

A conference sponsored by the American Historical Association and the National Museum of African American History and Culture with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and HISTORY™

The Future of the African American Past

May 19-21, 2016
Washington, DC

Forging Freedoms: Internationalization of African American History

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Available online at <https://futureafampast.si.edu/conference-papers>
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Introduction

In the last twenty-five years, there has been a seismic shift in the writing of African American history. Scholars in diplomatic, labor, women's, and cultural history have begun to explore the impact of African Americans on struggles for freedom around the world, and the impact of international movements on African Americans. Wars, military service, and ideological currents such as Pan-Africanism, communism, human rights, and anti-colonialism influence the visions of freedom for individuals and organizations. This essay will focus on women, and the ideological movements that shaped their visions and practices. An examination of these women's lives will highlight the global scope of their struggles for freedom at home and abroad.

A growing body of work has appeared that brings the gendered and class contours of internationalism out of the shadows. In his study of the shared struggle for freedom in the United States and India, historian Nico Slate defines *colored cosmopolitanism* as an "interconnectedness of African American and South Asian freedom struggles . . . understood within the larger history of racism and antiracism, of empire

and anti-imperialism, of civil rights and human rights, and in connection with key global events, such as the First and Second World Wars and the Cold War.”¹ This study is one from an immense body of work that has appeared in the last quarter century internationalizing African American history. These new studies build on the work of scholars and writers dating back to at least the nineteenth century, who understood their struggle for freedom as one connected to the struggles of the “darker races” in Asia, Africa, and the islands of the sea. Included in this list are David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Martin Delaney, and Anna Julia Cooper in the nineteenth century, and W.E.B. Du Bois, Rayford Logan, Merze Tate, and Joseph Harris in the twentieth century. This field also builds on the creations of artists such as Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Eslanda Robeson, Alice Childress, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Shirley Graham Du Bois, Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Louis Armstrong, and Dizzy Gillespie.²

Within the “colored world, women, Dalits, and the poor would have to fight to create visions of transnational resistance that did not relegate their own struggles to the shadows.”³ By 1896, hundreds of women’s clubs had already merged into the National Association of Colored Women to centralize the efforts of groups that wanted to address the education and social well being of women. An international perspective was also a part of the NACW, whose members included Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Talbert, Fannie Barrier Williams, Addie W. Hunton, Mary McLeod Bethune, and many others.⁴

In 1920, a group of African American women, many from organizations such as the NACW, founded the International Council of Women of the Darker Races. At their first public meeting in 1924,

¹ Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012, 3.

² See Higashida, Cheryl. *Black International Feminism: Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945-1995*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 2011 and Mia E . Bay, Farah J. Griffin, Martha S. Jones, and Barbara D. Savage, eds. *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015 for a discussion of artists and internationalism.

³ Slate, p. 91

⁴ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves: 1894-1994*. New York: Norton Publisher, 1999, 21-141.

two student participants from India expressed “their approbation of the international council and its difficult program” in *The Chicago Defender*.⁵ In the following years, many women in the ICWDR would establish relationships with Indian political figures, including Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Vijayalakshmi Pandit.

One year earlier, in 1919, as disparate groups organized to send delegates to the peace talks in Paris after the end of World War I, Madame C. J. Walker, the millionaire businesswoman, called a meeting at her palatial home at Villa Lewaro in New York. Her goal was to create a permanent organization that engaged world opinion even after the peace talks and the meeting of the League of Nations ended, and to create a space for hammering out varying perspectives with aim of reaching consensus. This gathering included A. Clayton Powell, Sr., Reverend Frederick Cullen, A. Philip Randolph, and Marcus Garvey.⁶ Thus, the International League of Darker Peoples was created. Walker herself had long been interested in building a school in Africa modeled on Tuskegee Institute,⁷ and though she never built the school, she continued to support the needs of people in Africa, especially children.

Randolph, who was then the secretary of the League and the editor of the *Messenger*, a left-leaning publication, presented a set of peace proposals calling for “a more enlightened world politics” and support for the independence and autonomy for Africa. In his statement, Randolph asserted that “Rapacious and unscrupulous ‘world power’ politics has raped Africa of over 100,000,000 souls and billions of wealth.”⁸ The document continued, “No ‘League of Nations’ can long endure which ignores the just claims of Africa. The world cannot be ‘made safe for democracy’ while Africa is unsafe for the Africans.” The ILDP document was directed at President Wilson, and called for an international agreement to remove “all economic, political and social discriminations in all countries based upon color.” The statement declared that “if peace can be secured through a league of free nations, so can the hydra-headed monster—race

⁵ Slate, p. 91. “International Council Holds Public Meeting,” *The Chicago Defender*, August 16, 1924, 10.

⁶ A’Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*. New York: Washington Square Press, 2002, 257.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257

prejudice—be destroyed by the darker peoples of the worlds. . .making common cause with each other, in one great world body.” This body of Black leaders further called for a “supranational commission” to govern the German colonies and establish a governing structure as well as educational and communications systems—a utopian plan indeed.⁹ Unfortunately, the ILDP only lasted for a few years.

Nevertheless, these early beginnings flourished into robust activity among women who combined their concern with racial discrimination with the uplift and well-being of women. Though these women were undoubtedly elite and well-educated, they were deeply committed to action on behalf of the darker races. As Anna Julia Cooper stated, “it was time for action, a time for women, in particular, to step forth to ‘help shape, mod, and direct the thought’ of their age, a time for organized female resistance.”¹⁰ The members saw the problem as one shaped by race, gender, and poverty. As Deborah Gray White explains: “They believed that if they worked for the poor, they worked for black women, and if they worked for black women, they worked for the race.”¹¹ Indeed, many of these women expanded their work to the international stage, becoming part of a colored cosmopolitan world. “Colored cosmopolitanism,” observed Slate, “was increasingly defined and redefined by women.”¹²

This essay will focus on a few of these women, who functioned with and outside organizations and embraced moderate as well as radical political views. Their lives will bring forward a sense of the worldliness of the struggle for freedom as much as possible in the limited space of an essay.

Global Expansion and American Realities

Despite the wealth and social statuses of some of its key participants, black internationalism did not emerge solely from the vested interests of the African American intelligentsia. On the contrary, it reflected

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ White, 24. In addition to White’s pathbreaking work see also Audrey Thomas McCluskey and Elaine M. Smith, eds. *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building A Better World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001, published documents on one of the great leaders among club women.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Slate, 91.

a consciousness of European global expansion and the material conditions of millions of Black workers whose forced labor was remarkably similar to regimes in Africa. This similarity is most evident in a comparison of the Belgian Congo and the Mississippi Delta.

By the second decade of the 20th century, planters in the American South had created an “alluvial empire” in Arkansas and the Mississippi Delta that garnered them wealth and riches beyond imagination. In 1921, William Pickens, a native of Arkansas and field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, described the Mississippi River Valley as the “American Congo.” In her study of labor struggles in the region, Nan Woodruff argued that, “like Belgian King Leopold II’s African Congo in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,” this empire “wore the face of science and progressivism, yet was underwritten by labor conditions that were anything but progressive.”

Leopold masked his search for ivory and rubber with the language of uplift and benevolence. The reality, however, was that of thousands of Congolese were burned, maimed, or decapitated, and thousands more labored in chain gangs until they died from hunger and exhaustion.¹³ Abuses committed in Leopold’s name were so horrific that the historian George Washington Williams and famed educator Booker T. Washington created a partnership with the Black Baptist Church and lobbied president Theodore Roosevelt on behalf of the Congolese people.¹⁴ They were aware of the abuses in the colonial regimes in Africa as well as the relationship of those regimes to Jim Crow in America.

¹³ Nan Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1. See also William Pickens, “American Congo: Burning Henry Lowry,” *Nation*, March 23, 1921. Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Sven Lindquist, *Exterminate All the Brutes: One Man’s Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide*. New York: New Press, 1996.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* The literature on peasant and worker resistance to colonialism and capitalism is extensive. A necessary place to start for the American South are the multivolume works of the Freedman and Southern Society Projects at the University of Maryland beginning with Ira Berlin, Thavolia Glymph, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie Rowland, and Julie Saville, eds. *Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. For work on the diaspora see Walter Rodney, *The Making of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981, and Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Post-Emancipation Societies*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

The labor practices in the Mississippi Delta were part of a plantation economy created during the years U.S. and European capitalists gained control of economies around the globe. The Delta was part of this larger expansion, as American capitalists joined with the British, French, and Dutch in search of raw materials and markets in a colonial world. A wealthy planter class from other regions of the United States converged on the area, and included lumbermen from the Northeast, Midwest, and England, as well as others who claimed southern roots. The Delta plantations of the twentieth century were new corporate entities operated according to principles of scientific management, which required a routinized labor force disciplined in ways reminiscent of an earlier period. African American sharecroppers and both transient and bonded day laborers were a captive work force. Peonage, murder, theft, and other forms of terror replaced mutilations to control this population. As Woodruff notes, “Like imperialists at the time, the progressive empire these planters created rested on the sweat and labor of a largely ‘coloured’ labor force. America had its Congo.”¹⁵

Nevertheless, the imperialism and human carnage in the Delta ignited resistance from these workers who labored in extractive industries such as mining, timber, rubber, and turpentine. They fought in numerous ways to protect their families’ lives and limbs, their land and profits from the impact of capitalism and white racism.¹⁶ Pickens and the NAACP had recently investigated the region for numerous lynchings and cases of coerced labor. The Elaine, Arkansas, riot of 1919, which was one of several race riots of the ‘Red Summer’ that emerged from the conditions of blacks in the post-World War II US, was also investigated, and the uprising illustrated the inequities of the sharecropping system in addition to the extreme racism that shaped black lives in the South.

¹⁵ Woodruff, p. 2

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 2. On the imperialist era see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*. New York: Pantheon, 1987. For a perspective on European colonialism, see George L. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economics in the Third World*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. See also Tiffany Ruby Patterson, “A Transient World of Labor,” in *Zora Neale Hurston: A History of Southern Life*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005, 129-158.

Rural workers also fought against persistent terror in the postwar decades by organizing NAACP branches all over the Delta, even in remote villages and plantations. They wrote letters to the national headquarters outlining their grievances and their determination to resist. They also noted their sacrifices in the war for freedom and the struggles in places like Elaine. For their part, local chapters provided rural populations with information regarding the struggles of people all over the world. The chapters often sent for copies of the *Crisis* for their constituents to read. Rural workers were also involved with political struggles through these chapters. They helped to raise money for the passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, which was snaking its way through Congress, and for the nine boys accused of raping two white women in the Scottsboro Case.

When Marcus Garvey arrived in New York during World War I, black people were experiencing demanding times within the entire US political economy. Black people in the Delta formed local chapters of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which was led by Garvey, and responded both to his message of resistance and self-reliance as well as to the NAACP's legal challenge for solutions to their problematic situation in American life. Despite the historical focus on Garveyism in large cities, in the 1920s, Arkansas claimed forty-three chapters of the UNIA. Mississippi had fifty-six, with the majority established in the Delta.

Through the publication titled *Negro World*, people stayed connected to the African Diaspora and the progress of colonialism. They also belonged to fraternal orders and Christian churches. The possession of literature or correspondence with these organizations threatened their lives, but black people in the countryside and towns persisted with connections to the larger world. This constituted an overlooked form of resistance. If one person in the community or church received a copy of *The Crisis*, *Chicago Defender*, or *Negro World*, the broader black community had access.¹⁷ For those working and living in these areas, the

¹⁷ Woodruff, 16-119. See Robert A. Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, Vol. 7 pp. 986-987 and 990-1910 for a list of local chapters. For an

pulpit and the press not only addressed local conditions, but also gave them a voice to register their protest. These institutions linked them to struggles taking place in other locations within the United States, and tied them to a larger colonial world where ‘coloured’ people like themselves were confronted with similarly exploitative forces. It is no simple postulation to state that their situation was, in the words of W.E.B. DuBois, “a local phase of a world problem.”

The context of the color line that encircled the world was the Demarcation of Africa: Europe’s division of the Continent in order to augment its existing empires in Asia and the Americas. Formal, structural colonialism became a reality in 1885, when German Chancellor von Bismarck convened a conference in Berlin to partition Africa among the European powers in attendance. Africans were predictably not invited, since “it was deemed that they had no say in the matter.”¹⁸

Britain built its empire in West, East, and South Africa; the French established possessions in West and North Africa; and Germany settled for colonies in West and East Africa. The Berlin Conference gave the Congo to Leopold as his “private” colony with the proviso that the area would serve as a free trade zone for all European nations. Leopold did not honor the agreement, and forced the indigenous people to farm rubber, which they were then required to give to the colonial government as a tax payment. Portugal retained colonies in West, Southwest, and East Africa, and Italy, the weakest European nation, was given tacit approval to carve an empire in the Horn of Africa. Ironically, this last edict would reveal the vulnerability of colonialism at its dawn and attract a nearly unprecedented degree of black internationalist interest.

understanding of how industrial workers transmitted news to less educated laborers, see Herbert Gutman, “Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1918,” *American Historical Review*, 78 (1973): 531-588. See also, James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 92-97 and Adam Ewing, *The Age of Garvey: How A Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014; and Mary G. Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

¹⁸ Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011, 82.

The first Italo-Ethiopian war was decided at the Battle of Adwa in 1896. Italian encroachment on Ethiopia began in Eritrea. However, the competence of Menelik II, ruler of Ethiopia, was seriously underestimated. He had skillfully acquired arms and ammunition from France and Italy, and organized a huge army, which, coupled with the mountainous landscape, gave him the opportunity to resist the Italian incursion. News of the first time a sovereign black nation defeated a white power was heard around the world:¹⁹

In 1904-05, a second world event shattered the notion of the indomitable power of European armed forces. On February 8, 1904, the Japanese attacked the Russian Pacific fleet during bold nighttime raids at Chemulpo and Port Arthur. At stake was the determination of which country would dominate China and extract the vast mineral wealth of Korea and Manchuria.²⁰ After an inland siege that lasted for more than five months, Russia presumed that its naval power was more capable than Japan's, and their Baltic fleet confronted the Japanese in the Straits of Tsushima on May 27. It took only hours for the Japanese to destroy the Russian fleet and force its leaders to surrender in 1905.²¹

Like many around the world, African Americans were stunned by Russia's defeat, and projected its importance onto their own conditions in a Jim Crow society. Black thinkers across the political spectrum championed Japan's victory. For example, *The St. Louis Palladium* referred to the event in an article titled, "Probably the Most Important Historical Event of the Twentieth Century."²² Du Bois opined that the Japanese had broken the "foolish modern magic of the word 'white.'"²³ Conservative media controlled by

¹⁹ See David Levering Lewis, *Race to Fashoda*. New York: Henry Holt, 2001, and Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

²⁰ Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 200, 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Reginald Kearney, "Afro American Views of Japanese, 1900 – 1945" PhD Dissertation, Kent State University, 1991), 34.

²³ Quoted in Kearney, 35. See W.E.B. Du Bois, "Atlanta University," in Kelly Miller et al., *From Slavery to Service*. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1904.

Booker T. Washington “articulated a theme of white demise and black rise.”²⁴ The educator and lecturer Mary Church Terrell travelled the country stating that Japan had destroyed the myth of racial superiority.²⁵

In the summer of 1900, W.E.B. Du Bois traveled to London and Paris, where he helped to install the American Negro Exhibit at the Paris Universal Exposition. In London, a Pan-African conference organized by the Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams included 37 delegates and 10 other participants and observers from Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and Britain. Notable figures at this historic meeting included African American feminist Anna Julia Cooper, black British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Haitian politician Benito Sylvain, the well-known former slave Henry “Box” Brown, Du Bois, and Bishop Alexander Walters of the AME Zion Church. On the opening Monday, 23 July, Bishop Walters’ opening address, “The Trials and Tribulations of the Coloured Race in America,” stated that “for the first time in history, black people had gathered from all parts of the globe to discuss and improve the condition of their race, to assert their rights and organize so that they might take an equal place among nations.”²⁶ In the final session of the conference in Westminster Town Hall, Du Bois gave a speech titled “To the Nations of the World”:

“In the metropolis of the modern world, in this closing year of the nineteenth century there has been assembled a congress of men and women of African Blood, to deliberate solemnly upon the present situation and outlook of the darker races of mankind. The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line, the question as to how far differences or race. . .are going to be made, hereafter, the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization.”²⁷

This sense of “black internationalism” or “black worldliness” was not new. African American activists had long pursued national rights and justice *including* appeals to an international

²⁴ Kearney, 35.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 36.

²⁶ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. London: Pluto Press, 1984, 283. This section of *Staying Power* discusses the rise of pan-africanism and the African Americans who participated in the Pan-African Conference in 1919 which also included Anna Julia Cooper. See pages 273-294.

²⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, “To the Nations of the World,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David Levering Lewis (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 639. See also *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of A Race. 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 246-251.

community for redress of their grievances against previous enslavement, terrorist violence, and Jim Crow discrimination. The now famous line by Du Bois, “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” appeared again in 1903 with the publication of *Souls of Black Folk*, and is often used in framing a U.S. history. Its usage at the first Pan-African conference in London suggests that this phrase references the black worldliness²⁸ or black *globalism* that is now the focus of considerable work in African American history.²⁹

Gendered Internationalism

Black American women’s mobilization on the international front responded to world wars, anti-colonial movements, pan-African visions, invasions of sovereign nations, the cold war, and the struggle for civil rights.³⁰ Black women became involved in black organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of colored People (1909) and UNIA, which was launched by Garvey in 1914. They supported these organizations in a variety of ways, including writing for publications and coordinating fundraising events with community groups. Pan Africanism was a necessary foundation if world peace and black freedom were going to be achieved at a time when American imperialism and European colonialism

²⁸ This term was coined by Nikhil Singh according to Brent Edwards. See Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

²⁹ Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, 2.

³⁰ Fatma Ramdani, “Afro-American Women Activists as True Negotiators in the International Arena (1893-1945). *European Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (2015), p. 2

supported race hierarchy.³¹ These women understood international issues and how they were linked to racism and larger global processes.

After the outbreak of World War I, activists identified the link between war and racism. As Fatma Ramdani notes, “their shrewd analysis of America’s deceptive “separate but equal” doctrine and the imperialism of Western countries and institutionalized racism throughout the world gave vent to new claims and strategies.” If one of the goals of the war was that the world was going to be safe for democracy, Afro-Americans were going to insist that America be safe for all Black people and the darker races.³²

However, ambivalence generally describes African Americans’ reaction to the war. Yet, even as pacifists, they supported the work, hoping to use their patriotism to force Wilson to support black rights. Unfortunately, the treatment of American soldiers and nurses by white Americans mirrored the everyday life at home. One black woman, Addie Hunton, would learn the horrors of life for black soldiers firsthand.

Addie W. Hunton was born in 1870 in Norfolk, Virginia. After attending public schools, she graduated from Philadelphia’s Spencerian College of Commerce in 1889. After teaching for a few years in Virginia and Alabama, she married W. Alphaeus Hunton, who emigrated from Canada to Norfolk as the first Negro professional secretary of the International YMCA. Her husband traveled extensively while Addie worked and raised their two children, Euncie and Alphaeus, Jr. Mrs. Hunton worked for the YWCA from 1907 to 1915, and worked as an organizer for the NACW. The Huntons lived well, eventually re-locating to Brooklyn after the 1906 Atlanta riot. Addie herself was fluent in French and German and traveled extensively in Europe. She even studied for three semesters at the Kaiser Wilhelm University at Strasbourg. After a long illness, Alphaeus Hunton, Sr. died in 1916.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7

³² *Ibid.*, p. 8

After her husband's death, Hunton became an activist, a race woman, and a peace reformer.³³ She often spoke out about segregation with quiet dignity, her two enduring qualities. In 1915, at the invitation of Jane Addams, Hunton joined the Women's Peace Party, which became International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in 1919. For the rest of her life, Hunton linked race and peace in her championing of domestic and international issues.

The United States soon began to deploy Black combat troops in segregated units to France and later to Germany, and life for these men was no better than life in the United States. Confined to segregated units, they experienced the same racism from white soldiers; yet, they were determined to fight for their country. When news of the situation reached black communities, many African Americans volunteered to do war work. Addie Hunton was one such person. She pressed the YMCA to send her to France.

When Hunton and Kathryn Johnson arrived in Bordeaux, they were pleased to be welcomed by the French people's openness to African Americans. According to the women, it was "the first full breath of freedom that had ever come into our limited experience!"³⁴ Almost immediately, however, their lives were regulated by the American Command, and they found themselves in the same Jim Crow system, but on French soil.³⁵ Astonishingly, the YMCA was complicit in this discrimination. The organization sent only 85 out of a total of 26,000 available African American secretaries to France to work with 150,000 African American troops. When Hunton and Johnson arrived, three secretaries were being sent home for charges that were never made clear. However, it seemed that their crime was success; these secretaries had created a well-run program for soldiers stationed outside of Bordeaux. Hunton and Johnson immediately realized that American racism had followed them "for 3,000 miles across the Atlantic to the very heart of the

³³ Joyce Blackwell-Johnson, "Addie Waites Hunton" in *Black Women in America*, Vol 2. ed. by Darlene Clark Hine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.87.

³⁴ Addie Hunton and Kathryn Johnson, *Two Colored Women wit the American Expeditionarhy Forces*. Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn Eagle, 1920, p.182.

³⁵ Susan Chandler, "Addie Hunton and the Construction of an African American Female Peace Perspective" *Affilia*, vol. 20, No. 3 (fall, 2005), p. 273. See also Melinda Plastas, *A Band of Noble Women:Racial Politics in the Woman's Peace Movement*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011, pp. 40-48

world's sorrow, [which] tremendously shocked [them] in the first days".³⁶ For instance, the YMCA huts were the main service area for soldiers, and they were segregated. Established near troop concentrations, they were crowded from morning to night. The secretaries worked hard to provide comfort, coffee, chocolate, and cigarettes. Literacy instructions were also available for those who needed it, as well as writing materials, movies, lectures, athletic tournaments, Bible study, and conversation. Because the American Command went to great lengths to isolate African American soldiers from the French by denying them passes to French towns and villages, the huts were their one source of relaxation and dignity.³⁷

As a Black woman, Hunton felt that it was her obligation to communicate to the French what it meant to be black in America. In addition, she could offer the comfort to the soldiers from someone who understood their pain. Once she arrived in France, she found that the officials of the YWCA at Paris were respectful and courteous to the soldiers, but the white secretaries were terrible. They brought their prejudices and contempt from every part of America. The Black women, on the other hand, believed that they had an obligation to support these men as much as possible. Offering the comforts of home, they sought to ease the loneliness of the wounded soldiers, while listening to the joys and sorrows of the others. Some had walked miles to simply sit around the tables of the YMCA huts. As Hunton explained:

Hundreds of them—quietly talking. . . .And the Y woman would leave her post behind the canteen for a little. . . and would drink a coup of chocolate while they talked of farming, opening a store or returning to college after the war. It was so little and yet it was so much in that everyday life of war—war so terrible—so long.³⁸

Adding insult to injury, Hunton and the YMCA African American workers received no praise, only mistrust from their superiors. They were often suspected of being radicals from the "Du Bois" faction, and were kept under constant surveillance in the "colored" huts, lest racial unrest arise there. Any protest over treatment, shortages, or various forms of discrimination was viewed as disloyal. All of this, compounded

³⁶ Hunton, and Johnson, p 138.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143

with the fighting and dying endemic in war, “created a sea change in soldiers and secretaries alike,” and in Hunton and Johnson’s words, “a racial consciousness and racial strength [developed in France] that could not have been gained in a half century of normal living in America.”³⁹

It was agonizing to watch the American Command practice brutal discrimination against the African American soldiers who fought bravely at the front. These soldiers moved supplies to the rear and worked hard in spite of constant criticism. Additionally, the American Command routinely accused them of cowardice, and warned the French that they were criminal and diseased. John Hope, the President of Morehouse College and in charge of the YMCA for African Americans in France, wrote:

If you should ask whether the prejudice was southern prejudice or northern prejudice. . . .I would be compelled to say that it was southern and it was northern, that it was American. The great pity is that our boys should have had so much to crush them at a time when they had thought they would have the freest chance to serve their country as men without the terrible trammels of color being ever with them.⁴⁰

Returning from the war zone in France, Hunton was deeply sobered by her experience. She was also angry. The American Command had levied unrelenting prejudice against the African American soldiers—individuals she had grown to love. Hunton and the other women were no longer content to merely uplift the race or arrange social services. She shared her experiences with friends that included W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson. When the war ended, James Weldon Johnson told an audience at Carnegie Hall, “The war is over and no miracle has happened Miracles of that kind never happen. If loyalty to the nation and fighting its battles could give the American Negro his full rights, he would have had them long ago.”⁴¹

In fact, though the war brought limited opportunities to the race, it also brought more violence and hatred. Membership in the Klu Klux Klan increased dramatically and so too did lynchings; there were 72 in

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157

⁴⁰ Quoted in Susan Chandler, p. 275.; R. Torrence, *The Story of John Hope*. New York: Macmillan, 1948, p. 224.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 276

1919. The 'Red Summer' brought 26 race riots as jobs disappeared when returning black soldiers and other black workers were displaced to make room for returning white soldiers. The color line that belted the world tightened, and colonialism secured itself in Africa and Asia.

Activists stepped up their determination to end imperialism, racism, and colonialism. In the West Indies, Latin America, China, and India, movements arose to challenge power structures. Race consciousness and internationalism also increased among African Americans. Membership in the NAACP increased, as well as in the Urban League, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and in more radical groups such as the African Blood Brotherhood and the UNIA. Dozens more joined the Communist Party.

Politicized and determined, Hunton and African American women like her committed themselves to working both nationally and internationally for "less charity and more justice."⁴² She decreased her work for the YWCA and became a field secretary for the NAACP. She and Kathryn Johnson eventually wrote *Two Colored Women With the American Expeditionary Forces*, a detailed account of the experiences of African American soldiers in World War I.

In 1926, Hunton joined Emily Balch of WLIPF on an investigation commission to the American occupation of Haiti. *Occupied Haiti* contains two chapters of her findings. The Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations was the political vehicle for women interested in uplift work in Africa. Hunton served as chair along with Jessie Fauset, Nina DuBois, and Ms. Casley Hayford, and together they raised \$3000 for the Pan-African Congress in 1927. DuBois was asked to chair the congress, and produced an exhibit on the political and economic conditions of Black people in Africa. The Congress was held at several churches in Harlem, and featured 208 delegates as well as 5,000 participants. Though there were representatives from Germany and India, most came from the U.S. and the West Indies. Africans came from Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Liberia. The issues were familiar, with added emphasis on education and the historical and political statuses of the African diaspora.

⁴² *Ibid.*

In the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations, Hunton and members of the group began to form a female peace perspective that, in the next two decades, would give African American women a “new political subjectivity.”⁴³ As Susan Chandler argues, “Compelled by their participation in war, newly acquainted with international forces and figures, informed by years of social service, and buoyed by growing racial and female consciousness, this remarkable group of women moved to carve out a greater role for themselves on the stage of international relations.”⁴⁴ Relations at the national level between Blacks and Whites had everything to do with peace at the international level, and for Hunton, racism was at the center of global war. This dialectic between peace and racial equality was one of the strongest to emerge from the war. These women were also determined to find a place for themselves in organizations dominated by black men and white women.

Hunton’s agenda included three parts. First, African Americans should use their decades of organizational work and deep ties with each other to create an international organization for African American women. Second, African American should center themselves in the Pan-African movement. Third, they should join with the network of women like Jane Addams and Emily Balch in the mainly White U.S. peace movement. The dominant male ethos in the PAC, the racism in the Peace movement, and the limited resources of their own organization were problems to be overcome. However, this model of engaged African American female political participation demonstrated a foresight unknown in other groups.

Hunton turned first to the women in the African American club movement who shared her outlook—women such as Mary Church Terrell and Mary McLeod Bethune. Together, they built two organizations, the International Council of Women of the Darker Races and the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations. The goal of the ICWDR, which was organized in 1922, was “to study the history and present conditions of darker-skinned peoples[,] to develop race pride and to emphasize world unity and

⁴³ Chandler, p. 277

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

peace as necessities of modern civilization.”⁴⁵ A smaller organization with a narrow focus was the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations, a fundraising arm of the PAC. Both organizations struggled with limited funds during the 1920s and 1930s, but they persisted.

In 1919, Hunton journeyed to Paris for the Pan African Congress with W.E.B. Du Bois and 87 other leaders from Africa, the West Indies, and the United States. It was a meeting dominated by masculinist sentiment, but Hunton brought female consciousness. She was not present at the PAC meetings in 1921 and 1923, but remained active; through this organization, she stayed in contact with leaders of the African diaspora and expressed her internationalist sentiment. The Pan-African perspective on peace reflected the growing international politicization and sophistication of colonial peoples. In 1921, PAC delegates concluded:

It is the shame of the world that today the relation between the main groups of mankind and their mutual estimate and respect is determined chiefly by the degree in which one can subject the other to its service, enslaving labor, making ignorance compulsory, uprooting ruthlessly religion and custom, and destroying government so that the favored few may luxuriate in the toil of the tortured Many.⁴⁶

By the time the Circle of Peace and Foreign Relations’ members organized the fourth Pan African Congress, it had already been delayed several times due to a lack of a meeting place. Though the Circle approached the NAACP to help host the meeting, it fell to the women of the Circle to organize it. Though the highly successful meeting drew 5,000 delegates, media coverage focused solely on the men, and made no mention of the women.

The third part of Hunton’s plan for activism was to join a white peace organization and she and other African American women joined the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

⁴⁵ Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920*. New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990, p. 236

⁴⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “To the world: Manifesto of the Second Pan-African Congress. In Herbert Aptheker, ed. *A Documentary History of the Negro people in the United States., 1910-1932*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel 1973, pp. 544-549. (orig. published in 1921.)

(WILPF). Jane Addams, Emily Balch, Alice Hamilton, Lillian Wald, and Jeanette Rankin were pacifists targeted by the government for their opposition to the war, and were placed under surveillance.

Addams' path to peace was different than Hunton's. Addams believed that peace was about actively caring for people and such an ethos was a powerful anti-war position. She opposed colonialism and violence that "resulted from failing to regard other people as valuable and equal human beings." Addams believe that women were the greatest advocates for peace and that, as 'bread-givers'" might be, were "caught up into a great world purpose—that of conserving life, rather destroying it."⁴⁷

Hunton, on the other hand, had supported the war, believing that African American people, especially men, could prove themselves and acquire the respect they deserved. As she saw the horrors of war develop, and as she grew to love the young men who were treated so terribly by white racists, her hatred of war and racism grew in equal measure. Her internationalism also grew, but her greatest sensibility was toward the African diaspora. She saw the struggle for peace from the perspective of an African American woman who struggled with marginalization from both black men's and the white women's peace movements.

In May 1919, when Addams and 23 women attended the second International Congress of Women in Zurich. Mary Church Terrell was the only Black delegate. Having been nominated to speak to the gathering on behalf of WILFP, she took the opportunity to enlighten the people of Europe on conditions confronting colored people in the United States. She said, "You may talk about permanent peace till doomsday but the world will never have it till the darker races are given a square deal." Terrell tied peace to racial justice, a perspective at the core of African American women's peace movements. The American delegation had a mixed response to her rallying cry, though she was applauded by European delegates.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Quoted in Chandler, p. 279,

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 280

The more active Hunton herself became in the organization, the more she would encounter similar mixed responses. In 1926, she traveled to Haiti as part of an interracial investigative mission, and in 1927, she was asked to chair the WILPF's Extension Committee. Hunton accepted the work with caution, concerned that this African American work should not become a cover for racial segregation.⁴⁹ Differences over race and politics surfaced several times during the Haiti trip, and Hunton's experiences resulted in the two chapters she wrote in *Occupied Haiti*.

In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia in partial revenge for the Battle of Adwa, and Roosevelt invoked the recently passed arms embargo. The League of Nations followed with a condemnation of Italy, penalized it with an economic sanction, and urged all member countries to freeze Italian imports.⁵⁰

Similarly, the WILPF debated sanctions, and supported those against loans and arms to all belligerents. Only Hunton and Bertha McNeil dissented, believing that only Italy should suffer sanctions since it was the aggressor. This disagreement hinged on members' support of neutrality. While Hunton and McNeil were concerned about the negative impact of the embargo on Ethiopia, others feared that, since the legislation was embargo-specific and not neutrality-related, applying sanctions against Italy only could draw the U.S. further into the conflict. African American members believed they could not "desert their race in Africa. It was this belief that continually guided African American peace activists' policy on Ethiopia."⁵¹

Hunton continued her peace work and moved more toward Pan-Africanism. She firmly believe that a pan-African consciousness was essential to the work of peace for people of color. Politically, club women shared a diverse set of political views. Margaret Murray Washington position on voting mirrored that of her late husband Booker T. Washington. Mary McLeod Bethune left NACW and formed her own organization the NCNW believing that the NACW was too limited and narrow in its thinking and methods.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 281

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135

⁵¹ Blackwell, p. 136

Her location in the Federal Government gave her access that she used effectively. Club women were nuanced in their views but steadfast in their commitment to the well being of women and Black people.

Vicki Garvin was working class and trod a more radical path. She became a communist and worked for the liberation of labor. From the 1930s to the 1980s, she was a fellow traveler with many of our most committed left radicals. Her mentors included Paul Robeson, Shirley Graham Du Bois, Claudia Jones, Robert and Mable Williams. She joins Esther Cooper Jackson, Louise Thompson Patterson, Beulah Richardson and many more as women on the left, dedicated to working people and liberating women. She was on the other end of the political spectrum from Addie Hunton, yet what they shared was a lifelong commitment to ending both the oppression of people of color and women.⁵²

Garvin and Freedom

Victoria Holmes Garvin was one of the most remarkable radical activists of her generation. Born in Richmond, Virginia, to a working-class family in 1915, she and her family relocated to New York on the eve of the Depression. Although her mother found work as a domestic, she often had to bargain for jobs in the “slave market”: the term used for “a street corner in the brutal day laborers’ market.”⁵³ Because the doors of unions were closed to him, her father found only menial work. Dayo Gore notes that, “In oral interviews, Garvin vividly recalls her father’s humiliation at his limited job opportunities and her mothers’ stories about harsh working conditions and disrespect she suffered at the hands of her white employers.”

⁵² Several scholars have excavated the lives of dozens of women whose politics were left. They have also begun to leave the big cities and usual states to find a hidden radicalism. See Dayo Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War*. New York: New York University Press, 2011.; Dayo Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodward, eds., *Want to Start A Revolution: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Movement*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.; Erik McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism and the Making of Black Left Feminism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011; Cheryl Higashida, *Black Internationalist Feminism: Women Internationalist Feminism: Black Writers on the Black Left, 1945-1995*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013.

⁵³ Dayo Gore, “From Communist Politics to Black Power,” in *Want to Start A Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, edited by Dayo Gore, Jeanne Theoharris, and Komozi Woodard. (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 74-75. See also Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

For Garvin, “the feelings of embarrassment and anger” she “experienced witnessing her parents’ exploitation and the family’s descent into poverty had an indelible impact and fueled her desire to understand the intersections of labor and race.”⁵⁴ She learned her first class and labor lessons in Harlem. Abyssinian Baptist Church became a haven in the poverty-stricken world for her family, and Vicki became active in a youth program run by Adam Clayton Powell, the man who would one day become the fiery congressman from New York.

Graduating from high school when she was sixteen, Garvin took her education seriously, attending Hunter College for Women, where she studied black history and further developed her understanding of radical resistance. Her student activities foreshadowed her political leanings. She became president of the Toussaint L’Ouverture Society, the black history club named after the Haitian general who led Haiti to independence. She was exposed to a series of other radical student organizations, including a very active Communist Party-affiliated Young Communist League.⁵⁵

In 1936, Garvin graduated from college and found employment the American League for Peace and Democracy, an antiwar and anti-fascism group with close ties to the CP, and became active in the CIO’s United Office and Professional Workers of America Union. She also worked extensively with Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., joining her first picket line in Powell’s “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” protest, which fought to gain employment for black workers in the shops along 125th Street in Harlem.

Garvin, however, soon left to earn a master’s degree in economics at the elite Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. From 1940-1942, she deepened her understanding of Marxism-Leninism by writing a thesis entitled “The American Federation of Labor and Social Security Legislation.” Garvin returned to New York in the middle of World War II and became deeply involved in labor organizing and left wing politics. In 1947, she officially joined the Communist Party. Forty years later she recalled that this

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 75

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

decision was a “key development” in her life: “I knew from that point where my focus would be in terms of work . . . certainly something related to white workers and black workers or the general working-class movement.”⁵⁶ Garvin understood early on that the “failures in U.S. democracy reflected in the plight of black women workers who were ‘forced into the dirtiest, least desirable jobs,’ earned the lowest wages, and were often excluded from leadership in and the benefits of workplace unions.”⁵⁷ Garvin joined black radicals like Paul Robeson, William Alphaeus Hunton, Jr. (Addie Hunton’s son), and Louis Burnham as a founding board member of *Freedom* newspaper. She was active in the Harlem Trade Union Council (HTUC), a mass-based black labor union founded by Ferdinand Smith, and worked diligently with the National Negro Labor Council and many other leftist organizations fighting for the rights of workers and women. For Garvin, her work with the NNLC was a high point of her life, a sense of real accomplishment even though it placed her on the radar of the McCarthy and HUACA.

Indeed, throughout the ‘40s and ‘50s, Garvin became a committed activists in labor union politics. She spent the war years working for the National War Labor Board and became National Research Director of the United Office and Professional Workers of America. Garvin also worked with Paul Robeson while he was being persecuted by HUACA; she remained friends with Robeson for the rest of his life.

Persecuted by McCarthyism, Garvin found it difficult to secure jobs that fit her skills. As the decade of the ‘50s closed, Garvin was offered a position by her friend Thelma Dale Perkins, at which she would work for a businessman in the newly independent country of Nigeria. Thus begins Garvin’s international sojourns

Garvin arrived in Nigeria just after the country’s independence, but the “homecoming” was strained by the political and gendered realities of daily life in Lagos, its capital city. Life there was difficult for Garvin, and was marked by disorganized work conditions as well as the demands of being an “American

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 76.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 77

woman living alone,”⁵⁸ sentiments that were sporadically recorded in her diary. After two years there, she noted “Niger neocolonialism-disillusionment” in her diary.⁵⁹ Like most African Americans, Garvin had high hopes for a decolonized Africa, but she was actually witnessing the conditions that would soon result in civil war. Furthermore, she realized that “intellectual-political sympathy” between U.S.-born activists and their African hosts were not enough to bridge the reality of three centuries of separation. Cultural difficulties led her to spend more time with the African American women working with the U.S. State Department.

While heading home to the U.S. in 1963, Garvin made a stop-over in Accra, Ghana, where dozens of black activists from throughout the diaspora had settled. Kwame Nkrumah had led Ghana to independence in 1957 and was well known by many. Not only had he had been educated in the United States at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, but W.E.B. Du Bois had passed the leadership of Pan-Africanism to him in 1945. For Nkrumah, Pan-Africanism was “defined as a politics of unity among continental Africa, as well as solidarity with the struggles against racial discrimination faced by Africans in the diaspora.”⁶⁰ Thus, there was already a growing number of left-leaning expatriates. Garvin arrived to see Du Bois and his wife, Shirley Graham Du Bois, along with Alphaeus Hunton, Maya Angelou Make, Julian Mayfield, and his wife, Ava Livia Mayfield. Garvin moved in with two single women, Maya Angelou Make and Alice Windom.⁶¹

Garvin’s years in Ghana were both similar to and different from than those in Nigeria. Her experience there left her with the sense that the “intellectual-political sympathy” between African Americans was true in theory, but difficult to realize on the ground given the different cultural and colonial realities. Ghana, however, was different—or it so seemed. The successful struggle there convinced Blacks in the diaspora that this was a place for activists to build a homeland to return to. Nkrumah had lived in the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 82

⁶¹ See Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

United States and Europe before leading his country to freedom. He therefore understood Pan-Africanism and its politics “as unity among continental Africans, as well as solidarity with the struggles against racial discrimination faced by Africans in the diaspora.” Nkrumah also refused to look East or West for a compass to lead his country to independence. For these reasons, activists viewed Africa in general and Ghana in particular as the place to continue their quest for racial independence and “as vital sites for sustaining a black radical moment.”⁶²

Though Garvin began to think that she had no useful skills to offer except her job as an English teacher through the Foreign Language Institute, she soon realized that she and other expatriates in Ghana could play a role in “strengthening the bonds of solidarity between African nationalist struggles and black liberation organizing in the United States.” One such opportunity that presented itself was the 1963 March on Washington. Garvin, Hunton, Windom, and others organized a protest at the U.S. embassy in Accra as a way to criticize “U.S. intervention in Vietnam and Cuba and . . . against racial discrimination.”

US policy makers had always feared African exposure to African Americans during decolonization—they did not want connections made between foreign and domestic policy. For this reason, they placed these activists under intense scrutiny, but the protests were well-covered in U.S. black publications and in the Ghanaian press. Garvin also played a significant role in welcoming and publicizing visiting African Americans in Ghana and connecting their visits to the political realities in Africa and the diaspora. The most famous example was the visit of Malcolm X in 1964.

When Malcolm X arrived in Ghana in May of that year, Garvin, Alice Windom, Maya (Angelou) Make, Julian and Ava Mayfield, and several others organized a “refugee night” for Afro-Americans to meet and talk with him. This was a night of significant exchanges. As Gerald Horne and Kevin Gaines have argued, “Malcolm X’s visit to Ghana and exchanges with black radicals broadened his ideas of coalition and

⁶² Gore, p. 83

the importance of unity in the black liberation struggles.”⁶³ Garvin also arranged for Malcolm’s introduction to a range of international revolutionaries. These included meetings with officials from the Algerian and Cuban embassies, as well as the Chinese ambassador, Huang Hua. She also served as an interpreter for his meetings with the Algerians. For both Malcolm and Garvin, these introductions resulted in future alliances. Malcolm would soon visit Algeria, and Garvin was extended an invitation to visit China by Ambassador Hua, one that she will use as her days in Ghana came to an end.

That end came abruptly in March 1966, when a military coup finally removed Nkrumah from his leadership of Ghana. The gendered realities in Ghana among the expatriates made life difficult for Garvin, and the fraught political situation had long been rife with the contradictions in Nkrumah’s administration. His decline began well before his coup, and Garvin herself had already left Ghana for China in 1964.

China was a different experience. She arrived alone but soon found a community of activists seeking to develop ties with the communist nation, including Robert Williams, the black radical from North Carolina who was driven abroad for advocating self-defense, and (occasionally) Shirley Graham Du Bois. Garvin was less well know in China than several others but she became part of a group that helped bolster China’s reputation as a supporter of the black liberation struggle. Shirley Graham was a part of that group when she visited but she remained located in Africa.

Garvin taught advanced English and a course on Black history at the Shanghai Institute of Foreign Languages. With the Cultural Revolution closing of schools, she found herself out of a job. She met and married Leibel Bergman an American living in Beijing. She moved to Beijing and got a job working for the English-language translation of the *Peking Weekly*. Robert and Mabel Williams were in Beijing and they became friends. Garvin found herself part of a community of radicals. They studied the changes in China

⁶³ Gore, p. 84. See also Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois*. New York: NYU Prss, 2000, 187-188; Kevin Gaines, *and*, 197-201. See also Roberson Taj Frazier. *The East is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015 and See also Keshia Blain, “ ‘[F]or the Rights of Dark People in Every Part of the World’: Pearl Sherrod, Black Internationalist Feminism, and Afro-Asian Politics during the 1930.” *Souls* 17, nos. 1-2 (January-June, 2015): 90-112.

and debated and argued over the events in both China and the United States honing her analysis and understanding of Maoism. Garvin, says Gore, “embrace of China reflected not only her continued commitments to socialist revolution and her broad vision of transnational solidarity but also an attendant black nationalist politics that led her to frame herself as a pan-Africanist and a proletarian.”⁶⁴

Garvin’s move to China made perfect sense. In the 1950s and 1960s African Americans were deeply engaged with anti-colonial struggles in Africa and the Latin America. It was from these struggles that many became acquainted with Maoism. When Ghana acquired its independence in 1957, Black activists celebrated all over America. However when the CIA initiated the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, protest erupted throughout the United States. Even before the death of Lumumba, African Americans were acquainted with socialism through the Cuban revolution and Fidel Castro’s famous visit to Harlem and his stay at the Theresa Hotel. Lest we forget, numerous Black radicals not only defended the Cuban revolution, they visited Cuba after the revolution. As Harold Cruse noted that young activists were looking to the former colonial world for heroes like Mao. He stated in an essay published in the *New Leader* in 1962,

Already they have a pantheon of modern heroes—Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure in Africa; Fidel Castro in Latin America; Malcolm X, the Muslim leader in New York; Robert Williams in the South; and Mao Tse-Tung in China. These men seemed heroic to Afro-Americans not because of their political philosophy, but because they were either former colonials who achieved complete independence, or because, like Malcolm X, they dared to look the white community in the face and say: ‘We don’t think your civilization is worth the effort of any black man to try to integrate into.’ This to many Afro-Americans is an act of defiance that is truly revolutionary.⁶⁵

Cruse went further and argued that black people were living under domestic colonialism and their struggles “must be seen as a part of the worldwide anti-colonial movement.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 86

⁶⁵ Robin D. G. Kelley and Besty Esch, “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution.” In *Souls*. (Fall, 1999), p. 12

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

Garvin's stay in Ghana and her previous work in New York placed her in this milieu of world struggle and revolution.

Garvin was invited by students from the Shanghai Institute of Foreign Language in 1968 to address a pre-rally meeting to celebrate Chairman Mao's second statement on the black liberation movement, "In Support of the Afro-American Struggle against Violent Repression," that was issued after the assassination of Martin Luther King. She was moved to tears by this experience. China in her estimation she opined was "a valuable resource for exploited and oppressed peoples everywhere who have so much in common."⁶⁷

Garvin and her husband returned to the US in the 1970s to a much changed world. She contacted old friends and from NNLC and *Freedom* newspaper and continued her commitment to mentoring a younger generation. Sadly, became ill and passed away.

In the late 1970s, she and Leible moved to Chicago and joined the Revolutionary Communist Party, one of the largest New Left organizations. Garvin was not comfortable in this organization for she questioned their commitment and understanding of the black liberation struggle. Nevertheless, she remained in the party with Leible and continued to mentor young people.

In time her marriage began to fail. As it disintegrated and her father's health declined, she returned to New York and resumed her political life. She was, to the end of her days, a radical activist in search of freedom.

⁶⁷Gore, p. 86

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