

‘A world which will have become the very valley of the shadow of death’: C.L.R. James on capitalism and environmental destruction

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Abstract

This essay will explore the black Trinidadian revolutionary historian C.L.R. James’s little theorised engagement with questions of the environment and natural world from the 1930s to the 1980s, situating this within his wider oeuvre as a Marxist who had experienced not only colonial domination in the Caribbean but also witnessed other catastrophes endemic to twentieth century capitalism, from the Great War, the Great Depression, the rise of fascism and the Holocaust, the Second World War and then the use of atomic weapons (Hiroshima and Nagasaki). The essay will firstly examine how James might be seen to have helped inspire contemporary theorising around the ‘plantationocene’ in his classic history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins* (1938). More generally, as early as 1951, James (and his co-thinkers) noted that ‘It is not the world of nature that confronts man as an alien power to be overcome. It is the alien power that he has himself created’. The choice ahead for James was one of socialism or barbarism, one of rebellion or extinction, and in 1958, evoking biblical language and imagery, he noted that we are already entering ‘the very valley of the shadow of death’.

Keywords

C.L.R. James, plantationocene, colonialism, capitalism, environment

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‘A world which will have become the very valley of the shadow of death’: C.L.R. James on capitalism and environmental destruction

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The black Trinidadian revolutionary historian Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901-1989) was one of the twentieth century Caribbean’s most remarkable thinkers and writers.¹ An anti-colonial campaigner for ‘West Indian self-government’ and thought-leader of the militant Pan-Africanist movement during the 1930s in Britain, James is perhaps best remembered as author of *The Black Jacobins* (1938), the classic work on the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804. As a Marxist, ever since penning *World Revolution* (1937), his pathbreaking anti-Stalinist history of the Communist International, James made critically creative and original contributions to developing the revolutionary democratic tradition of ‘socialism-from-below’, to use Hal Draper’s phrase.² Though many of James’s contributions to social theory, particularly in relation to black history and the struggle for black liberation, are today widely appreciated, as with many other Marxist thinkers who came of age before the late twentieth century, he is often assumed to have understandably thought and said little which can be of relevance to the contemporary ecological crisis. These questions have become ever more apparent and urgent in the years since James’s passing, not least in terms of the existential

With many thanks to Ashley Dawson and A. Naomi Paik as *Radical History Review* editors and the anonymous readers, as well as Steve Cushion, Georgios Maniatis, Camilla Royle for very helpful comments on this article in draft. I would also like to thank Ozzi Warwick of the OWTU, as well as Matthew Quest for sharing his research on the International Oil Working Group with me.

¹ On C.L.R. James and *Radical History Review*, see Mackenzie, ‘Radical Pan-Africanism in the 1930s’ and Paul Buhle, ‘C.L.R. James, Revolutionary Historian’. For a fine recent study of James’s life and personality, see Williams, *C.L.R. James*.

² On James’s Marxism, see Høgsbjerg, ‘C.L.R. James (1901-89)’ and *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism*, edited by McLemee and Le Blanc. See also Phelps, ‘C.L.R. James and the Theory of State Capitalism’ and Callinicos, *Trotskyism*.

threat they represent in general, and to the Caribbean in particular.³ In 2017, in a *Jacobin* article on ‘C.L.R. James in an Age of Climate Change’, Justin Slaughter rightly pointed to the relevance of James’s 1953 work of literary criticism, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, which analysed Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* as prophetically warning of an ‘industrial civilization on fire and plunging blindly into darkness’ and a ‘world of massed bombers, of cities in flames, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki’. As Slaughter noted, ‘today, James’s reading of *Moby-Dick* resonates even more strongly, as we face not only bombers and burning cities but rising oceans’.⁴

Yet the very fact James was so taken by Melville’s novel about a whale perhaps suggests an even greater depth of interest in the natural world on his part than Slaughter registers.⁵ In *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, James identified a fundamental problem at the heart of the modern industrial capitalist nation-state, which placed economic growth over everything else: ‘If the political basis of the national state was the racial superiority of the national stock, its strictly economic basis was the development of the resources of the national state’.⁶ For James, this critique of competitive nationalist empire state-building indicted not just Western capitalism but also Stalin’s ‘state capitalist’ Soviet Union, with its brutal industrialisation and forced collectivisation programmes.⁷ These programmes rode roughshod over Lenin’s policy on the protection of ‘ecological preserves’ (zapovedniki), and James himself had no time for those rulers, in whichever country, who ‘wish to build factories and power stations larger than all others which have been built. They aim to connect rivers, to remove mountains, to plant from the air, and to achieve these they will

³ On the Caribbean and climate change, see Sealey-Huggins, “1.5°C to stay alive”.

⁴ Slaughter, ‘C.L.R. James in an Age of Climate Change’.

⁵ *Moby Dick* alongside other animal characters also featured in James’s stories written for his son Nobbie during the 1950s, stories which also touched on wider issues relating to the natural world and the dangers of atomic warfare. See James, *The Nobbie Stories for Children and Adults*.

⁶ James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, 12.

⁷ James had criticized these at the time in *World Revolution*. See James, *World Revolution, 1917-1936*, 301-305. For more on the ‘many environmental disasters in the former Soviet Union and China’ see Angus, ‘The Discovery and Rediscovery of Metabolic Rift’, 57.

waste human and material resources on an unprecedented scale.’⁸ As James noted in 1960, ‘when I speak about the barbarism, the degeneration and the decay of Western civilisation, I do not separate East from West, and Fascism from Democracy. I take the whole as symptomatic of what is taking place today.’⁹

Yet as well as charting the tendency for bourgeois society to descend into crisis, catastrophe and barbarism, symbolized by Captain Ahab’s descent into monomania in hunting Moby Dick, James in *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* also pointed to the hope amid the horror, which rested with the multiracial, multinational working class crew of the whaling ship, the *Pequod*. As James noted, unlike the esteemed Captain Ahab, ‘they are meanest mariners, castaways and renegades’, but this motley crew live and work in ‘perfect harmony’ with both ‘Nature and technology’. Indeed, for James, ‘through them seems to move the very forces of Nature, while at the same time, they are the most skillful seamen and the most generous and magnificent human beings on board’.¹⁰ As Sylvia Wynter once eloquently noted, James offered ‘a vision of life that unfurls new vistas on a liveable future, both for ourselves and for the socio-biosphere we inhabit’, ‘an imaginaire social able to link everyone’ as opposed to the ‘bourgeois imaginaire social, creative in its time, purely destructive in its decline’.¹¹ This essay will aim to build on Wynter’s insight here, exploring James’s little theorised engagement with the relations between humans and the wider natural world, though doubtless further research across his vast corpus of work, both published and unpublished, will enable us to more deeply appreciate his contribution to the environmental humanities.

⁸ James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, 12.

⁹ James, *Modern Politics*, 71-72.

¹⁰ James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, 30-32. See also Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, 170.

¹¹ Wynter, ‘Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception’, 88-89. For more on James and Wynter, see Kamugisha, *Beyond Coloniality*.

It will firstly explore James's practical engagement with environmental politics arising from his Caribbean background and his direct political interventions in Trinidad and Tobago in particular. After growing up spending time in the rural village of North Trace in south central Trinidad, James recalled he was at age eight, at heart 'a country bumpkin'.¹² Though James within a couple of years won a prestigious scholarship to Queen's Royal College in the capital Port of Spain where he would later teach English and history, life for many in colonial Trinidad was comparable in a sense then to that of many black Americans in the South, where rural, agricultural lifestyles around labour still held sway. After politically radicalising to the Left during the Great Depression following his move to imperial Britain in 1932 to try and make it as a writer, James found Marxism the best explanation to make sense of, and confront, what he understood as the barbarisms of the twentieth century, including how the process of competitive capital accumulation for accumulation's sake destroyed the natural world of which humans are but a dependent part. In a 1988 interview he declared 'the rifle and cannon have meant a great deal in the progress of the morality of humanity, because it is through an awareness of the powers of destruction that we rise to higher thinking'.¹³ Already catastrophic climate change has rightly provoked both a wave of impressive 'higher thinking' from Marxists and other social theorists, who have rediscovered key aspects of Marx and Engels's ecological thinking, as well as, more critically, generating the growth of new social movements of resistance from below, such as Extinction Rebellion and the youth strike for climate movement.¹⁴ This essay will explore what we might rediscover about James's own ecological thinking through his deep and profound engagement with the Marxist

¹² James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 31.

¹³ *Sunday Times*, 2 March 1988.

¹⁴ See for example Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology*; Bellamy Foster, *The Return of Nature*; Angus, 'The Discovery and Rediscovery of Metabolic Rift'; Royle, 'Ecological Marxism'. Selma James has also recently praised Marx's 'holistic view' of exploitation, given his argument in *Capital* that 'capitalist production ... only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth - the soil and the worker'. James, *Our Time Is Now*, 68.

method in his work in general, while also examining how his writing on the plantation system in Atlantic slave societies in works such as *The Black Jacobins* connects with contemporary discourse around the periodising the origins and roots of the contemporary catastrophic climate crisis.

Environmental Politics in the West Indies

Amid the contemporary struggle to ‘just stop oil’ and confront the power of fossil fuel capital, it is worth firstly recalling James’s longstanding fraternal relationship with the Oilfield Workers’ Trade Union (OWTU), an organization born during the mass strikes and wider Caribbean labour rebellions of the 1930s.¹⁵ The natural resources of oil in Trinidad, and the refining of that oil, often by American companies, have come to play a critical role in the island’s history during the twentieth century. After independence in 1962, oil still accounted for 85% of Trinidad and Tobago’s exports and 30% of its Gross Domestic Product.¹⁶ Indeed, James noted the economic boom in oil after the OPEC hike in the 1970s ‘saved’ Trinidad and Tobago’s first independent prime minister Eric Williams: ‘In 1970, the whole country moved against him [Williams] and in 1974, he was all ready to go because the country was bankrupt. The oil saved him.’¹⁷

Yet the OWTU as the vanguard of the organized working class movement in Trinidad and Tobago also played a critical role in shaping wider national struggles for social justice, firstly in the struggle for colonial liberation and then, since independence, with its demand to ‘Let Those Who Labour Hold The Reins’. Since the 1937 mass strike which gave birth to the

¹⁵ On James and the Caribbean labour rebellions of the 1930s, see Høgsbjerg, “‘A Thorn in the Side of Great Britain’”. James regularly lectured to OWTU members and stayed in OWTU accommodation on his visits to Trinidad. After James’s death the OWTU named an educational centre after him and still hold an annual memorial lecture in his name.

¹⁶ Kamboon, *For Bread, Justice and Freedom*, 73.

¹⁷ James, ‘Williams Was No Genius... the Oil Saved Him’. See also Bond, ‘Oil in the Caribbean’.

OWTU, James had seen that oil workers when organized had a degree of strategic power not only to force changes in the oil industry but also to make an impact across society more generally. In 1969, James described how oil workers' protests over pay sparked a wider revolt in another Caribbean island, Curaçao, dominated by Dutch oil interests like Shell.¹⁸ A year later, during the eight-week long revolt against Williams in 1970, OWTU President General George Weekes, who James noted was 'a militant uncompromising trade unionist and an ardent advocate of Black Power', was arrested for his part in the struggle.¹⁹

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Figure 1. Left to right: C.L.R. James with George Weekes, President General of the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union, and John La Rose at a Labour Day demonstration in Trinidad on 19 June 1977. Credit: Oilfield Workers' Trade Union.

The OWTU fought for the nationalization of the oil companies (BP, Shell, and Texaco), and under Weekes's militant leadership targeted these corporations for their profiteering and their links to the apartheid South African state, noting, 'We shall not rest until BP means Black Power'.²⁰ Indeed, James worked with Weekes and Terisa Turner, another supporter of his since the late 1960s, in the International Oil Working Group (1979-1985), that campaigned for workers' sanctions against apartheid South Africa and coordinated African movements for workers' control in the oil industry in Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Latin America.²¹ Turner became a pioneering eco-socialist

¹⁸ James wrote about the Curaçao revolt at the time. See James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, 140.

¹⁹ James, 'The Caribbean Confrontation Begins', 313.

²⁰ Kambo, *For Bread, Justice and Freedom*, 188.

²¹ Other members of the IOWG included Eritrea's Kassahun Checole, Venezuela's Luis Prado, Kenya's Denis Akumu, Ecuador's Rene Ortiz, and Egypt's Mohamed Sid-Ahmed. See International Oil Working Group Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts at Amherst,

researching class struggles in the oil communities of Nigeria and grassroots environmentalism among Nigerian women.²² Today, the OWTU continues to shape the national debate in Trinidad and Tobago in a progressive and radical direction around what a ‘just transition’ to a low carbon economy should mean and look like.²³

Secondly, amid the contemporary international struggle for land reform by peasant movements such as La Via Campesina, it is noteworthy that James advocated radical agricultural reform in Trinidad and Tobago during the 1960s while secretary of the short-lived Workers and Farmers Party (WFP), formed (with the support of other radicals including Weekes) in 1965 to try and challenge the Prime Minister Eric Williams and his People’s National Movement (PNM) government from the Left. As James noted, the WFP’s programme was ‘(1) the purchase of the sugar estates from the English owners; the creation of a peasantry and the diversification of agriculture; (2) the control of the finances of the territory by the democratically-elected government; (3) the planning of the economy’.²⁴ In the 1966 elections, the WFP advocated the nationalization of the oil industry; reducing dependence on established industries such as oil, sugar, and asphalt; and redistributing land from the plantations owned by foreign sugar companies such as Tate and Lyle to create a ‘community of tens of thousands of small farmers’ with sugar cane production limited to just farms of ‘250 acres’.²⁵ In ‘Settling the Farmers’, a speech at WFP headquarters on 16 September 1965, J.M. Dube, a leading WFP member, explained that there was ‘ample, sound, scientific evidence’ for the ‘break-up of the large land holdings’ and shifting from sugar monoculture if ‘only one is prepared to read what has been discovered on peasant

<http://findingaids.library.umass.edu/cad/mums268#ser1> On Turner’s memories of working with James during the late 1960s, see Williams, *C.L.R. James*, 366-67.

²² See More and Turner, eds. *Oil and Class Struggle*; Brownhill and Turner, ‘Why Women are at War with Chevron’; Brownhill, Engel-Di Mauro, Giacomini, Isla, Löwy and Turner, eds., *The Routledge Handbook on Ecosocialism*.

²³ See for example Warwick, ‘Union Struggles Against Climate Change’ and Warwick, ‘Take a Stand for Trinidad and Tobago - COP 26 and Just Transition’.

²⁴ James, ‘The Caribbean Confrontation Begins’, 312.

²⁵ Rennie, *CLR*, 153; Kambon, *For Bread, Justice and Freedom*, 152; Look Lai, ‘Trinidadian Nationalism’, 201.

experimental farms' established by the Institute of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA) in Trinidad. Utilising an official 1954 report on 'Peasant Farming' by A L Jolly, Dube noted that on an experimental 'manual-arable' farm of 3 acres with yams, soya beans, maize, pigeon peas, sweet potatoes, cane and vegetable crops, and one milking cow, the earnings were 'twice what was originally obtained and at least twice as high as Trinidad peasants usually achieve from their farming activities', and critically 'the earnings are obtained from a small area of land farmed on a system that will maintain fertility indefinitely'. Dube noted 'the Workers and Farmers Party has never been more serious, more definite, more unequivocal than when it advocates its dynamic re-orientation policy for agriculture'.²⁶

James's concern with the diversification of agriculture and the break-up of the sugar plantation economy in post-colonial Trinidad connected with a growing appreciation on his part of the importance of peasant struggles underway at the time in the 'Third World' (as it was known then) more generally, above all in Vietnam against American imperialism.²⁷ Secondly it connects with contemporary emergent arguments around the 'plantationocene' as a way of periodising the origins and roots of the contemporary catastrophic climate crisis that unlike ideas of the 'Anthropocene', which focuses on human behaviour in the abstract, instead draws specific attention to the role of Atlantic slavery in helping globalise modern capitalist production and set in motion processes of environmental destruction such as deforestation.²⁸ Indeed, in *The Black Jacobins*, James registered the way in which despite an appearance suggesting 'the ordered beauty of agriculture and the prodigality of Nature' of colonial slavery in the Atlantic world, its essence as a form of brutal forced monocultural production had reaped devastating environmental as well as human costs.²⁹

²⁶ Dube, *Settling the Farmers*, 4, 7, 9.

²⁷ See James, *The Gathering Forces*, especially the section 'The Third World: The Peasantry'.

²⁸ For more on the 'plantationocene', see Sapp Moore, Allewaert, Gómez, and Mitman, 'Plantation Legacies'. See also Davis, Moulton, Van Sant and Williams, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?'.

²⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 22-23, 37. For more on plantations and ecology, see Eichen, 'Cheapness and (labor-)power'.

James's profound and powerful analysis of the colonial sugar plantation in *The Black Jacobins* might then be helpful for contemporary theorising around ecological imperialism. James not only showed how the forced labour behind the production of not only sugar but other tropical produce such as tobacco, coffee, and indigo came to ensure that 'on no portion of the globe did its surface in proportion to its dimensions yield so much wealth' for the master planter class as colonial Saint Domingue (later Haiti) in the eighteenth century. He also noted that the plantation itself was a modern capitalist form, and so therefore was intrinsically intertwined with what some environmental scholars call the rise of the 'capitalocene', which is generally seen as emerging around the year 1800 with the take off of the fossil-fuel driven industrial revolution in Britain. James's arguments about the 'modern' capitalist nature of the plantation owed much to Leon Trotsky's theorisation of 'uneven but combined development' and the related idea of 'permanent revolution'.³⁰ Yet Trotsky's own contribution to environmental thought and 'eco-socialism' in general was contradictory, and indeed somewhat problematic given his belief that, as he put it in *Literature and Revolution* (1924), that 'through the machine, man in Socialist society will command nature in its entirety'.³¹ James however, as we will see, was never an 'orthodox Trotskyist.' By returning to the classics of Hegel, Marx, and Lenin during the 1940s, he developed a more ecological Marxist methodology, and a more sophisticated grasp of humanity's dependence on the wider natural world, than many of his contemporaries.

C.L.R. James, Atlantic Slavery and the 'Plantationocene'

³⁰ See Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 183-194.

³¹ Trotsky, 'Socialism Will Bring Giant Advances for Mankind'. For a useful overview of Trotsky and the thinking of later 'orthodox Trotskyists' like Ernest Mandel on the environment, see Löwy and Tanuro, 'The Fourth International's Contribution to Ecosocialism'.

The Black Jacobins established James as one of the most eloquent and critical anti-imperialist writers of the twentieth century. It is easier, James noted, ‘to find decency, gratitude, justice and humanity in a cage of starving tigers than in the councils of imperialism’.³² One of the most striking and pathbreaking aspects of the work, which has been developed by later scholars of the Caribbean such as Sidney Mintz and Robin Blackburn, was James’s analysis of the sugar plantations of colonial Saint Domingue, which involved a form of modern manufacturing which made the plantation comparative in many respects to early capitalist factory production. ‘The sugar plantations demanded an exacting and ceaseless labour ... The extraction of the juice and the manufacture of the raw sugar went on for three weeks a month, sixteen or eighteen hours a day, for seven or eight months in the year.’³³ This meant that enslaved Africans were in a sense not only a ‘proto peasantry’ (given the largely agricultural nature of their work and the provision grounds they cultivated for themselves on the fringes of the plantations) but also a ‘proto-proletariat’.³⁴ Indeed, ‘working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plain, they were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time’.³⁵ Accordingly, as James summed up in his 1963 appendix to *The Black Jacobins*, using language that only a black West Indian anti-colonialist who was himself the great-grandson of enslaved Africans could use, ‘the sugar plantation has been the most civilizing as well and the most demoralizing influence in West Indian development’. He continued: ‘When three centuries ago the slaves came to the West Indies, they entered into the large-scale agriculture

³² James, *The Black Jacobins*, 229. For more on the work, see *The Black Jacobins Reader*, edited by Forsdick and Høgsbjerg, and Douglas, *Making The Black Jacobins*.

³³ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 8.

³⁴ For more on the provision grounds of the enslaved, and plantations in general, see Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations*.

³⁵ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 69.

of the sugar plantation, which was a modern system ... [and] from the very start lived a life that was in its essence a modern life.’³⁶

Against ideas of the ‘Anthropocene’ which tend to inherently posit an abstract ‘humanity’ in general as responsible for climate change without identifying structural inequalities at work around race, gender, class and power, and against versions of the ‘plantationocene’ which might try and counterpose plantation slavery as some kind of pre-capitalist entity to the ‘capitalocene’ proper, it is worth then recalling how the plantation system, these ‘huge sugar factories’, first emerged in the New World in Brazil in the 1580s and then spread with the growth of the British and French empires from the mid-seventeenth century. As Blackburn notes, ‘plantation slavery was an artificial extension of mercantile and manufacturing capital in the age of capitalist transition, extending their reach at a time when fully capitalist social relations were still struggling into existence’.³⁷ Indeed, the plantations as fruits of mercantile and manufacturing capital also in turn galvanised this wider age of ‘capitalist transition’ and helped fructify the emergence of fossil-fuel driven industrial capitalism, with all its increasingly devastating environmental consequences. In a 1970 piece, ‘The Atlantic Slave-Trade and Slavery’, James, building on the historical research conducted by his compatriot and former student Eric Williams, maintained Atlantic slavery had been absolutely critical to the development of the Industrial Revolution which by ‘bringing mechanical power into use, altered the conditions of life and created a new society’.³⁸ Indeed, as Williams had noted in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), ‘it was the capital accumulated from the West Indian trade that financed James Watt and the steam engine’.³⁹

³⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 306.

³⁷ Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery*, 376-77. See also Callinicos, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy*, 113.

³⁸ James, ‘The Atlantic Slave Trade’, 237. This article was co-written with William Gorman (Morris Goelman).

³⁹ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 102.

James did not know what we know today about the full environmental consequences that resulted from the shift in the early 1800s in Britain and then out to the world to a fossil fuel based economy, as an energy transition took place as steam power from burning coal replaced water power.⁴⁰ Yet as a Marxist he knew enough about the Industrial Revolution's world-historic significance and how, alongside the natural coal reserves in Britain and elsewhere that made this possible, the huge wealth generated from the profits of colonial slavery also played a critical role.

There is no question today that the resources which initiated and established this epoch-making change in human life resulted from the Atlantic slave trade and the enslavement of Africans in the Americas ... Eric Williams has demonstrated that it was in slavery and the slave trade that the power originated which created modern industry in England, making it the workshop of the world.⁴¹

In addition to analysing the forced labour behind the capitalist networks that would make Britain 'great', James's account of the brutal but highly advanced forms of exploitation as part of the accumulation of capital in the Caribbean in *The Black Jacobins* also had much to say about the natural environment on which the rise of slave societies rested. On the surface of colonial slave society in Saint Domingue, the natural world seemed as alive and rich and opulent as ever, not least to travellers visiting from Europe.

San Domingo is an island of mountain ranges rising in places to 6,000 feet above sea-level. From these flow innumerable streams coalescing into rivers which water the

⁴⁰ Malm, *Fossil Capital*. See also Linebaugh, *Red Round Globe Hot Burning*.

⁴¹ James, 'The Atlantic Slave Trade', 237.

valleys and not inconsiderable plains lying between the hills. Its distance from the equator gives an unusual lusciousness and variety to the natural exuberance of the tropics, and the artificial vegetation was not inferior to the natural. Field upon field, the light green sugar-cane, low and continually rippled in the breeze, enclosed the factory and the dwelling houses like a sea; a few feet above the cane-stalks waved the five-foot leaves of the banana-trees; near the dwelling houses the branches of the palm, crowning a perfectly rounded and leafless column of sixty or seventy feet, gave forth, like huge feathers, a continuous soothing murmur; while groups of them in the distance, always visible in the unclouded tropical air, looked like clusters of giant umbrellas waiting for the parched and sun-baked traveller. In the season, mango and orange trees, solitary or in groves, were a mass of green leaves and red or golden fruit. Thousands of small, scrupulously tidy coffee-trees rose on the slopes of the hills, and the abrupt and precipitous mountain-sides were covered to the summits with the luxuriant tropical undergrowth and precious hardwood forests of San Domingo. The traveller from Europe was enchanted at his first glimpse of this paradise, in which the ordered beauty of agriculture and the prodigality of Nature competed equally for his surprise and admiration.⁴²

The natural environment thus provided not only the conditions for plantation production of sugar and coffee, but also the means to cover over the violence and terror of what were essentially forced labour camps. Indeed, James noted ‘the professional whitewashers’ of colonial slavery ‘are assisted by the writings of a few contemporary observers who described scenes of idyllic beauty’ in the Caribbean, such as Vaublanc’s memoirs, which give us ‘a plantation on which there were no prisons, no dungeons, no

⁴² James, *The Black Jacobins*, 22-23.

punishments to speak of. If the slaves were naked the climate was such as not to render this an evil.’⁴³ The pictures painted by visitors of an apparent ‘paradise’ in Caribbean slave societies also contrasted markedly with the Industrial Revolution fuelled by steam and coal underway in parts of Europe in the late eighteenth century, where workers ‘had to descend into the bowels of the earth’ and dig ‘deep pits’ in ‘subterranean galleries’, while those in and around factories had to breathe in waves of pollution, ‘a deadly and infected air’.⁴⁴

The Caribbean tropical ‘paradise’ was partly as ‘luxuriant’ and full of scenes of ‘idyllic beauty’ only because of another catastrophic consequence of European settler colonialism in the ‘New World’. As Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin note, the all but total devastation suffered by the indigenous Carib peoples largely because of diseases brought by European settlers ultimately led to the regeneration of forests and thus to the ‘Orbis spike,’ a world-historic dip in atmospheric CO₂ levels by the year 1610. ‘The Orbis spike implies that colonialism, global trade and coal brought about the Anthropocene’, Lewis and Maslin write, an argument that only further confirms James’s pathbreaking stress on the critical historic role of colonial slavery in the Atlantic world.⁴⁵ Generations of enslaved labour engaged in monoculture production on plantations, then, had a deleterious effect on the environment, something that was recognised at the time by observers who developed theories of ‘desiccation’ in the late eighteenth century accordingly.⁴⁶ As James wrote in 1970, ‘The distinguishing feature of the slave was not his race but the concentrated impact of his work on the extensive cultivation of the soil’.⁴⁷ Yet James also noted how the enslaved ‘might cultivate a small piece of land to supplement their regular rations’, leading to the emergence

⁴³ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 11.

⁴⁴ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 11.

⁴⁵ Lewis and Maslin, ‘Defining the Anthropocene’, 175, 177.

⁴⁶ Grove, *Green Imperialism*.

⁴⁷ James, ‘The Atlantic Slave Trade’, 256.

of new black radical agrarian traditions with very different values to those of the slave-owners.⁴⁸

Despite gloriously overthrowing slavery and colonialism and striking a tremendous blow against racism in the process, the Haitian Revolution – as essentially a bourgeois revolution - failed to fully break with the plantation model of production.⁴⁹ However, from the mid-1790s, the formerly enslaved had resisted proletarianization, wanting instead to be subsistence farmers on their own land and committed to what the Haitian sociologist Jean Casimir has called the ‘counter-plantation model’.⁵⁰ *The Black Jacobins* as an anti-colonial, Marxist work of ‘total history’ that demonstrated the Haitian Revolution was an inspiring epic liberation struggle that won thanks to the leadership of figures like Toussaint Louverture contrasts with a ‘decolonial’ work like that of Casimir, focused on rural peasant resistance to the ‘counter-plantation system’ in post-revolutionary Haiti. Nonetheless, as Rachel Douglas recognises, James helped contribute to and inspire greater focus on the resistance from below and from outside the plantation through marronage, not least through his rewriting of *The Black Jacobins* in 1963, and his play of that name in 1967.⁵¹ In a 1964 essay on ‘Black Sansculottes’, James noted: ‘the Haitian peasants, alone among people of the Caribbean, have a long and vibrant historical tradition; they proved themselves capable of resisting an American attempt to take over the island and despite the accumulated ills of decades of poverty, they have managed to retain a notable vitality’.⁵²

For James, the inspiration of the Haitian Revolution always remained as a reminder of the kind of mass revolutionary struggle from below which brought emancipation from

⁴⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 9. Moore, Allewaert, Gómez and Mitman, ‘Plantation legacies’. On the slave ‘plots’ and black ecology, see Davis, Moulton, Van Sant and Williams, ‘Anthropocene, Capitalocene, ... Plantationocene?’

⁴⁹ Dupuy, *Rethinking the Haitian Revolution*, xx, xix.

⁵⁰ Casimir, *The Haitians*, 304.

⁵¹ Douglas, *Making The Black Jacobins*, 18, 24-25. James was in dialogue with Jean Fouchard, who undertook pioneering work on the maroons, and also helped mentor Carolyn Fick, author of the 1990 work *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*.

⁵² James, ‘Black Sansculottes’, 159-160.

colonial slavery in the past and a ‘resource of hope’ that ordinary Haitians could draw upon as they continued their struggle against wage slavery at home and the wider forces of Western imperialism. Yet even though post-revolutionary Haiti ultimately broke from the plantation model as a result of pressure from below which created an emergent militant peasantry, the damage caused by soil erosion and deforestation resulting from generations of monoculture production through plantations and colonialism were all too soon apparent in Haiti as elsewhere in the Caribbean. As Engels noted in 1876, ‘what cared the Spanish planters in Cuba, who burned down forests on the slopes of the mountains and obtained from the ashes sufficient fertiliser for one generation of very highly profitable coffee trees – what cared they that the heavy tropical rainfall afterwards washed away the unprotected upper stratum of the soil, leaving behind only bare rock!’⁵³

James could not have failed to register the devastating impact of other ‘natural disasters’ in the region, such as hurricanes, whose increasing frequency in recent decades has been linked to global warming through warmer sea temperatures. During the 1930s alone, while James was writing *The Black Jacobins*, the Caribbean was regularly hit by hurricanes and earthquakes. In 1930, a hurricane in the Dominican Republic, adjacent to Haiti, killed 1,200, while in 1931 a hurricane in British Honduras (now Belize) killed an estimated 2,500. In 1932, an earthquake in Cuba killed 1,500, a hurricane in the Cayman Islands killed 67 while Puerto Rico was also hit by a hurricane. In 1933, hurricanes and flooding hit Trinidad as well as Jamaica. In 1935, Jamaica had another hurricane, as did Haiti which caused flooding which drowned 2,000.⁵⁴ In September 1963, the year the revised edition of *The Black Jacobins* was published, now newly independent Trinidad and Tobago was hit by Hurricane Flora, which killed 18 and destroyed 2,750 homes, damaged 3,500 others, and

⁵³ Engels, ‘The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man’. For more on how environmental devastation in the colonial Caribbean was apparent to observers in the eighteenth century see Grove, *Green Imperialism*.

⁵⁴ Knight, ‘The Caribbean in the 1930s’, 77-78, 80.

destroyed approximately half of the islands' coconut and cocoa trees. The Met Office noted three quarters of the islands forest reserves were blown down and the remainder severely damaged.⁵⁵

In his appendix to the revised 1963 edition of *The Black Jacobins*, James now accordingly highlighted soil degradation and wider issues relating to environmental destruction in the Caribbean by quoting passages from two Caribbean writers, the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire and the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, whose poetry and prose, like that of many others from the Caribbean, revealed a concern with social ecology.⁵⁶ James quoted from Césaire's 1939 poem *Return to My Native Land*, including the lines:

my Negritude is not a mere spot of
dead water on the dead eye of
the earth
my Negritude is no tower, no cathedral

it cleaves into the red flesh of the
teaming earth...⁵⁷

James also quoted a passage relating to soil erosion and human responsibility from the novel *The Palace of the Peacock* (1960) by Wilson Harris, who worked as a land surveyor in Guyana, where, as James noted, 'there are nearly 40,000 square miles of mountains, plateaux, forest, jungle, savannah, the highest waterfalls in the world'. The passage from *The Palace of the Peacock* noted that 'we're the first potential parents who can contain the ancestral

⁵⁵ Doodnath, '10 of the deadliest storms and hurricanes to hit Trinidad and Tobago'.

⁵⁶ For more on Caribbean literature and 'world ecology', see Campbell and Niblett, *The Caribbean*.

⁵⁷ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 312.

house', but also that much damage had already been done. 'Like all the bananas and the plantains and the coffee trees near Charity ... A small wind comes and everything comes out of the ground. Because the soil is unstable. Just pegasse. Looks rich on top but that's about all.'⁵⁸

In his 1964 piece on 'Black Sansculottes', James closed by quoting a fellow Trinidadian writer, Rosa Guy, writing in the black American journal *Freedomways*. Guy highlighted soil erosion in Haiti and called for 'a bold and sweeping land-reform programme' given 'the dilemma of sustaining a steadily growing population on gradually shrinking land resources':

It is not true that the land is always waiting. The land dies too. For the land, like all else, if it does not progress, must retrogress. Years of abuse, of neglect bring its natural consequences as witnessed by the terrible erosion, the acres and acres laid bare by misuse and ignorance.⁵⁹

James therefore made an innovative contribution to theorising the plantation and colonial slavery more generally, but also became increasingly aware of the environmental degradation arising from what others have subsequently called the 'plantationocene'. In the next section, we will explore how for James, Marxism offered not only helped him to make sense of the catastrophes he experienced in his lifetime, but also how his understanding of alienation and the wider Marxist method might offer us tools to help us better understand and respond to our contemporary climate catastrophe.

⁵⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 325-26.

⁵⁹ Rosa Guy, 'Haiti: The Enigma of the Caribbean', *Freedomways*, 4, 3 (1964), quoted in James, 'Black Sansculottes', 162.

Socialism or Barbarism

C.L.R. James came to political and intellectual maturity in the period between 1914 to 1945, a period which Eric Hobsbawm called ‘the Age of Catastrophe’.⁶⁰ Aged seventeen James volunteered to fight in the last year of the Great War as part of the Merchant’s Contingent but was blocked on account of his race, though other colonial subjects from Trinidad including his great friend, Alfred Mendes, would have told him about all the horrors of the Western Front.⁶¹ In 1932, James would make his ‘voyage in’, arriving in Britain to witness a European continent scarred by economic crisis and mass unemployment during the Great Depression, and now also amidst rising fascism. In 1938, he would leave Europe for the United States, just as the world was about to be plunged into another inter-imperialist war, with all its attending horrors, including the Nazi Holocaust and the use of atomic weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In 1947, James and his co-thinkers Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee Boggs declared, ‘the unending murders, the destruction of peoples, the bestial passions, the sadism, the cruelties and the lusts, all the manifestations of barbarism, of the last thirty years are unparalleled in history’.⁶² Indeed, ‘only the complete social transformation of man as a productive force can begin to cope with the ruin, economic, political and moral, to which bourgeois society has reduced and is still further reducing the world’.⁶³

Part of the solution for James and his co-thinkers Dunayevskaya and Boggs then lay in building on Hegel’s critique of rationalism and Marx’s writings on *alienation*, the lack of

⁶⁰ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*. See also Callinicos, ‘Capitalism and Catastrophe’.

⁶¹ Williams, *C.L.R. James*, 35, 48. Alfred Mendes’s war time experiences provided the inspiration for his grandson Sam Mendes’s recent film *1917*.

⁶² James, Forest and Stone, *The Invading Socialist Society*, 14. F. Forest was the pseudonym of Raya Dunayevskaya and Ria Stone the pseudonym of Grace Lee Boggs. On Dunayevskaya, see *Raya Dunayevskaya’s Intersectional Marxism*, edited by Anderson, Durkin and Brown. On Boggs, see Boggs, *Living for Change*.

⁶³ James, Forest and Stone, *The Invading Socialist Society*, 8.

collective control humanity has under class society in general and capitalism in particular. As they noted in their 1951 work *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, 'It is *not* the world of nature that confronts man as an alien power to be overcome. It is the alien power that he has himself created.'⁶⁴ Their recognition that 'It is *not* the world of nature that confronts man' also, consciously or unconsciously, echoed Marx's understanding in *Capital* of how the rise of capitalism 'disrupts the metabolic interaction between man and the earth' and generates 'an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself'.⁶⁵

James and his co-thinkers here also implicitly broke from the assumption (shared by almost all other Marxists in this period) that posited human attempts to control and master nature held the same priority it had before the rise of industrial capitalism. As James, Grace Lee Boggs and Cornelius Castoriadis, put it in their co-written 1958 work *Facing Reality*:

The pressing need of society is no longer to control nature. The great and pressing need is to control, order and reduce to human usefulness the mass of wealth and knowledge which has accumulated over the last four centuries. In human, in social terms, the problem of mankind has gone beyond the association of men in a natural environment to achieve control over nature. Today mankind is sharply divided into two camps within the social environment of production, the elite and the mass.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ James, Dunayevskaya and Boggs, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, 117. The 'Johnson-Forest Tendency' around James and Dunayevskaya inside American Trotskyism in 1947 had published the first English translation of major extracts of Marx's 'Paris manuscripts' which discussed alienation, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844).

⁶⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 949-950, quoted in Angus, 'The Discovery and Rediscovery of Metabolic Rift', 54.

⁶⁶ James, Lee and Chaulieu, *Facing Reality*, 68. Pierre Chaulieu was the pseudonym of Cornelius Castoriadis, a Greek thinker who was a leading activist in the French group Socialisme ou Barbarie.

Rather than seeing ‘two camps’, ‘East’ and ‘West’ during the Cold War, which most saw as the key organising division with respect of global politics, for James under what he saw as a system of global ‘state capitalism’, the ‘two camps’ that still mattered most were essentially those Marx had identified within ‘the social environment of production’: capital and wage-labour. The first camp, the exploiting ‘elite’, the ruling classes and their political representatives, both East and West, were shaped by the imperatives of capital to accumulate further capital (or what we might today, following Andreas Malm, call ‘fossil capital’) at the expense of the other camp, the exploited and alienated ‘mass’. Ordinary people had no meaningful collective democratic control over production anywhere, including in the centralized, unaccountable and tyrannical bureaucratic ‘planned’ state capitalisms of the East. As James, Dunayevskaya and Boggs wrote in *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, since Stalin’s counter-revolution in the late 1920s, ‘the rulers of Russia perform the same functions as are performed by Ford, General Motors, the coal operators and their huge bureaucratic staffs’.⁶⁷ The Chinese Revolution of 1949 offered more of the same, for where ‘the urban petty-bourgeoisie comes to power at the head of the peasant revolt, it achieves the national independence, within the context of the international power of Stalinist Russia’ and so ‘will solve not one single problem of the agrarian revolution, which requires a complete reorganization of the economy on an international socialist basis’.⁶⁸

In *Facing Reality* (1958), with the Cold War at its height and only thirteen years after the dropping of atomic bombs, James raged against the ruling elites responsible for the Hydrogen Bomb and other ‘engines of destruction’: ‘Official society has produced these monstrous weapons because it is the type of society which needs them’. Humankind suffers ‘the unknown consequences of living in perpetual fear’ created by two super-powers locked

⁶⁷ James, Dunayevskaya and Boggs, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, 48.

⁶⁸ James, Dunayevskaya and Boggs, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, 73.

in economic and military competition and armed with the potential to unleash a nuclear war, which would represent the ultimate environmental crisis.⁶⁹ James turned to the King James version of the Bible, warning that we are in danger of entering ‘a world which will have become the very valley of the shadow of death’.⁷⁰ Referring to the Windscale fire of October 1957 in Sellafield in Cumbria, James noted that ‘in England recently radiation escaped from an atomic pile and infected the countryside, and milk from cows became radioactive’.⁷¹ ‘No one knows the damage that is being done to our physical existence by radioactivity resulting from their experiments and tests. The weight of scientific experiment grows steadily against this suicidal roulette.’⁷²

In 1960, in a series of lectures given in Trinidad and published as *Modern Politics*, James reiterated his theme at greater length, showing his admiration for the tradition of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, but noting that the situation now had changed:

It is not the world of nature that faces modern man. When Descartes, Copernicus, Bacon, the Royal Scientific Society of England, Spinoza and Hume and the rest of them, and early capitalism, early science, began, they were fighting to overcome nature and the learn to discipline nature and to turn nature to the uses of men. That was the struggle for the beginning of the modern world. But not today. Today man has not conquered nature in general (you will never be able to conquer nature), but he is able to bend it, substantial qualities of it, to his own purposes; and the problem in the world today is not what it was for many centuries.⁷³

⁶⁹ James, Lee and Chaulieu, *Facing Reality*, 46-48.

⁷⁰ James, Lee and Chaulieu, *Facing Reality*, 56.

⁷¹ James, Lee and Chaulieu, *Facing Reality*, 46.

⁷² James, Lee and Chaulieu, *Facing Reality*, 47.

⁷³ James, *Modern Politics*, 100-101.

Indeed, as the Romanticism movement demonstrated, by the early nineteenth century it was already apparent that the industrial revolution was having destructive consequences for nature, even before Marx's theorisation of 'metabolic rift'.⁷⁴ James's point here that 'you will never be able to control nature' echoed Engels's 1876 warning: 'Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us.'⁷⁵ As James continued in his 1960 lectures, 'the problem in the eyes of Hegel and in the eyes of Marx is the mass of accumulated wealth and scientific knowledge which man has built out of nature ... That knowledge is driving us to world suicide. Capital, I repeat, controls us. We do not control it.'⁷⁶ The state capitalist regimes of Russia and China were subject to the same economic drive to accumulate for accumulation's sake, a process intensified by geopolitical pressures from the West, and so as James put it, 'private capital or no private capital, this murderous competition goes on'.⁷⁷

In the face of the dangers of inter-imperialist warfare – and in the Cold War the realities of inter-imperialist proxy wars - the key question for James was achieving collective, democratic control from below by the great mass of humanity – socialism – rather than further attempts to dominate and control the rest of the natural world, or indeed the wider universe, under capitalist social relations. As he put it in *Modern Politics*,

As long as the wealth and knowledge are being guided by people who are concerned with preserving their position and their managerial status, this fanatical competition will continue, and man will constantly produce more means of production, and

⁷⁴ For more on Romanticism, see Linebaugh, *Red Round Globe Hot Burning* and Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*.

⁷⁵ Engels, 'The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man'

⁷⁶ James, *Modern Politics*, 101.

⁷⁷ James, *Modern Politics*, 101.

constantly improve means of production; and now they have become means of destruction pure and simple⁷⁸

James was not impressed with the contemporary space race unfolding amid the Cold War, used as cover for the development of long-range highly powered guided missiles. ‘They are not interested in what is going on on the moon at all’, James wrote. ‘They are not interested in scientific discoveries as Galileo was and Newton was and Einstein was. These fellows are interested in improving and perfecting weapons of destruction.’⁷⁹ Indeed, James noted ‘the world will choose between hydrogen bombs and guided missiles, and some form of Workers Councils. In 1960, the Marxist doctrine: either socialism or barbarism, seems to me truer than ever before’, a perspective he never retreated from.⁸⁰

James was in his eighties during the 1980s when questions of ecology began to come to the fore and never devoted explicit attention in later years to further theorisations about the environment. Grace Lee Boggs, born a little later in 1915 and one of James’s most important co-thinkers from the 1940s and 1950s, did, however, help develop a form of ecological thinking that has been described by Brian Bartell as a ‘degrowth’ project.⁸¹ After breaking with James in the early 1960s, together with her partner James Boggs, Grace Lee Boggs had moved away from Marxism and developed a new concept of ‘dialectical humanism’, which in their words aimed to ‘advance beyond the idea that all radicals have held - that in order to advance socialism, you must first smash capitalism. We have to advance towards the new

⁷⁸ James, *Modern Politics*, 102.

⁷⁹ James, *Modern Politics*, 148.

⁸⁰ James, *Modern Politics*, 167.

⁸¹ Bartell, ‘The Political Ecology of James and Grace Lee Boggs’, 409. For how the ideas of Grace Lee Boggs has inspired some contemporary ecological thinking, see brown, *Emergent Strategy*. On the case for ‘degrowth’, see for example Hickel, *Less is More*; Kallis, *Degrowth*, and Schmelzer, Vansintjan and Vetter, *The Future Is Degrowth*.

society by projecting an entirely different way to live and by building new social ties.’⁸² As the Boggses wrote in *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (1974),

The revolution to be made in the United States will be the first revolution in history to require the masses to make material sacrifices rather than to acquire more material things. We must give up many of the things which this country has enjoyed at the expense of damning over one-third of the world into a state of underdevelopment, ignorance, disease, and early death.⁸³

Amidst the devastating de-industrialisation of Detroit, the one-time jewel of US industrial capitalism, the Boggses therefore saw the main fight not as one to try and save jobs and defend public services but rather for workers to look to themselves and instead try and ‘re-civilise our society’ through fostering ‘collective self-reliance’, ‘creating support networks to look out for each other and moving onto community gardens and greenhouses, community recycling projects, community repair shops, community day care networks, community mediation centres’.⁸⁴

James doubtless would have had some sympathy for the Boggses’ project, but he would have also no doubt raised questions about any project of ‘degrowth’ which aimed to try and ‘re-civilise’ capitalist society. James always stressed the need to confront capitalist state power and overthrow an exploitative, oppressive and alienating system, establishing collective democratic control by the great mass of working people, a socialist society built initially on workers’ councils that, unlike state-capitalist regimes such as the Soviet Union or China, would rationally use the world’s resources including new technology to ensure a

⁸² Boggs, Boggs, Paine and Paine, *Conversations in Maine*, 287.

⁸³ Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, 140.

⁸⁴ Høgsbjerg, ‘Grace Lee Boggs’. See also Boggs, *Living for Change*.

sustainable future.⁸⁵ As we have seen, if James linked the sugar plantations to capitalism in *The Black Jacobins*, he also gave us in that work a masterful and inspiring account of the Haitian Revolution, when the enslaved themselves destroyed the plantations and so struck a powerful blow against the ‘plantationocene’. James’s historic relationship with the OWTU meant he was fully alive to the possibilities for how oil workers themselves could be central to fighting fossil capital. James was always optimistic about the potential for workers’ revolution against what is now called by some the ‘capitalocene’, even after witnessing the rise of fascism (and Stalinist counter-revolution following the Russian Revolution of 1917), for ‘this barbarism exists only because nothing else can suppress the readiness for sacrifice, the democratic instincts and creative power of the great masses of people’.⁸⁶ Global system change was not only therefore necessary but also possible, and indeed essential if new human relations were to flourish in harmony with the world around them. As he put it in *Modern Politics* in 1960, ‘What is the good life? An individual life cannot be comfortable and easy or creative unless it is in harmony to some degree with the society in which it lives ... that is where we begin. And that today is impossible.’⁸⁷

Overall, this essay has explored how James’s historical writings on plantations and the overthrow of colonial slavery in the Caribbean might contribute to emerging wider debates around how best to understand, characterise and periodise the emergence of our epoch of catastrophic climate change, while also examining aspects of his own political engagement with questions of oil extraction, land and freedom in post-colonial Trinidad and Tobago in organisations like the OWTU and WFP. It has also attempted the recovery of some of the deeper theoretical strands of James’s thinking on questions of nature that might serve to enrich ‘eco-socialism’ and ‘ecological Marxism’, living and developing traditions

⁸⁵ For critiques of some contemporary ‘degrowth’ paradigms, see for example Fraser, ‘Climates of Capital’ and Molyneux, ‘Growth and De-growth’.

⁸⁶ James, Forest and Stone, *The Invading Socialist Society*, 14.

⁸⁷ James, *Modern Politics*, 103.

that can help inform and inspire all of those in the global movement for climate justice today. The choice ahead for James was one of socialism or extinction, and, as we have seen, evoking biblical imagery and language, he thought given the dangers of nuclear holocaust, that we were already walking in ‘the very valley of the shadow of death’. That danger remains, as recent inter-imperialist conflicts over fossil fuels remind us. Without a revolutionary challenge to capitalism, the thirty years or so since James’s passing in 1989 have only made it clearer than ever how people and planet will indeed burn, not in the metaphorical fires of hell, but from the real fires caused by global warming.

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