



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *C.L.R. James and Italy's Conquest of Abyssinia*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/89997/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Hogsbjerg, CJ (2006) C.L.R. James and Italy's Conquest of Abyssinia. *Socialist History*, 28. pp. 17-36. ISSN 0969-4331

Reuse

Unless indicated otherwise, fulltext items are protected by copyright with all rights reserved. The copyright exception in section 29 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 allows the making of a single copy solely for the purpose of non-commercial research or private study within the limits of fair dealing. The publisher or other rights-holder may allow further reproduction and re-use of this version - refer to the White Rose Research Online record for this item. Where records identify the publisher as the copyright holder, users can verify any specific terms of use on the publisher's website.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

‘Ethiopia was the last piece of Africa left free. Mussolini decided that he wanted it. The League of Nations had sworn to defend it. Every Negro with a spark of pride knows what happened, and remembers it with justified bitterness.’ So wrote the late Trinidadian intellectual C.L.R. James in 1939, damning the idea that black people should support a war against Fascist ‘aggression’ waged by the ‘Democratic’ American and British Governments, ‘the very men who actively collaborated with Mussolini in destroying the last independent African state.’¹ Fascist Italy’s conquest of Ethiopia, or what was then Abyssinia, in 1935-6 provoked in James not just a feeling of ‘justified bitterness’ after the conflict, but outrage as Mussolini’s war plans became clear in early 1935. This article will look at James’s political response to the war while he was resident in Britain, but also the way in which it was shaped by his prior independent historical studies into the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1803. In 1938, James turned this research into the classic account of ‘the only successful slave revolt in history,’ *The Black Jacobins; Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*.² In a rare discussion of how James came to write this pioneering ‘history from below’, Stuart Hall argued that ‘what is riveting...is the way in which the historical work and the foregrounded political events are part of a kind of seamless web. They reinforce one another.’³ This article will try to elucidate a portion of this ‘seamless web’ by examining how Italy’s invasion and occupation of Abyssinia, just one ‘foregrounded political event’, ‘reinforced’ James’s understanding of the San Domingo revolution. However, for James, history was not just something to be written about, but something to be ‘made,’ and the article will also try to

demonstrate the extent to which James's developing interest in the San Domingo revolt helped 'reinforce' his political response to Mussolini's barbarism.

James first became interested in the Haitian revolution while teaching English and History in Trinidad in the 1920s. This was largely the result of his commitment to the growing movement for Trinidadian self-government, which had led James to look deeper into the pioneers of West Indian nationalism, such as John Jacob Thomas. Like himself, James discovered that Thomas was a schoolmaster 'without European or university education of any kind.' Yet in 1889, Thomas wrote a work titled *Fraudacity; West Indian Fables explained*, which demolished a bigoted attack on the West Indian people's capacity for self government, *The English in the West Indies* (1888), by the noted English academic, James Anthony Froude.⁴ James clearly felt inspired by Thomas's example. In the summer of 1931, James recalled that a 'distinguished scientist' at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture 'foolishly took it upon himself to write an article proving that Negroes were as a race inferior in intelligence to whites. I wasn't going to stand for that and in our little local magazine I tore him apart.'⁵ It was in this short article called 'The Intelligence of the Negro,' published in *The Beacon*, that James first wrote about Toussaint L'Ouverture.⁶ James now started 'reading everything' he could on the Haitian revolution, but he could find no books of 'serious historical value' while in Trinidad.⁷ He had been particularly angered by reading one 'very bad' biography of L'Ouverture - Percy Waxman's *The Black Napoleon* (1931). James thought 'what the goddam hell is this?' 'I was tired of hearing that the West Indians were oppressed, that we were black and miserable, that we had been brought from Africa, and that we were living there and that we were being exploited.'⁸ After travelling to England in 1932 to make his way as a

writer, James recalled 'I began to look for materials and found only the same shallow ones I had read in the Caribbean. I immediately began to import books from France which dealt seriously with this memorable event in French history.'⁹

However, despite his reading and studying, at this point James seems to have regarded this 'memorable' revolution as an inspiring event only in a general sense. That he felt it had little immediate relevance to the modern world can be seen from an article he wrote in 1933 on 'Slavery Today,' to mark the centenary of the passing of the Act of Parliament which officially abolished slavery in British colonies. In it, James passed over the struggles of the slaves themselves against bondage and was happy to give most of the credit for the abolition of slavery to British reformers, something he had no doubt been taught while a student at Queen's Royal College. He had been deeply impressed by a great-aunt who had once been a slave, and had 'often heard her speak of what slavery meant.' He described what her freedom meant to her, but did not mention the San Domingo revolt of 1791-1803 at all, even though it was undoubtedly central to securing that freedom. As he noted of the 1833 British Act of Parliament, for West Indians, 'our history begins with it. It is the year One of our calendar. Before that we had no history.'

Nevertheless, James was very concerned by what he had discovered about the state of slavery in the modern world. He pointed out that in 1833 there were 700,000 slaves worldwide, but that, one hundred years on, 'the shackled who have no future' amounted to more than five million. The commercial trade in these black slaves still continued, and 'all civilised countries must bear their share of blame,' indeed 'there are still thousands of slaves within the British Empire.'¹⁰ At this time James can perhaps be best described as a Fabian socialist.¹¹ He had joined the British Labour Party, and was on

the executive of the moderate League of Coloured Peoples. His proposals for abolishing the slavery that still existed in 1933 were timid, to say the least. 'We must get our own house in order. We owe that at least to the memory of Wilberforce and the other pioneers whose work we are celebrating today,' he wrote. James suggested that there was, fortunately, 'a weapon close to hand which can end the evil,' a Permanent Commission on Slavery at the League of Nations and so 'pressure must be brought to bear on the League' by the British Government. 'Public opinion, ten times more powerful now than in 1833, will do the rest.'¹²

Very soon however, James was to radically alter his perspective on how slavery could be abolished in the modern world. Central to this was James's profound and rapid orientation towards Marxism, a political transition not uncommon at that time, given the economic, political and ideological crisis engulfing global capitalism during the Great Depression. Having spent most of 1932 in Lancashire, James witnessed the impact of the slump on the local cotton industry and also met class-conscious workers in the town of Nelson, a 'Little Moscow', where he initially stayed. James was particularly gripped by reading Leon Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, which introduced him to Marxist theory. His strong sense of fair play then led him to read Stalin, then Lenin and Marx 'in order to trace back the quarrel', as he would later put it. James independently arrived at a commitment to Trotsky's ideas, though they flew in the face of the prevailing Left wing intellectual fashion for orthodox Communism.¹³ In the summer of 1933, after moving down to London, his developing ideas were soon challenged when he ran into his long lost childhood friend Malcolm Nurse. Nurse had now become 'George Padmore', the legendary leading black figure in the Communist International (Comintern). Padmore

was the head of the Profintern, the Red International of Labour Unions' International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (R.I.L.U. I.T.U.C.-N.W.). He edited their paper, *Negro Worker* and was the author of six pamphlets including *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (1931), which, like most things Padmore wrote, had been banned by colonial governments immediately.¹⁴ James heard Padmore speak about the mass struggles of black people across the world, but particularly in Africa. James recalls he was entranced because the Labour Party of which he was still officially a member of, oddly enough, never seemed to hold any meetings on the colonial question, let alone 'the coming revolution' in Africa.¹⁵

Hearing Padmore speak must have opened James's mind up to the potential of African people themselves to win their freedom. He later remembers, 'there was an exhibition of African art in 1933, I think the first one that had been held in Britain...I went because it was African, and because it was art, something new. I was about thirty-two years old and for the first time I began to realise that the African, the black man, had a face of his own. Up to that time I had believed that the proper face was the Graeco-Roman face. If a black man had that type of face he had a good face, and if he didn't, well, poor fellow, that was his bad luck...I went to this exhibition, I bought the catalogue, I bought some books.'¹⁶ James continued to educate himself politically through reading hard, while working as a cricket reporter for the *Manchester Guardian*. When the cricket season was over, James travelled to France to spend six months searching in the Paris archives for more material on the Haitian revolution.¹⁷ There he found many more exhibitions on African and black culture. As a result, by 1934 'I began to look at the West Indians whom I knew, look at people, and I began to see people in a way I had

never seen them before.’¹⁸ His reading of Marxism was also shaping the way he saw working class people in general, but it was not until he witnessed a spontaneous General Strike in Paris against the growing Fascist threat in February 1934 that he finally decided to seek out and join the Trotskyist movement. On his return to Britain, where Fascism in the form of Mosley’s B.U.F. was starting to take root, he eventually tracked down a tiny group of Trotskyists in London and threw himself into making propaganda for international socialism.¹⁹

The International African Friends of Abyssinia

Mussolini’s war plans and intentions to invade the East African state of Abyssinia became clear in early 1935, and it was James’s new found sense of black identity that spurred him to throw himself into organising solidarity with the Abyssinians. As Robert Weisbord has noted, ‘perhaps no single event in the twentieth century more clearly illuminated the nexus between diaspora blacks and continental blacks than the Italian-Ethiopian war.’ This was because of the collective memory of Ethiopia, with both ‘an impressive cultural tradition traceable to ancient Axum and a uniquely successful resistance to the European intrusion in Africa in the latter part of the nineteenth century.’²⁰ Together with Liberia, Abyssinia was one of the last areas of Africa free from European control, having heroically defeated Italy at the battle of Aduwa in 1896. However, Italy, particularly under Mussolini’s Fascist regime, had never lost the desire to take revenge and claim Abyssinia as one of its colonial possessions. Since 1932, Italian troops had been preparing for this and, as both Italy and Abyssinia were members of the

League of Nations, in January and March 1935, the East African state requested the League act to stop the looming illegal war of aggression.²¹

Through the League of Coloured Peoples, James had met Amy Ashwood Garvey, the former wife of Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican born pan-Africanist and founder of the Back to Africa movement. Together with him, she had been a founding member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association.²² She now also lived in London, and co-owned the Florence Mills Night Club, a ‘haunt of black intellectuals.’²³ James remembered that they both ‘felt that there ought to be an opposition’ to Mussolini’s war, and that Amy Garvey had ‘a unique capacity to concentrate all the forces available and needed for the matter in hand.’²⁴ Together they revived an ad-hoc committee formed in 1934 to aid the Gold Coast Aborigines’ Rights’ Protection Society deputation to England, and united it with a former Communist front group, the Council for Promoting Equality and Civil Rights between White and Coloured People.²⁵ James became Chair of the resulting International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA).²⁶

James was now faced with the need to reconcile his frantic political activity with his professional work, serenely reporting cricket for the Manchester Guardian. On Monday 29 July 1935, readers of the Manchester Guardian might have read James’s report on the match between Hampshire and Lancashire at Southampton played the Saturday before. ‘The dullness of the innings was enlivened by music from a loudspeaker, a brass band, singing, and periodical discharges from a gun’. While ‘it sounded far more exciting than the cricket...the gunfire next door continued with no regard for the batsman’s concentration,’ nearly leading one Lancashire batsman to be dismissed in an untimely fashion. James discovered that the gunfire came from the

stadium adjacent, where ‘the local Conservative party made demonstration’, and so they had been interrupted from their cricket by what James called a ‘political diversion’. ‘Cricket,’ James noted wryly, ‘should be kept well away from politics.’ However, ten pages on, keen readers of that Monday’s Guardian might have spotted a report of the launch meeting of the IAFA that took place the night before, on Sunday 28th July, in Farringdon Memorial Hall, London. In that report, one ‘C.L.R James’, their beloved cricket reporter, apparently ‘gave a lucid history of the European treaties with Abyssinia’ and declared that ‘Abyssinia is a symbol of all that Africa was and may be again, and we look on it with a jealous pride.’²⁷ Of course, by Monday, James himself was back in Southampton to report on the continuing match between Hampshire and Lancashire.²⁸

In fact it seems that James had suffered from a ‘cricket diversion’ during that IAFA launch meeting. Possibly still thinking about Lancashire’s batting, he remembers ‘I got myself into a blunder. Being a Marxist I was naturally opposed to the League of Nations, but in the excitement of forming the organisation we passed a resolution demanding...that the League of Nations take steps against the Italian Government.’²⁹ That such a proposal was passed is not surprising, given the faith in ‘collective security’ among not just the Abyssinian Government and British Labour Party, but among many of the British people at that time. As James recalled, ‘Lord Robert Cecil, a League of Nations maniac, instituted a private poll. It gathered over eleven million votes for collective security and over six million for an armed League of Nations.’³⁰ When the results of this ‘Peace Ballot’ were published in late June 1935, it showed that many people in Britain were deeply unhappy at the Tory National Government’s foreign policy and the prospect of another war. In less than a month, pragmatically thinking of British

colonial possessions in East Africa, the new Tory Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin took the opportunity to dramatically steal the wind from Labour's sails, claiming that 'collective security' through the League was now 'the sheet-anchor of British policy.'³¹ James noted 'there were certain political elements who were extremely glad that our organisation, which was pretty widely known among the limited circles who were interested in these matters, could be included among those who were urging the intervention of the League of Nations.'³²

Yet it is doubtful that the Tory National Government or Labour opposition would have been able to cite the IAFA as supporting their position for long. Indeed James remembered 'most of us who were in the organisation and who were supporting it, had a conception of politics very remote from debates and resolutions of the League. We wanted to form a military organisation which would go to fight with the Abyssinians against the Italians. I think I can say here with confidence that it would have been comparatively easy to organise a detachment of blacks in Britain to go to Ethiopia.'³³ Many black people felt that Abyssinia was, in the words of IAFA member Ras Makonnen, 'the black man's last citadel.' Makonnen recalled that 'letters simply poured into our office from blacks on three continents asking where they could register.'³⁴ On 1 August 1935, British Foreign Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare argued that if Italy invaded Abyssinia it would 'inevitably lead' to 'the formidable unsettlement of the great coloured races of the world.'³⁵ James's IAFA were determined to do their bit to prove him correct. Their attempt to form an 'International Brigade' to fight Fascism created, James remembered, 'something of a political stir at the time.'³⁶ Sadly, the hopes of the IAFA were dashed by the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870. This forbade British subjects to

join forces of countries – in this case Italy and Ethiopia – which maintained friendly relations with Britain.³⁷

That an established cricket journalist like James, who had no military experience, should be willing to risk death fighting in Abyssinia requires additional explanation. Robin D. G. Kelley has argued that for James, ‘as a Black man who probably felt a tinge of pride in Ethiopia’s legacy, and whose admiration for Africa ran much deeper than anti-imperialism, he felt obligated to defend the place of his ancestors.’³⁸ There is undoubtedly something in this, as James indicated in a letter to his comrades in the Independent Labour Party, published on 3 June 1936 in the *New Leader*. He hoped to join the Abyssinian army to make contact with ‘the masses of the Abyssinians and other Africans’. ‘I did not intend to spend the rest of my life in Abyssinia, but, all things considered, I thought, and I still think, that two or three years there, given the fact that I am a Negro and am especially interested in the African revolution, was well worth the attempt.’³⁹

However, the letter also gives an indication of how James’s desire to fight in Abyssinia reflected in part his study of what he would later call the victorious Haitian ‘revolution for national independence... a people’s war.’⁴⁰ In the Abyssinian army, James felt ‘I would have had an invaluable opportunity of gaining actual military experience on the African field where one of the most savage battles between Capitalism and its opponents is going to be fought before very many years.’ He reveals a keen sense of some of the strategy and tactics needed for victory, noting that ‘I believed also that I could have been useful in helping to organise the anti-Fascist propaganda among the Italian troops.’ He felt that an uncompromising national liberation struggle would be

won through guerrilla war. 'As long as the Emperor was fighting Imperialism I would have done the best I could'. However, James also reflected that if the Emperor surrendered, 'I would have identified myself with those bands, hundreds of thousands of them, who are still fighting, and for years are going to carry on the fight against Imperialistic domination of any kind.'⁴¹

Could James's research have inspired him to seriously consider the possibility that history could repeat itself, that the Abyssinians could humiliate the vastly more militarily powerful European forces as the slaves on San Domingo had? After all, the slaves in San Domingo had been 'two-thirds raw Africans from the Guinea Coast in a strange country, many of them not knowing the language.'⁴² Yet the process of revolutionary war saw these 'half-a-million slaves...trembling in hundreds before a single white man' become transformed into 'a people able to organise themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day.'⁴³ Abyssinia had a black population of six million, fully twelve times that of San Domingo, which included a slave population of 'upward of two million.' Moreover, unlike the slaves of San Domingo, these slaves were not strangers in a foreign land and 'every male slave is trained as a soldier.'⁴⁴ James knew that the Abyssinians were 'splendid fighters' who having foiled British, French and most memorably Italian imperialism for almost forty years were not now, he felt, going to 'tremble' before 'a single white man' like Mussolini, however powerful.⁴⁵

There were other parallels that James undoubtedly noticed. San Domingo, with its 'mountain ranges', (on Independence it took the name Haiti from 'Ayiti,' the Indian word for mountains) was similar in terrain to Abyssinia which was 'a high plateau,

strategically very powerful'.⁴⁶ The stage was surely set for what James hoped would be 'one of the most savage battles between Capitalism and its opponents', and he was determined to help the slaves liberate themselves from 'Imperialistic domination of any kind'. In *The Black Jacobins*, James described just why the slave revolt on San Domingo was so relevant. 'For self-sacrifice and heroism, the men, women and children who drove out the French stand second to no fighters for independence in any place or time. And the reason was simple. They had seen at last that without independence they could not maintain their liberty, and liberty was far more concrete for former slaves than the elusive forms of political democracy in France.'⁴⁷ Toussaint's achievement had been to help the slaves liberate themselves, and in the process transform themselves into an army capable of defeating the finest armies of that period.

James was prepared to use his study of Toussaint L'Ouverture's military strategy and tactics in the coming war. When the odds were against him in the fight against Napoleon's army, L'Ouverture had led a ruthless guerilla war. As James described in *The Black Jacobins*, 'Toussaint, with half his 18,000 troops in the ranks of the enemy, could only delay and harass the advance, devastate the country and deprive Leclerc of supplies, while retiring slowly to the mountains...he would raid Leclerc's outposts, make surprise attacks, lay ambushes, give the French no peace, while avoiding major engagements. With the coming of the rains, the French, worn out, would fall victims in thousands to the fever, and the blacks would descend and drive them into the sea.'⁴⁸ Taking the example of the slaves on San Domingo as a guide to action, James argued that the Abyssinians should also employ a 'scorched earth' policy if necessary. As James argued at a public meeting of the IAFA on 16 August 1935, if the Abyssinians were

defeated in the coming conflict, 'we look to them to destroy their country rather than hand it over to the invader. Let them burn down Addis Ababa, let them poison their wells and water holes, let them destroy every blade of vegetation.'⁴⁹ It is not surprising that by this time, after a few months of activity for the IAFA, James had turned his notes on the San Domingo revolt into a script for a play about its leader, Toussaint *L'Ouverture*.⁵⁰

Marie Seton, a journalist and friend of James brought the play to the attention of the Stage Society, 'a very exclusive society which had given first performances of Bernard Shaw and many other playwrights who became world famous.'⁵¹ Their precondition for performing James's play was that Paul Robeson, the famous black African-American singer and actor, who was currently living in London should play Toussaint. James had already met Robeson, who would often take his son to watch cricket matches at Lords, at various parties, and they had both been supporters of the League of Coloured Peoples.⁵² However, Robeson's busy work commitments, and his growing commitment to the Communist International (which involved frequent trips to the Soviet Union) meant regular contact was impossible. Eventually, however James 'ran him down at some party, told him about it and he agreed to read the script. He read it and with great simplicity and directness said, yes, he would be ready to play the role: there were not too many parts in those days which gave a black actor, however distinguished, a role that lifted him above the servants' quarters.'⁵³ Robeson in fact had already had five offers to star in various plays about the Haitian revolution, and had even been planning to make a film, *Black Majesty*, with the Soviet film-maker Sergei Eisenstein. However, by 1935 Eisenstein was under censure by Stalin's regime and the

project fell through. Perhaps that was an additional factor why Robeson, on the verge of going to the United States to film *Showboat*, promised to star in James's play on his return.⁵⁴

War and the continuation of politics by other means

Whatever James's hopes for a repeat of the Haitian revolution in Abyssinia, the war proved to be completely different when it began in October 1935. The Haitian slave rebellion lasted twelve years and was, as James noted, 'one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement'.⁵⁵ Yet largely thanks to advanced military technology, particularly aircraft, Italy's colonial conquest of Abyssinia was effectively over in only six months. However much heroic resistance they mounted to the Italian invasion, without international aid and modern arms, the odds facing the Abyssinians were insurmountable. Signor Vittorio Mussolini, an Italian flying officer, has described the ruthlessness with which the Italians exploited their overwhelming military superiority. 'I dropped an aerial torpedo in the centre of the group [of Ethiopian horsemen] and the group spread out like a flowery rose...about fifty brigands had a taste of our splinters. It was most entertaining work and had a tragic but beautiful effect.'⁵⁶ While rebels did retreat to the mountains to conduct a guerrilla war, the Italians used poison gas bombs extensively to terrorise the rest of the population, even targeting the Red Cross, hospitals and other civilian targets.⁵⁷

This is not the place to go through James's tremendous efforts to raise the question of the Abyssinians in Britain while the war was going on. As a member of the

ILP, James wrote searing articles in their weekly paper, the New Leader, and went on an extensive speaking tour which took him for the first time to Wales, Scotland, Ireland.⁵⁸ He urged support for ‘workers’ sanctions’, whereby industrial action would be taken to stop war materials going to Italy. An article entitled ‘Abyssinia and the Imperialists’ that James wrote in early 1936 for the League of Coloured People’s journal, The Keys, gives a sense of what Abyssinia meant to him. ‘Africans and people of African descent, especially those who have been poisoned by British imperialist education, needed a lesson. They have got it.’ The article noted that ‘the issue before us today is obscured by the mountain of lies and nonsense which are being wrapped around it’, notably the notion of ‘collective security’ which the existence of the League of Nations conjured up. James cut through the idea that the world’s two greatest imperialist powers, Britain and France, were motivated by the ideals of the League of Nations and their expressed desire to uphold ‘the independence of Abyssinia’. In fact, he argued, ‘these European imperialists have been after Abyssinia for years’ and now ‘every succeeding day shows exactly the real motives which move imperialism in its contact with Africa, shows the incredible savagery and duplicity of European imperialism in its quest for markets and raw materials’. Their duplicity was seen in the weak sanctions the League of Nations had belatedly imposed on Italy, and in the Hoare-Laval Pact of December 1935, which saw the British and French Governments once again bypass the League to offer Mussolini most of Abyssinia under a ‘peace’ deal. James stressed that ‘the only thing to save Abyssinia is the efforts of the Abyssinians themselves’, together with international solidarity. James called for ‘action by the great masses of Negroes and sympathetic whites and Indians all over the world, by demonstrations, public meetings, resolutions,

financial assistance to Abyssinia, strikes against the export of all material to Italy, refusal to unload Italian ships, etc.’⁵⁹

Following the negotiations between Italy, Britain and France over the colonial division of Abyssinia could only have strengthened James’s understanding of the economic impulse behind the colonial rivalry of Britain, France and Spain for San Domingo. In February 1936 James took a break from intensive touring and speaking, and spent March making revolutionary propaganda against Imperialism using the medium of radical theatre. Just how much the Abyssinian war had deepened James’s understanding of the San Domingo revolution can be seen by an examination of his play, *Toussaint L’Ouverture*, which was shown in two performances on 15 and 16 March 1936 at the Westminster Theatre in London. As James noted in March 1936, when the French Revolution broke out in 1789, the French portion of San Domingo was ‘the richest and most valuable colony in the world. Thirty thousand whites and a similar number of mulattoes controlled the production of vast wealth by the ruthless exploitation of half a million slaves.’⁶⁰ Its sugar industry, as he was to note in *The Black Jacobins*, made it ‘an integral part of the economic life of the age, the greatest colony in the world, the pride of France, and the envy of every other imperialist nation.’⁶¹

In *Toussaint L’Ouverture*, James highlighted how all the Governments of the European colonial powers had the same interests in common. The words he put in the mouth of British General Maitland, when in private conversation with a representative of the French Government, are typical. ‘I have spoken, not as an Englishman, not as an enemy of France, but as a white man and a representative of a colonial power with the same intentions as yours. As long as General Toussaint continues the way he is going,

the prestige of the European in these colonies is in grave danger. And we rule as much by prestige as by arms. See what he calls himself now, “Louverture,” opener of a way for his people. At whose expense?’⁶² The deserts of Abyssinia were a far less glittering prize, but imperial pride and power were still at stake for Italy, France and Britain.

James also satirised the duplicity of imperial diplomats. Perhaps thinking of how the British and French Governments had promised to safeguard the Abyssinian’s independence while in private colluding with Mussolini, James now attacked the American Government’s ‘non-intervention’ in respect to San Domingo. When discussing the British Government’s wish to return to San Domingo and re-establish slavery when the time was right, the American Consul, Lear, stresses ‘my Government is not interested in colonial complications, gentlemen...it is trade my Government is interested in. If a substantial amount of trade can be provided to our men of business in New York then you can be sure my Government will look with sympathy upon any measures you may take to guarantee the dominance of the white race.’ Lear agrees with Maitland’s observation to him that, ‘you know, Consul, in dealing with Orientals and men of colour, white men can never have the full confidence that we can have in another, for instance.’ Yet by way of a joke, once it is clear that Toussaint is too strong for the re-imposition of slavery to be viable in the short term, Lear turns to Toussaint himself. ‘My Government is not interested in the rivalry of colonial powers...all that we ask for is a fair share of the trade of San Domingo. If a substantial portion of that trade can be diverted from France to us, then you can be sure that my Government will look with sympathy upon any measures you may take to guarantee the independence of the blacks.’⁶³

The ideology of ‘humanitarianism’, with a promise to liberate the slaves of Abyssinia, was used alongside open racism by Mussolini to justify his conquest. Fascist Italy’s claims to be on a ‘civilising mission’ were given serious considered attention in Britain, and Lord Hardinge of Penhurst described the Abyssinians as ‘a savage and barbarous enemy.’ Lord Stanhope, Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, told a Foreign Office official that it would be wrong to sell the Abyssinians arms as that ‘would be going back on the White Man everywhere.’ On 15 July 1935 the Daily Mail asserted that ‘in this war which now seems inevitable’ the British people’s ‘sympathy is wholly with the cause of the white races, which Italy is so finely upholding’. The Mail’s Foreign Editor Ward Price went further, declaring Mussolini a ‘genius’ and warning that if we opposed Italy’s expansion ‘to one of the last and most backward of independent nation states, we should be hindering the progress of civilisation.’⁶⁴ The consequences of an Abyssinian victory were too alarming to consider. The Earl of Manfield feared that ‘should Italy lose, it would be at once a great encouragement to all that stands for mischief and sedition among the coloured races of the world.’⁶⁵ Racism was not new and, as James noted, had first developed in order to ‘justify the abominable cruelties’ the ruling colonists of the eighteenth century slave plantations practised. In *The Black Jacobins*, James quoted a memoir of one colonial Governor published in 1789 which noted ‘the Negroes are unjust, cruel, barbarous, half-human, treacherous, deceitful, thieves, drunkards, proud, lazy, unclean, shameless, jealous to fury, and cowards.’⁶⁶ In his play, James attributed racist statements to representatives of the British, French and American Governments as a matter of course.

Yet the play was also an attempt to highlight how the Haitian revolution had been victorious, and to drive the lessons he had learnt from the Abyssinian experience home. Many people had put their faith in the League of Nations, yet the ‘collective security’ of Britain, France and Russia had done nothing to safeguard Abyssinia. As Weisbord has noted, ‘regrettably, the black world had the will but not the power to stem the tide of fascist aggression. Perhaps the greater tragedy is that the white world which had the power lacked the will.’⁶⁷ Leaving the major imperialist powers aside, the betrayal of Abyssinia by Stalinist Russia, since 1934, a member of the League of Nations, was particularly striking. As war loomed in 1935, Trotsky observed that it was ‘an irony of history’ that ‘in the international arena, the government of the Soviet Union has become a conservative power. It is for the status quo, against change. But it has not lifted a finger for the status quo in Ethiopia.’⁶⁸ In fact, come war the Soviet Union did lift a finger, but only to tell the Abyssinians where they could go. The economic interests of the Russian oil industry came before any notion of calling for international working class action. As Trotsky later remarked, while Litvinov ‘expressed his gratitude to the diplomats of France and England for their efforts “in behalf of peace”, efforts which so auspiciously resulted in the annihilation of Abyssinia, oil from the Caucasus continued to nourish the Italian fleet.’⁶⁹

The defeat of Abyssinia, thanks in no small part to this betrayal, now brought home graphically to James the significance and importance of the Great French Revolution in general, and the Jacobins in particular, to the ultimate victory of the San Domingo slaves. The slave revolt on Haiti had been inextricably intertwined with another revolution, in France. Mild reforms to the slave system yielded in the first years of the

French Revolution by the Assembly in Paris created the necessary space for the revolt on San Domingo in 1791. The slave rebellion in turn encouraged radicals in France to smash the power of the slave owning 'aristocrats of the skin' altogether. From then on, as James put it in *The Black Jacobins*, 'to all the blacks, revolutionary France, which had decreed equality and the abolition of slavery, was a beacon...France was to them indeed the mother country.'⁷⁰ Many black anti-imperialist activists had, like Padmore and Kenyatta, taken 'Mother Russia' to their hearts in such a fashion, but when the news that Soviet Russia had sold oil to Fascist Italy broke, many broke with Stalinism overnight. George Padmore, who had resigned his posts at the Comintern in 1934 described what happened to the Communist controlled League Against Imperialism, which was effectively killed as an organisation. 'The few Africans in London who were associated with the League through affiliated membership of the Negro Improvement Association, headed by Arnold Ward, a West Indian, severed their association with the Communists and helped to form the International African Friends of Abyssinia.'⁷¹

There could be no better audience for James's play *Toussaint L'Ouverture* than those black revolutionary activists who had just had their faith in Stalin's Russia shattered. Many of them were so disgusted at the betrayal that they began to retreat from revolutionary politics altogether, and fell into simply lobbying and placing demands on the British Government.⁷² James used his play about Toussaint L'Ouverture to counteract this tendency. As he wrote of Toussaint in *The Black Jacobins*, 'in nothing does his genius stand out so much as refusing to trust the liberation of the blacks to the promises of French and British Imperialism.'⁷³ Indeed, 'it is easier to find decency, gratitude, justice, and humanity in a cage of starving tigers than in the councils of

imperialism, whether in the cabinets of Pitt or Bonaparte, of Baldwin, Laval or Blum.⁷⁴ In the play, Dessalines warns Toussaint of the imperialists' hidden agendas. 'Toussaint, you are too soft with these people. You will pay for it one day. Land for plantations – and slaves to work. That is their word, that is their God, that is their education, that is their religion...Don't trust the French. Don't trust the English. Don't trust the Americans. Trust the people. For freedom they will fight to the end.'⁷⁵

That line was delivered to Paul Robeson, playing Toussaint L'Ouverture. Robert Hill contends that The Black Jacobins would have been 'significantly different in quality in the absence of James's relationship to Robeson.' This was because 'at a very profound and fundamental level, Robeson as a man shattered James's colonial conception of the Black Physique...the magnificent stature of Robeson gave to him a new appreciation of the powerful and extraordinary capabilities which the African possessed, in both head and body.'⁷⁶ However, just as important, perhaps, was the way in which Robeson helped James understand Toussaint L'Ouverture's devout loyalty to the leaders of the French revolution. James now wondered at Robeson's 'complete commitment to the idea that something that was organised in Moscow and that came from Moscow was the only thing that could change the lives of black people in the United States.'⁷⁷ Part of the point of writing the play for James was to stress that when the French Revolution went down, Toussaint did not have the political independence to avoid going down with it. As he put it in The Black Jacobins, Toussaint's 'allegiance to the French revolution and all it opened up for mankind in general and the people of San Domingo in particular, this had made him what he was. But in the end this ruined him.'⁷⁸

The play itself put the black slaves' struggle centre stage in the liberation of Haiti. The *New Statesman* noted that James 'brings out effectively, though without exaggeration, the nobility of Toussaint's character and the treachery of the white men.'⁷⁹ However, Paul Robeson was the real star, both off and on the stage. Though the play was produced by Peter Godfrey, James remembers 'at times Godfrey was occupied and as the author I had to rehearse the cast. It was during those days that I had a good look at Paul and got to know him well.' Robeson, James felt, was 'that extraordinary combination of immense power enclosed in a pervading gentleness' and, despite his acting experience, was 'always ready to listen and to oblige'. The weeks in rehearsal with Robeson, who James later regarded as 'the most remarkable human being I have ever met,' must have been one of the happiest times of James's life up to that point.⁸⁰ James remembers Robeson's 'physique and the voice, the spirit behind him' ensured that 'the moment he came onto the stage, the whole damn thing changed.' James even revised the play to let Robeson sing.⁸¹ The *New Leader* noted that *Toussaint L'Ouverture* 'succeeds in convincing the audience that an Empire is nothing of which any white civilisation can be proud.'⁸² Unfortunately, it was not shown in Italy where Mussolini was succeeding in convincing his people of the advantages of Imperialism. Nor was it a topic Hollywood was keen to finance, despite Robeson's best efforts to turn the play into a film.⁸³

Italy's war on Abyssinia made a deep impact on James's political development, and on how he came to conceptualise the San Domingo revolution. One consequence of the Abyssinian war was to make another European war more likely than ever, as a more confident Fascist Italy drew closer to a rearming and aggressive Nazi Germany. Yet James knew that the First World War had led to revolution, and he remained optimistic

that another war would end in socialist revolution in Europe and colonial revolution internationally. His work with the IAFA, and the Pan-African movement more broadly, meant that by the time he settled down to write *The Black Jacobins*, he 'had reached the conclusion that the centre of the Black revolution was Africa, not the Caribbean.'⁸⁴ As James's *Toussaint L'Ouverture* argued in the play, 'what the future holds for us I don't know. These whites are stronger than us, but they fight so much with one another that we can have hope for the future...we shall establish a base in Africa and from there fight the slave trade, that curse and degradation of our people.'⁸⁵ *The Black Jacobins* was just as defiant. 'The imperialists envisage an eternity of African exploitation: the African is backward, ignorant...They dream dreams.'⁸⁶ After the defeat of Abyssinia, James's invocation of the spectre of the great Haitian revolution, according to Paul Foot 'perhaps the most glorious victory of the oppressed over their oppressors in all history,' was needed more than ever.⁸⁷ It was a timely reminder that while Mussolini's troops may have won that battle, in the war for their liberation from colonialism, it was the workers and peasants of Africa who, in Aime Césaire's words, really stood 'at the rendezvous of victory.' One wonders if the same could be said for those countries, and for Haiti itself, under American military and economic domination today.

Notes

¹ J.R. Johnson, 'Why Negroes should oppose the war' in C.L.R. James, and others, *Fighting Racism in World War II*, (New York, 1990), p. 29-30. Johnson was one of James's pseudonyms, and the article appeared in *Socialist Appeal* in ten parts during September to October 1939.

² C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, (London, 2001), p. xviii.

³ Hall, 'Breaking Bread with History; C.L.R. James and *The Black Jacobins*', *History Workshop Journal*, 46, (1998), p. 21.

-
- ⁴ C.L.R. James, 'The West Indian Intellectual', in J. J. Thomas, *Fraudacity; West Indian Fables explained*, (London, 1969), p. 26.
- ⁵ C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, (London, 1990), p. 117. The offending article was by Sidney Harland and entitled 'Race Admixture' and it appeared in *The Beacon* in July 1931.
- ⁶ Anthony Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom; The Early Political Thought of C.L.R. James*, (London, 1997), p. 21.
- ⁷ M.A.R.H.O., (ed.), *Visions of History*, (Manchester, 1984), p. 267. James, *Black Jacobins*, p. xv.
- ⁸ M.A.R.H.O., (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 267. Stuart Hall, 'A Conversation with C.L.R. James', in Grant Farred, (ed.), *Rethinking C.L.R. James*, (Oxford, 1996), p. 21.
- ⁹ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. xv.
- ¹⁰ C.L.R. James, 'Slavery Today: A Shocking Exposure', *Tit-Bits*, 5 August 1933.
- ¹¹ Kent Worcester has noted James embraced Fabian political values as part of his intellectual evolution. See Kent Worcester, "'A Victorian with the rebel seed': C.L.R. James and the politics of intellectual engagement' in Alastair Hennesy (ed.), *Intellectuals in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean; Vol. 1, Spectre of the New Class*, (London, 1992), p. 115.
- ¹² James, 'Slavery Today', *Tit-Bits*, 5 August 1933.
- ¹³ David Widgery, 'C.L.R. James' in D. Widgery, *Preserving Disorder: Selected Essays 1968-88*, (London, 1989), p. 123. As James told Widgery in 1980, 'I realised the Stalinists were the greatest liars and corrupters of history there ever were. No one convinced me of this. I convinced myself.'
- ¹⁴ James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary; George Padmore's path from Communism to Pan-Africanism*, (London, 1967), p. 23. See also Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The history of black people in Britain*, (London, 1987), p. 334.
- ¹⁵ M.A.R.H.O., (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 269.
- ¹⁶ C.L.R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory; Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, (London, 1984), p. 207.
- ¹⁷ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. xv.
- ¹⁸ James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, p. 207.
- ¹⁹ C.L.R. James, 'Interview with Al Richardson,' (1986), *Revolutionary History*, www.revolutionary-history.co.uk/supplem/jamesint.htm. For James's description of workers' power in France in February 1934, see C.L.R. James, *World Revolution 1917-1936; The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*, (London, 1937), p. 379-81.
- ²⁰ Robert G. Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship; Africa, Africans and the Afro-American*, (London, 1973), p. 89.
- ²¹ Articles X and XVI of the League of Nations Covenant laid down the principle that all League members should protect other members from external aggression, and authorised moral, economic and military sanctions. See D. Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935-6*, (London, 1975), p. 18. See also Paul Corthorn, 'The Labour Party and the League of Nations; The Socialist League's Role in the Sanctions Crisis of 1935', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 13, no. 1, (2002), p. 67, 70.

-
- ²² James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, p. 230. See also Paget Henry and Paul Buhle, (eds.), *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*, (London, 1992), p. 8.
- ²³ Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance; Africa and Britain 1919-1945*, (London, 1999), p. 211.
- ²⁴ James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 250.
- ²⁵ Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, p. 240.
- ²⁶ Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 340., 345. Amy Ashwood Garvey was honorary treasurer. For more on other leading members see George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism; The Coming Struggle for Africa*, (London, 1956), p. 145. The I.A.F.A. disbanded after 'major combat operations' had finished in Abyssinia and after others had formed the Abyssinian Association, active in April 1936. See Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian war*, p. 115.
- ²⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 29/7/1935.
- ²⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 30/7/1935.
- ²⁹ C.L.R James, 'Black Intellectuals in Britain', in B. Parekh, (ed.), *Colour, Culture and Consciousness*, (London, 1974), p. 158. James's memory serves him correctly here. See *The Times*, 29/7/1935, and S. Asante, *Pan-African Protest; West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934-1941*, (London, 1977), p. 46.
- ³⁰ C.L.R James, *The Future in the Present; Selected writings*, vol. 1, (London, 1977), p. 114.
- ³¹ Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian war*, p. 20.
- ³² James, 'Black intellectuals in Britain', p. 158.
- ³³ James, 'Black intellectuals in Britain', p. 158.
- ³⁴ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism; The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (New Jersey, 1991), p. 381.
- ³⁵ Konni Zilliacus, *Abyssinia*, (London, 1935), p. 6.
- ³⁶ James, 'Black intellectuals in Britain', p. 159.
- ³⁷ Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, p. 46.
- ³⁸ Farred, (ed.), *Rethinking C.L.R. James*, p. 109.
- ³⁹ *New Leader*, 3/6/1936. The letter is reprinted in James, 'Black intellectuals in Britain', p. 158-9.
- ⁴⁰ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 295.
- ⁴¹ *New Leader*, 3/6/1936.
- ⁴² C.L.R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, (London, 1977), p. 66.
- ⁴³ James, *The Black Jacobins*, p. xviii.

-
- ⁴⁴ Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War*, p. 46. James, 'Slavery Today', *Tit-Bits*, 5 August 1933.
- ⁴⁵ C.L.R. James, 'Abyssinia and the Imperialists' in Anna Grimshaw, (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader*, (Oxford, 1992), p. 64.
- ⁴⁶ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 22. Kent Worcester, *C.L.R. James; A Political Biography*, (New York, 1996), p.34. Grimshaw, (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader*, p. 64.
- ⁴⁷ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 288.
- ⁴⁸ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 248.
- ⁴⁹ Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, p. 46.
- ⁵⁰ By October, he had written the script. See 'Play by an ILPer', *New Leader*, 25/10/1935.
- ⁵¹ C.L.R. James, 'Paul Robeson; Black Star' in C.L.R. James, *Spheres of Existence; Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, (London, 1980), p. 257. Act II, Scene I of the original play was published in *Life and Letters Today* in Spring 1936. James is described in this as 'a Negro writer, born in the West Indies in 1901. After teaching and miscellaneous journalism, he came to England in 1932. He writes for the *Manchester Guardian* and other papers. He hopes to publish next year a political study of Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution.' See *Life and Letters Today*, vol. 14, no. 3, (1936), p. 211. For a cast list, see J.P. Wearing, *The London Stage, 1930-1939*, vol. 2, (London, 1990).
- ⁵² Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, p. 214.
- ⁵³ James, 'Paul Robeson: Black Star', p. 257.
- ⁵⁴ Marie Seton, *Sergei M Eisenstein*, (London, 1952), p. 352. Martin B. Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, (London, 1989), p. 194., p. 633. Eisenstein had wanted to make a film about the Haitian revolution since 1931, but he could not get financial backing from Hollywood, where he was at the time. As he told his Russian film students in 1935, 'when I was in America I wanted to make a film of this rising in Haiti, but it was impossible; nowadays Haiti is virtually a colony of the U.S.A.' See Ronald Bergan, *Eisenstein*, (London, 1997), p. 267. Haiti was under US military occupation from 1915 to 1934. Plus ca change.
- ⁵⁵ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. xviii.
- ⁵⁶ Viscount Cecil, *A Great Experiment*, (London, 1941), p. 267.
- ⁵⁷ Alberto Sbacelli, *Legacy of Bitterness; Ethiopia and Fascist Italy 1935-41*, (Eritrea, 1997), p. 55.
- ⁵⁸ John Archer, 'C.L.R. James in Britain, 1932-38', *Revolutionary History*, vol. 6, no. 2/3, (1996), p. 61.
- ⁵⁹ Grimshaw, (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader*, p. 63-4, 66. The article was originally published in *The Keys*, vol. 3, no. 5, (January-March 1936).
- ⁶⁰ C.L.R. James, 'Toussaint L'Ouverture' in *Life and Letters Today*, vol. 14, no. 3, (1936), p. 7. This is a publication of Act II, Scene I of *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, with an introduction by James. The rest of the manuscript of the original production seems to be lost but since writing this article I have discovered a copy among the papers of British Trotskyist Jock Haston at the University of Hull [DJH/21]. Perhaps more accessible is a revised version of the play that was performed in the 1960s. See 'Toussaint L'Ouverture [Black Jacobins]' in Anna Grimshaw (ed.), *The C.L.R. James Reader*, (Oxford, 1992).
- ⁶¹ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. xviii.

-
- ⁶² James, 'Toussaint L'Ouverture', p. 7.
- ⁶³ James, 'Toussaint L'Ouverture', p. 9, 13, 15.
- ⁶⁴ Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War*, p. 23.
- ⁶⁵ Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War*, p. 76.
- ⁶⁶ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 13.
- ⁶⁷ Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship*, p. 110.
- ⁶⁸ Leon Trotsky, *Writings, 1935-6*, (New York, 1970), p. 5.
- ⁶⁹ Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, (New York, 1989), p. 195. In James's 1937 work *World Revolution*, he outlined the steady retreat of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union with respect to Abyssinia, and how initial support for 'workers' sanctions' became replaced by support for the action by the League of Nations alone. See James, *World Revolution*, p. 387-9.
- ⁷⁰ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 174.
- ⁷¹ Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, p. 330.
- ⁷² James criticised George Padmore's *How Britain Rules Africa* (1936) on these grounds. James wrote that parts of it were 'grievously disappointing' as Padmore talks about Britain 'as if he were some missionary or Labour politician'. Instead, James insisted 'Africans must win their own freedom. Nobody will win it for them'. See *New Leader*, 29/5/36 and Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 383.
- ⁷³ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 195.
- ⁷⁴ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 229.
- ⁷⁵ James, 'Toussaint L'Ouverture', p. 16-17.
- ⁷⁶ Hill, 'In England, 1932-1938', in Buhle, (ed.), *C.L.R. James*, p. 73-4.
- ⁷⁴ James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, p. 196.
- ⁷⁸ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 236. Toussaint was captured and killed by the French in 1803 when they betrayed his trust.
- ⁷⁹ *New Statesman*, 21 March 1936.
- ⁸⁰ James, 'Paul Robeson', p. 257-8. See also James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, p. 207. James took a small walk-on part in *Toussaint L'Ouverture*. See Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 337.
- ⁸¹ Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, p. 197 and James, 'Paul Robeson', p. 257-8.
- ⁸² *New Statesman*, 21/3/1936, and *New Leader*, 20/3/1936. For other reviews, see *The Era* (18/3/36), *The Observer* (22/3/26), *The Stage* (19/3/36), *Evening Standard*, (17/3/36), *Daily Herald*, (17/3/36), *The Sunday Times* (22/3/26), and *The Times* (17/3/36). As James noted 'when the play was performed, he [Robeson], if not it, was a great success.' See James, 'Paul Robeson', p. 258. The *New Statesman* drama critic while praising Robeson's 'thoughtful performance', described the production as 'rough rather than ready, but we doubt if the play, respectable though it is, could ever be very impressive'. When this rather

hostile reviewer criticised James's portrayal of Christophe, James referred him to the historical record in the next issue. See *The New Statesman* (28/3/36). This also gives James's address as 9 Heathcote Street – by St Pancras and GB library - had he moved from Hampstead? The play also 'made history' in another sense. As Michael McMillan has noted, 'since the 19th century, black performers have graced the English stage' but 'if we are to talk of black theatre as a movement, as a body of work written by, produced, directed, and performed by black people, C L R James's play, *The Black Jacobins*, produced in the 1930s, signifies that beginning.' See A. R. Thompson, (ed.), *Black Theatre in Britain*, (Amsterdam, 1996), p. 58.

⁸³ As James remembers, 'Paul was pleased. We agreed that we should seek ways and means to do it commercially. "I can play Toussaint and you will play Dessalines, and later we can switch"...but at that time Paul was headed towards Moscow and I, as a Trotskyist, was most definitely anti-Moscow. We knew about each other and never quarreled, but the idea of doing the play automatically faded into nothing.' See James, 'Paul Robeson', p. 259. For Robeson's battle with Hollywood, see Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, p. 196-7. Also see Schwarz, 'Black Metropolis, White England' in Nava, and O'Shea, (eds.), *Modern Times*, p. 186.

⁸⁴ MARHO, (ed.), *Visions of History*, p. 267. In March 1936, James was aiming 'to publish next year a political study of Toussaint Louverture' and had secured an advance from the publisher Methuen. See James, 'Toussaint L'Ouverture', p. 211, and C.L.R. James, 'Lectures on The Black Jacobins', in *Small Axe*, 8, (2000), p. 70. However, in the event *The Black Jacobins* was not published in 1937, but in 1938, and by Secker and Warburg rather than Methuen. In mid 1936, via his contacts in the ILP, James had met Frederic Warburg, of the publishers Secker and Warburg, who asked him if he would consider writing a book on 'African Socialism'. James told him 'No, that is not the book for me.' Instead James wanted to write about 'the mess that is taking place in Russia and the explosions that are going to take place soon – this was before the first Moscow Trials [August 1936].' That work became *World Revolution 1917-1936; The Rise and Fall of the Communist International*, which was published in January 1937. Secker and Warburg published *Minty Alley* in late 1936, a novel James had written in Trinidad in 1929.

⁸⁵ James, 'Toussaint L'Ouverture', p. 17.

⁸⁶ James, *Black Jacobins*, p. 303.

⁸⁷ Paul Foot, 'The Black Jacobins', *New Statesman*, 2 February 1979.