intelligent knowledge of the pathology of...disease and use a variety of efficacious medicines” to treat it. And on the religious test, “not only do Africans believe in Gods, but...from the Bobowisi of the Ashanti, the Mawa of Dahomey, the Olorun of the Yoruba, down to the Umkulunkulu of the Zulus, most of them have a more or less clear perception of...God.”⁵³ Therefore, by any standard—government, laws, commerce, medicine, religion—continental Africans were clearly civilised.

This simple fact raised an important question. If civilisations already existed in Africa then how and why would outsiders attempt to “civilise” Africa? Harrison answered this question by calling imperialism’s bluff. “The real civilization meant by most whites who talk of civilizing Africa is the system which produces profits by taking the land from under the feet of the workers, producing a propertyless, landless proletarian class which must either work (for wages) or starve. Such a class doesn’t exist anywhere among black Africans except where white peoples have robbed them of their lands by force.” Harrison’s Marxism is detectable here by the language of his class analysis of European colonialism. From this analysis, he concluded that the ‘civilizing’ of Africa meant “the establishment of the European system, of ‘concessions’ for rubber, railroads,

⁵² H. Harrison, ‘On Civilizing Africa’, *Negro World* (18 Dec, 1920). HHP 13.7.

⁵³ Ibid.

factories and mines, whereby the labour of the native population and the new tastes developed in their minds yield enormous revenues to the white people who rule these lands.”⁵⁴ In other words, ‘civilisation’ was a euphemism for ‘domination by white capital.’

This brings us to Harrison’s analysis of the role of missionaries in Africa, which is relevant given the religious zeal which dominated African American political thought regarding Africa in the early twentieth century and Harrison’s background as the leading non-white voice of the anti-religious *Freethought* movement.⁵⁵ First, Harrison questioned why white missionaries didn’t work harder to spread Christian values in their own countries. “Isn’t there still a large jail population in every Christian country? And do not the atheists and agnostics and rationalists exist by the millions at home? The legislators like Lloyd George...who plunged millions of British Christians into a bath of blood-- have the missionaries yet succeeded in teaching them ‘the love of Christ, who died to save all men’?”⁵⁶ In short, Christian missionaries ought to ‘civilise’ their own countries before telling Africans how to live.

Secondly, Harrison argued that the work of the missionary abroad was like that of a soldier: they were both part of a larger institutional machinery. “In the modern European state every institution is used by the dominant class to some end which contributes to the general social purpose of that class.” It was not necessary that even noble and well-meaning missionaries understand their larger geopolitical impact. In fact, “it is better for his masters that he should not see them as his masters. Then he can be

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 221.

⁵⁵ For more on this, see J. Jackson, ‘Black Athiests of the Harlem Renaissance, 1917-1928’, speech to the 1984 American Athiests Convention, Online URL: http://nationofatheism.tripod.com/cgi-bin/the_black_atheist.html. Last accessed 17 February, 2016.

⁵⁶ H. Harrison, ‘Africa as She Is’, *Negro World*, (19 Feb. 1921). HHP 13.7.

quite ‘sincere,’ earnest and spiritually-minded.”⁵⁷ In other words, capitalist and imperialist interests lurked behind missionary work, regardless of whether its ground-level functionaries were conscious of it and regardless of their individual good intentions. “The white missionary’s function is to spread that form of religion which will soft-soap the soul of black Africa so that the business of robbing and ruling it shall become less costly and less dangerous to those who do the robbing and the ruling.”⁵⁸ Missionary work formed a hand maiden of colonial domination.

Harrison did not directly address the question of Black missionaries. But his anti-missionary arguments flowed fundamentally from his opposition to Christianity and religion in general. Some missionaries, including Black ones, did oppose and expose colonial atrocities, and the Black AME Zion Church in particular was restricted by whites in South Africa on the grounds that it was a racially subversive fomenter of Black nationalism.⁵⁹ Though Harrison favoured the overthrow of white supremacy and colonialism in South Africa, he did not believe that Christianity was a helpful or necessary vehicle for these goals.

Harrison took these ideas—that Africans already had ‘civilisation’ before Europeans came, that Western talk of ‘civilising’ formed an ideological element in the machinery of imperialist domination, and that the task of Black people in the West was to learn from Africans—to its logical political conclusion: African self-determination. In Harrison words, “the present Negro population of Africa is quite able to work out its own

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See, for example, E.P. Skinner, *African Americans and U.S. Policy Toward Africa 1850-1924*, Washington D.C. 1992), Ch 5 and J.T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa*, (New York, 1995).

salvation on the spot.”⁶⁰ This idea represented a conception of “Africa for the Africans” not as an imperative for Black diasporic emigration or African-American ‘development’ or ‘civilising’ of Africans, but that continental Africans themselves comprised the chief agency of their own liberation. In order to grasp the distinctiveness of his position, I turn to the thought and behaviour of Harrison’s contemporaries.

Contemporary U.S. Black Opinions of Africa

The distinctiveness of Harrison’s politics of radical humility toward Africa becomes even clearer when compared with the prevailing views about the continent and its peoples during his time. Therefore I now turn to look at the context of white and Black opinions of Africa at the turn of the century, Africa in the view of leading Black contemporaries Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington, William Monroe Trotter, W.E.B Du Bois, and the Garvey movement, as well as Harrison’s explicit or implicit criticisms of their African politics.

As the “scramble for Africa” unfolded in the late nineteenth century, the overwhelming consensus among white people was that Africans and other non-white peoples were backward savages who needed to be Christianized and “civilised” by colonial rule. Kipling’s famous 1899 poem “The White Man’s Burden,” gave expression to this sentiment by calling colonised peoples “Half-devil and half-child.”⁶¹ As arch-colonialist Cecil Rhodes put it in his *Confession of Faith*, “I contend that we are the finest

⁶⁰ H. Harrison. ‘The Negro and the Nation’, Radio Broadcasting of American Telephone Telgraphic Co., (21 June, 1923), reprinted in *HHR*, p. 290.

⁶¹ *Modern History Sourcebook: Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden, 1899* (New York: Fordham University).

race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race.”⁶² These racial views of European superiority were legitimised in the academy, particularly in disciplines like anthropology that were intimately connected with the colonial project.⁶³

While white people generally thought Africans an inferior people, most African-American opinion shapers maintained a superiority complex of their own. As mentioned earlier, most nineteenth century Black nationalists and emigrationists felt that Africans needed to be ‘civilised’ and Christianised from without.⁶⁴ In so doing they demonstrated a contradictory relationship with western imperialism: even when they cast Africa in a positive light or criticised white domination they simultaneously evinced a superiority complex regarding the ‘uncivilised’.⁶⁵ As historian Kevin Gaines has suggested, middle-class preoccupations with racial uplift ideology (as a sign of Black respectability and worthiness of full citizenship) ultimately hampered consistent criticism of colonial domination by re-enforcing the civilisationist ideological framework on which it was largely based.⁶⁶

Black activist women at the turn century manifested similarly contradictory views regarding Africa and European imperialism. Ida B. Wells, for example, spoke about Africa’s relationship to African-Americans as the “the land of their forefathers, the most

⁶² Rhodes, Cecil. “Confession of Faith.” (1877) Online. URL: <http://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/Rhodes-Confession.htm> Last accessed 30 July 2015.

⁶³ T. Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London, 1973). D. Lewis, ‘Anthropology and Colonialism’, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 14, No. 5 (Dec 1973), p. 581-602. L. D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*, (Berkeley, 1998), p. 14-16.

⁶⁴ W. J. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*, (Oxford, 1978), esp. Ch 2.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Michele Mitchell’s discussion of the “Black Man’s Burden” in M. Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African American and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction*, (Chapel Hill, 2004), Ch 2.

⁶⁶ K. Gaines, ‘Black Americans’ Uplift Ideology as ‘Civilizing Mission’: Pauline Hopkins on Race and Imperialism’ in A. Kaplan and D.E. Pease (eds.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, (Durham, 1993), p. 450.

fertile of its kind, and the only one which the rapacious and ubiquitous Anglo-Saxon has not entirely gobbled.” Yet in the very same piece, she also spoke of Africans as “simple natives” and enthused about the possibility that enterprising middle-class Black Americans could bring “capital, skilled labor, and intelligent direction” to Liberia, much like the “Romans who invaded Britain” or the “Puritans who came over in the ‘Mayflower’” and gave the world “the greatest country of the age.”⁶⁷

Wells likened the potential role African-Americans could play in Africa to that which the British colonists played in Massachusetts—without apparently recognising the rapaciousness of the Puritan’s destruction of the *Massachusetts* people, among so many other indigenous peoples destroyed by the consolidation and expansion of the white settler-colony.⁶⁸ By criticising ‘Anglo-Saxon’ domination while simultaneously extolling the outcome of genocidal colonisation, she revealed the inconsistency of her anti-imperialism.⁶⁹ Views about Africa and Western colonialism from other notable Black women activists like Nannie Burroughs, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Pauline Hopkins reveal similar contradictions to those of Ida B. Wells.⁷⁰

African-American men rarely went beyond the inconsistency of the women—and in some cases proved extremely reactionary. On one end of the spectrum, Booker T. Washington collaborated in Togoland with German authorities who thought his model of industrial education well suited to produce West African cotton plantations on the model of the Jim Crow south. Predictably, this colonial project distorted local ethnic identities

⁶⁷ I. B. Wells, ‘Afro-Americans and Africa’, *The A.M.E. Church Review*, vol. 9, no. 1 (July 1892): 40-44.

⁶⁸ R. Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States*, (Boston, 2014).

⁶⁹ I. B. Wells, ‘Afro-Americans and Africa’, *The A.M.E. Church Review*, vol. 9, no. 1 (July 1892): 40-44. Ida B. Wells Papers, University of Chicago, Box 8, folder 9.

⁷⁰ M. Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*. (Chapel Hill, 2004), p. 62. K. Gaines, ‘Black Americans’ Uplift Ideology as ‘Civilizing Mission’: Pauline Hopkins on Race and Imperialism’ in A. Kaplan and D.E. Pease (eds.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, (Durham 1993), p. 435.

by racialising all Togolese as *negre* (black), imposed forced taxation, destroyed local industries, introduced pass laws, and wrought severe economic and land dispossession. When the Togolese resisted forcefully in the southern city of Tove in 1895, military officers led by Hans Gruner undertook a scorched-earth campaign that included cutting off heads of the Ewe people and sending such battlefield ‘trophy’ back home to anthropologists in Germany. Upon their arrival, Booker T. Washington’s subordinates worked diligently under the very same Hans Gruner and were housed in the very huts that the Ewe left vacant after fleeing the German reign of terror.⁷¹

Even after the Germans committed the first genocide of the twentieth century against the Herero and Nama people in what is now Namibia,⁷² Washington went so far as to declare in 1910, “I have followed with great care the policies and plans according to which the German officials have dealt with the natives of Africa. Their work succeeds by these means in a wholesome and constructive manner. They do not seek to repress the Africans, but rather to help them that they may be more useful to themselves and to the German people. Their manner of handling Negroes in Africa might be taken as a pattern for other nations.”⁷³ By such shameless celebration of Black genocides at hands of colonial rule, it is perhaps no wonder that Tuskegeans collaborated with colonialism in other places like Sudan and South Africa on the grounds that the Washington’s “civilizing” backward Africans with Christian uplift, hard work, and Western consumerism.⁷⁴

⁷¹ A. Zimmerman, *Alabama In Africa: Booker T. Washington, The German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South*, (Princeton, 2010), Ch. 3.

⁷² D. Olusoga and C.W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust: Germany’s Forgotten Genocide* (London, 2010).

⁷³ L. Harlan, ‘Booker T. Washington and the White Man’s Burden’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (Jan., 1966), p. 446.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 442. Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, p. 147.

Some scholars have argued that Washington's approach to African affairs was different, and more positive than his accommodationist approach to African-American affairs. Manning Marable, for example, argued that Washington's philosophy "helped to create a nationalistic, proud and dynamic elite" in South Africa.⁷⁵ Indeed, Washington's approach resonated with some of his counterparts amongst the enterprising, Western-educated, middle-class Blacks who chafed at their exclusion from the state apparatus following the unification of the Republic of South Africa. And Washington did receive words of praise from African nationalists like Edward Wilmot Blyden, J.E. Casely Hayford, and Duse Mohamed Ali.⁷⁶

However, the notion of Booker Washington as a secret African nationalist overlooks the enthusiasm of colonial powers like Germany and Britain, who both saw the utility of the Tuskegee model of industrial education for stabilising colonial rule.⁷⁷ Washington did, to his credit, join the Congo Reform Association and lobby the US government against Belgian atrocities. But he also collaborated with the Germans and British colonialisms that supported the Tuskegee model, suggesting he criticised colonialism not just selectively, but in a way that targeted the colonial power (Belgium) that formed an imperial rival to Britain and Germany. In other words, Washington dutifully adapted his political outlook to that of his financial sponsors. Thus in the realm of foreign policy, Washington appeared "as in a tailor's mirror, from new angles but in the usual posture," as his biographer put it.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ M. Marable, 'Booker T. Washington and African Nationalism', *Phylon*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (1974), pp. 398-406.

⁷⁶ Zimmerman, *Alabama In Africa*, p. 184-185.

⁷⁷ D. Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery* (Westport, 1978), p. 113.

⁷⁸ L. Harlan, 'Booker T. Washington and the White Man's Burden', p. 441-442.

Although often seen as a progressive counterpoint to Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois initially revealed an attitude towards continental Africans that sprang from similarly civilisationist assumptions. His example is all the more interesting because of his role as a pioneer of the Pan-African movement in the early twentieth century. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Du Bois pushed for Belgian, German, and Portuguese colonies to be administered by an international governing commission, which “must represent not simply the white world, but the civilized Negro world.”⁷⁹ Certainly his call on the imperial powers to draw up a code of law for the protection of educational, economic, and political rights of the “natives of Africa” was well-intentioned.⁸⁰ But by accepting the notion that African people were ‘uncivilized,’ Du Bois re-enforced the same framework propagated by white colonisers to justify and perpetuate their domination. Implicit in his attitude was the elitist notion that the same “talented tenth” that was fit to lead Black Americans was, by extension, fit to lead Black Africans. Du Bois, in other words, aimed for a kinder, gentler, and African American-inclusive civilising mission for African ‘natives’.⁸¹

Harrison, by contrast, maintained a more sober view about the powerlessness of even privileged Western Blacks like Du Bois to administer African territories. “We may read in headlines the startling item ‘Negroes Ask for German Colonies,’ but Negroes of sense should not be deluded. They will not get them because they have no battleships, no

⁷⁹ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The World And Africa*, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 11

⁸¹ Du Bois became increasingly radical over time, eventually repudiating the “talented tenth” in favor of leadership by non-elites as he came to identify more strongly with the ideas of Karl Marx, communism, and the emancipation of labour. See, for example, J. James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals*, (New York, 1997), Ch. 1.

guns, no force, military or financial. They are not a Power.”⁸² Asking for Black participation in the running of African colonies was utopian, given that they had no force with which to claim or maintain them. “The King-word of modern nations is POWER... The secret of England’s greatness (as well as of any other great nation’s) is not bibles but bayonets—bayonets, business and brains...so long as the lands of Africa can yield billions of business, so long will white brains use bayonets to keep them.” Control of Africa rested not on morality but militarism.⁸³

In retrospect, Du Bois acknowledged his naiveté when recalling how at the Pan-African Congress of 1919, “we were...weak and ineffective amateurs chipping at a hard conglomeration of problems.”⁸⁴ Furthermore, Du Bois soon moved toward a more humble political position, writing in 1922 that he no longer thought “that Africa should be administered by West Indians or American Negroes.” In fact, “they have no more right to administer Africa for the native Africans than native Africans have to administer America.”⁸⁵ In this way he came to evolve from his pre-WWI position on Africans towards a more Harrison-like humility toward African people.⁸⁶

Booker T. Washington and Du Bois were not the only African-American leaders in this period to advance proposals based on the “civilizing mission” of colonialism. Rev. William Jernagin, president of the National Equal Rights League, put forward a similar proposal before the Senate Foreign relations committee that the German colonies in

⁸² H. Harrison, ‘Africa At the Peace Table’, *The Voice*. 26 December 1918, reprinted as “Africa and the Peace” in *WAA*, p. 33-35. and in HHR p. 210-212.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Du Bois *World And Africa*, p. 12.

⁸⁵ Du Bois, W.E.B. ‘Africa for the Africans’, *The Crisis*, (New York, Feb 1922), reprinted in E.F. Provenzo and E. Abaka (eds.), *W.E.B. Du Bois On Africa* (Walnut Creek, 2012), p. 101.

⁸⁶ Although Du Bois incisively analysed the global color line and racial politics of imperialism before the war, including a clear call for extending democracy to the “yellow, brown, and black peoples” of the world, he had also maintained paternalistically that “we must train the native races in modern civilization.” W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘The African Roots of War’, *Atlantic Monthly*, (May 1915).

Africa be turned over to the United States under a mandate from the League of Nations. In response, Harrison recalled that the country had “generally given [Black people] 59-cents-a-year education, Jim-Crow cars, public degradation, exclusion from parks, libraries and places of public amusement, segregation civic and military, exclusion from ‘white’ Christian churches and graveyards, peonage, race-hatred, race-riots, torture and lynching-bees.” Given this history of US behaviour toward people of African descent domestically, Harrison re-iterated his call for radical humility. “It would be well if we Negro-Americans, before seeking to legislate directly or indirectly for Africa, would first deign to get some little knowledge of Africa—to say nothing of our own country.” Before calling for the United States to administer African colonies, one ought to first think more deeply about the situation facing Black people inside its own borders and extrapolate for the prospect of US rule over Africans.⁸⁷

Even Africa-oriented Black leaders often demonstrated quite paternalistic attitudes toward African peoples. For example, although Marcus Garvey adopted Martin Delany’s “Africa for the Africans!” as a guiding slogan for his movement, the fourth item in the list of the UNIA’s official objectives was “to assist in civilising the backward tribes of Africa.”⁸⁸ This call to ‘civilise the backward tribes’ was an echo of the rhetoric that white imperialists used to conquer and dominate Africa, and which the anti-imperialist ‘New Negroes’ like Harrison vociferously rejected. That the UNIA also officially sought “to promote a conscientious spiritual worship among the native tribes of Africa,”⁸⁹ further demonstrated its adherence to the nineteenth century assumption that Africans had

⁸⁷ On Jernagin see “Rev. Jernagin is 60.” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, (12 October 1929). H. Harrison, ‘The World This Month’, *The New Negro*, Vol 4 No 2, (New York, October 1919), HHP 17.8.

⁸⁸ H. Adi and M. Sherwood (eds.), *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787*, (London, 2003), p. viii. A.J. Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism*, (New York, 1970), p. 11.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

no indigenous conscientious spiritual traditions of their own. Garvey's declaration of himself as 'President of Africa' rankled some continental Africans who, like Harrison, chafed at this reductionist and monolithic conception wherein the agency and authority of elders, chiefs, and leaders of the Zulu, Kikuyu, Yoruba, and all the other African peoples were to be superseded by a Jamaican who had never set foot on the continent.⁹⁰

Marcus Garvey's reductionist tendencies notwithstanding, the Garvey *movement* did indeed inspire many continental Africans. Kwame Nkrumah, for example, famously cited Garvey as a major influence on his thinking.⁹¹ Recent scholarship by Robert Vinson has uncovered the positive and liberatory impact of Garveyism on the continent, particularly on Black nationalism in South Africa.⁹² In many ways, the Garvey movement brought a pan-African identity and ethos down from the Sinais of the 'talented tenth' to the level of ordinary people. Yet Garvey himself seems to have retained a civilisationist attitude toward Africans, even when extolling their agency. In 1923, for example, he declared "Africa will redeem herself, not so much from without as from within. What we want is to implant the right kind of education in the minds of the natives, to let them realize that they are entitled to freedom like the other races of the world, and see to it that they push forward until they have succeeded in dislodging the alien enemy."⁹³ Here he states a humble position (Africa will redeem herself from within), followed by a paternalistic one (we want to implant the right education in the natives). One need not doubt that Garvey's commitment to make Africa the 'land of Black peoples of the world'

⁹⁰ I.K. Sundiata 'The Garvey Aftermath' in A. Jalloh and T. Falola (eds), *The United States and West Africa: Interactions and Relations*, (Rochester, 2008), p. 83.

⁹¹ A.J. Garvey, *Black Power In America: Marcus Garvey's Impact on Jamaica and Africa* (Kingston, 1968), p. 33.

⁹² R.T. Vinson, *The Americans Are Coming! Dreams of African American Liberation in Segregationist South Africa* (Athens, 2012).

⁹³ M. Garvey, 'Editorial', *Negro World*, 14 Apr 1923.

was sincere to see that the views with which he went about securing that objective did not, at least in the first decade of the UNIA's existence, fully break with the paternalist mindset of the nineteenth century.

In terms of Africa-conscious women, Amy Jacques Garvey offers a revealing example. Amy Jacques certainly played a key role in the Garvey movement by working as Marcus Garvey's secretary, compiling and publishing *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, serving as an associate editor of the *Negro World*, penning the paper's "Our Women and What They Think" column, and labouring tirelessly to get her husband released from prison.⁹⁴ According to historian Tony Martin, she "ran the organization almost single-handedly when Garvey was either imprisoned or otherwise unavailable."⁹⁵ Regarding Africa, however, her views did not go beyond 'common sense' paternalism until the late 1920s. For example, in 1924, she argued that because white missionaries were hypocritical, Africa needed Black missionaries who could teach Africans "how to live progressive lives on earth" and transmit to them "a Christianity that will satisfy their spiritual wants."⁹⁶ This view implied that Africans on the continent did not know how to 'live progressive lives' and suffered from a lack of sufficiently gratifying spiritual traditions of their own.

In a similar vein, Amy Jacques Garvey evinced the Christian missionary mindset with an Islamophobic twist. "Mohammedanism will triumph in Africa if Negro Christians are so selfish as to allow it," she warned. "We [therefore] appeal to the Negro churches of

⁹⁴ See, for example, U.Y. Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*, (Chapel Hill, 2002), CH 3-4.

⁹⁵ T. Martin, 'Women in the Garvey movement', in R. Lewis and P. Bryan (eds.), *Garvey: His Work and Impact*, (Trenton, 1991), p. 72.

⁹⁶ A.J. Garvey, 'Christianity in Africa', *Negro World*, 15 Nov 1924. reprinted in T. Vincent, *Voices of a Black Nation*, (San Francisco, 1973), p. 365.

all denominations to unite in this work of helping the African in Africa to know Christ and to know his own possibilities as a man. If we fail to heed the cry of awakened Africa, Mohammedanism will conquer, and a further breach will be created between Africans at home and Africans abroad.”⁹⁷ Undoubtedly, Muslims had their own share of crimes (e.g. the Arab slave trade) to answer for in Africa.⁹⁸ But identifying Islam as a bigger barrier to pan-African unity than Christianity comes across as a rather glaring absolution of Christianity’s role in the enslavement and colonisation of African peoples.

Hubert Harrison, by contrast, viewed Islam as a more favourable religion than Christianity for Africans. Though an anti-religious freethinker, Harrison maintained that under Islam all true believers belonged to a common community, that Muslims were equal “not only ‘in the sight of God,’ but in the sight of the magistrate, and in every civil right.” Christianity, on the other hand, “as organized and made effective in all her institutions, from the church to the jail, insists that only white men are men and that Negroes especially must be treated like dogs.”⁹⁹ Apart from its lack of race prejudice, Harrison also saw Islam as superior to Christianity for the way it strove to promote knowledge and free inquiry in universities where algebra, the astrolabe, and so much of the knowledge of the ancient world was developed. When Christianity ruled Europe’s education system, by contrast, “the inquisition...sat cross-legged at the birth of every scientific idea to insure that it would be stillborn.” Unlike Amy Jacques, Harrison took great inspiration from pan-Islamic movements amongst the “hundreds of millions of black, brown and yellow peoples from the Senegal to the shores of the Yellow Sea”

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ R. Segal, *Islam’s Black Slaves: The History of Africa’s Other Black Diaspora* (London, 2001).

⁹⁹ H. Harrison, ‘Africa As She Is’, *Negro World*, (19 Feb, 1921), HHP 13.7.

because he saw it as part and parcel of the general post-war mass movement of the 'darker races' internationally against white arrogance, race-prejudice, and imperialism.¹⁰⁰

Harrison's humility toward Africans influenced his radical Black protégés toward taking similar political positions. Cyril Briggs, for example, declared that his *Crusader* magazine stood "for a free Africa, and that without any frills of international control" on the grounds that Africans governed themselves without white tutelage for millennia since the time of ancient Egypt and Ethiopia.¹⁰¹ W.A. Domingo would evince similar commitment to African redemption from within, rather than something "forced upon the Africans from outside."¹⁰²

In addition to influencing a generation of New Negro militants, he also learned from them. For example, Domingo's call for protest against US imperialism in Haiti in the spring of 1920 foreshadowed Harrison's aforementioned argument along similar lines in the *Negro World* during the UNIA convention later that year.¹⁰³ The New Negro milieu of Harlem formed a dynamic intellectual community wherein traditions of nineteenth century Black nationalist and pan-African thought could be processed, radically criticised, and then re-fashioned in light of the new global political context. On that score, Harrison learned important lessons about the potential of Black nationality and religious community from the Garvey movement, both of which he would apply in his final organisational project, to which I now turn.

¹⁰⁰ H. Harrison, 'The Brown Man Leads the Way, Part 1, review of *The New World of Islam* by Lothrop Stoddard', *Negro World*, 29 Oct 1921: 8.

¹⁰¹ R. Hill (ed.), *Crusader Vol. 1* (New York, 1987), p. 114.

¹⁰² W.A. Domingo, 'Africa's Redemption', *The Emancipator*, 27 Mar 1920.

¹⁰³ W.A. Domingo, 'In the Claws of the American Eagle', *The Emancipator*, 27 Mar 1920. Compare with Harrison's articles 'Help Wanted for Hayti', and 'The Cracker in the Caribbean', in Harrison, *WAA*.

Grassroots Pan-Africanism: The International Colored Unity League

Following his break with Marcus Garvey, Harrison's subsequent major Black movement building project was the International Colored Unity League (ICUL), an organisation which he founded in 1924. The ICUL's significance lies in the fact of its being Harrison's last independent political undertaking. Documentation about the ICUL is scarce, but from the available sources one can piece together its general purpose, target audience, ethos, and objectives. As the final large-scale project of his life, the ICUL reveals Harrison's evolving thought, which appears somewhat more conservative economically and also more sensitive to the nation-building and religious faith of African American communities.

Harrison advanced an unmistakably pan-African vision for the ICUL. As one newspaper reported, "the word 'international' in the title of the league means...that all Negroes in America, no matter what part of the world they originally came from, were eligible for membership in the new organization."¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the League made a deliberate and explicit appeal to continental Africans, West Indians, and African Americans (see Figure 1).

¹⁰⁴ 'Negroes Plan New American State', *Monitor*, 7 June 1924, HHP box 13, folder 5.

Africans!

Kroomen, Fulanis, Nigerians, Abyssinians, Senegalese

West Indians!

From Barbados, Jamaica, Cuba, Hayti, Porto Rico, St. Kitts, Trinidad,
Demerara and the Virgin Islands

Americans!

From New York and North Carolina, Vermont, and Virginia, Georgia
and New Jersey, North, South, East and West

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Figure 1, Advertisement for the ICUL, 1927. HHP

Because of its pan-African orientation, the ICUL represents a notable local and grassroots model of pan-Africanism, as compared to the elite-oriented pan-African congresses that Du Bois organised in Europe. In that sense it extended the model of the Liberty League of Negro-Americans, "under whose banner the West Indian and American Negroes first

cooperated on anything like a large scale.”¹⁰⁵ The ICUL launched a campaign to establish branches across the country, raise money, and publish a magazine, *The Voice of the Negro*, in which Harrison articulated the purpose, program, and objectives of the organisation. By the end of 1925, the ICUL had some 550-600 members.¹⁰⁶

Fundamentally, the purpose of the ICUL was the construction of collective Black economic, political, and social power. It explicitly sought

to stop Negroes from hating one another and Negro leaders from attacking each other; to mobilize all that energy against lynching, disfranchisement and Jim Crow; to use the ballot of the Northern Negro to secure such enforcement of the Constitution as will put the ballot into the hands of the Southern Negro...to encourage our people to buy, to own and to use property in town and country, building up by cooperative action such economic structures as will enable them to stand on their own legs and keep the dollars of the race; to co-operate with the Negro church, lodge and other organizations that are already doing good work and to help them to do better.¹⁰⁷

In other words, the ICUL represented a kind of second incarnation of the Liberty League of Negro-Americans, but with a cooperative economic program and an eye toward collaboration with fraternal and faith-based organisations.

As for its motivating ethos, the ICUL sought to organise Black communities on the basis of Black love. Although racial oppression was of the white man’s making, Black people needed to do the work to solve it. How? “First, by organizing—and that involves cohesion solidarity of which binding force the great name is LOVE: love of race, love for one another, a blood-is-thicker-than-water policy, racial support and self-

¹⁰⁵ H. Harrison, ‘Prejudice Growing Less and Co-Operation More, Says Student of Question: Writer of Special Article for Courier Readers Says Immigrants Are Becoming Americanized and Naturalized—Garveyism Has Had Little Effect on Mental Outlook’, *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 Jan 1927.

¹⁰⁶ Harrison to A. Hillard, 27 Dec 1925, HHP box 2, folder 2.

¹⁰⁷ H. Harrison, ‘The I.C.U.’, HHP box 17, folder 10.

support, racial respect and self respect.” This emphasis on Black love, and self-respect is at the core of what Cornel West has called the tradition of “Black prophetic fire” and the deep and abiding love for Black people manifested in historic freedom fighters from Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells to Ella Baker and Malcolm X.¹⁰⁸

Harrison explained why this unifying force of Black love was necessary. “Every lynching-bee and Jim Crow car is teaching us that we must stand by each other; one for all and all for one, in matters of money, mind, politics and religion, if we wish to survive and succeed. But since there is work to do, we must organize to do that work. And that work is always where we are. In Boston or Bridgetown, Jamaica or Georgia, the old advice is still valuable: ‘Cast down your buckets where you are!’” Here, Harrison played on a theme that Booker T. Washington advocated in terms of the need of Black people to organize where they were and take active ownership over their own collective destiny. It also comprised a rejection of the Garveyist and emigrationist notions that Black Americans must physically return to Africa.¹⁰⁹

In the interest of racial unity, the ICUL seemed designed to accommodate Black business owners. Harrison argued that because Black money was not staying in Black communities, but instead getting siphoned off by white capital, Black people needed to keep Black money in the Black community. The ICUL’s economic program therefore advocated buying agricultural land in areas where Blacks were concentrated, raising farm produce co-operatively for direct sale to the Black community in order to eliminate the white middlemen, establishing cooperative groceries served by Black farms, and Black ownership of apartment houses, halls, and suburban households to offer employment to

¹⁰⁸ C. West and Christa Buschendorf (ed.), *Black Prophetic Fire* (Boston, 2014).

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, ‘The I.C.U.’.

Black architects, engineers, artists, and generally “keeping the cycle of Negro industry and commerce as far as possible within the Negro’s control.”¹¹⁰ In other words, Black ownership of the means of production. This idea he likely took from his experience in the Garvey movement’s Negro Factories Corporation with its array of Black-owned businesses.¹¹¹

This articulation of the ICUL’s economic program suggests a possible conservative turn in Harrison’s economic thought. In particular, the question of *how* Black people should own the means of production—as workers or as capitalists—is not clear. This did not necessarily mean that Harrison had abandoned socialism as a long-term goal. For example, the ICUL’s stated purpose of encouraging Black people “to buy, to own and to use property in town and country, building up by cooperative action such economic structures as will enable them to stand on their own legs” allows for a socialist-minded interpretation on account of the emphasis on cooperative economics, for which there was already a rich tradition in African American communities.¹¹² However, without explicit reference to the emancipation of Black labour, workers’ control of industry, or a concrete ICUL co-operative enterprise to examine, it remains unclear whether and to what extent Harrison’s vision of co-operative economics was conceived as a replacement or alternative to capitalist economic relations.¹¹³

In any case, Harrison’s call for Black ownership of the means of production led to one of the most distinguishing features of the ICUL program: the demand for a separate

¹¹⁰ H. Harrison, ‘Program and Principles of the International Colored Unity League’, *The Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 1 (April 1927).

¹¹¹ Martin, *Race First*, p. 13.

¹¹² For a history of Black co-operatives economic projects, see J. G. Nembhard. *Collective Courage: A History of African-American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*, (University Park, 2014).

¹¹³ Harrison, Hubert. “The Roots of Power.” *Boston Chronicle*. 21 June, 1924. HHP 6.43.

Black state. “We urge as a final solution of the graver aspects of the American race-problem the setting up of a state or states, in the Union as a homeland for the American Negro, where we can work out the ultimate economic and racial salvation as a part of the American people.” In Harrison’s conception, the idea was that no one would be forced to live in the Black state, but that Black aspirations there could flourish and bear fruit such that Black people could become governors, generals, judges, congressmen, and whatever else they wanted without the handicap of white supremacy and the racial proscriptions on Black achievement endemic to the rest of the country. On the grounds that “America is ours and we are hers,” Harrison conceived of the Black state as another one of the United States of America, rather than a separate country.¹¹⁴ This idea echoed an idea raised by Cyril Briggs in 1919 for a separate Black state, and prefigured a similar demand in the 1960s by organisations like the Republic of New Africa, which called for a territorial resolution of the land question for African-Americans.¹¹⁵

The organization’s social goals included friendly and active cooperation with fraternal organizations, Black newspapers, Black school teachers, and even the Black Church “which has done more for the education and spiritual uplift of the masses than any other agency in the race.”¹¹⁶ This last point is curious in light of Harrison’s militant agnosticism and years of *Freethought* movement anti-Christian agitation. I have seen no evidence that Harrison became religious, but one ICUL advert suggests that Harrison did support the radical efforts of Rev. Ethelred Brown’s church. In the *Voice of the Negro*, he

¹¹⁴ “Program and Principles of the International Colored Unity League,” *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 1 (April 1927), reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 399.

¹¹⁵ R. Hill, *Crusader Vol. 1* (New York, 1987). C. Davenport, *How Social Movements Die: Repression and Demobilization of the Republic of New Africa* (New York, 2015).

¹¹⁶ H. Harrison, ‘Program and Principles of the International Colored Unity League’, *The Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 1 (April 1927): 4-6, reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 401.

wrote “all our readers who have intellectually and ethically outgrown the fundamental doctrines of orthodox churches but who still believe in the religious value of a modern liberal church are invited to attend The Harlem Community Church.”¹¹⁷ At the very least, Harrison had come to the conclusion that religious faith must not divide Black communities in their collective struggle for liberation. Given that Garvey grew successful in part thanks to his non-denominational but faith-positive orientation, Harrison apparently took a cue from the UNIA on this score.

Ultimately the ICUL was short-lived, but significant as Harrison’s final political and organisational ‘statement’. Harrison died following an appendicitis operation in December of 1927, a mere eight months after the ICUL published its first issue of the *Voice of the Negro*. As a Harrison-led organisation it does not appear that the ICUL survived beyond his passing. However, its program demonstrated new strains of thought in Harrison’s field of vision, such as collaboration with Black people of faith and the call for a separate Black state, which spoke to his post-Garveyist inheritances. The ICUL differed from Garveyism in many ways, for example, by its emphasis on a domestic political struggle for Black rights. By combining elements from both the Liberty League of Negro-Americans and the Garvey movement’s strive for Black nationality, the ICUL may have grown into a larger and more significant political force during the heady years of the 1930s, if not for Harrison’s untimely death.

Conclusion

¹¹⁷ H. Harrison, ‘On Religion’, *The Embryo of The Voice of the Negro*, Feb 1927 Vol. 1 No. 1 , HHP box 17, folder 10.

Unlike his participation to the Freethought, Socialist, New Negro, and Garvey movements, Harrison's commitment to Africa essentially began with his childhood. In particular, experiencing the vestiges of west African culture that survived in his Afro-Caribbean community of origin in St. Croix led him towards his self-identification as an 'untamed, untamable African'. This identity emerged, in part, thanks to his 'untamable' thirst for reading and learning about African peoples, including with like-minded independent Black scholars like Arturo Schomburg. All his intellectual and political endeavours building social movements seem to have strengthened his convictions about the need for global African self-determination and identity amongst Blacks in the diaspora. Therefore, in addition to all the other subjects he lectured freely on, he also became a fountainhead of African consciousness in Harlem.

In addition, Harrison gave voice to a new paradigm-shifting political approach towards the continent: radical humility. This political principle—that Blacks in the diaspora needed to *learn from*, rather than 'uplift' continental Africans—formed a break with the civilisationism of the nineteenth century that predominated within Black leaders from Ida B. Wells and Booker T. Washington to W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey.¹¹⁸ Harrison's position of humility towards Africa formed a contribution to New Negro thought as against its antecedents and many of its contemporaries. Harrison's International Colored Unity League, building on his experience in various movements and organisations including the UNIA, comprised a multi-dimensional and grassroots project for building pan-African unity and independence.

¹¹⁸ This is not to say that some of these figures did not eventually develop an African humility of their own over time. Du Bois, for example, articulated Harrison-like humility by 1922, and Marcus and Amy Jacques Garvey seem to have developed a more humble perspective toward African people by the late 1920s. See n. 85 and U.Y. Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*, (Chapel Hill, 2002).

By embracing African consciousness and a Black epistemology which looked to Africa as a source of pride and self-respect, Harrison set a precedent that would influence others in the years to come. Between the Liberty League, the *Voice*, the Liberty Congress, the Liberty Party, the street corner speaking of the ‘Outdoor University’, the rise of the Garvey movement, the tradition of independent Black scholarship and African consciousness, Harrison greatly influenced Harlem’s intellectual and political culture in his time. From Black communists like Cyril Briggs, Grace Campbell, and Richard B. Moore, to community-grounded pan-African street scholars like John Henrik Clarke and John G. Jackson, Harrison was a principal architect of a whole period of Black awakening that was commonly called the New Negro movement.

Unfortunately, for decades, the consensus interpretation of the New Negro movement was that it was an apolitical “Negro renaissance” (or “Harlem Renaissance”) of Black artistic and cultural output, dating from Alain Locke’s 1925 anthology *The New Negro*. How and why this fundamental historical revision happened, including Harrison’s deliberate erasure, is the subject to which I now turn.

Chapter 7

The Renaissance School of Negro History

Introduction

The New Negro movement in Harlem began with Harrison and the Liberty League's mass movement for Black empowerment that sparked a whole new era of Black political, intellectual, and organisational breakthroughs. However, this broad movement was replaced by talk of a "Negro renaissance" of arts and culture beginning with Alain Locke's 1925 edited anthology entitled *The New Negro*.¹ This anthology aimed to illuminate the "the Negro in his essential traits" as demonstrated by the contemporary short stories, poetry, and interpretive essays on Black music and culture that Locke compiled. "We speak," wrote Locke in the foreword, "of the offerings of this book embodying these ripening forces as culled from the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance."² As time would tell, Locke's interpretation of the *New Negro* as a 'Negro Renaissance' would not be the last time a 'renaissance' trope would over-write the New Negro movement that Harrison pioneered.

The civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s led, among other things, to renewed interest in the so-called 'New Negro renaissance' period of Black artistic cultural output in the 1920s. In particular, Harvard historian Nathan Huggins'

¹ A. Locke (ed.), *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, (New York, 1925).

² Ibid. p. xi.

1971 book *Harlem Renaissance* not only re-birthed interest in the non-threatening Black artistic output of the 1920s, but effectively re-branded it a *Harlem* (rather than ‘Negro’) Renaissance.³ This change both eschewed the out-dated term ‘Negro’ and further restricted what was originally understood as a national (and international) phenomenon to one only concerning a few dozen artists in upper Manhattan.⁴ In the 1980s, David Levering Lewis’ magisterial *When Harlem Was in Vogue* comprised a second down payment on the “Harlem renaissance” framework.⁵ Both Huggins and Lewis, taking their cue from Alain Locke, ignored or minimized the seminal role of Hubert Harrison and the Black radicalism of the pre-Lockean New Negro movement.

Historian Tony Martin contested the exclusion from the “Harlem renaissance” canon of numerous ‘race first’ and Garvey movement writers, including Harrison, who formed an integral part of the cultural and literary output of the period.⁶ At the same time, Martin overstated his case by speaking of the Garvey movement’s “initiation of the Harlem Renaissance” and offered little space for the role of left-wing politics in stimulating Black arts, culture, and radicalism.⁷ Moreover, by claiming space for Garveyites within the ‘renaissance’, Martin re-enforced a problematic framework that emerged, as we will see, precisely to erase the race- and class- radical origins of the New Negro movement, including Garveyism.

Beginning in the late 1990s, scholars began to point out how much the mainstream ‘renaissance’ framework elided the influence of Marxism on the literature of

³ N. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, (New York, 1971).

⁴ A. Pochmara, *The Making of the New Negro*, (Amsterdam, 2011).

⁵ D. L. Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, (New York, 1989, c1981).

⁶ T. Martin, *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Dover, 1983). T. Martin, *African Fundamentalism: A Literary and Cultural Anthology of Garvey’s Harlem Renaissance*, (Dover, 1991).

⁷ Martin, Tony. *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-Africanist, feminist, and Mrs. Marcus Garvey no. 1, or, A tale of two Amies*, (Dover, 2007), p. 98.

the ‘New Negro’ in the interwar period. William Maxwell, for example, lamented how Alain Locke’s de-politicised interpretation “has commanded the description, marketing, and consumption of Harlem’s renaissance for over seventy years and remains the proving ground for revisions of the movement’s history.”⁸ These scholars were right to criticise Locke for seeking to ‘banish the spectre’ of race and class radicalism from Afro-America, Yet their accounts make no mention of Hubert Harrison and therefore miss a key architect of the New Negro movement against which Locke’s intervention was directed.

Barbara Foley argued similarly that Locke’s approach shifted the popular conception of the New Negro movement away from its roots, “from politics to culture, self-determinationist militancy to quietistic pluralist patriotism.”⁹ But unlike Maxwell, she included a discussion of Hubert Harrison and the story of his erasure from Locke’s standard-bearing volume. Unfortunately, her focus on the politics of the white left allowed little space for the inclusion of Black (inter)nationalist and pan-African political movements, leading her to a misguided assessment of Harrison, to whom she attributed a biological-essentialist view of race.¹⁰

Interestingly, even those scholars who re-initialised Locke’s “renaissance” framework eventually came to agree with these critical assessments of it. David Levering Lewis, for example, eventually admitted that if one analyses the statements of Alain Locke or James Weldon Johnson critically, “the Harlem Renaissance reveals itself to be an elitist response on the part of a tiny group of mostly second-generation, college-

⁸ W. J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism Between the Wars*, (New York, 1999), Ch. 1. A. Dawahare. *Nationalism, Marxism, and African American Literature Between the Wars : A New Pandora's Box*, (Jackson, 2003), p. 30-31.

⁹ B. Foley, *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Urbana, 2003), p. 198-9.

¹⁰ Foley claims Harrison said race “does not change essentially with changes of economic system. It is deeper than any class feeling and will outlast the capitalist system.” This was, in fact, not a quote from Harrison but from the Majority Report of the Committee on Immigration from the Socialist Party’s 1912 national convention. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

educated, and generally affluent Afro-Americans—a response, first to the increasingly raw racism of the times, second to the frightening Black Zionism of the Garveyites, and, finally, to the remote, but no less frightening, appeal of Marxism.”¹¹ Lewis’ assessment of the “Harlem Renaissance” as an elitist and anti-radical project is authoritative, given that he wrote the standard-bearing history of it. Huggins allowed similarly that “of course, like other historical ‘watersheds’, the Harlem Renaissance is merely a convenient fiction.”¹² These passages vindicate those who criticised the “renaissance” trope as a problematic contrivance. Yet recently, despite wide acceptance of these criticisms, the ideological mortgage on the “Harlem Renaissance” was again refinanced.

In 2007, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett published an updated version of ‘renaissance’ anthology called *The New Negro*. They largely reproduced a Lockean conceptualisation, featuring subsections under the themes of Art, Renaissance, Literature, Poetry, Spirituals, Jazz, Theatre, and Fine Arts. Ironically, even Gates and Jarrett agreed with the standard critique of this framework, conceding that “Alain Locke’s appropriation of the [‘New Negro’] name in 1925 for his literary movement represented a measured co-opting of the term from its fairly radical political connotations, as defined in the *Messenger*, the *Crusader*,...[and] bold essays and editorials” of the post-World War I period.¹³ Yet if Locke’s appropriation of the “New Negro” trope for his literary movement represented ‘a measured co-opting of the term’ from its radical origins, then so too does Gates’ and Jarrett’s reprise. Although their anthology is more nuanced by including pieces from figures such as Marcus Garvey,

¹¹ Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, p. xv.

¹² N. Huggins (ed.), *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, (New York, 1995), p. 5.

¹³ H. L. Gates and G. A. Jarrett, *The New Negro*, (Princeton, 2007), p. 6.

Hubert Harrison, and Fannie Barrier Williams, Gates' and Jarrett's anthology comprises a fundamentally Lockean *redux*.

Recent contributions to the study of Black literature in the early twentieth century have broadened the range of artists, intellectual disciplines, and geographical regions comprising the 'Harlem renaissance' era and thereby expanded the framework which Locke's anthology set in motion.¹⁴ Yet these studies generally fail to mention Hubert Harrison and largely reprise the arts and letters emphasis of the 'Harlem renaissance' framework.

This analytical schizophrenia in the historiography reflects the contentious struggle over the substance and meaning of the Black awakening of the early twentieth century. As for why this matters, Anthony Dawahare hit the nail on the head in his contextualisation of Locke's 1925 intervention. "At stake was whether the black masses—many of whom were radicalized by the failed promises of World War I, the racist backlash of the Red Summer, and the political reverberations of the Bolshevik Revolution—would continue to support American capitalism or, conversely, embrace black nationalism or socialism as solutions to racism and class inequality in America."¹⁵ In other words, the same irreconcilable forces that contended for influence during the 1920s still feel "the deep emotional force [the New Negro] embodies, both for those

¹⁴ D. Chinitz. 'The New Harlem Renaissance Studies', *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (April 2006), pp. 375-382. J. V. Hatch, *Lost Plays of the Harlem Renaissance, 1920-1940*. (Detroit, 1996). D.M. Lamothe, *Inventing the New Negro: Narrative, Culture, and Ethnography* (Philadelphia, 2008). E.K. Watts, *Hearing the Hurt: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Politics of the New Negro Movement*, (Tuscaloosa, 2012). B.A. Glasrud and C.D. Wintz (eds.), *The Harlem Renaissance in the American West: The New Negro's Western Experience* (New York, 2012). G.A. Briggs, *The New Negro in the Old South* (Rutgers, 2015).

¹⁵ A. Dawahare, 'The Spectre of Radicalism in Alain Locke's *New Negro*', in B.V. Mullen and J. Smethurst (eds.), *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States*. (Chapel Hill, 2003), p. 68.

whose experience it was and for those of us who find in it an important moment of our past,” as historian Nathan Huggins put it.¹⁶

In this chapter, I argue that Harrison’s seminal role—both as pioneer of the New Negro movement *and* as one of the earliest and most forceful critics of the ‘renaissance’—poses fundamental questions about the very existence and meaning of the ideological framework that Locke’s *New Negro* set in motion. Harrison symbolised the race radicalism, coloured internationalism, armed self-defence, and anti-capitalism that animated so much of the response to the traumatic experience of lynching, Jim Crow, and a world war for “democracy” whose victorious homecoming precipitated a epidemic of American pogroms. Therefore, the erasure of his Black radicalism (among many others) comprised a conscious and deliberate re-writing of the history of the New Negro movement by Black elites and their white sponsors in order to turn a system-menacing, Black, working-class political awakening into a profitable, non-threatening, and middle-class artistic showcase.

To see this, I will first analyse the emergence of Alain Locke’s *New Negro* and the racial politics which drove its erasure of radical voices like Harrison’s. I then move to a discussion of Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven* and the specific role that Harrison’s review of the book played in the public controversy surrounding the book that ended up stimulating a new genre. Next, I will present Harrison’s critique of what he called the “Cabaret School of Negro Literature” and assess his provocative contention that “the matter of a Negro literary renaissance is like that of the snakes of Ireland—there isn’t

¹⁶ N. Huggins, N. Huggins (ed.), *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, (New York, 1995), p. 4.

any.”¹⁷ Finally, I complement Harrison’s estimate with a sketch of the lived experience of other ground-level Harlem artists and residents during the so-called ‘renaissance’.

Eliminating the “Old Protest Psychology”: Locke and the Survey Associates’ *New Negro*

In 1922, James Weldon Johnson articulated an ethos that would set the tone for much of the thought and activity of his social set in that decade. “Nothing will do more to change the mental attitude and raise [the Negro’s] status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through his production of literature and art.”¹⁸ This quote captures the essence of the thinking behind what would eventually become Alain Locke’s *New Negro* anthology: if Blacks could produce their own high art and literature to demonstrate their intellectual equality with whites, then a broader social equality would surely follow. Because of its long-term impact as a genre-defining book and its particular role in erasing Hubert Harrison from history, it is worth taking a closer look at Alain Locke and the politics behind the emergence of his fateful anthology.

Born into what he called the “smug gentility” of middle-class native Black Philadelphia in 1885, Alain LeRoy Locke’s upbringing was marked by what he called the “frantic respectability of the free, educated Negro tradition” that marked his parents’ “bulwark against proscription and prejudice.”¹⁹ After attending Central High School, one of the top secondary schools in the country, he earned a degree in philosophy from

¹⁷ H. Harrison, ‘“No Negro Literary Renaissance” Says Well-Known Writer’, *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 Mar 1927.

¹⁸ Quoted in Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p. xv.

¹⁹ L. Harris and C. Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: The Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago, 2008), p. 12.

Harvard University in 1907. After spending three years at the University of Oxford as the first African-American Rhodes Scholar, he undertook graduate studies at the University of Berlin. According to his biographers, “as far as the ‘talented tenth’ was concerned, Locke was exponentially more elite and educated.” He would make a career as a philosophy professor at Howard University after earning the nickname of the “Proust of Lenox Avenue” for his “effete European academic quality” and the “refined egotism at the heart of his endeavors.”²⁰ As the postwar militancy of the New Negro movement subsided, he would soon find a new evocation as a kind of national curator of Black artistic culture.

In the spring of 1924, a dinner sponsored by Charles Johnson and the National Urban League’s *Opportunity* magazine brought together Black artists in order to celebrate Jesse Fauset’s new novel *There is Confusion*. Along with up and coming young Black artists like Eric Waldron, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Gwendolyn Bennett, Johnson invited Hubert Harrison to this celebration event, but it is not clear whether Harrison ultimately attended.²¹ In any case, Alain Locke’s performance as master of ceremonies for the evening caught the attention of Paul Kellogg, the white editor of the philanthropic and social reform-minded *Survey Graphic* magazine.²² Kellogg was so impressed by the event that he subsequently convinced Locke to edit a special Harlem number of the *Survey Graphic* which they would publish the following year under the title “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro.”²³

²⁰ Ibid., p. 295, 2.

²¹ Johnson to Harrison. (13 Mar. 1924), HHP. 2.53.

²² Foley, *Spectres of 1919*, p. 205.

²³ ‘Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro’, *Survey Graphic* 53, no. 11, 1 Mar 1925.

In the months before its publication, Kellogg made clear the racial ethos that animated his vision of the special issue of the magazine. “We are striking out along new lines in this Harlem number; offering a new approach—different from the economic-educational approach of Hampton and Tuskegee on the one hand; and on the other hand, different from the political approach of the Negro rights, lynching, discrimination, and so forth.” The goal was to advance a new framework for racial progress based not on industrial education nor on political protest against racial oppression, but instead on cultural exchange through the medium of the arts. As Kellogg put it, he wanted to interpret “the affirmative genius of writers, thinkers, poets, artists, singers and musicians, which make for a new rapprochement between the races.”²⁴ The task was to present a “racial and cultural frontage” that was “affirmative, and nascent, different from the old protest psychology.”²⁵ *Different from the old protest psychology*. In other words, rather than the approach of a Robert Moton, W.E.B. Du Bois, Nannie Burroughs, or Hubert Harrison, carefully selected Black artists would comprise the new face of the solution to racial conflict.

Alain Locke, as a philosopher of value and connoisseur of art, concurred with Kellogg’s vision of a culture-based approach to racial problems. In Locke’s words, “the days of obstruction and oppression exist only in the reactionary minds and fevered imagination of political demagogues. The young Negro of today is interested not in race problems and race controversy, but in self-development and in releasing those latent spiritual gifts of art, of literature, music or what not which are in him.”²⁶ Given the postwar growth of such forces as the Black Marxism, the Garvey movement, and Black

²⁴ Kellogg to Locke, 5 Feb 1925. ALP Box 164-88, Folder 6.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ A. Locke, ‘correspondence with publisher’, (undated), ALP Box 164-122, folder 12.

women's activism, Locke's insistence that young Blacks were not interested in 'race problems' comes across as a projection of his own interests and what his biographers called his "strong sense of elitism," a quality that fitted with his 'respectable' and gentlemanly disinclination toward calling attention to racial oppression in ways that might make white people uncomfortable.²⁷ In Locke's words, "I would much prefer to see the black masses going gradually forward under the leadership of a recognized and representative and responsible elite than see a frustrated group of malcontents later hurl these masses at society in desperate strife."²⁸ As a member of the 'recognized and responsible elite' himself, Locke's interest in deploying Kellogg's "new racial and cultural frontage" as against the 'old protest psychology' undoubtedly flowed from his own privileged class position.

Another telling indicator as to the social forces supporting this 'new frontage' can be found in the elite backing that Kellogg's Harlem *Survey Graphic* received in the realm of distribution. For example, white philanthro-capitalists such as George Foster Peabody bought 1,000 copies to send to people "interested in the Negro problem" including missionaries in Africa. Joel and Amy Spingarn of the NAACP paid the cost of 1,000 copies for sending to students, and James Weldon Johnson sent it throughout his middle-class literary and social network.²⁹ Almost immediately after it came out, white publishing mogul Albert Boni signed a contract with Locke to make the Harlem number into a book with the hope, which proved successful, that it would be sent to every college

²⁷ L. Harris and C. Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: Biography of a Philosopher*, (Chicago, 2008), p. 11.

²⁸ A. Locke, 'The High Cost of Prejudice', *Forum*, LXXVIII (Dec. 1927), 501.

²⁹ Kellogg to Locke. 20 Mar 1925. ALP Box 164-88, Folder 6.

and library in the country.³⁰ By contrast, both of Hubert Harrison's books were published on tiny Harlem-based presses without the benefit of such a distribution network.

Such broad-based and elite support for Locke's work amounted to the anointment of not just the new dean of Black art critics, but of liberal white America's official *New Negro*. As Kellogg said in a letter to Locke on the eve of publication, "with Alain Locke spread all over the contents page I guess there will be no uncertainty in people's minds as to who is our star."³¹ This coronation of Locke as the poster boy for the 'New Negro Renaissance' would have long-reaching impact, including the historical effacement of the original New Negro *movement* and its pioneer.

In the pantheon of Locke and Boni's hand-picked representatives of the *New Negro*, Hubert Harrison bears the unique distinction of being deliberately edited out of the 'definitive' anthology not once, but twice. In particular, one of Locke's original outlines included a piece by Harrison, entitled "The White Man's War." Locke's description of this piece noted that it dealt with "the effect of the war upon the Negro, and the analysis of the disillusionment of the treatment inconsistent with the principles of democracy and self-determination, reaction among the generation that took part in it toward the church, the state, and capitalism."³² The piece did not make it into the *Survey Graphic*'s Harlem number, nor the *New Negro* book version. Kellogg, claimed that Harrison's piece had generated concerns at a staff meeting because it was "disproportionately long." But, as Barbara Foley pointed out, Harrison's contribution in fact had been accorded one of the shortest word limits (2,200 words) of all the pieces

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Kellogg to Locke. 20 Feb 1925.

³² A. Locke, 'The Survey Graphic Harlem Issue prospectus', ALP Box 164-115, folder 9.

under consideration. As she rightly argued, Harrison's radical indictment of such forces as the church, the state, and capitalism, "a word that would not make it into the *Survey Graphic*, much less *The New Negro*...was too much for Kellogg."³³

In the place of the 'White Man's War', another of Locke's draft outlines included an article called "The Negro and Radicalism" by Hubert Harrison, which was slated to cover "the normal Negro social temperament, the normal Negro social attitude, the reactions of protest, the points of radical indictment, the reaction of those masses to the radical, the attitude of radical organizations toward the Negro, Garveyism as race radicalism, forecast of the forces of agitation and protest." That not one but *two* pieces of Harrison's were considered and then discarded indicates that his omission was no accident. Harrison's elimination represented a larger neutering of key radical New Negro elements so that Kellogg's 'philanthropic' transcendence of the "old protest psychology" could retain full-spectrum dominance in the "new racial and cultural frontage."³⁴ In the book version, the white publisher cut Harrison not only from the literary selections (despite the inclusion of pieces by Kellogg himself and 'Old Crowd Negro' Tuskegee president Robert Moton), but the founder of the New Negro movement in Harlem and author of two books about it was nowhere to be found even in the extensive bibliography which concluded the anthology.

The omissions in Locke's collection reflect the economic and social forces that sought to channel the New Negro movement away from politically-subversive outlets like Garveyism or Marxism and toward apolitical expressions of Black art and culture. Thus in addition to omitting Harrison, *The New Negro* contains no selections from other

³³ Foley, *Spectres of 1919*, p. 225.

³⁴ A. Locke, (Notes on the *Survey Graphic* Harlem number), ALP, Folder 10.

militant New Negro movement figures such as A. Philip Randolph, Chandler Owen, Cyril Briggs, or Richard B. Moore. The anthology excluded activist women like Ida B. Wells, Grace Campbell, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Amy Jacques Garvey. He included no poems from the militant pen of a Lucian B. Watkins, Walter Everett Hawkins, or Andy Razaf, and the selections from Langston Hughes and Claude McKay were decidedly non-threatening. The most popular ‘New Negro’ internationally, Marcus Garvey, was also conspicuously absent.

The non-radicalism of the volume explains why the *New Negro* officially announced and funded by white publishing capital resonated so deeply with liberal white opinion of the day. Prominent journalist and social critic H.L. Mencken, for example, gushed of Locke’s *New Negro*, that the book was “a phenomenon of immense significance” because “what it represents is the American Negro’s final emancipation from his inferiority complex... That inferiority complex, until very recently, conditioned all his thinking, even (and perhaps especially) when he was bellowing most vociferously for his God-given rights.”³⁵ Similarly, the New York Times noted how in Locke’s volume, “the negro... is finding a new dignity in success that does not interfere with that of the whites, and is far more of an asset to the country than when he was a slave.”³⁶ Here the *Times* let slip an embarrassing but revealing assessment: Locke managed to showcase those Blacks who did even better for the country than their enslaved ancestors!

In the debate which emerged in the 1920s about the proper relationship between art and “propaganda” (then defined simply as information designed to influence opinion), Locke articulated a position against propaganda. In particular, Locke felt that Black art

³⁵ H.L. Mencken, ‘The New Negro,’ *American Mercury* (February 1926), Reviews of *New Negro*, ALP Box 164-122, Folder 19.

³⁶ New York Times book review, 20 Dec 1925, ALP Box 164-122, Folder 19.

should be free of propaganda which drew attention to racial oppression, on the grounds of its “besetting sin of monotony and disproportion” that inevitably “perpetuates the position of the group inferiority even in crying out against it.”³⁷ He disdained the way journals like *the Crisis* and *Opportunity*, which had been leading vehicles for Black artistic expression were at the same time “avowed organs of social movements and organized social programs.”³⁸ He wanted an artistic journal of “pure” art, free from any propaganda.

This “anti-propaganda” view reflected, in part, the distance between Locke’s social set and that of Black poor and working people. For example, Locke referred to the fact of Harlem’s being “swept by revolutionary oratory” as among those features that made the neighbourhood “grotesque with the distortions of journalism.”³⁹ This was not how everyday community members saw things. In particular, the Harlemites not educated at Harvard and Oxford who regularly partook of the ‘revolutionary oratory’ and wide-ranging intellectual culture at the cost-free Outdoor University certainly did not congregate in masses large enough to block traffic because they regarded the experience as “grotesque.”

Ultimately, one wonders to what extent northern white publishing capital anointed Locke precisely for his ability to cast a reactionary hostility to political protest in wistful and romantic tones. For example, Locke wondered, “is this more the generation of the prophet or that of the poet; shall our intellectual and cultural leadership preach and exhort or sing? I believe we are at that interesting moment when the prophet becomes the poet and when prophecy becomes the expressive song.” The notion of ‘the prophet’ becoming

³⁷ A. Locke, ‘Art or Propaganda?’, *Harlem* 1 (November 1928): 12.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ A. Locke, ‘Harlem’, *Survey Graphic* 53, no. 11 (March 1, 1925): 629-630.

an artist sounds alluring. However, Locke sought to avoid propaganda, feeling it to be self-defeating. He ultimately sought to replace “one-sided” propaganda with “Truth.” And, in his words, “If we can accomplish that, instead of having to hang our prophets, we can silence them or change their lamentations to song.”⁴⁰ Here, Locke wrongly assumes that community prophets were not interested in truth, and that the truth itself could not serve as valuable propaganda in a society based on lies. That the thought of ‘having to hang’ the Hubert Harrisons of the world would even cross Locke’s mind says much about his political and ideological distance from those who did not share his qualms about making a ‘one-sided’ case, for example, against the practice of ‘having to hang’ Black bodies like strange fruit.

From *New Negro* to New Genre: Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven*

The year after Locke’s *New Negro*, one of the most prominent white writers and celebrity cultural promoters of New York City, Carl Van Vechten, published a novel called *Nigger Heaven*. Thanks in part to its title, the book set off a larger debate about artistic depictions of Black life. Apart from fierce debate, the stir surrounding Van Vechten’s book ultimately helped to stimulate a new genre of literature that would come to be closely associated with the so-called ‘Negro renaissance’ which Locke’s *New Negro* had proclaimed. For that reason it is worth delving deeper into the controversy that erupted between critics of the book like Harrison and the white and Black reviewers who lauded it.

⁴⁰ Locke, ‘Art or Propaganda?’.

Harrison criticised the book on the grounds that he felt it comprised a “viciously false” depiction of the Harlem night life that the author sought to portray. Harrison noted that Van Vechten “was well and favourably known to Harlem’s new and nocturnal aristocracy,” and had been “wined and dined by the seekers after salvation by publicity, by the pundits of ‘advancement’ and by the white pen-pushers who manufacture retail prominence for the smart snotties of the New Renaissance—Negro type, model 1926.”⁴¹ Harrison’s saw Van Vechten as belonging to the coterie of white writers and cultural pundits who catered their publicity to a snobbish audience. His reference to the ‘New Renaissance—Negro type, model 1926’ and the manufacture of ‘retail prominence’ suggests he saw the hype surrounding the book as a commodity being packaged and sold to a particular social audience.

But his main problem with the book, apart from its offensive title and “faked nigger dialect,” was that it was a “cheap shoddy” with “neither atmosphere, depth nor character” whose “poor putty figures...are jerked by visible wires that are visibly rusty—and they creak so!” Though he believed the book to be a poor specimen of literary craftsmanship, Harrison did think Van Vechten had the capacity for more genuine literature as demonstrated by his previous works *Peter Whiffle*, *The Tattooed Countess*, and *The Blind Bow Boy*. And despite his criticisms of *Nigger Heaven*, Harrison hoped the book would spur the writers of Black literature to write “of the actual lives of actual Negroes in this Harlem, which has been suffering for six years from blasé neurotics whose Caucasian culture has petered out and who come to this corner of Manhattan for

⁴¹ H. Harrison, ‘Homo Africanus Harlemi, a review of *Nigger Heaven* by Carl Can Vechten’, *Amsterdam News*, (1 Sept. 1926).

pungent doses of unreality, such as we get in *Nigger Heaven*.”⁴² In other words, the book demonstrated for the aspiring Black novelist how *not* to write about Harlem and a call to action for more authentic artistic depictions of the community.

Harrison’s review in Harlem’s *Amsterdam News* devastated Van Vechten and, alongside negative reviews in Black papers like the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, helped set off a flurry of apologism from his supporters. According to historian Emily Bernard, Van Vechten was “crushed by the wave of denunciation” from Black critics and “was pained by the suggestion that he had betrayed the people he loved—Black people.” Van Vechten described Harrison’s review in particular as an “attack” which caused him to have nightmares about being “a Negro chased in riots.” Given the history of slavery, lynching, and recent epidemic of actual ‘Negroes chased in (white) riots’, one wonders if Van Vechten stopped to ponder his irony of his dream and its implications.

By contrast, most of the Black intellectuals of the ‘Negro renaissance’ persuasion raved about the book. Charles Johnson of *Opportunity* called the book “the first achievement of a novel of Negro life.” Nella Larsen of *the Crisis* wondered aloud, “why, oh why, couldn’t we have done something as big for ourselves?” James Weldon Johnson of the NAACP claimed that the author of *Nigger Heaven* had “achieved the most revealing significant and powerful novel based exclusively on Negro life yet written.”⁴³ Johnson even went so far as to defend the use of the n-word in the title, something which even Van Vechten admitted was a terrible insult when used by a white man.⁴⁴ There were

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ E. Bernard, *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance* (New Haven, 2012), p. 136, 146-7

⁴⁴ L. Coleman, *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Critical Assessment*, (New York, 1998), p. 111.

exceptions to this trend. Du Bois, for example, called the book “a blow in the face,” and both he and Black poet laureate Countee Cullen broke off personal relations with Van Vechten for a time.⁴⁵ But overall, the relatively elite circles in which Van Vechten had ensconced himself gave it a positive reception.

The primary reason for support on the part of this group concerns their elite social status. Two years before publishing *Nigger Heaven*, Van Vechten had taken to meeting Black artists and intellectuals and inviting them to multiracial parties where they could interact with white New York socialites. He had written articles in *Vanity Fair* and other publications extolling the virtues of his newest ‘discoveries’: spirituals, the Blues, poetry, the Black theatre. He promoted the work of Black artists like Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, Bessie Smith, Countee Cullen, Ethel Waters, and Paul Robeson. This earned him credibility as a booster of the ‘Negro Renaissance’ whose arrival Alain Locke’s *New Negro* had announced. When it came time for Van Vechten to publish a book about Black Harlem, he not only tapped people like Walter White and the NAACP to publicise it in advance, but sent out a questionnaire about Black literary representation and authenticity that was reprinted in *the Crisis*, stimulating a discussion that ensured his book a receptive and sympathetic audience. As one Van Vechten-sympathetic historian put it, literary reviewers like Walter White, Eric Walrond, Charles Johnson, and James Weldon Johnson “praised the novel as accurate and honest. Of course, they were all members of the Negro Renaissance.”⁴⁶

In fact, so many positive and glowing reviews of *Nigger Heaven* followed Harrison’s that he was moved to expand his ‘attack’ to include the positive reviewers

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 149, 129.

⁴⁶ Bernard, *Carl Van Vechten*, 83-103, 119.

themselves. Harry Hansen of the *New York World* and Mary White Ovington of the Socialist Party and NAACP, for example, both produced glowing reviews that also candidly admitted that they were unacquainted with its actual subject matter. Harrison's response was devastating. "Some white critics are not above surrendering themselves to 'the emotions of a cult' and endorsing something bizarre and 'exotic' just because it falls in with the present ephemeral jazz idea of what 'the Negro' is. That idea...is largely a conventionalized expression of their own inner need for a new evocation." He felt that there was a kind of white bonding in operation amongst these critics which caused them to review the novel favourably because of the way it confirmed their racial preconceptions about a neighbourhood they knew nothing about.⁴⁷

Harrison also critiqued Black intellectuals like James Weldon Johnson for his fulsome praise of the book. Johnson claimed that "the story comprehends nearly every phase of life in the Negro metropolis." Harrison contradicted this assertion, arguing that the story "doesn't even touch such vital and obtrusive 'phases of life' in the Negro metropolis as the churches and their influence, politics, the labour movement, the lodges and fraternalism, economic penetration by whites...prostitution, organized superstition, or the newspapers."⁴⁸ Harrison also suggested that Johnson's glowing review of *Nigger Heaven* was a product of being a close personal friend of Van Vechten's.

Because of its commercial success as a novel based on Harlem nightlife, Van Vechten's book, like his *Vanity Fair* articles before it, fuelled a certain mania among whites by whetting their appetite for more literature about 'the Negro'. For that reason, the book has sometimes been hailed as a work which, building on Locke's *New Negro*,

⁴⁷ H. Harrison, 'Nigger Heaven – A Review of the Reviews', *Amsterdam News* 13 Nov 1926.

⁴⁸ Harrison, 'Nigger Heaven – A Review of the Reviews'.

helped open the door to a new mass market for literature about Black life, stimulating a “renaissance” wherein artists like Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen, Rudolph Fisher, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and others were able, with the help of publicity gurus like Van Vechten, to gain a wider audience.⁴⁹ As historian Nathan Huggins argued, Black people in the 1920s were self-consciously new to the commercialised arts and they needed supporters, guides, and patrons from among those who knew how to navigate the white-dominated industry. In that sense, and to the extent that it led wider awareness of African Americans’ humanity, Van Vechten’s stimulation of white interest in Black life seemed a positive step forward.

At the same time, this newfound interest was not without its contradictory effects. Eventually, one had to ask the fateful question: “whose sensibilities, tastes, and interests were being served by such art, the patron or the patronized?”⁵⁰ Hubert Harrison shined a bright light on this question by analyzing the new genre of literature that *Nigger Heaven* stimulated. In so doing he raised an even deeper question about the meaning of the ‘Negro renaissance’.

The “Cabaret School of Negro Literature” and Harrison’s Case Against ‘Renaissance’

Was there a “Harlem Renaissance”? The standard view is that indeed there was a “Harlem renaissance” comprising a unique flowering of Black literary, visual, and

⁴⁹ Claude McKay spoke of the NAACP and their ilk as setting up a ‘Ministry of Culture’ for Afro-America. Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, p. 179.

⁵⁰ N. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, (Oxford, 2007), p. 128.

performing arts roughly between 1919 and the mid 1930s.⁵¹ However, Hubert Harrison was one of the first voices in Harlem to radically critique the way in which white people “discovered” and exploited Black arts for their own financial gain, enlisting Black intellectuals to help them sell it as a ‘renaissance.’ With great verve and candour, Harrison offered an analysis of the economic and social forces behind the emergence of the ‘renaissance’ trope, radically rejected the notion that a renaissance was underway, and expressed hopeful optimism that a more genuine flowering of Black arts would eventually emerge from the younger generation.

Harrison’s case started with a look at the context in which the so-called “renaissance” phenomenon arose. The 1920s began with deep sense of crisis in the world following the wanton destruction and instability detonated by World War I. Books like Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1918) articulated the same crisis which reflected itself in the new art forms. As Harrison put it, “art as related to life is dying down among the white race...Pictorially, they have been seeking salvation among ‘primitives,’ from the South seas to the Congo forests, as witness Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin, van Gogh...They go to China for card games, to Old Egypt for dress designs, to the orient for their ‘new’ religions and to the Negro ‘down South’ or in Harlem cabarets for the zip, pep and verve needed to make their literature and art stand up.”⁵² Western “civilisation” had lost its lustre so white artists and cultural producers looked to non-

⁵¹ David Levering Lewis offers 1919 to 1934. Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, p. xvi. For Nathaniel Huggins it was “between World War I and the Great Depression.” Huggins, *Voices From the Harlem Renaissance*, p. 3. George Hutchinson periodises it from 1918 to 1937. G. Hutchinson, *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, (Cambridge, 2007), p. 7.

⁵² H. Harrison, ‘Cabaret School of Negro Writers Does Not Represent One-Tenth of Race: Dr. Hubert H. Harrison Takes Shot at ‘Midnight Maniacs from Greenwich Village’ in Article’, *Pittsburgh Courier*, 28 May 1927, re-printed in Perry, *HHR*, p. 355.

white peoples for inspiration, leading to a spike of white interest in Black culture during the 1920s.

Harrison analysed the Harlem experience in terms of the American tradition of minstrelsy and Black people as objects of entertainment. “When these whites seeking local (and other) colour, first ‘discovered’ the Negro they came to Harlem...with certain ‘fixations’ about the Negro in their minds, the most basic of which was the characteristic American one that he existed to furnish entertainment to others.” He also pointed out the essentialising nature of the white gaze. “Whatever about [the Negro] was quaint, queer, odd, bizarre and different was seized upon as the essential he, the ‘real’ Negro, the thing for which white editors, publishers and readers had been waiting all these years.”

Harrison located the site of this ‘discovering’ in the cabaret, and if the cabaret or Harlem dive bar was the “easiest point of contact for these discoverers of ‘The New Negro’,” then the whole conception of white writers and tourists in Harlem would tend to result in a narrow, distorted, and exoticised conception of Black people.⁵³

Indeed, white cultural producers did write books (like *Nigger Heaven*) which propagated reductive caricatures of Harlem life. In turn, the interests of white publishers and the audience they catered to led Black artists to exploit negative stereotypes of their own community for commercial gain. And, explained Harrison, “as soon as the resultant ‘stuff’ began to sell, the colored cognoscenti, Harlem’s high intelligentsia, flocked to the new centres of cultural exposition like a swarm of bees, and, in order that they might ‘get in on the graft’ and sell their ‘stuff’ downtown, they laid themselves out to attain the imitation which is the most fruitful form of flattery.” In other words, Black intellectuals started producing paintings, novels, magazine illustrations, poems, and plays which

⁵³ Harrison, ‘Cabaret School of Negro Writers Does Not Represent One-Tenth of Race’.

catered to white tourist experience and pre-conception of cabaret life in Harlem.

Ironically, the Black artist who re-produced distorted white cultural stereotypes remained “unconscious of the fact that he is giving creative inspiration to the whites when he starts...to imitate from them their imitation of him.” Here Harrison suggests that some Black artists ended up becoming caricatures of themselves as they were drawn into the process of catering to the exotic fetishism of white audiences.⁵⁴

As a result of this curiously-contrived new market for the arts and culture industry, the Black intelligentsia became a contractor and conduit for white exploitation of Harlem night life. According to Harrison, they opened up Harlem to “the official expositors” and even “competed for the honour of entertaining them and shepherded their guests about Harlem with the air of exclusive proprietors.” Soon enough, “cabaret parties became the order of the night, and at the cabarets the colored cognoscenti soon learned to see with the eyes of the angels whom they were entertaining.” Thus, the prejudiced white gaze elicited a kind of evil twin in its middle-class Black caretakers who judged their own legitimacy under the rubric of white approval and therefore came to see Harlem in the refracted white light of their paymasters.⁵⁵

Harrison felt that these “grotesque antics” of inebriated tourists ushered around Harlem by the ‘colored cognoscenti’ are what ultimately “furnished the aesthetic principles upon which a ‘new’ art of the New Negro was predicated.” This took many forms, ranging from portrait painting and magazine illustrations to fiction and poetry. “Oddly enough,” he remarked, the new trend did not catch on in the Black press, but instead within “race” magazines like *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*, which derived their

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

prestige “wholly or in part from the white world,” and therefore “cheerfully transformed themselves into official vehicles for the exposition of these new principles.”⁵⁶ Here, he subtly gestured toward forces like Walter White and the NAACP’s promotion and celebration of *Nigger Heaven*.

While Harrison clearly found this situation objectionable, he perceived an even deeper problem in the way in which the ‘new art’ propagated a negative view not only of Harlem, but of Black people as a whole. What Harrison dubbed the “Cabaret School of Negro Literature” became known for its coarse vulgarity and foul language, a characteristic he felt was “imitated from its Greenwich Village godfathers.” The result was that both white audiences and Black intellectuals mistook “the language of the gutter for the language of the common people,” which Harrison felt exacerbated the popular tendency to “identify Negro-ness with nastiness” and reflected poorly on people of African descent.⁵⁷

Some defenders of this ‘Cabaret School’ genuinely believed that their cultural and artistic output expressed the lived reality of poor and working-class Black Harlemites. Harrison responded to this claim directly. “It is a poor defence to hide behind the claim of representing the humbler elements of society. For, in the first place, the real representation of these elements among us is still left to white writers who attempt it with artistic seriousness—like [Thomas] Stribling, [Eugene] O’Neill, Paul Green, Mrs. [Julia] Peterkin and DuBose Hayward.” He felt these white writers captured Black life sincerely without resort to the crass portrayals of the ‘Cabaret School.’ Moreover, argued Harrison, the exemplary Black writers of humble origin like John Bunyan, Robert Burns, Gerald

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Massey, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and Claude] McKay “have not been notorious for vulgarity.” Therefore, the idea that vulgarity corresponded to Black working-class life was inaccurate and furthering harmful stereotypes.⁵⁸

Harrison’s disdain for the corrupting influence of the “midnight maniacs from downtown” and their “colored Brahmins” formed the basis of his objection to the notion that the Cabaret School of Negro Literature and the fanfare surrounding it represented a genuine renaissance. For starters, he argued that the existence of a “renaissance” would imply that the 1920s had produced more or better Black literature than the decades preceding it, which he could not permit. In Harrison’s words, “those who think that there is [a Negro literary renaissance] are usually people who are blissfully ignorant of the stream of literary and artistic products which have flowed uninterruptedly from Negro writers from 1850 to the present.”⁵⁹

As against the ‘blissfully ignorant,’ he offered examples of notable Black literary works which had escaped the “renaissance” trumpeters, including *The American Cavalryman* by Henry Francis Downing, *The Leopard’s Claw* by George Ellis, *Veiled Aristocrats* by Gertrude Sanborn, *The Vengeance of the Gods* by William Pickens, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers* by Charles Williams, *Two Colored Women with the A.E.F* by Addie Hunton and Kathryn Johnson. In light of the historical works by Joseph T. Wilson, George Williams, William C. Neill, William Wells Brown, Rufus L. Perry, Atticus G. Haygood, the essays of T. Thomas Fortune, and the fictional writings of Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Charles Chesnutt, Harrison suggested that if you asked the ‘renaissance’ acolytes about these

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ H. Harrison, “‘No Negro Literary Renaissance’ Says Well-Known Writer’, *Pittsburgh Courier*, (12 Mar, 1927).

authors, “they stammer and evade to cover up their confusion.” For Harrison, these authors exemplified the ‘uninterrupted stream’ of Black literature from the mid nineteenth century to 1920 that flew in the face of the notion that the writing of the 1920s represented something special enough to be called a ‘renaissance.’

To emphasize that it wasn’t just lay readers who were ignorant of the vast range of pre-1920s Black literature, he cited Du Bois’ 1905 *A Select Bibliography of the Negro American*, which made no mention of Charles Chesnutt, despite Chestnutt’s having already published four novels at that time. This exemplified a larger behavioural pattern of what Harrison called the “guardians of the gate” who he felt were not knowledgeable or independent-minded enough to recognise brilliant Black artists without that artist first being recognised by cultured white opinion. As Harrison put it, “from Dunbar to Countee Cullen, from James Edwin Campbell to Claude McKay, Hughes and Toomer...every Negro of real or alleged merit in literature or any other art has had to be first pointed out by white critical opinion before these hounds of spring could bay upon the trail.”⁶⁰ The result was that the “causal discoverer thinks that the stream of Negro literary production bubbled up at the precise point that he discovered it.”⁶¹ Because Black elites like Du Bois depended on white sponsorship for their existence, they acted as a rubber stamp by validating only those artists who white “discoverers” had first deemed worthy of promotion.

So confident was Harrison in his claim that there was no real renaissance underway that he threw down a challenge to the general public. “If anyone... should care to pick any decade between 1850 and 1910, I will undertake to present from among the

⁶⁰ H. Harrison, ‘Nigger Heaven—A Review of the Reviews’, *Amsterdam News*, 13 Nov 1926.

⁶¹ Harrison, ““No Negro Literary Renaissance” Says Well-Known Writer’.

Negroes of that decade as many writers and (with Schomburg to back me) as many lines of literary and artistic endeavour as he can show for this decade. And I go further! I will also undertake to show (with perhaps three exceptions) more able Negro writers for any decade in that period than can be found today.”⁶² If there was indeed nothing special about the 1920s, compared to previous decades, then the ‘renaissance’ notion would be exposed as a passing fad or shallow marketing strategy. Considering that Harrison developed one of the leading Black intellectual forums in the world, initiated the first regular book review column as editor of the *Negro World*, and that Schomburg knew eight or ten times more about African history and Black literature than Harrison (according to Harrison), it was a mighty dare.⁶³

Only one person responded.

One John P. Davis of Cambridge, Massachusetts responded to Harrison’s challenge. Davis argued that “the publication of novels, books of poetry, plays, historical treatises, and books on Negro folks songs—written by Negroes is unparalleled by any previous decade in American Life,” repeating the mainstream pro-‘renaissance’ consensus without offering any evidence for it. He acknowledged that “of course, quantity does not necessarily imply quality” but maintained that “the most profound chauvinist cannot justly claim for the works of Phyllis Wheatley the same prominence as for those of Countee Cullen.”⁶⁴ Wheatley, who was born in west Africa in the mid-18th century and survived the unspeakable horrors of the so-called “Middle Passage” only to be enslaved in Massachusetts, became the first published Black female poet in US

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Perry, *HHR*, p. 291.

⁶⁴ J.P. Davis, ‘No Negro Renaissance?’ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 2 April 1927.

history.⁶⁵ Cullen, by contrast, was not only a twentieth century free-born African-American, but he completed high school in New York City, a bachelor's degree at NYU, and a master's degree in English at Harvard. Given their radically different life contexts, comparing Wheatley to Cullen is a project of questionable propriety, but comparing her *unfavorably* to him suggested that perhaps Davis himself was the 'profound chauvinist.' By acknowledging that quantity did not equal quality yet offering only a profoundly chauvinist argument on qualitative supremacy of 1920s Black literature, Davis failed to answer the existential challenge Harrison posed about whether there was actually a literary 'renaissance' underway.

Harrison conclude, "the matter of a Negro literary renaissance is like that of the snakes of Ireland—there isn't any."⁶⁶ The whole notion of a Black "renaissance" was a concoction produced by an unholy alliance of what Zora Neale Hurston dubbed white "Negrotarians"⁶⁷ who specialised in patronising 'the Negro artist' and their Black intellectual "Niggerati" collaborators.⁶⁸ While the number of Black writers who received mainstream publishing deals did increase steadily in the 1920s, Harrison was concerned not so much with quantity but quality. His main problem seems to have been the question of whose interest the publishing industry's 'discovery of the Negro' was ultimately working.

Although Harrison explicitly argued against the existence of a 'Negro Renaissance,' he simultaneously and prophetically foreshadowed the growth of higher

⁶⁵ H.L. Gates, *Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America's Second Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers*, (New York, 2003).

⁶⁶ Harrison, '“No Negro Literary Renaissance” Says Well-Known Writer’.

⁶⁷ W. Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, (New York, 1932), p. 85.

⁶⁸ Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, p. 175. Lewis himself identified six figures who fit this description: James Weldon Johnson, Jessie Fauset, Charles Johnson, Walter White, Alain Locke, and Casper Holstein. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

quality Black arts in the years to come. “Within the next ten years,” he ventured, “the froth will be blown off the tankard and we will lift to our lips the real beer of literature with life in it, with snap and tang and color, brewed by Negro writers freed from the leading-strings of Greenwich Village neurotics, who like Van Vechten, mistake near-beer for the genuine lager.”⁶⁹

This is not a conservative or pessimistic attitude. On the contrary. If there was to be a Negro Renaissance, it would come to fruition by younger Black writers who would create works of art which treated Black life more respectfully. For this reason, he supported and helped promote artists like Augusta Savage, Andy Razaf, Lucien Watkins, Charles Glipin, Claude McKay, and Eubie Blake.⁷⁰ In fact, according to Harlem resident Oscar Benson, Harrison “was always willing to help or encourage a young writer or speaker.”⁷¹ Harrison predicted that “some time soon there will be a genuine literary renaissance” because the opportunity to represent the “nine-tenths” of Black life left out by the Cabaret School was “still open for true creative artists from the younger generation of Negroes.”⁷²

Working-Class Harlem and the ‘Renaissance’ Industry

Harrison’s critique of the ‘renaissance’ might have been among the first of its kind, but certainly was not the last. Langston Hughes, for example, joked in his autobiography about how some Black people thought the race problem had at last been

⁶⁹ Harrison, ‘Nigger Heaven—A Review of the Reviews’.

⁷⁰ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 6.

⁷¹ O. Benson, ‘Literary Genius of Hubert Harrison,’ *NY News*, 24 Dec 1927.

⁷² Harrison, ‘‘No Negro Literary Renaissance’ Says Well-Known Writer’. Harrison, ‘Cabaret School of Negro Writers Does Not Represent One-Tenth of Race’.

solved through the tolerance created by the artistry of people like Cullen, McKay, Gladys Bentley, and Alain Locke. “I don’t know what made any Negroes think that,” wrote Hughes, “except that they were mostly intellectuals doing the thinking.”⁷³ Sterling Brown hesitated to use the term ‘renaissance’ on the grounds that the “five or eight years generally allotted are short for the lifespan of any ‘renaissance’” and Harlem was a “cashier’s till” that did not represent the rest of Black America.⁷⁴ Young writer and ‘renaissance’ participant Wallace Thurman eventually wrote a novel criticising the white ‘Negrotarians’, thrill-seeking tourists, the ‘Niggerati’, and self-interested Black artists who sold themselves and the respect of their race for the ‘renaissance’ craze.⁷⁵ Claude McKay, the queer, Black, Marxist, Jamaican-born delegate to the fourth congress of the Comintern in Moscow and who penned the poetic anthem of the New Negro movement, recoiled at Locke’s diluting of his poetry submissions for the *New Negro* anthology, remarking how he “couldn’t imagine such a man[Locke] as the leader of a renaissance, when his artistic outlook was so reactionary.”⁷⁶

Critiques of this sort raise the question of how and why the ‘renaissance’ took shape in the way that it did, and who benefitted from it. Thurman pointed out how the focus of the ‘Renaissance’ on narrow slice of Black Harlem artists may have increased their own visibility and prestige, but in so doing it left behind the rest of the community. He pointed out that there were tens of thousands of Black people in Harlem, yet “it is fashionable only to take notice of a bare thousand...the cabaret entertainers, the actors,

⁷³ L. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, (New York, 1940), p. 228.

⁷⁴ S. A. Brown, ‘The New Negro in Literature (1925-1955)’, *The New Negro Thirty Years Afterward: Papers Contributed to the Sixteenth Annual Spring Conference of the Division of the Social Sciences*, (Washington D.C., 1955), p. 57.

⁷⁵ Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*.

⁷⁶ C. McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (New York, 2007 c1937), p. 241.

the musicians, the artists, and the colorful minority who drift from rent party to speakeasy to side-street dives. The rest are ignored...because we live in an age when only the abnormal is interesting.”⁷⁷ Spoken through a fictional character in Thurman’s novel *Infants of the Spring*, this comment highlighted anxiety in the community about the exoticism which so often drove whites to seek nighttime adventures uptown while ignoring the larger community.

Young Harlem resident Arthur Davis, who was a university student in the 1920s, sounded a similar criticism of the “renaissance” architects: the way they overlooked the role of local institutions in Harlem’s rich cultural life. For example, the 135th Street branch of the New York Public Library, under the direction of Ernestine Rose, featured “an intelligent and efficient group of young Negro and white librarians [that] made the branch a cultural center for the Harlem Community.”⁷⁸ Then, as now, one could find exhibitions of African art alongside the work of young Black painters and sculptors. Moreover, as Davis recalled, “attached to the branch as a kind of unofficial lecturer-in-residence was Hubert Harrison, the Dean of the Harlem Street Orators. A rather formal black man with a broad West Indian accent...he was fascinating and versatile speaker, taking all subjects for his province—politics, religion, the race problem, colonialism, literature—and handling them all with equal facility and ease.”⁷⁹ The decision of ‘renaissance’ architects to ignore local fixtures of Harlem’s intellectual culture like the 135th street library and “Outdoor University” suggests they were only interested in what could be made profitable or sold to white commercial audiences.

⁷⁷ Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, p. 137.

⁷⁸ A. Davis, ‘Growing up in the New Negro Renaissance’, reprinted in *Cavalcade: Negro American Writing from 1760 to the Present* (Boston, 1971), p. 435.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 435-436.

Black Harlem community residents, on the other hand, often had a less transactional and more organic relationship to the Black arts. Davis reminisced, for example, about how “the jazz musician and the blues singer, blowing and singing their respective ‘racial’ hearts out, became popular symbols in New Negro poetry, but as I recall the twenties, I realize that we didn’t talk in daily conversation about these performers in that light. For one thing, we hadn’t then ‘intellectualized’ jazz and the blues...we enjoyed them and took them in our stride.”⁸⁰ *Took them in our stride*. In other words, folks embodied Black culture. For the bellhops, porters, domestics, cooks, messengers, and elevator operators, the creative expression of Black musicians, painters, sculptors, actors, playwrights, singers, poets, dancers, novelists, and street corner orators was something to be enjoyed as part of affirming one’s own being and community: *living Blackness* from the inside, rather than consuming it from without. For ordinary people, recalled Davis, Harlem “was not the phony exotic primitivism which the white folks came uptown nightly to find in cabarets and other hot spots. Our enjoyment was in part the pride of having a city of our very own—a city of black intellectuals and artists, of peasants just up from the South, of West Indians and Africans, of Negroes of all kinds and classes.”⁸¹

Speaking of classes, Langston Hughes went to the root of the economic contradictions of the ‘renaissance’ and relationship to working-class Harlemites. “The ordinary Negroes hadn’t heard of the Negro Renaissance. And if they had, it hadn’t raised their wages any.”⁸² Hughes then noted, for example, how Black Harlemites didn’t like certain places like the Cotton Club which had a ‘Jim Crow’ policy of excluding Black

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 432.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² L. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, p. 228.

patrons in order to maintain a white bourgeois clientele. “Nor did ordinary Negroes like the growing influx of whites toward Harlem after sundown,” recalled Hughes, “flooding the little cabarets and bars where formerly only colored people laughed and sang, and where now the strangers were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers—like amusing animals in a zoo.”⁸³ Here Hughes points to the distorted picture of the community that he felt many outsiders experienced as ‘the Negro in its Harlem habitat.’ Of course, African-Americans could not even patronise white clubs downtown, let alone sit and gawk at the European-descended people in them.

Over time, those who lived in Harlem got tired of “all those white folks in the speakeasies and night clubs” and started to see if they “could find *some* place to have a drink that the tourists hadn’t yet discovered.”⁸⁴ This led to the rise of house parties which offered a more affordable nighttime social space free from the gaze of outsiders. Given that some 48 percent of Harlem renters spent more than twice as much of their income on rent as their white counterparts, the phenomenon of rent parties emerged to offered a chance for tenants to socialise and pay the bills at the same time.⁸⁵ Not to mention that in these settings, one could “do the black-bottom with no stranger behind you trying to do it, too.”⁸⁶

From Hughes’ perspective, there was a tension between ordinary Harlemites and the industry that sprung up from the sudden white interest in the ‘Negro renaissance.’ In his words, “non-theatrical, non-intellectual Harlem was an unwilling victim of its own vogue. It didn’t like to be stared at by white folks. But perhaps the downtowners never

⁸³ Ibid., p. 225

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 228.

⁸⁵ Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, p. 108.

⁸⁶ Hughes, *The Big Sea* p. 229.

knew this—for the cabaret owners, the entertainers, and the speakeasy proprietors treated them fine—as long as they paid.”⁸⁷ Hughes description of non-elite Harlem as ‘victim’ of the vogue points to the class contradictions between those who profited economically from artistic and entertainment industry Black labour and those who had to put up with a constant influx of tourists from downtown.

This observation speaks to the financial flows of the “two Harlems” that I mentioned in the introductory chapter. As a keen observer who lived right in the center of the neighborhood (134th street between Seventh and Lenox Avenues), Hubert Harrison noted how on weekdays a tide of Black folks went out of Harlem to work while a “thin stream” of white immigration flowed in to manage their daytime businesses. Then on Saturday nights the “returning colored flood” swept back into Harlem with its wages, but most of that money would also flow out with another “thin white tide” on account of who owned the businesses. He deplored how none of the outgoing money was available economic structures in Harlem that would encourage the ambitions of Black youth because it all ended up in white pockets.⁸⁸

Meanwhile, he noted, “the bank that collects our savings lends them out to white men to fertilize white business in our midst and will not lend them to Negroes to fertilize Negro business.”⁸⁹ To make matters worse, while Black-owned businesses struggled, Harrison observed, “the business that panders to ephemeral pleasure flourishes in our faces. They are the poolrooms, the night clubs and cabarets, the dance halls, the numbers,

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 88. Perry called it the “most densely populated block” of Harlem. J.M. Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana, 2005), p. 28.

⁸⁹ H. Harrison, ‘The Roots of Power’, *Boston Chronicle*, 21 June 1924, reprinted in Perry, *HHR*, p. 405.

the Italian rum shops,” which all made money for their owners.⁹⁰ Claude McKay made a similar observation when he noted how “the saloons were run by the Irish, the restaurants by the Greeks, the ice and fruit stands by the Italians, the grocery and haberdashery stores by the Jews.” The only viable Black businesses he saw, besides barber shops, were the churches and the cabarets.⁹¹ So while there were some Black cabaret owners who benefitted economically from the night time exploits of white visitors and the ‘Negro renaissance’ they read about, it was not enough of an economic base to drive empowering or sustainable development.

The domination and exploitation of Black Harlem by white capital formed a crucial backdrop to the “renaissance” phenomenon. In this context, it was not difficult to see that the ‘Negro Renaissance’ industry—like so many other white-owned businesses—did not empower the community. As Harrison put it, “this ‘Negro literary renaissance’ has its existence at present only in the noxious night life of Greenwich Village neurotics who invented it, not for the black brothers’ profit but for their own.”⁹²

To his credit, even the ‘reactionary’ Alain Locke himself developed a critical appraisal of the phenomenon launched, in part, by his *New Negro*. Reflecting in 1928 in *Opportunity* magazine, he no longer spoke of a ‘Negro renaissance’ but instead a “Negrophile movement” whose “proportions show the typical curve of a major American fad.”⁹³ Even worse, explained Locke, “there is inevitable distortion under the hectic interest and forcing of the present vogue for Negro idioms...to get above ground, much

⁹⁰ H. Harrison, ‘Harlem’s Neglected Opportunities: Twin Source of Gin and Genius, Poetry and Pajama Parties’, *Amsterdam News*, 30 Nov 1927.

⁹¹ McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, p. 43.

⁹² H. Harrison, ‘“No Negro Literary Renaissance” Says Well-Known Writer’, *Pittsburgh Courier*, (12 March 1927).

⁹³ A. Locke, ‘1928: A Retrospective Review’, *Opportunity*, Jan 1929, reprinted in T. Vincent, *Voices of a Black Nation* (San Francisco, 1973), p. 353-6.

forcing has had to be endured; to win a hearing, much exploitation has had to be tolerated. There is as much spiritual bondage in these things as there ever was material bondage in slavery.”⁹⁴ Here, Locke seems to have adopted a view similar to that of the *New York Times* assessment of his *New Negro*. Namely, that slavery formed the best standard of comparison for what the ‘present vogue’ was all about. Given Locke’s role as “midwife” of the ‘New Negro renaissance’, his criticism represented a damning indictment of the ‘major American fad’ that he once championed so enthusiastically.

Following Harrison, Alain Locke did eventually conclude that the future held better prospects for Black literature. Writing of the thousands of people who were “under the spell” of a “Negrophile movement,” Locke argued that the trendy “American fad” would not be recognized as such until a clearing away of the inauthentic could take place, a process which was necessary however painful it might be. “In this, as with many another boom, the water will need to be squeezed out of much inflated stock and many bubbles must burst... The real significance and potential power of the Negro renaissance may not reveal itself until after this reaction, and the entire topsoil of contemporary Negro expression may need to be ploughed completely under for a second hardier and richer crop.”⁹⁵ Locke’s suggestion that the ‘topsoil’ be ploughed under sounds remarkably similar to Harrison’s metaphor the previous year about ‘blowing the froth off the tankard’ in order to get to the ‘real beer of literature.’ Whether or not Locke took stock of Harrison’s writings in formulating his own analysis, both thinkers expressed a desire to see the vacuous artistic elements (i.e. the ‘Cabaret School’) discarded and a richer, more genuine creative expression take root.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion

The “Harlem Renaissance” framework represents a retroactive rebranding of Locke’s ‘Negro renaissance’, as initiated by his *New Negro* anthology, which was itself a revisionist erasure and replacement of the New Negro *movement* whose Harlem sector comprised the “fountainhead” of Black radicalism in the country. Hubert Harrison embodied, developed, and consistently led the Harlem-based section of an international awakening in political consciousness among the “darker races” of the world. By 1925 however, white publishing capital and its Black subcontractors had determined that was all now an ‘old protest psychology’, which needed to be overcome through the ‘new racial and cultural frontage’ of the arts. This racial-progress-from-‘non-threatening’-arts framework—originating in figures like James Weldon Johnson, Paul Kellogg, and Alain Locke—was problematic for many reasons.

First, the notion that the *New Negro* anthology or *Nigger Heaven* were watershed moments in a larger ‘renaissance’ wrongly assumed that no literary work of comparable value had been produced prior to the 1920s. Yet self-taught Black community intellectual workers like Hubert Harrison and Arthur Schomburg could offer as many, if not more quality literary works from any decade before the 1920s to disprove this assumption.⁹⁶ Second, as Black studies scholar Perry A. Hall pointed out, the privileging of literary works over other art forms (e.g. the oral tradition of the Outdoor University or female blues singers) was itself a white and masculinist standard against which to measure racial

⁹⁶ For the concept of ‘organic intellectuals’, see A. Gramsci, Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York, 1971): 5-6.

advancement, which assumed that Black people must attain such narrow standards in order to be considered equal to whites.⁹⁷ Third, the cultural framework of racial progress was elitist, because the focus on arts, particularly the ‘high art’ of literary production, tended to privilege those with university-level education or with a level of spare time (thanks to white sponsors like Charlotte Mason), to which the vast majority of African-Americans did not have access.

Of course, the framers could not have sold their product without the historical, racial, gendered, and class-defined blindspots behind which lurked the deliberative suppression of the Black political awakening of Harrison’s New Negro movement. After all, the contestation at hand was not one of art versus propaganda. This dichotomy assumes that art and propaganda are not inextricably linked. However, as W.E.B. Du Bois pointed out, “*all* art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists.”⁹⁸ Indeed, if art is not propaganda for social change then it all too often becomes propaganda for the perpetuation (or exacerbation) of the status quo. “Pure” art, conceived as art without political consequences, is not possible in an era when lynching, pogroms, and Jim Crow reigned supreme because “you can’t be neutral on a moving train,” as historian Howard Zinn put it.⁹⁹

Obviously, Locke and his collaborators did not marginalise Black socialist and communist voices, Black women’s activism, or Black (inter)nationalism through state or extrajudicial repression. Instead of ‘having to hang the prophets’ of these social movements, Locke and the white culture industry capital that coronated him found a way

⁹⁷ P.A. Hall, ‘Perspectives on Interwar Culture: Remapping the New Negro Era’, in J.O.G. Ogbar (ed.), *Harlem Renaissance Revisited: Politics, Arts, and Letters* (Baltimore, 2010).

⁹⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘Criteria of Negro Art’, *The Crisis*, Vol. 32, October 1926: pp. 290-297.

⁹⁹ H. Zinn, *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times*, (Boston, 2002).

to marginalise all the art, literature, music, and culture to which they gave rise, advancing one-sided artistic propaganda of their own—as against ‘the old protest psychology.’

To be sure, doing away with Black political consciousness was not an easy task. The international economic and social order underwent a deep crisis of legitimacy in the aftermath of the convulsions of the “white world war” and the global reverberations of the Russian revolution. In the US context, a generation of African-Americans not only took up arms to defend themselves from lynching and the epidemic of pogroms before, during, and after the “Red Summer” of 1919. They also underwent world-historic changes in social, intellectual, and political consciousness.

International valences of a concurrent historical turn in European radicalism offer a useful point of comparison here, however imperfect the analogy. Following the radically-democratic Russian Revolution of 1917, the anti-democratic Stalinist bureaucracy that came to prominence in the 1920s imposed a counter-revolution in the name of the very socialist revolution it was strangling.¹⁰⁰ It scarcely could have attained complete hegemony without obliterating Leon Trotsky and a whole generation of “Old Bolsheviks” like Gregory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, and so many others from history and memory.

In a similar way, following the radical New Negro movement of 1917, the anti-radical Renaissance Industry that came to prominence in the 1920s imposed a counter-revolution in the name of the very New Negro movement it was strangling. It scarcely could have attained hegemony without obliterating Hubert Harrison and a whole

¹⁰⁰ L. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is It Going?* (New York, 1937).

generation of “New Negroes” like Marcus Garvey, Grace Campbell, Richard B. Moore, and so many others from history and memory.

Of course, the trajectory of a nation-wide workers’ and peasants revolution that would shape the history and fate of some 130 million people in the Russian-speaking world does not compare, numerically speaking, to the situation of 12 million African-Americans. But the New Negro movement and the Russian Revolution were both part of the same world-historic process of international political radicalisation detonated by the inter-imperialist ‘white world war’.

In this context, the decision to hail works like *Nigger Heaven* reflected a strategy wherein elites could divert attention from such issues as racial oppression, class inequality, and colonial domination. It would not be the last time. The Black awakening of the 1960s, like its New Negro movement predecessor, was largely driven by a reaction to racial oppression, class inequality, and imperial domination. Among other things, it led to renewed interest in the artistic output of the 1920s amongst the same kinds of people to whom the ‘Negro Renaissance’ originally appealed—and probably for the same reason: as an intellectual and political escape hatch from the militant social struggle of recent years. Beginning in the 1970s, a vast scholarly literature has grown up around the output of the canonical ‘renaissance’ artists. Or, more accurately, around their *non-threatening* output as even Langston Hughes’ communist output in the 1930s, for example, has so often been dismissed as not worthy of serious study.¹⁰¹ The fact that non-radical Black art of the 1920s, i.e. the “Harlem Renaissance” represents the standard-bearing historical

¹⁰¹ J. Smethurst, ‘Langston Hughes in the 1930s’ in *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930-1946* (New York, 1999).

conception of the 'New Negro movement' thus extends a decades-long factor in the erasure of the New Negro movement associated with Hubert Henry Harrison.

Conclusion

(Un)Silencing the Past and the Memory of a Black Radical

This thesis reviewed the role of Hubert Henry Harrison and his key contributions to the Socialist Party, the New Negro movement, Black leadership, Garveyism, African consciousness, and the ‘Negro renaissance’. Understanding something of Harrison’s eclecticism and versatility, his Outdoor University, and his leading role in political projects ranging from Freethought to the Single Tax movement allows us to draw out some larger conclusions about his impact and legacy.¹ Therefore, I conclude the present study with a look at the following three topics: Harrison’s role as a ‘crystalliser’ and unifying link in the lineage of African-American struggle, why he has been so under-appreciated in history, and his relevance today.

A Crystallising Link in the Arc of Black Struggle

The chemical process of crystallisation can help make sense of a figure like Harrison. As Harlem activist Hodge Kirnon once said, “Harrison...was the first Negro whose radicalism was comprehensive enough to include racialism, science, politics, sociology and education in a thorough going, scientific manner...it was [the *Voice*] that really *crystallized* the radicalism of the Negro in New York and its environs.”² A crystal

¹ ‘Dr. Harrison Candidate for Congress on Socialist Ticket’, *Chicago Defender* 7 June 1925.

² Emphasis mine. ‘Contemporary Comment as to H.H.’, *Negro World*, 21 Aug 1920.

is basically a solid form in which component atoms or molecules are highly organized into a distinctive structure. Chemists who have synthesised new substances often have difficulty getting them to crystallise, but once the first breakthrough takes place, it can become the seed-form for a rapid and widespread proliferation which displaces the crystal forms that preceded it.³

Kirnon's metaphor thus remains apt for understanding Harrison's contributions. If one thinks of political ideas as crystals, the crystallisation of a New Negro movement displaced the political outlook of the "Old Crowd Negro." For example, Harrison's Liberty League of Negro-Americans *crystallised* a new form of race-radical politics and organisation, which in turn paved the way for subsequent forms like the African Blood Brotherhood and the rise of the Garvey movement. Similarly, his *Voice* crystallised a new genre of Black newspaper that precipitated rapid proliferation of a similarly-race-radical type: the *Messenger*, *Negro World*, *Crusader*, and so on. By his accumulated years of self-directed research into Africa, East Asia, the Islamic world, the Americas, India, and Europe, Harrison crystallised a new global intellectual and political consciousness. Finally, by synthesising disparate spheres of knowledge from the Freethought, Socialist, and New Negro movements and establishing the free 'Outdoor University' at 135th and Lenox Avenue, Harrison crystallised a new educational institution for the cultivation and propagation of a new epistemology, scaffolding a process that symphonised multiple currents of contemporary thought and experience within the multi-ethnic and international Black 'Mecca' of Harlem.

Besides crystallising innovative and ground-breaking paradigms, Harrison represented something else: a key link in the arc of Black radicalism that bridged the

³ R. Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, (London, 2009 c1981), p. 131.

post-Reconstruction Black radicalism and that of the 1960s. A. Philip Randolph captured the meaning of this arc in profound tones when he said in 1972, “we are creatures of history, for every historical epoch has its roots in a preceding epoch. The black militants of today are standing upon the shoulders of the New Negro radicals of my day, the twenties, thirties, and forties. We stood upon the shoulders of the civil rights fighters of the Reconstruction era, and they stood upon the shoulders of the black abolitionists. These are the interconnections of history, and they play their role in the course of development.”⁴ Harrison clearly played a key role in the course of historical development, but what kind of role?

As for nineteenth century figures, Harrison built on the independent Black radicalism of Frederick Douglass. For example, in order for Douglass to fully come into his own as an independent and leading Black abolitionist, he had to break with the white abolitionism of William Lloyd Garrison. In order for Harrison to fully come into his own as a pioneer of the New Negro movement, he had to break with the white radicalism of the Socialist Party. Harrison’s break from the Republican party of his day stimulated his deconstruction of the national myths surrounding Abraham Lincoln and reclaimed Douglass as a more appropriate antecedent of African American emancipation.⁵ Another political ancestor to whom Harrison owed a great deal, though he did not acknowledge it, was Ida B. Wells. By breaking the ideological apparatus that sustained lynching, Wells paved the way for the anti-lynching work of the Black women’s club movement, William Monroe Trotter, the NAACP, and Hubert Harrison’s Liberty League.

⁴ J. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (New York, 1972), p. 21.

⁵ For more on Harrison’s appraisal of Lincoln, see chapter 2, n. 69. Harrison argued that because Douglass travelled a farther distance in life than Lincoln and did so under the handicap of racial oppression, then one had to “face the startling conclusion that Frederick Douglass, the Negro, was greater than Abraham Lincoln, the Caucasian.” H. Harrison, ‘Lincoln and Douglass’, HHP box 17, folder 10.

Just as Harrison recognised and celebrated ancestors of the Black freedom struggle like Toussaint L'Ouverture, Black abolitionist Samuel Ringgold Ward, and poet Phyllis Wheatley, so too did he become such an ancestor.⁶ In chapter 4, I noted how Harrison built on the anti-lynching crusade of Ida B. Wells, the federal-level approach of Trotter's New England Suffrage League, and the need for a more radical policy than that of the NAACP, to formulate a political program for Liberty League that included opposition to lynching, segregation, and Jim Crow, with support for armed self-defence against white terrorism. These themes resurfaced as key elements of the civil rights movement of the early 1960s.⁷

Harrison's status as an ancestor of Black awakening in the 1960s can be seen in other ways. As noted in chapter 2, Harrison's chairmanship of the 1918 Liberty Congress of Negro Americans in Washington D.C. set a precedent for A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement in 1941 and Bayard Rustin's successful March on Washington in 1963.⁸ Harrison greatly influenced Randolph, who in turn exerted a great influence on Rustin. Both Randolph and Rustin in turn greatly influenced Martin Luther King Jr. Contextualising Harrison in this historical trajectory thus restores a key link in the lineage of national Black protest politics and leadership in the twentieth century. In chapter 5, I noted Harrison's seminal influence on Amy Ashwood's and Marcus Garvey's construction of a mass-based Black nationalist movement. This trend would later find expression in the Nation of Islam of Malcolm X, whose mother and father were both

⁶ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 66.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11-12.

⁸ J. Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: The Troubles I've Seen*, (New York, 1997).

Garveyites.⁹ Therefore, as Jeff Perry has concluded, “Harrison is the key link in the ideological unity of the two great trends of the Black Liberation Movement—the labour and civil rights trend associated with Martin Luther King Jr., and the race and nationalist trend associated with Malcolm X.”¹⁰

I would take Perry’s argument about Harrison as a ‘unifying link’ even further. Harrison’s Black electoral project of the Liberty Party anticipated the Freedom Now Party, which sought to build a Black electoral party in the 1960s.¹¹ Harrison founded the secular Black Marxist tradition in the United States, influencing the first generation of Black communists in Harlem. He advocated Black armed self-defence and developed a ‘coloured internationalist’ solidarity with the struggles of oppressed and colonised peoples around the world. These positions mark him as a political forerunner of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence. Similarly, the International Colored Unity League’s call for setting up “a state, or states, in the Union as a homeland for the American Negro” positions Harrison as link between the African-American land question in the nineteenth century, originally conceived as an allotment of ‘40 acres and a mule’ after the Civil War, and the Republic of New Africa’s demand for a territorial Black state in the twentieth century.¹²

Finally, the pan-African and Black power movements of the 1960s find in Harrison an ideological antecedent. Kwame Nkrumah, for example, revealed how “long

⁹ T. Vincent, ‘The Garveyite Parents of Malcolm X’, *Black Scholar*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (Mar-Apr 1989), pp. 10-13.

¹⁰ J. Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 5.

¹¹ Ali, *In the Balance of Power*, p. 141. H. Walton, *Black Political Parties: An Historical and Political Analysis*, (Ann Arbor, 1972), p. 199.

¹² L. Cox, ‘The Promise of Land for the Freedmen’, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 45, No. 3 (Dec., 1958), pp. 413-440. C.F. Oubre, *Forty Acres and a Mule: The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Land Ownership* (Baton Rouge, 1978). C. Davenport, *How Social Movements Die: Repression and Demobilization of the Republic of New Africa* (New York, 2015).

before many of us were even conscious of our own degradation, Marcus Garvey fought for African national and racial equality” and that Garvey’s writings “fired his enthusiasm” more than any other thinker.¹³ Harrison, as noted previously, represented not only the anti-imperialist wing of the ‘official’ Garveyism which made its way to Nkrumah and so many other continental Africans by way of the *Negro World*. He also formed a wellspring of African consciousness in Harlem. Not to mention the oratorical and Black street scholarly tradition that endured far beyond his years in institutions like the Schomburg Center at the 135th Street public library.¹⁴

Overall, Hubert Henry Harrison exerted a titanic influence on African American history. In addition to his own contributions and achievements, he became a political ancestor of secular Black Marxism, Garveyism, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Africa-conscious Harlem, the Black Panther Party, the Freedom Now Party, Republic of New Africa, the Schomburg Center, and John Henrik Clarke. As important as W.E.B. Du Bois remains for understanding Black protest politics and intellectual culture in the early twentieth century, he simply did not carry the mantle of Black radicalism in the 1910s or 20s in the way that Harrison did.¹⁵ For that reason, on most political questions, anyone looking for a voice of Black radicalism before 1927 is often better off consulting Harrison than Du Bois.¹⁶

¹³ A.J. Garvey, *Black Power In America: Marcus Garvey's Impact on Jamaica and Africa* (Kingston, 1968), p. 33.

¹⁴ M. Stevens, ‘The Early Political History of Wilfred A. Domingo’ in R. Lewis (ed.), *Caribbean Political Activism: Essays in Honor of Richard Hart* (Kingston, 2012).

¹⁵ Of course, before World War I Harrison looked up to Du Bois and was influenced by the Harvard scholar, but Du Bois’ radicalism towards issues like class did not emerge until the 1930s.

¹⁶ Gender is perhaps the one question where Du Bois, at least in terms of pro-feminist writings, is clearly in advance of Harrison. J. James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals* (New York, 1997), Ch. 2.

Hubert Harrison's Great Weakness: Gender Equality

Like all human beings, Harrison had many flaws. Perhaps his biggest political limitation can be found in his contradictions on the question of gender equality. On the one hand, he held progressive political positions for women's suffrage and access to birth control.¹⁷ However, he did not extend to women the political humility he manifested for striking workers and continental Africans. As Winston James aptly put it, "black socialist men seemed to have held a position on the woman question similar to that held by the white socialists on the Negro Question: they had nothing special to offer black women; socialism would solve the problem of black women as it would that of black men."¹⁸ Harrison worked under the mentorship of Francis Reynolds Keyser in the White Rose Home for Colored Girls, and collaborated with women like Irena Moorman-Blackston and Grace P. Campbell in the New Negro movement. Nevertheless, his conception of "race first," Black unity, and the Colored International seems to have followed a noticeably male-first orientation.

Examples of Harrison's masculinist gender politics remain abundant. His various articulations of it as the "New Negro Manhood Movement" reveal a male-dominated conception of politics.¹⁹ Although women like Eslanda Goode (mother of Paul Robeson's future wife, Eslanda Goode-Robeson) worked on the "street team" for the distribution of the *Voice*, I never found any articles written by women in its pages.²⁰ One of the few articles explicitly about women in the *New Negro* magazine that Harrison edited, entitled

¹⁷ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 77, 222, 359.

¹⁸ W. James, 'Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America' in C.M. Payne and A. Green (eds.), *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*, (New York, 2003), p. 382.

¹⁹ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 55.

²⁰ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, p. 305.

“The West African Woman,” was written by Itambo Asong, a *male* schoolmaster in Nigeria. In Harrison’s landmark book of New Negro thought, *When Africa Awakes*, only 1 out of its 51 articles is about women, and the article (“The Women of Our Race”) describes how much charm, grace, and aesthetic beauty Black women have compared to other women. Nothing about Black women’s activism or political agency. Although the Liberty League courageously put an anti-lynching petition to the federal government, it not only failed to credit Ida B. Wells but also failed to frame the anti-lynching effort as resistance to both racial *and* sexual oppression, as Wells had done. All of the above speak to Harrison’s weaknesses on gender equality.

Harrison’s male blindspot in the political movements he developed dovetailed with his patriarchal behavior at home, which was clearly abusive at times towards his wife Irene Louise Horton.²¹ Generally speaking, he seems to have left the majority of household work to her, including raising their five children. His recurring decision to move into his own apartment certainly did not help in this regard. Harrison revealed his neglect of family matters when he said “I believe in the sacrament of sacrifice--in giving myself in varying degrees to those who are about me: first to my friends, secondly to my race, next to my country, and lastly to Humanity.”²² Statements like this suggest he did not include his wife or kids in the list of groups to which he felt most accountable. Of course, Harrison’s patriarchal behavior was not unusual for men of his time, but certainly contradicted some of his own beliefs. For example, his decision to father five children with a woman with whom he did not get along well enough to consistently live in the

²¹ H. Harrison, ‘15 June 1914 (diary entry)’, ‘19 Apr 1913’, ‘11 Sep 1913’, HHP box 9.

²² H. Harrison, ‘The Meditation of Mustapha’, HHP Box 5, Folder 18.

same household suggests his political support for access to birth control remained limited to the domain of theory rather than practice.

Alongside these patriarchal behaviors, Harrison can also be found saying progressive things about women. For example, Harrison spoke of how “the female element in life conserves and protects. The restless masculine elementfertilizes it is true, but it also destroys. It is the symbol of aggression, conquest, conflict and destruction by all of which it works changes.” This sounds like a searing critique of patriarchal power. In the same letter, he went on to insist that “the female principle is the more important...It is like capital and labor. Before capital came into existence labor was: I have seen labor functioning without capital, but never capital without labor. Before maleness came femaleness.”²³ This sounds as though Harrison allotted a primary role for women and a secondary one for men.

Because of Harrison’s contradictions, I want to explore the New Negro politics of gender further in the future in order uncover how and why Harrison and other Black men could be radical on so many other issues but reveal the same male-supremacist patterns of thought and behavior as their less-radical male contemporaries. Male dominance has been a recurring tendency within Black nationalism historically, in part as a reaction against what is perceived to be the emasculating effect of white supremacy on Black masculinity. But I must confess that I have much more to learn about this subject and hope to learn more and research this problem more thoroughly in the future.

Silencing the Past: Why Isn’t Harrison Better Known?

²³ H. Harrison to T.L. Stoddard, 21 July 1921, HHP box 2, folder 19.

Hubert Harrison's obituaries invariably spoke to the significance of his life. The *Pittsburg Courier* remarked how "his achievements should prove an inspiration to many young Negroes, for, despite the handicap of poverty, he became one of the most learned men of his day and was able to teach the wide masses of his race."²⁴ The *New York Times* declared "tens of thousands of New Yorkers will miss the philosophy of the most brilliant street orator that this Metropolis has produced in the last generation."²⁵ The *New York News* called Harrison the "father of the Harlem intellectual."²⁶ Despite his monumental contributions to Black political and intellectual life, Harrison has been nearly forgotten in death. His case offers a prime example of "silencing the past" as Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot has described historical omissions.²⁷ Why the historical silence? The answer to this question is multi-faceted, involving individual personal factors, as well as larger structural and political ones.

Various personal factors contributed to Harrison's erasure. For one thing, he remained until his death a Black working-class immigrant without a college degree.²⁸ His humble racial and economic status made it harder for him to get recognition and respect not only during, but also after his life, particularly from the various influential individuals and institutions that revered academic titles. As Harrison himself once observed, "prejudice plays as great a part in history as in life."²⁹ To make matters worse, he died young at age 44. Compared, for example, to Du Bois' 95 years of life, Harrison had a relatively short lifespan, which undoubtedly limited his memorialisation.

²⁴ 'Hubert H. Harrison', *Pittsburgh Courier*, 31 Dec 1927.

²⁵ 'The Death of Hubert Harrison', *New York Times*, 31 Dec 1927.

²⁶ 'Celebrated Harlem Mass Leader Dies After Operation', *NY News*, 24 Dec 1927.

²⁷ M.-R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995).

²⁸ At times he adopted or was attributed the title "Dr." but this was an honorary title.

²⁹ H. Harrison, 'Plan to Write a 'History of the Negro in America'' (diary entry), 25 Nov 1907, HHP box 9, folder 1.

These personal factors set the stage for other difficulties making it into history. For example, although Harrison was a prolific writer, until Jeff Perry's donation to Columbia University in 2006, no one had compiled, sorted, and organised Harrison's papers into a documentary archive of which researchers could make use. Harrison did write two books, but they were published on tiny presses with limited distribution. His more important and paradigmatic book, *When Africa Awakes*, was published in 1920 but would not be re-printed for another 71 years, and even its reprints would be undertaken only by relatively small publishing houses.³⁰

Structurally speaking, the biggest reason for Harrison's erasure from history concerns power.³¹ Forces like the Tuskegee Machine, the Socialist Party, and the NAACP deliberately suppressed Harrison's significance during his life. Most decisively, Alain Locke's 1925 *New Negro* anthology re-defined the meaning of the New Negro as an artistic "renaissance" rather than a Black working-class political movement. Examples like these demonstrate the sense in which Harrison's historical erasure began *before* he died. By excluding Harrison, Marcus Garvey, Cyril Briggs, and so many others, the "Harlem Renaissance" framework that emerged in the 1970s largely re-initialised the Lockean erasure of a whole era of Black radicalism from the predominant historical narrative and literary analyses.

One of the barriers to greater recognition has been the difficulty of pinning Harrison down with an concise slogan or phrase that captures his contribution in a manner commensurate with that of other paradigm-shifting figures. Phrases like

³⁰ The first reprint, in 1991 was done by ECA Associates Press out of Chesapeake, NY, and Education Station Press in St. Thomas, V.I., and a second reprint was undertaken by Black Classics Press of Baltimore, MD. A recent reprint was done by Diasporic Africa Press in 2015.

³¹ Truillot, *Silencing the Past*, p. 28-9.

‘industrial education’, ‘anti-lynching crusader’, ‘double consciousness’, and ‘back to Africa’ all immediately conjure a Black leader of the early twentieth century. The natural choice for Harrison would be ‘New Negro movement’ if not for the fact that this phrase has been largely co-opted by Alain Locke and the Renaissance School of Negro History. This historical overwrite of the movement most clearly linked to Harrison results in a lack of a concise slogan, further hampering our ability to comprehend and connote his contributions.

The obliteration of Harrison and his valence of the New Negro movement from history and memory speaks to a larger dynamic concerning who has power to control the narratives of history. As George Orwell’s famous book *1984* put it, “Who[ever] controls the present controls the past.”³² In order to maintain control of the present, the powers that be must control the telling of the past. Hence Marx and Engels contention, “the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.”³³ In this case, the American billionaire class that controls the means of production—including the culture and publishing industries, the corporate news media, the education system, and Hollywood—overwhelmingly controls what shall be the ruling ideas. History and memory comprise sensitive components of the ruling ideas in society and therefore must be carefully managed, particularly in relation to groups like African Americans whose lived experience reveals the falsity of the ruling ideas concerning ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’, and the ‘American dream’ at the core of the U.S. government’s ideological

³² G. Orwell, *1984*, (Boston, 1983 c1949), p. 88.

³³ Marx, K. and Engels, F. *Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. One*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969, Chapter II.

self-justification and consent manufacturing process.³⁴ Thus the same American ruling class which sought to suppress Harrison's memory and Black radicalism more generally in the 1920s has naturally sought to do so ever since.

Of course, the elite political forces that sought Harrison's suppression were not all-powerful. In fact, Harrison's death in December of 1927 set off a struggle between dominant and non-elite forces over whether he would be remembered or forgotten. On the non-elite side, Harlem community members took it upon themselves to memorialise their very own 'Black Socrates'. For example, over one thousand people attended his funeral.³⁵ His death was front-page news in Harlem's *Amsterdam News*.³⁶ A Hubert Harrison Memorial Committee of the 135th Street public library presented the library with a life-like portrait of the late Harrison as a gift in 1930, which was mounted for some time on the first floor of the building.³⁷ Rev. Ethelred Brown changed the name of his Harlem Community Church to the Hubert Harrison Memorial Church and a small group of individual scholars and community members intermittently tried to reclaim and restore Harrison from the 1940s through the 1990s.³⁸ Unfortunately, efforts like these ultimately failed to restore Harrison's legacy against the hostility of the ruling institutions, which had (and still have) no interest in highlighting radical Black historical figures and movements that so fiercely criticised such forces as capitalism, Christianity, white supremacy, and US imperialism.

³⁴ N. Chomsky and E. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York, 1988).

³⁵ 'Lament Death of Dr. Hubert Harrison: Eulogized by Several Who Knew His Life and Worth', *Amsterdam News*, 28 Dec 1927: 1.

³⁶ 'HUBERT HARRISON DIES: HARLEM SCHOLAR SUCCUMBS AFTER 'MINOR' OPERATION', *Amsterdam News*, 21 Dec 1927: 1.

³⁷ 'Hang Hubert Harrison's Portrait in Library', *Amsterdam News*, Sept 10 1930.

³⁸ See introduction, footnotes 29-31.

Harrison did not maintain long-standing ties to any of the figures or organisations he influenced, and therefore tended to be written out of the histories of them. For example, because the white Socialist Party showed little regard or appreciation for what Harrison tried to do within it, its chroniclers have done likewise. Harrison's writings are readily available in Socialist Party archives of the *New York Call* and the *International Socialist Review*, suggesting that the problem is not so much a matter of sources but perspective: the white blindspot of the Socialist Party has largely re-appeared in its historians. Similarly, although Harrison had a decisive impact on the emergence and content of Garveyism, he became a sharp and radical critic of Marcus Garvey. Therefore, 'official' Garveyism did not take much care to remember Harrison and most of its historians have likewise paid him little mind. He was a genre-defying figure.

More specifically, Harrison's existence and dissidence remain subversive of the natural historiographical pillars—white left, Garveyism, 'Harlem Renaissance'—which might otherwise have preserved him. Historians of these subfields are often ideologically partisan towards them and therefore less comfortable engaging with forceful internal critics like Harrison. Figures or organisations outside of an agency or institution to which one is partisan are often more easily engaged for the simple reason that some (if not all) of their criticism can be attributed to their externality to, jealousy of, or competition with the movement to which one is partisan. Yet Harrison criticised the socialists, the Garvey movement, and the Harlem 'Renaissance' *from the inside*, thereby representing a kind of political 'touchstone' that revealed the often embarrassing gap between what they said they were doing and what they actually were doing.

Another reason for Harrison's lack of recognition concerns the pattern amongst Black people of not giving credit where it is due. Du Bois, for example, attempted to push Ida B. Wells off the list of the 'founding 40' of the NAACP.³⁹ Carter G. Woodson failed to give credit to Arturo Schomburg in his *The Negro in Our History*.⁴⁰ Marcus Garvey rarely gave credit to Harrison or others whose ideas he took. As J.A. Rogers said of Harrison, "No one worked more seriously and indefatigably to enlighten his fellowmen; none of the Afro-American leaders of his time had a saner and more effective program but others, unquestionably his inferiors, received the recognition that was his due."⁴¹ This statement has much truth, even though Harrison himself fit the general pattern in failing to give explicit credit to his own forebears like Ida B. Wells and William Monroe Trotter.

Although guilty of it himself, Harrison offered a salient explanation of this missing credit problem as a function racial oppression. In his article explaining how prominent African American intellectuals in the universities marginalised and neglected J.A. Rogers' classic book *From Superman to Man*, Harrison observed, "the Negroes whom Christian slavery reduced to the social level of brutes still have today some of the traits of the slave. And one of these finds continuous expression in our 'big Negroes' namely, 'Don't help to push any other Negro into notice if you have won notice yourself. Notice for them detracts from your notice.'"⁴² In other words, Black people often seek to counter their oppression by 'being somebody' and therefore feel, even if only subconsciously, that by giving credit where credit is due to other Black people, their own

³⁹ C. West, *Black Prophetic Fire*, p. 216 n. 21.

⁴⁰ Des Verney, *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, p. 127.

⁴¹ Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color* Vol. 2, p. 611.

⁴² H. Harrison, 'White People versus Negroes: Being the Story of a Great Book', *Negro World* 11, 7 Jan 1922: 10.

social standing will diminish. Ironically, Harrison too was guilty of this very same dynamic he so keenly observed in others.

To be fair, although Harrison did not usually credit his own influences and inspiration for his achievements, he also did not do much to boost himself. For example, Harrison claimed quite accurately that he was not widely known as a major influence on the emergence of Garveyism because he did not “hanker after newspaper publicity.”⁴³ More generally, he maintained an explicit aversion to praise. He once said that “if there is one thing which I hate next to lying and hypocrisy in human beings, it’s praise... Through most of life it has been a hard medicine to swallow. The first dose bewilders, the next annoys, the third irritates, and the added installments make me feel murderous.”⁴⁴ Fitting with his Socratic demeanour and disposition, glory and accolades were the furthest thing from his mind, a polar opposite style from that of a grandiose and ostentatious figure like Marcus Garvey.

Although Harrison’s humble personal disposition likely contributed to his reduced visibility in history, it also fit with his politics of humility. Harrison manifested an interest in listening to and learning from striking workers, the ‘plain people of Negro ancestry’, and continental Africans. By maintaining an ethos of humility he may thereby have ended up sacrificing public recognition for his political principles, much like Ella Baker and other grassroots and self-effacing leaders have done historically.⁴⁵

Hubert Harrison’s Relevance Today

⁴³ Harrison, *WAA*, p. 8.

⁴⁴ H. Harrison, ‘On Praise’ (autograph manuscript), 8 Apr 1920, HHP box 5, folder 46.

⁴⁵ B. Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, 2003).

John Henrik Clarke once observed that “as a people, we have not carefully listened to our greatest messengers. Harrison was one of them.”⁴⁶ The global political awakening of Harrison’s time presents an epoch of international mass movements that shook the system to its core, from the New Negro movement, to anti-imperialist agitation from Egypt to Trinidad and throughout the colonised world, to the Russian Revolution. Though they ultimately left the fundamental structure of the social order intact, these struggles opened up a whole new era of potentially revolutionary transformation, and produced great advances in consciousness and political reform. For that reason Harrison remains deeply relevant today, a messenger from whom we can still learn a great deal. Apart from Harrison’s various insights into systems of domination which still predominate in the world like organised superstition, capitalism, and imperialism, I will now take a moment to offer just two examples where Harrison’s ideas retain clear salience in the early 21st century: the status of Black life in the United States and the question of leftist white supremacy.

The country has undoubtedly made racial progress when a Black person can become the President of the United States, given that this would scarcely have been possible in Harrison’s time.⁴⁷ Yet contrary to the claim this represents the achievement of a “colorblind” society, racial inequality still pervades the education system, employment, housing, and health care access, among other social indicators.⁴⁸ As in Harrison’s day and age, Black people in the US still comprise a political “touchstone” that reveals the falsity

⁴⁶ J.H. Clarke, ‘Introduction’ in H. Harrison, *WAA* (Baltimore, 1997), p. vi.

⁴⁷ M. Jeffries, *Paint the White House Black: Barack Obama and the Meaning of Race in America* (Palo Alto, 2013).

⁴⁸ T. Wise, *Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity* (San Francisco, 2010).

of the country's lofty claims to represent "freedom" and "democracy." Many would agree that the post-Reconstruction practice of lynching has mostly been overcome, apart from the occasional Black person found hanging from a tree in places like New Jersey in 2013⁴⁹ and Mississippi in 2015,⁵⁰ and from a swing set in North Carolina in 2014.⁵¹ However, recent protests over the murders of Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, Rekia Boyd, Eric Gardner, and countless other Black lives have brought attention to the painful fact that *every 28 hours* a Black person in the United States today is killed by police or vigilantes.⁵²

According to NAACP data for 1890-1927, there was roughly one lynching every 86 hours in Harrison's lifetime.⁵³ Adjusting for a roughly four-fold growth in the Black population since then, this would be the equivalent of whites lynching a Black person every 21.5 hours in modern times.⁵⁴ If, adjusting for population growth, whites executed

⁴⁹ Y. Spivey, 'Black Man Found Hanging From a Tree in Jersey City, New Jersey', *Techyville*, Sept 2013, Online URL: <http://www.techyville.com/2013/08/news/black-man-found-hanging-from-a-tree-in-jersey-city-new-jersey/>, last accessed 22 April 2016.

⁵⁰ G. Botelho, E. Lavandera, and J. Morris, 'Officials: Evidence doesn't support foul play in Mississippi hanging', *CNN*, 20 Mar 2015. Online URL: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/20/us/african-american-man-found-hanging-in-mississippi/>, last accessed 22 April 2016.

⁵¹ A. Blinder, 'F.B.I. to Investigate a Hanging Death in North Carolina', *New York Times*, 12 Dec 2014, Online URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/13/us/fbi-to-investigate-a-hanging-death-in-north-carolina.html>, last accessed 22 Apr 2016.

⁵² See "Operation Ghetto Storm: 2012 Annual report on the Extrajudicial killing of 313 Black People." Malcolm X Grassroots Project. 7 April, 2013. Online URL: <https://mxgm.org/operation-ghetto-storm-2012-annual-report-on-the-extrajudicial-killing-of-313-black-people/> Last accessed 4 June, 2015.

⁵³ NAACP data showed a yearly average of 101 recorded lynchings in the period between 1890 and 1927, roughly one lynching every 86 hours. W. White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch*, (New York, 1929), pp. 19, 304.

⁵⁴ Although not all the victims in the NAACP data were Black, the figures necessarily underestimated the total because no one knows how many lynchings went unrecorded. Therefore, I assume for the sake of argument that the NAACP numbers are roughly close to the numbers of lynched Black people. To adjust for population size, I divided by four to account for the Black population growing roughly four fold, from 9,827,763 in 1910 to 38,929,319 in 2010. C. Gibson and K. Jung, 'Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States', *US Census Bureau*, Feb 2005. Online URL: <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.pdf>, last accessed 5 July 2016. S. Rastogi, T.D. Johnson, E.M. Hoeffel, and M.P. Drewery, 'The Black Population: 2010', *US Census Bureau*, Sept 2011, p. 3, Online URL: <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf>, last accessed 5 July 2016.

a Black person every 21.5 hours in 1910 and every 28 hours in 2010, then lynching has largely been *replaced by the everyday operations of the police and vigilantes*. This startling but inescapable conclusion has profound implications, revealing contemporary conditions eerily similar to those in which Harrison lived and worked. As another example, the “new Jim Crow” of mass incarceration presents a situation in which there are more Black men in prison today than were enslaved in 1850.⁵⁵ Furthermore, not only are African-Americans denied equal protection of ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ under the law, but thanks to felon disenfranchisement, voter ID laws, redistricting, and other nefarious measures, the US continues to deny African-Americans full voting rights.⁵⁶ In this context, Harrison’s call on the United States government to apply the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments of the Constitution—which supposedly abolished slavery, granted full citizenship and equal protection of the law, and enshrined voting rights—remains unanswered.⁵⁷ His call for Black armed self-defence—like that of so many African-American freedom fighters before and after him—also retains an uncomfortable salience.

Similarly, Harrison’s challenge to the racial blindspot of white leftists is still relevant. For example, a recent call for specific steps to address the lack of diversity in the US-based International Socialist Organization by three of its non-white members triggered a textbook example of leftist white denial. According to the official response,

⁵⁵ M. Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, 2010).

⁵⁶ K.R. Quandt, ‘1 in 13 African-American Adults Prohibited From Voting in the United States’, *Moyers & Company*, 24 Mar 2015. Online URL: <http://billmoyers.com/2015/03/24/felon-disenfranchisement/>, last accessed 23 April 2016. A. Cohen, ‘How Voter ID Laws Are Being Used to Disenfranchise Minorities and the Poor’, *The Atlantic*, 16 Mar 2012. Online URL: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/03/how-voter-id-laws-are-being-used-to-disenfranchise-minorities-and-the-poor/254572/>, last accessed 23 April 2016.

⁵⁷ These post-Civil War amendments, supposedly abolished slavery, granted full citizenship and equal protection of the law, and enshrined for Black people the right to vote.

arguing that comrades of colour have a special role to play in propagating socialist ideas in their own communities “assumes that there are such things as ‘communities’ based on racial identity. In fact, any racial or ethnic group is broken down into its various class components. Working class Blacks are no more a part of Barack Obama’s ‘community’ [than] working class women are part of Hillary Clinton’s.”⁵⁸ In short, *there is no such thing* as a Black community! This recalls Eugene Debs’ claim in 1903 that “there is no Negro question outside of the labor question.”⁵⁹ That the New York City district committee of a socialist organisation can take a position like this in the year 2010 demonstrates the depth of the white problem on the left. Namely, that self-proclaimed *historical* materialists have failed to learn anything about white leftism in the *century of history* that has elapsed since Hubert Harrison first systematically challenged them on it.⁶⁰

Harrison still has much to teach and communicate to the modern world. As one of the pallbearers at his funeral, Arturo Schomburg said Harrison was “ahead of his time.”⁶¹ When considering Harrison’s relevance today, one begins to get the feeling that in many respects he remains—nearly 90 years after his death—ahead of *our* time. For example, given the negative Western media portrayals of Africa as a backward continent full of AIDS, blood diamonds, Ebola, poverty, and ethnic conflict, the notion that one must look to Africans in order to, as Harrison suggested, “LEARN WHAT THEY HAVE TO

⁵⁸ H.T., ‘Response to ‘Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Members of Color in the ISO’,’ (on behalf of the NYC District Committee), 28 March 2010. In possession of author.

⁵⁹ E.V. Debs, ‘The Negro in the Class Struggle’, *International Socialist Review*, Nov 1903.

⁶⁰ Often, the discussion among white socialists today centers around the question of white privilege. For a Harrison-inflected treatment of this question, see B. Kwoba, ‘White Skin Privilege and Marxism?’, *Counterpunch*, 6 Dec 2013, Online URL: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/12/06/white-skin-privilege-and-marxism/>, last accessed 22 April 2016.

⁶¹ ‘Lament Death of Dr. Hubert Harrison: Eulogized by Several Who Knew His Life and Worth’, *Amsterdam News* (New York, 28 Dec 1927), p. 1.

TEACH US (for they have much to teach us)” is still far in advance of how many people outside of Africa, whether Black or not, view the continental birthplace of language, civilisation, and humanity itself.⁶²

Fortunately, Harrison is beginning to gain a wider hearing, including in the land of his birth. In the mid 1990s, Montserrat-born playwright David Edgecombe began thinking about writing a one-man play about Harrison because, in his words, “he is among the top five intellectuals the Caribbean has produced. He was born on St. Croix and most people in the V[irgin].I[slands]. have never heard about him.”⁶³ Some twenty years later his idea developed into a drama entitled “Hubert Harrison” with a cast of over twenty characters. It premiered on 20 March 2015, first in St. Thomas and then in Harrison’s island of origin, St. Croix, as part of the Virgin Islands Literary Festival and Book Fair. This event speaks to the growing awareness of Harrison’s importance and the slow, but steady return of Harrison not only to scholarly historiography, but to where he ultimately belongs: in the public memory of humanity in general, particularly working class people of Caribbean, American, and African descent.

On that note, and on account of Hubert Harrison’s own untamed and untameable African identity, I close with an African proverb.⁶⁴

Those who have died have never, never left. The dead are not under the earth, they are in the rustling trees, they are in the groaning woods... 'Tis the Ancestors' words when the fire's voice is heard, 'tis the Ancestors' words in the voice of the water...

⁶² N. Wade, ‘Phonetic Clues Hint Language Is Africa-Born’, *New York Times* 14 Apr 2011. E. Hadingham, ‘Where Is the Birthplace of Humankind? South Africa and East Africa Both Lay Claims’, *National Geographic* 11 Sep 2015, Online URL: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/09/150911-hominin-hominid-berger-homo-naledi-fossils-ancestor-rising-star-human-origins/> last accessed 21 Jun 2016.

⁶³ D. Knight, ‘Hubert Harrison Play to Premier Next Month’, *St. Croix Source*, 9 Feb 2015.

⁶⁴ Proverb taken from ‘In Memorandum: Dr. Ivan Van Sertima (1935-2009)’, Rutgers University Africana Studies, Online URL: <http://africanastudies.rutgers.edu/faculty-mainmenu-134/core-faculty/90-ivan-van-sertima-in-memoriam-1935-2009> last Accessed 21 June 2016.

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