# The Anticolonial Imagination:

# The Exilic Productions of American Radicalism in Interwar Moscow

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Abstract of "The Anticolonial Imagination: The Exilic Productions of American Anticolonialism in Interwar Moscow" by Ani Mukherji, Ph.D., Brown University, May 2011

"The Anticolonial Imagination" is an examination of race, migration, politics, and the history of ideas in the interwar period (1919-1939). Based on archival material collected in Russia and the United States, the dissertation analyzes the political and cultural expressions of a small group of African Americans and Asian Americans who traveled to Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s to work and to study in institutions administered by the Communist International (Comintern). This group included African American writers, West Indian Pan-Africanists, Japanese American socialists, and Indian revolutionaries. Through an examination of these sojourners' exilic activism and cultural productions, I demonstrate the ways in which anticolonialists attempted to place issues of anti-racism and self-determination at the center of the international Communist movement, much to the chagrin of American authorities and the European powers.

This study contributes to several interrelated areas of research. First, the dissertation advances a new angle of approach for studies of race and foreign affairs by excavating the history of the Soviet Union in the struggle against colonialism in the period before World War Two. Second, this study reconstructs how migrant activists of the interwar period attempted to unite the ideological impulses of nativist anticolonialism and proletarian fraternalism in innovative ways that cut across political space and diasporic boundaries. Lastly, for scholars of American politics, "The Anticolonial Imagination" reveals a rich set of political and cultural visions that were decisively

eliminated in the post-war repression that corresponded to the creation of the National Security State. By recovering the voices of those who were silenced, marginalized and forgotten, the manuscript provides for a better understanding of the political and racial ordering that occurred during the early Cold War.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

S. Ani Mukherji was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on May 24, 1976. He received his B.A. in the College Scholar Program at Cornell University in a program entitled "Language, Literature, and Social Theory" in 1998. Mukherji completed an M.A. in History at the University of California at Berkeley in 1999 and was granted an A.M. in American Civilization at Brown University in 2004.

Mukherji has received grants and fellowships from the Center for the Cold War and the United States (New York University), Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations, the Fulbright Program, and the Woodruff Library at Emory University.

Mukherji has taught courses in American Studies, History, and Ethnic Studies at Brown University and Wesleyan University. He has also taught history courses in Massachusetts public schools in Fall River, Hyannis, and Boston.

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# INTRODUCTION

Bachan Singh was born to a farming family in a Punjabi village in the first decade of the twentieth century. Like many small landholders in the Punjab, Singh's father lost his farm when Bachan was a boy. Suddenly homeless, the father left for China where he worked for a British bank as a watchman while his sons moved to Lahore to find new opportunities. In the city, Bachan befriended Piara Singh, an older Sikh who had recently returned from America, where, Singh explained, many young Indians were working their way through college by picking up migrant agricultural work in the summers while attending classes in the autumn and spring. Struck by this idea, Bachan borrowed fare for passage from his family on the promise of future remittances, and left for California.[1]

Arriving in Marysville in June 1928, Singh immediately found work harvesting peaches. At the same time, he came into contact with the Ghadar movement, a group of Indian radicals who organized itinerant South Asian laborers abroad while proselytizing for home rule in India. Ghadarites were active across the globe, in North America, Panama, Argentina, China, and Europe. Singh was quickly won over to their cause and dedicated all of his spare time to movement work. Based on his enthusiastic work, members of the Ghadar leadership nominated their fresh recruit for a scholarship to study in Moscow at the Communist University of Toilers of the East (KUTV) in 1929 based on an agreement made between Ghadar and the Communist International (Comintern). At

[1] "Autobiography of Bachan Singh," (n.d., circa 1933), Russian State Archive for Social-Political History (RGASPI) 539/4/137.

the University, Singh was trained in the theories of Marxism-Leninism and in the practices of political propaganda. Among his classmates and in the broader community of anticolonialist activists in Moscow, Singh found West Indian Pan-Africanists, Japanese socialists, Turkish poets, West African seamen, African American actors, Chinese dancers, Filipino trade union leaders, and a South African jazz musician with a commitment to racial equality. These men, alongside a small handful of women, witnessed and participated in the construction of a new society in the Soviet Union, acting in plays at the Meyerhold Theater, working in Ukrainian factories, and harvesting crops on collective farms in Central Asia.

Fresh from these experiences, Bachan Singh returned to America in 1930, briefly becoming the editor of the Ghadar journal in San Francisco before being tasked to Los Angeles to help with the effort to bring more African Americans into the Communist Party.[2] For Singh and other Communists of the period, the international problems of colonialism and racial domination were intertwined; hence work against anti-black racism was considered part and parcel of the struggle against colonialism across the globe. As a result of this effort, Singh was targeted by a local "red squad" in Long Beach, arrested, and set to be deported.[3] Rather than depart for India where he would face

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[2] Singh's assignment to Los Angeles was part of the renewed Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) effort to build an African American membership in California. The previous organizer of "Negro work" in the district was removed from his post in the fall of 1930 for his white chauvinism and failure to recruit black Party members. See "Plenum Report," 22 November 1930, box 1, folder 17, B.D. Amis Papers (TAM 355), Tamiment Library, New York University.

[3] For details on these arrests and deportation proceedings, see "Try 100 at Long Beach," *Western Worker*, 15 February 1932; Karl Yoneda, *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year Struggle of a Kibei Worker* (Los

certain imprisonment for his activities with Ghadar and the Communist Party, Singh voluntarily took up residence in the Soviet Union. After spending a year in Moscow trying to find meaningful work, he was sent to Tiflis. His Comintern file ends there. It is unknown whether he returned to India or perished in the Purges. A number of his anticolonialist comrades, including his fellow deportees from Long Beach, met the latter fate.

Bachan Singh's biography is typical of the subjects of "The Anticolonial Imagination." The story of his father's dispossession and the family's consequent migrations speaks to the ways in which the modern world economic system has structured life choices in the harshest of manners for natives of the world's global South.[4] Singh's ensuing transnational life and labors, moving from Lahore to Marysville to Moscow, calls attention to a diasporic network of vibrant ethnic communities strung together across the globe. At the same time, his inter-racial radical activism belies present-day attempts to pit class-based organizing against identity politics, or to reduce anti-racist social movements to bargaining units in a system of competitive ethnic pluralism. Finally, while Singh's peripatetic multiple border-crossings ask us to see a migrant life in a scope beyond the binary of immigrant and nation-state, the deadly

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Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, 1983), 49-55. Singh is identified simply as an "East Indian" in these sources.

[4] On the causes of land alienation in early twentieth-century Punjab, see Sucheta Mazudar, "Colonial Impact and Punjabi Emigration to the United States," in *Labor Immigration under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II*, ed. Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 324. For a broader treatment of the catastrophic effects of colonial rule in Asia and Africa, see Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (New York: Verso, 2001).

consequences of statelessness also reminds us of the singular importance of national belonging in the twentieth century.

But ultimately Singh's narrative is but one of the many stories that attest to the myriad ways in which anticolonialists participated in international communist movements in the period that followed the betrayal of what historian Erez Manela has dubbed the "Wilsonian moment," with its unfulfilled promises of national self-determination.[5] This dissertation examines the lives and labors of the small community of African American and Asian American anticolonialists who, like Singh, traveled to Moscow to work and to study in institutions administered by the Communist International in the 1920s and 1930s. By placing the transnational lives of Moscow's anticolonialists at the center of this dissertation, I have attempted to come to a robust understanding of the complex operations of race and politics on local, national, and global scales. Following the story of Singh's life—and the lives of others like him—across the borders of oppressive colonial regimes and the exclusionary nation-state in the US, "The Anticolonial Imagination" bespeaks the racialized constitution of American political culture (through mechanisms of repression and immigration control) while it recovers a grounded means to envision a different world through the political, cultural, and intellectual productions of these subjects in Moscow.

The fundamental argument of this dissertation is that the work of these activists in Moscow played a critical role in shaping the politics, practices, and culture of the

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[5] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a vivid contemporary response to this betrayal, see W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1999).

Comintern, placing issues of race and colonial rule at the center of the international communist movement. Of course, the Bolsheviks' espousal of national self-determination was already determined by the practical necessities of post-revolutionary rule, as the Soviet state was founded on the ruins of a multinational empire.[6] And before the founding of the Soviet Union, V.I. Lenin had already written *Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), even if it was not widely read at the time. At the same time, the Marxist tradition before 1917 was particularly weak on questions of colonialism and anticolonialist strategies, despite the works on imperialism as a global political and economic system.[7] One of the major achievements of the American anticolonialists in Moscow was the generation of theories and practices that united Marxian analyses of imperialism with resistance to colonial rule in "a revolutionary mixture of the indigenous and the cosmopolitan, a complex constellation of situated local knowledges combined with radical, universal political principles."[8]

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[6] The classic statement on the formation of Soviet nationality policies after the revolution is Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954). For a more recent interpretation, see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[7] For overviews of Marxist thought on imperialism, see Victor Kiernan, *Marxism and Imperialism* (New York: St. Martins, 1974); Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980). On the contrast between colonialism as local practices of rule and imperialism as centralized economic and political practices, see Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 17.

[8] This is Robert J.C. Young's description of twentieth-century anticolonialism, in contrast to the common misconception of anticolonialism as a type of nativism or provincial nationalism. See Young, *Postcolonialism*, 2. Notably, Moscow's anticolonialists considered US racism to be of a kind with racialized colonial domination in Africa and Asia; while subsequent literature has questioned the viability of such models of "internal colonialism," as it was explicitly theorized as a later date, I have followed the usage of the subjects of this dissertation both to explicate their worldview and for readability.

**Literature Review**

This project emerges from and contributes to three prominent emphases in the fields of history, politics, and ethnic studies: research on race, anticolonialism, and the Cold War; new scholarship on the transnational nature of racial identities and politics; and revisionist accounts of radical history and US political culture.

One of the liveliest areas of inquiry in recent diplomatic history has been the investigation of questions of race, empire, and international order. The past twenty years have witnessed a proliferation of research that has connected domestic racial formations with international events.[9] In his invaluable reinterpretation of the Cold War as a global event, Odd Arne Westad demonstrates the mutually constitutive triangular relationship between the United States, the Soviet Union, and the "Third World" that defined twentieth-century politics.[10] Just as important as Westad's globalization of the Cold War is his unearthing of the roots of the geopolitical conflict in the interwar period, a period that lurks in the shadow of the prodigious body of work on post-war foreign

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[9] Major works include: Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice* (Boulder: Westview, 1988); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Penny von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Gerald Horne, *Race War! White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

[10] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

affairs. By examining the combined forces of the rising anticolonialism after World War One, the Leninist promise of self-determination, and American racial politics, this manuscript fleshes out the triangular relationship described by Westad writ small, through the transnational experiences of those who occupied all three spaces. Their stories demonstrate unexpected connections between racial politics, migration, and US-Soviet relations in the period before World War Two.

This dissertation also builds on the rich literature on transnational racial politics and identities that has proliferated as a useful corrective to earlier works that confined the histories of Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans to the status of minor (if important) themes in a dominant national narrative. In contrast, transnational studies have remapped these stories in diasporic cartographies of borderlands, the black Atlantic, and the trans-Pacific.[11] While these geographies have been determined by global capitalism and demands for labor, scholars have also called attention to the active construction of ties that unite peoples across polities, or what literary scholar Brent Hayes Edwards described as "the practice of diaspora."[12] Certainly, the community of Asian and black anticolonialists in Moscow was the product of particular active imaginings, a site created from which Afro-Asian radicals—many of whom were exiled both from their countries of origin and from the United States—could "command space" to challenge

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[11] Though academic historians may have come to transnational history recently, diasporic intellectuals have their own tradition of histories across polities. Two of the subjects of this dissertation produced innovative histories of the black Atlantic and trans-Pacific—George Padmore's *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (1931) and Sen Katayama's *Japan and America* (*Iaponiia i Amerika*) (1925).

[12] Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

oppressive and exclusionary regimes.[13] At the same time, Moscow was not a cosmopolitan utopia. Eiichiro Azuma's superb research on the transnational lives of Japanese Americans emphasizes that cosmopolitan strategies may loosen the hold of one nation-state or another on a subject, but they cannot transcend state power.[14] As such, movement to Moscow may have provided anticolonialists with unexpected freedoms, resources for struggle, and new vistas on global possibilities, but it simultaneously enmeshed them in the realities of the Soviet state and society. Through a careful consideration of the Soviet context for anticolonial Moscow, this dissertation cautions against ungrounded studies of the possibilities of the transnational and cosmopolitan, while also trying to preserve some sense of the excitement that led activists and intellectuals to the USSR.

Finally, this work engages histories of US political culture and radicalism. In the half-century since Theodore Draper published his history of American Communism, historians have taken a decidedly broader view of the influence of radical movements in

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[13] The notion of the Soviet Union as a site from which anticolonial activists "command space" is taken from Josephine Fowler's *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists: Organizing in American and International Communist Movements, 1919-1933* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007). In a similar vein, Kate Baldwin's study of black writers and the Soviet Union draws attention to the ways that movement and translation allowed racialized writers to reconsider their identities and rethink power relations. *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). For a more balanced approach that has guided my thoughts on race, community, and exile in Moscow, see George Lamming's reflections on leaving the Caribbean: *The Emigrants* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955); *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

[14] Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

the United States.[15] While Draper focused on the distorting effects of Moscow's control of the Communist Party, revisionist historians have sought to excavate the local origins and vernacular articulations of Party work.[16] One of the most important of the revisionist accounts was Robin Kelley's study of Alabama Communists in the 1930s. Focusing on the social history that undergirded black Communism in the South, Kelley argued that it was not a Party vanguard that activated African American workers; on the contrary, black Communists used the Party as a powerful vehicle to carry their aspirations.[17] An examination of the anticolonial scene in Moscow reveals that one need not look all the way to Alabama to find radicals attempting to put the resources of the Comintern to their uses based on their previous political histories. Few activists arrived as "blank slates" in Moscow; rather they carried ideas, methods, and allegiances from a number of movements and ideologies. Among Moscow's anticolonialist intellectuals and artists were the influences of Isadora Duncan's ideas of modern dance, Marcus Garvey's Pan-Africanism, and the Industrial Workers of the World. As Dana Frank has observed,

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[15] Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking, 1957); Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking, 1960).

[16] The early contours of the differences between Draper and revisionist historians can be found in Theodore Draper, "American Communism Revisited," *New York Review of Books*, 9 May 1985; Theodore Draper, "The Popular Front Revisited," *New York Review of Books*, 30 May 1985; "Revisiting American Communism: An Exchange," *New York Review of Books*, 15 August 1985; Maurice Isserman, "Communism Re-visited," *New York Review of Books*, 26 September 1985. A diverse sampling of the revisionist school can be found in Michael Brown (ed.), *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of US Communism* (New York: Monthly Review, 1993). For a more comprehensive list, please see the bibliography.

[17] Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

transnational solidarity networks comprised "a moveable feast."[18] In the interwar period, I argue, Moscow constituted an important site where these ideas and practices were deposited, transformed, and recirculated.

**Chapter Overview**

The story of anticolonial Moscow unfolds in four chapters, organized by spheres of activity in rough chronological order, though there are significant overlaps. The opening chapter considers the intellectual and political contributions of two major anticolonial Marxist theorists, Katayama Sen and M.N. Roy, who sought to translate Leninist theory into a specific set of political analyses, practices, and institutions. Both of these Asian migrants experienced a political transformation during their residence in the United States followed by persecution and exile. Eventually, they both took up residence in Moscow at the Hotel Lux, the home of leading socialists and revolutionary nationalists who were guests of the Comintern. In Moscow, Roy was a crucial figure in Comintern debates, pushing forward the agenda of revolutionary work in the colonial world. Similarly, Katayama was also a consistent voice for Comintern work in Asia and anti-racist work in the United States. Through an examination of these thinkers' political writings, memoirs, fiction, speeches, and correspondence, this chapter traces two ideological paths to Leninism and the distinct conceptions of anticolonial practice

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[18] The reference is to Ernest Hemingway's observation: "If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast." See Dana Frank, "Where is the History of US Labor and International Solidarity? Part I: A Moveable Feast," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 1:1 (2004): 97. Earlier, Paul Buhle noted the irony of American radicalism's oft-times more successful career overseas. See *Marxism in the United States* (New York: Verso, 1991), 15.

developed in Moscow in the early 1920s, establishing a bridge for subsequent students and activists to cross to the place Katayama called “the red capital of the world.”

The Communist University of Toilers of the East was the major conduit that brought anticolonial students and activists from the United States to Moscow. The second chapter of “The Anticolonial Imagination” examines the experiences of American students, including African Americans, West Indians, Filipinos, Japanese Americans, and Indian Americans. In Moscow, KUTV’s administration sought to remake these students into well-trained cadre leaders for the revolutionary East. To undertake this project, the Comintern recruited a combination of older Russian ethnographers and young Soviet activists to instruct students in the basics of Leninist theory and practice. These professors and their ostensible apprentices also jointly undertook practical work of gathering information on the colonial situation in various locales across the globe to produce new strategies for world revolution, publishing the results of their intellectual work in Soviet ethnographic journals and internationally-circulated anticolonial literature. An analysis of the acts and the products of this collaboration reveals both the limits of the Soviet conception of anticolonial work and the ways in which students sought to transcend these confines.

The work of attracting colonial labor unions to the program of the Communist International and organizing colonial workers was tasked to the Profintern, also known as the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU), headquartered just a few blocks from Red Square. In this building, Japanese, Chinese and American activists managed the work of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Congress (PPTUC), while a small cadre of African American and West Indian Party leaders directed the International Trade Union Congress

of Negro Workers (ITUCNW). The third chapter interprets the work of the ITUCNW as an innovative attempt to bring together two distinct anti-systemic movements, nativist critiques of colonial domination and Marxist analyses of labor exploitation.

In the fourth chapter, I examine three figures as case studies in the construction of an anticolonial world culture: the Afro-Chinese Caribbean modern dancer Sylvia Chen, black actor Wayland Rudd, and the African American journalist Homer Smith, who published a regular column from Moscow in the *Chicago Defender* under the pen name Chatwood Hall. Each of these culture workers spent prolonged and prolific periods in Moscow, producing bodies of work that proselytized on behalf of the Soviet Union and attacked Western racism. An evaluation of Sylvia Chen's life and labor in Moscow also affords the dissertation the opportunity to explore the constraints of proletarian fraternalism.[19]

This two-decade effort to construct Moscow as a location for anticolonial struggle ultimately collapsed in the mid-1930s. With Hitler's rise to power in Germany and the growing threat of fascism in Europe, concerns about collective security dominated what hopes for world revolution that remained. While the Comintern's anticolonial political work declined, activity continued in the sphere of culture where contradictions could be more easily obfuscated, at least for a time. When the Stalinist Purges set in during the mid-1930s, anticolonial Moscow collapsed as foreigners were asked to take on Soviet

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[19] In a reflection on the history of the US left and international solidarities, Dana Frank notes that "[f]or every writer, delegate, or famous speaker, there were also five hundred women who copied pamphlets, circulated petitions, made old sheets into banners, and made tasty little snacks for the schmooze period after meetings." Frank, "Where is the History of US Labor and International Solidarity?" 107. Such was certainly the case in Moscow. Though I have not been able unearth a proper history of gendered division of labor in Comintern work, I have tried to indicate the important "behind the scenes" efforts of women where possible.

citizenship or leave the country. Colonial exiles who could not leave were stranded; as suspicions both of foreigners and of political dissent increased, the dreams of transnational radicals turned to nightmares of statelessness. But let us first try to understand the dreams.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Leninism in Asian America: Sen Katayama, M.N. Roy, and American Anticolonialism

### Introduction

In 1975, longtime Asian American activist Karl Yoneda penned a hagiographic essay about his mentor Sen Katayama for the Communist theoretical journal *Political Affairs*. The essay, entitled "The Heritage of Sen Katayama," was but one piece of a broader effort on the part of Yoneda to educate the new generation of Communists and Asian American activists about their revolutionary forebears.[1] Yoneda argued that Katayama had blazed a trail for later activists with his pro-labor, anti-racist, and internationalist vision, establishing what historian Daryl Maeda has called a "tenuous linkage" between the Asian American old left and the radicals who stormed campuses and communities in the 1960s and 1970s.[2] Yet, in spite of Yoneda's efforts, connections between Katayama's political legacy and new generations of Asian American activists have remained few.

In part, the repressive work of the state caused this disjuncture. Starting in the 1930s, a number of Asian American radicals of the old left generation were deported;

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[1] Yoneda's memorialization of Katayama can be traced back to the obituary he wrote for his mentor. See Karl Hama (Yoneda), "Sen Katayama—Revolutionist," *Western Worker*, 20 November 1933. On Yoneda's attempts to pass on the legacy of Katayama in the 1970s and 1980s, see "Sen Katayama, 1859-1933," *Gidra* (October 1973): 11; "The Heritage of Sen Katayama." *Political Affairs* (1975): 38-57; "Asian Pacific Americans and the CPUSA," Lecture notes for CPUSA course, 30 July 1982, box 2, folder 20, Karl Akiya Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University; *Ganbatte: Sixty-Year Struggle of a Kibei Worker* (Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, 1983).

[2] Daryl Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 38.

many of those who remained muted their political voices. At the institutional level, few Asian American left organizations survived the harassments of the McCarthy period. Still, political repression does not fully explain Katayama's lost heritage. Rather, the legacy of Sen Katayama has been lost in the translation between the radically different contexts of early twentieth century Asian American life and the political cartographies and cosmologies of the post-war world. In an insightful essay on the history of Asian American radicalism, Robert G. Lee described the condition of Asian immigrants in the era of exclusion as that of a "stateless proletariat" facing "the hostility of a racially defined working class, exploitation in a racially and ethnically segmented labor market, and almost complete political and social disenfranchisement."[3] Lacking protections both in their countries of origin and in the United States, many of these workers adopted anticolonial politics in order to establish a claim on some homeland. These anticolonialist migrants often worked with fellow diasporic students and intellectuals who came to America for educational opportunities or, in some cases, to organize revolutionary work beyond the reach of colonial police and censors.

As news of the Bolshevik Revolution travelled around the globe, it was greeted with particular warmth in these pockets of migrant radicalism across the United States. Not only had the Soviets demonstrated that revolution was possible, but the new state claimed to be committed to ideals of egalitarian social relations, national self-determination, and anti-imperialism. In the two decades after 1917, the Soviet Union became a critical site for the work of these activists, both as a refuge from hostile conditions and as a headquarters for anticolonial political work.

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[3] Robert G. Lee, "The Hidden World of Asian Immigrant Radicalism," in Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (eds.), *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 264.

This chapter reconstructs the political and intellectual histories of two major figures in the history of anticolonialism who traveled to Moscow in the interwar years: Sen Katayama and M.N. Roy. Both of these Asian migrants had experienced major personal and political transformations during their residence in the United States that eventually resulted in their adoption of Leninist programs of struggle. Using a combination of published works and archival materials, the chapter maps out the respective visions of these two radicals over the course of their movements through Asia, the United States, and the Soviet Union, offering a unique view of Asian American radicalism in the 1920s and 1930s.

**Katayama's Path to Communism**

Sen Katayama was born in a farmhouse near the village of Hadeki in Okayama Prefecture. The autobiography he wrote in 1924 for Soviet readers paints a rustic picture of village life with strong overtones of Turgenev's nineteenth-century classic *A Sportman's Sketches*. Hadeki was a small town not far from a Buddhist temple that attracted the occasional traveler. Young Katayama spent his boyhood, however, shunning the temple and spurning his mother's desires for him to take up the study of Chinese classics. Instead, he passed his time fishing, hunting rabbits, and foraging for nuts in the forest until he was old enough to work. As a teenager, Katayama toiled carrying coal, working in the rice fields, and chopping wood to support himself and his mother. These experiences soon impressed upon him advantages of an education and he enrolled in the village school. In 1880, at the age of twenty, Katayama decided to take his education to the next level. Borrowing money from his family, he studied first at Okayama Normal School before moving to Tokyo. In a narrative that was clearly crafted to appeal to his

Soviet audience in the 1920s, Katayama emphasized his experiences of hard labor in the city where he worked in a print shop and as a janitor. This period was also the time of Katayama's first political awakening as he learned of the transformative effects of the Meiji Restoration on Japanese society, results evident in his daily life in the city. It was an exciting but taxing time in the life of the young man, as he put in long hours of study and work. It also set the tone for the coming decades of a life marked by intense labor and continued study.[4]

It was with the goal of higher education that Katayama left for the United States in 1884, following the footsteps of a friend who had emigrated to avoid military service.[5] He arrived in San Francisco able to speak only a few scant phrases in English and untrained for any work besides the most menial tasks. For the next three years, he worked a string of jobs as a janitor, domestic servant, cook, and handyman while trying to study English in the little time at the end of his days. Eventually he found an employer he supported his educational aspirations and allowed him to enroll in a preparatory school to gain the training needed for college in America. A self-described timid youth, Katayama endured the teasing and taunts of much younger pupils. "I became an object of the anti-Japanese!" he wrote of the miserable time he spent with American teenagers.[6] But enduring this purgatory prepared Katayama to ascend the educational ladder,

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[4] My account of Katayama's youth in Japan is based on his short autobiographical manuscript prepared in 1924 for Soviet readers, checked against Hyman Kublin's authoritative biographical study. See Sen Katayama, "My Life," RGASPI 521/1/1; Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary*. Katayama's manuscript was translated into Russian and published as *Moia zhizn' [My Life]* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1926).

[5] On the various reasons for Japanese migrations to Hawaii and the United States in the late nineteenth century, see Ichioka, *Issei*, 7-56; Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 17-31.

[6] "My Life."

enrolling at Maryville College in eastern Tennessee in 1888. There Katayama attended classes alongside African Americans and poor whites. Perhaps reflecting on his recent experience of racialization in the United States, Katayama was appalled by the obvious discrimination against gifted black students in the school and the pervasive racism of the Jim Crow South.[7] Just a year later, he moved on to Grinnell College in Iowa where he embraced a nebulous brand of socialism that combined the social gospel teachings of Richard Ely and the ideas of German political activist Ferdinand Lassalle. Katayama furthered these studies in social problems and reform at Andover Theological Seminary and Yale Divinity School, where he wrote a thesis on social reform in the US and in Europe, based in part on research conducted in Britain.[8] After twelve years of labor and study in the United States, Katayama had set the loom of his political orientation toward improving the lives of workers and advocating for social equality.

It is difficult, at first blush, to discern how Katayama's first major publication, the short meditation "The H'yakusho's Summer Pleasures" written for *Harper's Monthly* in

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[7] Kublin speculates that Katayama inserted his sense of anti-Japanese persecution in California (ascribing the students' teasing to adolescence rather than racial animosity since few Japanese had arrived in the US by the late 1880s) and his sympathy for black students at Maryville ex post facto as a result of views about racial discrimination acquired later. See Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary*, 56-57. I find Katayama's account believable in light of rampant anti-Chinese sentiment that would have easily been transferred onto other "Orientals," thus providing Katayama with good reason to object to American racism in its different guises. On the transitive nature of anti-Asian stereotypes, see Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), passim.

[8] It is difficult to estimate the level of Katayama's belief in Christianity as his various memoirs were all written long after he embraced Marxism and moved away from religious ideas. The 1924 autobiography does not refer to the Christian content of Katayama's ideas about social reform in this period.

1895, fits into the pattern of Katayama's evolving social vision.[9] In the sketch, Katayama depicts a day in the life of a small land owner (*h'yakusho*) in a Japanese village, beginning at dawn: "With the first bright smile of day [the h'yakusho] finds the clinging morning-glory climbing round the eaves of his cottage to delight him with its beauty."[10] The overwrought prose drags along as the author follows the landowner in his morning labors, leisurely strolls, a fishing expedition, and, finally, to the community dance (*odori*) where the protagonist and his fellow villagers feel "the mild flush of the little sake they drank."[11] Katayama's biographer Hyman Kublin—in accord with his general penchant for finding underlying psychological motivations for his subject's actions—has suggested that the essay is the result of an "almost unbearable nostalgia" after more than a decade away from Japan.[12] A more plausible explanation exists. In the years since Katayama's first arrival in the United States, Japanese immigration had increased considerably, as had anti-Japanese sentiment. Representations of the immorality of the Japanese proliferated to support an argument that unruly migrant workers and prostitutes from Japan would swell the ranks of the Oriental threat to white civilization as they joined the existing Chinese communities across the Pacific Coast of North America. Despite his location on the East Coast, Katayama could not have been unaware of these developments. Read in light of this background, Katayama's writing may be considered a contribution to what

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[9] Sen Katayama, "The H'yakusho's Summer Pleasures," *Harper's Monthly* (February 1895): 403-406. Katayama had previously published some student journalism at Grinnell, as discussed by Kublin. See *Asian Revolutionary*, 64 and 85.

[10] Katayama, "The H'yakusho's Summer Pleasures," 403.

[11] Katayama, "The H'yakusho's Summer Pleasures," 406.

[12] Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary*, 85.

literary scholar Elaine Kim has termed the ambassadorial literature of early Asian America, educating American readers about the culture and mores of the author's homeland to vitiate stereotypes of Oriental depravity.[13] The choice of a landowner as the protagonist, rather than a common laborer, indicates that despite his exposure to socialism, Katayama's ideas of social reform were more closely aligned with the Issei literati who sought to uplift working-class migrants.[14]

These sympathies would change, if slowly, over the next two decades as Katayama committed himself to work as a labor organizer. Returning to Japan in 1896, Katayama helped birth the trade union movement in his homeland, taking on a number of positions that expanded his experiences with the working class and developed his understandings of labor in society. He worked at a settlement house, taught classes at a workers' school, served as secretary of the Iron Workers Union, and edited a labor newspaper. He outlined his perceived role in an oft-quoted editorial:

> The people are silent. I will be the advocate of this silence. I will speak for the dumb; I will speak for the despairing silent ones; I will interpret their stammering; I will interpret the grumblings, murmurings, the tumults of the crowds, the complaints, the cries of men who have been so degraded by suffering and ignorance that they have no strength to voice their wrongs. I will be the word of the people. I will be the bleeding mouth from which the gag has been snatched. I will say everything.[15]

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[13] Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 23-57.

[14] Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 35-60.

[15] As quoted by the author in Sen Katayama, *The Labor Movement in Japan* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1918), 39. This passage is also cited by Kublin and Yoneda in their studies of Katayama.

As part of his advocacy on the behalf of workers, Katayama encouraged emigration to the United States where modest laborers could gain an education as he had.[16] At the same time, he continued to gravitate to a socialist program and away from Christian ideas of social reform. Like other Japanese socialists of the period, Katayama's political ideas included critiques of imperialism and the espousal of a pacifism based on the belief in an international brotherhood of workers.[17] Following the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, Katayama drafted a statement of opposition to a war that set worker against worker in the interests of governments that encouraged violence against ethnic minorities and violently suppressed the labor movement.[18] Months later, Katayama repeated these sentiments before the Amsterdam Congress of the Second International, famously concluding his speech by shaking the hand of Russian Marxist Georgii Plekhanov in a display of international solidarity that brought members of the audience to their feet.[19]

On the way to Amsterdam, Katayama had stopped briefly in the United States to meet with American socialists and to undertake a speaking tour to promulgate the anti-war movement. What surprised him most during this visit was "the great development of the Japanese colonies everywhere along the Pacific Coasts."[20] In the few years that Katayama had been away, tens of thousands of Japanese immigrants had arrived, creating

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[16] Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 25.

[17] Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary*, 161.

[18] Sen Katayama, "Attitudes of Japanese Socialists Toward Present War," *International Socialist Review* (March 1904): 513-514.

[19] Katayama was one of two Asian representatives at this world conference. The other was the Indian Dadabhai Naoroji. See R.P. Masani, *Dadabhai Naoroji: The Grand Old Man of India* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1939).

[20] Katayama, "My Life."

thriving communities. After his appearance before the Second International, Katayama decided to settle in the United States, perhaps wishing to make a new start after the recent death of his wife. Over the next three years, Katayama tried his hand at rice farming in Texas while encouraging Japanese farmers to join him despite his reservations about anti-immigrant attitudes and policies.[21] The ventures all failed for a variety of reasons from drought to mismanagement. After three years, Katayama sailed to Japan, once more endeavoring to establish a meaningful labor movement through agitation and propaganda. These efforts amounted to little as the police had stepped up repressive measures to stymie nascent radical movements. After serving a five month term in prison for inciting a strike, Katayama was freed only to be hounded by detectives on a regular basis. By 1914, the fifty-four year old radical left Japan for the last time, hoping that he might have more luck organizing Issei workers in the relatively less repressive atmosphere of the United States.

Working as a day laborer and domestic, Katayama supported himself and his daughter Yasu while he continued his activist efforts as founder and editor of *Heimin,* a bilingual monthly originally intended as a socialist newspaper to be sent back to Japan from its office in San Francisco. Over time, however, *Heimin* became increasingly interested in the cause of Japanese workers in America; in July 1916, Katayama declared, "It is *The Heimin*'s immediate aim to break up the ground for the labor union movement among our countrymen *in this country*."[22] Still smarting from his treatment by the

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[21] Kazuhiko Orii and Hilary Conroy, "Japanese Socialist in Texas: Sen Katayama," *Amerasia* 8:2 (1981): 163-170. Katayama reflects on America's anti-immigrant policies in his recollections of passing through Ellis Island on his return from Amsterdam in "My Life."

[22] "Why There Have Been No Labor Unions among Japs. in America?" *Heimin*, July 1916. Emphasis added. Writing from Japan, Katayama had explained the furor over the passage of the

Japanese government, Katayama at first identified the Japanese consul as the primary obstacle to advancing the cause of Issei workers in the United States, with a supporting role played by American big business. Together, these forces conspired to restrict the emigration of Japanese laborers with any trade union experience who might take up the cause of labor in a new land; moreover, the consul maintained surveillance on its overseas communities to control any radical activism, a fact of which the editor was only too aware. A year later, however, Katayama's understanding of the problems of Asian workers in the United States showed signs of considerable development. In "Asiatic Labor in America," Katayama refuted the claims of anti-Asian labor leaders that foreign migrants undercut the wages of white workers. Labor segmentation and the high demand for labor in the West meant that white and Asian labor were rarely in direct competition.[23] Rather, trade union leaders trotted out anti-Asian rhetoric to stir the labor vote and heighten their political influence. Katayama's analysis was naively optimistic about the transient nature of rank and file racism in the labor movement, but at the same time, he showed keen insight into the connections of trade union maneuvering, electoral politics, and race in the West.[24] Alongside these reflections on the conditions of Japanese

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1913 Alien Land Law in California as an attempt on the part of Japanese war-mongers to incite international animosity. See Sen Katayama, "California and the Japanese," *International Socialist Review* (July 1913): 31-32. After his own emigration, his understandings of Japanese American life underwent a significant change and, by 1918, they had reversed completely. "And the California land legislation is the worst thing of all. The Japanese government is satisfied with the Gentleman's Agreement for the time being, but the Japanese people cannot be made to see the justice of the status of inferiority imposed on members of their race." Sen Katayama, "Armed Peace on the Pacific," *The Class Struggle* (September-October 1918): 398.

[23] "Asiatic Labor in America," *Heimin*, August 1917.

[24] For fuller historical treatments of these themes, see Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Ichioka, *Issei*, esp. 91-145.

workers in America, *Heimin* carried short reports from workers up and down the Pacific Coast as well as news from Japan.

At the same time that Katayama's thinking on race, migration, and class was deepening, he started to move further to the left, largely as a result of conversations with European immigrant radicals in New York, where he had relocated in 1916 on the invitation of the wealthy Dutch socialist S.J. Rutgers. For most of his career, Katayama's approach to ideas, like that of most activists, was not rigorously philosophical but pragmatic, taking diverse ideas that fit his basic disposition to provide aid to the disempowered and downtrodden.[25] But among the more theoretically advanced European Marxists—including Rutgers, Leon Trotsky, Louis Fraina, and Alexandra Kollontai—Katayama was encouraged to approach various specific issues from the perspective of a systemic analysis of capitalism and to delve more deeply into the writings of Marx.[26] After the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917, Katayama became all the more determined to further his study of Marxism and to puzzle out Marx's meaning for Asia and Asian workers in America.[27] Events in Japan gave him his

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[25] Glenn Omatsu makes this point regarding the eclectic inspirations for Asian American radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s. See Omatsu, "The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s," in *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s*, ed. Karin Aguilar-San Juan (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 31.

[26] For background on the left wing of the Socialist Party, see Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking, 1957), 50-79.

[27] *Heimin* carried a number of short pieces celebrating the Bolshevik Revolution, encouraging its reader to pay attention to events in Russia, and criticizing Japanese intervention against the Soviet Union. See "Bolshevism Contagious," *Heimin*, June 1918; "The Present Attitude of the Japanese Towards Russia," *Heimin*, August 1918; "Who are the Russian People?" *Heimin*, June 1919.

material, as a wave of protest swept the country in 1918, starting as a protest by fishwives on the Toyama Coast and quickly extending to numerous other locations. Katayama immediately took these protests as a sign of a political crisis in Japan and an expression of class unity against the bureaucrats, militarists, and capitalists.[28] While his European comrades looked to Germany for signs that the Bolshevik Revolution was spreading, already in 1918 Katayama was convinced that the true revolutionary possibilities were in the East.

On the occasion of the first anniversary of Bolshevik Revolution, Katayama gathered his friends from the Japanese socialist study group to celebrate. "There has been enough prattling about socialism, about whether it is realistic or a mere illusion. Lenin's socialism is victorious in Russia. We should not sing its praises, but lend it a hand," the host toasted.[29] To accomplish this task, what had been a study group needed

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[28] Sen Katayama, "A Japanese Interpretation of the Recent Food Riots," *The Class Struggle* (December 1918): 600-606. Katayama stretched his interpretation of the meaning of the rice riots, positing that the working class of Japan was rejecting the government's planned Siberian intervention in solidarity with the Soviet Union. (Profiteering based on plans of the intervention had inflated the rice prices, but there is no indication that unrest was connected to any Bolshevik sympathies in Japan.) In a reflection on the rice riots composed just before his death, Katayama also fancifully speculated that the fishwives of Toyama Bay had perhaps heard inspiring tales of the Bolshevik Revolution from sailors. Sen Katayama, "K 15-letiiu risovykh buntov 1918 goda v Iaponii [To the Fifteenth Anniversary of the 1918 Rice Riots in Japan]," *Kommunisticheskii internatsional* No. 26-27 (1933): 11-18. Despite these somewhat imaginative moments, Katayama's basic interpretation of the riots at the intersection of class formation and political crisis held sway in Japanese historiography for most of the twentieth century. Katayama's main Russian interpreter considers these articles among Katayama's most important intellectual contributions. See A.I. Senatorov, "Sen Kataiama kak istorik [Sen Katayama as Historian]," *Voprosy istorii* (November 1984): 49-58. For a more nuanced understanding of the various causes and forms of the protests, see Michael Lewis's detailed study, *Rioters and Citizens: Mass Protest in Imperial Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[29] Yasu Katayama, *Moskovskaia iaponka [Moscow Japanese]* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), 39. My translation from Yasu Katayama's (Sen Katayama's daughter) "clear memory" of her father's speech.

to become an active force. Largely consisting of younger recruits drawn to the elderly Katayama, the group included Kondo Eizo, Ishigaki Eitaro, Inomata Tsunao, Watanabe Haruo, Takahashi Kamekishi, and Taguchi Unzo.[30] They started by translating works of Marx and Lenin into Japanese for their own edification and for publication in Japan alongside news of the achievements of the Soviet Union. They also worked to produce new understandings of Japanese politics. While Katayama had long criticized Japanese imperialism as a pacifist, under the influence of Leninist teachings, he came to interpret expansionism and conquest as an outgrowth of capitalism.[31] Working from New York, Katayama's group became a point of articulation in a network that connected his European comrades who now formed part of the leadership of the Soviet state, Issei radicals in North America, and the labor movement in Japan.

But as the Red Scare cut down many of Katayama's socialist friends, he started to fear that he too would be subject to criminal proceedings or deportation. After a number of interviews with immigration officers and federal agents, Katayama went into hiding in Atlantic City in early 1920 to avoid arrest. (Katayama's Bureau of Investigations file reveals that the Department of Labor's Immigration Bureau found that "there is not sufficient evidence [from our investigation] upon which to base warrant proceedings."[32] But there was no way that Katayama could have learned of this conclusion. We know from Yasu Katayama's memoir that her father was worried enough about arrest that he

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[30] For descriptions and biographical sketches of the New York study group, see Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary*, 248-260; Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists*, 38-43.

[31] Sen Katayama, "Armed Peace on the Pacific," *The Class Struggle* (September-October 1918): 388-404. "Koreans and Korea's Independence," *Heimin*, May 1919.

[32] Alfred Haughton (Bureau of Immigration) to J.E. Hoover (Special Assistant to the Attorney General), 8 October 1919, in Sen Katayama's FBI file (#61-914), in author's possession.

had worked out a system with the lift operator in his building to leave a signal if agents were waiting for him.[33]) After four months in hiding—during which time he produced a Japanese translation of Lenin's *State and Revolution*—Katayama returned to New York where he learned of the Communist International's plan to send him, along with Fraina and Charles Shipman, to Mexico City to lure workers away from the post-revolutionary Mexican state to the program of the Comintern, following in the footsteps of Roy and Borodin.[34] The details of Katayama's ill-fated, brief venture in Mexico are not as important as the basic fact that his assignment indicated the trust that Comintern leadership placed in the longtime socialist. It is thus not surprising that after his short time in Mexico, Katayama was sent to Moscow to aid in the Comintern's work from the "center."

**M.N. Roy's Turn in America**

While Katayama's path to Leninist anticolonialism originated in his involvement with the Second International, M.N. Roy followed the more typical route of moving from existing revolutionary nationalist and syndicalist movements to Comintern work. Coming of age in a time of great political ferment in Bengal, the teenage Naren Bhattacharya (Roy's birth name) joined Jatin' Mukherjee's revolutionary nationalist group that was committed to the violent overthrow of the British. By the time Naren was twenty years old, he was a trusted lieutenant in the group, responsible for organizing local underground groups in villages and for contributing material to militant nationalist

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[33] Yasu Katayama, *Moskovskaia iaponka*, 41.

[34] Daniela Spenser provides a painstakingly researched interpretation of this plan in "Emissaries of the Communist International in Mexico," *American Communist History* 6:2 (2007): 151-170.

periodicals.[35] In 1915, Mukherjee learned of the possibility to gain financial and military support from Germany—which aimed to weaken the enemy British by providing aid to Indian revolutionaries—and charged Naren with making arrangements. But when colonial police learned of this plan, they closed in on Mukherjee's group, forcing Naren to flee, first to Japan, and then on to the United States, still in search of weapons to send back to his comrades in Bengal. After he arrived in San Francisco in 1916, Bhattacharya was immediately detected by British intelligence and, as a result, the young activist retreated to nearby Palo Alto where he found refuge at the home of Bengali writer Dhan Gopal Mukerji who was, at the time, a student at Stanford University. To confuse American police and British agents, Mukerji recommended that Bhattacharya take on the name Manabendranath Roy. Along with the new name, Roy was beginning to revise his understandings of revolution and freedom in conversation with Mukerji who, since his immigration to America in 1909, had constructed a hybrid worldview that united his interpretations of Vedanta philosophy, his experiences as a migrant worker, encounters with bohemian members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and readings of modernist literature.[36] This ongoing colloquy was broadened as Roy met his future wife

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[35] For background on the revolutionary politics in Bengal from the late nineteenth century until World War Two that shaped Naren Bhattacharya, see Leonard Gordon's useful survey, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876-1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), esp. 135-160. A fascinating portrait of the diverse ideological and political background of Bengali revolutionary groups in the first decade of the twentieth century can be found in Peter Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900-1910* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004). My account of Roy's life in India is largely based on M.N. Roy, *M.N. Roy's Memoirs* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1964); Sibnarayan Ray, *In Freedom's Quest: Life of M.N. Roy*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Minerva Associates, 1998).

[36] Dhan Gopal Mukerji was a cousin of Jatin Mukherjee and the brother of Jadu Gopal Mukerji, a fellow comrade of Roy's in India. For an account of his intellectual development, see his memoir, *Caste and Outcast* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002). It is possible that Mukerji's account of a conversation with "Nanda," a recently arrived Hindu nationalist, was based in part

Evelyn Trent, a Stanford undergraduate with socialist views, working-class revolutionaries of the Ghadar movement, and proponents of Indian Home Rule working in America, including Lala Lajpat Rai and Agnes Smedley.[37] Though Roy did not abandon his mission to purchase rifles for the fight for Indian independence, his travels in the United States inspired a much broader approach to questions of freedom and revolution.

This year-long sojourn ended abruptly when Roy was arrested in New York in 1917 as part of the suppression of Indian radicals working in the United States as part of what the government dubbed the "Hindu-German Conspiracy."[38] Charged with violating the Neutrality Act by working to overthrow Britain, an American ally after US entry into World War One, Roy jumped bail and made way for Mexico, then in the midst of revolution that Roy thought might provide more fodder for his evolving beliefs: "India was no longer my sole preoccupation. I was just learning to think of revolution as an

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on his discussions with Roy. In the semi-autobiographical story "Champak" (discussed below), Roy named the young protagonist Nanda. For Mukerji's telling of this encounter, see *Caste and Outcast*, 193-199.

[37] Evelyn Trent's biographer credits her with encouraging Roy to pursue a Marxist analysis. See Narisetti Innaiah, *Evelyn Trent alias Shanthi Devi, Founder Member of the Exile Indian Communist Party*. (Hyderabad: V. Komala, 1995). Roy's memoir describes his transformation to a class-conscious analysis as a result of reading done while conducting research for Lala Rajpat Rai at the New York Public Library. His memoir, dictated to his second wife Ellen Roy, makes no mention of Evelyn Trent Roy. For a semi-autobiographical account of the intellectual and political scene Roy encountered in New York, see Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of the Earth* (Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1973).

[38] On the Conspiracy, see Karl Hoover, "The Hindu Conspiracy in California, 1913-1918," *German Studies Review* (May 1985): 245-261; Joan Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 213-225; Seema Sohi, "Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Empire, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, 2008. Useful primers on the status of Indians in America can be found in H. Brett Melendy, *Asians in America* (New York: Hippocrene, 1981), 192-208; Vinay Lal, *The Other Indians: A Political and Cultural History of South Asians in America* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2008), 12-38.

international social necessity."[39] Over the next two years, Roy continued his informal studies, delving into Western music, Marxist theory, and American radical literature while moving among Mexican socialists, American radicals avoiding the worst of the Red Scare, and draft dodgers (known as "slackers") who had crossed the border to avoid service in World War One.[40] One of this lot was the young writer Irwin Granich (Mike Gold) who had come to Mexico from New York as a slacker and taken up his pen to describe local labor conditions and workers' life for radical publications in the United States.[41] According to Roy's memoir, the two men got along immediately: "…we became friends to the extent that I once narrated to him an episode of my early youth in India on the basis of which he wrote a short story to be published in an American literary magazine as our joint work."[42] The result of this collaboration was "Champak: A Story of India," published in Max Eastman's monthly journal *The Liberator* in 1920.

As a piece of literature, "Champak" was a middling composition, melding the straight-forward diction and the blunt approach for which Gold later became famous with

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[39] M.N. Roy, *M.N. Roy's Memoirs*, 43.

[40] One of the critical figures in Roy's political transformation in Mexico was Mikhail Borodin (born Mikhail Gruzenberg), a Jewish Bundist who fled Russia as a teenager during the repressions that followed the 1905 Revolution. Until 1917, he lived in the Chicago area as Michael Berg, attending college, working on a farm, running a language school, and, for a short period, editing a Russian-language newspaper. Borodin's precocious political activity, life in exile, and path from Bundism to Bolshevism surely gave him common ground with Roy to fuel their conversations in Mexico. See Dan Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

[41] See, for instance, Irwin Granich, "Sowing the Seeds of One Big Union in Mexico," *The One Big Union Monthly* (January 1920): 35-37; Irwin Granich, "Well, What About Mexico?" *The Liberator* (January 1920): 24-28. Gold's time in Mexico is briefly described in the biographical portrait in Alan Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 51.

[42] M.N. Roy, *M.N. Roy's Memoirs*, 110.

occasional flourishes of Orientalism and revolutionary verve: streets "thick in gloom," "ragged men and women with their pitiful big-eyed children," and a flute "sounding somewhere in the quiet morning."[43] As an artifact of cultural, political, and intellectual history, the story—along with the conditions of its production—is of immense value. As the tale opens, the protagonist, a young student radical in Calcutta named Nanda, has picked up five revolvers from the home of a sympathetic civil servant in Shibpur, just across the Hooghly River from Calcutta, whither Nanda was to deliver these weapons to a stockpile being amassed by fellow anticolonialists. After crossing the river, Nanda passes through the European quarter of Calcutta where he is spotted by a known informant, "one of those who for a few miserable rupees a month delivered his fellow-countrymen to the tireless gallows of the British Raj."[44] The revolutionary's attempts to evade this spy lead him across the city, from dark, deserted bazaars to the lively nightlife of the Eurasian section. This transparent device provides the authors with a pretext to paint a portrait of the colonial city: the threat of violent suppression at Fort William, the extravagance of the Grand Hotel "reeking with all the luxuries of a master-class," the bedraggled, drunken Anglo-Indians, and, finally, to Sonagachi, a red light district on the outskirts of the native quarter. In this last neighborhood, Nanda alights upon an effective means of losing his unwanted tail by ducking into a brothel. "Even the spies knew that every revolutionist had sworn an oath never to know love or have contact with women

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[43] Irwin Granich and Manabendranath Roy, "Champak: A Story of India," *The Liberator* (February 1920): 8-11, here 8, 8, and 11.

[44] "Champak," 9.

until the day that India was free… If Nanda went into one of the houses, he reasoned, the spy would feel sure that this was no revolutionist and would give up the chase."[45]

The house serves as more than mere sanctuary for the night. Instead, it becomes a place of rebirth as Nanda's beliefs are transformed by his encounter with a young sex worker named Champak, an innocent in the eyes of the narrator: "There was not a gross line or suggestion about her, nothing of that hardness the prostitute develops in self-defense."[46] Straining to comprehend the presence of this image of youthful virtue amidst her squalid surroundings, Nanda asks Champak how she came to live at the brothel. Describing the combined effects of crop failure, unfair taxation, and predatory land confiscation, Champak uncannily explains the underlying causes of the famine that took her parents from her.[47] Champak finds the situation intolerable and proposes suicide as the only release from the miseries of her life. Drawing out the lesson from this moment,

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[45] "Champak," 9.

[46] "Champak," 10. The innocent romantic attraction of working-class men to sex workers—as a peculiar form of proletarian solidarity—became a recurrent theme in Gold's later fiction. See Mike Gold, "Love on a Garbage Dump," in *Mike Gold: A Literary Anthology* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 177-185; Mike Gold, *Jews Without Money* (New York: Liveright, 1931). For a critique of Gold's gender politics, see Paula Rabinowitz, "Women and U.S. Literary Radicalism," in *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930-1940* (New York: Feminist Press, 1987), 1- 16, esp. 3.

[47] Earlier in 1919, Roy had published an indictment of British rule in India, focusing on the moral outrage of famine in India. See "Hunger and Revolution in India," in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 155-158. This article was notable for its internationalist outlook, reflecting Roy's changing beliefs: "…the struggle for Indian independence in not a local affair, having for its end and purpose the creation of another egoistic nationalism; the liberty of the Indian people is a factor in world politics, for India is the keystone of British Imperialism which constitutes the greatest and most powerful enemy of the Social and Economic Revolution that exists today…Seen in this light, it becomes self-evident that the liberation of India is more than a mere act of abstract justice; it signifies a long step towards the redemption of the world from the jaws of the capitalistic system." "Hunger and Revolution," 158.

the authors project an analysis of colonial India through an extended monologue by Nanda, only occasionally interrupted by brief leading questions by Champak. The major points that Nanda extrapolates from his encounter with Champak include criticism of the Hindu willingness to accept suffering, a call for Indian anticolonialists to address labor exploitation, and a utopian vision of life and love after independence that evinced Roy's exposure to American sex radicals of the 1910s: "There will be no masters and slaves, only brothers; there will be no hunger and despair, only freedom and joy. Men will be pure and innocent as children; and women will know love, and the dawn-light will be on everything."[48] Exhausted by this speech, Nanda and Champak fell into "a fraternal embrace" and talked quietly until dawn when Nanda left after giving his new comrade one the smuggled pistols for her to use when the revolution comes.

The story operates on a number of levels for different readerships. For the reader acquainted with India only through Orientalist literature, "Champak" provides an anthropological tour of the colonial Calcutta with its different neighborhoods and populations. The economic analysis of sex work, in particular, may be taken as repudiation of representations of moral degeneracy of Asians.[49] Nativist anticolonialist readers may take from Nanda's conversation with Champak the importance of a class-based analysis of exploitation that expands the meaning of freedom beyond the formal

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[48] "Champak," 11.

[49] The extensive literature on the inter-relation of ideas of race, gender, and Asian "depravity" prohibits citation. One of the critical American texts in this discussion is Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927), a wildly popular sensationalist treatment of sexual degeneracy in colonial India. Mrinalini Sinha's recent work on the context and responses to this work does a wonderful job of highlighting the American context of the book's production. See *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), esp. 66-108. It is tempting to consider "Champak" a pre-emptive rejoinder to Mayo's work.

granting of independence from the British. On another level, however, "Champak" can be read as a nationalist romance akin to the nineteenth-century Latin American "foundational fictions" that have been analyzed by literary scholar Doris Sommer. In her work, Sommer observes that tales of transgressive love were often used "to cast the previously unreconciled parties, races, classes, or regions, as lovers who are 'naturally' attracted and right for another."[50] If "a fraternal embrace" can be substituted as a prudish variant of consummation, the romance of "Champak" might be understood as a nationalist love story.[51] Importantly, it is a particularly gendered vanguard fantasy in which the male radical intellectual transforms the raw material (Champak's backstory) provided by a displaced female peasant into a revolutionary message. The presumed progeny of this unity of radical intellect and toiling body is the coming liberated India.

**Establishing an Anticolonial International**

Such was the presumption of vanguard status evinced by Roy when he traveled to Moscow in 1920 to represent India (though he was nominally a delegate from Mexico) at the Second Congress of the Communist International. After months of encounters with leading Communists in Berlin and Moscow, Roy was invited to meet with the Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin to discuss the resolutions on national and colonial questions that were being prepared for the Comintern Congress. It was an important moment. Though the Soviet Union had already committed itself to an anti-imperialist program and recently hosted a meeting of "Peoples of the East" in Baku, the exact shape of Comintern policy

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[50] Doris Sommer, "Irresistible Romance: The Foundational Fictions of Latin America," in *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1990), 81.

[51] Alternately, one may imagine that consummation is deferred for Nanda and Champak until independence, when the revolutionaries—at the risk of being too obvious—finally fire the weapons they have horded.

on the colonial question was, essentially, wide open. At the time, even Marx's ambiguous writings on India were unknown and the Second International had eschewed work in Asia or Africa. Yet, it was clear that, in the wake of World War One and the rising demands for national self-determination, the Comintern could not afford to ignore anticolonial movements. The question before the Congress was the basis for such work: What role would class struggle play in "backward" regions? Under what conditions could alliances with non-Communist organizations be formed? How would revolutionary movements in the colonies differ from those in Europe? What was the relationship between work in Europe and efforts in its colonies?[52] These were exactly the problems that Roy had been reflecting on since his arrival in the United States four years earlier.

Reviewing the prepared theses on the colonial question, Roy found that Lenin had severely underestimated the revolutionary potential of anticolonial movements. Lenin recommended that the Comintern assist "bourgeois-democratic liberation" movements in the colonies—to Roy this phrase surely translated to the Indian Congress Party—on a temporary basis until revolutionary proletarian organizations could develop.[53] In the meantime, the Comintern would look for revolutionary allies in the West. Roy objected that such a formulation was wrong on two counts. First, Lenin's theses evinced a lack of knowledge of industrial development in the colonies and the formation of proletarian

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[52] Helene Carrere d'Encausse and Stuart Schram, *Marxism and Asia* (London: Allen Lane, 1969); Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, 11-19; Ray, *In Freedom's Quest*, vol. 1, 81-132; John Riddell (ed.), *To See the Dawn: Baku, 1920, First Congress of the Peoples of the East* (New York: Pathfinder, 1993).

[53] In her biography of Ho Chi Minh, Sophie Quinn-Judge points out that Lenin's formulation was likely influenced by the Dutch communist Henk Sneevliet (Maring), who had been an organizer in Java during World War One, uniting radical socialists and the nationalist *Sarekat Islam* party against the Dutch. Maring chaired the Colonial Commission at the Congress. See *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years, 1919-1941*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 49-51.

organizations in Asian countries, such as India. Second, the proposed draft obfuscated the connection between European capitalism and its colonies. In the supplementary theses that Roy offered to the Comintern Congress, the young Indian outlined the importance of colonial work as a central concern:

> The breaking up of the colonial empire, together with the proletarian revolution in the home country, will overthrow the capitalist system in Europe. Consequently, the Communist International must widen the sphere of its activity. It must establish relations with those revolutionary forces that are working for the overthrow of imperialism in the countries subjected politically and economically. These two forces must be co-ordinated if the final success of the World Revolution is to be guaranteed.[54]

When the Colonial Commission voted to accept the modified resolutions of both Lenin and Roy—Lenin had importantly changed all instances of "bourgeois-democratic" to "nationalist-revolutionary"—it was a major coup, both for radical anticolonial movements and for the reputation of M.N. Roy.

Having established his credentials as a major figure in Comintern work, Roy turned from theoretical pursuits to practical work as he was called to Tashkent to work with a group of Indian *muhajirun* who had stopped in Central Asia for military training before proceeding to their final destination in Turkey. Roy hoped to lure these fighters to a Communist program and set up a school to offer political education as a supplement to their existing regimen. Based on the evaluation of a Soviet official in December 1920, Roy was a complete failure as an organizer and as a teacher. It was noted that he was condescending, unable to connect with his students, and acted "like a man who loves to give orders." Recommending his removal from Tashkent, the reporter did note that Roy

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[54] "From the Proceedings of the Second Congress of the Communist International," in *The Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, vol. 1, Sibnarayan Ray (ed.) (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 175.

should remain active in the Comintern, but as "an irreplaceable theoretical worker—let's place the practical tasks in the hands of someone more appropriate."[55]

**"As Many Good Centres as Possible": The Organization of Indian Diasporics**

Despite the fact that Roy had organized a nominal Communist Party of India among his students in Tashkent, it remained the case that the Comintern had no effective connections with Indian organizations. At the same time, exilic revolutionary groups were enthused by the prospect of gaining the support of the Comintern in their efforts to drive the British out of India. Two groups sought to supplant Roy's monopoly on the Comintern's Indian work and forge meaningful ties between Indian workers across the diaspora and the Comintern: Virendranath Chattopadhyaya's Berlin Committee and the American-based Ghadar Party.

Since the early 1900s, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (Chatto) had been actively working among the Indian revolutionaries in a loose-knit diasporic community that included European-based intellectuals, a handful of leaders in India, and diasporic workers in Asia, Africa, and the Americas.[56] During World War One, Chatto devised a plan that would establish Berlin as a nucleus for work among these dispersed groups with the support of the German government who hoped to weaken Britain by way of its colonies. The plan achieved few results in India, but the established links between exilic Indians remained, even after Chatto left Berlin for Stockholm in 1916. In 1920, Chatto sought to conjoin the efforts of this group with the work of the Comintern as part of a

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[55] "Kratkii obzor indusskoi raboty v Tashkente [Short Review of Indian Work in Tashkent]," 1 December 1920, RGASPI 495/68/36.

[56] For biographical details of Chattopadhyaya's life and the origins of the Berlin Committee, see Nirode Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

global anticolonial effort. At the same time, Chatto was savvy to the dangers of state sponsorship based on his previous experience with Germany. Writing from Stockholm to the group of Indians in Tashkent, representatives of the Berlin Group urged cooperation among a wide variety of Indian revolutionary groups in different locales united under one banner of Communist work: "Our revolutionary experience in different countries has taught us not to depend too much on one centre, but to found as many good centres as possible."[57] A follow-up proposal elaborated, "It is essential that there should be centres of Communist activity wherever there are colonies of Indian laborers, etc. We must send instructors to California, South Africa, East Africa, Batavia, etc."[58]

In contrast to Roy's purely theoretical approach to anticolonial work in India, the Berlin Committee emphasized the practical questions of how to organize revolutionary forces. Like Katayama, Chatto considered diasporic populations spread across the globe an essential element of his plan. During a preliminary meeting with Comintern representative Mikhail Borodin in January 1921, Chatto proposed that Indo-Caribbean workers and US-based revolutionaries be invited to an organizing conference on Indian work later that year in Moscow so that they might form diasporic radical groups aligned in a united front. Borodin brushed aside the suggestion, noting only that the condition of overseas communities was "entirely dependent on the Motherland" and that "the point of the conference was practical."[59]

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[57] B. Datta, P. Khankhoje, and V. Chattopadhyaya to "the Indian Comrades," 27 October 1920, RGASPI 495/68/37.

[58] Memorandum to M.N. Roy, Acharya, and A. Mukherji, (n.d.), RGASPI 495/68/37.

[59] "III Konferenz mit den indischen Genossen [Third Meeting with the Indian Comrades]," 16 January 1921, RGASPI 495/68/37.

Months later, representatives from the group including Chatto and Agnes Smedley came to Moscow with a comprehensive plan for work in India consisting of a diagnosis of the situation in India ("Thesis on India and the World Revolution") and a plan to build an international organization under the Comintern dedicated to fomenting revolution in India ("Organization and Scheme of Indian Work"). Taken together, these two documents comprised an alternate vision for the organization of anticolonial work that offered a flexible framework around which to build a transnational antisystemic movement. The Berlin Committee also took aim at Roy's conception of work for India that was based on his optimistic assessment of the development of an industrial proletariat in the Raj. While Roy was not specifically named, "Thesis on India" criticized anticolonial plans that were based on a "vague enthusiasm" that was not tempered by knowledge of local conditions that might "neutralise the extravagance of a priori theorising."[60] Specifically, Chatto and his comrades drew the Comintern's attention to the specific social structures that would necessarily define the struggle: labor arrangements that represented "a curious medley" of feudal peonage, medieval guilds, and large-scale industrial workers; no evidence of strike actions; six-percent literacy; caste distinctions; religious divisions; and the overall underdevelopment of the country that led to a situation in which most Indian workers were unable to distinguish national from class oppression. Despite these complications, India was the forefront of world revolution, according to the authors, as revolution there would deal a fatal blow to the foundation of world capitalism—the British empire. Moreover, while the unique conditions on the subcontinent prevented struggle along the lines laid out by European

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[60] "Thesis on India and the World Revolution," (n.d., circa 1921), RGASPI 495/68/37.

Marxists, there already existed a variety of sources of anticolonial resistance based on religious and nationalist impulses. "Academic" arguments against collaboration with these forces "show[ed] a pathetic and stupid detachment from the realpolitik of the world situation."[61]

As they had during the meeting in Berlin, members of the Committee also emphasized the critical importance of working with diasporic groups. Overseas Indians were less conservative, it was argued, as they were already a self-selected group of those who were daring enough to leave behind their homes to seek new opportunities. Additionally, as they faced the adversities of migrant labor abroad, many of them had formed vibrant radical organizations that were dedicated to the protection of their rights abroad and freedom from British rule that was identified as the cause for their exodus. Working from the United States and Europe, these diasporics were afforded opportunities to produce propaganda and to organize centers that could train new revolutionaries impossible under the watch of colonial police forces.[62] Smedley, identifying herself to the Comintern as a member of the IWW and as an "Indian revolutionary" en route to the Raj from the United States, declared that the best of these organizations was the Hindustan Ghadar Party.[63]

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[61] "Thesis on India."

[62] "Organization and Scheme of Indian Work," (n.d., circa 1921), RGASPI 495/68/37.

[63] Agnes Smedley to the "Mali Bureau" (Comintern), 5 August 1921, RGASPI 495/68/37. The Berlin Committee's conception of Ghadar as a labor organization was likely due to Smedley's influence. While in the United States, she told Ghadar leaders: "You must use the label union when addressing union men… You have the biggest field with labor. The future belongs to labor, and you must become a part of it. The 'intellectuals' might help you some, but labor is the best field." See Agnes Smedley to Gopal Singh, 5 July 1919, South Asians in North America Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. On the divisions between

As historian Sobhanlal Datta Gupta has made clear, the Comintern's response to this proposal was shaped entirely by M.N. Roy.[64] Painting the Berlin Committee representatives as petite-bourgeois nationalists with a personal grudge, Roy was able to marginalize the innovative proposal that would have decentralized anticolonial efforts and allowed for a broad base of supporting organization to work under the banner of an autonomous "Indian Revolutionary Committee" within the Comintern. Instead, the acknowledged Comintern expert on colonial questions dug in his heels, producing *India in Transition* (1922), a monograph-length defense of class-based struggle that asserted that one would find in India a growing bourgeoisie, rising proletariat, and only a "hollow shell of the decayed caste system."[65] Despite such unrealistic assessments of the conditions in India, it was clear that Roy was the Comintern's recognized expert and that all questions concerning work in South Asia would be answered by him.

So it was that when the Ghadar Party leaders, Rattan Singh and Santokh Singh, arrived in Moscow in the fall of 1922 to observe the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, they found themselves completely shut out, despite having been vouched for by the

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laborers and intellectuals in the Ghadar movement, see Maia Ramnath, "Two Revolutions: The Ghadar Movement and India's Radical Diaspora, 1913–1918," *Radical History Review* 92 (2005): 7-30. The two major biographies of Agnes Smedley both exhibit peculiarities of interpretation regarding Smedley's work with Indian revolutionaries and should be approached with caution, though they contain useful information. See Janice MacKinnon and Stephen MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of an American Radical* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 31-86; Ruth Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 34-120.

[64] Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India*, 251-264.

[65] M.N. Roy, "India in Transition," in *Selected Works*, vol. 1, 253.

American Communist Party.[66] But the leaders were not deterred, as they felt that an alliance with the Comintern was essential to their task of re-creating Ghadar as an international organization that followed a Marxist program of struggle. When the Ghadar Party was founded in California in 1913, it was an organization dedicated to liberating India from foreign rule. Though the membership was primarily drawn from Punjabi Sikh workers on the Pacific Coast, the organization also attracted immigrant Indian students and intellectuals; unified by their experiences of colonial rule, migration, and racial oppression abroad, the group grew quickly during World War One when many among its followers believed that an end to British imperialism was at hand. As an organization composed of migrant workers and cosmopolitan intellectuals, connections were quickly made throughout the networks of South Asian migration in North America, Europe, the West Indies, East Asia, and Africa.[67] This explosive growth was stunted by a campaign

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[66] Rattan Singh and Santokh Singh to Executive Committee of the Comintern, 7 October 1922, RGASPI 495/68/89.

[67] Though the literature on the Ghadar Party is expansive, much of the work on the organization consists of patriotic hagiography, ethnic nationalism, or sectarian analysis. Among these older works on Ghadar, however, the better studies include S.S. Josh, *Hindustan Gadar Party* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1978); Harish Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organization, and Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983). For an exceptional study that approaches Ghadar from the perspectives of social, political, and immigration history, see Joan Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). The recent works of two scholars have opened up new perspectives on Ghadar that have been influential to my understanding. Seema Sohi analyzes the formation of Ghadar in the matrices of colonialism, racism, and anti-radicalism in North America. See "Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Empire, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2008. Maia Ramnath has unearthed the various ideological impulses and alliances that sustained Ghadar in the first third of the twentieth century. See "Two Revolutions: The Ghadar Movement and India's Radical Diaspora, 1913-1918," *Radical History Review* 92 (2005): 7-30; "The *Haj* to Utopia: Anti-Colonial Radicalism in the South Asian Diaspora, 1905-1930," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2008. For the purposes of this study, see also the internal history provided by Rattan Singh at the Second Congress of the League Against Imperialism (1929): *A Brief History of the Hindustan Gadar Party* (San Francisco: Gadar, 1929).

directed to suppress Ghadar in a series of criminal and immigration proceedings that devastated the organization.

Reflecting on what he perceived to be Ghadar's failures, secretary Santokh Singh contrasted India's failure to overthrow the British with the successful revolution in Russia.[68] Having undertaken an autodidactic program of Marxist study while in prison, Santokh along with a handful of other Ghadar leaders sought to turn the organization left after their release. Between 1922 and 1926, Ghadar representatives from the United States sent copies of their constitution, details of their administration, and internal histories to Moscow to demonstrate that they were a transformed organization. But when M.N. Roy wrote to the Central Committee of the American Party in late 1923 to advocate the creation of an Indian Workers' League in the United States, he made no mention of Ghadar. Rather, he pointed out that a Communist Indian organization was needed in America because "so far propaganda about India has been made there only from the bourgeois nationalist viewpoint."[69] It was only in late 1925 that Roy first contacted Ghadar representatives directly. Tellingly, it was to request that Ghadar members be sent for political training at Communist University of Toilers of the East, a Comintern school dedicated to training anticolonial cadres. In Roy's mind, if Ghadar was to participate in the Comintern's work, they would first have to be remolded as Communists. That story is told in the next chapter.

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[68] Ramnath, "The *Haj* to Utopia," 356-360.

[69] M.N. Roy to the Central Committee of the Workers Party of America, 26 November 1923, RGASPI 515/1/164.

**Maintaining Connections, Theorizing Transnational Anticolonialism**

Arriving in the Soviet capital in December 1921 (just after the Comintern's meetings with the Berlin Committee), Sen Katayama was accorded the homecoming of a veteran revolutionary, met at the train station by a greeting party headed by Trotsky and Stalin. He was soon joined by the young Japanese delegates who had attended the Third World Congress of the Comintern earlier that year as they planned for the upcoming Congress of Revolutionary Organizations of the Far East where Katayama was scheduled to present on the situation in Japan.[70] Assuming that he followed the notes he had prepared in Mexico, Katayama's report to the Far Eastern Congress emphasized the new revolutionary possibilities in the East and the threat of American imperialism, ascendant in the wake of World War One.[71] In one draft of his report on Japan, Katayama concluded:

> Now I think that the Japanese worker has made as much progress in the last half century as the worker of Europe has made during the last two or three centuries, and so I am sure the Japanese proletariat will soon learn how to fight against the capitalist oppressors better and quicker than the American or European workers where the capitalistic system is fully developed and established. Our workers will be able to make the revolutionary progress quicker in Japan where capitalism is still in its premature stage.[72]

The position was more an article of faith than a reasoned judgment; Katayama gave no indication of the mechanisms by which Japan would "leapfrog" into the revolutionary future.

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[70] Yoneda, "The Heritage of Sen Katayama," 51; A. Tivel' and M. Kheimo (eds.), *10 let Kominterna v resheniiakh i tsifrakh [Ten Years of the Comintern in Decisions and Figures]* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1929).

[71] See draft of Katayama's letter to the Congress, RGASPI 521/1/23.

[72] Untitled draft of speech, RGASPI 521/1/23.

Unlike Roy, Katayama was not recognized as a theoretician within the Comintern. In the decade after his arrival in Moscow, he appeared at numerous international congresses and published regularly in radical journals and magazines. But not one major resolution or published position was associated with Katayama's name. Rather, Katayama was known for his steadfast support of the Comintern's anticolonial work, as it concerned European empires as well as the contending trans-Pacific empires of the United States and Japan. When the question of work among African Americans was brushed off by some white members of the American Communist Party, Katayama stridently pushed back that it was essential that the Party address the problem of racism. The moment was memorably captured by one of the black delegates, Jamaican poet Claude McKay:

> It was an unforgettable experience to watch Katayama in conference. He was like a little brown bulldog with his jaws clamped on an object that he wouldn't let go. He apparently forgot all about nice human relationships in conference. Sen Katayama had no regard for the feelings of the white American comrades, when the Negro question came up, and boldly told them so. He said that though they called themselves Communists, many of them were unconsciously prejudiced against Negroes because of their background.[73]

In addition to this regular encouragement of the Comintern's anti-racist and anticolonial efforts, Katayama also made it a point to reach out the colonial students and emissaries in Moscow, offering his room at the Hotel Lux as a salon for the discussion of revolutionary work. Using his reputation, he offered backing for political projects and personal support. For instance, when KUTV's administration recommended dropping a Korean student who lacked the academic preparation needed to make it in the university,

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[73] Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), 180.

Katayama stumped for him, underscoring the importance of building a Korean cadre for anticolonial work.[74]

Katayama also dedicated significant energies—especially considering his failing health—to correspondence with Japanese American radicals, stressing the importance of their efforts in the United States. "We must keep our America organization get growing [sic], so that we can supply able communist comrades when time comes for decisive action," Katayama reminded his pupils in New York, explaining that "[o]f course there are only two to three hundred thousand Japanese in America, Canada, and Hawai [sic], but these are better workers and more class conscious than those workers at home generally."[75] This belief in the revolutionary potential of migrants was perhaps Katayama's greatest contribution to Comintern work and the formation of American anticolonialism under the banner of international Communism in the interwar period. Though he never formally enunciated a theoretical foundation for this approach to anticolonial work from diasporic locales, a collection of short articles on Japanese-American relations, *Japan and America* [*Iaponiia i Amerika*] (1925) provides his longest meditation on the question. Taking on questions of labor, migration, imperialism, and diplomacy, *Japan and America* mined a wide range of sources to paint a picture of Japanese American life at the interstices of two empires. In retrospect, the text—which only exists in Russian—comprises a surprising forerunner to developments in Asian American studies as the field developed almost a half-century later.

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[74] "Uchebnyi plan inogruppy [Academic plan of the Foreign Sector]," 23 June 1927, RGASPI 532/1/37.

[75] Katayama to Comrades Unzo and Taro, 21 August 1921, RGASPI 521/1/17.

At the outset of *Japan and America*, Katayama explains to his reader that the book was built on articles written between 1921 and 1925. As such, it was a work written on the run with few reference materials available, as Katayama trekked from New York to Mongolia in the period, with many stops in between. But as the book concerned Japanese American immigration and relations between the two countries since the turn of the century, Katayama considered his expertise to be couched in his personal experience. The same experience provided the impetus for the book, as he felt "the deepest sympathy and compassion" for the 250,000 Japanese immigrants in the United States and Hawaii as they faced "inhuman and immoral" legislation and shameful anti-immigrant harassment.[76] To understand their plight, Katayama traced out a history of US-Japanese foreign relations, beginning with Commodore Perry's 1853 visit to Japan that leads into a discussion of Japan's economic dependence on US trade. Because of this asymmetrical relationship, Katayama asserted, Japanese immigrants in the US were left unprotected by their government and available to the worst exploitations and injustices.

Here, Katayama shifted emphasis to common experiences of racism and xenophobia, a record of personal and communal offense. He called out the hypocrisies of anti-Japanese moral campaigns against "picture brides" in a country where divorce was so easily obtained. He turned his gaze to popular culture, identifying the press as a major instrument of the anti-Japanese movement with William Randolph Hearst as its king.[77] Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915) was excoriated as a "mendacious representation of

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[76] Sen Katayama, *Iaponiia i Amerika [Japan and America]* (Moscow: Litizdat, 1925), 3. The Russian-language translation indicates that the original manuscript was in English. No such manuscript exists among Katayama's papers in Moscow; thus far I have been unable to ascertain whether a Japanese translation of the work was published.

[77] *Iaponiia i Amerika*, 30.

the Japanese, made only to arouse Japano-phobic sentiments in the American public... as though trickery and intrigue were purely Japanese traits. Not one race (*narod*) exists that is free from these traits of capitalist society."[78] The details of the recent *Takao Ozawa* (1922) Supreme Court case and its impact on Japanese American rights were discussed, as was the 1924 Immigration Act. In a perceptive, albeit brief, analysis of unions and electoral politics, Katayama stressed that anti-Japanese rhetoric undercut labor solidarity and only advanced the interests of labor leadership and lackey politicians. Elsewhere, Katayama recorded instances of racial violence, placing attacks on Japanese Americans in the context of the near destruction of American Indians, slavery and then lynching in the South, and anti-Chinese riots in the West, all part of the barbaric cycles of American imperialism.

As a collection of articles, the flashes of insight were bright, but presented in a disjointed manner. Only in the concluding section did the author connect the various threads, as he revealed his fear that his record of racism and inhumanity was only a prelude. As Japanese and American imperial interests increasingly came into conflict on the Pacific, Katayama worried, violence and racism would only intensify until a full-blown military conflict erupted. Here, Katayama believed that Japanese Americans' location of struggle—between the two empires—was particularly auspicious for a transnational program of struggle that sought to end racism, secure rights and justice, ensure peace, and destroy empire.

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[78] *Iaponiia i Amerika*, 30. Throughout Katayama's discussions of accusations of immorality, he is careful not to deny that immorality exists amongst Japanese Americans, but that the roots of such behavior has no relation to race or culture. For recent treatments of *The Cheat* by Asian Americanist scholars, see Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 10-45; Robert G. Lee, *Orientals*, 120-126.

**Conclusions**

After the publication of *Japan and America*, Katayama drifted into semi-retirement. He continued to meet with younger radicals and appear at international conferences, but he carried few official duties within the Comintern. Following his death in 1933, he was interred in Red Square. M.N. Roy continued to play a major role in Comintern work throughout the 1920s, organizing Indian work from offices in Berlin, Geneva, Paris, and Moscow and serving a brief stint as one of Moscow's advisors in China. During the struggle over Bolshevik leadership and reorientation of Comintern strategies in the late 1920s, Roy's criticisms of the Soviet leadership and continued association with "renegade" former Party members in Germany led to his expulsion from the Comintern.

Despite the brevity of their active careers in the Comintern, both Katayama and Roy played critical roles in establishing the importance of anticolonial work in the international Communist movements. Having cleared their own paths to Leninist anticolonialism, they then helped build a center for this work in Moscow that would eventually draw hundreds of Americans throughout the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, a tension was created between existing anticolonial movements that fed into Moscow and the Comintern's programs for revolution in the East, as was strikingly revealed in the 1921 meeting with the Berlin Committee. As the remainder of this dissertation will attest, the contrast of Moscow's immense promise with the limits of vanguardism and Comintern domination defined American anticolonialism as it was articulated under the banner of the Soviets.

# CHAPTER TWO

## "One Hundred Grams of Black Bread, Twenty Tons of Books": Revolutionary Encounters between American Students and Soviet Ethnography at the Communist University of Toilers of the East

### Introduction

The Communist University of Toilers of the East (KUTV) was the major conduit that brought migrant students and activists from the United States to Moscow. As one of the four universities operated by the Comintern, KUTV specialized in developing cadre leadership in the "East" (*vostok*), a sweeping geographical category that included the Central Asian and Caucasian regions of the Soviet Union as well as Asia, Africa, and the Americas.[1] As it was difficult to recruit students directly from European colonies where open Communist work was illegal, many colonial students were culled from diasporic populations in the United States. This circuitous path from colony to Moscow by way of America incongruously wedged the United States between the Soviet Union and the East.

Foreign students typically came to KUTV for one-year or two-year short courses (in contrast to the three-year full course completed by Soviet students) intended to develop their knowledge of Marxism and practical organizing skills needed in their home countries. In this short period of time, foreign students were asked to overcome greater obstacles than their Soviet peers. The difficulties began with the journey to Moscow that

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[1] The other schools were the KUNMZ (Communist University of National Minorities of the West), KUTK (Communist University of Toilers of China), and MLSh (International Lenin School). For a memoir account of the Comintern schools that provides a succinct overview, see "Friendship University, The Early Versions: Interview with an Ex-Insider," *Survey* (July-September 1961): 18-23.

involved evading colonial officials while sneaking across Afghanistan from British India to Central Asia, or finding work as a sailor to finance a trip to a port city in Europe or the Soviet Far East. Along the way, future students, using a stamped silk slip sewn into their clothes as Party credentials, relied on local comrades to help them complete their passage to Moscow. Based on student accounts, this journey took between two to six weeks, a time period during which conquering trepidation and hardship while relying on the aid of the Party comprised the first lessons for aspiring revolutionaries.

While never formally theorized as such, the arduous trip to Moscow was the beginning of a pedagogical program that emphasized personal transformation over specific learning objectives. In fact, when KUTV administrators responsible for the foreign section (*ingruppa*) met at the beginning of the 1925 academic year, they agreed that their students were encumbered with too many disadvantages—language barriers, varying levels of literacy and academic preparation, difficulties adjusting to local climate and culture—for the university's instructors to expect to deliver proper training in the study of Marxism and colonial problems (*vostokovedenie*).[2] One administrator outlined their curricular goals:

> First we must Sovietize (*osovetit'*) the student, and only then can we Easternize him (*ovostochit'*). It brings to mind the old formula for political work in the Red Army: First the soldier (*krasnoarmeits*) must be de-peasantized (*raskrest'ianit'*), and only in his last three months can he be re-peasantized (*okrest'ianit*') ... our

[2] *Vostokovedenie*—which I've loosely translated here in its Soviet sense as "the study of Marxism and colonial problems"—would be strictly rendered as Oriental Studies or Orientalism. However, as has been noted by other scholars, after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), it is difficult to speak of "Orientalism" without conjuring the specific analyses of Said's work. For a rich discussion of the meanings of "the East" and the contrast between Russian/Soviet *vostokovedenie* and western European Orientalisms, see Vera Tolz, "European, National, and (Anti-)Imperial: The Formation of Academic Oriental Studies in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia," *Kritika* (Winter 2008): 53-81.

> general system of political education (*partvospitaniia*) must balance these proportions of Sovietization and Easternization.[3]

These twinned goals—Sovietization and Easternization—placed KUTV's mission in the currents of two major realms of social and individual transformation emphasized by the Bolsheviks after the revolution: education and ethnography.

In the two decades following the October Revolution, education was a privileged and vexed sphere of social transformation in the Soviet Union.[4] On the one hand, the Party leadership recognized the importance of schools and universities as institutions that shaped its subjects. And, in the wake of the Revolution, the task of education was declared to be no less than the establishment of a new Soviet person (*novyi chelovek*) to inhabit a remade society. On the other hand, the Bolshevik Revolution had not, in the main, been supported by the educated strata of society. As a result of the lack of trained personnel and the priority given to social transformation, educational efforts in general focused on *vospitanie* (upbringing). According to one recent history of Soviet education,

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[3] "Soveshchanie s tovarishchami iz KUTV [Deliberations with Comrades from KUTV]," 10 October 1925, Russian State Archive for Social-Political History (RGASPI) 532/1/17. A longer statement of the *ingruppa*'s problems and need for adjusted curriculum can be found in the 1925 annual report that clarified that the "central idea of [KUTV's short course] is to change [the student's] worldview (*mirovozzrenie*), remove petit-bourgeois tendencies (*uklony*), etc." See "Itogi raboty inostrannoi gruppy za god [Annual Review of the Work of the Foreign Group]," (n.d., circa 1925) RGASPI 532/2/8. For a general statement on the tasks of KUTV that served as a vague, but oft-cited reference point, see I.V. Stalin, ""O politicheskikh zadachakh universiteta narodov vostoka, 18 Maia 1925 g. [On the Political Tasks of the University of Peoples of the East, 18 May 1925]," in *Sochineniia*, vol. 7. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1951), 133-152.

[4] My discussion of the history of Soviet education in the interwar period draws from the following: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Larry Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917-1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

"[b]y the mid-twenties rural children were befuddled by words such as 'tsar,' 'strike,' or 'Duma.' …At the same time, ignorance was accompanied by a willingness to label: children's games in the twenties turned the 'Whites' and the *burzhui* (a derogatory abbreviation of 'bourgeoisie') into evil-doers who 'feasted on children.'"[5] Put simply, early Soviet schools rarely attained high levels of educational achievement, but they did effectively inculcate basic Party values. In this sense, the focus on personal transformation at KUTV was not merely an exigency of the short course of study nor was it a traditional colonial civilizing mission; rather KUTV's foreign section was exemplary of general trends in Soviet education.[6]

The task of "Easternizing" colonial students, in contrast, summoned the specific knowledges and technologies of ethnography. As research by scholars such as Yuri Slezkine, Terry Martin, and Francine Hirsch has demonstrated, ethnography played an essential role in the formation of the Soviet Union as the Bolsheviks sought to integrate a new multinational state on the remnants of imperial Russia, a landmass that encompassed a wide range of ethnicities, linguistic groups, religious confessions, and lifeways.[7]

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[5] This passage is from Ben Eklof's summary of Evgenii Balashov's *Shkola v Rossiskom obshchestve 1917-1927* (Saint Petersburg: RAN, 2003). See Eklof, "Liberal Projects and Russian Realities: Two Recent Works on Early Soviet Education, 1917-1927," *History of Education* (July-September 2006): 589-600. For an insightful contemporary interpretation of the importance of *vospitanie* in early Soviet society, see Samuel Harper's reflections on his trips to the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s, *Making Bolsheviks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931).

[6] In a review of the work of KUTV, S. Popov noted that the focus on Party upbringing (*partiinaia-vospitatel'naia rabota*) was common to all Communist universities in the Soviet Union, but had demanded stronger efforts at KUTV due to the comparatively lower percentage of Party members among its student body. See "KUTV—kuznitsa kadrov dlia sovetskogo vostoka [KUTV—The Forge of Cadres for the Soviet East]," *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* No. 3 (1935): 190.

[7] Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet*

Moreover, the regime sought to accomplish this task while adhering to espoused Leninist principles of national self-determination and anti-imperialism. The key to resolving this conflict was the proposition of a Marxist evolutionary schema of stages of historical development (from hunter-gatherer communities to socialist societies) that could be acted upon so that backward elements of the Soviet Union could be advanced in a process that Hirsch has termed "state-sponsored evolutionism."[8] At KUTV, colonial students, including the Americans, were to be transformed into cadre leaders who could identify the progressive and revolutionary elements of their home countries and build a revolutionary movement that would advance their nation with the aid of these elements. To be "Easternized," according to this understanding, meant to shake free of the backward Orient and to embody the coming "revolutionary East."[9]

Such a transformation required the active participation of the Soviet ethnographers who were responsible for instruction and of colonial students who provided local knowledge. The use of native informants was especially important as few of the new ethnographers had field experience in "the East." Rather, they were, as a group, young Party loyalists with little academic preparation, representative of the major transformation in the discipline of ethnography; what had been an "extremely flexible, pluralistic scientific system" in the early 1920s had been radically transformed by the

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*Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[8] My discussion here relies on Hirch, *Empire of Nations*, 1-18. For a detailed study of evolutionary schema as applied to Arctic populations, see Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*.

[9] "Revolutionary East" (*Revoliutsionnyi vostok*) was the name of the school's monthly journal. In the 1922-1923 academic year, over one-quarter of student course hours (174 hours out of a total 572 hours of instruction) was devoted to the subject of "the history of the development of social forms," a course that combined Marxist theory, discussion with students about their homelands, and excursions to the Soviet East. See "Otchet [Report]," (n.d., circa 1923) RGASPI 532/1/5.

1930s as "all the key posts went to representatives of the new generation of ethnographers, raised on the idea that Marxism had a monopoly on scientific knowledge (*nauchnaia istina*)," according to the Russian scholar T.D. Solovei.[10] For instance, A.Z. Zusmanovich, head of the Africanist section, had come to KUTV following a period of practical work in the international wing of the Komsomol (Young Communist League). University administrator and India specialist Sofia Melman had first served as a political officer in the Red Army during the Civil War before starting at KUTV in 1926. A.M. Diakov only took an interest in Eastern affairs as a result of being posted to Tadzhikistan as a commissar of public health in the 1920s; the office he commandeered was furnished with a large collection of Orientalist books that he started reading in his spare time.[11] A few KUTV instructors had been trained by established ethnographers, but, overall, little

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[10] T.D. Solovei, *Ot 'burzhuaznoi' etnologii k 'sovetskoi' etnografii: istoriia otechestvennoi etnologii pervoi treti XX veka [From Bourgeois Ethnology to Soviet Ethnography: The History of Russian Anthropology in the First Third of Twentieth Century]* (Moscow: Institut etnologii i antropologii im. N.N. Miklukho-Maklaia, 1998), 38-39.

[11] On Zusmanovich, see A.B. Davidson, "Afrikanistika, afrikanisty i afrikantsy v Kominterne: stat'ia pervaia." *Vostok*, no. 6 (1995): 112-34; "Afrikanistika, afrikanisty i afrikantsy v Kominterne: stat'ia vtoraia." *Vostok*, no. 2 (1996): 100-14. Sofia Melman's obituary with relevant biographical and scholarly details can be found in *Narody Azii i Afriki* No. 1 (1979): 247-248. Diakov's experience as a health officer is recounted in "Pervyi narkom [The First Commissar]," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 25 February 1986. A general background on this generation of Orientalists can be found in *Slovo ob uchiteliakh: moskovskie vostokovedy 30-60-kh godov [A Word about the Teachers: Moscow Orientalists from the 1930s to the 1960s]* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Nauka, 1988). Unfortunately, few details are provided on the interwar period or connections to Comintern work. A contemporary literature review by a former KUTV instructor is similarly muted on Comintern connections, but provides a solid overview of scholarly work on the colonies; see A. A. Guber, "Izuchenie istorii stran vostoka v SSSR za 25 let [Twenty-Five Years of Soviet Historical Study of the East]," in *25 let istoricheskoi nauki v SSSR [Twenty-Five Years of Historical Studies in the USSR]* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo AN SSSR, 1942), 272-284.

importance was attached to local knowledge compared to the premium that was placed on ideological reliability and demonstrated Party allegiance.[12]

This chapter examines the experiences of KUTV's American students as intended objects of personal transformation and as active participants in the creation of ethnographic knowledge. Throughout the existence of the university (1921-1938), there was a sustained presence of students recruited in the United States. Black students recruited in the United States first attended classes at KUTV in 1925 and continued to do so until the university was shuttered. Asian migrants formed another contingent of students, including Indian, Filipino, Japanese, and Chinese activists recruited through study groups, labor organizations, and sympathetic revolutionary movements active in the United States (e.g., Kuomintang and Ghadar Party). Their presence reflects both the importance of the United States as a location for transnational activism and the increasing hostility faced by Asian Americans following the immigration restrictions of the 1920s.[13] After the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, M.N. Roy wrote from Moscow to the leadership of the California-based Ghadar Party, suggesting a new base of operations for the exilic revolutionaries: "In view of the fact that the latest immigration laws and general

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[12] Following James Scott, it may be useful to think of KUTV's fundamental approach to ethnography as departing from a high-modernist perspective, though some instructors were more attentive to specificity and some informants more insistent on tailoring the Party's approach. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), esp. 147-179.

[13] The 1924 Act came on the heels of the *Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) Supreme Court ruling that excluded Indians from US citizenship. On immigration restrictions and deportation in the interwar period, see Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004): 21-90. In a critical sense, these restrictions removed the United States from a global web of migrations that had enabled transnational anticolonial work in the early twentieth century. See Adam McKeown, "Global Migration, 1846-1940," *Journal of World History* 15:2 (2004): 155-189; Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 157-181; Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags* (New York: Verso, 2005).

attitude of the American Government towards Indians is making it very difficult for Indian workers and students to stay in America, and in fact a number of them have already been deported, we consider that there are many young men who would be very glad to have a chance to come to a country [the Soviet Union] where they will be hospitably received and given opportunities they cannot receive in America."[14] Inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution and in the midst of re-orienting their organization, Ghadar leadership readily obliged, sending a steady stream of students from the US to Moscow over the next ten years.[15]

While the small batches of students from America never comprised more than ten percent of the foreign sector of the university, an investigation of their lives and labors in Moscow sheds light on a number of issues. At a basic level, this chapter fills a gap in the literature on international communism in the portrayal of Comintern schools and the lived realities of its students and, to a lesser degree, its teachers. In a 1961 interview, a Comintern veteran noted: "If ever an authentic history of the Communist International is written and of the means by which it spread its creed, a substantial place will have to be given to the party school network."[16] But, to date, there has been little scholarship that explores the worlds of these schools.[17] In addition to the problem of closed archives

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[14] M.N. Roy to Hindustan Gadar Party, 5 October 1925, RGASPI 495/68/164. Anti-Asian immigration policy was common object of criticism among Indians at home and aborad. See, for instance, Taraknath Das, "Stateless Persons in the USA," *Calcutta Review* XVI (1925): 40-46. R. Dayal, "The Disabilities of Indians Abroad," *Modern Review* XLI (1927): 161-168.

[15] For a full discussion of Ghadar's evolving ideology and its relationship to the Comintern in the 1920s, see Chapter One, above.

[16] "Friendship University, The Early Years," 23.

[17] The only comprehensive survey of KUTV is the Soviet-era celebration of the university as a bastion of proletarian internationalism in N.N. Timofeeva, "Kommunisticheskii Universitet

during the Soviet era, scholars also faced the obstacle of KUTV alumni's sealed lips, as many former students stayed true to their vows to keep the operations of the university secret long after the school itself ceased to exist. When asked in 1989 about his time as a student in Moscow, African American activist B.D. Amis continued to act in accordance with the rules of conspiracy he agreed to in the 1930s and refused to provide any details of life in Comintern schools.[18] Drawing on the archive of university records and Comintern files in Moscow, this chapter reconstructs the history of American students in Moscow. Student autobiographies—a required element of their KUTV application that

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Trudiashchikhsia Vostoka (1921-1925) [Communist University of Toilers of the East, 1921-1925]," *Narody Azii i Afriki*, no. 2 (1979): 47-57; N.N. Timofeeva, "Kommunisticheskii Universitet Trudiashchikhsia Vostoka (1926-1938) [Communist University of Toilers of the East (1926-1938)]" *Narody Azii i Afriki* no. 5 (1979): 30-42. Despite the limits of Soviet scholarship, Timofeeva's articles are quite useful as an overview of enrollment and administration. Since the opening of the Comintern archives, there have been limited studies of KUTV's students from the African diaspora: Woodford McClellan, "Africans and Black Americans in Comintern Schools, 1925-1934," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26: 2 (1993): 371-390; "Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923-1927," *Paedagogica Historica* 35: 1 (1999): 41-66. Josephine Fowler briefly discusses the experience of Japanese and Chinese students at KUTV in *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists: Organizing in American and International Communist Movements, 1919-1933* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 67-73. On KUTK, commonly referred to as Sun Yat-sen University, see Yueh Sheng, *Sun Yat-Sen University in Moscow and the Chinese Revolution: A Personal Account* (Lawrence: Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, 1971); Miin-ling Yu,"Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow, 1925-1930," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1995.

[18] Miriam Crawford interview with B.D. Amis, 1 February 1989, box 1, Communist Party of the United States of America Records, Biographical Materials (Collection 132.02), Tamiment Library, New York University. A few autobiographies by KUTV students have provided more information. The richest account—likely a result of the author's break with the Party—can be found in Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978). See also William Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide* (New York: International Publishers, 1980); Si-lan Chen Leyda, *Footnote to History* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1984). For a semi-autobiographical fictional account of the early years of KUTV by a Turkish student, see Nazim Hikmet's novel, *Romantika* [*The Romantic*] (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1964). Kweku Awooner-Renner Bankole's sophomoric verse written during his student days also provides some insight into the mood of the school; see *This Africa* (London: Central Books, 1943).

detailed student's social background, education, political affiliations, military service, and a record of arrests, incarceration, and deportation—provide a particularly rich source that reflects the diverse networks of transnational connections that fed into the international Communist movement through the United States.[19] Utilizing these materials and focusing on a relatively small contingent of the student body, the chapter portrays the human experience of international Communism to understand how people inhabited the institutions created by the Comintern's directives and resolutions.[20]

Emphasizing the experience of migrant American students also reveals much about the construction and the limits of ethnographic knowledge produced at KUTV and, in turn, the confines of Comintern anticolonial work. As historian Henry Yu has demonstrated in his study of Asian American intellectuals (students, informants, and interpreters) and the Chicago school's work on the "Oriental problem," social theories about race reflect both the existing racial regime and the intentions of the scholars who frame the research.[21] All such knowledge necessarily simplifies and reduces human experience to bring into relief patterns of similarity and difference. For the migrant American students at KUTV, however, the contrast between the models of Soviet

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[19] In addition to student autobiographies, another set of useful sources are the annual evaluations (*kharakteristiki*) given by instructors that spoke to students' intellectual and political abilities. Other university records include disciplinary hearings, student complaints to the administration, and the minutes of student discussions.

[20] For the most part, scholarly literature on the Comintern has emphasized a history of the body's policies in the context of Soviet foreign relations. Relatively little work has been done on the practices and cultures of the Comintern. Irina Filatova's study of Africans at KUTV highlights the advantages of studying a small group of students. See Filatova, "Indoctrination or Scholarship," 43.

[21] Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Yu's work on the interactions of white sociologists and Asian American "native informants" influenced my approach to KUTV.

ethnographic theory and their transitory histories of labor migration and racialization was especially stark. Recruited in the United States, many of these students had not seen their "home countries" for years, if not decades. Drawn to work in international Communist movement as a result of their status as "stateless proletarians" excluded from the body politic at home and abroad, the evolutionary schema of KUTV's ethnographers offered an exceptionally poor fit for their personal experiences, as they were rendered as "marginal men" in a particularly Soviet mold.[22] The combination of their "peasant origins" and work in the United States among the "advanced proletariat" placed them between the traditional Orient, as imagined by Soviet ethnographers, and the coming revolutionary East; as such, they were perfect guides to usher in this future. At the same time, their marginal status gave rise to suspicions about their reliability as native informants which were only exacerbated when students voiced their own political interests and demands. This tension between Soviet models of colonial "liberation" forged from the demands of the post-revolutionary state and the students' visions of anticolonial work created an uneven dialogue between expert and local knowledge that indeed typified the Comintern's approach to work in the East.[23] At the same time, the conversations at the university and published research by students and Soviet scholars reveal the possibilities that were present in this encounter.

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[22] In the framework of the Chicago school, the "marginal man" was a product of migration and contact, positioned between two worlds, the traditional whence he came and the modern whither he moved. See Yu, *Thinking Orientals*, 93-123. For a brief critical review of the Chicago school's writing on race and ethnicity and its legacy, see also Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 14-23.

[23] This contrast of local and expert knowledge follows Hirsch's discussion of the formation of Soviet ethnographic knowledge. See Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 10-12.

**KUTV's Beginnings and the First Americans, 1921-1929**

When KUTV first opened its doors in 1921, there was already a waiting population of émigré revolutionaries from India, China, and Japan who had petitioned the People's Commissariat for the Affairs of the Nationalities (Narkomnats) to open a political school to provide revolutionary training for foreigners. Rather than establish separate schools for Soviet and foreign students, KUTV was split into two sectors to serve these respective populaces. By the end of 1923, the university's foreign sector had organized seven sections based on language of instruction, offering courses of study in Turkish, French, English, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Russian.[24] The demanding program was colorfully described by Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet: "Our daily regimen was twenty four hours of Lenin / Twenty four hours of Marx / Twenty four hours of Engels … Our daily ration: one hundred grams of black bread / twenty tons of books / and twenty minutes for ourselves."[25] An Indian student, however, was less sanguine in his description of conditions at the university to Evelyn Trent Roy, to whom he appealed for a release to travel to Berlin where he could receive finds sent from his family in India. His letter is worth quoting at length for its description of the conditions students endured:

> I want to get that money which will be very useful not only for myself but also for the other boys in the University, as the conditions in Moscow are very bad for them. One of the boys Saffdar is so ill that he is being sent to Crimea by the

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[24] Timofeeva, "KUTV (1921-1925)," 48-50. KUTV was under the administration of Narkomnats until the Commissariat's liquidation in 1923. At this point, responsibility for KUTV was awkwardly shared between the Comintern and Soviet Party (VKP(b)), an arrangement that gave university officials severe administrative headaches. The division of foreign sections evolved from linguistic sections to specific national populations in the late 1920s.

[25] Nazim Hikmet, "My Nineteenth Year [Moi deviatnadtsat' let]," in *Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo inostrannoi literatury, 1951), 107. My translation. Timofeeva quotes a shorter passage from this poem in "KUTV (1921-1925)," 53.

> University. The other [illegible] is always complaining about his health and about his head and the reason is lack of food... Now what we get in the University is this. Morning tea without sugar, black bread and sausage. Dinner, cabbage soup, black bread and kasha. Supper, the same as breakfast. Living condition is worse than a military barrack. There are at least thirty beds in a room, and they make so much noise that it is even impossible to sleep after three and to study you can think yourself. Now what they learnt is as follows. Lectures in Oratory only three; political economic 12; history of the workers movement 13; current events 3; and study of Marxism 3...[Though I] am living on bread butter and tea and that meal is also the cheapest of its kind, I do not complain as I know there are thousands of other people who can not even get that… I left my religion which was the most dearest thing, I left my parents and friends. And now if you want my life, I will give it also. I wanted to end it before but comrade Gupta told me not to do it. I am so miserable here and the life is so disgusting that I do not know what to do with it.[26]

In spite of the deprivations faced by students, the university continued to grow between 1921 and 1925, with increased enrollments every year, the establishment of translation bureaus to produce Marxist-Leninist texts in the native languages of colonial workers, and the building of a library that held forty-seven thousand volumes and subscribed to local newspapers and journals from around the world.[27]

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[26] [Musood] Ali Shah to "My Dear Mother" [Evelyn Trent Roy], 14 January 1923, RGASPI 495/68/41. Shah was one of a group of Indians who made their way from Kabul to Tashkent to Moscow, where they studied at KUTV from 1921 to 1923. KUTV's records from these early years are scarce, but an annotated list of Indian students from 1921-1924 is available. See "Svedeniia ob indiitsakh-studentakh KUTV [Information on Indian Students of KUTV]," 7 April 1924, RGASPI 532/1/375. Most of these students were Muslims involved in the Khilifat movement, though there was one Hindu among the group, Sibnath Banerjee, who later became a notable trade unionist in India. See J.P. Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 20-25; M.A. Persits, *Revolutionaries of India in Soviet Russia* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), 17-96. Shah's description of the weak program of study stands in stark contrast to the proscribed curriculum for1922-1923 that demanded study of the following subjects in course hours per year: geography (258); history of societal forms (174); Russian language (72); math (48); political economy (24); biology (24); chemistry (24); and graphic literacy (24). Most likely, KUTV could not find instructors who could teach this curriculum in English. See "Otchet KUTV, 1922-1923 [Report KUTV 1922-1923]," RGASPI 532/1/5; S. Banerjee to M.N. Roy, 28 January 1923, RGASPI 495/68/41.

[27] Timofeeva, "KUTV (1921-1925), 53-55.

Among the émigré revolutionaries at KUTV in its early years was its first American student, Kakuzo Takaya (alias Tereda), an Issei domestic worker who joined the CPUSA in 1922, a year before he enrolled at KUTV in the Japanese section.[28] Though his student autobiography gives few details of his time in the United States, Takaya was likely a member of one of the Japanese American socialist study groups in California or New York City.[29] Perhaps due to this international experience and ability to communicate in English (one of the four official languages of the Comintern), Takaya was elected to be the organizer of the Japanese section. In this capacity, Takaya acted as intermediary between the group and university administrators, representing student interests, a patently unenviable position in light of the life conditions described above. At the beginning of the school year in 1924, Takaya submitted a review of the previous year's work, demanding that greater support be given to the Japanese comrades as "the revolutionary crisis are approaching to us in the East more fastly than the West" and "the fate of the oppressed masses of the East depend upon the activities of the Koutveans [KUTV students] who learned not only to translate the Marxism into their own languages but to translate the hopes, aims, and pains of the workers and peasants into the Marxism

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[28] A brief biographical sketch of Takaya is provided in his personal file. He was born in Japan in 1898 and arrived in the United States during the 1910s; he worked as a domestic servant and waiter until leaving America in 1923. In 1922, Takaya joined both the Communist Party of Japan and the Communist Party of the United States of America. See RGASPI 495/280/288. There was also a large contingent of Chinese students at KUTV from 1921 to 1925. Among the 112 Chinese students who enrolled in this period, it is possible that there was a Chinese American student who preceded Takaya as the "first American student." On Chinese enrollment, see Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution, 1919-1927* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 167.

[29] Josephine Fowler describes these study groups in *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists*, 31-60.

in the KUTV, the seedplot of the young Leninists."[30] Among Takaya's requests on behalf of his group was the provision of facilities to produce a monthly magazine to send to Japan, disseminating the Leninist lessons of the university to common workers. At the end of the year, Takaya turned in another report, this time demanding both more time for students to study the problems of their own country (as opposed to the history of the Russian Communist Party) and more courses on the "contemporary situation in the East."[31] As a result of these complaints, the section was labeled as "anarchists" and Takaya's annual evaluation noted that he was "undisciplined," his "theoretical development was weak," and he "complained often and lacked self-control (*nevyderzhan*)."[32] Consequently, Takaya was held back from graduation and sent to Kamchatka to gain practical experience working among Japanese fishermen. He

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[30] "Report," 24 September 1924, RGASPI 532/1/462.

[31] "Trebovanie reform [Demand for Reforms]," 25 June 1925, RGASPI 532/1/462. It is notable that in KUTV's first years, none of the required courses were specifically focused on problems of the East. In the Japanese section, students took the following courses in their first year: history of the workers' movement, a study of *Capital*, modern world history, history of the Russian Communist Party, and Russian language; students who advanced to the second year of coursework studied: advanced readings of *Capital*, modern world history, history of the Comintern, Leninism, and basic military training. One of the major goals of these courses was to prepare translators. See "Zhizn' iaponskikh kommunistov v Rossii [The Life of Japanese Communists in Russia]," (n.d., circa 1924), RGASPI 532/1/463.

[32] On the accusations of anarchism, see "Zaiavlenie v kontrol'nuiu kommissiiu ot iaponskogo kruzhka [Statement to the Control Commission from the Japanese Circle]," 15 March 1925, RGASPI 532/2/169. The charge is likely a reference to an ongoing factional struggle between anti-Bolshevik anarcho-syndicalists and Comintern-aligned socialists. See Rodger Swearingen and Paul Langer, *Red Flag in Japan: International Communism in Action, 1919-1951* (Cambridge: University of Harvard Press, 1952), 7-14. Members of the Japanese section strongly objected to the claim that dissent was equivalent with anarchism. Takaya's evaluation can be found in "Iaponskii sector [Japanese Section]," (n.d.), RGASPI 532/1/462.

remained in the Soviet Far East for six years before returning to Moscow to finish his studies at KUTV.[33] It was a lesson in KUTV's attitude toward student dissent.

After these rocky beginnings in its early years, KUTV began to markedly improve in 1925. A research section was opened that brought in more ethnographers and trained instructors from the Institute of Red Professors and Sverdlov Communist University.[34] As a result, more courses and lectures covering special "Eastern" topics were offered while enrollment continued to expand. After the adopting of a new general curriculum, all first-year students took courses in political literacy, economic geography, the history of the evolution of societal forms, current events, Russian language and a technical course that included instruction in basic mechanics, printing, photography, and military science. Students who advanced to the second year enrolled in political economy, program and tactics of the Comintern, the agrarian question, the colonial question, trade unionism, the making of Soviet society, the history of class struggle, current events, and Russian language. A small number of exceptionally promising students were advanced to a third year of study; their coursework stressed theoretical development with topics including Leninism, the political economy of imperialism, historical materialism, and methods of Party leadership. Summers were dedicated to basic military training and

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[33] Takaya's personal file, RGASPI 495/280/288. After graduation from KUTV in 1934, Takaya was sent to Japan and arrested short thereafter by the Japanese police. According to a note in his file, Takaya renounced his Communist beliefs after his arrest and gave a detailed report to the Japanese government on Comintern workings. According to one source, Takaya worked during World War Two as a translator for Russian defector General G.S. Lyushkov. See Alvin Coox, "The Lesser of Two Hells: NKVD General G.S. Lyushkov's Defection to Japan, 1938-1945, part II," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11:4 (1998): 96.

[34] Timofeeva, "KUTV (1921-1925), 54. On the training received at Sverdlov University and the Institute of Red Professors, see David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind*, 83-191.

practical work (*praktika*), a category that included a wide variety of activities including factory employment, farm work, or organizing in one's home country (if possible).[35] Overall, the new curriculum redirected coursework to address practical issues and colonial affairs.

The foreign section also sought to increase its size in the 1925-1926 academic year from 193 to 366 students, with new quotas opened for black students (from America and Africa) and for activists from American colonies (in the Philippines and West Indies). Allotted spaces for Chinese, Japanese, and Indian students—all of which groups drew, in part, from diasporic communities in the United States—also increased dramatically.[36] In fact, in the first year, sending countries were unable to fill all available slots, due either to the inability to identify potential students or to a lack of funds to send the students to Moscow.[37] The small group that comprised what was alternately referred to as the "English-speaking section" or "American sector" in 1925 was a mix of black and Indian students along with one Jewish Party member, Carl Reeve (the son of Ella Reeve "Mother" Bloor). The Indians included Nisar Raz and Abdallah Safdar who had been in Moscow since the early 1920s, in addition to an American recruit who went by

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[35] "Itogi raboty." For a student account of the basics of these courses, see Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 155-160.

[36] Fifteen new spaces were allotted to black students and ten more for students from American colonies. Chinese enrollment was to increase from 63 to 93, Japanese from 13 to 20, and Indian from 2 to 10. These trends reflect the increased importance given to anti-imperialist work in the CPUSA and the demands of the international "Hands Off China!" campaign. See "Itogi raboty."

[37] On the failure to fill the quota for African American students "owing to financial and other reasons," see H.V. Phillips to C.E. Ruthenberg, 15 July 1926, RGASPI 515/1/720.

the Party name "Magarov."[38] According to his Comintern biographical file, Magarov was the son of a Bihari doctor who worked in Calcutta; he had been active in revolutionary groups in Bengal before immigrating to America where he found work in an automobile factory in Detroit. There, Magarov participated in an Indian political study group that was sympathetic to the Communist Party. In 1924, he had been sent to KUTV where, according to his instructors, he hoped to learn bomb-making skills. Despite this rather practical aspiration, his evaluation noted that his approach to problems was overly intellectual.[39]

The Indian revolutionaries were joined by the first four black students at KUTV: Otto Hall, Oliver Golden, West African Kweku Bankole Awooner-Renner (known simply as "Bankole" at the university), and a Caribbean recruit who took the Party name "Dessalines" after the Haitian leader. Both Hall and Dessalines had been active in the African Blood Brotherhood—a radical group led by West Indians in the States—before joining the Communist Party in the early 1920s. Bankole was the son of a Gold Coast lawyer who came to America to study at the Tuskegee Institute; he was recruited into the American Party shortly before being sent to Moscow. Golden, born in Mississippi to former slaves, had also attended Tuskegee where he worked with George Washington Carver. Despite this education, Golden could only find employment in unskilled jobs at lumber mills, hotels, and on the railroad before joining the army during World War One. According to an interview he gave to Eslanda Robeson in the 1930s, he first encountered

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[38] See the list of American students in RGASPI 532/1/84. Magarov's personal file indicates that he also used the Party name "Popov" and his given surname was Ahmad (*Akhmet*). I have been unable to track down his full given name.

[39] See Magarov's personal file, RGASPI 495/213/253. For his student evaluation, see "Kharakteristiki—Amerikanskii sector [Evaluations—American Section]," RGASPI 532/1/46.

radical ideas about racial equality while in France though he did not become politically active until Party organizer Bob Minor approached him in Chicago in 1925.[40] Both Golden and Carl Reeve were accompanied by their wives—Jane Golden and Sonya Kroll, respectively—who attended KUTV events and classes, though they were not officially students. Between the Indian and black members of the first so-called American group, the students could share stories that traversed much of globe, from Detroit to Tashkent or Calcutta to Accra.[41]

Over the next two years, the size of this American contingent doubled and then trebled into a group of two dozen African American, West Indian, Filipino, Malay, and Indian students. Starting in 1926, the primary feeder for the stream of Indian students into KUTV became diasporic branches of the Ghadar Party. The first two Ghadar recruits were Santa Singh (Lobov) and Karam Singh (Sokolov) who arrived from California in 1926; they were joined Suhasini Nambiar (Nata), Virendranath Chattopadhyaya's sister

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[40] See the unpublished oral history of Golden in the Paul and Eslanda Robeson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Golden's daughter, Lily Golden, also provides a biographical sketch of her father in her memoir, *My Long Journey Home* (Chicago: Third World Press, 2002), 1-15. Golden was not a Party member when he attended KUTV, but joined later. Hall and Dessalines both gave brief political biographies when they vied for the role of group organizer at KUTV. See "Minutes: English Speaking Party Group," 19 January 1926, RGASPI 532/1/84. According to McClellan, Dessalines was the Jamaican Aubrey C. Bailey. See McClellan, "African and Black Americans," 373. The rest of McClellan's list of the American students and the real identities is suspect; he fails to identify Otto Hall (Jones) or Oliver Golden (Nelson). Later he misidentifies Carl Reeve as an "American black." Details on Bankole's life were taken from his British Security Service file; see "Personality Note," KV 2/1840, British National Archives, London.

[41] While we know from memoir accounts that such discussions occurred, the official minutes of this group's weekly meetings are, unfortunately, dominated by the details of a protracted interpersonal dispute over the disbursement of stipends by the group leader (Otto Hall).

who travelled to Moscow from Berlin.[42] In the next year, four more Ghadarites from California entered KUTV, in addition to a small group of Sikh soldiers who had mutinied in Shanghai.[43] African Americans were recruited predominately from northern cities, including Chicago, Pittsburgh, and New York; future American Party leaders William L. Patterson, Harry Haywood, and Maude Katz White were among the handful of KUTV's black students in the 1920s.[44] Following the precedent set by the student Dessalines, one 1927 newcomer took on the Party name "Denmark Vesey" to honor the leader of the failed 1822 slave rebellion. Filipino students (often self-identified as "Malay") were also

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[42] Before arriving in America around 1912, Karam Singh had worked for eleven years in Shanghai and one year in the Philippines. He became a member of the Ghadar Party in 1917 and served on its central committee from 1922 to 1925. Details on Santa Singh are lacking, though his file indicates that he was an active Ghadarite and worked as an agricultural laborer. According to his application to KUTV, he spoke English and "the Mexican language" in addition to his native Punjabi. For biographical details, see Santa Singh's personal file, RGASPI 495/213/244; Karam Singh, RGASPI 495/213/256; Suhasini Nambia, RGASPI 495/213/250. The presence of the Ghadarites and Nambiar is a likely indication of the decreased influence of M.N. Roy in the Comintern's Indian work. For a discussion of the different Indian factions vying for power in the Comintern, see Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India, 1919-1943: Dialectics of a Real and a Possible History* (Kolkata: Seribaan, 2006), 235-281.

[43] I have thus far only been able to locate the Party names for the four Ghadarites who arrived: William, Orlov, Svobodin, and Indarov. Under his political affiliation, Svobodin listed Ghadar, but under his nationality, he listed "Mexican." It is possible that he had Mexican citizenship (as newcomers to the Soviet Union were sometimes confused about what "nationality" meant), that he was biracial, or simply that he had been identified as Mexican in California. See "Uchet raboty studentov spetssektora KUTV im. Stalina, kruzhok No. IV [Inventory of the Work of the Students of KUTV Special Section, Group Number Four]," (n.d., circa 1927), RGASPI 532/1/84. Haywood tells of the presence of the Shanghai mutineers at KUTV in *Black Bolshevik*, 165. See also "Brief Report of the Work of Pretam Singh," 18 March 1928, RGASPI 495/68/298; A.V. Raikov, *Natsional'no-revoliutsionnye organizatsii Indii v bor'be za svobodu [Indian National Revolutionary Organizations in the Struggle for Freedom]* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1979), 110-111.

[44] The political careers of Patterson and Haywood are detailed in their respective autobiographies: Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide*; Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*. For a sketch of White's work in the Party, see her Comintern personal file which includes an autobiography submitted to KUTV. RGASPI 495/261/3234.

recruited from the United States in the 1920s as part of the effort to build an effective anti-imperialist cadre, though little biographical material is available on these students.

Most Japanese American students at KUTV attended classes in the Japanese language section, but as fellow members of the CPUSA almost certainly circulated among the students in the American section. The most promising of these students was Ogino Seizo (Savelov/Savala). Ogino had been involved in socialist study groups in Japan before he matriculated at University of Kansas in 1922, funding his education by working at a local meatpacking factory. After completing his degree in sociology, the young graduate moved to New York where he immersed himself in Party work among Asians in America, helping establish the Chinese-language bureau, leading the "Hands Off China!" campaign, and organizing among local Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and Filipino workers in the city. By 1928, Ogino was a leader on the New York branch of the League Against Imperialism and served on the Bureau for Oriental Work. With hopes of being trained for work in Asia, Ogino first applied to KUTV in late 1927, but was only accepted in 1928 with the proviso that he return to the United States after graduation as he was too important to American work among Asians. At KUTV, Ogino excelled in his studies and regularly met with the aging Katayama Sen to discuss Comintern work in Asia and America.[45] Few Chinese American students were enrolled at KUTV, as they were typically channeled to Sun Yat-sen University in the south of the city, or to the

[45] See Ogino's personal files: RGASPI 495/261/3479; RGASPI 495/261/4709. Ogino's student evaluation can be found among the annotated list of Japanese students in RGASPI 532/1/463. On the possibilities for Japanese work in America, building on the establishment of Japanese-language sections in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Vancouver, see "To the Small Commission of the Comintern," (n.d., circa 1927), RGASPI 515/1/1241.

Lenin School which maintained a special Chinese section for advanced cadre training.[46] Among the most notable Chinese Americans in Moscow during this period were Chi Chao-ting, Benjamin Fee, Xavier Dea, and the poet Happy Lim, though their stories lie beyond the scope of this study of life at KUTV.[47]

The centerpieces of these students' coursework were two courses—geography and the cumbersomely titled "history of the evolution of societal forms" (abbreviated as IROF)—that taught the basics of Soviet ethnography.[48] These classes undertook a global survey of revolutionary possibilities in different corners of the globe, establishing a comparative framework based on Marxist-Leninist theory and the example of the Soviet Union. The approach was uncompromisingly teleological. One student remembered the

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[46] Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution*, 165. For the purposes of this chapter I have foregone a discussion of Chinese American students in Moscow, as their stories intersect with the distinct administrative and intellectual histories of KUTK and the Lenin School; furthermore the evolution of Chinese Studies and Comintern work in China comprise their own separate stories. The best source on these subjects is the recent research of Alexander Pantsov. In addition to *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution*, see also *Karl Radek o Kitae: dokumenty i materialy [Karl Radek on China: Documents and Materials]* (Moscow: Institut stran Azii i Afriki, 2005).

[47] Chi had been a representative for China at the first League Against Imperialism Congress in Brussels in 1927 and proceeded to Moscow thence. After returning from Moscow, he was active in Communist circles, acting in a production of the Soviet play *Roar, China!* on Broadway and publishing a book, *Militarist Wars and Revolution in China: A Marxian Analysis of the New Reactionary Civil War and Prospects of the Revolution in China* (New York: Chinese Vanguard, 1930), that was likely started as part of his studies in Moscow. He later studied at Columbia University and was strongly influenced by the work of Karl Wittfogel. The best account of Chi's American years—his career in China is a notable story in its own regard—is the lamentably unpublished essay by Phillip Jaffe (whose distant cousin married Chi): "My Chinese Cousin," MS in box 5, folder 5 of the Phillip Jaffe Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. Josephine Fowler discusses the organizing efforts of Fee and Dea in *Japanese and Chinese Immigrants*, 139-169, passim. On Happy Lim, see Gordon Chang, "The Many Sides of Happy Lim," *Amerasia Journal* 34:2 (2008): 70-98.

[48] IROF stood for *istoriia razvitiia obshchestvennykh form*. I have rendered *razvitie* as "evolution" rather than the more common translation of "development" to highlight the connection to Hirsch's work on state-sponsored evolutionism discussed above.

essential questions of KUTV's curriculum: "How did the Bolsheviks transform a territory embracing one-sixth of the earth's surface—known as the 'prison-house of nations' under the Czar—into a family of nations, a free union of people? …The starting point for us was to understand that the formation of peoples into nations is an objective law of social development around which the Bolsheviks, particularly Lenin and Stalin, had developed a whole body of theory."[49] To test students' mastery of the framework, instructors led debates on questions like "Can a country achieve socialism without passing through the bourgeois democratic revolution?", a question that students in the American section spent two months debating in 1929, working their way through examples from around the world and posting short articles based on their discussion to the wall newspaper (*stengazeta*) for other students to read, as was the duty of every section.[50] The theoretical framework was narrow and formulaic, but based on the tenor of debate, the atmosphere was exhilarating as representatives from across the world compared notes.

In fact, later recollections of life at KUTV share a recurrent theme of university life as a type of multicultural education imparted by everyday life, as students mixed and mingled both with youth from across the colonial world and with a variety of racially progressive Soviets and European Communists in Moscow. Students did not merely protest the deprivations and injustices they faced in their home countries but, conjuring the university as a utopian space, they imagined a new world of interracial anticolonial

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[49] Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 157.

[50] See the minutes for the American section for February to April 1929, RGASPI 532/1/84. This discussion was, essentially, an exegesis of the "Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries" adopted at the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928. See Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents*, vol.2 (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 526-548, esp. 533.

solidarities that extended from KUTV and prefigured the Third World project of the Bandung era. "All were one in their desire for political freedom," reflected one student.[51]

The quotidian realities of university life did not always match the utopian imagination of these revolutionaries. During the biweekly meetings to debate political questions, edit the *stengazeta*, and report on practical work, discussion often turned to conflicts within the group.[52] There were regular quarrels of a personal nature, presumably born of the combination of close quarters, intense work, and an atmosphere that disparaged compromise. At other times, personal criticisms belied deeper political and cultural rifts in the group. The two women in the group—Louise Rivers and Maude White—repeatedly criticized group leader William L. Patterson and Endre Sik, the instructor in charge of political education, of opportunism and favoritism. When pushed by Sik to define these terms and their allegations, White pointed to Patterson's presumed air of superiority while Rivers underscored Patterson's bourgeois background: "…every negro [sic] lawyer in America drank the blood of the poor negro clients." They found that Sik regularly sided with Patterson during debates, ignoring the opinions of other, presumably less bourgeois, students. Sik's reply also hinted at a gendered dynamic as he

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[51] William L. Patterson, "Autobiography: The Soviet Union. My First Visit" MS, box 208-12, folder 46, William L. Patterson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. This sentiment was cut from the published version of Patterson's memoir. Upon reflection, the author likely decided that this passage—along with others that stated that white Americans could never "understand the impact of a place like Moscow on a Negro" and that in Moscow "[o]ne may even—and this is the ultimate surprise—talk to, work, dance with, even embrace and kiss a white woman with casual ease"—smacked of the kind of "racial chauvinism" forbidden in the Party.

[52] These biweekly meetings of the American circle (*kruzhok*) resembled party cell meetings and, in addition to the discussion of broad scholarly and political questions, attended to bureaucratic business such as the approval of *kruzhok* members' transfers to the Soviet party (VKP(b)) during their time at KUTV. On the educational and disciplinary aspects of the institution of the *kruzhok*/party cell at Soviet universities, see David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind*, 121-127, 177.

denounced the only female members of the group as unbalanced, temperamental, and prone to "silly questions."[53]

Moreover, life in Moscow and conditions at the university in particular remained arduous. Based on reports from American students, J. Louis Engdahl wrote to the Central Executive Committee of the CPUSA from Moscow in 1928, urging them to advocate on behalf of KUTV students dealing with "unbearable conditions."[54] In 1929, the students themselves petitioned KUTV directly, proposing a reorganization of meal times (as students often missed meals), the appointment of a "Food Commission to supervise the preparation of food," and "lectures on sanitation and hygiene," the last request likely related to the condition of student bathrooms.[55] An internal report on student life indicated that two-thirds of students, upon the completion of two years at KUTV, suffered "considerable exhaustion with various types of negative emotional reactions" due to the excessive demands of study, extracurricular work within the university, practical work in the city, poor living conditions, and an inability to adapt to

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[53] Minutes, 26 April 1929, RGASPI 532/1/84. During the same year, Patterson had been accused of opportunism by two other comrades from America, though the charge was usually of an ambiguous nature and never pointed to a specific infraction. Patterson was older, more educated, and highly ambitious in comparison to other KUTV students. Later in the year, Rivers—who received a very negative student evaluation in 1929—asked to return to America before the end of term on the pretext that, following the stock market crash, she would be of greater use to the Party organizing workers in the coming economic crisis. See Rivers to KUTV, 27 December 1929, RGASPI 515/1/1569. Such requests were typically frowned upon as, in the words of one CPUSA leader: "The Party owes nothing to anybody… We will consider our questions on the basis of merit primarily and solely wherever possible." Lovestone to William Kruse, 26 October 1927, RGASPI 515/1/1006. This statement was in regards to Harry Haywood's request to extend his studies in the Soviet Union.

[54] Engdahl to Central Executive Committee, 27 February 1928, RGASPI 515/1/1252.

[55] Minutes of student meeting, 12 April 1929, RGASPI 532/1/84.

the quality of food in Moscow.[56] Every summer a handful of students were given dispensations from the required practical work due to exhaustion; instead, they were hospitalized or sent to sanatoriums outside the city to recover. Unfortunately, hospitalization carried its own risks; one Indian American student returned from a prolonged illness to find that all of his hard currency, Western suits, silk shirts, and dhoti (pants) had been stolen.[57] It is easy to imagine that the clothes and currency were used by fellow KUTV students to procure goods from the thriving "shadow economy" that was essential to coping with scarcity in Soviet society.[58] Indeed, even the American students had found ways to pool their limited resources and to exploit local connections to arrange for occasional home-style meals outside of the university canteen. From their immersion in Marxism-Leninism and Soviet ethnography to the lived lessons of tactics of party-cell squabbling and black-market haggling, KUTV's students becoming Sovietized in ways that surely exceeded the administration's plans.

**Research and Strife: 1929-1938**

A comprehensive overhaul of KUTV's foreign sector was initiated in 1929 that focused on strengthening national cadres and developing specialized instruction and research at the university. While planning for the 1929-1930 academic year, administrators reorganized the university's foreign sections, splitting up the multinational English-speaking section into separate national groups, each with increased allotments:

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[56] Report on psychological conditions of students, 6 June 1928, RGASPI 532/8/164.

[57] Comrade Johnson to Comintern, 11 May 1932, RGASPI 532/1/115.

[58] On the importance of the "shadow economy" in Soviet life during the 1930s, see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 238-279.

Filipinos (12); Indians (25); "Negroes" (35); Japanese (50).[59] At the same time, the university narrowed their criteria for students. In light of student health problems, administrators asked national Parties to send only young, healthy students who could withstand the conditions in Moscow. Additionally, students were to be literate, working-class Party members; in the "Negro" section, there was a push for more African students and a greater percentage of the African American students were to be recruited from Southern states. The circular that was distributed to different national Party leaderships added another stipulation that limited eligibility: "Individuals who have emigrated from their home countries and lost their connection to it as well as those who have graduated from bourgeois universities will not be accepted by the university."[60] These new standards for admission both reflected the dissatisfaction with the current student body and betrayed the rather unrealistic hopes of KUTV's administration. Overseas recruiters found it insurmountably difficult to fill the allotted seats with potential students who had the appropriate education (neither too little nor too much), social background, and political experience. And the difficulties of recruiting in the colonies remained, continuing the necessity of drawing students from diasporic locales in Europe and the

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[59] "Razverstka na spetssektor KUTV na 1929/1930 uch. god [Allotments for the Special Section of KUTV in the 1929-1930 Academic Year]," 7 February 1929, RGASPI 532/1/71. The size of sections was enlarged again the following year: Filipinos (20); Indians (50); "Negroes" (55); Japanese (50). "Proekt razverstki na spetsial'nyi sector na 1930/1931 uch. god [Draft of Allotments for the Special Section for the 1930-1931 Academic Year]," (n.d.), RGASPI 532/1/71. The previous arrangement of a multinational student group had been an exception to the rule of national organization at the university. It is also worth noting that the allotments for 1929 and 1930 were not filled.

[60] Pokrovsky and Melman (KUTV) to Randolph (CPUSA), 13 March 1930, RGASPI 515/1/1869; Recruitment Circular for 1929-1930 Academic Year, (n.d.), RGASPI 532/1/71.

Americas, despite increased efforts to work directly in colonial locales, especially in Africa.

The reorganization of national sections at the university also reflected the impact of Soviet ethnographic thought with its ensconced conception of socialist liberation in national form. Research efforts had been strengthened in the late 1920s with the institutionalization of NIANKP (Scientific Research Association for the Study of National and Colonial Problems, originally simply NIA) and the establishment of the research journal *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* (*The Revolutionary East*) that published work by students and staff at KUTV. NIANKP also published internal papers and collected primary sources for use in KUTV courses and by research staff. In the early years of KUTV, instructors were generalists who were versed in Marxist theory and colonial question; by the early 1930s, academic specialization was well underway, matching ethnographer experts with students from the region in research circles.[61] This approach allowed the instructors to speak to the specific nature of struggle for the students while also gaining local knowledge and skills (especially with regard to linguistic training) otherwise scarce in Moscow.[62]

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[61] Research circles were introduced by NIANKP in late 1929. See F. Telezhnikov, "O rabote i ocherednykh zadachakh NIA pri KUTV im. Stalina [On the Work and Regular Tasks of the Scientific Research Association at KUTV]," *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* No. 7 (1929): 361.

[62] In fact, these interactions laid the groundwork for Soviet studies of Africa and Asia in the post-war period, as many of KUTV's instructors went on to prominent careers that built on their Comintern work in the 1930s. Other major ethnographic institutes of the period included: the Leningrad Orientalist Institute (LVI); Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences (IVAN); Moscow Orientalist Institute (MIV); and the ethnography faculty at Moscow State University (MGU). While focused on the history of Indology in the USSR, Nisha Sahai-Achuthan gives a solid overview of the institutional history of Orientalism in "Soviet Indology and the Institute of Oriental Studies: Works on Contemporary India in the Soviet Union," *Journal of Asian Studies* 42:2 (1983): 323-343.

An examination of the work of two of KUTV's sections with significant American presences—the Indian and the "Negro" sections—in the 1930s reveals the mixed results of these encounters.[63]

*Indian Section*

Despite the fact that Indians had been among the first foreign students at KUTV and they comprised, by the 1930s, one of the larger sections, the Indian circle proved to be one of the least productive and most fractious units at the school. A number of factors account for this relative failure. The Indian section had not been converted into a research circle (*nauchno-issledovatel'skii kruzhok*) in 1929 and, as such, did not have the resources available to other groups. Few articles were published by instructors or students in *Revoliutsionnyi vostok*. In 1927, longtime student Saffdar published a short article on the meaning of the Chinese revolution for Indian activists, asking: "Can what has transpired in the valley of the Yangtze be repeated in the valleys of the Ganges and Indus?"[64] The rest of the article contrasted the heightening revolutionary mood in India with the heavy feet of the Indian National Congress. The following year, KUTV

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[63] The Japanese section at KUTV enrolled few Japanese American students in the 1930s due to an increased fear of Japanese spies following the 1931 invasion of Manchuria. The one exception was the influx of deported Japanese American Communists in 1933. Their tragic story illuminates the work of the Soviet secret police (NKVD) more than it concerns KUTV. It will be addressed in the concluding chapter, below.

[64] Savdar, "Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie Indii v sviazi s sobytiiami v Kitae [The Indian Revolutionary Movement as Related to the Events in China]," *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* No. 2 (1927): 97. After graduating from KUTV, Saffdar went on to study at the Institute of Red Professors (IKP) where he led an Indian study group and published a book on Indian revolutionary politics, *O revoliutsionnom dvizhenii v Indii* (1931). During the Purges, he was arrested on suspicion of espionage based on the testimony of Rattan Singh and evidence that he had published in a journal of M.N. Roy. He was shot in 1941; in 1959, his record was rehabilitated as the court found his arrest had no basis after Saffdar's wife, K.S. Levina, petitioned on his behalf. See Saffdar's personal file, RGASPI 495/213/194.

instructor and eminent Orientalist I.M. Reisner published a tentative, but provocative historical essay that sought to understand Punjabi Sikhs as a social class, certainly a reflection of his classroom experiences.[65] Published material on India in the 1930s tended to be of a predictable and sectarian bent. The only work published by a student was a translation of North American recruit Iqbal Singh's (Nelson) attack on M.N. Roy in 1932.[66] Other material tended to be reprints of Comintern policy statements by CPGB leaders such as Rajani Palme Dutt or echoes of these pronouncements as articulated by KUTV instructors. These teachers may have been acquiring the skills and knowledge to position them as leaders in their field in a later period, but there is little evidence to indicate that KUTV was a center of research on India in the 1930s.

The decision to preserve the Indian section as a teaching unit was, in part, a consequence of the caliber of student received. All sections at KUTV instructed students with a wide range of abilities, from those with a grade school education to graduates of universities in Europe and the United States. But Ghadar recruiters blatantly ignored instructions from KUTV's administration and selected students without any mind to academic preparation, valuing revolutionary fervor over intellectual development. As Ghadar supplied the overwhelming majority of students from 1929 onwards, the Indian

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[65] I.M. Reisner, "Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie sikkhov (1700-1849) [The Sikh Peasant Movement (1700-1849)]," *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* No.4-5 (1928): 100-126. This attempt to locate a "surrogate proletariat" in the East where European class relations had not developed had been attempted in Central Asia. See Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

[66] Nelson, "Programma i praktika renegatskoi gruppy Roia [The Program and Practice of Renegade Roy's Group]," *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* No.-3-4 (1932): 206-238. Iqbal Singh was trained as a mechanical engineer in Canada, but worked as a laborer in lumber mills in the Pacific Northwest until he was called to San Francisco to help with Ghadar Party work in 1930. In 1932, he was sent to KUTV. RGASPI 495/213/3.

section reflected these priorities. Students were mostly Punjabis who had recently migrated to the Americas; as it became increasingly difficult for East Indians to enter the United States (though some still crossed into California from Mexico), South Asian migrants found work throughout Latin America. Ghadar organizers from the US followed these patterns of labor migration, building new centers of work in Panama, Cuba, and Argentina, in addition to maintaining extant connections in East Africa, China, and New Zealand.[67] Half of the Indian students entering KUTV after 1932 arrived from Argentina, mainly from the port city of Rosario, where they had been radicalized by Ghadar leaders in the early 1930s. While these new students were enthralled by the prospect of revolutionary training in Moscow, few had more than one or two years of political experience; a number of them lacked even the basic literacy to complete their KUTV application. Consequently, instructors of the Indian section rarely addressed advanced topics in Marxist theory or "conditions in the home country" (*stranoved*), instead repeating remedial lessons in language, sciences, and geography. Evaluations for 1935 were littered with negatives, a record of faculty frustration: "extremely backward" (*ochen' otstal'yi*); "a big pudding-head" (*bol'shoi putanik*); "almost illiterate" (*pochti negramotnyi*); and "hard-headed" (*sklochnik*). Even positive evaluations favored the backhanded compliment: "Weak on the foundations, but inclined to the revolutionary"; "Was completely illiterate, has grown considerably."[68]

But neither insufficient support from the university nor the weak previous preparation of students ultimately accounted for the difficulties of the Indian section in

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[67] This information is culled from a review of dozens of student evaluations and the personal files of Indian students at KUTV.

[68] See student evaluations throughout RGASPI 532/1/379.

the 1930s. Rather, the section was debilitated by a three-year series of factional disputes that centered around questions of the Ghadar Party's relationship to the Comintern and the ends of KUTV training. The split among the students first came to the attention of the instructors in 1933 when Nelson (Iqbal Singh) posted an article on the lack of collective spirit (*kollektivnost'*) in the section, though he made no direct criticisms. When the Soviet leader of the section, ethnographer A.M. Diakov, inquired about tensions within the group, he discovered that there had been a deepening silent struggle (*glukhaia bor'ba*) among the students over the past year. On one side were Nelson and three non-Ghadarite students from East Africa (John, Moroz, and Kato) whose previous political experiences had been with the Indian National Congress (INC). On the other side stood veteran Ghadar leader Shattimore (Teja Singh) and an undetermined number of Ghadar recruits. Though the details of the dispute are unclear, the basic outlines indicate that Nelson's group refused to submit to Ghadar discipline or to the idea that the section was a body ruled by the Ghadar Party. As they were absorbing the lessons in Marxism-Leninism, they came to understand what they perceived as the bourgeois nationalist limits of Ghadar's ideology. Participation in the INC and Ghadar, imagined within the evolutionary framework learned at KUTV, was to be transitory, a necessary stage as they evolved into Communists.[69] In contrast, Shattimore—from what evidence we can discern—had little interest in the ideological training at KUTV and had openly

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[69] I have tried to reconstruct the outlines of this dispute from a number of different statements in the Comintern archive. The most comprehensive account is KUTV's own attempt to trace out the political meaning of these factional struggles within the Indian section: "Politicheskoe polozhenie I-oi sektsii [The Political Situation in Section I]," 1 September 1935, RGASPI 532/1/380. In order to avoid confusion during the discussion of these disputes, I am using Party names as most of the participants shared the surname Singh.

opposed the efforts of Rattan Singh and Santokh Singh to orient the Party to Bolshevik ideology and methods.[70] In fact, many of the Ghadarites believed that they had come to Moscow for martial training en route to India and did not expect the school's focus on political education. One of the students explained: "[KUTV instructors] asked us if we were members of trade union and we even did not know what was a trade union. Then also we learned what kind of education we will get, because before we thought we would have only military education… It is inevitable that differences will arise when the comrades study here, because their ideas change."[71]

In a different atmosphere such differences might have led to discussion, debate, and new syntheses of anticolonial politics and methods. But in the rigid evolutionist framework of Soviet ethnography, the analyses and practice of Ghadarites were seen as undeveloped, a collection of "feudal caste prejudices" and "terrorist traditions," in the words of one instructor.[72] Despite this condescending view, the school did attract a number of students every year to a Leninist approach on questions of nationalism and

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[70] Shattimore considered discussing Ghadar business with KUTV officials to be a break in discipline; hence we have no account from his perspective. In fact, Shattimore counseled fellow Ghadarites not to openly express any differences of opinion or viewpoint with KUTV officials. (When Shattimore learned that Moroz had spoken with the administration about the split, he told him: "Later there will be blood." See "Politicheskoe polozhenie I-oi sektsii.") In fact, Shattimore's influence had silenced a great number of the students, whom he had recruited. Once the split in the group was revealed, KUTV instructors revised their evaluations of the students as they learned that some students who had suppressed their opinions had received high marks for their political development while others who had been silent had been labeled as illiterate or ambivalent. See "Nashi oshibki [Our Errors]," 26 September 1935, RGASPI 532/1/380. For background on Teja Singh (Shattimore), see Maia Ramnath, "The Haj to Utopia: Anti-Colonial Radicalism in the South Asian Diaspora, 1905-1930," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2008, 378-385.

[71] Statement of Harrison (Naina Singh), (n.d.), RGASPI 495/16/32.

[72] "Nashi oshibki."

colonialism. But, as predicted by the student quoted above, these newly minted Communists only refreshed tensions; in a variety of guises and with a rotating cast to students, factional disputes dominated the life of the Indian section from 1932 to 1936. Eventually, KUTV adopted a "united front" policy, stopped attempting to "recast Ghadarites as Communists," and resolved to "direct our blow against British imperialism."[73] Still, in 1937, the administration was forced to split the last Indian section taught at KUTV into two study groups due to entrenched, irresolvable differences.[74]

*The "Negro" Section*

Originally dubbed the "Negro Movement" (*negrdvizhenie*) research section in 1929, the circle dedicated to the study of Africa and its diaspora was marked from the outset as unlike its peer groups that were organized around specific national groups.[75] In fact, the research section was founded in the midst of a heated debate between two of the leading Africanist specialists: N.M. Nasonov, who interpreted the so-called "Negro problem" as a national question (in the Soviet sense), and Endre Sik, the primary

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[73] Datta Gupta discusses the Comintern's adoption of a "united front" policy in *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India*, 184-207. For notes on implementation at KUTV, see the statement of Sofia Melman, (n.d.), RGASPI 532/1/380. KUTV administrators decided that it was "incorrect" and "harmful" for instructors to try to turn all Indian students into active Communists in 1935. See the untitled statement of the administration dated 26 September 1935, RGASPI 532/1/380.

[74] "Doklad tov. Shapiro ob itogakh ucheby za pervyi semester 1937-38 g. [Report of Comrade Shapiro on the Academic Results for the First Semester of 1937-1938]," 8 February 1938, RGASPI 532/1/380.

[75] Telezhnikov, "O rabote i ocherednykh zadachakh," 361. Telezhnikov makes no comment on the unique nature of the *negrdvizhenie* section. To be clear on administrative matters, the research section was formally a part of the research institute NIANKP, while students attended classes at the teaching institute KUTV. In practice, students contributed and collected material for NIANKP's work, while the instructors for particular KUTV sections were drawn from the parallel research circle.

instructor in KUTV's American section and an ambitious scholar who sought to devise new Marxist approach to what he termed "the race problem." The competing ideas had already had their day in court, as it were, when the Sixth Comintern Congress approved Nasonov's formulation—the so-called "Black Belt thesis" co-written with Harry Haywood—in 1928 over Sik's objection that the Comintern had failed to differentiate racial and national oppressions.[76] According to the Comintern's resolution, the most effective and correct means of organizing black workers was around the demand for self-determination, just as with other national groups.

But Sik was convinced, based on discussions with his American students and extensive readings, that one could not approach black liberation in the United States—the case that he best knew—as a national struggle. After Nasonov published a lengthy explanation of the scholarly basis for the 1928 resolution in KUTV's research journal, Sik composed a rejoinder that refined his original formulation that had been criticized for its bourgeois assimilationist approach that sought to resolve racial prejudices rather than abolish national oppression. "Race," he clarified in his reply to Nasonov, "is a social category that refers to a collective group drawn together as a societal unit (*obshchestvennaia edinitsa*) such that: the group can be examined as an exploited or exploiting class; members of the group have particular shared physical, spiritual, and moral qualities that distinguish them from other groups; and these differences accord members higher or lower status."[77] This definition fit African Americans far better than a

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[76] A. Shiek (Endre Sik), "The Comintern Programme and the Racial Problem," *The Communist International* 5:16 (15 August 1928): 407-411. Haywood describes the genesis and approval of the Black Belt thesis in *Black Bolshevik*, 218-280.

claim to nationhood that, following Stalin's 1913 definition, rested on a common language and territory.[78] A year later, Sik expanded his approach in a 400-page study entitled *The Race Problem and Marxism* (*Rasovaia problema i Marksizm*) that sought to develop a Marxist theory of race and anti-racist struggle, using black liberation in the United States as a case study. The first half of the work was a thorough-going survey of racialist thinking and the limits of non-Marxist critiques thereof. Sik stressed that racialists (*rasoviki*) could be found not just among those who wrote about race per se but also in esteemed academic associations of scientists, psychologists, historians, and sociologists.[79] As such, he imagined a wide purview for his work, including scholars and writers such as Arthur Gobineau, Lothrop Stoddard, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ernest Renan, and Denis Diderot, in addition to liberal and "pseudo-Marxist" (*lzhemarksistskii*) critics such as Jean Finot, Franz Boas, and Karl Kautsky. In the second half of the work, Sik cautiously offered an interpretation of African American oppression as a race problem, juggling, again, a wide range of sources including Booker T. Washington, Carter Woodson, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Melville Herskovits, and E.B. Reuter. Here, he proposed a hodge-podge definition of race as a social construction effected by processes of economic exploitation and violence enacted upon

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[77] E. Sik, "K voprosu o negritianskoi problem v SASSh [On the Question of the Negro Problem in the United States]," *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* No. 7 (1929): 140. Nasonov's article was published a month earlier: "Negritianskaia problema v Severo-Amerikanskikh Soedinennykh Shtatakh [The Negro Problem in the United States]," *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* No. 6 (1929): 59-76. During the time that Sik was working on the "race problem," he was regularly meeting with KUTV student William Patterson, according to Patterson's memoir. See *The Man Who Cried Genocide*, 104-105. While the two were great friends, Patterson's specific influence on Sik's work is unknown.

[78] Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1935).

[79] E. Sik, *Rasovaia problema i marksizm [The Race Problem and Marxism]* (Moscow: NIANKP, 1930), 12.

individuals and groups based on an ideology that divides peoples into categories of higher and lower. Race-based organizing was defended as progressive, though, according to Sik, only Marxism could identify the material bases of racial oppression and direct such movements against capitalism and imperialism. It was the task of Marxist theorists to undertake the necessary studies and provide appropriate guidance. As a whole, the book hung together loosely as an attempt to understand the importance of race in the modern world through a survey with an attached case study; but, to Sik's credit, his speculative tone indicates that he was well aware of the enormity of the task he set before himself and Marxist science and thus sought only to inaugurate a wide-ranging set of discussions within the research group.[80]

Unfortunately, Nasonov either could not or would not grasp the larger schema of *The Race Problem and Marxism*. In his review of the book for *Revoliutsionnyi vostok*, he focused on the critiques of racialist thinking in the first half of the work, offering that if Sik had only repudiations of biological racism to offer, NIANKP would be better off simply reprinting the works of Harriet Beecher Stowe.[81] Sik endured such jabs and harangues, both publicly and in closed meetings of the research group, over the next two years until he wrote a letter denouncing his previous work as contrary to established Comintern policy. The result of this dispute was the opposite of Sik's intention for *The*

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[80] Here *The Race Problem and Marxism* should be read alongside the research agenda on Black Africa that Sik proposed to NIANKP in 1929, noting that all studies to that point had been bourgeois and colonialist studies of the region and there existed a mass of questions for Marxist science related to imperialism, race, class, ethnicity, kinship, land expropriation, labor migration, forced labor, and liberation movements. The agenda is reproduced in English with commentary in Colin Darch and Gary Littlejohn, "Endre Sik and the Development of African Studies in the USSR," *History in Africa* 10 (1983): 79-108. See also Edward Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1974), 188-189.

[81] Nasonov, "Rasovaia problema i marksizm v ponimanii tov. Shiika [The Race Problem and Marxism as Understood by Comrade Sik]," *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* no. 9-10 (1930): 331.

*Race Problem and Marxism*. For years to come, there was little theoretical discussion of the inter-related nature of race, nation, and class by Soviet Marxists. (A greater irony was Soviet ethnographers' promulgation of obvious critiques of eugenics and racial theories in attacks on Nazi science after 1933.[82])

During and after the Sik-Nasonov affair, both ethnographers and black students at KUTV reoriented their research efforts away from the United States to problems in Africa and the West Indies. This turn was not only a result of the quieting effects of the attacks on Sik, but also in accord the emphasis on a global approach to the "Negro problem" following the Sixth Comintern Congress and the establishment of the International Trade Union Congress of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) with its global vision of black anticolonialism.[83] Moreover, there was an increased African presence at the school due to the efforts of the ITUCNW in making contacts across the African diaspora. Of the twelve black students studying at KUTV in late 1932, only three were African American with the remainder hailing from Liberia, South Africa, Kenya, and

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[82] For examples, see G.I. Petrov, *Rasovaia teoriia na sluzhbe u fashizma [Racial Theory in the Service of Fascism]* (Moscow-Leningrad: OGIZ, 1934); M. Arzhanov, "Rasovaia teoriia germanskogo fashizma [The Racial Theory of German Fascism]," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nosti* No.3 (1935): 38-50. As in the US, the foil of fascist eugenics was used to make a case against all notions of racial difference, a highly effective argument in its context. Interestingly, Sik republished his ideas from *The Race Problem and Marxism* after the war under the guise of a commentary on a nineteenth-century Russian expedition to Africa that offered an early alternative to Western European racialism. A.A. Shiik (Sik), "Iz istorii russkoi afrikanistiki [From the History of Russian African Studies]," *Sovetskaia etnografiia* No.2 (1946): 173-181. The article reiterated Sik's critiques of nineteenth-century racialist thinking but attributed the ideas to Russian scholar E.P. Kovalevskii. The notion of an early Russian anti-racist provided perfect cover for a reintroduction of Sik's heavily criticized work from the late 1920s. The resonance with Bartol'd's *History of Orientalism (Istoriia izucheniia vostoka)*, a central text for Soviet ethnographers and a commonly-assigned work at KUTV, is notable.

[83] I discuss the establishment and work of the ITUCNW in detail in Chapter Three, but I will touch briefly on their work as it pertains to KUTV here.

Cameroon.[84] For instructors who had never travelled to Africa, the black students were an exceptional resource. As a component of their party education, all KUTV students were required to write short essays and news items on a regular basis, usually as contributions for the *stengazeta*. The leaders of the African Section (as it was known in the mid-1930s) expanded the "literary activities" element of their students' curriculum. As Aleksandr Zusmanovich both headed the African Section of NIANKP and oversaw the work of the ITUCNW, he tasked students to support research and organizing work. According to a revised curriculum plan adopted in 1933, each student had to fulfill three requirements in the sphere of "literary activity": (1) compose an article or correspondence for a Communist newspaper or journal (e.g., *Daily Worker, The Communist, Moscow Daily News, Negro Worker, Umsebenzi*); (2) review and select articles for the section's research clippings file; and (3) contribute to the bimonthly in-house circular "Collected Materials on the Negro Question."[85] While articles for publication in outside newspapers tended to be abstract and propagandistic, the writings for "Collected Materials" were for background research (though some were transformed into publications) and often included autobiographical pieces and reflective essays. American student Louise Rivers wrote a history of a1926 strike of women workers that she had helped organize.[86] South Africans students Albert Nzula and Nikin Sobia composed analyses of race and politics in their homeland that were rich in local detail.[87] West African labor leader I.T.A.

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[84] "Spisok studentov sector 'A,' sektsii No.9 (Negry) [List of Students in Sector A, Section 9 (Negroes)]," 20 November 1932, RGASPI 532/1/439.

[85] "Plan of Activities of the National Bureau of Section '9'," (n.d., circa 1933), RGASPI 532/1/442.

[86] Louise Rivers, "Statement on the Strike of Negro Women in Chicago, 1926," RGASPI 507/2/155.

Wallace Johnson drafted an autobiographical indictment of colonial education and the civilizing mission of imperialists, entitled "From Slavery to Slavery" (*Ot rabstva k rabstvu*).[88] Perhaps the most enduring and important statement that resulted from these research efforts was *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa* (1933), a collaboration of Nzula, Zusmanovich, and a rising star of Soviet African Studies, I.I. Potekhin. Taking on the entirety of sub-Saharan Africa, the authors examined the labor question and colonial rule in different administrative contexts as well as the struggles against coerced labor by trade unions and nationalist organizations.[89] Conceiving, discussing, and producing these works, the few dozen African and African American students who attended KUTV in the 1930s participated in a rigorous education in black life across the globe, both for themselves and for their instructors.

Sadly, the tuition for these students was payable in discomforts and disappointments. As with all foreign sections, the students regularly complained to the administration about the terrible quality of the food, inadequate housing, and stingy stipends.[90] More unexpectedly, the students were taken aback by a series of incidents

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[87] T. Jackson (Nzula), "Political Repression and Social Discrimination in South Africa"; Jack Hilton (Sobia), "Sidelights on South African Politics." RGAPSI 532/4/95.

[88] I.T.A. Wallace Johnson, "Ot rabstva k rabstvu, ili kak zhivet afrikanskii negr (u sebia na rodine) [From Slavery to Slavery, or How the African Negro Lives in Homeland]," 17 February 1933, RGASPI 532/4/58. Other notable contributions in the research files include Jomo Kenyatta's "An African People Rise in Revolt: How Harry Thuku Led the Great Struggle Against Imperialism," 20 May 1933, RGASPI 532/4/58; Edward Small, "The Economic Situation in Gambia with Particular Reference to the Struggles of the Workers and Peasants," 17 November 1931, RGASPI 532/4/58. These underutilized materials comprise an important source for the history of African Studies and the study of Pan-Africanism in the twentieth century.

[89] Albert Nzula, I.I. Potekhin, and A. Z. Zusmanovich, *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa* (London: Zed Press, 1979).

[90] "To the Comintern," (n.d., circa 1933), RGASPI 532/1/441.

that revealed racial animus among common Soviet citizens and primitivist stereotypes about Africans voiced by the artistic elite. As part of their assigned curriculum, all foreign students were required to take in Soviet cultural life as a lesson in the construction of the socialist society, submitting monthly reports on plays, movies, concerts, and dance in Moscow. After watching a production of the fin-de-siècle English play *The Geisha* that featured a black character in minstrel-style make-up, KUTV student (and future president of Kenya) Jomo Kenyatta met with his classmates to discuss the work. The conversation evolved into a broader engagement with experiences of Soviet racism, leading to a letter of complaint addressed to the Comintern. Among the group's grievances were the stereotyped primitive African in the play *The Negro Child and the Ape* (*Negritenok i obez'iana*), a Soviet dictionary that offered "darkey" as a translation for *negr* (Negro), and verbal abuse directed at students on the streets of Moscow. When the students were met by Comintern functionary Dmitrii Manuil'skii, black seaman Pierre Kalmek (Robert) added that he had been repeatedly spit upon in Moscow and that "in all [his] travels [he] had never seen such chauvinism."[91] Manuil'skii defended that Robert must be exaggerating as there were no lynchings in the Soviet Union, but that should a Soviet citizen spit on a KUTV student in the future, he would be sent to the camps.[92]

These disappointments with Soviet life could not have helped win anticolonial students over to the Comintern. As with the Indian students, instructors complained that many of the students of the African section were either inexorably nationalist or

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[91] "Stenogramma besedy tov. Manuil'skogo so studentami 9-oi sektsii [Stenographic Report of a Conversation of Comrade Manuil'skii with Students of the Ninth Section]," 19 January 1933, RGASPI 532/1/441.

[92] "Stenogramma besedy tov. Manuil'skogo." McClellan also highlights this defense in "Africans and Black Americans in Comintern Schools," 385.

unacceptably unprepared, though a few stars were held up as exemplary. The tension between anticolonial nationalists and the administration was likely heightened by the growing rift between the Comintern and George Padmore, who was responsible for recruitment efforts in Africa from 1931 to 1933 as secretary of the ITUCNW. After Padmore formally broke with the Comintern (see chapter three), the ITUCNW collapsed, and with it, the main feeder for African students at KUTV. A small section of students from South Africa and French colonies gathered in 1935, though their instructors were likely distracted by an inquiry into Trotskyism within the African section.[93]

**The Last Days and Conclusions**

As the former editor of the Chattanooga-based Party newspaper *Southern Worker*, James S. Allen (Sol Auerbach) was well-acquainted with the tasks of organizing in an unfamiliar and hostile environment.[94] Thus, when the Party sent Allen to Manila to contribute to anti-imperialist efforts and build a local cadre, he was quick to take up the task, including the duty of recruiting Filipino students for KUTV. The small batch of students sent by Allen in the mid-1930s comprised the last American group—as the CPUSA recognized the entirety of the American empire as its domain—to be sent to KUTV. Escorted by Allen's wife Isabelle Auerbach, the four young men sailed from the Philippines to the Soviet Far East and then travelled overland to Moscow.[95] Based on their evaluations, these students had a difficult first year, receiving a range of marks from

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[93] For details, see the personal files of Sik and Zusmanovich: RGASPI 495/279/99a; RGASPI 495/65a/1100; RGASPI 495/65a/4861.

[94] Robin Kelley discusses Allen's work in *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 16-17.

[95] From Allen's unpublished memoir "Visions and Revisions," box 5, folder 18, James S. Allen Papers (JSAP), Tamiment Library, New York University.

"unsatisfactory" to the occasional "good." By the second year, however, students were judged to be "excellent" at their best, and simply "good" at their worst.[96] When the group returned to Manila in 1938, Allen was less certain about their progress. The star pupil among the group had been Federico (Primitivo Arrogante), and Allen agreed, in a letter written to Isabelle in Moscow, that "things look[ed] good for Fred" (presumably Federico). But fellow student Felipe Sevilla (Carlos) caused some worry: "Felipe is disappointing—what I feared in New York seems to be true. He is extremely academic, mechanical, and burocratic [sic]—he absorbed the worst features of his schooling."[97]

In light of Allen's assessment of Sevilla, it is tempting to conclude that KUTV's original efforts to build the future leaders of the revolutionary East devolved into training for Party bureaucrats, schooling them in the arts of factional struggle and formulaic propaganda statements. And certainly, American students' intellectual and political development was starkly limited by Soviet ethnography's approach to the colonial question and the hierarchical structure of life within the Comintern.

At the same time, the school served as an important site for the encounters of hundreds of revolutionaries from dozens of countries. Students endured deprivations and hardship in the belief that they could—armed with training in agitation, organizing, leadership, and, above all, a Marxist understanding of the "colonial question"—stir revolution after they left Moscow. A number of the African American students went on to important positions in international and national Communist movements. As shall be demonstrated in the next two chapters, students and alumni of KUTV were critical

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[96] See records of the Philippine section, in RGASPI 532/1/459, passim; RGASPI 532/1/460, passim.

[97] Allen to Isabelle Auerbach, 9 October 1938, box 1, folder 1, JSAP.

players in the production of interwar anticolonial politics and culture. Among the Filipino students one would find future trade union and Party leaders. A number of the Ghadar students were major figures in the Communist Party of India, though usually after terms of imprisonment upon their return to their homeland.

Other graduates never had the chance to put their KUTV education to use. Knowing that they faced certain arrest and imprisonment (if not execution) when they returned to their country of origin, Japanese and Indian students refused to leave the Soviet Union. The option of returning to the United States was also foreclosed. As the Great Depression battered the world economy in the early 1930s, hostility towards non-white immigrants in the U.S. deepened and deportations accelerated; undoubtedly Asian American radicals were the least welcome of migrants.[98] Plans to organize multiracial unions in Hawaii, foment revolution in New York, and crush imperialism worldwide were pushed across desks in the Comintern, but could not be attempted (however unlikely their success may have been). Trapped in the Soviet Union, these graduates took up work where they could find it—in factories, collective farms, and teaching foreign languages. As the Soviet state turned inward during the Purges and fears of subversion rose, these students who were at first unwilling to leave were now unable to escape as they were targeted as possible spies or informants. Their fates shall concern us later. For now, let us turn to some manifestations of American anticolonial politics and culture that were fostered by the institutional presence of KUTV.

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[98] Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 56-90; Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 246.

# CHAPTER THREE

## *The New Negro will not be an Aesthete*: Anticolonialism and Black Radical Politics in the Comintern

### Introduction

As the son of H.A. Nurse, a prominent headmaster and a colleague of Pan-Africanist lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams, George Padmore had been groomed to assume a place among the middle-class black intellectuals of Trinidad.[1] To this end, the young Padmore—then still known by his birth name of Malcolm Nurse—left for the United States to pursue a college education, arriving at Fisk University in the fall of 1925, just a semester after the student strike that had ousted the conservative university president Fayette Avery McKenzie.[2] Over the next three years, Nurse moved from Fisk to New York City—where he circulated among other West Indian radicals who convinced him to join the Communist Party—before eventually landing at Howard

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[1] Details of Padmore's youth are found in James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 1-4. On H.A. Nurse's connection to Henry Sylvester Williams, see Owen Mathurin, *Henry Sylvester Williams and the Origins of the Pan-African Movement, 1869-1911* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1976), 95-96. Cedric Robinson provides a succinct statement on the thought and context of middle-class black intellectuals in Trinidad in *Black Marxism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 247-251.

[2] On the student strike, see "A Student Revolution," *The Nation*, 18 March 1925; Lester Lamon, "The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925," *The Journal of Southern History* 40:2 (1974): 225-244; James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 263-270. While Malcolm Nurse missed the mass protests of 1924-1925, he was involved in smaller meetings and demonstrations during his time at Fisk. See "Students Protest U.S. Rule in China," *Chicago Defender*, 9 April 1927.

University in late 1927.[3] During this period, the young activist acquired a reputation for his fine oratorical skills and impeccable manners, his comportment being somewhat a thing of legend. One comrade joked that "his trouser creases could shave you."[4] Saving money to pay for law school, Nurse spent the summer of 1927 scrubbing dishes at Camp Kinderland, a retreat for socialist Jewish youth in the Hudson Valley. One evening, the understaffed kitchen crew was faced with mounting piles of dishes as the packed dining hall easily outpaced the small washing detail. When the waiters took to insulting the kitchen staff for falling behind, Nurse decided that he had had enough. Carefully rolling down his shirt sleeves before addressing the crowd of diners, Nurse walked out to the main hall to scold them for abetting in the mistreatment and exploitation of fellow laborers, passionately, and successfully, appealing to them to help with the kitchen work in the spirit of fraternity.[5]

A different story from only a year later, however, presents a stark contrast to this image of the polite British subject. In December 1928, British ambassador Sir Esme Howard was scheduled to speak alongside noted black scholar Alain Locke at the International House at Howard University in Washington, DC. Nurse, recently transferred from New York University to Howard, was incensed that his university would

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[3] On Padmore's career in the US, see Hooker, Black Revolutionary, 1-16. Winston James examines West Indian radicalism in *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998), 122-184.

[4] Ras Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within* (London and Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1973), 120.

[5] This story is recounted in James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 8. For background on Camp Kinderland and other socialist summer camps, see Paul Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

host the ambassador, as Sir Esme was thought to have played a consequential role in the deportation of Marcus Garvey, leader of the militant nationalist Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Under the newly assumed name of George Padmore, Nurse drafted a flyer to be distributed as Ambassador Howard made his entrance. The mimeographed statement called for students to join together with the International Anti-Imperialist Youth League to voice their disapproval of Sir Esme's invitation to the campus, while also rallying against imperialism, the suppression of civil rights and the threat of aggression against the Soviet Union. According to one account, Padmore threw the flyer in the face of the British official, though Padmore's chief biographer, James Hooker, considered this story unlikely as such behavior seemed incompatible with the student's character. Whatever the exact choreography of Padmore's actions, his protest caught the attention of the ambassador, who called on the University administration and the US State Department to investigate the students responsible.[6] In turn, this request was handed over to J. Edgar Hoover's Bureau of Investigations, although it is unclear whether the BI connected the young campus activist Malcolm Nurse with the Communist propagandist George Padmore.

This curious moment—peculiar both for the purported breach of decorum and for the seemingly contradictory defense of the ardently anticommunist nationalist Marcus Garvey and the Soviet Union in the same instant—marked the death of Malcolm Nurse

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[6] A copy of the flyer and Esme Howard's letter to the State Department can be found in "800.000B/Padmore, George," State Department Decimal Files, 1920-1929, Record Group 59 (RG 59), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland. The International Anti-Imperialist Youth League was, presumably, intended to be a campus branch of the Comintern's League Against Imperialism (LAI). For Hooker's account, see *Black Revolutionary*, 7. This incident is also recounted in Kevin Gaines, *African Americans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 36.

and the birth of George Padmore as an international figure. Not only was this the first time that Padmore's name was brought up as a person of interest to US and British authorities, but it also foreshadowed the development of the young revolutionary's political practice. In one defiant act, Padmore embodied an emergent black radical praxis that simultaneously critiqued the limits of liberal appeals for racial justice, dramatized black agency, and synthesized the impulses of nativist anticolonialism and proletarian internationalism.[7] Over the course of the next five years, the West Indian radical intellectual continued to develop this praxis among a small group of black diasporic activists operating out of Moscow under the auspices of the International Trade Union Congress of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), an office of the Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern) founded in 1928 to lead efforts to organize black workers in America, the West Indies, and Africa. Originally intended as the Negro section of the Profintern, the ITUCNW under the leadership of George Padmore was transformed into a critical corrective to the naïve universalism of the Comintern, producing an innovative set of black diasporic practices and political knowledge.

This chapter examines the rise and the fall of the ITUCNW from 1928 to 1933 in the context of the historiographies of black radicalism and international Communism,

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[7] While the concept of praxis has a long and complicated history, my usage here follows B. Anthony Bogues's definition: critical practical activity resulting in the development of "new political knowledge from a dialectical dialogue of lived experience and critical interpretation." See Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 21. For a cogent summary of the Marxist lineage of the term praxis, see Gajo Petrovic's entry in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 384-389. The contrast of nativism and proletarian internationalism as the main ideological impulses of anticolonialism follows the descriptions of interwar politics in Immanuel Wallerstein, "Anti-Systemic Movements," in *Transforming the Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), 13-53; and Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 73-109.

advancing three major interrelated arguments. First, the chapter calls attention to the diverse and heterogeneous forms of anticolonialism that camped together, if briefly and awkwardly, under the banner of the Communist International. This analysis builds on the examination of the politics of Katayama Sen and M.N. Roy in chapter one, developing the ways in which American anticolonialists found in Moscow an exilic location to work out their visions. Here, the chapter runs counter to two trends in the historiography of international Communism. My description of the work of the ITUCNW reveals a more complicated political scene in Moscow after the period of the Bolshevization of the Comintern (1924-1928).[8] Certainly, the ITUCNW faced demands for Party fealty that ultimately led to irreconcilable fissures in the organization. Yet what is more remarkable in some respects is the attempt by a handful of black diasporics to reorient the Comintern approach to colonial and black struggle. The explication of this divergent tendency in Moscow complicates the approach of revisionist scholars of radical politics who have argued against the orthodox charge that Communist efforts were controlled by Moscow by excavating the ways in which local struggles found in the Party a useful vehicle for their aspirations.[9] These revisionist works have brought new insights to bear on the political formation of international Communism but the conflation of top-down and

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[8] Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (New York: St. Martins, 1997), 41-80.

[9] For an overview of revisionist scholarship, see Michael Brown, ed., *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993). While the revisionist literature is now immense, the clearest statements are Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Robin D.G. Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at its Grassroots, 1928-1935* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

center-periphery has also obfuscated marginal voices in Moscow. The analysis of the ITUCNW presented here demonstrates that pockets of resistance and alternate possibilities operated at the highest echelons of the Comintern at least as late as 1933.

Second, this chapter endeavors to enrich the growing body of literature on interwar black internationalism by remapping the political contours and geography of these practices. Recently, a number of historians and literary scholars have taken up the task of unearthing transnational and international connections between the Harlem Renaissance, *Negritude*, exilic black communities in Europe, and the growing unrest in the West Indies and Africa during the interwar period. Literary scholar Brent Hayes Edwards has persuasively made the case that the New Negro must be situated in "the discourse of international civil society as embodied in the League of Nations, the counter-universalism of proletarian revolution envisioned by the Communist International, and the globe-carving discourse of European colonialism." According to Edwards, the literary, cultural and political movements of the "Harlem Renaissance" ought to be centered not in New York, but in Paris, which was crucial as "it allowed boundary crossing, conversations, and collaborations that were available nowhere else to the same degree."[10] Michelle Stephens, a historian of West Indian anticolonialism, has taken Edwards to task for this focus on Paris which obfuscates the crucial location and identity of the Caribbean in the political and cultural movements of the 1920s and 1930s.[11]

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[10] Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 3.

[11] See the discussion of Edwards' work in the March 2005 volume of *Small Axe*, especially Michelle Stephens, "Disarticulating Black Internationalisms: West Indian Radicals and *The Practice of Diaspora,*" *Small Axe* 9 (March 2005): 100-111. Stephens's view is fully developed in her monograph *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

Stephens has also called on scholars of black politics to attend to the ways in which discourses of blackness intersected with "various revolutionary internationalisms—Bolshevism, Pan-Africanism, and the related universalist discourses of the American and French revolutions."[12] Hitherto underdeveloped among these tasks is the relation of Bolshevik Revolution to the anticolonialist discourses of the interwar period.[13] This chapter attends to Stephens's appeal, recovering the ways in which one small group of African Americans and West Indians articulated a black internationalist radicalism that critiqued the limits of Western liberalisms, surpassed the limits of Bolshevik universalism, and put black toilers at the vanguard of revolutionary struggle.[14]

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[12] Michelle Stephens, "Re-imagining the Shape and Borders of Black Political Space," *Radical History Review* 87 (Fall 2003): 174. In many ways, this essay is an important update of Earl Lewis's "To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas," *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995): 765-787. On the transnational world of Caribbean radicalism, see also Winston James' revelatory work *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*.

[13] Edwards' chapter on George Padmore in *The Practice of Diaspora* would seem an exception to this observation, but his discussion is limited by a poor explanation of the geopolitics of the interwar period and the nature of Comintern policy and practice. Cedric Robinson's discussion of these points is a more useful, if cursory, exploration. See *Black Marxism*, 218-228. For an engaging discussion of race, gender, and the post-World War One global order, see Stephens, *Black Empire*, 35-55.

[14] In this regard, one might argue that Padmore inaugurated the work of "a highly internationalist and leftist cohort of black intellectuals [in the 1930s] … to produce a sophisticated body of work analyzing racism and colonialism as a global history of Euro-American dominance," in the words of historian Nikhil Singh. Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 48. Other radicals among this cohort included W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, and Oliver C. Cox. While I am largely sympathetic to Singh's arguments, I find his framing of these thinkers' contributions as a critique of American universalism and a contribution to a "long civil rights movement" to be somewhat reductive and anachronistic in the ways in which it reads back post-war understandings of a global order of nation-states, civil rights, and ethnic pluralism to a period marked by oft-times unmoored internationalist visions of liberation. On the dangers of the "long civil rights movement" scholarship, see Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang,

Furthermore, I contend that Moscow was a crucial epicenter for this work, providing connections and the means to develop contacts in capitals and port cities across Europe, the Americas, and Africa while at the same time putting ties across the "black Atlantic" in conversation with the radical organizing of "the pan-Pacific," if only tentatively.

Finally, in my analysis of George Padmore's crucial transformation of the organization, I contribute to a reassessment of a principal figure in the history of twentieth-century Pan-Africanism. Most analyses of Padmore's life and work have represented his career as bifurcated between his early years as a Communist and his later work as a Pan-Africanist, the former period marked by his political immaturity, the latter by a developed diasporic nationalism. Seizing upon Padmore's vitriolic denunciations of Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois in the early 1930s, interpreters of the black radical tradition have criticized the young Padmore for his failure to appreciate the power and importance of nativist anticolonial visions.[15] In contrast, my examination of Padmore's praxis as editor of *Negro Worker* and head of the ITUCNW reveals a striking continuity

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"The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *Journal of African American History* (Spring 2007): 265-288.

[15] Typical of such interpretations is Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*; Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*; Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Fitzroy Baptise and Rupert Lewis (eds.), *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009). Scholars of Garveyism have been more perceptive about continuities and differentiating Padmore's criticism of Garvey from his cooptation of Garveyism. See Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Dover: The Majority Press, 1976), 221-272; Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey: Anticolonial Champion* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988), 134-151. Similarly, the German historian of Pan-Africanism Immanuel Geiss is attentive to parallels between the ideas of Du Bois, Garvey, and early Padmore in *The Pan-African Movement* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1974), 331-339.

over the course of his political life from the late 1920s to the 1950s, as this black radical intellectual attempted, in various works and organizations, to synthesize communist internationalism and black nationalism. To a great extent, Padmore himself was responsible for this misunderstanding of his early political career. After his break with the Comintern in 1933, he explained his renunciation of the Party as an affirmation of his commitment to anticolonialism. This opposition of anticolonialist loyalties and Marxist sympathies was forcefully iterated in Padmore's classic *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* (1956). Yet, as the author confessed in a letter to Kwame Nkrumah, the title's question was posed thus not to represent the actual choice facing the African continent, but rather as an impetus to "speed up things" (i.e., decolonization) by using Cold War logic to pose "a hell of a dilemma": "either Pan-African freedom if the West wants to retain African friendship or Communism caused by disappointment and frustration."[16] Using documents from the Comintern archive, this chapter recombines and reconstructs the intertwined history of Pan-Africanism and international Communism in the early 1930s as a bridge between the dynamic black militancy of Marcus Garvey's UNIA in the 1920s and flourishing exilic Pan-Africanism in London and Paris in the later 1930s and 1940s.[17]

**Background and Beginnings**

In October of 1919, British intelligence officials forwarded the special report "Unrest among the Negroes" to the US Secretary of State. Following the "race riots" of

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[16] George Padmore to Kwame Nkrumah, 19 January 1956, folder 15, box 154-41, Kwame Nkrumah Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

[17] In this sense, my work supports the early suggestion of George Shepparson that Americans were essential to the history of Pan-Africanism in the twentieth century. See George Shepparson, "Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism," *Journal of African History* 1:2 (1960): 299-312; George Shepparson, "Pan-Africanism and 'Pan-Africanism': Some Historical Notes," *Phylon* 23:4 (1962): 346-358.

the summer—both in Britain and in the United States—the British requested that the State Department keep them informed of conditions in America as it was clear to them that threats of subversion transcended territorial borders. The report summarized the situation:

> The race riots in Washington and Chicago have naturally produced speculation as to whether the unrest which prevails all over the world has extended to the negroes, not only in the United States but in the British Colonies and Africa. It now seems clear that the riots were not the sporadic outcome of race prejudice, but the first fruits of the doctrine of socialistic equality preached by agitators to negro audiences throughout the country… It was hardly to be expected that coloured troops could be employed in France without stirring up race consciousness among returning soldiers.[18]

Appended to the report was an annotated list of organizations and individuals worthy of surveillance, including: the Socialist Party, Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), UNIA, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Hamitic League, W. Monroe Trotter, Hubert Harrison, Marcus Garvey, and W.E.B. Du Bois. While the recently founded Communist Party of America did not make the cut, the British did express worries about the influence of the "Bolshevists." This anxiety over the influence of Communism on African Americans was, at the time, unfounded. The period after World War One saw a marked increase in black activism in the United States, but outside of a handful of radicals in New York and Chicago, the Communist Party was of little interest to most African Americans, even among the politically

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[18] "Unrest among the Negroes," (dated 7 October 1919) in 811.4016/27, State Department Decimal Files, 1910-1929, Record Group 59 (RG 59), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland. The most comprehensive treatment of the riots in Britain is Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009). Barbara Foley explores the impact of 1919 on black radicals in the US in *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

minded.[19] Rather Garvey's UNIA dominated the political field among radical African Americans with over seven hundred branches throughout the United States, in addition to connections in the West Indies and Africa.[20]

In 1922, leaders of the Comintern and the Communist Party in America sought to remedy this situation and attract more African Americans and Africans to their cause. In the early part of the year, South African Communist David Ivon Jones, working together with the Comintern's colonial expert Mikhail Pavlovich, began organizing a World Negro Congress to be held in 1923. Jones composed the summons "Negroes of the

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[19] Among the handful of black radicals sympathetic to Bolshevism were *The Messenger*'s socialist editors, Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph and Cyril Briggs, editor of the African Blood Brotherhood's (ABB) journal *The Crusader*. *The Messenger* was immediately sympathetic to the Bolshevik Revolution. See "The Bolsheviki," *The Messenger* (January 1918): 7; "Bolshevism and World Democracy," *The Messenger* (July 1918): 9; W.A. Domingo, "Did Bolshevism Stop Race Riots in Russia?" *The Messenger* (September 1919): 26-27. By 1923, the editors had turned against black Communists in the US, though they still expressed admiration for the Soviet Union and Lenin. "The Menace of Negro Communists," *The Messenger* (August 1923): 784; "Lenin," *The Messenger* (March 1924): 69. *The Crusader* (voice of the African Blood Brotherhood) first mentioned the Bolshevik Revolution in a theatre review in 1919: "Darkest Russia," *The Crusader* (March 1919): 24-25. Sustained interest in the Soviet Union was only expressed after the "race riots" of 1919 and anti-radical campaign of the First Red Scare. See, for instance, "Make Their Cause Your Own," *The Crusader* (July 1919): 6; "Bolshevism and Race Prejudice," *The Crusader* (December 1919): 9; Cyril Briggs, "Bolshevism's Menace: To Whom and to What?" *The Crusader* (February 1920): 601. For a detailed description of black radical politics in New York in the early twentieth century, see Jeffrey Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918* (New York: Columbia Press, 2009). See also Theodore Kornweibel, *'Seeing Red': Federal Campaigns against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Minkah Makalani, "For the Liberation of Black People Everywhere," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois, 2004, 1-168.

[20] Tony Martin, *Race First*, 15. For a brief, but provocative description of the influence and legacy of UNIA in the American South, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the American South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 465-476. For comparative and transnational examinations of UNIA in the US and South Africa, see George Frederickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 137-178; Robert Vinson, "'Sea Kaffirs': 'American Negroes' and the Gospel of Garveyism in Early Twentieth-Century Cape Town," *Journal of African History* 47 (2006): 281-303.

World!" that called representatives from Africa and the Americas to travel to Berlin: "Delegates must attend from all sections of the globe inhabited by Negroes, in order that policies may be adopted for each particular section. Local and national conferences, therefore, must take place in the United States and in the West Indies (jointly, if possible), in Central and South America, in South and North Africa, to awaken the interest of the Negroes and prepare for the election of delegations."[21] In November, two black delegates—American Party member Otto Huiswoud and the poet Claude McKay—were sent from the United States to Moscow to attend the Fourth Comintern Congress and to report on the "Negro question" and aid in the formulation of a new program of action. Huiswoud's statement outlined the importance of the United States as a center for work throughout the African diaspora, as black Communists in America were more advanced than their colonial brethren, despite the deleterious influence of bourgeois reformist organizations such as the Urban League and the NAACP. McKay's report amplified this argument, in part, by underscoring the radicalization that was taking place among African Americans due to the combined effects of rising expectations for racial democracy after World War One, outrage at the racial violence of 1919, the State-sponsored backlash against "negro radicals," and the example of the Comintern's

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[21] Ivon Jones, "Negroes of the World!" (n.d., circa 1922), Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RGASPI) 495/155/4. See Edward Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa Before World War Two* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1974), 121-127. For background on Ivon Jones, see James T. Campbell's discussion in "Romantic Revolutionaries: David Ivon Jones and S.P. Bunting and the Origins of Non-Racial Politics in South Africa," *Journal of African History* (1998): 313-328. The Executive Committee of the Comintern had actually called on American representatives to draft a "preliminary program" for a "Congress of the Negro Peoples of the World" as early as 1919. See ECCI to Reed, Fraina, Gurevitch, Janson, and Scott, RGASPI 495/155/1.

anticolonial work.[22] Despite this push from Moscow, little was accomplished following the Comintern Congress. When the committee charged with organizing the World Negro Congress met in May 1923, they bemoaned the lack of cooperation on the part of the American Party and the problems posed by vigilant police surveillance in the colonies.[23] Having made no headway, further efforts were abandoned for the time being.

Sensing the need to dedicate greater resources to the race problem in the United States, the Comintern mandated the founding of the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) in 1925. Placed under the leadership of former Wobbly and theatre critic Lovett Fort Whiteman, the ANLC was charged with creating a black organization led by laborers that would purge organized unions of racial prejudice, pull the black masses away from competing reformist groups, and orient African American struggle to a global anti-imperialist political program. In the words of historian Mark Solomon, it was "a tall order."[24] But with UNIA is disarray after the arrest of Garvey in 1923, it was hoped that the ANLC might capture these energetic "nationalist" elements and reorient them to the Party's message. According to Israel Amter—a Jewish piano player who had scaled up the Party leadership and been assigned to direct the organization's "Negro work"—the

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[22] These reports were published in *Fourth Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Report* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1922), 257-262. For McKay's impressions of the trip, see *A Long Way From Home* (New York: L. Furman, 1937), 152-234; *The Passion of Claude McKay*, ed. Wayne Cooper (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 77-106. Theodore Draper first called attention to the importance of these 1922 reports in *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking, 1957), 386-387.

[23] Organizers included Ivon Jones, Israel Amter, Katayama Sen, and Mikhail Borodin. "Minutes of the Meeting of Commission Appointed by the Orgbureau to Prepare and Guide the Work for the Forthcoming World Negro Congress," (circa May 1923) RGASPI 495/155/8.

[24] Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998), 46-67, here 52. See also "Constitution and Program of the American Negro Labor Congress," RGASPI 515/1/575

Garveyites were, in fact, "splendid," "revolutionary," and "ready to organize to fight for their lives and liberties."[25] Unfortunately, Fort Whiteman, despite his charismatic oratory, was the wrong person to bring them into the fold, as he lacked any sense for organizing. Fort Whiteman travelled from city to city, giving speeches to draw black workers to the program of the Communist Party, but he failed to establish any long-term contacts or to build an infrastructure for the ANLC's work at the local level. According to the Party's Committee on Negro Work, the ANLC "exist[ed] merely as an office in Chicago" and, owing to the inability to collect dues, the Party's newspaper *Negro Champion* could only appear sporadically.[26]

While the ANLC floundered, cadre-building work continued as the Party slowly recruited young African Americans, sending the most promising to Moscow to gain greater exposure to revolutionary movements and to receive training at Communist University of Toilers of the East (KUTV) and International Lenin School (MLSh).[27] The black diasporics drawn into this work were, for the most part, middle-class and educated, with a previous history of geographic mobility. Almost all had been swept up in the

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[25] Israel Amter, "Israel and Sadie San Veen Amter Autobiographical Typescript," Israel and Sadie Amter Papers, Tamiment Collection 079, Tamiment Library, New York University. Amter's impressions were based on his experience as an organizer in Cleveland. In late 1924, he was charged with compiling a report on the conditions of blacks in Africa and in the Americas, published in Russian as *Mirovoe osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie negrov [World Movement for Negro Liberation]* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1925). On the hopes that the ANLC would attract UNIA members, both in the US and in Africa, see Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, 145-147.

[26] RGASPI 515/1/207; Solomon, *The Cry was Unity*, 56. For Amter's criticism of Fort Whiteman's barn-storming tours that failed to develop any long-term results, see Amter to Ballam, 14 January 1926, RGASPI 515/1/819. See also John Ballam, "Preliminary Report on Negro Labor Congress," 1 January 1926, RGASPI 515/1/819.

[27] This work is discussed at length in chapter two, above.

wave of black militancy that followed the First World War and many were avid readers of "New Negro" literature of the 1920s that had raised the call to a new modern, global black identity. In 1928, at the Fourth Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern), the Comintern leadership attempted to give the call for a "New Negro" a Leninist inflection and a new institutional form with the founding of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW). One student in Moscow, the American lawyer William L. Patterson, relayed this call from Moscow in the pages of the *New Masses*: "The New Negro is still far in the offing. He will come! He must come! But he will not be an aesthete; he will be a revolutionist, finding his milieu in the political arena."[28]

It was the task of Patterson and a small circle of his comrades to bring this new figure into being. The leader of this group was James W. Ford, a World War One veteran from Alabama who had attended Fisk University before shipping out to France in 1917. Upon his return to the States, Ford found work in the Post Office in Chicago. Before joining the ANLC in 1925, his only political experience had been protesting against the racism expressed by his superior officer while in the army and participating in a strike to desegregate the local postal workers' baseball league.[29] But after taking up Party membership, Ford's ascension through the ranks was rapid. When he was fired from the Post Office in late 1927 after his speech at a Communist rally was reported to the

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[28] William L. Patterson, "The 'New Negro,'" *New Masses* (June 1928): 28.

[29] James W. Ford, "Life and Activities," 20 April 1932, RGASPI 495/261/6747; "Fisk Trained Ford to be a Race Leader, and Ford Became One—To Fisk's Horror," *New York Amsterdam News*, 28 February 1934. On Ford's career in the 1930s, see Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 95-114.

Postmaster by the Bureau of Investigations, Ford was free to commit all of his energies to Party work.[30] In March 1928, Ford was sent to the Profintern Congress in Moscow, where he, along with Patterson, played a key role in advancing the cause of the ITUCNW.[31] The pair was joined in the summer by the now-seasoned Party functionary Otto Huiswoud who arrived in Moscow to participate in the momentous Sixth Comintern Congress. This Congress, most well-known to scholars of black radicalism and Communism for its adoption of the "Black Belt" thesis—a resolution calling for African American self-determination in the South—also resolved that the Comintern should advance its work among "Negroes" across the globe.[32] The ITUCNW, formed to "set up

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[30] Ford's speech at a Communist-sponsored rally for IWW workers in Colorado was reported to the BI by a member of the anti-communist and anti-Semitic American Vigilante Intelligence Federation (AVIF). This report was subsequently forwarded to the Postmaster. See Ford's FBI File (100-14632-X), in author's possession.

[31] L.O. Golden, "Mezhdunarodnyi profsoiuznyi komitet negritianskikh rabochikh [International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers]," *Narody Azii i Afriki* No. 5 (1970): 61; Hakim Adi, "Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Comintern, the 'Negro Question' and the First International Conference of Negro Workers, Hamburg 1930," *African and Black Diaspora* (July 2008): 240-241.

[32] See Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents* (vol. 2) (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 552-557. For a brief overview of the CPUSA's official positions on the African American question, see Timothy Johnson, "'Death for Negro Lynching!': The Communist Party, USA's Position on the African American Question," *American Communist History* 7:2 (2008): 243-254. On the "Black Belt" thesis, see Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking, 1960), 315-356; Harvey Klehr and William Tompson, "Self-Determination in the Black Belt," *Labor History* 30:3 (1989): 354-366. Contrary to Draper and Klehr's analysis of the deleterious effects of the "Black Belt" strategy, the "third period" (1928-1935) witnessed a great improvement in work among African Americans. Note historian David Montgomery's memory of Party organizing in the 1950s: "…there were a number of older Black workers who had never joined the Party, or if they did, were only in it a short time, but had considerable respect for it, and would for the most part think of the Third Period—the very one that most of us think of as the most outrageous—as the one in which these guys proved themselves, in the unemployed movement, and in the Scottsboro campaign. This was the period in which the generation of older Blacks looked upon with greatest respect." "Once Upon a Shop Floor: An Interview with David Montgomery," *Radical History Review* 23 (Spring 1980): 41.

connections with the Negro workers of the world" was central to this new emphasis of Comintern work.

**Building a Framework**

Over the next year, Ford and Patterson, joined by black students from KUTV and Profintern leaders, regularly met in Moscow to hammer out of program and plan for the ITUCNW. Their work was to be modeled on and to complement the efforts of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS), an organization founded by the Profintern a year earlier that worked to advance revolutionary causes across Asia, largely led by Chinese and Japanese sailors and migrants in the United States.[33] Like the PPTUS, the ITUCNW was instructed to establish a journal, to organize a founding conference, and to use American diasporics to lead anticolonial organizing efforts. Common demands, regardless of the specificity of local struggles, were agreed upon: an eight-hour day, the abolition of forced labor and racial violence, social insurance, protection of women and youth, freedom to organize, non-segregated trade unions, and an ambiguous call for self-determination. The group also laid out a flexible framework to deal with the specific conditions of black workers in different locales: "The Negro toiling masses are subjected both to capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression—they suffer both as members of the working class and of an oppressed race. In this or that country the one of the other

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[33] Josephine Fowler, "From East to West and West to East: Ties of Solidarity in the Pan-Pacific Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, 1923-1934," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 66 (Fall 2004): 99-117; Josephine Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists: Organizing in American and International Communist Movements, 1919-1933* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007). Fowler provides a rather sympathetic account of the achievements of the PPTUS, in contrast to the Secretariat's repeated self-criticisms of its inability to build a readership for its journal *Pan-Pacific Worker*, distribute its work, or sustain a mass base. See PPTUS records in: RGASPI 534/4/182; RGASPI 534/4/313; RGASPI 534/4/422; RGASPI 534/4/473; RGASPI 534/4/474.

form of oppression predominates."[34] The need for the ITUCNW program to deal with the specific nature of colonialism and racial capitalism was amplified in a report that criticized ostensibly "orthodox" Marxists who refused to acknowledge the need for a separate black organization within the Comintern:

> That this is not Marxism, but a parody of Marxism, is clear. It is one thing to assert, as Marxism does, that the basic antagonism of modern society is the antagonism of classes, that at the bottom of all conflicts are class roots, and quite a different thing to simplify the question and reduce all antagonisms to those of classes… As a rule, the Negro proletarian is aware of his racial oppression, but he does not yet conceive his class solidarity with the white workers. With insignificant exemptions, the best and foremost elements of the Negro proletariat, those who are already class conscious to a certain extent, and nevertheless conscious of themselves first of all as Negroes, and only afterwards as workers. They will simply refuse to join an organization which calls upon themselves first and foremost as upon workers.[35]

In order to understand how best to approach the Negro proletarian, committee members and dependable KUTV students pored over documents from the League of Nations and International Labor Organization related to matters of colonial rule and racial oppression. They also collected statistical data on working conditions in Africa, America, and the Caribbean while drafting short courses of study for trade union organizers in the colonies. Two African American women at KUTV, Maude White and Louise Rivers, turned in reports on the status of black women in the United States and Africa.[36] Coordinating these efforts, Ford compiled a bibliography of works on the "Negro question" available in Moscow, including their location in various institutional and private libraries throughout

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[34] "A Trade Union Programme of Action, RGASPI 534/3/359.

[35] "The Need for a Mass Racial Organization of Negro Workers," 20 July 1928, RGASPI 534/3/359.

[36] "Minutes of the ITUCNW," 1 December 1928, RGASPI 534/3/359; "Minutes," 16 April 1929, RGASPI 534/3/450.

the city.[37] Much as these activists believed in Marxism as a framework to approach the problems of global capitalism, they knew that the framework had to be adjusted to the specific conditions faced by racialized subjects. It was their task to prepare the framework and specific analyses needed for work across the black diaspora.

Yet a handful of African American and West Indian activists with a stack of reports did not make an international movement. Aside from the few students from the Caribbean and Africa at KUTV, the ITUCNW lacked contacts in colonies, a significant problem as the Moscow group approached the task of organizing an inaugural conference to be attended by representatives from across the African diaspora. To improve this situation, Ford and Patterson turned to comrades in Europe for help, beginning with the German based League Against Imperialism (LAI), an umbrella organization of anticolonial forces led by Communists Willi Münzenberg and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya.[38] Founded in 1927, the well-funded LAI was busy organizing their Second Congress in Frankfurt in the summer of 1929. While Münzenberg and Chattopadhyaya had ignored requests from Ford to set aside a full day of the Congress for a subconference to discuss black anticolonialist work, they did include several sessions that allowed representatives from the Americas, Europe, and Africa to congregate as a "Negro Delegation," including Ford, Patterson, Williana Burroughs,

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[37] "The Negro Proletariat," (n.d., circa 1929), box 1, folder 5, James W. Ford Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University. Repositories included the institutional libraries of KUTV, Mezhrabpom, the World Agrarian Institute, and the Profintern, in addition to the private libraries of Ford, Patterson, Fort Whiteman, Harry Haywood, Maude White, and KUTV instructor Endre Sik.

[38] For a brief, readable introduction to the work of the LAI, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007), 16-30.

Jomo Kenyatta, Garan Kouyate, and Henry Rosemond.[39] In addition to adopting a broad resolution on the "World Negro Question," the group dedicated their energies to planning the ITUCNW conference for the following summer.[40] After the LAI Congress, the committee contacted Party leaders in Britain, France, and Belgium to reach out to their respective colonies to publicize the ITUCNW. This approach yielded few positive results. The Belgians pled that they had no contacts in the Congo and the British Party did not see organizing in Africa as its duty.[41] This neglect of anticolonialist work existed despite a specific resolution in the ITUCNW charter—likely inserted by Ford and Patterson—directing "revolutionary trade unions and minorities in the imperialist countries (USA, Britain, France, Belgium) to extend all possible and active help to the

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[39] ITUCNW to Willi Munzenberg, 14 June 1929, RGASPI 542/1/33. LAI leadership had also rebuffed an earlier recommendation from Ford to postpone their conference until after the ITUCNW congress so that the ITUCNW could elect representatives of the black masses, rather than the colonial elite, to attend the meeting of the League. See "Speech of Comrade Ford in Cologne," 16 January 1929, RGASPI 534/3/450. For reports of the "Negro Delegation" meetings, see "Morning Session; July 25th, 1929," RGASPI 542/1/87; LAI had also invited William Pickens of the NAACP, a fact that incensed Ford and Patterson. Pickens—who likely guessed that he would come under attack at the Congress—had prepared and delivered his speech in German; this tactic prevented William Patterson, who was scheduled to speak after Pickens, from effectively rebutting the NAACP delegate's criticism of the Communist's factionalism . "Report on Anti-Imperialist Conference by Comrade Adams [Burroughs]," 11 September 1929, RGASPI 515/1/1685. Patterson had objected to the LAI's invitation of Pickens on the grounds that the NAACP did not confront US imperialism in Liberia and Latin America. Patterson to LAI, 25 March 1929, RGASPI 542/1/79. See also William Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 110-111. Hooker claims that Padmore was present at the Frankfurt meeting, but there is no evidence of this trip in the Comintern files. See *Black Revolutionary*, 12-14.

[40] "Draft Resolution on the World Negro Question," 21 June 1929, RGASPI 542/1/85.

[41] James Ford, "Report of Trip in Interest of ITUCNW," 14 November 1929, RGASPI 534/3/450; Report by George Padmore in "Stenogramma 5-ogo i 6-ogo zasedanii V Kongressa Profinterna," 18 August 1930, RGASPI 534/1/138.

work of organizing the Negro workers."[42] By the end of 1929, it was clear that the Moscow comrades would have to recruit delegates to the ITUCNW conference themselves.

To help with this work, George Padmore was sent to Moscow in December 1929. Ford had been called back to the States to attend to Party work and Padmore, recently relieved of his duties as assistant editor at the *Negro Champion*, was assigned to cover Ford's correspondence and edit the mimeographed bulletin *Negro Worker*.[43] It was hoped that Padmore, known as a capable journalist and orator, would benefit from "being close to the scene in Moscow and under the supervision of comrades who have experience in practical work."[44] Padmore's practical work, however, soon took him away from the scene in Moscow. In the spring of 1930, the committee appealed to the Comintern to support recruiting trips across Europe, Africa, and the West Indies. Otto

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[42] "Mezhdunarodnyi profkomitet rabochikh negrov pri Kominterne [International Committee of Negro Workers under the Comintern]," 31 July 1928, RGASPI 534/3/359. This directive to parties in the imperialist countries was absent in the original Russian, but added in the English translation.

[43] Padmore had filled in for Cyril Briggs as editor of the *Negro Champion* in the summer and fall of 1929 and also worked at the Party's main organ, the *Daily Worker*; Briggs had been inspired by Garvey's use of the press, writing: "…it should be noted that the UNIA was build [sic] very largely by the 'Negro World'…" See Report of Cyril Briggs, RGASPI 515/1/1685. While some scholars have, following C.L.R. James, credited Padmore with incorporating elements of *Negro World* into *Negro Worker*, it seems clear that this inspiration was shared by many black Party members, including Briggs and Patterson. See C.L.R. James, "CLR James on the Origins," *Radical America* (July-August 1968): 20-29; William Wilson [William Patterson], "The Tasks of the Revolutionary Negro Press of America," 27 December 1929, RGASPI 515/1/1685.

[44] Huiswoud to Ford, 14 November 1929, RGASPI 515/1/1688. Leaving Moscow, Ford instructed his Profintern superior: "Take care of Padmore, you will find him a good, energetic and capable comrade." Ford to Slavin, 23 December 1929, RGASPI 534/3/450.

Huiswoud and his wife Hermina Huiswoud had already set out for the Caribbean.[45] In April, Patterson arrived in Berlin to meet with LAI representatives only to discover that local comrades were entirely unaware of the coming ITUCNW conference despite the meetings and resolution of the Negro Delegation at the Frankfurt Congress. Writing to Moscow, Patterson noted that work on organizing the ITUCNW conference in Berlin could be described in two words: "apathy and passivity."[46] Patterson met with Chattopadhyaya and representatives of the League for the Defense of the Negro Race (LDNR) to "spur them into action" and secure addresses for African comrades.[47] While Patterson recommended that Moscow send a permanent representative from the Negro Bureau to work in Berlin, he left the task of publicizing the upcoming conference with Chatto and the LDNR. Leaving Germany, Patterson connected with Padmore and Gambian labor leader Edward Small on the way to London; after a brief meeting to establish his credentials, Padmore left with Small for West Africa, where Padmore, using the cover story—not entirely untrue—that he was researching a book entitled *Imperialism*

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[45] Cyril Briggs carried news of the Huiswoud's work in the Caribbean in *The Liberator* (successor to the *Negro Champion*). See Hermie Dumont [Hermina Huiswoud], "United States Oppresses Haitian Masses," *The Liberator*, 15 March 1930; "Trinidad Orders Huiswoud Out," *The Liberator*, 10 May 1930. Ford summarized the results of Huiswoud's trip—mainly a record of failure—in "Report on the Preparations for the London Conference," 12 May 1930, RGASPI 534/3/546.

[46] Patterson to Negro Bureau, 18 April 1930, RGASPI 534/4/330.

[47] On Chattopadhyaya's work in Berlin, see Nirode Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 246-282. On the German variant of the LDNR, Kouyate's French organization, see Robbie Aitken, "From Cameroon to Germany and Back via Moscow and Paris: The Political Career of Joseph Bile (1892-1959), Performer, 'Negerarbeiter' and Comintern Actvist," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43:4 (2008): 597-616.

*in Africa*, travelled throughout West Africa.[48] As with his trip to Berlin, Patterson was disheartened by the failure of local Party members to take up projects on behalf of the ITUCNW, characterizing the situation: "Objectively good field for Negro work, subjectively extremely bad. No one has a conception of what to do or how to do it."[49]

The problem, Patterson came to understand, was not only a lack of attention to "Negro work" in the European capitals, but also Moscow's failure to support anticolonial work on the continent. Travelling throughout France and Britain in May, he was forced to borrow funds from local race groups and Party members as he received no funds or communication from the Comintern. The lack of material support from Moscow severely undercut Patterson's efforts to bring in new recruits from nationalist anticolonialist organizations as it was difficult to criticize the program of those to whom he was beholden, just as his empty pockets made it difficult to convince them of the Comintern's commitment to anticolonial work. As he wrote to Ford, "This is a hell of a way of doing things."[50] Moreover, Patterson criticized the "low ideological level [of the Comintern] on [the Negro] question," which he thought led to an underestimation of the revolutionary

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[48] M.I. Nurse, "Letter to the Editor," *The Gambia Outlook*, 26 April 1930. This letter is in the clippings file from KUTV's African Research collection. RGASPI 532/4/95. For an account based on French archival sources, see Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 249.

[49] Patterson to Negro Bureau, 18 April 1930, RGASPI 534/4/330.

[50] Patterson to Ford, 30 May 1930, RGASPI 534/4/330. Williana Burroughs amplified Patterson's assessment of Party work in Paris in her report to the Negro Bureau. See "Report on the Activity of the French Communist Party among the Negroes," 10 September 1930, RGASPI 495/155/87. For an inside view of work in Paris, see Kouyate's incisive account, "Confidential Report," 29 September 1930, RGASPI 495/155/87.

possibilities in Africa and the West Indies, as well as hampering the Party's approach to non-Communist anticolonialist organizations.[51]

The critical tone of Patterson's correspondence notwithstanding, ITUCNW's organizers successfully arranged for their inaugural conference in July 1930 in Hamburg.[52] Delegates from South Africa, Kenya, Gold Coast, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Jamaica, and Haiti attended alongside representatives of black workers in France, England, and the United States. As Chairman of the ITUCNW, Ford set the parameters for the meeting:

> We must take up organizational questions relating to the economic situation and working conditions of the Negro workers—industrial and agricultural workers; we must discuss lynching, terrorism, police and soldier massacres, pass-laws and restrictions, racial discriminations, forced labour, the coming imperialist war and a number of other questions and problems…We are of many political faiths here to discuss openly and frankly the situation of the Negro workers as it actually is in the world today and to discuss and to study the affects [sic] of capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression upon the Negro masses.[53]

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[51] Patterson to Negro Bureau, 24 June 1930, RGASPI 534/4/330. See also W. Wilson [William Patterson], "Pervaia mezhdunarodnaia negritianskaia rabochaia konferentsiia [First International Negro Workers' Conference]," *Revoliutsionnyi vostok* No. 9-10 (1930): 299.

[52] At first the group had proposed having the meeting in London to attract the greatest audience, but Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government blocked the conference. See Patterson to Ford, 30 May 1930, RGASPI 534/4/330. On the original selection of London because "one-half of the Negroes of the world are subjects of the British Empire," see William Patterson, "Some Significant Features of the Coming Negro Workers' Conference," 10 January 1930, RGASPI 495/155/87. This was not the only logistical snag in organizing the conference. Due to lack of cooperation on the part of the Berlin Profintern representative, African delegates were stranded on their way to Hamburg. See letters dated 26 June and 30 June 1930, RGASPI 534/3/546.

[53] *A Report of Proceedings and Decisions of the First International Conference of Negro Workers*, (Hamburg: International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 1930), 5-6. In fact, the organizers had been instructed by the Profintern to limit their reports and to focus on gathering information from colonial delegates, especially so the American leadership of the ITUCNW could learn more about the situation in Africa. See "Instruktsiia po provedenie mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii negrov [Instructions for the Conduct of the International Conference of Negroes]," 19 June 1930, RGASPI 495/155/86.

Following Ford's opening address, delegates reported on their specific struggles. William Patterson called on black workers to struggle against compulsory labor, land expropriation, and discriminatory colonial rule (i.e., the poll tax, the pass system), emphasizing the failure of the League of Nations and International Labor Organization (ILO) to address these problems. Padmore presented a sweeping view in "The Economic Struggles of the Negro Workers." After a listing of black uprisings in South Africa, Nigeria, Congo, Madagascar, and Haiti, Padmore noted that the only ideology that currently drew these struggles together was Garveyism: "Garveyism utilises the feelings of mutual sympathy which exist among Negro toilers in all parts of the world by virtue of their exploitation and oppression, NOT in the interests of Negro toilers, but for the purpose of promoting reactionary utopias."[54] The necessary correction to Garveyism—the task of the ITUCNW—was clear: to build on those mutual sympathies to promote the interests of black workers in a variety of locales.

This undertaking required, the comrades in Moscow came to understand, more detailed study of workers in Africa and its diaspora to raise the ideological level of Marxist-Leninist approaches to race, class, and imperialism. Moreover, what became clear in these first excursions was that the ITUCNW also needed to impress upon the Comintern leadership the importance of committing material support to anticolonial

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[54] George Padmore, "The Economic Struggles of the Negro Workers," *Negro Worker* (15 October 1930): 7. This issue of the mimeographed bulletin *Negro Worker* (that preceded the proper printed journal that debuted in January 1931) reproduced a number of reports from the July conference that did not appear in the published proceedings, including Patterson and Padmore's reports. For an overview of the conference, see also Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, "The First International Conference of Negro Workers," *Inprecor*, 25 July 1930; Adi, "Pan-Africanism and Communism," 247-250.

work. These positions were stated at the Fifth Congress of the Profintern in 1930, just a month after the Hamburg Conference. Before an audience consisting of Comintern leaders, foreign delegates, and a special guest delegation of elderly Paris Commune veterans, representatives from the ITUCNW repeated inserted their views on the importance of race and colonialism in international work.[55] After listening to an English comrade's speech, Padmore criticized, "…when a reporter from the British Minority Movement forgets to mention India, one can realize what part British Africa plays in the Minority Movement."[56] Another representative, responding to a series of reports on the difficulties of revolutionary work in Europe, stated the position of the ITUCNW more sharply: "Comrades, I think the question should have been, 'Why is there no revolution in the other capitalist countries?' The answer to that simple question, I say, is the Negro problem."[57]

**Praxis and the Development of Black Anticolonialism**

Proceeding from this supposition that the "Negro problem" was central to world revolution, the ITUCNW developed a set of practices and political knowledge that sought

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[55] For a brief personal recollection of this Congress, see Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978), 328-331. According to Haywood, the presence of the Communards was especially touching, especially when one of their number welcomed the black delegates to the Profintern as brothers in the struggle for "the world commune."

[56] "Stenogramma." Padmore had pushed to put Africa on the Profintern's agenda for its Fifth Congress, advising that it was "necessary" to provide for passage for delegates from Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gold Coast, and Nigeria. See letter from Padmore, 2 April 1930, RGASPI 534/3/546.

[57] The statement is attributed to a 'Mizra,' a self-described "full-blooded Negro" who presented for the ITUCNW alongside Patterson and Padmore. The Congress recorder noted that his accent was "very bad." Based on the tone, accent, self-description, and timing, it is possible that Mizra was an alias for Garan Kouyate. "Stenogramma."

to rid the Comintern of its Eurocentric conceptions of Marxism and to advance the cause of black liberation throughout Africa and its diaspora. The cornerstone of this effort was the *Negro Worker*, a monthly journal that was intended to record the activities of the ITUCNW, to document past and present conditions of black workers, and to orient black struggles to the broad anticolonial program of the Comintern. The journal was neither mere propaganda nor theoretical vessel; rather, *Negro Worker* was a focal point around which an international movement and community coalesced. Readers were asked to submit letters that testified to their local conditions, while also receiving letters from editors asking for help in distributing the journal. It is worth noting that the ITUCNW, like the Comintern, was not a mass organization, but rather a steering organization "which assists the Negro workers in the different countries which they inhabit to organise [trade unions] and affiliate themselves with the [Profintern]."[58] Hence, unlike the Communist Party, UNIA, or the NAACP, individuals could not formally "join" the ITUCNW. That said, there existed, at the peak of its work, a remarkable web of ITUCNW supporters throughout the black world who risked jobs, freedom, and bodily harm in the process of producing, smuggling, distributing, circulating, and discussing *Negro Worker*. The constitution and collective endeavor of this international community was as much an achievement of the journal as was its theoretical reworking of questions of black agency, racial capitalism, and domination.

Publication of *Negro Worker* required that a member of the ITUCNW organizing committee stay in Hamburg, as it was impossible to distribute the journal to the colonies directly from Moscow as it would be clearly marked as Soviet propaganda. As head of

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[58] Padmore to Fred Thompson, 6 January 1932, RGASPI 534/3/754.

the Committee, Ford took up this position after the 1930 conference. Working out of an office at the Hamburg Interclub—a meeting place near the port where sailors and dockworkers fraternized at Communist-sponsored celebrations and study groups—Ford began the work of editing the journal and organizing colonial seamen to help smuggle out ITUCNW publications. As the ITUCNW's main recruiter, Ford took it upon himself to learn Swahili and he made daily visits to the docks to meet with sailors from Africa, India, and China, much to the chagrin of the British and American authorities who kept a watchful eye on the Hamburg Interclub.[59] He invited workers to visit his office where he taught a weekly class on the "colonial question" that was regularly attended by dozens of white and black seamen. He also maintained an informational "Colonial Corner" display with a map of newsworthy struggles in Africa, photographs and linocuts depicting the horrors of racial violence, and typed accounts of black life in various diasporic locations.[60] In the evenings, Ford hosted a small group of select recruits to instruct them in the theory of Communism and how to conduct practical work on board their ships and at foreign ports. When a Soviet ship was in port, Ford arranged for "colored seamen," both Asian and African, to come onboard to observe how officers and crew fraternized as equals according to Bolshevik tenets of social equality. Later the same week, these workers, with Ford's assistance, drafted a protest letter against the persecution of the eight young African Americans in Scottsboro, connecting this case with the pervasive

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[59] "800.00B/ITUCNW," State Department Decimal Files, 1930-1939, RG59, NARA.

[60] Report of Ford to ITUCNW, 6 August 1931, RGASPI 534/3/668. In this report, Ford also noted the two-week visit of Garan Kouyate who helped organize seamen from French colonies and traded organizing tips with Ford.

racial violence in the colonies.[61] A gifted organizer, Ford brought in dozens of white, Indian, and black seamen to help with the work of the ITUCNW. Through these recruits, Ford also developed a list of contacts in Africa and in the Caribbean to distribute *Negro Worker* and other publications.

At the same time, Ford's location in Europe made him available for work on behalf of the League Against Imperialism criticizing the failures of the League of Nations and International Labor Organization with regard to colonial injustices. In June 1931, Ford was called to present at the International Conference on African Children in Geneva, a perfect opportunity to expose contradictions of colonial paternalism, a common theme of ITUCNW efforts. According to Ford's record of the events, the official reporters at the conference were all white colonial officials and missionaries who bemoaned the tragic fate of Africa's youth, but failed to identify the root causes of infant mortality and illiteracy. Ford, with the support of seven African representatives including Jomo Kenyatta, declared that the only true protection of colonial children would come with the overthrow of imperial rule:

> This conference was not in the interest of the children in Africa. It was organized to help extend imperialist exploitation and oppression in Africa—which is the cause of the unspeakable misery and suffering of the African peoples…None of the reporters spoke of the world economic crisis of capitalism that is causing untold misery and starvation among the people, nor of the brutal imperialist exploitation and oppression or forced labour, heavy taxation, etc. –brutal suppressions, all of which is exterminating the peoples of Africa by the hundreds of thousands.[62]

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[61] Ford to Padmore, 30 April 1931, RGASPI 534/3/668.

[62] See "International Conference on African Children, Geneva," 19 July 1931, RGASPI 534/3/669; Ford's speech was printed along with a report on child labor and education in African colonies in the pamphlet *The Truth about the African Children* (Berlin: League Against Imperialism, 1931).

The perspective was not, according to Ford's report to the LAI, welcomed as "one old priest" rushed to the podium ready to tackle the speaker of such heresy and was only dissuaded by Ford—a former football star known for his athletic build—staring the cleric down with a "threatening look."[63] In conclusion, Ford provocatively connected the conditions of child labor, miseducation, and arbitrary violence in Africa with the plight of the so-called "Scottsboro Boys" in the United States, urging workers everywhere to unite to defend "Negro children."[64] A month later, Ford was called to represent the LAI in Vienna, stopping to deliver a speech to workers in the small industrial town of Leoben and to address an anti-war meeting in Graz on the way.[65] As an organizer and speaker, Ford was, by all accounts, without peer.

Ford's work as a literary propagandist was less inspired. The first issue of *International Negro Workers' Review* appeared in January 1931 with a plain text cover, opening to a dry four-page discussion of the basic aims of the journal: to discuss the everyday problems of black workers and to "connect these up with the international struggles and problems of workers."[66] This introduction was followed by an appeal by

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[63] "Moi otchet Lige [My Report to the League]," 3 August 1931, RGASPI 534/3/669.

[64] For a perceptive reading of the raced and gendered politics of the international "Scottsboro front," see James Miller, Susan Pennybacker, and Eve Rosenhaft, "Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys, 1931-1934." *American Historical Review* 106:2 (2001): 387-430.

[65] Report by James Ford, 6 August 1931, RGASPI 534/3/668. Ford was arrested and deported after the meeting in Graz.

[66] "Our Aims," *International Negro Workers' Review* (January 1931): 3-6. In Ford's defense, it is worth noting that his written work was often completed in the small hours of the night, the only time he could use the one English-language typewriter shared by all Party functionaries in Hamburg. "Report to the European Secretariat of RILU on Activities of the ITUCNW, Hamburg," 31 January 1931, RGASPI 534/3/669.

Solomon Losovsky, head of the Profintern, to reject reformist trade unions due to their history of racial exclusion. The only illustrations in the volume were two photographs, one of a Tsarist mansion converted to a workers' rest home and another of the delegates at the 1930 Hamburg Conference. When the journal arrived in Moscow, a disappointed Padmore wrote to Ford, advising simpler prose, the inclusion of cartoon art, and a lengthy section of workers' correspondence so that readers would recognize their own voices in the journal. Moreover, Padmore insisted that every issue of the journal include the iconic image of a black worker breaking his chains of bondage. This image, Padmore declared, would "convey the idea that only the workers themselves can break their chains," while at the same time marking ITUCNW literature and making it immediately identifiable to colonial readers.[67] Worried that the shoddy editorial work reflected problems outside of Ford's Party life, Padmore, with his typical synthesis of personal and political relations, wrote, "Perhaps things are not well with you personally. If so, write me a personal letter and I will try to see that things are righted."[68] For whatever reasons, Ford's editorial work improved following Padmore's suggestions. The second issue of International Negro Workers' Review featured a number of illustrations, including a compelling cover cartoon that depicted a muscular, bare-chested editor wielding a newspaper in one hand while his other arm waved on workers, encouraging them, "Workers, Write to the Editor." Henceforth, each issue of the journal bettered the previous. In the third issue, the journal's title returned to the more succinct and memorable *Negro Worker*. The next

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[67] Padmore to Ford, 13 February 1931, RGASPI 534/3/668; Padmore to Ford, 17 March 1931, RGASPI 534/3/668.

[68] Padmore to Ford, 8 February 1931, RGASPI 534/3/668.

month's double edition featured photographs of authors and active members of the ITUCNW, including seaman Foster Jones. Each change sought to transform *Negro Worker* into a popular journal for black workers. The contents included news from struggles through Africa, Europe, and the Americas, as well as coverage of anticolonial movements in India and descriptions of workers' life in the Soviet Union. By the fall of 1931, circulation reached 2,000 copies to be distributed in the United States, Britain, France, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Gambia, Gold Coast, Liberia, Jamaica, Barbados, and British Guyana.[69]

While Ford carried out his work as an editor and organizer in Hamburg, Padmore remained in Moscow throughout 1930 and 1931, meeting with KUTV students and instructors as he put his shoulder behind the research efforts of the ITUCNW. In this capacity, Padmore was charged with drawing up reports on local conditions in various parts of the African diaspora; this information was incorporated into "open letters" addressed to black workers of different colonies hoping to attract them to the ITUCNW. According to the plan of work for 1931, letters were to be readied for South Africa, Liberia, Congo, and Sierra Leone.[70] Padmore and his comrades at the ITUCNW were quick to understand that these appeals would be distinct from those of other sections of the Profintern as black colonial workers, "even in the advanced countries," faced unique conditions wherein capitalism existed side by side with "pre-capitalist forms of exploitation and oppression, such as peonage, slave agreements, and slave conditions." [71]

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[69] "Report of the ITUCNW, 12/1930-9/1931," 2 October 1931, RGASPI 534/3/669.

[70] "Plan raboty [Plan of Work]," RGASPI 534/3/668.

[71] "Report of ITUCNW, 12/1930-9/1931," 2 October 1931, RGASPI 534/3/669.

Moreover, as black workers were subject to lynching, segregation, pass laws, and other forms of racial oppression, revolutionary activity may take the form of strikes, self-defense against racial violence, or the "defense of certain tribal rites, songs, and dance."[72] The language of Padmore's open letter to workers in Sierra Leone was striking for its synthesis of demands for trade union organizing with a rhetoric that intended specifically to appeal to black workers through its characterization of bourgeois European settlers: "These people live as real lords. They pass their time drinking whiskey and soda in the morning, playing golf and tennis in the afternoon, and then bridge in the evening."[73] Two thousand copies of this letter were mimeographed and smuggled out from Hamburg to Freetown for distribution. Similar letters were drawn up for South Africa and Liberia, in addition to lengthier pamphlets on forced labor and the importance of the Soviet Union for the cause of racial equality.[74] All were a testament to Padmore's growing

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[72] See ITUCNW to Katayama Sen, 10 March 1930, RGASPI 534/6/23. In this letter, an ITUCNW member (possibly Padmore) wrote to Katayama to ask him to become a regular contributor to *Negro Worker*, starting with a consideration of recent revolts in Kenya, drawing his attention to "Native Unrest in Kenya," *London Times*, 27 February 1930. In particular, the letter's author wanted the established anticolonial theorist to help characterize the "political significance" of these nativist defenses of indigenous traditions.

[73] Open Letter to Sierra Leone, (n.d., circa 1931), RGASPI 534/6/23. The language here is back-translated from a Russian translation of the letter co-written with I.T.A. Wallace Johnson. On I.T.A. Wallace Johnson's career, see Leo Spitzer and LaRay Denzer, "I.T.A. Wallace Johnson and the West African Youth League." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6:3 (1973): 413-452; Leo Spitzer and LaRay Denzer, "I.T.A. Wallace Johnson and the West African Youth League. Part II: The Sierra Leone Period, 1938-1945." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6:4 (1973): 565-601.

[74] These letters and pamphlets, while incorporating local conditions, were fairly formulaic in the introduction of trade union demands, celebration of local signs of revolt and revolutionary consciousness, and concluding rallying cry for the ITUCNW. See George Padmore, *Forced Labour in Africa* (Moscow: Centrizdat, 1931); *Negro Workers and the Imperialist War Intervention in the Soviet*

understanding of Africa garnered from colonial students, visiting revolutionaries, and Moscow's libraries.

In October 1930, Padmore was directed to put this body of knowledge to work to convince white comrades in Europe and America of the importance of anticolonial struggles. According to his orders from the Profintern, Padmore was given three weeks to produce a short pamphlet from a "factual point of view" to be entitled *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*; the commissioned work should "acquaint white workers in the metropolitan countries of the conditions under which the Negro masses live in the colonies."[75] From this modest directive came the foremost intellectual achievement of the ITUCNW, a book that Padmore thought established his Marxist-Leninist *bona fides* while at the same time providing "heavy artillery" for "[e]very Negro worker, every Party comrade."[76] In the first half of the work, the young author—not yet thirty years old—surveyed the conditions of black workers in Africa and the New World, which, in his estimation, "form[ed] one of the most degrading spectacles of bourgeois civilisation."[77] Combining reportage, statistics, and demography, Padmore highlighted three major

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*Union* (Hamburg: ITUCNW, 1931); *American Imperialism Enslaves Liberia* (Moscow: Centrizdat, 1931).

[75] The orders to produce *The Life and Struggles* were reproduced in a 1931 letter to the Profintern in inquiring why the book had not been printed. "To the Secretariat," 15 July 1931, RGASPI 534/3/450. References to events in late 1930 and early 1931 indicate that the manuscript either was not completed on time or was revised in the spring of 1931.

[76] Padmore to Everett Boone (YCL), 16 February 1932, RGASPI 534/3/754. According to Aleksandr Zusmanovich, when Padmore was advised to improve his understanding of Lenin and Stalin on imperialism and the national question, Padmore would cite *Life and Struggles* as proof of his mastery of the subjects. Zusmanovich to ECCI, 20 February 1934, RGASPI 495/261/1380.

[77] George Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (London: RILU Magazine, 1931), 5.

themes : racial violence, the class character of the exploitation of black workers, and the rise of American power ("yankee imperialism") after World War One. Quoting liberally from government reports, academic historians, and non-Party periodicals, Padmore illustrated his contention that the inhuman treatment of black workers undercut any claims to civilization voiced by the United States and the European powers. Page after page, readers faced scenes of torture, murder, starvation, and disease—the price of imperialist exploitation of land and labor that created the profits used to "bribe" metropolitan workers. The rhetoric was a composite that reflected Padmore's breadth of vision as well as his peripatetic life history, brilliantly fusing the languages of American anti-lynching journalism, West Indian anticolonial discourses, and Leninist analysis.[78] In a text ostensibly written for European workers, one can only imagine the enjoyment of colonial readers who "overheard" the staged performance of an erudite black author upbraiding his white audience for their racism and ignorance.[79] In fact, based on the documented circulation of the pamphlet, it seems fair to presume that Padmore intended this *mise-en-scène,* as more copies were directed to colonial workers than to European readers.

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[78] Makonnen connects Padmore's rhetorical style with the work of late nineteenth-century West Indian radical intellectuals, especially J.J. Thomas's *Froudacity*. See *Pan-Africanism from Within*, 98-100. Robinson also discusses the radicalism of this generation of Caribbean radicals in *Black Marxism*, 248-249.

[79] My interpretation here is indebted to Philip Brian Harper's work on structure of address in the black nationalist literature of Black Arts Movement. See "Nationalism and Social Division in Black Arts Poetry of the 1960s," in *Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Padmore continued to develop this style of literary propaganda as editor of *Negro Worker*, relocating to Hamburg to replace Ford in late 1931.[80] Upon his arrival, Padmore found the ITUCNW office in shambles following a police raid. Party functionaries at the Interclub recommended that the ITUCNW temporarily cease its efforts lest it attract more unwanted attention from the police. But Padmore, now at the helm of the committee, was eager to prove his mettle. The most recent resolution on ITUCNW work indicated two areas most in need of improvement: (1) the building of cadres and (2) the popularization and expansion of *Negro Worker*.[81] Padmore combined these tasks, seeking to improve *Negro Worker* and to organize local cadres around the distribution of the journal as the voice of black workers. As the new editor, Padmore endowed the magazine with a more cohesive view while continuing to broaden its scope. When Ford was responsible for compiling the journal, *Negro Worker* already carried news from across the diaspora, with diverse authors each representing their bailiwicks—Ford's reports on the mendacity of social democrats; Albert Nzula's descriptions of racial violence and injustice in South Africa; Huiswoud's memoranda on labor conditions in different Caribbean colonies; and Patterson's dispatches on Comintern policy. *Negro Worker* was also particularly attentive to learning from and building solidarities with movements against imperial rule in Asia, carrying regular updates on the Meerut Conspiracy Case in India, the work of

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[80] Padmore to "Comrades," 16 November 1931, RGASPI 534/3/668.

[81] "Resolutions on the Work of the Hamburg Committee," 18 October 1931, RGASPI 534/3/668.

Chinese revolutionaries, and the efforts to organize colored seamen across the Atlantic and Pacific.[82]

Padmore's contribution was to draw these analyses together into a coherent and compelling anticolonial vision that integrated questions of labor exploitation, the dehumanization of racialized subjects, the destruction of non-European cultures, the nature of black revolt, and the articulation of a flexible, albeit distinct, vision of black radical politics that took shape alongside other anti-capitalist and anticolonialist movements. This perspective was laid out in a series of articles and editorials that examined the workings of the British and American empires.[83] Padmore was especially drawn to the subject of American imperialism in Liberia, a case that allowed him to explicate the Leninist theory of imperialism as the rule of finance capital, call attention to the rise of "yankee imperialism," and argue against Pan-Africanist resettlement plans that

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[82] While Padmore privately expressed reservations about the revolutionary dedication of Asian comrades, especially East Indians, such doubts rarely interfered with his duty to build coalitions to further the aims of the ITUCNW. In a communication with Walton of the South African Communist Party, Padmore noted that Ford's contacts in South Africa were "useless" as they were mainly East Indians. Padmore "simply cut them off." See Padmore to Walton, (circa 1932), RGASPI 534/3/754. Similarly, Padmore warned Kenyatta about East Indian "fakirs" and expressed doubts to Arnold Ward (of London's Negro Welfare Association) about Indo-Trinidadian Adrian Cola Rienzi (Krishna Deonarine). See Padmore's correspondence in RGASPI 534/6/23, passim; RGASPI 534/3/754, passim. These private comments aside, Padmore maintained close working relationships with East Indians both while leading the ITUCNW and later in London coordinating work between the International African Service Bureau and the exilic Indian Congress Party.

[83] My summary draws on the following articles by Padmore: "Hands Off Liberia!" *Negro Worker* (October-November 1931): 5-11; "Colonial Masses in Revolt," *Negro Worker* (October-November 1931): 13-16; "Workers, Defend Liberia!" *Negro Worker* (January-February 1932): 3-4; "How the Imperialists are 'Civilizing' Africa," *Negro Worker* (March 1932): 11-14; "How the British Empire was Built," *Negro Worker* (June 1932): 12-14; "How the Empire is Governed," (July 1932): 1-6; "The World Today" *Negro Worker* (August 1932): 1-4; "Nationalist Movements in West Indies," *Negro Worker* (January 1933): 6-7.

did not prioritize worker and native self-government.[84] While Padmore's chief biographer, James Hooker, has offered the idea that Liberia was a Pan-Africanist preoccupation, an examination of his writings indicates that his interest was more likely motivated by a desire to expose nascent American imperialism and to draw Americans—black and white—into the global movement against imperialism.[85]

But Padmore's vision was more than an application of Leninism to the African diaspora. Rather, the young intellectual supplemented the Leninist theory of imperialism—which had already acknowledged the late-nineteenth century scramble for Africa as pivotal to world geopolitics—with the important postulate that black toilers formed the most exploited segment of the global proletariat, subject to the most heinous deprivations and violence of capitalism.[86] In a telling article on conditions in the Caribbean, black workers were depicted as "pauperized, down-trodden natives huddled together in company-owned barracks," subsisting "on the verge of starvation."[87] Such passages underscored the depravity of racialized colonialism not to shame imperialists nor to motivate reforms, but rather to establish the special place of black labor as a great

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[84] Padmore's analyses of Liberia seem especially insightful in light of the problems faced by many countries in the wave of decolonization after World War Two. See especially his comments on controlling foreign business interests, the betrayal of a native elite, and problems of inter-ethnic strife in *Life and Struggles*, 64-77.

[85] See Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 6.

[86] Lenin's chapter "The Place of Imperialism in World History" characterizes the "scramble for Africa" thus: "But when nine-tenths of Africa had been seized (approximately in 1900), when the whole world had been shared out, there was inevitably ushered in a period of colonial monopoly and, consequently, a period of intense struggle for the partition and the repartition of the world." V.I. Lenin, *Essential Works of Lenin* (New York: Dover, 1987), 266.

[87] Padmore, "Imperialism in the West Indies," *Negro Worker* (January 1931): 17.

potential revolutionary force. In Padmore's schema, black toilers assumed a world-historical heroic role, as only the emancipation of the most down-trodden would signal the achievement of world revolution. This analysis gave a Leninist imprimatur to the notion of a global racial destiny for those of African descent.[88] Moreover, according to Padmore, the methods of colonial rule in Africa and the West Indies revealed the "danger ahead" of the working classes in America and in Europe. Not only was it the case that Europe was not bringing civilization to the colonies; on the contrary, the brutalities of the colonial domination could only augur poorly for the fate of workers in Europe. As such, the most important task for white workers who sought to fight the peril of fascism was solidarity work on behalf of black anticolonialism. It was an underdeveloped, but tantalizing argument.[89]

According to C.L.R. James, "[t]ens of thousands of Negro workers in various parts of the world received their first political education from [*Negro Worker*]."[90] But to fully understand the impact of Padmore's arguments in *Negro Worker* requires an examination both of the journal itself and of the letters Padmore sent to readers,

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[88] My usage of "racial destiny" here follows Michelle Mitchell's explanation of the concept, especially in her discussions of Garveyism. See Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004), esp. 3-15.

[89] Padmore, *Life and Struggles*, 6; This argument presciently foreshadowed Aime Cesaire's formulation that, with colonialism, "a poison has been instilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward *savagery*." See Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 13. Bill Schwarz identifies Padmore's understanding of fascism as "a racial politics linked to colonialism itself" as a result of the failure of European powers to act after the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. See Bill Schwarz, "George Padmore," in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 139-140. My interpretation here locates an earlier, ambiguous formulation of this concept.

[90] C.L.R. James, "Notes on the Life of George Padmore," undated manuscript. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York City.

distributors, and contributors. As Ford's list of contacts was lost in the 1931 police raid, Padmore had to build on the established ITUCNW comrades in London, Paris, Marseilles, and New York. First, he wrote to local Party offices, Party-aligned unions, and front organizations (such as the International Labor Defense and Friends of the Soviet Union) in America and Europe to encourage them to buy copies of *Negro Worker*.[91] To build contacts in the colonies, Padmore was forced to be more outgoing and inventive. Liberian and Nigerian journalists were contacted to distribute and to contribute to *Negro Worker*. Inquiries were made with representatives of Portuguese transport workers about translating the journal and circulating it in Angola and Mozambique. Finding the name and address of an East African student in Ohio published in a newspaper, Padmore sent him a letter out of the blue asking if he would be interested in *Negro Worker*. After receiving a letter from a young reader in Accra, Padmore implored him to send addresses of more possible Gold Coast subscribers. When *Negro Worker* was banned in British colonies, the seamen's local in New Orleans was contacted about covertly distributing the journal throughout the West Indies. Thanks to this combination of ambition, persistence, and gall, Padmore established a readership in his first year as editor that included—based on correspondence with readers and

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[91] Research on Padmore and *Negro Worker* has made much of his impact on Pan-Africanist thought in Africa and the Caribbean. Padmore's correspondence indicates that *Negro Worker* also had a wide circulation throughout the United States. In the first six months of 1932, Padmore was in touch with distributors in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chattanooga, New Orleans, Kansas City, Milwaukee, and Michigan. Padmore himself was startled by the American demand for *Negro Worker*, writing to the Friends of the Soviet Union (FSU) office in New York: "It is surprising to know the number of workers who have already written us from America. What attracts them is the news we carry about Africa and the other colonies. They have a tremendous interest in Africa. Perhaps because Garvey had promised to take them there." Padmore to FSU, 26 February 1932, RGASPI 534/3/754.

distributors—points in the Gold Coast, Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, South Africa, Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, and Panama. [92]

Through letters with these readers, Padmore was able to solicit information, revise his understandings of colonialism, and offer specific advice based on local conditions. Along with his voracious reading and regular conversations with Africans and West Indians in Europe, these contacts positioned Padmore as one of the foremost scholars of black life in the world. As such, his opinions were sought out, not only by fellow Comintern activists interested in the "Negro question," but by a wide range of intellectuals interested in the African diaspora. When Ralph Bunche was in Paris researching French colonies in West Africa, he wrote to Padmore for guidance on the suggestion of Jamaican scholar J.A. Rogers.[93] Similarly, the Guyanese schoolteacher Robert Adams—future star of British stage and screen—asked to meet with Padmore for help as he was drafting a pamphlet on the subject of "the Negro and the World."[94] Padmore also referred scholars to each other, for example, putting ethnographers in Leningrad in touch with historian Carter Woodson in Washington, DC.[95] While the demands of Party work had prevented Padmore from taking his degree, it certainly had not limited his intellectual development. And, at any rate, such academic pursuits were

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[92] See correspondence in RGASPI 534/6/23, passim; RGASPI 534/3/754, passim; RGASPI 534/3/755, passim ; RGASPI 534/3/756, passim.

[93] Bunche to Padmore, (n.d.), RGASPI 534/3/756.

[94] Adams was a founding member of Harold Moody's League of Coloured Peoples but did not mention this affiliation in his letter to Padmore, perhaps aware of Padmore's estimation of the organization, noted below. Adams to Padmore, 6 June 1932, RGASPI 534/3/756. For a brief biographical sketch of Adams, see "Guianese Actor to Visit W.I.," *Daily Argosy*, 13 January 1949.

[95] Padmore to Leningrad Orientalist Institute (LVI), 5 January 1932, RGASPI 534/3/754.

secondary for Padmore; as he explained to a former Howard classmate back in the States, "I am not so interested in this kind of highbrow stuff as in getting rid of the damn white blood suckers from the West Indies and Africa, my fields of specialty."[96]

The practice of correspondence was not just a means of collecting and relaying information and analyses; it was also an important tool for building the sense of collective endeavor crucial to the successes of the ITUCNW, as Padmore tailored the Committee's message and developed personal bonds with readers. For instance, when writing to Reverend Murray Motebang of Basutoland, Padmore played to his audience: "…it is necessary for us to proclaim the tiding to all other peoples throughout Africa—to your tents, oh Israel! Let Ethiopia arise and stretch forth her hands! A new day has come. Africa shall be free."[97] Enclosed with this letter, Padmore sent books by Soviet sympathizer and advocate of racial equality "Bad Bishop" William Montgomery Brown, who was also a subscriber to *Negro Worker*.[98] For a letter to a civil servant in the port town of Takoradi, Gold Coast, Padmore emphasized the economic roots of poor health:

> As a sanitary officer, you will immediately realize that the sanitary and health condition of a people depends upon their economic condition…The European capitalists and officials who come out to Africa and suck the life blood out of the masses and then look down upon them as a set of dirty ignorant 'Niggers' would

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[96] Padmore to Cyril Ollivierre, 26 September 1932, George Padmore Letters, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York City.

[97] Padmore to Murray C. Motebang, 1 April 1932, RGASPI 534/3/755.

[98] Padmore to Brown, 1 January 1932, RGASPI 534/3/754. Brown described his beliefs and his break with the Episcopal Church in *My Heresy* (Rahway: John Day, 1926). The unexpected role of dissident religionists, including Brown, in spreading Leninism in the United States is described briefly in Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the USA* (New York and London: Verso, 1991), 137-138.

> themselves be just in the same position if they had to maintain themselves and their families upon a pence and 1/ per day.[99]

While colonialists infantilized Africans, Padmore encouraged a fellow journalist from Nigeria to stand firm: "We are not children. We know who's who."[100]

In his memoir, Pan-Africanist Ras Makonnen noted that Padmore's journalism "invented a new dictionary of terms with which he could burlesque the chiefs and yes-men of the various colonial regimes."[101] In his private letters, Padmore honed this lexicon, calling colonizers "white bastards," referring to himself as "flesh and blood of mother Africa," and decrying less militant organizations as "fakirs" or, in the case of Harold Moody's London-based League of Coloured Peoples, "a hopeless bunch of boot-licking Negroes."[102] Fellow Communists were not immune to these insults; Padmore derided "little bureaucrats who send you paper instructions but not the ammunition to fight," though such criticism was typically aired only to those already in the fold of the Party.[103] In these letters, as in his published writing, Padmore crafted an argot and an aesthetic for his readers, a global community of black radical subjects—as opposed to the

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[99] Padmore to G.B. Baisie, 26 February 1932, RGASPI 534/3/754.

[100] Padmore to J. Celba Bright, 3 April 1932, RGASPI 534/6/23. Padmore's rhetoric here stood against the late imperial understanding of Africans as "child races," as described by Victor Kiernan in *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to Other Cultures in the Imperial Age* (London: Serif, 1995), 242-247.

[101] Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within*, 102-103. Bill Schwarz cites this passage in his literary interpretation of Padmore's prose. See "George Padmore," 136-137.

[102] For "white bastards," see Padmore to Kenyatta, 17 June 1932, RGASPI 534/6/23; "flesh and blood of mother Africa" was written in Padmore to Kenyatta, 1 June 1932, RGASPI 534/6/23; "fakirs" was one of Padmore's favorite epithets in this period and can be found throughout his published and unpublished writings; the description of the LCP can be found in Padmore to Ward, 28 February 1932, RGASPI 534/3/754.

[103] Padmore to Everett Boone, 16 February 1932, RGASPI 534/3/754.

bastards, fakirs, boot-lickers, and little bureaucrats—while at the same time developing his persona as editor of *Negro Worker*, a tireless, uncompromising advocate for black workers everywhere. In light of this projected relationship between editor and audience, it should come as no surprise that an African reader appealed directly to Padmore for help when his nephew was stranded in Germany without papers.[104]

Padmore believed that attracting workers in Africa required the development of this type of direct relationship. In a letter to Fred Thompson of the International of Seamen and Harbor Workers (ISH), Padmore explained: "Personal allegiance to leaders is a remnant to their tribal customs and our [Communist] comrades, because of their ignorance of colonial problems, underestimate the importance of this."[105] As time went by, Padmore increasingly found himself torn between these "comrades" and his work with colonial students, seamen, and readers whom he tried to develop into cadres for Comintern work. This duty required that Padmore send potential recruits from Africa and the West Indies to Moscow to study at KUTV in specialized one-year courses that would prepare them for organizing work in their home countries.[106] But Moscow was dissatisfied with the students received, complaining that they had nationalist tendencies and were unprepared for study. Padmore was directed to send African workers who were

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[104] Aaron Spiff to Padmore, (n.d., circa 1932), RGASPI 534/3/755.

[105] Padmore to Fred Thompson, 6 January 1932, RGASPI 534/3/754. Comintern superiors repeatedly directed Padmore to abandon his tactic of recruitment through personal allegiances and to focus on attracting workers to the Comintern's ideological prescriptions.

[106] See discussions of ITUCNW work, 22-26 May 1932, RGASPI 534/3/753. Members of the ITUCNW urged KUTV to emphasize preparation for practical work over abstract Marxist theory. For the 1932-1933 academic year, committee members proposed that ten slots be set aside, two each for Liberia, Gold Coast, Haiti, British Guyana, and East Africa.

more attuned to class-based proletarian fraternalism. In a long letter to Huiswoud, Padmore outlined his objections to these criticisms:

> We are now starting to give overly severe grades to the first workers who have come to us from places where Marxism is as little known as water in the desert…Communists do not fall from the sky, nor do they spring out of the African forests and the correct approach to this matter is to create the necessary cadres from those people who, like [Foster] Jones, have been stirred to revolutionary consciousness by our propaganda and who come to us with the hope that we will set them on the path.[107]

By the beginning of 1933 these divergent views on the Committee's work were coming to loggerheads. In the months that followed that Nazi ascension to power in January, the ITUCNW faced a number of setbacks. The office at the Interclub was raided, again, and Padmore forced to leave. Furthermore, sensing an increased war danger after Hitler's appointment as chancellor, the Soviet Union and the Comintern shifted toward a policy of rapprochement with the European powers in the interests of collective security.[108] One result of this policy was the near desertion of anticolonial work. Still, Padmore, as of March, remained hopeful about the future prospects of *Negro Worker*. Writing from a new base of operations in Paris, Padmore outlined his plans for continued progress, even offering that with his relocation "our French work will be greatly strengthened."[109] But, just as Patterson three years before him, Padmore complained that he had no resources, neither a typewriter nor even stamps to send hand-

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[107] Padmore to Huiswoud, (n.d.), RGASPI 534/3/754. The original letter was presumably lost; only a translation into Russian exists, from which I have back-translated the above passage.

[108] See E.H. Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern, 1930-1935* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 83-103; R. Craig Nation, *Black Earth, Red Star: A History of Soviet Security Policy, 1917-1991* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 74-112.

[109] Padmore to "Comrades," 6 March 1933, RGASPI 534/3/895.

written letters. "Up to now I have received no wages and this puts me in a hell of a fix as I have no possibility to live much less to work," he lamented before concluding "…there is no phase of work which is being sabotaged more than Negro work. It is painful but only too true. Nevertheless we are marching forward and not all the devils in hell will stop us."[110] It is hard to imagine that he was pleased with the reply sent two weeks later, excoriating him for his unrepentant stance on selection of students, his refusal to cease organizing based on personal connections, and new initiatives begun without previous approval from Moscow.[111] In unpublished reminiscences about her time with the Comintern, Hermina Huiswoud recounted that her husband Otto had been sent to Paris in June to confront Padmore about his refusal to accept Party control and his work with colonial contacts suspected of being informers. But, according to Huiswoud, Padmore considered such orders to be "paternalistic interference by whites in the affairs of blacks" and felt no obligation to comply.[112]

According to Padmore, he was subsequently ordered to liquidate the ITUCNW, the final straw that broke his confidence that anticolonial work could be pursued under the banner of the Comintern. Party officials, in contrast, declared that it was not that they abandoned anticolonialism, rather they simply relieved Padmore of his duties.[113] It's not clear that Padmore, at this point, would have recognized the distinction. In his last act as

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[110] Padmore to "Comrades," 13 March 1933, RGASPI 534/3/895.

[111] Zusmanovich to Padmore, 22 March 1933, RGASPI 534/3/895.

[112] Hermina Huiswoud, "Early Years and Political Parties," box 1, folder 24, Hermina Huiswoud Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University.

[113] George Padmore, "An Open Letter to Earl Browder," *The Crisis* (October 1935): 302, 315; "Earl Browder Replies," *The Crisis* (December 1935): 372.

head of the Committee, Padmore compiled a farewell issue of *Negro Worker*. The cover featured a portrait of Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture labeled "The Black Napoleon," a small act of defiance, but not an open break. Even in his last editiorial, "Au Revoir," Padmore made no mention of a split with the Comintern . Instead, he claimed that he was leaving the journal because *Negro Worker* was no longer financially viable. The only hint of his dissatisfaction with the Comintern came in the penultimate paragraph: "Let us never forget that a people are respected in proportion as they help themselves. It is high time for the Negroes to stop depending on other people to fight their battles."[114] It was a careful wording that suggested deeper issues, but left the door open for reconciliation.

None was forthcoming. In February 1934, as rumors circulated that Padmore would be formally expelled from the Communist Party, he submitted a letter of resignation to the CPUSA, explaining his decision:

> Unimportant as this might be to you, I must honestly say that I do so with the deepest regrets, because *I find myself in no conflict with the fundamental principles of our movement.* But since the liquidation of the International Trade Union of Negro Workers on the one hand, and the refusal of the comrades in the center [Moscow] to discuss this important political decision, the only alternative left to me, if I want to maintain my revolutionary self-respect, and the confidence of the Negro peoples, is to give my resignation.[115]

The tone of the letter was remarkable. For a writer most skilled in affronts and slights with his own dictionary of abuse, the language here indicated only disappointment and regret. A year later, in an open letter to Earl Browder, secretary of the CPUSA, his

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[114] George Padmore, "Au Revoir," *Negro Worker* (August-September 1933): 18.

[115] Padmore to Secretariat CPUSA, 3 February 1934, George Padmore Collection, box 1, folder 1; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Emphasis added.

rhetoric returned to its familiar fiery form, but for a short passage on his former comrades in the ITUCNW: "It grieves me to see men like James Ford and Patterson silently condoning this thing [attacks on Padmore]."[116] Their betrayal must have been particularly difficult to palate, for the source of Padmore's differences with the Comintern originated, ultimately, in the framework that these comrades had collectively developed in the first years of the ITUCNW. Padmore's achievement was the formulation of distinctive anticolonial politics that proceeded from their first postulates—a working philosophy that put empire and the exploitation of black labor at the center of modern politics, linked racial colonialism with European fascism, set the terms for interracial coalitions, and created a flexible, if necessarily schematic, means of articulating a global black radicalism that spoke to diverse local conditions and possibilities. The request to jettison this work—the result of five years of ceaseless activity—without explanation was simply a bridge too far.

**After the Split: Conclusions**

After Padmore was relieved of his duties as head of the ITUCNW, Huiswoud, as new head and editor of *Negro Worker*, assessed the future prospects for the Committee. In September 1933, he recommended that headquarters be moved from Paris to a port city and that six thousands francs be sent immediately for production of *Negro Worker* at a reduced circulation of two thousand copies (from four thousand, its peak circulation when Padmore left).[117] An increased budget was needed to hire a typist and a secretary,

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[116] Padmore, "An Open Letter," 315.

[117] Huiswoud to Moscow, 19 September 1933, RGASPI 534/3/895.

as "Padmore's wife" had previously performed these duties without payment.[118] This was just another example of how much the ITUCNW has become Padmore's connections, his personal arrangements, his contacts, and his philosophy. Without these, it took a full nine months for *Negro Worker* to reappear. But after the split with Padmore, Profintern officials exercised more control over the journal and the work of the Committee as a whole. The production quality of *Negro Worker* improved, but its content became more formulaic and abstract. Readers drawn to the language and vision of Padmore's editorials were presumably left cold by the new flavorless incarnation of the journal. They were also likely confused by the ITUCNW's shifting positions after the Comintern endorsed a United Front policy against fascism; even the core members of the Committee were perplexed as to what stand to take vis-à-vis previously scorned "reformists" like W.E.B. Du Bois.[119] More importantly, as the journal repeatedly moved in the next few years due to recurrent police raids, the editor lacked a regular address for readers to send correspondence or reports on local conditions.[120] A 1936 questionnaire circulated to potential *Negro Worker* readers in Africa and the West Indies

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[118] "Padmore's wife" here likely refers to a "Frida" who helped Padmore with translation and technical work in Hamburg and Paris. It is unlikely that Frida was actually married to Padmore as he had another "wife," Vera, in Moscow (along with an infant) in addition to his first wife, Julia Semper, in New York. Vera had written to Padmore in February 1933 asking to join him, hinting at her suspicions about his relationship with Frida: "My only wish is to be with you and to struggle side by side…and as to the baby (he wait only for his father), the baby will be quiet save, don't worry, he will be send to his grandmother and will live there as a little idol…I begin to envy F. because she's with you. Tell her that I am and shall be her good friend and that I am so sorry that I cannot make a better acquaintance with her." Vera to "Georgie," 6 February 1933, RGASPI 534/3/895.

[119] "Review of Work," (n.d., circa 1936), RGASPI 534/3/1103.

[120] Joyce Moore Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 216-217.

revealed that a South African union official considered the ITUCNW "an unknown"; a Communist in Guadeloupe confessed that workers paid no attention to the journal, though a handful of journalists and students still read it. American journalist Homer Smith encouraged Huiswoud to disguise the publication's link to Communism and employ more "Aesopian language" to appeal to a broader base.[121] The journal lingered on in this infirm state until late 1937 when the Comintern stopped funds. Huiswoud, absent orders directing him otherwise, stayed on in Paris until 1938 when Earl Browder unexpectedly ran into him. The Party Secretary pleaded with Moscow to release the tired and neglected ITUCNW secretary.[122] A decade after its inception, the ITUCNW had already been forgotten, both in Moscow and across the diaspora.

But the work of the organization was not lost. After definitively breaking with the Comintern, Padmore spent 1934 working on his next book, *How Britain Rules Africa*, a work that built on the insights of *Life and Struggles*, refining arguments that had been speculative and sparing the reader the requisite Party tangents that marred the flow of his previous work. He also contributed articles and excerpts from *Life and Struggles* to Nancy Cunard's famous *Negro* anthology. A year later, Padmore settled in London where he reconnected with his boyhood friend C.L.R. James, then a rising novelist, cricket journalist, and Marxist theoretician. Joining James's Friends of Ethiopia, Padmore returned to organizational work, soon drawing around him a familiar coterie from his Comintern days that included Jomo Kenyatta, Chris Foster Jones, and I.T.A. Wallace Johnson. In 1937, he founded the International African Service Bureau (IASB),

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[121] "Review of Work."

[122] Browder to Dimitroff, 19 January 1938, RGASPI 495/261/557.

a group committed to propaganda work on behalf of African independence, largely through news bulletins and its journal *International African Opinion*, founded in 1938. At the same time, Padmore built links with the Independent Labour Party and Indian Congress Party's exilic London branch, reprinting his articles in their respective publications, *New Leader* and *Congress Socialist*.[123] But Padmore never again joined an organization that was not led by people of African descent and committed to anticolonialism. One of the key lessons learned from Padmore's Comintern years was the importance of black organizational autonomy and the problems with what Stokely Carmichael would later term "the myths of coalition."[124] Padmore continued to take an interest in applying the insights of Marxism to the problems faced by the Africans, but he maintained a distance from Marxist organizations; his line, according to a colleague at the IASB, became "Buy the book! Don't join the club!"[125] It was a catchy quip, though it obscured the fact that Padmore's political knowledge originated both from reading the books (theory) and joining the club (praxis). In fact, it is impossible to imagine any of Padmore's future career in London and in Accra absent his Comintern experiences, a

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[123] My summary of Padmore's work in London is based on Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 38-57; Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 66-102. Matthew Quest provides a comprehensive survey of *International African Opinion* in "George Padmore's and C.L.R. James's *International African Opinion*," in *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary*, 105-132.

[124] See Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967), 53-84. Padmore never explicitly addressed his views on coalitions and solidarity, but a review of his practice during his London years indicates that he, more so than his peers, worked hard to build ties with non-black organizations while at the same time working to protect the autonomy of the IASB. The best source on this question is Ras Makonnen's memoir, though it needs be read carefully to discern Padmore's vision from Makonnen's politics. See below.

[125] Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within*, 159.

time of his life he would return to decades later while advising the new president of Ghana.

In the United States, the vision of black anticolonialism that was originally forged by American Party members—Ford, Patterson, and Huiswoud among them—in Moscow was lost for a moment. While Huiswoud continued his work abroad, it was anemic and had little audience in the States. Ford and Patterson both rose to positions of great prominence in the CPUSA: Ford was the vice-presidential nominee in both 1932 and 1936 while Patterson headed the International Labor Defense, a Communist front organization that led the Scottsboro campaign in the 1930s. Neither rejected the anticolonialism that they had advocated in their work with the ITUCNW. Their focus simply turned to local and national problems.[126] In the midst of the worst years of the Great Depression, these were many and the Party was able to turn these conditions into a compelling argument for their cause. Only in 1937 did an effective voice of black anticolonialism take organizational form in the United States when Paul Robeson, freshly returned from London, helped found the Council on African Affairs (originally the International Committee on African Affairs), modeled in part on the IASB.[127] The tangled lineage of this "import" was a curious testament to the complicated politics and geography of the Black Atlantic in the interwar period. The idea for a radical anticolonial political organization that would replace the appeal of Garveyism and inject politics into

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[126] Ford's 1935 pamphlet *World Problems of the Negro People (A Refutation of George Padmore)* (New York: Harlem Section of the Communist Party, 1935) is noteworthy in that it merely reprints his 1930 address to the Hamburg Conference prefaced by short remarks on the New Deal and Padmore's nationalism. No continued interest or work on international problems is in evidence.

[127] Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 17.

the cultural protest of the New Negro—an vision forged in Moscow by African Americans and West Indians, transformed in its travels across Europe and Africa, and reconfigured by the political pressures of the 1930s—now returned to the United States, proclaimed from the mouth of an aesthete, no less.[128]

[128] Robeson, in fact, was listed by Patterson as one of the aesthetes he found objectionable in their inattention to politics. See Patterson, "The 'New Negro,'" 28. The story of the CAA and the development of black anticolonialism in the US at mid-century is told in Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*. See also John Munro, "The Anticolonial Front: Cold War Imperialism and the Struggle Against Global White Supremacy, 1945-1960," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Santa Barbara, 2009.

# CHAPTER 4

## 'Like Another Planet to the Darker Americans': Anticolonial Cultural Work in 1930s Moscow

### Introduction

By the late 1920s, the Soviet Union and the Communist International had identified culture as a major battleground in the struggle for Bolshevik dominance at home and proletarian revolution abroad. One facet of this effort was the development of anticolonial cultural work that would speak to audiences around the globe. Soviet playwright Sergei Tretiakov's indictment of Western indifference to colonial suffering *Roar, China!* (1926) was staged with great success in Moscow, Berlin, and New York. The classic dramatization of anti-imperial revolt in Central Asia, *Storm over Asia* (1928), was an international sensation; among its many screenings across the globe, Indian students at Oxford University showed the film as a prelude to a debate on the importance of the Soviet experiment for colonial revolutionaries. When the anti-fascist Soviet documentary *Abyssinia* (1936)—a protest film that took aim at the Mussolini's 1935 invasion of Ethiopia—came to play in Shanghai, Italian seamen rioted in the theater to the amusement of colonial comrades.[1]

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[1] On cultural politics in the early Soviet Union, see Shiela Fitzpatrick (ed.), *The Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). A contemporaneous American account of Soviet cultural achievements was compiled by writers aligned with the journal *New Masses* in Joseph Freeman, Joshua Kunitz, and Louis Lozowick (eds.), *Voices of October* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1930). Tretiakov's *Roar, China!* is discussed in detail in Steven Sunwoo Lee, "Cold War Multiculturalism: The Clash of American and Soviet Models of Difference," Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford, 2008. The Oxford Majlis discussion of *Storm over Asia* was summarized in "Oxford Letter," *Bharat* (January 1931): 38. The US State Department noted

Soviet screenwriter G.E. Grebner contributed to this international cultural front in early 1930, drafting *Black and White (Chernyi i belyi)*, an "anti-Ku-Klux-Klan" story based on the author's autodidactic study of American race relations. Later that year, Grebner successfully pitched the work to the major production house for international films, *Mezhrabpomfil'm*. To drum up interest in the project among African American actors, an excerpt of the script was reprinted in *The Liberator*, the official organ of the Communist-aligned League of Struggle for Negro Rights.[2] In the author's preface to the script, Grebner announced, "In this film, Negroes will appear on screen as humans for the first time."[3] This idea appealed to at least twenty-two young African Americans who responded to a call for actors to participate in the shooting of the film in the Soviet

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the reception of *Abyssinia* among their many files on Soviet film propaganda; see memorandum dated 9 March 1937 in "861.4061/106," State Department Decimal Files, 1930-1939, Record Group 59 (RG 59), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland. See also "Chinese Protest Wrecking of Theatre by Fascist Who 'Just Can't Take It,'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 April 1937.

[2] This information is gleaned from a historical note by Grebner attached to the script. See G.A. Grebner, "Chernye i belye," Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), 2014/1/61. The genesis and various iterations of the script are discussed in greater detail in Lee's "Cold War Multiculturalism." In a preface to *Black and White*, Grebner observed that casting would be difficult, as black diasporics in Moscow attending KUTV (Communist University of Toilers of the East) and working in the Communist International could not participate in the film as their presence in the Soviet Union was not openly acknowledged. If black actors could not be brought from the United States, Grebner recommended using actors from the Caucasian republics or from the small colony of black Abkhazians. On the Abkhazian colony, see Allison Blakely, *Russia and the Negro* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1986), 5-12. American workers already in the Soviet Union were solicited to play the white roles in the movie. "'Black and White,' New Film, Illustrates the Class Struggle in USA," *Moscow Daily News*, 28 June 1932. On the international distribution of *Mezhrabpomfil'm* (sometimes mistakenly conflated with *Mezhrabpom*, the Comintern's international worker's defense organization), see Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 41.

[3] Grebner, "Chernye i belye." Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Russian are mine.

Union.[4] This cast—headed by Langston Hughes as script consultant and Louise Thompson as project organizer—consisted of writers, social workers, performers, and other middle-class African Americans who could afford passage to the Soviet Union. They made their way to Moscow in the summer of 1932, eager to measure the reality of life in the red capital against promises of a new egalitarian society. At first, the players were favorably impressed by their treatment as honored guests. But soon rumors started to circulate that *Black and White* had been scrapped due to the objections a white American businessman involved in a major Soviet development project. When shooting was repeatedly delayed, a handful of the visitors felt betrayed, cabling to black newspapers in New York that the Communist commitment to fighting racism had been an illusion.[5] Consultant Langston Hughes reported that the delays were caused by an

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[4] The movie proposal was brought back to the US from Moscow by James W. Ford. A US-based cooperating committee was formed to recruit actors and coordinate programmatic details. West Indian writer and editor W.A. Domingo chaired this committee and Louise Thompson served as corresponding secretary. For administrative details, see boxes 1-2, Louise Thompson Patterson Papers (LTP), Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University; "Announce Players for Soviet Picture," *New York Amsterdam News*, 8 June 1932.

[5] The American businessman in question was Hugh Cooper. When he learned of the plot of *Black and White*, he objected to Soviet government officials, who m he believed then cancelled the film due to his pressure. See "Memorandum by American Consulate General in Berlin," 30 August 1932, in "861.5017-Living Conditions/519" State Department Decimal Files, 1930-1939, RG 59, NARA. On the general background of American business and Soviet industrialization, see David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). In fact, the collapse of the *Black and White* film was overdetermined. Conflicting diplomatic interests and a troublesome (albeit fascinating) utopian vision of racial liberation in the script were only two obstacles blocking the production. Changing artistic criteria and cultural politics might also have held up the production, as films, by 1932, were increasingly expected (though not yet required) to adhere to the expectations of socialist realism. (See Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.) In this regard, Grebner's work on popular comedies and his previous teaming with the criticized Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky could not have soothed concerned apparatchiks; such worries could only have been exacerbated by the presence of consultant Lovett Fort Whiteman, who had been accused of Trotskyist deviations in

unwieldy script rife with misconceptions about African American life, despite revisions to the dialogue made by longtime black Muscovite, Lovett Fort Whiteman.[6] Whatever the reason, the film project collapsed. Even those who remained committed to anti-racist struggle within the Communist Party worried that the failure to shoot *Black and White* would be "disastrous," if not "fatal" to the blossoming relationship between African Americans and communism.[7]

They were wrong. The influx of African Americans with the *Black and White* cast actually accelerated and deepened the Soviet engagement with black arts and culture.[8] Langston Hughes stayed on in the Soviet Union for several months to study race relations in Soviet Central Asia, composing a series of essays on his research and travels.[9] Writer Dorothy West, along with her friend and aspiring painter Mildred Jones,

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1927. See memorandum dated 3 December 1927, Russian State Archive for Social-Political History (RGASPI), 515/1/1006.

[6] When Grebner's script was translated into English, Fort Whiteman did little to change the details of the story. Instead, he simply added 'local color'. For instance, when a black worker was shorted by the factory paymaster, a co-worker joked, "Too much C.P. time, brother." (The reference is to "colored people's time," that is, habitual tardiness, an in-joke playing on the common stereotype of black laziness.) See the English-language manuscript for "Black and White," box 2, folder 4, LTP.

[7] W.A. Domingo to Louise Thompson, 6 October 1932, box 1, folder 22, LTP.

[8] For an overview, see Maxim Matusevich, "An Exotic Subversive: Africa, Africans, and the Soviet Everyday," *Race and Class* 49:4 (2008): 57-81. A partial list of African American literature published in the Soviet Union during the 1930s is given in Andrew Steiger, "American Authors Popular in Soviet Russia," *International Literature* No. 3 (1936): 102.

[9] Langston Hughes, *A Negro Looks at Soviet Central Asia* (Moscow: International Publishers, 1934); Langston Hughes, *Good Morning, Revolution: Uncollected Social Protest Writings* (Westport: L. Hill, 1973); David Chioni Moore, "Local Color, Global Color: Langston Hughes, the Black Atlantic, and Soviet Central Asia, 1932," *Research in African Literatures* 27:4 (1996): 49-70; Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 86-148.

prolonged their visits to explore the cultural scene in Moscow; Jones was taken on as a pupil by the premier Soviet artist Aleksandr Deineka.[10] Journalist Loren Miller wrote the foreword to a Russian-language anthology of African American poetry.[11] Recent Hampton Institute graduate Lloyd Patterson found a position as a set designer and he soon married a Russian woman. His mother, Margaret Glescoe, followed her son to Moscow where she became a worker-correspondent, recording her impressions of life and factory labor from the perspective of a black woman.[12] This growing colony of black cultural workers also circulated among the committed anticolonialist activists in Moscow for political work, a coterie that included West Indians, Africans, and Asians who introduced the Americans to revolutionary struggles across the globe. When the poet Countee Cullen tried to lure Dorothy West away to Paris, she flatly refused him.

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[10] See West's letters to her family, box 1, folder 1, Dorothy West Papers (DWP), Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is unknown whether Deineka visited West and Jones during his 1935 trip to the United States, but one cannot help but wonder if his interactions with African Americans in Moscow affected his representation of American life, with major works including the well-received *Negro Concert* (*Negritianskii kontsert*), *Dancers in Harlem* (*Tantsory v Garleme*), and *Negro Youth* (*Iunosha-negr*). On the African American themes in the paintings from his 1935 trip, see Christina Kiaer, "Modern and Soviet: Deineka in America, 1935," *Pinakotheke* 22/23 (2006): 228.

[11] Iulian Anisimov, (ed.) *Afrika v Amerike* [Africa in America] (Moscow: Gosizdat khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1933). This preface was likely based on a lecture delivered at the Library of Foreign Literatures. "Film Groups Render Varied Program," *Moscow Daily News*, 23 July 1932. This work added to the proliferation of anthologies of black literature in the interwar period, indicative of the contestations over what 'blackness' meant. See Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), esp. 16-68.

[12] "New Jersey Youth Abroad Takes Russian Bride," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 25 February 1933; Margaret Glescoe, "Negro Mother, Now a Shock Worker," in *60 Letters: Foreign Workers Write of their Life and Work in the USSR* (Moscow: Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, 1936), 10-15. Lloyd Patterson's son James wrote a family memoir that gives more details of his father's immigration, incorporating letters written in the 1930s. See Dzhems Patterson, *Dykhanie listvennitsy [The Breath of a Larch]* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1985).

Ruefully, he admitted she was right to remain in Moscow: "It would be a spiritual catastrophe to come to Europe twice and not to see Paris. But I suppose in these times *it is far more important to have seen Russia*."[13]

As African American involvement in radical politics increased over the course of the 1930s, so grew the importance attached to the ongoing experiment in the Soviet Union, and in Moscow in particular.[14] This essay examines the careers of three artists who participated in and shaped the course of this experiment: dancer Sylvia Chen, actor Wayland Rudd, and journalist Homer Smith. The figures under consideration each demonstrate a unique facet of anticolonial cultural activism and its articulation in Moscow. Afro-Chinese Trinidadian Sylvia Chen took up the mission of forging a new type of anticolonial dance that fused elements of Chinese folk dance, modern choreography inspired by Isadora Duncan, and popular jazz steps. Chen's performances remind us of the importance of dance as a form for women's political expression in the interwar period, while the reception of her work calls attention to the ways in which races and gendered readings of bodily expression limned the potential for anticolonial and feminist choreographies. Wayland Rudd was a member of the *Black and White* cast who remained in the Soviet Union in hopes that he would find more sympathetic roles and that he might eventually be able to develop his skills as a playwright and director, avenues largely closed off to African American actors in the United States. His career in the

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[13] Countee Cullen to Dorothy West, 10 August 1932, box 1, folder 6, DWP. Emphasis added.

[14] The history of African American involvement in the Communist Party is examined in Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (New York: Grove Press, 1983); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Mark Solomon, *The Cry was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998).

1930s demonstrates the incredible access given to foreign artists in the Soviet Union and the mixed results of one man's attempt to exploit these resources. Finally, Homer Smith's work as the Moscow correspondent for black newspapers highlights the role of the press in disseminating a global vision of blackness and the significant location of Moscow in this black world. On the whole, this essay makes the case that due to the combined efforts of Soviet-sponsored cultural work and the enthusiastic, creative participation of anticolonial artists, 1930s Moscow was transformed into a dynamic crucible of anticolonialism and internationalism, watched from around the world.[15]

To advance this argument, detailed attention is paid to the lives of artists who made Moscow their home for extended periods, as opposed to the more famous black "pilgrims"—Claude McKay, W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson—whose sojourns have dominated the growing literature on black experience in the Soviet Union.[16] While celebrity tours caused considerable stirs at the time, the everyday activism of imagining and inhabiting black Moscow sustained the city as a site of anticolonial internationalism. In turn, this space allowed these resident artists new

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[15] On the making of an international left-wing cultural front in the 1930s, see Michael Denning's provocative essay "The Novelists' International" in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (New York and London: Verso, 2004), 51-72. While Moscow was, I would posit, a key location in promulgating this international cultural front, it was also a part of a broader global network with major nodes in capitals and port cities across the world, including New York, London, Liverpool, Paris, Marseilles, Berlin, Hamburg, Shanghai, and San Francisco.

[16] The term "pilgrims" is a reference to "The Magic Pilgrimage," the title of the fourth section of Claude McKay's memoir *A Long Way from Home* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970) that details his 1922-23 trip to the Soviet Union. The major work that opened up the inquiry of black and Soviet exchanges is Allison Blakely's *Russia and the Negro*. More recent contributions include: Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain*; Maxim Matusevich (ed.), *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2006); Joy Gleason Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights* (New York: Norton, 2008).

opportunities to criticize racial injustice, labor exploitation, colonial rule, and, in Chen's case, women's oppression.

As long-term residents, these artists also signal the major transformations of Soviet cultural and political history in the tempestuous 1930s and the impact these shifts had on the interwar internationalism. As historian Michael David-Fox has noted, "foreign cultural resources" in the Soviet Union were transformed over the course of the interwar period "from prized assets to fatal sources of contagion."[17] The cultural revolution (1928-1931) in the USSR pushed the arts to the forefront of political efforts, fostering the work of anticolonial writers and performers. At the same time, the increased activity of the State in the realm of culture shrank the sphere of available expressive options, placing limits on Soviet and foreign artists alike. Artists were forced to navigate turbulent waters, tossed by the forces of state sponsorship and censorship alike. Finally, during the worst of the Purges, this sphere essentially imploded for foreign artists. Much as activists like Chen, Rudd, and Smith worked to build and to sustain an anticolonial black Moscow, its ultimate fate was beyond their control. But none of them could have predicted such an outcome when they arrived in the city.

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[17] Michael David-Fox, "From Illusory 'Society' to Intellectual 'Public': VOKS, International Travel and Party-Intelligentsia Relations in the Interwar Period," *Journal of Contemporary European History* 11:1 (2002): 9. While most studies of black life in the Soviet Union gloss over questions of local context, Soviet historian Meredith Roman is, as one might expect, appropriately attentive to the broader currents of Soviet policy and culture. See Roman, "Another Kind of Freedom: The Soviet Experiment with Antiracism and its Image as a Raceless Society, 1928-1936," Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 2005.

**Sylvia Chen Dances Out Revolution**

Among the many foreign cultural workers in the Soviet capital, Sylvia Chen cut a particularly striking figure. The daughter of Eugene Chen, a former foreign minister in Sun Yat-sen's government, Chen had experienced a privileged childhood moving among the colonial elite in Port of Spain and in London. Up to the age of twenty-one, she demonstrated no particular inclination toward any vocation, though she had taken occasional ballet lessons. Chen entered the Soviet Union in 1927 after a two-year residence in Wuhan, China where her father played an important role in the Soviet-supported left-wing Kuomintang government.[18] Upon arrival in Moscow, the Chen family—father, two daughters, and two sons—checked in at the Hotel Metropol, a luxurious pre-revolutionary hotel near Red Square that had been converted into a lodge for important dignitaries and visiting artists. Young, attractive, and outgoing, Sylvia was immediately drawn into the cultural center of the city, socializing with foreign journalists and native intelligentsia at the hotel by day, while attending dance recitals, plays, and musical performances at night. It was the picture of a charmed, if not particularly radical, life.

In her memoir, *Footnote to History*, Chen recalls the first Soviet popular entertainments to strongly affect her—the ballet *Red Poppy*, a Bolshevik interpretation of the Chinese Revolution, and a celebration of the sixth anniversary of the Isadora Duncan School of Dance in Moscow. In both cases, Chen was impressed not by the overt

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[18] On the failure of Soviet-sponsored Communist revolution in 1920s China, see Robert C. North, *Moscow and the Chinese Communists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953); Conrad Brandt, *Stalin's Failure in China* (New York: Norton, 1966); Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution, 1919-1927* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000).

political messages woven into the performances, but rather by the arresting female protagonists. In *Red Poppy*, the fifty-one-year-old Ekaterina Geltzer starred as the ballet's lead, playing a selfless Chinese girl who gives up her life for the greater cause of the workers.[19] Geltzer, one of the few ballerinas who remained at the famed Bolshoi Theater after the October Revolution, was a crowd favorite; though she was no longer as lithe and nimble as she had been in her prime, the emotive power of her acting and connection with the audience was, by Chen's account, electrifying. At the Duncan recital, the pupils of Irma Duncan, Isadora's adopted Russian daughter, danced out a history of their school from their founder's first visit to Russia to her recent death.[20] Chen was particularly impressed by Irma's recreation of Isadora's most famous dances. For the first time, she realized that dance could be empowering and free, and also that it need not be "soft."[21] This juxtaposition of "hardness" and the feminine form came to define Chen's emergent vision of her own style of dance.

Leveraging her father's connections, Chen wangled her way into lessons at the Bolshoi, though she found their methodical, disciplined approach to training unsuitable to her desire to express herself. On the suggestion of friends, Chen decided to try the Vera Maya's studio of plastic dance—a more liberated form of dance movement that

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[19] Si-lan Chen Leyda, *Footnote to History* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1984), 99-100. Chen incorrectly writes that Geltzer was sixty five years old at the time of this performance. The evolution of *Red Poppy* from script to stage is discussed in Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 231-256.

[20] For an impressionistic account of the Isadora Duncan school in Moscow, see Lily Dikovskaya's memoir, *In Isadora's Steps* (Brighton: The Book Guild, 2008).

[21] *Footnote to History*, 102.

flourished briefly in the Soviet Union in the 1920s.[22] Maya's school was heavily influenced by Isadora Duncan in its style and vocabulary of movements, but rather than emphasizing individual expression, it emphasized satiric social sketches.[23] In the early summer of 1928, Chen had her Moscow debut with Maya's troupe in an incredibly successful show that ended with boisterous applause and cheers for the young Trinidadian dancer. Established Soviet dance critic Viktor Iving observed that, "of the number of participants, Sylvia Chen aroused the greatest interest."[24] The remainder of his lengthy review, however, sheds a more troubling light on the reception of the evening's entertainment and on the vaunted claim of the Soviet Union as a land free of racial prejudice. Paragraph after paragraph, Iving lingered on lengthy descriptions of Chen's body and features, followed by praise for the unmediated joy expressed in her free movements. And lest an obtuse reader miss the racial coding of this primitivist interpretation of the work, the author eliminated any ambiguity, "The manner of Sylvia Chen's dance reminds one of mulatto dances, which clearly exhibit a strong influence on her stage manner. Her appearance is even reminiscent of a mulatto… And like a mulatto,

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[22] On the various studios of the plastic dance movement, see Selma Jeanne Cohen's review, "New Dance in Russia, 1910-1930," *Dance Chronicle* 20:3 (1997): 337-341. For a revealing contemporaneous portrait of American perceptions of new dance in Russia with particular attention to Vera Maya's studio, see James E. Abbe, "Russia's Revolution of Dance," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 4 August 1929. Abbe's recurrent concern is the implied scandal of scantily-clad dancers performing in workers' and soldiers' clubs, as the audience may miss the finer points of modernism and simply perceive the dances as seductions.

[23] Maya's school is described briefly in Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers*, 166. My comparative descriptions of the different Moscow schools of dance follows the five-part taxonomy of dance conventions—frame, mode of representation, style, vocabulary of movement, and syntax of combinations—presented in *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), xviii.

[24] V. Iving, "Spektakli V. Maiia," *Sovremennyi teatr* (June 1928): 447.

she flirted with her choice of men in the audience."[25] Such dismissive raced readings were typical of dance critics' approach to non-white performers of modern dance in the interwar period, from the suggestive vaudeville of Josephine Baker to the ethnographic choreography of Katherine Dunham. In his perceptive history of early modern dance, theorist Ramsay Burt describes the ways in which the racialized body of the modern dancer occupied an uneasy liminal space, moving in a highly charged field between high and low culture, art and entertainment, ballet and jazz, white and black.[26] This charged dynamic surely held some allure for the mixed-race Sylvia Chen; but for Iving, and many other dance critics of the time, such hybrid performances were passing curiosities, derided as temporary titillations.[27]

While it is unknown if Chen read Iving's review—her Russian was still rudimentary at this point—for some reason, she distanced herself from Maya's studio after this performance at the urging of Russian friends. Over the next year, she went through several different directors until she finally won the attention of the acclaimed Kasian Goleizovsky, an established impresario of Russian dance.[28] For Golly, as Chen

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[25] "Spektakli V. Maiia." It is not clear from the text whether Iving knew that Chen was, in fact, Afro-Chinese.

[26] See Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, 'Race' and Nation in Early Modern Dance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998). For a thoughtful review of the connections between modernism, feminism, and race in Isadora Duncan's work, see Elizabeth Francis, "From Event to Monument: Isadora Duncan and the Desire for Wholeness," *The Secret Treachery of Words: Feminism and Modernism in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002), 1-37.

[27] Contemporary German dance historian Curtis Sachs revealingly likened the mixture of African American and European dance styles to an unsatisfactory "blood transfusion." See Sachs, *World History of the Dance* (New York: Norton, 1936), 445.

[28] On Goleizovsky's career up to 1927, see Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers*, 154-215.

took to calling her new mentor affectionately, dance was focused on rhythm, and the two were especially happy to work on complicated syncopated pieces that hearkened to exotic locales from Spain to Tahiti, though with "no attempt to be ethnographically authentic," as Chen later admitted.[29] Golly considered his new recruit perfect for these pieces, both for her feel for the beat and for her marked foreign features. Performing under the auspices of VOKS, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Counties, these dances were presented in February 1930 as the work of "Chinese dancer" Sylvia Chen, despite the lack of any identifiable elements from China in the program.[30]

Having worked under several directors, Chen was also gaining the confidence to choreograph her own pieces, beginning with a short piece set to the music of French composer Claude Debussy. The timing, unfortunately, could not have been worse for a debut. The ongoing Soviet cultural revolution had for two years been placing increasing demands on the arts to demonstrate fealty to the Party and to proletarian ideals. With this mid-winter performance, the Party set its sights on Goleizovsky's decidedly non-proletarian productions, which were savaged by reviewers who accused the pair of decadence and counter-revolution. The damage to Chen's reputation was severe; years later, critics would still bring up these performances and deliberate as to whether the dancer had truly left behind the eroticism and salon antics of "Western bourgeois music-halls."[31]

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[29] *Footnote to History*, 113.

[30] "Vecher VOKS," 27 February 1930, State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), 5283/8/76.

[31] "Sil'viia Chen," *Krasnaia gazeta*, 5 June 1932. On the general shifts in Soviet culture in the 1930s, Fitzpatrick's *The Cultural Front* provides a rich interpretation. A succinct summary is provided in

This rebuke started Chen down a new path. In the week after the show, Sylvia worked with her brother Jack—a good Party member, repeatedly described in Soviet archival documents as *komsomolets* (young Communist) Chen—to arrive at a fresh idea of modern dance that would better suit the present political demands.[32] Just two months after the public debacle with Golly, Sylvia unveiled "The Militarist," a new piece set to the music of Sergei Prokofiev. This offering evinced what would soon become Chen's signature style, a hybrid of Chinese folk elements and modern forms intended to evoke a particular figure or situation, often infused with political content. "The Militarist" was intended to satirize the aggressive warlords of China, with the provocative gender-inverting irony of the militarist's embodiment in Chen's petite female form. Sylvia submitted this dance to the arbiters of cultural politics at the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP). Winning approval, Chen found herself touring Caucasian summer resorts with the Workers' Youth Theater (TRAM) as part of the Komsomol's cultural front.[33]

Yet, following the immense disappointment of her experience with Goleizovsky, Sylvia remained uncertain of her artistic vision and she continually sought reassurance from her family. After receiving a letter explaining the new direction of his daughter's

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Ronald Suny, *The Soviet Experiment* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 169-190. On the particular transformations in Moscow's dance scene, including Chen's place in these movements, see V. Iving, "The Dance: Changes under the Soviets," *New York Times*, 28 June 1931.

[32] See notes on Sylvia's brothers Percy and Jack Chen in VOKS correspondence: GARF, 5283/4/169. The designation *komsomolets* indicates that Jack was a member of the Komsomol, the highly-influential and dynamic Communist Youth League.

[33] Programs for Sylvia Chen's VOKS-sponsored Moscow performances and relevant correspondence can be found in GARF, 5283/8/76. The work of TRAM is described in Lynn Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000)

dance career, Eugene Chen responded positively, "If I understand you correctly, you aim at removing the dance from the sphere of art and put it in the world of practical life."[34] Similarly, Jack supported her new work and directed her to listen to the people and not to the critics, "Your audience will create you, pull you up so that soon you will be able to address yourself to the more backward statas [sic] of our soviet and world public."[35] Jack's counsel emerged not only from the imperative to make art relevant to the working masses, but also from an intense distrust of dance critics. Jack was keenly aware of the racial undertones at play in the reception of Sylvia's performances. In an article reviewing the status of Soviet dance and the role of foreigners in new performances oriented toward the people, Jack defended the work of his sister and others:

> [They] are developing a technique that enables them to approach really significant themes. Characteristically, it is the general public rather than the critics (either old balletomanes, or writers who have somewhat *biological* ideas on dancing) who give them encouragement and understanding, and rather the public less exposed to ballet than the more 'cultured public.'[36]

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[34] Eugene Chen to Sylvia Chen, 17 November 1931, Si-lan Chen Leyda Papers (SCLP), Tamiment Library, box 28, folder 10.

[35] Jack Chen to Sylvia Chen, 10 July 1931, SCLP, box 28, folder 12.

[36] Chen-I-Wan (Jack Chen), "American Dancers in Moscow," *New Theatre* (August 1935): 21. Emphasis added. Jack's critique of "somewhat biological ideas on dancing" was likely directed at Iving and other critics who upheld a performer's work should follow from their physiognomic type (*emploi*). In his review notes on a 1934 performance by Sylvia Chen, Iving ably demonstrated the ways in which this theory of acting dovetailed into raced and gendered notions of dance: "Sylvia Chen's natural type (emploi) is that of the comic ingénue—cunning grimaces, amusing sneers, unexpected naughty outbursts, carefree playfulness, fleeting expressions on her jolly round face, soft catlike movements—this is the sphere in which Sylvia Chen feels herself like a fish in water." RGALI, 2694/57/1.

Sylvia's fear of criticism was assuaged by the implication that critics like Iving were both disconnected from the masses and possibly racist. Returning from tour in late 1931, she earnestly began to draft an entirely new dance program, to be based both on her experiences dancing for Soviet workers and on a proper understanding of Marxism-Leninism. Using her father's connections again, Chen enrolled as an auditor in the American section of the Communist University of Toilers of East (KUTV), a school established by the Communist International in 1921 to provide cadre training to colonial students.[37] Here, she diligently plodded through classic texts of Marxism. A letter from a friend written much later in life fondly recalled the nights that Chen spent reading the works of theorist Georgii Plekhanov, trying to arrive at a better sense of leftist aesthetics.[38] But beyond KUTV's lessons in historical materialism, Soviet nationality policy and colonial geography, Chen also came to experience proletarian internationalism in practice as she became part of a community of students and activists of color from Africa, Asia, and the Americas. In conversation with these students, she developed a new set of dances to celebrate the diversity of national forms of dance, to dramatize colonial injustices around the world, and to criticize the bourgeois West.

After growing up as an outsider in Port-of-Spain, London, and Wuhan, Sylvia had found a community of kindred spirits in the community of anticolonial students and

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[37] The establishment and affairs of KUTV are described in chapters 1 and 2, above. See "The Anticolonial Imagination." Sylvia's personal note—rather than formal application for admission—requesting to attend classes at KUTV can be found in her personal file at the Comintern archive, RGASPI, 495/225/1185. Chen joined the American section—though she had never traveled to the US—as she hoped to "work for the Communist Party in America through my dance."

[38] Nathalie Roslavleva (Rene) to Sylvia Chen, 11 March 1950, SCLP, box 30, folder 2.

artists in Moscow. Among these exiles, many of whom had followed similarly disparate migratory paths before landing at KUTV, a romantic sense of internationalism developed, in which all liberation struggles were seen as interconnected.[39] Chen's work flourished in this milieu. Furthermore, as her touring took her to Soviet Central Asia, the Caucasus, and China, the range of her dance numbers expanded. By the mid-1930s, her repertoire included a protest of the Jim Crow American South entitled "Lynch," a piece dedicated to the persecuted Chinese writer Ding Ling, and a dance celebrating the newly-emancipated women of Uzbekistan.[40] The last composition—a favorite that she regularly performed into the 1950s—exemplified the ways in which Chen continued to find in her dance a means for women's self-fulfillment after the decline of Duncan-inspired dance in the Soviet Union; by rendering the liberation of woman not as a matter of personal expression, but as a collective achievement, Chen re-scripted feminist modern dance in a socialist vernacular. Her new pieces also derided exaggerated expressions of masculinity in "Sport-Grotesque," a parody of the fascist obsession with physical culture. Despite the

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[39] Perry Anderson notes a similar formation in the first generation of Marxist theorists who worked in exile: "Abstaining from any direct role in the building of national organizations of the working-class in the major industrial countries, they advised and guided militants and leaders throughout Europe and North America. Their correspondence extended effortlessly from Moscow to Chicago, and Naples to Oslo. The very narrowness and immaturity of the working-class movement of the epoch permitted them to realize, at a price, a purer internationalism than was to be possible in the next phase of development." See *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979), 4-5.

[40] These dances should be placed in the context of the great international defense campaigns of the time: Sacco and Vanzetti, Scottsboro, Meerut, Ding Ling, and Tom Mooney, among others. See Lisa McGirr, "The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A Global History," Journal of American History (March 2007): 1085-1115; Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). The often-overlooked Ding Ling defense campaign is examined in Richard Jean So, "Coolie Democracy: US-China Political and Literary Exchange, 1925-1955," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2009.

retrenchment of conventional sexual mores in Stalinist times, Sylvia refused to abandon the idea that the Soviet Union should embody *both* racial and sexual freedom.[41]

Such beliefs were also embodied in Chen's personal life, which she considered another channel for the expression of her politics. After brief marriage to a fellow KUTV student, Chen entered into a curious romance with Langston Hughes. While Hughes' biographers diverge on the substance of this relationship and haggle over the poet's sexuality, the couple's love letters from this period testify to a depth of feeling, if not for each other, then for the idea of themselves as a couple in a self-consciously staged progressive inter-racial romance.[42] As multiracial subjects, Chen and Hughes saw in cosmopolitan Moscow an ideal place where different races mixed freely, and they found in each other the opportunity to act out this supposition. In a letter written to Hughes in the summer of 1934, Sylvia mapped out her racially ambiguity: "Convenient isn't it to be able to change one's nationality so easily, Chinese, Japanese, West Indian, Negro, you like me best as the latter, don't you? But my politics don't change, am always for the

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[41] Chen did not abandon her earlier commitments to free love, as evidenced by dances such as "False Chastity." Her work in the mid-1930s is richly described, in V. Iving's negative review notes. See RGALI 2694/57/1, passim. On Soviet sexual mores and policy, see Barbara Evans Clement, "The Birth of the New Soviet Woman," in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites (eds.), *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 220-237; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 65-90, 216-237; Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[42] Compare Faith Berry, *Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem* (New York: Citadel, 1992); Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, 1902-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

oppressed races in the fight against imperialism."[43] Responding in kind, Hughes replied, "What nationality would our baby be anyhow? Just so he or she is anti-Facist! [sic]"[44] For both Sylvia and Langston, this epistolary amalgamationist fantasy allowed the authors to thwart the logics of white supremacist myths of racial purity and the injunction against miscegenation that maligned their biracial existences.[45] In their love letters, they were no longer tragic figures, but anticipations of a future inter-racial internationalist world.[46]

Such ideological fantasies, however, proved a poor adhesive for a lived relationship. Despite his promises and good intentions, Hughes never returned to Moscow after 1933. Once her patience with Hughes ran out, Chen embarked on a new romance with Jay Leyda, a young American student of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, whom she eventually married. She continued dancing across the Soviet Union and Europe until the curtain of Stalin's Purges descended on the stage of cosmopolitan

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[43] Sylvia Chen to Langston Hughes, 29 August 1934, HM 64089, Huntington Library.

[44] Langston Hughes to Sylvia Chen, 18 October 1934, SCLP, box 29, folder 4.

[45] Both of Hughes's autobiographies and much of his fiction and nonfiction is concerned with his mixed-race heritage and the "problem" of inter-marriage. See Hughes, *The Big Sea* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

[46] These letters echo the fantasy at the center of W.E.B. Du Bois's romance of miscegenation, *Dark Princess* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995). For a reading of the global politics of *Dark Princess* that illuminates Hughes' and Chen's romance, see Alys Eve Weinbaum, "Reproducing Racial Globality: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Sexual Politics of Black Nationalism," *Social Text* (Summer 2001): 15-41. Historian Christina Simmons discusses the idealization of interracial relationships among sex radicals in "Women's Power in Sex Radical Challenges to Marriage in the Early Twentieth-Century United States," *Feminist Studies* 29:1 (2003): 168-198. The valorization of amalgamationist approaches to the race problem in the context of the Harlem Renaissance is also discussed in George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. 289-312.

Moscow in the late 1930s. As Leyda prepared to leave Moscow, Sylvia resolved to follow him to America where she planned to help African Americans and Asian Americans become more internationalist and less bourgeois.

**Wayland Rudd and the Theatre World**

Unlike most members of the *Black and White* crew, Wayland Rudd was an experienced dramatist who had come on to the acting scene just as black performers in the United States were beginning to find work in serious theater.[47] Earning a living as a salesman after his graduation from Howard University, Rudd was working in amateur productions in Philadelphia in the mid-1920s when he was discovered by Jasper Deeter, a veteran director of the Provincetown Players and Workers' Drama League. Deeter had recently founded Hedgerow Theater, an independent actors' commune run on mutualist principles. (Members of the collective were equally responsible for all tasks involved in running the theatre, from domestic duties to set construction.) Deeter's egalitarian commitments extended to racial equality and he was devoted to developing black actors to play significant black roles in American drama. So it was that he recruited Wayland Rudd in 1928, perhaps with a mind to restaging *The Emperor Jones*, Eugene O'Neill's dramatization of racial politics that had already successful runs in New York and in

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[47] Black actors had long found roles in musicals and vaudeville, but the literary energy of the Harlem Renaissance created a new scene for dramas with social and political themes with serious roles for black leads. See Errol Hill and James Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 214-254. For a contemporary assessment of the limited accomplishments, but great promise of these works, see Alain Locke, "The Negro and the American Stage," *Theatre Arts* 10 (February 1926): 112-120.

London.[48] It was a turning point for Rudd, as he first came to consider the possibility of a professional career on stage.

After his first year of work with Deeter, Rudd landed a part in the Broadway revival of *Porgy*. In 1930, Rudd headlined *Othello* at the Hedgerow, the first time a black actor played the doomed Moor on American soil. One member of the audience, Ellen Winsor, was so moved by Rudd's "vivid and intense character study" that she wrote to congratulate the actor for his "great creation."[49] Similarly, the young black poet Gwendolyn Bennett described Rudd's portrayal of Brutus Jones as an improvement on previous performances by Charles Gilpin and Paul Robeson, as Rudd relayed Othello not "so much [as] a senseless bully caught in the toils of his own folly as a human being

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[48] Information on Rudd's youth in Colorado and at Howard University comes from the profile "Rudd First to Play Role in Soviet Union Theatre," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 21 June 1947. Deeter's work with Wayland Rudd is discussed briefly in Errol Hill, *Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 101-102; Hill and Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre*, 229. Both works note that Deeter had insisted on casting Charles Gilpin as Brutus in the 1921 Broadway production of *The Emperor Jones*, setting a precedent for African Americans playing serious roles on Broadway. For Hubert Harrison's observations on the signal importance of this landmark production, see Jeffrey Perry (ed.), *A Hubert Harrison Reader* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 378-383. Henry Miller provides a halcyon portrait of Deeter and of communal life at Hedgerow in his memoir *Remember to Remember* (New York: New Directions, 1947), 109-125. Gwendolyn Bennett describes Deeter's commitment to black audiences and black actors in her review of Rudd's performance as Brutus Jones in "The Emperors Jones," *Opportunity* (September 1930): 270-271. Deeter's connection with the Workers' Drama League—a group of radical intellectuals that included Mike Gold, John Howard Lawson, and Ida Rauh—is mentioned in Harry Goldman and Mel Gordon, "Workers' Theatre in America: A Survey, 1913-1978," *Journal of American Culture* 1:1 (1978): 169.

[49] Ellen Winsor to Wayland Rudd, 22 April 1930, Hatch-Billops Collection, New York City. Winsor was an ardent pacifist and supporter of the Soviet Union. Her letter possibly encouraged Rudd's later emigration to the Soviet Union, as she noted that his method of acting reminded her of that developed by "the genius of the Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavsky." On Winsor's connections to the peace movement and her work for recognition of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, see Katherine A.S. Siegel, "The Women's Committee for the Recognition of Russia: Progressives in the Age of Normalcy," *Peace and Change* 21:3 (July 1996): 289-317.

crushed by an insurmountable fate."[50] On the strength of these performances, Rudd secured regular work in a series of minor plays on and off Broadway in 1931 and 1932.[51]

When he learned of the *Black and White* shoot in early 1932, it was undoubtedly a difficult decision for Rudd to leave his career in the United States, as it was on a definite upward trajectory. But Rudd was also aware of the limits placed on black actors of the period. The most successful recent Broadway play with an African American theme had been the 1930 production of Marc Connelly's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Green Pastures*, a fantastical interpretation of the Old Testament, ostensibly from a black folk perspective. This play—written by a white playwright based on stories transcribed by a white folklorist—employed dozens of black actors and provided a venue both for the tremendous acting skills of Richard B. Harrison (who played 'De Lawd') and for the musical direction of Hall Johnson (who arranged the spirituals). But most black critics excoriated the work for its simplistic representation of black religion.[52] The more

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[50] Bennett, "The Emperors Jones."

[51] These plays included Lula Vollmer's *Sentinels*, Julian McDonald's *The Marriage of Cana*, and *Bloodstream* by Frederick Schlick. While none of these plays were particularly successful, Rudd's performances were repeatedly noted as outstanding by critics. See "Laura Bowman and Wayland Rudd 'Steal' Show in White Play," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 2 January 1932; "For Negro Performers," *New York Times*, 3 February 1932; "Prison Drama," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 April 1932.

[52] Loften Mitchell, following black writer Sterling Brown and other critics of the period, criticizes *The Green Pastures* for its inattention to underlying emancipatory desires. See *Black Drama: The Story of the American Negro in the Theatre* (New York: Hawthorn, 1967), 95. Hill and Hatch are more even-handed in their historical treatment of the play in *A History of African American Theatre*, 308-310. Cedric Robinson's treatment of the play and subsequent 1935 cinematic adaptation pays particular attention to the work of the spirituals in the work, arguing that the "import of a slave-resistance spiritual transports the film far beyond the counterfeiture of its creators." Cedric Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 358. Rudd

socially conscious work of the black Little Theater movement held more promise for Rudd, but these productions were limited to the "small stages of Black colleges, universities, and amateurs," as Broadway "had no interest in Black playwrights who might exceed the strictures of melodrama by replacing personal demons with themes of racial oppression," in the words of scholar Cedric Robinson.[53] *Black and White* would, based on its description, offer opportunities beyond anything Rudd might imagine in the United States. Moreover, what rising actor could have resisted the opportunity to meet Konstantin Stanislavsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, or Sergei Eisenstein?[54]

After accepting the Mezhrabpom contract in June 1932, Rudd was thrown, like Sylvia Chen before him, into the whirlwinds of Soviet cultural politics. As the idle cast of *Black and White* awaited a new, and hopefully improved, script, they were treated to the best of Moscow's music and culture, as was customary for visiting foreigners. By the fall, when many other cast members had grown weary, Rudd was ecstatic. The Moscow theater season had opened in September and the actor was joyfully taking in the shows. "I confess that there has never been anything in my histrionic experiences so thrilling and

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himself was critical of *The Green Pastures*, as evidenced by his depictions of the deleterious role of religion in the black South in his later work, discussed below.

[53] Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, 178. Black theatre critic Dewey Roscoe Jones described the poor scripts and meager roles for black actors (including Rudd) on Broadway in 1932 in "Race Actors Find Broadway Hard Road to Travel," *Chicago Defender*, 26 November 1932.

[54] The Soviets were considered to be at the forefront of modern theater and film practice. See contemporary accounts in Joseph Freeman, Joshua Kunitz, and Louis Lozowick, *Voices of October: Art and Literature in Soviet Russia* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1930); another contemporary account that echoes this sentiment is Huntly Carter's *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia* (New York: International Publishers, 1925).

absorbing as the moments the theater afforded me there," he later reminisced.[55] Rejuvenated after the long, frustrating summer, Rudd decided that, despite the failure of *Black and White*, he was still intent on finding a place on the Soviet stage.

In October, Rudd began preparations for a performance of *Othello* as part of the celebrations scheduled for the fifteenth anniversary of the revolution.[56] At the same time, Rudd enrolled in the acting school at the Meyerhold Theatre, drawn to the company's international reputation for productions of *Government Inspector* and *Roar, China!*[57] Rudd explained his ambitions and reasons for choosing Meyerhold:

> I wanted to prove to all the European swine that any man, even if he's black or yellow, can act…I wanted to work with Meyerhold. Millions of Negroes watched to see what a Negro could do. They watched each of us who came [to the Soviet Union]. A figure like Meyerhold is of interest everywhere—in Europe, in America, and in Africa.[58]

Rudd wasted no time in this pursuit. By the time that Langston Hughes returned from his winter tour of Soviet Central Asia in early 1933, Rudd was already in rehearsal for the Meyerhold's spring offering, a staging of Yuri German's *Prelude*. German, a young writer who cut his teeth as a reporter for a factory newspaper in Moscow, had constructed *Prelude* as an indictment of labor exploitation and violence across the globe, all wrapped in the story of a German engineer's path from bourgeois ignorance to communist

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[55] Wayland Rudd, "Russian and American Theatre," *The Crisis* (September 1934): 270.

[56] "Wayland Rudd to Appear in Russian Show," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 15 October 1932. It is unknown whether Rudd's performance of *Othello* actually transpired.

[57] James M. Symons, *Meyerhold's Theatre of the Grotesque: The Post-Revolutionary Productions, 1920-1932* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971); Edward Braun, *The Theatre of Meyerhold: Revolution on the Modern Stage* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1979).

[58] RGALI, 963/1/70.

consciousness.[59] Rudd played the part of a touring singer in transit from Hamburg to Shanghai; his role demanded only a few lines in Russian and the performance of a popular American song. Hughes was effusive in his praise for the play and Rudd's execution of his role. Soviet critics, in contrast, barely mentioned the new black actor on the Moscow scene, instead emphasizing the disjointed nature of the plot and other defects in the script.[60] Rudd refused to be discouraged and immersed himself in the study of Russian so that he might find more prominent roles in the future.

Just months later, legendary filmmaker Lev Kuleshov—a leading film theorist who had fallen out of favor in the late 1920s for his formalism and alleged detachment from Soviet realities—recruited Rudd to work on *The Great Consoler*, a loose interpretation of two short stories by the American writer O. Henry.[61] The film depicted the life of an imprisoned writer who is called to his craft by the injustices he witnesses in jail. Instead of trumpeting the virtues of responsible art, however, Kuleshov painted an ambiguous portrait of the role of social art. Luckily, for Kuleshov and for Rudd, the implied criticism of the strictures of Soviet artistic expression was masked by an overall

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[59] Contemporary reviews of *Prelude* [*Vstuplenie*] can be found in *Meierkhol'd v russkoi teatralnoi kritike, 1920-1938 [Meyerhold in Russian Theater Criticism, 1920-1938]* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Artist. Rezhisser. Teatr.', 2000), 366-372. On the research and theatrical adaptation of *Prelude*, see German's recollections. Iurii German, *Sobranie Sochinenii* [Collected Works], vol. 2 (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1975), 525-550, passim. Interestingly, German had never travelled outside of the Soviet Union; he based *Prelude* entirely on interviews with foreign workers in Moscow.

[60] "Mixes Russian and Jazz on Soviet Stage," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 25 February 1933.

[61] Criticisms of Kuleshov are discussed in Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 114-118. The film was universally panned, but one element of *The Great Consoler* was praised: the cost-saving rehearsal and shooting method. See Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 297-299.

confusing plot line and unremarkable acting. According to cultural historian Peter Kenez, those critics who understood Kuleshov's film were silent for fear that they might be associated with anti-Soviet views if they were the first to point them out: "The emperor had no clothes, but who would dare to notice it?"[62] Rudd's work in the film was limited to recurrent close-up shots of his distressed face, a handful of over-saturated lines stammered in badly accented Russian, and a few musical numbers. When the protagonist Bill Porter told his fellow inmates that, as an artist, one has only two prerogatives, "You may talk of your dreams; and you may tell what you heard a parrot say." Rudd's character responded by repeating the word "parrot" [*papugai*] with a confused look.[63] The overall effect, here as in the rest of the film, was not flattering.[64]

Despite the setbacks of his first year in Moscow—a failed production, a panned play, and an unfavorable performance in poorly-received film—Rudd had reason for hope, if not for celebration. In just ten months, he had worked with two world-renown directors. His roles were not the transformative enactments of black humanity that he dreamed of. But they also were not the demeaning roles of the plantation and jungle genres popular in the United States.[65] After a brief return to the United States in 1934,

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[62] Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, 118.

[63] The passage is from O. Henry, "The Unfinished Story" *McClure's Magazine* (October 1910): 688.

[64] It is worth noting that Rudd's performance here deceptively rhymes with racist depictions and black linguistic incompetence on stage and on screen. There is, however, no evidence that this effect was intended by Kuleshov. Rather, Rudd was most likely added to the cast to lend the film's American setting an air of authenticity otherwise lacking. In his earlier work, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924), Kuleshov inserted a cowboy from the American West as a traveling companion for Mr. West to a similar end.

Rudd returned to his career in Moscow.[66] Responding to American critics who decried censorship in Soviet cinema, Rudd wrote:

> Two years with the Russian theatre has taught me above all the real significance of theatre in its influence upon the culture of a people. Watching theatre, with a definite purpose given it by government censorship, and an unlimited artistic scope because of government subsidy, inject healthful and constructive ideas into the minds of a society, makes one shudder to think what theatre has been doing to the minds of American society…[67]

In early 1935, Rudd was reported to be studying to play Othello under the director Sergei Radlov, whose wife Anna Radlova had recently finished a controversial new translation of the play into contemporary Russian.[68] For Rudd, the study of *Othello* in Russian was particularly revelatory, as the new language, associated with a new society,

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[65] Cedric Robinson discusses the plantation film and jungle film as the predominant genres available to African American actors: "And like distinct organs of state violence, the genres collaborated in general and differed in particulars. The counterfeit of Black speech in the plantation genre, for an example, provided evidence of the small-brained Negro. The cinema's Black dialect had to resemble an organized language so that it could capture fugitive Negro works like the blues and spirituals as the play of children, In the jungle film there was no Black language: the savage speech inhabited a proto-linguistic realm somewhat approximating rudimentary semaphores of insect colonies." *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, 298.

[66] "Wayland Rudd Returns Here," *Philadelphia Independent*, 1 July 1934; "Wayland Rudd Back for a Short Vacation," *New York Amsterdam News*, 7 July 1934.

[67] "Russian and American Theatre."

[68] "Wayland Rudd 'Makes Good' as Actor in Soviet Country," *Chicago Defender*, 23 February 1935. Shakespeare was indeed undergoing a major revival in the Soviet Union, following critic Sergei Dimanov's declaration at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers: "We need Shakespeare like oxygen… Shakespeare was a fighter, who at the head of his class, cut his way into life. Our writers with a truly proletarian world outlook must study Shakespeare so our hatred can incinerate the enemies of the socialist motherland, so our love can be the purest, most tender and affectionate love, so our thoughts can storm the world and move humanity forward to the radiant future, which, for the first time, is becoming out present!" As quoted in Arkady Ostrovsky, "Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism," in Irene R. Makaryk and Joseph G. Price (eds.), *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 57. Ostrovsky discusses the Shakespeare revival in the 1930s, paying specific attention to the immense popularity of *Othello* in the Soviet Union.

defamiliarized the interracial romance between Othello and Desdemona and allowed him to see their relationship outside of the American frame of miscegenation. As he explained to an interviewer, "[T]he beautiful white heroine Desdemona becomes [in Russian] a living element in the life of Othello and not as an apparition, as she is in America because of a different ideology there which is opposed to as natural, wholesome, and intimate love as possible between the Blackamoor and the beautiful Venetian lady."[69] As literary scholar Kate Baldwin has noted of African American artists who travelled to Soviet Russia in the period, crossing linguistic and territorial borders enabled these racialized subjects to re-imagine their identities and to reconsider the naturalized assumptions of white supremacy.[70]

This staging of *Othello* featuring Rudd never came to be. Radlov instead cast Aleksandr Ostuzhov, an accomplished actor on the Soviet scene. It is possible that Rudd backed out after hearing Meyerhold's criticisms of Radlov's approach to Shakespeare.[71] More likely, Radlov had been attracted to the idea of casting a black actor as Othello, but was dissuaded by Rudd's performances in rehearsal. Later that same year, Meyerhold excluded Rudd from a revival of *Prelude*; the head of Meyerhold's acting school sarcastically explained that "he does not have a good command of Rash'n speech [*ne*

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[69] "Wayland Rudd 'Makes Good.'"

[70] See Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line*, esp. 1-24.

[71] Meyerhold's criticisms of Radlov and his 1935 production of *Othello* are described in David Zolotnitsky, *Sergei Radlov: The Shakespearian Fate of a Soviet Director* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995), 139-143.

*vladeiushchii khorosho rasskoi rech'iu*]."[72] Having returned to Moscow to find meaningful work on the stage, Rudd seemed locked out of the world of serious theater.

In 1936, the Meyerhold Theater lent out Rudd to work on a children's film adaptation of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Director Lazar Frenkel's vision for *Tom Sawyer* was an unambiguous indictment of white terror, bourgeois manners, and religion; in an exemplary display of interracial unity for Soviet children, Tom, Huck, and Jim (played by Rudd) united against and defeated these forces. Rudd's delivery, both spoken and sung, showed a marked improvement from *The Great Consoler*, but his character's emotional range was limited to alternating displays of fear and joy. Publicly, Rudd gave no indication of dissatisfaction with such work. In fact, in an unpublished article written during the filming of *Tom Sawyer*, he explained that he saw his work as an important part of the struggles against racism and fascism: "I am proud of my opportunity to contribute my bit to world revolution by working in Soviet films and acting on the Soviet stage."[73] Rudd had, however, tired of waiting for Meyerhold to find an appropriate role for him. In 1937, the actor began to write his own material and announced his intentions to direct.[74]

His first script, *An' David Played His Harp*, exhibited the flaws typical of artistic debuts. Bearing a dedication to "The Green Pastures"—a possible double-entendre

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[72] It is possible that the replacement of the 'u' with an 'a' in 'rasskoi rech'iu' is simply a typographical error. But given the context, it seems more likely that the author was mocking Rudd's mispronunciations. RGALI, 963/1/90.

[73] RGALI, 962/1/406.

[74] "Complete Soviet Film of 'Huckleberry Finn,'" *New York Amsterdam News*, 17 April 1937.

referring both to Rudd's new homeland and to the popular play and movie—the drama asserted the futility of black religion in the face of racial injustice in the American South. Black characters spoke in a poorly-rendered vernacular with a peculiar tendency to explicate the points demonstrated by the action of the play. After the white store owner cheated black workers, picker Mose commented, "Evah year hits de same! We works hahdah 'n gits fudder in debt! Evah year moah mouths t' feed an' less t' feed 'm wid! Dey lives in fine houses and buys autermobiles while we does de work an' starves!" "Maybe we oughtta listen to dat new white fohman," replied Mose's friend Sam, "He keep tellin' us we win't gonna git nowheahs till we o'ganizes an' fights foh our rights."[75] The play quickly worked to a climax in which Communist-sympathizing Sam was falsely accused of rape and lynched. In the final scenes, this murder was transformed into martyrdom, as the black workers realized that they must organize to protect themselves, as the church offered them no sanctuary from white racism. In the closing scene, a black preacher shouts the Lord's Prayer to the sole remaining member of his congregation, a "semi-deaf" woman holding an ear trumpet to her head. The play was never approved for performance, despite adherence to the conventions of socialist realism and incorporation of "folk" elements then popular in Soviet popular art.

Rudd's next effort as a playwright was *Andy Jones*, a script loosely based on *Let Me Live*, a recently published autobiography of black communist Angelo Herndon.[76] The

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[75] Wayland Rudd, *An' David Played His Harp*, RGALI 962/1/406.

[76] The first draft of the play was entitled "The Walls Come Tumblin' Down." The manuscript can be found in RGALI, 962/1/406. The Russian translation of *Andy Jones* [Endi Dzhons] can be found in RGALI, 652/5/419. An excerpt of the first scene was published in English. See Wayland Rudd,

work dramatized dangerous working conditions for miners, racial animus within white trade unions, and the ultimate, inevitable triumph of the Communist Party as the defender of racial equality. Though the work was self-evident agit-prop, Rudd had curbed some of the excesses of *An' David Played His Harp*. The awkward attempt to render a folksy southern accent was eliminated and a relaxed pacing allowed the plot to develop naturally. The characters, two dozen in total, were a mix of stock types and real figures: protagonist Andy Jones; his family, fellow workers, and bosses; local Ku Klux Klan *kleagle* (recruiting officer); leader of the local branch of the International Labor Defense (ILD); Ted Drummond, a writer clearly based on Theodore Dreiser; and, in the first draft of the play, both Paul Robeson and the famous dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. Combining details from the Herndon case with elements of the international Scottsboro defense campaign, the plot followed Andy as he evolved from a dissatisfied worker to a whistleblower, and finally, into an avowed Communist, persecuted for his beliefs but defended by the international working class. The spectacle of the finale was worthy of Meyerhold's imaginative stagings. In quick succession, the writer Drummond appealed to the governor to protect Andy from a lynch mob, Paul Robeson sang in a benefit concert, 'Bojangles' Robinson danced to drum up a collection, and Andy was freed.[77]

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"Andy Jones," *International Literature* (September 1938): 52-58. Herndon was a Communist Party member who was arrested and charged with inciting insurrection under a nineteenth-century law prohibiting slave revolts. Herndon was eventually released following a popular campaign on behalf of his legal campaign. See John Hammond Moore, "The Angelo Herndon Case, 1932-1937," *Phylon* 32:1 (1971): 60-71; Charles Martin, "Communists and Blacks: The ILD and the Angelo Herndon Case," *Journal of Negro History* 64:2 (1979): 131-141.

[77] The extravagancies of the script indicate the largesse that Rudd expected in Soviet-sponsored production. The only comparable black production of the time was *Stevedore*, staged in New York and London, starring Rex Ingram and Paul Robeson, respectively. (Presumably, Rudd would star in *Andy Jones*, as Robeson would be precluded from being cast as 'Andy' by the

This play was published in English, translated into Russian, and approved for performance. But it was never staged. The year was 1937 and another drama had taken precedence.

For better or for worse, Rudd would find a role in this political theater. Addressing fellow members of Meyerhold's company, Rudd denounced his director: "I saw Meyerhold's errors… I may mangle your language, but my eyes see well and my ears hear well…I love our collective, but there is something higher than theater. There is the world revolution that we aspire to."[78] Applause followed this declaration, giving Wayland Rudd a moment to pause before finishing his denunciation. After having waited five years for the director to cast him again, Rudd now turned on Meyerhold. The actor cast Meyerhold's failure to utilize his talents as evidence of the director's lack of revolutionary commitment. He recommended that the Meyerhold Theater be closed and the director allowed to work only under strict Party supervision. If Rudd had hoped that joining in this attack would curry favor with officials and pave the way to future productions of his work, he was mistaken. As the Purges paralyzed the Soviet

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presence of the minor character 'Paul Robeson.') The themes of Andy Jones, in fact, borrow heavily from *Stevedore*, and it is possible that Rudd had seen the 1934 New York production when he had returned to the US. According to one source, Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson, swept away by the action of the play, jumped from the audience onto the stage to help protect black dockworkers from attack, a possible inspiration for Robinson's appearance in the final scene of *Andy Jones*. Sheila Tully Boyle and Andrew Bunie, *Paul Robeson: The Years of Promise and Achievement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 329. It was not unusual for Rudd's work to borrow both from real life and from other plays. The first acts of *Andy Jones* borrow elements from *Bloodstream*, a Broadway show featuring an interracial cast, set in a coal mine. Rudd had a minor part in this play in 1931.

[78] RGALI, 963/1/70.

intelligentsia and drove foreign artists out of the country, there was little opportunity to stage, much less cast, a play like *Andy Jones*.[79]

**Homer Smith Reports from Black Moscow**

For readers of the black press, Homer Smith was their man in Moscow.[80] Throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s, Smith contributed regular columns to the *Chicago Defender* and Baltimore's *Afro-American*, with occasional pieces appearing in the *Pittsburgh Courier*.[81] "What had started me, a twenty-two year old American Negro, on the long road from Minneapolis to Moscow?" Homer Smith asked himself at the outset of his memoir *Black Man in Red Russia*, written in 1964.[82] Embedded in this simple query was the beginning of the author's dissimulations, as he knocked ten years off his age to fortify a narrative arc that spanned from the naïve adventures of a fledgling reporter to the somber reflections of a seasoned foreign correspondent.[83] While the

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[79] In early February 1939, Eugene Gordon, a black writer who had recently toured the Soviet Union, described the script of *Andy Jones* for readers of *Daily Worker*; an excerpt from the play was published, but no mention was made of productions of the work. "Negro Dramatist in the Soviet Union Adapts Play from Angelo Herndon's Book," *Daily Worker*, 1 February 1939.

[80] On the black press and world affairs, see Theodore Vincent (ed.), *Voices of a Black Nation: Political Journalism of the Harlem Renaissance* (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1973); Penny von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), esp. 7-21.

[81] According to Smith's Comintern file, his reports also appeared occasionally in newspapers in South Africa, the Gold Coast, and the Gambia. See Homer Smith, "Autobiography," 27 July 1936, RGASPI 495/261/5147.

[82] Homer Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, 1964), 1.

[83] Smith gives his birth year as 1898 in his Comintern autobiography. Smith's file with the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) also lists his birth year as 1898 or 1899. See FBI case file 100-343164, in author's possession. Thus, when Smith left for Moscow in 1932, he would have been at least thirty-two years old.

image of a young innocent abroad likely served Smith's purposes at the time of writing—he was then a stateless person seeking refuge in Cold War America after fourteen years in the Soviet Union—the memoir obscured the author's previous political commitments, connections, and the morally ambiguous elements of Smith's biography and black Moscow's history.

According to his autobiographical statement submitted to the Comintern in 1936, Homer Smith was born in 1899 just outside Natchez, Mississippi. At the age of sixteen, Smith took up work as a deckhand on steamer that travelled up and down the Mississippi River, before eventually settling in Minneapolis, where he found a position sorting mail.[84] The work was, according to Smith, "a safe, secure job for a Negro" and one of the few attractive employments available to literate African Americans.[85] The stable income afforded the young migrant the means to continue his education, enrolling in journalism courses at the University of Minnesota. He was soon writing an occasional column for the local *Twin City Herald*. With these achievements came both pride and frustration. By the end of his third decade of life, Homer Smith felt he had already exhausted all possibilities for advancement available to a black journalist.[86] Hence, when he learned of the possibility to travel to Moscow to participate in a film project, he enthusiastically volunteered, despite the warnings of his friends that the Soviet Union was "a land of slaves, morons, and poverty." Such misconceptions, Smith confided to the organizers of *Black and White*, were the result of "bourgeois ideology and capitalistic

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[84] Smith, "Autobiography."

[85] Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*, 1.

[86] Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*, 1-2.

press lies."[87] He intended to correct such falsehoods, declaring his intent to stay in Moscow sustaining himself with work at the post office while arranging to have a column on Russian life appear in black periodicals.[88]

The first of these reports appeared just one week after the arrival of the *Black and White* cast. Under the pseudonym Chatwood Hall, Smith detailed the actors' aborted attempt to organize a debate about the Scottsboro case while aboard the transatlantic steamer *Europa*.[89] A month later, Smith's regular dispatches from Moscow commenced. The inaugural report recorded crowds of thousands greeting the small group of black literati, an antilynching demonstration, and a generous banquet thrown to honor the esteemed visitors. Smith's summarized the groups' impression, "All of this was new, like a pleasant dream, like waking from a nightmare, like another planet to the darker Americans…Although they were on the same planet, it did not take these Colored Americans long to realize that they were in another world."[90] This juxtaposition of worlds—one dream, the other nightmare—became the dominant trope of Smith's journalism. A week later, Smith submitted "Negroes Find Selves Whiter than Russians," a signature column that consisted of a series of anecdotes about Moscow's new black inhabitants and their hosts. The group, still waiting for news of their script, went to a

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[87] Homer Smith to Louise Thompson (n.d.), box 16, folder 19, Louise Thompson Patterson Papers (LTP), Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

[88] These arrangements are discussed in Louise Thompson to Homer Smith, 18 May 1932, box 16, folder 19, LTP.

[89] "Captain of Ship Halts Debate on Scottsboro Case," *Chicago Defender*, 2 July 1932.

[90] "Where Bands of Music Welcomed 22 Black Americans to Russia," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 6 August 1932.

workers' resort on the outskirts of Moscow where they were met by a crowd of eager Russians. The locals unleashed a barrage of questions: Do they speak both English and 'the Negro language'? Why were they of such diverse skin tones? How is it possible that some of the group were lighter than the Russians but still considered 'black'? The questions elicited a 'galaxy of broad smiles' from the Americans, who tripped over themselves trying to explain the intricacies and contradictions of US racialism. The Russian workers stood bewildered by the answers, but ultimately they put the matter out of their minds and decided to go skinny-dipping with the group in a nearby river.[91] The convoluted racial ideology of Smith's nightmare world simply could not be made sense of in this uncomplicated egalitarian dreamworld.[92] The juxtaposition revealed the social construction of the ostensibly natural racial order in the US while simultaneously offering a compelling image of liberated existence in the idyllic commingling of nude black and white bodies.[93]

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[91] "Negroes Find Selves Whiter that Russians," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 13 August 1932. It is unclear whether Smith intended the intriguing double-entendre in the column's title. (That is, the title might be read to infer that the obfuscations of bourgeois ideology encumbered the African Americans with white notions absent in Russians.)

[92] On the related industrial dreamworlds of capitalism and communism, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000). Buck-Morss pays only passing attention to the importance of racial progress as a benchmark of Soviet modernity. For an alternate view, watch *The Circus* (1936), Grigorii Aleksandrov's celebration of Soviet modernity, centered on its multinational composition. Smith was also keen to the importance of race in evaluating the related, competing models of modernity. Reviewing an exhibit of political posters, the reporter noted: "In the scheme of things Communistic, the Negro occupies an important and strategic position…The capitalistic world received the greatest "panning," illustratively on record; and *in this 'panning,' the Negro was most prominent*." (Emphasis added.) "Reds in 7-Hour Parade Carry Negro Posters," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 10 December 1932.

As a regular columnist, Smith was not always able to meet the creative standard set by this early piece. But he repeatedly returned to the practice of pairing Soviet progress with American (and occasional European) backwardness to address a variety of concerns. While black farmers faced an agrarian crisis, Smith repeated proclamations of the agricultural advances being made in Ukraine and Central Asia.[94] Langston Hughes and Wayland Rudd were considered guests of honor in Moscow, but band leader Duke Ellington was unable to find a hotel room in London.[95] Colonial missionaries blessed the work of soldiers "shooting and bayoneting natives" in Africa, a hypocrisy eliminated in the Soviet Union where only the elderly bother with a church that had, according to Smith, supported anti-Jewish pogroms and turned a blind eye to their starving congregations.[96] His favorite hobby horse, however, was the near obsessive recounting of interracial romances between black men and Russian women. After noting that a number of local women had become particularly enamored with the 'sheiks from

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[93] A decade later, Langston Hughes perfected a similar mode of comic social criticism that juxtaposed working-class insight with the bourgeois befuddlement in his "Simple" stories. See Arthur Davis, "Jesse B. Semple: Negro American," *Phylon* 15:1 (1954): 21-28.

[94] "While American Farmers are Starving, Look at Moscow," *Chicago Defender*, 1 April 1933. Though Smith had heard rumors of widespread famine, he believed it was only affecting kulaks and former aristocrats. In fact, his article quotes a Ukrainian farmer's ominous observation that "the few remaining kulaks will soon be extinct." See also Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*, 16. The literature on the Soviet famine is expansive, but the standard introduction remains, Robert Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[95] "Race Prejudice Finds No Sanctuary in Russia," *Chicago Defender*, 4 March 1933; "A Column from Moscow," *Chicago Defender*, 23 September 1933.

[96] "Russian Museum Explains Why No Religion is Needed," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 17 February 1933; "Church in Russia Bet on the Wrong Horse," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 5 August 1933; "Russian Churches Filled Every Night, With Movie Crowds," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 21 April 1934.

Harlem,' Smith quipped, 'Is it the good or is it the evil which men do that lives after them?'[97] In an article detailing the diverse populations found on Moscow streets, the reporter noted, "a Russian woman citizen may freely select or go any place with any man of her choice, be he red, yellow, black or brown."[98] Should anyone interfere with her pursuits, they would meet "the heavy hand of the government."[99] In such stories, Smith left the juxtaposition implied. Black readers in the era of lynching needed no reminder of the paired nightmare.[100]

The Moscow portrayed by Smith offered not only protection from racial violence, but also belonging. While the small handful of black diasporics in a city of over three million did not merit their own census group, Smith's columns served as an unofficial accounting of past and present African presences in the city and throughout the union.[101] His readers learned of the small colony of black Abkhazians descended from Ottoman

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[97] "Race Prejudice Finds No Sanctuary."

[98] "Red Russia Wouldn't Permit Jim Crow," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 23 September 1933. See also "When a Black Man Calls on a Russian Girl," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 17 June 1933; "Red Soldier, Brown Woman in Russia—Matter of Course," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 19 August 1933; "Soviet Reds Rebuke Snooty Ofay Woman in Moscow," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 25 August 1934.

[99] "A Column from Moscow," *Chicago Defender*, 12 May 1934.

[100] Not all readers were taken with this particular *leitmotif* in Smith's Moscow reportage. "I am greatly interested in Russia and your articles, but for goodness sake, 'lay off' mentioning those Russian women," pleaded a female *Afro-American* reader. "All Brunettes are Considered Black-'Chorney' in Russia," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 7 October 1933.

[101] Information on Moscow's demographics can be found in Timothy Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1995), 247, 271. On census groups, see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 101-144.

slaves and of nineteenth-century poet Aleksandr Pushkin's African heritage.[102] When reporting on the thespian achievements of Wayland Rudd or Paul Robeson in Moscow, Smith reminded his audience of the great black Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge, the first to play *Othello* in Russia.[103] The contemporary scene was presented as bustling, as Smith chronicled the visits of black scholars, writers, concert singers, classical musicians, wrestlers, and circus performers. Lest working-class readers sense that the proletarian capital only welcomed the cultural elite, dispatches on black life in the factory and in the field were sporadically sprinkled into the mix of reportage. Weaving tales of these few dozen diasporics among stories of Central Asian, Caucasian, Chinese, Indian, and Slavic Muscovites, Smith drove home his point that together they formed "a human tapestry not to be even closely approached anywhere in the world, and *least of all in New York*."[104]

After his first three years in Moscow, Homer Smith could rightly declare that he had won on his gamble of relocating to a cold, distant city. Having made a name for

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[102] "Races Can Walk Together on Streets of Moscow," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 2 June 1934; "Race Families Not Rare Even in Soviet Russia," *Chicago Defender*, 1 September 1934; "Defender's Moscow Correspondent Gets Interview with Pushkin's Descendant," *Chicago Defender*, 2 May 1936.

[103] "Defender Foreign Correspondent Greets Robeson on his Arrival in Soviet Russia," *Chicago Defender*, 12 January 1935; "American Prepares to Follow in the Footsteps of Ira Aldridge," *Chicago Defender*, 23 Febraury 1935.

[104] "When a Black Man Calls on a Russian Girl," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 17 June 1933. (Emphasis added.) Smith was not alone in the journalistic effort to construct a black Moscow. Fellow *Black and White* actors Langston Hughes and Dorothy West both wrote essays and short stories depicting Moscow as a "Negro setting," in West's words. See Hughes, "Negroes in Moscow," *International Literature* No. 4 (1933): 78-81; Mary Christopher (Dorothy West), "Room in Red Square," *Challenge* (March 1934): 10-15; Mary Christopher (Dorothy West), "Russian Correspondence,"*Challenge* (September 1934): 14-20. Eslanda Robeson also planned to expand her series on Black Parisians (published in West's *Challenge*) to include Black Muscovite Oliver Golden. See her unpublished oral history of Golden in the Paul and Eslanda Robeson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

himself as a foreign correspondent, Smith decided not to renew his contract with the Soviet post office when it expired in 1935. Instead, he committed himself fulltime to research and writing. He had already declared his intention to join the Soviet Communist Party (VKP(b)) in late 1934, likely with the intention of securing a more important position that would require Party membership. But his application was postponed due to an on-going purge of the Party rolls following the assassination of popular Bolshevik leader Sergei Kirov.[105] On the recommendation of William L. Patterson, then leader of the American branch of the International Labor Defense (ILD), Smith was assigned, despite his lack of Party credentials, to a research position in the African Studies (*Afrikanistika*) section of KUTV.[106] In fact, Smith had already been attending meetings of the Africanist section of KUTV, reporting on them for readers of the black press, but masking the names of the clandestine Comintern organizations and personnel. In March 1935, Smith recounted the details of "an international group of interested persons" who met "just off Pushkin Square," divulging just enough information such that insiders could discern the parties involved. This group discussed British imperial policy, the native question in South Africa, and the actions of American businesses in Liberia.[107] The article represented the widening gamut of topics for his columns, just as his recitations of

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[105] 'Gomer Smit – Biograficheskaia spravka,' [Homer Smith – Biographical Reference] 4 July 1936, RGASPI 495/261/5147. While Smith makes no mention of his Party application in his memoir, he does confirm that he left the postal service for fulltime work as a reporter in 1935. See *Black Man in Red Russia*, 67.

[106] William Patterson to Cadre Section, 23 April 1935, RGASPI 495/261/5147. A brief overview of KUTV's African Studies section can be found in A. B. Davidson's history of Russian and Soviet *Afrikanistika*, *Moskovskaia Afrika* [Moscow's Africa] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo teatral'nogo institute im. Borisa Shchukina, 2003), esp. 46-57.

[107] "Status of Africa Discussed," *Chicago Defender*, 9 March 1935.

black visitors to the city were growing stale.[108] For anticolonialists within the Comintern, Smith's assignment to KUTV was also a boon, as their platforms and positions would now receive regular airing in the leading black newspapers of the day.[109]

After one year at KUTV, the Comintern's Cadre Department was effusive in its praise for Smith: "Politically developed and trained in Marxism, [Smith] differs greatly from other Negroes in Moscow (and in the USA) in that he is modest, affable, and businesslike."[110] In the summer of 1936, Smith was released from his work in the Africanist section of KUTV due to lack of funds.[111] But on the strength of his evaluations, he was promoted to work as a consulting reporter (*referent*) for NIANKP (Research Association for the Study of National and Colonial Problems), an advisory body in the Eastern Section of Executive Committee of the Communist International (IKKI). In addition to fulfilling his duties as a foreign correspondent for black newspapers, Smith was also called upon to give his opinions on colonial propaganda and to compose internal reports on the conditions of African Americans.[112]

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[108] The incisive conservative columnist George Schuyler upbraided Smith for his predictable politics and prose in "Views and Views," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 19 September 1936.

[109] For a sample of Smith's coverage of colonial questions, see "James Crow Bars S. Africans from Streets at Night," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 10 August 1935; "Natives Drawn Into Industry," *Chicago Defender*, 16 November 1935; "Italy's Use of Natives as Shock Troops Not New in African Wars," *Chicago Defender*, 23 November 1935; "Australia's Aboriginals Dying," *Chicago Defender*, 6 June 1936.

[110] "Gomer Smit – Biograficheskaia spravka."

[111] Endre Sik to Cadre Department, 5 June 1936, RGASPI 495/261/5147.

[112] "Kharakteristika," [Character Evaluation] 9 June 1943, RGASPI 495/261/5147; "Review of Work," circa 1936, RGASPI 534/3/1103. See also Homer Smith, *Status and Opportunities of Negroes*

Between his political connections with anticolonial activists in the Comintern and working the beat of ethnic cultural life in Moscow, the ambitious Smith had effectively positioned himself at the center of black Moscow. Unfortunately, the real-life Smith did not inhabit the idealized metropolis that journalistic persona Chatwood Hall had created on the sheets of the *Chicago Defender* and *Baltimore Afro-American*. In February 1937, Smith the heavy hand of the Soviet government came down on Smith, as he was reprimanded by the Comintern for personal indiscretions unbecoming a writer with his high profile.[113] Later that year he was taught a more severe lesson in the perils of power. As the Purges wore on, the Soviet government began to push foreign visitors out of the country. A group of black engineers had their residency permits abruptly confiscated and were told by officials to make plans to leave the country immediately. Surprised and unsure of what to do, the men turned to Smith for help negotiating the Soviet bureaucracy so that they could stay in their new adopted homeland. Smith took up their case but badly overplayed his hand with Comintern superiors when he threatened that failure to issue new residency permits would be taken as racial discrimination and that word of these cases had already leaked to outside sources—namely, the London-based former Communist George Padmore—where it would be used against the Soviets. The

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*in Russia* (New York: Education Department of Communist Party of New York, 1949). This pamphlet was an update of a project started by Smith in 1936.

[113] It was not unusual for foreign students and activists to be admonished for moral indiscretions such as public intoxication and sexual promiscuity. Smith's apology to William L. Patterson is striking for his careful avoidance of admitting guilt, or even naming his offense: "[N]either you nor anyone else will ever have to speak to me again about the matter, which, if it was [sic] true, was an exception and an error on my part and not proving the rule. But what I want and must have emphasized is that even that error and exception will not occur again." He concluded by stating his continued commitment to develop as "a revolutionary journalist and writer." Homer Smith to William L. Patterson, 13 February 1937, RGASPI 495/261/5147.

leadership snapped back that comrades should be happy to take up work in their own country, that criticism of the socialist fatherland was "vicious counter-revolutionary propaganda," and that if Padmore was informed, then *someone* was informing him. Smith was criticized for not immediately correcting his comrades' deviations and he was asked to provide character and political assessments for each engineer. While informing on the engineers, Smith was careful not to address the charge of spreading anti-Soviet propaganda, but he did label two of the specialists "anti-Soviet" and opportunistic.[114] They both returned to the United States, a propitious fate, in retrospect, for ostensible anti-Soviet opportunists during the Purges.

Smith could not follow them. In 1935, he had married a Soviet citizen, Maria Kotik, and it was unlikely that the Soviet government would grant her emigration. Even if Smith were willing to abandon her—as others had left their families—he most likely apprehended that he would not be allowed to leave. He knew too much and could inflict too much damage outside the country.[115] Accepting Soviet citizenship in 1939 (and renouncing his US citizenship), Smith continued his work as a foreign correspondent,

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[114] Sidney Bloomfield to Comrade Ryan, 12 Dec 1937, RGASPI 495/261/1380; Homer Smith to Comrade Ryan, 16 December 1937, RGASPI 495/261/1632. The five specialists involved were Bernard Powers, Welton Curry, Frank Faison, John Sutton, and George Tynes; they had all come to the Soviet Union in 1931as a group of agricultural specialists in a venture organized by Oliver Golden. Bernard Powers and Weldon Curry were the two men criticized by Smith.

[115] This was precisely the reason given for the arrest and murder of the only known African American victim of the Purges, Lovett Fort Whiteman. Like Smith, Fort Whiteman had been at the center of black life in Moscow, straddling the worlds of Comintern activists and cultural emissaries. Before his arrest, William L. Patterson accused him of: spreading counter-revolutionary propaganda among black Muscovites; possibly communicating criticisms of the Soviet Union to Padmore in London and socialist Grace Campbell in New York; and smuggling anti-Communist writings to the editor at the *Chicago Defender*. See Patterson to Randolph, 17 January 1936, RGASPI 495/261/1476; memorandum by William Patterson, 30 April 1936, RGASPI 495/261/1476. Each of these suspicions could have easily been transferred onto Smith.

though in a more subdued tone. As there were fewer foreigners and cultural events to cover, his columns turned to anti-Japanese and anti-German propaganda. When he tried his hand at writing a longer piece on African American literature and arts, the essay was declared "absolutely incorrect" and based on "an array of empty and harmful ideas." Foremost among his errors was the failure to appreciate the proletarian origins of Richard Wright, a fellow native son of Natchez who took up work sorting mail before launching into his career as a writer.[116] Smith was in no position to note the irony of this judgment.

**Conclusion**

Nor could Smith comment on the larger bitter irony of the moment. For two decades, activists had labored to establish Moscow as an exilic space for the production of antiracist and anticolonial politics and culture. Universities had been built, libraries accumulated, and foreign specialists developed. The achievements of the international Popular Front movements had broadened the reach of radicalism and emphasized the possibilities of inter-racial activism.[117] VOKS, the organization charged with organizing cultural exchanges, was inundated with correspondence from black social workers, educators, writers, and artists who wished to witness, if not participate in, the Soviet experiment. Just at the historical moment when the labors of Moscow's anticolonial internationalists would reap benefits, cosmopolitan Moscow vanished. The Comintern effectively ceased to operate following the Seventh World Congress in 1935, though it

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[116] "Kriticheskii otzyv o stat'e tov. Gomera Smita [Critical Review of Comrade Homer Smith's Article]," RGASPI 495/261/5147.

[117] Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Verso, 1996); Solomon, *The Cry was Unity*; Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*.

did not formally dissolve until 1943.[118] VOKS turned down a major opportunity to win over black supporters when it refused the request of W.E.B. Du Bois to make a study of Soviet minorities in 1936. Later the same year, the organization was given orders to destroy large parts of their immense foreign library.[119] KUTV closed its doors in 1938, stemming the steady stream of Asian and African students that had animated cosmopolitan Moscow since 1921.[120] Like revolutionaries before them, those who worked to build anticolonial Moscow must have felt that they had 'plowed the sea.' The dreams expressed by hybrid modern dances, amalgamationist love letters, scripts for antiracist plays, and decade-old news columns were henceforth forgotten or obscured. What had appeared to Homer Smith as "a different planet for darker Americans" turned out to have been only a passing comet.

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[118] E.H. Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern, 1930-1935* (New York: Pantheon, 1982).

[119] David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1943* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 405-406; GARF 5283/1a/321; David-Fox, "From Illusory 'Society,'" 32.

[120] N. N. Timofeeva, "Kommunisticheskii universitet trudiashchikhsia Vostoka (KUTV) v 1926-1938 gg. [Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in 1926-1938]," *Narody Azii i Afriki*, No. 5 (1979): 30-42.

# CONCLUSION

## The Fall of Anticolonial Moscow

> Their discussions were different than anything that Jim had ever heard. Whether they talked about peonage; about racial persecution and segregation; about the anti-imperialist movement in Asia, Africa, and the Americas; about the organization of Negro workers and farmers; about the attitude of the trade unions; about the building up of a Negro working class press, always through the sessions of the [American Negro Labor] Congress ran the thread of class solidarity—Negroes and whites, shoulder to shoulder, against the boss and for the organization of a free world under working-class control… One of the leaders of the Congress—Whiteman—brought the delegates to their feet.
>
> *Free Born* (1932)[1]

This singular passing reference to Lovett Fort Whiteman in Scott Nearing's heavy-handed dramatization of the political awakening of a black worker in 1925 Chicago was enough to catch the attention of the book's Russian translator. Writing the American representative of the Comintern in 1938, she asked whether Fort Whiteman and another ANLC official had "changed politically enough to warrant their names being omitted."[2] In the eyes of secret police (NKVD), Fort Whiteman had. Though he had been the leading African American Communist in the 1920s, Fort Whiteman's position had fallen as he had taken the wrong side in a factional dispute within the Party in the late 1920s. Due to his affection for life in Russia, however, he decided to stay in Moscow where he studied at Moscow State University and taught classes for the children of American engineers. By 1933, we can surmise that his enchantment with the Soviet Union was over, as he stopped paying his Party dues, perhaps owing to the failure of the

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[1] Scott Nearing, *Free Born: An Unpublishable Novel* (New York: Urquhart Press, 1932), 182.

[2] Mary Reed to CPUSA Representative (Comintern), 6 September 1938. RGASPI 515/1/1870.

*Black and White* film project.[3] By the end of the year, he had repeatedly asked American Party representatives in Moscow for permission to return home, but to no avail. Still smarting from Padmore's break from the Comintern, leaders feared that Fort Whiteman would only add fuel to the fire of Padmore's criticisms. Another year later, it seemed that Fort Whiteman snapped, suddenly taking his problems with the Party public while visiting delegations were in Moscow for the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. During a reading of a Langston Hughes story at the Foreign Workers Club, Smith criticized the current Party line (the "Black Belt" thesis), only to be shouted down by William L. Patterson. Based on Fort Whiteman's Comintern file, he must have become the subject of some scrutiny at this point, as his records brim with extracts from his mail and conversations with friends. "He has written to an acquaintance in the USA that there's nothing doing in the USSR, that it's impossible to live here," reported a censor. According to his mail and conversations with friends, the disenchanted Communist was also preparing two manuscripts that criticized Comintern work and the Black Belt thesis.[4] Other reports indicated that Fort Whiteman has said the recent Comintern Congress was "all empty talk" and that Stalin had been "meaningless figure during the Revolution."[5] He was also organizing meetings of the small group of Africans and African Americans in Moscow; such meetings had occurred since the late 1920s, but previously only for

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[3] Details from Lovett Fort Whiteman's personal file, RGASPI 495/261/1476. See also Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: Norton, 2008), 106-154. Gilmore's account of Whiteman's life is engaging, though her use of sources is somewhat haphazard.

[4] Report dated 3 December 1935, RGAPSI 495/261/1476.

[5] Report dated 13 January 1936, RGASPI 495/261/1476.

dinner and conversation. Fort Whiteman, perhaps finally finding his feet as an organizer, was turning them into political discussions and community-building exercises.[6]

By March 1936, it was suspected that Fort Whiteman was preparing to escape as he visited the American embassy for a new passport, though he never received one, due either to a bureaucratic mix-up or lack of cooperation by US officials. Already, Patterson had expressed his concerns about the deleterious influence Fort Whiteman had among black visitors to Moscow. On May Day 1936, he restated his position forcefully: "In my opinion, [Fort Whiteman] should be sent to work somewhere where contact with Negro comrades is impossible."[7] The statement was no idle declaration. In January 1936, Comintern Secretary Dmitri Manuilsky wrote to Nikolai Yezhov about his fears that the Soviet Union was being penetrated by "spies and saboteurs disguised as political émigrés and members of fraternal parties."[8] Many foreigners were asked to leave Moscow and far fewer were allowed to enter. Fort Whiteman was banished to Alma Aty, Kazakhstan at first. But as the murderous paranoia of the Purges grew, harsher penalties were levied upon suspected spies. In 1937, Lovett Fort Whiteman entered the Soviet prison camp system. He died from heart failure on 13 January 1939.[9]

Fort Whiteman's death was one of many among the anticolonialists in Moscow, though he was the only African American victim of the Purges. The most vulnerable

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[6] William L. Patterson to the Cadre Dept, 2 February 1936, RGASPI 495/261/1476.

[7] William L. Patterson, 1 May 1936, RGASPI 495/261/1476.

[8] As quoted in William Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates: The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 102.

[9] Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 153-154.

were those from countries were Communist Parties were illegal.[10] They faced persecution whether they remained or not. Moreover, nobody in Moscow feared that Japanese or British officials would protest missing subjects in the Soviet Union. Suspicions of Japanese and Japanese American emigrants predated the onset of the Terror in the Soviet Union to 1931, with the invasion of Manchuria. Even Sen Katayama's daughters came under investigation, though their father's name protected them from punishments. David Seizo Ogino—one of Katayama's "boys" in Moscow and, according to his Comintern file, one of Yasu Katayama's suitors—had been a star pupil at KUTV in the late 1920s and studied for a year at the Lenin School. But after graduation in 1931, he was held from returning to the United States on suspicions of espionage. He was told that since no legal methods could be found for his return, he would have to work in a Soviet factory indefinitely, "maybe for years, maybe for life," joked Party representative Clarence Hathaway.[11] Ogino protested that means could be found, if the Party were willing, and that their refusal to send him reflected "the underestimation of the serious situation [that] exists among the Orientals in the States." The remainder of the letter demonstrates the reasons he rose to the top of his KUTV section. He clearly outlined the importance of work among "Japanese immigrant masses," their living conditions, work life, and the prospects for organizing in Hawaii and California. He also noted that he would be well-prepared to work among other immigrant groups, including Mexicans, Filipinos, Chinese, and Indian workers. It was a convincing proposal, but, unbeknownst

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[10] Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 399. While Conquest is referring to European countries that had outlawed Communism, the dynamic holds true for Japan and India.

[11] Ogino to Anglo-American Secretariat, 18 December 1931, RGASPI 495/261/3479.

to Ogino, it was neither the time nor the place. According to Yasu Katayama's Comintern file, Ogino lived with her until 1933. In a 1938 interview with the secret police, she told them, "Then he was sent to America and what happened next, I don't know."[12] If Ogino did escape, he was one of the lucky few. Almost all of his fellow Japanese American KUTV students and other emigrants were killed.[13] Among the Indians, most of the Ghadarites were sent to India were they faced imprisonment; afterwards many occupied important positions in radical politics in India.

Among the African Americans, a small group of devout black Muscovites remained in the Soviet Union through the Purges. Homer Smith stayed through World War Two, sending home occasional dispatches criticizing German racism and applauding the color-blind Soviet Union. In 1946, he emigrated to Ethiopia and eventually returned to the United States, though he never regained his citizenship. Wayland Rudd finished his studies to become a stage director in 1940. Throughout the war, he toured the front lines, performing concerts for the Red Army.[14] *Black and White* cast member Lloyd Patterson worked alongside veteran black Communist Williana Burroughs as announcers for *Inoradio*, the radio station dedicated to foreign-language broadcasts. Both Patterson and Burroughs remained stalwart champions of the Soviet Union, despite the dissolution

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[12] 1938 Interview with Yasu Katayama, RGASPI 495/280/275.

[13] Tetsuro Kato, "The Japanese Victims of Stalinist Terror in the USSR," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 32 (2000): 1-13.

[14] 'Rudd Doesn't Think Huns Like his Trench-Singing', *Baltimore Afro-American*, 25 December 1943.

of anticolonial Moscow, diminishing material conditions, and baseless criticisms from superiors at *Inoradio* that they spoke English with an incomprehensible accent.[15]

Then there were those who returned to the United States, ready to carry out their work. As might be expected, many ascended the ranks of the CPUSA. William L. Patterson headed the International Labor Defense and was a major figure in the campaign to free the Scottsboro "boys." James Ford was run as the vice-presidential candidate for the CPUSA in 1932 and in 1936. Harry Haywood was considered the Party's expert on the "Negro question." Others faced considerable difficulties. When Sylvia Chen arrived in New York, she was curtly informed that, as an excluded subject, she would only be issued a six-month visa, her spouse's citizenship notwithstanding. This moment marked the beginning of a three-decade repressive campaign on the part of the US Departments of State and Justice to keep Chen out of the country.[16] She was not alone. As the stifling politics of the Cold War descended on America, few would refer to their time in Moscow, or if they did, it was couched in terms of youthful adventurism. Moreover, as demands for revolution and liberation were transformed into calls for civil rights, the relevance of their anticolonial Moscow years was unclear. Their time in Moscow was perhaps still recalled fondly among friends, but like so many other flashes of American radical history—it was but a vanishing moment.[17]

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[15] RGASPI 495/261/3497.

[16] See Chen's immigration file in '151.547', RG 59, NARA; Federal Bureau of Investigations File #100-30551, box 28, folder 1, Si-lan Chen Leyda Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University.

[17] This insight is borrowed from Marx, by way of Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States* (New York: Verso, 1991), 17.

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