Black on Red: A Search For African American Rights in Soviet Russia

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BLACK ON RED: A SEARCH FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN RIGHTS IN SOVIET RUSSIA

by
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Abstract

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Bolshevik Party sought to export Marxist-Leninism abroad to foster a global communist revolution. They called upon the world’s oppressed and exploited to join their cause. In the United States, a small group of African Americans answered this call and began to travel to the new socialist empire in the 1920s in search of a remedy to Jim Crow segregation that dictated every facet of black life in America. This handful of African Americans proved instrumental in establishing the Soviet position on American racism and were vital to the rise of the Communist Party in the United States during the 1930s. While these expatriates moved within the upper echelons of the Soviet Party, many were not able to navigate the ever-changing political landscape of the new Communist empire and fell victim to excommunication or political imprisonment. While they were not successful in building a communist empire in the United States, many of their ideas about racial equality and self-determination again entered the mainstream almost fifty years later during the Black Power movement of the 1970s.
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Introduction

After Reconstruction ended and the white population of the United States settled on Reconciliation after the Civil War, African Americans saw their newly acquired civil rights eroded and rolled back. At the end of Reconstruction, African Americans emerged with the protection of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. For the first time in our nation’s history, many black southerners participated in the political, economic, and social life of the South. During the 1880s, African Americans continued to vote, sit on juries, hold public office, obtain education, and improve their economic status but white southerners continued to reinvent new ways to impose white supremacy.¹ Once the North tired of enforcing the Reconstruction acts and the Redeemers reclaimed southern politics; the “Nadir” took horrific shape.² This period from 1890-1920 was one of intense racial violence, mass movement, and calculated resistance. A new generation of African Americans, one who had not experienced slavery as their parents had, was born during this time and came of age in the early years of the twentieth century. Living in the age of mass Ku Klux Klan resurgence, Eugenics, the Great Migration, and World War I, a group of African American men and women sought out the most revolutionary and militant organization fighting to secure black civil rights, the Communist Party.³


³ Numbers conflict as to exactly how many African Americans joined the Communist Party in the 1920s. Most reports conclude it was less than 50. By 1930, there were about 300 black Communists. It is believed that Lovett Fort-Whiteman was probably the first native-born African American member. The Communist Party was not the only civil rights “game in...
Harry Haywood, Lovett Fort-Whiteman, and Oliver Golden are just three of dozens of African Americans who joined the Communist Party in the early 1920s to escape the brutal effects of Jim Crow. They journeyed to Soviet Russia to be educated in Marxist-Leninist principles, see the experiment in racial equality firsthand, and returned to the United States to spread the Communist message. The turn toward Communism proved problematic in recruiting African Americans to the radical side of the fight for black liberation but the Scottsboro trial of 1931 and the economic turmoil of the Great Depression brought more interest and a new wave of Americans traveled to Russia. As the men set out in search of racial equality and opportunity, their experiences in Soviet Russia, just as the events in the United States had, shaped their ideology. For Haywood, Fort-Whiteman, and Golden, Marxist-Leninism became a life-long political commitment, but it came at a cost to each of them. Although these men were "true believers" in Marxist-Leninist doctrine, at times, they saw the chinks in the Communist armor. They knew the Soviet system was not perfect but believed it was the best avenue to achieving black equality.

The early black Communists of the 1920s were the most radical of the “New Negro” movement. While the Communist Party was more popular among African Americans in the 1930s and the sojourners who traveled to Russia during that time experienced a vastly different Russia than the sojourners of the 1920s, I have chosen to focus this paper on the early black member travelers. The early African American sojourners journeyed to Russia for ideological

town” so to speak. The NAACP was formed in 1908, there was also a small black cadre of Socialist such as A. Philip Randolph (which is where many Black CP members came from), and after the war, Marcus Garvey is reported to have had thousands of followers for his “Back to Africa” movement. See “The Party and Black Liberation: An Interview with Jacob Zumoff,” The Jacobin Magazine, 08/2015, 8. https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/08/communist-party-scottsboro-comintern-zumoff-debs-racism/.

4 Most of the fellow black travelers who left written accounts or published accounts of Soviet Russia in the 1920s and 1930s discuss the lack of racism in the country and claim they never feared the Soviets because of their race. Yet, the men who left Russia before the Great Purges seemed to keep their positive impressions, while the African Americans who were
reasons and laid the foundation for the Party’s rising popularity among black Americans in the next decade. All three traveled to Russia as students but they also educated the Bolsheviks on the issues of race in America. Lovett Fort-Whiteman and Harry Haywood helped set international Communist Party policy while in Russia. Oliver Golden brought a team of agronomists back to the USSR in 1931 after his initial stay in Moscow and committed to helping build Stalin’s Russia. This shows how committed these men were to Marxism-Leninism and furthering black civil rights. While they were not successful in securing total equality during their lifetimes, they did lay important groundwork for the modern-day movement of the 1950s.

There are several historical works that focus primarily on African Americans and the Communist Party. Just as in Soviet historiography, there is a deep divide between the schools of thought. In Cold War historiography, Black Communists are often cast as puppets of Moscow. While revisionist historians tend to take some Soviet sources at face value and present a rose-colored vision of the relationship between Black liberation and the Communist International (Comintern). I believe the truth lies somewhere in between. Rather than being unbending adversaries or unquestioning allies, Black Liberation and the Comintern engaged a push and pull of contestation and cooperation. The CPUSA’s African American members radically advocated for their own autonomy and dignity, fought against white chauvinism within the party’s ranks, directed the creation of Black-led labor organizations, and became so influential that the Communist party would go from a single African American member in 1919 to leading a movement of tens of thousands of sharecroppers in 1931.

This paper is possible due to previous historian’s varied interpretations and stellar research, none more than Joy Gleason Carew’s *Blacks, Reds, and Russians*. While Carew writes with a critical eye fixed on Russia, she provides a detailed and balanced account of the sojourner’s lives abroad. Of equal importance are the biographies and autobiographies of the travelers themselves. Harry Haywood's *Black Bolshevik* (1978) is a riveting tale of Harry's rise and fall within the CPUSA. Not only does he give a detailed account of his time and education in Russia, but Haywood is also very candid about other African American members and Party bickering. Lily Golden's *My Long Journey Home* recounts not only her father, Oliver's time in Russia, but also tells of how she and her mother lived in Soviet Uzbekistan after Oliver's untimely death before World War II. These works have proved invaluable to this research and give insight into the mindset and reasoning behind the expatriates policy contributions and disagreements.

While much of the Cold War-era historiography pertaining to American Communism relegated African American members to the sidelines, all while ignoring the homegrown roots of African American radicalism, these histories provide some insight into the Party itself. Theodore Draper is probably the most influential of this early group. A fellow traveler in Communist

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circles himself, Draper worked as a writer for the *New Masses*, a New York City-based Communist magazine. While writing about the fall of France to Hitler, Draper concluded that the Soviet Union would be Germany’s next target. This position did not follow the Soviet Party line’s thinking and his article was rejected leading him to re-think his fellow traveler status with the CPSU. Draper was a prolific writer about the Communist Party and his own personal dealings with them led to his insistence that American Communism had always been directed by Moscow, in particular the Communist International.

Yet, Draper did not devote a lot of time to exploring African American’s role in the Communist Party. That research was taken up by Wilson Record. Record, a sociologist, wrote *The Negro and the Communist Party* (1951) as a detailed account of how the Communist Party failed to recruit black members in masse. He recounts many reasons for this lack of action including the CP’s monolithic structure, the issue of race as secondary to the class argument, attacks on pillars of the African American community such as the church, and storied black organizations such as the NAACP. Record argues convincingly that for communists, the "Negro question" could never be independent or electric, it was always relegated to secondary importance. While critical of the Soviet Communists and their motives, Record does credit the Party with pushing protest organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League to initiate changes in their policies and programs. He also recounts the impact the Party had on the black press, the trade union movement, and civil rights issues within our major political parties.

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Draper and Record’s writing deeply influenced the New Left historians of the 1970s and 1980s. Historians with a revisionist persuasion challenged Cold War assertions of Moscow puppetry but these works also tend to be confined to the 1930s heyday of Communist activity. These works also tend to look at one geographical location. Mark Naison’s *Communists in Harlem during the Great Depression* first published in 1983, used the personal stories of individual Black Communist Party members in Harlem to argue the role they played in shaping the priorities and theoretical perspectives of the organization. Robin Kelley’s *Hammer and Hoe* (1990) emphasized African American culture as being the driving force in influencing the way Communism as a movement and an idea came to exist in the American South, both for white and black comrades inside the Party. Both works pay close attention to the agency and autonomy of black party members but also begrudgingly admit that the groups dutifully followed national and international leadership.

Mark Solomon’s *The Cry Was Unity* (1998) lays out a different approach from Naison, whom he criticizes for going too far in correcting the Cold War argument of totalitarianism by

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12 While there are too many Soviet revisionist historians to name here, Sheila Fitzpatrick is the gold standard of revisionism when it comes to Soviet History. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Revisionism in Soviet History,” *History and Theory*, no.46 (2007): 77-91.


15 The opening of the Comintern archive in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union really worked to undercut both Naison and Kelley's arguments of American Communist autonomy. The archive revealed thousands of pages of communications between the American and Soviet parties. These communications clearly show the direction given by the Comintern to the American cadre on a wide range of topics including activism, policy, and leadership. While I think Kelley and Naison make good arguments to show the rank and file members didn't necessarily know about the extent of this control, the American leadership absolutely did know about it and the subjects of this paper were leaders within the CP during the period their studies are focused on. See Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Kyrill Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
over-emphasizing local autonomy within the Communist Party. Solomon argues that the membership was more varied as each member brought their own unique experiences and psychological makeup to the Party. Some "hoisted their umbrellas at the first sign of rain in Moscow or New York", while others "did not await orders from Moscow or U.S. Party headquarters" in their activism. While these activists functioned within a "coherent political culture" established by the Comintern, this did not require acceptance of the monolithic influence of Moscow. In other words, just because one was a member of a communist front organization did not necessarily mean that person bought into all Party rhetoric (or was even a member of the Party). Acknowledging the insights provided by cultural historians like Kelley, Solomon also considers how the turn toward cultural history often produces abstract and unclear explanations for African American radicalism. Solomon places consciousness of racial oppression and class at the center of the radicalization of Black Communists, rather than locating the source of their radicalism inside a distinct cultural experience.

Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore’s Defying Dixie (2008) also differs from Kelley by arguing for a direct link between the Communist Party and the formation of the modern civil rights movement. She goes even further by paying close attention to issues of race, class, and nation and how these raised theoretical questions from the beginning of the Party’s strategy to organize the black community. This paper also tries to advance the argument that Communist Party activity during the 1920s and 1930s laid important groundwork for the modern civil rights movement of the 1950s. Also, like Gilmore, I show that African American CP members


17 Ibid, xxi.

questioned Leninist theory and Party doctrine while trying to hammer out an effective organizing party line. Yet, Gilmore, Kelley, Naison, and Solomon stay out of Soviet Russia. They confine their studies strictly to the United States and the Communist movement within. This body of work follows these men abroad so it's important to understand the social climate, the politics, and the ideology that drove the actions of the Soviet Party (and for that matter, Haywood, Fort-Whiteman, and Golden) so these topics are also explored here. The previously mentioned historical works also focus on the 1930s heyday of African American Communism, but do not explore the conversations and actions the decade before that led up to the popularity of the Party.

In the lexicon of Soviet history, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening of the Soviet archives in 1991, there emerged another school of thought called the post-revisionist school.¹⁹ This group of historians worked to synthesize and combine the two previous schools for a more balanced account. While acknowledging the revisionist research of autonomy and rejecting the totalitarian line put forward by Cold War histories (as they readily acknowledge Bolshevism had massive ground-level support and faced calculated resistance as well) post-revisionist also recognize the power of the Soviet state's influence on those subjects (just like the

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¹⁹ John Lewis Gaddis is often recognized as the father of the post-revisionist school, but no post-revisionist has been more influential than Stephen Kotkin. Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* took a deep look at Magnitogorsk (the Soviet's answer to America's steel city of Pittsburgh). In true post-revisionist style, Kotkin challenged the "from above" and "from below" dichotomy and showcased the city as "the encapsulation of building socialism". He frames the interactions between the Soviet state and its citizens in terms of constant renegotiations of power. It is in this work that Kotkin coins the phrase "speaking Bolshevik", a concept that requires citizens to speak the state language in order to show compliance and support for the Soviet system. By invoking this concept, Kotkin argued that Soviet citizens actively participated in building Stalinist society. See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995). For more on the concept of "speaking Bolshevik" see Paul Gregory, "Speaking Bolshevik", Hoover Institute, October 5, 2017, accessed July 1, 2022, https://www.hoover.org/research/speaking-bolshevik. For a good breakdown of the post-revisionist school and how it compares to the two previously established schools of thought see, Clíméro Paulo Da Silva Neto, "The Cold War and Western Perspectives on Soviet Science", *Revista Brasileira de História da Ciência*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 9, n. 2, p. 164-175, July 2016, https://www.sbhce.org.br/arquivo/download?ID_ARQUIVO=2791
totalitarian school). The post-revisionist school also adopted the Cold War argument regarding the importance of ideology and the role it played in shaping Soviet society.

While post-revisionists have been slow to take up the study of African Americans in the communist movement, there are a few works that have used this model to varying degrees. Two of the earliest are Kate Baldwin's *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain* (2002) and Meredith Roman's *Opposing Jim Crow* (2012). Both works are built on Mary Dudziak's seminal work, *Cold War Civil Rights* (2000) but unlike Dudziak, Baldwin and Roman take the American Civil Rights movement into the international arena. Baldwin's work gives special attention to four African American cultural leaders, Claude McKay, W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, and Paul Robeson's writings in Soviet Russia (many of them unpublished in America or are in Russian only). Baldwin rejects the totalitarian line of duped men by showing these men engaged in critical dialogue with the Soviet leadership. Yet, she unabashedly calls the Soviet leadership to account for modifying the texts these men left behind to prop up Soviet propaganda and she is extremely critical of the Soviet Party and McKay, DuBois, Hughes, and Robeson's

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21 While not a post-revisionist work, Dudziak's work is widely influential in exploring African American and Soviet relations. Her work explores the American government's international response to Soviet propaganda regarding American racism. She argues that the Cold War both restricted and enhanced the Civil Rights Movement at home by restricting the movement to non-communist liberals (while the radical left like Paul Robeson, William Patterson, and Josephine Baker faced repression) but the Soviet indictment also pushed American leaders to act on behalf of civil rights (Dudziak readily admits that these policies were mostly symbolic and not substantial changes but actions to support the American international counter-narrative that acknowledged America's racial sins but insisted that only through democracy could true racial reform take place). Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2000).
lack of attention to feminist and gender-related issues.22 And, Baldwin completely discounts the four American scholar's interest in the Marxist ideology and the Soviet experiment.

Roman's work, while still limiting its scope to the militant Third Period (1928-1937), reworks post-revisionist Stephen Kotkin's concept of "speaking Bolshevik" to examine Soviet Party and African American interactions. Roman readily admits Soviet leaders utilized a strategy of "speaking anti-racism" for propaganda benefits in their domestic and foreign policies but she also contends that this strategy focused global awareness on American racism. In Roman's account, Soviet leaders broadcast and exhibited their commitment to antiracist ideals through court trials of racist party members (or sojourners), media depictions of American racial violence, and African American party members/sojourner's accomplishments while in the Soviet Union. Where Roman is at her best is her painstaking evaluation of how the Soviets used "anti-racism" in the political education campaigns of its own citizens to build the "New Soviet" person. Yet, Roman also argues that before 1928, the Soviets conceived American race relations as a "soft-line" policy.23 While I do not necessarily disagree with her soft-line assessment, she completely ignores the fact that African American Party members spent the better part of the 1920s trying to change that softness and elevate the issue of American racism within the Party.

I have attempted to expand these studies to include the sojourners time in the Soviet Union not only to gauge what influence the Russians had on their ideology and understanding of Marxist-Leninism but also to show the Cold-War histories of a Moscow-directed agenda are true, no matter how revisionists try to minimize it. In fact, when you look at the whole picture of these

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22 Baldwin's best example of this action is in regard to Claude McKay's critical writings of the Soviet tendency to bracket issues of gender and nationhood as secondary to the overall revolution.

23 Roman, Introduction, 6.
men's lives it is easy to see just how influential Moscow was. And yet, one can also see how wrong Cold War histories are about the totalitarian line. African American members did have a powerful influence on Party policies and engaged in debates with Soviet leadership. I have refrained from calling these men dupes as some scholars have, as these were intelligent, educated men. Yet, more importantly, I refrain from this language because they were seeking alternative means of freedom. There can be no argument that the Western world of capitalist democracy had left the black community locked out. They sided with a political party publicly calling for their complete social and economic equality.24

At first, I could not understand why the Communists were not more popular among the black populace of America. Over the course of this research, I have come to think that, in addition to the reasons Wilson Record numerated decades earlier, the traditionalist Marxist-Leninist's argument on class just did not fit the race question in America during the 1920s. This is not to say there were not class issues among black Americans, there were. But race was the issue that defined the lives of black Americans. White Americans had made it so. And race was the very thing that bound African Americans together in this environment. The early Bolsheviks could never completely accept this because it went against their doctrine that class was the issue defining human society. The Soviets could not understand the racial caste system that permeated the United States because Russia had not participated in the slave trade like the West. While it is true Russia had serfdom, a type of slavery dating back to feudal times and there is no question that black American Communists saw a strong connection between black American slaves and Russian serfs. The perimeters of serfdom were different from chattel slavery in America. Serf

24 I refer to the Communist Party here as a political party because that is essentially what they were. However, this party was very different from the traditional American Republican and Democratic parties. Communists followed a rigid ideology and members were required to follow the doctrine or face expulsion. The Communist Party and its ideology can’t be separated, they are one and the same.
labor was attached to the land, so the sale of serfs was not a prominent practice. Also, the nobles saw serfs more as peasant members of society. There were no racial differences between the two groups like in America, so race was never a medium to perpetuate ideas of inferiority. It was the early black Communists who brought the issue of American racism to Russia.

Yet, to say the Bolsheviks were sympathetic to African American’s racial struggle is a little bit of a stretch. Just like the African American CP members, the Soviets were true believers, and many probably were sincere about racial equality but protecting Russia's interests took precedence. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (hereafter, the CPSU) demanded complete loyalty and adherence to its policy and ideology. When fighting for black rights was not conducive to furthering the Moscow line, the Communist Party of the United States of America (hereafter, the CPUSA) pumped the brakes on the fight for racial equality at the behest of the Soviet Party. In their own country, the Russian Communists turned to terror to enforce Bolshevism but abroad, expulsion was the main punishment for deviation. Each of the sojourners examined here fell victim to some form of suspicion under the Communist system, and one is given the ultimate punishment.

The Communist International’s main international policy was to spread Soviet Communism around the globe. This required painting the USSR in the best light (both at home

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26 Post revisionist, Stephen Kotkin, makes the case that once he got into the Soviet archives, he would finally get to see what the Russians were talking about during their closed-door meetings. He states that those documents show the Party members talked about the very same things behind closed doors that they talked about publicly (collectivization, the dictatorship of the proletariat, etc.) Stephen Kotkin. 2015. Interview by Peter Robinson. Uncommon Knowledge, July 29. Accessed July 12, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZ9KCG0KO4U (minutes 16:36-16:56)

27 One of the best examples of this is the Sharecroppers Union. Even though it boasted a membership of 10,000 or more by 1936 the CPSU abandoned the project.
and abroad). Once Lenin named African Americans as the main conduit of the Communist revolution in the United States, a message of anti-racism and the confirmed moral authority of the Russian system consumed Bolshevik propaganda worldwide, but the American Party was slow to take up this directive with the vigor the Soviet leadership expected. Russian Communists never wasted an opportunity to tout the contradiction that was race in America. Black Americans who traveled to the USSR, gave talks to the Russian people about the conditions in America, were invited to discuss their ideas for better reaching black populations with Bolshevik leaders, and the Russian press was always there to take countless photos, record their speeches (to be later published with some "minor" adjustments), and interview their “exotic” guests. If the Russians "used" black visitors for Communist propaganda and to further the concept of world revolution, then African Americans "used" the international platform Communists provided to bring global attention to the race problem in America.

This work is not comprehensive. For example, there is no mention of the African American women who played a role in the early days of the Communist Party. This omission is not intentional per se, but the truth remains that women (especially black women) were not put into positions of leadership during the early days of the CPUSA.28 Also absent from this paper is any serious talk about the Black International. A struggle for African independence that began in France among the black intelligentsia. Running parallel to the Harlem Renaissance movement,

and what can only be described as early Pan-Africanism, the black international development was shaped by geopolitical events like the First World War and the emergence of the Soviet Union. And yet, the black international was not beholden to the CP line. While members exhibited Marxist thinking and many of those who fought for anti-colonialism were Communist Party members, their main commitment was to an anti-colonial Africa.²⁹ All of the early black sojourners in this work held black internationalist leanings and those ideas will be touched on, but none traveled to France as they traveled to Soviet Russia, so for this obvious reason I focus on their ties to the Communist movement.

It is also not lost on me that due to the nature of race relations in the United States, that I am fortunate to be able to study racism and its effects on groups of American citizens instead of living it. While I may seem critical of decisions made by black CP members, it is not my intent to judge them for these actions. My intent is to understand what motivated them to choose the Communist Party when so many other black Americans did not. Were their experiences vastly different than the other millions of African Americans during the time in question, I do not believe so. Thousands of black Americans took part in the Great Migration, fought in World War I, and were victims of racial violence but did not join the communists. While Fort-Whiteman, Haywood, and Golden’s intentions may not ever be fully known, their writings may provide some clues. The first decade after the Bolshevik revolution was a turbulent period in Russian history. It was also in these years the Bolsheviks hammered out many of its international policies and how they would be applied to other countries they hoped to bring into the Marxist revolution that was guaranteed to take place (as the communists believed). It is clear that early African

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American members were at the forefront of some of these conversations and influenced some of the outcomes reached by the governing bodies of Soviet Russia.

This is the story of a radical protest movement in the interwar period. Over the space of a decade, from 1919 to 1929 the Comintern and the Soviet Union itself served as sites of political engagement and contestation; where the impulses of Soviet foreign policy aspirations and the anti-colonial ideology of Lenin combined and eventually diverged on the point of Black self-determination and autonomous organization. Despite (and because of) the Comintern’s centralized and authoritarian nature, the organization’s Black Cadres massively advanced the cause for Black liberation. From Lenin and the Red Summer to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern and the disillusionment with the hardline Stalinism of the late 1930s, Black intellectuals around the world were inspired by revolutionary events in Russia and excited by the prospect that it might spread globally to signal the end of the capital-centered system and all that went with it, including racist oppression.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} Holm, 10.
Chapter 1: Beginnings

All three of the early sojourners examined here were children of former slaves and had various levels of education. There is little doubt their parent's stories and firsthand experiences with racism shaped their early understanding. Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Oliver Golden, and Harry Haywood were born and came of age during a precarious time, what historians refer to as the nadir. The term nadir was first used by Rayford Logan in 1954 when he wrote The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901.\(^1\) The term nadir means the lowest point, and that is what Logan was trying to determine in this work, the lowest point of African Americans’ status after Reconstruction. Logan’s research led him to the conclusion that 1901 was the lowest point. Logan’s timeline was taken up by other historians and while the timing of the nadir has been retracted and expanded since Logan first coined the term (the consensus now is 1890-1920)\(^2\) the social, cultural, and political events experienced by the African American community during this period remain a topic of study.\(^3\) The rights of citizenship such as voting remained

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fluid and gradually became non-existent for African Americans particularly in the South during this period, numerous racial riots plagued Northern and Western cities, and total war spurred a movement of people already underway into hyperdrive.

Before we get into the men's lived experiences as they were coming of age at the turn of the 20th century, it is important to understand the climate the nadir fostered and the black community's intellectual response to it. One of the main catalysts for Golden, Haywood, and Fort-Whiteman's radicalization was Jim Crow segregation. Racial segregation before the Civil War tended to be limited to the urban cities (Northern and Southern), this concept did not make sense in the rural agricultural and plantation settings of the South, but the end of the Civil War changed that.4 Reconstruction posed some serious challenges to segregation at the voting booth, in public accommodations, and in politics but by 1883 the Supreme Court had ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional. Since Redeemers had already taken the reigns of southern state governments by the 1880s, they wasted no time in enacting laws against integrated public accommodation. In fact, these governments went much further, enacting laws that intended to keep the races separated “from the cradle to the grave”.5 Jim Crow segregation touched every facet of African American life. It was more than just laws that kept the races separate in public spaces. There were simple everyday gestures or “etiquette” that if not closely followed, could have deadly consequences.6

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5 Lawson, Segregation

If a Black American did not follow Jim Crow laws and customs to the letter, they could be the victim of severe violence. The most vicious punishment was lynching. Again, this custom has roots in pre-Civil War America and often white men were the targeted victims but during Reconstruction, the victim demographic changed. Even after the Southern states had been "redeemed" and Jim Crow was essentially the law of the land, lynching and mass violence against black bodies continued unabated. Jim Crow finally won the sanction of the American federal government with *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in 1896.

I do not want to give the impression that the African American community was completely powerless, or did not attempt to put up resistance, they certainly did. Black people who could still vote during the years after the war and at the turn of the century continued to do so. There is also evidence that black landownership in the South rose after the 1880s from just 3% to over 25% by 1900. Many Black Americans did not necessarily oppose separation of the races, so long as it was voluntary. They took immense pride in the institutions they built like schools, churches, and civic organizations away from the watchful eyes of white Americans. In these spaces, Black people could have some modicum of independence and self-determination. Integration was a tactic, not the end goal necessarily. Black Americans confronted Jim Crow at every turn because they wanted access to every benefit their guaranteed citizenship had to offer, including political power. They challenged segregation in the courts (that is what *Plessy* was) and created advocacy organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of

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7 Early on, the federal government did try to stem the Ku Klux Klan’s violence with the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and the Civil Rights Act of 1871 (also known as the KKK Act). These acts allowed the government to prosecute acts of terror and provided placement of federal troops in volatile areas to quell the violence. In reality, racial violence in the South continued even after these laws were passed. The Southern Democrats continued to use paramilitary groups to suppress Republican voter turnout.

8 Gilmore, “Somewhere in the Nadir”
Colored People (NAACP) to keep the pressure on the American legal system going. Black journalists like Ida B. Wells spoke out publicly about the horrors of southern lynching and the specter of black rape used to shield such acts from scrutiny. She was one of many Black writers and intellectuals who worked to dispel black stereotypes and combat racist types of thinking by utilizing the politics of respectability.

And, as disparaging as the trope of "civilization" was to African Americans, the discourse was so potent that even prominent Black intellectuals used it as a framework for their own ideology, racial uplift.\(^9\) Racial uplift ideology was a multi-faceted attack on racism and contends that educated Black people are responsible for the welfare of the race. Two of the most influential contributors, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois embodied two vastly different approaches to racial advancement, race relations, and education. To be sure, both men wanted the same thing: social and economic equality for Black Americans but their individual experiences led them to advocate different ways of getting there.\(^10\) Washington advocated a gradual approach built on vocational education, economic advancement, and accommodation while DuBois favored higher education, political action, and vocal protest. Both Washington and Du Bois invoked the politics of respectability and the New Negro ideals that had been born out

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\(^9\) Jim Crow was based on the under-riding principle that Black people were inferior to whites in all things. This trope of "civilization" emerged from the ashes of Reconstruction and soon established a racial hierarchy. The field of human science proved especially fertile ground for the civilization trope. Indeed, it was through the rhetoric of civilization that eugenicists placed Anglo-Saxonism as the "pinnacle of civilization" and blackness as the lowest form. See Jansen Blake Werner, “Two Strivings: Uplift and Identity in African American Rhetorical Culture, 1900-1943” (diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016), 31, in University of Wisconsin Digital Commons, [https://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2232&context=etd](https://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2232&context=etd).

\(^10\) Washington was born a slave and after emancipation attended Hampton Normal Institute. At 25, he became the leader of Tuskegee (another normal school). Washington was the most influential leader of the black community during his lifetime. He promoted black progress through education and entrepreneurship, rather than directly challenging Jim Crow segregation and disenfranchisement, although he did confront these atrocities behind the scenes. WEB DuBois, on the other hand, was born a free man and excelled academically, earning a Ph.D. from Harvard. DuBois directly and often very publicly challenged racism and he urged other Black Americans to do the same.
of emancipation.\textsuperscript{11} By the time of the nadir era, the term New Negro was being defined by men like Washington and John Wesley Edward Bowen who were seeking to craft a public image that countered the Social Darwinism of the day.\textsuperscript{12} In short, Washington’s New Negro wanted to forget about a past defined by slavery and sought to show that (through the politics of respectability, and education) black progress was possible. Of course, after World War I the term New Negro took on a more militant political connotation and the label of the "Old Negro" would be affixed to Washington and Du Bois at that time.

This is just a small glimpse into the world that Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Oliver Golden, and Harry Haywood were born into and came of age in. Golden was born in Yazoo City, Mississippi on November 18, 1887. His parents were former slaves Hillard and Katherine Golden.\textsuperscript{13} Hillard Golden was the embodiment of Washington’s (and to a degree Du Bois’) uplift strategy. In the Deep South, African American economic agency was restricted (not only by race but also) by the “material conditions of the southern economic landscape and the occupational limitations that most had inherited from bondage.”\textsuperscript{14} Many Freedmen had developed agricultural skills but did not want to continue to work for white landowners. Under these conditions, land ownership


\textsuperscript{14} Werner, 39.
became associated with racial uplift.\textsuperscript{15} It is unclear how, but Hillard acquired a large amount of land in Mississippi and built a grand house. He also acted against Jim Crow by employing both white and black workers on his farm.\textsuperscript{16} Lovett Huey Whiteman entered the world on December 3, 1889. Born in Dallas, Texas to Moses Whiteman and Elizabeth Fort. Lovett’s father had been a slave in South Carolina but after the war, in what can only be viewed as an effort to gain some autonomy, economic agency, and possibly define a dimension of his freedom on his own terms, Moses migrated to Texas. While there, he married 15-year-old Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{17} For some, the economic and discriminatory conditions of the South proved too much, making northern emigration an attractive option. This was the case for the Hall Family. Harry Hall (a.k.a Harry Haywood) was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1898 to former Tennessee and Kentucky slaves.\textsuperscript{18}

There is little question that each of these men and their families were touched by Jim Crow and at times, forms of violence and intimidation. Lovett Whiteman's father was relegated to a blue-collar job working as a janitor and stockman. He worked hard to provide for his family and made sure that Lovett and his sister Hazel attended school.\textsuperscript{19} Lovett had a slight advantage due to his parent’s choice of location. In Dallas, there were some schools that provided consistent education for Black students and were not closed to Black youths during harvest


\textsuperscript{16} Lily Golden, \textit{My Long Journey Home}, 2-5.


\textsuperscript{19} Gilmore, 32-35.
season. Whiteman’s father made sure his children took advantage of these opportunities.\textsuperscript{20}

Around 1906, Lovett entered Tuskegee and he graduated as a machinist. He went on to be admitted to Meharry Medical School in Nashville but decided not to finish the coursework. This could be because sometime between Lovett’s entry into Tuskegee in 1906 and 1913, Moses died leaving his wife and daughter behind. Lovett took his mother and sister to the heart of Harlem.\textsuperscript{21} According to census records, the Whiteman’s lived a block away from the corner of 135\textsuperscript{th} Street and Lenox, which became known as the crossroads of the black world, where radical black speakers like A. Philip Randolph lectured in the open air. According to Glenda Gilmore, the Whiteman’s were a "radical family" so perhaps their choice of location in Harlem was no accident.\textsuperscript{22} Regardless, it must have been exciting to be in this cultural haven and away from the Jim Crow south, but Harlem proved to be no haven from racism.

Oliver Golden’s early life is not well known but one can assume he and his seven siblings assisted their father working on the large farm Hillard had acquired. What is known is that Oliver worked as a tailor and did a stint at Alcorn College in Mississippi. At Alcorn, he met George Washington Carver, whom Oliver considered a mentor for the rest of his life. In fact, Oliver followed Carver to Tuskegee Institute. Oliver Golden was not your typical Tuskegee student as Joy Gleason Carew makes known. She writes, “Golden, who was not a young, compliant person when he arrived, he had come from a family of some means. He was already twenty-five and a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid, pg.33.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Gilmore, \textit{Defying Dixie}, pg.33. Also see \textit{Thirteenth Census, 1910}, New York City, District 1, Ward 12 on ancestry.com
\item \textsuperscript{22} Gilmore, pg.33.
\end{itemize}
skilled tailor with some college education”. He may have had another reason to be a little less compliant because while Oliver was attending Tuskegee, his father’s house was burned down twice by the local Klan prompting the family to leave Mississippi for Alabama, then on to Memphis, and finally settling in Omaha. Yet, it was another event that prevented Golden from completing his studies at Tuskegee. Oliver was involved in an altercation with a local white person while in school. With the compliance of university officials, he had to be spirited out of town under the cover of night. This abrupt exit would have been not only for Oliver’s safety but also for the safety of the school as well. Southern black schools were dependent on white patronage and Tuskegee was no different in that respect. Nevertheless, Golden’s years at Tuskegee Institute were productive. He made many contacts aside from George Washington Carver, one of which was Lovett Whiteman. It would be Whiteman and Carver who would have a lasting impact on the trajectory of Golden’s life.

Harry Haywood’s past family experiences loomed large in his upbringing. His father was born on a plantation owned by Colonel Haywood Hall near Martin, Tennessee in 1860. After emancipation, his father’s family continued to live on the Hall plantation. Harry’s grandfather even took the given and surname of his former master, which he later bestowed upon his own son (Harry’s father). Harry’s grandfather was active in local Reconstruction politics, but these


24 Ibid. See also Lily Golden, My Long Journey Home (Chicago: Third World Press, 2002) 2.

25 Carew, Reds, Blacks, and Russians, 9; see also Alina Ernst, "Oliver Golden (1887-1940), "blackpast.org, April 1, 2018, https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/golden-oliver-1887-1940/. Alina Ernst contends that Golden didn’t graduate because he was drafted into WWI. While it is true that Golden was drafted into the army, the event Ernst refers to took place in 1913 which is too early for the draft.
actions brought him trouble from the local Ku Klux Klan.\textsuperscript{26} When Harry’s father was 15 years old, the local night riders singled out the senior Mr. Hall for lynching. While the Colonel’s paternalism kept the family safe for a time, eventually the Klan came knocking. When Harry’s grandfather fired upon the intruders, killing one of them, the family had to leave the state. With the help of Colonel Hall, the family made haste to Des Moines, Iowa.\textsuperscript{27} Harry’s father eventually left Des Moines and relocated to South Omaha to find work in the booming meat packing industry. Harry also heard his maternal grandparents speak of the horrors of slavery and saw their bodies covered in scars from whippings and other forms of punishment.\textsuperscript{28} These stories and images stuck with Harry throughout all his life, but it was a violent event at the age of fifteen that changed everything for him, just like his father before him.

Harry wrote extensively about his father in his autobiography. He describes him as “powerfully built...extremely intelligent”.\textsuperscript{29} It is obvious that Harry deeply admired his father but like any father and son, there were things Harry was critical of. In his description of his father, he continued "unfortunately, despite his great strength, he was not much of a fighter, or so it seemed to me. In later years, some of the old slave psychology and fear remained. He was an ardent admirer of Booker T. Washington who, in his Atlanta compromise speech of 1895, had called on Blacks to submit to the racist status quo...his ambitions for his sons were very modest, to put it


\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, pg.7

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, pg.8

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, pg.8.
When Harry was fifteen his father was violently attacked by a white mob in South Omaha. Harry wrote in detail about that night:

“I remember vividly the scene that night when Father staggered through the door...his face was swollen and bleeding, his clothes torn and in disarray. He had a frightened, hunted look in his eyes...he gasped out the story of how he had been attacked and beaten. ‘They said they were going to kill me if I didn’t get out of town.’” When Harry and his sister asked him why he would not go the police or use his connections to protect himself, we would reply “That ain’t goin’ to do no good. We just have to leave town.”

That is exactly what the Hall family did. His father packed his bags that night and left the next morning on a train bound for Minneapolis. Harry and his family were devastated. He recounts:

“Only when he closed the door behind him did we feel the full impact of the shock. It had happened so suddenly. Our whole world had collapsed. Home and security were gone. The feeling of safety in our little haven of interracial goodwill had proved elusive...the cruelest blow, perhaps, was the shattering of my image of Father...he had never gotten over the horror of that scene in the cabin near Martin, Tennessee...he distrusted and feared poor whites, especially the native-born and, in Omaha, the shanty Irish.”

This event broke up the family and cost them a home that when sold left them with only the sum of $300. Once in Minneapolis, Harry had a tough time adjusting to his new school and he dropped out just a few months after his enrollment. Yet, he liked the city, and he recounts how there was a strong black community but there was also a large mixed-race population due to inter-marriages between Scandinavian maids and Black male domestic servants. Minneapolis is also where Harry developed his racial awareness. At age sixteen, Harry took a job as a dining car

30 Ibid pg. 8 and 27.

31 Ibid, pg. 32-33. Harry recounts that his father was attacked right outside the gate of the packing plant by a “few grown men” and members of an Irish gang.

32 Ibid
waiter on the Chicago Northwestern Railway. He fell in love with the city of Chicago and by 1915, his parents joined him there.

The Great War

The outbreak of global war in the summer of 1914 had a profound impact on the new century and people all over the world were touched by this event and its aftermath. The “war to end all wars” killed millions, brought innovative technologies (like airplanes and tanks) that facilitated total war, and altered the political landscape of Europe forever. The United States remained relatively untouched by the initial outbreak as there was a desire for the country to stay neutral and removed from the European conflict but by 1915, the country under the direction of Woodrow Wilson, pursued a "preparedness" policy after the German military sank the Lusitania. America finally declared war on Germany in April 1917.


The black community closely watched the developments in Europe after 1915. Just as they had in every previous American conflict, many in the black community mobilized to show support. President Wilson’s comments about “making the world safe for democracy” were seized upon by black intellectuals such as Du Bois, who vocally encouraged black participation in the war effort as a way of showing patriotism, fitness for citizenship, and gaining the equality that had remained elusive.35 Hundreds of thousands answered Du Bois’ call to arms only to be disillusioned in the end. In the years leading up to America’s entry into the war, Oliver Golden, Lovett Whiteman, and Harry Haywood were slowly being radicalized by their personal experiences. The war and its aftermath sped up that process.

Oliver Golden was drafted into the United States Army in Clarksdale, Mississippi at the age of 32. He served from March 31, 1918, until July 14, 1919. While it is not known what his exact duties were, his daughter states frankly that like most black soldiers, he was confined to the service sector of the military. Golden was stationed in France, and it had a profound effect. His daughter writes, “I am inclined to believe that it was there that he acquired his beliefs in liberty, fraternity, and equality.”36 While Harry Haywood also served in France during the war, his experience was much different. Haywood had joined the military voluntarily in the winter of 1917. After moving to Chicago, some of Harry’s new friends were members of the Eighth

35 Wilson made the remark on April 2, 1917, during his address to Congress asking them to declare war on Germany. To see Wilson’s speech and view the transcript, see Library of Congress digital archive https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/world-war-i-american-experiences/about-this-exhibition/arguing-over-war/for-or-against-war/wilson-before-congress/. The most famous of DuBois’ call to action was published in the Crisis, see Shane Smith, “‘The Crisis’ in the Great War: W.E.B. Du Bois and His Perception of African-American Participation in World War I” The Historian 70, no.2 (Summer 2008) 239-262 https://www.jstor.org/stable/24454409?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

36 Lily Golden, My Long Journey Home, pg.3.
Illinois Black National Guard Regiment. He listened to their stories about their experiences at the Mexican border and admired their solidarity. He knew the country was headed to war but that did not frighten him. He states, “I didn’t regard it just as a part of a U.S. Army unit, but as some sort of big social club of fellow race men. Still, I knew that we would eventually get into the war. That did not bother me; on the contrary, romance, adventure, travel beckoned. I saw the possible escape from the inequities and oppression...I was already a Francophile. I had read about the fairness of the French with respect to the race issue...patriotism was the least of my motives.”

Harry set sail for France in April 1918 and was almost immediately brigaded with the French army. Harry and the rest of his regiment were elated to be incorporated with the French. Unlike many African American troops, Harry and his regiment saw brutal combat on the front lines at St. Mihiel and the Hindenburg Line. On the road back from Soissons, Harry became ill with the flu and spent the last few months of his deployment in a hospital near Paris. Being an old "Francophile," Harry spent the time wandering the city visiting the historical places he had

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37 Haywood, *Black Bolshevik* pg.42, 45, 49. Harry Haywood’s unit was federalized in July 1917, and he reported to Houston for training at Camp Logan. Haywood recounts that his regiment was deeply upset about the treatment of the Twenty-fourth Infantry soldiers at the camp, some of whom had mutinied after months of brutal treatment at the hands of white Houston citizens and local police. Nineteen men of the Twenty-fourth were executed and another forty-one received life imprisonment. In route to the camp, some of the men in Harry’s regiment openly challenged Jim Crow etiquette by "throwing kisses to white girls" and "raiding" stores near the railroad stations. Harry admits to taking part in the raids as well. Once in Houston, each man’s pay was docked five dollars to cover the damages incurred on the trip down, but Harry contends that it was a small price to pay for the lift in morale it brought to the men. For many of these men, this was their first trip past the Mason Dixon line and apprehension was high as they arrived just five days after the Houston riot ended. Yet, Harry says there was not one single clash between the soldiers and white police for the entire six months he was in training at Camp Logan. The riot seemed to have scared the local police and emboldened the local black community, who took immense pride in the soldiers. For more on the Houston Riot see Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) and Calvin Smith "The Houston Riot, Revisited" *Houston Review* 13: 85-95. Accessed November 2, 2021, [http://www.studythepast.com/4333_spring12/materials/houstonriot1917_houstonreview.pdf](http://www.studythepast.com/4333_spring12/materials/houstonriot1917_houstonreview.pdf)

38 Ibid, pg. 53-55

39 Ibid. Pg64. Harry discusses in detail the various battles and skirmishes he participated in on this page but these are the two major events he discusses.
read about and enjoyed being free of Jim Crow. After Harry linked back up with his regiment, his last few weeks abroad were miserable as he prepared to return home, he wrote “after my stay in Paris, I was seized periodically by moods of depression...I felt that I could never again adjust myself to the conditions of Blacks in the States after the spell of freedom from racism in France.” Many African Americans who served in the war felt France was a haven from the brutal segregation exported abroad by the American military. With the armistice, many black soldiers expected their sacrifice would be recognized and rewarded. Harry did not seem to think so, as evident in his statement. He dreaded the return home.

On the home front in the United States, war sped up a Great Migration that was already underway. The Great Migration was the mass movement of black Americans to Northern centers to escape the poor economic conditions and prevalent racial discrimination in the southern states. This movement started around 1916 and continued into the 1970s. It is estimated that around 6 million African Americans moved out of the southern states during this period. While many black Americans found more opportunity in the Northern part of the country, true economic advancement remained out of reach for most. During this voluntary migration, African Americans flocked to urban centers in the north and mid-west to work in factories, sometimes as strikebreakers. They were not welcomed by white residents and European immigrants who, for decades, had made up the industrial labor force. White laborers viewed migrating blacks as competitors for jobs and housing. Race riots broke out before, during, and after the war. Lynching continued unabated and unpunished and Jim Crow segregation continued to touch every facet of African American life. A “world safe for democracy” was not a reality for African Americans at home.

40 Ibid, pg.74.
After Lovett Whiteman moved to Harlem in the early 1910s, he took a job as a hotel bellman. His real aspiration was to become a Shakespearean actor, but he was unable to break into the trade. Frustrated by his lack of opportunities, Whiteman skipped town and traveled to Mexico in 1914. He too was looking for a respite from American racism. Whiteman spent the next two or three years in the Yucatan working as an accounting clerk in the hemp industry, but Mexico was in the midst of a revolution. This had a profound effect on Lovett, and it was in Mexico, by his own account, that he became a syndicalist and Socialist in the Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the Worker World). Yet by early 1917, Whiteman was back in the states with a newfound passion to pursue his acting career, but the continued lack of opportunity forced him into a job as a salesperson.

On June 6, 1917, Whiteman registered for the draft. He was never called to serve instead he joined the Shakespeare Negro Players and performed in cities all over the northeast. He also officially joined the Socialist Party (Harlem Branch) and changed his name to Lovett Fort-Whiteman, taking both his parents’ surnames. Under the socialist banner, he became fast friends with A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Owen and became the "Dramatic Editor" for the party newspaper, the Messenger. His new friends lectured at the Rand School, so Fort-Whiteman quickly enrolled. While attending, he took a six-month course in "effective service in the Socialist and radical labor movement." It is through the Socialist party Fort-Whiteman began to radicalize and look for alternative ways to secure his civil rights.

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41 Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 34. She cites the interview Whiteman gave to FSAA agents. This interview can be viewed at the National Archive under FSAA, reel 12 (October 11, 1919). He told the agents he had been a socialist for “about four years” at the date of the interview.

42 Ibid.

43 Gilmore, 35.
For Harry Haywood and Oliver Golden, the war had left them disillusioned but not radicalized as it had Harry’s brother, Otto. Many bitter soldiers and a new generation of black activists turned to radicalism and sought to distance themselves from traditional black reformist movements and assimilation politics, particularly in the wake of Red Summer. Fearing revolutionaries would overthrow the American system to implement a Soviet one, the American press, public, and government officials focused their attention on black Americans because of their call for social change. The Red Summer period of 1919 was marked by hundreds of deaths and race riots in the African American community at the hands of white supremacists. It was this event that finally pushed Harry Haywood to seek out radical politics as an avenue to secure black civil rights. After demobilization, Haywood took a job as a waiter on the Michigan Central Railroad. Three months later after a regular run to Detroit, Haywood stepped off the train in Chicago at 2 p.m. He writes:

“suddenly a white trainman accosted us, ‘Hey, you going out to the Southside? Yeah, so what? I said. ‘If I were you I wouldn’t go by the avenue’ He meant Michigan Avenue. Why? ‘There’s a big race riot going on out there, and already this morning a couple of colored soldiers were killed coming in unsuspectingly. If I were you I’d keep off the street, and go right out those tracks by the lake.’ We took the trainman's advice, thanked him, and turned toward the tracks...as we walked, I remembered the war. I had felt good to be alive...Southside Chicago, the Black ghetto, was like a besieged city. Whole sections of it were in ruins. Buildings burned and the air was heavy with smoke, reminiscent of the holocaust from which I had recently returned...I literally stepped into a battle that was to last the rest of my life.”


45 Haywood, Black Bolshevik, pg.1-3.
On July 28, 1919, Harry Haywood walked right into the Chicago Riot. This event was one of many that took place during Red Summer. There is reason to believe that Oliver Golden also experienced this event, although his account is lost to history. He also worked for the Michigan Central Railroad and had made Chicago his home after he returned from service in France. Yet, Red Summer does not appear to have immediately radicalized Golden as it did Harry Haywood. Haywood, under the tutelage of his brother Otto, began to read Marx and Engels in search of a remedy.

46 Lily Golden, My Long Journey Home pg.3.
Chapter 2: The Parley

The Russian Revolution in many ways was a byproduct of World War I. Globally, war further strained social and international relationships all over the world. In the beginning, countries mobilized their populations but as total war drug on, war-weariness set in across Europe. Chronic food shortages and material hardships sparked food riots, high inflation economies magnified class distinctions, and urban-rural antagonism over perceived food hoarding threatened the stability of monarchies and national governments from Britain to Japan.¹ Russians, living under a repressive autocracy before the war, coupled with war unrest and falling standards of living during the war years, were primed for a full-blown revolution. In 1917, that is exactly what happened forever ending a royal dynasty that had been in place for over three hundred years. A Provisional Government was hastily put into power, but it was short-lived. When the new Provisional government, led by Alexander Kerensky, refused to withdraw from the Great War, civil unrest in Russia continued. While Russian citizens' political leanings and ideas for future government remained divided, in October 1917, a political coup brought one party to power, the Bolsheviks.²


² There were several other political parties jockeying for power when the Bolsheviks took over in the October Revolution. While the Bolsheviks experienced wide support, that support didn’t constitute a political majority. The two best-known opposition parties were the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionary Party. The Socialists enjoyed the rural population’s support. For the Menshevik party see Vladimir Brovkin, The Mensheviks After October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). For the loyalist opposition see Lionel Kochan, ”Kadet Policy in 1917 and the Constituent Assembly.” The Slavonic
The Bolsheviks were a radical, far-left Marxist faction led by Vladimir Lenin. Under the guiding principles of Marxist-Leninism, the new Bolshevik leadership advocated a classless social system with common ownership of the means of production and every member of society sharing social and economic equality. Their new political system opposed capitalism, fascism, imperialism, and liberal democracy. More importantly, they opposed any form of racism. Revolution and violent overthrow of these institutions were vital to the Bolshevik’s action plans and a cornerstone of Marxism-Leninism, obviously a stance that complicated foreign relations between Russia and the West. In Russia, the Bolshevik coup was not universally recognized and almost immediately the country plunged headlong into a civil war that lasted until 1923. The Russian Civil War not only forced the Bolsheviks to abandon some of their immediate plans, such as reorganizing agricultural production into collective farms due to a peasant revolt, but it also set the tone for the party’s structure going forward.³

In truth, there was always this duality of sorts in Lenin's thinking (of being a Marxist but also a bit of a Russian populist), but this brutal civil war was the backdrop in place when the party attempted to put Lenin's ideas into practice. While Lenin's theory on the "vanguard party" had already laid the foundation for an authoritative regime, this environment of deep division and bloody conflict made authoritarian solutions virtually inevitable.⁴

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³ While the October Coup had support in the urban centers of Russia, the countryside peasant populations proved more difficult to win over. Once the Russian autocracy fell, the peasant class took the opportunity to claim land as their own. Private ownership of land flew in the face of Marxist-Leninist doctrine but in order to secure power Lenin relented and made a Decree on Land, essentially giving the peasants the land they had already claimed. See Geoffrey Hosking, Russia and the Russians (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011) pg.399 and See Sandra Badcock, “The 1917 Peasant Revolutions,” Jacobin Magazine, August 23, 2017, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/08/1917-peasant-revolutions-russia-serfs-bolsheviks.

⁴ See Hoskins, Russian and the Russians, pg.400-415.
civil war, the power to oversee discipline and suppression given to the "people" by Lenin’s theology had to be applied from above, the land redistribution that was supposed to solve the urban food crisis, in fact, exacerbated the lack of food, and the promised end to war was short-lived. In other words, all the promises Lenin had made to come to power were reversed while trying to secure power.

Still, the Bolsheviks genuinely believed in the special mission of their experiment for the world’s exploited and downtrodden, color did not matter. The Russian Communists were sure all oppressed peoples would join the Bolshevik cause and bring Communist revolution to the world. In this system, racism would be outlawed as "social poison." Lenin and the Bolsheviks came to power committed to world revolution; Russia was merely to be a starting point in what was to be a chain reaction. Lenin and the Bolsheviks believed that the socialist revolution had to sweep Europe, or the Bolshevik Revolution might not survive. The Communist International (Comintern) was established in 1919 by the Bolsheviks to help foment, oversee, and aid this world revolution. However, the Comintern also served as the Russian watchdog for affiliated foreign Party branches and gave direction to all international Communist Parties. It is within this arena African Americans brought the issue of American racism to bear on the Communist Party.

On the surface, it’s relatively easy to see why oppressed populations might be drawn to Russian Communism, particularly African Americans and colonized peoples, whom Lenin had identified as a vital part of the world revolution as early as 1916. Yet, it was the social conditions and lack of equal rights in the United States that drove some African American radicals to look to the Russian experiment as a model to achieve full racial equality.

Potential allies at home and abroad

The racial landscape of the United States changed dramatically in the years leading up to, during, and after WWI. The Great Migration that began before the war continued and drew a sudden influx of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Those fleeing the South found a kindred community with recent Afro-Caribbean immigrants. In many ways, these twin migrations coupled with the events of Red Summer cultivated a newfound sense of black consciousness. A consciousness that would come bursting out in novel forms of black self-expression and protest, in what is commonly referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. Many of the middle-class Caribbean immigrants brought with them a unique sense of autonomy and independence, which helped set off a reformed New Negro movement in America, one that was more militant. As Mark Solomon points out, “the West Indians carried into Harlem a sensitivity to the social

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stratification...those colonial roots made them fiercely anti-imperialist and hostile to Capitalism."\(^8\) Living as a minority group for the first time, Afro-Caribbeans bristled under the weight of American racism, but they also imported their own traditions of resistance, and some became the most influential black radicals in the United States.\(^9\)

By 1919, the Socialist Party that Lovett Fort-Whiteman joined after returning from Mexico had split into rival factions, those who supported the Bolsheviks and those who did not. Fort-Whiteman supported the pro-Bolshevik left wing, as most members did but bureaucratic maneuvering by the party’s right-wing prevented the left from taking leadership in 1919 and eventually ousted the left wing from the Socialist party entirely. Out of the wreckage of this expulsion emerged two communist parties, the Communist Party of America (CPA) and the Communist Labor Party of America (CLPA). For Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Otto Huiswood, and Claude McKay, who became the nucleus of the early African American section of the Communist Party after the two parties merged, support from an international party calling for racial equality must have been refreshing and empowering. From its founding in 1901, the Socialist Party of America members did engage in heated debates regarding racial segregation, which was being brutally established and enforced in the Southern states at the time of its founding and afterward.\(^10\) Yet, there was little direct action taken by the Socialist Party or its leadership to challenge racism.

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Glenda Gilmore described Fort-Whiteman as an exemplary New Negro: “passionate, political, impatient, and searching for racial equality”.\(^{11}\) He was one of many and the New Negro Movement led to the creation of multiple conservative and radical, Black-led organizations. The most important (for our purposes) was Cyril Briggs’ African Blood Brotherhood (ABB). The ABB was a secret radical association that advocated for armed self-defense and a free Africa. The newspaper of the ABB, the *Crusader*, gave a voice to black radicals and eventually an avenue to the Communist Party.\(^{12}\) Briggs was a Black nationalist and started the African Blood Brotherhood in response to Red Summer. He sought to fuse Black nationalism with revolutionary socialism and later bolshevism. Briggs did not come to communism via the Socialist Party the way Fort-Whiteman had. Mark Solomon points out that Briggs considered himself a "race man". Under Cyril Brigg’s influence, the ABB incorporated both Black nationalist and Marxist ideology and served as a radical alternative to Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).\(^{13}\)

\(^{11}\) Gilmore, pg.35

\(^{12}\) The New Negro Crowd of militant writers, ideologists, and organizers had a small cadre of publications, the NAACP’s the *Crisis*, Philip Randolph’s Socialists the *Messenger*, Garvey’s *The Negro World*, and Cyril Briggs’ the *Crusader*. Briggs’ paper probably had the smallest reach but was by far the most militant. As Glenda Gilmore points out, these radical newspapers prompted Southern congressmen to push for an investigation into “red” activities., see *Defying Dixie*, pg.37. It is through these publications; J. Edgar Hoover justified his agency’s brutal suppression and helped whip up Red Scare hysteria. The ABB was never a large organization. It only consisted of around 3500 members but Harry Haywood, his brother Otto Hall, Otto Huiswood, and Claude McKay were all members. All became communists and under their influence, the ABB became the main recruitment arm of the CPSU for black members by 1921 until the Russians dissolved the organization in early 1925. On the history of the ABB, see Mark Solomon, *The Cry was Unity*, 10-50; and Will Mack, “The Crusader (1918-1922),” Black Past, November 12, 2017, [https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/crusader-1918-1922/](https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/crusader-1918-1922/); on Harry Haywood’s role in the ABB see Joy Gleason Carew, *Blacks, Reds, and Russians* 30-31 and Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik* 121-147; Lovett Fort-Whiteman's role is documented by Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie* 36-39.

Garvey’s nationalist movement was extremely popular with the Black working class. In many ways, Garvey represented a mass rejection of the policies and programs of the traditional upper class of the NAACP, who had no tangible proposals for meeting the rampant anti-Black violence and unemployment of the post-war period. Garvey advocated race pride, uplift strategy similar to Booker T. Washington’s, and separatism with his Back to Africa movement. While Garvey’s UNIA had thousands of members, his message did not resonate with some black radicals. For the early black communists, like Lovett Fort-Whiteman, who gravitated toward the ABB, it was Garvey’s economic ideas and lack of militant action they took issue with. Simply put, Garvey, as well as the NAACP, were reformist uplift movements premised on maintaining capitalism or exporting the capitalist system abroad.\footnote{To be fair, Cyril Briggs was heavily influenced by the Garvey movement. It was Briggs’ connection to black communist members and the Bolshevik’s anti-colonialism stance that influenced Briggs to view Leninist Communism as a real ally in the fight for black liberation. See Mark Solomon, \textit{The Cry Was Unity}, 3-21.} Harry Haywood also joined the ABB (a Chicago Branch) in the summer of 1922.\footnote{Harry Haywood, \textit{Black Bolshevik}, 122.} Like Fort-Whiteman, Harry was critical of Garvey’s movement but for a different reason. Haywood writes, “we applauded some of the cultural aspects of the movement...however, we rejected in its entirety the Back to Africa program as fantastic, unreal, and a dangerous diversion which could only lead to the desertion of the struggle in the USA...this was our country and blacks should not waive their just claims to equality and justice in the land to whose wealth and greatness we and our forefathers had made such great contributions.”\footnote{Haywood, \textit{Black Bolshevik}, 107.} Harry’s guided readings had led him to the conclusion that he wanted to join the
Communist Party, but his brother advised him the time was not right and asked Harry to join the
Brotherhood instead.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1920 the Comintern had its Second Congress, no Black delegates were present. The
American delegate John Reed, author of the book \textit{The Ten Days that Shook the World} and
Communist Labor Party member, steered the Party’s understanding on the question of African
Americans’ special oppression. Reed had called the Communist’s attention to the militant spirit
of African American resistance months earlier but addressing the Comintern in 1920, he
reasserted traditional socialist views of African Americans as a laborer first. When the
Bolsheviks turned to their doctrine on self-determination, Reed argued that most Black
Americans did "not demand national independence. They consider themselves first of all
Americans and feel entirely at home in the United States."\textsuperscript{18} While there is little doubt Reed was
as tone-deaf as some white progressives who ignored African Americans in their quest for
reform, there is truth in what Reed said. African Americans did identify as Americans, just as
Harry Haywood did, and why shouldn’t they. A large part of America (and its economy) was
built upon the backs of Black slaves and African Americans had fought and shed their own blood
in every American war. They viewed themselves as American citizens (this is aside from the
Constitutional amendment that guaranteed their citizenship) and they wanted what America had
promised them, full citizenship, full protection under the law, and basic human rights.\textsuperscript{19}

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\textsuperscript{17} The Chicago Southside branch of the Communist Party had lost several black members because they resented the paternalistic attitude displayed toward them by some white comrades. Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{18} Quoted in Berland, “The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the ‘Negro Question”, pg.417. Also see, Philip S. Foner and James S. Allen, eds., \textit{American Communism and Black America} (Philadelphia: Tempe University Press), 1987, 7-8.
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\textsuperscript{19} This argument of African Americans identifying as Americans by Reed will come up again later in Communist circles, only that time it is raised by Otto Huiswood in 1928. See Carew, \textit{Blacks, Reds, and Russians}, pg. 43. Eric Arnesen also argues most African Americans identified as Americans and that is why Communism was only able to
\end{flushright}
While the Bolsheviks inherited the Socialist’s colorblind framework, Reed and the rest of the Communist International agreed to invite “negro revolutionists to visit Moscow” and instructed Communist parties in America to begin work among the Black populations.\textsuperscript{20} The American parties remained deeply divided and this Moscow directive was almost entirely ignored. But in 1921, the Comintern demanded the two American parties merge into one cohesive political party, the Workers Party. Cyril Briggs attended the founding convention and ensured black radicals and American Communism connected.\textsuperscript{21} Moscow also directed the establishment of a “negro commission” the same year, consisting of Otto Huiswoud, Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Cyril Briggs, and Joseph Zack but the group was headed by a white former anarchist turned Communist, Robert Minor. By 1922, Huiswood and Claude McKay traveled to Moscow to address the Comintern, they sought to change the Soviet’s perspective on the importance of race and force the CPUSA to address its lack of work among Black Americans.

Claude McKay admitted that black Americans were “only race-conscious and rebellious, not revolutionary and class-conscious” and “were hostile to Communism because they regard it as a ’white’ working-class movement and they consider the white workers their greatest enemy.” McKay also pointed out that the "bourgeois reformers" had fought harder for black rights in America than the Socialists or Communists had done. Otto Huiswoud argued, "the Negro

\textsuperscript{20} Berland,” Emergence of the Communist Perspective”, pg. 417.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, pg.418. Other historians point out the Workers Party publicly pledged to support blacks in their struggle for equality, but actions remained lacking. For this perspective see, J.A. Zumoff, “The American Communist Party and the ’Negro Question’, pg.61
problem as such is fundamentally an economic problem, it is aggravated and intensified by the friction which exists between the white and black races." He also recognized the NAACP, the Garvey movement, and the ABB "could be utilized by the Communists if the means of propaganda are carefully, deliberately, and intensively used to link up these movements."22

Both men rejected Lenin’s 1920 suggestion that Communist work begin in the South but advocated the African American struggle be linked up with the larger African struggle.23 This is not surprising. Both men were Dutch West Indies immigrants, so Bolshevik anti-imperialism sentiments struck a personal chord. The "Scramble for Africa" had resulted in European control of most of the continent by 1914 and facilitated powerful, widespread Pan-Africanist sentiments in the United States and around the world.24 The Comintern followed Huiswoud and McKay’s lead. The Bolsheviks continued to link race as an evil outcome of capitalism as their ideology demanded, but they agreed that evil touched African Americans more than anyone else in the world, so this fact placed Black Americans in the "vanguard role within the African race" and primed them to lead the Communist revolution within the international Black community. The


Comintern also committed to pushing the CPUSA to support Black American’s fight for total equality and to establish a World Negro Congress.\textsuperscript{25}

The Soviet Press was there to report on every word and movement of Claude McKay during their stay in Moscow. Some historians have rightly pointed out that there was tension between Huiswoud and McKay. By the time Claude McKay traveled to the USSR in 1922, he was a world-known poet. There is little question that Huiswoud was a dedicated Communist by 1922 but there is speculation that the CPUSA sent him as a delegate to the Comintern Congress because the Americans wanted to appear to comply with the Soviet’s earlier directive to include Black Americans in party work and because he was the lightest skinned Black member. The American delegation tried to exclude McKay from the congress, but the Soviets saw him as propaganda gold due to his famous status and because he fit their description of what a Black person should look like with his darker complexion. While Huiswoud was meeting Lenin secretly, McKay was out making speeches and being photographed for Soviet propaganda and newspapers.\textsuperscript{26} Images of a Black man (McKay) standing next to or among significant white figures in the Soviet Union were purposefully repeated during McKay’s stay and afterward. The Soviets also quickly printed a version of McKay’s speech in \textit{Pravda} with some calculated

\textsuperscript{25} Berland, “The Emergence of the Communist Perspective”, pg. 422; and” Resolution from the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, 30 November 1922” in “The Communist International and Black Liberation "on \url{www.marxist.org pg. 10.}

omissions and noted shifts in emphasis.27 Yet, McKay and Huiswoud’s presence at the Comintern Congress in 1922 planted the seeds of what was to become the Comintern’s “Negro Question.”

Since joining the Communist Party in 1919, Fort-Whiteman had become a prominent figure in radical circles and had drawn the attention of J. Edgar Hoover.28 In 1921 Fort-Whiteman was jailed in St. Louis for violation of the Espionage Act after giving a public speech. He mysteriously disappeared from the public record until 1923 when he re-emerged on the masthead of the Socialist newspaper, the Messenger.29 Regardless, Lovett Fort-Whiteman came out publicly as a Communist in January 1924 and was elected as a delegate to the national All Race Assembly in Chicago being billed as the “Negro Sanhedrin”.

The Sanhedrin was an important opportunity for mainstream conservative and radical African American organizations to form a powerful alliance and address the declining social, economic, and political status of all Black Americans.30 The meeting was attended by around two hundred fifty people representing over sixty-one Black organizations. A cohort of five Black


28 Glenda Gilmore argues that Fort-Whiteman planned to make his hometown of Dallas his home base but that first he had “earn his way back home by speaking to radical organizations”. He traveled to Pennsylvania and Ohio, eventually making his way to St. Louis, where he made his first public speech and was promptly arrested by special agents. He was charged with violating the Espionage Act and spent months in jail. See Gilmore, Defying Dixie 37-38. Also see, Dick Reavis,” The Life and Death of Lovett Fort-Whiteman, the Communist Party’s First African American Member,” Jacobin, 04.07.2020, https://jacobinmag.com/2020/04/lovett-fort-whiteman-black-communist-party.

29 Lovett Fort-Whiteman may have fallen off the public record because the Communist Party offices were raided within two weeks of his arrest in St. Louis, leading the party to go underground for the next two years.

30 In this the Sanhedrin was a huge failure because those with more conventional leanings, like Kelly Miller, deeply resented the Communists and their radical tactics. See Herb Boyd, "Radicalism and Resistance: The Evolution of Black Radical Thought", The Black Scholar, 28, no. 1 (Spring 1998) 47-50.
Communist Party members and a handful of ABB members were among those who attended but the assembly was far from radical in its agenda. While Fort-Whiteman, Cyril Briggs, and Otto Huiswoud fiercely opposed Dr. Kelly Miller’s appointment as chairperson of the convention, Lovett Fort-Whiteman did speak on the Communist agenda and pushed for a resolution calling for an end to racial segregation in housing, the termination of colonialism in Africa, an end to tenant farmer contracts, abolition of anti-miscegenation laws, and diplomatic recognition of Soviet Russia.31

Fort-Whiteman also condemned the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for allowing its unions to exclude Black workers from its ranks. He called those workers to join the Communist-affiliated Farmer-Labor Party instead. Most of the resolutions proposed by the ABB and the CP were hindered by Miller, who used his power as chair to appoint an official of the city’s Chamber of Commerce to lead the Sanhedrin’s Labor Committee. The resolutions that did pass were reconstructed to curb the radical language used in the original proposals.32 The black communist cohort desperately needed an alliance with black moderates if they were to play any significant role in the current battle against segregation, but it was not to be. Moderates at the Sanhedrin also moved to expel both the ABB and CPUSA from all further national congresses, which ended any chance of cooperation between the groups for the foreseeable future.33 After the conclusion of the Sanhedrin, Lovett Fort-Whiteman decided to stay in Chicago to become a full-

31 Gilmore, 40-41.

32 There are conflicting accounts of Lovett Fort-Whiteman’s leadership role at the Sanhedrin. Glenda Gilmore contends that Fort-Whiteman led the radical cohort during the assembly. While Mark Solomon argues that Cyril Briggs worked from the beginning to coordinate the meeting and worked alongside Kelly Miller. Solomon barely mentions Fort-Whiteman in his account. Both Gilmore and Solomon agree Lovett Fort-Whiteman did address the convention. See Glenda Gilmore, Defying Dixie, 40-42 and Mark Solomon, The Cry Was Unity.

33 Candee, “From the Volga to the Mississippi”, 27.
time Communist organizer. While in the city, Fort-Whiteman helped lead the Chicago Negro Tenants Protective League and made the acquaintance of Harry Haywood and his brother Otto Hall, all the while federal agents followed and tracked his movements and speaking engagements. The next Comintern Congress (5th) was held in 1924. This time Lovett Fort-Whiteman was tapped by the Bolshevik representative in Harlem, Ludwig Martens, to not only serve as a delegate to the Congress but also to enroll in a Marxist-Leninist indoctrination school.34 In four short months after the Sanhedrin, Lovett Fort-Whiteman journeyed to Russia for the first time.

A Renaissance Man in Russia

Only two short years had passed since Otto Huiswood and Claude McKay traveled to Russia to engage the Comintern by the time Lovett Fort-Whiteman arrived in Moscow in June of 1924. Yet, the political landscape in Russia had changed dramatically within that two-year gap. The Soviet’s charismatic leader, Vladimir Lenin, had died six months earlier and the Russian Party was in the middle of a fierce power struggle and ideological debate. Fort-Whiteman had no idea that his fate would ultimately be tied back to this debate and how it would shape his own ideology. Just as Lovett Fort Whiteman’s lived experience in the United States had shaped his radicalism, his time in Russia also shaped his understanding of Soviet Communism and Marxism-Leninism. Yet, his lived experience in America remained the more powerful influence and this complicated his Soviet life.

Lenin died on January 21, 1924, but before his death, he sowed the seeds of the power struggle and ideological debate in the upper leadership of the party, particularly with his creation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1922 and his appointment of Joseph Stalin as General Secretary of the Party just weeks before his first stroke. The NEP was a contentious topic during Lenin’s life, but he had justified the policy as a form of "state capitalism," the last stage of capitalism before socialism evolved.35 Once Lenin’s health deteriorated in 1923 and he spent more time away from Moscow, the NEP came under fire from those who opposed it from the beginning. The Left Opposition led by Leon Trotsky vehemently opposed the NEP and maintained that the policy had left the Soviet economy weak in the industrial sectors (which desperately needed to be modernized as the rest of Europe in case war broke out again). This group advocated for a plan of mass industrialization along with collectivized, modernized agricultural reforms. The Right Opposition was led by Nikolai Bukharin. This group’s plan was closely aligned with the current policies of the NEP. Bukharin argued that "easing" the peasant class into socialism was the best way to build socialism, besides Lenin had anticipated the NEP final stage would last a prolonged period (decades) before finally evolving into socialism.36 The last faction, known as the triumvirate, consisted of Comintern chairman Grigory Zinoviev, Politburo chairman Lev Kamenev, and General Secretary Joseph Stalin. The triumvirate took a more centered stance on the New Economic Policy. Yet, the NEP had not been the savior Lenin had hoped for and by the summer of 1923, the Soviets were in another economic crisis, and it

35 Richman, "War Communism to NEP" 93-94
had become apparent that the world revolution which looked so promising in 1920 had begun to fizzle out.

Lenin’s illness and early death fostered a cult of personality and since Marxism-Leninism was considered the only truth in Russia, knowledge of Leninist thought was crucial, especially in Party leadership, to secure a position of power. Joseph Stalin had positioned himself to be the authority on Lenin and de facto leader of the Party by the time Lenin died but his grip on the Party was not completely secure in 1924. As Stalin’s biographer, Stephen Kotkin points out, while Trotsky had been confrontational and critical of Lenin very publicly from the beginning, Stalin presented himself as a “student” of Lenin.37 Not only that, but Stalin had amazing organizational skills, something the new regime desperately needed after the civil war ended.

Just weeks before massive strokes left Vladimir Lenin in a semi-incapacitated state, he created a position for Stalin, that of the General Secretary. The position of General Secretary oversaw the day-to-day operations of the Party, and it was in this capacity that Stalin was able to place his cronies in positions of power from the ground up so that even before Lenin died, Stalin had begun to amass a powerful following. By the end of May 1924, at the 13th Congress of the Russian Communist Party, the triumvirate demonized Trotsky and the Left’s position as a "direct turn away from Leninism...and petit-bourgeois deviation".38 This was the beginning of the end


38 Ibid, pg532-33. The 13th Congress was also the first time Stalin openly challenged Trotsky’s permanent revolution theory and put forth the” socialism in one country” theory. Stalin’s biographer, Stephen Kotin maintains this policy is one of the most misinterpreted. He argues that Stalin was a true believer in Marxist-Leninist theory and a supporter of the world revolution by default, that Stalin was only declaring the possibility of socialism in one country first. See Kotin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power* pg. 555. The night before the 13th congress, at the plenum, Lenin’s Testament was read to the Central Committee. This document called for the removal of Stalin. The problem was, Lenin spoke harshly about much of the upper leadership, including accusing Trotsky of anti-bolshevism and Bukharin of having un-Marxist ideas. This led to the Central Committee voting to keep the document secret. Stalin offered to step down as Secretary, but with a hall packed full of Stalin loyalists, and the support of Zinoviev and Kamenev, he was retained as the General Secretary.
for Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition. For the next several years, Bolshevik politics were in a liminal phase. Everything seemed up for debate, including the Comintern’s policy on African Americans.

The Fifth Comintern Congress was held in Moscow from June 17 to July 8, 1924. As John Riddell asserts, this Congress was largely a forgotten congress, but it serves as a bridge between Lenin and Stalin’s leadership.\textsuperscript{39} On arrival, Lovett Fort-Whiteman, and the other Comintern delegates were taken to Lenin’s mausoleum on Red Square. He and the rest of the delegation checked into the Hotel Lux and spent the congress enjoying leisurely activities like boating on the Moscow River and attending classical music concerts.\textsuperscript{40} On July 1, Lovett Fort-Whiteman was given the floor in a session devoted to the "national and colonial question."\textsuperscript{41} Fort-Whiteman wished to be practical, he charged that African American Communists were seeking to undermine the influence of the petty-bourgeois black leaders, but the Party had given little to no assistance. Fort-Whiteman outlined the Great Migration and explained the new Black industry workers were hard to organize. He recommended the Party move South to "exploit" rising tensions among sharecroppers. The same position Lenin had taken in 1920 but Huiswood and McKay had argued against in 1922. Fort-Whiteman went on to explain that the Communist Party was doomed in America if the race question was not solved because "even the wealthy bourgeoisie among the negroes suffer from persecution;" thus they "are not discriminated against


\textsuperscript{40} Joshua Yaffa, “A Black Communist’s Disappearance in Stalin’s Russia” \textit{The New Yorker}, October 18, 2021, \url{https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/10/25/a-black-communists-disappearance-in-stalins-russia-lovett-fort-whiteman-gulag}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid. Also see, Glenda Gilmore, \textit{Defying Dixie}, pg.43.
as a class but as a race”. Fort-Whiteman was a devoted Communist, but he understood that in America, race *classes* you.

Yet, as Glenda Gilmore points out, this was not considered a proper opinion in the eyes of Marxist Bolsheviks, class came first and in turn, created race. For the Soviets and Socialists, racism was a social construct that an egalitarian revolution would remedy. Fort-Whiteman had a different notion due to his lived experience; he understood that in America it always came down to the fact he was a Black man. He failed to convince the Comintern of this point, but the die was cast. From this time on, African American delegates placed emphasis on "race" and pushed the Comintern to stop sidestepping the question of race antagonism. Once the Congress of the Communist International was over, Lovett Fort-Whiteman enrolled in the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (K.U.T.V.). Because the Soviet policy deemed African Americans a “colonized” people, they studied alongside students from China, India, and elsewhere while white students attended the International Lenin School. Fort-Whiteman spent part of his summer (and education) “touring” the Soviet Union.

Fort-Whiteman wrote to WEB DuBois under his party name, James Jackson, "from a village deep in the heart of Russia." He assured DuBois that the USSR had “solved the problem of racial discrimination” and that the various nationalities "live as one large family". Naturally,

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43 Gilmore, pg. 43.


45 Yaffa, "A Black Communist’s Disappearance."

46 Ibid; also quoted in Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, pg. 46.
Lovett Fort-Whiteman’s evaluation of the USSR was refined by his perceptions of American racism. There was no lynching, Jim Crow accommodations, no disenfranchisement based on race, and no widespread use of racial slurs. He pointed out in his letter to DuBois, the Bolsheviks positive treatment of the Jewish populations and how the Soviets encouraged their vast ethnic groups to retain and develop their native culture. He completely missed that the Bolsheviks had suppressed the Jewish and Muslim religions and supported the Communist campaign to persuade women to remove their veils. Fort-Whiteman also failed to realize that the Bolshevik encouragement of various languages and native cultures was a temporary ploy to gain the support of ethnic groups inside Russian borders, just as the NEP was developed to garner support from the peasant classes.

Fort-Whiteman kept up pressure on the Communist International to keep its promises to champion black equality abroad. He wrote an angry letter to Grigory Zinoviev (head of the Comintern) from his Moscow hotel charging the American Workers Party with "no serious or worthwhile efforts to carry Communist teachings to American Black workers" and the Russian’s lack of a promised World Negro Congress. He advocated a special solution, a Communist-backed entity dedicated to recruiting African Americans since the American party could not be depended on to do the work. Lovett maintained that due to racial discrimination, a “peculiar” racial psychology had developed, and that Marxism had spread slowly among blacks because

47 Ibid.

48 Stephen Kotin rightly points out that the ideas of "self-determination" in the Bolshevik lexicon were flexible. Lenin recognized the necessity of fashioning appeals and institutions to accommodate different nations. Of course, on the flip side of the Russian party's attempts to capture native allegiance was nationally inclined CP members in those states obtained a vehicle for their aspirations. The genie could not be put back into the bottle once nationalism took root and this policy was brutally retracted during Russification in the 1930s. See Stephen Kotin, Stalin: Paradoxes of Power, pg. 342-351.
Communists had failed “to approach the negro on his own mental grounds.” When Fort-Whiteman returned to the states in 1925, he led this special solution and created the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC). He also worked to critique Bolshevik propaganda during his first stay. While at university in Moscow, Lovett Fort-Whiteman wrote a letter requesting an interview with Comrade Cinarchowsky, wishing to discuss the Russian’s use of black caricatures in its ads and propaganda. He conceded the Russians did not harbor anti-Black sentiment, as they were just imitating Western depictions, but the use of stereotypes and caricatures to depict Black people reeked of racism all the same.

The Soviets heeded Lovett Fort-Whiteman in some ways. As Alexander Dunphy explains, early Communist cartoon depictions did not treat African Americans as individuals with agency, Black people were depicted as slave caricatures. After the 1922 Comintern Congress, African Americans were depicted as African natives due to the international perspective McKay and Huiswoud brought. Fort-Whiteman’s contribution brought special attention to the issue of race in America so Communist cartoons shifted to horrors inflicted by anti-Black organizations such as the KKK. Yet, Black lynching victims depicted in Communist propaganda continued to be drawn with large lips and noses. The Soviet drawings employed racism as a symbol of capitalism but specific issues facing Black Americans, such as housing discrimination, union exclusion, police brutality, and school segregation, for example, remained absent from Communist propaganda in the United States and Russia.

49 Solomon, 47-48.

50 See footnote 175 in Glenda Gilmore, Defying Dixie, pg. 464; pg. 50. Most of Gilmore’s information comes from a dossier the Soviets compiled on Fort-Whiteman. To my knowledge, she is the only American historian who has physically laid eyes on the file.

propaganda served another purpose as well, to instill pride in the Russian populace, confirming the Bolshevik mission was a noble, modern one and distracting from popular anti-Semitism that still permeated the Russian citizenry. The New Soviet Person proved adept at "speaking anti-racism".52

After his 1925 return, Lovett Fort-Whiteman enthusiastically began organizing the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) and recruiting the first cohort of African American revolutionaries to study in Moscow. The formation of the ANLC coincided with “Bolshevization” of the American Party, meaning the CPUSA was further centralized under Soviet leadership. This process drove some communist sympathizers (black and white) out of the Party.53 Mark Solomon goes on to say the policy of Bolshevization ended the autonomous foreign-language groups within the Party and "meshed" blacks and whites inside the party. Before Bolshevization, the main conduit of organizing for black Communists had been the ABB, which had some ties to the larger black community, but after Bolshevization, that conduit shifted.

https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D81N8161. This is not to say that Communist fronted organizations on the ground did not address these issues. See Harlem Tenants League and American Negro Labor Congress in Mark Solomon, The Cry was Unity, pg. 61-67. For a detailed history of the Sharecroppers Union see Robin Kelley, Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists in the Great Depression (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 1990.

52 Meredith Roman adapted this phrase from an argument put forth by Stephen Kotkin. Kotkin coined the term "speaking Bolshevism" in his work on the industrialization of Magnitogorsk. Kotkin's argument is citizens of Communist or National Socialist regimes must master "state language" to demonstrate compliance with the regime's political system. Kotkin's term reflects this concept in Soviet Russia. See Stephen Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995). Meredith Roman takes Kotkin's concept a step further, showing not only did Soviet propaganda prove to be a road map in thought of the New Soviet Person but professing anti-racism provided an avenue to prove one was a New Soviet Person. See Meredith Roman, Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928-1937 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

to the ANLC which had few community ties and was open to white membership.\textsuperscript{54} The Comintern disbanded the ABB and made the ANLC the official black Communist recruitment arm, creating a deep resentment between Cyril Briggs and Lovett Fort-Whiteman.

The ANLC was supposed to transform the American racial and social landscape and its organizers hoped that union and nonunion black workers, as well as farmers, intellectuals, and militants of all races would descend on Chicago for the founding convention. Months before the convention, Otto Huiswood and other black Communists pleaded with the Soviet Party leadership not to "place the stamp of our Party conspicuously upon the Congress," believing it would kill the movement before it started. They requested white communists not be at the forefront and propaganda be written to address "the psychology and status of Negro workers."\textsuperscript{55} The Soviets did not heed this advice and the organization struggled from the start.

The initial call for the Congress went out in the spring of 1925. The black press largely ignored the event or gave voice to moderates who did not look favorably on Communist affiliations.\textsuperscript{56} Not only did outright opposition hamper the congress, but as Mark Solomon argues, these were lean years in the labor movement.\textsuperscript{57} Black class consciousness grew slowly in the face of white working-class hostility and being affiliated with a radical association brought job loss and further repression. Nevertheless, Fort-Whiteman publicized the conference and its

\textsuperscript{54} Solomon, \textit{The Cry was Unity}, 50.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 52.

\textsuperscript{56} Solomon, 53-55. Also see Earl Ofari Hutchinson, \textit{Blacks and Reds: Race and Class in Conflict, 1919-1990} 29-39. The Communists were fearless in their criticisms of organized labor unions like the AFL, while the more moderate groups favored integration into these existing organizations as the best hope for securing black worker rights. A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters is a prime example of this strategy. This union did receive a charter from the AFL in 1935.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
affiliation with the Communist Party. He gave multiple interviews to the black press to tout the organization and spread the Communist message as the answer to American race relations, so much so that *Time* magazine dubbed him the "the Reddest of the Blacks” in 1925.58

The Congress took place on October 25, 1925. After months of traveling to pull the ANLC together and secure delegates, thirty-three delegates were seated (only two were from the South) but hundreds of observers attended.59 Harry Haywood, who had assisted Fort-Whiteman with organizing the convention, was particularly enthusiastic about the type of delegates attracted to the ANLC. The attendees were not middle-class professionals but people who represented black labor associations, union locals, and community organizers. There were janitors, waiters, cooks, farmers, domestics, steel, and mine workers.60 Yet, despite the warning from black party members to avoid large-scale white involvement and blatant affiliation with Communism, Bolshevization demanded a bi-racial conference. A predominantly white audience filled the hall under a banner of a black farmer and laborer with clasped hands and a portrait of the hammer and sickle and the hall was decorated with bright red signage urging the workers to

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59 Solomon, 55. Earl Ofari Hutchinson puts the number of seated delegates as forty, but he does not include a source for this number in his work. See *Blacks and Reds* pg.30.

60 Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 144-45. Harry stated after the first session “I was literally walking on air. At last, I felt, we were about to get somewhere in our work among blacks.”
revolution.\textsuperscript{61} It is unclear just how much influence the Russian CP had on the Congress program but the presence of large numbers of white Party members at the Congress can only be attributed to their policy of Bolshevization and the Comintern’s shift toward Stalin’s "socialism in one country”, as black party members had cautioned against that exact practice.\textsuperscript{62} What is clear is that there was a factional divide between African American party members, many were critical of the ANLC and laid the blame for the organization’s failure squarely at Fort-Whiteman’s feet.\textsuperscript{63}

By all accounts, Lovett Fort-Whiteman was a true stage performer. He was eccentric in his dress and demeanor, which could be off-putting to his fellow black Party members.\textsuperscript{64} Fort-Whiteman's love for Moscow and his flair for the dramatic prompted him to plan an opening night extravaganza of Russian ballet and theater for the Congress. He may have gone a bit too far. Harry Haywood recounted the opening night in his autobiography. He states the "Russian ballet" troupe were American dancers, who after shouting a racial slur, would not take the stage, and the one-act Pushkin play was spoken entirely in Russian. While interesting, Haywood wondered about "the relevance to a black workers congress."\textsuperscript{65} There were other critical complaints of Fort-Whiteman on the ANLC promotion trail, such as disappearing after his

\textsuperscript{61} The opening night of the Congress did have a high number of African Americans in attendance but the next morning, those crowds did not return, leaving mainly white CP members and sympathizers. See Mark Solomon, \textit{The Cry Was Unity}, 55. Also see Hutchinson, 31.

\textsuperscript{62} The Comintern followed the logic of "socialism in one country" by pulling back focus on the ideas of world revolution to the defense of the Soviet state. While the CP never totally abandoned the world revolution ideology (because it was a Marxist principle and ideology was the only truth), focus only shifted away from that work when the Russian Party dictated it needed to (which is what Stalin’s policy did).


\textsuperscript{64} Glenda Gilmore, \textit{Defying Dixie} 32-45; and Harry Haywood, \textit{Black Bolshevik} pg.144-46; and Joy Gleason Carew, \textit{Blacks, Reds, and Russians}.

\textsuperscript{65} Haywood, 144-45.
speeches and not staying to organize workers, as well as his complete lack of touring in the southern states as he had promised to do. The most potent complaints came from Afro-Caribbean members Cyril Briggs, Otto Huiswoud, and Richard B. Moore. These men were critical of the fact that Fort-Whiteman had leap-frogged ahead of them for leadership of the ANLC. In their opinion and as per their earlier request to distance the Party from the congress, the ANLC was supposed to become a mass organization, one that included members whose only agreement with the Communist Party was with its racial program. Fort-Whiteman’s detractors complained he tied it too much to the Party and the Russian Soviets.

Regardless (or in spite) of Fort-Whiteman's antics, the ANLC never drew large numbers of members. Even after Lovett Fort-Whiteman was removed from the leadership of the organization in 1927, the organization did not grow. There are a few reasons for this lack of growth, one being bolshevization and prominence of white members in the ANLC. The immense distrust among black workers when white workers and organizers were involved in union organizing was extremely difficult to overcome. Fort-Whiteman had been right in his address at the Comintern, many black workers understood their discrimination as racial, not class-based. Even if black workers joined the ANLC, what guarantee could the Communists give that white labor would welcome them? Another reason membership was hampered was that the American Federation of Labor (AFL) banned any black unionists from participating in the ANLC. There

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68 Since the ANLC was openly affiliated with the Soviet Communists and American Party, it was immediately branded by the press as radical. William Green, head of the AFL, was especially vocal about this affiliation cautioning black Americans who “think all their grievances will be remedied by overturning the government of the
was also an edict from Moscow that demanded the organization cease breaking bread with black clergy members and put them on equal footing with the capitalists. The turn against preachers who sympathized with the ANLC cause did not go unnoticed in the black press. Finally, as Earl Ofari Hutchinson demonstrates, the organization’s programs looked remarkably like the programs of other black protest organizations, particularly the NAACP. While Lovett Fort-Whiteman failed to organize black workers in masse for the ANLC, he did succeed in recruiting an all-black student cohort to study in Moscow.

**Sojourners in Red Russia**

It was a fortuitous meeting with Lovett Fort-Whiteman on a Chicago street, that drew Oliver Golden to Moscow for study. Like many other educated black Americans, Oliver Golden found jobs his education had prepared him for closed to him because of his race after WWI. He worked as a waiter, barber, and porter on a railroad. Golden had also married for the first time after returning from war to Jane Wilson and was living a quiet existence, but he was looking for a respite from Jim Crow. Fort-Whiteman had adopted a Russian style of dress upon his return home from Moscow in 1925. He had shaved his head, sported a *robochka*, knee-high boots, and a small mustache, so his appearance to Golden was a little shocking to say the least. Harry Haywood later recounted in his autobiography how Golden explained this chance encounter:

> “I asked Fort-Whiteman what the hell he was wearing. Had he come off the stage and forgotten to change clothes? He informed me that these were Russian clothes and that he had just returned from that country.” Golden at first thought it was a put-on but became...

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69 Hutchinson, 35, 37-40

70 Gilmore, 47.
interested as Fort-Whiteman talked about his experiences. ‘Then out of the blue, he asked me if I wanted to go to Russia as a student. At first, I thought he was kidding, but man, I would have done anything to get off those dining cars! I was finally convinced he was serious. But, I’m married, I told him. What about my wife?’ ‘Why bring her along too!’ he replied. ‘He took me to his office at the American Negro Labor Congress, an impressive set up with a secretary, and I was convinced. Fort-Whiteman gave me money to get passports, and the next thing I knew, a couple of weeks later were on a boat with Otto (Haywood’s brother) and the others on the way to Russia. And here I am now’.”

Golden was part of the first group of students who journeyed to Russia after Fort-Whiteman arrived back in the United States. Harry Haywood followed soon after in early 1926 but because of his work with the ANLC and Fort-Whiteman, Harry had begun to draw attention from the FBI. Thus, in contrast to Oliver’s departure for the Soviet Union just months before, which had been heavily publicized, Haywood’s departure was clandestine.

The day Haywood arrived in Moscow to take up his studies was a somber one for the African American students. Just that morning, Oliver Golden’s wife, Jane, suddenly passed away. By Harry’s own account, this event (and the funeral that followed) had a deep effect on all the Black American students at the school. The school collective and its leaders immediately took over the funeral arrangements and the chairman of the collective delivered the eulogy. Most of Golden’s fellow students at the Toilers of the East came out to pay their respects. It was the overwhelming outpouring of support from school leaders and fellow students that deeply moved the African American students and made a profound impression, as Jane Golden was not a

71 Haywood, Black Bolshevik, 166. Also see Lily Golden, My Long Journey Home (Chicago: Third World Press), 2002, 4; and Yelena Khanga, Soul to Soul: A Black Russian American Family 1865-1992 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.) 1994

72 This group included William Patterson, Otto Hall, and Roy Mahoney. See Joy Gleason Carew, Blacks, Reds, and Russians, 32.

73 Haywood recounts how he changed his name from Harry Hall to Harry Haywood to protect his family from anti-Communist harassment and made his way to Moscow by way of Detroit, then Canada, and finally Germany. See Black Bolshevik, 145-46.
member of the Communist Party but had taken on a mother figure role to her husband’s fellow
students.74

Haywood and Golden, like Fort-Whiteman, were mesmerized by the Soviet system. Haywood wrote extensively about the dozens of students of various nationalities he studied with at KUTV and his favorable impression of the Bolshevik policy to foster individual cultures within this multi-ethnic state.75 He took to his studies with excitement, which consisted of a three-year course on Marxist-Leninism and Stalinist teachings ranging in topics such as Lenin’s analysis of imperialism, theories and tactics of proletarian revolution, and the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).76 Oliver and Harry proved to be exceptional students. Golden shined in Marxian economy courses, while Haywood grew interested in the Soviet’s policy on nationalities.77 After coming to power, the Bolsheviks based their nationality policy on the principles of Marxist-Leninism.78 According to this ideology, nationalism was considered a bourgeois idea that would eventually disappear in time just as all nations would. Yet, the Bolshevik leadership saw revolutionary potential in nationalism and thought it could advance their own revolution, so they supported the idea of self-determination of those nations (just as they had used the NEP and land decrees to secure the support of the peasantry). Lenin, along with Joseph Stalin, who at the time was the People’s Commissariat for Nationalities,

74 Haywood, Black Bolshevik, 175-186. For Harry and the other Black students, it was the school’s collective response to Jane Golden’s death that impressed him and the vast outpouring of support they offered to a grief-stricken Oliver Golden.

75 Haywood, 155-160, 163-165.

76 Haywood, 161.

77 Ibid, 386.

reasoned that by granting forms of nationhood, the Soviets could split the above-class alliance for statehood. Class divisions would eventually emerge, and the Soviets would be there to recruit supporters from that division to build a communist empire. Simply put, the mass appeal of nationalism could be disarmed by granting forms of nationhood. The policy of *korenizatsia* (indigenization) was designed to recruit ethnic support for the revolution, not provide a model for governing a multi-ethnic state.79

Both Golden and Haywood developed romantic relationships with Russian women while they were students, and both traveled within the empire to collective farms and factories as was required for their education.80 The African American students who had traveled to Russia in the mid-twenties recorded their experiences with the Russian people as positive. Harry Haywood recalled “most people were dressed neatly, though shabbily, and all appeared to be well-fed. They were bright and cheerful...went about with purpose. People in Leningrad looked at me-and I at them...after all, a black man was seldom seen in those parts”.81 Haywood only spoke of one racist encounter while in Moscow. A drunken man on a streetcar called him a “black devil” but before Haywood could address the gentleman, other passengers on the car held an impromptu meeting and decided to turn the drunkard into Soviet authorities for white chauvinism.82 Other

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80 Harry Haywood married (for the second time) a woman he met in 1926 at a casual party. He was never able to bring her back to the United States with him. See Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 174, 388-390. Oliver Golden fathered a child with a fellow student at KUTV named Anna. Their son, Ollava was born in 1929 after Golden had returned to the United States. Both Anna and Ollava are discussed at length (favorably) in Oliver’s daughter’s book. See Lily Golden, *My Long Journey Home*, 56. For details about the student visits outside of Moscow see Haywood, 191, 212-213.

81 Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 152.

82 Ibid.
black students recounted episodes of blatant racism by Soviet citizens as well, such as being called "a monkey" or jeered in the Moscow street "to say a few words in Negro". For the most part, these instances were rare and most black sojourners did not perceive these episodes as instances of hate, merely ignorance and curiosity. For the Black students, Russia was a promised land of sorts. While the environment was challenging (not only the weather but also the chronic lack of creature comforts), Russia offered opportunities for work and education they could not have had in the United States and allowed them to become contributing, valued members of a society. It was in this spirit that the Comintern students took up their studies.

It is important to note a few things here. First, not all was perfect in Soviet Russia for the African American students who traveled there. While it is widely known that foreigners who traveled to Russia were given special privileges and accommodations, and the American students were no different, there were complaints from some of the Black students about insufficient accommodations. Students complained of dirty, freezing dorms with dim lighting, bed bugs, and food unfit for consumption (such as cooked chicken with feathers still attached). There were also complaints about segregation of schools, as white students attended the International Lenin School. Harry Haywood was tapped as the first Black student to enroll at the Lenin School after his first year of study at the KUTV. The next thing to be aware of is the places American students traveled to in the Soviet Union were tightly controlled by the Party. The students were

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83 Woodford McClellan, “Africans and Black Americans in the Comintern Schools”, pg.385-386; and Joy Gleason Carew, Blacks, Reds, and Russians, pg.40.

84 All of the sojourners I have examined throughout my research talk about the special status they enjoyed while in Russia. Foreigners didn’t wait for hours in bread lines like the average Soviet citizens and they didn’t go hungry, they had access to markets full of fruits, vegetables, and foreign goods, and had access to good quality housing. See Harry Haywood, Black Bolshevik; Lily Golden, My Long Journey Home; Robert Robinson, Black on Red; Langston Hughes, I Wonder as I Wander; and Homer Smith, Black Man in Red Russia (Chicago: Johnson Publishing), 1964.
not allowed to just roam the country freely, permission was required to leave Moscow. Even the collective farms Haywood worked on during his Soviet education were only 60 miles outside of Moscow.\textsuperscript{85} Foreign travel to the Soviet Union played a significant role in influencing world opinion. It was all about what the person saw. The regime made a concerted effort to control what those influencers saw and reported. The survival of the regime depended on the controlled flow of "material designed to enhance respect for the government and generate approval of its policies."\textsuperscript{86}

The last thing to be aware of is politics and student activity in high-level Soviet politics were commonplace. Not only were African American students intimately involved in hammering out Soviet policy, but they were also given access to some of the highest-ranking members of the Bolshevik government, something they could have never achieved in their homeland of the United States. Since Stalin had put men loyal to himself in the university, the students were taught by men loyal to his ideas of "socialism in one country” and Stalin's interpretations of Lenin’s ideas on Nationalities, one of the only policies Lenin and Stalin somewhat disagreed on.\textsuperscript{87} In 1927, while Golden and Haywood were students (it was Haywood's first year at the

\textsuperscript{85} Haywood, 191, 212

\textsuperscript{86} Sylvia Margulies, \textit{The pilgrimage of Russia: the Soviet Union and the treatment of foreigners, 1924-1937} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 1968, pg.3-7. In the case of African American sojourners, there is one known exception to the open travel rule somewhat. Homer Smith traveled to Russia in 1931 with Langston Hughes and the \textit{Black and White} film crew. When the movie was canceled, Smith (who was college-educated in journalism but relegated to a postal service job in the US) decided to stay in Russia due to the Great Depression that was raging in America and help “build socialism” by working in the Moscow Postal service. Before World War II broke out, he began reporting for the Associated Press. When the war broke out, due to Smith’s journalism duties, he was allowed to go to the front and travel largely unhindered in Soviet Russia. Upon his return to the states after the war was over, Smith wrote an autobiography of his time in Russia. He is the only black Party member to write extensively about the abrupt disappearances of his fellow postal workers during the Purge years and the devastating famine that accompanied forced collectivization. See Homer Smith, \textit{Black Man in Red Russia} (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company), 1964.

\textsuperscript{87} While it is commonly known among Russian historians that Stalin and Lenin somewhat disagreed on ideas of federalism as Lenin railed against Great Russian chauvinism, Stalin worried about non-Russian backwardness. Stalin argued that like the NEP, federalism would be a step toward full socialism. See Stephen Kotkin, \textit{Stalin:}
Lenin School), Trotsky belatedly denounced Stalin’s "socialism in one country" argument as a "betrayal" of the world revolution, prompting Stalin to begin his move to have Trotsky and those who agreed with him removed from the Party.\textsuperscript{88} Since Stalin had turned on his allies, Zinoviev lined up behind Trotsky while Bukharin continued to support Stalin (just as he had when Stalin first introduced the idea in 1924). Harry Haywood and the students at the Lenin School witnessed and supported the ousting of Trotsky in 1927. As Harry saw it, "Trotsky’s purist concept of the class struggle had led to the denial of the struggle for black liberation as a special feature of the class struggle."\textsuperscript{89} After Trotsky’s exile, the Soviet political winds changed again, and by the 6\textsuperscript{th} Comintern Congress in 1928, Stalin had secured his power over the Russian Communist Party, and Harry Haywood, under the influence of Stalin’s ideas on nationalities, drafted one of the most controversial Party directives to address the "negro question."

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\textit{Paradoxes of Power}, 344-351; 386-88. Kotkin also shows that Stalin countered every point of Lenin’s notes on Nationalities policy that was dictated after he became ill during the 1923 12\textsuperscript{th} Party Congress with Lenin’s own previous writings. His knowledge of Leninism once again aided Stalin in winning over most of his fellow CP members, 496-97. \\
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 615. \\
\textsuperscript{89} Haywood, \textit{Black Bolshevik}, 181-184.
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Chapter 3: The Black Belt Thesis

The Russian Revolution was an electrifying event, and it had a vast impact on African American intellectuals who sought solutions to resecure the rights that had been systematically and deliberately stripped from them at home. The reasons for this were clear. From the outset, Karl Marx was critical of American chattel slavery during his lifetime. He even went as far as to call the Emancipation Proclamation “the most important document in American History.”¹ One of Socialism’s most vocal critics of African American treatment was Vladimir Lenin and he continued to give special attention to black liberation issues after the October Revolution. The Soviets invoked a powerful slogan that they hoped would draw African American radical sympathies, the right to self-determination.² Yet, there were issues from the very beginning with Lenin’s Bolshevism and the idea of self-determination. Ones that went unseen by black radicals in the early years after the Revolution but would come to light after they immigrated to this new “utopia.” For one, the Bolshevik model was so all-encompassing, it required constant, intense policing and rapid punishment of violations, intentional or not. Soviet Russia became a somewhat closed society controlled by the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” This early model, established under Lenin, of violent coercion, state-sanctioned police terror, and lack of civil society (there was no freedom of speech, press, or assembly, no free elections, and no political freedom to form an opposing party) continued and were amplified under Joseph Stalin. The year

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¹ Paul Heidleman, “Socialism and Black Oppression”, *Jacobin* April 30, 2018. Cedric Robinson makes the case that other than this comment, Marx had little to offer on the “race” question as their writings had been based on European geopolitics, not colonial oppression. See Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

1928 turned out to be pivotal for both Stalin and the African American cohort of communists in Russia.

Stalin, with the help of Nikolai Bukharin, had outmaneuvered his former allies Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Trotsky in 1927 after the latter publicly criticized the leader's "socialism in one country" policy. Stalin first put forth this idea in 1924 after the world communist revolution failed to materialize. To this end, Stalin maintained that the Soviets needed to turn inward to build and protect socialism at home.\(^3\) As almost a natural progression of the socialism in one country doctrine and Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Soviets turned to rhetoric of "capitalist encirclement" and were convinced that war from the west was imminent.\(^4\) It was in this vein Stalin proclaimed that because the left opposition's actions demonstrated internal disunity and weakness, they were objectively traitors, who invited foreign intervention. In November of 1927, Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the party, and Kamenev's expulsion followed in December. By 1928, Trotsky and his principal followers were internally exiled and just a short year later, Leon Trotsky was exiled from the Soviet Union outright. With the Left Opposition

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\(^3\) To Trotsky and the Left Opposition, this was a complete abandonment of Marx's world revolution theory. See Erik Van Ree, "Socialism In One Country: A Reassessment" *Studies in East European Thought* 50 no.2 (June, 1998) 77-117.

\(^4\) The idea of "capitalist encirclement" was the natural progression of Stalin's "socialism in one country" policy. Following Lenin's theory of imperialism, Stalin was inclined to think that the development of capitalism, led to war, and because Soviet socialism constituted an immediate threat to the capitalist order, war between socialist Russia and the capitalist West was unavoidable. As Sheila Fitzpatrick and Stephen Kotkin show, there was reason to think the west was moving against the Russian regime during the mid-1920s. The west had intervened on behalf of the White forces during the Russian Civil War, and in 1924 there had been threats of war from the East, and finally, in 1927 there was a war scare in Russia due to many Western governments withdrawing diplomatic relations from Russia. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1994) and Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941* (New York: Penguin Press) 2017. For more on the 1927 war scare see Hugh Hudson Jr., "The 1927 Soviet War Scare: The Foreign Affairs-Domestic Policy Nexus Revisited" *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 39 no.2 145-165.
cast out of the Party, Stalin began to shift back to the left and away from his conservative allies. In 1929, Stalin applied the same tactics on Bukharin as he did to his opponents on the left. 

Exactly when Stalin concluded that now was the time to force the countryside onto the path of socialism (by collectivization) is not certain but the fact that Russia was facing a major food shortage in 1928 could serve as a deciding factor. Ideologically the question (and mission) remained, how to build socialism? The policies of socialism in one country and capitalist encirclement brought a new urgency to solve this question and the food shortage brought further attacks on the NEP. Stalin and many other Soviet Communists felt they had made enough concessions to the “kulak” class and NEPmen, whom they believed ultimately sought to destroy socialism with their capitalistic ways. The First Five-Year Plan was the answer to building socialism and protecting Russia from "foreign invasion." More importantly, the Soviets identified African Americans as valued allies in resisting an imperialist war against the first workers' state. For Stalin, collectivization had to work. The most important stage of the First Five Year Plan, industrialization, depended on it. Russia’s future depended on it. Furthermore,

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5 Nikolai Bukharin was a true believer just as Stalin and the rest of the Bolshevik leadership was. Yet, Bukharin was not in favor of Stalin's abrupt turn toward forced collectivization and dismantlement of the NEP. Bukharin advocated a much slower approach, but his position was not one of popular opinion within the higher ranks of the Party. By 1929, Bukharin had lost Stalin's favor and his position in the Comintern, as well as the Politburo. He was temporarily rehabilitated before the onset of the Great Purges of 1936. Bukharin was famously put on public trial in 1938 (The Trial of the Twenty-One) and was executed the same year at the Kommunarka shooting grounds.

6 Kotkin, Stalin: Paradoxes of Power 670-673. Kotkin explains that privately among the Soviet leadership the NEP had been discussed endlessly. He goes on to argue that even with the profound problems of the NEP, the bottom-line problem with the NEP was ideological and that there was no end in sight to the policy.

7 The farmers and store owners who profited from the NEP were known as” kulaks” (farmers/peasants) and NEPmen (business owners and management). After 1928, Stalin deemed these people enemies of the state.

8 The First Five Year Plan was a list of economic goals put forth by Joseph Stalin in 1928. This policy centered around rapid industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture. This plan also served as a replacement of the NEP. The policy of collectivization was staunchly resisted by the peasant classes and forced grain requisitions led to widespread famine by 1930.

9 For Stalin, Russia’s backwardness could be its downfall. Industrialization had to happen for Russia to survive in a modern age and to survive the invasion of the West (that Stalin was convinced could happen at any moment).
Stalin predicted a great economic downturn coming to the capitalist West and he wanted Russia ready to lead the Communist revolution and the world into a modern age.

The African American cohort of students in Soviet Russia, insulated from the vast famine and hardship brought about by forced collectivization, cheered the coming of socialism and the First Five Year plan. While enjoying his time in Soviet Russia, Harry Haywood's mind was still on the black liberation struggle back home. The ANLC was, in part, the Party's first attempt to use race to lure Black people away from the NAACP and Garvey. When it failed, the CP changed tactics by endorsing the demands for social equality, which was fairly easy to do since Briggs, Fort-Whiteman, and Haywood had pushed for this since they entered the Party. Now the Party had to convince African Americans they would fight for their platform. After years of racist abuse, many African Americans did not trust white people and wanted to develop and maintain their own programs and organizations. This was something Marcus Garvey had fostered with the UNIA. Harry knew that Garvey had not invented black nationalism, only tapped into it. Now, Haywood wondered if he could do the same and bring Black Americans in mass to the Communist Party.

While Karl Marx wrote sparingly on colonial people, he had given future Communists a twig to hang their theories of self-determination on, the Irish struggle against the British crown.

10 Harry Haywood's autobiography is full of the same rhetoric used by the CPSU and Comintern about "right deviationists", the coming war threat, and the problems with nationalism. It was part and parcel of his 1928 thesis and the defense of that policy going forward. See Haywood, Black Bolshevik pg227-234, 245-269, 277-280.


12 Hutchinson, Blacks and Reds, 50. Also see Shlomo Avineri, Karl Marx and Colonialism and Modernization (New York: Doubleday, 1969.)
Lenin worked to bring Marx's theory in line with modern times by delineating between the nationalism of oppressed nations and oppressor nations, although he didn't support nationalism because of his commitment to Marxism.\textsuperscript{13} Stalin took Lenin's theory and tried to give it more depth by adding the precepts that define what a nation is. Stalin defined a nation as a "stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up."\textsuperscript{14} It was these exact doctrines that influenced Harry Haywood's thinking as he crafted a new directive for the Party's work among African Americans. While at the Lenin School, Harry Haywood studied various independence movements, including the Irish campaign against the British. He connected parallels between the position of the Irish independence seekers and black Americans.\textsuperscript{15} However, it was a young Comintern functionary, Nasanov, who had the most impact on Haywood. Nasanov, a member of the Comintern Far East Bureau, had spent time in China but after the Comintern expressed displeasure with the CP of China and the agents there for "rightist policies", he was "exiled" to the United States to work with the Young Communist International.\textsuperscript{16} Upon Nasanov's return from the United States in 1927, he linked up with Haywood at the Lenin School. Harry Haywood stated, "Nasanov's observations had convinced him that US Blacks were essentially an oppressed nation...to me, the idea of a Black nation within the US boundaries seemed far-fetched and consonant with American reality."\textsuperscript{17} Haywood


\textsuperscript{14} Joseph Stalin, Marxism and the National Question (New York: International Publishers, 1942) 12-23.

\textsuperscript{15} Haywood, pg.205-206.


\textsuperscript{17} Haywood, 218-219.
recalled in his autobiography that Nasanov gradually convinced him that the policy was the
answer to revolutionizing black southerners, so there is no question the influences on Haywood's
ideology were Russian in this case.¹⁸

The thesis Haywood and Nasanov drafted and presented to the Comintern Congress in
1928 became known as the Black Belt Thesis. The thesis essentially argued black southerners
were trapped in semi-feudal conditions (lack of land ownership, poor living conditions, and
economic oppression) and these conditions facilitated an oppressed nation within the South,
where the majority of African Americans still lived. Haywood likened black Americans to an
"internal colony" of American imperialism and insisted that African Americans suffered the
same brutalities as other colonials.¹⁹ The men advocated a slogan of "self-determination up to
and including the right to secede from America" as the answer to black southern recruitment and
a way to steer revolution when the concept of black nationalism became popular again (as
Garvey had lost popularity at this point but it was his followers the CPUSA were trying to
recruit). Just as Lovett Fort-Whiteman did not see religious oppression in Bolshevik policy,
Harry Haywood could not understand that the idea of self-determination under Bolshevik
Communism was a fallacy. No Russian citizen (or Party member) could chart their own way or

¹⁸ Harry Haywood promoted this idea of self-determination until his death, so this was a lasting influence on his
political thought. Haywood, Black Bolshevik, pg.128, 327. Many revisionist CPUSA historians charge the idea of
self-determination was known to African Americans long before the Soviets came into the picture. Most cite the
early writings of Cyril Briggs. See Mark Solomon, The Cry Was Unity and Robin Kelley, Hammer and Hoe.
However, Harvey Klehr and William Tompson completely impeached this argument. Tracking Briggs’s newspaper
writings, they show the ABB did initially support Garvey’s Back to Africa movement but once the ABB became
absorbed by the CPUSA, this stance of separatism was revised. They also point out Haywood didn’t meet Briggs
until Harry’s return to the states in 1930. See, Harvey Klehr and William Tompson, “Self-Determination in the

¹⁹ See, Haywood, Black Bolshevik, pg.198-280; Garder, "African Americans in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and
the Black Belt", pg. 358. The thesis in its entirety can be read in Foner and Allen (eds), American Communism and
Black Americans, pg. 28-30.
determine for themselves if Bolshevism was right for them. Even on an international scale, the Bolsheviks temporarily allowed the Soviet Republics (such as Ukraine, Belorussia, and Estonia for example) to keep languages and cultural practices, but these countries were still tightly controlled by Moscow and any CP member, regardless of where they were, who went against Moscow directives were expelled from the party or worse.

Haywood explained in his autobiography the reasoning behind the Comintern's shift on African American policy leading up to the Sixth Comintern Congress was "the changed world situation."\(^{20}\) The economic downturn Stalin had predicted for the capitalist West was already showing signs in Europe and there was an upsurge of colonial revolution in China, India, and Indonesia. In the Communist mind, these harbingers signaled a new period, and it was to be a time of renewed revolutionary struggle. For Harry and the Soviets, "in order to lead these struggles, an attack on right opportunism was required...with the national and colonial question acquiring a new urgency."\(^{21}\) It was in this context that Harry and the leadership of the Communist International felt "that the establishment of a revolutionary line on the African American question was key if the CPUSA was to lead the joint struggle of black and white working masses."\(^{22}\)

Before the Congress took place, Harry and Nasanov's thesis was presented to a special subcommittee of the Comintern, where it faced the first serious critique by fellow black CP


\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
members.23 Harry's brother, Otto, was the first to voice concern during the preliminary assessment of the new thesis. Otto and the other black members of the subcommittee asserted the traditional Marxist line that nationalism brought to the fore by Marcus Garvey was a "foreign importation" that had attached itself to the black freedom movement. Therefore, African Americans were not an oppressed nation but an oppressed racial minority. From this line, Otto concluded that "the long-range goal of the movement was not the right of self-determination but complete economic, social, and political equality to be won through a revolutionary alliance of Blacks and class-conscious white labor in a joint struggle for socialism...that any type of nationalism among Blacks was reactionary"24 Otto's critique was met head-on by Harry, but this dissenting argument proved to be a harbinger of what was to come at the Comintern Congress.

Sixth Comintern Congress and the return of Lovett Fort-Whiteman

By the time of the 1928 Comintern Congress, many of the first cohort of students Lovett Fort-Whiteman had recruited to KUTV, including Oliver Golden, had returned to the United States after the completion of their university studies but subsequent cohorts remained and so did Harry Haywood.25 Those remaining were deeply involved in the debate on "the negro question."

As for Lovett Fort-Whiteman, the 1927 American Negro Labor Congress debacle had left him in

23 Haywood, 228. Harry explains that the composition of the subcommittee was Nasanov and five students. The five students consisted of four black students, two of which were Harry and his brother Otto. The other two black students are not named in Haywood's account. The fifth student was Clarence Hathaway, a fellow white student from the Lenin School.

24 Ibid, 229.

25 Lily Golden recounts that after the death of his wife, Jane, Oliver Golden was deeply depressed and found solace with a fellow KUTV student named Anna. Lily described Anna as "the first Udmurd woman to receive and education at the Toilers of the East University". Anna and Oliver had a son, Ollava, in 1929 (possibly after Oliver's return to the States). After Oliver's return to the USSR in 1931, he searched for Anna but was informed by Moscow officials she and their son were dead. See Lily Golden, My Long Journey Home, 56-57.
hot water with the Soviet leadership. Fort-Whiteman's difficulties at the grassroots level in the South reflected and fueled a debate in the halls of the Kremlin. There were really three ideological issues that divided the Communists when organizing African Americans: the direction of the American economy, whether black farmers or proletarians should be organized first, and how much black Southerners' condition resembled that of minorities in the Soviet republics? Suddenly emancipated from his Party duties in 1927, Fort-Whiteman sought solace that summer by enrolling in Robert Harry Lowie's anthropology class at Columbia University. It had a profound effect on his understanding of nationhood and on how to attract African Americans to communism.\(^{26}\) He came to believe the CP should not establish separate organizations, such as the ANLC, and they should not try to organize southern rural African Americans. Action should proceed on class lines, not racial ones. While he didn't mean black people should not organize, he now advocated they should be organized along with white people, according to their class interests. It is important to note here that Fort-Whiteman's opinions on this matter were also a reflection of the American Communist leadership's opinions under Jay Lovestone and the historic party line of the Soviet Bolsheviks.

Again, Fort-Whiteman was tapped to be a delegate to the 1928 Comintern Congress. As he prepared for the upcoming meeting, Lovett Fort-Whiteman coauthored a thesis of his own that would ultimately counter Harry Haywood's and present the Lovestone faction's stance during the debate that was sure to ensue. The paper titled "Thesis for a New Negro Policy" doubled down on the Lovestone factional stance and argued that it was counterrevolutionary to organize black and white sharecroppers because white southern farmers would never join black farmers. Since

\(^{26}\) Gilmore, 55-69. Lowie was teaching Franz Boas, who argued that cultural diffusion meant that minority groups did not have distinct, fixed cultures, an argument that countered Soviet ideas of ethnic nationhood.
black farmers were still leaving the South in droves for northern urban jobs, the Party should focus attention on organizing these radical transplants. Fort-Whiteman's thesis bore the signatures of William Patterson, a black student recruited by Fort-Whiteman and later leader of the International Labor Defense (ILD), and Jay Lovestone, the General Secretary of the CPUSA. Lovett Fort-Whiteman had no way of knowing that Stalin’s left turn in 1928, would leave him and his ideas on organizing black Americans labeled as a right deviationist or in other words, a sympathizer with Bukharin.

In truth, the Lovestone-Fort-Whiteman position antagonized three powerful ideological groups at home and abroad. First, there were those who supported Lovestone's competitor and rising party star, William Z. Foster. Foster was an ardent Stalinist and Harry Haywood was the Foster group's only African American member. Then there were black Party members, such as Cyril Briggs and Otto Huiswood, who had come to the party through the ABB. That group, which embraced a form of black nationalism that the Party tolerated in the early 1920s, also believed in the immediacy of the revolution, making them allies of Foster as well. Finally, the Lovestone-Foster breach in the American Party mirrored the breach among the Soviets that was partly personal, partly ideological. In the weeks leading up to the Congress as the delegates arrived in Moscow, each had settled into their respective camps and were ready to do battle. Each camp had heard rumblings of a possible right oppositionist faction in the Soviet Party but nothing definitive had become known yet. Harry Haywood explained,

"They (the delegates of the Foster faction) were anxious to get a report on the situation in the Soviet Party...we gave them the rundown as we saw it. The issues in the discussion included industrialization, the five-year plan, collectivization, the drive against the kulaks and the war danger. We told them about disagreements in the

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27 "Thesis for a New Negro Policy," May 28, 1928, 495/155/64, 2, RGASPI, quoted in Gilmore, Defying Dixie, pg. 59; Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, 64, 331, n.36.
CPSU. There was talk of a hidden right faction involving such leaders as Rykov, Tomsky, and possibly Bukharin. Thus far, however, there were only rumors and speculations. The fight was not yet out in the open, but was confined to the Politburo and the Central Committee.  

On July 17, 1928, the Sixth Comintern Congress convened under the slogan "War Against the Right Danger and the Rightist Conciliators". While the CPSU was not ready to definitively address the so-called "right deviationist" threat in the open, the slogan made clear where the Party and its agenda were heading. Harry Haywood and the Foster faction were ready to sniff out "right-leaning" communist members in the American Party and Harry's thesis served as an instrument used to draw them out. As Harry Haywood explained, the strategy of the Foster faction was to expose the Lovestone leadership as the "embodiment of the right danger in the U.S. Party and to explode the myth of their Comintern support." The debate lasted three days and while Fort-Whiteman appeared before the general session, his voice was conspicuously absent from the minutes of the debate.

Regardless, Fort-Whiteman's argument to wait out the Great Migration was quickly rejected by the Commission. Fort-Whiteman was not the only African American delegate at the Sixth Congress to openly disagree with Haywood’s thesis. In fact, all the African American delegation opposed it. James Ford argued the slogan would further divide black and white

28 Haywood, 245-246.

29 Haywood, 256.

30 Haywood, 247.

31 Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 63. Gilmore raises the question if William Foster has enough power to have Lovett Fort-Whiteman excluded from the debate. This is a possibility and there are no definitive answers on why he was silent, but Fort-Whiteman knew he was in a precarious position since the ANLC failure.

32 Those members were Otto Hall, Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Otto Huiswoud, and James Ford.
workers. Harry Haywood’s brother, Otto Hall, objected vehemently that the policy ignored the issue of class among African Americans. Hall charged its proposers with only viewing the problem through European and Eastern minorities’ experiences instead of the specific issues blacks in America were facing. Hall and Otto Huiswoud both argued as John Reed had in 1920, "the historical development of the American Negro has tended to create in him the desire to be considered a part of the American nation." Regardless of the American opposition, the Comintern adopted Haywood's thesis as policy.

As Harry Haywood's status within the Party was on the rise, Fort-Whiteman was trying to salvage his position. After the conclusion of the Congress, Fort-Whiteman decided to stay in Russia. He took a two-year fellowship to study ethnology at Moscow University but there are questions surrounding his motivations to remain in Russia. Having lost his position of importance, Lovett Fort Whiteman was viewed by the black leadership in the CPUSA as a "liability" so "to get him out of the way-and as consolation in view of his past service-the Comintern gave him work in Moscow." In the uproar after the Sixth Congress, black Communists who were still in Moscow began to avoid Fort-Whiteman, whom they saw as loyal to Bukharin. Yet, Fort-Whiteman made the most of his time while living in Russia. He married a Russian Jewish woman and transferred his political membership from the American Party to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He landed a lucrative job in research on fish breeding at

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33 International Press Correspondence (Vienna: Executive Committee Communist International), Vol. 8, 1928, pg.1346.

34 Ibid, pg.1393; Haywood, Black Bolshevik, pg. 268-269; and Heideman, "Socialism and Black Oppression", pg.17.

the University of Moscow and gave regular lectures on American racism. Fort-Whiteman eventually went on to teach science at the American School in Moscow, but he never abandoned his stewardship of newly arrived African American students, something that would come back to haunt him a few short years later.

Analysis of Haywood's Thesis

The Black Belt thesis held little attraction for black Americans and a persuasive theoretical foundation for it was never established so why did the Soviets adopt this policy? Aside from ideology, two major corresponding shifts in Soviet domestic and Comintern policy seem to be at play here. The Soviet central authorities abandoned the NEP, which sought to attain socialism by utilizing capitalist practices, and inaugurated a new campaign to build socialism through rapid industrialization also known as the First Five Year Plan. Part and parcel of the First Plan was also a concurrent propaganda effort to represent the USSR as a superior non-capitalist society filled with antiracist "New Soviet" people. Industrialization of Russia presented a paradox to the Soviet leadership. America's status as the most advanced capitalist country not only served as a model of Soviet industrial development but also made America the USSR's most formidable enemy. While Joseph Stalin and the Soviet leadership correctly anticipated capitalism's most devastating economic crisis (the Great Depression), the rapid disintegration of the capitalist system and accompanying revolutionary push the Soviets expected to follow was astronomically mistaken. Still, American workers hit hard by the downturn of the U.S. economy flocked to Russia during the 1930s to find work, and businesses around the world, including the likes of Ford Motor Company, General Electric, and DuPont all signed contracts

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36 Gilmore, pg. 104, Carew, pg. 179, and Homer Smith, Black Man in Red Russia pg. 77.
with the Soviets. Yet, a powerful "indictment of U.S. racism helped assuage anxieties among officials in Moscow that they were simply reinstituting capitalism."\textsuperscript{38}

The Soviet Party was also motivated by the coming of the Comintern's militant Third Period. This concept was put forth during the Sixth World Congress (oddly enough, the term was first coined by Nikoli Bukharin just two years prior to the 1928 Congress). The same congress that adopted Harry Haywood's thesis. Working in line with the idea that capitalism was entering a crisis of revolutionary proportions, Comintern leaders ordered Communist parties around the world to abandon their coalition policies with working-class parties while they assessed the revolutionary potential of black Americans. The adoption of the "African American nation" while simultaneously building socialism not only made American black people necessary "allies" to the Soviet's ideological mission but also elevated antiracism to a priority policy in the Party itself for the first time.\textsuperscript{39} The activism that the Communist Party pursued in America during the first half of the 1930s is evidence of this.\textsuperscript{40} As anxieties on the Left and Right about racial decline, degeneration, and reinvigoration fueled the rise of biological racism in Europe and the


\textsuperscript{38} Roman, pg.7.

\textsuperscript{39} Solomon, \textit{Cry Was Unity,} 85-89 and Roman \textit{Opposing Jim Crow,} 9.

\textsuperscript{40} Not only did the Soviets continue to enroll cohorts of African American students in Russian educational institutes, but the Party was active in the Scottsboro Case of 1931 and organizing black activists at a grassroots level in the South. One of the most important of these organizations was the Sharecroppers Union. This activism was really a worldwide campaign as shown by Susan Pennybacker, \textit{From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
United States, Soviet leaders alone promoted antiracism and maintained that a modern, superior society didn't use the construct of race to distinguish its citizens. As this paper has demonstrated, the Soviet Union was not a society free of racism as the leaders in Moscow claimed it was, but the Black Belt thesis showed they recognized black equality at least in theory.41

A closer look at the policy Harry Haywood drafted, one can see how the ABB and Marcus Garvey influenced the Comintern's recognition of African American nationhood.42 Yet, the most obvious influence on the Black Belt thesis was Moscow. While Soviet nationality policy defined the terms of "race" and "nation", the 1928 draft of the Black Belt thesis was not a complete break from the past. The policy still reflected the Soviet's belief that African Americans were the vanguard party to foment racial consciousness internationally (history proved the other way around).43 The Comintern either could not or would not grasp the complexities of racial formations. While calling for the "right to self-determination" in the American South, the Comintern and Haywood did not explicitly refer to the Black Americans in the South as a "nation", although it was implied many times.44 In fact, this notion of a black belt nation, capable of seceding from the U.S., was not plainly stated until the policy was reissued by the Soviets in

41 It's important to note here that the Soviets expressed a bias for African Americans, whom they deemed the least primitive and most primed for leading a revolution within the African diaspora. See Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

42 Harry Haywood acknowledges the influence of the ABB. See *Black Bolshevik*, 124-25, 230. Also see Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 224-28. Kate Baldwin argues that Soviet support of the black belt was support of black nationalism, an exception to policy that denounced national factionalism as a high crime within the Party. See, Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain*, pg.131.

43 This belief lay in what Kate Baldwin calls "a critical misperception of race" on behalf of the Soviets and that this misperception was "based on an assumption that black Americans were (in spite of systemic exclusions of imperialism and slavery) nevertheless ineluctably linked to Africa". Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line*, 48.

1930. This 1930 addition followed two years of continued American party inaction in organizing black communities, as well as CPUSA member confusion over what the policy concretely meant regarding black Americans, particularly in the North. Just as Ford and Otto Hall had warned the Comintern, many American CP members (black and white) thought the thesis called for/advocated racial separation (something the Communists had always rejected).

In truth, only a small portion of the thesis addressed African American self-determination while the majority of the policy placed the struggle in more of an international context, another continuation of the traditional Soviet line. Haywood admittedly studied other international liberation struggles, in particular, he looked to Ireland, but Russia also had a major impact. As Terry Martin has argued, Soviet leaders established an ethnicity-based affirmative action system based on their nationalities policy that favored non-Russians over ethnic Russians. Even after 1933, when Soviet leadership began promoting the Russian language and culture, the CPSU made no concerted effort to abandon these groups' national identities. Therefore, by insisting that white Americans place themselves in an underprivileged position to black Americans and recognize their rights to self-determination in the black belt region, the Comintern seemed to be operating within the confines of the Soviet affirmative action empire and holding white Americans to the same standards as Russians, as members of an oppressing nation.

Yet, the Soviets implemented ideas of "self-determination" very differently. The moment power was consolidated (around 1920) the Bolshevik Party took charge of all party and

45 This is especially true of the Soviet eastern people, whom the Bolsheviks saw as the most oppressed by the tzar. What Terry Martin fails to note though is how these "national identities" were later affixed to internal passports and used to hunt down "hiding kulaks" and purge them from the population. See Terry Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

46 Meredith Roman, Opposing Jim Crow, 15.
government affairs in every region and all major policy decisions had to carry Moscow's stamp of approval, effectively ending real self-determination for the Soviet people. These exact policies were carried out across Russia during the early 1920s as the Bolsheviks took control of local soviets, now the Comintern attempted to carry out the same policy via the Black Belt thesis to foment a communist revolution in the American South. When it comes to the "nationalities" question, Stalin's writings detail the Soviet's party ideas. Essentially, the Communists should aid nationalist movements against outside oppression, but they should also undermine the nationalists to clear the way for a worker's takeover. Internationally, this takeover must also be spearheaded by Moscow because it was the only socialist state.47

Lastly, the thesis touched on another aspect of Lenin's nationalities policy, white chauvinism. African American party members had long complained of little to no action of white party members in the black liberation struggle and at times, outright racism from fellow white Party members. The previous Comintern Congress had resolved to leave the implementation of resolutions on the "Negro Question" to the local parties and to adopt a popular front strategy. This action gravely hurt the CPUSA's interactions and recruitment of African Americans.48 During the Sixth Comintern Congress, the internal racism issue was again raised by black members in attendance.49 Just as Lenin had distinguished between the nationalism of oppressor


48 In truth, before the change in direction at the Sixth Congress, a black party member could be removed if they denounced white party members too vigorously as was the case with Otto Huiswoud in 1924. Huiswoud was temporarily suspended from the CPUSA for fiercely condemning a white farmer who had spoken against an anti-lynching resolution. While the Party agreed with Huiswoud's sentiment, they considered his verbal assault a breach of the Comintern's popular front directives. See Maria Van Enckevort, "The Life and Work of Otto Huiswoud" (Doctoral Thesis, University of the West Indies, 2001) 34

49 James Ford and William Patterson made arguments that class demands alone would not bring together black people but more importantly, the Party itself was not immune from racism and reprimanded white American party members for not including blacks in their social organizations. See Mike Gold, "William L. Patterson: Militant Leader," Masses & Mainstream 3 (February 1951) 36-43 and Earl Ofari Hutchinson, Blacks and Reds, 49.
nations and oppressed people, Haywood's thesis distinguished between black nationalism and white nationalism.\textsuperscript{50} While the thesis was used as an organ to identify "right deviationists" within the party, the policy also affirmed the Soviet's commitment to purge the American party of racism and bolster its status in the African American community.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} "The 1928 and 1930 Comintern Resolutions on the Black National Question in the United States". 1928 and 1930 Comintern resolutions. (n.d.). Retrieved June 25, 2022, from \url{http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/CR75.html}

\textsuperscript{51} Internal racism was a problem that plagued Communist's African American recruiting efforts from the very beginning. After the Black Belt thesis was adopted in 1928, the CPUSA was eager to show the Soviets they were in compliance with this directive. Following Moscow's precedent, the American Party organized show trials to publicly expel white members who displayed racist behavior. The most infamous of these show trials was the Yokinen show trial. See Associated Press, "Communist Party Expels Finnish Janitor at First Mass Trial Held in America for 'White Chauvinism' ", \textit{Lincoln Star}, vol. 29, March 2, 1931, pg. 5.
Conclusion: The 1930s and Beyond

The Black Belt thesis seemed almost doomed from the start in the United States. By the 1930s, even though it was the official line of the Communist Party, rarely was it invoked as a rallying cry at Party functions. Most African Americans supported the CPUSA’s principles on total equality and anti-racism, but the combativeness with other black civil rights organizations/unions, the unwavering support of Moscow directives and lack of rights that went with that, and finally, the constant push for the overthrow of American democracy is what drove many black people out or away from the Party. We must keep in mind, it was never the intention of the Communists to correct the ills of capitalism, it was to overturn the system completely and establish a Bolshevik model of Communism in the United States. This call to action was always pushed, even in Communist-fronted organizations like the Harlem Tenants League and Sharecroppers Union.¹

Still, the Communist Party made inroads into the black community through its advocacy for racial equality. In 1931, the International Labor Defense (ILD), which served as the legal arm

¹ This particular Comintern congress marked the beginning of the "Third Period" for the CPUSA. During the Third Period, the CPUSA and its members verbally attacked all liberals and progressives as "social fascists" and "treacherous Negro petty-bourgeoisie". See Cyril Briggs, "Negro Bosses Fight Labor, Not Lynching", Daily Worker, 31 January 1929; also "Denouncing Lynching of Pullman Porter, ANLC Calls for Mass Resistance Against White Ruling Class Terrorism", Liberator, 12 April 1930; and Eric Arnesen, "The Traditions of African American Anticommunism", Twentieth Century Communism, vol.6, pg. 124-132. Even revisionist historians such as Robin Kelley and Mark Solomon have been unable to avoid the vast archival evidence of communications between the Moscow Comintern and the CPUSA, their goal is to minimize it. See Solomon, The Cry Was Unity, preface; Robin Kelley, Hammer and Hoe, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1990, preface xiii; and John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, In Denial: Historians, Communism, and Espionage, (San Francisco: Encounter Books), 2003, pg.61. Comintern documents show all CP fronted organizations and the CPUSA (in particular) barely made a move without direction and permission from the Comintern. While the revisionists show at a ground-level, there was some autonomy to make decisions on the direction of the organization, documents again show, if a particular action was not supported in Moscow, that action would be stopped. See Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Kyrill Anderson, The Soviet World of American Communism, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1998; Harvey Klehr, “American Reds, Soviet Stooges,” New York Times, July 3, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/03/opinion/communist-party-usa-soviet-union.html.
of the Communist Party, successfully defended nine black youths accused of rape in the Scottsboro case after the NAACP initially declined to act.\textsuperscript{2} The CPUSA also supported the founding of the Alabama Sharecroppers Union, which advocated for improved wages and working conditions, and by 1936 the union boasted membership numbers of 10,000. The most lasting accomplishments of the ILD and the Sharecroppers Union were its successful national protest campaigns. Black protest had long predated the involvement of the ILD, but it had entered a state of decline during the 1920s. Along with other radical organizations, the ILD contributed powerfully to the revival and militancy of black protest during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{3} The ILD and others demonstrated to local black Americans and their allies the importance of collective action against racism. It was a lesson that did not go unnoticed and helped to advance a growing awakening on the part of black America that was already bubbling under the surface. Yet, membership in communist-fronted organizations didn't translate into numbers for the Party itself and black membership in the CP remained low.

The 1930s brought new challenges to African Americans at home and in Russia. The downturn of the Western economy happened just as Joseph Stalin predicted. The Great Depression proved to be the worst economic downturn in modern history. While the fallout of the 1929 stock market crash was felt worldwide, at home the effects of the Depression were felt more acutely by most African Americans, particularly job loss. Meanwhile in Soviet Russia, a

\textsuperscript{2} The NAACP had long been challenging racism in the American courts but cases that dealt with black rape were highly political in the South. The NAACP feared that if they lost a case like this, it would hurt the credibility of the organization, so they were slow to come to the defense of the accused boys. On the Scottsboro case see, Dan T. Carter, \textit{Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press) reprint 2007. For another case the ILD took on behalf of black Americans see, Charles H. Martin, "Communists and Blacks: The ILD and the Angelo Herndon Case" \textit{Journal of Negro History} 64, no.2 (Spring 1979) 131-141.

campaign of mass industrialization and collectivization in agriculture created somewhat of an economic boom and labor shortage. The Russians sent out an international call for workers and thousands of Americans, black and white answered. It proved to be a life altering choice for some.

Oliver Golden had settled in Harlem upon his return from Moscow in 1928. Working for the CPUSA, he opened a co-op restaurant and an office linked to Amtorg, a Communist trade organization that hired American specialists to work in Russia. As part of his Amtorg duties, Golden traveled around the states, visiting colleges, looking for qualified black people willing to travel to Russia and help build socialism. With the Soviets offering free passage, high salary (often times double or more current pay rates), free room, and a promise to deposit part of earnings into an American bank account, I imagine it sounded too good to be true to some inquirers.

Golden's time in Russia had changed him. While he, Haywood, and Fort-Whiteman were of the radical "New Negro" class, all three seemed to have developed "New Soviet Person" enlightenment as well. The "New Soviet Person" was (among other things) dedicated to building socialism in one country and exporting it abroad for the greater good of man. In response to the Russian need for technical experts, Golden himself answered the call in 1930. He wrote to his old Tuskegee instructor, George Washington Carver, requesting his assistance to recruit

4 Lily Golden, My Long Journey Home, pg. 7. Amtorg was the organization in which all contracted American specialists were sent to Russia during the 1930s, including Ford Motor Company engineer Robert Robinson and the twenty-one members of Langston Hughes’ Black and White film crew. See Robert Robinson and Jonathan Slevin, Black on Red: My 44 Years Inside the Soviet Union (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1988); and Langston Hughes, I Wonder as I Wander (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956). The Depression years brought mass interest in going to the USSR to work. The Russians asked for 20,000 specialists, over 100,000 people applied. See, Tim Tzouliadis, The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin’s Russia (New York: Penguin Books), 2008, pg.6.

5 Peris, Storming the Heavens pg. 78-83.
agricultural specialists. Carver agreed to help and in 1931, Golden set sail for Russia (for the last time) with thirteen other black specialists. Oliver and the specialists were sent to Uzbekistan to cultivate a cotton crop that would grow quickly in the region’s short growing season. The crop they created is still largely grown in the region to this day.

The Uzbek specialists were on a two-year contract with the option to renew their work contract yearly after the first two-year initial period. All the specialists renewed their contracts until 1937, when Stalin demanded they take up Soviet citizenship or leave. Golden (and one other) chose to remain in Uzbekistan the rest of his life. For Golden, I imagine it was not a hard decision to make. While the western economy was crippled by depression, Golden, who was a high-ranking member of the CP in Uzbekistan, lived a very nice life in one of the poorest countries in the world. His daughter, Lily, recalled in her autobiography "my parents were allotted a beautiful three-room apartment. We had a spacious veranda, wood-burning cooking range, and a bathroom with the supreme luxury of a bath, though there was no running water everywhere in the city...we had three servants" while the local farm collective peasants lived in villages "consisting of yards fenced in by walls made of dried manure and mud, the huts were made of the same material...there was no means of heating, no indoor cooking stoves, no radios, no culture or entertainment."  

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6 Golden, pg.6-12. Lily mentions her father understood Russia had a failing economic system when he returned to the States in 1927. Golden also knew Russians suffered from widespread hunger and few modern comforts. She claims he hid none of this from those he recruited to go with him. Yet, he thought it was important to help build socialism in Russia and help fellow "colored" populations around the world. Joy Gleason Carew has compiled a list of those who traveled with Golden. Of the 14 specialist, Golden and George Tynes remained in Russia the rest of their lives, see Joy Gleason Carew, Blacks, Reds, and Russians, pg. 212-217.

7 Foreign workers became suspected agents of espionage and saboteurs of socialism by Stalin and the Bolshevik regime after 1937. This was due to Stalin’s fear of capitalist encirclement and looming war in Europe. The United States and British governments had refused Stalin’s proposal of an alliance, largely because of the Bolshevik's track record of mass murdering its citizens made the Russians an undesirable ally.

8 Golden, pg13-17
Nice accommodations, access to foreign food markets full of good quality food, and favorable treatment from Soviet authorities (up until 1937) is a common thread in foreign expatriate’s recollections but once a sojourner took up Soviet citizenship, foreign accommodations and/or protections changed. Oliver Golden was no exception to this. In 1937, after he returned home from a month-long vacation, his daughter recalled:

"we were climbing the stairs to our apartment when I noticed that some of the doors were crisscrossed with tape. I asked my father what it meant and he replied that the tenants had been arrested...the KGB had also come to arrest my father. My naïve father took a gun given to him by the KGB...and went to KGB headquarters. Handing in the gun, he said: 'I understand that you have come to arrest me. Here I am. If it is a crime to come to the USSR to help this country, and you consider me an enemy of the people, arrest me!' The answer was: 'Comrade Golden, don’t worry. We have fulfilled our quota of arrests from your neighborhood. Go home, continue working and forget about it.'"\(^9\)

Golden’s status as a foreigner was gone and he lost many friends, as even socializing with a person of foreign status was dangerous during this time. It didn’t matter Golden was a Soviet citizen now, his foreign status could be seen on his skin. Fear and a changed status broke Oliver Golden. “He no longer told jokes or played games with people. He seemed to have lost the central purpose of his life...he lacked the will to live.”\(^10\) He died in 1940 from heart failure.

Harry Haywood returned to the United States in 1930 and went straight to work organizing African Americans under the banner of Communism. Within four years of his return, he was elected to the Politburo of the CPUSA and was head of the CPUSA National Negro Department. Yet, he felt his higher position took him away from the masses and he was restless, looking for a way to serve the CP and show solidarity with the Spanish people, who were


\(^10\) Ibid.
fighting fascist forces in 1935. He requested permission to join the Lincoln Brigades in Spain. While unhappy about Harry’s request, the Soviets and CPUSA gave Haywood permission to go.¹¹ The Russian army was a disaster in Spain and were quickly overwhelmed in battle and the International Brigades, under their command, didn’t fare much better. Haywood should have taken Earl Browder’s (head of the CPUSA) advice to stay away from Spain, it marked a major downturn in Haywood and the Soviet’s relationship. Browder knew the Soviet brass feared for their lives as failure, criticism, or even suspicion in Spain meant recall to Russia for either Siberian exile or immediate execution. As a foreign leader, Haywood was scapegoated for Soviet mistakes in Spain and his rivals in the CPUSA may have taken advantage of this to advance themselves.¹² Both American and Soviet Communists accused Harry Haywood of desertion but there is no evidence of this whatsoever.

Haywood was formally removed from the Politburo upon his return from Spain in 1938 based upon this reported cowardice in Spain. Harry’s wife wrote in her introduction of his edited autobiography, “he could never see beyond the false images hiding Soviet incompetence. He died without ever understanding what happened to him in Spain...Harry never blamed the Soviet Union for his fall...his loyalty to communism and the Soviet Union was unshakable.”¹³ Haywood was eventually expelled from the CPUSA when his anti-revisionist, pro-Stalinist beliefs conflicted with Nikita Khrushchev’s destalinization and peaceful co-existence strategy in the 1950s. The Soviets also officially dropped the self-determination line for African Americans in 1959 and had changed position on the importance of African Americans in bringing about

¹¹ Haywood, pg.628, 630, 441.

¹² Ibid, 467–497. Haywood particularly mentions James Ford as his rival.

revolution. Haywood went on to join the Maoist groups of the New Communist Movement after the Sino-Soviet split and continued to organize black and white Communist groups throughout the 1960s and 1970s. He died in 1985 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Lovett Fort-Whiteman's dance with Soviet Communism is the most tragic of all. After the denouncement of his resolution at the Comintern in 1928, Fort-Whiteman decided to stay a while in Moscow. In his days as head of the ANLC, he had traveled relatively easily back and forth between the two countries, so he never saw the danger he was in by making this fateful decision. Whiteman was, by all accounts, flamboyant and independent, and these behaviors, coupled with his outspokenness on the Black Belt Thesis were beginning to be a problem for the Soviets and his fellow black Communists.14 While in Moscow, Fort-Whiteman gave regular lectures on American racism and taught at various schools. By 1933, he was ready to return home to the United States. He applied for permission with the CPUSA, but his request was denied. As Joy Gleason Carew and Amanda Bosworth point out, Fort-Whiteman (who had made some major miscalculations on his own part) had no way of knowing that CPUSA members had facilitated his exile to Russia.15 While in Russia, Whiteman had considered himself a mentor to the incoming black American students. He reminded them to never forget their blackness, but the new sojourners escaping American racism for the first time in Russia, didn’t agree. They wanted to forget the burden of race.16 African American party members, Homer Smith, William Patterson, and James Ford sounded the alarm to the Comintern. Patterson wrote several letters to

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14 Carew, pg.179

15 Ibid, pg.180-181. Carew makes clear, Whiteman reentered Russia under a false name in 1928 so technically there was no record of Lovett Fort-Whiteman in the USSR, he joined the CPSU in 1929 but was expelled in 1932 for not paying his dues, and he continued to be outspoken on Russian political matters.

16 Gilmore, pg.151. Also see, Homer Smith’s comments in Carew, pg.183.
the Soviets accusing Fort-Whiteman of counter-revolutionary, anti-Soviet sentiments, and recommended his removal. In March 1936, Fort-Whiteman's fate was sealed, and he was arrested. Sent to a Kolyma gulag prison in 1937, he died there in 1939.

The black sojourners who traveled to Russia during the 1930s experienced a very different Russia than Golden, Haywood, and Fort-Whiteman. They saw firsthand the evil and mass murder of the Great Purges all around them. While their foreign status, race, and avoidance of Soviet politics kept them relatively safe from the same fate Lovett Fort-Whiteman experienced, the special status sojourners enjoyed before the Purges was no more and they were subject to secret police searches and surveillance. These events changed their impressions of the Soviet model and expatriates who had not been indoctrinated as the travelers of the 1920s had, fled Russia as soon as they could but the process took years. The Soviet-Nazi pact of 1939 essentially ended African American support of the Communist Party. The black Communist sojourners of the 1920s failed to recruit large numbers of black radicals to Communism but the influence they had on black radicalism going forward can be heard in the calls for self-determination in the Black Power Movement of the 1970s. In the story of the Long Civil Rights movement the legacy of the early Russian sojourners is an enduring one.

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17 Sean Guillory, host,” The Reddest of the Blacks” SRB Podcast (podcast), May 21, 2019, accessed March 27, 2020, https://srbpodcast.org/2019/05/21/the-reddest-of-the-blacks/; also see Carew, pg. 182.

18 Homer Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia*; and Robert Robinson, *Black on Red*

19 It took Homer Smith 14 years and Robert Robinson 44 years to leave the USSR safely.
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